

THE INTERPRETATION BIBLE STUDIES LEADER HELPS

ISAIAH

The IBS Leader Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process.

Each participant in the group should have a copy of IBS study book and should make a commitment to do advance preparation for each session.

The sessions are planned for one hour. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those that are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

Read Isaiah in its entirety before beginning to teach.

Skim through the whole study book to discern its flow. This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next unit.

Prepare the room ahead of time. For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semi-circular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as “the authority.”

Secure necessary teaching aids. A newsprint easel is an invaluable asset. Be sure to have markers and masking tape if you wish to display the sheets for future reference. A map of the biblical world in the periods of the monarchy and exile is essential. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as hymnals, paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.

Prepare necessary handouts. A folder for each participant’s handouts is helpful, but not essential.

Keep the key idea firmly in mind. Make sure all activities point participants towards this goal.

Pray for God’s guidance. Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Unit 1: YHWH and the Word, Part One (Isaiah 1)

Key Idea: God wants righteous living rather than pompous ceremonies.

Advance Preparation

Copy Psalm 51:10 onto newsprint, and post it where it can be easily read. Also provide newsprint and markers for the two groups in step 3.

Using the information on pp. 1–4 of the study book, prepare a brief report on the term “YHWH” and what it means.

Make copies of the following worksheet:

“ENOUGH IS ENOUGH”	
To Israel	To Us
God says, “I have had enough of . . .”	God says, “I have had enough of . . .”
A multitude of sacrifices	_____
Offerings of rams and fat	_____
Blood of bulls, lambs, and goats	_____
Trampled courts	_____
Incense	_____
Solemn assemblies with iniquity	_____
New moons	_____
Appointed festivals	_____
Making many prayers	_____
Hands full of blood	_____
The oppressed	_____
Orphans	_____
Widows	_____
Murderers in the city	_____
Watered wine and impure silver	_____
Rebel princes	_____
Bribes	_____
Payola	_____
Shameful oaks and gardens	_____

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Read Psalm 51:1–12 as an opening prayer. To do this antiphonally, divide your group according to men and women. Have the men read the first verse of the psalm, and the women read the next one. Continue like this, alternating verses, until the whole psalm has been read aloud.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Mini-lecture: YHWH

Using the information you gleaned from the study book, explain what the term “YHWH” means.

Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Scripture Comparisons

Divide participants into two groups. Ask the first group to take a few minutes to read Isaiah 1, looking for similarities to Psalm 51. Ask them to list their findings on newsprint.

Ask the second group to compare Isaiah 1 to Micah 6. Also ask them to list their findings on newsprint.

When both groups are done, have them share their work with one another. End this step by asking: What do you think God is saying to the people through Isaiah? What message do you hear for us?

Response (15 minutes)

4. Application to Today

Distribute copies of the “Enough Is Enough” list. Ask the participants to fill in the blank spaces beside each item on Isaiah’s list with equivalent behaviors in the church and society today.

Closing (5 minutes)

5. Prayer

Have the group read Psalm 51:10 in unison as a closing prayer, using the newsprint you have prepared.

6. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 2 and Isaiah 5. Also ask them to answer question 1 on p. 23 of the study book, using a concordance if possible.

Unit 2: YHWH and the People, Part One

Key Idea: God's mercy is available if people are willing to accept it.

Advance Preparation

Copy Psalm 56:12–13 onto newsprint, and post it where it can be easily read. Also provide paper and pens or pencils for the participants.

Make copies of the following quiz on the Woe Oracles:

The Woe Oracles	
Identify the groups or individuals described in these oracles.	
Oracle One: Isaiah 5:8	_____
Oracle Two: Isaiah 5:11–12	_____
Oracle Three: Isaiah 5:18–19	_____
Oracle Four: Isaiah 5:20	_____
Oracle Five: Isaiah 5:21	_____
Oracle Six: Isaiah 5:22–23	_____

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Have participants read Psalm 56:12–13 in unison as an opening prayer, using the newsprint you have prepared.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Discussion of Assignment from Last Session

Ask participants to share their learnings concerning vineyard images. Ask: What does the image mean in Isaiah 5?

Exploration (15 minutes)

3. Scripture Research

Give each participant a copy of the sheet on “The Woe Oracles” and ask them to find the answers. Suggest they refer to the study book as well as scripture for information.

Response (15 minutes)

4. Application to Today

Ask participants to write the answers to these questions:

- If God were to issue a “woe oracle” to the contemporary church, what do you think would be the most important sin addressed?
- If God were to issue a “woe oracle” to contemporary society in America, what do you think would be the most important sin addressed?

Then invite participants to name their responses aloud while you keep a running tally on newsprint. Ask:

- Which of these sins are similar to the ones in Isaiah?
- What should be the response of the church? of society?

Closing (5 minutes)

5. Prayer of Confession

Ask participants to silently reflect on this question: If God were to issue a “woe oracle” to me, what sin or sins would be addressed? Then ask them to write a prayer of confession and repentance.

6. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 3 and Isaiah 6. Also ask them to read 2 Chronicles 26 and list phrases that describe King Uzziah.

Unit 3: YHWH and Isaiah (Isaiah 6)

Key Idea: The call of a holy God is not always comfortable, safe, or easy.

Advance Preparation

Print Psalm 40:5–8 on newsprint, and post it where it can be easily seen. Also, gather construction paper, colored tissue paper, and small bottles of glue.

Make copies of the “Little Dictionary of Terms in Isaiah 6” for use in step 3:

A LITTLE DICTIONARY OF TERMS IN ISAIAH 6

- *Seraphs*: Possibly griffin-like creatures; name comes from the Hebrew word for “burning”
- *YHWH Sebaoth*: Lord of hosts or Lord of armies
- *Holy*: Something apart from the ordinary or common
- *Kabod*: glory; literally, to be heavy (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17: “an eternal weight of glory”)
- *Unclean lips*: figurative speech for the whole person; means unclean in thought, speech, and activity
- *Dabar*: can be translated word, deed, event. or manner
- *Hot coals*: symbol of purification

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Have the group read Psalm 40:5–8 as a unison prayer, using the newsprint you prepared.

Presentation (20 minutes)

2. Discussion of Assignment from Last Session

Remind participants of the assignment from the end of the previous session (to read 2 Chronicles 26 and list phrases that describe King Uzziah). Ask for volunteers to share what they learned. List their findings on newsprint.

3. Defining Terms

Distribute copies of the “Little Dictionary of Terms in Isaiah 6,” and briefly go over it aloud.

Exploration (15 minutes)*4. Sharing Call Stories*

Ask participants divide into groups of four and share their answers to question 2 on p. 34 of the study book.

Response (15 minutes)*5. Torn-paper Collage*

Ask participants to share materials at tables of four to six. Provide construction paper, tissue paper, and glue. Invite them to make a collage by gluing torn strips of the tissue paper onto the construction paper. The collage should be a visual representation of either the word *holy* or the word *glory*. If they like, they may try to represent Isaiah's vision in the Temple. Give individuals time to share their creations with the whole group.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Praying a Hymn*

Sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" or "Here I Am, Lord" as a closing prayer.

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 4 and Isaiah 7:1–17 and 9:1–7. Also ask them to consider the question: How does Ahaz weary God?

Unit 4:YHWH and Ahaz (Isaiah 7:1–17; 9:1–7)

Key Idea: Faith is not so much a matter of belief as it is a matter of trust.

Advance Preparation

On newsprint, write the following description of a cinquain (sin–can), which is a type of poem:

- Line 1 = a single word that is the subject of the poem
- Line 2 = two adjectives describing the subject
- Line 3 = three action words related to the subject
- Line 4 = four feeling words related to the subject
- Line 5 = a single word that acts as the conclusion or summary

Provide paper and pens or pencils for the participants. You will also want to have construction paper and tape or push pins on hand for mounting the cinquains to a bulletin board or wall.

Write a cinquain of your own to use as the closing prayer.

Bring a tape or CD player and a tape or CD of Handel’s *Messiah*, set to the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

Make copies of the following Who’s Who test. (Note: You may wish to omit the Answer Key on the handout you give to the participants.)

Who’s Who in Isaiah

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Jotham | a. Killed Josiah |
| 2. Ahaz | b. “A remnant shall return” |
| 3. Rezin | c. Intended puppet ruler |
| 4. Pekah | d. Repealed Hezekiah’s reforms |
| 5. “Son of no Good” | e. King of Syria |
| 6. Shear-jashub | f. Pekah |
| 7. “Son of Remaliah” | g. Evil son of Manasseh |
| 8. Hezekiah | h. “No king like him” |
| 9. Manasseh | i. King of Northern kingdom |
| 10. Amon | j. King of Judah before Ahaz |
| 11. Josiah | k. “God was with him” |
| 12. Neco | l. The king who wouldn’t listen |
| 13. Immanuel | m. “God with Us” |

Answer Key:

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. j | 4. i | 7. f | 10. g | 13. m |
| 2. l | 5. c | 8. k | 11. h | |
| 3. e | 6. b | 9. d | 12. a | |

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Praying the Psalms

Read Psalm 130 as an opening prayer. To do this antiphonally, divide your group according to the left and right sides of the room. Have the left side read the first verse of the psalm, and the right side read the next one. Continue like this, alternating verses, until the whole psalm has been read aloud.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Who's Who Test

Distribute the "Who's Who" test. Give participants ten minutes to match the names and identifications, using the study book to find the answers.

Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Discussing the Assignment from Last Session

Discuss the assignment question: How does Ahaz weary God? Then ask: How do we weary God?

4. Scripture Study

Divide participants into four groups. Assign each group one of the following passages, and ask them to discuss how their New Testament passage interprets the words of Isaiah:

Group 1: Matthew 1:23

Group 2: Matthew 4:12–17

Group 3: Luke 1:32

Group 4: John 8:12

Allow time to bring everyone back together for a brief sharing of what they learned.

Response (15 minutes)

5. Creative Writing

Post the newsprint with the description of a cinquain. Ask the participants to write a cinquain of their own, based on Isaiah 7:1–17 and 9:1–7. When they have finished, suggest they mount their cinquains on construction paper and attach them to a bulletin board or wall so that others may read them later.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Listening to Music*

Remind the participants that they just selected words and images to capture the feel of Isaiah 7:1–17 and 9:1–7. Invite them to reflect on what new images and words come to mind as they listen to the music you have brought. Then play the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*.

7. Prayer

Share your own cinquain as the closing prayer.

8. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 5 and Isaiah 36—37. Also ask them to identify the three sections of Hezekiah’s prayer (Isaiah 37:15–20), as described on pp. 51–52 of the study book.

Unit 5: YHWH and Hezekiah (Isaiah 36—37)

Key Idea: When we are faithful, God is faithful.

Advance Preparation

Provide newsprint and markers for the two groups in step 2. Also provide paper and pens or pencils for all participants.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Praying the Psalms

Read Psalm 96:1–9 as an opening prayer. To do this antiphonally, divide your group according to age. Have those who are a certain age or above read the first verse of the psalm, and those below that age read the next one. Continue like this, alternating verses, until the whole psalm has been read aloud.

Presentation (20 minutes)

2. Making Comparisons

Divide participants into two groups. Provide each group with newsprint and markers. Ask one group to make a chart listing Hezekiah's characteristics and the other those of Ahaz. Encourage both groups to use the Bible and Units 4 and 5 in the study book for ideas.

Bring both groups back together to share their findings with one another. Ask: What do these comparisons teach us about faithfulness to God?

Exploration (15 minutes)

3. Summarizing

Ask the participants to choose a partner and list the three sections of Hezekiah's prayer (Isa. 37:15–20), described on pp. 51–52 of the study book. Ask them to discuss this question: What does this prayer tell us about God? What does it tell us about Hezekiah? What does it tell us about what our prayers should be like?

Response (15 minutes)

4. Writing a Prayer

Ask participants to write a prayer based on the three sections of the prayer of Hezekiah: doxology, complaint, and petition. As an aid, ask them to focus on these three questions: What praise can you offer God? What threat or problem is facing you? What will you ask of God?

Closing (5 minutes)*5. Sharing Prayers*

Ask several participants to share aloud the prayers they have written.

6. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 6, Isaiah 40:1–11, and Psalm 23. Also ask them to consider these questions:

- Which verse of the Psalm 23 means the most to you, and why?
- How is Psalm 23 similar to Isaiah 40:1–11?

Unit 6: YHWH and the People, Part Two (Isaiah 40:1–11)

Key Idea: God comforts, relieves, and restores the covenant people.

Advance Preparation

Make copies of the questions to be used by the small groups in step 2.

Prepare a sheet of newsprint with this open-ended sentence: “Isaiah 40:1–11 is good news because it tells us that” Also provide paper and pens or pencils for the participants.

Bring a tape or CD player and a tape or CD of Handel’s *Messiah*, set to “Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye My People.”

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Praying the Psalms

Invite participants to read Psalm 23 in unison. Then ask them to reflect silently on the psalm and aloud the verse that means the most to them. Close with a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

Presentation (20 minutes)

2. Question and Answer

Divide participants into three small groups. (If your class is large, break into six or nine groups, and duplicate the set of assigned questions.) Give each group a set of questions, and tell them to look for the answers on the indicated pages of the study book. Ask them to appoint a recorder who will report on the group’s findings.

For Group 1:

1. How much time elapsed between Isaiah 39 and Isaiah 40? (See p. 55 of the study book.)
2. What had happened to Jerusalem? (See p. 55.)
3. What had happened to the people? (See p. 55.)
4. What world power was dominant? (See p. 55.)

For Group 2:

1. What does the Hebrew word for *comfort* include? (See p. 56 of the study book.)
2. What is the council God calls on to comfort the people and speak tenderly to Jerusalem? (See p. 57.)
3. What comfort does God offer in v. 2? (See p. 58.)

For Group 3:

1. How is the construction of a highway a message of comfort? (See p. 60 of the study book.)
2. What does the prophet's answer in v. 6 mean? (See p. 61.)
3. What message is the prophet proclaiming in v. 10? What is the image of God here? (See p. 62.)
4. What is the image of God in v. 11? What other scripture passages come to mind when you read it? (See p. 63.)

3. Sharing

Bring everyone back together to hear the small groups' reports. Ask each recorder to read the assigned questions aloud and then give the answer that the group found.

Exploration (15 minutes)

4. Interpreting Scripture

Use question 1 on p. 63 to discuss possible interpretations of Isaiah 40:2.

Response (15 minutes)

5. Open-ended Sentences

Post the newsprint with the open-ended sentence: "Isaiah 40:1–11 is good news because it tells us that . . ." Distribute paper and pens or pencils, and ask participants to complete the sentence in writing. Collect the unsigned slips of paper when everyone is done.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Meditating with Music

Mix up the slips of paper that you collected in the previous step, and pass them out in random order to the participants. Ask each participant to meditate on the words they have received while listening to music inspired by Isaiah 40:1–11. Then play a tape or CD of "Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye My People" from Handel's *Messiah* softly in the background while the participants meditate.

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 7 and Isaiah 42, 49—50, and 52—53. Assign one student to do research on Jesus' understanding of servanthood.

Unit 7: YHWH and the Servant (From Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52–53)

Key Idea: Every true believer is a servant of God.

Advance Preparation

Purchase a large lump of potter's clay. (It usually comes in 25 pound bags.) Divide into one pound lumps and place in zip lock bags. In addition to (or instead of) the clay, you may wish to provide drawing paper and crayons. Bring index cards for titles of art work.

Make a list of the following scripture passages, known as the Servant Songs:

- Isaiah 42:1–9
- Isaiah 49:1–13
- Isaiah 50:4–9
- Isaiah 52:13—53:12

Also provide paper and pens or pencils for the participants.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Praying the Psalms

Read Psalm 86:1–7 as an opening prayer. To do this antiphonally, divide your group according to men and women of the room. Have the men read the first verse of the psalm, and the women read the next one. Continue like this, alternating verses, until the whole psalm has been read aloud.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Small Group Scripture Study

Post the newsprint you have prepared, and divide the participants into four groups. Assign each of the four groups one of the servant songs. Ask each group to outline their song's main points and discuss these questions:

- What one word best characterizes the servant in the song?
- In what ways does Jesus fulfill this servant role?
- Does this song contain a shepherd image?
- Which of the servant characteristics seem hard for you?

Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Special Report: Jesus and Servanthood

Ask the participant who was assigned to do research to report on Jesus' understanding of servanthood.

Response (15 minutes)

4. Sculpture or Drawing

Give each participant a chunk of potter's clay or drawing paper and crayons. Assign one of the following images and ask them to portray it in clay or on paper. Provide index cards for titles.

- a bruised reed
- a smoldering wick
- light for the Gentiles
- a sharp sword
- God's hand
- a polished arrow
- an instructed tongue
- an awakened ear
- a face like flint
- a tender shoot
- a root out of dry ground
- a sheep gone astray
- a lamb led to slaughter
- a sheep before slaughterers

Closing (5 minutes)

5. Sharing

Ask participants to identify which is the most meaningful image of servanthood for them, and to say why.

6. Prayer

Close with prayer or ask someone to pray.

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 8 and Isaiah 44:9–10.

Unit 8: YHWH and Idols (Isaiah 44:9–10)

Key Idea: Those who worship idols live meaningless lives.

Advance Preparation

Copy Psalm 97:5–12 onto newsprint, and post it where it can be easily read.

Be prepared to summarize the difference between the religion of Babylon and the religion of Israel, as found on pp. 76–79 of the study book.

Provide paper and pens or pencils for the participants.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Praying the Psalms

Ask participants to read in unison Psalm 97:5–12 from the newsprint you have prepared.

2. Brainstorming

Using question 1 on page 84, ask participants to identify idols our society creates and worships. Ask: Why is it difficult in our consumeristic society to keep from worshipping idols?

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Mini-lecture: The Religions of Babylon and Israel

Present your summary of the difference between the religion of Babylon and the religion of Israel.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Discussing the Assignment from Last Session

Ask participants to identify other scripture passages they have found in which the worship of idols is condemned. What overriding message did they find?

Response (15 minutes)

5. Writing a Prayer

One of the message in this unit is that God is not satisfied with, and will not accept, our “leftovers.” Write a prayer of confession about the “leftovers” you have offered God.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Prayer*

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 9 and Isaiah 55. Also ask them to consider which verse means the most to them, and why.

Unit 9: YHWH and the Word, Part Two (Isaiah 55)

Key Idea: God's invitation into covenant life is a gift of grace.

Advance Preparation

Cut poster board into enough 3x24-inch strips for every two participants to receive one. Also provide several packages of markers in a variety of colors.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Praying the Psalms*

Read Psalm 89:1–8 as an opening prayer. To do this antiphonally, divide your group according to the left and right sides of the room. Have the left side read the verse of the psalm, and the right side read the next one. Continue like this, alternating verses, until the whole psalm has been read aloud.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. *Listening to Scripture*

Ask participants to read Isaiah 55 silently and underline passages similar to Psalm 89:1–8. Ask them to share their findings and list them on newsprint as they are cited.

3. *Defining Terms*

Ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What was God's covenant with David?
- How was David a witness, a leader and an evangelist?
- Why was v. 12 so important for God's people to hear at the time it was written? What was the context?

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. *Comparing Texts*

Ask participants to choose a partner, and compare Matthew 22:1–4 with Isaiah 55:1. Ask: What do these passages say about the kingdom of God?

Then provide the pairs with materials to create a bumper sticker that expresses in a few words the message they see.

Response (15 minutes)*5. Discussion*

Ask participants to discuss in groups of three a time when they felt cut off from God. (See question 4 on page 94.)

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Gathering Quotes “Popcorn-style”*

Invite participants to read aloud a meaningful verse or phrase from Isaiah 55, “as the Spirit moves.” Close with prayer.

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 10 and Isaiah 66. Also ask them to compare Isaiah 66 to Isaiah 44:9–20, and to consider these questions:

- How is the debate over building a temple to the Lord similar to the condemnation of idols?
- How is it different?

Unit 10: YHWH and All Flesh (Isaiah 66)

Key Idea: God's ultimate concern is for all nations.

Advance Preparation

Copy Psalm 131 onto newsprint, and post it where it can be easily read.

Be prepared to summarize the historical context of Isaiah 66, as described on pp. 96–98 of the study book.

Provide paper and pens or pencils for the participants.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Praying the Psalms

Ask participants to read in unison Psalm 131 from the newsprint you have prepared.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Mini-lecture: Historical Context

Present your summary of the historical context of Isaiah 66.

Exploration (15 minutes)

3. Discussion of the Assignment from Last Session

Ask participants to share their findings on the comparison of Isaiah 66 and Isaiah 44:9–10. Use question 1 on page 104 of the study book to continue the discussion.

Response (15 minutes)

4. Small Group Work

Form small groups of two to three people. Ask them to describe in writing the components of an ideal worship service: the kind of place, music, leaders, order of worship, prayers, décor, and so on. When all groups have completed the assignment, ask them to choose a spokesperson to present their ideas to the larger group.

Closing (10 minutes)*5. Summarizing the Study*

Ask the group to discuss question 4 on p. 105 of the study book, or ask: What was the most meaningful thing to you in this study?