Isaiah — Lesson 2

Holy God, Troubled Nation

Isaiah 3–8

Theme

Judah's greatest danger was not Assyria. It was trusting everything except God.

Isaiah shows us a nation struggling with failed leadership, pride, injustice, fear, and misplaced trust. In the middle of that trouble, Isaiah sees the holiness of God and receives his calling. Then King Ahaz is forced to answer the question that really runs through these chapters:

Will you trust God, or will you trust human power?

Opening Story

There are moments in life when the problem we can see is not actually the biggest problem we have.

Judah could see Assyria.

They could see neighboring armies.

They could see political instability.

They could see uncertainty on the throne.

But Isaiah saw something deeper.

The real crisis was not simply outside the walls of Jerusalem.

It was inside the hearts of the people.

Their leaders were failing. Pride was growing. Justice was being ignored. People were still religious, but they were no longer truly trusting God.

Then Isaiah saw something that changed everything:

> “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.”

An earthly king had died.

The nation was nervous.

But God’s throne was not empty.

That truth becomes the anchor for everything that follows.

CAAP — Before We Read

C — Content

Isaiah 3–8 contains judgment, warning, hope, calling, political crisis, and prophecy.

These chapters speak about:

Judah’s collapsing leadership, pride and injustice, the vineyard of the Lord, Isaiah’s vision of God, Isaiah’s calling, King Ahaz, the threat from Syria and Israel, the rise of Assyria, and the promise of Immanuel.

The chapters move quickly between present events and future hope, so historical context matters.

A — Author

Isaiah, son of Amoz.

Isaiah was a prophet with unusual access to Judah’s kings and national leadership.

In Chapter 6 we see the spiritual event behind his ministry.

Isaiah encounters God’s holiness, sees his own sinfulness, receives cleansing, and then answers God’s call:

> “Here am I; send me.”

A — Audience

Isaiah's primary audience was Judah and Jerusalem.

But in Chapters 7–8, much of the message is directed specifically to King Ahaz during a military and political crisis.

The king must decide where his confidence will rest.

P — Purpose

Isaiah is calling Judah back to God.

His message is that rebellion has consequences, but God has not abandoned His people.

The repeated lesson is:

Security does not come from alliances, armies, wealth, or political maneuvering. It comes from trusting God.

Background & Historical Context

The united kingdom of Israel had already divided.

The northern kingdom was called **Israel**.

The southern kingdom was called **Judah**.

Isaiah ministered primarily in Judah.

At the same time, **Assyria** was rapidly becoming the dominant power in the region.

Smaller nations were frightened.

The northern kingdom of Israel joined with Syria in an alliance against Assyria.

They pressured Judah to join them.

King Ahaz refused.

So Israel and Syria turned against Judah.

This became known as the **Syro-Ephraimite War**.

Ahaz now faced a decision.

Would he trust God?

Or would he seek protection from Assyria?

The tragedy is that Ahaz would turn out to be the very empire that would later become a major threat to Judah.

Assyria — The Superpower of Isaiah's Day

Assyria was one of the most powerful empires of the ancient world.

At its height, the Assyrian Empire controlled territory that today would include much of:

Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, southeastern Turkey, and parts of Iran and Egypt.

Its heartland was in what is now **northern Iraq**, around cities such as Nineveh and Ashur.

Assyria was not simply large. It was feared.

Its armies were highly organized, heavily armed, and experienced in siege warfare. They used infantry, cavalry, chariots, archers, battering rams, and siege towers.

But what made Assyria especially terrifying was its reputation for brutality.

Assyrian kings deliberately publicized the punishment of conquered peoples. Rebellious cities could be destroyed, populations deported, and captives mutilated or executed. These acts were not hidden—they were used as a warning to other nations:

Resist Assyria, and this may happen to you.

That helps us understand why Judah was frightened.

When Isaiah told Ahaz, in effect, **"Do not fear these enemies; trust God,"** he was not asking Ahaz to ignore a small threat.

He was asking him to trust God while one of the most frightening military powers in the known world was rising around him.

And that makes Ahaz's decision even more understandable—but also more tragic.

He turned to Assyria for protection from his enemies, and the power he trusted eventually became a threat itself.

Isaiah 3 — A Nation Losing Its Foundations

Isaiah 3:1–7 — The supports are removed

Isaiah describes God taking away things Judah had come to depend upon.

Food.

Water.

Military leaders.

Judges.

Prophets.

Elders.

Capable rulers.

The picture is of a society gradually losing stability.

People begin searching desperately for anyone willing to lead.

Isaiah is showing that national collapse does not happen only through invasion.

A nation can begin falling apart from within.

Takeaway

When people reject God's order long enough, even the structures they once took for granted can begin to fail.

Isaiah 3:8–15 — Why judgment is coming

Isaiah explains the deeper reason.

> “Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD.”

Then he turns directly toward the leaders.

> “Ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses.”

God holds leadership accountable.

The poor were being exploited.

The powerful were benefiting at the expense of those they were supposed to protect.

Takeaway

God cares not only about worship.

He also cares about justice.

Isaiah 3:16–26 — Pride and outward appearance

Isaiah then describes the pride of the “daughters of Zion.”

He lists clothing, jewelry, perfume, and outward display.

The problem is not simply fashion.

The issue is the heart.

Luxury, pride, and self-importance had become symbols of a society that was spiritually empty.

Takeaway

Outward prosperity can hide inward decay.

Isaiah 4 — Judgment Is Not the End

Isaiah 4 is short, but it introduces hope.

Isaiah 4:2–6 — The Branch of the Lord

After repeated warnings of judgment, Isaiah says:

> “In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious…”

This becomes an important theme in Isaiah.

God will preserve a remnant.

There will be cleansing.

There will be restoration.

Isaiah even uses imagery that would remind Israel of the Exodus:

Cloud by day.

Fire by night.

God’s presence remains with His people.

Takeaway

Judgment is never the final word when God is at work.

Isaiah 5 — The Vineyard of the Lord

Isaiah 5:1–7 — The Song of the Vineyard

Isaiah tells a story.

A man carefully prepares a vineyard.

He clears the ground.

Plants good vines.

Builds a tower.

Makes a winepress.

He expects good grapes.

Instead, the vineyard produces wild grapes.

Then Isaiah explains the meaning.

> “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel…”

God had given His people every opportunity.

But instead of justice, He found oppression.

Instead of righteousness, He heard cries of suffering.

Takeaway

God expected fruit from the people He had cared for.

Isaiah 5:8–23 — The six woes

Isaiah then describes the spiritual condition of Judah.

Greed — Isaiah 5:8

People were accumulating houses and land without regard for others.

Pleasure without God — Isaiah 5:11–12

People lived for drinking, music, entertainment, and pleasure.

Isaiah says:

> “they regard not the work of the LORD.”

Defiance toward God — Isaiah 5:18–19

Some were almost daring God to act.

Moral reversal — Isaiah 5:20

> “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil…”

This is one of the most memorable verses in Isaiah.

The danger is not merely committing wrong.

It is reaching the point where wrong is renamed as right.

Pride — Isaiah 5:21

> “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes…”

Corrupt justice — Isaiah 5:22–23

The guilty were rewarded while justice was denied to the innocent.

Takeaway

Isaiah is describing more than individual sins.

He is describing a culture losing its moral compass.

Isaiah 6 — Isaiah Sees the Lord

This is one of the great chapters of Scripture.

Isaiah 6:1 — The year King Uzziah died

> “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord…”

Uzziah had ruled for many years.

His death brought uncertainty.

But Isaiah sees another King.

One king has died.

The true King is still on the throne.

That is one of the most powerful contrasts in the entire book.

Isaiah 6:2–4 — Holy, Holy, Holy

The seraphim cry:

> “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts.”

Even the heavenly beings cover their faces.

God’s holiness means more than moral goodness.

God is completely set apart.

He is unlike anything in creation.

Isaiah 6:5 — “Woe is me”

Isaiah has just spent several chapters saying:

Woe unto them.

Now he says:

> “Woe is me! for I am undone…”

Seeing God changes Isaiah’s view of himself.

The closer he comes to God’s holiness, the more clearly he recognizes his own sin.

Takeaway

It is easy to see the sins of others.

Encountering God forces us to examine ourselves.

Isaiah 6:6–7 — Isaiah is cleansed

A seraph takes a burning coal from the altar and touches Isaiah’s lips.

His guilt is removed.

His sin is forgiven.

Notice the order.

Isaiah does not clean himself before serving God.

God cleanses Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:8 — “Here am I; send me”

Then comes the question:

> “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

Isaiah answers:

> “Here am I; send me.”

He does not ask for the job description.

He does not ask whether people will like him.

He simply makes himself available.

Takeaway

Sometimes faithfulness begins with willingness.

Isaiah 6:9–13 — A difficult calling

This part is often overlooked.

Isaiah is told that many people will not listen.

His ministry will not be easy.

He is called to faithfulness, not guaranteed success.

Takeaway

God’s measure of success is not always visible results. Sometimes it is faithful obedience.

Isaiah 7 — Ahaz Faces a Choice

Isaiah 7:1–2 — Fear grips Judah

Syria and Israel threaten Jerusalem.

Isaiah gives us a vivid picture.

The heart of Ahaz and the hearts of the people shook:

> “as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.”

They were terrified.

Isaiah 7:3–9 — God speaks through Isaiah

Isaiah tells Ahaz not to panic.

The message is essentially:

Do not fear.

Do not lose heart.

Trust God.

Then comes an important statement:

> “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

Another way to understand the thought is:

If you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand firm at all.

Isaiah 7:10–12 — God offers a sign

God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign.

Ahaz refuses.

> “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.”

It sounds religious.

But Ahaz had already decided to seek Assyria’s help.

His words sounded humble.

His heart was not trusting God.

Takeaway

Religious language can sometimes hide unbelief.

Isaiah 7:14 — Immanuel

Isaiah then gives one of the best-known prophecies in Scripture.

> "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Immanuel means:

God with us.

The prophecy had significance within Ahaz's immediate crisis.

But Matthew later identifies its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

This is one of the great bridges between Isaiah and the Gospel.

Isaiah 8 — What You Trust Can Become Your Master

Isaiah 8:5–8 — Assyria becomes a flood

Judah had looked toward Assyria for help.

Isaiah describes Assyria like a river overflowing its banks.

The very power Ahaz trusted for protection would become a threat.

Takeaway

The thing we trust instead of God can eventually become the thing that controls us.

Isaiah 8:11–13 — Do not fear what everyone else fears

God tells Isaiah:

> "Neither fear ye their fear…"

Instead:

> "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself…"

God does not tell Isaiah that nothing frightening is happening.

Something frightening is happening.

But Isaiah is told where his ultimate fear and trust should rest.

Takeaway

Faith does not mean pretending there is nothing to fear.

Faith means knowing whom to trust when fear comes.

Isaiah 8:19–20 — Where do you look for answers?

Some people were turning to mediums and spiritualists.

Isaiah asks:

> “should not a people seek unto their God?”

That is still a powerful question.

When people become afraid, confused, or uncertain, where do they look?

Takeaway

Fear often reveals what we truly trust.

Words & Phrases

Woe

A warning of grief, danger, and coming judgment.

Remnant

A group God preserves even through judgment.

This becomes an important theme throughout Isaiah.

Holy

God is completely set apart and unlike anything in creation.

Immanuel

God with us.

A promise that God had not abandoned His people.

Assyria

The dominant military power rising during Isaiah's ministry.

The Branch

A picture of future restoration and, ultimately, the promised Messiah.

Discussion Questions & Answers

1. What does Isaiah identify as Judah's deepest problem?

2. What does the vineyard in Isaiah 5 teach us?

3. Why is Isaiah 6 so important?

4. Why does Isaiah say, “Woe is me”?

5. What can we learn from Isaiah saying, “Here am I; send me”?

6. What crisis was King Ahaz facing?

7. Why was Ahaz’s refusal to ask for a sign important?

8. What is the significance of Immanuel?

9. What central question connects Isaiah 3–8?

Application

Isaiah 3–8 asks each of us a personal question:

What do I trust when I become afraid?

Money?

Government?

Doctors?

My own intelligence?

Other people?

My plans?

None of those things are necessarily wrong.

The problem comes when something good becomes the thing we ultimately depend upon instead of God.

Ahaz's great failure was not simply making a poor political decision.

He trusted Assyria more than he trusted God.

Isaiah had just learned the opposite lesson.

He saw God on the throne.

And once he saw that throne, every earthly throne looked different.

Closing Thought

There is a striking contrast running through these chapters.

Uzziah dies.

Ahaz is afraid.

Assyria is rising.

Judah is trembling.

Everything on earth seems uncertain.

Then Isaiah looks upward and sees:

> “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.”

That may be the lesson we carry with us.

Governments change.

Leaders come and go.

Nations rise and fall.

Circumstances frighten us.

But the throne Isaiah saw in Chapter 6 was never vacant.

And it still isn’t