



Isaiah 1-39

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:40

The book of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in the latter half of Israel's Kingdom period, and he spoke on God's behalf to the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah. He spoke first of all a message of God's judgment. He warned Israel's corrupt leaders that their rebellion against their covenant with God would come at a cost, that God was going to use the great empires of Assyria and, after them, Babylon to judge Jerusalem if they persisted in idolatry and oppression of the poor.

But that announcement was combined with a message of hope. Isaiah believed deeply that God would one day fulfill all of his covenant promises, that he would send a king from David's line to establish God's Kingdom (remember 2 Samuel 7), that he would lead Israel in obedience to all of the laws of the covenant made at Mount Sinai (remember Exodus chapter 19). And all of this was so that God's blessing and salvation would flow outward to all of the nations like God promised to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. And it's this hope that compelled Isaiah to speak out against the corruption and idolatry of Israel in his day.

Now, the book has a pretty complex literary design, but there's one simple way to see how it all fits together. Chapters 1-39 contain three large sections that develop Isaiah's warning of judgment on Israel. And it all culminates in an event pointed to at the end of chapter 39, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon. But in chapters 1-39, there's also a message of hope that, after the exile, God's covenant promises would all be fulfilled. And chapters 40-66 pick up that promise of hope and develop it further. In this video, we're just going to focus on chapters 1-39.

Chapters 1-12

01:40-04:54

The first main section focuses on Isaiah's vision of judgment and hope for Jerusalem, and it begins as Isaiah accuses the city's leaders of covenant rebellion, idolatry, injustice. And God says he's going to judge the city by sending the nations to conquer Israel. Isaiah says that this will be like a purifying fire that burns away all that's worthless in Israel in order to create a new Jerusalem that's populated by a remnant that has repented and turned back to God. And Isaiah says that that's when God's Kingdom will come, and all nations will come to the temple in Jerusalem and learn of God's justice, bringing about an age of universal peace and harmony.

Now, it's this basic storyline of the old Jerusalem purifying judgment into the new Jerusalem, this is going to get repeated over and over throughout the book, getting filled in with increasing detail.

So at the center of this section is Isaiah's grand vision of God sitting on his throne in the temple, and he's surrounded by these heavenly creatures that are shouting that God is "holy, holy, holy." And Isaiah suddenly realizes just how corrupt he and his people Israel are. And he's certain that he's going to be destroyed by God's holiness—but he's not. God's holiness, in the form of this burning coal, comes and burns him. But not to destroy; rather, it purifies him from his sin.

And as Isaiah ponders this strange experience, God commissions him with a very difficult task. He is to keep announcing this coming judgment, but because Israel has reached a point of no return, his warnings are going to have a paradoxical effect of hardening the people. But Isaiah is to trust God's plan. Israel is going to be chopped down like a tree and left like a stump in a field, and that stump will itself be scorched and burned. But after all of that burning, God says that this smoldering stump is a holy seed that will survive into the future. It's a small sign of hope, but who or what is that holy seed? The rest of this section offers an answer.

Isaiah confronts Ahaz, a descendant of David and a king of Jerusalem, and he announces his downfall. God says that it's the great empire of Assyria who will first chop Israel down and devastate the land—but there's hope. Because of God's promise to David, he's going to send, after this destruction, a new king named Immanuel, which means "God with us." And Immanuel's kingdom is going to set God's people free from violent oppressive empires. And Isaiah describes this coming king as a small shoot of new growth that will emerge from the old stump of David's family. It's this king that's the holy seed from chapter 6. And the king is going to be empowered by God's Spirit to rule over a new Jerusalem and bring justice for the poor. And all nations will look to this messianic king for guidance. His kingdom will transform all creation, bringing peace.

Now, you finish chapters 1-12 with a pretty good understanding of Isaiah's message of judgment and hope, but when will this all happen? Isaiah saw another empire arising after Assyria, and that's Babylon, who would also attack Jerusalem and actually succeed in destroying it. And that brings us into the next sections of the book.

Chapters 13-27

04:55-06:25

So first, we have a large collection of poems that explore God's judgment and hope for the nations. We learn first of all of the fall of Babylon and Israel's neighbors. Isaiah could see that Assyria's world power would one day be replaced by the empire of Babylon, a nation even more destructive and arrogant. Babylon's kings claimed that they were higher than all other gods, and so God vows to bring Babylon down. And not only Babylon. Isaiah goes on to list Israel's neighbors, accusing them all of the same kind of pride and injustice, and he predicts their ultimate ruin. But remember, for Isaiah, God's judgment is never the final word for Israel or the nations.

And that leads into the next section with the series of poems that tell a tale of two cities. There's the lofty city that has exalted itself above God and become corrupt and unjust. This city is an archetype of rebellious humanity and is described with language that's all borrowed from Isaiah's earlier descriptions of Jerusalem and Assyria and Babylon, all put together. This city is destined for ruin and, one day, is going to be replaced by the new Jerusalem, where God reigns as King over a redeemed humanity from all nations, and there's no more death or suffering. These chapters are the climax to this section, and it shows how Isaiah's message pointed far beyond his own day. It was a message for all who are waiting for God to bring his justice on violent, oppressive kingdoms and bring his Kingdom of justice and peace and healing love.

Chapters 28-39

06:25-07:42

The following section returns the focus to the rise and fall of Jerusalem. And first, we find a whole bunch of poems where Isaiah accuses Jerusalem's leaders for turning to Egypt for military protection against Assyria. He knows this will backfire, and Isaiah says that only trust in their God and repentance can save Israel now, which gets illustrated by the following story about the rise of Hezekiah, king of Jerusalem.

Just as Isaiah predicted, the Assyrian armies come and try to attack the city. And so Hezekiah humbles himself before God, and he prays for divine deliverance, and the city is miraculously saved overnight. But Hezekiah's rise is immediately followed by

his fall. So he hosts a delegation from Babylon, and he tries to impress them by showing everything in Jerusalem's treasury and temple and palaces. It's clearly an effort to make another political alliance for protection. Isaiah hears about this, and he confronts Hezekiah for his foolishness. He predicts that this ally will one day betray him and return as an enemy to conquer Jerusalem. And we know from 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25 that Isaiah was right. Over a hundred years later, Babylon would turn on Jerusalem, come and destroy the city, its temple, and carry the Israelites away to exile in Babylon.

Conclusion

07:42-08:08

And so all of Isaiah's warnings of divine judgment in chapters 1-39 lead up to this moment. He's shown to be a true prophet because it all came to pass like he said. But remember, the purpose of God's judgment was to purify Jerusalem and bring the holy seed and messianic kingdom over all nations. And it's that hope that gets explored in the next part of the book. But for now, that's what Isaiah chapters 1-39 are all about.