

Some Questions to Ask when Reading Isaiah

1. **What type of passage is it?** Most passages are (a) accusation; (b) a pronouncement of judgment; or (c) hope for restoration. Other types include (d) exhortation; (e) introductory or narrative material; (f) God’s presenting a covenantal choice to Israel.
2. **Who are the recipients? What’s the historical context?**
3. **How does the passage tie in with surrounding passages?** Look for the hallmarks of Hebrew poetry: parallelism, chiasm (A, B, B’, A’) and contrast.
4. **How would the passage have been understood by listeners** in the 8th cent. B.C.; the 1st cent. A.D. (both Christians and Jews); and the 21st cent.?

Example: Outline of Isaiah 2-5

- 1) **A—Hope: The ideal Jerusalem**—The City of God (2:2-4)
 - a) *Exhortation*: “...let us walk in the light of the Lord” (2:5)
 - b) *Accusation: The actual Jerusalem*: The city of sin—condemnation of Jerusalem (2:6-9)
 - c) *Judgment*: The terror of the Lord (2:10-22)
 - i) **B**—Go into the rocks (2:10)
 - (1) **C**—The proud will be humbled (2:11)
 - (a) 6× refrain: against the <insert arrogant thing here>... (2:12-16)
 - (2) **C’**—The arrogant will be humbled (2:17-18)
 - ii) **B’**—Go into the rocks (2:19-21)
 - iii) *Conclusion*: Stop trusting in man! (2:22)
 - d) **D**—*Judgment against the male leaders*: The siege of Jerusalem (3:1-8)
 - i) **E**—*Accusation*: The (male) leaders are oppressive (3:9-15)
 - ii) **E’**—*Accusation*: The powerful women are haughty and materialistic (3:16-17)
 - e) **D’**—*Judgment against the powerful women*: God’s curse upon them (3:18-4:1)
- 2) **A’—Hope: The new Jerusalem**: God will restore Zion (4:2-6)
- 3) *Accusation*: The parable of the vineyard—“...he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress” (5:1-7)
 - a) *Accusation & Judgment*: The six woes: (5:8-23)
 - b) *Judgment*: “He whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly!” (5:24-30)

Its
Religious
condition

Its
social
condition