

ISAIAH: Trusting God's Promises

Third Week in Lent:

March 8, 2026



Small Group Guide: Understanding Isaiah – Prepare the Way

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by inviting God's presence and asking Him to open hearts and minds to His Word and promises.

Icebreaker

Where were you on September 11, 2001? How did that event shape your understanding of national trauma or crisis?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **Historical Context Matters:** Isaiah 40-66 represents a shift from judgment (chapters 1-39) to comfort, written in the context of Babylonian exile (586-538 BC). (Read Jeremiah 25:11-12)
2. **The Trauma of Exile:** The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was a defining traumatic event for the Jewish people—everything seemed lost. (Read Lamentations 1:1-4)
3. **God's Impossible Promise:** In the midst of hopelessness, God promised to "prepare a highway in the wilderness" for His people to return home. (Read Ezra 1:1-4)
4. **Three Ways to Read Isaiah:**
 - In its historical context (Babylonian exile)
 - Through the lens of Jesus as Messiah
 - In our personal circumstances today
5. **Waiting on God's Timing:** The fulfillment of God's promise took 11 years—sometimes all we have is trust in God's promise when we can't see the way forward. (Read 2 Peter 3:9)

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. What surprised you most about the historical context of the Babylonian exile? How does knowing this background change how you read Isaiah 40:1-5?

2. The sermon described the destruction of Jerusalem as the Jewish people's defining trauma. Why was the destruction of the temple particularly devastating beyond just being a building? (Read 1 Kings 8:10–13 & Psalm 84:1–4)
3. How would you have felt as an exiled Jew hearing the promise to "prepare a highway in the wilderness" when there seemed to be absolutely no way home?

Personal Reflection

4. The pastor shared three ways to read Isaiah. Which perspective resonates most with you right now, and why?
 - Historical context
 - Messianic fulfillment in Jesus
 - Personal application to your life
5. When have you experienced a situation that felt utterly hopeless—where you couldn't see any possible solution? What was that like? (Read Romans 4:18)
6. The sermon mentioned that we often want God to fix things immediately, but the Jews had to wait 11 years for God's promise to be fulfilled. Share about a time when God's timing was very different from what you expected or wanted. (Read Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Going Deeper

7. Recall the illustration about the parent who had to discipline their child and then comfort them. How does this picture help you understand the relationship between God's judgment (Isaiah 1-39) and God's comfort (Isaiah 40-66)? (Read Lamentations 3:22–23, Hebrews 12:6)
8. The sermon asks: "Will you still believe that God is at work when everything seems hopeless?" How would you honestly answer that question about your current circumstances? (Read Job 13:15, Romans 8:28)
9. What does it practically mean to "wait on the Lord" when you're in a difficult situation? What does that look like day-to-day? (Read Psalm 27:13-14)
10. The hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" speaks of those who "mourn in lonely exile here." In what ways do we experience "exile" in our modern lives?

Points to Ponder

- **God's judgment is followed by God's mercy and comfort** - He disciplines those He loves, but never abandons them -Lamentations 3:31–33.
 - **Sometimes all we have is a promise from God** - When we can't see the way forward, trust in God's character and His Word is enough, Hebrews 11:1.
 - **God's timing is not our timing** - What seems impossible to us is completely possible with God, even if it takes longer than we'd like, 2 Peter 3:8.
 - **Comfort, comfort my people** - God grieves with us in our pain and speaks tenderly to us even after we've experienced consequences for our choices, 2 Corinthians 1:3–4.
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Choose one of the following to put into practice this week:

1. **Create a "Promise Journal"**: Write down specific promises from Scripture that apply to a difficult situation you're facing. Read them daily and pray them back to God.
 2. **Practice Waiting**: Identify one area where you've been anxious for immediate results. Commit to praying about it daily but releasing the timeline to God.
 3. **Comfort Someone Else**: Think of someone going through a difficult time. Reach out with words of comfort and encouragement, reminding them that God has not abandoned them.
 4. **Memorize Isaiah 40:1**: Commit this verse to memory as a reminder of God's tender heart toward His people.
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Closing Prayer

Merciful God, you are the one who speaks comfort to your people. When our world feels broken and our hearts feel weary, remind us that you have not forgotten us. Teach us to trust your promises even when we cannot see the way forward. Give us patience to wait upon you, faith to believe your Word, and courage to follow where you lead. Prepare a way in our hearts, O Lord, so that your glory may be revealed in us. And as we leave this place, help us live as people who trust your promises. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

For Next Week

- Continue reading Isaiah (chapters 28-35 this week according to the devotional schedule)
- Reflect on this question: "What does it actually mean to wait on the Lord?" (This will be addressed in next week's sermon)
- Come prepared to share one way you saw God's faithfulness this week, even in small ways