

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

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Isaiah

Theme: Of all the prophetic writings the book of Isaiah is the most beautiful and sublime. In none of the other books do we obtain such a glorious view of the Messiah and of His kingdom. Because of its emphasis of GOD's grace and His redemptive work in relation to Israel and the nations, the book of Isaiah has been called "The Fifth Gospel," and its author, "the Evangelist of the Old Testament."

The two main divisions of the book will aid us in finding its Theme.

The keynote of the first division (chaps. 1-39) is "Denunciation."

As we read this section we hear the rumblings of GOD's wrath against apostate Israel and against the idolatrous nations surrounding them. In these chapters are prophesied Israel's captivity by the Babylonians, and the tribulation and judgments of the last days.

The keynote of the second division (chaps. 40-66) is "Consolation."

This section contains prophecies of Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity and of their final restoration and gathering to Palestine in the last days. With these two last-named divisions in mind, we may sum up the theme of Isaiah as follows: The wrath of GOD resulting in Israel's condemnation and tribulation; the grace of GOD resulting in their salvation and exaltation.

Author: Isaiah.

Isaiah, the greatest of the prophets, was called to the ministry in the reign of Uzziah (Isaiah Ch. 6). His name, which means "*salvation of the Lord*," well describes his ministry and message. He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and perhaps during the reign of Manasseh (between 757-697 B. C.). He was a statesman as well as a prophet, for we find him speaking and acting in connection with the public affairs of the nation.

Tradition tells us that he was put to death by the wicked Manasseh by being sawed asunder.

Scope: The historical events recorded in Isaiah cover a period of about 62 years from about 760 to 698 B. C.

CONTENTS:

Isaiah naturally divides itself into the following three sections:

I. The condemnatory section, containing for the most part rebukes of Israel's sins (Chs. 1-35).

II. The historical section, containing the account of the Assyrian invasion, and GOD's merciful deliverance of Jerusalem and Hezekiah's healing (Chs. 36-39). These chapters form a link between the first and last section. They serve as an appendix to the first section, for they record the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity (39:5-8), which was the penalty of Israel's sins condemned in chapters 1-35. Because of this same prophecy, chapters 36-39 form an introduction to the last section which deals with Israel's restoration from captivity.

III. The consolatory section, containing words of comfort to chastised Israel and promises of restoration and blessing (Chs. 40-66).

As a basis for our study we shall use the following outline:

I. Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem (Chs. 1-12).

II. Prophecies of judgments on the nations (Chs. 13-23).

III. Prophecies of world judgments ending in Israel's redemption (Chs. 24-27).

IV. Prophecies of judgment and mercy (Chs. 28-35).

V. Invasion and deliverance of Judah (Chs. 36-39).

VI. Deliverance from captivity through Cyrus (Chs. 40-48).

VII. Redemption through suffering and sacrifice (49-57).

VIII. The future glory of the people of GOD (58-66).

SECTION I: CONDEMNATORY

Before continuing the study of Isaiah let the student read II Chronicles 26:1 to 32:33, which will give him the historical background of the book.

I. Prophecies Concerning Judah and Jerusalem (Chs. 1 to 12).

Isaiah begins his prophecy with a vigorous denunciation of the sins of Judah and Jerusalem. In chapter one he strikes the chief keynotes of the entire book. He describes Israel's utter apostasy, an apostasy so great, that were it not for the fact that the Lord in His grace had left a remnant, the nation would have been exterminated as were Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 1-9). Apostate Israel has still the form of godliness, but it is simply an empty formality which is a stench in the Lord's nostrils (vv. 10-15). Then follows a promise of pardon (vv. 16-23), and a promise of restoration through judgment (vv. 24-31).

Chapters 2-4 contain three pictures of Zion:

(1) Her exaltation in the last days (2:1-4), after the ushering in of the millennial kingdom.

- (2) Her present condition of ungodliness, pride and idolatry (2:5 to 4:1).
- (3) Her purification by the fires of judgment in the last days (4:2-6).

Isaiah continues his denunciation of the sins of Judah and Israel (Ch. 5). The following is a brief summary of chapter 5:

1. In the Parable of the Vineyard is shown Israel's punishment for their failure to fulfill the responsibilities that their blessings and peculiar privileges have laid upon them (5:1-7; compare Matt. 21:23-46).
2. Six woes are pronounced against the nation (5:8-24); against the avaricious rich (vv. 8, 9), against lovers of pleasure (vv. 11, 12), against skeptics (vv. 18, 19), against preachers of false doctrine (v. 20), against the self-righteous (v. 21), against unjust judges (vv. 22, 23).
3. Judgment against the nation is prophesied, in the form of foreign invasion (5:25-30).

Chapter 6 contains the account of Isaiah's call to the ministry.

Notice:

1. The vision - the glory of CHRIST (compare John 12:41).
2. The effect of the vision - the prophet's consciousness of his own sinfulness (v. 5).
3. His cleansing and his call (vv. 6-8).
4. His message - the judicial blinding of Israel for their willful rejection of the light (vv. 9, 10; compare Matt. 13:14, 15; John 12:39, 40; Acts 28:25-28).
5. His cry "**How long?**" (v. 11, i.e., how long Israel's blindness would last). The general import of the answer in verses 12, 13 is that this condition will last until there has been a long captivity and exile and a return of a faithful remnant. (See also Matt. 23:39; Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:25).

Chapters 7:1 to 9:7 contain a warning to the king of Judah against forming an alliance with the king of Assyria. The kings of Israel (of the ten tribes) and of Syria had united to invade Judah (7:1) and were planning to place a strange king on the throne of David.

Ahaz, fearing for the safety of Judah and for the continuance of the throne of David was preparing to make an alliance with the king of Assyria (II Kings, Ch. 16). It was at this point that Isaiah was sent to Ahaz to reassure him and to exhort him to trust in the Lord instead of in the king of Assyria, for the plans of his enemies would be frustrated (7:1-9).

Ahaz fears that the line of David will cease if his enemies succeed in capturing Jerusalem (7:6). Therefore the Lord Himself gives him a sign that the house of David will endure forever. This sign is the birth of a child from a virgin (7:14; compare Matt. 1:21), a child who shall be a light to those Israelites sitting in darkness (9:1,2), and who shall reign over the house of David forever

(9:6, 7).

Chapters 9:8 to 10:4 contain an account of the calamities which the Lord had sent upon the ten tribes, but which have gone unheeded. These calamities were: foreign invasion (9:8-17), anarchy (9:18-21), and impending captivity (10:1-4).

Chapter 10:5-34 sets forth the Assyrian nation as the instrument of GOD's judgment upon Judah. The nation upon whom Judah once relied for help (Ahaz sought alliance with Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria) has now become a scourge against them. Though the Lord has commissioned the Assyrian nation to chastise Israel, yet He will judge the former for their pride and arrogance against the One who had used them (10:5-19). Israel will then learn not to put their trust in idolatrous nations (v. 20). However severe Israel's chastisements may be in any age, GOD in His mercy will always leave a remnant who will form the kernel of a new nation (vv.20-23). The Jews are not to fear the king of Assyria, who will march upon Jerusalem, for the Lord will destroy him in a supernatural way (10:24-34; compare II Kings, Chs. 18, 19).

As the prophet predicts the Lord's deliverance of Israel from the Assyrian, his perspective reaches over to the end-time when Israel will be delivered from the anti-type of the Assyrian - the Antichrist, and when the Messiah, the Son of Jesse, will establish all Israel in their land, and usher in the millennial kingdom (Chs. 11, 12).

II. Prophecies of Judgments on the Nations (Chs. 13 to 23)

The events prophesied concerning the nations in chapters 13 to 23 were fulfilled in a few generations after their prediction. While these prophecies found a near fulfillment by Israel's return from captivity it should be remembered that many of them have a future fulfillment in the last days.

The end of prophetic perspective was the millennium, the age bringing Israel's final restoration and subsequent exaltation. In comforting and exhorting the nation, the prophets generally pointed to that far-off event, for, short of this, they could promise no permanent blessing for the nation.

With this thought in mind of Israel's final restoration, the prophet, by the inspiration of the Spirit, predicted the future in the light of the present; i.e., he made present and imminent occurrences a type of future and remote events.

For example: when prophesying a soon-coming national tribulation, and restoration he would usually look beyond these events into the future and foretell Israel's final tribulation and final restoration in the last days. The principle which we have just mentioned is known as the "law of double reference," and is found operative in all prophecy in general.

The following are the nations mentioned in this section:

1. Babylon (13:1 to 14:27). The destruction of the Babylonian Empire by the Medes and Persians is foretold. This event, to the prophet is a foreshadowing of the destruction of the empire of Antichrist together with its emperor and his inspirer, Satan (14:9-17). This to be followed by

Israel's restoration (14:1-6).

2. Philistia (14:28-32). The Philistines are warned not to rejoice over Israel's invasion by the Assyrians, for such will be their fate also. Verse 32 looks forward to Israel's future restoration.

3. Moab (Chs. 15, 16). The destruction of Moab by the Assyrians is predicted within three years from the time of the utterance of the prophecy. Note reference to last days in 16:5.

4. Damascus, i.e., Syria (Ch. 17). In addressing to Syria a warning of coming judgment, the prophet mentions also her ally, Ephraim (the ten northern tribes) . For Israel there gleams a ray of hope of restoration in the last days (vv. 6, 7, 13).

5. Ethiopia (Ch. 18). This chapter describes Ethiopia as in great excitement, sending ambassadors hither and thither, seeking help against the expected Assyrian invader. Isaiah tells these ambassadors to return and quietly watch the Lord bring to nought the attempt of the Assyrians to conquer Judah.

6. Egypt (Chs. 19, 20). Here are prophesied the judgments of the Lord upon Egypt-civil war, subjugation beneath an oppressor's yoke and national decadence. Looking forward to the millennial days, the prophet sees Egypt restored, and together with Assyria, forming an alliance with Israel (19:18-25).

7. **"The wilderness of the sea,"** i.e., Babylon (21:1-10). Another prophecy of Babylon's subjugation by the Medes and Persians.

8. Dumah, i.e., Edom (21:11, 12). Edom is seen in great anxiety making inquiry concerning the future. The answer is disappointing but sympathetic.

9. **"The valley of vision,"** i.e., Jerusalem (Ch. 22). The prophet pauses in his denunciations of the heathen nations to utter a warning against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who were indulging themselves in luxury and merry-making while the enemy was standing at their door.

10. Tyre (Ch. 23). Isaiah predicts that Tyre shall be laid waste, her commercial glory humbled, her colonies become independent of her, and she herself forgotten seventy years. However there is a promise of her restoration.

III. Prophecies of World Judgments Ending in Israel's Redemption (Chapters 24 to 27)

In chapter 24 the prophet announces a general judgment of the land of Palestine and of the kings and nations of the earth, this is to be followed by Israel's restoration.

Chapter 25 records the song that Israel will sing after their restoration, a song celebrating the Lord's might in destroying the cities of their enemies and His faithfulness in defending Jerusalem.

the Lord will make a feast to all nations in Mount Zion will remove the covering of spiritual

blindness from their eyes, will abolish death, and wipe away all tears. All His enemies of whom Moab is typical and representative, will be destroyed.

Chapter 26:1-19 records Israel's song of praise and testimony after their restoration to Palestine.

the Lord calls upon the faithful remnant of Israel to hide in the shelter which He has prepared for them to shield them from the great tribulation (26:20 to 27:1). After the tribulation the true vineyard of the Lord will be protected against the briars and thorns of foreign invasion (27:2-6). Israel's chastisements have been light compared to those of the other nations (vv. 7-11). After their chastisement they will be regathered (vv. 12-13).

IV. Prophecies of Judgment and Mercy (Chs. 28-35).

The above-named chapters contain a series of woes against Samaria, Jerusalem and Edom, interspersed and ending with comforting promises of Israel's restoration and blessing.

1. Woe to the proud, scoffing, spiritual and civil drunken leaders of Samaria and Jerusalem (Ch.28).
2. Woe to Jerusalem, for the formality and insincerity of her worship (Ch. 29:1-14).
3. Woe to those who attempt to make plans in secret, thinking to hide them from GOD (29:15-24).
4. Woe to those who go to Egypt for help, instead of trusting the Lord (Chs. 30, 31).
5. At this point the prophet introduces a picture of the millennial kingdom, where justice shall prevail, administered by the Lord's righteous King the Messiah (Ch. 32).
6. Woe to the Assyrians for their treacherous dealing with Gou's people (Ch. 33).
7. Woe to Edom, Israel's implacable foe, and a type of their enemies of the last days (Ch. 34).
8. Israel's glorious restoration to the Holy Land (Ch. 35).

SECTION II. HISTORICAL

V. The Invasion and Deliverance of Judah (Chs. 36 to 39).

This section forms an appendix to chapters 1 to 36 in that it records the fulfillment of the predictions concerning the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians and her deliverance by the Lord (Chs. 8; 10:5-34; 31:5-9).

This same section serves as an introduction to chapters 40 to 66 in that it records the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity (39:5-8), thus preparing the way for the promises of restoration.

We may sum up the contents of this section as follows:

1. Sennacherib's invasion (Ch. 36).
2. Hezekiah's prayer and the Lord's answer (Ch.37).
3. Hezekiah's sickness and recovery (Ch. 38).
4. Hezekiah's folly (Ch. 39).

SECTION III: CONSOLATORY

VI. Deliverance from Captivity through Cyrus (Chs. 40 to 48).

The above section predicts Israel's deliverance from Babylon by Cyrus, the king of the Persians, who overthrew the Babylonian empire (See also Ezra 1:4). The main thought running through these chapters is: The greatness of the Lord in contrast with the gods of the nations. The following is a brief summary of their contents:

1. Chapter 40 is the key chapter of this section. The prophet is exhorted to comfort Israel in view of the coming Deliverer (vv. 1-11), the Lord's greatness (vv. 12-26), and of His power to give strength to the weary (vv. 13-31).
2. The central thought of chapter 41 is: the Lord's power shown by His ability to predict future events (See vv. 1-4, 22, 23).
3. The Lord has predicted Israel's temporal deliverance through Cyrus. Now in Chapters 42:1 to 43:13 He promises spiritual deliverances through His Servant, the Messiah.
4. This spiritual deliverance is to be effected by the blotting out of Israel's sins by the grace of GOD. This is the message of chapters 43:14 to 44:23.
5. In chapters 44:24 to 45:25 we are given a description of the mission of Israel's deliverer - Cyrus, king of the Persians, who is here a type of the Messiah. It should be noted that Cyrus was surnamed and commissioned by the Lord 150 years before his birth (45:1-4).
6. Chapters 46, 47 describe GOD's judgments on Babylon, Israel's captor and oppressor.
7. The argument of chapter 48 is as follows:

Since the Lord, one hundred and fifty years before, had predicted the restoration of Israel from Babylon through a heathen prince, the exiles could not claim that it was the power of idols that caused Cyrus to liberate them.

VII. Redemption through Suffering and Sacrifice (Chs. 49 to 57).

The above-named chapters describe the Author of Israel's spiritual redemption - the Servant of the Lord.

The main theme is: redemption through suffering. The following is a brief summary of the chapters:

1. The ministry of Messiah, the Servant of the Lord (Ch. 49).
2. The humiliation of the Messiah by rebellious Israel (Ch. 50).
3. Encouragement to the faithful remnant of Israel to trust in GOD both for deliverance from their long Babylonian exile and from their present dispersion (Chs. 51:1 to 52:12).
4. The rejection, humiliation, death, resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah (Chs. 52:13 to 53:12).
5. Israel's repentance for their rejection of the Messiah to be followed by their restoration (Ch. 54).
6. The result of Israel's restoration - the call of all nations to faith in the Messiah (Chs. 55, 56).
7. Comforting promises to the faithful remnant in Israel, and denunciations of the wicked of the nation (Ch. 57).

VIII. The Future Glory of the People of GOD (Chs. 58 to 66).

The prevailing thought of the above division is: the establishing of GOD's universal kingdom and its triumph over every form of evil. The following is a brief summary of its contents:

1. An exhortation to practical religion as opposed to mere formality (Ch. 58).
2. An exhortation to Israel to forsake their sins which have separated between them and GOD (59:1-15). Seeing the helplessness of Israel in their iniquity and the inability of any of their leaders to help them, GOD Himself, in the person of the Messiah, comes to rescue them from their sins and from their enemies, after which He makes an everlasting covenant with them and puts His Spirit within them (59:16-21).
3. Then follows a picture of Israel's glory after their affliction (Ch. 60).
4. Chapter 61 sets forth the twofold commission of the Messiah to bring Gospel mercy at His first coming and judgment on unbelievers and comfort to Zion at His second coming.
5. The appointing of intercessory prayers for Zion's restoration (Ch. 62).
6. Chapter 63:1-6 stands by itself. It gives us a vivid picture of the Messiah as the Avenger of His people at His second coming.

7. Chapters 63:7 to 64:12 record the intercessory prayers of the faithful Jewish remnant. They remind the Lord of His mercy and grace to their nation in the past, and plead for that same mercy and grace in the forgiveness of their sins and in the restoration of their land.

8. In His answer to the prayer of His people (Chs. 65:1-16), the Lord justifies His dealings in relation to His people. Because of Israel's apostasy He has cast them off and turned to a people that did not seek Him neither were called by His name - the Gentiles. In Israel, the Lord distinguished two classes: His own servants and the apostates. Only the former will be delivered while the latter will perish.

9. Isaiah closes his prophecy with a glorious prophecy of the coming of the millennial kingdom (65:17 to 66:24). People will grow old like the patriarchs; they will enjoy the possession of houses and vineyards (65:17-24). Even the nature of ferocious beasts will be changed (65:25).

Religion will become spiritual and universal and mystic cults will disappear and their adherents will be punished (66:1-5). Zion's population will be marvelously increased and the people will rejoice (66:6-14). After judging those nations that have gathered themselves against Jerusalem (vv. 15-18), the Lord will send His servants to preach the glad tidings to them (v. 19). Those who once persecuted Israel will transport them to Palestine (v. 20), and from among those who were once enemies of the true religion, the Lord will choose ministers to serve before Him (v. 21), as representatives of a worship which will be universal (vv. 22-24).

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