

A Vision Concerning Judah and Jerusalem

Isaiah 1:1

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The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

The Book of Isaiah derives its' title from the author, of course the Prophet Isaiah whose name means "The Lord is Salvation," and is, in fact, similar to the names Joshua, Elisha, and even Jesus! Interestingly, the Book of Isaiah is directly quoted in the NT over 65 times, far more than any other of the OT Prophets and it is actually mentioned by name over 20 times. Isaiah, the son of Amoz, ministered in and around Jerusalem as a prophet to Judah during the reigns of 4 kings of Judah:

- Uzziah (Called Azariah in 2 kings)
- Jotham
- Ahaz
- Hezekiah

He did this service from c. 739-686 BC. It seems apparent that he came from a family of some social rank, because it appears that he had easy access to king (cp. 7:3). He was married and had at least two sons who bore symbolic names:

- "Shear-jashub" meaning "a remnant shall return" (7:3)
- "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" meaning "hasten the spoil, hasten the prey" (8:3)

It is very telling that when, in the year of King Uzziah's death (@739 B.C.), he responded with a cheerful readiness, though he knew from the very beginning that his ministry would be one of fruitless warning and exhortation (6:9-13). Having been reared in Jerusalem, he was a very appropriate choice as a political and religious counselor to the nation itself.

The Scripture makes it clear that Isaiah was a contemporary of both Hosea and Micah. His writing style has no rival in the versatility of expression, brilliance of imagery, and even richness of vocabulary. The early church Father, Jerome likened him to Demosthenes, the legendary Greek orator. His writing features a range of 2,186 different words, compared to 1,535 in Ezekiel, 1,636 in Jeremiah, and 2,170 in Psalms. Interestingly, 2 Chron. 32:32 tells us that he wrote a biography of King Hezekiah as well. We know that Isaiah lived until at least 681 B.C. when it seems clear that he wrote the account of Sennacherib's death (cf. 37:38). Tradition holds that Isaiah met his death under King Manasseh (c. 695-642 B.C.) by being cut in two by a wooden saw (cf. Heb. 11:37).

Background and Setting

During Uzziah's prosperous 52-year reign (c. 790-739 B.C.), Judah developed into a strong commercial and military state with a port for commerce on the Red Sea and the construction of walls, towers, and various fortifications (2 Chron. 26:3-5, 8-10, 13-15). Yet that period witnessed a profound decline in Judah's spiritual state. Uzziah's downfall resulted from the judgment of God because of his attempt to assume the privileges of a Priest and burn incense on the altar (2 Kings 15:3-4; 2 Chron. 26:16-19). God judged him by giving him leprosy, from which the Bible tells us that he never recovered. (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:20-21).

Uzziah's son, Jotham (c. 750-731 B.C.) had to take over the duties of King before his father's death. We know that Assyria began to emerge as a new international power underneath their first major ruler, one Tiglath-pileser (c. 745-727 B.C.) while Jotham was king (2 Kings 15:19). Judah also began to incur opposition from Israel and Syria to her north during his reign (2 Kings 15:37). Jotham was a builder and a fighter like his father, but spiritual corruption still existed in the land (2 Kings 15:34-35; 2 Chron. 27:1-2).

Ahaz was 25 when he began to reign in Judah, and he reigned until he was 41 (2 Chron. 28:1-8; c. 735-715 B.C.). Israel and Syria formed an alliance in order to combat the rising Assyrian threat from their East, but Ahaz refused to bring Judah into this the alliance (cp. 2 Kings 16:5; Isa. 7:6). For this, the Northern neighbors threatened to dethrone him and war resulted (774 B.C.). We're told that, in panic, Ahaz sent to the Assyrian king for help (2 Kings 16:7) and the Assyrian King gladly responded, sacking Gaza, carrying all of Galilee and Gilead into captivity, and finally capturing Damascus (732 B.C.). Ahaz's alliance with Assyria led to his introduction of a heathen altar, which, astonishingly, he set up in Solomon's Temple (2 Kings 16:10-16; 2 Chron. 28:3). During his reign (722 B.C.) Assyria captured Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom, and carried many of Israel's most capable people into captivity (2 Kings 17:6-24).

Hezekiah began his reign over Judah in 715 B.C. and continued for some 29 years until @686 B.C. (2 Kings 18:1-2). Reformation was a priority when he became King (2 Kings 18:4-22; 2 Chron. 30:1). The threat of an Assyrian invasion forced Judah to promise heavy tribute to that Eastern power. In 701 B.C. Hezekiah became very ill with a life-threatening disease, but he prayed and God graciously extended his life for 15 years (2 Kings 20; Isa. 38) until 686 B.C. The ruler of Babylon used the opportunity of his illness and recovery to send congratulations to him, probably seeking to form an alliance with Judah against Assyria at the same time (2 Kings 20:12ff; Isa. 39). When Assyria became weak through internal strife, Hezekiah refused to pay any further tribute to that power (2 Kings 18:7). So, in 701 B.C. Sennacherib, then the Assyrian King, invaded the coastal areas of Israel, marching towards Egypt on Israel's southern flank. In the process, he overran many Judean towns, looting and carrying many Judean people back to Assyria. While besieging Lachish, he sent

a contingent of forces to besiege Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17-19:8; Isa. 36:2-37:9ff). this side-expedition failed however, so a second in a second attempt he sent messengers to Jerusalem demanding an immediate surrender of the city (2 Kings 19:9ff; Isa. 37:9ff). With Isaiah's encouragement, Hezekiah refused to surrender, and when Sennacherib's army fell prey to a sudden disaster, he returned to Nineveh and never threatened Judah again!

Historical and Theological Themes:

Isaiah prophesied during what is called the period of the divided Kingdom, directing the major thrust of his message to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He condemned the empty ritualism of his day (e.g. 1;10-115) and the idolatry into which so many of the people had fallen (e.g. 40:18-20). He foresaw the coming Babylonian captivity of Judah because of this departure from the Lord (39:6-7).

Fulfillment of some of his prophecies in his own lifetime provided his credentials for the prophetic office. Sennacherib's effort to take Jerusalem failed, just as Isaiah had said it would (37:6-7; 36-38). The Lord healed Hezekiah's critical illness, as Isaiah had predicted (38:5; 2 Kings 20:7). Long before Cyrus, King of Persia appeared on the scene, Isaiah named him as Judah's deliverer from the Babylonian captivity (Isa. 44:28; 45:1). Fulfillment of his prophecies have given Isaiah further vindication (7:14). The pattern of literal fulfillment of his already-fulfilled prophecies gives assurance that prophecies of Christ's second coming will also see literal fulfillment.

More than any other prophet, Isaiah provides data on the future day of the Lord and the time following. He details numerous aspects of Israel's future kingdom on earth not found elsewhere in the OT or NT, including changes in nature, the animal world, Jerusalem's status among the nations, the Suffering Servant's leadership, and others.

Through a literary device called "prophetic foreshortening," Isaiah predicted future events without delineating exact sequences of the events or time intervals separating them. For example, nothing in Isaiah reveals the extended period separating the two comings of the Messiah. Also, he does not provide as clear a distinction between the future temporal kingdom and the eternal kingdom as John does in Revelation 20:1-10; 21:1-22:5. In God's program of progressive revelation, details of these relationships awaited a prophetic spokesman of a later time.

Also known as the "evangelical Prophet," Isaiah spoke much about the grace of God toward Israel, particularly in his last 27 chapters. The centerpiece is Isaiah's unrivaled chap. 53, portraying Christ as the slain Lamb of God.

Interpretive Challenges

Interpretive challenges in a long and significant book such as Isaiah are numerous. The most critical of them focuses on whether Isaiah's prophecies will

receive literal fulfillment or not, and on whether the Lord, in His program, has abandoned national Israel and permanently replaced the nation with the church, so that there is no future for national Israel.

On the latter issue, numerous portions of Isaiah support the position that God has not replaced ethnic Israel with an alleged “new Israel.” Isaiah has too much to say about God’s faithfulness to Israel, that He would not reject the people whom He has created and chosen (43:1). The nation is on the palms of His hands, and Jerusalem’s walls are ever before His eyes (49:16). He is bound by His own Word to fulfill the promises He has made to bring them back to Himself and bless them in that future day (55:10–12).

On the former issue, literal fulfillment of many of Isaiah’s prophecies has already occurred, as illustrated in Introduction: Historical and Theological Themes. To contend that those yet unfulfilled will see non-literal fulfillment is biblically groundless. This fact disqualifies the case for proposing that the church receives some of the promises made originally to Israel. The kingdom promised to David belongs to Israel, not the church. The future exaltation of Jerusalem will be on earth, not in heaven. Christ will reign personally on this earth as we know it, as well as in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 22:1, 3).

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

We should note that it begins like most other prophetic books with an identification of four notable things:

1. The nature of the material in what he is writing;
2. The audience he intends his Book to speak to;
3. His name as author of what he is writing; and
4. The date, in general, that this wonderful prophecy has been issued.

However, it differs from several other prophetic superscriptions in a couple ways:

- Its failure to associate Isaiah with a specific location (Mic 1:1; Nah 1:1),
- By omitting his former occupation (Amos 1:1 says Amos was a shepherd), and
- By not explicitly stating that he received “the word of the LORD” (cf. Hos 1:1; Mic 1:1; Jer 1:1).

Although there is no way to determine when the superscription was added to Isaiah’s messages (if, indeed, it was added, instead of originating with Isaiah himself), one commentator, named, D. N. Freedman observed that the names of the kings in 1:1 reflect the longer manner in which names were spelled in the pre-exilic period, so he hypothesized a date during the reign of Hezekiah (about 716-15 -687-86 BC). This overlaps with the initial co-regency of Manasseh, the date suggested above.

Truth be told, the first verse here gives us quite the bracket for Isaiah's writing. He tells us that it was given in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Their whole reign covered a period of about 113 years. We know, for instance, that the famous vision of the glory of the Lord occurred in the year that King Uzziah died in chapter 6. It seems as though we might safely conclude that he (Isaiah) was not a Prophet for a very long time before this vision. A number of writers have Isaiah's office as running for anywhere from 48-70 years.

An interesting sidelight is that the nation of Israel had become great during the reigns of David and Solomon, but since then, had become divided and weakened through civil unrest and turmoil, even civil wars and conflict with surrounding nations over a period of 240-250 years before Isaiah began his ministry. 1 about the 5th year of Hezekiah's reign the 10 Northern tribes of Israel were taken into captivity by the nation of Assyria (2 Kings 17; 1 Chron. 5:26; Amos 1:5). There are very few references made in Isaiah's writings to this Kingdom and then only regarding the times when they fought with Judah and Jerusalem, which Isaiah actually says are at least one of the major subjects of his Book (1:1 & 2:1). 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chron. 26-32 gives us a more detailed history of the Kings, and hence of the times of Isaiah's writing.

1:1 The superscription begins by announcing that the content of this book was derived from "insight, a vision" (*hāzōn*) by the prophet. This "visionary" qualification of the message was extremely important, for it gave divine authority to what Isaiah said and distinguished the divine truth that he spoke from the false illusions that some people followed (8:19; 30:10-11; 44:18-20). God's knowledge was marvelously transferred to the prophet in such a way that he was able to confront his audience from the divine perspective. Isaiah faithfully communicated God's message in order to transform the thinking and behavior of those who would listen (cf. Rom 12:2) and to confirm the fate of the wicked people who were unwilling to listen (6:9-10). Although some prophets had elaborate visions containing images of people, places, and symbolic animals (Dan 8:1, 2), the term "vision" (*hāzōn*) frequently refers to the general reception of a "divine revelation" of words, without any accompanying visual pictures (Obad 1; Nah 1:1). The decision to describe the content of what follows as a "vision, divine revelation" makes it unnecessary to state that these were the "words of God."

The inhabitants of "Judah and Jerusalem" were the primary audience for Isaiah's messages, though many times his messages seem specifically aimed at the kings and rulers of Judah (1:10, 23; 3:1-15; 7:1-17; 30:1-5; 36-37) or some specific group of people (3:16-4:1). Sometimes the audience was a righteous king (36-37) but at other times it was a wicked king (7:1-17). Isaiah spoke to the proud and powerful during periods when people were wealthy (2:6-22; 3:16-4:1), but he also addressed the national leaders in a time of military fear and defeat (7:1-17). In some oracles he warned the wicked and at other times he encouraged the righteous. The oracles against the foreign nations (13-23) were

designed to teach a Judean audience something about God’s plan for these nations; they were not delivered to warn or convert the foreign nations Isaiah spoke about. Since Isaiah addressed many different groups, different kings, and people living in very different economic and political situations, it would be a mistake to imagine that he was speaking to the same audience throughout the book.

The person officially identified as the author of these words was Isaiah, though there is a great deal of speculation among scholars that later authors/redactors wrote or edited parts of the book long after the death of Isaiah. Isaiah is not described as a prophet or seer in this verse (cf. 37:2; 38:1; 39:3). His father Amoz should not to be confused with the prophet Amos. Archaeologists found the name Amoz on a seal in Jerusalem, suggesting that this person was a scribe, but there is no way to accurately date this seal or prove that it referred to Isaiah’s father. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah’s father was the brother of King Amaziah, making Isaiah a member of the royal Davidic family.¹⁷ In light of Isaiah’s literary skills and his recording of the history of two Israelite kings (2 Chr 26:22; 32:32), it appears that he had scribal abilities. Although nothing can be proven from this data, it fits what one would expect of Isaiah’s status, background, and training.

The date of Isaiah’s ministry is circumscribed by the reigns of four kings—from Uzziah through Hezekiah. During these years, Judah was prosperous and powerful in the time of Uzziah (2 Kgs 15:1–7; 2 Chr 26:1–23), weak and under Assyrian control for much of the reign of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16; 2 Chr 28), and then free again in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18–19; 2 Chr 29–32). This period covers the time from about 746 to 686 BC. Since Manasseh, Hezekiah’s evil son, was co-regent with him for the last few years of his life, some of Isaiah’s writings may reflect the beginning of Manasseh’s reign (2 Kgs 21; 2 Chr 33). In the “Historical Setting” section above it was suggested that chap. 1 (including this superscription) was written near the end of Isaiah’s life when Manasseh had rejected his father’s religious reforms and was leading the nation into rebellion against God by worshiping other gods.

Superscriptions are important resources that help readers orient their interpretation to a time period and a specific kind of literary production. The reader’s attitude toward this text would be totally different if the superscription said this was a lament, a song, or a gospel. A vision to Abram before the revelation of the law would be handled differently than a revelation to Daniel in the exilic period. Interpreters would treat a word from an Assyrian king different from an inspired vision from God. This superscription informs the reader that the words contained in this vision require attention so that one will interpret each passage according to its historical setting, as well as its literary character. A message from a divine source should also circumscribe the audience’s theology and have an impact on their behavior. No one should read this revelation from God dispassionately, for it cannot be read without accountability.

Isaiah 1:1

We'll take a moment or two to look, in depth, at this first verse's contents.

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, kings of Judah.*

A “vision” in the OT is a word of revelation given to one who is called by God to be a spokesman to His people. We'll note that he uses the definite adjective “The” associated with the word we have mentioned “vision” which suggests that what he will mention is a vision that was known to the readers. Isaiah was a Prophet known to Israel and this vision of his was one that was familiar to them.

He says that he was the son of “Amoz”. Of course, “Amos” is Isaiah's genuine father, a known person to Israel. “Amoz” is a word meaning “*strong*” and was the father of the prophet Isaiah (Is. 1:1; 13:1; 38:1). According to a tradition of the rabbis, Amoz was a brother of King Amaziah of Judah (who reigned about 796–767) and, like his son Isaiah, appears to have also been a prophet. We ought to be careful to be sure not to confuse this man with the Prophet Amos.

This “vision” is arranged in acts and scenes like a play. It contains a high proportion of dialogue spoken by a number of speakers, including some in the first person plural, to be spoken like a chorus. Some of the scenes have historical settings (for instance, 7:1–16), while others have an otherworldly kind of setting in which the Heavens and Earth may be addressed and God speaks (for instance, 1:2–3). When references are made to historical events, they move chronologically through the Vision.

This Vision has so many of the qualities of a drama that this commentary will suggest a separation of speeches and a designation of speakers. Identification of the speaker is indicated in some places by the text, where it is not, the commentator's choice is arbitrary. This is literary prophecy of excellent quality and great complexity.

Isaiah is not specifically named here as the author. His name is a part of the title. His “vision” is the subject of the book, it is not to be understood as telling us that he was the writer; rather it is telling us that the writer is giving a record of the vision Isaiah saw. Isaiah does appear in passages where he is identified by name, as in 7:1–16 and in chaps. 20, 37, 38, 39. His name appears in other superscriptions, as in 2:1 and 13:1. There are first-person accounts in chaps. 6 and 8 and ought to be properly attributed to him. These are the portions of the Vision that justify his name in the title. They, and the title, imply that the Vision conveys his concept.

Just as a Comment

All that is known of Isaiah, the son of Amoz is contained in this book. He is only mentioned elsewhere in 2 Kgs 18–20 which, in turn, is seen to be speaking of Isa 36–39 and he is also referred to in 2 Chr 32:20. One book in what is called the Pseudepigrapha is ascribed to him as the writer.

Uzziah, referred to in Chapter 6, is called Azariah in 2 Kgs 15:1 and 2 Chr 26. The latter portion of his reign overlapped that of Jotham because of Uzziah's leprosy (2 Kgs 15:5; 2 Chr 26:19–21).

Jotham reigned sixteen years (2 Kgs 15:32–8/2 Chr 27), as did his son, Ahaz. Both the Books of Kings and Chronicles list Ahaz as one of the worst kings and blame him for bringing "Tiglath-Pileser" into the land. They both say the Lord brought Israel and Aram against Ahaz. The Vision, here is Isaiah, sets aside chaps. 7–14 for the reign of Ahaz and clearly has a view of him and his reign different from that in Kings and Chronicles.

Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz (2 Kgs 18–20; 2 Chr 29–32). He is lauded as one of the greatest kings in both Kings and Chronicles. The Vision repeats a selection of the Kings account (chaps. 36–39). Chaps 15–21 are set in Hezekiah's reign. But the Vision also has an independent evaluation of Hezekiah and his reign.

Explanation

The Vision takes its name from the prophet. It is firmly rooted in his time, reflecting the firm belief that God began in the latter eighth century to do an epochal thing that was still in progress almost three centuries later. The Vision refers to the earlier period as "the former times" and the later as "the latter times." History, it says, will never quite be the same. Not since Noah's flood had a period and its events so divided the ages.

The Vision insists that God's own strategy (עצרה) is behind it all. The coming of the empires is part of it. The scattering of Israel and the restoration of Jerusalem fit the pattern. But his people do not "know," cannot "see" or "hear," or "understand." To the very last, only a small minority are willing to take part in his "new world."

Thinking on the verse itself a bit further...

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, kings of Judah.*

Commenting on the identifying phrase that came first, we see, as a beginning and/or a connection, the second phrase begin with a relative conjunction..."which". This is a very common form that appears near 3900

times in the OT. The first usages are found over in Genesis 1 in describing what the various aspects of God's creation and their relationship to other parts. Genesis 1:7:

*⁷ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters **which** were under the firmament from the waters **which** were above the firmament; and it was so.*

We see that the word is used to join two ideas and to show their relationship to each other. Here, in Isaiah 1:1, it relates the vision which Isaiah saw and the contents or purpose of that vision.

The word "Concerning" essentially means "resting upon" or taking its' meaning from. This prophecy that Isaiah is giving to us essentially takes its' essence from God's thoughts and intentions regarding Judah and Jerusalem. References to Judah virtually always speaks of the Southern Kingdom, the one which entered into captivity to Babylon @605 BC (as well as the second group taken in 586 BC). This is so whereas references to Jerusalem most often speak of either the Northern Kingdom as a unit or the nation in its' entirety. It seems that what we need to hear Isaiah speaking to is the entire nation of Israel with some selected portions of the letter directed to the Southern portion alone. It seems clear that these more specific parts are clearly marked.

He further specifies just "when" he was speaking and gives more context for us to us to lend info to help us understand just it is that he is saying.

...in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

The first person mentioned is "Uzziah". This is likely a reference to the son of king Amaziah of Judah and king of Judah himself for 52 years. We should take note that there was also a Priest name "Azariah" who was a Kohathite Levite and ancestor of the Prophet Samuel. Yet another "Uzziah" was a priest of the sons of Harim who took a foreign wife in the time of Ezra. Just by way of a bit of "additional Information": Uzziah means "my strength is Jehovah".

The second name mentioned is "Jotham" who was the son of king Uzziah of Judah by Jerushah one of his wives. He was king of Judah for 16 years and contemporary as we can see here, of the Prophet Isaiah and as King of Judah also a contemporary of king Pekah of Israel. The Scripture also tells us that there was a Jotham who was a son of Jahdai and was a descendant of Caleb and Judah. We also know there was a Jotham who was the youngest son of Gideon who escaped from the massacre of his brothers. The name "Jotham" means "Jehovah is perfect".

The third name is a reference to King Ahaz. This name appears 41 times in the OT and most often refers to the king of Judah, son Jotham, father of Hezekiah. But is also used as a reference to a Benjamite, son of Micah, and great grandson of Jonathan. Interestingly, the name Ahaz means "he has grasped".

The fourth and final name is “Hezekiah”, a familiar name to us who are readers of Scriptures. He was a son of king Ahaz by and the 12th king of Judah; It is clear that his reign was characterised by his godly conduct; reigned for 29 years. There was also one named “Hezekiah” who was head of a family of returning exiles in the time of Nehemiah. Likewise, there was one who was an Ephraimite in the time of Ahaz. Just by way of additional information: the word “Hezekiah” or “Jehizkiah” means “Jehovah has made strong”.

All four of these men were kings of Judah, Isaiah says and so, together, give us a frame of reference as to just when Isaiah’s prophecies the referred we see in this Book. It is very beneficial that God, by Isaiah’s hand, give us a solid frame of reference from which to read and understand His revelation.