

Introduction to Isaiah

The Man and the Book

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The Plan of the Major Old Testament book studies

These notes are not intended to be textual commentaries of the Old Testament books. They serve as a proposed *outline guide* for the student or teacher in *preparing personal studies, or for teaching and study notes*. The notes are from the Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedia referenced below in the Bibliography as research references for further study. Much of the information in this lesson is edited from the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* and my own lecture notes.

Bibliography

Tyndale Bible Dictionary.
Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible.
Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary.

Preface

This study is not intended to be a critical commentary on the Book of Isaiah. It is a *guided study* of the *prophetic book of Isaiah*, its *form* and *literary role* in the life of Israel, its *theology* and importance to the *Christology* of the New Testament, and an introduction to the suffering service of all believers in God.

It will proceed in two parts, 1) The theological *history* of Isa 1-39, 2) The theological *hope* through *chosen servants* of God, Isa 40-66.

The second part can be divided into two sections, a) The leadership of chosen *servants* of God, Isa 40-44, and b) An *eschatological hope* under God's chosen servant Messiah, Isa 45-66.

The purpose of these notes is to give you an overview of Isaiah, to provide you with a *historical* and *theological context* of each book. You can then follow the chapter breakout sections as the framework of your study or class.

Bibliography

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Isaiah, the Person

The *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* reads, “Isaiah was an Eighth-century BCE prophet during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; author of the biblical book of Isaiah. Isaiah was the son of Amoz (Is 1:1) and may have been a relative of King Amaziah. *Growing up in Jerusalem, Isaiah received the best education the capital could supply.* He was also deeply knowledgeable about people, and he became the political and religious counselor of the nation. He had easy access to the monarchs and seems to have been the historiographer at the Judean court for several reigns (2 Chr 26:22; 32:32).

Isaiah’s wife is referred to as a prophetess (Is 8:3) and they had at least two sons, Shear-jashub (Isa 7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa 8:3). Isaiah’s customary attire was a prophet’s clothing, that is, sandals and a garment of goat’s hair or sackcloth. At one point during his ministry, the Lord commanded Isaiah to go naked and barefoot for a period of three years, (wearing only a loincloth) (Isa 20:2–6). This must have been humiliating in a society that measured status by meticulous dress codes.

Isaiah worked to reform social and political wrongs. Even the highest members of society did not escape his censure. He berated soothsayers and denounced wealthy, influential people who ignored the responsibilities of their position. He exhorted the masses to be obedient rather than indifferent to God’s covenant. *He rebuked kings for their willfulness and lack of concern.*

Isaiah’s writings express a deep awareness of God’s majesty and holiness. The prophet denounced not only Canaanite idolatry but also the religious observances of his own people that were external ceremonies only and lacking sincerity (1:10–17; 29:13). He preached impending judgment on the idolatrous Judeans, declaring that only a righteous remnant would survive (6:13).

Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah, the “peaceful prince,” and the ruler of God’s kingdom (Isa 11:1–11; cf. 9:6–7). He also depicted this Messiah as a suffering, obedient servant (Isa 53:3–12). Isaiah was preeminent among the prophets for the variety and grandeur of his imagery. His imagination produced forceful, brilliant figures of speech.

Isaiah prophesied during the last three decades of the northern kingdom of Israel but because he lived in Jerusalem, in Judah, he made little direct reference to Israel. However, when that kingdom fell, Judah lay open to conquest by Assyria. Isaiah advised King Ahaz to avoid foreign entanglements and depend on God to protect his people. Ignoring that advice, Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria.

It was Hezekiah, Ahaz’s pious son, who sought to remove Judah from this dangerous situation. When the Assyrians under Sennacherib approached Jerusalem, Isaiah inspired Hezekiah and the Judeans to rely on the Lord for the city’s defense, and “the angel of the Lord” destroyed Sennacherib’s army (37:36–38), securing a short period of peace for Hezekiah and the Judeans.

*Hebrew prophecy reached its pinnacle with Isaiah, who was greatly esteemed in both OT and NT times. One indication of that esteem is the collection of apocryphal literature associated with his name.”*¹

Isaiah, the Book

Most scholars recognize that there appears to be two prophetic sections in the book of Isaiah, Isa 1-39 and Isa 40-66.

The Historical era of Isaiah - Israel and Judah

During Isaiah’s fifty year ministry the *Kingdom of Solomon* split into two kingdoms, *Israel, the Northern Kingdom*, and *Judah, the Southern Kingdom*. Failed leadership, greed, idolatry, loss of faith in God, brought the downfall of *Solomon’s great kingdom*.

¹ *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale House Publishers, p. 642.

The history of Israel and Judea/Judah ca. 740-687 BCE was tragic! Repeated *failures in faithful leadership, pagan national conflict, and repeated failure of faith in God, captivity, and idolatry*, destroyed the heart of God's kingdom.

Paul explains at **Rom 10:1-21** that Isaiah was not successful in getting Israel to repent and return to God for help. **Rom 10:16-21**, "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"*"¹⁷ *So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.*

¹⁸ *But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."*

¹⁹ *Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."*²⁰ *Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."*

²¹ *But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."*

Isaiah informs us that his prophetic activity took place during the reign of *five kings* of the *Southern Kingdom of Judah*. This would be during a fifty year period ca. 740-687 BCE.

Isa 1:1. "*The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*"

As a result of Israel's and Judea's repeated idolatry, loss of faith in God, and turning to the nations of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia for help, God first sent Israel, the Northern Kingdom into *Assyrian captivity*, 734 BCE, from which he gave no promise of restoration. Babylon conquered Assyria in 612 BCE and then attacked Judea, destroying Jerusalem and the Temple, 586 BCE. Babylon was defeated by Cyrus, King of Persia ca. 539 BCE.

Through the prophets of the time, Isaiah, Jeremia, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others, God promised a restoration of Judea to their home and Jerusalem which he eventually accomplished under a decree of Cyrus, King of Persia, ca. 539 BCE. The prophets *Ezra* and *Nehemia* cover this era of *restoration*.

The First Section, Isa 1-39, describes Israel's "historically" negative religious situation

The bulk of the book, **Isa 1-39**, records God's prophecies against several kingdoms of the Eastern Mediterranean region indicating God's displeasure of these kingdoms for their pagan polytheistic religions and opposition to God's Kingdom, the *Kingdom of Israel*. These kingdoms include Assyria, Syria, Babylon, Ethiopia, Egypt, Moab, Edom, Tyre, Israel, and Judah.

The Second Section, Isa 40-66, prophesies a positive "eschatological theological" message

Isa 40-66, presents a challenging more encouraging message of *comfort and assurance, the restoration of a new Kingdom of Israel, an eschatological messianic Kingdom* under an *exalted servant who, as a messianic priest king would not appear to men as exalted but as a "marred person" whose appearance and message would not be pleasing to the people.*

The Suffering Servant Explanation

This pericope is challenging since it inserts the concept of a "*suffering*" *servant* into the description of the Messiah's suffering as the "*Suffering Servant*" in an interpretation of Isa 53.

Let me clarify the point that in this discussion I am not in any way challenging, diminishing, or lessening the horrific suffering Jesus endured leading up to, and in his crucifixion. My point is that the *servant* of Isa 53 is not defined as the “*Suffering Servant*” in either the Old or New Testaments. This expression is derived by reading Jesus’ horrific suffering back into Isa 53 and not out of Isa 53. It is a credible definition of the suffering Jesus endured on the cross but in Isa 40-53 the servant is defined as Israel, Judah, or the nation, even all prophets, who will suffer greatly in their service to God as His *watchmen*!

This *suffering* term has produced an unfortunate interpretation of the *servant songs or poems* of Isa 53. Because of this, the tendency for many is to read the New Testament suffering theology back into Isa 53.

Isaiah does not use the term suffering which likewise does not appear in the New Testament appended to Jesus’ death and resurrection. The common tendency is to read Isa53 as a prophetic prediction of the details of Jesus’ crucifixion!

What occurred in the New Testament use of Isa 53 was Matthew, Mark, and Luke confirming Jesus as *God’s prophesied messianic king* by pointing back to Isa 53 and explaining that Jesus fulfilled *everything that had been prophesied in Isaiah about such a servant messiah*. The Gospel writers, fully aware of the dynamic of *typological* and *midrashic* prophecy, were proclaiming that Jesus was the fulfillment of all of the Isaiah servant themes.

Christian biblical theology should read back from the New Testament to the Old Testament, not from the Old Testament into the New Testament. The New Testament confirms that Jesus was the *messiah king* prophesied by God *by showing that he rightfully fulfilled what the Old Testament prophets explained about a coming eschatological messianic king*.

That Jesus suffered for our sins is obviously a major theme of New Testament theology, but the *term suffering* was not appended *in Scripture* to the coming messianic king in either the Old or New Testament!

This might be a minor hermeneutic point to some, but to a biblical theologian it becomes an interesting expression of an inductive biblical hermeneutic!

A whole theology has been built around a term that is not found in Scripture leading to an unfortunate prophetic theology that moves *from the New Testament* to the Old Testament rather than the New Testament *from the Old Testament*!

The Author/Authors of the two major sections of Isaiah

Scholars with a more liberal persuasion propose that the two sections of Isaiah were written by two different prophets, Isaiah and a Deutero-Isaiah. The second Deutero-Isaiah, might represent a school of Isaiah disciple scribes who summarized Isaiah’s more promising prophecies of a *future messianic kingdom*.

It is suggested that the earlier section, Isa 1-39, was written by Isaiah, ca. 740-687 BCE, with the second section ca. 435 BCE, possibly written in Babylon by a school or group of Isaiah disciples.

While we recognize the intriguing possibilities of this “two author” proposal, we do not believe the arguments in favor of this are that persuasive. We prefer to hold to *the unity of Isaiah* written in two stages of Isaiah’s ministry, by the one Isaiah.

Isaiah is so complex that some scholars have even attempted to identify *three sections* possibly addressing *three different contexts* written by *three authors, Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trio-Isaiah*! Resorting to three Isaiahs is not a felicitous solution to authorship, but does reflect on the different historical and theological emphases of Isaiah.

I prefer the proposal of Brevard Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary, canonical analysis*, that we should work with the one *unified Isaiah tradition* that has been available since at least the Greek *Septuagint*, 270 BCE, and also found in the *Great Isaiah Scroll*, ca. 100 CE, of the Scroll Museum in Jerusalem, the *Dead Sea Scroll*.

Nevertheless, disregarding the confusing “conclusions” of authorship, the text of Isaiah can reflect *three related theological messages*.

Proposed Isaiah schematic

Isaiah Judgments, *Isa 1-39* which discusses *God’s judgment on sinful nations*, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, *et al*, including Israel and Judah, for ignoring his *watchmen warnings*.

The Servant poems, *Isa 40-55*², which offer comfort and salvation through a *restored eschatological kingdom* for those who trust in God. In this section we find the “Suffering Servant” songs or poems.

A Second Exodus theme, *Isa 56-66*³, offers instructions and comments relating to “*second exodus*” from Babylonian exile and return to Jerusalem.

Topical Analysis of the Book of Isaiah⁴

First Volume of Rebuke and Promise

Isa 1:1-6:13. Isaiah accuses the people of Judah, charging them with sin, rebellion, loss of faith, and disobedience to God. He exhorts them to repent and promises forgiveness, promising them severe, unlimited judgment if they do not repent and return to God. He prophesies about a glorious future for Judah in the last days, an eschatological kingdom. He outlines the sins of the people and in a parable of a vineyard predicts an invasion of enemies, and explains his own call and compassionate ministry.

Volume of Immanuel, God’s Coming to Ahaz

Isa 7:1-12:6. Isaiah prophesies the coming of a child named *Immanuel*. *Immanuel* means “*God with us*,” a reminder of *God’s presence*, and call for faith in *God*. In this miraculous event God speaks of the impending Assyrian invasion and of the birth of a child to a young woman (*alma*, *parthenos*, a “*virgin*”) as a sign of the impending invasion, of *God’s presence*, and of two other signs related to the names of two sons, *Shear-jashub* and *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*. God is telling Ahaz of the coming judgment on Israel, Assyrian invasion, but that God would be with them if they would repent and trust God for his help.

Volume of Burdens upon Heathen Nations

Isa 13:1-23:18. Isaiah prophesies of the fall of Babylon; the defeat of the Assyrians; Palestine to have worse oppressors; Moab to be judged; Syria (Damascus) to become a heap; Israel to be doomed; Ethiopia to be trodden down; a confused and fearful Egypt to be taken captive; Sennacherib to invade Judah; the visions of Edom and Arabia; Jerusalem to be overcome and removed; Tyre to be overthrown and restored.

Second Volume of Rebuke and Promise

Isa 24:1-27:13. The whole world to be judged. The song of praise for judgment. It is the righteous God who must judge and whose mercy brings salvation.

Volume of Woes upon the Unbelievers of Israel

Isa 28:1-33:24. Isaiah prophesies that Judah’s alliance with Egypt is death; it is a shame. Egypt itself will fall. Jerusalem itself will fall, but will be restored. Her salvation is from God.

Third Volume of Rebuke

Isa 34:1-35:10. The destruction of the hostile nations is prophesied, and the restoration of Zion (seat of *God’s reign over Judah*). The desert will blossom, the sick made well, the ground will bring forth fruit, the captives will return singing, a restoration of *God’s people to Jerusalem*.

² The Deutero-Isaiah servant songs or poems.

³ The supposed Trito-Isaiah section.

⁴ Based on *The Harper Study Bible*, 1962, but edited and corrected where necessary.

The Volume of Hezekiah, the King of Israel/Judea

Isa 36:1-39:8. Sennacherib, king of Assyria's invasion. Isaiah prophesies his defeat. A Babylonian captivity prophesied. Hezekiah recovers from his sickness and foolishly displays his wealth to the king of Babylon.

Volume of Comfort and Assurance

Isa 40-66:24. The deliverance of God's people announced. God has the power to save his people. The agent of God's deliverance is God's *Servant*. *Israel is God's servant nation*. Babylon will fall so the people of God can return from captivity. Cyrus, king of Persia is also an agent of God who will bring about God's deliverance of his people to Jerusalem. A coming *messianic servant king* is described as a king through grieving hurtful service for God. The coming servant king is pictured followed by a description of his reign and kingdom. God's messianic eschatological kingdom will be permanent; all men are invited to enter God's kingdom. Rules and requirements of the kingdom are explained. There will be judgment upon the foes of the kingdom. There will be a final eschatological sifting of all men in a final judgment.

The Historical Background to the Theology of Isaiah 1-39

Isaiah depicts Judah as a sinful nation that without God lies desolate for its loss of faith and rebellion

The following citation from **Isa 1:2-9** describes the message of Isaiah well. I could have included the whole chapter but encourage you to read the remainder of the chapter! *It is devastating!*

*“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the Lord has spoken:*

*“Sons have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.*

³ *The ox knows its owner,
and the ass its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people does not understand.”*

⁴ *Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the Lord,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
they are utterly estranged.*

⁵ *Why will you still be smitten,
that you continue to rebel?
The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.*

⁶ *From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores
and bleeding wounds;
they are not pressed out, or bound up,
or softened with oil.*

⁷ *Your country lies desolate,*

*your cities are burned with fire;
in your very presence
aliens devour your land;
it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens.*

⁸ *And the daughter of Zion is left
like a booth in a vineyard,
like a lodge in a cucumber field,
like a besieged city.*

⁹ *If the Lord of hosts
had not left us a few survivors,
we should have been like Sodom,
and become like Gomorrah.”*

In this long section of judgment there is, however, a glimmer of hope for the far distant future, an eschatological king and kingdom is predicted. New Testament theology describes this as the kingdom of Christ which began in Jesus’ ministry, Matt 12:28 and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Acts 1, 2.

Isa 2:1-4. The mountain of the house of the Lord—an eschatological kingdom

“The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² *It shall come to pass in the latter days [the later days, ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις in the Greek Septuagint and New Testament, Acts 2:17, the eschatological days.]*

*that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,*

³ *and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”*

*For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

⁴ *He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.”*

Themes of judgment and hope

The remainder of this section, **Isa 1-39**, alternates between *judgments on Judah for its repeated sins*, interspersed with *promises of redemption based on a return of faith in God*.

The Theological Theme of Isaiah 40-66 - The *Servant Songs*

Scripture indicates that *God's prophets* were his *servants* or *watchers*⁵, proclaiming His message of faithfulness and judgment on sinners *who* had opposed his purpose for Israel.

We notice in **Isa 40** that *Isaiah* is more precise in **assigning servant role** to God's kingdom people, *Jerusalem, Jacob, and Israel*.

Isa 40:9, "Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, **herald of good tidings**;
lift up your voice with strength,
O **Jerusalem**, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Behold your God!"

Isa 41:8, 9, "But you, **Israel, my servant, Jacob**, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "**You are my servant,**
I have chosen you and not cast you off;"

Isa 42:1-6, "**Behold my servant**, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him,
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

² He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

³ a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴ He will not fail or be discouraged
till he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his law.

⁵ Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread forth the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶ "**I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,**
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations;"

Isa 44:1, 2, "But now hear, **O Jacob my servant,**
Israel whom I have chosen!

² Thus says the Lord who made you,

⁵ Dan 4:13-23, "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, **a watcher**, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ He cried aloud and said thus, 'Hew down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches ...' The theme of watchers as in 1 Enoch defines the *watchers* as *angelic beings* who proclaim God's warnings to people.

*who formed you from the womb and will help you:
Fear not, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun⁶ whom I have chosen.”*

As we follow this servant theme in Isaiah we see that poetically the *prophets, Jerusalem, Israel, and Judea* are personified as *eschatological messianic servants* who would complete what Israel failed to do, speak God’s word of *judgment and redemption* to God’s people and the nations.

It is no surprise that our New Testament writers, Christological disciples of Jesus and themselves proclaimers of *messianic redemption*, would describe Jesus as the “*typological or midrashic fulfillment*” of the *Isaiah’s suffering servant of God*. We will follow this servant theme again at *Isa 40-66, the Servant Poem section*.

Reading and Interpreting Isaiah

Before the reader gets into interpreting Isaiah, the book, one should ask “*What did God and Isaiah have in mind?*” “*What was going on in the life of Israel and Judea that caused God to send Isaiah on such a “mission Impossible?”*”

A major problem Christians have when reading Isaiah is what has been described as *theological inconsistency*! Some interpret *Isa 1-39 and Isa 56-66 historically* in the context of *Israel/Judah judgments and restoration*, much as *Ezekiel* a contemporary of *Isaiah* did, but *then interpret Isa 40-55 Christologically*, removing it from the historical context of this section of *Isaiah*!

I fully recognize that, like our Gospel writer theologians, we cannot escape the Christological implications of *Isa 40-66*, especially since we have an additional landscape lens, the New Testament, through which we read the Bible.

But, go back to BCE 700-680, and read the pericope in the context of *Isaiah and Judea* and the best you could see is a *promising eschatological servant* who would suffer for his proclamation of God’s future redemption. *The human Christ figure or image would not be the lens through which you would read this text!*

However, I believe we do *Isaiah*, and ourselves, a disservice if we examine *Isa 40-66* as a prophetic announcement of *Jesus’ messianic incarnation and suffering*. It certainly was a prophetic pronouncement of a *future eschatological servant of the kingdom of God* which would later result from *God’s suffering servant’s image Isaiah⁷ and Isa 40*.

My “negative observation” does not deny that *Isa 40-55* has significant implications for the New Testament narrative of *Jesus’ death as a suffering servant*. The New Testament writers were serious about establishing *Jesus’ suffering ministry* in the context of the major Old and New Testament theology. Their point being that *the kingdom of God comes through much suffering*, but that it also offers unbelievable eternal rewards, *Matt 5:10, 11*, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.”

“*Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

Paul and Barnabas warned new disciples at *Derbe*, “*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God,*” *Acts 14:22*.

Some Scriptures, *Isa 1-39*, are normally correctly read through the eyes of *the original historical people*, the *Israel and Judah*. For this reading the message of *Isaiah* is one *coming from God through Isaiah*

⁶ Jeshurun, poetic name of Israel.

⁷ We will later examine this difficulty of identifying who God or Isaiah had in mind at different stages of the servant prophecies of *Isaiah*.

to the people of Judah who had historically lacked faith in and disobeyed God. In this approach we correctly read Isaiah through Jewish, Israel/Judah, lenses.

When we read Isa 40-66, we often change lenses and read Isaiah through a Christological lens. We see this block of Isaiah as a Christian message about Jesus, refocusing the message from Judah, to Jesus!

In this discussion we *focus on Jesus' suffering and death as the suffering servant of God, and not on Israel's suffering service to God* which was the *primarily focus of Isaiah*. We *midrashically* see Isaia predicting Israel as a type of suffering servant whose ministry would be fulfilled 450 years later by Jesus. Our assumption is that Isaiah was predicting the suffering service of Jesus, but not of Israel and Judah.

Our Christological interpretation of the text is helpful in the larger *eschatological framework of Jesus and the kingdom*, but not in the primary context of Isaiah! Jesus did fulfill what Isaiah was predicting, but we learn this from the New Testament, not from Isaiah! From Isaiah we learn that God has always had faithful servants who would speak his word, most of who the Jews killed, **Matt 23:37-39**, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!** How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!*"³⁸ *Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.*"³⁹ *For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'*"

Isaiah's message was that even in the struggles of Israel, the tragic affairs of Assyrian and Babylonian captivity and exile, God still has faithful servants who will speak his "watcher" message of judgment and redemption. *So, Israel, in your present predicament, keep your faith on God, for God still has future words of encouragement for you!*

Of the *first block of material, Isa 1-39* we should ask "what does Isaiah and Judah teach us as Christians—*keep your faith in God and obey God no matter what the cost!*

Of the *second block of material, Isa 40-66*, we should ask, "what was Isaiah teaching Israel, and what does this teach Christians as servants of God, *we follow Jesus our suffering savior as suffering servants of the kingdom of Jesus*. Jesus is the capstone of all the faithful suffering servants in God's ministry.

The closing section of Isa 55-66 explains the faithful service of God's people. God will save his people and his kingdom which will include the nations! However, it will cost your suffering!

Paul, Col 1:23-24, "*And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,*"²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him,*"²³ ***provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.***²⁴ ***Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.***"

The Servants of Isaiah

"*Servant of the Lord*, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible"

"The *servants* referenced in Isa 50, the *marred servant* of Isa 53, are most likely intended to refer to some leader, or leaders in Jerusalem (perhaps Zerubbabel) who struggled with the Jews in rebuilding the Temple and walls of Jerusalem before the arrival of authorities sent by Cyrus, the king of Persia, who oversaw Israel's return to Judea, 539 BCE. Ezra and Nehemiah provide background to this restoration, ca, 453 BCE. *Whoever the sufferer was he was a harbinger of suffering, restoration and renewal, which renewal came through many struggles.*

It becomes obvious when reading the New Testament that *the theological theme of Jesus* in the New Testament writers and theologians was intended to demonstrate that the servant prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus' messianic ministry!

This identification should take nothing away from the model or symbol of God's appointed *messiah* who *patiently bore suffering even to death*. This theme meant much for New Testament Christology. The importance of Isa 53 lies in showing God's attitude toward, and use of an innocent sufferer, to accomplish peace and healing for the community. God was prepared to regard the death of the *servant messiah*, Jesus, to provide a vicarious propitiation for the sins of the group, "a guilt offering."

The servant of the Lord in specialized biblical usage points to a Messiah, at the same time alluding to Isaiah's central message. Though he, with others, employs *servant* with a range of significations, Isaiah composed some passages known as the Servant Songs. These distinctive sections of his book are distinguishable in content, *but they cannot be extracted from the surrounding context without disrupting the flow of prophecy. Isaiah's focus is on a future Messiah-servant.*

None can question the NT's unanimous messianic interpretation of Isaiah's servant, nor its application of this understanding to Jesus Christ. The more debatable issue is how to discern a definitive messianic intent in Isaiah's prophecy itself. Most are agreed that Duhm's 1892 commentary on Isaiah correctly highlighted *four servant songs*: 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12. The last of these is "foolproof," but some would include verses 5–7 in chapter 42, verse 7 in 49, and 10, 11 in 50. Should one add Isaiah 61:1, cited by Jesus Christ himself at Nazareth (Lk 4:16–21)? V 2, p 1928. Though the title *servant* is not repeated here, the theme is unmistakable.

Since Isaiah 49:3 addresses Israel as "my servant," some scholars read a *collective* idea into all the songs. Others find a *cultic* significance, comparing the Babylonian Tammuz myth. Various *individualistic* views suggest some unknown contemporary of Isaiah (or "Deutero-Isaiah"), a choice from known historical figures (e.g., Jeremiah, Cyrus, Zerubbabel, or the prophet himself), or the coming Messiah. The latter was the predominant Christian view until the end of the last century. The *synthetic* interpretation is an attempt to understand a development, progressing from a collective figure to a clear individualization in the fourth song. The movement is personification to person, corporate personality to messianic Savior.

Isaiah sets the stage for a Messiah-servant's appearance by introducing Immanuel in chapter 7, divine Prince in 9, and the Branch in 11. The shock to Israel of a suffering servant-king is eased in this series of songs, where their own corporate struggles (Is 49:4) typify Israel's (and the world's) redeemer. Oscillation between nation (or remnant) and individual is between type and ideal anti-type. Franz Delitzsch suggests a pyramid, with national Israel as the broad base (42:19), spiritual Israel in the center (41:8–10), and Messiah at the apex.

A "servant Christology" pervades Acts (3:13, 26; 4:27, 30), and 1 Peter, with numerous allusions in the Gospels. Jesus himself quotes Isaiah 53 explicitly only in Luke 22:37, but he seems to allude to it in Mark 10:45; 14:24; and possibly 9:12. Peter not only emphasizes vicarious, redemptive suffering (1 Pt 2:21–25; 3:18) but seems to *highlight the theme of Isaiah 53 in summing up OT prophecy* (1:11) as predicting "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." Paul includes these elements (1 Cor 15:3; Phil 2:6–11; cf. Rom 4:25; 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21), and John's "Lamb of God" title derives from Isaiah 53:7 no less than from the entire sacrificial system.⁸

Christianity and the "Suffering" Servant theme

Jesus taught his disciples that *greatness in the kingdom* must come through *suffering service for the kingdom* just as *he would suffer as the "sacrificial" atoning servant of God*.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Matt 26:39–42 Jesus prayed, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*"⁴⁰ *And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?"⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may*

⁸ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J., *Servant of the Lord*, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 2, pp. 1927–1928.

not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, **“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.”**

Jesus’ disciples would need to drink the same cup that he was to drink, referring to his suffering and crucifixion. In Jesus terminology *drinking the cup* meant suffering and dying.

Jesus knew and understood the message and meaning of the *Suffering Servant Song* of Isa 40-66. His ministry was a fulfillment of every servant of God who had suffered in some form for the kingdom. Paul at **Col 1:24** applied the theology of that song to his own service. However, for Paul it had become a song of victory! The ‘Suffering Service’ of the *messiah* was a message of conquering **“²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”**

Paul proclaimed and celebrated the victory of suffering and dying with Jesus at **Rom 8:35-39**, **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”**³⁶ As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

An “Isaiah Word” from the Apostle Paul

1 Cor 15:20-24; 51-58

1 Cor 15:20-24. *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power ...*

1 Cor 15:51-58. *“Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ *“O death, where is thy victory?*

O death, where is thy sting?” ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*