

say that a good king "judges the cause of the widow, adjudicates the case of the fatherless." which is reflected in Isaiah 1:17. This illustrates the common ancient Near Eastern background on which Israelites and Canaanites drew for some of their moral and legal standards. Documents from the Assyrian kings especially throw light on the history of the times. Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) listed eighteen kings who brought tribute to him ca 539 BC, including Menahem of Samaria and Rezin of Damascus (cf. Isa 7:1-6; 9:1). Notice that the typical Assyrian style of naming a country or province for its capital city is reflected in these passages as well. Sennacherib (705-681 BC) claimed to have "shut up Hezekiah in his royal city Jerusalem like a bird in a cage". He did not claim to have captured it, however, which is reflected in Isaiah 36-37.

The most exciting find concerning Isaiah has been the discovery, in 1947, of a scroll of Isaiah. This scroll, known popularly as "The Great Isaiah Scroll" contains the full text of Isaiah. Copied between 125 and 100 BC it is 1000 years older than the previously oldest manuscript of Isaiah. Its text is basically that of the modern Hebrew Bible which illustrates the care with which the text was copied for centuries by scribes. During that process, however, it is inevitable that errors should creep into the text (by oversight)--two words might begin with the same letter and the scribe's eyes "skipped over" the first word, omitting it from his copy; other reasons account for omissions and additions also). It should be emphasized that these "errors of transmission" have nothing to do with inspiration, nor do they affect any major doctrine of Scripture, in Isaiah or elsewhere. Most modern English versions of the Bible use footnotes to tell the reader when the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls is being followed rather than that of the traditional text.

Important keys in the study of Isaiah are these: Chapter 6, Isaiah's call by the Lord, explains his emphasis on God's holiness and judgment on the nation's sin; these were the two major aspects of his call. Chapter one sets up the main theme of Isaiah 1-39, the judgment of God, tempered by occasional glimpses of hope. The main theme of Isaiah 40-66, salvation and hope, is introduced in unforgettable terms in chapter 40.

Advice for study---try to read the entire book at one sitting. If you must break, stop after chapter 35; then read 36-66 as the second section. Read a good introduction to Isaiah in a Bible commentary, dictionary, or encyclopaedia to grasp the historical context of the book. A detailed knowledge of issues regarding authorship and date of composition is not necessary, but some idea of the issues would help when studying with the help of a commentary.

How is Isaiah used in the New Testament (it is quoted at least sixty-five times)? With the aid of a concordance study Isaiah's life--how does it reflect his message? Blessings and promises abound in Isaiah. Read a chapter a day for two months, writing out or underlining special verses in each chapter. How does Isaiah's teaching about the Servant of the Lord develop in the various Servant Songs (42:1-7; 49:1-16; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12)?

Isaiah in the classics. Isaiah's writings have won for him the title of the "most literary" of the Old Testament prophets. This is certainly reflected in Handel's oratorio MESSIAH, one quarter of which consists of direct quotations from Isaiah. An anthem by David Williams is based almost verbatim on Isaiah's call--chapter 6. Isaiah has been sculpted on the portal of the cathedral at Souillac on the tiny island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean (c. 1100). Michelangelo painted him on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel 1508-1512 AD).