

MEET THE WRITER

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER

In Acts 8, we find Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian official. As Philip approached the official, he heard the man reading from Isaiah, so Philip asked the official if he understood what he was reading. The official replied that he needed a guide.

Isaiah had told many years before of One who would be pierced and crushed for our sin so that we could be healed by His wounds (Isa. 53:5). The healing would be required because of sin. Isaiah pointed to a coming judgment against the Israelites because of that sin and the salvation God would provide to those who repented. That repentance would not come until after the Israelites were led away as captives. The exile was more than judgment; it was purposeful discipline designed to help people understand their need for God. That realization would lead to repentance and a restored relationship with God.

The Book of Isaiah is filled with insights about the nature of God and our relationship with Him. Part of this relationship includes the promise of God reconciling His people to Himself. The message of Isaiah continues to be echoed today. We are sinners facing sure judgment. The sovereign God disciplines us with a view toward repentance and relationship with Him through faith in His Son.

As we study the Book of Isaiah, we pray that each of us will discover the truth found by the Ethiopian official: we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness which is found only through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.

Humbly,

Dwayne McCrary



WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Ahaz [AY haz]—evil king of Judah who participated in idolatrous practices (2 Kings 16:3); father of Hezekiah; contemporary of Isaiah

Assyria [uh SIHR ih uh]—a powerful nation that conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC; invaded all the fortified cities of the Southern Kingdom of Judah except Jerusalem, and demanded tribute payments from Judah’s king, Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14-26)

Chaldeans [kal DEE uhnz]—a people group who occupied an area of southern Babylon where the Tigris River and Euphrates River meet; “Chaldean” became synonymous with “Babylonian” in the Old Testament

Ephraim [EE fra ihm]—one of the tribes of Israel but by the time of the prophets came to be synonymous with the Northern Kingdom

Hezekiah [HEZ ih kigh uh]—son and successor of Ahaz as king of Judah; a good king who initiated religious reform in Jerusalem; his name means “Yahweh is my strength”; a contemporary of Isaiah

Sennacherib [suh NAK uh rib]—Assyrian king who overran all the fortified cities of Judah except Jerusalem, then demanded tribute payments from King Hezekiah of Judah

Seraphim [SEHR uh fim]—winged, angelic creatures; their name means “burning ones”; mentioned only in Isaiah (6:2-6) and Ezekiel (1:4-28; 10:3-22)

Sidon [SIGH duhn]—an ancient city, founded long before the Israelites entered Canaan; located on the Mediterranean coast, Sidon and Tyre were centers of sea trade

Tyre [TIGHR]—a major city situated on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel; was a major port for trade and an extremely wealthy place with a great deal of influence; its people were known as skilled seafarers

Uzziah [uh ZIGH uh]—king of Judah and contemporary of Isaiah; also called Azariah; a relatively good king who did “what was right in the LORD’s sight,” with the exception of failing to remove the high places (2 Kings 15:3-4)

Zion [ZIGH uhn]—First mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:7, the term Zion was used by biblical writers in a number of ways, including: the fortified hill of pre-Israelite Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-9), the temple mount (Ps. 2:6), the whole city of Jerusalem (Ps. 126:1; Isa. 10:12), the whole nation of Judah (Isa. 1:27), and the heavenly Jerusalem (Isa. 59:20; 60:14; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1).

BIBLE READING PLAN

SEPTEMBER

- 1. Isaiah 1:1-15
- 2. Isaiah 1:16-31
- 3. Isaiah 2:1-11
- 4. Isaiah 2:12-22
- 5. Isaiah 3:1-15
- 6. Isaiah 3:16-26
- 7. Isaiah 4:1-5:7
- 8. Isaiah 5:8-30
- 9. Isaiah 6:1-13
- 10. Isaiah 7:1-19
- 11. Isaiah 7:20-8:10
- 12. Isaiah 8:11-22
- 13. Isaiah 9:1-21
- 14. Isaiah 10:1-19
- 15. Isaiah 10:20-34
- 16. Isaiah 11:1-16
- 17. Isaiah 12:1-6
- 18. Isaiah 13:1-22
- 19. Isaiah 14:1-23
- 20. Isaiah 14:24-32
- 21. Isaiah 15:1-9
- 22. Isaiah 16:1-14
- 23. Isaiah 17:1-14
- 24. Isaiah 18:1-7
- 25. Isaiah 19:1-15
- 26. Isaiah 19:16-20:6
- 27. Isaiah 21:1-17
- 28. Isaiah 22:1-14
- 29. Isaiah 22:15-25
- 30. Isaiah 23:1-18

OCTOBER

- 1. Isaiah 24:1-15
- 2. Isaiah 24:16-23
- 3. Isaiah 25:1-12
- 4. Isaiah 26:1-13
- 5. Isaiah 26:14-21
- 6. Isaiah 27:1-13
- 7. Isaiah 28:1-13
- 8. Isaiah 28:14-29
- 9. Isaiah 29:1-14
- 10. Isaiah 29:15-24
- 11. Isaiah 30:1-17
- 12. Isaiah 30:18-33
- 13. Isaiah 31:1-9
- 14. Isaiah 32:1-20
- 15. Isaiah 33:1-16
- 16. Isaiah 33:17-24
- 17. Isaiah 34:1-17
- 18. Isaiah 35:1-10
- 19. Isaiah 36:1-22
- 20. Isaiah 37:1-20
- 21. Isaiah 37:21-38
- 22. Isaiah 38:1-14
- 23. Isaiah 38:15-22
- 24. Isaiah 39:1-8
- 25. Isaiah 40:1-17
- 26. Isaiah 40:18-31
- 27. Isaiah 41:1-10
- 28. Isaiah 41:11-29
- 29. Isaiah 42:1-13
- 30. Isaiah 42:14-25
- 31. Isaiah 43:1-13

NOVEMBER

- 1. Isaiah 43:14-28
- 2. Isaiah 44:1-20
- 3. Isaiah 44:21-28
- 4. Isaiah 45:1-13
- 5. Isaiah 45:14-25
- 6. Isaiah 46:1-13
- 7. Isaiah 47:1-15
- 8. Isaiah 48:1-22
- 9. Isaiah 49:1-13
- 10. Isaiah 49:14-26
- 11. Isaiah 50:1-11
- 12. Isaiah 51:1-11
- 13. Isaiah 51:12-23
- 14. Isaiah 52:1-15
- 15. Isaiah 53:1-12
- 16. Isaiah 54:1-17
- 17. Isaiah 55:1-13
- 18. Isaiah 56:1-12
- 19. Isaiah 57:1-21
- 20. Isaiah 58:1-14
- 21. Isaiah 59:1-21
- 22. Isaiah 60:1-22
- 23. Isaiah 61:1-11
- 24. Isaiah 62:1-12
- 25. Isaiah 63:1-19
- 26. Isaiah 64:1-12
- 27. Isaiah 65:1-16
- 28. Isaiah 65:17-25
- 29. Isaiah 66:1-13
- 30. Isaiah 66:14-24

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

Isaiah, whose name means, “the Lord saves,” lived and ministered in Jerusalem from about 740–700 BC. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah’s father, Amoz, was the brother of King Amaziah, who ruled Judah from 821–767 BC. If so, the prophet would have been King Uzziah’s cousin. New Testament writers attribute the authorship of the Book of Isaiah to one person: Isaiah. (See John 12:37-41.)

Some modern scholars, however, have argued there were at least two writers. These scholars appeal to differences in style and emphasis between chapters 1–39 and 40–60, along with the varying perspectives from both the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods. Much of their issue with an eighth century prophet is their presupposition that predictive prophecy is impossible. They believe it impossible for an eighth-century prophet to predict the rise and fall of Babylon or to know the name of Cyrus over one hundred and fifty years before he lived. However, a major theme of Isaiah is God’s ability to know the future, reveal it through His prophets, and bring it to pass.

Isaiah’s public ministry occurred during the expansion of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians threatened Israel and Syria, so these kingdoms organized a coalition to stand against Assyria. When they tried to enlist Judah to join the coalition, Judah refused. Therefore, Israel and Syria invaded Judah. Upon Judah’s appeal for help, the Assyrians conquered Syria and subjugated Israel. When Sennacherib became king of Assyria, Hezekiah of Judah withheld tribute to Assyria. Sennacherib invaded Judah, but in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord Himself defeated the invaders. Nevertheless, Hezekiah’s pride led to an ominous prophecy that dominates the second part of the book: the Babylonian invasion and exile. However, Isaiah also foretold Babylon’s defeat and Judah’s return home.

The themes of the Book of Isaiah include:

- God is the holy one of Israel, and Israel is His holy people who worship in Jerusalem, God’s holy city.
- God is incomparable; no one is like Him.
- The Servant of the Lord will bring salvation to Israel and the nations. He will establish justice, righteousness, and peace.
- The trustworthiness of God and the unreliability of all others;
- The demise of the wicked but hope and deliverance for the faithful; Isaiah’s message warns people of God’s judgment and exhorts them to trust in His salvation.

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

- I.** Rebuke and Promise from the Lord (1:1–6:13)
- II.** The Promise of Immanuel (7:1–12:6)
- III.** Coming Judgment upon the Nations (13:1–23:18)
- IV.** First Cycle of General Judgment and Promise (24:1–27:13)
- V.** Woes upon the Unbelievers of Israel (28:1–33:24)
- VI.** Second Cycle of General Judgment and Promise (34:1–39:8)
- VII.** The Greatness of God (40:1–48:22)
- VIII.** Peace Brought by the Servant-Messiah (49:1–57:21)
- IX.** The Program of Peace (58:1–66:24)



ON THE COVER

Miniature column base in the form of a human-headed winged animal, probably a part of a piece of furniture; Assyrian, 7th century BC, from Nineveh. The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of winged, angelic beings (seraphim) attending God's throne and offering praises to Him (Isa. 6:2).



God Confronts

God confronts His people about the consequences of their actions.

ISAIAH 1:10-20

Paying bills, going to the grocery store, getting the car serviced—our days are filled with mundane tasks that we carry out on autopilot. Sometimes, church and devotions fall into repetitive ruts. Even relationships can become stale and fade into the background. As a result, the failure of a relationship can catch us off guard.

When have you ever taken a relationship for granted? How did it affect the relationship? Were you able to do anything to get the relationship back on track?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ISAIAH 1:1-4:6

Isaiah 1:1-4:6 lays the groundwork for Isaiah's entire message. Here, the prophet contrasted the sin and rebellion of Judah in his day to their future of blessedness and holiness in the last days. After briefly mentioning the kings who reigned during his ministry, Isaiah described Judah's sinful ways like a prosecuting attorney with overwhelming evidence. We see a picture of a people who had abandoned God. Though God had raised them, provided for them, and cared for them in every way as a loving father would his children, with ingratitude they rebelled against Him (Isa. 1:2). They were worse than oxen and donkeys who at least knew who feeds them (1:3).

God was using loving discipline to draw His people back to Himself, yet they stubbornly refused to return (1:5-9). Instead of trusting in the Lord, the people of Judah placed their trust in material things, military heroes, renowned leaders, and spiritual gurus. God would remove their false sources of security so they might recognize their futility (3:1-3). Young and old, male and female, all would bear the consequences of their arrogant sin (3:5-26).

Such is the case with us. God never abandons His children but lovingly confronts us and, if need be, disciplines us so we will return to Him. Whatever God does to bring us to Himself is an act of loving kindness, no matter how difficult His discipline may seem.

The good news is that God's announcement of judgment was not His only message. Even though His people's present situation was dreadful, their future was bright. God was going to once again establish His temple, people from every nation would stream to it to worship the Lord and receive His instruction, and there would be peace (2:1-4). On that day, the Branch of the LORD, Jesus Christ, will be beautiful and glorious among them, the people of God will be called holy, and their names will be written in the book of life because the Lord washed away their sin (4:1-6).

As you read Isaiah 1:10-20, circle what God is looking for in those who worship Him. What do these actions reveal about the nature of worship?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EMPTY RITUALS (ISA. 1:10-15)

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ “What are all your sacrifices to me?” asks the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I have no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who requires this from you — this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing useless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of solemn assemblies — I cannot stand iniquity with a festival. ¹⁴ I hate your New Moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a burden to me; I am tired of putting up with them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

VERSE 10

The words *hear* and *listen* both mean “hear and obey.” So the message is straightforward. The people needed to hear and obey the word of God. Verse 10 contains several personal elements:

- **LORD**, often denoted as *Yahweh* from Hebrew, is God’s personal, covenantal name. Israel was Yahweh’s treasured possession and holy nation, set apart to God’s personal mission of blessing all other nations. God chose Israel to be a conduit of blessing for every people group on the earth.
- The expression *our God* emphasizes that while other nations had a multiplicity of gods, Yahweh was Israel’s God, the one and only God.
- The word *instruction* is the Hebrew word *tora*, and even though it is authoritative, it has the idea of affectionate, personal instruction, such as what a parent would share with a son or daughter.

There is a scathing indictment in verse 10. By saying, *you rulers of Sodom* and *you people of Gomorrah*, Isaiah was communicating how utterly depraved Judah’s ways had been and how serious the consequences of such sin were. Verse 9 reveals that were it not for

the Lord's mercy, Judah might have been completely wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Gen. 19:23-25.)

VERSE 11

Sacrifices were meant to be outward expressions of true commitment to the Lord. God knows what is in the heart of every person, and He knows when a sacrifice is offered insincerely. Outward formality cannot hide degenerate hearts. This verse is reminiscent of 1 Samuel 15:22, "Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams."

The Lord confronted His people about their sacrifices. He was clear about what He thought of their sacrifices: They meant nothing to Him; they added nothing to Him; and they did nothing for Him.

The *fat of well-fed cattle* represents offering to God one's best, and the *blood* represents devotion to God. But it was all a sham. The people were blemished with sin and absent of true devotion to God. It would be like offering a gift to a spouse who knows the one giving the gift is cheating on him or her. Instead of being a blessing, the gift would be an affront because of the infidelity. Similarly, their sacrifices were an affront to God.

***Outward formality cannot hide
degenerate hearts.***

VERSE 12

When a person comes before the Lord with an insincere heart and selfish motives, it is unacceptable "worship" to God. Acceptable worship involves approaching the Lord on His terms. Many believe they can come to God any way they please, and He should be happy with that. When contemplating his own worship, the psalmist recognized, "If I had been aware of malice in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). David wrote: "Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3-4). Isaiah was saying that no matter how impressive the number of sacrifices the people brought into the temple, it was just the sound of *trampling* in Yahweh's courts and nothing more.

VERSES 13-15

The Lord emphatically commanded the people to *stop bringing* their offerings to the temple because they were meaningless and detestable to Him. God described Israel's worship with the same words He had used to describe the worship of the pagans (Deut. 18:9; 1 Kings 14:24). He condemned them for the abhorrent practice of perpetrating their own arrogance in the guise of worship.

The *New Moons* festival consecrated each new month to the Lord by expressing to Him repentance, devotion, and fellowship. The law required the people to present offerings to the Lord (Num. 28:11-15). Additionally, the New Moons festivals included the blowing of trumpets over the sacrifices so that all who heard would be reminded that Yahweh was their God (Num. 10:10).

The institution of the Sabbath was so important that it was included as the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11). Israel was required to cease from all work and rest because the Lord rested on the seventh day of creation. The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant the Lord made with Israel (Ex. 31:12-13) and reminded the people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Keeping the Sabbath served as a testimony of their devotion to the Lord. In addition, the Sabbath was an act of faith. It was unheard of in the ancient Near East to cease from work every seven days. It would have been seen as bad business in the eyes of Israel's neighbors. Nevertheless, keeping the Sabbath was Israel's way of showing the nations that Yahweh could be trusted ultimately to be their Provider. The Sabbath also provided a designated, focused time to worship the Lord, as David mentioned in Psalm 92.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare related passages.*

Compare Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What reasons are given for celebrating the Sabbath in these verses? How are the reasons different and how are they the same? What do these verses reveal about God's desires? How does this compare to what we find in Isaiah 1?

Other prescribed festivals included Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. God instituted these holy days as times for Israel to celebrate God’s wondrous acts and blessings upon them and to express their gratitude, love, and devotion to Him. Instead, they turned them into something repulsive; they were a mockery of what they were meant to be and thus a mockery of God. The people worshiped the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. (See Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9.) What once was a “pleasing aroma” to the LORD (Ex. 29:18; Num. 15:3) had now become a burden to Him, and He was weary of them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament book.

Consequently, when the people *spread out* their *hands in prayer*, God would *refuse to look* at them. When the Lord shines His face upon His people and looks at them, it is a way of expressing His favor. To refuse to look at them was His way of saying He was withdrawing His blessing from them. How often one prays and how zealously one prays is no substitute for obedience. What’s more, He said *your hands are covered with blood*. It is possible *blood* is a reference to the multitude of sacrifices they made, but the way it is expressed in Hebrew suggests He was saying they were guilty of violent bloodshed. Isaiah’s message is sobering.

What are causes and ways believers today fall into patterns of unacceptable worship of the Lord? What warnings should we draw from Judah’s mistakes?

TRUE FOLLOWERS (ISA. 1:16-17)

¹⁶ “Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil. ¹⁷ Learn to do what is good.

Pursue justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause.

VERSES 16-17

The Lord gave nine commands for the people to correct their ways and demonstrate they were true followers of God. These commands were not given as a way to secure salvation but to demonstrate the authenticity of their salvation. The first three deal with the inward removal of sin. The second three address outward devotion to Yahweh. The last three pertain to relationships with others, showing how true repentance would affect how they related to others. Instead of being the oppressors, they would oppose oppressors. Also, they would champion the cause of those who could not care for themselves, such as *the fatherless* and *the widows*.

Taken together, the three sets of commands signify authentic repentance and true devotion to the Lord. The washing and cleansing of themselves called for sincere repentance so that there no longer would be a disconnect between their hearts and their acts of worship. The authenticity of their repentance would be demonstrated by their actions: turn away from their sinful ways, learn what God's will is, and do it.

If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation, then why is it necessary for believers to be faithfully obedient to God?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God (Isa. 55:7).

REPENTANCE REQUIRED (ISA. 1:18-20)

¹⁸ “Come, let us settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you

will eat the good things of the land.²⁰ But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

VERSE 18

“*Come, let us settle this.*” In this phrase is a note of hope. The verb translated *settle* carries the idea of setting things right and bringing an end to a quarrel. The people had a chance to repent and to avoid the fate that befell Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 10).

God invited His sinful people to come to Him in repentance and faith. He promised to cleanse them of all their sin. The Lord takes no pleasure in disciplining His children. It is necessary for their correction, but He would rather enjoy them in sweet fellowship. If their sins were *scarlet*, they would be made *white*, non-existent. Here, the Lord made clear that He alone can cleanse us of sin. When He calls us to wash and cleanse ourselves, that washing and cleansing can happen only when we come to Him in sincere repentance (v. 16).

VERSES 19-20

The Lord confronted His people with a choice: either repent, obey, and enjoy God’s blessing, or *refuse and rebel* and suffer the consequences. To *eat the good things of the land* means to live an abundant life. To be *devoured by the sword* means to be cut off from the Lord. It was God’s message to the people in Isaiah’s day, and it is His message to us today.

The Lord Jesus Christ graciously and mercifully calls to us: *Whosoever will, come to Me, and I will forgive you, cleanse you, and give you abundant, eternal life. Reject Me and spend eternity separated from Me.* It is a choice every person must make. The Lord offers forgiveness and cleansing to all who repent—to the lost who need salvation and to believers who seek restored fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:9).

How does God take the initiative today to bring people into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Relying on religious rituals alone falls short when approaching the holy God.
- God expects His followers to demonstrate righteousness and justice.
- God offers forgiveness to those who repent.

Ask God to examine your heart and reveal any sin in your life that might be hindering your worship of Him. What actions do you need to take in response to what God shows you?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being completely, how would you rate how well you do the nine commands found in verses 16-17? What do you need to do to more completely follow the commands?

Discuss as a group the difference it should make to believers as they go through their daily routines to remember that our sins are forgiven and have been made “white as snow.” Begin to memorize Isaiah 1:18.

PRAYER NEEDS
