

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



TOMORROW IS SPOKEN FOR

AN INTRODUCTION TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

What an accomplishment! We've moved through the Historical Books, then through the Poetical Books, and now we have made it to the Prophetical Books. In this chapter, we will grapple with the Book of Isaiah, but for the moment, we need to deal with what it meant to be an Old Testament Prophet.

To be an Old Testament prophet meant that you were selected by God to preach His Word before the people. That is actually what the word "prophet" means— it means "One who speaks in place of another." That's what we see when we read the New Testament texts such as **2 Peter 1:21** "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Or **Hebrews 1:1** "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets..." God used these men to speak God's Word to God's people.

This is quite a different picture than many people have in their minds when they hear this word. Many only think of an individual who tells the future. And while that is included in part of their task at times, their primary function was to speak on behalf of God. That said, their job was both forth-telling (explaining God's will and ways to the people) and foretelling (explaining the future to the people).

This is actually the distinguishing characteristic of the office of Priest and the office of Prophet. In the office of the Priest, it was his job to bring the people before God. In the office of Prophet, it was His job to bring God before the people. It is this fact that usually caused those who served in this capacity to be wildly unpopular. The people were fine coming to God on their own terms and being brought before Him, but what they did not like was to be told that they were wrong.

As for the origin of this office, we touched on this fact briefly that it began with the prophet Samuel and then rapidly increased as he instituted a "School of the Prophets" as it were, whose job it was to train up and send out those men who would speak to God's people. (1 Samuel 19)

Now, obviously not all of these individuals were those who gave writings to God's people. For example, we know that Elijah was a prophet but we don't see the "Book of Elijah" and so forth. This then causes us to categorize these prophets as the "Writing Prophets" and the "Verbal Prophets" when we are attempting to discuss the prophetical books.

Another distinction to be considered in this regard is the classification of the Prophetical Books. These books are commonly identified as the Major and the Minor Prophets. We briefly went through this in the introductory material in this work, but just to clarify once again, this was not to say that one group of prophets was more important than the other. This is simply a

reference to the length of the books. The Books of Isaiah through Daniel are commonly referred to as the Major Prophets, and the books Hosea through Malachi are known as the minor prophets.

Further, it is also important to note the order in which these books are placed. The Major Prophetical Books are those that were written to God's people before going into exile (Pre-Exilic Books), and the Minor Prophetical Books are those written after God's people experienced exile (Post-Exilic Books).

Lastly, by way of introduction we need to talk about the significance of prophecy. When God's prophets were inspired of Him to write the future, understand that this is what gives the greatest and best evidence for the validity and veracity of the Bible.

John MacArthur, in his book, "Why Believe The Bible?" cites an individual by the name of "Peter W. Stoner" and this is what he wrote:

Peter W. Stoner, a scientist and mathematician, utilized what he called "the principle of probability." This principle holds that if the chance of one thing happening is one in M and the chance of another thing happening is one in N, the chance that they both shall happen is one in M x N. This equation is used in fixing insurance rates. Stoner asked 600 of his students to apply the principle of probability to the biblical prophecy of the destruction of Tyre (see Ezek. 26:3-16), which claims seven definite events:

1. Nebuchadnezzar would take the city.
2. Other nations would help fulfill the prophecy.
3. Tyre would be flattened like the top of a rock.
4. The city would become a place where fishermen spread their nets.
5. Tyre's stones and timbers would be laid in the sea.
6. Other cities would have great fear because of Tyre's fall.
7. The old city of Tyre would never be rebuilt.

Using the principle of probability in a conservative manner, the students estimated the chances of all seven events occurring as described at one in 400 million, yet all seven did occur. Stoner's students did a similar study on the prophecy that predicted the fall of Babylon (see Isa. 13:19). They estimated the chances of the Babylon prophecies occurring at one in 100 billion, but everything stated did come to pass."

And there are literally hundreds of other prophecies just like these mentioned that are fulfilled to complete perfection. Much of the future written from these prophets of Old was the writing of the Messiah. What is even more incredible to think about is the fact that some of these prophets had no idea what they were even writing. This is what adds so greatly to our assurance of Jesus' second coming; because of all of the fulfilled prophecies that revealed themselves to be true and accurate for His first coming.

ISAIAH

Now, since we've covered in large part the purpose of the prophets, let's get into the history and message of Isaiah.

Isaiah was a prophet, and very bold, who served God during the 8th century B.C. (written around 700 to 681 B.C.) and was a diplomat of sorts. He was a highly educated statesman and came from a very prominent Jewish family which explains his ease in entering into certain circles of the Higher Jewish aristocratic atmospheres. He even displayed ease in entering into the courts of the kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah under whom he served during his ministry.

The name of Isaiah means the Salvation of Jehovah. God used this man to speak to God's people regarding the impending judgment on God's people, but by the end of Isaiah's ministry a new message was heralded— the message of how God would in fact save His people.

Another interesting fact about the book of Isaiah is that the prophecies were so specific, and the writing style so dramatic in terms of its presentation in different portions of the book, that in the past this work has been called the “Deutero” book. In other words, those attempting to critically analyze the book found certain portions so drastic that they said the only way to reconcile this was to attribute the authorship of this book to two different authors. It has been said that Isaiah wrote the first half of the book and an unknown author wrote the second half.

Now, this has been very much discredited in more recent times, however, this information is given simply to illustrate once again the veracity of God’s Word and the lengths critics go to in order to discredit the Bible from being anything other than a supernatural work.

How to Think About Isaiah

As was mentioned previously, the book of Isaiah can easily be broken up into two different sections.

The Cry of Condemnation (Chapters 1-35): This section consists of the first 39 chapters and tells us why Isaiah began to be hated. The people, especially those in power, began to hold an extreme dislike for Isaiah and the message he carried. This is why:

The Cry Against Judah (Chapters 1-12)— In this section Isaiah talks about “The Day of the LORD” which was a term of the wrath that God would eventually pour out on His people. Then, Isaiah begins this explanation of why God would cause judgment upon his people with the parable of the Vineyard that produced wild grapes even though only the best provisions were made for their growth. And lastly, in this section Isaiah explains his commission as a prophet and gives the specific prophecies regarding the downfall of the kingdom.

The Cry Against the Nations (Chapters 13-23): Here we see that the enemies of Israel are spoken against. The nations of Babylon, Assyria, Philistine, Moab, Damascus, Samaria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Tyre are directly warned in this section. Further, Jerusalem is specifically mentioned and warned along with these other nations, and yet another reference to the “Day of the LORD” is given here as well.

The Cry Against the World (Chapters 24-35): It is in these chapters you find several “woe” oracles against the nations of the world. A “woe” oracle is that phrase that always indicates death. And for this phrase to be repeated to the nations of the world is an indication that death would be upon them.

History Break (Chapters 36-39): After the above prophecies, there is a brief interlude that occurs which details King Hezekiah having to deal with the Assyrian army. Here you learn about this godly king, but also his foolish mistakes in dealing with this threat. Eventually you read of the Assyrian army being decimated by God and at this point in history, God preserving His people.

The Coming of Consolation (Chapters 40-66): The entire tone of Isaiah’s message begins to change right here. Just as previously discussed, this section is why some have tried to push the idea that there was a second author. However, as with all polarized subjects, the tone of a message is certainly going to be drastically different when the content and subject matter are drastically different. Such is the case here when first speaking about judgment, and then moving to the subject of salvation.

The Plan of God (Chapters 40-48): Here we have a detail that God will ultimately deliver His people after their captivity and inside of this explanation, we begin to see a revelation regarding God’s Servant, who will bring about an ultimate restoration.

The Provision of God (Chapters 49-57): God then explains a little bit more to Isaiah about this One whom God would send to bring about salvation. Here we read of the very purpose and job task of the Messiah when He came.

The Preeminence of God (Chapters 58-66): These chapters all have to do with the glory of God and how God would ultimately restore Israel.

What to Look for in Isaiah

The book of Isaiah has been called the Grand Canyon of the Bible, a miniature Bible, and the greatest of all the prophetic writings. Out of all of the Old Testament references and quotes found in the New Testament, the book of Isaiah is referred to the most. That said, this fact actually leads us to what we should be looking for in this book. True enough, there are phrases and words that will begin to surface. However, what you really should notice is the continual push towards the Messiah, which then leads us directly to the New Testament. Here are a few.

New Testament References—

The Virgin Birth: In Isaiah 7 you can read a detailed account of the virgin birth and exactly how the Anointed One would be brought into the world.

Cries from the Wilderness: If you remember a situation in the New Testament that sounds similar to this, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). That was exactly the job of John the Baptist. He was the one crying out in the wilderness to point out the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfinished Business: In Luke 4:17-20 we find an interesting situation. It was custom for Rabbis to be invited to speak at the different Synagogues when they were in town, and as Jesus was back in His hometown, evidently He was invited to speak. Once He was delivered a text, Jesus read these words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath appointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Those words are taken directly out of Isaiah 61 and Jesus stopped mid-sentence in verse 2. Why? Because the first part of what was preached had to do with his first coming— and this had been fulfilled. The second part of the verse had to do with His second coming.

Specifics of the Crucifixion: In Isaiah 52 and 53 you find a very detailed account of Jesus’ death and suffering and why it was necessary.

Salvation of the Savior: Further, in the above chapters we find that God is sending Christ to save us all from condemnation.

What to Gain from Isaiah

Remarkable Preaching: To restate what has been mentioned, Isaiah was a particularly bold preacher. If God wanted Isaiah to speak it, there was no running, there was no hesitation, there was only action.

Actually, tradition holds that Isaiah was actually one who died for his faith. It is said that his death was sentenced by the order of an evil king by the name of Manasseh and that Isaiah, knowing of this order, attempted to hide in the hollow of a tree. However, the story continues that the king’s men discovered this location and cut the tree down with Isaiah still inside. Some scholars believe that when Hebrews 11:37 speaks about some of God’s people being “sawn asunder” it was this situation to which the author was referring.

Whether or not this is the case, it is certainly a fact that Isaiah never hid from his calling.

This is the high calling of all of God's people. To be bold in our faith no matter the political atmosphere.

Remarkable Predictions: The mention of every prediction contained in the book of Isaiah is beyond the scope of this work, but if you dig in a little deeper, you will find rich and full prophecies throughout this book. Once again, this provides hope and assurance as we look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remarkable Presentation: It is intensely amazing when we compare Jesus' life and death with the explanation found in Isaiah. There is more written on the crucifixion here than in the actual Gospel Records. It is here where you find that Jesus will be virgin-born. It is here where you find His mission as the Suffering Servant. It is here where you find His rule as the Conquering King. And it is here where you find our response to the hope of the Messiah, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).



THE FOLLOWING RESOURCE IS OWNED BY LAKE WORTH BAPTIST CHURCH AND IS FREE FOR PERSONAL USE.
PLEASE DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE THE MATERIALS WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR.

WWW.LAKEWORTHBAPTIST.ORG