

READ The BIBLE Together



ISAIAH 1-12

26th June – 27th August 2016

SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

Day 1-3 Read **Introductory Notes – ISAIAH (I)** below.

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

ISAIAH 1:1

Author of ISAIAH

ISAIAH 1:1 tells us that the human author of **ISAIAH** is the prophet *Isaiah*, commonly known as *Isaiah of Jerusalem*. The name ‘*Isaiah*’ means “*salvation of Yahweh*” or “*Yah saves*”. He was said to be the son of *Amoz*. We have no idea who *Amoz* was, although tradition said that *Amoz* was a brother of *Amaziah*, the son of *Joash*, king of Judah (**2 KINGS 14:1**). This would make *Isaiah* a close relative to those who were kings during his lifetime, and would explain why *Isaiah* was able to gain rather easy access to the kings of Judah during his ministry.

ISAIAH 1:1 further informs us that what *Isaiah* wrote in **ISAIAH** was not self-generated. Instead, it was due to the vision that he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. This points us to the Ultimate Author of **ISAIAH**, who is God Himself. God revealed His truth to *Isaiah* concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which explains why *Isaiah* saw the vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

ISAIAH 1:1 also informs us that **ISAIAH** is one entire unit -- it is the *vision*, not *visions* that he saw. The Divine Author revealed **ISAIAH 1-66** to the human author, and hence the human author *Isaiah* wrote **ISAIAH**.

*** Excursus on the “One Authorship” Debate ***

In the last 200 years, there had been scholars who disputed the belief that *Isaiah* was the sole human author of **ISAIAH**. They claimed that a second *Isaiah* or even a third *Isaiah* wrote **ISAIAH 40-66**!

Their reasons for rejecting the “one authorship” of **ISAIAH** can be briefly summarized as follows:

- [I] **ISAIAH 40-66** talked about the future, even naming *Cyrus* the Persian king. This is not possible, for how could *Isaiah* have known of *Cyrus*? Also, prophets do not say things that their current hearers cannot relate to. Hence, the *Isaiah of Jerusalem* cannot be the one who wrote these chapters.
- [II] The style and words used in **ISAIAH 40-66** are very different compared to those used in the earlier chapters of **ISAIAH**. Hence, **ISAIAH** is really a collection of two or three separate writings authored by two or three different authors.

Their objections can be easily answered. Concerning [I], it is a position of unbelief. If the prophets are God’s messengers, and they convey God’s Word, then where lies the

difficulty for God to know the future and convey it to His people through His prophets? Concerning (II), the earlier chapters talk about sin and judgment, while the subject of the latter chapters are about blessings and peace. It is to be expected that the words used would be different!

The main issue at stake in this “one authorship” debate is really this: *Through Isaiah, God is saying to His people that He will deliver them, and the One who says He will deliver them is the One who knows the future! To believe the recent scholars, the message of this book would be “God says He will deliver them. This God says He knows the future, but He actually doesn’t!”*

To study this matter in greater depth, please look up these two commentaries:

The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary, *J Alec Motyer*

The Book of Isaiah, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, *John N. Oswalt*

Date of ISAIAH

ISAIAH 1:1 tells us that *Isaiah* prophesied in the days of *Uzziah*, *Jotham*, *Ahaz* and *Hezekiah*.

<u>King of Judah</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Biblical record</u>
<i>Uzziah</i> (aka <i>Azariah</i>)	767-740 B.C.	2 KINGS 15:1-7 2 CHRONICLES 26:1-22
<i>Jotham</i>	740-732 B.C.	2 KINGS 15:32-38 2 CHRONICLES 27:1-9
<i>Ahaz</i>	735-716 B.C. (regent from 735-732 B.C.)	2 KINGS 16:1-19 2 CHRONICLES 28:1-27
<i>Hezekiah</i>	716-687 B.C.	2 KINGS 18:1-20:21 2 CHRONICLES 29:1-32:33

Assuming that *Isaiah* began his prophetic ministry in the year of *Uzziah*’s death (**ISAIAH 6:1**) in 740B.C., and lived past the reign of *Hezekiah* in 687 B.C., this would mean that *Isaiah* served as a prophet for close to 60 years!

During those 60 years, four different kings ruled Judah. Although they were all from the house of *David*, yet each king was different, pursued a different policy, and hence impacted Judah in a different way. During those 60 years, Judah experienced a number of crises, brought about by changes in the surrounding nations and Judah’s response to these changes. *Isaiah*’s prophecies addressed the various situations and challenges faced by Judah during those 60 years.

To help us gain a better understanding of the message of *Isaiah*, it would be useful for us to read the **2 KINGS** and **2 CHRONICLES** passages cited above in page 3. Please take time to read them and note down things that you deem as significant:

Day 4-7 Read **Introductory Notes – ISAIAH (II)** below.

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

ISAIAH 1:1

Historical Background to ISAIAH

Assyria was the world's superpower in the 8th century B.C. Like all preceding and following great empires, Assyria expanded primarily southeastward down the Mesopotamian valley toward Babylon and the Persian Gulf, and westward toward the Mediterranean. Looking at the map (in page 5), it is clear that it is only a matter of time before the Assyrians arrive at the doorsteps of Syria, Israel and Judah.

When *Uzziah* became the king of Judah in 767 B.C., Assyria was governed by a succession of weak rulers who were unable to hold the conquests of earlier emperors. This enabled Judah under *Uzziah* to enjoy a time of peace and prosperity not known since the time of *Solomon*.

Tiglath-pileser III became the Assyrian king in 745 B.C. and he soon made it plain that he intended to extend his dominion as far as possible. Before long, Israel in the north had to pay tribute to Assyria (cf. **2 KINGS 15:19-20**). Judah in the south had to make a decision whether to be pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian. By this time in 735 B.C., *Ahaz* had become the king of Judah.

It appeared that Israel (also known as Ephraim) and Syria (also known as Aram) were trying to form an alliance (known as the Syro-Ephraimite alliance) to oppose Assyria. At the time, *Pekah* was Israel's king while *Rezin* was king in Damascus, capital city of Syria. Both of them wanted *Ahaz* to join the anti-Assyrian alliance, but he refused. This was probably the reason why they mounted an attack upon Judah in 735 B.C. To ward off their invasion, *Ahaz* appealed to *Tiglath-pileser III* for help (cf. **2 KINGS 16:5-9**). These events provided the occasion for the first public phase of *Isaiah's* ministry. He told *Ahaz*

that Judah should not be pro-Assyria or anti-Assyria, but pro-God! Assyria was no real friend to Judah. Inviting *Tiglath-pileser III* to help, or rather paying him to help, would eventually mean disaster and slavery to Assyria. Sadly, *Ahaz* rejected the words of *Isaiah*. **ISAIAH 7-8** records the counsel of *Isaiah* to *Ahaz* and his response to *Ahaz's* folly in this episode.



Ancient Near East in *Isaiah's* time

When *Tiglath-pileser III* died in 727 B.C., many of the tributary nations rebelled, for they saw that as an opportunity to break away from the Assyrian yoke. The northern kingdom of Israel led one of those rebellions. In 724 B.C., *Shalmaneser* the new Assyrian king marched down to punish Israel and laid siege on Samaria, the capital city. Finally in 721 B.C. Samaria fell and Israel went into exile. After *Shalmaneser*, *Sargon* became king. By then, *Hezekiah* had become king in Judah. Unlike *Ahaz*, he was firmly anti-Assyrian.

Egypt in the south was growing increasingly uncomfortable with the power of Assyria, and so the Egyptians were doing all they can to encourage the surrounding nations to be anti-Assyria. Judah was shifting from dependence upon Assyria towards dependence upon Egypt, much to the vehement objections from *Isaiah* (**ISAIAH 29-31**). There were a number of anti-Assyrian unions formed in those days, all with the sole aim of

opposing the dreaded Assyrians. All these came to nothing, as Sargon finally marched down and defeated his enemies, one by one.

When *Sargon* died, *Sennacherib* succeeded him. For some reason, *Hezekiah* thought that was a good time to rebel. A new coalition was formed, and various political manoeuvrings were engaged in, all encouraged by the Egyptians in the south. *Isaiah* was bitterly opposed to the entire proceeding, and warned Judah that such a course of action would only bring disaster. Not long afterwards, *Sennacherib* started his punish-the-rebels campaign, and he laid siege on Jerusalem. According to the Assyrian records, *Hezekiah* was “like a bird in a cage”. He sent tribute to *Sennacherib*, hoping to buy him off, but *Sennacherib* sent his officer to demand full surrender from Judah and consequent deportation. At this point, *Isaiah* urged *Hezekiah* to put his trust in the LORD. He did, and the LORD delivered *Hezekiah* (cf. **ISAIAH 36-39**)!

Message of ISAIAH

As mentioned above, *Isaiah* prophesied in the days of *Uzziah*, *Jotham*, *Ahaz* and *Hezekiah*. In modern language, this means the prophet was preaching to the people. A time came when he put his preaching into writing. The result was **ISAIAH**.

Just as God directed *Isaiah* in his preaching, so He directed *Isaiah* in his writing. In writing **ISAIAH**, it appears that *Isaiah* did not organize his materials chronologically but thematically, in order to convey an overall message to God’s people. What is this message? It is this:

YAHWEH SAVES! TRUST HIM!!

Recall that after God delivered Israel from Egypt and brought them to Sinai, He said these words to them, “*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” *These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.*” (**EXODUS 19:5-6**)

Israel was to be God’s special treasure, different from the rest of the nations. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, to reflect God’s glory and direct the nations to Him. However, we know from the records of **1 & 2 KINGS** that Israel failed miserably! **ISAIAH 1-5** spoke directly about this situation: *Judah was called but Judah was sinful!* In **1:4**, God called them “*sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters!*”

What is the solution to this problem? Sinners need to have a vision of the Holy One! That’s the solution presented in **ISAIAH 6**. *Isaiah’s* encounter with the thrice-holy God changed him, and made him a suitable messenger for YAHWEH. The nation of Judah needs the same solution!

“The rest of the book works out the ramifications and the implications of this introduction. Chapters 7-39 are unified by their recurring emphasis upon trust. They demonstrate that

Israel's problems stem from her tendency to trust the nations instead of God. Furthermore, they show that God alone is trustworthy, and that Israel can only become God's servant, a light to the nations, if she comes to that place of radical trust." (John N. Oswalt).

ISAIAH 7-12 and **ISAIAH 36-39** are remarkably similar. In **ISAIAH 7-12**, we have the Judean king *Ahaz* facing a big crisis, who chose to put his trust in human might and power, and ultimately faced disaster. In **ISAIAH 36-39**, we have another Judean king *Hezekiah* facing his big crisis, but choosing to trust God (although not completely), and experiencing the deliverance of the LORD. The message of both sections is clear and similar: *The LORD alone can save! So trust Him, and Him alone!!*

The middle portion (**ISAIAH 13-35**) functions to underline this message. Is God trustworthy? Can He deliver His people from the nations? Is His glory greater than that of any human nation? Is it foolish to look to the nations for help when God is near at hand? The answer to all these questions is a resounding yes.

Building on the theme of God's sovereignty in **ISAIAH 11-12**, **ISAIAH 13-23** contains a series of pronouncements against the nations. God is not just the God of Judah, but He rules over all the nations. **ISAIAH 24-27** assures Judah that God is indeed the sovereign actor. Upon Him we may fix our mind and dwell in security, and He will deliver us. **ISAIAH 28-33** addresses the folly of looking to human leadership to save us from our troubles. Instead of these foolish leaders, we should look to the king who will rule in righteousness and peace instead (**32:1-8**, **33:17-22**). This section is brought to a conclusion using a powerful contrast to show the result of trust misplaced and trust correctly placed (**ISAIAH 34-35**).

God has delivered Judah from the hands of Assyria. That was where **ISAIAH 39** left us. But life is not static, and before long, Babylon became the world power, conquered Judah, destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and took many of the Judeans into exile. Now, what does it mean that the God who delivered Judah from Assyria would not deliver them from Babylon? Is He still trustworthy? Is He still the Holy One like no other? Is He still the Lord of the nations, who has history under His control? Israel is so sinful that it cannot remain in the promise land. Would it also mean that sinful Israel no longer has a place in God's plans? More fundamentally, concerning the exile, the questions Judah would be asking are: *Can God restore and would He want to restore?*

In **ISAIAH 40-48**, *Isaiah* points to the character of God. Just as Assyria was a tool in God's hand, so also is Babylon (**47:5-9**). Babylon's destruction is as sure as Assyria's was before it (**48:14-16**), because God has already ordained its conqueror (**42:2-4**). All these only show that there is no god like YAHWEH, able to explain the past and tell us the future! Furthermore, not only is He *able* to deliver, He also *wants* to deliver. Far from giving up on His people because of their sins, He intends to use their lives as the solid evidence to show the world that He alone is God!

In **ISAIAH 49-55**, the prophet addressed yet another question: *What about the sin of His people, the very reason why they went into exile in the first place?* Will God ignore their

sins? How can and how will sinful Israel become His holy people to bear witness for Him to the world? This is where the Servant of YAHWEH comes to the fore. The Servant will be what Israel is not, so that Israel will finally become what she is meant to be! Who the Servant is and how He will deliver Israel is the subject of **ISAIAH 49-53**! It will be via substitutionary self-sacrifice! Unlike *Cyrus* the Persian (YAHWEH's servant in the political realm) who "delivered" Judah via military victories, the Servant of YAHWEH will accomplish deliverance in a completely opposite fashion. He will give Himself up to YAHWEH for the sins of the people, so that they be forgiven (**53:11**).

Being delivered, Israel will serve YAHWEH (**ISAIAH 56-66**). In **ISAIAH 56-59**, the major emphasis is on human failure, especially as it relates to promoting social righteousness (**56:1-57:13, 58:1-59:14**). In **ISAIAH 60-62**, the emphasis is reversed, and now we are reminded of divine ability (**63:1-9, 65:1-66:24**). A careful pondering of these passages will indicate that this is a fulfillment of **ISAIAH 2:1-5**! Finally, we have a trusting, redeemed servant Israel/Judah serving as God's messenger, with clean lips, through whom the world can find its Savior!

After reading **Introductory Notes – ISAIAH (I) & (II)** above ...

1. What questions do you have?

2. Are you able to give a brief outline for ...

(a) **ISAIAH 1-39?**

(b) **ISAIAH 40-66?**

Week 2

[3rd – 9th July 2016]

Day 1 Read **ISAIAH 1:1-31**

ISAIAH 1-5 can be taken to be the introduction to **ISAIAH**. **ISAIAH 1** is the first unit of the introduction. After **1:1**, the remaining 30 verses can clearly be sub-divided into three sections:

1:2-9

1:10-20

1:21-31

After reading **ISAIAH 1** . . .

1. What grabs your attention?

2. What questions do you have?

Day 2-3 Read **ISAIAH 1:1-9**

1. Whom does God call as witnesses against Judah? (**Verse 2**)

2. What charges does God bring against Judah? (**Verses 2-3**)

3. How was Judah described in **verse 4**?

4. How was the condition of Judah depicted in **verses 5-6**?

5. What do you think is the message of **verses 7-8**?

6. If God had not left Judah a remnant, what would they have been like? (**Verse 9**)

7. Review Q1-6 above, and write down a summary of the message of these 9 verses:
8. After reading/studying these 9 verses, how has your Christian Life changed? Name one specific area:

Day 4-5 Read **ISAIAH 1:10-20**

1. What is it that God could no longer endure? (**Verses 10-14**)
2. Why would God not accept their worship and prayers? (**Verses 15**)
3. What does God want them to do instead? (**Verses 16-17**)
4. (a) Do you think **verse 18** is a promise or a command or a warning?

(b) As a promise/command/warning (cancel out the ones that are wrong), the message of **verse 18** is:
5. In **verses 19-20**, what was promised to the obedient and threatened against the rebellious?

6. Review Q1-5 above, and write down a summary of the message of these 11 verses:
7. What are the truths concerning God that you have learnt from **ISAIAH 1:10-20**?
8. Which area(s) of your life must change now that you have read **ISAIAH 1:10-20**?

Day 6-7 Read **ISAIAH 1:21-31**

1. **Verses 21-23** depict the negative change that Judah has undergone.
 - (a) What was Judah like previously?
 - (b) What has Judah become now?
2. **Verses 24-31** describe the response of the LORD to this negative change in Judah. What is the LORD going to do?

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3. **Verse 24** mentions people who are God's adversaries and God's enemies. Who are they?

4. **Verse 29** talks about the Judeans being ashamed of the terebinth trees and embarrassed because of their gardens. What do you think this is referring to? Discuss your answer with your RTBT group.
5. What are the truths concerning God that you have learnt from **ISAIAH 1:21-31**?
6. After reading/studying **ISAIAH 1:21-31**, how has your Christian Life changed? Name one specific area:

Week 3

[10th – 16th July 2016]

Day 1 Read **ISAIAH 2:1-4**

Recall that **ISAIAH 1-5** can be taken to be the introduction to **ISAIAH**. **ISAIAH 1** is the first unit of the introduction. **ISAIAH 2-4** forms the second unit in the introductory section. After **2:1**, this second unit of the introduction can be sub-divided into three sections:

2:2-4

2:6-4:1

4:2-6

A quick scan of these three sections will tell you that the first and third section paint *Judah* to be what she is destined to be (the ideal state), while the second section paints *Judah* as she is in fact (the sinful state).

“It seems equally likely that the import of the section is that the Israel of 2:6-4:1 can only fulfill the destiny given her in 2:2-4 by experiencing the judgment expressed in 2:6-4:1 and the purification in 4:2-6. This schema would correspond well with the thought of chapter 1 and indeed the whole book: proud, self-sufficient Israel can become the witness to the greatness of God only when she has been reduced to helplessness by his just judgment and then restored to life by his unmerited grace.”

John N. Oswalt

“The whole section of Isaiah 2:1 — 4:6 has two bookends: the prophecy of the nations attracted to God’s people (2:2-5) and the prophecy of God’s people visited by him (4:2-6). In between, God speaks bluntly about the mess that his people are right now (2:6 — 4:1). His confrontation is real, but it stands within a larger context of grace. He will save his people. He will bless the whole world. He is moving us toward the Day of the Lord, when he will reveal himself with finality.”

Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr

For today, we shall focus on **ISAIAH 2:1-4**.

1. *“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days . . .” (verse 2)*. When do you think this “latter days” refer to? Discuss your answer with your RTBT group.

2. (a) What will happen in “*the latter days*”? (**Verses 2-3**)
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 -(b) What does each of the above mean?

3. (a) What will the Lord do? (**Verse 4a**)

(b) What will the people do? (**Verse 4b**)

4. Has the situation described in **2:2-4** happened? Elaborate.

Recall that **ISAIAH 2-4** forms the second unit in the introductory section, and after **2:1**, this second unit of the introduction can be sub-divided into three sections: **2:2-4**, **2:6-4:1** and **4:2-6**.

While the first section (**2:2-4**) paints *Judah* to be what she is destined to be (the ideal state), the second section (**2:6-4:1**) paints *Judah* as she is in fact (the sinful state). Our text for the next two days (**2:5-11**) belongs to this second section.

[If you wish to, read **ISAIAH 2:5-11** using the ESV and NASB as well]

1. What did *Isaiah* call the house of Jacob to do? (**Verse 5**)

Note #1: The house of Jacob is another name for Judah.

Note #2: This call echoes that of **verse 3**.

2. From **verses 6b-8**, *Isaiah* used the words "*filled*" and "*full*" many times.

(a) What was Judah filled with and full of?

(b) What was God's response to this? (**Verse 6a**)

3. Before what/whom do the people bow down and humble themselves? (**Verse 9**)

4. Although **verse 9** talks about people who bow down and humble themselves, yet **verses 11-12** accused them of being proud, lofty and haughty. How can this be so?

5. What will take place on “*the day of the LORD of hosts*”? (**Verse 11**)
6. Review your answers to Q1-5 above. Using a paragraph of no more than 5 lines, write down the message of this passage:
7. Having learnt the message of these 7 verses, explain one way in which your life must change:

Day 4-6 Read **ISAIAH 2:12-22**

Recall that **2:6-4:1** paints *Judah* as she is in fact (the sinful state) and our text for today (**2:12-22**) belongs to this section.

1. (a) What will the LORD do “*in that day*”? (**Verses 13-17**)

(b) What do you think that means?
2. In **verse 18**, God says that He will utterly abolish the idols.
(a) According to **verses 18-21**, how will this actually happen?

(Hint: We can take **verses 18-19** and **verses 20-21** as parallel passages, meaning they describe the same situation.)
(b) How can **verses 18-21** be an encouragement to us today?

3. What do you think is the message of **verse 22**? Discuss your answer with your RTBT group.
4. What are the truths concerning God that you have learnt from **ISAIAH 2:12-22**?
5. Which area(s) of your life must change now that you have read **ISAIAH 2:12-22**?

Day 7 Read **ISAIAH 3:1-4:1**

[If you wish to, read **ISAIAH 3:1-4:1** using the ESV and NASB as well]

After reading these 27 verses ...

1. What is your first impression?
2. What questions do you want to ask?
3. Take some time to read the introductory comments of John N. Oswalt on these 27 verses:

"The segment 3:1-4:1 follows upon 2:6-22 by giving particulars of the general statements given there. It continues the contrast between the high and the lowly by depicting in concrete and graphic language the foolishness of depending upon human leadership and human glory. Such dependence must ultimately have disastrous effects. In place of the "great" men which the nation had adulated, expecting them to do miracles on its behalf, it will be ruled by incompetents and wastrels. In place of all their glory, there will be shame and loss. Thus, although not necessarily written or spoken as a unit, the materials in 2:6-4:1 suppose a single point: dependence upon humanity will not lead to a realization of the destiny depicted in 2:1-5. In fact, it leads in a diametrically opposite direction: to dissolution."

1. (a) What will the LORD of hosts take away from Judah? (**Verses 1-3**)

(b) What will the LORD of hosts give to Judah instead? (**Verses 4-5**)

(c) In **verses 6-7**, *Isaiah* brings his message to a climax with a concrete example. What is the message of this example?

(d) Imagine that you are a Judean living in those days. What will be your response after you have heard His threats in **3:1-7**?

(e) How can we apply **3:1-7** to ourselves today in 2016?

2. According to **verses 8-9**, why has Jerusalem stumbled and Judah fallen?

3. (a) Who is the righteous and what shall be their end (**verse 10**)?

(b) Who is the wicked and what shall be their end (**verse 11**)?

- (c) Have you seen exceptions to what is stated in **verses 10-11**? If yes, how can you explain the exceptions?
4. Do you think **verse 12** is (i) a reason for Judah's sin, (ii) an effect of Judah's sin, or (iii) both a reason and effect of Judah's sin? Discuss your answer with your RTBT group.
5. (a) What is the message of **verses 13-15**?
- (b) How is it a sweet comfort to us?
- (c) How is it a stern warning to us?
6. (a) What do you think is the message of **3:16-4:1**?
- (b) Do you think the "daughters of Zion/women" are to be taken literally or figuratively or both? Elaborate.

Day 6-7 Read **ISAIAH 4:2-6**

1. **Verse 2** talks about "*the Branch of the LORD*" and "*the fruit of the earth*". Who or what do you think they refer to?

The Branch of the LORD:

The fruit of the earth:

2. We should see a parallelism in **verse 2**:

*In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be **beautiful and glorious***

*And the fruit of the earth shall be **excellent and appealing** . . .*

“The Branch of the LORD” corresponds to “the fruit of the earth”, while “beautiful and glorious” corresponds to “excellent and appealing”.

Beautiful and glorious/excellent and appealing to who? *Those of Israel who have escaped!*

What is the message of **verse 2**?

3. All throughout **2:6-4:1**, Judah had been portrayed as sinfully wicked. Yet now in **4:3**, it is said that they will be called holy.

How did this great transformation come about? (**Verse 4**)

4. What is the message of **verses 5-6**?

5. Review Q1-4 above. What is the message of this passage?

“In 3:1 God says he is ‘taking away’ something from his people. Then again in 3:18 he says he will ‘take away’ something further. But in 4:2-6, the gain section, he doesn’t say what we expect. He doesn’t say that he will give something back. He promises to ‘create’ something new. That is our gain — better than we expect or deserve.”

Raymond Ortlund

Week 5

[24th – 30th July 2016]

Day 1 Read **ISAIAH 5:1-7**

“Chapter 5 brings the introductory oracles to a close. If chapter 1 introduced the reader to the book as a whole, and chapters 2-4 laid bare the enormous conflict between what Israel was called to be and what, in fact, she was, chapter 5 brings us back to the realities of Israel’s condition at the moment of Isaiah’s speaking. Whatever the future might hold, however redemption might occur, the plain fact was that somehow present sin must be faced and dealt with. No future hope, such as that contained in 4:2-6, could ever obscure or obviate present evil. This message is ever the same. Yes, there is hope, but that hope cannot annihilate the present, somehow removing us from its responsibility.”

John N. Oswalt

ISAIAH 5 begins with the parable of the vineyard, and this is our focus for today.

1. **Verse 1** calls someone “my Well-beloved”. Who is this person?

2. **Verses 1b-2** describe what the owner has done for the vineyard.
 - (a) What has he done?

 - (b) Having done all that was outlined in (a), what did he expect and what did he get?

3. In **verses 3-4**, the hearers were asked for their response: *“If they were the owner of this vineyard, what would they do?”*

Imagine that you were one of the hearers present then. How would you answer this question?

Note that the method employed here is the same used by *Nathan* the prophet when he confronted *David* the king concerning his double sin of murder and adultery in **II SAMUEL 12**.

4. In **verses 5-6**, the owner outlined what his response will be.

(a) What will he do?

(b) Do you think he is reasonable in doing this? Elaborate.

5. According to **verse 7**, what is the message of this parable?

Day 2-6 Read **ISAIAH 5:8-30**

After the parable of the vineyard (**ISAIAH 5:1-7**), the rest of the chapter details some of the wild grapes produced by Judah. We can identify the wild grapes via the “*woes*” found in **ISAIAH 5:8-30**.

First “*woe*” (**verses 8-10**)

1. According to **verse 8**, what were the Judeans doing?

2. What would the LORD do in response? (**Verses 9-10**)

Note: To understand why the actions of the Judeans here are so bad that it called forth a “*woe*” from God, we need to understand that according to the Mosaic law, all the land of Canaan belonged to God. While He allowed families to possess parcels of land, it was never theirs to dispose of their property as they pleased. It had to be kept in the family.

In the event of severe poverty leading to a need to sell the land, it is incumbent that they should buy it back as soon as possible. Failing that, it must automatically return to the heirs of the sellers in the Year of the Jubilee (see **LEVITICUS 25:23-28**).

Sadly, most Judeans saw these prescriptions as just a nice ideal but not meant to be practiced. Hence, those with the means will dispossess the poor and

reduce them to servitude in their own land. What we see over time is that the rich Judeans only grew richer, while the poor remained poor, or even worse!

Such actions of land-grabbing reveals their covetous hearts, and worse, it shows a blatant disregard for the clear commands of the LORD, the One who delivered them from slavery and gave Canaan to them as a gift!

3. Ponder: Is there any way whereby you can be guilty of what the Judeans were doing then?

Do not be too quick to dismiss it, but rather ask God to “*search you and know your heart*” today.

Second “woe” (verses 11-17)

1. According to **verses 11-12** . . .

(a) What were the Judeans guilty of doing?

(b) What did the Judeans fail to do?

2. As a result, what will happen to these people? (**Verses 13-14**)

3. (a) **Verses 15-16** state a principle. What is it?

(b) What has this principle got to do with the sin of the Judeans (**verses 11-12**) and the punishment they will get (**verses 13-14**)?

4. What will happen after the judgment on these Judeans? (**Verse 17**)

5. What truths have you learnt about God from these 7 verses, and how have they impacted your life?

Third “woe” (verses 18-19)

1. What kind of person was being described in these two verses?

2. Assuming that someone you know fits these descriptions, what will you do?
 - (a) Avoid the person
 - (b) Rebuke the person
 - (c) Help the person
 - (d) _____ (fill in the blanks, if (a) – (c) are not your answers)

3. If you have answered (c) to Q2 above, please elaborate the kind of help you will give, and discuss your answer with your RTBT group.

Fourth “woe” (verse 20)

1. What kind of person was being described here?

2. What do you think could be the reason(s) why someone would adopt such values?

3. Imagine that you find yourselves living in a world whereby people “*call evil good, and good evil*”, “*put darkness for light and light for darkness*”, “*bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*”.

What would you do next?

Fifth-seventh “*woe*” (**verses 21-23**)

1. (a) What is the fifth woe? (**Verse 21**)

(b) How serious do you think this is? Elaborate.

2. (a) What is the sixth woe? (**Verse 22a**)

(b) How serious do you think this is? Elaborate.

3. (a) What is the seventh woe? (**Verse 22b-23**)

(b) How serious do you think this is? Elaborate.

Deserved punishments (**verses 24-30**)

1. **Verses 24-25** contain the first statement of God’s judgment upon these Judeans.

(a) What was the stated reason for this judgment? (**Verse 24**)

- (b) God's judgment upon Judah was depicted in straightforward language (**verse 25**) as well as using pictorial language (**verse 24**).

How severe would this judgment be? (Explain how you arrive at your answer)

2. **Verses 26-30** contain the second statement of God's judgment upon these Judeans. The last part of **verse 25** (*For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still*) will alert us to the fact that what we shall encounter in **verses 26-30** will be far more severe than what was depicted in **verses 24-25**.

(a) Who do you think "*the nations from afar*" refer to?

(b) **Verses 26c-29** give us a vivid description of these people. What do you think is the purpose of such vivid description?

(c) What is **verse 30** seeking to convey?

(d) How can **verse 26a-b** be a note of comfort to God's faithful people?

3. Review the sins of the Judeans and the punishment that will fall on them. In many ways, we should be able to see that "*the punishment fits the crime*". Can you cite a few examples of how "*the punishment fits the crime*"?

4. What truths have you learnt about God from **ISAIAH 5:8-30**, and how have they impacted your life?

Day 7 Read **ISAIAH 6:1-13**

After reading these 13 verses ...

1. What is your first impression?

2. What questions do you want to ask?

Week 6

[31st July – 6th August 2016]

Day 1-2 Read **ISAIAH 6:1-13**

According to **verse 1**, this vision took place in the year King *Uzziah* died.

1. From **verses 1-4** ...
 - (a) What did *Isaiah* see?

 - (b) What did *Isaiah* hear?

 - (c) What else did *Isaiah* experience?

2. *Isaiah's* response to the vision was to say, "*Woe is me, for I am undone!*"
 - (a) Why would he have such a response?

 - (b) If you were in *Isaiah's* shoes, what would be your response? Elaborate.

3. How could *Isaiah's* iniquity be taken away and his sin purged by the live coal touching his lips? Explain.

4. (a) What did *Isaiah* hear the Lord say? (**Verse 8**)

(b) How did he respond? (**Verse 8**)

5. (a) What was *Isaiah* to tell the people? (**Verse 9**)

(b) In general, what would be the outcome of his preaching? (**Verse 10**)

6. How long was *Isaiah* to proclaim his message? (**Verses 11-12**)

7. How would **verse 13** offer a ray of hope to *Isaiah* and *Judah*?

8. As we review **ISAIAH 6**, it is clear that there is a sequential relationship of the elements found here: *Uzziah's death led to Isaiah's vision, the vision led to his self-condemnation, his self-condemnation opened the door for cleansing, his cleansing made it possible for him to serve, which he did.*

What lessons can we learn from this?

9. Why is **ISAIAH 6** not **ISAIAH 1**? If **ISAIAH 6** records the calling of *Isaiah* as prophet, then why did **ISAIAH** not start with this event?

ISAIAH 6 indeed records the calling of *Isaiah*. Chronologically, it should come before all the preaching we've seen in **ISAIAH 1-5**. However, when the prophet wrote down his prophecies, he was not as interested to give us a time sequence of what happened, but to present his materials following a theme.

Recall that **ISAIAH 1-5** portrayed *Judah* as arrogant and sinful. How can such a people be God's holy people and be God's servant to teach the world about God? **ISAIAH 6** provides the answer: *Sinful Judah can become God's servant when the experience of Isaiah became the experience of Judah!*

Before *Isaiah* can be God's mouthpiece, he has to know his sinfulness and be cleansed. Only then can he be suited to serve the thrice-holy God. The same thing must happen to *Judah* if they are to fulfil the picture painted in **ISAIAH 2:2-4** and **ISAIAH 4:2-6**.

ISAIAH 6 also functions as an introduction to **ISAIAH 7-12**. **ISAIAH 7** brings us to the time of King *Ahaz* and the Assyrian crisis, and *Isaiah's* call to *Ahaz* and *Judah* to trust in the LORD. What we see is the hardening of *Ahaz's* heart to the prophet's gracious invitation to trust. Indeed, the destruction of *Judah* via the Assyrians' invasion can be traced to *Ahaz's* refusal of *Isaiah's* call. Like a tree, the nation was cut down till the stump is left. Yet in **ISAIAH 11**, we read that out of one of those stumps, a rod shall come forth, bringing salvation and life to His people!

10. (a) What truths concerning God have you learnt from **ISAIAH 6**?

(b) What truths concerning the Christian Life have you learnt from **ISAIAH 6**?

Day 3-4 Read **ISAIAH 7:1-8:22**

After reading these 2 chapters ...

1. What is your first impression?

2. What questions do you want to ask?

Note: *Rezin* was the king of Syria (also known as Aram). The capital city of Syria was Damascus.

Pekah (son of *Remaliah*) was the king of Israel (also called Ephraim at times). The capital city of Israel was Samaria.

Ahaz was the king of Judah. The capital city of Judah was Jerusalem.

Judah and Israel used to be one nation, but the split came about after the death of Solomon. Ten tribes broke away and formed the northern kingdom of Israel, leaving the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to form the southern kingdom of Judah.

Israel was later conquered by the Assyrians and went into exile in 722 B.C. Judah survived for another 100 plus years, before they were conquered by the Babylonians and went into exile in 587 B.C.

Day 5 Read **ISAIAH 7:1-9**

1. Historical background: *Ahaz* is now king of Judah (**verse 1**). *Tiglath-pileser III* became the Assyrian king in 745 B.C. and was soon showing everyone his intention to expand his empire. Syria (under *Rezin*) and Israel (under *Pekah*) decided to form the Syro-Ephraimite alliance to oppose the Assyrians. They wanted Judah to join the alliance, but *Ahaz* refused. As a result, they decided to attack Judah, depose *Ahaz* and place a puppet king in his place (**verses 5-6**). This took place around 735 B.C.
2. The response of Judah to this combined attack from Syria and Israel was described in **verse 2** in this way: “*So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.*” What does this mean?
3. Unasked and unsought, the LORD in grace spoke to *Ahaz* via His prophet *Isaiah*.
 - (a) Where was *Ahaz* when *Isaiah* met him with God’s message? (**Verse 3**)

(b) What do you think *Ahaz* was doing there?

(c) What was the message conveyed by *Isaiah* to *Ahaz*? (**Verses 4-9**)

(d) The king of Syria and Israel were described as “*two stubs of smoking firebrands*”. What is the message conveyed by this figure here?

(e) What was the required response from *Ahaz*? (**Verse 9**)

4. *Isaiah* was to bring his son along as he went to meet *Ahaz*.

(a) What is the name of the son, and what does it mean?

(b) What role did this boy play in this meeting with *Ahaz*?

Day 6-7 Read **ISAIAH 7:10-25**

1. In His kindness, the LORD offered to give *Ahaz* a sign to help him believe His message (**verse 11**).

(a) We read of *Ahaz*’s response to the LORD’s offer in **verse 12**. What exactly is he saying?

- (b) What was the LORD's reply (through *Isaiah*) to *Ahaz's* reponse? (**Verses 13-17**)
2. Who do you think the "Son (**verse 14**)/"Child (**verse 16**)" refers to? Elaborate.
3. What would happen within the time frame of the sign? (**Verse 16**)
4. (a) Instead of the two nations Ahaz feared, which two nations would desolate Judah? (**Verses 17-19**)
- (b) These two nations were likened to a fly and a bee, and **verse 18** says that the LORD will whistle for them. What is the message here?
5. What do you think is the message of **verse 20**?
6. Do you think the message of **verses 21-25** is one of blessings and abundance, or of poverty and desolation? Elaborate.
7. Review your answers above since Day 3.
- (a) What do you think is the message of **ISAIAH 7**?

(b) How has the message of **ISAIAH 7** impacted your life?

Week 7

[7th – 13th August 2016]

Day 1 Read **ISAIAH 8:1-4**

The word “*moreover*” indicates that **ISAIAH 8:1-4** is a continuation of **ISAIAH 7**.

1. What did the LORD ask *Isaiah* to do, and what do you think is the purpose for doing this?

2. What did the LORD say He would do, and what do you think is the purpose for doing this?

3. (a) What was the name of *Isaiah's* newborn son, and what does it mean?

- (b) The name of the baby born conveys a prophecy. What was it?

4. How was this prophecy/birth of this boy an encouragement to Judah?

Day 2 Read **ISAIAH 8:5-10**

1. (a) What do you think “*the waters of Shiloah*” refer to? (**Verse 6**)

(b) What do you think “*the waters of the River*” refer to? (**Verse 7**)

(c) What is the message of **verses 6-8**?

2. What is the message of **verses 9-10**?

3. Review your answer to Q1(c) and Q2 above. What is the message of **ISAIAH 8:5-10**?

Note: **Verses 6c** states that Judah ‘*rejoice(s) in Rezin and in Remaliah’s son*’. How could this be, since **ISAIAH 7** tells us that both *Ahaz* and Judah trembled greatly at the sight of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance coming to attack them?

A possible and acceptable answer is that Judah was actually rejoicing and congratulating themselves over *Ahaz’s* diplomatic coup in allying himself with Assyria, believing that this would effectively deal with the Syrian-Israelite threat. However, not long after, Judah will discover that their ally Assyria was far from their friend. Like how someone once said, two rats attacked a mouse and the mouse turned to the cat for help. The cat came, killed and ate the two rats for dinner, and then had the mouse for supper!

Day 3-4 Read **ISAIAH 8:11-22**

1. In **verse 11**, *Isaiah* was told (in very strong terms) not to “*walk in the way of this people*”.

(a) What would “*the way of this people*” consist?

Verse 12 (cf. **verse 13**):

Verse 19:

(b) What would be the outcome if this choice was made? (**Verses 14-15, 21-22**)

2. Instead of walking “*in the way of this people*”, *Isaiah* and the believing Jews should walk another way.

(a) What would this “another way” consist?

Verse 13:

Verse 20:

(b) What do you think is the implied outcome if 2(a) is chosen?

(c) What attitude/posture would *Isaiah* adopt? (**Verse 17**)

3. What do you think is the message of **verse 18**?

4. Using your own words, summarize the message of **ISAIAH 8:11-22** in a paragraph of no more than five lines:

1. What do you think is the connection between this passage and the previous passage in **8:11-22**?
2. *Matthew* quoted **ISAIAH 9:1-2** in **MATTHEW 4:12-17**. In *Matthew's* understanding, what is **ISAIAH 9:1-2** talking about?
3. **Verses 3-5** describe how the gloom will be lifted and the darkness replaced by light, as depicted in **verses 1-2**.
 - (a) The “*you*” in **verses 3 & 4** refers to God. Hence, it is God who has multiplied the nation and increased its joy, and it is God who has broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder. What is the significance of this?
 - (b) As a result of what God has done, the people will rejoice before God. How is their joy described?
 - (c) Why is the rescue work of God (**verses 4-5**) likened to “*the day of Midian*”?
4. How will God actually carry out the deliverance depicted in **verses 1-5**? **Verses 6-7** tell us that this will be done through a child!
 - (a) What would the child be known as? (**Verse 6**)
 - (b) What would be the nature of his rule? (**Verse 7**)

(c) What assurance do we have that this will certainly come to pass?

Day 6-7 Read **ISAIAH 9:8-10:4**

In **9:8-10:4**, the attention has turned to Israel the northern kingdom. We know this because **verses 8 & 9** addressed the hearers as '*Jacob*', '*Israel*', '*Ephraim*' and '*Samaria*'.

1. In their pride and arrogance of heart, what did the people of Israel say (**9:10**) and what does it mean?
2. What will be the Lord's response to their pride? (**9:11-12b**)
3. Despite the punishment meted out in **9:11-12b**, the anger of the Lord is not turned away but His hand is still stretched out to punish them.
 - (a) Why? (**9:13**)
 - (b) What further actions will the Lord do? (**9:14-17**)
4. How else will God's wrath express itself upon Israel? (**9:19-21**)
5. According to **10:1-4**, what other misdeeds was Israel guilty of, and what would the Lord do in response?

Note: The phrase “*for all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still*” is repeated four times in this passage – **9:12, 17, 21, 10:4**.

Week 8

[14th – 20th August 2016]

Day 1-3 Read **ISAIAH 10:5-19**

In **10:3-4**, we read of “*the day of punishment*” and “*the desolation which will come from afar*”. This is a reference to the Assyrians, and **10:5-19** turn our attention to them.

1. How did God view Assyria in His plans? (**Verses 5-6**)
2. How did the Assyrian king view his conquests? (**Verses 7-11**)
3. What will God do to the king of Assyria once His work on Jerusalem was done? (**Verse 12**)
4. What is the reason for God’s judgment on Assyria? (**Verses 13-19**)
5. What lessons have you learnt from these 15 verses?

Day 4-7 Read **ISAIAH 10:20-34**

1. What will be the end result of God’s use of Assyria on Israel? (**Verses 20-23**)

2. In **verse 24**, God called His people not to be afraid. What reason(s) did He give them to support this call? (**Verses 25-26**)
3. **Verses 27-34** come across as a poem. What is the message of this poem?

Week 9

[21st – 27th August 2016]

Day 1-3 Read **ISAIAH 11:1-16**

In **ISAIAH 11**, the Messiah is not merely promised or announced, but depicted as ruling! Here is a king in whose hands the concerns of the weakest in the land will be safe. He will usher in a reign of safety and security whereby the weary exiles will be streaming in as they return. From the New Testament, we know that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ). Hence, **ISAIAH 11** is about our Lord and Savior.

1. What was to come from the roots of Jesse? (**Verse 1**)
2. What was to rest upon Him and what would be His delight? (**Verses 2-3**)
3. (a) How shall He judge the poor and meek? (**Verses 4-5**)

(b) How shall He slay the wicked? (**Verses 4-5**)
4. How is the peaceful nature of His kingdom depicted? (**Verses 6-9**)

5. Who shall seek the Root of Jesse, and what is said of His resting place? (**Verse 10**)
6. (a) What will the Lord do a second time? (**Verses 11-16**)
- (b) When do you think this will be fulfilled?
7. Remember that **ISAIAH 11** is about the Messiah, and Jesus is the Messiah. If you can only pick one verse from **ISAIAH 11** and use it to praise/worship Jesus . . .
- (a) Which will you choose?
- (b) Why would you choose that verse?

Day 4-6 Read **ISAIAH 12:1-6**

ISAIAH 12 brings *Isaiah's* vision of God's grace to a climax. As God works out His redemptive purposes in human history, what do we contribute? Absolutely nothing except our sins! And what does God contribute? Amazing grace that is greater than all our sins!

There is grace for *Isaiah*, grace for Judah, grace for Israel as well as grace for us! The prophet is saying, "*We have all failed God, but He is not defeated! Far from it! Instead, He has a remedy: His saving grace in our Messiah (9:1-7, 11:1-16). He will triumph!*"

The structure of **ISAIAH 12** is simple. It is made up of two parts, each starting with the words "*And in that day you will say*" (**verses 1, 4**). The "*you*" in **verse 1** is singular while the "*you*" in **verses 3-4** is plural. Hence, the first part of **ISAIAH 12** is the personal testimony of God's people, testifying of God's saving grace. The second part of **ISAIAH 12** is the corporate witness of God's people, telling the world the wonders of His grace. Each of us has a story to tell, and together we will fill the world with the praises of God.

1. According to **verse 1**, a day will come when God will be praised because His anger has been removed, replaced by His comfort.
 - (a) God's anger is towards sin, and it is a just anger. So how can God remain just and yet have His just anger removed?
 - (b) When will "*God's anger*" replaced by "*God's comfort*" take place?
 - (c) Who will have the blessing of experiencing "*God's anger*" replaced by "*God's comfort*"?
2.
 - (a) What does it mean to say that God is my salvation (**verse 2**)?
 - (b) What does it mean to say that God is my strength (**verse 2**)?
 - (c) What does it mean to say that God is my song (**verse 2**)?
 - (d) If (a)-(c) is true, then how should I live? (**Verse 2**)
 - (e) Can you say **verse 2** honestly from the bottom of your heart? Elaborate.

3. Note that the “*you*” in **verse 3** is plural.
 - (a) What do you think is the significance of the singular “*you*” in **verses 1-2** and the plural “*you*” in **verse 3**?
 - (b) What do you think is the significance of the “*therefore*” at the beginning of **verse 3**?
 - (c) What does it mean to draw water from the wells of salvation?
 - (d) How will believers do (c) and what is the significance of this?
4.
 - (a) What is the message of **verses 4-6**?
 - (b) What is the significance that **verses 4-6** come after **verses 1-3**?
5. Write down the MOST IMPORTANT thing you have learnt from **ISAIAH 12**:

Day 7 Review **ISAIAH 1-12**

1. Can you rehearse the plot and flow of **ISAIAH 1-12**? Try doing it in the space below:

2. What is the most important truth you have learnt concerning God from **ISAIAH 1-12**?
3. What is the most important truth you have learnt concerning the Christian Life from **ISAIAH 1-12**?
4. How has **ISAIAH 1-12** changed your life? Share one change:

Acknowledgement

Whatever the weaknesses of this Read-The-Bible-Together guide, they would have been far greater without the kind help of SOH Jyue Theng and NEO Chun Choon. They gave their time and energy to review the entire guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions. Thank you, brethren!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)

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Questions or comments concerning this RTBT guide?
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