

יֵשַׁעְיָהוּ

Yasha'yahu

Isaiah

Who was he?

Isaiah 1:1

חֲזֹן יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ בֶן אָמוֹץ אֲשֶׁר חָזָה עַל יְהוּדָה וְיִירוּשָׁלַם בְּיָמֵי עֲזִיָּהוּ,
יוֹתָם, אָחָז, יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ מְלִכֵי יְהוּדָה:

The prophecies of Isaiah son of Amotz, who prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the reigns of 'Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

When Was This?

King 'Uzziah died in 739 BCE.

King Hezekiah became king no later than 716 BCE, and reigned 30 years, so until, at the latest, 686 BCE.

Isaiah's prophecies span, therefore, somewhere between 25-50 years, or so.

-- John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Eerdmans, 1986)

The oldest surviving manuscripts of Isaiah are two scrolls found among the Dead Sea Scrolls; dating from about 150 to 100 BCE.

--Wikipedia

What is the Book of Isaiah?

- A Book of Theology
- A Book of Politics

>Theology of Politics

Major Events During the Period of Isaiah's Prophecy

- **Renewed regional aggression from Assyria after a period of calm (823-745 BCE), when Tiglath-Pileser III becomes king.**
- **Northern kingdom of Israel pays tribute right away.**
- **Nevertheless by 731 BCE, Assyria conquers the north of Israel.**

Dilemma in Judea

- Be pro-Assyrian (so that Judea finally becoming dominant over the usually stronger Israel)?
- Be anti-Judea (to try to stop its ever-expanding march)?

Pro-Assyria!

New Judean King Ahaz (735 BCE), terrified of the threat from Israel & and the north, decides Pro-Assyria (II Kings 16:7-9):

7. Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria to say, “I am your servant and your son; come and deliver me from the hands of the king of Aram and from the hands of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.”

8. Ahaz took the gold and silver that were on hand in the House of YHWH and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent them as a gift to the king of Assyria.

9. The king of Assyria responded to his request; the king of Assyria marched against Damascus and captured it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

Isaiah Hates It

- Isaiah's politics: Be neither pro- nor anti- Assyria; be pro-God.
- Aligning with Assyria will lead to further apostasy and won't even help militarily, b/c Assyria will turn on Judea when it's useful.
- That's exactly what happened:
 - In 732 BCE, T-P forced Ahaz to recognize Assyrian gods
 - After T-P died in 727 BCE, Assyria sieged Samaria, in the north, exiling its inhabitants and kept marching south, toward Judea

Judea Turns Anti-Assyria

- Under King Hezekiah (Ahaz's son), generally righteous, Judea turns to Egypt for support against Assyria.
- Isaiah hates this, too: Egypt will also betray Judea and can't even deliver what it promises.
- It fails, too.

Some Pillars of Isaiah's Theology

- Allegiance should be only to God; human political aspirations are doomed efforts to supplant God.
- God is radically other: קדוש ישראל, רם ונשא (Holy One of Israel, Raised and exalted)
- This reflects God's power and morality.
- God has plans. History will find its climax as nations stream to a redeemed Zion.
- History is the interaction between Divine purpose and human response, not the the interaction between different human powers, who are just tools of God.

Isaiah 5:16

And YHWH of Hosts is elevated by justice,
The Holy God proved holy by righteousness.

וַיִּגְבֶּה יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בַּמִּשְׁפָּט
וְהָאֱלֹהִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ נִקְדָּשׁ בַּצְדִּיקָה:

“2nd and 3rd Isaiah”

Scholarly consensus of the 19th & 20th centuries was that the “Book of Isaiah” is actually 3 different collections of prophecy:

- **Isaiah 1-39:** The prophet Isaiah, late 8th century, BCE
- **Isaiah 40-55:** Unnamed prophet, 6th century, BCE, in Babylonian exile (which started in 586 BCE)
- **Isaiah 56-66:** Unnamed prophet, late 6th century BCE, after the return to Jerusalem (516 BCE)

Unified Book?

More recent scholarship sees more literary continuity across the 66 chapters, arguing that it's closer to a unified work, reflecting backward to different historical conditions.

Major Events During the Period of Isaiah's Later Prophecy

586 BCE: The Babylonian Empire, under King Nebuchadnezzar, conquers Jerusalem, destroys the Temple, exiles Jerusalem's elites.

- *Isaiah 40-55 addresses the Jews in exile, offering hope of return, through the imminent fall of Babylon and salvation from the rising King Cyrus of Persia, who will deliver Israel.*

Major Events During the Period of Isaiah's Later Prophecy

559 BCE: Cyrus the Great becomes King of Persia, then a small kingdom in today's eastern Iran. He rises meteorically. By 540, his empire stretches from the Mediterranean to Central Asia, and in 539 he conquered Babylon, including Jerusalem. Cyrus allows Jewish exiles to return. Some do and by 515 BCE they rebuild the Temple (much more modestly).

- *Isaiah 56-66 addresses the Jews who have returned to the land and find themselves in various political and economic conflicts.*