ISAIAH

*God calls his people to trust him and become his servants so that the world may know him and be saved*

SETTING

Approx. 740-700 BC

KEY VERSES

*In that day you will say: “I will praise you, Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”* 12:1-2

*"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."* 35:4

*"'For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the Lord your Redeemer."* 54:7-8

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# INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is the book in the OT that is most often cited or referred to in the NT, with around 600 different occurrences, including many known messianic prophecies. That is why Isaiah is sometimes called "the 5th Gospel". Jesus also quotes Isaiah a lot.

From 745 BC, Assyria had been on the offensive, and Israel did not know whether it was wiser to ally with Egypt or Assyria. Isaiah's task was to make the people turn around and trust in God rather than political alliances and to show them that their real problem was not their enemies but their sins. Isaiah points to idolatry, corruption, oppression of the poor, and a general rebellion against God. All this evil and injustice must be judged, and the people must be cleansed to come out again on the other side as more faithful to God. This purification occurred when God allowed them to be taken captive by the Babylonians in 586-539 BC.

But Isaiah also talks a lot about God's salvation, both in the form of a return from exile and in the coming of the Messiah. The so-called "servant songs" in chapters 42, 49, 50, and 53 (after the exile) are extra special in this context. These passages describe a person who is separate from the people and who is also not Isaiah himself, who is a righteous king (42:1-9), a prophet (49:1-6), and an obedient disciple who is willing to suffer (50:4-9) and die and become a guilt offering for the people's sins and transgressions. Especially in the fourth song in 52:13- 53:12, we find exceptionally specific descriptions of Jesus, many hundreds of years before it happened.

The book ends magnificently with the description of the new, purified Jerusalem in chapters 65-66, an image that is also used at the end of Revelation and thus the entire Bible. Here the final goal, what awaits those who trust in God, is described. Then death will no longer have power (65:19-20), and the curse from Genesis 3 will be lifted (65:21). The nations are described as Israel's brothers, who are brought to God as offerings. The last verses of the book describe judgment and eternity.

There are a lot of links to Jesus in Isaiah. Here are some examples:

* Born of a virgin, and *“God with us”* for real (7:14, 9:6, Matt 1:22-23)
* A shoot from the stump of Jesse (11:1-10, Rom 15:12, Rev 5:5, 22:16)
* The real return from exile (40:3, Luke 3:4)
* The Lord's suffering Servant (especially 52:13 - 53:12, Matt 8:17, Mark 10:45, 1 Pet 2:24). The opposite of a military savior.
* *"The Year of the Lord’s Favor"* came with Jesus (61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19)

The theme of the book is that God calls his people to trust him and become his servants so that the world may know him and be saved.

*"Isaiah should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the Church so clearly that you would think he is writing a history of what has already happened instead of prophesying about what is to come."* Jerome (342-420 AD)

*“… I believe that he foretells the gospel and the calling of the Gentiles more clearly than the others.”* Augustine (354-430 AD)

## HISTORICAL & POLITICAL SITUATION

Isaiah was active as a prophet in Jerusalem (1:1) approx. 740-700 BC. Comes with prophecies for Judah.

Assyria was on the offensive from 745 BC.

735 BC: Syria and the Northern Kingdom (Israel) attack Judah (Ch. 7)

732 BC: Assyria takes Syria

722 BC: Assyria takes the Northern Kingdom

701 BC: Assyria takes all 46 fortified cities in Judah but fails to take Jerusalem (Ch. 36-39)

586 BC: Babylon takes Judah and Jerusalem

539 BC: Persia takes Babylon and allows Judah to return from exile

*“The relative security that Uzziah had established was not without threat. Although at first largely unnoticed by the small nations of the Levant, a formidable superpower was rising in the northeast. Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria had set his sights on the treasures of Egypt, and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah lay right in his path. The rise of Assyria and the politics of Canaan become the backdrop for Isaiah's message.”* Daniel Lewis

## THE PROPHET ISAIAH

Son of Amoz (1:1), who is not the same person as the prophet Amos. Jewish tradition says he was a relative of Uzziah, but it is uncertain how reliable this is. Appears to have lived in Jerusalem.

Married to a *"prophetess"* (8:3). At least two sons with symbolic names: Shear-Jashub (*"a remnant will return"*) (7:3 → 10:21-22) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (*"quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil"*) (8:1).

The pseudepigraphic writing *Isaiah's Ascension* (2nd century AD) contains the tradition that Isaiah was sawn in two by King Manasseh since he would not retract his message. Hebrews 11:37 may refer to this. Also found in Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD), Tertullian (c. 160-240 AD), and the Talmud.

## STRUCTURE

**PART 1: SIN AND JUDGMENT**

**Ch. 1-12 Judgment and hope for Jerusalem**

Ch. 1-5 Introduction: The problem

Ch. 6 The short version of the solution (Isaiah's call)

Ch. 7-12 God is to be trusted, not the nations. (1st test)

**Ch. 13-27 Judgment and hope for the nations**

Ch. 13-23 The nations are judged

Ch. 24-27 The whole earth will be judged

**Ch. 28-39 The threat from Assyria**

Ch. 28-33 Do not rely on Egypt for help against Assyria

Ch. 34-35 Summary and conclusion: Edom's way or God's way?

Ch. 36-39 Hezekiah as one who trusts God (2nd test)

**PART 2: RECOVERY**

**Ch. 40-48 God is still in control and gives hope**

Ch. 40 The exile must end

Ch. 41-47 God against the idols

Ch. 48 Israel is still unfaithful, but God will do something new

**Ch. 49-55 The Lord's servant completes God's plan**

Ch. 49 The Lord's servant shall be a light to the nations

Ch. 50-53 The Lord's servant will be rejected and die as a guilty person

Ch. 54-55 Gratitude for the Lord's justice for all

**Ch. 56-66 How to live out God's will**

Ch. 56-59 Live according to God's character, not in legalism

*"Ch. 40-55 is often attributed to a prophet during the Babylonian captivity (586-539 BC) called Deutero-Isaiah, "the second Isaiah". He must have stood in the tradition of the first Isaiah. The voice in chapters 56-66 is often attributed to a Trito-Isaiah, "third Isaiah", but some believe the text has the same origin as chapters 40-55."* The Norwegian Bible Society: The literature edition, the quote has been translated

## AUTHOR

Isaiah or Isaiah + his disciples? (8:16, 29:10-12, 30:8-9)

A) The prophet Isaiah wrote the entire book: The traditional view right up to 1775, with the exception of a couple of rabbis in the 11th and 12th centuries.

B) From 1775:

Ch. 1-39: "First Isaiah" — The prophet Isaiah (7th century BC).

Ch. 40-55: "Second Isaiah" — A disciple of Isaiah who, based on Ch. 1-39, came up with new prophecies (about 550 BC).

Ch. 56-66: "Third Isaiah" — A third writer who makes more applications of the earlier prophecies after the people return from exile (about 500 BC)

## ARGUMENTS FOR DIFFERENT AUTHORS:

1. Prophecies about a time long after do not fit well with the function of prophecy in the present. Ch. 40-66 would not make sense to Isaiah's contemporaries. The prophecies are therefore linked to various historical situations and periods. Chapters 40-66 appear as "anonymous" texts.

2. "Second Isaiah" sees the destruction of the Temple as past. Would it make sense for God to say it like that before it was destroyed?

3. Cyrus seems to be already identifiable (44:28; 45:1, 13)

*"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.”’"* 44:28

*"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 armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:"* 45:1

*"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.”"* 45:13

4. Chapter 6 says that Isaiah should prophesy until destruction, but not after this.

*“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, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.”* 6:11-12

5. Mark 1:2-3 quotes Isaiah and Malachi as "Isaiah" only. The book of Isaiah might have been named Isaiah since he is the main prophet for more than half the book.

6. When Jesus and the authors of the NT refer to "Isaiah", they mean the book and not the author.

## ARGUMENTS FOR THE PROPHET ISAIAH AS AUTHOR:

1 John 12:38-41 refers to both Ch. 53 and Ch. 6 as "the prophet Isaiah". It’s most natural to understand this as the person and not the book. The same applies to the other NT quotes from Isaiah, also by Jesus.

2. No manuscript separates between these parts.

3. Several expressions run throughout the book. More reasonable due to one author than several authors intentionally imitating each other.

4. Chapters 40-66 have no historical references.

5. Chapters 40-55 talk a lot about idolatry, but this was not relevant after 586 BC. The post-exilic books never mention idolatry as a sin after the exile.

6. Isaiah can have long messages for future generations since Ezek 39-48, Dan 7-12 and Zech 9-14 also include this, and since he also speaks to nations that have never heard the message (Ch. 13-23). 1 Pet 1:10-12 says that the prophets also received messages far in advance that they did not fully understand themselves.

7. Naming Cyrus long before is no problem for God, although it may be unusual. Alternatively, Cyrus II (44:28; 45:1, 13) was indeed the king of Persia 559-530 BC, but his grandfather Cyrus I reigned over half of Persia from 652-600 BC. So a Cyrus was known about 70 years before Judah went into exile and was associated with the growing Persian Empire perhaps as early as 670 BC. If the legend of Isaiah's death under Manasseh (687-643) is reliable, Isaiah may have lived until Cyrus I.

8. Chapter 13 predicts Babylon's downfall long before it happens and long before Babel became a great power. It is clearly said that Isaiah himself saw this. And he says the same thing in 39:6-7.

*"A prophecy against Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw"* 13:1

*"Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Babylonians, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah."* 13:19

*"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. 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.'"* 39:6-7

9. The heading in 1:1 applies to the entire book and gives the impression that the entire book was created under these kings.

*"The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."* 1:1

*"The "one Isaiah" position may be the only one that takes the book's own claims seriously."* Richard Schultz

# JUDGMENT AND HOPE FOR JERUSALEM CH. 1-12

## OPENING (CHAP. 1): A TASTE OF THE THEMES IN THE BOOK

The introduction in 2:1 indicates that Chapter 1 is separated from what follows.

*"This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:"* 2:1

The situation is described: Spiritual apostasy, evil, empty religion, injustice, murder, and corruption (vv. 2-23). The book is "framed" by rebellion (v. 2 and 66:24).

*"Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."* 1:2

*"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."* 66:24

There is still hope (v. 9). They have an opportunity for forgiveness and restoration if they are willing and obedient (vv. 18-20).

*"Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."* 1:9

*"“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."* 1:18-20

The solution is a purification (vv. 16, 24-31), both physically by the exile and spiritually by the Lord's servant (→ 4:4, Ch. 53, Ch. 65-66).

*"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong."* 1:16

*“Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah! I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.” Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish. “You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.”* 1:24-31

*"The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains* *from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire." 4:4*

*"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."* 53:5

**Main theme:** God calls his people to trust him and become his servants so that the world can know him and be saved.

## 2:1-4: THE OBJECTIVE

*"In the last days"* → often messianic

The nations flock to the mountain of the Lord’s temple → all people can come to believe in Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the temple.

The word of the Lord goes out from Jerusalem → Jesus and the mission of the apostles

Judgment between nations → Jesus' return

No more war → Eternity in peace

How can God reach this goal when the people are so far away from Him?

## 5:1-7: THE SONG OF THE LORD'S VINEYARD

About God and his people (v. 7)

*"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."* 5:7

vv. 2, 4: God made everything ready for them to bear fruit, but he only got bad fruit: blood and cries of distress instead of justice and righteousness (v. 7).

*"'He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?”* 5:2,4

The judgment (vv. 5-6): God will not protect them anymore, and the country will become a wasteland.

*"Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.'"* 5:5-6

## 6 LAMENTS (5:8-23)

1. The rich and greedy (v. 8)

*"Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land."* 5:8

1. The rich/partying (vv. 11-12)

*"Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, pipes and timbrels and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no* *respect for the work of his hands."* 5: 11-12

1. Those who think they shall escape judgment and regard God almost as their servant. (vv. 18-19)

*"Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, “Let God hurry; let him hasten his work so we may see it. The plan of the Holy One of Israel— let it approach, let it come into view, so we may know it.”* 5:18-19

1. Those who turn God's will upside down (v. 20)

*"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."* 5:20

1. Those who think they know better than God (v. 21)

*"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight."* 5:21

1. The drunken, corrupt judges (vv. 22-23)

*"'Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent."* 5:22-23

## CH. 6: ISAIAH'S CALL

Why doesn't this appear in the book until now? Because it didn't happen until now, or is it placed here for a theological purpose?

In any case, it has a theological purpose: it provides the solution to the problem in chapters 1-5, which is further elaborated in the book. The people must, like Isaiah, realize that they cannot do anything about the problem. They must (like Isaiah) be cleansed and atoned for their sins so that they can be sent.

Chapter 6 is a "hinge" between chapters 1-5 and chapters 7-12 (with which it is chronologically connected).

The year Uzziah died: 740 BC, after 52 years on the throne! A new era for most people, and they were excited about King Ahaz and Assyria.

Isaiah sees that the real king is God himself (v. 5), who fills the whole earth with his glory. (v. 3). God is greater than what most people have thought.

*“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.”* 6:5

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”* 6:3

But the message will not be received (vv. 9-10)

*“He said, “Go and tell this people: “‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ 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.”* 6:9-10

The message was to last until the exile in Babylon (586-539 BC)

1. God's greatness and Isaiah's/people's sin (vv. 1-5) → Ch. 7-39
2. God's willingness and power to deliver his people (vv. 6-8) → Ch. 40-55
3. The difficult reality of being God's servants in unacceptable surroundings (vv. 9-13) → Ch. 56-66

## WHAT ABOUT US?

1. *"The Holy One of Israel"* is used 25 times in Isaiah (and otherwise only 6 times in the OT). It seems that the experience in chapter 6 affected him for the rest of his life. Has God's holiness left such a mark on us?
2. Isaiah had to preach judgment so that a later generation would hear the message and be saved. Are we willing to do what God wants even if no one is saved? Is it tempting to say or preach *"what their itching ears want to hear"* (2 Tim 4:3)?
3. Jesus used Isa 6:9-10 to describe his own ministry and why he speaks in parables (Matthew 13:14-15). Isaiah's ministry pointed to Jesus' ministry, and we also have one "prophetic message" to deliver to a world that often does not want to hear it. How do we deal with this?

## CH. 7: SYRIA AND ISRAEL ATTACK JUDAH (CA. 735 B.C.)

Ahaz will not join a coalition with Syria and Israel against Assyria. Rezin and Pekah attack to depose Ahaz and install Tabeel's son (v. 6) in his place.

The solution is to trust God (vv. 4-9). Ahaz chooses Assyria (2 Kings 16:5-9) and other gods (2 Kings 16:3-4, 10-19).

The sign: Immanuel (*“God [is] with us”*)

This is fulfilled in Jesus in Matt 1:23, but it was supposed to be a sign for Ahaz...?

*"'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')."* Matt 1:23

Syria and Israel must be gone before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right (vv. 15-16, 22). The threat was gone in 732 BC when Assyria attacked.

*"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."* 7:16

Was it Isaiah's own son? (Parallel between 7:16 and 8:4)

*"Then I made love to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said to me, “Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. For before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.”"* 8:3-4

* *"Virgin"* (Gr.) or *"young woman"* (Heb.)? Often synonyms, but not if it was Isaiah's second son.
* Immanuel in Isaiah's time was born of a young woman (perhaps she was a virgin when he was conceived), and he was supposed to be a sign that God would be with them and save them from their enemies.
* Jesus was born of a virgin (i.e., she was still a virgin when Jesus was born), and he was truly and literally "God with us" who saved us.

## CH. 7-12: GOD IS TO BE TRUSTED, NOT THE NATIONS.

God will save them from Israel and Syria (7:17-25), but Assyria will come over Judah as well (8:5-10) (→ 701 BC).

Immanuel is mentioned again in 8:8 and 8:10. He is the actual king of the country. (→ Messiah?) The Assyrians will not be able to take the whole country because God is with them. (→ 701 BC)

*"Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us."* 8:10

8:11-18: Therefore, they must trust God and not political solutions.

8:19-23: Do not rely on mediums and spiritists either.

9:1-2: Galilee had recently been conquered and repopulated by pagans, and over the centuries the area became the subject of jokes and insults (e.g., *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”* John 1:46a).

*"In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan — The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* 9:2

Fulfilled when Jesus moves to Capernaum (Matthew 4:13-16) and puts Galilee on the map again. He is the light that shines forth.

9:6-7: Ahaz has failed, but an ideal king, a child, will put an end to all war and establish an eternal kingdom of justice (→ Messiah).

*"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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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 9:6-7

## CH. 11: A BRANCH FROM THE STUMP OF ISAIS (KING DAVID)

Forest and forest clearing have been used as a metaphor for war several times (2:12-13, 5:5, 7:2, 7:23-25, 10:17-19, 10:33-34).

*"See, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One"* 10:33-34

Isaiah's message was to last until only a stump remained. That stump is a sacred seed. (6:13, 4:2) David's *"forest"* (lineage) would also be cut down (judged), but there was still hope.

The Messiah will have the Spirit of the Lord (v. 2), will judge righteously (vv. 3-5), bring peace (vv. 6-9a), the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord (v. 9b), and the nations will rally to Him (v. 10).

A new exodus will take place from all their known world (vv. 11-16).

That day (v. 11) seems to put this in a Messiah context (v. 10).

The Messiah is the one who gathers the nations (vv. 10, 12) and Israel & Judah from the four corners of the world (v. 12).

Acts as a spiritual gathering through faith in Jesus (with possibly the return from exile as a foreshadowing)

## APPLICATION OF CHAPTERS 1-12

1. In chapter 12, the people must give thanks for salvation and make God and his works known among the people (vv. 4-5). In the same way, the Gentile mission in the NT follows from the fact that the Messiah has come (Ch. 11). Do we say like Isaiah: *"Here am I. Send me!"*?
2. Ahaz trusts in Assyria and gives silver and gold from the temple to the Assyrians, copies their altar, and makes changes in the temple for the sake of the Assyrian king (2 Kings 16:10-18). When we trust in something other than God because we are afraid, it can lead to a spiritual compromise.

*"If our greatest treasure - communion with the living God - is safe, of what can we be afraid? Yet we are afraid of so many things. So our fears can serve an important purpose - they show us where we have really located our heart's treasure. Follow the pathway of the fear back into your heart to discover the things you love more than God."* Tim Keller on Psalm 27

What do you fear? Are you able to figure out where that fear comes from?

# JUDGMENT AND HOPE FOR THE NATIONS CH. 13-27

## CH. 13-23: THE NATIONS ARE JUDGED

13:1-14:23: Babylon will fall to the Medes because of wickedness and pride, but Israel will be allowed to come home (539 BC).

14:12-15 is about the pride of the king of Babylon — not the fall of the devil!

*"How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit.”* 14:12-15

In Latin *"How you have fallen from heaven, morning star..."* is “*quomodo cecidisti de caelo lucifer…*” Lucifer is not the name of Satan; it originates from this misinterpretation.

14:24-27: Assyria will be crushed (605 BC).

14:28-32: The Philistines must not rejoice over Assyria's apparent weakness (ca. 715 BC). There is only refuge to be found in Zion.

Ch. 15-16: Moab will perish because of its pride (715 BC). After that, a Davidic king will judge righteously.

Ch. 17: Damascus will become a ruin (732 BC) and Ephraim will lose its fortress because they have forgotten God, their savior (722 BC).

## CH. 18 AND 20: JUDGMENT AND HOPE FOR CUSH

Chapter 18: Wailing over Cush

Cush = Ethiopia and northern Sudan. Was one kingdom with Egypt from 715 BC.

vv. 1-2: Do the whirring wings refer to the swarms of insects along the Nile? Or are ships described as insects? The messages probably went to Hezekiah about forming an alliance against Assyria.

*"Woe to the land of whirring wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water."* 18:1-2

vv. 3-6: God looks calmly at the actions of the nations and will stop Assyria himself. (701 BC)

v. 7: Hope for salvation for the Cushites. They will come to the mountain of the Lord with gifts.

*"At that time gifts will be brought to the Lord Almighty from a people tall and smooth-skinned, from a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers — the gifts will be brought to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the Lord Almighty."* 18:7

Historical: They will come to Jerusalem to seek God. Messianic: That they should come to faith in Jesus (2:3-4, 11:11, Acts 8:26-40).

*"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"* 2:3

*"In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean."* 11:11

*"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”)."* Acts 8:26-27

## CH. 13-23: THE NATIONS ARE JUDGED

Ch. 19-20: Egypt will be handed over to a powerful king (671 BC), but many Egyptians will later turn to God, and Assyria and Egypt will be at peace.

Genesis 12:3 will be fulfilled, and they will both be called God's people, together with Israel. (Messiah)

21:1-10: Babel will fall to Media (539 BC)

21:11-12: Edom? (Will come back later…)

21:13-16: Arabia? (desert = *arab*) — must flee because of war

Ch. 22: Jerusalem will be taken by an enemy (before 701 BC, 36:3), but the people do not look for God who was behind it. Their perspective is the same as that of the nations, and therefore they are judged in the same way.

Ch. 23: Tyre is judged for its pride (701, 663, 573, 332 BC).

Why does Judah need to hear this?

## CH. 24-27: THE WHOLE EARTH WILL BE JUDGED

The whole earth is judged, and only a remnant escapes (24:6).

Enemies perish (25:10-12).

The Lord's adversaries are wiped out (26:11-14).

The evil forces will be put to an end (27:1).

Chapter 25: Rejoice because God judges violent men (vv. 1-5) and because the future looks bright for God's people. The Lord's banquet is prepared (v. 6), death is swallowed up (v. 8), and there shall be no more tears (v. 8).

Chapter 26: Peace for those who trust in God (vv. 3-4) and who sought him when He punished them (v. 16). They will reach the resurrection from the dead (v. 19).

Chapter 27: The vineyard (Ch. 5) is restored (vv. 2-3). Israel will be gathered from Assyria to Egypt (vv. 12-13, cf. 11:11-16).

## CH. 13-27: SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

**Summary:** God controls the nations and will use Assyria to judge them. Not even Egypt can help. Assyria will then be crushed by Babylon, and Babylon will be taken by Media.

**The point:** Don't trust the nations; don't look to them for help. They have trusted in themselves and not in God, and their pride will be judged. The solution and only option is to turn to God and bow down to him.

**Application:**

Why are pride and arrogance sins?

* Because sin, at its core, is the refusal to submit to God (Rom 1).
* We are called to follow Jesus in humility (Philippians), which is the opposite.

What does it mean for your life that God has control over world history?

# CHAPTERS 28-39: THE THREAT FROM ASSYRIA

Ch. 28-33: Israel's leaders want to form an alliance with Egypt to gain protection against Assyria. The solution is to repent and trust God, not Egypt. Instead of these leaders, a king is promised who will reign in justice and peace (32:1-8). The Lord will be their king (33:17-22).

Chapters 34-35: Summary and conclusion

To trust in this world is to choose destruction (Ch. 34) — to trust in God is to choose blessing (Ch. 35).

Chapters 36-39: Narrative text about the siege in 701 BC. Hezekiah trusts God and is saved from the Assyrians.

## CH. 28-33: DO NOT TRUST EGYPT FOR HELP AGAINST ASSYRIA

Ch. 28: The Northern Kingdom's leaders, priests and prophets will be judged (722 BC), but a remnant will escape (vv. 1-13). Judah trusts that lie and deceit will save them from Assyria, but only he who trusts in the Lord will have peace (vv. 14-22).

Ch. 29: Jerusalem will be attacked because they have not listened to the prophets (vv. 11-12). They have a religious facade because Jerusalem is the right place for sacrifices, but they are far from God (v. 13) and do not trust Him (vv. 15-16).

Judgment is coming, and the helpless and poor will rejoice (vv. 17-24).

Ch. 30: Judah is a rebellious child (vv. 1, 9, 1:2, 66:24) and trusts in Egypt instead of God. But Egypt cannot help. The only solution is to turn around and keep calm, trusting in God (v. 15). Judgment will lead to repentance (vv. 19-22) and restoration (vv. 23-26). God will also strike Assyria (vv. 27-33).

Ch. 31: Woe to those who trust in Egypt instead of God. They must turn to the only one who can help.

Ch. 32-33: There will be a time of distress. Then salvation will come - if they put their hope in the Lord (32:1-2) as their king (33:22).

## CH. 34-35: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION TO CH. 28-33

(A parallel to Ch. 24-27 as a conclusion to Ch. 13-23)

Contrast: A fertile land becomes a desert (Ch. 34), and a desert becomes a garden (Ch. 35).

## CH. 34: EDOM'S WAY (DESERT)

The whole earth will be judged and become a wasteland. Edom represents "anti-Israel" and thus all nations' opposition to what God is doing in the world. (Numbers 20:14-21)

Arrogant people cannot stand before God. Therefore, there is no point in relying on political alliances with a nation.

To ally with the nations is to choose a desert. To want to be independent of God and build our kingdoms on earth is to reduce ourselves to destruction.

## CH. 35: GOD'S WAY (GARDEN)

Those who do not follow the way of the nations but choose to wait on and trust God, even if it is in a desert, will discover the Way of Holiness back to Zion.

Perhaps both from Babylon (vv. 5-7, after God judges the nations at Assyria in Ch. 28-33) and messianic (vv. 8-10, Matt 11:2-5).

To trust God is to choose a garden of abundance, blessing and holiness.

## CH. 36-39: HEZEKIAH AS ONE WHO TRUSTS IN GOD (2nd TEST)

Ahaz allied himself with Assyria (2 Kings 16:7). Hezekiah "inherits" this and rebels (2 Kings 18:7). This led to the Assyrians attacking in 701 BC. (2 Kings 18:17)

"What do you trust, since you feel so safe?" (36:4)

1. Claims that Egypt cannot be trusted (v. 6)
2. Trying to make Hezekiah doubt whether it was right to tear down the altars and the high places (v. 7, 2 Kings 18:4)
3. Offer a financial reward? Perhaps mostly to point out that Hezekiah does not have many people (v. 8)
4. Perhaps worst of all, they claim that the God of Israel has told them to destroy Judah (v. 10)
5. Speaks Judean so that the people will hear it and rebel against Hezekiah (vv. 11-20)
6. Claims that no other gods have been able to save their lands from the Assyrians (vv. 18-20)

Reminiscent of a certain snake's rhetoric. Sowing doubt about what God has said and promised.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Ahaz (1st test)** | **Hezekiah (2nd test)** |
| **Where?** | *"at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field."* 7:3 | *"at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field"* 36:2 |
| **Addressing the prophet?** | No (7:3) | Yes (37:2) |
| **Sign from God?** | Will not ask for a sign but still received the Immanuel sign (7:10-17). | Receives the signs (37:30, 38:7) and asks for a sign (38:22). |
| **Faith/trust in God?** | No, did not trust that God was with them ("Immanuel"), trusted in Assyria instead. | Yes, trusted that God was with them ("Immanuel"), saved from Assyria. |

The bottom line: Trust God's promise to defend Jerusalem for David's sake (37:35) — not political alliances.

## "THEN THE ANGEL OF THE LORD WENT OUT AND KILLED 185,000 MEN IN THE ASSYRIAN CAMP" (37:36)

The defeat is not mentioned in the Assyrian version (Sennacherib's Prism). But Jerusalem is the only city mentioned as besieged on Sennacherib's stele, without mention of the victory.

37:7-9: He hears of a rebellion and ends the siege.

**Suggestion:**

The Greek historian Herodotus (4th century BC) writes that the Assyrians were attacked by mice (possibly plague via mice) when they attacked Egypt. Another story, or did he see the siege of Jerusalem as part of the attack on Egypt?

Josephus (1st century AD) interprets it as a plague.

Modern proposals: An epidemic, cholera, etc. due to the lack of water

It was common to interpret it as a divine intervention when something supernatural happened.

## CHAPTER 38-39: HEZEKIAH'S HEALING AND THE VISIT FROM BABEL

Hezekiah could have used the opportunity to tell about the Lord, his spiritual wealth, to the nations (12:4-5, 24:14-16), but instead, he displays his earthly wealth. Chapters 1-39 end by predicting the exile in Babylon.

38:1: *"In those days"*?

If Hezekiah died in 697 BC, he fell ill in 712 BC. This fits with the fact that Merodach Baladan was king in Babylon in 721-710 BC. It also makes sense that Babylon would contact anti-Assyrian Judah.

In that case, chapters 38-39 occur chronologically before chapters 36-37. Why this order if Hezekiah learned to trust God in 701?

1. To show that they must trust no human leader, for even the best fails. Hezekiah is not Immanuel/Messiah either. They can trust God even when they do not have a king in exile.
2. To show why the book cannot have a happy ending with chapter 37. Both Hezekiah and Jerusalem have received a temporary reprieve, but the problem is not solved. It goes much deeper, and chapters 40-66 provide the answer.
3. When the pressure is off, he becomes preoccupied with the riches of this world. Trusting God must be a lifestyle and not isolated actions. Chapters 40-66 will be necessary to explain how this can be possible.
4. To show why Judah fell to Babylon later, although God could be trusted against Assyria. Introduces chapters 40-66, which focus on the exile in Babylon.

# LESSONS FROM CHAPTERS 1-39

Chapters 1-39 have shown time and again that trusting God is fundamental. Confidence that God can be trusted = faith.

What would chapters 1-39 mean to the first readers?

1. For the people before the exile: They must realize their identity as God's people whom he has chosen for a purpose and trust that he will preserve and protect them from their enemies as they cling to him.
2. For the people in exile: They must realize that they ended up there because they did not trust God (and thus did not stick to him and the Law of Moses), but that God is greater than Babylon. Because they have turned and trusted Him, He will bring them back home so His plan can continue.

(Chapters 40-66 explain how they can be enabled to become God's servants when they trust in Him.)

## "WHAT DO YOU TRUST SINCE YOU FEEL SO SAFE?"

**What do you trust?**

Trusting God is not about abstaining from using your brain or not making any effort yourself.

It is impossible to believe in Jesus, and at the same time, not trust God. The belief that Jesus saves is based on the fact that God can be trusted. Trusting God is most of all about having trust in God for your eternal future — that the cross saves and that, regardless of the difficulties in this life, He will bring you home to Him. Nothing else must be allowed to take God's place; we need to trust in God when it comes to our salvation.

**Do you feel safe?**

*“Is it foolish of me to trust in God? My life doesn't always go so well..."*

*"Perhaps it is God who is behind these difficulties?"*

*"Is it extreme to live by the morals of the Bible? Did God really mean for me to take it so seriously? Others think it is intolerant and discriminatory..."*

*"Is it foolish of me to believe in God when most people around me don't?"*

# GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL AND GIVES HOPE CH. 40-48

Main themes in chapters 40-48: Comfort and motivation to serve God

God is the first and the last, the only one; he is above all (40:12-26, 41:1-6, 43:10, 44:6, 44:8, 45:5-6, 45: 18, 45:21-22, 46:9, 48:12).

There is no competition between God and the idols.

God is not overcome by either the Babylonians or the Babylonian gods.

*"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.”* Isaiah 40:12-13,15,17

*"Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.'"* 41:4

*"'This is what the Lord says — Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."* 44:6

*"And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."* 45:21b-22

Only God knows the future (41:21-29, 42:8-9, 44:7, 44:24-28, 45:11, 45:20-21, 46:5-11, 48:3-8).

Says in advance that Cyrus will let them return home so that they will turn to Him when they see that happening.

*"Declare what is to be, present it — let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me."* 45:21

*"I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass."* 48:3

Chapters 1-39 focused on trusting God over people and worldly power. In chapters 40-48, the focus is more on trusting God instead of idols and spirits.

**Israel:**

Israel are still the Lord's servants; they are not rejected. No matter what has happened, they are chosen and loved by God, and He will still use them. (41:8-9, 43:1-7, 10, 44:21)

They don’t need to fear (41:10. 41:13-14, 43:1-5, 44:8)

They are forgiven (40:2, 43:25, 44:22)

God will give them strength (40:27-31, 41:10)

He will save them through a new exodus, this time from Babylon. (40:3-5, 43:14-20, 44:27, 48:20-21)

Purpose: Get the people in exile to respond with trust in God instead of despair.

Can we apply verses from chapters 40-48 to ourselves? What are timeless truths? What is written about God is timeless, also that He comforts and gives hope. Otherwise, we must remember that it was written in a specific situation, which is considered in the interpretation.

## "SERVANT SONGS"

Bernhard Duhm was the first person to call them “*the Servant songs”* in 1892. It is 4 paragraphs about *"The Lord's servant"*. They stand out because they refer to an individual and not the people. This servant is also separated from Isaiah himself ("he" vs. "we", "us", "our").

Interpretations:

1. individual: historical (unknown who)
2. collective: Israel (Jewish interpretation)
3. individual: Messiah (separate from the people)

## 1. SONG (42:1-9): RIGHTEOUS KING

The Lord's Chosen

*"with him I am well pleased"* (Matt 3:17, Matt 17:5)

The Spirit of God is upon him (as with the kings)

Shall bring justice to the nations (especially the king's responsibility)

Do not make much of yourself (vv. 2-3)

*"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."* 42:2

Shall be a light for the nations, the blind, and the prisoners who sit in darkness

Used by Jesus in Matthew 12:18-21

*"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope."* Matthew 12:18-21

What does it mean for us that Jesus is the righteous king?

# THE LORD'S SERVANT COMPLETES GOD'S PLAN (CH. 49-55)

## 2. SONG (49:1-6): PROPHET

Written in 1st person (I, me, my)

Called from birth “Before I was born the Lord called me” v. 1b

Has a sharp message: "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword"

Hidden by God: “in the shadow of his hand he hid me” v. 2

A personification of Israel, not Israel as a nation.

Faces opposition (like all the prophets)

**Assignment:**

1. Bring the preserved people of Israel back to God

* "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" 49:5

2. Give salvation to all other peoples (49:6, Luke 2:32, Acts 13:47)

* "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." 49:6b
* “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” Luke 2:32
* "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.'" Acts 13:47

## 3. SONG (50:4-9): DISCIPLES

* Written in 1st person (I, me, my)
* An obedient disciple, with an open ear and a clear tongue
* Willing to suffer
* To be acquitted
* Trust in God
* How does Jesus show us what it means to be a disciple?

**52:7-12**

*"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!'"* (v. 7)

What is the gospel? That God is the King and that God's kingdom brings peace and salvation/rescue.

Some good news is promised in the future.

## "SERVANT SONGS"

1st song (42:1-9): Righteous king

2nd song (49:1-6): Prophet

3rd song (50:4-9): Disciple

4th song (52:13 - 53:12): Priest

The gospel is that Jesus is the king of the universe who will come again to restore everything. This is really good news that should be easy to tell others about. As a result, those who believe in this message live by a different standard. They live by the ethics of the future kingdom. Therefore, those who believe in this message help the poor and helpless since God's purpose is to restore everything. *"The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* Mark 1:15

## 4. SONG (52:13 - 53:12): PRIEST

v. 13: To be exalted

v. 14: His appearance was disfigured beyond that of any human being

v. 15: The nations shall be touched

v. 2: *"tender shoot"*, *"root"* → 11:1,10

*"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."* 11:1

*"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."* 11:10

v. 3: Was despised and forsaken

vv. 4-7 and 10-12: Suffer for our sins

vv. 8 and 12: Died for our transgressions

v. 9: Got a rich man’s grave

v. 10: Will see descendants and live long

v. 11: Shall *“see the light of life”* and *“justify many”*

What does it mean for us that Jesus is the High Priest who Himself becomes the sacrifice? (Heb 2:17, 4:15, 7:24-28)

## SERVANT OF THE LORD: SUMMARY

An individual figure, separate from Israel (42:6; 49:5-6, 8; 53:8).

*"Israel"* is nevertheless used in 49:3, and *"my servant"* is used for Israel outside the songs (e.g., 41:8), because this servant is all that Israel should have been. He fulfills the role to which Israel had been called.

Stands in a very special relationship with God

Is chosen and equipped to do a unique deed

Has royal features but is a different Messiah: Humble, will bring justice both to Israel and to the nations.

Has prophetic features but stands out from all other prophets, including Moses.

Has priestly features but becomes the sacrifice himself.

Surpasses all role models, both royal and prophetic and priestly.

The 4th song is clearly used with reference to Jesus in Matthew 8:17, Luke 22:37 (by Jesus Himself), John 12:38, Acts 8:30-35 and 1 Pet 2:22-25.

*"Only by recognizing the servant as essentially a “new Moses” can one preserve both the unity of the servant songs with the context, which is dominated by images of a new exodus, and the otherwise confusing combination of collective and individual, as well as the prophetic, royal and priestly features in the description of the servant."* Gordon P. Hugenberger

## CHAPTERS 49-55: A SUMMARY

The main point of chapters 49-52 is a growing expectation of Israel's salvation (e.g., 49:8, 51:5-8, 52:6-12). In chapters 54-55, they rejoice over this having been achieved (54:1, 11-15; 55:1-3). What has come in between?

* Chapter 53! (e.g., 52:13 — 53:12)
* A progression?

Ch. 52: The promise that God will come back and be king

Ch. 54: A new covenant

Ch. 55: Innovation

Ch. 53: The Lord's suffering servant

Ch. 53 enables Israel to become the Lord's servants (sudden plural in 54:17), redeemed (54:8), a witness, and a light to the nations (55:4-5). The Lord's servant becomes what the people failed to be.

God continues to call His people to be His servants so that the world may know Him. But this is only possible because the Lord's servant has redeemed us and become what we are unable to be.

# CH. 56-66: HOW TO LIVE OUT GOD'S WILL

The most confusing part? The point of view seems to have been moved forward to the people of Jerusalem after the exile, but is the message given in a 7th-century context?

If not, they have learned nothing from the exile and still sacrifice children to idols (57:5).

Why remind them of this if they don't do it anymore? We also find no trace of this in the post-exile books.

A metaphorical interpretation of the sins seems like a bit of an easy way out.

The theory of "Trito-Isaiah" can lead to this part becoming detached from the rest of the book. Then the big picture is lost. Constructing a historical context for the 6th century for these chapters can then be a piece of cake.

Similar to Ch. 1-39. Understandable if Isaiah said it in the 7th century (and 1:1 gives the whole book a 7th-century context).

Some kind of duplicity? Both the 8th century and after the exile? Would make sense to the people of Isaiah's time, and later readers had to understand that they didn't have to behave like that again after the exile.

A warning against believing that they were holy in themselves because of the deliverance? (65:5)

*"All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, … who say, ‘Keep away; don’t come near me, for I am too sacred for you!’"* 65:2a, 5a

After laying the foundation (Ch. 1-39), presenting the motivation (Ch. 40-48), and the mean (49-55) … what remains? Living the life after salvation and reaching the goal.

In chapters 40-53, the Lord's "servant" (singular) is mentioned 19 times (Norwegian Bible 2011, NO11) but never in the plural form. The Lord's "servants" are only mentioned in the plural form from 54:17 and never in the singular form (56:6, 61:6, 65:9, 65:13-15, 66:14).

1. Isaiah's guilt is taken away so that he can speak for God (6:8) and be God's servant among people who will not listen (6:9-10).
2. Israel's guilt is taken away (e.g., 40:2), and they are freed from Babylon to be God's servants among the nations.
3. This deliverance points out that the Lord's suffering servant, who represents the whole people and who will be what Israel will never manage to be, will have many "descendants" (53:10) who will be the Lord's servants.

**Main theme:** The necessity of living out God's justice (54:17 → 56:1)

Chapters 56-59: Focus on what man cannot achieve. God does not mean legalism (56:1-8, 58:1-14). His character must become part of the way of life.

Chapters 60-66: Focus on what God can achieve. He will complete all things.

It seems to be a theological structure (an x-structure, a chiasm) and not a chronological structure.

A. 56:1-8: Live out the justice they have received. Foreigners must be considered God's people and be his servants.

B. 56:9—59:14: Israel's sin separates them from God, the Lord heals the broken in spirit and corrects fasting and Sabbath.

C. 59:15-21: The Lord intervenes with vengeance and salvation. He will redeem Zion, and his Spirit will be upon them.

D. Ch. 60-62: The nations go toward the light of (the new) Jerusalem. Open the gates, the wealth of the nations will come, no violence, the Lord is the light and the glory, all are righteous and possess the land forever. The servant of the Lord has the Spirit of God, preaches good news, and comes with freedom. Zion will be rebuilt, and the people will be called God's servants. God rejoices over Zion, his bride, who will be a song of praise on earth.

C. 63:1-6: The Lord judges all nations (represented by Edom) on the day of vengeance to redeem God's people.

B. 63:7—66:17: The people realize their sin, repent, and ask for salvation. The Lord punishes the defiant people, but a remnant remains and will be blessed and rejoice. A new heaven and a new earth, the Lord's servants will live in the New Jerusalem, no more weeping, no one dies early, covenant blessings, peace, no evil or destruction on the Lord's holy mountain.

A. 66:18-24: All nations come to see the glory of God. Someone is sent out to announce it among the peoples. The nations are called Israel's brothers and will come to the Lord's holy mountain as gifts of sacrifices. The new creation and God's people will always remain. The corpses of those who rebelled against God shall lie outside the city.

## "IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL A FAST?" (58:5)

Why fast from food? Why fast from social media, etc.? To discover your addiction, appreciate the creation more, open yourself to God, become slimmer, or read more books?

**What exactly is fasting?**

Christian fasting is more than abstaining from something (v. 5, Matt 6:16).

*"Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?"* 58:5

*"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."* Matt 6:16

Fasting is connected with prayer (58:4, 9a, Mark 9:29, Luke 2:37, 5:33, Acts 13:3, 14:23), especially in connection with mourning/repentance (Dan 9:3, Joel 1:14, 2:12, Jonah 3:5-8).

* *“You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.”* 58:4b
* *"Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."* 58:9a
* *"He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer."* Mark 9:29
* *"She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying."* Luke 2:37
* *"John’s disciples often fast and pray…"* Luke 5:33
* *"So after they had fasted and prayed…"* Acts 13:3
* *"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."* Acts 14:23
* *"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."* Dan 9:3
* *"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord."* Joel 1:14
* *"'Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'"* Joel 2:12
* *"The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth… Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence."* Jonah 3:5-8

Loving one's neighbor is more important (vv. 6-7, 9b-10)

*"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? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"* vv. 6-7

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."* 9b-10

Is fasting without prayer really the fast God wants? (*"Is this the kind of fast I have chosen?"*)

## CH. 65-66

65:17-25: The new purified Jerusalem. The ultimate goal is what awaits those who trust in God.

65:19-20: Death no longer has power (*“he will swallow up death forever.”* 25:8)

*"Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed."* 65:20

65:21: Deuteronomy 28:30 → No curse (Rev 22:3)

*"They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit."* 65:21

*"You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and rape her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit."* Deuteronomy 28:30

*"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."* Rev 22:3

**66:18-24**

66:19: A picture of "all peoples", far away in all directions

66:20-21: The nations are Israel's "brothers", and they will bring pure offerings

66:22: Eternity

66:24: Judgment (Rev 20:14, 21:27, 22:15)

*"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. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord. “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.”"* 66:22-24

*"Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death."* Rev 20:14

*"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life."* Rev 21:27

*"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."* Rev 22:15

# CONCLUSION

**Main theme:** God calls His people to trust Him and become His servants so that the world can know Him and be saved.

**What will this book tell its first readers?**

They will be both physically and spiritually cleansed during the exile in Babylon, and it is important that they have the right focus and stick to God after the exile and not fall back into old tracks, so they can be the Lord's servants as He intended all along, so that the world can know God and be saved.

**What will this book tell us?**

We have been cleansed, and our sin has been atoned for. We have become His servants — not because we are perfect (cf. Ch. 56-59) — but because He has made it possible for us (Ch. 53) and because we give Him room to use us to complete His plan (Ch. 60-66).

God sends Isaiah to Israel; He sends Israel to the nations, and He sends us to the world. Do we say *"send me!"* in response, as Isaiah did in chapter 6, and as God wants Israel to say in this book?