

## ISAIAH

### Introduction

Author. Isaiah probably resided in Jerusalem and had access to the royal court. He was married and had two sons who figured in his prophetic ministry.

Date. Isaiah ministered during the reigns of at least four Judean kings (1:1). Since his ministry began some time during Uzziah's reign (790-739 B.C.) and probably continued until the death of Sennacherib (681, Isa 37:38), it most likely spanned a period of more than 58 years. According to tradition, from the second century A.D., Isaiah was martyred during the reign of Manasseh.

Times. These years in Israel's history were a time of struggle and decline. While the death of Jeroboam II (753 B.C.) signalled decline in Israel, the death of Uzziah (740 B.C.) was also the end of an era in Judah. With the rise of Assyrian power under Tiglath-pileser III both nations looked to foreign powers for protection. Rezin, king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel joined forces against Assyria. When Judah, under Ahaz, refused to join the coalition they were attacked in 734. Ahaz foolishly called to Assyria for help. Tiglath-pileser III then defeated Syria, pillaged Israel and made Judah her vassal. In 727 Hoshea, king of Israel rebelled against Assyria and turned to Egypt for help. Assyria responded under Shalmaneser V who began a siege of Samaria which was concluded in 722 under Sargon III. This resulted in the exile of the ten northern tribes.

Twenty years later when Judah rebelled against her Assyrian overlord, Sennacherib swept through Judah taking 46 cities captive and besieging Jerusalem. Through divine intervention he lost 185,000 soldiers and the city was spared. Thus it can be seen that during the time of Isaiah's preaching that the nation had fallen from its economic prosperity, political independence and military security. Isaiah's ministry occurred at a critical time in the life of the nation.

Structure. While the book appears in places as an anthology of Isaiah's preaching certain

structural markers are apparent.

Introduction. In contrast to the normal placement of the prophetic call at the beginning of the book Isaiah places the record of his call to the ministry well into the book, in chapter six. In the first five chapters he describes the sin of Israel, emphasizing her despicable condition, i.e., what she is now, by contrasting that with what she will be in the millennium. Thus the cleansing of Isaiah in chapter six and his transformation to that of a willing messenger serves as a paradigm of the transformation necessary for the nation to fulfill her role.

Historical centers. Two historical incidents involving Judean kings occur in the book. Those involve the sections 7-12 and 36-39. The accounts are deliberately paralleled and contrasted by the author. Both kings are confronted with the dilemma of trusting or not trusting Yahweh. Ahaz clearly fails while Hezekiah succeeds. It could be that these two incidents form an inclusio for the first 39 chapters. The abrupt change in tone from judgment to comfort in chapter 40 would support this construction. However, it may also be that these historical incidents may both be introductions to different sections, one building upon the other. The section with Hezekiah does look forward to the second half of the book with its introduction of the nation, Babylon, a major theme in 40-66. Beyond this, the incident with Hezekiah ends with the phrase "there will be peace in my day." Although not conclusive, this may serve to link the historical incident with the three divisions of 40-66 which are divided by the phrase "there is no peace for the wicked" (48:22 and 57:21).

Message Statement. *Being a servant of YHWH requires faith in Him and a desire to glorify Him.*

### Argument

- 1A INTRODUCTION: ISRAEL'S SIN AND ITS SOLUTION 1:1--6:13  
The first six chapters introduce the present situation of the people and contrast that with what they ought to be. Their failure to live up to their calling, calls for cleansing which only God can provide.
- 1B The Rebellion of the People Stated 1:1-31  
The rebellion of Israel is first of all explicitly stated. Israel is compared to Sodom and the futility of mere sacrifice is stated. In it all, however, Isaiah makes an eloquent plea for repentance from the people (1:18).
- 2B The Rebellion of the People Illustrated 2:1--5:30  
The rebellion of the people is first stated and then illustrated. The illustration involves

contrasting the despicable present situation with the glorious future of Israel. Such a comparison serves only to magnify the present depravity. Israel is seen as an unfruitful vine whose careful keeper has not benefitted from his work. This section appropriately concludes with two series of woes of judgment (5:8-30).

- 3B The Solution: The Paradigm of Isaiah's Call 6:1-13  
The only solution to their sin is repentance and cleansing. That scenario is seen in the call of Isaiah which serves as a paradigm for the nation.
- 2A TRUST IN YAHWEH: THE BASIS OF SERVANTHOOD 7:1--35:10  
This section focuses upon the faith which is necessary if Israel would be a servant of God. He must be trusted if He is to be their God. This section is divided into a question (7-12), provided in the historical introduction and an answer (13-35) provided in a series of prophecies, judgments and discourses.
- 1B Historical Introduction: The Question Asked: Is God or Assyria to be Trusted? 7:1--12:6  
The second major division begins with the historical section involving Ahaz. His dilemma, as Isaiah's, is representative of the nation. His choice was simple: trust Yahweh or trust Tiglath-pileser. Unfortunately, he made the wrong choice and thus serves as a foil against which the trusting Davidic king can be displayed. Throughout the rest of the "book of Emmanuel" (7-12) various portraits of the Deliverer are given which emphasize his humanity and trust in Yahweh. The Deliverer will both cleanse Israel and destroy the pride of Assyria by trusting in Yahweh.
- 1C The Answer: God is to be Trusted 13:1--35:10
- 2C God is sovereign over the nations as demonstrated by His judgment of them 13:1--23:18  
This section (13-35) seems to be designed as a commentary on the historical introduction. It is an extended answer to Ahaz' failure demonstrating in various ways that God can be trusted. The first evidence offered that God is indeed worthy of trust as opposed to Assyria or any nation is the fact that he is sovereign over them and will judge them. The reason for the listing of each of these nations is that these nations may well have formed, or at least attempted to form, a coalition against Assyria. For this reason it is necessary to single them out as only vassals of greater Suzerain who should be the object of trust.
- 3C God is the sovereign initiator in salvation and judgment 24:1--27:13  
Another reason why God is to be trusted is the fact that he is the original cause. The events of history and particularly the rise and fall of nations are not left to chance but rather directed by a sovereign designer. For this reason He is to be trusted.
- 4C The folly of trusting in the nations rather than in Yahweh 28:1--33:24  
The foolishness of trusting in other nations is demonstrated in this section. Two powers singled out for woes in this section are Egypt and Assyria, two neighbors who Israel was historically wont to trust. At the end of this section Assyria is destroyed by Messiah, as a powerful proof of the folly of trusting in other nations rather than Yahweh.
- 5C Summary 34:1--35:10  
This section closes with a negative and positive summary. For those who trust in the nations, their future can be found in chapter 34. For those who wisely trust in God

blessings of deliverance await as seen in chapter 35.

- 3A THE GLORY OF YAHWEH: THE GOAL OF SERVANTHOOD 36:1--66:24  
This, the final section of the book, focuses upon the glory which is due to YHWH. The one who would be a proper servant of God must not only trust, but also be willing to give glory to his God.
- 1B Historical Introduction 36:1--39:8  
As mentioned above under "structure" the significance of this historical incident is difficult to assess. It does answer to the first incident with Ahaz as a positive example of trust in Yahweh against the Assyrians. However, if that were the only purpose, then chapters 38-39 are superfluous. They do indeed introduce the topic of Babylon which is a concern of the second half of the book, but the failure of Hezekiah is difficult to determine textually. There is no evidence that he nor any other Judean king ever looked to Babylon for help. If Isaiah did in fact write the commentary on King Hezekiah in Chronicles then the comments there may provide the best interpretive key. "And even in the matter of the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that had happened in the land, God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (32:31) and concerning his illness and response to it "But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud;" (32:25). The lesson may be that even though Hezekiah rightly trusted in Yahweh, he failed to give God the glory for the miracle. Thus, the rest of the book continually emphasizes the glory which belongs to the Lord alone: "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed (40:5), "I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another (42:8), "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another" (48:11), and finally in the final verses of the book, Israel will "declare My glory among the nations" (66:19). Although this half of the book certainly concerns the comfort of Israel, there seems to be a more fundamental message. Israel will be comforted so that in the act of bringing comfort to His people and as a result of her obedience afterwards, God might receive His due glory. Thus as a servant she will indeed be a light reflecting God's glory to the nations.
- 2B The Glory of God Seen in His Deliverance of Israel 40:1--48:22  
God's glory is first seen in his deliverance of Israel. He first delivers her from captivity. He then provides his servant who restores her to a place of blessing. Cyrus is named a century before his appearance in human history so that when he arises Israel will recognize that God has raised him up and then give God the glory.
- 3B The Glory of God Seen in His Redemption of Israel Through His Servant 49:1--57:21  
God's glory is also on display in his work of redemption provided through the servant. His character, his work, suffering and blessings are described.
- 4B The Glory of God Seen in His Program 58:1--66:24  
This section is primarily eschatological in nature, looking forward to the time of Messianic blessing and prosperity. God will be glorified through dealing with Israel's sin, through exalting Jerusalem and in giving great joy to the remnant.



## Outline

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