

ISAIAH, THE FIFTH GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is usually regarded as the greatest of the writing prophets. He began his ministry in 740 BC, the year King Uzziah died. He was a contemporary of the prophets Amos, Hosea and Micah who did most of his work during the reign of King Hezekiah. According to Jewish tradition he died a martyr's death, sawn in two during the reign of Manasseh, sometime around 686 BC. There is considerable scholarly debate as to whether Isaiah wrote the entire book of Isaiah, or if students of his composed chapters 40-66.

Isaiah is perhaps best known for his prophecies and predictions concerning the coming of the messiah, especially the suffering servant poems. The main message of the book however, is a complicated juxtaposition of terrifying warnings of judgment and destruction with uplifting promises of hope and prosperity. The book is often referred to as the fifth gospel because of its prophecies concerning Jesus and because it is quoted some 65 times in the New Testament. In fact, Isaiah is mentioned by name 22 times in the New Testament.

The name Isaiah means "Yahweh is salvation". The book certainly has a very exalted view of our creator who is described as holy, glorious and incomparable. He is above creation, yet involved with His creation. He is the God of Israel, but also the God of all the nations. He is a holy God, our judge as well as our savior.

The greatest challenge in creating this study was choosing which passages we would examine. There are so many to choose from. Isaiah is a veritable goldmine of powerful spiritual truths. Given the length of this sermon series it was inevitable that some great and famous passages would have to be overlooked. Hopefully, the ones we have chosen will help us to hear the message of the book and apply its truths to our lives.

LESSON ONE

ISAIAH'S CALL

ISAIAH 6:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah was called to become a prophet through a powerful vision. Many think that the vision he had of angels worshipping the Lord is a model for what our worship on earth should be like. At his calling, Isaiah also received the message he would proclaim. It was a message he was unworthy to give, a difficult message that would transform his people.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) When did Isaiah receive his call?

- 2) Where did Isaiah's vision take place?

- 3) What were the seraphs doing with their six wings?

- 4) What did the seraph do to Isaiah with the live coal?

- 5) What message is Isaiah given to deliver?

- 6) How long will Isaiah have to give this message?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) In his vision Isaiah saw the Lord and "the train of His robe filled the temple." What is the significance of this?

- 2) The seraphs did things with their wings. What do these actions tell us about the nature of worship?

- 3) What famous hymn is based on verse three?
- 4) Why did Isaiah need the cleansing power of the hot coal? How does a hot coal cleanse?
- 5) What do you make of the message that Isaiah is called to give? How will he make the hearts of people calloused?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Presuming you have not had a call like Isaiah's, does that make you feel jealous? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you feel like you worship God in the same way as the seraphs?
- 3) In your worship do you ever feel unclean or unworthy? Which one?
- 4) Have you ever had to give a message that you really did not want to give?
- 5) How does a prophecy of doom help people? Has such a prophecy ever helped you?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, teach me more of Who You are and show me how flawed my understanding is of who I truly am and of all that Christ has done for me. Thank you for cleansing my lips and washing me clean in the blood of Jesus. Thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to live in me and for building me up, into the living Temple, with all who are saved by grace, through faith in Christ. In a world that has lost its way, I pray in Jesus' name, "Lord. Here am I, send me." AMEN.

Source: <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Isaiah/6>

LESSON TWO

THE BRANCH OF JESSE

ISAIAH 11:1-16

INTRODUCTION

In the days of Isaiah there were kings who sat upon the thrones of both Israel and Judah. Isaiah predicted that both kingdoms would fall. Israel, the northern kingdom would be gone for good, but in the South, God's promise to David would be remembered and fulfilled. A descendant of David would become the king and the messiah would rule. While the Jews, for the most part, looked forward to an earthly kingdom, Christians have seen this messianic hope fulfilled in Jesus.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) A shoot will come from whom? Who is this person?
- 2) What will he not judge by?
- 3) What will he judge by?
- 4) What animals will lie down with what animals?
- 5) Where will the peoples of earth be gathered from?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What does the talk of a shoot from Jesse really mean?
- 2) What does it mean when it says that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him?

- 3) What will the judgment of the messiah be like?

- 4) What does the passage mean when it speaks of predators and prey laying down together? Is this to be taken literally or metaphorically?

- 5) What is the significance of the passage when it speaks of the return of the exiles?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) What does this passage have to tell us about Jesus and God's plan for salvation?

- 2) Do you trust in God's judgment? Why or why not?

- 3) Does the description of prey and predators lying down together speak to you? Why or why not?

- 4) The messiah will rally all the nations to him. Has that happened already? If not, when will it happen?

- 5) Have the exiles been gathered? Is that happening? When will it happen?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us how to recognize the Messiah and some of the changes we can expect Him to make in our world as You foretold through the prophet Isaiah. Thank You for protecting many of the descendants of King David, so one of them would become the Messiah that You promised to send.

Thank You for the fruit that Jesus the Messiah bore when He walked on the earth and for all of the fruit His followers have borne by the Holy Spirit He sent, the Holy One who indwells those who believe in You.

Thank You, Father, that we can go to Jesus with faith and confidence in every situation, because we know the Holy Spirit rested on Him and He showed wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and respect for You, His Father.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for showing us that we can trust Your judgment in every situation; Your judgments

will be righteous and faithfully meet the true needs of all of Your people.

Lord Jesus, because You promised to come again and make all things right someday, we pray that You will come quickly and according to our Father's perfect timing, so

Your Kingdom may be on earth as it is in heaven. We look forward to the future when Your people will no longer suffer from the wicked. We pray for peace to return to the earth, to a time when all people and animals once lived together in harmony, peace, happiness, and everlasting joy in Your presence.

Oh Father, fill the earth with the knowledge of You and Your ways. May Your people proclaim the truth about You so many will come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

from ouosu.com

LESSON THREE

TRUE SECURITY

ISAIAH 36:1-17

INTRODUCTION

For generations the superpowers of the ancient world (Egypt and whatever power ruled in Mesopotamia) were dormant, allowing the minor powers of Asia minor, including Israel to flourish. That all stopped when the militaristic people of Assyria rose to power and immediately dominated the region. Extremely aggressive, they wiped out the Syrians, Edomite's and others . In 722 BC, they destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, taking its leaders into exile. Eventually they came to threaten the southern kingdom of Judah, laying siege to Jerusalem itself. What would become of the covenant people when they faced this crisis?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Was Jerusalem the first place in Judah attacked by the Assyrians?

- 2) Who spoke to the Hebrew people at the upper pool?

- 3) What are the Hebrew people warned not to depend upon?

- 4) The Hebrews are offered 2,000 what? Why is that an insult?

- 5) How do the Hebrew leaders respond? Why do they want the Assyrians to speak to them in Aramaic?

- 6) Do the Assyrians continue to speak in Hebrew? What continued message do they give?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) How would you describe the crisis that is facing the Hebrew people? Can you think of any similar crisis being faced by people today?

- 2) In times of crisis, what resources do nations typically rely upon? What should they rely upon?

- 3) The Assyrians challenge the things the Hebrew people are relying on: military might, foreign alliances, their God, their leadership and more. How much trust should be placed in such things?

- 4) The Hebrew leadership seek to keep information from their people. Does such a strategy ever work?

- 5) How did the nation respond to the Assyrian threat? Was their response reasonable?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) How does this story apply to us today? Does it?

- 2) What forces threaten our way of life today? How much do these forces frighten you?

- 3) Do you want to know about the forces that threaten you or would you rather be kept in the dark?

- 4) In what do you place your trust? Has it proven trustworthy?

- 5) How much should we rely upon our own strength and how much should we rely upon God?

PRAYER

Lord, there are times when our faith in you is challenged. Difficulties can cause us to struggle and doubt. In such times, help us to cry out to You saying, "Lord I believe, help me in my unbelief." In such times may you bless us so that we might act for Your purposes, Your plan and Your glory. May we be faithful instruments in your gracious hands. Amen.

LESSON FOUR

IDOLATRY

ISAIAH 44:6-23

INTRODUCTION

The bible is full of warnings against idolatry. Indeed, the ten commandments begin with two that warn against having other gods before God and the making of graven images. Many of the sufferings of the Hebrew people are directly attributed to their worship of idols. Nowhere in the scriptures however is there a more powerful diatribe against the practice of idolatry than here in Isaiah. In graphic detail this passage describes how foolish it is for a creature to make something and then worship it. We should instead worship God, the Creator of us all.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Who does God say is like Him?

- 2) Who makes an idol?

- 3) When someone takes wood to make an idol, what else might he do with the wood?

- 4) What is it we worship when we worship an idol?

- 5) In verse 22, what power does God display?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What is the most important verse in this passage?

- 2) Why is it foolish to worship something that we have made?

- 3) What does an idol represent? Do they represent anything?
- 4) Is idolatry a lie?
- 5) What does idolatry take us away from?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Are you ever tempted to worship something (we) (you) have made?
- 2) Are idols always made of wood or stone? Of what materials do people make idols today?
- 3) Are there things beside God to which we owe allegiance? What are they? Are they necessarily idols?
- 4) What do you think of Isaiah's critique of idolatry? Do you think it is fair? Accurate?
- 5) Are there other forces in the world that you are tempted to worship?

PRAYER

God Almighty, forgive me, I pray, for my wandering heart and wandering eyes. I am ready to return to you, the Author and finisher of my life. Please forgive my waywardness. I give you my heart, my mind, my all, I want to be yours, only yours. I am ready to do things your way, not mine. I am so sorry that I have been so stubborn, Lord. I humbly ask that you lead me and guide me. I want to assume my place in your family. Here I am, Lord, I am yours.

BY TONIA SLIMM

LESSON FIVE

CYRUS THE MESSIAH

ISAIAH 44:24-45:13

INTRODUCTION

In 587 BC, the Jews were exiled to Babylon just as the prophets had foretold. But the prophets (including Isaiah) had also predicted a return from exile. Here we learn of the method that God will use to carry out the work of return. He will use a foreign king, a non-believer to make His will a reality. In this passage he uses a remarkable term to describe this king. He calls Cyrus His anointed, his messiah, appointed to do His work. By using this term God causes us to reflect on the nature of God's rule in the world, especially over all things human.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Who made all things?

- 2) God appoints Cyrus to a task. What is it?

- 3) Does Cyrus acknowledge God?

- 4) Will Cyrus be rewarded for doing God's will? How?

- 5) Does the clay have the right to say to the potter, "What are you making?"

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What does it mean for God to call Cyrus His messiah?

- 2) Who is the one really in charge of seeing that the Jews return to the Promised Land?

- 3) Are we supposed to question God's use of a foreign king to bring about his will?
- 4) Is God in charge of all the nations?
- 5) If God is able to use a non-believer to do His will, but without the non-believer's knowledge, what does that say about free will?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Do you think that God has been active in your life even without your knowledge or consent?
- 2) Do you think that God has used you to do His will without your knowledge? Can you think of an example?
- 3) Do you think that you have the right to question the way in which God has chosen to act in the world? Why or why not?
- 4) All Christians believe in Providence, the idea that God is at work in the world bringing his will to pass. Do you believe that God does that primarily in the lives of individuals or on a larger scale?
- 5) Is God still working to bring exiles home, or was it a one-time thing for Israel?

PRAYER

I am just a pot, a jar of clay, a broken vessel. You are the Potter. I live among other broken vessels, all of whom you have created for your glory. Forgive me, Father, for telling you, "Your work has no handles" (Isa. 45:9). Forgive me for commanding you (when you are the Master Commander) concerning your children and the work of your hands (Isa. 45:11). Thank you, Lord, for the prophecy of Cyrus which always strengthens my faith. You called him by name before he was even born! There is none besides you. No one else could do this! You are the one true God. You are Lord over all creation and history and the future. You are my only Hope.

Help me trust you and your good will when things seem contrary to your purpose. Help me to trust your character. To rest in your promises. To walk in your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

from Thistlebend.org

LESSON SIX

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

ISAIAH 53

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of poems in Isaiah describing a suffering servant. These poems raise the idea that the suffering of one can be redemptive for others. Reading them today, it is hard to see the servant as anyone but Jesus. Certainly Jesus applied these prophecies to Himself, as did the church. What can we learn about our Savior and our faith from looking at these ancient poems?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Is the servant described as a handsome man?
- 2) What iniquities were laid upon the servant?
- 3) When afflicted did the servant speak?
- 4) Whose will was it that the servant suffer?
- 5) Will the servant have children? (Careful, this is a bit of a trick question)

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) How can the suffering of one person benefit another?
- 2) As Christians we tend to see the servant as Jesus. Is there any other way to read these passages?
- 3) What parts of this poem remind you of Jesus? Are there any parts that don't?

4) Why would God will for the servant to suffer?

5) Does any part of this poem seem to speak about the resurrection?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) If it was the role of Jesus to suffer, what does that say about any suffering you might endure?

2) Have you ever seen your suffering or the suffering of someone else as redemptive?

3) Do you think this poem was written as a prophecy for us? If so, do you think that Isaiah knew what he was writing, or do you think that it was the work of the Holy Spirit working through Isaiah?

4) Was the suffering of Jesus, the Father's will or Jesus' will?

5) How does this poem speak to you? Does it?

PRAYER

PRECIOUS LORD JESUS, I thank You for Your enduring love. You came into the world to set me free from the power of darkness. You embraced a violent death on the cross to pay the penalty on my behalf. You suffered the scourging at the pillar, taking the sickness of humanity upon Your own flesh, so that I could be healed.

I come before You now to place all my sin upon Your cross and ask for your Precious Blood to wash me clean. I place the penalty for my sinfulness, all my sickness, diseases and infirmities upon Your cross, and for the sake of Your sorrowful passion, I ask to be set free. I accept Your sacrifice and receive Your gift of reconciliation. I confess Your Lordship over every aspect of my life, heart, mind, body, soul and spirit.

FROM PRAY THE HOLY ROSARY DAILY

3) What is the new covenant of which this passage speaks?

4) What does it mean for God's word not to come back empty?

5) What is meant by verses 12 and 13?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Would you compare your desire for God with hunger or thirst?

2) What have you spent your resources and life on that was not worthy?

3) Verse six says to "seek the Lord while he may be found." Does that mean there may be a time when the opportunity has passed?

4) What hope do you have for the future? What does hope look like for you?

5) Do you think of Christian hope as something to be experienced primarily here and now, or in the life of come?

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(inspired by Isaiah 55:1-5)

God of abundance, you have promised to provide us with more than mere survival; in seeking to satisfy our deepest hungers, we shall find an even more profound sustenance than human imagination could envision.

In your holy love, you have given us so much: talents and treasure in unlimited supply. But often, we spend these on superficial needs. We throw away our plenty on little hungers and petty desires. We seek the fleeting

delight of novelty, of prettiness, and of veneer. We follow the urges to momentary importance; to the notice of a fickle society more interested in noise and sparkle than in mundane sturdiness. We chase after happiness while neglecting joy; we chase after romance while neglecting love; we skim the surface while fearing the depths. God of grace, we are hungry. God of mercy, quench our thirst.

Forgive us, we pray, for our fearfulness, as we rely more upon our own human illusions of control and satisfaction, even though we know that these illusions separate us from you. Forgive us for not trusting in your grace, in your abundance, in the covenant promises that you have renewed with every generation. In Christ, may we learn to love you more than we love ourselves. Amen.

by Rev. Eliza Buchakjian-Tweedy.

LESSON SEVEN

HOPE

ISAIAH 55

INTRODUCTION

There are many passages in Isaiah that speak of the hope we have in God. This beautiful passage has been a word of comfort and hope to many. It promises us the spiritual connection that we so earnestly seek and need. It also challenges us to commit our lives to what is worthy and to not be distracted by lesser things. We need to make the most of the spiritual opportunities which come our way.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Those who have no money are urged to do what?

- 2) What are we told that we often spend our money on?

- 3) What kind of a covenant will God make with us?

- 4) How will God's word return to Him?

- 5) What will come up instead of briars?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What does it mean to spend money on that which is not bread?

- 2) When you hear come to the waters, what New Testament passage comes to mind?