

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH**

**As we begin this study of the Book of Isaiah, I think it is important to consider the journey we are about to embark on, not leaving behind the one we just concluded. This new study is going to pretty closely parallel the other significant event we are very close to beginning- the opening of our new church. I am pretty sure these two will be inexorably tied to one another as the years go by. We will always connect this new study taking place as we move in to our new home.**

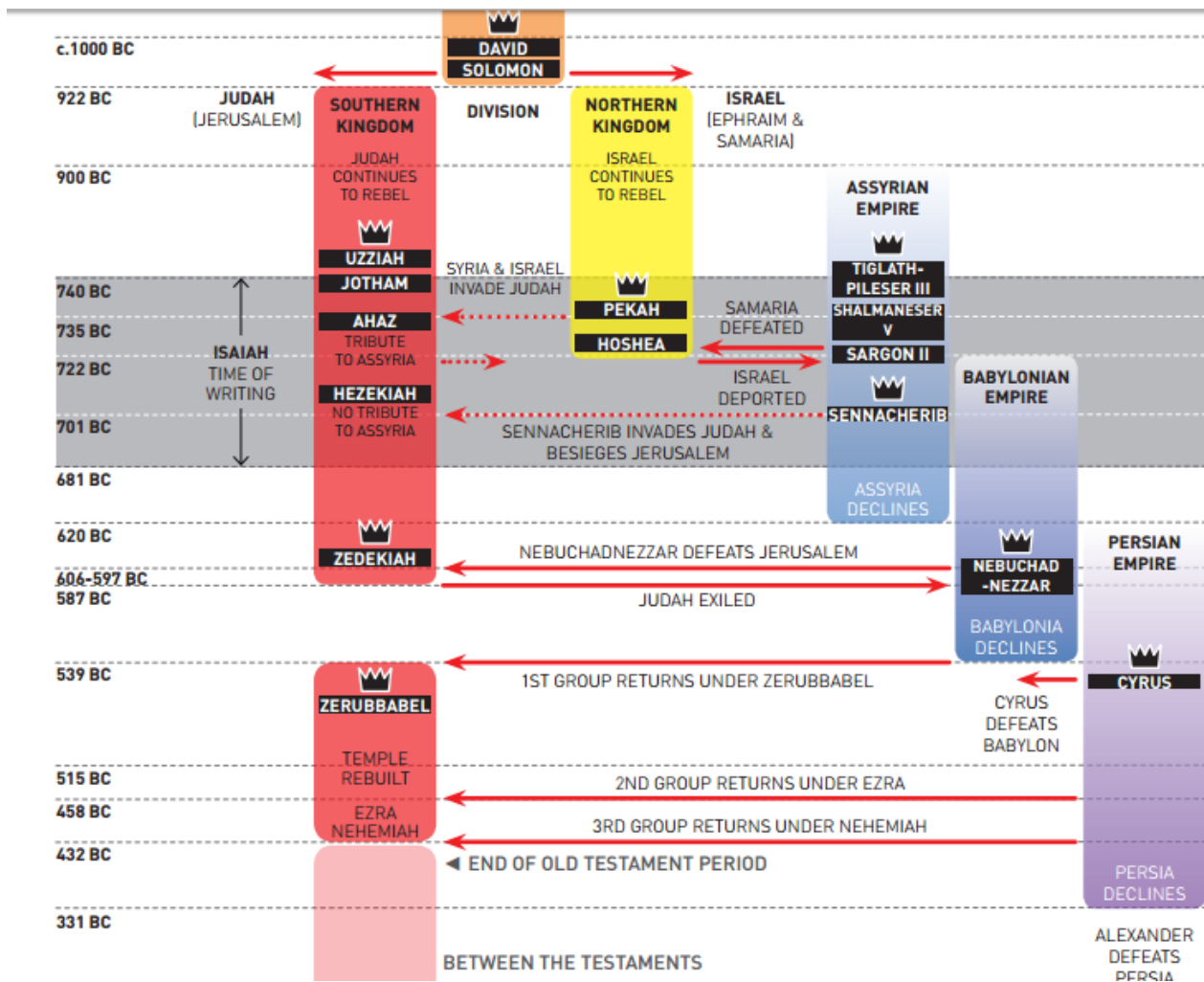
**More importantly, this new study needs to be a watermark for us in terms of our growth in knowledge, understanding and practical use. We should be able to have at least a discernible gauge of progress in these three areas and it is exciting to think where this will take us in the next couple years (I assume it will take us at least that long). Certainly, we will have a noticeable increase in knowledge, and that is always a good thing. But beyond that, we should have a significant increase in understanding- being able to expand on the knowledge we gather in order to make the next step of practical use or application. We will gather facts and information, understand what the implications of that knowledge is to us and then make application. I always worry about how much I am learning, how much I understand what that learning ought to mean to me and then not optimizing what I ought to be DOING about it.**

**I encourage you, therefore, to try to track all three as we go through the book and when we are done, we can all look back and say we have grown as individual believers and as a body...because that's what God intends for us to do with this study...not just to be smarter Christians, but BETTER, more**

**obedient Christians, better brothers and sisters to our fellow believers and better witnesses to a dying world.**

**I have a couple of hand-outs for you and I hope you will find them useful not only for today, but as a reference as we go through this book (pass them out). First you will see a time-line of the events going on during the writing of Isaiah. It was a very turbulent time, as you will see. We will also see quite clearly the wrangling and dealing and positioning both of nations and individuals- we will see human nature at it's worst. We will see the total depth of depravity that human beings are capable of. I have also provided a very broad outline- don't hold Jon to this outline, but it should serve to show you the major divisions of the book as we go through it. And thirdly, I have provided a map that shows the region involved in the book, centering on Judah.**

**TIMELINE OF ISAIAH**



## GENERAL OUTLINE:

### I. THE ASSYRIAN PERIOD - CONFLICT AND VICTORY (1-39)

- A. PROPHECIES CONCERNING JUDAH AND JERUSALEM (1-12)
- B. PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE NATIONS (13-27)
- C. DELIVERANCE FOUND NOT IN EGYPT, BUT IN THE LORD (28-35)
- D. HISTORICAL INTERLUDE (36-39)

### II. THE BABYLONIAN PERIOD - HOPE FOR TROUBLED TIMES (40-66)

- A. THE ONE TRUE GOD VERSUS IDOLS (40-48)
- B. THE LORD'S SERVANT WILL BRING SALVATION THROUGH VICARIOUS SUFFERING (49-57)
- C. THE FUTURE GLORY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE, THE NEW ZION (58-66)

I will note this here, but will offer no commentary on this- there is a lot of

thinking out there regarding the correlation of the Book of Isaiah to the entirety of the Bible. It has been called a microcosm of the entire Bible and that may be the case in some very important ways, but many commentators take it well beyond that into mysticism and numerology. But just for the sake of information- the book is generally divided into two sections from chapters 1-39 and 40-66. As you surely already know, there are 39 books in the Old Testament and 66 total books in the entire Bible. Some make a big deal of the fact that Isaiah is directly quoted 66 times in the NT- the same number as the number of chapters in Isaiah and the number of books in the Bible. That's all I have to say about that from up here...we can discuss in Sunday School if you want to make a case for the relevance of that information. But make no mistake, the relevance of Isaiah to the rest of Scripture and particularly the New Testament is clear. Isaiah is the most referenced and quoted OT book in the New Testament.

As is the case with nearly all the books of “the prophets,” the book of Isaiah takes its name from its writer. Isaiah was married to a prophetess who bore him at least two sons ([Isaiah 7:3](#); [8:3](#)). He prophesied under the reign of four Judean kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1)—and he likely met his death under a fifth, the evil King Manasseh, whom he may have been related to. Christian tradition as early as the second century identifies Isaiah as one of the prophets whose death is described in [Hebrews 11:37](#), specifically the prophet who was “sawn in two.” Obviously, if they were in fact related, this would make for some awkward moments at the family reunions. Isaiah likely lived in Jerusalem, given the book’s concern with the city ([Isaiah 1:1](#)) and his close proximity to at least two significant kings during the period of

his prophecy (7:3; 38:1).

As far as authorship, much of scholarship for the past two centuries has assigned multiple writers to Isaiah, dividing the book into three sections: 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66. If you look at the Cliff Notes on the Book of Isaiah, it claims that there is ample proof that Isaiah did not write the entire book, in fact they question whether he even wrote all of the first 39 chapters. The problem with something like Cliff Notes is they are approaching the book as literature, not as God-breathed. To me, the issue is not whether Isaiah wrote every word of this, but rather was there “unity” in the authorship- meaning were the writers on the same page and God-inspired. I mentioned in a talk to the CRU at Garrett that when Diane sends out the Christmas cards every year, she signs them from Brad and Diane, even though I didn't really have anything to do with sending them- I didn't buy them, I didn't write personalized notes in each one, I didn't mail them out- I was probably not even aware that she sent them out. But, because we share the affinity to the people she is sending the cards to, it is safe to say they are from both of us. So, I can't say with certainty that Isaiah was directly involved in the writing of the entire book, but I can say with certainty that the entire book is the inspired word of God and as such edifying to us.

Isaiah prophesied from 739–681 BC to a nation that had turned a deaf ear to the Lord. Instead of serving Him with humility and offering love to their neighbors, the nation of Judah offered meaningless sacrifices in God's temple at Jerusalem and committed injustices throughout the nation. The people of Judah turned their backs on God and alienated themselves from Him, which

created the need for Isaiah's pronouncements of judgment—declarations made in the hope that God's chosen people would return to Him.

Isaiah was a prophet of the southern kingdom. His call to a prophetic life took place in the year that King Uzziah died (740 B.C.), during a critical period in the history of the nation. Uzziah was one of Judah's greatest kings. He reigned for approximately half a century, and during this time, the kingdom enjoyed its greatest period of prosperity. Commercial relations were established with neighboring states, and the internal resources of the country were developed. However, this increase in wealth and the way in which it was distributed brought about some serious problems. The contrast between the rich and the poor reached an alarming state, which brought threats of a revolt from those who were deprived of their lands and other possessions. (read Isaiah 1:18-23). Then, too, there was an added threat from without, for the advance of the Assyrians against northern Israel was an indication that the time was not far distant when Judah might expect an invasion by the Assyrians. The situation was indeed ominous, but because Uzziah was a strong and able ruler, the people had confidence that he would know how to deal with these problems. Then came the startling news that the king had leprosy and would have to leave Jerusalem and live in a leper colony outside the city. Uzziah's son Jotham, heir to the throne, possessed none of the strong and admirable qualities characteristic of his father. Instead, he was a weak and vacillating person quite unable to inspire confidence on the part of his subjects. Uzziah lived for three years in the leper colony. The news of his death brought shock and consternation to the entire kingdom.

**During this time and under these critical circumstances, Isaiah became a prophet. The vision that he interpreted as his call to service is recorded in Chapter 6 of the Book of Isaiah. The scene in which the vision occurred is the Temple in the city of Jerusalem. Here the religious life of the nation was centered, and to this place Isaiah, a young man probably in his early twenties, turned in an hour when the future of his country looked especially bleak. The vision is described in considerable detail in Chapter 6 (read 6:1-8). Its essential meaning is expressed in the prophet's deep conviction that despite Judah's dark hour, Yahweh still controls the nations. His glory and majesty fill the whole earth. The contrast between Yahweh's holiness and the sinful state into which the Judean kingdom has fallen is something that calls for immediate action. Someone must speak for Yahweh and communicate the divine message to the people. Knowing what a difficult task this would be, Isaiah pleads that he is quite unfit to perform it. Then an act takes place in a vision that symbolizes an inner cleansing of his heart and mind, after which he responds to the call with the words "Here am I. Send me!"**

**The book of Isaiah provides us with the most comprehensive prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the entire Old Testament. In fact, it has been called the Old Testament equivalent of the Book of Romans. It includes the full scope of His life: the announcement of His coming ([Isaiah 40:3-5](#)), His virgin birth (7:14), His proclamation of the good news (61:1), His sacrificial death (52:13-53:12), and His return to claim His own (60:2-3). Because of these and numerous other Christ-centered texts in Isaiah, the book stands as a**

testament of hope in the Lord, the One who saves His people from themselves and their sinful nature.

Isaiah's overall theme receives its clearest statement in chapter 12: "Behold, God is my salvation, / I will trust and not be afraid" ([Isaiah 12:2](#)). This echoes the meaning of Isaiah's name, which means the "salvation of Yahweh."

Having read the book, one might wonder about the strong presence of judgment that runs through the first thirty-nine chapters when the theme is salvation. How can the two coexist? These two things are not in conflict, but rather are cause and effect...sin creates the need for judgment, God being God will judge sin, but thank God, He also intercedes for His people and offers salvation.

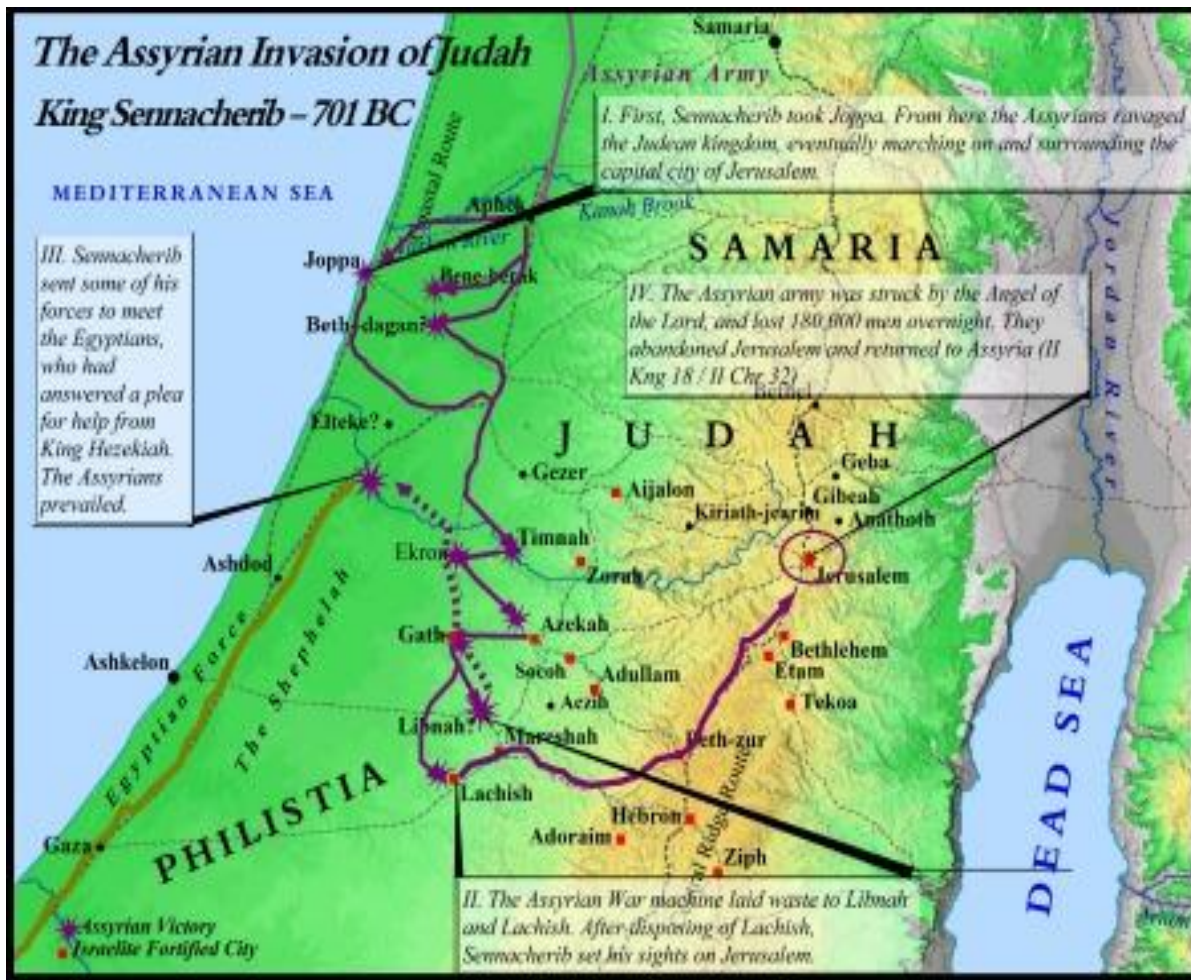
So the bulk of those early chapters in Isaiah detail judgments against the people who have turned their backs on the Lord, showing us that those who persist in their rebellion will receive judgment. On the other hand, we also see God's faithfulness to His promise. He will preserve a small remnant of faithful believers, those who will continue on into the glorious renewed world He has prepared for His children in the end times ([65:17–66:24](#)).

Because of its scope, Isaiah contains one of the clearest expressions of the gospel in all the Old Testament. Even from the first chapter, it is clear that the people have turned away from God and failed in their responsibilities as His children ([Isaiah 1:2–17](#)). Yet God miraculously holds out hope to this unrepentant people, offering cleansing of sins and the blessing that comes



**with faith and obedience in Him (1:18–20). Salvation lies only in God—the only question is whether or not they (and we) will accept His offer.**

**Now, let's look at the political landscape during this time (you may find the map and time-line useful in tracking this). It was a time of great political turmoil for the nation of Judah. Assyria was expanding its empire, attacking Israel and Syria to the north. When Judah refused to join a coalition with Israel and Syria to resist Assyria, Judah was instead attacked by Israel and Syria in retaliation. As Judah seriously considered Assyria to help them, Isaiah sought to encourage the King and the people to trust only in Jehovah. King Ahaz rejected Isaiah's advice and asked Assyria to come to his aid. Assyria accepted and the capitol of Israel, (Samaria) fell in 722 B.C.**



It soon became apparent that Judah was next on Assyria's hit list and Judah began looking to Egypt to the south for help. Once again, Isaiah counseled the nation to make no alliances but trust only in the Lord. King Hezekiah heeded Isaiah and God rewarded his faith by destroying the Assyrian army (Isaiah 36-37). But then Hezekiah made the mistake of showing the house of his treasures to the Babylonian ambassadors (enemies of Assyria).(Isa. 39:1-2). This prompted Isaiah to foretell that the King's treasures and his descendants would be taken away to Babylon (Isa. 39: 5-7), which we will see come to bear in much of the rest of the book.

**In addition to its gospel message, the book of Isaiah clearly articulates the sins of God's people—dealing with others unjustly which resulted in their offering hypocritical sacrifices to God and ultimately bringing God's wrath.**

**Individually, His people had turned away from Him and had become people who used every opportunity to gain an advantage over other men. They were greedy, idolatrous, rebellious. As a nation, they had put their trust in unholy alliances and failed to trust in the Lord. They offered sacrifices without repentance, they gave lip-service to God. Do you see anything in your own life that might fall under Isaiah's critique of injustice? How does our treatment of our brothers and sisters in Christ stand up to this kind of scrutiny? How do we deal with people around us in situations where we can have the upper hand, whether in relational or business dealings? Are we looking after those with need or lording over them? Isaiah's message points to the hope of salvation and the coming of the Lord but is also a call for believers to come back to purity in our love for God and for His people. (closing prayer).**