

5. Isaiah

I. Background and Context

- A. “[T]he Bible’s sole interest is in Isaiah’s message, which is summed up in the meaning of his name: ‘Yahweh is salvation.’”¹
- B. Isaiah says very little about himself. We know that his father was Amoz (1.1), possibly Amoz the brother of Amaziah, king of Judah; that he was a married man and a father (7.3; 8.3, 18); that he was a resident of Jerusalem (7.3); and that likely he was “sawn in two” (Heb. 11.37).
- C. Though it may appear that Isaiah is distinct from prophets we have studied thus far as his book contains “the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz” (1.1), his authority as a prophet of God is still rooted firmly in the “word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw” (2.1).
- D. The book of Isaiah spans from “the year that King Uzziah died” (6.1, around 740 B.C.) to the time of the Assyrian invasion, 701 B.C.
- E. Although there are Bible scholars who theorize that this book was written by several authors (perhaps even sharing the name Isaiah), the Bible gives us no indication of the authorship of this book other than that it was written by “Isaiah the son of Amoz” (1.1). There are further reasons for this:
 1. Ancient manuscripts such as the book of *Sirach*, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the references by NT authors Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul, and the testimony of Jesus himself credits Isaiah as the sole author.
 2. Several distinctive features of Isaiah’s writing style are consistent throughout the entire book, such as his characteristic title for the Lord, “the Holy One of Israel.”
 3. The predictive material of ch. 40-66 (which addresses issues faced by Israel in exile, and is often used to dismiss the possibility of Isaiah writing beforehand) were relevant both to the exilic audience and to Isaiah’s own day.
- F. The central theme of the book is God himself, and everything else by its relation to God: who God is, what he has done for his people, how his people have rejected him, the judgments they will face to be brought to repentance, and yet the glorious and redemptive future for his people.²
- G. Isaiah’s message will either “harden the reader’s pride against God (6.9-10; 28.13; 29.11-12) or it will become to the contrite reader a feast of refreshment in God (55.1-3; 57.15; 66.2).”³

¹ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1233.

² *ESV Study Bible*, 1235.

³ *ESV Study Bible*, 1237.

II. Overview of Isaiah

	Isaiah 1-39	Isaiah 40-55	Isaiah 56-66
Date and Setting	The eighth century B.C.; the Assyrian threat	Prophecies about the sixth century B.C.; 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 consoles 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).

III. Outline

A. PRE-ASSYRIA (Ch. 1-39)

1. *ORACLES FOR JUDAH AND ISRAEL*

- a) Introduction: "Ah, Sinful Nation!" (1.1-5,30)
 - (1) Judah's sins confronted (1.1-31)
 - (2) Judah's hope, guilt, hope (2.1-4.6)
 - (a) Hope (2.1-5)
 - (b) Guilt (2.6-4.1)
 - (c) Hope (4.2-6)
 - (3) Judah's sins condemned (5.1-30)
- b) God Redefines the Future of His People: "Your Guilt is Taken Away" (6.1-12.6)
 - (1) Grace—through judgment—for Isaiah (6.1-13)
 - (2) Grace—through judgment—for Judah (7.1-9.7)
 - (3) Grace—through judgment—for Israel (9.8-11.16)
 - (4) The enjoyment of God's grace (12.1-6)

2. *ORACLES FOR SURROUNDING NATIONS*

- a) God's Judgment and Grace for the World: "We Have a Strong City" (13.1-27.13)
 - (1) First series of oracles: the here and now (13.1-20.6)
 - (a) Babylon (13.1-14.27)
 - (b) Philistia (14.28-32)
 - (c) Moab (15.1-16.14)
 - (d) **The Syria-Israel alliance (17.1-18.7; cf. 2 Kgs. 16.5-9)**
 - (e) Egypt (19.1-20.6)
 - (2) Second series of oracles: the deeper truth (21.1-23.18)
 - (a) Babylon (21.1-10)
 - (b) Edom (21.11-12)
 - (c) Arabia (21.13-17)

- (d) Jerusalem (22.1-25)
- (e) Tyre (23.1-18)
- (3) Third series of oracles: the final end (24.1-27.13)
 - (a) The wasted city (24.1-20)
 - (b) The Lord will punish (24.21-23)
 - (c) He will swallow up death forever (25.1-12)
 - (d) He will ordain peace (26.1-21)
 - (e) The whole world will be fruitful (27.1-13)
- (4) God's Sovereign Word Spoken into the World: "Ah!" (28.1-35.10)
 - (a) Six laments, with assurances (28.1-33.24)
 - (i) The proud crown of Ephraim (28.1-29)
 - (ii) The city where David encamped (29.1-14)
 - (iii) Those who turn things upside down (29.15-24)
 - (iv) Stubborn children with their own plans (30.1-33)
 - (v) Those who go down to Egypt for help (31.1-32.20)
 - (vi) The destroyer who has not been destroyed (33.1-24)
 - (b) Two final outcomes: judgment or salvation (34.1-35.10)
- 3. **CASE STUDY OF HEZEKIAH: "In Whom Do You Now Trust" (36.1-39.8; cf. 2 Kgs. 18.13-16)**
 - a) Practical trust in God vindicated (36.1-37.38)
 - b) Human inconstancy sent into exile (38.1-39.8)
- B. UNDER ASSYRIAN RULE (Ch. 40-55)
 - I. Comfort for God's Exiles: "The Glory of the Lord Shall Be Revealed" (40.1-55.13)
 - a) The God of glory: his coming, exclusivity, power (40.1-31)
 - b) The one true God moving history for his people (41.1-20)
 - c) False hopes, the Lord's servant, a new song (41.27-42.17)
 - d) God reclaims his people for his glory (42.18-43.21)
 - e) God revives his people for his glory (43.22-44.23)
 - f) God predicts his use of Cyrus (44.24-45.25)
 - g) The gods and pride of Babylon doomed (46.1-47.15)
 - h) God will free his people from Babylon for his own sake (48.1-22)
 - i) The Lord's servant displayed, his people assured (49.1-50.3)
 - j) The Lord's servant taught, his people attentive (50.4-51.8)
 - k) Encouragements to a responsive faith (51.9-52.12)
 - l) The Lord's servant: the exalted sin-bearer (52.13-53.12)
 - m) Compassion for God's people, offered to all (54.1-55.13)
- C. FUTURE (Ch. 56-66)
 - I. How to Prepare for the Coming Glory: "Hold Fast My Covenant" (56.1-66.24)
 - a) The true people of God redefined (56.1-8)
 - b) The false people of God exposed (56.9-57.13)
 - c) The true people of God invited (57.14-21)
 - d) The path to blessing: ritual vs. responsibility (58.1-59.13)
 - e) Present failure, eternal covenant, future glory (59.14-60.22)

- f) The anointed Preacher renewing the world (61.1-62.12)
- g) The coming Victor; his past faithfulness (63.1-14)
- h) Praying for the power of God (63.15-64.12)
- i) The eagerness of God for his people's eternal joy (65.1-25)
- j) True worship now and forever (66.1-24)

IV. Key Passages

A. The question of whom to trust intensified on two occasions

1. The Syria-Israel Alliance (17.1-18.7; 2 Kgs. 16.5-9)
 - a) Under pressure from Assyria, the northern kingdom of Israel formed a pact of mutual defense with Syria. The two nations pressured Judah into alignment with them (ch. 7).
 - b) Isaiah assured Ahaz of God's saving purpose, but Ahaz refused God, preferring the power of Assyria, and negotiated for pagan protection (2 Kgs. 16.5-9). Thus Ahaz surrendered the sovereignty of the Davidic throne to a nation hostile to the kingdom of God. The coalition arrayed against Judah failed—Syria fell in 732 B.C., and Israel in 722, as God had said through Isaiah (7.16, 8.4).⁴
2. Hezekiah
 - a) With Assyria threatening Judah, Hezekiah sought a pact with Egypt (30.1-7; 31.1-3; 36.6), choosing the false refuge of human promises rather than to rest on the LORD's "sure foundation" (28.14-22).
 - b) Hezekiah also tried to buy peace from the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 18.13-16), but they turned on him (33.1).
 - c) Hezekiah finally learned to trust in God and found him to be powerfully faithful (chs. 36-37).⁵

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, 1236.

⁵ *ESV Study Bible*, 1236.

B. In exile, God's message to Israel was one of encouragement ("Comfort, comfort" 40.1)

Four Servant Songs	42.1-9	49.1-13	50.4-51.3	52.13-53.12
The Servant Presented	v. 1, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him."	vv. 1-4, "The LORD called me from the womb... And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'"	v. 4, "The LORD God has given me the tongue... he awakens my ear."	v. 3, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not."
The Servant's Task	vv. 1-4, "He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice."	vv. 5-6, "To bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him... to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel... that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."	vv. 5-6, "I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike... I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting."	vv. 4-12, "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed."
The Servant's People	v. 8, "I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations."	vv. 7-8, 13, "The Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One... the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you... I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people."	vv. 1-3, "Look to Abraham your father... For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden."	vv. 11-12, "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."

1. Israel's only hope (43.1-4, 11; 45.15-19)
2. God's covenant love (44.1-5; 54.5-10)
3. Babylon's fall (45.1-13; 46; 47)

- C. Finally, Isaiah ends with a glimpse of what the future may hold.
- I. Gentiles grafted into the covenant (56.1-8)
 - a) The Duties of God's Covenant People (vv. 1-2)
 - (1) "When God is coming towards us in a way of mercy we must go forth to meet him in a way of duty."⁶
 - (2) God's people are commanded to "keep justice, do righteousness, [and] kee[p] the Sabbath" *for* (not *so that*) "soon my salvation will come" (vv. 1-2). The motivation for our obedience is always that God approaches us in mercy.
 - b) The Discouragements of Foreigners (v. 3)
 - (1) The foreigner who has "joined himself to the LORD" is concerned that God will "surely separate me from his people" (v. 3).
 - (2) The foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD is concerned that he will not be able to produce acceptable fruit, for "I am a dry tree" (v. 3).
 - c) The Blessings for God's Covenant People (vv. 3-8)
 - (1) God's blessings are perfectly fitted to the discouragements of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD.
 - (2) God promises not to "separate [the saved foreigner] from his people," but rather to "give him within my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters... an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (v. 5).
 - (3) God promises to "gather" (v. 8) these people "to my holy mountain" (v.7) and that their worship "will be accepted" (v. 7) by God.
 2. The future glory of Israel (60)
 3. New Heavens and a New Earth (61.7-25)

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2014, www.biblestudytools.com.