

Lecture Two. Isaiah 1-39 (First Isaiah).

The book of Isaiah is a collection of oracles (made by about 400 BC) that span about three hundred years of history. Chapters 1-39 present the teachings of Isaiah from 740 until at least 701 (with the exception of certain later oracles such as 11:10-16; 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10, chs. 34-35, and the Apocalypse found at 24:1-27:13, presumably written after 450). Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah (chs. 40-55) contains the oracles delivered in Babylon between 550 and 539 by a prophet in the tradition of Isaiah. Third Isaiah or Trito-Isaiah (chs. 56-66) belongs to a later period in this tradition, with oracles delivered in Jerusalem after the return from exile but prior to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A contemporary of Amos and Hosea (from the northern kingdom of Israel) and of Micah (from southwestern portion of Judah, near the Philistines), Isaiah (born about 765) prophesied in Jerusalem from the death of King Uzziah (r. 781-740) until after the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC (1:1, 6:1, 36:1-37:38). He married a prophetess and they had at least two sons (8:1-4). Tradition holds that he was martyred until Manasseh, the apostate king of Judah (687-642); see 2 Kings 21:16.

During this period Judah suffered four Assyrian invasions:

734 BC: Tiglath-Pileser III (r. 745-727) conquered the eastern Mediterranean before turning his attention east. Ahaz of Judah (r. 736-716) refused the invitation to join the anti-Assyrian alliance made by Rezon of Damascus and Pekah of Israel and paid a large tribute to Assyria to secure the help of Tiglath-Pileser, who exiled the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali (8:23) to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29, 16:5-9).

724 BC: Shalmaneser V (r. 726-722) besieged Samaria and made Israel pay tribute. Hoshea, the king of Israel, joined with Egypt in rebellion. Under Sargon II (r. 721-705 BC) Assyria (in 721 BC) vanquished Samaria deported many more inhabitants of Israel and replaced them by people from elsewhere in his empire (2 Kings 17:1-6, 24-41). Judah survived by compliance.

711 BC: Sargon attacked Ashdod when it allied with Egypt. Assyrian control of the coast blocked Judah from any access to the Mediterranean.

701 BC: the Assyrian King Sennacherib attacked Philistia and Judah, which had formed an anti-Assyrian alliance with Egypt that was encouraged by Babylonia (Assyria's enemy in the east). But just when Jerusalem was about to fall, the Assyrians withdrew (2 Kings 19:35-37; Isaiah 37:36-37, 39:1-8).

I. The Situation of Jerusalem within Judah and in relation to other nations – 1:1-12:6

1:1-31 – a judgment oracle: God is majestic, glorious, and holy. God transcends history but remains close to His people and is never remote. Despite the prosperity of Uzziah's reign, the wealthy oppress the poor and neglect the helpless (1:23; 3:14-24; 5:8-10; 32:9-14)

2:1-5:30 – the glory and the shame of Jerusalem: pride and cynicism about God's plan (5:1-4) are obstacles to trusting the Lord and accepting revelation. God will prune the wild growth (5:5-7) and send the prophet precisely to tell the people that contrary to their view, they do not understand the Lord's ways (6:9-10). God will purge His city so as to humble the proud and punish the unjust (2:6-4:1), but He will preserve a remnant to show forth His glory and attract other nations to His ways (4:2-6; 6:1-7).

6:1-13 – Isaiah's vocation. During a liturgy in the Temple in 740, Isaiah experienced the holiness of God: the smoke of the sacrifice became the presence of God at Sinai (Ex 19:18), the voices of the choir became the song of the Seraphim hovering over the ark (Ex 25:18-20), and the prophet's heart encountered the Lord's glory as found in the Tent in the wilderness (Ex 24:16-17, 40:34) and the Holy of Holies at the dedication of the Temple by Solomon (1 Kings 8:10-11). While confessing his own sin and that of the people (6:1-7), the prophet saw the Lord like Moses did (Ex 33:18-34:9) and heard the call at the basis of the preaching (beginning with chs. 1-5).

7:1-12:6 – Isaiah's dealings with the King. To confront the tendency of Ahaz to apostasy and religious compromise, Isaiah demands trust in the Lord's protection against enemy armies (7:3-9). His prophecy of Immanuel in 734 comes with his effort to discourage Ahaz from allying with Assyria; the

king feigned piety by refusing to ask a sign, and so Isaiah announces that God will give a sign: a virgin who conceives (7:14; 8:8, 10). Isaiah asserts that before the child matures both Israel and Damascus will be in ruins (7:15-17). Ahaz refuses to believe and allies himself with Assyria. Isaiah prophesies that in the person of a true son of David who will bring a reign of eternal peace (9:1-6) the light of God will break forth upon those who have suffered exile and death by Assyria. God will prune the barren branches from the line of David and make a new king sprout from the house of Jesse (11:1-9; 32:1). Isaiah forms a group of disciples in relative seclusion (8:11-20; 10:20-23).

II. Oracles against the Nations. 13:1–23:18 The 721 fall of the northern kingdom vindicates Isaiah.
13:1–14:23 – against Babylon Isaiah as advisor to Hezekiah when he succeeds Ahaz.
13:24–16:14 – vs Assyria, Philistia, Moab Hezekiah’s religious reforms but obdurate
17:1-14 – against Damascus and Israel refusal to change foreign policy.
18:1–20:1-6 – regarding Ethiopia and Egypt. 20:1-6 – walking naked in the streets to
21:1-17 – the fall of Babylon, message to Edom and Arabia to show the futility of H’s policies.
22:1-25 – a vision about Jerusalem
23:1-18 – against Tyre

III. The Apocalypse of Isaiah. 24:1–27:13
24:1-23 – the collapse of earth and the kingdom of God
25:1-12 – the heavenly banquet in Zion
26:1–27:1 – psalms of deliverance
27:1-13 – the vineyard, the city, and the return of Israel

IV. Concerning Judah’s alliances and survival. 28:1–33:24
28:1–29:24 – message against Samaria and the rulers of Jerusalem
30:1–31:9 – God’s promised protection of Jerusalem against Assyria
32:1-20 – judgment on Jerusalem and God’s promise
33:1-24 – deliverance of Jerusalem and its glorious future

V. Judgment on Edom and the healing of Jerusalem. 34:1–35:10

VI. Isaiah, Hezekiah, and the gloom of Assyria. 36:1–39:8 [2 Kings 18-20]
36:1–37:38 – the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC and the city’s miraculous deliverance
38:1-20 – the illness and healing of Hezekiah
39:1-8 – letter from Babylon and the prophecy of exile

Matthew (1:23, 18:20, and 28:20) uses the name Emmanuel (God is with us) of Jesus. Matthew uses the Septuagint’s Greek term *parthenos* (virgin) for the Hebrew *almah* (young woman) in Isaiah 7:14.

In light of the Assyrian conquest of Galilee in 732 and 721, Matthew takes Jesus’s growing up in Galilee (4:13-16) as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah (8:23–9:1) that God’s light would come upon this territory (see also John 8:12 – “I am the light of the world”).

Jesus as the shoot promised to spring from the root of Jesse (Rom 15:12; 1 Peter 4:14; Revelation 22:16).

In all four Gospels (Mk 4:12, Mt 13:14-15, Luke 8:10, John 12:40) as a way to show the Apostles that even the misunderstanding of the crowds about His message is foretold, Jesus quotes Is 6:9-10 – God’s directive to Isaiah to tell the people that they are not accepting God’s revelation.