



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"
ISAIAH 61:1

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER 9 -10: 1-4

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophecies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 9-10: 1-4

Even though these people are in darkness, yet a time is coming when there will be no more gloom for the land of Zebulun and Naphtali and the Galilee of the Gentiles. They will finally see a great light, which will dawn for those in the shadow of death. People are then to rejoice as at the harvest, or as when dividing spoils, at the defeat of Midian.

For a child is to be born. The government will be his. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, even Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no limit to the increase of peace under Him, for he will sit on David's throne, establishing it - for it had fallen - and upholding it with what is right, from then on, and forever. The jealous love of the Almighty Lord will bring this about.

Amos had come from Judah to prophesy of the punishment of Israel, the northern kingdom. Here Isaiah does the same. Just as Amos had a remarkably structured presentation (5:7-6:14) so does Isaiah here, with four woes, prediction of punishment, each ending with the ominous: "Even so, after all this, His anger is not appeased: He will raise His arm against them." the fourth woe is in 10:1-4.

In the first woe, the basic cause of punishment is pride. Pride is the master vice, there is no virtue which it cannot mimic. One can even act humble to be praised for his humility. And when Eve listened to the tempter and looked at the fruit she ate as it were said: God may know what is right in some things, but right now, I know better!"

In the second: God will cut off both the head, the prominent men, and the tail, the false prophets - we note how he ridicules the prophets by making them just the tail. And the anger of God is great, for normally He is the protector of the widows and orphans, but here He says He will not pity the fatherless and the widows, for everyone is so wicked.

In the third: No one will spare his brother, strife it will spread like a forest fire in the wind. As to the time referred to: after the death of Jeroboam one usurper came after another. And fraternal strife broke out under Pekah.

In the fourth woe: God strikes out against the abuse of legal and judicial power, which should promote justice, but instead is used to promote wickedness.

End of Chapter 9-10: 1-4

b) Inter-testamental literature:

First Enoch 48. 1-6 (Charlesworth, Pseudepigrapha I:(p. 35): ". . . even before the creation of the sun and moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of Spirits. . . he was concealed in the presence of (the Lord of Spirits) prior to the creation of the world and for eternity.

(p. 9) Comments by editor of segment, E. Isaac: "The Messiah in 1 Enoch, called the Righteous One, and the Son of Man, is depicted as a <preexistent heavenly being> who is resplendent and majestic, possesses all dominion, and sits on his throne of glory passing judgment upon all mortals and spiritual beings." Isaac also thinks (p. 8) that the work originated in Judea and was in use in Qumran before Christian times.

c) Rabbinic thought:

<Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim> 4. 4. 54a: "Seven things were created before the creation of the world, namely: Torah, repentance, paradise, gehenna, the throne of majesty, the temple, and the <name> of the Messiah. "

<Pesikta Rabati, Piska 33. 6> (775-900 AD). From: W. Braude, <Yale Judaica Studies>, 18., 1968, p. 641-43): "You find that at the very beginning of the creation of the world, <the king Messiah had already come into being, for he existed in God's thought even before the world was created>. But where is the proof that the king Messiah existed from the beginning of God's creation of the world? The proof is in the verse, 'And the spirit of God moved,' words which identify the king Messiah, of whom it is said, 'And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him (Isa 11. 2)."

COMMENTS:

1. As Levey notices, Micah 5 implies preexistence of the Messiah. Mal 3. 1 as used by Jesus implies even divinity. The words of 1 Enoch do state a real preexistence. The Rabbinic texts are at least close. For in Hebrew thought the name at times approaches identification with the person. The naming of things brings them into existence: Is 40. 26. To cut off a person's name means not only death but obliteration of his existence: cf. 1 Sam 24. 22 and Ps 9. 6.

2. We noticed that in 1 Enoch the Messiah is called Son of Man.

Now even if the stiff-necked Jews did not understand the divinity of the Messiah, what of Our Lady, filled with grace beyond all other creatures? And at the annunciation she had readily learned her Son was to be Messiah, for the angel said He would rule over the house of Jacob forever. But further, the angel explained that the Holy Spirit would 'overshadow' her, the same word used of the divine presence filling the tabernacle in the desert, and that as a result of that, a unique reason, the Son would be called Son of the Most High. With the further help of the above texts, it is hard to suppose she did not know of His divinity.

But now, after the pleasant vision of the future, in 9:8, Isaiah's vision turns to God's punishment of Jacob (Israel: northern kingdom: there are four woes, and a refrain at the end of each).

Woe to those who say in pride that if the brick houses are destroyed, they will rebuild with dressed stone. But the Lord has given the foes of Rezin power against them, "Even so, after all this, His anger is not appeased: He still raises His arm against them."

Woe to those who have not returned to the Lord: the Lord will cut off the rulers, the head, and the tail, the false prophets. So even the Lord will not take pity on the fatherless and widows, for all are wicked. "Even so, after all this, His anger is not appeased: He still raises His arm against them. "

Woe to those whose ungodliness is like a fire, so that no one spares his brother: Manasseh against Ephraim; Ephraim against Manasseh. Both will turn against Judah. "Even so, after all this, His anger is not appeased: He still raises His arm against them."

Woe to those who make unjust laws, laws that should protect the poor, but are now turned against the poor. But a day of reckoning is coming. "Even so, after all this, His anger is not appeased: He still raises His arm against them."

Comments on Chapter 9 -10. 4

The chapter opens with a cheerful prediction of the coming of the Messiah. The people who have been in darkness in the territories of Zabulon and Naphtali and the northern part of Naphtali, with its heavy gentile population, hence called "Galilee of the gentiles", will see a great light, the Messiah. For He is to grow up in Galilee, and do much of His public preaching there. The joy of the people will be great, like that of men at the harvest, or of men who divide the spoils of war. Formerly the boots of warriors trampled the land. Now the great light will come.

"For a child is born to us, a son is given us, and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty-God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. '"

<Here the Septuagint omits the greatest title>: "A child is born to us, and a son is given to us, his government is upon his shoulder, and his name will be called messenger of the Great Council."

But the great title is found in the <Targum Jonathan>: "A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and his name has been called from of old Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, He who lives forever, Messiah in whose day peace

shall increase for us. "

The sense of the Targum is disputed. We have rendered it substantially as does J. F. Stenning (<The Targum of Isaiah>, Oxford, 1949). However Samson Levey (<The Messiah. An Aramaic Interpretation>, (Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 1974) turns the sentence structure around so as to read: "his name has been called Messiah. . . . by the Mighty God." The difference hinges on the Aramaic words <min qedem> which can mean either "by" or "from of old". As to the words "Mighty God" which the New American Bible renders God-hero - that version is not defensible, for the Hebrew <El gibbor> in the Old Testament always means only Mighty God, never God-hero. Levey makes a similar change in sentence structure for the Hebrew: "the Mighty God. . . has called his name 'Prince of Peace'." That translation raises the question of which terms belong to whom.

The Septuagint, which omits <mighty God>, testifies to the Jewish discomfort. We recall that the LXX since Qumran is thought to be in general a careful translation of the Hebrew, but of a Hebrew text differing from our Masoretic text, for the text then had not yet been stabilized.

Naturally, the ancient Jews, with their emphasis on monotheism, would have difficulty calling the Messiah God. Yet there are some other Old Testament passages that could indicate divinity of the Messiah:

Psalm 80. 15-18: God is asked to visit this vine "which your right hand has planted. . . . Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, upon the son of man whom you have strengthened for yourself." Samson Levey (<The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation>) here comments: "It would appear that the Targum takes the Messiah to be the son of God, which is much too anthropomorphic and Christological to be acceptable in Jewish exegesis." He notes that neither the earlier nor the later rabbis took up this interpretation by the Targum. Rather, he says that some of the later rabbis "carefully steer clear of any messianic interpretation" by the Targum here. (In passing: we note that here the Messiah is called Son of Man!)

Psalm 45. 7-8: "Your throne, O God, is ever and ever. . . . God your God has anointed you with the oil of rejoicing." Even though some think the Psalm was occasioned by a royal marriage, the Targum saw it as messianic. Levey even remarks that the Hebrew word for king, <melech>, in verses 2, 6, 12, 15, and 16 is understood as God.

Ezekiel 34. 11: God Himself said: "For thus says the Lord God: Behold I, I will search out my flock and seek them out." We notice the repeated "I", which seems to stress the thought that God Himself would come. But in verse 23 of the same chapter: "I will set one shepherd over them, my servant David." The Targum Jonathan does treat the psalm as messianic. Of course this is far from clear, but there could be an implication that the Messiah, called here "my servant David" would be God Himself.

Jeremiah 23. 3: God said: " And I myself shall gather the remnant of the my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them." But in verse 5: "I will raise up for David a righteous branch." That word "branch" is often taken by the Targums to indicate the Messiah. Hence Targum Jonathan on verse 5 does use "a righteous Messiah" instead of "branch". Then, surprisingly, in verse 6: "And this is the name which He shall call him: "the Lord is our righteousness." In the later Midrash, <Lamentations Rabbah> 1. 51 we read: "What is the name of the King Messiah? R. Abba b. Kahana said: 'His name is 'the Lord'". In the Hebrew text of that passage, the word for Lord is Yahweh! It is astounding to find a later rabbi doing such a thing. (cf. Levey, <op. cit>, p. 70).

Jeremiah 30. 11: "For I am with you - oracle of Yahweh - to save you." The Targum clearly calls this passage messianic. Levey notices this, and comments: "in v. 11 the apparent anthropomorphism of God being with Israel, in the physical sense is softened by the use of the word Memra" - Memra is a puzzling word in the Targums, which seems in general to refer to the complex interplay between God's constancy and the fickleness of His people - but at times, it seems to mean God Himself. (On Memra cf. Bruce Chilton, <The Isaiah Targum>, Glazier, 1987, p. lvi).

Jewish thought on the Preexistence of the Messiah:

a) Scripture: Micah 5. 2: "And you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, you are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, <whose origin is from of old, from the days of eternity>." The Targum Jonathan on this verse reads: "whose name was spoken from days of old, from the days of eternity." Samson Levey, a major Jewish scholar (<The Messiah. An Aramaic Interpretation>, p. 93) comments that although there does not seem to be a Rabbinic doctrine of a preexistent Messiah, yet the last words of the Hebrew text do tend to suggest such a preexistence.

Malachi 3. 1: "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before my face, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight." R. H. Fuller (<The Foundations of New Testament Christology>, Chas. Scribner's Sons, NY, 1965, p. 48: The starting point for this expectation is Mal 4:5 f. (Mt. 3:23f.). In this passage, an editorial note commenting on Mal 3:1, Elijah appears as the forerunner not of the Messiah but of Yahweh himself. . . followed by the coming of Yahweh to his temple for the eschatological judgment." Fuller uses the number Mal 4. 5, following some English versions and the Vulgate. The Hebrew has it at 3:23-24. Jesus in Mt 11. 13 used a modified form of the text (by influence of the familiar and similar sounding Ex 23. 20), and makes clear that he is the one, the Messiah, and by implication, is Yahweh Himself.