

Isaiah – Introduction Part 4

Isaiah 30:8-9, 12-13, 15 – Now go, write it on a tablet before them And inscribe it on a scroll, That it may serve in the time to come As a witness forever. For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to listen To the instruction of the LORD; ... Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, "Since you have rejected this word And have put your trust in oppression and guile, and have relied on them, Therefore this iniquity will be to you Like a breach about to fall, A bulge in a high wall, Whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant, ... For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." But you were not willing,

REVIEW

In part 1 of our introduction, we looked at Isaiah the man.

In part 2 of our introduction, we looked at the intended audience and how Isaiah has impacted Israel across the eras.

Part 3 was about the direct audience, the Nation of Israel from 800-685 BC. The people are blessed with land yet plagued by idolatry, injustice, and violence. A majority drifts, oppresses the weak, and chases false gods. But a remnant holds fast, seeking return. This is Isaiah's initial audience.

His message of judgment stings because it names their high places, their dishonest scales, and their alliances. His comfort shines for the remnant, promising restoration. As we study Isaiah, remember the Israelites, called to be God's chosen people, called to be a light unto the nations; they are unfaithful to the Lord, yet still His people.

Then we discussed themes: judgment, holiness, remnant, Messiah, and restoration.

INTRODUCTION

As we stand on the threshold of opening Isaiah chapter by chapter, one thing becomes clear very quickly: the book does not march forward in a typical linear arch (telling a story as time moves on). Isaiah writes in themes: judgments on surrounding nations, glimpses of a suffering Servant, and soaring visions of a renewed heavens and earth. That movement confuses many readers, especially for readers who prefer a clear beginning-to-end story. Yet the shifts are not random. The entire book functions as one extended covenant legal trial that God brings against His unfaithful people, and within that legal framework, the material falls into a logical progression: indictment, evidence, verdict, remedy, and final restoration. The outline below groups the chapters according to that flow. It preserves the book's own shape while giving us a path we can follow. With this, the apparent jumps become signposts that point us to what Isaiah is communicating: God's provision despite the failures of Israel and the entirety of humanity.

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OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

Section	Chapters	Main Theme	“Trial” Progression	Key Idea
I. The Indictment	1–6	Charges against Judah and Jerusalem	Opening arguments: God calls witnesses (heaven and earth) and lays out the case.	Judah is guilty of covenant breach—idolatry, injustice, hypocrisy. The tone is confrontational.
II. The Book of Immanuel	7–12	Signs of coming judgment and a coming King	Presentation of evidence: specific historical crises (Syro-Ephraimite war) and promises of a Child-King.	Near judgment on Ahaz’s day, but the far hope of Immanuel and the Davidic throne.
III. Judgment on the Nations	13–23	Oracles against surrounding nations	Expanding the courtroom: God shows He is sovereign over all nations, not just Judah.	Babylon, Assyria, Moab, Egypt, etc., will fall, proving YHWH alone is God.
IV. The Little Apocalypse	24–27	Worldwide judgment and future resurrection hope	Cosmic scope of the verdict: the whole earth is under judgment, yet a remnant survives.	First clear glimpse of final victory, resurrection, and banquet on the mountain.
V. Six Woes & Assyrian Crisis	28–35	Woes on corrupt leaders; deliverance from Assyria	Detailed cross-examination of Judah’s leadership; preview of coming deliverance.	Drunken priests/prophets condemned; trust in Egypt vs. trust in YHWH.
VI. Historical Appendix	36–39	Hezekiah’s reign: deliverance from Sennacherib, illness, Babylonian envoys	Historical evidence submitted to the court: what actually happened in Isaiah’s later years.	Jerusalem spared from Assyria (near fulfillment); warning of future Babylon exile.
VII. Comfort for the Exiles	40–48	God’s power to redeem; Cyrus as instrument; idols powerless	The verdict is announced: exile is certain, but God will bring His people back.	“Comfort, comfort My people”—shift from accusation to consolation.
VIII. The Servant’s Work	49–57	Servant songs; atonement; invitation to salvation	The only legal solution: the Servant takes the penalty and provides righteousness.	Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the heart of the book—substitutionary atonement.
IX. The Future Glory	58–66	True worship, new heavens and new earth, final gathering of nations	Final restoration and everlasting joy: the case is closed in total victory.	All nations stream to Zion; new creation; “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.”

ARE THERE MULTIPLE AUTHORS?

Now that we have a general overview of the book, let's deal with the most controversial aspect of the Book of Isaiah.

Many liberal theologians (not politically, but those who do not believe in the full inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible) teach that Isaiah was written by three different individuals, written and compiled at different times.

Here are the main reasons they give for this conclusion. I'll lay them out plainly so we can see exactly what they're basing it on.

These liberal theological circles argue that the book of Isaiah wasn't written by one person—the eighth-century prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz—but by two or three different authors (or schools of authors) writing at different times. This view is usually called the multiple-authorship hypothesis, and it divides the book roughly like this:

- Chapters 1–39: “First Isaiah” or Proto-Isaiah, written by the historical Isaiah in the 700s BC.
- Chapters 40–55: “Second Isaiah” or Deutero-Isaiah, written during the Babylonian exile (around 550–540 BC).
- Chapters 56–66: “Third Isaiah” or Trito-Isaiah, written after the return from exile (maybe late 500s BC).

1. There is a change in historical setting and audience. Chapters 1–39 repeatedly mention eighth-century kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah) and threats from Assyria. The Assyrian Empire is the big danger, and Jerusalem is still standing. Starting in chapter 40, the tone and situation shift dramatically. Jerusalem is spoken of as already ruined (“Comfort, O comfort my people... her warfare is ended,” 40:1-2), the exile in Babylon is treated as the present reality, and a Persian king named Cyrus is mentioned by name as the one God will use to let the people return home (44:28, 45:1). Cyrus did not appear on the scene until about 550 BC, well over a century after Isaiah’s ministry ended. Critics say it is highly unlikely that a prophet in 700 BC would address exiles in Babylon as if they were already there and name a future Persian ruler who had not yet been born.
2. There’s a shift in style and vocabulary. Scholars point to noticeable differences in word choice, sentence structure, and poetic rhythm between the sections. For example, chapters 40–55 use certain favorite phrases and theological terms more frequently (words like “redeemer,” “Holy One of Israel” in new combinations, or extended metaphors of light

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and creation) that are rarer or absent in 1–39. The poetic style in 40–55 is often described as more elevated, flowing, and repetitive—almost like a different voice.

3. There is development in theological ideas. In 1–39, the dominant themes are judgment on Judah, warnings to trust YHWH rather than foreign alliances, and promises of a future Davidic king. In 40–55, the focus moves to comfort for exiles, the incomparable uniqueness of YHWH against Babylonian idols, and especially the figure of the Suffering Servant who brings atonement. In 56–66, there is more emphasis on issues that seem post-exilic: proper fasting, Sabbath observance, inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs in the worship community, and tensions within the returned community. Liberal scholars argue these reflect later historical and theological concerns that grew out of the exile and return, not the pre-exilic situation of Isaiah's day.
4. There are supposed parallels with other late writings. Some of the language and ideas in 40–66 resemble books that everyone agrees are exilic or post-exilic (Ezekiel, 2nd Chronicles, Haggai, Zechariah). They see this as evidence that the same circles of writers or editors produced these sections later.

THE RESPONSE TO THE MULTIPLE AUTHORS VIEW

The arguments for dividing Isaiah into multiple authors (Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah) rest almost entirely on an inference from internal observation (things like shifts in style, vocabulary, historical allusions, and theological emphasis) rather than on any direct external evidence from ancient manuscripts or testimony.

First, consider the manuscript evidence. Every Hebrew manuscript of Isaiah we possess, from the complete scrolls found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (dating back to around 150–100 BC) to the medieval Masoretic texts, all treat the book as a single, unified work. There are no ancient copies that separate chapters 1–39 from 40–66 or mark any authorial divisions. The Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran is one continuous document with no breaks or titles indicating different writers. If the book had circulated as separate works that were later stitched together, we would expect some trace of that in the transmission history, but nothing, no indication that would indicate multiple authors.

Second, ancient testimony. From the earliest Jewish sources onward, the entire book is attributed to Isaiah, son of Amoz.

- The book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), written around 180 BC, praises “Isaiah the great prophet” and summarizes prophecies from both the first and second halves of the book without hinting at multiple authors (Sirach 48:20–25).
- Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, speaks of Isaiah’s prophecies, including predictions far into the future, as coming from one man.
- Early church fathers like Jerome, Augustine, and Origen all treat the book as the work of the eighth-century prophet.

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There is simply no ancient voice (Jewish or Christian) that says, “Chapters 40 and following were written by someone else.” That idea does not appear until the late eighteenth century.

- Every New Testament quotation attributes the words to “Isaiah the prophet,” whether the quote comes from chapter 6, 40, 53, or 65.

Isaiah Reference	New Testament Reference	How It Attributes Isaiah	Key Quotation or Note
Isaiah 1:9	Romans 9:29	"Just as Isaiah foretold" (v. 29, paired with 10:22-23)	"Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom..." Paul uses this to show that only a remnant of Israel would be saved at the end.
Isaiah 6:9-10	Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27	Explicitly called "the prophecy of Isaiah" or "Isaiah said"	"You will keep on hearing, but will not understand..." Explains the obstinance of Israel to God's truth.
Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22-23	"Spoken by the Lord through the prophet"	"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." The sign to Ahaz fulfilled in Christ's virgin birth.
Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:15-16	"Spoken through Isaiah the prophet"	"The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light..." Why Jesus ministered in Galilee.
Isaiah 10:22-23	Romans 9:27-28	"Isaiah cries out concerning Israel"	"Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved." God's sovereign choice of a remnant.
Isaiah 29:13	Matthew 15:7-9 (cf. Mark 7:6-7)	"Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites"	"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me." Jesus confronts empty religious tradition.
Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:3; John 1:23	"Referred to by Isaiah the prophet"	"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord.'" John the Baptist as forerunner.
Isaiah 40:3-5	Luke 3:4-6	"Written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet"	Extends to "and all flesh will see the salvation of God." Universal scope of the gospel.
Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:17-21	"Spoken through Isaiah the prophet"	"Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen... in His name the Gentiles will hope." Longest quotation in Matthew; Jesus as the gentle Servant to the nations.
Isaiah 52:15	Romans 15:21	"As it is written" (immediately after quoting Isaiah)	"Those who were not told of Him will see..." Paul's mission to unreached Gentiles.
Isaiah 53:1	John 12:38; Romans 10:16	"The word of Isaiah the prophet" / "Isaiah has said before"	"Lord, who has believed our report?" Unbelief in the gospel message.

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Isaiah Reference	New Testament Reference	How It Attributes Isaiah	Key Quotation or Note
Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:17	"Spoken through Isaiah the prophet"	"He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases." Jesus' healing ministry as part of the Servant's work.
Isaiah 53:7-8	Acts 8:32-33	The eunuch reading "the prophet Isaiah"	"Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter..." Philip preaches Jesus from this text.
Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:17-19	Jesus reads from "the book of the prophet Isaiah"	"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me... to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." Jesus declares fulfillment but stops before "day of vengeance."
Isaiah 65:1-2	Romans 10:20-21	"Isaiah is very bold and says"	"I was found by those who did not seek Me... All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient people." Grace to Gentiles; Israel's persistent rebellion.

What are the critical arguments built on? They are modern scholarly reconstructions based on observations of the text itself:

- Perceived changes in the historical backdrop (Assyria in the early chapters, Babylon and Cyrus later).
- Differences in poetic style and favorite words or phrases.
- Shifts in emphasis (more judgment early, more comfort and Servant themes later).

These are legitimate observations anyone can make while reading, but interpreting them as proof of different authors requires certain assumptions—chiefly that genuine predictive prophecy over long periods of time is not possible. If a prophet cannot accurately name Cyrus a century and a half in advance, or speak comfortably to exiles who are not yet in exile, then the text must come from a later hand. That is an opinion about the nature of prophecy, not a hard fact forced upon us by manuscripts or ancient witnesses.

Many of us who take the text at face value see those same shifts differently. The change in tone from judgment to comfort makes perfect sense in a single prophet whose ministry spanned decades and who was shown both near and far horizons by the Spirit (remember prophetic foreshortening). The mention of Cyrus by name is striking, but it is exactly the kind of specific prediction we would expect if God truly reveals the future to His servants.

In short, the multiple-authorship view is a theory built on internal literary analysis and philosophical presuppositions about what prophecy can and cannot do. It is not grounded in any ancient external evidence that divides the book. The traditional view—that Isaiah son of Amoz wrote (or dictated) the entire work under the Spirit's direction—has the support of every manuscript and every early witness we have.