

**Key Passage: Isaiah 40:1**

Key Thought: God brings his exiles back to Jerusalem and moves them to rebuild the walls.¹

The gospel in Isaiah:

Some of the early Church fathers called Isaiah ‘the fifth Gospel.’

It is easy to see the gospel in Isaiah.

For starters, the New Testament quotes from or alludes to two books more than any other. One is the book of Psalms. The other is Isaiah.

Second, when Jesus preaches his first sermon in the synagogue in the gospel of Luke, you could easily call it the first “gospel” sermon in the New Testament. After all—he proclaims the good news of the Lord’s favor. And the text he uses for that sermon is from the book of Isaiah (Luke 4:16; citing Isaiah 61:1-2) and he even said “today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21)

¹ Note, key passages, key thoughts, and hook questions come from Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*. These notes are compiled from 4 principal sources. In addition to Michael Williams book, notes are also derived from Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

Third, when the book of Revelation lays out a grand vision of the final day—the end to which the good news points; the grand culmination of God’s project, it cites, alludes to, quotes, and borrow from imagery we find first in the book of Isaiah.

And there are three chapters in Isaiah cited in the NT more than any other Isaiah chapter. But I’m getting ahead of myself. Let’s back up.²

Isaiah lives in Jerusalem and says God will judge his people if they continue in their wicked ways. But he also offers a word of hope. God will keep his promises, he will send a future King like David, and God will bless the whole world through his covenant promise.

The book of Isaiah can easily be cut into three sections. We will call them Isaiah 1, Isaiah 2, and Isaiah 3. [On Isaiah storing up prophecies for later, see (See 8:16; 29:10-12; 30:8-9)]. If you read the commentaries, you’ll find lots of discussion about authorship, and dating, but I’m much more interested in theme. Isaiah 1 is from the beginning of chapter 1 to the beginning of chapter 40. Here Isaiah says that Jerusalem has come to be a stagnant place. It is the epitome of rebellion and idolatry. It has become in the eyes of God like Sodom and Gomorrah. But there is hope.

And here we come to the first of those “big” chapters quoted often in the New Testament. It’s chapter 6. Isaiah sees the Lord, he sees his own sin, and he sees his calling. Taking a hold on his calling, realizing the consequences of sin, but trusting in the power of the Lord, Isaiah warns kings while declaring a new, coming king (Is 7-9). There is a future for the people of God and that means a future for the city of God. Isaiah speaks of a new Jerusalem, a purified Jerusalem, and all the nations will stream to it (Isaiah 12).

Isaiah then predicts the fall of Assyria by Babylon and the fall of Babylon itself (14:15). He uses these stories (Jerusalem and Babylon) to speak of God’s reversal plans. He speaks of “the lofty city” that exalts itself above God and says it will be replaced with the New Jerusalem (chap 24-27).

Isaiah challenges the leaders of Jerusalem for seeking protection and alliance with Egypt. They literally “return to Egypt”! Isaiah says this is a bad idea—that they need to trust in God alone (chap 28-35). Isaiah speaks of Hezekiah’s rise and fall by the same

² I am indebted to the Bible Project on Isaiah. Much of the material that follows is a summary of their work.

means—rises by trust in God, and falls by alliance with Babylon (chap 36-39; see 2 Kings 24-25).

But one thing that jumps out to any reader is that, in Isaiah, judgment is never the final word.

So Isaiah 2 begins at the beginning of chapter 40 and runs through the end of chapter 55. The scene picks up 200 years later (in the 530's BC). It is an announcement of hope and comfort for Israel. God is bringing an end to the exile, and he calls his people home.

Here is the second of those “big” chapters cited often in the New Testament. It's chapter 40. “Comfort, o Comfort my people” says the Lord. The language of God who keeps his promises reminds us of the greatest story that defines our lives.

But the people don't hear God's voice of love and call; they think God is ignoring them (Isa 40:27). So God responds in what appears like a trial. He says God judged his people and used other nations to fulfill his plans, so that Israel would be God's servant to the nations. But the people have become rebellious. Yet God still will fulfill his plans (chap 40-48).

So God speaks of his true servant. His true servant is sent as a light to the nations—and it sounds like the Messianic King of chapters 9-11. However, he says his servant will be rejected and killed, and his death will be a sacrifice for sin (50-53). However, his servant will live again (53:10-12), and his death put people into a right relationship with God. You can become a servant by humility and repentance, or you can reject him and thus be “the wicked” (54-55).

Here is the third of those 3 “big chapters” cited often in the New Testament. It's Isaiah 53—the suffering servant. The New Testament applies this text to Jesus, and we begin to see the story in more depth as a result.

Isaiah 3 is the rest of the book, chapters 56-66. These speak of the servants inheriting God's kingdom in the new Jerusalem. They receive forgiveness and inherit a new creation where death and suffering are no more. And all nations are invited to be part of this covenant family (66).

Some lines of thought concerning the gospel in Isaiah:

(1) God's holiness demands justice and judgment; yet judgment is never God's final word.

God is holy (43:15)

- (2) God's people often mimic rebellion—everyone sinned (59:12) and sin separates (59:2); but God is faithful and acts in faithfulness regardless.
- (3) Israel failed to be what God called them to be; so God becomes the faithful servant himself, to deal with the sin issue (53:6) and to reconcile us to God (54-55)
- (4) We must seek his face (55:6)
- (5) The gospel was always about all nations, not just one.
 Creator of “the world” (Isa 17:7; 29:16; 54:5)
 Hope to the nations (Isa 19:16-25; 44:6, 24)
- (6) The hope that is grander than we can imagine (Isa 65-66)

Language about Jesus:

One God who is our savior (Isa 43:3; 45:15, 21), yet a son is given who shall be called Mighty God (Isa 9:6)

The coming king (Isaiah 9-11)

The suffering servant; absorbs the covenant's curses.

“The arm of the Lord” (Isa 53:1)—Jesus Christ.

A faithful “remnant” – is Jesus himself! We are “engrafted” into the Messiah and the deliverance he brings. Thus liberated to love God and neighbor.

God's people are called to reflect God's heart. We thus become a light to the nations, holding out hope.

“Message: God is very great; astonishingly, his mercy is just as great!” (Kelly Kopic)