JUNE 2024 THURSDAY 3:00 pm BIBLE STUDY: **The Three Isaiahs**

Led by Pastor Mandy Derr

ZOOM LINK:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82936780016?pwd=dm8wL3V1bXVaZldybHQzSXVpZG9OZz09>.

**June 6**:   INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Why is studying Isaiah useful to us?

**1. In public worship on Sundays and regular holidays, we have more readings from the Book of Isaiah than from any other book of the Hebrew Scriptures.**

A. Over our 3-year Sunday lectionary cycle, we read 51 times from the Book of Isaiah:

14 times in series A – the year of Matthew; about 33%, every Sunday in Advent

22 times in series B – the year of Mark which we’re in now; about 40%.

15 times in series C – the year of Luke; about 33%

B. If you add in the possibility of Isaiah readings at the Easter Vigil (2) and

commemorations and occasions (8) there are 10 more possible times each year.

**2. Traditionally, Isaiah was thought to have one author: Isaiah, son of Amoz (1:1) whose ministry is dated from “the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1) ca. 734 BCE.**

A. In the 11th Century CE, a Jewish rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, suggested more than one author.

B. In the 18th and 19th Century CE, when biblical scholars (mostly German Lutheran) began studying the words and context of Isaiah and other biblical books, (historical critical method) and ever since, the idea that there is at least 3 authors within the book of Isaiah has been generally accepted by most biblical scholars except fundamentalists.

**3. Understanding this is critically important for understanding the prophetic message.**

A. The message of all the prophetic books is about justice as God’s intent for God’s covenant people. The prophets insist that God has a measuring device “plumb line” in Amos (a contemporary of the first Isaiah) by which God judges the people. Simply stated this is “Love the LORD with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself.” Both first Isaiah 1:10-18 and Micah (6:8) put that this way:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
    and what does the Lord require of you  
 but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
    and to walk humbly with your God?

This is a critique of Israel and Judah’s leaders and the reason both are judged guilty. For the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE, this is total destruction by the Assyrians.

For the southern kingdom of Judah in 587 BCE, this was exile in Babylon.

B. By holding the whole Book of Isaiah together, the message of the prophet(s) is reduced to prediction about the future and not about justice in the present. This allows those who read the prophets this way to ignore the chief prophetic message that made sense to the prophets’ hearers at the time of the prophet’s ministry.

C. When we understand the Book of Isaiah as coming from at least three different

Prophetic writers, we can read each prophet in his historical context and see how the prophetic message of judgment and promise is proclaimed in their time and can also be proclaimed in our time.

**4. What constitutes each prophet, time, and place for each Isaiah? Where does each begin and end?**

A. First Isaiah is chapters 1-39; the prophecies of Isaiah, son of Amoz beginning 732 BCE through ca. 701 BCE. In Jerusalem during the destruction of Israel in 722 BCE and the rise of Babylon threatening Judah.

B. Second Isaiah is chapters 40-54; unknown prophet, around 538 BCE in Babylon, responding to the victory of Cyrus the Persian and his invitation that the Jews return to Jerusalem.

C. Third Isaiah, chapters 55-66; unknown prophet; between 520 to closer to 400 BCE, possibly Jerusalem during the rebuilding of the Temple, the city, and the beginnings of Hellenist Judaism after the conquests of Alexander the Great.

D. Fourth Isaiah (or more?), chapters 24-27, “the little apocalypse,” unknown prophet; Jerusalem? Around 300-200 BCE; time of persecution by the Hellenistic Ptolemies or Seleucids? Maybe this is the compiler of one book?