

1 God is sovereign over his people (Isaiah 1–12)

Welcome to Isaiah. This is the first time we've devoted a term to studying one of the Old Testament prophets in the *Formed in God's Story* series.¹ Isaiah's message is so rich, filled with hope and the promise of God's presence in difficult times.

Here's how we'll survey this outstanding book:

Week	Chapters	Theme	Read
1	Isaiah 1–12	God is the sovereign over his people.	Isaiah 6, 11
2	Isaiah 13–24	God is sovereign over the nations.	Isaiah 19, 24
3	Isaiah 25–39	Trust the true sovereign, not the nations.	Isaiah 31, 37
4	Isaiah 40–47	God restores his fallen servant.	Isaiah 40, 43
5	Isaiah 48–55	God restores everyone through his servant.	Isaiah 49, 52
6	Isaiah 56–66	Be faithful to the God who restores creation.	Isaiah 60, 65

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Isaiah provides the setting in which he heard from God. This really helps us understand what God was saying to them, so we can understand what God is saying to us.

Isaiah 1:1 (NIV)

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem
that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of
Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Isaiah lived in the eight century BC, in the time of the **divided kingdom**:

- **Judah**: southern nation. Jerusalem was capital. David's sons were kings.
- **Israel**: northern nation. Samaria was capital. They appointed their own kings.

Isaiah worked during the reign of four kings of Judah:

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|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1. Uzziah : | mostly good | 2 Chronicles 26 | 790-739 BC |
| 2. Jotham : | a good king | 2 Chronicles 27 | 751-736 BC |
| 3. Ahaz : | one of the worst | 2 Chronicles 28 | 736-728 BC |
| 4. Hezekiah : | one of the best | 2 Chronicles 29–32 | 728-695 BC |

Uzziah contracted leprosy, so his reign overlaps with Jotham's.

Isaiah probably had an official government job in record keeping. 2 Chronicles 26:22:
The events of Uzziah's reign, from beginning to end, are recorded by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.

¹ We surveyed the OT Prophets in 2024. The notes and podcasts from that series are available here:
<https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/02/07/formed-in-gods-story-ot-prophets/>

Hezekiah plays a key role in Isaiah, but his role ends in Isaiah 39. Isaiah tells him the kingdom will fall. Babylon will conquer Jerusalem and take the people into exile.

Isaiah 39:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD Almighty:

⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD.”

This is the low point of the whole book. It feels like everything Isaiah has said has failed. It would be a complete tragedy if the book ended here.

Chapter 40 then delivers God's promise to bring his people back from exile. It's a new voice. Isaiah is never mentioned again. We're in the Persian period. When Persia conquered Babylon, King Cyrus told the people to return to their cities and rebuild (Isaiah 44:29–45:13). This is more than 150 years after Hezekiah's death.

So, the original setting described in Isaiah 1:1 applies to the first thirty-nine chapters, not the whole book. It's a little like the situation in Proverbs where the book opens by saying we're listening to *the proverbs of Solomon*. Later, as we progress through the book, we discover content from others too: *the sayings of the wise* (22:17), *the sayings of Agur* (30:1), and *the sayings of King Lemeul* (31:1).

The oracles of the eighth century prophet Isaiah end with Isaiah 35. Then we have a historical interlude that explains how Isaiah's words worked out (Isaiah 36–39). These chapters are nearly identical to the text of 2 Kings 18–20.

Then we hear a new voice declaring *comfort* for the exiles. *A voice crying in the wilderness* says the exile is over. It proclaims the good news: “*Your God reigns!*” (Isaiah 40:1-9).

This new voice affirms the oracles of the eighth century prophet Isaiah, declaring that the LORD reigns over the nations that had conquered them, promising the restoration of God's fallen servant, announcing that the LORD's reign would extend to all the peoples of the earth, restoring everything as a new creation.

The New Testament understands the promises of Isaiah 40–66 as finding fulfilment in the Christ who came to restore the fallen kingdom of God (e.g. Mark 1:1-14).

Any thoughts or questions on how the Book of Isaiah works as a whole?

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"The Divided Kingdom" in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, edited by Carl G. Rasmussen (Zondervan, 2010), 153.

1.1 Hearing the LORD (Isaiah 1–6)

God corrects his people (Isaiah 1)

The Sinai covenant established Israel as God's nation, called to show the nations the wonder of God's sovereignty. But Israel had divided into two nations, sometimes fighting each other, regularly disobeying the covenant law. So God sent prophets like Isaiah to confront his people:

Isaiah 1:2-3 (NIV)

² Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the LORD has spoken:

“I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.

³ The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”

LORD in block letters is the name God revealed at Mount Sinai, YHWH in Hebrew (Exodus 3:1-15; 6:1-8, 29; 20:2, 7; 24:1-8; 29:46; 29:46; 31:13; 34:5-10; 39:34-38). God's frustration with his people is something every parent can relate to: you want the best for your children, but they think they know better.

When God speaks, the prophets often present his words in poetic form. Poetry is majestic; it slows us down to hear what's being said. The opening image of God as a parent continues through Isaiah (e.g. 9:6; 49:15; 63:16; 64:8; 66:13).

Hebrew poetry also slows us down by repeating each idea, presenting each thought in a **parallel** way. (Did you see what I did there?)

For example, verse 3 has these parallel expressions:

*The ox knows its master,
the donkey its owner's manger,*

Then we hear another pair of parallel phrases:

*but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.*

The two lines about the *ox* and *donkey* are stacked together to draw a contrasting parallel between the animals who know their master's care and Israel who does not:

*The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.*

What God says in verse 3 is the same meaning, spelled out again in parallel way:

*I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.*

Of course, those two lines in verse 3 are parallel to each other as well, expressing two sides of the same relationship. Once you see it, parallelism is incredibly helpful: if you didn't get it the first time, hearing it another way explains what's being said. This isn't just in the Prophets of course; the Psalms work like this too.

Parallelism in Hebrew poetry is a bit like the swirling lines of *Starry Starry Night*. Each line, in combination with the next, contributes to the picture as a whole.

Parallelism extends well beyond the lines of a verse. A stanza of a poem can be set in parallel to the next.

Sometimes the poem takes us on a journey to the centre, with the second half retracing its steps so we end up back where we started. The first line matches the last, the second matches the second last, and so on. Isaiah sometimes sets entire oracles in parallel.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Starry_Night

Start by watching for the parallelism within a verse. As you read more widely, you'll see parallelism on a wider scale too. Any questions about parallelism?

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God's plans for his people (Isaiah 2)

When God confronts his people as he did in Chapter 1, it's always for a reason. He's calling them to follow where he is leading them. The prophets paint this vision:

Isaiah 2:1-4 (NIV)

¹ This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² In the last days **the mountain of the LORD's temple**
will be established as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

³ Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

The mountain of YHWH's temple was Mount Zion in Jerusalem. People journeyed to meet God at his house three times a year, for Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. God tells them that when he has completed his project (*in the last days*), it won't just be Israel streaming into Jerusalem to meet with God and hear his wise instruction. Nations will also seek God's ways, to resolve their disputes and bring an end to war. By listening to the LORD and following his ways, nations will stop fighting each other for power. The military budgets they spend to kill their enemies can then be redirected into producing food to save lives, so everyone is cared for. This is what God always intended. This is creation so completely restored that by the end of Isaiah it's called *new heavens and new earth* (65:17-25; 66:22). Thoughts on Isaiah 2?

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God commissions Isaiah (Isaiah 6)

We've seen how the prophetic message includes both confrontation (Isaiah 1) and inspiration (Isaiah 2), with God's words delivered in poetic form (parallelism). Now we're skipping to Isaiah 6, where LORD calls Isaiah to prophetic ministry.

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.

King Uzziah struggled with pride, but he did lead the people to follow the LORD. Would King Jotham continue that way? In this uncertain moment, Isaiah is given a vision of who really rules.

The word *Lord* is not in block letters. It's not YHWH but *ā-dōni*, meaning master or ruler. God is their *ā-dōni*, their sovereign ruler. Their mortal king has died, but Isaiah sees true sovereign, *high and exalted* above everyone, *seated on a throne*.

The temple was the palace Israel provided for their true king. The ark was his throne where the LORD sat *enthroned between the cherubim* (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 90:1; Isaiah 37:16). They knew when they built the temple that it could not contain the heavenly sovereign (1 Kings 8:27), so the ark is more of a footstool for their heavenly sovereign (Psalm 99:5; 132:7; Isaiah 66:1). Isaiah sees just the bottom edge of God's robe filling the temple.

As you'd expect, servants attend the sovereign:

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.

The word *seraph* (plural *seraphim*) may be related to the Hebrew word for serpent, but serpents don't have wings. Or feet. These are other-worldly creatures, attendants of the great ruler from whom they hide their faces and their feet. Their role is to draw Isaiah's attention to **the LORD of hosts** (*LORD Almighty* in NIV). The Hebrew phrase *YHWH šēbā'ôṭ* declares the LORD'S authority over the hosts of heaven and earth.

As the seraphim see it, *the whole earth is full of his glory*. That's not how we see a world full of wars and bloodshed. We see a history of horrors, humans grasping to take the power of God into our hands to rule over each other instead of recognizing God's throne (as in Genesis 11). Why God continues his project of rescuing his earthly realm through Abraham's family beats me.

But that's the very thing these creatures focus on! Something was *holy* if it was devoted to God (compare Leviticus 11:44; 20:7). Isaiah's favourite name for God is **the holy one of Israel** (Isaiah 1:4; 55:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 14; 31:1; 37:23 etc.) God's holiness is his unfailing devotion to his covenant people, even when they have not been faithfully devoted to God.

This is what amazes the seraphim. The holiness of God—his unfailing devotion to his people and the rest of creation that he will save through them—is the basis for their insight into how the story ends: *the whole earth is full of his glory* (compare Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

But from an earthly perspective, Isaiah sees it differently. In the presence of *YHWH šēbā'ôṭ*, Isaiah feels like a decaying man in a ruined world:

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.”

Isaiah and his people are *unclean*. The words on their lips reveal the uncleanness within. Uncleanness was a big theme in the Torah: for example, 100+ times in five chapters (Leviticus 11–15). Anything unclean was unfit to be in God's presence.

But the Sinai covenant also provided cleansing rituals to maintain the relationship. There were daily rituals like washing at the temple courtyard basin (Leviticus 8:11). There were annual rituals like the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). So the heavenly creatures cleanse Isaiah's lips, making him fit to speak God's message (verse 6).

Burning coals would destroy our lips. But by his own lips Isaiah has described himself as already destroyed (*ruined* in NIV). God's cleansing fire “undestroys” us. It sets us right with him: to *atone* is to make “at-one” (verse 7).

With cleansed lips, Isaiah is called to be a spokesman for the heavenly ruler:

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!”

That's what a prophet is. Prophets are not clairvoyants trying to predict the future. Prophets are people who deliver the message of the heavenly sovereign to his people. But remember God's frustration back in Isaiah 1:1-3? God's people don't want to hear his direction. They want to do their own thing. Bringing God's word to them will be a frustrating commission:

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.”

God does not want his people to be hard-hearted. He wants them to *turn and be healed*. But if they hear and refuse, it's worse than if they never heard. If they close their ears to the message, refusing what God is calling them to, Isaiah's words will have the effect of making them even more obstinate as they reject God's authority.

Everyone who speaks for God knows this frustration—the danger of making things worse. This was the reason Jesus talked about the kingdom in parables instead of telling people plainly that he was the God-anointed king. If they rejected the kingdom because they could not see him as king, they'd be worse off, so he painted cameos of kingdom life that would create a desire within them for what God had promised. (See Matthew 13:10-17 || Mark 4:10-12 || Luke 8:10; John 12:40 and Acts 28:27 where Jesus and Paul also quote Isaiah 9:9-10).

Isaiah asks how long it will be before he can get back to something more fruitful:

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.”

Oh, that's tragic! This commission will consume Isaiah's whole life, until the disobedient people cease to exist as a nation (verse 11), until they're exiled from the land God had promised them (verse 12).

Within a few decades, ten of the twelve tribes fell to Assyria (722 BC). Only Judah was left—perhaps *a tenth* of what Israel had been in Solomon's time. Then even this remnant will fall (verse 13). And fall it did as Babylon captured Jerusalem (586 BC).

So, was there any point to Isaiah's frustrating commission? Why does God bother if it will all end so disastrously?

The final sentence is God's answer. Like a tree chopped down by invaders, Israel would fall. But something will grow from the stump. A branch from the holy stock will sprout to accomplish what God intended when he planted this people to be his representative nation (verse 13).

Who might this be? Who was the anointed ruler who would come from the fallen tree of King David's dynasty to rescue his people and restore the heavenly sovereign's reign? Isaiah gives us more details in Chapter 11.

1.2 Who rules? (Isaiah 7–12)

A king who doesn't trust God's leadership (Isaiah 7)

We're in the time of the divided kingdom, where *Israel* means the northern nation (ten tribes), separate from *Judah* where David's descendants reigned. King Jotham died in 736 BC, so Ahaz was now king of Judah:

Isaiah 7:1 (NIV)

When **Ahaz** son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah,
King **Rezin** of Aram and **Pekah** son of Remaliah king of Israel
marched up to fight against Jerusalem.

All those names were obvious to them. Here's how they fit together:

Kingdom	Capital	King	Head
Aram (Syria)	Damascus	Rezin	?
Israel (Ephraim)	Samaria	Pekah (son of Remaliah)	?
Judah	Jerusalem	Ahaz (Davidic king)	The LORD

Judah was under attack from two countries: Israel (immediately north), and Israel's northern neighbour Aram (Syria today). Ahaz was terrified. If they conquered Judah, that would be the end of the David's dynasty, the kingship anointed by the LORD.

The LORD sends Isaiah to King Ahaz with this message:

Isaiah 7:5-9 (NIV)

⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying,

⁶ "Let us invade Judah;
let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves,
and make the son of Tabeel king over it."

⁷ Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

"It will not take place, it will not happen,
⁸ for the head of Aram is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is only Rezin.
Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.
⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son.
If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

This is great news for Ahaz: his enemies will fail; the LORD'S plans will succeed.

But Ahaz doesn't believe it. The alliance of Israel and Aram was so much stronger militarily that Ahaz could not see himself surviving.

Isaiah asks Ahaz to consider who's in charge. Ahaz is appointed by God, because the LORD chose David to represent his authority on earth. The rulers of the nations are not like that. It's only their people who enthroned them: *the head of Aram is Damascus*.

And Israel (Ephraim) is like Aram. Israel rejected the Davidic kings and put their own kings on the throne, so *the head of Ephraim is Samaria* (verse 9). Israel will fall, *too shattered to be a people* (verse 8).

Only Judah will remain, and only if they are faithful to the LORD. As God said to Ahaz: *if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all* (verse 9).

God's entire programme to rescue the world through his people is on a knife-edge. The faith[fulness] of God's anointed is so crucial that God offers any sign he wants:

Isaiah 7:10-14 (NIV)

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?"

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Recognize verse 14? Matthew 1:23 says this of Jesus, born without a human father. But first, let's understand how Isaiah's message relates to Ahaz.

The sign (evidence) that God is with them is the birth of a firstborn child in Ahaz's court. The child will be named *Immanuel*, so every time the king sees the child he is reminded, "God is with us." Ahaz would probably have preferred if God sent a great warrior, but if God is with this little child, Ahaz can trust that God is with him too.

And while this little one is still a child, the nations that plotted Judah's downfall would fall. A Jewish boy is typically 13 when he makes his Bar Mitzvah commitment the Torah's commandments that define what's right and wrong.

Isaiah 7:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, ¹⁶ for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.

In 722 BC, Assyria swept through Aram (Syria) and captured Samaria (capital of Israel). Judah survived as King Hezekiah trusted the LORD, the story in Isaiah 36–37.

Later (586 BC), Judah's unfaithfulness to God saw them fall to Babylon. For hundreds of years, the promises of God's reign lay unfulfilled as his people served the rulers of this world. That's why the promises of the prophets find their fulfilment in Jesus.

Matthew draws our attention to Isaiah 7:14. Hebrew has a word for virgin, but Isaiah used the word *āl-māh*, a young woman of marriageable age (see NRSV, CEB, CJB, GNB, NET, NJB, RSV etc). The child in Isaiah's context was not a virgin birth.

But a couple of hundred years before Jesus' birth, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, and the Septuagint did use the Greek word for virgin. Matthew uses this translation (since he's writing in Greek). And Jesus was conceived without a human father. The child in Ahaz's court was a *sign* of the Immanuel presence, but Jesus was *God with us* (Matthew 1:23), sent to save his people from their disobedience (1:21), to restore the exiled people (1:17), the anointed son of David (1:1).

Isaiah was not predicting that one day the Son of God would be born of a virgin. Isaiah was telling the current messiah (anointed ruler) not to fear his current enemies because God was with him. That kingdom fell because of unfaithfulness, but God remained faithful: he provided the Messiah to save his people and restore the kingdom of God. Jesus is the fulfilment of all the unfulfilled promises God gave through the prophets.

Your thoughts?

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The king who restores God's leadership (Isaiah 9-12)

"Assyrian Expansion" in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, edited by Carl G. Rasmussen (Zondervan, 2010), 160.

As Assyria invaded from the north, the region around Galilee was the first to be lost to the gentiles. Isaiah promised God would not let the story end this way:

Isaiah 9:1 (NIV)

In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations ...

When did God honour Galilee? Matthew 4:13-17 quotes this verse as the reason Jesus launched his kingdom restoration project in Galilee rather than Jerusalem.

Isaiah goes on to say God will send not a warrior but a child to restore the kingdom:

Isaiah 9:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Isaiah's message is that God will restore his kingship to the earth. *The LORD of hosts* is sovereign over all creatures in heaven and on earth. The kingdom of God fell to the

kingdom of the world, but *the zeal of the LORD of hosts* will raise up his Anointed to reign over his people and all the peoples of the earth.

After God used Assyria to bring Israel down, God would deal with Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-19) and eventually restore his reign to his people (10:20-34).

In the short term, the Davidic kingship fell. But eventually a branch would sprout from the root of David's family tree. (*Jesse* = David's father.)

Isaiah 11:1-10 (NIV)

¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him ...

⁴ With righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. ...

⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb ...

⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.



When Samuel anointed David as king, *the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David* (1 Samuel 16:13). He was *the LORD'S anointed*. So were his sons who reigned after him (Psalm 2:2). But the LORD'S anointed was cut off by the exile. Isaiah insists that one day the LORD'S anointed would reign again in the power of the Spirit, sorting out this injustice, restoring peace to the earth, recognized by the nations.

Jesus is the LORD'S *anointed* who restores heaven's reign to the earth. The Hebrew word *messiah* (anointed) translates into Greek as *christos* (anointed) and into English as *Christ*. To say Jesus is the *Christ* is to say Jesus is the *Messiah* (John 1:41; 4:25; 1 Peter 1:11). The New Testament opens with that claim: Jesus is *the anointed son of David* (Matthew 1:1) who deals with the exile (1:17), and saves his people (1:21). He is the Immanuel child Isaiah promised (Matthew 1:23). He is king of the Jews (2:2), the ruler from David's line (2: 6), arriving to restore the kingdom of God like Isaiah said (Matthew 3:1-3 and 4:14-17). *The Christ* is the most important title for Jesus in the New Testament, occurring more than 500 times.²

² Joshua W. Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020.

Everything in the opening chapters of Isaiah comes together in Isaiah 11: the glorious proclamation of God's reign restored to earth in the Christ, the anointed son of David:

- He is the branch sprouting from David's fallen kingship (verse 1),
- He is the LORD's anointed empowered by his Spirit to lead (verse 2)
- He sorts out the injustices on the earth (verse 3)
- He brings the nations into line with God's authority (verse 4)
- He restores peace so everyone and everything lives safely (verse 5-8)
- The whole creation is bathed in the majesty of its true Sovereign (verse 9).

God is doing far more than restoring Israel/Judah. Isaiah sees the nations recognizing the authority of God's anointed. Even the nations that tried to destroy them—Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and others—come under the leadership of the Christ as part of the kingdom of God (verses 10-16).

The New Testament sees these promises being fulfilled in Christ Jesus as the nations come under his leadership (Romans 15:12).

Isaiah 12 responds to this good news of God's salvation:

Isaiah 12:2 (NIV)

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.
The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defence;
he has become my salvation."

Isaiah is echoing Exodus 15:2. Just as God saved Israel at the Red Sea, he is saving the whole world in the anointed son of David (as in Psalm 118:14).

1.3 So what?

What have we seen in Isaiah 1–12?

We've seen oracles of *judgement*. The aim is not to condemn God's people; God was calling his flock back to follow where he's leading them when they've wandered off.

We've seen oracles of *salvation*. The aim is not to take them to heaven; God was saving them from oppression under other powers, rescuing them to be his kingdom.

The eternal sovereign called Isaiah to speak for him: *the King, the LORD of hosts* (6:5).

The kingdom fell as the Davidic king fell, the anointed representative of God's reign on earth. The kingdom would rise again as the anointed shoot from David's fallen family tree restores heaven's reign to earth—all the nations of the earth.

So what's the main message of Isaiah? What are your thoughts so far?

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If you want to buy a commentary on Isaiah, John Goldingay from Fuller Seminary is very good:

- *Isaiah for Everyone*. Old Testament for Everyone. (SPCK, 2015).
- *Isaiah*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. (Baker Books, 2012).

Here are some thoughts from others to help frame Isaiah's message:

If one were asked what the book of Isaiah 'is about', this would be the answer: the kingship of God now visible to the eye of faith and to be made visible to all in the new world that is about to dawn.³

First, the book [of Isaiah] regularly refers to God with titles like 'king' (*melek*), 'lord' ('*ādōnāy*) and 'YHWH (Lord) of hosts' (*yhwh šēbā'ōt*). Second, concepts related to kingdom, such as the throne, tribute, warfare, glory, and justice and righteousness, arise throughout Isaiah. Third, passages highlighting God's kingship occur at strategic points throughout Isaiah, indicating the concept's structural importance (Isa. 6; 24–25; 33; 40; 52; 59:15–63:6; 66). Fourth, the book of Isaiah addresses a people living amid a long trajectory of empires—Assyria, Babylon and Persia—so it is no surprise that Isaiah casts its message in the light of the notion of kingdom. In many respects, Isaiah provides a people living amid imperial contexts with a theological interpretation of these situations in the light of YHWH's past, present and future sovereign reign. While the points above will be more fully developed throughout this book, there is little doubt that kingdom is fundamental to the book of Isaiah's message.⁴

The Isaianic literature is built around three Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1–37), the Servant (chapters 38–55) and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56–66). It also shows how each of these portraits is integral to the 'book' in which it is set.⁵

The vision of Isaiah contains many impressive elements. First Assyria looms large, and then Babylon, and many other nations and persons vie for our attention as well. But what the superscription effectively does is to drape a banner from one particular window. It tells us to keep our eye firmly fixed on Judah and Jerusalem, and as we do so, a figure appears before our eyes. He has royal titles which link him in the most intimate way with God himself (9:6). He is a shoot from the stump of Jesse, an ideal king from the line of David (11:1). He is endowed with the Spirit

³ W. Houston, "The Kingdom of God in Isaiah: Divine Power and Human Response" in *The Kingdom of God and Human Society: Essays by Members of the Scripture, Theology and Society Group*, ed. R. S. Barbour (T. & T. Clark, 1993) 28–41.

⁴ Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic—Theological Approach*, (Downers Grove, IL; London: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2016), 2.

⁵ J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 13.

and rules with perfect justice, and under him all that God has purposed for his people and his world is fully realized (11:2–9). The term ‘messiah’ properly belongs to every king of the house of David, even the unworthy ones; each, by virtue of his office, is ‘the LORD’s messiah’. But this is *the* Messiah, the final and perfect one, and on reflection we can see how fittingly the window frames him and anticipates his appearance.⁶

The Messiah plays such a prominent part in Isaiah that the book is sometimes called the “Gospel of the Old Testament.” ... *Immanuel* (meaning “God is with us”) is the major theme of chapters 7–9. These passages are closely related to others which speak of the divine King (such as 11:1–9; 32:1–5; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6). The figure of Immanuel and the name itself are such that they were an encouragement to Isaiah and his contemporaries because they reminded them that God was with them and would bring them certain victory in the end because of His divine plans. But at the same time, they were so described by the prophet that they could not be fully filled with meaning until the coming of the Son of God.⁷

In preparation for next week, **read Isaiah 19 and 24.**

In this whole section, Isaiah says the LORD will get the nations under control. But God’s goal is not to destroy the nations but to deal with their arrogant attacks on his people; the goal is to make them his people (as in Isaiah 19:19-25).

⁶ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles’ Wings*, Bible Speaks Today (Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 29.

⁷ Kenneth E. Jones, “The Book of Isaiah,” in *Isaiah-Malachi*, Wesleyan Bible Commentary (Eerdmans, 1969), 16.