



Isaiah 40-66

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-00:45

The book of the prophet Isaiah. In the first video, we explored chapters 1-39, which was Isaiah's message of judgment and hope for Jerusalem. He accused Israel's leaders of rebellion against God and said that through Assyria, and then Babylon, Israel's kingdom would come crashing down in an act of God's judgment. And so chapter 39 concluded with Isaiah predicting Jerusalem's fall to Babylon and the exile. And 100 years after Isaiah, it all sadly came to pass.

But Isaiah's greater hope was for a new, purified Jerusalem where God's Kingdom would be restored through the future messianic king and all nations would come together in peace. And so chapters 40 and following explore this great hope.

Chapters 40-48

00:45-04:28

The first main section, chapters 40-48, open with an announcement of hope and comfort for Israel. The people are told that the Babylonian exile is over and that Israel's sin has been dealt with and a new era is beginning, so they should all return home to Jerusalem, where God himself will bring his Kingdom and all nations will see his glory.

Now, let's stop for a moment because this opening announcement raises a big question, that is, who is saying all of this? Whose voice are we hearing in these words of hope? The perspective of the prophet in these chapters is that of somebody who's living after the exile, in other words, in the time period described by Ezra and Nehemiah. But Isaiah died 150 years before any of that. So what are we supposed to make of this?

Well, there are many who think that it's still Isaiah in his own day speaking, but that he's been prophetically transported, so to speak, 200 years into the future, and that

he's speaking to future generations as if the exile is past. However, the book of Isaiah itself gives us some clues that something else is probably going on.

In chapters 8 and 29 and 30, we're told that, after Isaiah was rejected by Israel's leaders, that he wrote and sealed up in a scroll all of his messages of judgment and hope and that he passed it on to his disciples as a witness for days to come. Eventually, Isaiah died waiting for God to vindicate his words. Now, remember, chapters 1-39 were designed to show us that Isaiah's predictions of judgment were fulfilled in the exile. He's a true prophet. And so after exile is over, Isaiah's disciples, who have treasured his words for so long, open up the scroll and begin applying his words of hope to their own day. So on this view, the book of Isaiah consists of that first collection of Isaiah's words as well as the writings of his prophetic disciples that God uses to extend Isaiah's message of hope to future generations.

Whichever view you end up taking, everybody agrees that these chapters are announcing that the future hope has come, that God is fulfilling Isaiah's prophetic promises. And so the prophet hopes that Israel will respond by becoming God's servant. That is, after experiencing God's justice and mercy through history, that they will now begin to share with the nations who God truly is.

But that's not what's happening. Israel, instead of bearing witness to the nations, is actually complaining and even accusing God. They say, "The Lord doesn't pay attention to our trouble. In fact, he's ignoring our cause." The Babylonian exile, understandably, caused Israel to lose faith in their God. I mean, maybe he's not that powerful; maybe the gods of Babylon are way greater than our God.

And so the rest of these chapters, 41 to 47, are set up like a trial scene. God is responding to these doubts and accusations with the following arguments. He says first that the exile to Babylon was not divine neglect; rather, it was divinely orchestrated as a judgment for Israel's sin. And second, it was for Israel's sake that God raised up Persia to conquer Babylon, so they could come back home, fulfilling Isaiah's words. So the right conclusion that Israel should draw is that their God is the King of history, not the idols of the nations. In the fall of Babylon and the rise of the Persian King Cyrus, Israel should see God's hand at work and so become his servant, telling the nations who he is.

But by the end of the trial, chapter 48, we find that Israel is still as rebellious and hard-hearted as their ancestors. And so God disqualifies them as his servant, but God's still on a mission to bless the nations. And so the prophet says God's going to do a new thing to solve this problem, which moves into the next section, 49-55.

Chapters 49-55

04:28-06:00

We're introduced to a figure who's called "God's servant," who's going to fulfill God's mission and do what Israel has failed to do. God gives this servant the title "Israel" and sends this person on a mission to, first of all, restore the people of Israel back to their God, but second, to become God's light to the nations. And we're told that this servant is empowered by God's Spirit to announce good news and to bring God's Kingdom over all of the nations. It sounds just like the messianic king from chapters 9 and 11.

But then we learn the surprising way of how the servant will bring God's Kingdom. He's going to be rejected and beaten and ultimately killed by his own people. In reality, as he's being accused and sentenced to death, he's dying on behalf of the sin of his own people. The prophet says the servant's death is a sacrifice of atonement for the people's evil and rebellion. And then after his death, all of a sudden, the servant is just alive again, and we hear that by his death, he provided a way to make people righteous, that is, to put them in a right relationship with God.

And so this section concludes by describing two ways people can respond to the servant. Some will respond with humility and turn from their sins and accept what God's servant did on their behalf. These people are called "the servants" and also "the seed"—remember the holy seed from chapter 6. These are the ones who will experience the blessing of the messianic kingdom. But there are others who are called simply "the wicked," and they reject both the servant and his servants.

Chapters 56-66

06:01-07:38

Which brings us to the final section of the book, 56-66, where the servants inherit God's Kingdom. These chapters are beautifully designed as a symmetry that brings together all of the themes of the book.

At the very center are three beautiful poems that describe how the Spirit-empowered servant is announcing the good news of God's Kingdom to the poor, and he reaffirms all of the promises of hope from earlier in the book. The new Jerusalem, inhabited by God's servants, will be the place from which God's justice and mercy and blessing flow out to all the nations of the world.

And surrounding these poems are two long prayers of repentance where the servants confess Israel's sin, and they grieve over all of the evil they see in the world around them. And so they ask God to forgive them and that his Kingdom would come here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Now on each side of these prayers are collections of more poems that contrast the destiny of the servants with that of the wicked who persecute them. God says he's

going to bring his justice on all who pollute his good world with their evil and selfishness and idolatry, and that he's going to remove them from his city forever. But the servants, those who are humble before God and who repent and own their evil, they are forgiven and they will inherit the new Jerusalem, which, we discover, is an image for an entirely renewed creation, where death and suffering are gone forever.

And this brings us to the very outer frame of this part of the book. In this renewed world of God's Kingdom, people from all nations are invited to come and join the servants of God's covenant family, so that everyone can know their creator and redeemer.

Conclusion

07:38-08:03

And so the book of Isaiah ends with a very grand vision of the fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises. Through the suffering servant king, God creates a covenant family of all nations who are awaiting the hope of God's justice and bringing a renewed creation where God's Kingdom finally comes here on Earth as it is in Heaven. And that's the very powerful hope of the book of Isaiah.