

*Isaiah Answers God's Call

About one hundred years after Elijah lived, another prophet named Isaiah was born. He lived during the time when the land of the Jewish people was divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Isaiah was a polished city man: he spent most of his life in the city of Jerusalem, in the southern kingdom of Judah.

During Isaiah's lifetime, the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the mighty Assyrian Empire. Isaiah told the people of Israel that their sinfulness was the reason for the attacks of enemies on their country. But he also told them that some day God would destroy their wicked enemies. He assured the people that though they were suffering, God loved them. Isaiah said that God would not let them suffer forever. He told them that God loved them, and would never stop loving them.

The Assyrians were able to defeat and destroy Israel. But they did not plan to stop there: they also attacked Judah. Isaiah's book tells us how God protected Judah by cutting down the Assyrian army. But Isaiah knew that one day Judah would also be captured. Another empire-the Babylonian empire-would rise up and become even more powerful than the Assyrians. Isaiah warned the people of Judah that the Babylonians would destroy their kingdom in the years to come. They would be driven from their homeland.

But Isaiah had a wonderful message of hope for the people, too. He said that God was allowing their enemies to injure them for a reason. God wanted His people to learn to obey Him and trust Him. One day their enemies would be destroyed. As God's obedient people, they would return to their land. Most wonderful of all, God would send a Savior to His people.

Yes, all those long years before Jesus Christ was born, Isaiah the prophet told about Him. Here are some of Isaiah's words:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;

And the government will be on his shoulder,

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 8:6.)

How did Isaiah become a prophet? Like all the prophets, he was called by God. But each prophet was called in a different way. For Isaiah, the call came in a vision he had. He saw God seated on a high throne, lifted up and surrounded by the highest angels, the seraphim. They were calling to each other and saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory."

The house where Isaiah was sitting shook, and was filled with smoke. Isaiah was filled with fear. He said, "I am lost-for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips. How can I ever stand, when I am so sinful and I have seen the King, the Lord of all?"

Then one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah, taking a burning coal from the altar. He touched Isaiah's lips with the coal and said, "Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." These same words are said by the priest at every Divine Liturgy as he receives Holy Communion at the altar. Just as Isaiah was forgiven and cleansed so that he could serve God, each priest is forgiven and cleansed so that he can serve God.

After hearing these words from the angel, the seraphim, Isaiah heard the voice of God, who said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah answered, "Send me." Then God gave Isaiah a message for the people.

For many years, Isaiah would be a great prophet. He warned the people, and often told them that God was angry with them because of their disobedience. But also, he always gave them the great message of hope-one day the Savior would come. He would show everyone how to live with. He would offer them the chance to live with God forever in His Kingdom.