

As we head into the book of Isaiah, we'd like to provide a brief overview, as well as a few pointers for reading on your own, with your family, or in a community group or study.

Introduction to Isaiah

Isaiah prophesied about 740-680 BC. This was during the time that the Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 Tribes with a capital in Samaria) was destroyed by the Assyrians. Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom (Judah). From Scripture we know that he was the son of Amoz (Isa. 1:1). He was married with kids (Isa. 7:3; 8:3,18). And he was perhaps a resident of Jerusalem (7:3). Additionally, according to ancient Jewish tradition, he was part of the royal family of Judah. He was nephew of King Amaziah and cousin of King Uzziah, who is mentioned in the first chapter. Also, he was martyred by King Manasseh – he was sawn in two – around 680 BC. (cf. Heb. 11:37). Isaiah originally wrote his prophecies for the nation of Judah (Southern Kingdom) 740-680 BC. However, chapters 40-66 were written prophetically to the Jews (people of Judah) who would be exiled in Babylon 600-530 BC.

Basic Structure of Isaiah

Isaiah can, in its simplest sense, be broken down into two main aspects: behold your God, and the gospel (good news) about God. Both of these aspects run throughout the entire book, but they receive slightly different emphasis at different points throughout. During the first section of the book (Isaiah 1-39), Isaiah's primary emphasis is on presenting a vision of God and God's character for the people to behold. In the second section (Isaiah 40-66), Isaiah focuses more heavily on the good news about this God we are called to behold. For this reason, the second section (Isaiah 40-66) is often called "The Book of Comfort".

Tips for Personal Reading

Remember it is poetry! Isaiah is mostly written in poetic verse. Therefore, he often uses strong imagery to convey a point. This is because poetry conveys truth on a more emotional, heart level than through intellectual, objective facts and figures. Isaiah is not writing a scientific textbook about the way things will work or record a detailed history of the exact timeline of actions that will occur. He's trying to help his readers grip, on a heart level, a vision of who God is and why that is good news. As you read, be aware that Hebrew poetry often rhymes ideas, and so you will probably encounter a number of echoes that are meant to inform and expand on one another.

If you are reading on your own, try to periodically summarize Isaiah's main idea for the section you've just read. Don't worry about nailing down all the details. Simply focus on verbalizing the main impression the poem leaves with you.

Trace main ideas or themes as you work your way through the book. There are a number of themes and ideas that you can trace. If you pick one or two, they will give you a guideline to hold on to, so to speak, as you journey through the terrain of Isaiah. Some suggestions are:

- Names of God – What is Isaiah communicating about who God is by the names he uses?
- "In that Day" – What will "that Day" look like? What will happen and what is its significance?
- Remnant & redemption – Who, how, and when will God redeem a people for Himself?
- Idolatry & true worship – What is the difference between the two? What are their results?