

Lesson 1

Pre Exilic Prophets

Isaiah

The prophecy of Isaiah gives an account of the events of a period from B.C 760 to 698. Among the prophetic books, this stands out for its volume and high literary style. It is interesting to note that the book is divided into 66 chapters which reminds us of the 66 books of the Bible. Some go to the extent of saying that the book of Isaiah is ‘Bible in miniature’. Another distinctive feature of this book is its ‘*evangelistic*’ message. The book of Isaiah is said to be “*the gospel according to Isaiah*”. Some even call him the ‘Fifth Evangelist’ or ‘The evangelical prophet’.

The unity of the book is often questioned. Chapters 1 to 39, they say, were written by one author and the next section i.e chapters 40 to 66 by another. There are enough evidences available to refute this statement.

The prophet

Isaiah was a member of the Royal family and was the son of Amoz (not to be confused with Amos, the prophet). Isaiah had two sons (7:3, 8:3, 18). Tradition has it that he was sawn asunder in Manasseh’s reign. Perhaps this is alluded to in Hebrews 11:37.

Theme:

The very meaning of Isaiah, ‘Yahweh is Salvation’ is the theme of his book. The word ‘Salvation’ occurs twenty six times in this prophecy and only seven times in all the other prophets put together. Chapters 1 to 39 depict man’s need for salvation and chapters 40 to 66 give God’s gracious provision of it. That her wickedness would be punished is Isaiah’s solemn warning to Israel. However, God, the God of salvation would provide a Saviour for both the Jews and the gentiles.

We can find the following six subjects in the book:

- 1.The election of the prophet.
- 2.The life of Jesus Christ.
- 3.The sufferings of the Saviour.
- 4.The glorious age of the millennium.
- 5.The gospel.
- 6.The different appearances of Jesus Christ.

1. The election of the prophet: The first chapter of the book describes how God's own people deserted Him and have gone after idols. God says, "The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel doesn't know, my people do not understand". (Isaiah 1:3) Israel has sunk down to a very low moral level. The ox and the ass, the prophet says, know their master better and behave better than the people of Israel.

In chapter 6, we read of Isaiah's vision. He saw the Lord seated on a Throne, high and exalted. And he saw and heard the seraphim calling to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord." This brought about a tremendous change in the prophet. By contrast, he realized how unholy a person he was. He cried, "woe unto me, I am ruined, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphim flew to the prophet with a live coal in his hand, with which he touched the prophet's mouth. Then the Lord sent him out as His spokesman. Here we see that sanctification is a basic need of all believers especially those who are in God's service. Also we should remember that no one can see God without sanctification (Hebrews 12:14). Without practical holiness, fruitful ministry is impossible.

2. The life of Jesus Christ: We can see the following facts which are related to the life of Jesus.
 - a. His virgin birth. (7:14)
 - b. His deity and eternal existence. (9:6)
 - c. His family. (11:1)
 - d. His anointing with the Spirit of God. (11:2)
 - e. His character. (11:3,4)
 - f. His simple life and humility. (42:1-4)
 - g. His sufferings, death and resurrection. (ch. 53)
 - h. His glorious rule. (11:3-16)
3. The sufferings of Jesus: This subject, in chapter 53, clearly explains how Jesus sacrificed His life for the sinners. From verse 2 onwards, we see the Saviour bearing the sins of the world on His body. The people of Israel thought that God's salvation was only for them. The truth, however, is that God's salvation is for all. Verse 9 is worth noticing. They crucified the Lord Jesus between two thieves. They considered Him as a terribly wicked person, so they assigned Him a

grave with the wicked. However, He was buried in a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man. (Mathew 27:57-60) It is amazing that such prophecies were fulfilled meticulously.

4. Millennium: The description of the glorious millennial kingdom is seen in chapter 11:6-11 and 65:17-25. These prophecies will be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus establishes His millennial reign on this earth during which so many changes for good will take place. Life expectancy of man will increase considerably. The nature of animals will change. Ferocious creatures will become gentle. Even the deserts will bloom. The Lord Jesus Christ will be the sovereign blessed King.
5. Gospel: We see the clear message of salvation in this prophecy. God through His prophet invites all men to Him. “Come”, says He, “all you who are thirsty, come to the waters and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost”. (Isaiah 55:1-2) Read Ephesians 2:8-9.
6. The two appearances of our Lord: In chapter 61, we read about the two appearances of our Lord. His first advent (incarnation) was the beginning of *the year of the Lord's favour*. (v.2) But the same verse speaks of *the day of the Lord's vengeance* which will take place during His second advent. The prophecy concerning the first advent is quoted in Luke 4:18-21 by our Lord Himself. As He read this in the synagogue at Nazareth, He read this portion up to “*the year of the Lord's favour*” only, leaving “*the day of vengeance*”. Why did He do so? It is because it will be fulfilled only at His second coming. We are living in this interim period which is the age of His grace and favour.

Questions:

1. Why Isaiah is called the fifth evangelist?
2. Describe the prophet's vision of the glorious God?
3. Bring out the importance of the 53rd chapter of the book of Isaiah.
4. How will the millennium be like?
5. What is the relevance of Isaiah 55:1-2? What New Testament teaching do we derive from it?
6. What is meant by “*the year of the favour of our Lord*”?
7. What is “*the day of the vengeance of God*”?