

Old Testament Survey—Isaiah

We have come in our Old Testament Survey to the section known as "The Prophets." They were amazing individuals (see transparency, "The Prophets of Israel").

Discuss: What was a prophet? What did he do?

1. First, he was a "forth teller." The prophets were ethical and moral preachers; reformers who opposed the apostasy of God's people. They appealed to the Law (or the spirit of the Law) to get the people of God to live in obedience to the will of God. The prophets were not clones, and each focused on particular themes dictated by the needs of the times:

Isaiah--sociological corruption

Jeremiah--broken covenant

Ezekiel--apostasy in the Temple

2. The prophet was also a "foreteller." They gave new revelation.

3. The prophet was a model.

Isaiah was the Prince of the prophets. He ministered in the 8th century B.C. as a contemporary with Amos and Hosea (to the north) and Micha and Jonah (in Judah).

To understand the message of the prophets, we must understand the historical setting in which they ministered. Their messages fit a context.

Transp: "The Historical Setting of Isaiah's Ministry"

Who wrote the book?

--Isaiah ben Amoz

Note: Critics have suggested that Isaiah did not write the entire book, and have attributed the final section(s) to Deutero-Isaiah.

According to tradition, Isaiah was the cousin of Uzziah or the nephew of Amaziah (Talmud). This explains his ready access to the king (7:3) and the priest (8:2).

He ministered during the reigns of Uzziah (see 1:1), Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and possibly Manasseh, that is, from 740-690 B.C. Tradition says he was sawed in two by Manasseh (Heb 11:37).

When was the book written?

--Around 700 B.C.

Key: When Isaiah began his ministry, there was a political vacuum in the Middle East which allowed both Judah and Israel to expand and become strong. It was a time of expansion and prosperity under Uzziah (Judah) and Jeroboam II (Israel). This time of affluence also led to a change in the values of the people. Material prosperity led to spiritual apathy.

Then the mighty Assyrians hit the scene (745 B.C.) with their aggressive expansion policy providing a threat to Judah and Israel . Isaiah ministered to the southern kingdom during this precarious time, primarily with the ruling class in Jerusalem .

Discuss: How do you think this historical setting would affect Isaiah's message?

Why was the book written?

Isaiah's ministry was to call God's people in Judah to repent of social corruption and live in obedience to God's Law.

The occasion of the book was the Assyrian crisis. This military crisis produced a theological crisis for God's people and raised a series of questions which Isaiah addressed in his book (see Oswalt):

1. Is God truly the sovereign of history if the godless nations are stronger than God's nation?
2. Does might make right?
3. What is the role of God's people in the world?
4. Does divine judgment mean divine rejection?
5. What is the nature of trust?
6. What is the future of the Davidic monarchy?
7. Are not the idols stronger than God and therefore superior?

What is the outline of the book?

See Transparency: "Historical Setting"

See Transparency: "Outline..."

There are two main sections sandwiched around a historical interlude (36-39). Chapters 1-35 are about judgment, and chapters 40-66 are about comfort.

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah calls the people of Judah to abandon their social sins and live in obedience to God's Law.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

Isaiah's theology is a high-water mark of Old Testament theology. We see the major themes of his book in capsule form in chapter six, his call to ministry. Isaiah's entire pattern of thought was affected by what happened to him in chapter six, when he was struck by the tremendous contrast between the *greatness of God* and the *corruption of humanity*. We see these themes in Isaiah 6:

- a. The Holiness of God (3)
- b. The uncleanness of the people (5)
- c. The possibility of cleansing (6-7)
- d. The rejection of God by many which resulted in captivity (9-12)
- e. The remnant, the holy seed (13)

The following biblical themes are developed by Isaiah.

1. Theme #1: God

Isaiah is primarily a book about God. The doctrine of God is presented here perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in Scripture. The New Testament assumes the Old Testament basis for this material, for very little attention is given to the doctrine of God in the New Testament.

- a. Yahweh is Creator -- 40:26, 28; 42:5; 44:24; 45:7-8.
- b. He is Everlasting -- 40:28 (thus, incomparable; 40:18, 25).
- c. He is the Universal Ruler -- 6:1; 37:16; 40:15-17.
- d. He is the Sovereign over history. As such He uses Assyria to punish Judah (14:24-27) and punish Egypt (19:4); He uses Philistia and Syria to afflict Israel (9:11-12), and exalts Babylon to carry His rebellious people into exile. Then later He raises up Cyrus and the Persians to conquer Babylon and restore the remnant of Jews to Israel (39:6-7; 45:13).
- e. He is holy and transcendent -- 6:3; 41:14, 16, 20; 57:15.

Summary: In Isaiah we see God's holiness (1-39) and His mercy (40-66).

Discuss: In what ways is our concept of God distorted in our day?

2. Theme #2: Sin

Isaiah primarily addresses the sociological sins of Judah. In chapter one:

- a. Ethical concerns (1:15-17).
- b. Ritualism (1:11-14).

Result: Since the people trusted in themselves and lived for themselves (6-8), they will be humbled so they will know who God is and who man is (a creature of God, 17).

Discuss: Why do our ethics matter to God, according to Isaiah?

3. Theme #3: Yahweh's relationship with His people

The Lord desires an intimate relationship with His people as revealed by the illustrations used by Isaiah to represent this relationship:

- a. Husband/wife (1:21; 54:5-6)
- b. Father/child (1:2; 45:10-11; 66:13)
- c. Physician/patient (1:5b-6; 30:26)
- d. Husbandman/vineyard (5:1-5)
- e. Shepherd/flock (40:11)
- f. Potter/clay (29:16; 45:9)
- g. Teacher/pupils (48:17-18)

Theme #4: Messiah

Discuss: What can you tell about the Messiah from the book of Isaiah?

See handout (p. 5)