

Introduction to Isaiah

Timeline



Author and Date

Isaiah was called to his prophetic ministry “in the year that King Uzziah died” (**6:1**), around 740 B.C. He lived long enough to record the death of Sennacherib (**37:38**), in 681. However, most of the book can be dated only in very general terms because few specific dates are given.

Theme

The central theme of the book is God himself, who does all things for his own glory (**48:11**). Isaiah defines everything else by how it relates to God: is it rightly related to him as the center of all reality (**45:22–25**)? God’s people find strength only as they rest in the promises of their God (**30:15**). They find refreshment only as they delight themselves in his word (**55:1–2**). To serve his cause is their worthy devotion (**ch. 62**), but to rebel against him is endless death (**66:24**).

Simplified Overview of Isaiah

	Isaiah 1–39	Isaiah 40–55	Isaiah 56–66
Date and Setting	The eighth century B.C. (700s); the Assyrian threat	Prophecies for the sixth century B.C. (500s); the Babylonian exile	Prophecies about all times and occasions until the end
Audience	God’s rebellious people craving worldly security	God’s defeated people under worldly domination	All who hold fast to God’s covenant
Actions	God purifies a remnant of his apostate people through judgment	God encourages his discouraged people in exile	God prepares all of his true people for his promised salvation
Message	“In returning and rest you shall be saved; . . . But you were unwilling” (30:15)	“the glory of the LORD shall be revealed” (40:5)	“Keep justice, and do righteousness” (56:1)

Key Themes

1. God is offended by religious practices that come from an empty heart or a careless life (**1:10–17; 58:1–12; 66:1–4**)
2. God's true people will someday become a multinational community of worship and peace that will last forever (**2:2–4; 56:3–8; 66:18–23**). They will be the predominant culture of a new world (**14:1–2; 41:8–16; 43:3–7; 60:1–22**)
3. God opposes human pride (**2:10–17; 13:11; 23:9**)
4. The foolish idols that man creates are destined for destruction (**2:20–21; 44:9–20; 46:1–7**)
5. God's judgment will reduce Israel to a remnant. From this remnant he will raise up a holy people (**1:9; 6:1–12:6; 40:1–2**)
6. God sometimes judges people by making them deaf and blind to his saving word (**29:9–14**)
7. The only hope of the world is in one man. He is the promised Davidic king (**7:14; 9:2–7; 11:1–10**), the servant of the Lord (**42:1–9; 52:13–53:12**), the anointed preacher of the gospel (**61:1–3**), and the victor over all evil (**63:1–6**)
8. God uses everything, even human sin, for his own glory (**44:24–45:13**)
9. All people are called to repent of sin and trust in God alone (**12:2; 26:3–4; 32:17–18; 50:10; 66:2**)
10. Often, when God's people feel abandoned by him (**40:27**), they foolishly trust in worldly powers (**31:1–3; 39:1–8**)
11. God will vindicate his cause with a world-transforming display of his glory (**11:10; 40:3–5; 52:10; 59:19**)
12. God is guiding all of human history (**41:1–4; 44:6–8; 46:8–11**)
13. God's faithfulness and the certainty of his final victory should motivate his people to pray and to be obedient (**56:1–2; 62:1 – 64:12**)
14. The wrath of God is to be feared above all else (**9:19; 13:9, 13; 30:27; 34:2; 66:15–16**)

Outline

- I Introduction: “Ah, Sinful Nation!” **(1:1–5:30)**
- II God Redefines the Future of His People: “Your Guilt Is Taken Away” **(6:1–12:6)**
- III God’s Judgment and Grace for the World: “We Have a Strong City” **(13:1–27:13)**
- IV God’s Sovereign Word Spoken into the World: “Ah!” **(28:1–35:10)**
- V Historical Transition: “In Whom Do You Now Trust?” **(36:1–39:8)**
- VI Encouragement for God’s Exiles: “The Glory of the Lord Shall Be Revealed” **(40:1–55:13)**
- VII How to Prepare for the Coming Glory: “Hold Fast My Covenant” **(56:1–66:24)**

The Near East at the Time of Isaiah

c. 740 B.C.

The prophecies of Isaiah took place during the rise of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria posed a great threat to Israel and Judah as well as the entire Near East.



Isaiah: “God Saves,” or “The Salvation of the Lord.”

With 66 chapters, Isaiah is the longest of the writing prophets; actually the longest in the entire Bible.

If you read two chapters a day, you can read through Isaiah in an unhurried fashion in a little over a month.

Since Isaiah is so long, we will just note a few “extras” that you might look up to increase your appreciation of the book:

New Testament references to Isaiah:

7:14—Matthew 1: 22-23

9:1-2—Matthew 4: 12-16

28:16—1 Peter 2: 4-6

40:3-5—Matthew 3: 1-3; Luke 3:4

42:1-4—Matthew 12: 15-21

42:6—Luke 2:28-32

53:1; 65:1—Romans 10: 16,20

53:1; 6:10—John 12: 38-41

References to Jesus:

Virgin Birth (**7:14**)

A Wonderful child (**9:6**)

Ministry in Galilee (**9:1-2**)

His sufferings (**53**)

—died with the wicked (**53:9**)

—buried with the rich (**53:9**)

His reign: (**32:1-8; 61:1-3**)

His justice and kindness (**42:3,4,7**)

His rule (**2:2-3; 42:1; 49:6; 55:4-5; 56:6; 60:3-5**)

His influence: (**49:7, 23**)

—Idols will go (**2:18**)

—no more war (**2:4**)

—the earth will be destroyed (**24:1, 3; 34:1-4**)

—God’s people called by a new name (**62:2; 65:15**)

—a new heaven and new earth (**65:17; 66:22**)

—righteous and the wicked will be eternally separated (**66:15, 22-24**)

Also, check out The “Servant” sections: pay attention to 4 “Servant songs” in which the servant is the Messiah:

42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12

Some Concepts to think about in Isaiah:

1. God does not care for religious practices from an empty heart or a careless life (**1:10-17; 58:1-12; 66:1-4**).
2. God opposes human pride (**2:10-17; 13:11; 23:9**)
3. God uses everything, even human sin, for His own glory (**44:24 - 45:13**)
4. God is guiding all of human history (**41:1-4; 44:6-8; 46:8-11**)
5. Remember, God does have wrath (**9:19; 13:9,13; 30:27; 34:2; 66:15-16**)
6. Idols can't save (**2:20-21; 44:9-20; 46:1-7**). Neither can worldly powers (**31:1-3; 39:1-8**)
7. The only hope of the world is in God's King (**7:14; 9:2-7; 11:1-10**), the Servant of the Lord (**42:1-9; 52:13 - 53:12**), the anointed preacher of good news (**61:1-3**)
8. God's true people will someday become a multinational community of worship and peace (**2:2-4; 56:3-8; 66:18-23**) Also note chapter **11; 14:1-2; 41:8-16; 43:3-7; 60:1-22** in reference to Israel).

Extra Research:

The Dead Sea Scrolls. You can find information about this monumental archaeological discovery in most good encyclopedias, or, if you have internet access on your computer, check out the story of these scrolls. A copy of the book of Isaiah was in these scrolls, and it was essentially identical to the book of Isaiah in our Bible.

Predictive Prophecy: One study that strengthens confidence in the Bible is that of fulfilled prophecy.

One of the tests of a true prophet was that what was prophesied must always come to pass. (See **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**)

Research Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah. Or, do some research on Old Testament Prophecies about the Messiah, or Jesus.

Other prophetic subjects:

If you have a computer, check out some of the following subjects:

Isaiah's prophecies about Cyrus.

Isaiah's prophecies about Israel, or the Nations.

God's statements about Himself

Many times in Isaiah we hear God telling His people who He is. Note some of these statements:

42:8

43:11

44:6,7

44:24

46:9

Some powerful descriptions of the Almighty include:

40:21-31

43:10-13

55:6-13

An Oaks Family Favorite Passage:

Isaiah 61:3 "...They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor."