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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



# Prophets I

**ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, LAMENTATIONS, BARUCH**

**WILLIAM A. ANDERSON, DMIN, PHD**



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# Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

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READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and messages. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in

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## **Group and Individual Study**

*Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Except for Lesson 1, each lesson also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



# *Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading)

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BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. Pope Francis stressed in an address April 12, 2013, "The Church's life and mission are founded on the Word of God, which is the soul of theology and at the same time inspires the whole of Christian life." A study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

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## **The Meaning of *Lectio Divina***

*Lectio divina* is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

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## **Prayer and *Lectio Divina***

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 16 includes an opening prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book

for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

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### **Pondering the Word of God**

*Lectio divina* is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

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## Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.
3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



# How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

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THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Baruch, becoming more cognizant of the spiritual nourishment these books offer. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

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## Context

When the authors wrote and edited the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Baruch, they were dealing mainly with the era of the Babylonian invasion of Judah, the exile, and the period after the exile. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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## Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Baruch, this text is divided into eight lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 8 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers Isaiah 6—39. The study group reads and discusses only Isaiah 6—8 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on Isaiah 9—39 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the format at the top of page 14. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 14, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

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## Part 2: Individual Study

The Scripture passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

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## A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

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Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

*divina* (see page 9) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

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## GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

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### 1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

*About ninety minutes of group study*

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

*To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 9.*

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### 2. Bible Study

*About one hour of group study*

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

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## Notes to the Leader

- ✧ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✧ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✧ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✧ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✧ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✧ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✧ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✧ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✧ Use a clock or watch.
- ✧ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✧ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Prophets I" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✧ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✧ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

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## Notes to Participants

- ✧ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✧ Read "Introduction: Prophets I" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✧ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✧ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

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## Opening Prayer

*Leader:* O God, come to my assistance.

*Response:* O Lord, make haste to help me.

*Leader:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

*Response:* ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

*Leader:* Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

*Response:* Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

*Reader:* (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

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## Closing Prayer

*Leader:* Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

*Response:* Our Father...

*Leader:* Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

*Response:* Amen.

*Leader:* May divine assistance remain with us always.

*Response:* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## INTRODUCTION

# Prophets I

ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, LAMENTATIONS, BARUCH

*Read this overview before the first session.*

The role of the prophets was to communicate God's message to the people and to communicate with the Lord on behalf of the people. Prophets did not receive their office through heredity, as did the priests of the Old Testament, but they received their call from God, often through an intermediary sent by God. Since they were chosen by the Lord, prophets often began their message with the words, "Thus says the Lord," or something similar. Unlike the priesthood of the Old Testament, which was limited to males, prophets could be male or female. In the Book of Judges, a woman named Deborah is identified as a prophet (see Judges 4:4).

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### Former and Latter Prophets

Among the prophets, there were some who had their words committed to writing, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and others who did not have their words committed to writing, such as Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha. Nathan advised King David, and Elijah and Elisha challenged the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel to remain faithful to the Lord. The historical books that described the exploits of leaders such as Moses, Joshua, the judges, Samuel, the kings, and others were considered prophetic books. The prophets included in the historical books and who did not commit their prophecies to writing are known as former prophets, while those whose names the prophetic writings bear are known as the latter prophets.

The prophets communicated these dreams or visions through oracles, discourses, or symbolic actions. Besides the prophetic teachings found in the books of the prophets, the reader also encounters narrative sections in these books that offer insights and information concerning the prophets.

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### **Major and Minor Prophets**

Among the prophetic books, there are four major and twelve minor prophetic writings. The terms major and minor refer to the length of the writings. The major prophets include the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The minor prophets include the writings of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The Books of Lamentations and Baruch, although they are found among the prophetic books in the Catholic Bible, are not counted among the writings of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Lamentations was one of the books found among a group known as the Writings, which also included the Book of Daniel. The Catholic Bible places the Book of Daniel among the prophetic books. The Book of Baruch is not found in the Hebrew Bible, but it is in the Greek translation of the Bible and is accepted by the Church as inspired.

Although we refer to the prophetic writings as “books,” they are often a composite of the prophetic messages written or spoken by the prophet. In many cases, the followers of the prophets would hear the prophet’s spoken message and later put it in writing. The writings of the prophets could also be revealed at one time in the history of Israel and, when the historical climate had changed, committed to writing or editing at a later time. Some prophetic writings were edited several times throughout history before they reached their final form.

Although many people seem to think of prophets as predicting the future, the prophets mainly addressed the current issues of their era. At times they did predict the future, often as a warning about some destruction that was to visit the people if they did not turn their hearts back to the Lord. Some also predicted a time of peace and redemption. These prophets castigated leaders who abused their power, afflicted the poor, or took advantage of

the weakness of the people. They sought to persuade, encourage, and bring a future hope to the people who were suffering affliction.

The sting of the wrath of the prophets was especially felt by rulers and kings when the prophets predicted the dire consequences the Lord would afflict on those who used their power to act unjustly, or who turned to the worship of false idols. The prophets were totally dedicated to the Lord and the covenant and never failed to speak out courageously in the face of their own oppression and persecution. They addressed local, political, and international issues.

This volume of the *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series will study the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Baruch.

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### Historical Perspective

The history of Israel consists of four major periods that would naturally affect the manner of writing and the interpretations given to the writing by later editors.

1. The **first period** includes the era of the kings in Israel and Judah, from the eleventh to the ninth century before Christ.
2. The **second period** includes the era of Assyrian domination, which took place in the eighth century when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BC, sending many of its inhabitants into exile.
3. The **third period** includes the Babylonian crisis that took place from the seventh century to the early part of the sixth century before Christ, when Babylon invaded Judah and led many of its inhabitants into exile.
4. The **fourth period** includes the era from the late sixth to the middle of the fifth century before Christ, when Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonians and allowed the Israelites to return home to Judah.



## LESSON 2

# The Book of Isaiah (II)

ISAIAH 6—39

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*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
Upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone (9:1).*

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**Opening Prayer** (SEE PAGE 16)

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### Context

**Part 1: Isaiah 6—9:6** The Lord calls Isaiah for his mission as a prophet. As part of his mission, Isaiah attempts to convince Ahaz not to align himself with the Assyrians against the threatening invasion of the northern kingdom (Ephraim).

**Part 2: Isaiah 9:7—39:8** The Lord promises to provide salvation under a new, ideal king of the line of David, leading to a restoration in Judah. Isaiah speaks of the Lord's threat of destruction for Assyria and lists oracles of destruction against the nations. The Lord warns against Judah joining an alliance with Egypt to fight against the Assyrians and predicts the total destruction will come from Babylon.

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## PART 1: GROUP STUDY (ISAIAH 6—9:6)

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Read aloud Isaiah 6—9:6.

### *6:1–13 Isaiah's Mission*

In the year King Uzziah died (about 742 BC), Isaiah received his call to serve the Lord. He saw the Lord seated on a towering throne in a Temple, clothed in garments filling the Temple. In his vision, he sees Seraphim that resemble the image found in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. They have six large wings, with two covering their faces, two covering their feet, and two that allowed them to hover over the assembly. They are messengers of the Lord.

One of the Seraphim proclaims the Lord, whose glory fills the earth, is holy. The glory of the Lord becomes visible with the shaking of the door frame and smoke filling the Temple. The scene recalls a passage from Exodus when a cloud covered the meeting tent, which was the tent where the Lord dwelt with the Israelites during their journey through the desert. The cloud indicated the glory of the Lord filled the tent (see Exodus 40:34).

Isaiah recognizes his human condition as something lowly, calling himself a person of unclean lips living among people of unclean lips. One of the Seraphim takes an ember with a tong from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips, declaring that his wickedness has been cleansed. Isaiah hears the Lord ask, "Whom shall I send" (6:8), and Isaiah responds that the Lord should send him.

In response, the Lord sends Isaiah on his mission. He instructs him to inform the people that they will listen but not understand. If they were faithful, they would experience healing. Since living faithfully means trusting the Lord rather than trusting the armies of other countries, the people reject Isaiah's prophecies, refusing to trust the power of the Lord.

In frustration, Isaiah asks the Lord how much time these people will be given before they realize their need to trust the Lord. The Lord responds the people will experience desolation, vacant cities, and houses, and exile to a far-away land. Even the smallest remnant shall be destroyed, like a

tree whose trunk remains when its leaves have fallen. A hint of hope for the future comes when the Lord states that the trunk will remain. A new generation will sprout from this trunk.

### ***7:1–25 Emmanuel***

Isaiah had a special mission during the reign of Ahaz, the king of Judah who reigned from 735 to 715 BC. When the Assyrians became a powerful nation and threatened to invade the northern kingdom and its ally, Syria, the kings of both kingdoms tried to convince Ahaz, the king of Judah, to join them against the Assyrians. Ahaz refused and, as a result, the two kings attacked the kingdom of Judah with the hope of replacing Ahaz with a king who would join them in their war against the Assyrians. The war with Syria and the northern kingdom became known as the Syro-Ephraimite War. Isaiah often referred to the northern kingdom of Israel by the name of Ephraim, the most important tribe of the northern kingdom.

The Lord sends Isaiah to deliver an oracle to Ahaz. Isaiah's son, Shear-jashub, travels with him. The son's name points to the future, since it means "a remnant will return." Isaiah predicts the kingdoms of Aram and Ephraim will not survive.

Isaiah instructs Ahaz to ask for a sign that Judah will not be totally destroyed, but Ahaz refuses, saying he will not tempt the Lord. Although Ahaz refuses to seek a sign, Isaiah gives him one, stating that a young woman will give birth to a son who will be called "Emmanuel." This prediction in the Hebrew text points to a son for Ahaz, a sign that the Davidic line would not end with Ahaz. The child to be born of the young woman shall eat curds and honey, which will be the only food available left for those who remain in the ravaged land.

The Septuagint translation changed the term "a young woman" to "a virgin." Although it refers to a son for Ahaz, Christian writers, taking their cue from the Gospel of Matthew, view it as a prediction pointing to Mary and the birth of Jesus (see Matthew 1:22–23).

The king of Assyria captures and destroys the northern kingdom, and later plunders the cities of Judah. Because Ahaz asked Assyria for help against Syria and the northern kingdom, Isaiah predicted the devastation of the land of Judah will be worse than the time the northern kingdom

(Ephraim) cut itself off from Judah (see 1 Kings 12). Egypt and Assyria, pictured as insects, will appear and cover the land like flies and bees.

The land of Judah shall experience total devastation. The survivors will live poorly, keeping a young cow and a couple of sheep and eating curds from their yield of milk. Briars and thorns will cover the vines that once enriched the people.

### ***8:1–22 Light and Darkness***

Isaiah marries a prophetess who bore a son named Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The name means “quick spoils, speedy plunder.” The Lord predicts that before the child is old enough to speak, the Assyrians will have plundered the northern kingdom.

Isaiah delivers another oracle from the Lord. A gentle stream of water, known as the waters of Shiloah, provided drink for the people of Judah during a siege. Rejecting the Lord is symbolized by rejecting the waters of Shiloah. Because the people rejected the gentle providence of the Lord, the Lord will overwhelm them with the waters of the “River,” which refers to the Euphrates and in this case symbolically refers to the Assyrians. The Assyrian invasion will inundate Judah.

The Lord again offers some hope to the people. The Assyrians, a people from a distant land, shall eventually be defeated. Because the Lord is with the people of Judah, they will not be able to capture the land as they did the northern kingdom.

Because Isaiah and his followers oppose joining with the Assyrians, they are considered conspirators. The Lord directs them not to fear the people but to trust the Lord, who is the one to fear. In disobeying the Lord, both Judah and Syria will fall into a trap.

Isaiah sounds a warning against those who call upon the dead as though they were gods, predicting they will find only darkness without the dawning of light. They will live in a land where they are hungry, and when hungry, they will lose hope and become enraged against their kings and their gods.

### ***8:23—9:6 Salvation Under a New Davidic King***

The land of Zebulun and Naphtali, part of the northern kingdom, experienced the ravages of the Assyrian invasion. The way of the sea is the

area along the Mediterranean that became an Assyrian province. These once-devastated areas will see a great light. The Lord will bring them a reason for joy with a generous harvest and freedom from the yoke of the Assyrians that burdened them. Their oppressors will be smashed, as on the day of Midian. Midian was the place where Gideon led 300 Israelites against a strong Midian army and, with the help of the Lord, claimed an unlikely victory (see Judges 6—7).

Isaiah declares that a son is born for us and dominion rests on his shoulders, an image that appears to be borrowed from the inauguration of a new ruler. This new ruler seems to be Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, for whom Isaiah has great hopes and who seems to be the Emmanuel mentioned earlier. “They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace” (9:5). By naming him Father-Forever, the prophet does not declare that he will live forever but that he will always act fatherly.

### *Review Questions*

1. What are some significant points in Isaiah’s call to mission?
2. What does Isaiah mean when he speaks of a child who shall be named “Emmanuel?”
3. Who is the child Isaiah is speaking about when he says that a child is born for us?

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### **Closing Prayer** (SEE PAGE 16)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

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### **Lectio Divina** (SEE PAGE 9)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 9 for further instruction.)

### ***Isaiah's Mission (6:1–13)***

Jesus told his disciples, “You have not chosen me, I have chosen you.” Just as the Lord sent Isaiah on his mission, so the Lord gives each one of us a mission. In the Sacrament of Baptism, Jesus touched our hearts with the burning coal of his love and power, giving us a special mission of making Christ visible in the world through our manner of life.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

### ***Emmanuel (7:1–25)***

Near the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, we read, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us’” (Matthew 1:23). At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, we read, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Just as the Lord was with the line of David in the time of Ahaz, the Lord is present with us today. Jesus, Emmanuel, promised to be with us until the end of time.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

### ***Light and Darkness (8:1–22)***

In speaking to a woman at a well, Jesus says “whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst” (John 4:14). When Jesus uses this image of water, he is not speaking about physical thirst but a thirst for God’s presence in our lives. In the same way, when Isaiah speaks of the gentle waters of Shiloah, he is speaking of the blessings and protection of the Lord. The message is that the Lord provides for our needs and brings fulfillment to our lives, but we must trust the Lord and remain faithful.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

### ***Salvation Under a New Davidic King (8:23—9:6)***

In Matthew’s Gospel, we read Jesus went to live in Capernaum by the Sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah who declared the land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali have seen a great light. Jesus, the Light of the World, chose to live in this area during

his public mission. In our life, Jesus fills us with the light of his presence, helping us to endure our darkest moments.

✂ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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## PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (ISAIAH 9:7—39:8)

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### Day 1: The Arrogant Assyrians and the Salvation of Israel (9:7—12:6)

The Lord sends word to the northern kingdom, often referred to under the names of Israel, Ephraim, or those who dwell in Samaria. They brag they have endured destruction but will survive, using the images of fallen bricks that will be replaced with cut stone or cut-down sycamore trees that will be replaced by cedars.

The people, however, refuse to turn back to the Lord, so the Lord cuts off their heads (the elders and the nobles) and their tails (the false prophets). Manasseh devours Ephraim and likewise Ephraim devours Manasseh. Both these tribes belong to the northern kingdom. The reference implies a civil war within the kingdom with one tribe warring against another.

Isaiah speaks of a woe cast upon those who promulgate unjust decrees, depriving the needy of just judgments. After all their evil acts, they can ask themselves where they can flee for help at the time of the Assyrian invasion and to whom will they leave their wealth.

The Lord used the Assyrians as a punishing rod for the Israelites, supporting them as they plundered, looted, and trampled into the mud those who provoked the Lord's wrath. Isaiah names the cities conquered by the Assyrians. The Lord declares punishment shall come upon Jerusalem just as it came upon all idolatrous kingdoms that had more idols than those found in Jerusalem.

Because the Assyrians eventually became arrogant and proud, believing that their own power and wisdom brought about the devastation of the Israelites, the Lord abandoned them. They boast they had taken the nations as easily as a person takes eggs left in a nest with no protection. The Lord marvels at the foolishness of the Assyrians who do not recognize they are instruments of the Lord. Using rhetorical questions, the Lord asks

if the ax, saw, rod, or staff can boast of its work without realizing it is the one who uses it who brings results. In a single day, the Lord, the Holy One who is the Light of Israel, will become a flame burning and consuming the wicked. The glory of the Assyrians will be consumed with a plague that will leave them wasting away.

Justice demands the destruction of many of the Israelites who had turned against the Lord. Although the Israelites had become a nation as numerous as the sands, only a remnant will remain to return home. The Lord's anger against Zion, however, is about to cease, and when it does, the Lord will destroy the Assyrians. On that day, the burden of the Assyrians will cease and the yoke around the neck of the Israelites will be shattered. From the stump of the tree of Jesse, the father of David, a shoot shall sprout and blossom. The Spirit of the Lord will come upon the offspring of Jesse, a spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the Lord.

The Lord declares the that new Davidic leader will judge justly, not by appearance or by what he hears. He will deal fairly with the poor and afflicted. He will judge harshly with the ruthless and wicked. Isaiah paints a picture of ideal peace under this new Davidic king. The wild animals will live peacefully with their natural quarry, and those that eat meat will eat only vegetation. The wolf and lamb, the leopard and young goat, the calf and the young lion, the cow and the bear and their offspring, and a little child in an adder's lair shall all live together in peace. The lion will eat hay like the ox.

The Lord will reclaim a remnant of the people from Assyria, Egypt, and other areas of the four corners of the earth where the dispersed of Judah were living. The envy and hostility of Ephraim toward Judah shall cease, and Judah and Ephraim shall join ranks and plunder the Philistines of the west and the people of the east in the Arabian Desert. They shall conquer Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites, places and oppressive people their ancestors encountered in the wilderness. Isaiah speaks of the Lord drying up the tongue of the sea, which appears to be an image of the sea crossed by the Israelites when they escaped from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The Lord will cause a great wind to form small streams out of the Euphrates River, so the dispersed can return from captivity in Assyria.

Isaiah tells the people on the day of their deliverance they will proclaim God is their salvation, filling them with confidence and courage. The city of Zion will exalt with joyful praise of the Holy One of Israel.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Despite the sinfulness of the Israelites, the Lord quickly relents when they show some slight turning back to the covenant. Jesus expresses a similar compassionate concern for the people of Jerusalem when he laments, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold, your house will be abandoned” (Luke 13:34–35). The Lord longs to help us, the new Jerusalem, but we must respond by remaining faithful to the Lord.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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### **Day 2: Oracles Against Foreign Nations (13—23)**

Chapters 13 through 23 contain nine oracles against foreign nations, among them Babylon. Since the power of Babylon had not reached its peak during the era of First Isaiah, portions of the chapters appear to come from a later time by a different author.

The first oracle in chapter 13 concerns Babylon. The oracle begins with the Lord calling the armies to enter the gates of the nobles, which refers to the gates of Babylon. This will take place on the day of the Lord, which usually signified the image of the Lord coming in power to destroy the enemy. The day of the Lord, besides destroying the land and sinners, will also be a time of cosmic disturbance. The stars, the sun, and the moon will not send out their light. Many people will be slaughtered, with human beings becoming rarer than the gold of Ophir. Ophir was noted for its abundance of gold.

On that day, people will flee from their homes like hunted gazelles or a runaway flock. Those who do not escape will be abused and killed. The Lord identifies the attackers as Medes. The Medes joined with Cyrus of

Persia in defeating the Babylonians. The Medes think nothing of gold or silver, which means they cannot be bribed. The author predicts glorious Babylon will be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Chapter 14 describes the return of the people of Judah and Israel to their own land. The Lord states Sheol, the place of the dead, is preparing for the arrival of the Babylonians. All luxury and pomp of the Babylonians go down to Sheol with them, and their couch becomes a couch crawling with maggots and worms. The “Morning Star” will fall from the heavens. The Morning Star refers to the king of Babylon, although the Latin Vulgate translated the phrase as Lucifer, a name applied to Satan by early Church scholars. When the king of Babylon dies, he will become carrion, a trampled corpse with his name removed from the earth by the massacre of his sons and daughters.

In the year King Ahaz died, an oracle came from the Lord against Philistia, urging the nation not to rejoice over the death of the rod that struck them, a reference to the death of the king of Assyria. The Lord warns that another king will arise in Assyria. The Philistines will see the Assyrians coming, their horses raising the dust like smoke from the north.

Chapters 15 and 16 speak of an oracle on Moab. The Moabites suffered several natural disasters and invasions. Because of these tragedies, the people of Moab went into mourning, which involved the shaving of one’s head and beard, wearing sackcloth, and sobbing—all done in public. When many of the outcasts of Moab fled like flushed-out birds seeking asylum in Zion, the Lord directed the Israelites to allow them to live among them. The Lord knew of the pride and arrogance of Moab, and now Moab must weep in humility and disgrace. All in their land is lost, including the fruits, the harvest, and the joy of the winepresses. The Lord moans for Moab, who prays to deaf idols that can do nothing.

The oracle in chapter 17 states that Damascus will become a pile of ruins and its cities abandoned. Damascus is the capital of Aram, known also as Syria. The poor of the land will seek the gleanings left over after the harvesting, but they will find very little. Because of their need, the people will turn to the Lord, the God of Israel, and not to their false gods. A later addition says the people planted for the “pleasant one,” a reference to a false god. Since this addition seems out of place in the oracles, it can cause confusion for the reader.

The next oracle, found in chapter 18, concerns Ethiopia. Due to additions made at a later date, this oracle is difficult to understand. Ethiopia is addressed as the land of buzzing insects, which could refer to the land north of the Nile where there are many insects. The Egyptians sent ambassadors to Ethiopia, whose inhabitants are tall, bronzed, and feared, with the hope the Ethiopians will join them in a battle against the Assyrians.

Chapter 19 presents an oracle on Egypt. The Lord predicts a situation where Egyptians will fight Egyptians; this civil war will take place before Egypt is united. Isaiah states the Lord will bring Egypt under a cruel master, an apparent reference to the king of Assyria. Isaiah speaks about the foolishness of the princes and counselors in Egypt. A later addition to this chapter speaks about the Egyptians being like trembling women because of their fear of the Lord and Judah.

In Egypt there shall be an altar that witnesses to the Lord of hosts in Egypt, enabling the Lord to help the Egyptians when they cry out. Although the Lord punishes Egypt, the Lord will heal them when they turn to the Lord God.

Chapter 20 is a warning against trusting Egypt. Isaiah received a message not to join forces with Egypt and Ethiopia against the Assyrians. The Lord directed Isaiah to walk naked and barefoot, which he did for three years. His nakedness was meant to warn King Hezekiah this is what will happen to him and the people of Judah if he joined forces against the Assyrians. Hezekiah listened to Isaiah's warning and did not join in the rebellion. After a later battle, the general of the king of Assyria forced the captives of the Egyptians and Ethiopians to walk into captivity naked.

Chapter 21 appears to refer to a date immediately before or after the fall of Babylon, which took place in 539 BC. Two nations, Elam and Media, join with Cyrus and march under his leadership to conquer the Babylonians. Isaiah tells the nations to oil their shields in preparation for battle. When warriors went into battle, they would oil and grease their shields to deflect enemy weapons and to protect the shields. When the Babylonians are defeated, a watchman catches sight of a chariot pulled by two horses and a rider shouting out the news Babylon has fallen and all its gods smashed.

An oracle on Dumah, an oasis in Arabia, follows. Someone asks the

watchman how much longer the night will be. The people of Isaiah's era referred to suffering as night. The watchman says morning has come and again night. This seems to mean suffering will come, relief will follow, and suffering will come again.

An oracle in the steppe refers to an oasis in northern Arabia with enough water to help the fugitives who are fleeing from battle. The Lord uses the phrase, "In another year, like the years of a hired laborer..." (21:16), a phrase used to designate a fixed period of time. At that time, the glory of Kadar will come to an end. The people of Kadar were expert archers who once confronted Judah.

Chapter 22 tells of an oracle on the Valley of Vision, which is west of Jerusalem. The Lord is angry, saddened over the actions of the people of Jerusalem. Their soldiers fled but were captured far from the city. There is great dread and the people call for help from other nations. They seek weapons from the House of the Forest, a building established by Solomon for storing weapons and to prepare the city for battle. They planned on a water supply and made the walls of the city firmer. They, however, neglected to look to the Lord, the city's Maker, for help. The Lord expected to find the people weeping and in mourning, but instead they celebrated, expecting to die the next day.

The Lord sends Isaiah to a man named Shebna, who was a master of the palace and who built a glorious tomb for himself that would not be used for him when he died. When he dies, the Lord appoints Eliakim as the new master of the palace. He will be like a peg in a firm place and receive all the glory of his office. Eliakim, however, sins and loses his position.

In chapter 23, an oracle about Tyre concerns the destruction of Tyre and Sidon by the Assyrians around 701 BC. Tyre became wealthy as a port for merchants. The sailors on the ships of Tarshish wail as they near the port and realize the city has been destroyed. The merchants of Sidon, who once ruled because of their wealth, will be gone. Since the people of Tyre traded with Egypt, the destruction of the merchants will cause distress for that nation. Tyre was called the one who bestowed crowns, since the merchants were so powerful that they could make and depose kings in several ports, but they will have no harbor and remain at home. In time, Tyre will return to its trading, but the trade shall be for the people of Judah.

*Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

There are indeed tragedies such as those faced by the sailors of Tarshish, but there are also the normal difficulties of life that some view as terrible “woes.” We will have toothaches, colds, time pressures, disagreements, rejections, misunderstandings, and a number of other minor setbacks in life. Some react to them as major “woes,” while others can accept them as part of the flow of everyday life. Keeping God in the picture can help us through some very difficult “woes.”

✂ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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**Day 3: Apocalypse of Isaiah (24—27)**

The following chapters, similar to many of the chapters in the Book of Isaiah, have a long history of development with additions and interpretations being added by later editors.

In chapter 24, Isaiah speaks of the Lord making the earth a wasteland, scattering all the inhabitants. Everyone will experience this devastation. The people will be punished for their sins against the ancient covenant, which some commentators believe is the covenant God made with Noah. Noah planted grape vines after the flood. Only a few inhabitants will remain on the earth, and all wine drinking and singing will end. The small number of the saved will sing for joy and praise the Lord from all ends of the earth, crying out, “Splendor to the Just One!” (24:16).

The tone changes as Isaiah, speaking on his own behalf, sees devastation all around him with the earth shaken apart because of the rebellion of the people. Those who fall into a pit will climb out only to be caught in a trap. In other words, there is no escape. The Lord will punish the hosts of heaven, a reference to the stars that the pagans revered as gods. They will be shut up in a dungeon where they will perish. Then the Lord will reign in glory on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.

In chapter 25, Isaiah praises God for fulfilling a long-ago promise of destroying the city of an unnamed enemy. On the holy mountain of Sinai, the Lord will provide a banquet for the people. This is a reference to the

messianic banquet, an image often used in Old Testament literature. On this mountain, the Lord will swallow up death, reversing the idea that death has swallowed up all the things of the earth. It is a time for rejoicing in the Lord, who saved the people.

In chapter 26, Isaiah sings a psalm about the “strong city,” Jerusalem, which the Lord protects with walls and ramparts. The gates are opened to let in those who will eventually return. The Lord is an eternal rock for the people, who brings down the mighty under the feet of the poor. The people will wait for the dawn of a new day when the Lord’s judgment will teach justice to all nations, but the wicked will refuse to learn this justice.

The people of Israel suffered like a woman in labor, but they gave birth to the wind, meaning they gave birth to nothing. The Lord, however, will raise the people from their death and give birth to a new beginning for the people.

In chapter 27, Isaiah speaks of the Lord punishing the powerful wicked forces and Leviathan, a mythical dragon of the sea, a symbol of the power of evil. The Lord protects and nurtures the vineyard of Israel, but the Lord will march against Israel if the people bring forth briars and thorns, that is, if they abandon the Lord. Israel will expiate its guilt by destroying the altars and idols, leaving the fortified cities of the wicked a barren pasture. The Lord will destroy the wicked nations from the Euphrates River to Egypt and gather the children of Israel from Assyria to Egypt like a farmer who harvests grain. The Israelites will again worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spent 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

When Jesus speaks of the disasters coming upon the earth at the end of time, he has the good news about sending out angels to gather the elect from the ends of the earth. When he speaks of his passion and death, he always adds the good news of his resurrection. Just as the Lord offers hope to the people of Israel after calamities strike the nation, Jesus offers us hope in the midst of the greatest tragedies of our life. The message of God always ends with a message of hope.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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**Day 4: Salvation for Israel and Judah (28—32)**

In chapter 28, Isaiah speaks poetically in an oracle against the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria, the capital of Ephraim, stood on a hill like a garland on a person's head. Isaiah speaks of a majestic garland in the northern kingdom of Israel and the drunkards of Ephraim, a reference to the people of Samaria and Israel who abandoned the Lord of Israel. The Lord sends one who is powerful (the Assyrians) sweeping over the land like a destructive storm that will inundate Samaria like a flood. The Lord will protect a remnant of the people during this invasion.

Isaiah turns his attention to the southern kingdom of Judah and the priests and prophets who are like drunkards, staggering from strong wine, confused and incapable of judging. They live in degradation, in vomit and filth. They ridicule Isaiah, portraying him as a babbling and unintelligible fool. The Lord will reply by speaking to them in a language they do not understand, the language of their captives, the Assyrians. Isaiah warns them that in making an alliance with Egypt against the Assyrians, the leaders of Judah made a covenant with death. The Lord is laying a stone in Zion as a firm foundation for salvation for those who believe, but many reject it. Their alliance with Egypt will not help them. The onslaught of the Assyrians shall continue to bring terror, but the Lord will help them as the Lord helped David defeat the Philistines.

Isaiah compares the Lord's dealing with people to that of a farmer. The plowman plants after he tills and levels the land. The crushing of the seed and grain is necessary, not to pulverize them but to prepare them. The Lord knows how to balance punishment and favor.

In chapter 29, the Lord declares that Ariel, a name for Jerusalem, will be captured as David captured the city much earlier (see 2 Samuel 5:6–9). The people will be so overwrought they will be like dead people speaking from their graves. All of a sudden, the Lord will defend the city, a defense that takes the form of a cosmic event, with thunder, earthquakes, storms, and fire.

Unfortunately, the people will be unable to understand the Lord's message because it is sealed against some and given to others who are unable to read it. Because the people honor the Lord only with their lips, the Lord will take away all wisdom and guidance. When people attempt to hide their

plans from the Lord, they are like vessels saying the potter did not make them and does not understand them.

The day of redemption is coming when life will be restored to Israel. The deaf will hear the words of the sealed scroll, the eyes of the blind will see, the lowly will find joy, and the poor will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. The tyrant, the scoffer, and the wicked shall cease, and the children of Jacob will be able to understand the Lord as their maker. They shall praise the Lord of Israel. The erring shall find understanding, and those who find fault will receive instruction.

In chapter 30, a later editor lists a number of oracles against the nations. In the first oracle, Isaiah addresses the rebellious people who seek to make an alliance with Egypt to rebel against the Assyrians. Instead of victory, they will experience shame.

A second oracle is against the Beasts of Negeb. Isaiah refers to Egypt by the name Rahab Sit-still. Rahab is a furious sea monster. Egypt sits still, unresponsive to Judah's request for help. Because the people refused to listen to Isaiah, they will be like a high wall that will crash to the ground like a potter's jar. The Lord tells them that by waiting calmly with trust, they would have been saved. Instead, they chose to put their trust in horses. The Lord predicts they will become so panicky a thousand will flee with the appearance of one warrior.

The Lord wishes to show mercy, bringing them the security of food and drink, teaching and guiding them when they ask for it, but they must destroy their idols. If they follow the Lord, they will prosper as the Lord rewards them with rain for the seed and broad acreage for their animals. The moon and sun will become brighter, and the Lord will heal their wounds.

For the Israelites, there will be singing as at a banquet, when all return to the mountain of the Lord (Zion). The Lord will shatter Assyria, and the trophet (a place of sacrifice to idols) is ready for the sacrificing of the king of Assyria. The Lord will set the fire.

In chapter 31, Isaiah warns against those who seek an alliance with Egypt, putting their trust in horses and chariots instead of the Lord. Just as the lion growling over its prey has no fear of the shepherds challenging it, so shall the Lord of hosts protect Mount Zion against the enemy. As a

shield, the Lord will hover over Jerusalem like birds. Assyria will fall by the sword wielded by the Lord, and the leaders who are aligned with the king of Assyria will abandon him.

In chapter 32, Isaiah speaks of a Davidic king and princes who will rule with justice, shielding the people. All the wickedness of the past will be reversed. Those who deceived others will no longer be honored. The wicked are those who spoke against the Lord and did not provide for the hungry and thirsty. Those who are noble plan noble deeds.

Isaiah addresses the complacent women, warning them that in a little more than a year they will lose their sense of complacency when the harvest fails. They will strip themselves with only a loincloth to cover them. The land will be covered with thorns and briars.

A reversal will take place when the spirit from on high comes upon them, and the wilderness will become a garden as vast as a forest. Justice will bring peace, calm, and security forever. People will live in peace, security, and rest. Those who plant beside streams and let the ox and donkey roam freely are blessed.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

At times, Jesus tells his disciples they receive the privilege of understanding his message, but those who do not accept him “may look and see but not perceive, and hear and listen but not understand” (Mark 4:12). When the Lord spoke through Isaiah the prophet, some of the leaders of the people listened, but they rejected Isaiah’s message of doom. They refused to listen with faith, which led to their destruction.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

## **Day 5: Judgment and Deliverance (33—35)**

Chapters 33 through 35 appear to come from an author later than First Isaiah. In chapter 33, Isaiah speaks of the destruction of the enemy and God's blessings on Israel. All will receive punishment equal to the destruction they caused others. The Lord promised help to those who wait for the dawn. The Israelite writers sometimes used the image of night as representing a time of darkness when the Israelites suffered, and the image of morning as a time of salvation, a new beginning. The Lord's voice scatters the nations, who flee in fear, leaving their belongings behind for the Israelites to plunder. The Israelites will then praise the Lord for blessing Zion with wealth, salvation, wisdom, knowledge, and fear of the Lord.

Isaiah prophesies about a future that promises to be a time of devastation for Assyria and a time of strength for Zion. A majestic king will appear, a reference to the future messianic king. Zion shall become a city of festivals and securely established like a tent with sturdy pegs. The Lord will be with them, surrounding them with rivers and wide streams that no enemy can navigate. The Lord who saves them is judge, lawgiver, and king. Those who are as weak as the blind and lame will claim the spoils.

An oracle against the warriors of Edom in chapter 34 describes the Lord's destruction on the people of Edom whose corpses will be so many they will send up a stench. Like the sword of the priests offering sacrifice, the sword of the Lord will be covered with blood, and the people and the animals shall soak the land with their blood. The land shall become like burning pitch, a smoking waste.

Chapter 35 paints an idealistic picture of hope and joy for the people of Judah. Where the Lord brought devastation to Edom in the previous chapter, the Lord now brings rejoicing to the people and blossoming to the land of Judah. The glory of the Lord will appear as the Lord gives strength to the weakened people of the exile who will return home. As a symbol of renewed life, the eyes of the blind shall see, the ears of the deaf shall hear, the lame shall walk, and the mute shall speak. In place of the wasted land described in the previous chapter, the deserts sands will become a pool, and a holy way leading to Jerusalem will be opened for the Israelites. Those ransomed from slavery will enter Zion singing for joy.

*Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

When Benedict XVI resigned as pope, the cardinals elected a Jesuit cardinal who took the name Francis in honor of St. Francis of Assisi. As St. Francis had done, Pope Francis stressed the need to care for the poor and promised that caring for the poor would be a hallmark of his papacy. Since the election of Pope Francis, the concern and care for the poor reached the farthest ends of the world. Just as the words of Francis brought hope to the poor, so the Words of the Lord concerning the eventual renewal of the land bring hope to the Israelites.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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**Day 6: Historical Appendix (36—39)**

With the exception of chapter 38:9–20 and some other additions and omissions, the text follows closely the same situation found in 2 Kings 18:13—20:19. In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, captured many of the fortified cities of Judah. He sent his commander and two companions to speak with Hezekiah in the city of Jerusalem, which the Assyrians had not yet captured.

Knowing that Egypt was too weak to offer support, the commander of the Assyrians sarcastically asks Hezekiah if he really believes Egypt will help him. He declares that Hezekiah lost the support of the gods when he destroyed the unsanctioned places where the Lord of Israel was worshiped by people of Judah. The king wanted Jerusalem to be the only sanctuary of the Lord in the land of Judah. The Assyrian king claims to have the support of the Lord. For the Assyrians, worshiping the God of Israel along with other gods was acceptable. They rejected the idea that the God of Israel was the only God.

The commander speaks to the people, telling them not to listen to Hezekiah, who was deceiving them, and not to trust in the Lord for victory as Hezekiah requested. He urges the Israelites to surrender to the Assyrians, promising to give them food and drink. He tells them the king of Assyria

would lead them to a land similar to the land in which they were living. The people remain silent, as Hezekiah ordered them to do.

After the deputies of the king of Assyria left, Hezekiah sends word to Isaiah about the disgrace that Jerusalem is about to endure at the hands of the Assyrians. Isaiah tells Hezekiah's servants not to fear. Hezekiah then begs the Lord, the Creator and King of all the nations, to save him from the Assyrians who had destroyed the gods and idols of other nations.

Isaiah brings the Lord's response to Hezekiah's prayer. Because the Assyrians brag about their conquests, unaware of the help given them by the Lord of the Israelites, the Lord will force them to leave without conquering Jerusalem. The Lord promises that in two years the survivors of the house of Judah will again bear fruit. For the sake of the Lord's name and for the sake of David, the Lord's servant, the Lord will shield and protect the city.

That night, an angel of the Lord kills 185,000 men of the Assyrian army. Some commentators believe the Assyrian army was decimated by a plague. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, returns home and, as he worships in the temple of his god, is killed by his sons.

In chapter 38, as Hezekiah is near death, he weeps and prays to the Lord. Isaiah later tells him that the Lord witnessed his tears and heard his prayer and that he would live fifteen more years. The Lord also promises to rescue him and the city from the hands of the king of Assyria and to protect the city like a shield for the sake of David and for the Lord's own sake.

At the news of Hezekiah's recovery, an envoy from Babylon comes to Jerusalem. Hezekiah, pleased with their arrival, shows them all the treasures of the city. Isaiah later asks what he showed them, and Hezekiah admits that he showed them everything. Isaiah predicted that the day is coming when everything will be carried off to Babylon, including Hezekiah's descendants who will be made attendants to the king of Babylon.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The Lord punished the Assyrians and Hezekiah for bragging about their successes, as though they succeeded without any help from the Lord. Paul the Apostle speaks about true boasting when he writes, “Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord” (2 Corinthians 10:18). All the good we do in the world does not come from our own powers but from the power of the Lord working through us.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

### *Review Questions*

1. Why does the Lord become angry with Assyria after the Lord made them a rod to punish the people of Israel?
2. Why does the Lord allow Israel and Judah to be ravaged?
3. Why did Judah seek an alliance with Egypt?
4. Who is the servant spoken about in the Book of Isaiah?