

## EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #2

Isaiah 1:1

Most of us here have lived through several different presidents of the United States and, if the Lord tarries, we will probably live through a few more. We have lived through some good times and some bad. Times when we thought the leadership was good and times when we thought it was lousy. We have lived through times of when we have had plenty and times when it has been close to poverty. **The job of one right with God, no matter who is in power or no matter what the economic state of the union, is to communicate the truth of God.** Godly people present God's Word no matter what the climate or who the power. Never is that more evident than when you come to the opening verse of Isaiah .

In the prophetic books of the Bible, there are five that prophesy during the Assyrian power (Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah); seven that prophesy during the Babylonian power (Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Lamentations) and five that prophesy during the Persian power (Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Malachi).

**Now Isaiah was one of five prophets who prophesied during the Assyrian threat.** Of the five prophets, Jonah, Amos and Hosea primarily confronted Israel to the north and Amos and Hosea specifically tried to get Israel to turn back to God, but got no response. Nothing could shake Israel's self-reliance. It was Micah and Isaiah who specifically confronted Judah to the south and gave Judah the same message the other prophets gave Israel.

At the time Isaiah actually lived, Israel's history was filled with great struggle both politically and spiritually. The Assyrian power was to the north and the Egyptian power was to the south and Israel and Judah were right in the middle. God had permitted the northern kingdom of Israel to be taken captive by the Assyrians and because Judah did not learn a lesson from this, He was also about to let Judah collapse and be run over by the Assyrians.

Judah was prospering when the book of Isaiah opens. She felt secure. She had a solid military and was living the good life. Spiritually she had become lax. She had morally declined. The reason why God would permit bad things to happen to His people was because of their unrepentant sin. Judah would not admit her sin and would not repent of her sin and God said "okay, you are going down." Isaiah was raised up by God to say to Judah - it is time for you to turn to God, right now or you are heading to big trouble. What is actually said in this opening verse is this:

**GOD WANTS HIS SERVANTS TO SPECIFICALLY KNOW THE PROPHETIC PROGRAM OF GOD AND TO COURAGEOUSLY COMMUNICATE THAT HE IS A SOVEREIGN GOD WHO CONTROLS ALL THINGS, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, INCLUDING ALL THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WORLD AND IF HIS PEOPLE WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SIN AND TURN FROM IT HE WILL BLESS THEM, BUT IF NOT, HE WILL BRING NEGATIVE THINGS INTO THEIR WORLD AS A JUDGMENT UPON THEM.**

God will use political powers and economic trouble to bring about disaster on His own people. God is a gracious God who reaches out to His people, but if His people do not respond, He can bring terrible hardships as a judgment. That is exactly what Isaiah says in this book.

The **first verse of Isaiah** forms the basis for the entire book. Harry Bultema said in **verse 1** you get the author, the contents, the topics and the time periods (*Isaiah*, p. 30). There is a great deal of information in **verse one** and we want to observe four very important facts:

**FACT #1** – Isaiah is a vision. **1:1a**

This point is specifically stated here and it is also confirmed in II Chronicles 32:32, where Isaiah is referred to as a “vision.” It was Moses who said that a vision was a very unique, very rare and very special way that God revealed Himself to an O.T. prophet (Numbers 12:6). This word “vision” is also used to introduce the writings of Obadiah, Micah and Nahum. A “vision” was divinely inspired revelatory truth given by God visually to a prophet. The emphasis of this Hebrew word is on what Isaiah was permitted to see by direct revelation of God (i.e. 2:1; 13:1).

God had specifically revealed these prophecies to Isaiah and let him see them. As John Calvin said there are no human reasoning’s in Isaiah; these are the “oracles of God” (*Isaiah*, p. 36). In fact, in chapters 13-23, which feature Isaiah’s prophetic pronouncements against the nations, the word “oracle” (massa) occurs ten times.

Isaiah clearly saw this visually, mentally and spiritually and he heard it audibly. **This is not Isaiah’s message, it is God’s message.** Isaiah did not just set down one day and write some fireside chats of moral and religious thought. He wrote revealed truth that God actually let him see. So when Isaiah reveals that in 100 years Judah would fall to the Babylonian Empire in 586 B.C., he did so because he actually saw it.

**FACT #2** – Isaiah’s vision is a vision of Isaiah. **1:1b**

When someone mentions the name “Isaiah” today, most think of a famous basketball player. In fact, very few have probably ever wondered what the name actually means or connect it to a guy who lived 2500 years ago. But you may be certain of this - **the name Isaiah to God is inspired and important, for Isaiah was one of the most significant men of his time and one of the most relevant to our time.** He was not known as a player, but a prophet. He was a man of the court; not a basketball court but the King’s court.

When his parents named this Jewish man Isaiah, it was directed that way by Almighty God. Isaiah’s name actually means “salvation is of the LORD” or “Jehovah is salvation” and his inspired writing would certainly speak of God’s salvation: 1) The salvation of Judah from the Assyrians (chapters 36-37); 2) The salvation of all Israel from the Babylonians (chapter 40); 3) The salvation of the Jews from a worldwide dispersion of the Gentiles (chapters 11-12); 4) The salvation of lost sinners from God’s judgment (chapter 53); 5) The salvation of all creation to a new Kingdom (chapters 60, 66:17ff). The grace of God and the salvation of God is something seen time and time again in the name Isaiah.

Isaiah was a man of the city. He seemed to live in Jerusalem and he had access to the royal courts and kings (Isaiah 7:3; 38:1; 39:3). He was not afraid to confront high political leaders with the straight truth of God. He was as bold as a lion and would not flinch at presenting the straight truth of God to Israel, Judah and all the other nations of the world.

Isaiah was married to a prophetess (8:3) and apparently had two sons, Shear-Jashub - which means a remnant shall return (7:3) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means quick to plunder or swift to spoil (8:3). We don't know the name of his wife and we don't really know what happened to her or his two sons. **However, throughout the O.T., there are two personal matters about Isaiah that are continually stated:**

**(Matter #1)** - Isaiah was the son of Amoz. II Kings 19:2, 20; 20:1; II Chronicles 26:22; 32:20, 32; Isaiah 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; 20:2; 37:2; 37:21; 38:1

**We do not know who Amoz (אַמּוֹז) actually was but we do know what his name means, which must be the key point God wants us to understand.** The Hebrew word Amoz is translated in English to mean "take courage" or "courageous" (Psalm 27:14; Deuteronomy 31:6, 7, 23; Joshua 1:6, 7, 9). Rabbinical tradition says Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah and that he also was a prophet, but there is absolutely no specific Biblical support for this. If this were true, then Isaiah did have royal blood in him. However, the thing that stands out about Amoz is that he was a courageous man of God and clearly that dynamic was passed on to his own son, Isaiah. **The thing that stands out about Isaiah, is that no matter what his background was, or how important the person was in society, he was focused on courageously communicating the Word of God to those in any setting, from peasant to king, from pauper to priest.**

In fact, he was so courageous in presenting the Word of God that he literally wore nothing but a loin cloth for three years to communicate truth about God's judgment (Isaiah 20:2-3). Isaiah was a bold, courageous communicator of God's truth.

**(Matter #2)** - Isaiah was the prophet. II Kings 19:2; 20:11; 20:14; II Chronicles 26:22; 32:20; Isaiah 37:2; 38:1; 39:3

In the O.T. world of Israel and Judah, there were various kings who reigned at various times. God would raise up various prophets, whose job it was to communicate His Word to those political leaders and their people. Now a prophet was a person who had been called and raised up by God for the purpose of communicating His Word and will to Israel, Judah and the world. Moses, in speaking about this, said that God would raise up prophets and it was the responsibility of the people to listen to them and their message (Deuteronomy 18:15).

**The prophet's job was always to communicate accurately and precisely the truth of God, which actually featured two aspects: 1) Forth-tell God's truth for the present; 2) Foretell God's truth for the future.** God's messages could be positive or negative and the prophet's job was to accurately present them. Isaiah was not called to be a politician or a promoter; he was called to be a prophet.

A critical point to observe for application from the responsibility of the prophet is that a prophet was to have God's Word before he spoke. His job was to precisely communicate what God's Word was. Never did a prophet permit people to pool their ignorance about what they thought it meant to them. He boldly proclaimed the Word of God and the people knew exactly what God's Word was.

As we said, true prophets of God were very rare when Isaiah lived. In fact only Hosea (a prophet to Israel), Amos (who prophesied against both Israel and Judah - 1:1; 2:4; 3:1) and Micah (a prophet to Judah) were contemporaries of Isaiah. On seven occasions it is brought out that Isaiah is the son of Amoz and the prophet at the same time - II Kings 19:2; 20:1; II Chronicles 26:22; 32:20, 32; Isaiah 37:2; 38:1. **Combining these two ideas, we know that Isaiah was a courageous prophet.**

In fact, according to Jewish historians such as Josephus, it is believed that Isaiah was actually killed by being sawn in two by Manasseh, who was King Hezekiah's successor (Hebrews 11:37). John Kitto claimed that when he traveled in the Middle East, he was told that the corpse of Isaiah was initially buried near the Fountain of Siloam and then was transferred to Constantinople in A.D. 404. But he said he could not prove it (John Kitto, *Kitto's Daily Bible Illustration*, Vol. 2, p. 219). Regardless whether this is the true case or not, Isaiah was a very courageous prophet.

There was a man in one of our churches who used to say - how many truly gifted men of God do you think God sends to a particular city, who can actually unravel His Word? I used to answer, "I don't know." If you draw an answer from the days of Isaiah, you could certainly say, "Not many." You had only four prophets alive and ministering to the entire nation.

**FACT #3** – Isaiah's vision concerns Judah and Jerusalem. **1:1c**

Even though we will see a lot of movement with many nations in Isaiah, all of the prophetic data centers on Judah and Jerusalem. F. C. Jennings observed that "Judah and Jerusalem are the direct objects of the vision." **What this means to us is that the Church is not the direct object of the vision.** Isaiah's prophecies will stretch out beyond the boundaries of these two objects to the rest of the heathen world and ultimately to all of mankind (*Studies In Isaiah*, p. 19). However, we do specifically need to understand this point if we are to make a proper "rightly divided" dispensational application.

W. E. Vine said if you carefully study the book of Isaiah you will discover that Judah and Jerusalem is a twofold theme that is prominent both in chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66 (*Isaiah*, p. 11).

Judah was the tribe to the south and Israel was the tribe to the north. Isaiah is using the term "Judah" to refer to the entire southern portion of the nation and the term "Jerusalem" refers to the key city and capital city of that southern portion. If Isaiah were addressing us he would say - the vision of Isaiah to the United States of America and to Washington D.C. **At the time Isaiah wrote, Israel to the north had its capital Samaria and Judah to the south had its capital Jerusalem.**

At the time Isaiah wrote his prophecies, it was a critical time for Judah and Jerusalem. It was a prosperous time, which featured wealth and luxury and economic and material prosperity. There were military successes and optimism. But that is what caused the problem. **The people developed a self-confidence and a carelessness in their spiritual lives and they were losing a true perspective of God and losing their sense of reverent worship.**

People of Judah were acting corruptly, falling into sin, and making ungodly alliances and then going through the motions of religion once a week. They were saying they were right with God and that they had the blessings of God and that is exactly when Isaiah stepped into the picture. **God hated the sin and the sham religion and He sent Isaiah to rebuke Judah and warn her that He would turn her into the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians.**

Isaiah was a man who cared about these people. He loved God and he loved Judah, Jerusalem and Israel and so did God. In fact, Isaiah calls these people “my people” some 26 times. He was a patriotic prophet, but God sent Him to communicate His Word and that is exactly what he did.

God was warning His people that if they did not respond to His Word and will, He would permit them to be overtaken by various warring powers. Even though this area was prospering at the time, that prosperity would not continue if adjustments were not made to conform to the Word and will of God. God hates it when His people lose their reverence for Him and lose their perspective of righteousness and sin. God hates sham religion.

**FACT #4** – Isaiah’s vision covered the reigns of four different kings of Judah. **1:1d**

Martin Luther said if one is to accurately understand Isaiah, one must understand II Chronicles and II Kings. In fact, two of the four names listed here, Isaiah wrote a biography of - Uzziah (II Chronicles 26:22) and Hezekiah (II Chronicles 32:32). This shows us that Isaiah was not just focused on the future, but also on the present. **It also shows us that Isaiah had a lot of knowledge about imperfect kings, which would enable him to carefully describe the perfect King.** He was interested in what was going on at the time he lived.

If the prophetic ministry of Isaiah began sometime around the death of Uzziah in 739 B.C. (Isaiah 6:1) and if he continued to minister through the death of Hezekiah in 686 B.C. (II Chronicles 32:32-33), Isaiah’s ministry covered a span of 56 years. We know that Isaiah was alive when Sennacherib died (Isaiah 37:37-38), which was about 681 B.C. **We may conclude that all together, Isaiah’s prophetic ministry lasted over 60 years.** That is a lot of years to be in ministry. He fired God’s Word, regardless of whose toes it stepped on, for over 60 years. Isaiah was no quitter of ministry, regardless who was at the helm or regardless of the condition of the times or the world. It did not matter to Isaiah if times were prosperous or lean. People needed God’s Word, no matter what the climate, and that is exactly what Isaiah did, he strongly proclaimed it. Isaiah is a great example to us all - we need people who communicate the truth of God regardless of the political climate.

Now there are four reigns of kings mentioned in **verse 1**, to whom Isaiah prophetically ministered:

**(Reign #1)** - The reign of Uzziah . II Chronicles 26:1 (790-739 B.C.)

Most of the prophetic vision of Isaiah's connection to Uzziah shows up in **Isaiah 1-6**. Uzziah was made king at age 16 and reigned for 52 years (II Chronicles 26:1). He was a king who initially did right in the sight of God. As II Chronicles 26:5 says, "as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him."

God gave him victory over the Philistines and the Arabs (II Chronicles 26:7). Uzziah built things and he prospered. He made engines for war (26:15) and he became famous. You would think that Uzziah would have rejoiced at all he had seen God do, but that is not what happened.

He eventually became so proud of himself that he actually went into the temple and decided to offer his own sacrifices. He was so successful that he thought he could replace even the priests of God. God leveled him. God struck him down with leprosy (II Chronicles 26:16-23), and ultimately that is how his life ended. Uzziah tells us all that one can be greatly used and blessed by God for awhile and become so focused on yourself and your accomplishments that you end up dying a loser.

**(Reign #2)** - The reign of Jotham . II Chronicles 27:1 (750-732 B.C.)

Most of the prophetic vision of Isaiah's connection to Jotham also shows up in **Isaiah 1-6**. Jotham's reign was approximately a 10 year co-regency reign with Uzziah (II Chronicles 26:21), as his father convalesced with his leprosy. Jotham, the son of Uzziah, officially replaced Uzziah when he was 25 years old and he reigned 16 more years in Jerusalem. He was a good king and good builder who did right in the sight of the Lord. He fought battles and won, but he did not destroy the false places of worship (II Kings 15:35). However, even though the people acted corruptly, Jotham did what was right (II Chronicles 27:2).

**(Reign #3)** - The reign of Ahaz . II Chronicles 28:1ff (735-715 B.C.)

Most of the prophetic vision of Isaiah's connection to Ahaz shows up in Isaiah 7-14. Ahaz was 20 years old when he came into power and he reigned for 16 years in Jerusalem. He was a total dud. He did evil and tolerated evil and even promoted false religious worship to false gods (II Chronicles 28:2-4). He pretended to be very pious, but he was anything but that. Ahaz-types are dangerous political leaders. They talk a good game and pretend to be religious but they will sell out their God and sell out their country. For about three years, he reigned as a co-regent with Jotham because the "pro-Assyrian group in Judah" wanted Jotham to turn power over to Ahaz.

He did not do right in the sight of God, so God inflicted heavy casualties on him (II Chronicles 28:5) and delivered him and Judah over to a foreign king (II Chronicles 28:19). He allowed Syria and Israel to invade Judah and destroy her from the inside. Instead of Ahaz turning to God for help, he turned to foreign enemies like Assyria (II Chronicles 28:16). He made idols and sacrificed to them (II Chronicles 28:22-23). Get the wrong leader at the helm and you are heading to big problems. You put some arrogant political leader into power who does not truly reverence or fear the God of the Bible and there is nothing but disaster on the horizon.

**(Reign #4)** - The reign of Hezekiah . II Chronicles 29-33 (715-686 B.C.)

Most of the prophetic vision of Isaiah's connection to Hezekiah shows up in Isaiah 36-39. Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king of Judah and he reigned for 29 years in Jerusalem. He did right in the sight of God. He got Judah back on track, focused on God. He reformed the nation and got sacred worship back on track. Idols were destroyed and victories started to come again. God blessed him greatly and used him greatly to accomplish many wonderful things.

Of these four kings, the first two, Uzziah and Jotham, were very favorable to Isaiah. They recognized this is a special man of God who powerfully communicates God's Word. The third king, Ahaz, was not an open enemy of Isaiah, but he was a cunning fraud. He really didn't like Isaiah and he sure didn't want the Word of God. It was the fourth king, Hezekiah, that really honored Isaiah. He had a great reverence and respect for Isaiah as a prophet of God and he would listen carefully to God's Word.

What these kings teach us is that you can come from a good, godly home with good, godly parents and turn out to be a spiritual dud or you can come from bad, ungodly parents and still end up being greatly used by God and be a spiritual giant.

Isaiah the prophet lived during the reigns of these kings. He saw it all. What he did was to communicate the Word of God. Pure and simple - he proclaimed God's Word.

He knew that what any political leader needs, what any country needs, what any individual needs is a proper understanding of the Word of God. He spoke God's Word clearly and truthfully, regardless of who was in leadership and regardless if the message was positive or negative.

What he said was this - God is a sovereign God and if you will acknowledge sin and turn from it, you will be blessed by Him, but if you will not, His heavy hand of judgment will hit.