

BIBLE SYNTHESIS IV

(Bible Survey)

Introduction to Isaiah

“When ... Augustine asked Ambrose which of the sacred books was best to be studied after his conversion, the answer was ‘Isaiah.’ Certainly *nowhere else in the Old Testament have we so clear a view of the grace of God.* This book has been called, ‘The Gospel according to Isaiah,’ and its writer has been called ‘The Fifth Evangelist,’ and ‘the prophet of Redemption.’ Because of this, and its noble language and rich vocabulary and style, we venture to think that the advice of Ambrose was excellent and worth copying.”

—*The Outlined Bible*, Robert Lee, London

1. Author:

Isaiah, meaning “Jehovah is salvation,” which is the equivalent of Joshua. He is the great messianic prophet, and prince of the Old Testament prophets — Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Matt. 13:14; Acts 8:28, 32-33; etc.

Isaiah says very little about himself, though we do have a few references”

- (1) When he wrote — 1:1
- (2) His father’s name — 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; etc. Also, see II Kings 19:2, 20.
- (3) To whom he wrote — 1:1; 2:1
- (4) That he was married and had sons, and that he and his sons were signs to Judah — 7:3; 8:1, 18
- (5) His personal call and commission — Isa. 6
- (6) His encounter with Ahaz — 7:1-ff.
- (7) His ministry during the reign of Hezekiah and the crisis with Assyria, plus his part in Hezekiah’s sickness, and in Hezekiah’s folly — 36:1 — 39:8

2. Addressees:

- (1) Judah and Jerusalem — 1:1; 2:1; 3:1; 40:2; etc.
- (2) A number of Gentile nations: Babylon, Moab, Damascus, and others — 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; etc.
- (3) Ephraim, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and others mentioned incidentally — 7:10; 28:1; 37:5-6; etc.

3. Date:

- (1) Of writing: From about 739 B.C. (or earlier) to 692 (or later), during the reigns of Uzziah (Azariah); Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. It covers a period of at least 39 years, and probably longer — 1:1; 6:1; 38:4-5

(2) Prophets Contemporary with Isaiah:

- 1. Amos (764—755 B.C.). Amos has 9 chapters. It was written to Israel, the 10 Northern Tribes.
- 2. Hosea (755—714 B.C.). Hosea has 14 chapters. It was also written to Israel.
- 3. Micah (736—700 B.C.). Micah has 7 chapters. It too was written to Israel.

Note: The dates of these writings cannot be given with absolute certainty. They are approximate, and, if there is a variance, it will be only slightly from the actual date.

Note: Isaiah prophesied from about 739 to 692 B.C. See chart of *The Kings and Prophets of Israel*, included later in these notes.

(3) Background to Isaiah — The Setting of this Book

-1. Scriptures to be read (see Isa. 1:1 for the kings):

- (1. For King Uzziah — II Chron. 26:1-23; II Kings 14:21 — 15:4 [He was a good king. Was called Azariah in II Kings, and Uzziah in II Chronicles.]
- (2. For King Jotham — II Chron. 27:1-9; II Kings 15:7, 32-38 [He was also a good king.]
- (3. For King Ahaz — II Chron. 28:1-27; II Kings 16:1-20 [He was evil.]
- (4. For King Hezekiah — II Chron. 29 — 32; II Kings 18 — 20 [He was a good king, though he made a serious error near the end of his life.]

-2. Historically, the Assyrian Empire had been expanding for 150 years before the days of Isaiah. Isaiah was still a young man when Assyria carried the northern kingdom (Israel) into captivity (about 722-721 B.C.). Isaiah was an old man when the angel of God stopped the Assyrians near Jerusalem (II Kings 19:35). His entire life was spent under Assyrian threat. Also, Syria, an on-again off-again nation was a threat during the lifetime of Isaiah. Though this nation was destroyed by the Assyrians. The threat of the Israel—Syria alliance forms the background for Isaiah 7 and following. This was a dark and threatening time for Judah.

(4) Nations in prominence during Isaiah’s time:

- 1. **Israel** — The 10 Northern Tribes — From the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. on to the time of Isaiah, Israel became progressively worse. Hoshea became the final king over Israel. He reigned for 9 evil years before Assyria came, besieged Samaria (capital of Israel) for 3 years, captured that city, and carried Israel into captivity (II Kings 17:1-23). So ends “Ephraim,” Israel, or Samaria, as it was called. That nation has never been restored to its land to this day, excepting as a remnant of them returned with the Jews following the Babylonian captivity.

- 2. **Syria** — When David was King, Israel ruled over Syria (or Aram). Solomon extended the kingdom of Israel even farther to the north than Syria. In time, Syria began to play the part of a thorn in the flesh of Israel. II Kings 10:32 took place during the time of Jehu. (And see II Kings 12:17-18). When Jeroboam II became King, he once more subjugated Syria and Damascus, its capital. But this was short-lived, because Israel began to assassinate her kings one after another. As a consequence, there was a series of short and wicked reigns. When Rezin of Syria, became ally to Pekah of Israel against Judah, Ahaz of Judah hired Assyria to help them. Damascus, capital of Syria was conquered by the Assyrians, and Syria ceased to be a power.
- 3. **Assyria** — This nation was a threat to Israel over a long time. We see the final events of Assyrian influence upon Israel in II Kings 15:19-20, 29-30; 16:7-ff.; 17:3-ff.

After conquering Israel, Assyria invaded Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (II Kings 18:7 — 19:37). They were never able to capture Jerusalem, although some of the cities of Judah were overthrown, and Jews were carried off (II Kings 18:13). The LORD slew 185,000 Assyrians in one night and thus saved Jerusalem.

The Assyrians were noted for their cruelty as captors. Their policy was to displace the people whom they conquered. In this way they effectively destroyed a number of nations which have never been revived.

4. Circumstances and Message of Isaiah:

- (1) Judah had a form of godliness, but no reality — 1:11-15
- (2) God had repeatedly chastised Judah, but to no avail — 1:5-9
- (3) He appeals to Judah to repent or be devoured by the sword — 1:19-20; 6:9-12
- (4) Later, the LORD will punish the nations that He has used to chastise His people — 10:12; 13:19; etc.
- (5) Eventually, He will restore His people, and through them He will bless the nations of the world — 2:2-4; 10:20-22; 11:10; 42:1-7; etc.

5. Theme of Isaiah:

The LORD (Jehovah) as *Judge* (chapters 1 — 39) and *Redeemer* (chapters 40 — 66) — 1:18-20; 3:13; 7:17; 10:5-6, 11; etc., and 41:14; 43:1, 3, 14; 47:4; 49:7; etc.

6. Key Terms:

- (1) Key Phrase: “The Holy One of Israel” (25 times — 12 times in chapters 1 — 39, and 13 times in chapters 40 — 66). This is rarely used elsewhere in the Scriptures — 1:4; 10:20; 12:6; 41:14, 16; 60:14

(2) Key Words:

-1. *Judgment* (or *judge*) (52 times) — 1:27; 2:4; 3:14; 11:3-4; 33:22; 42:4

-2. *Comfort* (or *comfortably*) (18 times) — 40:1-2; 49:13; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13

7. Unity of the Book of Isaiah:

(1) The critics and the “Deutero-Isaiah” theory: Since about 1775 A.D. the authorship and unity of the book of Isaiah has been under attack. Critics have questioned whether Isaiah wrote chapters 40 — 66, or was it another writer? Their arguments have been based upon: (1) the literary style, (2) theological ideas, and (3) theme and subject matter. So the second Isaiah of the period 550—539 B.C. appeared in their fertile and unbelieving imaginations. Other critics have imagined a third Isaiah for chapters 55—66.

(3) The Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah have effectively destroyed the ideas of the critics. One of the scrolls contains the complete Hebrew text of Isaiah. It dates from the second century B.C. This authenticates the accuracy of our Hebrew text of Isaiah.

BIBLE SYNTHESIS IV

(Bible Survey)

Outline of Isaiah

1. DENUNCIATORY —Isaiah 1 — 35 (Poetry)

Prophecies from the Standpoint of Isaiah's Day

- (1) Concerning Judah and Jerusalem —Isa. 1 — 12
- (2) Concerning Surrounding Nations —Isa. 13 — 23
- (3) Of Kingdom Establishment —Isa. 24 — 27
- (4) Concerning Judah and Assyria —Isa. 28 — 35

2. HISTORICAL —Isaiah 36 — 39 (Prose)

History, largely of incidents in the life of Hezekiah.

- (1) Hezekiah's Trouble —Isa. 36
- (2) Hezekiah's Prayer and God's Deliverance —Isa. 37
- (3) Hezekiah's Sickness and Healing —Isa. 38
- (4) Hezekiah's Folly and the Future Judgment —Isa. 39

3. CONSOLATORY —Isaiah 40 — 66 (Poetry)

Comforting, redeeming, Enriching the nation (future)

- (1) Deliverance from Babylonian Captivity —Isa. 40 — 48 (9 chapters)
The dominant note in this section is *comfort*.
- (2) The Suffering Servant and His Salvation —Isa. 49 — 57 (9 chapters)
The dominant note in this section is *Suffering Servant*.
- (3) The Redeemer and His Restoration —Isa. 58 — 66 (9 chapters)
The dominant theme of this section is *Future Glory*.

Isaiah, the Miniature Bible

Isaiah is a Miniature Bible in structure. It has 66 chapters, just as the Bible has 66 books. There are two great divisions to Isaiah, just as there are in the Bible, with 39 chapters in the first division and 27 in the second.

1. The Old Testament (66 books) opens with God's case against man because of sin (Gen. 3). Isaiah opens the same way. The Old Testament section of Isaiah (the first 39 chapters) deals with judgment against the nation because of their sin.

2. The New Testament (27 books) opens with John the Baptist (Matt. 3). Isaiah 40 opens with "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" and it is concerned with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second section is divided into three divisions containing nine chapters each, with Isaiah 53, the dealing with Suffering Saviour, being the center chapter.

Warning, please do not try to make too much of this structural relationship. For example, chapter 1 of Isaiah does not contain the same material as Genesis, and so forth. There are some clear parallels, and there may be some less clear ones. Leave those things for later study. Get the general picture now.

