

Meeting Isaiah – *Isaiah 1:1*

Introduction – He has been called “the Saint Paul of the Old Testament” and “the Prince of the Old Testament Prophets.” His book, 66 chapters long, has commonly been referred to as “the Gospel according to Isaiah”; with over 60 quotations in the New Testament and countless allusions, Isaiah gives us the language and symbols of the Messiah and His kingdom. In that sense, the book of Isaiah is a primer for reading the New Testament with understanding. Isaiah ben Amoz, prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah, ministered under the reign of four kings for as many as sixty years, speaking the truth of the vision given to him with sure faith in his sovereign God amidst the chaos, decline, and apostasy of his day. Therefore, among other things, we can learn from him how to do the same in our modern day of decline.

Isaiah ben Amoz – We don’t know for sure who Amoz was, but Jewish tradition says that he was a relative of king Uzziah (*aka* Azariah). We do know Isaiah had access to the royal family and that he was a historiographer for two of the kings (2 Chron 26:22; 32:32). He was married (8:3) and had at least two children, sons, whose names were prophetic messages (Shear-Jashub, “a remnant shall return,” and Maher-shalal-has-baz, “swift the booty, speedy the prey” – 7:3; 8:3). He may have suffered a martyr’s death under the reign of the wicked king Manasseh (2 Kings 21:16) being sawn in two (Heb 11:37).

These Kings of Judah – You can read about the reign of these four kings of Judah in 2 Kings 15-18, 2 Chron 26-32. Uzziah was generally faithful although his success bred arrogance that ended with God’s judgment upon him with the plague of leprosy. Jotham reigned during the growing threat from Syria (Aram). Ahaz formed an alliance with Assyria and compromised the worship in the temple to conform to pagan liturgical forms. Hezekiah reigned during the fateful invasion of Assyria and Yahweh’s miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from their siege.

Assyria – If the end of Uzziah’s reign was approximately in the year 739 BC and if Isaiah was martyred around 680 BC, then throughout his life, Assyria was the rising threat to Israel and Judah. During the reign of Ahaz, Judah witnessed the Assyrian conquest of Samaria, Israel taken into exile and the settling of the northern kingdom with people from other conquered lands. Israel and Aram attempted to force Ahaz to join an anti-Assyrian alliance (Isaiah 7-8), but Ahaz instead allied with Assyria. Later, Sennacherib placed Jerusalem under siege, but under Hezekiah, Yahweh delivered the city (2 Kings 18-19, Isaiah 36-37).

The Structure of the Book of Isaiah – Smack in the middle of Isaiah are the narratives of Assyria (36-37) and Babylon (38-39) but they are interestingly reversed chronologically. This helps us see the structure of the book. The prophecies of Isaiah 1-35 could be summarized as present judgments in Isaiah’s day leading up to the Assyrian invasion. Isaiah 40-66 assume the Babylonian threat made in 38-39 would come to pass and what would happen, along with what all of this symbolized for an Israel brought out of exile, brought up from the dead, and made new. I would agree with Dorsey in this chiasmic structure –

A – Condemnation and Future Restoration: 1-12

B – Oracles to the Nations; Kings and Kingdoms Humbled: 13-27

C – Woes to Those Who Trust Earthly Powers: 28-35

D – Assyria’s Siege of Jerusalem; Hezekiah’s Compromise with Babylon: 36-39

C’ – Warnings Against Trusting Idols; Israel’s Future Deliverance: 40-48

B’ – Servant’s Songs; Israel’s Future Deliverer: 49-54

A’ – Condemnation and Future Restoration: 55-66

His Name, Isaiah – Isaiah’s name contains a form of the verb *yasha*, “save,” like the names of Joshua and Jesus. His name means “Yah saves,” and this points to the theme of the book. In Chapter 6, Isaiah is called to a ministry of judgment that will not be heard, and the judgment comes (6:9-13). In Chapter 40, he is called to a ministry of hope that must be heard and will not be stopped (40:1). Judgment and salvation. Exile and return. Demolition and reconstruction. Death and resurrection. This will all come through the substitutionary atonement of the Suffering Servant (53:6). In 40:9, the LXX gives us the first ever OT use of the word *euangelion*, “good tidings,” “Gospel.”

Learning as Disciples of Jesus – We have the privilege of studying Isaiah as disciples of Jesus Christ and the gift of the New Testament, an inspired commentary on the book of Isaiah. Through this we learn how to read the Bible “naturally” and not “woodenly” as the literalists would demand; and we learn how to understand the apocalyptic language of “symbol” which is in Isaiah (and other prophets), in many passages of the New Testament, and especially the book of Revelation. Consider marking every verse in Isaiah that is quoted in the NT and then using those marks to flip back and forth as you read your Bible. Also, consider these two examples of learning the language of Isaiah used in the New –

Collapsing Universe Language (Isaiah 13:1, 10; 34:4f, Matt 24:29ff) – If you hadn’t studied Isaiah, you might think Jesus was predicting a future destruction of the literal universe. But saturated in Isaiah (and the Old Testament), this wouldn’t even begin to occur to you. This was figurative language of pronounced judgment on kings, kingdoms, and world orders.

Sing, O Barren (Isaiah 54:1, Gal 4:21ff, Rev 21) – Paul teaches us what this more obscure verse in Isaiah is referring to. The barren woman is the church, which became fruitful at Pentecost. The New Jerusalem is not a literal city that is a gigantic perfect cube; she is the bride of Christ.