

The prophet Isaiah ben Amoz 740-700BC

Isaiah scroll 1-39

04. Introduction and Isaiah 1-4

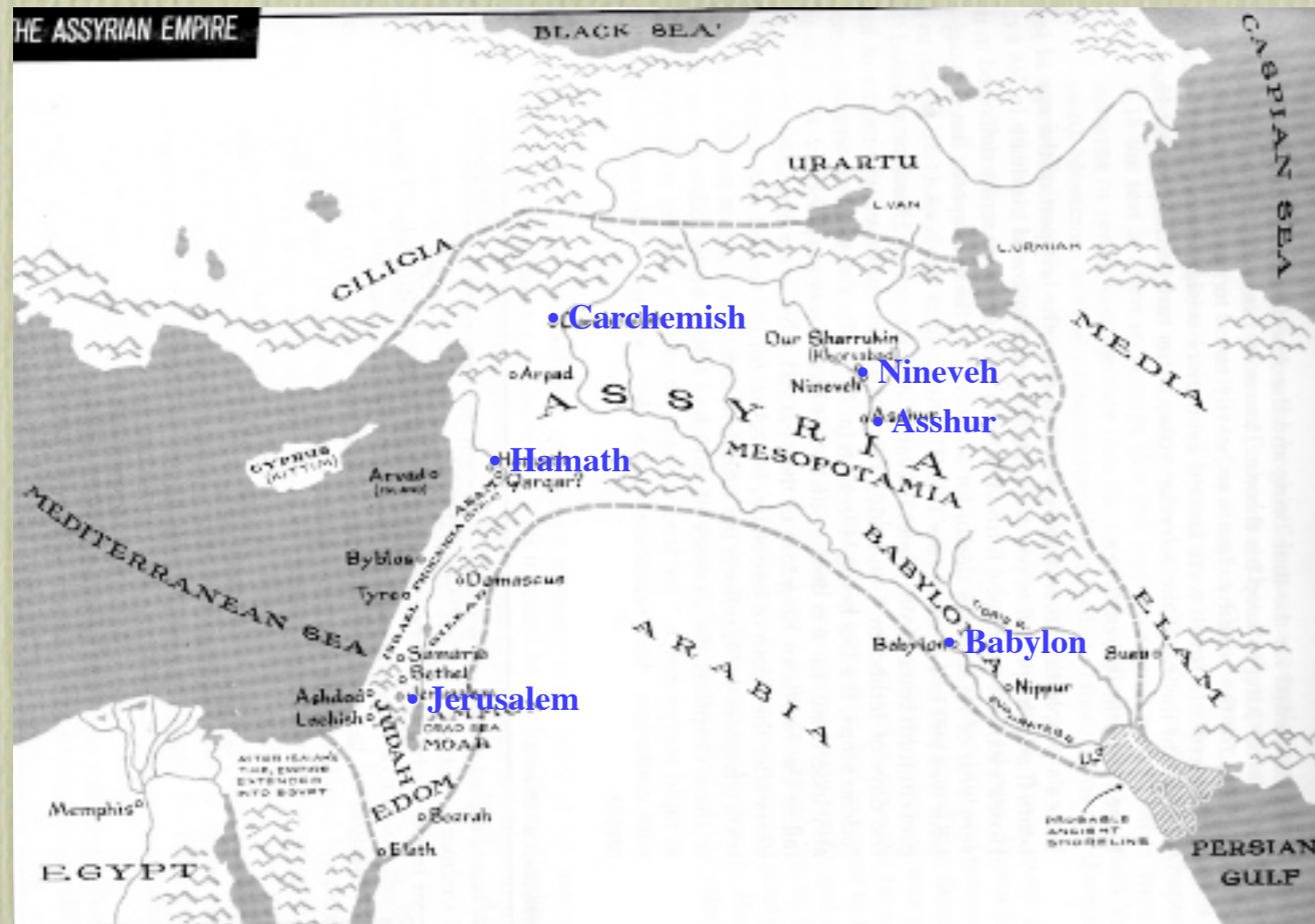


o4. The prophet Isaiah

References to the prophet Isaiah are found only in the first 39 chapters of the Isaiah scroll. Some of the material in these chapters come from Isaiah. Other parts were added, some as much as 500 years later, to 'update' the oracles of Isaiah, and apply them to later situations. Joseph Blenkinsopp, in his commentary on Isaiah speaks of 'an Isaian tradition carried forward by means of a cumulative process of reinterpretation and reapplication' (page 74).

He goes on to say: 'The Book has undergone successive restructuring and rearrangements in the course of a long editorial history' (page 83).

Isaiah's ministry (740-700BC) coincided with the westward expansion of the Assyrian Empire.



Hezekiah (727/715 - 699BC).

It was during the reign of Hezekiah in Judah (727-699BC), but before he was old enough to rule in his own right (715BC), that the Assyrian army captured Samaria (721BC). Refugees from the northern kingdom (Israel) poured into Jerusalem, which had to expand to the western hill.

‘The city’s population may have increased as much as fifteen times, from about one thousand to fifteen thousand inhabitants.’

(F&S page 243).

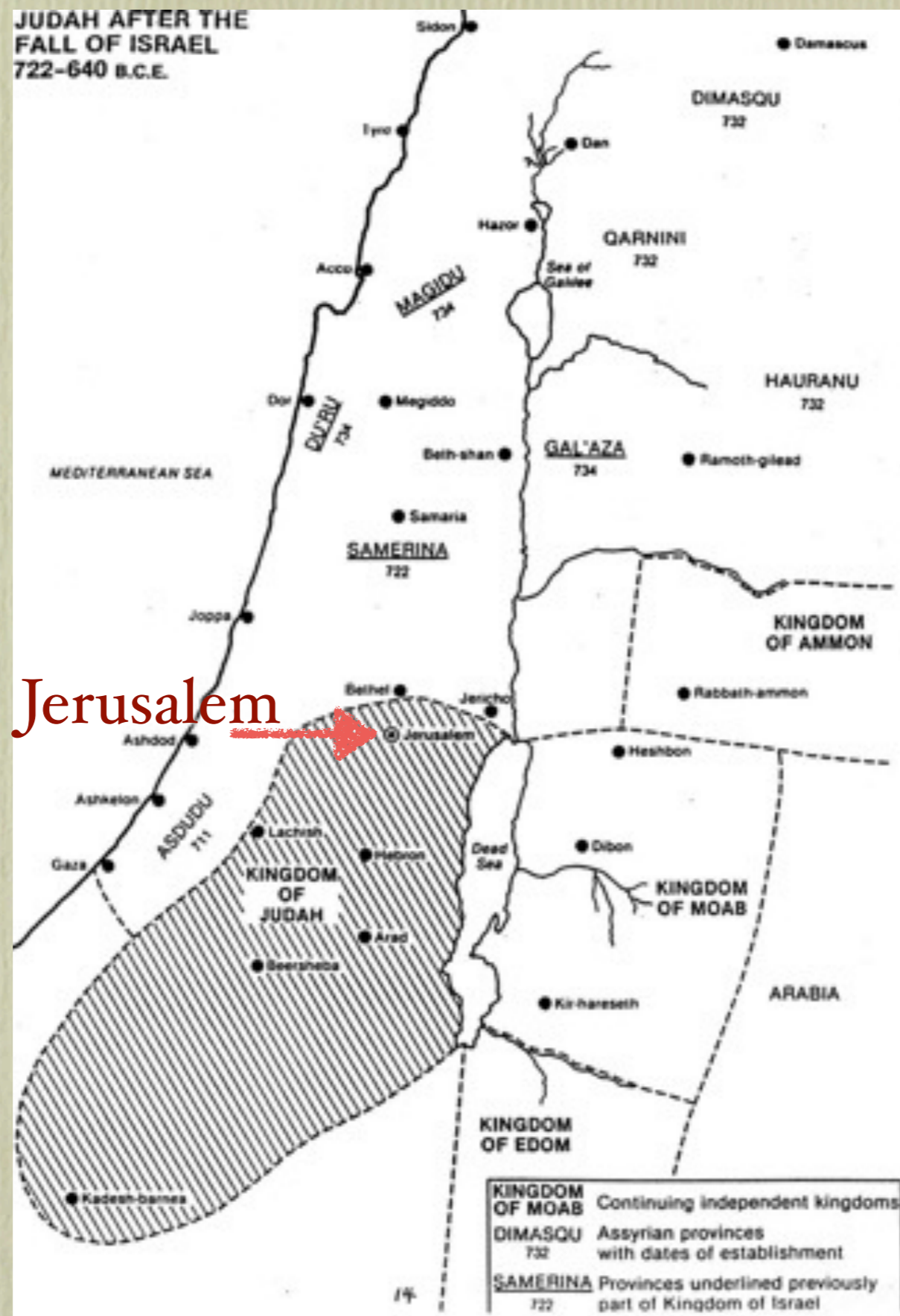
‘The population of Judah, which had long hovered at a few tens of thousands, now grew to around 120,000’(F&S page 245).

Hezekiah strengthened the fortifications and built an underground tunnel to bring water into the city from the Gihon spring located in the Kidron valley outside the city walls.

He cleansed and re-dedicated the temple. He began to remove pagan sanctuaries from the land and regularise the cult.



JUDAH AFTER THE FALL OF ISRAEL 722-640 B.C.E.



Jerusalem

It was during the reign of King Hezekiah that the Assyrian army put down a revolt by the Philistine city-state of Ashdod (713-711). Sennacherib succeeded Sargon II in 705. The death of Sargon led to revolts in every section of the Assyrian Empire. Hezekiah seems to have played a significant role in organising rebellion in Palestine. The prophet Isaiah ben Amoz was active in attempting to deter him from a policy which he saw as a failure to trust in YHWH. Hezekiah went ahead and Judah was devastated by the Assyrian army in 701.

Jerusalem itself survived intact, but had to pay a crippling tribute to Assyria

Sennacherib claims to have destroyed 46 fortified strongholds and to have driven 200,000 from their cities.

He besieged Jerusalem in 701 (2Kings 18:13 - 19:37 2Chronicles 32:1-23).

The siege was lifted when Hezekiah surrendered at the fall of Lachish and agreed to pay a huge tribute (2Kings 18:14-16). The Assyrian army withdrew to put down a revolt back in Assyria (2Kings 19:7).

Isaiah 1:1 : Editorial introduction to the Isaiah scroll

‘The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.’

Isaiah יהוה ישע

compare Joshua יהוה ישע

Yahweh Salvation

Salvation Yahweh

Isaiah chapter one stands alone. It is recitative, rhetorical prose that at times merits to be termed poetry. It functions as a summary of Isaiah's key themes and some verses may be oracles spoken at the time of Sennacherib's devastation of Judah in 701BC, which the prophet blames on the failure of justice, especially on the part of the leadership. Isaiah is particularly scathing of injustice that tries to hide behind conventional religious practice. He judges that the terrible devastation of Judah is the consequence of the failure of social justice

‘Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for YHWH is speaking:

Heaven and earth have witnessed the whole of history. They are in the best position to witness Israel’s extraordinary obtuseness, which involves, as we will see, looking to false gods, entering foolishly into political alliances that involve them in religious compromise, and rejecting God’s word mediated to them through the prophet.

I reared children and brought them up,

but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its owner,

and the donkey its master’s crib;

but Israel does not know,

my people do not understand.

‘You forgot the God who gave you birth’(Deuteronomy 32:18)

knowing that comes from intimate experience

Hosea 11:1-4

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.

I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

Isaiah 1:4-9 In 701 Sennacherib devastated Judah

Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil,
children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the Lord,
who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged!

Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel?

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it, but bruises, sores and bleeding wounds;
they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil.

Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire;

in your very presence aliens devour your land;

it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.

And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard,
like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors,
we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

Isaiah 1:11-14 : God is tired of their cult

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says YHWH;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the suet of fattened beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Isaiah 1:15-17 : YHWH wants justice

When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; **Matthew 6:7**
your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes.

Cease to do evil, learn to do good;
seek justice, rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites.
You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin,
and have neglected the weightier things of the law:
right judgment, mercy and fidelity’(Matthew 23:23).

Isaiah 1:18-20 : Repentance & Forgiveness

‘Come now, let us argue it out, says YHWH:
though your sins are like scarlet, they could be like snow;
though they are red like crimson, they could become like wool.

Or

‘If your sins are like scarlet, do you think they will be like snow?
If they are red like crimson, do you think they be like wool?’

Isaiah continues his critique for the rest of chapter one (1:21-31).

In verse 27 he declares:

Zion shall be redeemed by justice,
and those in her who repent, by righteousness.

Isaiah 2:1

The word Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

This appears to be a heading for Isaiah 2-12, before chapter one was included

The central core of 2:5 – 4:1 threatens judgment. It is introduced (2:2-4) by words that appear to be composed after the judgment has come (after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, and the exile), and in circumstances (the return to Judah) that open up a new perspective on the future. It concludes (4:2-6) in a similar way. The post-exilic editors have thus bracketed Isaiah's words in such a way as to challenge their contemporaries to learn from the mistakes of the past, but also to take up the mission to the world that YHWH has given them by bringing them back to Judah and rebuilding the temple.

Isaiah 2:2-4 (also found in Micah 4:1-3)

In days to come the mountain of YHWH's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction [torah],
and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:5 - 4:1

From Isaiah's early period of ministry, during the regency of Jotham, prior to Uzziah's death in 734 (see 6:1)

The contrast between the passage we have just read and the rest of chapter two could not be more striking. We have heard that the mountain of YHWH's house will be exalted; we are told that the mountains of human arrogance will be brought down. We have heard that the nations will flow to YHWH's mountain to learn of God and to walk in God's ways; we are told that Jerusalem is full of foreigners and soothsayers who worship their own inventions. We have heard that the nations will reject weapons of violence; we are told that the rulers of Jerusalem are pursuing trade in horses and chariots. We have heard that peace and harmony will be the result of YHWH's reign; we are told of the terror, fear and humiliation that is rife in Judah.

Isaiah 2:5-9

Exhortation 1: O house of Jacob, come, let us walk into YHWH's light!
For you have forsaken your people, O house of Jacob [king + leaders].

Description 1: Indeed they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they clasp hands with foreigners. Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. And so people are humbled, and everyone is brought low.

Prosperity has brought in its train the worship of idols. Instead of fidelity to the covenant, with its demands of care for one's neighbour, self-interest has the rich 'bowing down to the work of their own hands', with the consequence that 'everyone is brought low'.

Isaiah 2:10-17

Exhortation 2: Do not raise your eyes to them! Go to the Rock, and stay hidden in the dust in terror of YHWH, and of the glory of his majesty.

Judgment: *The haughtiness of people will be humbled,
and the pride of everyone will be brought low;
and YHWH alone will be exalted on that day.*

For YHWH of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft.

*The haughtiness of people will be humbled,
and the pride of everyone will be brought low;
and YHWH alone will be exalted on that day.*

Isaiah 2:18-22

The idols shall utterly pass away. They will go into the caves in the rocks and into holes in the earth, *in terror of YHWH, and of the glory of his majesty, when he rises to cause the earth to quake.*

On that day people will throw away to the moles and to the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship. They will go into the caves in the rocks and into holes in the earth, *in terror of YHWH, and of the glory of his majesty, when he rises to cause the earth to quake.*

Exhortation 3: Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for what is it worth?

Description 2: Deportation and Consequent Anarchy (3:1-9)

For now the Sovereign, YHWH of hosts, is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and staff, warrior and soldier, judge and prophet, diviner and elder, captain of fifty and dignitary, counsellor and skilful magician and expert enchanter. And I will make boys their princes, and babes shall rule over them. The people will be oppressed, one by another and everyone by a neighbour. the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the base to the honourable. Someone will even seize a relative, a member of the clan, saying, “You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule.” But the other will cry out on that day, saying, “I will not be a healer; in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you shall not make me leader of the people.” For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against YHWH, defying his glorious presence. The look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.

Exhortation 4 (3:10-11)

Say: How good things are for the just for he will feed on the fruit of his deeds; woe to the unjust, it will go ill with him, for he will be treated as his actions deserve.

Third description : The powerful exploit the poor (Isaiah 3:12-15)

O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths. YHWH rises to argue his case; he stands to judge the peoples. YHWH enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord YHWH of hosts.

[In the following judgment the 'daughters' are the rebellious towns of Judah?]

Judgment (3:16 – 4:1): YHWH said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet; the Lord will afflict with scabs the heads of the daughters of Zion, and YHWH will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; 21the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils.

Judgment (3:16 – 4:1): Instead of perfume there will be a stench; and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame. Your men will fall by the sword and your warriors in battle. And her gates shall lament and mourn; ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground. Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, “We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace.”

- Oracle of Salvation (Isaiah 4:2-6)

Like 2:1-4, this is written from a post-exilic perspective. Isaiah's dire warnings went unheeded. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586BC and its leading citizens were deported to Babylon. With Babylon's capitulation to Cyrus of Persia, a remnant returned to Judah to rebuild the city and the temple. The worst is over. The shadow of the past hangs over them, and its lessons must not be forgotten, but YHWH's fidelity to his people has opened up for them a new future. Because of the obvious political weakness of Judah, now part of the western province of the vast Persian Empire, those who wanted to inspire hope for a glorious future looked towards YHWH's intervention, the way they understood him to have intervened to 'miraculously' restore them to Judah against all the odds.

Aramaic translates 'messiah'

On that day the shoot that YHWH has planted shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then Yahweh will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed over all the glory there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.