

PROPHET ISAIAH

HAPPENINGS IN THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH

After the division of the Kingdom, Judah too started drifting, much like the northern Israel, into the same evils of idolatry, religious formalism (going through the motions of worship) and mistreatment of the poor. Around 750 BC onwards, Israel faced its annihilation, this is when Isaiah began to prophecy in Judah warning the people about the dire consequences of forsaking God.

The name **Isaiah means "the salvation of the Lord"** or "the Lord is salvation.

Isaiah a Hebrew prophet was believed to have lived about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ during the time in which the Assyrian Empire conquered the northern part of the Jewish homeland.

Isaiah was educated, distinguished, and a privileged noble man, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was born in Jerusalem in 770B.C. He is described as the son of Amoz. He was married and had two sons, Shear-Jashub and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Amoz was a brother of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah. This would make Isaiah a close relative to those who were kings during his lifetime, and would explain his close association with kings and priests.

Isaiah is said to have found his **calling as a prophet** in 740 B.C.(in the year of King Uzziah's death), when he saw a vision while in the temple. In this vision he saw the throne of God in the heavens and he had a glimpse of the glory of heaven for an instant. This revealed to Isaiah his own unworthiness to prophecy, until one of the seraphims took a burning coal and touched his lips as a sign of purification. The entire vision had a lasting effect on Isaiah. He was convinced of the tremendous holiness of Yahweh and the consequent holiness to which HIS people were being called to.

Isaiah – God's spokesman:

Isaiah was God's spokesman to **Judah** and **Jerusalem** at time when the nation was immersed in sin, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He then foretold destruction upon them if they did not return to God.

In the midst of these dire warnings, Isaiah also foretold of a bright future with the coming Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. God would not forget His covenant made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. He would spare a remnant of the nation of Israel out of which would come the Messiah and His new kingdom. In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

The false beliefs of the Jewish people at the time :

The mindset of the people at this time were based on two strong beliefs that had moulded their religious understandings:

1. David had brought the ark of God into Jerusalem and set it there making it the dwelling place of God.

2. Nathan's prophecy (2 Sam 7) that David's sons would retain a divinely appointed kingship over Israel. This meant David's dynasty would always provide the kings of Israel.

Judah was in great political turmoil:

During this time Assyria was expanding its empire, attacking Israel and Syria to the North. During the reign of King Uzziah and his son Jotham, Judah was an ally of Israel and Syria. However, during the reign of Ahaz, Judah refused to join a coalition with Israel and Syria to resist Assyria. Israel and Syria retaliated and attacked Judah. Jerusalem was about to be sieged. King Ahaz seriously considered inviting Assyria to help. Alliance with Assyria meant respecting other gods and forgetting its covenant with Yahweh.

Isaiah counseled the king and the people to trust only in Yahweh:

King Ahaz of Judah rejected Isaiah's advice and asked Assyria to come to his aid. King Ahaz displayed a total lack of faith in Yahweh but was instead by the two great beliefs that as long as the temple stood, God would stand by them and Kings would forever descend from David's lineage.

Isaiah warned King Ahaz that the Assyrians would surely come - not as deliverers as he hoped but as tormentors (Is 8:5-8). Assyria accepted King Ahaz's proposal and attacked Israel and the capital of Israel (Samaria) fell in 722 B.C.

However, as Isaiah had prophesied Assyria was now a rod of God's anger which he was using to punish the people. Judah was next on Assyria's hit list. Assyria unaware that God was using them to punish the people of Judah, boasted of their victory and so Isaiah prophesies that they would be punished for their arrogance and pride (Is 10:12). But this defeat would be different.

During the reign of King Hezekiah (son of King Ahaz), in 701 B.C. the Assyrian king Sennacherib's armies marched towards Jerusalem. When they came within striking range of the city walls they pitched camp and prepared for battle. The people of Jerusalem were filled with terror. Isaiah once again sends a message to King Hezekiah that the Lord would defend the city and not to make alliances but trust only in the Lord (2 Kings 19: 32,34). King Hezekiah heeded Isaiah and God rewarded his faith by destroying the Assyrian host overnight. The Assyrians were breaking camp and leaving next morning leaving the campsite littered with dead soldiers.

However the conversion of Judah was only short-lived. Things got worse when King Manasseh (Hezekiah's son) took over. God's punishment of Judah would have to follow through to its end.

Isaiah's ministry covered 40 years. The time covered is from the end of King Uzziah's reign (Isaiah 6:1) to the Assyrian King Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was executed by Manasseh (Hezekiah's son) only a few years after he ascended the throne.

The book of Isaiah is divided into two parts:

a. The Assyrian Period (chapters 1-39)

The prophet proclaims the Lord's indictment against Judah and Jerusalem, and the coming judgment against them. God warned them through Isaiah, to come clean and purify themselves, but they ignored his message. He portrays the sovereign rule of the Lord of Hosts who judges not only Israel, but heathen nations as well. He prophesies that the Lord will use Assyria, Babylon, and the Medes to execute His purposes, and afterward judge each of these along with other nations, bringing them to desolation because of their sins.

b. The Babylonian Period (chapters 40-66)

Isaiah exhorts an afflicted people to have faith and patience. He describes the salvation and future blessings to come upon the true Israel of God. Though Isaiah did not live during the period of Babylonian captivity, through inspiration he was able to speak words of comfort to those who would experience that difficult time of Israel's history.

Isaiah predicted the demise and captivity of Judah, yet comforted them with this hope: God has promised to provide a Redeemer. The last 27 chapters of Isaiah focus on comfort and the coming of the Messiah.

The two major themes running through the book of Isaiah

- "Trust in the Holy One of Israel"
- "The Messiah to come and the glory of His age"

HYMN

I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU MY PEOPLE
I HAVE CARVED YOU ON THE PALM OF MY HAND
I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU
I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ORPHANED
I WILL NEVER FORGET MY OWN.

DOES A MOTHER FORGET HER BABY?
OR A WOMAN THE CHILD WITHIN HER WOMB?
YET, EVEN IF THESE FORGET,
YES, EVEN IF THESE FORGET,
I WILL NEVER FORGET MY OWN.

(Based on Isaiah 49:15)