

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH – CHAPTERS FORTY TO FORTY-EIGHT

So far Isaiah has spoken of :-

- chap. 1 Our problem – sin in the form of rebellion, and the need of redemption and restoration.
- 2-11 Our Saviour - Christ, Teacher, Judge, King and God who would be born of a virgin and would be to us the rock, the vine, the branch and the light .
- 12 Our response - thanks, trust and a desire to share Him.
- 13-24 Our enemies - who rob us of all we could be enjoying in our Christian lives.
- 25-26 Our victory - through faith in Christ.

In chapters 27-35 he talks about our woes. He continues his warning from 26:1 about ‘that day’ on which God must finally act.

- (i) Leviathan was a sea monster, perhaps an aquatic dinosaur now extinct, which is here used as a representative of Satan.(Job 3:8; 41:1; Ps.74:14; 104:26) He will be dealt with forever.
- (ii) At the same time, God’s people pictured as a fruitful vineyard will flourish unhindered.
- (iii) The Lord’s harvest which sorts out who is His and who is not will take place.
- (iv) The signal will be given to worship Him as one.(27)

The next four chapters give a series of 5 ‘woes’, warnings similar to those Jesus used in the New Testament,(Lk.6: 24-26; Matt.23:13-33) spelling out the misery of life without God in contrast to the ‘blesseds’ of Lk.1:42-48; Matt.5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23).

(i) First he describes the proud drunks who led the northern kingdom at this time. God seeks those who can teach in place of those who should have been doing so. Will He use children or foreigners who do not speak the Hebrew language?(I Cor.14:21) However He does it, His purpose will be to lay the foundation of Jesus Christ.(Rom.10:11; I Pet.2:6) God will not be stopped.(28)

(ii) Next he warns of the futility of religion led by priests who did not know what they were talking about, who teach people words they do not mean and empty traditions instead of life changing truth.(Matt.15:8,9) God’s wisdom is so much greater than man’s wisdom.(I Cor.1:19) The Lord will not be silenced.(29:1-14)

(iii) The third ‘woe’ is in thinking that we can hide our thoughts from God. Those who do so deny or demean their Maker.(Rom.9:19-21) God will get through to us despite such teaching.(29:15-24)

(iv) It is equally stupid when we make our own plans for life instead of listening to God’s plan. Amazingly God does not give up on us but continues to reach out with His grace, wanting to be our Teacher and the one who guides every step of our lives.(30)

(v) Finally there is the disappointment which comes from depending on man, here pictured again as Egypt, as in chapter 19. Still the Lord keeps the door open to those who will turn back from idols in repentance to Him.(31)

Isaiah anticipates the kingdom of God in which Christ rules with us as His royal family,(I Pet.2:9) all the devastation of rebellion is reversed, those who do not care are ashamed, and the Holy Spirit pours out the blessing of God.(32)

Opposing this kingdom is the destroyer, Satan,(Rev.9:11) who will be destroyed so that Christ will be seen clearly and His grace unhindered.(33)

Among the absolute certainty that God will win and His enemies be judged there is still a simple way to escape by reading His book and trusting ourselves to Him.(34)

There are two paths before us but only one is 'the Highway of Holiness', which Jesus in Matt.7:13,14 calls 'the narrow way'. The choice is clear.(35)

From the unhappiness of religion on the outside instead of Christ on the inside, Isaiah turns to the example of another king, Hezekiah, who sometimes trusted God and sometimes did not. Hezekiah, so far in his life, had wholeheartedly trusted the God of whom Isaiah talked. At this point he faced his greatest challenge in the form of threats from the king of Assyria. Sennacherib's strategy was to undermine morale among the Israelites. Wisely Hezekiah's men remained silent in the face of the Assyrians' taunts, though privately they panicked.(36)

Isaiah encouraged Hezekiah to leave the enemy in God's hands where he would have nothing to fear. By now the Assyrians were bluffing in the hope that Judah would surrender without a fight. Hezekiah takes their letter and spreads it before God in the temple. His prayer is simply, 'God, this is your problem!' and God's answer is, 'Fine, I have it under control.' An epidemic spreads through the Assyrian army and the king's sons assassinate him. Problem solved.(37)

Soon after this triumph of faith, Hezekiah faces another threat. He is sick and dying. Isaiah tells him to be ready for death. Hezekiah panics and pleads for more years of life on the grounds that God cannot manage without him. The Lord grants his request and he celebrates his promised healing.(38)

The king from the rising new power of Babylon hears what has happened and sends ambassadors with a 'get well present' but their real task is to spy. Hezekiah boasts to them of his success and riches and they prepare to invade. When warned by Isaiah of the consequence of his foolishness, Hezekiah is unworried because it will not be in his lifetime. How quickly we can go from humble trust to proud self-sufficiency!(39)

Now he returns to the theme of Christ's coming.

40 Q.1. Of whom do verses 3-8 speak? What was his message to be? What effect could it have on his hearers?

41 Q.2. Look up all the times the word 'servant' is used between chaps. 41-53. Sometimes the servant is Israel and sometimes Christ - which refers to which? Why the confusion? In what way does chapter 41 show how people need to be served ?

42 Q.3. Where are verses 1-4 quoted in the New Testament.?(Matt.12:18-21; Mk.1:11; Lk.19:35) In what context? How does this help to explain Isa.42? Why did the Pharisees reject Christ 's programme of service?

43 Q.4. Daniel's three friends,(Dan. 3) would have known Isa.43:1-7. How did this help them? What does this story teach us about the hazards of being a servant of Christ?

44 Q.5. What two things will God do for His servant, both of which are essentials of effective service?

45 Q.6. The Hebrew word for 'anointed one ' is 'Messiah', the Greek word is 'Christ'. Who is here used as a picture of Christ? Why is he such an appropriate picture?

46-48 Q.7. What prevents us from being servants of Christ? How does each wrong attitude described here hinder our service of God and each other?