

GOD WITH US
Part 7: Kings & Prophets to Exile and Return
Judah's Fall and God's Faithfulness

Message 2 – Isaiah: His Calling and Message to Judah
Isaiah 1-39

Introduction

Isaiah has been called “the prince of the prophets.” His book was placed first in the Jewish collection of prophets because of the scope and significance of his prophecies. His prophecies are quoted more frequently than any other in the New Testament. His name means “Yahweh Saves;” or “Yahweh is Salvation”. He ministered during the reigns of four Southern Kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Uzziah reigned with zeal for God until the end, but he contracted leprosy from disobedience, so his son Jotham co-reigned, continuing to total 16 years. God called Isaiah as a Prophet and spiritual advisor the year Uzziah died and guided Jotham during his reign. Ahaz, Jotham’s son, turned his back on God, yet God used Isaiah to invite Ahaz to turn back (7:1-12), but he refused. Hezekiah continuously sought advice and prayer from Isaiah who guided Hezekiah’s steps in the Assyrian crisis, and with the major religious reforms Hezekiah introduced. He prophesied during the last 17 years of the Northern Kingdom, using their impending doom by Assyria as a warning to return to their God and forsake their injustices, idolatry and evil against their God, otherwise Assyria would destroy them as well.

Isaiah the Man

Isaiah was passionate about his God, his nation and his message which spanned approximately 50 years. He was fearless in his message to approach the kings of Judah, but also the kings of the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. He passionately shared God’s heart for his people – longing for them to turn back while He was still giving yet another window of time offering His mercy. Isaiah was humble and aware of his own sinful heart and lips, especially in contrast to his Holy God, the King of Kings. Isaiah’s vision of heaven’s throne room and God’s call will be discussed below in detail.

Isaiah was married to a woman who was a ‘prophetess’ (8:3), and

together they raised 2 sons. He was told to name each son with a specific name that spoke of God's intentions for Judah: 1. Maher-Shalal-hash-baz ('quick to plunder, and swift to the spoil' 8:1-4,18); 2. Shearjashub ('a remnant shall return' 7:3). These names foretold the nation's coming judgment and restoration (after captivity and in the distant future at the end of the age).

Isaiah used many forms of speech like similes, metaphors, personification, sarcasm, irony, and songs (chs.5,12,35,54), to drive home God's heart and message. He also willingly did odd things like wear a loin cloth and go barefoot for 3 entire years (20:1-6) to foretell how the Egyptians would be taken captive by Assyria (without clothing!) as a warning to Judah who had often trusted Egypt for security. The Bible does not say how Isaiah died, but tradition accounts that Isaiah was 'sawn in two' (Hebrews 11:37), during the reign of wicked King Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah (2Kings 21:16) from the Jewish writings in The Talmud.

Isaiah was an incredibly faithful man who found his identity in His God. He knew from the beginning that he would share the heart break that God carried. He would faithfully speak truth and hope to the people but they would mock him and ignore him. "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced...Who then will bring charges against me? It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me" (50:4-10). When we can find our identity in being His, and living in His love and purposes, then the pressures of people and even ridicule can be shielded from us knowing the LORD is our helper and intimate friend.

Isaiah's Message

His major role was to be God's mouthpiece concerning 4 main topics: **JUDGMENT**- He was to announce that God's incredible patience and mercy were about to end. Because of longstanding disobedience (over 700 years since the Exodus) to the covenant with Yahweh, **judgment** was coming in two waves: from Assyria (the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.) and Babylon (destruction of the Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C.). **REMNANT**- Yet, because God is always faithful to His covenant promises, Isaiah saw visions of a glorious future for God's chosen people. A **remnant** would be preserved through every season of chastisement and captivity, until the final days on earth. **MESSIAH**- A **Messiah** (Savior) would someday come first as a

‘Suffering Servant’ (ch.53) to shed His blood for the sins of humanity to redeem both Jews and Gentiles who would believe in Him. **EVERLASTING KINGDOM-** Secondly, Messiah would establish His rule over humanity with an **everlasting kingdom** that would bring righteousness and peace forever.

Isaiah’s prophetic collection is long, being comprised of many prophecies given during his lifetime of ministry. In general, his prophecies can be divided into two “books” as follows:

I. The Book of Judgment: 1-39

- A. Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem 1-12
- B. Prophecies concerning the surrounding nations 13-23
- C. Prophecies concerning the entire earth and its inhabitants 24-35
- D. Historical interlude: Hezekiah and the Assyrian threat 36-39

II. The Book of Comfort: 40-66

- A. The One true God versus idols 40-48
- B. The Lord’s Servant Who brings Salvation 49-57
- C. The Future glory of God’s people 58-66

This section of notes will focus on chapters 1-39 only.

Overview of “The Book of Judgment” (chs.1-39).

God appeared to Isaiah in dramatic fashion in the temple (ch.6). Isaiah saw a vision of God in His heavenly temple seated on His heavenly throne being worshipped by fiery heavenly beings- ‘seraphim’. They cried out **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.”** (6:3) Isaiah was shaken to his core, seeing God’s glory, recognizing his own sinfulness. Although he had been speaking to the Jews about their sinful lips and behaviors, now he identified with them, in light of this Holy God. When God asked for a messenger, Isaiah was quick to respond as His willing messenger. God cleansed and commissioned Isaiah to deliver a difficult message to the nation: Because of centuries of stubborn disobedience and rebellion against Yahweh, a *judicial hardening of heart* would fall on the people. God would *confirm the people in their own condition of stubborn disobedience* and this would lead to judgment. God told Isaiah from the beginning that he would give a message that would not be heeded, and being a prophet would be extremely difficult. Yet, Isaiah was pleased to suffer for His sake.

“Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (6:9,10).

When Isaiah asked God how long this hardening of hearts would last, the reply was clear:

Then I said, “For how long, Lord?” And he answered: “Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (6:11-13).

A. Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem (ch.1-12).

The hard assignment for the prophets was always to proclaim true reality ‘from God’s perspective’, not what was happening to the people in everyday life which seemed right to them. The nation seemed to be prospering, but Isaiah’s message was opposite to the false prophets of his day: Judah was a ‘wretched victim’ (1:5,6), a ‘ravaged battlefield’ (1:7-9), and Jerusalem was as wicked as ancient Sodom and Gomorrah (3:9; Gen 18-19)! Key themes appear in this section:

The peoples’ sins: were murder, robbery, bribery, exploiting those who were helpless, deception, denying justice, coveting, drunkenness, idolatry and sexual prostitution for fertility blessings, divination, proud men, arrogant women flaunting and flirting, calling evil good and good evil, spurning God’s Law and discipline... yet all was glossed over and impending doom of the Assyrians’ invasion was denied.

God’s promises and hope: Sprinkled throughout the doom and gloom are some of the most well-loved verses of hope. Eg: After King Ahaz refused to ask for a ‘sign’, God promised HIS SIGN:

“Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel” (7:14).

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light: on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (9:2).

“For unto us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time forth and forever. The zeal of the Almighty will accomplish this” (9:6,7).

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse: from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD... He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes, or decide by what He hears with His ears; but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions to the poor of the earth... (11:1-5).

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat... The infant will play near the hole of the cobra... for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (11:6-9).

God’s Holy Wrath (anger): We must be careful to NOT judge God’s ‘anger and fierce wrath’ as we would a human out-of-control abusive rage, or a child’s temper tantrum. Wiersbe describes God’s wrath as ‘motivated by love, which is anguish. It’s the anguish of a father who wants the best for his children, but they prefer to go their own way’ (O.T. History, pg.568).

‘Wrath’ is an old English word defined as ‘deep, intense anger and indignation’. ‘Anger’ is defined as ‘stirring of resentful displeasure and strong antagonism, by a sense of injury or insult’; ‘indignation’ as ‘righteous anger aroused by injustice and baseness’. Such is wrath. And wrath, the Bible tells us, is an attribute of God (J. I. Packer).

B. Prophecies concerning the surrounding nations (ch.13-23).

In this section, God pronounces judgment on all 11 of the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. They were Babylon, Assyria,

Philistia, Moab, Damascus of Syria, Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia and Phoenicia. Although they did not have the Laws of Moses and were not in a special “covenant relationship” with Yahweh, they were still accountable to God for how they treated their fellow human beings. We see several broad themes in this section.*

- God is in control of the nations of the world, and He can do with them what He pleases.

- God especially hates the sin of pride (13:11; 16:6; 23:9). When nations turn from the living God to trust their wealth and their armaments, God must show them that He is the only sure refuge.

- God judges the nations for the way they treat each other. Judah is the only nation mentioned that had God’s laws; yet, God held the other Gentile nations accountable for what they did.

- God always gives a word of promise and hope to His people. Babylon will fall, but God will care for Judah (14:1-3,32). Moab will not accept sanctuary from Jerusalem, but God will one day establish Messiah’s rule over Moab (16:5). Assyria and Egypt may be avowed enemies of the Jews, but one day the three nations will together glorify God (19:23-25).

- Therefore, no matter how frightening the national or international situation may become, God’s children can have peace because they know that Almighty God is on His throne (see Psalm 2:4).

**From Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, The Prophets - Isaiah, p.29.*

C. Prophecies concerning judgment of the entire earth and its inhabitants, and the of the Messianic Kingdom (ch.24-35).

Isaiah turns his God-given prophecies to the whole world. The prophets often refer to this time period of world-wide reckoning as “the Day of the Lord.” The N.T. parallels this time in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Revelation 6-19. Will there ever be justice for the oppressed and judgment for the proud and rebellious? Isaiah affirms that in the end there will. *“Isaiah 24-27 describes a global judgment that will end with the destruction of God’s enemies and the restoration of God’s people Israel in their land” (Wiersbe, OT Prophets, p.30).* The next sub-section (chs.28-31) shifts the focus back to God’s people and the reasons they will experience God’s judgment. *“Chapters 28-31 record a series of five “woes” (28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1) that focus primarily on Jerusalem. Interspersed with these “woes” of judgment are promises of*

restoration and glory. Isaiah is attempting to get the rulers of Judah to stop trusting “power politics” and international treaties and start trusting the Lord” (Wiersbe, p.34). The last sub-section (chs.32-35) focuses on the reign of the Righteous King in the midst of a restored Zion (Israel). It begins with this: “Behold, a king will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly” (32:1). It ends with this: “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” (35:10).

D. Historical interlude: Hezekiah and the Assyrian threat and his prayer when he became mortally ill (ch.36-39).

This section covers the same historical incidents found in 2Kings 18-20 and 2Chronicles 29-32. There is one major addition to the narrative: Hezekiah’s personal account of *his prayer for healing* at the time of his illness is given in full (Isaiah 38:9-20).

A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: I said, “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?” I said, “I will not again see the LORD himself in the land of the living; no longer will I look on my fellow man, or be with those who now dwell in this world. Like a shepherd’s tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!”

But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. Lord, by such things people live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness. The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.”

GOD ON DISPLAY: God's passion for relationship IS with those He has made in His image. Although this was directed to the Jews, the N.T. amplifies God's heart for every human being to know Him and to be brought under His mercy, and salvation. His holiness is an immutable attribute of His Divinity. He cannot change it but He has made provision for it through His Divine Son, sinless and willing to become one of us to redeem us from God's holy wrath that breaks out against all humans. Christ bore His Father's wrath against sin for our sake. He is a GOD OF LOVE, and a GOD OF JUSTICE. His 'unusual work' is judgment, therefore He is so incredibly LONG-SUFFERING in His MERCY and PATIENCE. So many warnings, so many chances to turn back (repent). May we lean into His indescribable LOVE and choose to believe that He is FOR US.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Isaiah's vision of God's HOLINESS and his response impact you (Isaiah ch.6)?
2. It was God's MERCY that caused Him to offer cleansing and forgiveness to Isaiah. How does the mercy of God for your life impact you?
3. God's FAITHFULNESS led Him to give Isaiah many visions of the future, including the Messiah and the Kingdom. Which future vision is your favorite? How does the faithfulness of God minister to your soul right now?

Sermon Overview: Isaiah's Vision of God

(as a picture of the overall message of Isaiah)

Isaiah was confronted with a vision of God's HOLINESS:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke (6:1-4).

He then saw his own (and the nations) UNCLEANNES:

"Woe is me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean

lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (6:5).

The whole nation was weighed down with sin:

“Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him” (1:4).

God’s holiness and our sin cannot coexist. A SEPARATION occurs:

“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made A SEPARATION between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (59:1,2).

Yet, the Holy One also wants to be the Saving One:

“There is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (45:1,2).

“Therefore, the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him” (Isaiah 30:18).

We have a choice to respond to or reject God’s offer of mercy:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you CONSENT and OBEY, you will eat the best of the land; but if you REFUSE and REBEL, you will be devoured by the sword.” Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (1:18-19).

For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, “In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.” But you were not willing . . . (Isaiah 30:15).

Isaiah chose the path of repentance for himself.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven” (Isaiah 6:6,7).

Cleansed and forgiven, God was able to use Isaiah for His purposes.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me” (6:8).

Israel refused to repent and be cleansed. They would face judgment.

“The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father’s house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria” (7:17).

Yet, because of God’s faithfulness, there was still a future for Israel.

1. A Remnant will be Preserved

“Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth . . . And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt” (11:11,12,16).

2. A Messiah will be Provided

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist” (11:1-5).

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (9:6,7).

3. A Kingdom will be Prepared

“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance” (19:23,24).

“And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (11:6-9).



*Credit to *The Bible Project* for some of the imagery in the above diagram. Follow *The Bible Project* if you want to see some amazing summaries of all the books of the Bible!