

## Isaiah

### 1A. Historical Background

The opening verse locates Isaiah in the southern kingdom during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. His ministry began in the year that King Uzziah died (6:1; 740 B.C.).

#### 1B. The divided kingdom, Assyria, and Babylon

Isaiah's ministry overlapped the demise of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. (as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel overlap the southern demise of 587-86).

Recall that 2 Kings outlines matters of both the northern and southern kingdoms (Chronicles centers attention mainly on the South).

We pick up context for Isaiah with the parallel kings of Jeroboam II in Samaria and Uzziah in Jerusalem (2 Ki. 14:23- 20:21; Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26, is Azariah, 2 Ki. 15).

Obviously Isaiah lived during the period of Assyrian ascendancy (IOT 276). Assyria reaches its peak in 664 B.C. when it overran Egypt all the way south up the Nile to Thebes (half way down the Red Sea on the Nile). Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, will fall to Babylon in 612. In 609 to 605 (at Carchemish in north Syria) the Assyrian Empire is destroyed. Thus:

#### The rise and fall of Assyria (790-605 B.C.)

Ascendancy	Jeroboam II, Uzziah (overlap begins 790)
"	Isaiah 740
"	Northern Exile 722
Peak	Egypt 664
Decline	Babylonian independence 626
End	Babylonian conquest 612-605

Note the new kid on the block - Babylon which will take the southern kingdom captive in 586 B.C. Isaiah anticipates both captivities and lives through the first one!

#### 2B. Life in the southern kingdom

The two major kings of Isaiah's time were Ahaz and Hezekiah. The former was extremely wicked, and the latter was an especially good king.

Because of Ahaz, the Lord humbled Judah (II Chron. 28:19-27; He sought the aid of Assyria, worshipped gods of Damascus, closed the doors of the temple, and set up altars to other gods at every street corner).

Hezekiah is noted for cleansing the temple and humbling himself in his pride and thus receiving a 15 year extension of life, told to him by Isaiah (2 Ki 20:4-6; Isa. 38:5). But his son, Manasseh, revitalized idolatry (2 Ki 21:4-6).

The people of Judah were all too ready to worship the stars and engage in sordid forms of idolatry in the temple of Yahweh (2 Ki 21:3-4; more evil than the original Canaanites). Isaiah brought a message from God to a people who would hear but not understand (cf. Isaiah's mission, 6:9-13).

### 3A. Literary analysis

#### 1B. Structure

There are definitely two halves to the book, 1-39 and 40-66. Chapter 39:6 "signals the transition from the first half of Isaiah and its concern with the Assyrian crisis to the affairs of the Judean exiles in Babylon" (IOT 276). What you possess will be "carried off to Babylon" including your children!

The first half predicts what the second half presupposes (cf. 3:1; 5:1-7, 13, the vineyard refers to both kingdoms, thus exile of both is future. In 45:13 Cyrus of Babylon frees the exiles; this presupposes the Babylonian exile as a past even. In 58:12, the rebuilding presupposes something already torn down (likewise 61:4, rebuild).

But this division (what the 1st half predicts, the 2nd half presupposes) is not absolute because we have remnant from Babylonia, in the first section! 11:11 thus presupposes both exiles!

## 2B. Authorship

The author of the book is Isaiah, son of Amoz (1:1). Critical scholarship has divided the book, usually between two authors for 1-39 and 40-66 (the second is usually called deuter-Isaiah, or 2nd Isaiah).

That Isaiah authored the entire book is clear from the NT. Some examples are 1) John 12:38-41 where quotes from both sections are clearly attributed to Isaiah, and 2) Acts 8:30 where the second section, critically assigned to someone other than Isaiah, is attributed to Isaiah.

## 3B. The perspective of 40-66

Therefore, the exilic setting of the latter section is prophetic (seers view the future as present, JFB, 504). Isaiah presupposes the Exile as a prophetic certainty in order to look beyond it with hope of restoration (he sees the future beyond the exile as if it were present though he is living before the Exile).

That the Exile had not yet occurred is important to a message that will have a larger theme unfold from the notions of exile and restoration; Isaiah looks far beyond the history of captivity by the nations to Israel's place in the realization of God's purpose of making Abraham's offspring a blessing to the nations.

## 4B. Outline (a broad reading structure)

### I. Introduction 1-6

### II. Judah and the nations with Ahaz as king, (King Ahaz is in the backdrop), 7-35

### III. Judah and the nations with Hezekiah as king, (King Hezekiah is in the backdrop), 36-39

### IV. Judah and the nations with Yahweh as King 40-66

Thus, when God comes, "His arm rules" as a shepherd (40:10-11). The creation promise will be fulfilled (40:21). As not one star in the heavens is missing, each called by name, so God will fulfill His purpose and bring the plans of princes to naught (40:26, 23). The end of history will be reached by restoration through a suffering king (Isa. 53).

## 5B. Genre

The book is an example of prophetic foreshortening; that is, it is prophetically complex; what Isaiah sees unfolds like a telescope (i.e. prophetic telescoping or prophetic perspective). The prophecy is like a closed telescope and what is being prophesied is like the telescope compressed and unopened. The rectangles inside each other extend out in historical realization.

## 6B. Theme

The theme is the restoration of Israel to God's Kingship from sin and captivity through the judgment of the nations and the suffering of the coming Messiah King.

## 4A. Contents

### 1B. Means of restoration

We begin with underserving/suffering Israel (1:2-3; 5:1-4, vineyard, 13; 6:5).

Israel will be saved through election of a remnant (1:9; 6:13; 10:20-21) and judgment of the nations (Assyria, 10; Babylon, 13, 21; the Philistines, 14; Moab, 15; Damascus, 17; Ethiopia, 18; Egypt, 19; Edom, 21; Tyre and Sidon, 23; the whole earth, 24; God is angry with all nations, 34). This is a historical stage in the outworking of his restoration of man and woman his fallen image bearers that typifies and promises the ultimate restoration that will come through the suffering Messiah/king (6:7, 13; 7:14; 9:1-7; 40:1-5; 53:10-11; see Odendaal 39).

### 2B. The new heavens and new earth

Thus return to the land (65:25, lion and lamb) prefigures return to Eden; it was a foretaste in small sample of the glory of the Lord yet to shine on the nations of the earth for there is mercy in the midst of judgment. This is a promise of national blessing that bears testimony to eternal

salvation of a people redeemed from the fall. Comfort and praise are the inevitable response to this good news.

Looking ahead to the NT and beyond, Isaiah tells us that the kingdom of God comes in the context of Israel but has its scope in the world of nations (Odendaal, *Esch. Expectation*, 187).

Ultimately Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord manifested in a new heavens and a new earth that is tied to God's Sabbath kingship established at creation, 65:17; 66:1-2). Then there will be a glorious rest for the root of Jesse (11:10).

In that final day, Israel will be the world; the city of God will embrace the nations (2:1-5; 55:5).

Then the world will be saved, in remnant, in the people of God from all nations for they will be the world, the redeemed human family dwelling in peace, security, and the joy of fellowship with God the Almighty Creator, Lord of History, and King of Kings.

### 3B. The continuing Sabbath

The Sabbath principle (Odendaal, 6, 30, 39) is relevant until that final day dawns as a foretaste of fellowship now with our Sabbath King in token of that final day of rest at the end of history (Isa. 58:13-14). Thus, it is taken up in Jesus clarification of the Ten Commandments for the new Israel, the new 12, the new nation with new wine to be taught to the ends of the earth until the end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20).

The return from captivity in Babylon was very disappointing to many who saw the first temple (Ezra 3:12). But Isaiah shows that that very return and rebuilding of temple and city is an embodiment of the gospel of Christ and release from captivity through him (Isa. 61:1-2).

## 5A. Message for us

1) Our comfort is that God is saving a remnant today in this time between the comings of Christ. Yes, He judges, but He saves Israel and the nations in remnant (cf. His sword, Mat 10).

Paul repeats Isaiah in Romans 10:21 on the sinfulness of Israel and on God's hardening (Rom. 11:7-8; He passed over them in judgment leaving them as clay in the sunlight of his holiness and thus hardened them). However, He will deliver them in covenant fulfillment (11:26-27) in the remnant (Rom. 9:29). In the remnant is how all Israel is saved (Rom. 11:26).

2) How does God save Israel and the nations in remnant?

It is through the coming king who is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. He was stricken smitten and afflicted (v. 7) but the deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that justice gave (v. 10a). His death is efficacious (10b-11; He will have an offspring; 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree").

3) God is Sovereign Lord of History

Thus, we have hope for not only personal salvation through the promised one of Isaiah; we also have hope for the redemption of history itself; for a spreading of the lordship of Christ to the ends of the earth within the historical process.

Then the lion will lay down with the lamb and there will be peace instituted by the prince of peace.

Afterward, history will reach its destined goal. Then we shall enter into eternal Sabbath rest with the king of kings and lord of lords, the lord of the Sabbath, our Lord Jesus.