



Book of Isaiah:Message to a Nation
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Introduction

A couple of years ago I heard a frightening statistic. It was something about the number of illegal aliens arriving into this country every day. I shudder to think of the drain that must have on our economic system. Hospitals, schools, and housing, lose tons of money by helping people that don't pay taxes but are working illegally in this country. Many send the money they do earn (tax free) back to family members in their home land! Even more disturbing is the language barrier we're creating. I can hardly think of what might happen should we not put a stop to the recklessness of our unsecured borders and the crazy notion that our country needs to cater to those who can't speak English and therefore conduct mass communication in two or three languages in the name of compassion.

I get a sorrow in my spirit so deep sometimes...almost a knowing that our country is on the brink of grave danger. Why? Economically we're weak, we all don't share a common language, most of us are apathetic, our guard is down, (even after 911), do I need to go on? Ok, we're fat, we're lazy and we make a side show out of the destruction people create of their lives. Television talk shows and magazines that publish all the celebrity dirt get rich off the misfortune and bad decisions of others. Sound harsh? I'm sorry but that behavior does not go unnoticed by God, and I'm scared.

Before anyone gets the wrong impression about my stand on immigration, let me say this. My grandparents came from Italy in the early 1900's. They "came over on the boat" as the phrase states and is often used when speaking of someone's ignorance. They were anything but ignorant, in fact my grandfather was self employed. He and my grandmother raised 4 children in this country, and college educated most of them. The oldest son attended MIT and rose up to the CEO level of a large oil company.

They learned English and although they remained true to their rich Italian heritage, they became citizens and lived here legally; paying taxes and they supported the laws of our great land. I am proud of them and will always remain in total favor of the statement on the Statue of Liberty that states "**Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free**" That phrase gives me chills and causes me to weep

every time I speak it. I am 100 % for immigration! What I am against is the way this country is handling (or not handling) this crisis.

Another thing, we allow so much trash to come in to our homes each day via radio, TV and the internet. Our children are totally desensitized by the sex and violence they're exposed to. Children are also isolating themselves in their bedrooms using the internet as a companion. We have kicked God out of our schools and out of the government. Our fore fathers believed "In God we trust" and while they were not perfect man, they knew the power of having God lead the way.

April 2007 marked the 400 year anniversary of the first recorded event in our country. It was when the English settlers landed here, a cross was planted in Jamestown, and they gave thanks to God for a safe journey to this new land . The God who is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ was the standard that started this country.

What has happen? Are we so arrogant we cannot see the need to reach out to the "Creator of the Universe" for direction or for help anymore? What about thanksgiving for all we have? We are all so blessed, to live in freedom, we have so many opportunities, and it seems ridiculous to even name them all. WE WOULD BE BLIND IF WE DIDN'T RECOGNIZE WHAT WE HAVE. We know what we have. We are arrogant and apathetic, and if we're not careful, our riches, our blessings and our beautiful land of the free and home of the brave will be gone....before our very eyes. POOF!

How's that for an introduction? Is anybody still with me? Stay with me and hear me out. Read on with an open mind and heart, Open your eyes and look around you. We've changed. Those of you 50 and older.... is this the America you remember as a kid? Do you like what you see happening to our society?

The prophet Isaiah was called by God Himself to deliver a message to the people of Israel who like us had drifted away from "The One TRUE God"

There are so many similarities between what was happening in Isaiah's day and what is happening in this age. The outcome for the Israelites wasn't good. God was mad. He still loved them, but he was mad. Rebellion against God does not go un-noticed by him. He knows all and

sees all and even though God is not swift to bring on His judgment does not mean it will not come.

Read what God told Isaiah to tell the Israelites and see if it doesn't fit the image of our beloved country today.

"Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me.

"An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand." Alas, sinful nation,

People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly!

They have abandoned the LORD, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him." Isaiah 1:2-4 NASB

Isaiah ministered to the people of Judah for almost 50 years and Jeremiah 40 years after him. God does not want to destroy us; He wants us to turn to him.

This book wasn't written to spout off gloom and doom. It is simply a "Message to a Nation."

Chapter 1

The Beginning

Before jumping into the teachings and the heart of this book so dear to me, I felt it necessary to lay some ground work. The beginning of things is always the best place to start and some events need clarification. Some readers may not know or ever thought about or even understood “The Beginning” of God’s plan. So we are going to step out in this first chapter and get informed.

This is not boring...do not skip over it. If you know your Bible ok you are excused, but if not please read it. I tried to only capture the highlights of this history to give a better understanding and prepare you, the reader, for the historical setting in Isaiah’s time.

I. History of the creation

- The Creation of the World. What happened?

The person and nature of God is revealed, creator, sustainer, judge and redeemer.

- God created the universe and the earth. Why?

...as an expression of His love. Love is best expressed toward something or someone.

- God created man in his own image. Why?

He made man and woman to set apart a people to worship Him and to fellowship with Him. He gave them a beautiful home in a garden.

- The Fall. What does that mean?

Satan was unmasked and sin entered the world. How?

The willful disobedience of Adam and Eve shattered the perfect existence of innocence in a majestic place. Satan was tricky he tried to make sin look good. (He hasn't changed; he does the same thing today) God said to Adam and Eve *"You can eat from any tree in the place but not the one in the middle of the garden."* Satan shows up...engages Eve in a little chat, convinces her God didn't "really" mean what he said and there ya go! She grabs the fruit takes a bite and gives it to Adam...

Fellowship with God was broken.

In a bible study I was doing the author of that study had this to say:

***Suffering Because of Being Born Into the Human Race**

There are four broad categories of suffering that comes because we are born into a sinful human race. In Genesis, chapter 3, verses 17-19, after Adam and Eve had both sinned; one hundred percent of the human race was sinful at that point because they were one hundred percent of the human race. Since that time, every person born into the human race has been born into that sinful state, that ability to commit sin whether we have actually exercised that ability or not. God isn't singling us out for any kind of punishment. It is just because the human race is sinful and God has inflicted these difficulties on us to remind us of what had been ours and what was lost because of sin.

*Dr. Joe Temple, Isaiah Study

Our willful sin separates us from God.

The environment was also affected. Read the following passage:

"Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';

Cursed is the ground because of you;

In toil you will eat of it

All the days of your life.

"Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;

*And you will eat the plants of the field;
By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are
dust,
And to dust you shall return.”*
Genesis 3:17-19 NASB

Life in the garden was perfect and if they had obeyed God they could have lived forever in paradise with God as their constant companion. After the disobedience God kicked them out and instead of life being joyful with everyday tasks being fun, in a place where everything was provided for them, they were now on their own, struggling to provide for themselves. The ground was also cursed causing disease and death to enter the world. Ooooooh! What a price to pay. God, can we have “do overs?” I bet the first person to wish for a “do over” was Eve. One other question I want to answer and I bet some of you are thinking this, because I wondered it myself and found the answer in the notes of my study bible. The question is... Why would God place a tree in the garden and then tell Adam and Eve not to eat from it?

It's simple really, God wanted Adam to obey, but God also wanted to give him a choice. Without the freedom to choose Adam would be like a prisoner. What is obedience without choice? Meaningless.

God's Presence after sin came to the human race

He is still present and ready to forgive us if we turn...and that means TURN our backs from the sin and ask for forgiveness. God will be faithful and bring us back to Him in full fellowship. Our peace returns and healing of our hearts, minds and bodies is restored. How can that work? Aha! God had a plan B... it was a man and not just any man but a perfect man, a man called Jesus. This man called Jesus was actually God himself returning to earth in human flesh to walk again among his beloved.

Did you find those points above interesting? I hope so. I wanted elementary Q&A to simplify areas that are so often taken for granted or misunderstood by people who attend church all their lives but never appreciate the order of things ... Next topic to review and hopefully answer questions for some.

II. Historical setting for the creation of the nation of God's people.

- Forming of a nation. Why did God want to do that?

Remember when Adam and Eve sinned they were sent packing from the garden to fend for themselves? Unfortunately when people are left on their own they have a tendency to get worse instead of better. God ended up destroying all the people on the earth because of the wickedness that developed. Remember, Noah and the flood? The people were sinning like crazy and when God got fed up he called to Noah, and well you know the story. Noah gathered two of everything in the ark, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights, the earth flooded and killed everything. So here we are, the rains have stopped, and Noah and his family are the only people left in the world. The re-population begins.

New nations were formed by Noah's sons. One son, Shem had the most powerful blood line...Abraham, David and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wow...now those are good genes. On with the story, Noah and his sons are honoring God's request to be fruitful and multiply and like I mentioned Abraham was a descendant of Noah's son, Shem.

While most people ignored God, some, like Abraham tried to follow Him. That did not go unnoticed by God. God appeared to Abraham one day, told him to pack his stuff, leave his family and go to a new land that He, God, would show him. What does God have up His mighty sleeve? God's desire was to form a new nation to be a source of truth and salvation in a pagan world. The big picture...**to make Himself known to all people!** Abraham was to be the father of that nation and God established a "covenant" with him, promising him that the nation would not only be blessed but so would other nations who were Abraham's descendants. The new nation was later called Israel. The name Israel came from the story about Jacob, who was Abraham's grandson, you can read the whole story in (Gen 32:24-30). God changed Jacob's name to Israel after he wrestled with an angel during a difficult time. Jacob turned to God for help and was persistent in seeking Him. This new name was a symbol of how God had changed his life. Jacob the deceiver became "Israel ... the one who struggles with God and overcomes" This right here is a lesson for all of us. Seek God with persistence of Jacob to overcome struggles.

· What was God's covenant? Lets define according to Dictionary .com

Covenant:

An agreement, usually formal, between two or more persons to do or not do something specified.

It is described in great detail in Exodus, Leviticus & Numbers, in short, God promised to bless Abraham's decedents by making them the nation through whom the rest of the world could know God. In return...

The Israelites promised to love and obey God in order to receive physical and spiritual blessings.

Paul speaking of God's plan and how he chose the Israelites...

"They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen."

Romans 9:4-5 NLT

Let's push on, I mentioned before, God changed the name of one of Abraham's grandsons from Jacob to Israel and that's where the name of the nation came from. The 11 sons of Jacob started the tribes (or families) of the new nation their names and some of their famous descendants were:

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Sons of Jacob (Israel)	Famous Descendants
Reuben	
Simeon	
Levi	Aaron, Moses, Eli, John the Baptist

Judah	David & Jesus
Dan	Sampson
Naphtali	
Gad	
Asher	
Issachar	
Zebulun	
*Joseph	
<i>Ephraim</i>	Joshua, Gideon and Samuel
<i>Manasseh</i>	
Benjamin	Saul, Esther and Paul

*NOTE: When Jacob was near death he blessed Joseph's two son's Ephraim and Manasseh and Joseph's tribe was divided into two, making 12 families.

I don't know about you, I don't usually like the parts of the Bible where the genealogy is listed because it's boring to read, but I loved reading this list.

· Israelites in Egypt. How did God's newly formed nation get enslaved in Egypt for 400 years?

I will try to just capture a few highlights on this subject since the main topic of the chapter is about the history in Isaiah's time. I did feel, however, it is important to lay the ground work regarding the history of the God's people. I always grasp a message better if I have all the facts straight up front.

Joseph was Jacobs's favorite son. Remember Jacob was Abrahams grandson...he was Isaac's boy. Isaac was the miracle baby born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Joseph's 11 brothers were jealous of him because he was the favorite. When Joseph was 17 he was sold into slavery by his brothers, unbeknownst to his beloved father. He spent 13 years as a slave and prisoner in Egypt. An opportunity arose and Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret a dream he'd had. Joseph successfully interpreted it, thanks be to God, and Pharaoh recognized Joseph was a wise man filled with the spirit of God. In time Pharaoh

made Joseph ruler of all Egypt. Not bad for a kid that was a nomad traveling the country side with his family. He was now the ruler of the most advanced civilization of that time.

So what was going on with the rest of family while Joseph was being promoted in Egypt? They were starving. There was a great famine throughout the world. Not in Egypt though, Joseph not only interpreted the dream of Pharaoh he also gave him a 14 year economic plan that saved Egypt from ruin. Many came to Egypt because it was the only land that had grain. So guess who showed up looking for help? Jacob and the rest of the boys did not recognize Joseph because he was not only many years older but he was also dressed in the fashion of the Egyptians. Eventually Joseph's identity was revealed; they had a family reunion, yada yada yada. The family became land owners and grew to great numbers. You can read all about the adventures of Jacobs's family in Genesis 28-50. It's a really good read.

Here we have Jacobs's family in the land of Egypt. Remember what I told you earlier...God changed Jacob's name to Israel and his sons were the heads of the 12 tribes or families of the new nation. Read below what happen to the generations that followed:

"In time, Joseph and all of his brothers died, ending that entire generation. But their descendants, the Israelites, had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land. Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country."

So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king".

Exodus 1:6-11 NLT

God's people once highly favored in Egypt because of Joseph were now enslaved by the Egyptians.

The "new" Pharaoh in charge was afraid because the Israelites outnumbered the Egyptians. For over 400 years the Israelites were used for

Egyptian building projects. The people prayed to God for a deliverer. We all know this story. Moses was called by God to guide the people out of bondage or slavery and set them on the course to the Promised Land (Canaan) where they would develop as a nation. Read Exodus sometime and refresh your memory on all the details of the great journey to the land of Milk and Honey! Let me say something here as a side note ...out of the original group, over a million people, that left Egypt with Moses only 2 actually entered the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb. Another tidbit...you might like to know. It took 40 years to get there when it was only an **11 day trip!** Why? They chose to grumble, complain and refused to follow God. This is such a good life lesson. We sure do burn a lot of years trying to do things on our own. I am a perfect example of that. Don't let it happen to you.

III. Historical setting for Isaiah

Again, before we look at the setting in Isaiah's day let's get more background and take up the story after the exit from Egypt.

The establishment of God's people in Canaan (later called Israel) had many cycles of faithfulness and disobedience to God. God gave Moses and his team specific instructions on, how to worship Him, in fact the "Levites", one of the 12 tribes, were specifically trained for that purpose, to teach the people how to worship God. God gave Moses the 10 commandments so the people would know how to act appropriately. God's intention was to cleanse them of all the pagan practices they learned in Egypt. Remember, God's purpose for this nation was to be the source of truth and salvation to the whole world. He was "The one true God" the "Holy One of Israel".

Joshua was Moses successor and after he died and the 12 tribes were unified under Joshua's command and finally entered the "Promised Land". The unified army crushed the Canaanite inhabitants until they were weakened. The area was divided among the 12 families, and each tribe was expected to complete the job by driving any remaining enemies out of their *own* territory. Some tribes were more successful than others but over time most of them became, fearful, undisciplined or side tracked by their own self interest. The tribes cherished their independence and moral decay set in when everyone did what they thought was

right in their own eyes. The end result of the disobedience was that pagans remained in the land. As one generation died out the people forgot all the good things God did like, delivering them from the bondage of the Egyptians and giving them a new home. The people began to accept the pagan rituals and traditions of their neighbors. Read below...

"All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed." Judges 2:10-15 NASB

When Joshua died the nation experienced a void in leadership. God would show mercy to His people when they got themselves into trouble and would raise up a "judge" to step in and oversee the situation. Judges in those days were more like a "Commander in Chief" of military and government affairs. They were the "deliverers" of the people from their oppression. The power of that position would expire if the judge died or the crisis passed. It was not like a monarchy that went from generation to generation. About 30 years after the Israelites entered their Promised Land the period of Judges began and lasted about 325 years. After the time of "The Judges" came the reign of "Kings", the Israelites wanted a king to take over, for a couple reasons:

1. Because of corrupt priests and judges who were "the government" or "the chosen" in authority at that time.
2. They also wanted to be led like the surrounding nations.
3. The 12 tribes continually had problems working together and they thought a king would unify them.

In reality they wanted to run the nation the way they wanted, therefore rejecting God. Bad plan! Trying to run a nation using only human strength instead of God's strength spells disaster, in fact that human arrogance can change a perfect plan, which of course God had, into a man made plan which eventually led to complete destruction. The system for the Israelites went from being a theocracy, (led by God) to a monarchy (led by a king) and it was the people's decision and a foolish decision I might add. Read a little of the story:

"When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.' But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us, 'this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.' Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, 'This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day.' But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!" they said. 'We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.'

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. The LORD answered, 'Listen to them and give them a king.'

Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, 'Everyone go back to his town.'"

1 Samuel 8:1-22 NIV

So the people wanted a king did they? They had a king, a leader, and protector. They had the “Lord Most High”, the “Holy One of Israel”. God is never enough for us is he? We always want a man to lead us. Why is that?

In this case they wanted to be like the other nations, but ya know what.. *they were not supposed to be like other nations*, they were set apart. They were the nation God chose to reveal Himself to the world. Well, God was going to give them what they were asking for. Sometimes we need to be careful what we ask for, because God might just give it to us, and it usually is not His best. In fact what we ask for can lead to disaster. When the people asked Samuel for a King they were clearly rejecting God. God said, fine give them a king, God also said when the king enslaves the people and takes all your money, don't cry to me for help for “I will not help you” God warned them first but they still wanted their king.

Saul was the first king and he did well when he was lead by the Holy Spirit of God, but as he grew in power and so did his pride, and he lost God's favor. Saul reigned for 40 years until David took over. We *all* know David, the greatest king of Israel and “a man after God's own heart” (Acts 13:22). He was also an ancestor of Jesus and wrote 73 of the psalms. He did many great things but ... he was not perfect and the consequences of sin can effect generation after generation. He has quite a story. He reigned 40 years.

David's son Solomon took over after his death and it was during the reign of both David and Solomon that the nation of Israel grew in great fame and enjoyed its greatest years of prosperity.

I encourage you to take time to fill in the blanks, and get all the details of the New Nation by reading the Old Testament books.

The Kingdom of Israel, united under the first King, Saul, was divided after King Solomon's death. All of those “golden years” of fame and fortune, established under first, David's reign then, Solomon's went downhill. The nation rebelled against God and his laws. This was the direct result of David's sin and Solomon's pride and disobedience. God might

have destroyed Israel had He not promised Abraham a redeemer, He still planned to use the house of David for this.

After Solomon's death civil war broke out and his sons and generals fought for the throne. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, had his father's blessing to be the new king, but Jeroboam, one of Solomon's officials, had more military influence. In the end, Rehoboam took the southern half of the country with two tribes and called it "Judah". Judah was the tribe (or family, David and Solomon were from). They lasted just over 300 years and eventually were conquered by Babylon about 586B.C. Jeroboam took the northern half with 10 tribes and kept the name Israel. The Kingdom in the north "Israel" endured 130 years after the split with one evil king after another, until their final collapse into captivity in 722 BC to the Assyrians. Israel's inhabitants were exiled and gone forever. So were God's promises. As a result they became known as the *Ten Lost Tribes of Israel*. Do you see now why I said that the people wanting a king was a bad plan! Both Jeroboam and Rehoboam did what was good for them and not what was best for the people. Selfish motives always backfire and cause destruction.

Judah lasted 136 years longer than Israel in the south because they had 2 good kings. It was because of those 2 good kings, their obedience to God and spiritual revival that Judah lasted that many years longer than Israel.

Let's talk about Isaiah for a minute. After the split there was still prosperity for both kingdoms during Isaiah's youth with little foreign interference. Jeroboam II ruled in the north and Uzziah ruled in the south. The prosperity of the time caused the people to fall away from God. It's typical that we cry out to God when we need something but the minute the pain of our circumstances subsides we forget the one who saved us or who answered our prayers. Isaiah's prophetic career was entangled in the political and cultural turmoil of the times, and began with the death of a monarch, his cousin Uzziah. Isaiah's vocation spanned the last half of the seventh century and the early eighth century B.C.E. -including all or part of the reigns of four Judean kings, [Uzziah (769-733), Jotham (758-743, regent) , Ahaz, (743-733 B.C.E., regent; 733-727 B.C.E.) and Hezekiah (727-698 B.C.E)]. One of the reasons the office of prophet was so prominent during these years was due to the evil nature of the kings in power. God needed a spokes person to get his message to the people.

Isaiah was called to deliver God's messages. Chapter 1 in the book of Isaiah is a sermon he preached. I'm going to end the chapter with a

couple of verses from that sermon, it's long but don't skip it. God was not happy and He wanted the people to know it. God wanted them to know it but what he really wanted was for them to turn back to Him... He *loved them* and wanted sincere worship not phony, empty, meaningless rituals.

"The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.'

*Ah, sinful nation,
a people loaded with guilt,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!*

They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore?

Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged

or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you,

laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons,

like a city under siege. Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors,

we would have become like Sodom,

we would have been like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom;

listen to the law of our God,

you people of Gomorrah! "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings!

Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—

I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”Isaiah 1: 1-17 NSA

Powerful words! As Americans we can look at this message and apply to our nation can't we? Read it again ... and think of that.

Chapter 2

The Character of Isaiah

This chapter gives us a Bio on the prophet. It will paint a picture of him to give a better understanding of who he was, who his family members were and the challenges he faced.

What type of person is called to the “office of a prophet”? You could probably name a dozen characteristics and we will discuss a few but the only two of any real importance are, being willing and obedient. Isaiah was that and much more.

First let’s answer the question, what is a prophet?
According to dictionary.com...

proph·et /'–noun

a person who speaks for God or a deity, or by divine inspiration.
in the Old Testament

a person chosen to speak for God and to guide the people of Israel:
Moses was the greatest of Old Testament prophets.

b. a person who foretells or predicts what is to come

The “office” of prophet was instituted during the days of Samuel. In the Old Testament, only the priest, the prophet and the king were anointed by the Holy Spirit to stand in those offices. Prophets stood with the priests as God’s special representatives; their role was to preach God’s word to the people, warning, teaching and encouraging them to live as they ought, to receive the best from God. Remember from the last chapter, I mentioned the reason the prophet was used by God so much during this time was due to the corruption of the kings and priests. When God wanted to speak to his people he was going to find someone to do it.

The law was well known in Isaiah's time. The first 5 books of our modern day bible, called the Pentateuch, were the sacred scriptures of Isaiah's day. They were mostly written by Moses and he lived 600 years before Isaiah. Those scrolls were well known by the Israelites.

Isaiah was considered to be one of the greatest prophets and has been called "the evangelical prophet". He speaks a lot about the Messiah and His redemptive work. The person of Christ is mentioned in Isaiah more than in any other Old Testament book. New Testament writers recognized Isaiah's special importance, quoting from it frequently. Handel used much of Isaiah's language in the famous piece of music he composed that we hear mostly at Christmas, the "Messiah".

Remember from the history in the previous chapter, Isaiah lived in a time when society was in a great upheaval. The original Kingdom of Israel was divided, in two, 10 tribes in the north "Israel" and 2 tribes in the south, "Judah". Isaiah himself was the cousin of King Uzziah, the 10th king in power after the split.

Uzziah was the king during Isaiah's youth and one of the two "good" kings in Judah's history. Isaiah was well educated and being a member of the royal family, could come and go in the court of Jerusalem as he pleased. Do you think that was a coincidence? I don't. God had a real message to deliver to the people, and He saw to it that the servant who proclaimed this message had an open door through which he could come and go without interruption. In other words he had clout and the ear of the most influential people of his day. I also don't believe it was an accident that Isaiah was married to a prophet. (Isaiah 8:3). There is so much power in a family when husband and wife are both serving the Lord. Isaiah and the Prophetess (I love that!) had two children, one named Shear-Jashub which means "a remnant will return" and the other God named Maher-shalal-has-baz meaning "swift to plunder and quick to spoil" Wow.. that's a mouth full. That name was given directly to Isaiah for his second born from God himself. (confirms Isaiah's obedience, I probably would have fought with God over that one...."no Lord not Maher-shalal-has-baz ... I want to call him Jr") Don't you wonder what the prophet and prophetess called the kids? Maybe *Has* and *Jas*. (Well maybe not...) The boys had names based on something about to happen and gave testimony to what Isaiah believed in relation to the future of the nation of God's people. This was a man who was not trying to

tell other people what to do while his own family was out of alignment with him. The entire family was dedicated to the cause which he served... power in that? I would say so. Do you think when they gathered together as a family in prayer God was listening? Uh, you bet. Let me just add a word right here. Parents, gather your family together, hold hands, read the word of God, thank Him and praise Him. Lift up your needs and watch Him move. Isaiah's family was unified.

Isaiah did not start out to be a prophet, he was possibly employed by his cousin, King Uzziah, in some respectable field in the court, perhaps a scribe. God had other plans. Isaiah describes his call from God in Chapter 6 of his book and leaves little doubt what motivated him to stay in service for 60 years. Read it below:

"It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies!

The whole earth is filled with his glory!' Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke."Isaiah 6:1-4 NLT

Ooooooooooh! I would have loved to hear that "praise and worship" session!

I have a little testimony about this scripture. I was driving to work one morning listening to a WOW Worship CD (for those that don't know, WOW Worship is like a greatest hit collection of Christian music released every May) A song came on called "I See The Lord" and it was based on the Isaiah scripture above. (I didn't know that because at the time I mostly read and studied New Testament scripture). I'd listen to this song many times before that morning but for some reason when I heard it that time the words captivated me. I will never forget it. I could picture very clearly the train of the robe (I saw purple) and it was magnificent. The artist (Chris Falson) sang the words...

I see the Lord sitting on the throne exalted

And the train of his robe fills the temple with

GLORY

And the whole earth is filled, the whole earth is filled

*the whole earth is filled with His Glory
Holy Holy Holy Holy is the Lord.*

It's a fairly short tune but the arrangement of it is amazing and I kept playing it over and over and I had the volume turned up to a window shattering level ...I could not get enough of it. It was like I was caught up in a moment of praise like I'd never known before and even though I'd arrived at work I sat for several more moments in the parking garage playing that song and singing the words. I had a tough time pulling myself away... . I did not want to turn it off. I will never forget that experience. Later that week, I was doing Bible study homework and was instructed to read Isaiah 6:1-4. I wept when I read that passage. I had no idea the words of that song that carried me to such high praise of the Lord that morning, were the words of Isaiah's testimony. From then on I knew the book of Isaiah would be special for meI didn't know I would write a book I just knew it was special.

The sound of the *seraphim's voices saying Holy, Holy, Holy and how it **shook** the temple. Have you ever been to a concert where the sound of the music shook the walls? I have and it's pretty amazing but this...wow. I have attended church services and at times when everyone is worshipping, the music almost lifted me off my feet. Can you imagine how powerful this vision must have been for Isaiah? In fact that vision of God permanently affected his character. Isaiah reflected the God he now represented, one of justice and mercy. Isaiah's messages were confrontational but also usually followed with ones of comfort and salvation. We have such an awesome God!

* Seraphim: Heavenly creatures that are caretakers of God's throne.

In the beginning of his ministry Isaiah was well liked but like most prophets soon became unpopular due do the message he was delivering.

He was calling people to turn away from their sin and was warning them about God's judgment and punishment. Keep in mind, he was not only preaching to the people but to the kings as well. We all are familiar with the egos of men, especially men in power. I'm sure Isaiah was apprehensive at times because the pronouncements were difficult ones to hear and most people can't handle the truth. We all want to feel good and want to leave a gathering uplifted. When Isaiah preached to the masses, anyone who liked could listen; anyone who liked could walk

away and God warned him that most would not listen. Isaiah remained obedient to his call no matter how sticky the circumstances got.

*“ And he (the Lord) said, ‘Yes, go, and say to this people,
Listen carefully, but do not understand.*

Watch closely, but learn nothing.’

Harden the hearts of these people.

Plug their ears and shut their eyes.

That way, they will not see with their eyes,

nor hear with their ears,

nor understand with their hearts

and turn to me for healing.”

Then I said, ‘Lord, how long will this go on?’ And he replied,

‘Until their towns are empty,

their houses are deserted,

and the whole country is a wasteland;

until the Lord has sent everyone away,

and the entire land of Israel lies deserted.

If even a tenth—a remnant—survive,

it will be invaded again and burned.

But as a terebinth or oak tree leaves a stump when it is cut down, so Israel’s stump will be a holy seed.” Isaiah 6:9-13NLT

God was telling Isaiah in the above passage that the people’s hearts were hardened beyond repentance. So why did God even bother sending Isaiah out to preach messages knowing they would not listen? The nation might suffer judgment due to their rebellion, but a few would listen, therefore a “Remnant” (those who are faithful to His original truth despite opposition) would be left as “Holy Seed” to rebuild the land after it was destroyed. Isaiah’s oldest son was named for that remnant, Shear-Jashub, remember his name meant “a remnant will return”, God was not going to be left without a witness.

God cared a great deal about those few. Isaiah’s main calling was to preach his heart out for the few who would listen and we can lovingly say, Isaiah was really the “prophet to the Remnant”. A thankless job really, and civilization usually neglects the remnant. Who cares about the few who will listen? Anything for sale is usually marketed to the masses. Right? In an article I read once I saw this statement...

“Every prophetic voice is addressed to the masses, and to them alone; the voice of the pulpit, the voice of education, the voice of politics, of literature, drama, journalism – all these are directed towards the masses exclusively, and they marshal the masses in the way that they are going.” –Albert Jay Nock

Something incredibly deep to think about: even if you are the only one in your family or the only one in the work place or in your neighborhood who believes and trusts God according to *His Word*, do not be discouraged! Do what God has told you, be of good cheer and praise Him for caring so much for the few who do "GET IT" You are the "few" the "remnant" God is reaching for.

So ... God would give Isaiah these powerful messages to preach and he made no specific appeal to the masses, he didn't try to soft pedal the message or sugar coat it in any way. Did he care when most walked away? He probably did, BUT that did not stop him from doing what God told him to do. Isaiah proclaimed what he heard God say knowing most would scoff, make jokes and walk away, and that was ok. He wasn't worried about opinion polls or re-elections and wasn't trying to create a following, or sell books or build mega churches. With all such distractions out of the way, he was in a position to do his best, without fear of losing church attendees, offerings or favor of the people. He was free to deliver the message and was answerable only to his boss and remained a simple and undaunted spokesman for Jehovah... *The Holy One of Israel*.

Isaiah used many methods of literature to get across his message. He preached sermons, sang songs, and wrote poetry. Isn't that cool? I'm trying to think of anyone in contemporary history that addresses or has addressed the faithful in such a multifaceted way? Can't think of any one.

As I stated above, one of the most telling traits of Isaiah's character was his willingness to answer God's call...immediately! Read below.

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."

Isaiah 6:8 NLT

I love that "Here I am...send me" he didn't hesitate for a minute. I want to be like him. Don't you? Instead I am probably more like Moses who protested three times when the Lord called him (Exodus 3:7-4:1) and also like Moses I suppose I lack the confidence in myself that I could do great things for God, but that's a lie and we need to get hold of this and understand one thing...*when we are called by God He will enable us to do the task. It's HIS task! His will.* He isn't going to hang us out to dry when we are commissioned by Him. Key point, make sure what you are doing is commissioned by God. We can wear ourselves out doing a lot of stuff that has very little to do with God and we will have no victory

in it. Be careful, Satan loves to keep us busy or distracted and many miss their calling from God because of it. Isaiah must have known this, so he was not only willing and obedient, but wise too. God *does* insist that we are humble and we must remember *He* gets the glory when greatness is achieved.

People have a tendency to get puffed up with pride and think highly of themselves. That attitude can cause us to fall and we need to be very careful. Kings Uzziah and Hezekiah are perfect examples, they did great things...but pride got the best of them and their lives ended badly. Isaiah was humble, willing and had absolute confidence in God and not himself. In fact Isaiah felt convicted when called, he recognized his sin and confessed it openly.

Then I (Isaiah) said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven." Isaiah 6:5- 6 NLT

What came immediately when Isaiah openly confessed his sin? Forgiveness. Nothing has changed dear friends. The same is true for us today. If we have sin in our lives, take a lesson from Isaiah, confess it, receive forgiveness immediately and move on. God is not looking for perfect people He is looking for those that are willing and obedient to go when called.

So far we have seen that Isaiah was, willing to serve God with no financial gain as a motivator. He was, talented and humble. What else? He counseled great kings and put his faith in God into action. We will talk about The Kings in Chapter 4 when we look at "The state of the nation in Isaiah's time", for now I just want you to know, Judah was in a desperate situation under one of the best kings in Judah's history, King Hezekiah. The Assyrians had Judah surrounded and sent messengers to the king telling him to surrender, the situation looked hopeless. What did Hezekiah do? He humbled himself and prayed. Next he sent word to his last hope, God's appointed prophet, Isaiah, to pray for him.

Isaiah delivered a message back to King Hezekiah:

"So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. Isaiah said to them, Say to your master, Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled and blasphemed Me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he will hear a rumor and

return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own country.” 2 Kings 19: 5-7 AMP

Isaiah puts his faith into action. He made bold statements based on the confidence he had in God. Hezekiah made a wise decision, he listen to the advice of the prophet. Read the end of the story:

“And it all came to pass, for that night the Angel of the Lord went forth and slew 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when [the living] arose early in the morning, behold, all these were dead bodies. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned and dwelt at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Armenia or Ararat. Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.” 2 Kings 19:35-37AMP

Not a good night for the Assyrian army. Isaiah had been a prophet for 40 years and even though Assyria was a world power and most would be intimidated by that, Isaiah just put his trust in *“The Holy One of Israel.”*

The other outstanding quality Isaiah had was his obedience to God even when God made a request that seemed illogical.

“ In the year when King Sargon of Assyria sent his commander in chief to capture the Philistine city of Ashdod, the Lord told Isaiah son of Amoz, ‘Take off the burlap you have been wearing, and remove your sandals.’ Isaiah did as he was told and walked around naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, ‘My servant Isaiah has been walking around naked and barefoot for the last three years. This is a sign—a symbol of the terrible troubles I will bring upon Egypt and Ethiopia. For the king of Assyria will take away the Egyptians and Ethiopians as prisoners. He will make them walk naked and barefoot, both young and old, their buttocks bared, to the shame of Egypt. Then the Philistines will be thrown into panic, for they counted on the power of Ethiopia and boasted of their allies in Egypt! They will say, ‘If this can happen to Egypt, what chance do we have? We were counting on Egypt to protect us from the king of Assyria.’” Isaiah 20:1-6 NLT

Can you imagine doing something that humiliating? But God’ was trying to get the message across to the Judah...do not put your hope in foreign governments. Wow...That hits home for me because I think *our* government deals way too much with foreign countries that do not have American interests at heart. True?

How important was Isaiah’s ministry?

His book is quoted more in the New Testament than any other book, with the possible exception of the book of Psalms. It is quoted fifty-eight times in the New Testament in eleven different books. Isaiah is often referred to as *the fifth evangelist* because the theme of this entire book is

salvation by faith, and the name *Isaiah* means ``*Jehovah saves,*' or '*Jehovah is salvation*.'" Isaiah was an eighth century B.C. prophet. He was prophesying eight hundred years before the Lord Jesus Christ was born.

Because of the power of his ministry and the fact that He saw God and He predicted the coming of the savior Emmanuel and because God gave him visions of future events that did in fact come to pass is exactly why so many have tried to discredit this work and it's value.

Some so called "scholars" want you to believe this book was written by more than one person, chapters 1-39 written by one person , 40- 66 written by another and therefore casting doubt in the mind of the reader as to it's authenticity. I want to mention a few simple examples of why it isn't so. One of the most creditable sources is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Jesus himself quoted from the book of Isaiah.

Read:

"But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him. This is exactly what Isaiah the prophet had predicted: "Lord, who has believed our message?

To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?" But the people couldn't believe, for as Isaiah also said, "The Lord has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts— so that their eyes cannot see, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and have me heal them." John 12:37-40 NLT

Verse 38 is a quote from Isaiah 53:1 and Verse 40 is a quote from Isaiah 6:10. It confirms to me that the Jesus recognized that both of them were written by one man, Isaiah the prophet. Another is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls were discovered and called such because they were found in a cave at the north end of the Dead Sea, about seven miles from the city of Jericho. Archaeological specialists tell us that the Dead Sea Scrolls are probably of first century B.C., or even older. They came some seven centuries after Isaiah wrote the book, from the first chapter to chapter sixty-six, complete and in perfect Hebrew. Not one deviation of any kind, and when it was translated, the translation was much like the translation that we have in our King James Version. When were they found? Some seven-hundred years after Isaiah actually lived. Finding the scrolls in the condition they were in was essential in supporting the unity of the work because the books in the bible, when originally written, were not divided into chapters. When the scrolls were found, on the very last line of the last sentence of the last verse of chapter thirty-nine, began the first word of the first verse of chapter forty.

In conclusion...If the book of Isaiah was written by two separate authors, it would have been found as two separate works. End of bogus theory. God always has a way of protecting His Word from those who wish to question its accuracy.

After Isaiah's public ministry came to an end, he lived on into the reign of Manasseh, who was the son of Hezekiah and he was evil. The Bible does not say what happened to Isaiah, but the Jewish Talmud says that Isaiah was executed by Manasseh because Isaiah claimed to have seen God and Moses said that anybody who saw God should die. In chapter 6 of Isaiah, he did have a vision of the LORD, high and lifted up. So, Manasseh wanted an excuse to kill him, and the Jewish Talmud said that was the reason that he did. The only thing in the Word of God that might be construed as referring to that is found in chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, verse 37.

You will remember there is the honor-roll, so called, in which the great worthies of the Old Testament are mentioned by name, and a great host of them not mentioned by name, because the sacred writer says that he does not have time to mention all of them. He said that some of them died by fire, some of them were sawn asunder. Most people believe that this is a reference to the manner in which Isaiah died when Manasseh laid him upon the block and sawed him asunder with a wooden saw, if you can imagine how terrible that might have been. This thing was believed by all of the Jews as late as the second century after the death of Christ.

Isaiah was a faithful and loving prophet of God, his calling and the plan for his life specific - *the establishment of the worship of the Lord in righteousness and truth*. Isaiah's call and challenge were unrelenting and persistent and his message is relevant especially in our day. It is crucial that we understand Isaiah remains a prophet for our time. If we will heed his warnings, repent of our ungodly ways and turn to God, the promises he recorded for the entire world in the future can be ours today.

Chapter 3

The Prophecies of Isaiah

Writing this chapter really intimidated me. In fact it was the last one I started. Where do you begin the discussion on prophecy in the book of Isaiah? The whole book is prophetic and taking into consideration the length of Isaiah Aughhhhh.....I felt overwhelmed. I'm OK now because I'm putting in the hands of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me. Let's start out slow.

What is prophecy?

A Biblical prophecy is a God-given revelation of the future. It isn't a prediction; it is a *promise* about the future.

God told his prophets, that the Jews would be forced out of Israel, scattered worldwide, persecuted worldwide, and that they would eventually return to Israel.

In 722BC, Israel (the 10 tribes) fell and were taken captive by the Assyrians, 100 or so years later Judah fell to the Babylonians. Jerusalem and the temple Solomon built were both completely destroyed.

"Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Listen to this message from the Lord of Heaven's Armies: 'The time is coming when everything in your palace—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors until now—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left,' says the Lord. 'Some of your very own sons will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon's king.'" Isaiah 39:5-7 NLT

Isaiah gave the proceeding prophesy 100 years before it happened and even before Babylon had entered on to the stage as a world power. Then Isaiah prophesied the fall of Babylon

“Come down, virgin daughter of Babylon, and sit in the dust. For your days of sitting on a throne have ended. O daughter of Babylonia, never again will you be the lovely princess, tender and delicate.” Isaiah 47:1 NLT

He also called by name the Persian king Cyrus as the one that would set the Israelites free from that captivity 150 years before he ruled.

*“When I say of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd,’ he will certainly do as I say. He will command, ‘Rebuild Jerusalem’; he will say, ‘Restore the Temple.’”
Isaiah 44:28 NLT*

And...

*“This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, his anointed one,
whose right hand he will empower.
Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear.
Their fortress gates will be opened,
never to shut again.
This is what the Lord says:
“I will go before you, Cyrus,
and level the mountains.
I will smash down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.
And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness— secret riches. I will do
this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls
you by name.” Isaiah 45:1-3 NLT*

And...

*“The Lord has chosen Cyrus as his ally. He will use him to put an end to the
empire of Babylon and to destroy the Babylonian armies.”
Isaiah 48:14 NLT*

What made that prophesy even more amazing was, like the Babylonians, the Persian Empire had not even made its way to the world stage during Isaiah’s time. Cyrus’s mission was to set Israel free and decree that all the Jews could return to their homeland. Only a prophet of God could have made such an inconceivable prediction and because Isaiah called Cyrus by name and described events in accurate detail causes many to believe the book was written by two different people.

So little faith. God is God why is it so hard to believe he could reveal future events to his spokesperson. I believe the Holy Spirit, through Isaiah, was not limited to time or space and that he was able to pull back the

veil of time and show Isaiah things that were going to happen 200 years after he was long gone. My own opinion on this...I just do not have a hard time taking it on faith. I mean God called Isaiah for this ministry, why would God limit him to talking about events in his own lifetime.

All of God's promises were fulfilled, the last one, in May, 1948 with the migration of Jews back to Israel and the re-establishment and restoration of Israel as a state. Israel declares itself as an independent nation without a war and the Soviet Union's UN ambassador, calls for the UN to accept Israel as a member state. The UN approves.

Another amazing prophecy was when Isaiah spoke of a voice shouting in the wilderness of the coming of a savior in 40:3 see it below...

"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'" Isaiah 40:3 NLT

All four gospel writers quoted Isaiah regarding this passage because when John the Baptist made the scene he used practically the same language Isaiah used. Matthew writes:

"The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, 'He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him!'" Matthew 3:3 NLT

Many of Isaiah's prophecies are about a Messiah, which means "anointed one" or "chosen one." These are called "Messianic" prophecies. Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies. In the book of Isaiah, 121 Messianic prophecies were made and fulfilled by Jesus Christ and His Church in the New Testament. Let's look at two...

"All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')." Isaiah 14:7 NLT

If anyone has heard Handel's Messiah, this one will be familiar:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 NLT

All of Chapter 53 speaks of the coming of a Messiah. This prophecy is amazing. God chose to save the world through a humble suffering servant rather than a famous King. This concept is so contrary to what the world would expect. That is why he was rejected by many; it was hard to believe he was who he said he was because He did not fit the “profile” of greatness.

Be careful who you hold up in high regard...rich, beautiful, powerful are not necessarily the clues.

I listed many more prophecies the end of this chapter for you to review.

The first 6 chapters of Isaiah are prophecies, or I should say, they are sermons preached to the people of Judah during the reigns of King Uzziah and his son, Jotham proclaiming prophetic messages about Israel’s future.

Some of it good, and some of it dreadful.

Let’s examine a couple of verses in Chapter 1 of Isaiah for a moment.

“Your country lies in ruins, and your cities are burned. As you watch, foreigners plunder your fields and destroy everything they see. Jerusalem stands abandoned like a watchman’s shelter in a vineyard or field after the harvest is over. It is as helpless as a city under siege.”

Isaiah 1:7-8 NLT

Isaiah was prophesying about Israel’s future. At the time of this prophecy

Judah was as prosperous under the reign of Uzziah as Israel was under King Solomon. (Read about it in 2 Chronicles 26:1-15) but Isaiah was saying.....

“Jerusalem stands abandoned like a watchman’s shelter in a vineyard or field after the harvest is over. It is as helpless as a city under siege.”

Isaiah 1:8 NLT

The people hearing this message probably snickered and said “Yeah right”. Ok, Isaiah, whatever.

Imagine someone today saying that about our beloved capitol, Washington D.C. Who would believe it? How many people would walk away from that person prophesying over our country's future thinking, they are crazy as a loon? Actually they would probably call them a religious fanatic or accuse them of being a part of a "vast right wing conspiracy". Many would not listen. A few would, and God might call them "The Remnant"

"Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, [if God does not in mercy leave us a small remnant] we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

Isaiah 1:9 NLT

Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities God destroyed because of great wickedness. In Isaiah's time, when he preached his messages from God, very few listened as God had warned and very few cared as God already knew. Why? The people were fat and happy and doing their own thing, I will speak more of this in the next chapter. The people were also totally blind to what was happening in their midst. They were ignoring the poor and had become totally self-centered. Isaiah compares the rulers and people of Judah to the rulers and people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Listen to the Lord, you leaders of 'Sodom.' Listen to the law of our God, people of 'Gomorrah.'"

Isaiah 1:10 NLT

Do you know why Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed? It wasn't because of homosexuality as is most commonly thought...Read below

"Sodom's sins were pride, gluttony, and laziness, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door."Ezekiel 16:49 NLT

Failure to help the poor doomed these cities to their fiery destruction, so what did God do...

"She was proud and committed detestable sins, so I wiped her out, as you have seen."

Ezekiel 16:50 NLT

Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed, but because of the mercy of God, He left a small group. A "Remnant"

It's important to understand this in your walk with the Lord and in times such as these. Even if everyone around you is falling away and

you are the only one taking a stand for your Christian faith your actions do not go unnoticed by God! He sees you so resist the temptation to fall into the mind set of “what difference does it make? It makes a lot of difference in fact it’s the difference between life and death...choose life.

Isaiah was warning the people of his day of the eventual judgment, that judgment was necessary because of the decay that accompanied the prosperity of Israel of that particular time. Again I can’t help but think of the times we live in. Many do not see the decay of our morals, there is always talk of the crime rate these days and the escalating drug use, those are obvious but I’m talking about the subtle things. I just saw a movie last night and it’s a perfect example. It was about a 20 year old woman about to be married. She never knew who her father was until she read her mother’s diary and discovered it could have been 1 of 3 men. She invited them all to the wedding.

The story was set to music and was very entertaining but the outcome was that she never found her father’s identity and she changed her mind about getting married at the last minute and decided to travel the world with her boyfriend. It completely disrespected the sanctity of marriage and emphasized promiscuous behavior throughout the whole movie without using any nudity or foul language. I have to admit, I walked out of there thinking it was fun....until I thought about it deeper, and it is typical Hollywood. Subtle moral decay is more dangerous than the obvious because it is accepted by us, those that call ourselves Christians. Be careful dear friends...listen to what Isaiah is preaching. He was sent by God to warn his nation, the warning is for America too. God Bless America!Please.

Below are listed more of Isaiah’s Prophecy’s. Some about a “Messiah” and some about the future of his beloved countrymen.

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah foreshadowed the virgin birth of Jesus

Isaiah 9:6-7

Jesus proclaims that he is the Son of God

Isaiah 13:19

Babylon's kingdom would be overthrown, permanently

Isaiah 14:23

Babylon would be reduced to swampland

Isaiah 35:4-6

He would perform miracles

Isaiah 40:1-5,9

The Messiah would be preceded by a messenger

Isaiah 45:1

Babylon's gates would open for Cyrus

Isaiah 49:6

God's salvation would reach the ends of the earth

Isaiah 49:13-17

God will never forget the children of Israel

Isaiah 50:6

Jesus was spat upon and beaten

Isaiah 53:1-3

The Messiah would be rejected

Isaiah 53:4-6

God's servant would die for our sins

Isaiah 53:7

God's servant would be silent before his accusers

Isaiah 53:9

God's servant would be buried in a rich man's tomb

Chapter 4

The state of the nation during Isaiah's time

The setting during Isaiah's time was Jerusalem, the capitol of Judah. The dates of his ministry were 740 B.C – 681 B.C. and as previously discussed, it was a time when the original state of Israel was divided into two nations. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel and Judah was in the south. Society was in an upheaval. Both Kingdoms were in big trouble with God. They were oppressing the poor and turning from God to the Pagan idols from surrounding nations. They were also relying on help and military aid from those pagan nations instead of turning to their God for help. They broke their spiritual and moral covenant with Him. (For details of the covenant read Deuteronomy 28) but the gist of it is this, God entered into a relationship with the people of Israel. He committed himself to protect his people and in return he expected obedience. Best summed up in:

"I will be their God and they will be my people"
Jeremiah 31:33 NLT

For breaking that covenant God brought charges against them through Isaiah.

*"Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth!
This is what the Lord says:
'The children I raised and cared for have rebelled against me.
Even an ox knows its owner,
and a donkey recognizes its master's care—
but Israel doesn't know its master.
My people don't recognize my care for them.'
Oh, what a sinful nation they are—
loaded down with a burden of guilt.
They are evil people,*

*corrupt children who have rejected the Lord.
They have despised the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.”
Isaiah 1:2-4 NLT*

I can't help but add a bit of my own commentary at this point and also briefly remind you how Israel got to the position of division. It was the consequences of Solomon's sins. First of all David, the greatest king of Israel, fought many wars to create the strong kingdom Solomon inherited. Solomon did many good things at first. He protected the country by keeping the army strong and building fortresses. Israel became rich under his rule partly because of his wisdom (God given wisdom I might add, read 1 Kings 3:7-12) in trading and making alliances with surrounding countries. Solomon also built the first temple of God in Jerusalem. He had everything, great wealth, position, fame and wisdom, all blessings from God. In time, Solomon became proud, greedy and he eventually treated his subjects badly. Because of his many foreign wife's, one of the most famous kings of Israel, turned away from worshipping the one true God to worshipping the god's of his wives. He allowed his wives to affect his loyalty to God.

What a disastrous decision! When Solomon died the ten northern tribes rebelled against Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and successor to the throne, because he was an unwise leader. I wonder if Rehoboam's lack of ability came as a result of being a spoiled over indulged child of a wealthy, popular king. Just a thought...it isn't always good to give children everything. They have to develop their own skills by having challenges from early childhood. The rebel group became the northern kingdom of Israel with Jeroboam elected as their king. The two remaining of the original 12 tribes, Benjamin and Judah remained loyal to Rehoboam and became the southern kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital. Kingdom divided...glory gone!

Israel is now under the reign of Jeroboam, a man from the tribe of Ephraim. He introduced idol worship and ordered two golden calves to be made, putting them in the lands of Dan and Bethel. His motive was to try and keep his subjects from going back to Jerusalem (in Judah) to worship. No wonder God was so mad! Lets's read the passage again:

“Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth! This is what the Lord says: ‘The children I raised and cared for have rebelled against me. Even an ox knows its owner, and a donkey recognizes its master’s care - but Israel doesn’t know its master. My people don’t recognize my care for them.’

Oh, what a sinful nation they are— loaded down with a burden of guilt. They are evil people, corrupt children who have rejected the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.”

Isaiah 1:2-4 NLT

God promised to bless the Israelites by making them the nation through whom the rest of the world could know Him. What were his chosen people doing...well what were 90% of them doing? They were praying to a gold cow. How easy it is to be lead astray when times are good and everybody’s fat and happy... so easy to take our eyes off God and how quick we forget who answered our prayers and blessed us with prosperity. Some in this country today may say “Well I’m not prosperous.” Ah yes you are! If you are living in this country, friend you are prosperous compared to most others in the world, don’t be deceived into thinking otherwise. Even if you don’t have all the material possessions, you have freedom and more opportunity then most and if you’ve made Jesus Christ Lord of your life you have a covenant with God that is the same as Abraham.

Read what else God had to say about the phony way the Israelites were worshipping.

*“When you come to worship me,
who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony?
Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me!
As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath
and your special days for fasting—
they are all sinful and false.*

I want no more of your pious meetings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!” Isaiah 1:12-14 NLT

The people were still making an outward show of rituals and traditions but they were unfaithful to God in their hearts. Does this sort of

activity sound familiar? When I first read the passage I couldn't help but think of the many church services I'd been to during one particular time in my life, a lot of pomp and circumstance and not a lot of sincere worship of the Lord. I broke away from that kind of service where the people put more faith in rituals than in the God they worshipped. It might sound critical and judgmental but to me that one hour service (and heaven forbid if it went over an hour, because the people would complain) was the epitome of vein repetitious prayers.

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." Matthew 6: 7-8

God does not take pleasure in outward appearances, He examines our heart. He looks at our motives. That's a scary thought ...but it made me come face to face with myself. Why was I doing some things? *To impress someone?* Sometimes. *To try and gain favor?* Yeah, sometimes. *To look holier than thou?* Ouch! I have to admit I'm guilty. It was hard to swallow but a lot of my motives, before I made my first, or shall I say, second, profession of faith, were shallow, vein and sanctimonious. What did I need? I needed to renew my mind (Romans 12:2) with the word of God and be changed forever. True repentance is not just saying I'm sorry to God. It is lining ourselves up with the word of God, agreeing with Him and changing our thinking. Is it working? You bet!

Let's look at another passage

"See how Jerusalem, once so faithful, has become a prostitute. Once the home of justice and righteousness, she is now filled with murderers." Isaiah 1:21 NLT

What a dreadful judgment God made. He compared the actions of His people to a prostitute. The people had turned their worship from "Creator of the Universe" to idols making their faith worthless and diluted. The word "diluted" of course means weak. I can't help but think that best describes the Christian church today. "Hey" you're probably thinking, "we're supposed to be talking about the state of the nation during Isaiah's day". I know, but we will be talking about the *Church Today* in the next chapter and I just wanted to pitch that out there as food for thought.

God chose Isaiah to bring a message to His people. Those people of the time could have been rescued by his words. Instead when Isaiah preaches and gives the people of the day a message from God, listen to how they respond.

“Who does the Lord think we are?” they ask. “Why does he speak to us like this? Are we little children, just recently weaned?

He tells us everything over and over— one line at a time, one line at a time, a little here, and a little there!” Isaiah 28:9-10 NLT

Over and over as I read and study the book of Isaiah God brings a message of warning to the people through the prophet, God rebukes them for their actions and in the very next chapter will speak of mercy if the people will just turn to Him. They were unconcerned. Why? They had everything they needed and were not desperate. Think for a moment of your own circumstances, what usually brings you to your knees? Stressful situations. Money problems and illness are the two biggest ones I bet. Let’s not wait for the worst times to be desperate to hear from God ...be desperate for Him EVERY day!

I want to look at the nation of Judah during the reigns of the 4 kings, Uzziah, Jothan. Ahaz and Hezekiah.

When Isaiah was a youth Uzziah was the reigning king in Judah. Uzziah was one of the good kings and for most of his reign did what was pleasing to the Lord. Uzziah's character was generally acknowledged to be very noble, and in every way he showed a spirit of true godliness, and for the most part he respected the things of God. The secret to his success...he was seeking the Lord.

“Uzziah sought God during the days of Zechariah, who taught him to fear God. And as long as the king sought guidance from the Lord, God gave him success.”

2 Chronicles 26:5 NLT

That is a verse we should all know and hold on to. Learn the power of the fear of the Lord, seek Him for guidance and you will have success.

Materially his reign is probably ranked as one of the most outstanding in the southern kingdom of Judah. Regrettably many of the people turned away from God. Why do you think they did? I will try to answer that shortly. Under the leadership of Uzziah battles against the enemy were won. The city of Judah was built up and fortified and God gave him great power and prosperity that the whole nation benefited from. Unfortunately sometimes when people are blessed they forget to give the glory to God, and they become proud and arrogant. They also begin to believe they are above the law. King Uzziah found out the hard way. God doesn't play favorites because in his later years he suffered from leprosy, due to an act of great pride. He is better known for his foolish pride than all the good he did and that is typical. We have to be on guard at all times, watch out for pride it is a killer. We need to be prepared to run the race to the end and not fall short before we get to the finish line. I know it sounds impossible to keep up and it would be if not for a merciful loving savior. Praise God for His son Jesus!

When Uzziah finally died the whole nation mourned his passing from the scene at a time when his presence seemed needed the most. Under him the worship of Jehovah was encouraged but he was not strong enough to destroy the high places where idolatrous practices were continued and that was a big mistake, the people would suffer because of it.

What really pains me about people today is, many go about their lives choosing to leave God out and refusing to seek Him or to even know Him.

I don't want just to know about God I want to know who He is and you can only really know God by studying his word. I've tried to do it without the aid of studying scripture and it just doesn't work. You can tell yourself you love God, you know God and that you have a relationship with Him, but if you are not reading about Him, you are only fooling yourself. You are not fooling God, You might know church doctrine, and what the church leaders tell you to believe, but let me say this again, if you are not reading His word, His story, His rulebook...you DO NOT know GOD! Ya know what? He knows you don't really know Him either. Isn't that scary.... People do not know what sin is either; there will come a time when it will be too late. Judgment will come friends; it's not a matter of *if*, *it's* a matter of *when*. God will not let sin go unpunished. He didn't let his beloved chosen people get away with it and he

will not turn his head for the fat, promiscuous, self centered, lazy, ugly American. Harsh words, I'm sorry. I'm sad about it and my heart hurts.

In a previous chapter we learned that it was the year of King Uzziah's death that Isaiah saw a vision of God and was called to ministry. Why do you think he was called at this point in time? He was called because so many were comfortable in their lives and had turned away. The people were no longer desperate. God wanted Isaiah to call them out, God needed someone to preach a tough message, the kings obviously weren't going to go the full mile and God needed a spokes person. Read Isaiah's calling again,

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;

The whole earth is full of His glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.' Isaiah 6:1-8 NKJV

After Uzziah died his son Jothan came to the throne. Jothan was already acting as regent (a person who exercises the ruling power in a kingdom during the absence, or disability of the sovereign.) Uzziah's was in isolation because of his leprosy. Jothan walked in the ways of his father, and under him the people continued to worship the Lord Jehovah though the places of idolatry were still allowed to remain. On the surface there might have appeared evidence of true and deep devotion, but in reality it was not so. On every side there was a rapid growth of the spirit of luxury and indulgence, and in the midst of this it is not surprising that the spirit of true faithfulness to God was steadily declining. The sinfulness of Jotham's kingdom is colorfully portrayed in Isaiah chapters 1-5. When people see no difference between good and evil, destruction soon

follows. HmMMMM Wake up America, wake up church. Doesn't that sound like America today? We have the same spirit of indulgence and luxury. You know we do.

Don't miss this friend because it's important. Uzziah for the most part was a good King. He encouraged the worship of Jehovah God. He failed to do one important thing; he didn't destroy the places where idol worship took place. Maybe he didn't want to offend anybody. Maybe he was trying to be tolerant and politically correct. I don't know why he allowed those places to remain but due to his lack of concern, it sent a message to the people, including his son Jothan, that it wasn't important ...and that those places didn't matter. They mattered to God. He chose these people to love and worship Him. Those pagan altars were an insult to God. The people of Judah knew that! The people in Isaiah's day knew about the covenant with Abraham, they knew about God delivering the people held in bondage by Egyptians. They knew The Law ... Read what Moses wrote in Exodus. These are God's words to Moses for the chosen ones.

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. 'You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.'" Exodus 20:2-5 NLT

Clear enough right? Both kings knew it was a breach of the covenant God made with His chosen ones, and they didn't care. You might say, "Well just because the high places were there doesn't mean the people were using them" Oh no, wait till we get to the next administration. It mattered that they weren't destroyed. Jothan's son Ahaz grew up around them. Maybe he had friends that worshiped at those high places and maybe he went with his friends to their pagan ceremonies. Maybe it looked good to him. Who knows, but I know this, when parents don't lay a firm foundation with their kids and teach them the truth about God, temptations come their way and it's easy to be lead astray or deceived.

Notice another point. I mentioned this verse earlier but it's critical to understand this...the people *were* attending worship services. They were

exposed to scripture and prayer, the whole nine yards. Read again what God says,

“When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me! As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting— they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them! When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims”Isaiah1:12-15 NLT

God was looking at their hearts, they were worshipping but the worship was shallow. We can attend all the church services in the world but if we are not doing what God wants us to do, the attendance of church is useless and wasted. The purpose of a church service is for two things only, to give God praise and to get equipped to take the message of God’s love to a lost world. That’s it! We will discuss this in more depth in another chapter.

Let me return to describing the nation in Isaiah time.

Following King Jothan, arose Ahaz, Jothan’s son, whose whole reign was a story of complete disaster and destruction. Ahaz rejected God “The Holy One of Israel” and overthrew the entire order of worship. He broke the commandments of God in almost every detail, destroyed the temple of worship and finally closed the doors to the house of God. If you’ve ever read Exodus, God gave Moses such explicit plans for building the altar and tabernacle (Exodus 25-40) it floors me that Ahaz had the nerve to just destroy it. Ego and arrogance...in the most premeditated manner he conspired to demolish completely the memory of the Lord of all Israel, the Redeemer and the Holy One. Under his reign Judah suffered devastating attacks from rivals Israel (the northern kingdom) and Aram. Instead of using the threat of invasion as a reason to turn to God for help, cowardly Ahaz turned to the Assyrians, his enemy, for help and submitted Judah to crushing domination by them. Ahaz, himself also adopted the Assyrian religious practices and even sacrificed

some of his children to the pagan god Baal. Soon every evidence of the “God” fearing nation of Judah disappeared.

All this provoked the devout and outspoken Isaiah.

Isaiah came forth and publicly rebuked the king for his extravagances in religious things, he reprimanded him for his sin, and charged him before the people as an enemy of the true way. But all his efforts were to no avail, for his warnings and advice were disregarded by the nation, led by the king himself.

Ahaz was followed on the throne by his son Hezekiah, who was very unlike his father and set about reviving the worship in the temple, which his father had abolished. He attempted, with some success to obliterate idol worship, and to deliver his people from the yoke of foreign power. I find it amazing that Hezekiah rose above the poor example of his father and I wonder who the primary influence in his life was.

It was under him that Isaiah came into his own, and was treated with high favor. In this position he was given every opportunity for the use of his keen and divinely inspired power of discernment into the facts of the contemporary situation. But now was the time when the nation's folly was to be seen more obviously, for it was too late to institute reforms, which could be effective. The overthrow of the nation, which Isaiah had for so long foretold, was at hand, and nothing could delay it.

Chapter 5

The state of the church today

The motivation to write this book was mostly due to what I was witnessing in the church today. In the first section of this chapter I want to share my experiences and see if you can relate. It's all true and most of it's rather sad.

My Journey through Church in America

Growing up I was forced by my mother to attend the local Lutheran church for 1 hour of Sunday school (which I remember very little about) then 1 hour of regular church service. Starting in the 7th grade I had to attend confirmation classes for 2 hours, one evening a week for 3 years. Did I learn anything? No I did not. Why? I don't know. Well, I think I might know now, but the reason will probably be offensive to the pastor who was the instructor. I will come around to the why I didn't learn anything in a bit.

The minute the decision was mine to attend church or not ...I said no thank you. Why did I dislike it so much? I didn't dislike God, actually I still didn't know anything about Him, however, I did believe He existed and I did pray every night. I didn't want to go to church anymore because it was boring. Same old service week after week ... we repeated the same old prayers week after week ...The sermons were dull....surely there should have been at least one sentence out of all that preaching I would have remembered. Nope not one. It sounds like I was distracted and self centered. I admit. I probably was at that age. Let's fast forward to early adulthood. I stopped going to church in high school but returned in my late twenties...early thirties.

I returned to the church for a very good reason, my life was a mess. Bad choices and alcohol were killing me. One morning, and I remember

this like it was yesterday; I was walking my dogs in a church playground across from where I lived. I was hung over...bad hung over. I had the shakes, I was sick to my stomach, and sick in my heart and in my mind. The night before was blurry and that was happening a lot at the time. The stuff I did remember was shocking. What was happening to me, I kept asking myself? I hardly recognized who I had become. I broke down that morning...and cried...I cried to God for help so I could turn my life around. He answered my prayer and came to my rescue. I still had a few more drinking episodes but God was there to pick me up. Finally I'd had enough and was ready to turn the mess I'd made of my life *completely* over to Him. I decided to go back to church and get my life together. My husband is Catholic and so was my father, so my denomination of choice, Catholicism.

The Catholics always interested me. My dad never missed Sunday Mass ...even though he was ex communicated because he married my mother Lutheran. Excommunication meant he was not allowed to participate or receive any of the sacraments and the church did not recognize him as a member. That never stopped him from attending services every Sunday, without fail. I was always impressed by that. My husband was also devoted and like my dad was not in good standing and also excommunicated because he divorced and married me outside the church. We went to Mass anyway because my husband's commitment to his denomination was stronger than mine. Actually I had no commitment to any church. There was always a lot of mystery surrounding the Catholics. They prayed to Mary and the saints. They did a funny kneel down in front of the pews before sitting (genuflection), and there was the sign of the cross, the fact priests do not marry and that outsiders were forbidden to take communion at their service. All those things were exclusive to Catholics, even the service being called "Mass". What did that mean? The many rules, rituals and traditions made this group appear to be "holy". Then there was the big one "CONFESSION", and it was mandatory. If you were a Catholic in good standing you had to go to confession. The rule at one time was to go at least once a week, but church attendance started to drop off drastically in the 60's so now days mandatory confession or reconciliation, as it is called today is only once a year. If, however, you commit "mortal" sin you need to go immediately.

Catholics divide sin into two categories, "mortal", defined in the dictionary as:

Involving spiritual death, opposed to venial defined as: Able to be forgiven or pardoned; not seriously wrong, as a sin excusable; trifling; minor.

Pretty scary way to teach about sin in my opinion. That thinking does not line up with what God says.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:23 NLT

God did not say a “Mortal” sin is death, he said SIN period. I suggest you read the book of Romans. It talks so much about sin. It’s important to know what God calls sin. Society constantly wants to redefine what is considered right and wrong. Do not be deceived by this. God’s idea of sin and ours are totally different. I too wanted to believe that God had two buckets with the words “MORTAL” and “venial” on them. Big sins and little sins. That is a big fat lie from the father of all lies Satan!

Read below, and these are the words of Jesus!

“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

Mathew 5:21 NLT

Can you see now, using our ideas or thoughts about sin can be dangerous? In fact, God told Isaiah:

“‘My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the Lord.

‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.’”

Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT

Jesus is putting anger and murder in the same category. Did you also notice *cursing* can send you to hell? Haven’t we all dismissed cursing as a minor offense? I used to; in fact I was guilty of cursing all the time, but not anymore. Once I got saved I just could not speak those foul words out of my mouth. In fact, I read this passage in James and I thought this

is so true. One minute I am praying when I'm driving in my car... someone cuts me off and **boom** a curse word pops out of my mouth. Read what James says about the tongue:

"People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!"

James 3:7-10 NLT

When that happens and we slip up we shouldn't dismiss it as insignificant. No, we need to ask God for forgiveness. Cursing does not line up with who we are if we are followers of Christ. Are you starting to see the importance of knowing what offends or pleases God? Only the Word of God can show us these things. Satan is very sneaky and will try to convince us that these sins are minor. No my friends ... they might be small in an immoral world but when we go against God's word it's **all** serious.

Back to confession in the Catholic Church, the thought of going to a priest and telling him my sins actually made me sick to my stomach. I imagined that after he heard my very long list he would be shaking his head for a week. I had such a problem openly telling some strange man intimate details of sin in my life. It seemed unnatural and embarrassing for both of us. Used to be the penitent (person confessing the sin) went into a confessional or a booth and were hidden from the priest. Now days they encourage the penitent to go face to face. That is one more reason I thought people that went to confession had to be better than me and most of all holier than me. I wanted to be holy too.

My husband and I attended a neighborhood Catholic Church practically every week for about five years. I always felt very uncomfortable, like I was on the outside looking in. The word "Catholic" means all-embracing. I never felt embraced. In fact I was never even noticed, or welcomed by anyone. My husband told me that one time he approached a priest after Sunday Mass and expressed the desire to meet with him and discuss his return to the church. The priest said he was very busy and wasn't sure when he would have time to do that. My husband walked away in shame. I know, I know...you can't condemn a whole church

because of one thoughtless priest. I don't, but I wonder how often that happens, the rejection of hurting people due to thoughtlessness. My quest for holiness seemed like a hopeless cause because I just didn't know what to do or who to ask.

A turning point came when my father died. I was attending his funeral Mass. How could he have a funeral Mass you ask when earlier I said he wasn't recognized as a member of the Catholic Church? Easy, on my parent's 25th wedding anniversary my mother agreed to remarry my dad Catholic. Voila! All is forgiven; he was reinstated and returned to his church community, a community where he attended church for 25 years.

It sounds so ridiculous now. Why did the marriage ceremony make any difference? My mom did not convert. Who knows, but my dad was thrilled and he could now receive communion and had all the benefits of membership in the church including a funeral Mass. I'm sitting in the front row of his home church, St. Ursula, in my home town of Baltimore, Maryland, holding hands with my two sisters. It was a sad day and a sad event, but what was going through my mind as I looked around the church where my father attended mass every single Sunday for as long as I can remember was the fact that his daughters were so unfamiliar with his church and the faith that was so important to him. No one in our family, attending that special service, could receive the communion that was offered, because we were not "Catholic". I was going to church with my husband every Sunday but I still knew nothing and felt out of place. Our whole family was uncomfortable with the service. Talk about division in the Christian community. Didn't Paul write a letter to the Corinthians about that very thing? Look at this Scripture:

"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."

1Cor 1:10 NLT

I was after all a confirmed member of what I *thought* was a Christian Church, a Lutheran church and so were my sisters. Why weren't we "allowed" to participate in the sacrament of communion? The church is the body of Christ, not a denomination or a set of rules written by men. The fact I could not receive communion made a huge impression on me; in fact it almost haunted me. What was it about the Catholic

Church...this Catholic faith that was such a mystery? .It was like a special club...a circle of people that knew something or were a part of something that was secret and not all were allowed to be in on it. People were willing, including my father and my husband, to be rejected but still remained devoted.

I now know the rejection was due to doctrine, not the word of God. It was fascinating to me....what in the world kept them coming back every Sunday....something powerful I thought and I wanted to know what it was...I wanted to be part of this click...this club...this mystery group. I'm going to take a leap of faith and find out what it's about.

I returned to my home in Houston after my father's funeral and I shared the emotional experience of the service with my husband and of my desire to inquire about the Catholic religion and actually becoming a member. His response was "good luck". He didn't mean good luck ...like best wishes...he meant good luck, like "fat chance"

I called a Catholic church closest to my house (it was not the same one we attended previously because we moved to another part of town), I asked how I could find out more about joining. I got transferred to someone's voice mail...left a message... *5 months later*, someone returned my call. "Inquiry classes are starting in September" they said. "Would you like to come and see what the church is all about?" Of course I wanted to see. I was dying to know what all the mystery was about. It was so exciting. I can still remember that first night, I was a little anxious...the place was packed...oh my gosh! Look at all the people like me, wanting to know the scoop. The program was called RCIA.

RCIA-Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The process was long... two hour classes, once a week, for two years! My entrance into the church, however, had a small complication about midway through ...my husband; remember what I said earlier, he was divorced, and not in good standing.

Well. It was more than just a divorce, we'd had an affair while he was married and he left his wife for me. That was one of the driving forces why I was looking for redemption and healing in my life. After his divorce and our marriage I realized the devastation to his children, the carelessness of our behavior and the insensitivity of myself towards his

former wife. How could I be so cruel, thoughtless and selfish? I needed a savior. Big time!

In order for *me* to go forward with membership and confirmation my husband needed to file papers requesting that his previous marriage be *annulled*. My husband and I both thought, no way...he and his ex-wife were married in the church. *We* committed the adultery! Well my friends, believe it or not my husband received his annulment, much to the shock of his ex-wife, and us. I was confirmed a Catholic and my marriage that began with adultery, was blessed Nov 4, 1989. My husband's 17 year marriage with three children, that began as a *sacrament* in the Catholic Church, ended in annulment. Null and void, like it didn't happen.

The word Sacrament means: *a visible sign of an inward grace, esp. one of the solemn Christian rites considered to have been instituted by Jesus Christ to symbolize or confer grace.*

I can look back now and think....What is going on in the church today?!? Who makes up these rules? I came to that church because I wanted God! I needed a Savior to pull myself from a pit of self destruction and sin. I wanted to be holy. I was not trying to humiliate my husband's former wife or drive the knife in deeper. I wanted a church community to serve in, a church family and I wanted to shake free of the dirt of the past. What did my desire to turn from a life of sin have to do with my husband and his previous marriage? I'm still shaking my head, but at the time I was just following the church rules. In fact I am convinced that the only reason I agreed to participate in such a lame stunt was because I was desperate for "acceptance". I thought this church was the holiest of holies. If I could not make it in....I thought it was rejection from God. Isn't that twisted?

I even went through the embarrassing exercise of confession to a priest and so did my husband. We recognized our grave sin of adultery and we sincerely repented. We were both sorry for the way we handled ourselves, but our confession to God and His forgiveness could have taken place at ANY time once we recognized our sinfulness. Confession is merely agreeing with God that we have sinned and not when "the church" decides it is Ok or that you are qualified by their standards and not when an annulment is approved. Read below.

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,”

1Timothy2:5 NLT

There is one mediator! Couldn't be any clearer. I could have prayed, ask for forgiveness and sincerely repented to God in the name of Jesus at *any time* and been forgiven! Instead what did I do? I spent 2 years studying doctrine, not the bible mind you, but the man made rules of the Catholic Church, because I didn't know any better.

Read what the bible says about scripture.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.”2 Timothy3:16-17 NLT

What does scripture inspired by God do? It teaches us *right and wrong*. God uses it to teach us not condemn us. He wants us to know the truth. He doesn't want us to carry the weight of our sin around for years. So what else can we do? Keep reading.

“So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.”Hebrews 4:16 NLT

We can approach God **boldly** any time, and we should approach him immediately! For what? To receive His.....what? MERCY and find grace.

The elders in the church or a prayer team can certainly pray with you but it's dangerous to wait. We don't know when our time is up in this world. If I would have died before the church got all the paper work straight...it would have been hell for me. Hell! It's real. I was still in sin because I had not confessed to the Father and asked for forgiveness. The RCIA process I was in was very risky because I was forced to wait until I had reached the right stage of “my journey” before I was qualified to go to confession, communion or even sit through a whole church service.

Look what Jesus Christ said:

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:3 NKJV

What does the above say....unless I **turn** from sin I WILL NEVER GET INTO THE KINGDOM!

God was so merciful with me. I had the chance to confess and turn, before it was too late. I served in the Catholic Church for 10 years.

A New Dawn

I'm calling this section “A New Dawn” because that's what really happened.

The truth dawned on me after 10 years.

I was going through a very difficult time in the late nineties. I was managing a store and worked with a “saved born again” Christian women and we became close friends. She showed me a scripture one day that literally brought me to my knees and caused me to repent of sin and give my life to Christ. I realized after long discussions on very slow days at the store that I knew nothing about the Word of God. When she prayed with me that one day, my joy returned. That was my NEW DAWN and that my friends, is the power of the written word of God. I wasn't repenting because it was the right time or day, I was repenting because I knew I was convicted of sin and God wanted to heal me of guilt, fear, and loss.

The Scripture she showed me was about something personal to me and my life really changed after that sincere act of repentance. When I made my confession to the priest I did feel better but I still carried a lot of guilt. I carried guilt for years and that baggage makes you old. The friend that prayed with me the day I gave my life to Christ said when she saw me the next morning I looked 10 years younger and you know what? I felt 10 years younger. I felt alive again, seriously and I'm not trying to sound hoaky or corny either. A burden was lifted and that's what is supposed to happen.

Preachers are so fearful of offending the church community and losing support and funding for projects they give glory to men and not God.

They pitch out softballs from the pulpit and are far more interested in keeping the church attendance up by preaching safe, un-offensive, politically correct sermons. Everyone goes away on Sunday feeling good about their self but I can assure you there is sin in our lives and it needs to be dealt with, turned away from and healed. Jesus wasn't afraid to offend. He spoke the truth and sometimes half the crowd left because they didn't want to hear this truth. When you don't want to hear the truth, that means you don't want to let go of your sin.

Think about that for a minute and let it sink in. We get angry when we hear a strong message preached because it goes against what WE believe to be true. Our beliefs cannot change the truth written in God's word and His word is very clear on the tough social issues, like abortion, pre marital sex, and homosexuality. We can't handle the truth of what God says about it so we say the bible is a matter of interpretation and translation.... in reality we just want to stay in our sin. Even something as simple as lying, we want to put a spin on it, by thinking that God divides lies in to groups like white lies or big fat lies. No. Lying is lying and I've had to restrain myself and stop lying about even little things when I read in Proverbs 12:22 *The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth.* I had to make a decision, the Word says...The Lord DETESTS, lying. He Detests lying. I don't want to do anything that the Lord detests and that is a pretty simple thing to change in my behavior. I had to stop lying. Little lies, big lies...all lies.

I'm telling you this because it's a matter of live and death. Some Christians do not get the full teaching of the gospel from the church they attend and are not hearing many, if any, bold life changing messages. Pastors are you thinking "Easy for her to say, she's not one of the people trying to keep the church facility up and running". That's where faith has to come in. If we are doing what God called us to do, if we are preaching his word and obeying Him, He'll take care of the bills, He knows it takes money. It seems there is too much emphasis on selling books or CD's and not enough attention to saving lost souls. It's a real trend these days to build mega church facilities and dazzle everybody with messages of prosperity and blessings from God. I also hear a lot of foot stomping, hand clapping praise music and I do like it, but we need to hear the truth about sin. Most pastors don't want to ruffle any feathers and steer away from sensitive topics. I don't want to sound harsh but I've listen to a lot of tickle the ear messages over the years and I'm sick of

it. Pastors...preach the gospel the way it is written and stop tap dancing around it. That is what you are called to do! Paul's words to Timothy were:

*"Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching."*²
Timothy 4:2 NLT

Do you know why I don't remember anything from my early days in Church, Sunday school or confirmation classes? Those messages preached from the pulpit were dead, God wasn't in them and therefore I never got saved! I was never convicted of sin and did not hear of an altar call until I was 48 years old. The pastor I grew up with wasn't preaching from the Word of God. A couple of passages were read during the services, but those random readings do absolutely no good. The Word needs to be proclaimed boldly, and it didn't take long for me to recognize the difference between a church service lead by the Holy Spirit and one that was not. Before getting saved I was hearing foolishness.

*"The man (or person) without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are **foolishness** to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."*¹ *1 Cor 2:14 NLT*

I think of Isaiah and how God gave him these dramatic messages of gloom and doom, as well as messages of hope, forgiveness and salvation. He delivered the message the way God gave it to him and he wasn't worried about who walked away. He already knew most would not listen. I can almost hear the crowd whisper as he rose to preach..."Oh brother here comes that old Isaiah again giving us one of his "buzz kill" messages, I'm outta here" Isaiah delivered the message God gave him anyway and so did Jeremiah. For 40 years Jeremiah preached to crowds in Judah to repent...not one person did but that didn't stop him from doing what God called him to do.

When God calls men and women to pastor churches those leaders need to hear from God before preaching a message. Most church leaders active today don't have clue what that means, most operate in their own power and most never even consult with God regarding the service or what to preach on Sunday. How do I know this? All the dead services I've attended in my life. God wasn't in them! Believe me when God

shows up you know it. There is a difference. I used to go to church for the same reason most Americans go, because it's the "right thing" to do, or I used to go out of obligation. That kind of empty church ritual disgusts God. He knows our heart, he knows why we are there. If it's because we think we have to, we might as well not bother. Let's read the scripture from Isaiah again...

"When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony?"

Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me

As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting— they are all sinful and false.

I want no more of your pious meetings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!" Isaiah 1:12-14 NLT

The message God gave Isaiah for the Israelite's could apply to us today,

"Why are you going through all of this religious ritual? Why are you going ahead bringing me empty gifts when your heart is not in it? Why are you continuing to come to church and observing the special holidays when you really don't mean anything by it?"

More people are attending church today than in any hour in the history of our country and more people are turning toward God but with less real heart-consciousness of God than at any other day. Most worship services, and I say worship reluctantly, are shallow and meaningless. Friends we are not fooling God. We are in the condition that Israel and Judah were in. We have to recognize it and make a decision to ask the Spirit of God to minister to our hearts the words of this text, and ask ourselves, "Are we just coming to church out of an obligation, are we reciting repetitious prayers and have our hearts grown cold." If the answer to this is yes, ask God to light a flame in your heart to know Him.

We need church...we are the church and let's not forget that. The church is the people not a building. I'm saying if you are going to church and you do not come out of there each week, uplifted, or if the Word of God is not preached in a way where you learn something or are set free

from something or changed in some way, get out of there and find a new church. Find one that uses the Word of God to teach. The word of God is the power. There lies the key to life, Power. Power to heal the sick. Power to defeat the enemy, and power to stay at peace when everything around you is falling apart. The Word of God is power. I love the sound of that, *POWER*. God's power, not mans.

There are some awesome people teaching the truth. Charles Stanley is one of the ones responsible for changing my life. The first time I heard him preach I was captivated. Why? Up until that time I never heard a message preached like that. I'll never forget the topic; he was talking about using our Time, Talent and Treasure to build the kingdom of God. That subject was very familiar to me because I was doing a monthly meeting with the newcomers to the Catholic Church and our priest spoke to them on that very issue. Our priest was a wonderful speaker but his message was nothing like the one Charles Stanley delivered. Charley Stanley used the Word of God. It made a huge difference. I've been watching him on TV for almost 10 years now and learn a ton every week.

Our relationship with God is not just going to church for an hour on Sunday. We are expected to know Him, love Him, serve Him and make Him known to the world. That's the calling of every believer, and if you ever wonder what your "*purpose*" is in this life... read below

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."Ephesians 2:10 NLT

Number one, we are God's masterpiece. I love thinking of myself as a masterpiece, don't you? God planned to use us to do good things, in other words, He wants us to be His hands, His feet and His mouth, He wants us to help others, and encourage others especially those that cannot help themselves. That is called pure and genuine religion.

"Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you."James 1:27 NLT

Read the scripture again. We are to help those that can't help themselves. We are to keep honest even if the whole world around isn't. It's not complicated. All the other "stuff" that church becomes is pointless if we are not helping the helpless. The reason God destroyed Sodom and

Gomorrah wasn't because of the perversion like most thought, read below.

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." Ezek 16:49 NLT

Wow! Friends are any of you as convicted as I was when I read that?

Many of us have been programmed since birth to think a certain way or to believe a certain way because that's the way we were raised. We need to know what God is saying. How can we know when Satan is lying to us unless we know what God says? We need to get into the Word, start studying it and start thinking for ourselves. Please do not go through your whole life trusting in what someone has told you about God, Jesus or the bible. Find out for yourself. You will be shocked to find that most of what you've probably been taught or what you believe in is just some man's opinion. God tells us in Isaiah:

"Don't put your trust in mere humans. They are as frail as breath. What good are they?"

Isaiah 2:22 NLT

Most of us have been completely deceived by the church doctrine, or we know just enough to think we are safe and on the road to life everlasting. My advice to you is, start getting into the word of God for yourself.

After I had the experience of rebirth and felt the weight of sin lift from my shoulders I was excited. Many things happened in the months that followed, but when I tried to explain to family and friends how the Word of God was speaking to me. I think they all thought I was nuts. I had many questions for God and it seemed He would answer them through His word, or through people or in prayer. It was awesome, and so intimate. When my friend Bethany, first invited me to her church it was a huge change for me. Her church was considered 'Non' denominational and was certainly less formal than the traditions and rituals of the Catholic Church I was used to. I was willing to step out of my familiar church setting and experience something new and it made an enormous impact on me. The service was so moving, the music was alive and so was the pastor's message. Like I said before it taught me the difference

between preaching led by the Holy Spirit and empty repetitious services that were dead.

I'm not trying to condemn any one denomination, because personally I think they are all wrong. Paul warned us in Corinthians.

See below

"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose." 1 Corinthians 1:10 NLT

Divisions in the body of Christ have left us **powerless** to overcome the challenges we faced each day. Nobody prays and believes their prayers will be answered. I used the above scripture earlier when I was discussing my confusion about the Catholics denying non Catholics from receiving communion at their service. Now I'm using it to say ALL the Divisions in the church are an abomination to God, the divisions go against God's word and clearly reveals interference and corruption by man. Too many man made rules and not enough God in my opinion.

Paul also says in 1 Corinthians:

"For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, 'I am a follower of Paul.' Others are saying, 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Peter' or 'I follow only Christ.' Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not" 1 Cor. 1:11-13 NLT

Look at what Paul is saying...we are not to follow men dear friends. We are to follow Christ and Christ alone, not the pope, John the Baptist, Martin Luther or any other man. This Psalm is smack dab in the middle of the bible.

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man." Psalm 118:8

Satan has been clever, over the past 2,000 years. He has used pride to work in the hearts and minds of men (and women) to chop up the body of Christ into little pieces.

I went to Church on and off most of my adult life but I still did not know scriptures and the power of praying them. I read a book by Charles Capps called *Releasing the Ability of God through Prayer* - oh my gosh! Go to his website order the book and read it! Most people pray for God to intervene in their lives and in the very next breathe cancel the pray because of the negative words of doubt and unbelief they speak. James wrote:

*"But when he asks, he must believe and not **doubt**, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."* James 1:6 NIV

I was almost 50 years old before I even realized that the bible was true. Bethany, believed what it said. She had a very unfortunate childhood, and was raised atheist. She was in a desperate situation one time and a customer gave her a bible and a friend told her to "Try God". She ran into her room and pulled out that bible she'd been given and read the salvation prayer. She did try God, she read His word and received the life giving messages. By the time I met her she was leaps and bounds beyond me in my spiritual journey though she was 22 years younger than me, and had only been saved about two years prior. You know what the difference was between us? Bethany believed God. She read His word and believed it. That is faith, and that pleases God!

"And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him." Hebrews 11:6 NLT

Bethany and I started to pray together after work. In fact we would spend the whole day jotting down the requests on sheets of paper. I was always willing to pray with her but at first had very little faith to believe for some of the things on the list. That is until I saw our prayers get answered, one by one. It was amazing, but we have an amazing God, who created us, loves us, knows every hair on our head and knows the desires of our heart. When I pray now, I know heaven and earth are moving, I expect my prayers to get answered Jesus did say,

"I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers I am there among them." Mathew 18:19-20 NLT

I believe he said *anything*. If I listed all the answered prayer I've received you would think I was lying, and remember I don't lie anymore! God answers the prayers of His beloved. Believe it (and don't doubt) miracles still happen. God has not changed, but the church today has. The church is weak and I'm sorry, but I'm using the "P" word again ... *powerless*.

Before Jesus was crucified he told his disciples

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father."

John 14:12 NLT

We are supposed to be doing greater things than Jesus did...that's what He said right? I always hate when someone tries to take God's Word and make it sound like it is not for us today. That's a lie straight from Hell. I've heard people say "Well he didn't mean healing and miracles and stuff like that" Oh no. Well then why did He say we "would do the **same** works" in fact He said "**greater works**" if that's not what He meant. No friends, Jesus meant what He said. When you start reading His Word and BELIEVING what it says...God will show you miracles. God will reveal Himself in such a way you will not be able to deny it is Him speaking or working in your life. I get so excited when I start talking about this because I just want everyone to pray, and ask God to *sincerely and personally* reveal himself. He will, I guarantee it. BUT! Let me warn you, your great enemy, Satan, will do whatever he can to stop you from knowing God. Be aware of that. He's very real too and very alive. Most people and I mean Christians too; don't believe that and what a mistake it is to dismiss his power. Peter talks of it in his first letter

"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." 1Peter5:8 NLT

He will put negative thoughts in your mind. Surprised about that? I will go deeper into that subject in a minute. He will also set up snares to get in your way and do whatever it takes to stop you praying or reading God's word. He might bring people around to distract you or the phone might ring and oh no you have to go off and handle some emergency... you might start to think, I will pray just as soon as I do such and such. Well guess what, such and such turns out to be an all day thing and before you know it, you are off track and have completely forgotten the passion you had earlier to ask God to reveal Himself. Please beware of distraction. I'm preaching to myself with this one because it happens all

the time. Tricks of Satan...they are usually subtle, but dangerous and powerful.

Do we have good news? Yes! As believers and followers of Christ we have authority to bind Satan, through Jesus.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Mathew 18:18 NLT

Let's look up the word bind and paint a word picture...according to Dictionary.com it means:

To fasten around; fix in place by girding.

EXAMPLE: They bound his hands behind him.

Hmmmmmmmm, so if we pray to God in the name of Jesus that Satan be bound on heaven and earthhis hands are tied behind him. Right?

Right!

The Word of God is so good. Write this on an index card or even on a *Post It* note and keep it where you can see it.

"Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to all who come to him for protection."

Proverbs 30:5 NLT

I was a true and faithful Catholic for 10 years. I knew all the doctrine, I followed all the rules. I participated in ministry; I sponsored other young women into the church and attended many of the educational programs offered. I tell you all this so you will know I did not make the leap into that church casually. I was serious about it, in fact, it meant everything to me.

But....after 10 years of service I came face to face with a couple of tough questions for myself. What was the condition of my heart? What was my relationship with God and His son Jesus? Did I know Him? Did I read His word and believe what it said? Was I sharing my testimony with others and letting the Holy Spirit lead me in all I did? Was I even really born again? According to scripture we have to be.

“Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

John 3:3 NLT

The born again experience should be an important moment in our lives and not just lip service. I was also wondering, had I really turned 180 degrees from sin, or was I just playing games, and trying to keep one foot in heaven and one in the world. A lot of us do that. I have to fight it. I admit it. Let's stop for a minute. God does not expect us to be perfect all of a sudden. That's why we need God, and we need Him "desperately". That's why we need a savior. I need him every day, not just once a week on Sunday. When I was in my late teens, early 20's I was living at home with my parents and made the decision not to go to church any more. Remember me telling you that? My father used to say to me and my sisters "You girls need to go to church!" I used to say back to him, "I don't need church daddy, I pray."

Many years later when I converted to a Catholic and started going to church once a week because it was mandatory to stay in good standing, I remembered what my father said and I agreed with him. We do need to go to church. But I realized something else later on. Instead of just needing to go to church every Sunday out of an obligation, I need Christ in my life every day. I need that word of God in my mind as well as psalms and songs of praise. We have to be conscience of what takes our attention off God. What is distracting us? What are we spending our time doing, what are we thinking about. I spoke earlier about Satan putting thoughts in our mind, and it's the truth...before I knew that it freaked me out when a crazy thought from nowhere came in my mind. Now I know Satan wants to keep us unsteady. When a bad thought comes to mind I immediately dismiss it and refuse to entertain it. When we meditate on the bad thought is when we get into temptation and sin. Paul wrote to the Philippians and told them:

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” Philippians4:8 NLT

Friends, the mind is such an important part of our walk with Christ and our victory while on this planet. Paul tells to renew our mind with the word of God.

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”Romans 12:2 NLT

The mind...we don’t have control when a bad thought comes in, but we have control over whether we dwell on it. Joyce Meyer wrote a good book on this subject called *Battlefield of the Mind*.

I continued my self evaluation as a Catholic and another question I was asking myself...what am I spending my money on. Years later, I heard a sermon and the pastor asked the question, “Are the things we spend our time and money on, worth Jesus dying on the cross? “ That statement sent chills down my spine. When we choose to make Jesus the Lord of our life, we are his, bought and paid for by His blood shed for us on the cross. Our lives are no longer our own. It’s a tough one I know, but that’s the kind of commitment God’s wants and that’s what we should be taught from the beginning of our walk with Christ and sadly we are not. I also thought about the un-forgiveness I carried around and what a load it was, but in my own human thinking I believed I was justified in being angry, I waved that hurt and pain around like a banner. The un-forgiveness issue is a huge stumbling block for many Christians but read the familiar scripture Jesus said in his “model prayer” to us, and keep in mind how often we all have prayed this in our lives, and then let’s examine it:

“and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.”Mathew 6:12NLT

We will only be forgiven by God as we have forgiven others. That’s not good for us if we are holding on to un-forgiveness toward someone else. We are stopping the forgiveness of God towards ourselves. Some pray that prayer every single week and still refuse to forgive. Forgiveness is not a feeling; it’s a choice we make. Can’t you see how devastating that could be in our lives? We need God to forgive us. I do not want God to hold back His forgiveness from me because I chose to wallow in self pity and wanted to hold on to a lot of junk from the past. I heard someone say one time that “holding on to un-forgiveness is shooting yourself and waiting for the other person to die.” Good one huh? We are hurting ourselves dear ones! We are not hurting the other person!!

For the record, no one said it would be easy but, if we are obedient and follow the directions of God we will be given the grace to survive even the most horrendous treatment by others. We have to get hold of this as Christians. It's important, because we all have someone in our life that's wronged us and Satan will use it to what? Keep us stirred up about it and what? Keep us trapped in bitterness, resentment and anger which in turn keeps us powerless. Forgiveness ... it's not an option with God, it's a must. It's a tough one to swallow but no matter what has happened to you in the past give that hurt to God and let Him begin to heal your heart. In fact stop right now and pray:

Father, I want to be obedient to your Word so today I choice to forgive _____, for all the hurt and pain He/She has caused me. I no longer want to carry the pain of the past around with me like a banner. I want to be free of it and chose to lay it at your feet with the confident assurance you will give me the grace to let it go forever. If Satan tries to remind me of it in the future I will not be tricked into swallowing that poison, but instead I will praise you for healing this wound. In Jesus' Name we pray Amen.

If you have to pray that prayer every single day....or every hour, it's better than wasting one more second of your life on something or someone you can't change and from preventing God from forgiving you of *your* sin. You may be thinking "My sins are not anything like what so and so did to me" Well you know...God does not think like that. Let's read the Isaiah 55: 8-9 scripture again and keep in mind, *God* spoke these words to Isaiah, it's important to understand this.

" 'My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,' says the Lord.

'And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.'"

Isaiah 55: 8-9 NLT

We have a tendency to give God human emotions and boy is that a mistake. He told us what to do in every circumstance and we are to be obedient to His Word, we cannot make up our own rules based on what has happened in our lives. That's why reading and knowing who God is and what God is like is vital! The Bible tells us these things. Most scripture is so plain, and people use the "interpretation" argument as a way for some to stay in their sin or sometimes it's just plain laziness. Reading the bible and studying it's meaning is work. I'm so fascinated by it and

so hungry for Him I can't seem to enjoy any other kind of reading material.

Another question I asked myself as a Catholic, do I use the gifts God gave me to build his kingdom, or am I selfish with my time and talent and money? Do I have victory in my life, the kind God promises believers or am I walking around with a loser mentality, believing lies from the enemy? Again it's a mind thing. We are God's Masterpiece Remember that.

When I finished my self evaluation I have to say, I did believe I was a better person than I before. But, I really had not grown much in 10 years. I did some good things and I read the bible occasionally but still didn't have understanding of it. I knew very little about its contents, but thought I knew more than I did. Was I "born again" in those days? I don't think so. Bethany knew the bible and studied it daily. When we had discussions about our faith she was surprised at what I believed in. I mean, I believed Jesus was the son of God and I did believe He died for me and rose from the dead, but when she asked me questions about sin and what was expected of me or what was acceptable to God or how you get into heaven... all those things, I really only guessed at. I had vague answers and none of them lined up with what God said in the bible. She would challenge me all the time by saying "read your bible". You know what I found out when I did? I found out the only things I really knew were all I was taught in the RCIA classes I attended. I knew church doctrine and you know what else? Most of it went against what the bible taught. I was shocked. This couldn't be right I thought. How can those speakers and priests get away with teaching stuff against the written Word? Easy, one big fat word PRIDE.

When Bethany prayed with me that day to be born again, there was such a difference. My eyes were truly opened. I understood more than I ever did before. Scripture finally made sense. One example...We were taught in RCIA, Peter is the rock, based on the scripture below.

"And Jesus said 'Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.'"

Matthew 16:18 NLT

When you read Matthew 16, and are told Peter is the rock, it is easy to be misled. Peter or Petros means rock (really it's more like stone). The Catholics believe each elected pope is the successor of Peter and so the Pope is the head of the church because Jesus said He was building his church on Peter. WRONG! The truth is, the proclamation that Peter made was "the rock". Jesus was building his church on the statement. *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* Not on a man named Peter. Jesus is the rock and He is the head of the church. I learned that listening to a teaching by Chuck Swindol on the radio one morning on my way to work. I almost wrecked my car, it was such a revelation. Read the whole set of scriptures below:

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.'" Mathew 16:16-19 NLT

Of course, there are many more examples and I could go on and on. In fact I co-authored a book called *Redeeming Catholics and their Catholicism*. (If you want to read about my whole journey in and out of the Catholic Church, please look for it on Amazon.com) For now I just want to make the point, be careful what or who you are putting your trust in. If it's not Jesus and Jesus alone something is wrong. Pray, ask God for help. My final break off from the Catholic Church came after attending a weekly home group called "Renew" We were having a discussion about the Bible. Most in the room questioned its validity (which was very shocking) I thought all Christians believed the Bible was true. I was amazed at what was coming out of the mouth of these people. One woman said, in so many words, what gave me the right to think I was smart enough to even understand the Bible and that we were to depend on those, like theologians, to tell us its meaning. Another woman agreed and said they were always discouraged from reading it because misinterpretation was dangerous for lay people.

My jaw dropped, number one at the insult of my intelligence and number two that these people, most have been Catholic since birth, went their whole life without knowing what The Bible said. They did not know about being saved by grace and thought they could earn their way into heaven with good works. One sweet little lady turned to me and

said "I want to work my way in". I said "OK but you don't have to". The absolute "piece de resistance" was when the pastor's assistance said to me "The Catholic doctrine is not all based on the Bible." I spun my head around and said "So what is it based on" She mentioned documents from the Council of Trent...and decisions made at meetings called Vatican I and Vatican II.

Well that did it for me; I walked away and never looked back.

That was eight years ago. Some might say I've been wandering in the wilderness. Wandering, yes, but not in the wilderness. My journey has taken me here, writing a book and passionate about getting a message to the American church. I want to scream...Wake up CHURCH! You've been lied to, deceived and lead astray. We as followers of Christ and as The BODY of Christ we are suppose to have power! We are suppose to be sharing our time, talent and treasure with the widows and orphans, we are suppose to changing the world not have the world change us into weak, fearful, distracted, busy with stuff that doesn't matter folks that are too tired to be of value to anyone.

One question to ask yourself: Why are you attending church today? What is your motive? Is it because it's expected, or the right thing to do, or because everyone in your family has always gone? Those are lame reasons. If you are doing it for someone else, that is another wrong reason. I am talking about a heart issue here. God knows your heart. You are not fooling him. Don't do things out of obligation; He knows what the deal is. Look at this passage again,

"Listen to the Lord, you leaders of 'Sodom.' Listen to the law of our God, people of 'Gomorrah.' 'What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?' says the Lord. 'I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony?

Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me! As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting—they are all sinful and false.

I want no more of your pious meetings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals.

They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them'"

Isaiah1:10-14 NLT

I know, I know, I've repeated this scripture a lot, it's so true!

Our outward appearances are meaningless. A lot of people put more faith in rituals and traditional than in having a real and intimate relationship with God. God is looking for sincere faith and devotion. It takes time to have a relationship with someone. God wants to spend quality time with each of his beloved.

I'm going to repeat myself again, "the church" should serve *one* main purpose, and that is to teach and train a body of believers to serve the Lord and to take what is learned out and show God's love, mercy and kindness to a lost world. That's it! It should not be what it has turned out to be, a *social club*. Sorry if I am stepping on toes, we can fellowship with each other, but you know what I am talking about. Am I speaking to anyone? I am trying to get people to examine their hearts. I've examined mine. I went to church years for all the wrong reasons too. Your church needs to be equipping you for battle, it's a war out there friends and you know it, and you are ignoring it and hiding from it.

Isaiah was out there warning the rebellious people of Judah about God's dissatisfaction with them. Remember they were going to church, they were worshipping God. But... their hearts weren't in it, they were comfortable in their prosperity and doing their own thing. Read what Isaiah said.

"Now go and write down these words. Write them in a book. They will stand until the end of time as a witness that these people are stubborn rebels who refuse to pay attention to the Lord's instructions. They tell the seers, 'Stop seeing visions!' They tell the prophets, 'Don't tell us what is right.

Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. Forget all this gloom. Get off your narrow path. Stop telling us about your 'Holy One of Israel.'"

Isaiah 30:8-11 NLT

It sounds like people today. Nobody wants to hear what God has to say. Nobody wants to take the time to read His Word and get the facts straight.

Nobody wants to hear messages of judgment. Nope, everyone wants to hear the nice things. Tell them the tough things and what happens? The majority gets upset, they may walk out and they may not come back. That's OK; remember God cares for those, the remnant, interested in the

truth. Pray, ask God to change your heart if it's not right. Desire truth. It's the only thing that sets us free, right? Church, we do not want to be like the Judeans. God help us! They were sent into captivity.

Read what Paul told Timothy.

"I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you." 2 Timothy 4:1-4 NLT

Let me repeat this

"For a time will come when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

Hmmmmmmmm. Sounds like what is going on today in most churches.

Set yourself apart. Don't reject truth or chase myths, be the remnant and not the majority that walks away. Read God's words... it's all in there, every life saving word of truth. Read it for yourself, carry it in your heart and live!

Halleluiah!

Chapter 6

Our Country

As I'm reading the book of Isaiah and the notes listed at the bottom of each page of my bible, I can't help but see a connection between the condition of Judah in Isaiah's time and our country today.

Read what God is saying to the people of Israel and Judah and see if it doesn't sound familiar:

"Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to its treasures. Their land is full of warhorses; there is no end to its chariots. Their land is full of idols; the people worship things they have made with their own hands."

Isaiah 2:78-9 NLT

Our own country came immediately to mind when I read those passages. Our land is rich with natural resources, beauty and opportunity. We have many *"things"*, huge TV's, 2 and 3 cars per household. Kids wear \$100.00 tennis shoes and I don't care what income bracket the family falls in, all the kids have their own cell phones. Our idols aren't golden calves; they are another form of gold...namely paper money and plastic cards. We idolize our things, we also idolize people in sports, movie stars and anybody that's been on TV. We are a nation that is celebrity crazy. I know most of you will deny that and say I don't IDOLIZE or WORSHIP those things. Oh no? Be honest. We not only idolize and worship our things and people we are OBSESSED with them, especially celebrities. It's almost embarrassing because the rest of the world laughs at us because of it.

When we put anything before God we are replacing Him with something else in our heart and in our mind. That my friends is called

idol worship. I want to define the word *idol* according to the dictionary.com

An IDOL:

1. *an image or other material object representing a deity to which religious worship is addressed.*

2. *an image of a deity other than God.*

3. *any person or thing regarded with blind admiration, adoration, or devotion.*

Be honest, we regard celebrities with blind admiration don't we? We want to know what they are doing at all times. Why do you think they are stalked by photographers? If we, the public, didn't care about their personal lives the photographers, would be out of a job. They hunt down and harass celebrities because it keeps news shows on the air 24 hours a day and sells magazines. When the rich and famous speak out on politics aren't many listening to their opinions even though most aren't qualified to speak on the subject much less preach on the subject which is what some of them do.

God hates when we lift up people and worship them. Read what He says.

"And on that day," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will erase idol worship throughout the land, so that even the names of the idols will be forgotten. I will remove from the land both the false prophets and the spirit of impurity that came with them." Zech 13:2 NLT

And..... When we place our *things* above God, read on.

*"They have roused my jealousy by worshiping things that are not God; they have provoked my anger with their useless **idols**."*

Deut: 32:21 NLT

And.....when we use crucifixes, statues and other things in our worship, it is against God again, read on.

*"Do not put your trust in **idols** or make metal images of gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God." Lev 19:4 NLT*

“Do not make idols or set up carved images, or sacred pillars, or sculptured stones in your land so you may worship them. I am the Lord your God.”
Lev 26:1 NLT

Look what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians:

*“So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of **idols**.”* 1 Corinthians 10:14
NLT

He said to *flee* and when I looked that word up it means:

1. To run away, as from danger or pursuers; take flight.
2. To move swiftly; fly; speed.

We are to run swiftly, friends this is serious to God. We have been deceived into thinking idols are golden calves. NO friends our idols are the stuff and people we place above God in our hearts.

Look what else Paul writes in the same book of Corinthians.

*“Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship **idols**, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.”* 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
NLT

Read that list carefully of those that will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God. Idol worship is an abomination to God among the other things written in that list and let me repeat you will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God. It is written right there, you have been warned. You cannot stand before God now and say “Sorry God I didn’t know any better”. Friends ya know now! Over a million Israelites were led by Moses out of their captivity in Egypt to a new land described as the “Land of Mike and Honey”

God wanted to bless them. Do you know how many of that original million actually made it into the “Promised Land”? TWO, Joshua and Caleb. Don’t miss your blessings from God and more importantly then that, don’t miss the opportunity to spend eternity with your creator. If

this is confusing you right now, because you've been taught something else, ask God to reveal truth to you. Start reading and studying His word. There are so many study tools on line these days that make it so easy for us. I use BibleGateway.com. Start now. Turn the TV off for 30 minutes in the evening and turn on your computer and use it for something good.

We allow a lot of activity or clutter in our lives and it keeps us distracted from spending time with him. I am speaking to myself when I say this because I fight it all the time. My thought is, "I need a fresh filling of God's Word today", and almost immediately 3 or 4 other things I want to do come to mind. If I'm not careful I can get off into another direction and before I know it the whole day will fly by. I will be exhausted and would have accomplished very little. Distraction is a trick of the enemy. Be aware of it. God tells us in the scripture below to seek him first and all things will be added to you.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Mathew 6:33 KJV

If we busy Americans could just get hold of that concept, maybe we could enjoy life more and we wouldn't all be so stressed out and preoccupied with money. When I put God first in the morning the activities of the day are orderly and not chaotic. My routine is to read The Bible in the morning while I'm drinking my cup of wakeup coffee, it starts the day with fresh and positive input. I listen to a Christian worship music while I'm getting ready for work, so I'm filling my mind with good music and healing lyrics...and on the way to work I either listen to a bible teaching on the radio in my car or I'm praying out loud to God all the way to work. I have a hectic job that could easily spin out of control, but it never does....ever. It's a total trap of the enemy to keep us distracted with thoughts of ourselves and our busyness and unless our mind is being renewed with the word of God, Satan can use negative thoughts to keep our hearts heavy and fill us with hopelessness. He wants us to believe we have no time to read the bible or that it's too difficult to understand.

He wants us to believe if we're going to read it we need someone to interpret it for us or that we have to join a big study group or something

complicated like that, so we make excuses and delay opening it up. I know because I've done it. It's all distraction, distraction, distraction! Some parts of the bible are more complex and require help to understand what's true. But the message God has for us in that book is powerful. Why do you think Satan is constantly trying to keep us from reading it. Do not let Satan lie to you. You have control over your thoughts. Read this scripture again.

"And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise."Philippians 4:8 NLT

We might not have control over every stray thought that comes to mind but we definitely have a choice on what we dwell on.

If as a country we would ever start to use God's word as it was intended, which is to teach us right from wrong and good and evil we would rock Satan's world and He wouldn't get away with what he does today. What I want you to grasp more than anything right now is, think for yourself and recognize the importance of reading God's Word. It is the voice of God. Reading it is like reading a card or letter from a loved one. You hear the voice of the loved one don't you? It's the same thing with reading scripture. Do not treat it like you would most instruction manuals, only useful when all else fails. Doesn't it make sense that God would give us guidelines to live by? He created us, He loves us, he did not just drop us on this planet and say "Ok guys you're on your own." That is foolishness. God knows how easy it is to foul up our lives. I've said this before, He has presented to us the perfect Manufacturers Handbook with instructions for every circumstance.

He tells us what to avoid, who to avoid, what to look at, what not to look at, what to think about and what not to think about so we will have a life that is blessed and more meaningful. Most people never take the time to open it up, even though I'll guess every "Christian" household in America has at least one Bible.

Another distraction Satan uses is to constantly bombard us with ads to buy more stuff...newer, bigger, and faster. We are suckers for a slick ad and a lower interest rate. What we currently own is probably just fine but if we can get a bigger one at a lower interest rate, we are off and

running spending time and money on something we didn't need to begin with. Keeping up with all that stuff is time consuming, and I can't tell you how much of it I just sent to the resale shop this year. I've been cleaning out closets, drawers and my garage for YEARS. It's pathetic when I think of all the time I've wasted keeping up with my junk. It's clutter friends, distraction and it has to go.

This next set of scriptures below also made me think of our own country, in fact I wrote it as the opening scripture..

It's a song Isaiah wrote.

"Now I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a rich and fertile hill. He plowed the land, cleared its stones, and planted it with the best vines. In the middle he built a watchtower and carved a winepress in the nearby rocks. Then he waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were bitter. Now, you people of Jerusalem and Judah, you judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already done? When I expected sweet grapes, why did my vineyard give me bitter grapes?" Isaiah 5:1-4 NLT

Isaiah was not only a preacher, but also a songwriter; and sometimes he was moved by God to sing a song. The very message conveyed a truth God wanted revealed.

Isaiah was singing about this vineyard that God created, but actually the vineyard represented God's chosen nation. God called the vineyard "My Beloved" The song goes on to describe how God took care of and prepared "His beloved" ... God said "I chose fertile soil, I plowed the land, cleared the stones, and planted the best vines. I built a watchtower to make sure the vineyard was protected." Instead of producing sweet grapes after all the hard work he got bitter ones. God said to Isaiah in verse 5:4 "What more could I have done for my vineyard then I have already done." God's chosen nation was suppose to carry out His work and uphold justice. God expected justice and found oppression. Instead of righteous he heard cries of violence.

Does anyone else see the resemblance between God's beloved vineyard, the nation of Israel and God's other beloved nation The United States?

Contrast in Events

The year 2007 had two significant anniversaries for our country. The first was that on April 26, 1607 the first English colonists landed at Cape Henry in Jamestown, Va. A wooden cross was erected by those early English settlers upon their safe arrival. According to George Percy, one of the early settlers, *"The nine and twentieth day we set up a cross at Chesupioc Bay, and named the place Cape Henry."* On the windswept sands, led by Reverend Robert Hunt, the colonists knelt in prayer giving thanks for this new land and their safe arrival. Four hundred years ago the first recorded event in the land we know as America was that a cross was planted, a prayer was said and thanks was given to God. The God who is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ was the standard that started this country. That standard has slipped friends...I'm not trying to condemn anyone I'm trying to open some eyes to truth. God was the standard this country was started on and this was a land of "Milk and Honey" we are blessed and privileged to call home. The soil of our great nation was fertile; the hills were filled with gold and other precious metals and stones. Our natural resources of water and oil are plentiful. I'm sure God expected more from us then he is seeing at this moment in time. He expected to see justice. Today, justice is only for the rich and I defy anyone to dispute that. I had lunch with a friend one day and she confirmed firsthand what I am talking about. Her brother got into some trouble, the lawyer had the nerve to tell the family for \$3,000 I can get him off or for \$1,500 I can get him probation. Shocking, to me, yes! There aren't many rich people in jail, if you can pay, the legal system is your friend, if not it's the pokey for you.

Finish reading the Song about the vineyard in Isaiah chapter 5, you will find the future is not a good one and the sins will not go unpunished.

In verse 5 and 6 God's anger is evident.

*"Now let me tell you
what I will do to my vineyard:
I will tear down its hedges
and let it be destroyed.
I will break down its walls
and let the animals trample it.
I will make it a wild place
where the vines are not pruned and the ground is not hoed,*

a place overgrown with briars and thorns. I will command the clouds to drop no rain on it” Isaiah 5: 5-6 NAS

God will not let sin and injustice go unpunished forever. He didn't let His “chosen nation” go unpunished and He will NOT let our beloved country go unpunished either. We are in rebellion against God and it's not hard to see it if we read His Word. I read this in *Dr. Joe Temple's Isaiah bible study*, and thought it was worth repeating.

“A nation that is in rebellion against God is a nation that excuses anything the authorities do as long as the economy is good.”

Hmmmm... food for thought.

One Sunday I heard a message preached on the 40 year anniversary of the Monterey Pop Festival first held in June 1967. That summer was called the *Summer of Love*.

In the sermon the pastor said,

“Satan used “songs of love” and chose a time when our country was in a very unpopular war to develop a counter culture ... the hippie movement...to undermine America's Christian values”.

I read an internet message describing it better....

It was a violent cultural earthquake that shook America. Its epicenter was San Francisco, in the Haight-Ashbury district. It was there, that a diabolical movement was born. Ushered in by evil, its offspring and actions we are still dealing with today. The hippie, counter-culture movement was a social revolution that began gaining national attention with its “doctrine” of,

Reject established institutions

Oppose middle class values

Embrace religions that are not Judeo-Christian.

and one more I used to hear all the time “If it feels good do it”.

The hippies championed sexual liberation and the use of psychedelic drugs to expand one's consciousness. This counter-culture promised peace, free-love, and personal freedom, but delivered anything but.

Hidden forces suddenly began to come together in the Spring of '67, and the movement gained world-wide attention.

I'm ashamed because I was one of the *hippies* that embraced that counter culture. Living the motto of "If it feels good do it" almost killed me...Thanks be to God He answered my call when I cried out for help.

It's been 40 plus years of "Wandering in the wilderness" for this country and it's time for the church to stand firm and reclaim this land for Christ before the hand of judgment falls like it did in Isaiah and Jeremiah's time. We don't want that to happen. Isaiah delivered messages from GOD Himself

Remember what he wrote about the vineyard?

Read it again:

*Now let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard:
I will tear down its hedges and let it be destroyed. I will break down its walls
and let the
animals trample it. I will make it a wild place where the vines are not pruned
and the ground is not hoed, a place overgrown with briars and thorns. I will
command the clouds to drop no rain on it. Isaiah 5:5-6 NLT*

God is not kidding and will not be mocked. He is merciful and his is patient. Oh how patient...but how much longer will he wait until he says enough is enough and He lifts His mighty hand of protection from our nation.

Knowing God

People today see no distinction between good and evil. Getting drunk, having extra marital sex, cheating and lying seem like normal behavior. Am I exaggerating when I make that statement? Some readers might say "I don't know who you surround yourself with, but my friends aren't like that" Maybe not, but are you outraged by that behavior or are you desensitized so that it doesn't bother you one way or another?

Most prime time TV shows now days are one tweak away from pornographic. Cursing is acceptable everywhere from morning drive time radio shows, to the white collar conference room meetings by men and women alike. Christians believe homosexual activity is ok, and if you try to take a stand against it, based on the word of God, you are viewed as judgmental and intolerant.

I am not judgmental let me say that right now. When sensitive topics come up for discussion I usually try to explain that some behavior is an abomination to God based on His Word. I have to say that before I was saved or read God's Word I was confused about tough issues and tried to justify bad behavior using the argument that people were a product of their environment or other mumbo jumbo, because I didn't understand or have the wisdom to explain it. I know now, bad behavior, is a flat out choice one makes. I do not have answers to all those tough questions.

I know there is corruption, sin, and curses carried from one generation to another and I am satisfied to wait until I am with the Creator Himself to find out truth about whatever it is that I do not understand. I trust God. I trust that He is good, all the time! My answer to those who do not like my explanation or my blind faith is, if you have a question, sincerely ask God to reveal His truth to you, spend time with Him alone in prayer, in silence...seek Him, and seek answers.

Ask Him to lead you into understanding. He will do it through His word, or he might use someone else. Don't just try to understand difficult social issues on your own by listening to what "They say". Start by reading The Psalms. Read Proverbs. Read them believing that the creator of the universe, the one true God is trying to teach us who He is. We are not to condemn people, we should never hate or reject them either. No. instead we need to know what is of God and what is not. I do not hate homosexuals or drunkards or adulterers. I was a drunkard and an adulterer, I hate the sin, I hate the fact that the media condones it and each generation gets more and more desensitized to behavior that is unacceptable to God. We cannot know what is unacceptable to God unless we know who God is. How do we get to know Him? There is only one way. Read His Story.

Many will shake their head, and claim "It's too hard to understand." One word for that response, and you're not going to like it either, ... *laziness*. Isaiah was giving a warning to the people that there will be much suffering because of laziness and the decision to reject God. People suffer today for the same reason, but they don't know it. They don't want to take the time to know God, but boy when something happens it's "Where was God" or "How could God let that happen."

So many people search for the meaning of life and look in all directions for answers but most don't even try to look in God's word. The bible should be our moral standard, if not, the difference between right and wrong is blurry. When we, as human beings try to define moral values, it is only one man's opinion verses another man's opinion. Sorry,

but mans opinion doesn't mean anything to me. Man was born with a sinful nature and so there is one place only to find clear, honest truth and that my friends in the Holy Word of God. Before we are saved our eyes are veiled from the truth and if we're not careful our conscience becomes seared. Do you know what happens when you sear meat in a hot skillet?

It is charred and crusty on the outside, while that is good for meat we don't want to become like that, incapable of absorbing truth or good news. Right? We don't want our hearts to harden either, and it would be so easy to do.

Listen to the news for 30 minutes to see the condition of the world, I don't have to write about it every one knows. What happens when we do not take the time to know Gods word? The truth becomes blurry, our consciences become seared and our hearts become harden and we also become bitter and start to blame God for the mess in our lives or in our country and we also become hopeless. In reality what we have done is ignore God. Look at what David wrote in one of his Psalms.

The wicked will go down to the grave. This is the fate of all the nations who ignore God. Psalm 9 :17 NLT

The King James Version says:

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

What happens when we forget God?

One word...Chaos

Children are shooting each other in schools, or having babies in the restrooms and then try to dispose of them in the most hideous and unthinkable fashion. We kicked God out of our school room. The result, chaos! Crimes of passion, rape, child molestation and abuse of all kinds are at their highest level in our history. Chaos! It's not only about sins of the flesh but also greed. Our nation is forgetting about God and God's people in this country are responsible for the problems that we have today because in so many instances they too have forgotten about God "The Holy One of Israel" and now focus on the god of "self" and the god of "money".

At this point in time when I am writing the end of the chapter about our country, Congress is conducting round the clock meetings to bail out an unraveling world financial system.

For years we Americans have lived way beyond our means and it doesn't help matters that we are bombarded with invitations to borrow money on a daily basis. We get the invitations to borrow money to buy bigger houses and more things we can't afford and continue to get deeper and deeper into debt.

The companies approving these loans don't care if we can't pay them back. They are making commissions on them...or at least they were until this financial meltdown occurred. Our greed will take us down friends. Our lust for material stuff and our ignorance of the things of God or the warnings from God will take us down. Look what happen to Judah and Israel. Their greed, idol worship and self centered attitude caused God to take his hand of blessing off them. That whole community, the land he promised to Abraham was trampled and destroyed by their great enemies, Assyria and Babylon. God used pagan nations to conquer His beloved.

Another similar point to make between then and now, is the fact that when Judah got into trouble under the reign of the evil King Ahaz, instead of asking God for direction and help he went to his enemy the Assyrian King, Tiglath-pilser.

"King Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria with this message: "I am your servant and your vassal. Come up and rescue me from the attacking armies of Aram and Israel." 2 Kings 16:7 NLT

Sorry but, where is the wisdom in that? How can you trust an enemy?

We do the same thing today. The United States circulates billions of dollars a year for foreign oil to nations that do not have our best interest at heart. In fact, *They Hate Us!* I can hardly think about it, because it's so ridiculous. Where is our leadership in all this?

"I will make boys their leaders, and toddlers their rulers." Isaiah 3:4 NLT

Sounds like our leaders today, boys and babies, not men.

We should all be on our knees right now friends asking God for direction, and mercy, but we have no fear of the Lord any more...and to quote a line from a Time magazine article I read today..."when greed exceeds fear, trouble follows". Trouble is here and now.

When we are disobedient our land will be cursed.

“But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you: Your towns and your fields will be cursed. Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be cursed. Your children and your crops will be cursed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be cursed. Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be cursed. “The Lord himself will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in everything you do, until at last you are completely destroyed for doing evil and abandoning me. The Lord will afflict you with diseases until none of you are left in the land you are about to enter and occupy. The Lord will strike you with wasting diseases, fever, and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, and with blight and mildew. Deuteronomy 28:15-22 NLT

That’s not even all of it...in fact go read the whole chapter of Deuteronomy 28 for yourself. The curses are really scary, and God is not kidding. He will not be mocked.

*“Be not deceived; God is not **mocked**: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Galatians 6:7 NLT*

We are in trouble right now and despite the chants of candidates on a campaign trail, we do not need the kind of “change” they are proposing. We need a “change of heart” by the American people, specially the Christian church! God *can* and *will* heal our land.

“Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14 NLT

Be prepared. And keep this in mind, there is only one who can truly bail us out. God the Father almighty! The Holy One of Israel.

I wrote this down in March of '09. Judge it for yourself:

“Our country is divided right down party lines. Passionate loyalty for leaders and political parties go way beyond normal support. Right is wrong and wrong is right. A time is coming when we will no longer be

called The United States of America. Like in the days of Israel our great country will split and a country divided is weak and easy to conquer. Cities will burn and our landmarks will be destroyed. The country that was created as one nation under God will be divided into parts and pieces. Financial failure and economic meltdown are ahead of us. Our enemies will easily move in and take over, in fact some will welcome bailout from them seeing it as a blessing. But it will be the beginning of the end. Many will run to the churches praying for help but it will be too late for America.”

The Lord spoke this word: “Instead of turning to me for help you looked to political figures and now you got what you asked for, men to guide you. Instead of turning to me you turned to men. You laughed in my face and scoffed at my ways.”

Friends, I don’t want to be all gloom and doom. We have the power to take back this country for God. It requires obedience, commitment and courage to stand for what is right. Most of us have been taught those things..down deep we *all* know right from wrong. Let us stand NOW together as **One Nation Under God!** Let’s pray for revival in this great land and storm the gates of heaven with our prayers! Below I wrote a prayer for the nation. Pray it (or write your own). Date it, sign it and make a commitment to take this country back for our Lord! If we don’t take action, it’s going to be gone, maybe not for you but what about your children, and your children’s children. I said a lot of harsh things through out this book, please do not fall into temptation to get offended. Instead pray. Ask for the truth. Jesus told his disciples:

“So Jesus told them, “My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own. 18 Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves, but a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies.” John 7:16-18 NLT

I am not trying to start a doctrine. I want people to start reading God’s word and get a revelation on their own. I want people to stop following others and think for themselves. I also want people to have a real and personal relationship with God and not just a “religious” one. Isaiah spent a life time preaching to the people in his day and very few listened. End result disaster. He was preaching a “Message to His Nation” I’m preaching one to mine. I’m going to end with one final scripture:

"The Lord has demonstrated his holy power before the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God."

Isaiah 52:10 NLT

I'm going to change one word, please reread:

*"The Lord **will** demonstrate his holy power before the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God."*

Isaiah 52:10 NLT

The ends of the earth will see the victory of the Lord friends. I guarantee it!

Prayer for our nation

Father God,

I come boldly before Your throne of grace right now (Heb 4:16) in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, please place your full and complete armor on me (Eph. 6:10). I ask Your Holy Spirit to please bring order to my day today and to the rest of my life. Lord, Thank You for Your goodness and mercy! Thank you, Lord for our great nation and all you have blessed us with especially the freedom we enjoy today and thank you for all those that shed blood to protect that liberty.

Open the eyes of our leaders and give them the courage to stand for what is true, not what is true in their own eyes or what is politically correct, but what is right and true by Your standard. Place in those leaders the desire to seek You for guidance at all times and not just when all else fails. Give us the grace, as Americans, to unite under the one True God and help us to completely surrender our will to Yours. Heal our land Father, help us to regain our love for You, our country and family that seems to be so lost in this day and time. Forgive us for our greed, selfish motives and apathy. Help us tear down the idols we worship and help us to recognize the distractions that keep us from doing your will.

For those of us that call ourselves Christians relight the fire in us to serve you, not just to gain Your favor but out of a love for others

**brought out in us because of Your love for us and our love for You!
Help us, who live in this great land, The United States of America,
bring light to those who do not know you and salvation to the ends of
the earth. In Jesus' mighty name, AMEN!**

Signed _____

Prayer of Salvation

For all those that have never made Jesus Christ Lord of their lives and want to, please pray this prayer of salvation but keep one thing in mind. A relationship with the Lord isn't about praying a prayer. That is only the beginning. It's about repentance, which means to not only turn from sin but it is about aligning yourself with what God has to say. That takes reading God's word and studying it. He reveals Himself in His Word!

It is a commitment to surrender your will to His. He does not expect perfection! It is worth the effort! Get into a GOOD church that is alive with the Holy Spirit and one that proclaims God's word boldly! Surround yourself with believers that will support you and pray with you. That is so important especially in the beginning of the Christian walk.

Pray out loud:

Father God,

I know that Your Son Jesus Christ walked on this earth and died on a cross for my sins, He rose again on the third day. I ask that you forgive me of all my sins (Speak them out loud) and wash me clean with the blood of Jesus. I ask that Your Holy Spirit would now apply the blood of Jesus to my sin record and wash it as white as snow, I ask that the blood of Jesus Christ would now purge my conscience of all guilt. I believe in my heart and I confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord and Savior.

Date: _____

It is the most important decision you will ever make and one to remember!

Welcome my dear brother/sister to God's family. Peace be with you.

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