



**2016 Lent devotional**

**Jubilee Church, Singapore**

## Foreword:

The devotional materials for Lent this year are complementary with our sermon series on the Gospel of Mark. The scriptures are taken from the book of Isaiah Chapters 40-55, and even though some of us may be reading this book chapter by chapter for the first time, persevere on! The message from Isaiah is very extensive, providing us with tremendous inspiration. As long as we are willing to let go of our mind-set of “keeping a distance” from the prophetic books which have been incomprehensible in the past or simply categorize them as classics which “refer to the impending birth of Christ and His mission only,” we may be able to use this as a starting point, and put ourselves in front of God and say, “Lord, I am here, please help me to get to know you better.”

May you prepare your heart to pray, also pray for your cell group leaders and fellow members (be it a zone cell group or a seniors renewal cell group). May each of us, as we open the prophetic books, begin to embark upon a new journey towards God and also fearing God.

**Day 1** Feb 10

**Passage: Isaiah 40: 1-2**

The Lord began to speak again, and spoke for a very long period of time...The contents of Chapters 40-55 are all God's spoken words! In fact, the entire 66 chapters in the book of Isaiah are almost solely based on God's words. God expressed Himself through the experience of Israel; the history of the Israelites cannot be separated from God. At the same time, through His acts for the Israelites, God expressed to the world His purpose.

Before this, God's spoken words could be traced back to the time when He created the world. When man then decided to choose his own path and walked into "chaos", deviating from God's will, came the words which God spoke to Abram's family. God said: From Abram's family would come forth a group of people who belong to God, and this group of people would be the intermediary through which the world would receive God's blessings.

God's word was not in vain, from a childless Abram family came forth a huge tribe who resided in Egypt. When Pharaoh felt under threat, and was determined to suppress the Israelites and to enact genocidal policies, God's words came forth again! God commanded Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and to head toward the fertile land of abundance which God had promised.

However, ever since entering the Promised Land, Israel did not live her life by God's word, leading to extreme decay in behavior and societal norms.

After God's repeated exhortation without resulting in repentance, God decided to punish the people and also allowed Israel to be destroyed. To anybody, this would represent hopelessness, sorrow and extreme darkness. Could the Israelites withstand this? Would the people acknowledge that these were all acts of God? Was God disciplining or punishing us? Was the Lord no longer able to bless and protect us? At this moment in a foreign country and on alien land, survival would be paramount and of fundamental importance.

The passage we are reading today is about God's words to the Israelites who had lost their country and home. The circumstance which the people were facing was also the situation of "darkness, chaos, emptiness" which God Himself was facing. How would God resolve the situation? Could God possibly suffer a setback and in turn give up on the people? (Would God give up on the people who had abandoned Him?)

We begin to hear God speak again: "Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem," and telling her that the days of war were over and behind her; "her sin has been paid for." God "spoke" to man again to restart his acts of creation...

**Prayer:** *Thank you Lord, for the words of comfort You had spoken to Jerusalem. You had spoken in the past, as you do speak now. May You continue to create in our midst.*

**Day 2** Feb 11

**Passage: Isaiah 40: 3-8**

God's judgment and discipline against His people was not the terminal point! Judgment and discipline are meant to renew once more! God clearly expressed to His people that He was the one who doubly punished them. Since this punishment was from God, then one can possibly look forward to a revival from God. If destruction of a nation was due to a chance event in history, then this would be entirely due to acts of man in history. Then God really had nothing to do with the national disaster faced by the people, and whether or not God still represented as hope to the people still could not be ascertained.

So God began Chapter 1 by bringing the charges against the people, and simultaneously proclaiming that God would act to discipline and punish the Israelites. This indeed came to pass; Jerusalem was destroyed, meaning that God's temple also ended in ruins! With the exception of the elderly and the people who were looked down upon, still staying in Jerusalem, many in their prime were held captive in the Babylonian kingdom. Of course, there were many who had fled to the neighboring countries. The Jewish nation had been destroyed! How could one face the days ahead? All the infrastructure and people having to do with God's faith were in total collapse! Would God's religion be lost as a result? Be forgotten as a consequence?

How would God go about starting the rescue and renewal effort? God decided to evoke the faith people have in Him once again! The direction of the revival had to be right, the content of the renewal had to be sound, God needed to be the object of peoples' trust and confidence again! And God started with how

He could once again become the God whom the people would willingly trust! God needed to let the people understand at this very moment that He is the God whom the people could trust. God needed to convince the people to restore their faith in and fear of Him.

God first began to have the people focus on Himself. God says:

***The splendor of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it at the same time.***

God once again revealed His glory, man has to see God's glory once again (imagine the glory which God had revealed to Israel in the past, the gospels also recorded that Jesus revealed glory). God did not explain in further detail here as to how to reveal His majestic glory. God only persistently reaffirmed His steadfast promise to the people to reveal His glory once again, God said this is what he had pre-destined, and no power whatsoever would be able to prevent God from completing this!

**Prayer:** *The grass dries up, the flowers wither, but the decree of our God is forever reliable.*

**Day 3** Feb 12

**Passage: Isaiah 40: 9-11**

The materials on Day 1 allowed us to focus our attention on God's comfort, and reading today's passage permits us to more clearly see the contents of God's message of comfort to the people. The good news from God was targeted at the people of Jerusalem. The good news was that God would return to Jerusalem. Jerusalem would be where God would command and exercise judgment.

Jerusalem had been the focal point of the message of the book of Isaiah. Almost the entire book from the beginning to the end narrated the situation in Jerusalem and all it would have to encounter! From the day of its destruction, Jerusalem and God had an inseparable relationship. The acts which God would manifest from hereon, Jerusalem would definitely be a place which could not be ignored. From book of Isaiah, we saw that God spoke to Jerusalem. After all, what did God want to do in Jerusalem? We have to be careful and watchful, and also be mindful as to whether what we understand is accurate, and consistent with the scripture!

The good news which God wanted to proclaim was, God would return to Jerusalem to shepherd His people! Verse 11 utilized the image of a shepherd, in the Old Testament the image of a shepherd signified that God is King, and He leads His people. Here the shepherd is herding flocks of sheep, guiding the ewe. In other words, Israelites would once again benefit from God's leadership and blessings from Jerusalem. This certainly would include the restoration of the relationship between the people and God, and also be close to God, and to walk with Him in their

daily lives! The good news which God gave the people is this vision, an image of a shepherd herding sheep and ewe, this image would become the hope of those facing the destruction of their nation, and this would be how God wanted the people to tide over the difficult situation at hand. Worthy of note, God did not say how He would achieve His objective, God wanted to first convince the people as to why He could realize what had been promised. Rebuilding the faith which the people have in God would be the critical starting point for revival and renewal.

**Prayer:** *Thank you, God, for allowing us to see that you would be coming to Jerusalem, to shepherd Your people. Your acts are what we fundamentally need.*

**Day 4** Feb 13

**Passage: Isaiah 40: 12-17**

The passage today is filled with question marks, and is one of the unique passages in the book of Isaiah. Three consecutive questions are not meant to allow the listeners to contemplate and to come up with their own answers. In actuality, the design of the questions is meant to turn the focus of the listeners (including the readers) to “who is God”!

Who could use the palm of the hand to measure the volume of water? No one could. Only God Himself could measure the dimensions of the sky and the earth, the height of the mountains, the depths of the seas, and determine the amount of dust covering the lands. Only God Himself could decide what to do, and what needed to be done. Only God Himself could formulate and implement strategies and initiatives!

This phrase, “The nations are like a drop in a bucket,” allows us to see that all things on earth are insignificant in the eyes of the Lord! Nations do not carry any weight in God’s eyes, they are transient, and will disappear from history! God is transcendent, unmatched! Who exactly is God? From the perspective of the people at that time, what did He have to do with their situation?

Perhaps the destruction of their nation dealt a blow to the people and brought about many doubts, the people in foreign lands could possibly be under persecution by foreign cultures and religions! God perhaps could no longer be a God who could protect us? Is the Lord only one amongst many gods? Facing Israelites who could be in doubt, the prophet brought forth a powerful response- NO! God is unique, meaning: God alone

decides, and at the same time God alone has the power to carry out His purpose! God does not need to consult the opinions of other advisors, God so emphasizes His singularity and uniqueness, the focus of which is a guarantee to the people that what He has promised would for certain take place.

What seemed like “water-cooler” theological questions are in fact God’s starting point to resolve the life and death situation of the people! The reason is simple, if God were not to be this “unique”, the people would therefore not have unique life prospects...

**Prayer:** *God, when we are troubled, never did it cross our minds that You are such a powerful and mighty God. Nations are like a drop in a bucket in Your eyes, so insignificant. Our hearts have opened wide...*

**Day 5** Feb 15

**Passage: Isaiah 40:18-26**

In today's passage, a list of questions was mentioned as before. All of these are God's further instructions for helping His people to know Him. Some might be surprised as to why God should put in such effort. And we also don't have sufficient evidence to indicate that the people had a clear and correct understanding about God. In fact, God's people did not even recognize and comprehend the God portrayed in the pages from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Ever since the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they did not take God's instructions seriously in their worship and did not apply them in their lives. After living for several hundreds of years among the Canaanites, the religious culture of the Israelites was mixed with pagan ideas and practices. In the assimilation process, many incorrect assumptions and strange ideas about God gradually influenced their thinking. Now, while the Israelites were residing in Babylon, God took this opportunity to redirect His people to learn about Him.

Who is this God? How can I know about this God? These two questions are the most important and the most essential to them. The first question concerns the essence of God. The second question deals with the accurate way of approaching God. Of course, God was in no way discussing with them about comparative religions or the theology of worship.

God pointed out directly that the gods His people were familiar with were only lifeless idols and not the true God. He does not wish to be understood by the usual religious frameworks of other

religions. Firstly, He reminded them that He was the God who created the heavens and the earth. He is the God above all gods. He alone gives life and takes away life. Whenever they look to the sky, the stars are displayed by His handiwork. In brief, His people must first recognize God as the great Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. Knowing who the awesome Creator God is, is not the solution to our quest of how the universe came about. (That is the question of the modern man, but not the question of the ancient scriptures.) Understanding and knowing what kind of Creator He is, is the first step to comprehend who the Almighty God is and what God will do for them. Then they will learn how to build their trust in Him.

**Prayer:** *Lord God, the Israelites need to relearn about You. We too need to go through a similar process in order to relearn the secret of trusting You.*

**Day 6** Feb 16

**Passage: Isaiah 40 : 27-31**

In the passages from Day 1 through Day 6, the object to which God was speaking to is getting clearer: Jacob/ Israel. The twelve tribes of Israel come from the same forefather Jacob. The history of how God led his life is the collective memory for all the Israelites! God intentionally used the name of their forefather to address and represent His people and then He responded to their needs. In the name Jacob, the past, the present and the future of the Israelites are linked together.

A long time had passed and the Israelites noticed that their circumstances did not show any change. Many questions arose: Has God forgotten about us? Maybe He is not concerned about us anymore? As the days go by, even the punishment of God became blurry in their recollections. On the contrary, they began to fault God for His inaction. They doubted God and poured out their complaints instead of praying to God for repentance of their sins. However, God responded. Without any anger God responds to His people.

God pointed out that He is the Eternal Almighty Creator! "Eternal" means He is the everlasting God who is in control of the past and the future. He knows every situation they had gone through. He will carry out the promised plan about their future. Had God not been present with their forefather Jacob in his life journey? Had God not been present with the twelve tribes of Israel in their occupation of the Promised Land? From the time of Jacob to the Kingdom of Israel, God was always present and was never absent in their history!

God is the powerful Creator. He is not man. The Eternal Creator never gets tired and weary. There is no limit to His wisdom and His mighty power will accomplish what He has promised. Though He is the transcendent God, He still humbles Himself and waits for His people. He cares about their future and wants to participate in starting every new chapter of their lives. His desire is that the people will recognize that He is a wonderful and loving God. He longs for His people to build their trust upon who He really is. When God regains His rightful place in their hearts as the one and only God, and in Him they build their trust, then they will be able to experience the reality of their renewed strength. They shall walk with God and run and not be weary!

The emphasis of waiting is not on the people. That's not even the lesson for them to learn!

Waiting is solely paying attention to God, the Creator, Himself!

**Prayer:** *Lord God, we are waiting on You alone.*

**Day 7** Feb 17

**Passage: Isaiah 41:1-7**

The verses in this section are juxtaposed with those in the next section (verses 8-20). Verse 1, “Be silent before me, you islands!” surprises us, why speak to islands? This confusion is clarified in the next section. Through such an arrangement, we are brought into a deeper reflection by God and drawn into the story.

In the previous chapter, the Lord said that the people would witness his glory. Again, the Lord spoke to the people directly and even invited them to debate with him. Through this process, people would realize the difference of the Lord. By asking questions, the Lord expressed who he is, and why he matters to people. In the ancient Near East, people all believed in gods, and there were many gods, the LORD was merely just one of them. What is unique and special about the LORD then?

Through this process of questioning, the Lord demonstrated that he is the God who is involved personally and controls the situation. The Lord also made it clear that he dominated the world from the beginning! However, based solely on verse 2, we do not know conclusively who was raised by the Lord in the east.

This powerful person who was raised by the Lord, engulfed all nations with his power. People were frightened and astonished by his power. However, they were merely frightened of his power and his victories, without understanding the deeper significance behind it. Faced with such a situation, the people could only cheer on each other and embolden one another. Typically, people could only rely on the idols that they crafted with their own hands. However, is that all there was to the

situation? Was this the only response that the people could give? How did the Israelites react?

**Prayer:** *God, what you have said, we must listen and obey!*

Remark: The ancient Near East is one of the origins of early civilization. It covers the regions of the current Mid-East area, including Mesopotamia (now Iraq), ancient Egypt, ancient Iran (Elam, Medes, Parthian and Old Persian), Minor Asia (now Turkey and Armenia), Levant (now Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian state and Jordan), Malta and the Arabian Peninsula.

**Day 8** Feb 18

**Passage: Isaiah 41:8-20**

Subsequently, God spoke to the people of Israel directly: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend” (verse 8). Here, God clearly indicated who he was speaking to, through whom he wanted to accomplish his works, and what he wanted to achieve.

God indicated explicitly: the Israelites were the chosen people through whom God’s power and glory would be demonstrated! The people of Israel were once disciplined and punished by God. They were also chosen by God, as servants and the descendants of God’s friend. They were the people God would be with, the ones whom God wanted to help and strengthen.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand ”(verse 10). God wanted to change the situation for the people of Israel, to save them from contempt and oppression. God would bless those in hardship and poverty, God would help them and be with them.

“All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced” (verse 11). “But you will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel”, “The poor and needy ... But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them” (verses 16-17). The people of Israel were previously forsaken and punished by God, but they once again became people who were shown grace by God. They would rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Lord. Herein the Lord declared to his people that He would achieve this by His own hands. The Lord would make it happen through

His power as the Creator. The people described in these verses were very different from those in the previous section. Here, when God acted, the Israelites were not frightened or confused, nor did they depend on idols that could not even save themselves. Instead, the Lord was determined to accomplish things for the Israelites so that they might see, know, contemplate and understand this was created by the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

**Prayer:** *Thanks be to God, for not abandoning Your people. You want them to see, to know, to contemplate and to understand your works!*

**Day 9** Feb 19

**Passage: Isaiah 41:21-29**

What does a “true God” mean? This question cannot be answered with one or two devotionals. But today’s passage can explain two areas on this topic.

First, the true God can only be the God who created the world and guided history. In the passage, God questioned the Babylonian gods. Can they interpret the present situation? Can they predict the future? In the events that happened, what roles did they play?

The Old Testament prophets have prophesized about the future many times, including the rise and fall of their nation and others. Although the Babylonian priests claimed that it was their god Marduk who led the Persian king Cyrus to attack them as punishment, it was claimed only after their country was attacked by the Persians. In other words, that was an afterthought. This clearly answers the earlier questions from the prophet: the Babylonian gods could not do it! They failed to interpret or predict anything. Only God is the true God that determines the future, and only his prophets can foretell the future.

Secondly, the true God is like a devoted potter, fully intending to shape clay into usable vessels; “like a potter treading the clay” (verse 25; See Jeremiah 18; Isaiah 29:13-16) describes the tragic fate of the imminent destruction of Babylon. “Tread” implies God’s servant Cyrus, but it also refers to God’s methods. To tread the clay is to make it formless, so that it can be reshaped into vessels. The process of shaping is varied and dynamic, and similarly God also uses many different ways to mold the

Israelites and humanity. Whether through blessing, or severe discipline (like Cyrus crushing the self-deifying Babylon, or in the earlier days, the exiling of Israel and Judah), God continually molds humanity, till they live out the divine will of their creation.

Simply put, our lives must turn towards God, whether it is Israel or Babylon of the past, or us today. God has never given up, nor stop molding humanity.

**Reflection:** *In this Lent period, are we ready for God to renew our lives, so that we may be vessels pleasing to God?*

**Day 10** Feb 20

**Passage: Isaiah 42:1-9**

“I have placed my spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.” These words describe the Servant of the Lord. God’s servant would spread God’s name in the nations and establish his justice (42:1,6-7). This was because Cyrus’ army would make people in the neighbouring countries live in fear. The prophet emphasized that they fear because they know that their gods cannot fight nor protect them, making them victims instead.

Though these Gentiles might be like a bruised reed or a smoldering wick (v.3), they were also created by God and given life. God would extend His merciful hand to them through his servant, so that they might experience His faithfulness and love.

But based on the descriptions of the Bible, one may be worried. Israel-Jacob as a servant was described as deaf and blind, a lost servant in need of guidance. How would a servant as weak as the Gentiles fulfill such a prophecy? As we read one, we shall see God’s righteousness and mercy.

Verses 5 to 9 prophesized that the servant would bless the nations, verse 6 said it would be fulfilled. “I, the Lord, ... make you a covenant mediator for people, and a light to the nations.” This says that the faithful God would restore relations with Israel, so that they might be blessed, to become a mediator, and be a witness to the happiness of a covenant with God. This would spur all to seek God.

God’s willingness to use a weak servant to bless the people brings enlightenment to our Lenten reflection. Lent focuses on

penitential prayer because of the weakness of believers. Today's reflection reaffirms:

- God is willing to use those who are weak to bless others
- God willingly restores relations with his servants, so that they may bless others as a mediator.

This also reminds us that in the period of Lent, we must remember the death and resurrection in Christ of our spiritual lives through baptism (Baptismal spirituality). Lent reminds us to be constantly in union with Christ.

**Prayer:** *May the loving Father continue to stretch out his hands to us to strengthen our will, to send us to spread His holy name on earth, now and forever.*

**Day 11** Feb 22

**Passage: Isaiah 42:10-17**

When Christians are in a dilemma, they often pray to God for wisdom and a way out. But have you wondered if God ever had times of dilemma?

The one who “have been inactive for a long time; kept quiet and held back” is referring to God. God also restrained himself at times, into inactivity and quietness. Because when God acts, “I will make the trees on the mountains and hills wither up; I will dry up all their vegetation.” (verse 15), there will be killing that leads to **death**. “I will lead the blind along an unfamiliar way;...I will turn the darkness in front of them into light, and level out the rough ground.” (verse 16) This is how saving the oppressed and the helpless will lead to **life**. To do the latter, there must first be actions of the former, and God was in a dilemma. Though God was willing to save the oppressed and the helpless, even to sacrifice Himself as a ransom, he was unwilling to end the lives of those who were evil. This shows God’s merciful heart, like a parent to a child.

But even when torn, holding back, waiting, up to a certain point, He must redress the wronged. When God’s fervor is displayed, two imageries appear, like a warrior (verse 13) and like a woman in labour (verse 14). Through shouts, yells and groans, he upholds justice for the persecuted.

Though there are many instances of God in battle in the Old Testament, like the times of Exodus or the entrance into Canaan, but because the biblical records span many generations, many in history have yet to see God in battle. Thus it seems God is often

in a state of inactivity. But today's passage indicates that God is not slow or unapproachable, or not listening to the pleas of those waiting for salvation.

Our times are filled with chaos and injustice, do we pray for the wronged? God hears the prayers of his children.

**Prayer:** *God, you are willing to listen. I want to pray for ... (a wronged person or people group). I pray for the time of your vindication to come.*

**Day 12** Feb 23

**Passage: Isaiah 42:18-25**

The Israelites exiled in Babylon were truly deaf and blind. Deafness refers to their unwillingness to listen, and blindness refers to their foolishness. Verse 22: “But these people are looted and plundered; all of them are trapped in pits and held captive in prisons. They were carried away as loot with no one to rescue them.” You would think that such experiences would compel them into reflection – shouldn’t dark times motivate them to long for the light? But they were truly deaf and blind. Babylon was facing an imminent disaster, and yet they did not think about turning towards God, nor seek his intentions or his future plans.

In the past, when God proclaimed His judgement upon them, and then followed up with His plans of salvation, these were deliberate ways which demonstrated that “The Lord wanted to exhibit his justice by magnifying his law and displaying it.”(verse 21) If they were to consider all these revelations and works carefully, they could understand God’s insight, including how the world works, God’s ways, and His execution style for His will. God is willing to reveal himself, so that Man may marvel at His insights and His ways.

But God’s people chose to ignore them. From the establishment of the kingdom to its downfall, prophets were sent to instruct them, but “They refused to follow his commands; they disobeyed his law.” (verse 24) They persisted in their blindness and were unrepentant. Despite all the troubles, they failed to know God. Alas, if they wallowed in their obduracy, they would not see the light. This was not to say that God was giving up on

them, but rather that all these engineered dramatic turn of events could not guide them in returning back to God. But God still sent his prophets to awaken them, because they remain “My servant ... my messenger ... my covenant partner”(verse 19) to God. They were supposed to be the light to the nations. But because they were deaf and blind themselves, they went against their calling. But it still was not too late. If they would only listen attentively and pay attention (verse 23), their fortunes could still transform.

**Prayer:** *God, your people are deaf and blind, how worried you must be! God, may the blind see and know that you are God!*

**Day 13** Feb 24

**Passage: Isaiah 43:1-7**

Israel is most precious to God. Verse 3: I have handed over Egypt as a ransom price, Ethiopia and Seba in place of you. Israel's precious value caused God to trade these territories for them, handing them to Pharaoh. This ransom was like the liberation price of a slave. God bought them with a heavy price. God said: Since you are precious and special in my sight, and I love you, I will hand over people in place of you, nations in place of your life. (v.4) Now, God was making the same sacrifice to deliver them from Exile. But it also meant that they belonged to God.

But let us not see this "belonging" in commercial terms. The "servant-master" relationship between God and Israel was one with mutual commitment and mutual honouring. God as the master had his responsibilities – he was the servant's backing. The servant should respect the master, but the master should respect the servant as well. Since the master once saved the servant from deep trouble, it was a commitment to the level of "When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you pass through the streams, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you." (verse 2) God will preserve the servant through thick and thin.

As Israel's deliverer, God will also gather back the dispersed. One can only imagine how many races vanished without a trace as history raged on. It was God's determination that preserved Israel. Whether at the extremes of the North and South, God will draw them back. We must especially note the mention of

“daughters” (verse 6). They shall return, just like the sons. We are comforted knowing that everyone is valued. Though the restoration of the community as a whole is important, but is it not true that the community is the sum of individuals? Verse 7 states “everyone who belongs to me”. Indeed, every single one must return to God’s will in His creation and complete His calling in glory.

**Prayer:** *God, thank you for speaking these precious words to Israel. Thank you for valuing your people.*

**Day 14** Feb 25

**Passage: Isaiah 43:8-13**

To appreciate today's passage, let us learn about its historical context. The people of Israel had an important role, and that was to be God's witness (verses 10,12) But what does that role mean? The way the ancient religions interacted was similar to disputing parties in a courtroom. Whenever a major event happened, the topics of dispute would be who was responsible and who was in control. During a dispute, witnesses play a key role, to provide testimonies for the case. In this case, the matter of dispute was: who was in control of history? Who could influence the situation? Who was the true God? Babylon would of course claim that their god was manipulating everything. So, God summoned Israel to court, and with its own experiences it could provide evidential testimony to prove the contrary. The strongest testimony would be Babylon's destruction by the Persians, for that was God's salvation plan for Israel. And events happened as foretold. Israel became a unique witness, who could testify to the true reasons that led to these events, proving that it was their God who was in control. If Israel had eyes and ears, they only had to listen to the prophecies, and observe the events, they would fulfill their role perfectly. The Babylonians had no room to argue otherwise.

Unfortunately, Israel was deaf and blind. They did not listen to the prophets, nor cared about God's unfolding plans. It looked like God would have to give up on the case, or find other witnesses. Surely God would not consider relying on these deaf and blind witnesses for their testimonies, would he? That would make him a laughing stock. But it appeared that God still put His hopes on Israel. It all boiled down to the servant-master

relationship. God must be committed to this servant, to enable him to fulfill his mission. In the end, this testimony would not just be witnessing towards the world. More importantly, Israel itself would be moved by its own testimony. From God's deeds, they would acknowledge God once again, and believe Him as their one true God.

**Prayer:** *God, you use ordinary men as your witnesses. Your invitation moves us!*

**Day 15** Feb 14

**Passage: Isaiah 43:14-21**

The Exodus event was the wondrous act of God. He described himself as personally leading his people across the Red Sea, then eliminating the pursuing enemies. The very mention of these things would help in encouraging the Israelites, for just as how salvation and victory were accomplished in the past, similar events now appear possible as well. But God then said in verse 18: “Don’t remember these earlier events; don’t recall these former events.” God said this because he was about to act again, and another wondrous act was about to happen. Even though the past events were great and memorable, but since these people were about to experience them for themselves, there was no need to dwell on the past. The past events helped in affirming their faith in God’s power, but if it impeded them into thinking that God was only powerful and active in the past, then these should be forgotten so that they would instead hope for God to be active in their future.

The wordings of the promises from the prophets often repeated God’s past promises. Even though these promises were from the past, they remained active in pushing God to act in new ways. In God’s re-creation plans, what materializes are a new exodus, new covenant, new inheritance of the land, new kingship, new Jerusalem, new Temple, even a new heaven and new earth. These descriptions of God’s new acts may resemble the past. But such forms of revelation were because of epistemological reasons. God had to use what they could comprehend to get them to imagine what would happen in the future.

God expressed that these things would take place “for your sake” (verse 14). In the past, for the pursuing Egyptian soldiers to lose all hope, God had to wipe them out. The Babylonians would suffer the same fate in this current case. This act of God would be a revelation to His people, and a proclamation to the world. To his people He stated, “I am the Lord, your Holy One, the one who created Israel, your King.” (verse 15) To the world He declared, “these are the people whom I formed for myself, so they might praise me.” (verse 21)

**Prayer:** *God, you did wondrous things in the past, and today you shall do the same!*

**Day 16** Feb 27

**Passage: Isaiah 43:22-28**

When God's people were living in captivity, God spoke to them through His prophet, "Why did you not call upon me?"

"Seeking God" is vastly different from our idea of "searching frantically" for someone in our days. Since the dawn of the Kingdom until the dusk of its fall in Israel's history, God had not distanced Himself from His people such that seeking Him became inconvenient and troublesome.

The root of the problem laid with the Israelites – they did not turn to the LORD, when they were able to.

In this passage the LORD said that He had never burdened His people with sacrifices. On the contrary, it was the people who had burdened and wearied Him (verse 24).

When the people were left stranded in a foreign land, they thought that the LORD had broken all ties with them. Contrary to their thought, the LORD remained caring towards the people and even questioned them, "Why have you not approached me for help? Have you made me grown weary of you?" (v.22).

In what ways had the Israelites wearied the LORD? Verse 24 tells us, "with their sins". These words make us ashamed of ourselves.

We were created to walk right with our Creator, but we have turned away from Him and grieved Him with our sins. We have given the Creator undue stress and caused Him to be weary.

“I, yes I, am the one who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; I will not remember your sins.” We are astonished at the phrase, “for my own sake.”

In their moral history, the people were neither commendable in their ethics, nor single-minded in and wholeheartedly committed to their religion, to a point that it was not justifiable for the LORD to regard them as His people. As a matter of fact, the Israelites were extremely weak in moral conduct and sloppy in their worship. However, all these factors did not lead God to terminate His covenantal-relationship with the people. It was “for His own sake” that the LORD refused to give up on the people.

However, even when the LORD had not chosen to break-up with His people, did He continue the covenantal-relationship with a heart of bitterness and resentment?

On second thought, does the LORD not have the right to be angry and resentful towards His own people?

What is recorded in verse 25 will shatter our wrong impression of God, “I... (will) blot out your transgressions ...; I will not remember your sins.”

Normally, such an expression of forgiveness would cause us to feel guilty and ashamed all the more, but it indeed conveys a delightful piece of good news.

**Prayer:** *O, LORD, I am just like the Israelites who have failed to seek you. However, You are willing to forgive my sins and wrongdoings for Your own sake. Thank you, LORD!*

**Day 17** Feb 29

**Passage: Isaiah 44:1-8**

Before we read this awe-inspiring passage Isaiah 44, we need to review Isaiah 43:28, because in that text God says “(I will) deliver Jacob to utter destruction”. The word “destruction” used here is a term that invokes a sense of horror in us. For example, Achan faced destruction because he did not obey the instruction of the LORD (Joshua 7). Should Jacob be utterly destroyed, there would be no remnant left of his line. If that happened, what would become of God’s promise to Abraham? However, in the following passage 44:1-5, we read the LORD declaring that He will revive Israel.

Like a caring Father, God addressed Israel by a personal title “my servant whom I have chosen” (In today’s context, the term “ambassador” is probably a better alternative). Once again, the LORD addressed His people as “Israel”, a name that He had bestowed on His people. In the past the LORD had delivered Israel from slavery; now the same LORD is calling Israel to be His people again. God will irrigate their dry land with flowing stream.

The desert is a strange and wondrous place. Should a misty storm pass over it, those seeds that were buried beneath the drought-stricken land will sprout up overnight. Like magic, a bed of flowers will bloom suddenly, covering the area of many square kilometers instantly.

God is able to water the desert, cause stream to flow through it, make flowers bloom in barren land, and sustain the plants to flourish – such a sight is beyond description.

That which occurs in a natural landscape can also happen in the life of God's people. The LORD said that He would pour out His Spirit on the descendants of Israel. This means that the current generation of Israelites would not encounter the horror that God had declared. They were expected to pass on the LORD's warning and assurance so that every generation will cherish the hope – the outpouring of the Spirit of the LORD.

Verse 5 expresses the intimate relationship between the LORD and His people: In the past, it was the LORD who declared Israel to be His people at Mt. Sinai; now it is the people who confess, "We belong to the LORD." What a beautiful and heart-warming scene.

**Prayer:** *God, thank You for pouring out your Spirit upon us, so that we can belong to you.*

## **Day 17 part two**

### **Passage :Isaiah 44:9-23**

It is incredible that God's people had forgotten about him. And even with such Israelites, God spoke intently to them, "You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?" And in verses 9-17, God let them reflect on what they had seen over the years. There was no lack of craftsmen in their midst, people who would use a piece of wood to craft idols, another piece to burn and keep warm, and another piece to roast meat. These same people would turn to the idol made out of their own hands and say,

“Save me; you are my god”. Verses 18-20 analysed that they did these out of total ignorance. Their God who had been observing them closely for a long period could see that they had come to a dead end, and there was no salvation ahead.

The turning point in their lives came when God called these ignorant and fallen people “Jacob”, “Israel”, which was their ancestor’s name. God had always remembered Jacob, who later was named Israel. Through the generations, and up to this current generation of the descendants of Jacob, God once again called them lovingly, “Israel, you are my servant”. No doubt they were far from perfect, but God who could see the future, would bring about a huge turn around. God saw that they had fallen prey to the temptations of false gods, but nothing was impossible for God. He could sweep away their offenses as easily as dust. What could possibly be difficult for God who created the heavens and the earth? The most crucial part is, “Return to me” – this was a call of love. God had seen them running after false gods and this caused him heartache and rage, but now God remembered his promise to Jacob. He was willing to redeem them, and willing to disregard their offenses.

Without such a God who calls out to us, who can we turn to in life? If God was even willing to call out to Israel at their worst, and address them as “my servant”, what more will He also speak to us who have been baptised in Christ. If our brothers have gone down the wrong path, should we not continue to pray, seek the opportunity to counsel, and wait patiently for their return? For God is our redeemer.

*Prayer: God we have heard your voice, and this has moved our hearts!*

**Day 18** March 1

**Passage: Isaiah 44: 24-28**

With the demise of the Kingdom of Judah, the country's elite and leaders were sent into exile in Babylon. For 50 years under the harsh rule of the Babylonians, the Jews were disheartened and their dreams of restoring their kingdom had vanished.

Nonetheless, God was on the move! But the task of awakening His people's desire to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple seemed formidable. How was God going to change the people's mindset that all was possible in Him?

First, through the prophet, God reminded the people that He was the Creator - even up to that very moment. As God described how He created heaven and earth, He has also shown himself to be the protector. The word "protector" originally meant "Redeemer." For God to protect His people was to redeem them out of their plight. Since God was the Creator, He could "create" a new situation in a desperate situation. Remember how He parted the Red Sea?

Were they going to continue to believe those diviners or so-called "wise men" (verse 25)? Or would they trust in the decree and proclamation of the Prophet? God asked His people. The promise of God's redemption stems from His power to create (verse 24). It was not some faint hope appearing out of thin air. What God was about to do would be beyond their imagination. If the Jews had understood this, they would have seen beyond what was in front of them and caught a glimpse of what God had in store for them.

God's plan was indeed fascinating. He went so far as to accomplish His will with a Gentile - King Cyrus, whom God said to be His shepherd (verse 28). King Cyrus built the Persian Empire and his unprecedented kingdom included all civilized nations of the ancient Near East, which spanned from the west of Hellespont to the east of Indus. But just like Moses and David, who were God's servants and instrument, God used him to redeem His people, thus accomplishing a seemingly impossible task. He is the God beyond imagination.

**Prayer:** *God, Your proclamation amazes us. Your way awes us.*

**Day 19**    March 2

**Passage: Isaiah 45: 1-8**

God used Cyrus, a Persian King, to fulfill His will in judging Babylon and redeeming the Jews. He used one superpower to eliminate another superpower. In the eyes of human history, that was the result of a fierce fight for regional supremacy. But God revealed to us that He was the one behind Cyrus and He was the one causing all these to happen when twice He said "though you have not acknowledged me" (verses 4-5). Cyrus might be thinking that he was creating his own kingdom, but he was merely an instrument that God used to fulfill His plan. Cyrus' success and victory were actually God's doing. God declared: He was the one and only God.

In the eyes of the people at that time, every nation had its own gods. The assumption would be that the exiled Jewish people then belonged to a nation with a god that failed. But God turned that view upside down with His marvelous doing, whether kicking up a storm or calming it. The notion of the one and only God is not about finding out how many gods were there, but recognizing the true God who reigns and is in total control. It was for the Jews to acknowledge that and worship God as the one true God. People of all nations would also recognize the God of the "Great I am" through His salvation and history changing ways.

Of course, recognizing God's sovereignty may inevitably attribute all things good and bad to Him. "I form the light, and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things." (verse 7) This does not mean God would do evil things but affirms the fact that God is in all things, good or bad.

Even bad things such as a disaster can be used according to God's will. The rise and fall of nations cannot escape His mind. So let us be grateful to God Almighty for “You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it.” (verse 8)

**Prayer:** *God, help us to realize in all things you are the God Great I Am in history.*

**Day 20** March 3

**Passage: Isaiah 45: 9 - 13**

It is a matter of fact that God commissioned Cyrus to accomplish His will. This was a very controversial action indeed. The speeches began from Chapter 40 onwards, but Cyrus' name was only mentioned towards the end of Chapter 44. This delayed revelation was an intentional arrangement. After all, the prophet's revelations were beyond common sense. On one hand, there was the feeling of being abandoned by God for 50 years; on the other hand, many could be equally skeptical about Persia after undergoing the violence of Assyria and Babylonia. However, the most difficult part was to accept a Gentile as God's anointed shepherd instead of a descendent of David. How did Isaiah convince them? Simply by reminding them that He is the indisputable God.

The prophet emphasized that if they argued with God's revelation, it meant that they were against God Himself. His thoughts are different from our thoughts; His ways are different from our ways. Therefore, one who argues with his Creator is like the clay questioning the potter (verse 9), or like the baby challenging the parents (verse 10). Can't God discipline His own children? Can't the potter shape the clay as he wishes? Since God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (verse 12), He is sovereign in His judgment on the Babylonians as well as the restoration of the Israelites. We may be uncertain about the destiny of a piece of clay, just like we are unsure about the future of a growing child. The mind of the potter is to transform the clay into a worthy and a useful vessel. As long as God continues to mold us, there will always be the possibility of becoming a special vessel. History is shaped like clay, so is man.

No matter Jews or Gentiles, noble or lowly, all are like clay in God's all powerful hands.

In the Jewish political, racial and religious thinking, Cyrus might not be the ideal candidate of God. It might even appear ridiculous. However, the prophet solemnly reminded them of the importance of God's sovereignty and at the same time challenged them to expand their perspectives. "How dare you question me about my children! How dare you tell me what to do with the work of my hands!" (verse 11). Can you imagine? Cyrus was God's child too. Cyrus' achievement was also God's accomplishment. God's deeds are wonderful and immeasurable by human ways.

**Prayer:** *God, we often dare to argue with you and forget how great you are. Your hands stretched out the sky and created the universe. We humbly acknowledge that you are the Divine Potter to do whatever you want with us, the clay.*

**Day 21** March 4

**Passage: Isaiah 45:14-25**

The achievements of Cyrus included not only destroying the Babylonians but also defeating the Egyptians and her allies. The relationship between Egypt and Israel go way back. Sometimes they were intimate neighbors, other times deadly rivals. When Judah was weakening and eventually came to an end, all Egypt offered were empty promises. And now, the success of Cyrus was forcing Egypt and her allies to bow down before him. Outwardly, the victor of the war seemed to be Cyrus the Persian, but the truth was: it was God who ruled history. In the plan to restore Jerusalem, these African countries all came to offer their aid. They come not to worship King Cyrus but to the glorified Holy City of the end times.

As a result, such a vision means the nations would worship the LORD. The great redemptive work of God led the nations to assure that "He has no peer. There is no other God!" (verse 14). His action itself was a form of self-revelation. His deeds were so wonderful and so beyond comprehension that the nations could only be in awe of the God who was hidden beyond their imagination and was now manifested in His greatness. To the despondent Jews such revelation could also be a challenge: in the future, nations could not help but acknowledge the magnificent acts of God. How about themselves? Could they also recognize this was the work of the Almighty God?

Although the Jews were humiliated by the destruction of the country, but in time to come, would they be able to draw courage from God to lift their heads high again? "All the descendants of Israel will be vindicated by the LORD and will

boast in Him." (verse 25). The days of shame will come to pass and the days of glory shall come. The nations depend on their own idols, "They will be ashamed and embarrassed; those who fashion idols will be humiliated." (verse 16). Jews must have faith in their true and reliable Deliverer, the LORD.

The nations will have to face the truth one day, that is there is no other God like Him. "I have no peer, there is no God but me." (verse 21).

**Prayer** : *LORD, there is no other God but you. We and all the nations will bow before you and worship you alone.*

**Day 22** March 5

**Passage: Isaiah 46: 1-2; 47: 1-15**

Verses 1 and 2 in Isaiah 46 inevitably perplex the reader, what is being conveyed?

Bel and Nebo were both Babylonian deities. Upon the erection of the victory flag of Cyrus, their statues likewise fell with the kingdom of Babylon during its defeat and destruction. With heads dropped, tied to beasts of burden and taken away in captivity, they resembled the people of Judah who, with their heads bent low, were crushed by the Babylonian army during the fall of the city of Jerusalem. Although Judah was destroyed by the mighty Babylonians, God still spoke through the prophets to His people, telling them that the idols, worshipped by the victors, would one day be in bondage too.

Chapter 47 reveals the life of the Babylonian princess who was of a highly privileged upbringing. First was the description of the splendor of great wealth painted in the most vivid language, followed by the oppressive and humiliating condition of the ordinary. The natives of Babylon had enjoyed unrivaled economic standards. The country itself had limited resources but relied instead on trade and exchange, and hence had acquired an endless supply of resources from other lands. However, with the country now defeated, the people were made to take on menial tasks performed in the past by their lowly servants, such as milling for flour (verse 2), wading across rivers, and getting themselves wet, much like those who had served them before. Formerly placed in the international arena for their political prowess, economic development and their cultural glory, Babylon no longer enjoyed any of that as they ceased to be a

superpower. Downtrodden, they were wordless and could only choose to be silent (verse 5). In the hour of unknowing, upon witnessing the calamity that had befallen them (verses 11), they found no escape route. There was only endless shame and silence.

All these words were spoken for Israel. In their circumstances, it was difficult to imagine that the Babylonian masters who were once tyrannical in their treatment would themselves be reduced to do a servant's work, and that they would lose their status in the international arena. Yet this is the way God works through the prophets—to sharpen the imagination of His people and restore hope in them.

**Prayer:** *Lord, our imagination is insufficient. We are unable to go beyond the trappings of today to see that they too will lose prominence in the world.*

**Day 23**    March 7

**Passage: Isaiah 46: 3-10**

Israel had gone through the humiliation of captivity, yet God who loves his people has never forgotten them. Instead, God's tone was unwavering as he spoke, "With whom do you compare me? Tell me, who is like me that he can be compared with me?" This is not the first time these words were uttered. In fact, since the time of Moses, God has said likewise (Deuteronomy 4: 32-36), and now, once again, He was saying this to His people.

Humans are forgetful, but God is constantly present. He has witnessed the passing of generation after generation of Israelites, from when they were like a child cared for by Him, till the present, having developed into a nation, and even when they lost their nationhood, God said he has been with them all the way (verses 3 - 4), and He will deliver them.

When Babylon and Persia were caught in the ultimate decisive battle, God announced through the prophet, "As I have said, so it needs to be completed. What I have purposed has to be done." (verse 11) Perhaps, in the eyes of Cyrus, his plan was to defeat the lofty Babylonian empire. But in God's eyes, Cyrus was his right-hand general and through Cyrus, He would judge Babylon. Furthermore, He would perform things that were marvelous and wonderful for his descendants. The acts of God are mysterious and wonderful. Before these acts were revealed, God spoke about them and after they were completed, His people recognized them as done and attributed them to God (verse 10). Man's experiences of God in history, like the layers of bricks in buildings, slowly and gradually, form our understanding of the Sovereign and Omnipotent God.

God is the Lord of history—not a single country can say that they are indomitable as no matter how successful or powerful they are, they are beneath the eyes of God, and they merely operate within the space of time allotted to them. This too is the Creator we know.

**Prayer:** *God, your acts are mysterious: when you speak them, they will be done.*

**Day 24** March 8

**Passage: Isaiah 48:1-11**

This entire passage is a speech from the Lord, addressing the family of Jacob, Israel, and the descendants of Judah.

From the perspective of God, they were the people of God, who took oaths in the name of the Lord, but did not act in the honest and just manner of the Lord (cf 48:1). In other words they did not live in the way of the Lord. Though they proclaimed themselves as residents of the Holy city, and so-called trusted in the Lord, but their practices were contrary. The irony was that the Lord knew how stubborn they were, their neck muscles were like iron, and their foreheads were like bronze. Such descriptions reflected their rebellious nature, even when the Lord said He announced it to them beforehand.

Common sense would lead one to avoid such stubborn people, yet the Lord predicted their stubbornness and went ahead with His plan to elect them as His Holy people. Despite their rebellion and deceitful behaviour, He stuck to them, for the Lord is Holy, He is different from other idols. Though they broke His heart, He wanted to refine them (cf 48:10). For the sake of His name He would not give up, nor allow His name to be defiled, for He is the Lord who would only tell the truth (cf 48:6).

In chapter 1 God called the heavens and earth to be His witness. He lamented that even an ox recognised its owner, a donkey recognised where its owner put its food, but Israel doesn't recognise Him (cf 1:2-3). For the sake of His reputation, God chose to hold back His anger. He has chosen Israel, and shall

continue with His work for the sake of His name, and surely He will not share His glory with anyone else!

Looking back at the time of exodus, God had proclaimed that he would gain glory through the stubborn King of Egypt and his army, so that the Egyptians will know that He is the Lord. And this time the Lord would gain glory through the Babylonians and Chaldeans. He would certainly not share His glory with anyone else. God proclaimed that He is the Lord, and entirely different from the idols!

**Prayer:** *Dear God, there is none like you, who would hold back your anger and work out your plan in your people.*

**Day 25**    March 9

**Passage: Isaiah 48 : 12-22**

When the Lord proclaimed that “I am the one who is present at the very beginning, and at the very end” (48:12), He was actually demanding them to know and acknowledge that God was the One who created the world. When He said His hands founded the earth, and His right hand spread out the sky, on one hand He was showing off His power, and on the other hand He was clearly stating that He was the One who was present at creation. Hence the Lord is the one from the beginning till the end, and whatever that has happened to Israel or has been accomplished, He hid nothing from Israel (cf 48:6,16). In short, He expressed His presence, and took responsibility for everything from the beginning till the end.

Back then, Abram who was the wandering Aramean, listened to God, and God promised that his offspring would be as countless as the dust of the earth and the stars in the sky. And they later became a nation, and after some time Judah was defeated by Babylon, and its people were exiled to foreign land. The Lord said from the beginning till now, He was behind all these, and this meant He was their Creator.

In 48:17 the Lord proclaimed Himself as protector of Israel , the Holy One of Israel, and the One who taught them the way of life, just like a father or a mother to them. As a matter of fact, God would deal with Babylon and the Chaldeans! Though Israel was now in Babylon, God says when they leave Babylon, they would shout in joy! Eventually the Lord will protect and redeem His servant Jacob, and He proclaimed that “there will not be prosperity for the wicked.”(48:22).

The Lord shall lead them through dry regions, and they will not thirst. God seemed to be sending a reminder that He has once led the Israelites out from Egypt. If they do hesitate, the past record would enhance their faith, and encourage them to leave Babylon when the time comes!

Knowing that the Lord is their Creator will spur their faith in God, and trust that He could take the Jews residing in Babylon back to their ancestor's land, and turn them back to the Lord. And this is the restoration which the Lord intends to bring about.

**Prayer:** *Dear God, you are our Creator and we put our lives in your hand!*

**Day 26** March 10

**Passage : Isaiah 49:1-6**

God spoke to Israelites while they were sojourners in Babylon, and this “servant” appeared on the stage of history.

We found this person speaking on coastlands and to people who live far away (they could be Gentiles, or Jews in diaspora), and we would soon find out more about his identity.

He claimed that the Lord summoned him from birth, and commissioned him. In the past, the Lord spoke and His words brought forth heavens and earth, but over here, the Lord was going to use this servant’s mouth, words and voice to speak for Him. The servant said his mouth was like a “sharp sword”, “sharpened arrow”, in the hands of the Lord. In other words, God’s word was now delivered by this chosen person. We are reminded of the times when he was hidden by God in the hollow of His hand, or in His quiver (cf 49:2).

We may expect this “sharp sword” or “sharpened arrow” to be an effective tool of the Lord at all times. However his experience made him conclude that his effort was in vain (cf 49:4), “I have expended my energy for absolutely nothing”. Yet he said the Lord who called him would “vindicate” him and “reward” him.

Verse 5 spelt out that the commission of this servant was to restore Jacob to the Lord, and he regarded his task as honourable, and trusted that the Lord was his source of strength. God had planned to bring restoration to the tribes of Jacob, and to bring those remnants back to their homeland. God had even

said, “Is it too insignificant a task for you?” In fact God had in mind for this servant to become a light to the nations, and to bring deliverance to the remote regions of the earth! And the readers by now shall discover that, God’s salvation is not just to re-establish the tribes of Jacob, but also to include nations and different ethnic groups of people into his big plan of restoration.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, please help your servant. Whether to be used by you, or to be hidden by you, I am ready for your good use, and to submit to you.*

**Day 27** March 11

**Passage: Isaiah 49:7-13**

The servant was described here as “the one who is despised and rejected by nations”, and surely the painful experience was beyond words. Yet the Lord said there would be a surprise twist, and one day he will no longer be so lowly and despised; Kings will see him and rise in respect. The crucial point is God is faithful, and it is He who will lift up His lowly servant to become a respectable ambassador to the Kings, and be duly received and respected. This is reflected in 49:5, where the vindication came from God, and as such His servant was duly honoured.

“At the time I decide to show my favour, I will respond to you; in the day of deliverance I will help you”, is a response by the Lord to this frustrated servant who saw no achievement in his endeavours. When the Lord said “I will protect you and make you a covenant mediator for people,” He was saying that He would bless the people through His servant. “Plans to rebuild the land and to reassign the desolate property,” would make a lot of sense to the sojourners in Babylon. They were born and raised in Babylon, and were totally unfamiliar with the land where their grandparents came from. But now God was going to reassign land back there to them as property, and it would be the servant who was commissioned to carry out this task.

Well, if there were reassignment of land, of course you have to make your way back! On one hand, there was this announcement to the sojourners in Babylon: You are free to depart from Babylon, so pack up and go back to your ancestors’ land! On the other hand, the good news was also proclaimed to

those who were sitting in the dark, imprisoned in sin, it was time to come out, and no longer be fearful of being seen!

The restoration of God would take place, even though the journey with women, elderly and infants back then was not so free and easy like it is today. Certainly the inconveniences will make people think twice about whether or not to make the trip. But God said all the mountains were His, and He would make a way for them, and would provide for them and guide them, so that they would not be thirsty and hungry.

So all the people, and all that is being created by God shall come and witness the Lord's restoration, and shout for joy! For the Lord consoles His people and shows compassion to the oppressed!

**Prayer:** *Dear God, your vindication is totally amazing! And it is also amazing to see you open a way in the mountains. O sky, shout for joy!*

**Day 28**    March 12

**Passage : Isaiah 49:14-23**

The text begins with a monologue of the city Zion (verse 14); the rest of the section comprises the LORD's response to the people. There are several biblical passages in the Old Testament where God spoke to the people as a mother. Verse 15 portrays a moving picture concerning the tender mercies of the Covenantal God. A mother can never forget the child whom she had nursed. From the time of their birth, babies will need to feed on their mother's milk. During the stage of breast-feeding, an intimate bond will naturally develop between the mother and the infant.

Could a mother ever become heartless, even to abandon and forget a child whom she has been nursing? The LORD employed the imagery of an affectionate mother towards her nursing child to illustrate the tender aspect of His covenantal-love towards His people Israel.

Even if there are exceptions, where a mother, for some reason, forgets her child, the LORD solemnly declared that He will never ever forget His own. Such is the depth of His love towards Israel.

"Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." Perhaps the LORD had engraved an image of the city's ruined wall on His palm. Whenever he looks at His palm, the LORD remembers the people. In this manner, He can never forget Jerusalem.

“The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry.” “The LORD is near to those with broken hearts; He saves those whose spirit is crushed.” (Psalm 34:15, 18)

Verses 28-23 describe the day when the exiles return to their homeland. The city shall overflow with joy, and its people be adorned as a bride in her fullest radiance. Life shall replace death; jubilation, in place of mourning, and those desolated towns will become vibrant again.

Verse 23 says, “Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers” Those words astonished the Israelites because the neighboring kingdoms had been creating nothing but troubles for them. They were the fiends who had invaded their homeland. However, due to God’s sovereign intervention, those kingdoms shall undertake the task of bringing up the children of Israel. Only the LORD is capable of declaring such wonders and making them happen eventually.

**Prayer:** *O, LORD God, what you do in human history is clothed with wonders. You cause those who are filled with despair to lift up their heads with hope once again.*

**Day 29**    March 14

**Passage : Isaiah 49 : 24-26**

Today's text begins with a question, and the warrior in the question presumably was Babylon. "Can spoils be taken from a warrior, captives be rescued from a conqueror?" Babylon was such a powerful warrior, who could be his competitor? God thinks he can do it. In order to accomplish His will, Babylon had to be dealt with. And the sequence of events that led to the eventual demise of Babylon the powerful warrior can be traced all the way to a tiny nation called Judah. Is this a realistic hope? Could Persia become a superpower that could potentially save Judah? When God wanted to salvage Judah from Babylon, it was like someone who intended to snatch a prey from the mouth of a lion, was it possible? But God said, "captives will be taken from a warrior; spoils will be rescued from a conqueror. I will oppose your adversary and I will rescue your children." (49:25) Babylon was once the agent of the Lord and reigned over Judah, whether from a political or theological perspective, it was because the Lord had placed Judah under the power of Babylon. This time round, who shall be the even more powerful warrior to release Judah from warrior Babylon?

The answer is still God. "I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will get drunk on their own blood, as if it were wine. Then all humankind will recognize that I am the Lord, your deliverer, your protector, the powerful Ruler of Jacob." Despite the power and realm of the Babylon Empire, because the Lord has established His covenant with Israel, the Lord will come and be their redeemer. Try reading book of Leviticus 25:47-48 to have a better idea of **redeemer**. Judah, while in the hands of

Babylon, had no brother or uncle to come forth as its redeemer, and it is at this point in time that the Lord came forth and declared that he would be the **redeemer**. He is their Creator, and so He will also be their Redeemer.

**Prayer:** *Our Lord, you could release those who are imprisoned, you say you are the redeemer, the powerful ruler of Jacob; this amazes us and makes us so astonished!*

**Day 30** March 15

**Passage : Isaiah 50 : 1-11**

50:1-3 can be regarded as the last reply from God to the question posted in 49:14. It sounded like a father speaking to his children, sort of like when a couple is not communicating with each other, the father speaks to the children expecting them to pass the words to the absent mother. If Zion thought that she was being abandoned, the Lord asked, where on earth was the divorce certificate? When did the covenant God ever desert them? The verse in 50:2 brought them back to the historical site where they crossed the Red Sea. The sea was divided before their eyes as though there was a retaining wall, and fish died due to lack of water. Did they forget what the Lord has done for them? When he came back to look for them, why couldn't he find someone waiting for Him?

As we know, the Lord has made up His mind to be their Redeemer, and His decision is considered as irreversible. Despite the fact that none responded when He called, the Lord will make His way in. How would the Lord make an inroad to them? 50:4 stated one of the required factors for restoration that was mentioned in Day 25. They needed to listen attentively like a prophet, with their “antenna” turned on from day to night for the Lord, this will lead to renewal! This is depicted in a lively way where “He wakes me up every morning; he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do.” Yes, this is exactly what the Lord expects from the people of God. Israel as the servant of the Lord, should be able to endure hardship and not be defeated. They should be able to withstand dispute and challenges. Israel is

to be called as witness of God, witnessing to the deeds and words of the Lord.

And once after the Lord's words are declared, there is no more chance to be on the fence. You either choose to fear the Lord, and pay full attention to the voice of the prophet, or you choose to put fire under the feet of the prophet and burn him at stake. For those who listened and responded to the prophet-servant, their fate will be similar to the prophet-servant. Should they be walking deep into the dark, all the more they needed to endure and trust the Lord all the way (cf 50:10). As for those who choose otherwise, they will "lie down in a place of pain" (50:11).

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, just as Israel needed renewal, so do we. We need to pay full attention to your words.*

**Day 31** March 16

**Passage : Isaiah 51:1-8**

It is hard to imagine that Jerusalem could be restored after being destroyed for decades. Isaiah painted a rosy picture of the restoration which would have been impossible given the situation then. However, God's people pursued holiness and sought the Lord (verse 1). If they knew what was right and were aware of God's law (verse 7), nothing would have been impossible. Isaiah reminded the Israelites that their existence from the line of Abraham and Sarah was a miracle in itself, given that both Abraham and Sarah were well beyond the conceiving age. To use Abraham and Sarah to multiply and create a nation is equivalent to digging people from the quarry and chiseling them from rock (verse 1). Jerusalem's situation in the time of the book was equivalent to the childless old woman, seen as hopeless, ashamed and helpless. Hence, when one thinks of the days where God helped Sarah, he would find hope in Jerusalem's restoration.

God's people are not just required to look back at history but also to look forward. Time is in God's control. Their world will eventually dissipate, wear out and die (verse 6), but the God that they rely on is eternal. Hence, they can believe confidently in God's visions of creation. Furthermore, at this time, God has something new in store. The problems they were facing should be cast aside like worn out clothes, and they should wait for God's promised salvation. The new Jerusalem will last forever and will exceed all current expectations. It is not just the Israelites who will receive glory, but also the "nations" and the

"coastlands" (verse 5), which implies that this new kingdom is for all. People who are discouraged should keep this in their sight.

**Prayer:** *Father, your grace permeates through all generations, your righteousness is eternal.*

**Day 32**    March 17

**Passage : Isaiah 51:9-16**

Isaiah invoked the image of the warring God. To understand why, we must know that small nations look at superpowers as insurmountable forces. Small sects are sometimes caught up in the struggles between larger countries. It is only the God of creation who can provide material support and comfort and justice to these people in these tumultuous times. In mythology, disasters are the result of mischief of sea monsters. But in creation, God overcame these monsters (See Psalms 89:9-13), brought order into chaos, and brought land and substance into emptiness. Similarly, when Israelites were fleeing the Egyptian army, God parted the Red Sea and brought the Israelites to safety. The "arm" (verse 13) as expressed by Isaiah invoked these images and signified the ability of God to overcome enemies and solve problems. In times of turmoil and chaos, God provides rescue. Under God's rescue, Egypt, who was regarded as an overwhelming enemy by the ever-oppressed Israelites became like one of those sea monsters that was previously defeated by God (See Isaiah 30:7).

To the people who were living in difficult and uncertain times, this passage brought the image of God revealing himself personally consoling the people. In the eyes of the Creator, tyrant men and dictators were no cause for concern. After all, they were just "mere human beings who are as short-lived as grass" (verse 12). Hence, it was never a question of God's ability but rather a matter of his willingness to help the people. To this, God answered: **you are my people**, which means to say that God was definitely involved in this. It was then promised that "The

one who suffers will soon be released; he will not die in prison, he will not go hungry." This is a great source of motivation and respite for the people.

**Prayer:** *God, we are small, and we have much sorrow and distress in this world, but you are the creator God and you marvel us. You regard us as your people, we are truly blessed.*

**Day 33** March 18

**Passage: Isaiah 51:17-52:6**

In the preceding passage, it was a wakeup call for the God who fights for his people. Now, the prophet makes two more wakeup calls, but this time to Jerusalem. First, she must sober up from collapsing after drinking spiked wine. The ferocity of the spiked wine came from God's wrath, and the outcome was waves of calamities. Jerusalem was brought to its knees after the drink. Now, it lay slumped in an alley, like a discarded or neglected corpse. Its children were too pre-occupied with their own troubles to search for it (51:20). But it is time to wake up, because God had decided to remove the cup and it shall no longer drink from it (51:22). God will instead put it into the hands of their tormentors (51:23). That refers to the oppressing Babylonians. God will repay them with their destruction. Babylon's fate will be like the present slumped and incurable Jerusalem.

But Jerusalem shall wake up (52:1). The prophet then aroused its pride of freedom. The metaphor described how God redeemed Jerusalem like a redeemed slave. But God paid nothing (52:3), because Assyria and Babylon offered nothing to Jerusalem. When the Israelites took refuge in Egypt, it was not exactly hospitable, but neither was it hostile at first. But Assyria and Babylon were brutal to the Israelites, and arrogant towards God (52:5). Since they were insufferable, God shall not suffer them. Thus, in redeeming Jerusalem, Babylon's fate was unlike Egypt's (see Is. 43:3). Cyrus of Persia would rob them of everything and Babylon would be annihilated. Now, God wants to acknowledge his daughter, and after sobering up, Jerusalem shall see God clearly. Through the toss and turns, it saw that

neither its embarrassment in the past nor its future freedom were by chance. This is the awakening of Jerusalem.

**Prayer:** *God, you are the one who awakens and stirs us up! We praise you.*

**Day 34** March 19

**Passage: Isaiah 52:7-12**

God's people might be longing for a Davidic king, but more so their true ideal would be for God himself to reign. So if anyone were to announce this good news to them, though the messenger's feet might be caked in mud, the receivers would see them as lovely. Because the message was "God is king". Such occasions always imply the deliverance and restoration of God's people. But is not God always reigning? How can any matter escape his control? How would such an announcement be "good news"? But from Israel's perspective, God's reign should imply his orders are completed and his wishes fulfilled. So when the world is in disorder, when evil runs rampant, God seems not to reign. Other times, God reigns but in the mode of punishing them, so that would not be "good news". Therefore, if God in goodwill reigns to save them, that is good news indeed.

Reigning should not mean the ceremonial title of kingship. Only when the directives and policies are followed, that is truly reigning. Thus the people shouted for joy, indicating that they witnessed something good worth celebrating. When the prophet proclaimed God reigning, it meant that the situation would transform according to God's will. The prophet gave the final call, this time to the Jews exiled in Babylon. Do not be seduced by the prosperity there and settle down, instead be ready to depart (verse 11), to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their home. God reigns! God will save and intervene in history! The arms of the Lord and Jerusalem have both awakened. To see the new Jerusalem, they shall depart from Babylon who awaits judgment. We can never predict when God chooses to act, but

when he reigns, there is always a herald. Our appropriate action is to respond accordingly.

**Prayer:** *The Lord reigns, what good news! Hallelujah!*

**Day 35**    March 21

**Passage: Isaiah 52:13-53:3    Servant of God (I)**

Who is the Servant of God? Is it Israel? Is it one of the Prophets? Both are possibilities. But what is important is not focusing on a particular subject, but in expressing the inspired effects from what happened to such a servant. And because of such effects, when it came to the New Testament times, such a theological understanding can also point towards Jesus, as well as the Church (see 1 Peter 2:21-22). This effect is that the Servant was able to fulfill God's entrusted mission according to God's way and insight. The Servant's mission was to reconcile men to God. Not only did the Servant accomplish this, the effects startled many nations. He was like a priest of the nations, spattering them with blood and cleansing them. They used to ignore God. But upon seeing how God's Servant was exalted, they were silenced (see Psalm 2). This is a heart-rendering story that is beyond imagination. So the story went viral, and the world was impressed and converted by this testimony.

The story started practically unnoticed, but that was precisely the key to this character. God did not call an outlandish figure to put on an impressive performance. Instead he elected an ordinary looking person as his starting point. This seems in line with God's usual style. Israel was weak among the nations. Nobody has a clue as to the appearances of the Prophets, whether Isaiah or Jeremiah. But because of how ordinary this man was, when he was glorified at the end, it accentuated the extraordinary work of God. From his initial simplicity, we can confirm that it was not due to his own special qualities, but rather God's sanctified use of this man, that he might accomplish such a mission beyond him. Not only was he ordinary, he was

downtrodden. Whether it was the attack of illnesses or troubles, or we might even assume that he brought this upon himself. But to our surprise, this was the precursor to the great twist in the story.

**Prayer:** *The Servant of God met with troubles and pain. But Lord, when your will is accomplished, we are awed by your ways.*

**Day 36**    March 22

**Passage : Isaiah 53:4-12    Servant of God (II)**

When the Servant of God met with many troubles, the onlookers thought he deserved them. But when the truth was revealed, they discovered he was innocent. He willingly suffered all of them for their sakes. Note: It is “for them”, not “instead of them”, since we know that the audience of the prophet were also in suffering. But the Servant suffered alongside them though he was innocent. The punishment they deserved for their sins were laden on him as well. In executing his prophetic ministry, he had to endure further pain from misunderstanding and false accusations. It was for the purpose of completing God’s will, but he was beaten for it. Throughout the process of mockery and being despised, the Servant accepted willingly. He did not cry out in grief nor cry foul, nor resist, nor retaliate. He bore all that till his death.

Hence, when this man was proven innocent, the realization of the crowds was alarming. What happened? Who was this man? Their hardened hearts were shaken by the bare testimony from the Servant. That an innocent man would willingly bear the well-deserved sufferings of a guilty crowd, the persevering and sacrificing will of God to win them back was fully expressed. The lost returned because of this love. So they realized: he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed. God was not taking revenge upon them, but rather disciplining them to repent. And when they witnessed this Servant who silently suffered from their misdeeds, they came to their senses about God’s will. They were the unrepentant and rebellious ones. This Servant demonstrated what is true

obedience to God. Not only that, the Servant's pain is the Master's pain. The Servant's sacrifice for his fellow men, is God's sacrifice for his people. When they finally return to God, the Servant's glory is God's own glory.

**Prayer:** *God, your Servant had suffered, yet we failed to see. Only upon his vindication do we come to full realization.*

**Day 37**    March 23

**Passage : Isaiah 54:1-10**

Isaiah 54 depicted Jerusalem as a barren woman who was desolate. In a patriarchal culture, a barren woman who was unable to produce an offspring for her husband was a shame both to herself and to her clan (verse 4). She had no standing in the community, and hence being barren was often a source of shame and worry to the female. However in verses 4 – 8, Jerusalem was consoled and told not to worry that such shame would persist for long. The shame of being desolate resembled widowhood, as if her husband had left her for a few decades and she lived without support from her clan. The shame resembled being abandoned by the entire community and it was long hurting. How on earth could a childless woman ever dream of having a large household? The answer is “impossible”, yet this impossibility highlights the significance of the vision in today’s passage. Israel was reminded that their ancestor Sarah was an old lady beyond child-bearing age, yet God could still use her when He acted.

Verses 1 – 3 promised that once again Jerusalem would become a prosperous city, for the husband of Jerusalem was her Maker, and her future would be bright. By the time Jesus entered into the historical scene, Jerusalem was a populated city, and also the centre to the people of God who awaited restoration. The period of childlessness was in the past, and now Jerusalem could lift up her head among the nations.

There is no doubt that God had shown his anger in the past, but that was only for a moment, as in the days of Noah (v. 9). The

population of Judah had reduced substantially after the judgment fell on them, but consequently, God lived up to His promise and the population grew. Hence believing in God requires courage and faith, but it certainly is not walking in the dark, for the work of God is perceptible. “In the same way I have vowed that I will not be angry at you or shout at you.” God, who is a faithful God, proclaimed that His covenant would be even more unmovable than the mountains (verse 10), so there is nothing to fear about the future, and Israel could disregard the present shame that she was suffering. The past will be past.

**Prayer:** *God, Your words of comfort are as sweet as long-anticipated rain to us.*

**Day 38**    March 24

**Passage : Isaiah 54 : 11-17**

The theme of restoration begins to emerge starting from chapter 54. Let us remember when we mention restoration, there is actually a historical context of Israel. And talking about restoration, it is impossible not to leave the shame issue aside. The act of restoration is actually to vindicate the name of the Lord, as Israel has blemished the name of the Lord before the nations. But now God is coming to correct all these. We also need to understand that shame is actually a gift of God, for what comes forth will be restoration, compassion, commitment and forgiveness, to be brought in by God himself. And it is indeed the grace of God to enable people to admit their own sins or mistakes, and it is through such acknowledgement of wrongdoings that people will be open to receive renewal. God will enable His people to realize how vast is such grace, they will realise that despite their lack of faith, God did not totally abandon them.

How solid a city would be, is dependent upon the structure, material used, geographical location, and ability of the defenders with their technology. But Isaiah 54 pointed out that the city's security is more than its beautiful look or structure, what is important is the people's moral and spiritual renewal. Jerusalem shall become a city of substance, like a rich woman laden with jewels and accessories. Isaiah imagined the grandeur of the city and its gate and structure, beautified by the renewal of its residents. "All your children will be followers of the Lord" denotes that they will learn after God, in an ongoing mentor or coach relationship, and this is "shalom" which arises from the

faithfulness of God. The grace of God brings forth His righteousness. Verses 15-17 proclaims that those who are decision makers in the community will be gifted to carry out their tasks. How the Lord has weakened the defenders of Ephraim and Judah in the past, now He would strengthen them. And the Lord will be their fighter and will strengthen the defender. This vision is realistic as Jerusalem has tons of conflicts and oppression, and there still will be enemies that will be a threat to their security. The Lord has turned around and has promised to provide the means of resolving their disputes and the strength to defend the city. "If anyone dares to challenge you, it will not be my doing! Whoever tries to challenge you will be defeated," declares the Lord. (verse 15)

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, we worship you, as you are the One who brings forth restoration, compassion, commitment and forgiveness.*

**Day 39** March 25

**Passage: Isaiah 55:1-5**

In the most glorious days of David – a great ruler and commander of many victorious battles, smaller surrounding nations have willingly conceded defeat to join his empire. However, as generations pass, the descendants of David’s empire have become exiled refugees in Babylon; a far cry from David’s ability to summon nations to come to him (verse 5) during his time. Any thoughts of returning to Jerusalem might be futile, considering that at best, they lose their chance of settling-in and assimilating into a new culture, but at worst, they may incur the wrath of the Babylonian rulers and put what’s left of the nation in danger. In terms of resource management, it is only logical that a person allocates his resources in preparation for a better future. Hence, it certainly seemed more pragmatic to just settle down for the long-term, in this foreign land of Babylon.

However, against all odds and amidst their apprehension, God had instead advised His people against settling down in Babylon. This is because in view of Babylon’s imminent fall, staying put would mean “paying for something that will not nourish” them, and “spending their hard-earned money on something that will not satisfy” (verse 2). All their efforts to re-build a place they can call home would eventually prove futile.

On the contrary, pinning their hopes on God would promise an entirely different outcome. God promised a covenant with these people, just like He did with King David. The only difference being that this time, God did it not through the ruler of a nation, but in a direct and unconditional covenantal relationship (verse 3), bestowed upon them by His grace. God calls all who are

thirsty to “come to the water” and all who have no money to “come buy wine and milk without cost” (verse 1). His sole request is for people to “pay attention” and “listen” so they can live (verse 3).

David’s power of summoning nations to come to him was God’s means to an end – gathering His people in a covenant that God has promised. Nations run to David not upon his command or out of fear, but because God wants to honour His people (verse 5).

If the people of Israel are able to manifest God’s grace in their lives, they shall bear a great testimony to all nations that have been summoned to come. For God has never given up his vision for the world, and in providing for His people an unconditional covenant, they should also move forward with this same vision in mind.

**Prayer:** *As unworthy as we may be, we thank you Lord for inviting us to come before you in a covenant, bestowing upon us the honour to seek you and learn your word.*

**Day 40** March 26

**Passage: Isaiah 55:6-13**

Just how trustworthy are the words that God speaks? Are His promises as true as the purity of gold? The Creator-God has answered these questions Himself. “The rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater” (verse 10).

As the LORD had designed this world that is capable of sustaining life, we can also learn much from it by observing its natural wonders. Since God governs the order in nature by means of His spoken words, the rain or snow shall surely accomplish their divinely ordained purpose. These elements in nature strongly testify to the trustworthiness of the words that the LORD has spoken.

When the LORD keeps silent, the world will still continue to revolve but its motion would then be aimless and non-meaningful. However, the moment the LORD utters, “Let there be...” whatever things that are verbally decreed shall materialize. Such is the awesome power of the LORD’s word.

Even when God’s people were judged and exiled to Babylon, it was not a time of total despair for the people because God had not forsaken them at all. Their future was not without hope. As the LORD had spoken about a New Covenant and His intention to renew His relationship with the people, they would have to wait and hope for the fulfillment of the divine promise to return them to their land.

Despite the fact that Israel's failure had brought much pain and grief to Him, God still remembered His covenantal relationship with the people and was willing to forgive them. Although the broken covenantal relationship seemed irreparable, its revival is not by the work of human planning but by means of God's plan and working. The realization of this much-anticipated event pins entirely on the will of God, whose power is ever inscrutable.

God promised His people that they "will go out in joy and be led forth in peace" (verse 12). The road that leads to their homeland would be well-paved and their hometowns would be ready to receive them. As a nature-loving Poet, God used imageries from His creation to depict the heart-warming scene of the homecoming in verses 12-13.

The life in the forest can begin afresh even after a devastating fire. Such wonder in nature bears witness to the veracity of God's words concerning the renewal of the covenantal relationship.

Whatever difficulties we may encounter in life, even if the problems were sin-related, the word of God is our strength and our hope. We will hope in the LORD to remember us in our weak and frail state, to accompany us all the way in our journey, until we have arrived at the place which He has prepared for us.

**Prayer:** *O God, your thoughts surpasses my understanding and way of thinking. You give me opportunity to turn back towards you. Such gracious love is great and profound, which goes beyond my comprehension. We can only exclaim in praise, "Your will is perfect and you will accomplish what you have spoken. May your will be done on earth and also in your Church. May*

*your Church, in turn, bear witness to the nations and lead the people to come to you.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Besides the pastoral team and office staff, contributions include:

Editors: Wang Hui, Li Zhijie, Xu Zhiwei, Chang Te Fang, Janey Ng

Translators: Vincent Kartili, Tan Hock Seng, Chee Soo Lian, Lou Jing, Soh Yuan Jie, Tan Wei Zhen, Chu Wen Yuan, Shelby Wu

Designer: Heleston Chew

We thank them for their participation in the production of this booklet. Without their hard work and efforts, this would not have been possible.

In the writing of this edition of Lent devotional materials, the pastoral team drew inspiration from the works of Dr. John Goldingay and we would also like to express our acknowledgement.