

SLOW FOOD: ISAIAH 1-12 sel

(34 studies)

The early chapters of 'what is arguably the most theologically significant book in the Old Testament' (Webb) introduce three main motifs: the faithlessness of Judah and Israel, with the Lord's resulting judgment; the preservation of a 'remnant' of faithful believers; and the emergence of a figure destined to be a Ruler of divine status. The historical setting of these prophecies, in reality a single 'vision' (1:1), is the 8th century BC, when the two kingdoms grew great and prosperous and then fell victim to external powers, in particular Assyria. The springboard of chapters 6-12 is the year 740 BC [approx.], the date of king Uzziah's death, when the balance of power begins to shift. In the same year Isaiah, a man of influence at the king's court and possibly (according to tradition) of royal blood himself, hears the call of God (ch 6) and begins a prophetic ministry that will last for at least 40 years. Chapters 1-5 are not anchored to a historical context; they are an extended introduction to the predicament of Jerusalem as seen from the Lord's viewpoint. For the historical background of chs 7-12 see note below. A few explanatory notes are included with the usual questions and cross-references; however, it makes sense to consult a commentary, such as Barry Webb *The Message of Isaiah* (BST 1996). Other recommended works include Alec Motyer *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP 1993), Derek Kidner in the *New Bible Commentary* (4th ed 1994), and the classic Matthew Henry commentary (available free from websites such as www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthewhenry). The shorter *Be Comforted* by Warren W Wiersbe (Victor 1992) offers some devotional insights. I haven't yet seen John Goldingay's *Isaiah* in the 'For Everyone' series. A Bible atlas could be useful for historical maps of the areas involved. The studies are based on *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (NIV 2011). *Asterisked sections are included for reading but are not part of the study.

Note on the historical background of chs 7-12. It is difficult to establish the chronology of the early part of Ahaz' reign – the main facts seem to be that some eight years after Isaiah's call, on the death of Jotham k/o Judah in c. 732, Ahaz his son succeeds; Rezin of Aram (Syria) and Pekah of Israel, under acute pressure from Assyrian incursions,

seek alliance with Judah; despite advice from Isaiah not to ally with any of these powers but to rely on the Lord their God, Ahaz pursues a policy of friendship with Assyria; Pekah and Rezin invade Judah with the intention of replacing Ahaz with 'the son of Tabeel'; the coalition fails to capture Jerusalem but takes prisoner large numbers of countryside dwellers in Judah who are subsequently returned (2 Chron 28); Pekah of Israel is deposed and Hoshea, an Assyrian vassal, reigns in his place.

Note:

The 34 studies follow. There are also three pages of background notes on Isaiah 1-12, which have been written to accompany these studies. The notes may be viewed and downloaded free from the TISCA website (www.tisca.org.uk). On that page you will also find many other Slow Food studies about various books of the Bible, as well as helpful supplementary material.

1:1-4 Is there a tension between God's love for his people and his condemnation of their faithlessness?
Dt 30:19-20; Hos 11:1-9.

1:5-9 Do I see the moral and spiritual state of the world (or my world) through God's eyes?
Lk 10:34; 15:13-16; 2 Tim 2:25-26.

1:10-15 Is there more than a touch of 'religious unreality' in my life or the life of my fellowship?
1 Sam 15:22; Mic 6:6-8; Lk 20:45-47.

1:16-20 Do I have to earn forgiveness by cleaning up my life first?
Jn 8:2-11; Heb 9:12-14; 1 Jn 1:5-2:2.

1:21-31 If I am exercising any kind of leadership, how do vv23-4 and 26 (a) search my motives and (b) encourage my hopes?
1 Sam 7:5-9; 12:20-25; Acts 20:28.

2:1-5 Is God's vision for the world we live in just an absence of war? How can this vision be achieved?
Jn 12:32; Rom 11:26-27; Rev 21:22-27.

2:6-11 If I or my community have succumbed to materialism and pride, has God given up on us?
Dt 17:16-20; Rev 3:14-22.

2:12-22,*13-16, 20-21 Is there any sense in which I am relying on the pride of earthly achievement to make me independent of God?
Acts 17:30-31; 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 6:12-17.

3:1-4:1 How can 'the righteous' (v10) keep themselves untainted by a society corrupted by inadequate leadership (4, 12), unconcern for the poor (14-15),

ostentatious luxury (18-23) and arrogance towards the Lord (8-9)? *Dt 32:4-6; Acts 2:40; 2 Pet 1:4.*

4:2-6 What difference does (or should) the work and presence of Christ make in my life? *1 Pet 1.*

5:1-7 What has happened, and why? What can be done? *Mt 21:33-44; Jn 15:1-8; Heb 6:4-8.*

5:18-21, *8-17, 22-30 Can I wait for God to reveal his plans for my life, or do I follow my own worldly-wise insights? *Ps 37:7; Prov 3:5-8; Isa 30:15-22.*

6:1-4 Is my God too small? *Ps 72:18-19; Isa 8:13; Rev 4.*

6:5-8 Have I heard the Lord's call? Am I fit to answer it? *Mt 12:34-37; Mk 7:20-23; Heb 9:13-15.*

6:9-13 If people won't listen to what I say, am I a bad teacher? *Mt 13:11-17; Jn 12:37-41; Rom 10:14-18.*

7:1-9 When trouble threatens, does God's word mean more to me than human resources? *Isa 26:3; Dan 6:16-23; Heb 13:5,6.*

7:10-17, *18-25 What does the name 'Immanuel' mean to me? *Gen 49:10-12; Mt 1:23; Gal 4:3-7.*

8:1-4 How is it possible to hold together the two aspects of God's character of judgment and salvation? *Jn 9:39; Rom 8:1-4; 1 Pet 3:10-12.*

8:5-10 Can I always rely upon the Lord's protection? *Ps 46:1-7; Ps 48:14; Lk 21:12-19.*

8:11-15 What do I fear most? Why? *Josh 1:9; Isa 41:10; Rom 8:31-39.*

8:16-18 In what ways are we 'signs and symbols' of Christ in the midst of the society in which he has placed us? *Ps 71:7; Lk 2:34; Acts 28:22; 1 Pet 4:14-16.*

8:19-22 If the people around me are resorting to alternatives to God's word in Christ, what future do they have and how can God speak to them? *Prov 4:18-19; Mt 5:14-16; Jn 8:12; Eph 4:17-19; Phil 2:14-16a.*

9:1-5 What blessings will come to people who have previously been 'in distress'? How is this to be fulfilled in Christ? *Mt 1:21; Mt 11:28-30; Rom 5:1-5.*

9:6-7 Who is this royal Child, and what is to be the character of his reign? *Mic 5:2-5a; Mk 15:16-20; Phil 2:6-11.*

9:8-12 What is likely to happen to a nation, society or institution which makes material prosperity its primary aim? *Deut 6:10-15; Ps 127:1; 1 Tim 6:6-10, 17-19.*

9:13-17, *18-21 What would 'returning to the Lord' mean (a) in my life (b) in the lives of those around me? *Prov 28:13; Hos 14:1-9; Joel 2:12-13.*

10:1-4, *5-19 Do any of these denunciations apply to the way I actually think or act? *Jas 1:22-2:17.*

10:20-23, *24-34 Does it matter if the people of faith appear to be few in number? *Gen 22:17; Hos 1:10-11; Rom 11:1-6.*

11:1-3a In what ways does the Spirit of Christ meet my needs? *Jer 23:5-6; Acts 2:38-39; 1 Cor 1:30.*

11:3b-5 What do I understand by 'righteousness' (a) in the world around me (b) in my own life? *Ps 72:1-4, 12-14; Rom 8:1-17.*

11:6-9 What part can I play in bringing the new creation into being? *Rom 8:19-25; 1 Cor 15:58; 2 Pet 3:13-15; Rev 21:1-5.*

11:10-12, 16 Have I caught the vision of an inclusive, worldwide ministry of the gospel, or do I need delivering from a defensive and inward-looking mentality? *Mt 9:35-38; 13:31-33; 15:21-28; 28:18-20.*

12:1-3 Are the 'tidings of comfort and joy' something I can celebrate only at Christmas? *Lk 1:67-71, 2:10-12; Jn 7:38; Phil 4:4.*

12:4-6 Why be joyful? *Hab 3:17-19; Lk 10:17-24; Rev 22:16-17.*

Please remember that Notes on Isaiah 1-12, as well as many other Slow Food studies, are available on the TISCA website (www.tisca.org.uk)