

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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THE LIFE AND WORK OF ISAIAH

Adam Orr

The Holy Spirit inspired the beloved physician, Luke, to record the conversion of a man from Ethiopia. He was a treasurer returning home from Jerusalem on the road that led to Gaza. Philip ran to the chariot and found the man reading. When asked if he understood what he was reading, the man said, “How can I unless someone explains it?” And beginning at the Scripture, Philip taught him about Jesus and salvation found only in His name. What was the man reading? He was reading words recorded by the prophet of God, Isaiah (Acts 8:26-39).

Isaiah’s name means, “God is Salvation.” All one really needs to know about his life and work is to know the meaning of his name. He was a man who cared deeply about God and the salvation that was found in the Christ to come. Isaiah 1:1 tells us about when he lived and the interaction he had with kings. He moved with ease among the most powerful men on the face of earth during his days. Isaiah could do this because he wasn’t interested in serving earthly kings, but only the God of heaven. He preached to the southern nation of Judah for approximately 50 years. He lived and wrote about 700 years before Jesus would leave Heaven and come to earth.

Consider three great lessons from his life of preaching and writing:

He only spoke what the Lord spoke.

We first read his name in 2 Kings 19:2. The king of Judah is Hezekiah and they are under attack by the Assyrians, who have taken Israel captive. The king of Assyria is breathing great threats against Hezekiah and the people of God. King

Hezekiah sends word of the prophet Isaiah. You, dear reader, can study the fascinating account beginning in 2 Kings 19, but for our purposes, focus on the words of Isaiah from this context. In 2 Kings 19:6, Isaiah’s first words are, “Thus you shall say to your master, Thus says the Lord...” (2 Kings 19:20,) “Thus says the Lord God of Israel...” (2 Kings 19:21,) “This is the word which the Lord has spoken...” Do you see the pattern? Isaiah teaches us, like so many of the wonderful prophets, the need to simply speak what the Lord speaks. It was Isaiah who was willing to say to God, “Here am I, send me,” (Isa. 6:8). God needed a man to speak His words to His people and Isaiah never failed the responsibility given

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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The Major Prophets:

The Life and Work of Isaiah ADAM ORR.....	1
Setting the Stage CODY WESTBROOK.....	2
A Brief Dossier on Jeremiah ANDY BAKER.....	3
Lamentations CARL MCCANN.....	4
Ezekiel, Prophet Of The Captivity RONNIE SCHERFFIUS.....	6
From the Director’s Desk TRENT KENNEDY.....	8

FROM THE EDITOR:

SETTING THE STAGE

Cody Westbrook

As far as we know the designation “major prophets” is attributed to the time of Augustin who referred to the “the twelve prophets who are called minor from the brevity of their writings” and “those who are called greater prophets because they published larger volumes.” The ancient Jews divided their bible into three major sections: Law, Prophets, and Writings. The Prophets were divided into the Former and Latter Prophets. The Septuagint rearranged the order and gave rise to the current divisions in our English Bible.

The books of the Major Prophets include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Their work spans a time period of approximately 200 years, from 735BC to 520 BC, and took place during the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires. Each one focuses its attention primarily upon the Southern Kingdom—Judah, and its road to Babylon.

Each book stands uniquely on its own in terms of author, time, style, and content. Yet, together, they make up a significant portion of the Biblical tapestry. Consider a very brief word of background material for each one.

Isaiah

His name means “Jehovah is salvation” and he has been described as “the prince of the prophets.” Smith summarized him as a theologian, reformer, statesman, historian, poet, orator, prince, and patriot.¹ Unlike his contemporary, Micah, who worked among the people, Isaiah was a “palace prophet.” He did his work under the administrations of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (ca. 739-683 BC), where he surely rendered influence on the Kings and their policies.

A major concern in Isaiah’s time was Assyrian invasion which finally occurred in 701 B.C (cf. Isa. 36-37). Israel’s inclination was to trust in Egypt to help them repel the

Assyrian hordes but Isaiah repeatedly reminded them that such faith was foolish because Jehovah was the only one in whom help would be found. The coming Babylonian invasion takes center stage in the latter portion of the book (chs. 38-66). Isaiah would not only explain why such would occur—idolatry, disobedience, etc.—but also the fact that there was hope for the future. Judah would return home and Messiah would come.

Jeremiah and Lamentations

Jeremiah, “The Weeping Prophet,” worked during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jerhoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. In the approximately 100 year interval between the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah, Assyria reached its peak and was replaced by Babylon as the dominant power of the world. Jeremiah rose up to denounce the political, social, and spiritual wickedness of Judah and to warn them of Babylonian invasion which would occur in 606, 597, and 586 BC.

Jeremiah personally bore witness to the city’s destruction and was himself carried away into captivity. Lamentations records the poetic weeping of God’s man, distraught over the consequences of the sin of his people. Thus Jeremiah’s work consisted of both calling God’s people to repentance and preaching their national funeral when they refused to do so.

Ezekiel

His name means “God strengthens.” Ezekiel was a priest who was carried away to Babylon in the second deportation (597 BC) (cf. 2 Kings 24:14-15). He was a contemporary with Jeremiah, but while Jeremiah did his work in Jerusalem, Ezekiel did his among the exiled Israelites. There were essentially two parts to his ministry. First, he sought to defeat the idea among the people that the captivity would end quickly. But he also worked to promote within them a sense of hope in the fact that one day God would restore them back to their homes.

¹ James E. Smith, *The Major Prophets*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1992), 17.

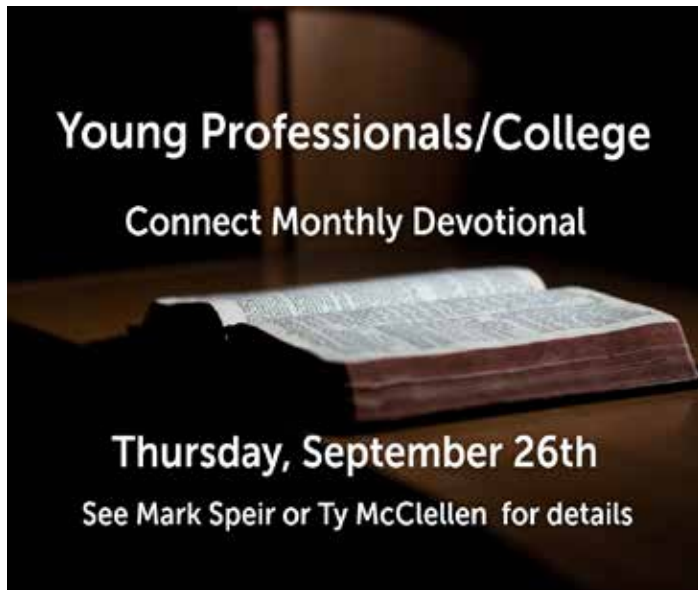
The book of Ezekiel is perhaps the most unique book in all of Scripture. His preaching was highly symbolic and certainly unorthodox. Yet it is rich in content.

Daniel

The name “Daniel” means “God is my judge.” Daniel was taken into Babylon in 606 BC and served God from the palace for more than 70 years. As a young man he served in the Babylonian court and as an older man he served the Persian kings.

The book of Daniel is quite different than the rest of the Major Prophetic works. It is composed of 2 halves, the first of which contains narratives of his time in Babylon and the second is made up of prophetic visions which mostly deal with events to transpire during the inter-testamental period. While Ezekiel worked among the people, Daniel worked in the palace, and in particular, reminded multiple Pagan kings that they weren’t in charge, really. Rather, “the Most High rules” (Dan. 4:25).

CW



Who:

- Jeremiah, aka “The Weeping Prophet.”
- His father was Hilkiah was the priest (who found the Book of the Law in the temple in Josiah’s reign. 2 Kings 22).
- He was from the priest city of Anathoth just north of Jerusalem in the land of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1).
- He was born and raised under the wicked king Manasseh (2 Kings 21). He would have seen Judah’s wicked priests firsthand, the end of Assyrian dominance on the world stage, and how Josiah reacted when he found the Book of the Law and instituted godly reforms throughout Judah. Yet, Jeremiah became the bitter enemy of Josiah’s sons as Jeremiah preached to them about forsaking God’s law, their blatant wickedness, and the destruction to come by Babylon.
- He never married as God showed him to be an object lesson to Judah (16:1-4).

What:

- His prophetic career was one of weeping, hardship and sorrow.
- His prophecies were often dictated to a scribe named Baruch (36:4-5). Baruch later worried about his association with Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 45).
- The book of Jeremiah contains the phrase “the word of the LORD” 157 times. The Old Testament itself contains the phrase a total of 349 times.
- His prophecies brought about great personal difficulty from the nobility, priests, and prophets who didn’t want to hear him. In fact a repeated phrase is, “but they will not listen” (7:27, 13:10, 17:23, 18:12, 19:15).
- He was beaten, sentenced to death, spent time in prison, was confined to a muddy cistern, and taken captive. He did this all for a message that God knew the people would reject.

When:

- Jeremiah was called to be a prophet from his youth (perhaps in his late teen years) (1:2-8).
- God knew Jeremiah before his birth and God purposed him for this task (Jer. 1:5).
- He preached during the twilight and darkness of Judah (c. 627-580 BC). He preached for about 40 years and watched everyone he preached to be killed, be captured, or flee.
- He preached during the great things that Josiah did to bring about reforms in Israel (2 Kings 22-23; Jer. 1:2).

A BRIEF DOSSIER ON JEREMIAH

Andy Baker

As a matter of help for the average Bible student, let’s make a dossier as we examine a few things regarding Jeremiah the prophet to help us to know some elementary things about him, his relationship with God, and with God’s rebellious people.

- He lived through the 3-month reign of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31-33).
- He preached through the wickedness of Jehoiakim (Eliakim) as he paid tribute to Egypt and later paid tribute to Babylon (2 Kings 23:34-24; Jer. 1:3).
- He preached through the 3-month reign of Jehoiachin (who was carried prisoner to Babylon) and all the way until Nebuchadnezzar came in Zedekiah's ninth year, besieged Jerusalem until the eleventh year, destroyed Jerusalem, killed Zedekiah's sons, put out his eyes, and carried a blinded Zedekiah to Babylon in chains (2 Kings 25; Jer. 1:3).
- The book of Jeremiah begins with this timeline so the reader knows how it ends as it begins.

Where:

- Primarily Jeremiah preached in the temple and royal court in Jerusalem, but later after the fall of Jerusalem, he is kidnapped and taken captive to Egypt.
- We do not know what happened to Jeremiah. The end of what we know about his life is at the end of Jer. 44:30.
- Some believe he escaped from Egypt and went back to Judah.
- Some believe he was offered to live in Babylon with Nebuchadnezzar.
- One tradition holds that he was stoned to death and his bones were moved to Alexandria, Egypt by Alexander the Great.

How:

- Jeremiah's prophecy is a collection of poetry, illustrations, narrative, apocalyptic literature and straightforward messages about the coming destruction but also the hope that God brings.
- In the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah literally weeps "from A to Z" in the Hebrew language for the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of God's people.

Why:

- Because God promised punishment for disobedience and made it crystal clear that the coming destruction of Judah was from Him (Deu. 27-28).
- Because God wanted the people to know how heartbroken He was over their treachery, disobedience and their stubbornness to change (Jer. 8:21; 9:1; 9:18; 13:17).
- Because God loved His people and wanted them back more than anything (Jer. 3-4).

- To show the coming hope of a better covenant based upon better promises (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8-10).

CW

LAMENTATIONS

Carl McCann

In 154 verses Jeremiah pours out a heartfelt, tear stained lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away of God's people into Babylonian captivity. For some 40 years Jeremiah had prophesied of the coming judgment of God through Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom (Jer. 1-29). Interestingly, Jeremiah refers to Babylon some 150 times in Jeremiah 20-52; but it is not mentioned in Lamentations. Jeremiah emphasizes God as the one who dealt with the sins of Judah (Lam. 2:17).

In this brief overview of the book, I would like to choose a passage from each chapter and prayerfully present truths from each chapter. Before beginning the chapter analysis, please consider a broad topic that I believe permeates the entire book - The faithfulness of God! Going back some 800 years, Joshua spoke prophetic words which sadly came to pass (cf. Josh. 23:15-16). The tearful lament of Jeremiah records God's faithfulness to His word and to the punishment of His people. As we turn our attention to the book of Lamentations notice these chapter points.

CHAPTER 1

GOD IS FAITHFUL EVEN WHEN NO ONE SEEMS TO NOTICE OR CARE. A personified city (Jerusalem) asks a haunting question in 1:12. The text reads, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted on me in the day of His fierce anger." Apparently, some who passed by and saw the city failed to grasp the magnitude of what had been lost. The once magnificent city was now lonely, widowed, weeping bitterly and could find no rest (1:1-3). Further, considering Lamentations 2:15 there appears to be a sense of rejoicing by some at the plight which had befallen once magnificent Jerusalem. Why has this great calamity come upon Jerusalem and Judah? The answer - because of a multitude of transgressions and sinning grievously (1:5, 8). Jerusalem and Judah forgot that "the Lord is righteous" (1:18) and would not allow their sin and rebellion to continue.

CHAPTER 2

GOD IS FAITHFUL EVEN WHEN HE IS ANGRY.

The anger of God is described in various terms, while the images of those terms paint an unthinkable picture of God's punishment. The book of Hebrews reminds us, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Jeremiah lived to see the horrors brought upon Jerusalem, because of their sinfulness. Consider, the image Jeremiah presents concerning God found in 2:4-5. It is hard to imagine God being an enemy, with bow in hand ready to pour out His fury, increasing mourning and lamentation in Judah, but that is exactly what happened. God was angry with His disobedient people (cf. Ps. 7:11) and God fulfilled His purpose and His word in punishing Judah. God is faithful even in His anger.

CHAPTER 3

GOD IS FAITHFUL IN ASTONISHING PROPORTIONS.

As an eyewitness of Judah's punishment Jeremiah would struggle and experience many emotions. He would feel personally attacked by God and would suffer from waves of despair. Perhaps a summary verse of all Jeremiah felt is verse 18 which reads, "And I said, my strength and my hope have perished from the Lord." On occasion we can fall into the same mindset as Jeremiah. Sometimes life is tough; circumstances and events cause us to feel as though God has abandoned us and oh how we need to "remember"—"Your (God's) faithfulness endures to all generations..." (Ps. 119:90). Like Jeremiah we need to sit alone, remain quiet and submit willingly to God and then we'll realize – there is hope (v. 28-30). No matter how far one may go away from God, it only takes one step to return. Why? Hear Jeremiah, "through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul, Therefore I hope in Him" (3:22-24). In unfathomable degrees God continues to show His loving kindness, compassion and faithfulness to us and each day we ought to be reminded and grateful for His love.

CHAPTER 4

GOD IS FAITHFUL WHEN MEN ARE NOT.

People will disappoint us. People will lead us astray, some unintentionally and some on purpose. The prophets of Jeremiah's day had seen and told the people false and deceptive visions (2:14) further, the sins and iniquities of the priests and prophets had led to the shedding of the blood of the just (4:13). However, unlike men, God is always wanting and providing for men what is best for them. Before leaving this section please take note of 4:1-2, "How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of

the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street. The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hand of the potter." Sin changes things from a human stand point, but God remains faithful (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13).

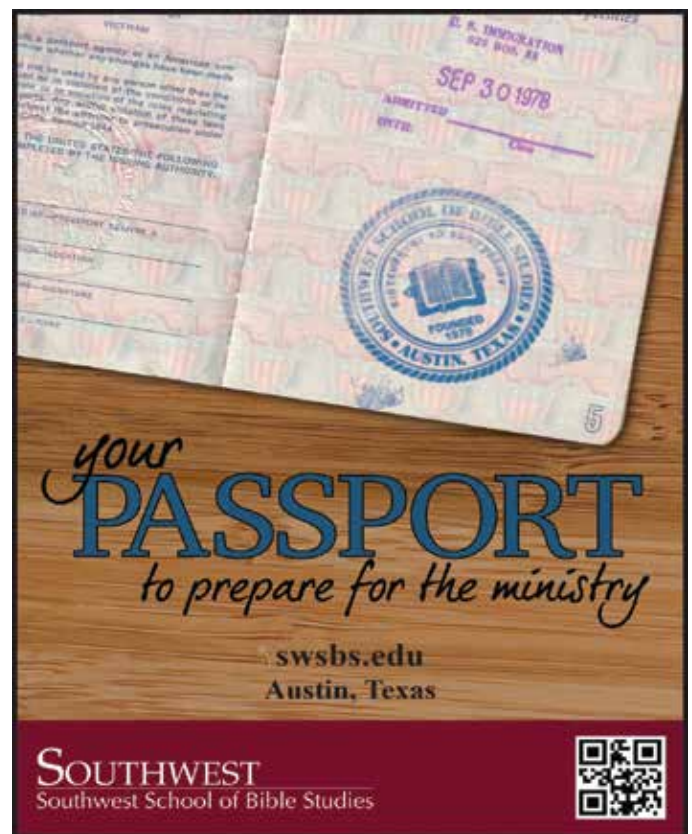
CHAPTER 5

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO RESTORE. The fall of Judah and Jerusalem was of epic proportions. The mighty Nation had been taken captive and forced into servitude all because of sin. However, that is not the end of the story. Seventy years would pass and then God's people would be allowed to return home (cf. Jer. 29:10; Ezra 1). All of this is possible because God is a restoring God. Jeremiah's plea for restoration (5:21) is echoing the truthfulness of God's word in Jeremiah 29:14 where God promises to restore the Nation to their land. God is a restoring God because He is a welcoming God (Luke 15:11ff), we ought to be thankful.

CONCLUSION

The book of Lamentations is both sad and encouraging. It is sad because of the sinfulness of Judah that led to their captivity in Babylon. But, it is encouraging because we are reminded of the faithfulness of God. How thankful we should be for our loving God (1 Cor. 1:9).

CW



EZEKIEL, PROPHET OF THE CAPTIVITY

Ronnie Scherffius

The Book of Ezekiel is one of the most magnificent books of the Old Testament. Yet, among the major prophets, it is generally the least considered. The time of Ezekiel spanned from the latter days of one of Judah's greatest kings (Josiah) to exile with the captives in Babylon. The message of the prophet was two-fold, punishment for one's own sin and the assurance of restoration because of God's mercy and righteousness. The unique way in which Ezekiel presents God's message to the people causes his prophetic work to stand out among the prophets. Through apocalyptic visions, imagery, allegories, dramatic enactments, proverbs, and prophecies, the prophet painted a picture of the hope God provides for man, even in the face of judgment.

Background to Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a descendant of Aaron, born to Buzi about 623 B.C. This would have been near the middle of King Josiah's reign. Though a priest (Eze. 1:3), he never served in the priestly functions of the temple because he was taken into captivity at the age of 25 (Eze. 1:1, 2).

The political and social upheavals during the early life of Ezekiel are astounding. He was 11 years of age when Assyria finally fell to the Chaldeans, he was 14 when King Josiah fell in battle to Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 35). In fact, he witnessed the fall of four of Judah's kings (Josiah in 609 B.C., Jehohaz in 609 B.C., Jehoiakim in 598 B.C., and Jehoiachin in 598 B.C.). Ezekiel was 17 years of age when Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were carried into Babylon. And one wonders if Ezekiel, contemporary with Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 3:6; 35:1), was familiar with or perhaps even heard the words of the weeping prophet.

Ultimately, in about 598 B.C., Ezekiel was carried into Babylonian captivity being among the 10,000 captives taken when young King Jehoiachin was removed and replaced by the Chaldean proxy Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:10-17). For five years, Ezekiel would dwell among the captives at the river of Chebar (cf. Eze. 1:1, 2) as an exile among exiles. But in the fifth year of his captivity, "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest" (Eze. 1:3), and for the next 22 years, he would stand as God's spokesman opposing the false prophets, correcting the misperceptions of the people,

and pleading with them to return to the Lord.

Message of Ezekiel

Ezekiel's message is one of divine justice and mercy. In his work *Know Your Bible*, Frank Dunn noted that Ezekiel's message can be summed up in four words: sin, punishment, restoration, and blessing. God's justice demands the punishment of sin, but His mercy provides the hope and promise of restoration.

God set Ezekiel as a "watchman over the house of Israel" (Eze. 3:17; 33:7) to warn them of their sin and the consequences of their sin. The people assumed that their punishment was unjust. They believed they were being punished, not for their own sin, but for the sins of their fathers: "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Eze. 18:2).

Ezekiel corrected the people's false belief in their innocence and of God's injustice. Their punishment was for their own sins, not for the sins of generations past:

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? (Eze. 18:23-25)

Ezekiel also emphasized the hope of Israel's restoration if they would but repent of their iniquity and return to the Lord (cf. Eze. 18:30-32). The prophet's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Eze. 37:1-14), one of the most familiar events of the book, provided hope for a people who saw themselves as dead and without hope.

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel (Eze. 37:11-12).

Key Words And Themes

The glory of God is one of the key themes of the book of Ezekiel. The book opens with a vision demonstrating “the glory of the Lord” to the prophet (1:28). Because of the people’s idolatrous practices, Ezekiel bore witness to the “glory of the Lord” departing from the temple in Jerusalem (10:4-18), only to see “the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” in a vision of the new temple, the church (44:4).

Brother Denny Petrillo, in his excellent Introduction to his commentary on Ezekiel, noted 12 words or phrases that are key to the book. Note the following and give close attention to the italicized words that highlight some of these:

Ezekiel’s task was to impress upon (that is, prophesy to) the exiles the word of the Lord, explaining that their enslavement was due to their own sinfulness. They had committed abominations by their continued worship of idols. Therefore, God was bringing upon them a sword that would shed their blood—the penalty for their sinfulness. God said that these events occurred so that they would “know that I am the Lord.”

The repetition of these words helps to highlight and thereby identify the themes of God’s holiness, Israel’s sinfulness, individual responsibility, and restoration.

What We Can Learn

The Book of Ezekiel abounds in the glory and holiness of God in contrast to the imperfection and sinfulness of man. In sin, man finds himself at the mercy of a just God. Thankfully, the God of heaven is not only just but merciful and has provided a means by which man can find hope, even in the face of judgment.

CW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to him. May we never get bored or fail to see the importance of using the Bible as the only authority for all we say and do!

He never failed to recognize God’s glory and holiness

The life and ministry of Isaiah was filled with many great challenges. If you read the book of Isaiah, you will find that he was tasked with trying to get God’s people to repent of their ungodliness and wicked living. He was also given

the responsibility of pronouncing judgment on Judah’s neighbors (Assyria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Babylon, Arabia, and Tyre to name a few). He began his prophesy in the year 759 B.C. which was 38 years before the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel. His was not a life of ease, but of great work.

Yet, in all the struggles he faced, Isaiah never failed to recognize the glory and holiness of Almighty God. The word ‘holy’ is found 54 times in the book of Isaiah. This is by far the most uses of the word in any of the writings of the prophets. God is called “The Holy One” 29 times in the 66 chapters of Isaiah. Isaiah 6:3 says, “And one cried to another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.” Again, the words of Isaiah 57:15,

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’

May we never fail to see God through eyes like Isaiah – the Holy One who is full of glory!

Isaiah spoke with certainty about Jesus

Isaiah is often referred to as the “Messianic Prophet.” He had much to say about the Messiah who was to come. How blessed we are to live this side of the cross and to know that everything Isaiah and the prophets had to say about the Messiah were all fulfilled in Jesus. Isaiah wrote about the coming kingdom of Jesus and its beginning in Jerusalem (2:2-4). He wrote about the virgin birth (7:14). We learn so many of the names and titles that Jesus would wear (9:6-7). Of course, our knowledge of Jesus is so much the richer with the portrait of Jesus as God’s suffering servant in Isaiah 53. It was this chapter the man from Ethiopia was reading and where Philip began to tell him of salvation available in Jesus. Isaiah helps us to get a glimpse of this salvation.

As you study the life and work of Isaiah, please know this is just a glimpse of the vast imagery that is provided. This was a man who loved God and wanted only to be His man. Isaiah was not interested in popularity with man, but being popular with God. Isaiah never failed to see God as totally set apart – full of holiness and glory. And Isaiah knew the promises of God were going to be fulfilled. We can have that same confidence in a great God because everything he said would be fulfilled in Jesus came true. Let’s strive to love God and see Him through the eyes of the one named, “God is Salvation.”

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