

# KNOWING GOD THROUGH ISAIAH

To know that someone is our friend is to be sure of his joy in our successes and his heartbreak in our failures. To know our Creator is to be sure of His pleasure in our trust, His strength in our weakness, and His warning in our carelessness.

To know God through Isaiah's prophetic book is to experience all of the above, and more. It is to discover that the Lord of heaven is our Friend, our Savior, and our King. To know God through Isaiah is to learn that the One who loves us more than we can imagine lives not only in the heights of the heavens but also with those who are of a broken and contrite heart (Isa. 57:15).

It is of this God that RBC Senior Research Editor Herb Vander Lugt writes about in the following pages, encouraging us to worship Him in truth.

*Martin R. De Haan II*

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# THE PROPHET

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What's your mental image of a prophet? For many of us, it's a caricature of a weather-worn man with long hair and a beard, wearing sandals and a robe, and carrying a placard that reads something like this: "Repent and be saved! Judgment is coming!"

Well, there is some validity to that stereotype. The most familiar prophets are those introduced into our language from the biblical narrative—serious men of the wilderness who probably did wear a robe and sandals.

But what about their message? *Warning* definitely was the key word. Like many of the other prophets of the Bible, Isaiah preached a message of repentance, judgment, and reconciliation. The reason that virtually all true prophets preached a similar message is that they were sent by God to warn about danger on the horizon.

*Compassion* and *indictment* don't sound like compatible terms. But consider their more simple expression: love and justice. Understood in those terms, they begin to come into balance. Isaiah indicated their balance and their significance when he wrote, "In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—One from the house of David—One who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness" (Isa. 16:5).

This verse gives us a handle on the book of Isaiah. It shows us that this is a prophecy from a God who cares enough for His people to be their judge and—unbelievable as it may seem—even provide for them

a Savior. This Savior from “the house of David” would eventually bear the entire judgment for their rebellion. God didn’t turn His back and walk away from a rebellious humanity. “In love” He judges and “speeds the cause of righteousness.” How the world needs to know that God loves enough to warn about real danger!

As you consider what Isaiah said about our compassionate God, keep in mind that love and justice are at the heart of all the promises God asked Isaiah to lay before His people. The promises of due punishment for rebellion and disobedience and the promises of eternal peace for repentance both proceed from the same loving heart of God.

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## **Love and justice are at the heart of the promises of God.**

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Throughout the book of Isaiah there are two ways set before mankind: the way of truth, life, and light; and the way of deception, death, and darkness. Our loving Creator, however, pleads with us to choose the way of life. And His message, carried by His prophets, has always been the same: Repent, turn to God, and be saved. This message is even evident in Isaiah’s name, which in Hebrew means “the Lord saves.” That is also the meaning of the name “Jesus” in Greek. So it’s no surprise to find that Isaiah’s book is filled with prophecy about Jesus.

Isaiah is one of the most important voices of the Old Testament. This is a book about a God who promises not to turn His back on His people if they will not turn their backs on Him.

# BOOK CHART OF ISAIAH

THEME	God's Anger And Mercy			God's Delivering Power		God's Benevolent Plans And Purposes								
	1	35		36	39	40		66						
DIVISIONS	God's Warnings To Judah		God's Warnings To Judah's Neighbors		God's Warnings To All Nations		God's Miraculous Deliverance Of Judah From Assyria		God's Universal Dominion Over All Creation		God's Promised Salvation Through The Suffering Servant		God's Ultimate Goal Achieved Through Messiah's Return	
	1	12	13	23	24	35	36	39	40	48	49	57	58	66
TOPICS	God's Holy Wrath And Forgiving Grace				God's Response To Humble Prayer		God's Wisdom And Power To Fulfill His Plans And Purposes							
	Judah, The Sinful Servant: Her Need For God's Salvation						Messiah, The Suffering Servant: God's Provision Of Salvation							
LOCATIONS	Judah		Judah's Neighbors		Nations		Jerusalem		Israel And All The Nations					
	About 50 Years (740 BC–690 BC)						Indeterminate (538 BC To Second Advent Of Christ)							
TIME	About 50 Years (740 BC–690 BC)						Indeterminate (538 BC To Second Advent Of Christ)							

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

# KNOWING GOD THROUGH ISAIAH

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Isaiah expressed the promises and warnings of God to the people of Judah for close to 50 years—from about 740 BC to nearly 690 BC. A king by the name of Uzziah was in power when Isaiah began his ministry, and under this good king the nation enjoyed generally peaceful and prosperous times. But the spiritual decline that began during the closing years of his rule accelerated under his successors. God responded with humiliating military defeats and economic distress.

A history of the times does not make pleasant reading. The society of Judah was marked by terrible injustices as the rich and powerful exploited the poor. Immorality was rampant as the people—in spite of Isaiah's impassioned messages and the evidences of God's displeasure—increasingly adopted the corrupt practices of pagan idolatry. Meanwhile, the unbelievably cruel Assyrians and Babylonians brought suffering, death, and devastation as they invaded the land. In both Judah and her enemy nations, the dark side of the human race was on full display.

We may think that our advances in scientific knowledge and technology have made us morally superior to the people of Isaiah's day. Some of us view ourselves as above pagan beliefs and practices. But isn't it possible that people today are just as proud, selfish, and cruel as the ancients? We may be shocked at what the Assyrians and Babylonians did to their enemies. But we must remind ourselves of the evils of our own times. The Nazis slaughtered more

than six million Jews, and millions more from other ethnic groups. Regimes in China and Russia have brought about the death of more than one hundred million people. Today, Christians in Indonesia, Ethiopia, and other countries are being tortured and killed by the thousands. “Official” and unofficial ethnic cleansing continues unabated all over the world.

Many of us who live in prospering countries are wasting our non-renewable resources, fouling our air and water, and ignoring the fact that one-third of us are overfed while two-thirds live in hunger and squalor. It’s not uncommon for us to be more concerned with improving our own living conditions than in making sacrifices to improve the lives of the poor and oppressed.

Human nature hasn’t really changed since the time of Isaiah. And neither has God. He is still the God we meet in this prophetic book written some 2,700 years ago. He is still the One who cares for those who have not yet discovered that real satisfaction and peace of mind are not found by living for ourselves. Real satisfaction is found by learning from our God how to live for the needs and for the good of others.

Isaiah painted a portrait of the unchanging God by using four descriptive titles. These will serve as the outline for this booklet:

- (1) The Holy One Of Israel
- (2) The Maker-Creator
- (3) The Lord Almighty
- (4) The Savior-Redeemer

We’ll find that these descriptive names have as much significance for us today as they did when the inspired prophet used them.

## THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL

Isaiah opens his book with five summary chapters in which he introduces his readers to the “Holy One of Israel,” a term he uses 25 times. The prophet first views the “Holy One” as that surpassingly awesome being whose greatness and moral goodness is beyond our human comprehension. Limited as we are by time and space, how can we grasp the concept of His eternal self-existence and simultaneous presence everywhere in His universe? Living as we do in an ever-changing world, how can we conceive of a being who always remains the same? Existing as we do with a mixture of good and evil within ourselves and everything around us, how can we understand absolute moral integrity?

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**The Holy One of Israel, whose greatness and perfection are beyond our understanding, is knowable and near.**

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Yet this Holy One of Israel, whose greatness and perfection are beyond our understanding, is knowable and near. Isaiah presents Him as reaching down to us, making Himself known to us, telling us what He expects from us, and relating with us when we humbly trust Him. He is knowable, near, and available. The dual truth of God’s transcendence (not bound by time and space) and immanence (everywhere present) is expressed beautifully in Isaiah 57:15.

*This is what the high and lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”*

Consider now two aspects of the Holy One of Israel as they are developed by Isaiah.

**The Holy One Of Israel As Exalted And Unapproachable (6:1-7).** When good king Uzziah died after a long rule of 52 years, God gave young Isaiah a vision in which He revealed something of what it means for Him to be called the Holy One, the one being in all the universe who is incomprehensible and uncompromised in His greatness and moral goodness.

*I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke (6:1-4).*

Isaiah was overwhelmed at the sight of the angelic beings covering their faces to shield their eyes from the blinding brightness of the throne and the sound of their chant. He was afraid he was going to die on the spot and was filled with a profound sense of his own sinfulness and that of his nation:

*"Woe to me!" I cried, "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (6:5).*

In the Bible, those who have been given a vision of God's majesty always react with awe and fear because they are overcome with a realization of their weakness, their smallness, and their sinfulness: Job (42:4-6), Daniel (10:7-19), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-

9), John (Rev. 1:9-18). And these were only visions! No human has ever seen the unveiled glory of God:

*God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To Him be honor and might forever. Amen (1 Tim. 6:15-16).*

No wonder even the most godly people experience a mingling of eager anticipation and uneasy apprehension at the thought of meeting God on the other side of death! How fitting are the words of Hebrews 12:28-29, “Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

**The Holy One Of Israel As Near And Relevant (1:1–5:30).** As noted earlier, the “high and lofty One” not only lives in “a high and holy place,” but He is also “with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit” (57:15). He is not only the Holy One, He is the Holy One of Israel. He is near at hand, a God who is involved in the affairs of earth. He has revealed His will to mankind, holds people responsible for doing it, and acts in judgment when they rebel.

***The Prophet’s Indictment.*** The first five chapters of the book of Isaiah summarize the situation in Judah during the years after the vision of chapter 6. They vividly portray God’s nearness and relevance as the nation’s Lawgiver and Judge. In the first chapter, the prophet acts out the role of a prosecuting attorney, calling all the inhabitants of the universe to listen to his indictment of the citizens of Judah:

*Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me. . . .*

*Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt . . . . They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him” (1:2,4).*

God had been a Father to the descendants of Abraham. He had brought them into existence through the miraculous birth of Isaac. The Israelites were His special people. But they had turned away from Him to worship the false gods of their neighbors. As a result, the ten northern tribes had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. And now the citizens of Judah (the two remaining tribes) were ripe for a similar fate. They too were rebellious children worshipping pagan deities.

In fact, their stubborn disobedience was already bringing God’s anger on them. In 1:5-8 the prophet describes the nation as resembling a person covered with loathsome bruises and sores. He says that her cities were burned by enemy invaders, and declares that “the daughter of Zion” (Jerusalem) stood helpless before the Assyrian armies, like a frail “hut in a field of melons.”

The remainder of the first five chapters continues to focus on God’s role as Lawgiver and Judge of the descendants of Abraham. But scattered throughout the rest of the book are reminders that God is also the Lawgiver and Judge of the nations. The judgments of chapters 13–23 are pronounced on Assyria, Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Cush, Edom, Egypt, Arabia, and Phoenicia for their sins, and further references to the wrath of the Holy One of Israel appear throughout the entire book.

Although God is beyond our comprehension, He is not a distant deity. He is near at hand, revealing Him-

self and His will. He knows every thought and observes every act of every person. And He responds in judgment or mercy.

***The People's Rejection.*** Although most people believe in the supernatural and in some kind of continued existence after death, a much smaller percentage accept the idea of a personal God who has established moral standards. Many in our day view God as an impersonal force or intelligence. And a large number who think of Him in personal terms place little value on the Scriptures. They see Him as a benevolent being who makes tolerance the ultimate virtue. Even atheists and agnostics have no quarrel with those who view God this way or speak of Him as an impersonal force or intelligence. What they indignantly reject is belief in a God who tells us how to live.

Our tendency to reject the God who made us for Himself is the message of the whole Bible. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul declared that mankind's downward progression from worship of false gods into self-destruction began when people who knew God "neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him" (v.21). We acknowledge God as God when we show how thankful we are for all that He has done for us. Yet to be thankful is to acknowledge that we owe Him our lives.

Exodus 32 tells us how the Israelites, shortly after God had miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt and given them the awesome revelation of Himself at Mt. Sinai, used the brief absence of Moses as an occasion to make a golden calf and engage in the sensual Canaanite worship of Baal.

In Isaiah's day, the wealthy and influential citizens of Judah were bringing some of the pagan practices of their neighbors into their worship. Isaiah 1:10-20

portrays God declaring that He detests their religion because they are using it as a cover for the harm they are doing to one another. He warns them that unless they change their ways, He will turn a deaf ear to their prayers. Then He pleads with them to change their thinking and their ways so that He can pour out His mercy on them.

This pattern of dire warning and gracious invitation continues throughout the book of Isaiah. But the national leaders, living in luxury and feeling secure in spite of the plight of the nation as described in chapter 1, continued to make and worship idols. They responded to Isaiah's warnings with the mock request, "Let God hurry, let Him hasten His work so we may see it" (5:19). This aroused the anger of the prophet and led him to use scathing satire and searing sarcasm to highlight the absurdity of what they were doing. In the process, he also stated the obvious—that an idol is something made by a craftsman and is so lifeless that it must be designed so it "will not topple" (40:18-20). Instead of worshiping the eternal living God who is "Israel's King and Redeemer," they made idols in the form of man and bowed down before lifeless objects that could neither hear nor see nor think (44:6-20).

All of us are inclined to ignore the "Holy One of Israel" and substitute a god of our own making. For example, we are prone to worship:

- The material things we crave more than God, which are just as much idols as the material objects worshiped by the ancients.
- An impersonal force that won't bother us with rules of conduct nor correct us when we do wrong, but also cannot help us or give us hope.

- A conjured-up personal but distant God who doesn't communicate with us and is indifferent to our conduct.

The actions of Israel's God are not surprising when we remember that the laws for life given by this Holy One are not the product of arbitrary decisions on His part. He didn't simply decide on a whim to forbid idolatry, theft, deceit, murder, envy, and human revenge. Rather, His standards of human conduct spring from His very nature as a good, loving, and life-giving God. Some behaviors are wrong because they violate His inherent goodness—they are evil. Some behaviors are wrong because they deny His compassionate nature—they are hateful. Some behaviors are wrong because they threaten life—they are death-dealing. And few behaviors lead to death more profoundly than sexual immorality. Consider just two present-day holocausts—abortion and the AIDS epidemic.

God would be untrue to Himself and His own love if He didn't care about our impurity, dishonesty, or cruelty. We can be glad that our Creator loves us enough to be angry about conduct marked by evil, hatred, and death, and that He is too good to be indifferent to it.

### SEEING GOD

- In Isaiah's reaction to his vision of God (6:1-5), we see something of God's inexpressible goodness.
- In God's reminder of His fatherly action (1:2,4), we see something of His heartbreak over our sin.
- In God's preliminary judgments (1:5-8), we see His reluctance to punish severely.
- In God's warnings and repeated appeals (1:5-8), we see His patient love.

## SEEING OURSELVES

- In the unbelievable cruelty of the Assyrians and Babylonians, we see the depths of human depravity.
- In Judah's ingratitude (1:2,4), we see our own tendency to take God for granted.
- In Judah's compromise with paganism, we see our own tendency to serve two masters.
- In the continued rebellion of Judah, in spite of God's warning judgments, we see the blinding power of sin.

## THE MAKER-CREATOR

God is the Creator of everything that exists. This is declared in the opening verse of the Bible and is repeated throughout the Scriptures. This fact is a major theme in Isaiah. In addition to the many times he talks about the things God has created, the prophet refers eight times to God as "Maker" and nine times as "Creator." He reminds his readers that the God they are rejecting is (1) the Maker-Creator of all existence, and (2) the Maker-Creator of Israel as His special people.

**The Maker-Creator Of All Existence.** In drawing his vivid picture of the sharp contrast between lifeless idols and Israel's living God, Isaiah eloquently portrays God in His role as Creator:

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? . . .  
He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth . . . .  
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy . . . .  
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who  
created all these? . . . Do you not know?  
Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting  
God, the Creator of the ends of the earth  
(40:21-22,26,28).*

Isaiah makes these statements to magnify the greatness of God. Reflecting on the greatness of the

One who spoke the worlds into existence has always produced a sense of reverence and awe in believers. I recall the time when my father and I looked at the sky on a bright cloudless night. Like most children, I instinctively thought of God on such an occasion. That night my spine tingled as I heard my father quote the well-known words from Psalm 8:3-5.

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*

I'm convinced that all of us instinctively see the evidence of our Creator. Until we learn to consciously suppress the knowledge of God, we cannot help but think of Someone far greater than human beings when we gaze upward at a cloudless night sky, look across the Grand Canyon, view the surging expanse of the ocean sparkling under the sun, or listen to the birds singing in the springtime. We lose this inborn understanding through our contact with other unbelieving adults and a deliberate suppression of our innate God-given awareness. That's probably why many non-Christian scientists and intellectuals, though wielding so much influence on our higher institutions of learning, the news media, and the entertainment industry, have been able to convince only about 10 percent of the public that everything exists by chance plus time plus space.

Interestingly, the more the institution of science learns about the complexity of life, even at its simplest level, the more all of it looks designed. A single cell is

known to contain more information than all the combined volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Evolutionist Richard Dawkins, in his influential book *The Blind Watchmaker*, makes the observation that “biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose” (cited by Phillip Johnson in *Objections Sustained*, p.48). Prominent British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle admits that when he faced one of the many unexplainable coincidences in nature, his faith in atheism “was greatly shaken.” He makes this startling statement: “A common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics” (cited by Fred Heeren in *Show Me God*, p.227).

These complexities led Carl Sagan and many other zealous unbelievers to speak in reverential language about our “awesome cosmos.” But in speaking this way they reveal that they are only a step away from the ancient pagans who believed in an eternal, magical universe that gave birth to the gods. Many scientific scholars are now saying that life’s genetic material may have been planted on earth by super-intelligent beings from a distant world. What a striking similarity there is between these unseen aliens and the gods of the ancients!

How much more reasonable it is to believe in the self-existent, personal God—the purposeful Creator of Isaiah 45:18.

*This is what the Lord says—He who created the heavens, He is God; He who fashioned and made the earth, He founded it; He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—He says: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”*

**Maker-Creator Of Israel.** As the Maker-Creator of all things, God created the Gentile nations, but Israel is His uniquely created people with whom He has a special relationship: “I am the Lord, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King” (43:15). “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me” (1:2). “Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many” (51:2).

This call to look back to Abraham and Sarah is significant. The Israelites knew that Isaac’s birth was a miracle, the truth so clearly stated many years later in Hebrews 11:11-12.

*By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father . . . And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.*

They also knew that when God called out Abraham, He promised that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:2-3).

Exodus describes how this miraculously-born nation was miraculously delivered from Egypt and miraculously preserved in the wilderness. In addition to all this, the land God gave them was perfectly adapted for their calling to be distinct and yet a witness of His power. It is a secluded land hedged around by mountains, desert, and water. Hostile neighbors surround it and isolate it on all sides. Yet it is the “center of the earth,” the bridge between the ruling nations of the Middle East, the place where three continents most nearly touch, the location from which it is easy to reach the chief Gentile countries.

Therefore Solomon, when dedicating his temple, prayed that when “the foreigner” who has heard about God comes to worship, he will respond so that “all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears Your Name” (1 Ki. 8:43).

That this was God’s intention was clearly stated at Sinai when God called the nation to be “a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:5-6), mediating God’s blessings to her neighbors. But the nation, through her continual disobedience, never fulfilled her calling. And as we have seen, this pattern of rebellion was very much in evidence during the time of Isaiah’s ministry. In fact, at the time of the vision recorded in chapter 6, God informed Isaiah that the nation was so completely given over to pagan practices that the people would not listen to him and would continue on the path to destruction. But, as we’ll see in the following two sections of this booklet, He also led Isaiah to prophesy of promised deliverance, restoration to their land, and salvation through His “Servant.”

In summary, Isaiah’s God is the almighty Maker and Creator of all that exists. He has a right to expect worship and obedience from every person everywhere. He brought all nations into being, but Israel is His uniquely created people—His miracle nation. She has been given a special place on earth and within mankind. And though Israel has repeatedly failed to live up to her calling, Isaiah’s God has not given up on her. He will carry out all His plans for her. As the Maker and Creator of everything that exists, He unquestionably possesses the wisdom and power to bring about all the plans He has for her and for all mankind.

## SEEING GOD

- In Isaiah's eloquent portrayal of God's role as Creator (40:21-25), we catch a glimpse of His wisdom and power.
- In God's revelation of Himself through the created world, we see His desire to communicate with us.
- In God's creation of Israel through the miraculous birth of Isaac, we see the power He exerts in our own regeneration.
- In God's placement of Israel in Canaan, we see His loving purpose for all mankind.

## SEEING OURSELVES

- In mankind's reluctance to see God as Maker-Creator, we see our prideful desire for independence.
- In Israel's rebellion after being made a special people, we see our own reluctance to give ourselves completely to God.
- In our doubts and desire for proofs that we didn't demand as children, we see our own unwillingness to trust without external evidence.
- In our failure to witness as we should, we see the deficiency of our love and gratitude.

## THE LORD ALMIGHTY

Throughout the book of Isaiah, we see God as the One who controls all history. As such, God is sometimes referred to as "the Mighty One" and "Sovereign Lord," but most often (60 times) He is the "Lord Almighty" ("Lord of hosts" in NKJV).

When the Assyrian army was poised to capture Jerusalem, Hezekiah prayed, "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth" (37:16). The One who created the heavens and "brings out the

starry host one by one, and calls them each by name” (40:26) is certainly qualified to control everything He wants to control.

In Isaiah we see God boldly announcing His goal for Israel and all nations, and exercising His sovereignty to bring about that which He has ordained.

**The God Of History Announces His Purposes.** As the Lord Almighty, God can confidently announce the details of His purposes for Israel and the nations. He knows exactly where history is going and how it will get there.

But God’s optimistic picture of how history will end contrasts sharply with the doomsday portrait drawn by non-Christian futurists. Some believe that an asteroid crashed into the earth and wiped out the dinosaurs some 60 million years ago, and they believe that the end for man will likely come as the result of another “deep impact.”

Others see life as we know it coming to an end through a nuclear holocaust, an environmental disaster, an uncontrollable virus, or a series of blunders on the part of scientists trying to play God.

Certainly it’s possible for an asteroid to crash into our planet, or that millions may die from one or more of the causes mentioned above. But history will not end that way! Isaiah made it clear that before God purifies the present earth system by fire (2 Pet. 3:10-13) and ushers in “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21), He will bring about the following:

- A transformed and restored Israel (54:1-17).
- A rebuilt Jerusalem as the center of worldwide worship and the capital city of a government that will secure justice for all and peace between the nations (2:1-5).

- A perfect Ruler who is born as a child and a special gift from heaven called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”—clearly the God-man Jesus Christ (9:1-7).
- A dramatic removal of the effects of the curse pronounced in Genesis 3:16-19. This will affect the animal world (11:6-9), cause deserts to become watered and lush (35:1; 41:19; 43:19-20; 51:3), greatly increase the human lifespan (65:20), and ensure a good life of incredibly long duration to all the redeemed (65:21-23).

These are obviously earthly conditions. The mention of animals, deserts, water, and the presence of death at the end of a long life eliminate the possibility that Isaiah was describing heaven. These prophecies clearly predict a golden age that will exceed our fondest dreams, the much-desired peaceable kingdom. The Lord Almighty has announced its coming—and He cannot fail.

**The God Of The Nations Exercises His Sovereignty.** Throughout the book of Isaiah, we see God repeatedly pronouncing judgment on Israel’s neighbors and making bold predictions about their future. The oracles against the nations (13–23)—Assyria, Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Phoenicia—are a mixture of dire warnings and bright promises of a coming Messiah. The apocalyptic section (24–27) portrays the awesome judgments of the endtimes and the rejoicing that will follow Israel’s repentance and restoration. The next section (28–35) begins with a description of the calamities that will fall on Israel and Judah, continues with a rebuke of Judah

for depending on an alliance with Egypt, and closes with bright promises of endtime restoration.

God exercises the control necessary to bring about His plan in at least three ways: (1) He blinds the minds of the rebellious by making them slaves to their own pride and self-will, (2) He brings into power leaders who knowingly or unknowingly do His will, and (3) He miraculously intervenes whenever He chooses.

***God blinds the minds of the rebellious by making them slaves to their own pride and self-will.*** Isaiah saw the rebellious nation of his day as afflicted with “madness, blindness, and confusion of mind” just as God had threatened in Deuteronomy 28:28, “Israel’s watchmen [spiritual leaders] are blind, they all lack knowledge” (Isa. 56:10). Though they had heard God’s message of warning and were surrounded by enemies, they called out, “Come . . . let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better” (v.12). Isaiah described the situation this way: “Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes” (59:10).

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## **Rebellion against God always brings spiritual blindness and mental confusion!**

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Rebellion against God always brings spiritual blindness and mental confusion! It did when men tried to frustrate God’s plan by building the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-8). It will in the endtime when world leaders gather in an attempt to dethrone God (Rev. 16:12-14). And it does today.

God used Pharaoh’s stubborn pride to display His

power (Ex. 7–11). He used the stubborn pride of the Canaanites to set the stage for their destruction by refusing to surrender to the Israelites even though they knew what God had done to others who had attempted to resist (Josh. 11:19-20). Ahab's stubborn pride led him to listen to the false prophets rather than God's servant, which brought about his violent death (2 Chr. 18:1-7).

The God of history has demonstrated throughout the ages that when men rebel against Him He sends them spiritual blindness and mental confusion by letting them become slaves to their pride and self-will.

***God brings into power leaders who knowingly or unknowingly do His will.*** Isaiah's amazing prophecy that Cyrus would allow the Israelites to return to their land after a time of captivity (44:28; 45:1) illustrates the fact that the Lord Almighty sometimes controls history by putting into place rulers who will, knowingly or unknowingly, assist in the accomplishment of His purposes.

One of the amazing elements in this prophecy is its chronology—more than 100 years before the beginning of Israel's captivity in Babylon (586 BC) and more than 150 years before Cyrus became the king of Persia (559 BC). Isaiah had given Hezekiah the bad news that some of his descendants would be taken as captives to Babylon (39:6-7). The next eight chapters proclaim the good news that their coming deliverance through Cyrus foreshadows a far greater deliverance and restoration in the endtime. God referred to Cyrus as His "anointed" *through whom* He would subdue nations, *to whom* He would reveal Himself, and *by whom* the whole world would see something of His power and glory. What's amazing is that there is no in-

dication that Cyrus ever acknowledged God as the one and only true God (45:1-7)!

God brought him to this place of power and helped him because He could use him to further His plans for Israel. Although Cyrus continued to worship Marduk, he had qualities that fitted him for his role in God's plan. His polytheism allowed him to hold a high regard for Israel's God as a powerful deity. He also believed that allowing captive people to return to their homeland was good policy in his empire. He was God's man—chosen and placed in office to help Him carry out His purposes for Israel.

***God miraculously intervenes when He chooses.***

The fact that God sometimes intervenes supernaturally in the affairs of nations is stated clearly throughout the Scriptures, but nowhere more clearly than in Isaiah 36–37. This narrative describes Jerusalem as helpless before the Assyrian army that had come to capture her. The Assyrian general sent an insolent letter to Hezekiah, ridiculing the idea that Israel's God could deliver the city. Hezekiah spread out the letter before the Lord Almighty and prayed. The next morning, the Israelites on the wall protecting the city looked out and saw that except for the 185,000 soldiers lying dead in the field, the camp was empty. God had supernaturally intervened.

Some scholars have suggested that the bubonic plague accounted for all these deaths. This is obvious conjecture, of course. But if true, the timing would still point to God. The fact is that God can supernaturally intervene without performing an obvious miracle. As the Lord Almighty, for example, He can control the weather and make it a significant factor in time of war. After a battle in which heavy rain or bitter cold helps a

smaller force to win, only believers would see the hand of God. And even then we ourselves would be unable to determine the extent to which God's supernatural power was involved. Material events always appear to material beings as having a material cause.

In summary, though all the names of God are used to denote His control of history, the name "Lord Almighty" calls special attention to this truth. God can announce His goal for history and predict the way He will bring it about because as the Lord Almighty He has the wisdom and power to overrule the best laid plans of His enemies and work out His sovereign will.

### **SEEING GOD**

- In God's announcement of His plans and purposes, we see His complete control of all things.
- In God's endtime scenario, we see His goodness.
- In Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus more than 150 years in advance of his reign, we see God's perfect foreknowledge.
- In God's miraculous deliverance of Judah from Assyria, we see His response to earnest prayer.

### **SEEING OURSELVES**

- In the response of Israel's watchmen to God's warnings (56:10-12), we see the foolish arrogance that resides within all of us.
- In Cyrus' failure to abandon his pagan worship, even after seeing and acknowledging the power of God, we see the blinding power of false religion.
- In the helplessness of the Jerusalem inhabitants in the face of the armies of Assyria, we see our own helplessness in the face of the powers of evil.
- In the sudden death of 180,000 Assyrian soldiers, we see our vulnerability in the presence of God.

## THE SAVIOR-REDEEMER

When I was in my teens, I heard a story that had a great impact on me. A young Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer was marooned by an unusually heavy snowstorm and eventually found dead in a remote cabin. On the table near his frozen body was a note: “Dear Mother, when I was home I told you that I didn’t want to go to church because I didn’t believe in God. Now that I am dying, I am haunted by the question, Will God forgive me for all my sins?”

The dominant fear for most people when they are facing death is not the fear of non-existence, it’s the fear of punishment for sin. Even the law of karma in Hinduism, which offers no hope of forgiveness, acknowledges the reality of guilt and punishment by teaching that the greater our sinfulness in this life, the more undesirable will be our next reincarnation.

The fact is that most religions, even the pantheistic Eastern belief systems, enslave their adherents to sacrificial rites and ceremonial rituals aimed at appeasing their angry gods. God, it seems, has built into all people everywhere an innate conviction that they need a redeemer, a savior.

It’s evident that Isaiah was aware of this need in that he referred to God as “Savior” eight times and as “Redeemer” thirteen times. Amazingly, in this he paints a comprehensive portrait of both Christ’s first coming and of His return for the restoration of Israel. But he does not acknowledge the time element between the two comings. Moreover, most of these prophecies are so intermingled with the warnings, assurances, and exhortations Isaiah addressed to his contemporaries that we would not understand them clearly if we did not possess the information

we have in the New Testament. This explains why even the apostles were confused and bewildered when Jesus went to the cross. We will see this as we survey some of the high points in Isaiah's portrayal of Christ as the Savior of sinners and the Redeemer of national Israel.

**Christ's Coming As Savior Of Sinners.** The details of Isaiah's predictions about the coming of Jesus as the Savior of sinners span the entire time of our Lord's sojourn on earth.

*A prediction of the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist (Isa. 40:3-5; Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4-6).* Isaiah promised the Israelites that the day would come when God would remove all obstacles to their return from the Babylonian captivity he had predicted. The Gospel writers present John the Baptist as announcing a spiritual deliverance far more than the deliverance from Babylon.

*A prediction of the virgin birth of Jesus (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23).* God sent Isaiah to Judah's king Ahaz to assure him that he had nothing to fear from the alliance of the ten-tribed northern kingdom and Syria and gave as a sign the promise, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel" (7:14). The prophecy goes on to say that very early in the life of this child, both Syria and the northern kingdom would be laid waste (vv.15-17). Isaiah 8:1-4 tells us that this part of the prophecy was fulfilled shortly after Isaiah's marriage to the woman to whom he was engaged when he met with Ahaz. She bore a son named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz who was still a small child when both the northern tribes and Syria were defeated by the Assyrians. Matthew tells us that the pregnancy of Mary before she and

Joseph had come together was the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Additionally, only Jesus could fulfill the meaning of the name “Immanuel” (“God with us”) in its full expression.

***A description of the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ (Isa. 9:6-7; Lk. 1:26-35).*** Isaiah declared that a child would be born as a gift from God and that “Mighty God” and “Everlasting” would be among the titles He would bear. The gospel of Luke gives us the angel’s message to Mary, explaining how this combination of deity and humanity would be fulfilled in the Son she was to bear.

***A description of the vicarious suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ as the suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12; the entire New Testament).*** Beginning in chapter 42 of Isaiah, we find many references to the “Servant of the Lord.” From chapters 42-48 the “Servant” is sometimes Israel or a godly remnant with indirect references to Jesus Christ. But in chapters 49-53, the “Servant” is clearly the Lord Jesus:

- The Servant’s extreme humiliation through a beating that grotesquely disfigures Him will be followed by such exaltation that men will bow in awe before Him (52:13-15; Phil. 2:1-11).
- The Servant will be despised and rejected because His appearance will differ from Jewish Messianic expectations (53:1-3).
- The Servant will suffer and die a violent death for our transgressions as the Lord lays on Him the suffering we deserve (53:4-6).
- The Servant will suffer without retaliation even though He is innocent of all the charges made against Him (53:7; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).

- The Servant will die with the wicked (plural—the two criminals crucified with Him) but will be buried with the rich (singular—the grave of Joseph of Arimathea in which His body was laid) (53:9; Mt. 27:57-60).
- The Servant will be “crushed” (die through the most intense mental and physical suffering imaginable) to provide a once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin (53:10; 2 Cor. 5:21).
- The Servant will live after dying, justify many, and take His place of highest exaltation (53:10-12; Mt. 8:17; Acts 2:29-36; Phil. 2:9-11).

The New Testament contains many more allusions to Isaiah’s prophecies about Jesus Christ. When we take them seriously, we cannot help but marvel that these prophecies were written about 700 years before they were fulfilled.

**Christ’s Return As Redeemer Of Israel.** Nothing in Isaiah suggests that a lengthy span of time will separate Christ’s coming as Savior from sin and His return as Redeemer of Israel. But both of these comings are clearly in view throughout. Because the prophecies about Israel’s repentance and restoration were not fulfilled at Christ’s first coming, it’s necessary to look for a fulfillment at a later time. These endtime prophecies, intertwined with messages applicable to Isaiah’s contemporaries and predictions of the first coming, include grim warnings of endtime judgments and bright promises of worldwide blessings.

### ***Serious Warnings Of Endtime Judgments***

- God warns Jerusalem that He will give her “the cup of His wrath, . . . the goblet that makes men stagger” (51:17).
- God (speaking in retrospect after the endtime

great tribulation) portrays Himself as treading a winepress with His garments made red by the spattering grape juice. This symbolizes His trampling of the nations in His anger (63:3-6).

- God speaks of a coming “Day of the Lord” in which He will cause the sun, the moon, the stars, and their constellations to be darkened (13:1,10), with stars falling like withered leaves (34:4) and the earth trembling under His wrath (13:13; 24:18).
- God will devastate the earth, causing Babylon and Edom to become places of abject desolation for the rest of earth’s history (24:1-13,19-20; 34:2,5,10).

***Bright Promises Of Worldwide Blessing.*** The judgments of the endtime Day of the Lord will be followed by unparalleled blessing for Israel and the nations—which we depicted earlier.

- Israel will experience a restoration beyond any in her previous history, a regathering foreshadowed by previous returns (27:12-13; 40:10; 49:22; 52:10).
- God, in the person of the exalted Christ, will return to Zion as her Redeemer and as King over the saved Jewish community (59:20-21; Rom. 11:26).
- Jesus Christ will rule the nations, receiving the willing worship of Gentiles and bringing about perfect justice, worldwide peace, universal prosperity, healing of all diseases and deformities, a greatly increased lifespan, and a friendly natural world (2:1-5; 11:1-16; 35:1-6; 42:7; 65:25).

As members of the body of Christ, who believe in His resurrection and ascension to heaven, we can anticipate His return with the assurance that all God has promised He will bring to pass.

### **SEEING GOD**

- In God's provision of a way by which He can righteously forgive sinners, we see His wisdom and love.
- In God's promise of a virgin-born divine-human Redeemer whom He would make the substitute sacrifice for our sins (Isa. 53), we see the depth of His love.
- In God's grim warnings of endtime judgments (13:13; 51:17; 63:3-6), we see that His holiness makes it impossible to leave sin unpunished.
- In God's promises of Israel's conversion and restoration, we see the triumph of His grace.

### **SEEING OURSELVES**

- In the fact that people everywhere have an innate conviction that they need a redeemer, we see why all who fail to repent are "without excuse."
- In the terrible suffering that Messiah endured when God laid on Him the penalty for our sins, we see the depths of our depravity.
- In the fact that God must use a time of wrath to bring Israel to repentance, we see our own stubborn pride.
- In the exaltation of Jesus Christ during the Kingdom Age, we see something of the blessedness that awaits us as His co-regents.

# **WHY WE NEED TO KNOW GOD**

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Ninety percent of the public believes in the existence of God. But most of us have a shallow understanding of who God is and what He is like. He's infinitely better than any of us think He is, yet He's not like a big-hearted physician or a doting grandfather—a view held, unfortunately, by many church people. Many of us have learned to trust God for salvation, to pray for health and happiness, to give to the church so that people may come to Christ, to be involved in church activities, and to anticipate being with God forever in heaven. But too few of us discover a profound appreciation for the great biblical truths of His character and His personality. The result of this small view of God is that we unknowingly substitute our own entertainment for real faith and worship. In doing so, we live almost on the same level as those who don't know Christ.

Proverbs 9:10 states, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” We can't begin to know God without the “fear of the Lord,” and we can't truly fear Him unless we understand who He is and what He is like.

Seeing God and seeing ourselves in His presence has been the goal of this booklet. We have seen our accountability to Him as “the Holy One of Israel,” His right as “Creator-Maker” to want the best for us, His power as “Lord Almighty” to accomplish all His purposes, and His grace as “Savior-Redeemer” by which He rescues us from real danger. Properly understood, these truths lead us to the greatest of all discoveries: to know our God and to love Him forever.

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