

EMBASSY

COLLEGE



TEXTBOOK (ACADEMIC VERSION)

INSIGHTS INTO ISAIAH

COURSE: ISAIAH, THE BOOK OF (OT340)

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INSIGHTS INTO ISAIAH

**Life Changing Lessons
From the Greatest Old Testament
Prophet with a Message for Today**

**Second Edition
Revised and Expanded**

by
IAN A. H. BOND, D.Min., D.Th.

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FOREWORD

Here is yet another fine book from the pen of Ian Bond. These studies in Isaiah are illuminating, revelatory and life-changing. Not only is this material the substance of a great college course, it is a good read for any pastor, teacher, or student of the Word. Here you will find food for thought as well as nuggets and insights that inspire.

Ian seems to write effortlessly. However, we all know it requires much prayer, knowledge and that marvelous gift of clear expression to produce this and the other excellent volumes he has shared with the Body of Christ. You will be blessed by these studies in Isaiah.

Ronald E. Cottle, Ph.D., Ed.D.
Founder of Christian Life School of Theology
Founder of Beacon University

Part One

Introduction to Isaiah

CHAPTER 1

TECHNICAL INTRODUCTION

The Book of Isaiah is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. Bible teacher and pastor Charles P. Schmidt has called it “the greatest Old Testament prophet with a message for today.” Isaiah has also been called both the “messianic prophet” and the “evangelical prophet.” Old Testament scholar Barry Webb describes the book as the “Romans” of the Old Testament, because “it is here that the threads come together and the big picture of God’s purposes for his people and for his world is most clearly set forth.”¹ Isaiah prophesies for all future ages, predicting both the first and second advents of Christ. No Old Testament book speaks more powerfully and appropriately to the modern-day church than the Book of Isaiah.

John Sawyer calls the Book of Isaiah “the Fifth

¹ Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*. The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 37–38.

Gospel."² He explores the usage of Isaiah in the entire theological-liturgical tradition of the church, emphasizing focal themes such as "Virgin Birth," "Suffering Servant," and "Messiah." Sawyer affirms the conviction of early teachers in the church who concluded that along with the four Gospels of the New Testament, Isaiah is a "gospel" that contains in full the crucial elements of the Christian faith. Walter Brueggemann poetically likens the Book of Isaiah to "a mighty oratorio whereby Israel sings its story of faith."³ He concludes that the Book is "a remarkable artistic achievement wherein the artistry is a match for the awesome, inscrutable Character whose tale it tells."⁴

The book is a collection of oracles, prophecies, and reports; but the common theme is the message of salvation. According to these writings, there is no hope in anything that has been made by humankind. The kingdom of Assyria had dominated the Fertile Crescent and posed a major threat to both kingdoms; and the kingdom of Babylon was gaining power and would replace Assyria as the dominant threat. The northern kingdom of Israel had been carried into captivity (722 B.C.), and the kingdom of Judah was in the middle of idolatry and evil. In light of the rapidly changing international scene, the people of Israel were deeply concerned about what would become of the promises of Yahweh? How could His chosen people

² John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*. Westminster Bible Companion. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

survive, let alone be a theocracy again? And must the remnant of the righteous also suffer with the nation that for all purposes was pagan?

The nation would be purged because Yahweh is holy. Therefore, before the nation could inherit the promises made to the patriarchs, it would have to be made holy. Yahweh would use the pagan nations to chasten Israel for its sins and cleanse it from iniquity. On the one hand, the judgment of the captivity would punish sin and destroy the wicked unbelievers. On the other hand, the removal of iniquity would ultimately be the work of the Servant of the Lord, the promised Messiah. On the basis of this cleansing and purification, Yahweh would ultimately establish the golden age, a time of peace and prosperity that the world has never known. Once the holy God would make the remnant holy, he would use them to rule over the nations rather than allow the nations again to discipline them. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck summarize Isaiah's primary purpose: "To remind his readers of the special relationship they had with God as members of the nation of Israel, His special covenant community."⁵

ABOUT ISAIAH

While little is known of the personal life of the prophet, he is considered to be one of the greatest of them all. He lived and worked in Jerusalem from about 750 to 700 B.C. John Watts notes, "All that is known of

⁵ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 1031.

him is contained in a few passages of the book that bears his name.”⁶ The name “Isaiah” is derived from the Hebrew *Yeshayah*, meaning “Salvation of YA[hwe]H.” The book uses derivatives of this name (*Yeshua*, *Yasha*) nearly fifty times. Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and to its capital city, Jerusalem. As a young man he was influenced by the prophets Amos and Hosea (compare Isa. 1:1 with Amos 1:1 and Hos. 1:1), who were prophets to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and were contemporaries with Isaiah. Isaiah was also contemporary with Micah (see Mic. 1:1), whose burden for the oppression of the poor, the selfish indulgence of the rich, their indifference towards God and their dead worship, Isaiah deeply shared. He has been called the “Evangelical Prophet,” because the writings attributed to him are the most frequently quoted Old Testament prophecy by Jesus and the New Testament writers.

Isaiah was married to a prophetess and had at least two sons: “Then the LORD said to Isaiah, ‘Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz . . .’” (Isa. 7:3); “Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, ‘Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz’” (Isa. 8:3). The prophet was the son of Amoz, who experienced over sixty years of public life and ministry in an effort to bring the nation back to Yahweh. He entered his public ministry around 750 B.C., about the time of the founding of Rome and the first Olympic Games of the Greeks. According to tradition he was sawn in half by

⁶ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), xxv.

Manasseh, the wicked son of Hezekiah.⁷ Some scholars believe that the writer to the Hebrews refers to the assassination of Isaiah: "They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword" (Heb. 11:37). He prophesied in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, and also may have lived past Hezekiah into the reign of Manasseh. Assuming that he was a young man at the death of Uzziah in 742 B.C. when his official ministry began, he might have been 70 or 80 at the time of his death (ca. 680 B.C.). According to tradition, Isaiah may also have been related to the royal family, conferring with kings as with equals, sensing himself to be the Lord's royal ambassador to them.

THE ISAIANIC WRITINGS

The writings attributed to Isaiah are by a brilliant writer (or writers), using nearly 2,200 different Hebrew words—more than any other Old Testament writer. His book contains various of his sacred songs, giving insight into his poetic nature and worshipful heart; for example as in Isaiah 5:1, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside."

The collection of Isaianic writings fits the progression of Israel's history over this time. The prophet began preaching during the Assyrian crisis, shortly

⁷ According to Sawyer, "A second century A.D. Jewish work known as 'The Martyrdom of Isaiah' assumes, not without good reason, that he was put to death under Manasseh, Hezekiah's evil son." John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah*. Vol. 1. The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1984), 4.

before Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom and was threatening the southern kingdom. Hezekiah, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, was able to survive that invasion through the help of the prophet. He foolishly allowed ambassadors from Babylon to see all the treasures of the kingdom, a sin that brought Isaiah's prediction of the Babylonian captivity in the future. The book includes this historical interlude before the second half, which focuses on that captivity in Babylon. The prophet has no idea when that captivity would come; for him it could have come right after the death of Hezekiah, which means his audience might be the people to go into the exile. And so he began to prepare them. However, history shows that it would not be that generation, for the exile began about one hundred years after the death of Isaiah. The second portion of the book looks in a more general way to that future time and offers a message of comfort and hope for the exiles of Judah, as well as descriptions of the restoration to Jerusalem. The hope of such a salvation culminates in a glorious vision of the new heavens and the new earth in the age to come.

Thus the *Sitz-im-Leben* ("seat-in-life") of the first half of the book is Judah in the days of the Assyrians. The *Sitz-im-Leben* of the second half of the book is Babylon, then Jerusalem again, and ultimately beyond in the age to come. The intended audience of the first half of the book is pre-exilic Israel; the target audience in the second half of the book is Israel during the exile and at the return. According to Robert Chisholm, Jr., chapters 40–66, which anticipate the exile and the concerns of the future exiles in Babylon, "seeks to convince the exiles that their God is alive

and well, despite appearances.”⁸ In both parts of the book the oracles frequently look to the distant future of the ultimate “Day of the Lord” for their primary meaning and application. The fact that each section includes vivid descriptions as well as general and poetic descriptions has generated controversy among higher critical scholars concerning the unity of the book and the identity of the prophet himself.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Under the Shadow of the Assyrian Threat

The Young Lion Roars

Immediately before Isaiah began his prophetic ministry, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah had both experienced great prosperity. Syria, to the immediate north, was weak and during the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham (792–735 B.C.), Assyria, to the north and east, was inactive in the area. In 743 B.C. there was a coalition under Azariah against Tiglathpileser III, king of Assyria (745–727 B.C.). Under Tiglathpileser, Assyria became aggressive again. The biblical narrative in 2 Kings 15:19–20 tells how Rezin, Menahem, and Hiram were put under tribute to Assyria. This may have taken place in 738 B.C.

The Smoking Firebrand and the Trembling Heart

Syria and Israel tried to force Ahaz, king of Judah, to join them in an alliance against Assyria. According

⁸ Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 13.