

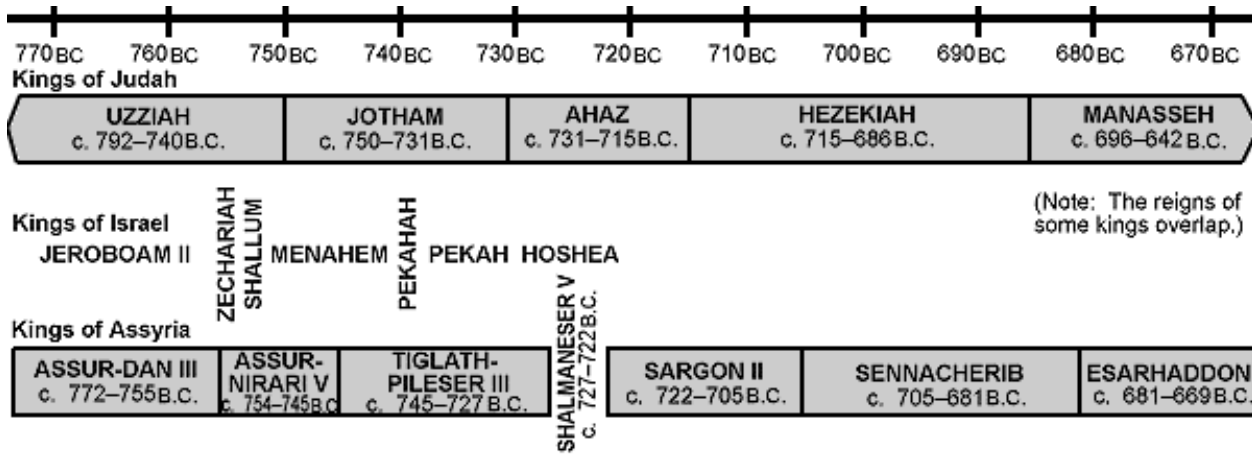
INTRODUCTION

Personal Anecdote:

- John 12:37-41 and Isaiah 53:1/6:1-13 | Isa 57:15; 52:13
- Isaiah and the current world situation

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

TIMELINE OF ISAIAH'S MINISTRY



Key Historical Moments – “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah”:

- 740 BC - King Uzziah died
- 722 BC - Northern Kingdom (Israel) defeated by Assyria
- 716/715 BC - Hezekiah begins to reign in Judah
- 701 BC - Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah
- 686 BC - End of Hezekiah's reign

Based on Isaiah 1:1, Isaiah would have prophesied over a period of at least 25 years, and potentially as long as 55-60 years. Depending on how we interpret Isaiah 6, this was either his calling as a prophet which would date the beginning of his ministry to 740 BC, or he had already begun his ministry earlier during the reign of Uzziah. Isaiah 1-5 give every indication of having been delivered during a historical situation much closer to that of King Uzziah's reign than any other subsequent king.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Three different historical situations sit in the background of the book:

- During Isaiah's lifetime (740-701 B.C.)
- Period of Judah's Exile (605-539 B.C.)
- Return from Exile and beyond (539-500 B.C. and ?)

DURING ISAIAH'S LIFETIME

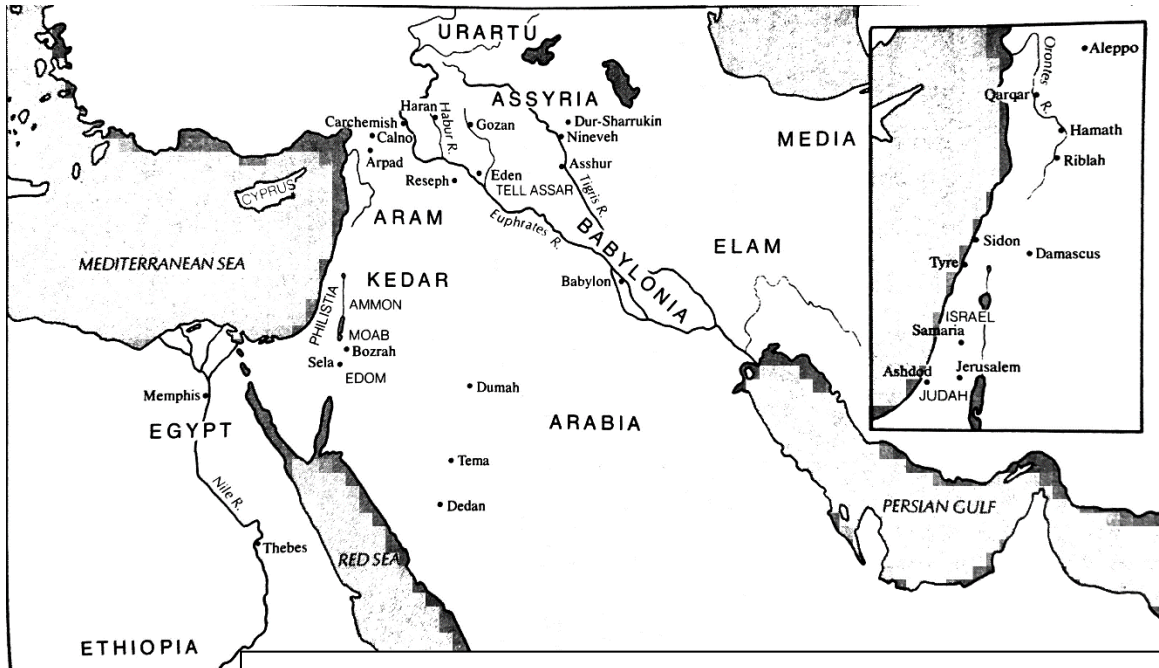
- 810 – 750 represented a succession of weak Assyrian Kings, meaning a time of peace and prosperity in Israel (under Jeroboam) and Judah (under Uzziah). Also, a false sense of complacency about their condition, as warned by Hosea and Amos.
- The ascension of a series of aggressive Assyrian kings forced the surrounding nations to choose whether they would be pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian.
 - Taking a pro-Assyrian stance was especially appealing to Judah given the tensions with Israel and Syria/Damascus to the North. This fear-driven alliance was the first major public activity of Isaiah's ministry. (Isa. 7)
 - Following the rise of Hezekiah, the political mood in Judah shifted to a more anti-Assyrian stance with many looking to Egypt as a potential ally against Assyrian aggression.
 - In 710BC, following his defeat of Babylon, Assyrian King Sargon had achieved a "pinnacle of world dominance" and proudly considered himself Lord of the Universe. Cf Isa. 14.
 - After Sargon's fall, Hezekiah joined an anti-Assyrian alliance and rebelled, prompting Sennacherib's invasion. This was a decisive time, in which Hezekiah's repentance and trust in YHWH resulted in a great deliverance. Sennacherib reigned for 19 more years but never again mounted a campaign in the west.

DURING THE PERIOD OF THE EXILE

- Ch. 40-55 are written as if to an audience of those in Exile
- 700-600BC saw the shift of world power from Assyria to Babylon
- Babylon briefly reigned before giving way to the Medo-Persian empire, but it is during this time that the Judean exile occurred.
- The theme of these chapters – YHWH's supremacy over the gods of the nations – speaks to the heart of concerns brought about by the exile.

AFTER THE EXILE

- 56-66 speak as if to an audience either pre- or post-exile, although a lot of the concerns addressed were consistent with those of the post-exilic community.



John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39.* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996)

BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN HISTORICAL TEXTS

Ethiopia. I besieged Eltekeh (and) Timnah (*Ta-am-na-a*), conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city. The (common) citizens who were guilty of minor crimes, I considered prisoners of war. The rest of them, those who were not accused of crimes and misbehavior, I released. I made Padi, their king, come from Jerusalem (*Ur-sa-li-im-mu*) and set him as their lord on the throne, imposing upon him the tribute (due) to me (as) overlord.

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza. Thus I reduced his country, but I still increased the tribute and the *katru*-presents (due) to me (as his) overlord which I imposed (later) upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen (it), had deserted him, did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, *nimedu*-chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, box-wood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians, in order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) messenger.

land) in the midst of the sea, and sought refuge (there). But even in this land, he met infamous death before the awe-inspiring splendor of the "Weapon" of my lord Ashur. I installed Ethba'al (*Tuba'lu*) upon his royal throne and imposed upon him the tribute (due to) me (as his) overlord. I laid waste the large district of Judah (*la-a-di*) and made the overbearing and proud Hezekiah (*Ha-za-qi-a-a-a*), its king, bow in submission.

(3) From the Nebi Yunus Slab, published by Rawlinson, Vol. 1, Pl. 43. Translation: Luckenbill, *op.cit.*, p. 86, and AR, II, §347.

(13-15)

I deprived Luli, king of Sidon, of his kingdom. I installed Ethba'al (*Tuba'lu*) upon his throne and I imposed upon him the tribute (due to) me (as his) overlord. I laid waste the large district of Judah and put the straps (*abiani*) of my (yoke) upon Hezekiah, its king.

(4) Epigraph from a relief showing the conquest of Lachish. cf. A. Paterson, *Assyrian Sculptures: The Palace of Sennacherib* (The Hague, 1912-13), Pls. 74-76. Translation: Luckenbill, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a *nimedu*-throne and passed in review the booty (taken) from Lachish (*La-ki-su*).

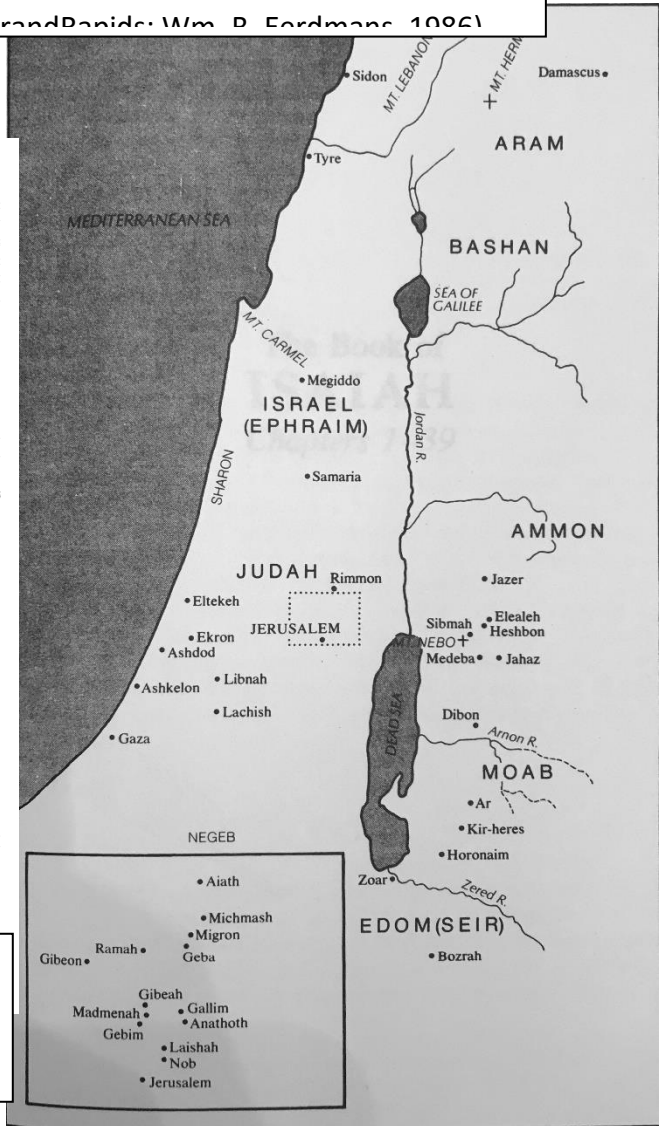
(b) The Death of Sennacherib'

To illustrate the still mysterious circumstances of the death of Sennacherib, a passage of the annals of Ashurbanipal (Rassam Cylinder, published by Rawlinson, v, Pls. 1-10) is translated here. Translation: Luckenbill, *op.cit.*; AR, II, §§795, 796.

(iv 65-82)

I tore out the tongues of those whose slanderous mouths had uttered blasphemies against my god Ashur and had plotted against me, his god-fearing prince; I defeated them (completely). The others, I smashed alive with the very same statues of protective deities with which they had smashed my own grandfather Sennacherib—now (finally) as a (belated) burial sacri-

James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,



GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT



- “Isaiah son of Amoz”
 - “Jewish tradition suggests that Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah, the father of Uzziah, thus making him of royal blood... Of perhaps greater significance is the appearance of the name Amoz on a seal, where he is identified as a scribe.”) Oswalt, Intro
- Isaiah would have been born at some time during the reign of Uzziah. His death is unknown, although Jewish tradition has Isaiah being killed early in the reign of Manasseh and that it happened by him being sawn in two (cf. Hebrews 11:37). It’s uncertain if the commission given to him in Isaiah 6 is his prophetic call to ministry, or if he had been prophesying some time before that. The tone and content of the messages in the introductory chapters 1-5 would seem to hint that at least some of them were giving during the days of Uzziah (prosperity, no looming Assyrian threat, etc).
- Most scholars over the past 150 years have concluded that Isaiah had at least two or three authors over the three historical periods mentioned above. As the theory goes, Isaiah gave the initial prophecies and they were preserved and compiled by his disciples, and additional prophecies added during the exile to Babylon. The final book would have been constructed from these various source materials after that.
- When all the reasons are laid out, the fundamental driving reasons are:
 - The assumption that prophets spoke to the people and conditions of the time they were living in, whereas Isaiah 40-55 very clearly address people of a different time.
 - The difficulty in accepting that Isaiah could call out Cyrus by name 150 years in advance
 - The different character and tone of Chapter 40-55 from what precedes it.
- Standing against the idea of multiple authorship is the structural and theological unity of the book itself. This book has a very tight structure that encompasses all 66 chapters, and although it very clearly is put together as an anthology of prophecies without clear chronological ordering, the book itself exhibits a unity that would imply a single primary author. In so many ways, Chapters 1-39 stand incomplete on their own and rely on 40-66 to complete the picture.
- The difference in language and style between 1-39 and 40-66 can be explained as the difference between a spoken word and a written word. Chapters 40-66 very much read like a message that was written first. You can imagine Isaiah late in his ministry, having foreseen what was to come, sitting down and penning a message to the people who would live through the exile he has prophesied giving them hope and encouraging their trust in God.
- It is interesting to note that, although apparently speaking into the life situation of each of these three distinct periods, neither 40-55 nor 56-66 contain clear historical, geographical, or cultural markers that would be expected had they been written from within that context (as is the case with chapters 1-39).
- The reality is that whether we have 1 or 3 authors, it doesn’t and shouldn’t affect our approach to interpreting the book. There is and has only ever been a single book of Isaiah, and so in order to properly understand it, we need to approach it as a unity and not try to divide it into pieces. The perspective of this study is that the book was written by Isaiah, son of Amoz, and that the book is intentionally composed to convey God’s message to his people.

WHAT KIND OF BOOK IS THIS?

WHO IS IT WRITTEN FOR?

- Isaiah is a collection of prophetic oracles and writings given over an extended period to a diverse audience. The arrangement is not chronological, but there is usually some kind of a relationship found between oracles. The overall organization of the book reveals an intentional and meaningful structure and is helpful for interpreting and applying the book.
- Who is the audience for the Book of Isaiah? While containing oracles given to the Jews in the 8th century and a message of hope for the post-exilic community, it's important to come to this book with the appreciation that it is as much written to Christians. This is a theological perspective that should follow you throughout the Old Testament and is especially pertinent when reading Isaiah. Some things to consider:
 - Romans 15:4 (after quoting Psa. 69:9 in v3)
 - 1 Corinthians 10:11 (after discussing the Wilderness wandering)
 - 1 Peter 1:10-12 ("it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you")
 - The people in Isaiah's time were spiritually blind – Isaiah 42:20, 43:8, 44:18
 - Isaiah's mission was explicitly one of judgment and blinding – Isaiah 6:9-10 (cf. Mark 4:11-12)
 - Isaiah knew his generation could not read it, but future generations would – Isaiah 29:9-11 ("For the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, and covered your heads") (c.f. Rom. 11:7-8). Isaiah 29:18-19, 30:8, 20-21 ("Your teacher will not hide himself anymore")
 - "When will blindness and deafness be overcome?"
 - Isaiah 2:2-3 ("Gentiles seek to learn from the LORD and walk in his paths.")
 - Isaiah 54:13 ("All your children shall be taught by the LORD")
 - Isaiah 42:1, 4, 6-7 (Eyes see, ears hear)
 - Isaiah 51:4-5 (Instruction goes out from the servant)
 - Consider Jesus' fulfilling of this role:
 - John 6:44-45 (Those who come to Jesus are those who "will all be taught by God")
 - Luke 4:18-19 (fulfilling Isaiah 61:1)

22.21 The Book of Isaiah

- a introductory messages of condemnation, pleading, and future restoration (1:1–12:6)**
- begins: message calling for repentance (1:1–31)
 - condemnation of empty religious practices (1:12–15), social injustice, wickedness
 - Yahweh's eyes hidden; he won't hear their prayers; their hands are full of blood (1:15)
 - themes: devouring beasts, Sabbath observance, briers and thorns, unacceptable sacrifices, drunkenness, punishment by burning, darkness transformed to light
 - "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb . . . the cow and the bear shall feed together . . . and the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain" (11:6–9)
- b oracles to nations: humiliation of proud king of Babylon (13:1–27:13)**
- fall of proud Babylon (first, middle, and last units)
 - lofty beginning of unit's key figure, king of Babylon: proud, boastful, respected and feared, wicked, smites (*nkt*), oppresses (*ngš*), slays peoples, exalts himself above stars, bright morning star (14:1–20)
 - humbling of king of Babylon: humiliated, brought low; kings shocked to see him, rise up (*qum*) and taunt him; he has no offspring
- c collection of woes: don't trust in earthly powers! (28:1–35:10)**
- Egypt's help is empty; it will not profit; shame will be the result of trusting Egypt; they are people, not gods; trust Yahweh!
 - folly of idols (30:22; 31:7) and of vessel advising potter (29:16)
 - highway in desert; flowers, glory of Yahweh being seen; coming with reward; strengthening the weak (35:1–10)
- d CENTER: historical narratives showing Yahweh's supremacy over all earthly and divine powers (36:1–39:8)**
- c' Yahweh's supremacy over idols: don't trust in idols! (40:1–48:22)**
- idols are worthless and empty; Yahweh is Israel's true help; idols will not profit; shame from trusting idols; trust Yahweh!
 - repudiation of idols; folly of vessel advising potter (45:9)
 - highway in desert; flowers, glory of Yahweh being seen; coming with reward; strengthening the weak (40:1–31)
- b' servant messages: exaltation of the humble servant (49:1–54:17)**
- restoration of humbled Jerusalem (first, middle, and last units)
 - humble beginning of unit's key figure, Yahweh's servant: humble, quiet, not esteemed, righteous, smitten (*nkt*), oppressed (*ngš*), slain for his people, remains lowly, hidden in dark obscurity
 - exaltation of servant: exalted, raised up; kings shocked to see him, shut mouths, rise up (*qum*) and bow before him; his offspring
- a' concluding messages of condemnation, pleading, and future restoration (55:1–66:24)**
- begins: message calling for repentance (55:1–56:1)
 - condemnation of empty religious practices (58:1–14; 66:3), social injustice, wickedness
 - Yahweh's face hidden; he won't hear their prayers; their hands are bloody (59:1–3)
 - themes: devouring beasts, Sabbath observance, briers and thorns, unacceptable sacrifices, drunkenness, punishment by burning, darkness transformed to light
 - "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain" (65:25)

David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis – Malachi*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999). p.234

IMPORTANT PASSAGES

Some of the more “exciting”¹ passages in Isaiah:

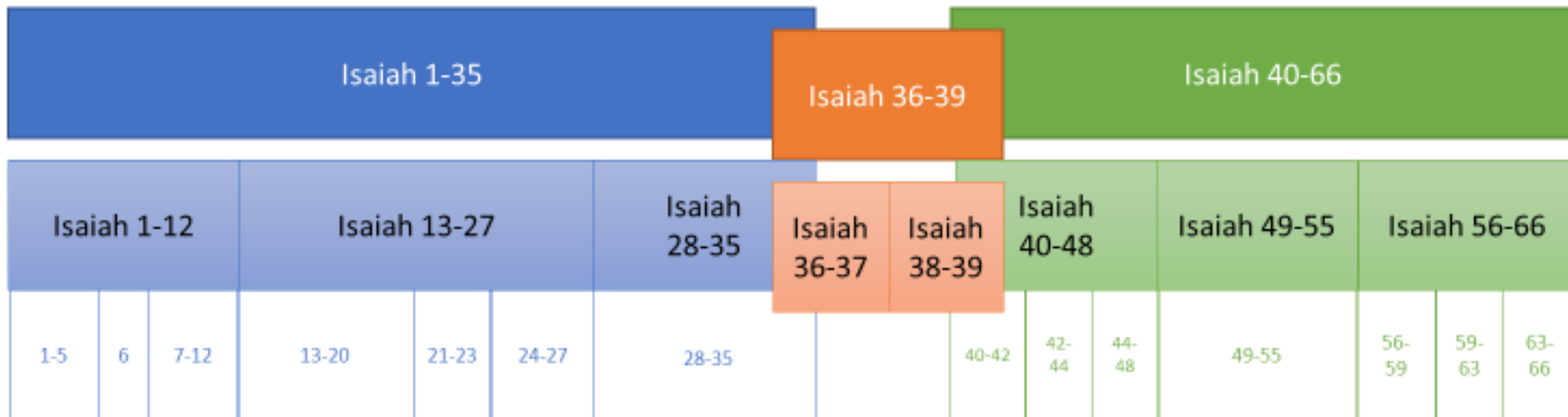
- 1:2 – 2:5
- 4:2 – 4:6
- 6:1 – 13
- 7:1 – 9:7
- 11:1 – 12:6
- 13:1 – 14:20
- 24:1 – 27:13
- 28:14 – 22
- 29:9 – 24
- 33:1 – 35:10
- 40:1 – 55:13
- 56:1 – 8
- 57:14 – 21
- 59:21 – 61:10
- 63:7 – 64:12
- 65:17 – 66:2
- 66:14 – 24

RECURRING THEMES

- The Holiness of God
- The folly of trusting men, nations, or idols
- The necessity of trusting YHWH
- YHWH’s supremacy over history and the future
- The vocation of God’s people, and their failure (servant of YHWH, corporate)
- The redemption of God’s people, and their restoration (servant of YHWH, individual)
- Contrasting fallen Assyria/Babylon (pride) with the restored new Jerusalem (humility)

¹ Meaning they are some of the more theologically rich or prophetically significant passages in the whole Bible.

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY



Introduction (1-2 weeks)

- The Historical Situation

Isaiah 1-12 - Immanuel (18 weeks)

- 1:1-5:30 Introduction
- 6:1-13 Isaiah's Call
- 7:1-9:7 Darkness and Light in Judah
- 9:8 - 11:16 Darkness and Light in Israel
- 12:1-6 Praise and Testimony

Isaiah 13-27 - Sovereign Over History (12 weeks)

- 13:1 - 20:6 - Isaiah's World
- 21:1 - 23:18 Future History
- 24:1 - 27:13 The End of History

Isaiah 28-37 - Sovereign over Egypt and Assyria (10 weeks)

Isaiah 38-55 - Servant of the Lord (21 weeks)

- 38:1 - 39:8 Hezekiah's Fatal Choice
- 40:1 - 42:17 Consolation of the world
- 42:18 - 44:23 Israel's Plight (Political and Spiritual)
- 44:24 - 48:22 The Persian Solution (Political)
- 49:1 - 55:13 The Servant Solution (Spiritual)

Isaiah 56-66 - Conquering King (13 weeks)

- 56:1 - 59:13 The ideal and the actual
- 59:14 - 63:6 The Anointed Conqueror
- 63:7 - 66:24 Prayer and Response

Outline derived from J. Alec Motver, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Primary commentaries I'll be relying on during this study:

- J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 1993, 544p
- John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39 (NICOT)*, 1986, 740p
- John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66 (NICOT)*, 1998, 755p

Other resources I'll be referencing:

- Alec Motyer, *Isaiah By the Day: A New Devotional Translation*, 2011
- Andrew Davis, *Christ-Centered Exposition Comments: Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, 2017, 432p
- Robert Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, 2002, 511p
- Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah: A Commentary*. 2001 (Liberal-leaning)
- E.J. Young, *Isaiah (NICOT)*, 1969
- Goldingay, John. *Isaiah*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series., 2012. (Liberal Leaning)
- John Calvin. *Commentary on Isaiah Vol I-IV*, trans. 1850
- Thomas Scott. *Scott's Bible*, 1832
- John Oswalt Video Lectures on Isaiah - <http://biblicalelearning.org/isaiah-oswalt/>
- Allen Ross Studies on Isaiah - <https://bible.org/series/book-isaiah>
- Jason DeRouchie – Audio Lectures on the Messianic passages in Isaiah - <http://jasonderouchie.com/isaiah-celebrating-the-servant-savior/>
- Ray Ortlund – Audio Sermon Series on Isaiah - <https://feedingonchrist.org/ray-ortlunds-sermon-series-on-isaiah/>
- The CSB Study Bible Notes
- The Zondervan NIV Study Bible Notes

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT LESSON

Read the following passages:

- **Isaiah 1:1-31**
- **Deuteronomy 28-30** – The Blessings and Curses of the Covenant
- **Deuteronomy 32** – The Song of Moses
- **Leviticus 26** – Blessings for Obedience, Punishment for Disobedience

Consider:

- What are the common images and themes describing blessing and judgment in the Deuteronomy and Leviticus passages?
- What threads of hope are woven into those passages?
- What parallels do you see between those passages and what you read in Isaiah 1?