

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# Isaiah

Isaiah accents God's grace and mercy. Repeatedly, he foretells the coming of Messiah — both as a suffering servant, redeeming the people by His faithful obedience unto death, and as a conquering king, bringing the age of peace and restoration to edenic paradise.

**What is it?** Twenty-third Old Testament book, between Song of Solomon and Jeremiah; named for the prophet who heard God's Word and gave it to the people (1:1; 6:9a).

**Who was Isaiah?** Son of Amoz, married with two sons, from Jerusalem (2:1; 7:3; 8:3). His name, like Jesus, means "Yahweh is salvation." No recluse, Isaiah was a statesman prophet with access to royalty (7:3). Tradition says he died by being sawn in two (Hebrews 11:37).

**How a prophet?** By revelation, cleansing, and commission from the Lord (6:1-13).

**When and where?** Last half of the eighth century BC, when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah reigned in Jerusalem and Judah (1:1). The northern tribes of Israel were captured by Assyria (722 BC.), and Judah was severely threatened (7:17; 8:7,8; 36 — 37; 701 BC.). Isaiah prophesied Jerusalem would be spared, but predicted its future captivity and return (37:33-35; 39:5-8; fulfilled 586 BC.; ch. 40ff).

**Why?** The prophet saw the people's sinful way and spoke against it. He also saw the grace and promise of God — greater than human failure.

**Confirmation!** Copies of Isaiah were among the Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947. One is 24 feet long, dates from the second century BC, contains the complete Hebrew text, and demonstrates the Bible's accuracy.

**Coincidence?** The Bible has 66 books and Isaiah has 66 chapters. As the Bible's books are arranged — 39 in older Scriptures, 27 in newer — so Isaiah's first 39 chapters incline to misery and the latter 27 toward comfort.

Off-heard in this section is "fear not" or "be not afraid" (40:9; 41:5, 10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8, 11; 51:7, 12; 54:4, 14). Other encouraging words echoing here are *delight, gladness, joy, pleasure, rejoice, sing, light, shine, awake, arise, lift, raise, return, build, and rebuild*.

Despite differences between the sections, Isaiah is a united book. One evidence of this: the prophet's favorite name for God — "the Holy One of Israel" — occurs 12 times in the first section, 14 times in the later section, but only six times elsewhere in Scripture.

**Easy reading?** Not quite. The brilliant Isaiah has a vocabulary of 2,186 different words (Ezekiel has 1,535; Jeremiah 1,653; Psalms 2,170). Add puzzling expressions, jumps of subject matter, and the gap between his culture and ours: Isaiah can be difficult, especially for a novice reader. Any chapter can have a thicket of ideas that sets

thoughtful readers puzzling. Don't quit: just ahead will be a clearing — a lovely lyric, a fresh burst of praise or promise, a pre-picture of Christ, a plain statement of duty — where meaning breaks forth with clarity, encouragement, and conviction. With experience and tools (translations, commentaries, fellow readers), even the problematic portions can be appreciated. Isaiah becomes more lovely knowing the New Testament and Christian music: both quote it often.

**Threatening refrain:** "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is

**Chapters 1-39:** Bad news begins with Israel's sad state before God (1:4ff). "Woe" is repeated often (3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20-22; 6:5), starting six chapters (10, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33). Oracles of woe — "burdens" — against the nations fill eleven chapters (13-23). Judgments are declared on the whole earth (13:11; ch. 24, 27, 34).

This first section is heavy with the peoples' sins: forgetting God, ritualism, idolatry, pride, drunkenness, materialism, injustice and oppression, permissiveness and lying, and trust in human alliance

(especially chapters 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 39).

Still, the darkness of Isaiah 1-39 is sprinkled with bright words, promises, and prophecies (1:18; 2:1-4; 12; 25; 26; 28:5, 6, 16; 30:18, 19; 32; 33:2ff; 35).

**Chapters 40-66:** The second section begins with double "comfort" for the restoration of God's people from future captivity (40:1, 2-11). It resounds with the greatness of the only God over all idols (40-48), the salvation He promises (49-55), and the future glory for Zion (56-66).

stretched out still" (5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4).

**Comforting finale:** "Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me" (12:1).

#### Remarkable pairs

- Chapters 1 and 40: one is typical of the first 39, summarizing Judah's sins and calling for repentance; 40 is typical of the last 27, promising that the incomparable God cares and renews our strength.
- Chapters five and 12: five recites a melancholy "song of the vineyard" (vv. 1-7); 12 contains a triumphant "song of salvation" (vv. 1-6).
- Chapters 11 and 53: Both starting from *root* (11:1; 53:2), 11 describes Messiah's work as praiseworthy, powerful, peaceful, and glorious (vv. 2, 4, 6-9, 10); 53 sees Him as uncomely, accepting pain and grief, remaining silent, dying for others before triumph (vv. 2-5, 7-12).
- Chapters 34 and 35: classic descriptions of God's wrath (34) and grace (35) to the nations. The bridge between them (34:16) urges readers to search God's book for these mated promises: None shall fail!
- Chapters 54 and 55: marvelous promises to the Lord's servants (54) — those who turn from their own ways to the gracious God Most High (55).
- Chapters 56 and 58: Sabbath's significance seen in the call for Gentiles to join unto the Lord (56) and for God's people to worship in truth (58).
- Chapter 37 and 2 Kings 19 are nearly identical.

**Isaiah in a sentence:** Although the Holy One of Israel punishes His people for sins, He also calls them to arise and return with assurance that He is the only true God, that He will deliver them from their enemies, and that the Messiah will suffer, reign, and bring Zion to glory.

#### Among the prophets, Isaiah . . .

- is first and greatest — the prince of prophets.
- is a "major" prophet according to length — 66 chapters. Other majors: Jeremiah (52 chapters, but more words); Ezekiel (48 chapters). Minor prophets (Daniel through Malachi) are much shorter.
- prophesied alongside Hosea and Micah (v. 1 of each; compare Isaiah 2:1-4 with Micah 4:1-3).
- lived 100 years before Jeremiah; 150 before Ezekiel and Daniel; 300 before Malachi; 700 before John the Baptist.
- is named (20 times) and directly quoted (65 times) in the New Testament — more than any other prophet.

#### Key concepts

- Holiness (5:16; 6:3): Israel's LORD is pure, radiant, glorious, and transcendent (4:2; 11:10; 30:30; 33:21; 57:15; 60:13; 63:1, 12-15).
- Holy also are His Spirit, mountain, name, arm, day, temple, and people (2:1-4; 6:13; 11:9; 27:13; 52:10; 56:7; 57:13, 15; 58:13; 62:12; 63:10, 11; 64:11; 65:11, 25; 66:20).
- Monotheism: the One and Only challenges all others that claim to be "god" (40:18ff; 41:21ff; 42:8, 9; 43:8-13; 44:6ff; 45:5ff, 18-22; 46:5-9; 47:10b; 48:3-5, 11-16).
- Turn/return, remnant (6:13; 31:6; 35:10; 44:22; 51:11; 55:7; 58:13; 59:20): In all divine chastening, a righteous few will return to Zion and follow God faithfully — the remnant (10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 37:31, 32; 46:3).

#### Important nations

- Assyria (7 — 11; 19:23 — 20:6; 36 — 37): northern power, the "rod of God's anger" against Israel (10:5). Capital: Nineveh.
- Babylon (13 — 14; 21:9; 39; 47:1;

#### Major prophecies of the Messiah

- His reign from Mt. Zion (2:1-5)
- His birth of a virgin (7:14)
- His marvelous name and kingdom (9:6, 7)
- His peaceful reign over all the earth (11:1-10)
- His miracles (35:5, 6)
- John the Baptist's preparations for Him (40:3-5)
- His exaltation by all (45:23)
- Servant songs reveal Him (42:1-7; 49:2-10; 50:5-9)
- Sorrows, sufferings, death, triumph (52:13 — 53:12)
- Zion's Redeemer attracts Gentiles (59:20 — 60:3)
- His Ministry foretold (61:1-3)
- His final coming in judgment (62:11)
- His bloody death (63:2, 3)
- New heavens and earth (65:17 — 66)

48:14, 20): northern super-power after Assyria; will bring wrath against Judah (39:6, 7).

- Egypt (19 — 20; 30:1-5; 31:1-3; 36:6, 9): southern power; Jerusalem must not look there for help.
- Ephraim (7 — 11; 28:1-4): with Samaria its capital, another name for ten northern tribes of Israel; joined Syria in war against Jerusalem (7:1ff).

#### Important names

- Cyrus (44:28; 45:1-7): Persian king, named 200 years before his birth; he released Hebrew captives.
- Hezekiah (36 — 39): King of Judah, threatened by Assyria; asked Isaiah's help, prayed in the temple, delivered by the Lord; became deathly ill, given 15 more years; showed treasure to Babylon.
- Immanuel (7:14; 8:8): name of promised Son — "God with us."
- Lucifer (14:12): king of Babylon, Day-star; may refer also to Satan.
- Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:1, 3): Isaiah's second son; longest name in Scripture.
- Sennacherib, Rabshakeh (36 — 37): Assyria's king and chief of staff; invaded Judah; spoke haughty threats against Jerusalem; armies destroyed.