



When was the book of Isaiah written?

“The vision which Isaiah, son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”—Isaiah 1:1 NAB

Until about the last 250 years, the book of Isaiah was generally accepted by Christians as being written entirely by the prophet Isaiah in the latter part of the 8th century BCE. Nowadays, however, many “scholars” think the book was written by various writers over the course of several centuries, citing factors such as differences in subject matter, style, theology, vocabulary, and the viewpoint that predictive prophecy is impossible. The real reason for this is, however, that they don’t think predictive prophecy is possible. While there are a variety of views about the writership of Isaiah, critics often claim that chapters 40-66 were not written by **“Isaiah, son of Amos.”** However, careful examination of the book reveals that chapters 36-39 are a historical interlude that concludes the first section of the book, chapters 1-35, and introduces the last section, chapters 40-66. This reveals the unity of the entire book.

Theories of the Writership of Isaiah

The most common theory today about the writership of Isaiah goes something like this:

“First Isaiah,” “or **“Proto-Isaiah” - Chapters 1-39** - Written either entirely, or mostly, by the prophet Isaiah from about 740-700 BCE. The prophet Isaiah’s name is only mentioned in this section of the book. Because [Isaiah 13-14](#) foretells the downfall of Babylon, and [Isaiah 34](#) foretells the downfall of Edom, and [Isaiah 35](#) predicts the return of the Jews from exile, some claim they were written by someone who lived after these events occurred. Others claim that still other writers wrote some other sections of this part of Isaiah.

“Second Isaiah,” or **“Deutero-Isaiah” - Chapters 40-55** - Assumed to be added by an anonymous prophet after the prophet Isaiah’s lifetime, around the end of the Babylonian exile, addressed to the exiles in Babylon. This is mainly because of the strikingly powerful prophecy of [Isaiah 44:26-45:6](#) which foretells Persian king Cyrus’ leading the overthrow of Babylon and his having the Jews returned to their homeland and rebuilding Jerusalem. Other reasons are that [Isaiah 40-44](#) speak as though Babylon is already the world power, the Jews are in exile, and God promises them redemption and restoration; [Isaiah 46,47](#) foretells Babylon’s downfall from its position as world power, and [Isaiah 48](#) encourages the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

“Third Isaiah,” or **“Trito-Isaiah” - Chapters 56-66** - Assumed to be written sometime after the Babylonian exile by a prophet, or even several writers, who was (were) imbued with “the spirit of Isaiah,” addressed to the Jewish community after its return to their homeland.

Three Isaiah Sections Examined

This article examines and analyzes the “*Three Isaiahs*” theory in the light of scriptural evidence. Weighing heavily against the “*Three Isaiahs*” theory are the following:

Predictive prophecy is not only possible, but expected, by a true prophet of God. While critics often say that chapters 40-66 speak of Babylon as being the current world power, which it clearly was not during Isaiah's lifetime, **Isaiah 13:19** calls "**Babylon, the most glorious of kingdoms**" (NLT), "**the jewel of kingdoms**" (NAB). This is definitely prophetic, since Babylon did not become the dominant world power until many years after Isaiah's lifetime. How is it prophetic? Sometimes in the Bible, including Isaiah, prophecies are written as if they have already occurred, because they are so certain of fulfillment. "**See, the earlier things have come to pass, new ones I now declare; Before they spring forth I announce them to you**" (Isaiah 42:9 NAB). An example of this forecasting the future in the past or present tense is in "*First Isaiah*": "**He has come up from Rimmon, he has reached Aiath, passed through Migron, at Mishmash he has stored his supplies. He has crossed the ravine, at Geba he has camped for the night**" (Isaiah 10:27-29 NAB), which describes the route of the then yet future Assyrian invasion of Judah from about 10 miles north of Jerusalem, as though it was a current event. Also, see **Isaiah 5:13-17; 9:1-7; 23:1,14**).

While the postexilic writers theory of Isaiah might seem to eliminate some of the prophecies about Babylon and other nations, the exile, and return of the Jews, it doesn't eliminate the fact that Babylon did not cease to be inhabited until the Middle Ages, so, in any case, **Isaiah 13** is a prophecy. **Isaiah 13:19-21** foretold: "**Babylon . . . will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in**" (NIV). The post-exilic writer postulations also do not eliminate the strikingly fulfilled prophecies about the Messiah, Jesus, such as **Isaiah 6:9,10; 7:14; 9:6,7; 29:13; 52:13-53:12; 61:1,2**. Isaiah's graphically detailed prophecies about Christ's suffering and death put the case for supernatural prophecy beyond reasonable doubt.

The entire book of Isaiah was written under the presupposition that Judah was doomed, even "*First Isaiah*." "**The vision which Isaiah . . . saw concerning Judah . . . Your country is waste, your cities burnt with fire . . . strangers devour it**" (Isaiah 1:1,7 NAB). This is the foundation of Isaiah's ministry. which Yahweh revealed in his prophetic

calling, recorded in *“First Isaiah.”* Isaiah was told that **“the cities”** would become **“desolate”** and **“the land”** would become **“a desolate waste”** (**Isaiah 6:11 NAB**).

The assertion that **“Yahweh says to his anointed one, to Cyrus . . . I have called you by your name . . . though you do not know me”** (**Isaiah 45:1,4,5 NJB**), is not a prophecy written 150-200 years in advance, but written after the fact — is refuted by the fact that, 300 years in advance, **2 Kings 13:2** accurately predicted that future king **“Josiah”** would eliminate idolatry and idolatrous priests out of Judah.

Deutero-Isaiah was supposedly written by an anonymous poet who had lived all, or almost all, of his life in Babylonian captivity. However, chapters 40-66 show little to no familiarity with Babylonian flora and geography, but great familiarity with Palestinian geography and flora. Notice:

“I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set juniper the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together” (**Isaiah 41:19 NIV**). **“Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak, and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow”** (**Isaiah 44:14 Nabs**). These are all trees native to Palestine. The vocabulary and language here indicate the writer was living in Palestine and was addressing a Jewish audience who were familiar with the making of wooden idol “gods.” This fits the prophet Isaiah.

“Say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God’” (**Isaiah 40:9 NJB**). *“Deutero-Isaiah”* was actually written from the perspective that the **“towns of Judah”** had not yet been destroyed, but were still in existence, and not from the perspective of very late in the exilic period, long after the destruction and desolation of Judah.

Bible books with more than one writer, such as Psalms and Proverbs, name them. (The deaths of Moses and Joshua, however, had to have been recorded by someone else

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Joshua 24:29-33). Nothing anywhere in the text of the book of Isaiah gives any hint at there being more than one writer of the book.

Arguments based on style and theology are weak. Style and content vary according to the purpose of the writer and the subject matter. In fact, recent studies have shown a significant thematic unity throughout the entire book of Isaiah. The unity of the entire book can be seen when we carefully analyze the content of Isaiah.

Notice the similarity of expressions from [Isaiah 1-39](#) as compared to those in [Isaiah 40-66](#), which shows the unity of the entire book:

“They have rebelled against me” ([Isaiah 1:2 NAB](#)) - “The people who rebelled against me” ([Isaiah 66:24 NAB](#))

“None among them is weary; none stumbles” ([Isaiah 5:27 NAB](#)) - “Young men grow faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall” ([Isaiah 40:30 NAB](#))

“I saw the Lord, high and exalted” ([Isaiah 6:1 NIV](#)) - “My servant will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” ([Isaiah 52:13 NIV](#)) - “This is what the high and exalted One says” ([Isaiah 57:15 NAB](#))

“Until the cities are desolate . . . and the land a desolate waste” ([Isaiah 6:11,12 NAB](#)) - “No more shall you be called ‘Forsaken,’ nor your land called ‘Desolate’” ([Isaiah 62:4 NAB](#))

“A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom” ([Isaiah 11:1 NAB](#)) - “He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot from the scorched earth” ([Isaiah 53:2 NAB](#))

“The wolf will live with the lamb . . . the calf and the lion and the yearling together . . . the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and

the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:6-9 NIV) - "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain" (Isaiah 65:25 NIV)

"He will raise a banner for the nations" (Isaiah 11:12 NIV) - "I will lift up my banner to the peoples" (Isaiah 49:22 NIV)

"Those whom Yahweh has ransomed will return, they will come to Zion shouting with joy, their heads crowned with joy unending; rejoicing and gladness will escort them and sorrow and sighing will take flight" (Isaiah 35:10 NJB) - "Those whom Yahweh has ransomed will return, they will enter Zion shouting for joy, their heads crowned with joy unending; joy and gladness will escort them and sorrow and sighing will take flight" (Isaiah 51:11 NJB)

The *"Three Isaiahs"* share many phrases and words. The phrase, **"The Holy One of Israel,"** occurs 12 times in *"First Isaiah,"* 10 times in *"Second Isaiah,"* and 3 times in *"Third Isaiah,"* but only 6 times in the rest of the Old Testament, which is powerful proof that **"Isaiah the prophet"** was the sole writer of the book bearing his name. Notice:

"First Isaiah" - **Isaiah 1:4; 5:19,24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11,12,15; 31:1; 37:23**

"Second Isaiah" - **Isaiah 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5**

"Third Isaiah" - **Isaiah 55:5; 60:9,14**

The so-called *"Three Isaiahs"* are also very concerned with the problem of idolatry, with the words **"idol"** and **"idols,"** or the idea of idolatry, appearing in all three sections of the book, 13 times in *"First Isaiah,"* 16 times in *"Second Isaiah,"* and 5 times in *"Third Isaiah."* Let's take note :

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 2:8,18,20** (twice); **10:10,11; 17:8** (idea); **19:1,3; 30:22; 31:7** (twice)

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 40:19,20; 41:22; 42:8,17; 44:9,10,12,15,17; 45:16,20; 46:1; 47:20; 48:5,14**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 57:6,13; 65:3,7** (idea); **66:3**

Idolatry was a big problem for the Jews before the exile, but it wasn't afterward, so “scholars” would expect to find it an issue in “First Isaiah,” but they would not expect to see it in “Second,” or “Third Isaiah.” Notice how much more the idolatry issue is dealt with in chapters 40-66 than in chapters 1-39, which is evidence of pre-exilic writing. Idolatry was certainly not a significant issue in the postexilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The idolatry issue in all “Three Isaiahs” is strong evidence that the entire book is a prexilic work by the one writer, the prophet Isaiah.

The *“Three Isaiahs”* accurately predict that many Gentiles would embrace the worship of the God of Israel, Yahweh, which clearly shows the theological unity of the entire book of Isaiah:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:6,22; 51:4,5**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 60:5; 61:5; 62:10,11; 66:18**

The *“Three Isaiahs”* use the term raising, or lifting up, a **“banner”**, **“signal”**, or **“standard”** eight times, whereas the term is only used seven times in the rest of the Old Testament.

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 5:26; 11:10,12; 13:2; 18:3; 30:17**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 49:22**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 62:10**

“Righteousness” is an important theme in **Isaiah**. The term is used 51 times in the book, but only 37 times in the other 14 Old Testament prophetic books. Notice how it is used frequently in all three *“Isaiachs”* - 18 times in *“First Isaiah”*, 16 times in *“Second Isaiah”*, and 17 times in *“Third Isaiah”*:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 1:21,26,27; 5:7,16; 9:7; 10:22; 11:4,5; 16:5; 26:9,10; 28:17; 32:1,16,17; 33:5**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 42:6; 45:8 (twice),13,23,24; 46:12,13; 48:18; 51:1,5,6,7,8; 54:14**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 56:1 (twice); 57:12; 58:2,8,9; 59:9,14,16,17; 60:17; 61:3,10; 61:11; 62:1,2; 63:1; 64:5**

“Justice” is another important theme in Isaiah, occurring 29 times in the book, but only 22 times in the other 15 prophetic books of the Old Testament. **“Justice”** is used 16 times in *“First Isaiah,”* 5 times in *“Second Isaiah,”* and 8 times in *“Third Isaiah.”* Notice:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 1:17,21,27; 5:7,16,23; 9:7; 10:2; 11:4; 16:5; 28:6,17,21; 30:18; 32:1,16; 33:5**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 42:1,3,4; 51:4,5**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 56:1; 59:4,8,9,14,15; 61:8**

The word **“light”** is used 33 times in Isaiah, but only 19 times in the rest of the other 14 prophetic books. Notice the distribution of the use of this word in the *“Three Isaiachs”*:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 2:5; 5:20** (twice); **5:30; 9:2** (twice); **10:17; 13:10** (twice); **26:19; 30:10** (four times)

“Second Isaiah” - **42:6** (twice), **16; 45:7; 49:6** (twice); **50:10,11; 51:4**

“Third Isaiah” - **58:8,10; 59:9; 60:1,3,19** (thrice), **20**

The **“nations”** are a main subject throughout Isaiah. The term is used both positively and negatively. Notice the distribution of the use of this term in the *“Three Isaiahs”*, 28 times, 13 times and 14 times respectively:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 2:2,4; 5:26; 9:1; 10:7; 11:10,12; 13:4; 14:2,6,9,12,18,26; 16:8; 17:12; 23:3; 25:7; 29:7,8; 30:28; 33:3; 34:1,2; 36:18; 37:12,18** (twice), **18**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 40:15,17; 41:2; 42:1,6; 43:9; 45:1,20; 49:6,22; 52:10,15; 54:3**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 60:5,11,12,16; 61:6,9,11,12; 62:2; 64:2; 66:12,18,19** (twice), **20**

A **“highway”** or **“way”** is a figure of speech used throughout Isaiah. Notice the use of this term in the *“Three Isaiahs.”*

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 11:16; 19:23; 35:8**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 40:3; 43:19; 49:11**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 57:14; 62:10**

Another main subject in Isaiah is **“salvation,”** which occurs 28 times; 8 times in *“First Isaiah,”* 11 times in *“Second Isaiah,”* and 9 times in *“Third Isaiah,”* but occurring only 8 times in the other 14 prophetic books. Take a look:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 12:2** (twice), **3; 17:10; 25:9; 26:1; 33:2,6**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 45:8,17; 46:13** (twice); **49:6,8; 51:5,6,8; 52:7,10**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 56:1; 59:11,16,17; 60:18; 61:10; 62:1,11; 63:5**

“Zion” is referred to 46 times in Isaiah, compared to 46 times in the all other 14 prophetic books combined. **“Zion”** appears 29 times in *“First Isaiah”*, 11 times in *“Second Isaiah”*, 6 times in *“Third Isaiah”*. **“Zion”** appears more times in Isaiah than in any other Bible book. Notice:

“First Isaiah” - **Isaiah 1:8,27; 2:3; 3:16,17; 4:3,4,5; 8:18; 10:12,24,32; 12:6; 14:32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 28:16; 29:8; 30:19; 31:4,9; 33:5; 34:14,20; 35:10; 37:22,32**

“Second Isaiah” - **Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 49:14; 51:3,11,16; 52:1,2,7,8**

“Third Isaiah” - **Isaiah 59:20; 60:14; 61:3; 62:11; 64:10; 66:8**

One of Isaiah’s favorite techniques is personification, which he uses in all three sections of the book. For example:

“First Isaiah” - **“The very cypresses rejoice over you, the cedars of Lebanon” (Isaiah 14:8 NAB)**

“Then the moon will blush and the sun be ashamed” (Isaiah 24:23 NAB)

“The wilderness and the parched land will exult” (Isaiah 35:1 NAB)

“Second Isaiah” - **“Raise a glad cry, you heavens . . . Shout you depths of the earth. Break forth, mountains, into song, forest, with all your trees” (Isaiah 44:23**

NAB)

“Third Isaiah” – **“Mountains and trees shall break out in song . . . all trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12 NAB)**

The word picture of a woman in **“labor,”** giving **“birth,”** or in **“childbirth”** is frequently used in Isaiah, in fact, in all *“Three Isaiahs”*:

“First Isaiah” – **Isaiah 13:18; 21:3; 23:4; 26:17-19; 33:11**

“Second Isaiah” – **Isaiah 42:14; 45:10; 54:1**

“Third Isaiah” – **Isaiah 59:4; 66:7-9**

The multiple writer theories of Isaiah received a tremendous blow with discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** in 1947. The famous nearly complete St. Marks **Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah (1QIsa)**, which has been dated to about 175 BCE, does not provide any evidence of *“Three Isaiahs.”* For example, there is no break between what is now chapters 39 and 40. Chapter 40 begins on last line of the column where chapter 39 concludes.

The New Testament quotes all *“Three Isaiahs”* and credits all three of them to **“Isaiah the prophet,”** which is the strongest proof of all that the entire 66 chapters of the book are the work of the one writer. The early Christians and inspired Bible writers clearly understood of Isaiah to be the work of the one prophet Isaiah. Let’s look at the *“Three Isaiahs”* and see how all three of these sections are quoted from the New Testament and specifically attributed to *“Isaiah the prophet”*:

“First Isaiah” – **Matthew 4:14-16** quotes **Isaiah 9:1,2. Matthew 15:7-9** and **Mark 7:6,7** quote **Isaiah 29:13. Matthew 13:14,15** and **Acts 28:25-27** quote **Isaiah 6:9,10. Romans 9:27,28** quotes **Isaiah 10:22,23. Romans 9:29** quotes **Isaiah 1:9. Romans 15:12** quotes **Isaiah 11:10.**

“Second Isaiah” – **Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2** and **Luke 3:4** quote **Isaiah 40:3**. **Matthew 8:17** quotes **Isaiah 53:4**. **Romans 10:16** quotes **Isaiah 53:1**. **Acts 8:28,32,33** quotes **Isaiah 53:7**.

“Third Isaiah” – **Luke 4:17-19** says that Jesus read from **“the scroll of the prophet Isaiah,”** and quotes **Isaiah 61:1,2**. **Romans 10:20,21** quotes **Isaiah 65:1,2**.

John 12:38-40 quotes both **Isaiah 53:1** and **Isaiah 6:9,10**, and the apostle John writes that **“Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41 ESV)**. *“These things”* refer to the quotes from both *“Deutero-Isaiah”* (53:1) and *“Proto-Isaiah”* (6:9,10), as being written by **“Isaiah,”** according to the inspired gospel writer, the apostle John. This fact sharply contrasts with modern-day critics, who claim that the 8th century BCE prophet **“Isaiah”** only wrote chapters 1-39.

There is no evidence anywhere in ancient Jewish literature of multiple writers of the book of Isaiah, or that a late-exilic writer wrote **Isaiah 40-55**, or that a post-exilic writer wrote **Isaiah 56-66**. In view of the fact that the book of Isaiah has always been viewed as one of the most prominent of the Biblical prophetic books, such silence speaks volumes in favor of the single writer of Isaiah.