Isaiah Introduction Part 3

Writing

- Like Paul, after a time Isaiah developed disciples and it may be that also like Paul that it was one of them who was actually doing the writing. A disciple of Paul's named Tertius actually penned Romans. Another disciple of both Paul and Peter, Silvanus, actually penned 1 Peter. It seems that is the case here in the second section of Isaiah. Some modern scholars have called this section the greatest piece of literature from the ancient middle east.
- A central theme of Isaiah's preaching is the ultimate victory of God and the writer captures this in soaring hymns of joyous praise. These are the passages that Handel drew so heavily on when writing "The Messiah".

Central Theme

- James Muilenburg describes this section of Isaiah as "an eschatological drama in which creation, history, and redemption constitute the central themes…God is the central figure from beginning to end." Here, Page Kelly points out, the emphasis is on the centrality and uniqueness of Israel's God and secondly the emphasis of the coming end times.
- In the past Israel had to contend merely with its small neighbors, primarily the Philistines, the Edomites, and the Amorites. Against these Israel saw clearly that their God was by far greater than all the gods of their enemies. The stories of Joshua, David and Sampson and other heroes were always at the forefront of their worship. Now comes the great Assyrian empire, overwhelming everything in its path, including the northern kingdom of Israel. Suddenly the nation of Judah was having a sever crisis of faith and Isaiah is preaching hope amidst a backdrop of hopelessness and despair.
- This is clearly seen in Isaiah 42:24-25 when the north has fallen and all but Jerusalem in the south remains. "Who gave Jacob up for spoil and Israel to plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned and in whose ways they were not willing to walk and whose law they did not obey? So He poured out on him the heat of His anger and the fierceness

of battle and it set him aflame all around. Yet he did not recognize it. And it burned him, but he paid no attention."

- But there is common theme in the Old Testament that God's punishment and wrath against Israel's sins will not last forever and whether it was the Assyrians in Isaiah's time or the Babylonians in Jeremiah's time, ultimately the God's judgement would come down on these pagan nations as well. In 51:22-23 we are told, "Thus says your Lord, ***the Lord***, even your God who contends for His people, 'Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of reeling, the chalice of My anger. (Your generation) will never drink it again. I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, 'Lie down that we may walk over *you*.' You have even made your back like the ground and like the street for those who walk over *it*."
- It is here that Isaiah introduces the divine Servant of the Lord, influencing the theology not only of Israel forever, but also the Christian understanding of the person of Jesus.
- It is here that the Judeo/Christian understanding of suffering is formed. As we saw in Job, the first view was that all suffering was tied to sin. In time a second understanding took hold that some who suffered could also be saints, like Job and Jeremiah. Here in chapters 52 and 53 we see that there is a suffering that leads to salvation. Here there is a clear presentation that suffering may vicarious, that the innocent may suffer on behalf of the guilty.
- The prophet's preaching here combines the concepts of vicarious suffering with God's purpose, love, and compassion, earning Isaiah the title of the "Evangelist of the Old Testament".
- Page Kelly points out that the message both in this section of Isaiah "and in the New Testament was the good news that God had come for his people in their sin and distress and had forgiven them through the sacrifice of His Servant and had initiated His rule over the nations, a rule that would be consummated in the creation of new heavens and a new earth."