

The Davidic ruler, the servant, and the anointed messenger are distinct figures in the outlook of the book of Isaiah, for they have fairly distinct purposes and operate in differing contexts. The Davidic ruler will be God's agent in maintaining justice within Israel in the aftermath of deliverance from their oppressors. The servant will be God's instrument among the nations in reconciling Israel and the nations to God through his suffering so that they may dwell with God, the holy king, in his holy city. The anointed messenger will emerge on the brink of the eschatological in-breaking of God's coming as the warrior king who will reign in Zion to declare the gospel to the disheartened faithful. It is not unexpected for Isaiah to envision multiple lead agents in the light of other prophetic literature...Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi envision royal, prophetic and priestly figures who will all play an important role in the establishment of God's kingdom. The claim here also does not undermine the New Testament's application of all three of Isaiah's figures to Jesus; instead, it displays the grandeur of Jesus and the surprise of recognizing how one person, Jesus Christ, can take on the role of all three figures, while also being the very God of these agent figures (169).

As we work through the three figures in Isaiah, and as we approach Christmas, the connections between them in Christ should become clearer and clearer. As we work from the details of our personal reading, and as we come together in Christmas worship, we will see all three strands, all three characters, come together in our magnificent Prophet-Priest-King born in Bethlehem.

What I uniquely offer is a way of approaching these themes in the season of Advent that covers the entire prophecy of Isaiah.

In the end, we will learn to postpone the urge to merge this trio of figures together in Christ until the end of the book. What we see is the urgent need for God to send three men, a threefold anticipation manifesting in three very distinct parts. Only as we approach Christmas will we begin to assemble these three anointed characters together.

I hope you can join us by following the hashtag **#IsaiahChristmas** on Twitter.

*"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"* Isaiah 46:9-10



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# BEHOLD! Christmas with Isaiah

## An Advent Reading Plan for the Book of Isaiah

### BEHOLD the COMING KING / Isaiah 1-39

*"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."* Isaiah 9:7-8

- ☐ Dec. 1 ..... 1:1-31
- ☐ Dec. 2 ..... 2:1-5:30
- ☐ Dec. 3 ..... 6:1-13
- ☐ Dec. 4 ..... 7:1-9:7
- ☐ Dec. 5 ..... 9:8-12:6
- ☐ Dec. 6 ..... 13:1-16:14
- ☐ Dec. 7 ..... 17:1-20:6
- ☐ Dec. 8 ..... 21:1-23:18
- ☐ Dec. 9 ..... 24:1-27:13
- ☐ Dec. 10 ..... 28:1-29:24
- ☐ Dec. 11 ..... 30:1-32:20
- ☐ Dec. 12 ..... 33:1-36:22
- ☐ Dec. 13 ..... 37:1-39:8

### BEHOLD the SUFFERING SERVANT / Isaiah 40-55

*"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. Isaiah 42:1-3*

- ☐ Dec. 14 ..... 40:1-41:20
- ☐ Dec. 15 ..... 41:21-43:21
- ☐ Dec. 16 ..... 43:22-45:25
- ☐ Dec. 17 ..... 46:1-48:22
- ☐ Dec. 18 ..... 49:1-52:12
- ☐ Dec. 19 ..... 52:13-55:13

### BEHOLD the CONQUERING MESSENGER / Isaiah 56-66

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God;"* Isaiah 61:2a

- ☐ Dec. 20 ..... 56:1-59:15a
- ☐ Dec. 21 ..... 59:15b-60:22
- ☐ Dec. 22 ..... 61:1-62:12
- ☐ Dec. 23 ..... 63:1-65:16
- ☐ Dec. 24 ..... 65:17-66:24

# BEHOLD! Christmas with Isaiah

## An Advent Reading Plan for the Book of Isaiah

Adapted from Tony Reinke | [tonyreinke.com](http://tonyreinke.com)

Usually by the time December begins Christmas decorations are up, holiday music is blasting, and pumpkin spice is in the air. But as the culture prepares for the holiday, I invite you to do something counter-cultural: to read the ancient collected prophecies of a man named Isaiah. Not only do I want you to read it, I want to run alongside and help you understand and enjoy it (Acts 8:30–31). That is my goal for you in the month of December leading up to Christmas — in twenty-four readings beginning on December 1 and ending on Christmas Eve.

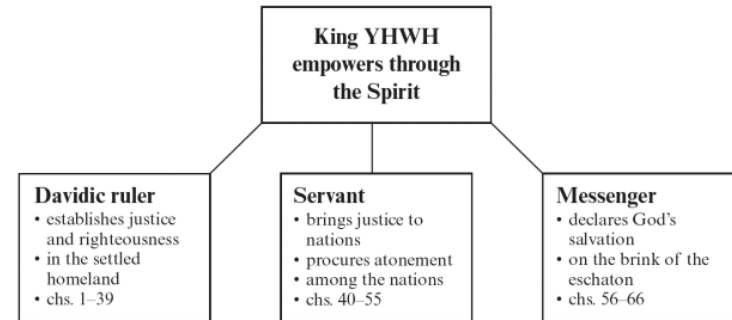
Isaiah tells the boisterous story of international political upheaval — the stunning prequel to Bethlehem. Nothing will deepen your appreciation for the Incarnation, nothing will better help you enjoy Christ, and all that he is for you, if you understand the global setting that anticipated, and demanded, his birth. It's been called the Fifth Gospel for good reason because along with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John it's a book about the Messiah, not merely in his birth, but in the whole of his world. And it's majestic. It's the prequel-gospel, the first gospel, or the gospel before the first gospel, because it serves as a forerunner to the biographies of Christ.

Ever since George Frideric Handel's famous oratorio *Messiah* took its rightful place as the musical theme of Christmas the holiday season has been a good time to reflect on the full redemptive story-line of Scripture. Handel's work builds from seventeen key citations drawn from across the prophetic book. Soaring texts like Isaiah 7:14; 9:2, 9:6; 35:5–6; 40:1–5, 40:9, 40:11; 50:6; 53:3–8; 60:1–3. He left no great Christmas text behind. But those texts are set within a bigger context we shouldn't ignore.

But any reader soon finds out that the book of Isaiah, like the incarnation of Christ itself, is rather dark and gritty compared to the holiday season we experience each year. Our Christmases are clean and too easily reduced to fresh pine trees cut and domesticated, boxes wrapped in shiny foil, and mass production frosted cookies in the kitchen. The true reason for the birth of Christ is borne of global need and widespread desperation. Christ arrived from sheer human necessity, based on the dominant political powers and the resulting pains of the world. Isaiah offers us all the reasons to explain the story.

A Christ-centered reading of Isaiah is problematic, too. We can too prematurely read Isaiah in light of what we know about Christ and miss the urgency of the prophet's hope and global expectation. Indeed, what Isaiah sees is a threefold need which must be remedied by a threefold promise. As Andrew Abernethy has pointed out in his book, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological*

*Approach*, Isaiah's visions for the future redemption of the world calls for three separate individuals: a **King**, a **Servant**, and a **Prophet**.



I'll give you the specifics of my reading schedule in just a moment, but first here are two important paragraphs from Abernethy's book to set the stage for how Isaiah develops these three characters. Here Abernethy also provides a caution about *what not to do* in our reading, and instead what we should be looking for as we read Isaiah.

Here's the first important excerpt.

Isaiah does not envision only one lead agent; instead, there are at least three distinct lead agents whom God will use in each of the major sections of the book: (1) the Davidic ruler (1–39), (2) the servant of the Lord (40–55), and (3) God's messenger (56–66). While Christians profess that Jesus ultimately embodies what the book of Isaiah envisions for these lead agents, I am not certain that these agents are necessarily understood to be the same individual throughout Isaiah. The book of Isaiah contains a range of expectations pertaining to the various roles God would need his lead agents to fulfill in the course of time. Instead of forcing all of these lead agents into one mold, it is better to allow the uniqueness of each figure to emerge. The common denominator, however, between these lead agents is that they are the divine king's agents and feature into his plans within his kingdom. In fact, God's Spirit empowers all three of these agents for the task assigned to them. These agents, then, are distinct, but are also united under God as king and overlap to some extent due to shared participation in God's mission (120).

The royal, the prophetic, and the priestly — three characters in three persons in the storyline of Isaiah. Before we run them together, based upon what we know from later revelation, we should first let the book of Isaiah develop the three characters individually in the full richness of the expectations of God's people.

Here's the second paragraph from the book I want you to see.