

Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah is full of beautiful imagery, with hope for a wonderful future with God's special servant, the Messiah, righting all wrongs. The thread running through Isaiah's long book of messages from God is, "I am the sovereign God: there is no other." No one can compete with God, or question his wisdom or power.

Warnings and predictions

Israel had been invaded and ruined: God hated their sacrifices, festivals and prayers because of oppression of the poor, luxurious living, excessive interest charges, murder, bribery and no justice. Jerusalem would be besieged and attacked by night. There would be no more wedding feasts, and their leaders' graves would be desecrated and the bodies lie scattered on the ground, open to the stars they had consulted. There would be fear, destruction and chaos. The fashionable women would become shabby and disgusting and everyone would mourn for those lost in battle. Those who plotted to destroy others would be destroyed by their own plots. A few who lived right would be saved from the destruction. Isaiah warned not to listen to mediums but to God's messages. The astrologers and fortune tellers were useless.

The Messiah's reign

God would give them a special ruler, descended from King David, who would bring peace. The Messiah would be gentle and encouraging to the weak and damaged. He would bring light and justice to all the nations and free the prisoners. He would defend the rights of the poor and helpless. He would cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the lame to dance. During his reign, no animal or human would do any harm. The exiled people of Israel would return and everyone would do the right thing, so they would live in peace and safety.

The punishment of evil nations

God would punish Assyria for its pride and cruelty. For the same reason Babylon would become an uninhabited marsh. The Philistines would die from famine. Moab would all be slaughtered. Damascus would be destroyed, Sudan would be punished in war, but would one day worship God in Jerusalem. Egypt would suffer from civil war and drought, but would eventually worship God. Isaiah had to go naked for three years to symbolise the manner of Egypt's and Sudan's deportation.

Disaster and chaos predicted

A time would come when the whole earth would shake and stagger. No one would be safe, the crops would fail and the sun and moon would turn dark. God's warnings had been ignored, religion had become lifeless rules and traditions, so they would be surprised: their wisdom would turn out to be foolishness. God would end oppression, slander and injustice. Those who used Egypt's horses to get away would be no better off. But God would protect Jerusalem.

The restoration of Israel

Afterwards, God would provide food and drink, and comfort all those who were sad. He was the creator of everything, full of wisdom and power. Though Israel had been like a deserted wife, or a lonely widow, God would tenderly look after her like a good husband and never banish her again. They had done wrong but they would be reclaimed and forgiven, and gathered home from all over the world with joy: "sorrow and sighing shall flee away". Although their land had been deserted, it would become too small for those returning from the diaspora. God would protect Israel and their fruit would go all over the world. Their

attackers and accusers would fail, and foreigners would work in their vineyards and on their farms. A time would come when the nations would come to Jerusalem to hear God's judgements, and no one would train for war.

The Assyrian threat

A high official came from Assyria threatening to invade Israel. He sent King Hezekiah a letter which Hezekiah showed to God and asked him to save them. The prophet told him that not a shot would be fired. The next morning 185,000 Assyrian soldiers had died in the night. The Assyrians returned to their own land and the emperor was assassinated by two of his sons.

About idol worship

Idol worship is ridiculous: a man fells a tree and burns part to bake his bread. The other part he carves into a figure and bows down to it.

A heathen helper

A foreign, heathen king, Cyrus, would order the Jerusalem temple to be rebuilt. No one should question God's decision in this: he created everything.

The suffering servant

God's special servant would be ill-treated, despised rejected, but would endure it without a word. He would die with criminals but be buried with the rich. His suffering would achieve healing, his death forgiveness for the evil deeds of many. Finally, he would have joy in seeing his offspring, the results of his suffering. Many nations would be amazed by him and he would be honoured.

Distant nations waiting for liberation

People all over the world could ask for and receive God's protection. Distant lands were waiting for God to save them, and indeed he would liberate and rule over them. Foreigners would respect God and his people: they were all called to change their ways and their evil thoughts.

God does not think like humans and his ways are superior. God's people may include eunuchs and foreigners (contrary to Moses' law). He is with anyone who is humble and turns away from evil.

Proper religious duty

At the same time as going without food and reciting prayers they were quarrelling and oppressing their workers. What was the good of that? Proper religious duty would be to eliminate contempt, evil talk, violence, oppression and injustice, to share food and clothes with those who had none, provide the homeless with shelter and care for their own relatives. They should rest and worship on the seventh day, and get rid of lying, violence, murder and perjury.

No one to help

God has seen that no one is righting these wrongs, so he himself will rush in to end the oppression and injustice.

The new creation

God would make a new earth and heavens where nothing could harm and there would be only joy.

Where God lives

God has made the universe, he doesn't need a house. Instead, he lives with people who respect him and turn away from evil.

Isaiah is often called "The Messianic Prophet" because he records many prophecies of the coming of the Messiah into the world. "Messiah" means "the anointed one." In the Old Testament, priests were anointed with oil when they were appointed to their office. Prophets and kings were also anointed with oil when they were appointed by God. The prophets foretold the coming of One who would hold all three of these offices and be prophet, priest and king all in one. Therefore, He was called "The Anointed One" or "the Messiah." The New Testament word for "The Anointed One" is "Christ."

Isaiah prophesied during the rule of four different kings of Judah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Isaiah was probably born in Jerusalem about 760 BC. He likely began prophesying about 740 BC and was God's spokesman to Judah for fifty years or even longer. Hebrews 11:37 speak of some men of faith who were "sawn in two." According to the Jews, this is the way Isaiah was killed--as a very old man, the evil king, Manasseh, had Isaiah's body placed between two planks of wood and sawed in two.

Isaiah lived and preached during a very important time in the world's history. During most of his lifetime, Assyria was the most powerful nation on earth. Babylon was only beginning to gain strength as a nation. While Isaiah lived in Judah, Romulus and Remus were beginning the city of Rome. The Greek cities of Athens and Sparta were just being built. It was during Isaiah's lifetime that the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 721 BC. Micah, Amos, and Hosea were other prophets of God who lived during Isaiah's lifetime.

During most of the time that Isaiah preached to God's people, the nation of Judah was very prosperous. People forgot about God because they were so involved in the things of this world. The rich people lived in luxury and idleness while the poor suffered from lack of food and clothing. Many of the people were drunkards, and the women were just as bad as the men. Government officials were corrupt, using their offices to oppress the poor. Even the prophets failed to do the job God had given them. Instead of rebuking sin and delivering God's message, they preached what the people wanted to hear.

The book of Isaiah has sixty-six chapters. The first thirty-five chapters speak of God's judgments on evil and evildoers. Chapters 36 through 39 tell of a time when the Assyrian army surrounded the city of Jerusalem. They planned to attack and destroy it. The leader of the Assyrians boasted that God could not save them just as the gods of other nations they had conquered had been unable to deliver them. King Hezekiah prayed to God about the matter. That very night God sent His angel into the camp of the Assyrians; the angel killed 185,000 Assyrians and the rest of the army fled.

The last section of Isaiah, chapters 40 through 66, foretold that the nation of Babylon would arise and oppress God's people. They also told of the sending of God's Servant to suffer for the sins of the people. Finally, the glory of the Messianic Age is described.

Isaiah has been more strongly attacked by critics of the Bible than almost any other book of the Bible. Perhaps this is because Isaiah gives such strong proof that the Bible came from God. Isaiah foretold many events in history hundreds of years before they happened which seems to prove that he was inspired by God. Critics and skeptics do not want to believe in the inspiration of the Bible, refusing to accept the evidence which shows that Isaiah spoke from God.

Isaiah contains evidence that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Christ in Isaiah exactly. Critics of the Bible do not like this for it proves they are wrong. Therefore, they try to explain away Isaiah's prophecies, claiming that Isaiah did not write all the book of Isaiah. Some claim that Isaiah was written by two different men. Others say there were three or more who wrote the book. They claim the parts which predict future events were written much later after the events had already happened.

Did Isaiah write all of the book which bears his name? Jesus, Paul and the other writers of the New Testament quote from the book of Isaiah. They say it was written by him. Some critics say that Jesus read all the prophecies in Isaiah of the Christ, then organized His life to do what Isaiah foretold. This would be impossible. Isaiah foretold that Jesus would be born of a virgin, and also predicted the manner of Jesus' death and His burial. This would have been very difficult to arrange, especially if Jesus were just an ordinary man as the critics claim. The fact is that Isaiah lived more than seven hundred years before Jesus was born. He predicted many things concerning the coming of the Christ and His kingdom—Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies exactly.

The prophecy that Jesus would be born of a virgin is found in Isaiah, chapter 7. Critics think He was just an ordinary man with a human father instead of being "the only begotten Son of God". They say the Hebrew word which is translated as "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 should be "young woman." Some of the modern translations of the Bible (The Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, and the Good News Bible) actually change "virgin" to "young woman."

Isaiah also foretold the coming of the kingdom of Christ, which is the church of Christ. He said it would come (1) In the last days; (2) in Jerusalem; (3) God's house would be built; (4) all nations would come into it; (5) the law of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem. This prophecy was fulfilled on the first Pentecost day after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2). Jews from every nation were assembled in Jerusalem—it was in the last days (the last age or dispensation). The Lord's house, which is His church was established. From Jerusalem, this goods news of salvation was carried to the whole world.

The book of Isaiah is strong proof that the Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Isaiah also proves that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 20:30,31).