

Isaiah Authorship

Introduction

The prophecy of Isaiah claims Isaiah as its author—and Jews and Christians have long believed this—so how should we address this matter to those who disagree?

I. Background to Isaiah

A. Who was Isaiah?

1. His name means "the LORD is salvation" or "the LORD saves."
2. He was a son of Amoz, traditionally believed to be a cousin of King Uzziah, and possibly had access to the royal court.
3. Tradition records that he was martyred by being sawn in two.

B. When did Isaiah write?

1. Isaiah wrote during the Assyrian invasions in about 700 BC.
2. These invasions destroyed the northern nation of Israel and devastated 46 cities in the south—all but Jerusalem, where Isaiah lived.

II. Arguments Against Isaiah as Author

A. Accusations

1. Background: Chapters 1–39 have an Assyrian background, but chapters 40–66 have a Babylonian background.
2. Style & Theology: The two sections' language, style, and theology differ radically.
3. Messiah: Messiah is presented as King in chapters 1–39 but as Suffering Servant in chapters 40–66.
4. Captivity & Cyrus: Isaiah could not have predicted the Babylonian captivity and return under Cyrus, mentioned explicitly by name several times (Is. 44:28–45:2; 45:13; 48:14–15) at least 160 years in advance.

B. Results

1. Deutero-Isaiah: Some argue for two authors of Isaiah: one for 1–39 and 40–66.
2. Trito-Isaiah: Others argue for two Isaiah 40–66 authors: one for 40–55 and another for 56–66.

III. Evidence for Isaiah's Authorship

A. Literary Arguments

Accusation	Response
<p><u>Background:</u> Chapters 1–39 have an Assyrian background but chapters 40–66 have a Babylonian background.</p>	<p>Babylon is mentioned more than twice as often in chapters 1–39 than in 40–66. The only shift is one of perspective from a present to a future time. Besides, Isaiah may have prophesied chapters 1–39 before Assyria conquered Israel and then preached chapters 40–66 afterwards concerning Babylon.</p>
<p><u>Style & Theology:</u> The language, style, and theology of the two sections differ radically.</p>	<p>The differences are exaggerated by critics and can be explained by different emphases (condemnation verses consolation). Critics often will not admit that content, time of writing, and circumstances normally affect an author's style.</p> <p>“The Holy One of Israel” appears 12 times in Isaiah 1–39 and 13 times in chapters 40–66, arguing in favor of the unity of the book. “The mouth of the LORD has spoken” likewise appears in both sections along with 40-50 other identical phrases.</p> <p>“The supposed three ‘books’ of 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66 have often been alleged to show traces of different periods of composition. There can be little doubt of 1–39 belonging to the later eighth century, having numerous links with that epoch. But that 40–55 is based in Babylon is simply not true. As scholars of various stripes have been compelled to observe, those chapters betray no firsthand knowledge of the metropolis of Babylon (mentioned only four times in these chapters, and only once actually implying a Hebrew exile, 48:20 — contrasted with nine times in 1–39!), but belong in the milieu of the Levant, not least Palestine.”—K. A. Kitchen, <i>On the Reliability of the Old Testament</i> (Eerdmans, 2003), location 8294 of 14432, Kindle Edition.</p> <p>“In the Dead Sea Scrolls there is just one positive indication, in the great, intact scroll of Isaiah, one of the first scrolls published. In this scroll, when he came to the end of what we today call chapter 33 (at 33:24), the ancient scribe deliberately left a blank space (equal to three lines’ depth)”—Kitchen, location 8279 of 14432, Kindle ed.</p>
<p><u>Messiah:</u> Messiah is presented as King in chapters 1–39 but as Suffering Servant in chapters 40–66.</p>	<p>Jewish scholars of the intertestamental period could not reconcile Isaiah's two seemingly contradictory depictions of the Messiah. Therefore, some thought there existed two Messiahs—one to rule and one to suffer. Others said Isaiah 53 depicted not the Messiah but the suffering Jewish people.</p> <p>But these two depictions need not argue for dual authorship. Messiah actually has two comings, one to suffer and the other to reign.</p> <p>Isaiah's predictions are certainly far more believable and accurate than so-called Nostradamus “prophecies.” In contrast to the ambiguous Nostradamus, Isaiah was amazingly specific. What the LORD said about Jerusalem not being attacked by the Assyrians who had destroyed hundreds of other cities was fulfilled to the letter! The Assyrian camp saw 186,000 soldiers killed in a single night.</p>

<p><u>Captivity & Cyrus:</u> Isaiah could not have predicted the Babylonian captivity and return under Cyrus who is specifically mentioned by name (Isa 44–45) 160 years in advance.</p>	<p>The accusation assumes that God cannot predict accurately, despite his claim to know the future (42:9). It also does not answer how many of Isaiah's prophecies were fulfilled even hundreds of years later in Jesus Christ (e.g., Isa 53).</p> <p>Nevertheless, God inspired Isaiah's prediction some 160 years before Cyrus the Persian sent the Jews back from Babylon and restored Jerusalem. Cyrus not only commanded the restoration of the temple in Ezra 1:2, but he funded the effort! Isaiah notes the victories of Cyrus but not by name in 41:2, 25, but then specifically gives the name of Cyrus SIX times in his prophecy (44:28; 45:1-2; 45:13-15).</p>
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B. Archaeological Arguments

1. Assyrian records in the Sennacherib Annals show this king threatening Hezekiah (701 BC). He claims to have "shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem" (i.e., unable to conquer it).
2. The Bible claims that Hezekiah and Isaiah lived at the same time (701 BC), but this is verified in the Ophel excavations at the foot of the southern wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in 2018. The personal seals of both Hezekiah and Isaiah were unearthed only 10 feet apart in the same strata.
3. This proves that Isaiah lived at that time. It does not prove that someone wrote in Isaiah's name in later generations, but it does show that Isaiah was not a myth.

C. New Testament Quotations

1. Matthew attributes Isaiah 40:3 to Isaiah in Matthew 3:3.
2. Luke attributes Isaiah 40:3 to Isaiah in Luke 3:4.
3. John attributes Isaiah 53:1 to Isaiah in John 12:37-38.
4. John attributes Isaiah 6:10 to Isaiah in John 12:39.
5. Paul attributes Isaiah 10:22 to Isaiah in Romans 9:27.
6. Jesus attributes Isaiah 6:9 to Isaiah in Matthew 13:14.

Conclusion

No legitimate reason exists to doubt that Isaiah wrote the prophecy bearing his name—whether linguistic or archaeological or in NT quotations attributed to him.