



Getting started with Isaiah

Isaiah is a prophet. This means that he was a messenger from God, to God's people (Isaiah 1:1; 6:1-13). Isaiah is one of the most referenced and quoted prophets in the New Testament.

Isaiah was a prophet to the people of Judah (the southern region of God's people). During his life time the northern part of God's people (Israel) fell to the Assyrian empire (722BC). The Assyrians also made an attack on Jerusalem but God miraculously saved them. This is the story Isaiah tells us in chapters 36-37. However because of the unfaithfulness of God's people in Jerusalem, God eventually punished them using the nation of Babylon and sending them into exile – something Isaiah foretold to the people in Chapter 39.

Given this history, it is helpful to know that chapters 1-39 are spoken to the people of God before they were taken into Exile to Babylon. chapters 40-66 are words for the people during and after the Exile.

Isaiah is a long book and it's easy to get lost in the details. But here is something I have found helpful in the past as I have read Isaiah. If we were to capture the book of Isaiah in two words we could pick **JUDGEMENT** and **HOPE**. These are two themes that give you a way through the long but important book of Isaiah.

JUDGEMENT

Isaiah is full of messages of judgement both to the wayward people of God living in Jerusalem, and to the nations around them that are full of idolatry.

Isaiah has a lot to say to the people of Judah/Jerusalem who were not in good shape spiritually. Life in Jerusalem was corrupt, rebellious, full of idolatry, and the nation had started to rely upon other nations rather than on the LORD. Because of this behaviour God was angry with Judah and through Isaiah warned them that He would punish them just as He did to the northern part of the kingdom using the Assyrian army in 722BC.

That means as we listen in to all that God has to say through Isaiah there are sober warnings both to the idolatrous nations but sadly also to the unfaithful people of God.

Therefore as you read the book of Isaiah expect it to make you feel uncomfortable and God uses it to expose our own sinful and wayward hearts. Think of it like a mirror that shows us our own hearts and shows us why we need a Saviour.

HOPE

Whilst there are a lot of warnings in the book of Isaiah there is also a lot of hope. There is hope that God will still fulfil his promises that He made to his people throughout the Old Testament up to the time of Isaiah. There **will** be a king in the line of David. There **will** be a group of people who are obedient to the law God gave them. God **will** bring blessing to the nations through his redeemed people. (These are themes to look out for as you read!)

But in the face of such unfaithfulness and the punishment of exile where is hope and redemption to be found? It is found in the promises we find throughout the prophecy of Isaiah. These are promises that lead us to, and are fulfilled by, Jesus and his kingdom.

- There are promises of a New Jerusalem with justice and peace for all nations (chapters 1-2; 24-27; 56-66).
- There are promises of “Immanuel” (chapter 7), a branch from David’s line (chapter 11), empowered by God’s Spirit, who will be for all nations as He rules in Jerusalem.
- There are promises of comfort for the people (chapter 40) as they return from exile.
- There are promises of a servant who is everything the people of God should be but are not in practice (chapter 49).
- There are promises of a servant who suffers, dies, and rises again, as a sacrifice for sins.
- There are promises of a new creation where all nations will be part of God’s kingdom and submit to God’s servant king. Isaiah is a book that shows us that God is for the world not just for one nation. He is described as the Creator of the world (e.g. 17:7; 40:28). As He said to Abraham, God wants his people to be a blessing to the world – “a light to the Gentiles.” God is the one who throughout the book offers salvation to his people but also extends that offer of hope and salvation to the nations who will repent and turn to him as the only true God. (Isa. 19:16-25; 44:6, 24).

These promises of hope are scattered throughout the book.

Given these promises are so obviously about Jesus, it is little wonder it is so quoted in the New Testament. Here is a structure for the book of Isaiah that might help you to read it:

- Chapter 1-12: Judgement and Hope for Jerusalem
- Chapter 13-27: Judgement and Hope for the Nations
- Chapter 28-39: The Rise and Fall of Jerusalem
- Chapter 40-55: Announcement of Hope through the Servant who fulfils God’s mission
- Chapter 56-66: The New Jerusalem and the New Creation

One writer helpfully summarises the message of Isaiah as follows:

“God will rescue and renew a faithful, obedient people for himself, out of the ashes of Israel’s failure and exile, through the coming of his Servant king (the Messiah – Jesus)”



Here are some questions the Bible wants you to ask of itself. Use these to help you as you read your way through this month's book: (please don't feel like you have to fill in every question in loads of detail. These are a guide to help you learn from what you are reading.)

- What did you learn about Jesus and what it means to trust him? (Luke 24:45-47)
- What did you learn about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)
- How were you corrected or rebuked or equipped for every good work? (2 Tim 3:16-17)
- What did you learn from the book that will help you keep going as a follower of Jesus? (Romans 15:4)
- What did you learn that will help you serve and build up the church? (Eph 4:11-16)
- What have you learnt that helps you love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your mind? (Matt 22:37-40)
- What has helped you love your neighbour as yourself? (Matt 22:37-40)

My notes of Isaiah:



g r o w
g r o u p

RBT Grow Group is on Tuesday 27th June

Bring along some things from your reading of
Isaiah to share with others.

Some RBT reading ideas:

Why not meet up once a week to read it with a friend?

Why not listen online at Biblegateway.com?

Check out this really helpful poster outlining Isaiah: <https://thebibleproject.com/product/isaiah-poster/>