

4.0 The Book of the [Prophet Isaiah](#)¹

4.1 The Prophet and His Times

Isaiah was called to his prophetic ministry in 742 BCE, the year king [Uzziah](#) (783-742 BCE) died.² His period of ministry was dominated by the rise of [Assyria](#). He lived and worked in the area around Jerusalem and so is considered one of the southern prophets. He was highly educated, from an upper-class family, married with two sons.³ The only oracles that can be dated with accuracy are those relating to the political crisis under [Ahaz](#) (735-715 BCE) and [Hezekiah](#) (715-687 BCE).

4.1.1 The Crisis Under Ahaz

As Assyrian influence and power increased, the Israelite king, [Pekah](#) (744-732 BCE) began to resist the Assyrians. He joined with Rezin king of Syria (died 732 BCE) in a coalition against the Assyrians. Both Pekah and Rezin wanted the [Southern State of Judah](#) to join the anti-Assyrian coalition. First under [Jotham](#) (742-732 BCE) and then under [Ahaz](#) (735-715 BCE), Judah refused to join Pekah and Rezin. This triggered a war between Judah and the coalition of Syria and Israel (Ephraim). Thus the war was called the *Syro-Ephramite War*. Israel and Syria invaded Judah in an attempt to depose Ahaz. Ahaz appealed to the Assyrians under [Tiglath-pileser III](#) (745-727 BCE).⁴ Isaiah warned Ahaz against appealing to Tiglath-pileser and encouraged him to trust in YHWH's promises to David. Ahaz refused to listen to Isaiah and sent a gift to Tiglath-pileser III. Tiglath-pileser III attacked the coalition and destroyed it. Pekah and Rezin died in the conflict and Judah became a *de facto* vassal of Assyria.

4.1.2 The Crisis Under Hezekiah

In 704 BCE [Sennacherib](#) (705-681 BCE) became king of Assyria. Hezekiah (715-687 BCE) king of Judah attempted to break free from paying tribute to Assyria. Other nations (particularly Babylon and Egypt) pledged support for Judah. Again Isaiah spoke out warning Hezekiah not to trust in Egypt.⁵ In 701 BCE Sennacherib struck⁶ and in the war that

1Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Period of Assyrian Expansion," in *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 97-110; John W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) 90-121.

2 Isa 6:1.

3 Isa 7:3; 8:3.18.

4 See Isa 7:1 – 8:18 which relate the crisis and the consternation it caused in Jerusalem.

5 Isa 30:17; 31:1-3.

6 2 Kgs 18:13-16.

followed Hezekiah was outnumbered and sued for peace. Judah lost some of its territory and Hezekiah was forced to strip the Temple and royal treasury to a hugely increased tribute to the Assyrians. None of Isaiah's oracles can be dated after 701 BCE and it seems likely that his ministry ended around that time.

4.2 Isaiah's Teachings

4.2.1 YHWH's Holiness

Isaiah's thought is dominated by his concepts of YHWH's *holiness* and *kingly power*. Both these concepts will be seen later with the study of Isaiah's inaugural vision.⁷ Isaiah's title for YHWH was *The Holy One of Israel*. Both oppression of the poor and social injustice were considered an offence against YHWH's holiness.⁸

4.2.2 YHWH's Plan for Human History

As a powerful God, YHWH had a plan for human history, which he carried out with wisdom and power.⁹ All human plans were folly in the face of YHWH's plan. For this reason Isaiah condemned Judah's attempts to govern its own destiny by turning to Assyria or Egypt for help. For the prophet, submission to YHWH was a sign of faith. Failure to do so was considered a lack of faith.¹⁰ Because the Judean kings' royal advisers set themselves against the plan of YHWH, they were the subjects of harsh condemnation by Isaiah.¹¹

4.2.3 YHWH's Judgement

For Isaiah, pride was the great sin that brought about YHWH's judgement.¹² Isaiah considered YHWH's judgement and punishment as medicinal.¹³ Isaiah was also a prophet of hope and some of the most hope-filled texts in the Hebrew Scriptures are found in this book.¹⁴

7 Isa 6:1-13.

8 Isa 1:10-17, 21-26; 3:13-15; 5:1-10, 20-23; 10:1-4.

9 On *wisdom* see Isa 28:23-29 and on *power* see Isa 14:26-27.

10 Isa 7:9b; 28:16-17; 30:1-5, 15; 31:1-3.

11 Isa 5:18-19; 6:9-10; 29:13-16.

12 Isa 2:11-12, 17; 3:16; 5:15-16; 9:8-9; 10:7-16, 33; 28:1-4, 22; 29:5.

13 Isa 1:21-26.

14 Isa 2:2-5; 8:23 – 9, 6; 11:1-9.

4.3 The Canonical Book

While the canonical book consists of sixty-six chapters, scholars divide these as follows:

- [Proto-Isaiah](#) (Isa 1-39).
- [Deutero-Isaiah](#) (Isa 40-55).
- [Trito-Isaiah](#) (Isa 56-66).

Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah are considered exilic or post-exilic. Within the Book of Proto-Isaiah scholars consider that the authentic words of the historical prophet are to be found in chapters 1-11; 13-23; 28-32; 36-39.

4.4 The Structure of the Book

1. An Introductory Collection (1:1-31)
2. Concerning Judah and Israel: Part 1 (2:1 – 5:30)
3. Isaiah's Memoirs (6:1 – 9:6)
4. Concerning Judah and Israel: Part 2 (9:7 – 12:6)
5. Oracles against the Nations (13:1 – 23:18)
6. The Apocalypse of Isaiah (24:1 – 27:13)
7. Oracles of Hezekiah's Reign (28:1 – 33:24)
8. Judgement on Edom and Joy for the Redeemed (34:1 – 35:10)

This course will study the following texts:

- The Inscription (1:1)
- A Word to the Survivors (1:2-9)
- The True Worship of God (1:10-20)
- Isaiah's Call (6:1-13)
- The Prince of Peace (8:23 – 9:6)
- The Future King (11:1-9)

4.5 Text #10: The Inscription (Isa 1:1)

Isaiah 1:1 The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

In its present setting, the inscription is meant to refer to all the sixty-six chapters of the Book of Isaiah. In the form in which it occurs, it may be due to the most recent editor to whom is owed the final compilation and redaction of all the prophecies contained in this book. It cannot come from Isaiah himself; for he would scarcely have given information of this sort concerning his own lifetime and career. Moreover, a new heading is given in Isa 2:1. It is no longer possible to tell whether Isa 1 once formed a small collection on its own, or whether the prophecies it contains originally had a place within the collection of the sayings of Isaiah, which begins with Isa 2:1 and possibly extends to Isa 32. In any case, the present heading must go back to the redactor who gave the chapter its present position, because the redactor found it possible to use this chapter as a programmatic summary of the whole preaching of the prophet. In spite of the oracles against foreign nations in Isa 13-23 it is not impossible that the redactor chose it for the whole book as it stands, with the intention of specifying Jerusalem and Judah as those to whom the prophecies of Isaiah (and those attributed to him) are principally addressed.

There are also internal reasons for recognizing the heading as the work of a later writer. Whereas Isaiah himself explicitly mentions a vision only in one passage (Isa 6), here his whole preaching is described as *the vision*. Hebrew possessed neither a specific expression for the reception of prophecy solely in the form of words, nor an inclusive expression corresponding to our word *prophecy*. In the course of time, the terms *to see* and *vision* came to fulfil the latter function, and this implies that visions were originally predominant and were later understood as the characteristic means of revelation.¹⁵ Moreover, for reasons so far unknown, those to whom the prophet's preaching was addressed are named in the order Judah and Jerusalem, whereas Isaiah himself prefers the older reverse order.¹⁶

The name Isaiah comes from **yěša'yāhû** (ישעייהוּ) - Hebrew: *YHWH is salvation*).

It is formed from **yāša** (ישע) - Hebrew: *to save*) and **yāhû** (יהוּ) - a Hebrew abbreviation of *YHWH*). The name is a summary of everything that Isaiah said to his people. There is no information about his origins. The only information is the name of his father Amoz, who must not be confused with the prophet Amos. If his dealings with his king¹⁷ and with the

¹⁵ Isa 2:1; 13:1; 29:10.

¹⁶ Isa 3:1.8; 5:3; 22:21.

¹⁷ Isa 7:3.

high priest of the Jerusalem temple¹⁸ cannot be explained by his status as a prophet, it might be supposed that he was born into a noble family of Jerusalem. Since in Isa 20,2b it is assumed that he wore sackcloth and sandals, the everyday clothing of an ordinary man, it is perhaps more accurate to speak of him as a free citizen with a farm, possessing full rights. The lack of biographical detail in the heading bears witness to the fact that the importance of the prophet lies not in his human situation and standing, but in his task. What is important is not what Isaiah was as a man, but the fact that YHWH desired and still desires to speak through his words.

4.6 Text #11: A Word to the Survivors (Isa 1:2-9)

4.6.1 Introduction

This passage first attained its present position at a late stage in the formation of the Book of Isaiah, if not in fact at the final redaction. It is easy to see why the compiler or redactor, working with a conscious purpose, gave it its present place at the head of the whole book, for it seems to contain in a concise form the whole legacy of the prophet to posterity: it is only thanks to the grace of God that Israel has not wholly yielded to the judgment which has threatened it time and again since the days of Isaiah. By giving the passage this emphatic position, the redactor working at a later period accepted a prophetic oracle belonging to a previous age as a valid interpretation of the situation of his own community, living in the expectation of the final judgment. The passage consists of two parts: the text of vv.2-3 contains an accusation by YHWH, and vv. 4-9, a taunt against Israel by the prophet. The solemn appeal to heaven and earth as God's witnesses, as required by ancient cultic usage, suggests that the temple of Jerusalem was the place where Isaiah delivered this prophecy. Vv.7-9 show that the invasion of Sennacherib and the reduction of the southern kingdom to the city state of Jerusalem had already taken place,¹⁹ so that the whole passage dates from the year 701 BCE or shortly after. Perhaps the accusation on the part of YHWH permits a conclusion to be drawn about the occasion of this prophecy. It would be understandable for Isaiah to have contrasted God's accusation with the lament of the people over their unfortunate fate. Thus the *Sitz im Leben* (German: *life-setting*) of the prophecy would be the solemn celebration of this lamentation. But whereas the assembly would have looked for an oracle of salvation from the prophet, he answered them with this call to remember their own guilt.

¹⁸ Isa 8:2.

¹⁹ 2 Kgs 18:13-16.

4.6.2 God's Accusation against the People (Isa 1:2-3)

Isaiah 1:2 Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; YHWH has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

Isaiah appears like a herald of judgment in the solemn assembly, and appeals to heaven and earth to listen to YHWH's accusations against Israel, as his witnesses.²⁰ They can testify that God, the partner and guarantor of the covenant concluded with his people, has been faithful to the obligation into which he has entered of his own free will. YHWH has brought up the people as a parent brings up children, and is therefore entitled to expect from them the thankfulness of children, expressed in complete obedience. In Israel, as in virtually all nations of the ancient world, a father possessed the power of life and death over his children. The duty of a child was to honour him,²¹ to rebel against him, either by word or by deed, brought death.²² Whereas those who worshipped heathen gods considered themselves their natural children, Israel knew that it was the child of God only as the result of God's free act of election,²³ YHWH has brought his people through all the ills of childhood, and given them a respected position among other nations. Israel's response to this care has been ingratitude and rebellion. Israel has broken God's covenant, by turning repeatedly to other gods and infringing God's moral demands. If the kingdom of David is now shattered, it is not YHWH, but the people, who are under accusation. The monstrous and unnatural attitude of Israel is emphasized by a comparison with the faithfulness of animals towards their owners. Israel compares very badly with the animals: its behaviour is less reasonable than that of mere cattle (v.3). The ox and the ass *know* their masters, that is, they associate with them on terms of trust and obedience. For the Israelites, knowledge is never a purely intellectual process, but always includes a practical relationship, a fact to which the usage of the Hebrew verb *to know* in a sexual sense bears witness. Thus in the Old Testament the knowledge of God is to know what YHWH wills, and to act accordingly. But Israel has refused to give to its God the childlike obedience that is due. If there is a

20 Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Ps 50:4.

21 Exod 20:12.

22 Exod 21:15,17. Parallels to the transference of the concept of fatherhood to God exist in other Semitic religions. The Mesopotamian storm-god **Enlil** was regarded as the father of the gods, while the god of the primeval ocean and of wisdom, **Ea**, was thought of as the father of the first man. In **Ugarit**, **El** was worshipped as the father of the gods and of the people. Moreover, the OT regarded the heavenly servants as the children of YHWH (Ps 29:1; 82:6). But because of the close association with the nature myths of neighbouring peoples, Israel very rarely referred to its God as father, and did so principally in order to emphasize the incontestable authority which God possessed over the people (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Ps 89:26; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4; 31:9; Mal 1:6).

23 Hos 11:1.

God, then godlessness either in practice or in theory is in an ultimate sense irrational, and a disguised suicide. The community of the old and the new covenant held the belief that the deity of God has been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the works of creation.²⁴ Those who listen to the prophet, the people through whose history God desires to be glorified before the whole world, and to overcome the blindness of all nations,²⁵ are meant to recognize their own position as a consequence of the anger of God. They, who have really deserved death, are still alive. But at the moment the prophet cannot yet proclaim the grace of God, because the people will pay no heed to the whole seriousness of judgment at the present hour.

4.6.3 The Grace of God has Preserved Israel from Total Disaster (Isa 1:4-9)

Isaiah 1:4 Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken YHWH, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged! 5 Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil. 7 Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. 8 And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. 9 If YHWH of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

Like a whirlwind, the prophet's rebuke falls upon the assembled people, in order to break their defiance. They, who are members of the chosen people of God, are behaving like a band of criminals, who selfishly set themselves above the laws of society (v.4). They have broken the covenant of YHWH, and nevertheless dare to contend with God. The monstrousness of this attitude is emphasized by the title given to God, the *Holy One of Israel*, which is characteristic of Isaiah. Because the holiness of God consumes everything impure and ungodly in the world like a burning fire Israel calls down God's punishment by its own behaviour (v.5). But what blows must fall upon it, before it recognizes its sin and does sincere penance? Its position is deadly serious: Israel is already like one who is sick and has been plagued, on whose body no whole place can be found, and whose central organs, the head and the heart, have not been spared. His wounds are still fresh and have

²⁴ Ps 19:1; Sir 17:5; Rom 1:18.

²⁵ Gen 12:3.

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not been dressed (v.6). V.7 passes from the image to reality. The whole country has been laid waste by Sennacherib's forces. Its cities have been reduced to rubble and ashes.²⁶ Only Jerusalem remained as a pitiful remnant of the former flourishing empire of David (v.8). But this Jerusalem was no longer the proud and self-conscious royal city that had been able to consider itself unassailable (Ps 46). The prophet presents the extraordinarily dangerous situation of the city to his hearers in two comparisons: the city is like a booth of branches, an overnight lodge, which the guards in harvest time set up for a few days and nights.

The closing words of the prophet sound like an incantation (v.9). It would have been right and fair for God to bring his people to the end that they deserve, by destroying Jerusalem forever, as he once destroyed the accursed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.²⁷ To survive the judgments of God is due to an act of his grace. Will Israel understand that it has only been given a brief period of probation?

4.7 Text #12: The True Worship of God (Isa 1:10-20)

4.7.1 Introduction

The content and situation of the two following passages, vv. 10-17 and 18-20, is closely similar to that of the previous passage, vv. 2-9. Under God's command, the prophet has begun by an accusation in the name of YHWH, the point of which was made clear by his own taunt that followed; and it is the same scene that he assumes here. Israel is being judged before a court. Since God's judgment upon the people formed a fixed theme in the great Israelite harvest festival, there is no need of the references to sacrifice and the courts of the temple in vv.11-12 to recognize the occasion on which Isaiah pronounced his prophecy. Clearly the assembled people, with the nobles at their head (v.10), had given evident expression to their displeasure at the preceding utterance of the prophet. In view of the Hebrew temperament, it is scarcely possible to exaggerate the liveliness of the scene. It would have been argued that the sacrifices were a sufficiently clear sign of the people's faithfulness to YHWH in the covenant. What did the prophet really want from them? Isaiah's answer is not given on his own authority. He does not think or defending himself. Once again, he lets YHWH speak. As in a dispute in civil law, he lets YHWH approach his opponents for a discussion, and suggests an agreement. He is struggling here to open the eyes of his people to their true position in the sight of YHWH, and to spare them further punishment.

²⁶ The prophet is not exaggerating. According to [Sennacherib's](#) (705-681 BCE) own claims, forty-six fortified places and numerous small towns were besieged and taken by storm. Sennacherib claimed to have carried off 200,150 people, as well as numerous cattle. A harsh tribute was laid upon Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:15). As far as the borders of the city state of Jerusalem, the fields were given over to the ancient hereditary enemy, the Philistines.

²⁷ Gen 19.

4.7.2 The False and True Worship of God (Isa 1:10-17)

Isaiah 1:10: Hear the word of YHWH, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says YHWH; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. 12 When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; 13 bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation, I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. 14 Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

This is a speech forming part of the discussion before the court. While the prophet began by solemnly calling heaven and earth as witnesses to the God of the covenant who was rising up to give judgment, he now turns imperiously and sternly to the assembled people (v.10). The comparison between the desperate situation of Jerusalem and the two cities that disappeared from the face of the earth through the judgment of God is still in his mind (v.9). But it is given a new twist by the reaction of the assembly to the prophecy that has just been concluded. Just as the inhabitants of Sodom violated God's commandments, the assembly now opposes Isaiah. In order to emphasize that the words he has just spoken were utterly serious, and furiously provoked, he calls the city officials responsible for the public administration of Jerusalem and the administration of justice, "rulers of Sodom," and the men of the chosen people, "people of Gomorrah." They must listen to the teaching of God. The people feel that through their own sacrifices, they are sufficiently proved to be truly pious and obedient, and are secure in their own works. Slain offerings, of which God received the fat, the priests the right breast, and the sacrificing congregation the rest as a meal; burnt offerings, which were wholly consecrated to God, and burnt upon the altar; and food offerings of cereals and fruits, have been offered in abundance, as has also the sweet-smelling incense offering. All the prescribed feasts days have been faithfully observed. The Sabbath, the new moon, penitential fasts, rests from work and solemn assemblies have been conscientiously carried out, with all their prescribed rites. Isaiah presents his God as speaking of these "pious" and "holy" works in terms of unsurpassed contempt. YHWH stands as it were helpless before the profusion of sacrifices that are offered. He is fundamentally weary of this whole activity. Neither the sacrifices with their offerings and

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manipulations of blood²⁸ nor the whole system of feasts can obtain YHWH's favour. When people hasten to the temple in order to see the face of God there,²⁹ God regards it as a disfiguring of the sanctuary, and even turns a deaf ear to prayer uttered with outspread hands, the most ancient attitude of prayer, and an expression of the fellowship between God and Israel. V.12 in fact clearly attacks not merely the driving of cattle into the forecourt of the temple for the celebrating of sacrifices, but also the intention of seeing the face of YHWH. But this polemic can hardly be taken as a fundamental attack on the whole procedure, but must be understood in the light of vv.16-17. No one may appear on the holy hill, who does not fulfil YHWH's moral commands. From this it follows that the statements in vv.13b.14 likewise do not contain a fundamental rejection of the feasts, for they provided the occasion for looking on the face of YHWH.³⁰ In the case of v.15 it is quite obvious that only in this particular case is prayer not heard; for it is quite simply impossible that Isaiah should have rejected prayer as such. In view of these observations the statements concerning sacrifices can be understood in the same sense.

While the extravagant sacrifices are still burning on the altar, the prophet begins to speak, instead of the priest, and in the power of the Spirit gives an authoritative declaration of the rejection of the sacrifices. Just as Samuel once insisted to Saul that YHWH loved obedience in concrete terms more than sacrifice,³¹ Isaiah here declares the sacrifices, festal assemblies and prayers to be worthless, and even an insult and annoyance to God, because their only purpose is to shield people against God's claim upon their whole life. God cannot and will not accept any sacrifice that is offered as a mere substitute, on which YHWH is obliged to compromise. The freely given obligation, which God took on in giving the law of sacrifice, becomes void, if the people do not at the same time show by their whole attitude that they in their turn feel themselves bound by the whole ordinance. Here Isaiah is attacking a perversion of meaning which has threatened all human worship through the centuries: sacrifice, worship and prayer only keep their true sense as long as in them people are really concerned to encounter the holy God. If a person tries to make use of them to achieve self security in the sight of God, then they become a blasphemy; sacrifice becomes a means of self-justification, the celebration of feasts the occasion of mere emotional exaltation, and prayer a meaningless, craven or hypocritical wailing. The people have received a hard blow from God. Yet they do not offer themselves to God, but seek to placate the living God with their dead works. They are stained with blood from the sacrifices, and that is how they stand in the sight of God: they are guilty.

V.16 apparently uses cultic expressions: the people are to wash themselves clean. But guilt cannot be washed away with water, and cannot even be set aside by better deeds in the future. It must be forgiven. Thus in the demands that follow Isaiah is not describing

28 Lev 17:10-14.

29 Ps 27:4; 42:2; 63:2; 84:2.

30 Exod 23:17; Deut 16:16.

31 1 Sam 15,22.

the means, but only the precondition for God's forgiveness. If God is to withhold, by a free decision, based upon his saving will, the word of judgment which hangs over the people of the covenant, if God is to be bound once again by the covenant ordinance, from which both sacrifice and prayer derive their validity, then the people itself must first return to this ordinance, by ceasing to sin. As an example of the doing of good that is required of them, Isaiah mentions the judicial honesty of the people, which is manifested in the protection of its weakest members, the widows and orphans.

4.7.3 The Conditional Offer of Pardon (Isa 1:18-20)

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, let us argue it out, says YHWH: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; 20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of YHWH has spoken.

This is a speech of reconciliation. The long statement of the prophet comes to an end. God challenges the assembled people to a legal dispute. The sentences that follow are not ironical, but serious in intention. It is not YHWH's intention to mock covenant partners, who for a long time have been so self-righteous. Rather, YHWH draws their attention to the divine power of forgiveness, which is not limited by the deepest human guilt. Even though guilt is blood-red, like scarlet and purple, and even if by human and divine law it has made the people's lives forfeit, YHWH still has the power to obliterate this guilt. The people of God can receive forgiveness as a gift from its creator and Lord, if it now at last becomes wholly serious in doing his will, and practises righteousness (v.19). The comparison of v.18 emphasizes once again the greatness of the guilt, in order to make the grace of God seem even greater and more desirable. If the people will not repent even now, then even the city of Jerusalem and the remnant are condemned to destruction, and abandoned to the sword of the enemy (v.20). Just as according to tradition Moses presented his people with a choice of life and death,³² so also does Isaiah, so that they may choose life. Pointing to the fact that YHWH has spoken, and is entirely serious in the twofold offer, the prophet concludes this eloquent poem.

³² Deut 30:19.

4.8 Text #13: The Prophet [Isaiah](#) and Holy One of Israel ([Isa 6:1-13](#))³³

Isaiah was called to his prophetic ministry in 742 BCE, the year king [Uzziah](#) (783-742 BCE) died.³⁴ His period of ministry was dominated by the rise of [Assyria](#). He lived and worked in the area around Jerusalem and so is considered one of the southern prophets. He was highly educated, from an upper-class family, married with two sons.³⁵ The only oracles that can be dated with accuracy are those relating to the political crisis under [Ahaz](#) (735-715 BCE) and [Hezekiah](#) (715-687 BCE). The purpose of the story of Isaiah's call is not only to offer speculation about the divine world, to justify and legitimize Isaiah as a prophet, but also to offer testimony that YHWH's judgement was *already decreed* when YHWH called him to proclaim judgement on his own people. The story of Isaiah's call can be subdivided as follows:

- The Vision of Isaiah (6:1-4)
- Preparation for Service (6:5-7)
- Calling and Sending (6:8-11)
- "Second" Conclusion (6:12-13)

4.8.1 The Vision of Isaiah (Isa 6:1-4)

Isaiah 6:1: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw YHWH sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

Year that king Uzziah died (v.1): Isaiah gives an exact date for the vision. It is during the last year of Uzziah's reign (742 BCE). It is not possible to say whether the event recorded here took place before Uzziah's death. The king's throne name had been *Azariah* (*YHWH is help*). In 758/757 BCE, because of bad health, the king had to share his rule with

33 B .S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM – Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster, 2000).

34 Isa 6:1.

35 Isa 7:3; 8:3.18.

others and so took the name *Uzziah* (*My strength is YHWH*). In stressing the particular date of his vision, Isaiah emphasizes that YHWH reached out to him in time and space, and chose him for ministry.

I saw YHWH (v.1): To the Hebrew mind this was an impossible statement. No human could see YHWH and live to tell it.³⁶ Yet Isaiah claims to have seen YHWH enthroned as a Heavenly King. An accurate study of what he says reveals that he does not claim to have seen YHWH directly, but to have seen his train and the seraphim with him. Isaiah then does not see YHWH directly, but is aware of his presence in what he actually sees, the train and the seraphim. YHWH's power is stressed by mentioning that the throne was "high and lifted up" and that the train "filled the temple." In Isaiah's time, the Temple contained the Holy of Holies, which formed a pedestal on which the Ark of the Covenant was placed.³⁷ Isaiah's vision is influenced by conceptions current in his own time. This is not to deny Isaiah's experience of the vision.

Seraphs ... six wings (v.2): Just as an earthly ruler is surrounded by guardians and officials, so too YHWH is surrounded by seraphim that shut YHWH off from people's sight. Some texts present the seraphim as naked winged serpents with human faces and hands.³⁸ The seraphim seen by Isaiah were not in serpent form as they had hands, faces and genitals. The Hebrew root *śrf* (שָׂרַף), from which the word *seraph* derives, means *to burn*. The seraphim were thought of as glowing beings. The seraphim hide their faces and feet (euphemism for genitals) from YHWH. Even they cannot look on YHWH and live. The covering of the genitals represents the Semitic experience of connecting sex and guilt. Their gesture stresses the infinite distance between YHWH and every other being.³⁹

Holy, holy, holy ... (v.3): Isaiah's mystical experience moves from the realm of seeing, to that of hearing. YHWH is called holy three times, thus emphasizing that YHWH is the source of all holiness. YHWH is so holy, so entirely the Holy One, so completely transcendent and other that humans cannot reach him by themselves. For Isaiah the Holy One is so perfect and mighty, that he is not under human control, but rules the whole earth.

YHWH of hosts (v.3): The Hebrew expression is *yhwh šəvā'ôt* (Hebrew: יְהוָה יִצְבְּאוֹת). It is best translated as *YHWH who creates the Hosts (of heaven)*. The meaning

36 Exod 33:20; Judg 6:22-23; 13:22.

37 1 Kgs 8:6-8.

38 Num 21:6; Deut 8:15 and Isa 14:29; 30:6.

39 C. G. Montefiore and L. Loeme, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 135. "Moses said to Israel: 'Know you not with what travail I gained the Torah? What toil, what labour I endured for its sake. Forty days and forty nights I was with God. I entered among the angels, the Living Creatures, the Seraphim, of whom anyone could blast the whole universe in flame. My soul, my blood I gave for the Torah. As I learnt it in travail, so do you learn it in travail, and as you learn it in travail, so do you teach it in travail.'" *Sifre Deut.*, Ha'azinu, #306, f.131b.

is that the Holy One is YHWH who has created all powers, and has the power to make his will prevail in the world.

Glory (v.3): The Hebrew word for *glory* is *kāvôd* (כָּבוֹד) derived from the verb *kāvēd* (כָּבַד – Hebrew: *to be heavy*). What is this *kāvôd* (כָּבוֹד)? In a few words it is YHWH's weight. This aspect is fundamental. In the OT generally it means that YHWH weighs on history. YHWH's glory is manifested in his power over the universe, over creation and nature and in the events of history. When YHWH manifests his glory, he manifests something of himself - his essence, his holiness.

Pivots ... shook (v.4): Throughout the OT there are many references to physical phenomena accompanying a theophany: the heavens pour down rain, the mountains shake, smoke rises, lightening flashes.⁴⁰ In our text the seraphs' proclamation of YHWH's holiness and glory causes the very thresholds of the Temple to shake.

4.8.2 The Preparation for Service (Isa 6:5-7)

Isaiah 6:5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, YHWH of hosts!" 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

I am a man of unclean lips ... among a people of unclean lips (v.5): Isaiah knows that he and his people are unworthy before YHWH. As a sinful person he cannot join in the praise of the Holy One. He is reduced to silence in the presence of YHWH's holiness. His inability to speak is in itself a symbol of remoteness from YHWH. Isaiah is a sinner and a transgressor of YHWH's will, and as such he deserves to be lost.

Seraphs ... live coal ... altar (v.6): The seraph takes a burning coal from the Altar of Incense. Since the altar is holy, so too is the burning coal. In touching Isaiah's mouth (v.7) the seraph explains and interprets his action as a taking away of guilt and as a forgiveness of sin. The lips are a *pars pro toto* way of designating the whole person under a particular aspect. Both the words "guilt" and "sin" suggest a departure from the norm demanded by YHWH. By sinning humankind departs from its form of existence as creature. As such humankind stands either in YHWH's grace or under his judgement. It is only when Isaiah is freed from his sinfulness can he take part in a dialogue with YHWH. Only when Isaiah recognizes his sin, and is set free from it, can he *do the will of YHWH*.

⁴⁰ Exod 19:9,18; 24:15-17; Judg 5:4; 1 Kgs 8:10; Ezek 44:4; Hab 3:3-6; Pss 18:8; 50:1; 104:3.

4.8.3 The Calling and Sending (Isa 6:8-11)

Isaiah 6:8 Then I heard the voice of YHWH saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" 9 And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' 10 Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." 11 Then I said, "How long, O YHWH?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate;

YHWH asks whom he will send (v.8) and immediately Isaiah responds "Here am I. Send me." It is a declaration by one who is willing. There is no reluctance expressed.⁴¹ Isaiah sees his call as an unmerited grace, to which he is obliged to be faithful. Once Isaiah expresses his willingness, YHWH gives him his commission. The phrase "this people" (v.9) is usually taken to be a term of contempt.⁴² YHWH quite deliberately does not use the more solemn and sacral titles of "Israel" and "House of Jacob."

Keep listening ... keep looking ... turn and be healed (vv.9-10): To understand these verses we have to understand the biblical concept of prophetic word. The prophetic word does not merely foretell events, but *causes them to happen*. Thus, a prophetic word, once proclaimed with authority, takes effect in history. V.9 is not to be understood as a statement of the content of what Isaiah is to say, but of the *effect that his prophetic ministry will bring about*. The metaphor used in v.10 is that of a sick people. If the people are so sick as to reject YHWH, Isaiah will not be able to heal them. His ministry will make the fatty heart of the people beat even slower, their ears more deaf and their eyes blinder! In short, YHWH calls Isaiah and the consequence of this will be the hardening of the people's heart.

How long, O YHWH (v.11): Scholars have taken this question of Isaiah to mean either:

- How long will the task of prophecy be imposed on him?

Or

- How deep will the effect of his prophecy be on the people?

Probably both aspects are to be understood here. It is also a cry for pity and relief.⁴³

41 On *Moses' reluctance* see Exod 3:11.13; 4:1. On *Jeremiah's reluctance* see Jer 1:6; 2:9.

42 Isa 8:6.11; 29:13.

43 Pss 13:2-3; 74:10; 79:5; 80:5; 89:47; 90:3; 94:3.

Until cities lie waste ... utterly desolate (v.11): YHWH is unambiguous in his answer. A fearful punishment will come on the people because of their rejection of YHWH. Originally v.11 marked the end of Isaiah's vision.

4.8.4 The "Second" Conclusion (Isa 6:12-13)

Isaiah 6:12 until YHWH sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. 13 Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Vv.12-13 differ from what has gone before in the following respects:

- In Isa 6:11 YHWH is the speaker, but in Isa 6:12-13 he is the one spoken about.
- Isa 6:11 deals with the total destruction of cities, houses and land. Yet 6:12-13 offers an element of hope and restoration. Nine-tenths of the people will be destroyed. Yet the remaining tenth will become a holy seed springing from the stump of what will be destroyed.

The addition of vv.12-13, put here by an unknown author, offers a note of hope. YHWH's judgement will not be the last word on God's dealings with his people. A remnant would survive, out of which YHWH's people would be built up again. Judaism interpreted this as the restoration of post-exilic Israel. Christianity has interpreted this in terms of Jesus.

4.8.5 The Implications of Isa 6:1-13 for the OT Concept of YHWH's Holiness and for Biblical Theology

The central concept in the text is that YHWH is the *Holy One of Israel*. Isaiah's vision offers the possibility of coming to terms with the concept of YHWH's holiness. Holiness is that divine essence which makes YHWH God. He *alone* is Lord. Once Isaiah has had this vision of YHWH's holiness, he perceives his own sin and that of the people as ugly. This introduces the *ethical dimension* into the concept of holiness. Fellowship with the Holy One requires being purged of sin. Isaiah is conscious that YHWH is the Holy One *of Israel*. YHWH in all his divine holiness wants to enter into a relationship with humans through the instrument of his people Israel. The implications for are three-fold:

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- **YHWH alone is God:** YHWH's holiness means that he alone is to be feared. The reverse is true also. Trust in YHWH and reliance on his promise will lead to rest, security and well-being. Only those who turn to YHWH in faith will have reason to rejoice.
- **The Ethical Dimension:** Isaiah was a severe critic of his people and their sins. Their injustice, oppression, greed, drunkenness, and social irresponsibility were going to bring YHWH's judgement on them. There was only one way to escape, by a reversal of their behaviour.
- **The Holy One of Israel:** Isaiah saw that there was a special relationship between YHWH and his chosen people. He expresses this relationship generally in terms of the "Zion Tradition" which influenced him greatly. This tradition maintained that YHWH was the Great Ruler of the whole world and that he had chosen Zion as his dwelling place.

These three elements shape Isaiah's view of salvation history. For Isaiah YHWH has decided to bring his judgment on Israel and Judah. Yet this judgement was not to be the last word. Out of the judgment YHWH would create a New Jerusalem. For Isaiah, the disobedience of Israel and Judah, YHWH's judgement and the ultimate redemption of Zion were all elements of YHWH's plan for the people of the world.

4.9 Text #14: The Prince of Peace ([Isa 8:23b – 9:6](#) [NRSV Isa 9:1-7])

In 734 and 732 BCE [Tiglath-Pileser III](#) in his response to the Syro-Ephramite invasion of Judah, took the Western, Eastern and Northern provinces of Israel and made them Assyrian provinces. For religious Israelites this caused a crisis of faith. The people of Israel asked themselves whether YHWH had abandoned his people to their enemies or whether he would unite his entire people again under one glorious ruler. In this text, Isaiah makes an act of faith in his people's future. YHWH will unite a peaceful Israel under the rule of a Second David, according to his plan of salvation. The text to be studied is Isa 8:23b – 9:6 according to the *Hebrew Bible*, *NJB* and *CCB*, but Isa 9:1-7 according to the *NRSV* and *NIV*. For the sake of convenience the *NRSV* division will be followed here. The oracle falls into five stanzas:

- **First Stanza (v.1):** YHWH will reverse the situation of the districts that have been separated.
- **Second Stanza (vv.2-3):** A hymnic stanza that describes the rejoicing of those who are redeemed.

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- **Third Stanza (vv.4-5):** This stanza gives the reason for rejoicing - YHWH will liberate Israel and defeat its enemies.
- **Fourth Stanza (v.6):** The people proclaim the enthronement of the Redeemer.
- **Fifth Stanza (v.7):** Isaiah proclaims that the change will be lasting, and that he is sure that his prophecy will be fulfilled.

4.9.1 The First Stanza (Isa 9:1)

Isaiah 9:1 But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

In Isa 7-8, the prophet told of the total collapse of Israel. This process got under way during the reign of Tiglath-pileser. The areas captured by the Assyrian king are the ones that were “in anguish” and “brought into contempt.” Yet Isaiah proclaims that even though YHWH did this in his anger, that anger is not the ultimate statement of what he is going to do. Rather his anger represents a transition to a new act of grace, by which YHWH will restore his people.

4.9.2 The Second Stanza (Isa 9:2-3)

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. ³ You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

Darkness ... great light ... on them light has shined (v.2): The people who have been oppressed rejoice in YHWH’s liberating presence, as a night-wanderer rejoices at the sun’s rising. Light is a familiar biblical motif for the presence of YHWH.⁴⁴ It is stressed here that divine action and not human achievement will defeat the enemies of Israel.

You have ... you have ... (v.3): Israel proclaims the great deeds of YHWH in hymnic form. Those who have been redeemed will celebrate before YHWH as people rejoice before a great harvest or when they share out the spoils of victory.

⁴⁴ Isa 10:17; Pss 27:1; 50:2; 104:2.

4.9.3 The Third Stanza (Isa 9:4-5)

Isaiah 9:4 For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of [Midian](#). 5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

Yoke ... bar ... rod (v.4): Are the symbols of Assyrian oppression. Isaiah now turns to give reasons for all this future rejoicing. Those who are oppressed are compared to work animals that have to carry a heavy burden and are directed by staff and rod. YHWH will throw of the oppressive burden. It will be done in the future, as it was in the past.

Day of Midian (v.4): Isaiah cites an example of YHWH's past intervention to help his people. The reference is to the hero [Gideon](#),⁴⁵ who defeated Midian in the plain of [Jezreel](#)⁴⁶ and by whom YHWH freed Northern Palestine. YHWH's future action will be unlike the past action in one respect. In the past YHWH's action was transitory. It held back Israel's enemies for a set period of time. But in the future YHWH will win a decisive battle and his enemies will be conquered. The warrior's boots and bloodied cloak will be done away with forever (v.5).

4.9.4 The Fourth Stanza (Isa 9:6)

Isaiah 9:6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This stanza mirrors the royal enthronement ceremony in which the king's five throne names were proclaimed and testimony was given of all that YHWH achieved through the king. Ancient Near Eastern rulers, particularly the Egyptian pharaohs, used the fivefold royal title. There is evidence to suggest that the original text of Isa 9:6 had also a fivefold title. However the text is corrupt and the fifth title remains unknown. The stanza is a proclamation as if by a herald; it is as if a herald came to proclaim the coronation of a new king in the wake of the liberation achieved by YHWH (vv.2-5).

A child has been born for us ... (v.6): Ps 2:7 echoes this phrase. It is an expression used to indicate the adoption of a king by YHWH is the moment of ascending the throne. YHWH is understood as the Father who adopts the king as his son in the moment of giving the government to him.

He is named ... (v.6): The name or *fivefold title* is used to indicate what the programme of his reign will be and what good fortune he will achieve for his people.

⁴⁵ Judg 6:33 – 7:24.

⁴⁶ Judg 6:33.

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Wonderful Counsellor ... (v.6): This new king will need no advice from anyone, unlike the king **Ahaz** who was led astray by advisers. His plans, which are for the whole world, will achieve their purpose, because it is YHWH who directs the king's thoughts.⁴⁷

Mighty God ... (v.6): This title *'ēl-gibbor* (אֱלֹ-גִבּוֹר) - Hebrew: *warrior-God*) stresses the king's power. In the Hebrew Scriptures there are only two references to where the king is called a god.⁴⁸ In other ANE societies (particularly in Egypt) the king was thought of as the physical descendent of the deity. In Jerusalem this idea was modified, whereby YHWH adopted the king.⁴⁹ This made the king the only legitimate representative of YHWH on earth.

Everlasting Father ... (v.6): The king's reign will last forever and will be paternal.

Prince of Peace (v.6): To the Hebrew mind *šālôm* (שָׁלוֹם) - Hebrew: *peace / harmony*) was the condition whereby all created things, humans, animals and plants were in harmony and followed their destiny in harmony. In religious terms this can only come about when the sovereignty of YHWH is both recognized and accepted. The king who will come will establish this kind of peace. Isaiah paints a picture of the future king as a **Second David**. The message of this stanza is: just as the first **David** had a fivefold royal title ("David ... son of Jesse ... who God exalted ... anointed of the God of Jacob ... favourite of the Strong One of Israel"),⁵⁰ so too the Second David will have his own fivefold royal title.

4.9.5 The Fifth Stanza (Isa 9:7)

Isaiah 9:7 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of YHWH of hosts will do this.

Isaiah is the speaker here. He gives a summary of what has been said in the Fourth stanza ("... authority shall grow ... endless peace ... for the throne of David ... kingdom"). The peace and kingdom will be everlasting because the king's throne will be established "with justice and with righteousness." The final line stresses that it is YHWH who will be the force behind all that happens.

Zeal (v.7): means that YHWH protects and cherishes all that he does and burns up like fire all that resists his will. In short the message of Isaiah is: all that YHWH has begun with Israel, he will bring to fulfilment, despite his judgement on Israel.

47 Isa 25:1; Ps 20:4.

48 Isa 9:6; Ps 45:6.

49 2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7; 89:26.

50 2 Sam 23:1.

4.10 Text #15: The Future King (Isa 10:33 – 11:9)

4.10.1 Introduction

This text is highly problematic. Scholars disagree substantially on the text's outward limits, internal subdivisions, origin, date of composition and whether or not vv.1-5 and vv.6-9 originally formed a unit. There is general agreement that: v.3a is a gloss and that v.9 is a quotation of Isa 65:25b. Without going through all the possible arguments for and against these different positions we will study Isa 10:33 – 11:9 on the following basis: that it is a unit and a true prophecy; that v.3a is a gloss and v.9 a redactor's addition; that most probable author was Isaiah. The text can be divided as follows:

- YHWH's judgement upon the king and the people (10:33-34)
- The righteous ruler of the future (11:1-5)
- Peace is restored between humankind and animals (11:6-9).

4.10.2 YHWH's Judgement upon the King and the People (Isa 10:33-34)

Isaiah 10:33 Look, the Sovereign, YHWH of hosts, will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the tallest trees will be cut down, and the lofty will be brought low. 34 He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.

The analogy here is that of a woodcutter with an axe. YHWH is the divine woodsman who will cut down the trees of the Davidic kingdom. The common people are the "thickets of the forest" (10:34) and the royal house is the "majestic trees." Both types will be felled. In other words the king and the people who have lost faith and who do not believe will not endure. The historical basis for the condemnation of the Davidic kings is Ahaz's appeal to Assyria to help against the Syro-Ephramite invasion of Judah. Isaiah sees such an appeal as a rejection of YHWH's plan.

4.10.3 The Righteous Ruler of the Future (Isa 11:1-5)

Isaiah 11:1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The spirit of YHWH shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of

knowledge and the fear of YHWH. 3 His delight shall be in the fear of YHWH. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

YHWH's judgement is not his last word on human salvation but an expression of his desire to bring his plan of salvation to fulfilment. Central to this plan is the replacement of Davidic rule with a Second David.

Stump of Jesse (v.1): The first David was chosen from the family of [Jesse](#).⁵¹ In YHWH's plan for salvation a new shoot will blossom from the stump of what remains in the wake of YHWH's judgement. This new shoot will be the Second David. Judaism has interpreted the reference to the Second David as referring to the [Messiah](#). Christianity has interpreted it in reference to Jesus. The Christian Scriptures use the adjective *nazōraios* (ναζωραῖος - Greek: *Nazarene*) of Jesus.⁵² This Greek adjective is a pun on the Hebrew word *nēšer* (נֶשֶׁר) - Hebrew: *shoot / branch*) as used in Isa 11:1. Thus Christianity sees the *nazōraios* as the *nēšer* that has sprung from the shoot of Jesse. Note also that Isa 11:1 is another case of semantic parallelism: *shoot / branch* v *stump / roots*.

Spirit of YHWH (v.2): Just as the spirit of YHWH rested on the first David,⁵³ the spirit of YHWH will rest also upon the Second David. This spirit is explained in three pairs of concepts that follow. "The spirit of wisdom and understanding" (v.2): "Wisdom" is the ability to act according to the existing circumstances while "understanding" is the clear appreciation of a given situation. Both terms denote the future king's ability to rule. "Spirit of counsel and might" (v.2): The future king will not need human advisers. He will possess the power to translate his decisions into action. "Spirit of knowledge and fear of YHWH" (v.2): "Knowledge" does not mean simply intellectual knowledge, but a living encounter with YHWH. Knowledge of YHWH means turning from evil and towards YHWH. "Fear" does not mean the human emotion, but the right attitude of awe by which every human being should reverence YHWH. These three pairs of concepts mean that the future king will be truly righteous because YHWH will give him his spirit.

His delight shall be in the fear of YHWH (v.3a): We have already stated that this is a gloss. The manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures were written by hand. It happened very often that in the process of copying a text, that a scribe would add a comment of his own to the text in order to explain a difficult word or phrase in the text. Such scribal additions were known as glosses. In this case a scribe came across the expression "fear of YHWH" in v.2

⁵¹ 1 Sam 16:1-13.

⁵² Matt 2:23; 26:71; Luke 18:37; John 18:5.7; 19:9; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 22:8; 24:5; 26:9.

⁵³ 1 Sam 16:13; 2 Sam 23:2.

and decided to explain the relationship between the future king and the fear of YHWH by means of the phrase “and his delight shall be in the fear of YHWH” (v.3a).

Not judge by ... eyes ... or decide by ... ears (v.3b): Human judgement is a leap in the dark, conditioned by what people can see and hear. The future king will not rely on these human faculties, but share YHWH’s ability to judge.

With righteousness he shall judge the poor ... with equity ... the meek (v.4): In the societies of the ANE the king showed great concern to look after the rights of the poorest and weakest in society. Israel had such royal ideology also.⁵⁴ Isaiah here extends this ideological view to the future king who will demonstrate his virtue and capacity to rule in terms of protecting the weak and the poor. The text is typical of how the royal liturgical language is transferred to the Messiah. The only valid description of royal behaviour is in terms of bringing justice to the poor.

He shall strike the earth with ... rod of his mouth ... with the breath of his lips ... shall kill the wicked (v.4): Note: this is another example of semantic parallelism which characterizes Hebrew poetry. It was the king’s duty to punish anyone⁵⁵ found guilty by trial.⁵⁶ The text may mean that the future king will bring death to the wrongdoer or it may be a metaphor for the king’s judicial sentence.

Righteousness ... belt around his waist ... faithfulness ... belt around his loins (v.5): Yet another case of semantic parallelism! Just as clothing lends dignity to the one who wears it, the future king will have dignity because his rule will be based on righteousness and faithfulness. It will be a rule that will please both YHWH and people.

⁵⁴ Jer 22:13-19; Prov 31:1-9; Ps 72:1-4.12-14.

⁵⁵ Ps 101:5; Prov 20:26.

⁵⁶ Exod 23:7; 1 Kgs 8:32; Isa 50:9.

4.10.4 The Restoration of Peace Between Humankind and Animals (Isa 11:6-9)

Isaiah 11:6 The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea.

To the Jewish mind the sinfulness of humankind expressed itself in many symptoms. One of these was the lost peace between humankind and animals. Originally a peaceful harmony existed between all the elements of YHWH's creation, only to be lost with the Fall. Isa 11:6-8 is an expression of hope in a time of salvation characterized by the restoration of this original harmony. The Second David will rule by righteousness. Where righteousness exists, the world will become as intended by YHWH. V.9, which is an addition by the redactor, limits the prophecy to Jerusalem ("my holy mountain"). But it also expresses the view that all will come about when the earth is "full of the knowledge of YHWH." It was the failure to know and understand YHWH that led to evil and disaster.⁵⁷ This vision of Isaiah's did not come about in the time and way in which the prophet expected, a fact that led to a re-interpretation of the prophecy. Judaism re-interpreted it in terms of a Messianic King who has yet to come. Christianity interpreted it by maintaining that the Second David, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, has indeed come in the person of Jesus, the Nazarene.

4.11 Conclusions

While studying the prophet Amos, we noted that his message was dominated by a proclamation of sinfulness of the nations and by the immanent judgement of YHWH that was coming upon them. Only at the end of the book (Amos 9:11-15) was there any hint of restoration. Thus the basic pattern in the Book of Amos is: **SINFULNESS → JUDGEMENT → RESTORATION**. A similar pattern was noted in Hos 1-3. This basic pattern is expanded in the Book of Proto-Isaiah. For Isaiah the starting point is YHWH in his holiness. The contemplation of YHWH, who is Lord of all, leads to recognition of sinfulness, from which the people must be purged if they are to enter into a right relationship with YHWH. This purging comes about through YHWH's judgement, which although an expression of his righteous anger, is not the ultimate word for Israel. YHWH's plan of salvation offers hope for the restoration of

⁵⁷ Isa 1:3; 5:12-13; 6:9-10.

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his people that will culminate in the rule of a Second David who will usher in a rule of everlasting peace. Thus in the Book of Proto-Isaiah the pattern is: **YHWH'S HOLINESS → RECOGNITION OF SINFULNESS → JUDGEMENT → RESTORATION → SECOND DAVID → PEACE.**

YHWH's anger or wrath must not be understood as a divine counterpart of the human emotion or psychological state. Nor can YHWH in his anger be thought of some kind of Jewish [Zeus](#)! YHWH's anger is not an *affectus* (Latin: *emotion*) Rather his anger is the instrument by which he achieves his plan of salvation and is born of his *hesed* (חֶסֶד - Hebrew: *loving-kindness*). It is the instrument whereby he does not spare his people the consequences of their sins, but allows them to experience such consequences so as to purge them from sin. In this YHWH's wrath is an *effectus* (Latin: *that which brings about or effects*) born of *hesed*. The prophet Isaiah interpreted the consequences of Israel's sins in terms of political annihilation and exile, through which Israel had to pass on its way to salvation. Centuries later, Paul would use a similar idea of divine wrath as an instrument of salvation.⁵⁸

58 Rom 1:24 – 2:11.

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