

Bible Study

This study follows the same Bible passage as the Sermon Outline (pages 20-21). It can be used before or after hearing the sermon. If it is used without the sermon, it may be useful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand.

You may also like to read the SCAAW 2021 eight-day Devotional Booklet, which is enclosed with this magazine and can be downloaded from barnabasfund.org/scaaw or ordered from your nearest Barnabas Fund office (details inside front cover).

The section headed "Digging Deeper" is for those who would like to explore the theme in more depth.



READ ISAIAH 40:1-11

The angelic message of comfort and forgiveness (v.1-2)

1. In this passage, we are reminded that God is in full, sovereign control over all that takes place with nothing left to "chance". How should we respond to that truth? Do we find this a comfort when we or others undergo times of *saba*, "hard service" (v.2, which describes a time of discipline, hardship and pain – but of limited duration)?
2. How is sin related to suffering? Is suffering always the direct consequence of sin? Or is suffering simply the consequence of living in a fallen world? If suffering is not necessarily related to sin, do you find that thought comforting, depressing or frustrating? Share with the group your initial response and notice whether your view changes with discussion.
3. Have you experienced a time of *saba*? Have you ever been delivered after a long period of suffering? How did it feel?
4. How do you think the first hearers felt about their sin being doubly atoned for?

Preparing for the coming deliverance (v.3-5)

5. What is the significance of "the way of the LORD" being made through the wilderness, for the Israelite exiles and for the suffering Church today? Why is the wilderness so significant?
6. Why is it necessary to prepare the way for the LORD? How can we do this in our own lives?
7. What is God's purpose in leading His people through the wilderness? How can we align ourselves with this purpose when we find ourselves in a wilderness?

8. How did Jesus respond to His desert experience (Matthew 4)? Can we respond in a similar way? God assures us that "every valley will be raised up, every mountain and hill will be made low" (v.4). How does that apply in our lives?

Confidence in the unchanging Word of God (v.6-8)

9. Why is the *hesed* (steadfast love or faithfulness) of human beings likened to a wildflower? How does this compare with God's *hesed*?
10. How can we be more dependable and demonstrate *hesed*?
11. What does it mean that the word of the LORD endures forever? Does it make any difference to our lives?

Enfolded in the eternal arms of God (v.9-11)

12. What is the good news proclaimed to (or by) Jerusalem in v.9? What does this good news mean for the suffering Church today?
13. Why does Isaiah keep exhorting us not to fear (7:4, 8:12, 35:4, 41:13-14, 43:1, 5, 44:2, 8, 54:4, 14)? Have you ever experienced a godly fear (Isaiah 8:13, 11:2)?
14. How should we understand the declaration in v.10 that the LORD "rules with a mighty arm"? Several translations refer to "His arm ruling for Him" where "arm" refers to strength. What does this tell us about how we should think and feel about the enemies of the Church?
15. Is it right to expect a reward from God (Hebrews 11:6)? Or do we not deserve anything? What is the "reward" which belongs to God (v.10)? What does this tell us about the nature of God and how He relates to His people? How do we reconcile seeking a reward and recognising our own unworthiness?



Digging deeper

16. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem" (v.2). What insight do we get from this passage or from Jesus' life of the passionate love we should have for our cities, towns and villages?
17. *Hesed* is translated in various ways, as glory, beauty, loveliness, faithfulness, constancy, goodness, loyalty and kindness and in the Amplified Bible as "all that makes it attractive (its charm, its loveliness)". Where in Scripture do you find *hesed* being most powerfully demonstrated? Is there a connection between faithfulness, beauty and glory?
18. What does it mean for Jerusalem to receive "double for all her sins"? Reflect on the references to paying double for crimes (Exodus 22:4, 7, 9, Jeremiah 16:18, Revelation 18:6 in reference to Babylon). Consider Elijah's request for a "double portion of your Spirit" (2 Kings 2:9) and God's desire to bless (Isaiah 61:7). What do we learn of God's justice and bountiful generosity?
19. What does it mean to have the glory of the LORD revealed? How is the appearance of God's glory described elsewhere in Scripture? (Exodus 16:10, 24:16-17, 1 Kings 8:11, Psalm 72:19, Isaiah 60:19, Ezekiel 1:28, Luke 9:32, John 1:14, Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18).
20. God is here described as a shepherd (v.11), putting us in mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. What does this tell us about the relationship between God as revealed in the Old Testament and Christ in the New Testament?