

## QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH - INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER ONE

Isaiah is inspiring in so many ways. He prophesied through the reigns of four kings of Judah for a period of at least 58 years. He records his vision of the Lord in the temple in chapter 6 as being, 'in the year that king Uzziah died', which was 739BC. But he also describes the death of king Sennacherib of Assyria at the hands of his sons in 681BC in chapter 37:38 which was during the reign of a fifth king, Manasseh. His message was tough at times but always full of hope. Above all it was full of Christ whose coming he foreshadows more than any other Old Testament prophet. He was prepared to speak the truth to ordinary people but at the same time he was available to kings as in 37:2. According to Jewish history it was Manasseh, who eventually ordered him sawn in half, thus fulfilling the Heb.11:37 description of a man of faith.

The authenticity of the book as the work of Isaiah has been attacked in recent years by those who want to undermine the authority of his message. Those who do this claim it is the work of at least two writers, dividing chapters 1-39 from 40-66 on the basis of a change in style. They do this ignoring the 22 times in the New Testament Jesus and others quote Isaiah by name from all over his book. For example Matt.8:17 draws on Isa.53 while Matt.13:14,15 is from Isa.6. Good writers can change style according to their topic, their audience, their purpose or just with time and maturity.

The five kings of Isaiah's time are an interesting contrast. Uzziah, also known as Azariah, was faithful to God in his own personal life but lacked the conviction or the courage to translate his faith into strong leadership against idolatry in the country. In his later years he became a leper cut off from society.(II Kgs.15:1-5) His son Jotham followed his father's faith but again did not apply this in government.(II Kgs.15:32-38) Jotham's son Ahaz not surprisingly turned away from God to revolting idolatry which even included child sacrifice. He was influenced by the world he lived in rather than his weak father and grandfather. The nation followed his example and suffered defeat from the bullying neighbours, the Assyrians.(II Kgs.16,17) Isaiah continued to speak out through all these dark years. The next king Hezekiah, Ahaz' son, is another surprise because he turned back to the Lord and wholeheartedly applied his faith not only in his personal life but in his leadership following David's superb example of several centuries before.(II Kgs.18,19) Teenage rebellion can go in either direction! Isaiah was undoubtedly a great influence on his life.(II Kgs.20:1) Isaiah must have been thrilled by this new era but then again came disappointment when Hezekiah lost his way spiritually and became arrogant with disastrous consequences for the next generation. Manasseh, his son who followed, had one of the longest and most evil reigns of all the kings of Judah, including apparently the murder of Isaiah.

The prophets Hosea in the northern kingdom of Israel, and Micah in Judah, were Isaiah's contemporaries and almost certainly influenced him and were affected by his ministry. They were the kind of spiritual team God builds for difficult times.

In chapter one Isaiah lays the foundation for his book. First he introduces us to the leaders in the society to which he was speaking. Nothing has changed in our world today.

1:1 Q.1. What were the main historical events and spiritual conditions during each of the reigns of the kings of Isaiah's time?(II Kgs.15-21; II Chron.26-33) What aspect of the gospel would be particularly appropriate to each period of time? Does Isaiah's prophecy contain such messages? Are our present circumstances in any way similar to those times?

Next he goes to the heart of their problem and ours.

1:2-9 Q.2. What different words and pictures does Isaiah use to describe what sin is and what its consequences are? How are these ideas different from the way most people think of sin? How does Isaiah's way of explaining sin help us to understand the need to be born again?

He deals very strongly with how God sees their way of trying to fix their problem with God.

1:10-15 Q.3. God was not impressed by their religion. Why not? Why does He call them Sodom and Gomorrah?(v.10) What would be the modern equivalent in the Christian church of their various religious activities? What should we do if we feel that our church services are hypocritical?

He then offers God's solution to sin.

1:16-20 Q.4. The Lord wanted repentance not religion. What effect would this have on the past and the future? What would happen if they did not repent? What urgent question would be in their minds after hearing these words?

He now speaks of the failure of leaders to provide an example of honest and caring lives.

1:21-23 Q.5. Why is Jerusalem described as a harlot? Where else does the Bible use the same picture of sin? What are the effects on a society of unfaithfulness towards God? Can a government make laws to cure those social problems?

The chapter ends with a simple choice.

1:24-31 Q.6. What does God promise to do for those who are repentant? What does He warn for those who are not?