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“I Saw the Lord...” (Isaiah 6)

Study 1
Introduction to Isaiah

We live in challenging times. Our state and our nation face many economic, social, and moral problems. You as leaders may feel the weight of those problems more heavily than most as you have taken on the difficult responsibility of trying to find solutions to those problems. In the coming days, you will deal with many weighty issues. You will face long, difficult hours. You will hear intense criticism from inside and outside the statehouse. Our studies during the regular session on the prophet Isaiah can help encourage you as you live in these challenging times and serve in your difficult roles.

Isaiah certainly lived in challenging times and God gave him a difficult ministry. In the face of extreme adversity, apparently fruitless ministry, and eventual martyrdom, Isaiah faithfully served God for over 50 years. What was it that kept Isaiah going in serving the Lord so faithfully for so long? It was his vision of God and his call from God recorded for us in Isaiah chapter six. There, Isaiah writes of this amazing experience, “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple...” As he described this amazing experience and the call of God that followed, we find the source of his commitment and faithfulness.

It is our prayer that during these challenging days of the session we can “see the Lord, lofty and exalted” as we spend time studying His Word together. It is this vision of Him that will encourage you as you live in challenging times and serve in your difficult tasks.

An Introduction to Isaiah

The book of Isaiah is one of the “major prophets” in the Old Testament. This simply refers to its size, not its importance. However, Isaiah is certainly one of the most significant books we have given to us in the Bible.

Isaiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. He ministered during the reign of four of Judah’s kings (1:1). The book is largely made up of poetry, prophesy, and sermons Isaiah gave to the leaders and the people.

As you read this lengthy book, you can divide it up into three parts. Chapters 1-35 are made up of poems, prophesies, and sermons regarding God and His expression toward His people and their unfaithfulness. This section is mostly “doom and gloom” and points to God’s judgment of sin. In Chapters 36-39 the poetry pauses and a significant historical event, the siege of Jerusalem by Assyria, is recorded. Then in chapters 40-46 the poetry and prophesy return and largely presents a message of hope as God shows His mercy and grace to His people in providing a Savior and a righteous King.

Isaiah proclaimed many prophesies, statements of what would take place in the future. Some of these actually came to pass during his life and ministry and verified his credentials as a prophet. Others were fulfilled shortly after Isaiah’s death. Still more were fulfilled when Jesus came to earth as our Savior. The rest will not be fulfilled

until Christ returns to rule and reign forever. It is a challenge for us as we read through Isaiah to carefully study these prophesies to determine to which fulfillment they speak.

The message of Isaiah is one of both judgement and of hope and salvation. The leaders and people of the southern Kingdom of Judah had become unfaithful to God. Isaiah warned them that God would judge them by sending them into exile. But Isaiah also proclaimed that God would show His mercy and grace by sending a Savior and a righteous King.

Isaiah’s Challenging Times

“In the year King Uzziah died...” (Isaiah 6:1)

This seeming simple statement points out the challenging times in which Isaiah lived. King Uzziah was a largely righteous king (one of the few) who reigned in Judah for 52 years.² He had returned Judah and the capitol city of Jerusalem to much of the glory they had under King Solomon. Now Uzziah was dead. There had to be doubts about the incoming king, his son Jotham.

With the death of the earthly king, God gave Isaiah a vision of the King of Kings to remind him that his hope was in the Lord!

Political storm clouds were gathering around them. Egypt to the South, the greatest world power up to that point was faltering. Assyria, a wicked nation to the

North, was growing in power and threat. The northern kingdom of Israel, as always, was making threats and conspiring against them. Uzziah's great grandson Hezekiah was a truly righteous king who rebelled against the idolatrous Assyrians. This led to the great crisis recorded in chapters 36-39 – the siege of Jerusalem. Isaiah's ministry ended under the reign of the wicked King Manasseh who led the people into wicked idolatry. Tradition tells us that Manasseh had Isaiah put to death by stuffing him into a hollow tree trunk and then sawing it in two. All these political problems are simply the background against which the message of Isaiah is presented. His message is about the spiritual condition of the people. While the leaders and the people are putting their trust in other gods and kings and nations, Isaiah urges them to put their trust in the true God alone.

Isaiah's Challenging Ministry

In chapter 6, God reveals His holiness and glory to Isaiah, and then calls him into service and ministry. However, God tells him ahead of time that his message will be largely ignored. God tells him the people will not perceive or understand, their hearts will be insensitive, their ears dull, their eyes dim (6:9-10). Isaiah asks how long he is to keep on proclaiming God's message. God tells him "until the cities are devastated and the land is utterly desolate" (6:11). In other words, Isaiah's message would have no apparent impact, the people would not repent and turn to God, and His judgment would fall upon Jerusalem and Judah.

Yet Isaiah faithfully served and shared the message of God for over 50 years! Why? Because he had seen the Lord!

Isaiah's Message

Isaiah is often called the "Evangelistic Prophet" because he so clearly proclaims the Gospel message throughout his book. His message to the leaders and people of Judah was that they were putting their hope and trust in the wrong things. They were putting their trust in other earthly kings. They were trusting in other gods. They were trusting in themselves – in their own strength and wisdom. They were trusting in their own ungodly leaders. Isaiah exhorts them to repent and put their trust in God alone.

Isaiah boldly confronted their sin:

Alas, sinful nation,
People weighed down with iniquity,
Offspring of evildoers,
Sons who act corruptly!
They have abandoned the LORD,
They have despised the Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away from Him. (1:4)

He called them to repentance and to find forgiveness and cleansing from their sin:

"Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet,
They will be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,
They will be like wool. (1:18)

Isaiah prophesied the coming of the one Who would be their Savior:

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:
Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son,
and she will call His name Immanuel. (7:14)

Isaiah proclaims how this one who came would suffer and die for our sin:

But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him. (53:5-6)

Finally, Isaiah tells of how Christ will come as King to rule in perfect righteousness and justice:

⁶For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷There will be no end to the increase of His government
or of peace, On the throne of David
and over his kingdom, To establish it
and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
from then on and forevermore. (9:6-7)

Conclusion

You live in challenging times. You certainly serve in a challenging position. How can you stay faithful and encouraged during the difficult days of the session? By, along with Isaiah, getting a glimpse of God's glory and holiness; and by remembering our true hope is not in politics or earthly leaders, but in our Savior and King, Jesus Christ. Please make plans to join us as we study this wonderful passage over the next 60 days that we too might be able to say, "*I saw the Lord...*"

¹Some material adapted from *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made*. Mark Dever. Crossway Books. 2006. Kindle Version. Pg. 567.

²See 2 Chronicle 26ff

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 House Government Org Conference Room (East Wing)
12:00 Noon Treasurer's Conference Room (EB54,
Basement of East Wing)