



A Course

In

STUDIES IN ISAIAH

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

Pineland, Florida 33945

A COURSE
IN
STUDIES IN
ISAIAH

Copyrighted
Used by Permission

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the

AMERICAN BIBLE COLLEGE

Pineland, Florida 33945

INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit, unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you

read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

The Book of Isaiah contains prose and poetry. While the King James Version is written in paragraph form, other Bible translations place poetical sections in a poetic form.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In our approach we are following the topical method. In this way several passages will be examined together in topical groups. Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Isaiah five times.

Contents

1. BACKGROUND TO A REMARKABLE PROPHECY.....	8
2. THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK.....	13
3. GOD'S MESSAGE OF COMFORT AND ASSURANCE.....	19
4. GOD'S MARAVELOUS GRACE.....	25
5. THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK.....	31
6. FOREGLEAMS OF CHRIST.....	37
7. THE SUFFERING SERVANT.....	46
8. THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION.....	56
9. GOD'S THREE R'S PROPHECY.....	62
10. FOR ALL THE WORLD.....	69

RECOGNITION

The American Bible College expresses our appreciation to the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and author Dr. Gilbert L Guffin for their permission to use their book, **THE GOSPEL IN ISAIAH.**

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO A REMARKABLE PROPHECY

- I. THE TOWERING INFLUENCE OF THE BOOK
 1. Its Influence on Hebrew History
 2. Its Influence on the New Testament
 3. Its Influence on Evangelism and World Missions
- II. THE PROPHET ISAIAH
 1. The Limited Data About Him
 2. The Vastness of the Man
 3. His Call and Commitment
- III. THE WORLD IN WHICH ISAIAH SERVED
 1. His Own Nation
 2. The International Scene as Related to Judah

1

BACKGROUND TO A REMARKABLE PROPHECY

AN appraisal of Isaiah by Richard B. Moulton, made near the end of a lifetime spent in the study of great literary works, seems fully warranted: "It may be safely asserted that nowhere else in the literature of the world have so many colossally great ideas been brought together within the limits of a single work. " ¹

Elmer A. Leslie correctly wrote, "The book of Isaiah is generally acknowledged to be the greatest of the prophetic books of the Old Testament."² Walter Harrelson believes with justification: "The long prophetic book that bears the name of Isaiah of Jerusalem contains not only some of Israel's best literature; it also presents Israelite faith in its most profound expression."³ Because of its massive ideas, its literary excellence, its massive ideas, its literary excellence, its expression of Israelite faith at its best, and its many other qualities the prophecy easily deserves the rank of one of the greatest books ever written.

I. THE TOWERING INFLUENCE OF THE BOOK

1. Its Influence on Hebrew History

The book of Isaiah contains statements of some of the most distinctive doctrines of the Hebrew faith and gives depth of meaning to others. This is particularly true of Israel's mission in the world. Long had the idea of a conquering political messiah been held by the

¹ J. Lawrence Eason, *New Bible Survey* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 285.

² *Isaiah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 15.

³ *Interpreting the Old Testament* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1964), p. 224.

Jews. In contrast, the prophet of the Exile set forth the idea of a Suffering Servant.

2. *Its Influence on the New Testament*

The prophecy of Isaiah is quoted directly or indirectly in the New Testament more than any Old Testament book other than Psalms. One Greek New Testament lists over 190 such passages. (See Westcott and Hort.)⁴ This is impressive evidence as to the impact of the book upon those who wrote the Gospels and Epistles.

3. *Its Influence on Evangelism and World Missions*

The note of evangelism finds reinforcement in many memorable passages in the book. Who can forget the glorious invitation in 55:6-7: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"? What evangelist has not felt moved to extend the entreaty found in the same chapter: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (55:1)?

The era of Amos and Isaiah marks the time of a renewal of the missionary vision imparted earlier to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). While Amos, and perhaps Jonah, deserve to be remembered as early missionaries, Isaiah and Micah were immortal missionary seers ("Seer" is found only in I and II Samuel, II Kings, I and II Chronicles and four times in the early prophetic books of Isaiah, Amos and Micah. It is translated from two Hebrew words, *ra-ah*=to see, and *chozeh*=a prophetic vision. I Sam. 9:9 states that "a prophet was beforetimes called a seer." "Seer" seems to have been an Assyrian word for prophet as it is only found in the Eighth Century B.C. prophetic books of Isaiah, Amos, Micah which were written during the Assyrian Age. "Seers" counter-part, "prophet," dominates the Old Testament and is found from Genesis to Malachi in all but ten books). The book of Isaiah, more

than any other in the Old Testament, gives emphasis to the truth that through Israel God's glory would be revealed to all nations and "all flesh shall see it together" (40:5). Furthermore, the book's revelation concerning the Suffering Servant whose sacrifice would bring healing to all "literally held the whole world in view and saw it as the object of God's great redemptive compassion and purpose."⁵

So interwoven with the great doctrinal tenets of the Christian faith and mission are the teachings of Isaiah that to disassociate the two would seem a major disaster.

II. THE PROPHET ISAIAH

1. *The Limited Data About Him*

Surprisingly few details are recorded about the personal life of the prophet Isaiah. His father's name was Amoz. It is certain he was not Amos the prophet. Tradition suggests that Isaiah's father was a brother of King Amaziah of Judah (from Solomon's son Rehoboam onward, the Hebrew people were divided into the Southern Kingdom, called Judah, and the Northern Kingdom, called Israel; although the nation as a whole often would be collectively referred to as Israel). If true, this would have made Isaiah a cousin of King Uzziah. Isaiah would also have been a cousin of Uzziah's successors--Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

The prophet Isaiah is thought to have been born around 762-760 B.C. and to have begun his ministry around 742-740 B.C., the final year of Uzziah's reign. The prophecy itself informs us that it was in the year Uzziah died that Isaiah was called to be God's spokesman (6:1-9).

The opening verse of the book tells of the long duration of Isaiah's ministry--through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. There is a strong tradition that Isaiah probably lived on into the early reign of the wicked king Manasseh, to as late as 687 B.C., and that he was put to a horrible death by this king for opposition to the latter's idolatry. Some suppose the reference in Hebrews 11:37 to some who were "sawn asunder" may have pertained to Isaiah. If Isaiah

⁴ Brooke F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek* (New York: Macmillan Co.).

⁵ Gilbert L. Guffin, "God's Missionary Message to Man," *Royal Service*, June, 1966, p. 17.

was about twenty years old at the time of his call, he apparently lived to be seventy or eighty. He was already married by about 734 B.C. and had two sons, Shear-jashub (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:3). The names given these sons had prophetic significance. This was especially true of the latter son (8:4). Isaiah's wife was called a "prophetess" (8:3). This title may have been given her only because she was the wife of the prophet. We have no record of her ever exercising the office herself.

So far as we know, Isaiah spent his entire life in and around Jerusalem. From II Chronicles 26:22 and 32:32, we learn that he may have written at least two books besides the one which bears his name, a *Life of King Uzziah*, whom he seems greatly to have loved and admired, and another about Hezekiah and the kings of Judah and Israel.

2. *The Vastness of the Man*

Only a few historical details, such as Isaiah's encouragement of Hezekiah to trust God in days of fearful crisis from siege and famine, are set forth in the prophecy (37:21-35). Yet how much more we know about him! Isaiah's authorship of the entire book which bears his name has come under question from time to time. However, enough is known from what is unquestionably accepted as Isaiah's writing to make us certain that he was one of the most towering and versatile figures of the age.

(1) *A historian.*--*Isaiah* was obviously an author of note and competence. A literary name does not endure for twenty-seven centuries without a reason. He was regarded also as a historian. The writer, or writers, of II Chronicles apparently felt the need of no better authority for the facts recorded in that book than an appeal to the writings of Isaiah.

(2) *Statesman.*-- There is considerable evidence to indicate that Isaiah was a statesman of great stature. Consider especially Isaiah's relations with Ahaz and Hezekiah (7:1-25; 20:1-4; 36:1 to 38:22), as well as his amazing understanding of the international situation of his day. Isaiah was a consultant to kings and a man of wisdom and understanding regarding the conditions and future prospects of various nations of his day. He was a person of

remarkable farsightedness and one of the most influential men in Judah. The Hebrew scholar Samuel Sandmel wrote: "Isaiah counseled kings and was ignored by them."⁶ He was sometimes *heard*, too, and heeded by kings, much to their own and the nation's good.

(3) *Poet.*--*Isaiah* was not only an author of ability, a historian of note, and a statesman of competence; he was also a poet of rare gift. In truth, most of what we have preserved from his pen was written in poetic form, as can be seen from versions such as the Revised Standard Version or Moffatt's. The use of poetic form discloses the power and beauty, the graphic and picturesque ability of the author. An understanding of his use of poetic imagery to express the revelation given him, therefore, should assist in interpreting Isaiah.

(4) *Servant of God.*--Most of all, Isaiah was God's servant. As such, he became a mighty and fearless preacher, a prophet of peerless power, and a religious leader of enduring influence. Though Isaiah has been described as prince, patriot, and prophet, he was obviously much more. No full explanation of the man and his message is conceivable apart from recognition that the Almighty laid his hand upon him in a special way and used him.

As a writer, and probably as a speaker also, Isaiah was like a master at the console of a great organ. His range seemed to touch every mood and express every level of human emotion. From "trumpet peals of faith, ringing challenge [and] inexorable demands" he could move with unusual effectiveness to "white-hot purity, scorn of all base things, championing of the poor, and tender assurances."⁷ It should be noted, also, that Isaiah was able to make use of every style and variety of exposition to communicate the message God had given him.

"The grandeur of his conceptions, his uncompromising emphasis on ethical principles, the vigor of his style, and his command of

⁶ *The Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1963), p. 86.

⁷ Clyde Francisco, *Introducing the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1950), pp. 114-15.

invective, sarcasm, and irony mark him as one of the most powerful and gifted Hebrew prophets."⁸

3. *His Call and Commitment*

Isaiah felt deeply the demand of his divine call which came in one of the high encounters of God with man (6:1-8). It was an hour of deep sadness and national mourning, for it was "in the year that king Uzziah died." Some think Isaiah's heaviness of heart was not only because Uzziah, a relative and a great ruler, had been taken, but because of the way he died. It is supposed that Uzziah died the terrible death of a leper. For any heart open to God, the hour of deepest darkness may be the moment when the glory of God is most brilliantly seen. It was so with Isaiah (6:1).

The glory in which God was revealed to Isaiah at once overwhelmed him with a sense of his own sinfulness and of the guilt of his people (6:5). But to those who thus "see" the Lord and sense the depth of their own uncleanness, the voice of the Lord also usually is heard calling them to action. It was so with Isaiah. He heard God asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (6:8). Having glimpsed the holiness of God and sensing his need and the need of the nation, he could give but one answer: "Here am I; send me." Isaiah knew God's call was for him; he heeded it with total commitment. By any reasonable measurement, he became a spiritual giant

III. THE WORLD IN WHICH ISAIAH SERVED

In our day of revolution and rebellion, we are given to think that convulsive international conditions are a modern phenomenon. On the contrary, at almost any point in Old Testament times, one will find that similar things were taking place. This was surely true of Isaiah's day. The first twenty years of the prophet's life may have seemed relatively quiet. Uzziah had stabilized his kingdom by this time. But change was taking place elsewhere and was soon to be felt in Judah

⁸ *The Universal Standard Encyclopedia* (New York. Funk and Wagnalls Co.), XIII, 4752.

1. *His Own Nation*

Jotham, son of Uzziah, appears to have taken over the reign of the kingdom, serving in a regency during his father's illness of leprosy. Possibly Isaiah, who may have been near the age of Jotham, had some uneasiness as to how strong the rule of Jotham would be.

(1) *The reign of Jotham.*--Jotham appears to have followed largely in the footsteps of his father. This may have been due in part to Isaiah's influence upon him. Yet Jotham suffered a losing battle in preventing a rising trend toward idolatry in the land. Rapid spiritual deterioration seriously set in by the latter part of his reign. To Isaiah, this trend could only have been of deepest concern.

(2) *The evil influence of Ahaz.*—Jotham died around 736-735 B.C. and Ahaz made an alliance with Tiglath-pileser III, king of increasing powerful Assyria. Amos had earlier recognized Assyria as a threat to Israel. But Ahaz was in trouble and he needed help. Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, were threatening to overthrow Ahaz. In the face of this threat, he turned to Pul (king of Assyria, also called Tiglath-pileser) who was only too glad to get involved in Judah's affairs. However, Isaiah foresaw alliance with Tiglath-pileser as an even more dangerous threat. This was a foresight which time was to verify.

More dangerous and perhaps more agonizing to Isaiah than the alliance was Ahaz' reversal of all the efforts of his father and grandfather to keep the nation true to God. Ahaz closed the Temple to worship of God, first stripping the Temple itself of all that was of value. He did this to purchase favor with Assyria. Then, under his reintroduction of Baal worship, the Temple doors were finally closed. While these conditions deeply grieved Isaiah, his sorrow was deeper still when Ahaz offered up some of his own sons as sacrifices on heathen altars.

2. *The International Scene as Related to Judah*

(1) *Judah's position in a World of struggle.*--Prosperity and peace had favored the long reign of Uzziah in Judah, just as had been the case with the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. Great empires were forming in surrounding areas and were

constantly struggling for mastery. Rivals for the domination, if not the overthrow, of both Israel and Judah were Phoenicia (Tyre in Amos), Philistia (Gaza in Amos), Edom, and, more importantly, Syria, Assyria, and Egypt. In the beginning of Isaiah's ministry, Assyria was in ascendancy; Babylon, or Chaldea, was later to become dominant. Palestine stood between these nations and served somewhat as a land bridge for trade and commerce. The country was thus caught in most of the intrigue, conflicts, and struggles of their neighbors."

The prophets warned that Israel's strength lay not in alliances with other nations, but in fidelity to the Lord. Assyria (the Nineveh of Jonah's day) brought about the fall of Israel around 722 B.C., in about the twentieth year of Isaiah's ministry in Judah. How much this disaster and its causes, as Isaiah saw them, affected his ministry in Jerusalem thereafter can only be imagined. Surely Isaiah's fear of God's judgment on Judah must have been intensified by Ahaz' wickedness and idol worship. For he was leading Judah over the same road which had led to Israel's ruin. This would help to explain Isaiah's warning to Ahaz against alliances with Pekah and Rezin which were mentioned earlier.

(2) *A good king intervenes.*--Surprisingly, Hezekiah, king of Judah, proved to be a good son of a bad father: The reason seems largely that he had respect for Isaiah and listened to his counsel. As already noted, it was Isaiah's advice and encouragement which led Hezekiah to resist all threats from siege and famine imposed by Sennacherib of Assyria. Isaiah persuaded the king not to allow the national leaders to pressure him into alliance with Egypt. Surrender to Sennacherib or an alliance with Egypt would have been disastrous. (See 2 Kings 18:20-21.)

(3) *Darkening days versus enduring hope.*--Manasseh was everything his father Hezekiah was not. Raised to the throne when he was only twelve years of age (2 Kings 21:1), his reign of fifty-five years led Judah steadily downward, both spiritually and morally. Indifferent to, if not contemptuous of the aging Isaiah, his father's trusted adviser, Manasseh reestablished Baal worship and erected altars to idols even in the Temple itself. He is said also to have "made his son pass through the fire" (2 Kings 21:6). This

means that he likely offered him as a sacrifice to heathen gods, a practice followed by his grandfather Ahaz. This was only one of Manasseh's sins against God and Israel.

The prophet seemed to see beyond Ahaz' and even Manasseh's failures and wickedness to a glorious day when God would fulfil his ancient covenant

The Exile of Judah is the major situation understood in Isaiah 40-66. The prophet was speaking of that time when Jerusalem fell to Babylon, and its people were taken captives to a strange land. This came about when the Assyrian Empire weakened and fell.

The prophecy acknowledges the despair and futility of an exiled people. But it also rings with the declaration that God was at the very point of redeeming his people from bondage. Israel is pictured as standing on the threshold of a "new Exodus," and the redemption of God is to be revealed in history.

So it was at the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 561 B.C. that Babylon also became weak, and the Persian king, Cyrus, moved in to take over Babylon. He soon decreed that the Hebrew people should return to their land and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:2-4). The rebuilding of the Temple was completed about 520 B.C. by a governor named Zerubbabel

While the prophet thus foresaw with great certainty the deliverance of Judah from Babylonian exile, he also saw the coming of great David's greater Son, who would be the Redeemer and whose work would affect all nations. What he saw enabled him to hold out hope, even in some of the darkest days his nation ever knew. That hope is still a light in man's darkness.

END OF SAMPLE