

Introduction to Isaiah

Author and Date

Isaiah was called to his prophetic ministry “in the year that King Uzziah died” ([6:1](#)), around 740 BC. He lived long enough to record the death of Sennacherib ([37:38](#)), in 681. However, most of the book can be dated only in very general terms because few specific dates are given.

The Gospel in Isaiah

Reading the book of [Isaiah](#) takes us into the precarious space between warning and wonder, faithlessness and fidelity, compromise and conviction: this is the world where a fallen people hear the holy God. Divine words come full of truth and grace; they expose sin while offering, beneath all failure, hope and redemption. In Isaiah, God’s word calls for a humble response of awe, humble trust, and reverent submission to the Lord and his kingdom.

While the immediate context of Isaiah relates to the dangers posed by Assyria and Babylon as well as the dramatic shifts between exile and return, this prophetic book was always understood to have ongoing relevance. One of the most referenced Old Testament books in the New Testament, later writers look back to Isaiah and unflinchingly identify Jesus as the foretold Messiah who fulfills all the promises in this prophetic book. Isaiah’s messianic profile informs Christian worship of Jesus as the suffering servant who brings a new creation through his life-giving resurrection.

God had entered into a covenant with Israel, and with that covenant came the promise of divine blessings for faithfulness and a warning about curses for lack of faithfulness (e.g., [Leviticus 26](#)). Sadly, Israel flirted with idols, and when difficulties arose they tended to trust in unrighteous foreign powers rather than their sovereign Lord. Through their hardness of heart they forsook wholehearted trust in the Lord, while showing apathy toward injustice and a lack of concern for the needy. Throughout Isaiah we read sober warnings not only against the idolatrous nations but also against God’s own covenant-breaking people. Israel has proven not to be the “light to the nations” they were called to be.

Where then can a foundation for hope and redemption be found? It is grounded on the promises brought home time and again throughout Isaiah—promises ultimately secured only in Jesus Christ ([2 Cor. 1:19–20](#)). A sampling of key ideas emerging from Isaiah demonstrates how much our understanding of Christ and his kingdom is informed by this glorious book.

First, a preserved “remnant” becomes the focal point of God’s promises in [Isaiah](#), and eventually the remnant is identified through and in its one messianic representative, the Anointed One: Jesus himself.

Second, this Anointed One will suffer on behalf of others: in the New Testament we discover that Jesus the Messiah is the one who absorbs the covenant curses—so that those who are united to him by faith might live in his covenant blessings. But we must turn to Christ, trusting in him as Savior and Lord.

Third, Isaiah reminds us that God’s people are meant to reflect God’s heart. We repeatedly read about Israel’s struggle with disobedience and with not consistently showing a concern for the things that reflect God’s heart (e.g., the poor and vulnerable, and matters of justice). In their rebellion they undermine the ancient ceremonies and practices that God instituted to prompt his forgiven people to practice righteousness and mercy. When they do not practice these things, the concern is that they may not have truly feasted on God’s grace in the first place.

Fourth, God’s call extends beyond Israel to the world. Isaiah keeps a global perspective even as it often focuses on Judah. God is described not merely as the Creator of Israel in particular, but also as the Creator of the world in general (e.g., [17:7](#); [29:16](#); [40:28](#); [43:15](#); [51:13](#); [54:5](#)). God wants his people to be a blessing to the world (e.g., [Gen. 12:1–3](#); [18:17–18](#); [28:14](#); [Jer. 4:2](#); cf. [Acts 3:25](#); [Gal. 3:14](#)). Part of the reason God’s judgments so often appear in [Isaiah](#) is that his people have been rebellious, creating darkness rather than bringing light. Nevertheless, the Creator, who singularly serves as the Redeemer of Israel, also extends hope to the nations who must repent and look in faith to the only true God (e.g., [Isa. 19:16–25](#); [44:6, 24](#)).

Engrafted into the Messiah and the deliverance he brings, God’s people are liberated to love God and neighbor. As this occurs, God’s people become a light to the nations, holding out the hope not merely of forgiveness but also of new creation. The message of Isaiah is that God is very great—and yet, astonishingly, his mercy is just as great.

Isaiah Outline

- Introduction: “Ah, Sinful Nation!” ([1:1–5:30](#))
- God Redefines the Future of His People: “Your Guilt Is Taken Away” ([6:1–12:6](#))
- God’s Judgment and Grace for the World: “We Have a Strong City” ([13:1–27:13](#))
- God’s Sovereign Word Spoken into the World: “Ah!” ([28:1–35:10](#))
- Historical Transition: “In Whom Do You Now Trust?” ([36:1–39:8](#))
- Encouragement for God’s Exiles: “The Glory of the Lord Shall Be Revealed” ([40:1–55:13](#))
- How to Prepare for the Coming Glory: “Hold Fast My Covenant” ([56:1–66:24](#))