**Is your faith in the Messiah growing? Are you serving Him more each day?**

Isaiah

Introduction

1/3/2018

# Trimester Class Objective

* Through this study we will work to explain the **historical significance** and the **prophetic impact** of the book of Isaiah. This process will enable us to **increase our faith in the Messiah** and **serve Him more diligently** in our daily lives.

## *Quick Facts*

* “Isaiah” means “Salvation of the Lord”
* Isaiah contains more Messianic prophecies than any other Old Testament book
* Roughly 60% of Isaiah’s writings are dedicated to prophecy
* Isaiah is quoted more than any other Old Testament writer
* At 1,292 verses, Isaiah is the second longest book in the Bible

## Who Wrote Isaiah?

Conservative scholars widely accept that the entire book was written by Isaiah (see Isaiah 7:3, 20:2, 38:4, 39:5). However, because of the change in content between chapters 1-39 and 40-66, some claim that there is a second author or “Deutero-Isaiah” who wrote the second portion. (Some even claim that there was yet another separate author – a “Trito-Isaiah” – who wrote 55-66). The crux of the supposed controversy surrounds the supernatural prophecy found in Isaiah. (For example, Isa 44:28-45:1 names Cyrus more than 150 years before he was even born!) Thus, **those who** **do not want to believe in an all-powerful Jehovah** must “prove” that these prophecies were actually written *after* they occurred (or at least at a time when one could “see” the political events of the day unfolding). While proving the authorship is beyond the scope of our study, here are a few facts to confirm that the entire book truly WAS written by Isaiah the prophet:

* The book **claims to be of Isaiah** as noted above, with no suggestion of change in author.
* The **same literary style and phrases are used in both sections** (e.g., “the Holy One of Israel” is used more than 12 times in both sections, and rarely elsewhere in the Old Testament).
* **Jesus and the inspired New Testament writers reference both sections of Isaiah and attribute it to Isaiah** (e.g., Mt 3:3, Luke 4:18f, Jn 12:38-40, Rom 10:16).
* The **Dead Sea Scrolls** date to two centuries before Christ, and show no break between chapters 39 & 40.

A few have also debated the dating of Isaiah’s authorship. They hold it as being written by Isaiah, but they would argue that he was writing *during* the Babylonian captivity while Isaiah himself was in Babylon. Here are some flaws with this theory:

* It claims to be written from Jerusalem, prior to Babylonian captivity (see Isa 1:1, 2:1, 62:1).
* The book of Isaiah shows no familiarity with the region of Babylon.
* Trees mentioned in Isaiah are native to Judah, not to Babylon.
* Contemporaries named or referred to in Isaiah are living in Jerusalem.
* Idolatry: During the Babylonian captivity, Israel lost its fascination with idolatry.
* **The prophet Isaiah wrote the book of Isaiah during the eighth century BC, just as the Bible indicates.**

#### **About Isaiah, the Man**

Despite the overall length of his writings, very little is actually known about Isaiah as a person. Isaiah 1:1 notes that Isaiah is the **son of Amoz**, and some rabbinic historians have stated that **his father was likely the brother of King Amaziah of Judah** (796-767 BC). If this is true, this would have made Isaiah of royal descent. Circumstantial evidence supports this notion. Isaiah was certainly very **comfortable when he addressed royalty** (Isaiah 7:3-12; Isaiah 37:21). Also, his vocabulary and writing style suggests that he was a **well-educated** individual. Outside this evidence, there is very little else to support this notion.

Besides being a **prophet**, II Chronicles 26:22 offers evidence that Isaiah was also a **scribe**. Also, Isaiah refers to his disciples in Isaiah 8:16. These may have been children he was educating in his profession as a scribe; his hearers criticized him of acting like a schoolmaster in Isaiah 28:9-13.

Isaiah was **married**, but no reference is made to his wife’s name. She is merely mentioned as “the prophetess” in Isaiah 8:3. Scholars debate whether Isaiah uses this as a title of *her* profession or as a title *of one married to* a prophet. Either way, Isaiah’s wife makes no recorded prophecies in Isaiah or any other book of the Old Testament. **Isaiah had two recorded sons**: Shearjashub (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4). Like the sons of Hosea, Isaiah’s sons had **names symbolic of God’s message for the people**.

It is **not known how Isaiah died**. Neither secular history nor the Bible contains a specific record of Isaiah’s death. Tradition and some theologians believe Hebrews 11:37 refers to Isaiah being sawed in half at the order of king Manasseh. This is only a theory; it is not scriptural fact. It is not so important whom Isaiah was, how he lived or died. Rather, what is important is what he spoke to the people through God’s inspiration.

Isaiah was a **prophet during the time of the divided kingdom during the eighth century BC**. Most scholars agree that his **ministry began about 740-748 BC** because of his reference to beginning his ministry **during the last year of King Uzziah’s life** in Isaiah 6:1. Isaiah continued his ministry **through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh**. The **latest historical event recorded in Isaiah is the defeat and assassination of Sennacherib**, king of Assyria, which occurred c. 681 BC (Some scholars place this event earlier, about 697 BC). Isaiah is **also credited with writing a biography of Hezekiah** in II Chronicles 32:32,33. Most scholars place the **length of Isaiah’s career at 40-50 years.**

Isaiah was **able to deal with peoples of all walks**. He was **active in court/royalty, among false religious leaders, and among the common folk**. His **mission was to turn the people back to God and avoid Assyrian captivity**. He **spoke against idolatry, political corruption, and immorality**.

# To Whom was Isaiah Written?

* Isaiah taught and prophesied to the **southern kingdom of Judah**. His activity seems to be **centered from Jerusalem**, the capital.

## Historic Setting

### Israel & Judah

During the 8th century BC, Israel & Judah had again become prosperous, more so than any time since Solomon. Through this, the people had essentially forgotten God, and attributed their good fortune to idols. Israel had begun idol worship when the kingdom divided, by setting up the 2 golden calves at Bethel and Dan as places of worship for God. Baal worship was then added during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel (874-853 BC). The nation continued downward with corruption in every aspect of life, despite other prophets sent by God (e.g., Amos, Hosea). Judah, the southern kingdom, likewise had become affluent and morally decadent. Unlike in Israel, there had been good kings periodically who led the nation in some degree of reform – destroying many of the idols, restoring the law and worship, etc. However, no reform was complete, and after each king died it seemed the people returned to where they had been and continued a general downward slide. They even began adopting extreme forms of idolatry practiced by their northern brethren.

**Assyria**

Beginning with the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1116-1078 BC), Assyria became known for military conquest and cruelty to those they fought/conquered. Subsequent kings carried on this manner. Their cruel acts included burning whole cities, beheading thousands, peeling off the skin of their live victims, sealing live victims up in walls, and impaling live victims on poles about the city. This explains the terror that an Assyrian onslaught – or the prophecy of one – would strike in the hearts of those affected. From 781-746 BC Assyria underwent a period of relative weakening, in part due to an extensive plague. It was during this time that Jeroboam II restored Israel’s borders (Jonah also was probably sent to preach to Ninevah, Assyria’s capital city, during this time period). In 745 BC an Assyrian general revolted and took the throne, being known as Tiglath-pileser III. Known in the Bible as “Pul” (II Ki 15:19), he began the conquest of Israel. His son Shalmaneser V continued, and the city of Samaria fell in 722-721 BC. Sargon II took the throne in 721 BC, and took credit for the fall of Samaria. He records deporting 27,290 Israelites to Assyria, and bringing captives from other lands into Israel (The intermarriage of these aliens with the remaining Israelites gave birth to the hated Samaritans of the New Testament). Sennacherib then became king in 705 BC. He besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC and 185,000 of his troops were killed by God outside the city. This was in large part due to good King Hezekiah, and the response of Judah in general to Isaiah and Micah. Assyria later fell to Babylon in 612 BC.

**Kings of Judah\* Kings of Israel\***

Joash 832-803 BC 821-805 Jehoahaz

Amaziah 802-786 BC 804-789 Jehoash (Joash)

Azariah (Uzziah) 785-760 BC 788-748 Jeroboam II

Jotham 759-744 BC 747 Zechariah, then Shallum

Ahaz 743-728 BC 746-737 Menahem

736-735 Pekaiah

734-731 Pekah

Hezekiah 727-699 BC 730-722 Hoshea

Manasseh 698-644 BC

Amon 643-642 BC

Josiah 641-610 BC

Jehoahaz 609 (3 months)

Jehoiakim 608-598 BC

Jehoiachin 597 (3 months)

Zedekiah 596-586 BC

\*Dates according to Hayes & Hooker. Dates may vary by one to ten years.

# Content of Isaiah

Isaiah’s message is essentially **two-fold**. First, he was sent to **warn the people**, including the rulers, of their sins and the impending judgment against Judah. This judgment would be in the form of **captivity to other nations**. His warning was thus a **call to repent**. Secondly, he spoke of a **future salvation to and through Israel and Judah**. This would **unite Jews and Gentiles**, a **salvation for all nations**.

It has been said that Isaiah is a “miniature Bible”. It contains 66 books, as does the Bible. The first 39 are said to correspond to the Old Testament, delivering a call to repent and speaking of Israel prior to the Messiah. The last 27 are said to correspond to the New Testament, focusing mainly on the Messiah and his kingdom. While this is an interesting consideration, the first portion does contain a significant amount about the Messiah – including chapters 7-12; the second portion also contains warnings of consequences of further sins against God.

**Much of our descriptive terminology to understand different aspects of the Christ comes from Isaiah.** Note the following phrases: The son of a virgin (7:14); “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6); A branch from Jesse and Anointed of the Lord (11:1,2); The “Comfort” of his people (40:1); The “Redeemer” and “Holy One of Israel”, their creator and king (43:1); deliverer of the captives (61:1).

The book of Isaiah is **NOT written in chronological order**; rather, there appears to be a topical organization to it. For example, his call to prophecy is noted in Isa 6:1.

* + In the first six chapters he points out the sinful problems that exist among Judah, shows a view of God’s ideal, speaks of the future purified remnant, and warns of the impending judgment (overall, a focus on their sin and its results).
  + Chapters 7-12 speak of the coming King who will rule righteously.
  + Chapters 13-23 speak of the judgment of the heathen nations that must occur prior to the coming King.
  + Protection of those who trust Jehovah and contrast of the world and Zion are in the ensuing chapters.
  + Chapters 26-39 close out the first section with a historical account. This includes the defeat of Assyria by Jehovah. With this threat gone, but the assurance of a subsequent Babylonian captivity, Isaiah’s focus changes to prepare the people for this Babylonian captivity, and assure them of a remnant returning.
  + Chapters 40-66 contain this focus. While still warning of consequences of continued sin, this section includes further focus on the coming Messiah and his kingdom.

* Studying and interpreting Bible prophecy can be generally categorized into three different “approaches”
* Most Bible students do not fall exclusively into one of these categories
* These are general “frameworks” to help us understand the thinking used to arrive at a conclusion regarding the meaning of a prophecy
* Considering these categories can help us better assess our thought processes in determining what prophetic Bible passages mean

Symbolic/Restricted Approach

This is often considered to be the most “conservative” form of prophecy interpretation. This approach tends to follow these general rules:

* All Bible prophecies are *symbolic*.
* All Bible prophecy was *fulfilled* by the conclusion of Bible times (typically held as AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem).
* All Bible prophecy has exactly *one event* that will fulfill it.
* The interpreter must accept Bible explanation for prophecies.

Literal/Unrestricted Approach

This is the most popular form of Bible interpretation. Doctrines such as the Millennium Kingdom, the Rapture, and the Tribulation result from this approach to prophecy application.

* Almost all Bible prophecies are *literal*.
* Many Bible prophecies, Old and New Testament, are *yet to be fulfilled*.
* Bible prophecies can have *multiple fulfillments*.
* Bible terms are never interchangeable (i.e. church, kingdom, Israel).

Cryptographic Approach

This approach believes that there are hidden messages within the Bible. Cryptographic interpretation became mainstream knowledge with the publication of *The Bible Code* (Drosnin 1997). Bible-Code proponents will trace their science back to Sir Isaac Newton as the one who discovered hidden messages in the Bible through use of anagrams and numerology. In his book, Drosnin arranged the letters of the Hebrew alphabet into a large array that could be computer analyzed for various letter combinations and frequencies. The computer is programmed to search for specific keywords and related words. From this program, some astonishing “prophecies” have been revealed -- *after they have happened in reality*. Obviously, this approach negates the need to study and the ability to understand the Bible outside of finding these hidden codes.

* **Guidelines for Understanding Prophetic Symbolism**
* **Consistency** -- The first thing we must do is use consistency when we interpret symbolism
  + We cannot make *part* of it representative & *other parts* literal
  + This is a common mistake made by those wishing to support Premillenialism. For example, consider Isaiah chapter 2:2-4. Those supporting Premillenialism would say that 4b teaches “even the art of warfare will be forgotten” (literal), but agree that the mountain referenced in verse 2 is figurative.
* **Historical Context** -- Understanding to *whom* the book was written & what was happening in their history at that point in time is also critical
  + The writings must have meaning to the original recipient, *as well as to us*. Think, *“How would this be understood by the original reader?”*
* **Theme of the Book** -- Try to understand the major overall theme of the book & keep this in mind when interpreting difficult passages
  + Ask, *“How does this relate to the overall message of the book?”*
* **Bible Teaching** -- The meaning you assign to a prophetic passage *must be in harmony with the rest of Bible teaching*
  + If a teaching on a difficult passage contradicts other passages in the Bible, the teaching cannot be correct!
  + Consider, *“Does this fit the overall theme of the Bible, & harmonize with all other Bible teaching?”*