

Isaiah

As we continue in the prophets, we now move to the Southern kingdom of Judah and Isaiah of Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesized for a long career, some estimating close to fifty years from approximately 735-687 BC(E). Yet, the book of Isaiah contains material that most scholars believe covers some two hundred plus years spanning the exile and return from exile. In fact, it is a consensus that there are at least two primary “Isaiahs” and possibly a third from different time periods compiled into the one book of our scriptures, Isaiah. They are:

- Isaiah of Jerusalem – Chapters 1-39 – 735-687 BC(E)
 - Isaiah of the Exile – Chapters 40-55 – ~580-540 BC(E)
 - Isaiah of the Return – Chapters 56-66 – after 515 BC(E)
- (some argue that the last two are really one)

Running through the entirety of Isaiah are similar languages and themes, that connect back to the historical Isaiah, who is referred to as the “Isaiah of Jerusalem”. In other words, his prophetic message echoes through the ages, is heard anew in different circumstances and the book we have as Isaiah contains both the historical, but also the later reflections/imaginations that arise in new circumstances. In that light, we will be looking first at Isaiah of Jerusalem and then later at the Isaiah of the Exile.

As we move into the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah, we find ourselves moving in royal circles which is an important piece for understanding Isaiah. Each biblical prophet is set in conversation with kings and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but Isaiah seems to have direct access to the king’s inner circle and the inner workings of the temple. Our typical view of prophets as lone outsiders who suddenly appear with wild sayings from God shouting crazily on street corners is not the view of Isaiah. Isaiah has access to and could possibly have been in the corridors of power, both politically in the king and religiously in the temple. He was not a rogue outsider, but someone enmeshed in the political/religious system of the day.

As we looked at Amos, we considered two trajectories that weave their way through the scriptures, the Mosaic and the Davidic. Isaiah engages both of those, while also reflecting on a further deepening of the Davidic trajectory that is known as royal/Zion theology. This theological trajectory has three main tenets:

1. God has promised a king from the line of David will be on the throne forever.
2. God has chosen Jerusalem as God’s holy city forever.
3. God has chosen the temple in Jerusalem as God’s dwelling place forever.

These tenets build upon the Davidic trajectory of nothing separating God’s children from God, concretizing that trajectory in the king, the city and the temple.

So, Isaiah’s world and worldview finds a centering in reflections on the king, Jerusalem and the temple. (It is not hard to see why Isaiah is the most quoted of the prophets in the New Testament, as royal theology leads to a messianic theology when kings go bad and eventually there is no king and we anticipate the coming of a righteous king). Yet, he also carries the Mosaic tradition of faithful obedience to commandments and justice. At times, Isaiah invites the king and people who are afraid that God has forgotten them to trust God’s faithful promises

to king, city and temple (Isaiah 7, 11, 36-39), while at others he chastens the king, city(people) and temple for not doing justice and loving mercy (Isaiah 2,5). Firmly rooted in the Davidic/Zion trajectory, he always holds it in tension with the Mosaic call to obedience to justice and mercy. As the old gospel hymn puts it, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus (for Isaiah, God), then to trust and obey." Isaiah holds the tension between trust and obey for the children of God through speaking a word in season for almost fifty years.

Key Memory Verses

6:8 - Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

9:2,6 - The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined... For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

11:1-5 - A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

Reflection Questions

1. When has it been hardest for you to trust God? What is the most difficult situation in which you have been asked to trust?
2. TRUST **and** OBEY – In situations where you have found trusting difficult or challenging, was there an act of obedience that helped you trust? What obedience was God requiring of you?
3. The 6th chapter of Isaiah is the Call of Isaiah. Read Chapter 6 again, then reflect on your own "call story." How, when, where, and to what has God called you? How is God calling you now?
