

ISAIAH – AN INTRODUCTION

WHO

Who is Isaiah?

“The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that **Isaiah son of Amoz** saw... (1:1)” **Isaiah** means ‘the Lord Saves’ or ‘Salvation is of the Lord’ – a key to the central themes of the book. The need for salvation and the provision of salvation through a mediator – the Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing is known of Amoz. Isaiah was married with at least two sons **Shear Jashub** (7:3) ‘A remnant will return’ and **Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz** (8:3) ‘quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.’ Again their names give clues to the content of the book.

Was Isaiah the sole author of the book of Isaiah? Were there two, three (pre-exilic, exilic, post-exilic), or a school of prophets who wrote this book?

The two-author theory was first promulgated in 1789 by Doderlein who suggested two different books composed after 540b.c. to account for the reference to Cyrus the Persian. The crux of the problem is, is predictive prophecy possible? Can someone be given insight into the future by God? The answer is given in Isaiah itself, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come. I say my purpose will stand, and I will do what I please.” Isaiah 46:10

Linguistic features argue for one rather than many authors. For example, “Holy One of Israel” used 12 times in chapters 1-39 and 14 times in chapters 40 – 66 only used 6 times in the rest of the Old Testament.

Compare similar language, 1:5-6 & 53:4-5, 11:1 & 53:2, 35:10 & 51:11

‘**Highway to Jerusalem**’ see 11:16, 40:3, 57:14 & 62:10

‘**Holy Mountain**’ see 2:2-4, 11:9, 27:13, 56:7, 57:13, 65:25, 66:20

Qumran (Dead Sea) Scrolls (ca. 2nd century B.C.) contain 15 copies of Isaiah including a complete scroll of Isaiah with no interruption between chapters 39 & 40. In one copy, verse 40:1 is squeezed at the end of a page break. The **Septuagint (LXX)**, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament (2 century B.C.) also treats Isaiah as one book. Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are divided because of their length.

Apart from the Psalms Isaiah is the most quoted OT book in the NT – 66 times! E.g. Luke 4:16 – 24, Acts 28:25. In Luke 4, Jesus clearly sees Isaiah 61 as pointing forward to and being fulfilled in himself. Jesus believes in predictive prophecy! The most compelling NT evidence occurs in John 12:38 – 41 quotes 53:1 and 6:10,

“This was to fulfil the word of **Isaiah the prophet**: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" [53:1] For this reason they could not believe, because, **as Isaiah says elsewhere**: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn--and I would heal them." [6:10] **Isaiah said this** because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.”

WHAT

What is a prophet? A prophet is an authorized spokesman of God: someone who has an audience with God and emerges to tell us what God has told him. The prophet is mainly a forth teller though at times can be a foreteller. The Hebrew term for prophet may derive from roots meaning ‘to announce,’ ‘to bubble up,’ or ‘to call.’ The LORD’s first prophet was **Moses**, “Now when the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, "I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you." But Moses said to the LORD, "Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" Exodus 6:28 – 30

Some prophets were court prophets (**Samuel & Nathan**) instructing the King primarily, others spoke directly to the people (**Elijah and Elisha**) while the later prophets, including Isaiah were largely writing prophets. In the 8th Century, Isaiah’s contemporaries were **Micah** (in Judah) and **Jonah, Amos and Hosea** (in Israel). There followed a fifty-year silence in prophecy which roughly corresponded with the reign of wicked King **Manasseh** (697-642).

Isaiah was called by God (chapter 6), given a message from God and charged with communicating that message to a stubborn and hardened people. The Book of Isaiah therefore is the Word of God. Isaiah claims to meet with the living God (chapter six) and repeatedly asserts that the words written are not his but God’s, e.g. “for the Lord has spoken” (1:2) “Hear the word of the LORD (1:10)

What is the Bible? Or What is Scripture? The Bible is God’s special revelation to us. It contains both an account of divine acts and God’s divine word. The Bible focuses primarily on God’s redemptive purpose and plan for his people and is also progressive and cumulative. From the time of Eden through the Apostolic Age (in which we currently live) God has been unfolding himself through word and deed.

Scripture’s view of Scripture – its source, accuracy and authority:

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1: 20–21

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17

Jesus’ view of Scripture, “The scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” Matthew 5:17 – 18

The value of Scripture for us today, “The holy scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” 2 Timothy 3:15

From the Shorter Catechism,

Q.1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Q.2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A. The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him."

WHEN

The prophet was active during the reigns of:

Uzziah (a.k.a. **Azariah**) [Good & Bad] (792 – 740), 2 Kings 15:1-17, 2 Chronicles 26

Jotham [Like Father like son] (750 – 735), 2 Kings 15:32-38, 2 Chronicles 27

Ahaz [Bad], (735 – 715), 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28

Hezekiah [Best King of Judah], (715 – 686), 2 Kings 18 - 20, 2 Chronicles 29 – 32, Isaiah 36 – 39

The inaugural vision of Isaiah was in the year King **Uzziah** died (740) – the golden age of Judah had come to an end. Isaiah was possibly martyred during the reign of **Manasseh** (697 - 642). Jewish tradition states he was sawed in half (cp. Hebrews 11:37), referring to the faithful people of God some of whom "were sawed in two."

WHERE

Isaiah primarily lived and ministered in Jerusalem where he had ready access to the king of Judah. He first [chapters 1 – 35] spoke to the people of Judah whose hearts were hardened to him. He later directed his attention forward to the exiled Israelite community in Babylon [Chapters 40 – 66].

WHY

God gave Isaiah a commission and a message. He had bad news and good news. Isaiah is the most overtly evangelistic book in the OT. The prophecy could be entitled, **The Gospel According to Isaiah**. The following themes are stressed:

- God's Holiness and Israel's sin
- God – Judge & Redeemer
- Messianic Hope, for Israel and the world
- Tale of Two Cities – Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem
- Fallen Creation – New creation

HOW

Chapters 1 – 35, The Book of Judgement [largely poetry]

Chapters 36 – 39, Historical Interlude Threat from Assyria over but future threat from Babylon foreshadowed [prose]

Chapters 40 – 66, The Book of Comfort [poetry]

More specifically, three units in early part (1-12, 13 – 27, 28-35) and later part (40 – 51:11, 51:12-55,56-66). Each unit ends with singing in Jerusalem or on the way there.

TO WHOM

to Judah, to Israel, to the nations – to you and me
Judah was a land of divisions rich and poor
The rich were unconcerned with the welfare of the poor
Formalism rather than heartfelt worship typified religion of the day
Mixture of pagan and true religion
Kings ranged from apostate to compromising to faithful

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN

An Approximate Time from **Saul to Jesus**:

1050 – 1010	Reign of King Saul
1010 – 970	Reign of King David
970 – 930	Reign of King Solomon
930	Divided Kingdom; 10 Northern Tribes = Israel (capital Samaria) 2 Southern Tribes = Judah (capital Jerusalem)
745 – 722	Reign of Tiglath Pileser III of Assyria – new power in near east
[740 – 686]	Ministry of Isaiah
722	Assyria Conquers Samaria. Ten northern tribes taken into captivity
701	Sennacherib [reign 705 – 681] lays siege to Jerusalem – unsuccessful
612	Fall of Ninevah – Rise of Babylonians
586	Fall of Jerusalem
586 – 538	Babylonian Captivity
539	Cyrus the Great - King of Persia conquers Babylon
538	First Exiles return under Zerubabel following edict of Cyrus
458	Second Return of Exiles under Ezra
444	Third Return of exiles under Nehemiah
432-5	Inter-testamental Period
6/5	Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem

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