

Commentary on Isaiah chapter 1 by Chuck Smith 3.15.23

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March memory verse 1 Peter 1:25 (NKJV)

But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

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WITH OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH BY CHUCK SWINDOLL

Let's get into the book of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah is a marvelous book of prophecy. Of course, it is the longest book of prophecy in the Bible, and it would seem that God gave to Isaiah a clearer vision of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ than any other of the Old Testament prophets. He writes much concerning the Messiah that is to come.

In the first verse he tells us the historical time of his prophecies, beginning when Uzziah was king of Judah, which puts it about 760 BC. And he lived through the succeeding reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and into Hezekiah's reign.

It's interesting the New Testament in Hebrews calls them men of faith, but some modern evangelists today would tell you they lacked faith, because it tells you how they suffered. And it's amazing that the men of greatest faith were marked by their suffering. And it tells how they were imprisoned, how they were stoned, and it does say how they were sawed asunder, or sawed in two. And there are those that believe that that is a reference to the fate of Isaiah under the king Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah.

But Isaiah names these kings through Hezekiah as the kings under which he served. In the Old Testament, if you go back to II Chronicles beginning with chapter 26 and on through to chapter 32, you will get the historic background for Isaiah's prophecies. Because in II Chronicles, chapter 26-32, these kings, their reigns are listed, and for special credit for the course, you'll go back and read [II Chronicles 26-32](#) in order to best understand the prophecies of Isaiah as they fit in their historic setting.

There is always a tremendous value in understanding the message of the prophet, to read in the contextual historic background the things that were happening to the nation at the time that he was prophesying. It would appear that the first five chapters of Isaiah are during the reign of Uzziah. Uzziah was a very popular king. In chapter 6, Isaiah records the death of Uzziah and the resulted effect that it had upon his own life. So the

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first five chapters are probably written during the time of the reign of Uzziah who was a very popular king, a very prosperous king over Judah.

So it is,

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz ([Isa 1:1](#)),

Which is not the same as the prophet Amos--different Hebrew word.

that he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah (also known as Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, the kings of Judah ([Isa 1:1](#)).

Now it's as though man isn't listening anymore. It's as though Israel isn't giving heed to the word of the prophet, so he calls unto the heavens and unto the earth to hear. Have you ever sat in a conversation and you're talking and you look up and no one is paying attention to what you're saying? They're in conversation and you discover that you've just been talking and no one is paying any attention. " And it's like people aren't listening anymore, so he says,

Hear, O heavens, give ear, O earth ([Isa 1:2](#)):

Man isn't listening to the word of God, so he's calling the heavens and the earth to bear witness to what the Lord hath spoken. And God gives here His indictment against the nation of Judah. Now it's interesting that as you read it in it's historic context, Uzziah was a fairly good king. It would seem that under his reign there was an outward revival among the people. They were going to temple, they were observing the Sabbath, and under Uzziah's reign they were also observing the feast days, the Passovers and all. And though there was an outward form of religion, yet the Lord is calling out to the nation because underneath of it God had this indictment against Judah at the time.

I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me ([Isa 1:2](#)).

So God's first indictment is that His own children have rebelled against Him. It is interesting that God gives this figure of father and children to the nation of Judah at this time, even as we still see the same figure, as we are children of God. But God said He has nourished these children, but they have rebelled against Him. "I've brought forth these children, I've nourished them, and now they are rebelling against Me." They have become worse than animals for,

The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, my people doth not consider ([Isa 1:3](#)).

In other words, at least an animal has enough innate sense. An ox, and we say a dumb ox, but an ox has enough sense to know his owner, and a donkey has enough sense to know his master's crib.

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The donkey has enough sense to know his master's crib. But God said, "But Israel doesn't know. My people do not consider." They have not taken God into consideration that God has been providing for them. "They don't know Me," God is complaining.

Think how patient God has been with some of you. Think of how long-suffering God is. Even an animal has enough sense to know his owner, to know his master's crib. To know where his provisions are coming from. But God says, "My people haven't considered; Israel doesn't know Me."

The third indictment that God has against them is they have become A sinful nation, a people who are loaded down with iniquity, they are a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, and they have gone away backwards ([Isa 1:4](#)).

Or they have backslidden. They have gone away backwards from God. They're not going forward towards God, going backwards from God. What a heavy indictment God lays upon them here.

And then God questions, Why should you be stricken any more? ([Isa 1:5](#))

Now they had already been suffering. The condition of the nation was vastly deteriorating, weakening. Their enemies had been coming in. They had lost a vast amount of their treasures. They had lost a vast amount of their cities. They were in a period of decline. And God said, "Why should you receive any more strife? Why should you be stricken anymore?"

[Why is it that] you revolt still more and more: for the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot to the top of the head there is no soundness in it; but there are wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment ([Isa 1:5-6](#)).

Here's the nation battered, bruised, bleeding because they have turned their backs on God. And God has allowed the judgment, the chastisement to come to His children, but still they're not learning the lesson, still they are not turning to God. "Why should you be stricken still? Why should it have to go on?" And the whole idea is turn to God.

Now I've always said that you can make it easy on yourself, or make it hard on yourself. And some people just make it hard on themselves. In a few chapters we are going to read, "Woe unto those who strive with their Maker." Whenever you strive with God you're making it hard on yourself. You're gonna hurt, you're gonna come out the loser. "Why should you be stricken any more?" God said. Covered with bruises.

Now God turns and He speaks of the desolation of the land. He deals, first of all, with the people as the result of their sin the land has been ravished.

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire ([Isa 1:7](#)):

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Now this is equivalent to the wounds and the bruises and the putrefying sores. He is just talking about how the nation has been ravished.

your land, the strangers devour it in your presence, it is desolate, it is overthrown by strangers. The daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in the garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city ([Isa 1:7-8](#)).

Become isolated and just alone like a city that is under siege.

Except the LORD of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and would have been like unto Gomorrah ([Isa 1:9](#)).

Unless God had spared the small remnant that was left, they would have totally been wiped out as was Sodom and Gomorrah. They would have been devastated.

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah ([Isa 1:10](#)).

So God, here He brings up the reference of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction by God's judgment, and now He speaks of Jerusalem as a present Sodom and Gomorrah, as we in a figurative sense would speak of San Francisco as a modern Sodom and Gomorrah. Where the same openness of the same sin, the parading and the flaunting of that sin that brought the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is being flaunted in San Francisco. So God then talks about Jerusalem as being Sodom and Gomorrah. In Revelation, John picks up the same figure and uses, "which is spiritually Sodom," he said concerning Jerusalem, where the bodies of the prophets are slain.

To what purpose, [God said,] is the multitude of your sacrifice? ([Isa 1:11](#))

Now He gets into the religious aspect of their lives. And getting into the religious aspects, God shows that the outward form of religion is without value. God isn't interested in religious forms; God is interested in your heart. The attitude of your heart is far more important to God than the actions. There are many people who are going through the right actions but have the wrong attitudes. And that's a sad condition. God is interested in the attitude of your heart. And, of course, this is certainly manifested in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks of the importance of attitude.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I'm full of burnt offerings of rams, the fat of fed beasts; I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or in lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who's required this at your hand to tread in my courts? ([Isa 1:11-12](#))

I didn't ask you to come, God said. Who invited you into My courts? They were coming; they were still going through the religious exercises. They were still observing the Sabbaths and the new moons and the feast days, but God said, "Hey, I'm full up with your sacrifices. That's not what I want." David said, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst

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not, else I wouldst give it. But a contrite heart, O Lord, that You will not turn away." This after his sin with Bathsheba and his fifty-first Psalm, a prayer of forgiveness. "Sacrifices and offerings, Lord, You're not really interested in, but the contrite, broken and contrite heart, Lord, You're not going to turn away." God is interested in the broken and contrite heart much more than your bringing some sacrifice to Him.

We look at the evil of the church and the church history that gave the impression to man that he could buy the forgiveness of his sins. "That's all right, just as long as you can make a healthy contribution." We'll pat you on the back and say, "Fine fellow. Sit down here in the front row. We got your name with a gold star on the window, crystal. We've got your name here. You've donated. You're in good standing." It's been the curse of the church. To make men feel comfortable thinking that because of their contributions and all that they're well accepted and God has an open-door policy. God is interested in the heart. God says, "Hey, I've had it up to here with your sacrifices. I didn't ask you to come in. Who invited you into My courts? Who required you to come along?"

Don't bring me any more of these vain oblations; your incense is an abomination unto me; and the new moons and the sabbaths, and the calling of the assemblies, I cannot away with it; it's iniquity, even in your solemn meetings ([Isa 1:13](#)).

Even in your sacred services are just filled with iniquity.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble; I am weary to bear them ([Isa 1:14](#)).

Oh how God is just so sick of the religious forms if your heart isn't in it.

And when you spread forth your hands ([Isa 1:15](#)),

Now, of course, this is in their prayer, as they would come to the time of the solemn assembly to pray, they would stretch forth their hands to heaven. And God said, "When you stretch forth your hands that is in prayer,"

I will hide my eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: for your hands are full of blood ([Isa 1:15](#)).

But here God Himself declares that there are certain prayers He's not gonna listen to. People that are spreading their hands towards God, but God said, "Hey, I'm not gonna hear." Why? Because your hands are full of blood.

God does answer prayer that's the basic thrust of prayer. That's why we continue to pray and that's our encouragement for prayer. But it is true that there are prayers that God doesn't hear. David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord does not hear me when I pray." In the fifty-ninth chapter of Isaiah it says, "God's hand is not short that He cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that He cannot hear, but your sins have separated

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between you and God." Here God is saying, "When you stretch forth your hands to pray and you offer your prayers, I'm not gonna hear them, for your hands are full of blood."

Wash yourselves, make yourself clean; put away the evildoings from before my eyes; and cease doing evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow ([Isa 1:16-17](#)).

So the things that God was really concerned about is that they would really seek an honest judgment, that they would relieve the oppressed people, that they would give a true judgment to the fatherless and to the widow. After this indictment against them for their sins declaring the desolation that has come to their nation as a result of it and of God's total abhorrence to their formal religious exercises without any heart behind it, He calls for them really to repent to cease doing their evil, learn to do well, learn to do the things that God wants. It is interesting that God didn't want the sacrifices. God didn't want the offerings or whatever that were being brought to Him. He wanted them to start living right, to deliver the oppressed. So God said,

Come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD ([Isa 1:18](#)):

God never challenges a person to take a leap of blind faith. The concept and idea of blind faith has been invented by those outside the church. It is not a scriptural term, nor is it something God has challenged any man to do. It is something that man is being challenged to do by the existential philosophers today. For the philosophy of existentialism has concluded that truth, good, evil do not exist on a universal base, that they only exist in the experience of an individual, and because we are all different, we must all then experience for ourselves what is good. And that if you live in reality, real honesty or reality is hopeless and despairing. And their net result of their search for truth has led them to hopelessness and despair. It doesn't exist. It is only relative as it relates to you. Therefore, because we as human beings cannot exist in hopelessness and despair, we must take our leap of faith, blind faith, hoping that we might find something to sustain us when we land. No guarantees, but you've got to take your leap of faith. And they start talking about the ultimate experience, the search for that ultimate experience. Take your leap of faith; maybe you can discover it.

But God doesn't say, "Take a leap of blind faith." God says, "Hey, come, let's reason together." God wants you to be reasonable. "Let us reason together, saith the Lord." Not a non-reasoned religious experience. God will give you a reason and a base for your peace. God gives you a reason why you're upset, a reason why there is the inner turmoil, a reason why there is that emptiness within. And God will give you a reason for believing and trusting.

One of the areas where we have strong evidence that God wrote the book and that God knew what He was talking about is in the area of prophecy. God challenged the false gods in [Isaiah 41](#) to bring forth their strong reasons by telling us something before it happens. So that after it happens we really know you're a god. Show us a sign, a miracle, and wonder in heaven or on the earth that we might wonder at it and know that

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you are god. Prove yourself, give some evidence. Don't demand that we blindly follow you. Give some evidence. "That you might know," He said, "that I am God, I'm going to tell you things before they ever transpire."

Jesus said to His disciples, "Now I've told you those things before they come to pass so that when they come to pass you might believe." It's to give you a basis for your faith. Not blind faith. To give you a reason to believe. So I tell you in advance the things that are going to take place so that after these things take place you will believe. A reason for it. "Come now, let us reason together saith the Lord."

Then God makes a challenging offer to these rebellious children who have sunk lower than the animals, who are covered with bruises, whose hands are filled with blood. He said,

Though your sins be as scarlet ([Isa 1:18](#)),

The word scarlet has as its background, double-dyed, soaked in the die so long, dried and soaked again until the die has permeated the very fibers of the fabric and it is impossible to remove. And some people are so steeped in sin that it has penetrated the very fibers of their being and sin has become second nature to them. You by nature are a sinner, but when it has become second nature, you are in big trouble. You are a rank sinner. Second nature, you do it without thinking. It's just second nature to you, but even though your sins be double-dyed, even though your sins have permeated the very fiber of your being,

though they be as scarlet, they may be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they may be as wool ([Isa 1:18](#)).

Again, very white. What a marvelous offer by God to sinning man. And this, of course, is an offer of grace. You can't do it yourself. You can't bring it about by sacrifice, by offering; God is sick of those. You can only do it by receiving the grace of God. Come now, let us reason together, though you are in this terrible, hopeless state, I'll wash you, I'll cleanse you, I'll make you over again--if you be willing. That's the key, if you are willing. It has to be your choice. God is not going to force His will upon any man, for God has created you with a capacity of choice and that would be totally meaningless unless He respected the choices that you made. So,

If you are willing and obedient [God said], you can eat of the good of the land ([Isa 1:19](#)):

The land that is wasted and desolate and taken over by your enemies, you can eat of it again, the good of it again.

But if you refuse and you rebel, then you will be devoured with a sword: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it ([Isa 1:20](#)).

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That's it. You've got your choice. Come, let's reason together. If you're willing, if you'll be obedient, you can have the best. If you continue to rebel, you're gonna get cut off.

Hey, with those kind of terms it would be reasonable to accept God's offer of grace and forgiveness. That would be the only reasonable thing under those terms. It would be very unreasonable to continue in your rebellion at that rate, to be cut off. So God speaks of Jerusalem,

How is the faithful city become as a harlot! ([Isa 1:21](#))

Speaking, of course, in spiritual terms. The city that God had chosen, the city that God had selected from all the cities of the earth to place His name there that the people might come to it to worship Him, and yet, they had established within the city the various groves, and high places and the worship of false gods and Mammon and Molech and Baal.

It's interesting some recent archeological excavations that have been done above the springs of Gihon, going up from the Pool of Siloam and the Spring of Gihon, just above the two and heading on up towards the temple mount, recent archeological excavations have uncovered the ruins of the ancient city of Jerusalem, some of the houses that were there in Isaiah's day and on up to the fall of Jerusalem. They have found the ruins of the houses that were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar when he did come in and level the city. And there are marvelous interesting artifacts that they have discovered in these houses that were torn down and broken down by Nebuchadnezzar's army. And within the houses they have found multitudes of little idols to the various pagan gods. Confirming what the prophets were saying to the nation of Judah as they were warning of the impending destruction, even as Isaiah said here, "The faithful city has become a harlot!" Because they've turned from the love of God, the true God, the living God. And as Jeremiah said, "You've forsaken the fountain of living waters and you've hewn out cisterns that can't hold water." And so they're turning to these idols and to these other gods. They've turned, as God would say, spiritually, unto harlotry. They've become a harlot.

the city is full of judgment; righteousness once lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver has become dross, thy wine is mixed with water: Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves ([Isa 1:21-23](#)):

Bribery was rampant.

and every one loves gifts, and they follow after rewards ([Isa 1:23](#)):

And thus, their judgment is perverted.

they do not really judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them ([Isa 1:23](#)).

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Because they are receiving bribes, the total breakdown of the judicial system.

Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies ([Isa 1:24](#)):

And what a tragic thing when the people of God have become His enemy.

I will turn my hand upon thee, I will purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: and afterwards thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city ([Isa 1:25-26](#)).

Now, of course, we got to about as dark as you can get. God had painted a black, black background for the nation of Judah, the city of Jerusalem. Get your blackest paint; paint the background using nothing but black, slate black. Now God takes... and in this black background He begins to bring a shaft of light, the shaft of hope for the future. For God is going to cleanse their dross and He will restore their judges as at the first and your counselors as at the beginning. And afterwards, after the restoration, thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Now she's a harlot, she's turned from God, but she shall become once again faithful unto her husband.

Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens which ye have chosen ([Isa 1:27-29](#)).

The oaks and the gardens were a couple of the different cultish religions that they had embraced there in Jerusalem. They are referred to by other prophets also. Worshipping under the trees, and planting these gardens and using them for a form of worship of other gods.

The strong shall be as a tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them ([Isa 1:31](#)).

So God will wipe out the iniquity. He'll destroy those who are guilty of iniquity and the strong will be as a tow, which is sort of a... the Hebrew word is to be cast off as a flax. The residue that is cast off, actually. So it is a broken rope or a strand that is broken and the maker as a spark and burning it, destroying it.

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Who wrote the book?

As is the case with nearly all the books of "the prophets," the book of Isaiah takes its name from its writer. Isaiah was married to a prophetess who bore him at least two sons

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([Isaiah 7:3](#); [8:3](#)). He prophesied under the reign of four Judean kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1)—and he likely met his death under a fifth, the evil King Manasseh. Christian tradition as early as the second century identifies Isaiah as one of the prophets whose death is described in [Hebrews 11:37](#), specifically the prophet who was “sawn in two.”¹ Isaiah likely lived in Jerusalem, given the book’s concern with the city ([Isaiah 1:1](#)) and his close proximity to at least two significant kings during the period of his prophecy (7:3; 38:1).

Much of scholarship for the past two centuries has assigned multiple writers to Isaiah, dividing the book into three sections: 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66. However, these divisions come out of a scholarly denial of predictive prophecy. This position not only limits the power of God to communicate with His people but also ignores the wide variety of specific, predictive claims about Jesus Christ scattered throughout the book.

Where are we?

Isaiah prophesied from 739–681 BC to a nation that had turned a deaf ear to the Lord. Instead of serving Him with humility and offering love to their neighbors, the nation of Judah offered meaningless sacrifices in God’s temple at Jerusalem and committed injustices throughout the nation. The people of Judah turned their backs on God and alienated themselves from Him, which created the need for Isaiah’s pronouncements of judgment—declarations made in the hope that God’s chosen people would return to Him.

Why is Isaiah so important?

The book of Isaiah provides us with the most comprehensive prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the entire Old Testament. It includes the full scope of His life: the announcement of His coming ([Isaiah 40:3–5](#)), His virgin birth (7:14), His proclamation of the good news (61:1), His sacrificial death (52:13–53:12), and His return to claim His own (60:2–3). Because of these and numerous other christological texts in Isaiah, the book stands as a testament of hope in the Lord, the One who saves His people from themselves.

What's the big idea?

Isaiah’s overall theme receives its clearest statement in chapter 12: “Behold, God is my salvation, / I will trust and not be afraid” ([Isaiah 12:2](#)). This echoes the meaning of Isaiah’s name, which means the “salvation of Yahweh.”² Having read the book, one might wonder about the strong presence of judgment that runs through the first thirty-nine chapters when the theme is salvation. How can the two coexist? The presence of judgment indicates its necessity for salvation to occur. Before we can have salvation, we must have a need for it!

So the bulk of those early chapters in Isaiah detail judgments against the people who have turned their backs on the Lord, showing us that those who persist in their rebellion

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will receive judgment. On the other hand, we also see God's faithfulness to His promise. He will preserve a small remnant of faithful believers, those who will continue on into the glorious renewed world He has prepared for His children in the end times (65:17–66:24).

How do I apply this?

Because of its scope, Isaiah contains one of the clearest expressions of the gospel in all the Old Testament. Even from the first chapter, it is clear that the people have turned away from God and failed in their responsibilities as His children ([Isaiah 1:2–17](#)). Yet God miraculously holds out hope to this unrepentant people, offering cleansing of sins and the blessing that comes with faith and obedience in Him (1:18–20). Salvation lies only in God—the only question is whether or not we will accept His offer.

In addition to its gospel message, the book of Isaiah clearly articulates the sins of God's people—dealing with others unjustly which resulted in their offering hypocritical sacrifices to God. Do you see anything in your own life that might fall under Isaiah's critique of injustice—treating family, colleagues, or even strangers with unkindness or even disdain? Isaiah's message is also a call for believers to come back to purity in our love for God and for our neighbors ([Luke 10:26–28](#)).

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ISAIAH

	The Judgment of God	The Deliverance of God		
		THE SUPREMACY OF THE LORD	THE SERVANT OF THE LORD	THE FUTURE PLAN OF THE LORD
	CHAPTERS 1–39	CHAPTERS 40–48	CHAPTERS 49–53	CHAPTERS 54–66
Emphasis	The law and judgment for disobedience	Comfort . . .	God's grace and deliverance Promise . . .	Hope . . .
"Bible within Bible"	Old Testament	New Testament		
Theme	The justice and mercy of God			
Key Verses	2:3–5; 6:1–3; 53:1–12			
Christ in Isaiah	His first and second advents are prophesied throughout the book (child of a virgin in 7:14, the shoot from the stem of Jesse in chapter 11, the Suffering Servant in chapter 53).			

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