PrayerLifeMatters Bible Study

ISAIAH

CONTEXT, OUTLINE, READING PLAN AND PRAYER

Free study guide | Scripture quotations NKJV
prayerlifematters.com

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Isaiah is one of the richest books in all of Scripture and one of the most quoted in the New Testament. It can also feel overwhelming. This guide gives you the history behind the book, a map of its sections, the themes to watch for, a four week reading plan, reflection questions and a way to turn what you read into prayer. All dates are approximate. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

HOW TO READ THE PROPHETS

The prophetic books are not arranged like a diary. Oracles spoken years apart sit next to each other. Historical narratives interrupt poetry. Later chapters may return to earlier crises. Jeremiah especially mixes theme and history: temple sermons, personal laments, foreign oracles, and the story of the siege are grouped for meaning, not always by calendar order.

Read for the voice of the Lord first. Then ask:

- Who is speaking, and to whom?
- What covenant faithfulness or unfaithfulness is in view?
- What judgment is announced, and what hope remains for a remnant?
- What prayer does this awaken in you for the church today?

CONTEXT LEADING UP TO ISAIAH

FROM UNITED KINGDOM TO DIVIDED KINGDOM

After David and Solomon, the kingdom splits (approximately 931 BC).

- **Northern kingdom: Israel** (ten tribes), capital at Samaria. First king: Jeroboam.
- **Southern kingdom: Judah** (Judah and Benjamin), capital at Jerusalem. Davidic kings continue.

Israel falls into calf worship and political chaos. Judah keeps the temple and the Davidic line, yet often copies the north's idolatry. Prophets rise in both kingdoms: Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea in the north; Joel, Micah, Isaiah and others in the south (dating for Joel varies).

THE ASSYRIAN STORM

In the 700s BC, Assyria becomes the great threat in the Near East.

- Under Tiglath Pileser III (approximately 745 to 727 BC), Assyria expands hard.
- Ahaz of Judah becomes an Assyrian vassal when Syria and Israel press him (Isaiah 7).
- Damascus falls (approximately 732 BC).
- Samaria falls (approximately 722 BC). The northern kingdom ends. Exile begins for Israel.

Judah alone remains. Many in Jerusalem wrongly conclude that the temple and the Davidic throne make them untouchable. Isaiah will confront that false security while still promising a holy remnant and a coming King.

KINGS OF JUDAH IN ISAIAH'S DAY

Isaiah's ministry spans (approximately 740 to 685 BC), under:

- **Uzziah** (also called Azariah): long reign, relative strength, then pride and leprosy.
- **Jotham**: generally better, yet the people keep high places.
- **Ahaz**: faithless alliance with Assyria; child sacrifice; temple compromise.
- **Hezekiah**: reformer who trusts the Lord when Sennacherib surrounds Jerusalem (approximately 701 BC).
- **Manasseh** (early years overlap traditional late Isaiah): deep idolatry (tradition also places Isaiah's martyrdom in this era).

EMPIRES ON THE HORIZON

- **Assyria** dominates Isaiah 1 to 39.
- **Babylon** appears at the hinge of chapters 36 to 39 and fills the horizon of chapters 40 to 66.
- **Persia** (Cyrus) is named as the Lord's instrument of return (Isaiah 44 to 45).
- Later, for Jeremiah's generation, Assyria collapses (Nineveh falls approximately 612 BC), Egypt contends briefly, and **Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar** takes Judah into exile (Jerusalem falls approximately 586 BC).

Isaiah stands at the Assyrian crisis and already sees Babylon and restoration beyond it. Jeremiah stands at the Babylonian crisis and must preach surrender under judgment while still announcing a new covenant.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH: BIG SHAPE

Isaiah means “Yahweh is salvation.” The book has sixty six chapters. A clear literary turn comes after chapter 39.

Section	Chapters	Tone and setting
Book of Judgment and Hope	1 to 39	Judah under Assyria; sin, remnant, Immanuel, nations, historical bridge
Book of Comfort	40 to 66	Comfort for the exiled and the returning; Servant of the Lord; new Zion

Many teachers note that chapters 1 to 39 feel like the Old Testament’s weight of judgment, and chapters 40 to 66 open into comfort and redemption. Hold the book as one prophetic word. The shift in audience and tone is real: chapter 40 speaks as if Babylonian exile is the present wound, and the Lord is coming to restore.

SELECTED NKJV PASSAGES

Isaiah 1:18

> “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”

Isaiah 6:3

> “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!”

Isaiah 6:8

> Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah 9:6

> For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 40:31

> But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 53:5

> But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

KEY THEMES TO WATCH FOR

- The holiness of the Lord of hosts
- Rebellion of a covenant people who keep empty religion
- A preserved remnant
- Trust in the Lord rather than in Egypt, Assyria, or horses and chariots
- The coming King from David’s line
- The Servant of the Lord who suffers and justifies many
- Nations streaming to Zion
- New creation hope

ISAIAH 1 TO 39: JUDGMENT, REMNANT, AND THE ASSYRIAN CRISIS

1. INDICTMENT OF JUDAH (CHAPTERS 1 TO 5)

Opening lawsuit: heaven and earth are called as witnesses. Judah is a rebellious child. Sacrifices without justice offend the Lord. Zion can be redeemed, yet unrepentant rebellion invites fire.

Practical note: chapter 1 is a deep well for repentance prayers. Chapter 2 lifts the mountain of the Lord's house. Chapter 5's vineyard song names fruit the Lord sought and did not find.

2. THE BOOK OF IMMANUEL (CHAPTERS 6 TO 12)

Chapter 6: throne room call in the year King Uzziah died. Holiness, cleansing coal, sending. Hardened hearing is part of the commission, yet a stump remains: the holy seed.

Chapters 7 to 8: Ahaz refuses to trust. The sign of Immanuel ("God with us") is given in crisis. Chapter 9: the Child and the increase of His government. Chapter 11: the Branch from Jesse, Spirit filled rule, peace among creation. Chapter 12: songs of salvation.

Practical note: this block is gold for prophetic prayer over leadership, trust, and the reign of Christ.

3. ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS (CHAPTERS 13 TO 23)

Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Jerusalem (the "Valley of Vision"), and Tyre. The Lord of hosts rules the nations. Judah must not hitch her hope to foreign alliances.

Practical note: read slowly. These chapters train you to pray for nations without flattery and without despair.

4. ISAIAH'S "LITTLE APOCALYPSE" (CHAPTERS 24 TO 27)

Worldwide judgment and worldwide hope. Cities fall. The Lord swallows up death. A song in Judah. Leviathan judged. Israel gathered one by one.

Practical note: hold both severity and joy. This is throne room language for end time prayer without sensationalism.

5. WOES AND TRUE SALVATION (CHAPTERS 28 TO 33)

Woes on drunk leaders, scoffers, and those who trust Egypt. “In returning and rest you shall be saved” is the heartbeat. Assyria is a rod in God’s hand, then is itself cut down. A King will reign in righteousness.

6. JUDGMENT AND JOY ROAD (CHAPTERS 34 TO 35)

Chapter 34: judgment on the nations (Edom in view). Chapter 35: the wilderness blossoms; the Way of Holiness; everlasting joy upon the heads of the ransomed.

7. HISTORICAL BRIDGE (CHAPTERS 36 TO 39)

These chapters parallel 2 Kings 18 to 20.

- Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem.
- Hezekiah prays; Isaiah prophesies; the Lord delivers.
- Hezekiah’s illness and recovery.
- Hezekiah shows his treasures to Babylon’s envoys. Isaiah announces that Babylon will one day carry it all away.

This is the hinge. Deliverance from Assyria is real. Exile to Babylon is also real. Chapter 40 answers that wound with comfort.

ISAIAH 40 TO 66: COMFORT, SERVANT, AND NEW CREATION

1. COMFORT AND THE FOLLY OF IDOLS (CHAPTERS 40 TO 48)

“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” God dwarfs the nations. Idols are nothing. Israel is chosen, redeemed, formed. Cyrus is named as the Lord’s shepherd to open the way home. Babylon’s gods bow. Stubborn Israel is still called to listen.

Practical note: chapter 40 is soaking worship Scripture. Chapters 44 to 46 sharpen prayers against idolatry in the modern heart.

2. THE SERVANT OF THE LORD (CHAPTERS 49 TO 55)

The Servant restores Israel and becomes a light to the Gentiles. He is obedient, struck, yet vindicated. The great Servant Song of 52:13 to 53:12 shows substitution: He bears iniquity; many are justified. Chapter 54 expands Zion’s fruitfulness. Chapter 55 invites the thirsty: seek the Lord while He may be found.

Practical note: this is the center of the gospel in Isaiah. Read 53 on your knees before you turn it into teaching.

3. THE SERVANTS INHERIT THE KINGDOM (CHAPTERS 56 TO 66)

Foreigners and eunuchs who keep covenant are welcomed. True fasting is justice and mercy. Sin still separates, yet the Redeemer comes to Zion. Zion's glory rises. The Spirit anointed herald proclaims good news to the poor (61). Watchmen pray until Jerusalem is a praise in the earth. Final chapters hold judgment, remnant, and new heavens and a new earth.

Practical note: chapters 58, 60 to 62, and 65 to 66 feed intercession for revival, justice, and the church's witness among the nations.

WHERE ISAIAH LEADS NEXT

After Hezekiah, Judah sinks under Manasseh's idolatry, recovers briefly under Josiah's reform (approximately 640 to 609 BC), then collapses through Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Babylon replaces Assyria. Deportations begin (approximately 605 and 597 BC). Jerusalem and the temple fall (approximately 586 BC).

Isaiah had already named the Babylonian future. Jeremiah must live it. Where Isaiah saw Sennacherib turned back, Jeremiah must tell a temple proud city that this time the Lord will not spare the city if they refuse to repent and submit to Babylon as His instrument of judgment.

When you finish Isaiah, continue with the PrayerLifeMatters Jeremiah Study Guide.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Chapters 1 to 12

1. In Isaiah 1, what does the Lord say about worship that continues while injustice is ignored? Where could that be true of me?
2. What changed in Isaiah after he saw the Lord in chapter 6? What did the coal from the altar accomplish before he was sent?
3. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign and trusted Assyria instead. What am I tempted to lean on in a crisis instead of the Lord?

Chapters 13 to 39

1. Why would the Lord speak at length about nations that would never read these oracles? What does that teach about His rule today?
2. In chapters 28 to 31, Judah looks to Egypt for help. What does "returning and rest" look like in my own decisions?
3. Compare Hezekiah's prayer in chapter 37 with his choices in chapter 39. What lesson does that hold for finishing well?

Chapters 40 to 66

1. Isaiah 40 begins with comfort for a people who had been disciplined. How does God's comfort differ from simply feeling better?
2. Read Isaiah 53 slowly. List every phrase that says what the Servant carried. Which one do you most need to receive?
3. Isaiah 58 describes a fast the Lord chooses. How should that shape the way I fast and pray?
4. In Isaiah 62 the watchmen keep praying until the promise is fulfilled. What promise am I called to stand on without giving up?

PRAYER APPLICATION

Isaiah gives you a pattern for prayer that moves from the throne, to cleansing, to sending, to comfort, to intercession for others.

1. **Behold His holiness (Isaiah 6).** Begin by worshiping the Lord for who He is before you ask Him for anything. Let His holiness set the tone.
2. **Confess honestly (Isaiah 1 and 6).** Name what the light of His holiness reveals. Receive His cleansing by faith; He invites you to reason with Him.
3. **Trust Him over every other help (Isaiah 7 and 30).** Tell the Lord where you have been leaning on your own strength, and choose to lean on Him.
4. **Wait on Him (Isaiah 40).** Make room for silence. Ask for renewed strength to keep running and walking with Him.
5. **Stand at the cross (Isaiah 53).** Thank Jesus for being wounded for your transgressions. Pray for healing and peace on the basis of what He carried.
6. **Answer the invitation (Isaiah 55).** Seek the Lord while He may be found. Bring your thirst to Him.
7. **Become a watchman (Isaiah 62).** Pray for your family, your church and your city by name, and keep praying until His promise is fulfilled.

A simple prayer from Isaiah

Holy, holy, holy are You, Lord of hosts. I see my need, and I thank You that though my sins were like scarlet, You make them white as snow. Teach me to trust You and not the arm of flesh. As I wait on You, renew my strength. Thank You, Jesus, that You were wounded for my transgressions and by Your stripes I am healed. Here am I. Send me. Amen.

FOUR WEEK READING PLAN

Aim for steady immersion, not speed. Adjust if the Spirit slows you on a chapter.

Week 1: Foundations and Immanuel

- Day 1: Isaiah 1 to 2
- Day 2: Isaiah 3 to 5
- Day 3: Isaiah 6
- Day 4: Isaiah 7 to 8
- Day 5: Isaiah 9 to 10
- Day 6: Isaiah 11 to 12
- Day 7: Rest or reread 6 and 12 in prayer

Week 2: Nations, Woes, and the Bridge

- Day 1: Isaiah 13 to 16
- Day 2: Isaiah 17 to 20
- Day 3: Isaiah 21 to 23
- Day 4: Isaiah 24 to 27
- Day 5: Isaiah 28 to 30
- Day 6: Isaiah 31 to 35
- Day 7: Isaiah 36 to 39

Week 3: Comfort and the Servant

- Day 1: Isaiah 40 to 41
- Day 2: Isaiah 42 to 44
- Day 3: Isaiah 45 to 48
- Day 4: Isaiah 49 to 51
- Day 5: Isaiah 52 to 53
- Day 6: Isaiah 54 to 55

- Day 7: Rest or soak in 53 and 55

Week 4: Zion and New Creation

- Day 1: Isaiah 56 to 58
- Day 2: Isaiah 59 to 60
- Day 3: Isaiah 61 to 62
- Day 4: Isaiah 63 to 64
- Day 5: Isaiah 65
- Day 6: Isaiah 66
- Day 7: Review notes; list prayer themes for teaching

PRACTICAL READING NOTES FOR PRAYER PREPARATION

1. Read aloud. Prophets were heard before they were studied.
2. Keep a simple journal: date, chapter, one word from the Lord, one prayer response.
3. When you hit oracles against nations, pray for specific nations by name without turning the text into headlines.
4. Do not skip the hard chapters to reach comfort. Comfort lands deeper after judgment is faced.
5. Let Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1 shape your own yes before you craft public prayers.
6. When a passage feeds a video or prayer, stay with the text's own burden. Do not force a theme the chapter is not carrying.
7. Cross check historical notes in 2 Kings 15 to 25 and 2 Chronicles 26 to 36 as you go.

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