

Isaiah

A. Authorship

Isaiah is much attacked by liberal critics, who maintain there are (at least) two or three contributors to the book. In particular, they insist that chapters 40-66 cannot have been written by the author of chapters 1-39, because they do not believe in supernatural revelation and inspiration (thus the passage about Cyrus, for example, must have been written much later). For the same reason, they insist that the 'Servant of the Lord' passages (found in chapters 42, 49, 50, 52 & 53) cannot refer to Christ.

No-one who calls himself a Christian should accept this. We believe the book has one human author, Isaiah, infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit, for the following reasons:

1. The New Testament writers attribute the authorship all parts of the book to Isaiah.

Matthew 3:3 (quoting Is 40:3), 4:14-16 (Is. 9:1-2) 8:17 (Is. 53:4), 12:17-20 (Is. 42:1), 13:14-15 (Is. 6:9-10), 15:7-9 (Is. 29:13).

Romans 9:27-29, 10:16 & 20, 15:12 (Is 10:22-23, 1:9, 53:1, 65:1-2, 11:10)

John 12:38-41 quotes Isaiah 53:1 & 6:10 ("the saying of Isaiah the prophet") as being the words of Isaiah.

Conclusion: Only one Isaiah is the human, divinely-inspired author of the whole book.

2. The 'Suffering Servant' is identified as Christ in the New Testament

As seen in the use of Isaiah in Acts 8:30-35 (cf. Luke 24:27) and 1 Peter 2:24

The name 'Isaiah' means 'Jehovah has saved' or 'salvation is of Jehovah'. Little is known of the prophet, though the fact that he had access to the royal court (7:3) suggests that he may have been of noble birth.

B. Historical Setting

Since the rebellion of the ten tribes in the North under Jeroboam against Rehoboam (Solomon's son), Israel was divided into two kingdoms: 'Judah' (comprising Judah and Benjamin) in the south, and the northern kingdom, 'Israel', made up of the other ten tribes and sometimes known collectively by the name of the largest of the ten, 'Ephraim'. (See 1 Kings 12). Jerusalem was the capital of Judah and Samaria was the capital of Israel.

Isaiah prophesied in Judah during the reign of four kings (1:1). His call came in the year of king Uzziah's death (6:1). Uzziah was succeeded by his son Jotham who, like his father, followed the Lord. Next came Jotham's son Ahaz who refused to join with Israel and Syria in an alliance against Assyria. As a result Israel and Syria turned on

Judah, but Ahaz, instead of trusting in the Lord for help, sought help from Assyria. Assyria defeated Israel and Syria and took many captives. Israel also sought help from Egypt, but this only led to further desolation of Israel by Assyria.

Judah is warned not to copy the example of Israel in the north and Hezekiah (who succeeds Ahaz as king) does trust in the Lord. When Assyria besieges Jerusalem, the Lord sends deliverance.

Babylon then comes to prominence as a power seeking to challenge the regional supremacy of Assyria. Babylon is looking for allies and when its envoys are sent to Hezekiah, he gives way to pride and shows them the treasures of Judah (see Isaiah 39). The Lord tells him that Babylon will, as a result, conquer Judah and take its people captive, but not in Hezekiah's lifetime. This prophecy was fulfilled approximately 100 years later.

C. Outline of the Book

Chapters 1-39 - Prophecies based on events in Isaiah's lifetime

- Judah's apostasy from the Lord. - probably a summary of Isaiah's ministry as a whole. (ch.1-5)
- Isaiah's call (ch.6)
- Warning to trust in the Lord, not Assyria (ch.7-12). Promises of Emmanuel.
- Judgments on the nations that oppose the people of God (ch.13-24)
- The hope of the remnant (ch.25-35)
- Blessedness of those who trust in the Lord exemplified in Hezekiah (ch.36-38)
- Babylonian captivity predicted (ch.39)

Chapters 40-66 - Prophecies concerning events in the more distant future

- Deliverance from the future captivity in Babylon
- Redemption from sin through the suffering Servant of the Lord (Christ)
- The glory of the redeemed Zion – the people of God and ruin of her enemies (these elements are interspersed throughout chapters 40-66)