

Reading Isaiah

The Big Picture

- 1-4 Rebellious Israel judged → Promise of restoration and Messiah after judgment
- 5-12 Jerusalem and Davidic king judged and promise of Messiah
- 13-27 God's justice and salvation among the nations
- 28-35 God's justice and salvation among Israel
- 36-39 Jerusalem saved > Babylon is looming
- 40-48 Israel called out of Babylon as a servant and witness to the nations
- 49-55 Israel forfeits its role as witness to the nations → the Servant takes up the role
- 56-66 Israel back in the land > awaiting future redemption

Key Historical Events in the Background of Isaiah

- 722 B.C. Assyrian empire subjugates Northern Israel, takes them into exile (see 2Kings 17), and forces Southern Judah under king Ahaz into submission. [2 Kings 16 is the background of Isaiah 5-10]
- 701 B.C. King Hezekiah rebels against Assyrian empire, trusts Yahweh to save Jerusalem [2 Kings 18-20 is the background of Isaiah 28-35, 36-39]
- 610–586 B.C. Babylon conquers Assyria, comes to subject Judah, finally destroys Jerusalem and exiles the Judeans [2 Kings 24-25 is the background of Isaiah 39]
- 540 B.C. Judeans called back from Babylon to Jerusalem in the hope of Yahweh's promises [Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah is the background of Isaiah 40-66]

Main Themes in Isaiah 1–39 [Before the Exile]

1. Israel and Judah have **broken the covenant** with Yahweh
 - Cosmic Courtroom: Yahweh will render justice on Israel
 - They have ignored Yahweh's call to social justice:
 - Worship and Injustice: 1:10–17
 - Unjust land grabs: 5:7-8
 - Preferring the wealthy and powerful in court: 10:1–4
 - They have relied upon foreign nations for protection
 - Especially Egypt: 30:1–5, 31:1–3
 - Military Power: 30:15–17
 - Rejection of Yahweh's prophets: 30:9–11
 - They have worshipped other deities: 2:6–9
2. Yahweh calls them to repent
 - By stopping injustice: 1:16–20
 - Trusting in Yahweh alone: 30:15
3. Yahweh will render justice on Israel and the nations
 - Israel will be conquered by other nations and taken into Exile: 1:19-20; 3:25-26; 5:9–16
 - The "Day of Yahweh" is coming against all nations,
 - Babylon: chs. 13-14
 - Moab: chs. 15-16
 - Damascus: ch. 17
 - Egypt: chs. 18–20
 - Tyre: ch. 23
4. Ahaz and Hezekiah are offered as examples of two contrasting responses to Yahweh
 - Ahaz refuses to trust Yahweh and turns to Assyria for help: chs. 7-8
 - Hezekiah trusts Yahweh to deliver Israel from Assyria: chs. 36-38

- BUT, Hezekiah strikes a deal with Babylon in ch. 39 which leads to Judah’s downfall (39:5-7 points forward to Babylonian exile)
5. On the other side of Yahweh’s judgment there is hope and salvation for Israel and all nations
- Isaiah 6: 11-13: a seed will sprout after the tree of Israel is cut down and burned
 - All nations will recognize Yahweh in an era of peace and harmony: 2:1-4
 - The messianic king will bring justice and new creation: 9:2-7; chs. 11-12
 - Yahweh will reverse the forces of death: 26:6-8

Main Themes in Isaiah 40–66 [After the Exile]

1. Yahweh is bringing Israel back to Jerusalem → The exile is over!
 - Yahweh alone is behind the restoration: 40:1-11
 - Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt: 44:24-28
2. The return from Babylon is depicted as a new Exodus and Wilderness journey
 - Water in the wilderness: 41:17-20; 43:19-20; 44:1-5
 - Passing through the sea: 43:1-3, 16-21
3. Despite the punishment of exile, Israel is still rebellious and obstinate
 - They are obstinate: 42:18-25
 - They do not genuinely worship Yahweh: 43:22-28
 - They are still worshipping idols: 57:1-13
4. Therefore, Yahweh has commissioned a **Servant** to carry out the redemption plan
 - 42:1-9: The Servant will accomplish Yahweh’s mission to the nations: BUT, Israel disqualifies itself because of disobedience and idolatry: Ch.48
 - 49:1-7: An individual Servant is commissioned to restore Israel and the nations
 - 51:4-9: The Servant trusts in Yahweh for vindication
 - 52:13-53:12: The Servant suffers and is vindicated on behalf of Israel and the nations
 - 52:7-10: Yahweh is going to come in royal power. How?
 - 52:13-15: My Servant will be exalted in suffering
 - 53:1-3 – The remnant describes the rejected servant
 - 53:4-6 – The servant dies for the sins of others
 - 53:7-10 – The servant’s death is a sacrifice
 - 53:11-12: My Servant will live again after suffering
 - 61:1-3: The Servant will announce the coming of Yahweh’s redemption
 - The Servant will have followers (the “servants” in 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; and chs. 65-66)
5. Concluding Themes of Isaiah
 - God’s people lament the world’s evil and wait for redemption: 63:7-64:12
 - God’s redemption will bring judgment on the wicked: 65:6-12; 66:15-16
 - God’s redemption will restore all creation for God’s people: 65:17-25, 66:22-23

