

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

Author & Date: The first verse of Isaiah clearly identifies the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, as the author of the book. The verse continues in detail and explains that Isaiah wrote these during the reigns of kings Uzziah (a.k.a. Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This would place the time of the writing of the book of Isaiah from between 740 and 680 B.C. The Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. and the Southern Kingdom of Judah would fall a century after the writings of Isaiah. In spite of these clear statements of authorship and date, Isaiah has been subject to critical evaluation by liberal scholars claiming that Isaiah only wrote the first 39 (or 36) chapters and that one or two other authors wrote the remaining third of the book. This theory is based upon textual and linguistic evaluation and not upon any manuscript evidence. On the contrary, other OT and NT writers quote from before and after chapter 40 without distinction. Furthermore, the fragments and copies we do have in possession do not break at the points liberal scholars have theorized. Twenty-one manuscripts of Isaiah (or portions) are included among the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹ The most famous of these, The Great Isaiah Scroll (IQIsa^a) dates to 125 B.C. and includes all 66 chapters of the book², confirming the unity of the book as the writing of a single author. It is worth noting that one of the primary reasons liberal scholars seek a second author for part of Isaiah is the specific prophecy that Isaiah makes naming Cyrus as the one who will issue the decree to build the temple in Jerusalem (Isa 44:28). This was fulfilled by the Persian King, Cyrus the Great, in 457 B.C., over 200 years after Isaiah prophesied.

Purpose: Isaiah is a book of both judgment and hope. Judgment in the sense that God describes the judgment due to Israel, Judah, and the gentile nations; and hope in the form of the promised Servant of the Lord and restoration of Israel. The book in many ways presents the entire message of the Gospel. Isaiah draws attention to the sin of Israel, Judah, and the Nations and dramatically explains how God will judge sin and those nations. The prophecies do not end there. Isaiah looks forward to the coming of the Savior and demonstrates how God Himself will provide salvation to Israel and the nations through His Servant (the Messiah)³. In short, Isaiah gives a reason for judgment and the hopeful promise that Messiah is coming!

Key/Noteworthy Passages:

- Isa 6 – The call of Isaiah “In the year King Uzziah died...”
- Isa 7:10-17 – The Prophecy of Immanuel (v. 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...”
- Isa 9:6-7 “For unto us a Child is born...”
- Isa 11 “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots, the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,...”
- Isa 40 – “...3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord;...”
- The four “servant” songs of Isaiah (42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12)
- Isa 43:25 “I, *even* I *am* He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins.” (note emphatic “I” – see also 43:11)
- Isa 44:28-45:7 Prophecy of Cyrus’ command to rebuild Jerusalem
- Isa 48:16 “Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I *was* there, And now the Lord God and His Spirit Have sent Me.”
- Isa 53 Prophecy of the crucifixion “...3He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him

¹ Vandercam, J. and Flint, P. *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York, HarperSanFrancisco, 2002, p. 131.

² Ibid.

³ The word “Messiah” is found nowhere in the book of Isaiah, but the descriptions of the Lord’s Servant, the branch of Jesse, the “Child” to be born, etc. are all clear references to the promised Messiah.

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; *He was bruised for our iniquities...*”

- Isa 59:16-17 He saw that *there was* no man, And wondered that *there was* no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. 17 For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.” (cf. Eph 6:14)
- Isa 61:1-3 “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed me...” (c.f. Lk 4:17-21)

Broad Outline for Isaiah

- I. Introduction of the author (1:1)
- II. Messages of Judgment (1:2-35:10)
 - A. Indictment against Judah (chapter 1)
 - B. The Glory of the Millennial Kingdom (2:1-5)
 - C. Future Judgment (2:6-5:30) (chapter 5 is a poetic illustration)
 - D. The Commission of Isaiah (6)
 - E. The Coming Messiah (7-12) (6:30 – “the Holy Seed”) Key sections listed below
 1. The Virgin Birth (7:10-16)
 2. A Stone of Stumbling (8:14)
 3. The Birth and Reign of the Son (9:1-7)
 4. The Davidic King and His Millennial Kingdom (11)
 5. Song of Praise in the Millennium (ch. 12 note the phrase “in that day”)
 - F. Prophecies against the Nations (ch 13- 23) (note these are all in poetry)
 - G. Judgments and Deliverance (Tribulational ch. 24-27)
 - H. Judgment and Messianic Hope to Samaria and Judah (28-35)
- III. Hezekiah’s Story (36:1-39:8)
- IV. Messages of Comfort (40:1-66:24)
 - A. Comfort in the Coming Servant (40-53)
 - B. Call for Righteous Living (54-59)
 - C. The Messiah’s Reign (60-66)

Food for Thought

1. Although Isaiah has messages to Israel, Judah, and the nations, he is primarily a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In Chapter 1, Isaiah describes the sin and the judgment due to Judah. Read this chapter and identify the following: a) Accusations against Judah, b) The results Judah has or will experience because of its sin, c) statements of hope
2. In Isaiah chapter 6, the call of Isaiah provides one of the most vivid pictures we have in all of Scripture of the throne room of God. The significance of the passage can be seen in the fact that all four gospels and Acts quote from Isa 6:9-10. Consider each of the following elements of this vision:
 - a. In your own words, describe the scene set forth in 6:1-4.
 - b. Who does Isaiah see in this vision (consider also John 12: 37-41 with John 14:9 and Col 1:15)?

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

- c. The four living creatures of Revelation 4 and 5 are likely the same as the Seraphim described here (cf Rev. 4:4-11). How would you describe their ministry and their cry?
- d. What is significant about Isaiah's response to the vision in v. 5? (c.f. Lk 6:45)
- e. When God announces the need for a messenger, Isaiah responds enthusiastically. What example does that provide for us?
- f. According to verses 9-10, what did God promise Isaiah would be the result of his message? How would you feel if that was the known outcome of your labors? How did this message to Isaiah see fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus (Matt 13:14-15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40, Acts 28:26-27, and an allusion to it in Rom 11:8)?
- g. How long must the message God gives to Isaiah be proclaimed?

3. Isa. 7:14 is quoted in Matt. 1:23 and alluded to in Lk 1:31 as referring to the virgin birth. What is unusual about who receives this prophecy (see 2 Chron 28) and the context in which it is given (Israel and Syria attacking Jerusalem)? What additional insight does the NT give to this prophecy? In light of this, how should we understand the prophecy of Isa 7:14?

Note: There are three primary views of how to interpret this prophecy: 1) The "virgin" speaks of a young virgin who will marry and give birth shortly, 2) The prophecy is exclusively messianic and only refers to Jesus, 3) The prophecy has both an immediate fulfillment in a young woman of Israel, and ultimate fulfillment in Christ. The alliance between Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel was broken in 732 B.C. when Tiglath-Pileaser III overthrew Damascus.⁴ Some also adapt the first view to refer to Isaiah's son of 8:1-4, however the difference in names seems to point to a different fulfillment (Isa. 7, messianic) as does the use of the word "Almah" for "virgin" which would not apply to Isaiah's wife. As such, the first interpretation does not fit the context of Scripture. Consider also the promise of a Child in Isa. 9:6.

4. Another great prophecy of Messiah is found in Isa. 9:1-7. What things do we learn about the Messiah from these verses?

⁴ Martin, John A., *Isaiah*, Bible Knowledge Commentary, Vol. 1, Walvoord & Zuck, ed., SP. Publications, USA, 1988 p. 1048.

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

Consider the names given for the Messiah in v. 6. How can knowing the Savior by these names encourage and comfort the believer in his/her walk with Christ?

5. In Isa 11:1-10, the description of the Messiah as the “rod” (or shoot) from the stem of Jesse seems to add clarity to the prophecy of Isa 6:13. What does Isaiah reveal about the character of this “branch” in verses 2-5? Compare v. 5 with Eph 6:14 – what does this tell us about how we should view the ministry of Christ?

What clues are in chapter 11 to help us understand the timing of the prophecy of this chapter? (comp. Isa. 11:4 w/ Rev. 19:15, c.f. Isa. 65)

6. From chapter 13 through 23 we have prophecies or “burdens” against various nations. Chapter 14 is of particular interest since its description includes a passage that is often taken as a description of the fall of Satan (14:12-15). Either way, what warning should we take from this passage?
7. Chapters 36-39 provide somewhat of a welcome relief to the reader from prophecy to narrative concerning the reign of Hezekiah.
 - a. Consider Hezekiah’s situation and his response (see esp. 37:14-20). What lessons do we learn about the importance of prayer from 37:21 ff.
 - b. What do we learn about prayer from the story of Hezekiah’s illness in chapter 38 and Hezekiah’s guests in chapter 39?
8. As seen in other prophecies of the Messiah, Isaiah 40 includes aspects of both the first coming of Jesus and his second coming (classic example: Isa 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19). What things in this chapter provide the “comfort” called for in 40:1?

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

9. There are four “servant” songs in Isaiah. These are passages that describe the Messiah as a servant and would therefore refer to the first coming of Jesus. Identify several characteristics of the “servant” in each of these passages. How can understanding these qualities of Jesus help us be better servants of the Lord?

Isa. 42:1-9

Isa 49:1-6 (autobiographical)⁵ Results 7-13

Isa 50:4-9

Isa 52:13-53:12 (cf. Mt. 27, Mk 15, Lk 23, Jn 19)

10. What do we learn about the nature of God and his provision of Salvation to mankind through Jesus as recorded in Isa 48:16?
11. Chapters 54-59 present God’s call for righteous living, in light of all His Servant has done. Consider the discipline of fasting from Isa. 58. What characteristics of a fast are not pleasing to God and which ones are pleasing (see esp. vv. 6-9).

⁵ Motyer, Alec J., *Isaiah*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL, 1993, p. 383.

Young, Edward J, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 volumes, Eerdmans Publishing, USA, 1972

Delitzsch, F., *Isaiah, Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, James Martin, Translator, Hendrickson Publishers, 2nd Printing 2001.

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH – ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Food for Thought

1. Although Isaiah has messages to Israel, Judah, and the nations, he is primarily a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In Chapter 1, Isaiah describes the sin and the judgment due to Judah. Read this chapter and identify the following: a) Accusations against Judah, b) The results Judah has or will experience because of its sin, c) statements of hope
a.) Poor rulers, fatherless and widows taken advantage of, Judah nourished-but rebelled, They don't know the Lord, Went through religious motions, Murder, Injustice, b) stricken already, country desolate, God hides, God will judge, c) v. 9 God left a remnant, v. 16 wash, v. 18-20 promised cleansing, v. 26 righteousness restored
2. In Isaiah chapter 6, the call of Isaiah provides one of the most vivid pictures we have in all of Scripture of the throne room of God. The significance of the passage can be seen in the fact that all four gospels and Acts quote from Isa 6:9-10. Consider each of the following elements of this vision:
 - a. In your own words, describe the scene set forth in 6:1-4.
 - b. Who does Isaiah see in this vision (consider also John 12:37-41 with John 14:9 and Col 1:15)? *God revealed himself through the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - c. The four living creatures of Revelation 4 and 5 are likely the same as the Seraphim described here (cf Rev. 4:4-11). How would you describe their ministry and their cry? (c.f. Ezek. 1 and 10)
They minister in the presence of the Lord - continuously serving and worshipping him. Their appearance reflects the power and majesty of the One whom they serve, in their worship; they proclaim the Lord's holiness. The glory of God's holiness is seen in the fact that they used 2 wings to cover their face; their constant activity shows that their service involves a constant activity.
 - d. What is significant about Isaiah's response to the vision in v. 5? (c.f. Lk 6:45)
When in the presence of the holy God, Isaiah recognizes his own sinfulness. I don't think it is fair as some say that Isaiah here acknowledges a foul mouth. Instead, the fact that one's words reflect what is going on in one's heart shows that Isaiah shows that he (as well as Israel) is sinful at heart and that is visible in the words we speak. It is not restricted to profane language.
 - e. When God announces the need for a messenger, Isaiah responds enthusiastically. What example does that provide for us? *We too should count it blessing and privilege to serve the Lord and do so with enthusiasm - Notice that Isaiah agrees to go before he knows the details.*
 - f. According to verses 9-10, what did God promise Isaiah would be the result of his message? How would you feel if that was the known outcome of your labors? How did this message to Isaiah see fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus (Matt 13:14-15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40, Acts 28:26-27, and an

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH – ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

allusion to it in Rom 11:8)? In short, people are not going to believe and they will actually reject and resist the message. Not much encouragement for the ministry of Isaiah, yet he proclaimed it in confidence that comes from knowing he was called by the Lord, even if the results were not readily apparent. Isaiah's ministry foreshadowed that of Jesus.

g. How long must the message God gives to Isaiah be proclaimed? *Until there are none left to preach to.*

3. Isa. 7:14 is quoted in Matt. 1:23 and alluded to in Lk 1:31 as referring to the virgin birth. What is unusual about who receives this prophecy (see 2 Chron 28) and the context in which it is given (Israel and Syria attacking Jerusalem)? What additional insight does the NT give to this prophecy? In light of this, how should we understand the prophecy of Isa 7:14?

Note: There are three primary views of how to interpret this prophecy: 1) The "virgin" speaks of a young virgin who will marry and give birth shortly, 2) The prophecy is exclusively messianic and only refers to Jesus, 3) The prophecy has both an immediate fulfillment in a young woman of Israel, and ultimate fulfillment in Christ. The alliance between Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel was broken in 732 B.C. when Tiglath-Pileaser III overthrew Damascus.⁶ Some also adapt the first view to refer to Isaiah's son of 8:1-4, however the difference in names seems to point to a different fulfillment (Isa. 7, messianic) as does the use of the word "Almah" for "virgin" which would not apply to Isaiah's wife. Consider also the promise of a Child in Isa. 9:6.

The prophecy should be understood as referring to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Isaiah's use of the Hebrew "Almah" supports this as does the confirmation in the NT Christmas story. The problem still exists in the immediate context. The prophecy seems to include elements that would be relevant to the invasion. As such, it seems best to understand the prophecy as referring to the birth of Jesus and the time frame from which it would take a child to be born and be able to discern right from wrong gives a maximum duration Ahaz will be facing the threat from Syria and the Northern Kingdom (say less than 3 years).

4. Another great prophecy of Messiah is found in Isa. 9:1-7. What things do we learn about the Messiah from these verses? *Here we see that the messiah is going to come from around the sea of Galilee (Only God could orchestrate both this fulfillment and the birth in Bethlehem in Micah 5:2, the same area Hiram told Solomon the towns he gave him were "cabul" or worthless. 1 Ki 9:11-12 (c.f. Jn 1:46). The prophecy also clarifies that the messiah will be for all people and that He will shine the radiance of God's glory on a dark land. The fact that He is "unto us" shows that this child to be born is a gift for you and me. The passage also clarifies that He will be king after the line of David reigning eternally.*

Consider the names given for the Messiah in v. 6. How can knowing the Savior by these names encourage and comfort the believer in his/her walk with Christ? *In biblical times, the name was to be an indication of the person's nature. As we see this promise, the messiah would be one who: is full of wonder; is a great counselor - who have us the Counselor in the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26); He is not a separate creation, but is the "mighty God" Himself (not a little "g" god); in case that was*

⁶ Martin, John A., *Isaiah*, Bible Knowledge Commentary, Vol. 1, Walvoord & Zuck, ed., SP. Publications, USA, 1988 p. 1048.

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH – ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

not clear, he is called the “everlasting Father” – Jesus had no beginning or end and is equal with the Father; as the Prince of Peace- he brings peace between men and God, but also since it is His nature, brings peace in situations we face.

5. In Isa 11:1-10, the description of the Messiah as the “rod” (or shoot) from the stem of Jesse seems to add clarity to the prophecy of Isa 6:13. What does Isaiah reveal about the character of this “branch” in verses 2-5? Compare v. 5 with Eph 6:14 – what does this tell us about how we should view the ministry of Christ? *The messiah is going to come out of the remnant that was to survive the judgment on Israel. The Spirit of God will be on Him and He would be wise and delight in the Lord - accomplishing the Father's will. He will have perfect knowledge of God and His righteousness. In the end, when he executes judgment, it will be perfect, based not upon circumstantial evidence or simple appearances, but in true righteousness. We can have confidence that God's judgments are true and right.*

What clues are in chapter 11 to help us understand the timing of the prophecy of this chapter? (comp. Isa. 11:4 w/ Rev. 19:15, c.f. Isa. 65) *The future tense indicates it is something yet to come, the description of a branch coming from the roots calls back to the stump of Isaiah 6:13 and points to a time after the judgment Isaiah has been talking about. The judgment of 11:4 points to the final judgment before the millennium and then in verse 6 he begins to describe the millennial kingdom, when Christ rules on earth for 1,000 years.*

6. From chapter 13 through 23 we have prophecies or “burdens” against various nations. Chapter 14 is of particular interest since its description includes a passage that is often taken as a description of the fall of Satan (14:12-15). Either way, what warning should we take from this passage? *This passage may or may not refer to the fall of Satan (Ezekiel 28 describes the fall of Satan). The passage cautions us to recognize the hand of God in any achievements we might have in this life and to give God glory for all of them. The passage also reminds us the Lord is the one in control of all circumstances and he can bless and correct as He wills.*
7. Chapters 36-39 provide somewhat of a welcome relief to the reader from prophecy to narrative concerning the reign of Hezekiah.
- Consider Hezekiah’s situation and his response (see esp. 37:14-20). What lessons do we learn about the importance of prayer from 37:21 ff? *Prayer involves laying our burdens before the Lord. Even when things look bleak, we must come to Him. In this prayer, Hezekiah acknowledges the Lord's power to be able to help, he asks the Lord to listen rather than to demand, he is honest with the situation he is in and asks God for help. In v. 21, we see that it is because Hezekiah prayed (Hebrew Hithpael - reflexive idea, “your yourself prayed”) that the Lord moved. Prayer does change things.*
 - What do we learn about prayer from the story of Hezekiah’s illness in chapter 38 and Hezekiah’s guests in chapter 39? *It is appropriate for our prayers to reflect the emotion of our heart (consider Hannah 1 Sam 1:10). The Lord answered Hezekiah's prayer in the affirmative, and that answer also provided occasion for Hezekiah to be the one to show Babylon the temple treasures. We must remember that God sees the end and that sometimes a “no” is also for our benefit and for His glory.*

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH – ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

8. As seen in other prophecies of the Messiah, Isaiah 40 includes aspects of both the first coming of Jesus and his second coming (classic example: Isa 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19). What things in this chapter provide the “comfort” called for in 40:1? *There is a time coming when God's judgment will end and when He will come for them. He will send a messenger first to prepare the way and he also promises that the word of the Lord will stand- these things will come to pass. Starting in verse 10, we see the Lord coming “with a strong hand” and “with His reward” (cf 62:11). He has blessing for his people and though He is strong, he deals gently with His flock (v. 11). God shows himself powerful and gentle; He cares and knows His flock by name (v. 26). He promises to strengthen those who wait upon Him (v. 31). What wonderful words of comfort!*
9. There are four “servant” songs in Isaiah. These are passages that describe the Messiah as a servant and would therefore refer to the first coming of Jesus. Identify several characteristics of the “servant” in each of these passages. How can understanding these qualities of Jesus help us be better servants of the Lord?
- Isa. 42:1-9 *He is gentle in performing the work of the Lord. Even in the face of suffering, Jesus did not cry out.*
- Isa 49:1-6 (autobiographical)⁷ Results 7-13 *The servant would be raised up as a light to the Gentiles. As a servant, we should not be a respecter of persons, but serve others as the Lord has.*
- Isa 50:4-9 *This passage describes the suffering of Jesus on his way to the cross. In spite of the horrible experience and pain, His confidence is in the help of the Lord.*
- Isa 52:13-53:12 (cf. Mt. 27, Mk 15, Lk 23, Jn 19) *Isaiah 53 provides the most graphic prophecy of the suffering Jesus will endure for the sins of the world. He shows us how much he loved us and challenges us to likewise have love for others. An interesting contrast in v. 9, the Servant would have no “deceit in His mouth” and when called, Isaiah acknowledged His unclean lips. (6:5).*
10. What do we learn about the nature of God and his provision of Salvation to mankind through Jesus as recorded in Isa 48:16? *This is the most clear statement of the Trinity in the OT. Here we see that the one sent to save the world was sent by the Father and by the Spirit. The one who was sent “Me” is Jesus - hence we see all three persons of the trinity at work in our Salvation. Indeed, “For God so loved the world that He sent is One and only Son...” (Jn 3:16).*
11. Chapters 54-59 present God’s call for righteous living, in light of all His Servant has done. Consider the discipline of fasting from Isa. 58. What characteristics of a fast are not pleasing to God and which ones are pleasing (see esp. vv. 6-9). *In short, God is looking at the heart when it comes to fasting. If we are engaged in other wrong behaviors, fasting is of no use. A true fast will call to repentance and we will cease from sins that hinder our walk with the Lord. Instead of religious activity, God delights in righteous living. This is not to say that there is no place for a traditional fast, but one’s heart and actions are more important in serving the Lord.*

⁷ Motyer, Alec J., *Isaiah*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL, 1993, p. 383.

Young, Edward J, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 volumes, Eerdmans Publishing, USA, 1972

Delitzsch, F. , *Isaiah, Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, James Martin, Translator, Hendrickson Publishers, 2nd Printing 2001.