

Isaiah

Author and date

Isaiah's name means "Yahweh will save" or possibly "Yahweh is salvation". Refer to "Encountering The Old Testament" by Bill Arnold and Brian Beyer ¹ and "A Survey of Old Testament Introduction" by Gleason Archer ² for a detailed discussion of the authorship and dating of the Book of Isaiah.

Main teachings of Isaiah

The main teachings of the Book of Isaiah are:

1. *God's character and nature.* Isaiah contains much teaching on His character and nature. Isaiah writes about:
 - a) the *holiness* of God. The expression "***the Holy One of Israel***" is used 25 times in Isaiah, but only 6 times elsewhere in the Old Testament. Isaiah 6:1-6 stresses how holy God is and how unholy and impure are humans by comparison. ³
 - b) the *righteousness* of God. Out of the 273 times the Hebrew words "sedeq" and "sedaga" which mean "***righteousness***" occur in the Old Testament, Isaiah uses them 58 times. (The bulk of the usages of these two Hebrew words are in the Psalms.)
 - c) the *judgments* of God. Out of the 420 usages of the Hebrew word "mispat" in the Old Testament, 40 are in Isaiah. (There are 65 in Psalms, 37 in Deuteronomy, 37 in Ezekiel and 31 in Jeremiah.)
 - d) the *supreme rule* or sovereignty of God. Isaiah insisted that all other gods are not real but are merely the work of human hands (see Isaiah 2:8, 2:20, 37:19, 40:18-20 and 44:9-20). God's supreme rule is also evidenced in Isaiah 44:6-8, 44:21, 44:24 and 46:10-11. read Isaiah 46:10-11: "***For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, 'No one sees me'; your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; and you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.' Therefore evil shall come upon you; you shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, which you shall not know.***"
 - e) God's *saving nature*. The Hebrew words for "***salvation***", "***save***" and "***saved***" are used more in Isaiah than in any other Old Testament book except the Psalms.

¹ Bill Arnold and Brian Beyer, "Encountering The Old Testament", Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, pages 355 and 370-372.

² Gleason Archer, "A Survey of Old Testament Introduction", Moody Press, Chicago, 1994, pages 365-390.

³ Refer to the section "The importance of having a revelation of God's holiness" in Chapter "Our Holy God" for more details on Isaiah 6:1-6.

2. *The Spirit of the Lord.* The Book of Isaiah has more to say about the Holy Spirit than any other Old Testament writer. Examples of verses about the Holy Spirit are Isaiah 11:2, 40:7, 40:13, 48:16, 59:19, 61:1, 63:10, 63:11 and 63:14.
3. *In God alone is righteousness.* Isaiah 45:24-25 reveals that our justification or righteousness is found only in the Lord Himself: ***He shall say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him, in the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.'***
4. *Salvation by faith.* Isaiah taught about salvation by faith in verses such as Isaiah 12:2, 28:16, 30:15 and 51:5. Trusting in the Lord is spoken of in Isaiah 26:3-4, 50:10 and 57:13.
5. *Prophecies about the coming Messiah.* There are many prophecies in Isaiah about the Lord's Servant and coming Messiah. Isaiah 9:6-7 is a wonderful prophecy about God the Son being born as a human. Isaiah 7:14 prophesies about the virgin birth and Immanuel – God with us. Isaiah 61:1-2 prophesies the message of the Messiah. Isaiah 50:6 predicts the Messiah's sufferings. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 contains prophecies about Jesus' death. Other prophecies about the coming Messiah are found in Isaiah 11:1-10, 16:5 and 55:4-5.
6. *God hates compromising disobedient religion.* In Isaiah 1:10-20, God states how He felt about the compromising hypocritical type of religion which most of the people of Judah were practicing at the time: ***"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? Says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The new Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of the assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword'; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*** Note God states above that:
 - a) the Judeans were generously giving plenty of burnt offerings, incense and other sacrifices to Him (verse 11 to 13). God commanded these in the Mosaic Law.
 - b) they were obeying the Mosaic Covenant commands about loving Sabbaths, New Moon Festivals and other appointed feasts (see Leviticus 23:1-43 and Numbers 10:10).
 - c) but God hated their generous giving, sacrifices and their obedience about the Sabbaths and feasts because these were used by the Judeans as a hypocritical religious cloak to cover their wicked immoral lives.

- d) the rulers of Judah were sexually immoral like the people of Sodom had been (verse 10). Most of the people of Judah were immoral like the inhabitants of Gomorrah (verse 10).
- e) the people of Judah were only obeying those parts of the Mosaic law which suited themselves. They ignored those parts which did not suit them. This is seen in God's Word, **"Give ear to the law of our God you people of Gomorrah"** (verse 10). They were taking away or subtracting from God's Word in disobedience to Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32.
- f) God commanded them: **"Put away the evil of your doing from before My eyes. Cease to do evil."** He instructed them to turn from their evil actions. In Isaiah 31:6-7, God emphasised that turning to Him is accompanied by turning from wickedness: **"Return to Him against whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. For in that day every man shall throw away his idols of silver and his idols of gold – sin, which your own hands have made for yourselves."**
- g) the Lord also told them **"Learn to do good, seek justice..."** (verse 17). He commanded them to live good righteous lives.
- h) God said that if they turned from their evil ways and began to live good lives, he would wash their sins away (verse 18).
- i) He gave them a choice between being willing and obedient or refusing and rebelling (verses 19-20).
- j) He warned that their choices would determine their future as a nation (verses 19-20).

In Isaiah 58:1-12, God reveals that even if His people fast, He does not value their fasting unless it is accompanied by godly right living. Isaiah 58:3-7 states: **"Why have we fasted, they say, and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?" In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the lord? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh."**

- 7. *People can be prosperous compromising religious hypocrites.* At the time, the descendants of Jacob were extremely prosperous but were practicing pagan idolatry, demonic soothsaying and the customs of pagans from the east. In Isaiah 2:6-8, Isaiah said: **"For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; they are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners. Their land is also full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is also full of horses, and there is no end to their chariots, their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made."**

8. *Turning to God and forsaking evil.* In Isaiah 55:6-7, God taught some very important truths: **“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”**
Note that:
- if humans turn to the Lord and forsake their wicked ways and wrong thoughts, God promises to abundantly pardon them and show mercy to them. This pardon of sins and manifested mercy is an unmerited result of fulfilling God’s stated conditions.
 - God does not say that it is possible to turn to Him without forsaking our known wicked ways and thoughts. Many foolish Judeans thought they could turn to the Lord and receive His wonderful mercy without abandoning their known sins.
9. *God condemns all justifying of evil and calling good evil.* In Isaiah 5:20, God declares: **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.”** Here God pronounced a curse on:
- those people who try to justify as good those things which He says are evil. For example, most unbelievers say that abortion of unwanted babies is good.
 - those who criticise as evil those things which He says are good. For example, most unbelievers these days say it is wrong for young people to remain virgins before they are married.
10. *Most Judeans did not want to hear about God’s holiness and commands.* Many of the people of Judah in Isaiah’s time wanted God’s prophets to stop confronting them with His holy nature and the expectations this put on them in relation to living a holy life. Instead they wanted the prophets just to give them false prophecies of success and prosperity. This is even though the truth was God was going to punish them in future for living such compromising hypocritical evil lives. Isaiah 30:9-11 states: **“That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophecy deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.’”**
These Judeans did not want to hear the commands of the Mosaic Law about how to live a holy godly life under the Mosaic Covenant. They were similar to the “Christianised” hypocrite Paul wrote of in 2 Timothy 4:2-4: **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”**
11. *Testing all revelations by God’s written Word.* In Isaiah 8:20, God said that all believers under the Mosaic Covenant needed to test all revelations by the Mosaic Law and the testimonies: **“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this**

word, it is because there is no light in them.” The word “*testimony*” refers to the Ten Commandments and to the written Words of God spoken through prophets like Isaiah.

12. *God’s Word will achieve what God says.* In Isaiah 55:11, God declares: “***So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.***”
13. *Only God should be exalted.* In Isaiah 2:11 and 2:17, the Lord said that only He should be exalted. Isaiah 2:11 states: “***The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.***”
As believers, we need to encourage others (see Romans 12:8) and commend them when they do right.

In recent decades, there has been an unbiblical ungodly almost Hollywood type of attitudes develop in the Church involving the hero-worship and idolising of certain well-known preachers. I believe God wants this sinful practice to stop. There is a big difference between loving and appreciating a fallible minister of God’s Word and idolising them.

14. *God will not share His glory with anyone.* In Isaiah 42:8, God said He will not give His glory to another: “***I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images.***” Isaiah 48:11 says the same. New Covenant believers are glorified in Christ (see Romans 8:30). But this is different from us being glorified like we are God Himself.
15. *God hates human pride.* In Isaiah 10:12-14, God condemned the arrogant proud attitude of the King of Assyria. Isaiah 10:12-13 states: “***Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.’ For he says: ‘By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries; so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man.’***” In Isaiah 23:9, God says: “***The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonor the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.***”

Other key points in the Book of Isaiah

Below are other key points in the Book of Isaiah:

- a) God wants to guide His people by His Holy Spirit. Isaiah 30:1 says: “***‘Woe to the rebellious children,’ says the Lord, ‘Who take counsel, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin.’***” See also Isaiah 30:20-21.
- b) Not all dreams are supernatural. Isaiah 29:8 refers to a hungry man dreaming about eating and a thirsty man dreaming about drinking.
- c) God is more loving than a human mother (see Isaiah 49:15).
- d) When God is gracious to the wicked, this often does not result in them turning to His righteous way. But sometimes when He judges people on earth, they learn God’s right ways. Isaiah 26:9-10 states: “***‘With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early; for when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet***

he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”

- e) God gave Isaiah prophecies about a king who would be born about *150 years* later. God gave Isaiah the king's name – Cyrus (see Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1). This is an amazing prophecy especially since Isaiah 44:28-45:4 reveals Cyrus would achieve God's purposes (Isaiah 44:28) and Cyrus did not know Him. Isaiah 45:4 records God saying to Cyrus years before his birth the following words: ***“For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.”***