

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 2, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Isaiah 1:1–4, 16–20; Psalm 50:7–15*; Ezekiel 18:31; Matthew 23:1–12*

Saint Mary’s lectionary texts have what Microsoft Word calls a “footer.” Each page of today’s lectionary has this footnote on every page. The first line is Lent 2, Tuesday: Mass. The appointed scriptures are in the second line: Isaiah 1:1–4, 16–20*; Psalm 50:7–15*; Ezekiel 18:31; Matthew 23:1–12. Today, there’s also a note in italics. The asterisks indicate whether there have been any changes in any of the appointed scriptures. In the case of the psalm, none is given—it’s almost always to shorten it. But today, the reason is that the appointed verses were not contiguous. So, in addition to the verses we read, 7 through 15, the lectionary includes verses 22–24. In normal times, we use the Prayer Book for said services. We don’t want to make it hard for people to participate.

But the asterisk on the lesson from Isaiah is an explanation. It says, “Isaiah 1:1 is included, so the appointed passage begins as the book itself begins.” This is the verse: “The vision of Isaiah the son of A'moz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzzi'ah, Jo'tham, A'haz, and Hezeki'ah, kings of Judah.” Few books of the Bible identify their authors convincingly. It’s amazing to know the author’s name of what we call the first thirty-nine chapters of this scroll.

In Isaiah’s lifetime, Syria and Israel, the northern kingdom, attacked Judah and Jerusalem. Ahaz turned to Assyria to stop a conquest, but then he became a vassal and paid tribute to the Assyrians.¹

An anonymous prophet, known as “Second Isaiah,” is credited with writing chapters 40 to 55. Jerusalem has fallen to the army of the Babylonian ruler

¹ Martin A. Sweeney, “Isaiah,” *New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, An Ecumenical Study Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 965.

Nebuchadnezzar. Its leaders and people were exiled to Babylon. The temple and the walls of the city were destroyed.²

Finally, there's another section in Isaiah, chapters 56 to 66, whose relationship to Second Isaiah is a matter of scholarly debate. Marvin Sweeney, a professor of Hebrew at Claremont School of Theology, is the author of the introductory essay to the Book of Isaiah in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. He writes, "Whereas Isaiah ben Amoz spoke about divine judgment and restoration in his own day, each of the subsequent editions of the book presupposes that Isaiah's vision of restoration would be realized in their own time."³

In the *Jerome Bible Commentary*, published in 1968, the first 39 chapters are covered by an article entitled "Isaiah." It was by a Jesuit priest, Frederick Moriarty, who died in 2004 at 91. He taught many places, including the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. The article on the rest of the book is called "Deutero-Isaiah"—from the Greek *deuteros*, meaning "second." It was by Carroll Stuhlmueller. He was a Roman Catholic Passionist Father and professor of the Old Testament. His article begins, "Until the 18th. Century, it was presumed that Isaiah of Jerusalem wrote all 66 chapters of this book. The tradition was questioned by Ibn Ezra (*c.* 1167), but the vigorous attack came from"⁴ [two German scholars, one in 1775, the other in 1780]. By 1892, another scholar was advocating for the last chapters to be by Third Isaiah.⁵

From time to time, I have visited churches where lessons from Second and Third Isaiah would be announced as "A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah." That's true if it's from the first 39 chapters, but not true if the passage is from the other part of the scroll.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Deutero-Isaiah," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary: Volume I: The Old Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 366.

⁵ Ibid.

When we started our lectionary project, we decided to keep it as simple as we could. So, we say, “A Reading from the Book of Isaiah.” I can’t imagine that the Prophet Isaiah would be displeased with the words of Jesus that we heard today from Matthew.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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