

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

Message #1

Various Texts

There are things that you look at that truly stand out above the rest. For example, when you look at a mountain range, one of the peaks jumps out at you as being the tallest. When Tom Smith was looking for a horse to purchase, he said the moment he saw “Seabiscuit” he knew that horse was different from any he had ever seen. As he would later say, the eyes of that horse “looked right through me.” In the annals of Christian history there are men who stand out above the rest for their remarkable ministry - John Chrysostom of Constantinople, John Calvin of Geneva, John Knox of Edinburgh, Charles Spurgeon of London, Philip Brooks of Boston, D. L. Moody of Chicago, C. I. Scofield of Dallas - these were magnificent men who changed history by their faithful ministry and commitment to God’s Word. They stand tall, far above the average.

When it comes to studying prophetic books in the O.T., there is one prophet that seems to tower above all others. He jumps out at you. His language and theology in the 8th century B.C. makes him, as one writer said, “soar like an eagle.” His prophecies comprise the third longest writing in all of the Bible (only Jeremiah and Psalms are longer). **He was “a man of the city” who powerfully ministered in Jerusalem to the man on the street and to the elite. His name was Isaiah.** In the next weeks, we would like to introduce you to this remarkable man and take you on a journey through his remarkable inspired writing, which is called by some - “the greatest of the prophetic books of the Old Testament” (*Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, p. 92). As is our custom, we begin the introduction to the book by asking and answering a series of six introductory questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study Isaiah?

(Reason #1) - Because Isaiah is one of only 66 inspired books God has given to man.

Isaiah is a very uniquely inspired Biblical book. **It is like other Bible books in the fact that it is inspired by God, but it is unlike all other books in the fact of its structure.** In the Bible there are 66 books and in Isaiah there are 66 chapters. In the Bible there are 39 books in the O.T. and in Isaiah there are 39 chapters which deal with the law and government and judgment of God. In the Bible there are 27 books in the New Testament and in Isaiah there are 27 chapters that deal with God’s grace and salvation (chapters 40-66). This certainly cannot be a mere coincidence. **Isaiah tells us there are 66 inspired books, 39 deal with law and 27 deal with grace.**

Isaiah was one of the famous seven scrolls found in Qumran Cave 1 by an Arab shepherd boy in March 1947 in the famous Dead Sea Scroll discovery. In this discovery two manuscripts of Isaiah were found and one was an entire copy of the book of Isaiah. In fact, Hebrew scholars work with this Isaiah Hebrew text more than any other because it is so intact. The importance of this discovery is of great significance because the only Hebrew text scholars had of Isaiah was the Masoretic Text (vowel pointed text) until this discovery (A.D. 500). **What was proved by the Dead Sea Scroll find was that the Masoretic text copy of Isaiah was almost identical to the Dead Sea text**, even though the Dead Sea text had been written 1000 years before the Masoretic text. The integrity of the copyists was amazing. God had carefully preserved His Word for over a thousand years.

The Masoretic Text, the Septuagint (Greek Translation of the O.T.) and the Dead Sea Scroll discovery clearly reveals that Isaiah is truly an inspired, protected book of God.

(Reason #2) - Because Isaiah is a somewhat familiar but mostly neglected book of the Bible.

At Christmas time, typically a couple of verses are cited from Isaiah (**7:14; 9:6**) and most people who go to church have heard something about **Isaiah 53**. These are passages that are loved from Isaiah. But beyond this, sad to say, most remain ignorant of the rest of the book. As one writer said, there are “vast stretches of the book...that are virtually unknown to most Christians.” Dr. Harry Ironside said that many Christians neglect careful study of a prophetic book like Isaiah and when they do they wrong their own souls and dishonor God who gave this book for our edification and comfort (Ironside, *Isaiah*, p. 5). **God didn't just inspire a few favorite verses from Isaiah, He inspired the whole book.**

God does not want His people ignorant of any one of the chapters or verses in any of His inspired writings and this is especially true about an O.T. book like Isaiah that exalts His Son. Many N.T. writers recognized Isaiah's special importance, because they quote from him or allude to him on several occasions. With the exception of Psalms, Isaiah is the most referred to book in the New Testament. But the fact remains, most Christians have never carefully journeyed in a systematic way through this epoch O.T. book. (Most theological training centers don't even take their students through it either.)

(Reason #3) - Because Isaiah is a book that is truly Christological .

The name “Christ” is a Greek proper noun that means Jesus is the Messiah , the Anointed One. Scattered all throughout Isaiah, there are many Messianic references to Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that Isaiah really took up the theme of Jesus Christ, because this is something both the Apostle John (**John 12:41**) and the Apostle Paul (**Acts 12:25ff**) both saw and understood.

In Isaiah we learn of Christ's first coming, His death, His burial and resurrection and we learn more about Christ's second coming and His Millennial Kingdom than in any other Biblical book. Dr. C. I. Scofield said there are all kinds of prophecies in Isaiah concerning Jerusalem, Israel, Judah and the nations, but beyond all of these prophecies Isaiah “sets forth the great Messianic predictions in which are foretold Christ's birth (**7:14; 9:6**); His Deity (**9:6-7**); His ministry (**9:1-2; 42:1-7; 61:1-2**); His death (**52:1-53:12**), His future millennial reign (e.g. **chapters 2, 11, 65**). Of all the O.T. prophets ... no prophet is more fully occupied with the redemptive work of Christ” (Scofield Reference Bible, p. 713). Isaiah saw clearly Israel's sin, but he also predicted One would come who could set her free from her sin and that One is Jesus Christ.

(Reason #4) - Because Isaiah is a book that is amazingly prophetic .

The magnitude of prophecies which are found in Isaiah covers so much time and space that one who studies it “will frequently be overwhelmed” (Alfred & John Martin, *Isaiah*, p. 11). As Scofield said there are prophecies concerning Jerusalem, Israel, Judah and the nations. Dr. John Walvoord lists nearly 70 major prophetic themes that show up in Isaiah (*Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, pp. 92-120).

Here are just a few of the amazing prophecies in this book:

- 1) Christ's Kingdom Reign (2:3-5);
- 2) Christ's Virgin Birth (7:14);
- 3) Christ's joyful reign (9:2, 3, 7);
- 4) Christ will rule the world (9:4);
- 5) Christ will be a descendant of Jesse and David (11:1, 10);
- 6) Christ will be filled with the Spirit (11:2; 42:1);
- 7) Christ will eventually judge in righteousness (11:3-5; 42:1, 4);
- 8) Christ will rule over the nations (11:10);
- 9) Christ will be gentle and just for the weak (42:3);
- 10) Christ will establish a new covenant with His people (42:6; 49:8);
- 11) Christ will make Israel be a light to the Gentiles (42:6; 49:6-7);
- 12) Christ will Himself have an impact on the Gentile nations (52:15);
- 13) Christ in obedience to the plan of God will permit Himself to suffer (50:6; 53:7-8);
- 14) Christ will one day be exalted (52:13; 53:12);
- 15) Christ will one day restore Israel and judge the wicked (61:1-3).

In Isaiah you'll see the Tribulation and take a trip into the Millennium. These are just a snapshot of the many amazing prophecies found in this book.

Furthermore, Isaiah was a prophet who looked ahead to the captivity of Israel by the Babylonians, the return of Israel after the Babylonian captivity and then beyond that to an ultimate deliverance for Israel. One thing Isaiah proves - you tamper with Israel and you put yourself on a path of doom. In presenting various prophecies, **Isaiah always maintained a confidence in the Sovereignty of God** who was orchestrating all events. **One of the key themes, which one cannot avoid in Isaiah, is the promise that one day God will regather Israel and bring her to a wonderful kingdom, one in which she will be free from any sin.** Any person who takes Isaiah seriously and literally, must conclude there must be a point in time when God is going to do this for Israel because Isaiah predicts this over and over and over again. Also any who see the Church in this book will have serious interpretive problems.

(Reason #5) - Because Isaiah is a book that presents the majesty and greatness of God.

Isaiah is certainly "Theo-centric," totally God-centered. There is no doubt that Isaiah had a very "lofty view of God." Isaiah's concept of God and worship was certainly not what you find in many religious institutions today. **Isaiah saw God as the Sovereign instigator and initiator of all events in history (i.e. Isaiah 45:9-12). God does what He wants even with people who do not know Him (Isaiah 45:4-5).** Nations to God are a drop in a bucket, a speck of dust (Isaiah 40:15). Isaiah saw God as a Holy God, a just God, an all powerful and all sovereign God who was infinitely wise. It was Isaiah who painted a high and holy picture of God, just by the names He gave to God - "Holy, Holy, Holy", "the Lord, the LORD Almighty"; "the LORD of hosts." Dr. David McKenna attempted to write a commentary on Isaiah and he said: "...I cannot see how any student of the Word of God can come away from Isaiah without spiritual transformation. All human arrogance falls prostrate at the feet of the Sovereign Lord. All human utterance fades to a whisper against the sound of Holy, Holy, Holy. Never again can I enter the sanctuary of the Lord without expecting the hush of holy awe" (Isaiah, p. 15). Isaiah presents God as the One and only true, majestic, high and holy God who "deserves and demands universal acceptance and worship."

(Reason #6) - Because Isaiah is a book that presents amazing Grace .

Isaiah is an amazing O.T. book, because it is a book written under the law, which clearly presents Grace. Isaiah has been called the Paul of the Old Testament and **even though the Church of God is not found in Isaiah, the Grace of God most assuredly is found (Isaiah 45:22)**. There is doom predicted, but there is also hope. Some have observed that Isaiah breaks down much like Romans does - first doom and then hope; first all proved guilty and second all may have sins forgiven. In fact, Dr. Martin said the theme of Isaiah's prophecy is "The salvation of God." Isaiah predicted that One would come into this world who would be wounded for transgressions and bruised for iniquities. In spite of Israel's terrible sin, God would send One who could deliver her from her sin. Isaiah does not in any way shirk or water down the subject of sin. In fact, he graphically describes the depths of Israel's sin, but he also speaks of One who could deliver from sin. One who would come through the line of Jesse (**Isaiah 11:1**), who could be a comfort to a nation filled with iniquity. Isaiah is a tremendous book of Grace. C. S. Robinson said that if the N.T. were lost, a helpful gospel for a sinner's salvation could be easily compiled from the chapters Isaiah wrote (Bib. Sac, 1936, p. 451). It is no wonder that Philip was able to lead the Ethiopian eunuch to faith in Christ when he heard him reading Isaiah (**Acts 8:27-39**).

Truth is, this gracious message from Isaiah was not only heralded to Israel, but has been proclaimed all over the world. As Isaiah said, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow" (**Isaiah 1:18**). That is amazing Grace, regardless of the dispensation. There is no question that Isaiah is one of the most amazing books of Grace in the O.T. and in all the Bible. Just as Isaiah could graphically describe all of Israel's sin, so God can graphically describe our sin. But there is gracious news - One has come who can make your dirty, filthy sin as "white as snow." Those who believe in Him will be washed in the blood of the Lamb.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote Isaiah?

Let me be very clear on this point **the entire book of Isaiah was written by the prophet Isaiah** . This was the firm belief of all Jewish and Christian interpreters until the 18th century, when some liberal literary critics tried to attack and discredit the book and suggested that Isaiah was written by more than one Isaiah. **At the heart of their attack was an attempt to discredit the amazing supernatural prophetic predictions that literally did come true.**

For example Isaiah predicts a man named Cyrus would come to dominant power and would permit Jerusalem to be rebuilt more than 150 years before he was even born (**Isaiah 44:28; 45:1**). Furthermore, there are remarkable predictions pertaining to Jesus Christ. This has caused some liberals to say that the book could not have been written by one Isaiah the prophet, so they have said it was written by two different men (#1 - **Isaiah 1-39**; #2 - **Isaiah 40-66**) and some have said it was written by three different Isaiahs (#1 - **Isaiah 1-39**; #2 - **Isaiah 40-55**; #3 - **Isaiah 56-66**).

Once one acknowledges that prophecy comes true specifically and literally as predicted, one must acknowledge the Bible is inspired and all prophecy is true, which means the liberal will face God and be condemned to an eternity of everlasting fire.

There are five irrefutable proofs that Isaiah wrote the entire book:

- (Proof #1)** - The book as a whole claims to be the work of one man - **1:1; 7:3; 20:2; 38:4; 39:5**
- (Proof #2)** - All Jewish tradition says the entire book was written by Isaiah.
- (Proof #3)** - The same literary style of thoughts and language runs throughout the entire book.
- (Proof #4)** - Liberal critics have yet to come up with the others who supposedly wrote parts of it.
- (Proof #5)** - The New Testament clearly proves Isaiah was written by Isaiah.

This actually is the simplest way to refute this nonsense by observing that, in the N.T., Isaiah is mentioned by name 21 times, far more than any other prophet. In those 21 places where he is specifically named there are quotes from **Isaiah chapters 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 29, 40, 42, 53, 61 and 65**. Isaiah is the best established prophet in the N.T. Jeremiah is mentioned in the N.T. 3 times, Daniel 2 times, Ezekiel 0 times. In fact, the very first quote in the N.T. of the Old Testament is a quote from Isaiah (**Matthew 1:22-23**). Furthermore, various quotes show up from **chapters 40-66**, proving he wrote the very section they question. For example in **John 12:38**, John says Isaiah the prophet wrote **Isaiah 53:1**. **Jesus assumed that Isaiah wrote the entire document known as Isaiah** because Luke records the fact that He opened the book and read from **Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke 4:17-20)**. **One does not need to be a brilliant scholar to see that the book of Isaiah was written by the prophet Isaiah in its entirety.**

QUESTION #3 – When did Isaiah write?

We learn from **Isaiah 1:1** that Isaiah's ministry lasted through four kings of Judah - Uzziah (790-739 B.C.), Jotham (750-732 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.). The first two of these kings reigned, generally speaking, in a time of prosperity for Judah. But the third king, Ahaz, was so corrupt that he almost brought Judah to total ruin. It took the fourth king, Hezekiah, a long time to straighten things back out and put Judah back on a course of God's blessing. Since his ministry began sometime during Uzziah's reign (we know he was ministering by the last year of Uzziah's life - Isaiah 6:1) and ended sometime after Hezekiah's death (**II Chronicles 32:32**), we may safely assume that Isaiah lived and wrote between these years - 740-685 B.C.

These were years that featured tranquility and tension, times of comfort and crisis in which there was real "international upheaval." The northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken captive by Assyria and now it looked like Jerusalem was about to cave in. Isaiah is a book for our times right now, because it is a book that goes right to God's Word. **Isaiah causes a world in economic and political turmoil to look to God.** Oh how we need this book right here and right now!

QUESTION #4 – Why did Isaiah write?

There are at least two main lines of thought as to the purpose of Isaiah:

Purpose #1 - Isaiah wrote to warn Judah that the sins she was committing were the same sins that brought about the downfall of Israel. Isaiah predicted that God would bring nations to dominate Judah in the south, just as He had Israel in the north. But as God would reveal to Isaiah, the people did not want His righteous predictions, they wanted “pleasant prophetic allusions.” They did not want to be confronted with Holy Truth from a Holy God (**Isaiah 30:10-11**). Isaiah is no flowery ear tickler; he is a hard hitting prophet who shoots straight truth from God. Sin is evil and it will bring God’s judgment and it does need to be faced.

Purpose #2 - Isaiah wrote to encourage that one day redemption would come in spite of all of the rebellious sin. It is true that God would bring condemnation on Israel and Judah through the nations, but also He would one day bring redemption to Israel and Judah through One born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14**).

QUESTION #5 – What is the theme of Isaiah?

The Majestic, Sovereign God will permit His rebellious people to go through terrible troubles and trials as a judgment directly from Him, but when they finally turn to Him, He will bring His forgiveness and blessing. Isaiah shows that if you want God’s blessings, sin must be rectified and when it is finally rectified God blesses the person, nation and world in a brand new way.

QUESTION #6 – What is the outline of Isaiah?

Dr. Norman Geisler does a nice job of simply breaking down Isaiah and we borrow in part from his outline (Norman Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, pp. 243-248). There are three main sections to the book of Isaiah:

Section #1 - Isaiah pronounces prophetic condemnations against everyone. **Chapters 1-35**
A. Prophetic condemnation of Judah and Israel. **1-12**
B. Prophetic condemnation of surrounding nations. **13-23**
C. Prophetic condemnation of all nations. **14-35**

Section #2 - Isaiah describes land confiscation of Israel and Judah. **Chapters 36-39**
A. Isaiah looks back to the Assyrian invasion against Israel. **(36-37)**
B. Isaiah looks forward to the Babylonian invasion against Judah. **(38-39)**

Section #3 - Isaiah describes the final consolation that will be brought by the Messiah. **Chapters 40-66**
A. God will deliver His people. **(40-48)**
B. God will send a deliverer to deliver His people. **(49-57)**
C. God’s deliverance will include Jerusalem, Israel, Gentile nations and a new Heaven and earth. **(58-66)**

If we, who are God's people, are to survive for a while in this world in a way that our lives will be blessed by the great God of all creation, then we must get back to our spiritual foundation which is found in the Bible and there is no book that is more foundational to our world or our lives right now than Isaiah. Some of God's people think God will not send His judgment, but Isaiah says "yes, He will." Others think it is too late for God's blessings, but Isaiah says "no, it isn't." What God demands is that we face sin and turn away from it and then we may find the grace and favor of God.

Just like Israel and Judah, we have all been rebellious against God and just like her we may experience His grace. One did come who was wounded for our transgressions and if you will believe on Jesus Christ - though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.

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