

DARKNESS TO LIGHT

GOD'S SALVATION IN ISAIAH 1-12



13 OCTOBER TO
24 NOVEMBER 2024

Bible Studies - Part 1



KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

Term 4, 2024

Darkness to Light

God's Salvation in Isaiah 1 - 12

Bible Studies accompanying the Sermon Series

PART 1: Studies 1-3

The Study and Preaching Plan			
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	4	7:1- 8:10	10 Nov
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The sections in each of the studies generally follow the divisions in “The Message of Isaiah - On Eagles’ Wings” by Barry Webb, IVP, 1996. It is part of the *Bible Speaks Today* series which expounds the Bible in a readable and relatable way.

“Isaiah - Surprising Salvation” by Kirk Patston, in the *Reading the Bible Today Series*, Aquila Press, 2010, was another helpful resource for the series.

Some of the comments and questions in the studies are from those books and from these two study books: (1) “Two Cities - Isaiah” in the *Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study* series and (2) “Isaiah - Trusting God in Troubled Times” in the *Scripture Union Lifebuilder* series.

Introducing Isaiah

by Drew Hunter

Getting Acquainted

The Hebrew meaning of Isaiah's name summarizes his message: The Lord saves. The prophecy of Isaiah alternates between promises of judgment and restoration, continually reminding us of the magnitude of humanity's sin, the judgment that all deserve, and the God who displays his glory by saving sinners.

The message is not for Israel and Judah alone, but for the whole world. Isaiah rebukes all nations for their unfaithfulness to God, yet announces a surprising plan of grace and glory for any sinner who comes to him in faith. As we are surprised by grace time and again throughout the book, a glorious picture of God's cosmic renewal develops. Central to this salvation is the sending of a Messiah, a servant-king who will suffer for his people and be exalted in victory.

Isaiah presents God in all his glory, worthy of all our trust. He is the redeemer who rescues from sin and restores all things, to the praise of his glorious grace.

Placing It in the Larger Story

Isaiah stands at a turning point in the history of God's people when, after centuries of breaking their covenant relationship, God's judgment will fall upon them and, indeed, the whole world. Yet Isaiah proclaims the 'good news' that God will bring his kingdom, renew all creation, and restore his people to himself. This redemption will be accomplished through a servant, who will suffer in the place of sinners that they might be forgiven and restored to God. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has begun to fulfill in a decisive way the promises of Isaiah. We await the day when Jesus returns to gather the redeemed to worship God in a new creation forever.

Date and Historical Background

Isaiah's writing can be dated within the time frame of his ministry, which began in 740 BC and continued to the 680s. He served when God's people were divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah's ministry was in the context of Judah as their lengthy period of prosperity declined in the shadow of the rising threat of Assyria. Because of their continual rebellion, Judah would eventually be exiled to Babylon.

Isaiah's prophecy assumes three different historical backgrounds: his own context in the eighth century BC (Isaiah 1-39), Israel's exile in Babylon in the sixth century (Is 40-55), and after the exiles have returned to their land (Is 56-66). Yet the entirety of Isaiah's message challenged his own contemporaries and continues to remain relevant to all of God's people until Jesus returns.

The above is taken directly from the week 1 Overview of "Knowing the Bible: Isaiah: A 12-week Practical Study Series on the Book of Isaiah," © 2013 Drew Hunter. It is available through *Good News Publishers' Crossway Books*, partnering with *The Gospel Coalition*. The course is available online at www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-bible-isaiah/.

A Grand Book

The book of Isaiah is grand. Apart from its sheer length, it is grand in its theological breadth and depth, with the big biblical ideas of God, sin, judgment, and salvation all found within it.

Apart from the Psalms, Isaiah is the Old Testament book most quoted in the New Testament. Jesus quotes from Isaiah at the beginning of his public ministry (Luke 4:16-21) and the second last chapter of Revelation alludes to Isaiah. (Revelation 21:1-4)

Israel and/or Judah

Under kings Saul, David and Solomon the Kingdom of Israel consisted of the 12 tribes all united. After the death of Solomon, the Kingdom is divided: The 10 northern tribes retain the name Israel, and the 2 southern tribes become the Kingdom of Judah. The capital of Jerusalem is in Judah.

Isaiah's ministry was to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Note however that the title of 'Israel' is used in different ways in Isaiah. Sometimes it refers to the Northern Kingdom in contrast to Southern Judah; most commonly it refers to the covenant people of God as whole and is used when speaking of or to Judah. The context means this is usually clear.

In 722BC the Northern kingdom of Israel is defeated by the Assyrians. This happens during the Isaiah's ministry to Jerusalem and Judah. The Assyrian threat to Jerusalem forms the backdrop to Isaiah 1-39. Jerusalem is saved at this time, though in 587BC, Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians who have taken over from the Assyrians as the world power. Isaiah 40-66 looks to the return from the Babylonian Exile, to the coming of the Servant, and beyond, to the end of the age.

Isaiah 1-12

This sermon and study series covers the first major section of Isaiah – the first twelve chapters – introduced in 1:1 as 'The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.'

Isaiah as a whole is about the transformation of Jerusalem and this transformation is a repeated theme in the first 12 chapters.

As we look at this 'vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem,' this vision about a specific city and nation in the eighth century BC, may God speak to us through his Word so that we are transformed as we 'walk in the light of the Lord.' (Isaiah 2:5)

Study 1 - Isaiah 1:2 - 2:4

Religiosity or Righteousness

Getting Started

What causes churches to move from being alive with vim and vigour to becoming formal and fossilised?

Read Isaiah 1:2-31

The Sinful Nation (1:2-9)

1. In a dramatic opening chapter, heaven and earth are summonsed as witnesses by God. What is the essence of Judah's sin?
2. What are the results of their sinfulness?

Corrupt Worship (1:10-17)

3. God is speaking to his people. Why does he refer to them as Sodom and Gomorrah?
4. What is wrong with their religious activity?

5. What does God want them to do?

6. Which is easier for you today - participating in religious rituals or doing right?

An Ultimatum (1:18-20)

7. What is the choice offered by God? What are the conditions?

8. Consider your own religious practices and the needs of those around us. Is there any reorientation or change required so that our religious activity is not a burden to yourself *and* to God (1:14)?

The Purification of Zion (1:21-31)

The lament of 1:21-23 implies there has been no change of heart among the people to the prophetic word of 1:2-20 (compare 1:17 with 1:23 and also see James 1:27) and so judgment is announced.

9. What comes as a surprise in the midst of the judgment? (1:25-27)

For us, living on this side of the cross, the juxtaposition of judgment and punishment with rescue, redemption and purifying shouldn't really be a surprise, because this is how God always acts and how he acts supremely in the Cross of Christ. (Romans 3:21-26)

The Mountain of the LORD (2:1-4)

There is a recurring pattern in Isaiah 1-12, a repeated movement from *before* to *after*. Having felt the drama of God's 'frustration' and judgment in the opening chapter, as chapter 2 opens we turn to 'the last days.' (2:2)

Read Isaiah 2:1-4

10. In what ways is the Mountain of the LORD exclusive?
In what ways is it inclusive?

11. For what purpose do 'many peoples' come to the Mountain?

12. As we look at Israel and the Middle East in October 2024 it all seems so far away from fulfillment. When and how will the peace described in 2:4 finally and fully come about?

Reflections

Isaiah 1:1 - 2:4 shows us Jerusalem's transformation from the darkness of its sin to a city with the light of peace.

13. Notwithstanding what is yet to come, can you think of any ways that the vision of 2:2-4 was partially fulfilled in New Testament times, through what has happened in church history, and in what is happening today?

14. What choices in your life are (or are not) in step with 2:2-4?

15. How should our sure and certain future impact how we live in the present? (2 Peter 3:10-14)

16. Read Isaiah 2:5. Some Bible translations have headings which link this verse with 2:1-4, whilst others have it linked with 2:6-22. Commentators also divide the sections in different ways. How does 2:5 conclude the thoughts of 1:1 - 2:4? How does it set us up for the rest of chapter 2?

Study 2 - Isaiah 2:5 - 4-6

God's Grand Plan

Getting Started

Are you one of those people who always operates to a plan or plans? What features on your plan for Christmas – just a couple of months away? What's on your five-year plan? What might interrupt your plans?

The Day of the LORD (2:5-22)

Read Isaiah 2:5-22

1. After the grand vision of 2:2-4, we have a dramatic contrast. What is the land full of in 2:6-9? What is the core of the problem?
2. What is the underlying sin in 2:9, 11, 12, 17? What is the result (2:9) and what will that look like? (2:10-21)

Note the recurring references to 'that day' in Isaiah 2, and on into chapter 3 and 4 with some eight occurrences in total. The idea of a 'day' becomes common in the prophets from this time on. 'The Day of the LORD' speaks of the day, of the time, when God's goal for his world will be fulfilled through his major intervention into human history. Israel, as God's chosen people, looked forward to this day seeing it as a time of vindication and blessing for them. The prophets, however, warned that it would also be a day of judgment for God's people. See Amos 5:18-20.

As Christians we see the Day of the LORD with a two part fulfillment – in the coming of Jesus in to this world, particularly in his death and resurrection, and then its final consummation with his return at the end of the age.

3. Are we in danger of being like the people of Isaiah's time? Is our excitement about the return of Jesus matched by a concern to live our lives in keeping with his will and ways?

4. How do we respond to the calls of 2:5 and 2:22? What difference does it make to the way we live?

Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (3:1 - 4:1)

The movement in 2:5 - 4:6 from Jerusalem under judgment to Jerusalem restored is similar to 1:1 - 2:4, but now the judgment aspect is given more space.

Read Isaiah 3:1 - 4:1

A note of immediacy is sounded in 3:1 which comes as a contrast to the 'last days' of chapter 2. There is a sense in which every occasion in which the Lord intervenes in judgment is a 'day of the LORD' and an anticipation and warning of the final one.

5. Compare 3:1-7 with 2 Kings 25:1-12 which reports the fall of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon 100 years after Isaiah.

6. Summarise the nature of the judgment in 3:1 - 4:1 and the reasons for it.

7. What warnings from this part of God's word to his Old Testament people (Israel) are relevant to his people today - the church?

Beyond Judgment - Glory! (4:2-6)

After 2:5 - 4:1, the final section comes as a relief. The opening 'In that day,' seems to point well beyond the 'days' referred to earlier in the passage. It parallels the 'last days' of 2:2 and looks to the great and final 'day of the LORD.'

Read Isaiah 4:2-6

8. What is God's ultimate purpose for his people? See also 1 Thessalonians 5:9 and 1 Peter 1:3-5.

9. What are the four images Isaiah uses to describe that salvation?

10. How would these images have inspired the people of Israel at the time and then after the return from the Babylonian Exile? How do they draw us forward?

Reflections

Isaiah 2:5 - 4:6 shows us God's grand plan of Jerusalem's transformation from a place of idolatry and pride to a city of holiness and glory.

11. 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols,' say John in the final verse of his first letter (1 John 5:21). What are the idols that can creep their way into the church, or in to your life, today?

12. Are there ways in which the pride that Isaiah speaks of in Israel is present in the church or in your life?

14. How does the vision of 4:2-6 impact our lives now? (2 Peter 3:10-14)

Whatever season of life we are in we know that God is, and has always been, committed to his people's holiness and ultimate safety. And so we can 'walk in the light of the LORD' (2:5) as we look forward to the heavenly city 'that does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.' (Revelation 21:22-27)

Study 3 - Isaiah 5:1 - 6:13

Isaiah's Call

Getting Started

For the gardeners: Have you ever prepared a garden bed, and done everything necessary to ensure a good crop of fruit or vegetables only to have it fail? How did you respond?

Chapters 5 and 6 of Isaiah continue the pattern of before and after, of transformation. In chapter 6, Isaiah himself will be a picture of transformation, but first we go from the heights of 4:1-6 to the depths of chapter 5.

A Worthless Vineyard (5:1-30)

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

1. Who is the Isaiah's beloved and who does the vineyard represent in this parable in song? (5:1-6)
2. What does the owner do to the vineyard and why? (5:4-6)
3. In case it the obvious has been missed, Isaiah explains the parable in verse 7. What has God looked for? What did he find?

Read Isaiah 5:8-25

4. The six 'woes' of this passage specify what the 'bad fruit' of the parable is. What are the sins described in the six sections? Note the contrast with God's character in 5:16.

5. What is at the core of the sins? (See 5:12b, 24b)

6. What punishment is announced? (5:9-10, 13-17, 24-25)

Read Isaiah 5:26-30

These verses describe a foreign invader who will be the destroyer of the vineyard. Though not explicitly named in this chapter, Assyria (the world superpower) is in view here.

Although the Assyrians are the means, it is God's hand that is upraised in judgment (5:25 and see also 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b) and it is God who summons them with a whistle. (5:26)

Once the Assyrians have been God's agent of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, they too will be judged, and in that process there is a reprieve for Jerusalem. See the narrative of Isaiah 36-37.

7. What is your response to the judgment of God on his people?

How easily we are deadened to the horror of (our) sin and judgement. Take time to personally reflect on the sins of Judah in chapter 5 and be honest about sin in your life.

Confess what God brings to mind. Thank God that Jesus has taken the judgment you deserve, and ask for the enabling of the Holy Spirit to grow you in producing good fruit – growing in righteousness and justice.

I Saw the LORD (6:1-13)

After a five chapters we come to one of the better known passages in Isaiah - the report of his commissioning.

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

The Vision of God (6:1-4)

8. How does the contrast in 6:1 highlight the underlying problem of the Israel in the first five chapters?

9. What is the significance of what Isaiah sees and hears?
What does all this tell us about God?

Isaiah's Confession (6:5)

10. How does Isaiah respond to see the King, the LORD Almighty? What are the two reasons he declares himself to be ruined?

Do you identify with Isaiah in your own self-assessment?

With the word ‘woe’ having been applied to the nation six times in chapter 5, Isaiah must first apply it to himself. He identifies with those whose sin he has been denouncing in the previous chapter. In the presence of a holy God our true condition is revealed.

His Cleansing (6:6-7)

11. What answer is given to Isaiah’s cry of ‘woe’?

In a symbolic way, Isaiah, the unclean man, moves through burning judgement to stand in the presence of God, able to hear and respond. This is a pattern that resonates through the whole book.

Isaiah is cleansed, not by his own efforts, but purely by the grace of God. The same grace was available to all Israel (see 1:18) but in pride they cut themselves off from it. The same grace (and even more so) is available to us in Jesus. (See Ephesians 2:4-5)

The Commissioning (6:8-13)

12. Immediately a question is asked, and Isaiah responds. What do you think he is thinking and feeling at this point?

13. What do you make of the commission and the message Isaiah is given?

14. Isaiah's message is essentially one of judgment but what thread of hope is given?

15. How is our message the same as Isaiah's and how is it different?

Reflections

Having stood in the presence of the Holy God and realised his sinfulness Isaiah is cleansed of his sin. The next thing he says is, 'Send me!' He is a picture of the transformation of God's people. He wants to walk in the light of the Lord. And we despite the different time in salvation history in which we live, we are urged to do likewise

16. Have you ever been confronted with something of God's surpassingly great holiness. How did it happen and how did you respond?

17. Do you see yourself as sent by God?
 - In a general sense?
 - In a specific sense?
 - If so, to who, when and why?

18. Compare the commissioning of Isaiah with the commissioning of Peter in Luke 5:1-11.



