

## INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

### 1. ISAIAH – the times

Active during 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. – the period when Rome, Athens and Sparta are founded. Israel is the corridor between Europe, Asia and Africa and thus at the centre of the then known world.

### 2. ISAIAH – the man

Isaiah means: *Salvation of Yahweh (God)/Yahweh will save us*

**Jewish** – from the tribe of Judah.

Born in the palace; brought up at court. **Royal connections:** grandson of King Joash, cousin of King Uzziah; son of Amoz

**Married:** to a prophetess

**2 sons** (at least): given names with prophetic significance:

(i) Shear-jashub (“*a remnant shall return*”) – restoration for Judah

(ii) Maher-shala-hash (“*quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil*”) – judgment for Judah

**Prophetic ministry:** 739 B.C (the year Uzziah died) -> 686 B.C. (the year Hezekiah died)

### 3. ISAIAH – the book

**Key Theme:** salvation (deliverance) of the Lord – sub-themes: judgment and restoration

Forth telling and foretelling: speaking into the present as well as the future

**66 chapters:**

<b>1-39:</b>	judgment, sin,	retribution	coming Saviour, Messiah	Judah & Assyria
<b>40-66:</b>	comfort, salvation,	redemption	Suffering Servant	Zion & Babylon

*Chapters 1-39 and 40-66 are very different in tone.*

**Structure:**

#### 1. Condemnation: 1-39:

Words against Judah & Israel (1-12);  
Judgment against the Gentiles (13-23)  
Songs about future glory (24-27)  
Judgment coming to Assyria (28-35)  
Historical interlude (36-39)

#### 2. Consolation: 40-66

God’s greatness: The Father <-> idols (40-48)  
God’s grace: The Son, God’s Servant (49-57)  
God’s glory: the Spirit of the Kingdom (58-66)

Isaiah could be described as the Bible in miniature – despite being in the Old Testament, it could be described as a Christian book. Of all the book in the OT, this one says more (and most clearly) about Jesus Christ. (\*\* see below) *“The book records Isaiah’s ministry of speaking and contending for God’s word over 60 years. In the first part we hear of the coming Saviour, Messiah. In the second part, the Suffering Servant. They did not make sense to the hearers of Isaiah’s prophecies at the time, nor indeed to observant Jewish theologians today. They are unable to see how the two are one and the same person. Messiah and Suffering Servant only make sense in the Person of Jesus, conquering through sacrifice.”* [David Pawson]

### 1,2,3, - How many Isaiah’s?

*“An ancient Jewish oral tradition tells us that King Manasseh executed Isaiah by commanding he be sawn in two...and many modern scholars are still trying to saw him in two today”* [Phil Moore]

The argument for more than one ‘Isaiah’, (some even say there could have been three) in brief:

(a) Chapters 1-39 and 40-66 are so different in their content they simply cannot have been written by the same person.

(b) The vocabulary used in Isaiah is by far the largest in the OT and there are subtle differences in his choice of words in the 2 sections. For example, the word 'righteousness' in the first part means God must punish His people. In the second part it means God will save His people.

(c) The prophecies in the 'Book of Comfort' are so accurate about the future that they must have been written in retrospect, rather than ahead of time. (These scholars find it hard to believe that Isaiah could have named Cyrus, the Persian King, 100 years before Cyrus was born.)

The argument for only 1 Isaiah: Some of the reasons to be confident about there being only one author and about the unity of this book of prophecies as a whole:

(a) The differences have been 'dramatically overplayed'.

(i) Isaiah calls the Lord, "*the Holy One of Israel*" 12 times in 1-39 and 14 times in 40-66 (N.B. the title is only used 5 other times in the OT).

(ii) *Zion* is named more often than any other book of the Bible – 31 times in 1-39 and 18 times in 40-66.

(iii) There are at least 25 words which are used nowhere else in the OT but are used in both halves of Isaiah. "*His vocabulary points towards unity, not disunity.*"

(b) There is no single ancient manuscript of Isaiah (in Hebrew or Greek) which is divided in such a way. In 1947, one of the documents discovered among the 2000 year old scrolls was the book of Isaiah, "*set out as one seamless book of prophecies.*"

(c) We should not be surprised that Isaiah foretold the future so accurately, that is "precisely what the prophets claimed that God had given them supernatural ability to do." John 12:37-41 draws attention to Isaiah's amazing insights into the future, not to deny them but to warn us not to be as deaf to them as Isaiah's contemporaries. John is quoting from both parts and attributing them to a single author.

(d) Jesus and the writers of the NT bear united testimony that Isaiah wrote the entire book. Matthew, Mark and John quote from both sections. So does Luke in Acts and Paul in Romans. The NT is very clear about this.

**\*\*The Messiah In Isaiah.** Isaiah's "Servant Song" about Jesus (Isa. 52: 13 – 53:12) is quoted or alluded to nearly 40 times in the New Testament. The prophet wrote about:

- The birth of Christ 7:14 and 9:6 (see Matt. 1- 18-25)
- The ministry of John the Baptist 40:1-6 (see Matt. 3:1)
- Christ's anointing by the Holy Spirit 61:1-2 (see Luke 4:17-19)
- The nation's rejection of their Messiah 6:9-11 (see John 12:38)
- Christ, the "stone of stumbling" 8:14 and 28:16 (see Rom. 9:32-33,10:11, 1 Peter 2:6)
- Christ's ministry to the gentiles (n.b. anyone who wasn't Jewish) - 49:6 (see Luke 2:32 & Acts 13:47)
- The Saviour's suffering and death 52:13 – 53:12 (see Acts 3:13, 8: 32-33 & 1 Peter 2:21-25)
- His resurrection 55:3 (see Acts 13: 34)
- His return as King 9:6-7, 11:1, 59:20-21, & 63:1-3  
(see Rom. 11:26-27 & Rev. 19:13-15)

**The message of forgiveness is not just for nations but also to individuals:** "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." & "I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no saviour. I have revealed and saved...I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."