

Isaiah, "because he saw his glory"

Lesson 2 – Isaiah, the Man

The prophet that is most quoted in the New Testament is **Isaiah**. Like many of the men who spoke for God, we know very little about his origin or the end of his life. There is nothing said in the Bible except that he was the son of Amoz, and of course we know the kings under which he served God were Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Because of the time frame of **Isaiah's** prophesying, we might assume with some certainty that he was born around 760 B. C. Later Jewish tradition has it that Amoz was the brother of Amaziah, king of Judah. If that was the case, then **Isaiah** would have been a cousin of Uzziah, and he would have been raised in close proximity to the palace, if not on the grounds of the palace itself. This would explain the easy manner of **Isaiah** in the presence of the kings. He was not at all intimidated, but respectful and submissive, and strongly independent. In fact, there seems to be a dependence on **Isaiah** on the part of the kings. They seemed somewhat to reverence him. Perhaps the reason for this is that he was God's prophet, and he spoke with the authority of God.

The manner and language of **Isaiah** showed that he was a man of dignity and, as some have suggested, had a "royal education." Indeed, in his words we find a familiarity not only with the law of God, but the political situation in Judah, Israel, and in the nations with which they had dealings. Though his prophecies dealt with all manner of people in just about every situation, he seems to have interacted mostly with the kings of Judah.

The longest book of prophecy belongs to **Isaiah**. Modernist scholars believe that the book of **Isaiah** was heavily edited by priests who came after him. It is a popular theory among modernists that **Isaiah** was not the only author of the book that bears his name, and that it is, in fact, not one book, but two, maybe three. The best evidence that they can produce is their own premise that it is impossible to tell the future. Maybe someone they don't know can (**Matt. 19:26**). The book of **Isaiah** does make a transition a little over halfway through. The first 39 chapters are filled with rebukes and warnings of impending disasters. The people and kings of Judah are not the only ones warned in this great book. Most of the nations of that day are told by the prophet what God is going to do about them, even Assyria, the dominating kingdom of the world, Babylon, and Egypt.

Chapter 40 through the end of the book is a vindication of the person and power of God, and a message of hope for the children of Israel. But the message looks so far ahead, beginning from the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus, that it is certain that even **Isaiah** only had a faint shadow of the things God planned to do. But the theme of hope and restoration is unmistakable.

The first event in the life of **Isaiah** that we can date approximately is recorded in **Isaiah 6:1** at the death of Uzziah in 742 B. C. It is in this chapter that **Isaiah** is whisked away to heaven itself in a vision, and he finds himself at the very foot of the throne of God. He is so awed by what he sees and the realization of God's majesty that he cries out for mercy. He has seen God and knows that he is unworthy, therefore he supposes that he must die. But an angel takes a living coal from the altar and touches his lips, taking away his sin. Then a voice from the throne: "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then in a moment of impulsive zeal, **Isaiah** cries out, "Here am I; send me." **Isaiah** is told by God that his message will largely go unheeded until the utter desolation of the land.

What a burden that must have been, for the majority of the time of **Isaiah**, the people followed good kings who were loyal to the law. But these were prosperous times filled with the kinds of worldly temptations that those time are known for.

We know that **Isaiah** had a wife (**Isaiah 8:3**) who was a prophetess. She bore to him a son, Shear-jashub [*a remnant shall return*](**7:3**), then another, Maher-shalal-hash-baz [*the spoil speeds – the prey hastens*](**8:3**). Some believe that the sign given to Ahaz, that a virgin would conceive and bare a son, was a third son of **Isaiah**. Others believe that he may have been referring to Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The word that is translated "virgin" does mean a maiden, or a young woman, also, depending on the context in which it is found. He tells Ahaz that before the weaning of Immanuel Syria and Israel would be carried off by Assyria. Of course, Maher-shalal-hash-baz was not born of a virgin. This prophecy reaches forward to Jesus who was certainly born of a virgin, and who was weaned before the destruction of Jerusalem and the redemption of the remnant of God's people.

His dress was suitable to his vocation (**20:1-2**), probably a coarse linen or hairy overcoat of a dark color, such as was worn by mourners.

Isaiah supports the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham, because they sought Jehovah. But Ahaz was one who was given to the excesses of the flesh, and therefore the pagan gods, Baal and Chemosh appealed to him, so he had an altar built to Baal built before the temple door in Jerusalem. In **2 Chronicles 28:3** we learn that he sacrificed some of his own children in the Valley of Hinnom by burning them to death. Needless to say, he and **Isaiah** had a rocky relationship.

Perhaps the king to whom **Isaiah** was the closest was Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king, loyal to God and zealous in his service. It is with the help of God, through **Isaiah**, that Hezekiah was able to stave off the onslaught of the Assyrian conqueror, Sennacherib. Hezekiah was told by **Isaiah** that he was going to die, and when he pleaded with God to spare him, **Isaiah** was sent once again to tell him that he had fifteen more years.

From this point, we do not what happened to **Isaiah**. It may be that he died before the end of Hezekiah's reign. It could be, as described by Jewish tradition, that **Isaiah** lived into the reign of Manasseh, that he was martyred by that wicked king. The rabbis tell us

that when **Isaiah** rebuked Manasseh for his idolatrous ways, that Manasseh had him fastened between two planks, and then the planks were sawn in half. We will never know in this life if that is so, but there is a reference in **Hebrews 11:37** to a "hero of faith" who was sawn asunder. Two things make us tend to believe that the reference is to **Isaiah**. **First**, rabbinical tradition is trustworthy when it is contradicted by neither historical record or the Bible. **Second**, it seems likely that in naming the great heroes of the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews would find it appropriate to mention something about one of the greatest, even if his name is not mentioned.

There are two verses in the Bible that give valuable insight to **Isaiah**. The first is found in **John 12:41**: "These things said **Isaiah**, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him." **Isaiah** saw the glory of Jesus in the prophecies uttered about him. Though many of the things that he prophesied himself were beyond his understanding (**1 Pet. 1:10-12**), he knew God's promises concerning the Messiah involved greater blessing for man than man has ever imagined. He knew that the most precious thing, the thing that must be first in our lives, was the promise of God through the Messiah.

The second verse is **Isa 6:8**: "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, **Here am I; send me.**" The conviction produced by what **Isaiah** saw resulted in the commitment in **Isaiah** that we see. **Isaiah** was anxious to do his part in the greatest work of God.

Certainly the character of this great hero of faith is worth studying for the purpose of imitation, and his life and works are an important element in the development of God's plan for saving us.