

A Chronology of Isaiah's Prophecies

Commentary for August 1, 2019 — Are They Presented in Order?

No one can determine when many of Isaiah's prophecies were given to him or what precise circumstances they addressed. That information would be helpful to understand future fulfillments of Isaiah's prophecies.¹ In this month's article "Israel and Judah: 35. Reforms of King Hezekiah," we examine the reign of one of the few "good" kings of Judah. Start learning about Hezekiah by reading the "[August 2019 Newsletter](#)" which introduces the article.

In this Commentary we look at the work of Hezekiah's close advisor and friend, the prophet Isaiah. The lack of information of when Isaiah received his prophecies makes it difficult to link the prophecies to the histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Isaiah had a long prophetic ministry during the reigns of four of the kings of Judah: part of King Uzziah (also named Azariah) and the entire reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). He apparently lived after Hezekiah, and died sometime during the early years of Manasseh's 55-year reign (2 Kings 21:1). This also means Isaiah's contribution as a writer and editor of Second Kings ended with chapter 20. We are told more in Second Chronicles:

"As for the rest of the affairs of Hezekiah, and his kindness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, the prophet, and on the scroll of the kings of Judah and Israel."

• ***2 Chronicles 32:32***

The prophecies of Isaiah can be outlined several different ways and understood by topics and themes, so we need to investigate and even ask questions as we read the texts of Isaiah to discover when individual parts were given to Isaiah and presented to his readers and listeners. I present two different outlines of the Book of Isaiah in Dr. Martin's article "[Introduction to Isaiah](#)."²

We read of Isaiah's interactions with the evil king Ahaz, the father of King Hezekiah, in Isaiah chapter 7. Isaiah tells Ahaz that the threat from Israel and Syria against Judah and Jerusalem would be gone soon.³ Woven into this good news of relief from the threat, God (and Isaiah) also gave to Ahaz God's message about the coming Immanuel, a messianic prophecy. One only wishes there were more anchors of information about contemporary events to help us understand other prophecies of Isaiah.

Isaiah is mentioned only three times in Second Chronicles and 13 times in Second Kings. Altogether, there is not much information about the central prophet in the Old Testament.

¹ Dr. Martin's article "[The 'Great Generation' and Modern Prophecy](#)" will help you understand the importance of better understanding the background of Isaiah's prophecies, cited often in the article.

² This article is the first of four about the Book of Isaiah. The three other articles are "[Isaiah, Part 2](#)," "[Isaiah, Part 3](#)," and "[Isaiah, Part 4](#)."

³ See, "[Israel and Judah: 33. Isaiah and the Death of Ahaz](#)."

A Literary Outline of Isaiah, by Avraham Gileadi

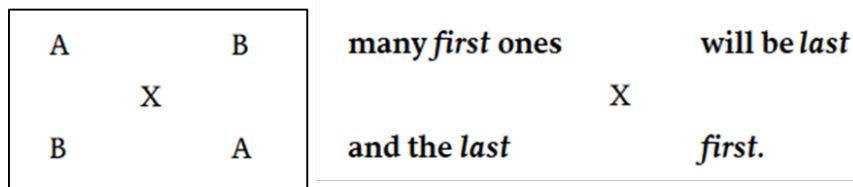
The book of Isaiah is a literary world unto itself, and students of Isaiah can get lost within it. Yet Isaiah was also attached to the contemporary times and events in Jerusalem, Judah, Israel and the surrounding nations. The prophecies of Isaiah relate to contemporary life. In fact, that is the focus of Isaiah's prophecies: how to live justly to receive benefits from YHWH and not suffer His punishments.

According to one well-developed concept put forth by Avraham Gileadi in his book, *The Literary Message of Isaiah*,⁴ all the major themes in Isaiah were structured to repeat in a complex and highly sophisticated structure call a chiasm. It is a circumstance found often in Scripture and some other literature. It is found most often in Scripture and Isaiah uses it extensively.

A chiasm or a chiastic pattern is a repetition of similar ideas in the reverse sequence. It is an A, B, C pattern of ideas repeated in reverse order C', B', A'. See the website, "[What is a Chiasm \(or Chiasmus\)?](#)" Chiasm in Scripture is pointed out in outlines in E.W. Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, and in the *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*, both of which use the King James Bible as the English text along with their extensive diagrams, lists, and informational notes. Professor George Buchanan explains with an example:

"Chiasm (Latin *chiasmus*) is derived from the Greek *chee-áhd-zayn* (χιάζειν), to mark with a Greek *chi* (X). The literary form, chiasm, is one which includes at least two units, whether they are paragraphs, ideas, lines, or words, and each of these units must have at least two parts, so that there are four parts to form the four points of a *chi*. ... The *chi* is formed by arranging the words of the first unit in one sequence and those of the second in reverse order, to form an arrangement such as this

Buchanan gives this example of Jesus using chiasm in Matthew 19:30⁵:



So, even though we do not have many historical links to help anchor when Isaiah's prophecies were put to writing, the literary structure of the writing itself can perhaps aid us to understand the future unfulfilled parts of Isaiah's prophecies. God has given us all we need to understand Isaiah. Different puzzles required different keys.

Look at a chart below that Gileadi has in the 1994 edition of his book (since updated) to show that the book of Isaiah follows a huge chiasm structure, with an unknown number of smaller ones within chapters and even verses. It has a different structure than Buchanan's model chiasm structure. There are several kinds of chiastic structures.

⁴ New York: Hebraeus Press, 1994, 15.

⁵ George Wesley Buchanan, [The Book of Hebrews: Its Challenge from Zion](#), Intertextual Bible Commentary (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 20–21.

Themes	Chapters in Isaiah	
1. Ruin & Rebirth	1-5	34-35
2. Rebellion & Compliance	6-8	36-40
3. Punishment & Deliverance	9-12	41-46
4. Humiliation & Exaltation	13-23	47
5. Suffering & Salvation	24-27	48-54
6. Disloyalty & Loyalty	28-31	55-59
7. Disinheritance & Inheritance	32-33	60-66

Note that the structure from chapters 1 through 33 are repeated in the same order in chapters 34 to 66.⁶ Sometimes the amount of information is different between the left and right “Chapters in Isaiah” portion of the diagram. For example the eleven chapters 13 to 23 on the left correspond to just one chapter on the right, chapter 47. At the bottom, two chapters 32 to 33 correspond to seven chapters 60 to 66. At this time I cannot explain how this pattern relates to the future fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies.

I tell you this to make a very important point: God’s word (the Holy Scriptures), is highly complex and sophisticated, composed of various elements which the people themselves putting the parts together for the construction of the complete product, likely had no idea what they were making at the time.

Isaiah, Sequential Timeline

Another understanding of Isaiah on the next page is a timetable of when portions of Isaiah were written. The developer of this timeline believes that Isaiah is structured and ordered in chronological order, the left “Year” column being in strict time order from earliest to latest. The author of this timeline may be correct in that conclusion, even though the accuracy of the years may be incorrect due to other chronological problems. Note that the last two rows are out of time sequence from all the other rows above.

Keep studying. The Bible is a source of endless information (Proverbs 25:2).

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⁶ Remember also that chapter divisions in the Scripture are a very late development in the early 1200s in England (“[Who divided the Bible into chapters and verses?](#)”). They are very useful for finding your way around the Bible. It is now a universal convention for referencing where you are in the Bible, within a book of the Bible, and even within a chapter of a Bible book such as Isaiah.

Bible Timeline – Isaiah

<https://biblehub.com/timeline/isaiah/1.htm> (years are approximate)

Year	Topic	Chapters / Verses
739 BC	Isaiah Complains of Zion's Corruption	Isaiah 1–5
739 BC	Isaiah's Vision and Commission	Isaiah 6
735 BC	Isaiah's Prophecy of Immanuel	Isaiah 7 (King Ahaz)
734 BC	Uriah and Zechariah	Isaiah 8 (King Ahaz)
730 BC	Isaiah Prophecies a Child Is Born	Isaiah 9
730 BC	Isaiah Prophecies Judgments Upon Israel	Isaiah 9:8
730 BC	Isaiah Prophecies Judgment on Assyria	Isaiah 10
730 BC	Isaiah Prophecies The Root of Jesse	Isaiah 11
730 BC	Isaiah's Joyful Thanksgiving	Isaiah 12
725 BC	Isaiah Prophecies against the Nations	Isaiah 13–22
725 BC	Isaiah's Valley of Vision	Isaiah 22 (Hezekiah)
725 BC	Isaiah's Burden of Tyre	Isaiah 23
725 BC	Devastation on the Earth	Isaiah 24
725 BC	Isaiah's Songs of Praise	Isaiah 25–27
725 BC	Isaiah's Further Warnings	Isaiah 28–32
725 BC	Isaiah Prophecies a King Shall Reign	Isaiah 32
725 BC	Isaiah Declares God's Judgments	Isaiah 33, 34
725 BC	Isaiah Declares the Joyful Will Flourish in Zion	Isaiah 35
712 BC	Hezekiah's Illness and Healing	Isaiah 38; <i>2 Kings 20</i> (Hez)
711 BC	Hezekiah Shows Treasures	Isaiah 39; <i>2 Kings 20:12</i> (Hez)
711 BC	Isaiah Prophecies Captivity and Restoration	Isaiah 40–66
701 BC	Sennacherib Threatens Jerusalem	} Isaiah 36 ; <i>2 Kings 18</i> ; <i>2 Chronicles 32</i>
701 BC	Hezekiah's Prayer	