

THE WORLD OF ISAIAH'S DAY

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (Isaiah 1:1).

This verse sets the date of Isaiah's ministry. It is a ministry that spanned the reigns of five kings of Judah since Isaiah later spoke during the reign of Manassah.

The kingdom of Judah was the southern section of what had once been the united kingdom of Israel. The kingdom had split to become two separate nations following the death of Solomon.

Judah was the tribe from which David had come. Because of this, when the other tribes split off and went their own way, Judah remained faithful to the lineage of David. Even though Jerusalem was thought of as a neutral city, it still lay within the boundaries of the lands of Judah. Furthermore, Judah had been exempted from the forced labor which Solomon demanded of the rest of Israel.

The land of Judah was geographically divided from the rest of Israel by the deep valley of Sorek. It was bordered in the east by the Dead Sea, on the west by the lands of the Philistines and in the south by Edom and the Sinai Desert.

The history of the northern and southern kingdoms would run in parallel courses. Though both of these kingdoms would see periods of rebellion against the Lord, Judah's history would be marked by occasional periods of repentance and return.



SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH	CATEGORY	NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL
19 Kings, 1 Queen	Kings	19 Kings
Jerusalem	Capital	Samaria
1 Dynasty - the line of David	Dynasties	5 Dynasties and several independent kings.
Judah & Benjamin	Tribes	10 Northern Tribes.
Most were unstable; some were good & some were bad.	Character of the Kings	All were bad, but only Ahab and Ahaziah were Baal worshipers.
By Babylon in 586 B.C.	Conquered	By Assyria in 721 B.C.
Returned to the land.	Afterward	No return.

THE KINGS OF JUDAH

1. Uzziah.

Uzziah is one of the bright and shining lights in the history of Judah. He led the people in a return to worship the Lord. He was also a capable leader and succeeded in expanding the borders of Judah to take in the lands of the Philistines and southward to the Red Sea.

Unfortunately, Uzziah became proud and he sinned when he attempted to take for himself the privilege of the priesthood and offer incense within the Temple. For this transgression, the Lord struck him with leprosy. The last years of his reign were spent in a co-regency with his son.

2. Jotham (740-732 B.C.).

Jotham followed his father's example by obeying the Law of the Lord. However, it is notable that he never entered the Temple. There are several possible reasons for this.

He may have been showing respect for his father who had been judged for his sin in the Temple. Or he may have been superstitious about entering the Temple, thinking that he might also contract leprosy.

As a result of Jotham's obedience, Judah prospered in both the areas of military strength as well as in the economy.

3. Ahaz (732-716 B.C.).

The name Ahaz is shortened from Jehoahaz, meaning Possession of Yahweh. Perhaps the reason that his name was shortened was that he was so rebellious to the Lord. Ahaz was the complete opposite of his father.

a. Religious policy.

As soon as he came to the throne, Ahaz began to follow the Canaanite religious practices, even sacrificing his own children to the false gods.

b. Military defeats.

Because of the sins of Ahaz, the Lord allowed the Philistines, the Edomites and the Syrians to invade and conquer the border cities of Judah. It was at this time that Judah lost the port of Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba.

c. Alliance with Assyria.

Because of these military threats, Ahaz made an alliance with the Assyrians, robbing the Temple to send money to bribe Tiglath-Pileser. In return, the Assyrians offered to attack Aram and Israel (they had been planning to do so anyway).

Isaiah confronted Ahaz and advised him to trust in the Lord instead of Assyria. He even offered to give Ahaz a sign from the Lord to prove the truth of his words. When Ahaz refused to choose a sign, the Lord Himself chose one, promising that a child would be born and that, before the child had reached a certain age, the kings of Aram and Israel would be overthrown.

It is in the midst of this prophecy that Isaiah tells of a Child whose name would be Immanuel, literally "God with us."

d. Destruction of Samaria.

Tiglath-Pileser 3rd died in 727 B.C. and Israel took this opportunity to revolt, stopping payment of the annual tribute. Ahaz wisely continued to pay the required tribute as the Assyrians swept down from the north, laying

siege to the capital city of Samaria. For three years, Samaria held out under the siege until famine and disease had decimated the population. When the city fell in 721 B.C., the surviving population was deported. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist.

The Jews of the Southern Kingdom were terrified as they watched the inhuman cruelties which the Assyrians inflicted upon their captives.

Now, the Assyrians began to eye the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was only a matter of time before they attacked.

3. Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.).

Hezekiah was 25 years old when he came to the throne. The prophet Isaiah had already been ministering for 35 years. With the advent of Hezekiah, a great revival began.

a. Religious reform.

Hezekiah began his reign by destroying all of the Canaanite idols and then repairing the Temple of God.

b. Envoys from Merodach-baladan.

Merodach-baladan had managed to snatch Babylon and hold it from the Assyrians. Looking for allies against Assyria, he sent envoys to Hezekiah, king of Judah. In a moment of pride, Hezekiah foolishly showed these envoys all of the treasures of the temple. As a result, the word got out of the great wealth that was stored up in Jerusalem.

c. Solicitations to rebellion.

Philistia, Egypt and Ethiopia sent envoys to Hezekiah, urging him to join in a rebellion. Isaiah warned him not to put his trust in Egypt.

And the Lord said, "Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush, ⁴ so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

"Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of

Cush their hope and Egypt their boast.” (Isaiah 20:3-5).

Hezekiah listened to the warning of Isaiah and continued to pay homage to Assyria.

d. Revolt against Assyria.

When Assyria was drawn into an extended conflict with Merodach-baladan, Hezekiah was persuaded to join Egypt; in a revolt. The cities of Philistia also joined in, along with Tyre and Sidon.

In 701 B.C. Sennacherib conducted a massive campaign against this western alliance. The Phoenician cities each submitted or were destroyed. The Egyptians were routed and Judah was left to face Sennacherib alone.

Hezekiah offered to pay any tribute in return for peace. Sennacherib set the price at 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold (in that day even a single talent was considered to be a fortune).

And Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king’s house.

At that time Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kings 18:15-16).

Instead of keeping his agreement, Sennacherib changed his mind and decided to try to take Jerusalem.

e. Hezekiah’s Tunnel and the Siloam Inscription.

Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah” (2 Kings 20:20).

Now when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, ³ he decided with his officers and his warriors to cut off the supply of water from the springs which were outside the city, and they helped him. (2 Chronicles 32:2-3).

It was Hezekiah who stopped the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all that he did. (2 Chronicles 32:30).

Hezekiah ordered a tunnel to be cut through the mountain on which Jerusalem rests. This tunnel served to bring water from the Gihon Spring down into the city. The tunnel can still be seen today. It winds its way 1900 feet under the city of Jerusalem.



This tunnel was explored by Edward Robinson when he arrived in Jerusalem in April of 1838. He made the first scientific study of this amazing engineering feat. The conduit, cut from solid rock in a rather circuitous route, was 1,750 feet long, with an average width of 2 feet, and an average height of six feet. Because the workmen's chisel marks changed directions at about the half-way point, Robinson speculated that two crews had dug the tunnel, starting at opposite ends, finally meeting in the middle. His theory was later confirmed.

In 1880 a boy was wading in the pool of Siloam and entered Hezekiah's Tunnel. Nineteen feet inside the entrance, he noticed marks on the wall of the tunnel. It was an inscription. It was later cut out and taken by the Turkish government to the Ottoman Museum in Constantinople. It related how a team cut through each end of the mountain to some together at a point in the middle.

"The boring through is completed. And this is the story of the boring through: while yet they plied the drill, each toward his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling unto another, for there was a crevice in the rock on the right hand. And on the day of the boring through the stone cutters struck, each to meet his fellow, drill upon drill; and the water flowed from the source to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone cutters."

While the Biblical narrative recounts Hezekiah's part in the construction, this inscription tells the same story from the point of view of the workers who dug the tunnel.

f. Jerusalem delivered.

This time, Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help and was promised deliverance. In a single night, the Assyrian army was overthrown.

Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead.

So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. (2 Kings 19:35-36).

The palace of Sennacherib was discovered in 1847 by the English archaeologist Austen Henry Layard at Kuyunjik. A total of 71 rooms were uncovered. Many of the walls were lined with sculptured slabs. One of Sennacherib's campaigns is described on the Taylor Prism, a clay octagonal cylinder which today resides in the British Museum (an even better copy is on a prism at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago). It contains the following:

*"As for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number, by escalade and bringing up siege engines, by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels and breaches, I besieged and took 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. **Himself, like a caged bird, I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city.** Earthworks I threw up against him. The one coming out of his city gate I turned back to his misery. The cities of his which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land and gave them to Mitinti king of Ashdod, Padi king of Ekron, and Silili-bel king of Gaza. Thus I diminished his land. I added to the former tribute and laid upon him as their yearly payment a tax in the form of gifts for my majesty. As for Hezekiah, the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him and the Urbi and his mercenary troops which he had brought in to*

strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him. In addition to 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver, there were gems, antimony, jewels, large sandu stones, couches of ivory, house chairs of ivory, elephant's hide, ivory, maple, boxwood, all kinds of valuable treasures, as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female musicians, which he had them bring after me to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute and to accept servitude he dispatched his messengers."

It is interesting to note Sennacherib's description of this campaign. He brags about how he had besieged the city of Jerusalem, closing up Hezekiah as a bird in a cage, but makes no mention of the outcome of the battle.

The remaining years of Hezekiah's life were peaceful and prosperous as the Lord continued to bless him.

4. Manasseh (686-642 B.C.).

Manasseh was involved in all of the practices of the Canaanite religious system.

- (1) Worship of false gods.
- (2) Child sacrifice.
- (3) Sorcery.
- (4) Idols in the Temple of God.

One of Manasseh's first acts was the arrest and execution of the prophet Isaiah. Tradition has it that the old prophet was placed inside a hollow tree trunk and then sawn apart.

Because of Manasseh's sin, the Lord allowed the Assyrians to invade Judah. The Scriptures tell how Manasseh was captured and taken in chains to Babylon. At this time in history, Babylon was a part of the Assyrian Empire and Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria, used it as his southern palace.

In Babylon, Manasseh repented and turned back to God. Soon after this, he was released and allowed to return to Jerusalem. He went on to lead Judah back to the Lord, tearing down the false idols in the land. Perhaps this is an instance where the teachings of Isaiah had some long-range fruit that extended past his own lifetime.

There is a lesson here for us today. It is that we may minister and not see the

immediate fruit of our labors. It may take an entire generation before those fruit grow to fulness.