

Isaiah

1. Introduction – The book of Isaiah contains the prophecies of Isaiah, who ministered as a prophet to Judah prior to the exile. The richness and beauty and length of this book set it apart from other books in the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament quotes frequently from Isaiah, making Isaiah a very important book for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testament. Isaiah deals with God’s judgment, his mercy, and his trustworthiness.
2. Author and date – Authorship and unity of the book are huge points of controversy. The very first verse attributes authorship to Isaiah, son of Amoz. He ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (2 Kings 19-20, Isaiah 1:1) in the latter half of the 8th century B.C. In the late 18th century, the unity and authorship of Isaiah were called into question by liberal scholars based on two primary considerations: 1) they could not accept the supernatural claims of predictive prophecy and were forced to date the book after some of the detailed prophecies (like naming Cyrus (44:28)) had been fulfilled; 2) they recognized significant differences in the historical situation, linguistic style, and theological concerns in ch. 40-66 compared to ch. 1-39. It became fashionable to refer to ch. 40-66 as “deutero-Isaiah” (Second Isaiah). Later scholars found even more distinctions in the text and theorized a 3rd, 4th, 5th, and even 6th Isaiah!

Conservative scholars responded with several counter-arguments: 1) Passages from both sections are attributed by the NT to Isaiah (e.g., John cites 6:10 and 53:1 in consecutive verses and identifies both as Isaiah). 2) Other prophets, such as Zephaniah, Nahum, and Jeremiah, seem to use very similar language to Isaiah 40-66, which suggests Isaiah was already available to them before the late date theorized by liberal scholars. 3) Many common themes and word choices are found in the two sections; 4) Extrabiblical literature and manuscripts from the 2nd century B.C. show no awareness of two authors, two sections, or two dates of composition. The Isaiah manuscript from Qumran shows no break at all between the end of ch. 39 and the beginning ch. 40.

More recent conservative scholarship has shown an openness to considering the book as a product of a later editor or author writing an addendum or update under divine inspiration. This is not different in principle from allowances that conservatives make concerning editorial additions and updates in the writings attributed to Moses given that those writings include an account of his death (Deut. 34). However, at least two further considerations make this approach seem unsatisfactory: 1) in John’s reference to Isaiah, he seems to attribute the sayings to a single *person* named Isaiah, not simply to a single *book* called Isaiah; 2) evidence indicates that Kings used the complete book of Isaiah, and Kings was completed by the middle of the exile. Therefore, a single author seems the most natural conclusion for those who accept the validity of predictive prophecy and the inerrancy of Scripture.

3. Major themes:
 - a. **Sons’ names as signs:** Isaiah’s children – Shear-Jashub (“a remnant will return”) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (“quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil”); God’s son – Immanuel (“God with us”) and the child in 9:6.
 - b. **The servant:** Four sections have been identified as “Servant Songs” (42:1-7, 49:1-9, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12). The servant will be used by God to fulfill God’s plans. Interpreters have wrestled over the identity of the servant, whether the servant is corporate Israel or an individual (the Messiah). This can best be understood as pointing to the faithful remnant of God’s people; the faithful remnant is ultimately shown to be a single person, pointing us to the faithful Man, the true Israelite, Jesus.
 - c. **The Holy One of Israel:** God reveals his holy character, the magnitude of Israel’s offense against God, and God’s gracious character in bringing the remnant back to himself.
4. Structure of the book (Hill and Walton):

<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Introduction<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Overture (1-5)ii. Commissioning (6)b. Assyrian Context<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Oracles at the time of Syro-Ephraimite coalition (7-12)ii. Oracles against nations (13-23)iii. Apocalyptic conclusion to oracles against the nations (24-27)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">iv. “Woe” oracles at the time of the siege of Jerusalem (28-33)v. Apocalyptic conclusion of “woe” oracles (34-35)vi. Resolution of the Assyrian crisis (36-37)vii. Transition to Babylonian crisis (38-39)c. Projected oracles addressing exiles (40-55)d. Projected oracles addressing postexilic situation (56-66)
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Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.