

Isaiah Chapter 1 - John Karmelich

Title: The Danger of Just Going through the Motions

Let me open with, why Isaiah? When I get close to finishing a book, I pray about what God desires me to do next. I remember doing Isaiah not that long ago, but who am I to argue with God? Before talking about Chapter 1, let me give my standard, "who, what, when and why's for the book"! He (Isaiah) lived about 700BC. He prophesized (spoke what God told him to say) during the reign of four Israelite kings of the Southern Israel Kingdom. He lived until a fifth horrible king named Manasseh. Jewish tradition is that king had Isaiah sawn in half. (See Hebrews 11:37, most likely referring to Isaiah). It is essential to understand before he had that grimly end, God used him in a mighty way. Isaiah states he wrote this to those living in the Southern Kingdom and mentions the North at times. (For those of you who don't know about the ancient Israel "split", I'll explain that in a bit.) Isaiah is the largest Old Testament book and quoted dozens of times in the New Testament! In fact, 20 of the 27 New Testament books quote it! Isaiah lived in Jerusalem. Tradition is, he was related to the Southern Kings mentions in the first verses of Chapter 1!

Isaiah doesn't talk much about his personal life. It's not until Chapter 6 where he explains that God did give him a vision that Isaiah was called to be a prophet for Him. I should talk about being a prophet for a second: It's not just about predicting the future, it's also about God explaining what He expects of all of us who are called to serve Him to do! Some of his predictions occurred relatively soon after the time he lived some are still to be fulfilled. Isaiah includes enough information here to make it clear God did call him to be a prophet! One of my favorite predictions in this book is he names a Persian (Iran today) king who conquered Babylon (in Iraq), before the Babylonian kingdom came in power. (I'll get to that later in the book.)

I should also add the oldest copy we had of Isaiah before "The Dead Sea Scrolls" was from the Middle Ages (written about 1,000AD). Jewish tradition was to copy Old Testament books a page at a time and were combined in a scroll). In the Hebrew alphabet "A=1, B=2", so when a page was copied, one adds the numerical value of that page and compares it to the old one, to make sure it matched exactly. As for the Dead Sea Scrolls, they go roughly to Jesus' day. Most of the scroll findings were scraps, but there's a complete copy of Isaiah among the findings. That Dead Sea scroll is the same as the 1000AD one! I should also add that the group who kept those scrolls were isolationists, so Jesus never discussed them! The scrolls were found in caves by the Dead Sea about 100 years ago!

Speaking of Isaiah scrolls, let me discuss a controversy and "put it to bed". This book changes its style around Chapter 40. Some scholars (I use that term loosely) say there were two Isaiah's! I can disprove that theory lots of ways, but here's the easiest one. In John Chapter 12, Jesus quotes from Chapter 55 of the book of Isaiah ("second half"). Two verses later he quotes from Chapter 6 ("first half"). When you read that in John's Gospel, the verse between those two says in effect, "They (the Israelites Jesus talked to) couldn't believe the same Isaiah said again!" (John 12:39.) Since I assume my readers are Christians who believe Jesus is God and John's Gospel is God inspired that means we accept there's only one guy named Isaiah who was a prophet of God!

With all that out of my system, let's get into Chapter 1. I'll just say Isaiah hits the ground running over what He heard God say to him. Realize this big book is not in perfect chronological order. However, I would argue Isaiah wanted to start with this hard message, not only to Israelites then but also to anyone

who worships the God of the Bible and takes that relationship seriously! While there are a few positive things in the chapter, the main message is in effect, "Do not bother going through the motions of rituals to seek God if your hearts not in it or you don't live as He desires!" Of course, God realizes we'll mess up! It's about confessing sin when we realize it and doing our best to live as He desires that we live! I would argue the rest of this lesson is mostly "The Details"!

The next logical question is why is Isaiah starting off so harsh? After all he could start with who God is and state some basic facts before all the criticism of Chapter 1. (For my newcomers the chapter breaks were not added till roughly the time of the printing press.) Isaiah's writing to those who knew God and desired to worship Him, so it's OK in that sense to start off so harsh! God wanted Isaiah to tell all of us believers that going through the motions doesn't cut it with Him. God criticizes what He ordained to be done in the first five books of the Bible. The point being doing what He desires is a waste of time if we are not "putting our money where our mouth is" (so to speak). Keep in mind the land of Israel is where it is, as in effect it's a land bridge to three continents. He wants His people to be a witness to the world, so that means living as He desires, not going through the rituals. If you get that, you get Chapter 1.

Let me quickly review basic ancient Israel history: When they first got to that land, they were ruled by judges, then kings. By their fourth king, Israel split into two kingdoms, the northern one is called Israel and the southern one being called Judah. Both kingdoms existed when Isaiah wrote this, but Chapter 1 Verse 1 says this is written for Judah and Jerusalem (the capital of the Southern Kingdom). Realize in the first verse it also lists four Southern kings that Isaiah's wrote during. Since this is 66 books, realize that the messages he got from God and taught were spread over a long time! The Southern kings were all descendants of King David, which is why Isaiah may have been related to all of them!

Let's just say Isaiah gets ugly to start chapter 1. In effect he's saying because of what you're doing now the consequences will be severe. Isaiah is predicting the fall of Jerusalem which did not happen for 100 years after he wrote this! Waiting approximately 100 years means both God is patience, and it verifies that Isaiah was a prophet as it came true! So why change if, "It'll make my great grandchildren suffer?" The bible regularly emphasizes a judgment day for all people. I realize Christians are forgiven but that means we are still accountable for the opportunities God gave us to be a witness for Him. In Chapter 1, God compares the Israelites living there to Sodom and Gomorrah and even Noah's day, right before the flood came. Point being a judgment day's coming for all people and even for those are trusting in Jesus for our salvation! None of us know when we will die so in that sense judgment day is always nearby!

When Chapter 1 was written, things were fairly good in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. I'm sure that the temple sacrifices were done according to the law as required by Moses. God's saying in effect, "So what? I'm not impressed, as collectively you're not living as I desire and those other nations in the area are aware of how you're really acting!" So, are you trying to scare us into doing more? If we're making the effort daily to live as He desires (not perfect but forgiven), it's still a matter of living daily to live as He desires! Bottom line we need to be aware of our daily behavior!

By Verse 11 God even says He would have wiped Israel out by now if not for a few who truly desire to please God with their lives! God even says He will ignore their prayer requests given how bad they are acting! I don't know about you, but that scares me. I admit when I pray, I try to think of any sin that is blocking my prayers. I know none of us are perfect, but confession is a key part of prayer! Bottom line most of this chapter is a dire warning to use our lives to honor God or suffer the consequences!

As I said in the beginning, the chapter is not all bad news. Verses 27 to the end say in effect God is still going to redeem Israel as it's an unconditional promise. To put it another way, Jesus is still returning to

rule the world one day from Israel regardless of how we act! The warnings in effect, be a good witness for God or we'll suffer the consequences. No matter what, God's will is going to happen whether we're part of it or not! The southern kingdom of Judah went into captivity about 100 years after Isaiah wrote this book and they didn't become an independent nation again until 1946! The obvious point is: "Don't mess with God"!

Let me end with this thought. None of us are perfect and I'm sure even when we're doing something to honor God we can easily be distracted or going through the motions. The key is to catch ourselves and realize we are living to honor Him and not vice versa. God doesn't expect perfection, but He does want us to use our lives for His glory. If you get that, "One chapter down 65 to go"! (They're not all like this one and I'll go faster than one chapter per lesson!)

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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