

Introduction to Isaiah

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The Man Isaiah

According to Jewish tradition Amoz, father of Isaiah, was brother of King Amaziah

Isaiah was married, with two sons, whose names were prophetic (7:3/8:1, 18)

Commissioned in 740 BC (6:1)

According to tradition (including Josephus), sawn in two by Manasseh (cf. Hebrews 11:37)

—The most important writing **Prophet**: The prophet of the Messiah (quoted in NT more than all other prophets combined, exceeded only by Psalms).

—**Historian**: (chapters 36-39/ cf. 2 Chronicles 26:22; 32:32—“the rest of the acts of Uzziah”; “Vision of Isaiah;” and “Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel”

—**Poet**: Most cultured and profound poetry of the prophets; considered superior to that of Homer, Milton, Shakespeare

—**Statesman**: of noble birth (grandson of King Joash, nephew of Amaziah), counselor to four kings; Jerusalem’s chief citizen; prolonged Jerusalem’s life by 100 years through his counsel to Hezekiah

Historical setting

The time of Isaiah’s ministry: 745—695 BC (50 years) corresponding to 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-32
200 years earlier, the kingdom had divided

Beginning about 745 BC, Assyria was expanding to regions of Israel and Judah

Pekah (of Israel) joined Syria and sought Judah’s cooperation against Assyria

Ahaz (with Isaiah’s encouragement) would not cooperate, so they sought to oust him and replace him

732 BC Syria was crushed by Assyria, Pekah assassinated the same year; Ahaz bought-off Assyria with money

Israel defeated by Assyria in 722 BC (Tiglath-Pilezar); 701 BC, Sennacherib threatened Judah under Hezekiah

A pro-Assyria party in Jerusalem counseled Hezekiah to placate Assyria

A pro-Egyptian party encouraged Hezekiah to seek assistance from Egypt against Sennacherib

Isaiah counseled Hezekiah to trust only in the Lord, and the Lord delivered Jerusalem supernaturally

Outline of Book

Part One: The Book of Judgment (chapters 1—39)

1. Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem (chapters 1-6)
2. Prophecies against Israel (chapters 7-12)
3. The “Burdens” against the nations (chapters 13-23)

4. The Great Transition: Out with the Old Order; In with the New (chapters 24-27)
5. The “Woes” (chapters 28-33)
6. The Great Transition: Out with the Old Order; In with the New (chapters 34-35)
7. Historical interlude, connecting the two sections (chapters 36-39)

Part Two: The Book of Comfort (chapters 40-66)

1. Two Salvations: Cyrus and Messiah (chapters 40-48)
2. Two Servants: Israel and Messiah (chapters 49-57)
3. Two Cities: the Old Jerusalem and the New (chapters 58-66)

Authorship

Liberal/Critical opinion

Moses ben Samuel Ibn-Gekatilla (110 AD): ch. 1-39 (time of Hezekiah); ch. 40-66 (time of second temple)

J. B. Koppe (1780) questioned Isaianic authorship of chapter 50.

Doederlein (1789) denied Isaianic authorship of chapters 40 through 66. His denial was followed by others

Scholars in the 1800s, divided between those who held this view and those who supported traditional view

Bernhard Duhm (1892) believed “Second-Isaiah” wrote ch.40-55; postulated “Trito-Isaiah” as author of 56-66

Since then, liberal critics have sought to attribute other passages (e.g., chapter 13) to additional “Isaiahs”

Arguments against Isaiah having written chapters 40 through 66:

1. The setting is Babylonian, not Palestinian
2. Prophecies of restoration and mention of Cyrus could not have been written before the events
3. Isaiah’s name absent from this section, though mentioned in chapters 1-39 (hence the author of the last section is anonymous)

Traditional/biblical opinion

Ecclesiasticus 49:17-25 (between 200 BC and 180 BC; earliest known statement about Isaiah’s authorship outside the book itself) attributes second section to same author as first section.

Dead Sea Scrolls (probably written at the beginning of the first century) treat both sections as a unity

The New Testament quotes Isaiah by name **20x** (and even more times without mentioning his name)

Matthew quotes him by name **6x** (**3x** from each section)

John 12:38-41 quotes Isaiah by name twice in one passage (one time from each section)

Internal evidence for the unity of Isaiah:

—**25** words or forms unique to Isaiah found in both sections

—“The Holy One of Israel” used **12x** in chapters 1-39; **14x** in chapters 40-66; only **5x** elsewhere in OT

—Themes found in both sections:

Unquenchable fire (1:31/ 66:24)

Sickness of the nation (1:5-6/ 53:4-5)

All Gentile nations flowing into the Holy Mountain (2:2/ 56:7/ 66:20)

God’s “highway” (11:16/ 40:3-5)

Wolf and lamb, lion eat straw, etc. (11:6-9/ 65:25)

A Banner for the nations (11:12/ 49:22/ 62:10)

Not written by an exile in Babylon: Author wrote while Jerusalem’s walls were apparently still standing (62:6) and the cities of Judah still existed (40:9) and wrote from a Palestinian vantage point:

—“send to Babylon” (not “from Babylon”—43:14)

—Cyrus comes “from the east” (i.e., from Palestinian viewpoint—46:11)

—From Babylon is called “from there” (not “from here”—52:11)

Could the “Greatest Writing Prophet” (author of chapters 40-66) have remained anonymous? Why were the identities of lesser prophets (like Obadiah) remembered but not this man’s?

Is Isaiah a Microcosm of the Whole Bible?

Isaiah = 66 chapters (The Bible has 66 books)

“The Book of Judgment” = 39 chapters (Old Testament has 39 books)

“The Book of Comfort” = 27 chapters (New Testament has 27 books)

—Opens (as does the New Testament) with John the Baptist (40:3-5)

—Closes (as does the New Testament) with a “New Heavens and New Earth”

—At the exact center (chapter 53) is the atoning death of the Messiah