

## **The Church of the Servant King**

### **Prophecy Series**

(Proph14R\_Prophecy in the Prophets\_Isaiah\_Significant Passages)

#### **Relevant Historical Background**

In our previous study, we briefly introduced the prophet Isaiah and his book (scroll). We focused primarily upon the internal and external evidence for Isaiah as the author of the entire book. In addition, we studied the purpose and the themes of the book. While I wish we could study the entire book, it is certainly beyond the scope of this series to do so. However, we will focus on a few selected prophetic and eschatological passages from the book of Isaiah in this lesson. But first, let us review a few more details regarding the period during which Isaiah lived and ministered.

*The length of Isaiah's ministry* – Nothing is recorded about either the year of his birth or the manner of his death. However, Isaiah must have ministered for a lengthy time since a period of 40, 50 or more years can be calculated based upon certain details disclosed to us in his book.

- ✓ Chapter 1:1 mentions that Isaiah ministered during the reigns of certain kings in Judah:
  - Uzziah a.k.a. Azariah (ca. 790-739 B.C.)
  - Jotham (ca. 750-731 B.C.)
  - Ahaz (ca. 735-715 B.C.)
  - Hezekiah (ca. 729-699 B.C.)
- ✓ Isaiah began his ministry around the time of the death of Uzziah, Jotham's predecessor (see 6:1).
- ✓ Add to that the fact that Isaiah mentions that Hezekiah became sick in the fourteenth year of his reign (38:1) and this gives us at least 25 years of prophetic ministry.
- ✓ However, there is a strong Judeo-Christian tradition that holds that Isaiah outlived Hezekiah and was sawn in two by Manasseh, Hezekiah's successor, with a wooden saw after Isaiah had hidden himself in a hollow tree (see Heb 11:37).
- ✓ If this is true, Isaiah prophesied for at least forty (40) years.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ He probably continued to minister for at least a few years into the period of Manasseh's reign (695-642 B.C.), so it is possible that Isaiah ministered for as many as 50 years or more.

*More about the historical setting* – Isaiah ministered during dangerous times to Israel and Judah as we've seen in our earlier lessons. Assyria and Egypt vied for supremacy in the region during the initial years of Isaiah's ministry. Later, toward the end of Isaiah's ministry, the outcome of the conflict between Assyria and Babylon became a factor in determining Judah's fate.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was already under pressure from the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III (745 to 727 B.C.). (This would have corresponded to a period of time that spanned the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz in the South). In 722 B.C., (while Ahaz and Hezekiah co-reigned in the South) Sargon II conquered the Northern Kingdom, but due to troubles on other fronts, he never conquered Jerusalem (Isa 36:7-10 cf. 36:36-38). *God honored the repentance and spiritual revival led by Hezekiah.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981), 4 calculates a period of from 46 to 60 years; however, his calculation is questionable. If we understand Uzziah's death to have occurred in ca. 739-740 B.C and if we assume that Isaiah's ministry ended shortly after Hezekiah's death in 699 B.C., we arrive at a span of about 40 years.

<sup>2</sup> Hezekiah's repentance and Judah's spiritual revival was rather shallow. The masses of Judah remained reversionistic. God simply honored even the slightest indication of repentance which was represented by Hezekiah. Nevertheless, the deliverance must have gone to Hezekiah's head for we find him boasting over Judah's wealth (2 Kings 20:12ff) in the

During the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. (i.e. a period of ca. 750-700 B.C.), Judah was headed in the same spiritual direction as its northern counterpart, Israel. As Assyria rose to a position of prominence in the region and threatened Israel, Judah, and surrounding nations, Syria and Ephraim (another name for the Northern Kingdom) formed an alliance with the hope of repelling the Assyrian threat. This Damascus-Samaritan alliance was led by Rezin and Pekah, respectively. Isaiah chapters 7 through 12 contain prophecies related specifically to this period in Israel and Judah's history.

This period provides at least one example of the types of human viewpoint motivated alliances to which the prophets to Israel and Judah referred in condemning language. Judah was being invaded by a coalition of Syrians and Ephraimites because she refused to join their alliance to repel Assyria (along with Philistia and Edom). This Syro-Ephraimite confederation laid siege to Jerusalem and carried off prisoners & booty (2 Chron. 28:5; 2 Kings 16:5).

King Ahaz of Judah (ca. 735-715 B.C.) manifested his lack of trust in the Lord by turning to Assyria for assistance in her wars with and deliverance from this alliance. Ahaz appealed to Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-8) for protection and was forced to pay tribute with gold from the Temple. Isaiah warned Ahaz that the Northern Kingdom would fall to the Assyrians (8:3-4) and it eventually did. The Northern Kingdom, suffered the effects of the 5<sup>th</sup> cycle of discipline (Lev 26) in 722-721 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me." And Ahaz took the silver and the gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria. (2 Ki 16:7-8)

Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz [Speed the spoil; hasten the booty]; for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria." (Isa 8:3-4)

Meanwhile, Ahaz evidently didn't get all that he wanted out of the deal for 2 Chronicles 28:20-21 indicates that Tiglath-pileser [*the predecessor of Sargon who conquered the Northern Kingdom*] "distressed him" and "helped him not." Just as Isaiah had warned, this pseudo-security alliance posed great danger to Judah. Later, when Sennacherib ascended the throne of Assyria, he marched upon Judah. However, by this time, a new king had arisen in Judah. This king was Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. There are many allusions to the march of Sennacherib in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 37 describes how Yahweh (the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ – the "Angel of the Lord") saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. [*Read Isa 36:1-37:38 cf. 2 Kings 19:35-38*]

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presence of representatives from Babylon. When Isaiah announced the consequences of this foolishness (2 Kings 20:14-18) which included the deportation of some of his sons by the Babylonians, Hezekiah's response reveals that it is very likely that Hezekiah was merely religious and not a spiritual man of deep character – "The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good...will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?" (2 Kings 20:19). With concern like that for his own sons, no wonder Manasseh turned out the way he did – an evil ruler.

<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the subject of the cycles of discipline as they pertain to Israel and Judah, see the lesson in this series – "*Proph12\_The 5 Cycles of Discipline\_Lev26.*"

Hezekiah was co-regent with Ahaz beginning in ca. 729 B.C. Hezekiah led the nation in spiritual revival which included: 1) reopening the temple (1 Chron. 29:3); 2) observation of Passover re-established (2 Chron. 30:1-9); 3) intercession (2 Chron. 30:18-19); and 4) the removal of pagan symbols (2 Kings 18:3-4; 2 Chron.31:1). Judah's repentance resulted in a stay of judgment until the Babylonian siege and captivity in 586 B.C. (For some of the background regarding Hezekiah's emotional repentance and God's answer to His prayer communicated by the prophet Isaiah, read 2 Kings 20:1-11).<sup>4</sup>

However, this miraculous rescue at the hand of the "Angel of the Lord" gave rise to at least two weaknesses in the spiritual paradigm of the people of Judah.<sup>5</sup> First, many adopted the self-righteous notion that Jerusalem, in contrast to other prominent cities that had fallen, was indestructible because it housed the temple in which Yahweh resided. Second, Babylon observed the defeat of Sennacherib and sent its messengers with congratulations to Hezekiah. Hezekiah fell victim to pride and was told that all of his treasures and his sons would be carried away to Babylon (2 Kings 20:12-21).

Note: Read Isaiah, chapter 1 to provide further background to Isaiah's amazing ministry.

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<sup>4</sup> Hezekiah is said to have "wept bitterly" upon hearing Isaiah's pronouncement that he was to die soon (Isa 20:3), yet he prayed. He sought a sign without being commanded to do so (20:8). Seeking a sign is an indication of a lack of spiritual maturity. In addition, he became arrogant and boastfully displayed Judah's Temple related wealth to the representative of the king of Babylon (20:12-19).

<sup>5</sup> Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 15.