



**Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides!** If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions on page 3.

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**SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE**  
for the sermon preached on February 6, 2022  
“The Chutes and Ladders of Life”—Isaiah 44:1-6; 9-10; 14-22



We're living in an in-between time—as families, as a nation, as a church. We're in between a pre- and post-pandemic world. The life we knew isn't coming back, but the new reality hasn't arrived yet—and we don't know when it will. This winter, we're looking back to another in-between time for God's people—the Babylonian exile—and remembering God's promises through the prophet Isaiah. In a series called Promiseland, we're learning that God's promises not only see us through this in-between time, but prepare the way for better times to come.

**Group Discussion Questions**

Q – Pastor Leah began with the image of the game of Chutes and Ladders, talking about how sometimes in life we feel like we get a boost, are offered a ladder to climb, and get ahead. And other times, life feels like we're careening down a chute, and things are quickly unraveling.

- In what ways does this image resonate with you? What are some “chutes” or “ladders” you have experienced recently?

Q – This week we're looking at Isaiah 44. Let's start by reading vv. 1-2 out loud:

“But now listen, Jacob, my servant,  
Israel, whom I have chosen.

This is what the Lord says—

he who made you, who formed you in the womb,  
and who will help you:

Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant,

Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.” [*Jeshurun* means *the upright one*, that is, Israel.]

- What do you notice in these opening verses? Is there a word or phrase that most stands out to you?

Q – Let's continue with vv. 3-4:

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,  
and my blessing on your descendants.  
They will spring up like grass in a meadow,  
like poplar trees by flowing streams.”

In reflecting on this passage, Leah talked about how God promises the gift of transformation: Israel had been like a dry and barren land, but God promises streams of new life. God promises to pour out his Spirit on his people. She used the image of home-renovation shows to remind us of the dramatic difference between “before” and “after.”

- When have you seen God's Spirit have a transformative effect in a person's life—either your own or someone else's?
- In what areas of your life do you long for God to pour out his transforming Spirit?

Q – In v. 6, God asserts that he alone is “King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty... the first and ... the last; apart from [him] there is no God.” In the next few verses, it becomes clear that Israel had forgotten this. As Leah noted, “Of all the pitfalls in Israel's journey in exile, **idolatry** was the greatest and most pervasive.” Let's read vv. 9-10 and 13-17 together now:

9-10: “All who make idols are nothing,  
and the things they treasure are worthless.  
Those who would speak up for them are blind;  
they are ignorant, to their own shame.  
Who shapes a god and casts an idol,  
which can profit nothing?”

13-17: “The carpenter measures with a line  
and makes an outline with a marker;  
he roughs it out with chisels  
and marks it with compasses.  
He shapes it in human form,  
human form in all its glory,  
that it may dwell in a shrine.  
He cut down cedars,  
or perhaps took a cypress or oak.  
He let it grow among the trees of the forest,  
or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow.  
It is used as fuel for burning;  
some of it he takes and warms himself,  
he kindles a fire and bakes bread.  
But he also fashions a god and worships it;  
he makes an idol and bows down to it.  
Half of the wood he burns in the fire;  
over it he prepares his meal,  
he roasts his meat and eats his fill.

He also warms himself and says,  
 'Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.'  
 From the rest he makes a god, his idol;  
 he bows down to it and worships.  
 He prays to it and says,  
 'Save me! You are my god!'"

- Why were the Israelites so tempted to construct gods for themselves? What do you think lies underneath this universal human impulse?
- What are some of the ways you and I look to created things, rather than to the Creator, to fill our needs for security, comfort, hope, fulfillment, and meaning?

Q – After denouncing Israel’s problem of idolatry, God offers an antidote. Let’s read vv. 21-23:

“Remember these things, Jacob,  
 for you, Israel, are my servant.  
 I have made you, you are my servant;  
 Israel, I will not forget you.  
 I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,  
 your sins like the morning mist.  
 Return to me,  
 for I have redeemed you.”

- How can remembering God’s faithfulness be an antidote to the problem of idolatry?
- How can worship help us to remember God’s faithfulness and to trust in his promises?

### How to Use These Study Guides:

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don’t feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
  - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
  - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

**Group Leader Support:** Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.