

## ISAIAH

### 1. *Isaiah* must have just as much influence on our thinking as it had on the apostles.

- a. The NT writers reference *Isaiah* more times than all the other prophets together (21 direct quotations and numerous allusions).<sup>1</sup>
- b. *Isaiah* 53 alone is quoted or alluded to at least 85 times in the New Testament.
- c. *Isaiah* was especially important to Paul. *Isaiah* has been called the “Saint Paul of the Old Testament.”
- d. If we want to understand our faith and what the apostles taught, we must understand *Isaiah*.
- e. The worldview of *Isaiah* must be the believer’s worldview today.

### 2. We must be ready to use *Isaiah* in evangelism.

- a. It was through *Isaiah* that the Ethiopian eunuch came to relive in Jesus.
  - (1) **Ac 8:27-35** 27 There was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet *Isaiah*. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, Go over and join this chariot. 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading *Isaiah* the prophet and asked, Do you understand what you are reading? 31 And he said, How can I, unless someone guides me? And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. 34 And the eunuch said to Philip, About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else? 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.
- b. Paul constantly used *Isaiah* to prove Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah.
  - (1) **Ac 9:20-22** 20 Immediately [Saul] proclaimed Jesus in the [Damascus] synagogues saying, He [Jesus] is the Son of God. 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah [using *Isaiah* and other Old Testament books].
  - (2) **Ac 28:23** 23 From morning till evening [Paul] expounded to [the Jews of Rome], testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets [especially *Isaiah*].

### 3. We don’t know a lot about *Isaiah*’s personal life. This is by design.

- a. For *Isaiah*, it’s never about himself. It’s about God, Israel, the nations, and the Messiah. Except for Is 6, he leaves himself out of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:29.

- b. Here's what we do know:
- (1) Isaiah prophesied in Judah for about sixty years, from about 740 to 680 bc.
    - (a) **Is 1:1** 1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
  - (2) He was from Jerusalem and likely from a distinguished Jewish family.
  - (3) He had a wife and at least two sons (Is 7:3; 8:3).
  - (4) He was well-educated, as evidenced by his style and vocabulary.
  - (5) He maintained close contact with Judah's kings.
  - (6) His contemporary prophets were Hosea and Micah.
  - (7) Talmudic tradition says he was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh.
    - (a) **He 11:37** 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword.

#### 4. Like Isaiah, we can make a huge difference in our nation if we stand for God.

- a. Isaiah was a huge influence in the lives of both Ahaz and Hezekiah.
  - (1) Judah survived Ahaz's apostasy because of Isaiah's ministry.
  - (2) Hezekiah was as faithful as he was at the critical moment for Jerusalem's survival on account of Isaiah's ministry.<sup>2</sup>
- b. Judah (conquered 586 bc) was given 136 more years of independence than Israel (conquered 722 bc) because of Isaiah and handful of other heroes (Hezekiah, Josiah).
- c. Isaiah's ministry did not stop God's discipline of Judah, but it did extend her time of grace (cf. Hezekiah and Josiah).

#### 5. Like Isaiah, we must come to understand the big picture of God's salvation plan.

- a. The breadth and scope of *Isaiah* is truly incredible.
  - (1) "Of all the books in the OT, Isaiah is perhaps the richest. Its literary grandeur is unequalled. Its scope is unparalleled. The breadth of its view of God is unmatched. ... Thus it is no wonder that Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the NT, and along with Psalms and Deuteronomy, one of the most frequently cited of all OT books. Study of it is an opportunity for unending inspiration and challenge."<sup>3</sup>
- b. Interestingly, *Isaiah* is structured almost as a miniature Bible.
  - (1) The first 39 chapters (like the 39 OT books) stress God's holiness, justice, and righteousness.
  - (2) The last 27 chapters (like the 27 NT books) stress God's compassion, glory, and grace.
- c. For developing a biblical worldview, few biblical books compare with *Isaiah*.
  - (1) *Isaiah* is close to being in the top tier of biblical books, along with *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Psalms*, *John*, *Romans*, and *Revelation*.

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<sup>2</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:3.

**6. Like Isaiah, we must develop a continual, deep awareness of the holiness of God.**

- a. **Is 6:3** 3 Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory!
- b. The adjective קדוֹשׁ (“holy”) is used of God more in *Isaiah* than in the rest of the OT combined.
- c. God’s title “the Holy One of Israel” occurs 45 times in *Isaiah* and only 7 times elsewhere in the entire Bible.<sup>4</sup>
- d. “[Isaiah’s] whole pattern of thought has been affected by the tremendous contrast between the greatness of God and the corruption of humanity. But caught up with this contrast is the amazing paradox that if humanity will lay aside its pretensions to deity, the true God will raise us to fellowship with himself (57:15).”<sup>5</sup>
  - (1) **Is 57:15** 15 Thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.
- e. For Isaiah, no one other than God has the right to be called holy.<sup>6</sup>
- f. “Because God alone is great, and because he alone is holy, the worship of other gods is sheerest folly. Above everything else, it is stupid. Nowhere else in Scripture is the stupidity of idolatry subjected to such exquisite sarcasm as in the book of Isaiah.”<sup>7</sup>
  - (1) **Ro 1:22-23** 22 Claiming to be wise, [men] became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals and creeping things.

**7. *Isaiah* shows Israel is and always will be at the center of human history.**

- a. *Isaiah* is crucial in understanding the relationship between Israel and the nations.
  - (1) **Ge 12:3** 3 I [Yahweh] will bless those who bless you [Abraham], and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.
  - (2) **Is 49:6-7** 6 It is too light a thing that you [Messiah] should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. 7 Thus says Yahweh, 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 Yahweh, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.
- b. *Isaiah* clearly shows God interacts with Israel and the nations dispensationally.
  - (1) See *Dispensations*.
- c. Paul and others used *Isaiah* to explain Israel’s temporary rejection of Messiah Jesus.
  - (1) **Ac 28:25-28** 25 And being in disagreement among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 26 Go to this people and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. 27 For this people’s

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<sup>4</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:19.

<sup>5</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:32.

<sup>6</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:32.

<sup>7</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:34.

heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them [a quotation of Is 6:9-10]. 28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen.

- (2) **Ro 9:27-29** 27 Isaiah [Isaiah 10:22-23] cries out concerning Israel: Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay. 29 And as Isaiah predicted [in Is 1:9], If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.
- (3) Isaiah gave the warning before Jerusalem's first destruction. Paul gave the warning before Jerusalem's second destruction.
  - (a) Neither of them lived to see the destructions, but both warnings came true.
- d. Paul also used *Isaiah* to prove the future salvation of the remnant of Israel.
  - (1) **Ro 11:26-27** 26 In this way all [believing] Israel will be saved. As it is written [in Isaiah 59:20-21; 27:9], The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will banish ungodliness from Jacob, 27 and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.
- e. Finally, *Isaiah* shows it is always foolish for nations to fight against Israel.
  - (1) **Ge 12:3** 3 Him who dishonors you [Abraham and Israel] I will curse.

## 8. We must believe all hope depends on the first and second comings of Messiah Jesus.

- a. There is a Messiah who is King, Servant, and Conquerer—all three.
  - (1) He is endowed with the Holy Spirit and the word of God.
    - (a) Is 11:1-4; 42:1; 49:1-3; 50:4; 59:21; 61:1-3.
  - (2) He is righteous.
    - (a) Is 9:7; 11:4; 53:11; 54:17; 61:3, 10-11; 63:1.
  - (3) He is the Son of David.
    - (a) Is 9:6-7; 11:1; 55:3; 63:1
  - (4) He will restore Israel in order to bless the Gentile nations.
    - (a) Is 1:26-27; 2:2-4; 11:6-9, 13-14; 19:23-25; 27:12-13; 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 66:19
  - (5) He is some unexplainable way both God and man.
    - (a) Is 9:6; 11:1, 10; 53:1-2; 59:16; 61:10; 63:1-5
- b. In *Isaiah*, references to Messiah Jesus are found all over the place.
  - (1) Isaiah's Messianic prophecies are more explicit than those of any other OT book.
- c. Truly Peter was thinking of Isaiah when he wrote these words:
  - (1) **1 Pe 1:10-12** 10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets [like Isaiah] who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Messiah in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the subsequent glories [Is 53]. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.
- d. The message of Isaiah may be summed up this way: A King is coming who will rule in righteousness over a righteous community of believers, but he cannot do so until he

becomes a Servant who provides righteousness for that community and a Conquerer who overthrows the enemies of that community.<sup>8</sup>

- (1) “[P]roud, arrogant, sinful Israel is anything but the servant of God. Nevertheless, Israel is declared as the means through whom God’s light and blessing will come to the world. In the words of chs. 40-48, Israel is to be his witness. But this poses a nearly unanswerable question: How can *this* Israel become *that* Israel? The rest of the book functions as an answer to that question. In short, the answer is God, God who has the power (chs. 7-39) and the grace (chs. 40-66) to make the impossible possible.”<sup>9</sup>Paul states the essence of *Isaiah* in this way:
- (2) **Ro 15:8** 8 I tell you that Messiah became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.

### 9. *Isaiah* has much to say about events that are future to us.

- a. Isaiah’s Messianic prophecies that await fulfillment include:
  - (1) Is 4:2; 11:2-6, 10; 32:1-8; 49:7; 52:13, 15; 59:20-21; 60:1-3; 61:2-3.
- b. God has big plans for the human race.
  - (1) “God, unlike the idols, had plans and purposes for human experience ([Is] 14:24–27; 19:12; 23:8–9; 25:1; 37:26; 45:9–11, 18; 46:10–11). Moreover, these plans were part of a comprehensive whole. Isaiah expected that history would find its climax as the nations of the world flowed to a redeemed and glorified Zion, there to share in the divine character itself (2:1–5; 11:9; 25:7–8; 60:1–22).”<sup>10</sup>
- c. **Ge 12:3** 3 In you [Abraham] all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

### 10. Don’t be swayed by arguments against *Isaiah*’s authenticity, reliability, and unity.

- a. Critics claim a second Isaiah wrote chapters 40-55, and possibly a third Isaiah wrote chapters 56-66. This is because:
  - (1) Is 1-39 has an Assyrian background, but Is 40-66 has a Babylonian background.
  - (2) The style of Is 1-39 differs from the style of Is 40-66.
  - (3) The theological focus of Is 1-39 (Messianic King) differs from the focus of Is 40-66 (Messianic Servant and Conquerer).
  - (4) Isaiah could not have predicted the Babylonian captivity and Israel’s return under Cyrus 150 years in advance (Is 44:28; 45:1). Predictive prophecy is impossible.
- b. Arguments in favor of *Isaiah*’s unity and single-authorship are:
  - (1) Only Isaiah is named in the book (Is 1:1-3; 2:1; 7:3; 13:1; 20:2; 37:2, 6, 21; 38:1, 4, 21; 39:3, 5, 8).
    - (a) If another prophet wrote Is 40-66, why wouldn’t he be named in accordance with usual Jewish practice?
  - (2) Jesus, the apostles, and many others always viewed *Isaiah* as written by Isaiah.
    - (a) Jn 12:37-41 quotes from Is 6:9-10 and Is 53:1 and attributes it all to Isaiah.
    - (b) In Ro 9:27 and 10:16-21, Paul quotes from Is 10, 53, and 65, giving credit to Isaiah.
    - (c) The same is true of Mt 3:3; 12:17-21; Lk 3:4-6; and Ac 8:28.

<sup>8</sup> See Motyer, *Isaiah*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:35.

- (d) Ecclesiasticus, the Septuagint, and the Talmud viewed *Isaiah* as written by one author.
- (e) The historic position of the Church is that *Isaiah* is a compositional unit.<sup>11</sup>
- (3) Every edition of *Isaiah* ever found presents Is 1-66 as one physical unit.<sup>12</sup>
  - (a) “That the text form of that scroll as well as the fragmentary 1QIs<sup>b</sup> is essentially identical to that of the normative MT of A.D. 950 indicates that as early as 100 B.C. the book was considered of such authority that its final form was already well established.”<sup>13</sup>
- (4) *Isaiah* certainly was written before Jesus’ birth and does include predictive prophecy.
  - (a) The earliest known manuscript of *Isaiah* dates to 125-100 bc. It was found at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea in 1947 and is referred to as 1QIs<sup>a</sup>.<sup>14</sup>
  - (b) All prophecies fulfilled in Jesus’ life were predictive and not after-the-fact.
  - (c) That details of Jesus’ life were predicted proves details of Cyrus’ life could also be predicted.
  - (d) Predictive prophecy is a basic assertion/claim of *Isaiah*.
    - 1. **Is 42:9** Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare. Before they spring forth I tell you of them.
- (5) Difference in language, style, and theology between chs. 1-39 and 40-66 are overstated.
  - (a) *Isaiah* is an anthology. Is 1-39 reflects Isaiah’s oral ministry; Is 40-66 reflects his written ministry.
  - (b) There is no theological contradiction between Messiah as King (Is 1-39), Servant (Is 40-55), and Conquerer (Is 56-66).
- (6) *Isaiah*’s textual integrity between 125 bc and 950 ad is absolutely incredible.
  - (a) There were only minor differences between the Masoretic text of *Isaiah* (950 ad) and the Dead Sea Scroll versions (125-100 bc).

## 11. Tips for reading *Isaiah* are:

- a. Understand the historical context.
  - (1) We must strive to understand the political, social, and religious situation of Israel and the nations during this time period to interpret what Isaiah was saying to his original audience.<sup>15</sup>
  - (2) 2 Kings 15:27-21:26.
  - (3) 2 Chronicles 26-32.
  - (4) Amos.
    - (a) **Amos 1:1** 1 The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the

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<sup>11</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:20.

<sup>12</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:16.

<sup>13</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:29.

<sup>14</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, I:3.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *NAC*, 1:25.

days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

(b) Amos was probably the first of the “writing prophets.”

(5) Hosea.

(a) **Ho 1:1** 1 The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

(6) Micah.

(a) **Mic 1:1** 1 The word of Yahweh that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

(b) Micah was the country prophet of Judah. Isaiah was the city prophet of Judah.

b. Read *Isaiah* as a carefully constructed anthology.

(1) Isaiah is “an anthology of many different materials coming from a variety of settings in the prophet’s life, but that they have been assembled together according to an overall literary and theological grid, either by the prophet himself or by his immediate followers.”<sup>16</sup>

(2) *Isaiah*’s order is often thematic, not chronological.

(3) Is 1-37 is a written deposit from a spoken ministry. Is 40-55 and 56-66 are books with a plan and structure.<sup>17</sup>

c. Enjoy *Isaiah*’s literary artistry. Look for (especially in Hebrew):

(1) Palindromes: sentences that begin and end with same word (e.g., Is 1:7, 18; 40:19; 57:6).

(2) Assonance: the resemblance of sound between syllables in nearby words arising from the rhyming of stressed vowels (e.g. *sonnet, porridge*), and also from the use of identical consonants with different vowels (e.g. *killed, cold, culled*)(e.g., Is 1:21; 40:31; 57:1).

(3) Alliteration: the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words.

(4) Lists (e.g., eight imperatives in Is 1:17-18; four statements of overthrow in Is 41:11-12; five contrasts in Is 65:11-16).

(5) Extended doublets: the same area of truth is covered twice over, from two angles of perspective (like Ge 1-2) (Is 7:1-9:7 with Is 9:8-11:16; and Is 42:18-43:21 with Is 43:22-23).<sup>18</sup>

d. Use your imagination. Enjoy *Isaiah*’s imagery and word pictures.

(1) *Isaiah* is called the “Shakespeare of the prophets” for a reason.

e. Be ready for sudden changes in referent or time period.

(1) Carefully identify referents. Keep asking the question, “Who is *Isaiah* talking about?”

f. Look for contrasts.

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<sup>16</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 44–45.

<sup>17</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 24.

- (1) Again and again polar opposites are played off against each other.<sup>19</sup>
- g. Keep in mind the primary questions *Isaiah* is answering:
  - (1) How does the God of Israel compare to other gods?
  - (2) How will the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants be fulfilled?
  - (3) What is God's relationship to the Gentile nations?
- h. Develop broad theological principles from the specific incidents in *Isaiah*.
  - (1) Establishing relevance to our own day "comes from (a) understanding the meaning of the prophet's message to his audience, (b) developing broad theological principles from these specific incidents and teachings, and (c) finding analogies between the Old Testament theological teaching and the modern world today."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:32.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *NAC*, 1:23.



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*Notes*