

Isaiah Outline

Introduction: In Israel's earliest days in Canaan, the people were ruled by judges, charismatic figures who lead the people in battle and settled their disputes in light of God's covenant with them. When Israel asked for a king, the role of leadership and the role of advocating justice split into two offices: king and prophet. In First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings we met prophets like Samuel and Nathan, men who stood up to kings speaking truth to power. Now, in the prophet books, we focus on the words of the prophets themselves.

The "book" of Isaiah is really a collection from three different historical periods. The first collection, dubbed "First Isaiah" comes from the historical Isaiah who prophesied from 738 BCE to around 701 BCE. "Second Isaiah" dates from the time Israel was in exile in Babylon from 597 BCE to 539 BCE. And then "Third Isaiah" dates from after the return home after the temple was being rebuilt.

So important when reading prophetic literature, especially from a Christian perspective, is the ability to cultivate a kind of bi-lingual attitude. On the one hand these books, especially Isaiah, have particular meaning in the Christian community. Phrases like "For unto us a child is born, a son is given...and his name shall be Wonderful, Counselor...Prince of Peace" and images like "the voice crying out in the wilderness "make straight the ways of the Lord"" are cherished scriptures pointing to the coming Christ child. But at the same time, Isaiah was an historical figure, speaking his message to a particular people at a particular time with meaning completely independent of the Jesus tradition that wouldn't even arrive on the scene for centuries. Many people feel they have to make a choice, and they feel they must read Isaiah as either a "Christian" text or a "Jewish" one. Here I would encourage us to acknowledge the Holy Spirit is able to produce a surplus of meaning here, and we should become able to hear the meaning Isaiah probably intended, as well as hear the layers of meaning these texts have accrued in different communities over the years.

Section One: First Isaiah

Chapter 1: God lays out the complaints against Judah- religion without justice

Chapter 2: The vision of holy mountain: "Swords into plowshares"; words against Jacob/Israel

Chapter 3: Words against Judah

Chapter 4: Continued

Chapter 5: Song of the unfruitful vineyard- again words against social injustice

Chapter 6: The call of Isaiah

Chapter 7: Isaiah prophesies to King Ahaz of Judah to hold fast against Israel/Aram alliance; Sign of Emmanuel (Hezekiah)

Chapter 8: Third sign and foretelling of Israel's destruction

Chapter 9: The coming of the righteous king "people who have walked in darkness have seen A great light...For a child has been born to us..." (Hezekiah)

Chapter 10: Words against injustice, Assyria, words about the remnant

Chapter 11: The ideal Davidic king "A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse"

Chapter 12: Brief thanksgiving

Chapter 13: Words against Babylon

Chapter 14: Words against Philistia, Assyria

Chapter 15: Words against Moab

Chapter 16: Continued

Chapter 17: Words against Damascus

Chapter 18: Words against Ethiopia

Chapter 19: Words against Egypt

Chapter 20: Conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia

Chapter 21: Words against other nations

Chapter 22: Words against Jerusalem

Chapter 23: Words against Tyre

Chapter 24: Words against all

Chapter 25: Thanksgiving to God and vision of the mountain again- even death destroyed

Chapter 26: Judah's song- lament and reassurance

Chapter 27: God's redemption of Israel, too

Chapter 28: Judgment against the religious establishment in Judah, "Laying in Zion a stone"

Chapter 29: Foretelling the siege of Jerusalem

Chapter 30: Warning against relying upon Egypt

Chapter 31: Continued

- Chapter 32: Restoration predicted with a righteous king
- Chapter 33: Deliverance from Assyria
- Chapter 34: More judgments issued against the nations
- Chapter 35: Image of return to Zion
- Chapter 36: Sennacherib attacks Hezekiah at Jerusalem
- Chapter 37: Hezekiah consults with Isaiah; Hezekiah prays; God responds;
Hezekiah triumphs (Like 2A football team defeating an NFL team)
- Chapter 38: Hezekiah becomes ill
- Chapter 39: Hezekiah invites envoys from Babylon (dark music heard in background)

Section Two: Second Isaiah

Chapter 40: *“Comfort, comfort, you my people”; a vision of return: “a voice cries out...in the wilderness make a highway for the Lord.”*

- Chapter 41: God’s promised help to poor and needy, to Israel
- Chapter 42: The first song of God’s servant, a light to the nations, blind and deaf
- Chapter 43: A new Exodus from Babylon imagined
- Chapter 44: Words against idolatry and for Israel
- Chapter 45: Cyrus of Persia, God’s surprising “messiah”
- Chapter 46: Again words against idols
- Chapter 47: Destruction of Babylon promised
- Chapter 48: Words of hope to Israel
- Chapter 49: The servant speaks, promise of restoration
- Chapter 50: The servant suffers “I gave my back to those who struck me”
- Chapter 51: Words of hope again
- Chapter 52: The suffering servant again: “so marred was his appearance”
- Chapter 53:** *Suffering servant cont. “He was despised and rejected, a man of suffering”
“He has borne our infirmities...crushed for our iniquities...”*
- Chapter 54: Promise again- like the days of Noah to God
- Chapter 55: The abundant life “Why do you spend money on that which is not bread?”

Section Three: Third Isaiah

- Chapter 56: Salvation for all- even the stranger; corruption of leaders
- Chapter 57: Continued problem with idolatry
- Chapter 58: True worship: justice “Is not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of injustice?”
- Chapter 59: Israel unable to save itself; God remakes covenant
- Chapter 60: Vision of a restored Jerusalem (the three kings piece, too)
- Chapter 61: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me...to bring good news to the oppressed...”
- Chapter 62: Another song of salvation for Jerusalem
- Chapter 63: Words against Edom, psalm of lament
- Chapter 64: Psalm continued
- Chapter 65:** *God’s judgment and restoration: “65:17 For I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth...wolf and lamb again”*
- Chapter 66: Rebuilding of the temple

Stories to know: The problem Isaiah believes God is most upset about and the positive vision for the future (Chapters 1 and 2); the call of Isaiah (Chapter 6); Vision of restoration from exile (Chapter 40); the suffering servant (Chapter 53); the vision of the new heaven and new earth (Chapter 65)