



Isaiah's Messiah Reading Plan

December 2023

One of the Christian traditions that has made its way into our culture's experience of Christmas is Handel's *Messiah*. You know the Hallelujah chorus - ♪'HAAAAAAL-Lelujah! HAAAAAL-Lelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! - ♪ but did you know that Handel's *Messiah* is actually a meditation on Isaiah's Messiah?

A little more than two thousand years before Handel, the Holy Spirit led the prophet Isaiah to proclaim the coming of an anointed king who would come to restore God's people to Him - a 'messiah.' Handel took that promise, traced it through Jesus' Nativity and into its fulfillment in Jesus' death and resurrection and put it to music.

This Christmas season we're going to go back to the source, to Isaiah, to see the Messiah that God promised. I pray that as you read these passages, you will recognize Jesus in them and rejoice in our eternally faithful, unflinchingly righteous God.

December 4 - Isaiah 1:1-20

1. Before we get to the Messiah, we need to talk about why a Messiah was necessary in the first place. Read verses 1-10. What do they tell us about God's relationship to His people? (Remember that at this point, we're talking about the Jewish people only). What do they tell us about God's heart for His people? Why would people rather double down on rebellion and its consequences than come to God for healing?
2. Reading verse 11-17. What's shocking about these verses, given the way God's people are described in verses 1-10? What kind of worship is truly honouring to God?
3. How do verses 18-20 anticipate Jesus? What do these verses tell us about mercy and about covenant faithfulness?

December 6 – Isaiah 49:1-18

1. Read verses 1-6. How do these apply to Isaiah? How do they apply to Jesus? What do they tell us about God's commitment not just to Jewish people but to Gentiles too?
2. When you read verses 7-18, you should know that much of Israel was languishing in Exile as Isaiah wrote this. The people were not faithful to their faithful God and so God allowed them to be taken away from the Promised Land and into a foreign land. At that point, it would have been very easy for those people to feel as though God had abandoned them. Is that even possible – for God to abandon His people?

3. How can verses 14-16 be an encouragement to you? How does the restoration of Israel to Jerusalem pictured here reflect our restoration to God?

December 8 – Isaiah 11:1-10

1. Today's reading starts to bring the Messiah into focus. Read verse 1-5. What will this Messiah be like? Which of these characteristics do you need more of in your life?

2. Read verses 6-10. What will the Messiah's eternal reign be like? How can we cultivate those realities today?

December 11 – Isaiah 52:13-53:6

1. The next two readings describe the Messiah as 'the Suffering Servant.' Why was it so counterintuitive that the Redeeming Messiah would be a Suffering Servant? Why was it necessary?

2. How does this passage help you to understand what Jesus did on the Cross?

December 13 – Isaiah 53:7-12

1. Today's reading refers to the Messiah's descendants. Who are Jesus' descendants?

2. This passage presents the seemingly contradictory reality that though the Messiah would die, He would live again. How does this passage anticipate Easter and the ministry that Jesus is doing even today?

December 15 – Isaiah 42:1-13

1. How do verses 1-3 anticipate Jesus' humility? What encouragement does this give to hurting people?

2. This passage tells us that the Messiah will prioritize justice and righteousness. How do you see that expressed in Jesus' life? What will that look like when He returns?

December 18 – Isaiah 61:1-11

1. This passage anticipates that the Messiah will turn the world upside down; there will be a total reversal of circumstances. Which expression of this reversal resonates most with you?

2. Verse 3 says that the Messiah's people will be like 'oaks of righteousness.' Verse 6 says that they will be 'priests of the LORD.' That's us. What does it look like for us to be 'oaks of righteousness' and 'priests of the LORD'?

3. In Luke 4, Jesus read this passage in His hometown and then announced "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Talk about a mic drop! What does this mean for us as His followers?

December 20 – Isaiah 40:1-15

1. Why is it important to 'prepare the way for the LORD'? How did John the Baptist accomplish this? Are there ways that you need to 'prepare the way' in your heart today?

2. What images does Isaiah use to describe the LORD? How are we different from Him? What do we learn from the differences?

December 22 – Isaiah 7:1-17

1. What did the sign of 'the virgin with child' signify in Isaiah's day? Why is 'the virgin with child' sign such a significant sign to see in Jesus' birth?

2. Isaiah's words in verse 4 sound familiar to those of us who know the 'Keep calm and carry on' motto. Why is it so important for us to 'keep calm and don't be afraid on'? What happens when we focus more on the problem than on the Saviour?

3. In verse 12, Ahaz refuses to 'put the LORD to the test' by asking for a sign when YHWH Himself had invited him to ask for a sign. I wonder if Ahaz was using religious sounding language to disguise the fact that in his heart, he really didn't think that God could do anything about his problem. Are there any areas in your life where you need to expand your confidence that 'nothing is impossible for God'?

December 25 – Isaiah 9:1-7

1. Merry Christmas!

2. May the 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' be born anew in you today.

December 27 – Isaiah 32:1-8

1. The Messiah has come! But His Kingdom will not be complete until He comes again. How will life be different after Jesus' return? How will His ethics shape the world's? How can we live according to His ethics today?
2. What would it look like for you to be 'a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm' (verse 2) today?
3. Note that in v. 2, Isaiah says that we will be like 'the shadow' of a great rock in a thirsty land. Not 'like a great rock,' but 'like its shadow'? What does that mean? (I think 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 is helpful here). What does it mean for us to be 'followers of the Rock'? (And I don't mean Dwayne Johnson) ;)

December 29 - Isaiah 52:1-10

1. This passage is part of a larger unit of Scripture where God calls His people to awaken from spiritual lethargy. The people of Israel in this passage were so used to being put upon and abused by others that they got used to their chains and lived below their status as the people of God.

Here though, God says: 'Remember who you are! You are people loved by the Sovereign God! Live like it!' Are you living as the valuable, precious, treasured child of God that Jesus gave you the right to be by faith (John 1:12)? Who defines your self-concept? The world or the Lord?

2. Paul quotes verse 7 in Romans 10:15. Why is that a good verse to apply to Jesus? How does Isaiah's description of the Messiah's victory and His peoples' response here deepen your understanding of Jesus' victory and our response?