

# Notes on Isaiah 1—12

*by Grant Thorpe*

available at

<http://www.corobaptist.org.au>

The following notes may be copied and distributed freely if they are acknowledged and not used for profit.

Christians read the Old Testament as those who know the Christ to whom it bore witness. We do not live then but now. But there are many things about a relationship with God which are not clear without the whole story, then and now, being told.

We will read about a people who belonged to God but were unfaithful to him. In many respects, we who have heard the gospel of Christ will blush with them for their sins and ours, feel the pain of the judgments that chastened them and us. But we will also learn to love the promises God made to them and which broke through the hopelessness of their situation to give them forgiveness and hope.

## **The story when we begin**

Isaiah was a poet, a confidant of princes, aware of national events and the royal household and aware too, of the civic and religious life of his people. However his vision of 'the Holy One of Israel' shaped everything he saw. God spoke to him and, by doing so changed the situation in which the nation found itself.

Prophets, like Isaiah, were those to whom God spoke. They were commanded to speak what they had heard to the nation of Israel, and, in some cases, to the nations particularly at times of crisis. Priests had been commanded to teach Israel about the Lord and about how they should live as his people, but when this was not done and Israel's situation deteriorated, prophets were sent with a special word.

This word from God did not just remind Israel of what they had forgotten but set before them, with increasing clarity, the things God would do to save the nation and take them onto their inheritance. In particular, prophets showed how God's gift of a king would be fulfilled by a coming Leader and Saviour, a Messiah, and how God's glory would be revealed to the nations.

When Isaiah began his speaking, Israel had already been fathered by God and shaped for over a millennium by the promises made to Abraham. For about half of this time they had lived as a nation saved by God from slavery in Egypt. Now established in their land for two and a half centuries, they had had the benefit of a kingship established by God so that they would prosper and fulfill God's purpose for them.

But all was not well in the land.

## Chapters 1–2

Only a father could speak to people like this, a father who was faithful and strong. He confronted the estrangement of his people from himself. To him, they were like Sodom or a harlot; they were sick; he hated their worship and despised their injustice to one another. They were his enemies, but in attacking them he would heal them. Their healing would come through righteousness, although he does not yet tell us how this could be. Israel would then blush as they remembered their idolatry. Their present strength would go up in flames.

We do not need a vision for ourselves other than the one God has for us. God's temple was established at Jerusalem as a sign of God's presence among the nations. The Lord's house, or Zion, is now the people of God who are joined to Christ as his body (Gal. 4:26–28). All that God promised here to Israel is being fulfilled as Christ leads his church in making disciples of all nations. This is the true hope of peace among the nations.

The Lord calls us to walk in his light. Pride stands, as it stood then, as an obstacle to this purpose of God. It was expressed by going to wizards for guidance, relying on wealth, trusting in what their hands had made. Furthermore, God would terrify everyone who was haughty and make them throw away their false trusts and cry out to Him.

### Prayer

Father, your hand is on your people. Your voice is heard among us. Your voice is that of your Son and you are the Holy One among us. But though you are our God, we quickly become estranged from you and arouse your jealous love. Father, forgive us for our injustice to each other and especially for our arrogance in your presence. Then Lord, let us hear and heed your reasoning, and cherish again your hope for us, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Chapters 3–4

Only the loss of public services and a crisis of leadership would speak to a proud nation. God was still present among his people (v. 8) but their treatment of those without power was in defiance of him who was father of the fatherless and husband to the widow (Psalm 68:4–6). Their infrastructure would collapse because leaders acted like children or heeded their own domestic interests rather than those of the nation. Women with riches had adorned themselves with trinkets rather than the nation with good deeds. These women would learn what was real about life by having to beg for a man to father their children however some had kept their integrity, and others would be chastened and repent.

'That day' (3:18; 4:2) would not be for humiliation but for glory. The 'blood' on the hands of Jerusalem had to be washed away and only then would the people become holy. God's glory would be over the nation for the protection of all its residents. No less than this was in God's purpose when he gave up his Son for our sins that he might purge for himself a people who are zealous for good works (Titus 3:10).

### Prayer

Father, you have seen my self-interest and carelessness of your presence. You have judged me in the person of your Son. Show me again and again your care for all the peoples of the

earth. Take away the inclination to protect what is my own and place in me the care you have shown the world in Jesus Christ, for his name's sake. Amen.

## Chapters 5–6

God purposed that his people would bear fruit, by replicating the character of God in their community living. In fact, they had been unjust, pleasure hungry, arrogant and blasphemous. They would not display righteousness, but God would, and the proud would be humbled. When Jesus came, he said that without him we could do nothing, that is, anything that would bear fruit for God. But if we would abide in him we would bear much fruit (John 15:1–6). Christ is the true hope for a people in the earth who love God and their neighbour.

Isaiah describes his vision for us. It happened at the end of the long and prosperous reign of the good King Uzziah. Isaiah may well have been thinking about the future of the nation and its leadership. He saw the holy Lord of Israel and heard angels (seraph, or burning one) worshipping him because the whole earth was full of his glory; not all heaven but the whole earth.

This made Isaiah aware of his and his nation's sinfulness so that he cried out. Nevertheless he could not have anticipated the change that would come to him when he knew that his sin was blotted out. He was equipped now to speak for this holy God, even though the nation remained unresponsive. Love for his Maker and not the expediency that ruled the nation would shape everything he did. The nation would be felled like a tree and its remaining stump be burned.

John says that it was the glory of Jesus that Isaiah saw (John 12:40–41). Every revelation of God has had in view the revelation of all his glory in his Son. Still, Israel remained unresponsive, but Jesus said that when he was lifted up he would draw all men to himself (John 12:32). Christ was Israel's remaining stump, and he was burned by God's judgments in our place. In this way, God's revealing himself to be the holy God is not designed to exclude us but to catch us up to himself and make us like himself.

## Prayer

Holy Father, for whose pleasure and glory I have been created, forgive the sin which has marred your image in me. Show me your glory, and touch my whole being with your forgiveness. Send me where you choose that I may bear witness to your holy love in this world, for the sake of Christ. Amen.

## Chapters 7–8

King Ahaz had opportunity to grow in faith because God sent Isaiah to tell him that the two countries he so feared (Syria and Northern Israel) would soon be no threat. A third power, Assyria, would bring them low. God desired to move forward with his people but could not bring Ahaz with him, so Ahaz and his people trembled. A newborn child called 'Immanuel' or 'God with us' would be God's witness that what he said was true. The story of the child growing up and Ahaz's fears proving groundless, and the promise declared in the child's name was remembered by the nation. These things were remembered when Christ was born and Matthew saw that

God had prophesied the coming of his Son (Matt. 1:22–23). The nation had never been abandoned.

Another child, Isaiah's own son, would indicate the time of Assyria's rise, not only to remove the Northern alliance but to threaten Judah herself. The need for faith would never go away in this world. Judah, however, was still Immanuel's land, even while being judged. The religious world may want God's presence without the fire of his cleansing, or worship without a crucified Christ but will gain no security of conscience in such a faith.

The faithful remnant in the land knew the nation still belonged to God and affirmed that 'God is with us!' Isaiah himself learned that he should fear only the Lord, and regard him alone as holy (perhaps a reminder of his vision). This God of Israel would be a sanctuary to those with faith but a stone to stumble over for all Israel including its capital city and covenant centre.

### **Prayer**

Lord, you have never been absent from us. Your Son is with us always. He was all that was left of your people when the judgment fell at Calvary, but he was there for us and so we have endured to this day. Then Lord, while the world rages, and your people seem to be in disarray because they do not trust in you, let my faith be firm and my words be clear, for the sake of your glory. Amen.

### **Chapters 9–10**

Northern Israel had separated from the South and had a rival kingship and an heretical worship. They constantly feuded with the southern part of the nation, and now, fell to the Assyrians however they would be the first to benefit from God's coming King. It was no accident that Jesus poured out his blessings mostly in this area, not around Jerusalem (Matt. 4:13–17). Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.

While Israel knew their kings were anointed by God (a faith maintained only by the Southern tribes known as Judah), none could fulfill the titles attributed to this son born to the nation. When he counselled, wonders would happen. When he came, God would be present and the Father would be made known. His reign would establish peace by righteousness and would never be ended and so fulfill the promises made to David (not like the reign of northern kings that had ended).

The North had much to answer to God for. God had spoken to them in Amos and Hosea some 40 years before they fell but they had spoken as though they could rebuild what God had thrown down. So God came to them in wave after wave of judgment, sparing none. They fought against each other. They were unjust to their own vulnerable people.

As for Assyria, they thought they had gained an upper hand in conquering the Northern tribes of God's people. They thought their gods superior to Israel's and boasted that the South would fall too. They thought their victories were the fruit of their own wisdom. They would discover what happened when a stick became confused by its destructive power and thought it wielded itself.

God himself remained the light of Israel, even when Israel ignored God. He was the Holy One of these apostate people too, for the sake of his promises, and he would become a fire to devour his enemies. In his vision, Isaiah had seen that God was the Holy One for all his people, not just for himself or for a few.

### **Prayer**

Praise be you our God for in your zeal and grace you have done for us what we could never have deserved. You have given us a King to save us from our sins and sent your own eternal Son to lead us in our present life and into the life to come. Our Father, have mercy on our present world which thinks itself so great. Grant that many may see the light that you have always been for your people, and turn and be saved. Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hear our prayer. Amen.

### **Chapters 11–12**

Readers of Isaiah had to face Assyria pressing on their borders. They did not have a strong king in Ahaz, so what would be their hope? It was in a coming King, one who discerned rightly because the Spirit of God was on him. The distance between Isaiah's day and the coming of Christ, who fulfilled this prophecy, did not lessen the power of the message. Hope tells us that God still has a purpose in the present and that he is among us. The coming King would act righteously and would bring righteousness to the land and so establish true community, not only among his own people, but across the earth.

Now that this King has come, every person who turns to Christ is a part of the nations 'giving up' their citizens to him who has a higher claim. Among this new people, Isaiah was told, there will be no jealousy; fighting between North and South tribes will be ended. This deliverance will be like a new exodus from slavery.

The true peace to come will be the end of judgment, and, in its place, there will be gratefulness. Salvation is like a well to drink from. The woman of Sychar (John 4) was offered this water, water Christ would give to her. Those who have received the gift of life should sing with joy to God and let the earth know the great thing God has done.

### **Prayer**

Father, as I live in this present world, experience its pressures and see the inability of leaders to lead us in your ways, may my faith rise up to see your Son, now made Lord. I thank you that he rules with a wisdom that has led me to you, a wisdom made known by the preaching of the cross. Father, prosper the preaching of your word, and, by the outpouring of your Spirit, bring many to gratefulness and submission to your Son Jesus the Christ, in whose name I pray. Amen.