

## Who was Isaiah in the Bible?

Isaiah, whose name means “Yahweh is salvation,” is best known for writing the book that bears his name in the Old Testament. His writings are especially significant for the prophecies he made about the coming Messiah, hundreds of years before Jesus was born (Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7, 11:2-4; 53:4-7, 9, 12). Matthew quotes Isaiah when describing John the Baptist’s ministry (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3), and when Jesus moved to Galilee to start His ministry, Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled (Matthew 4:13-16; Isaiah 9:1-2). Jesus quotes Isaiah’s prophecy when speaking in parables (Isaiah 6:9; Matthew 13:14-15), and the apostle Paul also makes reference to the same prophecy when he is in Rome (Acts 28:26-27). When Jesus reads from Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2) in the synagogue at Nazareth, He amazes many of the Jews by claiming the prophecy is fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:16-21). It is also interesting to note that the Gospels quote more from Isaiah’s writings than from any other of the Old Testament prophets.

Little is written about Isaiah the man. We know that he was the son of Amoz and that he married and had sons of his own (Isaiah 1:1; 7:3; 8:3). Though Isaiah’s recognition as a great prophet is indicated in the books of the Kings and Chronicles, it is also probable that he was a priest, as his calling from God took place in the temple (Isaiah 6:4), an area reserved only for priests. The anointing he receives at his calling is similar to that of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 6:7).

Along with his contemporary, the prophet Micah, Isaiah served the southern kingdom of Judah under the reigns of four kings. At the time of Isaiah’s ministry, Judah was a sinful and unjust nation. Nevertheless, Isaiah believed that Judah was God’s chosen nation and they would be vindicated by God. With support from Micah and the godly King Hezekiah, their enemies were held at bay and a revival swept through the nation of Judah

(2 Kings 19:32-36; 2 Chronicles 32:20-23). Many commentators describe Isaiah as Judah's evangelist because he worked tirelessly to turn the people back to God.

There were many highs and lows in Isaiah's life. His faithfulness to God was rewarded with some amazing miracles. In answer to Isaiah's prayer, God moved the sun back ten steps as a sign to King Hezekiah that God would add a further 15 years to Hezekiah's life (2 Kings 20:8-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24). Yet Isaiah spent three years stripped naked and barefoot, in obedience to God, as a "sign and wonder" against the Egyptians (Isaiah 20:2-4). His contemporary, Micah, did likewise (Micah 1:8), though we are not told for how long.

It is in examining a man's heart that we can learn what kind of a man he is, and Jesus said it is from the overflow of a man's heart that he speaks (Matthew 12:34). It is from Isaiah's writings that we learn of his unwavering faithfulness and his complete humility before God. He also had great respect from King Hezekiah's court and his peers, which was evident in times of crisis. Some of the world's greatest art works, music and poetry have come from men who walked closely with God, and we can count Isaiah among them. His grasp of the Hebrew language has been likened to that of Shakespeare's English, as we read in Isaiah some of the most beautiful writings in the Bible. Though the book of Isaiah was written over 2,500 years ago, it is well worth reading through the entire book, because in it we see much wisdom that still applies to our Christian lives today.

It appears that Isaiah was a very private man. When we meet some of today's renowned speakers face to face, we may be disappointed to find they appear somewhat aloof. However, as with Isaiah, we can learn that their ministry is all about pointing people to God, not to themselves. And despite his reticence, Isaiah's prominence is in the

effect his ministry had on the people. In these last days, we need to make every word we speak count for the kingdom. And from Isaiah's lifestyle we learn that, when God accomplishes a part of His plan through us, we must ensure that all the glory goes to Him.

In addition, it appears Isaiah's ministry was characterized by closeness with other godly men, like Micah and King Hezekiah. Going it alone can often leave us vulnerable, but when we are united by God's Holy Spirit to other members of the body of Christ through fellowship and prayer, our ministry is more effective by virtue of the protection others provide.