



BETHEL CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



A STUDY ON

ISAIAH



INTRODUCTION

In the Bible, a prophet is the “one who speaks forth” or “advocates”. A prophet is someone who sees the things as God wants them to be. Many think that prophets are assigned to predict the future. However, in the Bible, prophets were both forth-tellers and fore-tellers.

As forth-tellers they presented God’s truth, pointed out the evil of their day and called on people to repent. Prophets invited people back to covenant faithfulness.

Prophets were also fore-tellers. God revealed the near and distant future to them and they, in turn, made it known to the people. They spoke of restoration and judgment - of good news and bad news.

The role of a prophet took on a special significance in times when the Israelite monarchy and the Israelite priesthood turned away from God. God’s true prophets stand outside of corruption and proclaim the undiluted word of God to all the guilty parties, irrespective of their status in society the king, the priesthood, the false prophets, and the people.



● ROLE OF PROPHETS ●

Prophets provide the primary link between the Old and the New Testament. Indeed, much of the theology of the New Testament is built upon the prophets of old. Some of the characteristics of true prophets are listed below:

- Prophets present insight into many aspects of God's character—his loyal love, his patience, his anger and wrath, his pain, his power, his justice, and his sense of humour.
- Likewise, prophets spend a lot of time addressing how God's people ought to live. The themes of social justice and right living are frequent.
- Prophets denounce hypocrisy and superficial worship and call for sincere faith that manifests itself in the way people treat each other on a daily basis.
- And finally, prophets proclaim comfort and hope for those who suffer, for their God (and our God) is a God who rescues and restores those who return to Him. He is the one who controls history, and works to bring all things to the conclusion that He has planned.

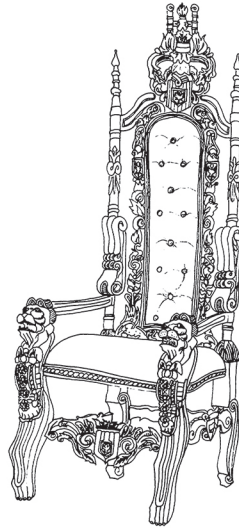
Generally, the books of the prophets are not biographies of the prophets themselves, but collections of the prophets' sermons. Many a time these sermons were built on divine visions, experiences or a direct word from God.

Being a prophet was not for the faint of heart. It often involved saying hard things (and doing hard things). Often, prophets were met with resistance from people to whom they were sent. Hence, it took shocking words and actions to get their attention. The elevated speech of the prophets often employed poetry to catch the attention of their audiences.

PROPHETIC BOOKS IN THE BIBLE

Former Prophets*	Latter Prophets
<p>Joshua Judges 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings</p> <p>*Former Prophets are also known as historical books in the English Bible.</p>	<p>Major Prophets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Isaiah - Jeremiah - Ezekiel - Daniel <p>(apocalyptic prophet)</p> <p>Minor Prophets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi

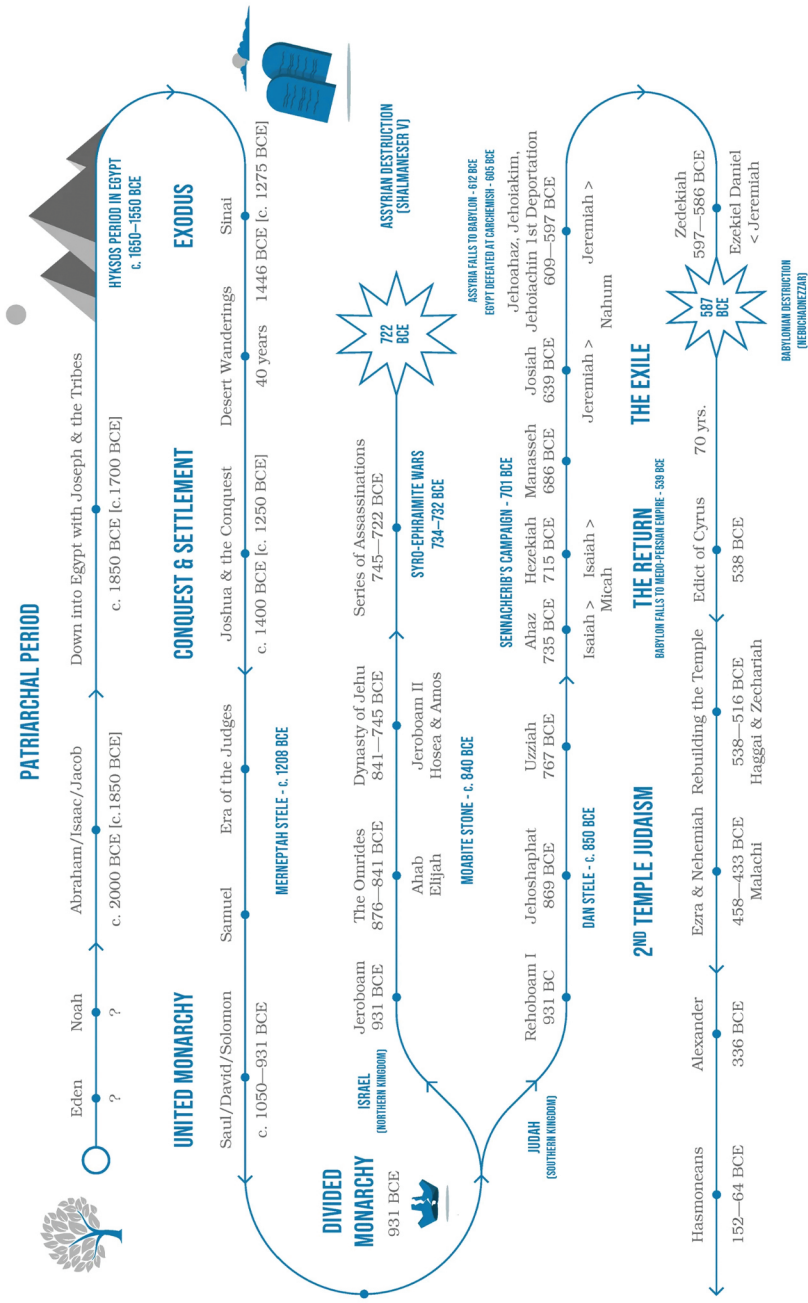
Please Note: The United Monarchy of Israel lasted over the term of her first three kings – Saul, David and Solomon. After their reign, there were two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The role of Prophets became particularly important after 930 BC, when the nation split into the northern and southern kingdoms.



Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea preached in the northern kingdom before it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Jeremiah and Ezekiel focussed their attention on the southern kingdom before it fell to the Babylonian exile. Daniel prophesied during the exile while Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi did so after the exile. Obadiah was assigned to Edom, while Nahum and Jonah dealt with Nineveh.





INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

Isaiah means “The Lord is salvation.”

The opening verse of the book tells us about prophet Isaiah who is the son of Amoz (It is inferred from the Jewish literature that Amoz is the brother of King Uzziah of Judah). According to Isaiah 1:1, Isaiah ministered during the reign of four kings of Judah - Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah and he likely met his death under the fifth, the evil King Manasseh (2 Kings 15:32 – 21:18).

Isaiah was called to his prophetic task in the year of King Uzziah’s death. This was the beginning of a time of severe transition for both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah was a southern prophet, staying in and around Jerusalem his entire life. The first half of the book contains a prophecy dedicated to the southern kingdom warning them about the coming judgements. The 2nd half of the book is a collection of prophecies dedicated to the people who are exiled in Babylon.

Drawing a connection between the Old and the New Testament:

- Isaiah is the Paul of the Old Testament. He taught that faith in God’s promises is the single most important reality for the Lord’s people.
- He is also the James of the Old Testament because he insisted that faith should lead to obedience and faith without works is dead.
- Also, as Jerusalem served as the centrepiece of Isaiah’s prophecy in the ancient world, the church serves as the agent of God’s truth for the contemporary world.

THE BIG IDEA OF ISAIAH

A. The standard three-point message of Isaiah follows throughout the book:

1. People have broken the covenant (through idolatry, social injustice, religious ritualism), so repent!
2. Judgement is a natural consequence that follows a lack of repentance! Judgment will also come on the nations.
3. Yet, there is hope beyond judgment for a glorious future restoration, both for Judah/Israel and for the nations.

B. Isaiah points to Jesus:

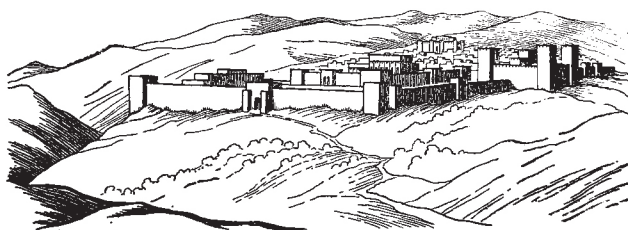
Often named “the fifth gospel,” the book of the prophet Isaiah has more to say about Israel’s coming Messiah (Lord Jesus) than any other Old Testament book. Isaiah is the second most quoted book (60 plus citations) in the New Testament after Psalms.



Most of these references point to Jesus as the one who fulfilled Isaiah’s messianic prophecies. John, in his Gospel, quotes verses from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6 and then editorializes, “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (John 12:41).

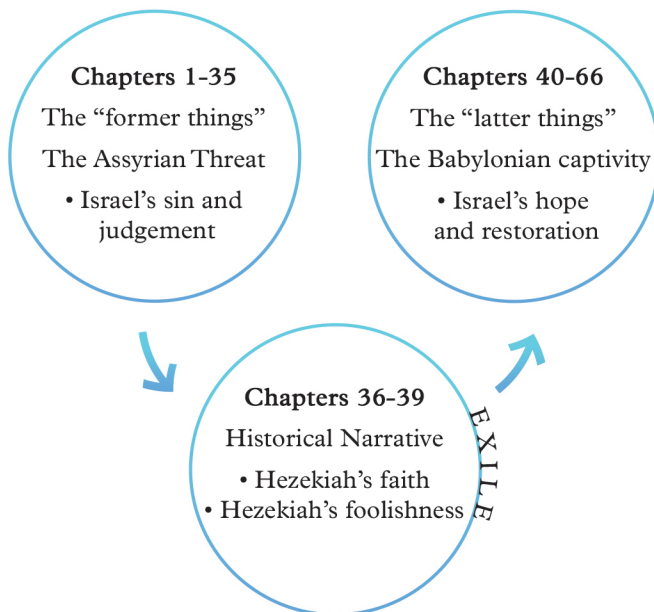
C. Old to New:

The overall journey in the Book of Isaiah is from the Old Jerusalem of Isaiah's time to the New Jerusalem of the future kingdom of God. The focus shifts from a ruined and disgraced nation of Israel to a New Israel— a redeemed, reborn and reenergized People of God who will be gathered from every nation to enjoy God's blessings and live forever in covenant with Him.



Jerusalem

The Structure of Isaiah's Prophecy



CHAPTER SUMMARY

ISAIAH 1-39

Former things... Sin and Judgments

1-6 Introduction:

The Problem of
Judah's sin

7-12 Ahaz:

A faithless king

13-23

Oracles against the
Nations

24-27

The
“little apocalypse”

28-35

A series of Woes
against Israel

36-39 Hezekiah:

an (almost) faithful
king

ISAIAH 40-66

Latter things... Hope and Restoration

40-43 Transition:

The solution:
Transformation and
Restoration of Israel

44-53

The Servant & the
Idol – “Who will
you serve?”

54-63

The restoration of
Israel & the Nations

64-66 Summary of All

Can a land be born
in a single day? Can
God recreate?

For this study, the book of Isaiah is divided into **three sections**:

Isaiah 1–39: You have broken the covenant. Repent! Without repentance, judgement is inevitable. (Isaiah's lifetime)

Isaiah 40–55: There is hope beyond the judgment for a glorious, future restoration, both for Israel/Judah and for other nations. (The Exile)

Isaiah 56–66: Calls all Yahweh's people to live righteously. (The Return)

SECTION I - ISAIAH 1-39

YAHWEH'S JUDGMENTS

The first five chapters of Isaiah form a preface of sorts to the entire book. In this opening section, we come across a recurring accusation against God's people for their rebellion. Israel's behaviour was outrageous – the exact opposite of what God had wanted from his people. Israel had lost the ability to distinguish between good and evil.

- **A. Isaiah 1–12** stresses judgment (based on Yahweh's righteousness and justice) on Judah (with strong promises of hope in Isaiah 9 and 11).
- **B. Isaiah 13–35** focuses on Yahweh's righteousness established among the nations, primarily through judgment, demonstrating that Yahweh is the supreme master over the nations of the world.
- **C. Isaiah 36–39** is quite different from the first 35 chapters, as it provides a narrative of how Yahweh delivered Jerusalem and King Hezekiah from the Assyrians. Hezekiah, a faithful king, is compared to King Ahaz, the faithless king, in Isaiah 7.

The central question addressed to Judah, which runs through these first 39 chapters is, *“Whom will you trust, Yahweh or the strength of mankind (i.e., alliances, money, military, power)?”*



Isaiah 1-12: Our God is seated on the Throne

THRONE OF JUDGMENT

Isaiah 3:13, *“The Lord takes his place in court; He rises to judge the people.”*

In Isaiah 1:2–3 Yahweh states that He raised children (lit. “sons,” referring to the people of Israel/Judah) but they rebelled against Him. To make things worse, his children no longer know Him and “they have turned their back on Him.”

In a catalogue of sins, Isaiah lists these substitutes for human trust: eastern religions (2:6), astrological divinations (2:6), pagan alliances (2:6), material wealth (2:7), military might (2:7), religious idols (2:8), technological advancement (2:8).

In **Isaiah 3:13**, Yahweh is seated in court as a judge. Isaiah, like a prosecuting attorney, assumes the voice of Yahweh Himself and levels charge after charge against Judah.

One of the major accusations made by the prophet is that of **religious ritualism**. Israel/Judah believed that they could ignore righteous behaviour and the righteous demands of Yahweh regarding true worship if they simply carried on the rituals of worshipping Yahweh (along with their worship of other gods). Very often the people of Israel/Judah thought their religious rituals would compensate for their lack of righteous living.

Isaiah minces no words when he calls out the “*lofty looks*” and the “*haughtiness of men*” as a sin that goes beyond rebellion against the love of God and trust in false Gods. By attitude and action, the people of the house of Jacob had assumed God-likeness in their own right. Also, Yahweh’s call to uphold justice and defend the fatherless, widows, and downtrodden, is a common expectation from his people.

In the midst of all judgments, you will find God providing hints of restoration...

Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Isaiah 4:2-5, “In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious,... will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.”



THRONE OF GLORY

Isaiah 6:1, “*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple*”

- *Sovereignty of God*: In the first five chapters, we learn that Israel had become too complacent in its security to heed the warnings of God, and too corrupt in its prosperity to escape the wrath of God. Not only that, but Uzziah, a good king for fifty-two years, had become arrogant, profaned the temple, contracted leprosy, and died in shame. All of Israel needed to be shaken by the vision of the LORD “sitting on a throne, high and lifted up” with the train of His robe filling the temple.

Each of these symbols—the title LORD, the throne, the lofty position, and the all-encompassing robe—reinforced His sovereignty over all of the universe, over all its kings, over all of their nations, and over all peoples, including the chosen children of Israel.

- *Holiness of God*: Sovereignty is not the primary revelation of God’s character in Isaiah’s vision. First and foremost, it is the holiness of the Lord that Isaiah senses. Sovereignty is the powerful nature of God, while holiness is the moral character of God. He is pure; He is complete; He is whole. Holiness of God is not exclusively a matter of His being, but it is observed in His doing as well.

In His holy and glorious presence, our holiness begins. Not only does the holiness of God call out the Christ who can redeem us, but it also gives us the promise that we can be imprinted with His character. “*Be holy, for I am holy*”

(1 Pet. 1:16) is not an optional command. God’s desire is that we be holy as He is holy. So, we who worship in reverential fear will follow after holiness to mould our character (2 Cor. 7:1) and walk circumspectly in our conduct (Heb. 11:7).

AHAZ - A FAITHLESS KING, BUT IMMANUEL - GOD WITH US

Isaiah 7:14, *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”*

The three successive chapters (Isaiah 7, 8, and 9) share a common theme—the expectation and sign of a special child. Isaiah 7 is connected explicitly to the reign of Ahaz, the faithless king who turned to the king of Assyria for help when Syria - Israel waged war against Judah. Rather than trusting Yahweh to deliver him and his people, he trusted the military alliances of Assyrians.

Yahweh decided to give him a sign anyway, even though it is an unusual, ironic sign - A virgin will give birth to a child who will be called *Immanuel* (“*God is with us*”), and before this baby gets to be very old, the two threatening kings of Syria and northern Israel will be destroyed. However, because of Ahaz’s lack of faith in Yahweh, this sign will also point to the coming judgment on Judah (7:10–25).

[Faithless king Ahaz in Isaiah 7 is compared with the (almost) faithful king Hezekiah in Isaiah 37]



Isaiah 9:6 the prophet speaks of a child again, only this time the child is connected to the messianic hope of a great Davidic king. Isaiah refers to this child as “*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.*” The birth of the child is not only an immediate fulfilment of the prophecy but also a foreshadowing of the Testament, where Jesus fulfils this prophecy (Matthew 1:23).

In the midst of faithlessness, God provides hope for the remnants – the faithful ones.

In the midst of continual judgment, God provides hope to the remnants that they would escape punishment if they depend on the Lord alone. Isaiah tells us that God’s true followers were becoming an increasingly small minority. A repentant and believing remnant was preserved. “In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob ... will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.” (Isaiah 10:20-22)

For the faithful, the promise of “*God with us*” provides assurance of His presence in plenty and in poverty, at home or in exile, in suffering as well as in health. For the wicked, however, the same promise “*God with us*” brings the judgment of God.

Isaiah 13 – 35: God is the judge over all nations

As a relatively small nation threatened by great powers, Judah was constantly tempted to look to political and military alliances to save her. Chapters 1 – 12 began by focusing on Judah and ended with a proclamation to the nations. This second major section begins with a focus on the nations and ends with Judah (13:1; 26:1; 27:13). But the net message is the same - **Salvation is to be found in the LORD alone.**

- Isaiah 13-23 – God’s judgment over neighbouring nations
- Isaiah 24-27 – God’s judgment over the whole world
- Isaiah 28-35 – God’s judgment follows God’s deliverance

Isaiah 14:4, *“The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers;”*

God does not discriminate while judging people and nations because He created every human on earth. For most of Isaiah’s ministry, the two major superpowers were Assyria to the north and Egypt/Cush to the south. Isaiah 13–23 is made up of oracles concerning the many nations involved in the political conspiracy of the surrounding regions like *Babylon* (Isaiah 13), *Assyria* (Isaiah 14), *Philistia* (Isaiah 14), *Moab* (Isaiah 15), *Damascus* and other nations (Isaiah 17) like *Egypt / Cush* (Isaiah 18). While most of these prophecies are judgment oracles directed against each specific nation, the real target audience for Isaiah is the people and leaders of Judah who demonstrate that Yahweh is the Sovereign Lord and Master of all creation.

The point of these oracles is centred on the reassurance that Yahweh's people need not fear worldly powers or rely on them for protection. They should instead trust in God. God's judgment of nations is against their greed for world domination, playing God, and treating the Holy One of Israel as a common God. These attitudes are tied together by their extreme human pride and arrogance.

Isaiah 14 uses direct quotes of Lucifer and the king of Babylon to reveal their supreme egotism. Setting themselves up in competition with God, they committed the cardinal sin of assuming that they are sovereign above the stars, worthy of being worshiped, and rulers of the universe.

Although most of this unit deals with judgment, there are glimpses of hope and deliverance, even for the nations. Indeed, Isaiah's vision of the future kingdom includes foreign nations. In **Isaiah 19:23–25**, the prophet describes a future highway from Assyria to Egypt, which allows the two incompatible superpowers to join together with Israel in peaceful worship of Yahweh. He blesses them and calls Egypt "my people" and Assyria "my handiwork."

Isaiah 35, however, standing at the end of the unit, is a wonderful picture of deliverance in the future kingdom of peace - when the blind will see and the lame will walk (35:5–6) and Yahweh's redeemed ones both Jews and gentiles will enter Zion with singing and joy (35:9–10).



Isaiah 36 – 39: Hezekiah – The (almost) Faithful King

Chapters 36–39 are written as a narrative. They deal with King Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion and siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC. The events in this unit parallel those described in 2 Kings 18:17–20:19. Isaiah describes the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem and predicts victory for Judah. He urges Hezekiah to stand firm in trusting Yahweh. All Hezekiah had to do, like his fathers of old, was to ‘*stand still and see the salvation of the LORD.*’ It brought the king and his people back to the exodus roots of their faith.

In Isaiah 37:36–38 Yahweh miraculously defeats the Assyrians, and the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, is later assassinated. Isaiah 38 recounts Hezekiah’s illness, miraculous recovery, and prayer of thanksgiving.

In Isaiah 39, however, Hezekiah entertains an envoy from Babylon and even shows the envoy all of his wealth. Isaiah, knowing that the Babylonians will be the ones in the future who will completely destroy Jerusalem and exile the people, rebukes Hezekiah for his foolishness. Isaiah 37–39 shows what could have happened if the people and the king had but listened to Yahweh’s prophet and obeyed, in comparison to Ahaz who feared the enemy and doubted the voice of God.

Isaiah 40 – 66

While Isaiah 1–39 focuses on the broken covenant and judgments, Isaiah 40–66 centres on the future hope and restoration for Israel and the nations. At the heart of this section is Yahweh’s saving grace. Just as Isaiah 1 introduces 1–39, so Isaiah 40 introduces chapters 40–66.

Here are some of the characteristics of Isaiah 40–66:

1. The primary people whom Isaiah addresses are those in the Babylonian exile.
2. No specific historical events are mentioned, and there are no words addressed to specific kings or individuals (like Uzziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, etc as in Isaiah 1–39).
3. “Fear not!” is a major theme, often accompanied with words of comfort.
4. Cyrus (king of Persia) is represented as Yahweh’s instrument for judgment (on Babylon) and for deliverance (for Israel).
5. Deliverance focuses on the role of the Servant, presented in four Servant Songs (42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). Uniquely, the coming Servant will bring salvation through suffering, which points towards Jesus the Messiah. All four gospels cite Isaiah 40:3–5 (“the voice of one calling in the desert”), identifying John the Baptist as the “voice in the desert” and identifying Jesus as the Coming One prophesied in this passage (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4–6; John 1:23).

Isaiah 40–66 is divided into two themes:

- A. Isaiah 40–55 shows Yahweh’s grace and restoration
- B. Isaiah 56–66 shows ethical living for God’s children

Section II - Isaiah 40-55

BE RENEWED LIKE AN EAGLE

Isaiah 40:31, *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”*

The children of the exile in Babylon were prophetically promised a return to their homeland. But the fear of returning to the unknown and leaving the familiar behind gave way to doubt and fear. So Isaiah begins with God’s words of comfort and end of punishment (40:1-2). God declares that He is transcendent over all nations in omnipotence. His children need not fear the power of Babylon, which is “less than nothing” in His sight (40:17). He asks them to remember what they have heard and what they have known. He, the Lord of Jacob and the Holy One of Israel, is also “the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth” His power never weakens or grows weary, and His understanding is perfect (40:28).



With a declaration of His omnipotence and omniscience, God offers to the exiles a final resolution of their fears about the return to Jerusalem. He promises to exchange His power for their weakness and His strength for their weariness (40:29). When He does so, their energy would exceed the vigour of youth. The willingness to trust God for the timing and the strength to fulfil His promise, would activate His supernatural provision - *“they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”* (40:31).

The ones who returned from exile were the true faithful remnants through whom God rebuilt the people of Israel. When the prophets proclaimed the glorious restoration, they often described it poetically and figuratively in terms of a great New Exodus. Isaiah envisions the start of their migratory journey as a time of joy rather than fear, much like their fathers experienced in the Exodus from Egypt. However, this time they would be led out in peace by Cyrus rather than pursued by Pharaoh.

In this New Exodus, Yahweh will dry up waters and rivers to allow his people to cross safely (Isa. 11:15; 19:5; 43:2), just as He had led Israel through the Red Sea and the Jordan. The New Exodus will be even more glorious than the original exodus.

For example, in the original exodus, Yahweh gathered up the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, but in the New Exodus, these regathered people will come not only from Babylon but from all nations - north, south, east, and west (Isa. 43:5–6). In addition, the New Exodus will not be limited to the deliverance of Israel, but will extend to other nations as well, including Israel's old adversary, Egypt herself (Isa. 11:10–16; 19:19–25).

The New Testament continues this theme, identifying Jesus as the one who brings about the New Exodus prophesied by the Old Testament prophets.

THE SERVANT of the Lord

Isaiah 55:8-9, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."



As a demonstration of his ability to control history, predict the future, and bring events into being that had been foretold, Yahweh raises up Cyrus to judge Babylon. Cyrus ascended to the throne of Persia in 559 BC, and in 539 BC he conquered the Babylonian Empire, thus controlling the Jewish exiles that were in Babylon. In 538 BC he issued a decree that allowed the Jewish exiles to return home.



This unit contains three of the four Servant Songs (49:1–6; 50:4–10; 52:13– 53:12). Although in Isaiah 44–45 Cyrus, the king of Persia, was to play a leading role in Yahweh’s unfolding plan, the future focus moved beyond Cyrus to the Servant of Yahweh. The Servant would be the crucial character in bringing about the future restoration and all the “new things” that Yahweh had planned.

The other major theme in this unit is the restoration and renewal of Zion (Jerusalem). These two themes—the Servant and the restored Zion—intertwine throughout this unit. Yahweh gives the Servant a twofold task: the restoration of Israel, and salvation for the nations (Gentiles). Once again, the Servant is proclaimed to be “a light for the Gentiles [nations].”

WHO IS THIS SERVANT?

Isaiah 53:4–6 proclaims the greatest irony in history - the very one who was despised and persecuted was the one who would bear their suffering and sorrows and provide them with peace and forgiveness. Isaiah points to one of the most important theological truths in the Scripture—one that is not fully explained until the New Testament but that is at the very heart of Christianity: **The coming Servant (i.e., the Messiah) will suffer and die as a substitute for those who have sinned. We like sheep has gone astray (Isaiah 53:6).** Isaiah seems to be saying that we are the sheep, but that the Servant will be the one who dies in our place. This suffering and death of the Servant will bring peace (with God), forgiveness, righteousness (see 53:11), and healing.

Isaiah 53:5, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”

The New Testament clearly identifies the **Lord Jesus as the Servant** who fulfils the tasks assigned to the Servant in Isaiah. Recall the bafflement of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:32–34 regarding the identity of the Servant in the Isaiah 52:13–53:12. The Ethiopian asks of Philip, “Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” In response to the Ethiopian’s question, Philip “began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

Isaiah 55 calls the weary, hungry, and thirsty exiles to a great feast. This imagery refers to the great restoration that is coming. The restoration - the great feast - is a result of the new everlasting covenant, based on the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7, which Yahweh will inaugurate (55:3). Sinners are called to repent and be saved (55:7). Yahweh's word is powerful and effective (55:11), leading to the great deliverance that produces joy in his people (55:12).

Section II - Isaiah 40-55

The previous section (Isaiah 40–55) focuses on Yahweh's grace. The Servant will bear the sins of those who do not deserve it, and Yahweh will restore his people based on his grace, not on their merit or piety. **Isaiah 56–66 then points out that although salvation is based on grace, Yahweh, the Righteous One, calls on his people to live righteously and to worship authentically.** Thus, this section condemns false, hypocritical worship and focuses on the theme of ethical behaviour.

Mere genealogical membership in physical Israel does not automatically make one a “servant of Yahweh”; rather, the “servants of Yahweh” are those who choose to follow Yahweh authentically and live righteous lives as He graciously empowers them.

This empowerment is critical because one of the repeated points in this section of Isaiah is that the people cannot live righteously in their own strength, but they can if they trust in Yahweh's empowerment. Finally, as Yahweh's servants live out righteous lives in his service, they are also to keep their eyes on future promises—that glorious time when Yahweh will restore all of creation and make “new heavens and earth.”

A call to righteous (ethical) behaviour

Isaiah 56:1, *“Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed.”*

Righteousness according to God's word first and foremost is based on the right relationship with God. Out of this loving relationship flows the love for others and the will to do good to others.

It is significant that the book of Isaiah does not end on the theme of Israel's glorious restoration and future blessing 60–62, instead it closes by focusing on the theme of ethical behaviour. Isaiah 63–66 includes a picture of the coming eschatological future (new heaven and new earth), but the emphasis is on obedience to Yahweh in the present. This theme of “obedience and just behaviour now while waiting expectantly for the glorious future” is one that is continued throughout the prophetic books and into the New Testament.

Spirit Empowered Living

Isaiah 61:1-3, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

The Bible teaches us that all of the Old Testament’s ministers, Jesus, and the apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit for an effective life on Earth. Just as the Spirit worked in Jesus’ life, He will carry out all that God has in store for us and wants to accomplish in our lives. Every person needs the Holy Spirit to enable them to understand that they are sinners; to help them repent; to lead them to God; to give them faith to believe; to place them into the family of God; to seal them; to regenerate them; to help them pray and understand the Bible; to empower them for ministry; to change their life; to help them minister to others through His spiritual gifts; and display the fruit of the Spirit in their life as a disciple of Jesus.

The Future: New Heavens and a New Earth

Isaiah 65:17, “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*”

The goodness of Yahweh’s original creation described in Genesis 1–2 had been marred by Satan and humanity (Genesis 3–11). Indeed, sin had produced death. Isaiah proclaims that the disobedience of God’s chosen people, Israel, and their total rejection of Yahweh and his covenant are similar to this sin, spoiling creation itself. Thus, as Isaiah looks to the coming messianic age, he describes a vision of “new heavens and a new earth.”



CONCLUSION

Isaiah contains one of the clearest expressions of the gospel in the Old Testament. The book of Isaiah stands in the middle of the Old Testament as a reminder that Yahweh is the living God who will judge the world in righteousness and will in mercy save His people and the nations through his “suffering servant”, the Messiah. It thus gathers up the whole of the Old Testament story and prepares the way for the New – a story that finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ and the cross.

In reading these prophecies, we need to recognize that some of Isaiah’s prophecies were fulfilled in its fullness in Isaiah’s time and during the exile. However, other prophecies were only partially fulfilled in that time. Of these, some were completed with the coming of Christ, the ultimate servant of the Lord, to deliver His people. Still others, like the depiction of a peaceful and just society, living in harmony with all of nature, will only be completely fulfilled when Christ returns.



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