

## The Vision of Isaiah

This is an apocalyptic ("visionary") work of great antiquity and unquestioned authenticity, probably dating to before the second century; it manifests early Gnostic Christian influence. It was apparently known to some early Christian writers; Jerome and Epiphanius both quote sections of the text. The Vision of Isaiah was possessed by the Bogomils in the twelfth century and had reached the Languedoc in a Latin translation by the early thirteenth century. Cathar possession and use of the Vision of Isaiah is very well attested and witnesses both their access to transmissions of early Christian writings from the East, and their identification with traditions of Christianity that had preserved and honored these writings. Cathars probably valued this text not only because it seemingly supported their theology, but also because it gives testament to a primary and Gnostic visionary experience.

The Vision of Isaiah is known to be part of a larger compilation of texts collectively called the Ascension of Isaiah. The Vision is an "ascension text" -- recounting Isaiah's visionary journey through the seven heavens to the Throne of God. It bears comparison to the Enoch and Merkabah literature of the first century (for example, compare the Merkabah vision text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls). The section in Chapter 4 speaking of the "Robe of Glory" recalls the vision of the "Robe of Glory" found in the Acts of Thomas.

Six manuscripts of The Vision of Isaiah survive in various European languages, the earliest from the twelfth century. This version of the text is based on the translation in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (2 ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 449ff. The text given here contains minor corrections, rephrasing and general reformatting of the versification.

-- Lance S. Owens

### The Vision of Isaiah

#### Chapter 1

The vision which Isaiah, the son of Amos, saw in the twentieth year of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah:

Isaiah the prophet, son of Amos, came to Hezekiah in Jerusalem; and after he had come in, he sat down upon the king's couch. And all the princes of Israel and the counselors of the king and the eunuchs stood

before him. And the prophets and the sons of prophets came from the villages and the fields and the mountains to salute him, when they learned that Isaiah had come from Gilgal, and to announce to him those things that were to come. Then as he was speaking words of truth; the Holy Spirit came upon him and all saw and heard the words of the Holy Spirit.

The king summoned the prophets, and all entered together, as many as were found there. Now there were the aged Micah and Ananiah, Joel, and as many of them as were found there, on his right hand and on the left. However, when they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit they fell to their knees and sang to the Highest God, who rests among the holy ones. Who bestowed such power of words in the world.

Now, as he was speaking in the Holy Spirit in the hearing of all, he fell silent, and thereupon they saw one standing before him. His [Isaiah's] eyes were open, yet his mouth was closed, but the inspiration of the Spirit was with him. And they did not think that Isaiah had been exalted, but the prophets recognized that it was a revelation. The vision which he saw was not of this world but of what is hidden from all flesh. And when he ceased to behold the vision, he returned to himself and recounted the vision to Hezekiah and his son Nason ... (continuing in next chapter)

## Chapter II

... And to Micah and the other prophets, saying, "When I prophesied what you heard, which you witnessed, I saw an angel, glorious not with the glory of the angels whom I have always seen, but having a particularly great glory and a light which I cannot describe.

Taking me by the hand he led me on high, and I said, 'Who are you, and what is your name, and why are you lifting me up like a bird?' -- for the ability to speak to him was given me. Then in answer he said to me, 'When I shall bear you on high I will show you the vision which is the purpose for which I have been sent; then you will know who I am, but my name you do not know, because you wish to return again to your body. And when I raise you on high hereafter you will see.'

And I rejoiced because he answered me softly. And he said to me, 'You have rejoiced because I replied gently to you, and you will see one greater than I am wishing to speak to thee; one gentler and wiser, better and sweeter; for to this end was I sent, to explain all things to thee.'

And we ascended, he and I, upon the firmament, and there I saw the great battle of Satan and his might opposing the loyal followers (honorantiae) of God, and one surpassed the other in envy. For just as it is on earth, so also is it in the firmament, because replicas of what are in the firmament are on earth.

And I said to the angel, 'What is this war and envy and struggle?' And in reply he said to me, 'This is the devil's war and he will not rest until He whom you wish to see comes to slay him with the spirit of His virtue.'

Thereafter, he raised me into that which is above the firmament, which is the first heaven. And I saw in the midst thereof a throne on which an angel was seated in great glory, and angels sat at his right and his left. Those on the right had a special glory, and they sang with one voice; and those who were on the left sang after them but their song was not like that of the ones on the right. And I questioned the angel who conducted me: 'To whom is this song raised?' And in reply he said to me, 'To the great glory of God, who is above the seventh heaven, and to His beloved Son, from whom I was sent to thee.'

And again he raised me up, into the second heaven; its height was the same as that of the first heaven above earth. And I saw there, just as in the first heaven, angels on the right and on the left. And the glory of these angels and their song were superior to those of the first heaven. And I fell on my face to adore him," and the angel, who guided me said to me, 'Adore not the angel nor the throne of this heaven. This is the reason why I was sent to guide you; adore Him only of whom I will tell you, and in like fashion adore Him who is above all angels, above thrones, and above the garments and crowns which you shall see hereafter.' And I rejoiced with exceeding great joy, for such is the consummation for those who know the Most High and Eternal and His beloved Son, because they ascend to Them as by the angel of the Holy Spirit.

And he raised me above the third heaven and in like manner I saw a small throne and angels on the right and the left. The memory of this world, however, was given no name there. But the glory of my spirit was undergoing a transformation as I ascended into heaven and I said, 'Nothing of that world is given a name here.' And in reply the angel said to me, 'Nothing is given a name on account of its weakness and nothing is hidden of the things which are done there.' And they sang a song and glorified him who was enthroned, and this angel was greater than the second angel.

And again he raised me, unto the fourth heaven. The height from the third to the fourth heaven was greater. And I saw a throne and angels on the right hand and on the left. But the glory of him who was enthroned was greater than that of the angels on the right hand and their glory likewise surpassed the glory of those who were below.

And I ascended into the fifth heaven, and there I saw innumerable angels and their glory, and their song was more glorious than that of the fourth heaven. And I marveled, beholding such a multitude of angels arrayed in the ranks of their diverse goodnesses; each, having his own glory, glorified Him who is on high (Whose name is not revealed to all flesh), because He gave so much glory to the angels who are above each heaven.

But in reply the angel said to me, 'Why are you astonished that they are not all of one appearance? You have not yet seen the insuperable virtues and the thousands and thousands of angels.'

### Chapter III

And thereafter he raised me into the air of the sixth heaven and I saw there a great glory which I had not seen in the fifth heaven. And I beheld angels in great glory. And the deeds of the virtues were honorable and pre-eminent; their song was holy and wonderful. And I said to the angel who guided me, 'What is it that I see, my lord?' And he said to me, 'I am not your lord but your counselor.'

And he spoke to me about the sixth heaven. Herein are neither throne nor angels on the left, but they receive their direction from the virtue of the seventh heaven, where dwells the mighty Son of God. And all the heavens and His angels hearken to Him, and I have been sent to bring you hither, so that you may see this glory and the Lord of all the heavens and His angels and virtues. Therefore, I say to you, Isaiah, no one who desires to return to the flesh of that world has seen what you see nor is able to see what you have seen; because it is your lot in the Lord to come here.' And I magnified the Lord in song because thus I go into His lot.

And he [the angel] said to me, 'When you shall have returned here through the will of the Father, then you will receive your garment, and then you will be equal to the angels who are in the seventh heaven.' And he led me into the sixth heaven, and neither thrones nor angels on the right and the left were there, but all had one appearance and identical song. And it was given me to sing with them; and the angel who was with me and I, myself, were even as their glory, and their glory was one. And they glorified the Father of all and His beloved Son and the Holy Spirit; all with one voice they sang, but not with a voice such as that of the fifth heaven, but with a different voice.

And there was a great light there. And when I was in the sixth heaven I thought the light of the fifth heaven to be as darkness. I rejoiced greatly and sang to Him who gave such joy to those who received His mercy. And I begged the angel who guided me never more to return into that carnal world. Moreover, I say unto you that here is much darkness.

But the angel who guided me said to me, 'Since you rejoice in this light, how much more will you rejoice and exult when you see the light of the seventh heaven, in which sits the Heavenly Father with His only begotten Son; where lie the vestments and the thrones and the crowns of the righteous. And as to your plea not to return into your flesh, the time is not yet fulfilled for your coming here.' And I sorrowed greatly at hearing these words.

#### Chapter IV

And he raised me up into the air of the seventh heaven and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Why do you who desire to live in the flesh come here?' And I was very much afraid and trembled. Again, I heard another voice saying, 'Forbid him not to, come in, since he is worthy of the glory of God, for here is his robe. And I questioned the angel who was with me, 'Who is he who forbids me, and who is he who bids me come up?'

And he said to me, 'The one who forbids is he, the angel who is above the angels singing in the sixth heaven; and He who commands is the Son of God, and His name you may not hear until you have departed from the flesh.'

When we ascended into the seventh heaven I saw' there an astounding and indescribable light and innumerable angels. And I saw certain of the righteous who, stripped of fleshly robes, were in heavenly robes and standing in great glory. But they sat not on their thrones; moreover, their crowns of glory were not upon them.

And I questioned the angel, saying, 'Why have they received robes, and why have they not received thrones and crowns of glory?' And he said to me, 'Now they receive them not, until the Son first brings here those thrones and crowns, when He shall be in your likeness.' And the prince of that world will stretch forth his hand upon the Son of God and will kill Him and hang Him on a tree, and he will kill Him not knowing who He is. And He will descend into hell and will lay it waste, with all the phantoms of hell. And He will seize the prince of death and despoil him, and crush all his powers, and will rise again on the third day; having with him certain of the righteous. And He will send His preachers into the whole world, and will ascend into heaven. Then these will receive their thrones and crowns.'

And after [he said] these words, I said to him, 'In regard to that which I asked you in the first heaven, show me, for this you promised.' And as I was addressing him, there was among those standing about us one angel, more glorious than he who conducted me and than all the angels. And he showed me a book, and opening it, gave it to me; and I saw writing which was not like that of this world. And I read it, and lo, there were the deeds of Jerusalem recorded there, and the works of all men were there, among whom also was I. I saw in truth that nothing which was done in the world was hidden in the seventh heaven.

And I questioned the angel, 'Who is this who is pre-eminent over all the angels in his glory?' And in reply to me he said, 'He is the great angel, Michael, who prays constantly for humanity and humility.' I saw many robes and thrones and crowns lying there. And I said to the angel, 'For whom are these robes and crowns and thrones reserved?' And he said to me, 'Many of that world lost these crowns, who are believers in the world of Him of whom I have spoken to you.'

And, turning about, I saw the Lord in great glory and I was most sorely afraid. And all the righteous approached Him and adored Him singing with one voice and [my] voice was like unto theirs. And Michael, approaching Him, adored and together with him all the angels adored and sang. And I was again transfigured and was like the angels.

Then the angel who conducted me said to me, 'Adore Him and sing.' And I adored Him and sang. And the angel who conducted me said to me, 'He is the Lord of all the glories which you have seen.' And I

saw another most glorious one, like unto Him in all things, and the righteous approached Him and adored Him and sang, and I sang with them and I was not transfigured into their aspect. And the angels came with them and adored Him, and I adored Him and sang.

And again, I saw the other in great glory. And while walking, I questioned the angel, 'Who is He?' And he said to me, 'Adore Him, for he is the angel of the Holy Spirit, who speaks in you , and in all the righteous.'

And after that, another indescribable and ineffable glory was revealed which I could not behold with the opened eyes of my spirit, nor could the angel who conducted me nor all the angels whom I saw adoring the Lord. But I saw the righteous only in great glory beholding [His] glory. And my Lord approached first and then the angel of the Holy Spirit (angelus spiritualis). And they adored Him and the two sang together. Then all the righteous adored Him, and with them Michael and all the angels adored and sang.

## Chapter V

Thereafter I heard a voice there and the song which I heard in the six heavens rose up and was heard in the seventh heaven. And all glorified Him whose glory I could not behold. And the song of all six heavens was not only heard but seen. And the angel said to me, 'He is the One Living Eternal, living in the highest eternity and resting among the holy ones; we cannot endure to name or see Him who is praised by the Holy Spirit in the mouths of the holy [and] righteous.'

And after that, I heard the voice of the Eternal saying to the Lord [His] Son: 'Go forth and descend from all the heavens and be in the world, and go even to the angel who is in hell; transfiguring thyself into their form. And neither the angels nor the princes of that world shall know thee. And thou shalt judge the prince of that world and his angels, and the rulers of the world, because they have denied me and said, "We are and without us there is no one." Thereafter, thou shalt not transfigure thyself as thou ascendest through the heavens in great glory, and thou wilt sit at my right hand. Then the princes and the virtues and all the angels and all the principalities of the heavens and of earth and of the lower regions will adore thee.'

And I heard the Great Glory commanding my Lord. And then the Lord went out from the seventh heaven and descended into the sixth heaven. And the angel who guided me said to me, 'Understand and see the manner of His transfiguration and descent.'

When the angels saw Him, they praised and glorified Him, for He was not transfigured into their image, and I sang with them. When He had descended into the fifth heaven, there at once He was transfigured into the form of those angels and they did not sing to Him or adore Him, for He was of a form like theirs.

And He descended into the fourth heaven and appeared to them in their form. And they did not sing to Him for He was of a form like theirs.

Moreover, He came into the third heaven," and into the second and the first, transfiguring Himself in each of them. Consequently, they did not sing to Him or adore Him, for He appeared to them in [a form] like theirs. And He showed them a sign (characterem).

Moreover, He descended into the firmament and there gave the signs (signa), and His form was like unto theirs, and they did not glorify Him and they did not sing to Him. And He descended to the angels who were in this air as though He were one of them. And He gave them no sign, nor did they sing to Him.

## Chapter VI

And after these things, the angel said to me, 'Know, Isaiah, son of Amos, this is why I was sent by God to show you all things. For no one before you has seen nor can anyone after you see what you have seen and heard.'

And I saw one like the Son of Man dwelling with men and in the world. And they did not recognize Him. And I saw Him ascending into the firmament and He was not transfigured into [their] form. And all the

angels who were above the firmament were struck with fear at the sight and, adoring, they said, 'How didst Thou descend into our midst, Lord, and we did not recognize the King of Glory?'

And He ascended into the first heaven more gloriously and did not transfigure Himself. Then all the angels adored and sang, saying, 'How didst Thou pass through our midst, Lord, and we did not see or adore Thee?'

Thus He ascended into the second heaven and into the third and into the fourth and into the fifth and into the sixth, even to all the heavens, and His glories increased. When He ascended into the seventh heaven, all the righteous sang to him, and all the angels and virtues whom I could not see.

I saw a wonderful angel sit at His left hand, who said to me: 'This suffices you, Isaiah, for you have seen what no other son of the flesh has seen, which eyes cannot see nor ears hear, nor can it rise in the heart of man, how much God has prepared for all who love Him.'

And he said to me, 'Return in your robe until the time of your days shall be fulfilled and then you shall come here.'"

Having seen these things, Isaiah spoke to those standing about him; and, hearing these wonders, all sang and glorified the Lord, who gave such grace to men.

And he said to Hezekiah the king, "The consummation of this world and works will be fulfilled in the last generations." And he forbade them to proclaim these words to the children of Israel or to give them to any man to be recorded. But how many things will be understood by the king and by the utterances in the prophets! And thus be you also in the Holy Spirit, so that you may receive your robes and thrones and crowns of glory placed in the heavens.

He ceased then to speak and went out from King Hezekiah.