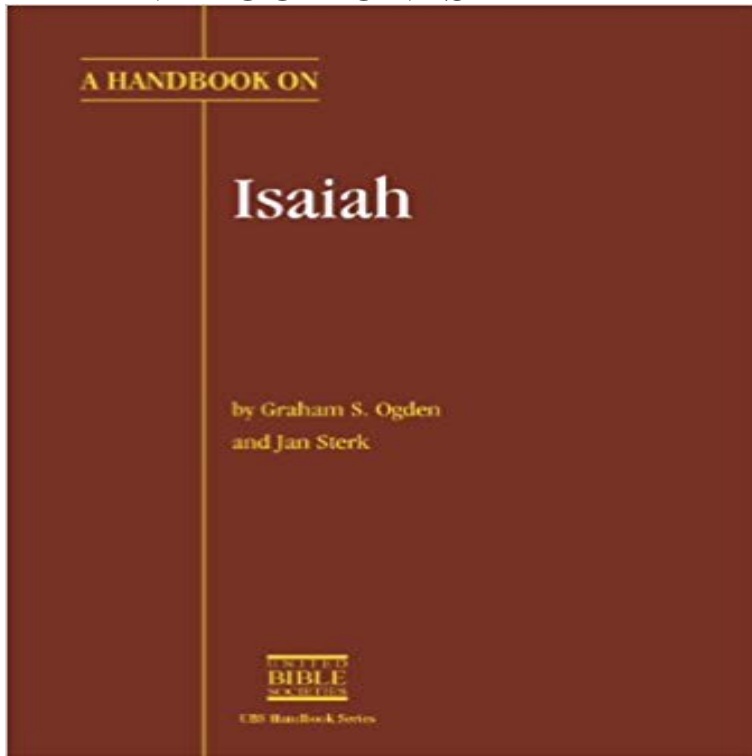


# A HANDBOOK ON ISAIAH



The Handbooks in the UBS Handbook Series are detailed commentaries providing valuable exegetical, historical, cultural, and linguistic information on the books of the Bible. They are prepared primarily to assist Bible translators as they carry out the important task of putting Gods Word into the many languages spoken in the world today. The text is discussed verse by verse and is accompanied by running text in at least one modern English translation. Over the years church leaders and Bible readers have found the UBS Handbooks to be useful for their own study of the Scriptures. Many of the issues Bible translators must address when trying to communicate the Bibles message to modern readers are the ones Bible students must address when approaching the Bible text as part of their own private study and devotionsThe book of Isaiah is widely regarded by both Jews and Christians as one of the literary and theological high points of the Hebrew Bible. It is of lasting significance in both the synagogue and church. For the translator this book presents a challenge, not only because of its length, but also because it contains an immense range of vocabulary items, some of which are not found elsewhere in the Old Testament. Partly as a result of this, the interpretation of many passages today is problematic. In addition, Isaiah was an accomplished poet besides being a prophet. And since poetry represents a special form of literature, translating poetry successfully from one language to another is always a challenge. Isaiah the prophet lived in the last half of the eighth century B.C. Isaiah was from Jerusalem and he eloquently and forcefully preached Gods messages to the kings, leaders and people of Judah during days of crisis. Judah was a small kingdom caught between the major nations of Assyria and Egypt. Isaiah called on Judahs kings not to join alliances with these powers since these powers were being used to bring judgement

on Judah for its failings. Judah should put its trust in Yahweh alone. While the first half of the book deals with messages from Isaiah during the Assyrian period, beginning at chapter 40 there is a radical change in the historical setting. The people addressed by the prophet in chapters 40-55 are in Babylonia, as exiles. The Persian king Cyrus has come to power. He will conquer Babylonia and release the people of Judah to return home. These events took place in 540-538 B.C. The last part of the book in chapters 56-66 contains various warnings, prayers, and songs. The people addressed are the exiles who have returned to Jerusalem. The message of the prophet Isaiah, expressed in beautiful, poetic language, is an important one. It speaks of warnings and punishment against sinners, but also of hope and salvation for those who live according to God's ways. The book is outstanding among the books of the Old Testament, and its influence reaches into the New Testament, where we find numerous quotes of the ancient prophet. The book of Isaiah will present a serious challenge to translators, but it will also offer them a great reward. The purpose of this Handbook is not just to give translators the needed technical information, but also to make the book of Isaiah come alive to them and through them to their readers. [About the authors: Dr. Graham Ogden was a UBS translation consultant in the Asia-Pacific region from 1985 through 2003, with a special interest in Chinese. He has co-authored the UBS Handbooks on Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Dr. Jan Sterk is a Flemish Belgian who has lived and worked almost his whole life in Africa, especially in Nigeria, Congo, and Kenya. After his doctoral studies in African linguistics (1977), he joined UBS as a translation consultant. For 22 years he supervised Bible translation projects in a great number of African languages. Since his retirement, he has adapted the UBS Handbook on Hebrews into French.]

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