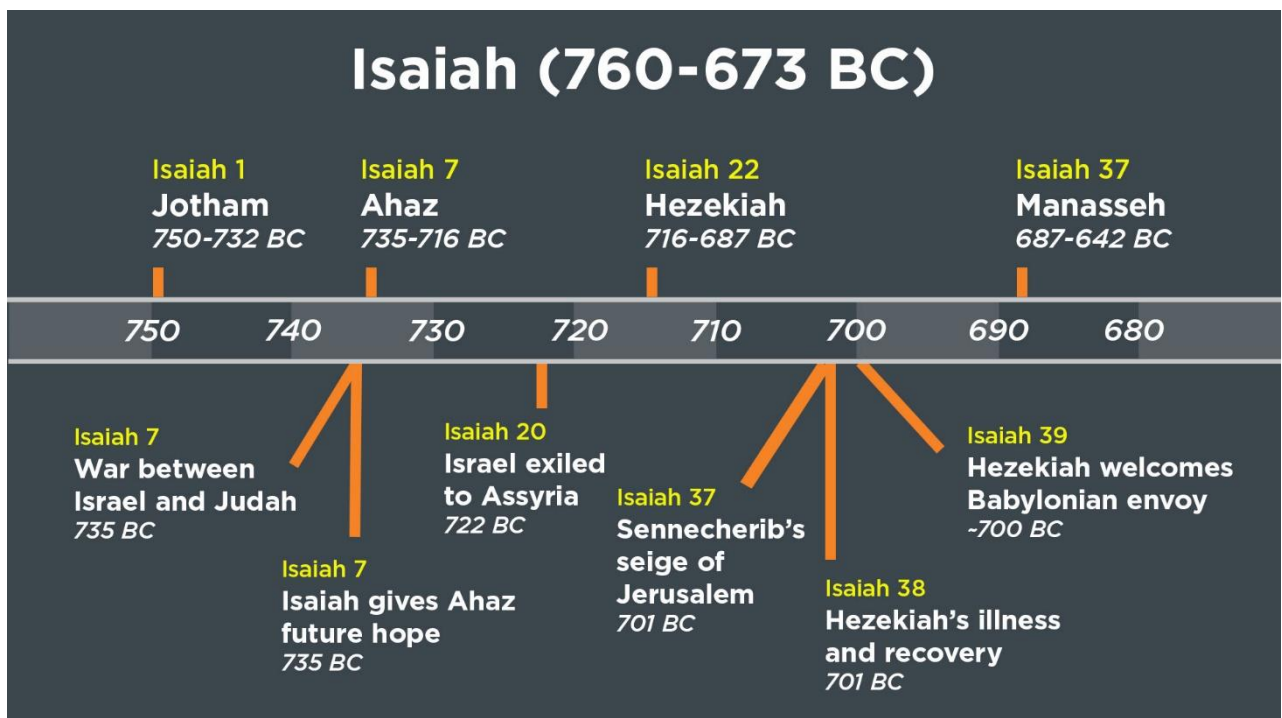


Isaiah – Introduction

Background Notes

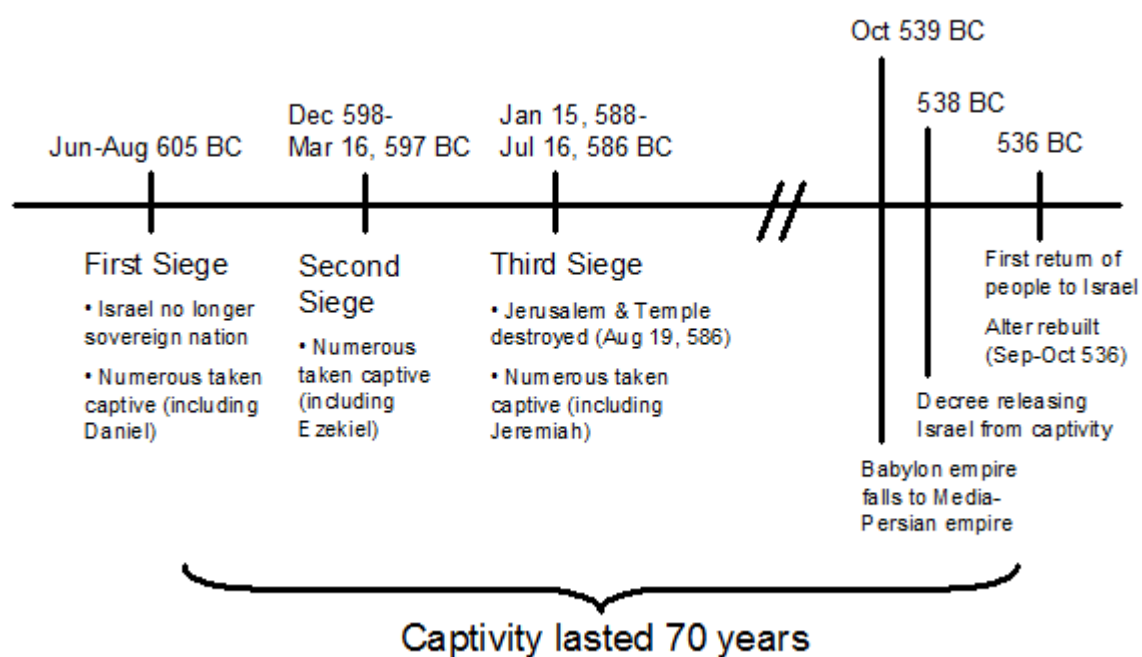
Use in conjunction with published notes.

The Book of Isaiah is a collection of poetic prophecies made by the prophet during the 8th Century BC. As we can see from the diagram below, Isaiah was active during the reigns of four kings. The kingdom of Israel, which grew in strength during the reigns of David and Solomon, has split after the latter's death in 922BC. The southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the kingdom of Judah, while the other ten tribes kept the name of Israel. Almost 200 years later, we have a war between the two nations and Judah seeks the aid of Egypt. Then from the north came the Assyrians (present-day Syria and Iraq), who quickly conquered Israel and carried many of them off into exile. Assyria then turns to Judah and begins to capture some of the cities.



When they lay siege to Jerusalem, Isaiah persuades Hezekiah to have faith and that Jerusalem would not fall. The siege did indeed fail, and the Assyrians left for home. The Assyrians were defeated by the Babylonians, who sent an envoy to Judah. The prophecies of Isaiah are recorded in chapters 1-39. Hezekiah showed the Babylonian envoy the treasures of the Temple.

The Babylonians secured the lands that the Assyrians had conquered and then attacked the next significant power, Egypt. After Egypt had been brought under Babylonian control, eyes turned to Jerusalem. They laid siege to the city and captured it in 605 BC. Many of the notable people were taken back to Babylon. After a few years, Judah tried to make an alliance with Egypt against Babylon. The Babylonians returned, and after a siege, once again, in 597 BC., captured the city, and more captives were taken. A third uprising led to the destruction of the city and the Temple, and the third wave of captives were removed to Babylon. It was after this third disaster that Psalm 137 (By the rivers of Babylon) was written. Captivity lasted until 538 BC. This period was known as the Exile.



Several prophets were active in Babylon during the Exile. Some named others unknown. The prophecies of an unnamed prophet from the later years of the Exile are recorded in chapters 40-66. Some scholars argue that this section may be the work of two prophets, one during the Exile and one after the Exile, but there is no consensus. While this prophet was not the original Isaiah, some writers suggest that he was a disciple of Isaiah, which was why the work was added to the original prophecies but again, we cannot be sure.

Books used in the background information: -

JG – John Goldingay – The Theology of the Book of Isaiah

WB1 Walter Brueggemann – Isaiah 1-39

WB2 Walter Brueggemann – Isaiah 40-66