

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 30: Isaiah 12-39 *The Book of Judgment*

Welcome to Week 30 of the Bible Reading Coach Podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we will be reading in the middle of the book of Isaiah, chapters 12 through 39. Last week, we read chapters 1 through 11, we gave you a short intro to the book of Isaiah and to the prophets. But we reserved most of that for this week, because this week, and next week, we will be spending in this important amazing book and at the beginning of the section that we call The Prophets.

So let's first of all, start wide. And what do we mean when we talk about the prophets? Well, first of all, when we use the word "Prophets", we mean both the books and the people who wrote them. So from Isaiah all the way to the end of the Old Testament, and Malikai, these books are called the prophets. But they're each, all but one anyway, named after the people who wrote them. And so when we say Prophets, sometimes we mean the books, sometimes we mean the people and sometimes you have to infer from context which one is meant. But it's usually pretty easy to figure out. So let's first of all talk about the books, the prophets themselves, what do they mean? Like I said, from Isaiah through Malikai, the rest of the Old Testament are the books of the prophets. These books are divided into two sections, there's the major prophets, which are the large books at the beginning. And then there's the Minor Prophets, which are the small books, at the end of our lessons at the end of the Old Testament, major and minor has nothing to do with the importance of the message, or the importance of the prophets, it has literally just to do with the size of the books.

So the major ones are the big ones, they come first. The minor ones, or the small ones, and they come second. It's also important to note as we read through these, they're not putting your Bible in chronological order. They're put large to small. So when we get to each book, I will spend some time letting you know about that book and about that Prophet, including when they wrote the book, why they wrote the book, who they wrote it to, and what the circumstances were because the chronology doesn't necessarily fit.

Okay. Now, that's the prophets, the book, what about prophets, the people? Well, there were four different types of leaders in Israel. We've talked about this earlier, Prophets, Priests, Kings, and the tribe of the Levites. Let's take a look at what they mean. First of all, Prophets, when we think of someone giving a prophecy, we usually think, oh, somebody foretelling the future. And that sometimes happens with the prophets. But that's not really the main role of the Prophet, it's not to tell the future, the main role of the Prophet is to speak for God to the people. So every time there's a prophecy, it's from God to the people. Most of the time those prophecies are prophecies of judgment, they are negative prophecies. And occasionally those messages from God to the people that involve judgment, sometimes also involve the future. So they always involve God speaking, they sometimes and even usually, involve judgment. And occasionally, they mentioned what's coming in the future. So that's what the Prophets do.

The priests, on the other hand, are a division of the Levites. The Levites are one of the tribes of Israel, they were not given any land, they were given authority over the temple. And of those Levites, some of the men could be chosen to be involved as priests. In addition to being men, they had to meet other qualifications that are given throughout the Old Testament. So

Levites is the larger group of people, Priests is the smaller group of people who are the ones who are actually allowed to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. There weren't always Prophets in the land, God called specific people up to speak His word to them on certain occasions. But there were always Priests in the land because that was a role that they were actually born to, and that they were supposed to serve in.

The Kings, of course, were a totally different thing and Kings were what you think Kings are. So sometimes, like I said, there was more than one prophet in the land during the time of Isaiah, because he served for so long. There were actually three other prophets who also came along and prophesied concurrently with him. And that's Amos, Hosea, and Micah, those were three of the Minor Prophets. Again, not minor, because what they said was unimportant, but because their books were smaller, and we'll get to them in a few weeks time.

Now, the book of Isaiah. Isaiah, the prophet in the book is often considered by many to be the greatest prophet and the greatest book of prophecy in the entire Bible. Isaiah ministered for about 40 years, actually over 40 years. And during this time, the people had come to a point where they believed that they had matured in worship. They weren't refusing to worship in the temple, but they really just went through the motions when they were in the temple. They were doing it out of culture, and "Well, we're mature enough we're gonna go ahead and do that, but we're not really sure we believe that", it was that kind of a thing. Because of that there's verse after verse after verse in Isaiah of God telling them that their offerings mean nothing to him because they're not taking it seriously. Showing up in church and going through the motions doesn't fool God one bit, neither did showing up to the temple and offering sacrifices that didn't fool him either. And he calls them on their phoniness.

It's also important to note that the book of Isaiah is divided into two distinct sections, chapters 1 through 39 is the Book of Judgment, chapters 40 through 66, is the Book of Comfort. So this week, we will be finishing up the book of judgment, as we read chapters 12 through 39. Now, Isaiah, the man, when he starts his ministry, here's what's going on. The Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom have separated it's no longer one kingdom of Israel, it is two kingdoms. In the north ten tribes are called Israel. In the south one tribe is called Judah, in the north Israel, they have Samaria as their capital, in the south Judah, they have Jerusalem as their capital. Most of Isaiah is spoken against Israel to the north. Why? Because they were just simply more corrupt. Then Judah to the south, they were rife with paganism, idolatry, child sacrifice, they were cheating widows out of their inheritance, all kinds of things were happening like that. So God tells them, "Get right with Him and become people of justice and mercy again, or it's going to be bad, my judgment is going to be horrific that's going to come upon you."

Now, the judgment that was coming upon them was the nation of Assyria. Assyria was the empire that was dominating at the time, they were annexing every country they could get their hands on. And Israel, the kingdom to the North knew that Assyria was coming for them next. So God tells him "Assyria's coming for you because of your disobedience. If you get right, I'll protect you if you don't, they're going to take you." And during the lifetime of Isaiah, in fact Israel, the Kingdom to the north, does fall to the Assyrians. He also then prophesies against the southern kingdom, Judah and Jerusalem and tells them, "you're coming next." Now, by the time he ends his prophecy and by the time Isaiah dies, they have not been conquered yet but they will eventually.

Next week in the book of comfort, he will explain very thoroughly that this judgment is coming not because God wants you to be punished, but because the punishment is designed to bring you to repentance. So the following week will be more helpful. But for now, this week, here's what we're going to be taking a look at. First of all, let's take a quick short look back to the last chapter of last week. Last week we ended with chapter 11 of Isaiah, which had the hopeful start of this 11:1 of Isaiah, "A chute will come up from the stump of Jesse from his roots, a branch will bear fruit, the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of knowledge, and the Spirit of the Lord, the root from the branch of Jesse." Who's Jesse? Jesse was King, David's father. So this is a reference to Jesus who was regularly called Son of David, the Messiah who is to come. So when we begin, it's kind of the end of that hopefulness that the Messiah will be coming when we read chapter 12.

We then get to chapters 13 through 21. And it's a whole bunch of bad news. With one interruption of a Psalm of praise. We have nine chapters of judgment against Israel's enemies, both their current enemies like Assyria, and their past enemies like the Philistines. Their enemies that are prophesied against and are cursed include Babylon, Assyria, the Philistines, Moab, Damascus, which is the capital city of Syria, Kush, which is the capital city of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Edom. So why is it that there will be prophecies against old enemies that have been long forgotten and long defeated alongside current enemies that still have yet to be defeated? Here's why. When you prophesy against an old enemy, like the Philistines, the new enemy can read that and go, Oh, I remember what happened to the Philistines, and it can serve as a lesson to them. This is what happens when you mess with God's people. So that's why the old and new enemies are mixed in there.

We then go to Isaiah 22 with a call to repentance, it's a prophecy against Jerusalem. If you don't repent, take a look at what's about to happen to Israel, that will happen to you as well. Then in Isaiah 23 and 24. There's a strange prophecy against Tyre and quote, "The whole earth". Now does that mean like the globe? Probably not. Earth in prophecy is usually a metaphor for both nations. The seas are usually a metaphor for the Gentiles. The earth is usually a metaphor for God's people Israel, and when it says the whole earth it means this is a prophecy not just against Israel in the north or Judah in the South, but against both of you together, that's probably what that means in Isaiah 23 and 24. We then go to something a little more hopeful in chapters 25 to 27, where there are some reminders that God is in charge, and there is some hope.

Then in 28 to 31, we get to a spot called 5 woes. And it's a woe against Ephraim, that's another name for the northern kingdom. A woe against Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom. A woe against the quote unquote, "obstinate nation", and quote, "Those who rely on Egypt" is the final woe. So a woe against the North, a woe against the south, a woe against you because you're obstinate, and then a woe against anyone who had tried to find help in Egypt, like, don't go to Egypt to think they're going to rescue you from my wrath, because that is not going to help you right now, In other words, what it says in these four chapters is, your hope isn't in your capital cities, it's not in your politics, it's not in your military, and it's not in your allies. turning to God is your only hope.

Then 30 to 35, we have four chapters of "get right with me, and I'll take care of your enemies". There is a solution here, you have time still, you can do this, and I will rescue you.

And then the storyline resumes, as we'll finish out the week and Isaiah, chapters 36 through 39. Up until this I'm gonna let you know it is a bit of a slog to read. That's why I've outlined what it is. So you can look for these things and get some more interest out of it and keep you engaged as you go through it. But then Isaiah 36, you can relax and go, ah, a story again, this is easier to read. And we get four chapters that gets back to the story of King Hezekiah, who ruled in Jerusalem, and King Sennacherib, who was the king of Assyria, about the attack on Jerusalem, about a prophet, a prophecy of deliverance, and about a prophet and the story of Sennacherib's failure to take Jerusalem in his first attempt to do so.

This then sets everything up for the second half of Isaiah called the Book of comfort, which comes the following week. So for what you're about to read this week, let me tell you, again, I'm not gonna lie, this is a challenging book. And this is a challenging week of reading. So in order to get the most out of it, keep this in mind. First of all, note who's being spoken against. There are sections that speak against God's people, either the kingdom to the north, or the kingdom to the south, or when it says the whole earth both kingdoms together, but it also has prophecies against their enemies. So pay attention who's being prophesied against also. As you do that note, God doesn't pick sides here. He's not saying, "Oh, you people aren't my people so I'm going to judge you simply because you're not Israelites and, oh, Israelites, you're wonderful". He also doesn't say, "Oh, Israelites, because you're denying me, I hate you, and therefore I love your enemies". No. Even as God uses Israel's enemies to discipline Israel, he still judges Israel's enemies for their evil. God always judges evil, no matter who's committing it. And God always applauds righteousness, no matter who's being righteous. The challenge is you can't be righteous outside of God. So you've got to be following God in order to be righteous, but he will always applaud righteousness, and he will always come against evil, even if it's being committed by God's people.

So that's kind of why the Scripture says, you know, judgment has to begin in the house of the Lord. There's a whole kind of thing going on today where if you criticize my side, politically whatsoever, then you must be from the extreme other side. And I reject that completely because that's simply not how the Bible is written. That's not how people think when they're actually being rational and logical. We see the evil in our own house as well. And we have to take care of it too. And God does that. Here, also, please note, there are constant and really welcome moments of light that seep in through the cracks of darkness. Even in this first half of the book of judgment. Take a look for those, you're going to need to see them like water in the desert when you find them. Next week, of course, we'll have a lot more light seeping in through the book of comfort. But even this week, in the book of judgment, we're going to see light even in the darkest times, there's hope. All right, tackle this week, find some great stuff in it. There are all kinds of treasures to be found, and I hope this teaching will help you find them. We'll see you next week.

This episode was produced by Veronica Beaver. The original theme music was written and performed by Jack Wilkins of Jack Wilkins.music.com. And me, I'm Karl Vaters and I'm your Bible reading coach.