



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Isaiah

Chapters 38-55

Intro: The Prophet of the King

Isaiah the Prophet served as a prophet during the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His main service was to THE king, The LORD God of Hosts. The Prophet's role is to serve the Lord of Hosts by challenging/ inspiring/ judging the kings of the House of Judah.

The purpose of the book centers around the vision of God for Judah and Israel and the world. The ideal is that the reign of God on Earth would begin with Israel and draw

the nations of the world into the Kingdom's blessing. The ultimate vision and earthly reality are two different things. Isaiah holds out the hope of the ideal of Kingdom expansion under the reign of the God of Hosts, while sternly pronouncing judgment on the present sinful state of affairs.

Kings of Judah	Years of Reign
Uzziah	767-740 b.c.
Jotham	750-735
Ahaz	735-715
Hezekiah	715-686

Structure of Isaiah ³⁷	1-66
The Book of the King	1-37
The Book of the Servant	38-55
The Book of the Anointed Conqueror	56-66

The dramatic announcement of the Book of Isaiah is that The LORD God of Hosts will bear his arm as a paradoxical suffering servant and an anointed conqueror. The general literary shape of the book of Isaiah bears this out.

³⁷ Isaiah literary structure outlines are taken from J Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and a Commentary* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1993)



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The Book of the Servant (38-55)

In the first section (chapters 1-37), the prophet Isaiah argues that Israel's hope is not to be in foreign kings and alliances of their choosing, but rather they should place their hope in the Davidic Messiah and the YHWH as their King.

But what happens when the Davidic line ceases to hope in the LORD?

In 36-37, the narrative of Hezekiah's prayer and resistance of the Assyrian King Sennacherib shows strong faith in YHWH over false gods and foreign alliances.

But in chapters 38-39, Hezekiah's faith in the LORD falters. He is given a reprieve from his own death because of his faith in YHWH and yet he still selfishly and foolishly falters in the face of the coming Babylonian Crisis. Because of the sin of Judah's Kings even Jerusalem would fall to Babylon. Isaiah has been warning of this all along. But the Hezekiah narrative serves to give the historical confirmation that the prophesy is true. Hezekiah made a Fatal Choice to trust in envoys of Babylon for personal protection rather than the Lord.

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: ⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." --Isaiah 39:5-7

Again, what is Israel to do? Where is their hope from the depths of exile to Babylon with Jerusalem destroyed?

God has a plan for the liberation of Israel from bondage to Babylon, his plan includes a Gentile liberator they are not expecting: Cyrus of Persia. But even greater than Israel's liberation from earthly bondage will be the universal atonement for sins of the world offered through the Suffering Servant of the Lord!



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Structure

A¹ Historic Prologue: Hezekiah's Fatal Choice (38:1-39:8)

B¹ Universal Consolation (40:1-42:17)

b¹ The Consolation of Israel (40:1-41:29)

b² The Consolation of the Gentiles (42:1-42:17)

C¹ Promises of Redemption (42:18-44:23)

c¹ Release (42:18-43:21)

c² Forgiveness (43:22-44:23)

C² Agents of Redemption (44:24-53:12)

c¹ Cyrus: Liberation (44:24-48:22)

c² The Servant: Atonement (49:1-53:12)

B² Universal Proclamation (54:1-55:13)

b¹ The Call of Zion (54:1-55:13)

b² The Call to the world (55:1-13)

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

--Isaiah 40:28-31

Universal Consolation (40-42)

The vision of Isaiah has always been global with Israel as central to God's plan for the world. (Cf. Isaiah 2:2) But the global realization will only follow great distress. The earthly city of God, Jerusalem, will be laid in desolation by the Babylonian crisis. Into this desolation, Isaiah speaks a word of consolation--first to Israel, then to the nations.

The LORD will return and gather his people through an earthly agent of liberation--the consolation of Israel (40:1-41:29). Israel will be delivered at YHWH's hand through the agency of the "stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step" (41:2) This is the LORD's doing, so look to him for deliverance. For, there is no hope in any idols. YHWH is the comforter of his people (41:21-29).

But God will also bring hope and consolation to the nations through his "chosen servant" who is anointed of the Spirit (42:1-42:17):

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations. Is. 42:1*



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Promises of Redemption (42:18-44:23)

The Servant of the Lord, the anointed of the Spirit will arise from within Israel. So the first step to the Servant of the Lord's coming will be a new Exodus. The Lord will redeem his people from their bondage(42:18-43:21) and he will forgive their sins (43:22-44:23).

Just like the first exodus, the liberation from Babylon will require both a liberation from earthly bondage:

*Thus says the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
“For your sake I send to Babylon
and bring them all down as fugitives,
even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which
they rejoice.*

*¹⁵ I am the LORD, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.”*

*¹⁶ Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷ who brings forth chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick
Isaiah 43:14-16*

*“Yet you did not call
upon me, O Jacob;
but you have been
weary of me, O Israel!*

Isaiah 43:22

Yet, just like the exodus of old, physical liberation was insufficient. Israel grumbled against the Lord in the wilderness because of their lack of trust in the LORD. Israel needed not only liberation but also forgiveness of sins. The LORD promises that he will not only forgive their sins but annoint them with his Holy Spirit.

*“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions
for my own sake, and I will not remember your
sins...³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my
Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on
your descendants. Isa. 43:23; 44:3*



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Agents of Redemption (44:24-53:12)

The promises of redemption proclaimed in verses 42:18-44:23 will be brought about by the agents of redemption identified in chapters 44:24-53:12.

Cyrus: Liberation (44:24-48:22)

The Promise of Liberation from Babylonian captivity and exile will be brought about by a Gentile deliverer king named Cyrus.

"[I am the LORD] who confirms the word of his servant

and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited,' and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins';

²⁷ who says to the deep, 'Be dry;

I will dry up your rivers';

²⁸ who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose';

saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" --Isaiah 44:26-28

He says to Cyrus, "I call you by name, though you do not know me...I equip you though you do not know me." The LORD will use an instrument of his choosing to liberate his people and provide for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (45:13). There may be some critique of the LORD's plan in this. "What are you making?" (45:9) Yet the LORD's response is that he makes everything--even Gentile Kings! (45:12) He is the LORD of hosts. Babylon and its proud idols will be humiliated (46:1-47:15).



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The Servant: Atonement (49:1-53:12)

But there will be an even greater agent who will be raised up by the arm of the LORD. This agent will forgive the sins of not only Israel, but of the nations of the world, Isaiah 49:7:

*Thus says the LORD,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation,
the servant of rulers:
"Kings shall see and arise;
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."*

This agent would not come in military might, but in weakness and humility. He will be one who will bear sins on his personhood and in his death. He will be the one who takes away the wrath of God from all who will put their hope in him (51:22). The announcement of his coming will be called "good news" (52:7).

*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief; when his soul makes
an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring;
he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD
shall prosper in his hand.¹¹ Out of the anguish
of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his
knowledge shall the righteous one, my
servant, make many to be accounted
righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the
many, and he shall divide the spoil with the
strong, because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many, and makes
intercession for the transgressors.--Is. 53:10-12*

*Behold, I made him a
witness to the peoples,
a leader and
commander for the
peoples.
5 Behold, you shall call
a nation that you do not
know,
and a nation that did
not know you shall run
to you,
because of the Lord your
God, and of the Holy
One of Israel,
for he has glorified
you. Isa.55:4-5*

The universal salvation will lead to universal proclamation to the people of the world! (54:1-55:13)