

The Book Of Isaiah—Introduction

→ Historical Background—742-700

I. Reign of Jotham—742-735

--Immediately followed the prosperous reign of Uzziah, when the Assyrians were engaged in battles outside the Levant. This allowed for a time of peace and prosperity in both Judah & Israel.

II. Reign of Ahaz—735-715

A. Syro-Ephraimite War—

1. Rezin, king of Damascus, & Pekah, king of Israel, formed a coalition against Assyria in 735.
2. When Ahaz refused to join them, they besieged Jerusalem. Ahaz, against the advise of Isaiah (see Isaiah 7), appealed to T-P III for help.
3. T-P III attacked the coalition for 3 campaigns (734, 733, 732). In 733 Israel was reduced to a vassal. Most of their territory was made into Assyrian provinces.

B. Fall of Samaria

1. Hoshea rebelled against Assyria in 724 with encouragement from Egypt.
2. Shalmaneser V, T-P III's successor, besieged Samaria for 3 years (724-722).
3. Sargon II, Shalmaneser's successor, completed the defeat of Samaria & deported much of the population (he claims 27,290 deportees). He also resettled captives from Babylon & northern Syria into Samaria (see map 69, p. 139).

III. Reign of Hezekiah—715-687

A. Religious Reform

1. Destroyed "high places," sacred pillars, and Asherim
2. Cleansed the temple
3. Celebrated Passover—

--Apparently the Passover was neglected by Israel once they entered the land. Perhaps this was due to the uniqueness of the Passover. It defined who they were & set them apart from the other nations. The people tended to fall into familiar and comfortable patterns of worship that were similar to those of the people around them. Thus, during the reforms of Hezekiah & Josiah, the Passover was celebrated.

B. Political Reform—

--After the death of Sargon II, Merodach-Baladan & Hezekiah apparently entered into a conspiracy against Assyrian (see 2 Kings 20:12ff).

1. Jerusalem fortifications—

--The "Broad Wall" around western Jerusalem was apparently built by Hezekiah (see *Holman Bible Atlas*, p. 146). This fortified the western suburbs that had been outside the walls.

2. Water System—

--"Hezekiah's Tunnel" was built to connect the Gihon spring with the Siloam Pool. This put the entire water system within the city walls.

3. Supply System—

--The *l'melek* (= “for [belonging to] the king”) jars found throughout Judah during this period suggest a massive supply system. Goods were apparently collected from throughout the nation and sent to 4 centers for safekeeping & distribution in case of war.

C. Rebellion—

--After Sargon II's death in 705, Hezekiah and the kings of Sidon, Ashkelon, and Ekron (w/o their king, who was turned over to Hezekiah) rebelled against Sennacherib.

D. Sennacherib responded in 701 (some have argued that he attacked twice). (See 2 K 18-19, 2 Chr. 32, Isa 36-37)

1. He defeated Sidon, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Timnah.
2. He then laid siege to Lachish (see p. 149). He claims the destruction of 46 Judean cities, which is at least partially supported by mass destructions at this point in excavations.
3. He demanded the surrender of Jerusalem via his officer, Rabshakeh. Sennacherib brags that he locked Hezekiah up in Jerusalem like a “bird in a cage.”
4. Isaiah counseled Hezekiah to trust in God, because Jerusalem would not fall.
5. Miraculously 185,000 Assyrians died mysteriously. Sennacherib received tribute and left.
6. Hezekiah had lost many cities, lost control of Philistia, and given away much of the temple treasury.

➔ History of Criticism

I. New Testament & Early Christianity

--In the NT, many portions of Isaiah were used to explain the life and work of Christ.

- Isaiah 7:14
- Isaiah 9 & 11
- Isaiah 40:3
- Isaiah 53
- Isaiah 61:1-2

--In early Christianity, Isaiah was a popular book. The messianic nature of the book was primarily emphasized.

II. Critical Research

--Unity of the Book

--The unity of Isaiah has long been questioned, usually divided into three broad sections.

--**First Isaiah**—Isaiah 1-39

--Contains several historical references, including encounters between Isaiah and kings of Judah & historical narratives, even in direct parallel with Kings.

--Focuses upon the sins of Judah and the coming judgment for that sin, as well as God's promises of a future deliverance of a remnant and a messianic ruler.

--**Second Isaiah (Deutero-Isaiah)**—Isaiah 40-55

--Contains no historical references except for the reference to Cyrus as "messiah."

--The theme is deliverance of Israel/Judah from exile back to their homeland.

--**Third Isaiah (Trito-Isaiah)**—Isaiah 56-66

--Contains no historical references.

--The focus is upon following the Torah, apparently back in the land of Judah & Jerusalem.

--Authorship

--**Single Author**

--8th century Isaiah wrote the entire book of Isaiah, much of the latter portion prophetically.

--The strength of this view is that it takes seriously the fact that the remainder of the Bible considers the historical Isaiah to be the author of the book. At the least, the entire book is considered the "Book of Isaiah."

--The weakness of the view is that chapters 40-66 appear to be written from a different context than 1-39. These chapters do not read like future prophecy, rather the message is one of hope directed to a troubled exiled people. If they are prophetic and written by Isaiah, then they are different from other prophetic materials of the OT.

--**Two or more authors**

--One or two authors in addition to 8th century Isaiah wrote portions of the present Book of Isaiah. Most scholars assume that two separate authors, one during & one after the exile, wrote 40-55 and 56-66. However, the same author could well have written both sections after returning to Judah with the former exiles.

--With multiple authors the Book of Isaiah is a canonical unity because of the complete message: promise, sin, judgment, exile, & restoration. This is the canonical message of the book.

III. Other Critical Matters

--Literary Criticism—

--Every text has a context. That context is literary as well as historical, cultural, etc. The literary context includes such matters as:

--How the text functions in the whole biblical book;

--How the text relates to the rest of the biblical book;

--How the text relates with the rest of the biblical canon (Intertextuality!).

--Redaction Criticism—

--Every text has a history. That history includes an origin, development, and a final form. Some texts have a longer redaction history than others.

--Redactors are those people who edited texts and (according to one's understanding of inspiration and authority) made some alterations and additions.

--The redaction history of the biblical books were likely long. The amount of change made by redactors, however, depends upon one's perspective and is a matter of opinion.

--Is this important? Childs tends to downplay redaction history in favor of reading the canonical text as it stands. He does not deny the reality of redaction; rather he argues that these questions are often irrelevant for purposes of interpretation.

--*Heilgeschichte*—

--“Salvation History”—This is a German term used to describe the history of God's dealing with his people in the OT (and the NT for that matter). *Heilgeschichte* began at least with Abraham (perhaps earlier) and took many turns.

--In fact, in Isaiah *Heilgeschichte* takes a difficult turn as God seemingly rejects his chosen people to judgment and destruction. *Heilgeschichte* is based upon God's covenant, which is in jeopardy in the book of Isaiah.