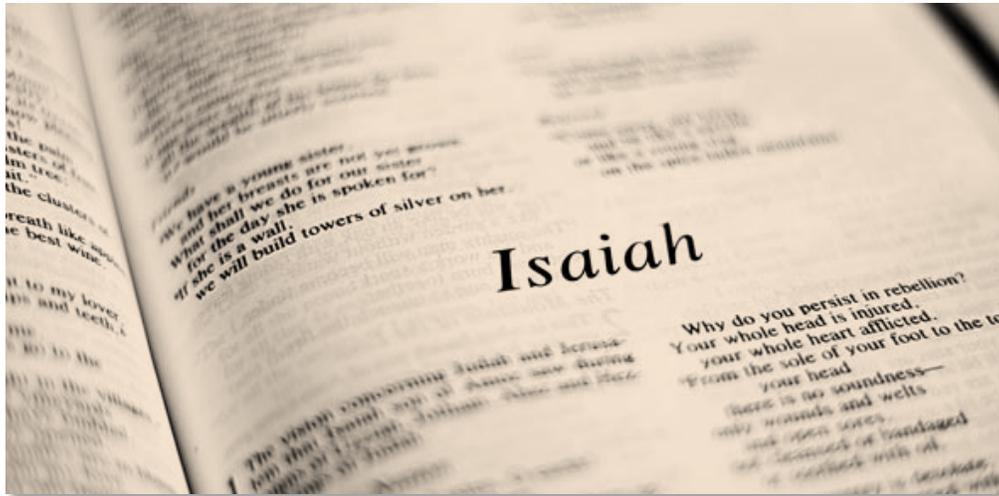


THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

INTRODUCTION



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Book of Isaiah: Introduction
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The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Introduction to *Isaiah*

Isaiah is the first of the major prophets, so called because of the amount of writing in their books. His is a message of judgment and hope, wrath and renewal, loss and eternal gain. Isaiah witnessed the downfall of Israel, and he used that tragic event to warn his own nation, the southern kingdom of Judah, to turn from their wickedness and seek the Lord.

But, as God had promised him, the people of Judah and Jerusalem would not heed his words. God spoke judgment through Isaiah, but He also pointed to the far horizon of history, when a day of redemption would come.

Isaiah's prophecy includes many glorious insights to the coming Messiah, and to the great salvation God has in store for His people. In this first study in our series, we'll look at the work of the prophets overall, consider how best to read them, then take a look at Isaiah and his book by way of introduction to the remaining studies in this series.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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1 Introduction to Prophecy

Pray Psalm 85.8, 9

I will hear what God the LORD will speak,
For He will speak peace
To His people and to His saints;
But let them not turn back to folly.
Surely His salvation *is* near to those who fear Him,
That glory may dwell in our land.

Read Isaiah 6.1-13.

Reflect.

1. What did God want Isaiah to do? Why did he not feel worthy to be in the Lord's presence?
2. What promise did God attach to Isaiah's calling?

Meditate.

Traditionally, the Old Testament is divided into three sections: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings.

The Law includes the first five books of the Bible, the books written by Moses. This section is called The Law because the giving of The Law takes up a major portion of the section.

The Writings take the form of poetry. The content of this section is liturgical, contemplative, philosophical, and practical. The books in this section include Job through Song of Solomon, and sometimes the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

The Prophets are considered from various perspectives. Some speak of the Former Prophets (those who wrote before the Babylonian captivity) and the Latter Prophets (those who wrote after the Babylonian captivity). We can also think of them as Historical Prophets (who wrote mainly histories) and Preaching Prophets (whose books contain messages given to them from God, which they proclaimed to the people). The 16 books typically thought of as The Prophets (the histories not included) are sometimes divided into the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and the Minor Prophets (the remaining 12 books of the Old Testament, beginning with Hosea). The distinction refers to the amount of written material in these books and not the relative importance of their messages.

The prophet's calling was to proclaim the will of God to a designated people, whether the people of Israel and Judah or the Gentile nations (cf. Jonah, Nahum, Obadiah, and parts of all the prophets). Their methods vary, but they mainly center on visions, messages, historical accounts, and prophesies concerning the future of God's people and Kingdom. The writings of all the prophets are charged with Messianic insights and promises. Their focus is threefold: God's faithfulness in the past, the rebellion of the people in the present, and the promise of judgment and restoration in the future.

Prophets came from various walks of life, but all brought a consistent message than can be summarized as, "This is what the LORD says..." While the messages of the prophets were given in and for a particular historical setting, the Word of God which they encode is timeless. Therefore, we should expect in every prophet to find some word of warning, promise, encouragement, or edification to guide us in our walk with and work for the Lord.

We will certainly see that this is the case with the book of Isaiah.

Prepare.

1. How does God present Himself to Isaiah in Isaiah 6? How does Isaiah respond?
2. Summarize God's calling for Isaiah. What did God intend? What did He promise?
3. Is there any sense in which your calling from the Lord shares aspects of Isaiah's?

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" O divine secrets of Scripture! As long as Isaiah's tongue was treacherous and his lips unclean, the Lord does not say to him, Whom shall I send, and who shall go? His lips are cleansed, and immediately he is appointed the Lord's spokesman; hence it is true that the person with unclean lips cannot prophesy, nor can he be sent in obedient service to God. Jerome (347-420 AD), Homilies on the Psalms 41 (Psalm 119)

Here am I, Lord, send me today to...

Pray Psalm 85.

Use today's psalm to seek the Lord for revival, and to begin putting in place in your mind a vision of what revival will look like as it begins.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 85 (*Lyons: O Worship the King*)

O Lord, You Your favor showed to Your land;
Your people You saved by Your mighty hand.
Their sins You forgave, all Your wrath You withdrew;
You turned back the anger which to them was due.

Restore us, O God, renew us in peace,
And cause all Your wrath against us to cease.
Will You evermore all Your wrath to us show?
Revive us that we may Your joy again know.

Lord, show us Your love; restore us, we pray!
And help us to hear the words that You say.
Speak peace to Your people; in truth let us stand.
We fear You; let glory and grace fill our land.

In Jesus God's grace and truth are combined;
Both goodness and peace in Him do we find.
Truth springs from the earth as He walks in our midst,
And righteousness flows from the heav'ns as a gift.

The Lord by His grace will give what is good;
Our land will produce abundance of food.
And righteousness will go before the Lord's face,
And make of His footsteps a way in this place.

2 The Message of the Prophets

Pray Psalm 75.1.

We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks!
For Your wondrous works declare *that* Your name is near.

Read Isaiah 1.2-4, 16-20.

Reflect.

1. What is repentance? Why should it be an important part of our walk with and work for the Lord?
2. What does it mean to “reason together” with the Lord? How do you practice this?

Meditate.

Typically, when we think of the Old Testament prophets, one of two stereotypes comes to mind. We see them as angry men, pointing the finger and threatening the judgment of God. Or we see them as starry-eyed dreamers, rambling on about a future revelation and glory neither they nor we fully understand.

There is some truth to these views, but the prophets offer a much richer and more edifying message, a message that unifies the whole of Scripture and demonstrates the centrality of God’s redemptive plan. The message of the prophets has three foci.

First, the prophets reminded their contemporaries of the promises and commandments of God. It was important that the people of Israel remembered who they were, where they’d come from, and how they’d happened to have a land and Kingdom of their own. God had made promises to their forefathers, and He had been unfailingly faithful in fulfilling those promises, especially in delivering His people from Egypt and settling them in the land of Canaan. For the better securing of all He had promised, God gave them His Law, to guide them into that condition of blessedness which would allow them to be a blessing to the world. The prophets of the Old Testament reminded the people again and again of what God had promised and done for them. He was a God of grace and holiness, and He called His people to be like Him.

Second, reminding the people of God’s faithfulness and Law, the prophets rehearsed the failings of the people to live in good faith before their loving God. Not only their fathers, but each generation of Israelites was unfaithful to the Lord, and turned away from Him and His righteousness to the pagan gods of the nations around. Thus they stood condemned, having freely brought on themselves the warnings of judgment God included with His promises (cf. Deut. 28). Sometimes those words of judgment were personal, specific, and short-lived. At other times they were national, calamitous, and of long duration. The prophets insisted that sin was a big deal with God, and He would not allow it to continue unchecked within His people.

Third, the prophets’ words of judgment include a call to repentance, to turn away from evil and take up the way of the Lord again. With repentance comes the promise of restoration, the renewing of God’s covenant blessings for His people, and of better days to come.

The message of the prophets often outlines two futures, one for the short-term (e.g., the promise to return the people from captivity in Babylon after 70 years), and one for the longer-term (the coming of Messiah and His Kingdom). Very often these two futures are intermingled, as if to suggest that the realization of the earlier one holds the promise of realizing the later one.

All the prophets emphasize the grace of God and promise more of that grace for those who hear and seek Him in faith. Taken together, the message of the prophets is that the grace of God realizes its fullest

manifestation in His giving a new and unbreakable and eternal covenant, in which His Messiah will accomplish deliverance from sin and a way of holiness for His people.

Prepare.

1. How can you see the three parts of this outline of the prophets' message in Isaiah 1.2-4, 16-20?
2. Why do Christians today need to hear this prophetic message?
3. What does this message of the prophets suggest about the kind of life God wants us, His people, to pursue?

Let us become as clean as is possible. Let us wash away our sins. And the prophet teaches us how to wash them away, saying, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, put away from my eyes the evil of your souls." ... See that we must first cleanse ourselves, and then God cleanses us. He first said, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean," and then said, "I will make you white." ... The power of repentance is then tremendous as it makes us white as snow and wool, even though sin had stained our souls. John Chrysostom (344-407 AD), On the Epistle of Hebrews 12.4

Show me where repentance is needed in my life, Lord, and help me today to...

Pray Psalm 75.

Pray this psalm slowly and reflectively. How can you see that it speaks to conditions in our own day? How does God's work of judgment apply to His churches?

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 75 (*Galilee: Jesus Calls Us*)

We give thanks, Lord, we give thanks for Your all-glorious Name is near!
Men Your wondrous works declare, Lord; let all living creatures hear!

When you choose the time of judgment, You will judge with equity.
Then the earth and all within it by Your hand no more shall be.

Warn the boastful, warn the wicked: "Do not boast or raise your horn!
Do not raise your boastful voices; do not speak with pride and scorn!"

Neither east nor west nor desert shall exalting bring to man.
God is Judge, He puts one down and makes another one to stand.

For the cup of judgment foams in Jesus' sovereign, holy hand.
He has mixed it and will pour it out on every wicked man.

As for me, I will declare it: Evermore to God be praise!
He abases all the wicked, but His righteous ones He saves!

3 The Work of the Prophets

Pray Psalm 73.25-28.

Whom have I in heaven *but You?*

And there is none upon earth *that* I desire besides You.

My flesh and my heart fail;

But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;

You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

But *it is* good for me to draw near to God;

I have put my trust in the Lord GOD,

That I may declare all Your works.

Read 2 Kings 19.1-5, 20-34.

Reflect.

1. How would you describe Isaiah's role as you see it in these verses?
2. Did Isaiah only speak about "spiritual" matters? Or only to the people of God? Explain.

Meditate.

The verses for today provide an overview of the work of a prophet. That work consisted of four distinct functions.

First, the prophet was set aside by God *to bear and receive His Word* (recall Is. 6.1-13). Let's remember that, in Isaiah's day, they didn't have all the Scripture we have today. They would have had the Law of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy), perhaps some of the early historical writings (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel), and most of what we know as the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.). Even then, not everybody had copies of these. But since God was still giving verbal revelation to His people, He appointed certain ones, like Ezra (Ez. 7.10), to devote themselves to studying the existing Word of God and being alert and receptive to additional revelation, as God chose to give it.

Second, prophets *communicated God's revelation* to the people of God by preaching and writing, and sometimes by other means. What God made known to them, the prophets relayed to the people. They would preach, give advice, write psalms (like Asaph) or sermons, and even whole books.

Third, because they were recognized as being in communication with God, prophets, served as *counselors and advisors to kings and other rulers*. When Hezekiah was threatened by an overwhelming enemy force, he turned to Isaiah to intercede with the Lord and give him the Lord's counsel and advice.

Finally, prophets *spoke the Word of God to the nations*, as we see Isaiah doing here in pronouncing the judgment of God against the Assyrians.

Each of us shares in this prophetic work today. God calls us to receive His Word daily, to share His Word for encouragement and advice with our fellow believers, to be available to counsel and advise those who turn to us for some Word from the Lord, and to bear witness to the world of what God requires. Certainly we have much to learn about this calling from a faithful prophet like Isaiah.

Prepare.

1. Should the work of a prophet be part of your walk with and work for the Lord? In what ways?

2. How would you rate yourself in each of the four functions of a prophet?
3. What can a local church do to fulfill more of the functions of a prophet in its community?

*Does not the prophet say the same most aptly and concisely in the words, "It is good for me to cling to God"? Does not this one word cling express all that the apostle says at length about love? And do not the words "it is good" point to the apostle's statement, "All things issue in good to them that love God"? Thus in one clause and in two words the prophet sets forth the power and the fruit of love. Augustine (354-430 AD), *The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life* 16.26*

It is good for me to cling to You and to Your Word, O Lord, and also to...

Pray Psalm 73.

Asaph the prophet shows us how to resist temptation and cling to the Lord. Let his psalm guide you to contemplate your calling as a prophet of the Lord.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 73 (*Ellacombe: Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*)

To us our God is only good, to all the pure in heart!
But as for me, I nearly stood in sin from Him apart.
I nearly stumbled, nearly slipped as I the proud observed,
How they with ease and riches dripped while I, impoverished, served.

The wicked know in death no pain; with fat their bodies surge.
The plagues and trials of other men their ease do not disturb.
In fury, wrath, and pride they dwell; their minds run where they will.
Their tongues of sin and mocking tell; with earth their mouths they fill.

They never change but fill their soul with earth's abundant charms,
And laugh to think that God might know or do them any harm.
For thus do they themselves appease with riches and good health;
The wicked ever dwell in ease, in pleasure and in wealth.

"Surely in vain have I kept pure my heart, or cleansed my hands!
What troubles daily I endure while thus with God I stand!"
But had I spoken thus I would Your children have betrayed.
When this at last I understood, my troubled soul obeyed.

Into Your presence, Lord, I come and see the sinner's end:
In slippery places they must run; to judgment them You send.
Destruction all at once must fall when You Your anger raise;
And terror will beset them all both now and all their days.

When my poor sad, embittered heart was pierced within by grace,
I saw how beastly was the part I chose before Your face.
But I am ever with You, Lord, You hold me by the hand,
And guide me daily by Your Word; in glory I e'er shall stand.

Then what have I in heav'n above but You, my God and Lord?
And on this earth what shall I love besides You and Your Word?
My flesh and heart shall surely fail, and death my soul release;
Your strength for me will e'er avail and grant eternal peace.

Then let them perish who depart from You and from Your Word.
All those unfaithful in their heart You shall destroy, O Lord!
But as for me, Your presence, Lord, is where I e'er will dwell!
I hide myself within Your Word, Your wondrous works to tell.

4 False Prophets

Pray Psalm 74.1-3.

O God, why have You cast *us* off forever?
Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?
Remember Your congregation, *which* You have purchased of old,
The tribe of Your inheritance, *which* You have redeemed—
This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.
Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations.
The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

Read Jeremiah 23.

Reflect.

1. How would you be able to identify a false prophet?
2. Why are prophets and those who are called to the ministry of the Word thought of as shepherds?

Meditate.

From the moment the first prophet appeared on the stage of history, false prophets began to proliferate. The primary distinction between the two was that false prophets had not received a Word from the Lord; instead, they were operating out of mere self-interest and making up their messages as suited the moment.

They were a continual source of woe, scattering, deprivation, deceit, and destruction to the people of God throughout the Old Testament.

God condemned false prophets, but it is easier for Him to spot them than for the people of God. They use the same language as true prophets, claim to be speaking God's Word, give the people messages easy to receive, and gain a measure of popularity that allows them to persuade a great many people.

In reality, the false prophet's ways were *slippery* (v. 12). That is, they led to increasing sin and disregard of God, a slippery slope of drifting ever further from the Lord's path. They taught *darkness* rather than light (v. 13) by letting people think sin was no big deal, God would never do anything but good for them, and the problems they seemed to have been facing weren't all that bad.

God used true prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to expose the false prophets, and that often got the good guys into a heap of trouble. But when truth is at stake, true prophets stand for God and His Word. They do not compromise. They refuse to tell people what they want to hear. They point the finger at false prophets and warn them of the judgment of God. And they leave to the Lord the consequences of their faithfulness.

There will always be false prophets in the churches of the Lord. One indication of their holding sway is that churches lose their vision, let go of the promises of God, turn from the plain teaching of His Word, try to attract the world on the world's terms, and end up shallow, floundering, divisive, and lacking in fruit.

Where these markers are present, false prophets are not far away. Isaiah will help us to know the good guys from the bad guys in this most important aspect of our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God.

Prepare.

1. How would you be able to know if a false prophet was teaching in your church?

2. God promised to send true shepherds to feed the people, so that they would “be fruitful and increase” (Jer. 23.4). If the people are not being fruitful and increasing, what does this suggest about their shepherds?
3. What can you do to encourage your shepherds to continue as true shepherds of the Lord, and to resist any temptation to drift toward being false prophets?

Against such people as these the Lord cries out, from these he reins in and recalls his erring people, saying, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who invent a vain vision for themselves, which they speak as false prophets from their own heart and not from the mouth of the Lord. They say to those who reject the words of the Lord, ‘Peace shall be yours’ and to all who walk according to their own desires, to everyone who walks in the error of his heart, they have said, ‘No evil shall come on you.’”
Cyprian of Carthage (fl. 248-258 AD), *The Unity of the Church* 11

Lord, help me to encourage the shepherds of our church to be faithful to Your Word. Today let me...

Pray Psalm 74.

Listen as you pray for the Spirit to show you any specific ways this psalm speaks into your life or the situation in churches and Christianity today. Pray accordingly.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 74 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, with All My Heart*)

O Lord, why have You cast us off? Why does Your anger ever burn?
Remember now Your Church, O Lord, and to us let Your grace return.

Turn now Your steps to this sad ruin; our foes have damaged all within.
They roar throughout Your meeting place and raise the banner of their sin.

The wicked wield their ax within and desecrate our walls around;
Defiling Your abiding-place, they burn Your temples to the ground.

Within their hearts they plot and scheme: “Now let us finally bring them down!”
Our signs and prophets all are gone; they burn our churches to the ground.

How long, O Lord, must they prevail and mock and spurn Your holy Name?
Why stay Your hand? Deploy it now, and bring Your foes to lasting shame!

Our God is King from long ago, Who works deliv’rance in the land;
He split the sea, He crushed His foes; against Him none can ever stand.

You opened the springs, fresh water flowed; to You belong both day and night.
You bound the seasons and the earth, and gave the sun its glorious light.

Remember this, O Lord, our God: a foolish people spurns Your Name;
Deliver not Your flock to them, nor leave Your holy ones to shame.

Your covenant recall, renew, for violence spreads throughout the earth;
The poor and needy rescue, Lord, and we shall sing Your matchless worth!

Arise O God, and plead Your cause! See how the fools reproach Your Name.
Their voices quell, their uproar still, who Your majestic grace defame.

5 Reading the Prophets

Pray Psalm 33:20-22.

Our soul waits for the LORD;
He *is* our help and our shield.
For our heart shall rejoice in Him,
Because we have trusted in His holy name.
Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us,
Just as we hope in You.

Read Habakkuk 2:1-14.

Reflect.

1. What does it mean to *watch* for the Lord and to *wait* on His Word?
2. What is the *knowledge* of the glory of the Lord?

Meditate.

Reading the prophets can be challenging, because they don't always follow the kind of linear, rational narrative we're familiar with today; and because much of what they have to say is specific to the times in which they lived. These are times we're not quite familiar with, and so the names and conditions the prophets describe can seem not directly relevant to our present needs.

In the verses for today, Habakkuk outlines a good approach to reading the prophets – well, to reading any of God's Word. Let's take a closer look.

First, we need to *stand watch* for the Lord (v. 1). A watch is a regular, recurring assignment. Those who stand it are to remain alert, attentive, and ready to respond. We need a daily watch in which we present ourselves before the Lord, ready to hear what He has to say and to *answer* as His Word indicates.

Second, strive to *see* what the Lord wants to show you (v. 1). If you need to check some cross references, or do a little reading in a Bible dictionary, take the time to do so. You want the message God has for you to become as clear as possible, so be patient. Meditate. Pray your thoughts to the Lord. Ask more questions about the text. At length, if you will *set* yourself and *watch* attentively, God will allow you to *see* what He has for you in His Word.

Third, there is something here to be said for reading your Bible with a pen in hand (v. 2). Habakkuk was instructed to *write* what the Lord showed him. Writing, or journaling, can help in clarifying our thoughts about a passage and leading us in identifying how we ought to respond. It also tends to make our learning more permanent. Plus, you can share your thoughts with others, so that they can benefit from what the Lord has allowed you to see.

Fourth, as you are watching and waiting and making notes, let the Word search your *soul*, to make sure it is *upright* before the Lord (v. 4, vv. 5-13). Let the Word speak to your thought life, your desires and fears, and your values and priorities. Are you harboring any sins anywhere in your soul? Wherever you need to shed the light of faith and truth in your soul, do so in confession and repentance.

Fifth, determine how you will *run* your race through the day ahead, in the light of what your reading has revealed to you (v. 2; Heb. 12:1, 2). Where do you need to take some new steps of faith? Whom can you touch with the grace of Jesus today? What opportunities will you have for sharing with other believers what

the Lord has shown you from His Word? Expect the Lord to guide and use you according to what He has shown you in His Word (v. 3), and plan your words and deeds to fit the insights you have gained.

Finally, make sure your objective in everything you do is to fill your world with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (v. 14). Be always ready to talk about the Lord. Give thanks in every situation and for everything. Share what you're learning with others. Listen for opportunities to inject a word of witness or testimony, or to point out some aspect of the Lord's glory in the world around.

We'll gain more of what God intends for us from our study of Isaiah by keeping these practices in mind and reading this great prophet as the Lord intends.

Prepare.

1. What opportunities for pointing out the glory of the Lord do you expect to have today?
2. What can you learn from Habakkuk to improve your time reading and studying the Word of God?
3. Why is it a good idea to write down the things God teaches you from His Word?

O truth, you do preside over all things, even those that take counsel with you, and you do answer in the same time all who consult you, however diverse their questions. You do answer clearly, but all do not hear clearly. All seek counsel concerning what they wish, but they do not always hear what they wish. He serves you best who does not so much expect to hear the thing from you that he himself desires, but rather to desire what he hears from you. Augustine (354-430 AD), Confessions 10.26

Help me to be more diligent and attentive in seeking You in Your Word, O Lord, so that I...

Pray Psalm 33.

As much as any psalm, this psalm summarizes the message of the prophets. Let it lead you to give thanks and praise to God, and to commit yourself afresh to Him for this day.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 33 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

Sing with rejoicing in the Lord, for praise becomes His righteous ones!
With harps and songs raise grateful words, and let new songs of praise be sung!

Joyfully shout! His Word is true; He does His work in faithfulness.
His love prevails the whole world through; the Lord loves truth and righteousness.

God spoke and heaven came to be, and all its hosts His Spirit wrought.
He heaps the waters of the sea; the deeps their dwelling place are taught.

Let all below now fear the Lord; let all in awe of Him abide!
The worlds exist by Jesus' Word; let all on earth in Him confide.

He nullifies the nations' plans; forever stands His sov'reign Word.
All they are blessed who with Him stand – the chosen people of the Lord.

God from His throne looks down on men; He knows our works and made our hearts.
Let not Your Church, let none depend on strength or skill or human arts.

God watches those who fear His Name, who hope upon His grace and love;
He keeps their souls from death and shame who trust in Him Who reigns above.

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God is our Helper and our Shield; upon us let Your grace descend!
We hope in You; to You we yield; we trust in Jesus to the end.

6 Isaiah among the Prophets

Pray Psalm 115.1.

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.

Read Isaiah 1.1; 6.1-13; 2 Kings 15.1-6; 2 Chronicles 26.16-22.

Reflect.

1. Azariah the king and Uzziah are the same person. They are referred to by different names to avoid confusion with the priest who was also named Azariah (2 Chron. 26.20). In the year of Uzziah's death, God called Isaiah to his ministry (Is. 6.1-13). What seems to have been the state of the nation of Judah at this time?
2. How would you summarize the charge God gave to Isaiah?

Meditate.

Isaiah is the first of the major prophets. Other writing prophets preceded his work – such as Jonah and Hosea – and he may well have been aware of their ministries. But he is the first of the four major prophets, so called because of the large amount of material in their books.

By the time Isaiah was called to his ministry, the nation of Israel to the north, had turned away from God irrecoverably. Soon they would be carried away captive by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17), who began a resettlement program in the northern kingdom that would see the intermarriage of Israelites and Assyrians, leading to the Samaritans, who were despised by Jews in the New Testament.

Isaiah would have been a witness to the carrying away of Israel to Assyria. Indeed, that event seems to have been the signal for him to step forward with the Word of the Lord. As we shall see, he will have much to say about this situation, and he will use it to warn the nation of Judah against following the same path to the same end.

But as the Lord explained in his call to Isaiah, even with the powerful example of Israel's tragedy, the people of Judah would not listen.

Isaiah spoke urgently and often to call the people from their erring ways and unto repentance. But it was not God's pleasure for his words to be heeded. Nevertheless, the unfolding of events would confirm that Isaiah was a true prophet. So when he prophesied concerning coming days of restoration and a new Kingdom and King for God's people, and beyond that, of a day of glorious peace for all the nations, faithful Israelites would have taken hope, and would have fixed their desires on the Lord and His promises.

We live in those days of restoration and Kingdom concerning which Isaiah prophesied so powerfully. We know that the Servant he wrote about is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who bore our sins and brought near the Kingdom of God. We should therefore take heart from the words of Isaiah. What he spoke and wrote about for his day came to pass as he said. What he has written for our day – an eternal Kingdom of peace, increasing without end, unto a new world to come – is just as sure, and should encourage us in seeking that Kingdom and the glory of its King.

Prepare.

1. Can you see any parallels between the situation in Israel (the northern kingdom) in Isaiah's day and the state of the Church in our own day?
2. Would you say that Isaiah's ministry overall was successful? In what way?
3. How do you hope our study of Isaiah will help you in your walk with and work for the Lord? What goals will you set for this study?

[Isaiah] should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet, because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the church so clearly that one would think he is composing a history of what has already happened rather than prophesying what is to come.
Jerome (347-420 AD), *Preface to Isaiah*

Thank You, Lord, for the book of Isaiah. As we begin this study, help me to...

Pray Psalm 115.1-18.

Isaiah *saw* the glory of the Lord, and he *sought* it throughout all his life and ministry. As you pray, ask the Lord to show you His glory throughout the day, and resolve to live for His glory in every aspect of your life.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 115 (*Plainfield: Nothing But the Blood of Jesus*)

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Idols made by men's own hand – ever to Your Name be glory –
see nor hear nor understand – ever to Your Name be glory!
They neither feel nor walk, nor can they speak or talk;
All those who serve them fall, but unto Your Name be glory!

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory –
find in Him their help and shield: Ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –
will attend us evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,
All who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
And bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

7 Isaiah: Overview

Pray Psalm 130.1-4.

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications.
If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But *there is* forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.

Read Isaiah 1.21-31.

Reflect.

1. While much of Isaiah's message is dire, the overall thrust of his book is positive and hopeful. How can you see that here?
2. How is Zion (the Church) redeemed with *justice* and *righteousness*?

Meditate.

There are undoubtedly many ways to approach the study of Isaiah. Here I want to outline how we will be studying this book over the next several weeks.

Isaiah 1-6: The Prophet's Remit

The essence of Isaiah's prophetic word to God's people is outlined in these chapters – a message of judgment and hope, culminating in the Lord's call to Isaiah to begin his work.

Isaiah 7-12: Prophecies against Israel

The fall of Israel was at hand, but few saw it coming. Isaiah established his credentials as a true prophet of the Lord by preaching that Israel would come under the Lord's wrath. Yet even here, Isaiah's message of hope and redemption begins to emerge.

Isaiah 13-23: Prophecies against the Nations

God does not give the nations a pass for their sins. Just as He would judge Israel for her rebellion, so He would judge the nations around Israel for their wickedness.

Isaiah 24: Prophecy against the Earth

In this chapter we receive a glimpse of the final judgment of God. We'll spend an entire week on Isaiah 24.

Isaiah 25-35: The Day of Salvation

The word of final judgment is followed by the announcement of divine redemption, which Isaiah celebrates as the way of escape from the judgment of the Lord. But God's people will remain blind to His grace and fall into judgment and woes until the coming of the Lord's salvation.

Isaiah 36-39: Hezekiah

These chapters recount God's dealings with Hezekiah. They provide an historical touchstone to anchor the rest of Isaiah's work.

Isaiah 40-48: Comfort and Deliverance

Though God will judge His people by the Babylonians, He will comfort and restore them under Cyrus. This serves to set the stage for God's greater comfort and deliverance to come by the Servant of the Lord.

Isaiah 49-54: The Servant of the Lord

The Servant brings salvation to God's people and deliverance for all the nations.

Isaiah 55-66: Seek the Lord

The Messiah is coming to bring God's Kingdom to the world, so Isaiah calls the nations to seek the Lord and His everlasting covenant, to enter His redemption and to avoid His wrath.

Our journey through Isaiah's prophecy begins tomorrow.

Prepare.

1. How would you explain the relationship between Scripture and historical events?
2. Believers today are as susceptible to idols as were the people of Isaiah's day. Explain.
3. What does it mean to be saved? How should our salvation affect our outlook on life? Our daily activities? The things we talk about with others?

He will restore, therefore, a judge like them, or after the Babylonian captivity, as the Jews desire, Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah and other leaders who presided over the people until Hyrcanus, whom Herod succeeded as king. In any event, the apostles and those who believed through the apostles were established as more trustworthy and upright leaders of the church, in keeping with what we said at the beginning of this vision, namely, that both the threat and the promise pertain to the time of the Lord's passion and to the faith that formed the church after his passion. Jerome (347-420 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 1.1.26

Lord, thank You for the book of Isaiah. As we begin this study, I want to...

Pray Psalm 130.

What will the Lord do today to transform you more into the image of Jesus, and to bring you more completely into His great redemption? As you pray this psalm, wait in silence for Him to renew forgiveness, hope, and joy in your soul.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 130 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Out of the depths I cry to You, Lord!
Lord, hear my voice; have mercy on me!
Who can resist Your powerful Word
If You should mark iniquity?

There is forgiveness, Lord, with You,
That we may fear before Your face.
I wait for You; in Your Word most true
I hope to find renewing grace.

More than the watchmen wait for the day,
Eagerly seeking the morning light,
I wait for You and earnestly pray,
Hoping in You with all my might.

Hope in the Lord, with Jesus is love!

The Book of Isaiah: Introduction

Plenteous redemption abounds in His face.
He will redeem us, who rules from above;
He will forgive us by His grace.

The Book of Isaiah: Introduction

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What was the role of the prophets in the Old Testament?
2. Why is it important for us to study the prophets today? What should we expect to learn from them?
3. Prophets like Isaiah spoke of judgment and restoration, both in the short term and the long term. Explain.
4. Isaiah's prophecies remind us that the world operates according to the Word and patience of God. Explain.
5. What are you most hoping to learn from our study of Isaiah?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.