

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

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ISAIAH

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Prophecies Concerning Judah and Jerusalem (1-6)

STUDY 2

The Book Of Immanuel (7-12)

STUDY 3

Prophecies Against The Nations (13-18)

STUDY 4

Prophecies Against The Nations (19-23)

STUDY 5

"The Day Of The Lord" (24-27)

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THE MAJOR PROPHETS

ISAIAH - Contains a two-fold message of condemnation (1-39), and consolation (40-66). Isaiah analyzes the sins of Judah and pronounces God's judgment on the nation. He broadens his scope to include judgment on the surrounding nations and moves to universal judgment followed by blessing. After a historical parenthesis concerning King Hezekiah, Isaiah consoles the people with a message of salvation and restoration. Jehovah is the sovereign Savior who will rescue His people.

JEREMIAH - Judah had reached the depths of moral and spiritual decay, and Jeremiah was called to the heartbreaking and unpopular ministry of declaring the certain judgment of God against the nation. Jeremiah faithfully ministered in spite of rejection and persecution, and the dreaded day finally came. Judah's defiance of God's holiness led to her downfall, but God graciously promised to establish a new covenant with His people.

LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH - A beautifully structured series of five lament poems is Judah's funeral for the fallen city of Jerusalem. After his forty years of warning, Jeremiah's awful words came true. His sorrow is obvious in his vivid descriptions of the defeat, destruction and desolation of Jerusalem.

EZEKIEL - Ezekiel ministered to the Jewish captives in Babylon before and after the fall of Jerusalem. Like Jeremiah, he had to convince the people that the city was doomed and that the captivity would not be brief. He also described the fate of Judah's foes and ended with a great apocalyptic vision of Judah's future.

DANIEL - The book of Daniel abounds with detailed prophecies and visions of the future. It outlines God's sovereign plan for the Gentile nations (2-7), and moves on to a portrait of Israel during the time of Gentile domination (8-12). At a time when the Jews had little hope, Daniel provided encouragement by revealing God's power and plans for their future.

THE KINGS OF JUDAH DURING ISAIAH'S MINISTRY

UZZIAH - Azariah - A good king; pious man, but allowed the pride of heart to overcome him - he died of leprosy.

JOTHAM - Son of Uzziah; good king, but did not remove altars to false gods; died and buried in Jerusalem.

AHAZ - Son of Jotham; evil king; worshipped idols; sacrificed his own children to false gods; "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel..." - died and buried in Jerusalem.

HEZEKIAH - Son of Ahaz; good king; "did right...after David;" removed the altars to false gods; instituted many religious reforms; repaired the Temple and made a covenant with the Lord; however, he failed when he was strong (2 Chronicles 32:26,32), became strong and prosperous once again (2 Chronicles 32:30).

STUDIES IN ISAIAH - THE STATESMAN PROPHET

THE AUTHOR: Isaiah (1:1) - the son of Amoz of the southern kingdom of Judah

Born in Jerusalem about 780 BC

Probably of an aristocratic family from his access to the royal court

Means - "Jehovah Saves"

Prophesied from 750-698 BC

Cf. Isaiah 6:1

His wife was a prophetess (8:3)

Two sons who bore prophetic names:

Shear-jashub - "a remnant shall return"

Maher-shalal-hashbaz - "the spoil speeds; the prey hastens (8:3,18)

Heads the list as the greatest of all prophets

As a statesman, he had no equal among the prophets; as a preacher of social reform, none excelled

Pre-eminently the Messianic prophet

Has been called the evangelist of the Old Testament; also called the "Paul of the Old Testament"

As was the case with the prophets, Isaiah was unpopular in his day

Prepared a biography of King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:32)

Jewish tradition has him martyred by King Manasseh (sawn into)

Contemporary with Amos and Hosea (Israel) and Micah (Judah)

Rome, Athens and Sparta were founded during his ministry (750-700 BC)

KEY VERSES: Isaiah 30:18,19

KEY WORD: "Salvation" (32 times)

KEY PHRASE: "The Holy One of Israel" (33 times)

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS: Intolerable; idolatry was rampant in both kingdoms; rituals were lifeless; religious leaders had compromised themselves; true worship of Jehovah was syncretized with pagan practices; morals and ethics were at a low ebb.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK:

One of the greatest of the prophets in splendor of intellectual endowments

Unexcelled from a literary standpoint

Style marks the high point of Hebrew literary art - no other Old Testament writer uses so many beautiful, picturesque illustrations

Written in Hebrew poetic style, except for chapters 36-39

Quoted more in the New Testament than any other Old Testament book (308X)

It is more like the New Testament in its message than any other Old Testament book

Nowhere else in the Old Testament have we such a clear view of God's grace

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK, CONTINUED

The great Isaiah scroll found in the caves of Qumram was 24 feet long and dates the 2nd century BC

Isaiah is a miniature Bible - 66 chapters and two great divisions (1-39 & 40-66)

The first section (1-39) deals with law, sin and judgment; the second section (40-66) deals with Messiah, grace, forgiveness and redemption

Isaiah is written with the power of vivid, luminous visualization of truth, extraordinary depth of emotion, intensity and majesty of utterance

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK:

To correct, reprove and admonish the Hebrews of Isaiah's day

Reveals coming judgment on the nation's heathen neighbors for evil done to God's people

Declares and explains the redemptive plan of God for Israel and all other nations

Prepares God's people for the coming Babylonian captivity

Since salvation would come only from God, no alliances should be made with neighboring nations

The book warns the people of Judah of impending doom because of their lack of faithfulness to God. There are many prophecies given to prove the deity of God. Isaiah beautifully portrays the glorious hope of the Messiah's coming.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH:

There are three clearly defined sections of the book. The first 35 chapters set forth the moral decay of the Jews and "the swift retribution to be visited upon them for their sins, and the punishment by Jehovah of the nations who afflicted His people."

Chapters 1-35

Prophetical with mainly local application

Chapters 36-39

Historical concerning Judah in Hezekiah's day

Chapters 40-66

Prophetical concerning future matters relating to Israel, Messiah and His kingdom

In the **first section**, Assyria is central with the note of condemnation. This first section sets forth the moral decay of the Jews, and "the swift retribution to be visited upon them for their sins and the punishment by Jehovah of the nations who afflicted His people.

In the **second section**, Assyrian and Babylon are central with the note of confiscation. This section forms the historical tie-in with the book of 2 Kings where Isaiah is referred to.

In the **third section**, Babylon is central with the note of consolation to Israel. The hope of restoration from Babylon burns brightly. The major emphasis in these

chapters is "Jehovah bases His entire right to rule over His people upon the exact fulfillment of the prophetic utterances."

MAIN THEOLOGICAL THEMES OF ISAIAH:

1. The over-ruling providence of God, i.e., The judgment of God (1-39); the comfort from God (40-66)
2. The ultimate redemption through the Messiah. Cf. Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1-10; 52:13-53:12.
3. The righteous remnant - the hope of Israel.
4. The new heavens and the new earth - the church.
5. The great commission - the call to all the nations.

SOME PROPHETIC SAYINGS OF ISAIAH:

1. One of the most amazing utterances of Isaiah - Cyrus who would allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem (44).
2. Prophecy concerning the establishment of the church (2)
3. Prophecies concerning the Messiah, His person, and His events:

Virgin birth (7:4) - Matthew 1:21-23

Descendant of David's seed (11:1; 22:20-22) - Matthew 1:18-20

The Chief Cornerstone (28:16; 8:14) - Matthew 21:42; 1 Peter 2:7,8

The Voice crying in the wilderness (40:3) - Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:1-5

The prophecy of Isaiah 53 - the most familiar passage about Christ

God would call His people by a new name (62,65) - Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16

Isaiah 61:1,2 - Jesus applied these passages to Himself in Luke 4:16-21.

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM ISAIAH

1. The basic issues of life are the same as they were in Isaiah's day, i.e., material strength; wealth; luxury; forgetting God; lying; killing; stealing; adultery; hate; oppression; injustice; pleasant messages; men prefer to make amends by sacrifice rather than doing right, etc.)
2. The condemnation of formalistic worship is just as much needed today as it was then - Isaiah 1:10-18.
3. Notes on evil women (Isaiah 3:16-26)

4. Some church vineyards today are just like the one Isaiah saw in Isaiah 5:1-7.
5. People serve God from the lip instead of the heart (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8,9).
6. People with “itching” ears (Isaiah 30:9,10; 2 Timothy 4:3,4)
7. God still pronounces the same woes upon the same sins (Isaiah 5).
8. The prophecies of Isaiah and the coming of the Messiah vitally connect the book with the purpose of the Bible - “The glory of God and the salvation of man through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
9. Correct worship without corresponding holy living is an insult to God (1:11-17).
10. The church was not an “after-thought” of God. Isaiah vividly described it 700 years before (2:2-4).
11. The day of Jehovah is coming - 2:12.
12. Thoughts on “strong drink” - 5:11.
13. People are destroyed for lack of knowledge - 5:13.
14. The Lord is still asking this question in 6:8.
15. The virgin did conceive and bear a son - Immanuel - 7:14.
16. Isaiah foresaw all nations worshipping together in the Christian age - 19:24,25
17. Consider Isaiah 26:3.
18. Consider 28:10.

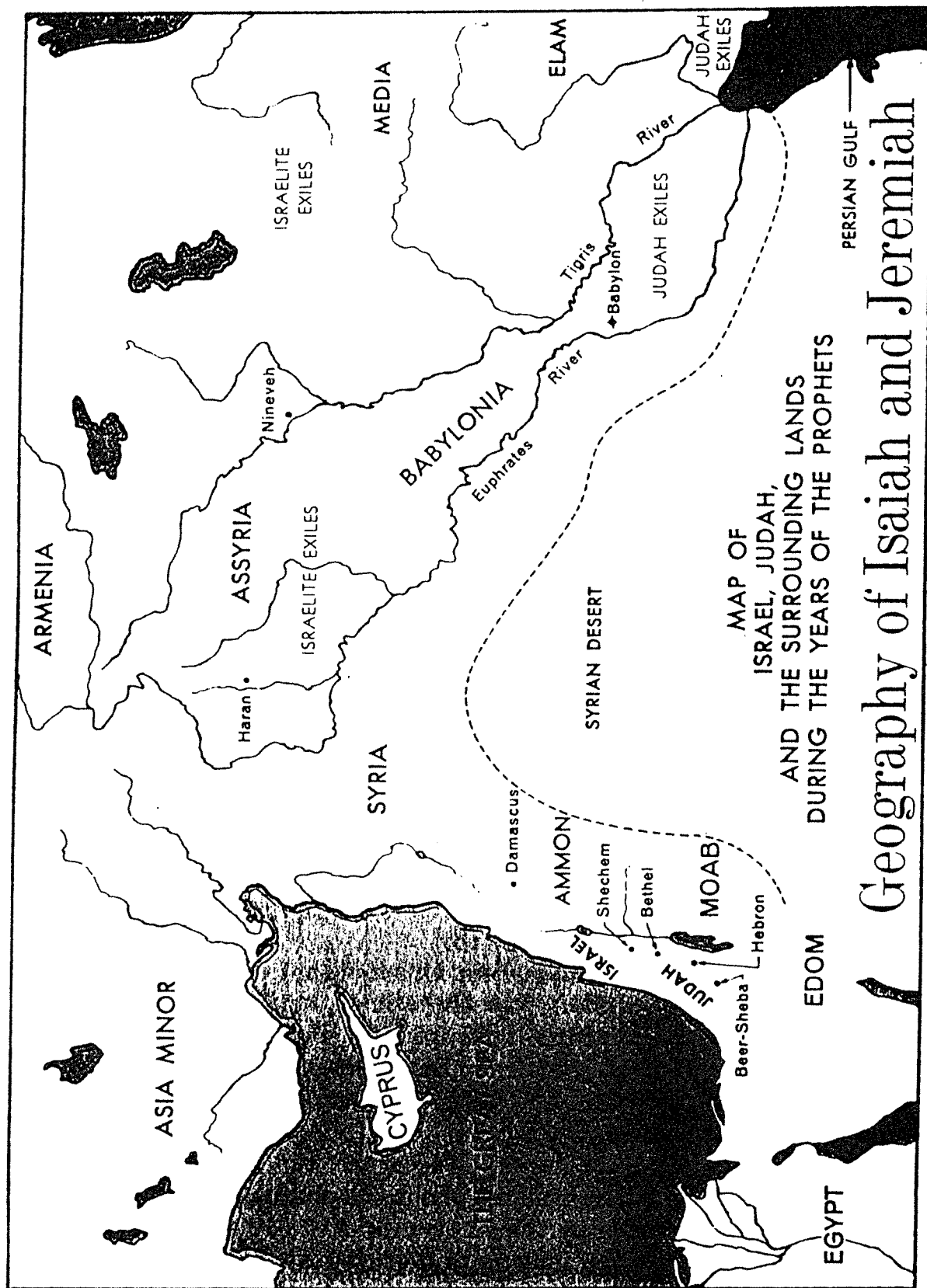
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR ISAIAH'S MINISTRY

1 Kings 15-20; 2 Chronicles 26:32

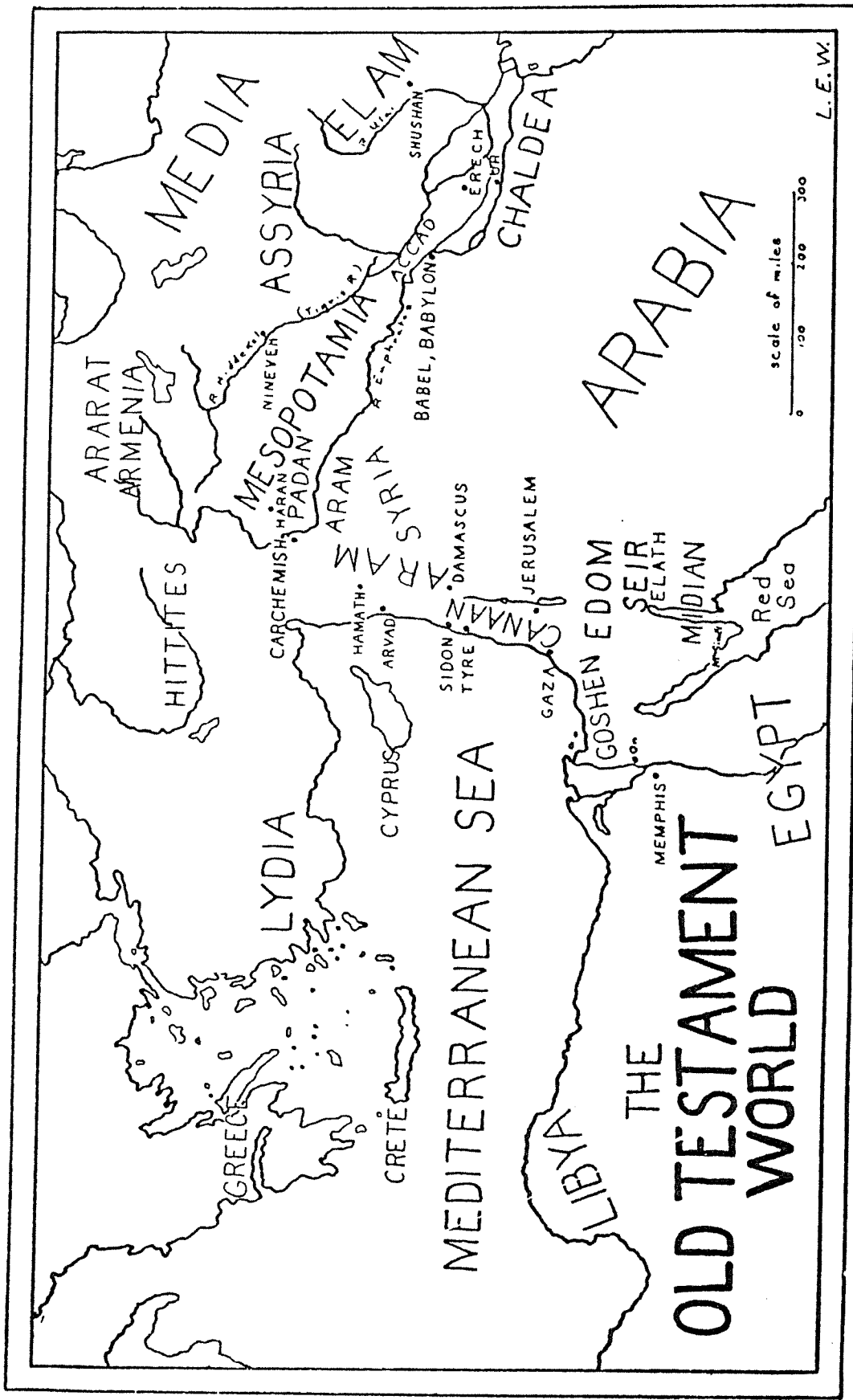
Isaiah 7:1,2	2 Kings 16:5,6
Isaiah 36	2 Kings 18:13-16
Isaiah 37	2 Kings 19
Isaiah 38	2 Kings 20
Isaiah 39	2 Kings 20:10-19
Isaiah 63:2-10	2 Kings 18:17-25

IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE STUDY OF ISAIAH

745 BC	Tiglath Pileser (Pul) ascends to the throne of Assyria
740 BC	The death of Uzziah, and the call of Isaiah
736 BC	Death of Jotham and ascension of Ahaz to the throne of Judah
734-732 BC	Pul invades Syria and Israel
727 BC	Ascension of Shalmanezar to the Assyrian throne
725 BC	Ascension of Hezekiah to throne of Judah
722 BC	Samaria falls to Shalmanezar; Sargon ascends to throne of Assyria
711 BC	Sargon invades Philistia and takes Ashdod
709 BC	Sargon defeats Babylon
705 BC	Sargon murdered and succeeded by Sennacherib
701 BC	Sennacherib attacks Judah and Jerusalem



Geography of Isaiah and Jeremiah



MESSIANIC PROPHECIES IN ISAIAH

Match the subject of these prophecies with the correct passage.

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| <p>___ 1. At the Messiah's coming, nations would repent.</p> <p>___ 2. Hearts would be hardened at His coming.</p> <p>___ 3. Messiah would be born of a virgin.</p> <p>___ 4. He would be offensive to the religious.</p> <p>___ 5. Messiah would be called Immanuel.</p> <p>___ 6. He would come as a child, a son given to us.</p> <p>___ 7. A government would be on His shoulders.</p> <p>___ 8. God's Spirit would anoint Him to preach liberty.</p> <p>___ 9. He would be full of wisdom and power.</p> <p>___ 10. He would come from David's household.</p> <p>___ 11. In Him, death would be swallowed in victory.</p> <p>___ 12. The deaf would hear, the blind see.</p> <p>___ 13. One would come before, making the way ready.</p> <p>___ 14. As a shepherd, He would tend His sheep.</p> <p>___ 15. He would be pierced for our transgressions.</p> <p>___ 16. He would suffer for us.</p> <p>___ 17. He would be scourged and spat upon.</p> <p>___ 18. He would be rejected and insulted.</p> <p>___ 19. He would be crucified with transgressors.</p> <p>___ 20. He would be the stone in Zion.</p> <p>___ 21. He would heal the needy.</p> | <p>a. Isa. 11:2; 42:1; Matt. 3:16; John 1:32</p> <p>b. Isa. 11:1-10; Rom. 15:12; Eph. 1:17</p> <p>c. Isa. 16:4-5; Luke 1:31-33</p> <p>d. Isa. 25:6-12; 1 Cor. 15:54</p> <p>e. Isa. 22:21-25; Rev. 3:7</p> <p>f. Isa. 2:2-4; Luke 24:47.</p> <p>g. Isa. 9:6; Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:24-25</p> <p>h. Isa. 9:6; John 3:16</p> <p>i. Isa. 8:14, 15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8</p> <p>j. Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:14-15; John 12:39,40</p> <p>k. Isa. 9:1-2; Matt. 4:14; Luke 2:32</p> <p>l. Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:22-23; Luke 1:27-35</p> <p>m. Isa. 7:14; 8:8,10; Matt. 1:21,23; John 14:8-10</p> <p>n. Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6</p> <p>o. Isa. 29:18,19; Matt. 11:5; Mark 7:37</p> <p>p. Isa. 35:4-10; Matt. 9:30; John 9:1-7</p> <p>q. Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1</p> <p>r. Isa. 63:8-9; Matt. 25:34-40</p> <p>s. Isa. 40:3-5; Matt. 3:3; John 1:23</p> <p>t. Isa. 40:10,11; John 10:11; Heb. 13:20</p> <p>u. Isa. 42:1-4; Matt. 12:17-21; Phil. 2:7</p> |
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| <p>___ 22. Messiah would be a meek servant.</p> <p>___ 23. He would call the Gentiles.</p> <p>___ 24. The nations would walk in His light.</p> <p>___ 25. He would come as a king.</p> <p>___ 26. He would be a lamb slaughtered for us.</p> <p>___ 27. Messiah would be silent when accused.</p> <p>___ 28. He would be buried with the rich.</p> <p>___ 29. He would bear our iniquities and forgive sins.</p> <p>___ 30. His clothing would be bloodied.</p> <p>___ 31. He would be afflicted with the afflicted.</p> <p>___ 32. He would usher in a new heaven and earth.</p> | <p>v. Isa. 63:1-3; Rev. 19:13</p> <p>w. Isa. 62:11; Matt. 21:5;
Rev. 22:12</p> <p>x. Isa. 49:6; Luke 2:32;
Acts 13:47</p> <p>y. Isa. 61:1-3; Luke 4:17-19;
Acts 10:38</p> <p>z. Isa. 61:1-3; Luke 2:32</p> <p>aa. Isa. 59:16-20; Rom. 11:26-27</p> <p>bb. Isa. 50:6; Matt. 26:67;
John 19:1</p> <p>cc. Isa. 53:3; Matt. 27:1,2;
Luke 18:31-33</p> <p>dd. Isa. 55:4,5; Rom 9:25;
Rev. 1:5</p> <p>ee. Isa. 53:12; Mark 15:27,28</p> <p>ff. Isa. 53:11; Acts 10:43;
1 Cor. 15:3</p> <p>gg. Isa. 53:5; Rom. 4:25;
2 Cor. 5:21</p> <p>hh. Isa. 53:4,5; Matt. 8:17;
Luke 23:32-35</p> <p>ii. Isa. 53:7; John 1:29</p> <p>jj. Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:62</p> <p>kk. Isa. 53:9; Matt. 27:57-60</p> |
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OVERALL VIEW OF THE PROPHETS

The seventeen prophetic books comprise about 1/4 of scripture and are crucial from a theological and historical point of view.

Yet, their message and meaning evade more people than any other section of the Bible - principally because of neglect.

DESIGNATION

The second division of the Hebrew Bible was known as *the Prophets*, and consisted of the *Former Prophets* and *Latter Prophets*.

The *Former Prophets* were actually the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. These books chronicled God's dealings with the theocratic nation from the time of Joshua to the Babylonian captivity. Thus, they furnish the background to the writing prophets.

The *Latter Prophets* are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets. The term "latter" speaks more of their place in the canon than of chronology.

The *Oral Prophets* - Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Oded, Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, Jahaziel, and Huldah.

The *Writing Prophets* were later divided into the Major and Minor Prophets as we know them today.

NAMES

These men were called prophets, seers, watchmen, men of God, messengers, and servants of the Lord.

The most frequently used title is "Nabi", i.e., prophet - used over 300 times. Refers to one who has been called or appointed to proclaim the message of God Himself.

The word *roeh* - "seer" - speaks of one who perceives things that are not in the realm of natural sight or hearing.

The English word "prophet" is derived from two Greek words that literally mean "speak for." They were divinely chosen spokesmen who received and related God's messages, whether in oral, visual, or written form.

God communicated to them through a variety of means including dreams, visions, angels, nature, miracles, and an audible voice.

Samuel was, in a sense, the first of the real prophets - Acts 3:24; 13:20; Hebrews 11:32.

He was the first to create a colony of prophets, and he presided over them at Ramah - 1 Samuel 19:20.

True prophets were divinely called and endowed with special abilities. Deuteronomy 18:18-20 prescribed that a true prophet would speak in Yahweh's name and that his prophecies must be completely accurate.

MESSAGE

The prophet's primary role was forthtelling as well as foretelling.

The prophetic message had four major themes:

1. They exposed the sinful practices of the people
2. They called the people back to the moral, civil and ceremonial law of God
3. They warned the people of coming judgment
4. The prophets anticipated the coming Messiah. "To Him all the prophets bear witness" (Acts 10:43).

INTERPRETATION

The prophets spoke in the context and background of their times. It is important to understand their historical and cultural circumstances.

A CHRONOLOGICAL CHART OF THE WRITING PROPHETS

Pre-Exilic Prophets (9th-7th centuries)	Obadiah* (ca. 845)	
	Joel* (ca. 830)	
	Jonah (ca. 780-750)	
	Amos (ca. 760-750)	
	Hosea (ca. 760-710)	<i>ASSYRIAN PERIOD</i>
	Isaiah (ca. 740-690)	
	Micah (ca. 735-700)	
	Jeremiah (ca. 627-585)	
	Nahum (ca. 650-612)	
	Zephaniah (ca. 625)	
	-----	612 B.C. Fall of Nineveh
	Habakkuk (ca. 612-606)	606 B.C. Babylon becomes dominant; first captives deported from Judah
		<i>BABYLONIAN PERIOD</i>
Exilic Prophets (6th century)	Daniel (ca. 606-536)	
	Ezekiel (ca. 592-570)	
	Lamentations (ca. 585)	
	-----	539 B.C. Persia conquers the Babylonians
Post-Exilic Prophets (6th-5th centuries)	Haggai (ca. 520)	
	Zechariah (ca. 520-518)	<i>PERSIAN PERIOD</i>
	Malachi (ca. 445-425)	

*As indicated in the comments on these books, the dates of Obadiah and Joel are the most uncertain of all the prophetic books.

Note: Jonah and Nahum prophesy to Nineveh and Obadiah to Edom; Amos and Hosea are concerned with the Northern Kingdom prior to its fall in 721 B.C.; the remainder of the Books of the Prophets address their primary messages to the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

COME NOW, AND LET US REASON TOGETHER, SAITH
JEHOVAH: THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET, THEY
SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY BE RED
LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL.

ISA. 1: 18.

AND HE WILL JUDGE BETWEEN THE NATIONS, AND WILL
DECIDE CONCERNING MANY PEOPLES; AND THEY SHALL
BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES, AND THEIR
SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS; NATION SHALL NOT LIFT
UP SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY
LEARN WAR ANY MORE.

ISA. 2: 4.

JUDAH'S SOCIAL SINS (CHAPTERS 1-6)

Formal Religion (Chapter 1)

1. The dramatic discourse in chapter 1 contains a summary of all Isaiah's characteristic and essential teachings; and, therefore, is marvelously appropriate as an introduction to his book.

2. It is one of the earliest of Isaiah's prophecies, dating probably from the reign of Jotham, when Syria and North Israel began to threaten Judah in 736 B. C. (cf. 2 Kings 15: 37).

3. After the editorial title in v. 1, Isaiah describes the hopeless moral and religious condition of the nation (vs. 2-20), and the need of a purifying judgment (vs. 21-31).

4. Judah's sins are set forth as primarily and fundamentally sins of religion. She has rebelled against God (v. 2). The whole nation is insensible to God's goodness. Conscience is asleep: "My people do not think" (v. 3); yet they keep up the hollow forms of ritual sacrifice (vs. 11, 12). A bad conscience easily resorts to hollow worship.

5. The prophet bids them reform (vs. 16, 17); he even offers them gracious pardon (v. 18). But they remain stubborn and rebellious; accordingly he sings a dirge over Jerusalem in dirge meter (vs. 21-26), and warns them of approaching judgment: sin, he says, withers (v. 30); sin burns (v. 31).

6. The paramount lessons of the discourse are the too oft-forgotten facts that true religion is the prime condition of a healthy social order; that irreligion or formal ritual is a social vice; that no man liveth to himself; and that what a peasant or a prince believes is of public concern to all.

7. All social evils are traceable ultimately to rebellion against God.

TRUE RELIGION IS THE PRIME condition
of a healthy social order

FORMAL Religion is a social vice

No man lives unto himself

what people believe is a concern
to everyone

sin is traceable ultimately
to rebellion against God.

The Sin of War (Chapter 2:1-4)

1. War was imminent when the prophet wrote the well-known passage contained in 2: 2-4 (736 B. C.). Probably Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus were already planning to strike a death blow at Jerusalem.

2. This same inspired vision has also been incorporated by the collectors of prophecy among the writings of Isaiah's younger contemporary, Micah (4: 1-3). It is impossible to say with which of these prophets it was original, or whether both found it already at hand and used it. In any case, it is evidently a vision of eighth century origin. "It may have been the ideal of the age." (G. A. Smith.) Such a picture is marvelous coming from any age prior to the actual advent of the Prince of Peace.

3. The passage is Messianic. The vision is of Zion exalted and idealized. All nations are seen voluntarily streaming up to Jerusalem to be taught Jehovah's law and to be instructed in his ways. Zion becomes the religious metropolis of the world; Jehovah, the umpire in all international disputes. In the latter days, Isaiah predicts, an era of universal peace will be ushered in, and war shall be no more.

4. Such a vision is of permanent value. It was not only the ideal of Isaiah's age, it is the goal also of the gospel; the only difference being that through the Incarnate Word of Jehovah, Zion has become spiritualized and decentralized, so that the whole world, regardless of geography, shares in the Messianic blessings of idyllic peace.

5. War is the arch-enemy of all social happiness.

Foreign Customs and Alliances (Chapter 2:5-22)

1. When Isaiah first beheld the vision of Jerusalem exalted as the Mecca of all nations in religion and law (2: 2-4), he hoped to see his ideal realized at once (v. 5); but the real Jerusalem of his day fell too far below his ideal.

2. Before the prophet stood a crowd of soothsayers; yonder a company "filled with customs from the east" (Babylonia); while the politicians of Jerusalem were openly courting the friendship and support of Assyria.

3. Accordingly, he breaks out in a vehement diatribe against the nation's feverish lust for things foreign: in particular their eagerness to trust to foreign alliances in time of danger (v. 6). He also denounces their wanton display of wealth and confidence in their military resources (v. 7); and their gross idolatry, which has permeated every stratum of society beyond the possibility of forgiveness (vs. 8-11).

4. The prophet's chief point is, that Jerusalem's best interests are being jeopardized through her foolishly aping foreign customs, her worshiping foreign gods, and her making alliances with foreign peoples, instead of relying on God.

5. For Jerusalem, therefore, he declares that a day of reckoning is appointed (v. 12), when Jehovah will punish her proud and haughty inhabitants (note the emphatic refrain repeated thrice in vs. 10, 19, 21). Then they will cast their idols to the moles and to the bats (v. 20).

✓ 6. The only real safety in all social crises is trust in God.

The Sins of the Aristocracy (Chapters 3-4)

1. The nation's chief sinners are those of the upper classes, the very ones to whom the people are looking for protection and guidance. Boldly and vehemently the prophet reproaches these (3: 1-4)—the army and its officers, the cabinet officials, judges and law givers, the professional prophets, and the diviners and skillful enchanters—because they have provoked by their unblushing wickedness the eyes of Jehovah's glory (3: 8, 9). That is to say, the soothsayers have sought to ascertain the will of deity and the magicians have sought to control that will, ignoring Jehovah.

2. All such dignitaries and so-called props of the commonwealth will be removed and a reign of terror will ensue. Society will be dissolved. In place of the elders and princes who now despoil the poor (3: 14), still more incompetent and capricious officers will rule, until anarchy destroys the state and Jerusalem is ruined and Judah is fallen (3: 8).

3. Isaiah also draws a picture of the women of Jerusalem (cf. Amos 4), painting them as "state dolls," who by their baneful influence on the government (3: 12) and their unbounded love of finery are undermining religion and morals in the home and poisoning the entire national life. He gives a catalogue of the twenty-one articles of their costly and curious attire (3: 18-23), and sternly warns the proud ladies of Zion that all their gaudy paraphernalia will ere long be exchanged for captives' garb (3: 24—4: 1).

4. He further assures them that Jerusalem shall be cleansed of their social filth and that a mere remnant shall survive (4: 2-6), who, however, shall be the people's true glory in the eyes of the other nations (cf. 32: 15-18; 45: 8; 61: 10).

Judah's National Sins (Chapter 5)

1. The beautiful parable of the vineyard in 5: 1-7 stands closely related both to what precedes and to that which follows. Alas! when Jehovah looked that his vineyard should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes (v. 4); and when he "looked for justice (*mishpat*), behold oppression (*mispah*); and for righteousness (*sedakah*), behold a cry (*seakah*)". Isaiah frequently employs paranomasia, or play on words, as here in 5: 7.

2. He then names a few specimens of "wild grapes," or sins of the nations:

(1) Insatiable greed; but their crops will be only a tenth of the seed sown (vs. 8-10).

(2) Dissipation and disregard of the word and work of Jehovah; but carnival and carousing will end in captivity (vs. 11-17).

(3) Daring defiance of Jehovah, and willful contempt of the prophet's denunciations, boldly displayed by their challenging the "day of Jehovah" to come (vs. 18, 19).

(4) Hypocrisy and dissimulation, confusion of moral distinctions (v. 20).

(5) Political self-conceit, which scorns to submit to God's correction (v. 21).

(6) Misdirected power, heroic at wine drinking, but cowering before a bribe in avenging wrong (vs. 22-23).

3. Therefore, says the prophet, the worst is yet to come. Judah's national vitality is being sapped (v. 24), and a terrible invader (the Assyrian, as yet unnamed) is coming to smite them. It is Jehovah's judgment, and there will be no escape (vs. 25-30).

The Sins of the Masses (Chapter 6)

1. Chapter 6 contains an account of Isaiah's inaugural vision. It follows a discourse full of "woes," which, as we have seen, closes with a thunderstorm of doom unrelieved by any ray of hope (chapter 5).

2. One can easily fancy how the prophet, having spoken thus, would meet with counter opposition from his audience, and find it necessary to produce his credentials and demonstrate his authority for speaking in tones of such severity. No one, however, could give better proof of his commission than Isaiah. He had beheld a vision of Jehovah's holiness in contrast to his own unholiness; he had also received pardon, and been commissioned. From this point of view, chapter 6 becomes an apologetic. Embedded within it is the tacit claim of authority to pronounce "woes" upon others, because the prophet has already pronounced "woe" upon himself. This best accounts for the editorial insertion of this vision at this point among Isaiah's prophecies. "Unclean lips" was the nation's chief sin (6: 5).

3. But Isaiah's commission was a hard one. We must not suppose that the prophet, from his subsequent experience, read into his original commission elements which it did not convey to his mind at the time; for, as Skinner wisely observes, "by doing so we mistake the prophet's attitude to his work." From the very first Isaiah labored under the depressing conviction that he would only harden the people in unbelief (6: 9-13).

4. This was as obvious as it was inevitable. Sin, like water, percolates most rapidly downward. The upper classes were already callous in unbelief; it was, therefore, only a matter of time when the masses also should become insensible to spiritual things: their hearts fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes smeared.

Summary of Isaiah's Social Discourses

1. All social evils are traceable ultimately to a want of true religion: apathy towards, and rebellion against God. Formal religion is but a common species of hypocrisy (chapter 1).

2. Social happiness is rendered impossible by war; therefore, to have satisfactory social conditions there must be peace (2: 1-4).

3. Foreign alliances, soothsaying and idolatry are all proofs of distrust in God. "Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah" (2: 5-22).

4. Woe to the nation whose political and religious leaders are corrupt. The next step is anarchy, and after that, exile. Double woe when the leading women of a community think only of fashion and of self, of bracelets and head-tires, festival robes and mantles, shawls and veils; ruin then is dangerously near (3-4).

5. Judah's national sins were outstanding, namely, oppression and wrong-doing (5: 7), inordinate greed (5: 8), careless high-living (5: 11), blatant unbelief in a divine Providence (5: 18), willful self-deception (5: 20), unwillingness to be criticised (5: 21), bribery or "graft" (5: 22, 23). Such a nation of sinners was ill prepared to resist a foreign foe (5: 24-30).

6. The sins of the aristocracy filter downward; as patricians, so plebeians. Judah's condition was well-nigh hopeless. The whole nation was becoming spiritually insensible. They had eyes but they could not see. Only judgment could avail—"the righteous judgment of the forgotten God." A "holy seed," however, still existed in Israel's stock (6: 13).

THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A
SIGN: BEHOLD A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE, AND BEAR A
SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL.

ISA. 7: 14.

FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN, UNTO US A SON IS
GIVEN; AND THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS
SHOULDER: AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDER-
FUL, COUNSELLOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISA. 9: 6.

THEREFORE WITH JOY SHALL YE DRAW WATER OUT OF
THE WELLS OF SALVATION.

ISA. 12: 3.

JUDAH'S POLITICAL ENTANGLEMENTS (CHAPTERS 7-12)

The Syro-Ephraimitic Uprising (Chapter 7:1-9)

1. The so-called Syro-Ephraimitic war of 734 B. C. is one of the very great crises in Isaiah's ministry. Side by side stood the young prophet of perhaps thirty years, and the still younger king of not more than twenty-one, with policies diametrically opposed. Pekah of North Israel and Rezin of Damascus, in attempting to defend themselves against the Assyrians, coveted an ally in the king of Jerusalem. But Ahaz preferred the friendship of Assyria, and refused to enter into alliance with them; as Jotham seems to have done before him (2 Kings 15: 37).

2. Accordingly Pekah and Rezin combined to dethrone Ahaz and to put in his place one who would ally with them (Isa. 7: 6). But when news came of their threatened attack Ahaz was panic-stricken and all Jerusalem with him (7: 2). He resolved to apply at once to Assyria for assistance, sending ambassadors with many precious treasures, both royal and sacred (2 Kings 16: 7, 8).

3. At this juncture Isaiah is bidden by Jehovah to take his son, Shear-jashub, and go forth to meet King Ahaz, who is busy preparing for siege, repairing the fortifications and in particular securing the city's water supply. The prophet obeys, and expostulates with Ahaz concerning the fatal step he is about to take by calling in the aid of Assyria, and assures him that the two petty kingdoms of North Israel and Syria are but "two tails of smoking firebrands" (7: 3, 4). On the one side, it is only Rezin with Damascus, and the mere son of Remaliah with Samaria; whereas, on the other side is Jehovah with Jerusalem (7: 8, 9).

4. Here for the first time, Isaiah appears in the rôle of a practical statesman; a position which he continues to occupy all his life, and the duties of which he more and more influentially discharges.

Ahaz, the King of No-Faith (Chapter 7: 10-25)

1. Isaiah in his interview with Ahaz emphasized faith; to the prophet faith meant security and quietness (7: 4, 9). Isaiah saw clearly that the only path of safety was loyalty to Jehovah, and independence of foreign alliances. Hosea had previously advocated the same policy to North Israel (Hosea 14: 2, 3).

2. But Ahaz did not possess this faculty of mind; wherefore, Jehovah graciously offers him a sign in order to make faith easy as possible. The king may choose either earthquake or lightning (7: 11). Ahaz refuses both, in order afterwards not to be bound by God's word. He has a secret dread of the truth. Accordingly Jehovah unasked determines to give him a sign, a child, Immanuel, "God with us" (7: 14), the stages of whose life will reveal the rapid changes which will take place in the land of Judah in the near future.

3. The passage is implicitly Messianic. The underlying truth of the prophecy is the necessity of faith in Jehovah's power to save. Because of the king's unbelief, Judah is to become the theatre of war between Assyria and Egypt (7: 18, 19). The country will be left ravaged, depopulated and uncultivated, and become the hunting ground of nomads (7: 21-25), all because of the short-sighted policy of Ahaz, the king of No-Faith.

No Conspiracy Successful without God (Chapters 8:1 — 9:7)

1. By means of a great tablet, posted in a conspicuous place, bearing the motto Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "hasting to the spoil, hurrying to the prey," Isaiah announced publicly the issue of Assyria's attack on Damascus (732 B. C.). Isaiah also appropriated the motto as a living sign, naming his newborn son Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8: 1-4).

2. Judah he predicts will barely escape; for she has despised the softly flowing waters of Shiloh—the symbol of Jehovah's silent power and gracious rule—for the waters of the river Euphrates—the power of Assyria (8: 5-8).

3. Yet "God is with us," proclaims the prophet, and conspiracy is impossible unless God too is against us. With God on our side as a sanctuary, there is no reason for fear; the only possible conspiracy is when Jehovah fights against us on the side of the enemy (8: 9-15).

4. However, the prophet's message of promise and salvation finds no welcome. It must therefore remain bound up and sealed, i. e., committed to Isaiah's disciples for future use (8: 16-18). Nevertheless out of the coming darkness will flash forth eventually a great light: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." In his day, the empire of David will be established upon a basis of justice and righteousness (8: 19—9: 7). The Messianic scion is the ground of the prophet's hope; which hope, though unappreciated, he thus early in his ministry commits, written and sealed, to his inner circle of "disciples."

Accumulated Wrath (Chapters 9:8 — 10:4)

1. In an artistic poem composed of four strophes, the prophet describes the great calamities which Jehovah has sent upon North Israel to warn them of their wickedness. Each strophe closes with an awful but most effective refrain, "for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (9: 12, 17, 21; 10: 4; cf. 5: 25).

2. But Jehovah's judgments have gone unheeded, although North Israel has already suffered untold misfortunes (cf. Amos 4: 6-11). Isaiah specifies some of them and foretells others yet to come:


(1) Foreign invasion; but loss of territory made no lasting impression upon their arrogant and stubborn hearts (9: 8-12).

(2) Defeat in battle; but even the loss of their young men and the cries of their suffering widows and orphans did not bring them to repentance (9: 13-17).

(3) Anarchy; but even internecine strife, raging like a blazing forest fire, was not sufficient to cause them to take heed (9: 18-21).

(4) Now captivity stares them in the face; yet with the day of visitation confronting them, and with the prospect of condemnation from the Supreme Judge, and with no possibility of escape, they still persist in their downward course (10: 1-4).

3. "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." Divine discipline has failed; only judgment remains.



**Assyria, an Instrument of Jehovah
(Chapter 10:5-34)**

1. Chapter 10: 5-34 dates also from the reign of Ahaz. Verse 20 is decidedly in favor of this view; verses 28-32 do not describe Sennacherib's route of invasion in 701 B. C., but rather that of the great Assyrian conqueror, as, *in Isaiah's mind*, he would naturally plan it after taking Samaria. Moreover, the tone of verses 12, 21-23 shows that the Assyrians' devastation of the land is not yet complete; while 2 Chron. 28: 20, 21 describes the exact conditions which the prophecy demands as an appropriate historic setting, namely, that instead of Judah receiving help from the Assyrians, the Assyrians treated the Judeans as enemies, and exacted heavy tribute.

2. The prophet's main point is that the great Assyrian despot is but the unconscious rod of Jehovah's anger, a mere instrument in God's hands, with which he is going to punish his people. In his carnal self-confidence and barbarous lust of plunder and conquest, the Assyrian may boast of his achievements, but he is really nothing more than an axe or a saw in the hands of the divine Woodsman, who will lay him low so soon as he has accomplished his purpose (10: 5-19; cf. "Cyrus," 45: 4).

3. Only a remnant, however, shall be saved (10: 20-23). They will return to their land "after the manner of Egypt" (10: 24-27); for the prophet here is not speaking of the people's conversion to Jehovah, as some think, but of their return from exile. Therefore let not Judah fear, for Jehovah is a God of righteousness, and eventually he will demonstrate also that he is greater than the gods of the Assyrians, who seem at the present to be supreme (10: 28-34).

Israel's Return from Exile (Chapters 11-12)

1. Isaiah's vision of Israel's future reached beyond the exile, which was steadily taking place before his eyes, to Israel's return. A prediction to the same effect had already been made by Amos (9: 14, 15). The downfall of Assyria is the signal for the commencement of a new era in Israel's history.

2. Assyria has no future, her downfall is fatal; Judah has a future, her calamities are only disciplinary. The house of Jesse has not wholly lost its recuperative power. An Ideal Prince will be raised up, in whose advent all nature will rejoice, even dumb animals (11: 1-9).

3. Him also the nations will seek (11: 10). The prophet had predicted this essentially before (2: 2-4).

4. In his days, righteousness and wisdom will be diffused; "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea" (11: 9).

5. A second great exodus will take place, for the Lord shall set his hand again "the second time" to recover the remnant of his people "from the four corners of the earth" (11: 11, 12). In that day, "Ephraim shall not envy Judah and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (11: 13).

6. Then the reunited nation, redeemed and occupying their rightful territory (11: 14-16), shall sing a hymn of thanksgiving (12: 1-6), as ancient Israel did after their exodus from Egypt (cf. Exod. 15); and they shall further proclaim the salvation of Jehovah to all the earth (12: 5).

**Summary of Isaiah's Political Discourses
(734-732 B.C.)**

1. "Take heed and be quiet; fear not, neither let thy heart be faint;" "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (7: 4, 9). This was the essence of Isaiah's advice to Ahaz when threatened by the two kingdoms from the north—Ephraim and Syria.

2. "For before the child (Immanuel) shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken" (7: 16); and so it was. Within two years both Pekah and Rezin were dethroned and their richest spoils taken away to Assyria (732 B. C.).

3. "Say ye not, A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people shall say, A conspiracy: neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof. Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (8: 12, 13).

4. "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel" (9: 8); judgment upon judgment, and calamity upon calamity, but Jehovah's warnings had notwithstanding all passed unheeded. "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (9: 12, 17, 21; 10: 4).

5. "O my people, that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians: though he smite thee with the rod, and lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation against thee shall be accomplished, and mine anger shall be directed to his destruction" (10: 24, 25). Which means that if the Assyrian bondage is to be like the Egyptian, there will be a correspondingly glorious deliverance.

6. Finally, a Messiah-Branch will grow out of the root of Jesse, bringing salvation and peace not only to the returned exiles, but also to the nations (11: 10). Then shall the redeemed with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation, and proclaim their salvation to the end of the earth (12: 3, 5).

C. Does Isaiah predict the virgin birth?

1. A great deal of controversy began to swirl when the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament was published in 1952.
 - a. Isa. 7:14 in the King James and American Standard Versions
 - b. In the RSV, the text reads "young woman," with "virgin" as an alternate reading contained in a footnote.
2. Liberals deny the phenomenon of predictive prophecy in Scripture altogether; conservatives are found who argue for either a double or single fulfillment of Isa. 7:14.
 - a. Some claim that the prophet foresaw two births—one in his own day (a non-virgin birth) and one later in history (the virgin birth of Christ); these favor the RSV reading.
 - b. Others insist that Isaiah spoke exclusively of the Messiah's virgin birth; these favor the KJV, ASV, and New International Version renderings.
3. In my judgment, the text specifies a "virgin" and is best interpreted as having a single fulfillment in the conception and birth of Jesus Christ.
 - a. The word in question (Heb. *'almah*) seems always to refer to an unmarried woman. Cf. Gen. 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Psa. 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8.
 - b. *Bethulah*, another Hebrew word translated "maiden" or "virgin," can refer to a married woman (Joel 1:8); thus only *'almah* could have made it evident that the mother was unmarried.
 - c. Thus the unmarried woman of Isa. 7:14 was either a virgin or a fornicator, and there is no evidence that the latter would have been employed as a "sign" to Ahaz.
 - d. Ahaz was pointed forward to a birth to occur 700 years later, and the immediate promise to him was that, in the short length of time it would take such a son to pass through his childhood (Isa. 7:15-16), the two kings threatening him would be devastated.
4. The Septuagint translators (third century B.C.) understood the text to refer to a virgin and translated with a very specific Greek word, *parthenos*.
5. That Isa. 7:14 pointed ultimately to the birth of Jesus is stated at Matt. 1:23.

Is Isaiah 7: 14 a Messianic Prophecy?

Alan E. Highers

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isa. 7: 14, ASV.) "Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us." (Matt. 1: 22, 23.)

The statement of "the Lord through the prophet" in Isaiah 7: 14 is quoted by Matthew to show that it was "fulfilled" in the miraculous birth of Christ. It has long been contended, and correctly so, that the best interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is the inspired interpretation found in the New Testament. There are some prophecies that are given an inspired interpretation such as the prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter on Pentecost. Peter stated unequivocally that "this is that" of which Joel spoke. (Joel 2: 28-32; Acts 2: 16.) This leaves no doubt as to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

It would seem that the prophecy of Isaiah would be equally as clear in view of its New Testament usage by Matthew. Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would conceive and bear a son whose name would be Immanuel, meaning "God with us." Matthew quoted that statement of Isaiah, saying it was "fulfilled" in the birth of Christ. It would be difficult to find a plainer statement that Isaiah did, in fact, prophesy, the virgin birth of Christ. But the fact remains that not all students of this passage regard it as a messianic prophecy of the miraculous birth of Christ.

THREE VIEWS

There have been at least three broad views set out by various ones with regard to the prophecy of Isaiah 7: 14:

(1) *The Non-Messianic Application.* Jewish writers, liberal commentators, and apparently some brethren hold that this prophecy had primary meaning only for Isaiah's day and that it was fulfilled in the birth of a child of that time.

(2) *The Dual Application.* Many conservative expositors have considered that there was an immediate fulfillment in the time of Isaiah, but that the fuller and higher fulfillment of this prophecy came only in the birth of Christ. It is true that some Old Testament prophecies have an immediate as well as a distant fulfillment. But the principal difficulty of this view with reference to Isaiah 7: 14 is that there is *no immediate fulfillment* which satisfies all the demands of the passage.

(3) *The Unique Application.* This view recognizes that the prophecy had meaning in its historical context in Isaiah's day, but that it was fulfilled completely, fully, and *only* in the virgin birth of Christ. This is the very opposite of the non-messianic view, and is altogether consistent with Matthew's application of the prophecy.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

In Isaiah 7 the prophet was warning Ahaz, king of Judah, not to depend on Assyria for protection against Syria and Ephraim. He should rely, rather, on God; for these two nations were merely "two tails of smoking firebrands" and would soon be brought to nought. (Isa. 7: 4.) Isaiah encouraged Ahaz to ask for a sign of God's deliverance, but Ahaz rebelliously refused. The prophet then announced not only to Ahaz but to all the house of David that the Lord himself would give a sign. The sign would be the virgin-born son known as Immanuel. Isaiah saw that son in prophetic vision, and he stated that before he reached the age of maturity and discernment, the kingdoms Ahaz feared would be without power. In other words, the years of development of the promised Messiah were used as the measure of time allotted for the kingdoms that opposed Judah.

There is a deeper sense, however, in which this prophecy is a "sign" to Ahaz and the house of David. It would scarcely be a sign as promised here by Isaiah if some young woman—*any* young woman—gave birth to a son in the natural manner. The very word "sign" indicates that more is to be expected. As Machen observes: "That word naturally leads us to think of some event like the turning back of the sun on Hezekiah's dial, or the phenomena in connection with Gideon's fleece." (J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pages 290-91.) The sign is the promised Messiah and, as already seen, the downfall of Judah's enemies would be measured in the length of time it would require him to reach the age of discernment. But further, this promised Messiah was to come *through Judah*. (See Gen. 49: 10; Micah 5: 2; Heb. 7: 14.) This served, therefore, as more positive confirmation that Judah would not be destroyed, for that virgin-born Deliverer was yet to come! How could Judah be destroyed without nullifying the promise of God?

The thought is similar to the principle found in the case of Abraham and Isaac. God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt-offering, and Abraham manifested great faith as he endeavored to comply with the divine command. (Gen. 22: 1-18.) But Abraham's faith was based on a definite promise from the mind of God; namely, that *through Isaac* God would establish an everlasting covenant "*for his seed after him.*" (Gen. 17: 19.) That promise had not yet been fulfilled when Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac his son; therefore, Abraham's faith was founded upon the promise of God inasmuch as he accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac "even from the dead." (Heb. 11: 17-19.) God's promise was Abraham's assurance that Isaac would not be destroyed, even though offered as a burnt-offering to God.

In like manner, Isaiah's promise to Ahaz and the house of David was a "sign" of God's assurance that Judah would *not* be destroyed, for the *promise* of God was yet to be fulfilled through Judah. If we remove this miraculous element of the birth from Isaiah 7: 14, this assurance is eliminated and the passage is *robbed of its true significance, meaning and beauty.*

We believe that the context, the subject matter, and the application of the passage by Matthew all demonstrate that Isaiah 7: 14 is, indeed, a messianic prophecy of the miraculous, virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

The Twofold Sign: 10-25

10 We appear to have a new oracle here. The prophet called on Ahaz to trust in Jehovah but he trusted in Assyria (2 Kings 16:6-7) and sent messengers there. I'm guessing that as soon as Isaiah gets word of the Assyrian being called into the affair that he receives a word from God for Ahaz.

11 Note the condescension of God in this passage. A vile and wicked man is offered assurance that Jehovah will be with him. And he is offered this assurance in the most assuring way. Ask for a miracle. Name your miracle! God is not only condescending, he understands that at times people need special assurances (cf. Thomas and Christ offering his wounds).

12-13 Ahaz acts the pious one. He's too holy to go against the Deuteronomic word: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The prophet explodes. He sears through the prattle and addresses the head of the house of David as one who would weary the prophet's God. It isn't the prophet Ahaz is putting off, it isn't only the prophet who's exploding out of frustration, it is God who is being rejected and God who has had enough!

14-17 Ahaz didn't want a sign. Well, God was going to give him one anyway. It involved a baby whose name would be *Immanuel*. And it involves the baby's experience — by the time the baby could tell the difference between good and evil, he would be eating curds and honey (15, following the NEB which I think carries the right idea, see also the NIV and Moffatt). But before the baby was old enough to tell the difference between good and evil, the northern confederacy about which Ahaz and the nation worried so much, would have been destroyed and their land devastated.

1. I believe Isaiah was speaking about a well known virgin ("the" virgin)
2. She is in the process of being married (is she walking now on her way to complete the marriage ceremony?).
3. She will (very soon) bear a child in the normal way.
4. The baby will be named *Immanuel* and will be a visible token that God is with the nation in the middle of these crises.
5. *Before* the baby is old enough to discern between good and evil the northern confederacy will have been obliterated.
6. *And* "by the time" (NEB) he is old enough to discern the difference between good and evil he will be eating the food of the poor.

My own view is that there is nothing to be gained by a long, drawn out debate over the word "almah" and the word "virgin". Everyone agrees that "almah" is at least *capable* of expressing virginity and when Matthew 1:23 applies this passage to Jesus, absolute virginity is involved! Mary had a child called Jesus without having sexual relationship with any man!

Now I think it's right to discuss the word "almah" in connection with the prophecy, but I don't think that there can be *gain* from it in regard to Matthew's use of the passage. And I don't think it settles anything with regard to the setting of Isaiah 7.

I believe in typology. A type is a *concrete* (non-verbal) prophecy. I believe this child was/is a type of Jesus Christ. I believe he was intended to reflect the coming child who was literally born of a virgin and was literally, *God With Us*.

I believe it is sheer nonsense to say that anyone who sees in this passage any other baby than Jesus is a "Liberal" who denies the inspiration of Scripture. How often have you heard 2 Sam. 7:14 claimed as applying both to Jesus and Solomon? Psalm 8, of man in general and Jesus in particular? Hosea 11:1 of Israel as a whole and Jesus in particular? Now the view I've stated could certainly be incorrect, but to say it denies the inspiration of Scripture is nonsense.

14 "The Lord himself" would take the initiative. He would give a sign anyway. A sign could be either miraculous or non-miraculous. See 1 Sam. 14:10 and Isa. 37:30 as illustrations of the non-miraculous and 7:11 and 38:8 as miraculous.

17 In these verses God has been stressing the fact that he will not allow Pekah and Rezin to succeed. God is with Judah in this regard. Just the same, there is the "butter and honey" element. Ahaz has called Assyria into the affair and this will turn out to be a chronic blunder. Before the whole matter is closed, Judah will be crushed by heavy tribute (all the way down to 701 and even beyond that). There will be other enemies, the Philistines and the Edomites. And Assyria will be of no help to Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:23), they will be Judah's ruin. The policy established with Ahaz will result, down the line, in mass deportations under Sennacherib and the desolation of much of Judah. The flood of the Euphrates (8:7-8) will reach even to Jerusalem's throat.

18-19 Ahaz has invited a plague into Caanan when he invites in the Assyrian. In deserting God and choosing Assyria, Ahaz has asked for his own poison. He means it for God and God will use it for calamity. He is the Lord of the Assyrian and he will "whistle them in".

They'll come like tormentors. Like swarms of bees they will cover the land. Like Egyptian flies which were notorious for driving animals into madness as they smothered the head and eyes and ears of the tormented beast. "In the day" when Ahaz drags Assyria in, he is choosing for God the stick with which he will beat ungodly Judah.

20 Ezekiel (5:1-12) gives us a graphic illustration of this verse. There we are explicitly told that his hairs represent the people. Read that section. We have the same thing here. Ahaz pays the money to bring Assyria into the picture but God is the one who uses him. Ezekiel shaves his head and beard. Here the shaving involves feet as well (stressing thoroughness, I suppose).

21-22 The passage speaks of few people left in the land (the land has been shaved of people). That means plenty of grazing land and plenty of butter for the smaller population. See the comments on 7:15.

23-25 The land suffers. Agriculture is at a standstill since the nation has been decimated. Vines that used to be worth a lot of silver are gone. In their place, briars and thorns.

The land isn't tamed and it becomes a jungle where wild animals prowl. When men come that way, they come armed against predators (24). No ploughing is done, nobody does any hoeing, there are no more farmers. The good "bottom land" is now only good for grazing. All this is the price you pay for hiring Assyria and spurning the Lord God.

ONE CALLETH UNTO ME OUT OF SEIR, WATCHMAN,
WHAT OF THE NIGHT? WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE
NIGHT? THE WATCHMAN SAID, THE MORNING COMETH,
AND ALSO THE NIGHT: IF YE WILL INQUIRE, INQUIRE YE:
TURN YE, COME.

ISA. 21: 11, 12.

ISAIAH'S "BURDENS" CONCERNING FOREIGN NATIONS (CHAPTERS 13-23, 34-35)

Concerning Babylon (Chapters 13:1 — 14:23; 21:1-10)

1. Isaiah's horizon was world-wide. He was a close observer of national movements, and passed in review the foreign nations whose destinies affected Judah, as did Amos (chapters 1-2), Jeremiah (chapters 46-51), and Ezekiel (chapters 25-32).

2. First among his foreign prophecies stands the oracle concerning Babylon (13: 1—14: 23), in which he predicts the utter destruction of the city (13: 2-22) and sings a dirge or taunt-song over her fallen king (14: 4-23). The king alluded to, however, is almost beyond doubt an Assyrian not a Babylonian monarch of the eighth century (so Winckler, Cheyne, Cobb and others); the brief prophecy immediately following in 14: 24-27 concerning "Assyria" confirms this interpretation. Moreover it was subsequent to this that Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital and removed the seat of his empire thither.

3. The other brief oracle concerning Babylon (21: 1-10) describes the city's fall as imminent. Both oracles stand or fall together as genuine prophecies of Isaiah. Both seem to have been written in Jerusalem (13: 2; 21: 9-10). It cannot be said that either is absolutely unrelated in thought and language to Isaiah's age (14: 13; 21: 2); each foretells the doom to fall on Babylon (13: 19; 21: 9), at the hands of the Medes (13: 17; 21: 2); and each describes the Israelites as already in exile—but not necessarily *all* Israel. The best historical setting for 13: 1—14: 23, therefore, seems to be the period between 732-722 B. C.; and for 21: 1-10, 709 B. C. A perfectly satisfactory historical background, however, should not be expected for an oracle dealing with "the day of Jehovah" (13: 6, 9).

4. It is enough that the two great lessons of the redemption and comfort of Israel are taught by these oracles (14: 1-2; 21: 9-10), and that the prophet announces Babylon's impending doom with feelings of sincere emotion (21: 3).

Concerning Moab (Chapters 15-16)

1. This ancient oracle against Moab, whose dirge-like meter resembles that of chapters 13-14, is composed of two separate prophecies belonging to two different periods in Isaiah's ministry (16: 13).

2. Chapters 15: 1—16: 12 describe Moab's woe-ful condition in 734 B. C., just after Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, had overrun Galilee and the region east of the Jordan, probably threatening Moab (2 Kings 15: 29). Chapter 16: 13-14 is a brief epilogue to the former prophecy, predicting the actual capture of Moab "within three years" (711 B. C.).

3. The principal points of interest in the oracle are:

(1) The prophet's tender sympathy for Moab in her affliction (15: 5; 16: 11). Isaiah mingles his own tears with those of the Moabites. "There is no prophecy in the book of Isaiah in which the heart of the prophet is so painfully moved by what his spirit beholds and his mouth must prophesy." (Delitzsch.)

(2) Moab's pathetic appeal for shelter from her foes; particularly the ground on which she urges it, namely, the Messianic hope that the Davidic dynasty shall always stand and be able to repulse its foes (16: 5). The passage is an echo of 9: 5-7.

(3) The promise that a remnant of Moab, though small, shall be saved (16: 14). Wearied of prayer to Chemosh in his high places, the prophet predicts that Moab will seek the living God (16: 12).

Concerning Philistia and Damascus (Chapters 14:28-32; 17:1-14)

1. The oracle concerning Philistia (14: 28-32) is dated, "in the year that king Ahaz died" (727 B. C.). Tiglath-pileser III., king of Assyria, died in the same year.

2. In the first half of the oracle (vs. 29-30), the Philistines are bidden not to rejoice over the death of the great Assyrian "serpent" (Tiglath-pileser III.), as he will be succeeded by an "adder" (Shalmaneser IV.), and he in turn by a "fiery flying serpent" (Sargon II.), each one more destructive than his predecessor.

3. In the second half (vs. 31-32), Isaiah warns the Philistines of the Assyrians' approach, and of Jerusalem's unwillingness to form an alliance with them, because faith in Jehovah renders Jerusalem inviolable; therefore, Philistia's messengers may as well return home, for everything human is going down.

4. In the oracle concerning Damascus, which also includes North Israel in its scope (17: 1-14), Isaiah predicts the fate of the two allies—Syria and Ephraim—in the Syro-Ephraimitic war (734 B. C.), with a promise that only a scanty remnant will survive (17: 6).

5. The cause of Israel's sad desolation, the prophet boldly declares, is their forgetfulness of God (17: 10); on the other hand, their unnamed foes (the Assyrians, undoubtedly) will themselves be vanquished between evening and daybreak (17: 14).

Concerning Egypt and Ethiopia (Chapters 18-20)

1. Three distinct prophecies are addressed to Egypt and Ethiopia. Both these lands in Isaiah's period were ruled over by a single king from Napata in Ethiopia.

2. The first (chapter 18) describes Ethiopia as in great excitement, sending ambassadors hither and thither—possibly all the way to Jerusalem—ostensibly seeking aid in making preparations for war. Assyria had already taken Damascus (732 B. C.) and Samaria (722 B. C.); consequently, Egypt and Ethiopia were in great fear of invasion. Isaiah bids the ambassadors to return home and quietly watch Jehovah thwart Assyria's self-confident attempt to subjugate Judah; and he adds that when the Ethiopians have seen God's hand in the coming deliverance of Judah and Jerusalem (701 B. C.) and Samaria (722 B. C.); consequently, abode in Mount Zion (cf. 2 Chron. 32: 23; Ps. 68: 31; Isa. 45: 14).

3. The second oracle (chapter 19) contains both a threat (vs. 1-17) and a promise (vs. 18-25), and is one of Isaiah's most remarkable foreign prophecies (720 B. C.). Egypt is smitten and thereby led to abandon her idols for the worship of Jehovah (vs. 19-22). More remarkable still, it is prophesied that "in that day" Egypt and Assyria will join with Judah in a triple alliance of common worship to Jehovah and of blessing to others (vs. 23-25). The prophecy is a marvelous "missionary sermon," worthy of a place alongside Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill.

4. The third prophecy (chapter 20) is a brief symbolic prediction of Assyria's victory over Egypt and Ethiopia in 711 B. C. By donning a captive's garb for three years, Isaiah attempts to teach the citizens of Jerusalem that the siege of Ashdod (v. 1) was but a means to an end in Sargon's plan of campaign, and that it was sheer folly for the Egyptian party in Jerusalem, who were ever urging reliance upon Egypt, to look in that direction for help. In this graphic manner Isaiah symbolized the shameful fate which later befell the Egyptians at the hands of Sargon (cf. Mic. 1: 8).

Concerning Edom and Arabia
(Chapters 21:11-17; 34-35; 63:1-6)

1. Of the three brief oracles concerning Edom in the book of Isaiah, that in 21: 11-12 is "the only gentle utterance in the Old Testament upon Israel's hereditary foe." In it the prophet, in vision, beholds Edom in great anxiety sending messengers to inquire how far gone is their night of darkness and distress. The prophet's answer is disappointing, though its tone is sympathetic. The outlook is chequered. Dawn struggles with darkness. But if the messengers will come again, there may be additional tidings later (711 B. C.).

2. A second prophecy against "all the nations," but against Edom in particular, is the fierce cry for justice in chapter 34 (701 B. C.). Its tone is the tone of judgment. Edom is guilty of high crimes against Zion (34: 8), therefore she is doomed to destruction. On the other hand, Israel's scattered ones shall return from exile and "obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (chapter 35).

3. Shortly after this, Isaiah lifts his eye again and beholds a solitary majestic warrior coming from the direction of Edom, in clothing besprinkled with blood, and learns on inquiry that a terrible judgment of the nations has taken place on the soil of Edom (63: 1-6). The prophecy is a drama of divine vengeance on those who rejoiced in Judah's devastation and Jerusalem's humiliation in 701 B. C. This picture of Jehovah graphically prefigures the agony and passion of the Saviour who also "trod the winepress alone."

4. The brief oracle concerning Arabia in 21: 13-17 is a sympathetic appeal to the Temanites to give bread and water to the caravans of Dedan, who have been driven by war from their usual route of travel. For, says the prophet, "within a year" their fate will have been sealed and only a small remnant will survive (711 B. C.).

Concerning the Foreign Temper within the Theocracy (Chapter 22)

1. Isaiah pauses, as it were, in his series of warnings to foreign nations to rebuke the foreign temper of the frivolous inhabitants of Jerusalem, and in particular Shebna, a high official in the government (chapter 22). The minatory tone of the oracle points to the year 711 B. C., when Sargon invaded Judah, rather than to a temporary raising of the blockade of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701 B. C.

2. In verses 1-14 the prophet draws a picture of the reckless and God-ignoring citizens of the capital, who venture to indulge themselves in hilarious eating and drinking, when the enemy at that very moment is standing before the gates of the city. Very differently the impending catastrophe affects Isaiah, who weeps bitterly and refuses to be comforted because of the destruction of his people. With prophetic courage he declares that such godless impenitence and spiritual insensibility are sins beyond the possibility of forgiveness (v. 14).

3. In verses 15-25 Isaiah directs a personal message—the only philippic in his book—to Shebna, the comptroller of the palace, in which he predicts his deposition from office and degradation to a lower and less honorable position in the royal service.

4. Shebna seems to have been an ostentatious foreigner, perhaps a Syrian by birth, quite possibly one of the Egyptian party, whose policy was antagonistic to that of Isaiah and the king. On the other hand, Eliakim, who was appointed in his place, probably represented the true policy of the state; yet he also seems eventually to have forfeited his position of trust through nepotism—showing unwarrantable favors to his relatives. Isaiah's prediction of Shebna's fall was evidently fulfilled (36: 3; 37: 2).

Concerning Tyre (Chapter 23). Summary

1. In this last of Isaiah's foreign oracles (chapter 23), the prophet predicts that Tyre shall be laid waste (v. 1), her commercial glory humbled (v. 9), her colonies become independent of her (v. 10), and she herself forgotten for "seventy years" (v. 15); but, "after the end of seventy years," her trade will revive, her business prosperity will return, and she will dedicate her gains in merchandise as holy to Jehovah (v. 18). The best date for this oracle is shortly before 722 B. C.

2. In summing up the lessons of permanent value taught by these foreign oracles, emphasis should be laid on the following points:

(1) That Babylon falls because of arrogance and pride, whereas Israel is redeemed through Jehovah's gracious compassion (13: 11; 14: 1-2).

(2) That Moab bases her appeal to Zion for shelter on the permanent character of the Davidic dynasty, as expressed in the Messianic hope current in Israel, namely, that "a throne shall be established in loving kindness" (16: 4-5).

(3) That the Philistines are not allowed to ally themselves with Judah against Assyria, because Jerusalem is already inviolable through faith in Jehovah (14: 32), and that the allied forces of Damascus and Israel had failed in the Syro-Ephraimitic war because they forsook the God of their salvation for idols (17: 10).

(4) That Ethiopia is converted to Jehovah through seeing God's hand in history (18: 7), and that Egypt is won to Jehovah's worship through divine discipline (19: 22).

(5) That Edom's fickle cry for light in the night (21: 11-12) is not deep or sincere enough to secure her from rejoicing over Judah's calamities, and therefore not sufficient to avert her deserved doom (34: 10).

(6) That careless, godless abandon on the part of people in imminent peril of siege is an unpardonable sin and foreign to the spirit of the theocracy (22: 14); and that a man's pride, even of one who is a high officer of state, "shall bring him low" (22: 16, 19).

(7) And lastly, that the profits derived from merchandise are no better morally than the hire of a harlot unless consecrated to the service of Jehovah (23: 18). In short, that the heathen, as well as Israel, are responsible to God, and may share if they wish in his mercy and grace.

AND IN THIS MOUNTAIN WILL JEHOVAH OF HOSTS
MAKE UNTO ALL PEOPLES A FEAST OF FAT THINGS, A
FEAST OF WINES ON THE LEES, OF FAT THINGS FULL OF
MARROW, OF WINES ON THE LEES WELL REFINED.

ISA. 25: 6.

HE HATH SWALLOWED UP DEATH FOR EVER; AND THE
LORD JEHOVAH WILL WIPE AWAY TEARS FROM OFF ALL
FACES; AND THE REPROACH OF HIS PEOPLE WILL HE
TAKE AWAY FROM OFF ALL THE EARTH; FOR JEHOVAH
HATH SPOKEN IT.

ISA. 25: 8.

THOU WILT KEEP HIM IN PERFECT PEACE, WHOSE
MIND IS STAYED ON THEE; BECAUSE HE TRUSTETH IN
THEE.

ISA. 26: 3.

THY DEAD SHALL LIVE; MY DEAD BODIES SHALL
ARISE. AWAKE AND SING, YE THAT DWELL IN THE
DUST; FOR THY DEW IS AS THE DEW OF HERBS, AND THE
EARTH SHALL CAST FORTH THE DEAD.

ISA. 26: 19.

SPIRITUAL MESSAGES OF SALVATION (CHAPTERS 24-27)

Prophecy or Apocalypse?

1. It is difficult to distinguish between prophecy and apocalypse. Prophecy, however, usually foretells a definite future which has its foundations in the present; apocalypse directs the mind more abstractly to the future in contrast with the present.

2. Strictly speaking chapters 24-27 are prophecy, not apocalypse. No one ascends into heaven or talks with an angel, as in Dan. 7 and Rev. 4. They can, therefore, be considered apocalypse only in the sense that certain things are predicted as sure to come to pass.

3. Isaiah was fond of this kind of prophecy. He frequently lifts his reader out of the sphere of mere history to paint pictures of the far-off distant future (2: 2-4; 4: 2-6; 11: 6-16; 30: 27-33). In chapters 24-27 we are especially impressed by the scope of his imagination.

4. These prophecies stand closely related to chapters 13-23. They express the same tender emotion as that already observed in 21: 3, 10; 15: 5; 16: 11, and sum up as in one grand finale the prophet's oracles to Israel's neighbors. For religious importance they stand second to none in the book of Isaiah, teaching the necessity of divine discipline and the glorious redemption awaiting the faithful in Israel.

5. They are a spiritual commentary on the great Assyrian crisis of the eighth century, and seem to have sprung from the period prior to the fall of Samaria (722 B. C.), or possibly just before the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B. C. They are messages intended not for declamation but for meditation, and were probably addressed more particularly to the prophet's inner circle of "disciples" (8: 16).

Waves of Approaching Judgment (Chapter 24)

1. A general judgment is on the way (v. 1), which will level all classes of society (v. 2), "because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (v. 5). Even "the earth" (in particular Judah) becomes polluted by Israel's sins and shares their guilt. Nature is frequently described in the Old Testament as sympathetic. "Man not only governs nature, he infects her." (G. A. Smith.)

2. Few mortals remain (v. 6), the merry-hearted sigh (v. 7), the harp is silent (v. 8), Judah's cities (the word "city" in verses 10, 12 is collective) are broken down, and mirth has vanished (v. 11); only a sorry remnant is left of all the nations east and west to glorify the majesty of Jehovah (vs. 13-15).

3. The prophet fancies he hears songs of deliverance, but alas! they are premature; more judgment must follow (v. 16). Universal catastrophe is about to burst in on every side like a terrible flood (v. 18). Neither the greatest of earth's kings nor even the guardian princes of heaven will escape (v. 21). Indeed, the sun and moon will lose their brightness, in token that God is angry with the world; for Jehovah will reign as sovereign over Zion in glory (v. 23).

4. Thus beyond the coming waves of judgment there lies a glorious salvation; Zion's enemies will be punished, while Zion herself shall emerge triumphant.

Songs of the Redeemed (Chapter 25)

1. In chapter 25 the prophet transports himself to the period after the Assyrian catastrophe and, identifying himself with the redeemed, puts into their mouths songs of praise and thanksgiving for their deliverance. His aim is not political but religious.

2. Verses 1-5 are a hymn of thanksgiving to Jehovah for deliverance from the Assyrians, and also a confession of faith on the part of heathen cities ("city" is here again collective as in 24: 10, 12), whose surviving remnants now recognize the wonderful might of Jehovah.

3. Verses 6-8 describe Jehovah's bountiful banquet on Mount Zion to all nations, who, in keeping with 2: 2-4, come up to Jerusalem to celebrate "a feast of fat things," rich and marrowy. While the people are present at the banquet, Jehovah graciously removes their spiritual blindness so that they behold him as the true dispenser of life and grace. He also abolishes violent death, that is to say, war (cf. 2: 4), and its sad accompaniment, "tears"; so that "the earth" (Judah in particular) is no longer the battlefield of the nations, but the blessed abode of the redeemed, living in peace and happiness.

4. Verses 9-12 unfold in hymn-like language how in that day Jehovah's people will rejoice that in the midst of desolating calamities which are safely past, they waited patiently for Jehovah's salvation and, in consequence, now enjoy peace and rest; whereas Moab and all other enemies of Israel are described as suffering untold anguish and desolation.

5. The chapter is "an enhanced echo of the song on the seashore in Exodus 15." (Orelli.)

Life from the Dead (Chapter 26:1-19)

1. In chapter 26: 1-19 Judah sings a song over Jerusalem, the impregnable city of God. The prophet, taking again his stand with the redeemed remnant of the nation, vividly portrays their thankful trust in Jehovah, who has been unto them a veritable "Rock of ages" (v. 4).

2. Jerusalem was impregnable because surrounded by the walls of Jehovah's salvation (v. 1); yet she is ever accessible to all who keep faith (v. 2), and the secure abode of all those whose dispositions are firmly stayed on Jehovah (v. 3). Other cities ("city" in verse 5 is without the article and therefore collective) have been brought low, but in Jerusalem, the impregnable city of Jehovah, there is safety.

3. Looking back over their past experiences the redeemed community at length recognize that by patiently waiting on God to come to judgment they were taught righteousness (vs. 8, 9); the wicked, on the contrary, who are incapable of learning righteousness, will be judged (v. 10).

4. At this point the prophet pauses to reflect on the destruction of the nation's adversaries (v. 11), and on the people's peaceful condition as the result of Jehovah's deliverance of them from foreign oppressors who are now dead and forgotten (vs. 12-14). He also recalls how Jehovah increased the nation (v. 15), how they prayed to him in their distress (v. 16), and how they utterly failed in attempting to save themselves (vs. 17-18).

5. With hope, therefore, he exclaims, Let Jehovah's dead ones live! Let Israel's dead bodies arise! Jehovah will bring life from the dead! (v. 19.) This is the first clear statement of the resurrection in the Old Testament. But it is national and restricted to Israel even here (cf. v. 14), and is merely Isaiah's method of expressing a hope of the return of Israel's faithful ones from captivity (cf. Hos. 6: 2; Ezek. 37: 1-14; Dan. 12: 2).

Israel's Chastisements Salutory (Chapters 36:20 — 27:13)

1. In chapter 26: 20, 21 the prophet exhorts his own people, his disciples, to continue a little longer in the solitude of prayer, till God's wrath is overpast. They are to be saved, but the land as a whole is incapable of salvation. Yet in that day (27: 1) the agents of destruction shall themselves be destroyed: viz., "the swift serpent," Assyria; "the crooked serpent," Babylonia; and the sea "monster," Egypt.

2. The true vineyard of Jehovah, which these three great heathen world-powers have like ravenous beasts laid waste, will henceforth be safely guarded against the briars and thorns of foreign invasion (27: 2-4; cf. 5: 1-7); and it will flourish so gloriously that the whole earth shall be filled with its fruit (27: 6; cf. 4: 2). The language here is that of prophecy, not apocalypse (cf. 37: 31).

3. Notwithstanding all, Jehovah's chastisements of Israel were light compared with the judgments of Jehovah upon other nations (27: 7, 8). Theirs were punitive; Israel's, remedial. Israel he sifted; the nations he destroyed. In their case his object was annihilation: in Israel's, salvation. Forgiveness, therefore, is ever possible, if "Jacob" will only renounce his sins and forsake his idolatry (27: 9).

4. But Judah, like Ephraim in Hosea's time (Hos. 4: 17), is wedded to her idols, hence her fortified cities ("city" in 27: 10 is collective, as in 24: 10-12; 25: 2; 26: 5) will become solitary and forsaken (27: 10-11). When, however, Israel repents, Jehovah will spare no pains to gather "one by one" the remnant of his people from Assyria and Egypt (cf. 11: 11); and together they shall once more worship Jehovah in the holy mountain at Jerusalem (27: 12-13).

The Historical Standpoint of the Author

1. The prophet's fundamental standpoint in chapters 24-27 is the same as that of the author of 2: 2-4 and chapters 13-23, namely, that of the eighth century B. C. As to his style and figures also, "everything is Isaianic," and "has an Isaianic ring." (Delitzsch.)

2. Yet the prophet not infrequently throws himself forward into the remote future, oscillating backwards and forwards between his own times and those of Israel's restoration. It is especially noteworthy how he sustains himself in a long and continued transportation of himself to the period of Israel's redemption. He even studies to identify himself with the new Israel which will emerge out of the present chaos of political events. His visions of Israel's redemption carry him in ecstasy far away into the remote future, to a time when the nation's sufferings are all over; so that when he writes down what he saw in vision he describes it as a discipline that is past.

3. For example, in 25: 1-8 the prophet, transported to the end of time, celebrates what he saw in song, and describes how the fall of the world-empire is followed by the conversion of the heathen. In 26: 8-9 he looks back into the past from the standpoint of the redeemed in the last days, and tells how Israel longingly waited for the manifestation of God's righteousness which has now taken place. While in 27: 7-9, he places himself in the midst of the nation's sufferings, in full view of their glorious future, and portrays how Jehovah's dealings with Israel have not been the punishment of wrath, but the discipline of love.

4. This kind of apocalypse, indeed, was to be expected from the very beginning of this group of prophecies, which are introduced with the word, "Behold!" Such a manner of introduction is peculiar to Isaiah, and of itself leads us to expect a message which is unique.

The Value of Chapters 24-27 to Isaiah's Age

1. The practical religious value of these prophecies to Isaiah's own age would be very great. They would bring untold spiritual comfort to the theocracy.

2. In a period of war and repeated foreign invasion (734-722 B. C.), when but few men were left in the land (24: 6, 13; 26: 18) and Judah's cities were laid waste and desolate (24: 10, 12; 25: 2; 26: 5; 27: 10) and music and gladness were wanting (24: 8), when the nation still clung to their idols (27: 9) and the Assyrians' work of destruction was still incomplete, other calamities being sure to follow (24: 16); it would certainly be comforting to know that forgiveness was still possible (27: 9), that Jehovah was still the keeper of his vineyard (27: 3-4), that his judgments were to last but for a little moment (26: 20), and that though his people should be scattered, he would soon carefully gather them "one by one" (27: 12-13), and that in company with other nations they would feast together on Mount Zion as Jehovah's guests (25: 6, 7, 10). On the other hand, the prophet assures his hearers that their enemies, Moab (25: 10), Assyria, Babylon and Egypt (27: 1) shall be trodden down and destroyed and that Jerusalem shall henceforth become the center of life and religion to all nations (24: 23; 25: 6; 27: 13).

3. Such faith in Jehovah, such exhortations, and such songs and confessions of the redeemed, seen in vision, would be a source of rich spiritual comfort to the few suffering saints in Judah and Jerusalem, and a guiding star to the faithful disciples of the prophet's inner circle; and through them a ground of hope to the generations to come, upon whom similar judgments would inevitably descend.

4. As a matter of fact, it is pretty generally recognized even by the most radical critics that these prophecies have at least an Isaianic basis.

FOR IT IS PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT; LINE UPON LINE, LINE UPON LINE; HERE A LITTLE, THERE A LITTLE.

ISA. 28: 10.

THEREFORE THUS SAITH THE LORD JEHOVAH, BEHOLD I LAY IN ZION FOR A FOUNDATION A STONE, A TRIED STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE OF SURE FOUNDATION: HE THAT BELIEVETH SHALL NOT BE IN HASTE.

ISA. 28: 16.

FOR THE BED IS SHORTER THAN THAT A MAN CAN STRETCH HIMSELF ON IT; AND THE COVERING NARROWER THAN THAT HE CAN WRAP HIMSELF IN IT.

ISA. 28: 20.

AND A MAN SHALL BE AS A HIDING-PLACE FROM THE WIND, AND A COVERT FROM THE TEMPEST, AS STREAMS OF WATER IN A DRY PLACE, AS THE SHADE OF A GREAT ROCK IN A WEARY LAND.

ISA. 32: 2.

THINE EYES SHALL SEE THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY; THEY SHALL BEHOLD A LAND THAT REACHETH AFAR.

ISA. 33: 17.

AND THE INHABITANT SHALL NOT SAY, I AM SICK: THE PEOPLE THAT DWELL THEREIN SHALL BE FORGIVEN THEIR INIQUITY.

ISA. 33: 24.

A SERIES OF SIX WOES (CHAPTERS 28-33)

Woe to Drunken, Scoffing Politicians (Chapter 28)

1. This is one of the great chapters of Isaiah's book. It is the first of a series of six, all of which refer to the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B. C. The opening verses (1-6), however, seem to have been first spoken before the downfall of Samaria (722 B. C.)—a hint possibly that the whole series may have been written earlier than is usually supposed (704-701 B. C.).

2. After pointing in warning to the proud drunkards of Ephraim, whose crown (Samaria) is rapidly fading (vs. 1-6), the prophet turns to the scoffing politicians of Jerusalem, rebuking especially the bibulous priests who stumble in judgment, and the staggering prophets who err in vision (vs. 7-8).

3. But they, looking up with bleared eyes, only mock in burlesque mimicry his monotonous preaching. (Each word in verse 10 is a monosyllable in Hebrew.) Whereupon, Isaiah hurls back the sarcastic but serious retort that Jehovah will one day speak to them in Assyrian monosyllables (vs. 11-13).

4. Then, without openly denouncing their desire to make an alliance with Egypt, he assures them that to suppose that they had made a "covenant with death" is a delusion, that judgment is imminent, and that the only true element of permanency in Zion is the "sure foundation" stone of faith (v. 16).

5. However, Jehovah's judgments upon them will not be arbitrary. The methods employed by peasants in agriculture are a parable of God's purpose in disciplining. For example, the husbandman does not plow and harrow his fields the whole year round; he plows and harrows that he may also sow and reap. So God will not punish his people forever; a glorious future awaits the redeemed. The husbandman does not thresh all kinds of grain with equal severity; no more will God discipline his people beyond their deserts (vs. 23-29).

Woe to Those Who hide their Plans from God (Chapter 29:15-24)

1. Isaiah's third woe is pronounced against those who secretly hide their counsel from Jehovah in order to avoid Jehovah's rebuke; who work in the dark, foolishly fancying that Jehovah does not see them (v. 15).

2. What their counsel is, or what they may be devising in secret, the prophet does not yet disclose; but he doubtless alludes to their intrigues with the Egyptians and their purpose to break faith with the Assyrians, to whom they were bound by treaty to pay annual tribute.

3. Isaiah bravely remonstrates with them for supposing that any policy will succeed which excludes the counsel and wisdom of the Holy One. They are but clay; he is the potter. Shall the creature attempt to dictate to the Creator? Can they by their cleverness correct his ways (v. 16; cf. 45: 9; 64: 8)?

4. At this point, though somewhat abruptly, Isaiah turns his face toward the Messianic future. In a very little while, he says, Lebanon, which is now overrun by Assyria's army, shall become a fruitful field, and the blind and deaf and spiritually weak shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel; for the Assyrian tyrant shall be brought to nought, and Jerusalem's scoffing politicians shall be cut off (vs. 17-21).

5. The end of Israel's history shall be like its beginning. As God ransomed Abraham from his heathen compatriots, so will Jehovah rescue Jacob-Israel from their idolatrous surroundings. Those capable of reformation will be reformed; those erring will be corrected; those given to murmuring will be admonished; while all will in that day submit docilely to the revealed teaching of God (vs. 22-24).

Woe to the Pro-Egyptian Party (Chapter 30)

1. Isaiah's fourth woe is directed against the rebellious politicians who stubbornly, and now openly, advocate making a league with Egypt. They have at length succeeded apparently in winning the king over to their side, and an embassy is already on its way to Egypt, bearing across the desert of the Exodus rich treasures with which to purchase the friendship of their former oppressors (vs. 1-5).

2. Isaiah now condemns what he can no longer prevent. He warns them that their policy is untheocratic because they lack faith in Jehovah, and therefore doomed to failure; that they absurdly exaggerate Egypt's resources; that they are grossly ignorant of Egypt's true character in time of war and danger; that Egypt is a Rahab "sit-still," i. e., a mythological sea monster menacing in mien but laggard in action; and that when the crisis comes she will sit still, causing Israel only shame and confusion (vs. 6-7).

3. But the advocates of the pro-Egyptian party stubbornly refuse to give heed to Isaiah's admonition. Accordingly Jehovah bids the prophet to take a tablet and to write before them in a book his unavailing protest against this fatal step, that it may be a perpetual memorial to the generations to come of Judah's unwillingness to listen to Jehovah's instruction, forever and ever (vs. 8-14).

4. Therefore, urges the prophet, recall the embassy now on its way to Egypt, and trust quietly in Jehovah for deliverance in the impending crisis (vs. 15-17). Jehovah is waiting to be gracious. If Israel will only repent of their idolatry (vs. 18-26), copious blessings will follow and they "shall have a song as in the night" from the Rock of Israel (vs. 27-29).

5. But with fire and tempest he will suddenly devour the Assyrians, and kindle as with brimstone their funeral pile (vs. 30-33).

Woe to Those Who Trust in Horses and Chariots (Chapters 31-32)

1. Isaiah's fifth woe is a still more vehement denunciation of those who trust in Egypt's horses and chariots, and disregard the Holy One of Israel. Those who do this forget that the Egyptians are but men and their horses flesh, and that flesh cannot avail in a conflict with spirit (31: 1-3).

2. For it is Jehovah who, by means of Assyria, has seized hold of Jerusalem and like a lion holds it in his grasp; and it is idle folly to suppose that a few Egyptian allies, called in to help shepherd Jerusalem, will be able to scare the All-powerful One from his prey (31: 4). Note the Homeric ring of this verse!

3. Eventually Jehovah means to deliver Jerusalem, if the children of Israel will but turn from their idolatries to him; and in that day, Assyria will be vanquished (31: 5-9).

4. A new era will dawn upon Judah. Society will be regenerated. King and nobles will rule in righteousness, and the poor will find justice. The renovation of society will begin at the top. Those who were once spiritually blind and deaf shall at length understand; those who thought aforetime only superficially, will think deeply; and those who stammered when speaking on religion, will henceforth speak clearly and forcibly. Conscience also will be sharpened, and moral distinctions will no longer be confused (32: 1-8). "The aristocracy of birth and wealth will be replaced by an aristocracy of character." (Delitzsch.)

5. The careless and indifferent women, too, in that day will no longer menace the social welfare of the state. Within a year their palaces and pleasant gardens will have been given over to wild asses and flocks for pasture. "Next year's harvests will never come" (32: 9-14; cf. 3: 16—4: 1).

6. With the outpouring of Jehovah's spirit an ideal commonwealth will emerge, in which social righteousness, peace, plenty and security will abound (32: 15-20).

Woe to the Assyrian Destroyer (Chapter 33)

1. Isaiah's last woe is directed against the treacherous spoiler himself, who has already laid waste the cities of Judah, and is now beginning to lay siege to Jerusalem (701 B. C.).

2. The precise historical situation of this chapter is defined in verses 7-12, from which it appears that the ambassadors, who were sent by Hezekiah with costly tribute to Sennacherib at Lachish, have returned home with the melancholy news that the treacherous Assyrian has accepted their tribute but refused to abandon the siege (cf. 2 Kings 18: 14-16). For Isaiah, such treachery fills the measure of Assyria's iniquity to the full, and the hour of Judah's deliverance is come (v. 10).

3. The prophet prays (v. 2); and while he prays, behold! the mighty hosts of the Assyrians are routed, and the long-besieged but now triumphant inhabitants of Jerusalem rush out like locusts upon the spoil which the vanishing adversary has been forced to leave behind (vs. 3-4). The destroyer's plan to reduce Jerusalem has come to naught.

4. The whole earth beholds the spectacle of Assyria's defeat and is filled with awe and amazement at the mighty work of Jehovah. Even the sinners within Jerusalem stand aghast at Jehovah's omnipotence, and solemnly inquire: Who among us dare dwell in a city with such a God? Jehovah's wrath is like a divine fire, and his furnace is in Zion (v. 14; cf. 31: 9).

5. Only the righteous may henceforth dwell in Jerusalem. Their eyes shall behold the Messiah-king in his beauty, reigning no longer like Hezekiah over a limited and restricted territory, but over a land unbounded, whose inhabitants enjoy Jehovah's peace and protection, and are free from all sickness, and therefore from all sin (vs. 17-24). With this beautiful picture of the Messianic future, the prophet's woes find an appropriate conclusion.

Summary: No Woe without a Promise

1. The most striking feature of these prophecies is the constant alteration of threat and promise. Isaiah never pronounced a woe without adding a corresponding promise: thus, Woe to those who vainly scoff at Jehovah's warnings (28: 7-22); yet, God will not ruthlessly destroy even scoffers; he will only punish them according to their deserts (28: 23-29). ①
2. Woe to those who in their spiritual blindness and hypocrisy trust in form and ritual (29: 9-13); yet in order to rouse them from their spiritual stupor, God will do an extraordinary work and destroy their arch-enemy without assistance (29: 5-8, 14). ②
3. Woe to those who exclude God from their plans and purposes, and practically dictate to their Creator what the issues of life must be (29: 15-16); yet even to such God will continue to reveal himself in wisdom and instruction (29: 17-24). ③
4. Woe to those who make friends with God's enemies, rejecting the counsel of his Spirit; who silence the voice of prophecy and demand that the seers preach "smooth things" (30: 10); yet even to them a voice will be heard from behind whispering, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (30: 21). ④
5. Woe to those who rely for help on flesh and blood rather than upon the spirit of the living God (31: 1, 3); yet such may be saved by repentance (31: 6), and be allowed to dwell in peace in a land rejuvenated by God's presence (32: 15-20). ⑤
6. Finally, woe to the treacherous enemies of the kingdom of God, who would violently destroy the last vestige of Jehovah's possessions; they shall be destroyed, and that without mercy (33: 1-12); on the other hand Israel will be gloriously delivered, and their iniquities forgiven (33: 22-24). ⑥

THUS SAITH JEHOVAH, SET THY HOUSE IN ORDER; FOR
THOU SHALT DIE, AND NOT LIVE.

ISA. 38: 1.

WHAT SHALL I SAY? HE HATH BOTH SPOKEN UNTO
ME, AND HIMSELF HATH DONE IT: I SHALL GO SOFTLY
ALL MY YEARS BECAUSE OF THE BITTERNESS OF MY SOUL.
O LORD, BY THESE THINGS MEN LIVE; AND WHOLLY
THEREIN IS THE LIFE OF MY SPIRIT: WHEREFORE RE-
COVER THOU ME, AND MAKE ME TO LIVE.

ISA. 38: 15, 16.

HISTORY, PROPHECY AND SONG (CHAPTERS 36-39)

The Fourteenth Year of King Hezekiah (Chapter 36:1)

1. In chapters 36-39 three important historical events are narrated, in which Isaiah was a prominent factor: (1) the double attempt of Sennacherib to obtain possession of Jerusalem (chapters 36-37); (2) Hezekiah's sickness and recovery (chapter 38); (3) the embassy of Merodach-Baladan (chapter 39). With certain omissions and insertions these chapters are duplicated verbatim in 2 Kings 18: 13—20: 19.

2. Chronologically chapters 38-39 precede chapters 36-37. This is probably due to the fact that chapters 36-37, which describe the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701 B. C., explain and appropriately conclude chapters 1-35; whereas, chapters 38-39, which record Hezekiah's sickness (714 B. C.) and Merodach-Baladan's embassy of congratulation upon his recovery (712 B. C.), fittingly introduce chapters 40-66.

3. The whole section (chapters 36-39) is introduced with the chronological note, "Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah." Various attempts have been made to solve the mystery of this date; for if the author is alluding to the siege of 701 B. C., difficulty arises, because that event occurred not in Hezekiah's fourteenth but twenty-sixth year, according to the Biblical chronology; or if, with George Adam Smith and others, we date Hezekiah's accession to the throne of Judah as "most probably" in 720 B. C., then the siege of 701 B. C. occurred, as is evident, in Hezekiah's nineteenth year. It is barely possible that "the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah" was the fourteenth of the fifteen years which were added to his life, but more probably it alludes to the fourteenth of his reign.

4. On the whole it is better to take the phrase as a general chronological caption for the entire section, with special reference to chapter 38, which tells of Hezekiah's sickness, which actually fell in his fourteenth year (714 B. C.), and which, coupled with Sargon's expected presence at Ashdod, was *the* great personal crisis of the king's life. In any case the author of these chapters was not a mere historian but a prophet.

The Events of 701 B.C. (Chapters 36-37)

1. Sennacherib made two attempts in 701 B. C. to reduce Jerusalem: one from Lachish with an army (36: 2—37: 8), and another from Libnah with a threat conveyed by messengers (37: 9-38). The brief section contained in 2 Kings 18: 14-16 is omitted from between verses 1 and 2 of Isaiah 36, because it was not the prophet's aim at this time to recount the nation's humiliation.

2. Sennacherib's two attempts to take Jerusalem followed each other in rapid succession. First (36: 2—37: 8) he sent his commander-in-chief, the Rabshakeh, from Lachish with a vast army (36: 2). After arriving at Jerusalem, the Rabshakeh, in an oral address in Hebrew before the walls of the city, insolently defied Hezekiah and Hezekiah's God (36: 13-20). The king was panic-stricken. He rent his clothes, repaired to the temple, and sent a request to Isaiah to pray for the remnant of his people (37: 1-4); whereupon Isaiah returned answer that the king should not be afraid, for Sennacherib would hear tidings and return to his own land (37: 5-7).

3. Sennacherib's second attempt (37: 9-38) was baffled by the rumored approach of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia. Not being able to spare a detachment of the regular army he sends messengers to Hezekiah with an insulting letter, in which he threatens Jerusalem with utter destruction (37: 9-13). Hezekiah receives the letter and again repairs to the temple, spreads the letter before Jehovah that He may more clearly behold its arrogant character, and prays that Jehovah may vindicate himself as the only true and living God by saving the city (37: 14-20); whereupon Isaiah sends him a message of comfort, predicting that Sennacherib will not return to renew the siege, nor shoot an arrow into the city, and that the city will be surely delivered (37: 21-35).

4. It is then recorded (37: 36-37) how the angel of Jehovah went forth and smote, perhaps by means of a pestilence, as Herodotus suggests, 185,000 of Sennacherib's army, and how the king himself returned to Nineveh; to which an editor has appended the information that Sennacherib died a violent death at the hands of his two sons (37: 38). This happened twenty years subsequent to the siege of Jerusalem (681 B. C.); during all these years Sennacherib apparently never made another expedition into Palestine.

**Isaiah's Last "Word" Concerning Assyria
(Chapter 37:21-35)**

1. This last formal prophecy concerning Assyria is one of Isaiah's grandest predictions. It was delivered during the din and excitement of a real crisis (701 B. C.), and before the historical issue was generally known.

2. It is composed of three parts: (1) A taunt-song in elegiac rhythm, on the inevitable humiliation of Sennacherib (vs. 22-29); (2) a short poem in different rhythm, directed to Hezekiah, in order to encourage his faith (vs. 30-32); (3) a definite prediction, in less elevated style, of the sure deliverance of Jerusalem (vs. 33-35).

3. The taunting tone of the first section (vs. 22-29) is accounted for by the insolent character of Sennacherib's letter (37: 10-13), in which he scorns the God of Israel as impotent and powerless to protect Jerusalem. Isaiah, on the contrary, reminds Sennacherib that Assyria's successes in time past were not due to their own gods, but rather to the eternal purpose of Jehovah, who has been using Assyria as an elect instrument in the overthrow of nations (37: 26; cf. 22: 11; 10: 5-15).

4. Then turning to King Hezekiah, in verses 30-32 Isaiah gives him a "sign," by which he may verify the prophetic "word." For two years there will not be regular harvests, but in the third, the surviving remnant will sow and reap in peace. Thus would Isaiah give the king a tangible support to faith, and encourage him in rejecting Sennacherib's insolent demand to surrender.

5. The prophecy concludes with a definite prediction of Jerusalem's deliverance (vs. 33-35), which was absolutely and literally fulfilled. "Never had a prophet predicted more boldly, never was a prediction more brilliantly fulfilled."

THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue waves roll lightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still:

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there roll'd not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown.

And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow at the glance of the Lord!

—Lord Byron.

Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery (Chapter 38)

1. "In those days (i. e., his fourteenth year, 714 B. C.) was Hezekiah sick unto death." The king was about thirty-eight years of age when Isaiah was divinely commanded to pronounce upon him the sentence of death: "Set thy house in order; for thou shalt die and not live" (v. 1).

2. Hezekiah at that time had no son (39: 7; cf. 2 Kings 21: 1), and the dynasty of David, in which centered so many Messianic hopes, was seriously threatened. The king accordingly turned his face to the wall and prayed and wept sore; whereupon Jehovah, seeing Hezekiah's tears, revoked his death sentence, and added to his life fifteen years (vs. 2-5).

3. God also gave him a "sign" that what he promised would come to pass. As Hezekiah lay in his palace chamber he could look through the window and watch the sun's shadow descend on the staircase of Ahaz, by which the king was accustomed to go up into the house of the Lord (cf. 1 Kings 10: 5). The shadow naturally would serve the purpose of a chronometer for the dying monarch. That the shadow might be an indubitable sign to Hezekiah, God caused it to return backward "ten steps." So the sun returned "ten steps" on the dial, or steps, whereon it was gone down (vs. 6-8).

4. Among the celebrated sun-dials of antiquity this staircase of Ahaz has become the most famous. That of Augustus on the field of Mars in Rome is another. There is a modern dial on the rear of the Sirdar's palace at Khartum in the Sudan, which bears the suggestive motto: "The bird of time has but a little way to fly, And lo! the bird is on the wing."

5. The prophet's prescription for the king's malady in verses 21-22, which in 2 Kings 20 stands after verse 6, comes in rather awkwardly after Hezekiah's psalm, but its position may be due to the editor's desire to bring verses 20 and 22 into close juxtaposition.

Hezekiah's Song of Thanksgiving (Chapter 38:9-20)

1. This beautiful plaintive "Writing" of King Hezekiah, in which he celebrates his recovery from some mortal sickness, expresses the sentiments and feelings of one who has himself personally been unexpectedly and miraculously delivered from the brink of death. It is omitted altogether by the author of the book of Kings (cf. 2 Kings 20).

2. With hopeless melancholy the king, in the first half of the poem, depicts his deep despondency when confronting death and the darkness of Sheol (vs. 10-14); but with correspondingly boundless rapture he describes his joy at the thought of continued life in communion with Jehovah in the land of the living (vs. 15-20).

3. A more minute outline of this royal psalm is as follows: (1) Verses 10-12 review the king's feelings as in the noontide of life (thirty-eight years old) he faced gloomy Sheol, whose pale inhabitants were supposed in Old Testament times to lose all interest in human affairs and to be completely cut off from all conscious communion with God. (2) Verses 13-14 describe how in the midst of his distress he prayed, but God did not regard him; and how sometimes during his illness he felt so languid that he despaired of living out the day. (3) Verses 15-17 relate how Jehovah came to his rescue, and not only promised him life but actually caused him to live. Therefore, he asks, What can I render to God for his faithfulness? I shall go softly, as in solemn procession, all my added years; for now I see that my affliction was God's chastisement, and that by such experiences and with the help of such promises, men really live. (4) In verses 18-20, he continues to rejoice in the prospect of continued communion with God in the land of the living; and vows that as a faithful choragus he will sing songs with which to celebrate Jehovah's praise in the temple all the remaining days of his life (cf. 2 Chron. 29: 30).

4. While Hezekiah's view of the future world is gloomy, being without consciousness of God's presence, and consequently without moral or intellectual energy (v. 18), yet the same view is entertained in several of the psalms (6: 5; 55: 4; 56: 13; 116: 3), and is in perfect harmony with Hezekiah's early times.

The Embassy of Merodach-Baladan (Chapter 39)

1. Hezekiah was sick in 714 B. C. Two years later Merodach-Baladan, the veteran arch-enemy of Assyria, having heard of his wonderful recovery, sent letters and a present to congratulate him (v. 1).

2. Doubtless also political motives prompted the recalcitrant Babylonian. Sargon complains in one of his inscriptions that Merodach-Baladan was ever sending ambassadors to the disaffected subjects of the empire, inciting them to join with him in getting rid of the Assyrian yoke. The chronicler mentions scientific curiosity as another motive for the embassy (2 Chron. 32: 31).

3. In any case Hezekiah was greatly flattered by the visit of Merodach-Baladan's envoys; and, in a moment of weakness, showed them all his royal treasures (v. 2). This was an inexcusable blunder, as the sight of his many precious possessions would only excite Babylonian cupidity to possess Jerusalem.

4. Isaiah at once perceived the issues of the transaction and sought an interview with Hezekiah. In tones of prophetic authority he catechized the king as to the ambassadors, their home, what they had said, and what they had seen, and boldly rebuked him for his vanity of heart and lack of faith in Jehovah in thus receiving them. And not only did he solemnly condemn the king's conduct, but he announced with more than ordinary insight that the days were coming when all the accumulated resources of Jerusalem would be carried away to Babylon (vs. 3-6; cf. Mic. 4: 10).

5. Hezekiah, conscience-smitten, in pious resignation meekly submitted to the prophet's rebuke; evidently, however, regarding the postponement of the calamity as a mitigation of its severity (vs. 7-8).

6. This final prediction of judgment is the most marvelous of all Isaiah's minatory utterances; because he distinctly asserts that, not the Assyrians, who were then at the height of their power, but the Babylonians, shall be the instruments of the divine vengeance in consummating Jerusalem's destruction. There is absolutely no reason for doubting the genuineness of this prediction. In it we have a prophetic basis for chapters 40-66, which follow.

An Estimate of Hezekiah

1. Hezekiah is mentioned thirty-one times in Isaiah 36-39. Next to David he was the greatest king the Jews ever had. Throughout his entire reign Isaiah was his constant counselor.

2. His deeds were important and manifold. He began his reign with a widespread reformation of religion, and renovation and purification of the temple and its services (2 Kings 18: 4; cf. 2 Chron. 29-30); he built a pool and an aqueduct to improve the water supply of Jerusalem (2 Kings 20: 20); he encouraged and promoted literature (Prov. 25: 1); in short, he did that which was right as David his father had done, so that neither before nor after him was there a king like him (2 Kings 18: 5; cf. however 23: 25). Jesus Ben-Sirach associates him with David and Josiah (Ecclus. 48: 22; 49: 4).

3. In his sickness he learned the true meaning of life, and was led to interpret God's discipline in terms of wisdom and love (Isa. 38: 17). In consequence of his vain display of his riches to the Babylonian envoys, he learned humility (2 Chron. 32: 25-26); while by his rebellion against Assyria (2 Kings 18: 7), he brought upon him and his people a series of events which taught him that the highest type of patriotism was faith in Jehovah-God. The secret of his life was prayer.

4. Side by side for nearly thirty years, the king and the prophet guided the ship of state, and by God's mercy Jerusalem was saved.