

## **LESSON TWO - ISAIAH**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH, CONTINUED**

One of the strongest arguments came from the pen of Edward Kissane who postulated that the author of chapters 40-66 so respected Isaiah that he wrote it in the language of Isaiah and gave him credit by attaching Isaiah's name to his own writings. This accounts for the anonymity of the Second Isaiah, but there is something far more important for which it does not account. The theory is contrary to all that the Bible says about prophecy. The prophet was a spokesman for the Lord (Deut. 18:18-22). How were the hearers to test the prophet's accuracy if they did not know his name? This is especially true when the message is a written message whose author is unseen by his readers. If it is argued that that is all the more reason to attach "Isaiah," whose name is well known, the response is that those who know it well would also know that he had been dead for some 200 years! Why should they believe a forged prophecy that began with a lie if they either knew who the author was or began with a question mark if the author was unknown?

Finally, Second, Third, and Fourth Isaiahs and all participants in the "Isaiah School" remain unidentified. That is amazing, especially for Second Isaiah who is, by many of his proponents, touted as the greatest prophet who ever lived, the most spiritual of them all, and the one who provided us with the greatest vision of the nature of God. It is difficult to see how he could have been the most spiritual of all and have the greatest understanding of Yahweh and His nature, while at the same time "stealing" the name of Isaiah and leading his readers to believe that that which he wrote was from Isaiah ben Amoz. The argument in chapters 41-48 for the nature of God compared with gods of wood and stone is Yahweh's ability to tell the future and control events to bring them to pass. What does it say for these "authors" if, at the same time they were writing of a God who could tell and control the future, they knew that the one to whom they attributed authorship did not write that which they were attributing to him? Is their credibility not completely undermined and their theology destroyed?

The conclusion is that the critics have not only been unable to establish a convincing argument for Second, Third, and Fourth Isaiahs, they have also failed to account for the establishment and centuries long held tradition of Isaiah's authorship.

Much more could be said about the authorship of Isaiah. Entire volumes have been written asking "Who Wrote Isaiah?" However, this will suffice for our purposes. The words of John N. Oswalt will conclude our discussion:

All of the multiple authorship hypotheses finally undercut this theological point<sup>1</sup> because their underlying rationale is that God *could not* have so inspired Isaiah ben Amoz. It seems we cannot have it both ways. If we conclude the theological claims of the book are true, then we cannot avoid the implications of that conclusion for the book's authorship. If we conclude the book was created by a group of persons much later than Isaiah, then we are forced to admit that these persons knew what they were saying was not true but believed it ought to be true and thus tried to create such an account of the book's origins as would make readers believe it was. Such a book may still be an inspiring piece of theological innovation that is of interest to historical theologians, but it has no claims upon those of us who read it 2,700 years later.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The theological point is "that the book was written by Isaiah the son of Amoz in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and was gifted by God to see the future in such a way that it would forever demonstrate that Yahweh of Israel was not one of the gods, but was THE GOD who was able to tell the future in detail, the ultimate evidence that he was the Creator of creation, the One who made it, continued to direct it, and would ultimately redeem it."

2. *The NIV Application Commentary*, p. 41

4) THE USE OF ISAIAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Summary of the New Testament Evidence<sup>3</sup>

(Quotations from Isaiah by name)

SOURCE	MANNER OF INTRODUCING QUOTATION	PASSAGE QUOTED	SOURCE Whether in the alleged 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> Isaiah
Matthew			
3:3	the prophet Isaiah	40:3	2
8:17	Isaiah the prophet	53:4	2 (3)
12:17	Isaiah the prophet	42:1	2
13:14	the prophecy of Isaiah	6:9, 10	1
15:7	Isaiah prophesied	29:13	1
Mark			
1:2	in Isaiah the prophet	40:3	2
7:6	Isaiah prophesied	29:13	1
Luke			
3:4	in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet	40:3-5	2
4:17	the book of the prophet Isaiah	61:1, 2	3
John			
1:23	The prophet Isaiah	40:3	2
12:38	Isaiah the prophet	53:1	2 (3)
12:39	Isaiah said again	6:9, 10	1
12:41	Isaiah – said – saw – spake	53:1; 6:9, 10	2
Acts			
8:28	reading Isaiah the prophet	53:7, 8	2 (3)
8:30	reading the prophet Isaiah	53:7, 8	2 (3)

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3. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Edward J. Young, p. 203

8:32	the passage of the scripture <sup>4</sup>	53:7, 8	2(3)
28:25	Well spake the Holy Ghost through Isaiah the prophet	6:9, 10	1
	Romans <sup>5</sup>		
9:27	Isaiah cries	10:22, 23; 11:5	1
9:29	As Isaiah said before	1:9	1
10:16	Isaiah says	53:1	2 (3)
10:20	Isaiah becomes bold and says	65:1	3

## 5) THE DATE OF ISAIAH

The date of Isaiah can be fairly ascertained by his description of the historical periods that he describes in 1:1 – “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” As mentioned above there is indication that his preaching was extended into the reign of Manasseh; however, that could have been a reference to a co-regency with his father, Hezekiah. The following chart provides the dates:

NAME	DATES OF REIGN
Azariah/Uzziah	792-740
Jotham	750-732 <sup>6</sup>
Ahaz	735-715
Hezekiah	715-686

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4. Note that the background of this incident illustrates and fulfills Isa. 56:3-7 (3)
  5. Note that Romans 9 and 10 contain many allusions to and echoes of the language of Isaiah.
  6. Note the 10-year gap between Uzziah and Jotham, his son. Most likely there was a co-regency during those 10 years. 2 Chron. 26:18-21 records that Uzziah was struck with leprosy for attempting to offer incense in the temple. Zechariah 14:15 and Amos 1:1 speak of an earthquake in the days of Uzziah. Josephus states that it occurred when Uzziah was arguing with the priests in the holy place. Josephus records such an earthquake, Chapter IX, 4, as occurring at the same time that Uzziah was engaged in this violation of God’s law.

Jim Mcguiggan provides a chart of who reigned when during the period:<sup>7</sup>

Judean Kings	Israelite Kings	Assyrian Kings
Amaziah: 798-782	Jehoash: 798-782	Tiglathlileasar: 745-726
Uzziah: 792-740	Jereboam II: 793-753	Shalmaneser V: 726-722
Jotham: 750-732	Menahem: 752-742	Sargon II: 722-705
Ahaz: 735-715	Pekah: 752-732	Sennacherib: 705-681
Hezekiah: 715-686	Hoshea: 732-723/2	Esarhaddon: 681-669
Mahasseh: 697-642		Ashurbanipal: 669-627

Other lists could be given that have slightly different dates for the reigns of Judean and Israelite kings. These are given to show the approximate dates of the prophecy of Isaiah. It is not clear when Isaiah penned some of the prophecy. What is clear is that his ministry took place in the last half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and, for those who do not accept the late dates of writing by “many Isaiahs,” the writing took place during the same period. What time indications there are in the Prophecy of Isaiah will be discussed as we study further.

## 6) THE CONCURRENT HISTORY OF ISAIAH

a. We don’t know much about Isaiah. Most of what we know is garnered from the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophecy that bears his name. We know that over 2,700 years ago, around 740 B.C.,<sup>8</sup> probably in the Temple, a man named Isaiah, who was the son of Amoz,

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7. If you have a copy and check this chart you will find that the dates here are different. They have been modified to harmonize with the dates in the book in confidence that the dates in the chart in his book are typographical errors.

8. This is a good time to learn that all dates given for the reigns, births, and deaths of the Kings of Judah and Israel are somewhat uncertain. The Hebrew calendar does not correspond to our January-December calendar. Additionally, the Old Testament uses two systems for dating the reigns of kings – one counting from the year of ascension and the other counting from the first full year following ascension. There were also a number of co-regencies where both father and son reigned.

received a call from God to serve him as a prophet. This call is recorded in chapter six which indicates that Isaiah, like some of the other prophets, is not always concerned with being chronological. If this was the beginning of his prophecy and if he died early in Manasseh's reign, his ministry probably covered 740 – 690 B.C., or some 50 years.

Judah, where Isaiah prophesied, was one of the smallest of countries. Israel, though larger, was still a small country. Together they occupied a strategic position on the land routes from the Far East, through Central Asia, to Africa. Judah's smallness did not prevent it from asserting to the rest of the world that its God, Yahweh, was the creator of the entire universe, controlling and reigning over it all.

By this time Egypt was pretty much a has-been that was unable to deal with Assyria. Assyria had ambitions, but was unable to realize them because it had problems of its own. There was a "hot spot" across its northern border; within its border it had problems with succession of its rulers – Shalmaneser died without a successor. Against this background, Uzziah's reign was able, for the most part, to be one of peace and prosperity.

Some five years before Uzziah's death (745 B.C.), Assyria solved its problems. Tiglath-Pileser III (also known as Pul, 2Kings 15:19; 1 Chron. 5:26; Isa. 66:19), a capable and ambitious man, came to power. He took control in Babylon and secured the northern border. Recognizing his power, other kings began paying tribute – Rezin (Damascus), Menahem (Israel), Hiram (Tyre). By the time of Uzziah's death, Assyria had rolled over everything between it and Judah.

In addition to the threat of Assyria, Judah was decaying internally. Wealth was concentrated in a few who had little concern for the poor. Justice was for sale to the highest bidder, which enabled the rich to defraud the poor, creating greater division among its people. Oppression was the practice of the day; religious obligations were ignored; spiritual decay characterized God's people.

Under Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah matters did not improve. Israel had one emergency after another. In 734 B.C. Pekah (King of Israel) entered into an alliance with Rezin of Damascus and tried to persuade Ahaz to join. When Ahaz refused,

Assyria and Israel joined forces against Ahaz to either make Judah a part of the alliance or replace Ahaz with a king who would join. Isaiah advised Ahaz to trust the Lord, but Ahaz chose to seek the protection of Tiglath-Pileser, thus becoming subject to Assyria. Assyrian subjection required heavy tribute, which, if Judah failed to pay, would bring severe punishment. The Israel-Damascus alliance fell in 732 B.C, followed by Samaria in 722 B.C. Israel became a province of an empire having a border only 8 miles from Jerusalem. Judah struggled. Its economy was in severe depression. Its existence depended on its submission to Assyria insofar as the human eye could see.<sup>9</sup> Any indication of Assyrian weakness created a hope of successful rebellion with Egypt's aid.<sup>10</sup> Isaiah speaks of one such rebellion by the Philistines in 711 B.C. (20:1). Apparently learning nothing from Ashdod's experience, Judah, tiring of the Assyrian yoke, rebelled. When Hezekiah ascended to the throne he was willing to risk refusing to pay the tribute.

Perhaps the stars were already aligned. After Sargon II died, rebellion quickly spread against Sennacherib, his successor (705-681). Babylon had already rebelled and hoped that Judah would join with it (39:1-2). With rebellion on its east and west, it appeared to be the ideal time for Judah to rebel. Hezekiah refused to pay tribute, forced the Philistines to join his rebellion (2 Kings 18:7-8), and prepared for battle.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately for Hezekiah and Judah, Sennacherib brought things under control more quickly than anticipated. In less than a year he had everything under control, including Babylon. By 701 B.C. he was ready to move west. The campaign was great in size and swift in action. Palestine was rolled over from the north (Sidon) to the south (Lachish) and Jerusalem was placed under siege. According to Sennacherib's annals, he knew that Hezekiah was a leader of the rebellion and he was determined that Hezekiah would suffer greatly. Egypt's apparent willingness faded and failed

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9. Judah had abandoned dependence upon God and could not see what Isaiah saw.

10. Egypt was enjoying somewhat of resuscitation at this time and seemed ready to participate in the rebellion.

11. This was when he created a tunnel to bring fresh drinking water into Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30).

(37:9 – Ethiopian rulers controlled Egypt at the time.). All was over; Judah was doomed; all hope was gone!

Or was it? Isaiah heard (or learned) of the boasts of Rabshakeh, Sennacherib's field commander.<sup>12</sup> And whatever Hezekiah and his court may have believed and feared, Isaiah knew there was a God – the God – and that the battle truly belonged to the Lord. God, not Sennacherib, ruled Assyria. As one commentator wrote:

Isaiah lived by the old creed. Ahaz and Hezekiah found it hard to translate into practical politics, the common people gave it only lip service, and Sennacherib mocked it as madness, but Isaiah charted his entire course by it.

Isaiah lived for his mission given by the God who called him. Chapters 1-39 deal primarily with two crises – 734 B.C. and 701 B.C.<sup>13</sup> Isaiah is always true to his Lord

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12. Some consider "Rabshakeh" to be a name. Other's consider it to be a military title equivalent to "field commander" which accounts for some translations of 36:2.

13. The crisis of 701 B.C. relates to Sennacherib's campaign, recorded in Isaiah 36-37 and 2 Kings 18-20. Both texts state that the war occurred in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah's reign. This creates a chronological problem because some place Hezekiah's ascension in 727/26 B.C. while others place it at 715 B.C. There are several suggestions for resolution. Some believe that Hezekiah was in co-regency with his father, Ahaz, from 727 to 715. This theory accords with God's addition of 15 years to Hezekiah's life. These 15 years would be from 701-686 B.C. One commentator suggests that "fourteenth year" should read "twenty-fourth" year. He admits that there is no textual support for this change. He argues that the ancient method of writing numbers made this type of error very easy. His example of such an error is 2 Chronicles 36:9 where Jehoiachin ascended the throne at eight years of age, whereas 2 Kings 24:8 gives the correct age at 18. Hebrew scholars Keil & Delitzsch support this conclusion by calling the "8 years" of 2 Chronicles 36:9 a "slip of the pen." John Oswalt, in *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, pp. 674-75, makes a strong argument for the "co-regency" stance:

It appears that Hezekiah did begin to reign in 727/26, probably as co-regent with his father Ahaz. Furthermore, the Babylonian rebel Merodach-baladan seems to have been out of the picture by 703. Beyond this, it is inconceivable that the Babylonian envoys would have come to congratulate Hezekiah solely on his recovery if he had recently experienced a great deliverance from Assyria. Furthermore, as Young [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 2] and others point out, most of the temple



who directs him and behind whom, in humility, he stands. Isaiah's prophecy is truly not about Isaiah.

Within some five years after Hezekiah's death, Manasseh, his son, turned away from Hezekiah's policies and led Judah farther away from God. He submitted to Assyria. Idol worship was the fashion of the day. According to tradition, Manasseh's men sawed Isaiah in two. As Isaiah declined physically, he reached his spiritual heights. During this period he wrote chapters 40-66. Here he looked into the future, seeing not only the Babylonian captivity of Judah and its return under Cyrus, but also the triumphant coming of the Messiah and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

## 7. THEMES TO LOOK FOR IN ISAIAH

### a. God and History

Isaiah leaves no doubt about who created the universe, controls the earth, and governs nations – Yahweh. Moreover, he controls it in righteousness. He uses nations to punish his wayward people, but then punishes the very nations that he used because of

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treasures were stripped to pay the initial, abortive tribute to Sennacherib, leaving nothing to show the Babylonians if they came after that time. Finally, the dates of the Babylonian revolutionary Merodach-baladan . . . seem to confirm that the sickness did not occur after Sennacherib's attack, but before it.

Bryan E. Bayer, in *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, p. 143, outlines disadvantages of this theory:

(1) it requires an assumption of a co-regency without specific evidence, though we do know Judah's kings often utilized them, (2) it requires 2 Kings 18 to have two different reference points for Hezekiah's reign in the space of a few verses, and (3) it requires the Babylonian delegation's visit in 713-712 BC (Hezekiah was given fifteen years of additional life, 38:5), which many have argued fits better around 703 BC.

Bayer's closing comments on the subject well states where all the discussion leaves us:

All three interpretations [He adds a third to the two discussed here – the assumption that Hezekiah ruled later than some suggest. It is not widely held.] have their strengths and weaknesses, and the exact chronology of Hezekiah's reign remains difficult to determine. Interpretation 2 appears most likely [his personal position], though perhaps the appearance of further historical evidence will one day settle the matter.

their idolatry and viciousness. This doesn't mean that God gets everything that he wants. Some of God's promises, both for blessing and punishment, are conditional. Man's free will determines which of God's promises are fulfilled. See 2 Pet. 3:9.

b. God and Holiness

"The Holy One of Israel" is one of Isaiah's favorite descriptions of Yahweh. God is holy – free from sin. He desires (and demands) holiness from his people. Knowing their inability to attain it, he provides it for them through Jesus Christ.

c. God and the Remnant

God's remnant began with Noah, not Abraham. When Elijah was under the Juniper tree, God's remnant was described as 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:28). Isaiah often speaks of a remnant, but he does not always refer to the same thing when he uses it. He may refer to survivors of some judgment. He may refer to those who remain faithful in the face of widespread idolatry and law breaking. He may refer to the spiritual Israel that will exist after the establishment of the Lord's Kingdom. It is often difficult to determine his reference. It was the remnant of faithful Jews that led to God's preservation of national Israel (1:9; see also, Rom. 9:29; 11:25).

All uses of "remnant" have one thing in common – they emphasize the glory of God in his faithfulness to his commitment, particularly through Abraham, that through his seed all nations would be blessed. Abraham grew into Israel and, through Israel, in spite of its disobedience, came David, and, in spite of his disobedience, through David's descendants came the Messiah. Instead of eliminating a rebellious people (1:9), God left himself a remnant (Rom. 11:14). When the Kingdom was at hand Jesus made clear that the physical seed of Abraham was no longer either the sons of Abraham or the sons of God. Their father was the Devil (John 8:37-45).

d. God and the Servant

Once again we are dealing with a term that Isaiah uses to refer to different things (*e.g.*, Isaiah – 20:3; Eliakim – 22:20; David – 37:35; the spiritual or righteous remnant – 65:8-9). Most importantly it is used of the Messiah (42:14; 52:13-53:12 and the New

Testament uses of these passages).

Keep these different uses in mind and read carefully as we study through the book. We will find that commentators don't always agree and definitive conclusions may not always be reached.

e. God and the Elect

Twelve times in his prophecy Isaiah uses the terms "elect" and "chosen." "Called" is used at times as a synonym for "chosen." The terms are used of individuals (Abraham – 51:2; Cyrus – 45:4) and Judah (See 41:8-9; 43:1, 7, 10, 21; 44:1-2; 65:15). The concept runs from Genesis to the Messiah because God was working to bring salvation to his creation. F.F. Bruce stated it beautifully (*New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*, p. 62):

When the crucial test came, the faithful remnant was reduced to one person, the Son of Man who entered death single-handed and rose again as his people's representative."