
The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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The Background and Unity of the Book of Isaiah

by Wayne Jackson

Part 2 of 2

Internal Evidence – The internal evidence for the unity of the book of Isaiah may be summarized as follows:

1. There are historical indications within the book which place 40-66 *before* the Babylonian captivity (cf. 40:9; 62:2, where Jerusalem and other cities are still standing). It should be noted, though, that, in harmony with his intended purpose, Isaiah sometimes thrusts himself forward in spirit to the time of the Captivity in order to give emphasis to his message. The critics ignore his prophetic stance. Moreover, in 6:11-13, a section admitted by all to be from Isaiah, there is a prophetic description of the Exile and return. The prophet even named his first son Shear-Jashub, which meant, “a remnant shall return” (7:3). If Isaiah’s prophetic ability can be recognized in this early portion of the book, there should be no objection when the same gift is evidenced later in the document.
2. The argument based upon alleged stylistic differences is highly subjective. The “highway” symbolism is employed in the different sections of the book (cf. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 62:10). The expression “the Holy One of Israel,” a title for God, is found only thirty-two times in the Bible. Twelve of these are in Isaiah 1-39, and fourteen are in chapters 40-66. Arguments of a similar nature could be multiplied many times over.
3. Analogous prophetic admonitions in the various portions of the book indicate that the same social and moral problems are being addressed. For example, the Jews’ hands were “full of blood” (1:15), indeed, defiled with blood” (59:3). Compare also 10:1, 2 with 59:4-7.
4. In the latter sections of the book, allegedly written in the Babylonian and post-Babylonian era, there are numerous references to Judah’s idolatry (cf. 41:19; 44:14; 57:4ff; 65:2-4), and yet, it is well-known that the Hebrews did not practice idol-worship after the fall of Jerusalem! This is demonstrated by the fact that the post-Exilic prophets, e.g., Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, addressed a variety of other sins, but they never mentioned idolatry. This is a clear indication that the latter portions of the book were not written during the Babylonia/post-Babylonia period.

5. Language symbolism in the latter segments of the book is drawn from geographical features that relate to Palestine, not Babylon. Note, for instance, that the idol-worshippers were slaying their children “in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks” and “among the smooth stones of the valley” (57:5, 6), which is descriptive of the rushing streams of Canaan, but not of the lazy canals in the flat alluvial soil of Babylon.

External Evidence – In addition to the above, there are external evidences for the unity of the book of Isaiah.

1. For ages the unit of this book was accepted by Jews and Christians alike. The critical theories are only a couple of hundred years old. Even liberal writer A.B. Davidson acknowledged: “For nearly twenty-five centuries no one dreamt of doubting that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was the author of every part of the book that goes under his name” (*Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 244).
2. There is no indication in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the 3rd century B.C.) that the book had multiple authors.
3. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947), which contain the Isaiah manuscript, argues against the Deutero-Isaiah, etc. theories. For example, chapter 40 (allegedly the commencement of Second Isaiah) begins on the very last line of a column which contains chapter 38, verse 9, through chapter 39, verse 8. Noted scholar Oswald T. Allis has observed: “Obviously the scribe was not conscious of the alleged fact that an important change of situation, involving an entire change of authorship, begins with chapter 40” (Oswald Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah*, p. 40).
4. The New Testament quotes more from the book of Isaiah than all other prophecies combined. There are 308 quotations from, or references to, Isaiah in the New Testament, and these involve forty-seven of the sixty-six chapters. The prophet is cited by name twenty-one times and all three of the so-called divisions are credited to him. For example, in John 12:37-41, the apostle quotes from Isaiah chapter 53, and also from chapter 6, in the same breath, citing Isaiah as the author of both passages. He even joins the two quotations together by saying, “Isaiah said *again* ...” (12:39). It is impossible to deny the unity of Isaiah without reflecting upon the integrity of the New Testament record.

Finally, we might ask: If Isaiah did not author the material in chapters 40-66 of that ancient work, just who did? It is incredible that the Hebrews would not have preserved the authors’ names, in view of their characteristically careful handling of the Scriptures. In some of the ancient scripture collections, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were bound together, yet the authorship of these writings was never confused. That such a tragedy should mysteriously occur in the case of Isaiah is inexplicable.

We are thus able to confidently affirm that the unity of this inspired Old Testament narrative is unscathed.

News and Notes:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

“...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16