

Isaiah

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Isaiah using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Reading the Prophets*—especially the section on Isaiah—will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Shinin
12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec-

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God’s g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi **(1)** Some, like “something sel

Prepare

Read the Introduction to Isaiah, paying particular attention to *The Prophet and His Times*, *The Message of the Prophet*, and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Isaiah to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Isaiah, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Isaiah as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:2–20.** What form does Isaiah's opening tirade have? What role does the prophet take? With what does Isaiah charge Israel? What are some of the parallels between these verses and the Song of Moses in Deut 32?
2. **1:4.** What is Isaiah's signature epithet for the Lord, and how often does it appear in the book? What revelation does it encapsulate? What gaping divide does it also underscore?
3. **1:10–17.** What attitude does the prophet denounce in these verses? In biblical teaching, what do liturgy and life form? If Isaiah's polemic is not against the rites of Mosaic worship themselves, what is it against?
4. **1:19–20.** What are the "two ways" of the covenant set before Jerusalem and between which it must choose? Although not apparent in translation, what does the Hebrew verb *'akal*, which appears in both verses, indicate?

For application

1. **1:2.** According to the note for this verse, rebellion against parents and their discipline was a capital offense (look up Deut 21:18–21). Why do you think the Mosaic Law was that harsh? How do parents in our culture tend to treat rebellious older children? Even though we are more lenient, what makes the kind of rebellion Deuteronomy describes still serious?
2. **1:10–15.** As you examine your conscience, what separation of your religious observance from your work, home, or recreational life do you detect? What effect does that separation have on your view of your faith? On your prayers? How do you think God views it?
3. **1:18–19.** Why does God urge you to repent of and confess your sins? What have you done that he cannot forgive? Who benefits from confession, you or he?
4. **1:25.** According to the analogy in this verse, who will cleanse with lye or smelt silver? How does lye clean household items or smelting purify metal? How does this serve as a metaphor for the purification from sin that suffering or mortification can accomplish?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:2–4.** What do these verses present? What is its focal point, and what will it become? With what era will it coincide? In the ancient world, how were mountains viewed?
2. **Word Study: The Latter Days (2:2).** What does the Hebrew phrase *'aharit hayyamim* mean? Occasionally, what does the expression foresee regarding judgment? In another instance, what does Jacob predict regarding the latter days? Because the phrase is thus linked to the eschatological hopes of Israel, what kind of time do the latter days mark? If they are not simply the "last days" of human history, to what do they point?
3. **2:3.** For what is Zion another name? Originally, how was the word "Zion" restricted in meaning? In the NT, how is the summit of Zion, crowned with the city of Jerusalem, viewed? When does Jesus seem to have this passage in mind? According to Eusebius of Caesarea, how should one identify the law going forth from Zion, which differs from the law of Sinai?
4. **2:12.** What was the "day of the Lord" as announced by the prophets? For whom is it sometimes a day of reckoning or settling of accounts? Theologically, what glimpse does every "day of the Lord" throughout history offer?

For application

1. **2:2.** What is your experience with mountains like the Rockies, the Sierra Nevadas, or the Smokies? What draws people to mountains? Where in nature do you feel closest to God?
2. **2:4.** Warfare and the stockpiling of weapons have been constants in the relations between groups of people throughout history. What are some reasons for this? According to this verse (and its context), from where will the desire to stop war and destroy weaponry come?
3. **2:9.** What is the difference between being *humbled* and being *humiliated*? Which would you rather have happen to you? How can being humiliated teach humility?

4. **2:22.** On what person or group of people do you depend for your security or happiness? How effective have they been in providing what you expect of them? Who looks to you for these things? What happens when you fail? If you decide to turn away from such support, to whom do you turn?

Chapters 3–4

For understanding

1. **3:1.** What does the expression “stay and staff” mean? What will be swept away in the coming distress? What was the deportation policy of the Assyrians and Babylonians?
2. **4:2.** To whom does the title “branch of the LORD” refer, as used by the prophets and also Isaiah? What meanings of the image in this passage are under dispute, and what might be their resolution? Of what is abundant vegetation a sign?
3. **4:4.** Who are the daughters of Zion referred to here? What does the Hebrew word *damim* mean, and to what may it refer? What is the purpose of a spirit of burning? According to St. Jerome, how will the remnant of Jerusalem be saved?
4. **4:5.** What do the images of the cloud by day and fire by night recall? What is the glory, and what is it called in rabbinic theology? How does the glory form a canopy over Zion, and what did it provide for the Exodus pilgrims fleeing Egypt? To what does the Hebrew word for canopy, *huppah*, refer?

For application

1. **3:5.** Have you ever made or heard complaints about the decline of civility in our culture or the lack of respect of youth toward parents, teachers, or elders? If you agree with such complaints, what do you think is the root cause for the decline? If you disagree, why do you think people make such complaints?
2. **3:6–7.** If you were asked to take charge of a clearly failing enterprise, such as a business or church scheduled to close, what would be your answer? What considerations would guide your decision?
3. **3:16–24.** What attitudes toward self or others can the ability to afford lavish goods such as those mentioned in these verses generate? To what extent have you been affected by a consumerist mentality? How does your possession of goods affect your attitude to the poor and homeless?
4. **4:4–6.** In recent years, speculation has emerged that Christianity will decline until a purified remnant remains. Since many Christians today appear to be abandoning the faith, what is your opinion? What significance do you see for the Church in the image of the protective “cloud by day” and “flaming fire by night”? Where does that image come from, and what did it mean for Israel at the time?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:1–7.** What kind of parable is the Song of the Vineyard? How is it similar to Nathan’s parable in 2 Sam 12:1–7? What does this sad story of unrequited love announce? What does the parable stress? How does Jesus draw from Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard?
2. **5:8–24.** What does Isaiah decry in these verses? Prefacing his words with six “woes”, what does he denounce? Where are the dreadful consequences wrought by these sins spelled out?
3. **5:14.** For what is Sheol the Hebrew name? How is it portrayed here?
4. **5:20.** About what does this verse speak? What is diminished the more a society descends into godlessness? What does wanton iniquity cause over time?

For application

1. **5:1–4.** What religious instruction for children and adults is available in your parish or church community? What has been the fruit in terms of conversion? If these efforts are not bearing the desired fruit, what do you think may be the cause?
2. **5:10.** What evangelistic efforts is your church or parish making, and what are the results? How have your expectations for the future been influenced by the results you are currently achieving?
3. **5:20.** How is our secular culture attempting to call good evil and evil good? What effects are these reversals having on the moral quality of our culture? What is the Church doing to oppose such views? What can you do about them?

4. **5:21.** How does one gain wisdom? What does being “wise in one’s own eyes” mean? If that is as bad as the prophet says, what wisdom should one try to gain?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:2.** What are seraphim? As the Lord’s angelic attendants, how do they behave? How are these heavenly spirits symbolically portrayed? How does Catholic tradition identify the seraphim?
2. **6:3.** With its threefold repetition, to what is the expression “Holy, holy, holy” probably equivalent, and what does this mean? What shows that this encounter with divine holiness had a deep impact on Isaiah? How does Catholic tradition explain the threefold acclamation as a form of address? According to St. John Chrysostom, from whom does the cry “Holy, holy, holy” come, and what does it accomplish? How is “the whole earth” represented in this passage?
3. **6:6.** According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, what does the burning coal taken from the altar by one of the seraphim signify? According to St. John of Damascus, how does the burning coal prepare one for the Eucharist?
4. **6:9–10.** How will Isaiah’s preaching put the Lord’s punitive sentence into effect? If divine hardening is not a cause of people’s sin, what is it? Why does God harden the heart of the disobedient? What do the Lord’s words to Isaiah, quoted several times in the NT, explain? Who refers to them this way?

For application

1. **6:1–3.** Have you ever had an experience of the holiness of God? How did it change your relationship with him? If you have not had such an experience, what might your response be if you did?
2. **6:8.** When the liturgy calls upon you to “go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”, how eager are you to comply? Is your attitude “send me” or “send someone else”? If you sense no eagerness to spread the Gospel, what prevents it?
3. **6:9–10.** These verses are a good description of spiritual obtuseness. As you examine your own conscience, do you detect any spiritual sluggishness? For example, when you hear words of exhortation from the Scriptures or from the pulpit that call for personal change, do you shut your ears?
4. **6:11.** Isaiah asks how long his ministry is to continue. How long are you supposed to strive for holiness? How long are you supposed to encourage others toward that same holiness?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:1—9:7.** What does Isaiah address in these chapters? Historically, against what background do these events take place? Theologically, what seemed to be in jeopardy? What is Ahaz urged to believe?
2. **7:9.** What test is set before Ahaz? What is he invited to do, and what does he do instead? To what do his actions amount? To what does the expression “you shall not be established” probably allude? What proviso is included in this covenant?
3. **7:14–25.** How is this first Immanuel prophecy theologically significant, and what makes it difficult to interpret? What three interpretations have been proposed? According to Mt 1:23, how does the prophecy of Is 7:14 find its ultimate fulfillment? If this is not a denial of any preliminary fulfillment in Isaiah’s time, how are the births of Immanuel and the Messiah intrinsically related? What does it mean to speak of a fulfillment in stages? According to St. Justin Martyr, why did God foretell that things beyond human ability would take place?
4. **Word Study: Virgin (7:14).** What does the Hebrew word *’almah*, used nine times in the OT, mean? Although, strictly speaking, *’almah* is not the technical term in Hebrew for a virgin, how is “virgin” defensible as an interpretive translation? Why is it significant that Matthew cites the Septuagint version of this passage in Mt 1:23?
5. **7:14.** What does the name “Immanuel” mean in Hebrew? According to St. Bede, how does the name of the Savior, whom the prophet calls “God with us”, signify both of his natures in one person?

For application

1. **7:3.** Read the note for this verse. Why do you think the Lord told Isaiah to take his son Shearjashub with him to meet the king? What implicit message was the son’s name meant to convey?
2. **7:9.** What are some ways your faith has been tested? How does faith in God stabilize your personal life? How does lack of faith destabilize it?

3. **7:10–11.** Isaiah challenges the king to ask God for a sign that his word is true, and the king declines. Why would an unbeliever wish *not* to have proof that God’s word is true? What would knowing the truth require of him?
4. **7:14.** Throughout Scripture, God often directs the naming of newborn children. What are some examples of biblical figures whose names the Lord has either chosen initially or caused to be renamed? Why do you think the Lord is concerned with people’s names?

Chapters 8–9

For understanding

1. **8:14–15.** How do these verses present contrasting images of the Lord in relation to Israel? How does Isaiah, speaking about 735 B.C., apply this to both houses of Israel? Historically, how will this application come about? How does the NT apply this depiction of the Lord as a stumbling stone to Jesus?
2. **9:2.** Of what is the “great light” a sign? How does Matthew see this prophecy fulfilled in Jesus’ Galilean ministry, both in this passage and later ones? According to St. Jerome, why did Jesus begin his ministry in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee?
3. **9:6–7.** In Isaiah’s second Immanuel prophecy, how is the “son” promised in 7:14 further identified? According to some scholars, from where do these verses come, and as what would the four titles given to the child in 9:6 thus function? When does the angel Gabriel allude to this oracle? Why is its ultimate fulfillment messianic? According to St. Irenaeus, in what twofold way do these things testify to Christ?
4. **9:6.** To what does placing the government “upon his shoulder” allude? How is the king a “Wonderful Counselor”? As a “divine warrior”, how will the king represent the Lord, “the mighty God”? How will the king be an “Everlasting Father”? How is he the “Prince of Peace”?

For application

1. **8:5–8.** How would you rephrase the Lord’s message to Isaiah in your own words? What is the analogy of the two streams—one, the gentle flow of water through a conduit; the other, the flood of a mighty river—trying to convey? Which flow of water does the Lord desire that the people receive?
2. **8:14.** How is the Lord of Hosts a stone of offense and a stumbling block to our culture? For whom is he a trap and a snare? How do you experience him?
3. **9:1–2.** Why do you think Jesus chose Galilee rather than Judah as the focal area of his ministry? If he were to have ministered in this country, in what region do you think he would have chosen to focus his light? What makes you think so?
4. **9:7.** This verse ends with a proclamation of God’s zeal. How does he show his zeal for his Church? What zeal does he wish for you to have?

Chapters 10–12

For understanding

1. **10:20.** Who are the “remnant of Israel”? Following the demise of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., with what was Jerusalem flooded, and what did it make the city? When judgment finally comes, what will the remnant do? What reversal will it mark?
2. **11:1.** What image does the “stump” recall? Of what does the oracle speak, and whose act brings about its preservation? Who is Jesse? What two things does the image of a shoot rising from the stump imply? How do the prophets describe the royal Messiah from David’s line? When does Matthew show that he has this passage in mind, and what word play does it involve?
3. **11:2–3a.** Upon whom will the full measure of the Spirit rest, and for what will it equip him? Since only six gifts of the Holy Spirit, which inspire baptized believers to follow God’s will in thought and action, are mentioned in the Hebrew text, how does Catholic tradition arrive at seven gifts? According to St. Gregory the Great, why are the sevenfold graces of the Spirit listed in descending order (from wisdom to fear)?
4. **11:10.** Paul cites the Greek LXX version of this passage in Rom 15:12. What does he do with this verse? What is an ensign, and for what is it used? What does Isaiah envision distant nations coming in search of? How does Jesus relate this ensign to his Cross?

5. **12:1–6.** What two psalms does this completion and climax of the Book of Immanuel feature? When will God's people sing these songs? How do Isaiah 11 and 12 compare with Exodus 14 and 15 in both theme and language?

For application

1. **10:14.** Do you have any experience with being bullied? If so, how did you respond when the bully threatened or attacked you? What caused the bullying to stop (if it did)? If you were the bully, how did you view your victims? What motivated you to start and later to stop?
2. **10:20.** What does it mean to lean on an oppressor? What motivates a victim of bullying to “lean on” or even depend on the bully? How can that dependence be overcome or broken? How does one “lean on” the Lord?
3. **11:2–3a.** These “seven gifts of the Holy Spirit” are discussed in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Compare them with the charisms listed by Paul in 1 Cor 12:4–11. What are the connections? What are they for? Whom do they benefit?
4. **11:6–9.** In the Christian understanding of these verses, who brings about the benefits of peace described here? What are the underlying causes of this peace? (Hint: Review the previous verses.)

Chapters 13–16

For understanding

1. **13:1—14:23.** What are these chapters about? As what will the Babylonians, like the Assyrians before them, serve? What does Isaiah single out as the main reason for Babylon's humiliation? What else does he show about the succession of powers in the ancient Near East?
2. **14:12.** To what does the Day Star refer, and how does it apply to Isaiah's prediction regarding Babylon? Because the Latin Vulgate translates the epithet “Day Star” as *Lucifer*, meaning “light bearer”, how does Catholic tradition read this passage? How does Origen of Alexandria answer his question about why Lucifer, as a being of darkness, is called a bearer of light? How does St. Augustine compare the “body” of the devil with the Body of Christ?
3. **15:1—16:14.** What four parts does this oracle concerning Moab have? What other prophet will cite and expand parts of this oracle?
4. **16:5.** Of what is the “tent of David” an image, and on what was it founded? On what was Israel's hope for a coming Messiah anchored? How does the embassy from Moab invoke this future hope?
5. **16:13–14.** According to Isaiah's prediction, how soon will Moab's devastation come to pass? What is probably the background? What is Judah warned not to do, and why?

For application

1. **13:6.** How do the Lord's enemies experience the “day of the LORD”? How do his friends?
2. **14:2.** The toppling of the high and the exaltation of the low is a frequent theme in Scripture. In Mary's *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46–55), how does she describe it? How was that reversal revealed in her life? Have you ever seen it materialize in yours?
3. **14:12–17.** When you hear of the downfall of a powerful political or media personage, what sympathy do you have for that person? What do you think happens to such a one after the downfall and humiliation have occurred? What (if anything) does it teach you about your own conduct?
4. **16:3–5.** Refugees flee from danger, often to neighboring countries that are not happy to receive them. How should refugees be received? How should they be cared for? How long should they be allowed to stay in your country?

Chapters 17–20

For understanding

1. **17:1–11.** What is the historical backdrop of this oracle against Damascus (Syria) and Ephraim (Israel)? What does Isaiah contend regarding Judah? On the positive side, what will the catastrophe prompt survivors in Israel to do?
2. **18:1—20:6.** What is probably the historical setting behind these oracles against Ethiopia and Egypt? How was the conspiracy destined to end? Though Isaiah foresees the coming catastrophe, how does he look beyond it?
3. **19:1.** How does the image of the Lord thundering toward Egypt in his battle chariot draw from the imagery of Canaanite mythology? However, how is the Lord approaching? According to St. Jerome, how does the Lord “riding on a swift cloud” refer either to the body of the Virgin Mary or to that of Christ? According to Eusebius of Caesarea, what does the saying prophesy? What is the attitude of the idols of Egypt?

Isaiah

4. **19:16–24.** What is scheduled to begin on “that day”? How does this particular oracle stand out from its surroundings? What does it show?
5. **19:19.** Where did Jewish colonies in Egypt construct temples in OT times? However, since the laws of Deuteronomy prohibit sacrificial offerings outside the central sanctuary, what is Isaiah looking beyond these cultic restrictions to see? To what does the “pillar to the LORD” refer?

For application

1. **17:10–11.** How did you feel if you have ever experienced an apparent bonanza turn to loss, a nearly complete project collapse, or a garden that promised fruit fail to bear it? How much personal investment went into such ventures, and how did their failure affect your faith in God?
2. **19:19–24.** During the Communist era, how did Christianity fare in the Soviet Union? At Fatima, what did the Blessed Virgin predict about Russia? How have the fortunes of Christians in Russia changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union? How might the conversion of Russia become a blessing for the rest of the world?
3. **20:6.** When the economy goes into recession and your bank fails, where do you turn for support? Ultimately, where does your security (financial or otherwise) lie?

Chapters 21–23

For understanding

1. **21:9.** What does this verse announce? In Isaiah’s day, what does the vision serve to discourage Judah from doing? In the sixth century, however, how was this happy news for Judah? How often do these words appear in the Book of Revelation, and for what purpose?
2. **22:1.** When is the likely historical occasion for this oracle? What happened when Assyrian forces eventually invaded Judah? Where perhaps is the “valley of vision”? As another possibility, why might Isaiah be speaking sarcastically?
3. **22:15–25.** In these verses, who is stripped of his office, and who replaces him? When would Eliakim have become the royal steward, or prime minister? What does the account show about the corruption of faith and life?
4. **22:22.** What body part symbolically bears the weight of government? To what does the text perhaps allude? What symbolizes the royal authority entrusted to the chief steward? Being the king’s representative, what is he authorized to do? In the NT, how does Jesus, as the messianic King from David’s line, elevate Peter to chief steward?
5. **23:18.** In what way does Tyre’s conversion appear to be in view? What do similar prophecies in later chapters portray about Gentile nations? Since Deut 23:18 forbids dedicating a prostitute’s income to the Lord’s sanctuary, what will become of Tyre’s riches?

For application

1. **21:3.** The simile of a pregnant woman going into labor appears frequently in Scripture. What is the image supposed to convey? Have you ever faced a situation for which this simile would be appropriate?
2. **21:6.** Read the note for this verse. Who are the watchmen for the Church? On what watchtower do they stand? For what are they on the watch?
3. **22:9–13.** Read the note for these verses. What preparations is your country making for its defense? What attention has the country given to spiritual defenses, such as acts of repentance?
4. **22:12–13.** These verses contain a well-known proverb. Does the proverb intend to communicate a sense of joy and gladness or a sense of despair? What does the prophet mean to say by quoting it?
5. **22:22.** What does it mean for the prime minister of a country to have the final authority to “open and shut”? The note for this verse alludes to Mt 16:19, the giving of the “keys of the kingdom” to Peter. In terms of papal authority, does it mean that the pope can do whatever he wants? If not, what are the limitations on his authority?

Chapters 24–26

For understanding

1. **24:1—27:13.** What is the Isaiah Apocalypse? Expanding beyond the horizons of chapters that stress the Lord’s sovereignty over individual nations, in what four ways—literarily, historically, eschatologically, and theologically—do chapters 24–27 affirm the Lord’s sovereignty over the world?

2. **24:22.** Where will rebel spirits and kings be detained to await their final sentencing? To what later Jewish tradition did this vision seemingly give rise? Which are some passages of the NT that have links with Isaiah's vision?
3. **25:6–8.** What kind of banquet do these verses describe? What will be served to the guests at this banquet? What does the future banquet on Zion teach about Jerusalem, and to what promises is it also related? What linkage did the vision inspire later Jewish writings to make? How does Jesus likewise depict the kingdom of God as a pilgrimage and a wedding banquet? How does the Book of Revelation evoke Isaiah's prophecy? According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, on what is the feast of wine and joy founded?
4. **26:19.** As one of the clearest affirmations of bodily resurrection in the OT, how do some interpret the language of resurrection in this text? What is more likely the point? How is the singular Hebrew expression ("my body") apparently intended? How does the Greek LXX read? What is the significance of dew in this context?

For application

1. **24:5.** To what does our culture attribute the pollution of the earth? To what did Isaiah attribute it? Which is right? Whichever side you take, what is the solution to the problem?
2. **25:6–8.** How do these verses affect your vision of what heaven is like? Why in the NT is heaven compared to a banquet rather than, say, to the vision of God? What sorrows would you like to have wiped away?
3. **26:9a.** What time of day is your best time for prayer? Why do you think the prophet prefers the night? What yearning for the Lord do you experience? When are you most likely to feel a longing for the presence of God?

Chapter 27

For understanding

1. **27:1.** Which oracle does this verse conclude? What is Leviathan, and what does he represent? How does the Bible depict him? Although a terrifying menace to mortals, who has the power to subdue him? In the NT, who is he unmasked to be? Although some scholars hold that Leviathan is a symbol of Babylon, the city that the Lord will punish with a sword for its monstrous wickedness, what will be the ultimate fulfillment of this promise?
2. **27:2–6.** What does this new Song of the Vineyard look beyond? How does this song differ from the first song?
3. **27:8.** Why is the chastisement of Israel carefully administered? What does Scripture teach about the discipline of the Lord? According to the next verse, what is the suffering and scattering of Israel among foreign nations meant to induce? What does the east wind symbolize here?
4. **27:13.** What does the "great trumpet" signal? What does Jesus foretell at the sound of a trumpet, and of what does Paul speak? Of what is the holy mountain Zion the focal point?

For application

1. **27:1.** The note for this verse says that Leviathan the sea monster "represents primordial chaos in ancient Semitic mythology", something only God can conquer. How do you imagine total chaos? Of all reptiles, which do you most fear? What evil does that reptile represent to you?
2. **27:2–4.** Aside from anything produced by it, why do people enjoy gardening? What might make the challenge of combating weeds enjoyable? What spiritual benefit might a dedicated gardener enjoy?
3. **27:13.** Why does the military use trumpets or bugles for various signals? Why is an angelic trumpet regarded as the signal for the end of time?

Chapter 28

For understanding

1. **28:1—39:8.** What shift occurs in the central section of Isaiah? What dilemma do Judah and Jerusalem face concerning the rising threat of Assyria? How does Hezekiah of Judah stand out in this section?
2. **Word Study: Woe (28:1).** Appearing roughly 50 times in the OT, how is the word *hōy* (Heb.) variously translated? How did it originate? When a prophet utters a "woe" on himself, of what does he seem to despair? Ordinarily, why do prophets pronounce "woes"? As what do they function, and what is the underlying idea behind them? At times, how are the "woes" of the prophets strung together? In Isaiah, how does one encounter them?

3. **28:10.** What is the Hebrew that is translated here as “precept upon precept, line upon line”? As what were sounds such as these apparently uttered? How, then, will God’s punishment fit the crime? Rejecting divine instruction, what will the drunkards of Ephraim be forced to suffer?
4. **28:11.** Who are the “men of strange lips”? What point does Paul make when he cites this passage in 1 Cor 14:21? Although a gift of the Spirit, what limits the charismatic gift of speaking in tongues? As in Isaiah’s prophecy, of what can tongues that no one understands be a sign?
5. **28:16.** What is the Lord laying in Zion? What new work will the Lord accomplish there? On what kind of foundation will it rest? What does the “cornerstone” seem to represent? In the Aramaic *Targum of Isaiah*, as what is the stone identified? About whom is Isaiah 28:16 a messianic prophecy? According to St. Ambrose, what does Jesus, as the foundation of the Church, enable us to do?

For application

1. **28:1.** Given the explanation of the word *hōy* (Heb.) in the word study for this verse, what do these various interjections mean to speakers of modern English? Have you ever pronounced or heard pronounced a “woe” on anyone, and, if so, what did the speaker intend? When you hear the Yiddish expression *Oy veh!* in casual conversation, what do you think it means? How is the scriptural use of the expression so much more serious?
2. **28:10.** According to the note for this verse, to what are these expressions, as phrases of dismissive mockery, equivalent in everyday speech? Have you ever been dismissed in a similar way? How personally do you take such a dismissal? How personally might God take it?
3. **28:11–13.** Despite modern translations that strive for readability, the Bible seems to speak to many people in a language that they claim not to understand. What do you think is the real problem with understanding biblical language? What do you think of Isaiah’s opinion at the end of v. 12?
4. **28:24–29.** How would you rephrase these verses in your own words? For example, what are you supposed to do once you have made preparations for a project? What does that say about how you are to progress in the spiritual life?

Chapter 29

For understanding

1. **29:1.** As a poetic name for Jerusalem, how can the name Ariel be translated? For what is Jerusalem coming to judgment?
2. **29:10.** What is the “spirit of deep sleep” that the Lord brings upon Judah? Why are the purposes of God incomprehensible to Judah? How does Paul apply this verse in Rom 11:8? Though some of his kin accepted the gospel, what prevented many of them from accepting it? Who are normally expected to understand God’s actions and purposes in history?
3. **29:13.** What does it mean that Judah’s leaders are charged with hypocrisy? Instead, what do they do? When Jesus cites this passage in his criticism of the Pharisees, for what is he faulting them, and what does that say about their leadership?
4. **29:16.** In what way is the thinking of the rulers of Judah upside-down? On what does Paul insist when he alludes to this passage in Rom 9:20–21?

For application

1. **29:9–10.** What seems to be the area of Catholic theology that is most susceptible to controversy? How does the secular world want Catholic teaching to change? How are theologians responding? How *should* they respond?
2. **29:13.** How would you apply this verse to your own relationship to God? How is your heart far from him? How routine is your practice of the faith? What would it take to change the direction of your heart?
3. **29:16.** What right do you have to tell God how he should treat you? Have you ever taken that right to yourself? What benefit have you derived from it? In reality, what rights does God have over you, given that he has granted you free will?

Chapters 30–33

For understanding

1. **30:18–26.** In his impassioned appeal to Jerusalem, about what is Isaiah adamant? To receive God’s mercies, what is all that they have to do?
2. **32:1–20.** What does Isaiah foresee regarding the house of David? As a time of spiritual renewal, what will it follow? What must Judah’s leaders first come to see? With what will these blessings coincide?

3. **32:15.** What will be the future “blessing” that God will pour out on his people in the time of messianic fulfillment? How does this, as one among several OT passages, envision the Spirit? When is it ultimately fulfilled?
4. **33:1.** Against whom is this cry of lamentation directed? In whom is Assyria represented? What suggests that Isaiah has a typological view of history? How will Sennacherib deal treacherously with Jerusalem?

For application

1. **30:1–2.** When personal circumstances (financial, marital, medical, etc.) get difficult, where do you turn first for help? How many resources do you have available to you? In such circumstances, how quickly (or slowly) do you turn to prayer?
2. **30:10–11.** What do you think of leaders who only listen to people who tell them what they want to hear? How often do you seek out such people yourself? From what kind of counselors do you want to hear?
3. **30:20–21.** How do you discern the will of God for your life? How willing are you to trust that the Lord will guide you in a way that is fulfilling for you?
4. **33:14–16.** According to these verses, how do you know you are right with the Lord? What would you add to this list of behaviors to work toward spiritual perfection?

Chapters 34–35

For understanding

1. **34:1—35:10.** What is the theme of these oracles? How certain is the historical background of these sayings? How do they show parallels with earlier as well as later parts of the book?
2. **34:4.** What beings comprise the “host of heaven”? How does Isaiah’s vision reappear in the Book of Revelation?
3. **35:3.** What kind of message is Isaiah giving the covenant people in exile? What is the good news? When does the Book of Hebrews allude to the LXX version of this passage?
4. **35:8.** How is the way of returning to God pictured, and where does it lead? Why is the way called holy? How did the earliest Christians understand adherence to the gospel? When might Jesus himself have had this theme from Isaiah in mind?

For application

1. **34:9–17.** How would you describe what a once-populated region would look like following nuclear irradiation? What, if anything, would live there? How long would that kind of devastation last? How would that image compare with Isaiah’s vision here of God’s judgment?
2. **35:3–4.** Those “of a fearful heart” need to be encouraged, that is, have their hearts strengthened. Where do you find courage? What Scripture passages renew your hope or strengthen your trust?
3. **35:5.** What do physical healings have to do with the proclamation of the gospel? Why does proclamation of the Word often result in healing?

Chapters 36–37

For understanding

1. **36:1—39:8.** What do these chapters cover? What is the historical setting? Why are the stories presented out of chronological order? Theologically, how does the Lord feature in these stories? Canonically, what accounts do these stories parallel in Scripture?
2. **36:1.** Who is Hezekiah, and for what is he admired in Scripture? With whom was he apparently co-regent, and for how long? Why did Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invade Judah in 701 B.C.? What do the surviving *Annals of Sennacherib* describe?
3. **37:2.** Who were Hezekiah’s delegates to Isaiah? What are some hallmarks of Isaiah’s distinctive language and style that appear in this chapter? What does sending delegates to Isaiah say about Hezekiah?
4. **37:26.** What do the Assyrians wrongly suppose about their status as a mighty empire? On the contrary, what does the God of Israel—who is likewise the God of all nations—predetermine regarding these events? What does Isaiah stress about the Lord?

For application

1. **36:2.** Read the note for this verse. What implicit point is being made by observing that the upper pool is the same place where Isaiah had challenged Ahaz years before?
2. **36:7.** What is the Rabshakeh implying by charging that Hezekiah has removed the Lord's high places and altars throughout Judah in preference to the Temple? If someone asked you, as a Catholic Christian, why it's so important to worship the right God in the right way, how would you answer?
3. **37:23.** What makes the mockery of anyone in authority a dangerous act? What especially makes blasphemy against the Holy One of Israel so grievously sinful?
4. **37:26–29.** What is Isaiah telling Sennacherib in vv. 26–27? What apparently has caused God to change his mind regarding Sennacherib's purpose in God's plan (vv. 28–29)? Does that mean that God's mind is changeable?

Chapters 38–39

For understanding

1. **38:8.** What kind of miracle is performed here? On what instrument does it take place? What does Hezekiah witness?
2. **38:9–20.** As Hezekiah's psalm of thanksgiving, what does it recount? As what illustration does the psalm serve? In view of the larger context, what parallel between the personal fate of Hezekiah and the collective fate of Jerusalem can one see?
3. **39:1.** Who is Merodach-baladan II? What do many believe about the motives of his envoys in coming to Jerusalem? What is he probably seeking? Why does Hezekiah lead the Babylonian dignitaries on a tour of his royal treasures?
4. **39:5–7.** What does Isaiah foretell about Jerusalem more than a century before its occurrence? What does he warn about a partnership with Babylon? What did Isaiah often advise about faith?

For application

1. **38:2–3.** Hezekiah, told to prepare for death, reminds the Lord of how virtuous he has been. For what was he implicitly asking? Have you ever similarly reminded the Lord of your good behavior? For what were you likewise asking?
2. **38:9–20.** When you are ill, how easy is it for you to pray? Under those conditions, how do you pray for yourself? Why is it appropriate to give thanks to God even before you know the outcome of your prayer?
3. **39:1.** According to the note for this verse, why did Hezekiah most probably show the Babylonian envoys Israel's treasures? What would our government be likely to show foreign diplomats whom they wished to impress? How does such an attitude filter down to your relations with your neighbors and business associates?
4. **39:8.** What do you think of Hezekiah's reply to Isaiah? How concerned is he for the future stability of Israel? If you were told that the economic security you enjoy today would not be around for your great-grandchildren, what would be your response?

Chapter 40

For understanding

1. **40:1—55:13.** What message do chaps. 40–55 proclaim to the Judean exiles in Babylon? For this community, how current is Isaiah's prophecy of the conquest of Jerusalem? What historical vantage point does the book now take? On what does the prophet's message center, and what must the covenant people do in the meantime? What do these chapters stress about the kind of deity that the God of Israel is?
2. **40:3–5.** When the Lord rescues his people from Babylon, where will he lead them? Although deliverance from Babylon replicates the former exodus from Egypt, what greater salvation does it anticipate? How will the glory of the Lord be most fully revealed? According to St. Augustine, if the Baptism by Jesus is not by water only, by what is it accomplished?
3. **40:6–8.** How certain and lasting is Isaiah's message of good news? What does it say about the prophetic word of God? What relation does Peter make of this passage to the message of the gospel? According to St. Basil of Caesarea, what should you think about when you look at something grassy or a flower?
4. **40:22.** Where is the Lord enthroned? How was this belief represented in the sanctuaries of Israel? To what could the "circle of the earth" refer? To what is the work of creation, with the sky suspended over the earth, compared, and what belief does it reflect?

For application

1. **40:1–2.** Have you ever been severely punished for something that happened or was allowed to happen, even if you were not directly responsible? How did you feel about the punishment? Where would you turn for comfort in such a circumstance?
2. **40:6–8.** In the context of the message of hope in vv. 1–5, why does the prophet remind Israel here of the passing of generations? What point is he making in v. 8? What point is St. Peter making by quoting these verses in 1 Pet 1:23–25?
3. **40:9.** How often have you been told of your responsibility as a Christian to announce the gospel of the Lord? What have you done in response? What do you think your role is in evangelizing others? How afraid are you to use words?
4. **40:18.** Despite knowing that God is not like anything in creation, how do you imagine God? Why is it impossible for humans to avoid imaging what God “looks like”? How do the comparisons we make of Divinity to things we know limit our understanding of God? How can we know him without comparing him to created things?
5. **40:29–31.** In what sorts of situations are you most likely to feel in control? When are you least likely to feel confident of yourself? What did Jesus mean when he told St. Paul that “my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9)? How do you rely on such strength?

Chapter 41

For understanding

1. **41:2.** Who is the “one from the east” named in 44:28 and 45:1? How did he establish the Persian Empire? When Babylon itself surrendered to Persian forces in 539 B.C., what happened to its foreign captives? What does Isaiah emphasize about Cyrus’ remarkable rise to power?
2. **41:14.** To what does the term *go’el* in Hebrew refer? How might this refer to the Lord? At what does the language of redemption hint?
3. **41:17–20.** What is made available in Isaiah’s vision of the desert highway from Babylon to Zion? What do these images symbolize? Of what do these provisions evoke memories?
4. **41:21–29.** About what issue are the gods of the nations summoned to testify before the Lord? What are they challenged to do? Why do none of the gods respond?

For application

1. **41:4.** What do the Greek letters alpha (Α) and omega (Ω) symbolize to Christians? Who in the NT claims that they are pointing to his identity? As suggested by the note for this verse, what do these symbols say about him?
2. **41:10.** Numerous times in both the Old and New Testaments, the Lord assures warriors, kings, prophets, and his disciples that he is with them. What does that assurance enable his servants to do? How does the Lord’s presence reassure you, and for what purpose?
3. **41:14.** The note for this verse defines the Hebrew term *go’el*. According to the note, what is the relationship of the *go’el* to the one he redeems? How might that understanding change your view of Jesus as your personal *go’el*? How can you participate in his redemptive work?
4. **41:24.** What, or who, are some of the pagan gods worshiped today? Why do people reject Christian revelation in order to choose them? How do you think Isaiah would describe the spiritual state of those who do?

Chapter 42

For understanding

1. **42:1–9.** This is the first of how many “Servant Songs” in Isaiah? At one level, who does the Servant appear to be? However, what considerations make this identification improbable? In view of this, what kind of figure does the Servant appear to be? Which passages in the NT reference this first Servant Song in connection with Jesus as “the servant of the Lord”?
2. **42:1.** In what does the Lord’s Spirit instruct the Servant, and what does it empower him to do, as it did with David? With what does the statement here stand in contrast? What does the Hebrew word *mishpat* denote? According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, if Jesus, being divine, was not sanctified by the Spirit (since he is the one who sanctifies), how is he sanctified and anointed, and for what purpose?

3. **42:6.** What is a covenant a formal means of creating? In a way not explained, how will the Servant accomplish this in himself? How will the Servant's work compare with other prophetic expectations? What is the light referred to here? In essence, what national vocation of Israel does the Servant fulfill? According to Thomas Aquinas, why does the Lord God foretell the sending and exaltation of his Son?
4. **42:18.** To what is the spiritual condition of Israel owing? Despite being the Lord's messenger, what does Israel still need?

For application

1. **42:5–7.** Although these verses are addressed to the Servant of the Lord, how do they apply to you? As part of God's covenant people, how are you a "covenant to the people" and a "light to the nations"? Specifically, what does that involve for you personally?
2. **42:10.** What does music add to the act of worship? How does singing enhance prayer? From where should the words for sacred hymns be derived?
3. **42:19–20.** What is the difference between seeing and observing or between hearing and listening? Have you ever come to realize that you have been spiritually blind or deaf in your spiritual life? Where do you think the Church in your country should be more spiritually attentive?
4. **42:23–25.** Pay attention to the pronouns in these verses. Who is the speaker? To whom is he speaking? Who is included in the "we" and the "they" of v. 24? When preachers use such pronouns in their homilies and exhortations, do you include yourself among those being addressed?

Chapter 43

For understanding

1. **43:1.** How is Israel's calling viewed? What does the Hebrew verb *yašar*, which also describes Adam's creation in Gen 2:7, suggest? What points to an intimate personal relationship between the Lord and Israel? What does it reaffirm?
2. **43:5–7.** What do these verses promise? How did the Israelites become sons and daughters of the Lord? When does Jesus probably allude to this passage?
3. **43:10.** To what can Israel, entrusted with divine revelation, testify? Unlike other nations, what were the covenant people in a unique position to know and believe? When does Jesus draw from this passage? What does the expression "I am He" mean?
4. **Essay: The New Exodus in Isaiah.** Of what is the epic story of the Exodus viewed as a pattern in Isaiah? At the same time, what do the People of God need more than a land to call their own? What are seven ways in which Isaiah's use of Exodus imagery speaks to both of these issues? According to the New Testament, how does the new exodus find its completion in the redeeming work of the Messiah?

For application

1. **43:1.** Although this verse is addressed to a group, how could you apply it to yourself? What does it mean to you that the Lord knows your name and regards you as his?
2. **43:2.** How precious are you to the Lord? How honored? How loved? How do you assure yourself of the truth of these words despite the suffering you endure? As you apply them to yourself, how do they change your image of yourself?
3. **43:11.** How convinced are you that there is no salvation except in Jesus Christ alone? Why is it necessary to work for the conversion of believers in other religions? How do you answer a critic who contends that Christian missionaries should not insinuate their religion into other cultures?
4. **43:25.** When you go to confession, how confident are you that your sins are truly forgiven? If God says that he will not remember your sins, why do you still feel guilty about them?

Chapters 44–45

For understanding

1. **44:6–8.** What is monotheism? What does the Bible acknowledge about the worship of pagan nations, and about what does it warn Israel? What theological conviction, attributed to Moses, stood alongside this practical reality? With what does Scripture identify false gods, represented by idols, and what does that make of their worship?

2. **44:28.** How will Cyrus II, founder of the Persian Empire and victor over Babylon in 539 B.C., be the Lord's instrument of deliverance? Because it is unusual for prophets to identify persons to come in the future by name, what controversy was sparked by the appearance of Cyrus' name in this verse and in 45:1? What two solutions are proposed? How will Cyrus, like Moses, who was called from the pasture to rescue captive Israel, fulfill the role of "my shepherd"?
3. **45:1.** What is the Hebrew word for "anointed"? Of whom is it used in Scripture? How often is the title given to a Gentile in the OT? What does the title "anointed" signal about Cyrus? What responsibility of the Davidic king is Cyrus given?
4. **45:17.** What constitutes the chief benefit of God's "everlasting love" for Israel? How does Paul reaffirm this statement?
5. **45:23.** Why does the Lord swear a divine oath? How effective are words spoken by God? On what two occasions does Paul draw from this vision in his letters? Since Paul identifies Jesus with the divine Lord of Isaiah's prophecy, what does he imply?

For application

1. **44:3.** Read the note for this verse. In terms of the imagery used, what would be the difference in meaning if the verse were phrased "I will sprinkle my Spirit", rather than "I will pour my Spirit"? How generously does the Father intend to be with giving the Spirit? How generous is your response?
2. **44:12–20.** Many Christian commentators say that our era is reverting to paganism. If so, how are our gods fashioned? Since most modern idols are not cast or carved statues, how does the prophet's satire on idol manufacture apply to them?
3. **45:8.** This verse is prayed by the Church during the Advent season. What righteousness is the Church praying the heavens to rain down? How is righteousness like a seedling?
4. **45:9–13.** The context is about God's selection of Cyrus, a pagan emperor, as a tool. Why would an Israelite object that Cyrus is a pot with no handles or an illegitimate child? When the Lord allows misfortune in your life, do you view his methods as providence or as punishment?

Chapters 46–48

For understanding

1. **46:1.** For what god is Bel another name? Who is Nebo, and where is reference made to him? How were idol images of these gods handled during the city's annual New Year's festival? What is the contrast between the lifeless gods of Babylon and Israel's living God?
2. **47:1–15.** For what is judgment about to fall on Babylon? When will it happen, despite the army of wise men and astrologers who claim to predict the future? At another level, what may Babylon be said to represent?
3. **47:9.** When judgment comes, with what will Babylon be left? What are some superstitious practices of Babylon?
4. **48:1–22.** Why is the end of the Babylonian Exile not something the covenant people deserve? Instead, why will it come about? What is the Jewish community in Babylon urged to do?

For application

1. **46:10.** If you could describe God's plan of salvation in a few sentences, how would you summarize it? Would seers within pagan religions have been able to identify any plan for history from their gods? If so, how would they go about it? When the Christian God says he has a plan for your life, how will you be able to know it?
2. **47:8–11.** According to the note for v. 8, what is Babylon claiming for itself? In our culture, who seem to make similar claims? What thoughts cross your mind when you witness the downfall of once powerful and respected people? What if such disgrace happened to you or those near you?
3. **48:3–5.** As suggested by these verses, what attitudes caused Israel to mistake both the coming of the Messiah and his identity? If you had been alive in Galilee in Jesus' day and heard what he said about himself, what would you honestly have thought of his claims?

Chapter 49

For understanding

1. **49:1–7.** In this second "Servant Song" in Isaiah, where the Lord's Servant is closely identified with the people of Israel (49:3), how is he at the same time distinguished from them? What does the Servant thus appear to be? Whereas Cyrus is

granted the political power to bring exiles back to Jerusalem, with what is the Servant armed? From earliest Christian times, with whom is the Servant of the Lord identified and to whom does his salvation apply?

2. **49:5.** How does the Lord form the Servant? When does God become intimately involved in the life of each person? What spiritual mission does the Servant have?
3. **49:6.** To what does the “tribes of Jacob” refer? In what respect does the Servant embody all that Israel was called to be? How does Paul read this passage?
4. **49:16.** What is marking the hands a way of saying and of what is it a sign? To what does “your walls” refer? When would they be rebuilt?

For application

1. **49:2.** For good or ill, how is your mouth like a sword? What can it do either to help or to harm? When Jesus is represented as a warrior with a sword coming from his mouth (Rev 19:15), what is this sword?
2. **49:4.** Do you ever feel as if the spiritual life is a never-ending struggle, with little progress in holiness to show for it? If so, how do you deal with such feelings? What considerations bolster your trust in God?
3. **49:14–15.** How do these verses speak to you at times of spiritual desolation? How do they reassure you of the Lord’s love for you?
4. **49:16.** Why do people write notes on their hands? Why might it be important that the word in this passage is not merely “written” but rather “graven”?

Chapter 50

For understanding

1. **50:1.** Who is the mother of exiles? Why is a bill of divorce necessary? What is significant about the fact that the necessary documentation is lacking in this instance? What is the legal background from Deuteronomy? In biblical times, how could the head of a household pay off personal debts? According to St. Ambrose, why was Christ sold, even though he was not forced to pay the price of sin?
2. **50:4–11.** In this third “Servant Song” in Isaiah, as what does the Servant appear? While he represents the people of Israel, how is he still distinct from them? Where does Christian tradition see a fulfillment of these verses? According to St. Athanasius of Alexandria, how does Jesus give us an image of all that is virtuous and an example for conducting ourselves?
3. **50:8.** Who vindicates the Servant, and when? How does Paul show that he has this passage in mind? What is implicit in his comments?

For application

1. **50:4.** What kind of spiritual formation have you received? Which persons or institutions have been the most formative influences in your spiritual life? How did they teach you? If you have had no such formation, where do you think you might go to get it?
2. **50:5.** The Scriptures and related Church teachings contain many “hard sayings”, moral teachings that many find especially challenging. Are there any that you find irksome to the point of rebellion? If so, what decisions have you made about applying them to yourself and your life?
3. **50:6.** Notice the words “gave” and “hid” in this verse. What do they say about the Servant? What can you learn from the Servant of the Lord about facing opposition in your practice of the faith?
4. **50:10.** How prepared are you to be accused of bigotry and hatred because of your Christian beliefs or to resist laws that endanger your ability to earn an income? How ready are you to abandon trust in the economy and social acceptance and rely on the Lord for your welfare?

Chapter 51

For understanding

1. **51:2.** In what ways are Abraham and Sarah the ancestors of Israel? Of what are they held up as models here? What does that model say to the Jewish community in Babylon?

2. **51:5.** To what does the term “islands” refer? Of what is the Lord’s arm an image? How should we understand descriptions of God as if he had a body?
3. **51:9.** What does the prophet implore the Lord to do? What is Rahab, and what does he represent? When did the Lord demonstrate his mastery over the sea? Whose evil power does Rahab sometimes represent?
4. **51:17.** Of what is the “cup of wrath” an image? To what are its effects likened? When did Judah and Jerusalem drink of this cup? What is it now Babylon’s turn to taste?

For application

1. **51:1–2.** Who is your Confirmation patron saint? What prompted you to select that person? What do the saints have to teach you about how to grow in holiness? What writings by or about them have you read?
2. **51:6.** How often do you look at old photographs and wonder what happened to the people in them? How well or badly have friends and relatives aged compared to what they looked like when young? How have you aged? What do you have that is not transitory? Where can you go for what is permanent?
3. **51:9–10.** By recalling the miracle of the Exodus, what is the prophet asking of God? As you look around you, do you see the miracles of Pentecost still happening, or are such things ancient history? How should the Lord strengthen his arm in our day?

Chapter 52

For understanding

1. **52:7.** To which mountains does this verse refer? What does Isaiah envision a herald racing to Jerusalem to announce? What is Paul saying by citing this passage? What is the essence of the good news proclaimed to Zion? How does the rabbinic *Targum on Isaiah* render this statement?
2. **52:11.** What does the phrase “from there” (Heb., *mishsham*) imply about the prophet who wrote these words? With what views is this consistent, and for what hypotheses are they problematic? Why should the returning exiles “touch no unclean thing”? To what “vessels of the Lord” is the prophet referring?
3. **52:13—53:12.** In this fourth “Servant Song” in Isaiah, how does the Servant appear? How does he show himself to be faithful? In the end, how does tragedy turn to triumph? Theologically, what is the central mystery of the song? Rhetorically, which voices speak in the song about the Servant and what he achieved? How does the NT read the fourth Servant Song?
4. **52:15.** What does the alternative translation “sprinkle” suggest the Servant will do? Why will people shut their mouths, and what will they see and understand? Why does Paul quote the Greek LXX of this verse? According to St. Thomas Aquinas, what is the prophet Isaiah foretelling here?

For application

1. **52:1.** The prophet imagines Zion “putting on” strength as if it were a suit of clothes. When you have worn the same clothing for too long, how does donning fresh clothes make you feel? What does St. Paul mean by suggesting that we “put on” Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14)?
2. **52:11.** What are some of the liturgical vessels used in connection with the Eucharist? Who is permitted to handle them? What are the restrictions on cleansing them after use? What message do such restrictions communicate?
3. **52:12.** When an army is on the move, what is the function of the advance guard? Of the rear guard? At the Exodus, how did the Lord perform both functions? What is the difference between the urgency with which the Israelites left Egypt and their pace in leaving Babylon?
4. **52:13.** What do you think Isaiah’s prophecy means by promising that the Lord’s servant shall be “lifted up”? What did Jesus mean by it (Jn 3:14)?

Chapter 53

For understanding

1. **53:4.** How are sin and suffering conceived in this verse? According to the Gospel of Matthew, how is this verse fulfilled in Jesus? What did people initially think of the Servant, and what did they realize later? What does Paul claim about Jesus?

2. **53:7.** What does the sign of obedient submission indicate about the Servant? How is this response fulfilled in Jesus? What does the comparison of the Servant to a lamb mean, and how does it apply to Jesus?
3. **53:10.** How does the prophet view the suffering and death of the Servant? What is an “offering for sin” known as in Levitical law, and how would a person who profaned something holy offer one? How does the Greek LXX translate this? How is the expression “shall prolong his days” a mysterious statement, and at what does it hint from a Christian standpoint?

For application

1. **53:1–2.** Who is the speaker here? What is the speaker’s attitude toward the Servant? How does that attitude resemble your own toward someone you grew up with and thought of no account?
2. **53:3.** What is your instinctive reaction when you see someone with a disfigured face? What is your impression of the person behind the face? How do you deal with any revulsion you may feel?
3. **53:5.** Where is the justice in having someone else be punished for an offense you committed? In the case of your sins against God, why will punishing you not suffice to make amends to him? How does the innocent suffering of the Servant bring about a different outcome?

Chapter 54

For understanding

1. **54:1–17.** What are these verses about? In what four ways is the city of Jerusalem described, and how do they express what the city will experience from God? How do Paul and the Book of Revelation draw from this passage to describe the heavenly city?
2. **54:5.** When did the Lord wed himself to Israel? Thereafter, what provoked him to jealousy? What attitude does Isaiah underscore?
3. **54:10.** What does the phrase “my mercy” express about the Lord? What is the “covenant of peace”, and what will it bring about?
4. **54:17.** What heritage is referred to here? Who are the servants of the Lord, and how do they resemble the messianic Servant? Who will this community of servants include?

For application

1. **54:2.** If a sudden influx of Christian refugees were to join your parish, how would you make room for them? How would you determine what their needs were? How would you handle cultural differences and still maintain a united parish?
2. **54:7–8.** St. Ignatius Loyola says that an active spiritual life tends to alternate between relatively short periods of desolation and consolation—spiritual “ups” and “downs”. Have you ever experienced periods of desolation? What should you do when desolation comes? How do you recognize the consolation that comes after it?
3. **54:10.** Do alternations of desolation and consolation mean that God’s love for you is vacillating? How can such variation indicate that his love really does not alternate but is constant? What do these alternating periods indicate about your spiritual life?
4. **54:15.** What is the objective of the discipline that God’s servants receive from him? How can apparently random misfortunes help us to grow in self-discipline?

Chapter 55

For understanding

1. **55:3–5.** What promise will the new covenant fulfill? How should these verses be interpreted: as a *transfer* of God’s commitments or as an *extension* of the Davidic covenant? How does Paul relate this passage to the Resurrection of Jesus in Acts 13:34? According to St. Jerome, why will this covenant not be brief and confined to a single period of time but will abide forever?
2. **55:4.** What does this verse recall, and how was David “head of the nations”? How is that pattern of international rule expected to play out?

3. **55:6–8.** What do these verses appeal to Israel to do? Now that deliverance is near at hand, what is this a prime opportunity for Israel to do?
4. **55:8.** From whose “ways” are the Lord’s ways drastically different? How abundant are the mercies of the all-holy God?

For application

1. **55:1–2.** If it is not possible to earn entry into the Heavenly Banquet, why does it seem that the Christian life is so hard? If your good actions do not merit the kingdom of God, what does?
2. **55:6.** What does it mean to seek the Lord? Does the text of this verse mean that there are times in life when the Lord might *not* be found or that he might not be near?
3. **55:8–9.** If the divine mind is so different from the thought patterns of the human mind, how does one learn what the Lord is thinking? Why is it never safe to assume that the Lord thinks the way people do? How does one acquire the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16)?
4. **55:10–11.** The Lord promises through his word in Scripture and in numerous other ways that he loves you. How do you reconcile that promise with the misfortunes that come your way? If he promises victory for you, what does that promise imply about how you attain it?

Chapter 56

For understanding

1. **56:1—66:24.** What are these prophecies about? Why is Isaiah 56–66 designated Third Isaiah? Why was this a time of high expectation and low morale? Into what groups was the community clearly divided?
2. **56:2.** Why is the sabbath important? Of what is the observance of this weekly day of rest an acknowledgment? Why was keeping the sabbath an especially serious concern in the postexilic period?
3. **56:3–8.** By what is the salvation to come marked, and whom will it include? On what is acceptance based? In essence, beyond what restrictions does Isaiah look? How is the fulfillment of this prophecy signaled in the Book of Acts? When may Jesus have had this passage in mind?
4. **56:7.** What “holy mountain” is envisioned here? Who will be allowed to bring their sacrifices there? What had Solomon envisioned, and how does Isaiah expand this vision? When does Jesus quote this passage?

For application

1. **56:2.** What is the law of the Church regarding observance of the Lord’s day (see CCC 2042)? Why do you (or do you not) obey it? Why is more than mere observance of the law necessary? How is observing the Lord’s day a blessing for you and your family?
2. **56:4–5.** Who are the eunuchs to whom this prophecy is addressed? Aside from professed celibates (e.g., priests, consecrated religious), who else might be included in that number? What monument and name might they be given?
3. **56:7.** What does the adjective “catholic” mean? How truly “catholic” is your parish? Who are the foreigners who come to your church door?

Chapters 57–59

For understanding

1. **57:19.** For whom is the blessing of peace available? To whom is it proclaimed? When does Paul allude to this verse?
2. **58:3.** Why can fasting be done? What makes it a form of supplication here? If Isaiah’s polemic is not against fasting *per se*, at what is it aimed? What does Jesus affirm about fasting?
3. **59:3.** What does specifying different parts of the body related to the mouth and hands illustrate? Why are people’s hands defiled with blood? What suggests that deceptive and untruthful speech was a pervasive problem in the postexilic community?
4. **59:20–21.** What benefit does making a new covenant with God’s people offer them? In reference to whom does Paul cite this prophecy? Whom does the new covenant embrace?

For application

1. **57:1.** What attention do you give to the situation of Christians being persecuted in other countries? What help, material or spiritual, do you give them? How does their situation affect yours?

2. **57:8.** Where is pornography most available to you? How does looking at it harm you and those you love? If the saying “You become what you look at” is true, what does that say about you if you are viewing pornography?
3. **58:3–7.** What is the purpose of fasting? What kind of fasting do you do, and when? What kind of fasting is the Lord advocating in these verses? How does that kind accord with your practice?
4. **58:13–14.** To whom does Sunday belong, to you or to God? If the latter, what do you do to give him his time? How should you be spending Sundays (cf. CCC 2184–88)? How much of them do you claim for yourself?
5. **59:4.** We live in a litigious society. If you have ever sued anyone, what was the reason for the suit? Among fellow Christians, how legitimate is it to sue one another? Why was Paul so upset that Christians were taking each other to court (1 Cor 6:1–7)?

Chapter 60

For understanding

1. **60:1–22.** How does the vision describe the future Zion? How does the Book of Revelation draw from this vision? Of what kind of city do both passages speak?
2. **60:4.** Who are the sons and daughters mentioned in the verse? How does Isaiah envision Gentiles participating in Israel’s restoration? How does St. Methodius apply this passage to the Church?
3. **60:6.** Who are Midian and Ephah? What was Sheba, and for what was it known? What does the mention of caravans of camels bearing gold and frankincense call to mind?
4. **60:19.** What is the “everlasting light” mentioned in this verse? Where in Scripture does the image of divine glory outshining the brightness of the sun and moon reappear, and for what is it used?

For application

1. **60:1.** When someone you have long known suddenly seems more cheerful and at peace, to what might you attribute the change? How would the person’s face signal the change? Has your face ever seemed to radiate an inner light?
2. **60:5.** Read the note for this verse. For what is the wealth of the nations to be used? When the Lord increases your wealth, how should you use it?
3. **60:11.** What are the modern equivalents of city gates? Since walls and gates are no longer useful, how do modern cities ensure their own security? How can you make your home a place of praise?
4. **60:18.** In an age of violence and terrorism, what would it take to realize this vision in the modern world? What needs to change for salvation and praise to become realities in our communities?

Chapter 61

For understanding

1. **61:1–3.** For what ministry is the one who speaks anointed by the Spirit? Though he is not otherwise identified, what do parallels with earlier verses in Isaiah show about him? Contextually, for what purpose does he appear as God’s anointed agent? What does Jesus, after reading this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth, claim?
2. **61:2.** To what does “the year of the LORD’s favor” refer? How did this year begin? What is the “day of vengeance”? When does the Book of Sirach echo this and the following verse?
3. **61:6.** What renewal does this verse envision? For much of biblical history, to whom was the priesthood restricted? What dramatic expansion does Isaiah foresee? To what does “the wealth of the nations” refer?
4. **61:7.** What is the “double portion” referred to here? How else is this inheritance also fitting?

For application

1. **61:1.** What are some ways that persons not in a physical prison can still be bound as if imprisoned? How can you participate in the mission of the Messiah to unbind them?
2. **61:2.** Jesus proclaims blessed all who mourn (Mt 5:4). What are some differences between the kind of mourning that Isaiah has in mind here and that which Jesus has in mind? Since Isaiah is talking about Israel’s exiles, might there be any similarity?
3. **61:3.** What is a faint spirit? How will a “mantle of praise” fortify a faint spirit?

4. **61:6.** According to the *Catechism*, Baptism and Confirmation enable you to participate in the priesthood of Christ (CCC 784, 1546–47). How do you exercise your ministry as one who belongs to the “common priesthood of the faithful”? If you are ordained to the ministerial priesthood, how does that common ministry expand?

Chapter 62

For understanding

1. **62:1–12.** In another announcement of Zion’s salvation, what will happen to the glorified city? What key idea is introduced at the outset?
2. **62:2.** What new name is revealed in 62:4? According to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, what new name will all believers in Christ bear? According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, what kinds of things are made new in Christ?
3. **62:5.** What odd notion does this verse introduce about sons and their mothers? What alternative translation from the Hebrew do others prefer? What support for this alternative can be found in Scripture? On this reading, to what is Zion compared?
4. **62:8–9.** What oath does the Lord swear? In particular, from what does he pledge to preserve Zion?

For application

1. **62:2.** Quoting St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the note for this verse says that “Christ grants all believers to bear his name.” Why is that important? What does the name “Christian” mean to most people? What does it mean to you? What should it mean?
2. **62:4.** This verse contrasts Zion’s old name (Forsaken, Desolate) with its new name (My Delight Is in Her, Married). Despite the experiences of some married couples, what are the ideals of a marital relationship (for example, how intimate is it and how long should it last)? If you have ever felt forsaken by God, how does the reality of being “married” to him change that?
3. **62:5.** Why is prior virginity considered important to a marital relationship? Why has modern society rejected the ideal of virginity at marriage? Even though successful marriages occur when one or both partners have lost their virginity before the wedding, what is lost even then? If virginity is a virtue, how can it be regained if lost?
4. **62:8.** Read the note for this verse. Why would an ancient society such as Israel use the right hand as the proper hand for swearing an oath? For what was the right hand commonly used? Why not the left hand?

Chapter 63

For understanding

1. **63:3.** What is a wine press? For what does the crushing of the fruit and the likeness of red juice to blood make the wine press a potent image? What help does God need to accomplish the work of salvation and judgment?
2. **63:7.** What Hebrew term does “steadfast love” translate in this verse, and to what does it refer? To what might use of the plural of the Hebrew word *hesed* be a reference?
3. **63:10.** How had Israel rebelled against God? To what does the Lord’s Spirit refer in this context a reference? How does Paul adopt the language of this passage in Eph 4:30? What does Christian tradition infer from this expression? Why must the Spirit be a personal force? According to the verse, how did God fight against the rebels?
4. **63:16.** What is the unusual way of addressing God in the OT? Where else in the OT is he addressed this way? On what is the language of divine paternity in the OT based? How is a new dimension of God’s fatherhood opened up in the NT? Who are the founding fathers of Israel?

For application

1. **63:7.** How often do you recount to yourself how the Lord has shown his steadfast love for you over the years? How does reviewing these experiences with gratitude strengthen your trust in him?
2. **63:10.** Read the note for this verse. How is it possible to “grieve” the Holy Spirit? Why does Paul urge Christians not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30)? How does being “sealed” in the Holy Spirit become a motive for not grieving him?
3. **63:16.** The note for this verse states that “if invoking God as Father is rare in the OT, it becomes routine in the NT.” How habitual is it for you? How does experience with your earthly father influence your view of God as Father? Which Person of the Trinity do you invoke most often, and why?

4. **63:17.** The note for this verse talks about hardening of the heart as coming from God; but Ps 95:8 suggests that it also comes from ourselves. Is hardening of the heart something that happens instantaneously, or is it a gradual process? Is hardening of the heart mere stubbornness, or is it something more insidious?

Chapters 64–65

For understanding

1. **64:1.** How are the heavens imagined in this verse? What is the prayer to the Lord being made here? How might this verse lie behind Mark's account of the Baptism of Jesus?
2. **65:1–2.** Despite a divine plea for repentance that goes unheeded, what does the Lord say he is ready to do? What response does he receive from the people he has chosen to be "a light to the nations"? By quoting the LXX of these lines in Rom 10:20–21, how does Paul apply them to the Gentiles and to Israel? According to St. Thomas Aquinas, when has God spread forth his hands in giving many benefits to Israel?
3. **65:17–25.** On what does this vision of God's new creation mainly focus? What sharp contrasts does the highly poetic language draw? What kind of a place will the holy mountain be? How will the righteous who dwell there live?
4. **65:17.** How long will the new heavens and earth remain? What other "new things" will be awaited by God's people? How is Isaiah's prophecy of a new creation here and in 66:22 utilized in NT descriptions of the world to come? According to St. Jerome, what does newness mean?

For application

1. **64:1.** How does Isaiah's desire for God to tear the heavens open and come down reflect your own wishes? If he did, what would you want him to do? How has God actually answered that prayer?
2. **64:6.** Read the note for this verse. Some Christians take the verse to mean that all human actions are unclean and polluted in God's sight. What is your opinion? When you do an act of devotion, how pure are your motives? If your motives are mixed, what will it take to purify them?
3. **65:5.** Can a person fulfill all religious duties faithfully and yet keep the Lord at a distance? How can someone be active in Church ministry and yet have no personal relationship with God? Why do some people feel that letting the Lord into their lives is not safe?

Chapter 66

For understanding

1. **66:1–24.** To whom are these verses addressed? Although there is a remnant of devout "servants" (66:14) who "tremble" at God's word, what is the state of the masses? What does the Lord thus promise to do?
2. **66:1.** As God's sanctuary, how is the mystery of creation artistically represented? What is the house that the returnees are building? Instead of a building, where is God's presence more reliably located? To what does the expression "the place of my rest" traditionally refer?
3. **66:7–12.** To whom does Mother Zion miraculously give birth, and how? On that day, what will she do for her little ones? According to St. John of Damascus, what was characteristic of the way Mary gave birth to Jesus?
4. **66:18–21.** When the Lord plans to gather all nations to Mount Zion and reveal his glory to them, how is this grand event expected to take place? How does Paul show that he has this prophecy in mind that finds a partial fulfillment in his own life? What does he state as his mission?
5. **66:23.** What day of the month is the new moon? What day of the week is the sabbath? What literary device does the conjunction of "new moon" and "sabbath" form?

For application

1. **66:1–2.** Rather than looking to the Temple as a place of his rest, God looks to the human heart. What does it mean for him to find rest there? Why are humility and contrition so important? What does it mean to "tremble" at God's word?
2. **66:5.** How would you define joy? Why do many (including fellow Christians) evaluate the life of a Christian according to one's experience of joy? If joy is supposed to be visible, what are the signs that one has it?

Isaiah

3. **66:10–14.** How does joy characterize your life? How is the Church like a mother caring for an infant? How do you take nourishment from what the Church provides?
4. **66:21.** One of the goals of Catholic missionary efforts is to establish a native clergy in lands being evangelized by missionaries. In your diocese, how serious is the shortage of priests? How many men are preparing for ordination, and how many are likely to be ordained in the near future? Does your diocese send out missionaries, or does it receive clergy from other countries? What does that say about whether your diocese is a mission territory or an established church?