

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. Today we will study the book of ISAIAH - PART 1. We will learn about the structure of the book, the historical background and division of the book and the origin of the book of Isaiah.

### **POINT 1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH**

There are learned men who think that the book Isaiah is composed of two or even three different writers. They consider *chapters 1-39 as Isaiah 1, chapters 40-55 (or 40-66) as Isaiah 2 and chapters 56-66 as Isaiah 3*. They base their view on the assumption that prophecies concerning the future are impossible and that therefore these so-called prophecies were recorded *after* the events actually occurred. They say that there must have been two or three different writers, because they took their historical point of view as being *before, during and after* the exile. Subsequently, they assume that Isaiah 1-39 was composed *long before the exile* in Judah, Isaiah 40-55(or 66) must have been composed *during the exile* in Babylon and Isaiah 56-66 must have been composed *after the exile* in Judah. However, the internal evidence decisively proves that Isaiah is a unity composed by one writer.

#### **First. The prophecies recorded in Isaiah are real and possible.**

The view that prophecies concerning the future are impossible, must be rejected on bases of biblical evidence. For example, king Jeroboam lived from 932-911 B.C. He erected a golden calf idol at Bethel, installed idolatrous priests and sacrificed calves. A prophet prophesied that later a certain king named *Josiah* would come and sacrifice the idolatrous priest on this altar and desecrate it (1 Ki 12:25-13:3). About 300 years later, king Josiah went to Bethel, burned the bones of dead people buried around it on the altar, demolished it and ground it to powder (2 Ki 23:15-16). Another example is that the prophet Micah prophesied that the coming Messiah would be born in the town of *Bethlehem* (Mic 5:2). About 700 years later, Jesus Christ, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem (Mt 2:1-6). If it was possible for prophets to prophesy the name of king Josiah 300 years before he actually lived, and to prophesy the name of the place where Jesus Christ would be born 700 years before he was actually born, then all Isaiah's prophecies are real prophecies! The prophet Isaiah prophesied that a certain king *Cyrus* would subdue nations and give the command to rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple (Isa 44:28; 45:1). About 200 years later, king Cyrus founded the Medo-Persian Empire, destroyed nations and gave the command to rebuilt Jerusalem and its temple. Therefore the structure of the book Isaiah cannot be based on the assumption that prophesying concerning the future is impossible.

#### **Second. The internal evidence of Isaiah 40-66 prove that it was composed in Palestine before the exile, just as Isaiah 1-39.**

The writer's viewpoint is clearly from Palestine looking towards the east. Isaiah 46:11 says "From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfil my purpose" (52:11). In Isaiah 40:9 and 62:6, the writer spoke in the knowledge that the cities of Judah and Jerusalem were still standing. And in Isaiah 58:6, he mentions that their courts of law were still functioning. But the most decisive objection against a date during or after the exile for the composition of chapters 40-66 is *the numerous references to idolatry in this section*. Chapters 40-66 accurately describes the infamous types of idolatry which was practised during the time of king Manasseh. Compare 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33 with Isaiah chapter 44:9-20; 57:4-7; 65:2-4 and 66:17. The hilly or mountainous terrain on which idolatry was practised excludes Babylon as the place of description, because Babylon is a flat, alluvial terrain. Moreover, people who lived after the exile, the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi as well as the writers Ezra and Nehemiah, prove beyond all reasonable doubt that Judea after the exile was free from idolatry. Therefore the structure of the book Isaiah cannot be based on the assumption that a part of the book was written during the exile.

#### **Third. If Isaiah could prophesy the rise and fall of Babylon in chapters 1-39, then the one who prophesied the rise and fall of Babylon in chapters 40-66 is most likely the same person.**

Isaiah 13 is a prophecy against Babylon, which at that time was just a small subject province in the Assyrian Empire. It prophesies that Babylon would become a great army that would bring kingdoms in turmoil, would punish nations for their evil, would be ruthless and arrogant, would devastate Palestine and become the jewel of the nations. It also prophesies that Babylon would eventually be conquered by the Medes (13:17). But also Isaiah 46-47 prophesies the fall of Babylon. Therefore, the writer of both sections is one and the same person.

**Fourth. The New Testament writers regard the writer of chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66 as one and the same person.**

John 12:38-41 quotes Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-10 as being from one prophet called *Isaiah*. We conclude that the book of Isaiah is a unity. It does not consist of 2 or 3 books written by different writers.

**POINT 2. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, CONTENTS AND DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.**

The book of Isaiah may be divided into four major parts:

**The first part of Isaiah** consists of chapter 1-6 and covers the period under Uzziah and Jotham.

King Uzziah reigned for 52 years from 788 to 737 B.C. During his last 13 years he was a leper and was excluded from all business of state and his son Jotham reigned in his stead. King Jotham reigned from 750 to 737 B.C. Their reign is described in 2 Chronicles 26-27. The first 5 chapters of Isaiah fit the situation described in 2 Chronicles perfectly. A century before Uzziah, Israel and Judah had suffered much from Aram (Syria). But during the reign of Uzziah, Israel experienced a time of power and prosperity. Nevertheless, Israel rebelled against the Lord and turned their backs on him. Although Assyria is only mentioned for the first time in the second part under king Ahaz, Isaiah's ministry begins together with the renewed power of Assyria. Isaiah received his call as prophet during the year that Uzziah died, that is in 737 B.C.

Isaiah chapter 1-6 is about *judgement and promise* and may be divided into 4 sections:

Chapter 1. Rebellious and corrupt Israel judged.

Chapter 2-4. The false and true glory of Israel.

Chapter 5. Unfruitful and corrupt Israel threatened by attack of distant nations and exile.

Chapter 6. Isaiah's calling and commission.

**The second part of Isaiah** consists of chapter 7-12 and covers the period under king Ahaz.

King Ahaz reigned for 6 years and 10 months from 734 to 727 B.C. His reign is described in 2 Chronicles 28. He was completely depraved, promoted gross idolatry and wickedness in Judah and was very unfaithful to the Lord. Therefore the Lord allowed king Rezin of Aram (Syria) and king Pekah of the northern kingdom of Israel to invade the southern kingdom of Judah and defeat it. God sent the prophet Isaiah to encourage him, especially by announcing the birth of the coming Messiah, who would rule over the kingdom of David in righteousness forever. But Ahaz refused the evidence upon which his faith might have been established and instead pursued his own plans. Ahaz preferred to depend on king Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria to rescue him from Aram and Israel. Assyria punished Damascus of Aram in 734 B.C. and Samaria of Israel in 732 B.C. But instead of becoming the means of rescuing Judah, as Ahaz had hoped, Assyria became God's means to punish Judah (7:17-20). Isaiah 14:28 records the death of Ahaz in 727 B.C., the same year Tiglath-Pileser died.

Isaiah chapter 7-12 is about *the contrast between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God* and may be divided into 4 sections:

Chapter 7:1-9:7. Two kinds of helpers: the nations of the world or God.

Chapter 9:8-10:4. God's upraised hand against the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim).

Chapter 10:5-34. Assyria is God's rod and axe, but God will eventually destroy it.

Chapter 11-12. The Messiah and his kingdom.

**The third part of Isaiah** consists of chapter 13-39 and covers the period under king Hezekiah.

King Hezekiah reigned for 42 years from 727 to 685 B.C. For the first 13 years, he reigned under a guardian (727-714 B.C.). He reigned alone from 714-695 and together with his son Manasseh from 695-685 B.C. His reign is described in 2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32. He did what was good, right and faithful in the eyes of God. In everything he did, he sought God and worked wholeheartedly (2 Chron 31:20-21). He was godly and a great reformer: He restored the temple and the worship in the temple of the Lord, re-instituted the Passover festival and destroyed idolatry all over Judah and Israel. During the 6<sup>th</sup> year of his reign under a guardian, that is in 721 B.C., the northern kingdom of Israel was deported to Assyria by Sargon. Sargon lost a battle against Elam and this sparked a revolt against Assyria among the nations in the west.

When Hezekiah began to rule alone in 714 B.C., he tended to side with the western nations against Assyria. Around 700 B.C., Judah was indeed invaded by Sennacherib of Assyria. Hezekiah paid the required tribute to Assyria by stripping the Lord's temple of all its treasures (2 Ki 18:13-16). Then in desperation, he sought the help of Egypt against Assyria (2 Ki 18:21; Isa 36:6). But Isaiah preached against this un-theocratic political alliance and warned that this was not the way to escape the Assyrian yoke (Isa 30:1-5; 31:1). Egypt did not help and finally, the Assyrian army stood before Jerusalem's walls. The Assyrian general mocked God (36:18-20; 37:10-13). Together with the prophet Isaiah, king Hezekiah prayed about this and the angel of the Lord annihilated the mighty Assyrian army (2 Chron 32:20-21; Isa 37:14-37). During this period, Hezekiah became mortally sick, but recovered and God added 15 years to his life (38:5). After his recovery, Hezekiah made an ill-considered display of the treasures of the temple to some Babylonian envoys.

At this time, Babylon was only a subject province of the Assyrian Empire. The prophet Isaiah predicted that Israel together with all its treasures would be taken into exile to Babylon (39:6-7). *Isaiah's ministry is very much characterised by the contrast between the actions of the worldly powers represented by Assyria and Egypt on the one hand and the kingdom of God represented by Jerusalem, which is still a shadow of what is to come, on the other hand.*

Isaiah chapter 13-39 is about *the contrast between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God* and may be divided into 5 major sections:

Chapters 13-23. Prophecies concerning God's judgement of specific Gentile nations.

Chapters 24-27. Prophecies concerning the last things, especially the judgement of the whole world (apocalyptic=revelation).

Chapters 28-33. Isaiah's ministry under Hezekiah, especially concerning the threat of Assyria.

Chapters 34-35. Prophecies concerning the last things, especially the future glory of God's people.

Chapters 36-39. Isaiah's ministry under Hezekiah, especially concerning the destruction of Assyria.

**The fourth part of Isaiah** consists of chapter 40-66 and covers the period under king Manasseh.

King Manasseh reigned for 55 years. The first 11 years, he reigned under his father Hezekiah. He reigned alone for 44 years from 685-641 B.C. His reign is described in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. Under his reign, a strong tide of reaction set in against the strict worship of the Lord during the previous reign. Manasseh did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and led Israel astray so that Israel did more evil than the Canaanite nations, which the Lord had destroyed (2 Chron 33:9). Isaiah lived to see the undoing of all his work so far as contemporary politics was concerned (not to depend on Egypt). In spiritual matters, Israel fell in even greater depravity than under the reign of Ahaz. Isaiah realised that God's judgement of Israel was inevitable. During Manasseh's reign, Isaiah concentrated his prophecies increasingly on the coming overthrow of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, the exile to Babylon and, for the sake of the faithful remnant, also on the return from exile. Manasseh promoted so much idolatry in Israel that it became fashionable. This condition explains Isaiah's tremendous emphasis on prophesying against the idols and on prophesying the uniqueness and sovereignty of the Lord. The inevitable judgement coming to apostate Israel, logically led to the recording of the Lord's prophecies concerning vicarious atonement. Apart from vicarious atonement there could be no reasonable hope for the survival of the genuine people of God in Israel. This explains Isaiah's emphasis on the coming Servant of the Lord and his work of salvation.

Isaiah chapter 40-66 is about *comfort for God's people* and may be divided into 3 major sections:

Chapters 40:1-49:13. Prophecies in this section are about the contrast between the idols and the Lord, the appearance of king Cyrus, the conquering of Babylon and the return of the exiles to Judah. There are prophecies concerning the servant of the Lord.

Chapters 49:14-55:13. Prophecies in this section are about the restoration of Jerusalem, called Zion, and its subsequent glory. There are more prophecies concerning the Servant of the Lord.

Chapters 56-66. Prophecies in this section have a variety of themes.

### **POINT 3. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH**

#### **First. The name or title of the book.**

The book of Isaiah is introduced by chapter 1:1, which says, "The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." This is the *title* of the book of Isaiah. The title of the book is thus the name of the prophet whose prophecies have been gathered and recorded in this book. The introductory verse does not mention king Manasseh. One possibility is that it was the introductory verse of an earlier part or version of the present book of Isaiah, but later became the introductory verse of the whole book of Isaiah. Another possibility is that Manasseh's name was left omitted, because Isaiah probably no longer prophesied publicly during his reign and died during his reign. Nevertheless, the title has reference to the main contents of the book. The name *Isaiah* means *the Lord has given salvation*. His name also characterises his ministry, in which he continually emphasised that only the Lord can save and that all human help is in vain.

#### **Second. How the book was written.**

The prophet Isaiah began his ministry during the reign of king Uzziah and most probably ended it under king Manasseh. Thus, he prophesied over a period of about 60 years. God himself commanded Isaiah to record the prophecies God gave to him. In Isaiah 8:1 is written, "The Lord said to me, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen ..." He himself recorded the prophecies which God gave him. According to Isaiah 8:16-18, Isaiah did not stand alone, but had a group of disciples around him. Throughout his long life and ministry, his growing number of prophecies were collected and bound together in a volume, most probably by these disciples and under Isaiah's direction. The groups of prophecies are arranged either chronologically or thematically.

#### **Third. The writer of the book.**

There are people who believe that chapters 40-66 were not the prophecies of our prophet Isaiah, but belonged to an unknown writer called *Isaiah 2*. They also believe that these prophecies were written *during* the exile. If that were the

case, then it would be a remarkable phenomenon that the Jews knew this famous person who prophesied these wonderful prophecies contained in chapters 40-66, possessed his prophecies in a book and still did not remember his name! Both the book itself as well as the Jewish tradition ascribes the whole book to our prophet Isaiah, who lived in the period of king Uzziah to Manasseh. The title of the book clearly states that *the main contents of the whole book* comes from our prophet Isaiah!

Also the writers of the New Testament regard both Isaiah chapters 1-39 as well as chapters 40-66 as being from one and the same prophet Isaiah. The most notable is John 12:38-41, which quotes chapter 6:9-10 and 53:1 together as being from one and the same prophet Isaiah!

Isaiah prophesied during the reign of five kings of Judah, over a period of about 60 years from about 740-680 B.C. His wife was a prophetess and he had two sons, whose names were prophetic messages to Israel. "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" means that Israel would soon be deported with all their possessions to Assyria (721 B.C.). And "Shear-jashub" means that only a remnant of the people of God would return from exile (8:3; 7:3). According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was martyred to death under Manasseh. It says that Isaiah was placed inside a hollow tree trunk and then sawed in two. This tradition may be true, because according to 2 Kings 21:16, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood and according to Hebrews 11:37, some people, who believed in the living God, were sawed in two. Since Isaiah records the death of king Sennacherib in 681 B.C., it is fair to assume that Isaiah lived till about 680 B.C.

The title or introductory verse does not say who finally gathered all Isaiah's prophecies together and composed one book of them. For Christians it is not important to know *who* wrote every single verse in a Bible book or who composed a book in the Bible in its final form, but it is important to believe that according to 2 Peter 1:20-21 and 2 Timothy 3:16, both the contents and composition of every Bible book was the work of the Holy Spirit!

**Fourth. The time and place the book was written.**

The book was compiled progressively during Isaiah's lifetime. Because it does not record his death, it was probably completed in its present form before the end of his life, that is, by 680 B.C.

**ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read Isaiah 40-66. Next week we will introduce the book of Isaiah - part 2.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".