

The Prophets

Study 5: Isaiah – Revealer of God's Heart

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Background

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, lived in Jerusalem. His name literally means ‘Yahweh is salvation’. According to Jewish tradition he was of royal blood – probably because (according to Willmington) it is believed that “*his father, Amoz, was the brother of King Amaziah of Judah.*”¹

Isaiah was married; his wife is called ‘the prophetess’ (Isaiah 8:3), perhaps because she too prophesied. Two sons are mentioned, both of whom bear symbolic names (Isaiah 8:18); Shear-yashuv, ‘Remnant will return’ (Isaiah 7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, ‘Quickly to the spoil (a city), make haste to the plunder’ (Isaiah 8:1-4).

Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries (cf Isaiah 1:1 with Micah 1:1) and according to Isaiah 6:1 the commissioning of Isaiah was in the year that King Uzziah died – circa 739 B.C. Isaiah’s activity was preceded by that of Amos and Hosea (Amos 1:1; Hosea 1:1). If we take a look at the book of Isaiah in detail there are some controversial aspects we should consider:

- **The identity of the Servant in the Servant Songs**

Elliot states “*Isaiah has been the scene of many battles in the struggle for a Christian reading of the Bible. From as early as disputes about the identity of the virgin, or young girl, of Isaiah 7:14 to that of the Servant in the Servant Songs of the latter part of the book, one fact remains undisputed, captured by Sirach: “By [Isaiah’s] dauntless spirit he saw the future and comforted the mourners in Zion.”*”² In his ministry he truly was the revealer of God’s heart.

- **Whether the book of Isaiah was written in its entirety in the 8th century or even by more than one author**

Whilst the traditional view is that all 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah were written by Isaiah himself in the 8th century B.C., there are numerous sections of the book of Isaiah that would suggest that some parts of the book were written in the 6th century rather than the 8th century. This is because of differences in literary style and content. There are even some scholars who propose that the book of Isaiah was written by three authors, each writing a section as follows:

- Section 1: Chapters 1 – 39
- Section 2: Chapters 40 – 55
- Section 3: Chapters 56 – 66

In light of this we should ask ourselves ‘does it matter?’ or ‘what difference does it make?’

In this first study on Isaiah we will take a look at the focus of Isaiah’s prophecy from Chapter 1 and Chapter 6, whilst in our next study we will take a look at the Servant Songs in the context of what they may tell us of Jesus the Messiah.

¹ Willmington, H.L., (1984), *Willmington’s Guide to the Bible*, First Edition, Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

² Elliot, M.W., (2007), p.xvii, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament XI Isaiah 40 – 66*, Nottingham, InterVarsity Press

The Message

Whereas Amos and Hosea prophesied mainly against the Northern tribes; Isaiah and Micah concentrated their prophecies mainly on Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah 1 opens with an introduction to Isaiah's vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem, stating that this was "*in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah*"³:

- Uzziah was a good king (also known as Azariah), who reigned from 791 – 740 B.C. (cf. 6:1)
- Jotham was also a godly king (and reigned between 750 – 736 B.C., including a co regency with Uzziah)
- Ahaz was a wicked and idolatrous king and ruled from 736 – 716 B.C.
- Hezekiah (who reigned from 716 – 687 B.C.) promoted religious reform⁴

In contrast with Isaiah 1, it seems strange that in Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah's call is set "*in the year that King Uzziah died.*"⁵

A clear sense of ethics begins to develop in Isaiah 1, in particular:

- Isaiah 1:17
- Isaiah 1:21-23

This gives us some insight into the motivation behind Isaiah's prophecies, and his sense of righteous indignation against Judah and Jerusalem, perhaps born out of his comprehension of the holiness of God. Isaiah truly is a revealer of God's heart.

Questions

Isaiah 1:1-17

1. What is God's complaint against his people in verses 2-3?
2. In what state do God's children find themselves in verses 4-9?
3. How does God view their religious life (verses 11-17)?
4. Which goals would God like his people to have in verses 16-17?

Isaiah 1:18-31

1. What does God offer in verses 18-20?
2. Name God's further grievances against his people (verses 21-23)?
3. In light of the nation's rebellion, what does God plan to do (verses 24-31)?
4. What is God's ultimate goal in taking these harsh measures (verses 24-27)?
5. Look again at the entire chapter of Isaiah 1. What is revealed about God's heart to his people?

Isaiah 6:1-13

1. How does Isaiah react to God's presence?
2. What did the seraph do to Isaiah before God asked, "Whom shall I send?"
3. What does God want the prophet to tell the people? (Refer to Matthew 13:13-15)
4. Describe the future for God's people?

³ Isaiah 1:1

⁴ See Ryrie, C.C., (1995), *Ryrie Study Bible NASB*, First Edition, Chicago, Illinois, Moody Press

⁵ Isaiah 6:1