



ISAIAH Session 1/5  
Isaiah chapter 1 – 2 v 5  
A tale of two cities

## Opening prayer

- You might want to light a candle and then open this time together with the prayer below, or use your own.

God of all comfort,  
where we are stuck, release us,  
where we have given up hope, inspire us.  
Where we focus only on ourselves,  
help us to see the needs of others;  
transform us by your Spirit to be the people you have called us to be,  
spreading your love and proclaiming your presence throughout the world.  
We ask this through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Hearing and understanding God's word

### Introduction to the book of Isaiah

If we want to understand what this great prophetic book means and apply it to our own world, then we need to understand the people to whom these prophecies were first spoken – their needs and their beliefs. But the prophecies had more than one audience, because the book of Isaiah covers a long time-span. So we must look at the people of Israel at three stages of their history, each related to one great disaster, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took most of the people into exile.

The first prophecies, chapters 1 to 39, were addressed to the people of Jerusalem some years before the city fell. In chapters 40 to 55 are prophecies addressed to the people in exile in Babylon. Last come prophecies addressed to Israelites who returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple and the city (chapters 56 to 66).

- **Ask someone in the group to read, or share the reading of Isaiah chapter 1 to chapter 2 v 5.**

Before Jerusalem fell, its people were confident that God would never allow their city or their land of Judah to be destroyed. They had their reasons for thinking this. God dwelt in Zion (the term means first the temple and then, by extension, the whole city of Jerusalem) so how could it be overthrown? But Isaiah challenges this thinking. The city was full of wickedness. Its people exploited the weak (1.21-23; 5.7,8; 10.1,2); they imagined sacrifices could turn away God's anger without sincere repentance (1.10-17 is a key passage for this). Isaiah warned them that God would use foreign nations to destroy the city.

One way of understanding Isaiah's message is as a tale of two cities: Babylon is a symbol of a city without God, which is self-centred, leading to disharmony, pain and suffering. Jerusalem is a symbol of a city as God sees it could be. God has a dream for how we all live and for the places where we live and work. God's people have a central role in the making of such a city.

## Word and Spirit

In this study of Isaiah you are invited to let the Holy Spirit be your teacher, asking the Spirit to

1. highlight the scriptures
2. show you what you need to do
3. give you his strength to fulfil what he shows you

- **Reread Isaiah 1 – 2 v 5 ready to answer the following questions**

- How does the passage challenge our culture and the world we live in today?
- What does the passage reveal about Jesus/ God/ the Gospel?
- How does this shape my understanding of what it means to be a disciple?
- Reading this in the light of where I have been today/this week
  - What do I notice? How am I challenged? How does it shape me?
  - Thinking together about this passage makes me want to pray that....and
- In the light of the discussion do I need to take any specific actions?

### **Praying and acting on God's word**

Spend some time in prayer, first sharing God's grief for the sadness, sinfulness and suffering of God's world. Then pray that we will be part of the change God longs to see.

You might want to say together the prayer you began with and then blow the candle out to end the session.

### **Suggestions for follow-up**

Here are some ideas .....

Let Isaiah (who was so creative and imaginative) inspire a written prayer, a song or some instrumental music, a picture, painting, drawing, a poster or banner design, a card to give to someone to encourage them .... You might want to share it in your group.

A website to inspire: [www.craftivist-collective.com](http://www.craftivist-collective.com)

Films that catch something of the whole of Isaiah's message: 'Babette's feast' & 'It's a wonderful life'