

"So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God! (II Peter 1:19-20)

And that's the case for the prophecy of Isaiah, and the reason we're back to resuming our study of this great book--a book, like all books of the Bible, inspired by God, and "profitable for teaching doctrine, for reproof and correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate and equipped for every good work!" (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Welcome back "MOBsters," men of the Bible!

Interesting that Isaiah begins his prophecy by writing about "the vision" he saw, and the voice he heard, from the Lord Himself--"sitting on the throne, lofty and exalted, with the fringes of His robe filling the temple and Seraphim (angels!) calling out to one another and singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory"! And though seeing himself as a man "woeful and ruined, with unclean lips, living among people with unclean lips," finding himself divinely commissioned "to go and tell a people" (a people ordained to influence the whole world for good, but ones with "insensitive hearts," and "dull ears," and "dim eyes") about God's plan for man for the days (and ages) to come!

As we noted in our preview in May, Paul Shockley wrote that the purpose of Isaiah is to display God's glory and holiness through the judgment of sin, but ultimately through His deliverance and blessing of a righteous remnant!

Harry Ironside viewed the 66 chapters of Isaiah as "the Bible in miniature," with the first 39 chapters resembling the 39 chapters of the Old Testament--with its focus on the Law of God and judgment for sin--and the final 27 chapters (which we're now getting into!) emphasizing God's grace and mercy! And redemption!

We've covered the first 39 chapters! Now the "good news" of the final 27!

Notice how quickly it all begins in Isaiah 40, verse 1--with a message from the Lord telling Isaiah to offer words of comfort and hope for Israel! Following the dark and dismal closing words for King Hezekiah, in Isaiah 39! "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts, 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid in store to this day will be carried to Babylon...!"

Babylon? Interesting, that when Isaiah wrote this prophecy, Babylon was not yet a great power! Who would have thought that it would be Babylon and not Assyria who would destroy Jerusalem and carry away the Jews into captivity, or that the Medes and Persians, and a king named Cyrus, would later arise and be used as God's "anointed" to defeat the Babylonians and issue a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land and rebuild walls and the temple of God in Jerusalem!

As we'll see, in chapters 40-66, Isaiah will prophesy about a time when it would all be turned around and there would be "a voice in the wilderness"--someone who would "clear the way for the Lord...!" The Messiah! But so much more!

John Edwards, in his book on Isaiah, wrote that "when one turns from the thirty-ninth chapter to the fortieth chapter, it's as though he steps out of the darkness of judgment and into the light of salvation"! Motyer writes that "no sooner the message of disaster, than a message of comfort and consolation...!"

And, more importantly, in these final 27 chapters we will see God's plan for the ages! And see that it's not just for Israel, but for all the world! And that more, so much more, is still coming!

As John Neal noted, the final 27 chapters can be divided into three main sections!

In Isaiah 40-48 focuses on the greatness of God, whose glory is revealed as He offers comfort and delivers His people from captivity in Babylon, using His "servant," Cyrus, the king of Persia, who just happens to rise to the occasion!

- "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not grow weary or tired! His understanding is inscrutable! He gives strength to the weary...and those who wait upon Him will gain new strength...!
- Isaiah 43:14 calls Him "the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel"!

In Isaiah 49-57 Isaiah addresses the "problem of Israel's sin" that resulted in her captivity--and prophesies about a coming Deliverer! A Savior! The "Suffering Servant"! Moving from a physical deliverance to a "spiritual" deliverance! From Cyrus to Christ!

- Wierbe writes that the heart of Isaiah 40-66 is the section on chapters 49-57, where Isaiah announces the coming of Messiah, and that the heart of chapters 49-57 is Isaiah 53, with its description of the "substitutionary death" of Christ for the sin of the world!

And, finally, Isaiah 58-66 deals with Israel's glorious future, with the consummation of God's restoration of Israel--and of the world! Picturing the "redeemed" of the Lord!

- Jim Battle noted, instructively, how these last 27 chapters go well beyond the deliverance of God's people from Babylon captivity, and even beyond the redemption of God people from their sin, to an actual change in the cosmos, and the Lord's restoration of His created order"! Paradise restored!

And so, as we noted earlier, it's no surprise that people for centuries have turned to these passages to find comfort and consolation--and assurance in the difficult days of life! (Check out Isaiah 40:31, e.g., and compare it with II Corinthians 1:3-4!)

I'm glad you're aboard as we resume our study and "pay more attention" to Isaiah's writings in the weeks and months to come!

Be comforted!

Lowell