

Isaiah

Isaiah has been referred to as the “Mount Everest of Hebrew prophecy,” and resembles the Bible in miniature. Its first thirty-nine chapters correspond to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and stress the righteousness, holiness, and justice of God. The prophet announces judgment upon immoral and idolatrous people beginning with Judah, then Judah’s neighboring nations, and finally the whole world.

But the last twenty-seven chapters correspond to the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and portray God’s glory, compassion, and undeserved favor. Messiah will come as a Savior to bear a cross and as a Sovereign to wear a crown.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. The first thirty-nine chapters (like the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament) are filled with judgment upon immoral and idolatrous men. Judah has sinned; the surrounding nations have sinned; the whole earth has sinned. Judgment must come, for God cannot allow sin to go unpunished forever. But the final twenty-seven chapters (like the twenty-seven books of the New Testament) declare a message of hope. The Messiah is coming as a Savior and a Sovereign to bear a cross and to wear a crown. Isaiah’s prophetic ministry spans the reigns of four kings of Judah and covers at least forty years.

Yeshàyahu and its shortened form *Yeshaiah* mean “Yahweh is Salvation.” This name is an excellent summary of the contents of the book.

AUTHOR

Isaiah, the “Saint Paul of the Old Testament,” was evidently from a distinguished Jewish family. His education is evident in his impressive vocabulary and style. His work is comprehensive in scope and beautifully communicated. Isaiah maintained close contact with the royal court, but his exhortations against alliances with foreign powers were not always well received. This great poet and prophet was uncompromising, sincere, and compassionate. His wife was a prophetess and he fathered at least two sons (7:3; 8:3). He spent most of his time in Jerusalem, and talmudic tradition says his persecutors sawed him in two during the reign of Manasseh (cf. Heb. 11:37).

DATE & SETTING

Isaiah’s long ministry ranged from about 740 to 680 b.c. (1:1). He began his ministry near the end of Uzziah’s reign (790–739 b.c.) and continued through the reigns of Jotham (739–731 b.c.), Ahaz (731–715 b.c.), and Hezekiah (715–686 b.c.). Assyria was growing in power under Tiglath-pileser who turned toward the west after his conquests in the east. He plucked up the small nations that dotted the Mediterranean coast including Israel and much of Judah. Isaiah lived during this time of military threat to Judah and warned its kings against trusting in alliances with other countries rather than the power of Yahweh. As a contemporary of Hosea and Micah, he prophesied during the last years of the northern kingdom but ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah who was following the sins of her sister Israel. After Israel’s demise in 722 b.c., he warned Judah of judgment not by Assyria but by Babylonia, even though Babylonia had not yet risen to power.

Isaiah ministered from the time of Tiglath-pileser (745–727 b.c.) to the time of Sennacherib (705–681 b.c.) of Assyria. He outlived Hezekiah by a few years because chapter 37, verse 38, records the death of Sennacherib in 681 b.c. Hezekiah was succeeded by his wicked son Manasseh who overthrew the worship of *Yahweh* and no doubt opposed the work of Isaiah.