

Isaiah

I. The Main Idea of Isaiah

Through the prophet Isaiah, God admonishes his people to trust wholly in Him.

Isaiah was written to confront Israel's sin and give them hope for the future, specifically the hope of a "Suffering Servant," the Messiah.

II. Outline of Isaiah

- Isaiah 1-39: Message for 8th Century Israel
 - Isaiah 1-12: Will People Trust God or Exalt Themselves?
 - Isaiah 13-27: Do Not Put Your Trust in the Nations
 - Isaiah 28-35: Woes of Judgment Mixed with Threads of Hope
 - Isaiah 36-39: God Miraculously Delivers Those Who Trust Him (History)
- Isaiah 40-66: Message for 6th Century Israel in Exile
 - Isaiah 40-55: Trust God, for He Will Restore His People
 - Isaiah 56-66: The Destiny of God's Servants and the Wicked

Adapted from DeRouchie, ed. *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 280.

III. Interpretive Keys to Isaiah

Genre: Mostly Poetry, Some Narrative

- It expresses "experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose."
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.

New Testament References

- Referenced almost 200 times in the New Testament!
- "The influence of Isaiah on the NT writers is nothing short of profound. One hundred and ninety-four NT passages have citations or allusions to 54 of the 66 chapters of Isaiah. The NT books of Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, Hebrew, and Revelation are especially replete with quotations from the book of Isaiah." --Mark F. Rooker, "Isaiah," in *The World & the Word*, 376.

Author: Isaiah

- Some scholars break the book into two or more sections and claim that there were different authors for each section.
 - One of the primary motivations for doing this is the clear prophecy about Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28 & 45:1.
 - Isaiah ministered from 740 to 700 B.C. The Persian King Cyrus issued his decree to allow the Jews to return home in 538 B.C. So Isaiah is providing the name of a king who will live about 200 years in the future.
 - Those who discredit the supernatural and miraculous events in the Bible have to explain away this remarkable prediction.
 - Another motivating factor is the difference in tone between chapters 1-39 (judgment) vs. 40-66 (comfort & hope).
- However, the following evidence strongly supports the unity of the book of Isaiah as well as it having one author: Isaiah, the son of Amoz (Isa. 1:1).
 - First, this multiple-author theory was suggested relatively recently in history and was most likely motivated by humanistic philosophies that did not allow for the supernatural.
 - The fact that Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 mentions the Persian king Cyrus by name is a problem for secular humanists who believe the Bible was written by mere men and not by divine revelation and the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus would pave the way for the exiled Jewish people to return to their land and rebuild the temple.
 - The Christian worldview adopts the theological position of the Bible: that there is an all-knowing God who is in control of history and who sometimes tells his people what will happen in the future. Since Isaiah was a prophet, we have no problem believing that God revealed to him the name and actions of a ruler who was to reign 200 years in the future.

- Second, the oldest manuscript we have of the book of Isaiah makes no indication that there were multiple authors.
 - Most scholars who believe Isaiah had multiple authors would argue that at the very least, there is a break from one author to the next at the end of chapter 39. But the Great Isaiah Scroll found among the Dead Sea Scrolls makes no indication that there was any major shift between chapters 39 and 40.
 - On the scroll, chapter 39 ends and chapter 40 begins within the same column of text. In fact, chapter 40 begins on the last line of a column, and it would have been very easy for the scribe to start chapter 40 at the top of the next column if he had reason to believe it should be separated.
 - This scroll dates to ca. 125 B.C., a few hundred years after the historical Isaiah lived in the 8th century B.C., so it is not iron clad proof. But it is supporting evidence. If there was more than one author of Isaiah, wouldn't someone living in the 2nd century B.C. be more likely to know that, rather than someone living in the 21st century A.D.?
 - You can examine this scroll for yourself at <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah>.
- Third, the New Testament writers indicate that verses within both Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40-66 were written by Isaiah himself. From the standpoint of the New Testament writers, there was only one author for the *entire* book of Isaiah.
 - John 12:39-41, Acts 28:25-27, Romans 9:27-29, and Romans 15:12 quote from passages in Isaiah 1, 6, 10, and 11 and attribute those words to the prophet Isaiah.
 - Luke 3:4, Luke 4:17-19, John 1:23, John 12:38, Acts 8:28-35, Romans 10:16 and Romans 10:20-21 quote from passages in Isaiah 40, 53, 61 and 65, and again attribute those words to the prophet Isaiah.
 - The apostle John even makes back-to-back quotations from Isaiah 6 and 53, essentially the beginning and the end of Isaiah's book, and attributes **both** quotations to the prophet Isaiah (John 12:38-41).
- Fourth, the argument of those who hold to multiple authors does not even make sense. The line of reasoning is this:
 - Skeptics say, there is no way that Isaiah could have known the name of Cyrus, therefore a post-exilic writer must have written that portion of the book.
 - But if you look at the argument being made in chapters 40 through 46, the author is encouraging the Israelites to place their faith in Yahweh because he is the one true God who can do incredible things. One of the pieces of evidence pointed to by the biblical author is that Yahweh can predict the future (Isaiah 44:6-8).
 - A few verses later (Isaiah 44:28 & 45:1) the author provides a test case by declaring that Cyrus would be the one to allow Jerusalem and the temple to be rebuilt after the exile.
 - Why would this be a convincing argument if the biblical writer was writing *after* Cyrus had already issued his decree?
 - Why would an author "predict" an event that had already happened to prove that Yahweh could declare the future?

- If this portion of the book was written by a post-exilic author, his argument would be unconvincing. It makes much more sense for the eighth-century Isaiah to have made a genuine prophecy.

IV. Key Passages of Isaiah

Isaiah 1:2-3

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: ‘Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.’”

- This is how Isaiah opens the book. He is reaching back into Israel’s past all the way to what Moses told the Israelites as they were getting ready to enter the promised land:
 - Deuteronomy 4:25–26 “When you father children and children’s children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, **I call heaven and earth to witness against you today**, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.”
- In the next 35 chapters, Isaiah lays out the case against Israel. The nation had:
 - Gave unjust judgments in court (1:17, 23; 5:7, 23; 10:1-2).
 - Worshiped Idols (2:8, 20; 10:10-11).
 - Oppressed the poor (3:14-15; 5:8-10; 10:1-2).
 - Gave themselves to wine and strong drink (5:11-12, 22; 28:1-7).
 - Called evil “good” and good “evil” (5:20).
- Isaiah summarizes their sinful state by saying, “Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.” (1:4)

Isaiah 6 – The Prophet’s Call

- “The New Testament quotes this passage more than any other Old Testament scripture (e.g., Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-41; Acts 28:26-27; Rom. 11:8).” –J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 106.
- Isaiah sees Yahweh on his throne, is convicted of his sin, is cleansed of his sin, and then commissioned as a prophet.
- “[T]he call narrative provides the prophet with the credentials necessary for proclaiming judgment and hope. That seems to have been the purpose of the call narrative in the prophetic collections.” –Bullock, *Intro to the OT Prophetic Books*, 166.
- Note: The conviction of sin and the cleansing of sin were required before Isaiah could start his ministry.

“Trust the Lord, not yourself” is a major theme in the book:

- **Isaiah 2:17** “And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.”
- **Isaiah 12:2** “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.”
- **Isaiah 26:3-4** “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.”
- **Isaiah 40:31** “but they who wait for 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.”

In a time when Israel was turning away from the Lord and trusting in other things, they needed to be reminded by the Lord’s messenger that the only reliable person in whom we can place our trust is the one, true God.

Isaiah 40:1-3 “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”

- This passage marks a turning point in the book. Chapters 1-39 were written primarily for the people in Isaiah’s lifetime, and contains warning about coming judgments. Chapters 40-66 seem to have been written primarily for a future generation after the exile. (See outline above.)
- This passage is referenced in all four gospels: Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23.
- When asked who he claimed to be, John the Baptist responded: “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (John 1:23) Thus, this prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist.

Additional key passages include the Cyrus prophecy (see discussion above) and the Messianic prophecies (see discussion below).

V. Messianic Elements within Isaiah

In several places of the book, Isaiah introduces and develops the idea of a Messiah. We see this servant doing several things throughout the book, and the New Testament authors pick up on that theme and apply these prophecies to Jesus. The following organization is from Walter Kaiser's book *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 155-185.

The prophecies marked with an asterisk (*) are the major prophecies from Isaiah you should know.

- The Messiah as King
 - The Branch of the Lord: Isaiah 4:2
 - *The Virgin Birth: Isaiah 7:1-16
 - *The Wonderful Ruling Son: Isaiah 9:1-7
 - *The Reign of Jesse's Son: Isaiah 11:1-16
 - The Universal Triumph of Messiah: Isaiah 24:21-23
 - The Foundation Stone: Isaiah 28:16
 - The Messiah as Teacher: Isaiah 30:19-26
- The Messiah as Servant
 - The Servant's Ministry: Isaiah 42:1-7
 - The Servant's Mission to the World: Isaiah 49:1-6
 - The Servant's Gethsemane: Isaiah 50:4-9
 - *The Servant's Atonement: Isaiah 52:13-53:12
 - There are at least 37 references to Isaiah 53 in the New Testament!
- The Messiah as Anointed Conqueror
 - The Messiah's Unfailing Gifts Promised to David: Isaiah 55:3-5
 - *The Messiah As Proclaimer of Good News: Isaiah 61:1-3 (cf. Luke 4:16ff)
 - The Messiah As Conqueror: Isaiah 63:1-6