

Route 66

Isaiah: So You Will Know

Part 23 – November 8, 2009

We are in the final division of the Old Testament: the Prophets!

Prophecy is so important in God's Word that it occupies one third of the whole Bible (and the last 17 books of the O.T.). The prophets were men who God raised up to rebuke and correct and redirect His people when they went astray. So, it's no surprise that the prophets really move to the forefront of scripture when the nation of Israel splits in two, and remain so until the return to Jerusalem after the exile. Then they go silent for 500 years; till John the Baptist arrives.

God communicated to His prophets through dreams and visions and angels and miracles and on rare occasion an audible voice! He gave them messages for their *own* time, messages for predicted *future* times, and also timeless principles of right and wrong. And *Isaiah* is considered the greatest prophet of them all! He ministered from about 740^{BC} to 700^{BC}, and his book begins:



The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah [aka Azariah], Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. - *Isaiah 1:1 NIV*

These are the 19 King's of Judah (from the split to the exile). The good ones are in blue. Isaiah prophesied during kings 9-12.

Isaiah was unpopular because his message was *so* provoking.

The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. - *Isaiah 1:3 NIV*

In other words, they're dumber than an ox and they don't have the brains of a donkey! And He condemned their empty ritualism.

[For the LORD has spoken] Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. - *Isaiah 1:13 NIV*

He was saying that God is offended by religious ritual, however impressive, if it conceals an empty heart and a careless life.

Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks ... - *Isaiah 5:22 NIV*

Isaiah was ... a character! And the Lord *really* liked him. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was in the temple when it began to shake and it filled with smoke, and he saw God in there, seated on a throne being worshipped by angels.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” - *Isaiah 6:5 NIV*

An angel takes a coal from the altar and touches it to his lips; but, instead of burning him it purifies him to speak for God. Within seconds you have conviction, confession, and cleansing! And then Lord asks whom he should send to speak His Word.

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” He said, “Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’” - *Isaiah 6:8b-9 NIV*

And thus begins the incredible 53 year prophetic ministry of Isaiah. He forewarned, but they refused to listen. He foretold, but they simply disregarded his unbelievable insights. During his 53 years of ministry, Isaiah *correctly* predicted:

A. That the Assyrians would destroy Israel (northern kingdom).

... Samaria [the capital of Israel] will be carried off by the king of Assyria.” - *Isaiah 8:4 NIV*

This took place through Sennacherib [suh-NAK-uh-rib] circa 722^{BC}.

B. That the Assyrians would then sweep into Judah (southern kingdom) like floodwaters up to their necks (8:8) (which they did), but then be crushed at Jerusalem (a.k.a. Mount Zion).

I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down.
- *Isaiah 14:25a NIV*

C. And that this defeat would be a *miraculous* event.

Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. - *Isaiah 31:8a NIV*

The Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian military men while they slept outside the walls of Jerusalem (*2 Kings 19:35*); one of the only miraculous military events with secular substantiation! [*Sennacherib’s clay prism that we covered in “2 Chronicles”*]

The Assyrian’s were then overpowered by the Babylonians who became the world’s new superpower (circa 612^{BC}). But, long before that ever happened, Isaiah accurately predicted:

D. That Judah would eventually fall to the *Babylonians*.

The time will surely come when everything ... will be carried off to Babylon.
Nothing will be left ... - *Isaiah 39:6 NIV*

- E. That the Jews themselves would be carried off as well.

Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding ... - *Isaiah 5:13a NIV*

- F. That a final blow would come to those left behind.

And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. - *Isaiah 6:13 NIV*

Even though the only people left in Judah were the poorest, oldest, and weakest, King Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and they returned to utterly wipe out everything that remained.

- G. He predicted: That the temple would be *burned* to the ground.

Our holy and glorious temple, where our fathers praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins. - *Isaiah 64:11 NIV*

- H. That Babylon itself would then be destroyed by the Medes.

See, I will stir up against them the Medes ... Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms ... will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. - *Isaiah 13:17-19 NIV condensed*

This was predicted over 150 years prior to the event (539^{BC})!

- I. That a man named Cyrus would lead this ordained battle.

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor ... I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. - *Isaiah 45:1a;3 NIV*

- J. That this "Cyrus" wouldn't even be a believer.

... I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. - *Isaiah 45:4 NIV*

- K. That Cyrus would then freely release the exiled Jews.

I will raise up Cyrus ... He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward ... - *Isaiah 45:13 NIV*

- L. That he'd fund the rebuilding of Jerusalem *and* the temple.

... he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid. - *Isaiah 44:28b NIV*

M. That even the captured temple vessels would be returned.

... Come out from [Babylon] and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. - *Isaiah 52:11b NIV*

N. And that only a remnant of Jews would return home.

Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. - *Isaiah 10:22 NIV*

Isaiah says that this remnant will return to prepare the way for the coming Messiah who will reveal the triumph of God's grace!

He even wrote them a victory song for when Babylon fell:

On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended! - *Isaiah 14:3-4 NIV*

Isaiah is writing a victory song over Babylon before Babylon has even defeated the Assyrians and come into power!

That's like saying "I want to give you a victory song over the *Brazilians*." "Why the *Brazilians*!?" "Oh, they take over America; but that's not my point. I want to give you a victory song for when the *Canadians* defeat the *Brazilians* and make you a free nation again."



And he doesn't stop with Israel, Judah, Assyria, and Babylon. In chapters 14-23, Isaiah accurately predicts the fates of Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre.

All of these nations had a hand in leading Israel astray. And within about a century they would all fall to invaders.

And these weren't all far-off projections. Concerning Arabia (a.k.a. Kedar), Isaiah wrote:

This is what the Lord says to me: "**Within one year**, as a servant bound by contract would count it, all the pomp of Kedar [KEE-duhr] will come to an end. - *Isaiah 21:16 NIV*

Short term predictions like this substantiated and validated Isaiah as a prophet because they were monitored and verified.

The Lord has used predictive prophecy for two main reasons:



1. To demonstrate His superiority over false gods

For I knew how stubborn you were ... Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, "My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them." - *Isaiah 48:4a;5 NIV*

2. To prove that His hand is guiding human history

Which of the idols has foretold these things? The Lord's chosen ally [Cyrus] will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians. I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission. - *Isaiah 48:14-15 NIV*

The structure of the book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. And some of the coincidences are just incredible.

Isaiah has 66 chapters; the Bible has 66 books. Isaiah can be divided into two distinct messages; the Bible has the Old and New Testaments.

Isaiah's first 39 chapters stress God's holiness, justice, and judgment; the O.T. has 39 books. Isaiah's last 27 chapters emphasize God's compassion, restoration, and grace; the N.T. has 27 books.

The second half of Isaiah opens with: "A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God." (*Isaiah 40:3*) And the New Testament opens with John the Baptist saying: "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord." (*John 1:23*)

And then Isaiah portrays the coming Messiah as a Suffering Servant and a Conquering King. And he couldn't have pictured Jesus more clearly if he'd been an eyewitness to the events! Here's a condensed portion:

He was despised and rejected by men ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ... He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich ... After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life ... he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. - *Isaiah 53:3-12 NIV condensed*

First, this was so contradictory to the prevailing thought in Isaiah's day. They pictured a triumphant warrior Messiah who would free them from their oppressors. It's the *opposite* of what a prophet would expect to say!

Second, this is so *absurdly accurate* that critics disregarded its authorship and pointed to the incomprehensible accuracy of the prophecies as proof that they had to be written *after* the facts. Isaiah was seen by many as history being *passed off* as prophecy.



That is, until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947.

Among the scrolls was only one *complete* book from the Bible: Isaiah. This is the Isaiah scroll. It's 24 feet long!

It was copied on leather about 125 to 150 years before Jesus' time, and the scroll contains all of the incomprehensibly accurate predictive prophecies about our "suffering Savior". The critics are quiet about the whole history as prophecy thing! And the astounding agreement between the Isaiah Scroll and the next oldest copy of Isaiah (1,100 years apart) demonstrates the trustworthiness of the Jewish scribes over the centuries.

Isaiah ends with the vision of the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness perfectly dwells; just as the N.T. closes with the same view in Revelation 21.

Toward the end of the book, Isaiah quotes the Messiah. And when Jesus *began* his ministry he stood in the synagogue to read:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [Isaiah 61:1-2] Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." - Luke 4:17-21 NIV

I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, but my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty, and I have been convicted, I have confessed, and I have been cleansed!