

The Prophecies of Isaiah

Commentary for October 1, 2011 — Future Witnesses

The Book of Isaiah is the first of the major prophetic books in the Old Testament. It is again the subject of Dr. Martin's article this month "Isaiah, Part 2." Read the "[October 2011 Newsletter](#)" before you read the article.

Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls

A new endeavor has gone online. It is the "[The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls](#)," a project of The Israel Museum in Jerusalem and several universities and companies. As the website states:

"The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) is one of the original seven Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran in 1947. It is the largest (734 cm) and best preserved of all the biblical scrolls, and the only one that is almost complete. The 54 columns contain all 66 chapters of the Hebrew version of the biblical Book of Isaiah. Dating from ca. 125 BCE, it is also one of the oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some one thousand years older than the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible known to us before the scrolls' discovery."

*["The Great Isaiah Scroll,"](#) **underlining mine***

I encourage all who have internet capability to click the two links above. Look at the websites, and in particular view the "Great Isaiah Scroll" which is a digital reproduction of a handwritten copy penned over 2,100 years ago. Its state of preservation is remarkable as you will see. The letters and words are clear and easily readable for those who read Hebrew. The website gives one the ability to make the size of the letters larger, which is very useful. I believe God has given us this preserved copy of Isaiah as a sort of witness. I wish there were many others! Perhaps God will have them uncovered in the future.

Witnesses to Various Stages of Prophecy

Consider the far future: for each prophecy that God gives there are at least three periods when human beings will be witnesses to God's work through prophecy. Then they will be without excuse regarding a prophecy:

First is when the prophecy is given. Those receiving it have no excuse for not hearing or reading it.

Second is at the time the prophecy comes to pass. Those living and observing will have no excuse for not heeding the prophecy as it is fulfilled before their eyes.¹

¹ People are responsible even if God blinds their understanding. God most always uses simple words that are easily understandable. Those who witnessed events regarding Jesus in New Testament times (believers and non-believers) were accountable to understand the prophecies of the Messiah's death even though they were obscured. Even the disciples and apostles of Jesus did not understand the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies until He explained them.

Third is after the fulfillment of the prophecy. Those reading the prophecy and reading how it was fulfilled will have no excuse for not acknowledging God's role in bringing that prophecy to pass. They will be witnesses to their disregard of God's Word.

In the period of the Great White Throne judgment, those who lived during the various time periods of a prophecy will be witnesses to each other about [1] the prophecy being given, [2] its fulfillment, and [3] those reading long afterward about the prophecy and fulfillment. People will compare experiences with each other about their lives and what they knew about God, His Word, and His prophecies during their life. Most will have known next to nothing (just as you did before God informed you that you were saved through Christ).

For example, pre-flood people resurrected to physical life for judgment, education, and punishment, will read about and understand God's hand in later events throughout history when they are properly explained. People in our time will give witness that God's Word was always available to them.

A Short Outline

In "Skeletal Outline of the Book of Isaiah" in Dr. Martin's article "[Introduction to Isaiah](#)," I presented two outlines of Isaiah. Here is another short outline with useful information:

- "(1) The first 35 chapters, almost wholly prophetic, Israel's enemy Assyria, present the Messiah as a mighty Ruler and King.**
- (2) Four chapters are historical (36–39) relating to the times of Hezekiah.**
- (3) Prophetical (40–66) Israel's enemy Babylon, describing the Messiah as a suffering victim, meek and lowly."**

"Isaiah, Book of," in Easton Bible Dictionary, Third Edition, 1897

So, on one level Isaiah has a simple "prophecy/history/prophecy" structure to it.² The historic portion of Isaiah is interesting because Isaiah chapters 36–39 coordinate with portions of 2 Kings chapters 18–20 and 2 Chronicles chapter 32, about God destroying the Assyrian army.

Anyone reading the Old Testament in the correct manuscript order would first read about God's destruction of the Assyrian army in the Second Kings portion, then the Isaiah portion, and finally in Second Chronicles, the last book of the Old Testament. Each instance informs the other with different or more information.

God chose to tell us about this historical event in three portions of His Word instead of two. This calls to mind what was a well-known practice from the time of Moses, that two or three witnesses establish a matter (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28). This was true not just in a legal sense, but also in the sense of witnessing historical evidence as well (Matthew 18:20; John 8:16–18). This two or three witness of biblical evidence occurs very often with biblical texts.

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² Of course, there is history in the prophetic portions, and a bit of prophecy in the historic portion.