

Text: Isaiah 1:1

Title: "The Book of Isaiah"

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Introduction: *The New York Times* publishes a best-seller list for nonfiction. Currently, the top 10 volumes on that list include at #1 the title, *House of My Mother*, in which author Sheri Franke tells the story of abuse within her family. #2 is *The Anxious Generation*, which examines the mental health consequences of phone-use among minors. At #5 stands *Cher: The Memoir*, and our first lady's autobiography is #7.

If the newspapers of the first century had published a best seller list in the category "apostolic favorites," Isaiah would have made the list as one of the favorite works of nonfiction among New Testament authors. The authors of the New Testament directly quote the 66 chapters of Isaiah 66 times. These authors include Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter, who together wrote all of the New Testament except the Book of James and the Book of Jude, two brothers of the Lord Jesus.

In addition, the editors of my Greek New Testament found 342 allusions and verbal expressions in the New Testament that are traceable to the knowledge of the Book of Isaiah possessed by New Testament authors, none of whom are left out of this category. These foundational apostles and prophets of the New Testament church knew what Isaiah has written, and they wanted their churches to know what Isaiah has written, and so we must not be ignorant of what Isaiah has written as a NT local church today.

This morning it is my purpose to introduce you to the book of Isaiah, and we will note 3 things about the book from the

way the prophet introduces his book to readers in verse one. We will take this introduction in reverse order.

I. The book of Isaiah comes from the days of 4 kings (1c).

Illustration: Isaiah lived in a day when Khorsabad, the Assyrian capital, was at the great center of the world's political superpower. Archeologists in Northern Iraq recently used magnetic survey technology to find buried there under the sands of time the palace of Sargon II, who reigned from 722 - 705 B.C.. Isaiah lived from around the 740s to the 670s B.C..

The site included a huge villa with 127 rooms, twice the size of our White House in Washington D.C.. This powerful king named his new capital "Fortress of Sargon." After he died in battle, his son Sennacherib moved the capital to Nineveh, the place of the ministries of Jonah earlier and later Nahum. Assyria became the nation that destroyed Northern Israel, and they posed a constant threat to the Southern Kingdom of Judah during the days of Isaiah's ministry.

Application: Isaiah was called to his ministry in the year that King Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1). Uzziah had been a godly king for the most part. Although four kings are mentioned in this introduction as the days in which Isaiah saw the vision that became his book, we know that because he recorded the assassination of Sennacherib in 681 B.C. (Isa. 37:38) he also ministered during the reign of Manasseh (697-642 B.C.). Jewish tradition tells us that it was this wicked king Manasseh who martyred the aged Isaiah by sawing him in two.

The next king mentioned, Jotham, mostly reigned with his father, who had become a leper his last ten years. Jotham's was an inconsequential reign as sole ruler for only three or four years, when a pro-Assyrian party in Judah reversed his stand against Assyria by making Ahaz a co-regent with him.

After Jotham the days of Ahaz took Judah in a different direction. They were days of idolatrous apostasy and weak compromise with the Assyrian threat. Isaiah proclaimed to this wicked king that he must trust God instead of Assyria or Egypt. Isaiah's message to the king was a simple one: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (Isa. 7:9). Isaiah teaches that faith is always the path to salvation.

The Lord offered the king a miraculous sign to strengthen his faith. Ahaz refused the Lord's offer in unbelief. He chose rather to pay heavy tribute to Assyria, and he even built a replica of the Assyrian idolatrous altar in Jerusalem.

In response, the Lord graciously promised His people a future miraculous sign as His merciful plan of salvation: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (7:14). Matthew explains in his Gospel that this was the promise of Jesus's miraculous virgin birth, and that *Immanuel* means *God with us*.

It is an amazing thing for God to be God, and an additionally amazing thing that He has a plan to be with us, His people. These two amazing truths are combined in one of Isaiah's favorite titles for God – *The Holy One of Israel* (Isa. 1:4).

It is commonly recognized that the book of Isaiah contains two parts that are providentially divided into chapters that mirror our Bible as a whole. Just like our Old Testament has 39 books, the first part of Isaiah has 39 chapters. And just like our New Testament has 27 books, the second part of Isaiah has 27 chapters. Like our New Testaments, the second part of Isaiah begins with the voice crying in the wilderness, John the Baptist (Isa. 40:3). The central chapter of the second part is chapter 53, with 13 chapters in front of it and 13 chapters after it. Isaiah 53 is the great chapter of the Messiah's sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people. And the

central theme of our New Testament is the cross of Calvary. Isaiah calls God *the Holy One of Israel* 13 times in the first section and 13 times in the second section.

The book of Isaiah calls God holy more than all the rest of the Old Testament combined. *Holy* means *set apart*. And yet Isaiah's God is not just set apart, not just the Holy One, but rather the Holy One *of Israel*. He is the one set apart who is nevertheless with His people. In other words, He is Immanuel, God with us.

Do we view God as the Holy One of New Boston Baptist Church? Or do we view Him in a casual, complacent, and familiar way? If the latter, Isaiah will remind us that He is the Holy One. Worshipping and serving Him is a formal responsibility, not a casual, optional thing. Or do we view God as distant and unknowable? Isaiah wants us to know that God is *our* Holy One, that He is with us in Christ. We can and must know Him personally.

II. The Book of Isaiah is about Judah and Jerusalem (1b).

Illustration: We have recently seen the return of the MAGA movement in American politics with the reelection of Donald Trump as President. *MAGA* stands for *make America great again*, and the movement is sometimes called *the America-first movement*. It is a reaction of American nationalism against that part of the spirit of antichrist that yearns for the utopia promised by globalism, the one-world government of earth's final rebellion against God, what global leaders in our lifetime have referred to as *the new world order* or *the great reset*.

Application: We see this same kind of political nationalism in God's choice of the Israel of Isaiah as His nation of blessing, here specifically Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah demonstrates that the God of heaven chose to be Israel-first in his day.

God's election of Israel is a blessing promised to Abraham, and it was a blessing that God wanted Israel to bring to the other nations of the world. It is clear from Isaiah 13-24 that Isaiah's God is the God of all nations, but He has chosen Israel, and more specifically Judah and Jerusalem, to bring His saving truth to those nations.

Isaiah is a book about Judah and Jerusalem in 3 ways.

1. Isaiah is about the God of Judah and Jerusalem. He is the Lord of hosts (the armies of heaven) who shall destroy every enemy in ultimate victory: "But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name" (Isa. 51:15). Isaiah tells us He is a Trinity (Isa. 11:2, "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.") and that He is incomparably unique: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isa. 46:9).

2. Isaiah is about the sin of Judah and Jerusalem. God's chosen people were committing the original sin of prideful unbelief in Isaiah's day. This was the sin that caused the fall of Lucifer who boasted, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). God's response is judgment: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isa. 5:20-21).

These woes describe man's prideful unbelief in three areas of life: (1) we choose for ourselves what is right and wrong, calling evil good and good evil; (2) we choose for ourselves what is true, putting darkness for light and light for darkness; and (3) we choose for ourselves what is aesthetically beautiful, putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

3. Isaiah is about the future of Judah and Jerusalem. That future consists of two works of God, first judgment, and second salvation. In Isaiah, the order of these works is very important, because God's promised salvation from sin comes out of God's judgment on sin, which comes first. God does not save by overlooking sin, but by atoning for it in judgment. Both this judgment and this salvation depend entirely on the promised Messiah. In Isaiah, the Divine Messiah is both a child and a king, both a suffering servant and a conquering hero, both a tender branch and a rock of offence, and He is a mighty light that shines to the nations (Isa. 9:1-7).

III. The Book of Isaiah is a miraculous revelation (1a).

Illustration: In 586 B.C., Judah and Jerusalem were finally defeated and carried away to captivity by Babylon, who would later be conquered by the Medes and the Persians. Later that century, over 150 years after the death of Isaiah, the Persian king Cyrus would be instrumental in the return of Israel to their homeland in preparation for the first advent of the promised Messiah, Jesus.

Application: Isaiah told his contemporaries the name of this great future king: "Who saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, 'Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid'" (Isa. 44:28). How did Isaiah know about Cyrus? How did he know his name and what he would do for God's people? The answer is simple. When Isaiah wrote, "Who saith of Cyrus," Isaiah was referring to the Lord, who knows the future (Isa. 44:24). What Isaiah wrote in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. about Cyrus in the 6th century B.C. was part of the vision the great God of Eternity had given him.

One of my theology teachers (Dr. Robert Bell) found 120 places where Isaiah tells us that what he is writing is what

God has said. And Jesus Christ, along with all the New Testament authors that quote Isaiah, agreed with the prophet, that what he wrote is what God has said. The book of Isaiah is not a compilation of multiple musings of religious men. It is a singular vision, unified and complete, from God through His prophet to all with faith enough to read it as such.

And so, the prophet rightly charges you and I as we embark on the study of this great book together: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). To go to this book of Isaiah is not a nice pastoral plan for Sunday morning; it is the solemn command of God. Let’s be sure to obey.

Conclusion: The name *Isaiah* means *the salvation of Yahweh*. In the end, the book of Isaiah is a Gospel of God’s plan of salvation. Through the sacrifice of God’s Messiah, God’s people have a blessed future in spite of their past sin of prideful unbelief, but they must humble themselves and believe.

The great New Testament book that gives the account of this gospel’s spread throughout the known world is the book of Acts. There God’s people fulfill Jesus’s commission to do with the power of the Holy Spirit what Israel failed to do, to become His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

But in spite of that triumph, the book of Acts ends with a tragic quotation from Isaiah about the difficulty of gospel ministry, the same difficulty our gospel ministry faces here this morning. We find the quotation in Acts 28:25-27. It is from Isaiah 6, the account of Isaiah’s call to ministry:

“And when they [the Jews of Rome] agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word: ‘Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet

unto our fathers, Saying, "Go unto this people, and say, 'Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive': For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.'""

How well shall we hear what the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers? Will we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, understand with our heart, and be converted and healed? Will we see the necessity of learning this testimony of God's truth, or find it merely optional? God gave us the book of Isaiah that we might be changed and healed. This is our need. Let's pray for those miraculous results in our lives as we study it together in the weeks ahead.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*