

SESSION ONE

Isaiah 2:1-5

Learner Session Guide

Focus Statement

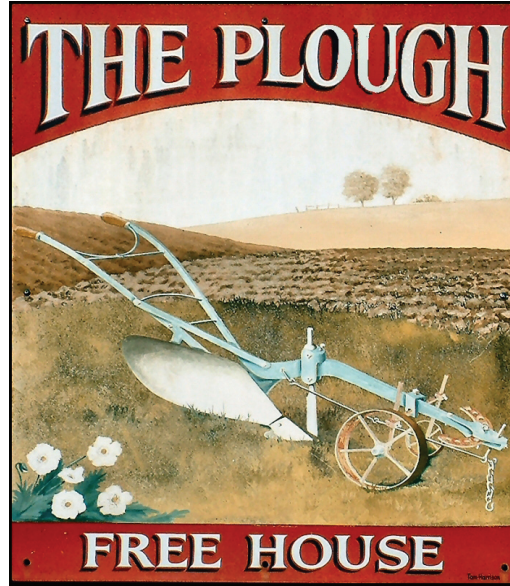
Even though we live in a world beset by war, poverty, and unrest, with great expectation we long to walk in the light of God's peace today.

Key Verse

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. [Isaiah 2:4](#)

Peace for God's People

Focus Image



The sign outside The Plough, Walcott, Lincolnshire, England.

Gather

Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group. As you gather together, share your thoughts and ideas about where this study in the book of Isaiah might take you. These thoughts and ideas will encourage better discussion and guide the conversation around the Book of Faith.

Pray

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, and enlighten our walk in the way of your salvation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (ELW, p.18)

Focus Activity

World peace and inner peace are common desires, but as God's people, can we ever truly experience peace in a broken world? The apostle Paul links peace with grace in the majority of his

SESSION ONE



Notes

salutations in letters to the early church: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- What is the connection Paul is trying to make with his use of the words *grace* and *peace*?
- How do grace and peace relate to one another? How does one affect the other?
- A plowshare is an agricultural tool used for cultivating and planting. How does that connect with Paul’s image of grace and peace?
- In what ways does the Focus Image portray the idea of peace in the world?

Open Scripture

Read Isaiah 2:1-5.

- What emotions well up as you hear or read this passage? What images are the strongest?
- What does the phrase “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” mean for you?
- Are there any personal, news, or historical events that come to mind in this moment?

Join the Conversation

Historical Context

We might think of the book of Isaiah as an anthology of his most memorable words, along with a few references to his life, most likely collected and assembled by his followers.

1. When we think of God’s messengers in the Bible, apostles and prophets are among the best-known. Although not exclusively so, prophets are most often thought of as belonging to the Old Testament and apostles to the New Testament. What insight does Isaiah 6:1-10 give to the life of a prophet?

Because prophets of the time primarily delivered their messages in an oral form, the words that we attribute to Isaiah were not necessarily written down by him, but rather evolved through the recording of oral tradition into the form we have today.

2. Think about current world conditions and events. Can you identify a prophet of these times? Is it as easy to identify a prophet in real time as it is to identify someone as a prophet in hindsight?

3. Prophets were called such because of what they did: a prophet is one who prophesies. Read the following passages to discover what other prophets of the Old Testament had to say about God's people.

- Amos 6:1-7
- Hosea 13:4-8
- Micah 7:1-7
- Jeremiah 25:32, 34-38
- Habakkuk 1:5-11

Literary Context

A prophet was human, yet—because of God's call—experienced different thoughts, feelings, and understandings than most people. A prophet often told it like it was, without concern for using the most politically correct terms. In the Old Testament, the prophets spoke against the sins of the people, often in opposition to the priests and the people who continued to tolerate such behavior.

1. Scan the first chapter of Isaiah for passages that speak to the rebellion that God's people have against God and the evil that is permeating the land.

2. Chapter 2 in Isaiah speaks of the secondary phase of how God will deal with his people: after judgment and chastising, God's people will recognize their sins. It is after this that they will yield to God, repenting and trusting God with all that they are. Then, and only then, will God's rule result in understanding the forgiveness God has for them.

- In what way is the tone of Isaiah 2:1-5 different than that of chapter 1? Is there any good news to be found in chapter 1?
- What is the role model Isaiah points his listeners to in verses 2-4?



Notes



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- What words of hope does Isaiah offer the people in this chapter that specifically serve to promote peace—inner peace, peace between peoples, peace with God?

Lutheran Context

Martin Luther recognizes how important it is for us to understand that the book of Isaiah has historical significance for us. In Luther's commentary on Isaiah, he says there are two facets necessary to explain the prophet. The first, which carries much weight, is knowledge of grammar. The second Luther deems even more necessary: knowledge of historical background. Luther felt it extremely important to move quickly beyond understanding only grammatical concerns and into a wider understanding the history of the times and the kings who were in command while Isaiah was prophesying.

1. How does an understanding of grammar help us to unpack the meaning of Isaiah 2:4? Read Psalm 48:1-2 and Micah 4:1-3 for further insights into this metaphor.
2. Historically speaking, in Isaiah 7:1-15 the prophet warns King Ahaz not to foolishly rely on the military option by giving a sign of how God peacefully works. We'll talk more about this passage in Session 4, but for now, what's so surprising about this sign? In what ways does Jesus "choose the good" when confronted with force in Matthew 26:47-56?
3. Luther says beating swords into plowshares means that "they will return to complete harmony and peace, and there is no better way to get rid of disagreements than that which Christ uses." (*Luther's Works, Volume 16: Commentaries on Isaiah I* [Concordia, 1995], p.32).
 - What does Christ recommend we do in cases of disharmony?
 - Read Matthew 18:15; Romans 12:14-21; Galatians 6:1-5; and John 13:34-35. What do these words tell us about living in peace and harmony with others?

Devotional Context

It is easy to relate Isaiah 2:1-5 to the relationships between countries and nations, especially in light of the fact that we do not know of a time in history that has been without war. For the people who lived in the agrarian society to whom Isaiah spoke to, making the connection between tools of war and tools of agriculture was an understandable metaphor. The devotional

turn of the Book of Faith method urges us to apply these allusions and metaphors to our personal lives today.

1. Reflect on peace-stealing news events or stories that have unfolded this week. Are you aware of instances of strife, anger, and war in these stories, and the outcome each brings into people's lives? Talk with your group about these events. Write or record prayers for the people and nations that strive for peace. Be sure to share your thoughts and prayers with your children and family members to better equip them to deal with difficult times.

2. Identify the "swords" in your life—items or actions that have proven contentious and destructive. Brainstorm ways these things can be transformed into peaceable and productive "plowshares." How does Isaiah 1:25 speak to this transformation?

Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session, and look forward to the next readings in the book of Isaiah.

Pray

Lord, thank you for bathing our lives in the light of your Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. We offer our lives to you as vessels of light to shine in the dark corners of the world we live in. Guide our words and actions to always reflect your lovingkindness, and help us to be open to observing the ways we can bring people closer to you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Extending the Conversation

Homework

1. Read the next session's Bible text, Isaiah 11:1-10, and think about what a "peaceful kingdom" looks like for you.
2. If you were to create an image of peace other than the peace sign or a dove, what would it look like? Sketch your vision of peace in the world to share with the group the next time you gather.
3. Find a quote about peace that speaks to you, and start each day with it during the next week.
4. Look through your photos from holidays or vacations and pull out one that is a reminder of peace. Share this photo and your thoughts about it with your group the next time you meet.



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