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Isaiah: Shakespeare of the prophets

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Isaiah

Shakespeare of the Prophets

by Harold L. Willmington

rom the revolt of Satan to the ¶ rule of the Saviour—all is told by Scripture's most eloquent prophet, Isaiah. He was the Shakespeare of the prophets and the Paul of the Old Testament.

Isaiah has more to say about the greatness of God (40,43), the horrors of the Tribulation (24), the wonders of the Millennium (35), and the ministry of Christ (53) than any other book in the Bible. Isaiah 53 is probably the most important and far-reaching chapter in the Old Testament, as it is quoted from or alluded to 85 times in the New Testament. Jesus said that Isaiah saw His glory and spoke of Him (John 12:41). This book is an extended commentary on Jonah 2:9, when that prophet exclaimed from the fish's belly, "Salvation is of the Lord." The word salvation appears 33 times in the writing of the prophets, and of these, 26 instances occur in Isaiah.

The Book of Isaiah is easily compared to the Bible. The Bible has 66 books; Isaiah has 66 chapters. The Old Testament has 39 books; the first section of Isaiah has 39 chapters. The New Testament has 27 books; the last section of Isaiah has 27 chapters. The Old Testament covers the history and sin of Israel, as does Isaiah 1-39. The New Testament describes the person and ministry of Christ, as does Isaiah 40-66.

The New Testament begins with the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-3); the second section in Isaiah begins by predicting this ministry (Isa. 40:3-5). The New Testament ends by referring to the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-3); Isaiah ends his book by describing the same things (Isa. 66:22).

Isaiah is the only book in the Bible to mention and describe a company of angels known as the seraphim (6:1-8). This remarkable section not only provides us with a glimpse into heaven but also illustrates an aspect of the ministry angels perform for believers (cf. Isa. 6:6-7 with Heb. 1:14).

Finally, upon viewing the holiness of God in this heavenly vision, Isaiah is made aware of his own uncleanness (6:5), and upon being cleansed, dedicates himself anew to God's work (6:8). Isaiah is one of the two Old Testament books describing the pre-Fall existence of Satan (cf. Isa. 14:12-17 with Ezek. 28:11-19).

Isaiah is the fifth longest book in the Bible, with 66 chapters, 1,292 verses, and 37,044 words. It is quoted from or alluded to 472 times by 23 New Testament books. It contains the only Old Testament prophecy concerning the Virgin Birth of Christ (cf. Isa. 7:14 with Matt. 1:21-23).

Isaiah provides a review of history's most ancient event, the fall of Satan (14:12-17) and a preview of the future's most far-reaching event, the creation of the new heavens and earth (66:22). It also contains one of the Old Testament's clearest statements on the Trinity (48:16), and one of the Old Testament's most remarkable and precise prophecies about an individual. The Persian King Cyrus and his decree are both mentioned by Isaiah 150 years before Cyrus was even born! (See Isa. 44:28; 45:1.)

This marvelous manuscript has been almost universally regarded as the greatest and grandest treatise on the greatest subject in the history of writing-Christ and His salvation. Its importance and sheer eloquence simply cannot be overstated.

Adapted from Willmington's Visualized Study Bible, ©1984 Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.