

Isaiah

1. Introduction

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The Book of Isaiah is the second longest Book in the Bible after the Book of P salm. Even if you are familiar with the OT only in a limited sense, you might have heard this prophet's name "Isaiah."

Isaiah is the prophet we need to pay attention to today as he cries out the divine message to the world that is falling apart from inside. Whether people would like to admit it or not, this world will not and can not last much longer , because humans are, by nature, self-destructive without Jesus Christ. From birth we are sinners, he or she doesn't have to be taught and trained to be sinners, because it is already in our DNA. We had to be taught to be nice to others.

When people are doing whatever they want to do without regards for anyone, we call it 'chaos.' If a prophet of God tells them that they need to repent from their sins and turn their hearts over to Him and seek His way , not theirs, because God's judgment for them is coming, what kind of reactions would the man of God get from them?

For the same reason, the OT prophets were usually despised and persecuted. They received their messages and orders from the Lord as the occasion demanded and could never be sure what would happen next. It was dangerous to be a prophet. Most people resent being told about their sins and prefer to hear messages of encouragement to continue in their sins, not declarations of judgment.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

As is the case with nearly all the Books of "the prophets," the Book of Isaiah takes its name from its writer. Isaiah was married to a prophetess who bore him at least two sons according to Isaiah 7 and 8.

He was a God's prophet under the reign of four Judean kings – Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah – and he likely met his death under a fifth, the evil king Manasseh. Christian tradition as early as the second century identifies Isaiah as one of the prophets whose death is described in Hebrews 11:37, specifically the prophet who was "sawn in two." If that was true, Isaiah had a total split personality .

There are some silly theologians who insist that this Book was written by two or three different authors. According to the many authors of the NT Books and Jesus Himself , as they were quoting what Isaiah said throughout this Book, they named Isaiah as the author. I believe that Jesus and the apostle Paul are far more creditable than some self-impressed modern day theologians.

Isaiah was a very courageous man who was not afraid to denounce kings and priests, nor did he try to be politically correct. He simply and boldly declared the Word of God.

This Book was written between 700-680 B.C. Isaiah's contemporaries were Amos, Hosea, and Micah.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The name "Isaiah" means "Salvation of the Lord" and salvation is the key theme of this Book by prophesying about our Lord Jesus. As many of you already know, the name "Jesus" is an English word that was originated from the Latin form of the Greek name "Iesous", a rendition of the Hebrew "Yeshua" or "Joshua" which means "Yahweh is salvation."

The Book of Isaiah provides us with the most comprehensive prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the entire OT. It includes the full scope of His life: the announcement of His coming in chapter 40, His virgin birth in chapter 7, His clearest proclamation of being deity in chapter 9, His proclamation of the Good News in chapter 61, His sacrificial death in chapters 52 and 53, and His return to claim His own in chapter 60.

Because of these and numerous other christological texts in Isaiah, the Book stands as a testament of hope in the Lord, the One who saves His people from themselves. For this reason, many have called the Book of Isaiah "the Fifth Gospel."

C. THE STRUCTURE

Another interesting feature of the Book of Isaiah is that it seems to depict the completion of the canon of the Scripture in the way it is laid out. The Bible has 66 Books, while the Book of Isaiah has 66 chapters; the Bible has 2 major divisions – 39 Books of OT that mainly covers His judgment and 27 Books in the NT that emphasizes grace and salvation, while the Book of Isaiah also has two major divisions in theme – the first 39 chapters deals with the Judgment of God and the next 27 chapters emphasize the deliverance of God. Do you think that the Lord knew what He was doing?

The first section from chapter 1 to 39 emphasizes the law and judgment for disobedience. But the second section of this Book can be divided into three segments as well:

- Chapters 40-48 – The Supremacy of the Lord
- Chapters 49-53 – The Servant of the Lord
- Chapters 54-66 – The Future Plan of the Lord

D. A FEW INTERESTING FACTS

1) Isaiah was called to minister to the leaders of Judah.

According to Talmud, it states that Isaiah was a cousin of king Uzziah. In other words, Isaiah was a part of the Jewish royalty and he was called to minister in a place of high visibility and influential dignity.

When we hear the word "prophet", we tend to think of a rough looking guy with the latest in "ragbag" fashion and down to his last pair of sandals with holes in the soles. Not Isaiah. He was well-educated and very influential and he lived in affluent times, not times of poverty. Not every prophet of God was called to minister in poverty and obscurity.

2) Isaiah's prophetic ministry lasted 40 years.

Isaiah was serving king Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Though he was in affluent times, but it was a difficult time to minister. It's easier to minister in an economic depression than in a time of affluence. Even though these Israel people had everything money could buy, they were poor spiritually.

Many churches grew and flourished in depression times, but when times of affluence and ease come, you reap the backwash of self-sufficiency. We have a tendency to forget God when we are not in need.

3) Isaiah was living in the time much like ours and the Lord will speak to us through his prophecies in volume.

Socially, Isaiah was living in a time when people were indulged and loving it. They certainly did not want anybody laying a guilt trip on them just like now. The people in America are more concerned about the latest gossips about the Hollywood celebrities, chats in Twitter and Facebook, and sports game score than the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I believe that studying this Book of Isaiah will help us stand alone for the truth of God. We all know that taking a stand for the truth will never win a popularity contest, as a matter of fact, we will be despised. But we will influence the lives of others more by standing firm for our convictions in Christ than going along with the crowd.

Isaiah was living in a nation that was given over to idolatry by their own choice. The people had forsaken their commitment to the one true God – Yahweh God of the Hebrews – and had become contaminated by the polytheistic concepts of the pagan religions. Their idea was, “If one God is good, then certainly two or three or more gods would be better. The more, the merrier. A god for every occasion, every need, just in case.”

E. THE WICKEDNESS OF JUDAH

Isaiah 1:1-3 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me; 3 The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master’s crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider.”

The beginning of the Book is almost like a courtroom scene where the Lord states the charges against Judah and its people for their idolatry. But the Lord was not interested in merely punishing the guilty, rather desiring the people to repent and be forgiven.

Ezekiel 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live!

Please note that the Lord is calling heavens and earth as His witnesses against the nation Judah who broke away from the contract between the Lord and the Israelites. At Mount Sinai, Israel had entered into a solemn covenant with their God, but they had broken the contract by their unbelief and idolatry time after time. They did not appreciate what God had done for them and were taking their blessings for granted. They had forsaken the Lord, gone backward, and grown corrupt; and therefore, they were guilty and deserved judgment.

This is what we call ‘backsliding’ in Christianity. As the bride of Jesus, the church should remain pure and holy to follow Him. But we find that many churches embrace different doctrines than what the Bible teaches. Whether it is done by those individual churches or individual Christians, they are backsliding and walking away from the Lord. They are breaking away from the marriage covenant with the Lord Jesus.

This is like a wife decide to commit adultery with someone other than her husband continuously, but she expects her husband to be nice to her and provide what she wants. You may say, "Ah, I don't think that the illustration fits in here." Yes, it does. Have you ever met any backslidden Christian who expects to be condemned by God? No, the backslider expects God to wink at his or her sin and continue to bless them in spite of their willful sins.

F. THE LORD IS WILLING TO CLEANSE US

Isaiah 1:18-20 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The Lord is telling us to repent and come to Him with broken hearts and He will forgive us from our sins. A simple instruction, yet so many come up with excuses why they wouldn't.

A recent poll revealed that half of Americans who describe themselves as Christians do not believe that satan exists, and one-third are confident that Jesus sinned while He was on Earth. Pollster George Barna concluded, "Growing numbers of people now serve as their own theologian-in-residence." The Bible teaches there is a literal devil and that Jesus, the Son of God, never sinned. These things are Christianity 101, yet so many people who profess to be believers don't understand anything about the exclusiveness of salvation through Jesus.

As believers, we need to realize that Christianity is a reasonable faith. It is a logical faith. We do not have to check our brains at the door when we choose to be followers of Jesus Christ. God is effectively saying, "Let's get this right. Get this straightened out in your mind. Understand these things," in this portion of Scripture.

As believers, we need to think and act biblically, not emotionally. Yet far too many people today solely rely on their emotion when it comes to God. They go by their feeling and don't think. They will say things like, "Well, I don't believe in a God of love judging anyone." Or, "My God would never..." Or, the all-time classic: "Well, I am not into organized religion. But I am just a really spiritual person." We need to study and know God through His Word, the Bible.

We neglect theology, the study of God, to our own peril. C.S. Lewis warned, "If you do not listen to theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones."

Our experience is never to be the basis for theology; rather, sound theology should be the basis for our experience.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Being a Christian means that you often have to stand alone and firm in the conviction of Jesus Christ according to the Bible.

2) Without knowing the theology of God, we will have a lot of wrong concepts about God. We need to know Him through the Word of God.