

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 42: The Book of Isaiah, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Introducing the Book

Virtually every commentary, outline or brief study of the Book of Isaiah mentions the fact that Isaiah is a miniature Bible. So, in order to shake my reputation as weird and needing to be different, I'll start there as well.

It is made up of 66 chapters with the first 39 (corresponding to the Old Testament) stressing the righteous, holiness, and justice of God. Isaiah announces *judgment* on all immoral and idolatrous behavior, beginning with Judah but eventually including the entire world.

It is amazing, however, that so much redemption and restoration can be seen in these chapters thus binding them to the last half of the book along the theme of YHWH's restoration of His creation.

The last 27 chapters (corresponding to the New Testament) show God's compassion, mercy and grace and introduce the Messiah as both the coming sacrifice and the coming king. This section includes more Scripture about the person and work of Jesus, than any other Old Testament book.

To give you the flavor of this book, let me read from a book of sermons, *Isaiah, an Exposition*, by W. A. Criswell. *"Isaiah was the most accomplished poetically inspired genius the world has ever produced. There are no limits to the poetical sublimity Isaiah reaches as he declares the message of the almighty God. He is an artist with words, a master with language, and an orator far beyond Demosthenes. Celestially he uses his perorations, his descriptions, and his poetic imagery. He employs every form of poetic speech: alliteration, parable, interrogation, dialogue, metaphor, simile, paronomasia (a play on words). He rises to the heights of poetry beyond what we could think human speech could bear."*

Introducing the Prophet

Isaiah's name means "Jehovah's salvation" or "The Lord is salvation," (Remember Joshua, Elisha, and Jesus are very close to the same word). That certainly applies to the message of his prophecies in this book.

Isaiah was born into an upper-class family that was involved in the society and politics of the nation of Judah. He was well bred and highly educated. He had the ear of the royal leaders, including the king (7:3) and the priests (8:2). He took part in formulating Judah's foreign policy and some writers refer to him as the "court seer or court preacher."

Traditional Jewish history tells us that his father, Amoz, was a brother of King Amaziah who was King Uzziah's father. This would make Isaiah Uzziah's cousin and explain why he was so devastated when he saw Uzziah's future death in a vision in chapter six.

Isaiah was a city boy, born and raised, and he remained in Jerusalem for more than fifty years of ministry where his message could have an effect on the spiritual and political life of Judah. His illustrations, his references and his imagery are all drawn from city life.

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Isaiah had a wife, whom he referred to as "the prophetess" and his two sons, by their names alone, were a part of his message. One was named Shear-jashub, "a remnant will return," (mercy) and the other Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "quick to plunder, speeding to the spoil" (judgment).

As Judah's leaders watched Israel taken into exile by Assyria (722 B. C.), Isaiah warned them to avoid the false security of foreign alliances and trust the Lord instead. He then watched as his whole world disintegrated.

Due to this, Isaiah dressed in a hair-cloth (sackcloth) garment, like Elijah and John the Baptist, mourning for his land and calling the people to repentance. At one time he, for three years walked the streets of Jerusalem, barefoot and dressed only in a loincloth, just like a slave, to illustrate the coming captivity.

Some consider him an early "hippie" and see him as a political activist, but his preaching against the social problems of the nation were based on the knowledge that those problems indicated a bad heart attitude and spiritual apostasy. In reality he was a patriot wanting the best for Judah.

He was not a popular prophet. In fact, Jewish traditional writings (*Talmud*) describe him being sawed in half while still alive, inside a hollow log with a wooden saw, by order of Manasseh, the evil king who ruled for 55 terrible years and brought the eventual fall of Judah..

Author

Isaiah is accepted as the author of the Book of Isaiah by most Jewish and Christian scholars, with a few notable exceptions. The questioning comes from a change in style and perspective in chapters 40-66, with the biggest objections coming from those who cannot accept supernatural prophesying of future events. **That is interesting because this passage carries a theme of God's ability to predict events, and bring them to pass.** If you enjoy this kind of debate, there is a fine treatment of the arguments from, so called, "higher critics" in J. Sidlow Baxter's survey, *Explore the Book..*

Introducing the Times

If you refer to the *Chart of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Lesson 21, I Kings) and *Chart of the Prophets*, (Lesson 41, Intro. to the Prophets) it will help you follow these events.

Chapter 1, verse 1, places us in the correct historical time frame:

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."

Isaiah grew up in a day of great affluence and plenty. King Uzziah, in Judah and King Jeroboam II, in Israel brought the people to lofty heights of political and economic prosperity. Some claim it rivaled the days of David and Solomon. With these riches and power came vices and abuses.

When his spiritual mentor, a prophet named Zechariah died, even the righteous King Uzziah fell. Late in his rule, when he tried to usurp the office of priest, he was struck with leprosy. Isaiah was "called" to be a prophet in the year of Uzziah's death and would live to see the fall of Israel and the decay of his beloved Judah.

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In the last half of the eighth century B. C., Judah was following the downward path of the Israel who had already been carried away into captivity. Judah was completely surrounded by enemies when King Ahaz came to the throne: Joab and Edom on the east, Egypt to the south, the city states of Philistia in the west and Israel in the north.

REFER TO MAP OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE (Lesson 23, II Kings)

On the horizon, and threatening Israel, was the fast growing power, Assyria. Ahaz thought Assyria would leave Judah alone and, in fact made a pact with Tiglath-pileser to help keep their other enemies away. Isaiah had already warned him that Assyria was the real enemy, and when they marched through Israel and destroyed their enemies they made Judah a vassal state even destroying all of their major cities.

Hezekiah, Ahaz's righteous son, brought religious reform that lasted for almost thirty years. He was, like David, a man after God's own heart and called his nation to revival and repentance. God destroyed his enemy, Sannacherib by sending one angel to wipe out his entire army.

As often happened, his son was another story. Manasseh allowed idolatry to overwhelm the kingdom and Isaiah predicted this would eventually bring on the Babylonian captivity. Isaiah also assured the faithful remnant that they would survive and the nation would be restored. **There is always a faithful remnant.**

"Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom; we would have been like Gomorrah."--Isaiah 1:9

Note: Amos, Hosea, and Micah were also prophesying at the same time, confirming God's message. The people had ample warning but would not repent.

Importance of the Book

The Book of Isaiah is often quoted in New Testament writings. It is Isaiah from which Jesus most frequently quoted. (Remember it was Isaiah that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip led him to the Savior.) As long as evangelism has its proper place in the church, Isaiah will be an important tool. Both Jew and Gentile can see the thread of truth that leads to a consideration of the Person and work of God's son, Jesus.

Jerome, the historian, saw so much emphasis on the expected Messiah in this book that he called it the *Gospel of Isaiah* rather than the *Prophesy of Isaiah*, saying about Isaiah, *"He is not so much a prophet as an evangelist."*

Isaiah supports the position that Israel has never been totally abandoned by God and the church has not permanently taken its place in literal or spiritual history. God will fulfill His covenant promises to Israel, the Kingdom will be renewed on the earth with its capital in Jerusalem and the Messiah on the throne (55:10-12). Too many prophecies have already been fulfilled to believe the remaining ones won't also come to pass.

Since Isaiah is such a large book and has so much good stuff in it, we will begin our outline study today and complete it next week.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Introduction

Isaiah spoke for God to the nations of Israel and Judah warning them of a coming judgment because they broke their covenant with Him. God would judge them, using surrounding nations, then judge those nations, and reestablish His people in their own land.

God's promise to return and reform the Hebrew nation, with its capital in Jerusalem, would be only temporarily and partially fulfilled in 538 BC.. The full restoration awaits a future time when, not only will the nation exist, but the Messiah will Himself sit upon the Throne of David.

I. PART 1: JUDGMENT (Chapters 1-39)

As it was in the Book of Judges, it is the forty chapters of judgment that lead many to look on Isaiah as a depressing book, and so they avoid reading it. I was excited to find, as I read again for this study, a never-ending thread of grace, mercy, and salvation in even these forty "judgment" chapters. *God is sovereign and doing a beautiful thing.*

A. Judah (1-12)

God begins by indicting Judah for failing to keep their promises of worship and allegiance to Him. Even though Jerusalem was the only city left untouched by their enemies (1:7), still they did not repent and turn back to God. This was to be the last warning.

1. Condemnation of Judah (1-6)

a. Through Isaiah, God compares His errant people to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, denouncing their false worship and social injustice. (1:2-23) God's ultimatum is: *"obey and receive forgiveness and restoration; disobey and be destroyed."*

b. Isaiah sees a cleansing affect from God's directed punishment. They will be purified and restored (1:24-4:1)

c. Isaiah presents a picture of the coming millennial kingdom by using the picture of a beautiful branch bearing much fruit (4:2-6)

d. By use of a parable of a vineyard and vine-dresser, Isaiah explains why the coming divine judgment is necessary (5).

At this point Isaiah is symbolically purified and commissioned to be the official messenger of God to this stiff-necked people (6).

2. Coming of Messiah (7-12)

a. Using three signs, Isaiah discusses the Lord's ultimate deliverance of His faithless people.

The background for these chapters is the Syro-Ephramitic War (735-733 BC.) when Aram and the Northern Kingdom invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem.

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Ahab was terrified and refused to follow Isaiah's instructions to ask God for a sign. He refused but God gave him three signs:

- 1) (God with us--7)
- 2) The sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz (quick to plunder-swift to spoil--8)
- 3) (Savior--9:1-7) [*The Messiah*]

These signs are too complex to handle now, but they make a great study. Basically, they point to Judah's short-term victory, mid-term defeat, and ultimate long-term permanent victory.

b. Next comes a message of judgment on Samaria, the capital of Israel (9:8-10:4). Even though they had been ravaged by enemies, they were "*asserting in pride and arrogance of heart . . . we will rebuild . . .*" (9:10).

This portion also predicts the destruction of Assyria in payment for all they had done to Israel and Judah and they would be restored (10:5-34).

c. Assyria's destiny is laid out in direct contract to the eventual glorious return of a re-united Hebrew nation, the "Branch of Jesse, to their promised land. Unlike Isaiah's day when the nation "spurned the Holy One of Israel" (1:4), the Holy One of Israel will be exalted among His people (12:6)

This section ends with a great hymn of praise which previews the nations ultimate response when Jesus, the Messiah reigns.

This is a great place to break our study. We'll continue in lesson 43 by looking at God's plans for all those nations who have acted alone, and in concert, to destroy the Jewish race.

Homework:

Read: Continue to read the Book of Isaiah

Think: Consider the warnings we receive from God in the New Testament. **Do we listen?**

Apply: This week try to give thanks to God for the future He has prepared for us, His church.

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Bible Survey Lesson 43: The Book of Isaiah, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (Continued)

Introduction

Last lesson we started our outline study of the Book of Isaiah. We began by stating that God, through Isaiah, had warned Israel and Judah of the coming judgment in the form of war with and captivity by their neighbor nations.

We also saw that, after the punishment was done and the people had repented, God would restore them to their land, with its capital in Jerusalem. *However, this would not be the end.* The full restoration, the complete fulfillment of God's covenant promises, was yet to come. This would be in the form of a millennial kingdom and the Messiah, the King of Kings, would rule the world, from the Throne of David in Jerusalem.

I. PART 1: JUDGMENT (Chapters 1-39)

The book begins with God declaring judgment on everybody in sight.

A. Judah (1-12)

God begins with Judah, judging them for breaking their covenant with Him. They had been beaten bloody by the Assyrians, and yet they would not repent and obey.

1. Condemnation of Judah (1-6)

Likening them to Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaiah tells them to obey or be punished. This is God's way to purify them for a renewed relationship with Him. He gives them vivid pictures of the coming judgments, and the eventual perfect kingdom.

2. Illustrative Signs (7-12)

Isaiah next used three signs to illustrate how the Lord would ultimately work to deliver His people. Judgment of Assyria is contrasted to the eventual glorious return of a re-united Hebrew nation. A closing hymn gives praise to the Messiah, who will reign forever.

That brings us to:

B. Other Nations (13-23)

Before the prophet's vision of peace for His people could be realized, God had to subdue their enemies, the heathen, the pagan, the idolatrous, the Godless. These speeches of judgment remind us that God is sovereign and His people need not fear other nations.

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1. Babylon (13-14:23)

The first message is against Babylon. In Isaiah's day, they were struggling with Assyria for control of Mesopotamia. In order to surround their enemy, they wanted to sign a treaty with Judah. But, Isaiah knew (he was a prophet) that they would be the ultimate enemy taking his people into captivity.

The Lord would use the cruel Medes (13:17) to totally wipe them from the earth (13:20-22). This, of course, made it possible for the Jews to return to Jerusalem, rebuild temple, wall and nation.

2. Assyria (14:24-27)

(v 25) " . . . to break Assyria in My land, and I will trample him on My mountains." Assyria was the power that destroyed and carried off the people of Israel and attempted to destroy Judah as well. God protected Jerusalem from them earlier and would see them eventually broken and trampled.

3. Philistia (14:28-32)

The Philistines were rejoicing because the Assyrians were busy elsewhere and thought they were safe. Isaiah tells them not to gloat. In 712 B. C., Sargon made most of Philistia an Assyrian vassal province, and in 701 B. C. Sennacherib conquered the rest.

4. Moab (15-16)

We don't have an exact reference to the fall of the Moabites but records available tell of a monstrous invasion by Assyria in the late eighth century B. C. Isaiah "twists the knife" by quoting their own cry for help, including the admission that only a Davidic ruler could help save them (16:3-5).

5. Damascus, Syria and Israel (17)

This speech was against Damascus, the capital of Aram (Syria), but it is primarily dealing with their top ally, Israel. When the Assyrians captured Israel, they also enveloped Syria as well. *"Now it came about in that day, that the glory of Jacob will fade, and the fatness of its flesh will become lean, etc. . . ."* (vv. 4-)

6. Ethiopia (18)

South of Egypt was the land of Cush . They could not get Judah to help save them from Assyria and were plundered. Later they brought gifts to Jerusalem to acknowledge God's sovereignty.

7. Egypt (19-20)

Egypt was closely allied to Ethiopia at this time and was also decimated by Assyria. Isaiah spoke against any alliance with Egypt, knowing that God was going to judge them. Isaiah not only foretold of a time when a foreign king would sit on Egypt's throne (Ashubanipal), but also saw a time when Assyria and Egypt would worship the True God (this prophesy yet to come).

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8. Babylon (21:1-10)

Isaiah had a very vivid and emotional vision that he told in dramatic fashion. He described them feasting when they should be arming for battle. In 539 B. C. Cyrus marched his army into the city and took it unopposed, as the king and his army partied.

9. Edom (21:11-12)

This short speech took the form of a riddle. Isaiah was saying, in effect, that a day of relief was coming, but a night of gloom would follow. There was no hope in this message.

10. Arabia (21:13-17)

In a related speech, Isaiah dramatically described a situation of deserters running from battle. He officially announced that Kedar, a royal Arabian city, would be destroyed. Sargon and Sennacherib brought this to pass when they invaded Arabia.

11. Jerusalem (22)

In the midst of the defeat of enemies, is a message to Judah and Jerusalem. It is a fascinating one. I wish we had more time. There are two judgments:

First, to the people of Jerusalem who reacted to the crisis (probably Sennacherib's siege) by fortifying city walls, building a new water system, and then losing hope and partying when things looked black instead of trusting God.

Second, a bureaucrat named Shebna was so proud he built a giant tomb for himself while he was supposed to help God's people. Isaiah said that he would lose his job and be buried in a foreign land. He did and he was.

12. Tyre (23)

Tyre was a prominent shipping port on the northern coast of the Mediterranean. Tyre's many shipping partners were told to mourn, for the Lord would lay it low. It went into a decline that lasted seventy five years and was only great again when all of its wealth was paid in tribute to God's people.

C. Israel and Judah (24-39)

In this section Isaiah describes God's judgment, on a universal scale, culminating his messages to the individual nations. This section is sometimes called Isaiah's Apocalypse since it deals with the end time Tribulation Period and the future Kingdom.

1. World of Judgment (24-27)

a. Isaiah foresees the time when God devastates the earth judging it for its rebellion and destroying all but a small remnant (24).

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b. That remnant lifts a song of praise and worship, as the Lord hosts a feast in Jerusalem. God *"will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth"* (25)

c. A second promise for redemption is raised. (26)

d. This chapter describes the defeat of God's enemies as His people hide. He will then make Israel His *"fruitful vineyard,"* and watch over it with never ending attention. This is the final hope of the Jew. (27)

2. Warning of Egypt (28-35)

Throughout the period of threat from enemies on all sides, Israel and Judah often looked to Egypt for help. Isaiah was constantly warning them to trust the Lord, not Egypt. Those warnings take shape in this section and are in the form of woes.

a. Woe to Samaria (capital of Judah) and Judah for their drunk politicians, hypocrisy, and alliances with Egypt. (28-31)

b. In the midst of this gloom comes a vision of that day when a just king, the Messiah would reign over a glorious kingdom. (32)

c. The next two chapters describe destruction. The first, that of Assyria in the flow of history. The second and the final defeat of all enemy nations at Armageddon in the future. (33-34)

d. *"The wilderness and the desert will be glad, . . ."* (v 1) kicks off another prophetic vision of the Kingdom and its blessings. And *"the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."* (v 10) (35)

3. War of Assyria (36-39)

During the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20) there were two significant events which Isaiah reviews here:

a. In 701 B. C. the mighty Assyrian army overran the nation of Judah and, according to Assyrian records, decimated forty-six cities. Next, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, sent his field commander to Jerusalem to tell Hezekiah that his confidence, whether in his fortified city or in his God, was misplaced. He even claimed that God had commissioned his attack. He demanded an immediate, unconditional surrender. (36)

Hezekiah and the people were terrified, but Isaiah assured him that God was going to punish the Assyrian king for blasphemy. Assyria renewed their threat in writing. Hezekiah went before the Lord acknowledging Him as the ruler of the universe and asking Him to deliver them. You know the rest. God struck down the Assyrian army and forced Sennacherib to return home in disgrace. (37)

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b. The last two chapters of this section deal with Hezekiah, his illness and request that God prolong his life. The Lord agreed and Hezekiah promised to praise Him all his days. (38)

We don't have time to debate the question of whether Hezekiah's request was wise or not. We do know that he made a serious blunder by allowing the Babylonian officials into his headquarters, showing off his riches, and of course, he sired Manasseh who ruled after him for 55 wicked years. (39).

This brings us to the second section of the Book of Isaiah.

Since this portion of the book is filled with supernatural prophesy it, like Daniel, has many critics claiming it was written by a scribe or prophet many years later. This makes the prophetic passages out to be reports of what had already happened rather than a foretelling of the future.

My question is: If you don't want a supernatural God, why bother to be a Bible scholar or theologian? *Beats me!*

II. PART 2: SALVATION (Chapters 40-66)

The entire setting of Isaiah's messages switches to the future as things he has prophesied are revisited: The time deliverance from captivity, Salvation provided by the Servant-Messiah, and the future glory of God's chosen people.

A. Release (40-48)

God is both willing and able to deliver His people from exile. The major focus of this passage is on God's superiority over all nations and their false gods.

1. Judah (40-42)

This message of encouragement is tied to the overall redemptive plan of God. He will supernaturally bring the release of Judah from captivity in Babylon just as He supernaturally created and controls all of His creation . . . by His sovereign power!

2. Israel (42-48)

In two parallel passages God reviews His involvement in life:

- a. He intervenes in world events 42:13-17 43:14-21
- b. He chastises Israel 42:18-25 43:22-28
- c. He will save His people 43:1-7 44:1-5
- d. He will restore 43:8-13 44:6-20

Isaiah prophecies the entire restoration process in detail, using Cyrus, judging Babylon, freeing Judah, and the returning remnant. (45-48)

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B. Redemption (49-57)

The shocking message that has confused Jewish people for centuries is this: **The Messiah will come, not a conquering king, but as a suffering servant. *They couldn't buy it . . . and still don't!***

1. Mission (49-52:12)

God introduces into the flow of history a new character-- **The Lord's ideal servant** who would be:

Commissioned from birth for a special task

A new Moses to mediate a new covenant

An obedient servant (as opposed to Israel)

A channel of blessing to the Gentiles

Rejected by His own people, but vindicated

Persevering despite severe opposition and humiliation

2. Result (52:13-57)

This passage begins with an even more detailed description of the Servant's suffering, but explains why it is necessary.

Isaiah 53 is excruciating, but ends, *"As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquity."*

What then is the result?

Personal and national salvation for Israel (55)

Fulfillment of God's covenant promises--A Kingdom (56)

Blessings and salvation extended to the Gentiles (56)

Isaiah finally rebukes those who reject salvation (57)

C. Rebirth (58-66)

The closing chapters of Isaiah deal with the fulfillment of God's will for his chosen people.

1. Immediate (58-59)

God called His people back to Himself with a demand for right worship. He demanded righteous living, not meaningless ritual. When they were obedient they would again experience His presence and enjoy His blessings. (58) Chapter 59 listed the accusations against Israel, confession of those sins, and the blotting out of them by God.

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2. Future (60-66)

The Book of Isaiah ends on a triumphant note describing the glory of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom:

Messiah's reign of peace (61)

Restoration of the nation Israel (62)

Conditions of Blessings (63-64)

Description of the Kingdom (65)

Final rebirth and rejoicing in Israel (66)

Lesson

Isaiah teaches us:

1. God is "the Creator of the universe" (grand and powerful), and "the Holy One of Israel" (involved and personal).
2. God demands obedience, moral purity, and justice from His people.
3. God gave His Son "*a ransom for many that He might bring us to Himself.*"
4. Even though God did not put us in the place of His chosen people, He did provide a way of salvation for us so that we can live with Him forever.
5. God is in complete control of the events of history, and we can be a part of His plan if we will bow and worship Him.

Homework

Read: Start the Book of Jeremiah

Think: Do I appreciate the great cost the Suffering Servant paid to bring me to God?

Apply: Spend the entire week praising God for His "great salvation!"