



ISAIAH

Week 1: Introducing Isaiah
Trusted. Obedient. Prophetic.
Winter 2023 w/Wednesday Night Crew

INTRODUCING ISAIAH

SL#3

ISAIAH [I-ZAY-yuh: “Yahweh is salvation(deliverance)”].

The prophet who authored the Book of Isaiah. 2 Kings 19; 20; 2 Chronicles 26; 32.¹

HAYFORD:

- The book of Isaiah is sometimes called a miniature Bible: Sixty-six chapters paralleling sixty-six books.
[The Bible divides into an Old Testament of thirty-nine books and a New Testament of twenty-seven books. Isaiah breaks into two sections.]
- The first thirty-nine chapters deal with the history of God’s people during Isaiah’s lifetime.
- The last twenty-seven chapters begin with a forerunner who will prepare the way for the Messiah, and they end with a description of the new heaven and the new earth.
- Isaiah prophesied for about seventy years [Prophesied 739–681 B.C.] during the reigns of four kings of Judah (**Is. 1:1**).²

SL#4

The vision about Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah, Amoz’s son, saw in the days of Judah’s kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Rest of the World at this time:

HAYFORD: In the eighth century before Christ,
*the Chou Dynasty flourished in China,
*Hindu sages of India started compiling the *Upanishads*, [Sanskrit text developed Hindu philosophy]
*Homer penned the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Greece,
*In Judah, the prophet Isaiah wrote the most exquisite Hebrew composition of all time.

It was an era of high culture in the ancient world.

Isaiah didn’t concern himself with art and philosophy.

A **vision of the holiness of God** inspired his genius. Isaiah **continues** to challenge his readers to see God with the eyes of their hearts and spirits.

After we see Him, we see ourselves more clearly than ever before, and we know how much we need the Holy One of Israel to reign in our hearts.³

¹ Richards, L. (1999). *Every man in the Bible* (p. 215). T. Nelson.

² Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1996). *Welcoming the Saving Reign of God: A study of Isaiah*. Thomas Nelson.

³ Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1996). *Welcoming the Saving Reign of God: A study of Isaiah*. Thomas Nelson.



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The **Upanishads** ([/uˈpɛniˌʃɛdz/](#)^[1] **Sanskrit**: उपनिषद् *Upaniṣad* pronounced [*ˈʊpənɪʃɛd*]) are **late Vedic Sanskrit** texts that supplied the basis of later **Hindu philosophy**.^{[2][3][note 1][note 2]} They are the most recent part of the **Vedas**, the oldest scriptures of Hinduism, and deal with meditation, **philosophy**, **consciousness**, and **ontological** knowledge; earlier parts of the Vedas deal with mantras, benedictions, rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices.^{[6][7][8]} While among the most important literature in the history of Indian religions and culture, the Upanishads document a wide variety of "rites, incarnations, and esoteric knowledge"^[9] departing from Vedic ritualism and interpreted in various ways in the later commentarial traditions. Of all Vedic literature, the Upanishads alone are widely known, and their diverse ideas, interpreted in various ways, informed the later traditions of Hinduism.^{[2][10]}

The **Sanskrit** term *Upaniṣad* (from *upa* "by" and *ni-ṣad* "sit down")^[29] translates to "sitting down near", referring to the student sitting down near the teacher while receiving spiritual knowledge. (Gurumukh)^[30]
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishads>

TEN POINTS OF INTRODUCTION TO ISIAIAH:

1.)

Isaiah was the Son of: **AMoz [A mozz]** (*strong*) — the father of the prophet Isaiah (Is. 1:1; 13:1; 38:1). According to a tradition of the rabbis, **Amoz was a brother of King Amaziah of Judah** (reigned about 796–767) and, like his son Isaiah, also a prophet.⁴

Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Thomas Nelson, Inc.

SL#5

NKJV

Isaiah 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.

13:1

The burden^[a] [prophecy, oracle] against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

38:1

In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.' "

2.) SL#6

Uncle: **King Amaziah** of Judah [Good King] 2 Kings 14/2 Chronicles 25

- (אִמְצַיָּהוּ, *amatsyah*), King of Judah for 29 years.
- Was 25 yrs old when he became King.
- Son of Joash [Good King]
- Reign coincided with Israelite kings: Jehoash and Jeroboam II.

⁴ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Thomas Nelson, Inc.



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- Amaziah reigned over Judah from 796–767 BC (Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 217). He succeeded his father, Joash, and was succeeded by his son Azariah (Uzziah), who likely reigned as coregent with Amaziah from 792–767 BC.
- **He was one of the eight good kings of Judah (along with Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah).**
- He failed to destroy the pagan shrines in Judah.
- 2 Chronicles 25:1–28 = Amaziah’s idolatry and his refusal to listen to a prophet sent by God. [Wins a war following God’ word thru the unnamed prophet but goes and worships the idols of that overthrown culture and gives God the finger. Due to those Men of Valor he hired and the prophet told him God said “No” so King sent them back to Israel and they were angry so they attacked a Judean town while King was at war w/o them?]
- The prophet warned him that God would destroy him for his idolatry and refusal to listen (2 Chr 25:15–16).
- THIS WOULD BE ISAIAH’S UNCLE.

Gilboy, J. J. (2016). [Amaziah, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

3.) SL#7

Isaiah = **THE Evangelist** of the Old Testament.

[Isaiah’s quoted or referred to some 13X in the Gospels, 3X in Acts, and 5X in Romans.]

Richards, L. (1999). [Every man in the Bible](#) (pp. 91–93). T. Nelson.

4.) SL#8

ETCETERA What we can **piece together**:

Richards, L. (1999). [Every man in the Bible](#) (pp. 91–93). T. Nelson.

Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In [Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary](#). Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Nelson’s *Illustrated Bible Handbook* comments on how little we know of Isaiah the man.

- He is often mentioned in Kings and Chronicles,
- His name occurs several times in his own book.
- Isaiah was **married to an unnamed prophetess and that he had children (Isa. 7; 8),**

But his family background and social status remains a mystery.

FACT: Great personal vision of God took place in the temple (Isa. 6) suggests he may have been a priest, as only priests were to enter the holy place.

FACT: Isaiah was an intimate of King Hezekiah—probably a sort of court preacher.

FACT: His mastery of Hebrew is as rich and great as Shakespeare’s grasp of English, and shows he was a highly educated man (p. 282).

FACT: Sticks to facts as he describes experiences:

“Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.” And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, “... My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia.” (Isa. 20:2, 3)



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A very public figure, is at the same time a very private man.

Isaiah faithfully left the comfort of the temple and served God for over 40 years, faithfully representing God to the people and its leaders.

All felt the impact of his prophetic preaching.

5.) SL#9

Place & Time

Horton, S. M. (2000). [Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary](#) (pp. 11–38). Logion Press.

a. Civic Background:

- A false, government-aided prosperity
- encouraged a corrupt luxury
- accompanied by oppression of the poor
- and a sensual, immoral, heathenish religion (2 Chron. 26:16–18, 20; 27:2; 28:1–27; 29:6–9).

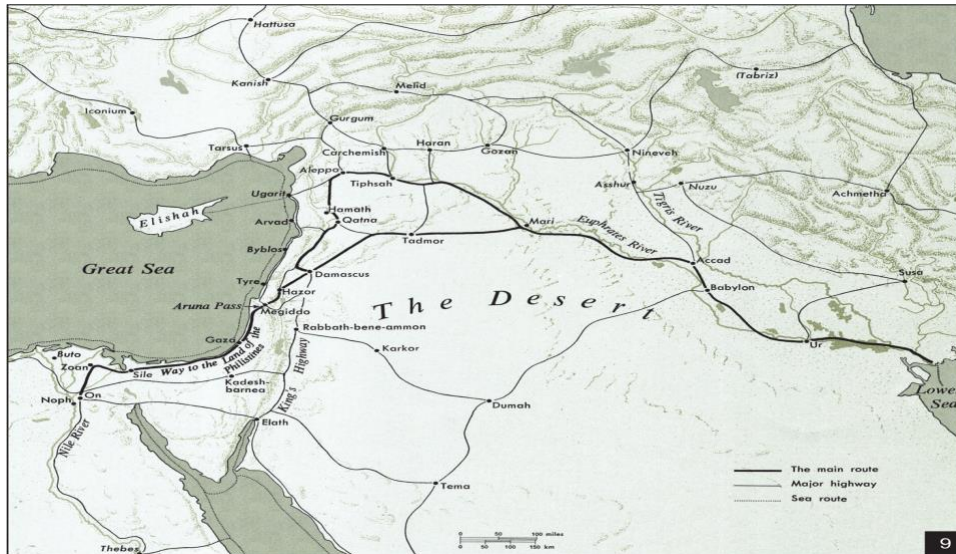
b. Geographical Background

God could have put His people, Israel, in a distant, sheltered oasis where no one would bother them. Instead He put them at the crossroads of the ancient world. This “promised land” would be a vital center for the spread of the gospel when Jesus came. But in Isaiah’s day, it was a place where the armies of the known world came into conflict. To the northeast, Assyria was the dominant power, with its cities of Nineveh and Asshur on the Tigris River (see map, Appendix B). However, Babylon, on the Euphrates River, was the cultural, commercial, and religious center for all Mesopotamia. To the south, Egypt, along the Nile River, was a great and wealthy nation.

Assyria’s goal was to dominate Babylon and conquer Egypt. To this end, its kings habitually sent their armies every year to conquer, pillage, and destroy cities and nations that stood in the way. The Assyrians were noted for their cruelty and kept inventing new ways to torture their captives.

Horton, S. M. (2000). [Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary](#) (pp. 11–38). Logion Press.

SL#10

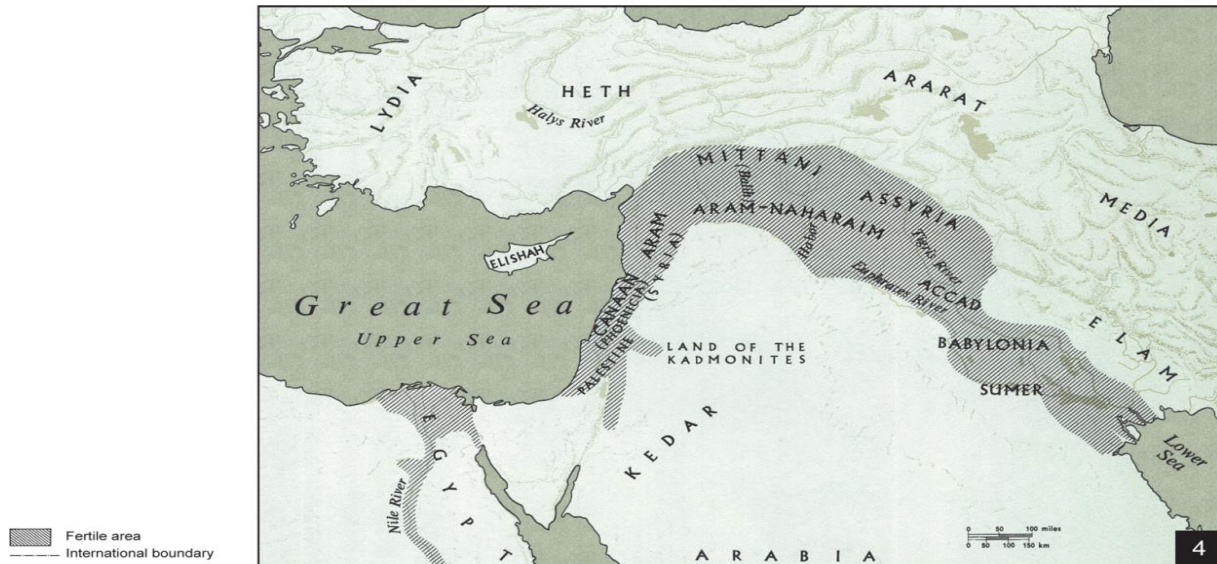


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6.) SL#11

Isaiah's children were named to bring symbolic remembrance of the LORD.

Isaiah 8:18 CEB

Look! I and the children the Lord gave me are signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of heavenly forces, who lives on Mount Zion.

may indicate that "Immanuel" refers to Isaiah's own son, as it states, "I and the children whom the LORD has given me" as "signs and portents." Under this interpretation, three of his sons played the role of "sign and portent":

- Shear-jashub (Isa 7:3)
- Immanuel (Isa 7:14)
- Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa 8:1, 4)⁵

SHEAR-JASHUB Isaiah's son whose name, meaning "a remnant shall return," symbolized the prophecy that, although Israel and Judah would be destroyed, a remnant would be saved and later return (Is 7:3).⁶

Immanuel *im-maw-noo-ale'*; from 5973 and 410 with a pron. suff. ins.; *with us (is) God*; *Immanuel*, a typical name of Isaiah's son:— Immanuel.⁷

MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ [MAY-huhr-SHAL-uhl-HASH-baz: "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens"]. 725 B.C. Symbolic name given to one of Isaiah's sons signifying that Syria and the northern kingdom would soon be destroyed by Assyria. Isaiah 8:1-4.⁸

⁵ Allen, L. C. (2016). [Immanuel](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

⁶ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (p. 1186). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁷ Strong, J. (1996). In *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*. Thomas Nelson.

⁸ Richards, L. (1999). *Every man in the Bible* (p. 215). T. Nelson.



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Isaiah’s children were named to bring symbolic remembrance of the LORD.

- What happens when someone does not want to remember the LORD?
- How would they respond?
- What would it be like to have God speak through your family?

7.) SL#12

Most Messianic of all O.T. books.

The Enlarging Picture of the Messiah:

7:10–17	Born of a virgin.
8:8	Immanuel—The <i>with-us</i> God.
9:1–7	Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.
11:1–10	Descendant of David, Spirit-anointed. (Read here Rom. 8:18–25.)
16:5	The throne of justice and love.
28:16	The chief Cornerstone.
32:1–5, 15–18	The Messiah is King.
42:1–12	The divinely-chosen and -sustained Servant who gently and mercifully restores the Jews and brings light to the Gentiles.
49:1–13	The Servant is God’s weapon to rouse and extricate and regather the people.
50:4–11	The Servant, taught by God, teaches and strengthens others.
52:13 to 53:12	“The Mount Everest of Messianic Prophecy.” The Servant by His vicarious, substitutionary suffering and death pleases God and makes possible His matchless salvation.
54	Israel’s growth as the result of the Servant’s redemptive work.
55	The wide-open door to “whoever wills.”
61:1–11	The Messiah’s saving, healing, liberating ministry brings joy. (Read Luke 4:16–21.)

Date: Isaiah was the greatest of the prophets of the last half of the eighth century B.C.

Good Kings of Judah = Amaziah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

8.) SL#13

Amaziah = Good

Kings of Judah Isaiah dealt with:

Uzziah/Azariah = Good

Jotham = Good

Ahaz = Bad King

Hezekiah = Good

King who had Isaiah killed:

Manasseh = Bad King

Isaiah 1–12: Messages about Judah and Jerusalem, with references to King Ahaz

Isaiah 13–23: Messages about the nations around, with a reference King Ahaz



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Isaiah 24–27: Messages about the destiny of the world around, with no reference to specific kings

Isaiah 28–39: Messages about Judah and Jerusalem, with references to King Hezekiah

Isaiah 40–55: Messages about Judah and Jerusalem, with references to King Cyrus

Isaiah 56–66: Messages about Judah and Jerusalem, with no reference to specific kings⁹

Cyrus:

In one of the most amazing prophecies of the Bible, **Isaiah predicts Cyrus’ decree to free the Jews. One hundred fifty years before Cyrus lived, the prophet calls him by name and gives details of Cyrus’ benevolence to the Jews:**

“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him ... ‘I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me’ ” (Isaiah 45:1, 4; see also 41:2–25; 42:6). Evincing His sovereignty over all nations, God says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please” (Isaiah 44:28).

Cyrus’s decree releasing the Jewish people, in fulfillment of prophecy, is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23: “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.” ’ ”¹⁰

9.) SL#14

IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE VISION...

ISAIAH 1:1

1 The vision about Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah, Amoz’s son, saw in the days of Judah’s kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. CEB

Judah Called to Repentance

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. NKJV

Isaiah’s Call: A **vision** of God led **to** a vision of self and sin. **Confession** led **to** cleansing and consecration. The **work** was to be difficult, = but it laid the foundation for a remnant to return and prepared the way for the Messiah (chap. 6).

Horton, S. M. (2000). [Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary](#) (pp. 11–38). Logion Press.

10.) SL#15

QUESTIONS the arise from the book/life of Isaiah:

Define Prophet:

What does it mean to be “a Prophet”?

What does it cost?

Who are they today?

⁹ Goldingay, J. (2015). [Isaiah for Everyone](#) (p. 258). Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

¹⁰ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Logos Bible Software.



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[#1 prerequisite – Must be a **PART OF** -> involved in the community. Skin in the game. Give and take of the people they are prophesying over. Serve God’s people. Member of a local church and in good standing. There is no such thing as rock star prophets. No Hollywood gain.]

Understanding Visions

The Power of Repentance

The Cost of Anointing

Anointed Suffering

Embracing Mercy

God’s Presence

God’s Holiness = The Assurance of

Judgement

CLOSING: SL#16,

Blackaby – Experiencing God Bible:

#17 As we prepare to meet Isaiah, look to see the God he sees:

One of holiness.

One of power. [Can I trust His power over the power that surrounds me.]

One of hope.

One who walks with us in hard.

One of anointed suffering. [Will I take His suffering?]

#18 Decisions for us as we study Isaiah:

How will I handle my own sin?

How will I respond to His summons on my life?

Does my faith extend to hard?

Can I trust His power over humanities power sources?

Can I pick up His suffering?

#19 Hard Truths of Isaiah:

God’s judgement reveals that God is supreme and we are not.

God’s judgement demands a response in us. What will it be?

God’s judgement can be delayed by His mercy.

If we do not embrace His mercy, the judgment is inevitable.

Who should I fear more: God’s judgement or my enemies?

God’s judgement reveals that He takes His holiness and His word seriously (supernatural law?) whether we do or not.

God communicating with Isaiah. He could have been a big shot but....

- **I want JC to be my visible self.**
- **My immersion experience.**

#20 For Us: What would others find out about JC, taste of JC, know of JC by living with me?

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NotES:

<https://nypost.com/2023/01/01/pope-emeritus-benedict-xvis-final-words-before-death-revealed/>
Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's last words before he died Saturday were, "Lord, I love you," according to his longtime secretary.
Archbishop Georg Gaenswein quoted a nurse who was helping the 95-year-old and heard the words shortly before his death on New Year's Eve.
The nurse recalled Benedict making the short statement at about 3 a.m. before he died later that morning, Gaenswein said.
"Benedict XVI, with a faint voice but in a very distinct way, said in Italian, 'Lord, I love you,'" Gaenswein told the Vatican's official media Sunday.
"I wasn't there in that moment, but the nurse a little later recounted it.
"They were his last comprehensible words, because afterwards, he wasn't able to express himself any more."
Gaenswein, a German prelate, lived in the Vatican monastery where Benedict resided after he retired from the post in 2013.

Isaiah's son's name, *Shear-Yashub*, translates "a remnant will return." It was to be a prophetic indicator to beleaguered Hezekiah that God would turn the seemingly impossible plight of Judah into deliverance (Isa. 7:3–4; 10:21–22). This was also the local setting for the well-known prophecy that "A virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him *Immanu El*" ("God with us," Isa. 7:14). The name of Isaiah's second son, *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*, was a prophecy of coming doom—the fall of the northern kingdom at the hands of the Assyrian armies, as the name graphically portrays ("quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil" Isa. 8:1–3). Whether the Immanuel prophecy had any local fulfillment in relation to this second son is a debated subject (cf. Isa. 8:8–10). That it has ultimate messianic significance in connection with Jesus of Nazareth is clear from Matthew 1:22–23.¹¹
IMMANUEL (עִמָּנוּאֵל, *immanu'el*; Ἐμμανουήλ, *Emmanouēl*). Means "God is with us." Occurs primarily in Isa 7:14 (which is quoted in Matt 1:23).

Biblical Significance

In Isa 7:14, "Immanuel" is a symbolic name given to a child who was to be born in the reign of King Ahaz of Judah. Isaiah 8:8 repeats the name and Isa 8:10 echoes it. Matthew 1:23 claims that the baby Jesus fulfills Isa 7:14, especially with reference to His virgin birth.

Isaiah 7:14 in Context

Historical Context

Isaiah 7:14 is set during the Syro-Ephraimite war in the 730s BC. This context can be reconstructed from Assyrian records and biblical texts, especially 2 Kgs 15–17 (see Donner, "Separate States," 421–34). In 734 BC, the neighboring nations of Syria (also called Aram) and Ephraim (the northern kingdom, Israel) pressured Ahaz of Judah to join a military coalition in response to a threat from the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III, who wanted to create an empire out of surrounding states. Ahaz refused to join the coalition, and instead appealed to Tiglath-pileser to support him by invading his aggressive neighbors' territory, voluntarily pledging his allegiance to the Assyrian king. Ahaz thus provided the aggressor with a legitimate pretext for invading Syria and Palestine. By 732 BC, Tiglath-pileser had subdued Damascus—the leading Aramaean state—and Israel, and brought the whole area under Assyrian control. Thereafter, the kingdom of Judah survived only as a permanent vassal state, first of Assyria and later of Babylonia and Persia.

Literary Context

¹¹ Wallmark, L. S. (1996). [Name](#). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., p. 551). Baker Book House.

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Isaiah 7:1–17 and 8:1–10 represent Isaiah’s two prophetic responses to the Judaeen crisis. The first response mainly addresses King Ahaz, while the second has the people in view.

Isaiah 7:1–17. In Isaiah 7:3–9, Yahweh commissions the prophet to confront King Ahaz as he was inspecting the water supply just outside Jerusalem (in anticipation of a siege). He commands Isaiah to take along his son, Shear-jashub, whose name means “a remnant will return.” The text does not explain the significance of the name, but it seems to anticipate Judah’s forthcoming experience of judgment and salvation (Isa 7–8). Yahweh gives His prophet an oracle of salvation—these oracles typically open with the declaration “Do not fear” (compare Exod 14:13–14) and often offer the divine assurance “I am with you” (Isa 41:10). A similar assurance will come in the name “Immanuel” (Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 289). The oracle closes in Isa 7:9 with the warning: “Have firm faith, or you will fail to stand firm” (REB).

In Isaiah 7:10–17, God gives Ahaz a message of positive assurance (Isa 7:11–16), in which he promises “the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and name him Immanuel” (Isa 7:14 NRSV). This sign was confirmation that God would rescue Ahaz and his people from the threat of the other two kings. Such a sign could be miraculous (compare Isa 37:7–8) or not (compare Isa 37:30–32). God concludes this message with a negative note, promising that the northern kings’ territory would be devastated before the baby “knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isa 7:16 ESV), probably indicating the child is still young. The Judaeen people would be living off the fat of the land by then (“curds and honey” 7:15), which the child would share.

Isa 8:1–10. In the second passage, the name “Immanuel” occurs in Isa 8:8 and also, in translation, in Isa 8:10, “God is with us.” This passage features another symbolic name: “Maher-shalal-hash-baz,” which means “Spoil speeds, prey hastens.” Like Isa 7:15–16, this passage indicates that the king of Assyria would have plundered the wealth of the two kings’ capitals (Damascus and Samaria) before this child could speak his first words. Also like the earlier passage, judgment would follow deliverance for the people who resorted to fear instead of faith in God. Isaiah 8:8 addresses Immanuel, stating “it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel” (ESV). The boy would now have to live through bad times.

In Isa 8:9–10, the prophet turns a call to war into a call to defeat, which closes with the assurance: “God is with us.” If Isa 8:8–10 recalls the threat from Israel and Syria, the phrase “God is with us” refers to the same period as the name “Immanuel” in Isa 7:14. More likely, however, the reference to “far countries” envisions an Assyrian international army of vassal troops; in that case, Isa 8:8–10 has Judah’s deliverance from Assyria in view (compare Isa 10:5–12; 14:24–27; 17:12–14). In this case, it also accords with Isaiah’s resolve to withdraw and wait in hope for eventual salvation after the judgment (Isa 8:17). Immanuel was to have continuing relevance for Judah as a pointer to salvation.

The Identity of Immanuel

A number of interpretations exist for the identity of Immanuel.

Direct Prediction of Mary and Jesus

Traditionally, Isa 7:14 has been related to Matt 1:23 because of its reference to a virgin in its quotation from the Septuagint (LXX) of Isa 7:14. This interpretation is aided by an etymological explanation that עַלְמָה (*almah*) (used for the mother) comes from a Hebrew root עַלַּם (*’Im*), meaning “hide,” thus referring to sexual seclusion. However, modern scholarship derives the term עַלְמָה (*almah*) from a homonym that means “be sexually mature,” so that עַלְמָה (*almah*) may or may not refer to a virgin; essentially, the noun is not used to define a woman’s virginity, but her capacity for marriage. Koehler identifies that it may also refer to a married young woman until the birth of her first child (Koehler, *Verständnis*, 50; Bratcher, “Study,” 98). More naturally, בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*) (meaning “virgin”) would have been used if virginity had been of primary relevance.

The LXX interpreted עַלְמָה (*almah*) as παρθένος (*parthenos*), “virgin.” The Greek word could also be used of non-virgins, but probably the basic sense was intended since it renders הָרָה (*harah*) as “will be pregnant,” instead

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of the more natural “is pregnant.” This future perspective implies that a woman who is now a virgin will lose her virginity by becoming pregnant.

Perspectives on this discussion include:

- Wenham argues that *בְּתוּלָה* (*bethulah*) by itself does not mean “virgin” because it requires an explicit addition to express virginity (Wenham, “Betûlâh,” 341; compare Gen 24:16; Judg 11:37–39; 21:12). However, this interpretation overlooks a rhetorical factor of repetition for emphasis (see e.g., Gen 25:8; 35:29; Job 42:17).
- Ziegler observes that the LXX also understood Ahaz to be the father because it went on to translate “and you will call” by vocalizing וקראת (*wqr’t*) as וקראתה (*weqaratha*) instead of the masoretic וקראת (*weqarath*), meaning “and she will call” (Ziegler, *Isaiah*, 147).
- Walton observes that the NASB and NIV retain “virgin”; however, in Gen 24:34, where the LXX rendered *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) with παρθένος (*parthenos*), they translate “maiden” and “young woman” (Walton, “Isa 7:14,” 290–91).
- Gundry (*Use of the Old Testament*, 227n8) maintains the traditional interpretation by taking the period of Jesus’ infancy in the far future as a measure of near-future events. However, Bratcher argues, “the person of the child is inextricably connected with the events forecast, and to lift the promised sign out of its historical setting is to do intolerable violence to scripture” (Bratcher, “Study,” 109).
- Heiser notes that although *בְּתוּלָה* (*bethulah*) refers to someone who has been sexually inactive, it does not mean that *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) never means virgin as none of the occurrences of the word *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) give clues about the sexual status of the woman (women) in question, with one exception. Song of Solomon 6:8 says: “There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins (*עַלְמוֹת*, *alamoth*) without number.” Heiser also highlights a parallel from the book of Esther where she moves from being part of a group of virgins to the group of concubines, creating a parallel between the terms *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) and *בְּתוּלָה* (*bethulah*). Furthermore, Heiser notes that in Genesis 24, the terms *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) and *בְּתוּלָה* (*bethulah*), as well as the term for young women (*נַעֲרָה*, *na’ara*) are all used to describe Rachel, which indicates possibly synonymous usage. Heiser says that all this combined makes a case for Matthew’s understanding of *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) as “virgin” (Heiser, “Immanuel’s Mother: Virgin or Not?,” 35).

A Collective Interpretation

While the word *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) has the definite article, it may be a generic usage of “the” (Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, 114). If this is the case, the text refers to young women in general (Koehler, “Verständnis,” 49; Fohrer, “Jesaja 7:14,” 167–68; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12*, 102–3). The communal situation envisioned by the name “Immanuel” (“God is with us”) supports this interpretation. Thus, babies born less than a year after the present crisis would be called “Immanuel” in celebration of a turnaround that demonstrated God’s protective presence in the community. However, if this interpretation is correct, it would be more likely that the mothers would be designated as “women.”

An Interpretation as Isaiah’s Son

Isaiah 8:18 may indicate that “Immanuel” refers to Isaiah’s own son, as it states, “I and the children whom the LORD has given me” as “signs and portents.” Under this interpretation, three of his sons played the role of “sign and portent”:

- Shear-jashub (Isa 7:3)
- Immanuel (Isa 7:14)
- Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa 8:1, 4)

Jerome (early fifth century AD) and the medieval Jewish scholars Ibn Ezra and Rashi accepted this widespread interpretation.

This interpretation would require that there were different mothers for the latter two children, since the timing of their births appears to have been so chronologically close (Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 334). However, Isa

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8:18 may not have been intended as an exact summary, especially if Isaiah's own symbolic name, which means "Yahweh gives salvation" (compare Isa 12:1–2), is in view. Alternatively, Immanuel could be equated with Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Wolf, "Solution," 449–56; Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 213, 220; Blomberg, "Matthew," 4). This interpretation is supported by the fact that Isa 7:3–17 and Isa 8:1–8 exhibit a number of parallel features, suggesting they may be parallel accounts of the same child.

A Royal Interpretation

"Immanuel" may have been the son of King Ahaz—specifically Hezekiah, his successor (Clements, "Immanuel Prophecy," 70–77). Clements argues that, historically, "Immanuel" referred to Isaiah's son, but the reference was then editorially reinterpreted. The last verse of the thanksgiving psalm in Isa 9:2–7, which celebrates the accession of a new Davidic king, announces "The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this" (Isa 9:7), providing a future setting. Clements argues that it announces the arrival of a successor to Ahaz.

Early Judaism interpreted the passage in terms of Hezekiah; the LXX implies this identification as well. Like the name "Immanuel," the new king was to have a fourfold throne name that designated that his reign mirrored God's will for His people (compare Psa 45:6–7). The oracle speaks of "a child ... born for us," referring to accession to the throne (compare Psa 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) but echoing Isa 7:14.

Other factors provide links between Immanuel and a future Davidic king:

- Isaiah 11:1–9 celebrates the coming of a future Davidic king
- Part of the design of Isa 1–39 was to contrast bad King Ahaz with good King Hezekiah (Isa 36–39), of whom 2 Kgs 18:7 states "The LORD was with him."
- A royal oracle in Mic 5:3 references a woman in labor giving birth to a child (Mic 5:3), and alludes to Isa 7:14.
- In Isa 7:9, the word אמן (*'mn*), meaning "be firmly established," is reminiscent of the promise to David in 2 Sam 7:16, "your dynasty ... will ever stand firm before me" (NJB).
- The phrase "house of David" features in Isa 7:2, 13 (compare Isa 7:17), referring to Ahaz as dynastic representative whose behavior put the royal line at risk.

Chronology is the main drawback to interpreting the child as Hezekiah. However, Seitz has observed that there are chronological difficulties with the account of Hezekiah's reign in 2 Kgs as well, suggesting that Hezekiah is still an option (Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 61–69). What Clements has regarded as editorial reinterpretation, Seitz (*Isaiah 1–39*, 74–75) and Childs (*Struggle*, 11) explain as canonical shaping. Seitz argues that Hezekiah "becomes a type for later kings to follow" (Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 74). Isaiah 7–9 paves the way for an eschatological tradition of messianic rule that, according to the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth was to eventually fulfill.

Matthew 1:23

Matthew quotes Isa 7:14, stating that it has been fulfilled in the virgin birth of Jesus. Luke 1:31–32 alludes to the language of Isa 7:14 and Isa 9:6–7. Luke 1:34–35 mentions the virgin birth separately and gives it as a reason for Jesus being Son of God (Stendahl, "Quis et Unde?" 94n1). There is no tradition in Intertestamental times of a messianic use of Isa 7:14 (Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 147n42).

A Retrospective Interpretation

The relationship between the two texts is primarily one of typology or analogy, which draws a parallel with a happening in the past. Here, Matt 1:23 draws an analogy between Isaiah's Immanuel and the one whom Christians may call "our Immanuel." Matthew 1:18–25 draws careful linguistic correspondence with the Isaiah quotation, and also adds the interpretation of the name from the LXX of Isa 8:8. Within the quotation, the real name "Jesus" (Matt 1:21), against the title "Immanuel," dictated the switch to "they will name him." It also suited the plural nature of the affirmation ("with us").

Instead of explaining the Old Testament, the New Testament uses the Old to explain Jesus' theological significance. This was common in New Testament texts; Dunn argues, "The interpretation was achieved again and



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again by reading the Old Testament passage or incident quoted *in the light of the event of Christ*, by viewing it from the standpoint of the new situation brought about by Jesus" (Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 94).

This retrospective viewpoint corresponded with the contemporary culture of Judaea. Barr observes that this approach, which must go back in principle to Jesus (compare Luke 24:27, 44), illustrates that He was incarnated as a first century AD Jew (Barr *Old and New*, 157). The Qumran sect related Old Testament prophetic passages to their own times and chose textual variants that best situated this procedure (Stendahl, *School of Matthew*, 185–90; Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, 7–15). The interpretation of Psa 2:1–2 in Acts 4:25–28 is an example of the New Testament's use of this general procedure. In Matt 1:23, the preference for "virgin," which already was traditionally found in the LXX, illustrates the choice of a convenient rendering (Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 127–28). Although Matt 1:18–25 is not a commentary on a prophetic text, it uses that text to comment on the narrative about Joseph (Soares Prabhu, *Formula Quotations*, 15); there is sufficient affinity between the two approaches to regard them as comparable.

Surface and Sophisticated Meanings

Matthew 1:23 appears to have two levels of meaning (compare France, "Formula Quotations," 240–51, with reference to Matt 2). In Matthew 1:23, the narrative comments on the key word "virgin," which is also the motif that binds quotation and context together; the birth of Jesus was independent of the sexual activity of a man. However, the deeper theological concern for the verse was Jesus' role as Davidic Messiah, a concern that continues from the genealogy of Matt 1:1–17 (see Matt 1:1, 16 NRSV; compare Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 167–69). In Matthew 1:20, Joseph, the "son of David," is to marry Mary and become the legal father of "Jesus the Messiah" (Matt 1:18). Stendahl asserts, "The angel encourages Joseph, the son of David, to make this child a Davidic child" (Stendahl, "Quis et Unde?" 102). The Old Testament promise of a divinely empowered king was thus fulfilled in Jesus.

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Part I:

Our God Is An Awesome God: Needing the Saving Reign of God Isaiah 1-39

In the eighth century before Christ, the Chou Dynasty flourished in China, Hindu sages of India started compiling the *Upanishads*, Homer penned the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Greece, and in Judah the prophet Isaiah wrote the most exquisite Hebrew composition of all time. It was an era of high culture in the ancient world.

Isaiah didn't concern himself with art and philosophy. A vision of the holiness of God inspired his genius. ~~Isaiah continues to challenge his readers to see God with the eyes of their hearts and spirits. After we see Him, we see ourselves more clearly than ever before, and we know how much we need the Holy One of Israel to reign in our hearts.~~

Lesson 1—As the Heart Hardens

Isaiah 1-6

Is Judah cheating on the living God, her Husband of 700 years? Didn't her sister Israel do the same thing and suffer through a messy divorce that left her penniless and stranded in a foreign country?

Who's her latest exotic lover? How jealous is the living God? Did He send a messenger to Judah threatening her with divorce if she didn't break off all her affairs?

Did Judah laugh in the messenger's face and flaunt her latest escapades? Does she think she can get away with it because the living God has put up with her so long?

Is it true that Judah's glamor is wearing thin?

[THE ILLUSION OF GLAMOUR. WHAT IS MY CURRENT ILLUSION?]

That she has to give away more and more to keep the attention of the fast crowd she moves with? What about the rumors that the young nations are about to drop her as soon as they get all her jewels and money?

And who is the mysterious stranger Immanuel? These questions and more are answered in another episode of "As the Heart Hardens."

HOLINESS AND WHOLENESS AT A GLANCE

- But first let's remember where our drama comes from. The book of Isaiah is sometimes called a miniature Bible: Sixty-six chapters paralleling sixty-six books.
- The Bible divides into an Old Testament of thirty-nine books and a New Testament of twenty-seven books. Isaiah breaks into two sections.
- The first thirty-nine chapters deal with the history of God's people during Isaiah's lifetime. The last twenty-seven chapters begin with a forerunner who will prepare

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the way for the Messiah, and they end with a description of the new heaven and the new earth.

- Isaiah prophesied for about seventy years during the reigns of four kings of Judah (Is. 1:1). List these kings in order below, look up the indicated Scripture, and supply the requested data for each. (Note timeline box below)
- 1. (2 Chr. 26)

Uzziah rules Judah

26 Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah,^[a] who was 16 years old, and made him king after his father Amaziah. **2** He rebuilt Eloth, restoring it to Judah after King Amaziah had lain down with his ancestors.

3 Uzziah was 16 years old when he became king, and he ruled for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem. **4** He did what was right in the Lord's eyes, just as his father Amaziah had done. **5** He sought God as long as Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear^[b] of God, was alive. And as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. **6** He marched against the Philistines and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod. Then he rebuilt towns near Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. **7** God helped him against the Philistines, the Arabs who inhabited Gur,^[c] and the Meunites. **8** The Meunites^[d] paid taxes to Uzziah, whose fame spread even to Egypt because he had grown so powerful. **9** He built towers in Jerusalem, at the Corner Gate, the Valley Gate, and at the Angle, and reinforced them. **10** He also built towers in the wilderness and dug many wells for his large herds in the lowlands and the plain. He had many workers who tended his farms and vineyards, because he loved the soil. **11** Uzziah had a standing army equipped for combat whose units went to war according to the number determined by the scribe Jeiel and Maaseiah, an officer under the authority of Hananiah, one of the king's officials. **12** The grand total of family heads in charge of these courageous warriors was twenty-six hundred. **13** They commanded an army of three hundred seven thousand five hundred. They formed a powerful force that could support the king against the enemy. **14** Uzziah supplied the entire force with shields, spears, helmets, armor, bows, and sling stones. **15** He set up clever devices in Jerusalem on the towers and corners of the wall designed to shoot arrows and large stones. And so Uzziah's fame spread far and wide, because he had received wonderful help until he became powerful. **16** But as soon as he became powerful, he grew so arrogant that he acted corruptly. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God by entering the Lord's sanctuary to burn incense upon the incense altar. **17** The priest Azariah, accompanied by eighty other of the Lord's courageous priests, went in after him **18** and confronted King Uzziah.

"You have no right, Uzziah," he said, "to burn incense to the Lord! That privilege belongs to the priests, Aaron's descendants, who have been ordained to burn incense. Get out of this holy place because you have been unfaithful! The Lord God won't honor you for this."

19 Then Uzziah, who already had a censer in his hand ready to burn the incense, became angry. While he was fuming at the priests, skin disease^[e] erupted on his forehead in the presence of the priests before the incense altar in the Lord's temple. **20** When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests turned and saw the skin disease on his forehead, they rushed him out of there. Uzziah also was

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anxious to leave because the Lord had afflicted him. ²¹ King Uzziah had skin disease until the day he died. He lived in a separate house, ^[a] diseased in his skin, because he was barred from the Lord's temple. His son Jotham supervised the palace administration and governed the people of the land. ²² The rest of Uzziah's deeds, from beginning to end, were written down by the prophet Isaiah, Amoz's son. ²³ Uzziah died and was buried with his ancestors in a field belonging to the kings, because people said, "He had skin disease." His son Jotham succeeded him as king.

Length of reign

Key events of reign

Spiritual tone of reign

- 2. (2 Chr. 27)

Jotham rules

27 Jotham was 25 years old when he became king, and he ruled for sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah; she was Zadok's daughter. ² Jotham did what was right in the Lord's eyes, just as his father Uzziah had done. Unlike Uzziah, Jotham didn't enter the Lord's temple. But the people continued their crooked practices. ³ Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Lord's temple and did extensive work on the wall of the elevated fortress. ^[a] ⁴ He built towns in Judah's highlands and fortresses and towers in the wooded areas. ⁵ He fought against the king of the Ammonites and defeated the Ammonites. They paid him one hundred kikkars of silver, ten thousand kors ^[b] of wheat, and ten thousand kors of barley that year and for the next two years. ⁶ Jotham was securely established because he maintained a faithful life before the Lord his God. ⁷ The rest of Jotham's deeds, including all his wars and accomplishments, are written in the official records of Israel's and Judah's kings. ⁸ He was 25 years old when he became king, and he ruled for sixteen years in Jerusalem. ⁹ Jotham lay down with his ancestors and was buried in David's City. His son Ahaz succeeded him as king.

Length of reign

Key events of reign



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Spiritual tone of reign

- 3. (2 Chr. 28)

Ahaz rules

28 Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king, and he ruled for sixteen years in Jerusalem. He didn't do what was right in the Lord's eyes, unlike his ancestor David. ² Instead, he walked in the ways of Israel's kings, making images of the Baals ³ and burning incense in the Ben-hinnom Valley. He even burned his own sons alive, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. ⁴ He also sacrificed and burned incense at the shrines on every hill and beneath every shady tree. ⁵ So the Lord his God handed him over to Aram's king, who defeated him and carried off many prisoners, bringing them to Damascus. Ahaz was also handed over to Israel's king, who defeated him with a severe beating. ⁶ In Judah, Pekah, Remaliah's son, killed one hundred twenty thousand warriors in the course of a single day because they had abandoned the Lord, God of their ancestors. ⁷ An Ephraimite warrior named Zichri killed the king's son Maaseiah, the palace administrator Azrikam, and Elkanah, the king's second in command. ⁸ The Israelites took captive two hundred thousand women, boys, and girls from their Judean relatives and seized enormous amounts of plunder, which they took back to Samaria.

⁹ One of the Lord's prophets named Oded lived in Samaria. When the army arrived there, he went to meet them and said, "Don't you see that the Lord God of your ancestors was angry with Judah and let you defeat them? But look what you've done! Your merciless slaughter of them stinks to high heaven!¹⁰ And now you think you can enslave the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem? What about your own guilt before the Lord your God? ¹¹ Listen to me! Send back the captives you took from your relatives, because the Lord is furious with you."

¹² At this, some of the Ephraimite leaders—Johanah's son Azariah, Meshillemoth's son Berechiah, Shallum's son Jehizkiah, and Hadlai's son Amasa—confronted those returning from battle. ¹³ "Don't bring the captives here," they told them. "Your plan will only add to our sin and guilt before the Lord. We're already guilty enough, and great anger is already directed at Israel." ¹⁴ So the warriors released the captives and brought the loot before the officers and the whole assembly. ¹⁵ Then people named for this task took charge of the captives and dressed everyone who was naked with items taken from the loot. They gave them clothing, sandals, food and drink, and bandaged their wounds. Everyone who couldn't walk they placed on donkeys, and they brought them to Jericho, Palm City, near their Judean relatives. Then they returned to Samaria.

¹⁶ At that time King Ahaz sent for help from the king^[a] of Assyria. ¹⁷ Once again, the Edomites had invaded Judah, defeating Judah and carrying off captives. ¹⁸ The Philistines had raided the towns in the lowlands and the arid southern plain of Judah, capturing Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, and Gederath, along with Soco and its surrounding villages, Timnah and its surrounding villages, and Gimzo and its surrounding villages, and occupying all of these cities. ¹⁹ The Lord was humiliating Judah on account of Israel's King Ahaz, because he had exercised no restraint in Judah and had been utterly unfaithful to the Lord. ²⁰ Assyria's King Tiglath-pileser^[b] came to Ahaz, but he brought trouble, not

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support. ²¹ Even though Ahaz took items from the Lord's temple, the royal palace, and the officials to buy off the king of Assyria, it was of no help.

²² It was during this troubled time that King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord ²³ by sacrificing to the gods of Damascus, who had defeated him.

"Since the gods of Aram's kings are helping them," he said, "I'll sacrifice to them too, so that they will help me."

But they became the ruin of both him and all Israel. ²⁴ Ahaz gathered the objects from God's temple, cut them up, shut the doors of the Lord's temple, and made himself altars on every corner in Jerusalem. ²⁵ He made shrines in all the towns of Judah for burning incense to other gods. This made the Lord, the God of his ancestors, very angry.

²⁶ The rest of Ahaz's deeds, from beginning to end, are written in the official records of Israel's and Judah's kings. ²⁷ Ahaz lay down with his ancestors and was buried in the city, in Jerusalem, but not in the royal cemetery of Israel's kings. His son Hezekiah succeeded him as king.

Length of reign

Key events of reign

Spiritual tone of reign

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ISAIAH THE PROPHET

1. Isaiah is born probably during Uzziah's reign.
2. Time of increased prosperity in Judah and Israel (Is. 2–4).
3. Assyria comes into prominence as a powerful world empire, especially under Tiglath-Pileser III.
4. Isaiah sees a vision of the Lord and is called to minister as a prophet (Is. 6).



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5. Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus rebel against Assyria. They ask Ahaz of Judah to join them, but he refuses (Is. 7).
6. Samaria falls to Assyria (722 B.C.). The northern kingdom goes into exile.
7. Philistines invite Hezekiah to ally against Assyria. Isaiah counsels against it (Is. 14:29–32).
8. Hezekiah fortifies his defenses, including construction of a water tunnel (see 2 Chr. 32:20), to resist the Assyrians (Is. 22:8–11).
9. Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem. Hezekiah prays for deliverance, and Isaiah tells him that God has heard his prayer. When the Lord kills 185,000 Assyrians, the invaders withdraw (Is. 36–37).
10. Hezekiah becomes sick but recovers (Is. 38). [HE FATHERS MANASSEH DURING THIS EXTRA 15 YR LIFESPAN]
11. According to tradition, Isaiah is executed during the reign of Manasseh by being sawn in two inside a log.



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- 4. (2 Chr. 29–32)

Length of reign

Key events of reign

Spiritual tone of reign

When did Isaiah's prophetic ministry begin? (Is. 6:1)

AT A GLANCE

KINGS DURING ISAIAH'S MINISTRY

Isaiah 1:2, 3 and 12–20 preview the first thirty-nine chapters of the book. What do you gather are the main ideas of the first portion of Isaiah?

Isaiah 40:9–11 preview the last twenty-seven chapters of the book. What do you gather are the main ideas of the second portion of Isaiah?

There are three dominant ideas in Isaiah. The first appears twenty-six times throughout the prophecies (Is. 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14). What is it?



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The second dominant idea appears twenty-eight times throughout Isaiah (12:2[2], 3; 17:10; 25:9; 26:1; 33:2, 6; 45:8, 17; 46:13[2]; 49:6, 8; 51:5, 6, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:11, 16, 17; 60:18; 61:10; 62:1, 11; 63:5). What is it?

The third major idea of Isaiah's prophecies belongs exclusively to the second part of his book (Is. 41:8, 9; 42:1, 19[2]; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21[2], 26; 48:20; 49:3, 5–7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). What is it?

Weave the three dominant ideas of Isaiah into one sentence as a preview of the whole book of Isaiah. Later you can look back and see how well your sentence fits the book.

ALONG THE WRONG LONGING

The opening sketch of flirty, faithless Judah comes from the reign of Hezekiah when the countryside had been devastated by the Assyrians and Jerusalem nearly besieged (Is. 1:7–9). Isaiah put this late prophecy at the front of the collection because it's a sharp portrait of a hard-hearted, hardheaded people.

In what ways was flirty, faithless Judah like a brood of rebellious children? (Is. 1:2–4)

In what ways was flirty, faithless Judah like someone beaten up by robbers? (Is. 1:5–9)

Flirty, faithless Judah liked to act religiously. What did the Lord think of her religion? (Is. 1:11–15)

How did the Lord advise Judah to deal with her sins? (Is. 1:16–20)

KINGDOM EXTRA

We may believe that if we sin, we will be immediately aware of it; but sin is subtle, and our hearts may not perceive or acknowledge our guilt. So those most in need of repentance and cleansing may have no awareness of their spiritual state. Therefore, we must continually



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examine ourselves before the Lord, asking Him to enlighten our hearts to any unacknowledged sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When we disagree with God's agenda, we must repent and change our way of thinking (Is. 1:16, 17). **Repentance and obedience** are reasonable to a willing and obedient heart, but folly to one with a resistant and rebellious attitude (vv. 18–20).

Why do you think Isaiah compared Judah to Sodom and Gomorrah and to a prostitute? (Is. 1:9, 10, 21–24)

How did the Lord propose dealing with the sin of flirty, faithless Judah? (Is. 1:24–31)

WORD WEALTH

A **terebinth tree** (Is. 1:29, 30) is a spreading tree with reddish-green leaves and clusters of red berries. It grows to a height of twenty to twenty-five feet. The seasonal dormancy and reawakening of the terebinth made it suitable as a sacred tree for fertility cults. The **gardens** may be groves of sacred terebinth where both Baal and his consort Ashtaroth were worshiped with immoral rituals.

HAYFORD

AMOZ [A mozz] (*strong*) — the father of the prophet Isaiah (Is. 1:1; 13:1; 38:1). According to a tradition of the rabbis, Amoz was a brother of King Amaziah of Judah (reigned about 796–767) and, like his son Isaiah, also a prophet.¹³

[Isaiah, Book Of.](#) (2003). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 837–840). Holman Bible Publishers. **ISAIAH** (Ī zā' a) Personal name meaning "Yahweh saves." Isaiah ministered primarily to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, although he was interested in the affairs of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during its time of demise and ultimate fall in 722/21 B.C. According to Isa. 1:1, the prophet ministered under the Judahite kings of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Neither the beginning nor closing dates of Isaiah's prophesying can be discerned with certainty.

Isaiah 6 dates the temple vision of Isaiah to the year of Uzziah's death in 740 B.C. Often the temple vision is assumed to be Isaiah's "call," but the experience is never stated specifically in those terms. Isaiah's temple vision took place in the year that Uzziah died. The assertion of 1:1 that the prophet served during the days of Uzziah is a strong indication he prophesied prior to Uzziah's death. Possibly, the prophet ministered earlier during Uzziah's reign with chapter 6 recounting a particularly momentous event in the life of the prophet but not the call experience itself. Similarly, the close of Isaiah's ministry cannot be dated with certainty. The last datable prophecy records the Sennacherib crisis of 701 B.C. (chaps. 36–37), although the prophet may

¹³ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In [Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary](#). Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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have continued to minister beyond this point. The Assumption of Isaiah, an apocryphal book, preserves the tradition that the prophet was sawn in half at the command of Manasseh, who began to reign around 689 B.C.

Relatively little is known about the prophet in spite of the large book associated with him. He was the son of Amoz (1:1). Jewish tradition mentions Amoz as the brother of King Amaziah of Judah. If this assumption is correct, Isaiah and Uzziah were cousins, thus making Isaiah a member of the nobility. This family connection would explain the impact of Uzziah's death (chap. 6) on the prophet as well as the apparent ready access Isaiah had to the kings to whom he ministered.

Isaiah was married to "the prophetess" (8:3) and had at least two sons, Shear-jashub, "A Remnant will Return" (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "Speed the Spoil; Hasten the Prey" (8:3). The sons' names were symbolic and served as warnings to Isaiah's generation of God's coming judgment against Judah's rebellion.

Harold Mosley.

ISAIAH, BOOK OF The book of Isaiah stands at the head of the classical prophetic books both in the order of the English canon as well as the Hebrew canon. The English division of Scripture into the "Major Prophets" and the "Minor Prophets" places Isaiah first among the Major Prophets. In the Hebrew canon Isaiah appears first among the "Latter Prophets," the section including also the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "The Twelve" (that is, the "Minor Prophets").

Division of the Book Of particular scholarly interest is the question of the division of the book and the related issues of authorship. In the late 18th century, different theories regarding the authorship of Isaiah began to emerge. The issue of authorship is directly related to the division of the book into sections. Different sections of Isaiah do contain different emphases, issues, vocabulary, style, and even historical perspectives. However, whether these differences demand different authors for the book is debated.

Isaiah 1–39 The issues and events found in Isa. 1–39 clearly relate to the times of Isaiah as an eighth-century prophet. In fact, in some of the oracles, Isaiah relates the story in first person (chaps. 6 and 8). Other oracles, although told in third person, refer to incidents in Isaiah's lifetime (chaps. 20; 36–39). The historical background of Isa. 1–39 involves Assyrian aggression and attempts on the part of Assyria to expand control into the areas of Israel and Judah. Isaiah 7 and 8 clearly have Assyrian interference in the region as their historical basis. Assyria is mentioned specifically in chapter 10, as well as chapters 20 and 36–37. Assyria is the major international power in the region in chapters 1–39.

Another indication that Isa. 1–39 comes from the time of the Prophet Isaiah is the frequent occurrence of the prophet's name (occurs 16 times in 1–39). Isaiah interacts with various people on several occasions in these chapters. The clear intent of the text is to show Isaiah acting and prophesying during the first 39 chapters.

A major emphasis in this section of the book is the prediction of exile because of the nation's rebellion against God. The clearest statement of this is Isa. 39:5–7. In the early chapters of Isaiah, judgment has not yet come upon the people, but it is predicted.

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Isaiah 40–66 The situation changes in Isa. 40–66. The prophet’s name does not appear at all nor is any indication given that the prophet is acting or speaking. Of greater importance is the change in the major world power. Assyria is no longer the emphasis; Babylon is now the power. Babylon and Babylon’s gods receive attention (Isa. 46–48). The mention of Cyrus (45:1), the Persian king who conquered Babylon, presumes a Babylonian background.

The judgment upon God’s people for their sin that was prophesied in Isa. 1–39 is depicted as having already happened in Isa. 40–66. Jerusalem had received God’s judgment (40:2) and was in ruins (44:26, 28). God had given Judah into Babylon’s hand (47:5–6). Jerusalem had drunk the cup of God’s wrath (51:17). The temple had been destroyed (63:18; 64:10–11). The historical perspective of chapters 40–66 seems clearly different from the perspective found in 1–39. The explanation for this, some argue, is that Isaiah prophesied extensively about these future events; others, that someone(s) later appended what befell Judah as the consummation of what the prophet had earlier predicted. Clearly, the latter chapters need to be interpreted in the light of the events of the sixth-century exile to Babylon and return while the earlier chapters need to be interpreted based on events in the eighth century.

Authorship Issues Multiple Authorship View Scholars disagree on whether the difference in historical perspectives in the two sections of Isaiah demand different authors for those sections. Many modern scholars hold to multiple authorship. That is, Isaiah was responsible for the first 39 chapters, while “Deutero-Isaiah” (Second Isaiah), a prophet living during the exile, was responsible for the later chapters. Still other scholars would divide further the later chapters into “Deutero-Isaiah” (chaps. 40–55) and “Trito-Isaiah,” or “Third Isaiah” (chaps. 56–66). The perspective of 56–66 focuses more on worship issues, thus some hold to a different author and setting for those chapters. Still further divisions are advocated by some scholars based upon the various genre and/or repetition in the text, e.g., apocalyptic material (24–27), history (36–39), “woe” statements (28–33), servant passages, and so on.

Discussion of the authorship of Isaiah emerged in the late 18th century with J. C. Döderlein (1775), who separated 40–66 from 1–39. In the 19th century, Bernard Duhm (1892) separated the book further by attributing 56–66 to “Trito-Isaiah.” Among the reasons for the division of the book were internal evidence, stylistic concerns, and different theological emphases, though recent studies have shown that none of these actually require multiple settings or authors. Still a lingering, major concern for many scholars is the issue of the basic prophetic function, that is, the prophet primarily addressing his contemporary audience. However, in the latter portion of Isaiah, the focus is not on Isaiah’s eighth-century setting but on the situation of the exile, an event that occurred over 100 years later. Not infrequently the prophets did address issues beyond their time frame, but for a prophet to devote such a large portion of material to a generation not yet born is indeed unusual though not beyond the scope of God’s sovereignty. Likewise, numerous scholars have a problem with the specific mention of Cyrus since he would have been unknown to Isaiah (apart from divine revelation). So, this too causes some scholars to attribute the later chapters of Isaiah to a later prophet who knew of the rise of the Persian king.

Single Authorship View Although many scholars would divide the book of Isaiah among two or more authors, other scholars hold to single authorship of the book. The designation as “single

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author” may be misleading. Few would argue that Isaiah personally penned every word. Rather, this view holds that the messages themselves derive from the Prophet Isaiah, leaving open the possibility that Isaiah’s disciples later organized or put the prophet’s oracles in writing. Several reasons exist for the single author view.

One of the arguments for division of the book has to do with stylistic issues. Proponents for division argue that the style and vocabulary are different between the sections. These stylistic differences do exist; however, the importance of these differences has been overstated. Considering the differences in historical perspective, subject matter, and themes between the sections, one would expect stylistic alterations, especially if the sections were from different periods in Isaiah’s life. Over the prophet’s 40-plus years of ministry, events and perceptions could easily create changes in literary style.

Although differences are present, many similarities also exist between the sections of the book. Several images are used consistently throughout the book: light and dark (5:20, 30; 9:2; 42:16; 50:10; 59:9; 60:1–3); blindness and deafness (6:10; 29:10, 18; 32:3; 42:7, 16–19; 43:8; 44:18; 56:10); human beings as fading flowers (1:30; 40:6–7; 64:6); God as potter and mankind as a vessel (29:16; 45:9; 64:8). Also, the distinctive name for God in Isaiah is “the Holy One of Israel.” This epithet occurs 31 times in Scripture, with 25 of them appearing in the book of Isaiah. (The occurrence in 2 Kings 19:22 was also spoken by Isaiah.) In Isaiah, the name occurs 12 times in chapters 1–39 and 13 times in 40–66, thus indicating a continuity of thought across the entire book.

The NT includes quotations and allusions from Isaiah on several occasions. In each instance, no indication is given that the book should be divided. For example, John 12:38–40 alludes to both Isa. 53:1 and Isa. 6:10, indicating both were spoken by Isaiah. Likewise, the Dead Sea Scrolls sheds light on the unity of the book. Among the discoveries at Qumran was a complete copy of Isaiah. The particular placement of Isa. 40 is interesting. Chapter 39 ends on the next to the last line on the page. Chapter 40 begins on the last line. If a break ever existed between chapters 39 and 40 the copyists at Qumran did not indicate it. However, a break of three blank lines does exist after chapter 33, with chapter 34 beginning on the following page. The Dead Sea Scrolls thus do not solve the problem of the division of Isaiah. Rather, they complicate the issue.

Theology of Isaiah Holiness of God In the temple vision Isaiah saw God as holy. The cry of the seraphim depicted God as “Holy, Holy, Holy.” The holiness of God indicates the separateness of God from all other entities. God is transcendent, morally pure, and separated from sin. This attribute of God brings into contrast the attitude of the nation of Judah in Isaiah’s day. The name, “the Holy One of Israel,” contrasts the holiness of God with the sinfulness of God’s people. The holy God seeks a relationship with human beings, and in that relationship, God demands holiness from His people.

Sin and Resulting Judgment God demands obedience and holiness from His people. The nations of Israel and Judah, however, constantly rebelled. Isa. 1:2–4 depicts the people as rebellious children who refused to listen and obey. These actions prompted God’s judgment in 1:24–25. God neither overlooks nor excuses sin. Instead, God seeks repentance on the part of human beings (1:16–20). If the offer for repentance is refused, judgment for sin is administered.

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Even judgment, however, has a redeeming purpose, with God seeking to restore people through the discipline of judgment (1:24–25). The themes of sin and judgment are echoed throughout the book. The judgment of exile presupposed by chapters 40–66 is the exile prophesied because of sin in chapters 1–39. The judgment in the exile, however, was not designed to destroy the people but rather to purify them.

The recurring theme of “remnant” is associated with the theology of sin and judgment. The idea of remnant occurs often, even appearing in the name of Isaiah’s son, Shearjashub, “A Remnant will Return.” After the promised judgment in the form of exile fell upon God’s people, a remnant would return to possess the land again. The remnant was both a positive and negative reminder to the nation. Although God would preserve and cause a remnant to return after the exile, many who entered the judgment would not return. The severe consequences of sin brought judgment, but God’s grace promised a remnant.

God as the Sovereign Lord of History Although Assyria, and later Babylon and Persia, were the international powers who seemed to work at will among the nations, Isaiah pictured Israel’s God as the controlling hand behind all powers. In Isa. 10:5–19, Assyria was nothing more than a rod in God’s hand used to discipline Israel and Judah. Similarly, God controlled and used Babylon in Isa. 47. Babylon’s boasting and arrogance was brought low by the hand of God. Assyria and Babylon thought of themselves as powerful. In reality, God controlled history, using sometimes Assyria, sometimes Babylon, sometimes Persia to accomplish His plan for history.

Faith in God Is True Security Judah and Israel tended to depend on themselves for security. Isaiah’s words called for something much more secure. Isaiah 7 illustrates the need for trust in God. Ahaz, the newly installed king of Judah, was threatened by the combined armies of Syria and Israel. God through Isaiah counseled faith. Ahaz, however, refused to trust God, choosing instead to trust the power of Assyria. As a result of Ahaz’s lack of faith, Assyrian influence entered Jerusalem. Rather than enjoying the blessings of obedience to God, the nation suffered the consequences of refusing to trust God. The opposing choices of trusting God or trusting other nations occur throughout the book of Isaiah. True security and safety does not lie in military armaments nor alliances with other nations. Faith in the Sovereign Lord of history provides the only true security (7:9; 28:16; 30:15).

Messiah and Suffering Servant The word “messiah” simply means “anointed.” Cyrus is the “messiah” or “anointed” in 45:1. The anointing of an individual indicated the empowering of God for a particular task. Thus, even the pagan king Cyrus could be “messiah” because God was empowering him for service to return the exiles to the land. The messiah concept later developed into a designation for the promised king from David’s line.

The messiah of Isaiah is an enigmatic figure. Sometimes this image is a branch (11:1), other times a kingly figure (9:6–7), and other times a suffering servant (50:6; 53:3–6). Isaiah, however, never made a distinct connection between the messianic passages dealing with kingship and those having the suffering servant motif. The messiah and the suffering servant themes seem contradictory, at least initially. The messiah would rule while the servant suffered and died for the nation. From the NT perspective, one can easily see how Jesus fulfilled both images in His

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ministry. The church, knowing how Jesus suffered, yet believing He would also return to rule, combined the concepts into the ministry of the ultimate Messiah, the Christ.¹⁴

Isaiah (Person). Eighth-century (BC) prophet during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; author of the biblical Book of Isaiah (called Esaias in KJV NT). Isaiah was the son of Amoz (Is 1:1) and may have been King Amaziah's brother. Growing up in Jerusalem, Isaiah received the best education the capital could supply. He was also deeply knowledgeable about people, and he became political and religious counselor of the nation. He had easy access to the monarchs and seems to have been the historiographer at the Judean court for several reigns (2 Chr 26:22; 32:32).

Isaiah's wife is referred to as a prophetess (Is 8:3) and they had at least two sons, Shearjashub (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hashbaz (8:3). Isaiah's customary attire was a prophet's clothing, that is, sandals and a garment of goat's hair or sackcloth around his loins. At one point during his ministry, the Lord commanded Isaiah to go barefoot for a period of three years, wearing only a loincloth (20:2–6). This must have seemed bizarre in a society that measured status by meticulous dress codes.

Isaiah worked to reform social and political wrongs. Even the highest members of society did not escape his censure. He berated soothsayers and denounced wealthy, influential people who ignored the responsibilities of their position. He exhorted the masses to be obedient rather than indifferent to God's covenant. He rebuked kings for their willfulness and lack of concern.

Isaiah's writings express a deep awareness of God's majesty and holiness. The prophet denounced not only Canaanite idolatry, but also the religious observances of his own people that were external ceremonies only and lacking in sincerity (1:10–17; 29:13). He preached impending judgment on the idolatrous Judeans, declaring that only a righteous remnant would be saved (6:13).

Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah, the "peaceful prince," and the ruler of God's kingdom (11:1–11). He also depicted this Messiah as a suffering, obedient servant (53:3–12). Isaiah was preeminent among the prophets for the variety and grandeur of his imagery. His imagination produced forceful, brilliant figures of speech.

Isaiah prophesied during the last three decades of the northern kingdom of Israel. Because he lived in Jerusalem, in Judah, he made little direct reference to Israel. However, when that kingdom fell, Judah lay open to conquest by Assyria. Isaiah advised King Ahaz to avoid foreign entanglements and depend on God to protect his people. Ignoring that advice, Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria.

It was Hezekiah, Ahaz's pious son, who sought to remove Judah from this dangerous situation. When the Assyrians under Sennacherib approached Jerusalem, Isaiah inspired Hezekiah and the Judeans to rely on the Lord for the city's defense, and "the angel of the Lord" destroyed Sennacherib's army (37:36–38), securing a short period of peace for Hezekiah and the Judeans.

¹⁴ [Isaiah, Book Of](#). (2003). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 837–840). Holman Bible Publishers.



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Hebrew prophecy reached its pinnacle with Isaiah, who was greatly esteemed in both OT and NT times. One indication of that esteem is the collection of apocryphal literature associated with his name.

See ISAIAH, BOOK OF; ISRAEL, HISTORY OF; PROPHECY; PROPHET, PROPHETESS.

Isaiah, Book of

Author. The prophet Isaiah, whose name means “the Lord saves,” lived and ministered in Jerusalem. Because of his repeated contact with the kings of Judah, some scholars believe that Isaiah was related to the royal family, but this is not certain. According to chapters 7 and 8, Isaiah was married and had at least two sons, Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hashbaz, whose symbolic names illustrated God’s dealings with the nation as a whole. The “disciples” mentioned in 8:16 probably assisted Isaiah in his ministry and may have helped him record the book that bears his name.

When Isaiah saw the Lord in the famous temple vision described in chapter 6, he was willing to go wherever God sent him, even though he would face strong opposition (6:9, 10). King Ahaz proved to be particularly resistant to Isaiah’s advice (7:4–17), and the people in general made fun of his preaching (5:19; 28:9, 10). During the reign of the godly Hezekiah, however, Isaiah’s ministry was much appreciated, and the king consulted him eagerly during times of crisis (37:1–7, 21–35).

Isaiah is usually regarded as the greatest of the writing prophets. Some of the chapters in his book display an unparalleled literary beauty and make use of poetic devices and a rich variety of symbols. Chapters 40–66 contain many powerful passages that underscore the grandeur of the book. It is ironic, then, that many scholars attribute these chapters to a “second” or “third” Isaiah, unknown authors who wrote much later than Isaiah in connection with the Babylonian exile. Yet elsewhere in the OT, the names of all who wrote the prophetic books are preserved, and it would be most unusual for the Jews not to know who wrote such magnificent prophecy as chapters 40–66.

Date. Since many of the events recorded in chapters 1–39 took place during the ministry of Isaiah, most of these chapters were probably written by about 700 BC. or shortly thereafter. The destruction of the Assyrian army in 701 BC. represents the climax of the first half of the book, fulfilling the prophecy of 10:16, 24–34 and 30:31–33. In 37:38 Isaiah refers to the death of King Sennacherib, which did not occur until 681 BC. This means that some of the earlier chapters, along with 40–66, were probably written later during Isaiah’s retirement years. A gap of several decades could help account for the change in subject matter that is found in the last half of the book. In these chapters Isaiah projects into the future as he addresses the Jews who would be in exile in Babylon about 550 BC.

Historical Background. Isaiah’s public ministry occurred primarily from 740–700 BC, a period marked by the rapid expansion of the nation of Assyria. Under King Tiglath-pileser III (745–727

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bc), the Assyrians moved to the west and south, and by 738 bc. the Assyrian monarch was demanding tribute from Damascus and Israel. About 734 bc. Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel organized a coalition to rebel against Assyria, and they tried to enlist the support of King Ahaz of Judah. But Ahaz refused to join, and when the kings of Damascus and Israel invaded Judah (see 7:1), Ahaz appealed directly to Tiglath-pileser for help (cf. 2 Kgs 16:7–9). With little hesitation the Assyrians returned to capture Damascus and to turn the northern kingdom of Israel into an Assyrian province.

The puppet king Hoshea ruled over Israel from 732–723 bc. but was imprisoned when he joined a revolt against Shalmaneser V, the new Assyrian king. Shalmaneser besieged the capital city of Samaria, which finally fell in 722 bc, spelling the end of the northern kingdom. Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser in 722 and had to quell a number of revolts. In 711 bc. Sargon captured the Philistine city of Ashdod in a campaign that became the occasion of Isaiah's prophecy of 20:1–6.

Even more important was the widespread rebellion that broke out with the accession of Sennacherib in 705 bc. King Hezekiah of Judah withheld his normal tribute payment, and by 701 bc. Sennacherib had invaded Palestine to punish the rebels. The details of this campaign are given in Isaiah 36; 37 and tell how city after city was captured by the Assyrians before the invaders stood at the gates of Jerusalem and demanded total surrender. With almost no hope of survival, Hezekiah nevertheless was encouraged by Isaiah to trust in God, and in one night the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, virtually wiping out Sennacherib's army (Is 37:36, 37).

In an effort to befriend the enemies of Assyria, Hezekiah showed his treasures to envoys of the king of Babylon (39:1–4). Isaiah warned that some day the Babylonian armies would conquer Jerusalem and carry off those very treasures, along with the residents of the city (39:5–7). Not only did Isaiah predict the Babylonian captivity of 586–39 bc (cf. 6:11, 12), but he also foretold that Israel would be released from Babylon (48:20). The Chaldean kingdom led by Nebuchadnezzar would be God's instrument of judgment upon Judah, but they too would suffer defeat. One of Isaiah's most remarkable prophecies was the naming of Cyrus, king of Persia, the ruler who would conquer the Babylonians in 539 bc. and release Israel from exile (cf. 44:28; 45:1). Along with the Medes (cf. 13:17), Cyrus won several important victories before sending his troops against Babylon. Isaiah hailed him as one anointed by the Lord to bring deliverance for Israel (45:1–5).

A ship—with two banks of oars and two sets of rowers—from Nineveh, capital of the Assyrians, from whom Hezekiah withheld tribute.

Unity. Largely because of the references to the later kingdoms of Babylon and Persia, the unity of Isaiah has been called into question. Chapters 40–66 move abruptly into the exilic period of 550 bc, almost 150 years after Isaiah lived. Moreover, the Servant of the Lord plays a prominent

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role in these chapters and the messianic king fades into the background. Brilliant poetic passages are found in chapters 40; 53; 55, and 60, demonstrating remarkable depth and power.

Although these factors are sometimes cited as a sign of disunity, there are actually strong indications for unity in the book. For example, the historical interlude (chs 36–39) forms a hinge or bridge that links chapters 1–35 and 40–66. Chapters 36; 37 complete the Assyrian section, and chapters 38; 39 introduce the Babylonian material. Most of the linking chapters are written in prose, while the others are largely poetry. From the standpoint of verbal or stylistic unity, one can point to Isaiah’s favorite title for God, “the Holy One of Israel.” This title appears 12 times in chapters 1–39, and 14 times in chapters 40–66, but only 4 times in the rest of the OT. A study of the famous Servant Songs of 52:13–53:12 reveals several ties with earlier passages, especially in chapters 1–6. The servant who is smitten and wounded (53:4, 5) receives the same punishment as the beaten and injured nation of 1:5–6 (also cf. 52:13 with 2:12 and 6:1).

Theological Teaching. Isaiah is to the OT as the Book of Romans is to the NT, a book filled with rich theological truth. Like Romans, Isaiah unveils the sinfulness of God’s rebellious people and his gracious provision of salvation. Because God is the Holy One of Israel (1:4; 6:3), he cannot ignore sin but must punish those who are guilty. Both Israel (5:30; 42:25) and the other nations (2:11, 17, 20) experience a time of judgment known as the day of the Lord. In anger God raises his hand against his people (cf. 5:25), but ultimately his wrath is poured out upon Babylon and the nations (cf. 13:3–5; 34:2).

With the fall of Assyria and Babylon, the day of the Lord becomes a day of joyous victory (10:27; 61:2). According to Isaiah 63:4 it is “the year of my redemption.” Earlier, Israel had been redeemed from slavery in Egypt; now the return from the Babylonian captivity brings equal joy (52:9; 61:1). The ultimate redemption is to be accomplished through the death of Christ, and Isaiah 53 describes our Lord’s suffering and death in graphic terms. His ministry as the Suffering Servant is also introduced in 49:4 and 50:6, 7; 49:6 states that the servant will be “a light for the Gentiles.” Looking ahead to the second coming, Isaiah predicts a messianic age of peace and righteousness. Nations will “beat their swords into plowshares” (2:4) and the “Prince of Peace” will rule forever (9:6, 7).

Throughout the book God is pictured as the all-powerful Creator (48:13), the sovereign One “seated on a throne, high and exalted ... the King, the Lord Almighty” (6:1, 5). He controls the armies of the earth (13:4) and removes rulers as he wills (40:23, 24). Before him “nations are like a drop in a bucket” (v 15), and compared with him all idols are worthless and without power (41:29; 44:6). This is the God who shows his fury to his foes and his love to his servants (66:14).

Content

Messages of Judgment and Hope (chs 1–12). In the opening chapter Isaiah characterizes Israel as a nation that has rebelled against God. Although the people regularly bring offerings to him, their worship is hypocritical, an attempt to mask their oppression of the poor and helpless. The Lord encourages the nation to repent of their sin or face the fires of judgment. After this

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introduction, Isaiah turns to describe the peace of the messianic age in 2:1–4. The day will come when all nations will obey God’s Word and live at peace. “The mountain of the Lord”—Jerusalem—will be raised up “and all nations will stream to it” (vv 2, 3). In the meantime, however, both Israel and the nations have exalted themselves against the Lord, and he will judge them in an awesome display of power. For Israel, God’s judgment will bring great upheaval, including the loss of its leaders. Defiant and ruthless, the rulers will face either death or deportation. Chapter 3 ends by denouncing the pride and vanity of the women of Zion; they too will suffer disgrace. After Jerusalem is cleansed of its sin, the remnant will enjoy the rule of “the Branch of the Lord,” who will protect and shield his people (4:2–6).

In 5:1–7 Isaiah presents a short song about Israel as God’s vineyard. The Lord has done everything possible to insure a yield of good grapes, but the vineyard has produced nothing but bad fruit and must be destroyed. Isaiah then pronounces six words against Israel, and announces that the Assyrian army will invade the land. Against the backdrop of Israel’s sin Isaiah (ch 6) gives an account of the vision through which he was called as a prophet. Overwhelmed by the holiness of God and by his own sinfulness, Isaiah thought he was ruined, but when he is assured that his sins are forgiven, he responds positively to God’s call in spite of the stubbornness of the nation to which he is sent.

One of the most stubborn individuals in all of Israel is King Ahaz, and chapter 7 describes Isaiah’s encounter with this godless ruler. When Ahaz is threatened by Damascus and the northern kingdom, he refuses to believe Isaiah’s promise that God will protect him. This is occasion on which Isaiah gives Ahaz the sign of Immanuel (7:14). The “virgin” refers ultimately to Mary, but in the near fulfillment she is probably Isaiah’s fiancée whom he marries (8:1–3) and who later gives birth to a boy named Maher-shalal-hashbaz and Immanuel (cf. 8:3, 8). The birth of this child within a few years is a sign that God will be with Judah and will put an end to the threats of Damascus and Samaria. If Ahaz appeals for help to the king of Assyria, Isaiah warns him, Assyria’s powerful armies will one day invade Judah also (cf. 7:17–25; 8:6–8). The destruction brought by Assyria will plunge Judah into a time of famine and distress (8:21, 22).

Nevertheless, the gloom and darkness associated with the Assyrian invasion will not last indefinitely, and 9:1–5 speaks of a time of peace and joy. Verses 6, 7 introduce a child who will become a righteous King and will rule forever. This “Prince of Peace” is the Messiah, the “Mighty God” whose kingdom is described in 2:2–4.

For the immediate future, however, both Israel and Judah will suffer the agony of war as punishment for their sins. God is angry with his people because they are proud and arrogant and their leaders disregard the pleas of the poor and needy. Civil war and foreign invasion will crush the hapless nation (9:8–10:4). But once Israel has been judged, God will turn his hand against Assyria, the instrument he has used to judge other nations. Because of her string of victories, Assyria is filled with pride and is eager for more triumph. Yet even at the moment when Jerusalem is about to succumb, God cuts down the Assyrian army like a cedar in Lebanon and spares his people (10:26–34).

After the joyous news of Assyria’s defeat, Isaiah describes the restoration of Israel and the powerful rule of the Messiah (ch 11). Both Jews and Gentiles will be attracted to Jerusalem to

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enjoy an era of peace and justice. Like David, the Messiah will have the Spirit of God resting upon him as he judges the wicked and protects the needy. To conclude these opening messages, Isaiah offers two short songs of praise that reflect upon God’s past deliverance and his promise of future blessing (12:1–6).

Oracles Against the Nations (chs 13–23). Although Babylon is not the major power of the day, Isaiah begins his announcements of judgment with two chapters about the destruction of Assyria’s neighbor to the south. Babylon will eventually conquer Jerusalem (between 605 and 586 BC), but the Medes (13:17) along with the Persians will capture Babylon (539 BC). In spite of the glory to be achieved by future kings of Babylon, God will bring their pomp down to the grave (14:9–20). The chapter ends with short prophecies against Assyria and the Philistines.

One of Israel’s oldest enemies was the nation of Moab, situated east of the Dead Sea. Even though it was a small country, Isaiah devotes two chapters to these descendants of Lot. Chapter 15 describes the extensive mourning that will overwhelm their cities. After a brief interlude urging the Moabites to submit to Israel and to her God (16:1–5), Isaiah notes that pride will lead to Moab’s downfall. Sounds of weeping fill the land as the vines and fields wither and are trampled.

In chapter 17 the fourth oracle is directed against Damascus and Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel), probably reflecting their alliance against Judah about 734 BC. Both nations will face ruin, and Ephraim is condemned for abandoning the Lord, her “Savior” and “Rock” (v 10).

In chapters 18 and 19 Isaiah turns to the south and addresses Ethiopia and Egypt, countries that had strong links from 715–633 BC, when an Ethiopian named Shabako became pharaoh in Egypt. But Egypt is plagued with disunity and suffers greatly at the hands of Assyrian kings. In spite of the supposed wisdom of her leaders, Egypt faces economic and political ruin (19:5–15). Yet the time is coming when the Egyptians will be restored and will worship the God of Israel. Along with Assyria and Israel, Egypt will be “a blessing on the earth” (v 24). Some interpreters feel that this is a prophecy of the salvation of Gentiles during the church age, but others relate this day to the peace of the millennial age (cf. 2:2–4; 11:6–9). For the immediate future, however, Isaiah announces that Assyria will take many Egyptians and Ethiopians into captivity (20:1–6).

A second oracle about Babylon (cf. 13:1–14:23) is contained in chapter 21. This time her attackers are identified as Elam and Media (v 2), and Isaiah is staggered as he considers the impact of Babylon’s fall (vv 3, 4). When Babylon collapses, the world will know that her gods were powerless (v 10; cf. Rv 14:8; 18:2).

Although it seems out of place among these oracles against the nations, chapter 22 condemns the city of Jerusalem. Like the nations, Jerusalem is full of “tumult and revelry” (v 2) and will soon experience the terrors of a siege. Since the people no longer rely on the Lord (v 11), he will hand them over to the enemy. Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness is exemplified by Shebna, a high official guilty of pride and materialism whose position will be taken by the godly Eliakim (vv 15–23).

The last oracle (23:1–18) is directed against the city of Tyre, which resisted capture until Alexander the Great conquered the island fortress in 332 BC. When Tyre fell, the economy of the

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entire Mediterranean world was shaken, for her ships had carried the goods of the nations far and wide.

Final Judgment and Blessing (chs 24–27). This section functions as a grand finale to chapters 13–23 as it anticipates God’s judgment upon the nations and the inauguration of the kingdom of God. A defiled earth must bear its punishment (24:5, 6) and even the forces of Satan, “the powers in the heavens” (vv 21, 22), face judgment.

In chapter 25 Isaiah rejoices over God’s great triumph and looks ahead to a day when death will be swallowed up and tears will be wiped from all faces (v 8). Israel’s longtime enemies, symbolized by Moab, will be laid low (vv 10–12), but Jerusalem will be a stronghold for the righteous (26:1–3). In 26:7–21 the nation prays that these promises will become a reality. Verses 20, 21 indicate that the Lord will indeed respond, pouring out his wrath upon a sin-cursed earth and upon Satan himself (27:1). When that takes place, Israel will be a fruitful vineyard, a blessing to the whole world (vv 2–6; contrast 5:1–7). First, however, Israel will have to endure war and exile, and then the remnant will return to Jerusalem.

A Series of Woes (chs 28–33). Returning to his own historical period, Isaiah pronounces a series of woes upon both the northern and southern kingdoms, as well as one upon Assyria (ch 33). Chapter 28 begins with a description of the fading power of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. Verses 7–10 portray the leaders of Judah in the same light; they have disregarded Isaiah’s message and are out of touch with God. Judgment is on the way, and their false preparation (vv 15, 18) will be of no avail. God will fight against Israel (vv 21, 22), and even Jerusalem will be put under siege until God in his mercy intervenes (29:1–8). Because of their hypocritical worship, the people deserve to be punished, but in the future Israel will again acknowledge the Lord and be made physically and spiritually whole (vv 17–24).

Chapters 30 and 31 denounce Judah’s proposed alliance with Egypt in the effort to thwart Assyria. God wants his people to trust him, not their unreliable neighbors to the south. The Lord promises to protect Jerusalem (30:18; 31:5) and defeat the invading Assyrian army (30:31–33; 31:8, 9). None can stand before his mighty sword.

Continuing on this positive note, Isaiah goes on to emphasize the righteous rule of the messianic king in chapters 32 and 33. Zion will enjoy peace and security at last (32:2, 17, 18; 33:6), a great change from 8th-century bc. Judah. In Isaiah’s own time the women feel secure (32:9), but the Assyrian troops will devastate the crops and precipitate widespread mourning. However, the lamenting will soon end for the prophet pronounces woe upon Assyria in 33:1. After Isaiah prays for the destruction of Assyria (33:2–9), God promises to take action (vv 10–12). Gone will be the enemy soldiers and officials, for the Lord will save his people and bring them justice and security.

More Judgment and Blessing (chs 34; 35). This section forms a climax to chapters 28–33. Once more, cataclysmic judgment precedes a time of blessing and restoration. In chapter 34 Isaiah depicts a judgment of cosmic dimensions as he moves to a consideration of the last days. Heaven and earth endure the wrath of God that is poured out upon the nations, and verse 4 provides the

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basis for John’s description of the great tribulation in Revelation 6:13, 14. Edom—like Moab in 25:10–12—represents a world judged by the sword of the Lord in his day of vengeance.

Chapter 35, on the other hand, speaks of joy and restoration in a passage that pulsates with life. A blooming desert corresponds to the physical and spiritual healing that will characterize the messianic age when God will come to redeem his people. Both the return of the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity and the second coming of Christ fit this glorious scene.

Historical Interlude (chs 36–39). These chapters form the hinge that ties together the two halves of the book. Chapters 36 and 37 contain the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies about Assyria’s collapse, and chapters 38 and 39 introduce the Babylonian captivity that forms the backdrop for chapters 40–66. In 701 bc. King Sennacherib of Assyria demands the unconditional surrender of Jerusalem. He sends his field commander to address the people and try to gain their submission. With persuasive words, the commander tries to convince the city that surrender is the best policy. Amazingly the people do not panic, and King Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray for the beleaguered city. The prophet does so and announces that the proud Assyrians will not triumph. Instead, they suffer a terrible disaster as the angel of the Lord strikes down 185,000 men.

Chapters 38 and 39 relate another crisis in Hezekiah’s life when he becomes desperately ill. Miraculously, God heals him and Hezekiah praises the Lord for his gracious intervention. When the king of Babylon sends envoys to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery, Hezekiah foolishly shows these messengers his royal treasures. Isaiah solemnly announces that someday the armies of Babylon will capture Jerusalem, plunder the land, and take away these treasures.

The Return from Babylon (chs 40–48). The Babylonian captivity eventually comes, but Isaiah promises that it will end. God, the incomparably powerful Creator, is far greater than any king, nation, or god, and he will bring his people back to Jerusalem. To accomplish this return from exile God raises up Cyrus the king of Persia (41:2, 25). The Lord does not forget his people, and he encourages them to take heart and to rejoice.

In chapter 42 we are introduced to a person even more significant than Cyrus the Persian. Verses 1–7 describe the servant of the Lord, who will bring justice to the nations and will be “a light for the Gentiles” (v 6). This is the Messiah, and the redemption he will accomplish on Calvary (cf. ch 53) is greater than the release from Babylon. In light of the good news associated with the servant, Isaiah praises the Lord for punishing the wicked and rescuing his wayward people. Chapter 43 declares that nothing will stand in the way of Israel’s return, and the Lord will remember their sins no more. In fact, he will pour out his Spirit on their descendants (44:3).

A God so great is far more powerful than any idol. In 44:6–20 Isaiah makes use of satire to show the worthlessness of manmade images. God alone has the power to create and to restore, and he will bring Cyrus on the scene to effect the release of the exiles and to begin the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Chapters 46 and 47 contrast the God of Israel and the idols of Babylon. When God raises up Cyrus, Babylon’s idols will be unable to save their nation, and the “queen of kingdoms” (47:5) will collapse along with her sorcerers and astrologers. The final chapter in this section (48) restates God’s purpose of gaining release of the Israelites from Babylon through his “chosen ally” (v 14), Cyrus of Persia.

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Salvation Through the Servant of the Lord (chs 49–57). Chapters 49–53 contain the final three Servant Songs (cf. also 42:1–7), culminating in the death of the servant for the sins of the world (52:13–53:12). In the second Servant Song (49:1–7), Isaiah describes the call and ministry of the servant, noting that he will face strong opposition as he accomplishes salvation for Israel and the nations. The rest of chapter 49 (vv 8–26) deals primarily with the way God will bring Israel back from exile. Soon the land will be filled with a mighty throng (vv 20, 21), and the Gentiles will acknowledge Israel and her God (vv 22, 23).

The Cylinder of Nebuchadnezzar II—which concerns the restoration of temples to a god and goddess—indicates the Babylonian idolatry about which Isaiah prophesied.

Although Israel has fully deserved the exile because of her sins (50:1–3), the suffering endured by the servant (vv 4–11) is wholly undeserved. The beating and mocking of verse 6 are prophetic of Christ’s experience (cf. Mt 27:26, 30; Mk 15:19). In verses 10, 11 the whole nation is challenged to trust in the Lord, as the servant did. There is, in fact, a believing remnant who obey the Lord (51:1–8), and the Lord promises that he will restore them to their homeland. Israel has drunk the cup of God’s wrath (vv 17, 22), but the good news of release from exile causes even the ruins of Jerusalem to burst into songs of joy (52:7–10).

Yet the best news of all is salvation from sin; the final Servant Song (52:13–53:12) tells how Christ wins freedom for those held in bondage to sin. In this brief passage we learn how Christ suffered rejection (53:3) and even disfigurement (52:14), but, “led like a lamb to the slaughter” (53:7), he carries our sins in his body as he dies in ignominy. The people think he is suffering for his own sins (v 4), but he is “pierced” and “crushed for our iniquities” (v 5). The first and last paragraphs of this section (52:13–15; 53:10–12) state that through his suffering the servant is highly exalted. What seemed like a terrible defeat is actually victory over death and Satan and brings salvation for many.

As a direct result of the servant’s death, great joy comes to all people. In chapter 54 this joy is reflected in Jerusalem’s new status as the Lord’s wife. Her descendants will be numerous and eager to learn from the Lord (v 13). For the first time the term “servants of the Lord” appears (v 17), apparently including all believers, whether Jew or Gentile (cf. 65:8, 9, 13–15). Joy and prosperity also characterize chapter 55, an invitation to a great spiritual banquet. All people are urged to turn to the Lord who keeps his promises to Israel. In 56:1–8, foreigners are invited to come to God’s “holy mountain” in Jerusalem, for the temple will be “a house of prayer for all nations” (v 7; cf. Mt 21:13).

Believing Gentiles contrast sharply with unbelieving Jews, and in 56:9–57:13 Isaiah returns again to the theme of judgment. Israel suffers because her leaders are wicked and because the people are guilty of idolatry. Spiritual healing is available, but unless individuals repent they cannot be part of the remnant who will return from exile and enjoy peace in the Promised Land.

Ultimate Blessing and Final Judgment (chs 58–66). The last nine chapters of Isaiah emphasize redemption and glory, but the reality of judgment is also very much in evidence. In fact chapters

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58 and 59 bemoan the sins of Israel. The people are hypocritical in their worship; they are selfish and fail to keep the sabbath. Lying, oppression, and murder separate the people from God. When Isaiah openly confesses these sins (59:12, 13), the Lord suddenly takes action on behalf of his people. Like a mighty warrior he rescues the believing remnant from Babylon and brings them back to Jerusalem.

In chapter 60 the glory and wealth of Jerusalem reach new heights. Both the city and the sanctuary are adorned with splendor, matching the prosperity of Solomon's reign. Just as the nations treated Solomon with honor, so earth's leaders will assist and strengthen the returning exiles. While it is true that the Persian government did help the Jews repeatedly, the conditions described here will have their ultimate fulfillment during the millennium and in connection with the new Jerusalem (cf. Rv 21:23; 22:5). "The ancient ruins" will be rebuilt (61:4), and the Lord will fulfill the covenant made with Abraham and David (v 8; cf. Gn 12:1–3; Is 55:3). Jerusalem will be the city of the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord (62:12), and the Lord will take delight in her (v 4).

In order to accomplish salvation for his people, God will have to judge the ungodly first. The great trampling of the winepress (63:2, 3) graphically portrays the judgment process and is linked with the day of the Lord (cf. 13:3; 34:2). Since God has promised to intervene on behalf of his people, Isaiah prays for the realization of that promise (63:7–64:12). He recalls God's faithfulness in the past and pleads that he will again have mercy upon his suffering people.

The answer to Isaiah's prayer is found in chapter 65. God does promise to give the holy land back to his servants, to those who worship him and obey him. But for that segment of the nation that continues in its obstinacy, God promises anguish and destruction. The ultimate joy of God's servants is contained in a description of "new heavens and a new earth" (vv 17–25). Peace, long life, and prosperity will be among the blessings enjoyed in an era that seems to combine features of the millennium and the eternal state (cf. 60:1–22).

In a fitting summary, chapter 66 ties together the themes of salvation and judgment. God will comfort Jerusalem and abundantly bless her, but sinners are the objects of his wrath. Those who honor him will endure forever, but those who rebel will suffer everlasting rejection.

HERBERT M. WOLF

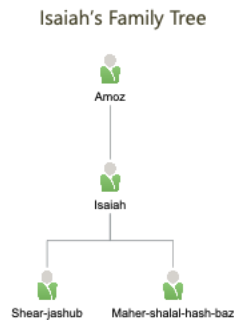
See ISRAEL, HISTORY OF; ISAIAH (PERSON); MESSIAH; SERVANT OF THE LORD; VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS; PROPHECY; PROPHET, PROPHETESS.

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¹⁵ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Isaiah \(Person\)](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, pp. 1046–1053). Baker Book House.



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ISAIAH, BOOK OF Records a narrative about the prophet Isaiah which is interspersed with his prophecies to the royal court of Judah (Isa 1–39); also contains poetic narrative about Yahweh’s judgments and His prophesied restoration of His people (Isa 40–66). Set within the eighth—sixth centuries BC. The book of Isaiah focuses on God’s people and His plan for them leading up to, during, and perhaps just after, their exile.

Introduction

This 66-chapter book appears in the Hebrew canon first among the Latter Prophets, after Kings and before Jeremiah. In the Septuagint and Protestant canons, Isaiah follows Song of Songs and is the first prophetic book among the Major Prophets. The book of Isaiah contains prophecy that is important to both the people of Isaiah’s time and future generations. The main message of the book is that Yahweh will bring judgment upon those who oppose Him, while simultaneously redeeming His people via foreigners and the Suffering Servant.



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Date

Sections of Isaiah point to clear dates:

- Ch. 6—740/739 BC: The passage refers to the year of King Uzziah's death.
- Ch. 7—735/734 BC: This passage mentions a battle in King Ahaz's life which can be dated to around this time (2 Kgs 15:37–16:8).
- Ch. 20—715/714–711 BC: This passage mentions a campaign of Sargon II of Assyria and events leading up to it.
- Chs. 45–46—540 BC: This passage envisions the acts of King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

Isaiah prophesied from around 740 to 690 BC—primarily during the Syro-Ephraimite War, when the smaller nations of Syria (Aram) formed a coalition with Israel (Ephraim) to wage war against the ruling power, Assyria. Because of this, Isaiah regularly interacts with Ahaz and Hezekiah (both kings of Judah) about the war and the plans they should (and should not) execute (see Irvine, *Isaiah*).

The date of the book of Isaiah largely depends on the issue of authorship—mainly, whether a single author or two or more authors composed the book (see below: “Authorship”). Isaiah 1:1 states that Isaiah prophesied during the days of “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah,” kings of Judah. Second Chronicles 26:22 mentions that Isaiah recorded “the rest of the acts of King Ahaz.” Similarly, 2 Chr 32:32 states that Isaiah recorded “the rest of the acts of King Hezekiah.” This indicates that “First Isaiah” (Isa 1–39) was written during this time period. If a single author wrote the entire book, Isa 40–66 was probably written between 740–690 BC (i.e., within the lifetime of Isaiah). However, if multiple authors wrote Isaiah, “Second Isaiah” (Isa 40–66; or 40–55 under a “Third Isaiah” view) must have been written sometime after Israel's return from the Babylonian exile in 539–38 BC. Isaiah 40–55 and 56–66 primarily differ in subject matter. Isaiah 1–39 and 40–55 have a distinct writing style, though Isa 1–39 is mainly narrative while 40–55 is predominately poetry (or poetic narrative).

The “Second Isaiah” view is enhanced by the explicit references to King Cyrus of Persia, who is recorded as allowing the Jews to return from exile to rebuild the walls and temple of Jerusalem (see Isa 44:28; 45:1; compare Ezra 1:1–5). Isaiah perceives of King Cyrus as a rescuing figure (Isa 44:28; 45:1; see Laato, *The Servant of YHWH and Cyrus*). However, Cyrus' name may have been an addition—to update the text—made by a scribe or scribal community. If this is the case, the date of Isaiah would basically remain the same: It would have come into its final form sometime after the Israelites' return from exile, post 539 BC.

Isaiah's multiple references to Babylon (43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20) and the few references to directly coming out of exile in Isa 40–55 (see 48:14, 20) indicate that the prophet probably delivered the oracles in Isa 40–55 to Israelites living during the exilic period in Babylon (ca. 587–539 BC; see Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*; North, *The Suffering Servant*; McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*; Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*; Snaith, *Isaiah 40–66*; and Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*). Watts diverges from this view, placing Isa 40–55 almost entirely in postexilic times (Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*). He views the references to Babylon

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and those to the people coming out of exile as a reflection upon past events by a prophet or redactor living in the postexilic period.

There are no definitive dates connected with Isa 56–66, although some see parallels in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (ca. 450 BC) and others date particular portions of Isa 56–66 to earlier periods, but usually after the rebuilding of the Temple (post-515 BC; see the survey and opinions of Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 54–66; compare Watts, *Isa 34–66*). There also are a wide range of dates proposed for the so-called “little apocalypse of Isaiah” (Isa 24–27).

(For further information on the dates proposed for the “little apocalypse of Isaiah,” see this article: *Isaiah, Book of, Critical Issues*.)

Context

Over the span that the book of Isaiah was written, the southern kingdom of Judah was in political upheaval due to power of nations like Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Warfare, both threatened and real, was always present. This warfare ultimately results in God’s people being taken into exile under Babylonian rule; they eventually return under the Persian Empire.

After about 20 years of Isaiah prophesying, Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. The southern kingdom of Judah was apathetic, since they had very little hope in the Lord and His stronghold over the nations. Those who had hope were following false prophecies, thus ignoring the Lord’s impending prophetic message of repentance (see Isa 5:18; 28:15). Nonetheless, King Hezekiah—the last king during Isaiah’s lifetime—demanded that the Israelites tear down all symbols of paganism (see 2 Kgs 18:4). He saw the irreverence of God’s people—and the pain, suffering, and turmoil it was bringing upon them—and acted.

Since no idols remained for them to call upon, the Israelites had to depend upon the Lord. God’s people were desperate for an answer to what appeared to be an inevitable catastrophic downfall. From the beginning of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, the people of Judah were aware that it would be difficult to resolve their political concerns completely.

Isaiah 38–39 begins as Babylon is rising to power in the East, thus casting a shadow on the small nation of Judah. God’s people, as always, were caught up in the spiritual concerns of Yahweh. The Suffering Servant is Yahweh’s answer to their problems (Isa 52:13–53:12). After the author prophesies against Babylon, the book turns to the envisioned saving nation of Persia (Isa 56–66).

Purpose

The prophecies in the book of Isaiah have three main purposes:

1. Calling Judah and Israel to repent and walk in the ways of the Lord (see 1:1–6:13; 9:8–10:4; 24:1–27:13; 35:1–10; 43:1–45:25; 48:1–52:12; 54:1–59:21; 60:1–66:24.).
2. Prophesying against foreign nations who had begun to invade the land that God had given to His people (see 7:18–8:22; 10:5–34; 13:1–23:18; 28:1–33:24; 36:1–39:8; 46:1–47:15).
3. Offering hope to those who wish to follow Yahweh (see 7:1–17; 9:1–7; 11:1–12; 42:1–25; 52:13–53:12). Isaiah anticipates the future Messiah who will redeem God’s people from



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their transgressions and from the judgment that they have received because of their contraventions.

Structure of Isaiah

There are various ways to outline the book of Isaiah. Here is one approach (compare Olley, “No Peace,” 351–70):

- 1:1–6:13—Introduction (or introduction to First Isaiah)
 - 1:1–31—Opening words to Judah
 - 2:1–5:30—God’s judgment
 - 6:1–13—Isaiah’s call, vision, and message
- 7:1–35:10—Messiah and the nations, part 1 (or First Isaiah)
 - 7:1–17—The sign of Immanuel
 - 7:18–8:22—The coming invasion of Assyria
 - 9:1–7—The Messiah and His era
 - 9:8–10:4—Yahweh’s judgment against Israel
 - 10:5–34—Yahweh’s judgment against Assyria
 - 11:1–12—The Messiah and His era further described
 - 13:1–23:18—Woes against the nations
 - 24:1–27:13—Judgment of the earth, praise to God, & salvation of Israel
 - 28:1–34:17—Woes against the nations and God’s vengeance against the nations
 - 35:1–10—The salvation of the redeemed
- 36:1–39:8—Interlude between the Assyrian and Babylonian era
 - 36:1–37:38—The end of the era of Assyria
 - 38:1–39:8—The beginning of the era of Babylon
- 40:1–55:13—The Messiah and the nations, part 2 (or Second Isaiah)
 - 40:1–31—Comfort for God’s people
 - 41:1–29—Deliverance for God’s people
 - 42:1–9—*First Servant Song: The role of Yahweh’s Servant*
 - 42:10–45:25—Israel praises the Lord, is rebuked, and told they will be redeemed
 - 46:1–47:15—Judgment against Babylon
 - 48:1–22—Israel’s disobedience
 - 49:1–13—*Second Servant Song: The commission of the Servant*
 - 49:14–50:3—The plea for Zion and the sin of Israel
 - 50:4–11—*Third Servant Song: The commitment of the Servant*
 - 51:1–52:12—Comfort to Zion and salvation to God’s people
 - 52:13–53:12—*Fourth Servant Song: The fulfillment of God’s plan for the Servant; His death and resurrection*
 - 54:1–55:13—Celebration of the return from exile
- 56:1–66:24—(The results of) the Messiah’s actions and the nations, part 3 (or Third Isaiah)
 - 56:1–57:13—Salvation for the nations and judgment against God’s people
 - 57:14–59:21—A call for restoration and God’s reply

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- 60:1–62:12—Yahweh’s climactic restoration of His people
- 63:1–65:12—Yahweh’s judgment on the nations related to His people
- 65:13–66:24—Yahweh’s servants receive a new heaven and new earth: all will worship Him

(For alternative approaches for outlining the book, see these articles: Isaiah, Book of, Critical Issues; Deutero-Isaiah.)

Location and Audience

Isaiah 1–39 was written in Judah, as indicated by Isaiah’s Judah-specific prophetic message, which emphasizes Judah’s royal court (see chapters 1–5; 6–14; 35; 36–39). Under the two-author view, chapters 40–66 likely was written in Babylon while the Hebrew people were exiled (586–536 BC). Under the three-author view, chapters 56–66 would have been written after the exile (post 536 BC), either in Babylon or Judah.

Isaiah’s prophecy is directed at Judah, Israel, and the nations; the audience includes regular citizens of Judah and the royal court. The text records several instances of the prophet addressing the kings of Judah (Ahaz, 7:3–13; Hezekiah, 37:2–7; 21–35; 38:1–8; 39:3–8).

Isaiah 40–55 anticipates Cyrus’ victory over Babylon (539 BC) and presents his sudden rise to power as a surprise to all, including the Babylonians (44:24–45:13; 48:14–16).

Authorship

There are five major viewpoints regarding the authorship of Isaiah:

Single-Author View

The single-author view argues that the prophet Isaiah wrote the entire book. This perspective is based on the book’s own mention of Isaiah as its author (1:1; 2:1; 7:3; 20:2; 37:2, 21; 38:1, 4; 39:3; see Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, xxvii—xxxii, who doesn’t hold this view, but demonstrates the connections between the book; also see Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3, Chapters 40–66*).

Although the viewpoint of multiple authorship of Isaiah is logical, a single-author hypothesis also can be defended (Seitz, “How is the Prophet Isaiah Present in the Latter Half of the Book?” 219–40; Orinsky, *The So-Called “Servant of the Lord”*). The time-span issue may be approached from a belief that God knew the future events that were to occur involving the king of Persia and foretold this information to the prophet, who recorded it in the book. This explanation is purely faith-based. However, this would make Isaiah the first and only prophet to specifically identify the name of a future king beyond his own lifetime (compare Childs, *Isaiah*.)

Two-Author View

Stylistic, thematic, and historical disparities between Isa 1–39 and Isa 40–66 indicate that two authors might have written Isaiah. In this case, Isaiah the prophet wrote (or communicated) his own words in “First Isaiah” (i.e., chs. 1–39), but an author (or authors) wrote “Second Isaiah” (or “Deutero-Isaiah”; i.e., chs. 40–66) in the epic of Isaiah (see Naidoff, “The Two-Fold Structure of Isaiah XLV 9–13,” 180–85). Some even see portions of Isa 1–39—primarily chapters 34–35,

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and all or portions of 13–14, 32–33, and 36–39—as composed either by the same author as “Second Isaiah” (and more specifically the Isa 40–55 author) or by an additional author. It also is possible to view the so-called “little apocalypse of Isaiah” (chs. 24–27) as composed by a separate author.

(For additional information on the “little apocalypse” and viewpoints proposed about it, and various viewpoints concerning “Second Isaiah,” see these articles: Isaiah, Book of, Critical Issues’ Deutero-Isaiah.)

The references to specific kings of Judah (740–690 BC) throughout Isaiah 1–39 and the mention of King Cyrus of Persia (540 BC) in 44:28 and 45:1 create a temporal division between 1–39 and 40–66. Further, while “First Isaiah” (1–39) deals primarily with Isaiah’s generation during the Assyrian rule, “Second Isaiah” (40–66) deals with the future of Israel under the rule of Babylon and Persia. The lyrical grandeur of “Second Isaiah” also creates a schism between the two sections. In Isaiah 1–39, the text adopts a narrative-like form, whereas in chapters 40–66 it employs a beautiful poetic prose.

Three-Author View

The three-author view holds that Isaiah the prophet wrote chapters 1–39; a second author (or authors) wrote 40–55; and a third author (or authors) wrote 56–66 (or, in some views, 54–66 or 55–66), known as “Trito-Isaiah” (e.g., Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, 1–6; Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 25; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 30–49; McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, xxxi–xxxiv; Laato, “The Composition of Isaiah 40–55,” 207–28; for an overview of the various divisions provided, see Watts, *Isaiah 33–66*, 802). According to this view, chapters 56–66 could be ascribed to a school of Isaiah’s disciples who lived shortly after him, or perhaps even a generation later. This view is based on the writing style and thematic choices of 56–66, which may be different enough from 40–55 to warrant the proposed third author(s).

Scribal Community (or Later Editor) View

Postexilic scribal communities (after 539 BC) may have added the name of King Cyrus during the editing process of the book to signify the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

Furthermore, the stylistic variations between Isa 1–39 and 40–66 may be explained by a difference in genre—from narrative to poetry (or poetic narrative). A genre change causes an author to employ different vocabulary and style. Despite the genre change, recurrent themes that run through the entire book of Isaiah favor single authorship.

The textual evidence from the ancient world could hint at single authorship, as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament treat Isaiah as one book. For example, the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) has no separation between Isa 39 and 40, signifying that the oldest textual evidence available views Isaiah as one book (see Olley, “Hear the Word of Yhwh,” 19–49). In addition, the New Testament writers use the entire book of Isaiah interchangeably as being from one author (see Matt 3:3; Acts 28:25; Rom 9:27–29; 10:16, 20). However, once a book reaches its final form, an ancient author or scribe didn’t need to think about the book in separate parts, which seriously weakens this argument.

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Multiple Authors, One Redactor

This view suggests that various parts of Isaiah were written by different people but later combined by a single editor. Isaiah 36–39 is nearly identical to 2 Kgs 18:9–20:19, the difference being that Isaiah does not acknowledge Hezekiah’s repentance (2 Kgs 18:14–16; see Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 556–65). This could indicate that it was composed by a different author than Isaiah 1–35.

In addition, the themes of the passages known as the “Servant Songs” (42:1–4, with the later addition of 42:5–9; 49:1–6, with the later addition of 49:7–12; 50:4–9, with the later addition of 50:10–11; and 52:13–53:12) are juxtaposed against the content of the rest of chapters 40–66. This may suggest that a different author composed these sections (see Budde, “The So-called ‘Ebed-Yahweh Songs,’ ” 499–540; Evans, “On the Unity and Parallel Structure of Isaiah,” 129–47; Torrey, “Some Important Editorial Operations in the Book of Isaiah,” 109–39).

History of Interpretation

Qumranite Interpretation

Nineteen copies of Isaiah have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls; the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a), alone contains more than 25 percent of all the biblical text among the Dead Sea Scrolls. There also are six commentaries (*pesharim*) of Isaiah among the Scrolls (3Q4, 4Q161–65).

The Qumran community interpreted:

- Isaiah 5, which refers to Israel’s destruction at the hand of foreigners, as about the “Last Days” and the “Men of Mockery” (which may be a reference to the Pharisees; 4Q162).
- Isaiah 10:22–34, which is about the Assyrians encroaching upon Jerusalem, as a prophecy about the Messiah overthrowing Israel’s enemies, the Kittim (likely the Romans; 4Q161, cols. 1–2). The Messiah figure does not play a role in the physical combat.
- Isaiah 11:1–5, which describes the messianic branch from Jesse, as a prophecy about the Messiah ruling the earth (4Q161). The Messiah figure works with, rather than against, the legitimate priesthood (4Q161, col. 3). This would have been a reference to a reestablished priesthood, since the Qumran community had little respect for the priesthood of the time, the Sadducees.
- Isaiah 54:11–12, which is about Yahweh’s eternal covenant with His people, as a prophecy about the reestablishment of the proper priesthood (4Q164).

(The scrolls 4Q163, 4Q165, and 3Q4 are too fragmentary to interpret. 4Q515, a highly fragmentary text, may also be a *pesharim* of Isaiah, which would take the total count of commentaries on Isaiah from Qumran to seven.)

New Testament Interpretation

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Isaiah is the second-most-quoted book in the New Testament, preceded only by Psalms. The Gospel of Luke, for example, portrays the entire life of Jesus through the theological lens of Isaiah:

- Jesus is born of a “virgin” (Luke 1:27–28, 31; Isa 7:14).
- Jesus is born into the “house of David,” like “the servant, the branch” comes from Jesse—David’s father—lineage (Luke 1:27; Isa 11:1–2).
- The angels’ song echoes the song in Isaiah’s vision (Isa 6; Luke 2:14).
- Zechariah is looking for God’s salvation and finds it in Jesus (Luke 2:29; Isa 12:2–3).
- John the Baptist prepares the way like the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Luke 3:4–6; Isa 40:3–5).
- Jesus uses Isaiah’s words to defend His view against the temptations of Satan (Luke 4:12; Isa 7:12).
- Jesus cites Isaiah, and then says that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled (Luke 4:16–21; Isa 61:1, 2).
- People marvel at Jesus’ words just as people marveled at the Suffering Servant’s words. They noted that Jesus seems ordinary, which also fits the description of the Servant (Luke 4:22; Isa 52:14–15; 53:3). They despised Jesus, like the Servant, shortly after (Luke 4:23–30; Isa 53:3).

In addition, like the Suffering Servant, Jesus:

- Is rejected, dismissed, but by implication killed by kings and rulers (Luke 23:6–25; 52:15).
- Suffers and is killed by the Jerusalem leaders (Luke 23:25; Isa 53:10).
- Is mockingly (though truthfully) called “God’s chosen” one in the midst of His suffering, in the fashion of the Servant (Luke 23:35; Isa 42:1).
- Suffers just before death alongside criminals, “the wicked” (Luke 23:33; Isa 53:5)
- Is set in a rich man’s grave (Luke 23:50–56; Isa 53:9).
- Forgives those who killed Him, perhaps because He knew the results of His death and that His death is the will of God (Luke 23:34; Isa 53:12).
- Is declared undeserving of punishment by one of the criminals (Luke 23:41; Isa 53:6).
- Is resurrected like the Servant (Luke 24:1–12; Isa 53:9–12; see Barry, *Resurrected Servant in Isaiah*).
- Does all of this, like the Servant, to save people from their own iniquities (Luke 24:25; Isa 53:10–12); His death is a sacrifice (Luke 24:46–49; Isa 53:10).

The other Gospel writers make interpretive decisions similar to Luke’s (e.g., John 12:41 parallels Isa 6:1; Matt 2:23 draws on Isa 11:1), but Luke’s Gospel is the portrayal most influenced by Isaiah. Luke and the other Gospel writers did not alter their accounts to fit Isaiah; rather, they were sure that the portrayals of Christ in their works made the connections with Isaiah clear.

The letters of Paul and the book of Revelation often allude to Isaiah, as well (e.g., Rom 12:16 alludes to Isa 5:21; Rom 9:32 alludes to Isa 8:14; compare Isa 6:2–4 with Rev 4:8; 15:8;



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compare Isa 8:22 with Rev 16:10). Every book in the New Testament contains allusions or direct quotations from Isaiah (see Jones, *Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament*). In light of this, Childs and Seitz propose that Isaiah should be read not only in its original context, but also as Christian Scripture (see Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*; Seitz, *Figured Out*; Seitz, "Isaiah 1–39").

Related Articles

For additional information on the Suffering Servant(s) in Isaiah, see these articles: Servant Songs; Servant of the Lord.

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JOHN D. BARRY

ISAIAH, BOOK OF, CRITICAL ISSUES Discusses various outlines for the book of Isaiah, the so-called “Apocalypse of Isaiah,” and the history of interpretation of the book of Isaiah.

Possible Outlines for the Book

For most of the 20th century, the book of Isaiah has been outlined as three parts. However, some interpreters outline the book in two equal sections. The outline of the book of Isaiah has been conceived in three parts since the time of Duhm’s (1892) commentary, where he proposed three separate prophets (Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, xxvi):

- (1–39)—First Isaiah, or Isaiah of Jerusalem
- (40–55)—Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah
- (56–66)—Third Isaiah, or Trito-Isaiah

Before Duhm’s analysis, but post Driver’s work, it was popular to conceive of Isaiah in two main parts:

- (1–39)—First Isaiah, or Isaiah of Jerusalem
- (40–66)—Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah

Samuel Driver (1891) saw Isa 40–66 as a continuous prophecy (Driver, *Introduction*, 217) and provided a detailed argument for why Isa 40–66 should be viewed as written by a different author than 1–39. Post Driver’s work some form of the Deutero-Isaiah hypothesis became generally accepted and became the assumed viewpoint in much of critical, biblical scholarship.

(For details regarding the origins of the Deutero-Isaiah hypothesis, which predates Driver’s work, see this article: Deutero-Isaiah.)

In the latter part of the 20th century, critical scholarship began moving away from an emphasis on analysis of small units of the text to an interest in redaction issues and the final form of the text. Due to this transition, for some scholars, the eighth century BC setting of Isa 1–39 (in comparison to possible dates for the rest of the book) became less important than the position and function of various chapters within the book as a whole. This eventually led to the consideration of a two-fold division, the first part ending at chapter 33, which happens to be



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the place where one of the Isaiah Dead Sea Scrolls leaves two lines blank before beginning chapter 34 (there is no break in the scroll between chapters 39 and 40; Brownlee, *Meaning*, 247).

Marvin Sweeney takes this approach and outlines Isaiah as follows:

- (1–33)—Concerning Yahweh’s plans for worldwide sovereignty at Zion
 - (1:1–31)—Prologue to the book of Isaiah
 - (2:1–33:24)—Prophetic instruction concerning Yahweh’s projected plans to establish worldwide sovereignty at Zion
- (34–66)—Concerning realization of Yahweh’s plans for worldwide sovereignty at Zion
 - (34:1–54:17)—Prophetic instruction concerning realization of Yahweh’s worldwide sovereignty at Zion
 - (55:1–66:24)—Prophetic exhortation to adhere to Yahweh’s covenant

Following the viewpoints of a few others, Sweeney views chapters 36–39 as an introduction to the following chapters rather than as a conclusion to chapters 1–35. He also sees chapters 34–35 as transitional. His viewpoint is consistent with the suggestion by some that chapters 34–35 are written by the author of Isa 40–55 and are transitional because of the themes of judgment and salvation (see Pope, “Isaiah 34,” 235–43). Sweeney also sees chapters 32–33 as transitional because they summarize the content of chapters 1–33 (Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 39–44).

Other scholars who see a break at chapter 33 echo Gene Tucker, who considers chapters 34–35 and 36–39 to be among the latest materials in the book. For example, Tucker observes a similarity of chapter 35 to chapters 40–55 and argues that chapter 35 is dependent on chapters 40–55 (Tucker, “Book of Isaiah 1–39,” 32). Roland Harrison also divided the book into two parts at chapters 33 and 34 (*Introduction*, 764) and John Sawyer divides the book into two parts after chapter 32 (Coggins, “Deutero-Isaiah,” 81).

The Little Apocalypse (Isa 24–27)

Isaiah chapters 24–27 are often known as the “Little Apocalypse of Isaiah,” and some scholars consider these chapters to have been written last of all the chapters of Isaiah (see Clements, “Beyond Tradition-History,” 98). Three main problems have dominated the study of these chapters (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 3):

- the literary genre
- the external structure
- the historical setting (including date, authorship, and identification of the destroyed city).

Genre of Isaiah 24–27

The genre of Isa 24–27 has been variously identified as apocalyptic or simply eschatological. There are also elements of a type of victory song and city lament.

Apocalyptic and Eschatological Elements in Isaiah 24–27. Isaiah 24–27 shares a number of features with apocalyptic literature (Box, *Isaiah*, 112):

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- World wide scope (Isa 24:1, 18–20; Ezek 38:19–20; Zech 14:4–5)
- A banquet (Isa 25:6; Rev 19:9)
- Punishment of heavenly host (Isa 24:21; Enoch 18:13–16; Rev 20:2–3)
- Victory over death (Isa 26:19)
- The trumpet (Isa 27:13)
- Hiding of the faithful (Isa 26:20)
- Veiled and symbolic language (Isa 27:1).

Bernard Duhm compared the genre of chapters 24–27 to apocalyptic works such as the Sibylline Oracles, Daniel, and Enoch (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 6).

Victory over death, or resurrection, sometimes occurs in apocalyptic literature. Isaiah 25:8 speaks of swallowing death, and Goldingay sees this as an abolition of death on a permanent basis, but not the same as resurrection (Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 143; compare Dan 12:2). Isaiah 26:19, however, does speak of the dead living, which certainly implies resurrection; the question is how to interpret this resurrection in the context. Philip Smitz takes these references as metaphors for political revival (Smitz, “Resurrection,” 148; compare Ezek 37). Kaufmann related the dead living allusions to metaphors for revival and the escape from near death for the sick and suffering (Isa 25:8; 26:19; compare Ezek 37; Pss 88:4; 143:3; Kaufmann, *Religion*, 384–85; see Millar, *Isaiah 24–27*, 8). It is also possible to view them as references to a prophesy of corporate resurrection for God’s people (compare Ezek 37; Dan 12:2).

Some interpreters have preferred to identify the genre of chapters 24–27 as prophetic eschatology rather than apocalyptic. It is possible to focus on the central theme of the judgment of the world and the contrast between the power of God and the power of the world, and then to understand this as consistent with prophetic eschatology (see Millar, *Isaiah 24–27*, 3). Yehezkel Kaufmann also saw other prophetic categories in elements such as the punishment of the host of the high ones which he related to the day of Yahweh in the prophets (Isa 24:21; Amos 4:13; Hos 4:3). He also noted that Leviathan and the serpent in Isa 27:1 have a Canaanite background and do not need to be explained as apocalyptic (Kaufmann, *Religion*, 384–385; see Millar, *Isaiah 24–27*, 8).

Victory Songs and City Lament. Five passages in Isa 24–27 were identified as victory songs by Paul Lohmann (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 8). Gunnar Hylmö saw chapters 25 and 26 as a prophetic liturgy which included hymns, oracles, and a lamentation (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 9).

Isaiah 24–27 has some elements of the genre city lament, such as various classes of people in Isa 24:2—people, priest, servant, master, maid, mistress, buyer, seller, lender, borrower, taker of usury, and giver of usury. This is used to show that a disaster affects everyone. By comparison, Lamentations 5:11–14 mentions women, virgins, princes, elders, old men, and young men and Eccl 12:3 mentions keepers of the house, strong men, grinders, and those looking through the windows (Bennett, *Ecclesiastes/Lamentations*, 176). Another element common to city lament is the cessation of music (Isa 24:8; Eccl 12:4; Lam 5:14).

Structure

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Various suggestions have been made for the structure of Isa 24–27, but a division in scholarship exists over how the chapters fit with the rest of the book of Isaiah.

Structure of Isaiah 24–27. Chapters 24–27 center around two themes, according to Rudolf Smend: Israel was being punished for sin and the imminent fall of Moab was a cause for rejoicing and hope. Each of the chapters develops these themes (Isa 24:14–23; Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 5).

Three independent prophetic liturgies provide the structure of chapters 24–27 for Georg Fohrer. These liturgies are found in Isa 24:1–20; 24:21–25:10a; and 27:1–13. Fohrer considered chapter 26 to be transitional and dated chapters 24–27 to the fifth century (see Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 16).

Bernard Duhm understood the apocalyptic and lyrical elements as making up the literary structure of Isa 24–27. Benedikt Otzen rejected these in favor of a thematic approach, focusing on universal world judgment (pre-exilic) and Zion passages (postexilic). These themes alternate throughout Isa 24–27 (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 18–19).

A thematic approach led William Millar to outline chapters 24–27 on the basis of the divine warrior hymn found in Psalms and in Isa 40–66. He based this analysis on themes which are also found in Ugaritic literature: threat, war, victory, and feast (Millar, *Isaiah 24–27*, 15).

Dale Lewis identified structure on the basis of rhetorical devices such as repetition and inclusio. He found two main divisions—24:1–20 and 24:21–27:1. The first consists of prophetic judgment, communal lament, and a response to a hymn. The second reflects the themes and events of an enthronement festival (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 22, 204–05).

Connection between Isaiah 24–27 and the Rest of the Book. One of the main viewpoints on Isa 24–27 is that it is a composition or collection separate from the rest of the book dating to the second century BC, and thus one of the latest compositions of the Old Testament. This is due to the viewpoint that apocalyptic literature did not develop until this period, and thus this section of Isaiah likewise could not have been written before this period. Alberto Soggin identified Isa 24–27 as one of four major parts of the book (along with chapters 1–39 [not including 24–27], 40–55, and 56–66; Soggin, *Introduction*, 299, 309). Philip Smitz identified three reasons why Isa 24–27 has been seen as a separate unit (Smitz, “Resurrection,” 145):

- absence of a plausible connection with the Neo-Assyrian period
- distinctive vocabulary and syntax
- themes and imagery generally associated with later periods in the history of Israel.

More recently, as interest in the final form of Isaiah has grown, there have been attempts to discover how Isa 24–27 functions in the book as a whole. Gordon McConville suggests that chapters 24–27 function as a conclusion to the oracles against nations in chapters 13–23. The oracles against nations have an international scope and chapters 24–27 carry this further with cosmic events. Both units work together to show God’s sovereignty over the whole earth (McConville, *Prophets*, 19).

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Since the chapters lack specific historical references, Goldingay prefers to see them as a continuation of the movement from a focus on Judah in Isa 1–12, to the nations in Isa 13–23, to the whole world in Isa 24–27 (Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 8, 137).

Marvin Sweeney’s study of chapters 24–27 identifies seven textual citations or allusions to the rest of the book of Isaiah. These are identified by their “high lexical correspondence and thematic correlation” (Sweeney, “Isaiah 24–27,” 42). The connections come from chapters 2, 4, 5, 11, 13, 17, 21, 32, 33, and 66. John Oswalt identifies a chiasmic structure for Isa 1–39. Chapters 24–27, God’s Triumph over the Nations, stand as the climax to that chiasm (Oswalt, “Isaiah 24–27,” 79).

Setting of Isaiah 24–27

A number of suggestions have been made for the geographical and historical setting of Isa 24–27.

The Destroyed City. The historical setting of Isa 24–27 is determined by the identification of the destroyed city (or cities) (Isa 24:10; 25:2; 26:5; 27:10; see 26:1). Three main suggestions have been made:

- A city in Moab
- Babylon
- Jerusalem

Moab is trampled down in Isa 25:10–12. Three verses from Isaiah also appear in Jer 48 in an oracle against Moab (24:16–18). This suggests that Moab may also be the focus of Isa 24. The reference to Moab in Isa 25:10–12 was the historical point of departure for E.S. Mulder, who related the fall of Moab to the Nabateans in the third century and so dated the chapters to around 270 BC (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 12). In this case, the reference to Moab would be considered an addition, a corruption, or a symbolic reference (Millar, *Isaiah 24–27*, 18).

Jerusalem and Babylon are the two cities in chapters 24–27 according to Wilhelm Gesenius, whose view on this point dominated 19th-century scholarship (Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 4–5). Gesenius saw descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem in chapters 24 and 27 (as a past event), and the expectation of the fall of Babylon in chapters 25 and 26. Mark Biddle sees ambiguity in the text so that both Babylon’s and Jerusalem’s sinful nature leads to the new Jerusalem (Biddle, “The City of Chaos,” 11).

A fourth approach to the identity of the city in Isa 24–27 is to see a condemnation of city life in general (see Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 174).

Time Frame. Theories for the time frame of Isa 24–27 range from pre-exilic to late postexilic. Edward Kissane suggested an eighth-century date. However, rather than argue that ideas such as resurrection can come from the earlier period, he interpreted Isa 26:19 as political revival and 25:8 as an end to death by violence (see Millar, *Isaiah 24–27*, 7).

Christopher Seitz dates Isa 24–27 to the Babylonian period, specifically between 586 BC and 538 BC. He holds this date because Babylon is not only the agent of the destruction of nations,

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but the subject of God's judgment on human pride (Isa 12–23; 24:12; 25:2; 26:5). Thus God's judgment comes upon his agent of judgment (Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 178).

The Maccabean period is the historical timeframe for Otto Ludwig, who identified two different settings: the fall of Jerusalem to Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC, and the overthrow of the Jerusalem acropolis Akra by Simon Maccabeus in 141 BC. He made this distinction by tracing the different words for city and fortress in Isa 24–27 (see Lewis, *Isaiah 24–27*, 15).

History of Interpretation of Isaiah

The interpretation of the book of Isaiah has followed a transition from traditional approaches to critical approaches. Interpretation has also progressed from an emphasis on the author's intention to a focus on the text itself (a final-form or canonical approach) and to the reader. Alternative approaches, such as feminist and non-Western interpretation, have also arisen in the 20th century.

Early Interpretations of Isaiah

Interpretation of the book of Isaiah began with Sirach (Sirach 48:23) and the translation of Isaiah in the Septuagint, then with the New Testament view that much of Isaiah's proclamations had been fulfilled in Jesus' actions and the results of his actions (Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, Galatians, 1 Peter, and Revelation). The New Testament and the early church pursued a christocentric interpretation of Isaiah. For example, Philip preached about Jesus to the Ethiopians on the basis of Isa 53:7–8 (He was the "sheep led to the slaughter"). Later, Jerome would identify Isaiah as an evangelist who declared mysteries, such as the virgin birth of Jesus and His death (Wilken, *Isaiah*, xiii).

In addition, the allegorizing method of interpretation was also applied to Isaiah by both Jewish and Christian interpreters. An example is seen in Cyril of Alexandria's understanding of Isa 63:1–3, which mentions coming in crimson garments from Edom. Cyril applied this to the blood-stained garments of Christ (Wilken, *Isaiah*, xvi; compare Rev 19:13).

Traditional

The traditional interpretation of the book of Isaiah connects all 66 chapters with the eighth-century BC prophet from Judah. This approach was hardly challenged until the 18th century AD, but the traditional approach is now uncommon in academic literature.

While the critical view of multiple authorship was gaining acceptance in the 19th century, Carl Caspari, Moritz Drechsler, Rudolf Stier, Joseph Alexander (*Prophecies of Isaiah*, 13–14), and Ebenezer Henderson (Archer, *Survey*, 311) continued to argue for the traditional interpretation. Other 19th-century supporters of unified authorship are listed by Harrison (*Introduction*, 770–71).

The traditional view of the unity of Isaiah continued to be defended in the 20th century by Armand Kaminka, Oswald Allis (*Unity*, 39–50), Rachel Margalioth, Edward Young (*Isaiah*, vii), Harold Thomas ("Authorship," 46–55), Roland Harrison (*Introduction*, 769–74), Gleason Archer (*Survey*, 330), Homer Hailey (*Isaiah*, 29), John Oswalt (*Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, 25), Robert Vasholz ("Isaiah Versus 'The Gods,' " 389–94), John Walton ("New Observations," 131), Alec Motyer

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(*Isaiah*, 23–24), and Mark Rooker (“Dating Isaiah,” 303–12; see Dillard and Longman, *Introduction*, 271).

Critical

The critical interpretation of the book of Isaiah seeks to distinguish different historical contexts and authorship for different parts of the book, especially chapters 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66. The focus in most of 20th-century critical scholarship has been to recover the original words of the prophet, whether from the eighth century BC (Isaiah of Jerusalem) or the sixth century BC (Second Isaiah).

While Bernard Duhm (1892) is responsible for bringing wide acceptance to the idea that Isaiah originated as three separate parts (see Clements, “Beyond Tradition-History,” 95), the separation of chapters 1–39 from the rest of the book was perhaps anticipated by Ibn Ezra (medieval interpreter) and B. Spinoza (Dutch philosopher, 1632–1677). It was then later fully argued for by J.C. Döderlein (German scholar, 1788).

While Döderlein argued for a sixth-century BC date for chapters 40–66, Ernst Rosenmüller (1768–1835) further argued for sixth-century elements in chapters 1–39. For example, he held that chapters 13 and 14 originated in the sixth century because they may relate to Babylon, which was not a world power in the eighth century (Archer, *Survey*, 310).

The full independence of chapters 1–39 from 40–66 was further argued in the work of G.H. Box (1908). He outlined a theory of the history of composition for each half following Cheyne’s suggestion that the two halves were brought together between 432 and 180 BC (Box, *Isaiah*, 2–6).

The presupposed historical context was one of three reasons why Driver argued for the independent authorship of chapters 40–66 (Driver, *Introduction*, 223–29). His arguments are:

- The exile is presupposed in chapters 40–66 (not predicted).
- The literary style of chapters 40–66 is different from chapters 1–39.
- A difference exists in theological ideas, such as the nature of God.

The argument that the second part of Isaiah presupposes a sixth-century BC context was crucial for later interpreters who held that Isa 40–66 was not authored by Isaiah, such as George Gray. He argued that chapters 40–55 do not predict that Cyrus will have remarkable victories, but describe victories that he has already achieved (Gray, *Isaiah*, xxxi). Gray considered the book of Isaiah to be a compilation of previously existing books, which is suggested by the titles such as “the Oracle of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of ‘Amoş saw” (Isa 13:1; Gray, *Isaiah*, xlvi).

At times, the two parts of Isaiah were understood to be completely unrelated. Robert Pfeiffer suggested that the book consisting of chapters 1–39 did not fill up a scroll, so a scribe added the work of another prophet to the remaining space (Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, 415). R.N. Whybray saw more purpose in the connection. He viewed chapters 40–55 as a separate work which was added to chapters 1–39 because of thematic similarities such as their “devotion to Jerusalem and its religious traditions” (Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, 5).

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Some have credited the authorship of the second part of the book to a school of disciples who followed the teaching of Isaiah and applied it to later contexts. Eaton suggested that the reference to disciples in Isa 8:16 comprised a definite society which preserved the oral prophecies of Isaiah. This recognition allowed Eaton to study the book of Isaiah as a whole (Eaton, "Origin," 145, 157). Sigmund Mowinckel also emphasized oral tradition passed down by a school of disciples (Rendtorff, *Canon*, 147). G. von Rad contributed to this understanding by noting that themes common to both parts of Isaiah are explained by supposing that both are dependent on the oral traditions available to the prophets (von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 174, 239; see Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History," 110).

Claus Westermann studied Isa 40–66 from a form-critical perspective. He investigated small units within chapters in order to find forms of speech from everyday life. The forms which Westermann identified include promise of salvation, proclamation of salvation, praise of God, polemic, trial speeches, songs of praise, and servant songs (Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 10–20). This viewpoint greatly influenced the work of many later scholars, including R.N. Whybray.

The poetic nature of Isa 40–66 was important for James Muilenburg who saw these chapters as a unity. He therefore studied the relationship of each unit with those preceding and following (see Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 18).

The study of chapters 40–55 as a unit from an author(s) other than the author of chapters 1–39 continues in recent commentaries such as those of John Goldingay and David Payne. Nevertheless, Goldingay and Payne see chapters 40–55 as an integral part of the book with "substantial and historical links" to the rest of Isaiah (Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 1, 7).

The integrity of Isa 40–55 as a unit and the identity of Deutero-Isaiah as a prophet have been called into question by Richard Coggins. He challenges the geographical and historical assumptions that led to the views surrounding Isa 40–55 which were dominant in the 20th century. But Coggins is also not comfortable with final form approaches; instead he sees the book of Isaiah as an anthology which presents great hurdles to the discovery of its historical circumstances (Coggins, "Deutero-Isaiah," 86–92).

Canonical (Final Form)

The canonical interpretation of the book of Isaiah seeks to understand elements of unity which transcend historical origins from different time periods. The purpose is to identify the theological message being communicated. Canonical interpretation departs from earlier critical scholarship by raising the prestige of the editor who brought Isaiah into its final form rather than focusing on the individual prophets who may have originally spoken the words in the book. The emphasis may be diachronic (how the text reached its final form) or synchronic (study of only the final form).

Canonical criticism was pioneered by Brevard Childs. In regard to Isaiah, he argued that the reference to "former things" in Isa 41:21 and elsewhere was meant to refer to the prophecies of chapters 1–39 (Childs, *Introduction*, 328–30). Thus, the canonical context provides an important connection between prophecy and fulfillment.

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The canonical approach is also pursued by other scholars such as Christopher Seitz, Ronald Clements, Peter Ackroyd, Roy Melugin, Marvin Sweeney, H.G.M. Williamson, Antti Laato, Rolf Rendtorff, J.J.M. Roberts, Robin Routledge, Katheryn Darr, John Watts, Edgar Conrad, Richard Schultz, and Walter Brueggemann (see Melugin and Sweeney, *New Visions*, 13–14).

Diachronic. There are many different approaches to canonical interpretation, and a major distinction can be made between diachronic and synchronic study. Diachronic study is interested in the prehistory of the text, giving major focus to how the constituent parts were brought together.

A final form approach (but one that is perhaps more interested in the actual historical and reactive elements of the text than Childs' approach) is represented by Christopher Seitz, Ronald Clements, Peter Ackroyd, Roy Melugin, and H.G.M. Williamson. Seitz sees the final form as "an intelligible and an intended result of the efforts of those who gave shape to the present form of the book" (Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, xi). According to Seitz, this emphasis on the final form allows greater attention to the text itself as well as the larger context of a passage.

Clements sees evidence in Isaiah for the work of editors who have "injected a great degree of their own understanding into the work" (Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History," 100). He rejects the idea of chapters 1–39 and 40–55 as completely separate and that the elements of chapters 40–55 were independent but seen as a suitable sequel to chapters 1–39. Instead, Clements suggests that chapters 40–55 were specifically written to "develop and enlarge upon prophetic sayings from Isaiah of Jerusalem" (Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History," 101). This unity is seen in two fundamental themes: Israel's blindness and deafness, and the divine election of Israel. Clements identifies his method as "redaction criticism" but recognizes that the process differs from the editorial process seen in narrative texts (Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History," 111). More recently, Clements has identified "faith in Jerusalem and its place among the nations" as the "thread that holds it all together" (Clements, "Book without an Ending?" 124).

According to Peter Ackroyd, there is a connection to be made by seeing the messenger of doom in Isa 1–12 depicted as the messenger of salvation elsewhere in the book. Ackroyd also sees a special relationship between chapters 36–39 and Isa 6:1–9:6. Both are narratives portraying the prophet's confrontation with a king (Ahaz the bad king and Hezekiah the good king). The whole was brought together with the purpose of instilling confidence in God's assurance of salvation (Rendtorff, *Canon*, 147–48).

Links between various parts of Isaiah also suggest a unity for Roy Melugin. Key words show connections between different parts. The words "left [and] remnant" connect Isa 39:6 and 1:9, and the word "guilt" connects Isa 40:1 and 1:4 (Melugin, *Formation*, 82, 89, 174–78; see Rendtorff, *Canon*, 147–49).

Sweeney examines the exhortations to accept the terms of a covenant with God as key themes. At the beginning and end of the book, Judah and Jerusalem are called to covenant loyalty (chapters 1 and 55). Following an alternative outline, Sweeney argues that chapters 1–

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33 project God's plans for worldwide sovereignty, while chapters 34–66 show the realization of those plans (Sweeney, "Prophetic Torah," 52–53).

H.G.M. Williamson goes further in his view of the integration of chapters 1–39 and 40–55. He views all of chapters 1–55 as the composition of Deutero-Isaiah who used the words of the eighth-century prophet for his own purpose, even adding sections found in chapters 1–39 (Williamson, *Book*, 154).

Synchronic. The synchronic approach to canonical study is less interested in the prehistory of the text and lacks confidence that the context can be discovered. Instead, the focus is on the existing text as a whole, as it was (or is) read by a particular reader. Various methods are applied within this approach, such as the application of rhetorical criticism, analysis of the possible unifying elements of the book, and various theological readings.

Antti Laato applies rhetorical criticism to Isa 40–55. He finds a chiasmic macrostructure for chapters 40–53 (A-B-A'-B'-A'"), with chapters 54–55 serving as a summary. The central unit shows that the main purpose of Isa 40–53 is to argue "that Yahweh will create a new future for his people through Cyrus" (Laato, "Composition," 208, 228).

Rolf Rendtorff studies the book as a unity with little attention to the process of writing and compiling. He notices the distribution of themes such as "guilt," "comfort," and "glory" (Isa 1:4; 40:2; 59:2–3; compare Isa 12:1; 40:1; 51:12; 66:13; and Isa 6:3; 35:2; 40:5; 59:19; 60:1; 66:18; Rendtorff, *Canon*, 149–55). These links and theological connections are not accidental in Rendtorff's opinion, but were "deliberately forged in order to connect the three parts." He is doubtful that chapters 56–66 could have existed independent from the rest of the book (Rendtorff, *Canon*, 155–69).

Another synchronic approach is to see the book of Isaiah as a theological unity. J.J.M. Roberts conducted such a study, and found the central concept of the book to be "Yahweh as the Holy One of Israel" (Roberts, "Isaiah in Old Testament Theology," 131). For William Dumbrell, the theological unity is found in "Yahweh's interest in and devotion to the city of Jerusalem." Themes such as holiness and divine kingship are sub-themes (Dumbrell, "Purpose," 112). For John Oswalt it is not a unifying theological theme that is the point, but Isaiah's emphasis on theology in general. Oswalt finds "a more extended theological reflection" in the book. In this regard he traces the themes of righteousness, theology of the Messiah, exaltation and humiliation, and God (Oswalt, "Biblical Theology," 54, 62, 67).

The main theme of "the relationship between God, Israel and the nations, and the role of the Servant of the Lord" is identified by Robin Routledge on the basis of identifying a narrative structure for the book of Isaiah, which is mostly poetic (with few narrative passages; Routledge, "Narrative Structure," 183).

Other Canonical-Like Approaches. In Katheryn Darr's interpretation of Isa 36–39, she excludes the information about the 701 BC siege of Jerusalem found in 2 Kgs 18 and Sennacherib's annals. In her view, the implied reader of Isaiah would not have this information and so would interpret Isa 36–39 based only on the chapters of Isaiah which have come before (Darr, "No Strength," 234–35, 245–46).

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In some ways, John Watts also interprets the book as it now exists, from the viewpoint of a reader situated in 435 BC. The unifying structure for him is that of a drama in 12 acts (Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, xxiii—xxiv, xlii—xliii, li).

Edgar Conrad draws attention to “the trick of the disappearing redactor,” a concept from John Barton where the editor becomes less of an editor and more of an author (hence the redactor has disappeared). Conrad notes a continuum among final form interpreters between the view that an author gathered quotations (compiled) and the view that an author reworked sources (authored). This is what John Noble calls a distinction between Quotation Theories and Resource Theories (Conrad, *Prophet*, 308–09). Conrad prefers the resource end of the continuum as a model for interpreting Isaiah because he considers the data for identifying the resources inaccessible (Conrad, *Prophet*, 311). This results in more of a focus on the formation of the book by a postexilic community, disconnected from any original prophet or later process of canon. In the end, the “meaning of a text is dependent on the reader” (Conrad, *Prophet*, 325).

Walter Brueggemann emphasizes the application of Isaiah’s theology to contemporary settings (*Isaiah 1–39*, 6–7). But to do so, Brueggemann studies the social processes which caused the shaping of the literature. He suggested the following correlations for the canonical shape (Brueggemann, “Unity,” 91, 102):

- Isaiah 1–39: a critique of ideology
- Isaiah 40–55: a public embrace of pain which leads to hope
- Isaiah 56–66: a release of social imagination

Although scholars like Brueggemann and Watts draw different conclusions than Childs, they are in many ways reflecting his overall approach to Isaiah as canonical Scripture, with the goal of finding application for particular settings. This approach, and Childs’ for that matter, is in a way a type of reader-response interpretation.

Reader Response Approaches

Reader response interpretations shift the focus from the text to the reader.

Richard Schultz attempts to adapt the canonical approach in a way that would be relevant for evangelical interpreters. He looks to related texts from within Isaiah and within the Old Testament (Pentateuch, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). He is also interested in texts from a later period which have influenced the contemporary reader. He finds connections with apocalyptic literature (which he groups 2 Peter and Revelation under), explorers (Christopher Columbus), Quakers (paintings by Edward Hicks), and Kitsch art. While texts that are chronologically later could not have influenced the author of Isaiah, Schultz is focused on the reader and identifying an interpretation which is not necessarily more accurate, but in his view, richer (Schulz, “Intertextuality,” 32–37).

There are also other alternative interpretations of Isaiah that are not necessarily canonical or historical-critical influenced. For example, Christopher Devanesan objects to the possible racial implications of an interpretation of Isa 1:18 that sees “scarlet” as a metaphor for guilt and



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“snow” as a metaphor for innocence. Instead, he suggests the explanation, “Though your sins are alive and kicking (scarlet), I will make them cease to exist (whiter than snow)” (Devanesan, “Sin and Colour,” 192).

Some feminist interpretations of Isaiah focus on violence against women in the marriage metaphor of Isa 47, women’s fate in war in Isa 3 and 47, inclusive language, motherly terminology for God (Isa 42:14; 43:6; 49:15; 49:22; 51:2), and the overall portrayal of women (Isa 3:16; Scholz, *Introducing*, 44–45, 65, 92; Brenner, *Latter Prophets*, 23–26; Ackerman, “Isaiah,” 163, 167–68).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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STEPHEN J. BENNETT

ISAIAH THE PROPHET (יְשַׁעְיָהוּ, *yesh'a'yahu*; "the salvation of Yahweh"). Eighth-century BC prophet who foretells the salvation of Yahweh's people, including a return from Babylonian captivity and an eventual return to Yahweh.

Overview

Isaiah was the son of Amoz (Isa 1:1; 2:1; 20:2; 21; 2 Kgs 19:2, 20:1; 2 Chr 26:22; 32:20).

Although little is known of Amoz, he may be the person mentioned in 2 Chr 25:7–8. Isaiah married "the prophetess" (Isa 8:3). Together they had two sons:

1. Shear-jashub (יְשַׁעְיָהוּ אֶשְׁרָיִם, *yashuv she'ar*; "a remnant shall return"; Isa 7:3). When Shear-jashub accompanied Isaiah to visit Ahaz, his name suggested that the invaders of Judah would be defeated and only a remnant of the enemy forces would return.
2. Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("quickly the plunder; it hurries, the loot"; Isa 8:1, 3). Isaiah interpreted this as a prediction of the demise of Syria and Israel by an Assyrian invasion (Isa 8:4).

Isaiah prophesied during the times of four kings of Judah:

1. Uzziah/Azariah (787–736 BC);
2. Jotham (coregent 756–741 BC);
3. Ahaz (741–736 BC as coregent; 736–725 BC as sole ruler);



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4. Hezekiah (725–697 BC) (Larsson, “Chronology,” 224–35).

From the beginning of Uzziah’s kingship to the end of Hezekiah’s spans a period of 90 years. Assuming the year of Uzziah’s death marks the beginning of Isaiah’s ministry (736 BC), his ministry would cover 39 years. However, Isaiah’s ministry may have commenced earlier into Uzziah’s kingship and further into the kingship of Manasseh (Milgrom, “Did Isaiah Prophecy?” 164–74). His original call, not recorded, probably precedes Isaiah 6; his martyrdom likely took place during the reign of Manasseh (687–642 BC). Thus his ministry probably spans 60 years.

Isaiah dealt significantly with two kings of Judah:

1. Ahaz, during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and fallout (732–722 BC);
2. Hezekiah, during the onslaught of the Assyrians on the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms (722–701 BC).

Isaiah witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and the near similar fate of Judah during Sennacherib’s invasion.

During Isaiah’s lifetime, Assyria was the major power and the primary antagonist of Judah and Israel. Isaiah’s ministry spanned the reigns of four Assyrian kings (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 18–19):

1. Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC);
2. Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC);
3. Sargon II (721–705 BC);
4. Sennacherib (704–682 BC).

The conflicts with Assyria in the book of Isaiah are most prominent in terms of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Isaiah’s Background

The book of Isaiah bears signs of a wisdom genre, suggesting that Isaiah may have been a converted sage, scribe, or counselor at the court (Fichtner, “Jesaja unter den Weisen,” 18–26; Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, 113–22; Anderson, “Was Isaiah a Scribe?” 57–58). Although his exact role or background is disputed, the influence of wisdom is generally accepted (Jensen, *The Use of Tôrâ by Isaiah*, 45; Sonnet, “Le motif de l’endurcissement,” 212; Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 11; Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 14; Scobie, “The Place of Wisdom in Biblical Theology,” 43, 46).

- Wolffe and Whybray suggest that there is ample evidence in the book of Isaiah to substantiate a wisdom connection without supposing Isaiah was a converted scribe (Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 91; Whybray, “Slippery Words,” 360).
- Wedbee argues that Isaiah uses the wisdom genre because his opponents are counselors to the king, and they oppose the wisdom of God (Wedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 150–53).

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- Most acknowledge the role of Isaiah’s opponents as counselors in Isaiah’s decision to use wisdom motifs and genre.

However, it is uncertain how Isaiah seems to handle the genre of wisdom within the prophetic so effectively (Jensen, *The Use of Tôrâ by Isaiah*, 51; Sonnet, “Le motif de l’endurcissement,” 216; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12*, 3; Milgrom, “Did Isaiah Prophesy?” 171; Whybray, “The Sage in the Israelite Royal Court,” 133–34). Thus a significant part of Isaiah’s background is linked with the acquisition of the wisdom traditions and some form of training in wisdom pedagogy (Hartley, *The Wisdom Background*, 169–72).

Isaiah 6:9–10 should be treated as programmatic—the verses contain terms and themes that reoccur throughout Isaiah and define his ministry (Isa 29:9–10; 32:3–4; 42:6–7, 18–20; 43:7–8; 44:18; 52:13–53:12; Clement, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah,” 125–26; McLaughlin, “Their Hearts Were Hardened,” 1–25; Hartley, *The Wisdom Background*, 178–200; compare Beuken, “The Manifestation of Yahweh and the Commission of Isaiah,” 72–78). Isaiah 6:9–10 reads, “And he said, ‘Go and say to this people, *Hear indeed but do not perceive, see indeed but do not know*. Cause the heart of this people to remain fat and ears to remain heavy and their eyes to remain blind otherwise they will see with their eyes and hear with their ears and perceive with their heart and repent and I will heal them.’ ” The terms within the text reflect Isaiah’s background. Emphases on hearing, seeing, perceiving, and knowing, and the inability of the heart described as “fat” suggests a calculated use of a wisdom background familiar to both author and audience.

Biblical Usage

The Old Testament

The name “Isaiah” occurs 35 times in four Old Testament books, including 16 times alone in Isaiah (Isa 1:1; 2:1; 7:3; 13:1; 20:2–3; 37:2, 5–6, 21; 38:1, 4, 21; 39:3, 5, 8). Three other Old Testament books also mention Isaiah:

- 13 times in 2 Kings (2 Kgs 19:1–20:19).
- Three times 1 Chronicles (1 Chr 25:1–15; 26:25).
- Three times in 2 Chronicles (2 Chr 26:22; 32:20–32).

The *Targum Jonathan* adds Song of Songs 1:1 to this list of biblical witnesses. These passages outside of the book of Isaiah cover the period surrounding the incident of Hezekiah and Sennacherib.

New Testament Quotations/Allusions

Isaiah is directly quoted 66 times in the New Testament, second only to the Psalms (quoted 79 times; Aland, *The Greek New Testament*, 887–88). Allusions to Isaiah in the New Testament are tabulated at 348 times, more than any other Old Testament book, including Psalms (alluded to 333 times) (Aland, *The Greek New Testament*, 891–901).



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Non-Biblical Usage

Deuterocanonical Literature

The Old Testament deuterocanonical literature mentions Isaiah four times:

- Prayer of Manasseh 5:0—records a prayer of Isaiah.
- Prayer of Manasseh 10:0—records a song of Isaiah.
- Sirach 48:20 and 22—Mentions Isaiah’s ministry and the deliverance brought about during the reign of Hezekiah from Sennacherib—especially the destruction of the Assyrian troops by the miraculous intervention of the Angel of the Lord.

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

The Old Testament pseudepigrapha have a number of references to Isaiah:

- Fourth Maccabees 18:14 speaks of the comfort given by the mother of seven sons, citing Isa 43:2 as words frequently uttered by the boys’ deceased but godly father.
- 4 Baruch 9:21 (second century AD) either quotes or alludes to Isa 6: “I saw God and the Son of God.” This saying may give added significance to previous traditions utilizing this passage (Hartley “Destined to Disobey?” 284–86).
- The *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* (1:1–3:19), a document that probably dates as early as the first century AD, records three incidents. The first and third of these incidents do not occur in the canonical Old Testament (Helmbold, “Ascension of Isaiah,” 348–50; Hall, “Isaiah’s Ascent to See the Beloved,” 463–84):
 - a. Isaiah refuses to bless Hezekiah’s young son, Manasseh. He instead predicts the boy’s sinfulness.
 - b. Isaiah predicts the deportation of Jerusalem to Babylon.
 - c. Isaiah’s death depicts him being sawn in two (πρισθῆναι, *pristhēnai*) within a log (5:1–14). The same death is described in another pseudepigraphal work as well (*Lives of the Prophets* 1:1–5 [1st century AD]). Hebrews 11:32 and 37 may refer to the martyrdom of Isaiah. Heb 11:37 mentions that some of the prophets were “sawn apart” (ἐπρίσθησαν, *epristhēsan*)—many commentators link this to the great prophet (Metzger, *TCGNT*, 603–04). This may be an incident where the New Testament testifies to historical realities preserved in subsequent tradition but not found in the Old Testament.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Qumran community possessed at least two Isaiah scrolls and many sectarian scrolls related to Isaiah—other Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah exist, but these cannot be directly linked to the Qumran community. The importance of Isaiah among this sect is significant. It reflects the New Testament’s similar priority to the book, if not the man. The sectarian Hebrew manuscripts mention Isaiah explicitly 13 times (CD 4:13; 6:8; 7:10; 3Q4 f1:1, 3; 4QFlor 174 f1 2i:15; 4Q176 f1 2i:4; 4QSD f1:3; 4QD^a f3i:7; 4Q267 f2:15; 4Q285 f7:1; 11QMelch 2:15; 11Q14 f1i:9).

Inscriptions



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Inscriptions reference Isaiah several times, although their context is lacking. The Hebrew inscriptions record the phrases, “belonging to Isaiah” (Seals 212:1; 213:1; 214:1; 215:1) and the “(son of) Amariah” (Seals 212:2).

Josephus

Josephus mentions Isaiah explicitly 12 times, mostly in reference to Hezekiah’s healing and Cyrus’ decree to return Jews to rebuild the temple (*Antiquities* 9:276; 10:12, 16, 27–28, 32; 11:5–6; 13:64, 68, 71; *Jewish War* 7:432).

Major Contributions to Christian Theology

Isaiah gives two major contributions to Christian theology:

1. His presentation of the young woman who will give birth to Immanuel in Isa 7:14. This is later interpreted by Matthew to refer to Jesus and the virgin conception.
2. The Suffering Servant as a vicarious atonement for his people and the means of accomplishing this ultimate salvation (Isa 52:13–53:12).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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DONALD E. HARTLEY¹⁶

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

¹⁶ Hartley, D. E. (2016). [Isaiah the Prophet](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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Background

God could have put His people, Israel, in a distant, sheltered oasis where no one would bother them. Instead He put them at the crossroads of the ancient world. This “promised land” would be a vital center for the spread of the gospel when Jesus came. But in Isaiah’s day, it was a place where the armies of the known world came into conflict. To the northeast, Assyria was the dominant power, with its cities of Nineveh and Asshur on the Tigris River (see map, Appendix B). However, Babylon, on the Euphrates River, was the cultural, commercial, and religious center for all Mesopotamia. To the south, Egypt, along the Nile River, was a great and wealthy nation.

Assyria’s goal was to dominate Babylon and conquer Egypt. To this end, its kings habitually sent their armies every year to conquer, pillage, and destroy cities and nations that stood in the way. The Assyrians were noted for their cruelty and kept inventing new ways to torture their captives.

Archaeologists have found at Nineveh the bas-relief of the conquest of Lachish; it shows captive Jews being led before King Sennacherib of Assyria by ropes attached to giant fish hooks put through their jaws, something Amos had already prophesied for northern Israel (Amos 4:2). Jews are also depicted as impaled before the city walls, a prototype of the form of capital punishment called crucifixion.²

Isaiah, however, began to prophesy in what seemed to be good times. Not since the days of Solomon had Israel and Judah enjoyed such prosperity. In the days of Elisha, Damascus caused trouble for the northern kingdom of Israel, capturing part of their territory (e.g. 2 Kings 8:12). But the days of Syrian domination were over.

In 805 B.C. Adad-Nirari III of Assyria knocked out Damascus. Though Israel and Judah paid tribute to Assyria for a few years, Adad-Nirari died in 783 B.C., and his successors were weak. They had trouble from Armenia (Urartu) on their northern border, and an Assyrian defeat followed an eclipse of the sun in 763 B.C. Then successive occurrences of the bubonic plague decimated their people. As a result, the Assyrian kingdom fell apart into a group of city states (the case when Jonah went to Nineveh). Egypt was also weakened by internal disputes. Thus, for about fifty years Israel and Judah had no problems from foreign invasions.

Jehoash of Israel (798–781 B.C.) regained territory captured by Hazael of Damascus (2 Kings 13:25). Amaziah of Judah (796–767 B.C.) took control of Edom (2 Kings 14:7) and dared Jehoash to fight him (2 Kings 14:8). Jehoash then defeated Amaziah at Beth Shemesh, broke down a six-hundred-foot section of Jerusalem’s wall, stripped the temple and palace of gold and silver, and took hostages. This made Amaziah unpopular and conspirators assassinated him at Lachish (2 Kings 14:19). The people then put his son Uzziah (also called Azariah) on the throne. He had already been coregent with his father since 790 B.C.

Prosperity had already begun to return to northern Israel when Jeroboam II took the throne in 791 B.C. Encouraged by the prophet Jonah (2 Kings 14:25), he won victories and extended political control from the entrance to Hamath on the north to the Dead Sea on the southeast.

Jeroboam’s long and prosperous reign lasted to 753 B.C. and was paralleled by prosperity in Judah under Uzziah (790–739). Both enjoyed peace, regained most of the territory of Solomon’s

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empire between Egypt and the Euphrates River (2 Kings 14:22, 25; 2 Chron. 26:9, 11–15), and were enriched by control of major trade routes. Merchants brought in luxuries from trade with Tyre and Sidon, as well as from the Red Sea trade by way of Ezion Geber (modern Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba).

The wealthy enjoyed luxury, built large homes of squared stones, decorated walls and furniture with beautiful ivory carvings (cf. Amos 3:15; 6:4), and enjoyed rich food and wine. At the same time moral corruption and economic injustice toward the poor increased. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah all pronounced God's judgment on the rich who were getting richer at the expense of the downtrodden poor. Greedy merchants cheated them, demanded high interest, and sold some of them into slavery. Corrupt priests made the situation worse by demanding multiplied sacrifices and by allowing idolatry and immorality to be mixed with the worship of the LORD.

THE END OF NORTHERN ISRAEL

The era of prosperity was soon to end. After the death of Jeroboam II, the northern kingdom of Israel, though warned by Amos and Hosea, was full of debauchery. Under the judgment of God it rapidly degenerated.

Jeroboam's son, Zechariah, reigned only six months and was assassinated by Shallum. Shallum reigned one month and was assassinated by Menahem. Menahem reigned ten years. However, in the first year of his reign, Pekah took over the territory in Gilead on the east side of the Jordan and claimed the kingdom. In 742 B.C., Menahem died and his son Pekahiah reigned for two years. He was then murdered by his two bodyguards and fifty Gileadites.

Then Pekah took the throne in Samaria and reigned eight more years. During that time he made an alliance with Rezin of Damascus, king of Syria, and invaded Judah twice. The first invasion was successful (2 Chron. 28:5–8). When Pekah and Rezin threatened a second invasion, King Ahaz of Judah—against the God-given advice of Isaiah—appealed to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria for help. The Assyrian king then defeated Syria and killed Rezin. He also took captive people from the northernmost part of Israel. Hoshea, the last king of northern Israel, assassinated Pekah in 732 B.C. Then Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria placed him on Israel's throne.

Tiglath-Pileser's son, Shalmaneser V, reigned only five years. As one of his first acts, he came west against the Philistines. At that time King Hoshea of Israel gave assurance of his loyalty as a vassal of Assyria. But as soon as Shalmaneser was back in Assyria, Hoshea quit paying tribute to Assyria and made an alliance with So (Sibe) of Egypt. But it was a mistake to put trust in Egypt for it was weak and was of no help. Shalmaneser came and conquered Israel. In 724 B.C. he took Hoshea prisoner, though the steep sides of Samaria's hill and its great fortifications enabled it to endure a siege for nearly three years. Samaria fell in 722 just before Shalmaneser died. Then northern Israel became an Assyrian province (which they called Samaria), fulfilling prophecies of its final end by Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah.

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The next Assyrian king, Sargon II (721–705 B.C.), then made a campaign to the west and retook Samaria in 720 B.C. In his annals he says he took 27,290 Israelites into exile, replacing them with people from other countries he had conquered. (Cf. 2 Kings 17:3–6.)

JUDAH IN ISAIAH'S DAY

Since Isaiah's call came in the year that King Uzziah died (739 B.C.), he was old enough to be aware of Uzziah's pride that led to his downfall. In 750 B.C., God afflicted Uzziah with leprosy when he presumed to offer incense on the golden altar which belonged to the Holy of Holies in the temple. He did it even though Azariah and eighty other priests tried courageously to stop him (2 Chron. 26:10–20). He spent the remaining eleven years of his life under quarantine in a special house built for him (2 Kings 15:5).

Jotham, his son, took the throne and reigned until 731 B.C. He was a good but weak king. He "rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the LORD" (2 Chron. 27:3), did other rebuilding, and conquered the Ammonites (vv. 3–5). However, in view of the renewed Assyrian threat when Tiglath-Pileser III usurped the throne of Assyria in 745 B.C., Jotham brought his son Ahaz to the throne in 744 to reign as coruler with him.

Ahaz reigned until 715 B.C. Like the kings of Israel he mixed the worship of the Baals with the worship of the Lord, sacrificed his sons in fire, worshiped in the high places on the hilltops, "and under every spreading tree" (2 Chron 28:4; see also vv. 2–3). He faced threats not only from Assyria, but from Israel and Damascus as well, so he brought his son Hezekiah to the throne to reign as co-king with him in 728 B.C.

Twice Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus joined to invade Judah. The first time they took many prisoners and killed 120,000 soldiers (2 Chron. 28:5–8). When they threatened a second invasion, saying they would put a puppet king on the throne to force Judah to join them against Assyria, Ahaz sent to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria for help and paid tribute to him (2 Chron. 28:16, 21).

When Tiglath-Pileser took Damascus in 732 B.C. he demanded that Ahaz and others come there to pay homage to him. While there Ahaz saw an altar and had a replica of it made and put in the temple court (2 Kings 16:10–16). Ahaz also turned against the LORD, closed up the temple, and worshiped other gods (2 Chron. 28:22–25). They did not help. Edomites threw off Judah's yoke and invaded Judah from the south. Philistines invaded from the west (2 Chron. 28:17–18). Ahaz remained a weak vassal of Assyria until he died in 715 B.C.

Soon after Ahaz died, because of a great spiritual revival and celebration of the Passover, Hezekiah began counting the years of his reign over again, so that the twenty-nine years of his reign lasted to 686 B.C. A few years later, in spite of Isaiah's warnings of Egypt's inability to help, Hezekiah broke the alliance Ahaz had made with Assyria and sent to Egypt for help. Like Hoshea, Hezekiah miscalculated the power of Egypt and Assyria. Egypt was defeated, and in 701 Sennacherib destroyed all the walled cities of Judah except Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13).

God judged Hezekiah with a sickness that was to be fatal. God was gracious, however, and answered Hezekiah's prayer, healing him and granting him fifteen years of life. Five years later,

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in 696 B.C., he brought his son, Manasseh, to the throne to reign with him. Then, in 688 B.C., the Assyrians again threatened Jerusalem, but their army was destroyed by the angel of the LORD.

After Hezekiah died, in 686, Manasseh soon turned away from God and massacred those who resisted his restoration of idolatry. Jewish tradition says he tied Isaiah to a log and sawed him in half (cf. Heb. 11:37).

THE ASSYRIAN INVASIONS

The renewed Assyrian threat came with the accession of Tiglath-Pileser III to the throne of Assyria in 745 B.C. He was determined to reestablish the Assyrian Empire and restore its glory and power. With startling suddenness, a new era of brutal Assyrian conquests began. He put together a massive army and a corps of engineers who, for the first time in history, used great siege machines to break down the walls of cities they attacked. He also skinned captives alive, piled up decapitated heads, and impaled people (over sharpened stakes), in order to terrify the people of the next city and cause them to surrender.

At first he followed the custom of previous conquerors. After a city surrendered, he would take an oath of loyalty from the people who were left, tell them how much taxes or tribute to pay each year, and let them go back to rebuild their homes. However, when he returned to Assyria, many of the conquered cities would rebel, and he would have to go back and reconquer them. So he instituted a new tactic. He took the political and religious leaders, teachers, and skilled workers captive and resettled them in another conquered country. Then he replaced them with others from still other conquered cities or countries. The native people would be without their leaders and thus would not be likely to rebel. The leaders who were taken captive would not be with people they knew, and would not have a base for fomenting rebellion either. This policy was intended to make it possible for the Assyrians to make new conquests each year, rather than having to station or reinforce garrisons. His successors and the Babylonians followed the same policy of taking captured people into exile. This helped to fulfill the prophecies of the scattering of the people of Israel (cf. Deut. 28:64). It also helped to spread the Aramaic language so that the Jews who returned after the Babylonian exile spoke Aramaic instead of Hebrew in their homes. Thus, Jesus and His disciples spoke and preached in Aramaic.

After defeating the Armenians to the north and Babylonians to the southeast, in 738 B.C. King Tiglath-Pileser III took his armies west as far as Hamath on the Orontes River. In 737 B.C., according to Assyrian records, Menahem of Israel paid heavy tribute to save Samaria and protect his throne (see 2 Kings 15:19–20 where Tiglath-Pileser is called by his Babylonian name Pul). Tiglath-Pileser then pressed on through Galilee and down the coast as far as Joppa by 734. Tyre paid an enormous tribute of 150 talents. In 733 he came back through Galilee and took over the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. In 732 he took Damascus and destroyed it.

During this time both Israel and Judah were torn between pro-Assyrian factions who wanted to surrender and anti-Assyrian factions who wanted to resist. Though Menahem paid tribute to Assyria to prevent the capture of the southern part of northern Israel, Judah paid no tribute at this time, but did so later under Ahaz.

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Two years before he died, Tiglath-Pileser III was crowned king of Babylon and took the name Pulu (called Pul; 2 Kings 15:19). His son, Shalmaneser V (726–722 B.C.), conquered Samaria in 722, and was succeeded by Sargon II (721–705). Sargon, according to his records, deported over twenty-seven thousand Israelites to places in Assyria and Media, replacing them with people from Syria and Babylonia who intermarried with remaining Israelites and became Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24). Later Assyrian kings, including Ashurbanipal, continued this process (Ezra 4:9–10).

While Sargon was preoccupied with revolts in the north, Azuri of Ashdod, encouraged by Egypt, revolted. Again, Egypt was no help. In 711 B.C., Sargon invaded Philistia, besieged Ashdod, and crushed the revolt. This time Judah listened to Isaiah and wisely did not join Ashdod (Isa. 20:1–5).

Merodach-Baladan, the Chaldean from the Sealand near the Persian Gulf,⁸ took Babylon after Shalmaneser died. He reigned as king there for twelve years. Then, with the west settled down, Sargon drove him out in 609 B.C.

When Sargon was killed in a border skirmish in 705 B.C., Merodach-Baladan again took Babylon. Sargon's son Sennacherib (705–681) retook Babylon in only six months. In 703, he deported over 208,000 people from Babylonia.¹¹ Then he moved west. Phoenicia, Philistia, Moab, and Ammon paid tribute, but Hezekiah and the armies of Judah withstood him. Sennacherib considered Hezekiah the ringleader of rebellion in that part of the world and captured "all the fortified cities of Judah" (2 Kings 18:13)—according to his records, 46 of them—and took 200,150 Judeans captive, leaving Hezekiah in Jerusalem shut up "like a bird in a cage,"¹³ but unconquered. In the process, Sennacherib at Eltekeh defeated an Egyptian army sent to help and scattered mercenaries Hezekiah had hired from Arabia.

Then Merodach-Baladan took advantage of Sennacherib's absence in the west and took over in Babylon again. Because Babylon was so important to Sennacherib, he left Jerusalem in 701 and defeated Merodach-Baladan. But from 700 to 689 B.C., Sennacherib continued to have trouble with Babylon. In 691 a combined army of Chaldeans, Elamites, and Arameans (hired by the native Babylonians) defeated him. When the Elamite king became ill in 689, Sennacherib headed for Babylon, seeking revenge. After a nine-month siege Babylon capitulated. He then leveled the city to the ground and dug trenches from the river to make its site a swamp. Because the priests of Babylon had used gold from their temples to hire the Elamites, Sennacherib smashed temples and idols, saving only the statues of their chief gods, Bel and Nebo. These he carried off to Nineveh (see Isa. 46:1–2).

With Babylon destroyed, Sennacherib's chief goal was now Egypt. In 688 B.C. he started in that direction by way of Arabia. After conquering the king and queen of Arabia, he proclaimed himself king of Arabia and continued toward Egypt. His records do not mention any other military campaigns after that (though he lived seven more years). Esarhaddon (681–669), his son and successor, suggests Sennacherib continued west in 688, heading across southern Palestine toward Egypt.¹⁶ He intended to capture Jerusalem on the way. However, an Egyptian army headed by the Ethiopian Tirhakah started in his direction. So, Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah, letting him know of his intention (2 Kings 19:9–14). He never met the Egyptians. This

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indicates that it was at this time that the angel of the LORD brought sudden death to 185,000 of his soldiers (2 Kings 19:35). Then Sennacherib returned to Nineveh and stayed there (v. 36).

Herodotus, the fifth-century B.C. Greek tourist who wrote down what the guides told him, called Sennacherib the king of Arabia, which was his latest title, and told a story of mice eating the bowstrings of the Assyrians. At least he corroborates the fact that the Assyrians and Egyptians did not do battle at this time. Apparently, later Egyptians attributed the sudden death of the 185,000 to bubonic plague, which was carried by rodents.

Babylon was too important to be left as ruins in a swamp, so Esarhaddon rebuilt it and made it one of his capitals. According to his records, Manasseh paid tribute to him (cf. 2 Chron. 33:11).

Many support the idea of two invasions into Judah by Sennacherib, perhaps initially because of some records that seemed to make Tirhakah, the Egyptian king, too young to lead a battle in 701 B.C., the time of the Egyptian defeat at Eltekeh. This seemed to confirm a second invasion as necessary in 688, believed to be the year of Sennacherib's victory over Arabia and of the subsequent slaying of the 185,000 Assyrians by angel of the LORD.

Since that time better analysis of methods of recording historical information has shown Tirhakah's age to be inconsequential, and a shift in the thinking of many has occurred, believing that more than one invasion was unnecessary and even improbable. To uphold this view, Kitchen has noted: "In other words, the biblical narrative (from the standpoint of 681 B.C.) mentions Tirhakah by the title he bore at that time (not as he was in 701)—as is universal practice then and now. Unaware of the importance of these facts, and badly misled by a wrong interpretation of some of Tirhakah's inscriptions, Old Testament scholars have often tumbled over each other in their eagerness to diagnose hopeless historical errors in Kings and Isaiah, with multiple campaigns of Sennacherib and what not—all needlessly."

However, Tirhakah's chronology aside, the return to the conclusion of only one invasion really seems to be an overreaction. Strong argument still stands for two invasions by Sennacherib—one in 701 B.C. and another in 688 B.C. This explanation is much more adaptable to Herodotus's historical accounts.²⁰ (See the commentary on 36:1 and following.) We see also that 37:9–20 shows basic changes in what Sennacherib writes and how Hezekiah responds. Sennacherib says nothing about depending on Egypt (cf. 36:6). He also recognizes that Hezekiah claims to have received a message from God (37:10). Hezekiah responds differently from 37:1–2, where he tore his clothes and sent messengers to Isaiah. This time he goes himself to the temple, spreads the letter out before the Lord, and declares "a straightforward, personal and unequivocal faith." Most important is the fact that, like the preceding robber kings of Assyria, Sennacherib had made a military campaign every year of his reign until 688. Inscriptions of Sennacherib tell of an Arabian campaign in that year.²² It is logical that this would lead to a campaign against Egypt where Tirhakah would be the defender. But he never engaged Tirhakah, nor did he go near Jerusalem or build a siege ramp against it—just as Isaiah prophesied (37:33)—something Sennacherib did in 701. After 688 B.C. he never made another campaign. This meant there was no treasure or spoils of war being brought into Nineveh and the economy must have suffered greatly during the final seven years of his reign. This was probably the reason his sons assassinated him (2 Kings 19:37).



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During the fifteen added years of peace promised to Hezekiah, many of the surrounding nations “brought offerings to Jerusalem for the LORD and valuable gifts for Hezekiah,” for they were free from Sennacherib’s oppression as well (2 Chron. 32:23). However, even though it was a time of “comfort” (Isa. 40:1), Hezekiah followed the custom of his predecessors and brought his son Manasseh to the throne in 696 B.C. to reign with him. After Hezekiah’s death in 686 B.C. Manasseh turned away from God, becoming one of the worst kings in Judah’s history. He reintroduced idolatry with its many immoral practices. So many resisted him that he “filled Jerusalem from end to end” with the innocent blood of martyrs (2 Kings 21:16). Ancient Jewish tradition says Isaiah was among this number and Manasseh had him sawn in half (cf. Heb. 11:37).

Chronology Of The Time Of The Prophet Isaiah

Critical Views Of The Book Of Isaiah

Isaiah began to prophesy in 739 B.C. and continued to be a voice for God during the Assyrian invasions until well into the reign of Manasseh. Because there is a “change of tone and focus at ch. 40, and ... a similar change at ch. 56,” and because of his mention of Cyrus (44:28; 45:1, 13), critics have claimed that chapters 40 to 66 were not written by Isaiah. Abraham ibn Ezra proposed something like this in the early twelfth century A.D. J. C. Doederlein in A.D. 1775 proposed that these chapters were written by a second or “Deutero-Isaiah” in 540 B.C. when Cyrus was already on the way to Babylon. Duhm and Marti in 1892 each proposed a third, or “Trito-Isaiah,” for Isaiah 56 to 66. Soon Isaiah 1 to 39 was also fragmented, as many took from Isaiah most of his book. By 1900, most German critics claimed that Isaiah did not write chapters 40 to 66. Also at that time the writings of S. R. Driver and George Adam Smith popularized the views of the German critics in England and America. By 1950 liberal critics were “virtually unanimous”³⁰ in their belief in at least a second Isaiah. Gray, for example, said, “The fact that the book of Isaiah is not the work of the prophet Isaiah, but a post-exilic compilation, ought to be the starting-point in all detailed criticism, or interpretation of the book.”³² Conservatives also hastened to affirm that they would not lose their faith if it should turn out that there was a Second Isaiah after all. Kyle Yates, for example, said, “When all the arguments are arrayed on each side of the question we are still left without conclusive proof. The reader is left to choose for himself, knowing that if he accepts the theory of two or three authors, he may still value the material as highly as he could if he were convinced that Isaiah wrote it all.” This consensus against the unity of Isaiah still dominates the literature on Isaiah.³⁴

Even though many conservatives were swayed by the liberal arguments, some conservatives recognized that God is able to give true prophecies about Cyrus in advance and that Isaiah 40 to 66 fits Isaiah’s time and includes many statements that could not be said about the later exiles or the later Babylon. These include Joseph A. Alexander, Oswald T. Allis, Thomas E. Bartlett, John H. Raven, Merrill F. Unger, George L. Robinson, W. A. Wordsworth, Armand Kaminka, James W.

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Thirtle, Benjamin R. Downer, J. Wash Watts, Edward J. Young, R. Margalioth, and, more recently, Gleason Archer, Jr., J. Alec Motyer, John N. Oswalt, Willem A. VanGemeren, and Herbert M. Wolf.³⁶ Watts stated something that is still true: “We cannot afford ... to dismiss this question of authorship as unimportant.... Theoretically, it is easy to say it does not matter. Practically, the effect is tremendous. Commentators’ interpretations of the teaching concerning Israel’s destiny, concerning the Messiah’s work and person ... [and] the plan of salvation seem to vary with their decisions on this point.”

Archaeological discoveries also confirm the fact that Isaiah wrote about the Babylon of his own day. Even so, some liberal critics still ignore the facts and obvious implications of Babylon’s importance and its destruction. Some also fail to accept as evidence the important discovery of the Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll coming from before the time of Christ, probably from the second century B.C., that contains all sixty-six chapters. Chapter 40 begins on the last line of the column that completes chapter 39—with no indication that the ancient copyist had any idea that it could have been written by someone other than Isaiah. Liberal critics have supposed that chapters 40 to 66 were not added to Isaiah until the second century B.C. Many liberal critics also ignore the evidence for spiritual revival under Hezekiah in 700 B.C. and its implications of a new faith among Isaiah’s audience and a new message that help to account for the few changes we see in Isaiah’s style in 40 to 66 (see comments on 36:21 and 40:1).

The primary basis for dividing the Book of Isaiah is historical. The real reason, however, is theological—because of presupposition against the supernatural. The views that propose more than one Isaiah are attempts to disallow the prophetic and the miraculous.

There are two chief historical arguments: One is that Babylon was unimportant and was off the horizon during the Assyrian invasions of Isaiah’s day so that Isaiah would have known little about it and would have been concerned even less. The other is that the basic standpoint of chapters 40 to 66 and the passages that mention Babylon in chapters 1 to 39 is that of the Babylonian exile about 540 B.C. or later.

Babylon *was* prominent in Isaiah’s day, however. The Assyrians made it one of their capitals, even sending it some of the tribute they collected until Sennacherib destroyed it in 689 B.C. That destruction caused shock to all the nations around—as their records state—so it would be strange if Isaiah failed to mention it. Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians remembered Babylon’s destruction and in 612 B.C. used it as a reason for the destruction of Nineveh.

Many critics have recognized that not everything in 40 to 66 fits the conditions in Babylon during the latter part of the exile. The geographical allusions, the mention of trees native to Palestine, and many historical allusions demand a Palestinian viewpoint and do not fit the later Babylon (e.g., 57:5). The hills and valleys of Judah are in view, never the flat plains of Babylon. Another group of passages (56:7; 60:7; 62:6, 9; 65:11; 66:6) clearly shows that the walls of Jerusalem were still standing and the temple and its services were still functioning.

Though Isaiah 40 to 66 has many similarities in style with 1 to 39, liberal critics draw attention to the few differences, especially to its warmth and passion and to its more developed theology, as well as its eschatology and the greater degree of material on comfort versus judgment. One analyst, Y. Radday, put the text of Isaiah through a computer and found linguistic variations, but



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only one significant difference—less war terminology in 40 to 66. Radday used this to say that one author could not have written the entire Book of Isaiah. However, there is good reason for the difference in war terminology. Before 701 B.C., Isaiah was in conflict with the war party in Judah and had to warn them repeatedly. This was no longer true after 701.

The Assyrians defeated the Egyptians at Eltekeh, about thirty-two miles west and slightly north of Jerusalem. The mercenaries Hezekiah hired were scattered. After Hezekiah's healing and the failure of Sennacherib's field commander (Heb. *rab-shakeh*) to take Jerusalem, the war party was discredited and the people took a stand of faith. During Hezekiah's fifteen added years, Isaiah was able to give them comfort. Now that they had seen prophecy fulfilled, the Holy Spirit was able to remind them of the foolishness of idolatry and give them a new message about the salvation of the LORD—through His suffering Servant-Messiah.

Any writer or speaker will show differences in style depending on the subject and the audience. It is also true, as Motyer points out, that Isaiah sometimes used "a high poetic style," especially in chapters 40 to 55, and sometimes "more workmanlike rhythmic prose or somewhat less artful poetry." Furthermore, "These two styles ... appear throughout the whole book.... It is intolerably wooden and unimaginative to deny that one author could produce both styles." It is also true that "at least forty or fifty sentences or phrases ... appear in both parts of Isaiah, and indicate its common authorship."⁵⁰

The latter part of the Book of Isaiah deals with the evils Manasseh was introducing. Yet Isaiah continued to point ahead to the millennial glories to come and even to the new heavens and the new earth. He never lost the vision of God given to him at the beginning of his ministry in chapter 6—God is the Holy One of Israel and the Lord of history throughout the entire book.

Then, we should not forget that Jesus and the New Testament writers treat the entire book as Isaiah's. Sometimes we could take their words as referring to the book's traditional title. However, "there are other references which clearly imply the personality of the historic Isaiah himself." These include Matthew 3:3; 12:17–18; Luke 3:4; Acts 8:28; Romans 10:16, 20. Most conclusive is John 12:38–41, which quotes Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10 as from the same Isaiah.

OVERVIEW OF ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

Introduction

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem and had a God-given ministry to its kings, especially to Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was surrounded in his early life by a false, government-aided prosperity that encouraged corrupt luxury accompanied by a downtrodding of the poor and a sensual, immoral, heathen religion (2 Chron. 26:16–20; 27:2; 28:1–27; 29:6–9).

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He begins his book with what is often called “The Great Arraignment.” Judah was a sinful nation, judged, desolate, and left with a small remnant. God was not only Israel’s judge, however; He was also a brokenhearted Father who invited His children, Israel, to return: He would redeem them—if they would be ashamed of their idolatry. The conditions Isaiah describes fits the time of Sennacherib’s first invasion, in 701 B.C. Thus the first chapter is an introduction to the whole book.

Isaiah: The Prophet And His Message

Isaiah’s name (Heb. *Yeshā’yahu*) means “Yahweh [the LORD] saves [or is the source of salvation].” His father Amoz (Heb. *’amots*, “strong”) is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Later Jewish tradition speculated that Isaiah was related in some way to the royal family. However, archaeologists have discovered a seal inscribed “Amoz the Scribe.” Some believe this means Amoz was a prominent scribe with a high government position.

Since Isaiah came quickly when the king sent for him and since the LORD told him to go out of the city to meet Ahaz (7:3), it seems obvious that Isaiah made Jerusalem his home. Early in his ministry he became well-known as a prophet of God. The Bible calls his wife a prophetess, and though she wrote no books, she must have had an important ministry. He had two sons, *Shear-Jashub* (“a remnant will return”) and *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* (“quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil”). Their names highlighted his message to Judah.

Isaiah began prophesying in 739 B.C., the year King Uzziah died. Some suppose he was already a prophet before that time, but there is no evidence of this. Since he records both the death of Hezekiah (686 B.C.) and the death of Sennacherib (681 B.C.) and names the next Assyrian king, Esarhaddon (37:38), he ministered for over sixty years. During the fifteen additional years of peace God gave Hezekiah, Isaiah had opportunity to live quietly and write words of comfort for the people of Judah as he looked ahead to the ministry of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of the LORD. Then when Manasseh took over and turned away from God, Isaiah’s writings dealt with the foolishness of the idolatry Manasseh reintroduced and warned of God’s judgment.

The word “prophet” (Heb. *navi*) comes from an old word meaning “speaker.” Throughout the book, Isaiah speaks for God and declares, “ ‘The word of our God stands forever’ ” (40:8). Key verses to his message include 6:3; 45:22; 55:6–7; and 59:2. There are many powerful passages in the book. Note especially chapters 1; 6; 40; 49; 50; 53; and 55.

Early Prophecies

Isaiah’s prophecies are arranged in a form that keeps showing the contrast between Israel’s present sin that requires judgment and the future hope of God’s promised restoration. He draws attention to the nations who will come to Jerusalem in peace, seeking God and His word, at a time when God alone will be exalted. But the people of Judah and Jerusalem have done evil to



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themselves. The leaders have crushed the poor. What they have done will be repaid to them in special judgment.

Isaiah's Vision And Call

After introducing his message, Isaiah introduces himself. He began his ministry the year King Uzziah died as a leper (739 B.C.). As a proud young aristocrat, probably related to the royal family, Isaiah went into the temple courts, probably congratulating himself that he was not a sinner like Uzziah. But a vision of God's majestic glory and holiness led him to see himself as a sinner. Then God provided cleansing and Isaiah responded to God's voice and was commissioned as a prophet to warn a people who would be hardened by his message and would be brought to judgment. However, there would be a change in his ministry after prophecy was fulfilled and judgment came.

God's Angry Hand And His Saving Hand

Isaiah prophesied that because of Judah's sin, God's angry hand of holy, righteous judgment would use Assyria to bring judgment in the near future; but His saving hand would use the Messiah in the distant future. Then God sent Isaiah and his son *Shear-Jashub* ("a remnant will return") to tell King Ahaz of Judah not to be afraid of King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Syria, who were threatening to attack Jerusalem and replace him with a puppet king who would help them defy Assyria. God offered Ahaz the privilege of asking for a supernatural sign to confirm His promise, but Ahaz refused because he had already decided to send tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria to help himself. God then promised a sign, not for Ahaz, but for the whole dynasty of David. The Messiah, "Immanuel" ("God with us"), would be born to the virgin (see comments on 7:14). God promised that before such a child could reach an age of accountability, the land of those two kings would be forsaken.

Immanuel is again mentioned in 8:8, and the Book of Isaiah gives an enlarging picture of the Messiah, continuing in 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 16:5; 28:16; 32:1-5, 15-18; 42:1-12; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 to 53:12; 54; 55; and 61:1-11.

Isaiah's second son, *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* ("quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil"), became a further warning that the Assyrians would attack, plunder, and rob Judah soon. In contrast, the virgin-born Son with names that show His deity (Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace) would make David's throne eternal.

God would use the Assyrians, without their knowledge, to punish Judah, and in due time they, too, would receive God's judgment. However, the Messiah as a new shoot or branch from the line of David would come in the future with the sevenfold Spirit of the LORD upon Him. He would be a Teacher, a righteous Judge, a Peacemaker filling the earth with the knowledge of the LORD, and a Banner to the Gentile nations who will seek Him. The result will eventually be a return of



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Israel that will be like a new exodus. Then they will acknowledge God himself as their salvation and will draw water from the wells of salvation with joy, thanksgiving, and shouts of praise.

Judgment On Foreign Nations

Because God is the God of the whole world and sovereign over all nations, Isaiah had a message for other nations. His attention, however, is primarily on their relation to Judah. Babylon, as the leading center of pagan religion in Isaiah's day, is mentioned first. Its judgment would be severe, total, and soon to come. This was fulfilled in 689 B.C. when Sennacherib leveled Babylon and made it a swamp.

Then Isaiah resumes telling more of the king of Babylon who exalted himself and in whom Ahaz put his trust, Tiglath-Pileser III, who was crowned king in Babylon two years before his death. He took prisoners into exile instead of releasing them to go home. He set the example for later kings of Assyria by considering himself greater than any god, even greater than the God of Israel. He was brought down to Sheol, all his glory left behind and not even a proper burial.

Other foreigners upon which God pronounced judgment include Philistia, Moab (for its pride), Damascus (and with it, northern Israel that had forgotten the God of their salvation), Cush, and Egypt. Egypt would have internal discord (fulfilled in Isaiah's day) and would become weak. Yet God would eventually have a witness there, and both Egyptians and Assyrians would eventually worship the LORD.

When Sargon took the Philistine city of Ashdod, God commanded Isaiah to go naked and barefoot for three years as a sign that Assyria would lead people captive from Egypt and Cush. An additional word against Babylon prophesied that it would become a wilderness. In 689 B.C., Isaiah received the news that Babylon had indeed fallen. Sennacherib had not only destroyed the city but smashed most of its idols. Further prophecies tell of judgment on Edom, Arabia, Jerusalem's treasurer (Shebna), and Tyre.

Judgment And Restoration For Judah

Isaiah is careful to show that God's judgment reveals not His arbitrariness but His righteousness. Nor is judgment an end in itself. It prepares for the demonstration of God's glory that will eventually bring a feast of spiritual things for all nations. This will be necessary before Jerusalem can be transformed into a city of peace. In contrast to the vineyard of bad grapes mentioned in an earlier prophecy, judgment will make Judah a vineyard of good fruit. For Isaiah's day, many lessons must be taught by the Assyrians.

Samaria was ripe for judgment and the people of Judah were hypocritical in their worship of the LORD. They mocked Isaiah's message that was meant to bring them rest and refreshment. They would have to learn the hard way, from the Assyrians. Five woes must come on Jerusalem and Judah because of their hypocrisy, their rebellion against God, their trust in Egypt, and their refusal to trust in the LORD. But in the future day, a King will reign in righteousness. Although



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judgment must come, God's purpose for Israel would not change. He will restore the land and the people of Israel, giving them salvation, streams in the desert, holiness, and everlasting joy.

Hezekiah And Sennacherib's Invasions

In 701 B.C., Sennacherib destroyed all the fortified cities of Judah except Jerusalem. The Book of Isaiah finishes up the account of Sennacherib's invasions and then tells of Hezekiah's sickness, the miraculous sign of the shadow on the sundial going backward, Hezekiah's recovery, the promise of protection from the Assyrians, and the promise of Hezekiah's fifteen additional years of life. However, that sickness came early after Hezekiah took gold from the temple and paid tribute to Sennacherib so he would bypass Jerusalem.

The news of this prophesied promise of protection against the Assyrians stirred Sennacherib to send an army under his field commander (Heb. *rab-shakeh*), who demanded Jerusalem's surrender and told the people not to listen to Hezekiah and not to put their trust in the Lord. He kept telling them that the gods of the other nations had not delivered them from Sennacherib, implying Sennacherib was greater than any god, even greater than Israel's God. However, the people took a stand of faith, refused to answer or surrender, and put their trust in the Lord. Isaiah prophesied the Assyrians would hear a rumor and leave. The rumor they heard was that the Chaldeans had overrun Babylon. Babylon was more important to Sennacherib than either Jerusalem or Egypt. So both the field commander and Sennacherib with their armies left without taking Jerusalem, just as Isaiah had prophesied.

Though Isaiah does not indicate the interval between 701 and 688 B.C., the context and Assyrian records found by archaeologists indicate that Sennacherib made a second campaign westward after he destroyed Babylon. This time he sent a letter to Hezekiah threatening to take up where he had left off and warning him not to trust in the LORD—whom he treated as no different than the pagan gods of the countries he had conquered already. Hezekiah brought the letter before the LORD. Then Isaiah prophesied that God would defend Jerusalem, that the Assyrians would not enter the city but go back by the way they had come. This was fulfilled when the death angel slew 185,000 of Sennacherib's army. Sennacherib then withdrew, going back to Nineveh the way he had come, as Isaiah had prophesied, and stayed there, until two of his sons assassinated him and another son, Esarhaddon, took the throne.

Isaiah then goes back to the time when kings were sending gifts to Hezekiah because of his healing. Envoys from Babylon came and Hezekiah showed them all his treasures. Isaiah told him this was a mistake, for the time would come when the Babylonians would remember this and take captive some of Hezekiah's descendants.

Comfort And Deliverance

After the people of Jerusalem took a stand of faith and Sennacherib left Jerusalem unconquered, Isaiah called for the people to prepare the way for God to come back to His people.

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The guarantee of comfort was God's word, and the assurance of the truth of God's word was God himself who created the universe and who is far greater than anyone or anything in it. He is different from idols that have to be fastened in place to keep them from falling over. He is the everlasting God, the Creator, the unwearied Guide for His people. He gives power to the faint, to those who wait for Him.

God will reveal His glory, and He has made Israel His servant. However, Israel as a whole failed, for they sinned and did not accomplish the work they were called to do. But within Israel there was and always has been a godly remnant that is truly God's servant. The remnant will do a work for God, but they cannot do the work that needs to be done—the work of salvation and redemption. God kept telling Israel to stop being afraid. Prophecy has been fulfilled and God will continue to be faithful. He has another Servant, the Messiah, who will accomplish His work of salvation and restoration.

Looking ahead to the time of Israel's exile in Babylonia, Isaiah prophesies of one from the north, Cyrus, who will be God's shepherd, anointed to do the work of sending back the exiles to their land—though Cyrus does not know God. On the other hand, the true Servant upon whom God puts His Spirit will be given as a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. God will rebuke Israel, yet promises to blot out their transgressions for His own sake. They are still God's chosen, and He will pour out His Spirit and His blessing on their descendants. When God restores Israel and makes both peace and judgment, others will recognize there is no other God. He reveals both the past and future and calls everyone in the whole world to turn to Him and be saved.

Isaiah then goes back to the destruction of Babylon in his own day and draws a lesson from the fact that the great gods of Babylon, Bel and Nebo, were loaded on weary beasts and taken into captivity. (Archaeological discoveries show they were carried to Nineveh.) But God says to Israel that they never carried Him—He carried them. His purpose for them will stand.

Then Isaiah goes back to give prophecies about the fall of Babylon, which would take place in 689 B.C. The Assyrians did not destroy Babylon before this time. Babylon thought of itself as a god, but they had to learn that God will not share His glory with another—not with pagan gods, not with Babylon. Sennacherib had taken people from Judah to Babylon to replace the Babylonians he had exiled. Isaiah tells them God prophesied this far in advance, so they could not give credit for their return to idols. Then he calls them to flee. Archaeological records show they did, so there was a prophesied return to Judah fulfilled in Isaiah's day.

Isaiah says nothing more about Babylon or Cyrus after chapter 48. His focus is on the suffering Servant-Messiah. He is the solution to Israel's failure, the assurance of their future joy. Through Him the godly remnant is encouraged. They think God has forgotten them, but He has engraved them on the palms of His hands. He will act and they will be restored. The heavens and earth will pass away, but God's salvation will be forever. Zion will be restored and the good news will be that God reigns.

The high point of the Book of Isaiah describes God's Suffering Servant, who deals wisely. His contemporaries do not understand His suffering. They despise Him and think of Him as smitten by God. But His sufferings are vicarious—completely for others. He bears their sicknesses, pains,



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sins, and guilt. By His wounds, we are healed. He suffers willingly, and after His atoning death, He lives to see spiritual children and to see the will of God prosper by his power.

The result of the Messiah's suffering, death, and resurrection is growth and blessing for Zion with multitudes added and free grace for everyone. The call is for everyone who thirsts to come. The greater David, the Messiah, will be a covenant and a witness to all peoples. But Isaiah calls on all to seek the LORD while He may be found. He will have mercy and will abundantly pardon. God assures also that His word will accomplish what He pleases.

Glory For God's People; Judgment For Others

God's blessings are not limited to Israel and to those whose ritual impurities were removed by the cleansing and sacrifices of the Law. Eunuchs could not join in with the temple worship. But God promises to include them in His blessing. Foreigners who turn to the LORD will also be included.

Toward the end of Isaiah's ministry, he had to deal with the failures of leaders in Manasseh's time. They did not contribute to God's purpose, but they could not destroy it. God departs from them, but He does not limit the manifestation of His presence to heaven. He who fills the eternity of time and space also comes to dwell with those of a contrite, humble spirit.

This contrasts with the leaders who go through forms of worship and fast to get their own way, mistreating the poor even while they are fasting. God does not want their kind of fasting. He is looking for a fast from sin, oppression, and greed. Their sins have separated them from God. They confess this and acknowledge they have turned their backs on God. But there was no one to intervene. So God's own arm, His own power, worked salvation. He promised that a Redeemer would come to Zion to those who repent. Then Zion will hear the call to arise and shine for its Light has come. New glory will come. Foreigners will help in Zion's restoration. God will give peace and He will be an everlasting light for them.

The Messiah then speaks, for the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him, anointing Him to preach good news to the poor, the brokenhearted, and the captives. Jesus applied this to Himself at the beginning of His Galilean ministry (Luke 4:17–21).

Isaiah goes on to give further prophecies of Zion's salvation and of the future time when its people will respond to their Savior. God will rejoice over them, and they will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD. Their Messiah will come with garments spattered from having trodden the wine press of God's judgment alone. Judgment must come before the millennial kingdom is established.

Isaiah then praises God for all the good things He has done for His people, even though they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. He prays for deliverance, restoration, and glory. God then promises mercy, blessing, and joy. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, but the present Jerusalem will also have its fulfillment, with joy and many blessings that fit the conditions of wonderful peace prophesied for the Millennium. This will be during the thousand years when Satan will be bound, as the Book of Revelation tells us.



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Finally, God draws attention to heaven as His throne and the earth as His footstool. He wants pure worship. He will judge evil and extend peace like a constantly flowing river to Jerusalem. His fame and glory will be declared among the nations. Those who are left after the final judgment will come and worship the LORD, but the judgment of the wicked will be everlasting.¹⁷

Introduction

As I wrote this introduction, rumours were circulating that the aged Deng Xiaoping was on his deathbed, possibly in a coma, and the whole People's Republic of China was holding its breath. So were thousands of China-watchers world-wide, aware that a critical moment was approaching. Deng had been the effective leader of China since the late 1970s, making him a figure of impeccable revolutionary credentials. He helped organize the first Communist enclave in the 1930s, participated in the Long March, and played a leading role in the resistance to the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. In those early days he was a comrade of Mao Zedong himself. Deng represented stability, based on continuity with the past and the wide respect he was still able to command. On the whole his status had been enhanced rather than diminished in recent years by the way he had implemented economic reforms that progressively opened China to the rest of the world. It had been a dangerous balancing act, producing deep tensions between progressive and conservative elements, north and south, rich and poor, but it had given China what was possibly its only chance to avoid haemorrhaging again in a world where the pressure for change was irresistible. But now Deng was on his deathbed and no-one seemed capable of taking his place. China was on a knife-edge, the future heavy with dire possibilities.

It was in similar circumstances, over two and a half millennia ago, that a young man called Isaiah stood in the Jerusalem temple and heard God calling him to be a prophet. By Isaiah's own reckoning it was the year 740 BC, 'the year that King Uzziah died' (6:1).

Isaiah and his world

Judah was hardly the China of the ancient world; it was tiny in comparison to Egypt to its south and Assyria to its north-east. **[STRATEGIC LOCATION!]** But together with its sister kingdom Israel it occupied a strategic place astride the land routes linking Africa with Central Asia and the Far East. It lay at the centre of the known world and made the astounding claim that its God, the LORD, was the creator and effective ruler of everything. Uzziah and his predecessors in the Davidic line were the LORD's vice-regents whom he had installed on Zion, his holy hill, which would become the centre of a new world. Judah lived in the conviction that the LORD was the true king, and looked forward to the day when all the earth would know it.

This creed had not been difficult to believe during Uzziah's long reign, which spanned the whole first half of the eighth century (791–740 BC). **[51 YEARS!!!]** The once mighty Egypt **[IMPLODED DUE TO INTERNAL STRIFE]**, well past its prime and weakened by internal strife,

¹⁷ Horton, S. M. (2000). [Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary](#) (pp. 11–38). Logion Press.

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was in no position to interfere. Assyria, which still had ambitions to do so, was too preoccupied for the time being with more pressing matters, including harassment along its northern border and uncertainty about the succession.⁵ The most it could do was to maintain enough pressure on Damascus to ensure that it, too, remained weak. This left Israel and Judah ideally situated to capitalize on their key location in the region and to reap rich economic rewards. They also engaged in an impressive programme of military expansion, recovering between them most of the territory that Israel had ruled at the height of its golden age under Solomon. It was a proud time of military success, political stability, and great prosperity.

As Uzziah's reign drew to a close, however, it was clear that this state of affairs could not be maintained for much longer. Five years before Uzziah's death, in 745 BC, an ambitious and **[SIGNS OF TIMES CHANGING:]** capable new ruler, **Tiglath-Pileser III**, had come to power in **Assyria**. He quickly took control of Babylon, and secured his northern border by a decisive victory over Sardur II of Urartu. By *relentless campaigning he put down all rebellion and *re-organized the country into a network of provinces controlled by his appointees, and then turned his attention to the west lands. First to feel his wrath was the Syrian city of Arpad, which had been in league with his northern enemies. It was placed under siege for two years and was finally annexed in 740 BC. Seeing the writing on the wall, the rulers of other states in the region soon began to bring tribute, including Rezin of Damascus, Menahem of Israel, and Hiram of Tyre. The direction of Assyria's advance was clear, and everything between it and Judah was beginning to crumble. In the year Uzziah died the international scene was full of threat. *At home, too, things were far from well. The new-found wealth was not evenly distributed. It was concentrated in the hands of an economic élite who cared little for the have-nots beneath them. Deep fissures were opening up in Judean society as justice was bought and sold, or simply disregarded and replaced by violent exploitation and repression. Religious observance continued, **[BUT NO WORSHIP!]** but could no longer conceal the rot that had set in underneath. The *creed that the LORD was king had become hollow. *Its ethical implications were disregarded at home, and it no longer inspired much confidence when one looked out on the changing world beyond Judah's fragile borders. It was going to be a hard creed to live by in the turbulent years that lay ahead.

[SOCIETAL CREED THAT LORD = KING WAS PERSONALLY IGNORED. ROTE, MECHANICAL WORSHIP = UNETHICAL LEADERSHIP SEEPED INTO PRIVATE WORSHIP. BECAME SECULAR.]

Judah's situation in the eighth century BC

[WHAT ISAIAH WAS CALLED TO DEAL WITH] **Under Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah,** Judah was to lurch from crisis to crisis and Assyrian pressure built relentlessly. In 734 BC Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus formed a defensive alliance and tried to persuade Ahaz to join them. When he refused, they invaded Judah in order to replace him with someone who would. It was a severe test, and Ahaz proved unequal to it. Isaiah counselled him to stand firm and trust the LORD; instead he appealed to Tiglath-Pileser for help and effectively subjected Judah to Assyrian domination. From then on tribute would be a heavy drain on the national exchequer, and refusal to pay it would constitute rebellion which would attract swift retribution.

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[WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF AHAZ WOULD HAVE LISTENED TO ISAIAH?]

The northern alliance soon collapsed, beginning with the *fall of Damascus in 732 BC. *Samaria followed in 722 BC. The northern kingdom of Israel was dismantled and reorganized as a province of an empire whose border now lay only 8 miles north of Jerusalem. In the years that followed, Judah and its southern neighbours struggled on, economically crippled, and restive under the Assyrian yoke. Any sign or rumour of Assyrian weakness sparked fresh talk of rebellion, with hope of Egyptian backing. **[TRUSTING POLITICS TO USHER IN THE RESULTS THAT ONLY OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD CAN BRING.]** One such revolt by the Philistine city of Ashdod was savagely crushed in 711 BC. It should have been enough to warn Judah to keep well clear of all such intrigues, but as the century wore on, desperation and opportunity gradually drew her in. The Assyrian yoke was intolerable; it involved acknowledgment of the imperial gods, a price too high to pay. Ahaz had been willing,¹² but Hezekiah was not. He nailed his colours to the mast by implementing major reforms in the very first year of his reign, and from then on it became a war of nerves as Hezekiah bought time to prepare as thoroughly as possible for the showdown which had to come sooner or later. Abroad, there were signs that events were playing into his hands. Following the death of Sargon II, there were widespread risings against his successor Sennacherib (705–681 BC). In the east, Babylon was already in rebellion and viewed Judah as a potential ally. Egypt, too, was experiencing something of a revival and seemed ready to offer support.¹⁴ A simultaneous uprising in east and west offered the best opportunity to capitalize on Assyria's weakness, and it looked as though it would have to be now or never. **[TRUSTING IN POLITICS =]** This time Hezekiah did not hesitate. He hazarded all by throwing his hat unreservedly into the ring. He withheld tribute, forced the reluctant Philistines to fall into line, and strengthened Jerusalem's defences.

It was a fateful move; well-intentioned perhaps, certainly courageous, but dreadfully mistaken, and it brought Judah to the brink of extinction. Sennacherib moved more quickly, and proved to be far stronger, than anyone had reckoned on. In less than a year he got the reins firmly in his hands at home, brought Babylon to heel and secured his northern border. By 701 BC he was ready to move west, determined to settle matters once and for all. It was a massive campaign in which he systematically ravaged Palestine from Sidon in the north to Lachish in the south and finally placed Jerusalem itself under siege. 'Hezekiah the Judean' had been a key player in the uprising and Sennacherib was determined to make him pay in full.¹⁷ Hezekiah's last hope, humanly speaking, was Egypt, but in the end it proved to be a broken reed whose help was completely ineffective. It looked like the end, and would certainly have been so if the LORD had not intervened. Miraculously, Jerusalem survived, but the whole Judean countryside was a smoking ruin.

Through all this Isaiah clung to the truth that had been etched into his consciousness by his call. In the year that King Uzziah had died he had seen *the* King, high and exalted, and the whole earth full of his glory. So when Sennacherib's men stood at the gates and proclaimed, in the name of 'the great king, the king of Assyria', that Jerusalem was utterly at his mercy, **Isaiah knew it was a lie. **[HOW DID HE KNOW IT WAS A LIE? BECAUSE HE PERSONALLY KNEW THE BEING OF TRUTH...HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP/CALLING WITH THE LORD. HE KNEW GOD'S****

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CHARACTER.] The truth behind appearances was that the LORD himself was the supreme ruler, and would determine the fate of Assyria and Judah alike. 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.

[FOUR POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO ISAIAH]

The meagre biographical details we have indicate how completely Isaiah's mission dominated and consumed him. *Jerusalem, which featured so much in his preaching, was his home city. *His ready access to the king suggests that he was high born and moved in the most élite circles.

²² *Yet there was nothing effete or fawning about him. His presence was a *constant reminder that royal power was not absolute, and privilege entailed heavy responsibility. His tense confrontation with Ahaz in chapter 7, for example, speaks volumes for his courage and unswerving commitment to his high calling, qualities that were eventually to cost him his life. His *wife is called 'the prophetess' in 8:3, suggesting that she, too, prophesied. Certainly she did so indirectly, for she bore sons to Isaiah whose symbolic names expressed key aspects of his message. Beyond this we know nothing of his family life, what solace he drew from it, or what strains it suffered. All we know is that he was not a divided person; his call impacted and shaped his home life as it did every sphere he moved in. We catch a glimpse in 8:16–18 of a small band of disciples gathering around him, with a strong suggestion that it included his sons. That, at least, must have been a tremendous comfort to him and a most fitting reward for his faithfulness.

- JERUSALEM = HOME CITY
- Highborn
- STRONG PRESENCE = OVER SHADOWED ROYAL POWER
- WIFE = PROPHETESS (8:3)
- SONS =
- DISCIPLES =

Most of the material in chapters 1–39 of the book relates in one way or another to his ministry during the crises of 734 and 701 BC respectively. But rarely is he seen directly, [LIVING INVISIBLE] and even then the focus is not on himself, but on others: Ahaz, Hezekiah, Sennacherib, and of course the LORD, whose word shapes and directs everything. The servant is hidden behind his LORD, and the messenger behind his message. But he was destined to become more hidden still, for a time came when it was impossible for him to appear in public at all. Within five years of the débâcle of 701 BC, [THE MANASSEH AFFECT] Manasseh had completely reversed his father's policies, plunging Judah into one of the darkest periods of its history. Submission to Assyria became the new political orthodoxy, pagan rites of the most detestable kinds were reintroduced, and all dissent was ruthlessly crushed. Tradition has it that Isaiah was martyred at this time, sawn in two by Manasseh's men. If so, it was a cruel end indeed, but not a defeat, for it is likely that it was in those last silent years, when he was confined by old age and persecution, that he plumbed the depths and scaled the heights of spiritual understanding, and committed to his disciples the inestimable treasures preserved for us in chapters 40–46. They completed and rounded out the



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insights of his earlier preaching. For something larger occupied his mind now than the particulars thrown up by this or that political crisis. It was the whole shape of God's future plans for his people and for his world. It was what the opening verse of the book calls his 'vision'.

[WHO ARE THE KINGS?]

[DEFINE VISION. DEFINE REVELATION]

The vision of Isaiah [SAW IT. LIVED IT. DIED FOR IT.]

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

² *Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!
For the LORD has spoken ... (Is. 1:1–2a)*

These opening lines are like the first stirring chords of the overture to a great oratorio. They summon us to listen and give us the first indication of the character of the work we are about to hear.

The vision is objective

We are told at once of both the human agency and the divine origin of the vision. It is the vision of 'Isaiah son of Amoz'; he saw it, lived it and died for it. In this sense it *his* vision. It comes to us clothed in a human person, alive with human passion and cast in human language. **It is the human aspect of the vision that makes it accessible to us.** But at the same time it has a quality that transcends this. The very term 'vision', especially in this and similar contexts, stands for divine revelation.³⁰ It is received by a human person, but originates outside him. At the most fundamental level, it is *God's* vision, and exists only because 'the LORD has spoken'.

The vision is big

The vision which is introduced here spans the whole sixty-six chapters of the book. It is big in terms of its sheer bulk; big enough to daunt most readers, let alone preachers and commentators. But, more significantly, it is conceptually big. *The vision **begins** with heaven and earth being summoned to listen (1:2), and it *ends with their being so affected by what they hear that they are transformed into new heavens and a new earth (66:22). It is about renewal on a massive scale; the re-creation of the universe. Isaiah's vision begins with the historical Jerusalem of his own day, corrupt and under judgment (1:8), and finishes with the end-time city of God, the new Jerusalem, the joy and delight of the whole earth (65:17–19). It deals with God's dealings with his people from the eighth century BC (1:1) right down to our own time and beyond, to the



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things that will bring history to a close and usher in eternity (66:22–24). Its sweep is huge. In a very real sense the vision is as big as the mind of God himself.

[WHO IS THE MAN WHO COULD CARRY THIS?]

The vision is a unity

There is no denying that the book contains a great diversity of material. It moves from verse to prose and back again many times. There are lawsuits, hymns, narratives, terrifying descriptions of judgment and tender passages of comfort. The many changes of character and scene, mood and style, can be quite bewildering. Scholarship has generally responded to this diversity by separating out the various elements and subjecting each of them to independent, intense scrutiny, a strategy which has not been without its value. But the opening verse points the reader in a fundamentally different direction. It subsumes all this diverse material under the heading *'the vision of Isaiah ...'* It tells us that what we are about to read is fundamentally one thing, an **integrated whole**. [HOW TO CHART/DIAGRAM?] It is not just that it is all attached in some way or another to one person (the 'visions' or 'words' of Isaiah would have served well enough to convey that), but that *the varied content itself* amounts to a single thing, one gigantic vision, and that we will have to apply ourselves to reading it as such as if we are to understand it. [EACH A PART, A PIECE OF THE PIE]

The vision is historical [WE GET TO SEE IT FROM THE REAR VIEW]

In one sense the vision transcends history, reaching above it to the heavens and beyond it to eternity. But at the same time it arises from a particular time and place, and takes the particulars of history with the utmost seriousness. Isaiah saw it, we are told, 'in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah'. As we have seen, these were turbulent times, and the immediate future promised to be even more so. Battles were won and lost, kingdoms rose and fell, the world was an unstable and dangerous place in which people struggled to survive and make sense of their lives. History as they experienced it was characterized by constant change—intense, threatening and confusing. And so it must have remained if God had not spoken into it.

But verse 2, with its announcement that 'the LORD has spoken', breaks on the scene like the 'Let there be light' of Genesis 1:3. It pierces the chaos of history with the brilliance of divine revelation. The vision breaks into history to expose its true shape, character and goal. It is not history-denying but history-affirming. It draws back the curtain and shows us that history, with all its confusing particulars, is the stage on which a great drama is being enacted, a drama scripted and directed at every point by God himself. Assyria is the rod of his anger (10:5); the sufferings which lie ahead, including the Babylonian exile, are a furnace in which God will purge his people (1:25). The outcome will be not just a new people, but a new city and a new universe (65:17–19). History has meaning because God is taking it somewhere, and what the vision does is to set the end firmly before us and call us to live every moment in the light of it (2:1–5).



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But the end is guaranteed only because of something else. It is the fulcrum on which all history turns, and it lies at the very centre of Isaiah's vision.

The vision is sharply focused

I imagine we have all had the experience, at some time or other, of viewing a great work of art. At first we receive only a general impression, of beauty perhaps, or energy or sadness. But then as we look more closely and become aware of the lines of composition, or the distribution of light and shadow, we find our eye being drawn to one particular point. Something is thrown into prominence, something which, if we are only sensitive enough to it, will unlock the whole work to us. This focal point contains the answer to what the work is *about* at the most fundamental level.

The careful reader will find that the vision of Isaiah is the same. Its lines radiate out from one clear focal point and lead back to it. And just in case we are too obtuse to see for ourselves what it is, we are told at once: the vision is 'concerning Judah and Jerusalem'. But I think we can go further even than this. There is a sharper focus still.

Not very long ago I stood with my two daughters one Sunday morning in the huge, circular forecourt of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. There was the usual press of tourists, pilgrims, officials and traders. Would we like a postcard, a cross, a souvenir spoon, or perhaps a rosary or holy picture? No, we found our way past these distractions as quickly as possible; they were so tawdry compared with the magnificence of the place itself. At first it was the basilica that captivated us. The whole forecourt seemed designed to produce precisely this effect; the magnificent curving colonnade, the fountain, the grand staircase, all drew us towards it. But then we noticed the barricades, the seats, the music and the children's choir and realized that a quite deliberate strategy was being put in place to focus our attention elsewhere, at least temporarily. The crowds seemed to be aware of it too, for they were obediently falling into line, so to speak, and expectantly looking across the square towards a far less impressive building situated to the right of the basilica and partly hidden behind a wall. It had long rows of identical windows, so there was no obvious point of interest until about ten minutes to eleven, when a figure appeared briefly at one of the windows and draped a richly coloured banner from it. The effect was immediate. A murmur of anticipation went through the crowd, the volume of the music lifted as the choir went into its carefully rehearsed routine, and the basilica receded entirely from our consciousness as every eye became riveted on that one small window. We were soon rewarded. At exactly eleven o'clock the Pope appeared at the window and addressed us.

The vision of Isaiah contains many impressive elements. First Assyria looms large, and then Babylon, and many other nations and persons vie for our attention as well. But what the superscription effectively does is to drape a banner from one particular window. It tells us to keep our eye firmly fixed on Judah and Jerusalem, and as we do so, a figure appears before our eyes. He has royal titles which link him in the most intimate way with God himself (9:6). He is a shoot from the stump of Jesse, an ideal king from the line of David (11:1). He is endowed with the Spirit and rules with perfect justice, and under him all that God has purposed for his people

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and his world is fully realized (11:2–9). The term ‘messiah’ properly belongs to every king of the house of David, even the unworthy ones; each, by virtue of his office, is ‘the LORD’s messiah’. But this is *the* Messiah, the final and perfect one, and on reflection we can see how fittingly the window frames him and anticipates his appearance. For ‘Judah’ and ‘Jerusalem’ both have the strongest possible links in the Old Testament with the house of David.

But then, as we watch, he is strangely altered, or more correctly he appears again in a different guise. It is so different, in fact, that at first we have difficulty recognizing him as the same person. He is a humble and gentle servant (42:1–3), he meets discouragement and opposition (49:4), he is cruelly persecuted and killed (50:6; 53:8–9), but at last he is raised and glorified, and all God’s purposes prosper in his hand (53:10). And then at last it becomes clear: the two figures are one. For the Servant, too, is a royal figure. He brings forth justice to the nations (42:1), the distant lands wait for his law (42:4), and through him the blessings promised to David are at last fully realized (55:3–5).

At the heart of Isaiah’s vision is the startling revelation that the Messiah must suffer. Its sharpest focus is on the one who came to the window for us all. That is, if you like, the depth of it, the truth that lies at the centre. But like a well-cut diamond, the vision has surface as well as depth, and we will be able to appreciate its many facets only as we attend carefully to the way it has been shaped and presented to us as Holy Scripture.

The book of Isaiah

Structure

Chapters 1–35 and 40–66 are predominantly verse, reflecting the powerful rhythmic style characteristic of prophetic preaching. But at the centre, in chapters 36–39, stands an extended block of material which is predominately prose. It has two parts. The first (chapters 36–37) describes Sennacherib’s invasion and its outcome, and finally resolves the Assyrian crisis which has dominated the whole first half of the book. The second (chapters 38–39) deals with Hezekiah’s illness and his reception of envoys from Merodach-Baladan. It anticipates the Babylonian crisis, which casts its shadow over the entire second half of the book. So chapters 36–39 are effectively the structural pivot on which the whole book turns. It is preceded by three units (chapters 1–12; 13–27 and 28–35), all of which end with the redeemed singing God’s praises in Zion, or on their way to it. It is followed by another three units (40:1–51:11; 51:12–55:13; and chapters 56–66) which end in the same way.

We observed earlier the overall movement from Jerusalem to new Jerusalem and from fallen creation to new creation. But in fact this movement takes place again and again *within* the book as well as across the whole of it. While the fullest description of life in the new creation is reserved until the last two chapters, we are given frequent anticipations and pledges of it all the way



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through, especially at the conclusion of Parts 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. We glimpse the end many times before we finally arrive and rest there.

The basic plan of the book, then, can be set out as in the table opposite.

Themes

We have already noted some key aspects of the book’s message: the truth that the LORD is creator and universal ruler, the movement to new heavens and a new earth, and the key role of Jerusalem and the Messiah. But now that we have clarified the book’s structure we are in a position to go further and ask how the various aspects of its message relate to one another.

Jerusalem	Part 1	1–12	
	Part 2	13–27	Assyria
	Part 3	28–35	
	Part 4	36–39	--
	Part 5	40:1–51:11	
	Part 6	51:12–55:13	Babylon
New Jerusalem	Part 7	56–66	

Of key significance here are the two passages, in chapters 6 and 40, in which Isaiah finds himself summoned into the presence of God to receive a specific commission. Both the nature of these passages (commissionings) and their strategic location (at or near the beginning of Parts 1 and 5) confirm their great importance for an understanding of the book’s major themes. The first commits Isaiah to a ministry of judgment, the second to a ministry of comfort; and these become the dominant notes of the first and second halves of the book respectively. It is a book about demolition and reconstruction, judgment and salvation. And the order is significant: paradoxically, salvation emerges out of judgment and is possible only because of it. But of course there is much more to it than this. The two themes we have identified are developed on at least three different levels.

The first has to do with the discipline that is brought to bear on the people of Judah and Jerusalem. We meet them in chapter 1 as the LORD’s rebellious children. They are so estranged that they hardly know him any more. They are laden with guilt and have given themselves to corruption. They have spurned the LORD, turned their backs on him, and resisted every attempt he has so far made to bring them to a better mind (1:2b–6). But he will not leave them so. He first takes up Assyria as a rod to chastise them in their land (10:5–6). Then he uses Babylon to

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take them out of it (39:5–7), and finally, when they are broken by suffering, he summons Cyrus of Persia to set them free and give them the chance to go home and start again (44:24–28). Out of this scourging process there emerges, by the end of the book, a group of people who are truly repentant. They are described as those who ‘mourn’ (61:2–3), the ‘servants’ of God (65:13–15), and the ‘humble and contrite in spirit’ who tremble at the LORD’s word (66:2). They are the nucleus from which a new people of God will grow.

At the second level a more profound issue is addressed. This, too, is introduced (though more obliquely) in chapter 1, for there for the first time we meet Isaiah’s characteristic description of God as ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (1:4). It is this Holy One who has been spurned by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and the unspoken question at this point is: how can he forgive them (or any sinner for that matter) without compromising his holiness? Failure to see it as an issue is simply an indication of how small is our appreciation of the holiness of God and the gravity of human sinfulness. The same issue surfaces much more pointedly in the call passage of chapter 6. When Isaiah is summoned into the presence of this holy God he knows himself to be ruined, for he is unclean and lives among an unclean people (6:5). But no sooner is the confession made than a live coal is taken from the altar and applied to his lips, and he is told that his guilt is taken away and his sin atoned for (6:6–7). The implication is clear. Forgiveness is possible only when atonement is made, and atonement is provided by God himself. It is a gift from his altar. This is the key to understanding the ministry of the Servant of the LORD in the second part of the book. He is the final answer to the mystery of how God can forgive and remain just. He does it through a perfect sacrifice which he himself provides. And at last, in 53:5, the forgiven ones see it: ‘The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.’ There is more to judgment than being exiled from the land, and more to salvation than returning to it. There is separation from God or reconciliation with him. At this level the themes of judgment and salvation are focused on the vicarious suffering and exaltation of the Servant.

But this opens up a wider perspective, which brings us to the third and final level at which the two themes are worked out. The people of Judah and Jerusalem have a history which reaches right back to Abraham (41:8; 51:2), and it was always God’s intention that they should be the channel through which his blessing would flow out to the world at large. This is why heaven and earth are summoned to hear what God has to say about these people at the beginning of the book (1:2). Whatever God does among them will impact on the entire creation. This is really the seed from which the great missionary vision of the book springs. Already in chapter 2 Isaiah sees the nations streaming to Zion to share in the salvation that has been realized there. But again we have to wait until the second part of the book to find out how this will be brought to pass. Again the key is the work of the Servant. He is a covenant for the people, and a light for the Gentiles (42:6). His sacrifice is sufficient for all and provides the rich food of pardon and forgiveness of which all who are hungry and thirsty may partake, if only they will come (55:1–7).

But now we see that the inward flow of the nations to share in the gospel banquet presupposes and requires another movement which is directed outwards—a great missionary movement of gospel proclamation and invitation. And such a movement does indeed unfold in the closing chapters of the book. It begins with the repeated statement, ‘You are my witnesses’,

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in 43:10, 12 and 44:8. It is given further impetus by the final appearance of the Servant as a Spirit-anointed preacher (61:1–3), and it climaxes in the sending out of messengers far and wide to proclaim God’s glory among the nations (66:19). But as servants of the Servant, their message has the same two-edged nature as his, and divides the world into the saved and the lost. In the end, salvation and judgment become absolutized as eternal life and eternal death (66:22–24), and both alike express the truth of who God really is, the *Holy One* of Israel.

Unity and authorship

It will be apparent by now that I am convinced that the book of Isaiah is a unity. But there are various kinds of unity, of which unity of authorship is only one. A book may be from various hands, but have an editorial unity imposed by someone who has worked over the material and given it its final form. It may have tensions within it but have a fundamental theological unity because it is the expression of one theological tradition. I would argue that the Old Testament as a whole (and by extension the whole Bible) has this kind of unity. And on a smaller scale, a book may have a unity because it is a product of a ‘school’ of writers who have drawn their inspiration from one very influential founding figure (*e.g.* an ‘Isaiah school, consisting of Isaiah himself and several generations of his disciples). Most scholars have accepted that the book of Isaiah does have some sort of unity, but exactly what kind of unity it is has proved to be an extremely vexed question.

This is not the place for a detailed review of the history of Isaiah research; that can be readily accessed elsewhere. Suffice it to say that since the late nineteenth century, the vast majority of scholars have opted for some form or other of the ‘Isaiah school’ approach. In principle this has much in its favour. It enables full recognition to be given to the differences of style and setting in the book without denying its underlying theological unity. And there is *prima facie* evidence of the existence of such a school in the reference to Isaiah’s disciples in 8:16–17. In practice, however, this approach in its various forms has so stressed the distinctives of the different parts of the book that its unity has almost ceased to be a subject of scholarly concern at all. Chapters 40–55 have been assigned to a ‘Second Isaiah’ of the late exilic period, and chapters 56–66 to a ‘Third Isaiah’ of the early restoration period. This was the basic analysis made by Duhm in his landmark commentary of 1883. Since then the study of each part of the book has more or less gone along separate ways. Most scholars have continued to regard chapters 40–55 as a unity, but the tendency has been to see chapters 1–39 and chapters 56–66 as complex compositions of material from various periods, with only a relatively small nucleus of material (from chapters 6–8 and 28) being from Isaiah himself. In this process the notion of ‘disciples’ has become very elastic, and the connection between Isaiah himself and the book which bears his name extremely tenuous. At the opposite extreme E. J. Young has continued to attribute everything to Isaiah and nothing at all (except faithful preservation) to his disciples. The truth probably lies somewhere in between.

The most natural way of taking the superscription in 1:1 (which refers to Isaiah in the third person) is that it is from the hand of the final editor, who wishes to affirm that the book as a

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whole is a faithful expression of the vision (revelation) which was given to Isaiah. From the editor's own point of view the period of the prophet's life is now past. It was 'in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah' that the vision came. A similar backward look occurs in the third-person accounts of events in Isaiah's life in chapters 20 and 36–39. These are quite different in style and viewpoint from the autobiographical material in chapters 6–8. In the present arrangement of the book, Isaiah's account of his call does not occur until chapter 6. It is preceded by material that has apparently been placed before it for thematic reasons, some of it drawn from quite late in his ministry. In short, there is clear evidence of editorial activity in the production of the present book, and it makes good sense to attribute this to Isaiah's disciples. The question, however, is how long this activity went on, and how close the editors stood to the prophet himself.

Of particular interest here, again, is the arrangement of the material in chapters 36–39. Merodach-Baladan, who had been a leader of rebellion against Assyria in the east, was finally ousted from the Babylonian throne in 703 BC, two years before Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. This is one of a number of indications that the events of chapters 38–39 in fact occurred before those of chapters 36–37. Hezekiah's reception of envoys from Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon (39:1–2), was part of his anti-Assyrian activity which provoked Sennacherib's subsequent invasion of Judah in 701 BC. In other words, it seems that the material in these chapters has been arranged quite deliberately in reverse chronological order to form a bridge between the two halves of the book. The same basic material occurs in 2 Kings 18:13–20:19, in the same order, but without any apparent explanation in terms of its context there. It is likely, therefore, that it is primary in Isaiah and secondary in 2 Kings. But there is virtually universal agreement that the books of Kings, as part of the 'Deuteronomistic History' (Joshua–2 Kings), are from the period immediately following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. If this is so, (and there seems to be no good reason to doubt it), it follows that not just chapters 36–39, *but the whole book of Isaiah in substantially its present form*, is pre-exilic. Assuming that Isaiah survived into the reign of Manasseh, this means that the book that bears his name was completed by his disciples within, at the most, the next ninety years.

This explains a number of features of the book which continue to puzzle scholars. Brevard Childs, for example, argues that while a general situation of exile and restoration is in view in chapters 40–66, these chapters are remarkably light on historical specifics compared with chapters 1–39. 'The one notable exception to this generalization is the reference to Cyrus (44:28–45:1), but even here the references to the historical events associated with Cyrus are minimal.' Childs is unclear whether this stems from 'an intentional removal of historical data' (for theological reasons) or is the result of 'a peculiar transmission process' which we do not fully understand.⁵⁴ But surely the more natural explanation is the one the book itself offers us: that in chapters 40–66 Isaiah is addressing a future situation which is clear to him in outline only. Of course the naming of Cyrus will make this impossible for many to accept, but this detail should be seen for the exception that it is. Only a dogmatic adherence to a particular view of the nature of prophecy would allow it to decide the issue.

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This is not to say, of course, that the material concerning Cyrus is of no consequence. In fact a key aspect of the theology of Isaiah 40–55 hangs on it. The author is insistent that the LORD has proved himself to be the only true God by predicting the rise of Cyrus. He declared it in advance, even naming Cyrus, so that when the fulfilment came there could be no mistake about who controlled history (41:21–29; 45:3–7). The whole force of the argument depends on the existence of a prophecy concerning Cyrus which precedes his rise. This presents a considerable problem, however, for those who hold the ‘Second Isaiah’ hypothesis, *for no such prophecy is to be found outside Isaiah 40–55 itself*. It has usually been assumed that the oracle(s) at issue cannot be identified or have been lost. But this dilemma is resolved at once if the book’s own testimony is accepted. Isaiah 40–55 is a continuation of the vision of the eighth-century Isaiah. The ‘missing’ oracles are not ‘missing’ at all, and the theology of Isaiah 40–55 does not hang in the air but rests on the solid evidence of the LORD’s sovereignty that the Cyrus oracles provide.

Equally difficult for the majority view is the need to maintain that the author of chapters 40–55 should have had his name either completely forgotten or deliberately suppressed by those who transmitted his words to us. It is understandable that a mere editor should remain anonymous, but the author of Isaiah 40–55 is much more than this. Chapter 40 opens by presenting us with his credentials. He has stood in the heavenly council, heard the LORD’s word and received a divine commission. He is a prophet in his own right, whom many would acknowledge to be the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets, and yet his identity is never disclosed. This is strange indeed. In every other instance of prophetic commissioning in the Old Testament, the prophet is either addressed by name or clearly identified in the framing narrative, and the names of those so called are revered and honoured.⁵⁷ Even where there is a close ‘master-disciple’ relationship between two prophets, as with Elijah and Elisha, each is remembered by name. But in the case of ‘Second Isaiah’, we are required to believe that a ‘disciple’ who receives a separate commissioning almost a century and a half after the death of his master, and whose own ministry rivals or even surpasses that of his mentor, has had his identity completely suppressed!

The canonical book of Isaiah presents a very different account of what actually took place. The one called in chapter 40 is not named there because he has already been named in chapter 6. There are many connections between the two passages, including the references to the LORD’s glory in 6:3 and 40:5. The glory which Isaiah saw in the heavens is soon to be revealed on earth in the deliverance he will bring to his people. What Isaiah alone saw in chapter 6, ‘all flesh’ will one day see. His question here, ‘What shall I cry?’, echoes his earlier one in chapter 6, ‘How long, O LORD?’ Like Elijah at Horeb, Isaiah finds himself back at the source of his prophetic ministry and is commissioned afresh for the second phase of his work.

This exposition has been written in the conviction that the account that the book of Isaiah itself gives of its own origins is far more plausible than any alternative that has so far been proposed. It is supported by Jewish tradition from a very early period, as the following passage from *Ecclesiasticus* shows:

Hezekiah did what was pleasing to the Lord,



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and kept firmly to the ways of his ancestor David,
as he was instructed by Isaiah,
the great prophet whose vision could be trusted.
In his time the sun went back,
and he added many years to the king's life.
With inspired power he saw the future
and comforted the mourners in Zion.
He revealed things to come before they happened,
the secrets of the future to the end of time.

This same tradition is reflected in the New Testament.

Importance

In terms of theological significance, the book of Isaiah is the 'Romans' of the Old Testament. It is here that the threads come together and the big picture of God's purposes for his people and for his world is most clearly set forth. Something of its importance can be gauged from the fact that it is quoted no fewer than sixty-six times in the New Testament, being exceeded in this only by the book of Psalms. These quotations are spread through all the major sections of the New Testament, from Matthew to 1 Peter. And if more or less transparent allusions are taken into account, its influence is even more obvious. The New Testament moves to its climax by echoing Isaiah's promise of death conquered, tears wiped away, and new heavens and a new earth.⁶¹ In fact it was Isaiah who, via the LXX, gave us the term 'gospel' by drawing it out of the reserve of common words available to him and charging it with profound new theological significance.⁶²

By far the greatest importance of this book, however, lies in the witness it bears to Jesus Christ. In the synagogue, at the very outset of his public ministry, this book was placed in Jesus' hands and he read from it the passage we now know as 61:1–2. It was as though he had received it, not just from human hands, but from the hands of God. By reading from it as he did, he assumed the role of the Servant with all that that would mean for him in terms of willing submission to the Father's will. It was the beginning of his journey to the cross. And in handing the scroll back to the attendant, it was as though he gave it to all of us who would be his followers. If we want to understand fully who he is and what he came to do, we must read this book.

The apostle John understood this well. At the midpoint of his gospel he quotes twice from the book of Isaiah, first from chapter 53 ('Lord, who has believed our message ...?'), then from chapter 6 ('He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts ...'). Finally he binds them together with his own comment: 'Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.' It is the point in the gospel where the rejection of Jesus has become obvious, and it is clear that the time has come for him to descend into the darkness of his passion. And this, says the apostle, is the glory of the Messiah that Isaiah saw and spoke about: the glory of his servanthood, the glory of his suffering for those who rejected him. This exposition will show (if demonstration



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is needed) that he correctly grasped the heart and true significance of Isaiah's total vision as the book which bears his name presents it to us.

Finally, in Acts 8:26–35 we catch a glimpse of how this same understanding of Isaiah's vision was to open into the great outward thrust of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In the midst of a remarkable ministry in Samaria, Philip is told to go southward to the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. There, in one of those amazing moments made by God, he comes upon an Ethiopian eunuch, returning home from Jerusalem and reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. It is not just any passage he is reading, but Isaiah 53, where the Servant is led like a lamb to the slaughter. He is fascinated and puzzled by what he reads and asks Philip for an explanation: 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' Luke gives Philip's response in words of immortal simplicity: 'Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.' It was the beginning of the gospel going to Africa.

This exposition of the book of Isaiah is sent forth with the prayer that it may help all who read it to see and speak of the glory of Christ with the same clarity and power.

Two final comments

The nature of prophecy

It has not been possible to provide here the kind of introduction to Old Testament prophecy as an oral and literary phenomenon which might be expected in a longer, more technical commentary. For those who are interested, the chapter on prophecy by Richard Patterson in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* is excellent. Patterson deals with the characteristic forms of prophecy as an essentially oral genre, but then goes on to offer sound advice on how to read it in the final, literary form in which we now have it in the canon. He notes Ryken's characterization of prophecy as 'visionary literature', which 'transforms the known world or present state of things into a situation that at the time of writing is as yet only imagined.'⁶⁷ Patterson himself prefers 'proclamation' as perhaps the most apt designation of the prophetic genre, but recognizes that it moves beyond preaching to inscripturation, and has a visionary dimension which transcends the boundaries of the prophet's own time.

All this is very relevant to this exposition, which seeks to do justice to the structure and unity of Isaiah's vision in its final, literary form, without ignoring the original historical context in which that vision originated.

Israel in the book of Isaiah

In the broad sweep of Isaiah's vision the term 'Israel' is used in a variety of ways, depending on the particular situation in view or the theological agenda which is operating.

Most commonly it is used to refer generally to the covenant people of God who could trace their ancestry back to 'Jacob/Israel' and, before him, to Abraham.⁶⁹ The same general sense is

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implied in the divine title, ‘the Holy One of Israel’, which is so characteristic of Isaiah. Less frequently the term is used specifically of the northern kingdom of Israel, in contrast to Judah, the southern kingdom, reflecting the political situation which existed between the death of Solomon and the fall of the two kingdoms in 722 and 587 BC respectively. To assist the reader I have included an explanatory comment, usually in a footnote, where it may not be clear in what sense the term is being used, either in the text of Isaiah itself or in my exposition of it.

Webb, B. (1996). [*The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles’ Wings*](#) (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.; pp. 195–252). Inter-Varsity Press.

AMAZIAH, KING OF JUDAH (אֲמַצְיָהּ, *amatsyah*), King of Judah. Son of Joash, king of Judah through Jehoaddin; his reign coincided with those of the Israelite kings Jehoash and Jeroboam II. Amaziah is one of the eight kings of Judah to receive a positive assessment.

Biblical Relevance

Amaziah reigned over Judah from 796–767 BC (Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 217). He succeeded his father, Joash, and was succeeded by his son Azariah (Uzziah), who likely reigned as coregent with Amaziah from 792–767 BC. He was one of the eight good kings of Judah (along with Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah). However, he failed to destroy the pagan shrines in Judah. Second Chronicles 25:1–28 includes the story of Amaziah’s idolatry and his refusal to listen to a prophet sent by God.

Amaziah in 2 Kings

Amaziah began his 29-year reign over Judah at the age of 25 following his father’s assassination (2 Kgs 14:2; 2 Chr 25:1). Upon taking the throne, he avenged his father’s death by executing the assassins; however, in accordance with the Deuteronomic law of retribution, he spared the assassins’ children (Deut 24:16; see Cogan & Tadmor, *II Kings*, 158).

Second Kings records that Amaziah waged a successful war against Edom and then sent messengers to challenge Jehoash, king of Israel. Jehoash tried in vain to dissuade Amaziah. In the ensuing battle, Jehoash defeated the army of Judah, captured Amaziah, destroyed 600 feet of Jerusalem’s wall, looted the temple and royal palace, and carried off hostages (2 Kgs 14:11–14). Archaeological excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh support the historicity of this account (Hasegawa, *Aram and Israel*, 109). Apparently, Amaziah was later freed; he outlived Jehoash by 15 years and ultimately was assassinated at Lachish (2 Kgs 14:17–19). The identity of his assassins and their motive for killing him is unknown (Cogan & Tadmor, *II Kings*, 159).

Amaziah in 2 Chronicles

The account of Amaziah’s reign in 2 Chr 25 follows the account of 2 Kgs 14, but with several significant additions (Graham, “Aspects,” 79–80).

Preparations for Battle against Edom

The Chronicler’s account of Amaziah’s life begins positively. He conducted one of the four censuses taken during the period of the divided monarchy (2 Chr 25:5), each of which was taken by a Judaeen king who “did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh”:

- Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:12–19);

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- Joash (2 Kgs 12:1–21; 2 Chr 24:1–27);
- Amaziah (2 Chr 25:5–10);
- Azariah/Uzziah (2 Chr 26:11–13).

As a result of the census, Amaziah decided to hire an additional 100,000 fighting men from Israel to augment his own army of 300,000 troops in battle against Edom (2 Chr 25:6). A prophet of God confronts Amaziah and calls him to send these Israelite troops home (2 Chr 25:7–9). Amaziah obeys, and the remaining troops are victorious over Edom. However, the dismissed Israelite troops “became very angry” and expressed their wrath by plundering and killing in the villages they passed through on their way back to Israel (2 Chr 25:11–13).

Amaziah after Defeating Edom

The Chronicler’s depiction of Amaziah’s reign takes a decidedly negative turn following the victory against Edom. According to 2 Chronicles 25:14, Amaziah brought “brought the gods of the men of Seir and ... worshiped them” (2 Chr 25:14 ESV). God sent a prophet to confront Amaziah for worshiping these pagan gods, but Amaziah refused to listen and threatened to kill the prophet. The prophet warned him that God would destroy him for his idolatry and refusal to listen (2 Chr 25:15–16).

According to 2 Chronicles 25:20, Amaziah’s later insistence on battle with Israel was part of God’s punishment of Amaziah for his idolatry (2 Chr 25:20; see Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology*, 65). The Chronicler’s account follows 2 Kings 14 in recording Amaziah’s defeat and capture by Jehoash. The Chronicler then records that Amaziah was assassinated in Lachish after he “turned away from the Lord” (2 Chr 25:27a). Despite the idolatry and ensuing punishment that characterized the latter half of Amaziah’s reign, the Chronicler nevertheless describes him as a king who “did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh” (2 Chr 26:4).

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JEFFERY J. GILBOY¹⁸

UZZIAH, KING OF JUDAH (וִּזְיָיָהּ, *uzziyyah*). The 10th ruler of Judah. Also called Azariah.

Name

Scripture refers to the 10th king of Judah as both Uzziah (וִּזְיָיָהּ, *uzziyyah*, “Yahweh is my strength”) and Azariah (אֶזְרָיָהּ, *azaryah*, “Yahweh has helped”). The two names are spelled similarly in Hebrew, suggesting the two forms are variant spellings. Alternatively, they may indicate the king’s given and throne name. The book of Kings prefers the name Azariah, while Chronicles prefers Uzziah.

Date

¹⁸ Gilboy, J. J. (2016). [Amaziah, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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Scripture records that Uzziah was made king at age 16 and reigned for 52 years (2 Kgs 15:2; 2 Chr 26:3). However, it is debated whether he reigned until his death or whether his son replaced him as king. Dates posited for his reign reflect this debate:

- Rogerson suggests 767–739 BC (Rogerson, *Chronicle*, 134)
- Hughes proposes 772–747 BC (Hughes, *Secrets of the Times*, 275)
- Hayes and Hooker argue 785–734 BC (Hayes and Hooker, *New Chronology*, 106–108)
- Galil suggests 788~7–736~5 BC (Galil, *Chronology*, 147)

Many scholars have tried to resolve chronological issues by suggesting coregency for Judah's rulers (Hayes and Hooker, *New Chronology*, 106–108). Yet other scholars have rejected this idea (Rogerson, *Chronicle*, 135, Hughes, *Secrets of the Times*, 111–112), and the biblical data is inconclusive. If Uzziah was stricken with a disease that made him ineligible for public duties, it is more likely that he would have had to stop acting as ruler.

Genealogy

Uzziah was the descendant of David and the son of Jecoliah and King Amaziah, who came from the inner circles of power at Jerusalem. He was married to Jerusha, daughter of Zadok, whose name suggests she came from a priestly family. Uzziah's son Jotham succeeded him.

Rise to Power and Rule

The book of Kings provides little detail about Uzziah's 52-year rule. According to Kings, Uzziah took the throne after his father, Amaziah, was killed while fleeing a coup that had arisen in Jerusalem, apparently in the wake of Amaziah's unsuccessful war against Israel. The Judeans enthroned Uzziah either because they expected that he would be a better ruler than Amaziah or believed they could control the young king. Because Uzziah came to the throne of a defeated Judah during the reign of the powerful and politically astute Jeroboam II of Israel, Na'aman suggests Jeroboam II may have served as his overlord (Na'aman, "Azariah," 229). Second Kings 14:22 credits him with restoring Elath to Judah, and 2 Kgs 15:3 states that he did "what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done" (ESV). However, as with all of Judah's rulers to the time of Josiah, Uzziah allowed many sacred places to continue local religious traditions. The author of Kings hints that this is the reason he had to step down from rule.

Chronicles offers a more detailed description of Uzziah's reign. According to the Chronicler, Uzziah began his reign as a good and pious king under the tutelage of Zechariah (2 Chr 26:5). Because of his loyalty to Yahweh, Uzziah was successful in war against the Philistines, extending his influence to Egypt itself (2 Chr 26:8). The Chronicler credits him with having military prowess, building fortifications in Jerusalem, and raising and equipping an enormous army (2 Chr 26:9–10, 11–15). His agricultural program expanded cattle production, vineyard cultivation, and crop raising throughout Judah (2 Chr 26:10–13).

Skin Disease

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Kings records that at some point, Uzziah came down with a skin disease that barred him from reigning (2 Kgs 15:5). At that time, his son Jotham took over the actual rule of Judah and the government in Jerusalem. The Chronicler attributes Uzziah's downfall to his pride. According to the Chronicler, "When he [Uzziah] was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction" (2 Chr 26:16). Uzziah entered the temple of Yahweh to act as a priest in offering incense in direct opposition to the priest Azariah (the name of Uzziah as Azariah in Kings as a background for this passage is either intentional irony or a coincidence; Beentjes, "They Saw," 65; Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 379) and the 80 priests with him (likely an exaggerated number; see Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 886). Although some scholars assume that the king of Judah was in fact a priest of Yahweh, the biblical text presents Uzziah's act as an abomination (de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 113, 127–28; Grabbe, *Priests*, 28–29, 39–40). In response to his actions, Yahweh struck him with a skin disease that deformed his face even as he stood holding the censer (which recalls the Dathan and Abiram incident of Num 16:1–40).

Later Years, Death, and Burial

Uzziah's exact status from this time until his death is unclear. He did not live in the palace where Jotham governed, indicating he was not a ruling monarch. Uzziah may have ceased to be the designated ruler; alternatively, Jotham may have served as acting but not crowned king. Most likely, Jotham took over the throne in all aspects and Uzziah became a living, former king.

Kings records Uzziah as having been given a royal burial in Jerusalem. Chronicles only allows the burial to have taken place in a field belonging to the kings of Judah, for he was diseased and not fit for presence among the ritually pure (2 Chr 16:11, Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* 887, Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 369). Matthew 1:8–9 includes Uzziah in Jesus' genealogy, though Luke 3:23–38 does not.

Extrabiblical References

Josephus repeats the Chronicler's narrative regarding Uzziah with several expansions (Begg, "Uzziah," 12–14, 17, 21). He particularly emphasizes Uzziah's military and agricultural endeavors. Josephus also expands on the account of Uzziah's disease, stating that Uzziah threatened the priest Azariah with death if he didn't acquiesce to Uzziah's demands. Josephus records Uzziah as being 68 at the time of his death, accepting that Uzziah's reign lasted to his death.

Bright and Wright assert that an inscription by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III mentions Azariah (Bright, *History*, 270; Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 162). However, the original publication of this inscription had reconstructed the name in a broken section of the text. Aside from this possible mention, there are references to Uzziah outside the Bible in texts dependent on the biblical narratives (Dalley, "Yahweh," 23–25).

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JOTHAM, KING OF JUDAH (יֹחָזָבָב, *yoatham*, Ἰωθαμ, *lōatham*). Son of Uzziah and Jerusha, daughter of Zadok; reigned in the mid-eighth century BC as Judah's 11th ruler. The name "Jotham" means "the Lord is perfect."

Biblical Relevance

Prior to his official reign, Jotham ruled over Judah when his father, King Uzziah (also called Azariah), contracted a skin disease (2 Kgs 15:5). After the illness forced Uzziah to live in separate quarters, Jotham became king at the age of 25 (Donner, "Separate States," 395). Uzziah had reigned for 52 years and left a mostly positive legacy, but he also allowed the high places of pagan worship to remain. Jotham ruled for 16 years (2 Kgs 15:33; 2 Chr 27:1).

The Chronicler appears to adopt the framework of the 2 Kings account of Jotham, but he adds material in 2 Chr 27:3b–6 about Jotham's building projects and victories over the Ammonites (Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 889). According to Klein, a record of building projects often indicate the Chronicler's approval of a king (Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 386).

Both accounts recognize Jotham's rule as being righteous, but 2 Chronicles notes that he did not succumb to his father's folly: He never entered the temple (2 Kgs 15:34; 2 Chr 26:16–18; 27:2). Myers states that this "may actually be an expression of approval on the part of the Chronicler indicating that Jotham observed his status as a layman and did not violate the sacred precincts as his father had done" (Myers, *II Chronicles*, 156). Second Kings notes that the high places remained during Jotham's reign, and 2 Chronicles records that the people of Judah continued their corrupt ways (2 Kgs 15:35; 2 Chr 27:2). However, neither text seems to hold Jotham responsible for the people's persistent sin (Myers, *II Chronicles*, 156). The Chronicler states that "Jotham became strong because he ordered his ways before the Lord his God" (2 Chr 27:6 NRSV).

Unlike his father, who was buried in a field due to his skin disease, Jotham is buried in the city of David (2 Kgs 15:38; 2 Chr 26:23; 27:9).

¹⁹ Handy, L. K. (2016). [Uzziah, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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Chronological Conflict

Several chronological details regarding Jotham's reign appear to conflict. Although 2 Kgs 15:33, 2 Chr 27:1, and 2 Chr 27:8 all state that Jotham ruled for 16 years (an apparent point of emphasis for the Chronicler, given its repetition), 2 Kgs 15:30 reports that Pekah, King of Israel, was assassinated "in the *twentieth* year of Jotham the son of Uzziah" (italics added). One explanation for the discrepancy is that the reference to Jotham's 20th year is counting his tenure as coregent due to Uzziah's skin disease (2 Kgs 15:5; Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 55; Albright, "Chronology"). Another possibility is that Jotham was still alive for four years or more after his son Ahaz came to the throne (in contradiction to 2 Kgs 15:38, 2 Chr 27:9; Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 64).

Archaeological Evidence

Excavations at Tel El-Kheleifeh in 1938–40, headed by Nelson Glueck, led to the discovery of a copper-smelting refinery. The site is believed to be Ezion-geber, a seaport from Solomon's era that the kings of Judah possibly used at various times—particularly during the reign of Uzziah. Further excavation in a room that dates back to the eighth century BC unearthed a signet ring enclosed in a copper casing and bearing the inscription *LYTM*, "belonging to Jotham." Glueck, Albright, and Myers accept the ring's association with Jotham, king of Judah (Glueck, "Third Season," 15; Albright, "Chronology"; Myers, *II Chronicles*, 151).

The ring also bears two images: a ram and what seems to be a headless person extending his arms upward (Glueck, "Third Season," 13). The ram (Hebrew: *ayil*) could allude to the city, Eilat, where the refinery was located; parallels for the headless man have been discovered in the tomb of Khnum-hotep III, which has images depicting Asiatics arriving in Egypt with portable bellows used for making copper. Thus, the signet ring might depict the location as well as its chief industry (Avigad, "Jotham Seal," 20).

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²⁰ Crutchfield, J. A. (2016). [Jotham, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH (אָחָז, 'chz; shortened form of אֱהָזְכָּז, yhw'chz, meaning "he [Yahweh] has held, grasped"). The 12th king of Judah. Placed his trust in Assyria when faced with military threat. His actions led to divine judgment upon Judah.

Date: Chronology of Reign

According to 2 Kgs 16:1, Ahaz came to the throne at age 20 and ruled Judah for 16 years. He was probably co-regent with his father, Jotham, for four years before his solo reign began. Ahaz shared the throne with his son, Hezekiah, from 728/7–715 bc (Walton, *ZIBBC*, 353). The dates of his reign are circa 735–715 bc (House, *1–2 Kings*, 39–44).

The correlation of Assyrian and Mesopotamian records fixes the date Ahaz paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III as 733/32 bc (see Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*). The prophetic ministries of Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah took place partly during his rule.

Biblical References

The historical books and Isaiah portray Ahaz as an evil, wicked, idolatrous ruler. His sins and failure to heed God's warnings led to divine judgment upon Judah in the form of invasion by a Syro-Israelite coalition and subjugation to Assyria.

Kings and Chronicles (2 Kgs 15:38–16:20; 17:1; 2 Chr 27:9–28:27; 29:19)

When Ahaz ascended the throne, the nation of Judah was threatened by various military-political powers. These threats came from the resurgence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (745–612 bc) in Mesopotamia and the diplomatic-military posturing of the countries surrounding Ahaz's kingdom. After a lull in aggressive military expansion, Assyria, under Tiglath-Pileser III (named Pul in 2 Kgs 15:19), focused on asserting control over the lucrative trade routes that ran past Syria.

Tiglath-Pileser III had received tribute from king Rezin of Syria and king Menahem of Israel in 738–37 bc (*ANET*, 283; *COS*, 2:117A, 285). Rezin and Pekah—the new king of Israel—formed a coalition of nations in the area with the goal to challenge Assyrian hegemony. As punishment for Jotham's refusal to join their anti-Assyrian coalition, Rezin and Pekah planned military incursions into Judah (2 Kgs 15:37).

While Ahaz was co-regent, Rezin and Pekah pressured him to join their coalition with the threat of military occupation. Isaiah notes that the coalition planned to replace Ahaz with an unknown ruler called the "son of Tabeel" who was loyal to the anti-Assyrian coalition (Isa 7:6b). This Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and Ahaz's response became the defining event of his reign.

The crisis escalated into a war (735–734 bc) and the Syro-Israelite coalition devastated the nation of Judah. The coalition inflicted heavy losses, and Israel took many Judean captives. The Philistines to the West and the Edomites to the South also took advantage of their weakened Judean neighbor (2 Chr 28:5–8). In the midst of this catastrophic invasion, the chronicler records the gracious intervention of God through the prophet Oded. Oded persuaded Israel to release their Judean captives by reminding them of their kinship with Judah. He also warned them of God's wrath if they failed to do so (2 Chr 28:9–15).

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Earlier, Isaiah had advised Ahaz to trust in the Lord's promise to deliver Judah (Isa 7:1–12) rather than joining the coalition or becoming an Assyrian vassal state. Ahaz did not realize that Assyria would have to deal with these nations on its own, and relief could come without the immediate necessity of a tribute payment (Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 380). Isaiah offered Ahaz the choice of any sign he desired to verify the divine promise, but Ahaz refused and appealed to Assyria for help.

Tiglath-Pileser III marched swiftly to quell the Syro-Israelite coalition. He invaded Syria, captured Damascus, and executed King Rezin (732 BC; 2 Kgs 16:9). In order to pay tribute to Assyria, Ahaz plundered the temple, his palace, and his nobles' treasures. It still was not enough (2 Kgs 16:8; 2 Chr 28:21).

In spite of divine intervention through Oded and the guidance offered by Isaiah, Ahaz turned to the Syrian gods for deliverance. He may have reasoned that the Syrian deities had shown their superiority in their victory over Israel (2 Chr 28:23). After traveling to Damascus to affirm his loyalty to Tiglath-Pileser III, Ahaz replaced Solomon's bronze altar in Jerusalem with a replica of the Damascene one. The people were to use this altar, while he reserved the bronze altar for his own private use. Ahaz then began to practice "extispicy," the reading of animal entrails (Walton, *ZIBBC*, 175–76). Ahaz may have been forced to adopt the Damascene altar to show loyalty (see Heger, *Three Biblical Altar Laws*, 260). Ahaz shut down the worship of Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple entirely and created altars to pagan gods throughout Jerusalem and Judah, "provoking the God of his ancestors" (2 Chr 28:26). Second Chronicles notes that Ahaz was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the tombs of the kings (2 Chr 28:27). His son, Hezekiah, attempted to reverse Ahaz's political and religious policies.

Isaiah and Other Prophets

The book of Isaiah contrasts the evil reign of Ahaz and the righteous rule of Hezekiah. Isaiah's condemnation of Judah's sins reflects the moral state of Judah's leaders and people during Ahaz's reign. Isaiah equates the rulers of Jerusalem to "rulers of Sodom" (Isa 1:10). The leaders neglect the defense of the widows and orphans, lead the people astray, worship idols, and depend on alliances and military might instead of God (Isa 1:23; 2:6–8; 3:12).

Isaiah 7 describes the prophet's attempt to persuade Ahaz to trust in the Lord during the Syro-Ephraimite War. When Ahaz refused Isaiah's offer to bring about any sign to assure him of God's protection, God offered His own sign instead. Isaiah reminded the king of God's covenant (2 Sam 7:12–16) with David, which ensured that He would protect and defend the reigns of David's faithful royal descendants (Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, 73). He stated that the king would see a child called Immanuel, meaning "God with us," born to a young "virgin" who would not reach the age of knowing right from wrong before this dangerous coalition would cease to be a threat (Isa 7:16). God also informed Ahaz that the Assyrians would become Judah's greatest menace (Isa 7:17–25).

Micah indirectly references Ahaz's wickedness several times in his prophecy. In his lament over the coming fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in Mic 1:9, he notes that Samaria's idolatry has infected the leadership of "my people in Jerusalem." In his lawsuit against Judah,

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Micah accuses the people and leadership of implementing the regulations of Omri and the wicked practices of Ahab. The prophet said this would lead to the judgment of Judah (Mic 6:16; Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 250; Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 21–25, 54–56, 119–20; Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, 52–53). Ahab’s practices included child sacrifice (1 Kgs 16:34) and widespread Baalism (1 Kgs 18). Since Micah prophesies during the reigns of Jotham and Hezekiah and Samaria’s judgment has not yet come, he is likely condemning Ahaz.

Other biblical references to Ahaz describe how the effects of his rule were reversed during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. God’s healing of Hezekiah took place on Ahaz’s stairs, where the shadow retreated 10 steps (2 Kgs 20:11). Hezekiah restored the temple worship his father had forbidden and purified the temple instruments Ahaz had removed (2 Chr 29:19).

In 2 Kings 23:10–12, Josiah destroyed the place of child sacrifice—Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom—where Ahaz and Manasseh had passed their sons through the fire. Josiah also eliminated the pagan altars constructed on the roof of Ahaz’s upper room.

New Testament

Ahaz is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matt 1:9 as the son of Jotham and father of Hezekiah.

Extrabiblical Inscriptions

The first seal impression of a Hebrew king ever discovered reads “belonging to Ahaz (son of) Yotam, king of Judah.” The king’s name occurred on a clay “bulla,” which was used to seal and validate documents on papyri (Torrey, “Hebrew Seal,” 27; also Avigad below). Ahaz is also noted on a building inscription detailing Tiglath-Pileser III’s actions during military campaigns in Syria and Palestine. He is listed among a group who paid tribute to the Assyrian king, and is called by his longer name (*la-u-ha-zi*) or Jehoahaz (*ANET*, 282–84).

Theological Evaluation in the Canon

Kings and Chronicles evaluated the kings of Judah by two standards:

1. Their keeping of the covenant with Yahweh and encouragement of the people to foster the covenant established in the law of Moses (1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 17:15–16).
2. Their keeping of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 7 (1 Kgs 2:4; 2 Kgs 16:2; 2 Chr 34:2).

Since Ahaz had led Judah into idolatry, failed to uphold social justice, and entered into godless political alliances, he failed according to these standards.

Ahaz’s reign is set within the portion of 2 Kings that ends with the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17). Ahaz is the first of Judah’s kings to rule over the sole remaining kingdom occupied by the Davidic descendants. However, Ahaz committed the same sins which caused the exile of the northern kingdom. Just as Israel had, Ahaz drove God out from before his people (2 Kgs 16:3b; 17:8) and sacrificed on the high places (2 Kgs 16:4; 17:9b, 10)—Ahaz even sacrificed his own son. This was a condemned practice (Lev 18:21; Deut 18:10).



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The narrator predicts that the future rulers of Judah will not fare any better than Ahaz (2 Kgs 17:19). The warning of coming judgment, however, is tempered by the reign of Hezekiah, whose faithfulness to Yahweh and the Davidic covenant results in God’s protection and deliverance from the continuing Assyrian threat (2 Kgs 18–20).

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DAVID D. PETTUS²¹

HEZEKIAH, KING OF JUDAH Hezekiah, King of Judah. The 13th king of Judah. The name Hezekiah (חִזְקִיָּיָהוּ, *chizqiyyah*) derives from the combination of the verbal root “to strengthen” (חִזַּק, *chazaq*) and the shortened form (יָהוּ, *yah*) of the divine name Yahweh (יְהוָה, *yhwh*), meaning “the Lord strengthens.” King of the southern kingdom of Judah for 29 years (727–699 BC) during which time the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians, and Judah itself was invaded by the Assyrians. Remembered for his religious reforms (2 Kgs 18:4; 2 Chr 29:3–36), for breaking allegiance with Assyria in favor of an alliance with Egypt (2 Kgs 18:13–16; Isa 30; 31; 36:6–9), and for his illness and miraculous recovery (2 Kgs 20; 2 Chr 32; Isa 38).

Overview of the Biblical Account

There are three accounts of Hezekiah’s reign in the Bible: 2 Kgs 18–20; 2 Chr 29–32; and Isa 36–39.

²¹ Pettus, D. D. (2016). [Ahaz, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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Hezekiah in Kings and Isaiah

The accounts in Kings and Isaiah of Hezekiah's reign focus on the Assyrian threat against Judah. Sennacherib's army takes some of Judah's fortified cities. Hezekiah, looking to avoid further damage, sends Sennacherib gold and silver as tribute (2 Kgs 18:13–16). However, Assyria continues its campaign and besieges Jerusalem. Scholars debate whether Assyria attacked once or twice. The Assyrian commander Rabshakeh taunts Hezekiah, saying that he cannot rely on help from Egypt or God (2 Kgs 18:19–25). Rabshakeh addresses the people of Jerusalem directly in an attempt to frighten them, mocking God by saying that just as the gods of other nations did not deliver them, Israel's God will not deliver Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:28–35).

Hezekiah reacts to this threat by mourning and seeking God through the prophet Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:1–2). Isaiah responds that God will make Sennacherib return home and die there. Eventually, the angel of Yahweh comes and kills 185,000 people in the Assyrian camp (2 Kgs 19:35). Sennacherib returns home and is assassinated (2 Kgs 19:37).

During the Assyrian threat, Hezekiah became terminally ill. He again sought God and was given 15 more years (2 Kgs 20:1–7). God's promise to extend Hezekiah's life was accompanied with the sign of the sun going back "ten steps" (2 Kgs 20:8–11) (ESV). After Hezekiah's illness, he was visited by envoys from Babylon. Hezekiah shows them all of Jerusalem's treasures. Isaiah rebukes him for this and prophesies the Babylonian exile (2 Kgs 20:14–19).

Hezekiah in Chronicles

The account in Chronicles gives more attention to Hezekiah's religious reforms, devoting three chapters to them. The chronicler spends only one chapter reporting the Assyrian conflict and Hezekiah's illness. Rather, the author is more concerned with proper temple worship throughout 1 and 2 Chronicles, and so emphasizes Hezekiah's reforms. Hezekiah instructs the Levites to cleanse the temple (2 Chr 29:3–19) and gathers Jerusalem's leaders to restore proper worship (2 Chr 29:20–36).

The chronicler also portrays Hezekiah as an agent of restoration and redemption for remaining members of the exiled northern tribes. Hezekiah sends letters to the northern tribes inviting them to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (2 Chr 30:1–12). People respond and celebrate in unity and joy (2 Chr 30:25–27).

Extrabiblical References

Sennacherib makes reference to his campaign against Hezekiah in his royal annals. He refers to his campaign throughout Judah as well as his siege of Jerusalem. Sennacherib does not refer to his defeat, however. He writes:

"As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered [them] by means of well-stamped [earth-] ramps, and battering-rams brought [thus] near [to the walls] [combined with] the attack by foot soldiers, [using] mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out [of them] 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys,

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camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered [them] booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage” (ANET, 288).

The writings of Nabonidus, a Babylonian king, confirm the biblical description of Sennacherib’s death. Nabonidus describes Sennacherib’s son as his own father’s assassin (ANET, 309).

The Siloam Inscription, discovered in 1838, records the construction of a particular tunnel associated with other tunnels built by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30). It is written in paleo-Hebrew script and most likely dates to the 8th century BC..

Dating Hezekiah’s Reign

Recent archaeological and extrabiblical discoveries raised questions regarding several previously agreed-upon aspects of Hezekiah’s reign, primarily the date. The matter is further complicated by the difficulties in alignment of biblical kingships with other historical events as well as the possibility of coregencies.

There are two predominant methods for dating Hezekiah’s reign.

Conquest of Samaria

The first dating method uses the correlation that 2 Kgs 18:9–10 establishes between the fourth—sixth years of Hezekiah’s reign and the beginning and end of Shalmaneser’s conquest of Samaria. Exact dating depends on archaeological evidence found in Israeli and Assyrian records, with three possibilities.

Dates of Conquest. Scholars have proposed various dates for Samaria’s fall:

- 723 BC (Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, 205; Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 163–72; Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*, 53–56)
- Late 722/early 721 BC (Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 195–201; Hayes and Kuan, “The Final Years,” 153–81; Hays and Hooker, *A New Chronology*, 59–70; Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology*, 151–58; Younger, “The Fall of Samaria,” 461–82)
- 720 BC (Laato, “New Viewpoints,” 216–19; Na’aman, “Conquest of Samaria,” 206–25; Galil, “The Last Years,” 52–65; Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 12–18)
- 719 BC (Tetley, *Reconstructed Chronology*, 153–57).

The historical evidence is complicated by many conflicting accounts of the fall of Samaria. Both Shalmaneser V and Sargon II claim to have conquered Samaria (for more on Sargon II, see Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 15–16 n.19). Sargon II’s ascension to the throne after the death of Shalmaneser V took place close to the fall of Samaria. This has led some to reconcile the conflicting claims in multiple ways, including:

- Sargon II concluded the siege initiated by Shalmaneser V (Na’aman, “Conquest of Samaria,” 206–25).
- The untimely death of Shalmaneser V allowed Sargon II to claim credit for his victory (Olmstead, *Days of Sargon*, 45–47; Reade, “Sargon’s Campaigns,” 95–104).

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- There were two conquests of the city, one by each king (Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur,” 22–40; Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*).
- There were four conquests of Samaria between 727–719 BC, only the last of which was conducted by Sargon II (Hayes and Kuan, “The Final Years,” 153–81; Kuan, *Neo-Assyrian Historical Inscriptions*, 193–207).

Extrabiblical Inscriptions. No extrabiblical inscriptions mention that Samaria was destroyed, indicating it may have survived military defeat, possibly implying multiple campaigns against the city. In addition, the fall, deportation, and repopulation of Samaria that 2 Kgs 17:1–6 describes could have taken place over several years (Younger, “The Fall of Samaria,” 479). Shalmaneser died in 722 BC, leaving his son Sargon to claim the throne. Second Kings 18:9 indicates that it was Shalmaneser who conquered Samaria. At the beginning of Sargon’s reign, various vassal states rebelled, and he took military action to solidify his power. He spent two years reclaiming power over Babylon in the east before turning his attention west to Samaria. Thus, it is quite possible that Shalmaneser conquered Samaria in 722 BC before his death. His son would then have retaken the city in 720 BC during his consolidation of power. The biblical text, however, clearly dates Hezekiah’s reign relative to Shalmaneser’s campaign and not Sargon’s. Therefore, the fall of Samaria in the Kings account could date to 722 BC, in which case Hezekiah’s reign began in 727 BC and ended in 699 BC (for more on the historical evidence supporting this conclusion, see Younger, “The Fall of Samaria,” 461–82).

Implications for Dating Hezekiah’s Reign

- If Samaria fell in 722 BC, then Hezekiah ascended the throne in 727 BC and reigned till 699 BC (Tadmor, “Chronology of the First Temple Period,” 58; Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology*, 154; Hayes and Hooker, *A New Chronology*, 66–80).
- Some scholars, however, date the destruction of Samaria to 721~20 BC, necessitating a 725~24 BC ascension (Galil, *Chronology of the Kings*, 83–107; Begrich, *Die Chronologie der Könige von Israel und Juda*, 155–60).
- If Samaria fell in 719~18 BC, it would imply Hezekiah started to rule in 724 BC (Tetley, *Reconstructed Chronology*, 164).

Campaign against Jerusalem

The second method for dating Hezekiah’s rule depends on the correct date of Assyria’s campaign against Jerusalem. Scholars have relied on 2 Kgs 18:13 for dating Sennacherib’s 701 BC campaign against Jerusalem to the 14th year of King Hezekiah. This information has been used to date the first year of Hezekiah’s reign to 716/15 BC (Thiele, *Chronology of the Kings*,” 164; Albright, “Chronology of the Divided Monarchy,” 22; Na’aman, “Hezekiah and the Kings of Assyria, 236–39; “Historical and Chronological Notes,” 83–92).

Agreement of Evidence. Various proposals have attempted to reconcile the conflicting evidence. Lewy and Jenkins favor the later date, suggesting 2 Kgs 18:13 refers to Sargon’s campaign in 714–712 BC that Kings incorrectly attributes to Sennacherib (Lewy, “Sanherib und

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Hizkia,” 158–59; Jenkins, “Hezekiah’s Fourteenth Year,” 284–98). Others have proposed reading “24” years instead of “14” in 2 Kgs 18:13, suggesting that textual corruption left the relative dating incompatible with 2 Kgs 18:9–10 (Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 513–18).

Most scholars reject one date for the sake of the other. Those who defend a late date must conclude that 2 Kgs 18:9–10 is in error, whereas those who advocate an early date must conclude 2 Kgs 18:13 is. Each argument attempts to account for the most data while explaining the appearance of any errors in the records (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 11).

Two reasons support the higher likelihood of the early date. First, it accounts for most of the evidence in the textual witnesses. Dating Hezekiah’s reign to 727–724 BC suggests that Hezekiah was king during both events attributed to his reign in 2 Kgs 18:9–13, with only the year itself being in error in 2 Kgs 18:13. Second, it seems highly unlikely that the editors of 2 Kings would attribute such a significant event (2 Kgs 17) to the reign of the incorrect ruler (Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology*, 83–84; Rowley, *Men of God*, 98–132). To accept the later date, 716–715 BC, as Hezekiah’s inaugural year would require accepting that all details in 2 Kgs 18:9–12 are in error.

Political Relationships

Hezekiah was a vassal to the Assyrian Empire until ca. 705 BC, when he abandoned submission in favor of a treaty with Egypt, thereby asserting Judaeans independence.

Assyrian Vassals

Judah was vital to neighboring empires because of its strategic location along important trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Judah likely complied with Assyrian dominance until early in Hezekiah’s reign. Hebrew seals reveal Assyrian authority in the area as early as 785–733 BC during the reign of Azariah/Uzziah (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 36). During the campaign of Tiglath-pileser III in the south, King Ahaz of Judah submitted to Assyrian authority (2 Kgs 16:7–8). Thus Judah remained independent after the Syro-Ephraimitic War, indicating their submission to Assyrian authority during the campaign (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 36).

Extrabiblical evidence indicates Hezekiah remained loyal to Assyria early in his reign. The Nimrud inscription (dated to 717–716 BC) records Sargon boasting about subduing Judah, so Judah likely paid tribute during Hezekiah’s early years (Cogan, *Raging Torrent*, 100–02; Na’aman, “Sargon II’s Nimrud Inscription,” 17–20; Crocker, “British Museum Excavations of Nimrud,” 68–70; Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 38). Hezekiah likely did not abandon this loyalty until the death of Sargon II in 705 BC (Na’aman, “Ahaz’s and Hezekiah’s Policy,” 5–30). Some suggest Hezekiah even aided Assyrian military interests in the region as a vassal state, and Dalley even suggests Judaeans formed part of Sennacherib’s royal body guard (Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 404–07; Dalley, “Recent Evidence from Assyrian Sources,” 91–92).

Hezekiah’s Rebellion

Sargon’s death led to widespread rebellion among Assyria’s vassal states, beginning with Babylon (Levine, “Sennacherib’s Southern Front,” 28–58). Hezekiah moved to establish a treaty

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with Egypt, joining several neighboring nations in rebelling against Assyrian dominance. The motive for Hezekiah's decision remains unclear (see Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, 263–74).

Assyrian Invasion. The Assyrian invasion is well-attested in both biblical and archaeological material. Most of the coverage of Hezekiah's reign in 2 Kings recounts Sennacherib's campaign into Judah. The destruction layers related to Sennacherib's march reveal much about his movement and tactics against the rebelling cities. Assyrian records attest to three geographical phases of Sennacherib's campaign from the summer of 702 BC to the summer of 701 BC: Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 79).

Evidence of Sennacherib's military campaign includes the destruction layer of Lachish, along with relief depictions of the siege. Large quantities of arrowheads and burned wood at the site of a siege ramp indicate that Assyria built large siege ramps, which the Judaeans attempted to disrupt by throwing torches and firing arrows. An additional ramp was found inside the city, constructed by residents to reinforce the wall against battering rams. A cave serving as a mass grave for approximately 1,500 bodies outside the city testifies to the massacre when the city fell (Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish*; Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 63; for more on the campaign, see Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 64–65; Vaughn, *Theology, History and Archeology*, 19–79).

After the fall of Lachish, a commander was dispatched to negotiate the surrender of Jerusalem. Sennacherib blockaded the city and ravaged the Judaeans countryside, but there is no evidence of a formal siege against Jerusalem (Young, *Hezekiah in History*). Hezekiah agreed to pay all of the gold in the temple (2 Kgs 18:16), which satisfied Sennacherib, who then returned to Nineveh (Mayer, "Sennacherib's Campaign," 181). Of the 354 Judaeans sites destroyed by Sennacherib, only 39 show evidence of rebuilding within the next 100 years (Stern, *Archeology of the Land of the Bible*, 142).

One Campaign or Two? Debate exists whether Sennacherib launched one or two campaigns against Judah (Noth, *History of Israel*, 265–69; Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 66–73; see also Goldberg, "Two Assyrian Campaigns," 361–74; Begg, "Sennacherib's Second Palestinian Campaign," 685–86). The two-campaign model based on 2 Kgs 18:13–15 indicates Hezekiah repented and gave the temple gold to Sennacherib, who then sent his commander to threaten Jerusalem—a threat alleviated only by the Lord's intervention in 2 Kgs 19. This view, therefore, proposes that Sennacherib came, received payment, left, and then returned and besieged Jerusalem.

The one-campaign model suggests that either Sennacherib took the money, then proceeded to lay siege; or that he took the money and left, with the 2 Kgs 19 account as a later reinterpretation attributing deliverance to the Lord. Scholars prefer the one-campaign model because it aligns with Sennacherib's annals, which record only one military incursion (Shea, "Sennacherib's Second Palestinian Campaign," 401–18), as well as with the presence of only one destruction layer in the region (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 68). The biblical material does

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not necessitate two campaigns. (For a complete survey of scholarship on Sennacherib's campaign, see Grabbe, "Two Centuries of Sennacherib Study," 20–36.)

Critical Discussion of Hezekiah's Kingdom

Judah's power and size under Hezekiah's reign is likewise debated. Recent archaeological discoveries such as the Siloam tunnel and the *lmlk* jars provide insight into Jerusalem at the time.

Jerusalem Expansion

Although scholars debate when Jerusalem underwent expansion and fortification, several recent discoveries indicate this occurred during Hezekiah's reign (see Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, 226–29; Geva, "The Western Boundary of Jerusalem," 84–85; see also Broshi, "Expansion of Jerusalem," 21–23; Tushingham, "The Western Hill of Jerusalem," 137–43; Bahat, "Was Jerusalem Really that Large," 709–12). Pottery fragments from tombs in the valley of Hinnom indicate the expansion of an eighth-century settlement in the area (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 44–45; Killebrew, "Biblical Jerusalem," 337; Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 245–46). Significant residential expansions appeared during this period as well, with civilian expansions preceding military fortifications (as indicated by portions of the wall being constructed over the foundations of domestic dwellings) (Reich and Shukron, "The Urban Development of Jerusalem, 209–18; Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 55–56; Tatum, "Jerusalem in Conflict," 296–97; see also Isa 22:10–11). Jerusalem's population was 6,000–20,000 inhabitants during this time. The increase was likely due to economic and trade growth, as well as the influx of refugees from the Assyrian invasion to the north and the fall of Samaria (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 48; Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 55; Broshi, "Expansion of Jerusalem," 21–26). The military fortifications probably followed Hezekiah's decision to break with Assyria in favor of a relationship with Egypt; he likely would have anticipated an Assyrian campaign to bring Jerusalem back under Assyrian control (Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 45–60; Younger, *Hezekiah in History*, 47).

The Siloam Tunnel

The Siloam tunnel connects Jerusalem with the Gihon Spring east of the city, which may have ensured a water supply in the event of a siege. (For alternative proposed functions, see Tatum, "Jerusalem in Conflict," 297; Ussishkin, "The Water Systems of Jerusalem," 301–03). The spring itself was flanked with guard towers (Reich and Shukron, "Light at the End of the Tunnel," 22–23; "The System of Rock-Cut Tunnels," 5–17). The tunnel channeled water to the pool of Siloam, allowing the city access to water while minimizing enemy accessibility to the city (Ussishkin, "The Water Systems of Jerusalem," 289–307). An inscription attributes construction to the rule of Hezekiah (Ussishkin, "Original Length of the Siloam Tunnel," 82–95). Second Kings 20:20 and 2 Chr 32:2–6, 30 likewise record its construction.

*The *lmlk* Jars*

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Archaeologists discovered a series of jars in the 1860s, bearing the inscription *lmlk*. The label means “for/of the King,” designating royal property. Found in several urban locations, including Jerusalem, Lachish, and Ramat Rachel, they may have been part of Hezekiah’s preparations for Sennacherib’s campaign (Fox, *In the Service of the King*, 219–20; Vaughn, *Theology, History and Archeology*, 166). Due to the large quantity of them found in the destruction layer of Sennacherib’s march, many scholars date them to the time of Hezekiah, though similar jars may have been used before and after his reign (Ussishkin, “The Destruction of Lachish,” 28–57; see also Maier and Shai, “Pre-LMLK Jars,” 108–23; Vaughn, *Theology, History and Archeology*, 138–40). The inscriptions on the jars occasionally include the name of an official, but this sheds no light on their function (Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archeology*, 90–93). Though the function of the jars remains a matter of debate (see Mommsen, Perlman, and Yellin, “The Provenience of the *lmlk* Jars,” 89–113; Fox, *In the Service of the King*, 223–25), scholarly opinion favors seeing them as evidence of Hezekiah’s preparation of supplies in areas that would be targeted during an Assyrian campaign (Na’aman, “Sennacherib’s Campaign,” 75; “Hezekiah’s Fortified Cities,” 12–14; Borowski, “Hezekiah’s Reforms,” 152–54). Other opinions are that they were used for storing produce, either for taxation or to support the increased population (Rainey, “Wine from the Royal Vineyards,” 177–87; Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 56–57).

Religious Reforms

The Bible represents Hezekiah’s religious reforms as his most significant action. Hezekiah removed the high places and idols from Judah and kept the commandments of the Lord (2 Kgs 18:1–8, 22).

Critical Debate over Historicity

There is considerable debate as to whether the reforms are historical. Those defending the historicity of the biblical account generally assume the proposed situations justify widespread reform (Rowley, *Men of God*, 98–132; Weinfeld, “Cult Centralization in Israel,” 202–12; McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 15–17; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 132–42; Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 218–20; Lowery, *The Reforming Kings*, 142–68). Challenging the historicity of the account requires that the reform accounts are actually representations of Josiah’s reforms projected onto Hezekiah’s reign (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur geschichte Israels*, 25; Na’aman, “Debated Historicity of Hezekiah’s Reform,” 179–95; Edelman, “Hezekiah’s Alleged Cultic Centralization,” 395–434).

Potential Problems. Issues surrounding the historicity of the reforms include:

- How extensive were the reforms?
- Where were they enforced?
- Which destruction layers correspond with Sennacherib?
- Which (if any) destruction layers would indicate Hezekiah’s destruction of a high place?
- Why were the located religious sites decommissioned and subsequently destroyed?

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Young, among others, believes the archaeological evidence is inconclusive (e.g., Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 91–121, especially 120–21).

Archaeological Evidence. A Yahwistic temple in Arad was initially claimed as evidence of Hezekiah's reforms. The temple was destroyed and the courtyard was filled in, covering the altar (Herzog, Aharoni, Rainey, and Moshkovitz, "Israelite Fortress," 1–34). A subsequent study, however, argued that the temple was not in use during Hezekiah's time, having been destroyed in 734 BC, prior to Hezekiah's rise to the throne (Herzog, "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad," 3–109). This site does show evidence of the destruction of a religious center outside of Jerusalem, but because of the conflicting dates, the evidence is inconclusive.

Archaeologists who found a dismantled horned altar in Beer-sheba, in a storehouse destroyed during Sennacherib's campaign, initially presented it as evidence of Hezekiah's reforms (Aharoni, "Horned Altar of Beer-sheba," 2–6; "Excavations at Tel Beer-sheba," 154–56). Several aspects of this initial claim are questionable, including the dating of the altar, the dating of the destruction level, the identification of the biblical Beer-sheba with Tel Beer-sheba, and the original location of the altar (see Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 96–97). The dismantled altar of Beer-sheba may represent additional evidence of the destruction of cultic sites outside of Jerusalem, but the evidence is still inconclusive due to the debated nature of the artifacts.

Criticism of the Biblical Account

Though archaeological evidence for religious reforms may be inconclusive, the biblical witness clearly attributes these events to Hezekiah's reign (2 Kgs 18:1–8, 22). Hezekiah's actions match the prescribed theological standard by which the authors of the Deuteronomistic History (Judges-Kings) judge the nation's leaders. The theological alignment of the reforms with the ideology of the text has caused some scholars to question the accuracy of the accounts (e.g., Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 101), though this is unnecessary if the ideology was birthed out of the reforms themselves.

The reforms may have served many functions. First, they could have been part of Hezekiah's declaration of independence from Assyrian dominance by overturning all installations promoting the worship of Assyrian deities (Rosenbaum, "Deuteronomistic Tradition," 37–38; Bright, *A History of Israel*, 282–84). However, scholars have questioned the imposition of an Assyrian religious system in Judah (Dalley, "Recent Evidence from Assyrian Sources," 397; Cogan, "Judah under Assyrian Hegemony," 403–14).

Second, the reforms could have been part of Hezekiah's preparations for Assyrian invasion. Decommissioning external sanctuaries could have obtained their wealth for state purposes, protected it from the Assyrians (Handy, "Hezekiah's Unlikely Reform," 111–15), and prevented the cultic objects from being used as propaganda by the Assyrians (Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 110).

Third, the centralization of the worship of Yahweh could have been because of the influx of refugees from the northern kingdom. This would serve the purpose of establishing Jerusalem as a rival center to the northern Bethel and to create an ideal of a reunified kingdom around Jerusalem leadership (Silberman and Finkelstein, "Temple and Dynasty," 348–57).



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Hezekiah's reforms are sometimes thought to provide a historical context for the birth of Deuteronomistic theology. The influx of northern refugees leading to the centralization of the worship of Yahweh would explain the preservation of northern traditions in the Deuteronomistic theology while uncompromisingly holding to the idealized centralization of the cult in Jerusalem. The Deuteronomistic school of thought is usually understood as having developed through Josiah's reforms and into the exile. However, Josiah's reforms could have started with Hezekiah, which would explain several textual features of the Deuteronomistic corpus (see Young, *Hezekiah in History*, 116–20).

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NICHOLAS R. WERSE²²

MANASSEH, KING OF JUDAH (מְנַשֶּׁה, *menaseh*; Μανασσῆς, *Manassēs*), King of Judah. Son of Hezekiah who reigned ca. 687–642 BC; the longest-tenured king of Judah. Manasseh secured economic recovery for Judah after the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BC, but he is blamed for the fall of Judah due to corrupt religious practices and social injustices.

Overview

Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah and Hephzibah, and began his rule at the age of 12. Considering Manasseh's age and his father's illness (2 Kgs 20:1), it is likely he had a coregency with Hezekiah. After Hezekiah's death, Manasseh reinstated banned religious practices (2 Kgs

²² Werse, N. R. (2016). [Hezekiah, King of Judah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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21:3), but ruled with apparent peace and stability during a difficult chapter of Judah's history. The accounts of his reign connect him directly with the chain of events leading to the fall of Judah (Long, *2 Kings*, 248).

Second Kings 21:4–16 presents Manasseh as the worst of all the kings of Judah (Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 426). Jeremiah 15:4 likewise places on him the responsibility for the doom proclaimed against Jerusalem. Second Kings depicts Manasseh's misdeeds as a foil for Josiah's righteous behavior (Knoppers, *Two Nations Under One God*, 2:171–96; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 271–73). In the account of Josiah's religious reforms, Manasseh is singled out as having provoked God's anger and judgment (2 Kgs 23:12). Literary connections between 2 Kgs 21:3–16 and 2 Kgs 23 reinforce that Manasseh—the “mirror image” to Josiah—is both a historical king and a paradigmatic example in the theology of the Deuteronomistic History (Smelik, *Converting the Past* 154; Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen*, 155–67; Eynikel, “The Portrait of Manasseh”).

Other aspects of the biblical record are more positive. His long reign and peaceful death would usually be interpreted as signs of divine favor. Chronicles recounts Manasseh's sinful behavior, but preserves an account of repentance. After the king of Assyria—possibly Ashurbanipal—bound him and deported him to Babylon, Manasseh prayed to Yahweh, who responded by returning him to Jerusalem in peace (2 Chr 33:10–13; see Rainey, “Manasseh, King of Judah”, 159–60). His prayer is reimagined in the pseudepigraphal Prayer of Manasseh, written during the first century AD (see 2 Chr 33:19). Chronicles also describes a series of building projects and religious reforms instituted by Manasseh (2 Chr 33:14–17). In these texts, Manasseh is the apostate king who later humbled himself and repented.

The Context of Manasseh's Reign

Manasseh became king of Judah during hard times. Though Jerusalem did not fall to the Assyrians during Hezekiah's rebellion (2 Kgs 18–19; Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32:1–22), this victory was mitigated by the “crushing burden imposed upon Judah as a result of the conflict” (Rainey and Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 246). During the revolt, Sennacherib claimed to have destroyed 46 walled and fortified towns and deported a huge portion of the populace as captives (Rassam Cylinder, lines 52–60; Grayson & Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions*, 65–66). The newly conquered lands were distributed to the kings of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza, with heavy tributes. Sennacherib describes receiving a long list of gifts and payments from Hezekiah along with a promise of allegiance. These military, political, and economic losses resulted in Manasseh beginning his rule during a period of Assyrian dominance (Nelson, “*Realpolitik* in Judah (687–609 BC.)”, 181).

Politics under Manasseh

Relations with Assyria

In the first few decades of his rule, Manasseh served as a loyal Assyrian vassal. Esarhaddon claims to have enlisted the support of twenty-two kings, including Manasseh, in the construction of a new armory (Nin. A. v 54–vi 1; Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 23–

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24). Ashurbanipal lists Manasseh among the kings who supported his military effort against Egypt in 667 BC (Prism E 10, 13–21; Prism C II 37–67; Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk*).

Relations with Other Nations

Manasseh cultivated friendly relations with several surrounding kingdoms during his reign. He is said to have instituted the worship of Baal and Asherah “as Ahab king of Israel had done” (2 Kgs 21:3). Ahab erected an altar to Baal and made an Asherah pole as a result of an alliance between Israel and Tyre (1 Kgs 16:32–33). Manasseh may be following Ahab’s lead politically and commercially as well as religiously (Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre*, 263–64; “Phoenician Deities”, 190–1; McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 20–27).

Judah immediately follows Tyre in the list of kingdoms in an alliance that Esarhaddon called “the twenty-two kings of Hatti [Syria-Palestine], the seacoast, and the midst of the sea” (Nin. A. v 54–73a; Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 23). The establishment of Canaanite cults under Manasseh may simply reflect the friendly relations between the neighboring kingdoms (on the archaeology of reforms, see Fried, “The High Places”, 444–50). Manasseh also was linked to southern Palestine through Meshullemeth, daughter of Haruz of Jotbah (2 Kgs 21:19; Lehmann, “Survival and Reconstruction”, 303; Niemann, “Choosing Brides”, 230–31). Jotbah is known from the wilderness wanderings, which links Meshullemeth with Edom and Arabia (McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 24; Num 33:33; Deut 10:7). The garden of Uzza, named as Manasseh and Amon’s burial place, could have associations with an Arabian deity and may have been a religious location in honor of Meshullemeth (McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 24–25; Gray, *I & II Kings*, 710; in contrast, see Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 252–54). Political ties to the south would have assisted Manasseh’s agricultural development in the Negev and southern wilderness (Finkelstein, “Archaeology”, 176–81).

Manasseh’s Deportation

While aspects of Manasseh’s reign can be corroborated with other historical sources, the account of Manasseh’s deportation in 2 Chr 33:10–13 is problematic. The building projects listed in 2 Chr 33:14–17 have long been considered to reflect real historical practice, and it is possible that they lend credibility to the deportation account (Rainey and Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 250).

One theory regarding the deportation is that Manasseh and the Phoenician kingdoms may have supported the rebellion of Shamash-shum-ukin against his brother Ashurbanipal in the mid-seventh century BC (Rassam Cylinder III 96–106; Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk*). After putting down the rebellion, Ashurbanipal interrogated the kings who supported it. Manasseh was able to convince Ashurbanipal of his trustworthiness, and was reinstated as king (Rainey, “Manasseh, King of Judah”, 159–60; McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 25–26).

Though this is a plausible reconstruction, it remains hypothetical since there is no parallel account in Assyrian records. It is also difficult to explain why the episode would be omitted from Kings, especially since such a punishment would validate its negative assessment of Manasseh. Alternatively, the story could be a literary device that uses Manasseh as a

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theological paradigm for repentance and return from exile (Ben Zvi, “Prelude to a Reconstruction”, 39–41; Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 113). Given the weakness of Judah, which necessitated a submissive stance toward Assyria, the immense danger of rebelling so close to the Assyrian border, and the political and economic advantages Judah gained through its alliance with Phoenicia, the historical evidence does not fully square with the account (Evans, “Judah’s Foreign Policy,” 167). An absence of archaeological change during Manasseh’s reign further signals continuity in his station as loyal Assyrian vassal (Fried, “The High Places”, 444–50).

Religion under Manasseh

Condemnation of Religion under Manasseh

Religious practices under Manasseh are denounced in the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kgs 21:2–7), as well as in other prophetic texts. This account depicts a flagrant rejection of the Deuteronomic law as shown by the comprehensive list of Manasseh’s sins:

- He followed practices of the nations (Deut 18:9).
- He rebuilt shrines destroyed by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:3–4).
- He built altars to Baal (Jer 11:13).
- He placed image of Asherah in the temple (Deut 16:21).
- He worshiped the host of heaven (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Zeph 1:5).
- He burned his son as an offering (Deut 12:31; 18:10; 2 Kgs 17:17; 23:10; Jer 7:31; 32:35).
- He practiced illicit forms of divination: soothsaying (Isa 2:6), consulting false prophets (Jer 14:14; Ezek 12:24; 13:6, 9, 23; 21:26, 28), and necromancy (Deut 18:11; Isa 8:19; 19:3).

This catalog of transgressions is so comprehensive and offensive that it effectively would make Manasseh the sinful king *par excellence* (Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 1:441; Evans, “Naram-Sin and Jeroboam”, 123–24). Not only did Manasseh violate the prescribed manner of worship in Deuteronomy, but he led Judah to sin in the process and kindled the anger of God against the nation (2 Kgs 21:9, 11; Blanco Wißmann, «*Er tat das Rechte ...*», 161–73). Manasseh stands out as a ruler of the worst kind.

Sources of Religion under Manasseh

Illicit religious practices under Manasseh would have originated in the local customs of Canaanite religion, rather than an Assyrian system of belief imposed on vassal states (Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 272). There is no evidence of forced worship in Assyrian annals, nor were vassal states prevented from practicing their forms of worship (Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 42–64). In the case of Judah, local syncretistic practices could have flourished based on influences from Phoenicia and the south due to trade and political ties. The worship of Baal, Asherah, and the host of heaven are best explained as expressions of local religiosity (McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 22).

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Manasseh could have made concessions to tribal leadership and local kinship groups because of his weakened royal position following the Assyrian takeover (Lehmann, “Survival and Reconstruction”, 305; Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 80). It is also possible that the popularity of Hezekiah’s reforms suffered due to their perceived ineffectiveness in bringing Assyrian downfall (contra Isa 10:12–19; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 273). The brief mention of Uzza as Manasseh and Amon’s place of burial is not entirely clear, but could suggest a link with the Arabian astral god Al-‘Uzzah (Gray, *I & II Kings*, 710–11; McKay, *Religion in Judah*, 24–25).

Manasseh and Child Sacrifice

Manasseh is accused of burning his son as an offering (2 Kgs 21:6; 2 Chr 33:6), though the historicity of human sacrifice in ancient Israel and its presence in Yahwistic religious practice is contentious. There are very few mentions of human sacrifice in the biblical account, and they are universally negative; it is an exemplar of detestable Canaanite religious practice (Deut 12:31; 18:10; Lev 18:21; 20:2–5; 2 Kgs 3:27; 16:3; 17:17, 31; 21:6; 23:10; Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:35). Biblical texts tend to associate these offerings with Molech (Lev 18:21; 20:2–5; 1 Kgs 11:7; 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35) and the Valley of Ben-Hinnom (2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 7:31–32; 19:6; 32:35; see also Barrick, *King and the Cemeteries*, 81–103), and Ahaz and Manasseh are the only kings accused of burning their sons as sacrifices (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6). The nature of the practice is not manifestly clear, though it is most likely linked to a kind of necromantic divination during situations of extreme crisis.

Debate over the issue revolves around whether Israelite forms of the practice could have been derived from Phoenician offerings to Melqart of Tyre (Heider, *Cult of Molek*, 403–5; “Molech”, 585) or if child sacrifice could have been an indigenous practice that infrequently appeared in religious practice in ancient Judah (Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 283–99). Although Manasseh is linked to child sacrifice in the biblical tradition, the precise nature and origins of the practice are subject to debate (see also Day, *Molech*; Lewis, *Cults of the Dead*).

The Economy under Manasseh

Judah’s serious loss of territory after Hezekiah’s rebellion had terrible economic consequences. Sennacherib reassigned the Shephelah and western territories to neighboring kingdoms (Finkelstein, “Archaeology,” 178). In spite of these setbacks, Manasseh appears to have successfully shifted agricultural production to the Beersheba Valley (Thareani-Sussely, “ ‘Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh’ Reconsidered”, 75). Archaeological evidence suggests stable economic growth and expansion under Manasseh (Knauf, “Glorious Days”, 166–73; Grabbe, “Kingdom of Judah,” 101–4; Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 76–81).

Though direct evidence does not exist, the combination of the Chronicler’s account of Manasseh’s building projects and the general situation of recovery could be evidence that the Siloam Tunnel and the palace at Ramat Rahel were both achievements of Manasseh (2 Chr 33:14; Knauf, “Hezekiah or Manasseh?”; Finkelstein, “Archaeology”). Although his legacy in

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Kings and Chronicles is negative, it is likely Manasseh preserved the Judaeen state from collapse.

Manasseh's Role in the Fall of Judah

Although the Chronicler suggests that Manasseh later repented, the sins of the king are ultimately cited as the reason for Yahweh's judgment of Judah (2 Kgs 23:12, 26; 24:3). The message of Jeremiah cites the sins of Judah and the monarchy as the causes of the impending judgment (Jer 15:4). As Manasseh and Ahab are already linked in Kings, Manasseh's shedding of innocent blood could refer to Ahab's persecution of the prophets as portrayed in the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1–29; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 270). Not only is this an instance of the persecution of the innocent, but it is also a rejection of Yahweh's word.

Finally, the blame given to Manasseh for the exile is an important structural element in the literary development of the Deuteronomistic History. Noth originally suggested that the books of Joshua through Kings constituted a single work, written during the Babylonian exile around 550 BC. Prefixed to the beginning of this work was a shortened form of Deuteronomy, which deeply influenced the linguistic style and theological perspective of the history.

Cross revised this picture by suggesting that there were two editions of the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr1 and Dtr2). Dtr1 focused on two main themes: the destruction of Samaria due to the sins of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:34), and the promise given to David and Yahweh's election of Jerusalem (2 Sam 7). Dtr2 focuses on the destruction and defeat that was a part of Yahweh's judgment against Jerusalem, manifested in the conquest and deportation by the Babylonians. Manasseh is to Judah as Jeroboam is to Israel—the one who sealed Judah's fate (Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 289; see more recently Blanco Wißmann, «*Er tat das Rechte ...*», 161–73). Cross' suggestion has been met with a number of modifications and counter-suggestions, but it remains one of the most influential theories regarding the redactional development of the Deuteronomistic History (van Keulen, *Manasseh through the Eyes of the Deuteronomists*, 14–51; Hutton, *Transjordanian Palimpsest*, 79–156).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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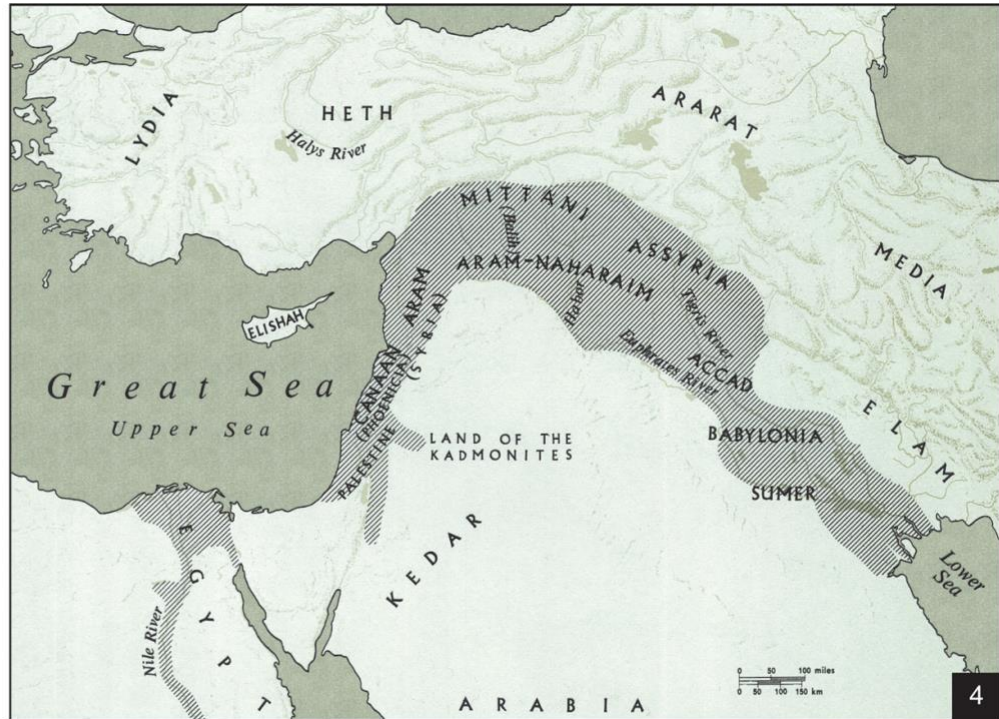
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