

Bible Reading Notes

August 2020 – Isaiah 28-39

How to use these Bible reading notes

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you feed on God's word a little and often and allow it to change your life. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever you left off – it doesn't matter if it's the wrong date.

Here are some tips on how to get the most out of this:

1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake. Maybe set an alarm on your phone to remind you each day.
2. Pray: ask God to help you understand what he says.
3. Use the notes to help you think about the passage (use a good translation of the Bible like the NIV).
 - 'Read' tells you which verses to read
 - 'Apply' shows how it affects you
 - 'Pray' suggests ways to talk to God about it
4. Pray about what you have read. You might also like to use the Church Prayer Diary.
5. Look for a chance to share with someone what God has been saying to you.

These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets. Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'Add Subject → Church Life → UK Churches → St.Philemon's → Bible Notes'. You can also find them on our website: www.stphilemons.co.uk. If you have any problems, email miriam@stphilemons.co.uk.

Some important people/places in Isaiah 28-39

Isaiah makes lots of references to people and places throughout his book. Here is a list of some of the words we will come across this month with some explanations.

Ephraim – Isaiah’s name for the ‘northern’ kingdom of Israel (at this time God’s people are split into two nations). The capital city was Samaria.

Judah – The southern kingdom of God’s people.

Ariel – An ancient name for Jerusalem the capital of the southern kingdom. It’s also called Zion.

Assyria – The superpower of Isaiah’s day.

Babylon – A rising power. Not as strong as Assyria yet, but looking to become dominant. Around this time, it’s king, Marduk-Baladan, rebelled against Assyria.

Hezekiah – King of Judah. His father was Ahaz the unfaithful king from the early chapters of Isaiah.

Sennacherib – King of Assyria, probably the most powerful person on earth at this time.

Lachish – The last fortified town of Judah before arriving at Jerusalem, Assyria destroyed it. You can see art showing this in the British museum! (It’s history!)

Saturday 1st August

Isaiah part 5 – Who do you trust to rescue you?

Before we get stuck into chapters 28-39 let's just recap Isaiah's message to this point.

Read Isaiah 24:1-3

- What does God have power over?

Read Isaiah 26:1-4

- What is the right response to this great God?

Isaiah has made it clear that God is the ruler of the world. He wants his people to know that so they will trust him.

But what about when the going gets tough...? In chapters 28-39 God's people are split into two, north and south, and face a powerful enemy about to invade – the Assyrians... so will they put their trust in God?

Apply

Ask God to show you more of who he is this month so you can trust him no matter what enemies crowd around you or how powerful they appear. God is big enough to deal with them.

Sunday 2nd August

The north: a fading crown...

This passage talks about 'garlands' or 'wreaths'. These were 'crowns' worn at parties in Isaiah's day. They looked nice at the start of the night but were tattered by the end! In the northern kingdom of Israel, the walls of the capital city also looked like a 'crown' on the hills. Isaiah explains what will happen to this 'crown'.

Read Isaiah 28:1-6

- What will happen to Ephraim (v1-4) and why?

Assyria were about to attack Ephraim. Their destruction (described in v2) was about to happen.

- Who is the other crown in the passage and how is he described (v5-6)?

Apply

- "Eat, drink and be merry." Do you see that attitude today?
- How might the reality of coming destruction wake people up?

Pray

Praise God for the way he is described in v5-6.

Ask him to help you look to him for fulfilment instead of indulging in short term pleasures.

Monday 3rd August

The north: drunk leaders

Today we see how far the rot had set in Ephraim. Isaiah speaks of its leadership. They are being indulgent with drink, and that is corrupting them spiritually!

Read Isaiah 28:7-13

- Who is getting drunk and how it is affecting their work (v7-8)?
- In v9-10 the corrupt leaders are speaking about Isaiah's ministry. What do they think of it?
- What happens as a result (v11-13)?

Apply

'If we scoff at those who bring the word of God to us we will end up unable to hear it'.

- How should that challenge us as we live for Jesus?

Pray

Pray for those who teach the word of God to you. Pray they would be godly in life and willing to listen to God's word themselves.

Tuesday 4th August

The south: safe or swept away?

After taking aim at the leaders in the northern kingdom today Isaiah turns to the leaders in the south. They might have cheered at what Isaiah said about the north (they didn't get on) but what about them? Will they be safe from the Assyrian army?

Read Isaiah 28:14-22

- What's the attitude of leaders in Jerusalem (v15)? Who have they made an agreement with?
- What does God say in response (v16-19a)?
- What is this 'cornerstone' where safety can be found? (see 1 Peter 2:4-10 for more)
- Will the deal the leaders made in v15 work? (v22)

Apply

Verse 20 is a popular proverb of the day. It's saying *'what you've got can't do the job you want.'*

- What/who do you trust in to bring you security?
- Do you sometimes put your trust in something that won't or can't deliver?

Pray

Praise God that he is righteous, just and trustworthy to deliver on his promises!

Wednesday 5th August

The natural order of wisdom

The arrogant leaders of north and south are cynical about Isaiah's warnings. Isaiah now speaks about a humble farmer who pays attention to God and the way he works in the world.

Read Isaiah 28:23-29

- How does the farmer behave (v23-25)?
- What motivates him (v26)?
- What are the examples in v27-28 saying? Why wouldn't you do things the way it describes?
- How is God's ordering of the world described (v29)?

Apply

- Who do you think of as wise?
- If wisdom is measured by being humble before God and the way he works, does that change your answer?

Pray

Pray for the wisdom that comes from humility and trust in God. Praise God that he governs all things with wisdom.

Thursday 6th August

Dry religion in David's city

The south thought they were purer than the north because they had kings from the line of David and they had the temple with its worship and festivals (see v1-2). Now we see God's word on Jerusalem (Ariel).

Read Isaiah 29:1-14

- Does God think this city honours him (v1-4)?
- What is the surprise in v5-8? What will happen to Jerusalem's enemies? Who will do this for them?
- What is the response to God's rescue (v9-14)? Does this shock you?

Apply & Pray

God rescues those who don't deserve it and often don't appreciate it – that includes us!

- Thank God that Jesus came for us while we were still sinners.

Dry religion that doesn't care for God is really harmful.

- Do you see this in yourself? Do you need to repent of dry religion?
- Ask God to protect you from a dry religious duty that blinds you to his wonderful rescue.

Friday 7th August

Upside down...and round again!

Today's passage tells us about people turning the world upside down... then God turns the world the right way up again!

Read Isaiah 29:15-21

- What are the people trying to do (v15-16)? Why is it so foolish?
- What reversals happen in v17-21? What is the result of these reversals? Good or bad?

In Isaiah's day God's people were leaving him out of their plans for the future as we will see in the next chapters!

Apply

In the end it is God's plan for the world that will win.

- How might this change the way you think about: the next month? Year? 10 Years?

Pray

Praise God for his plan to turn the world the right way up again! Ask God to help you make him the centre of your plans.

Saturday 8th August

Trusting the holy God of promises

Today's reading is a summary of chapters 28-29. Here Isaiah promises that God will rescue his people. He tells them this because, as we have seen, right now they are far from God in their hearts. He wants to reassure them that they can trust that God has their best interests at heart.

Read Isaiah 29:22-24

- Which old testament people are mentioned (v22)? Why do you think Isaiah mentions them?
- What will God do for his people (v22b, v24)?
- How will the people respond (v23-24)?

Apply

- How do you feel about the idea that one day, if you trust God, you will feel no shame (for anything!)?
- How might this passage help us see salvation as something bigger than *just* being rescued...?

Pray

Pray for those you know who need to turn and trust in this God who is always holy and faithful.

Sunday 9th August

The problem of 'Do-nothing' allies

Churchill once said: *'The only thing worse than fighting with allies is fighting without them.'* But God calls his people to see things differently and trust him alone. They are in danger from the powerful Assyrians, and are being tempted to put their trust in other places...

Read Isaiah 30:1-7

- Who are the people wanting to ally with (v2)?
- What does God think about that (v1-3)?
- How does God describe the help of this ally (v4-5)?
- The road to Egypt went through the Negev, is that road a good one to travel (v6-7)?

Apply

The people are 'obstinate'. They think they know better than God.

- Do you ever find yourself thinking that you might need to give God a helping hand to work his plans out? What might be a sign that this attitude is in us? (think v2a!)

Pray

Pray that God might take away those things you trust in rather than him. Thank God that he is not a 'do-nothing'.

Monday 10th August

Stubborn hearts and deaf ears

Yesterday we saw that the people were making alliances rather than trusting God. Today we go under the surface to see the attitude in their hearts that caused them not to trust God.

Read Isaiah 30:8-18

- Why does God want this written down (v8)?
- What do the people want [not] to hear (v8-11)?
- What are the results of their attitude (v13-14)?
- Will the Israelites avoid the judgement (v15-17)?
What hope is there (v15, 18)?

Apply

- Are there things in God's word you struggle with?
- Do these ever make it harder for you to turn to him in trust with what's going on?

Pray

Ask God to help you have a heart that is soft to his word.

Praise God that in his grace he comes to rescue his people even when they are stubborn!

Tuesday 11th August

Floods of grace!

Last time we saw the people of Judah were not trusting God and were under serious threat of judgement (and Assyria are close by!). Yet today God promises a wonderful reversal by his grace (Isa 30:18).

Read Isaiah 30:19-26

- How does grace reverse what we saw yesterday (v19-21)?
- What else are we told about the people's 'worship' in v22? What have they been worshipping?
- After their hearts are changed and they listen to God – what else will change for them (v23-26)?

Apply

Verse 25 talks about towers falling. This is probably a symbol of the people's pride needing to be smashed.

- Can you think how God uses hard times to humble us so that we might return in trust?

Pray

If you're brave why not pray for God to show you where your pride needs bringing low?

Pray for the wider church to be people who will come humbly before God's word.

Wednesday 12th August

Floods of judgement

God has promised that his people will be rescued. At that time, they were under threat from Assyria, a violent superpower, who committed acts of terror to scare their enemies into surrender... so the obvious question was – what was going to happen to them?

Read Isaiah 30:27-33

- How is God described (v27-28)? What kind of response does this vision of God get (v29-30)?
- Who is God coming to judge (v31)?
- How does Isaiah think the fight will go (v32-33)?

Apply

Isaiah's description of God causes people to sing...

- Do you ever praise God for his 'raging anger and consuming fire' ...?
- Why might it be good news that this is what God is like?

Pray

Thank God that he is fearsome and mighty and will come to overthrow tyrants and wicked people. Pray for Christians persecuted by evil governments, that they would know this God!

Thursday 13th August

Let me say that again...

In many ways chapter 31 repeats chapter 30... a bit shorter but still challenging his people; 'where is their trust?' God must feel this is a very important message for his people so he wants them to be clear on it!

Read Isaiah 31:1-3

- What does God warn his people against (v1)?
- Why might it be tempting to trust an alliance?
- What/who have the people forgotten (v2)?
- Compare and contrast Egypt and God in v3.

Apply

Verse 2 is mocking the king's counsellors advising an alliance with Egypt... Isaiah seems to be saying 'God knows a thing or two as well...'

- Do you ever forget that God might have his own ideas?

Pray

Pray that God would show us all how weak other things are in comparison to him, so that we might put our trust in him fully.

Friday 14th August

Safe? Who said anything about safe?

In the Narnia books C.S. Lewis uses a lion (Aslan) to represent God. He's trying to get across that God is fierce and powerful. It's a nice idea, in fact Isaiah got there about 2,700 years before!

Read Isaiah 31:4-9

- In verses 4-5 there are two pictures used to teach us about God. What are they and what do they teach?
- What is the command of v6-7?
- What is promised in v8-9 in regards to Assyria?

Apply

The structure of the passage is: a truth about God (v4-5), a command to turn back and trust in him (v6-7), delight in the promise of this God (v8-9).

There's a logic; know who God is so that you know you can trust him, then rest in his promises.

- Which of those stages do you forget most easily?

Pray

Ask God to help you with whichever one of the above is the biggest challenge for you.

Praise God that he is mighty to rescue us.

Saturday 15th August

A better alternative (1) - noble government

God has told his people to rely on him – not Egypt – for rescue. If chapters 30-31 talk about the bad consequences of relying on Egypt, then the next two chapters give us a glimpse at the alternative if they will trust in God. He starts with the leaders...

Read Isaiah 32:1-8

- What kind of government is promised (v1-2)?
- What impact will it have (v3-8)?
- Who is hurt most by godless government (v7)?

Apply

- Do you ever think about how godlessness in society has an impact on the poorest? How should this challenge us as a church to offer a better alternative of community?

Pray

Pray for our government to be wise and make noble decisions.

Praise God that he gives us the government we need in King Jesus. Meditate on how wonderful the future world that he promises will be!

Sunday 16th August

A better alternative (2) – fruitfulness!

The alternative vision of chapter 32-33 will still involve some pain. God will need to remove the pride and indulgence of the people. This next section gives a vivid description, before showing that this stripping away will lead to greater fruitfulness in the long run.

Read Isaiah 32:9-20

- What is the attitude of the people (v9)?
- What will happen to change this (v10-14)?
- After having things stripped away what happens next (v15)?
- What is the result (v15-20)?

Apply & Pray

In Isaiah it often happens that God's people bring disaster on themselves, then God's grace breaks in to redeem them. Praise God that this is his nature – turning tragic situations to blessings!

Pray that you would trust God with situations in your life that seem fruitless. Ask for his Spirit to bring the fruit of righteousness to them.

Monday 17th August

A better alternative (2) – destroyers destroyed!

'Just trust God' sounds great, but there are still problems in life! God's people might have asked what will trust in God do about the destructive Assyrian army on the prowl and coming for us! Isaiah reassures them God has a plan...

Read Isaiah 33:1-6

- What will happen to Assyria the 'destroyer' (v1)?
- Where are the people to look for strength (v2)? Why (v3, v5-6)?
- What will happen to Assyria's plunder when they are defeated (v4)?

Apply

- Do you often view God as a mighty Lord of armies (v3)? Why might this be good?

Pray

Pray for those persecutors who wish to destroy God's people. Ask God to show them the stupidity of challenging him, so they might learn to fear him rightly!

Ask God to help you trust him to be your strength rather than relying on yourself!

Tuesday 18th August

Our only hope...

Today all the things God's people might be tempted to put their hope in are wasted away...

Read Isaiah 33:7-16

- What is the situation like in v7-9? What sources of potential hope have been taken away?
- What does God do (v10-12)?

Note: Verse 11 seems to be what God will say to the enemies attacking his people!

- When God acts, how will people respond (v13-16)?

Apply

The idea of God's judgement isn't just to help the unbeliever turn to God, it also is there to purify God's people. Have you thought about how knowing about God's judgement should change you?

Pray

Pray for those far and near to hear of God's work and acknowledge him. Perhaps pray for those you know looking to take the gospel into particular places in the world far and near!

Wednesday 19th August

The beautiful king

After the rescue earlier and the people returning to God we now get a vision of him in all his glory. That changes everything...

Read Isaiah 33:17-24

- After God's victory, how do the people think about the threat they faced before (v17-19)?
- What is the city like after the rescue (v20-22)?

Verses 23-24 are hard to understand. Some of the best commentators think it is a before/after shot. Verse 23 is when the people were not trusting God; now in v24 the picture has changed.

Apply

A big vision of God puts all other things into a new perspective. He also gives his word to direct our thoughts and actions.

- What has Isaiah told you about God?

Pray

Pray God would use these truths to give you the right perspective.

Praise God that he has sent Jesus to be the king that saves us!

Thursday 20th August

The desert of judgement (1) – General judgement

Chapters 34-35 are two sides of a coin. Chapter 34 describes judgement that lays waste to God's enemies and chapter 35 shows how God will restore the land of his people. It seems to be a courtroom scene as God calls his witnesses to stand before him – the judge!

Read Isaiah 34:1-4

- Who is God speaking to in v1?
- What is God's attitude toward 'the nations' (v2a)?
- What will God do to them (v2b-3)?
- How big is God's judgement (v4)?

Apply

God's judgement is a very uncomfortable thing to hear. The Bible is clear that God will judge so it is something we need to consider. Can you see how this is a violent judgement on the violence and war of the nations (in v2 for example)? Does this help you see that God's judgement is appropriate?

Pray

Praise God that he is the judge and no one else, and ask for help in trusting him with judgement.

Friday 21st August

The desert of judgement (2) – Edom's judgement

Yesterday's passage spoke about a general judgement that the 'nations' who opposed God would face. Today Isaiah focusses in on one nation – Edom. They were Israel's neighbours and they were especially hostile to them. (See the book of Obadiah for example).

Read Isaiah 34:5-17

- How is God's judgement described (v5-8)?
- Why does God execute judgement (v8)?
- What is Edom like after the judgement (v9-15)?
- Why is it certain that all this will happen (v16-17)?

Apply

There can be no more terrifying thing than being an enemy of God. These verses give us a glimpse as to why.

- What would change in our evangelism if we saw God's judgement more like Isaiah did?

Pray

Pray that God would help you trust in the rightness of his justice. Thank God that he is committed to his people (v8).

Saturday 22nd August

A desert turned into a garden

Chapter 34 saw fruitful places become a desert. Now we see the reverse. The God who destroys in judgement is also the God who redeems and restores in grace.

Read Isaiah 35:1-10

- How do you think Isaiah wants the people to respond to the picture of restoration (v1-4)?
- What will restoration mean for people (v5-7)?
- What's good about travelling on the road described in v8-10?

Apply

The picture here is the power of God to recreate and bring beauty, life and joy.

- Why do we need this given everything we have seen so far in Isaiah?

Pray

Praise God that his plan for us is to enter into everlasting joy! Pray for someone you know who needs strengthening by a vision like this.

Sunday 23rd August

A proud king (part 1) – the challenge

Today we move from prophecy to history. Isaiah has been telling the people to trust God (not Egypt) with their situation... he can rescue them! Over the next few days we see what happened when Assyria came to attack. It's one of the great Old Testament stories, so sit down somewhere comfortable and enjoy...!

Read Isaiah 36:1-20

- How does the king of Assyria speak about himself (v4)? What does he think of his chances (v5-9)?
- How do things look for God's people (v11-12)?
- What does the king of Assyria offer (v16-17)?
- What does the king of Assyria claim (v18-20)?

Apply

Pride is wanting to replace God. That's what the king of Assyria does. He claims he can overpower God and even offers the blessings God promised.

- Where do you see similar attitudes today?

Pray

Pray for us all to examine our hearts and repent of our pride.

Monday 24th August

A proud king (part 2) – the response

After yesterday's passage, humanly speaking, it didn't look good for Jerusalem. Today the king of Assyria continues to try and scare them into surrender. We see their response to this proud king.

Read Isaiah 36:21-37:13

- What are three signs that the people are looking to God (v21, v22, ch37v1-2)?
- Where do they place their hope and where don't they place it (v3-4)?
- What is Isaiah's message (v6-7)? What does the king of Assyria say (v11-13)?

Apply

- When life situations seem desperate are you someone who starts by going to God with a humble heart and who seeks to obey?
- If not, how are you tempted to react to difficult circumstances?

Pray

There are competing voices and claims in our world and sometimes God's word comes into conflict with other voices. Pray for the humility to trust God's word when other voices seem louder.

Tuesday 25th August

A prayerful king

Today we see Hezekiah do what we should always do in a tough situation. He turns to prayer. This is one of the great prayers in the Bible!

Read Isaiah 37:14-20

- How does Hezekiah describe God (v16)?
- What does he ask God to do and why (v17)?
- What is the difference between the God of the Bible and all the other gods Assyria have beaten (v18-20)?

Apply

- Prayer starts with who God is... a bigger view of God will lead to a bigger view of prayer. Does this challenge your prayer life?
- In what ways might you use this prayer as a model to help you pray?

Pray

- Praise God for who he is and thank him that he does 'give ear and hear'.
- Ask God to help you make his glory your greatest concern.

Wednesday 26th August

A powerful king (part 1) – A word to Assyria

We've seen a proud king mocking God and a prayerful king depending on God. Now we see the true king – God himself! He declares what he will do to the Assyrian army camped outside Jerusalem.

Read Isaiah 37:21-29

- How will the tables be turned on Assyria (v21-22)?
- What mistake has the king of Assyria made (v23-25) and what has he not understood (v26-27)?
- What will happen next (v28-29)?

Apply

The wicked are only allowed to prosper because God sovereignly permits it. This is challenging to us in some ways but can you see that it is also a comforting truth?

Pray

Praise God that he is not like powerless idols, but he is the true and living God in control of history.

Pray for people who are proud and think God will not act. Ask for mercy for them to see the foolishness of their ways.

Thursday 27th August

A powerful king (part 2) – A word to Hezekiah

God has spoken and told Assyria what he will do to them for their arrogance. But they are still at the gates of Jerusalem... today he speaks to Hezekiah in the middle of the siege.

Read Isaiah 37:30-38

- Why is v30-32 good news to people under siege?
- What does God say will be the result of the Assyrian siege (v33-35)?
- What happens to Assyria and its king (v36-38)?

Apply

The battle is a bit of an anti-climax after all the build-up! What matters is which side you are on because the outcome is assured. How does this change the way we think about following Jesus?

Psalm 46 was probably written in response to this event. Why not read through it and reflect on its message?

Pray

Praise God that we can trust him to secure the victory against all his enemies!

Friday 28th August

Hezekiah - The king who prayed for life

Chapter 38 actually goes back in time... before the attack by Assyria (see v6!). They help us understand Hezekiah better. We want to know if he is the promised king of Isaiah chapter 9. So, let's look at Hezekiah – the one who trusted God...mostly...

Read Isaiah 38:1-8

- What is Hezekiah facing (v1)? How does he respond (v2-3)? When have we seen this before?
- How does God respond (v4-6)? What are the limits of God's 'rescue' of Hezekiah (v5)?
- How does God reassure Hezekiah (v7-8)?

Apply

God calls himself 'the God of your father David'... God is faithful to his people and to promises he made centuries before this - have you thought about what a great thing that is? How does that affect your daily Christian life?

Pray

Praise God for his kindness in giving reassurance to his people that he will do what he has promised!

Saturday 29th August

Hezekiah – the king who will still die

Yesterday we saw that Hezekiah's fate was linked to the fate of the city. Today we hear a song about his rescue from death, nevertheless that was only temporary (remember v5!) ... which should make us think... what about Jerusalem?

Read Isaiah 38:9-22

- What things make Hezekiah mourn about his coming death (v10-11)? How did he feel (v12-14)?
- What does the news of his restoration mean to him (v15-17)?
- Why are v18-20 a cause for concern given God has only promised him 15 more years?

Apply

- Though the song is about Hezekiah's miraculous recovery, the fact of death hangs as a shadow over the whole thing. How often do you consider the fact that each of us must face death?

Pray

Pray for wisdom to live the life you are given in the best possible way – that is to live for God!

Sunday 30th August

A King like the rest of us – the pride of Hezekiah

Everything God had promised about Assyria came true and Hezekiah trusted God. However, we know Hezekiah will die. Today we see that though Hezekiah was a good king, he was not perfect...

Read Isaiah 39:1-8

- How does Hezekiah greet the Babylonians (1-2)? Are there any hints he is being proud?
- What does God say in response (v5-7)?
- What does Hezekiah's reaction in v8 make you think about the king who was so faithful earlier?

Apply

After all that... it turned out the deliverance from Assyria was only temporary! We sometimes wonder why God works the way he does – where do you find it hard to understand God's ways?

Pray

Pray against pride in your own heart and ask for the humility to trust and obey God.

After all we've seen, we know God is the only true source of hope. Pray that for help to believe that.

Monday 31st August

An unsatisfying ending!

God has done what he promised and rescued his people from Assyria. Yet by the end of chapter 39 we are a little disappointed. God had promised a glorious kingdom for his people back in chapter 11... yet we are told that Judah will be conquered by Babylon, and Hezekiah has shown himself to be a bit disappointing... but Isaiah had promised a better king!

Read Isaiah 9:6-7

- Where do we see that Hezekiah is NOT the king Isaiah speaks of here?

Apply

We need a better king than Hezekiah. At the end of this section he's happy to see the people conquered if he is kept safe (39:8). But God has given us a better king, one who put others' interests before his own and lived perfectly faithfully all his days (see Philippians 2:5-11).

Pray

Praise God for the perfect king Jesus. Ask God to help you live your life for his perfect king.