

The Bible's Big Story



Isaiah 1–39

Isaiah is the first of the prophetic books listed in our English Bibles. Because of its size and literary complexity, it will be covered in two lessons. Containing some of the clearest revelation of God's redemptive plan in the Old Testament, Isaiah is sometimes called the fifth gospel.

Introductory Information

Title: The book is named for the prophet Isaiah. Providentially, the meaning of his name, "Yahweh is salvation," is the perfect three-word summary of the book's message.

Authorship: Isaiah, son of Amos (1:1), was arguably Judah's greatest and most prolific writing prophet, and has sometimes been called the Prince of Prophets. Outside of his own prophecies, little is known about him for certain. Later Jewish tradition suggests he was a member of the royal court, potentially a cousin of King Uzziah, and claims that he was martyred under Manasseh by being sawn in two. If this is accurate, this may be alluded to in Hebrews 11:37.

Traditionally, the book has been viewed as the work of one author, but higher-critical scholars argue for multiple authors on the basis of perceived stylistic and theological differences between the earlier and later chapters. For believers, the decisive factor is the testimony of Scripture. The New Testament consistently names Isaiah as the author of quotations from chapters 40–66. (See Mt 3:3; 8:17; 12:8-21; Lk. 3:4; Jn 7:23; 12:38-41; Rom 9:27-33; 10:16-21)

Date: Isaiah's ministry began under Uzziah (co-regent as early as 792 BC) at some point before Uzziah's death in 740 BC (ch. 6) and continued into Hezekiah's reign. The last historical event in the book is the death of Sennacherib (37:8), around 680 BC. This allows us to date his ministry circa 740-680 BC, overlapping with Micah, Hosea, Amos, and perhaps Jonah.

Theme & Purpose: The book's theme unfold in three movements:

- **Judgment and Warning (chs. 1-39):** Judah rebuked for injustice and idolatry.
- **Comfort and Deliverance (chs. 40-55):** God's sovereignty proclaimed, and hope promised through a Suffering Servant who will succeed where Israel failed.
- **Future Glory and Restoration (chs. 56-66):** Visions of the renewed covenant and a new heavens and earth.

Theme Summary: Isaiah's prophecies deliver warnings of impending judgment against Judah and the surrounding nations, interspersed with promises of redemption and restoration. That redemption will come through the promised Davidic king, a Suffering Servant who will bear the sins of many and establish God's eternal kingdom.

Redemption Revealed In Isaiah (Part 1)

Isaiah declares that God, the Holy One, both judges sin and rescues sinners.

Isaiah's warnings demonstrate the seriousness of sin. Judah and the nations are justly under God's judgment; his mercy will not last forever, and justice will be accomplished. Yet Isaiah also offers hope for a remnant who will be rescued, redeemed, and restored.

Isaiah exposes the need that only the gospel answers, and this is clearest in the vision of chapter 6. Seeing the Lord's holiness, Isaiah cries "Woe is me," recognizing his own sin and, by extension, Judah's. Yet his lips are cleansed with a coal from the altar, demonstrating that the source of atonement comes from God himself.

This imagery, though shadowy in Isaiah, is clearer in the New Testament. The apostle John quotes Isaiah 6, declaring that Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke of him (John 12:41). Ultimately, Isaiah's need for atonement was accomplished by Christ, whose death, burial, and resurrection provide the necessary sacrifice to cleanse God's people.

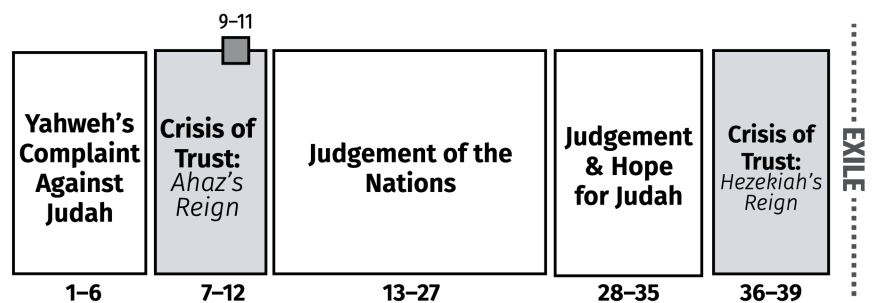
Isaiah reveals that the promised Davidic king will be Immanuel—God with us.

Israel's and Judah's flawed kings expose the need for a truly righteous king, anointed by the Spirit, to rule God's people forever. The divided kingdom would be cut off and its kings would fail, yet from the old stump would come a new shoot, a righteous branch from the same root. The Son of David would perfectly fulfill the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. Paul describes this in Romans 11: unbelieving branches are cut off, yet a remnant is preserved, and Gentiles from every nation are grafted by faith into the restored people of God.

This deliverance will come not through another merely human king but through David's greater son, whom Isaiah prophetically names Immanuel, God with us. He is the sinless God-man who takes on human flesh, is born of a virgin to suffer and die as the perfect servant fulfilling the Father's will. He redeems us from rebellion and establishes God's kingdom, and of his government and peace there will be no end.

Notes:

The Structure of Isaiah—Part 1



Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Isaiah's "Woe is me" in chapter 6 is a response to seeing God's holiness. When you consider God's holiness, what does it reveal to you about your own need, and where do you look for cleansing?
2. Ahaz turned to Assyria and Hezekiah turned to the Lord, yet Hezekiah later tried to impress Babylon. In what situations are you tempted to put your trust in someone or something other than God?
3. Isaiah's warnings give a clear-eyed view of the seriousness of sin, while also offering hope. How do you hold God's justice and God's mercy together, and how does the gospel answer the question of how sinners can be right before a holy God?
4. John 12:41 says Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke of him. What does this reveal about Jesus' divinity? How does reading Isaiah 6 and the promise of a Davidic king named Immanuel in light of Jesus influence the way you read the Old Testament?