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Introducing Isaiah

We will focus on: **first**, the history that’s taking place; **second**, key prophetic messages; and **third**, the revelation of Christ: Isaiah has been called “the Fifth Gospel.”

1. Isaiah in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew Scriptures (the “Old Testament”) have 39 books, 24 by Jewish counting.

The Jews divide the Old Testament into three sections:

“...all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44b).

- The Law is the first five books of the Bible.
- The Prophets contains most of the prophetic writings.
- The Writings contains the Psalms, Proverbs, and some other poetic books.
- The Jews call the Old Testament the *Tanakh*, an acronym that comes from their words for Law (*Torah*), Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and Writings (*Ketuvim*).

- The Prophets section is divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. Isaiah is the first and greatest of the Latter Prophets.
- Isaiah is a large book, with 66 chapters and a high “word count.”
- It is generally considered to be the greatest piece of literature in the Old Testament, known for its beautiful poetry and imagery.
- Isaiah is also utilized in the New Testament more than any book of the Old Testament. The New Testament has more direct quotes from the Psalms, but the NT writers allude to Isaiah more than any other book, perhaps 400+ times.

2. An important consideration about Isaiah’s times.

Isaiah wrote after civil war split Israel into northern and southern kingdoms.

- The northern kingdom, called *Israel*, had ten of the 12 tribes of Israel. Its kingdom was Samaria.
- The southern kingdom of *Judah* retained, for the most part, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, plus the Levites. Its capital was Jerusalem, Isaiah’s city.

3. The Structure of Isaiah.

We can divide Isaiah into three sections, each highlighting a different facet of the Messiah’s career and mission. There’s also a historical interlude.

- The first section (chs. 1-37) we can call *the Book of the King*. It paints a picture of Israel’s King, whether it be the current king, or King David, or the Messiah. This section deals with the threat that Judah was facing from Assyria.
- The second section (chs. 38-55) is *the Book of the Servant*. It emphasizes *the Servant of the Lord*. It focuses on the Messiah, and others who serve God. This section looks ahead to when the people were living in exile in Babylon.

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- This map illustrates the political landscape of the Near East and surrounding regions around 700 B.C. The Assyrian Empire, shown in light green, is the dominant power in the region, stretching from the Taurus mountains in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. To its west, the Kingdom of Urartu (darker green) is situated in the highlands. Further west, the Phrygian Kingdom (red) and the Greek City States (pink) are visible. To the south, the Kingdom of Judah (yellow) and The Egyptian Kingdom (light green) are shown. The map is bordered by the Black Sea to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and the Persian Gulf to the east. Major cities like Athens, Jerusalem, and Memphis are marked. A legend indicates the Assyrian Empire's extent from 824 B.C. to 671 B.C.

4. Isaiah's goals.

- Show people the holiness of God. He often calls God “the Holy One of Israel.”
- He also calls the people to repentance.
- He gives people comfort and hope.
- He wants to assure the people of God’s ultimate victory in history.

5. Other themes.

- He commonly refers to *the remnant*.
- He often speaks against idolatry, and empty rituals.
- He focuses heavily on Jerusalem.
- He shows us how God’s salvation will encompass all nations, not just Israel.
- Perhaps most important, we see Jesus the Messiah. Remember how Jesus read Isaiah in the synagogue: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor...” (61:1a).

6. The man.

- He is called the son of Amoz (not Amos but Amoz).
- Tradition says he was a cousin of Uzziah, and nephew of Amaziah. This would have made him a prince as well as a prophet.
- Isaiah was married to “the prophetess.” They had at least two children: Shear-Jashub, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz.
- Tradition says Isaiah was martyred by the evil King Manasseh, who was also said to be his grandson.

7. His ministry.

- “Isaiah” is the Hebrew *Yeshayahu*, which means *the salvation of the Lord, the salvation of Yahweh, or Yahweh is salvation*. That means it’s related to Jesus’ name of *Yeshua*.
- He prophesied “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (1:1). Uzziah died ~740 BC, and Hezekiah died ~687 BC. Isaiah also recorded the death of King Sennacherib in 681 BC. So, he ministered nearly 60 years. He ministered to Ahaz and Hezekiah during several major crises.
- His prophecies were both a *vision* and a *word*. He was taken up into Heaven and had powerful visions of the Cross and the return of Christ.

8. Caution!

Be aware of whom Isaiah is addressing. Pay attention because Isaiah can be a little “random” in his structure. He frequently points to the ultimate deliverance of God, sometimes in unexpected places.

God grieves over the sinful nation (1:1-7).

1 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.”

4 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. 5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. 6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment. 7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.”

- He immediately denounces Judah’s sin, and reveals God’s disappointment.
- For the first time, Isaiah calls God *the Holy One of Israel*. God gives them a disturbing image: they are like a person covered with wounds and sores.
- This was likely written around 700 BC, when the Assyrian army had come into Judah and burned up the cities, all except for Jerusalem.

God despises empty religion (1:10-11, 14)

10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: 11 “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.... 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.”

This may be the most unflattering comparison God can make!

An invitation (1:17-20)

17 “Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. 18 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.

- A very famous invitation from the Lord – the promise of complete forgiveness. But repentance would be necessary.
- God presents them with two alternative futures. Their repentance and their deeds would determine the outcome.

“From the Jerusalem that was to the Zion that will be” (1:24-27)

The Lord will judge and refine His people so that ultimately, Jerusalem will not be known for sin but for faithfulness to God:

24 Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, “Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. 25 I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. 26 I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. 27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her penitents with righteousness.”

- God promises that one day His people will enjoy godly rulers again. But notice that this is God’s doing – *He* will restore to them righteous judges.
- Have you asked Him to make you holy, as He is holy?

The future glory of Judah and Jerusalem (2:1-4)

1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. 3 Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

- This is an example of Isaiah providing hope to the people (and us) by using his “prophetic telescope.” God will establish His kingdom in that place of idolatry.
- Here is an important picture of Jesus reigning over the nations. He will return to set up His kingdom of peace and justice: the Millennium, or Millennial Kingdom.
- Notice that there will no longer be warfare: Christ Himself will decide any disputes between the nations. The United Nations can never bring about world peace – it will require the presence of the Prince of Peace!

- People will then seek to learn the ways of God. The Word of YHWH will go forth from Zion, and all the Gentile nations will be streaming there to hear His Word!

An introduction to the Day of the LORD (2:5-6, 11-12, 17-19)

5 O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD. 6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; they are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners.... 11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. 12 For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low... 17 The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, 18 but the idols He shall utterly abolish. 19 They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.

- He encourages the people to walk in the light of the Lord. God has forsaken them because they have gone into eastern religions and the occult.
- Here we are introduced to the key concept of *the Day of the Lord*. This is when He arises to judge the earth at the end of the age. This will be the time when He punishes the wicked nations, at Christ's return. You will note similarities to language we find in the New Testament – people going into caves, etc. to hide from the glory of the Lord (see Rev. 6, etc.). Only God will be exalted in that day!

Tell the righteous! (3:9-12)

9 The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. 10 “Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. 11 Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him. 12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.”

- Isaiah warns the people that God is removing their prosperity. They don't even hide their sin. Despite all this, Isaiah encourages them that it will be well with the righteous. God can preserve and bless them even in the face of disaster.
- He prophesies against the proud women who want to live in luxury, and graphically portrays how they will come to ruin, and their men will fall in battle.

His Presence over His people (4:3-5a)

After God enters into judgment with them, there will be blessing; His Presence will be among them. As we'll see many times in Isaiah, God will preserve a remnant.

3 And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. 4 When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning... [cont.]

5 ...then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.

- Every dwelling place on Mount Zion will then be covered by His glory.
- He will cleanse them by a work of His Spirit that will search the hearts.
- Here again, he encourages people to live holy and avoid sin, because of the great reward that awaits the faithful ones.

The Song of the Vineyard (5:1-5, 7a)

1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. 2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. 3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? 5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down....” 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression...

- A famous song: God compares Israel to an unproductive vineyard. See God's disappointment and sorrow. What more could He have done?

Those who call evil “good” (5:20, 25-26)

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!... 25 Therefore the anger of the LORD is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. 26 He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, and will whistle to them from the end of the earth; surely they shall come with speed, swiftly.

- In a very famous line, God pronounces woe against people who say that evil is good. Despite the judgments God has executed, His anger hasn't yet turned away. You will notice this is a phrase Isaiah will use several times.
- God will signal to the nations, saying, “Come here!” (that is, to come and chastise His people). He will whistle to call them from the end of the earth.
- To whom does this apply? I would suggest that this applies to the Assyrians and, later in the book, to the Babylonians. God used those nations to chastise His own people. But He will also use the nations of the world in this fashion a final time, at the end of the age just before Christ returns.
