LITTLE PRINCE PELE-JOEZ

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The problem

Chapters vi-viii of the Book of Isaiah—except for minor interpolations—are by a pre-exilic author who is doubtless the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, mentioned in the Books of Kings and Chronicles. Chapter viii in particular contains threats against Damascus and Samaria, which were about to be captured by the Assyrians. The poem from Is. ix 8 (Hebrew 7) to x 4 refers to the same nations and may be attributed to the same Prophet. Between these two sections a short passage is inserted (Is. ix 1-7) with an entirely different tone, subject, and political situation. It celebrates the liberation of the people from the rod of an oppressor and the birth of a little prince who seems destined to sit upon the throne of David. When was this passage written? And who was this prince?

The date of Isaiah ix 1—7

1. The mention of the throne of David proves that our Prophet is thinking of Judea, not of Samaria. Now Judea was twice under the rod of an oppressor; she was under the Babylonians, from whom she was liberated by Cyrus, and she was under Antiochus Epiphanes, from whom she was liberated by Judas Maccabeus. But in the days of

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1) In numbering the chapters and verses I follow the English version.
2) These passages contain proper names of eighth-century persons. Moreover, the city of Samaria was inhabited by Macedonians, not by Israelites, in the Hellenistic period (Eusebius, Chron. II, 112). In the Babylonian and Persian periods it had been inhabited by various oriental peoples (Ezra iv 9-10).
Cyrus the Davidic pretenders, recognized by the legitimists, were Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, two elderly men. We do not see why the Davidic party should pin their hopes on a new-born baby. We are left with the Maccabean period.

Now I shall set forth a few observations which may—in part at least—support this dating. In any case, they do not disprove it.

2. As Blank remarks 1), the real Isaiah was gloomy and unpleasant. The joyous parts of his book were composed by later prophets.

3. The term goy has several acceptations. Originally any nation, including Israel, could be called a goy (Gen. xii 2, xlvi 3; Ps. xxxiii 12; Is. xxvi 2, etc.) In some O.T. passages the goyim are the “foreign nations” only (Lev. xxvi 33, Ps. lx 5, cv 44, cvi 47, cxxxv 15; Jer. x 2, xiv 22; Lam. ii 9; Ezek. vii 24, xxxii 30). In other passages the goyim are “foreign individuals”, “Gentiles” (Lev. xxvi 45; Neh. v 8; Ps. ix 5, 15, 20; x 16, lx 5, lxxix 1; Is. xxxiv 2, lxiv 2; Jer. xvi 19; Lam. i 10 2). The second meaning does not occur before the sixth century, the third before the fifth. Therefore Isaiah ix 1 (Hebrew viii 23), which mentions the “district of the Gentiles”, can hardly be by an eighth-century prophet.

4. The “land of the shadow of death” (Is. ix 2) or “the land of deep gloom”, as others translate 3), was unknown to the Hebrew geography of the pre-exilic period. It reminds us of the land of the Cimmerians, enwrapped in perpetual darkness, of Erebus, Tartarus, Hades, and the abode of Irkalla and prompts us to conjecture a Greek or Babylonian origin of the phrase. This verse can hardly be by the real Isaiah.

5. Actually this phrase is an abbreviation of “the land of darkness and of the shadow of death” in Job x 21 or of “the land of drought and of the shadow of death” in Jeremiah ii 6, and obviously is later than its source. But the word salmāwet in Jeremiah is probably an interpolation, as it does not suit the context very well and is missing in the Septuagint. So we are free to attribute the introduction of this phrase to the poet of Job, that great scholar who wrote about 200 B.C. and introduced into the Hebrew language dozens of Greek

2) Is. xxxiv extols the campaign against Edom of 163 (Kennett, p. 68). Jer. xvi 19 predicts the universal conversion of the Gentiles. Lam. i imitates Greek epigrams. The Psalms cited belong to the second century.