

Book of Isaiah Explained

Title:

The book derives its title from the author, whose name means “Yahweh is salvation,” and is similar to the names Joshua, Elisha, and Jesus.

Isaiah is quoted directly in the New Testament over 65 times, far more than any other Old Testament prophet, and mentioned by name over 20 times.

Author – Date:

Isaiah began his ministry in Judah around 740 B.C., “in the year that king Uzziah died” (6:1), some two decades before Assyria invaded and conquered the 10 northern tribes known as the nation of Israel.

The prophet witnessed the final years of Israel’s spiritual decline and the utter disaster that followed.

And God called him to warn the tiny nation of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, about a similar outcome.

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, ministered in and around Jerusalem as a prophet to Judah during the reigns of 4 kings of Judah: Uzziah (called “Azariah” in 2 Kings), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1; from 739-686 B.C.).

He evidently came from a family of some rank, because he had easy access to the king (7:3).

He was married and had two sons who bore symbolic names: “Shear-Jashub” (“a remnant shall return”; 7:3), and “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (“hasting to the spoil, hurrying to the prey”; 8:3).

When called by God to prophesy, in the year of King Uzziah’s death (739 B.C.), he responded with a cheerful readiness, though he knew from the beginning that his ministry would be one of fruitless warning and exhortation (6:9-13).

Having been reared in Jerusalem, he was an appropriate choice as a political and religious counselor to the nation.

Isaiah was a contemporary of Hosea and Micah.

His writing style has no rival in its versatility of expression, brilliance of imagery, and richness of vocabulary.

The early church father Jerome, likened him to Demosthenes, the legendary Greek orator.

His writing features a range of 2,186 different words, compared to 1,535 in Ezekiel, 1,653 in Jeremiah, and 2,170 in Psalms.

(2 Chronicles 32:32), records that he wrote a biography of king Hezekiah also.

The prophet thrived until at least 681 B.C. when he penned the account of Sennacherib's death (compare 37:38).

Tradition has it that he met his death under king Manasseh (ca. 695-642 B.C.), by being cut in two with a wooden saw (compare Heb. 11:37).

Background – Setting:

During Uzziah's prosperous 52 year reign (ca. 790-739 B.C.), Judah developed into a strong commercial and military state with a port for commerce on the Red sea and the construction of walls, towers, and fortifications (2 Chron. 26:3-5, 8-10, 13-15).

Yet the period witnessed a decline in Judah's spiritual status.

Uzziah's downfall resulted from his attempt to assume the privileges of a priest and burn incense on the altar (2 Kings 15:3-4; 2 Chron. 26:16-19).

He was judged with leprosy, from which he never recovered (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:20-21).

His son Jotham (ca. 750-731 B.C.), had to take over the duties of king before his father's death.

Assyria began to emerge as a new international power under Tiglath-Pileser (ca. 745-727 B.C.), while Jotham was king (2 Kings 15:19).

Judah also began to incur opposition from Israel and Syria to her north during his reign (2 Kings 15:37).

Jotham was a builder and a fighter like his father, but spiritual corruption still existed in the Land (2 Kings 15:34-35; 2 Chron. 27:1-2).

Ahaz was 25 when he began to reign in Judah and he reigned until age 41 (2 Chron 28:1, 8; ca. 735-715 B.C.).

Israel and Syria formed an alliance to combat the rising Assyrian threat from the East, but Ahaz refused to bring Judah into the alliance (2 Kings 16:5; Isa. 7:6).

For this, the northern neighbors threatened to dethrone him and war resulted (734 B.C.).

In panic, Ahaz sent to the Assyrian king for help (2 Kings 16:7), and the Assyrian king gladly responded, sacking Gaza, carrying all of Galilee and Gilead into captivity, and finally capturing Damascus (732 B.C.).

Ahaz's alliance with Assyria led to his introduction of a heathen altar, which he set up in Solomon's temple (2 Kings 16:10-16; 2 Chron. 28:3).

During his reign (722 B.C.), Assyria captured Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, and carried many of Israel's most capable people into captivity (2 Kings 17:6, 24).

Hezekiah began his reign over Judah in 715 B.C. and continued for 29 years (to ca. 686 B.C.; 2 Kings 18:1-2).

Reformation was a priority when he became king (2 Kings 18:4, 22; 2 Chron. 30:1).

The threat of an Assyrian invasion forced Judah to promise heavy tribute to that eastern power.

In 701 B.C., Hezekiah became very ill with a life-threatening disease, but he prayed and God graciously extended his life for 15 years (2 Kings chapter 20; Isa chapter 38), until 686 B.C.

The ruler of Babylon used the opportunity of his illness and recovery to send congratulations to him, probably seeking to form an alliance with Judah against Assyria at the same time (2 Kings 20:12ff.; Isa. Chapter 39).

When Assyria became weak through internal strife, Hezekiah refused to pay any further tribute to that power (2 Kings 18:7).

So (in 701 B.C.), Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, invaded the coastal areas of Israel, marching toward Egypt on Israel's southern flank.

In the process, he overran many Judean towns, looting and carry many people back to Assyria.

While besieging Lachish, he sent a contingent of forces to besiege Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17 – 19:8; Isa. 36:2 – 37:8).

The side expedition failed, however, so in a second attempt he sent messengers to Jerusalem demanding an immediate surrender of the city (2 Kings 19:9ff.; Isa. 37:9ff.).

With Isaiah's encouragement, Hezekiah refused to surrender, and when Sennacherib's army fell prey to a sudden disaster, he returned to Nineveh and never threatened Judah again.

Historical – Theological Themes:

Isaiah prophesied during the period of the divided kingdom, directing the major thrust of his message to the southern kingdom of Judah.

He condemned the empty ritualism of this day (e.g., 1:10-15), and the idolatry into which so many of the people had fallen (e.g. 40:18-20).

He foresaw the coming Babylonian captivity of Judah because of this departure from the Lord (39:6-7).

Fulfillment of some of his prophecies in his own lifetime provided his credentials for the prophetic office.

Sennacherib's effort to take Jerusalem failed, just as Isaiah had said it would (37:6-7; 36-38).

The Lord healed Hezekiah's critical illness, as Isaiah had predicted (38:5; 2 Kings 20:7).

Long before Cyrus, king of Persia appeared on the scene, Isaiah named him as Judah's deliverer from the Babylonian captivity (44:28; 45:1).

Fulfillment of his prophecies of Christ's first coming have given Isaiah further vindication (e.g., 7:14).

The pattern of literal fulfillment of his already fulfilled prophecies gives assurance that prophecies of Christ's second coming will also see literal fulfillment.

Isaiah provides data on the future day of the Lord and the time following.

He details numerous aspects of Israel's future kingdom on earth not found elsewhere in the Old or New Testaments, including changes in nature, the animal world, Jerusalem's status among the nations, the Suffering Servant's leadership, and others.

Through a literary device called "prophetic foreshortening", Isaiah predicted future events without delineating exact sequences of the events or time intervals separating them.

For example, nothing in Isaiah reveals the extended period separating the two comings of the Messiah.

Also, he does not provide as clear a distinction between the future temporal kingdom and the eternal kingdom as John does (in Rev. 20:1-10; 21:1 - 22:5).

In God's program of progressive revelation, details of these relationships awaited a prophetic spokesman of a later time.

Also known as the "evangelical Prophet", Isaiah spoke much about the grace of God toward Israel, particularly in his last 27 chapters.

The centerpiece is Isaiah's unrivaled chapter 53, portraying Christ as the slain Lamb of God.

Isaiah, in my opinion, is the most spiritual of the Old Testament books.

The man, Isaiah, was a prophet and preacher at the time he wrote this book.

Isaiah was prophet during the reign of 5 kings, most of whom were evil.

His wife was a prophetess in her own right.

Some believe that the word "prophetess" means wife of a prophet, but that is not correct.

A person does not become a prophet, or a prophetess, because they are married to a prophet.

The office of prophet, or prophetess, is a call from God.

You are not called to preach, because your husband preaches.

You may be called to preach, but if you are, the call is from God, not because of who you are related to.

History tells us that Manasseh had Isaiah tied to two boards and sawn in two.

The following Scripture is believed to be in reference to the horrible fate of Isaiah.

Hebrews 11:37 "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;"

Isaiah had great reverence for God.

He was a serious, spiritual man.

He was known as the prophet of redemption.

There were more prophecies of the coming Messiah in Isaiah than any other book, except Psalms.

The book of Isaiah contains 66 chapters divided into 39, and 27 the same way the Old and New Testament is divided.

The one thing that tells us beyond a doubt that Isaiah, the prophet, wrote all of it, is his use of the title "Holy One of Israel".

It occurs 12 times in the first 39 chapters and 14 times in chapters 40 through 66.

This expression of who God is, is only mentioned 7 times in all the other books of the Bible, and one of those times says, "Holy One in Israel".

This is Isaiah's expression.

If there is a key word in all of this, it would be salvation.

Isaiah expressed over and over that the Light and the Savior are One and the Same.

As we continue in this study, we will see Isaiah had a depth of understanding who God is, that few have.

It is commonly believed that Isaiah lived (from 750 to 680 B.C.).

Isaiah prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh.

He faced many hardships, but continued in his call from God.

It is commonly believed that Isaiah was about 20 years old when his ministry began, and he continued until his death.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which were found in the caves near the Dead Sea, contained the writings of Isaiah, and were very close in interpretation to what we have in the King James version of the Bible.

That his book should stand at the head of the 17 prophetic works is no mistake.

All who have an appreciation for literature must be impressed by Isaiah's excellence of style, seen in his vivid descriptions and dramatic rhetorical touches.

The grandeur and dignity are paralleled by a liveliness of energy and profusion of imagery.

He was without doubt the "Prince of Prophets".