

2 Isaiah

There's gospel joy in Isaiah: the promise of hope and salvation for a fallen people. The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than any other prophet.

Let's start with God calling Isaiah to be a prophet (Chapter 6). We'll spend some time in this chapter since it defines what a prophet is, shows what a prophet did, and gives us insight into the problem Isaiah addressed.

2.1 Isaiah's call (Isaiah 6)

It all started with the death of the Davidic king who had reigned well for 50 years (2 Chronicles 26). What would happen now?

Isaiah 6:1 (NIV)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Wow, that's who has the throne! The undying ruler is seated on the throne, in the royal palace his people had prepared for him in Jerusalem.

Actually, God doesn't fit in the house. Merely *the edge of his robe* fills the temple. It's like Solomon said, "*The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!*" (1 Kings 8:27)

In the most devoted chamber of God's house, the ark was the throne they'd provided for their heavenly sovereign, inviting the God of Israel to sit *enthroned between the cherubim* (Isaiah 37:16; Psalm 80:1). Realistically, the ark was more of a *footstool* on earth for the one who reigns in the heavens (Psalm 132:7; Isaiah 66:1).

As you'd expect, the LORD of heaven's hosts is attended by other-worldly servants who draw attention to his majesty:

Isaiah 6:2-4 (NIV)

² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

It's his character they comment on. *Holy* means **devoted**. Holy things were set aside (devoted) for specific tasks. *The Holy One of Israel* is the one devoted to Israel. Isaiah loves that name (1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6 ... twenty-six times!) YHWH's devotion to them is the covenant relationship they live in.

But what about the other side of the relationship? How devoted was God's nation to their heavenly sovereign?

Isaiah 6:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

It's the revelation of who God is that makes us aware of our need. Despite our sense of inadequacy and failure, *the Holy One* remains committed to his people. He designed the covenant with provisions to maintain the relationship. God reconciles (atones), enabling his people to speak for him.

That is the point of the covenant relationship. God's nation represents him to the nations, embodying the revelation of the heavenly sovereign in his earthly realm. That's the prophetic calling of God's people.

And that's the specific commission God gave Isaiah:

Isaiah 6:8 (NIV)

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Isaiah now knows his own identity. He's appointed to convey the word of the Holy One of Israel to his nation. He's a spokesman for the throne. That's what a prophet is.

The trouble is that God's people often ignore their heavenly sovereign, with tragic consequences. The King wants his spokesman to know how frustrating this commission is:

Isaiah 6:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people:
'Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'
¹⁰ "Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull and close their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

The more God speaks to them, the less they listen. Every prophet faced this frustration. Including Jesus (Matthew 13:13-15).

Isaiah asks how long he must persist with a commission that feels so pointless. Doing the same thing and expecting a different result is madness. How long do you keep cultivating a land that yields no fruit?

Isaiah 6:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ Then I said, "For how long, Lord?"
And he answered:
"Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, ¹² until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.
¹³ "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

In the years ahead, Isaiah saw the devastation of the land. Assyria captured most of it, leaving only Judah. Babylon captured what remained, destroying God's house and cutting off the Davidic kings who represented his reign. They lost everything.

This is the tragic context for Isaiah's prophetic ministry:

- Isaiah 7:17 introduces the **Assyrian** threat. It would have been the end of Judah too if King Hezekiah had not called on the name of the LORD. That story is retold in Isaiah 37–39.
- Isaiah 39:6 introduces the **Babylonian** threat. From Isaiah 40 onwards, God's nation has died and his people are under foreign rule. How will God rescue them and reign over them again? Isaiah 40–66 contain amazing insights into the restoration of God's reign in his anointed.

The commission God gave Isaiah was frustrating, but not hopeless. The nation would fall like a tree, leaving nothing but a stump in the land. But the stump wasn't dead:

The holy seed will be the stump in the land (6:13).

Isaiah later speaks of a branch shooting from the stump. A descendant from David's family will be raised up as God's anointed, restoring heaven's reign to the earth, bringing justice and peace for all people (Isaiah 11).

In the end, Isaiah reveals *the Holy One of Israel* as sovereign over the whole earth, restoring all things (Isaiah 65). The one whom Isaiah saw on the throne of the Jerusalem temple declares, "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool*" (66:1).

So, what is a prophet? Isaiah's call tells us: a **prophet** delivers a message from the one who has the throne, calling his people to live under his leadership as the people who make the heavenly sovereign known on the earth.

Isaiah proclaimed the LORD's kingship in frustrating times, as the kingdom disintegrated, and after it fell apart. Those are the TWO contexts for Isaiah's message:

- **Isaiah 1–39** expresses God's kingship in the time of the Divided kingdom (Israel and Judah), during the reign of the kings named in Isaiah 1:1.
- **Isaiah 40–66** expresses God's kingship even when Israel and Judah have both fallen, when God's people were exiled and ruled by foreign powers.

Do you have any questions or comments about the call of Isaiah and the settings of this book? Then we'll zoom out for a high-level survey of the book's contents.

2.2 Isaiah 1–39

Isaiah assumes the covenant relationship between God and Israel: God as heavenly king, and the nation as his kingdom on earth. *The Holy One of Israel* is devoted to them, but they've *turned their backs on him* (Isaiah 1:4) even though God has honoured them as the highest representation of his presence on earth (2:2). God would need to bring them down (3:8) to fulfil his purposes (4:2), since God's vineyard has not provided the flavour God intended his world to produce (5:4).

God called Isaiah (6:8) to tell Israel's kings they were servants of God's authority (7:9). God would bring Assyria to conquer them (8:7), but it's not the end. God would provide the child to restore divine government to earth (9:6), while Assyria would fall (10:5). God would restore his reign through a branch growing from the stump of the Davidic kingship (11:1), revealing the Holy One of Israel among his people (12:6).

God reigns over all the nations of the earth, even the nations that threatened the existence of the Abrahamic project:

- the dominant treat from the north: Babylon (Isaiah 13, 21)
- the surrounding nations: Philistia (14), Moab (15–16), and Aram (17)
- the nations to the south: Ethiopia (18–20) and Egypt (19)
- God's own people whose disobedience threatens God's plans (22)
- the trading port to the north that withstood Babylon for a time: Tyre (23)
- the whole earth that abuses God's provision and programme (24)

Nevertheless, God's purposes will be revealed in his people (25–27), even though their leaders misrepresent God's authority (28), dishonouring God (29–30) by relying on human powers instead (31).

God will still raise up a nation that represents his reign (32), rescuing them from oppression (33), dealing with their oppressors (34), establishing the people who resonate with his song (35).

Those are the warnings and promises of divine kingship in Isaiah 1–35. So how did it work out in practice? Isaiah 36–39 provides a historical interlude (repeating 2 Kings 18–20). Assyria swept through the region, swallowing everything including Israel. Judah survived because King Hezekiah called on the heavenly king for help. But then Hezekiah started relying on Babylon. God warned, "They'll take everything!" (39:6).

The ominous warning that Judah will fall too is the tragic conclusion of Isaiah 1–39.

2.3 Isaiah 40–55

The second part of Isaiah addresses God's people in Babylon, about 170 years after God rescued Hezekiah from Assyria.⁴ Jerusalem and the temple are demolished. There's no longer a land or nation under God's rule: they're living in exile.



F. F. Bruce, *Bible History Atlas* (Carta Jerusalem, 2005), 42.

⁴ Hezekiah was rescued around 712 BC. The events of the second part of Isaiah begin in the 540s BC.

But God had promised that when the Davidic dynasty was chopped down, God would still raise up a king, like a branch growing from the stump. Isaiah had declared that God's anointed would restore the LORD's majestic reign (Isaiah 11).

Well, another prophet now continues the message God gave Isaiah. Good news! The LORD is coming to reign over them!

Isaiah 40:3, 9-11 (NIV)

³ A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD ..."

⁹ You who **bring good news** to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who **bring good news** to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD **comes with power**, and he **rules with a mighty arm**. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ **He tends his flock like a shepherd:**

He **gathers** the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently **leads** those that have young.

This is the origin of the word *gospel*. Two centuries before Christ, the Septuagint translators used the Greek word *euangelizō* for Isaiah's statement about *bringing good news*. The *gospel* (according to **Mark 1:1-15**) is the good news that God's anointed (the *Christ*) is restoring God's reign to his people (his *kingdom*).

Isaiah explains that God had called Israel to be his **servant** to the nations (41:8-9), a witness to God's amazing leadership (43:10). In practice, they'd been about as helpful as a blind and deaf servant (42:19). That's why they fell. But God had not given up on them! Astoundingly, the LORD became the **servant to his fallen servant**:

- Devoted to his people, *the holy one of Israel* buys them back — **redeems** them! That's the keyword in Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5.
- God's own **arm** reaches and rescues his fallen servant. That's the image in Isaiah 48:14; 50:2; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:1, 16; 63:5, 12.

Israel had been commissioned as God's light to the nations (42:6; 49:6). They'd fallen, but the nations would see the LORD doing right by his people (*righteousness*)—*saving* them from their oppression (51:4-5). The divine rescue is the *gospel*:

Isaiah 52:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring **good news**, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim **salvation**, who say to Zion, "Your God **reigns!**" ...

¹⁰ The LORD will lay bare his holy **arm** in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the **salvation** of our God.

But how? If God is the servant sovereign who rescues his people rather than smashing his enemies into submission, how?

Isaiah 53:1-11 (NIV)

¹ To whom has the **arm** of the LORD been revealed? ² He grew up before him like a **tender shoot**, and like a **root** out of dry ground. ...

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind, **a man of suffering**, and familiar with pain. ... ⁵ He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ...

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away. ... ⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ...

¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life; ... my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

The LORD's *arm* is revealed in the *Branch* who enters into the suffering of his people, their demise, their death. God does not save his people by smashing their enemies into submission. The Branch God promised suffers for and with his suffering people. That's how he is raised up on their behalf, to lead them as God's kingdom. This is the gospel—the good news of God's reign restored to earth in his suffering servant.

In God's anointed (the Christ), the people of God are restored, and the reign of God extends to the nations. That's how God fulfils his covenant with Noah (54:9-10) and with David (55:3) as he calls everyone to seek his kingship (55:6). The fruitfulness God decreed in the beginning is restored as earth comes back under heaven (55:9-13).

Is this how you've heard Isaiah before?

2.4 Isaiah 56–66

The final section of Isaiah maintains this cosmic outlook for all people. Foreigners can participate in God's reign too (56:3). This is an astounding salvation that restores the whole earth under God's reign.

God's nation could not rescue themselves, so the LORD donned his armour and came to save them himself (59:15-20). But God didn't save them by destroying their enemies; God saved his nation by bring the nations under his reign as well.

The violence that has covered the earth since Genesis 4 is subdued as the nations recognize God's reign in his Anointed ruler and his people embody his reign:

Isaiah 59:19 – 60:3 (NIV)

59 ¹⁹ From the west, people will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. ... ²⁰ "The Redeemer will come to Zion ...

60 ¹ "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ... ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

King David had been the LORD's anointed, empowered to restore heaven's reign to the earth. The kingship and the nation had fallen, but God promised to restore his people in his anointed:

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind

up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ...

The gospel—according to Luke 4:21—is that this is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

The Messiah rescues God's people from serving other powers, and **sets right** all that is wrong with the world. These twin themes—*judgement* and *salvation*—dominate the final chapters of Isaiah.

It's in the Christ that earth is restored under heaven, a **new creation** where everything is set right (65:17-19). The relationship between earth and heaven decreed in the beginning is fulfilled in God's gospel proclamation, "*Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool*" (66:1). God's people live under his enduring reign, while those who rejected his kingship do not have a place under his reign (66:22-24).

In preparation for next week, read Jeremiah 7 and 31.

2.5 Resources

Posts at <https://allenbrowne.blog>

- [An overview of Isaiah](#)
- [When God called Isaiah](#) (Isaiah 6)

Books:

- Andrew T. Abernethy. *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic—Theological Approach*. (InterVarsity Press, 2016).
- John Goldingay. *Isaiah*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. (Baker Books, 2012).

Videos from Bible Project:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/isaiah/>
- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-kingdom/>

New Testament quotations:

Next time you're reading through Isaiah, keep this list alongside you. Each time you come across a verse that's quoted in the New Testament, see what it says. It will take you much longer to read Isaiah, but it's like a Holy Spirit inspired comment on how Christ fulfils the prophets (the topic of the final week in this series).

Prophet	Quotation
Isaiah 1:9	Romans 9:29
Isaiah 6:9-10	Matthew 13:15 Mark 4:12 Luke 8:10
Isaiah 6:9-10	Acts 28:27
Isaiah 6:10	John 12:40
Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Isaiah 8:12	1 Peter 3:14
Isaiah 8:14	Romans 9:33
Isaiah 8:14	1 Peter 2:8
Isaiah 8:17-18	Hebrews 2:13
Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:16
Isaiah 10:22-23	Romans 9:26

Isaiah 11:10	Romans 15:12
Isaiah 13:10	Matthew 24:29 Mark 13:25
Isaiah 22:13	1 Corinthians 15:32
Isaiah 25:8	1 Corinthians 15:54
Isaiah 27:9	Romans 11:27
Isaiah 28:11-12	1 Corinthians 14:21
Isaiah 28:16	Romans 9:33
Isaiah 28:16	Romans 10:11
Isaiah 28:16	1 Peter 2:6
Isaiah 29:10	Romans 11:8
Isaiah 29:13	Matthew 15:8-9 Mark 7:6-7
Isaiah 29:14	1 Corinthians 1:19
Isaiah 29:16	Romans 9:20
Isaiah 34:4	Matthew 24:29 Mark 13:25
Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:3 Mark 1:3 John 1:23
Isaiah 40:3-5	Luke 3:6
Isaiah 40:6-8	1 Peter 1:25
Isaiah 40:13	Romans 11:34
Isaiah 40:13	1 Corinthians 2:16
Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:21
Isaiah 45:9	Romans 9:20
Isaiah 45:23	Romans 14:11
Isaiah 49:6	Acts 13:47
Isaiah 49:8	2 Corinthians 6:2
Isaiah 52:5	Romans 2:24
Isaiah 52:7	Romans 10:15
Isaiah 52:11	2 Corinthians 6:17
Isaiah 52:15	Romans 15:21
Isaiah 53:1	John 12:38
Isaiah 53:1	Romans 10:16
Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:17
Isaiah 53:7-8	Acts 8:33
Isaiah 53:9	1 Peter 2:22
Isaiah 53:12	Luke 22:37
Isaiah 54:13	John 6:45
Isaiah 54:1	Galatians 4:27
Isaiah 55:3	Acts 13:34
Isaiah 56:7	Matthew 21:13 Mark 11:17 Luke 19:46
Isaiah 59:7-8	Romans 3:17
Isaiah 59:20-21	Romans 11:27
Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:19
Isaiah 64:4	1 Corinthians 2:9
Isaiah 65:1	Romans 10:20
Isaiah 65:2	Romans 10:21
Isaiah 66:1-2	Acts 7:50
Isaiah 66:24	Mark 9:48