



September - December 2024 | Trinity Church Golden Grove

Isaiah is long. It's mostly poetry (and let's face it, most of us didn't like studying poetry at school). It's filled with strange language, weird imagery, and has a complicated historical background which you have to get across if you're going to understand it. So why would anyone read it? Why should we read it?

Well, here are a few reasons. *Firstly*, it's one of the most quoted books in the New Testament. When the first Christians try to make sense of who Jesus is and what he's done, it's Isaiah they come back to time and again. *Secondly*, it's one of Jesus' favourite books for explaining himself to people. *Finally*, it tells us so much about God's plan of salvation, in such detail and with such foresight, that many scholars have called it 'the fifth gospel.' In fact, it speaks so plainly about Jesus that when a church once letter-box dropped copies of Isaiah 53 in a Jewish area, it got complaints about distributing Christian propaganda! If the scholars, the New Testament, and Jesus himself all think that Isaiah is worth reading, then we probably should too.

However, before we get into it, some background will be useful. Isaiah (the man) prophesied between 740BC and about 687BC. Around two hundred years before this, the original nation of Israel had divided into two kingdoms, one in the north (which Isaiah normally calls 'Israel') and one in the south (called 'Judah'). Isaiah prophesied in Judah, and especially its capital city, Jerusalem. Isaiah's prophecies revolve around two main threats to Judah's security.

The *first* is one that existed during Isaiah's lifetime: Assyria. Assyria was the local superpower at the time and, in 735BC, demanded that Israel become its financial slave. Israel refused and

was destroyed in 722BC. Assyria made the same threats to Judah. Judah refused and Jerusalem was besieged in 701BC. Who would Judah and its king trust to save them? Its army and political allies, as Israel had done, or God? God had some big things to say to Judah through Isaiah during this period, and these prophecies make up the first half of Isaiah 1-39. The *second* threat is one which existed well beyond Isaiah's lifetime: Babylon. At the time Isaiah was living, Babylon was a minor political player in the region and one of Judah's allies. But Isaiah foresaw a day when Babylon would grow mighty and turn against Judah. Who would Judah and its kings trust to rescue them from that enemy, when the time came? Themselves? Or God? And if they mucked it up, and Babylon did ruin them (as they did in 586BC when they destroyed Jerusalem and exiled most of its residents), would God give them another chance, or would that be the end of them? God has some big things to say to Judah through Isaiah about this period, too - even though it is a hundred years in the future - and these prophecies form the second half of Isaiah, chapters 40-66.

For those who find it helpful to have a visual summary, The Bible Project has once again provided a really useful overview:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/isaiah/>

If you're looking for a helpful commentary to refer to, a good option is *The Message of Isaiah* by Barry Webb in 'The Bible Speaks Today' series (1996, IVP)

Series Outline

| Passage and Title | Themes | Application |
|--|---|---|
| #1 A Tale Of Two Cities, Isaiah 1 | Rebellion from God v2 has lead to corrupt worship, v10-15. The faithful city has become unfaithful and God will judge her for this, v21-31. Will they listen and be the faithful city of God's people? | Stop rebelling! Repent and return to God, our maker. Remove evil from your life and seek justice, v16-17. Only God can affect the change and purification if we turn to him, v18, 21-31. |
| #2 One City Alone Will Be Exalted, Isaiah 2 | Mountain of the Lord, v1-5 and the nations coming is about the coming kingdom and city of God. Day of the Lord is a time of judgment, v6-11 but fleeing to the rocks can't save, only trusting in the Lord. This is the city that will be exalted, not human pride. | Walking with the Lord, v5 and anticipating his future while facing injustice. There is a judgment coming! Trust in the Lord! V22 not your pride |

| Passage and Title | Themes | Application |
|--|---|--|
| #3 Judgment On The City, Isaiah 3-4 | The Lord is the judge of his people, v13 and will deal with the injustice in the land from his people, v1-12. The first half deals with men and the second with women, v16-4:1. Only the Lord can both judge and make clean our deeds. | God will vindicate the poor and oppressed and is a shelter to turn to in oppression. Future city of no injustice or pride is the hope - there is a glory beyond judgment! Living as God's people in all of life and seeking the welfare of others. |
| #4 Looking For Justice, Isaiah 5 | Tension in what is and what will be is seen again. Glorious future and awful present. Ch 5 is a song in a vineyard, using creativity to deliver God's message. God will use foreign nations to execute his judgment, v25-30. The woes and reaction of God are piling up by now. | God has made us for life under him, v16, but there is only woe and destruction if we forsake him. God is merciful to us. |
| #5 The King's Message, Isaiah 6 | The focus turns to inner transformation by seeing the Holy One and having our sin stoned for. Isaiah's ministry is costly and hard and there will be little to no fruit, but, the vision of God is what matters most. | Only the Holy one can clean away our sin. We need a vision of God, the Holy one and a deep awareness of our sinfulness to face sin and the hardness of mission in the world. God's grace. |
| <i>Break</i> | - | - |
| #6 God With Us, Isaiah 7-8 | Ahaz is afraid and at a cross road of what to do and who to trust, v1-2. He thinks he can find safety in another political alliance but Isaiah gives him a third option - trust in the Lord and forsake all others. Isaiah announced that judgement will soon come on the nations Ahaz wants to trust in v17-25. Ch 8 develops the theme of trust in Emmanuel with the image of darkness and light. To trust in the Lord is to walk in the light. | Trust in the Lord. Trust in the Emmanuel sign, he is the light we need to walk in. God is with us. |
| #7 A Great Light, Isaiah 9-10 | Future focus. Isaiah looks ahead to the dawn, v2 and God's new eternal reign though a king, v3-7. But, a baby king! This flies in the face of human strength and accomplishments. V9:8-10:4 jumps back into the present woes of God's people and how God is wielding the nations around them, v10:5-19 and they will be judged for their actions. | God always saves a remnant. God will bring about an end of evil and injustice. |

| Passage and Title | Themes | Application |
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| #8 The Righteous Judge, Isaiah 11 | Here we have the ideal king, coming up from the line of David, v1, even though there's not much to look at. We see what this king is like, v2-5 and then what his region will accomplish - universal peace, v6-9. This is a day to come, v10-11 and God will gather his people from all over to be under his righteous king. | Take heart because God is king over the nations. God will restore the world back to himself, even as we live in brokenness. |
| #9 Our Salvation, Isaiah 12 | A song of praise in the new city. God is holy and his saving world will happen in his city, even though judgment will first come. God's anger will turn away and will be our salvation. This is the culmination of Ch 1-12 with the hope of salvation resting only on the Messiah, our strength and joy. | Praise and sing to God (Not just on a Sunday) that he is in our midst and we will one day be in his midst. |

Songs

Each week of our series you'll hear one of these 2 songs. *You Alone* has a great missional thrust, reminding of both the holiness of God and his heart for the nations. *He Calls Me Friend* reminds us of the faithfulness of God, declaring our God is strong, wonderful and the true king over all.

| Song | YouTube Link |
|----------------------------------|---|
| You Alone by Trevor Hodge | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH62F2zS4rc |
| He Calls Me Friend by CityAlight | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PpiezP6xRM |

Community Groups

Our Community Groups will work through each passage before Sunday's talk. Below are some helpful study guides collated from a few Trinity Churches (Adelaide, Modbury and Golden Grove) you can use to help your discussion.

Isaiah 1

Getting started

Have you ever purchased a 'renovator's delight' - or known someone that has? A project where something was once beautiful, has since fallen into disrepair, but you can see the potential for a gloriously restored future in it? If you have, how did you feel when you first bought it? If you haven't, what do you imagine you might feel about it?

Observation and interpretation

Read Isaiah 1:1-2-4

1. What is life like in Jerusalem/Zion?
2. What are some of the (colourful!) images used to describe Jerusalem?
3. Summarise as simply as you can Isaiah's message to Judah and Jerusalem.
4. Is there any hope for Jerusalem? If so:
 - a. what is it?
 - b. who is it for?
 - c. and when?

Application

Trust

What elements of Jerusalem's behaviour or attitudes in Isaiah 1 can you see in our community and in your life?

Say

Memory verse: Isaiah 1:18. Aim to speak this to yourself each day in the coming week.

Pray

Isaiah calls the people of Judah and Israel to repent from their sinful ways and turn to God, so he can cleanse them (Isaiah 1:18). Take time acknowledging our sins that have been brought to mind by this passage and bringing before him the sins of our world and asking him to cleanse us.

Isaiah 2

Background

As Isaiah continues his critique of Jerusalem in his day, he moves on to the theme of its immense pride and God's determination to break it. To do so, he presents a series of pictures of proud things: human idolatry (2:5-22), leaders (3:1-15) and ladies (3:16-4:1).

Observation and interpretation

Read Isaiah 2:5-22

1. How have Judah become scheming and self-reliant in the way they think?
2. How will God respond?

Isaiah 2:1-4 says that in 'the last days' when Jerusalem has been restored, 'all nations' will stream to it to hear God teach them his ways.

Read Acts 2:5-12, 22-24.

1. Who has come to Jerusalem?
2. About whom is the message they hear?
3. How is this a manifestation of the vision of Isa 2:1-4?

Application

Trust

What accomplishments in your life might tempt you to become proud and self-reliant? What do you need to remember to keep this in perspective?

Say

Let's not just gloss over the simple exhortations of this passage. As odd as it might feel, pair up with someone in your group and take a moment to speak the following verses to each other, reflecting together on one situation in life where you need to put this into practice: Isaiah 2:5 and Isaiah 2:22

Isaiah 3-4

Discussion Question

How would you respond to someone who tells you that a loving God would never judge people?

Here's how Isaiah would respond, "God will bring judgment on all who defy his glorious presence and exploit the poor and powerless."

Observation and interpretation

Read Isaiah 3:1-15

1. What will God do to the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem?
2. What will be the result for the nation and city?

Read Isaiah 3:16-4:1

1. How does God describe the leading ladies of Jerusalem?
2. How will God deal with them?

Isaiah has painted a grim picture: a city of proud thinkers, leaders and women all about to be cut down to size by a humiliating God. What a relief 4:2-6 is, then!

Read Isaiah 4:2-6

1. Isaiah has already used a term similar to 'in that day' (see 2:2). When does this make you think he is talking about?
2. Who is Isaiah talking about in this vision?
3. What will they be like, in contrast to their predecessors?

Application Questions

1. How should the (fulfilled) promise of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem in chapter 3 shape how we think about God's judgment today?
2. In Isaiah 3:8 God accuses the people of "defying his glorious presence". How does this accusation help us to understand the seriousness of sin?
3. In Isaiah 3, God condemns those who oppress and exploit the poor and powerless. What are some examples in our society or wider world today of this sort of oppression?
4. Are there opportunities we have to support or stand up for the poor and powerless?
5. What comfort does God provide in this passage for when we experience injustice ourselves, or see it around us?
6. What comfort does God provide in this passage for when we feel the weight of our own failures and defiance against him, or wonder if he could ever accept us?
7. How does Jesus' death shape how we think about God's judgment today?

Isaiah 5

Background

Isaiah 5 is another critique of Judean society in the eighth-century B.C., especially its greed (5:8-10), drunkenness (5:11-17), foolishness (5:18-21) and worship of false heroes (5:22-30).

And, it's written as a song.

Observation and interpretation

1. In Song of Songs a vineyard is a way to describe the woman and the desires for her. What does the vineyard stand for in Isaiah 5? Look down to 5:7.
2. How does 5:1-2 describe the care that God has had over his people?
3. But, when God has looked for fruit, what has he found? Isaiah 5:3-4.

Read Isaiah 5:8-17

1. What will God do to his vineyard from 5:8-15?
2. But, there's an echo of hope. How is God and his people described in 5:16-17

Isaiah 5:18-30 end with a list of woes to his people for no longer living a fruitful life of justice and righteousness as his people. The image we have seen in his chapter is that God has planted them for a life under him and given them all they need to flourish. But, they have forsaken God and his ways, living as if they can ignore God, (5:1-24) and now he will take action against it (5:25-30). Thus, God had looked for fruit and found something that tasted nasty! one another. The crop that God reaps in his carefully tended vineyard is one that makes him simply wish to abandon it to the elements!

Read Matthew 23:13-39. Jesus denounces the religion leaders of his day in a similar way.

1. What are the similarities between Isaiah 5 and Matthew 23?
2. Is there any hope in both of these chapters?

Application

Confess

Has God impressed upon you any particular sins in your life or in our community? Use the following prayer (or your own words, if you prefer) to bring your sins before God in confession:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, We confess with shame the sins we have done, against you, and against those whom you have made. We have not loved you with our whole heart, and we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are sorry, and turn from our sins. For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us and change us. Set us free by your Spirit to live for you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Read Isaiah 1:18 and then Isaiah 53:5-6 as a reminder of God's mercy to us in Christ.

Isaiah 6

Discussion Question

Share about a time when you tried to share about Jesus with someone (perhaps you got a favourable response from the person, or perhaps not).

Observation and interpretation

Read 2 Chronicles 26:1-5, 16-21.

1. What was Uzziah like as a king?

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

1. How does the description of God as king contrast with the descriptions of Uzziah as king we've just read?

2. Summarise the stages of Isaiah's encounter with God in 6:1-8

v1-4

v5

v6-7

v8

3. Why is Isaiah so reluctant to be commissioned as God's spokesperson?

Read Isaiah 6:9-13

1. What is so unusual about the message God tells Isaiah to give his people?
2. When will Isaiah's strange mission be over?
3. Is there any hope in this chapter?

Application Questions

1. Is your mental picture of God similar to what Isaiah saw in his vision, or a bit tamer?
2. Are there ways we can develop a deeper sense of God's holiness?
3. Can you relate to Isaiah's 'hopeless' task in your own efforts at leading people to Jesus?
4. What encouragement and hope is there for us, particularly in light of Jesus quoting this passage in the Parable of the Sower (see Matthew 13:1-23, especially verses 14-15)?
5. Are there unbelieving friends or family who you're tempted to give up witnessing to or praying for? Or situations where you don't think it's worth trying to lead people to Jesus? How might Isaiah 6 speak into these situations?
7. How does our own experience of "conviction" and "cleansing" equip us in our "commission" to share the gospel?

Isaiah 7-8

Getting started

At Christmas, we remember that one of Jesus' names is 'Immanuel', 'God with us.' We assume that 'God with us' must always be a good thing, but is that necessarily so? What circumstances might make it a bad thing?

Background

Isaiah 7 needs some historical context for it to make sense, which we can glean from 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28. The year is 735BC, five years after Isaiah was commissioned as a prophet. Ahaz is king of Judah. Assyria is threatening Judah's northern neighbours, Syria (also known as 'Aram') and Israel (also known as 'Ephraim'). Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, have formed an alliance to oppose Assyria and try to force Judah to join them by besieging Jerusalem and then, they hope, installing a puppet king to be their ally (7:6). In 7:1, we enter the story right in the middle of the siege.

Observation and interpretation

Read Isaiah 7:1-9

1. What is Ahaz's predicament in 7:1?
2. What is Ahaz's reaction to his predicament in 7:2?
3. What is Isaiah's message to Ahaz in 7:3-9?

Read Isaiah 7:10-12

Ahaz thought he only had two choices when it came to Judah's survival: side with Syria and Israel, or side with Assyria. God has offered him a radical, third choice: side with neither of them and trust God instead. To reinforce this, God volunteers to prove his trustworthiness to Ahaz by offering him a sign (7:10).

1. How does Ahaz respond to God's offer of a sign and what does this look like on the surface?
2. Read 2 Kings 16:5-9. What does this show us about the real reason behind Ahaz's answer to Isaiah?

Read Isaiah 7:13-25

Ahaz refuses God's offer of a sign because he has already chosen who he will ask to help him in this fight: Assyria, not God. In response, God insists on giving him a sign anyway, but it comes in two stages.

Remembering that Immanuel means 'God with us', let's consider what the sign is that 'God is with' Judah: From v16, what will happen before the child is old enough to know right and wrong? (see also the timing of the birth of Isaiah's own child in 8:3-4). From v15 and its

explanation in v18-25, what will life be like when the child is old enough to know right and wrong? (see also 8:5-8).

1. What does it mean for God to be 'with' Judah in each of these timeframes?

The child 'Immanuel' is a sign that God is 'with' Judah in two very different ways. In the short-term (before the child is old enough to know right from wrong), God is 'with' Judah in the sense that he is on their side. He will defeat Israel and Syria and so protect Judah from them. This sign came true in history. A son born at this time (735BC) would be a young boy when Syria fell to the Assyrians (732BC) and a young adolescent when they conquered Israel (722BC). God was 'with' Judah in salvation. However, in the long term (by the time the child had grown up), God is 'with' Judah not in salvation but in judgment. In 701BC, when the child would be about thirty years old, Judah fell almost completely into Assyrian hands and only narrowly avoided Jerusalem being captured (see Is 36-37). In this sense, God will be 'with' Judah in judgment. In summary: because of Ahaz's stubborn refusal to trust God and instead trust in 'mere humans' (2:22), Judah will only stand in the short term, not the long (7:9). God will be 'with' them in the last way they'd ever want him to be. The picture for Judah is gloomy!

Read Matthew 1:20-23

1. Matthew helps us see the ultimate and far greater fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 7. The woman is not merely young, but the virgin mother Mary. The child is not merely a reminder that God is with us, he literally is God with us. How is this Immanuel much greater news than the Immanuel of Isaiah's day?

Application

Trust

Isaiah 7 helps us see that 'God with us' can be good news or bad news depending on where we stand with God. How conscious are you of God's presence in your life and how does this affect the way you carry yourself in public and how you spend your private time?

Pray

Thank God that through Jesus he has come to live with us not to condemn us but to forgive our sins and enable us to rejoice in his presence with us. Pray that we will stand firm in his love for us and be encouraged to reject sin that grieves him.

Isaiah 9-10

Background

Instead of taking any notice of Isaiah, most people are inclined to consult mediums and other spiritual experts, who can put them in touch with relatives who have passed and who, because they are not confined to this life, may be able to give them advice about the suppliants' lives and future. They are resorting to darkness in order to find their way through dark times, but they will find themselves in even greater darkness, gloom and murkiness. Surprisingly, at this point, Isaiah 9:1-7, there comes a declaration that light has dawned. Darkness is a figure for a situation where one does not understand what is going on, for an experience of trouble, for deception and plotting, and for death itself. Light is a figure for a situation where one can see and understand, for a place where one doesn't mind being seen, for an experience of deliverance and blessing, for a realm where God is present and active. Isaiah 9:8-10:34 is a description of the thoroughness of God's justice: he will not stop until every sin has been punished. God will punish Israel for its sin but, even when that has been done, his anger will still not have been exhausted (9:12, 17, 21). Judah still needs to pay for its crimes, and will do so via Assyria (10:1-4). But even then, God will still have justice to mete out, this time to Assyria itself, for its pride in seeing itself as anything more than a weapon in God's hands to carry out his will (10:5-34).

Observation and interpretation

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

1. As v1 implies, the picture for Judah has been pretty gloomy so far! How do these verses provide hope?
2. How does the promise of 9:1-7 further inform us of what it means to fear the Lord?
3. What is the contrast between this royal son and Ahaz?

Read Isaiah 10:12-19

1. How is Assyria described in God's hands?
2. What does this tell you about God's rule over the nations?

Read Isaiah 10:20-27

1. What does the phrase in v20, 'In that day' imply about when these events being described will happen?
2. How does God give his people hope even under the oppression of Assyria?

Read Revelation 21:22-22:5 and discuss the features of the new cartoon God will bring about, thinking especially of Isaiah 9-10.

Application

Do

How does the guarantee of a place for you in the new creation shape the way you live and respond to the evil and injustice that you see in life now?

Pray

Pray in thanksgiving to God that he will one day bring all evil and injustice to an end and establish his Kingdom of peace, righteousness and justice. Pray that we will not grow weary of warning those who reject Jesus about the judgment of God that awaits them if they don't repent.

Isaiah 11-12

Note: we will look at both Isaiah 11 and 12 in this weeks study as the Christmas break is coming up soon.

Discussion Question

Do you ever find it hard to believe that God really will restore the world to order in the new creation? Why? Why not?

Background

Following on from Isaiah 10, In Isaiah 11 we see that it's only when every sinner - Israelite, Judean or Assyrian - has been given justice that God can rest. But when all that has been done, the way is clear for some hope: a new king who will rule for the benefit of all of God's people, not just in Judah but in every nation on earth. This is the theme of Isaiah 11:1-12:6.

Observation and interpretation

Read Isaiah 11:1-9

1. Isaiah 11 focuses on one particular figure. From 11:1-9, summarise:
 - a. who he is
 - b. what he will do
 - c. what his actions will result in
2. How does this figure remind you of the child of 9:6-7?
3. What does the imagery of 11:6-9 teach us about the scope of this figure's impact? Can you recall coming across imagery like this elsewhere in the Bible?

Read Isaiah 11:10-16

1. Who will this figure:
 - a. save?
 - b. destroy?
2. When?

Read Isaiah 12:1-6

1. What is the great theme of this song of praise?

Isaiah refers to this figure as a 'shoot ... from the stump of Jesse'. By mentioning Jesse, the father of King David, Isaiah tells us he is talking about the dynasty of David's line, and hence that this 'shoot' will be a new king. The fact that Isaiah goes on to mention the Spirit in the next verse therefore makes perfect sense. Historically, the Spirit empowered the kings of Israel to perform their kingly duties (1 Samuel 10:10; 11:16; 16:13-14). If the kings did not have the Spirit, they couldn't do their job. If they did have the Spirit, they could. In fact that was part

of how you identified a king of Israel: by whether he had the Spirit or not. So with all that in mind

Read John 1:29-34

1. How did John know who Jesus really was?
2. What does this tell us about who Jesus really is?

Application

Trust

How often do you reflect on God's promise to restore the world to order in the new creation? Does this passage challenge or affirm your attitude towards God's promise of the new creation?

Say

Here's a memorisation challenge: commit Isaiah 12:4-6 to memory.

Do

How does the guarantee of a place for you in the new creation shape the way you live and respond to the evil and injustice that you see in life now?

Pray

Pray in thanksgiving to God that he will one day bring all evil and injustice to an end and establish his Kingdom of peace, righteousness and justice. Pray that we will not grow weary of warning those who reject Jesus about the judgment of God that awaits them if they don't repent.