

## GOD SPEAKS THROUGH ISAIAH

Isaiah was one of the prophets whom Jesus said wrote about Him. Isaiah's prophecy concerning Jesus is also amazingly accurate. Luther echoes Jesus' words when he says that Isaiah "prophesies more clearly and in more ways than any other prophet" (Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 275). Why is Luther's evaluation of Isaiah so important? First, remember that Isaiah prophesied 700 years before Jesus was born. Again, why is this so amazing? Because Isaiah writes, "Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son, and she will call His name 'Immanuel,'" (Is. 7:14).

Was Isaiah joking? On the basis of recorded history, you decide. Seven hundred years later, just as Isaiah prophesied: <sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called "Nazareth,"* <sup>27</sup> *to a virgin betrothed to a man by the name of Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.* <sup>28</sup> *When the angel entered her home, he said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."*

<sup>29</sup> *She was greatly troubled at what he said, and was wondering what kind of greeting this was.* <sup>30</sup> *The angel told her: "Stop being afraid, Mary! For you have found favour with God.* <sup>31</sup> *You see: **you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a Son, and you shall call His name 'Jesus.'**...* <sup>34</sup> *Mary asked the angel, "How will this be, since I am not living with a husband?"* <sup>35</sup> *The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the Holy One who is conceived will be called 'the Son of God.' ...* <sup>37</sup> ***For nothing will be impossible with God.***"

<sup>38</sup> *Mary answered, "Look! I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said!" Then the angel left her.*

The Old Testament is God's long, reliable record of how He showed His grace to a people who regularly failed, worshipped other gods, and even openly defied the one true God. In addition to the devil working in their hearts, the Israelites were constantly surrounded by deadly military forces.

Luther describes the setting: "*I shall briefly describe the country surrounding Jerusalem or Judah, where Isaiah lived and preached, so that they may better see whither the **prophet** turned when he **prophesied** to the south or the north, etc.*

*Toward the east the nearest thing to Jerusalem or Judah is the Dead Sea, where Sodom and Gomorrah stood in ancient times. Beyond the Dead Sea lies the land of Moab, and of the children of Ammon. Farther beyond lies Babylon, or Chaldea, and farther still the land of the Persians, of which Isaiah speaks so much.*

*Toward the north lies Mount Lebanon, and beyond it Damascus and Syria. Farther on to the northeast lies Assyria, of which Isaiah also treats a good deal.*

*Toward the west, along the Great Sea, are situated the Philistines, the worst enemies of the Jews. Along the shore to the north of them lie Sidon and Tyre, which border on Galilee.*

*Toward the south are many lands: Egypt, the land of the Moors, the Red Sea, Edom, and Midian, so situated that in this southern region Egypt lies to the west.*

*These are really the lands and the names about which Isaiah **prophesies**, the neighbours- enemies and friends - surrounding the land of Judah like wolves around a sheepfold. With some of them Judah made alliances and counter-alliances, but it did not help her at all,"* (Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 274-275).

What was Luther emphasising? When you read the Old Testament prophets, God assures you that

He will help you, even when you are faced with problems in life that seem insurmountable and completely impossible to solve. *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honour Me,”* (Psalm 50:15).

In the darkness of sin, in the midst of deadly threatening powers, how was God’s remnant within Israel able to go on? Why didn’t they simply give up? Isaiah writes: *“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them,”* (Is. 9:2).

The believers in the tiny remnant within Israel, with their God-given eyes of faith, saw the light and hope prophesied by Isaiah, *“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this,”* (Is 9:6-7).

When people travel through the desert, they see ahead what appears to be water. But what they see is only an illusion. False religions are the same. They claim to preach the light of God and hope that is eternal. But all who follow these false teachers are soon disillusioned and eventually die of spiritual thirst. *“Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light,”* (2 Cor. 11:14).

The light Isaiah spoke about; the light the Israelites could see ahead of them by faith was Jesus. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, *“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life,”* (John 8:12).

Praise God that the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the coming of the Saviour came true! The Saviour was born, and went the way of the cross for us, in fulfilment of another prophecy made by God Himself in Genesis 3:15. We celebrate Christmas with much joy, but that celebration soon turns to sorrow as we see Jesus nailed to the cross because of our sins. Isaiah also prophesied about the death of Jesus (Is. 53), but by this death many would be justified. The resurrection of Jesus proves this. God accepted the payment of His only Son.

We thank God for the prophecies made through Isaiah, and rejoice that they have been fulfilled.