

# The Broken Siege

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**Arizona-California District Convention**

**St. Mark's Lutheran Church**

**Citrus Heights, California**

**October 22-23, 2014**

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**Henderson, Nevada**



## Foreward

This paper arose out of a perceived need. Often our conferences are blessed with well thought-out and wonderfully executed papers and presentations which edify the body and make the cost of attendance at these conferences worth it. Once in a while, because of a change in ministry or some other bit of misfortune quite outside the control of our officers of the conference, papers need be quickly put together and are not as insightful as we would like.

I had suggested that our officers of the conference have a treasure store of papers on hand in case there was a need for a last minute replacement on the agenda. Among the older generation of pastors there must have been something that has piqued their interest in the twenty to thirty years they have already spent in the ministry. For once they could write a paper of their own choosing and submit it to the officers of the conference for a rainy day. If the paper never saw the light of day, they wouldn't mind (it would be the closest we would come to a snow day in most of the Arizona-California District!). If they were needed "in the clutch," they would have something to share with the brothers.

If you make a suggestion, you should be ready to back up that suggestion with action. For at least twelve years I've been shadow boxing this: why would the "Gospel of the Old Testament" have such an unsettling ending?

*"Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."*  
Isiah 66.24

I presented an embryonic form of this paper to my midweek Adult Bible class about twelve years ago when I was justly accused by one of my members of having "epic" Bible classes—18 weeks minimum! I reworked the material last year for Green Valley Evangelical Lutheran's Teen Bible Study. For that age group I am attempting to cover sixteen "foundation" books of the Bible in a four year cycle in order to avoid the shallow relevance and saccharine moralizing in much of recent teen Bible class material. I always feel it is better to honestly confront the primary sources. It was this nine week course I submitted to the officers of the conference with my suggestion for a paper.

They accepted it and here I am, with a paper of my own choosing bearing their imprimatur on it, as it should be. Our district has had one paper too many where a pastor who mistakes himself for Elihu, one of Job's accusers, is so bursting at the seams that he must relieve himself of his so-called unsolicited

wisdom, but ends up only dumping on his unsuspecting victims. In the Lord's kingdom, the call seeks the man, even when it is a call to present a paper at conference.



*Victorious Stalingrad, Spring 1943*

## Part I: The Prism of Isaiah

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### Introduction

In late August 1942 Nazi forces started their attack on Stalingrad. Over the next five months almost 2 million combatants would be killed, wounded or captured, not counting civilians. When the siege was broken Stalingrad was a depopulated ruin. Only from a distance could one say the Soviets had won.

In 701 B.C. another siege was broken, this time around Jerusalem. Half of the nation of Judah was gone, wiped off the face of the earth. The capital city of Jerusalem remained, ruling over a wasteland stretching to the south and west, clutching at the untouched hamlets of the Hill Country and Benjamin. Is this what victory from the Lord looks like? It would be the decisive event in the prophet Isaiah's life and the prism through which his whole book would be focused.

This is relatively unexplored territory. Conservative scholars gave it little notice as they poured out extensive and exhaustive outlines of the prophet's writing, content to rely on New Testament attestation to prove the unity of Isaiah as well as his authorship. Edward Young approaches it noting the repetition of words and phrases from Isaiah I in Isaiah II (Young, 1949 [1977]: 210) But we all use the same words, do we not? The mere repetition of words and phrases may not be significant, especially if it comes from a "school" surrounding the prophet in person or his revered memory. How those words are used show the individuality of the writer. Young is very close to it when he writes,

"But Isaiah 40-66 is far more than a repetition of the earlier teachings of Isaiah. It is rather an expansion and development of some of these teachings" (Young, 1949 [1977]: 208).

Unfortunately he does not pursue this observation. He notes the centrality of the Broken Siege, "a bridge is introduced which connects 1-35 with 40-66. This bridge consists of 36-39, which again is divided into two parts" (Young, 1965 [1972]: III.544). Yet he downplays the centrality of the Broken Siege by elevating the Babylonian embassy to the same level as he sets the stage for the Babylonian captivity in Isaiah II. August Pieper sweeps over it, claiming Isaiah I is the foundation for Isaiah II and the two have to be considered together. "Part I is the broad and firm pedestal on which Part II is erected as a glorious pillar." (Pieper, 1919 [1979]: 24) After considering this paper, I would tend to compare Isaiah to an inverted pyramid. The grandest and most sweeping proclamations are at the top. Granted, August Pieper's assessment was a radical throw-back idea compared to the dissection historical-critical scholars have employed since long before his day. On a side note, some of our own have seen a difference in thought and style between Isaiah I and Isaiah II, totally missing the literary unity as themes pass through the prism of the Broken Siege and are transformed. Perhaps the culmination of the critical thinking to which Pieper delivers a tongue-lashing, finds its voice in the counsel of The Jewish Study Bible (Berlin and Brettler, 2004: 780).

*It will probably not be helpful to read the whole book from beginning to end the way one reads, say, a novel. Rather, it is best to approach the book as a collection of texts or an anthology.*

The Broken Siege is the unifying feature of Isaiah. It serves as a prism. Every theme save one which Isaiah treats in chapters 1-36 is repeated in chapters 40-66. But the themes are fleshed out, magnified and transformed. An earthly deliverance before the Broken Siege becomes an eternal deliverance after the Broken Siege. An earthly city, barely hanging on, becomes an eternal city, the Church. A despondent watchman turns into joyous messengers of the eternal Gospel.

To demonstrate that this pattern is real and is a powerful witness to the unity of authorship of Isaiah is the purpose of this paper.

## Background

Ever since the days of King David and Solomon, the Southern Kingdom (Judah) had been in decline. Once the capital of a united kingdom, it had lost 80% of its people and 90% of its resources as the Northern Kingdom (Israel) seceded. So strained had the relationship between the two brother nations become that Israel and Aram (Damascus) had formed an alliance to topple King Ahaz. They besieged Jerusalem. Though they could not capture Jerusalem, they did defeat Ahaz in open battle. The Arameans “took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus (2 Chronicles 28.5).” The Israelite army killed 120,000 of Ahaz’s soldiers (including his son, Maaseiah) and took 200,000 women and children as captives to Samaria. Only at the prompting of a faithful prophet were the soldiers shamed into sending their war booty back south.

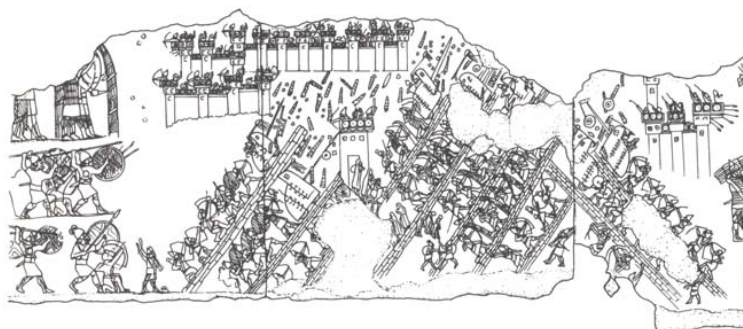
The secret was out. Ahaz could not defend his country. Edomites raided from the southeast and Philistines hit the Shephelah and the Negev, capturing six towns, including Beth-Shemesh and Aijalon. Feeling the next blow from Israel and Aram would be the last, Ahaz hastily made an alliance with the Assyrian king, looting the Temple in Jerusalem for protection money to the Assyrians. Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria, made quick work of Aram, incorporating it into the Assyrian empire in 732 BC. Ahaz slavishly went to meet him in conquered Damascus and “removed the royal entryway outside the temple of the Lord, in deference to the king of Assyria (2 Kings 16.18).” Samaria would fall in 721, after a three year siege by King Shalmaneser V and his successor, Sargon II, thus ending the history of the Northern Kingdom. But now, instead of having two weak enemies at its border, Judah had a world power looking for any excuse to extend its empire farther.

That excuse would come when Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, would break the treaty with Assyria, refuse to pay tribute and cleanse the land of false worship, including the worship of Assyrian gods. It would fall to Sennacherib to extend the Assyrian empire and swallow up rebellious Judah. Another long siege loomed.

Isaiah gives a coldly balanced view of Sennacherib’s campaign in chapter 36. He “attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them (36.1).” The Assyrian account from Sennacherib’s palace

claims forty-six Judean cities fell. Most of them were along the the Shephelah and the southern highlands. Benjamin and the sliver of Judah north of Jerusalem were spared simply because Sennacherib had not gotten there yet.

So weakened was Hezekiah's army that the Assyrians were able to start the siege of Jerusalem with just a portion of their forces. Most of their army was engaged in a brutal siege of Lachish, effectively cutting off Egypt from advancing to the aid of its ally, Hezekiah.



*The Siege of Lachish*

Siege warfare was the rocket science of the ancient world. The best of technologies were demanded of both sides. The besieged had to have strong enough fortifications, a motivated and determined populace to defend the walls and adequate, secure storehouses of food and sources of water. The besiegers had to have engineers to build machines strong enough to damage or dig under walls, a motivated and courageous fighting force willing to assault the walls and adequate food and water from the surrounding lands. Success was not guaranteed. In another age Nebuchadnezzar would besiege Tyre, but fail to completely take the city. He would devastate mainland Tyre, thus crippling the Phoenecian hold on Mediterranean trade (leading to the rise of Carthage), but the city that was on the island just off the coast would resist his efforts. Ezekiel mentions the set-back.

*“Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon drove his army in a hard campaign against Tyre; every head was rubbed bare and every shoulder made raw. Yet he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre.*

Ezekiel 28.18

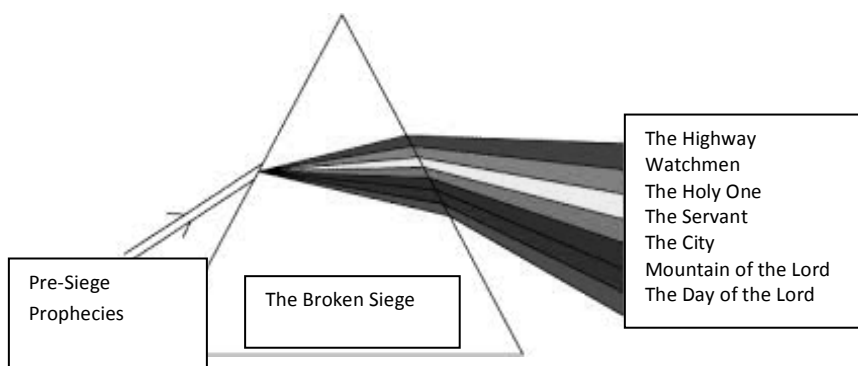
The island citadel could not be entered by troops and was able to be resupplied by its navy, much as sea-going, besieged Athens planned to hold out against Sparta during the Peloponnesian Wars, protected, not by an island, but by its Long Walls. It would not be until the campaign of Alexander the Great when superior Greek engineers would build a mole to the city and make all Tyre part of his empire.

Given the high stakes, siege warfare was not entered into lightly. Better to cow the besieged into surrender, which is exactly what Sennacherib's men attempted with Jerusalem, as related by Isaiah chapter 36. The Assyrian field commander offers to parlay with King Hezekiah's officials. He speaks in Hebrew so the troops on the wall can hear. He threatens the already hungry defenders with drinking and eating their own filth. A better future awaits—surrender and exile in a place just as good as Judah before it was ruined. His words hit home. The defenders greet his words with silence in obedience to King Hezekiah's commands, but the Hebrew officials tear their clothes in dismay and sorrow. The Assyrians also play the religion card. How could the Hebrews rely on the LORD to defend them? None of the other gods of the other nations had prevailed against Assyria. Didn't Hezekiah tear down the altars and high places dedicated to the LORD? Didn't the LORD give Sennacherib the order to destroy this land? He even taunts Hezekiah with the offer of 2000 horses, knowing Hezekiah doesn't have enough riders to put on them. When Sennacherib has to temporarily dial back his siege of Lachish to meet and defeat the half-hearted invasion of an Egyptian army, the Lord answers Hezekiah's humble prayers for deliverance.

*"Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eight-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.*

Isaiah 37.36, 37

Though this year's crop was lost because the planting season was already past, and the next year's planting cycle would also elude a demoralized and depopulated landscape--a band of survivors must come out of Jerusalem (37.32)-- the year after they would restart the cycle of planting and harvesting. The Broken Siege was the pivotal point of Isaiah's life and provides the organizing principle for his prophecy. It is the prism through which the Holy Spirit would reveal God's will for sinful human beings.





## The Highway

Highways were few and far between in the ancient world. Roads and footpaths were abundant. They also were washed out by flooding, overgrown with bushes and beset by robbers and wild animals. Highways were the undertakings of royalty who wanted to get from one important city to another in safety. Highways were the up-front investment of governments who had much to gain with a steady and growing trade.

There is a highway in Isaiah, too. Sometimes exceptions prove the rule.

Isaiah 11.10-16 presents us with “a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria.” At first glance this is nothing more than a promise that God would undo the immediate effects of Sennacherib’s campaign and bring back to Judah those from Lachish, the Shephelah and the rural areas who had been taken into exile before the siege of Jerusalem was broken. But the section starts out with “in that day,” linking it to Isaiah 11.1-9, the work of the Savior in New Testament times as the spread of the Gospel brings peace among formerly sworn enemies. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit (11.1).” Exiles will reassemble and tribal jealousies will cease. We are starting on a very high point here, far from the prism of the Broken Siege.

Isaiah 19.23-25 brings up another highway. This one runs from Egypt to Assyria, linking two hated enemies of God’s people, both of whom were significant powers in Isaiah’s day. Israel, however, takes her place among them, not as a world military power, but as a spiritual power, blessing those on earth. Again, the high point is maintained as the theme of the Highway directs us to the glory of the New Testament era when the Gospel joins former enemies together around the Gospel.

Isaiah 33.1-9 brings us to the low point in the Highway theme. It is not looking forward to the days of the spread of the Messiah’s message after his first coming. It is not looking forward to the eternal joys that we will have after his second coming. It is looking at the present situation.

*The highways are deserted,  
No travelers are on the roads.  
The treaty is broken,  
its witnesses are despised,  
no one is respected.*

Isaiah 33.8

Assyria, having destroyed the Northern Kingdom, was threatening to destroy Judah, the Southern Kingdom in a blatant betrayal. King Ahaz had hired Assyria to defeat his enemies, but Assyria had come

down and attacked Judah. There is no earthly hope, for both warriors and envoys cry in the streets. They have neither the power nor the wisdom to save their city. The impotence of the state shows in the lack of commerce. People are afraid to travel the roads in a country that is already losing its people like trees losing their leaves.

Isaiah 35.1-10 brings us back from the brink.

*The desert and the parched land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.  
The burning sand will become a pool,  
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.*

Isaiah 35.1, 7

The highway now has a name. It is the Way of Holiness. As the way to Babylonian exile was the way of sin, death and punishment, so the way back to Jerusalem is a holy highway because those who come back are redeemed by the LORD. They are safe from any spiritual attacks, symbolized by lions and ferocious beasts, even though they are defenseless, with feeble hands, unsteady knees and fearful hearts. Isaiah is picturing the return from Babylon in Old Testament times. But he could also be portraying the entry of believers into the Christian Church before Judgment Day as well as showing the joy of the redeemed entering into heaven on Judgment Day. All three interpretations would work.

Let's see what happens to the Highway on the other side of the prism of the Broken Siege.

Isaiah 40.1-5 combines the theme of the Highway with that of the Watchman

*A voice of one calling: "in the desert prepare the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.*

Isaiah 40.3

From the New Testament citations, we know the voice crying in the wilderness is John the Baptist. The time frame is that of the coming of the Savior. Jerusalem's "hard service" has been completed because her sin will be paid for and she will receive righteousness from the Savior. Through the ministry of John the Baptist people would see this Savior with their own eyes.

Isaiah 49.8-12 uses the same imagery to portray the same reality.

*He who has compassion on them will guide them  
and lead them besides springs of water.  
I will turn all my mountains into roads,  
and my highways will be raised up.*

Isaiah 49.11

In the time of God's favor, the days following Christ's entry into heaven, the Gospel will go out and bring people into the Church. There people will no longer be thirsty for forgiveness. From all over the world people will find the way (all mountain obstacles turned into roads, all dangers eliminated by the raised highways) into God's family of faith.

In the last appearance of the Highway (Isaiah 62.10, 11) the Savior is travelling on this highway.

*Pass through, pass through the gates!  
Prepare the way for the people.  
Build up, build up the highway!  
Remove the stones.  
Raise a banner for the nations.  
The Lord has made proclamation  
to the ends of the earth:  
"Say to the Daughter of Zion,  
'See, your Savior comes!'"*

Isaiah 62.10, 11

His coming is the Last Day, Judgment Day and the reward he brings is eternal life. From the context (verse 7) the LORD will not rest until he makes Jerusalem the praise of the earth. Only in heaven will there be perfect justice and the praise which it brings forth in the saved. But the Savior is still in the process of coming all through the New Testament era. The word of encouragement for the believers in Isaiah's day as well as the believers of today is "Don't grow weary, don't give up. Your Savior comes to you."

What started as a highway that led from Assyria back to Jerusalem has turned into a highway to heaven.

## The Watchman

The Watchman is a minor theme in Isaiah, but it typifies the function of the prism. Isaiah starts out with a watchman—him! “The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw (Isaiah 1.1).” “This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2.1).” The prophet is literally God’s watchman, seeing what is going on and warning the people of danger (or informing them of good news).

It is significant that the vineyard the Lord had planted had a watchtower in it.

*He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.*

Isaiah 5.2

The vineyard represented his church on earth, his Old Testament people.

*The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.*

Isaiah 5.7

The watchmen would be the leaders of the Church, God’s spokesmen, the priests and prophets, those who taught the people and warned the people. After a devastating series of oracles promising Assyrian destruction for Sudan, Egypt and Babylon, the circle of destruction comes closer to home, to Edom, southeast of Judah. The pre-dawn watchman complains of the coming night. Deliverance from Assyria will be a reprieve but the Babylonian armies will follow. As for Jerusalem, “the fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever (32.14).” At the point of the prism, Hezekiah’s soldiers themselves are the watchmen, hearing the threats of the Assyrian field commander but remaining silent (Isaiah 36.21).

After the Broken Siege, the watchmen become something else altogether.

In Isaiah 21.11-12 the watchmen had a message of despair and destruction. That message is now transformed into a message of comfort. “Proclaim to her she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins (Isaiah 40.2).” These are good tidings, fit to be shouted from the mountaintops. Instead of an enemy coming to destroy Jerusalem, her God is approaching with his salvation.

A messenger’s voice cries out a message of repentance and preparation. Every bit of pride must be cut down by contrition. Every humbled spirit must be raised up with forgiveness. And it will happen,

because the glory of the Lord will be revealed. Here is your God! From the Gospels we know this messenger on Jerusalem's walls has been transformed into John the Baptist pointing out the Savior. This imagery is repeated in Isaiah 52.7-8. The Lord is returning to his people. "Your God reigns!"

As there are good watchmen, there are bad watchmen. The watchmen of Isaiah 56.10-12 are to watch over God's crops and vineyard. But they are mute dogs, sleeping on the job, useless.

A different sort of watchman arises in Isaiah 61.1-2. He comes to proclaim liberty and release. The dispirited and powerless watchmen have become the Savior, filled with the Spirit, with a Gospel message of freedom from sin, release from the power of the devil to proclaim. The despondent watchmen preached temporary deliverance from Assyria, only to have the night of Babylon's oppression fall upon them. This messenger comes to proclaim eternal deliverance from sin, death and the devil.

The coming of the Savior transforms the watchmen on the walls. They were silent before the Assyrian field commander. They are silent no longer. "I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night (Isaiah 62.6)."

## **The Holy One of Israel**

**T**he Holy One of Israel is a major theme in Isaiah. It occurs on either sides of the Broken Siege. But there is a marvelous progression here the closer we get to the Broken Siege and the farther we get past it. Like a prism, the Broken Siege brings out the fullness of the theme.

Let's let you do the first one. Fill in the chart with the chapter and verse number of Isaiah in the appropriate columns—whether it accuses Judah of sin, threatens punishment or promises deliverance. If it promises a deliverance, also determine whether this is a deliverance in the Old Testament (the Return from Exile to the Promised Land) or it is a deliverance promised in New Testament times (the Return of nations to God's grace). Mark your choice with an X. The first one is done for you.

Here are the passages (be sure not to ignore the context):

Isaiah 1.4	41.20
5.18-25	43.14, 15
10.17	45.11
10.20, 21	48.17-20
29.23	55.5
30.11	60.9

Sin	Punishment	Deliverance	Return to Promised Land? (X)	World Converting (X)
1.4				
5.18-24	5.18-24			
	10.17			
		10.20-21	X	
		29.23	X	
30.11				
The Broken Siege of Sennacherib				
		41.20	X	
		43.14, 15	X	
		45.11	X	
		48.17-20	X	
		49.5-7		X
		54.5-8		X
		55.5		X
		60.9		X
		60.14		X

I have singled out a few passages for further investigation.

Isaiah 49.5-7 describes Jesus as the Holy One of Israel. He was the one who was formed in the womb to be God's servant. He is the light for the Gentiles, as inspired Simeon sang in the Temple. He is the one who was despised and abhorred. In Jesus the stalemate of progression in the theme of the Holy One of

Israel is broken. The Holy One stops being the God of Israel who punishes his people and all people who go too far, the God who sets things right by bringing back the survivors to the Promised Land. Instead, the Holy One is the one who makes the two into one, Gentiles and Israel together, as members of one body, the Church. Deliverance is promised which will find its fulfillment in the New Testament era.

Isaiah 54.5-8 pictures the Holy One of Israel as the husband to God's people. Earlier she is promised a world-wide dominion as she "will dispossess nations." Shortly after this selection God reminds her of his unshakable covenant. We are clearly in New Testament times and a world-wide deliverance as the eternally trustworthy Gospel goes out from Israel to conquer the world.

Isaiah 60.14 concludes the Holy One of Israel theme. We would expect the widest and most expansive use of the theme and are not disappointed. Not only will the wealth of nations flow into Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Her gates will never be shut. Those who oppose her will be utterly ruined. Isaiah's phrases create an echo in John's vision of Revelation. Part of that New Testament deliverance God promises is an eternity of security and peace in heavenly Zion. We have reached the end and the culmination of the Holy One of Israel theme, moving from a frank accusation of sin on the part of God's Old Testament people, through threats of immediate punishment to deliverance as we pass through the prism of the Broken Siege, either in the near future or in the latter days of the New Testament era, culminating in eternal heaven.

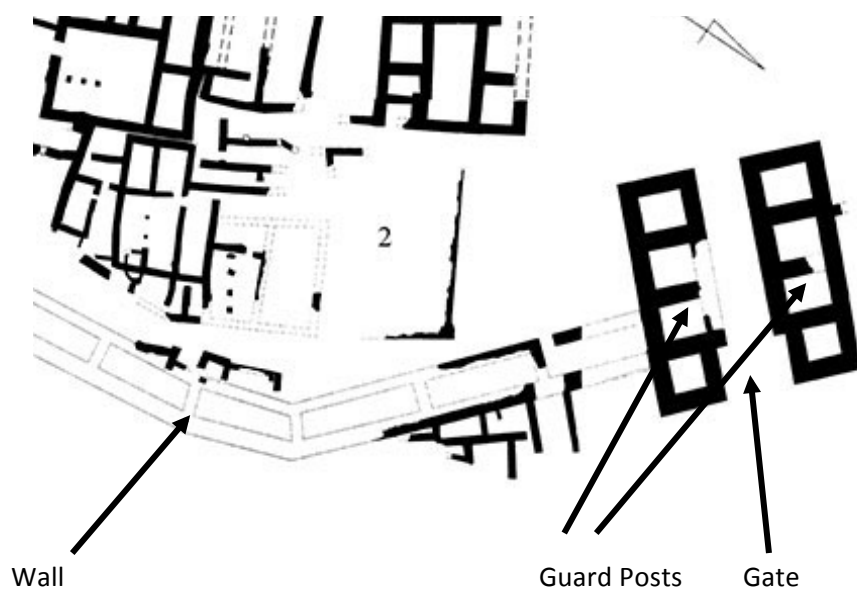
## The City

Isaiah gives us an overview of the City in his first chapter. Cities were a source of life, wealth and protection in the ancient world. Anybody who was somebody was in the city and any city worth anything had a fortified wall around it. Without the city, agriculture would quickly degenerate into subsistence farming. There would be no place for the middlemen to market what you had to get what you wanted. But Judah has been attacked and her cities have been burned. Jerusalem does not even resemble a city as much as it resembles a pathetic "hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege (Isaiah 1.8)." Already the Broken Siege casts its shadows across the prophet's words. Soon she will literally be under siege. Later in the chapter (1.21-23) Isaiah is forthcoming about Jerusalem's sins. Instead of being faithful to the Lord as displayed by a godly life, full of justice for others, fairness and compassion

for the needy, she is unfaithful to the Lord. It shows in her unbelieving life. God's own people, the citizens of Jerusalem, have become the enemies of the Lord.

But the Lord is not done with Jerusalem. She will become the Faithful City. The Faithless City will become the Besieged City and turn into the Righteous City.

The theme of the City reappears in Isaiah 22. Something is amiss. The City should be bustling and full of life, happiness and security. That's why people congregate together in cities! It's almost as if they have lost a war that has never been fought! They have destroyed themselves by their unbelief and the lives of godlessness that unbelief drove them to live. Something else is jarringly out of place. The chariots are in the valleys—the worst places for chariot battles. They will have no room to maneuver. An open plain is where they belong. Horsemen are useless for the defense of a city's gates. There's no room for their horses in the side chambers of the gate. And a horseman without his horse is like a soldier without a weapon—he has lost all his advantages! Side chambers of the gate are supposed to be filled with soldiers armed with swords and spears to kill any who (after the wooden door of the gate is broken down) try to rush into the city, not filled with unhorsed horsemen.



*Diagram of Gate at Hazor  
(from Near Eastern Archaeology 76.2)*



The chariots in the choice valleys belong to the enemy, for, if the city's horsemen are cowering in the city gates, it is because the city's horsemen have been defeated and lost their horses. Even before the Assyrians appear, Jerusalem has been defeated for she has abandoned her faith in God. Yet the revelry does not end. Right up to the bitter end they do not know any better.

In Isaiah 24.8-13 we see the desolation of the ruined city. Everything a city has to offer its citizens, happiness, joyful music, partying and drinking, is gone. There is only silence. The beer is spoiled. There is gloom instead of joy. But the destruction of the City goes beyond the boundaries of Judah. All the world is to be destroyed. All its inhabitants (significantly described as city dwellers with city professions) will perish. In eschatological language Isaiah pictures the end of the world. This destruction of the Last Day will be done away with "on this mountain," Jerusalem. The Lord will swallow up death. The fortified walls of Moab's cities will be brought down, but the Righteous City will stand.

Chapter 26 introduces a different kind of city. She trusts in the Lord as she looks forward to a resurrection from the dead (Isaiah 26.19).

The Faithless City cannot have a future. She must change before she can become the Righteous City. And that transformation must pass through the Broken Siege.

Isaiah 29 introduces us to Ariel, the "Lion of God," a proud nickname for Jerusalem, expressing her royal power and her faithfulness to God. But she will not remain proud. The Lord will lay a siege against her. Though she will be greatly humbled—brought to the ground—she will still be able to whisper. She will (barely) survive because the Lord Almighty will deliver her, dashing the desperate dreams of the City's enemies to the ground.

Yet Ariel does not respond to the Lord's goodness. For all she has gone through, she cannot see, she cannot hear what God has in store for her. It is judgment from the Lord. She is like someone who owns a book, but is illiterate. With that we are brought up to Isaiah's prism of the Broken Siege.

The Faithful City, the Holy City (Isaiah 52.1-3) is on the other side. The Lord's redemption has freed her from the chains of sin around her neck. Her Lord is reigning, even over the ruins of Jerusalem. All nations will see the coming of the salvation which the messengers already are proclaiming. With this, we are in the New Testament times and the coming of the Christ. The Faithless City is being transformed into the New Testament Church.

Isaiah 54.11-14 pushes the City imagery further along.

*O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,  
I will build you with stones of turquoise,  
your foundations with sapphires.  
I will make your battlements of rubies,  
your gates of sparkling jewels,  
and all your walls of precious stones.*

Isaiah 54.11-12

No one builds a city out of turquoise and sapphires, rubies and jewels. Isaiah is picturing the glory of heaven in words remarkably similar to John's description of the heavenly City of God.

*He showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.*

Revelation 21.10,11, 18, 21

The City has been transformed through the prism of the Broken Siege into a picture of heaven. The final transformation comes in Isaiah 62. Themes of the Watchman and the Highway reappear. The City functions as it should, a place filled with life, security and happiness. The Rejected City becomes the Sought After City, the Deserted City becomes the No Longer Deserted City. The transformation is complete, from a hut in a melon field to the heavenly Jerusalem after it passes through the prism of the Broken Siege.

## The Mountain of the Lord

Isaiah presents us with a "hard" geography, at least around Jerusalem. He confronts wicked King Ahaz "at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field." This is no once upon a time story in a land far away. Central to Isaiah's geography is the Mountain of the Lord.



Jerusalem from the Kidron Valley (looking west)

The physical elevation of Jerusalem is less than intimidating (2500 feet). It is not even the tallest of the other mountains in the Judean range, none of the southern ones topping 3000 feet. Jerusalem does, however, dominate its immediate surroundings as it rises out of the Kidron Valley to the east.

Predictably, Jerusalem was built on the top of its mountain for the utmost protection against ancient enemies. The City of David (see map on page 32) was the oldest part of Jerusalem and built on one ridge. On a second, slightly higher ridge, Solomon would build the Temple. David had purchased the land in his lifetime and had started fill-in construction (Ophel) between the two ridges to connect them. The ridge the Temple was built on was Mount Zion. It was the center of religious life for God's Old Testament people.

Jerusalem was a special place. Isaiah pictures the Lord living on Mountain Zion (8.18), sitting enthroned on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain (14.13). It is the place of the Name of the Lord Almighty (18.7) where the throngs go for festive worship. It was a special place because the Lord's Temple was located there. There the sacrifices were offered; there the Word of God was taught. Isaiah will transform Mount Zion, the site of God's Old Testament Temple, into a mountain that not only fills the world, but becomes the world to come.

As we will see in the Day of the Lord, so here with the Mountain of the Lord, we have to decide into which time frame Isaiah's words are putting us. Is he talking about the Mountain of the Lord of his day? Is he talking about the Mountain of the Lord during New Testament times (our day)? Is he talking about the Mountain of the Lord for all eternity (heaven)?

Isaiah starts out with a bang as he introduces the Mountain of the Lord. It will be "chief among the mountains (2.2)" as he prophetically and poetically pictures the ascendancy of the New Testament Church with its influx of converts in the "last days." Because of the prophetic perspective, all the "last days" look pretty close together. Context will tell us which one the prophet is talking about.

Isaiah is not here picturing the Last Day, Judgment Day, because he talks about people being converted ("He will teach us his ways, the law will go out from Zion"). God's people on earth will enjoy a foretaste of heaven, being at perfect peace with God and their fellow believers through the work of the God of Jacob.

This is clear in the next appearance of Mountain of the Lord (Isaiah 11). Immediately our imagination leaps to a picture of heaven as the wolf lives with the lamb and the cow feeds with the bear. Yet the context does not bear this interpretation. In the verses immediately preceding (Isaiah 11.1-5) the

prophet talks of the Branch of Jesse, Jesus. The Mountain of the Lord represents the impact his work has on this world in New Testament times. The following context (Isaiah 11.10-11) refers to “that day,” the same day as the previous verses.

Isaiah 25 brings up the Mountain of the Lord again. A rich banquet is spread, portraying the forgiveness of sins and the blessings which flow from the Gospel. Yet heaven is also pictured as a rich banquet. Which time zone is this mountain on? On this mountain God will destroy the shroud over all people, namely, death. He is talking about heaven. The context following (25.9-12) enforces this view, for we have the songs of praise of the saved in heaven and the suffering of the damned in hell.

Because of the Broken Siege, Isaiah cannot contemplate deliverance of God’s people without also casting an eye on the destruction of God’s enemies, Moab, in this case, thrust so far in deep manure they are swimming in it.

The Mountain of the Lord reappears on the other side of the Broken Siege in Isaiah 65.11-16.

*But as for you who forsake the Lord and forget my holy mountain  
 who spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny,  
 I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter;  
 for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen.  
 You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.”  
 Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says:  
 “My servants will eat, but you will go hungry;  
 my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty;  
 my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame.*

Isaiah 65.11-13

If our contention of the Broken Siege is correct, these verses must be talking about heaven. That is just what the context brings out (Isaiah 65.17-25). We see new heavens, new earth with weeping and crying heard in it no more. Life spans are as the “days of a tree.”

Because of the prism of the Broken Siege, the same words that figuratively describe the peace we have with God on earth will literally describe the perfect peace and joy we will have in heaven. Now we can only believe—in heaven we will see! Isaiah’s Prism has done its work! Even the very words spoken before the Broken Siege carry more meaning after the Broken Siege!

## The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. Sometimes it refers to Judgment Day (*Dies Irae*). Sometimes it refers to coming earthly judgment. Sometimes it refers to the restoration of God's people in the Promised Land. Sometimes it refers to the coming of the Savior. In every case, the common thread is that the Lord will come on a certain day. For the unbelievers that will be a day of destruction and punishment. For the believers it will be a day of deliverance and joy. We aren't going to trace its development and transformation before and after the Broken Siege (it follows the pattern we have laid out). Let's simply consider some of its various appearances.

We expect the first appearance of the Day of the Lord to be a simple one, earthly judgment upon the wicked, and so it is. Isaiah 2 shows us a land full of horses and chariots preparing for war. Jerusalem is fighting against their Lord because they had deserted him and worshipped idols. The Lord has "a day in store" for them. True to their unfaithfulness, they will throw away their idols because their idols don't work. Repentance and a turning towards the Lord is the furthest thing from their minds. Verse 22 transitions between chapter 2 and 3. Judah had sinfully placed her trust in idols. She has seen that will not help. Now she puts her trust in man, the pillars of society, the warriors, judges, prophets, elders, counselors and craftsmen. Yet these will also be powerless to help. They will be taken away as society degenerates into neighbor against neighbor, young against old until they get the most worthless of men to be their leader and even he will not want the responsibility (3.7). Before the Day of the Lord the women of Jerusalem had jewelry, flirted and minced their steps and had gorgeous hairstyles. After the Day of the Lord they have no fine clothes or jewelry. The stench of death will hang heavy around them and they will be bald from tearing out their hair in mourning.

Yet every visit from the Lord does not end in destruction. The Lord comes to save his own. This is apparent when the Day of the Lord refers to the time God will bring his exiled people back to the Promised Land.

Faced with an alliance of regional enemies, King Ahaz had foolishly bribed powerful, but distant, Assyria to come and help him. Assyria betrayed Judah's trust and turned against her (Isaiah 36-37). Because of Assyria's arrogance, God would have the Babylonians destroy them, but Babylon would suffer the same

fate for the same reason. After the depredations of these two nations (10.20-21), a remnant would remain and then a remnant of that remnant would return to Jerusalem. With both Assyrian and Babylonian power gone, reliance on treacherous allies would be impossible. Enter another day, the Day of the Lord's Favor.

The special day of the Lord coming to his people is the time Jesus walked on this earth. Isaiah 11 clearly is talking about Jesus, the Savior. This Savior to come would trust in the Spirit of the Lord, unlike Isaiah's Jerusalem which trusted in foreign military alliances and in the strength, wisdom and wealth of her own people. This ushers in an era of peace, with Isaiah's famous words of the wolf lying down with the lamb.

The Day of the Lord's favor appears again in Isaiah 49, interwoven with the Servant and the Highway theme. All of these themes are different expressions of the same spiritual reality. God is working through history to bring eternal salvation to an undeserving people.

Finally the last appearance of the Day of the Lord is in Isaiah 63, with the *Dies Irae*, the day the Lord finally judges the ungodly and eternally rescues his people.

## The Servant of the Lord

Unlike the other themes, the Servant is not used figuratively in the first part of Isaiah's prophecy. Literal uses include a method of recording time (16.14, 21.16), calling Isaiah (20.3) and Eliakim (22.20) God's servants. The Last Day will fall upon all. "It will be the same for masters as for servants (24.2)." God promises to save Jerusalem "for the sake of David, my servant (37.35)." None of these usages are in any way figurative. Only after the Broken Siege does the figurative theme of the Servant present itself and, to a degree, shows some progression from that point. Viewed another way, however, this is perhaps the biggest proof of the prism of the Broken Siege: things that were not before now are after. What was inconceivable before is now a reality transcending expectations.

In Isaiah 41 Israel is proclaimed as God's servant. God took Israel from the farthest corners of the earth and chosen them (8-9). But Israel is an unfaithful servant.

*Hear, you deaf;  
look, you blind, and see!  
Who is blind but my servant,  
and deaf like the messenger I send?  
Who is blind like the one committed to me,  
blind like the servant of the Lord?  
You have seen many things,  
but have paid no attention;  
your ears are open, but you hear nothing.*

Isaiah 42.18-20

Yet the works of the Lord are so obvious and manifest, even the blind can be witnesses. Even the deaf can testify (Isaiah 43.8-11). Their testimony is that God, their God, has predicted all these things long ago.

Another reference to Israel as the Servant of the Lord comes in Isaiah 44. God is hoping that through the testimony blind and deaf Israel presents, they themselves will see and hear it, be converted and restored. Restored Israel will return from captivity in Babylon.

*Leave Babylon,  
flee from the Babylonians!  
Announce this with shouts of joy  
and proclaim it.  
Send it out to the ends of the earth;  
say, "The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob."*

Isaiah 48.20

But there is a second, higher thread in the Servant theme. Isaiah 42 introduces a servant God always delights in. This servant is none other than the Savior to come, as the New Testament proclaims (Matthew 3.16-17—The Baptism of Jesus-- and Matthew 12.15-21—Jesus' Retreat from the Murderous Pharisees). Unlike the unfaithful servant, Israel, this servant knows and does God's will. He sees clearly and hears everything God the Father says to him.

In Isaiah 49 we hear the Servant speaking. "Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name (49.1)." So special is the Servant that God has addressed him before his birth, giving him a special task. He will be a light for the Gentiles as well as the one who restores the tribes of Israel. The Servant is Jesus and Isaiah's words portray both his work while he walked this earth and the effect of that work, the spread of God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Far from laboring in

vain, the Servant's victory will be absolute. Though he was abhorred and despised by his own, he will be received and accepted by kings and princes.

At this point we would assume the Servant, the Messiah Promised by God, would be a glorious figure, a conquering hero. Isaiah turns that idea on its head. Isaiah 52 takes up the idea introduced in Isaiah 49, that the Servant would be despised. The same pattern is there. First he was despised. The theme progresses to show that rejection expressed in physical attacks upon the Servant, disfiguring his face, beating him into a barely recognizable human form. Yet he will enlighten the peoples, "sprinkle many nations (52.14)." His victory will be complete. Even kings will become silent as they listen to his exploits and understand by faith. This victory overshadows that expressed in Isaiah 49. The Servant will be exalted and lifted up. The extent of that exaltation is brought up in the next verses of chapter 53.

Tender shoots and roots should grow under the best conditions, where the soil is thick and moist. The Servant would have none of these advantages. Parched soil is his nursery. It leads to a life stunted by the world's estimation. "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him (52.2)." So attuned to our Good Friday services and Lenten series are we, we cannot but help to make the connection with Jesus' Passion. In this case, it is permissible to read the New Testament into the Old Testament almost from the start. Pontius Pilate despised Jesus so much he condemns an innocent man to death. The thieves crucified with Jesus despise him so much they ridicule and mock him. The religious leaders and many of the Jews despise him through their unbelief, confident that a blasphemer is getting his just deserts from the hand of an angry God.

But the Servant suffers for us. He takes our sins upon himself. He was suffering for the wrong we all had done. Isaiah refuses to offer a straight line progression from earthly glory (a light to the Gentiles, kings will bow down before you) to earthly glory, as much as our sinful nature would wish it. The Servant must go through hardship to receive a greater glory. He must die and be cut off from the land of the living. Only then can we see the extent of his exaltation. He will see the light of life again. By his death and resurrection, he will justify many and prolong the days, give eternal life, to all who believe.



## Part II: The Unity of Isaiah and Historicity of Doctrine

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### Authorship

The historical-critical arguments about the author of the book of Isaiah have been going on since the late 1700s. The prophecy has been divided along literary lines, vocabulary and grammar. As an earlier century of historical-critical scholars has parsed the Pentateuch into J-E-P-D, so the historical-critical scholars turning their eyes to Isaiah have produced a collection of Isaiah I (1-39), Deutero-Isaiah, Isaiah II (40-49) and Trito-Isaiah, Isaiah III (50-66). Whether one of these was the original Isaiah is up for heated discussion. The second and third authors (if they are indeed individuals—there is no small cadre that believes Trito-Isaiah is a committee) lived after the fact, working in Babylon towards the latter part of the Exile or even after it, in the early years of Persian rule, conveniently hitting all their prophecies on the head as only hindsight can do.

I need not remind you the historical-critical school denies the miraculous. That includes a denial of prophecy. Therefore, any prophecy whose fulfillment can be historically authenticated must have been made after the fact. That portions of Isaiah (especially 40-66) should be written in Babylon is almost self-explanatory. That is where the intelligentsia of Judah and Jerusalem were carried off into exile. That is where the seat of learning for all nations was. The ongoing vigor of this community is evident centuries later in the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud. And, of course, the Return was led by Babylonian refugees who could show previous claims on the land and royal courtiers, without whom, Jerusalem and Judah would never have been permanently and securely resettled.

Even before the arrival of statistical analysis, it was observed that other, undisputed post-exilic writings (Ezra, Nehemiah) were greatly different in tone and style than any of the bits and pieces of Isaiah. “These writings show a certain amount of linguistic intrusion from Aramaic and are sprinkled with Babylonian terms. There is a complete absence of such influence in the language of Isaiah II” which is “closely resembling the Hebrew of Isaiah I (Archer, 1964 [1974]: 335).”

In the early twentieth century, Charles Torrey addressed this issue with a radical approach. “So far as the Jews of the Babylonian deportation are concerned, it is not likely that they ever exercised any

considerable influence on the Jews in Judea (Faust, 2012: 3).” Torrey was part of the historical-critical scholars, but his contention was that Isaiah’s various parts were written and assembled in late exilic or early post-exilic Judah. “Most inhabitants returned to their homes and continued to live in the same way as before the Babylonian conquest (Faust, 2012: 4).” This continuity of culture is vital to maintain authorship or editorship of large sections of the Hebrew Bible, especially Isaiah 40-66 and Deuteronomy, by someone in Judah. Torrey’s long over-looked assessments have been championed over the past twenty years by Hans Barstad and Oded Lipschits. “One very important question is whether Neo-Babylonian and Persian period Judah had the necessary population or infrastructure to produce the literature that we now find in the Hebrew bible.” And Barstad concludes, “I do believe that it did (Faust, 2012: 202).”

Let’s get back to the Broken Siege as Isaiah’s prism. Contrary to assertions by the historical-critical school, there is a very strong thread which ties all supposed portions of Isaiah together, the Broken Siege. If there was but one thematic element in Isaiah I which was transformed by the Broken Siege into something progressively more expansive and illustrious in Isaiah II, we all would have our doubts. But it is not a literary pattern imposed on the text by a fanciful outsider. It is there. We have seen no less than seven such thematic elements, the Highway, the Watchmen, the Holy One, the Servant, the City, the Mountain of the Lord, the Day of the Lord. I do not relish being a drudge and beating a dead horse, but simple sweeping and magisterial statements from experts need to be bolstered by facts. Far from being mere vocabulary and phrases resonating in Isaiah II after they have been introduced in Isaiah I, these themes progress and transform into something almost totally other. How else can you describe the City which starts out as a ruined hut in a melon patch being transformed into the City of God? Vocabulary can be aped by students and schools, as students of Sig Becker in one generation and John Brug in another can ape their words without catching their significance. But only the master himself, the Isaiah, can carry these thematic progressions through his entire prophecy of sixty-six chapters. It is not the work of several men or even a school. It is the work of Isaiah, son of Amoz, a master wordsmith, a priest of the royal court, perhaps the best writer of the entire Bible, working during Jerusalem’s cultural height. So skilled is he, he whispers the theme of the Broken Siege from the start, “like a city under siege (1.8).” The Broken Siege is formative to Isaiah’s thinking.

As to the date of authorship, the linguistic arguments put forth by conservative scholars still stand, for recent archaeological advances seem to have discredited Torrey’s theory of continuation.

Avraham Faust has surveyed the evidence for the theory of continuation in his book, Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation (2012). I simply summarize his conclusions which lead one to view Torrey's position as untenable (Faust 2012: 244-247).

The land of Judah after 586 B.C. could not, of itself, have produced the literature of the Bible. The urban centers of Judah were devastated. Every one of them showed a destruction layer which could be attributed to nothing other than Nebudchadnezzar's campaign. The rural areas were also devastated. In evaluating continuity of habitation, only seven out of fifty locations could generously be said to be continuously inhabited from before 586 B.C. (the end of Iron Age II) into the Persian period. Even in those seven, it was simply a portion of the settlements that were occupied. There was a total absence of international trade in the area. Whereas archaeological interpretations cannot pinpoint certain dates, external data that is well known, such as Greek pottery or dated coins, can pinpoint dates. There is absolutely no Greek pottery to be found, either in Judah or Philistia, from the Neo-Babylonian period. While there is precious little imported pottery in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, because of the Israelite bias against foreign luxury goods, the total absence of foreign pottery is telling (personal correspondence with Faust, 2014). If the traditional Exile is only a fabrication of returnees from Babylon trying to inflate their prestige and bolster their claims to land, a "myth of an empty land," if you will, then surrounding areas should not show a similar pattern of desolation. But they do. The desolation caused by Nebudchadnezzar's campaign was not mythical, but real. Not only Philistia, but Tyre shows the effects of Nebudchadnezzar's campaign. Tyre loses its trading influence in the eastern Mediterranean, abandons its colonies and, in the vacuum created, allows the rise of Carthage. In Judah, slow demographic recovery takes almost 300 years to accomplish. Not until Hellenistic times is the population equal to Iron Age II Judah. All the signs of a post-collapse society are evident. Military defeat and exile are only the start. Famine, epidemics, violence, voluntary resettlement, an inability to create social and commercial networks to trade and barter specialized foodstuffs, repurposing of abandoned forts into hamlets, all argue that Judah after Nebudchadnezzar could not have produced an Isaiah I, II or III.

If Babylon is untenable and post-exilic Palestine is untenable, the only tenable position is that Isaiah wrote his prophecy in Judah before the Exile.

That our circles have not grappled with this fully is not surprising. We are victims of our educational system. We conveniently divide Isaiah into Isaiah I and Isaiah II. We treat the first isogogically and the second exegetically. It is hard to see the thematic progression in such a treatment. We make our

arguments not upon data that would give the historical-critical school pause, but upon dogmatic arguments which play well to our people and line up with our securely held tenets. Hence, Young confidently quotes the New Testament to prove authorship (Young 1949 [1964]: 205). August Pieper delivers a tongue-lashing upon those who do not understand the righteousness of grace. “No amount of historical or grammatical scholarship will be of any help (Pieper 1919 [1979]: 30).” I am not saying this is wrong, but it can lull us into a state that we do not examine what we have before us to see if our forefathers missed something because of the urgencies and responsibilities of their generation.

Yes, I believe Isaiah wrote the whole prophecy because Jesus says so. But I can also answer those who attack it on a rationalistic basis with solid refutation based on what they themselves claim to adhere to and trust.

## The Ending

Isaiah is built around the Broken Siege. It is the prism that transforms and amplifies thematic material from Isaiah I and projects it into Isaiah II. It would be strange not to find the Broken Siege itself reflected and transformed in Isaiah II.

*Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!*

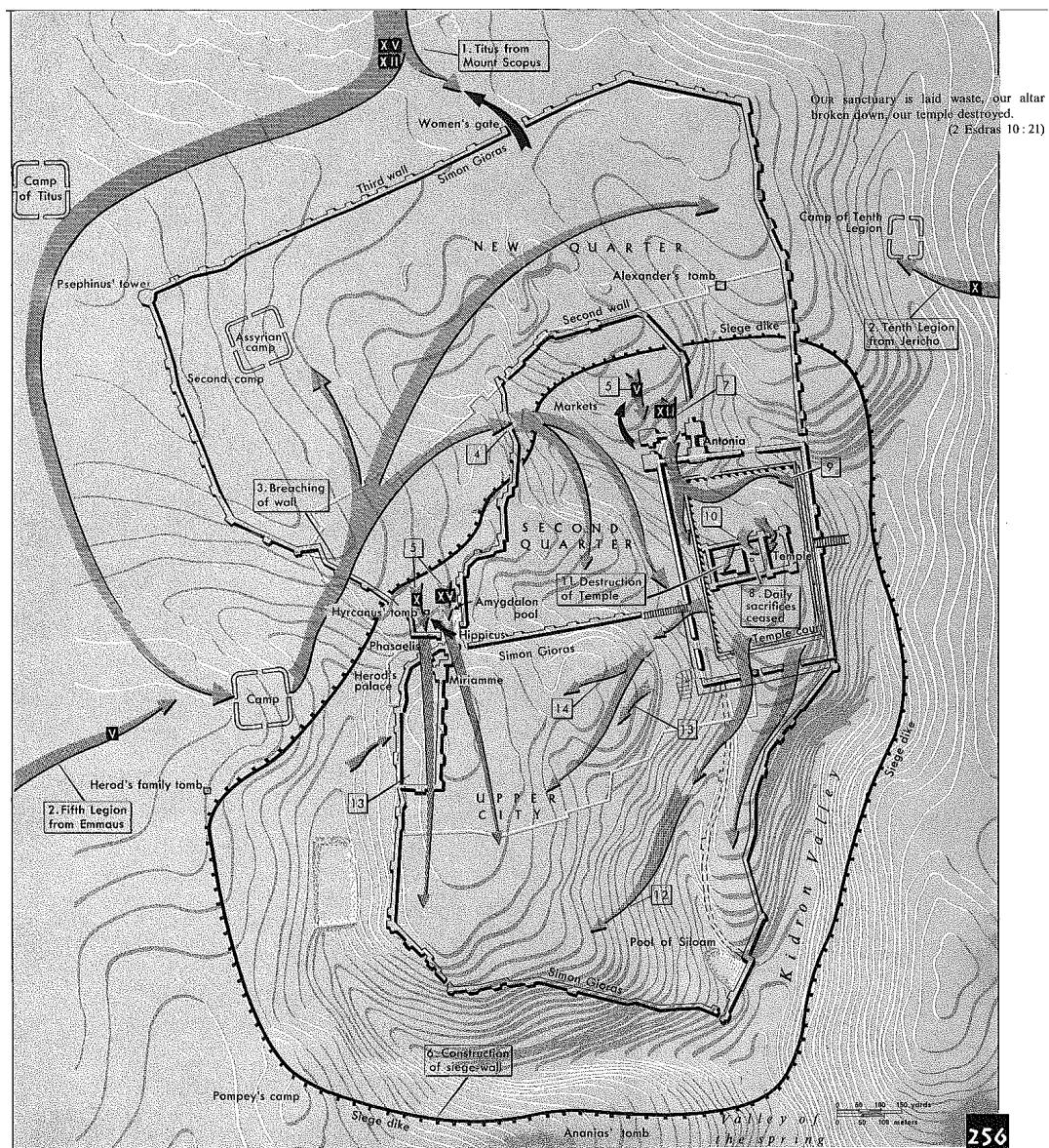
Isaiah 37.36

The Broken Siege does reappear, at the very end of the book.

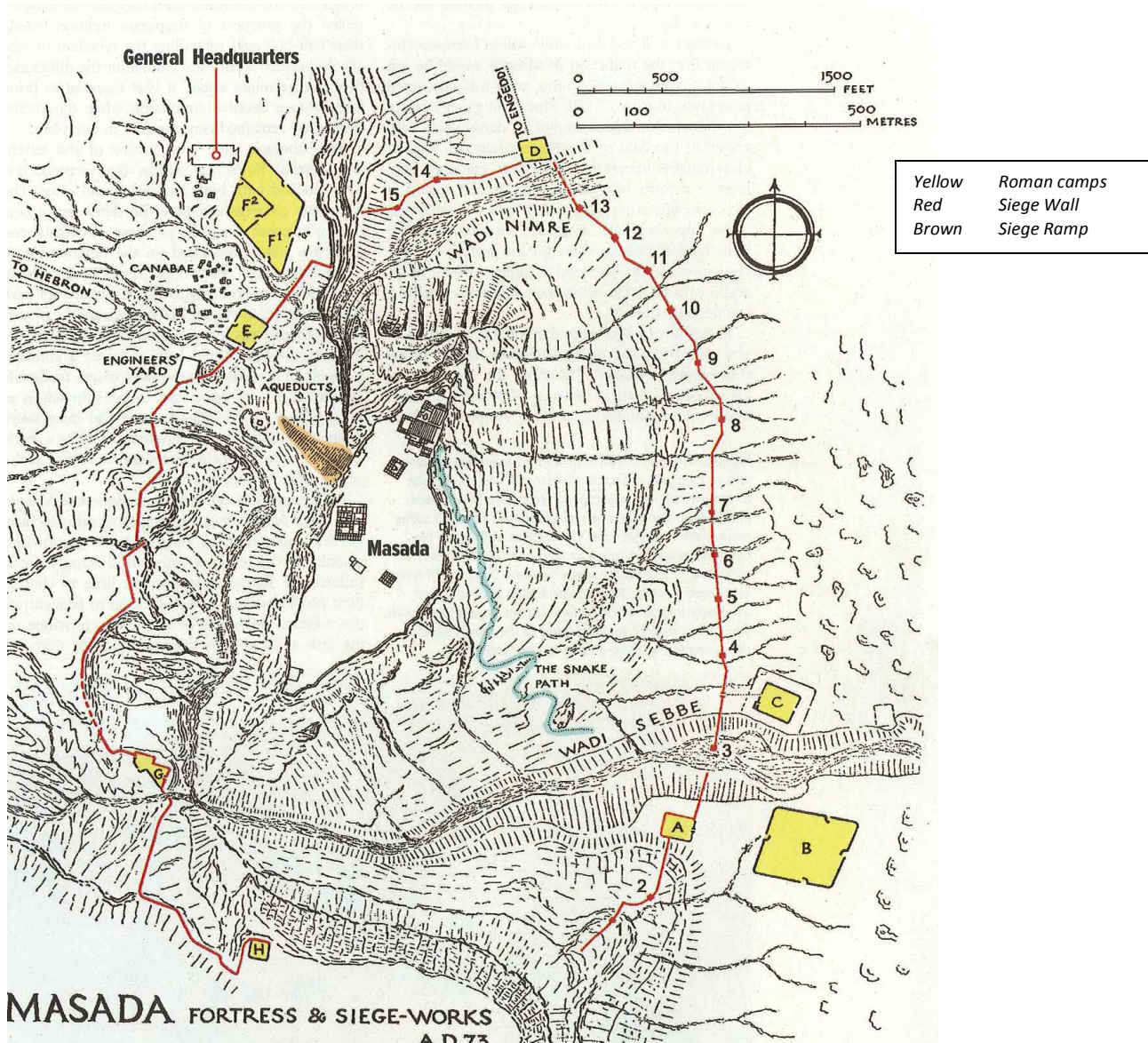
*And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.*

Isaiah 66.24

Where were the dead? At the time of Hezekiah, Jerusalem extended westward across the Tyropoan Valley to the rise of the Southwestern Hill. This would be a logical place a large army could amass for an attack. In 70 AD it would be the spot where the Roman legions would launch their attack upon Jerusalem, angling north, into the New City, which didn't exist in Hezekiah's day. Subsequent Roman siege walls, actually 6 foot siege dikes, were thrown up around the city, about 300 yards from the walls, just outside the range of ancient archers. Below is an attempt to diagram Josephus' description of the Roman siege walls (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah, 1968 [1979]: 161). Because of the populated nature of Jerusalem and the intricate system of historical walls, this is about as close as we can get to the reality of the matter—an artist's conception! No wonder there will be conflicting views on where to locate the Assyrian camp besieging Hezekiah's Jerusalem



We can, however, work on something more than artistic conjecture based on historical texts. We have one pristine siege wall in Israel. It is not buried by an inhabited city. Its stones were not reused on subsequent building projects. There is no weathering to wear down and crumble away the stones. Masada shows us what the Romans could do and regularly did in terms of siege warfare. From the archaeological map below we can accurately see where the Romans did build their siege walls and where their camps were.



Three hundred yards was about the closest the Roman walls approach to the citadel at Masada in a much more challenging landscape. Large camps were positioned on either side of the site, the one commanding the point where the walls would be stormed, the other supplying the force to back up the guard towers to prevent escape along the opposite walls. Since the grunt work technology of building siege walls hadn't changed much in 800 years, it is not risky to postulate a similar Assyrian siege dike being built as closely to Jerusalem's walls as possible, with the main force gathered at what would be the point of attack, west of the city from the high ground. From there a siege ramp similar to the one shown in the Assyrian account of the siege of Lachish would have the smallest elevation to conquer, just as the Roman ramp, built on a rocky spur, at Masada had the smallest vertical elevation to overcome.

With the coming of the dawn it became evident to the watchmen on Jerusalem's walls that the Assyrian camp was filled with the dead. While not easy, it would seem to be possible to roll the looted bodies down the hillside into the Valley of Hinnom. Thankfully the Valley of Hinnom emptied into the Kidron Valley below Jerusalem's only reliable source of water, the Gihon Spring, preventing the spread of water-borne disease.

The other surmise would be to place the majority of the Assyrian camp on the exact opposite side of Jerusalem, in the Kidron Valley itself, near the Gihon Springs. This would not be an advantageous site for a final attack on the city, but such an attack would perhaps be two to three years off if Jerusalem was anything like Samaria. This is where the field commander has his parlay with Hezekiah's officials, "at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field (Isaiah 36.2)." This was the very place where the younger prophet Isaiah had challenged unbelieving Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign, "at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field (Isaiah 7.3)." Evidently Ahaz had also noticed the glaring weak spot in Jerusalem's defense if the city were placed under siege. Its water supply was exposed. If this were the site of the Assyrian camp, it would be even more urgent to move the dead bodies to a different location to avoid polluting Jerusalem's water supply.



<http://biblelight.net/siloam-map.jpg>



In either case, who would bury the dead? Who would prevent 185,000 corpses from polluting the land? Not Sennacherib and his army. They had beaten a hasty retreat. It was left to the citizens of Jerusalem, the malnourished remnant who previously couldn't even provide 2000 horsemen to answer the Assyrian field commander's taunts. Burial would be out of the question. It would take too long. They could only burn the Assyrian dead and even then, short-handed Jerusalem had difficulties. By the time they got to many of the corpses, the Assyrian dead were already teeming with maggots. In their haste to pile up as many of the dead as possible, fires were smothered, leaving smoldering flesh, like someone who foolishly tries to stoke a fireplace's dying flames with so much paper it only smothers the flickering flames.

Seen this way, the assertion of Joachim Jeremias (1964 [1993]: I.658) must be impossible. Gehenna did not come to be known as a place of torment because of the curses issued by Jeremiah over child sacrifice practiced there (Jeremiah 7.32 and 19.6).

*The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of 'Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem for the land will become desolate."*

Jeremiah 7.30-34

A closer look at the Jeremiah passages (which are almost identical) indicates much more is at play than sacrifice of children. It will be the Valley of Slaughter where Jerusalem has fallen by the sword and their bodies are eaten by the birds of the air. Instead of the Assyrian dead, maggot-ridden and smoldering, it will be Jerusalem's hardened sinners exposed in their death. History will repeat itself. The Valley of Ben Hinnom again will be littered with corpses. But this time, it will be the dead of Jerusalem. Jeremias' citation of Isaiah 31.9, "whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem," is too vague to read the Valley of Hinnom into it and his reference to Isaiah 66.24 is a bit of circular logic.

Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, is not a picture of hell because of the child sacrifices. Nor is it a picture of hell because, as August Pieper expresses, "Since very ancient times, filth and carcasses were burned in this valley in fires that were kept constantly burning, and hence the valley was a place of abhorrence for all Jerusalemites (Pieper, 1919 [1979]: 705)." Perhaps only in the late Iron Age II (after Hezekiah) and

in the Persian period, was the Valley of Hinnom used as a garbage pit (Reich, 2003: 17). It is a picture of hell because of the difficult mass cremation of the Assyrian dead. “The later Jewish belief of punishment after death in a location called Gehinnom developed out of this verse (Berlin and Breitler, 2004: 916).” Our conception of hell, quoted by Jesus as the horrifying picture of hell, Mark 9.48, finds its first expression of a place of active and eternal torment and suffering in the historical reality of Jerusalem badly disposing of the Assyrian dead. Without this historical event, we would not have this picture of hell.

## The Historical Roots of Doctrine

Christian doctrine is not something that arose out of the mind of theologians or dogmaticians. It is not the product of deep thinkers or innovators working on a blank page. It is the result of God working his plan of salvation through the history of the world. Isn't this one of Isaiah's main points?

*“Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My idols did them, my wooden image and metal god ordained them.’”*

Isaiah 48.5

*“I am the Lord who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers.”*

Isaiah 44.25-26

Isn't this what we maintain against a Neo-orthodoxy which demands another higher, spiritual reality where the words of God are true and relevant, because they are not rooted in the relevancy and truth of this reality? The atonement is rooted in the blood of Jesus which dropped from the cross on that horrible Friday. The bodily resurrection is not rooted in some discourse where a school of philosophers logically conclude that because the soul which houses the personality lives on, that personality and the body which sustains it must also live on. The bodily resurrection rests on the bed rock reality of Jesus rising from the dead on the third day and being seen alive, body and soul alive, by multiple witnesses at multiple times. Indeed, the whole New Testament is rooted in the history of God's saving plan. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life (1 John 1.1).” While it is outside the scope of this paper (and the patience of this audience), there is not one passage in the epistles that isn't rooted in, reflecting or applying the historical words and deeds of Jesus Christ.

If the teachings of the New Testament are so rooted in history, how can we ignore the enduring values the historical events of the Old Testament have in the formation of our teachings? The account of Cain's murdering Abel was not devised to prop up the Fifth Commandment. The Fifth Commandment flowed out of Cain's murder of Abel. The Tower of Babel does not explain the multiplicity of languages in the world, it causes them. Our doctrine of hell flows out of the ending of Isaiah's prophecy as the prism of the Broken Siege finds its final expression. "What do these stones mean?" "Why is this night special?" These are the outcomes of historical precedents. These are the teachings of God's will as he expressed them through that history.

Even in small details we have this pattern. David and his men were called by Achish for the final confrontation with Saul at Mount Gilboa. Before Achish dismissed them from duty, raiders hit Ziklag and carried off the women and children. As they are tracking the raiders, some of David's men are exhausted and cannot continue. The remaining 600 fight a fierce battle, dusk to evening, and reclaim everything, but do not want to share it. "The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this (1 Samuel 30:24-25). Zelophahad's daughters, the only heirs of their father, establish "a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the Lord commanded Moses (Numbers 27:11)," that they might possess their father's inherited share of the land. The statute stood.

We believe what we do because our God has acted in the history of our world and we have responded to it. Far from being an evolution of religious thought and development of philosophy, we believe because our God has acted and has also revealed his intentions behind those actions. There is no need to find a place for a contemplative Isaiah in Neo-Babylonian or Persian Mesopotamia or Palestine who weaves a history to explain the miraculous survival of his race. Like Noah's first dove, Isaiah has no place to rest his foot there. And he has no need to find a place there. He stands firmly in eighth century Judah, describing, interpreting and predicting events as the Holy Spirit gave him words.

When viewed this way, perhaps some of the most thorny dogmatic issues may find, if not a resolution, than at least a softer tone. *Cur alii, non alii* jumps to mind when we consider the "discomforting" ending of Isaiah. Look at the Broken Siege. See the little flock of God safe behind Zion's walls. Cast your eyes on the maggot-ridden, smoldering corpses of the Assyrian host which just days before had been looking forward to unbridled rampage, rape, plunder and destruction. Why some, not others? Were the inhabitants of Jerusalem deserving of the Lord's favor? Hezekiah's prayer in the Temple shows none of that. "Deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God

(Isaiah 37.20).” They were saved because of the Lord’s promises made to David, “for my sake and for the sake of David my servant (37.35).” But saved they were. Because of their wickedness and evil the Assyrians were not saved. The ending of Isaiah is not discomfoting at all. It is the final triumph of God over his enemies, a sort of Old Testament descent into hell assuring a tremendous victory has taken place. Rather than being ashamed of it or, as the Jews do, reduplicating Isaiah 66.22 after verse 24 so Isaiah ends on a positive note, we rejoice in it. Those who sought our destruction are themselves destroyed! Those who would overthrow our God are themselves overthrown. The deliverance of God’s people equates with deliverance from the enemies of God’s people. God laughs on Zion’s hill and on Judgment Day we will echo his scornful ridicule over the wicked. *Cur alii, non alii?* Because some insist on losing.

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