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Isaiah - Introduction (Part 1)



Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah, the book of prophetic revelations, contains powerful poetry that inspired and thrilled readers despite being foreign to Western readers. In this introduction by Steve Gregg, he discusses Isaiah's background, prophetic vision, and the timeframe of his prophecies. Gregg also explains how the book, which is divided into seven sections, contains predictions of the Messianic age and the passing of the old covenant. Despite some scholars questioning whether Isaiah wrote all the chapters, Gregg emphasizes that the book's supernatural predictions are essential to understanding the Old Testament message.

Transcript

I hope you have in front of you the printed notes, the introduction to Isaiah. If you don't, it's because we might not have printed out enough for all our visitors, but you can follow along and make your own notes if you want to. Everything in the notes will be spoken also.

It's actually, frankly, a very exciting thing to embark on a study of Isaiah, who is the greatest of the writing prophets. I mean, it's hard to be greater than someone like Jeremiah, but I believe that most would agree that Isaiah is great in more respects than any other prophet. As far as who he was, he was a citizen of Jerusalem, and he prophesied beginning in the year 740 B.C., which was the year that King Uzziah died.

And we find in chapter 6 of Isaiah, he says, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple, and he commissioned Isaiah to preach. Now, there are five chapters of Isaiah before that, and exactly how they relate chronologically is not known. It's possible that he wrote those chapters later, and then when the book was composed, they were put in as sort of an introduction to the subject, or it's possible that he was doing some writing before he actually saw the Lord.

He may have had some prophetic revelations before he had this specific vision he describes in chapter 6, but chapter 6 does describe him being specifically commissioned to be God's spokesman to Israel and Judah at a time of crisis, which we will discuss

momentarily. He was apparently of royal birth, though he was not in the direct line of the kings. He was apparently the grandson of a king.

Amoz is the name given of his father. According to Josephus, Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah, and therefore King Amaziah was Isaiah's uncle, and of course his grandfather would then be a king also. He was from royal lines, and he would have been probably first cousin to King Uzziah.

So the death of King Uzziah was not only a national tragedy, the loss of the king, but also a personal family tragedy. It was his first cousin who died and left a vacancy, which was at a crisis time in Judah, and would have created more problems at that time than maybe at some other time. The man was married.

It's interesting how many times the prophet's marital condition is mentioned in different prophets. Jeremiah did not marry. He was told not to.

Ezekiel was married. His wife died in the midst of his prophesying, and Hosea is married, a very important marriage, part of his message. Isaiah was also married.

Well, in the case of Hosea, his wife was in a sense part of his message. In Isaiah's case, the wife was not directly so much part of the message, but his children were. He had two sons.

One was named Shir Jashub, and the other was named Mehar-Shelel Hashbaz. I thought some of my hippie friends gave the kids strange names, but I never knew any. I mean, Moondrop Rainbow or something like that is pretty strange, but not even as strange as Mehar-Shelel Hashbaz.

Mehar-Shelel Hashbaz means speed the spoil, hasten the booty. Obviously, it speaks of some kind of an invasion, some kind of military conquest, some enemy taking spoils and booty. The name Shir Jashub, the older son of Isaiah, means a remnant shall return or the remnant shall return.

Actually, these two names of his sons sort of summarize the two aspects of his message. His message was a message of judgment and conquest coming upon Israel and Judah, but it was also a message of hope about a remnant that would be saved ultimately. His sons bore names that sort of carried on his message apparently probably even after he died.

According to tradition, this prophet was killed as a martyr by Manasseh. Now, Isaiah says that he prophesied during the reign of four different kings. In verse 1 of chapter 1, it says, in the days of Uzziah.

Now, that's interesting because chapter 6 was the year Uzziah died. Either it was the year he died but before he died that the vision occurred or else there were other

prophecies during the lifetime of Uzziah before that vision occurred. But King Uzziah, his cousin, was the first of the kings during whose reign he prophesied.

Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah are the others. After Hezekiah, there was Manasseh. According to tradition, Manasseh killed Isaiah.

Hezekiah, Manasseh's father, was a very good and righteous king, but his son Manasseh was the worst king Judah ever had. He actually sacrificed his own children to Molech and did other horrible things. He enforced pagan worship in Judah and apparently persecuted the prophets.

So the rabbis tell us and Josephus tells us that Manasseh actually killed Isaiah who would have been a very elderly man at the time, at least in his 70s, and had been a man whose contribution to the safety of the nation was unparalleled because through his counsel to King Hezekiah, Isaiah preserved the nation's life for 100 years longer than it would have been preserved. A little bit like Jonah going to Nineveh 40 days before its scheduled destruction and turning them away from their sins, and so Nineveh lasted another 100 years. Jonah's prophesied in Nineveh spared that nation for 100 years longer than it would have lasted.

Isaiah's prophecies, as we shall see, spared Judah approximately 100 years after the time it would otherwise have fallen to the Assyrians. So he made a tremendous contribution to the nation, but Manasseh didn't have any sympathy for him because of his religious views apparently, and killed him. According to tradition, he put Isaiah in a log and sawed it in two.

So he was sawn in two. There is no scripture in the Old Testament that confirms this. However, the book of Hebrews appears to confirm it because the writer of Hebrews is, in chapter 11, giving a summary of things that occurred in Old Testament times, primarily focusing on the faith of individuals who are the heroes of the Old Testament.

And he points out how that they suffered great things and their faith sustained them in those things. And so it says in Hebrews 11, beginning at verse 35, So he catalogs the various ways in which saintly people in the Old Testament suffered. And among the things listed are they were sawn in two.

Well, there's only one known Old Testament character of whom it is even reputed that he was sawn in two. That would be Isaiah. And therefore, it would appear that the writer of Hebrews was taking that tradition as a true case, as a true story.

And therefore, we would have a New Testament confirmation for the veracity of that tradition. So it would appear that Isaiah died a martyr eventually. Now, he was more than a prophet, though he was the greatest of the writing prophets.

This was apparently the estimation of the New Testament writers. They quoted Isaiah

more than all the other prophets combined. Now, you know, they quoted from almost all the prophets and frequently from some.

But if you take all the times the New Testament writers quoted the prophets at all, Isaiah is quoted more than twice as much as the rest taken together. Obviously, he is the prophet of the Messiah. He's the prophet of the New Testament more than any other.

There's only one book of the Old Testament that the New Testament writers quote more often, and that's the book of Psalms. Actually, the book of Psalms provides more prophetic material about the Messiah than any of the prophets do. But the New Testament writers quoted the Psalms most and Isaiah second.

And then the third was a far distant third after Isaiah because his prophecies were so germane to the message of the New Testament. That should say something, too. We were considering whether the messianic prophecies are, you know, for future fulfillment or for the present time.

Well, the fact that so many of the things Isaiah said are brought into the New Testament as things that are, you know, predictive of the New Testament message would suggest, of course, that the fulfillment of Isaiah in a very large degree, if not entirely, has taken place in New Testament times. In addition to being a prophet, he wrote history. And being a historian is another kind of skill, another kind of a discipline.

A person who is a historian has to do research, has to verify stories, you know, from various sources, has to organize them, has to make some decisions about what to include, what to exclude. A historian does—it's not so easy being a historian as one might think who's never done it. You actually have to decide what threads of history am I going to follow? Because there's millions of threads of history I could follow.

I have to leave most of them out. What is the message going to be? What materials should I include that contributes to this overall thread that I'm considering? It's quite a discipline to be a historian. And Isaiah wrote a number of historical books.

For one thing, he wrote four historical chapters even in this book. Chapters 36, 37, 38, and 39 of Isaiah are historical narrative. In fact, the narrative there follows almost verbatim certain chapters in 2 Kings and in 2 Chronicles.

It's a piece of history that's found three times in the Bible, once in Kings, once in Chronicles, and once in Isaiah. Isaiah may be the primary source of it since it's about him and it's about his time. It's about Hezekiah, which was contemporary with Isaiah.

It's possible that the books of Kings and Chronicles drew that portion of their material from Isaiah as their original source. We do know that those books knew of other writings of Isaiah and no doubt used them. In 2 Chronicles 26, we have reference to other works of Isaiah that we don't have.

The works have perished. They're not available to us anymore. But we know that he wrote them and that someone had read them.

In 2 Chronicles, which was written considerably later than Isaiah's time, in chapter 26 and verse 22, it says, Now the rest of the Acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz wrote. Now, we don't have any of the Acts of Uzziah described by Isaiah in our book of Isaiah. So it's obviously another book.

The book that we call Isaiah doesn't have any of the Acts of Uzziah. And yet, he apparently wrote a complete and thorough history of the Acts of King Uzziah, which is a document that has since perished. Likewise, in 2 Chronicles 32 and verse 32, it says, Now the book of Kings of Judah and Israel was not written by Isaiah.

But there was a book, apparently, as there was one about the reign of Uzziah, there was one about the reign of Hezekiah that had all his Acts. Now, the four chapters in the book of Isaiah, chapters 36 through 39, are about King Hezekiah. But they could hardly be what is being referred to here because they do not contain all the Acts of Hezekiah, just a few things.

And so there must have been more material on Hezekiah that Isaiah wrote. In fact, it's possible that the chapters in Isaiah about Hezekiah were drawn, excerpted from a larger work that he had done on Hezekiah. But the point is that he wrote the histories and biographies, apparently, of at least two kings who were his contemporaries.

And so he was a man of literature, a writer, a historian, a scholar, really. It's scholars who write history. So he was both an inspired prophet and a scholar and a writer, historian.

Besides that, he had an artistic streak. He was a poet. He didn't just prophesy and write history.

He also wrote poetry, lots of it. Most of the book of Isaiah is written in poetry. Most of his prophecy is poetry.

It is the assessment of scholars that Isaiah contains the most cultured and profound poetry of any of the prophets. Now, I'm not schooled in poetry myself. I never studied poetry much.

I know a little bit about a few English poems and American poems. I just don't know very much about poetry in general. I would not be one to assess the value of Isaiah's writing as poetry.

But it is majestic. It is magnificent. It is thrilling.

And since poetry is supposed to evoke emotions and impressions like that, he does seem to be effective, even though when you're reading Isaiah as an American reader, you're

reading a very foreign kind of poetry, not like Western poetry. But still, it has that power to inspire and to thrill. And he's a great poet.

And some consider that his poetry is superior to that of Milton, Homer, Shakespeare, obviously classical Greek and English poets. He was also something else. He had another hat he wore.

He was a political advisor. He was a statesman. He was, of course, connected to the royal family a little bit remotely, a cousin of the king's.

But he had access to them. He could go and see the king whenever he wanted to. He could go see King Ahaz and talk to him or go and visit King Hezekiah.

I think kings were a little easier to get in touch with personally in the old days than they would be in modern times. I mean, you'd never get in to see the president unless you were one of his staff or family members. Today, kings probably could be, it seems like the average person at a complaint could go to the king and bring it up in biblical times.

But Isaiah had access also because he was part of the family of the kings. He was a counselor to four of the kings. And he would be rightfully called Jerusalem's chief citizen because he was, again, a scholar, a prophet, a literary man, a poet, and royally connected.

And he gave political advice to the kings. So the man was like a Renaissance man. And unlike any other writer in the Bible, probably Moses comes closest to having as many hats that he wore.

Moses was a military leader and a law giver and, you know, a poet. He wrote songs and so forth, too, and a historian. Moses and Isaiah, therefore, probably are the very most brilliant writers and the most versatile writers of the Old Testament.

Though there were others who had great powers, too. In order to understand the prophecy of Isaiah, you need to understand the political setting of Isaiah's time. If he began prophesying in 740 B.C., that means about 200 years earlier, the nation of Israel had split into two.

David and Saul, not in that order, the reverse order. Saul and David had ruled over a united kingdom made up of 12 tribes. These tribes had been distributed geographically throughout the land of Israel in the time of Joshua, and they had tribal territories.

And they had tribal loyalties, too, but they were one nation under Saul and under David. But when David died, his son Solomon displeased the Lord. The nation remained one in the reign of Solomon, but it began to break down a little bit.

There began to be problems, and there began to be enemies that began to attack and

reclaim territory that David had conquered, and now they're reclaiming it back from Solomon, David's son. Solomon displeased God, and God told him that not in his life but his son's life, Rehoboam, God would take 10 of the 12 tribes away from him. He would leave Judah, which was Solomon's own tribe, and the small tribe of Benjamin, which was geographically adjacent to it, and give the rest of the tribes to somebody else.

Well, that happened in the time of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, around the year 940 or so B.C., sometime in that general area, about 200 years before Isaiah's time. The nation split. The 10 tribes to the north succeeded from the union and set up their own king, their own capital, and their own religious system.

The two tribes to the south, Judah and Benjamin, remained under the house of David, that is, the kings of David's line, until, well, forever, really. And so there were two kingdoms, a northern kingdom, which is comprised of 10 tribes, and a southern kingdom comprised of two. The southern kingdom remained loyal to the house of David and lasted longer.

It also had the temple, which was in Jerusalem, which was the capital of Judah, and therefore the worship of Yahweh was centered there in the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom, originally headed up by Jeroboam, became idolatrous, partly because Jeroboam was afraid that his citizens in the north would go down to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh and would get homesick and would say, ah, we ought to be part of this whole thing again, and so that he'd lose his 10 tribes back to the house of David. So he set up alternative rival shrines, one in Bethel and one in Dan, where there was a golden calf put up, and he said, this is where you guys worship.

So the northern kingdom began with idolatry and continued in idolatry, never changed. God sent them prophets, but they never heard the prophets. All the kings of the northern kingdom were evil.

There were 19 of them before the kingdom fell in 722 B.C., 19 bad kings. They were eventually conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C., and that was the end of the northern kingdom. That northern kingdom during its existence was called Israel in contrast to the southern kingdom being called Judah.

The northern kingdom sometimes was also called Ephraim, so you'll find sometimes in the Old Testament Ephraim is mentioned. It's simply another reference to Israel. Ephraim was the largest tribe in the north, just like Judah was the larger tribe in the south, and so the southern kingdom was named after the larger tribe Judah.

The northern kingdom was sometimes nicknamed after its largest tribe, Ephraim. So Israel and Ephraim, interchangeable terms in the prophets and in the Old Testament, and they were the kingdom to the north. Now, the reason to go into all this is because in Isaiah's day, both kingdoms were existing, although the northern kingdom fell also

during Isaiah's time, so about halfway through his ministry, as a matter of fact, a little before the halfway point, but he prophesied before and after the fall of the northern kingdom.

But in the early stages of the book of Isaiah, there was a crisis that occurred in the reign of Ahaz. Ahaz was the third of the kings under whose reign he prophesied. He prophesied on the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

The third of these kings was not a good king. Uzziah was a good king, and Hezekiah was a good king. Jotham was rather nondescript, and Ahaz was not good.

And in the time of Ahaz, there was a rising threat to all the Middle Eastern countries, and that was the threat of Assyria. Now, you must be careful not to confuse Assyria with Syria. In fact, in our Bible, the New King James that we're using here, the word Syria is used consistently.

I think modern scholars would prefer the name Aram, A-R-A-M, from which the language Aramaic comes, the language Jesus spoke. Aram was the name of the nation that we later called Syria. When the King James and the New King James version used the word Syria in the Old Testament, it's probably an anachronism.

That is to say, it's giving a name to that country that didn't bear at the time. In those days, they called it Aram. But in our Bible, it's Syria.

But don't confuse Syria with Assyria. Syria, or Aram, was a very small country, similar in size to Israel or Judah. These were small Middle Eastern countries.

But Assyria was a large empire that was sort of like Babylon later did, moving into the region and conquering one at a time the various countries and annexing them and bringing them under tribute. The Assyrians were not very nice conquerors. They were, in fact, horrible.

They would skin people alive. They'd rape the women. They would put hooks in the survivors' noses and drag them off into captivity.

They would impale people. It was a nasty, nasty people, the Assyrians. When the Assyrians were threatening your country, you really didn't want to lose.

You wanted to win. Now, in the time of Ahaz, Syria, or Aram, which was adjacent to the northern kingdom of Israel, felt that they were threatened by Assyria's aggression and felt that they were no match for Assyria. So it would be simply a matter of time that they would succumb also, as other nations had, to the Assyrian expansion.

So Syria came up with a plan to join ranks with others in the area to sort of cause a confederacy to form in the Middle East to resist the Assyrian expansion in that direction.

They got Israel involved. The northern kingdom of Israel and Syria got involved.

Although the Bible doesn't go into it, historians suggest that some of the Philistines became involved, too. And there's some allusions to that, perhaps, in Isaiah in some of the prophecies against Philistia. But there were other small countries in the area that joined together, and they were trying to get Judah to join them.

Ahaz was the king of Judah. He was not a good king, but he didn't feel comfortable joining their confederacy against Assyria. We're not told why, but one would probably imagine that it was because he felt that would just make Assyria mad.

And he probably felt that even the combined forces of all these small countries could not resist Assyria. So you're just stirring up the antagonism of Assyria by forming a confederacy against it, which will not be able to stand. And then you're going to have the hook in your nose and be dragged off into captivity.

And so in the time of Isaiah in the early days, there was this Syro-Ephraimite, that is, Syria and Israel confederacy, that were wanting Judah to join the confederacy. Isaiah was urging King Ahaz not to join. And therefore Ahaz was resisting, not just because of Isaiah.

I think Ahaz had his own reasons, because he wasn't that good a man to listen to the prophets. But he and Isaiah both agreed that Judah should not join. So Israel and Syria decided to come against Judah in battle and conquer Judah and replace Ahaz with a king of their own.

Now, this would, of course, interrupt the Davidic dynasty. God had promised that David's seed would sit on the throne in Jerusalem continuously. Ahaz was descended from David, but whatever king that the Syrians or Israel would put in his place would not be.

And that would interrupt the Davidic succession, of course. And God wasn't into it. God was not on the side of Israel and Syria in this.

He was on the side of Judah. And so Isaiah counseled Ahaz to resist the pressure to join that confederacy. Ahaz ultimately did resist that pressure, but not the way Isaiah said.

Isaiah wanted him to trust in the Lord. Instead, Ahaz trusted in Assyria. He actually paid off Assyria to attack his enemies and get him out of trouble.

So he aligned himself, Ahaz aligned himself with Assyria against these other nations and did not trust in the Lord. Well, Isaiah said that was going to go badly for him. And that was one of the crises during which Isaiah wrote.

And we see some of that history alluded to in Isaiah chapter 7. And Isaiah's counsel to King Ahaz there is in that context. At that time, the king of Israel was named Pekah, and the king of Syria was Rezin. And they are mentioned in Isaiah 7 when Isaiah is giving

counsel to Ahaz.

In 732 B.C., which was just three years later, Syria or Aram was crushed by Assyria. Pekah, the king of Israel, was assassinated the same year. And Ahaz bought off Assyria with money.

So that's how that crisis ended. Israel defeated by Assyria in 722 B.C. That was ten years later. That is ten years after this crisis that Ahaz faced and after Pekah had been assassinated.

The kingdom in the north fell in 722 B.C. to Assyria. Tiglath-Pileser was the Assyrian general and king who conquered. Later in 701 B.C., 21 years later, Sennacherib, another Assyrian king later on, threatened Judah when Hezekiah was king there.

And that provides the scenario for many of the later prophecies in the first part of the book of Isaiah. It is the scenario in chapters 36, 37, 38, and 39, which is the historical portion of Isaiah. It is when Sennacherib has sent his general Rapsheka to come and threaten Jerusalem.

And Isaiah counsels Hezekiah to trust the Lord, just as he had counseled Ahaz earlier to do in a different crisis. Ahaz had not trusted the Lord, and it went badly for him. But Hezekiah decided to trust the Lord.

And although there were tens of thousands of Assyrian troops encamped around Jerusalem, because of Hezekiah's faith in God, God sent an angel one night out who killed 185,000 of the Assyrian troops as they slept. That's not very sportsmanlike, is it? Should have done it while they were awake. But anyway, they shouldn't have been there.

And so God wiped out the vast majority of the Assyrian armies, and that ended the siege. The survivors retreated and didn't come back. Now, in Hezekiah's day, and this is important in some of the prophecies of Isaiah, in Hezekiah's day, when Assyria was threatening, before the angel killed 185,000 soldiers, back when Assyria was a big threat to Jerusalem, Assyria had already 20 years earlier destroyed the northern kingdom and everything else around, and Judah alone was standing.

In fact, most of the cities of Judah had been destroyed and burned. But Jerusalem alone stood and was delivered by God. But before God delivered Jerusalem, there were different political parties in Jerusalem advising the king.

There was a pro-Assyria party that was advising that they should surrender to Assyria, that they should align themselves with Assyria. Instead of fighting and resisting and trying to retain their sovereignty, they should just give up and save themselves a bloodbath, just surrender to Assyria. There were those who did that.

Ahaz had taken that approach. Ahaz had bought off Assyria. We called it the pro-Assyria party.

Then there was a very strong influence from a party that we'd call the pro-Egypt party. These were people who didn't want to surrender to Assyria, but knew that Jerusalem could not, by its own military strength, withstand Assyria, and therefore they thought, we need a powerful ally. More powerful than Israel was, or Syria or the Philistines, we need a big, powerful ally.

And just to the south was Egypt, a very large nation. Egypt was a, at one time, a very powerful nation, though not so powerful as in its past, when Isaiah was around. But there was a pro-Egypt party that wanted Hezekiah to send messengers down and gifts down to Egypt to buy armies, mercenaries from Egypt to come and help them against Assyria.

Then there was the pro-Yahweh party. That was Isaiah's party. He was probably the head of that party.

And he was saying, no, don't trust in Assyria, don't trust in Egypt. Neither of those are secure things to do, nor are they consistent with Israel's commitments. We have a God.

God is our king. God can deliver us. He's more powerful than Egypt and Assyria combined.

In fact, all the nations in His sight are as a drop in the bucket and as the fine dust in the balances. They are counted as nothing, said Isaiah. And this pro-Yahweh influence was what Isaiah was all about.

In many of the chapters of his book, he's writing in the situation where Hezekiah, the king, is being pressured to trust in Assyria by one group or trust in Egypt by another group. And Isaiah's writing is, no, you don't do that. And he says, woe to those who trust in Egypt and in horses because they are strong and so forth and who cover themselves with a covering but not by my spirit.

And basically, Isaiah's message much of the time is in that situation where Hezekiah is trying to decide between options in a crisis where Assyria is threatening. But of course, eventually, Hezekiah went with Isaiah's plan, trusted God, and that did result in deliverance. So that's the historical setting.

During the entirety of Isaiah's life, the Assyrian threat exists. Now, he did not live during the Babylonian era later. After Assyria, the Babylonians posed a similar threat.

Jeremiah lived at that time, and so did some of the other prophets. Jeremiah was about 100 years later than Isaiah. And so Jeremiah is talking about another enemy, another threat, and it was a time when God did not deliver Israel.

In this case, He delivered them over to the Babylonians. But through Isaiah's counsel, Israel or Judah was actually delivered from the threat of his time. It is clear that if Hezekiah had trusted in Egypt or in Assyria, Isaiah said they'll lose and Judah will be destroyed.

The only salvation is to trust in Yahweh. And so because Hezekiah was urged by Isaiah and convinced by Isaiah to do this, the nation survived another 100 years up until Jeremiah's time, when it was conquered by Babylon. Okay, so that's the historical setting.

Now I want to talk about the outline of the book. There's a very obvious and natural division of the book between chapters 39 and 40. It's not the only division, but it's the major division.

Chapters 1 through 39 are the first division of the book. Chapters 40 through 66 are the second division. This division is so marked and so obvious that there have been critical scholars for the past 150 years who said they were written by different men.

The two sections are that different, and it's easy to spot the differences. We'll talk about that in a moment, but that's the major division. The first 39 chapters, the subject matter primarily is on judgment, and therefore sometimes Isaiah 1 through 39 is called the book of judgment.

We could give it that nickname in speaking about it, the book of judgment. The last 27 chapters, that's chapter 40 through 66, are sometimes called the book of comfort. Chapter 40 actually begins with the words comfort, comfort ye my people.

It is a book about salvation and comfort. It's very common for commentators to refer to the first 39 chapters as the book of judgment and the last 27 chapters as the book of comfort. These two sections, we will discuss more about them in a moment, but I want to subdivide them smaller.

When you're dealing with a book as large as Isaiah, it's unwieldy. It's hard to get your mind wrapped around it, as you've seen. In the past 36 hours, many of you have tried to read through the book of Isaiah.

I hope you've succeeded. If you have, good on you. If you have not, it's kind of understandable.

It's quite a chore to read through. Even after you read through, if someone says, okay, well, what was that about that you just read through? It's all over the place because there's so much there. Whenever you take a large book like that and if it can divide into natural divisions, it's much easier to master the whole thing.

You figure, oh, that division is about that, that division is about that. That's what I'd like

to do before we actually begin to study the text itself, is show you the natural divisions. I mentioned the major divisions, the book of judgment and the book of comfort.

The book of judgment itself divides into seven sections, not at all of equal length, but they are seven discrete sections. The book of comfort, on the other hand, divides into three segments that are three equal length segments. Let's talk about the seven divisions first of the first part.

Chapters 1 through 39, the book of judgment has seven divisions. These are not entirely artificial, although we have to remember the chapter divisions were not inspired. Chapter divisions were added to the Bible centuries after it was written.

There could be mistakes made in at least one place, and if not more, there are places where the chapter division is not very advantageous. While the chapter divisions are not inspired, yet there are clear natural divisions in the material. The first division, I'm going to give them simple names, chapters 1 through 6, these are prophecies against Isaiah's own nation, Jerusalem and Judah.

It ends with the description of how God called him in the year that King Uzziah died. Whether that call came before the prophecies were uttered, and he only mentions it at the end, or whether it came chronologically at that point, we don't know, but those prophecies are focused on Jerusalem and Judah and the judgment coming upon them. So chapters 1 through 6, judgment on Jerusalem.

Chapters 7 through 12, another six chapters, are about judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. They are, of course, about the Assyrians coming and destroying the northern kingdom. Then you have 11 chapters, chapter 13 through 23, another section.

These are best referred to as the burdens, because almost all of them begin with the burden of Babylon, the burden upon Philistia, the burden against Moab, the burden against Egypt, burdens. The word burden, in some modern translations, is translated as oracle. If you use the King James or the New King James, it'll say burden.

In a modern translation, it might use the word oracle. It just means a prophetic message. But it's interesting that in the Hebrew, it does use the word burden.

It's like the ordinary word for carrying a load. It either suggests that it's a heavy load, a crushing burden that God's going to bring upon these nations, or it could refer to the burden state of the prophet's own heart. It's not only Isaiah that uses the word burden this way.

It's possible to understand this, that God revealed to the prophet what's going to happen, and it's so horrendous that his heart felt burdened by it. This is the burden. He's unloading this burden of prophetic awareness of what's going to happen to these people.

The exact reason for using the word burden in such a connection is not known, at least not known by me. That's why I just suggested some maybe possibilities, but I don't know. But it is a fact that some prophetic oracles are referred to as burdens, and there are a large segment of Isaiah, chapter 13 through 23, that are the burdens.

All of them are against pagan nations, with the exception of chapter 22, which is about Judah, which is interesting because this is a block of material against pagan nations. By the way, Jeremiah also has such a block of material against pagan nations. I think it's chapter 46 through 51, if I'm not mistaken, in Jeremiah.

Ezekiel also has a segment where in one section, like chapter 27 through 32, I think it is. I may be wrong, but I think those are the chapters in Ezekiel. It's like these prophets who are actually prophesying to Israel have segments of their books where it's a prophecy against this nation, this nation, this nation, other nations who are actually the enemies of Israel.

In all likelihood, these prophets did not send their books or go to these nations so that those nations would hear them. In all likelihood, the prophecies are for effect, for Jewish ears only, that they would be encouraged to hear that God is also going to judge their enemies. But they are uttered as if to the nations themselves.

In any case, that's the third section, the third subdivision of the first part of the book, the burdens against the nations, chapters 13 through 23. Then there's a section I would call the great transition. By that I mean the transition from the old order to the new.

Now, Isaiah speaks about this more than most prophets do, but many prophets speak about it, that God predicts a time when the Messianic age would come, but it would come at the expense of the age in which the Jews were then living. That is, the old covenant order would be destroyed and a new covenant order would come. Isaiah doesn't use the term new covenant.

Jeremiah gives us that terminology in Jeremiah 31. But this new covenant is spoken of in Isaiah. Sometimes he calls it an everlasting covenant, and there are other terms for it.

But there is a new covenant that God would make through the Messiah with his people. But in doing so, he would have to bring judgment upon people of the old covenant order. Historically, of course, this occurred with the coming of Jesus and the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, which occurred in that same generation.

Jesus came earlier and started the new covenant with his people, but the passing of the old covenant in its entirety with the destruction of the temple occurred within 40 years after that. That was a transitional generation, just as the Jews who came out of Egypt had a transitional generation before they went into the promised land. There was 40 years they wandered in the wilderness.

When God made the older covenant, it was still 40 years before the Jews came fully out of their Egyptian mindset into the promised land. Likewise, when God made the new covenant, it was 40 years before the Jewish believers were fully freed up of their legalistic bondage and the destruction of the temple brought the collapse of the old order. But this transitional period where the old order is passing and coming under judgment and the new order is replacing it is many times discussed in Isaiah.

And the fourth segment is about that, I believe. And that's chapters 24 through 27. 24 through 27.

Now, I must say that there are those who take a different view of this. They do see a transition, they do see a judgment, and they do see a new order, but they would say chapter 24 is about the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, and that chapters 25 through 27 are about the millennial kingdom. Obviously, this represents that alternative viewpoint that I mentioned.

Some people believe the messianic age is still awaiting its inauguration when Jesus comes back, and they associate it with the future millennium. That would be the people who take this section that way, too. But I believe the evidence will be good, and when we come to this passage, we'll show what the evidence is, that this is in fact talking about the passing of the old covenant order and the institution of the new covenant.

It is, again, the same material, not the same material, the same subject matter, as chapters 24 through 27. This segment is chapters 34 and 35. This also appears to be the great transition.

Chapter 34 speaks of a judgment in very figurative terms, and chapter 35 of the messianic age. So the same transition from the old order to the new order, which we find in chapters 24 through 27, comes up as the theme of chapters 34 and 35 again. That's the sixth segment.

The seventh segment, which brings to an end the book of judgment, is chapters 36 through 39, to which I've alluded previously. They are a historical interlude. They are the story of Isaiah counseling Hezekiah not to trust in Egypt, not to trust in Israel, but to trust in the Lord and of God's deliverance of the people.

And then also a story about Hezekiah's later illness and his being healed of illness, after which, in chapter 39, Hezekiah receives visitors from Babylon, which is a nation not yet foreboding. In the days of Isaiah, Babylon was a pagan nation far away. They had not yet begun their expansion.

The Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar was still a century off into the future. Babylon was not a particularly threatening nation in Isaiah's day, but messengers from Babylon came to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from illness. And on that

occasion, Hezekiah showed them much more than he should have showed them of the treasures of Jerusalem.

And Isaiah came to him and says, you know, they're going to come back and take all this. That is, Isaiah predicted the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem 100 years before it occurred. And he actually said, Hezekiah, this won't happen in your time.

It will happen in the time of your descendants. And Hezekiah said, good. Glad it won't happen in my time.

That's really kind of his closing remarks on that. Now, that brings us to the end of chapter 39. We've got that historical interlude.

Then comes the Book of Comfort. And this is quite interesting how this works out, because it's 27 chapters, and it divides into three segments of nine chapters each. And this is true just based on its contents, but also based on an interesting marker at the end of the first nine chapters and at the end of the second nine chapters.

If you look at chapter 48 and verse 22, chapters 40 through 48 are the first nine chapters of this Book of Comfort. And that section ends with Isaiah 48, verse 22. It says, There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked.

A term that has come into common parlance. People say that sometimes all the time, even if they're not Christians, especially if they're wicked and they're not getting much sleep. And then in Isaiah 57, which comes to the end of the next nine chapters, chapters 49 through 57, another nine chapters.

And how does it end? The last line in verse 21, There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked. Same refrain. It's like these two refrains, There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked, punctuate at two points this segment into three parts of equal length.

And the first of these contrasts or looks at two salvations. One of the leading characters in chapters 40 through 48 is Cyrus, the Persian king who conquered Babylon and who gave the Jews permission to go back and rebuild their temple and rebuild Jerusalem. He was their deliverer from the Babylonian exile.

In Isaiah 44 and 45, especially, God actually names Cyrus 150 years before the man was born. His name is given. And he is said to be the one whom God would raise up and use to deliver his people from the Babylonian exile and to see to it that the temple was rebuilt and the community of the Jews was restored.

Cyrus is in the picture in a big way in chapters 40 through 48. But he is not the only deliverer in the picture because the Messiah is also in the picture. In a sense, Cyrus is a type of the Messiah.

And so we have two salvations, that which is the actual physical salvation of the Jews from Babylonian exile through Cyrus, and that which is the spiritual salvation of God's people through the Messiah, which get somewhat interwoven throughout the section. The next nine chapters, chapters 49 through 57, are about two servants. In this segment, we have many references to a figure called the servant of, well, the way it reads in our Bible, the servant of the Lord.

In the Hebrew, it's the servant of Yahweh. Now, the term servant of God or servant of Yahweh might seem to be a generic term in the Bible for prophets and other godly people. But in particular, there's a particular usage of the term servant of Yahweh in these chapters.

It speaks of a particular individual that God is raising up to bring salvation, not only to Israel, but to the Gentiles as well. What's interesting about this servant of Yahweh is in some passages, it distinctly says that Israel, the nation, is the servant of Yahweh. But at other times, the servant of Yahweh is there to save Israel and the Gentiles.

And probably the most frequently quoted verses from Isaiah in the New Testament are from these servant passages where Jesus is identified as the servant of Yahweh, especially in Isaiah 53, but other places too, Isaiah 42 also, and other places. Now, the servant of Yahweh, therefore, is an enigmatic figure. There have been whole books written by Bible scholars about who is the servant of Yahweh, and there are different views.

It would appear that just as Cyrus is the deliverer who is a type of Christ in the first of these nine chapters of the Book of Government, Israel, the servant of Yahweh, is a type of Christ, the servant of Yahweh, in this second segment. We'll, of course, look at that much more closely when we come to it, but the second segment, chapters 49 through 57, would have two servants, two servants of Yahweh, Israel and the Messiah. And then the last segment, chapters 58 through 66, is a tale of two cities, so to speak.

There's the Old Jerusalem coming down and the New Jerusalem being established. Once again, this is the same transition from the Old Order to the New that we've seen in earlier places. This section talks a great deal about that, and we know it because of the multitude of times the New Testament writers quote from this section, that Jerusalem in this section is sometimes the Old Jerusalem, which is under judgment, and sometimes it's the New Jerusalem, the spiritual Jerusalem, which has come up under the New Covenant era instigated by the Messiah.

And so you've got two cities in this segment. So this is how the book divides. It's helpful just knowing that much, but it's really interesting.

There's an intriguing consideration here. I want you to turn to the end of your notes on Isaiah just for a moment. On the third page of your notes, at the bottom of the pages, is

Isaiah a microcosm of the whole Bible? Now, the observations I'm going to make, I don't know what to do with them.

They're fascinating, really, but it still makes it hard to know whether this is anything important. The Bible as we have it today contains 66 books. Now, that's because there's 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New.

It was not always the case that there were 27 books in the New Testament, and some Bibles, the Catholic Bible, for example, has more than 39 books in the Old Testament. But the Protestant Bible, which follows pretty much the Jewish Bible, has 39 books in the Old Testament. The New Testament, as it has come to be canonized since the 4th century, has 27 books.

So as the Bible now stands, there are 66 books in the Bible. There are also 66 chapters in Isaiah, which would seem to be inconsequential and a mere coincidence since the chapters are not even inspired. The chapter divisions and numbers are not inspired.

And if we could go no further with this than that, it would be something to wave off as just a coincidence of no consequence. 66 chapters in Isaiah, 66 books in our present Bible, so what? Well, what's interesting is it goes further than that. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are about judgment, as the first 39 books of the Old Testament are pre-salvation.

They are the Old Testament. The last 27 chapters of Isaiah are about messianic salvation. The 27 books of our New Testament are about that subject, too.

What's really interesting to me is that when we look at the Book of Comfort, the last 27 chapters of Isaiah, and consider a similarity with the New Testament, Isaiah 40, the beginning of the Book of Comfort, starts with a prediction of John the Baptist. So does the New Testament, only it's him. However, Isaiah 40 is quoted in virtually all the Gospels and applied to John the Baptist.

So the beginning of the Book of Comfort is about the beginning of the New Testament. The end of chapter 66 is about the new heavens and the new earth, which is how the New Testament ends in the Book of Revelation. So this Book of Comfort in Isaiah begins and ends exactly as the New Testament begins and ends.

One thing really interesting is in the Book of Comfort, there's 27 chapters, the chapter right in the middle, 13 chapters before it and 13 chapters after it. The one in the middle is what? Isaiah 53. The most quoted chapter in the New Testament, the most quoted chapter of Isaiah in the New Testament, and obviously one of the most graphic portrayals of Christ, his sufferings and his exaltation, which is, of course, the center of the message of the New Testament as well.

It's in the exact center of the Book of Comfort in Isaiah. What do you make of it? I don't

know. It's almost, I almost don't want to make anything of it because it suggests, I mean, it depends so much on the chapters having been divided properly, though not under inspiration.

The right number of books being in the New Testament, which was a decision not made under inspiration. I mean, it was a selection that was developed over centuries and eventually there were 27 books there. Even the arrangement of putting Revelation at the end and so forth, which it didn't have to go there chronologically.

It's not something that seems like humans could have worked out, not so neatly. It almost seems like there's a divine pattern there, but it's hard to argue that there is with so many of the factors being almost kind of arbitrary or things that were decided over a period of time by people and so forth. Yet, this is how it is.

So, some people think that Isaiah is a microcosm of the whole Bible. Now, we're out of time, and next time I need to talk about the authorship of the book. You might say, why don't we just get into the book? I'd love to.

We will. But, it's very important that we deal with the authorship question, because for the past century and a half, it has been argued that Isaiah did not write the Book of Comfort. Now, the Jews believed he did.

Jesus believed he did. The apostles believed he did. And Christians believed he did for 18 centuries.

And many of us still do. So, you say, well, if Jesus and the apostles and the Jews and Christians throughout history all believed that Isaiah wrote the whole thing, why even pay attention to the theory that he didn't? Because almost all modern scholars think he didn't. Now, that means the modern scholars are wrong, of course.

Frankly, I don't care how many scholars line up against Jesus on a proposition. I'm going to vote with Jesus. But, the point is, they have their reasons that they give, and whether we think their reasons are good, bad, or indifferent, we will encounter them if we go any further in our biblical studies than simply to be devotional readers.

Because if you ever read a commentary, you ever hear a scholarly discussion of Isaiah in any place, many times, most of the time, unless it's a very strict fundamentalist author or preacher, the assumption is going to be made that Isaiah didn't write those chapters. Now, you might say, well, does it really matter whether Isaiah wrote them or not? I think it does. Those chapters, it is argued, were not written by Isaiah because they are too accurate, predictive.

And the assumption is there is no such thing as supernatural inspiration. You see, this is the view of liberal scholarship who don't accept supernatural things. They don't accept that Isaiah could have predicted.

So, they say, Isaiah couldn't have written those chapters. After all, Cyrus is mentioned by name. He wasn't even born until 150 years after Isaiah.

Isaiah couldn't have written that, they say. And they give other reasons, but you see, the point is, if Isaiah didn't write it, if their reasons are good, it means that there's nothing supernatural about these predictions at all. It was written by somebody after the fact and not inspired at all.

That means some of the most important material in the whole Old Testament was not inspired and was written by an anonymous author who we don't even know if he was a prophet or not. Now, I know Isaiah wrote it all because I agree with Jesus, and yet, many scholars don't. You might not be interested in the controversy.

You might just say, I'm going to just read the Bible devotionally the rest of my life. What do I care what the scholars think? Well, so be it. That's fine.

But I care because I like to be able to argue it. I like to be able to debate it. And you will, unless you live a very sheltered life, run into Christians who think that Isaiah didn't write those chapters and who, therefore, will discount some of the most important material in the Old Testament.

And there are excellent reasons to believe what Jesus believed about that, besides the fact that Jesus believed it. There are evidences and so forth, and that's what we'll consider next time. And then we'll get into the book of Isaiah itself.