

## CHAPTER 14: Isaiah

Isaiah is a prophet of God during the period of the divided kingdom. He is living in Jerusalem, the capital city of the southern kingdom of Judah. The book of Isaiah begins with this introduction: **Here is the message about Judah and Jerusalem that was revealed to Isaiah son of Amoz during the time when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah reigned over Judah.** (Isaiah 1:1)

Isaiah's early prophetic messages mostly deal with God's judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. Isaiah accuses Judah's leaders of violating their covenant with God, which was made back in Deuteronomy. Among the charges levied against them are rebellion, idolatry, injustice and oppression of the poor. Isaiah warns of the consequences. He harkens back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28. This would include invasions by foreign nations, destruction and even deportation away from their land.

God wants His people to repent of their sins. **“Wash! Cleanse yourselves! Remove your sinful deeds from My sight. Stop sinning! Learn to do what is right! Promote justice! Give the oppressed reason to celebrate! Take up the cause of the orphan! Defend the rights of the widow!”** (Isaiah 1:16-17)

Repentance will bring God's forgiveness... **“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”** (Isaiah 1:18)

God's judgment against His covenant people is intended to purify them. His plan is to create a new holy city that will be populated by a remnant returning to God. This is when God's kingdom will come on earth. Isaiah has a vision where he sees all nations making their way to the temple in Jerusalem where they will learn of God's justice. This will usher in an age of universal peace. **“For Zion will be the center for moral instruction; the Lord will issue edicts from Jerusalem. He will judge disputes between nations; He will settle cases for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not take up the sword against other nations, and they will not train for war.”** (Isaiah 2:3-4)

Later Isaiah has another vision – it is a grand vision of God seated on His throne in the temple. He observes some unusual looking heavenly beings. **They called out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord who commands armies! His majestic**

**splendor fills the entire earth!” The sound of their voices shook the door frames and the temple was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6:3-4)**

In God’s holy presence Isaiah is deeply convicted of his own sin. **Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”** (Isaiah 6:5) Isaiah sees the Lord’s glory! Isaiah feels certain that he is about to be destroyed by the awesome holiness of God. To his surprise this does not happen. God’s holiness, in the form of a burning coal from the altar, comes down and burns Isaiah. But rather than destroy Isaiah, it purifies him. He hears these reassuring words: **“Your evil is removed; your sin is forgiven”** (Isaiah 6:7).

It’s right here in the middle of this amazing revival experience that God commissions Isaiah. **I heard the voice of the sovereign Master say, “Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?” I answered “Here I am, send me!”** (Isaiah 6:8) God instructs Isaiah to go tell the people that God’s judgment is coming. He informs Isaiah that Judah’s spiritual decline is so far gone that his words of warning will not be heeded. Instead the hearts of the people will become even more hardened. But Isaiah is not to become discouraged by their lack of repentance. He is to simply trust God’s sovereign plan. He is to be faithful to do what God tells him.

**I replied, “How long, sovereign Master [will this go on]?” He said, “Until cities are in ruins and unpopulated, and houses are uninhabited, and the land is ruined and devastated, and the Lord has sent His people off to a distant place...”** (Isaiah 6:11-12)

The first story told from Isaiah’s prophetic career takes place during the reign of Judah’s King Ahaz. A coalition of two nations comes up to fight against Judah and Jerusalem. This strikes fear in the hearts of the king and the people. Isaiah goes out with his son to meet King Ahaz and gives him a message from God: **“Make sure you stay calm! Don’t be afraid!”** (Isaiah 7:4) Isaiah assures Ahaz that the enemy army will NOT prevail against Jerusalem.

To prove what he is saying is from God, Isaiah gives Ahaz a sign. Isaiah points to a particular young, single woman who is a virgin that they both know about. He makes the following prediction: **“Behold! A virgin shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which interpreted is ‘God with us.’”** (Isaiah 7:14) Isaiah then goes on to tell Ahaz that before this woman’s baby is old enough to even know the difference between right and wrong (about 2 years of age), the two-nation coalition which seems like such a huge threat to Judah right now will be broken up. One of these nations is the northern kingdom of Israel – their own brothers! The other nation is Syria.

Nothing further is said about this woman or the birth of her son, but the strong inference being made here is that the two-nation coalition Ahaz is so concerned about will not be around much longer. History tells us that within only a few years after this prediction by Isaiah, both of those nations are conquered by the Assyrians.

As we noted before, King Ahaz is not a good king. He has a problem with a lack of faith in God. So later, God sends Isaiah back to Ahaz with a message of judgment. Isaiah informs Ahaz that God's judgment is about to fall upon Judah. God is going to raise up the Assyrian Empire who will swoop down from the north and devastate both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. He tells Ahaz not to be surprised when this happens.

**“You must recognize the authority of the Lord who commands armies... He will become a sanctuary [and] a stone that makes a person trip, and a rock that makes one stumble – to the two houses of Israel. Many will stumble over the stone and the rock, and will fall and be seriously injured, and will be ensnared and captured. I will wait patiently for the Lord, who has rejected the family of Jacob; I will wait for Him.”** (Isaiah 8:13-17)

Well we have just heard a lot of bad news. But Isaiah isn't all gloom and doom. He says, **“the gloom will be dispelled... the people walking in darkness see a bright light.”** (Isaiah 9:1-2)

Isaiah now balances this bad news for God's covenant people with some good news, words of hope...

Recall God's covenant promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17. Isaiah says that after all of the upcoming destruction and chaos ends, God will keep His promise and will send a new messiah king to His people. Isaiah describes this king in glorious terms... **“For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and [His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor], Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His dominion will be vast and he will bring immeasurable prosperity. He will rule on David's throne and over David's kingdom, establishing it and strengthening it by promoting justice and fairness, from this time forward and forevermore...”** (Isaiah 9:6-7) An eternal kingdom ruled by an ideal king! This is great news!

Isaiah continues this thought on into Isaiah 11. David's father was Jesse, and so this coming messiah king is described as... **“A shoot will grow out of Jesse's root stock; a bud will sprout from his roots. The Lord's spirit will rest on him...”** (Isaiah 11:1-2) What Isaiah is saying here is that this king will be a small shoot of new growth that will emerge from the old roots of David's family. God will empower this king with His spirit to rule wisely and to bring justice for the poor. God's spirit is upon him! His kingdom will bring lasting peace. **“A wolf will reside with a lamb, and a leopard will**

**lie down with a young goat; an ox and a young lion will graze together, as a small child leads them along.”** (Isaiah 11:6) This beautiful poetic imagery indicates the quality of peace that will exist during this future kingdom.

So, yes, judgment IS coming to Israel and Judah. There WILL be destruction. And there will be a period of exile away from the Promised Land. But God’s plan is that one day He will bring His people back to their homeland and will send His king to rule in a glorious kingdom.

In Isaiah 13 the prophet declares God’s judgment on Babylon. Isaiah foresees the present Assyrian dominance as a world power being replaced in the near future by the Babylonians. As destructive and arrogant as the Assyrian Empire is, the Babylonians are going to be even worse! The Babylonian kings will make themselves out to be gods. And so, the one true God vows to bring them down. Now remember, from Isaiah’s perspective these events are yet future and some of them will occur well beyond his own lifetime.

In a rather long section, Isaiah 15 thru 23, Isaiah pronounces divine judgment on all of the surrounding nations, those who are Judah’s neighbors and enemies. Isaiah calls them out by name – Philistia, Moab, Damascus (Syria), Cush (Ethiopia), Egypt, Seir (Edom), Arabia and Tyre. He accuses them all of pride and injustice and prophesies their ultimate ruin.

Then Isaiah surprises his readers and listeners. Right after all the judgment against these foreign nations, Isaiah includes judgment against Jerusalem. At this point in history the northern kingdom of Israel has just fallen to the Assyrians. Isaiah points to what happened to Israel as an object lesson for Judah. If it could happen to them, it could happen to Judah. Isaiah decries the decadence of Judah’s leaders, how they scoff at God’s message, how they made alliances with Egypt. The true basis of Judah’s security does not rely on the power of other nations. Rather, it lies in their complete trust in the might of a supreme, all-powerful God.

This reliance upon God is effectively illustrated in Isaiah 36 with the story of godly King Hezekiah. We looked at this story before, but it is worth looking at again. Just as Isaiah had predicted, the Assyrian army lays siege against Jerusalem. The Assyrian king Sennacherib taunts the defenders of Jerusalem. He calls upon them to surrender. Sennacherib foolishly taunts and ridicules God. In response, King Hezekiah does the right thing. He fearfully humbles himself before God. He prays for divine deliverance – **“O Lord our God, rescue us from his power, so all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are the Lord.”** (Isaiah 37:20) The city of Jerusalem is miraculously saved overnight when an angel of the Lord strikes down the massive

Assyrian army dead killing 185,000 troops! Sennacherib returns home and is later assassinated by his own sons.

Hezekiah's greatest moment is soon followed by his worst. Hezekiah does something foolish. In an effort to impress a delegation from Babylon, Hezekiah shows them all the wealth of his kingdom. When Isaiah hears about this, he confronts Hezekiah. **Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Listen to the word of the Lord who commands armies: 'Look, a time is coming when everything in your palace and the things your ancestors have accumulated to this day will be carried away to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the Lord."** (Isaiah 39:5-6) We know from the end of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles that Isaiah's prediction does, in fact, come true.

Fast forward 96 years... As noted previously, under Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonians DO return. And just as Isaiah predicted they plunder Judah's wealth. The Babylonian army kills many of Jerusalem's residents. They destroy the city and the temple and tear down its walls. Those who are not killed by the sword are taken captive to Babylon. This is all part of God's judgment against Judah. And that's how the first part of Isaiah ends – with exile for God's people looming on the horizon.

Keep in mind the main purpose for God's judgment. It's to purify His people. The sad fact is that God's covenant nation has shown that they are really no different from all the nations around them. They're just as sinful. But we know from Leviticus 19 that God wants His people to be holy as He is holy. God wants them to be different from all the other nations. So, through the words of Isaiah in the next part of the book, God is going to address Israel's sinful condition and reveal how He plans to bless all humanity through them.

Isaiah 40 opens with an announcement of hope. **"Comfort, comfort My people," says your God. "Speak kindly to Jerusalem, and tell her that her time of warfare is over, that her punishment is completed. For the Lord has made her pay double for her sins."** (Isaiah 40:1-2) Isaiah sees in a vision that the long period of exile ends. Israel's sin has been dealt with. A new era is beginning. So, God's people should all return home to Jerusalem where **"the splendor of the Lord will be revealed."** (Isaiah 40:5) **"Look, the sovereign Lord comes as a victorious warrior; His military power establishes His rule."** (Isaiah 40:10). God is about to usher in His kingdom. This is exciting news!

God reminds His people who they are and who He is... **"You, my servant, Israel, Jacob whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham my friend, you whom I am bringing back from the earth's extremities, and have summoned from the remote regions – I told you, 'You are my servant.' I have chosen you and not rejected you. Don't be afraid, for I am with you! Don't be frightened, for I am your God! I**

**strengthen you, yes I help you – yes, I uphold you with My saving right hand!”**  
(Isaiah 41:8-10)

This good news should prompt the people of Israel to become witnesses for their great God – telling others of what He has done for them in the past, what He is doing now, and the wonderful plan He has laid out for their future. **Shout out praises to the Lord, all the earth!** (Psalm 100:1)

The Lord God of Israel is sovereign. He is in total control of history. He subdues foreign kings to carry out His will. Isaiah announces that God **“stirs up this one from the east”** and **“commissions him for service.”** (Isaiah 41:2) Who is “this one” being spoken about here? He is a mighty ruler. Isaiah reveals his name. It is the same name we heard at the end of 2 Chronicles – “Cyrus” (see Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1). God says... **“It is Me – I stir him up and commission him; I will make all his ways level. He will rebuild My city; he will send My exiled people home...”** (Isaiah 45:13) This predicts the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia that will free the exiles and send them back home.

How can Isaiah possibly know all this? These events will not unfold for another 200 years. We know that Isaiah dies long before they happen. And this man Cyrus – he hasn’t even been born yet! So what are we to make of all this? Some people attempt to explain away this part of the book of Isaiah. They say there is no way Isaiah could possibly know all this. It had to be written many years later by someone other than Isaiah. This, of course, completely discounts the possibility of divine revelation. In the Bible God does this all the time. He reveals certain future events to certain people for a specific reason. So then, Isaiah IS writing this. God gives Isaiah a vision of the future. God shows Isaiah what is going to happen at the end of the exile. Isaiah then passes this information on to his listeners and readers who need to have this hope. God controls history. He knows what is going to happen. And by His sovereign will, He orchestrates those events to take place.

In this vision of the future Isaiah sees what the mindset of God’s people will be during their exile. And it is not surprising under the circumstances. Many of them will lose faith in God. Through Isaiah and other prophets God tells these future exiles that He will show compassion to them. He is going to deliver them. He will restore Israel and bring salvation. This should be good news!

But instead of bearing witness to the nations of God’s mercy and goodness to them, the people mope. They say tearfully, **“The Lord has abandoned me; the sovereign Master has forgotten me.”** (Isa 49:14) It is apparent to Isaiah that these people do not believe what God has told them. Isaiah can see that the people in exile are going to be just as faithless, rebellious and hard-hearted as their ancestors!

Despite the faithlessness of God's people, God remains faithful to them. This whole section of Isaiah bears witness to God's faithfulness: **"But that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."** (Isaiah 40:31) **"I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I am with you.'"** (Isaiah 41:13) **"I have made you and will carry you; I will sustain you, and will rescue you."** (Isaiah 46:4) God is so faithful to His people!

The prophet Isaiah says that God has a solution to deal with the nation of Israel's spiritual issues. And that takes us to an important section of the book of Isaiah, Chapters 42 to 52, known as "The Servant Songs."

There are a series of four servant songs. They describe in detail a unique and special servant of the Lord. This servant is called: **"My servant, My chosen one"** (Isaiah 42:1); **"My servant, Israel, through whom I will reveal my splendor"** (Isaiah 49:3); **"One formed from birth to be His servant"** (Isaiah 49:5); **"His spokesman"** (Isaiah 50:4); **"My servant... greatly exalted"** (Isaiah 52:13); and **"Righteous One"** (Isaiah 53:11). This servant is one in whom God will take pleasure (Isaiah 42:1). The servant has the spirit of God on him just like the messiah king had in Isaiah 11 (Isaiah 42:1 and 48:16). This servant will **"open blind eyes, to release prisoners from dungeons"** (Isaiah 42:7). This servant will be commissioned by God from birth (Isaiah 49:1).

This servant is NOT the nation of Israel. These servant songs are speaking about an individual, a person. This servant, whoever he is, will come FROM the nation of Israel BUT he will accomplish for God what Israel as a nation failed to do.

**[The Lord] says, "Is it too insignificant a task for you to be My servant, to reestablish the tribes of Jacob, and restore the remnant of Israel? I will make you a light to the nations, so you can bring My deliverance to the remote regions of the earth."** (Isaiah 49:6) The servant of the Lord will have a two-fold mission: (1) to restore Israel so that God's covenant promises can be fulfilled; and (2) to bring salvation to the world.

It is obvious as you read these servant songs that the servant of the Lord, this chosen one, is Israel's messiah king. The character and mission of Israel's messiah, God's Promised One starts to become clearer. We can see that the messiah king will be a servant king.

As Isaiah describes God's servant, there is a sudden and surprising twist in Chapter 53. Nobody saw this coming. Yes, the servant is coming to God's people. Yes, he will bring peace and deliver them. Yes, he will establish God's kingdom. Yes, he will bring salvation. Yes, he will provide hope for the future. All true. But here's the

surprise... God's people are going to REJECT HIM! He will be beaten, suffer, and ultimately die at the hands of His OWN people! What? This is unbelievable!

Listen as Isaiah describes what will happen to God's servant... **"He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed. All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the Lord caused the sin of all of us to attack him. He was treated harshly and afflicted, but he did not even open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughtering block, like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not even open his mouth. He was led away after an unjust trial – but who even cared? Indeed he was cut off from the land of the living; because of the rebellion of his own people he was wounded."** Isaiah 53:5-8.

Because of passages like this one, the servant of the Lord is sometimes referred to as "The Suffering Servant." Isaiah vividly describes the servant's suffering and his death. It says that **"he was cut off from the land of the living."** In other words, he dies. But somehow his suffering and ultimate death will provide a way to heal people spiritually, to mend humanity's broken relationship with God. Isaiah says, **"because of his wounds we have been healed."**

The suffering servant's healing (atoning) work is for all who are willing to come. God extends an invitation. **"Hey, all who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come!"** (Isaiah 55:1) **"Seek the Lord while He makes Himself available; call to Him while He is nearby!"** (Isaiah 55:6)

In Isaiah 56 thru 58 God confront the people of Israel with a list of their sins. The people humbly confess those sins in Isaiah 59 and God is pleased at their honest repentance. He says... **"Arise! Shine! For your light arrives! The splendor of the Lord shines on you!"** (Isaiah 60:1) The picture presented here is that God saves His people and they enjoy all the blessings of God's kingdom.

This wonderful place comes to be known as **"The City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel"** (Isaiah 60:14). It is from here that God's justice and mercy and blessing will flow out to all the nations of the world.

What a grand and glorious vision of the future! God's covenant promises to David, Moses and Abraham WILL be fulfilled. God's kingdom finally comes here on earth!

Isaiah 61 opens with familiar words. **"The spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has chosen me. He has commissioned me to encourage the poor, to help the brokenhearted, to decree the release of captives, and freeing of prisoners..."** (Isaiah 61:1) Who is this speaking? It sounds a lot like the servant of the



Lord from back in the servant songs (Isaiah 42 thru 52). But didn't the servant of the Lord suffer and die in Isaiah 53? How then can he be speaking here in Isaiah 61? It appears like the servant of the Lord is back and he is continuing his mission to restore and save. This is a pleasant surprise. It is a mystery. We are not told what happened between Chapters 53 and 61, but seeing the servant of the Lord again is great news!

As the book of Isaiah nears its conclusion Isaiah awakens from the vision he has been seeing of a glorious kingdom. He finds himself back in the stark reality of his own day. Isaiah looks around at Jerusalem and he laments over the people's sin. The people view themselves as good Jews, as being morally upright. However in God's eyes... "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6) The reality is that the people of Jerusalem's hearts are far from God.

Isaiah prays for the nation. **"Yet, Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, and You are our potter; we are all the product of Your labor. Lord, do not be too angry! Do not hold our sins against us continually! Take a good look at Your people, at all of us!"** (Isaiah 64:8-9) Isaiah recognizes God's sovereignty and pleads for Him to do a saving work in His people, the people of Isaiah's day.

Isaiah goes out and proclaims God's message to the people of his day. He calls on them to live humbly, faithfully and rightly. Blessings await those who are obedient and trust in God. However, punishment will be rendered against those who choose to rebel against Him. This is not a new message at all. It goes back to the blessings and curses from Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

Isaiah gives Judah and Jerusalem this message from God... **"I made Myself available to those who did not ask for Me; I appeared to those who did not look for Me. I said, 'Here I am! Here I am!' to a nation that did not invoke My name."** (Isaiah 65:1) Here God announces His intention to save even the pagan Gentiles who turn to Him! This must have stunned the Israelites when they heard it. Many of them probably thought that because they were God's covenant people they had an inside track to God. But that's NOT true. Through Isaiah God declares that people groups outside of Israel will turn to the Lord God of Israel. And when they do, God will save them.

But in contrast God gives this message to His own covenant people... **"I spread out My hands all day long to My rebellious people, who lived in a way that is morally unacceptable, and who did what they desired. These people continually and blatantly offend Me as they sacrifice in their sacred orchards and burn incense on brick altars."** (Isaiah 65:2-3) God hates the self-righteousness and empty religion He sees in His own people.

Now, not all Israelites are rebellious. There is a faithful remnant that follows God and honors Him with holy lives. These will become God's witnesses to the rest of the world. So, God sees less of a difference between Israelites and Gentiles than He does between those who seek and follow Him and those who do not.

The book of Isaiah vividly paints a picture of the glorious messianic kingdom to come. It reveals that the promised messiah king will be God's servant and that he will save the people from their sins. He will comfort God's people and heal them spiritually.

Isaiah's vision for the future of Israel and the world brings a renewed hope. But for now, given the reality of the nation's spiritual condition in Isaiah's own day, all of that appears to be far off in the distant future somewhere.