

BOOK OF ISAIAH

Approximate date: 700s B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); 500s B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate); 500s-300s B.C.E. (Left)

Time period: the Southern Kingdom of Judah preparing to see the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim fall to Assyria

Prophet/author(s): Isaiah son of Amoz (Right); Isaiah son of Amoz and later editors (some conservative-moderate); Isaiah son of Amoz, “Deutero-Isaiah” (some conservative-moderate, some Left); Isaiah son of Amoz, “Deutero-Isaiah,” “Tritio-Isaiah” (some conservative-moderate, some Left)

Location of author: Land of Israel or Jerusalem (Right, some conservative-moderate); Land of Israel, Jerusalem, and/or Babylon (some conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and their location: people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Right, some conservative-moderate); Southern Kingdom Israelites in Babylonian exile (some conservative-moderate, Left)

People:

Isaiah (son of Amoz), Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz (son of Jotham), Hezekiah, Rezin, Pekah (son of Remaliah), Shear-Jashub, son of Tabeel, Uriah (the priest), Zechariah (son of Jeberekiah), Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Sargon, Dedanites, Shebna, Eliakim (son of Hilkiah), Leviathan (spiritual principality), Joah (son of Asaph), Tirhakah, Adrammelech, Sharezer, Esarhaddon, Merodach-Baladan, Baladan, Cyrus, Sabeans, Bel (deity), Nebo (deity), Molech (deity), Lybians, Lydians

People mentioned:

Jacob, David, Philistines, Jesse, Abraham, Sarah, Noah, Moses

Places:

Judah, Jerusalem, Zion, Aram, Upper Pool, Washerman’s Field, Damascus, Samaria, Assyria, Egypt, Shiloh, Galilee of the Gentiles/Nations, Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, rock of Oreb, Aiath, Migron, Micmash, Geba, Ramah, Gibeah of Saul, Gallim, Laishah, Anathoth, Madmenah, Gebim, Nob, Cush, Elam, Babylonia, Euphrates River, Ar, Kir, Dibon, Medeba, Heshbon, Elealeh, Jahaz, Zoar, Eglath, Shelishiyah, Horonaim, Nimrim, Ravine of the Poplars, Eglaim, Beer Elim, Dimon, Arnon, Kir Hareseth, Sibmah, Jazer, Aroer, Valley of Rephaim, Nile, Zoan, Ashdod, Desert by the Sea, Media, Dumah, Seir, Arabia, Tema, Kedar, Palace of the Forest, Lower Pool, Old Pool, Tarshish, Tyre, Cyprus, Sidon, Shihor, Wadi of Egypt, Mount Perazim, Valley of Gibeon, Ariel, Hanes, Negev, Topheth, Sharon, Araban, Bashan, Carmel, Edom, Bozrah, Lachish, Sepharvaim, Gozan, Haran, Rezech, Eden, Tel Assar, Hena, Ivvah, Nineveh, land of Ararat, Sela, Seba, region of Aswan, Midian, Ephah, Nebaioth, Valley of Achor, Tubal, Greece

Places mentioned:

Sodom, Gomorrah, Lebanon, Eden

Key Themes:

Judah is rebuked as though it is rebellious Sodom and Gomorrah, but redemption is promised if it seeks justice and what is right / Jerusalem will have to be judged by God because of its sin, but it will be restored as evil is purged / the nations will come streaming to Zion in the Last Days to be taught God’s Torah / the Day of the LORD will be a time when idols fail humankind and people will try to hide themselves from Him to no avail / the Lord promises to significantly judge Judah and Jerusalem, issuing great disgrace upon them / Jerusalem will be cleansed from its sins / the Lord compares His people to a vineyard that produces bad grapes / a series of woes is issued against the evil deeds of the people, who although judged, will still be restored from their dispersion / the Prophet Isaiah is given a vision of God’s

throne and the Heavenly host / the Prophet Isaiah tells King Ahaz that the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim will be shattered as a people in due time / facing calamity as a nation, the answer for all Israel¹ will be found in Immanuel, the Messiah to come / Assyria's plot against Judah will be foiled, as Assyria will be used by God to judge Ephraim / Immanuel's land will be hit hard by Assyria, as Assyria's advance will sweep into Judah / the Coming One will be a cause of stumbling for both Houses of Israel / looking to mediums and spiritists for help, in place of God, will only bring further despair / Galilee of the Gentiles/Nations will be honored by the birth of a unique Son / the Lord will severely punish Israel for its evil, a serious cause of which is its bad leaders and false prophets / after punishing His people via Assyria, the Lord will punish Assyria for its own evil / despite the numbers of Israel, only a remnant of them will be saved in the end / a righteous Branch will come forth from the line of Jesse, heralding great righteousness and peace / the nations will rally to this Branch / the Lord will bring back His people (Judah and Israel) to the Promised Land / as they are restored, God's people will recognize Him as their salvation / the Lord will enact a great punishment upon the Babylonians / as Babylon is destroyed, the Lord will restore His people to the Promised Land / the people of God issue a taunt against Babylon, who is presumably led by a "morning star" / Isaiah says that the Lord will judge Assyria / Isaiah says that the Lord will judge the Philistines / Isaiah says that the Lord will judge Moab / Isaiah says that the Lord will judge Damascus / Isaiah says that the Lord will judge Cush / Isaiah says that the Lord will judge Egypt / many in Egypt will come to know and worship the God of Israel / the Lord has Isaiah strip naked as a testimony for Egypt and Cush and how their exiles will be taken away by the king of Assyria / Isaiah issues a word about the fall of Babylon / Isaiah issues words against Edom and Arabia / Isaiah issues a word about the fall of Jerusalem / Isaiah issues a word against Tyre / Isaiah prophesies how the Lord is going to judge the whole Earth / Isaiah prophesies of a praise to the Lord that will be sung in Judah when He judges the world / Isaiah speaks of God's great deliverance of Israel that will come / Isaiah issues a word against Ephraim, who specifically suffers from a drunkenness / the covenant of death that Israel has made will be annulled by God / Isaiah speaks of how David's city ("Ariel") will be besieged / God's people will seek Him, acknowledging His holiness / Isaiah says that Judah joining into an alliance with Egypt is considered sin by God / God will be gracious when those of Zion look to His way for help / the people will rejoice when God enacts His vindication / Isaiah appeals that the people not look to Egypt for their help, but rather to the Lord / Isaiah describes the (ideal) kingdom of righteousness / Isaiah issues words to the women of Jerusalem / help will be found in the Lord, when His people face distress (by Assyria) / God's judgment has cosmic ramifications / God's judgment upon Edom is compared to His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah / those who are redeemed have great joy in the Lord / Sennacherib of Assyria attacks Judah / the Assyrian field commander insults Israel's king, but most significantly Israel's God / Sennacherib sends an intimidating letter to King Hezekiah, indicating how other gods failed to deliver their people from Assyria's power / King Hezekiah prays to the Lord that Judah would be delivered from Assyria / Isaiah prophesies of Sennacherib's fall / God's angel is responsible for the death of a significant part of the Assyrian army / returning to Nineveh, Sennacherib is assassinated by two of his sons / King Hezekiah is saved from dying by an illness / envoys from Babylon visit King Hezekiah, who shows them the state treasures of Judah / Isaiah tells Hezekiah that there will be an exile of his descendants to Babylon / the Prophet Isaiah calls for God's people to be given great comfort / the Prophet Isaiah describes the Lord as Israel's Helper / the Servant of the Lord will be His light to the nations / the Prophet Isaiah calls for the singing of great praise to the Lord / Israel, as God's designated servant, is blind to His Torah and His chastisement of them / Isaiah declares that only the Lord is Israel's Savior / God is merciful to Israel in spite of their unfaithfulness to Him / Israel is God's chosen, who will have His Spirit poured out upon them / idols made of human hands are nothing compared to the Almighty God / Isaiah says that the Lord will restore Jerusalem through a Cyrus, designated as being His "shepherd" / the Lord mocks the gods of Babylon, showing how they are futile to save anyone / the Lord speaks of the fall of Babylon, causes of which are its unrighteousness and mystical religion / the Lord speaks of the stubbornness of Israel / the Lord speaks of how those captured in Babylon will be able to flee / the Lord's Servant will not only be responsible for restoring the tribes of Israel, but will be a light of God's salvation to the nations / God's restoration of Israel will be a worldwide affair / the Servant of God is One who obeys Him / the salvation that God will enact for Zion will be everlasting / the wrath intended by God for Israel will be poured out on Israel's enemies in the long run / the Servant, the Messiah, sent by the Lord

¹ Isaiah 7:14 says that the sign will be *l'khem* (לַחֶמֶת), or "to you" in the plural.

will be scourged and rejected in spite of His faithful service / the Prophet Isaiah describes the future glory of Zion / the Lord invites those who are “thirsty” to come to Him / the salvation and regathering of Israel is to include foreigners / God issues a series of poignant accusations against the wicked / the Lord promises that He will restore comfort to those who are contrite / the Lord compares false fasting with true fasting / because no one else was there to act, the Lord Himself had to act to deal with the unrighteousness of His people / the restoration and glory of Zion will involve both Israel and the nations, and be a significantly impactful event / Isaiah details what the year of the Lord’s favor is to be / Zion’s new “name” will be its belovedness before the Lord / the day of God’s vengeance is described as a trodden winepress / Isaiah praises God as Israel’s Savior, imploring Him for His past deeds on their behalf, as well as His compassion in spite of Israel’s rebellion against Him / judgment will be issued by God upon those who eat pigs’ flesh and offer abominable sacrifices, yet such sins will be forgotten if one turns to Him / a New Heavens and a New Earth will be brought forward by God / judgment will be issued because of Israel’s abominations, but hope of restoration and return is given, as God punishes the world for its sin / as the judgment of the Lord is enacted, many from the nations will be brought in to serve Him as Levites / those who rebelled against the Lord will be killed by Him in judgment, being a reminder to all of His vengeance

Key Scriptures: Isaiah 1:11-20; 2:2-4; 6:1-8; 7:13-14; 8:13-16; 9:1, 6-7; 10:1-4, 20-23; 11:1-10, 12-16; 14:1-2, 12-15; 24:5-6, 19-21; 29:13-14, 22-24; 30:19-22; 32:3-8; 33:2-6; 40:1-10, 13; 42:5-7, 19-25; 43:10-12; 44:6-8; 45:15-17, 21-23; 46:9-11; 47:13-18; 49:5-7, 22-23; 51:4-6; 52:7-10, 52:13-53:12; 55:6-9; 56:1-3, 8; 59:15-20; 60:1-4; 61:1-3; 62:1-5; 63:7-10; 66:7-8, 18-21 / **Words of Judgment** (1:1-39:8); **Words of Comfort** (40:1-66:24)

Theological Summary: One of the most important and frequently discussed books of the Bible is undoubtedly the Book of Isaiah. In the Jewish theological tradition Isaiah (Heb. *Yeshayahu*, יֵשַׁעְיָהוּ) is the first of the Latter Prophets (considering that Joshua-Kings compose the Former Prophets). Many songs, important theological concepts, wisdom ideas, and even some Western social concepts are derived from Isaiah – sometimes without people even realizing it.³ Isaiah is a text that speaks in very broad terms to individuals, communities, and entire nations about their relationship with God. Isaiah is not something that is read easily like one of the histories of the Tanach, and requires a person to read it very observantly. It has been a widely considered and debated text throughout Jewish and Christian history, and this will probably continue as the Messianic movement grows.⁴

The Prophet depicted in this book is identified by name as Isaiah the son of Amoz (1:1), something that is upheld by the Apostolic Scriptures (Matthew 12:17-21; John 12:28-41; Romans 10:16, 20-21). This Isaiah was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Micah, beginning his service in 740 B.C.E., and some Jewish tradition considers him to be a relative of the royal court (b.*Megillah* 10b)⁵ and even sawn in two (cf. Hebrews 11:37).

Isaiah prophesied during the period of the Northern Kingdom of Israel’s decline and Assyria’s expansion. Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722-721 B.C.E., and the supplementary history behind Isaiah is largely found in 2 Kings 15-21 and 2 Chronicles 26-33. King Uzziah dies in 740 B.C.E. (6:1), ending a fifty-year period of stability and co-existence with the Northern Kingdom.⁶ Isaiah enters the scene and warns the Southern Kingdom of Judah that its sin will bring judgment by Babylon. Against this backdrop, much of Isaiah’s prophecy deals with the judgment and restoration of the Southern Kingdom, with the Northern Kingdom having already been judged,⁷ even though ultimately all of Israel will be restored – and it will have consequences for not just Israel but also the nations.

Many conservative scholars accept the premise that all of the prophecies in Isaiah are attributed to a single Isaiah. This is largely because of the commonality throughout the book, with themes seen such as

² Cf. Philippians 2:5-11.

³ G.W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *EXP*, 3:4.

⁴ Dillard and Longman, 268.

⁵ Grogan, in *EXP*, 3:4.

⁶ G.L. Robinson and R.K. Harrison, “Isaiah,” in *ISBE*, 2:886-887.

⁷ Oswald T. Allis, “Isaiah,” in *NIDB*, 472.

punishment, Jerusalem as God's holy mountain, and a highway being made by Him to Jerusalem. One of the strongest arguments made in favor of Isaianic unity is its usage of the term "Holy One of Israel" twelve times, and other various common words and phrases.⁸

Until modern times, the unity of the Book of Isaiah was something that was assumed by most scholars.⁹ Divisions that occur in Isaiah cause some to think that there are several different "Isaiahs" responsible for various parts of the text—perhaps as many as three. It is sometimes thought that chs. 1-35 begin with a series of prophecies about the Southern Kingdom in relation to Assyria, chs. 36-39 form an historical interlude, then introducing chs. 40-66.¹⁰ Chs. 36-66 are often referred to as Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah in various theological works.

Propositions for Deutero-Isaiah actually began in the Middle Ages with the Jewish scholar Abraham Ibn-Ezra suggesting that a second prophet spoke to those in Babylonian Exile.¹¹ It was believed that the later prophecies seen in Isaiah were given during the Babylonian Exile with the expectation that Cyrus of Persia would be used to deliver Israel. These prophecies, for lack of a better description, were given by a Pseudo or Second Isaiah. Some conservative theologians believe in Deutero-Isaiah,¹² but most believe that these later prophecies are predictive and were given by Isaiah son of Amoz. "Conservative opinion is anchored in its theological conviction...about the reality of prophetic revelation—that the Spirit of God did give to ancient writers insight into the future" (Dillard and Longman).¹³

Liberal scholars are often the ones found to be advocating the existence of a Deutero-Isaiah for the compilation of chs. 40-55 during the Babylonian Exile, and even a Tritio-Isaiah for chs. 56-66.¹⁴ These trends largely began among Nineteenth Century German scholars who adapted Ibn-Ezra's view and were influenced by some of the views espoused by Pentateuchal source criticism.¹⁵ Third Isaiah was added as another prophet who spoke apocalyptic visions of God's judgment on the world. A good summation of these views is found in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry for the Book of Isaiah, which is actually divided into three sections for: First Isaiah, Second Isaiah, and Third Isaiah.¹⁶

Liberals often tend to see the composition of Isaiah as having taken place over a very long, drawn out period of compilation and redaction. Some do not even believe that Isaiah was finished until the Third Century B.C.E.¹⁷ Conservatives often respond to these views by pointing out that Isaiah's prophecies were made under the assumption that the Southern Kingdom was doomed, and these words were predictive in nature.¹⁸ Even some liberals urge caution, warning that "It is not clear to us when, or why, the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah were combined with those of Isaiah son of Amoz" (*Jewish Study Bible*).¹⁹ Canonical criticism of the Bible recognizes that Isaiah is to be taken as a single work.²⁰

There is certainly discussion as to whether or not Isaiah simply prophesied these words, or whether he wrote them down as a prophetic work.²¹ It is likely that Isaiah wrote down many of these prophecies, or that those associated with him did this. If one holds to some kind of unity for the Book of Isaiah, it is not improbable that Isaiah's prophecies are interspersed with historical data because they were redacted by the

⁸ Robinson and Harrison, "Isaiah," in *ISBE*, 2:896-897; Dillard and Longman, pp 271-273.

⁹ Robinson and Harrison, "Isaiah," in *ISBE*, 2:893; Grogan, in *EXP*, 3:6-8; Margaret Barker, "Isaiah," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 489.

¹⁰ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 775.

¹¹ Robinson and Harrison, "Isaiah," in *ISBE*, 2:893; A. Joseph Everson, "Isaiah, Book of," in *EDB*, 648; Dillard and Longman, 268; Benjamin D. Sommer, "Isaiah," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 781.

¹² Dillard and Longman, 275.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁴ C.R. North, "Isaiah," in *IDB*, 2:735-742; Dillard and Longman, pp 269-271.

¹⁵ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 765-771; Christopher R. Seitz, "Isaiah, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:473.

¹⁶ Seitz, "Isaiah, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:472-502.

¹⁷ Barker, in *ECB*, 489.

¹⁸ Grogan, in *EXP*, 3:9-11.

¹⁹ Sommer, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 784.

²⁰ Dillard and Longman, 273.

²¹ Derek Kidner, "Isaiah," in *NBCR*, pp 588-589.

School of the Prophets or Isaiah's immediate disciples.²² Talmudic tradition indicates that Isaiah was actually written by the men of Hezekiah (b.*Bava Batra* 15a),²³ which probably was "in the sense of 'edited' or 'compiled'" (Harrison).²⁴ Some theologians today propose that the composition of Isaiah was intended to be read in two paralleling volumes with concurrent themes.²⁵

The textual integrity of the Book of Isaiah actually remains very strong. A single scroll of Isaiah was discovered at Qumran. Although Isaiah is currently placed as the first of the Prophets, this may not have always been the case in antiquity.²⁶ The Hebrew Masoretic Text of Isaiah is relatively intact, with only minor variants. Among ancient witnesses, those seen among the Dead Sea Scrolls are very important. Some minor variants likewise exist between the MT and Greek Septuagint, and the LXX can be useful in examining various difficulties in the Hebrew as they present themselves.²⁷

The events of Isaiah chs. 1-39 are contemporary to the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E. Significant sections of Isaiah deal with ancient prophecies intended to call Israel to repentance and restoration before God. Concurring with these major themes are sections in Isaiah of various additional prophetic oracles, poetry, hymns of praise to God, and apocalyptic revelations. Isaiah also makes distinct usage of personification, where worldly elements such as mountains and trees are often used to represent people, or represent how the world is under the control of God. Isaiah also makes mention of previous events in Israel's history such as the Exodus or other judgments He has enacted.

Common ideas seen throughout Isaiah include the judgment of God upon His rebellious people (1:2), followed by a later time of His redeeming them (41:14, 16). God will also judge the nations who try to thwart the restoration of His people (2:11, 17, 20, et. al.). Isaiah is used to call the people back to holiness, to repent from their sins, urging them to remain faithful to the Lord, and to eagerly await His Messiah. The future Messianic Age will bring the ultimate redemption as Israel is used as the conduit by which the entire world can be saved.

In the Jewish theological tradition, Isaiah is one of the most favorite of the prophetic books, being cited in more Rabbinical works than any other of the Prophets, and being used for more Haftarah selections than any of the others.²⁸ It is notable that there does exist some difference between the Jewish interpretations of various Messianic passages when compared to the traditional Christian interpretations. This is particularly true in identifying the Servant of Isaiah 53.²⁹ Targumic material of Isaiah often shows how various passages were interpreted messianically, and these are considered to be quite valuable among Christian exegetes today.³⁰

The Book of Isaiah plays a major role in the Messianic expectations of the Apostolic Scriptures, particularly in the theology of Yeshua and His immediate followers. Isaiah is quoted more times in the New Testament than any other Tanach book besides Psalms. Isaiah relates not only to the entry of Yeshua into the world as God's Messiah, but also helps to establish the mission for God's people going out into the world. "The day of the LORD" is a time associated with the Second Coming of Yeshua to judge the Earth and establish His Kingdom.

In certain early Christian traditions, Isaiah was sometimes considered to actually be the "Fifth Gospel." While certain parts of Isaiah remain very familiar to today's Christian, most of the book remains decidedly elusive, and many Christian theologians note that this is something that needs to change.³¹ Redemption is undoubtedly the overarching theme of Isaiah.

²² Kidner, in *NBCR*, 589; cf. J.M. Ward, "Isaiah," in *IDBSup*, 457.

²³ "Hezekiah and his colleagues wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Qohelet" (b.*Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

²⁴ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 765.

²⁵ Dillard and Longman, 281.

²⁶ North, "Isaiah," in *IDB*, 2:734.

²⁷ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 798.

²⁸ Sommer, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 780.

²⁹ Robinson and Harrison, "Isaiah," in *ISBE*, 2:893-894.

³⁰ Barker, in *ECB*, 490.

³¹ Grogan, in *EXP*, 3:3.

A SURVEY OF THE TANACH FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

Today's emerging Messianic movement undoubtedly has a great appreciation for Isaiah. There have been some limited Messianic studies of Isaiah conducted, but it is probable that very few of them are engaged with contemporary composition issues and debates over authorship and date. It can be easily said that too many of today's Messianics who examine Isaiah probably give too much attention to ancient, post-Yeshua Jewish views of Isaiah that often subtract from Isaiah's legitimate Messianic significance. Truly, much improvement can be made for our engagement with the Book of Isaiah.

Bibliography

- Ackerman, Susan. "Isaiah," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, pp 955-1049.
- Allis, Oswald T. "Isaiah," in *NIDB*, pp 471-474.
- Barker, Margaret. "Isaiah," in *ECB*, pp 489-542.
- Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. "Isaiah," in *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 267-283.
- Everson, A. Joseph. "Isaiah, Book of," in *EDB*, pp 648-652.
- Grogan, G.W. "Isaiah," in *EXP*, 6:3-354.
- Harrison, R.K. "The Book of Isaiah," in *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 764-800.
- Kidner, Derek. "Isaiah," in *NBCR*, pp 588-625.
- North, C.R. "Isaiah," in *IDB*, 2:731-744.
- Robinson, G.L., and R.K. Harrison. "Isaiah," in *ISBE*, 2:885-904.
- Seitz, Christopher R. "Isaiah, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:472-507.
- Sommer, Benjamin D. "Isaiah," in *Jewish Study Bible*, pp 780-916.
- Ward, J.M. "Isaiah," in *IDBSup*, pp 456-461.