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Isaiah Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview of Isaiah by Steve Gregg, we learn that Isaiah was a prophet, poet, historian, and statesman who had significant political influence across various kings in his time. His book is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the threat from Assyria, and the second with the threat from Babylon. There is controversy among scholars about whether Isaiah wrote the entire book or if it was written by multiple authors. However, Isaiah's book contains both poetry and historical narratives, with chapters 36-39 being almost identical to the historical accounts in 2 Kings.

Transcript

We decided that each time we'd gather, we'd take one successive book of the Bible, and I would give a, hopefully a thorough introduction to the book and an overview of the book so that you could, on your own, as you study it, have more of a foundation for understanding what you're reading. And we've gotten through everything up to Isaiah now. So Isaiah is the book we're looking at, which is, of course, the first of the prophetic books that are in our arrangement in Scripture.

It's also one of the earliest prophets to write. Jonah was probably a bit earlier than Isaiah, but most of the prophets were not earlier, and some were quite a bit later than Isaiah. Isaiah is the greatest of the prophets, judging by almost every standard.

He's not the longest. Jeremiah's book is a slightly longer book, and Jeremiah's a great prophet, too. But Isaiah predated him by a hundred years, and actually, it seems clear that Isaiah, in some respects, may have had some influence on Jeremiah.

And don't think it's strange that one prophet might have influence on another. We know, for example, that Jeremiah influenced Daniel. We read about it in Daniel chapter 9. Daniel was reading the book of Jeremiah.

And so there's nothing strange to think that some of the earlier prophets would not have had an influence on later prophets. But Isaiah is one of the greatest for many reasons. He is preeminently the prophet of the Messiah.

That is to say, although all the prophets, or most of them, have something to say about the coming Messiah, which we find, of course, fulfilled in Christ many years later, yet no prophet spoke as much about the Messiah as Isaiah did. And so we have, in the Old Testament, no better picture, no more comprehensive picture of Christ than what we have in Isaiah. So that's very helpful to us as we begin to read the prophets, to have one that's very relevant to us as Christians, very obviously connected to what we believe as Christians.

And one of the marks of the importance of Isaiah is that the New Testament writers quoted Isaiah more than they quoted all the other prophets combined. Now, they quoted all the prophets, well, not all, but most of the prophets got quoted numerous times in the New Testament. But if you take all the times that all the other prophets were quoted in the New Testament, Isaiah is quoted more than the combination of all the others.

So you can see that the early Christians, the apostles, and the writers of the New Testament certainly considered Isaiah to be the chief prophet from whom to draw references to Christ and so forth, as they quoted him. By the way, there is one book of the Old Testament quoted more often than Isaiah, and that's Psalms, which is, of course, not one of the prophets, but Isaiah is the most quoted of the prophets. Now, the man Isaiah was of royal birth of sorts, perhaps not, we should say noble birth, although he was related to the kings of Judah, he was a nephew of one of the kings.

His father Amoz, who's identified for us in the first verse, was, according to Jewish tradition, the brother of King Amaziah, which means that King Amaziah would have been the uncle of Isaiah. And then the kings that followed would have been sons and grandsons of his uncle. So he'd have some connection with all the kings of Judah from that point on, though it would be increasingly remote with each generation.

But he prophesied during the reigns of several kings, and they were all, in some respects, his relative. And that's probably why he had access to them, because we do find Isaiah approaching, for example, King Ahaz and approaching Hezekiah and giving them counsel. Now, the kings of Judah and Israel in those days were part of a theocracy.

Israel was not a democracy. It was a monarchy, but it was a monarchy under God. The kings were required to obey God, and they would find out what God wanted them to do by what the prophets of God would tell them.

And so, for example, King Saul, the first king of Israel, got into a lot of trouble because he didn't obey what the prophet Samuel said. In fact, when Samuel told Saul what to do, and he didn't do it to the letter, Samuel asked, well, you've rejected the word of the Lord. God has rejected you from being king, and he's gone and found another man after his own heart.

So it was not optional for the kings to obey Yahweh, the God of Israel. They were kings

under the real king, who is God. And the prophets were the ones who spoke for God and let the kings know what God wanted.

So Isaiah had that role. Now, in a sense, Jeremiah had that role 100 years later, and he actually had access to some of the kings, but they didn't listen to him. But Isaiah, some of the kings did, and some did not listen to him.

There were about four kings that reigned in the lifetime of Isaiah, or during the time of his ministry, anyway. And a couple of them were good. The others were not.

He was married. Just a little personal information about the man. He had a wife, and he had two sons.

And they had funny names, and their names were related to his message. One of the names, the first son, was Shir Jashub. Now, Shir Jashub means a remnant shall return, which is certainly a major part of Isaiah's message, that God was going to send Israel into captivity, or Judah into captivity, and that a remnant of them would someday return.

It's a very important message. And so his first son was named, a remnant shall return, in Hebrew. And the second son was named Meher Shalel Hashbaz, which is quite a mouthful.

And it means swift to the booty, swift to the plunder, or hasten to the plunder. This has to do with the fact that the Assyrians were going to come and conquer the region. Now, the Assyrians, we'll say more about that in a moment, but the Assyrians were the major world power rising at that time.

The Egyptians had held some important political position in the world prior to this, but the Assyrians were rising up and taking control of the region, and eventually would do some very serious harm to the northern kingdom of Israel. I'll say more about that in a moment. As far as his private life goes, we don't know much, except that he's married and had the two sons, and we know something about his death, because the Jewish tradition holds that when Hezekiah died and left his kingdom to his son Manasseh, who was the very worst king Judah ever had, and reigned longer than any other, he reigned for 50 years, that Manasseh actually killed Isaiah, and did so by sawing him in two.

According to the tradition, he put him in a log and sawed him in two. Not a very pleasant way to go. Now, we say, well, that's Jewish tradition.

It may not be true, but it apparently is true, because the writer of Hebrews, when he is summarizing the way that some of the men of faith in the Old Testament died, actually makes reference to this tradition as if it is true. It's in Hebrews chapter 11, and verse 37, again, summarizing the various things that happened to people who were men of faith in the Old Testament. It says, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and

goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

So, the writer of Hebrews indicates that some of the men of faith in the Old Testament were sawn in two, at least one of them was. And there's no record in the Old Testament of anyone being sawn in two, and as far as we know, the only tradition, and the writer of Hebrews will almost certainly be referring to that tradition, is that Isaiah was sawn in two. So, he was martyred like so many of the other prophets, though in a much more gruesome way, it would appear.

Now, he was quite a Renaissance man. All of the prophets, in addition to being prophets, which is a pretty major gift, obviously, Paul said, covet the best gifts, especially that you may prophesy. So, apparently, prophecy is a very high-ranking gift.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, God has appointed first apostles, secondarily prophets, and then he lists some other things, teachers and so forth. But Paul felt like the apostles were the most high honor, I suppose, that a person could have in gifts, but a prophet would be second. And Isaiah was not only a prophet, but he did several other things.

All the prophets, in addition to being prophets, were poets. Virtually every book of the prophets in the Old Testament is written in poetry. Now, you might not recognize it, because when we read poetry in English, it usually rhymes.

That's one way we know that someone's a poet. And there's that corny joke that someone accidentally makes a rhyme to say, Oh, I was a poet and I didn't know it, because rhyming is the way that our English poetry is usually characterized. Not so in Hebrew poetry.

The main feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, that the prophet would say the same thing twice or even three times, depending on how aesthetically pleasing he felt it sounded to do so. And this is, you know, just a cultural thing. We take some delight in the artistic putting together of words in a way that they come out to rhyme with each other.

The Semitic mind and ear found something aesthetically pleasing in hearing the same thing repeated in several different ways, but the same thought. And you'll find this to be true in Isaiah and frankly in all the prophets. Not that they never spoke without poetry, but rarely.

And that in itself would mean that in addition to being inspired, they were also artistic. I can't write poetry. I mean, I think lots of people do write some poetry, but not very many people write really good poetry.

And I can't write poetry at all. I could sit all day and try to find a way to put four lines together in poetry. I would not come up with anything I'd be willing to show anyone.

And yet these prophets, they just went off chapter after chapter after chapter in poetry, which is a tremendous artistic, creative skill. And you might say, well, it's not their skill. They were inspired by God.

They were inspired by God. But the words they chose apparently were at their own discretion. And we say that because each of the prophets had their own favorite vocabulary, different from other prophets and so forth.

I mean, if it was only the Holy Spirit deciding what words and sentences they were going to get, it seems like the Holy Spirit's personality would be the same in all of them. Whereas each prophet, Jeremiah, for example, or Ezekiel or Isaiah, they all have their distinctive personalities that come out, but they're all poets. And I think that as God showed them visions and revealed truth to them, it would appear that they were capable of preaching what they saw in words that came naturally to them.

We see this in the New Testament also. John's writings, for example, have a lot of unique vocabulary. It's not found in any of the other writers of the New Testament.

But it's found in the Gospel of John and in the epistles of John and in the book of Revelation, but nowhere else. Likewise, Paul has his favorite themes and favorite vocabulary and so forth. So even though we say these men were inspired, it doesn't mean that they didn't have any of their own creativity in play as God would reveal to them the truths they would present.

God chose people, apparently, who are actually quite literary in many cases, Isaiah being especially. So in fact, many people think that Isaiah's poetry is superior to that of any of the great English poets and sometimes or even the Greek poets. Homer, Milton, Shakespeare are all mentioned as very famous, accomplished poets whose poetry is inferior to that of Isaiah.

So, again, I'm not really a scholar of poetry. I'll trust the experts on that. But it is beautiful, beautiful writing.

In addition to the content itself, it's kind of nice when God, you know, when he gets a message across, but he does it in a way that's pleasing to the ear. It's sort of like listening to a hymn or something that has great theology in it. It's much more, as you say, easy to consume if it's in music or if it's poetry or whatever.

And that's how God often had the prophets right, apparently. In addition to being a poet, he was a historian. Now, again, not everyone can do that.

A historian has to gather sources, has to select how to interweave the stories together. Because, for example, if you wanted to write the story of your own life, something that you should be a pretty good authority on, you'd find it was a very difficult thing to write because there's so much that has happened in your life. You're going to say, OK, what

threads am I going to trace here in this story? Because there's no way I could say everything that ever happened.

Every conversation I've ever had, you know, every person I've ever met. You can't be included. You've got to be selective.

You've got to say, OK, this is important and that's going to be traced through this way. I'm going to tell my story with all these interweaving threads that make sort of a cohesive story. And to write history where you actually need to write other people's stories, even people you knew like Hezekiah and Uzziah and stuff like that, which Isaiah knew, he wrote histories of these kings.

And he wrote great history. In fact, we have several chapters in Isaiah, chapters 36 through 39, which are just historical narrative. And they're almost verbatim the same as similar chapters in 2 Kings, which makes you wonder maybe he wrote 2 Kings also.

It's possible. We know of some other historical works that Isaiah wrote, but we don't have them. But they are mentioned in Scripture.

If you look at 2 Chronicles 26, verse 22, it says, Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, which is the king who, the first of the kings in sequence during whose lifetime Isaiah prophesied, says, Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah from the first to the last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, wrote. So apparently there is a book of the annals of the king of Uzziah, King Uria, excuse me, who we don't have that book. But apparently, in addition to the book of Isaiah, Isaiah wrote that too, a history of that particular king, who happened to be a third cousin of his or something like that.

And there's some more works that Isaiah did, apparently. It would appear that if you look at 2 Chronicles 32, 32, there's a couple of other books. At least one of them is written by Isaiah, maybe more than one of them.

It says in 2 Chronicles 32, 32, Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his goodness, indeed, they are written in the vision of Isaiah, the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. Now, it doesn't say that Isaiah wrote the books of the kings of Judah and Israel, and he may not have. But he did apparently write the works of Hezekiah.

Again, Uzziah and Hezekiah of the kings living in Isaiah's day were the good kings. And apparently, Isaiah felt it worthy to commemorate their many acts from first to last in additional books he wrote that were historical in nature. We just don't have them.

They're lost books now. The only thing we have written by Isaiah that has survived is the book of Isaiah. And it does contain four chapters, chapters 36 through 39, which are historical in nature that preserve the story, especially of God's delivering Judah in the time of Hezekiah from the Assyrian siege under Sennacherib.

Now, so the man was a prophet, a poet, a historian, and he was a statesman. That is, he had political influence. He didn't hold political office, but he did have influence upon kings.

In fact, he rebuked Ahaz and gave him some a word from the Lord. It turns out that Ahaz did what Isaiah said, but not because Isaiah said it. Ahaz was not interested in Isaiah or the Lord, but he ended up doing the thing that God wanted him to do anyway in this particular instance.

More significantly, Isaiah had access to King Hezekiah at a time when the nation of Judah was about to be destroyed by the Assyrians. The Assyrians had already destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. And 21 years later, the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem, and they had already wiped out the cities of Judah all around.

And now the capital city alone was standing, and it was under siege by hundreds of thousands of Assyrian soldiers and in no way capable of defending themselves. And it was through the counsel of Isaiah to the king to ignore the counselors who were giving alternative counsel and to just trust the Lord that Hezekiah obeyed and the city was spared. In fact, God sent an angel out in the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 of the besieging Assyrians in one night.

185,000. So, and that was because of Hezekiah. Hezekiah had people counseling in different ways.

There was a whole party that wanted him to placate the Assyrians, either by paying them off or something else. Another party wanted him to get military aid from Egypt to come out and help him defeat the Assyrians. And then Isaiah and maybe a few others like him were counseling the king, no, just trust God.

Don't trust in Assyria. Don't trust in Egypt. Just trust in Yahweh.

And finally, although he has pulled all these different directions by his counselors, Hezekiah followed the instructions of Isaiah. And it's because of that that the kingdom was spared and lasted 100 years longer than it would have. It would have fallen to the Assyrians in 701 BC.

Instead, it lasted actually over 100 years more to 586 BC when it fell and became reign of Hezekiah. Anyway, so Isaiah saved his country. He was a statesman who had access to the political figures and at least because of his influence on Hezekiah, he prevented his nation from succumbing and being destroyed 100 years earlier than it actually did get destroyed.

So several generations of Jews can thank Isaiah for having given them a chance to be born and live and die because of that. And so this man wore a lot of hats, prophet, poet, historian, statesman, and he did everything really well. Like I said, he was a Renaissance

man and he even apparently wrote some music.

We don't have any real, you know, we don't have any way of knowing the music he wrote, but some of the material in Isaiah is said to be songs that were written. We know it's poetry, but apparently also intended for music. He might have been a musician too, who knows? A lot of the prophets were musicians.

I don't know if you remember in the days of Saul and David that companies of the prophets would wander around with musical instruments and play music and prophesy to music. It was very common. The sons of the prophets usually had musical instruments and so forth.

All right. Well, let's talk about the historical side. I've already said something about this, but you can't understand any of the prophetic books without knowing what was going on at the time.

And frankly, unless you study the Bible itself, especially for this purpose, you probably are not familiar with the history of the time. You know, I mean, it is recorded in the Bible, but apart from the Bible, most people don't study ancient Near Eastern history. So, I mean, it's important for us to have some familiarity if you're going to make any sense of the book at all.

Since the New Testament quoted Isaiah so much, speaking so highly, obviously, of its authority and importance, I think we ought to try to master it as well, and that will necessitate that we know the background. So, the ministry of Isaiah lasted from 745 BC to 695 BC. That's the recorded ministry.

And that's 50 years, exactly 50 years. He may have lived a few years longer than the life of Hezekiah, but traditionally Hezekiah's son Manasseh killed Isaiah. And we don't have any evidence of any prophecies that go beyond the lifetime of Hezekiah.

But that's 50 years of ministry. And there were several kings during that period of time. The earliest was Isaiah, also known as Azariah.

But we see in verse 1, The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. And Uzziah and Hezekiah, at least, were pretty good kings. The other two, not so much.

But his ministry continued through the reigns of four kings. He outlived three kings. Actually, he outlived four, apparently.

And had an impact on Israel's history. Makes him more than a little bit significant in our historical knowledge of Israel. Now, 200 years earlier than Isaiah's time, the nation had split into two.

I'm sure most of you know that story. David's grandson, King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, made a very foolish choice. And alienated the northern ten tribes.

There were 12 tribes of Israel. They all had their territories that had been given to them in the days of Joshua. And ten of those tribes were to the north.

Judah and Benjamin were to the south. And he alienated them. Now, the family of David, which included King Rehoboam, were living in Jerusalem, in Judah.

And Benjamin and Judah stayed loyal to the monarchy, the dynasty of David. And the other ten broke off and started their own kingdom under a man named Jeroboam. And a succession of very evil kings.

None of them good, actually. They had a total of 19 kings on the northern kingdom. And not one of them was good.

Some were very, very bad. The southern kingdom had a series of 20 kings until it finally fell. And most of them were bad.

Some of them were good. But the majority of them were just as bad as the kings to the north. And the one that reigned longest in Judah, the southern kingdom, was the one who was the worst of them all, Manasseh.

Now, the two kingdoms made up of the ten tribes to the north and the two tribes to the south, respectively, were called Israel in the north and Judah in the south. And they had separate lineages of kings. Actually, the northern kingdom didn't really have a dynasty that lasted more than four generations.

And most of the dynasties changed hands by assassination and coup and things like that. It was a very turbulent nation. They never were right with God.

They had some prophets sent to them, Elijah and Elisha being the most notable in the northern kingdom. But the southern kingdom, God had a few good kings down there who were loyal to him. And there were some good prophets, a lot of good prophets down there.

But some of the kings were so bad that they killed the prophets and led the nation of Judah into trouble. But the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Assyria was growing in size and power in the Middle East and conquering all the small nations around, including Syria and Moab and Ammon and Edom and all those nations around Israel.

And they came against the northern kingdom and it fell to them in 722. As I mentioned, Assyrians came 21 years later to try to conquer the southern kingdom of Judah and came very close to doing so, except an angel of the Lord prevented that through the prayers of

Hezekiah. Pekah, who was the king of Israel when Ahaz was king of Judah.

The king of Israel aligned himself with Syria, which was a pagan nation. And the two of them wanted to come and bring Judah, the southern kingdom, into a three-nation confederacy to try to resist the growth into the region of Assyria. All the nations that were small knew that they were no match for Assyria.

But they thought if they got enough of them gathered together in league, they might be able to put up a good resistance. So Israel and Syria had decided to go that route and they wanted Judah on board and Judah was resistant. King Ahaz, for whatever reasons, didn't want to do that.

I think he just knew, I don't want to make Assyria more mad at us than necessary. Those guys are cruel. And they were.

Being conquered by Assyria was nobody's idea of a good time. The Assyrians would disembowel the women. They'd cut people open.

They'd lead live captives away with hooks through their nose and drag them onto, or hooks in their lips, and just drag them off to Assyria. Very cruel. And so I think Ahaz and Judah just didn't really want to stir up more trouble than he had to with Assyria.

And he did end up paying off Assyria to go away. Took some of the money from the temple and so forth and paid off so they went away. But before that happened, Isaiah came to him and said, you know, Syria and Israel have made a conspiracy against you.

And they want to break in here and they want to take you off the throne and replace you with a man who's more compliant with their wishes to make you, to make Judah become part of this conspiracy against Assyria. And Isaiah said, just trust God and these two nations that are coming against you right now, you don't have to worry about them. Now Ahaz didn't trust God, but he still didn't go along with the two nations.

And like I said, he paid off Assyria and they went away briefly. But he didn't buy permanent safety for the nation that way. The immediate threat was dissipated.

In 732, Syria was crushed by Assyria. And now those two words sound similar, Syria and Assyria. Syria is what it is today, kind of a small Middle Eastern Arabic nation.

Assyria was this much larger empire that was swallowing up these small nations. So Syria was crushed by Assyria. Pekah, the king in Israel was assassinated the same year, although Israel didn't fall to Assyria until 10 years after that.

And Ahaz bought off Assyria with money. Now Israel was defeated by Assyria in 722, as I said, by a king named Tiglath-Pileser. Interestingly, for a long time, there was no knowledge in history of Tiglath-Pileser by name.

And skeptics who tended to try to find as many historical errors in the Bible as they could find, were pretty sure that Tiglath-Pileser was a fictional character because the history of Assyria known in the 19th century did not include any knowledge of Tiglath-Pileser. And therefore critics used this as one of the arguments that the Bible cannot be trusted. But as has been the case virtually in every instance where critics have said those kinds of things about characters the Bible mentions, Tiglath-Pileser's palace was found.

And he's now well known by all to have been king of Assyria at the time that Israel fell. And the Bible said Tiglath-Pileser was the king of Assyria at the time. Apparently the Bible was much more aware of the history of the time than any other historians at the time were.

Archaeology, however, has vindicated the Bible in that. Then it was a later king, Sennacherib, who sent the siege against Jerusalem in 701 BC. And that ended up with God sparing them.

I've already told you some of this that's in the notes, so I'm going to skip over some. Now the outline of the book is interesting. It divides naturally into two segments of unequal length.

And, you know, anybody who reads carefully the book of Isaiah will immediately see that there are two very different parts of the book. The first part is the first 39 chapters. And the second part, obviously, is the remaining chapters from 40 to 66.

And there's quite a few differences between these two segments. Enough differences, in fact, that for a very long time there have been people who doubted that both segments were part of the original book. And there have been many who have suggested that the first 39 chapters were written by one person.

And the last 27 chapters were written by somebody else. And I'll tell you in a moment what their reasons were for thinking this. Because this is the main controversy about Isaiah that we need to be aware of.

The main controversy is did Isaiah write the whole book or not? Most scholars, even skeptical scholars, are willing to say that Isaiah wrote most of the first 39 chapters. But most liberals do not accept that Isaiah wrote chapters 40 through 66. And they'll say those were written by Deutero Isaiah or some of it by Deutero and some of it by Trito Isaiah.

Now, what's those words mean? That means they don't know the name of whoever wrote it. And so they're saying there's a second writer of Isaiah. We'll call him Deutero, which means second.

And there's a third writer in there too somewhere. And we'll call him Trito, which means third. And so liberal scholars will talk about the various authors of Isaiah.

And unfortunately, some conservative scholars have taken to, I guess, being intimidated by this consensus of liberal scholars. And so sometimes I've been very disappointed to read conservative commentators make reference to the author of Isaiah 40 through 66 without committing to that being Isaiah. We will see that there's very good evidence that Isaiah wrote the whole book, notwithstanding the critics' suggestions to the contrary.

We'll not get to that yet. We'll come to that after our break. But let me just say the book does very noticeably, very conspicuously divide into two sections.

The first 39 chapters, quite different in content and nature from the last 27 chapters. And I can actually tell you what some of the differences are. I guess they're later in your notes, but I'll bring them up now.

One is that in the first 39 chapters, the threat to the Jews is Assyria. In chapters 40 through 66, the enemy is Babylon, which didn't become a threat till 100 years after Isaiah's time. Assyria was the threat while Isaiah lived.

Babylon was a threat 100 years later. And it's obvious when you read chapters 40 through 66 that it's talking about the Babylonian period. Whereas the earlier chapters are about the Assyrian period, 100 years earlier.

Now, of course, liberal scholars do not believe in the supernatural. They don't believe in real prophecy. They believe that prophets only kind of were like preachers today who get something in their craw and complain a lot about what's going on in Washington, D.C. or something like that.

And that they're just really, they don't really have any inspiration except to say that they're inspired to criticize. And that they don't really see into the future because no one could do that, of course. And they don't believe that God really inspires prophets.

So they would say, well, the first 39 chapters are written about the time of Isaiah. So he probably wrote those. But the last 27 chapters are written about the Babylonian era, which didn't even happen until 100 years after Isaiah's time.

So it must be written by a later author living at the later period. That's one of the arguments. Another argument is that the, and this is a big one, the second part of Isaiah prophesies the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonian exile and specifically names Cyrus, the king of Persia, as the one who will in fact liberate them.

You see Babylon was conquered in 536 BC by the Persians, the Median Persian Empire replaced Babylonia. And the Persian king who conquered them was Cyrus. And Cyrus is the one who gave the Jews permission to go back, who had been taken into captivity, back to Jerusalem and rebuild Jerusalem.

Well, Isaiah 44 and 45 actually predicts this and mentions Cyrus by name several times

in the passage as the one that God will use to do this. Now, if this is really written by Isaiah, this was written 150 years before Cyrus did that. No, 200 years before Cyrus.

It was about 150 years before Cyrus was born. So we have Isaiah apparently naming the man who would liberate the Israelites from Babylon and giving his name and what he'd do 200 years before he did it and a full 150 years before the man was even born, which is pretty striking. If Isaiah wrote that, then he certainly was a superior prophet to most to be able to name a man and a very important man long before he was born.

And so, of course, the liberal scholars who don't believe in inspiration say, well, that can't be, you know, Isaiah couldn't have talked about that. So that's another reason that they'd like to late date that latter section of Isaiah that contains those prophecies about Cyrus. And they say that must be someone who lived after the Babylonian exile ended and who knew about Cyrus doing that.

So that's a second reason for rejecting Isaiah's having written those chapters. Obviously, both of those reasons are simply prejudice. I mean, there's really it's simply someone saying, I do not.

I choose to believe that God could not inspire anyone to know the future. OK, well, what evidence do you have that God can't do that? Well, of course, there's no evidence in favor of their view. It's just there.

It's just their bias. It's their prejudice. I say, well, that's your prejudice.

I have a different prejudice. Mine is I think there's evidence that God did inspire prophets to know the future. So I think, you know, my prejudice is better than your prejudice.

So frankly, better better sustained, I think, by evidence. Anyway, one thing that is not just a matter of prejudice. And this is a third reason for them saying it is that Isaiah's name is not found anywhere in the last 27 chapters.

Or he's mentioned several times, both as a character and as the speaker many times in the first 39 chapters. But in chapters 40 through 66, there's no mention of Isaiah by name. They don't say that Isaiah wrote them, which has led some people to believe, well, then maybe he didn't.

And, you know, it's no disrespect to the man to say he didn't write it when he didn't say he wrote it. Or whoever wrote it didn't say who they were. They're written anonymously.

And that that may be probably the best argument for the liberal case, because it doesn't involve any particular prejudice like the other two arguments. This is simply an observation. The first chapters in the first 39 chapters are definitely said to be Isaiah's writing.

The last 27, they don't say if they are him or not. And if another person wrote those chapters and somehow in the transition of the book through history in the middle of it, they got attached to Isaiah's actual work and no one noticed it. And some anonymous writer wrote it.

Well, it's that then we might expect to see the phenomena in it that we find. So this is how the critics think. Now, I'm going to after you have our break, I'm going to actually I'm going to actually tell you why I believe the critics are wrong from evidence.

I mean, the evidence is certainly on the side of a more conservative position of accepting Isaiah as the author of the whole book. And we'll hold off for that time. But before the break, I want to give you an outline of the book.

And I had to mention this major division because that's the division in the outline. The first section of the book is 39 chapters. The second section is 27 chapters.

And if you want to subdivide those, it's interesting that the first 39 chapters naturally fall into seven subdivisions, not of equal length by any means, but just seven different kinds of prophecies. So the first six chapters would be the first of these divisions in the first 39. The first six are prophecies about Isaiah's own nation and capital city, Judah, and the capital city of Jerusalem.

And they are written at the time of the Assyrian invasion. They are written before God has delivered Judah. As we've been saying, God later did deliver Judah because of Hezekiah's prayers.

But before that happened, the Assyrians were swarming throughout Judah. They had not yet reached Jerusalem, but they were just wiping out all the villages of Judah all around. They were saving Jerusalem for last.

For a main thing, Jerusalem would be the harder city to conquer. It had big walls around it. Most of the other cities didn't have quite the defenses Jerusalem did.

So Assyria was saving the hardest project for last. They were wiping out all the easy pickings. And because of that, the first six chapters are Isaiah telling Judah that this is happening to them because they are alienated from God.

And God is disciplining them. And he represents Israel in the first chapter as like a man that's been beaten by God, beaten with a rod and has become infected. His stripes are open sores.

There's been no medical attention given to him. He's been flogged pretty hard. His infection has become throughout his body.

He's sick from the head, sole of his foot to the crown of his head and so forth. And the

introductory words section of chapter one speaks of Judah this way and says, there's no one who's been able to give proper medical attention to this man. In other words, Judah has been afflicted for its evil.

It's been under God's discipline, under God's chastening. And there's been no one who's been able to cure its wounds. Now, this is an important motif that comes up in the first chapter, because later on, you'll find Isaiah sometimes referring to potential leaders seeking to heal the nation as if they're physicians.

The nation is sick. It's morally sick. It's under God's judgments.

Their sickness is their alienation from God through their sin. And this gives a particular meaning to some passages later on. In, for example, chapter 61 verses one and two, which Christ quoted about himself.

And he said, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. And he goes on to list several things he's known to, which includes to bind up the brokenhearted. Now, in chapter one, it says these the nation is all wounded and no one has bound up their wounds.

No doctor has, you know, bandaged them. They haven't been bound up. And Jesus, the Messiah, comes in 61, one and two and says, God has anointed me to bind up.

I'm the physician here. I'm the one who's going to bind up the wounds. But these are spiritual wounds.

I'm binding up the brokenhearted. I'm not going to bind physical bodies because this is not a physical sickness being described. It's a spiritual sickness and therefore needs spiritual attention from a spiritual physician.

And we know that Jesus identified himself by that very terminology when the Pharisees said, why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus said, well, those who are well don't need the physician. Those who are sick. Therefore, I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

So Jesus sees himself as a spiritual physician for the spiritual sickness of the nation. This becomes significant also in Isaiah 53 in a much misunderstood passage. Isaiah 53 is obviously the most famous passage in the Old Testament about Jesus.

I mean, that's unmistakably about Jesus. And it says at one point in verse five that he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.

The chastisement for our peace was upon him. And with his stripes, we are healed. And a lot of people have taken that last line, with his stripes we are healed, and assume that this is saying something about our sicknesses, our physical sicknesses, being healed by

Jesus having been flogged on the whipping post, by his stripes we are healed.

And so it's a very common thing to hear people say, well, Jesus died for our sins, and he was flogged for our sicknesses. And therefore, in the atoning work of Christ, both our sins and our sicknesses have been paid for, and we shouldn't have to bear either of them. Which means, of course, this becomes the basis for people teaching that there should always be healing.

If you have enough faith, you should never be sick, because by his stripes you've been healed. They're missing the point. They haven't studied Isaiah very well.

When Isaiah says, with his stripes we are healed, he's referring to the same subject that he's introduced in chapter one. The nation is sick. There's no healer.

There's no physician. No one has bound up their wounds. And then when he talks about Messiah, well, when he comes with his stripes, we are healed.

Meaning, we, the nation, are healed of this calamity, of this sickness, of this plague, that we've had since the beginning of chapter one of Isaiah. In other words, he's not talking about physical sicknesses being healed. He's talking about restoration of our relationship with God, because the sickness was the alienation.

The healing is the restoration. In fact, Jeremiah and Hosea also use terminology like this when God repeatedly says in Jeremiah, I will heal their backsliding. Now, we don't think of backsliding as a sickness, but that was their sickness.

Backsliding, they had slid away from God. They're alienated from God. That's what needs to be healed.

They need to have their relationship healed. And we can even see that as we look carefully at Isaiah 53 and the poetic structure of it. It says, he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. Those are parallel statements, are they not? Wounded for transgressions, bruised for iniquities. Are not transgressions and iniquities very similar? And wounds and bruises very similar? Then the next two lines also parallel each other.

One says, the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. Chastisement and stripes are parallel thoughts. Being healed is parallel to our peace with God, that is restoration, reconciliation.

He received chastisement for our reconciliation with God. With his stripes, we are healed in the sense that we're no longer alienated from God. We're healed.

That's sickness. And Peter quotes that verse, Isaiah 53, 5. One time, it's the only New

Testament verse that quotes it. And Peter says that when Jesus was reviled, he did not revile again.

When he suffered, he threatened not. He committed himself to him that judges righteously by whose stripes you were healed. And then he says this.

This is at the very end of 1 Peter 2. After he quotes Isaiah 53, 5, by whose stripes you're healed, he says, For, because you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and bishop of your souls. So he's saying, you were healed by his stripes. Let me explain what I mean.

You were going astray, and now you've come back. You have been reconciled to God. You were sheep gone astray.

You've now returned to your shepherd. That's the healing that has been brought about. So, again, these motifs in the prophets, Isaiah and others, are often misunderstood by people who don't really study the prophets.

They just get proof texts from this part or this part of the prophets. Almost every Christian can quote a verse or two, or at least as familiar verses or two, out of Isaiah 53 and maybe a few other places in the prophets. But, frankly, most Christians are not very familiar with the prophets and certainly have not studied them enough to make proper sense of them.

And so people have really mangled some of these verses by not studying the book. So the first six chapters are about this crisis in Judah, this sickness of the nation. The second six chapters, chapters 7 through 12, are now about the northern kingdom, written before it fell.

Now, the kingdom fell right in the middle of Isaiah's ministry. But in the early part of his ministry, he prophesied against Israel, the northern kingdom, and the calamity that was coming on them, which it did, of course, in his lifetime. So we've got six chapters.

He's speaking about his own nation, Judah. Then six chapters, he's speaking against Israel, the northern kingdom. And then he looks further out, and in chapters, and that was the second section.

The third section is what we could call the burdens. It's chapters 13 through 23. And we call them the burdens because in the King James Version, it says, the burden against Babylon, the burden against Philistia, the burden against Moab, the burden against Edom, the burden against pagan nations.

Basically, the burden, I think the modern translation would say something like the Oracle or something like that. The older English uses the word the burden of the Lord. The burden of the Lord is a heavy weight of information that comes on the prophet, a

revelation of how horrible it's going to be.

It's a burdensome word. Again, modern translation is just trying to make it more accessible to biblically illiterate people. Change the word burden to something like Oracle or something like that.

I frankly think that's not a good choice because biblically illiterate people can't make sense of the word Oracle either. But so I guess instead of trying to dumb it down unsuccessfully, I might as well just educate people up so they can understand the Bible and not become more and more juvenile. And by the way, this process really gets bad in some of the paraphrases, not so much the word I'm talking about, but I don't know if you're familiar with the Message Bible, which is just a little side note, no extra charge for you here.

But the Message is not a Bible I'd recommend to anybody. It hardly has any relationship to the original languages at all. And there's one place where David says, you know, Oh Lord, do not chasten me in your wrath or something like that.

The Message Bible says, Oh Yahweh, don't take me to the woodshed. And I think when I read that, it gave me a break. You know, you're trying to make this relevant to a younger generation.

Does anyone younger generation know what taking to the woodshed means? Two generations ago that made sense. Who has a woodshed anymore? I mean, I doubt if there's anyone under 30 who knows what it means to go to the woodshed. You know, so I mean, these guys who try to dumb down the Bible, unfortunately, the culture dumb downs faster than we can dumb down the Bible.

You can't keep up with the culture in terms of dumbing down. You might as well just make it your goal to keep the Bible as it is and educate people who want to understand it up to the level of being able to understand what it says. Anyway, that's my little rant.

I go off once a while. So we've got these, the section chapters 13 through 23. We can call that the burdens.

That's the third segment of the book of Isaiah in the first portion. This is, so he's prophesied against his own nation, then against Israel, which is the nation that's not his own but is related to him, because Judah and Israel are brother nations, and then to the pagan nation. So his prophecies progressively get further and further out from the center where he stands.

Now, after chapter 23, you've got a fourth segment. And I would call this segment the great transition. This is chapters 24 through 27.

That's four chapters. And in my understanding, now different people understand this

differently. Can't help it if I'm right.

My judgment is that this is talking about the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. Isaiah definitely talked about the New Covenant a great deal. And this is, there's prophecies of judgment and restoration, which I believe are actually applied to the passing of the Old Covenant order, especially the destruction of the temple in 7 AD, and the institution of the New Covenant order under Christ.

And this is not the only segment of Isaiah that's going to have that as its focus, but that's, this is the first time those things come up. So that would be our fourth segment. The fifth segment is six chapters, 28 through 33, which I would call the woes.

Why are they called that? Because of those six chapters, five of them begin with the word woe. So we just call them the woes. And these are woe unto this group and woe unto that group, usually people of his own nation.

He's talking back again now to his own nation, and woe unto those who sin in this way and woe unto those who sin in that way, and woe to those who seek after Egypt for help from the Assyrians and so forth. These are the six chapters that we could call the woes. That would be the fifth segment.

The sixth segment is, again, what I call the great transition. The same thing, the passing of the Old Covenant and the introduction of the New Covenant. Same time frame, same general subject as we found in chapters 24 through 27.

This is now simply two chapters, 34 and 35. Now, after 34 and 35, there is a historical interlude that takes us right up to the end of this first segment. Chapters 36, 37, 38, and 39 are a historical interlude.

And as I say, they are almost verbatim the same as similar chapters in the books of 2 Kings and also in 2 Chronicles. The story is told of the defeat of the Assyrians as the angel of the Lord kills 185,000 of them outside Jerusalem because of the prayer of Hezekiah. And then it skips to Hezekiah's sickness and Isaiah's prediction that Hezekiah would die, and Hezekiah prays for more time, and God gives him 15 more years.

And after he recovers from his sickness, he shows off all the wealth of Judah to Babylonians. Now, the Babylonians in Hezekiah's day were not very significant. They were just a lesser people who also were subject to the Assyrians, like everybody else.

So, it would be like showing, sort of like showing the wealth to the Edomites or to the Moabites or something like that. Some Babylonian emissaries come to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from sickness. He shows off all the wealth.

Isaiah comes to him after the emissaries are gone back to Babylon. He says, what did you show these men? Hezekiah says, I showed them everything. And Isaiah said, well,

the days will come, not in your time, but in your offspring's time later on, when the Babylonians will come and they'll take everything.

So, the historical interlude, interestingly, links the two sections of Isaiah quite logically. Because Isaiah, the first chapters are about the Assyrian period, and the last 27 chapters are about the Babylonian period. And in the historical interlude at the end of the first 39 chapters, that's 36, 37, 38, 39, the first two chapters are about the Assyrian period, that is, the conquest of Sennacherib by an angel.

And the other two chapters, which are 38 and 39, are about Hezekiah's sickness and the recovery and the prediction about the Babylonians coming. And lo and behold, chapter 40, the next chapter and on is the next segment, and you've now jumped to the Babylonian era. So, the historical interlude kind of connects the two periods.

The fact that that interlude is there, connecting the Assyrian period with the Babylonian period, makes it seem deliberate. It makes it not seem like the second portion of the book was written by somebody else and accidentally got attached. But rather than Isaiah, in writing this, transition from his own period to a prophetic period in the distant future, by means of this prediction Isaiah made that the Babylonians would come and take everything, as he made that prophecy to Hezekiah.

So that's how we understand the first segment, 39 chapters. Again, it divides into seven smaller segments. The first six, prophecies against Judah.

The next six, prophecies against Israel. Then chapters 13 through 23, prophecies against the pagan nations, for the most part. Then chapters 24 through 27 is the first part where we begin to see the transition between the Old Covenant and the New being predicted.

And then, after that, we have the woes in chapters 28 through 33. Then another short segment, 34 and 35, which is again the great transition from the Old Covenant to the New. And then the remainder of that first segment, the last four chapters, 36 through 39, are the historical interlude, which allows us to shift our attention from the time of Isaiah to the time coming of the Babylonian conquest.

Now, the second portion is usually called the Book of Comfort. It begins with the word comfort. Comfort, comfort ye my people, says the Lord.

In chapter 40, verse 1. The first thing predicted in this segment is the ministry of John the Baptist, a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. And Isaiah is quoted in all four of the Gospels. This passage in chapter 40 is quoted and applied to John the Baptist.

So it's unanimously in the New Testament understood to be introducing John the Baptist's ministry. So, the last 27 chapters then, chapters 40 through 66, can be divided into three sections of equal length. And each one has its own basic emphasis.

But what's interesting is this division into three segments of nine chapters each can be verified as deliberate by observing the last verse of the first section and of the second section. Now, let me just point this out to you. If you look at chapter 48, which is nine chapters into this latter section, chapters 40 through 48 are nine chapters in the first third of this segment.

The last verse in Isaiah 48 is, There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked. Now, if you go nine chapters more to the end of the next nine chapters, which is chapter 57, and look at the last verse there, it says, There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked. Interestingly, this same statement, There is no peace for the wicked, is found punctuating the three segments.

Nine chapters, nine chapters, nine chapters. Interestingly, the very exact center chapter is chapter 53, which is, as I said, the most graphic prophecy about Jesus in the entire Old Testament. Now, it's rather interesting, isn't it, that Isaiah 40 begins with the prophecy of John the Baptist.

Isaiah 65 and 66, the last two chapters, talk about the new heavens and the new earth. The New Testament begins with John the Baptist, and the New Testament ends with the new heavens and new earth. And Jesus is the central figure, of course, in the New Testament, and in the very central chapter of this second part of Isaiah, we have Isaiah 53.

Now, let me just tell you something about these three segments, then we'll take our break. The first nine chapters of this section, chapters 40 through 48, contrast two salvations, two saviors. Cyrus, who saves the Jews from Babylon, and Messiah, who saves them from their sins.

The salvation of Israel from Babylon is treated in the prophets. This is my judgment, having studied and taught all the prophets. Not everyone necessarily would see it this way, but I think it's true.

I believe that Cyrus is seen as a type of Christ, that the rescue of Israel from captivity in Babylon, very much like the Exodus and God's rescue of them from Egypt, both are seen as types of the salvation that we have in Christ. There's really no controversy among Christians that the Exodus in Moses' day was a type of salvation. Passing through the Red Sea, Paul said that Israel was baptized through the sea, they ate the spiritual bread, and so forth, and were led by the cloud.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul goes through the salvation of Israel from Egypt and says, that compares, that's a type of us, he says in verse 6. 1 Corinthians 10, 6, these are all types of us. The salvation of the Jews from Egypt is a type of us, a type of Christ's salvation. When Moses and Elijah met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, in Luke chapter 9, it says they were talking to Jesus about the Exodus that he was about to accomplish in

Jerusalem.

Here's Moses and Elijah, but Moses, the leader of the Exodus in the Old Testament, talking to Jesus about the Exodus that Jesus was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Throughout the New Testament, it is assumed that the Exodus and salvation from Egypt were a type of salvation in Christ. Jesus is even the Passover.

Christ, our Passover, is slain for us, it says in 1 Corinthians 5, 7. So the idea here that the Passover was the means by which the Jews were delivered from Egypt, Christ's death is the means by which we are delivered, and all these, in various ways, the Bible, anyone who studies the New Testament with their eyes open, it's unambiguous. The salvation of Israel from Egypt's captivity was a picture of Christ's salvation for us, a type of the shadow. Likewise, and this is not as obvious but can be demonstrated as much if someone wants to take the time to do so, the rescue of Israel from Babylon, which was very much a second Exodus.

It also is a type of our salvation in Christ, and Cyrus, the leader who delivered them, is God's servant, according to Isaiah 44 and Isaiah 45, and servant of Yahweh is also the title for the Messiah. So we see Cyrus is a type of Christ. The salvation from Babylon is a type of our salvation.

This is why I call the first nine chapters in this segment, Two Salvations. Now, the next nine chapters focus on two servants, and this time Cyrus is not one of them. You have these prophecies called the servant passages, servant of Yahweh passages, and these are about Yahweh's servant who is called by Yahweh and chosen to bring light to the Gentiles and bring salvation to Israel.

And initially, the servant is identified as Jacob or Israel. But as the time goes by in Isaiah, you find eventually the servant has morphed from Israel to the Messiah. And this is because it says Israel, God's servant, has become blind and has failed.

And therefore God raises up the quintessential Israelite, the Israelite par excellence, the Messiah, who will accomplish himself what the nation failed to accomplish. So there's a morphing of the servant of Yahweh from being Israel collectively to being the individual Messiah. And of course, Isaiah 53 is the last of several servant of Yahweh passages, and there's no question to a Christian that that's talking about Jesus.

Even though the servant is earlier referred to as Israel or Jacob, it's the Messiah before we're done with this transition. And so we have the two servants as the topic of chapters 49 through 47. And the last section, the last nine chapters, would be the tale of two cities.

We've got two salvations, two servants, and now two cities, the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem. You've got passages here in this section that are cited in the

New Testament as being about the New Jerusalem. For example, Isaiah 60, much of the imagery of the New Jerusalem in Revelation chapter 20 is taken directly from Isaiah 60.

And in this section, it does talk about the temple being burned down, which happened in 70 AD, and the end of old Jerusalem. It also has prophecies about the New Jerusalem. And so we have these two cities contrasted.

We have two salvations contrasted. We have two saviors, as it were, contrasted, or two servants. And then we have the two cities.

So this is how the second part of the book breaks up. And we're going to give you a break, well-deserved. And we're going to come back in about five, ten minutes.

Let's just say ten. And by then, you'll be itching to sit down again and hear more. So we'll just take a break right there.

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