

File No. 85

ISAIAH 1:1–23; 2:5–9; **6:1–13**; 9:6,7

GOD'S MESSENGER, ISAIAH

(SBS Bk 3 Story Nos. 39)

Story Notes

Background Information

Christians read the Old Testament knowing the Christ to whom it bears witness. We see more of what it means than the writers themselves. On the other hand, there are many things about a relationship with God which are not clear to us without the truth that was revealed to them.

We read about a people who belonged to God but were unfaithful to him. We who have heard the gospel of Christ will blush with them because our sins are often the same. We will feel the pain of the judgments that disciplined them. 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 friend of princes, aware of national events and the royal household. He was also aware 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 tell Israel what they had heard. Their message was usually for Israel but often concerned other nations as well. 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 announced the things God would do to save the nation and take them onto their inheritance. In particular, prophets announced the coming of a Leader and Saviour, a Messiah, who would reveal God's glory 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.

Isaiah tells us (in chapter one) that God spoke to Israel as only a father could speak, a father who was faithful and strong. Israel had turned away from their God. They were like Sodom, or a harlot, and they were sick. God hated their worship and despised their injustice to one another. They were his enemies. However, in attacking them, God 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.

The Lord called Israel (in chapter two) to walk in his light. God's temple was established at Jerusalem as a sign of God's presence among the nations. 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. God would terrify everyone who was haughty and make them throw away their false trusts and cry out to Him.

Main Lesson

Chapter 6

God purposed that his people would bear fruit, by reflecting 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's vision 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 chopped down 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 killed 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.