

How did Isaiah die?

The Bible does not disclose how the prophet Isaiah died, but Hebrews 11 may offer a clue. This chapter, often referred to as the “hall of faith,” presents an extraordinary list of Old Testament champions of faith, including a description of several anonymous martyrs and persecuted saints. Hebrews 11:37 states, “Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword” (NLT). According to some extrabiblical sources, one of those unnamed persons sawed in half was Isaiah the prophet.

Isaiah, whose name means “the Lord is salvation,” is the masterful author of the book of Isaiah. His 55-to-60-year prophetic ministry presented the hope of salvation to the people of Judah in the reigns of the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Ancient Jewish-Christian tradition suggests that Isaiah was martyred by King Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. According to the tradition, Isaiah was tied inside a sack, placed within the hollow of a tree trunk, and then sawed in two. This story traces back to a first-century, noncanonical book called the Ascension of Isaiah, which claims to tell the story of Isaiah’s death.

According to the account in the Ascension of Isaiah, Isaiah prophesies that King Hezekiah’s wicked son, Manasseh, will torture and kill him and renounce the commands and precepts that Hezekiah had previously delivered. After Hezekiah’s death, King Manasseh devotes himself to serving Satan, and Isaiah flees to the mountains of Bethlehem along with Ananias, Joel, Habakkuk, and other faithful servants of God. Belchira, a kind of middleman between Satan and the ungodly lovers of the world, accuses Isaiah of stirring up trouble against Manasseh. Belchira, motivated by Satan, hates Isaiah because of his significant prophecies of salvation through the coming Messiah. Manasseh has Isaiah

arrested and then cut in half with a wooden saw.

The legend contained in the Ascension of Isaiah influenced other early Jewish and Christian writings. According to the Talmud, a collection of Jewish texts that record the oral tradition of the early rabbis, Isaiah hid inside a cedar tree and then was sawed in two by King Manasseh.

Tertullian and early Christian apologist Justin Martyr both mentioned the legend of Isaiah's death in their writings, with Justin Martyr specifying that the saw used to execute Isaiah was made of wood (Dialogue with Trypho, 120). Bible scholar and philosopher Origen of Alexandria also upheld this traditional view of Isaiah's death in his writings and offered various justifications for it.

While it's certainly possible that Isaiah, the exquisitely faithful prince of prophets, died as the ancient legend specifies, there is no way to know for sure. The Bible does not give us any evidence that Isaiah lived into the reign of King Manasseh, nor does it tell us what year Isaiah died or how he died.