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Introduction to the Prophecies of Isaiah: chapter 1

The first chapter of the book of Isaiah has been intentionally formulated from a selection of the prophet's sayings in order to provide a general preface and guide to his preaching. This is made evident by the presence in 2:1 of a 'second' superscription which must originally have introduced a major written collection of the prophet's words. The extent of this written collection can only be roughly established and, although Fohrer would limit it to 2:1-10:6, we have already seen (Introduction, p. 7) that it is much more plausibly to be regarded as comprising 2:1-32:20. Hence the time at which the prophecies of ch. 1 were set in their present position must be exilic, or later. However, there is widespread agreement among commentators that the five main prophecies in 1:2-26 are from Isaiah, even though it is rather difficult to establish the precise period of his ministry to which they belong. 1:4-9 undoubtedly comes from the year 701 BC, or very soon thereafter. Vv. 27-28 are an addition that has been made to the last of these prophecies, providing a general conclusion to the theme of the whole chapter. A later addition, with a more admonitory tone, has then been made in vv. 29-31 condemning certain types of illicit worship. This is certainly of post-exilic origin.

The acceptance of the authenticity to Isaiah of the sayings contained in 1:2-26 prompts the question how they came to be preserved and placed where they now stand. Since it is highly improbable that they simply survived as isolated and disconnected sayings of the prophet, or that they once formed a kind of independent collection, they must have been drawn from a larger body of the prophet's sayings. Most probably, therefore, they have been extracted from their original positions among the larger collections of chs. 2-32. Thereby they have been separated from their connection with particular crises and historical events in the prophet's ministry and made into a more general introduction to the larger book. Cf. H. Barth, p. 220n., for suggestions concerning their original locations. Their purpose is relatively clear: to show that the prophet's preaching established a lasting disclosure of Israel's sin and of the need of the people to show a deep and genuine repentance. By the addition of such an introduction the book as a whole has been given a permanent and timeless relevance, extending the significance of prophecies which were originally addressed to specific historical situations into a larger context. Cf. my book *Prophecy and Tradition*, pp. 50ff.

We can recognise a deliberate structure in the chapter as follows:

- 1:2-3 The nature and extent of Israel's sin
- 1:4-9 The judgment of God upon this sin
- 1:10-17 The way of deliverance from sin
- 1:18-20 An appeal for repentance and a return to obedience
- 1:21-26 The hope of purifying judgment and restoration

To this vv. 27-28 add a generalised and summarising conclusion, which has then been further expanded by a later scribe in vv. 29-31 in order to make clear that the worst kind of sin is that of idolatrous worship. Upon this the most final and fearsome of judgments is threatened (v. 31).

THE SUPERSSCRIPTION

I:1

I:1. The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz: The heading provides a simple preface to the book and dates from the post-exilic period. In form it is modelled closely upon those set at the head of the books of Amos and Hosea (Am. 1:1; Hos. 1:1) except that it contains no reference to the regencies of the Northern Kingdom. Evidently the fate of that kingdom, which constituted an important theme for the prophet, was already taken for granted, and its end assumed (cf. the glossator's addition in v. 7:8b). **The vision** is an unexpected description of the prophet's message, which contains only one full vision in ch. 6, but the word has come to be used in a broad sense to cover not only visionary experiences, but prophetic revelations and messages of all kinds. It does not, therefore, express any particular emphasis upon the manner of the divine revelation. The name **Isaiah** means 'Yahweh saves', or 'Yahweh is salvation'. **the son of Amoz** does not refer to the prophet Amos, but to an unknown figure. Jewish tradition has identified him with the brother of king Amaziah of Judah (2 Kg. 14:1-2), thereby making Isaiah of royal descent. Yet it is highly improbable that Isaiah's father is to be identified with this royal personage, or with the otherwise unknown person of that name mentioned on an ancient seal, as suggested by R. T. Anderson, *JBL* 79 (1960), pp. 57-9. **Judah and Jerusalem** is in the reverse order to what is otherwise found in the book (cf. 3:1, 8; 5:3; 22:21). This change very probably reflects the period of Persian domination after the exile when the political importance of Jerusalem had been much weakened. For the book as a whole it is too restricted as a description of those whom the prophet addressed since these certainly included members of the Northern Kingdom, as well as a number of major foreign nations. **In the days of Uzziah, Jotham, etc.**, provides a general guide to the kings of Judah in whose reigns Isaiah was active. For the important questions of chronology and dating that are raised, see Introduction, pp. 8f. If the prophet were not called to his task until the year of Uzziah's death, it is improbable that we have any prophecies from this king's reign. Furthermore, on the chronology that we have followed, Jotham had already died before Uzziah, with whom he was co-regent, so that all the prophecies can be most satisfactorily explained as belonging to the reigns of either Ahaz or Hezekiah. In this, as in the case of other superscriptions, the amount of historical information contained is limited, but can be filled out by such notes as that contained in 7:1. No reference is made to the kings of the Northern

Kingdom of Israel, in line with the geographical note concerning the addresses.

REBELLIOUS SONS

1:2-3

These two verses establish the accusation that Israel is a rebellious and wayward people who do not know the extent of their own folly and waywardness.

2. **Hear, O heavens:** The appeal to the sky and earth to serve as witnesses to what has taken place between God and Israel reflects a form of speech adopted from ancient Israelite legal practice. The elements of creation are regarded as impartial in their judgment, and so the prophet calls upon them, as reliable witnesses, to pass their verdict on the events which they have witnessed. Some have sought to see here a form of cultic lawsuit which reflected the tradition of the covenant made on Sinai. So G. E. Wright, *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson, London, 1962, pp. 26-67, esp. p. 44. J. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance*, Bruges/Montreal, 1967, pp. 36ff., has contrastingly related the form to letters of ultimatum delivered by a suzerain to his vassal whom he suspected of rebellion. However, a simple adaptation by the prophet himself from legal practice is sufficient to explain all the features that are present. **Sons have I reared:** The notion that Israel's relationship to God could be compared to that of sonship is an old one and belongs as a central feature to the ancient Passover tradition. Cf. Exod. 4:23 and Hos. 11:1-7.

3. **The ox knows its owner:** The appeal, based on a comparison with the behaviour of animals, supports the charge that what Israel had done was unnatural, and contrary to the order of creation. Israel neither recognised its divine LORD, nor realised that its behaviour towards him was reprehensible.

ONLY ZION IS LEFT

1:4-9

The situation in which Jerusalem was left isolated, with most of the towns and countryside of Judah ravaged and destroyed, is used to demonstrate the contention that Israel-Judah had been severely punished by God for its sins. The situation must certainly be that of the year 701, when Sennacherib conquered all of Judah and Jerusalem was only spared a like fate by Hezekiah's surrender (2 Kg. 18:13-16). The situation is fully described in Sennacherib's Annals (*ANET*, p. 288). The only question that is at issue regarding the date of this particular prophecy is whether it pictures the city before the surrender, or after it. Here too, however, we can confidently follow most recent commentators (Fohrer, Kaiser, Wildberger) in recognising that the prophet's portrayal here derives from his viewing the scene of Judah's ruination, with Jerusalem as the only city left intact, in the immediate aftermath of the crisis of 701 BC.

Following Barth, pp. 217ff., we may regard v. 9 as a later addition made by a redactor after the further destruction of Judah, this time including Jerusalem, in 587. It now viewed the few survivors left in Jerusalem as the only hope for Israel's future.

In vv. 4-8 the prophet's intention is clear. After the Assyrian forces had left Jerusalem, the inhabitants of the city were tempted into celebrating their remarkable escape (cf. 22:1-4, 12-14), instead of lamenting the catastrophe that befallen the nation as a whole. Isaiah was concerned that the lesson of what had happened should be correctly learned and the year 701 remembered as a time of judgment, not of special divine favour for Jerusalem. That any of the people at all had survived was a mark of divine mercy, as in the survival of Abraham and Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-29).

4. **Ah, sinful nation:** The opening cry (Heb. *hōy*) is usually found in threats warning that disaster is coming (as in 5:8ff.). Here, however, it occurs in invective and serves as a meaningful expression of rebuke. Those addressed are the people of Judah, who must not forget that they are all that remains of a once great nation. At a time when the people were tempted to see themselves as divinely favoured by their escape, especially when set against the total succumbing of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria, Judah was to remember that it, too, was guilty of the same sins. **the Holy One of Israel** is a distinctive title for Yahweh in the prophet Isaiah, and appears designed to stress, not only the element of holiness (cf. Th. C. Vriezen, *Outline of O.T. Theology*, pp. 61f.) but also the fact that he was the God of both kingdoms: Ephraim (Israel) and Judah (cf. 5:7). It is almost certainly an ancient title, used in the temple cult, and it appears unlikely that it was uniquely coined by the prophet himself (as claimed by O. Procksch, *TDNT*, I, pp. 93f.). However, the prophet has certainly vested it with a new significance in view of the sharp division between the two kingdoms which had occurred, first with the Syro-Ephraimite conflict and then with the fall of Ephraim to Assyria (733-722). Yahweh still remained the God of the entire people.

5. **Why will you still be smitten** views the sufferings of the people as a fate which they have voluntarily chosen for themselves. The military defeat and humiliation which had overtaken them was a direct result of their own sin and moral corruption. Already therefore the prophet implies an idea, which he later develops explicitly (10:5), that the Assyrians have been acting as the instrument of Yahweh with which to chastise his people.

7. **aliens devour your land** refers to the armies of the Assyrians who had devastated Judah, but it is a commonly found convention for a prophet not to identify explicitly the enemies and oppressors who are working as the instruments of God. The clause **as overthrown by aliens** should be read as 'like the overthrow of Sodom', and must be regarded as an editor's gloss based upon v. 9.

8. **the daughter of Zion** is a pictorial reference to the city of Jerusalem. The name **Zion** originally referred to the south-east hill of Jerusalem, the area upon which the old Jebusite city had been

situated. It came to be applied to the royal quarter of the city, and acquired a special religious significance because the temple was situated there. Cf. G. Fohrer, *TDNT*, VII, p. 295, who, however, is scarcely correct in seeing the special religious use of the term as a late development. **like a booth in a vineyard** reflects the practice of preparing a rough shelter, or **booth**, made from tree branches covered with leaves to protect a vineyard. The watchman could then shelter in it in order to guard the ripening crops.

9. **If the LORD of hosts:** The entire verse is taken by Barth to be a late, exilic, addition in which the condition of Jerusalem after 587 was read back into Isaiah's prophecy of 701. This is very probable since it introduces an alleviating factor in the prophet's condemnation. The title **the LORD of hosts** is certainly an ancient one which was closely associated with the Ark (cf. 1 Sam. 4:4; and see O. Eissfeldt, *Kleine Schriften*, III, pp. 103-23). The **hosts** originally referred to the armies of Israel which he was believed to lead into battle. Later the title came to be associated with the 'hosts' of heaven, i.e. the stars, which he had created. **like Sodom** reflects the patriarchal tradition of the overthrow of the cities Sodom and Gomorrah recounted in Gen. 19:24-29. The fate of the two cities had become a proverbial illustration of the reality and fearfulness of divine judgment.

THE WAY OF TRUE RELIGION

I:10-17

This, the third saying in the introductory presentation of Isaiah's preaching, sets out the classical prophetic teaching on the way of repentance and of true obedience. It bears the form of a priestly instruction, or *tôrâh*; cf. J. Begrich, *Ges. Stud.*, pp. 232-60. The prophet imitated the character of this priestly style of speech, although we may deduce that he originally addressed it to an audience gathered in the temple in Jerusalem.

10. **you rulers of Sodom:** The ruling classes of Jerusalem are singled out as those chiefly responsible for the city's behaviour, and also as those who displayed the greatest zeal in worship. The reference again to Sodom suggests that the catchword principle has been applied in linking together the separate sayings of I:1-26. Alternatively, if v. 9 is a gloss, then its introduction could very well have been prompted by the reference here. Entirely at variance with the way in which the proud rulers of Jerusalem saw themselves, the prophet implies that they are in reality as sinful, and as deserving of judgment, as were the notorious rulers of the ancient city (cf. Gen. 19:1-14).

11. **What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?** conveys the sharp rejection by the prophet of the idea that the simple formal observance of ritual and cultic duty would suffice to maintain the people in a state of blessedness under God. Not the correctness of cultic observance, but a more far-reaching demonstration of obedi-

ence in turning away from sin was called for by God. Hence the prophet was not asserting that the cult had no place in true religion, but rather that it could not be used to secure God's protection and blessing in contradiction to man's sin. Cf. H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, pp. 144ff., and cf. Am. 5:25; Jer. 7:22. **the fat of fed beasts** designates animals specially fattened for slaughter. *NEB's* 'buffaloes' is not necessary, and is scarcely an improvement.

12. **When you come to appear before me** reflects the slight modification of the Hebrew text, which occurs in several instances, where the traditional phrase for worshipping 'to see the face (image) of God' has been revocalised to read **to appear before God**. Cf. Exod. 23:17; 34:23 for similar instances and F. Nötscher, *Das Angesicht Gottes Schauen*, Würzburg, 1924, pp. 85ff. The origin of the phrase is certainly pre-Israelite and it was clearly felt to assert too crudely the belief in the divine presence at a sanctuary.

13. **Incense is an abomination to me:** Incense was a common accompaniment of worship in antiquity, and appears to have been a particularly popular feature of Canaanite religion. As a consequence its use was viewed with much suspicion in Israel. The word **abomination** (Heb. *tō'ēbāh*) is a technical term for that which was unfit for use in worship, as shown by Lev. 7:18. **New moon and sabbath:** The conjunction of the two names shows that the sabbath was itself originally a lunar (full moon) day. Cf. the Babylonian *šapattu*, and see *THAT*, II, cols. 863ff. When it came to be linked directly with the seventh day rest cycle (Exod. 23:12; 34:21), probably not until the exilic age, then this rest day acquired the name sabbath. **solemn assembly:** The basic sense of the Heb. word *'āšārāh* points to 'restraint' (i.e. from work, and hence from normal secular activities). The prophet appears to be making a deliberate play on the association of the word for 'iniquity' with the belief in a special power derived from God through the cultus.

15. **your hands are full of blood:** The metaphor refers to the perpetration of crimes of violence, but the prophet no doubt also had in mind that the worshippers would be marked with the bloodstains of the sacrificial animals they had slaughtered for use in worship. It thereby served to reinforce his accusation that the people were burdened with bloodguilt because their actions had brought suffering and misery to many.

16. **Wash yourselves:** The phrase presents an excellent example of the prophet's artistry in finding a deeper significance in a common situation. What the worshipper must do is not simply wash his blood-stained hands, but change his whole way of life. With this the prophet reaches the climax of his brief *tôrâh*-instruction to the people. His hearers must turn away from evil and re-establish justice in their city. Underlying all the prophet's warnings and threats lies this passionate appeal for a changed way of life. Although the passage is certainly Isaianic in its origin, the redactor who has placed ch. I in its present position has seen in this admonitory instruction an appeal of permanent relevance to Israel. Not only is there need for repentance in

times of crisis and national danger, but as a continued, and oft-repeated, way of approach to God.

17. defend the fatherless: The conjunction of fatherless children and widows as classes of people in need of special charitable concern is found frequently in the Old Testament (cf. Dt. 10:18, 24:17, etc.) and was known also in ancient Canaanite society. Cf. E. Hammer-shaimb, *Some Aspects of Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 69ff. It undoubtedly reflects a feature of urban life and social grouping in the ancient world, where such people had little economic means of support without the husband-father to provide this, and where there was no larger 'extended family' to protect them. The case of such people is singled out by Isaiah as an illustration of the way in which his contemporaries displayed their disregard for the deeper requirements of true religion.

IF YOU REFUSE

I : 18-20

The general theme of the opening chapter is here continued with a strong appeal for true repentance and a return to Yahweh with all the promise that this brings of well-being. Kaiser regards the section as an original continuation of vv. 10-17, but we must rather see in it a separate appeal by the prophet, possibly at one time part of a larger unit, which has been set here editorially because of its appropriateness within the general theme of the chapter. It is set out in the form of a court-room appeal, and must reflect ancient Israelite legal practice. Cf. H. J. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im A.T.* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964), pp. 68ff.

18. Come now: The starkness of the two alternatives now set before the accused people leaves indeterminate the question of whether the speech as a whole has an admonitory and threatening tone, or a reassuring one. Both features are clearly implicit, and such appeals to reason out the rights and wrongs of a case must have been commonplace in ancient legal proceedings. It is not necessary therefore to see a deliberate element of irony in the appeal: 'In view of all this, can your sins . . . ?' (so B. Duhm). If we take v. 18b in a clearly affirmative sense, then it asserts that, when the wrongdoer turns from his offences, he can find an accepted and happy place in society. Only if he persists in his wrongdoing does his guilt become incurable. The original date of the prophecy can scarcely be determined, since it appears that ch. 1 has been formed out of sayings uttered during different periods of Isaiah's ministry.

20. you shall be devoured: The threat referred to is evidently a military one, and the impersonal passive formulation illustrates finely the prophet's technique of saying sufficient to drive home his warning, but not too much lest it should be too easily proved false. There are, therefore, no closer details given of whose sword is referred to, or when such a threat might be realised. We must, however, reckon that

it was the threat from Assyria which the prophet envisaged, most probably in the period of the revolt against Sennacherib by Hezekiah (705-701).

THE FAITHFUL CITY

I : 21-28

The condemnation of the political leaders and officials in Jerusalem, the clear implication that it is they who are responsible for the unhealthy state of the moral, social and political life of the city, and the threat that they will be removed (vv. 24-26), makes this one of the most far-reaching expressions of Isaiah's social criticism. Cf. W. Dietrich, pp. 284ff. In several respects it stands somewhat apart from the attitude adopted by the prophet elsewhere. Frequently he expresses opposition to the policies adopted, and to the behaviour of Judah's leaders (cf. 5:18-23), but here he points to a more radical overthrow of the existing political order. It is the leaders of Jerusalem themselves who have become Yahweh's enemies (v. 24), and their removal will make way for their replacement by a more just and responsible group of counsellors and judges (v. 26). Nowhere is there any hint that Judah is endangered by a major threat from an external enemy, so we must assume that the Assyrian crisis of the years 705-701 had not yet arisen. More plausibly we are directed to a much earlier time in the prophet's ministry, almost certainly whilst Ahaz was still on the throne, so that the period between 733 and 727 is the most likely occasion for its delivery. Once again, however, the redactor has found in the saying a more lasting and repeatedly applicable denunciation of Jerusalem's sins. With the Babylonian exile behind him, he has found in Isaiah's words some explanation of the city's tragic history and also a pledge for its divinely promised future.

The limit of the original Isaianic saying must be found in vv. 21-26, which looked for some radical change in the leadership and government of Jerusalem in Isaiah's own time. To this saying a later redactor has added in vv. 27-28 a generalised formula about the divinely set conditions for Jerusalem's well-being. It evidently presupposes that Jerusalem had suffered severe setbacks, and that the way forward could be pursued only by a deep act of repentance, issuing in a new order of justice and righteousness.

21. the faithful city: The LXX adds 'Zion', thereby establishing the city's identification beyond dispute in line with v. 27, but this was certainly not necessary to the original prophecy. The expression intends a subtle play on the adjective, hinting at an association between the ideas of 'firmly established' and 'faithful' (in conduct and piety). Cities were described in Hebrew as the 'mothers' of those who lived in them (cf. the frequent use of the expression 'daughter of Zion' for the inhabitants of Jerusalem), so that the city's unrighteous way of life could be vividly portrayed as moral infidelity, i.e. playing the harlot. **Righteousness lodged with her:** An ancient and strongly felt association appears to have existed between Jerusalem and the

concept of **righteousness** (Heb. *ṣedek*). This very probably arose through the use of the word *ṣedek* as a divine title. Cf. the personal names Adonizedek, Zadok, etc. What particular offences the prophet had in mind to justify his accusation that the city tolerated murderers in its midst is not clear. Either we must think of a relatively high level of physical violence which was current in Jerusalem, as in many ancient cities. Alternatively it may be, if our linking the prophecy with Ahaz's reign is correct, that there had been a number of notorious political assassinations.

23. Your princes are rebels: The reference is to rebellion against God and against the just order of society which he demanded, rather than to an act of political rebellion against Assyria. The **princes** were not necessarily men of royal descent, although these were certainly included, but men of authority who held high civil and military administrative posts. Their corruption undermined the entire moral fabric of Jerusalem's life, so that the only remedy for the city's ills lay in their removal. A typical illustration of their moral obstinacy is provided by their lack of concern for the sufferings and misery of those in economic need (cf. v. 17 above).

24. the Mighty One of Israel was a very ancient title for Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf. Gen. 49:24). It was pre-Mosaic in its origin, being associated with the patriarch Israel-Jacob, and emphasizing the divine power and strength under the simile of a bull. Cf. A. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 25f. By the time of Isaiah the prominent fertility aspects connected with this simile had almost entirely receded into its forgotten background and pre-history. **I will vent my wrath:** In this verse the prophet turns from invective to direct threat but is careful to avoid introducing unnecessary details to explain how, or by whom, the threat would be fulfilled. The offending figures would be removed by the action of God, although clearly the prophet understood this to be through some human agents. We must think of a major internal political change, rather than the action of a foreign invader. Cf. Am. 7:9 for a comparable insistence on the divine origin of an act of political overthrow.

26. I will restore your judges: What this was to mean in precise political terms is not made clear. It can hardly refer to the period of the 'Judges' as such, before David's time, since Isaiah evidently regarded David's capture of the city as the time of its true beginning as an Israelite fortress and religious centre (cf. 29:1). Yet his awareness of the way in which the royal court and its officials were able to manipulate the social and administrative life of the city to their own advantage (cf. 5:8; 10:1) made it plain to him that only their removal could improve the lot of the majority of the city's inhabitants. The **judges**, therefore, would be leaders chosen by the people themselves, rather than officials appointed by the crown, with all its potential for corruption.

27. Zion shall be redeemed: This, and the following v. 28, form an addition made to Isaiah's prophecy about the reform of the government of Jerusalem, and must emanate from a time after 587.

Jerusalem had already suffered judgment in the redactor's eyes, and he is concerned to spell out clearly the conditions through which the restoration of the city's life and well-being could take place. The name **Zion** is now clearly meant to apply to the whole city, but the time of its return to normality is felt not yet to have arrived. The time of the first half of the fifth century, prior to the coming of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, provides the most likely occasion for the addition.

28. But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed points to a continuing inner tension within the city, with a sense that the final purging must still take place.

THE END OF FALSE WORSHIP

I:29-31

These three verses represent an independent addition to the preface to the book of Isaiah which constitutes ch. 1. Their purpose is to identify the particular sin to which the people are tempted as idolatry, by especially singling out for punishment those who had participated in idolatrous cult practices. They have most probably been composed especially for inclusion here, rather than forming a fragment of some larger threat which has simply been included at this point. The kind of offence referred to bears some comparison with that condemned in Isa. 65:3-5, but in reality the resort to rituals in gardens and groves flourished through the entire Old Testament period in a variety of forms. It is therefore scarcely possible to identify any one particular occasion of special concern with the sin of idolatry.

29. You shall be ashamed of the oaks: Oaks may be more precisely identified as terebinths, which were deciduous trees which enjoyed considerable popularity in fertility cult rites, because they were held to symbolize the death of the god and his rebirth in the spring. **the gardens** were small cultivated sanctuaries in which the growth of the plants was made to express the life and fertility-giving powers of the gods. The actual plant life cultivated could be used to symbolize a variety of functions associated with the giving of 'life' and 'blessing'. Cf. J. Pedersen, *Israel*, I-II, pp. 314ff. Different expressions of such a cult were to be found in ancient Egypt, Canaan, Phoenicia and Greece, and all of them made use of types of 'sympathetic magic'. The threat that those who worshipped in this fashion would be **ashamed** meant far more than a loss of prestige, and rather indicated an experience of total failure and ruination. Cf. M. A. Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande nach dem Alten Testament*, ATANT 62, Zürich, 1972, pp. 50ff.

30. like an oak: The prophet uses the picture of the withering of leaves of the tree in autumn and winter to express a totally different message from that which the worshippers found in its symbolism.

31. And the strong: IQIs^a adds a suffix here 'and your strong one', i.e. 'the strongest of you'. However, this looks like an attempt to clarify a reference that was already felt to be obscure. *NEB* is probably correct in recognising that the original reference was to 'the strongest tree' so that the sense follows on from the preceding verse quite

smoothly. The metaphor of the vigorously growing tree being reduced to **tow** enables the prophet to direct his threat in relation to the idolatrous trust shown by his hearers in the life force displayed in their tree gardens.

Prophecies Concerning Judah and Jerusalem: chapters 2–12

The appearance of a further heading in 2:1, albeit much briefer than that given in 1:1, provides some clear guide to the way in which the present book was put together. Undoubtedly this superscription originally formed an opening to a collection of Isaiah's prophecies, rather than representing a deliberate repetition of the one that had been given earlier in 1:1. Moreover we may fairly confidently assert that the heading in 2:1 is older than that in 1:1, and that the latter was added, either along with or subsequent to, the prefacing of ch. 1 to the whole Isaianic collection (at least as far as ch. 32*). H. Barth, pp. 203ff., gives a considered case for recognising that a major redaction and collection of Isaiah's prophecies took place in Josiah's reign (640–609 BC). The contents of this redaction are to be found in chs. 2–32, although later additions are also now included in this. Signs of earlier collections of Isaianic prophecies are to be found in 6:1–8:18* (see below on 6:1ff.) and 5:1–14:27* (see below on 5:1ff.). For the complex redaction-history of Isaiah 1–39, see Introduction, pp. 3ff.

The superscription of 2:1 was evidently composed to introduce a specific collection of Isaiah's prophecies at a particular phase of their redactional history, and it is of singular interest on two counts. The first of these is that it interprets Isaiah's prophecies with regard to 'Judah and Jerusalem', and thereby leaves aside the undoubted wider application of many of them to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim), to Syria, and to other non-Israelite nations. The second factor concerning 2:1 is that it serves to highlight the fact that 2:1–4:6* comprises a relatively self-contained collection which very directly and specially does relate to the fate of Judah and Jerusalem. In this both the opening word of hope in 2:2–4(5) and the concluding promise in 4:2–6 concerning the fate of the survivors in Jerusalem are reassuring in tone. The intervening material (2:6–4:1), however, is consistently threatening in tone and warns explicitly of the defeat and downfall of Jerusalem through the ravages of war (cf. especially 3:25–26). That we have an authentic nucleus of sayings from Isaiah (although 2:6–22 in particular is in a poorly preserved state) is assured, and so we are faced here with the prophet's warnings of the downfall of Jerusalem. A later, post-exilic, redactor has then supplemented this at the beginning and end in order to affirm that these threats had been fulfilled. These reassuring additions most probably stem from the fifth century BC. The threatening element of Isaiah's prophecies in 2:6–4:1*, even allowing that it has subsequently been added to, appears to be authentic, however. The question then arises whether it derives from the early or later period of his ministry. It is abundantly clear from the prophecies preserved in chs. 28–31 that Isaiah foretold

disaster for Hezekiah and his kingdom at the time of the revolt against Sennacherib in the years 705–701. Yet it appears clear, too, from the threatening element in 6:1–8:18*, that Isaiah also foretold a disastrous consequence for Ahaz in the years 733–725, as a result of his appeal to Assyria during the crisis surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite war. It is in every way plausible that Isaiah had anticipated the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem at this time, as 8:8 very strongly suggests. The likelihood is, therefore, that the Isaianic kernel of the threats to Judah and Jerusalem expressed in 2:6–4:1 belongs to these years.

If this is the case, then it would also appear likely that the present placing of these prophecies before the account of the prophet's call has taken place at a particular redactional stage in the composition of the book, at a time when a renewed threat to Jerusalem was felt to have arisen. This could only have been in the period after 605 when the Babylonian menace appeared in Judah. We find a similar linking of the Isaianic threat to Jerusalem with the disaster of 587 BC in a number of redactional comments which have been added *post eventum* (cf. 2:18–19; 6:12–13; 8:22, etc., and see Introduction, pp. 6f.).

A SECOND SUPERSSCRIPTION

2:1

The superscription which has been placed here is striking on account of the fact that it is specifically addressed to **Judah and Jerusalem**. Precisely what collection of the prophecies it was meant to introduce must certainly be related to this. It would appear doubtful that such a title was intended to be appropriate to the Josianic Redaction since this is so clearly concerned with the wider fate of all Israel, including the Northern Kingdom. In fact it would appear to be more probable that this superscription was linked directly with the threats to Judah and Jerusalem which follow immediately after the promise of 2:2–5. This particular heading, therefore, must have been composed at the time when this collection of prophetic threats was used to illuminate the experience of what had taken place in 587 BC. Alternatively we might date it later still, to the time in the fifth century, when the promises were added in 2:1–4(5) and 4:2–6.

2:1. concerning Judah and Jerusalem: Such a title, but in the reverse order, appears in Neh. 7:6, and is striking on account of the separation which it assumes between the city and the country. Already it suggests that **Judah** has become a region, to a considerable extent economically and politically dependent on **Jerusalem**. Cf. also 3:1 and the concern with Jerusalem alone in 4:2–6.

THE GLORY OF ZION

2:2–5

The portrayal of the exaltation of Mount Zion to become the highest of the mountains of the earth is found repeated in Mic. 4:1–4, where a further concluding verse is added (Mic. 4:5). There are also a number