

BIBLE READING NOTES FOR DECEMBER 2022
Compiled by Rev Dr J Jack for the Congregation of Duddingston Kirk

You will find reading the Bible rewarding and encouraging,
but reading the Bible is not always easy!

These guidelines may help you.

Before you read each passage, ask God to speak to you through His Word.

Set aside a special time each day to read the Bible, and stick to it!

Make use of your Bible index to find readings – every Bible has a contents page.

Pray that what you have read will help you live according to God's wishes.

December 1st Isaiah 1:1-3

Isaiah wrote during the reigns of four kings of Judah in the latter half of the 8th century BC. It was a time of great upheaval for this small nation. He was deeply concerned with both the message God had given him to declare and also the political affairs of his country. In Isaiah, religion and politics were not only mixed but thoroughly inter-related. Because of this double concern with both religion and politics, Isaiah swings from moments of great spiritual vision to times of deep despair when he sees how his people have rejected God.

December 2nd Isaiah 1:4-9

Isaiah sees all Judah's national and social troubles as the direct result of their rejection of God. Judah is likened to a body that is full of sores, bruises and wounds. The capital city, Jerusalem, is as defenseless as a garden shed. A great theme in this whole book is no matter how great the disaster God of His infinite goodness and grace always allows a few to survive. This is frequently referred to in this book.

December 3rd Isaiah 1:1-10

Isaiah now speaks directly to Jerusalem, the political and religious capital of the nation. In the Temple religious services and sacrifices still go on, yet they are totally displeasing to God, 'I am tired of the blood of bulls; I am disgusted with the smell of incense you burn; I hate your New Moon Festivals, they are a burden that I am tired of bearing.' They displeased God. The mere action of religious duties do not impress God. God is more concerned with the inner thoughts of the mind, the inner feelings of the heart.

December 4th Isaiah 1:21-31

Jerusalem had once been faithful, now it is not; its leaders were once righteous men, now they are not; once it was rich like silver and good wine, now it is worthless and insipid. Just as a church can grow in spiritual strength and vitality, so also it can decline and lose that vitality. God is not interested in what a church was once, in the 'good old days' God is concerned with what it is NOW.

December 5th Isaiah 2:1-5

Although Isaiah was terribly aware of the sins of his country, he was equally aware of God's great plan for the future. He sees Zion, the hill on which the Temple was built, standing as a beacon for the whole world. Crowds will flock to it because of its moral and spiritual purity. Note that this moral and spiritual purity will bring international peace.

December 6th Isaiah 2:6-22

Isaiah turns from a vision of future blessing to the reality of the world around him. Note the causes of Judah's ruin – magic, alien customs, affluence, military might (horses and chariots), idols, obsession with man-made things. These have become the principal concerns of people, who still pay lip service to the faith. Isaiah, like the other prophets, sees a future day when God's righteous judgment will be made plain. That will be a day of terrible disgrace and humiliation for all who have turned away from God.

December 7th Isaiah 3:1-12

Several ideas are fused together here. a) God will punish His people by removing their leaders. b) These leaders have misled the people. c) The new leaders will be immature and the ensuing chaos will be the punishment of the people. d) their sin was the open rejection of God. e) Through all the chaos righteous men will know peace but evil men are doomed.

December 8th Isaiah 3:13-15

The central issue here is Divine Judgement. Many ignore this, thinking it incompatible with a God of mercy and love. Yet the Bible speaks frequently of Judgement. We cannot avoid it. Notice that it is the 'elders and leaders' who will be judged. All will be judged, but those called to places of authority in both Church and State bear the most responsibility.

December 9th Isaiah 3:16-4:1

Both Amos and Isaiah see the women of their time so obsessed with fashion and self-ornamentation that they have no time for God. This emphasis on appearance is a form of blasphemy. Note that their punishment will 'fit the crime' – instead of using perfumes, they will stink! How far should Christians conform to, or differ from, social customs and fashions?

December 10th Isaiah 4:2-6

Again Isaiah looks to the day when God will restore Jerusalem. We are given a glimpse of what might happen if only man learnt to submit to God. The holiness of a community comes only when the individual members of it are themselves holy.

December 11th Isaiah 5:1-7

Isaiah tells a parable about a vineyard that was given every attention yet succeeded in yielding only sour grapes. As a result it was abandoned and left to go wild. The meaning is given in v.7. Israel was given every attention by God, but responded by immoral behaviour. Note how Jesus expanded this parable in Matt.21:33-45.

December 12th Isaiah 5:8-17

'You are doomed!' is stated six times, together with the reasons for this awesome judgement. The first reason is foolish husbandry – men are busy adding to their possessions, yet failing to cultivate the land and so produce adequate crops. The second reason lies in being too concerned with drink and enjoyment. In their self-indulgence they completely fail to see God's hand in the affairs of their nation. Is it possible that God is more active in daily affairs than we realize?

December 13th Isaiah 5:18-25

Note how evil progresses. The people are now trapped in their sins and think God is no longer concerned with their affairs. They fail to realize that it is their own sin, which is blinding them to God's action. Their moral understanding has become completely warped, 'you call evil good and call good evil.' They are proud of what they think is their own cleverness and are now quite corrupt and utterly useless in society. Isaiah calls them 'heroes

of the wine bottle' that is the extent of their interest in life! We are constantly growing. If we are not growing in virtue then we are growing in evil. We have no other choice. Those who think God absent from the world are blinded by their own evil, and go on to rejoice in their own foolishness thinking it is wisdom!

December 14th Isaiah 5:26-30

Isaiah is here saying that God can use foreign nations as the instrument of judgement upon God's own people. This is something many find difficult to accept and understand, yet it is true. Here we see Isaiah's grasp of international affairs as well as God's judgement. Here also we see the marks of a truly wise man – breadth of vision, and depth of understanding. Is God using other nations today to discipline the so-called Christian West?

December 15th Isaiah 6:1-5

Isaiah receives a vision of Divine splendour to confirm his faith. This vision occurred in a sad year for Judah. Uzziah had been a good king, and had reigned for many years, yet the latter part of his reign had been marred by leprosy. It was while in the depth of sadness that Isaiah saw God in His glory. God often reveals Himself most clearly to His people in their times of trouble. For Isaiah the whole Temple was filled with the glory of God. It was an unforgettable experience. But it was also a time when he was most aware of his own sin.

December 16th Isaiah 6:6-13

Such an experience could not leave Isaiah unmarked. His lips, which were later to proclaim God's message, were cleansed by the living fire from the altar. But look at the message he was to proclaim! It was a message of doom. Sometimes God's servants must speak in terms of rebuke and warning. The 'good news' of the Gospel only comes to hearts that are ready to receive it. We have to be made aware of our own utter helplessness before we can really grasp the wonder of God's love.

December 17th Isaiah 7:1-9

Here is a time of great fear for the people of Jerusalem. Their city is besieged by two larger nations – Israel and Syria. Little wonder that the king and his people trembled like trees in the wind. Very often God's message seems contrary to sound sense and experience. Our personal faith, or lack of it, has a greater influence over local circumstances than we will ever realize. Even Jesus could do no miracle in Nazareth through the lack of faith there. What difference does faith make in my own life?

December 18th Isaiah 7:10-16

The rest of this chapter is hard to understand. It would seem that, in spite of Isaiah's call for a steadfast faith, King Ahaz was intent on some political settlement. Isaiah tells him to ask God for confirmation, but Ahaz refuses to do this. In a dramatic illustration Isaiah tells him that before many years are past the kings of Israel and Syria will have gone. v14 is often used as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. It is uncertain that Isaiah was thinking so far ahead when the prophecy was made, but there is no doubt that it is very relevant to the Incarnation. Prophecy may sometimes have this double application; a short term and then a long-term fulfillment.

December 19th Isaiah 7:17-25

The central message of those verses frequently occurs in the Bible, yet many still find it difficult to believe. If God's people continue to rebel, then God may well use their enemies as

agents of God's wrath and punishment. The rest of this passage depicts the devastation that will result from the attack by those enemies.

December 20th Isaiah 8:1-4

We may think it cruel, but long ago children were often given names with a special meaning. It was their form of 'visual aid', a kind of personal testimony. Note how it was given an authority by the priests who were to serve as witnesses. Note also the time was limited to a few years. When God judges a nation, God's punishment may come immediately, or be delayed for some years, but it will come.

December 21st Isaiah 8:5-10

See the contrast between the 'quiet waters of Shiloah' and the 'flood waters of Euphrates'. The ungodly generally reveal a loud, arrogant, aggressive, over-bearing manner, whereas those in whom God's spirit dwells have quietness and a confidence, which is quite different. Even though the Assyrian forces will 'flood' over the nation, still 'God is with us'. This may seem contradictory, yet there is truth in it. God never punishes in vindictive anger. Always God's desire is that God's children may repent and know again God's love.

December 22nd Isaiah 8:11-15

'Everyone is doing it' is often given as a reason for doing something that is wrong. There are times when God's people must be content to be in the minority. To be obedient to God often requires courage, obedience and sacrifice. It also requires a strong confidence in God's love and purpose for mankind.

December 23rd Isaiah 8:16-9:1

These verses show two results of faithlessness. The first is a growing interest in the occult and spiritualism. These are real, but they are not of God, and so should be unremittingly avoided by all God's people. The second is a lack of purpose in life, and so all that can be seen is nothing but trouble, doom and disaster. Life without faith is a life of darkness. Only with faith can there be seen any purpose or reason.

December 24th Isaiah 9:2-7

Whether Isaiah realized it or not his words have their supreme fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ. How wonderful that God should reveal to His prophet something that was yet seven centuries in the future. Notice how the 'light at the end of the tunnel' is now a 'great light' and it brings joy and happiness. How wonderful also that this light focuses on a child who will be called 'Mighty God', 'Prince of Peace', and that He will rule 'until the end of time'.

December 25th Isaiah 9:8-17

Yesterday we thought of the 'Mighty God, Prince of Peace' who was to come. Today we return to the disaster of present punishment. Here is the prophet's dilemma. He can see both God's final triumph and man's present suffering. The Light has come into the world to dispel the darkness. Let us enjoy that Light today!

December 26th Isaiah 9:18-10:4

Note how both the wickedness of the people and the punishment from God are likened to a fire burning all in its path. Is it possible for human wickedness to be a form of divine punishment?

December 27th Isaiah 10:5-19

Isaiah says with greater clarity something at which he has already hinted, that God will use a pagan power as the instrument of punishment. The great power of Assyria is to be used like a club to beat Judah! Assyria may boast of its conquest of Judah, but God is still in control. God is the hand that wields the club.

December 28th Isaiah 10:20-34

This passage really ought to be read backwards!! Here is Isaiah's '*doctrine of the Remnant*' of those who will survive and be the source of a new nation. TO THINK ABOUT – Do the 'remnant' survive because of their own virtue, or because of God's mercy and grace?

December 29th Isaiah 11:1-9

The remnant will be like new shoots growing from the stump of a tree which has been felled. For the Christian this prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in the birth of Christ. For here is a beautiful vision of how life could be in a world that is Christ centered.

December 30th Isaiah 11:10-13

Here is a gathering of the nations under the sovereign purposes of God. Isaiah's vision has a new king gathering together the people of God from all over and uniting us in peace. Here is our hope for the future as we enter into a New Year with new opportunities to serve.

December 31st Isaiah 12

Let us give thanks for the year now ending. Let us not take for granted the many blessings that we have encountered but also the help and strength we have experienced from God in the difficult time. Thanks be to God!