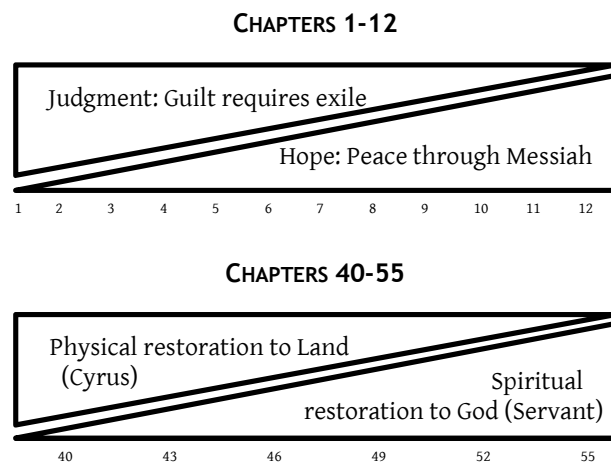


the second subject is an increasing presentation of the second subject takes over. An example of this is found in chapters 1-12, sometimes designated the “book of Immanuel.” Chapter 1 is primarily concerned with judgment upon the people, but chapter 2 gives a general glimpse of future glory. Chapter 3 is a long passage of judgment, and chapter 4 is a brief message of hope. In chapter 7 we have a hint of hope (a baby is born, but in exile), which expands by chapter 9 to a more detailed description of the “Prince of Peace.” Chapters 11 and 12 conclude this part of the book with a glorious description of the king’s reign on earth. This may be represented graphically:



FAVORITE COMMENTARIES

John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 volumes, NICOT, 1986-1998.

-The best commentary on the book. Detailed, relevant, engaging, and conservative.

John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary, 2003.

-A more accessible approach to the brilliance of Oswalt without the technical details or the length.

Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, 2 volumes, New American Commentary, 2007-2009.

-A good volume to read alongside Oswalt. “Theological Implications” sections are often very valuable.

Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, 1996.

-The beginner’s best introduction to what the book is all about.

AN OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH

BASIC FACTS

Prophet of Judah from 740-680 BC. Third longest book of Bible. Contemporary of Micah, who gave a very similar message. The Isaiah Scroll is the best preserved Dead Sea Scroll and was written before 100 BC.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ISAIAH

Isaiah is a foundational prophet not only by virtue of his canonical priority (first of all writing prophets) but because his teachings were developed and expanded by all who followed him, especially Jeremiah and Zechariah.

Isaiah is quoted 66 times and alluded to more than 300 times in the New Testament (average: more than 10x per book!). He is mentioned by name 22 times in the NT. This indicates how familiar Jesus, Paul, John, and others were with Isaiah. Key point: the arguments of some NT books assume familiarity with Isaiah; to fail to understand Isaiah is to risk misunderstanding the NT.

MAJOR THEMES

Judah will be **exiled** by Babylon (esp. 7-10, 39).

The Lord will **restore** his people from exile in Babylon (esp. 40-48).

A future **king** will rule over the people in perfect righteousness (esp. 9, 11).

An obedient **servant** will die for the sins of his people (esp. 42, 49, 50, 52-53).

Though tempted to trust the nations in times of war and peace, Judah must **trust** God only (esp. 13-35).

The Lord will **fulfill his covenant** with **Abraham** by restoring the nation to the promised land and by blessing all nations through

Israel. The Lord will fulfill his covenant with **David** by raising up a perfectly righteous king to rule forever.

KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK

Two historical narratives provide striking contrasts (7-8, 36-39). Both involve a king (father and son) meeting the prophet Isaiah at “the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field.” In both cases the king was threatened by an imminent attack by a foreign power. The responses of the two kings not only brought about different results but they served as models to the people.

- Ahaz rejected the Lord’s offer for a sign guaranteeing his deliverance and the result was a prediction of exile by Assyria.
- Hezekiah trusted the Lord and the result was deliverance from Assyria. Hezekiah’s faith, however, was only partial and thus the Lord predicted a future exile by Babylon.

Two individuals stand in sharp relief in each half of the book. In each case, the prophet gradually develops the portrait of the individual in a series of brief passages interspersed in a larger context.

- In the first half, a child is born in a time of exile but he rises to bring peace and righteousness to Israel (esp. 7, 9, 11). He is primarily characterized as a KING.
- In the second half, a gentle individual with royal characteristics is sent to restore Israel and he does so by suffering unto death for the forgiveness of sins of the nation. He is repeatedly called a SERVANT.

Careful examination reveals that these two individuals are one and the same, despite apparently contradictory functions. This identification is confirmed by the New Testament. In particular, the Gospel of Matthew seems written to make the point that Jesus is the person (King and Servant) predicted by Isaiah.

The Lord told Isaiah in his commission that his preaching would result in ears becoming deaf and eyes becoming blind (6). Thus Isaiah’s message was in part **to harden the people** further so that they were ripe for judgment. The difficult nature of some of the passages may have been intended, like the parables of Jesus, to be hidden from the rebellious nation but understandable to the faithful remnant. This interpretation is strengthened by the faithful Simeon who understood that Jesus was both the Messiah and the suffering Servant, yet the majority of people in Jesus’ day denied that the Messiah would die.

Isaiah is a difficult book to understand. While some resources may be useful in figuring the book out, nothing can substitute for long, patient study, with multiple re-readings of the book. Hard work pays off in spades.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

Israel must trust God, because depending upon the foreign nations will only lead to exile. Israel’s judgment does not invalidate the promises, for the Lord will raise up a righteous individual to suffer for the sins of the people in order that he may establish a kingdom of lasting peace with them.

THE STYLE OF ISAIAH

Isaiah is difficult for those who like linear development (like Genesis), logical arguments (like Romans), or stand-alone poems (like Psalms). The book is unified and presents a single, coherent argument, but Isaiah may best be approached as a symphonic overture or a Michelangelo masterpiece. Like an artist, Isaiah moves between subjects without notice, gradually painting a complex presentation which becomes clearer as the work progresses. Like an overture, Isaiah weaves various musical elements into a unified and diverse whole that is often easier to appreciate than to analyze.

Some parts of the book weave together two major strands. The first subject dominates the initial presentation but gradually is muted as