Studies through the book of Isaiah.
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An Introduction to Isaiah

Background to Isaiah 1-12

Chapters 1-5 introduce the theme of disobedience. There are also the themes of “hope” and “no hope”. On one hand, God has a future for his people. But on the other hand, God must also judge their sin. The first 5 chapters are quite dark, and there is not much talk of hope.

Chapters 6-12 open with the story of the prophet Isaiah having his sin cleansed, and this section ends with the song of a saved community. There is reference to King David and those days of glory under his Kingship. Then there is reference to the terrible King Ahaz. These chapters help Israel, God’s people, look forward to a time when they will be under the reign of the perfect King.

Isaiah is the revelation of the conflict between divine Glory and human pride, and the grace of God in bringing restoration to a destroyed humanity. God is holy, and his love is above all else.

Isaiah prophesied between 739-701BC. It was in this time that chapters 1-39 were believed to have been written.

Chapters 40-55 cover the years of exile, 605-539BC.

Chapters 56-66 cover most likely the return from exile, 539-500BC.

Isaiah was written in the context of the Assyrian Crisis, which would bring about the destruction of Northern Israel and threaten the existence of Southern Israel (Judah).

This was a crisis for the people of God:
• Is God truly more powerful than the other godless nations?
• What is the role of God’s people in the world?
• If God judges, will they be destroyed totally? Will God still love them?
• What is the future of the Davidic monarchy?

**Things to look out for in the book of Isaiah:**

• God is the Holy One. The whole earth is full of his glory. He is morally and ethically perfect. It is an offence to his very nature. What does this mean for God’s people?
• Humanity – who are we before God? Are we nothing? Are we everything? If God is exalted above all else, where does that leave us? Why does he care about us? What are we to him?
• Sin is rebellion against God. It is a refusal to accept God’s complete Lordship over all things in our life and our world. Sin is a refusal to admit dependency on God. What do we do about sin, then?
• Judgement and redemption is God’s response to sin. Chapters 1-39 focus on judgement. Chapters 40-66 focus on redemption.
  o Judgement – comes in many forms – natural disaster, military defeat, disease – all from the hand of God. Judgement is the outworking of the personal outrage of God for sin against him by his people.
  o Redemption is seen in the faithfulness of a God who is willing to let his anger go. He does not want to lose his people. As our creator, God cares about his creation. God wants to restore his holy image in his people, and restore them to their land, and restore social justice, as well as restore the servant hood of his people. God will make his people like himself, by sharing with them his holy character.
Study one

God's charge

Isaiah 1:1-20 Isaiah 1:21-31

Opening discussion

• What defines faithfulness in a relationship?

• What defines unfaithfulness in a relationship?

Ensure that everyone has had time to read through the introductory notes on the book of Isaiah, in order to give some context to these studies.

Read Isaiah 1:1-31
(Note: “Zion” is the city of God. On earth, it is Jerusalem. After the return of Jesus, it will be the city of heaven itself.)

1. What tone does Isaiah chapter 1 set?

2. Verse 1 – Concerning Judah and Jerusalem – i.e. Southern Israel. What sort of Kings were Uzziah (aka “Azariah”) (2 Kings 15:1-5), Jotham (2 Kings 15:32-35), Ahaz (2 Kings 16:1-4) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-5)? And what were the people of Israel like during their reigns?
3. Verses 2-9: What is happening in Israel?

4. Verses 10-17: Why is God sick of their sacrifices and festivals?

5. Verses 18-20 (and up to verse 31): What is God promising in the midst of Israel’s sinfulness? Why does he offer this glimmer of hope?

6. Is the situation of God’s people, in all their sin, hopeless? Is it ever hopeless?

7. Can you identify with Israel’s situation of sinfulness? How do we end up in that place with God? How do we end up being so continually sinful that God is angry with us?

8. God still promises restoration to Israel. What does this tell you about the character of God? How is that relevant to us today?

9. Where do you think Jesus fits into this picture of chapter 1?
Study Two

God's day

Isaiah 2:1-5  Isaiah 2:6-22

Opening discussion

• What defines the people of God? What should we “look” like to the world?

Read Isaiah 2:1-5

1. In this end time vision, what does the city of God look like?
   a. What will God do?
   b. What will his people do?
   c. What will the other nations do?

2. Does our church today look anything like this picture? In what ways does it, or doesn’t it?

Read Isaiah 2:6-22

3. What are the practices of Israel for which they are being judged in verses 6-9?
4. The themes of humility and pride and arrogance come into this passage quite a lot.

   a. Why do you think God’s prophecy through Isaiah focuses on these things as sin?

   b. What is the ultimate problem with pride and arrogance for God’s people?

5. Discuss verse 22.

6. In what ways do we see pride and arrogance in the people of God in our churches?

7. In what ways do we see humility in the people of God in our churches?

8. Do you struggle with pride or arrogance? If so, how?
Study Three

God's vineyard

Isaiah 5:1-7  Isaiah 5:8-30

Opening Discussion

• Have you ever been at a point with someone where you feel you just cannot offer them any more grace? Discuss how that makes you feel to be at that point with someone.

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

1. In this powerful metaphor of the vineyard, what do we learn about:

   a. The work and character of God?

   b. The work and character of humanity?

2. Why is God so angry?

3. What do these verses say about human free choice?
Read Isaiah 5:8-30

*Note first:* In Israel, God had apportioned the land to each family. Even if they sold their land to get out of debt, the land was still to return to them in the 50th year of Jubilee. However, this had not happened. Some were becoming richer and richer, and building mansions, while others had nothing to live on. Land was not only where you lived. It was how you fed your family. Hence, the problem had huge implications for the community of God.

**Verses 8-17**

4. What is the sin of the rich and powerful in these verses?

5. What will happen to the rich mansions and owners?

6. What will happen to the poor? What will justice look like?

7. Think of our own place in the world. We are among the richest people in the world. Is there any way that we may be guilty of these same sins in the way we treat those in need?

**Verses 25-30**

These verses speak of the Lord’s judgement coming by his command of other armies. God reminds them that he is powerful over ALL forces.

8. What do these verses tell us about the character of God when it comes to seeing his desire for judgement?
Study Four -

God's call

Isaiah 6:1-13

Opening Discussion

• Have you ever been called on to do something difficult? What made it difficult to do?

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

1. What is the theme of these verses?

2. What do these verses tell us about God’s character?

3. How does Isaiah respond to God’s presence?

4. In verse 7, we see the theme of atonement introduced. What is atonement? What does it mean to have our sins atoned for?
Read Isaiah 6:9-13

5. Why does God want Israel to be destroyed? Why does he want them NOT to turn yet?

In answering this question, consider this quote: “...verses 9-10 are a very stark statement of the preacher’s dilemma: those who resist the truth can be changed only by telling them the truth, but to do this exposes them to the danger of rejecting the truth yet once again – and maybe this further rejection will push them to the point of no return and they will become irretrievably hardened in mind and heart (Hebrews 6:4-8)” From Alec Motyer, “Isaiah” Tyndale Commentary Series, page 73.

6. In verse 13, we are told a tenth will remain. This is known as “the remnant”. God always leaves something behind. He never completely destroys his people.

   a. Why?

   b. Again, what does THIS tell us about God’s character?

7. How do you treat God as “Holy” in your life? Are there times you do not treat him as Holy? How does that affect your relationship with Him?
Study Five

God's hope

Isaiah 7:1-17 Isaiah 7:18-25

Opening discussion

• What do you do when you face a threat in your life?

Read Isaiah 7:1-13

1. Verse 9 is a call to trust God. Where people may make political or military decisions, the one who follows God is called to trust Him and His wisdom alone. Given the prophecy of Isaiah in this chapter, how difficult would it have been to remain faithful to God, and to hear these words: “be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid” (verse 4)?

2. Read 2 Chronicles 28 to get a grasp of the attacks against Jerusalem and the actions of the King. How did Ahaz respond to Isaiah’s words from God?

3. How do we respond to God when he calls on us to trust him?
Read Isaiah 7:14-18
Some explanation:
“The separation of Ephraim (1 Kings 12:20) reduced David’s kingdom to a tiny remainder. The coming of the King of Assyria would take even this from David: the semblance of monarchy would survive another century but the reality would never be restored. This was indeed the case: from the time when Ahaz disbelieved, he and David’s descendants reigned as puppet kings, by courtesy first of Assyria and then of Babylon, until the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC extinguished kingdom and monarchy altogether so that (with Christian hindsight), when Immanuel was born, the heir to the throne was an unknown carpenter in Nazareth (Matthew 1:16)!
From Alec Motyer, “Isaiah” Tyndale Commentary Series, page 78.

This prophecy of Jesus, Immanuel, born to a virgin, signs that it will be a long time coming before we see God’s people restored to God as his people, under God’s King.

Read Isaiah 7:18-25
4. “In that day”, before Immanuel (Jesus), when God brings judgement down on his people, what is the picture we are given of what will happen?

5. Why is God’s judgement so complete and destructive? What does this say about his view of sin and the effect it has upon his people?

6. What does this chapter say to us about how we deal with sin in our own lives?
Study Six

God's judgment

Isaiah 8:1-10 Isaiah 8:11-22

Opening Discussion

- Have you seen God’s plans for you unfold in your life? If so, how?

Read Isaiah 8:1-10

1. The name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, the longest name in the Bible, literally translates to “Speed-Spoil-Haste-Booty”. It is the name given to the child of the prophetess (Isaiah’s wife). What does this name imply about the attack that will come upon God’s people?

2. This new sign of another child is a sign for the immediate context (unlike the sign of Immanuel). So what happened?
   a. In 734BC, Tiglath-Pileser came down to the Egyptian border. Egyptian aid to Israel was cut off.
   b. 733BC – Israel lost Galilee, Transjordan (the Israeliite land across the other side of the Jordan river), and Megiddo and other cities.
c. Hoshea (quickly read 2 Kings 17:1-2) submitted in some ways to God, but it was too little and too late. Damascus fell in 732BC. It was over. It all happened very quickly. And completely.

What do you think of God’s ways in bringing destruction to Israel by using other nations?

Read Isaiah 8:11-22

3. What does God call on Isaiah to do?

4. Again, God refers to his holiness. In what ways has Israel not treated him as holy?

5. In verses 19-20

   a. What instruction do these verses give us today of the way we are to seek guidance and wisdom?

   b. What practices in our society would God find detestable today?

6. How do you seek guidance from God’s Word today in your life?
Study Seven

God's salvation chapter 9-12

Isaiah 9:1-7  Isaiah 11:1-11

Opening discussion

• What makes a great leader?

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

1. As you read this prophecy of the reign of Jesus that will come, what fresh understanding do you have of these prophetic verses in light of the situation in Israel during Isaiah’s time?

2. Verse 7 – how will this be accomplished? What is the zeal of the Lord? What is he zealous for?

3. What would this hope have meant for Israel while they were in exile?
Read Isaiah 11:1-11

4. How does the leadership/kingship of this new leader (Jesus) compare to the old leadership of sinful Israel?

5. Verses 10-11:
   a. In what way is Jesus a banner for the nations through the ministry of your church?
   b. In what way is the Lord reaching out his hand to people through the ministry of your church?

6. Discuss the themes of darkness and light in reference to the chapter 7 and 11 prophecies of Jesus.

7. Random but related question! Read 1 Corinthians 11:26. How do we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes?

8. How do you show your hope in Jesus’ second coming in your day to day life?

9. If you have time, discuss again the idea of God’s holiness in these first 12 chapters of Isaiah.