
TWENTY PAGES A WEEK

ISAIAH - MALACHI

THE PROPHETS



HAL HAMMONS

**TWENTY PAGES A WEEK:
THE PROPHETS**

Isaiah-Malachi

Hal Hammons

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Spiritual Equipment for the Contest of Life

Section 3

The Prophets

(Isaiah-Malachi)

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The Prophets section begins with a book that is in many ways the most challenging. Isaiah deftly balances a practical, immediate prophecy for the people of his day with a look forward to greater things to come in the era of Messiah. It's like reading two books at the same time.

But then, God's message has always had short-term and long-term implications. The reason we read the Old Testament is so we can learn from their mistakes — and hopefully not repeat them.

In a time of trial, God has a message of relief for His people

God's people were poisoning themselves with sin in Isaiah's day, as we are in ours.

His desire always is for sinners to repent and be clean (Isaiah 1:18-20). But we are not always willing to listen. But, whether Isaiah's audience would listen or not — and God told him they would not (6:9-10) — the message would go out, the opportunity would be presented.

Zion, the mountain of God, would be the launching point for God's message, according to Isaiah 2:1-4. As is the case frequently in Isaiah, the prophecy speaks to near and far audiences. Isaiah's contemporaries received assurance of the nation's long-term success and survival. Today, we hear him proclaiming the coming of the era of the gospel; beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 2), God's law of faith and salvation went out to all people, either lifting them up or casting them down (Romans 1:16-17; Hebrews 4:12-13).

God will send a child. There is nothing so hopeful and encouraging as the birth of a child. Every new birth is a world of new opportunities. For the Israelites, it meant another generation of God's people to carry on the faith, ever watchful for the fulfillment of the promises made to



Week 27: Isaiah 1-24

We all imagine what it would be like if God pointed His divine finger at us individually and called us into service. We all imagine that we would, like Isaiah, say, "Here am I. Send me!" But would we? The best way to tell is by asking whether we are responding to His impersonal, general call right now — and answering honestly. If we cannot bring ourselves to go where He is taking us through the written word, we have no right to assume we would respond differently in other circumstances.

What is your initial reaction to the reading?



their ancestors. The Child of Mary, who was the true fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, was more than continued hope; He was accomplished reality. "God with us" is the literal translation of the symbolic name given to the child, "Immanuel." When God sent His Son to take on human flesh (Colossians 2:9), He demonstrated that He was present among us and eager to help — and more than that, that He always had been.

God will send a government. This child of prophecy was destined for glory. Isaiah 9:1-7 describes light coming to the land from the most unlikely of places — "Galilee of the Gentiles." A land known for its disrespect for the things of God, even in Isaiah's day, would be the home of the greatest advocate for the Father's will that had ever lived. He would be elevated over His enemies to rule with power. But His rule is not characterized by images of violence. Rather, "His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." By submitting to the rule of this King to come, God's people would be blessed with all the wisdom, power, fellowship and comfort that heaven itself could offer.

God will send a shoot. Imagery of destruction fills Isaiah, as well as the other prophets. Much of the time, God's wrath is directed at His own people. The enemy during Isaiah's day was Assyria. Judah watched as the northern tribes were assimilated into Assyria's domain, essentially disappearing forever. A similar fate seemed inevitable for Judah. But Assyria was merely an axe in the hand of God, a tool used to execute His wrath against His people. In time, Assyria too would be punished for its arrogance and haughtiness (10:12-15). In the meantime, though, Judah suffered greatly. A century after Isaiah's prophecy, Babylonian forces would come to destroy Jerusalem and take captive its inhabitants, finishing the destructive work God had begun through Assyria. Unlike these pagan nations, though, life would emerge from the ruins of Judah. "A shoot" (11:1-5) would emerge, vibrant and fruitful. The strength God would show through this One would bless the entire nation. Just as the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus at His baptism (Matthew 3:16-17), so also the "spirit of wisdom and understanding" resident in Jesus

would be visible to all who would have eyes to see. His judgment and righteousness would inspire all who would follow after Him.

God will send a champion. Ever since Moses, the nation of Egypt had represented all things ungodly and oppressive to the Israelites. The language of Isaiah 19:1-15 calls to memory the stories of the ten plagues and the Red Sea crossing. Another victory over Egypt and all it symbolized was in Israel's future. Almost certainly, "Egypt" in Isaiah 19:16-25 refers to the oppressors of God's people in the gospel era. We, too, are oppressed in a foreign land. And as God sent Moses to Israel, He sends Jesus to us. The power Jesus showed in the flesh was every bit a demonstration of God's superiority and sovereignty as the deeds of Moses were. His victory will be just as complete. In fact, this Champion wins a victory not even Moses could have accomplished. The text says Egypt itself will come to know God in that day — Assyria as well. This is not saying there will be wholesale conversions in these nations, one of which did not even exist in Jesus' day. Rather, those who had set themselves deliberately against God's people (i.e., the Gentiles) would come to believe in God themselves through Jesus. Israel, Egypt and Assyria, united in faith and praise. What a magnificent conclusion to this message!



- **Isaiah 1:18** — **“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.’ ”**

Our sin is entirely our doing, but that does not stop God from attempting to address the problem. The “reasonable” thing for us to do is listen to God and accept His word, including whatever correction and discipline He may consider appropriate.

- **Isaiah 8:20** — **“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.”**

Those who are dwelling in the sunlight of God's favor instinctively seek out His word for direction, correction and encouragement. Those who seek such things elsewhere, who have “no dawn,” condemn themselves as faithless and unworthy of God's blessings.

- **Isaiah 11:10** — **“Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.”**

This verse clearly points to the hope we have in Jesus here on earth. That puts the lie to the notion that the previous verses, describing wolves and lambs dwelling together, also refers to the church era. Jesus takes peoples who traditionally opposed one another, such as Jews and Gentiles, and causes them to live in peace.



Why preach to people who will not listen? What implications does this have for us today?

Is it appropriate to speak of "law" (2:1-4) in a New Testament context? Explain.

Give examples of evil being called good and vice versa in today's world (5:18-23).

- **Mountain**

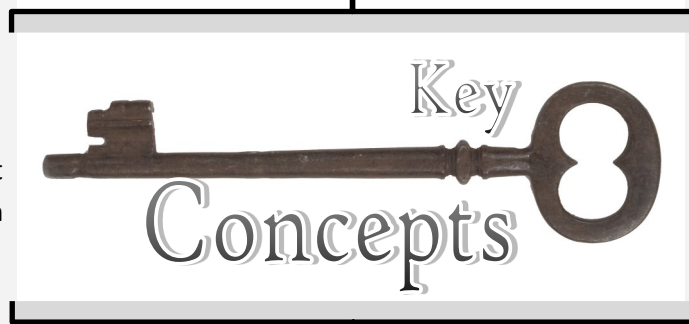
Although Zion is literal, "mountains" also signify connection with God. Literal height carries the connotation of spiritual height. It is no accident that so many encounters with God happen on mountains.

- **Virgin**

The Hebrew word for young woman in Isaiah 7:14 often means virgin. The Septuagint translators read the word that way; more importantly, Matthew 1:22-23 gives God's approval to this reading.

- **Vineyard**

As in Jesus' parable, Isaiah 5:1-7 likens God's people to a vineyard. God, as the owner and proprietor, has an expectation of good fruit. There is no point in having a vineyard without it.





Ahaz: The king who tore up a blank check from God

Ahaz' father, Jotham, was a good king, as was Jotham's father, Uzziah. Ahaz' son, Hezekiah, was one of the greatest kings in the history of Judah. But Ahaz

himself was not. In fact, he was the most wicked king in Judah's history — at least until the reign of Josiah's sons. He was the first to adopt a policy of foreign entanglements that included state-sponsored idolatry (2 Kings 16:7-16).

Isaiah urged Ahaz to trust in the God of his fathers instead of the power of Assyria. He even offered him the sign of his own choosing — “make it as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven” (Isaiah 7:10-16). Considering that his son asked for the very laws of nature to be reversed — on the stairway that bore Ahaz' name, no less (2 Kings 20:8-11) — we should feel free to assume this “blank check” from God was real.

And yet Ahaz demurred. He used the language of politeness, acting as though it were inappropriate for him to place a demand on God. But then, God was the one who made the request. Isaiah was infuriated on God's behalf — and then gave Ahaz a sign anyway. A young woman would bear a son whose life would mirror God's judgment. He would subsist on “curds and honey” during the times of trouble; however, before he reached his maturity, the nations Ahaz feared so greatly would come to nothing.

Isaiah 8:1-8 clearly applies the prophecy to Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the son of Isaiah and “the prophetess.” We know the prophecy, of course, for its deeper fulfillment in Jesus. It would not be just any “young woman” who would give birth, nor would the offspring be just any child. “Immanuel” would be the literal truth with Jesus; never was God with His people in a fuller and more literal sense than when His Son walked among us as one of us (Matthew 1:22-23; John 1:14).

What might I do that would make me more like Ahaz (for better or worse)?

Moments before leaving this earth, Jesus spoke to His disciples regarding prophecy and fulfillment. Luke 24:44-49 describes how He “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” This appears to be a reference to the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives as His chosen ambassadors. He promised the Spirit would guide them “into all the truth” (John 16:13), and this was the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy. He told them they were to be His witnesses, and that they would proclaim “repentance for forgiveness of sins ... to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, they began that work. Acts 2 describes how people from nations all over the world gathered and were witness to the first gospel sermon. True to his calling, Peter told those present that they were to repent of their sins — and that by testifying to that repentance in baptism, they would be joined in fellowship with Jesus Christ, the apostles, and other believers.

They would also receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38-39). This certainly does not mean Jesus’ promise to the apostles is extended to us — at least, not in the fullest sense. But just as surely as the apostles received full direction through the Spirit, we also receive “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3) when we listen to their words. As this promised “gift” is for all believers, it may be best understood as the gift God promises to all people who come to Him in faith — eternal life (John 3:16).

Thus we continue to go to the “mountain” of Isaiah 2:1-4 today. There Jesus teaches us the ways of God and establishes His peace in our hearts.

Can the church exist apart from the gospel? Can we have Jesus without His words?

How does Jesus “judge” us? Is it appropriate for us to “judge” each other? Explain.

*Wonderful Story
of Love*

**“Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday and today and
forever.” — Hebrews 13:8**

W

e are told just enough about angelic beings to make us wish we knew more. We know at least this, that different names are given to angels throughout Scripture, evidently referring to different classes of beings. A “seraph” is one that is particularly associated with the holiness of God. In the vision described in Isaiah 6:1-7, they are too holy for the prophet to fully behold; each used a pair of wings to cover his face and another to cover his feet. When Isaiah confessed his unworthiness to behold such a sight, a seraph took a coal from the altar and applied it to his “unclean lips,” ceremonially cleansing him. Having thus been “sanctified” by God, Isaiah was ready to proclaim His word to the nation.



The word “seraphim” occurs nowhere else in the Bible. However, the seraphim resemble the four-winged “living beings” of Ezekiel 1:4-21. These beings joined to form God’s flying throne, used to convey Him from place to place as He made war against the unworthy. Also, “cherubim” were made to form the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18). Solomon made statues of cherubim to guard the inner sanctuary of the temple (1 Kings 6:23-28). How distinct these beings are from one another is unclear.

What have we left out that you wish had been included, and why?

Isaiah is one of those books that we refer to a lot, but we seldom read. The isolated images and prophecies serve to bolster our discussions of the sins of Israel’s past or of the Christ who would come. But in my experience, we seldom read more than a few verses at a time. Reading large chunks of it is already impressing upon me how the book is a compelling narrative on its own.

What is your takeaway from the reading?



My Takeaway

