

## NOTES FOR ISAIAH 6-12 (SLOW FOOD)

**1:1-4** For the historical background see Webb 20-25; for a date-chart of prophets and kings see *NBC* 628. All dates are BC (BCE).

**1:5-9** This could be written after, or be a prophecy of, the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 (Isa 36-37 = 2 Ki 18-19). The 'remnant' motif of v9 returns frequently, see 10:20-22 and Rom 9:29.

**1:10-15** The ref to Sodom and Gomorrah (9-10) is not accusing Jerusalem of the sins of those cities (Gen 19), but illustrating how in God's sight pious hypocrisy and neglect of the oppressed are equally hateful. The phrase 'religious unreality' is Kidner's.

**1:16-20** Ethics and ritual had become separated. Isaiah is not advocating morality without religion, but insisting that getting right with God entails a wholesale renovation. 'The Lord's promise is not only to deal with the stain of sin but with the nature from which it springs' (Motyer).

**1:21-31** v26 is the first hint in the book of a 'Davidic restoration' (Motyer). God himself will act in redemptive justice to bring in an agenda of righteousness. Isaiah is not simply advocating a moral clean-up campaign; transformation in a society, institution or individual must originate in God's mercy. 'This is how he always acts, and how he acted supremely in the cross of Christ' (Webb).

**2:1-5** Mic 4:1-4's very similar wording reflects the centrality of this vision to OT thinking about the ultimate purposes of God. World unity is to be based on the revelation of God's word. 'Peace on any other terms is a cruel delusion' (Webb).

**2:6-11** 'Thronged though it is, the land is destitute; it has everything but God' (Kidner). On v7 Motyer comments: 'The Bible has no animus against wealth as such; all depends on how it is acquired, how it is used and whether it is seen as an alternative security to trusting the Lord.'

**2:12-22,\*13-16, 20-21** vv11-12 are the first occurrence in Isaiah of 'the day of the Lord'. This signifies (a) God's inescapable reckoning with sin (b) the humbling of human pride (c) the 'final triumph of God and his purposes' (Webb).

**3:1-4:1** This chapter is 'a study in disintegration, through the pressure of scarcity on a people without ideals' (Kidner). Isaiah sees past the present Assyrian threat to the final Babylonian invasion 100 years in the future.

**4:2-6** Motyer (as against Kidner, Webb) sees the 'Branch' as fully Messianic. 'Salvation lies on the far side of judgment' (Kidner); the wonder of the gospel is that Christ has accepted the judgment in our place, so this passage anticipates the fruits of salvation to be found in the life of the redeemed.

**5:1-7** This miniature parable can be applied collectively (to an institution, community or fellowship) or individually (to my life in Christ). The Song of Moses in Deut 32 links Israel's potential downfall to the worship of false gods. 'Where grace does not work, corruption will' (Matthew Henry).

**5:18-21, \*8-17, 22-30** The six 'woes' in this sequence illustrate the life of a materially affluent society which has lost a proper reverence for God. 'When life consists of the following of sin, denial of God and rewriting the moral code, there is no stopping-place short of complete devotion to self-pleasing' (Motyer). Isaiah makes an explicit link between corruption and calamity. vv26-30 anticipate the arrival of the Assyrian military machine; Tiglath-Pileser (745-727) was preparing to absorb the lands between Nineveh and the Mediterranean into his kingdom.

**6:1-4** Uzziah died c740 after a reign of 51 years. For Isaiah, who received his prophetic call that year, the greatness of the Lord provided a more immediate context than international powers, national instability or failure of leadership.

**6:5-8** 'The touching of the lips with the live coal shows how God ministers to the sinner at the point of confessed need' (Motyer). The altar is the place of substitutionary sacrifice; our cleansing from sin has already been made through the cross of Christ, though its application to our lives may be painful. 'Before we can minister to others, we must permit God to minister to us' (Wiersbe).

**6:9-13** Isaiah's message is described in terms of its effects, not of its content or intention (Webb). 'The test of ministry is not outward success but faithfulness to the Lord' (Wiersbe). Isaiah was to preach through four reigns with little success. However, 'hope is the unexpected fringe attached to the garment of doom' (Motyer on v13b). The 'holy seed' will be both a believing remnant and, ultimately, the Messiah himself.

**7:1-9** The time is a few years after Isaiah's call. Aram is Syria, ruled by Rezin; Ephraim is Israel (the northern kingdom), under Pekah. The empire-building of king Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria caused these leaders to seek an alliance with Judah; but Ahaz (the new, young king of Judah, see 2 Chr 28 for his reign) was inclined towards friendship with Assyria as the greatest power around. The reaction of the northern kings was to try to replace Ahaz with a vassal nominee. Isaiah seeks to persuade him to trust in the still greater power of the Lord.

**7:10-17, \*18-25** Ahaz' pious and apparently scriptural refusal to seek a sign masks his reliance on human alliances. God's own sign is deeply complex (who is the 'virgin'? who is the 'child'? when is the time of fulfilment?) but implies that he is a Lord who is already in the midst of his people, if only they would wait for him to act.

**8:1-4** The 'scroll' is a public placard, witnessed and posted before Isaiah's second son is even conceived. The name (the longest in the Bible!) means 'Quick-pickings-easy-prey' (J B Phillips) and anticipates the swift descent of the Assyrian upon the northern kingdoms that was to occur within a

couple of years. It is possible that this child is the same as Immanuel (7:14), in which case his names reflect both God's salvation (for his believing remnant) and his judgment (on the sin of unbelief).

**8:5-10** Shiloah, an overground water conduit flowing into Jerusalem, stands for God's unfailing provision. If 'this people' is Judah (as against Motyer), they are now foolishly 'rejoicing' because the Assyrians have invaded the northern kingdom – but this tide of destruction will overflow into the south, as was to happen in 701. Yet 'Immanuel', the presence of the Lord among his repentant and believing people, will ensure that the destruction, though severe ('up to the neck'), is not total. Jesus promises (Lk 21:19) that whatever apparent disasters overwhelm us, no ultimate harm will come to us.

**8:11-15** 'The "you" in view (v13) are the prophet and his disciples, the inner circle of believers' (Webb). 'It is as the most solid of all realities that God is presented here; either all-sufficient or insuperable' (Kidner). This passage is quoted in the NT at Lk 20:18, Rom 9:33, 1 Pet 2:7-8 and at 1 Pet 3:14-15, where Christ is identified with 'the Lord Almighty'.

**8:16-18** These verses are a summary of the 'instruction' so far, or a reflection on it. 'Bind up' and 'seal up' are addressed to a single person, perhaps the Lord speaking to Isaiah. Then the prophet responds in 17-18 (his words become Christ's, Heb 2:13). The distinction between 'my disciples' (the remnant) and the bulk of the nation is becoming more marked. They are to be 'typical of the church gathered around Christ - a model church, teachable, faithful, expectant, conspicuous' (Kidner).

**8:19-22** 'Dawn (v20) is the metaphor for a hopeful future' (Motyer). The description of spiritism in v19 may recall Saul and the medium at Endor in 1 Sam 28. This passage paints the dark and hopeless situation into which the glorious light of the Messiah is going to shine.

**9:1-5** These verses are applied to Jesus Christ in the Gospels, e.g. Mt 4:13-16; Lk 1:78-79. The defeat of Midian by

Gideon happened some four centuries earlier, Judg 7. The places mentioned (Zebulun etc) were the first to be overrun by the Assyrians in their invasion of the north (2 Ki 15:29). 'The dawn will break in the very region that was the first to experience God's judgment' (Webb).

**9:6-7** Webb says of this passage: 'There can be little doubt that this oracle points directly to the coming of the Messiah, the great Son of David and the true light.' It is listed as Messianic by S Edersheim (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* ii, 723). The term 'Mighty God' is used of God himself at Isa 10:21. There are fascinating similarities between this passage and Micah 5:2-5a; Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah. The Lord's 'zeal' (v7) is his passionate concern for his people and his intolerance of any rivals; it is the driving force behind God's intention that Christ's rule of holiness should extend over the whole world, including my life. 'If his name is Wonderful, then there will be nothing dull about his reign' (Wiersbe).

**9:8-12** The poem that follows is one of unrelieved gloom, with a fourfold refrain hammering home the inevitability of God's judgment (unless there is repentance). It is directed against 'Jacob', i.e. the northern kingdom, which in fact was to fall to Assyria in 722; but it is also applied to all Israel, including Judah. The events of these years are detailed in 2 Kings 17, together with the various forms of idolatry practised by Israel. v12 'Arameans ... Philistines' are harassing Judah, see 2 Chr 28:5, 18. 'If God cannot bring us to repentance through his word, then he must lift his hand and chasten us. If we do not submit to his chastening, then he must stretch out his hand and judge us'.

**9:13-17, \*18-21** 'Even the virtues which the Lord loves cannot be had without commitment to the Lord. When the word is rejected every grace is subject to erosion' (Motyer). v15: the prophets who should be leading the people back to God are like dogs' tails being wagged by public demand. The 'folly' of v17 is 'the practical atheism which believes that

life can be lived without God, that God and his word are irrelevant to the "real" world' (Motyer).

**10:1-4, \*5-19** 'The prophet's three questions (v3) ought to be pondered by every person who wants to be ready when the Lord comes' (Wiersbe). vv5-19 indicate that though the Lord may use temporal agents to do his 'strange work' (Isa 28:21), they are still responsible to him should they overstep the mark; compare the classical concepts of 'hubris' and 'nemesis'.

**10:20-23, \*24-34** 'In that day' means 'in the Lord's good time'; it emphasises the certainty of God acting, whether in judgment or in salvation. 'Israel/Jacob' here refers to the whole nation. 'Him who struck them down' is the Assyrians, who despite being the Lord's instrument (their invasion path is imagined at vv28-32) are still subject to his judgment on their pride. 'A remnant will return' (vv21, 22) is Shear-Jashub, the name of Isaiah's first son (see on 7:3). 'The Mighty God' is the same title as in 9:6. V22 is better translated: 'Yet your people, Israel, will be like the sand by the sea; a remnant will return' – this recalls the original promise to Abraham (Gen 22:17). Paul in Rom 9-11 and Gal 4 argues that all true believers are children of Abraham and members of Israel: the 'remnant' will be too many to count (Rev 7:9). True faith is both 'returning to' and 'relying on' the Lord whose promise is utterly secure.

**11:1-3a** The glory of ch 11 arrives as a complete contrast with the previous destruction; but they are linked by the image of a forest being felled and a fresh tree emerging from its remains. Jesse is the father of king David, who is the prototype of the King to come. The 'Branch' was first seen at 4:2; from now on in scripture it will have a Messianic reference, to be fulfilled in Jesus (Rom 15:12). This passage is deeply trinitarian, and prophetic of Jesus' divine/human origins (Mic 5:2). This description of the sevenfold Spirit is quoted in the Confirmation service; this Spirit is not only

Christ's (Lk 4:18, Acts 10:38) but is promised to us when we believe (Acts 2:38-39).

**11:3b-5** 'In practical terms righteousness will mean justice for the poor and meek, something which the current kings had conspicuously failed to bring about' (Webb). 'The belt (v5) symbolises readiness for action' (Motyer). 'Rod of his mouth' and 'sash round his waist' (vv4-5) recall the vision of the reigning Christ given to John in Rev 1:13-16. 'When the Messiah-King speaks the word, it is with power' (Wiersbe).

**11:6-9** This vision, which will be realized when Christ returns, is 'an earthly expression of the new heavens and new earth (Isa 65:17, 25) in which variety will not be enmity, and the weak will be the complement, not the prey, of the strong' (Kidner). 'When the true order of creation is restored, the whole earth is the Lord's hill, indwelt by him in his holiness' (Motyer). 'A little child' (v6) may be the Messianic child of 7:14, or a symbol of kingdom values (Mt 18:4), or both. "'The waters cover the sea" (v9) by filling it to the fulness of its capacity' (Motyer).

**11:10-12, 16** 'The Root of Jesse' is Christ whose 'banner' is the cross of reconciliation. Cush is Ethiopia, Elam is Syria; Babylonia is 'symbolic of the world of self-confidence and wickedness' (Motyer). This vision of the 'remnant' flocking to Jerusalem is partly fulfilled in the gradual return of Jews from exile in 538 BC and later; but its NT application is to believers from all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike, finding salvation in Jesus Christ; the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2), the Ethiopian official (Acts 8) and the proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13) are examples of this being fulfilled. 'A second time' looks back to the original Exodus from slavery in Egypt and forward to 'a wider exodus from a world-wide dispersion' (Motyer). vv13-15 describe the reuniting of the two kingdoms in aggressive war on their hostile neighbours; this never took place literally, but points forward to the spread of the gospel by a church united under the banner of the Prince of Peace.

**12:1-3** Isaiah concludes this sequence of oracles with songs of individual (1-2) and collective (4-6) praise. 'In that day' looks forward to the fulfilment, in God's good time, of his promise of salvation; this, for us, is the coming of Christ Jesus as Lord. 'Your anger has turned away' is an anticipation of the atonement (Rom 3:25). As in 6:5-7, human sin meets divine mercy. v2 'defence' (NIV) or 'song' (ESV) is a reference back to the song of Moses after the Exodus (Exod 15:2) and forward to the song of the redeemed (Rev 15:3). v3 links the two songs. 'Water...wells': Jesus is quite possibly recalling this promise in Jn 4:14 and 7:38 (D Carson).

**12:4-6** The 'you' changes from the singular to the plural in v4. The mission of God's people, to tell the world how great is their God, is triumphantly reaffirmed; it is not just Isaiah (ch 6) who is to be the Lord's messenger. 'The whole collection, chs 6-12, was put together by Isaiah to give heart to a beleaguered remnant of the Lord's people, by sharing his own experience, reviewing and explaining the ways of God and the certainty of his promises, and strengthening them with a diet of truth, experience and sure hope' (Motyer). V6 the message of Immanuel, 'God with us,' is the final word. The living presence of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the true source of rejoicing for his people in all ages.