

Isaiah & the Promise

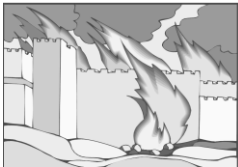


The “Great Nation” Falls

Under Kings David and Solomon, Israel became a “great nation” (*Genesis 12:2*).¹ However, before Israel entered the Promised Land, God warned them. If they disobeyed God and turned to other gods, the Israelites would be cursed, uprooted from the land, and dispersed (*Deuteronomy 29:9-28*). This warning was repeated to King Solomon after he dedicated the temple (*1 Kings 9:6-9*). However, Solomon took hundreds of wives who worshiped other gods, and his heart was turned to other gods, and away from the one true God (*1 Kings 11:1-6*).

God told Solomon, “Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you ... Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him ...” (*1 Kings 11:11-13a, NIV*)

After Solomon died, the kingdom was torn apart (in 931/930 BC).² Solomon’s son Rehoboam retained one tribe (Judah),³ but the northern tribes (called Israel) broke away under the reign of Jeroboam (*1 Kings 11:29-39*). Judah continued to be ruled by the descendants of David as God had promised. However, most of the kings in both Judah and Israel were corrupt and did evil.⁴ As a result, Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.



Bad News & Good News

During the time of the Israelites’ rebellion, God was still speaking to Israel and Judah. He spoke through his “prophets.”⁵ A “prophet” is a:

- ✎ forth-teller: who proclaims God’s word for the present day
- ☞ fore-teller: who speaks of the future, as it relates to the present

The prophets brought bad news and good news. The bad news was God’s judgment because of their sin. The good news was God’s blessing because of His grace. Both God’s judgment and God’s blessing were demonstrations of His faithfulness to His promises and covenants.

Isaiah the Prophet

Isaiah is probably the most famous writing prophet. Most scholars date Isaiah’s prophetic ministry around 740-690 BC. He prophesied mainly to Judah, though he also spoke concerning Israel and other nations.

¹ God’s promise to Abraham was temporally fulfilled during Solomon’s reign (*1 Kings 8:56*). See Lesson 10.

² Factors in the kingdom’s division included longstanding strife among the tribes (*Joshua 8:1-3; 12:1-6; 2 Samuel 2:10-11; 3:1*); and Solomon’s heavy taxation and conscription of labor and military forces, which Rehoboam made worse (*1 Kings 12:1-19*).

³ Judah, the southern kingdom, included Judah, Simeon and a portion of Benjamin (*2 Chronicles 11:1-12*).

⁴ None of the 19 kings of the northern kingdom (Israel) were considered “good.” Of the 20 kings in Judah, the following four kings were relatively good: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, & Josiah; and to a lesser degree, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah & Jotham.

⁵ See *Times of the Prophets*, which provides a timeline for the writing prophets relative to the kings of Judah and Israel (included in the hardcopy version of this handout).

Isaiah 1:2-4 (NIV)

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!

For the LORD has spoken:

“I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me. (2)

The ox knows his master,
the donkey his owner’s manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.(3)

Ah, sinful nation,
a people loaded with guilt,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!

They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him. (4)

Isaiah 1:11-13 (NIV)

“The multitude of your sacrifices –
what are they to me?” says the LORD.
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
(11)

When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts? (12)
Stop bringing me meaningless offerings!
Your incense is detestable to me.

New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations –
I cannot bear your evil assemblies.” (13)

Isaiah 6:11-13 (NIV)

Then I said, “For how long, O Lord?”
And he answered:
“Until the cities lie ruined
and without inhabitant,
until the houses are left deserted
and the fields ruined and ravaged, (11)
until the LORD has sent everyone far away
and the land is utterly forsaken. (12)
And though a tenth remains in the land,
it will again be laid waste.
But as the terebinth and oak
leave stumps when they are cut down,
so the holy seed will be the
stump in the land” (13)

**Isaiah 11:1-2** (NIV)

A shoot will come up from the
stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. (1)
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of
understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the
fear of the LORD. (2)

Isaiah 11:10-12 (NIV)

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a
banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to
him, and his place of rest will be glorious (10).
In that day the LORD will reach out his hand a
second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of
his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt,
from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam; from
Babylonia, from Hamath, and from the islands
of the sea (11).
He will raise a banner for the nations
And gather the exiles of Israel;
He will assemble the scattered
people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth. (12)

Isaiah 49:5-6 (NIV)

And now the LORD says –
he who formed me in the womb
to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has been my strength – (5)
he says:
“It is too small a thing for you to be
my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to
the ends of the earth.” (6)

Bad News & Good News

The Problem

1. Read Isaiah 1:2-4 & 1:11-13. According to these verses, what are Judah's problems?

They have _____ against God (1:2). They do not know (1:3).⁶

They are sinful (1:4). They have _____ the LORD (1:4).

Their religious activities are _____ (1:11-13).⁷

Personal Reflection: What is your relationship with God?
How meaningful are your "religious activities?"



God's Response to the Problem

2. Isaiah 6 records Isaiah's commission. Isaiah is assigned a difficult ministry because as he preaches, the people will only become more rebellious. So Isaiah asks a question. Read Isaiah 6:11-13. What will happen to Judah? How does God demonstrate his faithfulness?

God will expel them from the land. (6:11-12, *cp. Deut 28:20-21; 29:28*). Though the desolation will be complete, there will be offspring (holy seed) set apart for God (6:13), for God is faithful to fulfill his promises. (Remember his promise to Abraham.)

Application: Though people did not respond to Isaiah's preaching, he remained faithful to God's assignment. As Christians, what can we learn from this?

3. Read Isaiah 11:1-2 and 11:10-12. Again, how does God demonstrate his faithfulness?

A ruler will be raised up from the line of David (11:1-5).⁸ (Remember God's promise to David.) The Jews looked forward to this future, ideal king, the Messiah (Anointed One).

God will _____ his people to the Promised Land (11:10-12).

The Servant of the Lord⁹

4. Read Isaiah 49:5-6. What is important besides the restoration of Israel? How does this relate to "God's promise for the nations?"



God's servant will be a _____ for the Gentiles, to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth (49:6b). (Remember God's promise to Abraham.)¹⁰

⁶ The ox and the donkey are not considered to be smart, but even they know who cares for them and where they belong. To "know" (*yada*) and "understand" (*bin*) involves more than intellectual knowledge. It involves experience and relationship. This is fundamental, and is no different for us today. We must seek to know God through Christ.

⁷ Elsewhere God says, "These people ... honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13).

⁸ "stump of Jesse" refers to David's family line. Jesse was David's father.

⁹ Isaiah speaks a lot about the "servant of the Lord." Sometimes the servant is Israel. Sometimes the servant is the Messiah. Sometimes it seems that the servant is both, but in such cases the Messiah is the ideal Israel. He is the model for the people of God. Most scholars agree that the servant in Isaiah 49:1-6 refers to the Messiah.

¹⁰ The "Gentiles" ("nations") – those who are not Jewish by racial origin. It is "too small a thing" for the servant to restore the Jews to the land. He has a much greater task: saving the world! God promised Abraham that all nations on earth would be blessed through his offspring (Genesis 12:3; 18:18). Christ is "the light of the world" (John 9:5).

Reflection: Jesus Christ said, “I am the light of the world” (*John 8:12*). As Christians, we are Christ’s representatives. Thus Jesus says to his disciples, “You are the light of the world” (*Matthew 5:14*). If you are a Christian, in what ways are you being a “light for the Gentiles?”

5. God is called the “Redeemer of Israel” (*Isaiah 49:7*). Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Who is “the servant” in this passage (*Acts 8:30-35*)? What price does God pay to redeem¹¹ his people from their sins?

The Price of Redemption

- Jesus said that he came “to give his life a ransom (redemption price) for many.”

“Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45, NIV)



- About 700 years before Jesus made that statement, Isaiah spoke of a suffering servant (*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*). Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus in amazing detail. Why did Jesus suffer and die?

† He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows (*Isaiah 53:4*).

† He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (*Isaiah 53:5a*).

† The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed (*Isaiah 53:5b*).

† The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (*Isaiah 53:6*).

† The Lord made His life a guilt offering (*Isaiah 53:10b*).

† He bore the iniquities of many (*Isaiah 53:11b*).

† He bore the sin of many (*Isaiah 53:12b*).



- Jesus Christ never sinned, but as the supreme Servant, he gave his life to release sinners according to the plan of God.

“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be an offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. As God’s partners, we beg you not to reject this marvelous message of God’s kindness. For God says,

*‘At the right time, I heard you.
On the day of salvation, I helped you.’*

*Indeed, God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation.”
(2 Corinthians 5:12-6:2, NLT)*

¹¹ The word “redeem” and its derivatives are used 22 times in Isaiah. To “redeem” literally means to “buy back.” The Bible uses the term as a metaphor to describe God’s merciful and costly action on behalf of His people. In particular, Jesus Christ said that he came to give his life as a “ransom.” A “ransom” is a price paid for release from captivity and/or punishment. The purchase price was the “blood of Christ” (that is, Christ’s sacrifice). Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins, so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God (restored to relationship with Him).