

CHAPTER VI

ISAIAH

THE STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH

A. Assyrian background—Chs. 1-39.

1—(a) Ch. 1. Introduction to section and whole book.

(b) Chs. 2-6. Growth of obduracy in the mass of the people. (Chiefly time of Jotham.)

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(looking back.)

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(looking forward).

B. Babylonian background. Chs. 40-66.

1—Chs. 40-48. Deliverance from Babylon.

2—Chs. 49-55. The spiritual deliverance of Israel.

3—Chs. 56-66. The new Zion and miscellaneous prophecies.

The Unity of the Book.

THE structure of Isaiah is unique. The first thirty-five chapters are attributed to Isaiah the son of Amoz, and are dated in the period Uzziah to Hezekiah. This first section, commonly called Proto-Isaiah by scholars—we use these names for convenience, not to prejudge the question of authorship—is closed by four historical chapters from the time of Hezekiah, which can be, but quite probably are not, from the pen of Isaiah. There follows an anonymous collection of prophecies (chs. 40-55—Deutero-Isaiah) in which it seems "the Babylonian Exile is not predicted; it is described as an existing fact."¹ The book ends with a less homogeneous section (chs. 56-66—Trito-Isaiah) in which the general picture seems to be the position after the return from exile.

¹ Kirkpatrick, p. 359.

The most obvious interpretation of these phenomena is that we have the work of one, or possibly two, anonymous prophets appended to the prophecies of Isaiah. Nor does the New Testament necessarily dispel such a view, for the attribution of passages from "Deutero-" and "Trito-Isaiah" to Isaiah *might* mean no more than that they were taken from the book which circulated under that name. The moment, however, that the phenomena of the book are examined more closely, the more difficult this apparently simple theory is seen to be.

We cannot here enter into questions of style, language and theology. It will suffice to say that the differences in these spheres between "Proto-" and "Deutero-Isaiah" are sufficient to suggest possible difference in authorship; the similarities demand some connexion between them.

Much more important is, that in "Deutero-Isaiah" we reach the climax of prophecy. After the picture of the Servant of Jehovah there was nothing more for the prophets to reveal about God, until the fulfilment Himself should come. It seems incredible that God could have raised up one in Israel to whom He could give such a revelation of Himself, and yet the messenger should leave neither name nor other trace in the traditions of his people.

Then, Isaiah is a literary unity, and a skilful one at that—cf. outline of its structure. The same arguments which would deny chs. 40–66 to Isaiah inevitably deprive him of considerable sections of "Proto-Isaiah." Furthermore, closer study has shown that there may well be sections by "Deutero-" and "Trito-Isaiah" in "Proto-Isaiah," and vice versa. In other words, to suggest that the work of a later prophet has been appended to that of an earlier one, is an over-simplification. If the unity of authorship is denied, then the only theory which does justice to the facts is that "a personal connexion between the three main parts of the book is found in the circle of disciples who handed down the Deutero-Isaianic material, and who had direct connexions with the Proto-Isaianic circle of disciples."¹

When we consider the increasing complexities demanded by the usual modern view, and the many improbabilities it involves, it is surely easier to accept the traditional view of the Isaianic authorship of the whole prophecy. It must, however, be stressed that here, as in many other Old Testament problems, we are dealing with probabilities, not provable certainties.²

¹ Bentzen: *Introduction to the Old Testament II*, p. 114.

² For the unity of Isaiah see Young pp. 202–211, ISBE, article Isaiah, Harrison, pp. 764 *seq.* against HDB, article Isaiah, Driver LOT pp. 236–246.

The Problem of "Deutero-Isaiah."

We have already seen that the structure of Isaiah is unique. Once having accepted the Isaianic authorship of the whole book, we are not likely to question that Deutero-Isaiah was written in the dark days of Manasseh, when it seemed that true religion had perished, and the exile in Babylonia, prophesied by Isaiah to Hezekiah (39: 6f), became a necessity. With this dating agrees the form of the prophecies, which were probably from the first written rather than spoken. No open prophecy was possible in the time of Manasseh, and there is no reason to doubt the tradition that Isaiah suffered a martyr's death under this evil king.

But this is not sufficient explanation of the historical chapters which divide the book in two. They stand rather as a deliberate sign to the reader that we enter a new sphere of Isaiah's prophecy. If "Deutero-Isaiah" is by Isaiah, it is the one clear example in the Old Testament in which a prophet is transported from his own time, and not in fleeting glimpse, apocalyptic generalities or symbolism, but in clear vision is shown things yet far future.

We do not doubt that God could do this, but we may well ask whether He would. Is there a good reason for such an exceptional prophecy? We are of the opinion that there is.

Though the prophetic message is a revelation of God that comes from God, it has to come through the prophet, and God limits Himself by the prophet's ability to receive. This adaptation of the message to the personality and circumstances of the prophet is stamped on every chapter of the prophetic books.

We have already noticed that the figure of the Servant of Jehovah is the climax of prophecy. We may well suppose that God in His foreknowledge knew that there would be none of the generation of the exile spiritually capable of receiving such a revelation. It seems clear enough that Jeremiah would not have been able, for he does not seem to have come to an understanding of his own sufferings; and there is nothing to suggest that Ezekiel or Daniel was suited for the task. If that is so, we have adequate grounds for assuming that Deutero-Isaiah is in fact unique in its nature. (We shall see later that the figure of the Servant had to be set against an exilic background.)

The acceptance of Isaianic authorship explains one feature of "Deutero-Isaiah" that has puzzled those scholars who accept an exilic date for it, *viz.*, the vagueness of its geographical background. While the background of Palestine has grown faint, that of Babylonia has not become clear. This is what we might expect, if Isaiah were transported

forward about a century and a half in time. (So vague is the background that some scholars have placed "Deutero-Isaiah" in Palestine of the exile, or even Egypt.)

One argument for the later date of "Deutero-Isaiah" is that, on the balance of evidence, it seems unlikely that it was known to Jeremiah, Ezekiel and other contemporary prophets.¹ It seems fair to suppose that Jeremiah would have found his sufferings much easier to bear had he had the figure of the Servant of Jehovah before him to explain them at least in part. It would seem that though God gave the vision to Isaiah, He gave it for a generation yet future, *viz.*, in the first place that of the late exile, and that this portion of the book of Isaiah was treasured up by the disciples of Isaiah (8: 16, see below) against the time when it would be needed.

Isaiah.

There is every evidence in "Proto-Isaiah" that Isaiah was a native of Jerusalem. As he seems to have had ready access to the royal court, and Ahaz evidently knew the name of his son Shear-jashub (this follows inevitably from 7: 3), he must have been a man of high social standing. The Jewish tradition that his father, Amoz, was the brother of Amaziah, the father of Uzziah, is attractive and quite possible. It is, however, too late to be accepted with certainty.

"Proto-Isaiah" covers the period from the death year of king Uzziah, 740 B.C. (6: 1, see below), when Isaiah received his call, probably as quite a young man, to at least Sennacherib's invasion, 701 B.C., and to even a later date, if there was a second invasion. This allows ample opportunity for Isaiah's writing of "Deutero-Isaiah" in his old age.

The Historical Background of "Proto-Isaiah."

During the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, Assyria passed through a phase of weakness and civil war; but when Pul, an Assyrian general, seized the crown in 745 B.C., five years before Uzziah's death, and adopted the title of Tiglath-Pileser III, it was the beginning of a new period of aggression and expansion which reached its climax in the conquest of Egypt and its end in the destruction of Nineveh itself (612 B.C.).

By 738 B.C. Rezin of Damascus, Hiram of Tyre, and Menahem of Israel had all become tributary to Assyria. In 735 B.C. Pekah, who had murdered Menahem's son, and Rezin raised the standard of revolt. They attacked Judah, presumably to force her into an anti-Assyrian alliance (7: 1f; II Kings 16: 5f; II Chron. 28: 5-15). In spite of Isaiah's efforts, Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser for help. In 734 B.C. the Philistine cities were captured. In 732 B.C. Damascus was captured and

¹ But equally "Deutero Isaiah" was unaware of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

the inhabitants carried into captivity. Israel under Hoshea yielded at the cost of the loss of Transjordan and Galilee, whose inhabitants were carried away (II Kings 15: 29; 16: 9; I Chron. 5: 6, 26). Ahaz naturally became tributary.

An increase in Egyptian power encouraged Israel to revolt against Shalmaneser V, Tiglath-Pileser's successor (II Kings 17: 4). The inevitable result was the capture of Samaria in 723 B.C. by Shalmaneser, and the deportation of its inhabitants by his successor Sargon (II Kings 17: 5f).

At that time Judah had remained loyal to Assyria, but from 715 B.C. Egyptian intrigues increasingly inclined Hezekiah to revolt. Though involved in the revolt of the Philistines, Judah escaped apparently scot free in 711 B.C. (ch. 20); it may be that Hezekiah was able to yield in time. It is likely that the ambassadors of Merodach-Baladan (ch. 39) are to be dated between this and 701 B.C. but Thiele opts for a date immediately after 701 B.C. Some scholars have, however, found evidence in Isaiah that Judah was invaded at this time.

When Sennacherib followed Sargon in 705 B.C., most of the Assyrian empire rose in revolt. Hezekiah was one of the leaders of the revolt in the west. Sennacherib was not to deal with the west till 701 B.C., but then opposition quickly collapsed. An Egyptian army was decisively defeated, and Hezekiah yielded, receiving very onerous terms (II Kings 18: 13-16).¹ Sennacherib, with a treachery he showed on other occasions as well, changed his mind and demanded the surrender of the city (II Kings 18: 17-19: 8; Isa. 36: 1-37: 8—cf. also Isa. 33: 1-12). This demand was not supported by any very great force, and was refused.

The more obvious interpretation of II Kings 19: 9-35 and Isa. 37: 9-37 is that Sennacherib, with his hands full, contented himself with writing a threatening letter, and the smiting of his host by the angel of the Lord led to his abandoning the campaign. Many, however, consider that there is a gap between II Kings 19: 8 and 9 (Isa. 37: 8 and 9) of rather more than ten years—this is quite compatible with the Hebrew method of writing history—and that Sennacherib had a second campaign in the west. The Assyrian records here are incomplete. For a full discussion see Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 282-287. It should be remembered that the results of Sennacherib's invasion were so disastrous for Judah that henceforth she remained a loyal vassal of Assyria.

Introduction (Ch. 1).

This chapter is not merely an introduction to chs. 2-12, but serves in that capacity for the whole book. It consists

¹ For the Assyrian version see Finegan, p. 177, Kenyon, p. 50f.

in all probability of a number of short, originally unconnected prophecies of varying date, but in the main probably from Hezekiah's reign, so arranged as to present God's "Great Arraignment" of Judah.

We find the assessors, heaven and earth, in ver. 2a—for God Himself is the judge; the charge is unnatural ingratitude (vers. 2b, 3)—the ox and the ass of the traditional Nativity pictures come from here. In vers. 4–9 we have the evidence for the prosecution; as the unchangeable character of God is assured, the blame for Judah's sufferings must rest on herself—the scene of utter desolation suggests the time of Hezekiah. Judah is imagined as pleading her regular and large-scale temple worship in her defence, but this is rebutted in vers. 10–17. As there is no other defence, the Judge makes a conditional offer of mercy in vers. 18–20; but vers. 21–23 imply that the offer has been rejected. The sentence, present judgment leading to purification and the restoration of a remnant, closes the chapter.

This chapter contains two of Isaiah's key thoughts, that of *holiness* and the *remnant*; these should be noted whenever they occur in the prophecy—see vers. 4 and 27 (her converts), R.S.V. those who repent, and comments on ch. 6 below.

The condemnation of the Jerusalem temple-worship in vers. 10–17 should not be referred to the period of Ahaz' apostasy; it almost certainly dates from the time after Hezekiah's reformation. Note that so far from commending Hezekiah's action, Isaiah does not even mention it. Isaiah was fully aware that the reformation was purely external, and judged it accordingly. It is a painful thought to a certain type of "high churchman" that the main prophets from Amos to Jeremiah are unanimous that correct worship without corresponding morality of life only angers God, and is a sin. Indeed, the very correctness only magnifies the offence. It should be noted that the demand is for correct behaviour toward one's neighbour (cf. I John 4: 20).

This section is most instructive for the principles underlying the recording of the prophetic message. We may be certain that Isaiah repeatedly attacked the mockery of a purely external worship, but it is recorded only here and in 29: 13f. Once the message had been clearly given in the Introduction, posterity did not need its further repetition.

Judah under Jotham and Ahaz (Chs. 2–12).

Though, as has been indicated in the outline structure of the book, there is a break between chs. 6 and 7, and the two resultant sections are complete in themselves, yet they form a larger whole. Chs. 2–6 come mainly from the time of

Jotham, and depict the increasing hardening of Judah until there is no hope; chs. 7-12 are mainly from the time of Ahaz, and give the bitter fruit of the hardening.

We start with a picture of God's ideal (2: 2-5), possibly a quotation from an earlier prophet quoted also by Micah (cf. Micah 4: 1-5), which immediately changes to the grim reality (2: 6-4: 1). It should be noted that here, as elsewhere in the prophecy, present, future and final punishment all flow together under the general conception of the Day of the Lord (see p. 20f), although the expression strictly applies only to the final ushering in of the kingdom of God. The purification and final glory, which are the gracious result of the inevitable divine punishment, are pictured in 4: 2-6. The vintage song (5: 1-7) is both a condemnation of Judah's unnatural sin and an indication of Isaiah's difficulties. Unable to capture the ear of his wearied hearers otherwise, he goes round as a wandering minstrel at some vintage festival; note how cleverly the barbed point of the song is hidden until the very end. Six woes (5: 8-24) then indicate some of the "wild grapes" of the vineyard. Hard on their heels follow the Assyrians, the instruments of God's wrath (5: 25-30); when originally spoken this passage stood probably after 10: 4. Finally, Judah's hardness is explained by the story of Isaiah's call in ch. 6.

The second section begins with the rejection of the prophet's message and Jehovah's help by Ahaz and "the house of David" (7: 13) in favour of an appeal to Assyria (7: 1-25). This is approved by the people (8: 1-8). The prophet is denounced as a traitor, and turns his back on the people to devote himself to his disciples, who become a pattern for the remnant (8: 9-9: 1). A picture of the coming Messiah gives a gleam of light in the spiritual gloom (9: 2-7). There follows an oracle of judgment on Israel and Judah (9: 8-10: 4 and add 5: 25-30), and several on Assyria, threatening God's judgment when her work for Him has been done. The section closes with two Messianic chs. (11 and 12), which end with the fulfilment of 2: 2-5.

The Call of Isaiah (Ch. 6).

Many have failed to see the prophet's call here, and have looked on his experience as a sort of "second blessing."¹ There is nothing to be said for such a view; it only hinders our understanding of the prophet's message; it would seem to be based upon the failure to realize that in the Scriptures chronological order is always subordinated to the spiritual lesson to be learnt.

¹ So *The New Bible Handbook* and with hesitation Young, p. 213.

Isaiah was in the Temple court, in fact or in vision, probably at the great autumn feast celebrating God's sovereignty. The dying leper king symbolized to him the people's sinfulness. Now the worship of the seraphim brought home to him the sinfulness of the people's worship ("unclean lips"). The Israelite recognized that God was holy (*qadosh*), *i.e.* separate¹ from man, but understood it mainly physically, cf. Judges 6: 22 (R.V.); 13: 22, I Sam. 6: 19, II Sam. 6: 6ff. *et al.* (Obviously the people had to learn respect for God first). Now Isaiah realized that it was above all sin that created the barrier between man and God, though it did not exist for the earth. Note that Isaiah probably did not see the form of Jehovah, for the LXX and Origen are probably correct in interpreting "his face," "his feet" as referring to God. In any case, it was the glory of the pre-incarnate Son that he saw (John 12: 41).

This stress on the holiness of God runs right through Isaiah, especially in the phrase "the Holy One of Israel," which occurs twenty-five times in the prophecy, *including thirteen times in the second half*. (It is found in only six passages outside Isaiah, all probably later.) Not only is God holy, not only should Israel be holy, but God has separated Himself to Israel that He may be sanctified through Israel.

Isaiah's message is one of doom, for his task is one of hardening (6: 9f.). This passage is cited on three occasions in the New Testament, Mark 4: 11f (and parallels); John 12: 37-41; Acts 28: 25-28, and underlies the whole argument of Rom. 9-11. It should be clearly noted that the New Testament teaching is not that the hardening in part (Rom. 11: 7, 25, R.V.) came upon Israel because he rejected Christ, but that he rejected Christ because he was hardened (see especially John 12: 39).

In other words, it is from this moment that Judah ceases to function *as a nation* in God's purposes, though her national existence continued for over a century and a half. From now on, God is working out His purpose through a remnant, which is dimly seen in 6: 13. (This verse is unintelligible in the A.V.; see R.V., R.S.V.). The picture is of the tree of the nation hewn down, but the stock or stump left in the earth; from it new life can spring (cf. 11: 1).

We can now justify the position of ch. 6. It will only have been as Isaiah saw the people getting harder that he himself will have fully realized the implications of his task. Further, we can more easily understand God's action in the light of chs. 2-5. Though God hardens, there is an antecedent cause in the one hardened.

¹ See Snaith: *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, ch. II.

Immanuel (7: 1-17; 8: 5-8; 9: 2-7, 11: 1-10).

Few who quote 7: 14 as evidence for the virgin birth of Christ trouble to study the promise in its context. The sign promised by Isaiah cannot be our Lord *in its primary fulfilment*. Isaiah has offered Ahaz any sign he likes that he may trust God, but Ahaz in mock piety refuses (7: 10-12). Isaiah then proclaims a sign. A maiden (*almah*) is about to conceive a son, who will be called Immanuel. Before he is about two ("Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good . . ." ver. 16) Rezin and Pekah shall be dead. Shortly after, however, Judah will have been wasted (ver. 15). Butter and honey are the food of a land where agriculture has ceased.

While this interpretation *and fulfilment* cannot be escaped, it is clearly a superficial one. The sign is a threat not merely to Ahaz, but also to the house of David ("The Lord Himself shall give *you* (plu.) a sign . . ." ver. 14). Immanuel is to be of the royal house (8: 8), and it is impossible to dissociate the child of 9: 6 from him. He cannot be Hezekiah, as claimed by Jewish tradition, for he was born some time earlier. Finally in 11: 1 he is definitely moved into the future, for the tree of David has been cut down, the shoot is out of the stump (R.S.V.) of Jesse, the branch is out of his roots.

While *almah* should mean a maiden, it is actually always used with the meaning of virgin in the Old Testament, and is therefore so translated in 7: 14 by the LXX and so quoted in the New Testament. *Betulah*, which should mean virgin, on the other hand does not necessarily bear that meaning, e.g. Joel 1: 8. So the use of an ambiguous word gives the sign a double meaning, one natural and immediate, the other supernatural and future.¹

Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8: 1-8).

Immanuel was a sign for the king and royal house; *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* was to be one for the people. Note the method used to awaken curiosity. The strange phrase "Haste-spoil-speed-booty" is written on a large board and fastened outside Isaiah's house during the nine months his son is in his mother's womb. Only after the child's birth is it explained. It is clear that the prophet's appeal to the people had no more success than the appeal to the king.

Note that the identification of Immanuel with *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, found in some commentaries, has nothing to commend it; also that the prophetess simply means the prophet's wife.

¹ See Lukyn Williams: *The Hebrew Christian Messiah*, p. 21ff, and E. J. Young: *Studies in Isaiah*, chs. 6 and 7.

The Rejection of the Prophet (8: 11-18).

While it is usual to praise Isaiah's clear-sighted foreign policy when Judah was attacked by her neighbours (7: 1-9), a very good case could be made for Ahaz' action from a purely worldly point of view. Certainly the people looked on it as the only hope of salvation and came to suspect Isaiah of being a Quisling (v. 12, R.V., R.S.V.). The prophet himself seems to have lost confidence in his message for the moment (ver. 11).

The result was that Isaiah turned from the people and devoted himself to the small group that held with him (ver. 16ff). There is no evidence that he ever carried on a *regular* prophetic activity among the people after this, not even in the reign of Hezekiah; we gain the impression that he was given to intervening in moments of crisis. We must allow for the possibility that a good part of the following prophecies come from his teaching to his disciples, and we believe it was to them he entrusted "Deutero-Isaiah."

The Judgment of the Nations and of the World (Chs. 13-27).

Here, too, we have two sections organically connected. The oracles of doom on Israel and Judah could well raise the question whether God confines His judicial activities to His own people. To that, chs. 13-23 give an answer, for in them we see God's judgments on most of the peoples known to Isaiah, so these are really prophecies about other nations for Israel's learning, rather than prophecies for the nations' good. But that in turn leads to another question, *viz.*, was God's activity among the nations exceptional? This is answered by the apocalyptic and eschatological chs. 24-27. Here God's final judgment is seen to involve not merely Israel and the surrounding nations, but the whole world.

It is most instructive to note the difference in language between the two sections. In the former we have clear-cut pictures of the surrounding countries; in the latter we seem to be moving in a fog in which we see figures moving dimly until the sun of God arises in all its glory.

Delitzsch points out how the former section begins with Babylon, the city of world power, and ends with Tyre, the city of world commerce, while a second prophecy against Babylon forms the centre.

It is not clear why 22: 1-14, a prophecy about Jerusalem, is included in this section, but as Shebna was virtually Foreign Secretary, 22: 15-25 is entirely in place here.

The Taunt-Song Against the King of Babylon (14: 3-23).

This taunt-song (not proverb or parable, ver. 4) is one of the finest poems in the Old Testament, and must be interpreted

as poetry. A fine translation is given by G. A. Smith.¹ It is not clear whether some definite king is here intended, or whether Babylon is being personified in its king. In either case, no reference to the fall of Satan is intended. Lucifer (14: 12) simply means the morning star, and the application of the name to Satan is due to patristic exegesis. At the same time the king's overweening pride (14: 13) makes him a type of Satan—"the Mount of congregation in the uttermost north" is the home of the gods in Babylonian mythology.

Philistia (14: 28-32).

A logical *non sequitur* should be avoided here. "Out of the north" (14: 31) shows that the prophecy has no connexion with the death of Ahaz. The serpent, the adder (R.S.V.) and the fiery flying serpent are Assyrian kings.

Moab (15: 1-16: 14).

There are two prophecies here, see 16: 13. It is not clear whether the earlier, 15: 1-16: 12 is one of Isaiah's earliest, or whether it is by an earlier prophet. 16: 1 implies a strong ruler in Jerusalem who controls Edom. Uzziah is the last king to satisfy the picture. It is equally uncertain whether the earlier prophecy had been fulfilled at the time, or whether Isaiah is saying that it is now to come into effect.

Egypt and Ethiopia (Chs. 18-20).

At this time Egypt was ruled by Ethiopian kings. Ch. 18 is addressed to the Ethiopian rulers; ch. 19 deals with the Egyptian people; ch. 20 includes both in one common doom.

The interpretation of 19: 18-22 is far from easy. "The language of Canaan" is Hebrew, and it probably refers to the Jewish communities that sprang up later in Egypt. There was a Jewish temple at Leontopolis from 160 B.C. to A.D. 72, and its builders looked on it as the fulfilment, but this is almost as doubtful as the identification of the great pyramid with the altar and pillar.

In 19: 24f we have one of the finest universalistic passages in the Old Testament. Though Israel still has the pre-eminence in the use of "inheritance," the difference has become so small as to be virtually negligible; elsewhere "my people" and "the work of my hands" are confined to Israel.

The Resurrection Hope (25: 6-8; 26: 13-19).

There is little clear teaching on the resurrection in the Old Testament, this passage being one of the earliest. In 25: 6-8 we have the abolition of death for *all* peoples, but it does not

¹ The Book of Isaiah I, pp. 433-436.

extend further than the living at the setting up of the kingdom of God. In 26: 13f there is the guarantee that the oppressors of Israel are gone for ever, never to rise. But then in 26: 16-19 comes the promise that Israel's dead will arise. Further Isaiah was not permitted to see; and it seems that his contemporaries were not able to grasp his message (cf. 38: 18f). This may have been partly due to the obscurity of the language, partly perhaps to its restriction to his own inner circle.

Judah under Hezekiah (Chs. 28-33).

The general impression created by this section is that Isaiah did not resume his regular prophetic activity on Hezekiah's accession; most of these prophecies are called forth by the intrigues that led to Hezekiah's rebellion against his Assyrian overlord, and the consequences of his action.

The prophecies are divided into six sections by the word "woe"—28: 1; 29: 1; 29: 15; 30: 1; 31: 1; 33: 1.

The first woe is concerned with the dissolute nobles of Jerusalem. 28: 1-6 is an older prophecy by Isaiah against Ephraim applied in ver. 7f to the nobles of Jerusalem; ver. 9f is their drunken answer in broken Hebrew; ver. 11ff Isaiah's answer. 28: 23-29 should be read in a modern version.

The second woe deals with God's wonderful purpose for Jerusalem and the reception of the message by a hardened people. "Ariel" means altar-hearth, or hearth of God.

The third woe is uttered against the political intrigues with Egypt, and goes over into a Messianic picture.

The fourth and fifth are both concerned with the Egyptian alliance, interspersed with promises of divine aid and the Messianic transformation of society. 30: 21 is the great verse on guidance, which comes when men are going wrong, not while they walk right. 32: 3 reverses 6: 9f.

The last woe is addressed to treacherous Assyria, and once again ends in a glowing Messianic picture.

Judgment and Blessing (Chs. 34, 35).

Much of the message of "Proto-Isaiah" is summed up here. Edom personifies the hostile nations in general. That the eschatological picture should not be taken too literally is easily seen by comparing 34: 9f with 34: 11-15. A number of the beings mentioned in ver. 14 are mythological, but even they could not live in burning pitch and brimstone.

Ch. 35 is an outstanding example of the parabolic use of the transformation of nature so common in Isaiah, cf. also 11: 1-9, 40: 3f. etc. While there is no reason why we should not take the transformation of nature literally (cf. Rom. 8: 19-22), it

should be clear that it is the antecedent transformation of men that is uppermost in the prophet's mind.

Historical Chapters (Chs. 36-39).

Chs. 36 and 37 obviously hang together, as do 38 and 39. The chronology of Hezekiah's reign is far from certain, but whichever we adopt, the fifteen years of 38: 5 would seem to bring us to a date before 701 B.C., the date of Sennacherib's invasion.¹ Our knowledge of Merodach-baladan and his movements point in the same direction. Once we accept the Isaianic authorship of the whole book, Isaiah is just as likely to have influenced the order in II Kings as vice versa. In that case we have one more example of chronology being made subservient to spiritual ends. Chs. 36, 37 are placed first as rounding off the prophecies about Assyria; chs. 38, 39, though earlier in time, are placed last as looking forward to the captivity in Babylon to which 40-55 introduce us.

It is not easy to reconcile the general picture of Hezekiah in II Kings 18-20, II Chron. 29-32 with Isa. 28-33. Ch. 39 may help us. The resigned words of ver. 8 are not due to personal selfishness, content so long as trouble came later; they are rather the recognition of God's mercy by one who knew himself guilty. It is obvious that here we have one more example of the foreign intrigues that Isaiah denounced so unsparingly; but Hezekiah had gone into it with his eyes open. Even good kings like Hezekiah found prophets like Isaiah unwelcome at times.

The Historical Background of "Deutero-Isaiah."

Assyria has disappeared. Nineveh fell to the confederate armies of Babylon and the Medes in 612 B.C., and these two countries with Lydia formed a triple alliance dominating the Near East.

Jerusalem was captured and the Jews led into captivity in 586 B.C. Some thirty years later Cyrus, the Persian prince of Anshan—part of Elam, due east of Babylon (Isa. 41: 2)—was extending his power over Persia. Alarmed, Astyages king of Media attacked him in 550 B.C., but was betrayed into his hands. By 546 B.C. Cyrus controlled the Median empire and this brought him to the north of Babylon (Isa. 41: 25).

An initial attack on Babylon in 546 B.C. was quickly checked by the need to deal with Croesus king of Lydia. He was defeated and captured in one short campaign, but Cyrus needed three years to subdue the Greek cities of Ionia.

Babylon was attacked in 539 B.C. The king, Nabonidus, "the first archaeologist," offered little opposition. The Babylonian

¹ But see Thiele, pp. 157, 159, who places Merodach-baladan after 701 B.C.

army was routed in the field, and Babylon itself betrayed into the hands of the Persians. Only the citadel held out. This was stormed and Belshazzar, Nabonidus' son, killed (Dan. 5).

Cyrus gave the exiled Jews permission to return and rebuild the Temple—a permission which may well have been given to other deported peoples as well; but only a relatively small part, in which priests formed a high proportion, took advantage of the king's kindness (Ezra 1, 2). Obstacles and disappointments led to religious laxness, and these conditions may be reflected in some of the chapters of "Trito-Isaiah."

"*Deutero-Isaiah*" (Chs. 40–55).

Though it is comparatively easy to dissect Deutero-Isaiah (the approximate result is given by the paragraph divisions of R.V., R.S.V.), after the first few stages it does not often help very much in the understanding of the prophecy. Though these chapters form the closest unity of any prophetic message of comparable length, and contain a clearly marked progression in time, yet the thought does not develop along normal logical lines. We are not dealing with a unitary writing of the modern type, but with a series of prophetic poems, each complete in itself, yet all contributing to the building up of the final picture. This explains why, though "Deutero-Isaiah" contains some of the best-known chapters in the Old Testament, as a whole it is comparatively little known.

Though we are dealing with written rather than spoken prophecy, and the most sustained poetry in the prophetic books, the manner in which the message was originally received is obviously similar to that in "Proto-Isaiah." It would seem that the message in its totality only became clear to the prophet himself as he received and recorded it.

The Spiritual Background.

The universal belief in the Near East was that a god and his people were inextricably bound together. The god (or gods) needed his people as much as they needed him, for he needed the sacrifices they brought him—this view is violently attacked in Ps. 50: 7–13. The conquest of his people meant the conquest of their god by the god of the conqueror, and he was bound to fade away into impotence, starved as he was by the ending of his sacrifices.

Unless we grasp that this view was shared by a large majority in Israel, we shall not understand the shock of the Babylonian exile and the peculiar difficulties that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to face.

Isaiah meets the resultant spiritual despondency with two

tremendous revelations of God, 40: 1-11 and 40: 12-31. The former is a message of comfort in which the main source of comfort is the very weakness of man (ver. 6ff). The deliverance is to be the work of God alone, and the assurance of it is based on God's Word. (One reason for seeing the end of "Deutero-Isaiah" in ch. 55, rather than in ch. 57, as in the older commentaries, is that thus we start with the Word of God going out in ch. 40 and returning to God in ch. 55: 11, having accomplished its work. A division after ch. 57 is based not on any intrinsic suitability, but on the similarity of 57: 21 with 48: 22, which does mark a major break.)

Fancy interpretations have been discovered for 40: 2b, but they can all be ignored. For anyone making a dispassionate comparison of national guilt and punishment in Israel and the nations, it would have seemed that Israel had suffered double in proportion to the others. "Quite so," says the prophet. God's "firstborn" may expect double, whether blessing or punishment (cf. 61: 7; Jer. 16: 18). The fact of the double punishment is proof that Israel has not been cast off, but is still God's firstborn; and so it is to-day!

The second is a hymn (40: 12-31) which is one of the most wonderful descriptions of God's power ever penned. The prophet's vision of His greatness, surely not derived from human speculation, is seen even more strikingly when we consider man's best concepts of God (ver. 18ff). A similar gulf exists between the Absolute of modern philosophic and liberal thought and Him who has been revealed as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the light of God's greatness, the despondency of the exiles (ver. 27) is absurd.

The Vindication of Jehovah.

By the destruction of Jerusalem and His temple, Jehovah had been humbled in the eyes of the nations. Now He summons them, that His honour may be vindicated (41: 1). For this He uses three witnesses or agents: Cyrus (41: 2-4, 21-29; 44: 24-45: 17; 46: 1-48: 16); Israel, His servant (41: 8-20; 42: 18-44: 5; 44: 21-23; 48: 17-22); and the Servant of Jehovah (42: 1-9; 49: 1-13; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53: 12).

It will be noted that with the exception of the last three Servant passages, all these references are from chs. 40-48, which form a clear-cut section by themselves, and are commonly referred to as "The Book of Cyrus"; they deal with the deliverance from the Babylonian exile. In chs. 49-55 ("The Book of the Servant"), not only do Babylon and Cyrus disappear, but even in one sense Israel; now we read of Zion and Jerusalem, for the *spiritually* unredeemed people have now returned from their *physical* exile, or rather all

obstacle to their return has been removed (48: 20, *cf.* with 52: 11f; 55: 12).

Cyrus was probably the first of those world conquerors who have swept meteor-like through the history of mankind, confounding every anticipation and inaugurating a new era in human history. Even if "Deutero-Isaiah" had been written by a contemporary, what a contrast its confident foretelling would be to the silence, confusion or ambiguity of the heathen oracles we learn of from Herodotus and other writers; how much greater is the contrast, if it was written a century and a half earlier!

Cyrus did not know Jehovah (45: 4f); this we know from his own inscriptions. From those of Darius I, we can infer with virtual certainty that he was a Zoroastrian who was polite to the gods of the countries he conquered.¹ If, then, he does Jehovah's will, he vindicates Him, for then assuredly the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile were Jehovah's doing (42: 24; 43: 28, A.V., R.S.V., N.E.B.). And as God's agent he is given a remarkable series of titles, unique in the Old Testament for a Gentile: My shepherd, *i.e.* My ruler (44: 28), His anointed, *i.e.* Messiah (45: 1), the man of My counsel (46: 11), he whom Jehovah loves (48: 14). But it is to be noted that no moral qualities are attributed to him; the titles are his not because of what he is, but simply because all unknowingly he carries out God's will.

Jehovah's vindication through Israel is seen not merely in their restoration, but far more by their becoming His worthy representatives (41: 8ff; 43: 4-7, 10, 12; 44: 21), although at the time they are slaves (42: 22, 24) and entirely unworthy of their call (42: 18-20; 43: 21-24).

The Servant of Jehovah.

With our lack of knowledge as to how the prophets received their message, it would be foolish to be dogmatic; but it does seem probable that the prophet only grasped the full implications of his message by degrees as it was given to him, even as we only understand it by degrees as we read it. So it is more than likely that Isaiah at first thought he was foretelling exactly that which would happen. But already in 42: 1-4 there appears the enigmatic figure of the Servant, who might be taken for Israel, and is yet so different from Israel. But with the jubilant call to Israel to leave Babylon (48: 20) there comes the realization that though Cyrus will do all for which he has been raised up, Israel will fail to carry out God's purpose (48: 22).

¹ For Cyrus' politic acceptance of the gods of Babylon *cf.* Finegan, p. 191, Kenyon, pp. 54, 141.

The Exodus from Egypt did not change Israel, and at the very Law-Mount they sinned, worshipping a calf of gold. The people whom the exile had not changed, would not be changed by the victories of Cyrus. Spiritual ends can never ultimately be attained by material means. So though Cyrus sweeps to his fore-ordained goal, there is no transformed Israel and so no transformed nature; then in 49: 1 the figure of the Servant slips out of the shadows.

The failure to realize the way in which the prophet's revelation developed, and the contrast between the glowing visions of Isaiah and the grim realities of the return, have made many conservatives deny that "Deutero-Isaiah" is primarily a prophecy of the return from exile; instead, they have applied it to the Church. To do so is to empty the prophecy of all coherent meaning, for while many portions can be applied to the Church, it is impossible so to apply the prophecy as a whole.

The traditional interpretation of the Servant has for many years now been denied by the vast majority of Old Testament scholars; usually he has been interpreted as collective Israel, real or ideal. This denial has not been due solely or even mainly to infidelity, as has been so often suggested, but rather to the reasonable conviction that the Servant could not be both Israel and the Messiah almost in the same breath.

The only tenable method of combining the traditional view with the general setting of chs. 40-55 was that of Delitzsch who wrote:

The idea of the Servant of Jehovah . . . is rooted in Israel. It is, to put it briefly and clearly, a Pyramid: its lowest basis is the whole of Israel; its middle section, Israel not merely according to the flesh but according to the spirit; its summit is the person of the Redeemer. Or to change the figure: the conception consists of two concentric circles with a common centre. The wider circle is the whole of Israel, the narrower Jeshurun (44: 2), the centre Christ.¹

One of the greatest gains of recent scholarship has been the very widespread recognition that the so-called Servant Songs (42: 1-4; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13-53: 12) are a separate production from the bulk of "Deutero-Isaiah." This does not imply that they need be by a different author. It can easily be seen that if the Songs, and in two cases the connecting link, *viz.* 42: 5-9; 49: 7-13, are omitted, there is no apparent loss in sense. The effect of this isolation is to make a personal interpretation of the Servant almost compulsory, and the only personal interpretation that really satisfies is Messianic.

¹ An additional note in the German commentary on Isaiah by Drechsler and Hahn, 1857.

Professor North in his standard book¹ shows that Continental scholars have long been unhappy about the identification of the Servant with Israel, literal or ideal, but that the long list of individuals with whom he has been identified is equally unsatisfactory. We agree with him that only a Messianic figure in which kingly, priestly and prophetic traits are all blended does justice to the language of the Servant Songs.

The first Song contrasts the Servant's methods of action with those of the world, and even of Israel (41: 15f). Note carefully the margin to 42: 3f in R.V., R.S.V.

The second gives a picture of the Servant conscious of the greatness of his task (ver. 6), but wearied by his long wait (ver. 4). Though fully fitted for the work, the sword is still in the scabbard, the arrow in the quiver. Here we have a picture of what the long "hidden years" in Nazareth must have meant to our Lord (cf. Luke 2: 49).

In 50: 4-9 we are introduced to the Servant in God's school, a hard school in which he was to endure "the contradiction of sinners." In spite of the attractive applicability of ver. 6, it is once again the years in Nazareth (cf. Heb. 2: 10, etc.)—rather than the Passion that are under consideration.

Finally we have a vision of the perfect accomplishment of the Servant's work. It is indeed inadequate in its foreseeing of the resurrection, but otherwise it is the most perfect picture of our Lord's atoning work in Scripture.²

And so Zion, broken-hearted and despondent through the failure of the return, is transformed by the Servant; her Maker becomes her Husband, and the shame of her youth is forgotten.

The Servant and Israel.

In 49: 6 the Servant is called Israel, and this helps to explain why he and Israel both bear the title of Jehovah's Servant. The history of Israel is not merely the preparation for the coming of Christ. Jesus the Messiah is the fulfilment of all that Israel ever stood for in the purposes of God. Isaiah had experienced the failure of Israel and the choice of a remnant; looking out over the exile, he sees the failure there of the remnant (see especially ch. XIV). But beyond all the centuries of suffering and failure he sees one who is both Jehovah's Servant and the fulfilment of all that Israel had longed to be but never was. It is only through the anguish of the exile, and the failure of the return, that the prophet could be brought to this climax of vision.

¹ *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah.* This is the most comprehensive modern work in English on the subject, and is of outstanding importance.

² For detailed study see David Baron: *The Servant of Jehovah.*

It may be noted that no effort is made to identify the Suffering Servant with the royal child, Immanuel, in "Proto-Isaiah." It may well be that Isaiah himself did not identify them, for until the Incarnation who could have imagined its stupendous wonder as God and man met in Christ Jesus?

"I create evil" (45: 7).

The many efforts to empty these words of their apparent meaning seem to be unnecessary and mistaken. They form part of an address to Cyrus, who was a Zoroastrian, a believer in a dualism in which light and good were the work of Ahuramazda, darkness and evil of Ahriman. The context, therefore, seems to compel us to take 45: 7 literally as God's claim to be behind all that is. We do God no honour by putting the blame for sin and evil on Satan, for God is the creator and preserver of Satan, even as He is of men. In the light of the cross we need have no fear in accepting this, the extremest Old Testament statement on the sovereignty of God. R.S.V. "weal . . . woe" does not change the picture materially.

"Trito-Isaiah" (Chs. 56-66).

Unlike the two preceding sections of Isaiah, there is no coherent structure to be found here. Some chapters deal with "the Jerusalem that now is"; normally the picture seems to be of the post-exilic city, but sometimes the language is more applicable to the city of Ahaz and Manasseh, especially in its references to idolatry. Other chapters are eschatological. By a number of scholars chs. 60-62 are taken as belonging to "Deutero-Isaiah," with 61: 1-3 as another Servant Song. We indicate the various sections, with a few comments.

Comfort to the Proselyte and Eunuch (56: 1-8).

In the rigorist atmosphere of the post-exilic community, probably some who had joined themselves to Israel during the exile found themselves no longer welcome; but Jehovah bids them welcome. When we consider that Daniel and Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 6: 11, esp. R.V. mg., R.S.V.) will have been eunuchs, we need not wonder at the presence of this message.

Venial Rulers and an Idolatrous Population (56: 9-57: 21).

While certain elements here might, on the basis of Malachi, be attributed to the post-exilic community, we have no suggestion that matters ever so degenerated, and for such open idolatry there is no evidence. It is better to suppose that it is the time of Manasseh that is depicted.

Sin and Redemption (Chs. 58, 59).

Here again we seem to be in post-exilic Jerusalem. First, the prophet deals with the apparently religious, before he turns on the open sin. During the exile, circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and fasting were among the few open expressions of religion possible to the Jews; hence they grew in importance in the popular mind. Isaiah deals with the misuse of the latter two.

As might be expected, sham religion is accompanied by open sin, and the result is national disaster. The only hope is divine intervention.

"Arise, Shine" (Chs. 60-62).

There seems to be an inversion of order in these chapters (deliberate, by the prophet, not accidental in transmission). In ch. 62 we have a picture of continuous intercession for Zion, together with a fore-shadowing of what its result will be. In ch. 61 we have the Servant of Jehovah, who by his work brings it to pass, while in ch. 60 we have a picture of the glorious fulfilment. Whether these chapters belong to "Deutero-Isaiah," with which they seem to be linked by style, or not, they do seem to give the fulfilment of that prophecy. We are convinced that any effort to make these chapters apply only to the Church, instead of mainly to Israel, goes far toward emptying them of their full meaning.

The Day of Vengeance (63: 1-6).

The application of these verses to the Passion of our Lord is perverse, and is only possible by ignoring the sense of the passage.

A Prayer (63: 7-64: 12).

The prayer starts with the first person singular, but then changes to the first person plural. The prophet prays as the representative of the people. The development of thought is not easy, and observing the main sub-divisions may make its understanding easier. They are: 63: 7-10, 11-14, 15-19; 64: 1-7, 8-12. Note 63: 10, probably the only affirmation of the personality of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament that is unmistakable without the help of the New Testament.

Final Blessedness (Chs. 65, 66).

Though in its original use ch. 65 will have had no connexion with the prayer that precedes it, it here stands as God's answer. The idolaters referred to are, once again, probably pre-exilic.

66: 3 is probably not a condemnation of sacrifice, either absolute or qualified. The end of the verse suggests that we have to do with those who combined idolatrous worship with their worship of Jehovah, and so their sacrifices became an abomination.

Note that the book ends, not with the new heavens and the new earth (66: 22), but with the carcasses of the rebels. Isaiah is not only the prophet of the divine Redeemer, but also of human sin, which has made redemption through the Suffering Servant necessary. In the Synagogue, when this chapter is read publicly, ver. 23 is repeated after ver. 24 (cf. pp. 136, 154).

Note, too, how 65: 25 links with 11: 1-10, and implies the reigning of the king described in the earlier chapter.

Additional Notes.

The reasonable criticism has been made that the theory of authorship of "Deutero-Isaiah" given earlier implies that the same applies to "Trito-Isaiah." If that were so, it would seriously shake the theory, for there is nothing in chs. 56-66 to justify such an assumption. The term "Trito-Isaiah" is, however, a mere literary convenience. Part is almost certainly pre-exilic, part can be regarded as a portion of "Deutero-Isaiah" without any straining of probabilities, and the remainder is essentially timeless and is regarded as post-exilic mainly because of its setting in Isaiah.

There is a widespread idea in certain circles that the manuscript discoveries at the Dead Sea have disproved the composite authorship of Isaiah. The older MS. of the prophet must be dated about 150 B.C. If we accept the older view of composite authorship, it could only be disproved by a MS. earlier than 200 B.C. (cf. p. 124); that suggested on p. 43 would demand a MS. at least as early as 400 B.C. before it could be rejected on these grounds.

More advanced students will find much of value in E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah*. The two chapters on *The Immanuel Prophecy* are of special value.