

## Book of Isaiah

Isaiah was a southern prophet.

The Assyrian empire threatened and destroyed the northern kingdom (the northern kingdom falls in 722) and then of course was threatening Judah.

So he's active for over 50 years and he counseled Judah's kings.

He counsels them through two sieges.

The siege of 734, where he counsels King Ahaz

The siege of 701, where he counsels his son, Hezekiah or Hizkiah, Hezekiah.

There is excellent evidence for all of these events in the Assyrian sources, and also archaeological finds.

The first 11 chapters contain memoirs. Chapter 1 sets out some of the basic themes of Isaiah but we have a lot of first-person narrative. Then we have various oracles against Israel. Some of this material refers to the attacks on Jerusalem, especially the siege of 701. And there seems to be a kind of concluding hymn in chapter 12. We then have about 11 chapters of oracles against foreign nations from chapters 13 to 23. I'm skipping over chapters 24 to 27. They are a little apocalypse, a sort of mythological vision of the end of days, and that probably dates to a much later time, the sixth century. We move on to chapters 28 to 33. Here, we turn from oracles against foreign nations to oracles against Judah and Israel and the relationship with Egypt. This is a time when we're caught between these two powers — Egypt and Assyria. Judah is trying to figure out with whom to make alliances.

And then chapters 36 to 39 — this is third-person, historical narrative and it is, in fact, 2 Kings chapters 18 to 20. That material has simply been inserted here.

From 39 to 66 the remaining material is not the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem. It dates to a period long after Isaiah's lifetime. We refer to these as Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah. Chapters 40 to 55, which we refer to as Second Isaiah, assume a historical setting in which Babylon is dominant, not Assyria. And so we see that as coming at a much later time. Chapters 56 to 66, we refer to as Third Isaiah. This material contains oracles that are spread throughout the eighth to the fifth centuries.

Isaiah is consistent in denouncing again the social injustice and moral decay, which is the cause of God's just and inevitable punishment.

He places more emphasis on the Davidic Covenant than on the Mosaic Covenant. This is a key feature of Isaiah.

Isaiah has an overriding interest in Davidic theology, the royal ideology that centers on Zion.

We also see it in his firm belief in the inviolability of Zion. This is a clear doctrine with Isaiah: the inviolability of Zion. Yahweh has a special relationship with the Davidic royal line and the Davidic capitol, Jerusalem or Zion, and he will not let either perish.

His advice to the king is: be quiet and do not fear (chapter 7:4). The crisis will pass. 7:9: "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established."

Isaiah then offers Ahaz a sign of the truth of his prophecy. And that is, namely, that a young woman who has conceived will bear a son and will call him Immanuel. So this woman who has conceived will bear a son and will call him Immanuel. This is in 7:14. Now, in the New Testament, Matthew, in chapter 1:22-23, takes this verse as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus. This is based on a Greek mistranslation of the word "young woman" as "virgin." The Hebrew term that's used is not in fact the term for virgin, but it was translated into the Greek with a term that can mean virgin. And moreover, the verb that's used in the Hebrew is in the past tense. A woman has already conceived. The birth is pending. It is imminent. This child will be born. God will be with us.

The identity of the woman that Isaiah is speaking about is a matter of some dispute. So some scholars take the verse as a reference to Isaiah's own wife. She's already had two children with portentous names and now she's pregnant with a third. But the others take the verse as a reference to the king's own wife, who will bear his son Hezekiah, King Hezekiah. He did in fact manage to keep Judah intact against the Assyrian threat and kept Jerusalem from falling in the siege of 701. And 2 Kings, the Book of 2 Kings, chapter 18:7, says of Hezekiah, "The Lord was with him." God was with him. Connecting it to the name Immanuel — God is with us. God is with him.

These verses are verses that announce, “for unto us a child is born” — a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father, a prince of peace, referring then to an unending peace in which David’s throne and kingdom are firmly established. And again, these verses have also been decontextualized and are utilized in Christian liturgies to this day, again, as if they refer to the future birth of Jesus.

So God will punish. God cannot *not* punish Israel. And so the demands of justice will be met, and God will have upheld the terms of the conditional Mosaic Covenant. But God will at the same time effect the salvation of his people in the future. He has sent a prophet with a call to return and in due time a remnant of the people — a tenth Isaiah says — will understand and heed that call. They will receive God’s mercy and the covenant will be reestablished. And in this way the demands of love and mercy will be met, and God will have been faithful to his covenantal promise to the patriarchs and the royal House of David. The people’s delayed comprehension of the prophet’s message guarantees the operation of God’s just punishment now and his merciful salvation later.

The royal ideology of Judah plays an important role in the eschatological vision of Isaiah because this new peaceful righteous kingdom is going to be restored by a Davidide. It’s going to be restored by a king from the Branch of Jesse. David’s father name was Jesse. So when you say the branch, or from the stump of Jesse, then you are referring to a Davidide. Isaiah 11 refers to the restoration of the Davidic line, which implies that it had been temporarily interrupted. So Isaiah 11 may be post-exilic. It may date from a time when people were hoping for a messiah to arise and restore the line of David.

Isaiah 11:1-12, 16:

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse,  
A twig shall sprout from his stock.  
The spirit of the Lord shall alight upon him:  
A spirit of wisdom and insight,  
A spirit of counsel and valor,  
A spirit of devotion and reverence for the Lord.  
He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the Lord:  
He shall not judge... by what his ears perceive.  
Thus he shall judge the poor with equit  
And decide with justice for the lowly of the land.  
He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth

And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.  
Justice shall be the girdle of his loins,  
And faithfulness the girdle of his waist.  
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard lie down with the kid;  
The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,  
With a little boy to herd them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze.

Their young shall lie down together;  
And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.  
A babe shall play  
Over a viper's hole,  
And an infant pass his hand  
Over an adder's den.

The hostility, the animosity between humans and serpents or snakes which was decreed at the fall, the expulsion from Eden, is reversed in this end-time. This is a return to the situation in paradise.

Isaiah is typical of the prophetic reinterpretation of the ancient covenant promises, giving Israel a hope for a better, ideal future. And like the other prophets, he declared that the nation was in distress not because the promises weren't true but because they hadn't been believed. The nation's punishment was just a chastisement. It wasn't a revocation of the promises. The prophets pushed the fulfillment of the promises beyond the existing nation however. So only after suffering the punishment for the present failure would a future redemption be possible. So the national hope was maintained but pushed off to a future day.