

## Isaiah – Introduction Part 3

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Isaiah 30:8-9, 12-13, 15 – Now go, write it on a tablet before them And inscribe it on a scroll, That it may serve in the time to come As a witness forever. For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to listen To the instruction of the LORD; ... Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, "Since you have rejected this word And have put your trust in oppression and guile, and have relied on them, Therefore this iniquity will be to you Like a breach about to fall, A bulge in a high wall, Whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant, ... For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." But you were not willing,

### REVIEW

In Part 1 of our introduction, we looked at Isaiah the man.

In Part 2 of our introduction, we looked at the intended audience. Remember Isaiah 30:8, where God tells him, "Now go, write it on a tablet before them and inscribe it on a scroll, that it may serve in the time to come as a witness forever." This isn't just a message for Isaiah's immediate hearers in Judah. It's a permanent record, a witness for all Israel across time. The book wasn't addressed to Gentiles, but to the Jewish people as God's covenant nation. Still, its truths echo principles that reach everyone.

Last week, we saw the impact of Isaiah across the eras. From the time of Isaiah's ministry (740-686 BC), the time of the later prophets (685-400 BC), the intertestamental period (399-John the Baptizer), the time of Christ and the apostles (30-70 AD), the post-temple period (70-1800 AD), and the current time (1800-current day).

We saw how Isaiah became the most cherished book, but most still do not take Isaiah literally. How one understands Isaiah 40-66 (specifically 53) will typically indicate if they consider Jesus Christ as Messiah.

### THE DIRECT AUDIENCE OF ISAIAH: THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH (800 TO 685 BC)

Before we move forward in our introductions, I wanted to take one more look at the intended audience, this time looking intently at the people of Israel and Judah during the time of Isaiah. Why focus here? Because Isaiah's message hits home when we see who these people were. The Book of Isaiah is an indictment upon them, so it helps if we can understand them better. It helps us grasp why God spoke through Isaiah the way He did.

#### **I. The People in Prosperity and Hidden Decay (Around 800-750 BC)**

Around 800 BC, the kingdoms were divided: Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Both enjoy a season of relative peace and growth, but beneath it, spiritual rot sets in. Scripture shows us a people who benefit from stability yet drift from the Lord.

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In Judah, the people experience expansion and wealth. 2 Chronicles 26:6-15 describes how the nation thrives: fields are cultivated, towers are built in the wilderness, and cisterns are dug for large herds. The people aren't just surviving; they're prospering. Farmers till fertile land, shepherds tend flocks in the hills, and craftsmen build fortifications. But this success breeds pride. The same chapter notes that as strength grows, hearts turn away. High places, (Pagan altars) remain, and the people burn incense there, forsaking YHWH and turning to idolatry (2 Kings 15:4). Rebellion seeds are growing.

Up north in Israel, under Jeroboam II, the people see borders restored from Lebo-hamath to the Sea of Arabah, as prophesied by Jonah, son of Amitai (2 Kings 14:25). This means more land for farming, trade routes open, and cities bustling. Amos paints the scene vividly. In Amos 6:4-6, he describes the affluent lounging on ivory beds, eating lambs from the flock, strumming harps, drinking wine from bowls, and anointing themselves with finest oils. Sounds luxurious, right? But it's at the expense of the poor. Amos 2:6-7 accuses them of selling the righteous for silver and the needy for sandals, trampling the poor into the dust. Merchants cheat with false balances (Amos 8:5), eager to make the ephah small and the shekel great. The people include the elite who oppress, and the common folk who suffer; widows without justice, and orphans pushed aside.

Hosea adds the spiritual side for Israel. The people chase after Baal, crediting idols for their grain, wine, and oil (Hosea 2:8). Families engage in ritual prostitution at shrines, thinking it ensures fertility for crops (Hosea 4:13-14). Knowledge of God fades; Hosea 4:1 says there's no faithfulness, kindness, or knowledge of God in the land, only profane things: deception, murder, stealing, adultery. Yet some cling to truth. Amos calls out a remnant who seek good, not evil, that they may live (Amos 5:14-15). In Judah, too, Micah later echoes this divide: while many pursue dishonest gain, a few hate evil and love good (Micah 3:2).

So, in this era, the people are materially blessed but spiritually divided. Prosperity masks idolatry and injustice, setting the stage for warning.

### **II. The People in Crisis and Compromise (Around 750-730 BC)**

By mid-century, threats loom. Assyria rises in the east, pressuring borders. The Syro-Ephraimite war broke out around 735 BC, shaking both kingdoms. Scripture shows people gripped by fear, yet deepening their sins.

In Judah, as invasion nears, hearts tremble like trees in the wind (Isaiah 7:2). Families in Jerusalem huddle, whispers of siege spread. Isaiah walks among them, meeting people at the upper pool's conduit, where women and men congregate. But instead of turning to the Lord, many seek alliances or omens. Isaiah 8:19 warns against consulting mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter; the people turn to necromancers for guidance, ignoring God's law.

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Socially, injustice peaks. Isaiah 5:8-10 condemns those who evict small farmers, turning them into tenants or wanderers. The people feast and drink but ignore the Lord's deeds (Isaiah 5:11-12). Micah 2:1-2 describes them devising iniquity on their beds, then seizing fields and houses at dawn, oppressing man and his inheritance. The poor cry out, but the wealthy bribe judges (Micah 7:3). Women and children suffer most; Micah 2:9 says their little ones are cast out from delightful homes.

In Israel, the crisis accelerates judgment. Hosea depicts a people like a heated oven, burning with intrigue (Hosea 7:4-7). They mix with nations, becoming like a cake not turned, half-baked and useless (Hosea 7:8). Elders fall, but none call to God. Idolatry runs rampant: calves in Bethel and Dan draw worshippers (Hosea 8:5-6), sowing wind to reap a whirlwind. Families sacrifice on mountains, under oaks and poplars for shade (Hosea 4:13). Hosea 6:1-3 shows some yearning to return: "Come, let us return to the Lord... He will heal us... revive us."

Assyria begins captivity. 2 Kings 15:29 tells of Tiglath-pileser capturing Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee; all of Naphtali's land, carrying people captive. Families torn apart, marched to foreign lands. Those who are left grieve, yet persist in sin.

Overall, crises expose the people's hearts: fear drives some to forbidden practices, and others harden in greed. A remnant seeks the Lord, but the majority compromise.

### **III. The People in Invasion and Reform (Around 730-685 BC)**

After Israel's fall, attention shifts to Judah. Assyria invaded in 701 BC under Sennacherib. Scripture reveals a people tested by siege, with moments of revival under reform.

The fall of Israel scatters its people. 2 Kings 17:6 says the king of Assyria carries them to Halah, Gozan's river, Media's cities. Survivors intermarry with imported foreigners, birthing Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24-41). They fear the Lord yet serve idols, teaching mixed ways.

In Judah, reforms begin. 2 Chronicles 29:3-11 describes priests and Levites sanctifying themselves, cleansing the temple. People bring sacrifices: 70 bulls, 100 rams, 200 lambs for burnt offerings (2 Chronicles 29:32). The assembly rejoices with music, as in David's day (2 Chronicles 29:25-28). Families from cities gather, consecrated for seven days, then extend another seven in gladness (2 Chronicles 30:21-23). Tithes overflow: heaps of grain, wine, oil, oxen, sheep (2 Chronicles 31:5-8).

But invasion tests this. 2 Kings 18:13-16 notes Sennacherib capturing Judah's fortified cities. People in Lachish, Libnah, and others face siege. Isaiah 36:4-10 records Rabshakeh taunting

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Jerusalem's inhabitants in Hebrew: "On what do you rest this trust?" He mocks their reliance on the Lord, claiming YHWH sent him. The country begins to waver. Isaiah 30:1-5 rebukes those forming alliances with Egypt without asking God, calling them stubborn children carrying out unprofitable plans.

Deliverance comes. 2 Kings 19:35 says an angel strikes 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. The people awoke to corpses; the siege lifted. Joy follows, but Scripture hints at lingering issues. 2 Chronicles 32:31 notes envoys from Babylon; people grow complacent.

Faithful mixtures persist. High places remain (2 Kings 18:4, 22). Isaiah 65:3-4 later describes people provoking God with gardens' sacrifices, incense on bricks, sitting among graves, eating swine's flesh—secret rites continuing.

Yet, hope glimmers in the remnant. Isaiah 10:20-21 speaks of survivors leaning on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth; a remnant returns.

### **Conclusion: Who They Were and Why It Matters for Isaiah**

From 800 to 685 BC, the people of Israel and Judah shifted from prosperous yet compromising to crisis-hardened, to reformed, but eventually to failure. The people are blessed with land yet plagued by idolatry, injustice, and violence. A majority drifts, oppressing the weak, chasing false gods. But a remnant holds fast, seeking return. This is Isaiah's initial audience.

His message of judgment stings because it names their high places, their dishonest scales, and their alliances. His comfort shines for the remnant, promising restoration. As we study Isaiah, remember the Israelites were called to be God's chosen people, called to be a light unto the nations; they were unfaithful to the Lord, yet still His people.

### THE STATED THEMES OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Isaiah wrote this document over a span of decades, addressing Judah's immediate crisis while also pointing ahead to God's larger plan. The book divides roughly into judgment (chapters 1 through 39), comfort amid suffering (40 through 55), and future restoration (56 through 66), but the themes weave through all of it. I have identified five core themes that Isaiah states explicitly, and for each one, we will look at key passages to see how the text presents them.

#### **1. God's Holiness and Sovereignty Over All Creation**

Isaiah emphasizes that God is utterly holy, set apart from sin, and He rules over everything with absolute authority. This theme sets the foundation for why Judah's sin is such a problem; it offends a perfect God who controls history, nations, and even the heavens.

Isaiah's own calling vision in chapter 6 captures this vividly.

Consider Isaiah 6:3: "And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.'" Here, the seraphim proclaim God's holiness three times for emphasis, showing His purity fills the entire world. This is not just a description; it is the reason Isaiah feels ruined in verse 5: "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.'"

We see God's sovereignty echoed later in Isaiah 40:22-23: "It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless." This stresses that no king or nation stands outside God's control; He brings them low as easily as He spreads the sky.

This theme reminds us that God's actions, whether in judgment or mercy, flow from who He is, holy and supreme sovereign Creator.

#### **2. Judgment on Sin, Idolatry, and Injustice**

A major part of Isaiah is God's indictment against Judah for breaking their covenant with Him. The people have turned to idols, oppressed the poor, and trusted foreign alliances instead of the Lord. This is presented as a legal case, with God as the prosecutor calling out their rebellion.

Right from the start, Isaiah 1:2-4 lays it out: "Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks, 'Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox

knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand.' Ah, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him." God calls creation as witnesses to Judah's ungrateful rebellion, comparing them unfavorably to animals.

On injustice, Isaiah 5:8-9 warns the greedy elite: "Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, Until there is no more room, So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land! In my ears the Lord of hosts has sworn, 'Surely, many houses shall become desolate, Even great and fine ones, without occupants.'" This targets those who exploit the poor for land, promising their wealth will turn to ruin.

Idolatry gets a sharp rebuke in Isaiah 44:9-10: "Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, And their precious things are of no profit; Even their own witnesses fail to see or know, So that they will be put to shame. Who has fashioned a god or cast an idol to no profit?" Isaiah mocks the absurdity of worshiping man-made objects, showing how it leads to shame and judgment.

These passages show judgment is not arbitrary; it is the consequence of violating God's standards, as laid out in the law from Deuteronomy.

### 3. The Preservation of a Faithful Remnant

Even in judgment, Isaiah states that God will not wipe out His people entirely. He will preserve a "remnant," a small group of faithful ones who return to Him. This theme offers hope amid despair, pointing to God's mercy in keeping a seed for the future.

Isaiah 10:20-21 declares: "Now it will come about in that day that the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God." Here, the remnant is defined by their trust in God alone, not alliances, and they will come back to Him.

In Isaiah 6:13, after foretelling desolation, God says: "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be subject to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump." This image of a burned stump with a holy seed inside shows that even after destruction, life remains through God's preserved faithful ones.

This theme teaches that God's promises endure not through the whole nation, but through those who stay true, a principle we see carried into the New Testament.

### 4. The Coming Messiah and His Redemptive Work

Isaiah repeatedly states themes around a coming figure, the Messiah, who will suffer for sins, rule as King, and bring salvation. This includes both His humble suffering and glorious reign, often blended in prophetic foreshortening.

One key passage is Isaiah 9:6-7: "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this." This child is divine, a Davidic king whose rule brings endless peace and justice.

For the suffering aspect, Isaiah 53:4-6 states: "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." This describes the Messiah taking on punishment as a substitute, healing through His wounds.

And in Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." "Immanuel" means "God with us," stating the Messiah's divine presence among people.

These quotes show the Messiah as both sufferer and sovereign, central to God's plan of redemption.

### 5. Comfort, Restoration, and Future Glory

Finally, Isaiah states themes of comfort for the afflicted, promising restoration after judgment, including a new heavens and earth where righteousness reigns. This looks beyond exile to a renewed creation.

Isaiah 40:1-2 opens this section: "'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God. 'Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins.'" God commands tender words, declaring that sins are paid for and conflict is over.

For future glory, Isaiah 65:17-18: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever

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in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, And her people for gladness." This promises a complete renewal, where joy replaces sorrow.

And in Isaiah 35:10: "And the ransomed of the Lord will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away." The restored people return in triumph, free from pain.

This theme assures that judgment is not the end; God's ultimate goal is restoration for those who turn to Him.

In closing, these themes - judgment, holiness, remnant, Messiah, and restoration - form the heart of Isaiah's message. They show a God who hates sin but pursues redemption. As we study further, notice how they interconnect, always pointing to all aspects of His attributes and character.