Research Paper

The Authorship of Isaiah

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Problem of Isaiah’s Authorship

The heart of the issue regarding the authorship of Isaiah is who wrote the book of Isaiah. It is this writer’s belief that the ultimate writer of any biblical book is always God Himself through His use of the Holy Spirit, but what is questioned is which man did God work through in compiling the contents of Isaiah. There are those who believe that the book of Isaiah was written by the man Isaiah himself; and the entire book is a reflection of God using Isaiah in writing this work. However, there are biblical critics who question the authorship of Isaiah. These critics assert that Isaiah contributed to the authorship of the book that is entitled with his name, but that he is not the only contributing author. In making this assertion, these critics claim that the book of Isaiah is written by at least two authors.

In Vine’s discussion of the authorship of Isaiah, the argument is stated in this manner, “these objectors admit Isaiah wrote twenty-six chapters of the book bearing his name, but when they come to the prophecy concerning Cyrus and his kingdom, rather than believe the prophecy, they say, ‘He is not the author of the remaining chapters.’ ‘A second Isaiah,’ they say, ‘some unknown writer in the time of Cyrus wrote these’”(Todd, p. 162).

In Homer Hailey’s commentary on Isaiah, he summarized the argument this way, “[t]he unitary authorship of the Book of Isaiah has been under attack by critics for over a century; some claim there were two Isaiahs (the writer of chs. 1-39 and the writer of chs. 40-66), some three, and others claim the book is a composite of numerous unknown writers”(Haily, p. 29).

Another has stated the argument thusly, “[t]he unity of Isaiah has been challenged in the modern period by scholars who ascribe much of chapters 1-39 to the prophet Isaiah himself, but attribute chapters 40-55 (called ‘Deutero-Isaiah’) to an unknown prophet in Babylon, and
chapters 56-66 (called ‘Trito-Isaiah’) to another unknown prophet in Palestine (c. 460-445 B.C.)” (Nelson’s, pp. 204-212).

In the next few sections, we will briefly examine the arguments of the critics, give an answer against these arguments, discuss Isaiah’s unity and conclude regarding the issue of Isaiah’s authorship.

**Arguments for Multiple Authors**

The primary argument against a single author for the book of Isaiah is what one author termed “predictive prophecy” (Nelson’s, pp. 204-212). Predictive prophecy is based on the belief that biblical writers have the ability through supernatural means to predict future events, such as Isaiah predicting the Babylonian captivity and the involvement of king Cyrus in the return of the Jews. The critics of the single authorship of Isaiah claim that it is not possible for a single writer to have supernatural knowledge of future events and therefore the writer must have lived during the period in which the events happened. Because of this unbelief in predictive prophecy the “Deutero-Isaiah” and “Trito-Isaiah” theories have come about.

The Deutero-Isaiah theory (Ayers) was first put forth by Doederlein in 1775. In this publication he denied that Isaiah wrote chapters 40-66 of Isaiah. With this denial he proposed that a second Isaiah, a Deutero-Isaiah, was the author; claiming that this second Isaiah author wrote this portion of Isaiah before the end of the Babylonian exile (550-539 B.C.). However, in 1892 this Deutero-Isaiah theory would be modified by Duhm (Ayers). Duhm also claimed that Isaiah did not write chapters 40-66, but he modified the previous theory and claimed a third author, a Trito-Isaiah, for chapters 55-66, claiming that this author was in Jerusalem before Nehemiah.
Answering the Multiple Authors Arguments

When the Bible student believes the Bible to contain matters of faith, predictive prophecy is not a matter of question. If the student believes that the Bible is true, and that it is also the inspired word of God, then one will accept predictive prophecy. Believing in these, a person who believes in the Bible will accept that biblical writers have the ability through supernatural means to predict future events and that predictive prophecy is possible because the writer was inspired by God, moved by the Holy Spirit.

Another area of criticism used by the textual critics against Isaiah as being the only author claim that there is a significant stylistic difference beginning in chapter 40 (Ayers). The critics who espouse this criticism, also most likely believe that Isaiah has multiple writers. However, when one considers Isaiah as being the only writer and that he worked from about 740 to 680 B.C. during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Nelson’s, pp. 204-212), one can see that he probably changed, modified and/or matured in his approach with the people and adapted the message to the situation to still convey God’s eternal truth.

Arguments for Unity of Isaiah

The primary argument for the unity (or single authorship) of Isaiah is believing the very item that some Bible students will not believe, and that is believing in the ability to contain predictive prophecy. This predictive prophecy enables the writer to be inspired by God, have the Holy Spirit move them to write the oracles of God (II Peter 1.20-21).

There is also biblical testimony to the fact that Isaiah is the only writer of this prophetic book. Isaiah is quoted more than all the other prophets, with over 300 quotations in the New
Testament, using 47 of the 66 chapters Isaiah is quoted as the writer by name 21 times and all quotations come from these areas of authoric division (Ayers).

In the words of Homer Hailey, “[t]hat the New Testament quotations are drawn from both divisions of the books is an effective witness to its unity. In addition, the complete manuscript of Isaiah discovered at Qumran in 1947 and believed by all scholars (as far as I know) to date back to the second century before Christ has no break between chapters 39 and 40. This is strong evidence that the transcribers knew of only one author of the book” (Hailey, p. 29).

**Conclusion**

If one believes the Bible to be God’s complete inspired word, one will accept the biblical and archeological evidence to the single authorship of Isaiah by the prophet Isaiah. It is also this writer’s belief that any criticism against Isaiah as the only writer of the book of Isaiah is nothing more than an attempt to discredit the prophetic word of a promised Messiah.

If these critics are able to cast doubt on this book, what is at stake is that the promised Messiah, found in the man Jesus from Nazareth, is then in question. If the prophecy of Jesus the Christ is questioned and nullified, then the Bible itself is nothing more than a book compiled by mere men. Consequently, this would mean that there is no higher power, and certainly no Almighty and Powerful God to which all of humanity has to answer.

Isaiah contains so much predictive prophecy from captivity to the promised Messiah, and is so frequently used in New Testament teachings that to not believe in a single prophet and author to be all inspired of God is to cast doubt on God’s ability to carry out His promise of the Messiah to redeem and save the world.
Works Cited

Ayers, Timothy.  *Introduction to Isaiah*.  Southwest School of Bible Studies, 2005.

