INTRODUCTION TO I S A I A H

Why6i4v5y4 , "salvation of the Lord"— prophet to Judah, second half of eighth and beginning of seventh century B.C.

1. The prophet Isaiah

1:1, son of Amoz (Joma5 *'amots*), not Amos (somi5`*amos*); Amoz and Amos were contemporaries

Jewish tradition: Amoz was brother of King Amaziah (d. 767), and both were sons of King Joash (d. 796); thus Isaiah would be a grandson of King Joash, and cousin of King Uzziah.

Isaiah was a native of Jerusalem, with high social standing, and easy access to the court and the king, especially in the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Isaiah was married, his wife called the "prophetess," Isa. 8:3. He had two sons, Shear-jashub (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1).

The prophet is mentioned often in 2 Kings, 3 times in 2 Chronicles, and 16 times in Isaiah (ch. 1-39).

Isaiah had a distinct prophetic call, emphasizing the holiness of God (ch. 6).

2. Date of Isaiah

1:1 lists these kings:

> Uzziah (sole reign end 750, died 739)
> Jotham
> Ahaz
> Hezekiah (start reign 715, co-regent with Manasseh 695, died 686)

Isa. 37:37-38 records the death of Sennacherib, 681 BC

According to tradition, martyred under Manasseh by being sawn in two (cf. 2 Kings 21:16; see "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," ch. 5, in Charlesworth, *The OT Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 163-64; a Jewish writing probably from the 2nd century BC); this apparently in view in Heb. 11:37; the tradition asserted by Justin Martyr and Tertullian

Thus, the date for Isaiah's ministry is ca. 740-680 BC, approximately 60 years

3. Historical background

(see under Micah)

note especially items #2, 4-7, and item #1 under the Babylonians

Isaiah's advice throughout this turbulent and difficult period was isolation for Judah (nonalignment), coupled with trust in Yahweh and loyalty to Him. Although battered and reduced, Judah was able to weather the storm of Assyria, and for a time to remain as the only independent nation in the area.

4. Authorship and unity of Isaiah

a. Some references for further study

—J.A. Alexander, *Prophecies of Isaiah* (1847)
—F. Delitzsch, "Isaiah," *Imperial Bible Dictionary*, III, 158-171 (1886)
—G. L. Robinson, "Isaiah," *ISBE*, III, 1495-1508 (1929)
—O.T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (1954)
—E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (1954); *Introduction to the OT*, pp. 202-11 (1958); *Who Wrote Isaiah?* (1958); and his commentary on Isaiah, III, App. I, "The Authorship of Isaiah," pp. 538-49 (posthumous, 1972)
—Rachel Margalioth, *The Indivisible Isaiah* (1964)
—Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of OT Introduction*, pp. 317-39
—R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the OT*, pp. 764-95 [but calls "Cyrus" text a gloss, pp.794-95] (1969)
—Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah* (1971)
—J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah* (Bible Student's Commentary; (1985)

b. History of critical discussion

Virtually all held to unity and genuineness of Isaiah until J. C. Doderlein, *Esaias* (1775), who suggested two parts, ch. 1-39 and ch. 40-66. This view spread through Germany.

Ernst F. K. Rosenmueller suggested that parts of ch. 1-39 are late also; e.g., ch. 13-14 (ca. 1800). An example of this approach—T. K. Cheyne, who denied ch. 12-13, 15-16, 23-27, 33 as being written by Isaiah (1888). Other scholars have noted that the similarities in both parts, instead of fragmenting the first part, actually argue for the book's unity (e.g., Archer, pp. 332-33).

*   **Bernard Duhm** (1892) divided Isaiah into three parts: ch. 1-39, ch. 40-55 ("Deutero-Isaiah"), and ch. 56-66 ("Trito-Isaiah"). In general this view has been retained by critical scholars to this day.

This critical view was popularized in England and America by A. B. Davidson, and G. A. Smith (1904).

During these years many conservatives defended the unity of Isaiah (see list above). Some held a mediating position; e.g., Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (1st ed. 1866, 4th ed. 1889); he preferred and argued for the unity of the book, but said the issue was unimportant: "If we only allow that the prophet really was a prophet, it is on no essential consequence to what age he belonged" (II, 138; but stronger in *Imperial Bible Dictionary* article "Isaiah").

c. Critic's Arguments for dividing Isaiah

(see S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the OT* (1897), pp. 236-43)

(1) Historical setting seems different in the <u>second half</u>:

Jerusalem ruined, 44:26; 58:12; 61:4; 63:18; 64:10-11

now suffering under Babylonians, 42:22, 25; 43:28 (marg.); 47:6; 52:5

return to Jerusalem is imminent, 40:2; 46:13; 48:20

warm concern for the captives, 40:21, 26, 28; 43:10; 48:8; 50:10-11; 51:6, 12-13; 58:3-14

(2) <u>Literary style</u> is different:

arguments in Driver, *LOT* 238-42

cf. Y. T. Radday, "Two Computerized Statistical-Linguistic Tests Concerning the Unity of Isaiah," JBL 89 (Sep 1970) 319-24; Radday notes that pronominal suffixes on nouns occur much more frequently in ch. 40-66 than in ch. 1-35, and concludes that there were different authors

but note comments of Archer (331-32) regarding Milton, Goethe, and Shakespeare

(3) <u>Theological emphases</u> are different:

Isaiah 1-39	Isaiah 40-66
God majestic	larger and fuller conception of God: God infinite
affirms theology	reflects on and argues from theology
remnant idea prominent	remnant idea not prominent
messianic king	righteous servant

(4) "Anachronism" of <u>Cyrus</u> the Persian mentioned by name: Isa. 44:28 – 45:7

Cyrus ruled 550-530 BC, 150 years after Isaiah

this point forceful even with R. K. Harrison, who takes it as a gloss (pp. 794-95)

but note other specific or precise predictions in the OT:

captivity by Babylon in first part of Isaiah

Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, Mic. 5:2

King Josiah to demolish altar in northern kingdom; named in 1 Kings 13:1-2, fulfilled 300 years later in 2 Kings 23:15-16

d. Evidence for a unified and genuine Isaiah

(see E.J. Young, Appendix I in his Isaiah commentary, vol. 3)

EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

(1) Strongest possible <u>tradition</u> of Jews and Christians: "2500 years of agreement"

admitted by A. B. Davidson, G. A. Smith,

(2) <u>No evidence</u> or tradition of a separate man who wrote "Deutero-Isaiah"

remarkable, since he would be the world's "greatest prophet"

Why would the work of the great "Deutero-Isaiah" be assigned to an otherwise "obscure" prophet from the 8th century?

(3) Statement of Ecclesiasticus 48:17-25

48:18-25 In his days Sennacherib invaded and sent Rabshakeh; he lifted his hand against Zion, and boasted loudly in his arrogance. [19] Then their hearts and hands trembled, they felt the pangs of a woman in labour, [20] but they called on the merciful Lord, stretching out their hands towards him. Swiftly the Holy One heard them from heaven and delivered them <u>by the agency of Isaiah</u>; [21] he struck the camp of the Assyrians and his Angel annihilated them. [22] For Hezekiah did what is pleasing to the Lord, and was steadfast in the ways of David his father, enjoined on him <u>by the prophet Isaiah</u>, a great man trustworthy in his vision. [23] In his days the sun moved back; he prolonged the life of the king. [24] In the power of the spirit he saw the last things, he comforted the mourners of Zion, [25] he revealed the future to the end of time, and hidden things long before they happened.

upholds Isaiah as historical prophet contemporary with Hezekiah

Ecclus. dated ca. 180 BC

(4) Text Form of <u>Dead Sea Isaiah scroll</u>

1QIsa[a], ca. 125 BC

Isaiah 40 starts on the last line of the page; no division from the end of ch. 39

There is a three-line break between ch. 33 and 34; W. H. Brownlee suggests a two-part work, with many parallels between ch. 1-33 and 34-66; this would imply unity of authorship. See R. K. Harrison, "The History and Literary Criticism of the OT, "*Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary, and Textual* (Zondervan, 1978), p. 32.

(5) <u>NT</u> attributes all parts of the book to Isaiah as a person

Jn. 12:38-39, 41 — Isa. 6:9-10; 53:1 (= I & II Isaiah)

(II Isaiah)   John 12:38-41 [38] that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

(I Isaiah)   [39] Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: [40] "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."
[41] These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

(III Isaiah)   Rom 10:20 — Isa. 65:1
Rom 10:20   But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me."

Isaiah is named and quoted 23 times in the NT (Young, *Intro.*, p. 206)

ARGUMENTS FROM THE INTERNAL <u>PLAN</u> OF THE BOOK

(6) Isaiah shows <u>unity of plan and cohesiveness</u>

(See Young, *Isaiah*, III, 540-46)
(See Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, pp. 98-100,107-108☺

—each of the three sections of the book has a dominant emphasis on Isaiah's interest in the fate of Jerusalem; this integrating factor introduces i) the entire book, ii) II Isaiah, and iii) III Isaiah. It is woven through each section. It concludes the book in the last chapter.

—Dumbrell (p. 99) cites B.S. Childs who suggests that II Isaiah (40-55) is the interpretation and elaboration of I Isaiah (1-39), and that III Isaiah (56-66) is the elaboration of II Isaiah.

(7) Isaiah 36-39 itself shows an <u>historical transition</u>

ch. 36-37 — Assyria
ch. 38-39 — Babylon

(8) The <u>Cyrus</u> prophecy is consonant with divine prediction

    cf. 1 Kings 13:2 (Josiah)

    The Cyrus prophecy forms an integral part of the argument in Isaiah only <u>if</u> predictive of the distant future (cf. Allis, Unity of Isaiah, ch. 4-5).

(9) Many <u>connections</u> of thought between ch. 1-39 and ch. 40-66

    many "Babylon" references in ch. 1-39; e.g., ch. 13-14, 21

    many "Palestine" references in ch. 40-66, so many that most now believe "III Isaiah" written from Palestine; e.g., flora and fauna Palestinian, idolatry, temple, sacrifice

(10) Many evidences of <u>style similarity</u>; differences are related to subject and time of writing

    (see G. L. Robinson, "Isaiah," *ISBE* 3:1505-06; see especially R. Margalioth, *The Indivisible Isaiah)*

    —"Isaiah's style differs widely from that of every other OT prophet, and is as far removed as possible from that of Ezekiel and the post-exilic prophets."

    —"for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it"—three times in Isaiah (1:20 / 40:5 / 58:14); nowhere else in OT

    —"streams of water" — 2 times (30:25 / 44:4 Heb.); nowhere else in OT

    —emphatic reduplication (2:7-8; 6:3; 8:9; 24:16, 23 / 40:1; 43:11, 25; 48:15; 51:12 / 57:19; 62:10)

    —"the Holy One of Israel" — in all parts (12 times in ch. 1-39, 13 times in ch. 40-66); appropriate for Isaiah (cf. 6:3)

    —"highway" — 2 times in ch. 1-39, 5 times in ch. 40-66

    —"remnant" — 14 times in ch. 1-39, 3 times in ch. 40-66

    —"Zion" — 10 times in ch. 1-39, 10 times in ch. 40-66

    —"pangs of a woman in travail" — 4 times in ch. 1-39, 3 times in ch. 40-66

5. Text of Isaiah

1QIsa[a] shows basic agreement with the Hebrew MT. There are a few differences. The RSV followed the DSS over the MT in 13 places. Millar Burrows voted for several of those changes; now he has doubts about many of them (Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 305, 314). The NRSV returned to the MT in several cases.

For a close comparison of the DSS text with the MT, see J. R. Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll* (Eerdmans, 1970); note his conclusions on pp. 81-84.

6. Summary <u>historical</u> outline of Isaiah

I.   First epoch: death of Uzziah (<u>739</u> BC)—the need for a prophet: Judah's sins and Isaiah's call, ch. 1-6

II. Second epoch: reign of Ahaz (<u>735-715</u> BC), ch. 7-27

    A.   Book of Immanuel, ch. 7-12
    B.   Prophecies against the nations, ch. 13-23
    C.   Isaiah's apocalypse, ch. 24-27

III. Third epoch: first 15 years of Hezekiah (715-701 BC), ch. 28-39

    A.   Warnings, judgments, blessings for God's people, ch. 28-35
    B.   Historical interlude (cf. 2 Kings 18-20), ch. 36-39

IV. Fourth epoch: last 15 years of Hezekiah (701-686 BC), ch. 40-66

    A.   Babylonian exile and deliverance, ch. 40-48
    B.   Salvation through the Lord's Servant, ch. 49-55
    C.   Sins of Judah, ch. 56 - 59:15
    D.   Zion's Redeemer and kingdom, 59:16 - ch. 66

*7. Prophetic Scheme of Isaiah

    1-12   History and Eschatology
    13-23 History
    24-27 Eschatology
    28-33 History
    34-35 Eschatology
    36-39 History
    40-55 Eschatology
    56-66 History and Eschatology

"...eschatology builds upon prior history and projects a historical fulfillment. The Book of Isaiah takes the salvation history bound up with the original choice of Jerusalem and turns it into a magnificent concept of a populated city of God." —Dumbrell, *Faith of Israel*, p. 111