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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-13

24. THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Ray Steadman tells the story that during the 2ⁿ^d World War an American pilot was flying near the Pacific island of Guadalcanal when he encountered a squadron of enemy planes. The enemy attacked him and in the ensuing dogfight his plane was hit and seriously damaged. Though he was uninjured, his plane was going down. The pilot managed to nudge his plane away from the enemy held island to a tiny neighbouring island not far away. He bailed out, his parachute opened and he floated down toward the little jungle island. During his pre-flight briefing, he had been told that some of the neighbour islands were inhabited by cannibals. His boots no sooner hit the sand when a group of islanders came running toward him.

The island people surrounded him and took back to their village. To his amazement he discovered that a number of them spoke English and they were not cannibals. *They were Christians.* The pilot was an atheist. Though relieved that he was not on the menu he was convinced that these islanders had simply traded tribal myths for Christian myths. Since he had a long wait before being rescued he had plenty of time to talk with the islanders about their beliefs. One day he noticed one of the villagers sitting

near a cooking fire reading his Bible. *"Do you believe the stories in that book ?"* the American asked. The villager pointed to the black pot over the cooking fire, *"If it weren't for this book,"* he replied *"you would be in that pot."* My the Word of God is a powerful force for changing human lives. As the Hebrew epistle says, *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

(4:12) Now most of begin our Christian experience by reading the New Testament and that's understandable. But many sadly never get round to reading the Old Testament. Now do you recall that the 39 Old Testament books are divided into 5 categories.

1. *The Law or Pentateuch: Genesis to Deuteronomy:*
2. *History: Joshua to Esther:*
3. *Wisdom or Poetry: Job to Song of Solomon:*
4. *The Major Prophets: Isaiah to Daniel:*
5. *The Minor Prophets: Hosea to Malachi:*

Now Isaiah was the greatest of the prophets and a master of language. The book of Isaiah is found in the exact middle of the Bible and has often been called " *a miniature Bible.*" How many books does the Bible have ? Sixty-six. How many books are there in the Old Testament ? Thirty-nine. In the New Testament ? Twenty seven. Well, the book of Isaiah divides in exactly the same way. The first part of the book has thirty-nine chapters. There is a distinct division at chapter 40 so that the remaining twenty seven chapters constitute the second

part of this book. Thus the book of Isaiah is a kind of Bible all in itself. Even more remarkable is that fact that chapters 40- 66 divide clearly into three sections, each of nine chapters, and each ending with the same solemn phrase, "*There is no peace saith the Lord unto the wicked.*" (48:22 57:21 66:24) But don't stop there for each of these nine chapters divide into three sections of three chapters. If you take the middle three the three sections are chapters 49-51, 52-54 and 55-57. Now take the middle section chapters 52-54 and take the middle verse of the middle chapter of the middle section and where are we ? We are at the Cross. "*But he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed.*" (53:6)

At the centre of this tremendous book, God has put the Lamb. He is the crux, the centre, and the heart. My let us keep the Lamb where God has put Him, in the centre. Now when we come to Isaiah there are certain things we must keep before us. The first is,

1. THE PROPHET:

Think of his Name: Isaiah means "*The Lord is salvation,*" and salvation or deliverance is the key theme of his book. As Warren Wiersbe says, "*Isaiah spoke of the deliverance of Judah from Assyrian invasion.*" (Ch's 36-37) *He spoke of the deliverance of the nation from Babylonian captivity. Isaiah spoke of the future deliverance of the Jews from worldwide dispersion among the Gentiles.* (Ch 11-12) *He talked about the deliverance*

of lost sinners from judgment. (Ch 53) *And he spoke of the deliverance of creation from the bondage of sin when the kingdom is established "* (Chs 60, 66:17)

Now Isaiah was a prophet. (Jn 12:38) Now what was a prophet ? Well, whenever a prophet appeared in Israel it was always a sign that apostasy and rebellion were predominant in the nation. So the primary ministry of a prophet was to deliver a message from God calling the nation back to God. (Deut 18:18-19) You say, "*I thought a prophet was someone who foretold the future.*" Well, he was a "*foreteller,*" but he was first of all a man with a message from God for his own generation. A "*forthteller,*" rather than a "*foreteller.*" The fact that the Old Testament refers to Isaiah as "*the son of Amoz,*" thirteen times has led some to believe that Isaiah's father was a man of some prominence.

Isaiah was called to his ministry "*in the year that King Uzzaiih died,*" (6:1) which was 739 B.C. and that his ministry spanned a period of about 50 years. Jewish tradition believes that Isaiah was born into nobility and that he mixed freely with royalty. Tradition also says that the wicked king Manasseh killed Isaiah by having him sawn in half. (Heb 11:37)

2. THE PRINCES:

Or the kings that are mentioned in (1:1) Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of these four kings and was martyred in the reign of the fifth. You will recall that the nation divided after the death of Solomon. Ten tribes in

the north organized as Israel and two tribes in the south as Judah. The capital of Israel was Samaria and the capital of Judah was Jerusalem. Now Isaiah ministered in Jerusalem but his messages touched both the north and the south. Isaiah lived to see Israel the northern kingdom decline and go into captivity to Assyria. You see,

(3) THE POWERS:

In that day were all vying for position. The empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia overshadow the whole prophetic era, the empires of Greece and Rome colour the visions of Daniel. You see, the power struggles of these nations form the historical background against which the prophets poured their warnings, their wooings, and their woes. (1) (2) (3) Now what about,

(4) THE PROBLEM:

Of Isaiah. For in recent years this book has been subjected to criticism in relation to its unity and authorship. As the wicked king Manasseh took the saw and divided Isaiah into two, so there are those today who would take the saw of criticism and modernism and divide this book into two, or perhaps three sections and talk of a "*Deutero*," Isaiah (Deutero) means second. Some even talk of a "*Trito Isaiah*." So now we have three Isaiah's. You see, what they are basically saying is that God does not know the future. But our God does know the future, and He is able to predict the future. Why in this very book He says, "*I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are*

not yet done." (46:10) Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ puts His stamp of approval on this book for He speaks of Isaiah the prophet. (Jn 12:37-38 Rom Ch's 9-10) This is enough for me. When Christ speaks the matter is settled. Now the book falls into three distinct parts. *The keynote of the first part is Condemnation, the keynote of the second part is Confiscation, and the keynoted of the last part is Consolation. In the first part Assyria is central, in the Third part it is Babylon, and the second part points back to the one and forward to the other.*

(1) CONDEMNATION CH'S 1-35 PROPHETIC

Isaiah has been called "*the evangelical prophet*," and the *evangelical message*," of this prophet cannot be fully appreciated and applied until sin is exposed for what it really is. So in this section,

(a) SERMONS ARE PREACHED:

The book opens with a series of sermons denouncing the personal sins of the people (Ch's 1-6) and the national sins of the leaders. (7-12) Now these prophecies or sermons of Isaiah were given against a backdrop of peace and prosperity. For the first four chapters of the book seem to belong to the closing years of Jotham's reign. (6:1 7:1) A reign that had known some prosperity. (2 Chron 27:6) But along with the prosperity came pride and indulgence. There was an "*every man for himself*" attitude. The poor were oppressed and injustice was common. (1:16-18) One of the great concerns of Isaiah

was that *religion had become a ritual*. The people went through the routine of worship but their hearts remained cold toward the Lord. (1:10-15) The Lord Jesus was equally concerned about an outward empty show. He applied (Isaiah 29:13) to the Pharisees and scribes of his day. " *Well, hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites as it is written ' this people honoureth me with their lips but their heart is far from me. '* " (Mk 7:6) Before passing judgement on the worshippers of a bygone day perhaps we should confess the " *sins of the worshipping church.*" Do we worship with a full heart ? What about our minds where are they, as we enter the presence of God ? The nation, Judah were a disappointment to God. He intended them to be fruitful (5:1-4) but they brought forth wild grapes. (5:4-7) *One of the other great concerns of Isaiah was foreign alliances.* (30:2 31:1-3 36:6) Concerned about the increasing power of Assyria, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the king of Israel tried to persuade Ahaz the king of Judah to join them against Assyria.

When Ahaz refused they attacked Judah. Isaiah told Ahaz to trust in the Lord but he refused and turned to Assyria for help. (2 Chron 28:16-25) You see, instead of trusting God they made alliances with whichever power seemed able to provide the best protection at the time. The Lord did not get a look in. I wonder in that time of crisis are you trusting the Lord ? You see, when you fear the Lord you don't need to fear the people or the circumstances.

(b) SENTENCES ARE PROCLAIMED:

For in (Ch's 13-23) sentences of judgment are passed on the nations. Isaiah called these prophetic utterances " *burdens.*" Look at (13:1 15:1 17:1) The Hebrew word " *burden,*" means " *to lift up.* " You see, the prophet was carrying a heavy weight because of the solemn nature of his message. My he was announcing judgments that involved the destruction of cities and the slaughter of thousands of people. Isn't it wonderful to know in the words of Isaiah that " *the nations are a drop of a bucket And the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.*" (40:15, 22) " *Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you.*" Do you know who said that ?

The Premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev made that statement to a group of Western diplomats on the 18th November 1956. But Khrushchev is dead, and the Soviet Union no longer exists. His boastful prophecy was not fulfilled. Do you know why ? " *The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*" (Dan 4:32) My God is still on the throne and " *history is His story.* " And so we see here,

(c) SONGS ARE PRESENTED:

Songs of future glory for the nation. (Ch's 24-27) You see, Israel is going to be redeemed through the world being judged. Isaiah speaks of a particular day in his prophecy. Do you know what he calls it ? He calls it " *the day of the Lord.*" (13:6 24:21-23) This is that period of time when God will sent judgment to the nations and purify Israel in preparation for the coming of His King to

reign in Jerusalem. The " *day of the Lord*," is described by John in (Rev Chs 6-19) its described by the prophets (Joel 1:15 Zeph 1:7 Zech 14:1) and its described by the Lord Jesus. (Matt 24:1) My it's going to be a time of terrible suffering, the environment will be devastated and millions of people will die. Now to the prophets " *the day of the Lord*," was foreshadowed by events in their own day. Assyria's conquest of the northern kingdom and the Babylonian captivity of Judah both picture " *the coming day of the Lord*." But Isaiah not only foresaw a "grim," day he foresaw a "glorious," day when Israel would be singing again. (26:1) Look at (25: 6-9) You know, for the Old Testament Jew a feast was a picture of the Kingdom Age when Messiah would reign over Israel and all the nations of the world.

You see, there are three comings of the nation of Israel into the promised land. The first time they came into the land it was from Egypt and they gave the world *the Bible*. The second time they came into the land it was from Babylon and they gave the world *the Saviour*. The third time is now, after the purging of the nation in the fires of the great tribulation they will give the world *the millennium*. " **And Jesus will reign**,"

(d) SINS ARE PORTRAYED:

For here we have a series of " *woes*," that focus primarily on Jerusalem. Do you know what Isaiah is seeking to do here ? He is trying to get the rulers of Judah to stop trusting " *power politics*," and international treaties and start trusting the Lord. Let's just look at one of these

" *woes*." Have a look at (31:1) You see, their faith was in men not in God. Going to Egypt for help had always been a temptation to the Jews. (Ex 13:17 14:11-12 Num 11:5 14:3) My why should the Lord fear the Assyrians ? Does a lion fear a flock of sheep ? Do eagles fear as they hover over their young in the nest ? Sure, in one night the Assyrian army was wiped out. (37:36) Think of the money Judah would have saved and the distress they would have avoided had they only rested in the Lord. But they trusted the words of the Egyptians and not the Word of God. My as we face our enemies and challenges the temptation is always to turn to the world or the flesh for help. But we need to trust the Lord. My do you know faith is ? *Faith is living without scheming*. In one statement that is what Isaiah was saying to Judah and Jerusalem and that is what he is saying to us today. (1)

(2) CONFISCATION CH'S 36-39 HISTORIC

Not to confiscate is " *to seize*." By this time Assyria had swooped down on the Northern Kingdom of Israel and taken them into captivity. After that took place in 722 B.C. Judah had constant problems with Assyria. Hezekiah finally rebelled against Assyria, (2 Kings 18:7) and when Sennacherib threatened to attack, Hezekiah tried to bribe him (2 Kings 18:13-16) Sennacherib accepted the bribe but broke the treaty (33:1) and invaded Judah in 701 B.C. Now when we come to Hezekiah we are looking at one of the godliest kings in Judah. Do you know what the Bible says of Hezekiah ? (2 Kings 18:5-6) ?

Former U.S. Secretary of State Dr. Henry Kissinger once told the New York Times, " *There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full.*" Crisis comes, whether schedules permit them or not, and sometimes crisis seems to pile up. How do we handle them ? One of my favourite Bible commentators Warren Wiersbe says, " *What life does to us depends on what life finds in us. A crisis does not make a person, it shows what a person is made of*" Now Hezekiah faced three crisis or three enemies in a short space of time. There was an International Crisis: the invasion of the Assyrian army, there was a Personal Crisis: his sickness and near death experience, and there was a National Crisis: the visit of the Babylonian envoys. He came through the first two victoriously but the third tripped him up. Notice then,

(a) HEZEKIAH'S PROBLEM:

Problems often come when circumstances seem to be at their best. Hezekiah had led the people in a great reformation and the people were reunited in the fear of the Lord. But instead of " *receiving blessing*," they found themselves " *facing battles*." " *And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God after these things and the establishment thereof Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered into Judah.*" (2 Chron 31:20 — 32:1) Had the Lord turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to all that Hezekiah had done ? Of course not. But the Assyrian invasion was a part of the discipline of the Lord to teach them to trust Him alone. Do you recall that even Hezekiah had at first put his trust in treaties and

treasures ? (2 Kings 18:13-16) Judah had sought to get help from Egypt which was an act of unbelief. (30:1-7 31:1-3) My Hezekiah and his people needed to learn what we need to learn that " *faith is living without scheming*." Are you also facing a problem of great proportions ? Are you trusting God for it ?

(b) HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER:

Look at (37:14-20) Do you see how saturated it is with Biblical theology ? Did you notice that Hezekiah recognised God as the Creator ? " *Thou has made heaven and earth.*" (37:16) He recognized God as the only true and living God. " *Thou art the God even thou alone.*" (37:16) He recognised God as the Covenant God of Israel. He recognised God as the " *Lord of hosts*," that is the " *Lord of the armies*." (37:16) And did you notice the real basis for prayer ? " *That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord even thou only.*" (37:20) You see, the glory of God was his chief concern. How did God respond ? (37:36) Do you believe that God is " *able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think* ? " (Eph 3:20) But it wasn't all good news for notice,

(c) HEZEKIAH'S PAIN:

Or physical suffering. If you look at (38:6) you'll notice this took place before the Assyrian invasion though that invasion was impending. Can you imagine how the people of Judah reacted when they heard that their king was going to die and Assyria was on the march ? Hezekiah

cried to the Lord and was given 15 more years of life but he did not use the time well, for did you notice,

(d) HEZEKIAH'S PRIDE:

In (Ch 39) ? What happened was this. The Babylonians arrived with a "*get well*," card from the son of the King of Babylon. Hezekiah was pleased that someone so far away was thinking about him, so he showed the visitors around his palace so that they would tell their king what a wonderful king Hezekiah was. But when Isaiah heard what happened he was horrified, and told Hezekiah that one day the king of Babylon would take everything the visitors of Babylon had seen. My when Satan cannot defeat us as the roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8) he comes as the deceiving serpent. (2 Cor 11:3) What Assyria could not do with weapons Babylon could do with gifts. My do we not need to stay humble before the Lord ? For "*a broken and a contrite heart* **0** *God thou wilt not despise.*" (Ps 51:17) (1) (2) but notice finally,

**(3) CONSOLATION CH'S 40-66
MESSIANIC**

For in these chapters Isaiah is looking far ahead. He sees Babylon destroying Jerusalem and the Jews going into captivity. But he sees God forgiving His people, delivering them from captivity, and taking them back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and restore the nation. And as always the prophet's vision is filled with the vision of Christ. **He sees His two comings, His coming to redeem and His coming to reign.** But while he saw

these two aspects of Christ's coming, he did not see the church age which lay between. *Isaiah saw two mountain ranges of truth, one behind the other, but he could not see the valley in between.* Now as you study these chapters keep in mind that they were originally addressed to a group of discouraged refugees who faced a long journey home and a difficult task when they got there. Now these last 27 chapters divide's into three sections. Firstly, there is brought before us,

(a)THE GREATNESS OF GOD Ch's 40-48

This section underlines the Father. Do you see here,

1. The Greatness of His Person: Ch 40:

Look at (40:18-22) How could this feeble remnant of Jews ever return to their land ? The answer is in one word. God. "*Behold your God*," says the prophet. He is the Creator of the universe. Is He not able to strengthen and sustain you ? ((40:28-31)

) 2. The Greatness of His Purpose: Ch 41:

For Jehovah is not simply the God of the Jews, He is the Controller of the nations. He would raise up Cyrus from the east (41:2) Persia but bring him down from the north. (41:25) You see, Israel did not having to fear (41:10) because God was with them and was working out His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

3. The Greatness of His Pardon: Ch's 42-43

Here we are introduced to the Lord Jesus.
(Matt 12:18-20) We see His first coming in humility and grace and His second coming in power and judgment. Of course between these two events we have the entire church age. Here Isaiah chides the nation for having forgotten God (43:22-27) yet in His grace He would forgive their sins. (43:25)

4. The Greatness of His Promises: Ch's 44-45

Have you ever noticed how many times God repeats two words in these chapters ? Do you know what they are ? " *I will.*" In (Ch 44) God promises to restore Israel to their land, bless the land and reign as their King. In (Ch 45) God promises to go before Cyrus as he captures the invincible fortress of Babylon. Do you know Cyrus did it ? He dried up the rivers that flowed into the city and keep into the city under the gates. (Dan 5:30) History records this event, but prophecy announced it hundreds of years before it happened.

5. The Greatness of His Power: Ch's 46-48

For these chapters describe the utter ruin of Babylon. Now isn't this amazing ? For when Isaiah wrote this, Babylon was not yet a world power, so some of the Jews must have wondered. But they did become a world power and they did conquer Judah, but one day God would conquer them. Do you see here again the futility of idols ? Look at (46:6) Instead of the heathen gods carrying their people the people would carry the gods. But God would carry His

people and bring salvation to Zion. (46:3-4) What a God we have this ! Time and again God says to His people " *Fear not,*" (41:10, 13,14 43:1,5, 44:2, 8) Are you fearful this ? Fearful because of the circumstances before you, the enemy around you, and the inadequacy within you ? God says "*Fear not.*" (a)

(b) THE GRACE OF GOD: CH'S 49-57

This section underlines the Son, the suffering Servant. Of course the heart of Ch's 49-57 is 52:13-53:12. My the Servant that Isaiah describes is the Messiah and the New Testament affirms that this Servant-Messiah is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Matt 8:17 Acts 8:27-40) So we have found the central section of the book, and we have found the central chapter. What then is the central statement ? Look at (53:5-6) And there it is. Isaiah the evangelical prophet, Isaiah the great gospel preacher of the Old Testament, Isaiah whose very name means " *Jehovah saves,*" brings us step by step to Calvary and leaves us standing as guilty sinners before the One who loved us enough us to die for us. It was this very sentence ,that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in his chariot when Philip led him to Christ. For that is what this great book of Isaiah is all about. It is about Christ. God's answer to man's desperate need.

Years ago the great evangelist D. L. Moody was boarding a train. He had been conducting evangelistic meetings. Many had been saved. There was one man however who had kept putting it off. He knew he was a sinner, knew he was lost, and knew he needed to be saved. He had

intended to go forward and get the matter settled but he had put it off and put it off. Now the meetings were over and D.L. Moody the man who had been used of God to hammer away at his conscience was leaving town. The man rushed off to the station hoping to have a word with the preacher before he left, but he arrived just as the train was about to leave the station. He spotted D. L. Moody waving goodbye to a group of friends. He rushed down the platform. "*Mr. Moody, Mr. Moody,*" he cried. "*What must I do to be saved ?*" The train was beginning to move and the desperate man ran alongside the coach. D.L. Moody looked at him. What could he say to point a man to Christ in just five seconds as the train was gathering speed ? "*Isaiah 53:6,*" he called. "***Go in at the first 'all,' and go out at the last one.***"

The man went found his Bible and turned to (53:6) He went in at the first all. "*All we like sheep have gone astray.*" " Yes," he said "*that's me alright I have gone astray.*" He went out at the last all. "*All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" " Thank God" he said "*I am a sinner but Jesus died for me.*" That's the gospel of Isaiah, that's the gospel story of the Old Testament, that's the same gospel we find in the New Testament. "***I am a sinner but Jesus died for me.***" My have you gone in at the first all and came out at the last all ? (a) (b)

(c) ***THE GLORY OF GOD: CH'S 58-66***

This section underlines the Holy Spirit. (59:19, 21 61:1 63:10-11, 14) Now one of the challenges of this book is this. *Will Isaiah's prophecies receive literal fulfilment or not ?* Has the Lord abandoned national Israel and permanently replaced the nation with the church so that there is no future for Israel ? The answer is no, and at least for two reasons.

The first is, the literal fulfilment of many of Isaiah's prophecies have already occurred. To contend that those yet unfulfilled will see nonliteral fulfilment is biblically groundless.

The second is, Isaiah has much to say about God's faithfulness to Israel, that He would not reject the people He has created and chosen. (43:1) Why this nation is engraved on the palms of His hands, Jerusalem's walls are ever before His eyes. (49:16) My God is bound by His own Word to fulfil the promises He has made to Israel and in the closing section of Isaiah we see the glory of the coming kingdom. (65: 18-25) What a picture of the blessings of the kingdom when Jerusalem will be the centre of the earth. At that time, the prayer "*Thy kingdom come,*" will be answered. Christ will reign in righteousness, justice, truth and peace.

What should our response be to that coming "*crowning day* ? What was Isaiah's response to the glory of the Lord ? To the call of the Lord ? "*Here am I send me.*" (6:8) "***Mine are the hands***"