

book of Isaiah. Chs. 34–35 are much closer in style and content to Second or Third Isaiah and should probably be dated to the exilic or postexilic period. Chs. 24–27, often referred to as the Isaiah Apocalypse, contain protoapocalyptic oracles that stand in marked contrast to those of Isaiah of Jerusalem. Although Isaiah's oracles are rooted in particular historical contexts and his threats and promises do not dissolve the reality of those contexts, the oracles in chs. 24–27 are very difficult to root in any historical context and are marked by a heavy dependence on mythological motifs. Scholars normally date these chapters to the early sixth century BCE or later.

Isaiah of Jerusalem was rooted in the Zion tradition, which celebrated God as the great king of heaven and earth, Jerusalem (Zion) as the city God chose to be his royal dwelling, and the kings of the Davidic line as God's anointed vice-regents on earth. The influence of all three aspects of this tradition is evident in the prophet's message. Isaiah's inaugural vision (6.1–4) portrays God as the exalted king, from whose terrifying holiness even the most august angels must hide their eyes. That vision colors the prophet's attitude toward anything that humans might lift up as a rival for the fear and allegiance that rightly belong only to the divine suzerain (see 2.12–22; 8.13). Isaiah assumed that God had founded Zion/Jerusalem (14.32), lived in it (8.18), and hence would ultimately save it. Nevertheless, since the holy God would not live in a moral slum, a morally defiled Jerusalem must be purified by judgment before the city could be saved (1.21–28; 29.1–8). Isaiah's adherence to the Davidic royal tradition is clear from his assurance to Ahaz (7.3–17) and his several portrayals of the ideal king (9.1–7; 11.1–10; 32.1–2).

Second Isaiah

CHAPTERS 40–55 PRESUPPOSE AN Israelite audience living in Babylon toward the end of the Babylonian exile (597–539 BCE). The prophet announces to his listeners that the end of their exile in Babylon is imminent. Babylon, not Assyria, is Israel's main enemy, and the burden of the prophet's message is the promise of deliverance, not the threat of judgment. Moreover, the prophet twice mentions the Persian ruler Cyrus (44.28; 45.1) as a figure who has come to the attention of his audience. Such notice certainly presupposes Cyrus's dethroning of his Median overlord Astyages (550) and perhaps Cyrus's defeat of the Lydian king Croesus (547/6) as well. Thus this anonymous prophet's work can probably be dated between 545 and 539 BCE.

Though clearly dependent on First Isaiah's message, Second Isaiah is also easily distinguishable. Second Isaiah shares the eighth-century prophet's emphasis on the holiness of God and his vision of God as the great king, and he at least adapts the earlier prophet's ideal of the Davidic king, democratizing it to apply it to the entire nation. Unlike First Isaiah, however, the message of Second Isaiah is primarily that of consolation, and this message is couched in a distinctive style. In relatively long, markedly lyrical oracles, Second Isaiah reassures the exiles that God still controls history. Despite present appearances, the Lord will soon demonstrate his power by bringing the Israelites back to their own country in a second exodus more glorious than the first. Before this God, who has created all things, the Babylonian idols are as nothing; God's judgment on both the Babylonians and their gods is imminent.

Third Isaiah

CHAPTERS 56–66 ARE SO SIMILAR stylistically to Second Isaiah that they must be attributed either to the same author or to some disciple or disciples who used the poetry of Second Isaiah as a model. The historical setting presupposed is, however, different from that of Second Isaiah.