

The Man— GOD'S MESSENGER



The book of Isaiah, with its key revelations about God and the Messiah, is one of the most significant books in the Old Testament. From the study of it, we will understand God better, see the unfolding of His purposes through Christ, and have a confident hope for the future.

The book has been compared to Romans in its scope and importance. As Romans is a treatise concerning all the major doctrines of the Christian religion, so Isaiah covers prophetically all of God's mind and purposes for mankind. Yet Isaiah's work was not solely to foretell the future. He was a spokesman for God and gave God's word to the people of his day. He was God's messenger to Judah and Jerusalem at a time when the nation was immersed in sin. He spoke against that sin, urging the people to repent, and then foretold the destruction that would come if they did not return to God. The prophet was a courageous man who was not afraid to denounce kings and priests. Unwavering when public opinion went against him, he boldly declared God's word in every circumstance.

Family

The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord," and the book's name is symbolic of its message. In the overruling providence of God, it is no accident that the prophet was so named. He is described as "the son of Amoz" (Isaiah 1:1; 2:1; 13:1), a man of whom the Bible reveals nothing. Jewish tradition suggests that where the father of a prophet is named, then the father also was invariably a prophet. But this rule does not apply universally. Another view asserts that Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah, father and predecessor of Uzziah, but there is no historical basis for this assertion. Isaiah was obviously well educated, his writings indicating he was a master of words, one able to communicate appropriately in every situation.

It is evident that Isaiah was a native of the city of Jerusalem, where he spent his days with his family. The prophet was married and had two sons. The sons' names were Shear-jashub (meaning "the remnant shall return" [7:3] and Maher-shalal-hash-baz

(meaning “quick to plunder, swift to the spoil” [8:14]), names symbolic of core elements in the prophet’s message, which emphasized Judah’s judgment and restoration.

Much of the tradition surrounding Isaiah’s life and times is virtually worthless. However, it is generally accepted that the conventional view of the circumstances surrounding his death has some historic credibility. Ancient Jewish documents (including a commentary on 2 Kings 21:16) indicate that Isaiah was executed by King Manasseh and that he was “sawn asunder.”

Ministry

During the time period specified at the outset of the book (“the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” [1:1]), Isaiah’s mission was to prophecy to the southern kingdom of Judah. Two significant themes may be identified in his messages. The first theme is the exhortation to “trust in the Holy One of Israel,” rather than embarking on an ill-considered alliance with pagan Assyria. True faith in the Lord would assure forgiveness for their transgressions and deliverance from their enemies. Eight times the people are urged to “wait upon the Lord” (Isaiah 40:28–31). Another prominent theme is “the Messiah to come and the glory of His age.” Isaiah spoke frequently of the events to come. He foretold the fall of heathen nations and the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah who would rule in justice and righteousness (as early as chapter 2:1–5).

Isaiah’s favourite designation for Jehovah is the “Lord of hosts,” a phrase employed some sixty-two times in the book. “The name designates the Lord as omnipotent, and is used by all the writing prophets except Ezekiel, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. The term ‘hosts’ designated the armies of Israel. It could also refer to the angels, the heavenly messengers of the Lord. When, as here, it appears without further qualification, it designates the Lord as the God of all hosts, and is thus an equivalent expression for the ‘all-powerful God’” (Edward J. Young). Even in days of outright apostasy,

Isaiah had confidence in the omnipotent One, who was working out His eternal purposes for the good of His people.

Legacy

Isaiah’s legacy is the book that bears his name. However, since around 1750 modern scholarship has severely challenged the unity and authenticity of the book of Isaiah. The critical arguments have centred on the alleged stylistic differences between the first (chapters 1–39) and second (chapters 40–66) parts of the book. Typically, the concept of supernatural, predictive prophecy is also rejected. The modernist position argues that two or more Isaiahs wrote the book, and the latter part is assigned to a period well into the Babylonian captivity or even later.

But there are substantial arguments for discarding the view of the critics. While the focus does shift from Assyria to Babylon as the narrative progresses, the shift in no way undermines the genuineness of any portion of the book. There is no great familiarity with Babylon in the second half, which we might expect if the writer resided there. Evidently Isaiah conveyed his message while the cities of Judah were still standing (40:9). And there are as many stylistic similarities between the two parts of the book as there are supposed differences. For instance, the title “Holy One of Israel” occurs twelve times in chapters 1–39 and fourteen times in chapters 40–66. There are also many acknowledged literary similarities to the writings of the prophet Micah, an eighth-century contemporary of Isaiah.

It is surely significant that the New Testament writers clearly regarded the author of the so-called “first” and “second” Isaiahs as one and the same person.

Consider such passages as Matthew 3:3; 12:17–18; Luke 3:4; John 12:38–41; Acts 3:18–26; and Romans 10:16, 20. Perhaps the strongest argument of all is that Christ Himself quoted from both sections of the

book and ascribed all the statements to the prophet Isaiah.

Furthermore, there is no external evidence to suggest that the book of Isaiah ever existed in a form different from that known today. The Jewish historian Josephus was content to credit it in its entirety to Isaiah of Jerusalem. The oldest existing manuscript of the book, dating from at least 100 B.C. and discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls fifty years ago (1 Q Isa), shows no hint of disunity or multiple authorship. All the evidence points to a text

kept intact over the centuries and not tampered with in any way.

Plainly, the book of Isaiah, the prophet’s great legacy, still stands. That it stands at the head of the prophetic works of the Old Testament is surely no mistake. Isaiah’s book will be acknowledged by all who have an appreciation for literature. But it is more than just literature: Isaiah was a man who saw God’s glory and God’s Son, who was inspired to set down what he beheld, and who is rightly termed “the messianic prophet.” ■

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