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What's the Point...of Isaiah?

Mark Garner

The book of Isaiah is best known for its prophecies of Jesus, yet it also covers many aspects of God's relationship with us. Many images throughout Isaiah tell us of the needs that only God can fill, and others also help us to understand God's nature. Isaiah both reflects the main themes of the Old Testament as well as looking ahead to the main themes of Jesus' ministry.

The Sure Foundation For Our Times (Overview Of Isaiah 1-39)

Many of the ideas in Isaiah remind us that God is the sure foundation for all of our times. Early in the book the prophet says, "Let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isaiah 1-6), and he encourages us to "go up to the mountain of the Lord", to let him teach us his ways. There is also the vivid scene of Isaiah seeing God in his temple, where he realizes how true it is that holy is the Lord.

The next section of Isaiah contains some well-known Messianic prophecies (Isaiah 7-12). The original setting was in a time of fear (when Judah was being attacked by Northern Israel and Aram), so the sign of Immanuel, the great light that has dawned, the child that has been born, and the others came in these troubled times. These promises our Heavenly Father makes through Isaiah also give us hope and encouragement today, whether in difficult times or in peaceful times.

Next there is a series of visions about the Israelites and the surrounding nations (Isaiah 13-24). Many of them remind us of the difference God's presence can make in our lives; they also remind us of God's hope to show his grace to anyone, anywhere, when they turn to him.

God is a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation, an image the New Testament uses of Jesus as well (Isaiah 25-39). This section talks about things God planned long ago, and encourages us to walk with our Heavenly Father. Isaiah also tells us about the blossoms of truth and grace God can bring even in the desert. This section closes with some events during the reign of Hezekiah.

Our Light Has Come (Overview Of Isaiah 40-66)

Light and the guidance it brings us is a common image in Isaiah. In the next section we see God's desire to give comfort and kindness to the weary, and Isaiah often contrasts this with the pitfalls of relying on idols and earthly thinking (Isaiah 40-49). We see God making a highway in the desert, and reassuring us that he is near. The Messianic prophecies also tell us about Jesus' nature.

Then we see God's promise to make an everlasting covenant with those who seek him humbly (Isaiah 50-55), and memorable prophetic images of Jesus taking up our pain and bearing our sins to reconcile us with our Heavenly Father. God's thoughts are not our thoughts; and as he nourishes the earth with rain and snow, he nourishes our hearts with his words and the living bread of Jesus.

God has made this the time of his favor through Jesus (Isaiah 56-66). He heals us when we open our hearts to him, and he gives us peace and hope. The true light that we have always needed has come; and Jesus changes ashes, mourning, and despair into spiritual joy, beauty, and praise.

Besides this short overview, there are many more images, teachings about God, and Messianic prophecies in Isaiah that are well worth contemplating and that can encourage us at any time.

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What's the Point...of Isaiah? Caleb Dillinger

Isaiah is one of the most quoted Old Testament books in the Christian New Testament, but probably one of the least read Old Testament books, at least in totality. What I mean by that is, a 66 chapter book that has some dauntingly long chapters that deal with prophecy and poetry and metaphor is rather intimidating. But there's a point Isaiah makes that is well worth the time of Christian readers.

First, I'll remind you of the New Testament useage – Jesus quotes himself as fulfilling prophecies from Isaiah, and the Ethiopian Eunuch is converted to Christianity while reading from the scroll of Isaiah and hearing Philip explain the gospel starting with the ancient prophet. That alone should warrant reading Isaiah today – our savior himself finds value in it, and conversion can begin from it!

Second, while Isaiah is vast indeed, it provides a deep understanding of WHO God is. Not just what God does (which the history books of Israel portray well) – but WHY God does what he does. The prophet explains why God looks out for certain people – not just “his people”, but the widows, the poor, the outcasts and downtrodden. Harsh words are delivered to the arrogant and powerful who abuse said power. It also reveals God's heart for people – so much so that prophecies are given about a special savior, whom we as Christians acknowledge to be Jesus.

Consider these words: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:1-2). And “⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (53:4-6).

When prophecies of the Son of God who saved us are there, and insights into the heart of God can be found in every chapter, you won't find it hard to find the point of reading Isaiah today. Yes, it can have its' challenges. But if you patiently read and discern, you will be blessed.