

Over this term on Sunday mornings we will be studying Isaiah chapters 1-12. Isaiah is a big book (sixty-six chapters) with a clear message – *God has a plan and, as his people, we are to trust and obey him.*

Isaiah prophesied around 740-700 BC, a time of sad spiritual decline as God's people turned away from him. God has given them a land, a city, a temple, blessed them in so many ways. They were his people, called to be a light to the surrounding nations. But they would not trust and obey him. God's prophet, Isaiah, spoke the word of God to people whose hearts were dull, ears heavy and eyes blind (6:10). They refused to listen to the warnings that their sin and compromise would lead to God's judgement, that one day the mighty city of Jerusalem would lie in ruins with the people of God in exile in Babylon. Because the people of God did not listen then, judgement did come when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC and took God's people into exile.

Isaiah's message is a sober warning of judgement, but also a wonderful picture of the sovereignty and grace of God. Isaiah speaks of a 'shepherd' who will lead the people of God out of exile (44:28). God's shepherd is Cyrus the king of Persia who would conquer Babylon in 539 BC and decree that God's people should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the temple. Ezra 1 describes how that happened. And looking way beyond that time, Isaiah speaks of a son who will be called Immanuel (7:14), a child who will be born called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (9:6), the Lord's chosen servant (42:1), a 'man of sorrows', who would be 'wounded for our transgressions,' accomplishing God's purposes of salvation (52:13-53:12). We read the Gospels and see that what Isaiah prophesied has happened. Jesus has come. He has died for our sins. He has inaugurated the everlasting Kingdom of God. And we are God's people, the Church of Christ, called to take the message of salvation in Jesus to the ends of the earth. But remarkably, Isaiah's prophecy (and remember that he prophesied around 740-700 BC), looks beyond our time to the return of Jesus, when the everlasting Kingdom of God inaugurated with his first coming will come in its fullness, a new heavens and a new earth (65:17). Isaiah also speaks about the new heavens and a new earth as Zion, the city of God, the New Jerusalem (62:1, 66:10). This is God's plan.

As *Chalmers Church*, as individual believers, what is the message of Isaiah for us? *God has a plan and, as his people, we are to trust and obey him.* Over the weeks this message will come home to us in both deeply challenging and deeply reassuring ways. If we do not trust and obey God we have no right to feel secure and safe. If we do trust and obey God, our safety and security is guaranteed. Pray with me that unlike the people of God in Isaiah's day, our hearts will be soft, our ears attentive, our eyes open to the message of God's prophet Isaiah.