

The Heart of Isaiah

Frank Chesser

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To my Sunday morning Bible class
at the Panama Street Church of Christ
in Montgomery, Alabama,
celebrating nineteen years
of studying and learning together.

Books by Frank Chesser

Spirit of Liberalism

Portrait of God

Voyage of Faith

Thinking Right about God

The Heart of Isaiah

The Man of Chebar

Life-Changing Questions

Foreword

I am happy to have the opportunity to write the foreword for Frank Chesser's outstanding book, *The Heart of Isaiah*. Frank is imminently qualified to author this book. I have known Frank for over fifty years and he is one of my closest friends. We attended Alabama Christian College in Montgomery, Alabama, in the mid-1960s while studying for ministry. From my earliest acquaintance with him, I knew he would make an immense impact for Christ. Frank has surpassed the ordinary in doing supreme good for the cause of Christ through his teachings and writings. His writings are indicative of his comprehensive, lifelong study of God's word.

Frank Chesser uses a brilliant and enlightened approach in writing about one of the most remarkable books of the Bible, the book of Isaiah. The word "heart" is in the title because Chesser takes you to the innermost meaning of this great prophetic book. Chesser brings out the essence of God's revelation through the prophet of old, Isaiah. Many books have been written about the book of Isaiah, but Chesser's book utilizes a unique approach that will equip faithful brethren to teach from Isaiah in Bible classes, to preach lessons from Isaiah in the pulpit, and to conduct scholarly research for university coursework.

Chesser illuminates the ultimate nature of the teachings found in the book of Isaiah. He identifies, classifies, and presents the attributes of the book in clear and concise words. Powerful truths can be comprehended by the methodology employed by this outstanding writer. He has spent more than forty years studying, teaching, preaching, and writing about the Old Testament prophets. *The Heart of Isaiah* is one of his greatest achievements. Chesser's knowledge of both the major and minor biblical prophets has given him keen insights into the character and nature of the living God. He avoids the "keyhole" approach to a study of the scriptures and achieves a broad spectrum of Bible knowledge. He is also eloquent in oration and preaches marvelous, heart-stirring, and soul-searching sermons using various texts from the book of Isaiah. He has used the format in this book for teaching the Old Testament and New Testament since 1970. The reader will quickly see that Chesser has a profound appreciation for the awesome God in the book of Isaiah.

Many people have numerous questions about the book of Isaiah. It is important not only to ask questions, but to ask the right questions. Some teachers pose questions to students only to leave the questions unanswered and the students confused. However, in *The Heart of Isaiah*, Chesser asks the right questions and then allows the holy Word of God to supply the answers.

In *The Heart of Isaiah*, the author does not apologize for what Isaiah wrote concerning God's strictness, judgment, and retribution. Many writers

today soften the pronouncements of God against those practicing disobedience, sin, arrogance, and wickedness. They attempt to minimize and even ignore God's righteous anger against those who wilfully practice sin. Some even teach that there is nothing man can do to incur the wrath of God. Chesser refuses to acquiesce to that false doctrine and instead unshackles the Word of God to reveal the God of the Bible. He gives the reader insight into the true God revealed in the divine revelation.

While Chesser's book brings out the pronouncements of God's judgments on those practicing disobedience, it also accentuates the redemption that was to come to man through the seed of woman (the virgin birth) in the redemptive act of Christ on the cross. God's righteousness makes it impossible for Him to overlook and disregard man's sin. Chesser's book makes clear the fullness of God's character, rather than focusing on only one facet of His nature. God possesses many attributes. Sin demands that God mete out punishment for wickedness, but God's attribute of love for His people is clearly seen in the book of Isaiah. Chesser highlights the comfort and hope for the future of God's people by pointing out the love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God that will be offered to all through the crucified and resurrected Christ. Christ, our Lord, had the heart of a servant. In patterning his life after Christ, Frank Chesser has developed the heart of a servant as well. This great man of God is held in high esteem by his colleagues and all who have come into contact with him. He is highly respected for his scholarship, his speaking ability, and his extraordinary writing skills. His writings are exceptional. He has remarkable intelligence and talent. It is with great joy that I recommend *The Heart of Isaiah*. I believe it will have a wide circulation, because it will appeal to a diversified field of readers. It should be read by preachers desirous of becoming more effective and by Christians seeking to increase their Bible knowledge. It should also be studied in universities, colleges, and preacher training schools as a course textbook. I found this book revealing, enlightening, and uplifting, and I expect you will as well.

Demar Elam, DMin
Chancellor Asian Christian University
Director Open Door Ministry

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To my good friend, James Andrews, for the long and arduous hours he has expended to bring this book to publication. His abilities as an editor are unexcelled.

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And to Cherry, my dear wife, for her grammar and typing skills and whose continuous support assured the reality of this book.

Editor's Preface

“Understandest thou what thou readest?” In Acts 8:30, Philip asked the Ethiopian that question. He had been reading aloud from the book of Isaiah and needed help in understanding its message. People in our world today, including many Christians, also need help understanding the deep truths of the prophets of God.

Frank Chesser has spent years in study, and is wise and capable in his analysis of Isaiah's message from God and the times in which it was proclaimed. As deep and detailed as this study is, Chesser never allows us to lose sight of the overall purpose and message of this prophet of God and the broader perspective of how it fits into the overall biblical theme.

Chesser uniquely leads us through a study of all 66 chapters of Isaiah, one chapter at a time. Interspersed through the investigation of each chapter are questions to help the student understand God's message given through Isaiah and the implications of it. Answers to all the questions are included in the back of the book—readily accessible, but not too easily available.

This rich study, in a textbook format, is perfect for many settings. Consider the following:

- Sunday school classes are an ideal situation for delving into this study of writings which were preserved “for our learning” (Romans 15:4).
- College-level classes can use this textbook to search for Isaiah's truths in deep and detailed ways.
- Homeschooling families with high school students will benefit from using this book as an aid for a semester of Bible study—and be sure to give appropriate credit on a transcript.
- A private home environment will offer a husband and wife an opportunity to explore the book of Isaiah together.
- Any dedicated student of God's Word can glean great riches from Isaiah's pen by spending a few minutes daily in this book.

Thank you, Frank Chesser, for sharing the benefits of your labor. Those of us at Publishing Designs, Inc. feel privileged to participate in making this product of your years of study an accessible blessing to countless students of the Word.

Elizabeth Kee
Associate editor

Preface

The prophets were unique men. They were spokesmen for God. God used them to reveal His will to individuals, groups, and nations. Enoch was the first prophet of God (Jude 14-15), with Abraham serving as the second (Gen. 20:7). God informed Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet and would intercede for him in prayer that his life might be spared. In an effort to excuse himself from taking the leading role in delivering Israel from Egypt, Moses pointed to his weakness in oratory skills (Exod. 4:10). God provided Aaron to serve as Moses' "prophet" (Exod. 7:1) to reveal God's will to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:2). Moses is described as a prophet to whom Christ was likened (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22) and as being characterized at his death, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).

During the period of the judges, God sent an unnamed prophet to rebuke Israel when they complained under Midian's oppression (Judg. 6:8-10), but it was not until Samuel that a continuous line of prophets commenced their work with the nation of Israel. Peter alluded to this truth when he referred to the redemptive work of Christ and said, "Yea, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those that follow after have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:24). Schools or bands of prophets were formulated under Samuel's leadership and served as God's spokesmen to the people of Israel.

Israel needed a prophet, not a king. Israel's demand for a king was an act of rejection of God's "reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). Israel's rebellion against God's rule intensified their need of a prophet. Saul needed Samuel, but what Saul needed, he did not want. His self-will disposition left no room for a prophet to work in his life. When Saul refused to implement God's will regarding the Amalekites, "Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death" (1 Sam. 15:35). In contrast to Saul, David never lost his need and desire of a prophet from God to aid him in his spiritual life and his performance of God's will. He enjoyed the companionship and spiritual assistance of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. It was to his ruin that Solomon's quest for what men "should do under the heaven all the days of their life" (Eccles. 2:3) did not include a prophet. There is no record of Solomon's summoning Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo (1 Chron. 9:24), or any other prophet into his presence for spiritual aid or instruction.

The divided kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17) and the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25) witnessed the rise and work of the writing prophets, with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi laboring on the other side of the Babylonian captivity. Though not numbered among the writing prophets, 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13 narrate the great work of Elijah and Elisha. With the exception of Jonah, the writing prophets were among the most extraordinary spiritual men to ever live upon the

earth. They appeared in Israel and Judah when “the heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money” (Micah 3:11), when the “good man is perished out of the earth” (Micah 7:2), and when fathers and sons frequent the same harlot to profane the holy name of God (Amos 2:12). They were called by God when there was “no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land” (Hos. 4:1), when the law of God was viewed “as a strange thing” (Hos. 8:11), when the leaders of the people burned incense to idols, declaring, “The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth” (Ezek. 8:12), and when their considered freedom to sin with impunity was viewed as occurring in a place of spiritual safety (Jer. 7:8-11).

Isaiah was an eighth century prophet to “Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” (Isa. 1:1). His majestic book reveals the heart of God and his own heart as it relates to sin, punishment, restoration, and redemption. It is full of divine wrath and judgment, but since God experiences “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezek. 33:11), every announcement and demonstration thereof was divine grief on display. Isaiah’s heart shared kinship with the heart of God. He rejoiced over restoration and redemption, but wept over sin and judgment. Though kinsmen in the flesh, the Moabites were bitter enemies of Israel, yet Isaiah bewailed the necessity of God’s judgment on Moab, affirming, “My heart shall cry out for Moab” (Isa. 15:5). As he ponders the ruin of Moab’s agricultural life, he cries, “I will water thee with my tears” (Isa. 16:9), and he borrows the mournful melody of a harp to describe the immense anguish sweeping over his deepest emotions (Isa. 16:11).

When Isaiah contemplated the suffering that the people would experience when God’s judgment afflicted Babylon, he portrayed the deep sorrow of his own heart in terms of the pain of a woman in childbirth (Isa. 21:3-4), and when he reflected upon the punishment that God would inflict upon Jerusalem, he cried, “Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labor not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people” (Isa. 22:4). Isaiah is a portrayal of God’s nature, heart, and attributes, but it is also a revelation of the heart of one of God’s greatest prophets.

Introduction

Isaiah preached to the nation of Judah for approximately fifty years during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (2 Kings 15:20; 2 Chron. 26-32). Micah was his contemporary in Judah while Hosea and Amos labored with the northern kingdom of Israel.

Judah was ripe for judgment. The first fifteen verses of chapter 1 sets the tragic tone for the first thirty-five chapters of the book. Though interspersed with promises regarding the restoration of Israel to Canaan and the coming of Christ and His kingdom, the church, the bulk of this first section of Isaiah focuses on sin and judgment.

Isaiah's preaching reaches beyond Judah to embrace the pagan nations. Eleven chapters (13-23) depict God's wrath against ten heathen nations. Since Judah had adopted pagan life as its own, one chapter (22) addresses God's judgment on Jerusalem. Judah's sin was so grievous that the people are likened unto Sodom and Gomorrah (1:10). The land was full of idols (2:8). They had reversed the roles of good and evil (5:20). They were hypocrites and evildoers (9:17), and their legal system promoted the oppression of widows and orphans (10:1-2). The nation was void of spiritual instruction because their priests and prophets were drunkards (28:7), their rulers were liars (28:15), and the people desired prophets who would offer justification for their sin by supplanting the truth with words of deceit (30:9-10).

Isaiah's name means "God is salvation." His wife was a prophetess (8:3). They had two sons: Shear-jashub 'a remnant shall return' and Maher-shalal-hash-baz 'the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth.'

The very names of Isaiah and his sons depict the background of redemption in Genesis 3-12.

1. Judah, Israel, and the pagan nations would be "prey" and "spoil" under God's judgment. This points to sin and its consequences (Gen. 3:6).
2. Isaiah's name points to the redemption flowing through the "seed" of woman and Abraham (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 22:18) to be enjoyed by the spiritual "remnant" as depicted by the meaning of Shear-jashub's name.

Isaiah 36-39 are historical chapters with a backward and forward look. Chapters 36 and 37 look back to Assyria, Judah's primary enemy in chapters 1-35. Isaiah pointed to Assyria as the rod of judgment that God would use to mightily afflict the nation of Judah (Isa. 10:5-6). Sennacherib, king of Assyria, conquered the fortress cities of Judah (Isa. 36:1) and expressed his intention to take Jerusalem (Isa. 36:2-20). But God said, "I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake" (Isa. 37:35). He did so with a

mighty judgment upon Sennacherib and his army (Isa. 37:36-38). Isaiah 38-39 looked forward to God's judgment upon Judah with the rod of Babylon.

Isaiah 40 commences the third and final section of this spiritually opulent book. There are three words in this chapter that are unexcelled in significance in the whole of God's revelation to man. It would not be hyperbole to describe these words as the theme of the Bible: "Behold your God" (40:9). These three words point back to the four words with which God initiates the incremental revelatory unfolding of His mind to man's mind: "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1). These two statements are paralytic in their impact upon the mind. They are incomprehensible relative to the fullness of their containment. The Bible is indeed a portrait of God.

Isaiah is a commentary on the majestic attributes of God, the tragic nature and consequences of sin, and the marvelous principles of redemption flowing through the "seed of woman" (Gen. 3:15) to which Isaiah specifically points in his prophecy of the virgin birth (7:14) that would reach fruition through the righteous remnant of the seed of Abraham.

Outline of Isaiah:

1. Sin and judgment: 1-35.
2. Historical, transitional chapters: 36-39.
3. Comfort and hope: 40-66.

Chapter 1

Isaiah 1-12 constitutes a unit. Chapters 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 7:14; 9:1-7; and 11-12 depict redemption through Christ. But the primary emphasis in this 12-chapter unit is judgment upon Judah. This commencement section of Isaiah mirrors the background of redemption in Genesis 3-12. Genesis 3:6 is the introduction to sin, Genesis 3:15 introduces redemption through Christ, and Genesis 12:3 closes this inspired segment by enlarging on this divine sentiment. Genesis 3:6 is the beginning of man's problem, and Genesis 3:15 and 12:3 point to God's remedy in Christ.

Genesis 3:6 is sin in a singular state, and Isaiah 1:2-15 is sin in its full-grown state, having enveloped an entire nation of people. Genesis 3:6 is sin in infancy, and Isaiah 1:2-15 is sin in maturity. These first 12 chapters of Isaiah close with two chapters (11 and 12) that delineate redemption through Christ, looking back to the inception of redemption in Genesis 3:15 and 12:3.

Though not intending to suggest that such was the objective of inspiration regarding this section, it is nonetheless worthy of reflection that this inspired portrait occurs repetitiously throughout the Old Testament, sometimes involving entire books. The beginning and end of the Old Testament press this truth. On the other side of God's perfect world (Gen. 1-2), Genesis 3:6 is the commencement of sin, and Malachi 4:5-6 points to redemption through Christ by announcing the coming of John the Baptist who would affirm, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). As we journey with God across four thousand years of human history, allowing His mind to instruct our mind, He will not let us forget what transpired in Genesis 3-12.

1. (v. 1) What word points to God as the source of Isaiah's discourses?

Though his ministry embraced Israel and the pagan nations, who were its primary focus?

During the reigns of what four kings did Isaiah work?

2. (v. 2) Who is called upon to bear witness to God's indictment of Judah?

What had God done for the nation?

What was their response?

3. (v. 3) What contrast is set forth in verse 3?

4. (v. 4) What four terms are used to describe Judah's conduct?

What two phrases are used to describe Judah's conduct?

What impact did this have upon God?

How is God described?

5. (vv. 5-6) What would further chastisement bring?

How is their present state described?

6. (v. 7) What description is given of the land of Judah due to judgments because of their sin?

7. (v. 8) What three phrases describe the weak and frail state of Jerusalem in the presence of their enemies?

8. (v. 9) Though national rebellion against God has characterized Judah, what has been preserved?

What would Judah's condition be were this not the case?

How does Paul use this text? (Rom. 9:29).

9. (v. 10) To whom does Isaiah liken the rulers and people of Judah?

What does He call upon them to do?

Worship consistent with God's design is inconceivably significant. It is not possible to overstate this truth. Man's vertical relationship with God in worship according to His will has horizontal implications that embrace and impact every aspect of life. It fosters purity of life and blesses the home. It generates honesty in business and proper choices and conduct in recreation. It lessens the intensity of temptation and abates the injurious power of trials. It promotes gratitude, stimulates benevolence, and stills the spirit. It motivates proper thinking about God, the secret to victorious living.

Verses 11-15 paint a tragic picture of Judah's hypocrisy in worship. Their hands were replete with sacrifices, but their hearts were full of sin. Can a nation that calls "evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20) rightfully expect God to accept their sacrificial offerings? Will God hear a man who refuses to hear Him? (Prov. 28:9). Judah had forgotten what David learned. God wanted their sacrifices and their assemblies with Him on feast and holy days. He had ordained them. But only when wed to "a broken and a contrite heart" (Ps. 51:17). There is no substitute for a heart in recognition of its spiritual poverty before God (Matt. 5:3), bathed in tears of penitence.

10. (v. 11) What quantity of sacrifices was Judah bringing to God?

What was God's attitude toward them?

11. (v. 12) What does God wish for Judah to understand about this endless stream of trampling feet and bloody sacrifices endeavoring to appear before Him?

12. (vv. 13-14) What seven words or phrases does God use to describe His attitude toward Judah's sacrifices, assemblies and feast days which He had ordained?

13. (v. 15) What was God's attitude toward Judah's prayers, and why? (See also 1 Peter 3:12.)

14. (vv. 16-17) What eight commands are given by which Judah needed to express repentance and reformation of life?

15. (v. 18) What does God call upon Judah to do?

What offer does He make?

How is it depicted?

16. (vv. 19-20) What conditions, promise, and warning are set before Judah?

How is the certainty thereof pressed?

17. (vv. 21-23) What three terms or phrases describe Jerusalem's past?

What six terms or phrases depict her present state?

18. (vv. 24-25) In what two ways does God depict Himself?

What action is He going to take with regard to His enemies?

In what would His judgment result?

19. (vv. 26-27) What would God restore in Judah?

What would Jerusalem be called?

By what would Jerusalem be redeemed?

20. (vv. 28-31) What are the two basic points of these verses?

Chapter 2

This chapter commences with the first prophecy of Isaiah pointing to Pentecost of Acts 2. It contains specific truths regarding the when and how that the church Jesus promised to build would become a reality in the world and the nature of the life of its members (vv. 2-4). Judah supplanted the light of truth with idols, sorcery, and materialism, and God left them to their own devices (vv. 5-9). God will exalt Himself as He shakes the earth in His judgment upon Judah, destroying their idols and expunging the haughty looks of the proud. Moles and bats will be the companions of their idols, and Judah will learn too late the futility of trusting in man for deliverance (vv. 10-22).

1. (v. 1) What did Isaiah see, and concerning whom?

The Old Testament looks forward to the two greatest events in all of human history—the coming of Christ and the establishment of the church of Christ. When sin became a reality, God headed toward Calvary. Sin left man in a state of spiritual paralysis. God, clothed in flesh, having lived a perfect life and suffering the agonies of the damned on Calvary is man’s only hope. Jesus paid the price of man’s redemption “through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20) in the “body of his flesh through death” (Col. 1:22).

The church of Christ is the product of the gospel of Christ that centers in the cross of Christ. On Pentecost of Acts 2, the gospel was preached in its consummated form “beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Some three thousand obeyed the gospel and were “added to the church” (Acts 2:47) that Jesus said, “I will build” (Matt. 16:18). The following three verses is a prophecy of this monumental event. The prophet Micah, Isaiah’s contemporary, also preached this great truth (4:1-3).

2. (v. 2) When would the church become a reality?

How is it depicted? (Acts 2:16-17; 1 Tim. 3:15).

3. (v. 2) What two phrases point to the greatness of the church?

Who would flow into it? (Matt. 28:19-20).