



Isaiah

Prepared by Allen Browne

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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

You're welcome to email me if you have questions: allen.browne@riverview.church

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:

- | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 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?

.....
.....

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.

2 God is sovereign over the nations (Isaiah 13–24)

Isaiah began by confronting Judah: they were not following where the LORD was leading (Isaiah 1–5). Isaiah was called to participate in God's frustration with their unfaithfulness, refocusing them on *the Holy One of Israel* (Isaiah 6). Even the king was faithless, but God was present in the Immanuel child (Isaiah 7). God would use Assyria to bring God's people down, and then God would humble Assyria (Isaiah 8–10). An anointed ruler would sprout from the stump of David's dynasty to restore the fallen people of God and bring the nations back into heaven's reign (Isaiah 11–12).

Any questions on the first twelve chapters of Isaiah?

.....

What's in a name? The LORD of hosts

Seventy times, Isaiah refers to God as *YHWH šēbā'ôṭ*. Our translations read:

- the LORD of hosts (KJV, ESV),
- the LORD of Heaven's Armies (NLT, CSB),
- the LORD Almighty (NIV, GNB)

šēbā'ôṭ means **hosts**, multitudes, a vast array. Military forces were often described as hosts. You don't tell your enemies how many troops you have, just that you have hosts arrayed against them. Israel's armies were described as hosts (especially in Numbers). So were their enemies' (e.g. Judges 4:2–7; 8:6; 9:29; 1 Samuel 12:9).

There are also **hosts** of stars in the sky (Genesis 2:1). Many cultures of the Ancient Near East regarded them as the powers of heaven, so God warned his people not to worship the starry hosts (Deuteronomy 4:19; 7:3).

YHWH šēbā'ôṭ declares that Israel's God reigns over the multitudes in both realms. He is sovereign over all people and creatures of the earth (not just Israel/Judah), and he is sovereign over the angels and creatures in the heavenly realm.

The LORD of heaven's armies is far too narrow an interpretation. It sounds like a subset of the heavenly beings and misses the earthly realm completely. *The LORD Almighty* recognizes God's authority but doesn't emphasize the scope of God's reign: the multitudes of creatures in both realms.⁸ The literal *LORD of hosts* is stronger.

That is the point Isaiah is making in Chapters 13–24. The LORD reigns over the nations, so the nations should drop their arrogant claims to be running the world and submit to the one who is Lord of both heaven and earth.

All nations answer to the LORD of hosts. That includes:

- Babylon and Philistia (13–14)

⁸ For more detail, see this study of Zechariah 8, the chapter that uses this phrase most: <https://allenbrowne.blog/2021/05/14/lord-of-hosts/>

- Moab (15–16)
- Damascus (17)
- Cush and Egypt (18–20)
- Babylon, Edom and Arabia (21)
- Jerusalem (22)
- Tyre (23)
- the whole earth (24)

The LORD reigns over all the nations. As their sovereign, he decrees their outcomes.



“The Neo-Babylonian Empire/Judah Exiled” in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010), 171

2.1 Who rules the nations? (Isaiah 13–19)

Babylon (Isaiah 13–14)

What do you make of this? Who is this about?

Isaiah 14:12-15 (KJV)

¹² How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

¹³ For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:

I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

¹⁵ Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Who is *Lucifer*? (verse 12)

What was Lucifer's sin? (verses 13-14)

People often use this text to discuss Satan's origins, especially in combination with Ezekiel 28.⁹ They often read it the way we just did—without reference to its context.

Isaiah 14:4 is the heading over this oracle. Who is it about?

Confused? How can they describe Nebuchadnezzar as Lucifer trying to ascend into heaven, exalting his throne above God's? (verses 13-14)

Okay, *Lucifer* is not a name for Satan. It's a Latin word: *lux* (light) + *fer* (carry), so light-bearer.¹⁰ Most translations have *morning star* (NIV), *Day Star* (ESV) or similar. The parallel phrase in verse 12 is *son of the dawn*. We still call Venus the morning star as it heralds the dawn. The word is unique here (nowhere else in Scripture), though the image of *the bright Morning Star* is applied to Jesus in Revelation 22:16.

In this context, the king of Babylon pretended to be ushering in a bright new day for God's people. Like Babel in Genesis 11:4, he was trying to reach up into the heavens to take the power of God into human hands. Since the LORD reigned over Judah, by taking Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar was trying to take God's throne.

How does that sound? Does that make more sense than spiritualizing it?

.....
The previous chapter explains that the LORD of hosts planned to use Babylon as a weapon to bring down his disobedient people (compare Ezekiel 21):

Isaiah 13:1-5 (NIV)

¹ A prophecy against Babylon ...

⁴ Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude!

Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations massing together!

The LORD Almighty is mustering an army for war.

⁵ They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens—the LORD and the weapons of his wrath—to destroy the whole country.

After destroying Judah, Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian empire:

Isaiah 13:17-19 (NIV)

¹⁷ See, I will stir up against them the Medes ...

¹⁹ Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Babylonians, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁹ On Ezekiel 28, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/02/09/you-were-in-edem/>

¹⁰ "Lucifer" in *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* ed. C. Soanes and A. Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2004).

We've already seen how God responded to Israel's unfaithfulness. Assyria conquered them (7:20). Then God brought Assyria down because of its pride—its claim to be running the world when sovereignty belongs to the LORD. (10:12).

God is responding to Judah's unfaithfulness in the same way. Babylon will conquer them. Then God will bring down the king of Babylon—for the same reason: his prideful claim to have taken God's throne (14:12-15).

Egypt (Isaiah 19)

Isaiah receives God's word that he will deal with Judah's neighbours:

- The Philistines to the south (14:28-32)
- The Moabites to the east (15 – 16)
- The Arameans to the north (17)
- The Cushites and Egyptians to the southwest (18–20).

The issue in every case is who is running the world. If the nations were doing right, they'd recognize the LORD of hosts as sovereign over their nation and its rulers. God is correcting them because they've rejected his authority, replaced him with idols and ethics of their own making (compare Romans 1:21 ff).

Tonight we'll just cover the oracle concerning Egypt (Isaiah 19).

Isaiah 19:1 (NIV)

¹ A prophecy against Egypt:

See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt.

The idols of Egypt tremble before him,
and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear.

The language here recalls when the LORD approached Egypt in a cloud to protect his people from the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:19-20). Ten plagues demonstrated to the Egyptians that the LORD reigns. The powers the Egyptians trusted (Pharaoh, the Nile god, the sun god, etc.) are not in control of their lives.

Isaiah 19:2-4 (NIV)

² "I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—

brother will fight against brother, neighbour against neighbour,
city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

³ The Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their plans to nothing;
they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead,
the mediums and the spiritists.

⁴ I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master,
and a fierce king will rule over them,"
declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.

Isaiah doesn't say who the *cruel master/fierce king* was. The Assyrians defeated Egypt in 720 BC, and a Cushite dynasty ruled Egypt after that. What is clear is that their trust in their human and spiritual powers was misguided. Their destiny is decided by their true ruler: *the Lord, the LORD of hosts* (verse 4).

When Moses demonstrated that he was speaking for the LORD, *Pharaoh summoned wise men and sorcerers and the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts* (Exodus 7:11). But listening to other voices that claim spiritual power didn't end well. It still doesn't:

Isaiah 19:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools;
the wise counsellors of Pharaoh give senseless advice.
How can you say to Pharaoh,
“I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings”?

¹² Where are your wise men now?
Let them show you and make known
what the LORD Almighty has planned against Egypt.

The LORD of hosts rules all people. His plans decide the fate of the nations. Eventually, they'll stop fighting the God of Judah and recognize his authority:

Isaiah 19:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ In that day the Egyptians will become weaklings. They will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them. ¹⁷ And the land of Judah will bring terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be terrified, because of what the LORD Almighty is planning against them.

¹⁸ In that day five cities in Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD Almighty.

But don't read these oracles of judgment as if God intends to destroy the nations. His plans are not to destroy them but to rescue them from the powers of evil and include them under his leadership as his people. Just listen to this!

Isaiah 19:19-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the LORD at its border. ²⁰ It will be a sign and witness to the LORD Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them. ²¹ So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD.

Egypt (or at least Pharaoh) was the oppressor of God's people. But the Egyptians themselves were oppressed by a *cruel master/fierce king* (verse 4), as they had been

by Pharaoh (Genesis 47:19). So the LORD of hosts planned to rescue Egypt from their oppression, and include them as his people. Does this sound like good news?

Would God do this for the other nations that had oppressed Israel? The most violent oppressor of the eighth century BC was Assyria. Would God rescue them and include them as his people too?

Isaiah 19:23-25 (NIV)

²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria.
The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria.
The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.

²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria,
a blessing on the earth.

²⁵ The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.”

What a picture of a world rescued from the oppression of wars and evil, into the reign of the one who has always reigned over heaven and earth—the LORD of hosts.

And now I have to let you in a secret. When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek, the Septuagint used the word *Pantokratōr* for LORD of hosts. *Pan* means all, and *kratōr* means ruler, so the *Pantokratōr* is the all-ruler, the sovereign with authority over everyone and everything.

The New Testament therefore uses *Pantokratōr* for LORD of hosts (2 Corinthians 6:18 quoting 2 Samuel 7:8). And Revelation uses *Pantokratōr* to describe the LORD of hosts who has given his authority to the Lamb. Messiah Jesus bears the authority of the *Pantokratōr*. Christ leads the nations to allegiance (faith) to the one who rules the nations:

Revelation 15:3 (NIV)

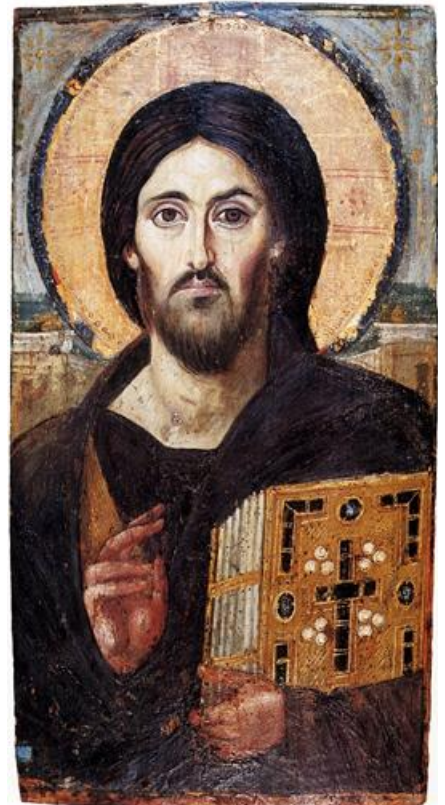
And [they] sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

“Great and marvellous are your deeds, **Lord God Almighty**.
Just and true are your ways, King of the nations.”

The ruler (*kyrios*) is God (*theos*) the All-Ruler (*Pantokratōr*). As the parallel expression explains, he is *King of the nations*.

It is the Lamb who leads the nations back to the one who has always reigned over heaven and earth. It's the Messiah who made the way for Egypt and Assyria to join with the Jews as the people God, citizens of the reign of the LORD of hosts.

Whether Isaiah understood it or not, he was laying a foundation for the gospel, the good news of God's reign.



Pantokratōr: icon from the 6th century AD.

2.2 Who rules the world? (Isaiah 20–24)

You can answer the title above now: The *Pantokratōr* does! After reaffirming his reign over Egypt and Cush to the south (21), along with Babylon to the north and Edom and Arabia to the east (21), Isaiah reaffirms God's reign over Judah.

Jerusalem (Isaiah 22)

Jerusalem is the place where the LORD was giving Isaiah these visions:

Isaiah 22:1-4 (NIV)

¹ A prophecy against the Valley of Vision:

What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs,

² you town so full of commotion, you city of tumult and revelry?

Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle.

³ All your leaders have fled together;

they have been captured without using the bow.

All you who were caught were taken prisoner together,

having fled while the enemy was still far away.

⁴ Therefore I said, "Turn away from me; let me weep bitterly.

Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people."

Isaiah is moved to tears by these visions of Jerusalem falling because it rejected the LORD's authority. It's the grief Jesus felt as he realized the city would murder the Messiah God had sent them, and so the city would fall (Matthew 23:37–24:21). Jesus used phrases similar to Isaiah's.

Isaiah 22:9-13 (NIV)

⁹ You saw that the walls of the City of David
were broken through in many places;
you stored up water in the Lower Pool.

¹⁰ You counted the buildings in Jerusalem
and tore down houses to strengthen the wall.

¹¹ You built a reservoir between the two walls
for the water of the Old Pool,
but you did not look to the One who made it,
or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.

¹² The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day
to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth.

¹³ But see, there is joy and revelry,
slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep,
eating of meat and drinking of wine!
"Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!"

Verse 13 describes a people without hope. Paul quotes this in 1 Corinthians 15:32.

Isaiah says God must transfer the government of Jerusalem to someone else:

Isaiah 22:15-22 (NIV)

¹⁵ This is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says:

“Go, say to this steward, to Shebna the palace administrator: ...

¹⁷ “Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you
and hurl you away, you mighty man. ...

¹⁹ I will depose you from your office,
and you will be ousted from your position.

²⁰ “In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah.

²¹ I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around
him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to
those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah.

²² I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what
he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”

To whom was the authority of David given after the house of David had fallen?

Compare the person described in verse 21 with the person John saw in his vision of Jesus: *dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest* (Revelation 1:13). Then compare verse 22 with how John recorded Jesus' words for the assemblies that recognized his authority: “*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open*” (Revelation 3:7).

Heaven's authority is restored to the earth in the authority given to Messiah Jesus.

The earth (Isaiah 24)

Isaiah receives a vision of a devastated world. God intended the earth to be fruitful (Genesis 1:11-12), but the earth has been defiled by its people:

Isaiah 24:1-5 (NIV)

¹ See, the LORD is going to lay waste **the earth** and devastate it;
he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants—

² it will be the same for priest as for people,
for the master as for his servant, for the mistress as for her servant,
for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender,
for debtor as for creditor.

³ **The earth** will be completely laid waste and totally plundered.
The LORD has spoken this word.

⁴ **The earth** dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers,
the heavens languish with **the earth**.

⁵ **The earth** is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws,
violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. ...

The images in this chapter remind modern readers of the ways we devastate the earth today. We have a whole genre of movies that depict a post-apocalyptic world, scorched by nuclear weapons and incendiary bombs. Isaiah was not predicting these things, but we're still inventing ways to devastate the earth God gave us.



Verse 3 suggests Isaiah had war in mind. Invaders *completely laid waste* the cities they captured, *plundered* what was worth taking, and set fire to what they'd trashed. Invasion reduces everyone to the status of slave, regardless of previous position (v. 2).

But it's not the invaders who are blamed in verse 5. It's the people of God who *disobeyed the laws* and *broke the everlasting covenant*, leaving the land vulnerable.

There's a crucial wordplay here. The word *earth* (ĕ-rěš) is also used for *land*. *The heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1) and *the land of Israel* both use ĕ-rěš (e.g. Genesis 1:1 and Ezekiel 40:2). So, what is this chapter talking about? Does verse 1 say the LORD would *lay waste the earth*, or *lay waste the land*?

It's ambiguous. One commentator put it like this:

Like other translations, NIV has **the earth** for *ha'arets*, which was its meaning in 23:8, 9, and 17, but in 23:1, 10, and 13 the same word meant "the land." ...

If you were a Judean hearing the prophecy, you would not be sure which way to understand it. Is this a depiction of disaster on the land of Israel, or on the world as a whole? As the chapter unfolds, the ambiguity deepens. On the one hand, verse 4 also uses the word that specifically refers to **the world**. But then verse 5 sounds like a description of the people of God. Judah cannot simply dismiss this vision as a depiction of calamity that does not affect them.¹¹

That's the point. The earth is devastated as people destroy each other for power. The Abraham project aims to restore the blessing of God's sovereignty to the nations. But if God's people are destroyed, if their land is captured and incorporated into the kingdom of the world, then the whole earth is destroyed. What happens to them happens to the world.

The ruination of the city in the land becomes the ruination of the earth and its nations:

¹¹ John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Baker Books, 2012), 137–138.

Isaiah 24:10-13 (NIV)

- ¹⁰ The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred.
¹¹ In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom,
all joyful sounds are banished from the earth.
¹² The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces.
¹³ So will it be on the earth and among the nations,
as when an olive tree is beaten,
or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.

But if the devastation of God's people means the devastation of the earth,
the salvation of God's people means the salvation of the earth:

Isaiah 24:14-16 (NIV)

- ¹⁴ They raise their voices, they shout for joy;
from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty.
¹⁵ Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD;
exalt the name of the LORD, the God of Israel,
in the islands of the sea.
¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we hear singing:
"Glory to the Righteous One."

But I said, "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me!
The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!"

The peoples of the world—from *the west*, from *the east*, from *the islands of the sea*—
join their voices together to give honour to the LORD. They declare him to be the
Righteous One, the ruler who does right by all the peoples of the earth.

Remember Isaiah's call? "*I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne*" (6:1),
with his attendants remarking on the unfailing devotion of the LORD of hosts,
proclaiming, "*The whole earth is full of his glory*" (6:3).

That's what's happening here. The ends of the earth are declaring the majesty of the
ruler who sets everything right: "*Glory to the Righteous One*" (24:16).

But once again, Isaiah is conscious that he and his people still need to be set right.
At his commission, Isaiah lamented that he and his people were not being faithful to
the King, the LORD of hosts (6:5). Now as the nations sing, "*Glory to the Righteous
One*," Isaiah sees *treachery* and *betrayal* from the covenant people (26:16). I guess
Isaiah was right: when God provided the Messiah, that is what he faced.

In the latter part of Isaiah, we'll see more about the suffering servant of the LORD who
carries in his own body, for his people, the pain of their disobedience (Isaiah 53).

As the apostles understood, the rulers of this world rejected the Christ, the anointed
ruler God provided for his people and the world. (See Acts 4:24-27.) But the human
powers that served evil were defeated as God enthroned his anointed by raising him
from the dead (Romans 1:4). That's the promise God gives through Isaiah:

Isaiah 24:21-23 (NIV)

- ²¹ In that day the LORD will punish
the powers in the heavens above
and the kings on the earth below.
- ²² They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon;
they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.
- ²³ The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed;
for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and before its elders—with great glory.

Please understand how the prophetic symbolism works here. The day when God causes these powers to fall is presented as the sun, moon, and stars falling from their places in heaven or refusing to give their light (compare Isaiah 13:10; 34:4).

In the ancient world, rulers all claimed to have been given their authority by their gods. They'd consult the gods or read the stars to find when to go to war. But Isaiah says the LORD is ruler over all the powers people recognize—in heaven and on earth. He pictures the brightest lights in the heavens (sun and moon) hanging their heads in shame and dismay before the one who rules over the rulers of the nations and the powers in the heavens. The LORD of hosts reigns over them all, and he reigns on earth through the people he has chosen to represent him.

Questions or comments about Isaiah 24?

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2.3 So what?

There's a great deal in these chapters. What struck you?

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For me it's the claim that the LORD of hosts rules over everyone and everything in heaven and on earth. Israel's God decrees what happens for the nations (Isaiah 13–21) as well as for his people (Isaiah 22), for the whole earth (Isaiah 24).

In the beginning, God said, "*Let there be ...*" and it was so (Genesis 1). In the end, what the LORD says endures, becoming *new heavens and new earth* (Isaiah 65:17).

What questions remain unanswered for you?

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In preparation for next time, **read Isaiah 31 and 37.**

3 Trust earth's true sovereign (Isaiah 25–39)

Isaiah's prophetic oracles are a revelation of God: "I saw the Lord," he said (6:1).

Isaiah warned God's people to turn back to him, and inspired them with visions of where God was leading them (Isaiah 1–12). All the nations of the earth are subject to the LORD of hosts (Isaiah 13–24). Any questions on what we've covered so far?

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Tonight, we'll hear Isaiah calling God's people to trust the LORD to save his people, not to rely on the rulers of this world since the LORD rules over them all (Isaiah 25–35). Then in our second session we'll hear how that worked out for one of the best kings of Judah as he faced impossible odds (Isaiah 36–39).

3.1 The LORD will save his people (Isaiah 25–35)

Salvation from the powers of sin and death (Isaiah 25–28)

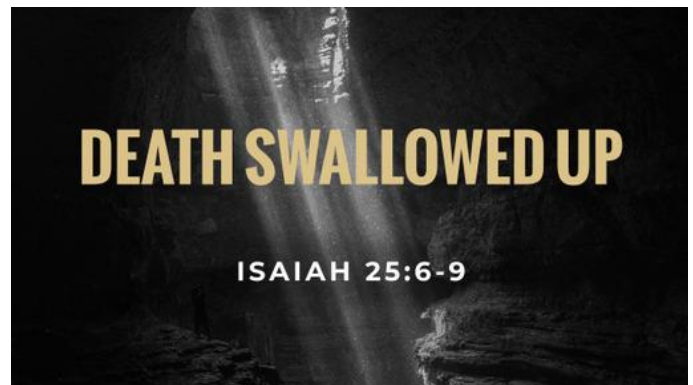
Isaiah 24 did not say God would completely destroy the earth; it said God would completely destroy all that's wrong with the earth. The next three chapters, therefore, burst forth into songs of praise and deliverance:

Isaiah 25:7-9 (NIV)

⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away
the tears from all faces; he will remove
his people's disgrace from all the earth.
The LORD has spoken.

⁹ In that day they will say,
"Surely this is our God;
we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the LORD, we trusted in him;
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."



Very few passages in the Old Testament anticipate resurrection from the dead. The clearest examples are here and in Daniel 12:2-3.

When did God *destroy the shroud that enfolds all people* (verse 7), *swallowing up death forever* (verse 8)? Looking back after the coming of the Messiah, does the image of God destroying death on a mountain in Jerusalem mean anything to you? It certainly did to the apostle Paul. (See 1 Corinthians 15:54).

Isaiah goes on to speak of resurrection for the LORD's people (Isaiah 26:14, 19).

Including the nations in his reign (Isaiah 27–28)

As the Messiah rescues his people from the dominion of evil and death, even the nations that have been their enemies bow the knee to the LORD:

Isaiah 27:13 (NIV)

In that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Tragically, while the nations seek the LORD, God's people don't:

Isaiah 28:1, 9-12 (NIV)

¹ Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, ...

⁹ "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?

¹⁰ For it is:

Do this, do that, a rule for this, a rule for that;
a little here, a little there."

¹¹ Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues
God will speak to this people, ¹² to whom he said,
"This is the resting place, let the weary rest"; and,
"This is the place of repose"— but they would not listen.

Ephraim (the northern kingdom) was drunk with their own power. Its leaders proudly held onto their own crown instead of recognizing the LORD and his anointed (verse 1).

The Torah called them into covenant relationship with the LORD as their sovereign, but they treated it as a list of rules, the way children do (verse 10). God would make them jealous by including the people of other nations in his reign (verse 11).

In Messiah Jesus, God called the nations under his authority (Matthew 28:18-19). Sharing his anointing with the people of the nations was a sign he was calling the Jewish people to himself (1 Corinthians 14:21). Seeing gentiles included in the people of God was meant to make them realize they were missing out (Romans 10:19; 11:11-14). Unlike previous sons of David (1 Kings 12:1-4), the king who restored his Father's authority promised rest for his weary people (Matthew 11:27-30). Isaiah 28:11-12 lays the foundation for all of that.

But it wasn't just the northern kingdom (*Ephraim*) who were at loggerhead with the LORD's authority. Isaiah sees the leaders of Judah doing the same:

Isaiah 28:14-18 (NIV)

¹⁴ Therefore hear the word of the LORD,
you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ You boast, "We have entered into a covenant with death,
with the realm of the dead we have made an agreement." ...

¹⁶ So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. ...

¹⁸ Your covenant with death will be annulled;
your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand.”

The covenant with YHWH promised life, but death for those who turned from him (Deuteronomy 30:19). Isaiah sees Jerusalem's leaders so obsessed with their own power that they'll make a covenant with death. Israel had done that at times, killing the prophets who spoke for the LORD (1 Kings 19:10, 14).

That entire history came to a head as the Jerusalem leaders chose to hand over God's Messiah to be killed (Matthew 23:33-39; 26:4), a covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20).

Isaiah's audience would not have understood how God would do this, but he annulled their covenant with death and installed Jesus as *the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead* (Romans 1:4). Paul and Peter understood Isaiah 28:16 as applying to Jesus (quoted in Romans 9:33; Romans 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6)

Trust the true sovereign, not the nations (Isaiah 31–35)

If God has the nations under his authority, it makes no sense for Israel to rely on the power of other nations for their survival:

Isaiah 31:1-3 (NIV)

¹ Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,
who rely on horses,
who trust in the multitude of their chariots
and in the great strength of their horsemen,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
or seek help from the LORD. ...

³ The Egyptians are mere mortals and not God;
their horses are flesh and not spirit.
When the LORD stretches out his hand,
those who help will stumble,
those who are helped will fall;
all will perish together.

Judah wanted Egypt's armies to help them repel the Assyrian Empire threatening them from the north. Egypt's army had the power of horses and chariots—the tanks of ancient warfare. But Judah's faith in armed forces and mortal rulers was misplaced: in chapter after chapter Isaiah has been calling them to rely on the One who reigns over all the nations and decides their fate.

No human army could bring Assyria down, but Assyria would fall when the LORD's people relied on him:

Isaiah 31:8–32:1 (NIV)

⁸ “Assyria will fall by no human sword;
a sword, not of mortals, will devour them.
They will flee before the sword
and their young men will be put to forced labour.
⁹ Their stronghold will fall because of terror;
at the sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic,”
declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem.
32 ¹ See, a king will reign in righteousness ...

The LORD is king, and he has promised the anointed son of David who will reign in righteousness (9:7; 11:4-5). Isaiah calls them to trust the one who can save them:

Isaiah 33:22 (NIV)

²² For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver,
the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.

When God reigns, the world is transformed from a place where we struggle to survive into a world that flourishes in the reign of its Saviour:

Isaiah 35:1-6 (NIV)

¹ The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. ...
³ Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;
⁴ say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with
vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”
⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

Does that remind you of anything? (Hint: Luke 7:22.)

This song sums up everything we've seen in Isaiah 1–35.

We now have a historical interlude that explains how God saved his people from the Assyrian threat (Isaiah 36–39), followed by the second part of Isaiah where God promises to also bring his people back from the Babylonian exile (Isaiah 40–66).

People sometimes read these texts as if God was promising me a flourishing life personally. Is that what it means? What questions do you have from these chapters?

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3.2 The LORD did save his people (Isaiah 36–39)

Hezekiah prays for Jerusalem and God answers (Isaiah 36–37)

It's around 700 BC. Assyria ruled everything to the north and east of Judah, the places we know as Iraq, Iran, Syria, Phoenicia, Lebanon, and Israel. As the Assyrian army marches south to capture Egypt, it plans to swallow Judah too. Hezekiah is king in Jerusalem. How could he survive against such an enemy?

Isaiah had said that Assyria would fall (11:12ff). He said the LORD would shatter Assyria (30:31). We now have a historical interlude to tell us how that happened.

Chapters 36–39 of Isaiah are almost identical to 2 Kings 18–20. Compare the start:

2 Kings 18 (NIV)

¹³ In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ...

¹⁹ The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: ... 'On what are you basing this confidence of yours? ...

²¹ I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it! ²² But if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God"—isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed", saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?"

⁸ "Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria ..."

Isaiah 36 (NIV)

¹ In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ...

⁴ The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: ... 'On what are you basing this confidence of yours? ...

⁶ I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it! ... ⁷ But if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God"—isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar"?"

²³ "Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria ..."

Assyria tells Judah that no one can save them, no ally or god. Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray:

Isaiah 37:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says:

"Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷ Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword."

Then King Hezekiah prays, relying on the LORD, their true sovereign:

Isaiah 37:15–20 (NIV)

¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD:

¹⁶ “LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁷ Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

¹⁸ “It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. ¹⁹ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. ²⁰ Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are the only God.”

LORD Almighty (verse 16) is LORD of hosts (*YHWH šēbā’ôṭ*). He rules over the all hosts of heaven and earth—including the Assyrians! “*You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth,*” Hezekiah said. “*You have made heaven and earth.*” And the little kingdom Hezekiah ruled provided a house for their true king who sat *enthroned between the cherubim*.

Hezekiah prays for YHWH to save his people *so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are the only God* (verse 20). That’s what Isaiah had tried to tell Ahaz (7:1-14). The good kings of Judah represented the LORD’S kingship rather than being preoccupied with their own. It’s why David wanted to build a house for the LORD in Jerusalem.

And that’s how Jesus lived: proclaiming the kingdom of God, calling people to trust the good news that the time had come for the kingdom of God to be restored in him (Mark 1:15). Jesus is restoring the kingdom of God not just to Israel but to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus fulfills the prayer of his ancestor Hezekiah: *that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD are the only God* (verse 20).

God’s responded to Hezekiah’s prayer with this message from Isaiah:

Isaiah 37:33-35 (NIV)

³³ “Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria:

“He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city,” declares the LORD. ³⁵ “I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!”

Astounding! How could this be?

You thought Covid was bad, but listen to this:

Isaiah 37:33–38 (NIV)

³⁶ Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! ³⁷ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

³⁸ One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

From there, Assyria's power began to decline. In less than 100 years, Assyria was captured by Babylon.

Hezekiah prays for his own need and God answers (Isaiah 38)

Now we jump back to before Assyria attacked Jerusalem:

Isaiah 38:1-6 (NIV)

¹ In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said,

“This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”

² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,

³ “Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.”

And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵ “Go and tell Hezekiah,

‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶ And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.’”

What difference does praying make? Is God immutable, unwavering, with everything planned out from the beginning? What's the point of praying if God has already decided what to do? It's a question people often ask.

This story challenges that view of God. “You are going to die,” God told Hezekiah (verse 1). But then God changed his mind in response to Hezekiah's prayer (verse 2). What does this tell you about God and our relationship with him?

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And don't forget, Hezekiah was an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:10). I wonder if God may have been giving Hezekiah a sense of what the Messiah would face. Listen to how he describes his impending "death" and coming back from the brink:

Isaiah 38:9-19 (NIV)

⁹ A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:

¹⁰ I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?"

¹¹ I said, "I will not again see the LORD himself in the land of the living ...

¹⁸ For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.

¹⁹ The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness.

Hezekiah trusts an envoy from Babylon (Isaiah 39)

East of the Assyrian Empire was Babylon. The ruler of this region sought alliances to help him resist the power of Assyria. He reached out to Hezekiah:

Isaiah 39 (NIV)

¹ At that time Marduk-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. ² Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses ...

³ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?"

"From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came to me from Babylon."

⁴ The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?"

"They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them."

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.

⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

⁸ "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied.

For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

Isaiah has been telling us not to trust human rulers. "*Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,*" God said (31:1). Ironically, the Assyrian commander confirmed God's word, describing Egypt as "*that splintered reed of a staff which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it!*" (36:6).

The warning is clear: do not look to the rulers of this world to save us. Presidents, prime ministers, and politicians all serve their own self-interest. Heaven has given only one name to trust to save humankind (Acts 4:12).

Trusting the envoy from Babylon was the biggest mistake of Hezekiah's life. Isaiah saw through the ruse. Babylon will eventually come back to take everything. The whole kingdom of God would fall.

In 612 BC, Babylon captured Nineveh (capital of Assyria). Assyria was swallowed into the Babylonian Empire. Then in 586 BC, Babylon captured Jerusalem.

But that's more than 100 years ahead of Hezekiah's time. Struggling to survive in the present, Hezekiah had no emotional energy to worry about the future.

3.3 So what?

The historical interlude in Isaiah 36–39 (repeating 2 Kings 18–20) brings us to the low point of the book of Isaiah. When we pick up the story in Isaiah 40, we've skipped forward about 150 years. Babylon has captured Jerusalem and taken the people into exile. Then Persia has captured Babylon and is allowing them to return.

In Isaiah 40, we hear a new voice bringing God's message of hope to his people. We've heard the last of Isaiah: the last mention of his name is in 39.5. The new prophet doesn't give us his name. Some commentators call him "second Isaiah" since he continues the ministry Isaiah began. It might be a community of prophets who hear the word of the LORD together rather than just an individual.

So what will this new voice tell us? What does God say to a people who have lost their country and been carried away into exile? How will God restore his fallen kingdom?

Isaiah 40–66 proclaims the gospel more clearly and with more detail than any other part of the Old Testament. The LORD of hosts will be the saviour and sovereign not only of his people but of the whole earth.

Are there any remaining questions over Isaiah 1–39? What stood out to you in these chapters?

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“The Near East in the first millennium B.C.” in *Understanding Biblical Kingdoms & Empires*, (Carta Jerusalem, 2010), 20.

In preparation for next time, read **Isaiah 40 and 43**.

4 God restores his fallen servant (Isaiah 40–47)

“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” (Isaiah 39:5).

That was the tragic conclusion of Isaiah's ministry in the eighth century BC. The LORD established Israel to represent him to the nations. But instead of showing how wonderful it was to be under God's reign, they split into two kingdoms, and both parts fell. When Jerusalem fell to Babylon, there was no kingdom of God left.

Nearly 50 years later, Persia captured Babylon. King Cyrus allowed the captives to return. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, but no son of David was installed as king since they belonged to the Persian Empire. Would the kingdom of God be restored?

Isaiah's oracles took on fresh significance. He'd said the stump of David's family tree would bear a shoot, and this Spirit-anointed king would gather his people from the nations (11:1-11). He'd said a God-given son would receive the government, to reign on David's throne and over his kingdom (9:6-7).

Isaiah said the LORD of hosts would judge the nations (Isaiah 13–24).

Isaiah said the LORD would redeem his people (Isaiah 25–35).

Isaiah's final song declared the LORD would restore the devastated land, making a way for his holy people (those devoted to the LORD) to return and serve him gladly:

Isaiah 35 (NIV)

¹ The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the **glory of the LORD**,
the **splendour of our God**.

³ Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come, he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution he will come **to save you**.”

⁵ Then will the eyes of the **blind** be opened
and the ears of the **deaf** unstopped.

⁶ Then will the **lame** leap like a deer,
and the **mute** tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert. ...



Regrowth after devastating fire

- ⁸ And a **highway** will be there;
it will be called **the Way of Holiness**;
it will be for those who walk on that Way. ...
- ⁹ But only **the redeemed** will walk there,
¹⁰ and those the LORD has rescued **will return**.
They will **enter Zion** with singing;
everlasting joy will **crown** their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

What a significant message for the exiles in Babylon! Isaiah's prophetic work continues as a new voice speaks after the exile.

4.1 Good news for the captives (Isaiah 40–42)

To uproot their lives after 50 years and make the 1400-kilometre journey back to Jerusalem, they needed assurance that the hope of becoming a kingdom of God again was real. If they returned to the LORD, would the LORD would return to reign over them?

The good news of God's kingship (Isaiah 40)

Isaiah 40:1-10 (NIV)

- ¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.
- ³ A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness **prepare the way for the LORD**;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
- ⁵ And the **glory of the LORD** will be revealed,
and all people will see it together." ...
- 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**.



The promise that the LORD would reign over his crushed people was the *good news* the returning exiles needed to hear. This is the origin of the word *gospel*.

When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek, the Septuagint used the word *euangelizō*. The New Testament then picked up Isaiah's word and used it 63 times for proclaiming the gospel, along with the noun *euangelion* a further 73 times.

The content of the gospel is, "The LORD reigns." It's the good news that the oppression caused by sin and death is over, that God's anointed (the Christ) has come and restored heaven's reign (the kingdom of heaven) to the earth.

Mark opened his "Gospel" by explaining that the word has its roots in Isaiah 40:

Mark 1:1-1, 14-15 (NIV)

¹ The beginning of the **good news** [*euangelion*] about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,

² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

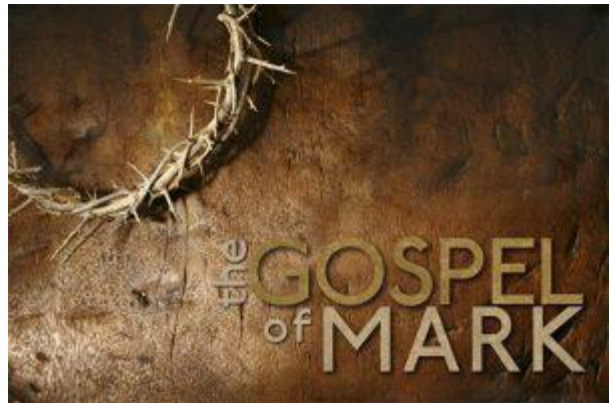
"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—

³ "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord, make
straight paths for him.' " [Isaiah 40:3-4]

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness ...

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee,
proclaiming the **good news** [*euangelion*] of God.

¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has
come near. Repent and believe the **good news** [*euangelion*]!"



The gospel Jesus proclaimed was *the good news of the kingdom* (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16). The arrival of the Messiah, the anointed son of David, is *the good news* [*euangelion*] *God proclaimed ahead of time through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, regarding his Son who was appointed as 'Son of God in power' by his resurrection from the dead*, i.e. the good news that *Messiah Jesus is our Lord* (Romans 1:1-4).

But Jesus was not the king the Jews expected. Five centuries is a long time to wait for Isaiah's *good news* to become their experience. They thought it was amazing when Jesus unrolled an Isaiah scroll in the synagogue at Nazareth and read Isaiah's message about *proclaiming good news to poor*. It sounded so full of promise until he said, "*Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" (Luke 4:21). If Jesus was the fulfilment of what Isaiah said, they'd throw him off a cliff.

A crucified Messiah looked nothing like the great King David, the legendary warrior who freed his people from their enemies. How could Jesus be the fulfilment of what Isaiah had promised? Let's keep that question in mind as we read Isaiah 40–66.

The fallen servant (Isaiah 41–42)

“Where is God?” people ask when life falls apart. “Has God rejected us?” his people asked when they went into exile. Like Job, they thought God wasn’t doing right. The book of Esther doesn’t even mention God. Like her people, Esther was unsure if she should still identify as Jewish when she’d been given to the king of Persia.

This is the word of the LORD to his fallen nation in the Persian period:

Isaiah 40:27-31 (NIV)

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on **wings like eagles**; they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

The LORD reigns as sovereign over the whole earth. They may feel they cannot journey back to God, but he will renew their strength. Like Frodo at the end of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, they’ll rise up on wings like eagles as he brings them home.

The LORD chose Israel to partner with him in his project to rescue the nations. He had not given up on the covenant that bound them together:

Isaiah 41:8-14 (NIV)

⁸ “But you, Israel, **my servant**, Jacob, whom I have chosen,
you descendants of Abraham my friend,

⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.

I said, ‘You are my **servant**’;

I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

¹¹ “All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced;
those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish.

¹² Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them.

Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all.

¹³ For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

¹⁴ Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel,
do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Even though Israel was unfaithful to the covenant, the LORD remained faithful to them. The nations that captured them would perish, but the LORD would take the hand of his fallen servant and lift him up. Jacob may feel like a worm in the dirt, but the One devoted to Israel (*the Holy One of Israel*) would restore his people.

41:8 introduces the key phrase that runs right through Isaiah 40–55. God chose Israel as **the servant of the LORD**. Israel was called to serve the LORD, in covenant relationship with him. They represented the sovereign authority of heaven on earth, representing his justice among the nations.

But as the story develops, Israel struggles to fulfil their calling. By Isaiah 53, God steps in as the suffering servant to rescue his fallen servant. The Messiah ends up fulfilling the servant role for his people (e.g. Matthew 12:18-21 quoting 42:1-4).

Isaiah 42:1-7 (NIV)

¹ “Here is my **servant**, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my **Spirit** on him, and he will bring **justice to the nations**.
² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.
³ A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”
⁵ This is what God the LORD says—
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,
who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:
⁶ “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you to be
a covenant for the people and a **light for the Gentiles**,
⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

This is why God chose Israel: they were a prototype of the world under God's reign. They represented God ruling with justice and gentleness, with understanding for his suffering and vulnerable people (verses 2-4). They represented the creator of heaven and earth to the other nations, a light revealing the way in a dark world.

4.2 Two witnesses to God's authority (Isaiah 42–47)

God's blind and deaf witness (Isaiah 42-44)

But their vocation had not worked out. Living in the dark world, they became blind to the LORD and his calling:

Isaiah 42:14-20 (NIV)

- ¹⁴ “For a long time I have kept silent,
I have been quiet and held myself back.
But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.
¹⁵ I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.
¹⁶ I will lead the **blind** by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them ...
¹⁸ “Hear, you **deaf**; look, you **blind**, and see!
¹⁹ Who is **blind** but my servant, and **deaf** like the **messenger** I send?
Who is blind like the one in covenant with me,
blind like the **servant** of the LORD?
²⁰ You have seen many things, but you pay no attention;
your ears are open, but you do not listen.”

Blind and deaf! They're deaf like Sodom and Gomorrah (1:10). They close their ears and eyes to the LORD (6:10). They're blind drunk, like someone asleep at the wheel (29:8). They turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to those who plot evil (33:15). How will the nations ever discover their heavenly sovereign if this is the best evidence God can present that they should live under his authority?

Isaiah 43:9-13 (NIV)

- ⁹ All the **nations** gather together and the peoples assemble. ...
Let them bring in their **witnesses** to prove they were right,
so that others may hear and say, “It is true.”
¹⁰ “You are my **witnesses**,” declares the LORD,
“and my **servant** whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.
¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no saviour.
¹² I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my **witnesses**,” declares the LORD, “that I am God.
¹³ Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”

Witnesses is a legal term. God is making the case that the earth belongs under his authority. To make the case that the nations should trust him to save them from the

those who currently claim to rule, God summons as his witnesses the people who live under his leadership. As Isaiah said previously, this is meant to be their testimony:

Isaiah 33:17-22 (NIV)

¹⁷ Your eyes will see the king in his beauty ...

²⁰ Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode ...

²² For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver,
the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.

But what use are blind and deaf witnesses? If you were in a car crash, would you call a blind, deaf witness?

If Israel is *deaf* to the LORD and *blind* to where he is leading them, how are they any different to the nations that follow blind, deaf, mute, mindless idols?

Isaiah 44:8-23 (NIV)

⁸ You are my **witnesses**. Is there any God besides me?
No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”

⁹ All who make **idols** are nothing,
and the things they treasure are worthless.
Those who would speak up for them are blind;
they are ignorant, to their own shame. ...

¹⁸ They know nothing, they understand nothing;
their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see,
and their minds closed so they cannot understand.

¹⁹ No one stops to think,
no one has the knowledge or understanding to say,
“Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals,
I roasted meat and I ate.

Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left?
Shall I bow down to a block of wood?”

²⁰ Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him;
he cannot save himself, or say, “Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?”

²¹ “Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my **servant**.
I have made you, you are my **servant**; Israel, I will not forget you.

²² I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,
your sins like the morning mist.
Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

²³ Sing for joy, you heavens, for the LORD has done this;
shout aloud, you earth beneath.
Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees,
for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel.

How will God rescue his fallen people? The promise of verse 23 seemed impossible. But just listen to what God says next!

Cyrus as the Lord's anointed (Isaiah 44–45)**Isaiah 44:24–28 (NIV)**

- ²⁴ This is what the LORD says—
your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb:
I am the LORD, the Maker of all things,
who stretches out the heavens,
who spreads out the earth by myself, ...
²⁶ who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,'
of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be rebuilt,'
and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,' ...
²⁸ who says of **Cyrus**, 'He is my shepherd
and will accomplish all that I please;
he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"
and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'

Who was Cyrus? Why did he send the Jews back to Jerusalem? Why would a pagan king help them build a temple to the LORD to replace the one Babylon had destroyed? Sounds incredible, beyond belief, right?

In 539 BC, the Persian king Cyrus captured Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had taken his captives to Babylon to keep an eye on them, but Cyrus believed people would be happy to serve him if he let them return to their cities, worship their gods, and live according to their culture. The book of Ezra explains how Cyrus authorized the return to Jerusalem and helped finance the construction of the second temple that stood from 515 BC to AD 70.

We have historical evidence that Cyrus did this for the peoples of all the nations that were captive in Babylon. A clay cylinder inscribed with Cyrus' message for the nations (not just the Jews) is preserved in the British Museum.



The Cyrus Cylinder. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1880-0617-1941 Photo: Allen Browne, 2008.

Astoundingly, God calls Cyrus his *anointed*. That's *Messiah* in Hebrew, *Christ* in Greek. Previously, the LORD'S *anointed* was always a descendant of David. But David's dynasty has fallen, and Cyrus was serving as the LORD'S anointed:

Isaiah 45:1-3 (NIV)

¹ “This is what the LORD says to his **anointed**,
to **Cyrus**, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour,
to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:
² I will go before you and will level the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.
³ I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

The exiles in Babylon need to know the LORD is still running the world. It was the LORD who *gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar* (Ezra 5:12). As Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, “*The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory*” (Daniel 2:37). It was the LORD who raised up Persia. On the night Babylon fell to Persia, God's finger wrote, “*Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians*” (Daniel 5:28).

Isaiah has been telling us all book long that it is the LORD who rules over the nations (Isaiah 13–24). He said God would bring down the king of Babylon who tried to raise his throne above God's (14:13). God has dethroned Nebuchadnezzar, giving his kingdom to someone who does what God wants. By his actions, King Cyrus says, “*The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.*” (2 Chronicles 36:23).

Functionally, Cyrus is the LORD'S anointed, the leader who does on earth what heaven wants done, even though he has no idea who the LORD is:

Isaiah 45:4-6 (NIV)

⁴ For the sake of Jacob my **servant**, of Israel my chosen,
I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour,
though you do not acknowledge me.
⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.
I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,
⁶ so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting
people may know there is none besides me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other.”

How do you think this would have sounded to the exiles in Babylon?

What do you think about God's appointment of Cyrus after David's dynasty died?

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The gospel call (Isaiah 45–47)

The LORD takes hold of Cyrus' hand, so Cyrus lifts up the fallen servant of the LORD. Cyrus reestablishes them as the LORD'S people, so they can serve him. If Cyrus was the Messiah of his day, he's a picture of the Messiah to come.

The day would come when a son of David would visit the towns and villages of his people, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, dealing with their afflictions, gathering the harassed sheep who'd waited so long for a shepherd (Matthew 9:35-36).

The LORD said:

Isaiah 45:13 (NIV)

¹³ "I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness:
I will make all his ways straight.
He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free,
but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty."

That's good news, right? It's what God has done more completely in Christ:

Romans 3:21–22 (NIV)

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

God-doing-right is revealed in giving his Messiah. In response, we give our loyalty (faith) to Messiah Jesus who sets us right with God. This message is for all who trust his leadership, not only Israel.

That's Isaiah's gospel call too:

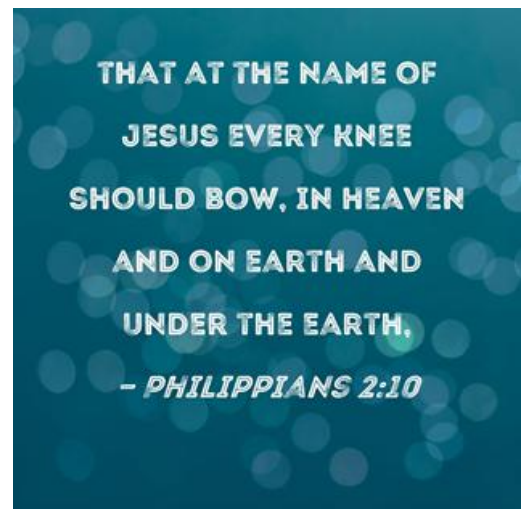
Isaiah 45:22–24 (NIV)

²² "Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.
²³ By myself I have sworn,
my mouth has uttered in all integrity
a word that will not be revoked:
Before me every knee will bow;
by me every tongue will swear.

²⁴ They will say of me,
'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.'"

All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.

Verse 23 calls everyone to bow the knee to the LORD and declare allegiance to him. We do that by bowing the knee to his anointed, declaring our allegiance to Messiah Jesus who God raised up. That's how Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10–11 understand Isaiah 45:23.



So, this is how it comes together in the end:

- Isaiah 46 pictures the gods of Babylon as bowing to the LORD, the only true ruler over everyone and everything. When their idols bow, the nations bow.
- Isaiah 47 pictures the kingdom of Babylon falling into the dust. She who seduced the nations with her wealth and power is silenced in shame.
- Isaiah 48 calls God's people to leave Babylon and set out for the promise of the new Jerusalem God is raising up.

If those images sound familiar, many of them reappear in the final book of the Bible. The visions of Revelation focus on God's throne, and the Lamb who gave his life for his people. Although the *satan* deceived the nations into worshipping its power, the kingdom of the world is becoming the kingdom of our God. The nations lose their fight against the Lord's authority. Babylon falls. God is calling his people to come out of her, to give their allegiance to the new Jerusalem, as the Lamb restores the Lord's authority to all the peoples of the earth. To describe what the Lord showed him, John uses the language of the Law and the Prophets, particularly Exodus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Daniel, and Zechariah.¹²

4.3 So what?

God called his people into partnership with himself as *the servant of the LORD*.

How does Isaiah's use of this phrase clarify what God is calling us to be and do in his earthly realm?

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Isaiah introduces the word *gospel* to describe the good news that God reigns, that the LORD's reign is being restored to the earth in his Anointed. How does this shape the way you think about the gospel?

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¹² For more detail, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/10/02/formed-in-gods-story-book-of-revelation/>

Michael Bird notes that other prophets also proclaim the restoration of the kingdom:

The exilic and post-exilic prophets are permeated with the promise that Yahweh will again manifest his kingly power to deliver Israel from exile and to establish a new kingdom. ...

Yahweh's kingship was never limited to Israel's territory or confined to its temple, but was eternal, universal, cosmological and eschatological.¹³

What do you make of the Persian King Cyrus? In what sense was he *the LORD'S anointed (messiah/christ)*? How does this help us understand the New Testament's claim that Jesus is *God's anointed (messiah/christ)*?

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How do Isaiah's visions affect the way you see John's visions in Revelation? Had you realized that there is such a strong overlap in imagery and message? Does it help you understand the throne of God, the leadership of the Lamb, the demise of Babylon and the nations deceived by Satan into resisting God's authority, and the restoration of a new Jerusalem under the leadership of the Lamb who gave his life to save his people?

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How do you feel about Isaiah 40–47? What else strikes you from these chapters?

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In preparation for next time, **read Isaiah 49 and 52.**

¹³ Michael F. Bird, *Whispers of Revolution: Jesus and the Coming of God as King* (Apollos, 2025), 32-33.

5 God restores through his servant (Isaiah 48–55)

The servant of the LORD had been blind and deaf to their Master. The nation God established as a witness to heaven's authority over the earth had fallen captive to nations that make their own gods.

Nevertheless, a voice in the wilderness proclaims, *“Good news! The Sovereign LORD reigns with a mighty arm!”* (40:9). Faithful to his fallen servant, he says: *“You are my servant; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ... I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (41:8-9).

God places them in the hands of a Persian king who sends them back to reconstruct a house for the LORD in Jerusalem. God says of Cyrus, *“He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid.’”* (44:28).

Isaiah 48–55 goes on to explain how God will effectively become a servant to his fallen servant. But first, do you have any pressing questions from previous chapters?

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5.1 The Servant and arm of the LORD (Isaiah 48–51)

Cyrus did what God had promised by opening the way for them to return to Jerusalem. So, the LORD calls his people to leave Babylon, to return and resume their role, as the rescued servant of the LORD:

Isaiah 48:12, 20 (NIV)

¹² “Listen to me, Jacob, Israel, whom I have called:

I am he; I am the first and I am the last. ...

²⁰ **Leave Babylon**, flee from the Babylonians!

Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it.

Send it out to the ends of the earth;

say, “The LORD has **redeemed** his **servant** Jacob.”

Led by Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, groups started to trickle back to Jerusalem (Ezra 2, 8, and Nehemiah 2). But most Jews were still living in other countries 500 years later (in Jesus' time).



The servant of the Lord (Isaiah 49)

Read this carefully:

Isaiah 49:3-5 (NIV)

³ He said to me, “You are my **servant**,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendour.”

⁴ But I said, “I have laboured in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand,
and my reward is with my God.”

⁵ And now the **LORD** says—
he who formed **me** in the womb to be his **servant**
to bring **Jacob** back to him and gather Israel to himself
for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has been my strength.

There are three people in verse 5:

- *The LORD*,
- *me*, and
- *Jacob*, that is *Israel* (the twelve tribes of Jacob).

Who is *me*? There’s an intermediary who speaks for the LORD, to his people. He’s calling the people back to the LORD, to be his servant (verse 3). This spokesman for the LORD feels like he has *laboured in vain*, like he’s spent all his strength *for nothing at all* (verse 4).

Have we heard anything about the frustration of being a spokesperson for the LORD? Do you recall the job description God gave Isaiah? (See Isaiah 6:9-13.)

The prophet trusts that his seemingly pointless commission will produce something worthwhile, for the reward for his ministry is *in the LORD’S hand* (verse 4).

The LORD affirms that the prophet was created for this work even before he was born. So even if he’s devalued and rejected by humans, his role as a **servant** of the LORD is of great value and esteem in God’s eyes (verse 5).

Crucially, *the servant of the LORD* is not just Israel! When Israel was not fulfilling their role as God’s *servant* (verse 3), the LORD could call someone else as his *servant*. This individual servant was not replacing Israel; he was restoring Israel as God’s servant: *to bring Jacob back to him*, that is *to gather Israel to himself* (verse 5).

We’ll have to be more careful now. *The servant of the LORD* is not only God’s nation. It can be an individual servant of the LORD who is bringing his people back to him:

Isaiah 49:6 (NIV)

He says:

“It is too small a thing for you [singular] to be my **servant**
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

That was Isaiah's ministry: calling *the tribes of Jacob* back from exile where they'd been scattered among the nations. So, the gentiles would see the *brilliance* of the LORD *saving* his people (as the Egyptians had done in the exodus). The message of God's saving work would *reach to the ends of the earth*. That's what this text meant in the Persian period.

But *the servant of the LORD* is not just the Isaiah who started this book in the eighth century BC. We haven't heard of him since his conversation with Hezekiah in Chapter 39. A new voice began delivering God's message in Isaiah 40. Many prophetic voices kept delivering God's message across the centuries.

Then John the Baptist is the voice delivering God's message in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the LORD!” (Isaiah 40:3, quoted in Mark 1: 3 etc.). John was the culmination of all the servants who called God's people back to God's saving power (Matthew 11:10-11). But John realized he was merely a pointer to the servant of the LORD who would save his people and restore them as his kingdom (Matthew 3:1-12).

As the servant of the LORD, Jesus entered into the suffering and rejection his people faced from the rulers of this world, saving them since they could not save themselves:

Isaiah 49:7-9 (NIV)

⁷ This is what the LORD says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers:

“Kings will see you and stand up,
princes will see and bow down,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

⁸ This is what the LORD says:

“In the time of my favour I will answer you,
and in the day of salvation I will help you;
I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people,
to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances,

⁹ to say to the captives, ‘Come out,’
and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’”

What do you think? How does this sit with you?

The commission that God gave to Isaiah, Israel, and Jesus continues in us today. That's how the early church understood Isaiah. As Paul and Barnabas began to spread the message, they applied Isaiah's commission to themselves:

Acts 13:47 (NIV, quoting Isaiah 49:6)

“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: *‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’*”

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (NIV, quoting Isaiah 49:8)

¹ As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace **in vain**.

² For he says, *“In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of **salvation** I helped you.”*

I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of **salvation**.

In vain (verse 1) is also a reference to Isaiah 49 (verse 4). It's the frustration every servant of the LORD experiences, a phrase Paul often refers to (1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:1; 3:5).

Salvation is also Isaiah's word (49:6, 8). Just as God had promised to save his people from the rule of Babylon, Persia, and so on, he also promised to save the nations from these rulers who serve sin and death, so the whole earth can serve the king of heaven. *Salvation* is a world set right, not merely an individual experience.

The Old Testament background gives New Testament words a whole new dimension. It's like a 2-D picture transforming into a 3-D life we live in Christ.

The arm of the LORD (Isaiah 51)

What is the arm of the LORD?

Isaiah 51:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ “Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation:

Instruction will go out from me;

my justice will become a light to the nations.

⁵ My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way,

and my **arm** will bring justice to the nations.

The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my **arm**.

The parallel expression makes it clear that the *arm* is a symbol for strength (44:12; 50:2; 51:9). But how God uses his strength is so different from how the rulers of the world use theirs. God's power is not revealed by smashing nations into submission.

The arm of the LORD is revealed in doing right (*my righteousness*), in



rescuing his oppressed people (*my salvation*), in extending *justice to the nations*. So, even the most remote communities in the oceans *look to me and wait in hope for my arm* (verse 5).

How and when would God roll up his sleeves and use his own strength to rescue his people and set everything right for everyone? Isaiah has more to say about *the arm of the LORD* (52:10; 53:1; 59:1, 16; 62:8; 64:5, 12). He asks us to trust God's strength as more enduring than creation itself:

Isaiah 51:6 (NIV)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
look at the earth beneath;
the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies.
But my **salvation** will last forever,
my **righteousness** will never fail.

Salvation and *righteousness* are keywords in the New Testament. God sets us right (*justifies*) through his Messiah, as we give him our trust (*faith*). That's a response to God doing right by us (*the righteousness of God*) out of his faithfulness (Romans 3:21-26). Romans is wrapped in this vision of the nations coming into obedience through faith[fulness] to him (Romans 1:5; 16:26).¹⁴

5.2 The reigning and suffering servant (Isaiah 52–55)

As the Jews returned from exile, Ezra taught them the Torah, Zerubbabel helped them construct another temple, and Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls. The one thing they could not restore was the kingship. They were ruled by foreigners, instead of being a kingdom of God with an anointed son of David to represent heaven's reign on earth.



The reigning servant (Isaiah 52)

Zion (Jerusalem) has been dormant, but Isaiah sees a day coming when it will wake up, put on its royal robes, and sit enthroned instead of being trampled by the nations:

¹⁴ We saw this in our previous course: <https://allenbrowne.blog/2025/07/31/formed-in-gods-story-romans-9-16/>

Isaiah 52:1-6 (NIV)

- ¹ Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength!
Put on your garments of splendour, Jerusalem, the holy city.
The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.
- ² Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, Jerusalem.
Free yourself from the chains on your neck, Daughter Zion,
now a captive.
- ³ For this is what the LORD says:
“You were sold for nothing,
and without money you will be redeemed.”
- ⁴ For this is what the Sovereign LORD says:
“At first my people went down to Egypt to live;
lately, Assyria has oppressed them.
- ⁵ “And now what do I have here?” declares the LORD.
“For my people have been taken away for nothing,
and those who rule them mock,” declares the LORD.
“And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.
- ⁶ Therefore my people will know my name;
therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it.
Yes, it is I.”

God remembers the suffering his people have endured: crushed by Egypt in Moses' time, and then losing most of the land to Assyria. And now what? The last remnant was captured by Babylon. These nations don't know the LORD. Assyria blasphemed the LORD as unable to save his people (36:18-20). Babylon said its gods were superior (debunked in Isaiah 46). The LORD promises to set the record straight by redeeming his people.

Redemption means reacquiring something you owned. In New Testament theology, God redeems us in Christ. We sometimes speak of Christ “paying the price” for us. But we present the wrong picture of divine justice if we imagine God wanting Jesus dead in order to save us because “someone had to pay!” Retribution was part of the Sinai covenant, so it does show up in the Prophets. That's all the more reason to be amazed that it's not part of Isaiah's theology of redemption *without payment* (verse 3).

The rulers of this world (Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon) had no legal right to God's people. They took them by force. God owes them nothing. So God redeems them **without payment**, because God cares for them and it's the right thing to do. The world then sees its true sovereign doing exactly what he promised: his righteousness as the expression of his faithfulness.

The point of God redeeming his people is to bring them back under his reign. In the ancient world, a runner would bring news of significant events such as the outcome of

a battle. Isaiah pictures a runner delivering the good news that God's reign had been restored to his people:

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!**"
- ⁸ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy.
When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.
- ⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.
- 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.

As we said back in 40:9, this is the origin of the word *gospel*. Do you remember what the gospel message was back there? What is the content of the gospel message here? Is this the same message as Paul's gospel? (Hint: see Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:9-15.)

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Did you notice the **arm** of the LORD again in verse 10? We've seen:

- *The Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty **arm*** (40:10)
- *His **arm** will be against the Babylonians* (48:14)
- *Was my **arm** too short to deliver you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you?* (50:2)
- *My **arm** will bring justice to the nations. The islands ... wait in hope for my **arm*** (51:5)
- *Awake, awake, **arm** of the LORD, clothe yourself in strength!* (51:9)

As the parallel phrases show, *the arm of the LORD* is his strength, his regal authority over the nations, his intervening to save his people who cannot save themselves. When *the arm of the LORD* intervenes to stop the bullies ruling over his people, the whole earth sees the salvation of Israel's God (52:10).

Just in case you thought this meant that God was finally going to give up on trying to work with his servant and do it all by himself, Isaiah keeps emphasizing the servant who acts in partnership with God:

Isaiah 52:13–53:1 (NIV)

- ¹³ See, my **servant** will act wisely;
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
- ¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations,
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will understand.

53 ¹ Who has believed our message
and to whom has the **arm** of the LORD been revealed?

So who is this servant of the LORD? We've seen two:

- Initially, *the servant of the LORD* was **Israel**, called to represent God to the nations (41:8-9; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20).
- Then God's *servant* was a prophetic spokesman, a **messenger** called to *restore the tribes* of Jacob, yet feeling he'd *laboured in vain* because they were unresponsive (49:3-6).

So who is the servant in 52:13? Israel, or is it the messenger God sent to them?

Two clues:

- In verse 12, God was addressing Israel as *you*. Now in verse 13 he's talking to Israel about *him*, the servant God will raise up for them.
- In 53:1, the people don't believe the message of the LORD and his servant. So the servant must be the messenger, not the people.

If that's right, the *disfigured* servant of verse 14 is not the nation of Israel that's been damaged beyond recognition. It's the servant, mistreated by God's recalcitrant people.

It also makes sense of verses 14-15 where the nations and their kings recognize the LORD'S servant, while his own people do not believe he is the arm of the LORD (53:1).

That's how Paul understood Isaiah 52:

- He quotes 52:5 to describe how the disbelief of his people dishonours God's name among the nations (Romans 2:24).
- He quotes 52:7 to support proclaiming the gospel message of the Messiah to everyone, and 53:1 regarding God's nation not believing the message about him (Romans 10:15-16).
- He quotes 52:15 as the basis for his mission to proclaim the Messiah among the nations that have not yet heard of him (Romans 15:21).

John's Gospel also understood Isaiah 53:1 as God's people refusing to believe his messenger, disregarding all the power of God working through him (John 12:37-38).

What do you think?

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The suffering servant (Isaiah 53)

Did you notice *the arm of the LORD* making a reappearance in 53:1? This is God's strength rescuing his people, doing for them what they could not do for themselves. And the LORD is doing that through someone—someone who entered into the suffering of his people and did not receive the esteem he deserved:

Isaiah 53:1-3 (NIV)

- ¹ Who has believed our message
and 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.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Who is this figure who suffers with and for his people? Verse 2 calls him *a new growth* (*yô·nēq*). That word usually means an infant (as in 11:8) but the parallel expression in verse 2 compares him to a new growth from *a root in dry ground*. We heard something like that back in 11:1:

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

Isaiah 11 was about the Messiah, the anointed king who would restore God's reign over his people and bring peace to the earth. Could the figure in Isaiah 53 be the promised king, representing his people and suffering for them?

A suffering Messiah is not how Israel thought of their king. They pictured a strong warrior defeating their enemies as David had done. But in reality, the king always suffered for his people. Most of David's Psalms are laments (43 out of 74), describing his sufferings for his people. The first psalm of David starts like this:

Psalms 3:1-2 (NIV)

- ¹ LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!
² Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

With his life under threat, David felt distress rather than esteem:

Psalms 86:1-2 (NIV)

- ¹ Hear me, LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
² Guard my life, for I am faithful to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.

So, even in the Old Testament context, a king suffering for his people makes sense. David could describe himself as *afflicted and in pain* for his people (Psalm 69:29).

When the king suffers because his people have been disobedient to the LORD, they can say this:

Isaiah 53:4-6 (NIV)

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But 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.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

You may be thinking of Jesus already, but let's look at one more example of an Old Testament king. After each king's reign, 1 & 2 Kings summarizes how the king received what he deserved—blessed for obedience, or cursed for disobedience like the covenant promised. Hezekiah's son Manasseh was so evil that God announced the end of the kingdom (2 Kings 21).

But when **Josiah** died at the hands of Pharaoh Necho, it was totally undeserved (2 Kings 23). He died not for his own iniquity but for the iniquity of his people over many generations. He was the last God-appointed king; the final four were appointed by Egypt and Babylon before Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

The Book of Kings could make no sense of Josiah's undeserved death. But the people could say what Isaiah says in verse 6: *the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.

And that's how the New Testament makes sense of the Messiah's death at the hands of his people (Isaiah 53:1 quoted in John 12:37-38 and Romans 10:16). It's not as if God wanted or needed Jesus to die as a payment (contradicting 52:3); it's that the king died because of the iniquity of his people. He was taking in his own body their sufferings, their afflictions (53:4 quoted in Matthew 8:17, and 53:9 quoted in 1 Peter 2:21-25).

Isaiah is not saying Jesus died to satisfy divine justice. He's saying it was unjust:

Isaiah 53:7-9 (NIV)

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

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.

Stephen understood verse 8 to mean that Jesus was *deprived of justice* (Acts 8:33). But the problem is the same one Kings had with Josiah's death. Are we to say that God is no longer in control of the world, that it's just running amok? No, says Isaiah:

Isaiah 53:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

The Sinai covenant is the context for *an offering for sin*. God had authorized the community to kill animals and criminals. The high priest had the authority to kill an offender to save the people (e.g. Numbers 25:10-13, compare John 11:49-50). Since God delegated that authority, *a hanged man is cursed by God* (Deuteronomy 21:23 ESV, quoted in Galatians 3:10). Verse 10 is not saying God wanted the Messiah dead; it's saying the buck stops with God.

In the sense that Josiah died for the sin of his people, Jesus did too. The crucifixion of the Messiah looked like God had forsaken the King of the Jews in his hour of distress (Psalm 22:1 in Mark 15:34), but God had a more enduring plan. God did not abandon his anointed to the realm of the dead (Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2:27, 31).

So, after the Jerusalem leaders have used the authority God gave them to condemn the Messiah to death, *he will see his offspring and prolong his days?* (verse 10) He's alive after his death?

Yes! Verse 11 confirms: *After he has suffered, he will see the light of life!*¹⁵ The one who died for his people's iniquities is vindicated (*my righteous servant*). And the Righteous One sets us right with our Sovereign in the heavens!

What a leader for the peoples of the earth!

Isaiah 53:12 (NIV)

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

¹⁵ The Masoretic Text lacks the word "light", but this reading is confirmed by both copies of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QIsaiah^{a-b} and 4QIsaiah^d) as well as the Septuagint.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Throughout human history, the rulers of this world have loudly proclaimed their own power, with blood on their hands to back up that claim. King Jesus did not promote himself or force himself on people: he humbled himself and was given authority by heaven. That's what Isaiah said as he introduced this incredible message: "*He will cleanse many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him*" (52:15).

His people have not always followed what Jesus did. He was *numbered with the transgressors* since his followers were carrying swords to kill their enemies when he was arrested (Luke 22:37, 49-51). Truly, he bore *the sin of many*: the *many* who are set right (*justified*) in him (verse 11).

What are your thoughts on Isaiah 53?

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5.3 So what?

Isaiah 54 describes the majesty of the community that gathers around the Messiah, the community that's larger than the Old Testament nation and incorporates the nations.

Isaiah 55 invites everyone to come and discover grace in the community of God's faithfulness in his Messiah (with verse 3 quoted in Acts 13 :34). In this way, the fruitfulness God decreed for the earth at creation is fulfilled in Christ. That's what verse 11 means: "*My word that goes out of my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*"

Andrew Abernethy pulled together what these chapters mean to us:

As Christian communities read Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the light of its witness to Christ, the suffering servant's death does more than achieve atonement for sin. It creates a community of servants who are willing to suffer and serve like their master (1 Peter 2:20–25). What is more, Paul understood from Isaiah 49:6 his own mission in the light of God's servant being a light and salvation to the Gentiles; if this was Jesus' mission, Paul shares in it too as his servant (Acts 13:47). Thus, though the book of Isaiah does not present the Davidic ruler and the servant as identical figures, we find an unexpected and glorious merging of two unique offices and purposes in one person, Jesus Christ.¹⁶

In preparation for next time, **read Isaiah 60 and 65.**

¹⁶ Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic—Theological Approach*, (Downers Grove, IL; London: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2016), 159–160.

6 Be faithful to the God who restores creation (Isaiah 56–66)

How would God restore his people who had fallen to the nations? *The arm of the LORD* would raise them up. *The servant of the LORD* would restore his fallen servant. How did you go as you meditated on promises like these from Isaiah 48–55?

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Tonight we conclude the Book of Isaiah. Some Jews returned from exile and settled in Jerusalem. Generations came and went, but they remained under foreign rule—serving the nations instead of serving the LORD.

In this post-exile setting, another voice continues Isaiah's ministry. We don't know his name. Some call him "third Isaiah" (since a "second Isaiah" gave us Isaiah 40–54). It may be better to think of these sections as the word of the LORD to the community rather than to individuals.

The main themes in this third section of Isaiah are:

- a) the call to serve the LORD, to comply with the Sinai covenant that defined them as his nation.
- b) the promise that God would restore his nation as his partner reflecting his glory, and that God would sort out the nations so they also recognize the LORD.

6.1 Life under God's reign (Isaiah 56–59)

Justice (Isaiah 56–57)

Justice is the indicator that God's community is living under his leadership:

Isaiah 56:1 (NIV)

¹ This is what the LORD says:

“Maintain **justice** and do what is right,
for my **salvation** is close at hand
and my **righteousness** will soon be revealed.”

Righteousness is God doing right by his people, out of faithfulness to them.

Salvation is God rescuing his people from oppression, restoring them to his reign.

Justice is a community doing what is right, because they trust God to set them right.

These are keywords in the new covenant too, though the relationship starts with God: we *do right* in response to God *justifying* us by *faith*, since Christ is the expression of God-doing-right by the world because of his faithfulness (Romans 3:21-26).

In Isaiah's context, complying with the covenant meant observing the *Sabbaths* (56:2, 4, 6). But this focus on the Sinai covenant law does not exclude foreigners:

Isaiah 56:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ And **foreigners** who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—
⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called **a house of prayer for all nations.**
⁸ The Sovereign LORD declares—he who **gathers the exiles of Israel**:
“I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”

Can you think of an Old Testament example of *foreigners binding themselves to the LORD*? (Hint: Ruth 1:16). In this vision the foreigners *bring sacrifices* and *keep the Sabbath* because the context is the Sinai covenant. But the image of the foreigners honouring God and being accepted by God was a radical turnaround from what they were experiencing: they had been crushed by the nations who cared nothing for what God said about Israel being his people.

Jewish apocalyptic literature like Enoch wrestled with how God would bring the nations down in order to raise his people up. Isaiah suggests a different solution. Instead of praying for the downfall of the nations, God asks his suffering people to **pray for their tormentors**: *my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations*. Jesus insisted this approach—rather than violence—would save his people (Mark 11:17).



The wicked have always relied on violence to get justice, instead of calling on the name of the LORD (Genesis 4:22-23, 26). But violence only perpetuates violence; it never delivers peace: “*There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked*” (57:21).

Fasting (Isaiah 58)

What is fasting all about? The Gospels discuss fasting, and Acts mentions it twice. But there's nothing on fasting in the New Testament letters (except when Paul had nothing to eat: 2 Corinthians 6:5 and 11:27). Is fasting a spiritual discipline we should practice today? Why fast?

There's nothing on fasting in the Torah: lots about feasts, nothing about fasts. People practiced fasting when things were wrong (e.g. 2 Samuel 21:9; 2 Chronicles 20:3). When Babylon took the people into exile, they could not practice the feasts, so they fasted on those special days. When they came back from exile and rebuilt the temple, they asked if they should continue these annual fasts. Zechariah questioned what they were fasting for, now they had God among them again (Zechariah 7:3-4). He said their annual fasts should become feasts where they celebrate the LORD (8:19).

But those who were still in exile continued to fast (Esther 4:3; 9:31). The Pharisees called everyone to fast weekly, pleading for God to renew them as his kingdom.

Isaiah had promised a Branch from David's line to reign over them again, but God had not restored the kingdom. They fasted, but God had not answered their pleas:

Isaiah 58:3-9 (NIV)

- ³ 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'
Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.
- ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists. ...
- ⁵ Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?
- ⁶ Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
- ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter ...
- ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

Going without food doesn't impress God. Going without imposing our will on others is more meaningful. To use the money we saved by not eating to help someone else is closer to the heart of justice God desires.

Ironically, the focus on our own personal spiritual disciplines that characterizes religious life in general (not just Christianity) is not what God wants. What do you think?



God's arm and armour (Isaiah 59)

Isaiah 59:1-3 (NIV)

- ¹ Surely the **arm** of the LORD is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.
- ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.
- ³ For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt.
Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

I've heard evangelists quoting verse 2 to say that every person is a sinner separated from God for eternity unless you respond to their invitation to accept Jesus as your personal saviour who bridges the divide between God and sinners. Is that what Isaiah 59:2 is saying?

The context is prayer. They accused God of ignoring them when they fasted (58:3), and they're treating God as either unable to save his people (*his arm is too short*) or not wanting to hear their cries (*his ear is too dull*). But lifting blood-stained hands to God in prayer will not succeed. Requests from lying lips cannot be trusted (verse 3). God is looking for *holy hands without anger or disputing* (1 Timothy 2:8). That's what verse 2 is about.

Dishonesty and injustice don't impress God. Yet, God will act to save his people:

Isaiah 59:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ **Truth** is nowhere to be found,
and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.
The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.
¹⁶ He saw that there was no one,
he was appalled that **there was no one** to intervene;
so his own **arm** achieved **salvation** for him,
and his own righteousness sustained him.
¹⁷ He put on **righteousness** as his **breastplate**,
and the **helmet of salvation** on his head;
he put on the garments of vengeance
and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

Astounding! They are *untrue*, yet their unfaithfulness does not nullify God's faithfulness (Romans 3:3-4). He remains faithful to the covenant, so he does right by them: *his own righteousness sustains him*, so *his own arm achieves salvation* (v. 16). Since they could not save themselves, God donned his armour to fight for their release.

This is *the armour of God* Paul refers to in Ephesians 6:13-17. When did God do this? When did God put on *his breastplate of righteousness* and his *helmet of salvation*, with *his own arm achieving salvation* because he remained *true*?

We've already seen how *the arm of the LORD* (his strength) was revealed in Jesus. The arm of the Lord came into conflict with the kingdoms and rulers of this world when Jesus was handed over to *the palace of the Roman governor* (John 18:28).

The king of the Jews seemed to have no army or amour for this confrontation. Yet here he stood, in a life-and-death confrontation with Pontius Pilate, the representative in Jerusalem of the Caesar who claimed to rule the world, including God's people:

John 18:33–38 (NIV)

³³ Pilate ... summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"
³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"
³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"
³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

³⁸ “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.”

Truth is the foundational issue, just as the truth of who the Hebrews belonged to was the foundational issue in the confrontation with Pharaoh in Exodus. That truth was the foundational armour Jesus relied on as he declared his kingship came from another place (not from Rome). This belt of truth is the foundational piece of God's armour, holding it all together (Ephesians 6:14).

Truth stands on its own merit, but that's not something Pilate understood. For him, the truth was all about who had the weapons to crush their opponents:

John 19:10-16 (NIV)

¹⁰ “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement ...

¹⁴ “Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”
“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.
So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

Tragically, God's own people betrayed the king God had sent them, so he died at the hands of those who use violence to assert their authority (the soldiers of the Roman Empire). If the rule of the world depends on force, God loses because that's not how God uses his power (flexes *his arm*).

A higher court than Rome's overturned the injustice that is rule-by-force. On the third day, the eternal Father overturned the condemnation and execution of his Son. God's Holy Breath entered into the Messiah's dead body, raising him from has-been to always-will-be. This descendant of David was raised up by the Spirit of holiness and *appointed as 'Son of God in power' by his resurrection from the dead* (Romans 1:4).

The Spirit gave his testimony about Jesus by overturning the dominion of sin and death in the world, *“proving the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement ... so the prince of this world now stands condemned”* (John 16:8).

That's how God overturned the *truth* that relied on force for justice. That's how *his own arm achieved salvation for him*. That's what it looked like when God *put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head*. That's what it looked like when *the redeemer came to Zion* (Isaiah 59:15-20).

How does that sit with you?

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6.2 Life in the Messiah's reign (Isaiah 60–66)

The restored city of God (Isaiah 60-61)

Under the Messiah's leadership, the people of God will be a new Jerusalem, a place where the nations can see the brilliance of the LORD'S sovereign reign in his people:

Isaiah 60:1-3 (NIV)

- ¹ “Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
- ² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.
- ³ Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

This is life as it was meant to be, life in the reign of God's Anointed (Messiah/Christ):

Isaiah 61:1-4 (NIV)

- ¹ 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 brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
- ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
- ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion ...

Magnificent promises of the capital under the Messiah's reign keep coming:

Isaiah 62 (NIV)

- ¹ For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.
- ² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you
will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
- ³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ...
- ¹⁰ Pass through, pass through the gates!
Prepare the way for the people.
Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones.
Raise a banner for the nations.
- ¹¹ The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth:
“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes!
See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’”
- ¹² They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD;
and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.

But then we're reminded of the bloodshed he endured to establish this city.

The Messiah as victor (Isaiah 63)

In the list of David's victories over his enemies, Edom is near the end, a symbol that *the LORD gave David victory wherever he went* (2 Samuel 8:14). So who is this?

Isaiah 63:1-5 (NIV)

- ¹ Who is this coming from Edom,
from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson?
Who is this, robed in splendour,
striding forward in the greatness of his strength?
“It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save.”
- ² Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?
- ³ “I have trodden the winepress alone;
from the nations no one was with me.
I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath;
their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.
- ⁴ It was for me the day of vengeance;
the year for me to redeem had come.
- ⁵ I looked, but there was no one to help,
I was appalled that no one gave support;
so my own arm achieved salvation for me,
and my own wrath sustained me.”

This warrior has returned after the battle, like a king with blood-stained garments. He has dealt with the false claims of ownership over God's people. On his own he has redeemed God's people when not one of them stood with him. *The arm of the LORD* was here in the Messiah, achieving salvation for us all.

Praying for divine visitation (Isaiah 64)

So here is their prayer for God to step in and set things right:

Isaiah 64:1-4 (NIV)

- ¹ Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!
- ² As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil,
come down to make your name known to your enemies
and cause the nations to quake before you!
- ³ For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.
- ⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

What would it look like for God to *rend the heavens and come down*? Maybe they expected something like Mount Sinai when God came down to establish them as his people, when *the whole mountain trembled violently* (Exodus 19:18).

God answered this prayer in a way they did not expect (1 Corinthians 2:9). *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (John 1:14), *the one who came from heaven* (John 3:13, 31; 6:38).

New heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65)

God would reveal himself not just to Israel but to the nations as well:

Isaiah 65:1-2 (NIV)

- ¹ “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name,
I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’
- ² All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people,
who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.

Astoundingly, the nations would hear the good news, trust the Messiah, and be grafted into God's people. Tragically, those who had been God's people through the centuries of the kingdom and the exile would turn away from the God who literally held out his hands to them in the Messiah. That's how the New Testament understands this text (Romans 10:20-21 in context).

By including the nations in the Messiah's redeeming work, God restores the whole creation to be what he intended in the beginning:

Isaiah 65:17-25 (NIV)

¹⁷ “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

That's the effect of the Messiah's saving work. The whole creation has been groaning like a woman in labour, yearning to give birth to what God always intended. In Christ, *the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God* (Romans 8:21-22).



Jerusalem was significant as capital of the kingdom of God in Old Testament times.

There they provided a house for their heavenly sovereign, the ark where he sat enthroned. But even as they built the temple they knew it could not contain God:

“Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27). The fringe of his robe was all Isaiah saw as the LORD of hosts towered above his temple.

All creation restored (Isaiah 66)

If the nations recognize God's Messiah, the whole earth becomes God's kingdom and creation itself becomes a temple for the heavenly Sovereign:

Isaiah 66:1-2 (NIV)

¹ This is what the LORD says:

“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

Where is the house you will build for me?

Where will my resting place be?

² Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the LORD.

It's as the LORD's anointed declared in Psalm 24:1: *The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*

Isaiah 66:18-24 (NIV)

¹⁸ “And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.

¹⁹ “I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD—on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,” says the LORD. “They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels. ²¹ And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,” says the LORD.

²² “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.

²³ From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD. ²⁴ “And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

The prophet has received such an expansive vision of heaven and earth being reunited in the Son of David who restores heaven's reign to the whole earth. Yet the only lens he has for approaching God is the Jerusalem temple and the Sinai covenant.

From a New Testament perspective, *the prophets ... searched intently and with the greatest care ... when they spoke of things have not been told to you by those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven* (1 Peter 1:10-11).

But when God fulfilled these promises in Christ, he established a new covenant with all mankind, a new Jerusalem that covers the whole world rather than a hilltop in old Jerusalem. The whole earth is now God's holy land.

The whole world is redeemed, but that does not mean every individual is rescued. Some persist in their rebellion against the heavenly sovereign. They are not made part of the new creation against their will. They die. Their bodies are eaten by worms or burned with the rubbish that does not make it into the redeemed world.

Jesus used these phrases when he spoke of *Gehenna*. Usually translated “hell,” it was a literal place just south of Jerusalem where bodies were burnt. Jeremiah called it *the valley of slaughter* because so many died there when Babylon invaded (Jeremiah 7:32-34; 19:3-13). In calling people to follow his leadership, Jesus incorporated this horror language from Jeremiah and the ending of Isaiah (e.g. Mark 9:48).

6.3 Conclusion

What do you believe about God's plans for the earth? What does "a new heavens and a new earth" mean for you as we live in a world that's not yet fully restored? How does that shape the way we live now?

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Thinking back over the Book of Isaiah, what are the key messages that have stood out to you? In what ways does this book help shape your understanding of Christ?

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There's so much in Isaiah. It begins eight centuries before Jesus, in the time of the divided kingdom before Israel fell to Assyria and Judah fell to Babylon.

Week 1:

Isaiah confronted Judah, calling them to turn back to the LORD (Isaiah 1). He planned to make Jerusalem the place where the nations would discover God (Isaiah 2).

With a vision of God's throne, Isaiah was called as God's spokesman, delivering his instruction to a people who reject the LORD'S leading at their own peril (Isaiah 6).

"Immanuel! God is with us," Isaiah proclaimed to a king who saw himself as in control (7:14).

To a kingdom that had fallen to Assyria, Isaiah proclaimed the birth of the royal Son (9:1-7).

To a kingdom that died when David's family tree fell, Isaiah proclaimed the Branch from the root of David, the anointed king who brings peace to the world (Isaiah 11).

Week 2:

To the king of Babylon who raised his throne above God's, Isaiah proclaimed his humiliation (14:4-18).

To the nations that had oppressed God's people (Assyria and Egypt), Isaiah proclaimed the LORD would include them in his reign (19:19-25).

To Jerusalem, Isaiah proclaimed a change of government for a people who resisted God's authority (Isaiah 22), and a world devastated by disobedience (Isaiah 24).

Week 3:

Joyful praise accompanies the LORD'S reign as he delivers his people from the reign of death (Isaiah 26–27). But this restoration requires faith: the LORD'S people trusting in him, rather than their own strength or the power of other rulers (Isaiah 31–35).

That's how it worked out in practice. Through faith, Hezekiah saved Jerusalem from Assyria, though he later trusted the king of Babylon (Isaiah 36–39).

Week 4:

To the exiles in Babylon, another voice announced the *gospel*, the good news of the restoration of God's reign (40:1-11). The LORD would restore his fallen servant (Isaiah 41–43), through the Persian King Cyrus (Isaiah 44–45) who would humiliate Babylon (Isaiah 46–47).

Week 5:

The servant of the LORD would do for God's people what they could not do for themselves (Isaiah 48–52), shouldering their affliction for them as he suffered and died for them (Isaiah 53), extending God's reign to the world (Isaiah 54–55).

Week 6:

The concluding voice in Isaiah calls God's people to live justly as the expression of God's reign (Isaiah 56–58), promising the LORD himself would rescue them (Isaiah 59), restoring them as his brilliant beacon to the nations (Isaiah 60–62).

The son of David wins that victory for his people (Isaiah 63–64), resolving every injustice, restoring heaven and earth under the LORD's leadership (Isaiah 65–66).

Any further thoughts on Isaiah? Which New Testament quotations help you understand how the word of the LORD through Isaiah are fulfilled in Christ?

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If you need to see what others have written so you can write your own summary, Barry Webb puts it like this:

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 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. For ‘Judah’ and ‘Jerusalem’ both have the strongest possible links in the Old Testament with the house of David.

But then, as we watch, he is strangely altered, or more correctly he appears again in a different guise. It is so different, in fact, that at first we have difficulty recognizing him as the same person. He is a humble and gentle servant (42:1–3), he meets discouragement and opposition (49:4), he is cruelly persecuted and killed (50:6; 53:8–9), but at last he is raised and glorified, and all God’s purposes prosper in his hand (53:10). And then at last it becomes clear: the two figures are one. For the Servant, too, is a royal figure. He brings forth justice to the nations (42:1), the distant lands wait for his law (42:4), and through him the blessings promised to David are at last fully realized (55:3–5).

At the heart of Isaiah’s vision is the startling revelation that the Messiah must suffer. Its sharpest focus is on the one who came to the window for us all. That is, if you like, the depth of it, the truth that lies at the centre. But like a well-cut diamond, the vision has surface as well as depth, and we will be able to appreciate its many facets only as we attend carefully to the way it has been shaped and presented to us as Holy Scripture.¹⁷

Michael Bird (a fellow Aussie) describes God’s promises to restore his kingdom:

It is a domain of power, authority, kingship; benefaction and blessing; economic and political liberation; the present and future; justice and judgment; people and place. It is transcendent yet immanent; something supernatural though terrestrial; capable of abstraction in parables and yet brutally confronting when its demands are laid upon individuals.

Jesus appears to have been shaped principally by Isaiah, Daniel and Zechariah in his discourse about God’s kingdom. ...

Jesus’ message of the kingdom was an appropriation of Israel’s sacred traditions even while it challenged and undermined competing notions of God’s kingship vis-à-vis Israel and the world. ...

The overwhelming impression that Jesus created was that the ‘kingdom’ was God’s present reign ahead of its expression in a future realm ...

¹⁷ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles’ Wings*, Bible Speaks Today (Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 29.

where there would be the life, renewal, blessings and justice that the prophets had announced ... a hybrid of God's forthcoming dominion-domain-deliverance. ...

To be close to Jesus is to be close to the kingdom. ... Jesus is the 'strong man' who raids the demons' kingdom and establishes his own. Jesus is also the Son of Man around whom the disciples will gather as the leaders in charge of a restored Israelite monarchy which the Father will confer on Jesus. Those who witness Jesus' deeds and hear his words are 'blessed' because they see what many prophets and kings of Israel's sacred history longed for but did not experience, namely, the fulfilment of God's promises to reveal his kingly power precisely in Jesus. It is one's response to Jesus that determines entrance to the kingdom.

When it comes to the kingdom, Jesus was no onlooker and no forerunner. To the contrary, he believed that he was at the centre of it as its chief agent. This is why, presumably, the early church correlated Jesus and the kingdom, yielding expressions such as 'the kingdom of God and the name/teaching of Jesus', 'the kingdom of the son of his love' and the 'kingdom of Christ', believing that '[Jesus] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet', destroying 'every ruler and every authority and power', and that 'then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father'. One day, the church would declare: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.' God's kingdom entails the reign of Jesus!¹⁸

Ben Witherington and others see Isaiah's impact everywhere in the New Testament:

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus's glory and spoke about him. —John 12:41

Almost everywhere one turns in the NT, one finds the fingerprints of Isaiah. In some 300 pages of most any translation of the NT, there are over 400 quotes, paraphrases, or allusions to Isaiah. That's more than one per page on even a conservative estimate. More strikingly, precisely in regard to the subjects that we find most central and crucial to the NT, having to do with Christology, eschatology, and soteriology, Isaiah is drawn on again and again to articulate the good news. There is a good reason why John F. A. Sawyer entitled his book *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity*.¹⁹

¹⁸ Michael F. Bird, *Whispers of Revolution: Jesus and the Coming of God as King* (Apollos, 2025), 49–50.

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Fortress Press, 2017), 13.