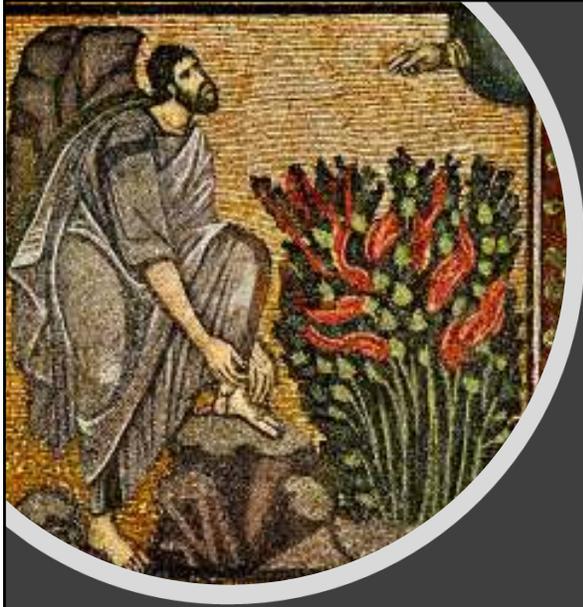




## The Prophets - 2

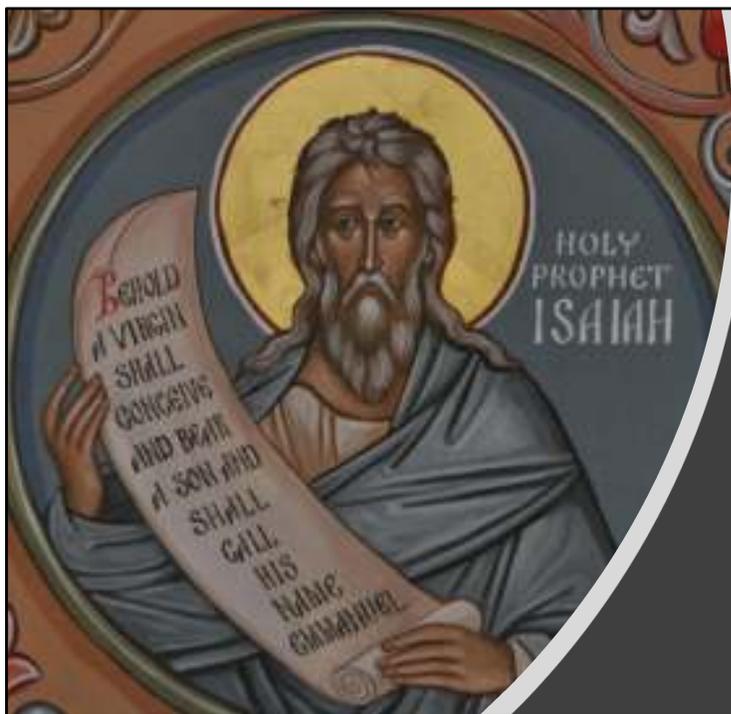


## The prophetic call narrative

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other OT figures (esp Moses) experience God as calling them to be God's messengers. We call these stories "prophetic call narratives." They share certain characteristics:

- 1) a situation of distress or crisis in which God confronts the person
- 2) the commissioning of the person for some action or message
- 3) objections raised by the person in the form of inadequacy for the task
- 4) assurance of God's help, often in the formula "I will be with you"
- 5) a sign to confirm the commission, often with the content of the commission

Elements	Moses (Exod)	Gideon (Judg)	Samuel (1 Sam)	Isaiah (Isa)	Jeremiah (Jere)	Ezekiel (Eze)	Micaiah (1 Kg)
Confrontation	3:7-9	6:11-13	3:2-10	6:1-7	[1:3]	2:1-2, 3:12-15, 22-24	22:19
Commission	3:10	6:14	3:11-14	6:8-13	1:4-5	2:3-8a, 3:4-11, 16-21, 25-27	22:20-21
Objections	3:11,13, 4:1,10, 13	6:15			1:6		
Assurance	3:12, 14-22, 4:2-9, 11-12, 14-17	6:16			1:7-10, 17-19		
Sign	[4:2-9, 17]	6:17-24			1:11-16	2:8b-3:3	



Isaiah/ישעיה

Dates, themes, call



Isaiah by Antonio Balestra  
(18<sup>th</sup> c.)

...a great man trustworthy in his vision.  
In his days the sun went backward;  
he lengthened the life of the king,\*  
by the power of the spirit, he saw the last things.  
He comforted the mourners in Zion.  
He revealed what was to occur in the end of time,  
and hidden things long before they happened.  
(Sir. 48:22b-25. Early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE)

1. Isaiah is the product of 3 different authors whom we refer to as First Isaiah (Isaiah of Jerusalem) (chs 1-39), Second Isaiah (Isaiah of the exile) (chs 40-55), and Third Isaiah (Isaiah of the restoration) (chs 56-66).
2. First Isaiah (the “historical Isaiah”) is the product of a prophet who lived in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in the last half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. (Note Isa. 1.1: “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzzi’ah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezeki’ah, kings of Judah.”) He was the son of the priest Amoz (Isa. 2.1) During Isaiah’s lifetime, the Assyrian empire destroyed the Northern Kingdom (Israel) (722-21 BCE)

\*Re. lengthening the life of a king, see Isa. 38.

## Understanding Isaiah, cont.

3. The Book of Isaiah as a whole reflects several different periods but is not just a collection of unrelated prophecies. Chs 40-66 continue on from chs 1-39. In all 3 parts of the book, YHWH is "the Holy One of Israel." This title of God appears 25 times throughout the book and only 5 times in the rest of the OT. The entire book is a message from the Holy One.

4. Isaiah 1-39 reflects the unsettled period of the late 8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. Both Israel and Judah were threatened by Assyria, a "superpower" of that historical period. Isaiah urged Judah to depend on YHWH, not on alliances with other countries. "Therefore thus says the Lord, the Lord of hosts: 'O my people, who dwell in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians when they smite with the rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did.'" (Isa. 10.24) Cf. Isa. 30.1-3:

"Woe to the rebellious children," says the Lord,  
"who carry out a plan, but not mine;  
and who make a league, but not of my spirit,  
... who set out to go down to Egypt,  
without asking for my counsel,  
to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh,  
and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!  
Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame,  
and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation."

Chs 1-39 indicate that Isa lived at a time when Judah came under considerable pressure through the expansionist policies of Assyria. How were the people of God to cope with that kind of situation? These chapters also reflect on the social changes that had come upon Judah during a time of increasing urbanization and a divide between the rich and the poor.

## Understanding Isaiah, cont.

5. Although Isaiah urges Judah to rely on YHWH, he also warns them that they will be destroyed:

I will turn my hand against you  
and will smelt away your dross as with lye  
and remove all your alloy. (Isa. 1.25)

6. Yet, Judah will be restored:

Zion shall be redeemed by justice,  
and those in her who repent, by righteousness. (Isa. 1.27)

7. Isaiah, like many of the other prophets, delivers his prophecies in poetic form:

Let me sing for my beloved  
a love song concerning his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard  
on a very fertile hill.

He dugged it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines;  
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,  
and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
and he looked for it to yield grapes,  
but it yielded wild grapes. (Isa. 5.1-2)

## Understanding Isaiah, cont.

8. Isaiah, like the prophets of an earlier time, displays ecstatic, or at least very unusual, behavior.

a. His call in ch. 6.

b. Isaiah prophesied naked:

...the Lord had spoken by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take off your shoes from your feet," and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot—the Lord said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, 4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. (Isa. 20.2-4)

c. The names of his children: "...the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go forth to meet Ahaz, you and She'ar-jash'ub your son..." (Isa. 7.3) Also: "I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Ma'her-shal'al-hash'baz..." (prophetic sign-acts)

## Understanding Isaiah, cont.

9. Martin Luther referred to Isaiah 30-66 as “the second book of Isaiah.” The name of Isaiah is missing from these chapters. They clearly have to do with a period over 100 years after Isa. 1-39. Also, there’s an abrupt transition at the beginning of ch. 40. Here is Isa. 39.5-6: “Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord.” Now, compare Isa. 40.1-2: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned...”

10. Chs. 40-54 are connected to chs 1-39 with the themes of comfort and hope. Although God has judged Judah and allowed it to be destroyed, they will be restored to their land. Second Isaiah contains some of the most sublime poetry in the history of literature. For ex., Isa. 43:

But now thus says the Lord,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

## Understanding Isaiah, cont.

10. Third Isaiah is addressing exiles who have returned to a devastated homeland and have undertaken the difficult work of rebuilding the Temple. They are told that the Temple must be a house of prayer and that they as a people must be holy—holiness that expresses itself with true love for the poor.

They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks,  
foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers... (Isa. 61.4-5)

Also, "...for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples." (Isa. 56.7)



Jeremiah/ירמיהו  
The “weeping”  
prophet

Jeremiah on the ruins of Jerusalem – Horace Vermet (1844)

Dates, themes, call

# Understanding Jeremiah

1. The first two sentences of Jeremiah summarize the book's contents and assign it a date: the reigns of the last four kings of Judah. (650-570 BCE) Babylon invaded Judah in 587-86 BCE.
2. Jeremiah's content is loosely organized. There is no principle of organization.
3. Islam also regards Jeremiah as a prophet. In the Quran his name is rendered as Irmiyā, Armiyā or Ūrmiyā.
4. Although loosely organized, the main thrust of Jeremiah's prophecy was to interpret Judah's present historical circumstances in terms of the people's past behavior and to make projections about its future.
5. Jeremiah is unique in giving detailed descriptions of Jeremiah's interaction with his fellow Judeans. There is also information about Jeremiah's state of mind. His message was received with hostility and he was abused. For ex., Jer. 26.1-17. For his state of mind, see, 11.18-20; 15.10ff.
6. Most famously, Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and apparently left to starve to death (Jer. 38).
7. We know little about the composition of other prophetic books. However, Jeremiah tells us that he took steps to preserve his prophetic oracles. See Jer. 36.



# יחזקאל/ Ezeziel

Ezeziel – Raphael (1518)

Dates, themes

## Understanding Ezekiel

1. The dates of Ezekiel are clearly established. See ch. 1.1-3.
2. Ezekiel's prophetic call places him in Babylon during the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, and the last dated oracle in Ezekiel is assigned to the 27<sup>th</sup> year of the exile (27.17).
3. Unlike Jeremiah, whose book contains much biographical information, Ezekiel is an enigmatic figure. He was the son of the priest Buzi, who is otherwise unknown. Presumably Ezekiel functioned as a priest also. He was married, but his wife died just before the fall of Jerusalem (24.15-18).
4. Ezekiel's psychology: The prophet's behavior seems bizarre to modern readers. He had visions in which he was transported from one place to another. The Lord tells Ezekiel to perform prophetic sign-acts that seem impossible (chs 4-5).
5. To many, Ezekiel's behavior seems pathological.
6. Ezekiel's initial vision influenced the author of Revelation. Cf. Rev. 4.6ff.
7. Ezekiel is listed among the prophets of Islam.



Even during the last days of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the prophetic opponents of Jeremiah continued to proclaim that the city was inviolable because YHWH dwelt there. When Jerusalem fell, questions were raised about this theology. Did the destruction of the city and the temple mean that God has broken the divine promise and rejected Jerusalem and David's line? Or, even worse, had God lacked the power to defend the city against the Babylonians? It was essential for the exiles to find some satisfactory theological explanation for the situation in which they found themselves if they were to retain their ancestral faith.

## Understanding Ezekiel, cont.

### 8. Ezekiel's 4 visions:

- a. The wheels and the four creatures (Ezek. 1)
- b. The departure of YHWH'S glory (chs 2-3)
- c. The valley of the dry bones (Ezek. 37)
- d. The restored temple (chs 40-48)

### 9. Ezekiel "son of man".

### 10. Ezekiel and the spirit (or Spirit).