

Equally important is the comparison with the usual attitude of prophecy elsewhere. Normally a prophet begins with things around him, and then goes on to discuss more distant horizons. The prophet first looks at the immediate situation. He begins with a reference to the sin of his people, and looks ahead to its inevitable punishment. Then he may look into the more distant future and see the blessing that God will ultimately bestow. In instance after instance we can notice this procedure on the part of Isaiah himself. It is natural to expect a similar arrangement here, unless we find strong evidence to the contrary.

There is really only one obstacle to this interpretation of our section. That is the use of "world" in verse 4: "the world languisheth and fadeth away." The word here rendered as "world" is one that occurs less often. It is used only thirty-six times in the Old Testament, and in thirty-five of them the King James Version translates it "world." In one instance (Prov. 8:31), it is rendered "habitable part." It seems to have the same difference from the other word that our word "world" has from our word "earth." Its stress is on the organized life of man, rather than on the universal area of the globe. When we speak of something as "worldly" we are apt to think of sophistication, rather than of universality. So it is not at all unreasonable to take the statement, "the world languisheth and fadeth away" as showing the decline of the highly sophisticated life of Judah, rather than as necessarily indicating a world-wide cataclysm.

A Survey of Verses 1-13a

Having thus established the general import of the passage, let us survey it in order. Isaiah has repeatedly affirmed that God will ultimately punish Judah for its sin. He now views the disaster as already present. Verse 1 pictures the land as emptied of the bulk of its inhabitants. Many have died in war. Still larger numbers are "scattered abroad," some by being carried off into exile (cf. Jer. 39:9), others by flight into Egypt and elsewhere (cf. Jer. 43:5ff.).

Verse 2 shows the leveling of the people as a result of the disaster. Social, ecclesiastical or financial distinction is no protection against this calamity. Where the King James