

A Panoramic View

In the opening chapter of Isaiah, we have an example of the kind of message Isaiah delivered to his people. It is an appropriate introduction to the entire book because it introduces the major themes Isaiah develops. Chapters 2-5 complete the introduction by expanding and summarizing Isaiah's essential teachings. In our lesson this week, we will become acquainted with some of the main topics that appear and reappear in Isaiah's book.

1. When you write a letter, are you more likely to write until you run out of paper, or keep it short and to the point?

Invitation to Pray: Acknowledge the presence of God as you begin to study. Respond by listening prayerfully to His words.

2. **Read** chapters 2 through 4 to get an overview of the subjects Isaiah is covering. Observe the use of the words *day* and *days*. Notice the striking contrast between sections 2:1-5, 2:6-4:1, and 4:2-6. What would you say is the main subject of each section?
3. Now, carefully **re-read 2:1-5**. Here, Isaiah is allowed to look far ahead into the future. This scene is said to occur in "the last days." New Testament Christians applied this term to the time following Christ's first coming. Here, it must mean after His second-coming, since these conditions did not follow His first coming.
 - a. To whom does the prophecy concern (v.1)?
 - b. According to Isaiah, what will be the center of interest in "the last days?" (See also Psalm 48:1-3, 68:16; Isaiah 11:9, 24:23.)
 - c. Who is going to participate in this era of peace?

The term "mountain" is a symbol of a kingdom or nation in other prophetic writings (Daniel 2:35; Amos 4:1). Mountains were also regarded as the homes of the gods. Isaiah foresees the day when one holy mountain will stand supreme and the world will be transformed with the glory of God.

4. Picture the restored world that Isaiah envisions (vv. 2-5). Describe this new environment in your own words.

5. In view of what the nations will do in verse 3, Isaiah appeals to the house of Jacob (Israel) to do the same thing immediately (v.5). This motivation is also applicable to present-day Christians. What does it mean to “walk in the light of the LORD” (John 3:19-21, 8:12; Psalm 119:105)?

6. Why do you think Isaiah’s generation was given a glimpse of the glorious restoration of the future?

7. How might this vision of the future shape your hope, your prayers, and your values?

Thoughtfully re-read Isaiah 2:6-4:1. This section dates possibly from the prosperous days of Uzziah and Jotham. Refer to the Timeline for historical context.

Here Isaiah returns to the reality of the present and to the judgment of God. The concept of the “day of the Lord” appears here for the first time in Isaiah’s message. This term is used by the prophets to describe *any* period of time in which God intervenes to save or to judge. It does not always refer to the end of the world. The day has two sides to its nature—it can be a time of devastating destruction (Isaiah 13:1, 6, 9,13) or of overwhelming blessing (Isaiah 4:2-3, 2:1-5). In some cases, wrath and blessing occur simultaneously. This will be especially true “in the day” of God’s ultimate triumph over evil (2 Peter 3:10-13). The phrase, “in that day,” is an expression that is equivalent to the “day of the Lord.”

8. What evidence do you find in 2:6-9 and 3:13-17 that God’s judgments are just?

9. What will happen “in that day” when the “splendor of God’s majesty” is revealed (2:10-21)?

10. Why is human pride incompatible with the presence of God?

11. What is the basic meaning of pride? How do men show their pride and arrogance? List as many ways as you can.

For your own heart: The following verses provide additional insight into the nature and consequences of pride (Obadiah 1:3; Proverbs 11:2, 13:10, 16:18, 29:23; Mark 7:21-22; 1 John 2:16). As you read these passages, ask God to reveal any areas in your life where pride is being exhibited. Humble yourself before God and seek His forgiveness. Reflect on Matthew 5:3, 5 and Mark 10:41-45. Consider what it will be like “in that day” when God alone will be exalted!

12. Will the terrible judgment of the “day of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:12-22) extend beyond Judah and Jerusalem? Support your interpretation.

13. How are you affected by the prospect of God coming in judgment? (Consider Psalm 96:13)

14. Chapters 3 and 4 of Isaiah reveal what will happen to the structure of their society when God judges Judah and Jerusalem.
 - a. What things make up their “supply and support” that the Lord is going to take away?

 - b. What types of social chaos would come about as a result of God’s judgment (3:4-7)?

 - c. Who does God blame primarily for His people’s depravity (3:13-15)?

 - d. What do you consider to be the greatest sin of the daughters of Zion (3:16-4:1)?

15. What have you learned from this passage about God’s methods of judgment?

16. Carefully **reread Isaiah 4:2-6**. In these verses Isaiah returns to the glorious aspect of the “day of the Lord.” What does this passage add to your understanding of “that day?”
- b. Who do you think the Branch is in this passage? Support your answer.
 - c. What is God’s ultimate purpose in judgment, according to verse 4? (Compare Isaiah 1:25-28.)

No other Old Testament book develops the relationship between judgment, salvation, and restoration as thoroughly as Isaiah does. As our study continues, look for clues of how these subjects are related.

Chapter 5 is the last of Isaiah’s introductory messages. As you read this chapter you will notice the subjects are very similar to chapters 1-4; but Isaiah varies his method of presentation to stir their interest. Here, he assumes the role of a “ballad singer,” inviting Jerusalem and Judah to consider the story of a vineyard. Attracting their attention through song and a well-crafted parable, Isaiah now confronts them with a hard-hitting message.

Read Isaiah chapter 5 meditatively. Reflect on the character of God—the sins for which the six woes were pronounced—and the consequences of willful sin and an unyielding heart. Allow the truth of God’s Word to filter through your mind and into your life.

17. How might your study of God’s character in chapters 1-5 affect the way you act during the coming week?

By now you have become acquainted with some of the main themes that are woven through the book of Isaiah. Finish the lesson by reading the “Themes of Isaiah” handout. Then, page slowly through the first 5 chapters, reviewing the main topics.

18. If you have any questions about chapters 1-5, write them here. Ask God to give you wisdom and understanding. Commit these questions to further study.

The Themes of Isaiah

One of the challenges of studying a book like Isaiah is getting a sense of what the book is about as a whole. One way of finding order in a complex book is by noticing the major themes that occur again and again, and then discovering how these themes are bound together. Once we are able to grasp the overall shape and structure of a book, the task of interpreting and applying its truth to our lives becomes easier.

As you study, remember the book of Isaiah is a huge mosaic of the prophecies Isaiah received from the Lord. There is a basic chronological order (6:1; 7:1; 14:28; 20:1; 36:1; 37:38), but they are not completely chronological. More importantly, Isaiah arranged his prophecies in harmony with the reality of who God is—Israel’s Holy One. The holiness of God is the keynote of Isaiah’s book. The whole structure of Isaiah is unified by its teaching about the “Holy One of Israel.”

In our study, we will consider how this central aspect of God’s being is related to the different themes of Isaiah: *The Judgment of God; God’s Salvation through the Messiah; God’s Sovereignty over the nations; the Remnant; and Restoration*. The result will be an indication of how large and over-arching the idea of holiness is for understanding God, ourselves, and our relationships to each other.

Below is an introduction to some of the main themes we will consider. (This is one way of looking at the book of Isaiah. You may find other perspectives that are equally valid).

- **The Holiness of God** (Unifying theme)

God’s throne is established on the basis of His holiness. Holiness means morally perfect, pure, and separate from all sin. Every distinctive attribute of God functions in holiness. Just as the sun’s rays combine all the colors of the spectrum and come together and blend into light, so all of the attributes of God come together and blend into holiness. God alone is holy in Himself.

- **God’s Judgment**

Judgment is the retributive aspect of God’s holiness. Exercising judgment is a moral necessity in God. Judgment can bring deliverance for the righteous as well as destruction for the wicked. In the context of Isaiah, judgment is described as a purging process in which the nation is purified, cleansed, and redeemed through God’s holy acts of judgment. The coming day of judgment, spoken of by Isaiah, will reveal God’s righteous treatment of all men.

- **God’s Salvation through the Messiah**

God’s holiness is the reason for the atonement—the reason for the coming of the Messiah. In His life and character, Christ provided the supreme example of divine holiness. In His death, Christ provided a “holy sacrifice” for man’s sin. The imparting of God’s holiness through Christ at regeneration becomes the foundation of holy character.

- **God's Sovereignty over the Nations**

God's sovereign rule of the universe is derived from His holiness. His holiness inspires all His dealings with mankind and with nations. He never wills or performs anything contrary to Himself and His purposes. He never violates His holy character.

- **The Remnant**

A small group of those who heeded God's warnings after the nation had been visited by the judgment of God. Their spirit of humility, contrition, and confession reveal that they too grasped the incredible reality of the holiness of God.

- **Restoration**

Restoration is the recovery of that which has been lost through sin. The holiness of God ensures that there will be a final restoration in which God will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.