

Palmetto Baptist Church – *January 19, 2020*

Behold Your God – *Isaiah 40*

- Background to Isaiah 40
 - Authorship
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- Message of Isaiah 40
 - Behold Your God!
- Questions from Isaiah 40
 - Do you really know me?
 - Do you think I forgot about you?
 - Do you know what I want to do in and through you?

BACKGROUND

Isaiah ministered for nearly sixty years, prophesying during the reigns of at least four Judean kings (1:1): Uzziah (790-739 B.C.), Jotham (750-732 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.). Tradition records that the prophet was executed by being sawn in two under the wicked King Manasseh (686-642 B.C.; cf. Heb. 11:37). Isaiah preached during a time of intense political struggle, as the Assyrian Empire sought control of the Middle East. On several occasions the kingdom of Judah found its existence threatened by Assyrian power plays. Isaiah interpreted these as tests for the Judean kings to trust in God's power rather than proudly rely on "the arm of the flesh." King Ahaz had the opportunity to see the Lord deliver him from an invasion by Aram and Israel. Faithless and fearful, Ahaz rejected the Lord's "Immanuel" sign and appealed to the Assyrian monarch Tiglath-Pileser III to rescue him (Isa. 7; cf. 2 Kings 16:1-9; 2 Chron. 28:1-21). Ahaz received immediate relief—Aram fell in 732 and Israel in 722—but the Assyrians would now be a thorn in Judah's side for decades to come.

Ahaz's son Hezekiah learned to resist his father's bad example. Initially he looked to Egypt for help against Assyria (2 Kings 18:19-21; Isa. 37:9) and was rebuked by Isaiah (Isa. 20; 30-31). But when faced with a siege by the Assyrian Sennacherib (701 B.C.), Hezekiah cried out to God for deliverance. That night the Angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, and the humbled Sennacherib returned home (Isa. 36-37; cf. 2 Kings 18:17-19:37). Hezekiah still struggled with pride, however. In connection with the 701 deliverance, Yahweh healed the king of a mortal illness and granted him fifteen more years of life. Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, sent emissaries to Jerusalem ostensibly to celebrate Hezekiah's recovery. Hezekiah responded by gleefully showing them the treasures of Jerusalem. Isaiah announced that this event marked the beginning of a process that would end in Babylonian exile (Isa. 39; cf. 2 Kings 20:12-19).

STRUCTURE

The historical events outlined above provide the broad organizational framework for the collected oracles of Isaiah. The book contains two major sections: chapters 1-35 and chapters 40-66. Chapters 1-35 are set in the immediate context of the Assyrian crises and tend to emphasize God's judgment on Judah for its pride and rebellion. Beginning with chapter 40, Isaiah shifts largely to the Lord's restoration in the future. First he prophesies the Persian Cyrus' deliverance of Judah from the Babylonian captivity—a captivity that was itself over a century away. But Isaiah also moves far into the future and predicts the ultimate deliverance from sin that would result from the first and second advents of the Messiah. Chapters 36-39 comprise a narrative section that serves as a "hinge" between the two main parts of Isaiah. These chapters focus on the invasion of Sennacherib and thus connect with the Assyrian emphasis in the first part of the book. But the introduction of the delegation from Merodach-baladan (ch. 39) provides a transition to the Babylonian captivity, the subject that begins the second part of the book.

Within Isaiah's overall structure, individual chapters cover a rich variety of topics. The outline below highlights the basic flow of thought. 1:1–2:4 can be used as a summary of this flow, moving from the pollution of Jerusalem to its destruction to its restoration as the center of the world.

1. Judgment (chs. 1–35)

- a. Introduction (1–6)
- b. Prophecies relating to the Aram-Israel coalition (7–12)
- c. Judgment of foreign nations (13–23), with an apocalyptic conclusion (24–27)
- d. Woes against Judah relating to the siege of Jerusalem (28–33), with an apocalyptic conclusion (34–35)

2. Historical interlude (chs. 36–39)

- a. Jerusalem delivered from Sennacherib's siege (36–37)
- b. Hezekiah's life extended (38)
- c. Merodach-baladan's delegation received and Babylonian captivity predicted (39)

3. Restoration (chs. 40–66)

- Major breaks here are indicated by the refrain "There is no peace for the wicked" (48:22; 57:21; cf. 66:24), a sobering reminder that not everyone will enjoy restoration.
- a. National restoration after the Babylonian captivity (40–48)
- b. Spiritual restoration through the work of the Messiah (49–57)
- c. Ultimate restoration to a perfect kingdom (58–66)

THEME & APPLICATION

As suggested above, the theme of Isaiah is that *the Holy One of Israel is the only reliable object of trust*. The concept that unifies Isaiah's oracles is found in the prophet's distinctive title for Yahweh—"the Holy One of Israel." This title occurs throughout the book twenty-five times while it appears only seven times in the rest of the OT.

The NT's frequent use of Isaiah—possibly as many as 400 quotations and allusions—establishes the continuing relevance of the prophet's message. We may not be Israelites, yet God's character has remained the same during the millennia that have passed since Isaiah wrote. Yahweh is still the Holy One of His people—ininitely exalted above us but intimately associated with us through Christ. This truth ought to purge away self-assertiveness and overwhelm us into God-dependence. And, as in the eighth century B.C., it is particularly in the crises of life that we discover whether we truly trust the Lord in this way.

A call to bring good news of comfort that God is greater than our greatest fears. "Behold your God!"(9)

- Embrace the comfort of God. (1-8)
- Enjoy the majesty of God. (9-24)
- Respond to the questions by God. (25-31)

Embrace the comfort of God. (1-8)

- The Call of Comfort is a shared responsibility.
 - verse 1: the call to comfort is in the plural indicating that it is a commission to be shared by many not just one!
- The Call of Comfort is based on hope in the midst of great difficulty. (2)

verse 2: the call to comfort comes during a time of great difficulty (book of Lamentations... the preceding 39 chapters were written BEFORE Judah was taken into exile by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.... Remember, according to Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah prophesied "in the year that Uzziah died" (740 BC) and lived at least long enough to record the death of Sennacherib 37:38) in 681 BC. Thus, chapters 1-39 were written by Isaiah to the nation of Judah in response to the exile

of the nation of Israel by Assyria in 722 BC (that the original audience observed with their own eyes or heard about during their own day)...

- 2:1-4; 26:3-4 (The Promise of Coming Peace)
- 9:1-7 & 11:1-5,10 (The Promise of a Coming King)
- 12:1-6;25:8-9 (The Promise of Salvation)
- 14:1-2; 27:12; 35:10 (The Promise of Restoration)
- **The call of comfort involves a great mystery. (3-8)**
 - Am I doing enough or trying to do too much? (3-7)
 - Am I investing in what really matters? (6-8)
 - How is God working in my life? (Trinity)

verse 3-5: the call of comfort directs attention to hope in the coming King (note the change to the singular... the voice of one crying) who will bring comfort...much of the earlier sections of Isaiah (Chs. 7-39) presents consistent themes of divine judgment and confrontation, sprinkled with sections that provided the promise of a future hope (9:1-7; 11-12; 14:1-2; 25-27; 35)

verses 6-8: the call of comfort directs the nation of Judah to the security of the Word of God.

Verses 1-8: the call of comfort is based on a reference to the mystery and wonder of the Trinity! All three members of the Trinity are referred to in 40:1-8: God the Father (1-2), God the Son (3-5), and God the Spirit (6-8).]

Behold Your God

- He is omnipotent...the power of God (10a)
- He is benevolent...the reward of God (10b)
- He is compassionate...the care of God [Jesus as the Great Shepherd] (11)

- He is magnificent...the greatness of God: compared to the size of the world [Created by God the Father] (12); compared to the wisdom of men [in contrast to the wisdom of the Spirit] (13-14); compared to the nations of the world (15-17); compared to the idols crafted by men (18-21); compared to the size of the world and it's leaders (22-24); compared to the stars in the sky (25-26)

Application:

- Questions from Isaiah 40
 - Do you really know me? (25-26)
 - To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?
 - Reject wrong thoughts about God's greatness and authority. (25-26)
 - Do you think I forgot about you? (27)
 - Why do you say...“My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”?
 - Rebuke wrong thoughts about God's concern for your current situation. (27)
 - Do you know what I want to do in and through you? (28)
 - Have you not known? Have you not heard?
 - Repent of slowness to believe in God's ability to provide for you during times of difficulty. (28-31)