

Isaiah

Authorship: Isaiah the prophet. Commonly acknowledged as the “Prince of the Prophets” because of his exquisite literary style. Isaiah has also been called the “St. Paul of the Old Testament” because of his methodical presentation of humankind’s problem of sin and God’s answer of salvation. Isaiah may have been related to Judah’s royal family. Because of the shift in mood and audience between 1-39 and 40-66, some have suggested separate authors for the two sections. Strong evidence points, however to a single author:

- ↳ The commonsense understanding of the statement of authorship (1:1) is that it applies to all 66 chapters;
- ↳ The same style, vocabulary, and figures of speech occur in both sections;
- ↳ NT writers attribute both sections to Isaiah (see John 12:37-41; Matthew 3:3; 4:14-16; Romans 9:27-29; 10:16);
- ↳ One of the Dead Sea Scrolls includes the entire text of Isaiah, with no break between chapters 39 and 40.

Date and Location: Isaiah prophesied from 740 B.C., the year of King Uzziah’s death (6:1), until about 690, during Hezekiah’s reign. His recorded visions cover much of that time span and are not always in chronological order. For instance, though it presumably preceded all his visions, Isaiah did not record his prophetic “call” until chapter 6. His ministry was probably, for the most part, in Jerusalem.

Background: Isaiah 6:1 records that Isaiah received his prophetic call in the last year of Uzziah’s reign over Judah (ca 742 B.C.). Uzziah’s reign was a particularly prosperous time in the history of Judah, but storm clouds were on the horizon. Assyria was on the rise again in the person of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.). The Assyrian king threatened to engulf Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel. After the death of Tiglath-Pileser, his successors, Shalmaneser and Sargon, defeated the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and deported its citizens. This event brought Judah even more under the shadow of that great empire. Isaiah 37:38 suggests that the prophet lived until the death of Sennacherib in 681 B.C.

Isaiah’s vision extended beyond the eighth century, through the rest of the Old Testament period and beyond. The New Testament authors cited Isaiah as finding fulfillment in the great events surrounding Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Suffering Servant.

Purpose: (1) To warn about the danger of alliances with pagan nations and worship their gods; (2) To warn of judgment, encourage repentance, and promise forgiveness and restoration; (3) To teach about God’s attributes; (4) To foretell the coming of Messiah.

Outline:

I. Introduction: Indictment of Judah (1-6)

II. Trusting Yahweh and His judgment: The Assyrian Threat (7-35)

A. Trusting Yahweh or trusting the nations (7-12)

B. Yahweh’s judgment of the nations (13-27)

C. Yahweh’s judgment of the world (24-27)

D. Woes and promises (28-33)

E. Destruction of the nations (34)

F. Joy of the redeemed (35)

III. Historical Interlude: Transition from Assyrian Threat to Babylonian Captivity (36-39)

A. Historical fulfillment of judgment on Assyria (36-37)

B. Beginning of Babylonian threat (38-39)

IV. Comfort after Babylonian Captivity (40-66)

A. God’s power to deliver Israel (40-48)

B. God’s grace to atone for Israel’s sin (49-57)

C. Realization of Yahweh’s restoration (58-66)

Key Verse

“but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31 ESV).

Meaning of Name

Isaiah, the eighth-century Israelite prophet from Judah, has given his name to this book as its composer. His name means “The LORD Saves” in Hebrew.

Key Term: “Judgment”

Isaiah’s vision of the heavenly throne compelled him to proclaim God’s case against his people before their earthly throne in Jerusalem. Although divine judgment was inevitable, Isaiah offered hope, comfort, and a glorious future for God’s kingdom.

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