

## Prophecy and the Pre-History of Apocalypticism, Heavenly Ascent, and Resurrection

### 1. Isaiah

- The prophet Isaiah lived in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) prior to the Babylonian Exile. The period of his prophetic activity (ca. 738-688 BCE) spanned [1] the conquest of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) by the Assyrians and the dispersion of its population dispersed (= "lost tribes of Israel") and [2] the reign of the Judean king Hezekiah (715-687 BCE), who enacted religious reforms to promote monotheism and the centralization of all worship in Jerusalem.

Scholarly View of the Structure and Date(s) of the Book of Isaiah			
Isa 1-39	First Isaiah	Ca. 742-701 BCE	<b>Pre-Exilic:</b> Prophecies of warning by Isaiah, in response to Assyrian conquest of Northern Kingdom; stressing importance of Jerusalem as central religious site and of Davidic line as the proper line to hold earthly kingship in a way true to the divine king, God.
Isa 40-55	Second Isaiah	Ca. 546-538 BCE	<b>Exilic:</b> Prophecies of consolation in the tradition of Isaiah, written during Babylonian Exile and proclaiming the impending end to the Exile and celebrating Cyrus' role in bringing this about—by God's hand and in a display of God's power and His continued commitment to His people.
Isa 56-66	Third Isaiah	Ca. 538-520 BCE	<b>Post-Exilic:</b> Prophecies of warning in the tradition of Isaiah, reflecting a situation in which many exiles had returned and the Temple was being rebuilt, but also grappling with the difficulties involved in the return, which was not as rosy as promised & expected.

- The first chapters of Isaiah ("First Isaiah" = 1-39) likely record the prophecies of this historical figure. The rest of the book, however, is widely recognized by scholars as having been written at later times, by people in the tradition of Isaiah, since these chapter reflect knowledge of (and reaction to) much later historical events, to which the book responds explicitly.
- For our purposes, this proves interesting because the book of Isaiah may tell us much about reactions to the events surrounding the Exile, and about interpretations of the Exile and Return. They reflect an ongoing discussion of theodicy and contributed to the development of views about death and the afterlife.
- All share the idea that Israel's God controls the history of all nations and uses history as a means to communicate His will to Israel in particular; Israel suffers when it strays from Him, but God remains ever faithful to His covenant with His people and fights on their behalf.

**Theodicy:** In Second Isaiah it is asserted that since God is God of all, it is from Him that good and evil, light and darkness, reward and suffering all come (esp. Isa 45).

**Ouranology:** First Isaiah includes Isaiah's commission and vision of God's throne and angels in the temple (Isa 6). In Second Isaiah, we find references to God's throne being in heaven ("heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool")—later a major theme of Jewish reflection on heaven and the possibility human ascent to heaven.

**Apocalypticism:** The last chapter of Third Isaiah (i.e., 66) proclaims an eschatological message and thus provides a precedent for later books like Daniel. Here, we find promises that God will comfort Israel like a mother, Israel will take its proper place as the wealthiest of all nations, God will vanquish all of Israel's enemies by fire, and He will make a new heaven and a new earth. At that time, moreover, "all flesh shall come to worship before me"—i.e., all people, not just Jews, will turn to God.

**Resurrection:** Segal (p. 202) suggests that Third Isaiah's reference to God making "their bones flourish like the grass" in Isa 66:40 represents "the scriptural root of Israelite notions of the resurrection of the dead," as it later flourished in contact with Persian beliefs about death and the afterlife.

### 2. Ezekiel

- The prophet Ezekiel was a priest and was among the first set of Jews deported to Babylon (i.e., already in 598 BCE); his prophetic activity began in 593 BCE and continued at least until 571 BCE.

**Ouranography:** Ezekiel tells of being transported in visions to heaven and of seeing the glory of God, God's chariot/throne, and His angels (esp. Ezek 1 and 10). These visions culminate in Ezek 40-48, when Ezekiel sees a vision of the renewed Temple in heaven—he had earlier seen (Ezek 8-11) how God's presence left the Temple because of Israel's corruption: this is why the Babylonians could even destroy it! Here he assures the reader that the plan of the Temple that will be restored on earth is always and already in heaven.

**Resurrection:** Ezek 36:11-14 is often read as the first reference to resurrection; later Jews and Christians interpreted the passage in these terms, but it seems in its original context to be symbolic and reflect other concerns (see Segal pp. 255ff).