

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 1

Person of Isaiah, Context, Structure of Isaiah

I. Isaiah

A. Some Comments on Isaiah the Prophets Himself and His Family

We begin with Isaiah. And A. of the outline is: “Some comments on Isaiah the prophet himself.” The meaning of the name “Isaiah” is “salvation is of YHWH.” The name comes from the root *yasha'* and YHWH. “Salvation is of YHWH” or “YHWH is salvation,” is the meaning of his name. It occurs in several places in the Old Testament other than in the book of Isaiah as the name of an individual that quite clearly is not the same as the Isaiah who authored the book of Isaiah. For example, 1 Chronicles 3:21 you read there, “the descendants of Hananiah: Pelatiah and Jeshaiiah.” That Jeshaiiah is the same name as Isaiah; it’s just transliterated differently. In 1 Chronicles 25:3 you read a list of names—it’s that Jeshaiiah again—the same as the other one, but in Hebrew it’s the same as Isaiah. Down in verse 15 we read, “the eighth to Jeshaiiah, his sons and relatives.”

So it does occur elsewhere; thus when you look at Isaiah 1:1; he is further identified as the son of Amoz. I think I discussed this when we looked the prophet at Amos. But Isa 1:1 has, “See, the vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son Amoz.” Isaiah the prophet is the son of Amoz, which in Hebrew is spelled with a *sade* and an *aleph*, whereas Amos is an *ayin* and a *samek*; so there’s the difference. This is the English “Amoz” and not “Amos.” We don’t make much distinction in English.

We don’t know anything about his father Amoz. There is a rabbinical tradition that can’t be verified, that Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah of Judah. If that’s the case, then Isaiah would have been the nephew of the king. But there’s no real, substantiating evidence for that other than that Jewish tradition.

It seems that Isaiah lived in or near Jerusalem because much of the setting when it appears for the various prophecies that he gives is near Jerusalem, particularly if you look at chapter seven. You read in chapter 7 verse 3, “The Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out, you

and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field.” It is near the location of a water system that supplied water for Jerusalem. Later, in the time of Hezekiah, when the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem and surrounded it, Isaiah is called for by Hezekiah and he seems to be in or near Jerusalem throughout most of the book.

We know he was married and had at least two sons who were given symbolic names. The one we just mentioned there in Isaiah 7:3. “The Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out, you and your son, Shear-Jashub.’” Shear-Jashub means “the remnant will return”; *shear* meaning “remnant” and *jashub*, coming from *shub*, “to return.” So it means “the remnant will return.” And, of course, that carries a message that first of all you’re going to be forced out of the land. Exile is going to come but a remnant will return. So judgment is coming, but beyond judgment there’s hope. A remnant will return.

The name of the other son appears in chapter 8. You read in verse one, “The LORD said, ‘Take a large scroll, write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberekiah as reliable witnesses for me. Then I went to the prophetess; she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said to me, ‘Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.’” That’s a good name if any of you are looking for a name for a son. The meaning of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is “hasten the booty, speed the spoil.” “Hasten the booty, speed the spoil.” I notice the NIV note here says it means *quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil*. Either way, the name carries a message. If you go over to chapter ten, verses five and six, you really get a play on the name of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, because in five and six Isaiah says, “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation.”

That is, the Lord is using Assyria against Israel as a rod in his hand to bring judgment and punishment. In the latter part of verse 6 we read, “I dispatch him against a people who anger me” – then notice the next phrase – “to seize loot and to snatch plunder.” They’re the same words as Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz: “to seize loot and snatch

plunder.” The Assyrians are going to come and plunder Israel, to trample them down like mud in the streets. But this is not what the Assyrians intend; in other words, the Assyrian is looking out for his own interests, but behind Assyria’s own interests, God is using Assyria as an instrument of judgment. So the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is really anticipating that judgment that is coming at the hands of the Assyrians.

Chronology and Kings During Isaiah’s Life

Now, Isaiah prophesied, as you know from the first verse, during the reigns of various kings of Judah: “The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.” Isaiah prophesied during the time of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. These reigns are somewhat complex because there appears to be a series of co-regencies.

If you want to get into the details of that chronological time, you are running from 767 B.C. down to 695 B.C. the end of Hezekiah’s reign. It is a rather lengthy period of time; however, there is again a Jewish tradition, a rabbinic tradition, that Isaiah was killed in the time of the following king, after Hezekiah, in the time of Manasseh.

Tradition of Isaiah’s Death Under Manasseh

The Jewish tradition is: Manasseh was a very wicked king of course, Isaiah fled from some of Manasseh’s men and he hid in a hollow tree, which his men proceeded to cut down, and in so doing they cut Isaiah in two. Some see an allusion to that in Hebrews 11:37 where it speaks of these heroes of the faith and it speaks of being “sawn asunder.” Hebrews 11:37 says, “They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins.”

Now, the interesting thing about that tradition is that it still sees Isaiah around in the time of Manasseh even though that superscription says Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It seems that there’s still a basis to conclude that Isaiah did survive past the end of Hezekiah’s reign and did live in the time of Manasseh. The reason I say that is that

in chapter 37, verse 38, you read, “One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch (this is speaking of Sennacherib the Assyrian king), his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.” The succession of Esarhaddon came after Sennacherib’s death, and we know from Assyrian records that Sennacherib died in 681 B.C., and that’s a pretty firm date. So you can see from this that is into the time of Manasseh. Again, whether we have co-regency or sole reign, that’s into the time of Manasseh, quite clearly.

Now, many feel that perhaps the reason that Manasseh’s not mentioned in the heading of 1:1 is that subsequent to the death of Hezekiah, who was a godly king, and the beginning of the reign with Manasseh, who was a very wicked king, that Isaiah’s public ministry ceased. In fact, many feel that maybe, this is speculation of course, many feel that maybe that the second part of the book chapters 40 to 66, which begins to speak about deliverance from exile were written then.”

With the coming of Manasseh, the certainty of the judgment of the exile was clear. In fact, the book of Kings tells us that even after the time of Manasseh, when you had a reformation under the time of Josiah, it was too little, too late. Because of the wickedness of Manasseh, the judgment was inevitable. It could not be avoided.

Many feel that what Isaiah did after the death of Hezekiah was withdraw from the public ministry and maybe had a more private kind of ministry, to the godly element, or “remnant.” Then he produced his prophecies about deliverance from exile that was certain to come, and these prophecies would have been a comfort and provided a basis for hope for those godly people that remained in the land. But it seems clear that Isaiah did live on into the reign of Manasseh, even though Manasseh is not mentioned in the heading for the book.

B. The Historical Setting for the Book

1. Israel Context

B. of the outline is “The Historical Setting for the Book.” In chapter six, with that well known vision of Isaiah, you have a date. You read, “In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted.” The year that king Uzziah died was 739 B.C. That’s an important date in this sense, that the death of Uzziah really marked the end of a period of prosperity and political strength for Judah. Remember that during the time of Uzziah over Judah in the south, Israel in the north was quite prosperous – it paralleled the time of Jeroboam II. Jeroboam II would have been just about 752 B.C. With Jeroboam II was a time of great prosperity for the Northern kingdom, Israel.

But that period was ending; Assyria had really threatened Israel. We discussed this last quarter with the background to the book of Jonah. Assyria had threatened Israel about a century earlier during the time of Ahab and subsequently in the time of Jehu, who destroyed the dynasty of Ahab. Remember, Jehu was 840 B.C., about a century earlier. Jehu paid tribute to Shalmaneser of Assyria. During Shalmaneser III’s reign, there’s a black obelisk that has a picture of Jehu paying tribute to Shalmaneser.

Assyria threatened Judah at the time, but then Assyria had gone into decline. Assyria was pressed from the North by the Urartu people. For a time, Syria gave Israel trouble—not Assyria, but Syria, better called “Aram.” Damascus, the capital of Syria, had threatened Israel. But Syria, or Aram, also was weakened so that when you come to the time of Uzziah and Jeroboam II, there was a period of power and prosperity for Israel because both Syria and Assyria were weak.

2. Assyrian Context

But that was all ending. Assyria was now again to rise in power and attempt to extend her influence and control over other peoples. And that began with Tiglath-Pileser III (745 – 727 B.C). Tiglath-Pileser III begins what’s known as the neo-Assyrian Empire.

You have this succession of rulers in Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and then Sennacherib who would later attack Judah and Hezekiah.

From Assyrian records we learn that Tiglath-Pileser fought in Northern Syria against a league of kings among whom was “Aziahu of Yiuda.” Most people think that is Uzziah. Now Uzziah had two names, sometimes he was called Azariah (either Azariah or Uzziah). Many think Aziahu was Uzziah. That’s not absolutely certain, but many think it was Azariah or Uzziah, the king of Judah.

Tiglath-Pileser says that these kings against whom he fought, were forced to pay tribute. From the Assyrian record that’s dated at 743 B.C. Now, there’s nothing said of that in the Old Testament. But in 743, he took tribute from a coalition of kings, among whom was perhaps Uzziah. That is the third year of Tiglath-Pileser’s reign. See, that’s early on in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser. In another of his annals he speaks of taking tribute from Menahem of Samaria. You see if you go over to the Northern kingdom, that’s the same time.

And if you look at 2 Kings 15:19, here you do have a biblical reference, you read there, “Then Pul” (which is the Babylonian name for Tiglath-Pileser, Tiglath-Pileser being the Assyrian name; the Babylonian’s call him Pul and he is referred to as Pul here in Kings). “Then Pul, king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and strengthen his own hold on the kingdom.”

Menahem exacted this money from Israel. The year of that is not known precisely, but Albright puts it at 738 B.C. Thiele puts it at 743. In any case, you can see that under Tiglath-Pileser pressure again is beginning to be exerted on Israel from the Assyrians. Tiglath-Pileser says, “As for Menahem, I overwhelmed him and he fled like a bird. Alone I returned him to his place. Gold, silver, linen garments and multi colored trimmings I received from him.” If you look in your bibliography (under Roman numeral I. D.), I have that text from ANET (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts* by James C. Pritchard). It is the standard collection of extra biblical texts from the Ancient Near East. It’s on pages 25 to

29 if you want to look at some of the Assyrian annals from this time. The point is at the time of Uzziah, early in the ministry of Isaiah, Assyria begins to rise to power and begins to put pressure on both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms of Israel.

3. Syro-Ephraimite War (734 BC)

The next significant thing as far as historical context is concerned is 734 B.C., the Syro-Ephraimite War. The Syro-Ephraimite War is when Syria, or Aram, and Ephraim, the Northern kingdom, attack Judah, and that's the historical background for the prophecies in Isaiah 7 through 11. Israel and Syria attack Judah with the purpose of putting a puppet king on the throne in Judah and getting rid of Ahaz. If you turn to Isaiah 7, you read in verse 5, "Aram" – let me make a comment on that. When you read the NIV you will read "Aram." When you read the King James you will read "Syria." They're the same. Aram is really better, I think, because that's the way it appears in Hebrew. In Hebrew it's "Aram." The term Syria is a shortened form of Assyria. The title "Syria" really comes from Greek terminology when Alexander and his forces came east. They came into the western part of what had been Assyrian land, the area around Damascus. The Greeks called it "Syria," a shortened form of Assyria. That terminology came down through tradition into the English version. But I think many people confuse Syria and Assyria, which is very easy to do, so it's probably better and certainly closer to the Hebrew terminology to speak of the area around Damascus as "Aram" and the area farther to the east, in the Tigris-Euphrates area, as Assyria which was in the northern part of the Tigris-Euphrates area.

But Isaiah 7:5 says, "Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, 'Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.' Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'It will not take place.'" What is being referred to there is this attempt by the Northern Kingdom, which here is referred to as Ephraim and Syria (Aram) who wanted to put their own king on the throne of Judah in place of Ahaz. Ahaz is very concerned about this. What Ahaz

did in order to seek help was that he concluded an alliance with the Assyrians, and Isaiah condemned him for it.

That's the context of chapter 7. Isaiah says that dependence on Assyria ultimately is going to bring trouble and sorrow, and eventually Assyria, whom Ahaz turned to is going to take the Northern Kingdom into exile and also put pressure on the Southern Kingdom, Judah. That was realized not that long after this. When you look at around 734 B.C. the Syro-Ephraimitic war takes place and by 721 B.C. Samaria is completely defeated by Assyria. And it's not too long after that Sennacherib is laying siege to Jerusalem (701 B.C.), and if it wasn't for God's intervention, Judah would've been gone, too. So that alliance with Assyria was certainly a disastrous thing.

The next important event after 734 B.C., the Syro-Ephraimitic war, as far as historical background for the messages of the prophet Isaiah, is 732, two years later when Damascus was captured by Assyria. In 732 Tiglath-Pileser took Damascus, but he didn't take the Northern Kingdom immediately. Look at 2 Kings 15:29, "In the time of Pekah, king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor." Those are areas way in the North of Israel. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria. "Then Hoshea, son of Elah, conspired against Pekah, son of Remaliah. He attacked and assassinated him, and then succeeded him as king in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah" (2 Kings 15:30).

So you have a succession by virtue of authority of revolution and intrigue where Hoshea conspires against Pekah and takes the throne in Samaria. Now, the interesting thing is in ANET, when you look at the annals of Tiglath-Pileser he says that he put Hoshea on the throne in Israel. Now you see, that gives you somewhat of a fuller picture of what's going on here in verse 30 in 2 Kings 15:30, "Hoshea, son of Elah, conspired against Pekah." But he must have done that with Assyrian backing, so Hoshea was Assyria's puppet on the throne.

Tiglath-Pileser makes a claim in his annals that he's the one who put Hoshea on

the throne of Israel. But what you see is that Assyria is beginning to move. They capture Damascus and they're moving west, putting pressure on the Northern Kingdom, taking some of the towns and even disrupting the rule there and putting their own man on the throne in the Northern Kingdom.

4. Capture of Samaria (722/721 BC)

Next important event—it'd be ten years later—is the capture of Samaria by Assyria. That's the downfall of the Northern Kingdom. Hoshea apparently was put on the throne by Tiglath-Pileser, but after a time he revolted and that caused Shalmaneser, who was Tiglath-Pileser's successor--and then his successor, Sargon--to besiege Samaria for three years. You read of that in 2 Kings 17, beginning in verse 3, "Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came up to attack Hoshea who had been Shalmaneser's vassal and had paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So, king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore, Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah," and verse 7 says, "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God"; they'd broken the covenant.

If you go over to chapter 18, which is a discussion of the rule of Hezekiah, of the Southern Kingdom, you notice verse 9 says, "In King Hezekiah's fourth year, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser, king of Assyria; marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. At the end of three years the Assyrians took it. So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was the ninth year of Hoshea, king of Israel".

5. Sennacherib's Attack on Jerusalem (701 BC) & Hezekiah

The next significant event, 701 B.C., is the attempt to seize Jerusalem by Sennacherib. See, if you go down to verse 13 of that chapter, "In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them." And over in 2 Kings 19, towards the end of the chapter, you read of the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib and of the intervention of God to deliver the city. You read in 2 Kings 19:35, "That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there." So in 701 B.C. there was a siege of Jerusalem, but there was divine intervention to deliver, which had been prophesied, as we well noted by Isaiah.

Now Isaiah had prophesied long before that when Ahaz made that alliance with Assyria, that Assyria's going to overflow the land like a flood, but in the midst of that there's going to be deliverance. And you find later, even in Isaiah's life, during the time of Hezekiah, a fulfillment of prophecies that Isaiah made in the context of the alliance with the Assyrian king.

Verse 15 of chapter 18, "Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple." Well this seems like what you see often in politics and in relations like that. There's just greed. The Assyrians will take what they can get, but it's never enough. They'll just want to take more in spite of paying the tribute. Now what may be involved, as well is: Hezekiah, even though he paid the tribute, made certain overtures to Babylon, which was generally under Assyrian control, but still a distinct element within the Assyrian area of control. That overture to Babylon may have been interpreted by Assyria as a revolt by Hezekiah that prompted that attack, even though he had paid the tribute.

There are a lot of difficult problems of chronology in putting together the accounts of Hezekiah's relationship with Assyria. There's a historical parallel to this in Isaiah 36 - 39. It seems quite clear that the sequence of these narratives was arranged more on a

topical, or logical, basis than it is on a chronological basis. So part of the problem, I think, is sorting out what is the exact sequence of those events. You see in the Isaiah account that envoy from Babylon comes at the end, which in light of what we're saying, that was after the tribute was all gone. What would there have been left to show? But it seems that that envoy must have been earlier, it's put at the end of this section of Isaiah in order to make the transition in the flow of thought to the second part of the book where Israel was in Babylonian captivity.

So it seems like there is more a logical ordering of material than there is chronological ordering. Now, I'm not sure I can sort all that out for you right here at the moment. But I think that's probably a factor in the questions being asked. In other words, you see in chapter 18 of 2 Kings, those first 16 verses, give you a summary of the reign of Hezekiah. Then you go back, and when you start at verse 17, Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem; you have an account of that specific event. That may chronologically fit differently in that whole flow of things. It's not necessary, but it happens subsequent to everything that happened.

6. Key Dates in Hezekiah's Reign

In spite of Hezekiah's chronology, here are key dates then: 734, Syrio-Ephraimite war against Judah; 732, Damascus captured by Assyria; 721, Samaria falls; and 701, Sennacherib attacks Hezekiah's Judah. When we move beyond that, we come into the time of Manasseh. That was a time of great apostasy in the Southern Kingdom. Manasseh was pictured as the absolute worst of the kings of Judah. During the time of Manasseh the exile of Judah becomes certain and unavoidable and it seems that it's at that time that Isaiah turns his message to the godly remnant to bring words of comfort, consolation, and hope and looking beyond the judgment that was sure to come. In other words, the exile is definite, but it is not forever. There will be an end to it. There will be a remnant that will return.

C. The Structure of the Book of Isaiah

That's – in general – the historical setting for the prophecies of Isaiah.

Let's go on to C., which is, “The Structure of the Book.” Isaiah is a difficult book to outline. I'm following here a system that I picked up from Dr. Allan MacRae to try to find some principle of organization of the book, to break it down into the blocks of material that can be found within the whole of the book. The book contains 66 chapters, so that first line on the board represents the book of Isaiah. If you're going to start dividing it, there's a major dividing point and that is this section, chapters 36 to 39, because 36 to 39 is distinctly different in form from the rest of the book. Chapters 36 to 39 is historical narrative. In fact, it parallels the historical narrative in the book of Kings at the time of Hezekiah and this threat of Sennacherib. Isaiah 36 to 39 and that section of 2 Kings around 17 and 18 is what we've just been looking at; it's very similar. So that is a distinct section that naturally divides the book into two parts: 1 to 35 and 40 to 66. 1 to 35 and 40 to 66 both being prophetic discourse as distinct from historical narrative.

Now, most of the material of 1 to 35 is made up of discourses given in the time of Ahaz or even prior. Some of them are from the time of Uzziah. So 1 to 35 is early in the ministry of Isaiah, you might say, or relatively early, most of it around the time of Ahaz. Chapters 36 to 39 – it's not prophetic discourse but it's historical narrative dealing with the time of Hezekiah. What you see in 36 to 39 is the fulfillment of some of Isaiah's prophecies in the first part of the book. Particularly that prophecy, that even though Assyria's going to come in and be an instrument of God's judgment, Assyria is not going to completely overrun the whole of the land, and it doesn't. Isaiah said Assyria would attack, but Judah would be spared of complete defeat, and that's exactly what happened. It's recorded in that section of 36 to 39. You see how that's worked out historically.

I'll come back and say something about 40 to 66 later. But let's work with this section 1 to 35 and try to break it down further. I think if you do, you'll find that the most natural divisions are as follows: chapters 1 to 6 form a sort of unit in its own right, then chapters 7 to 12, then chapters 13 to 23, then 24 to 27, then 28 to 35. Those are the

divisions. Now what sets each one of them apart? Let's look at them.

I'd say the clearest units are 13 to 23 and 24 to 27; that's why I set them above the line. Chapters 13 to 23 are a group of prophecies of judgment on foreign nations. So in that section Isaiah is not directing his message so much to Israel itself, but to the surrounding nations. If you look at 13:1, you can see how this works quite quickly. "An oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah son of Amoz saw." Isaiah 15:1, "An oracle concerning Moab;" chapter 17, "An oracle concerning Damascus;" chapter 18, "Woe to the land of whirring wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water." It's a prophecy against Cush. Cush is probably Ethiopia to the South of Egypt. Chapter 19, "An Oracle concerning Egypt." So you see here in this section prophecies concerning foreign nations, and that sort of sets them apart as a unique section.

When you get to chapters 24 to 27, that section is often called "Isaiah's Little Apocalypse." What you see in 24 to 27 is a collection of prophecies that speak of a great judgment that's coming on the nations of the earth. All who oppose God will suffer this judgment. It seems to be quite global in scope. So that section is "Isaiah's Little Apocalypse."

Those two sections pretty much set themselves apart from 1 to 6, 7 to 12, and 28 to 35. When you come to 1 to 35, the clearest section is probably 7 to 12. When you've pulled out 13 to 23, 24 to 27, that leaves you with 1 to 12. But out of 1 to 12, 7 to 12 is a clear unit. Chapters 7 to 12 concerns that Syro-Ephraimitic war and its aftermath. In chapter 7, the Lord says to Isaiah, take your son Shear-Jashub, go out and meet Ahaz and confront him about this alliance he's made with Assyria. Instead of trusting in me, he's trusting in Assyria. Judgment is pronounced because of that. So 7 to 12 have a specific background and historical setting: the Syro-Ephraimitic War of 734 B.C. And that sets it apart as a unit. That unit is often called "The Book of Emmanuel." The reason for that name is the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 because in Isaiah 7:14, in the context of that Syro-Ephraimitic War, Isaiah says, "The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will

conceive and bear a son, and shall call him Immanuel." A lot of interesting questions arise about how you interpret that prophecy, how you relate it to that context and at the same time see it as Messianic prophecy. We'll get into that. That well known verse, Isaiah 7:14, has given a title to this section, chapters 7-12, because it's right at the heart of that section, "The Book of Immanuel."

That leaves the opening chapters 1 to 6. And 1 to 6 is much more general in nature. You can't pin it down to a specific historical setting as you can 7 to 12, with that Syro-Ephraimitic War, despite its general nature. But chapters 1-6 divides into 3 sections, and we're going to look at these, at the character of the three sections. The three sections are 1:1 to 2:5, 2:6 to 4:6, and 5:1 to 6:13. The character of those three sections is that you have a pronouncement of judgment followed by a section that speaks of future blessing. (In the outline, the section that speaks of future blessing is in parenthesis.) You see in 1:1 to 2:5, 2:1-4 speaks of future blessing. You have judgment then future blessing. Then you go back in 2:6 to judgment again but that's followed in 4:2 -6 with another section of future blessing. Then you go back to judgment again in 5:1, but that's followed by blessing in 6:1 to 13, the latter blessings in that case being the call of Isaiah and the vision he sees and permission to bring the word of the Lord to the people of Israel. So you see the character of that material is: judgment, blessing; judgment, blessing; judgment, blessing. We'll look at the three sections in more detail and see how that works out but that's the way it is structured.

That gives you then the way in which the material from 1 to 35 is organized. You really break it down into these 5 sections. The prophecies are grouped around some kind of principle of organization, like prophecies against foreign nations; this eschatological apocalyptic judgment; Syro-Ephraimitic War; properties of judgment; and blessing.

Chapters 28 to 35 is much like 7 to 12. And it seems like it has the same general historical background for chapters 28 to 35 shares the Syro-Ephraimitic War as its historical background. But it seems like whereas chapters 7 to 12 is addressed more to the king, Ahaz, who is an unworthy representative of the house of David, sitting on the

throne of Judah, chapters 28 to 35 is addressed more to the nobles of the land, the leadership apart from the King. But it's very similar to the "Book of Immanuel."

So that's the section chapters 1 to 35. We noticed 36 to 39 is historical narrative, then you get to chapters 40 to 66, the last 27 chapters of the book. And the interesting thing here is this material is in some respects quite different. Of course, that's the kind of thing that critical scholars use to suggest that we have a different writer here. The material is quite different. Assyria that is so prominent in the first part of the book is now hardly mentioned. In this section, the prophet turns his attention away from the sad conditions in Israel in the times of Manasseh and Ahaz. And he's looking forward not just to exile, but looking forward to release from exile, assuming that exile has already taken place. So Isaiah sees the exile as absolutely certain, and what he's concerned with in the second part of the book is not so much the coming of the exile, but with the end of the exile. His focus is on the fact that the exile is not going to be forever; there will be deliverance.

But what that means is, whereas the first part of the book, 1 to 35, is concerned with warning of coming judgment and call to repentance, the second part of the book has quite a different emphasis. That warning of coming judgment is not emphasized at all in the second part of the book. You have material of comfort, consolation, of future hope beyond exile. So it seems that Isaiah is now speaking to believers, giving them something to be passed on that would be of value, and giving encouragement and hope to their descendants who actually experience those conditions of exile and judgment.

Now, it's interesting that in this section the 13th chapter, which is Isaiah 53 (40+13), which is the central chapter of the 27 chapters of Isaiah 40-66. It is right in the middle of this section that you have the climax towards which everything previous moves in and from which everything subsequent is based on. Right in the heart of 40 to 66 is Isaiah 53. What that portrays is the suffering of Christ. The suffering of the "servant." It's in the climax of the sequence of servant passages. But it depicts the suffering of Christ for the salvation of those who believe in him in a beautifully clear way.

Now, that brings up a question that I think is an important one and an interesting one, and that question is: How does that Messianic theme (the suffering of the servant), how does that relate to this whole focus of this section of Isaiah on deliverance from exile? What's the relationship between the exile and this servant theme that climaxes in the death of this servant on behalf of his people?

We'll have to look at that next time.

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