

Isa 1-2(2)

historical background. Isaiah wrote principally during the reigns of three kings. In the beginning of the book he speaks of his visions in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. For practical purposes we may disregard Uzziah and Jotham. They do not play any great part in the book. On the other hand, it is probable that he wrote a substantial portion of the book during the reign of Manasseh, who followed Hezekiah.

Thus a large portion of the book was written in the reign of Ahaz, a wicked king who had little use for Isaiah and denied him access to the palace. Another portion was written in the days of Hezekiah, the good king who tried to follow God with his whole heart and was always glad to hear the Word of the Lord from Isaiah. Finally, we have the latter portion, which was probably written in the days of Manasseh, a king who was far more wicked than even his grandfather Ahaz. He persecuted the followers of God and introduced all sorts of abominations, even bringing idolatry into the very precincts of the temple itself. According to a Jewish tradition, Isaiah was pursued by the men of Manasseh. Fleeing from them into the woods, he hid himself within a hollow tree. This tree is said then to have been sawed through by the pursuers so that the body of the prophet was cut in two (cf. Heb. 11: 37). This is, of course, only a tradition, and we cannot be sure that Isaiah was one of those who suffered this way, but it shows how the later Jews regarded the days of Manasseh.

It is important to realize the general situation in Jerusalem during the reigns of these three kings. When Ahaz became king, Judah was in much the same situation as during the previous two centuries. Its neighbor Israel to the north was made up of ten of the tribes, and was perhaps three times as large as Judah. North and east of Israel was the kingdom of Syria, with its