

## Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah

The critical analysis of the book of Isaiah begins with Abraham Ibn Ezra, a Medieval Jewish exegete (12<sup>th</sup> century) who in his commentary to Isaiah remarked that chapters 1-35 dealt with a different historical period than chapters 40-66 (he quotes an earlier source, which is unavailable). The first verse of the book states that Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and most famously Hezekiah, the kings of Judah in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E and indeed a great deal of the material in chapters 1-35 focuses on this time period. Chapters 40-66, for the most part, center around the miraculous return of the Judeans to their homeland, following the fall of Babylon in the last third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

The division of the book into two parts – First Isaiah and Deutero Isaiah – has been accepted by all but the most conservative Jews and Christians. The process of “excavating” the book, however, did not end here. At the end of the nineteenth century, as biblical criticism really began to take off, German scholars among them Bernard Duhm, suggested that in reality there were three authors who participated in the composition of the book of Isaiah. They distinguished between the first part of Deutero Isaiah (chapters 40-55) and the second part (chapters 56-66), claiming that the latter section was composed by a later author, a Trito Isaiah, who was active in Judah following the return of the Judeans to their homeland, and who should be distinguished from Deutero Isaiah who prophesied in Babylon prior to the return. This division was not accepted by all scholars, and thus up to this very day, Isaiah exegetes are divided into two camps. I studied under distinguished representatives of both schools, Shalom Paul, whose commentary on Deutero Isaiah (and most emphatically not Trito-Isaiah), I translated from Hebrew to English, and Alexander Rofe, who wrote many articles teasing out distinctions between the two halves of Chapters 40-66 in support of the Duhm’s theory.

Though in general my reading strategy owes more to Rofe than to Paul, today I am solidly in Paul’s camp. There is no doubt that there are prophecies from two different periods in Chapters 40-66. Those periods, however, are not very far apart temporally, that one needs to assume two authors. Deutero Isaiah prophesied eloquently of the return, and it makes sense that he would be among those who would make the journey, Jeremiah prophesied from both Israel and Egypt, why couldn’t Deutero-Isaiah have prophesied from two places? As Paul very convincingly shows the language and style of the two parts of Chapters 40-66 are so alike as to be indistinguishable.

We can extend this debate to First Isaiah as well. Prophecies from several different periods are woven together. There are prophecies in which the main threats to the kingdom of Judah are the Arameans and the Assyrians. There are other later prophecies in which the main threat is the Assyrian empire. As in Deutero Isaiah, I see no reason to attribute these prophecies to different authors, they are similar both in outlook and in style. Finally, there is a large group of apocalyptic and end of days prophecies, which are hard to place. These issues and others will be dealt with in the commentary on Isaiah that I shall progressively add to the site.