

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

Harry A. Ironside, Litt.D.

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FOREWORD AND INTRODUCTION

For several years Dr. H. A. Ironside had it on his heart to write an exposition of the Book of Isaiah. His extremely busy preaching and teaching schedule, and later his failing sight, seemed to prevent his making headway on the exposition. Then, when he had progressed part way in this work, the Lord took him to be with Himself. It seemed as if the planned volume were doomed to be left uncompleted.

But God had planned otherwise. Surely the events that transpired to produce this volume are of God. We have asked Mrs. Ironside to tell a little about the way this exposition on Isaiah has come to fulfillment, believing that readers of this volume will be thrilled, as we were, to see how God arranges men's affairs so that their work for Him can never be thwarted.

In December 1949, Dr. Ironside gave lectures on the Book of Isaiah at Dallas Theological Seminary. One of the students, Ray C. Stedman, made wire recordings of the classroom lectures.

Mr. Stedman also did a great deal of secretarial work for Dr. Ironside during his stay at the seminary. He was so efficient and helpful that Dr. Ironside asked him if he would be willing to travel with us during the summer, and help with the writing of his exposition of the Book of Isaiah, which had long been delayed on account of his failing sight.

Mr. Stedman joined us in June 1950, after his graduation from the seminary, and for two months served not only as chauffeur, secretary, and companion, but as a "**brother beloved**" was so helpful in all the varied activities of the itinerant ministry that we came to love him as a son. Without his help and cooperation the publication of Dr. Ironside's "*Isaiah*" would have been impossible.

Traveling constantly, Dr. Ironside's reference library consisted of M. A. Vine's *Isaiah - Prophecies, Promises, and Warnings*; F. C. Jennings' *Isaiah*; a one-volume Bible encyclopedia; and J. N. Darby's *New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

As Dr. Ironside was unable to read at all during this time, except with the aid of a powerful magnifying glass, his method of working under this handicap may be of interest. Mr. Stedman writes:

“In general our procedure was as follows: I would read to him the portion chosen for comment, out of the Authorized Version - a portion which had previously been read to him and over which he had been meditating. He would take a moment or two to gather his thoughts and then would begin dictating, seldom pausing for rephrasing or changes. I would then read the next section and he would dictate on that until an entire chapter had been covered.

After that I would read through the next chapter, usually from Darby’s “*New Translation*” and also the corresponding portion from Jennings and Vine. This would form the basis for his meditation in preparation for the next day’s dictation.

“Occasionally we would discuss interesting sections of the chapters together and he would ask me to look up certain words in a one-volume Bible encyclopedia he carried. I was always amazed at the way he kept his comments from simply being a “rehash” of Vine and Jennings, but always managed to bring out some interesting sidelight which the others had overlooked.”

When Mr. Stedman left us to go to the pastorate of the Peninsula Bible Fellowship at Palo Alto, California, the first thirty-five chapters of Isaiah were completed and typed.

After the operation on Dr. Ironside’s eyes in September 1950, which entirely restored his sight, he edited the manuscript and left it with Loizeaux Brothers before our departure for New Zealand. Chapters 35-39 were written by Dr. Ironside in his characteristic scrawl during December 1950 and were copied in longhand by his wife, who was his only secretary on the trip.

When he went to be with the Lord from Rotorna, New Zealand, on January 15, 1951, he had only completed chapter 39.

As to chapters 40-66, Ray Stedman writes: “I had taken them on wire recordings at the time of his lectures in Dallas. Unfortunately, I did not have enough wire to take the whole series. I did record the early chapters, too, but had to wipe them off and use that same wire for the later chapters, which I saved. Upon the request of one of the students, I copied off on Soundsciber discs the entire series from chapter 40 on. It was these discs which were sent Loizeaux Brothers for transcription . . . It certainly was the hand of the Lord that I should have retained the lectures beginning with the very one where Dr. Ironside left off and that they should be on Soundsciber discs, ready for immediate transcription. The wire originals are a precious heritage to me, and have already proven of wide blessing wherever they have been played.”

Chapters 40-66, after having been transcribed from the Soundsciber discs, have been edited by Miss Emily Farmer, who edited in the past, most of Dr. Ironside’s manuscripts when his works were being prepared for publication. We are most grateful for her careful and efficient work as unto the Lord.

It has been a joy to each of us to have a part in the publication of this book. May God continue to bless the written ministry of “H.A.I.,” who, being dead, yet speaketh.

Ann Hightower Ironside
Thomaston, Georgia, 1952

Publishers' Note: Miss Emily Farmer came to Loizeaux Brothers from Colchester, England, in 1907. From that time until her retirement in 1947 she was invaluable as an accurate proofreader and an able editor with a wide knowledge and deep appreciation of the truths of Scripture.

Dr. Scofield borrowed the services of Miss Farmer to give editorial assistance in preparing notes for the Scofield Bible in their final form. The excellence of the Scofield Bible today is attributable in no small measure to Miss Farmer's keen discernment of sound doctrine.

In her work on Dr. Ironside's *ISAIAH*, Miss Farmer has had to accomplish this while lying in her bed and it has thus been a real labor of love on her part, for which the Publishers wish to express their heartfelt thanks.

INTRODUCTION

ISAIAH'S "wild measure" has ever been a portion of God's Holy Word in which spiritually minded believers have found much to exercise their hearts and lead out their souls in glad anticipation of the coming day when Immanuel, of whom this prophet speaks, will take His great power and reign.

Longer than any other prophetic book, it contains the fullest Messianic predictions to be found in the Old Testament, testifying in no uncertain way to "**the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.**" Of late, like all other books of the Bible, it has suffered much at the hands of unbelieving and haughty critics, who have done their best to undermine the faith of the simple in the integrity and unity of the Bible, but all that is settled for those who have faith by the Lord Jesus. When here on earth He placed the seal or his divine approval upon it in its entirety. And from this book the apostles drew again and again in their ministry after the ascension of the Saviour, all by the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, giving it a place of unquestionable authority as the very word of the Lord.

Isaiah himself was a man of wealth, rank, and learning, if we may give any credence to Jewish tradition respecting him. He is supposed to be the one referred to in Hebrews 11:37, who was "**sawn asunder**" by the enraged rejecters of his prophetic ministry. If this be so, it occurred at the close of a long and honored life, for his public service extended over at least half a century. As he tells us in the opening verse, he prophesied "**in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.**" In all likelihood he did not appear in the prophetic office until the last year of Uzziah's long reign (Isaiah 6:1).

Chapter six records his divine commission, and it is questionable if he had uttered the burdens of the previous chapters ere the vision there portrayed, which took place "**in the year that King Uzziah died**": that is, not necessarily after he died but in the same year as that solemn event. We know he continued to give forth the word of the Lord later than the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, for it was then that he was commissioned to make known to the stricken monarch that fifteen years were to be added to his life. He was, therefore, contemporary with Hosea throughout, and possibly with Amos for a very brief season, though it is more likely the herdsman-prophet had passed off the scene before Isaiah began to make known the mind of God.

Micah also held the prophetic office during the reigns of the last three kings mentioned. So Isaiah would be the chief among a goodly little company, who had the secret of the Lord in a day when formalism and hypocrisy largely prevailed.

That there was but one Isaiah, not two, is evident from the testimony given by the inspired writer of the Gospel of Luke. He tells us that on the occasion of the Lord's first public visit to the synagogue at Nazareth, "**there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias,**" (not of "the great unknown"), and from it He preached His gospel of deliverance to the captives and the acceptable year of the Lord. The glorious predictions of Isaiah 61:1,2 the Lord cited as inspired Scripture and written by Isaiah, not as the writing of an unknown poet of the Maccabean or a later period.

The book as it stands bears every evidence of being preserved in its divinely arranged order. It is only unbelieving ignorance coupled with amazing egotism, that could lead any to think to rearrange and dissect it in the manner of modern critics, of which George Adam Smith's "**Isaiah**" in the Expositor's Bible series is the most commonly known specimen. It is a virtual denial of inspiration and a biased attempt to destroy the true prophetic character of the Messianic portions of this magnificent "golden prophecy."

Unbelief finds difficulties where faith bows with adoring reverence. As I write not for skeptics, but for those who truly know Christ whose sufferings and glories Isaiah foretold, I shall pay but slight attention to the objections of those unbelieving, natural men, albeit distinguished in the world of letters and in the Christless religious circles of the day.

Many professing Christians pay little or no attention to the prophetic word, but in neglecting that which formed so large a part of the Holy Scriptures, they wrong their own souls and dishonor Him who gave His Word for our edification and comfort. The real value of prophecy is that it occupies us with a Person, not merely with events. That Person is our Lord Jesus Christ who came once to suffer and is coming again to reign. Of both these advents Isaiah treats, and that In a way more plain and full than do any of the other Old Testament seers.

It should be borne in mind, however, that prophecy is not simply the foretelling of future events, but is rather the *forth-telling* of the mind of God for the moment. When both the priesthood and the monarchy had failed completely in Israel and Judah, God continued to minister to His people through the prophets. These were men to whom special insight was given into holy things, and who were sent of God to call an erring people to repentance.

It was their responsibility to put before the people not only the coming glories into which they were to enter in Messiah's day, but also to impress upon them the necessity of preparing the way of the Lord by turning from sin to righteousness, and from their idolatrous vanities to the living God who had so wonderfully manifested His power on their behalf throughout Israel's history.

Those who are interested in the curious things of Scripture have noticed long since that Isaiah, in one sense, comprises a miniature Bible. The Bible consists of sixty-six books: Isaiah has sixty-six chapters. The Bible is divided into two Testaments, Old and New.

Isaiah is also divided into two parts, the first having to do largely with Israel's past condition and the promise of Messiah's coming, and the second dealing particularly with their future deliverance. The Old Testament has thirty-nine books: the first half of Isaiah has thirty-nine chapters. The New Testament has twenty-seven books: the second part of Isaiah has twenty-seven chapters. This, of course, is a mere coincidence because it was not the Spirit of God but human editors who divided the book in this way; nevertheless it is interesting and quite suggestive when we realize that Isaiah deals in a very definite way with that which is the outstanding theme of all the Scriptures - God's salvation as revealed in His blessed Son.

There are many things in the writings of Isaiah which are perhaps beyond our present comprehension even as they were beyond the comprehension of the writer himself. Like the other prophets, Isaiah wrote at the command of the Lord, and then searched his own scriptures, the scriptures then available, as to what manner of time the Spirit of Christ that was in him did prophesy when he testified beforehand concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow.

The portions that deal with the sufferings of Christ which took place at His first advent have become amazingly clear in the light of the New Testament Gospels. Those that have to do with the glories that shall follow at His second advent, while linked with all prophecy as to that glorious advent, will never be fully understood until the day of fulfillment arrives. Even though at times, as we study this book, we may seem to see through a glass darkly, we may be assured of real blessing as we weigh carefully before God that which He commissioned Isaiah to proclaim.

The divisions of the book would seem to be as follows.

There are three great divisions, though these again readily subdivide:

Part I is chiefly ministry to the conscience of Israel and Judah, suffering under God's hand in government, with Messiah's coming as the goal of blessing before them. It consists of chapters one to thirty-five, and is an orderly, connected series of messages or burdens, evidently uttered by Isaiah before the illness of Hezekiah.

Part II is historical, though of a prophetic, and typical character, showing how, for Judah, all blessing is bound up with a Son of David who goes down to death but is raised up by omnipotent power. It consists of chapters thirty-six to thirty-nine, and is almost identical with II Kings 18:13 to 20:19, and also as to the main points with II Chronicles 32. Isaiah himself doubtless was the recorder of the portion of the book of Kings written during his ministry, and by divine direction he introduces the parts specified into the book bearing his name.

Part III concludes the prophecy, embracing chapters forty to sixty-six. It sets forth the utter failure of the first man and the bringing in of the Second, the Lord from Heaven. Israel as the servant of God is shown to be unfaithful in every particular and is set aside that the True Servant, the Elect of the Lord, may be manifested.

Through Him, all God's counsels shall stand and His glory be established, and that forevermore.

Prophecy, however, does not go beyond this earth, so it is "**as long as the sun and moon endure.**" But we know from the later revelation that He, the Eternal Son of the Father, will be the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead shall be displayed forever.

With these preliminary thoughts before us, we turn then to the consideration of the book itself, assured that like all other Scriptures, we shall find it "**profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness**".

~ end of Foreword and Introduction ~

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