

An Overview of

Isaiah

Chad Sychtysz

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An Overview of Isaiah

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Spiritual "equipment" for the contest of life.

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Introduction

Isaiah is easily one of the most informative and significant books of the entire Old Testament. It provides a wealth of insight into the nature of God, His dealings with His (unfaithful) people, His providential care for His servants, and the layout of the kingdom of God under the reign of Messiah. However, it can also be a daunting study. At sixty-six chapters, Isaiah is the one of the longest of the prophetic books. Its explanations, prophecies, and descriptions of judgment are often couched in highly dramatic, poetic, and symbolic language. There are also a number of historical allusions as well as references to specific instructions in the Law of Moses throughout Isaiah; an unawareness of these references severely limits the communication of book's message. Furthermore, there are several major thematic contexts which Isaiah is constantly appealing to or is developing as he goes. Again, if one is unaware of those themes, or misses the transition from one to the next, this will frustrate his or her study of this grand book.

An Overview of Isaiah is intended to help the student deal with all of these factors. This is not a mere survey, but is certainly nothing like the standard commentaries on this book (which are 400 to 1000 pages in length, and are usually written for ministers and theologians). This overview is designed to provide a simplified yet explanatory treatment of the Book of Isaiah. It will serve as a study guide for nearly any adult Bible class as well as private or individual study. It is not a verse-by-verse study, but does cover the significant details of any given chapter. It is not meant to develop the original Hebrew text or offer detailed focus of specific words or idioms; however, it does attempt to provide the student with a working knowledge of the *essence* of the English-version text. It also does not pretend to be equated with the work of scholars whose knowledge and education deserves to be recognized. Instead, this work stands on the shoulders of those scholars and allows them to speak throughout the study, as needed.

This overview is meant to be a companion reader for the Book of Isaiah, not to be read in place of it. Questions provided at the end of each major break in the chapters are specifically designed to test one's comprehension of the text *and* bring a sense of significance and practicality to the study. In other words, they help the student to discover how *useful* Isaiah is in viewing our modern world and modern attitudes—of believers and non-believers alike—through the eyes of God. Since God's nature has not changed, and neither has His attitude toward the faithful *or* unfaithful, then whatever He reveals through the prophet Isaiah is still relevant for our understanding today.

What you have in your hands is a valuable resource, but it is only valuable if you put it to good use. Considerable time and research has already gone into this overview of a Bible book that is well worth *your* investment of *your* time and study. Much has been done for you up front; what you personally do with it from here is up to you.

Biblical Prophets and Prophecy

“Prophet” is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “to boil up; to bubble forth, as a fountain.” Thus, a prophet was one who “poured forth” the revealed Word of God. This was done by way of divine inspiration—that is, God personally disclosing to the prophet what He wanted communicated. Sometimes prophecies are referred to as “oracles” or “burdens” (as in Isaiah 23:1)—something that is “taken up” by the prophet and then given over to the people (see Jeremiah 23:33-39). Prophecy “is any instruction from a divine source and communicated by man to his fellowmen.”¹ Not all prophecy dealt with the future; sometimes the prophet unveiled (or called to mind) the distant past as a means of teaching those to whom he prophesied. Old Testament prophets were not always aware of the content of which they spoke (see 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Hebrew prophecy was always based upon the religion and theocracy of the Hebrew (Israelite) people. It was “usually connected with the history of the times in which it rose. The prophet took occasion to deliver his predictions when they were needed by the people among whom he lived.”² In other words, each prediction was born out of that generation’s own social, religious, and/or political situation. The prophet’s message was also intended to become part of the written history and heritage of his people. These facts are especially true of Isaiah’s writings: while initially directed at the people of his own time, they also have become part of Israel’s written history. No prophet’s message stood alone, however; “Their work was part of a great system, the benefits of which the whole world was to share.”³ The primary target of the Old Testament prophets was God’s people by covenant, the Israelites. Yet while all Hebrew prophecy was based upon God’s covenant relationship with Israel, it was not all limited to the Hebrew people. Jonah, Nahum, and Obadiah, for example, spoke entirely about foreign nations. Likewise, in the midst of some prophetic writings are what may be described as “universal judgments” against world powers (Isaiah 13 – 23, Jeremiah 46 – 51, et al). These oracles revealed God’s sovereignty over *all* nations and their moral accountability to Him.

The ancient Jews divided the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) into three major sections:

- ❑ **Law** (a.k.a. Pentateuch or Torah): Genesis – Deuteronomy
- ❑ **Prophets**: divided into two sections—
 - Former prophets [historical narratives]: Joshua – Kings
 - Latter prophets [divine oracles]: Isaiah – Malachi (except for Daniel)
 - Major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
 - Minor prophets: Hosea – Malachi
- ❑ **Holy Writings** (a.k.a. Hagiographa):
 - Books of poetry and/or wisdom: Job – Song of Solomon
 - Books of history or exhortation: Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, Lamentations, Daniel

¹ Clinton Lockhart, *Principles of Interpretation* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., no date), 198.

²Ibid., 198.

³Ibid., 200.

The Prophet Isaiah

“Isaiah” means “Yahweh [Jehovah] is salvation” or “salvation is from Yahweh.” He was the son of Amoz, but we know nothing else of his background for certain. He was born ca. 760 BC (presumably in Judah), some forty years before the fall of Israel to Assyria (721 BC). It seems that Isaiah was a resident of Jerusalem, and he appears to have been well-educated in Hebrew literature and history. He must have had considerable political and religious influence, given his immediate access to several of the Judean monarchs. His awareness of the royal court, marketplace, upper society, and political frustrations are all evident within his writings. In other words, he had a broad exposure to the different social classes in old Jerusalem. Isaiah was married and had two sons (7:3, 8:1-3), the latter whose name carried significant symbolic meaning to the message he preached.⁴

Isaiah began prophesying ca. 740BC, in the final year of King Uzziah’s long reign. Isaiah’s long prophetic career—possibly 60 years—spanned the reigns of several Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; see 1:1); correspondingly, this career also spanned the last four kings of Israel (Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea). Indeed, Isaiah was a personal advisor to the kings (2 Kings 19:1-7) and apparently was not afraid to speak the truth to them, even when it was unpopular. Some have suggested that many of the social and religious reforms of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29 – 31) were prompted by Isaiah’s direct influence and instruction.

Isaiah seems to be one who either understood more plainly God’s message than his fellow prophets or to whom more insight was given (see John 12:41). Of all the prophets since Moses, Isaiah seems to have had the clearest and most detailed concept of Israel’s present state of being *and* its ultimate future. Commentators over the centuries have ascribed to Isaiah various descriptors, such as “prophet of the future,” “prince of the prophets,” “the evangelical prophet,” and “the universal prophet of Israel.” One scholar (George L. Robinson) calls Isaiah’s book “the climax of Hebrew literary art.”⁵ Jim Valeton writes: “Never perhaps has there been another prophet like Isaiah, who stood with his head in the clouds and his feet on the solid earth, with his heart in the things of eternity and his mouth and hands in the things of time, with his spirit in the eternal counsel of God and his body in the very definite moment of history.”⁶

Indeed, God chose Isaiah to be His special mouthpiece. The scope of his prophecies is unparalleled anywhere in the Old Testament. This does not mean that everyone listened to him, however. Many of his words fell upon deaf ears—just as God predicted would happen (6:9-10). Like John the Baptist, Isaiah had his followers—fellow prophets and a believing remnant of Israel and Judah who believed in his message. These likely formed the backbone of the so-called “prophetic party” within

⁴ It has been suggested that Isaiah’s first wife died, and that his second wife is the “virgin” who bore him his second son. Yet George L. Robinson, for one, claims that this is a “false interpretation of 7:14” and a Jewish tradition (“Isaiah,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*[Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939], 3:1495).

⁵Ibid., 3:1496.

⁶ Jim Valeton, “Isaiah,” *Holman’s Bible Dictionary* (CD), QuickVerse for Windows, © 1994 Parson’s Technologies.

Jerusalem, which preserved his writings and continued to advance his message even after the prophet's death. (Nonetheless, it has also been suggested that some of Isaiah's writings may have been lost; see 2 Chronicles 32:32). Isaiah seems to have served as a state historical recorder as well as Judah's prophet; some of the material in the books of Kings and Chronicles may have come from his own records. For example, most of Isaiah 35 – 39 duplicates 2 Kings 18 – 20, but it may be that the Kings record comes from Isaiah and not the other way around. We do not know exactly what happened to Isaiah, although Justin Martyr (2nd century AD) upheld an ancient tradition that the prophet was martyred (by being sawn in half between two boards) during the early and particularly brutal reign of Manasseh (to which Hebrews 11:37 may refer; see 2 Kings 21:16).

Characteristics of the Book of Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah is prominent among the ancient prophetic oracles not only for its length, but also its tremendous exposition on the state of Israel/Judah and the unprecedented development of the coming (spiritual) kingdom of God. It is the most quoted book of the prophets in the New Testament, with 26 direct quotes attributed to it. Its canonicity has never been doubted; the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947) has only buttressed its authenticity and sacred place in God's Word.⁷ One scholar (Robinson) calls Isaiah "the Epistle to the Romans of the Old Testament," which is a fitting descriptor. Just as Paul developed the theology of "justification by faith" to the church (Romans 1:17), so Isaiah has developed the "righteousness of God" to the ancient Jews. Throughout the Book of Isaiah, God proves Himself to be innocent of any wrongdoing—even as He sends His people into captivity—and vindicates His own righteous action against the irrefutable evidence of Israel and Judah's gross misconduct. "The Book of Isaiah, as it stands, is acknowledged to be one of the richest in the OT. ...The book is not a collection of abstract dogmas. The lessons of God's greatness and love in respect to human need are stated in the concrete historical realities of one of Judah's most critical periods."⁸

Isaiah makes no clear distinction between church and state, inasmuch as Israel was originally established as a theocracy (or God-governed state) rather than a monarchy (or king-governed state). The statements and arguments made in Isaiah are both political and religious in nature; the state of the monarchy is often reflected in the nation's social and religious attitude. Thus, Isaiah deals with the corruption of Israel—from its princes (or "shepherds") to its social classes to its religious system—and explains exactly why God is just to level His judgment against it. Israel had not only rejected God as their king (1 Samuel 8:7) but had rejected His law, holiness, and prophets. In essence, Isaiah makes the case that there is nothing in the northern kingdom (Israel) worth saving. Assyria was chosen to be the punisher of Israel, after which Assyria itself—for its own arrogance and inhumanity—would also be punished and destroyed. Isaiah's attention is also turned toward the sins of Judah, whose heart was compromised with sin and idolatry. That nation would also be punished—

⁷ R. L. Harris, "Isaiah," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 3, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1976), 322.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 330.

but not destroyed, as Israel was—through exile into Babylon.⁹ After 70 years, Judah would be returned to its land, though its people would never reach the status that they once enjoyed. After this, the prophet looks well into the future and sees the reunification (or regeneration) of Israel/Judah in a glorious kingdom that transcends any political or geographical entity: the holy City of God (Zion) ruled by the transcendent Messiah of God.

Isaiah portrays God (Yahweh/Jehovah) as the sovereign Lord over all nations. His nature is absolutely holy and incorruptible; His guidance is perfect and infallible. He is called “the Holy One of Israel” 25 times in this book. God is the provider of blessings as well as the pronouncer of judgment: He is both Savior and Destroyer all at once. The determining factor of which role God will exercise is the people’s response to His kindness and offer of redemption (see 1:18-20, for example). Whatever happens to Israel or Judah, then, is not because God failed to keep His promises or abandoned His people; it is because their stubborn *sins* caused a breach between Him and them (see 59:1-2, for example). Prophets contemporary with Isaiah (i.e., Amos, Hosea, and Micah) have very similar messages; Paul makes a similar argument in the third chapter of Romans.

The authorship of Isaiah has been the source of centuries-old debate among scholars. Most are content with Isaiah’s authorship for chapters 1 – 39; yet some maintain that chapters 40 – 66 belong to a “second” Isaiah (a so-called Deutero-Isaiah)—an anonymous writer who lived centuries after Isaiah yet attached his work to that of the prophet. Reasons for this “two-author” theory include:

- ❑ Internal evidence (in chapters 40 – 66) points to a time after Jerusalem is destroyed—thus, after Isaiah’s own lifetime. The argument, then, is that Isaiah could not have known such historical details; therefore, he is not the author of that work.
- ❑ Cyrus the Great, the first emperor of the Persian Empire, is specifically mentioned as the one responsible for Judah’s release from captivity and the temple’s restoration—before these events ever happened *or* Persia became a world power (44:28 – 45:1).
- ❑ The emphasis in the first half of Isaiah is “doom and gloom”; in the second half, it is “hope and deliverance.” These emphases are too diverse to be the work of one author.
- ❑ Stylistically, the first half is compact and abrupt; the second half is flowing and poetic.
- ❑ Doctrinally, the first half focuses on God’s attention toward Israel and Judah; the second half includes God’s compassion for “the nations” (or Gentiles).
- ❑ Isaiah is personally mentioned several times in the first half but nowhere in the second half.

These arguments may seem convincing at first, but they are more presumptive than conclusive.¹⁰ An argument that the second half of Isaiah cannot be written *by* Isaiah because he describes events and people after his own lifetime undermines the credibility of all divine prophecy. If prophets can speak only about that which they can personally confirm, there is nothing “divine” about that. Moses

⁹ Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1969), 797.

¹⁰ Harrison, for one, spends over 30 pages of great detail on the matter, only to conclude that there is no evidence to support a “two author” theory. “What is particularly unfortunate about the situation is that...something that has always been at best a hypothetical matter has come, over the process of time, to be accepted uncritically in some circles as sober fact” (793).

wrote of the creation of the world when he was not there; John wrote of the end of the world (in Revelation) when this obviously has not yet happened. Both writings are prophetic and inspired; both rest upon what *God* sees, not the prophet himself. God can name a future “anointed” servant of His (in Isaiah 45) just as easily as He can predict Assyria’s demise even while that nation is still rising to its zenith of power (in Isaiah 10). As to the other arguments, one must take into account the *nature* and *purpose* for the writing, not just what is being said. The first half *does* seem to be “doom and gloom”—but it is not exclusively so; the second half *does* seem filled with hope and deliverance—but it also is not exclusively so. Isaiah (the prophet) had to deal with some very ugly matters in the first half; some of these spill over into the second half. Likewise, he looked far into the future and saw glorious things awaiting God’s people in the second half; some of this is addressed, however, in the first half. God always deals with His covenantal people (Israel) first, then turns to the greater scope of humanity: the “nations” (Gentiles). Accordingly, Jesus did the same thing (John 10:16) and so did Paul (Romans 1:16). Some biblical scholars have noticed a parallelism between the two halves of the book:¹¹

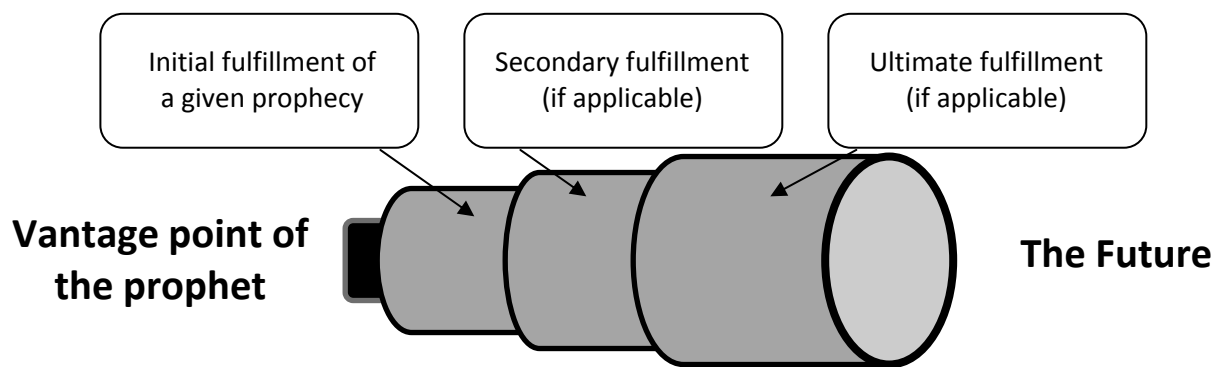
Subject:	Isaiah 1 – 33	Isaiah 34 – 66
Ruin and Restoration	1-5	34-35
Biographical Material	6-8	36-40
Agents of Divine Blessing and Judgment	9-12	41-45
Oracles against Foreign Nations	13-23	46-48
Universal Redemption and Israel’s Deliverance	24-27	49-55
Ethical Sermons	28-31	56-59
Restoration of the Nation	32-33	60-66

This parallelism does not suggest two separate authors but more conclusively supports a single-author perspective. Likewise, Isaiah himself is personally and historically *involved* in the first half, which explains his name being mentioned there; the second half exceeds his own lifetime, which explains the omission of his name there. Such factors do not demand two separate authors but easily support two different emphases of the same author. This study will maintain Isaiah the prophet to be the sole author of the entire Book of Isaiah. The reasons for this, beyond the rebuttals offered above, include:

- ❑ The ancient Jews never separated Isaiah into two separate books and never considered the Book of Isaiah to be the work of two or more authors.
- ❑ The New Testament cites from both halves of Isaiah and credits Isaiah himself in each case.
- ❑ Jesus quoted from both halves of Isaiah and credited Isaiah the prophet in each case (see in particular Luke 4:16-19, which is cited from Isaiah 61:1-2—the second half of Isaiah).
- ❑ The Dead Sea Scrolls—the oldest and therefore most authentic of all extant Old Testament manuscripts—considers Isaiah to be one complete and undivided work.
- ❑ Except for academic suppositions, we have no good reason to assume otherwise.

¹¹ Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset and David Brown, *New Commentary on the Whole Bible: Old Testament Volume* (D. Douglas, gen. ed.; revised by Dr. Philip W. Comfort; © 2009 QuickVerse for Windows), on “Introduction to Isaiah.”

More needs to be said concerning the *time factor* of prophecy. The very concept of divine prophecy is that it is *not* hindered or bound by physical time: the prophet “sees” what God reveals to him, and all of human history lies before God as an open map. Thus, Moses could speak of a “prophet like me” who would rise up from among his people, even though this did not happen for nearly 1,500 years in the future (compare Deuteronomy 18:15-17 and Acts 3:22-26). Likewise, Isaiah looked ahead (through the medium of God’s revelations) and “saw” the glorious restoration of Israel and Judah even before either nation underwent such awful destruction. Prophets of God spoke with a telescopic view: they were able to “see” people, things, and events far in the future while they themselves remained fixed in their own day and age. We do this same thing today in a physical way: looking at the city of Seattle from afar, with Mount Rainier in the same picture, makes it look like the city and the mountain are side-by-side, when in fact they are separated by many miles. The same is true of prophecy: two events seem to occur in immediate sequence, when in fact they may be separated by many years (or even centuries). In God’s view, time and distance are irrelevant; neither He nor His vision is bound by either one. To men, everything is a mystery until God discloses it (cf. Ephesians 3:1-6). Even then, God only discloses what He wants to disclose, not necessarily every detail of the matter.



Conditions at the Time of Writing

Isaiah was written during a major upheaval in the history of God’s people. The nation of Israel teetered at the edge of its very existence, the threat of Assyrian deportation looming ominously on the horizon. This was also true for surrounding nations: Syria [Aram], Ammon, Moab, Edom, Arabia, Tyre, and Philistia. Israel was not necessarily the worst of these nations but *was* the least excusable: after all the privileges God had heaped upon this people, their having prostituted themselves to idolatry was particularly grievous (see Ezekiel 16). God provided Israel with a choice: you can trust in Me or you can trust in someone or something else. At the time, Israel placed their trust in Egypt, which was the largest nation that stood in Assyria’s way of world domination. The route of Assyria’s expansionism would come from the north, along the western arm of Mesopotamia (a.k.a. the Fertile Crescent) and straight through ancient Palestine. For Egypt, then, the nations to the north of it—such as Judah, Israel, and Syria—served as a buffer between it and Assyria. It was in

Egypt's best interest to persuade these smaller states to stand their ground against Assyria—and to offer its own moral support to this cause. Assyrian emissaries, however, called Egypt a “crushed reed” and warned the nations not to trust in its power (Isaiah 36:4-6). This characterization was true: Egypt was unable to protect itself against Assyria, much less its buffer states. (See God's own unflattering view of Egypt in 19:1-18 and 31:1-3).

Ahaz, king of Judah, was directly confronted with this problem (Isaiah 7:1ff). Israel and its northern neighbor, Syria, had set aside their long-standing feud to join forces against Assyria, and leaned heavily upon Ahaz (Judah) to join them as well. Isaiah promised God's help to Ahaz, if he would but take it; but Ahaz refused to accept it, feigning moral indignation at the very idea. Instead, Ahaz actually called upon *Assyria's* help in dealing with the Israel-Syrian collusion—and unwittingly invited the wolf into the sheepfold. Professor Young writes:

Isaiah's ministry occurred at a critical time in Judah's history. The Assyrian power was rising, and in the light of this fact two groups appeared within the nation. One sought alliance with Egypt and the other with Assyria. Isaiah, however, forbade human alliances and urged the nation to trust in God. As a sign of deliverance he proclaimed the birth of the Messiah and prophesied concerning the nature of His kingdom. In the latter portion of his prophecy (40 – 66) he set forth the spiritual walk and destiny of the people of God.¹²

Ahaz's decision—not only to turn to Assyria for help, but also to openly reject God's intervention—reveals the deep-seated problem that Isaiah elsewhere brings to light repeatedly: God's own people did not trust in His ability to deliver them. Furthermore, they were an estranged people: they did not even know their God (as they should have). Thus, “An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand” (1:3; see Hosea 4:6-9). Israel's glorious exodus out of Egypt (during the time of Moses) thus ended in its shameful march into permanent exile; the nation of Israel—as God had intended it—would disappear forever. Thankfully, Hezekiah—Ahaz's son and successor—trusted in God rather than listen to Assyria's threats. Yet, the core of the nation was by then so rotten and corrupt that not even all of Hezekiah's reforms could affect it for long.¹³ Even after watching Israel disappear into oblivion, Judah continued to rebel against God. Judah's glorious days under David and Solomon thus ended in its involuntary surrender to the glorious power of a heathen king (Nebuchadnezzar), and its cherished city (Jerusalem) was leveled to the ground.

In both nations (Israel and Judah), the inward moral condition of the people gave rise to the external threat of their enemies—just as God foretold (Leviticus 26:14-33, 1 Kings 9:1-9). Israel's prosperity and expansion under King Jeroboam II (Israel's king contemporary to Judah's King Uzziah) was surpassed only by that of Solomon's reign. Instead of giving thanks to God for such blessings,

¹² Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 211.

¹³ This fact is evident in ungodly reigns of Hezekiah's immediate successors, Manasseh and Amon. Amon's son, Josiah, also instituted extensive reforms, but these also could not turn the nation around; see 2 Kings 23:25-27.

however, the people became self-reliant, materialistic, and indifferent toward their moral responsibilities. They sought to become like the nations around them and mixed the worship of their pagan gods with that of Yahweh (Jehovah). Instead of maintaining a sacred distance from foreign nations (in order to serve God exclusively), they compromised their holy and special covenant with God with idolatry (see 2 Kings 17:7-23). In this way, Israel manifested the “old spirit of Babel” (or universalism) in having joined together with the surrounding heathen nations to create one universal and indistinct people. God’s response was potent—and ironic: He gave them exactly what they asked for. Since Israel wanted to be like the other nations, He scattered them amongst those people. As a result, their national identity disappeared forever.

Judah should have learned better, but did not—and except for God’s restraint for the sake of His remnant, they would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:9). While Israel was essentially destroyed by Assyria, Judah was severely punished by Babylon. “Babylon” became the archetype of the hostile, worldly oppressor of God’s people (a metaphor that is used heavily in Revelation). In the end, God would rescue Judah from captivity, but in order to be saved, Judah first had to undergo a kind of “death.” This life-through-death formula serves as a background thesis for the Book of Isaiah and ultimately all of Scripture. It defines the experience of ancient Judah, culminates in the sacrifice of Christ, and is repeated by every believer today (in his “born again” experience).

Despite the deplorable political, social, and religious state of both nations (Israel and Judah), Isaiah himself did not lapse into despair. His predictions of shame and great upheaval are punctuated with scenes of future glory and exaltation; “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light” (9:2). Some of these scenes are called dual-prophecies. This kind of prophecy is revealed by a relatively soon-to-pass event, yet its complete fulfillment is in the distant future. (Isaiah 7:14 is a classic example: its immediate goal was only a few years away; yet its full completion lay 700 years in the future [Matthew 1:22-23].) In a sense, Isaiah stood above the smoke and anguished cries of his people’s destruction and saw in the distant future a great city on a hill—the city-state of Zion, the New Jerusalem, bathed in light, filled with peace, and governed by a King unlike any earthly king. This new King would come onto the scene as a living paradox: a seeming contradiction, one whom no one would recognize at first but afterward would be known to all the nations (52:13-15). “A Child will be born to us”—a Child with unprecedented majesty and honors: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6-7). This “root of Jesse” (11:1) or “Branch of the LORD” (4:2) would be nothing like what the people expected in a Redeemer, and yet He would far exceed the very best of Israel or Judah. “He was pierced through for our transgressions” (53:5), indicating that this Redeemer would suffer on behalf of Israel but would not succumb to Israel’s sins or unbelief. Instead, this “Branch” would become the embodiment of the *ideal* Israel—“My Servant Israel” (49:3) who would not only rescue the twelve tribes but would also bring salvation to all mankind (49:6).

With such vision and perspective, Isaiah lived in both worlds: the crumbling, deteriorating, and decadent Israel of his day; and the glorious, triumphant, and honorable “Israel” of the future. In-between these two visions laid an awful chasm of suffering and gloom—a wasteland of tears, despair,

and punishment. Israel would be humiliated for its sins; the Branch would be humiliated in order to *remove* those sins. Israel would be lifted out of its captivity but would remain a vassal state to one heathen government or another; the Branch would have His own government which would reign over all of Creation. Israel's only hope was in God's mercy and grace; the Branch would be the personification of this mercy and grace.

Question:

- 1.) In your opinion, what makes the study of Isaiah so relevant and appropriate today? Is Isaiah just “ancient history,” or are we still dealing with some of the same issues in the world *and* the brotherhood that are covered in this book? Please explain.

This transcendent, otherworldly kingdom of God represented more than the spiritual restoration of Israel. In a very real sense, this kingdom—depicted as the reign of Messiah—would become the “new order” which would supersede and outlast all the kingdoms of man. It would retain some of the characteristics of the “old” kingdom of Israel but would take those elements to a far higher level than was possible by mere men. Thus, the “new order” would:

- Begin in Jerusalem but would eventually encompass the earth.
- Be called the “new heavens and new earth”—a new kind of existence (65:17).
- Become the “New Jerusalem” but would not be a man-made city (Hebrews 11:16).
- Be filled with God's people but not only Israelites by birth.
- Be governed by a Great King whose throne would be in heaven, not on earth (John 18:36).
- Be out of reach of the corruption of secular or spiritual powers.
- Never be overthrown, experience decline, or end.
- Be spiritual in nature, and thus retain its citizenry even after the earthly deaths of its citizens.
- Remain intact, even after all other kingdoms—and the earth itself—are “shaken” and completely destroyed (see Hebrews 12:25-29 and Revelation 21:1-2).

This “new order” symbolizes the new manner in which believers have fellowship with God. No longer would men seek the Lord through law or ritual sacrifices. Instead, they would come to Him through the “once for all” sacrifice of Messiah (John 14:6, Hebrews 10:10). No longer would only