

**The Book of Isaiah**  
*Introduction*

**Introduction:** Isaiah is known as the “prince of the prophets.” (for a variety of reasons)

- His easy access to the kings causes many to speculate a royal descent.
- Great majesty in the book itself as it presents a breadth of theology (from creation to the New Heavens).
- He is seen as both an austere Judge and a compassionate Redeemer.
- Isaiah is also like a “Bible in miniature.” (2 major divisions, 39/27, first part is judgment and second part is hope)
- Mt. Sinai covenant is the basis of judgment while the Davidic covenant which promises the Messiah is the basis of hope.

**Several Key Introductory Issues:**

**I. Authorship and Date**

- A. The book itself cites no other author other than “Isaiah the son of Amoz.”
1. States that he received the vision during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all kings of Judah. (1:1)
  2. Attribution of authorship appears twice in the book (see also 2:1)
- B. Some have suggested a “Deutero-Isaiah” theory
1. Lack of historical references after chapter 39
  2. Announcement of Persian King Cyrus more than 100 years before his birth (see 45:1)
  3. Suggestion of some stylistic differences in chapters 40-66
  4. German scholar J.C. Doderleing (1775) first to propose that Isaiah might be the conflation of two works.
  5. Became an especially popular view in Europe (toward the end of the Enlightenment period, supernatural was now skeptical and predictive prophecy was scorned.”

C. Bernard Duhm in 1892-suggested three Isaiah's

1. Proto-Isaiah (1-39)
2. Deutero-Isaiah (40-55)
3. Trito-Isaiah (56-66)

NOTE: JEDP theory of Pentateuch and the Q document. This is how many of the mainline denominations went liberal. This was taught in their seminaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

D. Hermann Gunkel-called it folk literature and said it did not come from authors but communities (long pre-history of oral transmission)-Form Criticism in 1920's and 30's

1. 40-55 was saved for the "Deutero-Isaiah"
2. 56-66 became a work of community in post-exilic period
3. 6-12 and 28-31 was Proto-Isaiah and the rest was a compilation of various authors and the folk literature of community.

E. There is no objective evidence to prove anything other than the unitary-Isaiah theory

1. Earliest text we have is the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls-1<sup>st</sup> century BC) and it is virtually unchanged (only minor spelling differences) from the Hebrew texts a millennium later.
2. No evidence of an Isaianic community that would have formed these texts
3. No agreement at all among those who oppose unitary Isaiah
4. Why would the author of Isaiah lead us to believe this was written by Isaiah, son of Amoz at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC?
  - a. It is clear that is what he does
  - b. He wants us to believe that he foresaw what would happen to the people of God in the next few centuries and had a theological message to share with the people of that generation and future generations.
  - c. The argument of 41-48 is that Yahweh can foresee the future like other gods cannot. Why would authors do that if they were denying it could happen?
5. Motivation is to deny predictive prophecy

F. Arguments against unitary book with one author

1. No outline but seemingly a composition of stories (ancient Hebrew literature, however, often lacks the kinds of unities that Greek rhetoricians said were necessary)

- a. Many of the books in the Bible were like this
  - b. Major and Minor prophets
  - c. Jeremiah
  - d. Even the Gospels
  - e. Critics say the lack of strict composition is sign of oral transmission
2. Differing styles, vocabulary, and theological foci
    - a. Different audiences
    - b. Different situations
    - c. Different generations
    - d. Isaiah was given a sweep vision of rebellious nations being overpowered by Yahweh but also a descendent of Jesse leading a restored remnant. He saw a people who refused to trust and obey God, redeemed and living in hopeful trust.
    - e. The vision was not just for his day but for a people yet unborn.

#### G. Arguments FOR a unitary book

1. Even distribution of “the Holy One of Israel” throughout the book
  - a. 31 x in all the OT, 25 in Isaiah
  - b. 12 in 1-39 and 13 in 40-66
2. Many words that appear in all three sections of Isaiah and only in Isaiah
3. Many historic references in 1-39, none in 40-66, only general prophecy but no historical details (a characteristic of Hebrew literature)
4. The context is clearly 8<sup>th</sup> century (not dealing with syncretistic worship which happened after Persians, but more about idols) speaking to a post-exilic people from a pre-exilic context by way of predictive prophecy

H. God could have used multiple authors and the book still have been powerfully authentic and effective-but the book claims just one, Isaiah, the Son of Amoz.

## II. Historical Background

### A. Historical conundrum (seems to be addressing two or three different contexts)

1. His own time (740-700 BC)-chapters 1-39
2. Exilic period (585-540) Judean exiles in Babylon-chapters 40-55
3. Post-exilic period (after return in 539)-chapters 56-66

### B. Answering the conundrum

1. Composite or conflation hypothesis
2. Not impossible but denies the internal claim
3. Predictive prophecy is more likely and makes more sense

### C. Why would Isaiah have written for a future generation as well as his own?

1. Chapters 6-30 reveal God's sovereignty and superiority over the nations
  - a. All of history is in His hand
  - b. He can and will deliver His people (climactically seen in 37:36-38)
2. Isaiah also sees a time when his people would not trust God-will be devastated and carried away into Babylonian exile

**Question:** Does this invalidate what Isaiah was given for his own day?

3. He also sees a time when they will return
  - a. Son's name "Shearjashub"-Only a remnant will return
  - b. Conditions will be very different
  - c. No king, an afterthought in the vast empire of the Persians, no kingdom or army
  - d. Yet the greater danger (not the kingdoms or empires) but the syncretistic worship of the Persians
4. They are allowed to see so they can trust God in their situation that God is still sovereign and superior
  - a. Even if situations and circumstances are different
  - b. Even if Jerusalem is not delivered
  - c. Can experience God's kingdom without Judah's kingdom
  - d. If Isaiah ended with 39, wouldn't know God's Lordship over history
  - e. He is Lord of history not only because he directs events but precisely because he redeems them as well

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- f. He is both King and Redeemer of history

#### D. Historical span of Isaiah

##### 1. 740-700 BC

- a. World power belongs to the Assyrians (900-609 BC)-Nineveh the capital, a brutal empire
- b. Extreme pressure and threat on both the north (Israel) and south (Judah)-885-785
- c. 40 year respite (782-745)-time of wealth, steady monarchies, Jeroboam III in Israel (793-753) and Uzziah in Judah (792-740)
- d. Tiglath Pileser III (TP III) new period of Assyrian aggression
- e. North with weak leadership began to collapse and the south was weakening
- f. Assyrians continued to annex, even much of Israel
- g. Israel and Syria tried to ally with Ahaz but he refuses (7:1-9)
- h. He sought help from TP III (2 Kings 16:7-9)
- i. In 722 Israel (Samaria) fell
- j. Hezekiah was 16 and king of Judah-led spiritual and religious reforms and they never bowed to Assyria
- k. Sennacherib was going to attack Judah but God turned them (37:33-38)
- l. God was Lord over history and the nations

##### 2. 625-540 BC

- a. Babylonian empire began to emerge
- b. Nabopolassar set his sights on Assyria
- c. 614-Ashur fell and 612-Nineveh fell
- d. 605-Nabo's son Nebuchadnezzar destroyed both Assyrian and Egyptian empires
- e. Marched south and set sights on Judah and began to control (took treasures from temple and some of the best men, Daniel and three friends)
- f. 598 second invasion (Jeremiah's prophecy but people worsened)
- g. Final siege began in 588 BC and ended in 586 BC with the collapse of Jerusalem
- h. Did God fail? Did he control history or not? Were His promises true or not?
- i. While in Babylon they opened the scrolls of 40-55 to read that God promised to be with them, even in their exile
- j. Did not need to lose hope...the Babylonian gods were not superior. They began to see that a return from exile was predicted. (see Daniel 9:1-9)
- k. Nebuchadnezzar died in 582 BC
- l. Medes and Persians joined forces under Cyrus in 547 and took over when a vice regent in Babylon (Belshazzar was leading) See Daniel 5
- m. 539 Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and allowed the exiled Jews to return if they wished (Isaiah 45:1-13)

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- n. 50,000 returned in 537 BC
3. 540 BC to 500 BC
- a. Promise of prophets enabled the exiled Jews to survive and return home
  - b. Like Jesus, the prophets often telescoped events so that the return from exile and the coming of Messiah and establishing of the kingdom seemed to meld together.
  - c. They looked for the return of Messiah, for nations to return to Jerusalem and mercy to flow to them
  - d. But instead they had no king no true independence, things were almost worse than the exile,
  - e. Foundations of the temple laid waste and exposed for 16 years until Haggai and Zechariah stirred the people up
  - f. In 331 Greeks (Alexander) would defeat the Persians
  - g. Under Babylon and Assyria the Jews saw Yahweh above all gods (see 1Kings 18:22-24 and Isaiah 46:1-5)
  - h. Persians introduced syncretism that saw all gods as merely manifestations and forces of creation (Biblical truth; God is OVER His creation) Note today!
  - i. After temple built, apathy and lethargy set in
  - j. Chapters 56-66 bring up often the issues of ethical righteousness. They wondered if it was even necessary since they were covenant people.
  - k. There continues to be a promise of a new kingdom that is set forth

### III. Things to Watch For

#### A. Figures of Speech

1. Trees (1:29-30; 2:13; 6:13; 10:33-34; 29:17; 32:15; 37:24; 44:14; 55:12; 57:5; 60:13; 61:3)
2. Highways (2:3; 7:3; 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 49:9; 57:10; 59:7,8; 62:10)
3. Banners (5:26; 11:10-12; 13:2; 18:3; 30:17; 49:22; 62:10)
4. Deserts (5:6; 6:11-12; 32:14; 34:13-17; 41:18-19; 43:20; 48:21; 50:2; 64:10)
5. Gardens and fertile fields (29:17; 32:15; 35:1-7; 41:18-19; 51:3; 65:3, 10; 66:17)
6. Children (1:4; 3:12; 9:6; 11:8; 26:17; 37:3; 49:19-21; 54:1-3; 66:7-12)
7. Light and darkness (2:5; 5:20, 30; 8:22; 9:2; 26:19; 29:18; 30:26; 42:6-7, 16; 45:7; 49:9; 51:10; 58:8, 10; 59:9-10; 60:1-3, 19-20)

## B. Paired Themes

### 1. Judgement and Hope

- a. Chapter one the accusations of 1:1-15 give way to a promise of restoration if there is repentance (1:16-20)
- b. This theme and cycle is seen throughout introduction: 2:1-5 (hope) 2:6-4:1 (judgment) 4:2-6 (hope) 5:1-30 (judgment)
- c. Book as a whole (7-39 is judgment) and (40-66 is hope) note these are major and minor themes
- d. The point? If there is to be any hope it is through judgment.
- e. Hard for Jewish people (they had promises) either judgment OR hope but Isaiah says it is both and.
- f. Just like Isaiah's impure lips could only be purified by fire (chapter 6) so could they only be purified through fire.
- g. As hard as this was for Isaiah's day, even more the people in exile. They thought it was over because of judgment.
- h. He has to keep calling them
- i. After return from exile they had to be reminded that if they fell away that judgment could again follow hope...warning.
- j. Judgment is not God's intended last word but if there is no repentance it will be.

### 2. Servanthood and Kingdom

- a. When Judah is faced with the cruel threat of Assyria's power they look for a king mightier and fiercer than the Assyrians.
- b. But, they receive a vision of a child (9:6) who is righteous and wise and who will bring in a kingdom of peace
- c. God's answer to cruelty and oppression is not more cruelty and oppression but love
- d. Ahaz in 7-8 will not submit and destruction comes
- e. Hezekiah in 36-38 submits to God's plan and calls the people to do the same and deliverance is the result.
- f. Kingly Servant (Messiah) depicted in 40-55
- g. How can sinful Israel become servant Israel? Only through the suffering Servant (53:10-11)

### 3. Trust and Rebellion

- a. People called rebels five times in chapter 1 (2, 5, 20, 23, 28)
- b. Contrasting results of trust and rebellion (1:19, 20)
- c. Most telling example of options (Isaiah 36:1-ff)
- d. Isaiah challenges Ahaz to trust God instead of the nations but he refuses and trusts his enemy Assyria (chapter 7). It will bring destruction but God promises later a Davidic monarch who will restore (12:1-3)
- e. Hezekiah will begin in trust but trust is more than a one-time act it must be a way of life. They will rebel and end up in captivity.
- f. Book ends with consequences of both (66:22-24)

### 4. Arrogance and Humiliation

- a. 2:11
- b. 2:17
- c. 2:22
- d. 41:24; 44:9

## C. Other themes

### 1. The Uniqueness of Yahweh

- a. No book unpacks this theme like Isaiah
- b. Relentless attack on idols and exaltation of Yahweh (40:12-15; 18-31)

### 2. The Nations

- a. Israel's responsibility to the nations (2:1-3)
- b. Seen also at the end of the book (66:18-23)
- c. God's victory over death is for all people (25:7,8)
- d. Judah, because of a lack of trust in Yahweh will be enslaved by the nations but ultimately the nations will come to them and they will seek their God (60:14)

### 3. Righteousness

- a. Hebrew root *sadaq* appears 61 times in Isaiah (12 in Jeremiah and 22 in Ezekiel)
- b. Evenly spread out in all three sections
- c. Special prominence in chapter one (21, 26, 27)-God expects righteousness
- d. The righteousness that is expected is not just judicial or forensic, it is a special kind of behavior (see 33:14-16)

- e. Yet the people, to whom Isaiah spoke, failed and destruction came as a result. So what does that mean for those people?
- f. In 40-55 the focus is not the righteousness of the people but that of God.
- g. How can people who failed to be righteous expect to be righteous? Only through His righteousness. (46:12; Ezekiel 36:21-32; Isaiah 53:11)
- h. Final section God reveals how he will enable helpless humanity to attain to His righteousness (59:15-21; 63:1-8)

#### **IV. The Relevance of Isaiah Today**

NOTE: All biblical books speak to us today but because of its breadth, Isaiah has a unique place and relevance for contemporary believers. Some of those areas are below:

- A. Uniqueness of Yahweh (maybe the most significant of our day)
  - 1. Exclusivism has become the unpardonable sin and inclusivism and relativism are the embraced philosophies.
  - 2. Tolerance, except those who hold to the exclusivity of Christ, is the norm
  - 3. Syncretism is encouraged and all religions are equally valid (other religions view God as part of the universe with us...Christianity and Isaiah especially see God as transcendent and therefore human value is that we are created in His image.)
  - 4. Take away transcendence and:
    - a. No ultimate meaning in life...we are an accident
    - b. Life has no value and is disposable
    - c. Ethics are relative
    - d. No goal in life and survival of the powerful
  - 5. But, if God is the ultimate reality of all things, then there can be no other ultimate reality and that is what Isaiah teaches.
  - 6. We must know that our view is not bigoted or arrogant exclusivism. It is the worldview as taught by Scripture and especially by Isaiah.
  - 7. The western world is being weighed in the balances
- B. Servanthood-the way to greatness is not through power but thorough serving an humiliation
- C. The Lord of History
  - 1. Not coincidental or accidental life
  - 2. Not just the strong win
  - 3. A God who is Creator who has broken into our world and who Lords over history and our lives

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#### D. Realized righteousness

1. Great emphasis on imputed righteousness
2. Coupled with security of the believer then our behaviors matter very little (born-again politicians who live how they want and every athlete thanking God)
3. Don't want to return to "works righteousness"
4. One side of truth: we can never be righteous enough in our own efforts, we will fail miserably
5. The other side is we were not saved to miss Hell or just go to heaven (self-serving and truncated)
6. Saved to share in His character (so we can be holy as He is holy)
7. Chapters 1-39 is the demand for righteousness
8. Chapters 40-55 is the offer of free grace and the provision of righteousness
9. 56-66 synthesizes the two
  - a. What is grace for?
  - b. Revel in chosen-ness and live perversely? No way!
  - c. So we can live lives of righteousness and become a lamp through whom God shines
10. How do we do that given our history of failure?
  - a. Through the same grace that restored us to relationship with him
  - b. The demand and the provision both come from God
  - c. Not calling for an arrogant claim to have arrived
  - d. He is saying that if we are not a conduit of His righteousness then we are missing a big part of what grace is for. (32:15, 16: 44:1-5)