THE SO-CALLED ISAIAH- "DENKSCHRIFT" (6:1-9:6):

AN EXEGETICAL - HISTORICAL STUDY

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Bible Interpretation at Stellenbosch University
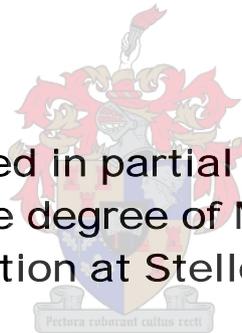
Prof. Paul Kruger

March 2007

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: _____

L. Esterhuizen

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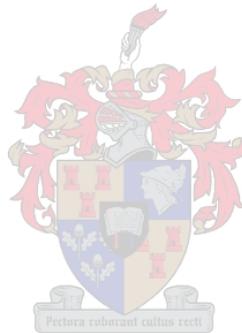
ABSTRACT

The so-called Isaiah *Denkschrift* (Isa 6:1-9:6) is seen by many scholars as the personal memoirs of the prophet during the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic war. The aim of this study is to investigate the related issues in this periscope within the framework of the *Denkschrift.* The aim of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East and to study how this phenomenon manifests in Isa 6:1-9:6. This study examines the biblical and non- biblical literature relating to this phenomenon with the objective to gain an understanding of the text and the world behind the text. The exegetical process of the study also studied the historical background as it is found in the *Denkchrift* (Isa 6:1-9:6). The literature investigation of the study focuses on prophecy as it is found in the Hebrew Bible as well as in cross-cultural settings such as the West Semitic, Old Babylonian, Neo- Assyrian and Egypt cultures. It is eminent that in the Ancient Near East prophecy in the different cultures shows parallels and differences in the manifestation thereof.

Within the corpus of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East, the study analyses the calling of Isaiah to become a prophet to the people of Judah. Isaiah 6 reports the prophet's vision of the heavenly divine council, his purification and the commission to prevent the repentance of the people and the resolve of Yahweh to punish them. Another unit within the *Denkschrift* addresses the symbolic action behind the naming of Isaiah's children within the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis. Chapters 7:3 and 8:1-4 records the circumstances surrounding the symbolism as part of Isaiah's prophecy when he prophecy to king Ahaz. The interlinking relationship between Isaiah and king Ahaz is visible in the *Denkschrift* as an issue in the understanding of Isaiah's prophecy and speeches. Chapter 7, 8 and 9 records the tension in the relationship and the study explores the significance thereof in the pending crisis. The literature study shows that this relationship can be interpreted in different ways and the aim is to compare these literary findings. The investigation of Isaiah 6:1-9:6 construe a prophetic message of disaster, judgement and doom but similarly also presents a message of promises, hope and future expectations. This message is still a message needed in a modern world today.

S A M E V A T T I N G

Die sogenaamde Jesaja *Denkschrift* (Isa 6:1-9:6) word deur baie geleerdes gesien as die persoonlike memoirs van die profeet gedurende die tyd van die Syro-Ephraimitiese oorlog. Die doel van hierdie studie is om die verwante geskilpunte in hierdie navorsing binne die raamwerk van die *Denkschrift*, te ondersoek. Die doel van hierdie navorsing is voorts om die verskynsel van die godsprake in die Ou Nabye Ooste te ondersoek en om te leer hoe hierdie verskynsels in Isa 6:1-9:6 ge-openbaar word. Hierdie studie ondersoek die bybelse en nie-bybelse literatuur wat betrekking het tot die verskynsel met die doel om die teks en die wêreld agter die teks te verstaan. Die verklarende proses van die studie bestudeer ook die historiese agtergrond soos dit gevind is in die *Denkschrift* (Isa 6:1-9:6). Die ondersoek ten opsigte van die literatuur van die studie fokus op godsprake soos dit in die Hebreeuse Bybel gevind word sowel as in kruis-kulturele raamwerke soos die Westerse Semitiese, Ou Babiloniese, Nuwe Assiriese en Egiptiese kulture. Dit is duidelik dat in die Ou Nabye Ooste profesieë daarop wys dat daar ooreenkomste en verskille in die uitleg daarvan bestaan.

Binne die korpus van die verskynsel van profesieë in die Ou Nabye Ooste, analiseer die studie die roeping van Jesaja om 'n profeet van die mense van Judah te word. Jesaja 6 rapporteer die profeet se visie van die goddelike raad, sy reiniging en die opdrag om die bekering van die mense te verhoed sowel as die besluit van Yahweh om hulle te straf. 'n Ander eenheid binne die *Denkschrift* spreek die simboliese aksie agter die benaming van Jesaja se kinders binne die Siro-Ephraimitiese krisis. Hoofstukke 7:3 en 8:1-4 bevat die omstandighede rondom die simbolisme as deel van Jesaja se profesieë wanneer hy aan Koning Ahaz sy profesieë deurgee. Die onderlinge verhouding tussen Jesaja en koning Ahaz is duidelik in die *Denkschrift* as 'n uiteensetting van die begrip van Jesajah se profesieë en redevoerings. Hoofstukke 7, 8 en 9 maak melding van die spanning in die verhouding tussen die profeet en die koning. Die studie ondersoek die belangrikheid van hierdie verhouding met die oog op die hangende krisis. Die literatuurstudie openbaar dat hierdie verwantskap in verskillende maniere geinterpreteer kan word en die doel is om hierdie literêre bevindings met mekaar te vergelyk. Die ondersoeke van Jesaja 6:1-9:6 bring die profetiese boodskap van ramp, oordeel en verdoemenis maar tegelykertyd bied dit 'n

boodskap van beloftes, hoop en toekomstige verwagtinge.   Hierdie boodskap is 'n
boodskap wat in die moderne wêreld vandag benodig word.
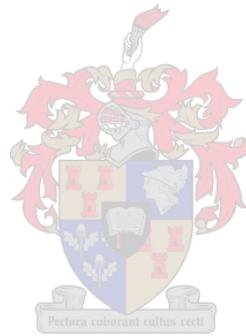
Dedication

To my Heavenly Father, my Creator, who saved me when I needed Him the most.
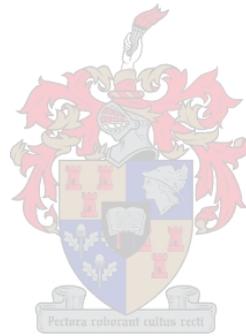
Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The broad interpretation of Isaiah 6 v.1- 9 v.6, or part thereof, as the prophet's personal memoirs from the period of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis derives largely from Budde in his work of 1928 *Eine gemeinverständliche Auslegung der Denkschrift des Propheten.* The *Denkschrift* in its original form portrayed Isaiah's rejection, first predicted in the call vision (Isa 6:1-11), and concluded with repeated announcements of disaster against Ahaz and Judah (Isa 7 and 8).

1.1 **Research Topic:**

It is clear that behind the Isaiah *Denkschrift* (6:1-9:6) stands one of the greatest figures of the religious and political stories of ancient history. This study is aimed at giving an exegesis-historical analysis of the nature of prophecy in the Ancient Near East and as it is depicted in Isa 6:1-9:6

The aim of this study is to focus on the nature of prophecy as a phenomenon in the Ancient Near East and to study how this phenomenon manifests in the unit of Isa 6:1-9:6. Isaiah's calling as a prophet and the role that it played in ancient times will be assessed within the framework of religion and the politics of the time. The need for prophecy in a modern world will also be studied to determine if that need still exists today.

1.2 The Rationale:

The rationale for the study is based on hypotheses regarding the so-called Isaiah *Denkschrift.* And the aim of the study would be to test the hypotheses with the use of comparative literature. The hypotheses are two directional, two factor hypotheses. De Vos (2001:119) writes that there is a relationship between the two variables, and that the direction can be in any of the possible directions. This study will focus on Isaiah's prophecy in the *Denkschrift*, and it will also

indicate the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East. This dualism in direction will take into account the historical, political and religious aspects.

The following aspects will be investigated in the study:

- The phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East and the influence this has on the politics and religion of a given in the community
- Isaiah's calling was a calling to prophecy
- The so-called Isaiah- *Denkschrift*
- The symbolic conduct of Isaiah in the naming of his children
- The influence of the Syro-Ephraimite war and the relationship between prophet and the king
- The need for prophecy in a modern world and its relevance in modern society

The hypotheses and synthesis of the study aim to determine what the evidence of literature studies, and textual and secondary data, conveys about the so-called Isaiah- *Denkschrift.* The hypotheses will serve as subject matters for the various chapters of the thesis as part of the investigating process.
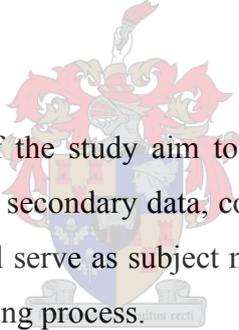
CHAPTER 2

THE PHENOMENON OF PROPHECY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

2.1   Introduction

"A rose is a rose is a rose", the most widely cited line of the American writer Gertrude Stein, suggests that all roses are the same. When the focus is shifted from flowers to people, in particular to the religious roles of various individuals, all people cannot naturally be grouped together by saying that "a prophet is a prophet is a prophet". The prophets of the Ancient Near East shared much commonality but contributed in different ways to the religious and political lives of their own communities.

The thorn in this analogy is the terminology that should be used to define a prophet. Bailey (1987:2) cites that the biblical literature uses several terms, but their meaning and relationship are difficult to ascertain. Wood (2003:16) agrees with this observation by mentioning that there are three terms which are especially important for designating prophets. The most important is *nābhî',* usually translated as "prophet". He states that this term is used nearly three hundred times in the Hebrew Bible in its noun form alone. The other two terms, namely *ro'eh* and *chozeh,* are used less frequently and are translated as "seer". Both these terms mean "to see". Kruger (1994:325) also emphasises the fact that the "prophet" is derived from a Greek word *prophētes* which is the customary translation of *nābhî'* in the Septuagint (Bailey 1987: 23). It is noteworthy that there is a fourth term, namely, *man of God*, usually used in the book of Kings for these types of figures. This term is the least used of all the terminology and Wood (2003:17) postulates "it is the phrase 'man of God'" which simply refers to the prophet as one who had been chosen and sent by God.

 Blenkinsopp (2000:124) contributes to the list of terminology related to the phenomenon of prophecy when he refers to the Deuternomistic scribes' list of eight types of classification in Deuteronomy, 18:10-11. This list includes "practitioner of divination", "soothsayer", "auger", "sorcerer", and "caster of spells", "one who consults ghosts", "medium" and "one who consults the dead". It is further postulated by Blenkinsopp (2000:125) that, according to the Deuteronomists, the prophet is

elevated from a rather peripheral location in society to the status of spokesman for a central morality religion. One also gathers from Carroll (1989:202) that prophecy may be seen as a social phenomenon, confirming the role of the prophet as spokesman of a given social group. The vagueness of the term "prophecy" and the inability to form a definition contribute to the clear comprehension of the phenomenon of prophecy. Kruger (1994:326) also describes the vagueness: "Should one turn to the Old Testament corpus as such, then it seems that the term prophet has various contents, dependant upon the period and sphere of allotment".

The question that could therefore be asked is "how these differences in terminology should be explained?" There is a definitive religion overlap in usage that could point to the fact that the identification of a person as a prophet depends on certain particular religious characteristics rather than just a general description in the text. Grabbe (1995:83) confirms this viewpoint when remarking: "The individuals recognized as prophets in the text show a wide diversity of activity and characteristics."

Prophets' roles were diverse and therefore they could be referred to as social, moral, and religious critics and reformers. A typical statement in a standard history of Israelite religion which ought to be cited in full is the following statement by Fohrer (1972:99):
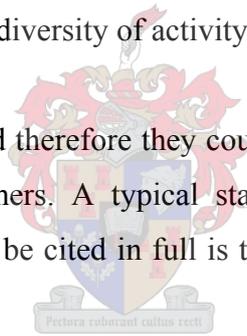
> More important than the professional prophets – indeed, second only to Moses in importance for the history of Yahwism – is the small group comprising the great individual prophets, including Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, Zephaniah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and, in Deutero- Isaiah. They did not exercise their prophetical ministry as members of a profession but on the basis of a special calling that snatched them from their original profession. In them, Israelite prophecy reached its summit and, although they are lumped with other forms under the common heading of "prophecy", there is more that distinguishes them rather than link them to these forms. They came forward among their people not as members of a guild or a class, not as representatives of a tribe or a clan, not as functionaries of a

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sanctuary or the king, but as conscious representatives and messengers of God.

It is further to be remembered that prophets like Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah were not writers in the first place, but speakers or messengers. Their original situation was that of oral proclamation where they were in direct contact with their audience in a given social setting.

To answer the earlier question of how the different terminology of prophecy should be explained, seems a big task and almost render for a study of its own. To be able to form a fully conclusive terminology of prophecy it does seem that the main information on prophets and prophecy is gained by references to the terms used within a certain social locus. Grabbe (1995:105) confirms this viewpoint when remarking that the person is first recognised as a prophet because that is what the text calls the man or woman, or because the person is said to prophesy as a calling from God.

2.2 The role of prophecy in the Ancient Near East

It is argued above that the term "prophet" encompasses a variety of elements clearly indicating that the whole cannot be dissected into separate parts, but that the sum total should be seen in conjunction with the parts. Huffmon (1992: 477-482) describes the parts in relationship to the whole in that the designation "prophet" is partially in the eye of the beholder, including the prophet himself. This is almost a paradox, encompassing simplicity and complexity. Huffmon further states that the prophet must be defined by his function and role in society (1992: 482).

The phenomenon of prophecy is well attested to not only in the Hebrew Bible, but also in a number of ancient Near Eastern contexts from different times and places. But as Overholt (1986:7) asserts, the term "prophet" is especially at home in the Israelite, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious traditions. Within the spectrum of various religions the term prophet usually refers to persons who communicate the future on the basis of some contact with the world of spirits. As a phenomenon, prophecy is cross-cultural and Nissinen (2003:3) also further emphasises the fact that this phenomenon can be observed in various cultural environments throughout human

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history. Nissinen (2003:3) further makes the claim that because of the biblical background of the concept of prophecy, the adaptation to extra-biblical contexts has seldom happened independently from the biblical paradigm and he base his claim when he uses the example of the " prophets of Baal" which makes their appearance in 1 Kings 18 in the Hebrew Bible. Even Schmidt (1995:38) agrees with the cross-cultural phenomenon by stating that the most important are the Mesopotamian findings at the city of Mari, where the text refers to activities and messages of various types of oracle givers that were in accordance with Hebrew Bible prophets. Because prophecy was a phenomenon in the Ancient Near East, Biblical Israel was not an "island" set apart from the influences of people around it. The Israelites existed as a people among other peoples. Brongers (1989:145) therefore states that the people of Israel did not lead an insular existence – one of the consequences of their contact with other states was the development of religious commonalities similar to their neighbours who had different religious practices. These communalities include various roles and it is of interest to note that Brogers qualifies these roles as eschatology, social and religious criticism, and the ability to make predictions and commissioned messages from deities. All of the above roles could be found according to Brongers, in the ordinary priests in Egypt and technical diviners in Western Asia (1989:146-147).
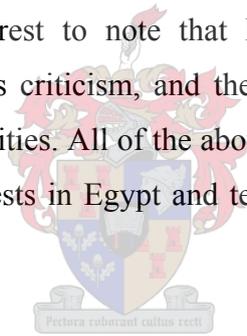
The phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East lead to the frequently asked question that was picked up by the writer hereof in various literature studies namely whether Israel borrowed from other religions in respect of prophecy?   Viewpoints vary on this question. In early research, Hechel (1962:34) believed that almost all aspects of Israel's prophecy were borrowed from Canaan. Lindblom (1963:140), on the other hand, does not believe Israel borrowed from Canaan, but rather observed the phenomenon of prophecy simply because the entire world did. The Israelites were like other people and did as others in their religious activities. Heschel (1962:472) follows the presentation of the Scripture itself and sees Israel's prophets as a unique people and their writings as being in a class of their own. There is a disagreement as to what degree Israel was influenced by other cultures and religions and Woods (2003:22) further writes that some scholars believed the influence to be extensive, while others saw it as being minimal. The Bible itself indicates that there was at least some. For

instance, many Israelites are depicted as having come to worship Baal, the god of the Canaanites (Judg. 2:13), according to Wood (2003:23).

It should also be noted that the application of the term "prophecy" played a role in the indication of similarities as well as differences between the Ancient Near East and Israel. Barstad (2000:5) elaborates on these similarities and differences when he writes that when we compare biblical "prophecy" in other texts or cultures, it is always our own views of prophecy that we compare. Ellis (1989:132) is in agreement with Barstad and he writes: "We must also attempt to avoid imposing on the source value judgments conditioned by our own religious beliefs or those of our heritage". I would like to agree with the writers above, as I believe that our own values and perceptions influence the way that we look at prophecies today.

To conclude, that which is seen as a definition of prophecy is also determined by the Ancient Near East texts with which the reader is working. Some texts can be classified as being "prophetic", without qualifying as such (Kruger 1994: 336). The people of the Ancient Near East gained access to a deity in two ways, namely an inductive way and an intuitive way. Kruger (1994:336) elaborates as follows:

> "Op 'n induktiewe (deur gebruikmaking van tegniese middele soos die stand van hemelliggame, bewgings van verskillende diere, hidromantie,ens.) en intuitiewe wyse (direk, sonder die tussenkoms van middele). Wat die Ou Nabye Ooste betref, was eersgenoemde die reel, terwyl laasgenoemde (dit is intuitiewe profesie) 'n marginale verskynsel was. In die Ou Testament is dit presies die teenoorgestelde geval: indktiewe mantiek het beslis wyd bestaan hoewel dit meestal verswyg word, terwyl die intuitiewe die eintlike "wettige" toegang tot die Godskennis was".

> (On an inductive (with the use of technical means such as the status of heavenly bodies, movement of different animals, hydromancy etc) and intuitive methods (direct, without the

intervention of means). So far as the Ancient Near East is concerned, the first method was the rule, while the last mentioned (i.e. intuitive profession) was a marginal phenomenon. In the Old Testament precisely the opposite was the case: inductive mantic existed widely although it was mostly withheld, while the intuitive was the actual "legal" entrance to divine knowledge".)

Israel's prophecy, then, was a unique phenomenon, different from any other in the world. Heschel (1962:480) describes difference as "The Biblical prophet is a type *sui generis.*"

2.2.1 Cross-cultural parallels of prophecy in the Ancient Near east

There were distinct parallels between prophecy in the Ancient Near East and prophecy in Israel. These cross-cultural parallels can be found in the following Ancient Near East cultures:

2.2.1.1 West Semitic prophecy

The uniqueness of Israel's prophetic institution is apparent when the phenomena of prophecy among the other nations are also observed. Grabbe (1995:85) postulates that, apart from prophecy in Israel, prophecy is attested to in a couple of texts relating to the Syro-Phoenician area. In the West Semitic prophecy the two main inscriptions are the tale of Wenamun and the inscription of the north Syrian king Zakkur who claims that the god Baalshamayn made him king. Zakkur prayed to Baalshamayn, who answered him through "seers" and "messengers" who said to him "fear not, I shall deliver you". Grabbe (1995:85) also writes that the word '*hzyn* (seer) seems to be a cognate of the Hebrew word '*hozeh* that has some relation to the Old Testament prophetic descriptions because it belongs to the Judean tradition.

2.2.1.2 **Old Babylonian prophecy**

The old Babylonian prophecy was, until recently, limited to texts from Mari. Roberts (2002:5) postulates that the only other prophetic texts from Mesopotamia came from Neo-Assyrian times after the Assyrians had long been in contact with Syria and the West which was at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Grabbe (1995:87) further emphasises regarding the Old Babylonian prophecy that this prophecy had lead to a widespread conclusion that prophecy as a mode of divine revelation arose in the West and was imported into Mesopotamia. A number of characteristics of Mari prophecy are of interest when focusing on the parallels in cross-cultural prophecy. According to Grabbe who writes that the message was not brought to the king but to the high officials of the court for transmission to the king. The king was interested in all omens, bad and good. Many prophets, received support from the court, suggesting that they functioned as "central prophets" (1995:87).

2.2.1.3 **Neo Assyrian prophecy**

The Neo-Assyrian texts have much in common with the Mari texts, and Van der Toorn (2000:82) writes that there are similarities even though the Neo- Assyrian texts are a thousand years later. The Neo-Assyrian and Mari prophecies together form the main corpus of the prophetic texts from Mesopotamia. Van der Toorn (2000:83) further mentions that there are twenty-eight oracles, presented as direct divine communications, usually to a named individual. Grabbe (1995:91) adds to this the fact that of the dozen prophetic figures named, more than half seem to be women. The explanation hereof is the fact that the main deity from whom the messages originated is Ishtar of Arbela, which may partially explain the dominance of the prophetesses.

In the royal archives of Mari, the Neo-Assyrian texts and the Hebrew Bible, together with the related texts, there is commonality in the distinctive settings and with differing manifestations emphasizing the cross- cultural parallels. Huffmon (2000:48) again asserts that the commonality is that prophets first of all present communication from the divine world, normally to a third party and they serve as mediators. Secondly, they offer messages, often unsolicited, that are immediately understandable by the audience addressed and not only offer assurance but also frequently rebuke the

receiver of the message. He also states that "This prophetic activity, however, takes place within different contexts and develops in different ways" (Huffmon 2000:49). My understanding is that within each community the prophets are perceived in different ways by different people and this reflects the particular settings and perspectives of those involved.

2.2.1.4 **Egypt**

It is interesting to note that Ringgren (1982:1) states that Egypt offers very little that is comparable to Old Testament prophecy. He mentions further that inspired persons are not mentioned, oracles proclaimed by the aid of the statues of the gods hardly deserve to be called prophecy. Grabbe (1995:86) is in accord with Ringgren when he states that there are several reasons why prophecy as such seems to have been absent from Egypt. The reason for the absence of prophecy is that there is no evidence of speaking under inspiration. There is also in the Egyptian writings nothing comparable to the Mari prophets or to individuals like Elijah and Amos.

It is important to note that Riggren writes about a fact that has remained widely unnoticed, and that is the occurrence of the so-called salvation oracle in Egyptian documents. In this magical text of the Metternich there is a prayer to Ra by a woman who has been stung by a scorpion, followed by an oracle: "Fear not, fear not, my glorious daughter, behold, I am behind you" (1982:2). This has close resemblance with the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah. And therefore it can be concluded that it reflects cultic practice rather than prophetic inspiration.

2.2.1.5 **Cross-cultural differences in prophecy of the Ancient - Near East**

Research shows that there are also differences between the Old Testament prophecies and those of the Ancient Near East. For me Kruger (1994:338) sums it up the best when he states: "As so far as the senders of the prophetical messages are concerned: in the wider Ancient Near East it is almost exclusively addressed to the king". The only cross-cultural difference currently is just one known Mari text in which the inhabitants of a specific geographical area, and not the king are addressed. Over against that in the Old Testament according to Kruger (1994:338) a certain

democratisation took place. In the early monarchy, in the Old Testament, the prophet addressed and spoke to the king of the time, but in the "classical" period (8th century) the message was almost always to the nation (Kruger 1994:338).

The nature and contents of prophecy also showed a difference. In the Ancient Near East the nature of prophecy was situational meaning that prophecy was not actualized in new circumstances, and Kruger (1994:338) writes that in Israel it was different because it became a literal tradition which grew with the changes that took place. Therefore prophecy found new ways of implementation.

Kruger (1994:338) also further mentions a difference in prophetical contents. He writes: "Wat die adressate van die profetiese boodskap betref: in die wyere Ou nabye Ooste word dit byna uitsluitlik aan die koning gerig". (Referring to the contents the Ancient Near Eastern profession is exclusively a profession of salvation. It is aimed at the properity and success of the royal house. An unconditional judgemental contemplation as in the case in the Old Testament, is strange to the Ancient Near Eastern profession." (1994:338).

The titles for Israel's prophets offer little continuity with the Mari and Assyrian titles but those titles are for the most part transparent in the local language and Huffmon (2000:65) elaborates that, for the most part, these titles where transparent in the local language, but in the Israelite tradition the titles occur occasionally in self-reference or are supplied by others. The interesting part is though as Huffmon writes that these titles like the Near Eastern titles, are usually supplied by others (2000:65). An example is the most common Israelite title, *nābî'* which functionally means "an ecstatic who might also prophesy", and it has a parallel in the Mari text, *nabû,* which is also known as a title from the Late Bronze Emar. The difference as Huffmon further states could be that these persons at Emar could be "singers", except that the title *nābî* identifies the group of prophets reported in the Bible (Huffmon 2000:66).

The conclusion regarding the cross-cultural differences is best summed up by Brongers (1989:150) who indicates that the major difference between Israelite and non-Israelite prophecy is that the former manifests an ethical-religious message that demands being heard and taken seriously. These messages were usually directed

towards the monarchy and the people as well as Israel's neighbours. Ancient prophecy therefore had the responsibility to interpret signs or deliver messages from gods to supply information that was useful in the social environment and for human conduct.

2.3 **The role of the prophet in a social setting**

It is important to bear in mind that the role of the prophet was always determined by a certain social context. Carroll (1989:203) states:

> "It is an activity carried on among and between people within a specific society and conforming to social norms operative among such people. The social status of prophets would therefore be determined by the institutions and social values of their communities and a proper social analysis of prophecy that would be an enquiry into the structures and values of ancient Israel society".

Defining precisely what these individual prophets share in common is not a simple matter. Sheppard (1987:9) elaborates on this issue further when he writes that the social location of the prophet's activity differs in each case and that it depends greatly more on the particular traditions to which it was a recipient as well as the historical-cultural setting of the prophet's activity than the transcendent ideal that applies to every member of the group. Sheppard (1987:9) again sees the main characteristics of the prophetic activity as follows:

o They all conceived of their activity as the result of a personal divine commission. The prophet's thought and believed that their supreme deity had appointed them individually to give a specific message to the community and this commission usually consisted of oral speech and writing of prophecies.

o Religious traditions arose that regarded these prophets as heaven-sent, sacred and binding. Their oral prophecies became part of a scriptural canon, or a collection of writings. When the prophet's words became part of a scriptural canon that was seen as the repository of revealed knowledge and this in turn became the standard by which the tradition judged all later religious

pronouncement and activities. Prophets like Muhammad and the Hebrew prophet's whose prophecies were formally oracular, the scripture became a collection of those oracles.

o All the founding prophets proclaimed what their later tradition regarded as universal truths even though the content of their messages differs significantly from one prophet to the next, depending on the historical circumstances and inherited traditions.

o The founding prophets were, in their own individual ways, social critics even though their ideas about society were quite different from each other. Mainly in the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions prophetic teachings have been seen as attempts to denounce injustices against the weak and powerless. Issues of social morality were often addressed.

o They helped to maintain and to reform religious traditions. This sometimes was met with stiff resistance, as one clearly can see in the case of Isaiah's prophecy for King Ahaz who wanted to maintain other traditions or the status quo.

Today we know prophecy as literature rather than the spoken word. Oswalt (1986:4) stipulates that such a shift from orality to literacy has removed prophecy from its original setting to a decontextualised, timeless setting and any search for the *Sitz im Leben* of specific prophecies is irrelevant. The uniqueness of biblical prophets speak for it selves. Through the ages their impact can be seen in ancient Israel, the development of Judaism and Christian theology.

There can be additions to Sheppard's list regarding the way in which the message is conveyed and here Grabbe points out that a variety of functions are performed by prophetic figures in different locations and therefore making the message of the prophet either positive or negative. This message either positive or negative may support or undermine social institutions. Taking this into consideration, the type of message does not distinguish one prophet from another, since prophets may well utter one sort of message on one occasion and another sort on another occasion (1995:117). In Porter (1982:20) we read an affirmation to the fact that the message may have positive or negative meanings depending on the prophetic situation:

> "Again, in a society, one group that has its own characteristic behaviour pattern can easily take a negative attitude to the different pattern of another group, which would account for the often observed fact that in the Old Testament 'ecstatics' are sometimes venerated and sometimes despised".

It was no specific type of prophetic behaviour that were decisive, but rather the recognition by the group that an individual had been chosen by the deity as his intermediary. Porter (1982:23) writes about the importance of the recognition of the simultaneous existence of different groups and circles in Israel for the understanding of prophecy. This recognition shows that in most societies the behaviour of inspired persons in one religious or social context varies from that of similar persons in other groups.

2.3.1 The role of politics and religion in the conception of the prophetic phenomenon

Nearly all the prominent aspects of international relations in the Ancient Near East are documented in prophetic writings, either as elements in the relation between Judah and Israel and the nations or as aspects of the relations between non-Hebrew states. The fact that all of this prophetic writings are documented in relationship to the historical setting of the time clearly shows the role of prophecy in regard to the politics and religion of the time. Gottwald (1964:349) postulates on this aspect that "war is commented on by the prophets as the crude adjudicator of disputes and the ready instruments of aggrandizement." He further explains that prophetic oracles are permeated frequently with the tense atmosphere of political intrigue and revolt. Often the information related by the prophets is of help in visualising events and placing them in a framework supplied by extra-biblical sources.

Furthermore, Gottwald (1964:351) states that the realisation of the historical development of the canon led to the insistence that the prophet had to achieve his own political viewpoint and to convince his contemporaries without either his or their having the benefit of a written norm to guide them. There is a similarity to this statement in the work of Carroll (1979:9) who emphasizes that the political crises of

their day constituted the larger background of the prophet's work. Carroll (1979:9) furthermore explains that the prophets responded to various internal and external stimuli and pressures and their responses took the form of public proclamations or performances of symbolic actions which influenced the religious and political setting of the day. Often the prophet was outraged by the corruption and oppression that took place and Carroll (1979:8) gives the example of Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who were spokesman for the law prevailing at the time. Barton (2003:29) confirms this viewpoint that this is also evident in the second-millennium Mesopotamian texts from Mari, where prophets advise kings in times of war and warn them of impending military disasters. There also is evidence in the Old Testament where Samuel, Elijah and Isaiah are consulted by kings, or where they confront them with messages of impending doom.

Literature studies show that prophets may function at any level of the social structure and may be found in connection with any group in the society. It seems, however, that the social standing of a prophet is measured in the relationship with the society's social, religious and political power structures. Wilson (1995:332) writes that prophets within a society can be divided into two groups. The first is the central prophets, who enjoy religious and political powers within their religious functions. The second is the peripheral prophets, who have almost no authority within the society. Wilson (1995:340) elaborates:

> "Prophets of course are not confined to the two ends of this
> spectrum but may appear at any point on the continuum between
> a society's centre and its periphery. It is possible for a society at
> any given time to contain prophets located at various places on
> this continuum, and over time a prophet may move from one
> social location to another."

People do not become intermediaries in isolation from the rest of the society. The society is involved in the process of choosing such an intermediary. Rogerson (1989:26) confirms Wilson's statement above and postulates that societies themselves play an important role in the process by which members become intermediaries.

Petersen (1981: 44-47) makes the statement that Israel's prophecy can be divided into two main types, namely peripheral possession prophecy and central morality prophecy. By this he means that peripheral prophecy arises among socially oppressed or underprivileged members of a society. This would involve the formation of a group led by a prophetic-type figure, and its god is amoral. The central morality prophets emerge when a society is under pressure. These, possibly individuals without a support group, legitimate or sanction public morality. Petersen's explanation coheres with Wilson's theory.

Rogerson writes that the distinctions between central and peripheral prophets make a lot of sense in the Old Testament setting. The prophetic groups led by Elijah and Elisha seem to be peripheral prophets. They lived at the margins of society with an amoral god. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah seems to be individual figures, both operating in times of national crisis in the centre of things in Jerusalem. This makes them good candidates for central morality prophets (1989:48).

Scholars like Overholt (1986:8-9) seem to differ from Wilson (1995:345), who identifies the role of the prophet as that of "intermediaries". Overholt (1986: 9) states that even though they share certain features related to this role, the term is not satisfactory. According to Overholt "priests are also intermediary of sort" even though their concern is to maintain proper relationships between the divine and human worlds rather than to convey messages from deities (1986:9).

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the "intermediary" or "prophet" function seems to cluster around the maintenance of social stability or introduction of social change. It is also to be noted that the very fact that a person functions as an "intermediary" or "prophet" can enhance his or her social position.

The political role of the prophet can therefore be seen as elaborated by Gottwald (1964:84) as being that of shapers of foreign policy. Gottwald (1964:84) underlines this when he states that they presented a baffling contradiction of support and criticism which could not easily be translated into political policy. For that reason the role of the prophets in the political sphere is seen by Long (1995:321) as being that of

deliverers of oracles to Israelite kings, priests, princes and people, as well as to kings of neighbouring states.

The social dimensions of conflict between the prophet and the audience form part of a renewed proclamation of religion and political posture. Petersen (1981:57) writes that prophets can vary according to their degree of involvement. Some prophets operate with the support of the political or religious authorities, while others receive less support. Petersen concludes that "the different traits of prophecy require a renewed attention to Israelite prophecy as an historical phenomenon with precursors and parallels in sibling Near Eastern cultures" (1981:59).

In conclusion it can be said that prophecy as a phenomenon entails different traits and that there is similarity in many details between prophecy in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament prophecy but that there are also considerable differences. It is the combination of elements that are similar and other that differ and it is in these elements that the pattern of Biblical prophecy is formed. The statement of Ringgren (1982:11) could not be truer when he writes that it should be borne in mind that Biblical prophecy just like its Ancient Near Eastern counterpart, is not a homogeneous phenomenon.
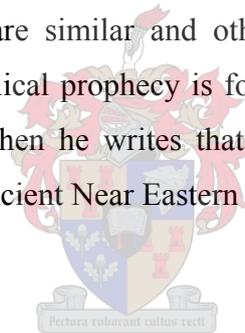
CHAPTER 3

THE SO-CALLED ISAIAH - *DENKSCHRIFT*

The widespread interpretation of Isa 6:1- 9:6 as the prophet Isaiah's personal memoir from the period of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, derives largely from the work of Budde in 1927. In this highly influential work, Budde first investigates the integrity of Isa 6:1- 9:6 as an originally independent unit. Irvine (1990: 3-4) explains Budde's investigation as a chronological notice which begins with chapter 6 and its parallel in Isa 7:1 linking the two chapters and setting them apart from Isaiah 1-5. Irvine (1990:2) agrees that the autobiographical style throughout chapters 6-8 binds all three chapters together and this demonstrates their character as a prophetic memoir. Sweeney (1996:180) elaborates further on the unit and explains that Isa 9:1-6 refers to the dark fate of the people described in Isa 8:20-22, but that it then concludes with a view to future salvation. When reading Isaiah 6:1-9:6 as a combining unit I have to agree with Budde and other scholars that this is the personal memoirs of Isaiah.

The rest of Budde's work examines closely the individual parts of Isa 6:1-9:6 tracing in the course of analyses the experience of Isaiah throughout the Syro-Ephramitic crisis. Irvine (1990:4) and Sweeney (1996:132) takes the work of Budde in acknowledgment that as early as the temple vision, Isaiah realized that Yahweh was bringing judgement against his people in the form of the Assyrian campaigns. Budde (1928) explained that the harshness and inevitability of this punishment was already clear to the prophet at the time of his call but that he also anticipated salvation in the distant future. We read about this anticipation in Isa 6:13 where it is written that out of the devastation there would emerge a remnant, a "holy seed". The imminence and fulfilment of the divine judgement, Budde argues, becomes clear to Isaiah years later when he met Ahaz shortly before the Syro-Ephraimitic siege of Jerusalem (Isa 7:1-25).

Hayes (1987: 115) contests Budde's argument that the interpretation of Isa 7:1-17 forms part of larger *Denkschrift.*

> Scholars frequently view Isaiah 7:1-17, if not the whole of the chapter, as an integral part of the prophet's *Denkschrift*, or memoirs. This larger work allegedly extends from 6:1-8:18 (or 9:7) and supposedly represents Isaiah's written record of speeches, which he had delivered primarily during the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis. The purpose of the memoirs, so it is argued, was to demonstrate that the opposition that Isaiah's message had met during the crisis had been foreseen by Yahweh and announced to the prophet as early as the death year of Uzziah (6:9-10). The memoirs were thus Isaiah's attempt at self-vindication in the face of his failed ministry.

The argument that (1987:116) poses is that the interpretation of Isa 7:1-17 as part of the bigger unit is problematic for several reasons. The first is that Isaiah 6 and 8 are autobiographical in form whereas Isaiah 7 is essentially a narrative about the prophet, referring to him in a third-person style. This discrepancy according to (1987:116) has often been handled by emending the third-person references to Isaiah to first-person forms. bases his argument on the fact that there is no textual evidence to support these changes and all Hebrew manuscripts as well as the versions agree with the third-person usage of the Masoretic text (1987:116). I would like to agree with Irvine (1990:5) who states that this fact alone is not decisive because the conversion of an original autobiographical account to report about the prophet may simply have preceded the phases of textual transmission represented by the versions and Hebrew manuscript traditions. Irvine further writes that the first-person forms in Isaiah 6:1-9:6 attest to the existence of a *Denkschrift* and that the *Denkschrift* hypothesis serves as a basis for arguing that the third-person references to Isaiah in chapter 7 are secondary.

Budde's analyses of the *Denkschrift* is also derived from 2 Kings 16:5, 7-9. Irvine (1990:5) interprets Budde's analyses by reporting that the passage talks about Ahaz, when he was faced with the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion, he appealed to Tiglathpilser

III, the Assyrian king for military aid against the attacking troops. At this point Ahaz was submitting to the Assyrians. The main focus of the *Denkschrift* falls on the exchange between the king and the prophet. Isaiah instructed the king to ask for a sign of protection from Yahweh but Ahaz refused. The response of the prophet exposed the king's lack of faith and marked according to Irvine (1990:6) the decisive break between the two.

The aim and purpose of this study and the following chapters is to indicate the purpose of the *Denkschrift* as a whole and to indicate Isaiah's posture during the Syro-Ephraimitic war. The exegetical analyses of the study will focus on the following topics that are relevant to the *Denkschrift:*

- The prophetic calling of Isaiah as a first person account in the presence of Yahweh which gives this calling prophetic authority.
- The symbolic conduct in the name giving of Isaiah's children. In Isa 7:1-9 She'ar –Yashub accompanies the prophet to meet the king, with a message that only *a remnant* of the invading Syrian-Ephraimite army *shall return* home. In Isa 7:10-17 the coming birth of Immanuel is to show that *God is with us*. In Isa 8:1-8 Maher-shalal-hash-baz is conceived, a sign that the *spoil* of Damascus and the *prey* of Samaria will be *running* away before he can speak. The three children's names which symbolize the coming victory are paralleled by the similar symbolism of the three children of Hosea in Hos 1-2.
- The relationship between the prophet Isaiah and King Ahaz. The relationship with the king is an issue in the *Denkschrift*. In Isa 6:1-9:6 the prophet's thoughts on the war are well recorded.
- The need for prophecy in a modern world.

CHAPTER 4

ISAIAH'S CALLING AS A PROPHET

4.1 **Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is on Isaiah's calling to be a prophet, as it is recorded in Isaiah 6: 1-13. This pericope forms the beginning of the so-called Isaiah *Denkschrift* (6:1-9:6). The *Denkschrift*, according to Barton (2003:24), may have been put together in its present form by Isaiah himself. If it is indeed so, the calling of Isaiah forms the pinnacle of his prophecy.

The question that should be asked first, before an attempt is made to address the calling of Isaiah into prophecy, is: Who is Isaiah? The answer is that Isaiah was a prophet who lived and worked in Jerusalem from about 750 to 700 B.C. (Watts 1985:25). The name "Isaiah" is derived from the Hebrew *yeshayahu*, meaning "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah is salvation". Hanke (1997:222) further remarks that the Greek form *Esaias* is used in the English New Testament, King James Version. The title of the book Isaiah originated from the reference in the verse, "Isaiah son of Amos". The name "Isaiah" also appears a number of times in various sections of the book Isaiah, as well as other parts of the Old Testament. Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophets in the English Bible and the first of the Latter Prophets in the Hebrew canon. Both Jewish and Christian tradition accepted Isaiah as the author of the book bearing his name. It is of interest to note that the name "Isaiah" appears sixteen times in the body of the book. Jesus referred to Isaiah at least four times as the author of the book Isaiah (1997:223).

All that is known of him is contained in a few passages of the book that bears his name. Schmidt (1995:217) remarks that it is clear that Isaiah's ministry was concerned primarily with Judah and Jerusalem at a very critical period of the nation's history (739-700 B.C.), and that it formed the background for his prophecies. Gottwald (1964:147) writes that several of his most significant messages are directly related to the critical circumstances encountered by Judah in the second half of the eight century B.C., such as the Syro-Ephraimitic war (734) and the Sennacherib crisis

(701). Research in Rogerson (1989:24) shows that Isaiah seemed to be a more individual figure, operating in times of national crisis in the centre of things in Jerusalem, and thus seems to be a good candidate for that of central moral prophet.

 Clements (1980:11-12) further remarks it is beyond question that the book Isaiah is based on one of the greatest figures of the religious and political story of ancient Israel. There is very little positive information about him and the personal circumstances in which he lived. The little that is known indicates that he was a man of the city, who had a deep affection for the city of Jerusalem, and the reason for this was the fact that Jerusalem was the place of Yahweh's temple. Anderson (1980:302) also sees Isaiah as a man of the city, because of the great number of urban metaphors he used in his prophecies. Clements further postulates that the desire for information about Isaiah leads to the drawing of conclusions based on the evidence presented to us. He also draws the conclusion that the knowledge about Isaiah was drawn from an interest in his message, rather than in the man himself (1980:12-13). The relevant literature indicates that the manner, style and contents of Isaiah's speech form the basis of any deduction of who he was.

Wood (2003: 303) also emphasizes the fact that there is biblical evidence of who Isaiah was as a person. The Bible states that he was the son of Amoz, that he was married to "prophetess" (8:3), and that he had two sons, Shear-jashub (7:3) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4).

Isaiah was well known to the priests and rulers of Jerusalem, and he appears to have information about the governing of Jerusalem (Wood 2003:304). Clements (1980:12) comments that Isaiah himself must have been a nobleman of high birth and high education. Wood further elaborates on Clements's view that Isaiah was a noble man when he states: "The ease of royal contact may have been due to a blood relationship Isaiah held to the royal line. Jewish tradition says that Isaiah's father, Amoz, was a brother of King Amziah, the father of Uzziah, thus making Isaiah a cousin of King Uzziah" (2003:305).

4.1.1 **Isaiah the person**

According to Wood (2003: 303-305) Isaiah had many attributes, which can be described as follows:

- Prince of prophets: Isaiah is often called the prince of prophets. The designation is probably appropriate for two reasons. The first is the ability of Isaiah because he showed excellent training and knowledge of the world as well as a capacity for work. The second concerns the amount of messianic prophecy that God revealed through him. God revealed more about the Messiah in Isa 7 through Isaiah than any other prophet in the Old Testament.

- Spiritual status: Evidence of his spiritual status may be noted from the call to service he received as is recorded in Isa 6. Another indication comes from Isaiah's conduct with the King in the pericope of Isa 6:1-9:6 in the so-called *Denkschrift*. Isaiah went to Ahaz with a word of rebuke and salvation. This required a true sense of obedience, commitment and dedication. Further evidence was his willingness to respond to God's call in obedience. Still another indication comes from the book Isaiah wrote. In it he exalts God in the highest terms. Especially the theme of God's holiness is emphasized. Isaiah's vision in Isa 6 seems to have set the tone for his life.

- Ease at the royal court: Isaiah exhibited an ease when he visited the royal court. Isaiah's calling as a prophet came to fruition in the *Denkschrift* and it is especially famous in his relationship to king Ahaz. As recorded in Isa 7-8, Isaiah came to Ahaz and not only had the courage to rebuke, but spoke at length about the danger Ahaz faced from Assyria.

- Intellectual ability: Isaiah was one of the intellectuals of his day. No less than eleven chapters (13-23) are devoted to prophecies of judgments that God would bring on surrounding nations. These nations were not only those near to Judah but included Babylonia and Assyria far to the east, and Egypt and Ethiopia far to the southwest.

- Courage: Isaiah must be seen as a prophet of outstanding courage and the evidence is clear. It took courage to go to Ahaz with words of denouncement

and rebuke. Ahaz could have retaliated with punishment, but this made no difference to Isaiah. He therefore gave the warning whether popular or not.

All of the attributes given to the prophet Isaiah is apparent in the so-called *Denkschrift* froms when he first answered God's call in Isa 6 until he proclaimed that a remnant shall return and that salvation will come in a royal birth that would take place as it is recorded in Isa 9.

Watts makes the concurring remark that Isaiah's prophecy and prophetic ministry forms the heart of the *Denkschrift* legitimizing Isaiah's prophetic activity: "The role of Isaiah is anchored in his prophecy concerning Jerusalem's future, calling attention to Isaiah's claim to his vision report" (1985:27).

4.2 **The Throne Room vision**
Isaiah 6:1-13

Chapter 6 has often been named a "call narrative", referring to Isaiah's call to a prophetic ministry. Many interpreters have often wondered why it does not come at the beginning of the book as is the case with Ezekiel. Because of the peculiar placement of this vision narrative, it is important to discuss, firstly, the setting and structure of this chapter.

4.2.1 **Structure and setting**

Chapter 6 begins a new scene marked by a monologue. Wildberger writes that this is a first-person report and the section claims to come from Isaiah himself (1991:234). The work of Watts details three features that are important in the setting of a narrative. A summation of these three features in Watts (1985:70-77), will focus on a first-person speech, an authenticating vision and the heavenly council.

- First-person speech: Accounts of prophetic vision are often told in the first person. The visions of Amos (Amos 7:1-9) and Zechariah (Zech. 1:8-6), for example, are almost the same as Isaiah's vision. A number of these speeches do not use the prophet's name in the immediate context. There is a frequency

of first-person speeches in Isaiah and the majority present Yahweh speaking for himself as read in chapter 6.

- An authenticating vision: Isaiah 6 bears all the marks of authenticity because it is a report about a genuine experience Watts (1985:71) gives a distinction of two types of narratives, which are related to a prophetic call. The one type is found in the stories of Moses, Gideon, Saul and Jeremiah where reluctance and excuses to be Yahweh's spokesmen must be overcome. In the second type the vision plays an important role, as in Isaiah 6 where it begins with "I saw". The person is drawn into God's presence and becomes part of God's plan.

- Heavenly Council: The setting in the hall of Heavenly Council appears in several Old Testament passages, such as 1 Kgs 22:17-23, Job 1:6-12 and Zech 3:1-5. In Isaiah 6:1-2 the frame of the chapter is composed to illustrate a heavenly throne room scene, the response and speech in the room. (Watts 1985:70-77)

Wildberger confirms this viewpoint that chapter 6 begins with a new scene marked by a monologue, first-person narrative and a chronological notice. Therefore Isa 6 is a *kerygmatic* unity and v. 1 begins anew with its very precise date. Verse 13 concludes with a short but very meaningful glimpse into a time of salvation which is yet to come, bringing this section to a close (1991:252). Blenkinsopp writes that the chapter is placed at the very beginning of the "memorial record" which comes from the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic war, and includes material all the way to Isaiah 9:6. Blenkinsopp comments that: "It is therefore structurally part of chapters 6-9 at least since Budde, who termed it the Isaian – Denkschrift" (2000:224).

Chapter 6 has unity and movement and Watts (1985:70) writes that it is composed of five parts:
1.   Vv. 1-4: the Hall of the Lord, Heavenly King.
2.   Vv. 5-7: the purging of the prophet's sin.
3.   Vv. 8-10: the task for the people.
4.   V. 11: how long will the prophesying about suffering last?
5.   Vv. 12-13: if some survive and return what of them?

It is to be noted that the combination of the parts is unique. Each part builds on what precedes and moves the thoughts forward. The nearest parallel to Isaiah's calling scene according to Watts (1985:70) is the account of Michaiah's prophecy as recorded in 1 Kings 22.This account also involves kings of Israel and Judah and the fate of those kings. It is of interest to note that this passage in 1 Kings 22 also deals with prophecy which manipulates the one God intends to execute.

Wildberger confirms this viewpoint on the uniqueness of the parts when remarking that the chapter is initially divided into two main sections, namely theophany (1-5) and commissioning (6-8). He further states that:

> "The command concerning hardening in v. 10 is inseparable from the commissioning in v. 9 which immediately precede this already and include a message for the people. But in reality this message was to prepare Isaiah himself for the great difficulty which this task entailed. The follow-up question posed by the prophet and the response of Yahweh in v. 11 also belongs to the original material of the chapter" (1991:259).

Wildberger (1991:259) also states that v. 12 does not belong to the original material of the chapter and he explains that the style alone keeps one from considering this verse in a continuation of the speech of Yahweh in v.11. The reason for his statement is the fact that reference is made to Yahweh in the third person, whereas v.11 is Yahweh's own message. He also makes the comment that v.13 could be a later addition to the text and he refers to it as "post-Isaianic".

Watts (1985:70) also makes the remark that although Chapter 6 is seen as the call narrative in Isaiah, it could also not be seen as such because the position in the book poses a question, as it does not appear at the beginning of the book of Isaiah. He further writes that the beginning of the chapter marks the end of Uzziah's reign, as the opening words clearly indicate. He writes: "Its purpose is to show that the nature of God's actions towards Israel and Judah which had emerged in Uzziah's reign would remain the same until a complete destruction would come. The time clause 'in the year of Uzziah's death' points backwards, making this a closing scene" (Watts

1985:70). There is no indication that this is the prophet's first vision or first prophetic experience.

Sawyer (1996:304) confirms this viewpoint when he remarks that Chapter 6 should be the first chapter by suggesting that perhaps Isaiah's call is recorded in Chapter 6 instead of Chapter 1. The reason could be that Isaiah wished to portray the extreme wickedness of his generation, providing the reader a better understanding of his reluctance in accepting the responsibility of his prophetic ministry. It seems then that the account in its present form is written in retrospect to emphasise Isaiah's calling to prophecy.

The genre of Isaiah 6 has provoked considerable disagreements among scholars. Though it is often understood as a call narrative of the prophet insofar as the vision is dated to the year of king Uzziah's death and this would be a likely date for the beginning of Isaiah's career. But there are problems with the identification of chapter 6 as a typical call narrative, and here Sweeney (1995:134-135) writes that it does not contain all the features typically found in a prophetic call. Chapter 6 contains five of the six elements including the divine confrontation (vv.1-2), the introductory word (vv. 3-7), the commission (vv. 8-10), the objection (v.11a) and the assurance (vv.11-13). Sweeny (1995:135) further remarks that although the sixth element, namely, a sign to confirm the prophetic call, does not appear in this chapter, it could be speculated that the Immanuel sign in Isa 7 may well complete the narrative sequence. Sweeney further makes an interesting observation when he remarks on the vision similarities of Isaiah and Micaiah as reported in 1 Kings 22:19-21. Like Isaiah, Micaiah stands in the heavenly temple but there is no indication that Micaiah is called to be a prophet in this setting. Micaiah's presence in the heavenly council suggests that he already had standing as a prophet and that he simply reports his experiences in the council in order to explain his statements concerning impending disaster to King Ahaz and King Jehoshaphat in the war with Aram. Another observation by Sweeney (1995:135) between the similarities of Isaiah and Micaiah shows that just as Micaiah is never addressed, so is Isaiah never directly addressed until he responds to Yahweh's question of " Whom shall I send and who will go for us". The argument that Sweeney offers is that Isaiah's presence before Yahweh indicates that he was not called to become a prophet at this point but that he was just present at a time when a

specific task was to be performed. Therefore Sweeney refers to Isaiah 6 as a commission rather than a call.

In summation, three scholars, Wildberger, Sweeney and Watts have different viewpoints and thus have lead to a debate whether Isaiah 6 functions as a "call" report, initiating the prophet's ministry in general, or a "commissioning" for a particular task, or as a part of the collection of Isaiah's sayings with a particular 'literary' function. After studying the works of these scholars, I have to agree with Wildberger that Isa 6 functions as the call narrative of the prophet Isaiah. The reason for my agreement is that the account of the prophet vision is told in the first person "I saw". This autobiographical style concurs with the so-called *Denkschrift* assertion that it is Isaiah's personal memoirs. The fact that the prophet Isaiah is not introduced by name in Isa 6 is not enigmatic to prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. Accounts of Micaiah' vision (1 Kings 22: 17, 19-23) is an example and so are the visions of Amos (Amos 7:1-9), Zechariah (Zech 1:8-6:8) and Jeremiah (Jer 1: 4-19) where in a number of these speeches the prophet's names are not used in the immediate context. Wildberger (1991:232) confirms his viewpoint when he remarks: "Isaiah 6 bears all the marks of authenticity because it is a report about a genuine experience and must have been composed or dictated by Isaiah himself".
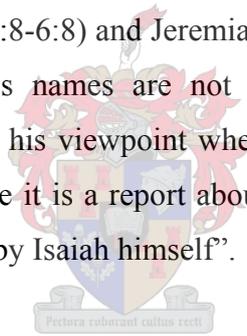
4.2.2 Isaiah's experience of Yahweh

Isaiah recalls his own experience in Isaiah 6:1 as follows: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robes filled the temple."

As the vision narrative opens, the scenario appears to be that of a throne room. A visual imagery is created and Blenkinsopp (2000:224) sketches a picture where the throne is at a high elevation that can be approached by steps, and the description of the One Enthroned is restricted to his royal robe and its train, which filled the entire room.

This description forms the frame of the chapter and the heavenly throne room scene turns into a subcategory of narratives of meetings with God. The throne room description is the only one in the entire vision. It serves as a background for the previous chapters as well. Although the prophet found himself in the earthly temple, what he saw was the heavenly throne of God, which the earthly buildings merely symbolised. Clements (1980:130) states that even though Isaiah's call took place during a service in the Jerusalem temple in "illuminating circumstances", this point has not been universally conceded. Van den Toorn (1995:2045) writes that in this temple setting, the elements of the temple serving – the antiphonal singing, the altar with its red hot stones, the incense-filled sanctuary, and the priestly attendants; the mysterious depths of the Holy of Holies are transfigurated. Scholars vary on their understanding of the temple setting. Fohrer (1971:40) denies that the prophet was in the temple at all, and claims that the entire scene is visionary. The literature indicates that this would mean that the many elements drawn from the setting and liturgy of the Jerusalem sanctuary should be ignored.

By using the word "see", Isaiah has in mind a visionary type of event, and Wildberger (1991:260) explains that to be able to "see", the "seer" must be able to "see" the vision. He explains that the prophet is the seer himself and/or the visionary it self. God himself is the content of the vision as He reveals himself to the prophet. In Ancient Near Eastern times, prophecy was also associated with the ability to see visions. In Isaiah's case, "visionary" does nor refer to ecstasy, since the prophet remains completely in a state of normal consciousness because v.5 states: "And yet, with my own eyes I have seen the King, the Lord Almighty". Wildberger argues further that the fact that the narrative is composed by using a long-established form and employing specific concepts and motifs, particularly from the Jerusalem cult theology, should in no way be used in an attempt to deny that the report describes something which was actually experienced (1991:260).

Even though there is no attempt to describe Yahweh's appearance, his throne is mentioned. Wilberger (1991:261) writes that it is a throne with steps. He further states that this corresponds with Isaiah's concept of God, since it is high and lofty. Schmidt (1995:306) draws a comparison with the Ancient Near East's description of a heavenly throne to show the similarities with Isaiah's experience. Schmidt writes that

in the Ugarit text, mention is made of divinity being enthroned forever (1995:306). Israel adopted from Canaan not only the general concept of an assembly of gods but also the idea of a king ruling over all the gods. Blenkinsopp (2000:226) remarks on this viewpoint that:

"It fits right into the context of the general view within the ancient Near East that Yahweh's kingdom, in these texts, is always seen as one which does not change: God is enthroned from eternity to eternity, and the seraphim makes it known that the entire earth is filled with Yahweh's glory. There is no hint of a suggestion that Yahweh's rule was to be understood as an eschatological dominion".

Ahlstrőm (1995:596) describes the temple in Canaan and Israel as the visual expression of the god's realm, his nation. What this means is that only the "king", the vice-regent on earth, could order the building of national sanctuaries. Van den Toorn (1995:2044) also notes that the Hebrew word for temple means "palace". This means that the wider use of the word "temple" is based on the analogy between temple and palace. The analogy states that the temple, in which the god is thought to reside, is in fact an earthly palace, serving as a replica of his royal mansion on high. Wildberger (1991:262) refers to the fact by that palace can also mean "the heavenly dwelling place of the deity". This seems to be the case in Ugarit mythology, where the construction of the palace for the deities plays a very important role.

In Isaiah 6:3 Yahweh is addressed three times as "Holy". The use three times of "Holy" also derives from choral antiphon actually sung in the Jerusalem temple, as this is the cult name for Yahweh. Prèvost (1996:62) also mentions that the triple acclamation has crossed the frontiers of Jewish liturgy to find itself at the heart of the Christian Eucharistic liturgy. Watts (1996:11) describes the solemnity of the occasion and the awesome character of the place as being echoed in the "Holy, Holy, and Holy". God is identified as the Lord of Hosts. This name is used regularly of God, especially in the prophecies.

Verse 3 recounts that the seraphs were engaged in a song of praise to Yahweh. From the texts two key words emerge: "holy" and "glory". Light (2001:27) writes that Yahweh is holy and the holiness of Yahweh is emphasized by the fact that the seraphs repeat the word three times, signifying the absolute quality of God's holiness. My understanding is that this is a term to set something apart from the ordinary or that which is common, and this would mean a special regard to God.

At the same time the song celebrates the fact that God's "glory" fills the earth. The word "glory" in Hebrew (*kābôb*) comes from the verb meaning "to be heavy" and Light (2001:27) explains that it means that God carries weight in the world and "glory" can signify the visible evidence of God's presence. Glory can signify the visible evidence of God's presence which is also recorded in Ezekiel 10:18-19.

In Isa 6:2 it is recorded that Yahweh is not alone in the temple. The New King James version reads: "Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew". Light (2001:27) explains that the word "seraph" originates from the Hebrew verb "burning". This suggests some kind of association with the fire as a symbol of divine presence, holiness, and purification. It is also of interest to note that Egyptian fables also refer to " seraphs" describing them as winged creatures with human, serpent or bird features (Light 2001:27).
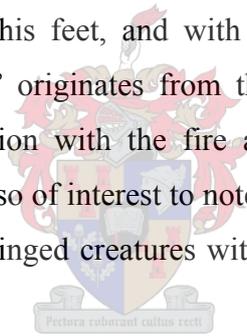
 Yahweh's holiness is a completely dynamic reality, not a static quality and Wildberger summarises it as follows:

> "This means that there is a very decisive modification of the concept of holiness in contrast to what it was generally understood to mean by those who lived in the region around Israel and also in contrast to the way it is conceived in the history of religious studies, an alteration occasioned by Israel's understanding of God" (1991:267).

Verses 4 and 5 convey that the praise would be fitting at any time. Watts (1985:75) elaborates on this viewpoint stating that the dating of the passage suggests a timely meaning here as does the shaking of the threshold and the smoke and the incense. It

further suggests approval of Yahweh's decision to destroy Israel and to purge Jerusalem that was reached in Isa 1-5. Watts (1985:75) further elaborates that the prophet is constrained to join the praise, but dares not. His own nature (unclean lips) and that of his people do not allow him to speak in the assembly. He further states: "It is astonishing enough that he has been allowed to see the King, Yahweh of Hosts and still be alive. Hebrew tradition held that to be an impossible tradition (Exodus. 24:10). The prophet's protest parallels those of Moses and Jeremiah".

4.2.3 Isaiah the Sinner

"And I said: Woe is me! For I am lost" – Isaiah 6:5

"Woe!" is the cry of a funeral hymn and Isaiah counted himself as good as dead, because he is in the immediate presence of Yahweh (Light 2001:29). Isaiah's first response as recorded in v. 5 is that he has "unclean lips" and is a member of "unclean" people. Anderson (1980:305) remarks that this response is evoked by the sense of Yahweh's holiness, a fundamental aspect of the experience of worship. Lips according to Light, is a poetic device in which the part stands for the whole, where Isaiah knows that he is wholly unclean. This is significant that he chose to draw attentions to his lips. A prophet is God's spokesperson. As a prophet, Isaiah could be faithful only by speaking those words that God puts on his lips (2001:29).

The very cry of Isaiah can be translated, "Woe is me! I am silenced." and Clines (2003:31) defines the Hebrew verb *damah* as meaning "silence". Isaiah may be playing with the meaning, because he feels guilty, and therefore has been struck dumb before God (Holladay 1978: 31-32). This interpretation would make me think that being in God's presence, would evoke a humbling silence. The prophet himself needs purification before he can be God's messenger because he says he is "unclean". Anderson (1980:305) makes a comparison between Amos and Isaiah where Amos had prayed that Yahweh would forgive his "unclean" people (Amos 7:1-6), but Isaiah begins his prophetic career as a man who himself has been forgiven (Anderson 1980:305) because he is "unclean".

In v. 6 and 7, the seraph performs the purging rite that gives the prophet his right to speak. It corresponds with the sacrifices which were needed to enter the Temple. Blenkinsopp (2000:226) observes that purification of the lips, rather than the hands, indicates preparation for a specifically prophetic mission and was a necessary prelude to the conversation and commissioning that follow. It had been compared with the rinsing of the mouth by Mesopotamian cultic functionaries as a preparation for public speaking. In the vision-narrative of Micah (Micah 1) the question of the Enthroned One is followed by a discussion, but in Isaiah's case discussion is pre-empted by his immediate volunteering to serve. "The atonement does not take place solely within the realm of the spoken word but within a sacramental action that serves to underscore the reality and authentic power inherent in this action." (Blenkinsopp 2000:226).

4.2.4 **Answering God's Call**

After Isaiah has atoned he can become a tool for Yahweh. Wildberger (1991:270) explains atonement as "out of the *visio* proceeds *missio*". In v. 8 God's own voice is heard speaking: "Whom shall I send, who will go for us?" The Lord calls for a messenger to put process into effect. The usual messenger would be one of the heavenly hosts. Naturally, God expects Isaiah will declare that he would be willing to go. Wildberger (1991:270) writes that one must understand that the history of tradition connected with the heavenly council dictated that this demand takes the form of a question, not a direct command. Verse 8 shows similarities with one of the series of Maqlû incantations in which a man functions as a messenger for the deity. Isaiah freely makes the decision: "Here I am, send me!" Watts (1985:75) states that this is unique to the call narratives, but is normal in heavenly throne room descriptions. Isaiah then finds himself, like Moses (Exod. 3: 10-11), and indeed Jeremiah (1:4-8), faced with the task of being God's prophet.

In Isa 6: 9-10 we read that Yahweh accepted Isaiah's offer. God tells Isaiah to "Go! And you shall say to this people". This reference refers explicitly to Israel, because this term is used for the covenant people. Watts (1995:75) writes that hearing-seeing-understanding-knowing are words which are part of a motif that runs through the length of the vision. Wildberger (1991:271) says that this is not a one-sided action because Israel's heart is hard and Yahweh has made it so and therefore it must also be

spoken in dialectical balance. Blenkinsopp (2000:226) confirms Wildberger viewpoint when remarking that the closing line provides a lucid description of revelation's normal purpose, namely that seeing and hearing should lead to understanding. Thus, Isaiah ought to know that he will have to be active among a people who indeed can "hear" and "see", but has a stubborn heart and mind as mentioned in v.10. This must have been disquieting for Isaiah, as Wood (2003:30) cites that the people would hear him but not understand and they would see but not perceive. Isaiah should know, if he answers God's call, he should be aware ahead of time that there would be few results coming from his effort because the people would display a stubborn heart. Wildberger elaborates on the meaning of a stubborn heart when he remarks that "the meaning which is given to heart corresponds to the wisdom tradition where it is the highest goal of a pious Israelite to get a wise heart" (1991:272). In v.10b the purpose and goal for the commissioning is also explained and the reason was to bring forth hardening. Isaiah must hinder them, so they do not turn and find salvation .Wildberger explains:
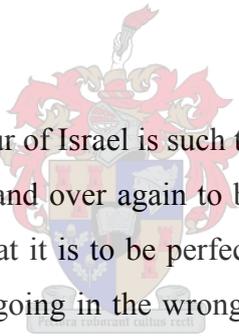
> "…the actual behaviour of Israel is such that the way to salvation is demonstrated over and over again to be an unreal possibility. It is for this reason that it is to be perfectly clear to the prophet that he would not be going in the wrong direction as he carried out his commission, even if his success is measured as nothing more than an ever-increasing hardening. Israel had to know that this result, which came after a period of prophetic proclamation, in no way had anything to do with whether Isaiah could legitimately claim that he was a messenger of Yahweh" (1991:272).

It should also be noted that Isaiah is not purely a prophet of doom, but he could do nothing else than to announce judgement. In this way he could be a faithful servant of Yahweh.

In v. 11, Isaiah ask Yahweh "How long, my Lord?" Through this question it is obvious that Isaiah did not consider himself to be a doom prophet. Blenkinsopp (2000:226) states that the question must refer to the future devastation of Judah, rather

than to the Assyrian conquest of Syria and Israel, since it is Judah that is to become stubborn as a result of this mission. When Isaiah asked Yahweh the question "how long?", Isaiah reveals something of the dread which he faces as he thinks about his task. The answer is difficult to interpret. Watts (1995:76) remarks that it could be interpreted as a total destruction of cities, houses, and fields. This may be understood to include social and political institutions. Wildberger (1991:274) observes that the interpretation of the question has much to do with the overall understanding of Isaiah and prophecy in general. Even though the cities and country side are destructed, it does not mean that Israel as a nation will be destroyed. Wildberger writes "that the passage deals only with the fact that Isaiah must persist until Yahweh's wrath had ceased its raging" (1991:274).

The prophet's second question in vv. 12-13 asks for clarification, assuming the fulfilment of God's judgement, but also assuming the survival of some. Watts (1985:76) explains that the word "turn" or "return" may indicate "repentance" or "the return" of some remnants. The answer is in the form of the parable of the trees. Watts explains the parable as "when the hardwoods are cut down, they play a continuing role as funeral monuments in the burial grounds of the worship areas, that is, the remnant will continue to have a significant role" (1985:76). It also, however, indicates a role that they would not enjoy and the final verse of the vision suggests the same gruesome role that they would be a continuing reminder of the nation that was now dead and why they were destroyed.

The primary intention of this passage is to legitimize Isaiah's activity in relation to the disasters that befell Israel and Judah at the hands of the Assyrian empire. Sweeney (1996:140) sees Isaiah's task as the hardening of the people's hearts so that judgement can be carried out. Isaiah 6 as the opening chapter of the *Denkschrift* legitimize Isaiah's calling as a prophet within the context of the prophet's memoirs. In the visionary event of his calling, Isaiah experienced what Yahweh had in store for the people of Judah, and he was commissioned to proclaim this message with nothing held back. In this harshness of Isaiah's prophecy lies Israel's only hope.

CHAPTER 5

THE SYMBOLIC CONDUCT OF ISAIAH'S NAMING OF HIS CHILDREN

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to cast light on the symbolic meaning and implication of the names given by Isaiah to his children. Isa 7:3 and 8:1-3 form the main focus of the *Denkschrift* insofar as it provides a parallel account concerning the significance of Isaiah's children. Isa 7 relates to the significance of Shear-jashub and Immanuel for the Davidic dynasty and Isa 8:1-3 relates to the significance of Maher-shalal-hash-baz Within the *Denkschrift* the interpretation of symbolism, and the placement of these verses, will be further addressed.

5.2 The significance of a name in the Ancient world

It is worth noting that in literature, references to children reveal a number of ancient Israel conventional ideas about babies, children and adult offspring. Darr (1994:47) writes that the importance of children in families indicates the bonds joining Yahweh and Israel as familial ties. The Hebrew Bible testifies to Israel's belief that progeny is life's greatest blessing. Berrigan (1996:27) states that birth announcements were met with joy, and the Israelites knew the pleasures of child-rearing. Negative and positive associations with children names also appear in the Scripture. Keizer (1978:45) notes:

> "In the Old Testament one reads that directly after birth and
> when the baby is still young before the circumcision, a child
> receives a name. This happens once only as is still the custom in
> the Middle East. The name expresses a meaning and is based on
> symbolism, as is seen in the names of Isaiah's children".

Tenderness, love and affection for children are often expressed in the Hebrew Bible and, as Perdue writes, it was clear that children were valued beyond their economic worth to their families. A child's name was given at birth, usually chosen by the mother and sometimes the father (1997:171).

Albertz (1990:881) provides seven categories of dynamic name-giving situations. In short, the list exists of: the status-name, the occasion-name, the event-name, the circumstance-name, the transformation or alteration-name, the predictive-name and the theophoric-name. Isaiah's two sons are pre-eminent in predictive-name giving. The practice of naming a child as a prophetic symbol is also documented in Hosea 1: 6-9.

Before proceeding to the discussion on the symbolic meaning of Isaiah's children, a short summation on the prophetic symbolic act needs to be done. Scholars are generally in agreement that prophets did not perform signs or engage in symbolic actions as mere emphasis to their words while such actions were rooted in the magic practiced in the Ancient Near East. This is adequately summarized by Bailey (1987:110): "It may be said that these prophetic actions are designed to give force and emphasis to the words only when they are seen in the total context of the prophetic proclamation and activity. Their setting is not an attempt to read the future but the divine commission to extract the future from the present, whether by inspired word or by a symbolical action which speaks for itself". Watts (1985:84) confirms this viewpoint when remarking that Isa 7:1- 9:6 deals with "sons" and "signs" and within the *Denkschrift* signs and symbols are found in the names of Isaiah's sons. Other symbols are also found in the *Denkschrift* where reference is made to other kings as "smoldering firebrands" (7:4), descriptions of the Assyrian as a barber (7:20) and the gentle water contrasted with the floods (8:6-8). All of these descriptions may be mentioned as symbols.

5.3 **Isaiah's two sons**

We read in Isaiah 7 v. 3 and 8 vv. 1-3 of Isaiah's sons' bearing symbolic names. This is significant of the prophet's certainty of the word of God through him. Isaiah was willing to embody God's message in his sons' names who, within there own time, became symbolic of "the word become flesh". Isaiah named his two sons with deliberation so that they could embody certain aspects of the word of God to the people (Motyer 1990:881).

5.3.1 **The symbolic meaning of Shear-Jashub**

"Then Yahweh said to Isaiah: Go out to meet Ahaz together with Shear-Jashub your son at the end of the conduit of the Upper pool on the way to Bleacher's Meadow" (Isa 7:3 NKJV).

The name Shear-jashub generally has been translated as "a remnant returns" and it could be understood in a negative or positive light. Scholars vary in their understanding of the symbolism behind the name. Wildberger (1991:297) proposes that it can be a prediction of disaster, it warns and demolishes. It, however, could also have been a proclamation of salvation. But that salvation is linked to a return to Yahweh.

In the present context the name is clearly one of good omen, but only in the sense of a few people barely surviving a major devastation. Hasel writes that the crucial question, however, at the time of this historic meeting is what has the name of the boy to say to Ahaz in this particular situation? Ahaz, in his acceptance of Yahweh's protection could also be a part of the returning remnant if he stood fast and trust in God (1972:274).
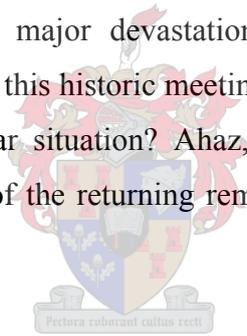
It is important to take into account the immediate narrative context, and Irvine (1990:147) remarks that the context should outweigh other factors in explaining the significance of the name Shear-jashub. Isaiah 7:1-7, though written in the third person, depicts a situation in which the prophet was principally concerned with encouraging Ahaz and with predicting the failure of the Syrian-Israelite siege. When taking into account this viewpoint, the symbolic meaning of Shear-jashub probably expressed a hopeful message, promising the survival of a remnant.

Isaiah perhaps intended a religious connotation to the name Shear-jashub. The remnant that returns to Yahweh will survive. With the symbolic name of his son, Isaiah affirmed that Ahaz and the Davidic dynasty would survive the crisis. (Irvine 1990: 147). The remnant that would return, according to Thompson (1982:28), conveys a strong "faith" element. This could mean that Isaiah's concept of a remnant is a group of people that would repent and turn back to God. My understanding then is

that the reference to a remnant is an immediate invitation of repentance to the king. The assessment of Thompson sounds valid when he states: "In all probability Isaiah deliberately took Shear-jashub with him in order to give the king an opportunity to join the remnant" (1982:29).The prophet's call was then for the king to have faith in God, and the presence of the child with the symbolic name, Shear-jashub, was meant as an opportunity for the king to be saved.

5.3.1.1 Grammatical Interpretation

Watts notes that the limits of this episode are marked by the narrative imperfect in v. 3 which begins this episode within the larger narrative (1985:90). Verse 3 can be seen as a narrative within the larger narrative, because it has significance within the larger narrative. It tells a story within the story and has active role players within the scene.

Verse 3 narrates God's instructions to Isaiah and Isaiah's word given in obedience to the instruction and this function as a clear unit in this episode of the narrative. Watts writes that "this fits the genre of prophetic narrative with several characteristics" (1985:90). The characteristics as explained by Watts can be summarized as:
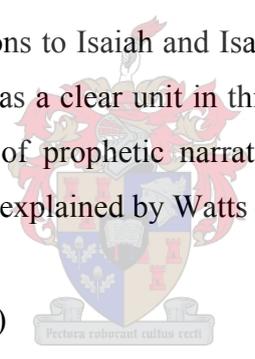
- The imperative to go (v.3)
- The mission to be fulfilled (vv.3-6)
- The "word" of Yahweh (v.7)
- An explanatory expansion (vv. 8-9)
- An exhortation to faith (v. 9)

 (Watts 1985:90)

The prophetic narrative at this point in the vision according to Watts (1985:91) gives the work its first specific historical foundation. The significance of the presence of Isaiah's son, Shear-Jashub, as well as the naming of the prophet and the king, giving the exact location of the meeting and by describing the historical circumstances gives it a historical setting where Isaiah is commissioned to prophecy to earthy rulers (1985: 90 -91).

Wilberger writes that the presence of the child Shear-jashub a young boy, takes on great significance when Isaiah approached the king. It can therefore be presupposed that this boy was well-known throughout Jerusalem. Shear-jashub must have gone with Isaiah when he went around Jerusalem (1990:290). And there can be no doubt that Shear-jashub, like his brother Maher-shalal-hasb-baz, would corroborate the prophetic proclamation of Isaiah. Thomson asks the question whether Shear-jashub was intended to be part of Isaiah's message to Ahaz and then states that the answer must be in the affirmative. Nowhere else in prophetical records do we encounter a prophet taking with him a member of his family when he is to deliver an oracle (1982:23). It is therefore apparent that the boy was involved in the meeting with king Ahaz as well as in the communication of the prophet's message.

It is clear from the literature that the meaning of the name is ambiguous. Irvine explains that the meaning of the name depends on the historical and rhetorical situation (1990:143). When the situation is taken into consideration, the name of the child corresponds with the crisis in which the nation and the king find themselves. Thomson (1982:24-25) further elaborates that because of the situation of the invasion of Judah, Isaiah should have felt called to speak about a remnant and to take the boy with to emphasize his message to the king as a matter of urgency.

A further issue that contributes to the ambiguity of the significance of Shear-jashub relates to when the name was given to the child. Thomson (1982:23) asks whether he was given the name earlier or whether he received the name for the occasion of meeting with the king. The Bible does not give any evidence of a name change having taken place. Thomson (1982:24) writes:

> "In view of the fact that no change of name for this occasion is
> recorded we may assume that Shear-jashub was the name given
> to the child at the time of, or at least soon after, his birth.
> Further, in the view of the fact that there is no suggestion that the
> child had to be carried by Isaiah, but apparently that he was able
> to walk himself, it would seem that his name must have been
> given at least two to three years earlier, and thus the concept of

remnant was in mind of the prophet earlier than the occasion of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis."

Shear-jashub is a grammatically a short sentence, and Irvine (1990:142) explains that it consists of a subject, *shear*, and a predicate, *jashub*. The former derives from the Hebrew root *š r* meaning "remain" or "left over" and generally this means "remnant". In Thomson (1982:24) we read that the Hebrew derivates of the root *š 'r* are used 223 times in The Old Testament, and speak of a wide variety of threats. The latter part of the name, *jashub* might have a religious sense implying a turn to Yahweh. The verb can also refer to "a return from battle" and the "survival in war". Irvine gives a further explanation:

"Two quite different interpretations however are possible. The emphasis might suggest the smallest of remnant: "Only a remnant …" or "A mere remnant …" Alternatively, an assertive meaning may be intended: "A remnant indeed …" or less strongly "At least a remnant …" (1990: 144).

To summarize Irvine's remarks, "the first and the second of these are hopeful declarations, focusing on the repentance of a remnant and on its political-military survival. The third and fourth translations are both pessimistic, but differ from each other in their concern, either with a religious turning to Yahweh or with political survival" (1990: 144). I would choose a combination of the translations because of repentance and survival.

5.4 **The symbolic meaning of Maher-shalal-hash-baz**

"Moreover the Lord said to me, "Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother', the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria." (Isa 8:1-4 NKJV)

In Isaiah 8 reference is made to Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The Hebrew meaning of the name is "speedy plunder"; "swift pillage". This was a name Isaiah was commanded first to write in large characters on a tablet, and afterwards to give as a symbolic name to a son that was to be born to him as denoting the sudden attack on Damascus and Syria by the Assyrian army (Wood 2003:301).

This strange episode is the first of three commandments (vv. 1-4) from Yahweh to Isaiah and it is recorded in first person narration (Blenkinsopp 2000:236). The section tells of the birth of a son who is given this name and of the meaning the name carries (vv.3-4). Watts (1985:110) remarks that although the explanation is directly related to the son, it actually explains the entire passage because the pericope is actually a unit. The name Maher-shalal-hash-baz is not an unusual name in the Old Testament or in the Ancient Near East. Watts states that this name speaks of literary creativity and it is also noted that a similar Egyptian name appears in documents of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1995:113). This Egyptian text, according to Wildberger (1991:332), had reference to military personnel as "warriors of booty, hurrying for robbery".

5.4.1 **Grammatical interpretation**

The composition of Chapter 8 v. 1-15, including vv.1-4, is consistent with a first-person autobiographical perspective and the interrelationship of the report concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz with the disputational material in vv. 5-15. Sweeney again sees the overarching genre of this unit to be concerned with the Maher-shalal-hash-baz sign and its significance. This is indicated formally by the narrative style of the passage, which is governed by *wāw*-consecutive imperfect verbs, and it is consistent with a first person singular perspective that indicates that the prophet is the speaker (1996:168).

Watts elaborates that the story implies the succeeding steps are directly related to first of all, taking witnesses, producing a son with the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz and then explaining the entire process (1985:112). If it is indeed so, Isaiah must have known the significance of the name from the beginning and he must have understood the name on the board to be that for a son yet to come, because Watts further writes that

"The whole report contains a command to perform the act, to report its performance and give a statement of its meaning. This could further be seen as a command to write, a statement of compliance with an expansion concerning witnesses, and lastly two further actions which continue the symbolic act. This symbolic act implied the conception, birth and naming of a son. The symbolic report then closes the usual explanation" (1985:112).

It is worth noting that Wildberger states that the writing on the tablet (v.1) can also be seen as a symbolic action. This action is in preparation for the actual sign, which was the son who is to be given this special name (v.3). In v. 2 Isaiah brings along witnesses, and he took the witnesses with him to witness the specific point in time when the name was written down. The political situation could have changed before the son was even born. But Isaiah wishes to leave absolutely no doubt about what he proclaimed at a very specific point in time, concerning the fall of Damascus and Samaria (1991:334).

(1987:143) has a different viewpoint on the writing of the name on the tablet and state that a more satisfactory solution is to assume that Isaiah first used the expression "spoil speeds, prey hastens" not as a proper name but as a kind of motto or slogan. Time lapsed between the inscription on the tablet, and the birth and naming of the child (v.3). Several months later, when his son was born, Isaiah was inspired to name the child symbolically after the earlier used slogan. At a still later point during the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis, Isaiah recorded in writing both symbolic actions namely the inscription and the naming of the child (1987:143).

Because the symbolism of this passage clearly centres on the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz as a sign and Isaiah's interpretation of its significance in relation to the Syro-Ephraimite War, Sweeney (1996:172) remarks:

"It functions as a means for specifying the period of time in which the army of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition will be

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removed from Judah, namely, before the child is able to speak its first words, "my father and my mother." It also specifies the time in which the Assyrian empire will appear in the region, since the Assyrians will be the cause for the removal of the Syro-Ephraimite army".

Wildberger (1991:338) postulates that the two symbolic actions, first of the inscription upon the tablet and secondly the naming of his son can only be understood and make sense in Isaiah's proclamation at the time of the threat from Aram and Israel. Chapter 8, God speaks of a speedy military action. According to Watts, the birth of the child as well as the full explanation came later in the year, emphasising that military relief was hastening to lift the siege (1985:114).

Isa 8:1-15 is written from the perspective of the aftermath of Ahaz's decision to request aid from the Assyrians. The symbolism behind the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz predicted that the Assyrian's campaign had indeed been "swift plunder and hastening booty" against Judah's foes. The observation that Sweeney (1996:171) makes about the symbolism of the name is that the only role that this child plays is to define the time in which the Assyrian king appears to remove the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. Once the Assyrian monarch is mentioned, he the king, not Maher-shalal-hash-baz, becomes the primary focus of attention throughout the rest of the Chapter.

It can be concluded that the purpose of the name is to record the sign from God and to confirm the validity of its interpretation in the historical outcome of the events.

5.4.2 The **resemblances and differences between names of Isaiah's children**

Although Isaiah 8 vv.1-3 is clearly linked to Isaiah 7:3 as a parallel account of the significance of Isaiah's children, there are also a few differences as is noted by Sweeney. He states that Chapter 7 relates to the significance of Shear-jashub for the Davidic dynasty and Maher-shalal-hash-baz in Chapter 8 vv. 1-3 for Judah. Isaiah 8 is written from the perspective of the aftermath of Ahaz's decision to request aid from the Assyrians, whereas Chapter 7 presupposes a situation prior to the king's request.

In this regard, the symbolism of the two names would vary significantly with regards to the historic situation which needs to be considered (1996:166).

Both narratives begin with a report of Yahweh's instructions to the prophet concerning the use of one of his sons as signs in relation to the Syro-Ephraimite War (7 vv. 1-25; 8 vv.1-4), and both narratives include a section elaborating the meaning of the respective signs (Irvine1990:177).

Chapter 8: 1-4 focuses on the threat posed by the Assyria, whereas chapter 7 concentrates on the threat posed by the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. The names of Isaiah's children therefore have a prophetic meaning relating to the circumstances (Sweeney 1996:166).

Darr (1994:46) writes that the significance of the prophet Isaiah's children – their number, names and functions as signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of Hosts – has long been a topic of debate. She further elaborates that "the reference to Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz tells little of the stereotypical associations with progeny in ancient Israel society". Their significance lies in their essentially passive contributions to the prophet's ministry as Isaiah's penchant for giving them "message" names and linking future events to their developmental milestones, rather than their ability strategically to quicken associated thoughts and feelings. The names of Isaiah's children formed an integral part of his prophecy and I would like to give it a "show and tell" description where Isaiah took the children as a physical symbol to make his prophetic point to king Ahaz and the people of Judah. Their physical presence serves as a concrete reminder of God's word and their symbolic meaning underlines God's plan to the people. Van den Berg (1990: 25) writes:

> "And for the rest of the people who does not comprehend
> Isaiah's preaching, Isaiah himself as well as his children with
> their symbolic names stayed in the dark (7:3; 8:3) going around
> as living symbols on account of God, referring to God and His
> word. Also although it became dark in the world, they remain
> signals referring to God and His word."

CHAPTER 6

PROPHET AND KING

Isaiah 7-8 belongs substantially to the time of the Syrian-Ephraimite invasion of 735 B.C. The aim of this chapter is to focus on the relationship between Isaiah and King Ahaz of Judah and the crisis of the Syro-Ephhraimite invasion. Isaiah's relationship with Ahaz arises as an issue also in treatments of the so-called Isaianic *Denkschrift* (Isa 6:1-9:6). Irvine (1990:2) writes that the *Denkschrift* contains a large deposit of Isaiah's thoughts about the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and its principal figures.

6.1 **Judah threatened**

Several years after Isaiah experienced a vision of God in the divine council (Isaiah 6), his role as prophet led him to a direct encounter with the King Ahaz. Petersen (2002:51) explains that II Kings 16 offers one perspective on the situation in which Ahaz found himself. This Judahite king was being threatened by two nations to the north, Israel and Syria. These two states had wanted Judah to ally itself with them in order to create an even larger coalition which they hoped would be able to overcome the threat posed by an attack from the Assyrians. Petersen (2002:51) sketches the dire situation further when he remarks that Israel was desperate for help because they had already lost some land to the Assyrians. II Kings 16:5 refers to a military attack on Judah by Israel and Syria. Petersen (2002:51) makes an interesting observation that Isaiah reported no such a moment but did present a scene in which the king of Judah was reviewing Jerusalem's position, should an attack eventuate.

This young king was no match for the political trouble he inherited because, as Anderson (1980:308) remarks in the prevailing circumstances a disaster seemed unavoidable. A plot was made among the small western states to stop the advance of Assyria. These one-time enemies, Israel and Syria, became allies for a short while.

The crisis that Ahaz and his advisors had to face was complex. Matthews' (2001:90) is of the opinion whatever decision Ahaz made, there would inevitably be dire consequences. On the one hand, as an Assyrian colony, Judah had a treaty obligation

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to suppress any rebellion against Assyria. On the other hand, as a covenant partner of Israel, Judah had a legal responsibility to support Israel's struggle for freedom. If Judah did not join their struggle against Assyria, Israel and Syria would invade, but if Judah joined their struggle, Assyria would certainly punish Judah.

Chapter 7:3 Isaiah is instructed to take his son and to meet Ahaz at a place where he would be examining Jerusalem's water supply in time of siege. Isaiah's message to Ahaz has two aspects. Barton (2003:31) describes it as, firstly, the symbolic prediction in his son's name, Shear-jashub, and, secondly, as the advice given to the king, which bears directly on the political decision he has to make. This advice is very clear, "do not fear, because God can deliver his people and therefore take no action to prevent defeat by the coalition" (v.4). In Isaiah's eyes, the enemies are so insignificant that he does not refer to the king of Israel by name. Peterson (2002:51) writes that the phrase "the son of Remaliah" asserts that. Isaiah's oracle makes it clear that this two-nation coalition will soon be destroyed and that should have been good news for Ahaz. However, we read in Isaiah 7:9 "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all". This oracle carries a caution to stand firm. Petersen (2002:51) further explains that "to stand firm" means not seeking assistance from the neo-Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser, because such action could lead to disaster. Ahaz disregarded Isaiah's advice and we read in 2 Kings 16 that he indeed travelled to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser. Ahaz, according to Wood (2003:298), sent the king of Assyria a considerable amount of silver and gold.

Initially, the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser, was recognised by the western nations, but Anderson (1980:308) remarks that in 738 B.C. Menahem, king of Israel, joined with Rezin of Damascus to pay tribute to the Assyrian victor. This capitulation to Assyria kept Menahem and his son Pekahiah in power even though they were very unpopular. This lead to a revolution and an army captain Pekah, the son of Remaliah, murdered Pekahiah in 737 B.C. Pekah then conspired with Rezin of Damascus to form an anti-Assyrian coalition. The two kingdoms joined in an attack on Judah in an attempt to replace Ahaz with a puppet king on the Judean throne. Isaiah 7:6 records of this history: "'Let us invade Judah', they are saying 'and terrify it'; let us conquer it for ourselves. We will then put the son Tabeel on the throne of Judah." Wood (2003:299) claims that it is at this time that Judah became a vassal state of the Neo-

Assyrian Empire. The conclusion is that Ahaz did not "stand firm", and Israel was soon defeated by the Neo-Assyrians, who attacked Judah in a matter of decades.

6.2 The attitude of king Ahaz

Ahaz was king of Judah between 732-715 B.C. and he was the son and successor of Jotham. Bauckman (1990:21) describes the Hebrew name ʾāhaz as "he has grasped or has held". The name Ahaz is an abbreviated form of Jehoahaz which means "God has held". It is of interest to note that the meaning of Ahaz's name had no impact on his belief in God to "stand fast" in the impending Syro-Ephraimitic crisis.

Ahaz was in a difficult position, for he had come to the throne of Judah at the time of one of the gravest crises of Judean history. From a purely political standpoint he deserves our sympathy, even though as a leader he was weak and inferior. Anderson (1980:308-310) is of the opinion that the presence of the invading armies on his soil filled him with panic. In Isaiah 7:2 it is said "When the house of David was told that Syria had prevailed on Ephraim to join them, its resolve, and the resolve of its people, was shaken as the trees of the forest shake in the wind"(NKJV). Ahaz was confronted with a lack of support among his own Judean subjects, as we read in Isaiah 8.

Isaiah found himself confronted with a king who was bent on betraying his historic unity between the two kingdoms still further by appealing to Assyria to rescue him. Instead of listening to Isaiah's advice, it is recorded in Isa 8:19 that Ahaz has given himself up to a life of wickedness, introducing many pagan and idolatrous customs. Ahlström (1995:2071) elaborates on witchcraft and magic as recorded in Isa 8:19 as an accepted practice in the ancient world and it was treated with conviction. Anderson further remarks on this viewpoint that Ahaz did this in the hope that this pagan rite would assuage the divine wrath that had come on the city. Here the actions of the Moabite king in Second Kings 3 v. 26-27 can be compared (1980:30).

For Ahaz the situation was desperate. Thompson (1982:28-29) writes that as a responsible political leader, Ahaz had to choose between accepting defeat at the hands of the invaders or appealing for outside help. Of his reign, little more is known.

6.3 **Isaiah's relationship with King Ahaz**

Isaiah's relationship with Ahaz arises as an issue in the so-called *Denkschrift* (Isa 6:1-9:6). This is understandable for here one finds a large deposit of the prophet's thought about the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis and its principal figures. Irvine (1990:3) rightly remarks in his regard that many of these issues are related inextricably to the historical question of how precisely Isaiah reacted toward the Judean king and his policies during the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis. As for Isaiah's attitude towards Ahaz Isaiah's attitude towards Ahaz, it changed from support to opposition during the course of the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis. Irvine (1990:15) notes that a basic two-part concensus persists on the relationship between Isaiah and Ahaz and that is that the prophet rejected the king midway through the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis and that Ahaz's appeal to Assyria precipitated the break.

It is of interest to note that the speeches of Isaiah in the *Denkschrift* provide strikingly little clear evidence that Isaiah rejected Ahaz. Irvine (1990:15) remarks that the consensus of Isaiah's rejection of Ahaz rest on the correlation of Isaiah's speeches with the historical notice in II Kings 16:5-9. Irvine further construes that if in fact the break occurred, one might expect to read at least one unambiguous statement about it in Isa 7-8. Nowhere however is the king's rejection explicit. The threats in Isa 8:5-8 and 11-15 criticize the behaviour of 'this people' but say nothing against Ahaz and his policies specifically. Goulder (2004:34) notes that Isa 7:17 does however announce disaster upon the royal house. Irvine (1990:15) is of the opinion that Isa 7: 17 can be understood as encouragement to Ahaz, promising the reunion of the Israelite and Judean kingdoms under Davidic rule and he bases his theory on the fact that the vast majority of scholars view the reference to the Assyrian king as a late addition to the verse. Isa 7:18-25 according to Irvine (1990:15) announce Yahweh's punishment of the 'land' but again the verses neither reproach nor threaten the Davidic house specifically. Irvine further claims that if one reads the speeches of Isaiah in isolation, one would never guess that the point of contention between Isaiah and Ahaz was the decision of Ahaz to appeal to Assyria for help. In Isa 7:10-13 the cryptic exchange between Isaiah and Ahaz certainly reflects tension between the two, but not necessarily a decisive falling out (1990:15). Budde however cite the Assyrian alliance as reported in II Kings 16 as the obvious issue of dispute between the prohet and the

king. Within the context of the *Denkschrift* the pericope is oriented neither towards the king's difficult political situation nor towards the right or wrong policy decision (1927:34).

Scholars such as Light (2001:40-41) is of the opinion that there was a definite break between the prophet and the king and he makes a very important observation that in Isa 7:13 Isaiah speaks of "my God" and not "our" or "your" God indicating the break and also that Isaiah's ministry is coming to an end.

It is worth noting that Ahaz's reluctance to receive a sign was because he was worried that he would bring trouble to himself and that he was of little faith. This suggests that he "stood fast", not in faith but in stubborn ignorance. In the Hebrew Bible faith is more a matter of trust than belief. Brueggeman (2000: 67) expresses well that faith: "Is not a matter of intellectual content or cognitive belief. It is rather a matter of quite practical reliance upon the assurance of God in a context of risk where one's own resources are not adequate." Goulder (2004: 33-35) further attests that in his decision to decline a sign from God, Ahaz brought down on his head the wrath of an impatient (Isaiah) man of God.

Another important component of Isaiah's argument is the pre-monarchic tradition that considers Judah to have only one treaty, namely that with Yahweh. Matthews' remarks that it is this covenant with Yahweh that originally recognized Yahweh alone as king of Judah. Therefore it is Yahweh, not Ahaz his representative, who must provide for and protect the nation. As a last attempt to convince Ahaz to remain neutral, Isaiah announces the verdict of the Divine Assembly against Israel and Syria. The divine assembly has indicated these nations for attempting to liberate themselves rather than accept Yahweh's plan for them as recorded in Isa 7:8-9 (2001:90).

It may seem that Ahaz had little choice but to form an Assyrian alliance and that such alliance was but mere politics. But Irvine remarks that for Isaiah it was a public insult to Yahweh, and a refusal to trust his promise. Yahweh would not go back on his word, and would defeat the Aramaeans and Ephraimites. Ahaz, his house and his people would suffer for it thereafter (1990:131). The warning and the threats in Isaiah 7 v. 1-25 were disregarded. The first two signs were given in person by Isaiah to the king but, because of the change in their relationship, not the last sign.

6.3.1 **The Immanuel sign**

Budde (1927:137) sees the meaning of the Immanuel saying as the most important aspect in the rejection of Ahaz. The meaning could be twofold: it could either encourage the king or it could be an announcement of his demise. Budde is of the opinion that it means the announcement of demise and gives the following arguments:

- The prophet accuses Ahaz of exhausting Yahweh's patience (v.13).
- The Immanuel sign connotes a threat (v.14).
- The diet of the child "curds and honey" symbolizes an end to all culture in the land (v.15).

The name of the child, Immanuel means "God with us" and Porter (2002:51) writes that in accordance with the expression's hopeful meaning, it would signify salvation for Ahaz. Irvine (1990:12) remarks that the Immanuel sign does not invariably signal announcements of disaster and that the child's name "God with us" is a quotation from the Jerusalem royal cult and when it is given as an assign to the king, likely bears a hopeful meaning. Matthews' (2001:91) elaborates further on the Immanuel sign when he remarks that the meaning of the name "God with us" is also a sign that the power behind Assyria is actually Yahweh. Judah should therefore fear the coming of the Lord and not kingdoms such as Syria and Israel. Isaiah matches this prediction with a second annunciation, this time predicting the birth and naming of his own son Maher-shalal-hasb-baz who will see the destruction of Samaria and Syria before he could say "my father" and "my mother" (Isa 8:1-4).

The eventual outcome, paradoxically, to be afraid, and therefore to seek help from Assyria, is the one certain way of not obtaining help from the one true source of help – the God of Israel. It can therefore be claimed that political inaction is as much an imperative, from Isaiah's point of view, as is the political action which the king was pursuing.

While the promise of salvation remains unconditional throughout the *Denkschrift*, the threat of disaster in Isa 7:9b changes to an unconditional announcement (Isa 7:17, 8:5-8, 8:11-15) once Ahaz appeals to Assyria for help. The exegetical process of the study

this far has shown that in chapter 7 the prophet exhorts and encourages Ahaz and the Davidic house (vv.4-9 and 14-17) but Isaiah also announces doom for the wider land of Judah (vv.18-25). Isaiah 8 similarly presents a mixture of messages: exhortations and promises to the Davidic house and its supporters (8:1-4, 8b-10, 12-15and 16-20). There are also announcements of judgements against "this people" and the Syrian-Israelite coalition (8:4, 6-8 and 12-15).

Isaiah 6:1-9:6, the so-called *Denkschrift* coheres insofar as reproaches, exhortations, warnings, promises and threats that follows one after another. Irvine (1990:131) remarks that: "if certain consistency is nevertheless apparent, it is not so much due to the careful editing of Isa 6:1-9:6, as it is to the consistency of Isaiah's own thought during the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis".
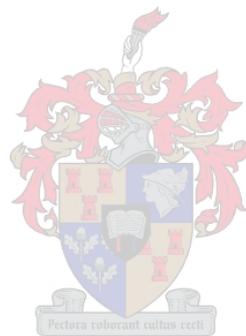
CHAPTER 7

THE NEED FOR PROPHECY IN A MODERN WORLD

7.1 **Introduction**

A prominent feature of Isaiah's prophecy in the so-called *Denkschrift* (6:1-9:6) is that it speaks of the present as well as the future. An example of a future prediction of hope is recorded in Isaiah 9:5-6:

> "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a son is given; and the
> government will be upon His shoulders. And His name will be
> called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting father,
> Prince of peace. Of the increase of his government and peace
> there will be no end, from that time forward, even forever"
> (NKJV).

The need for prophecy today in a modern world is even stronger than it was in the time of Isaiah. The aim of this chapter is consider the need for prophecy today through the studying of Isaiah 6:1-9:6, not only a prophecy for the past but also as a legitimate prophecy for the future. The aim is also to cast some light on the need for prophecy today.

7.2 **Paradigm shift within tradition**

The prophetic message in Isaiah 6:1-9:6 seems on the surface to be far removed from the modern world. The inability to bridge the gap between what the prophetic texts meant for the original audience and the audience of today needs a paradigm shift in our understanding of the message. Careful consideration should be given to the established tradition of prophecy as recorded in Isaiah 7. Irvine (1990:9) remarks in this regard that Isaiah 7:1-9 records a strong link to the tradition of Yahweh's promise to David. The aim if Isaiah's warning is that Ahaz realize for himself in the present moment of political crisis that the Davidic promise is still in place and that faith in Yahweh is the only prerequisite. Other traditions are detected in the Immanuel

sayings. Blenkinsopp (2000:233) notes that within the nucleus of the *Denkschrift*, Isaiah 7:14 can be seen as a quotation from the Jerusalem royal cult. Irvine (2001:11) makes a further summation of the traditions when he refers to the titles of the child and the description of his reign as just and righteous (9:6).

The challenge therefore would be to the ability and the willingness to use the prophecies found in the so-called *Denkschrift* in a modern world context. Within the framework of tradition, paradigm shift is needed in our interpretation of the prophecy today. Neethling (2001:5) defines "paradigm shift" as "a significant change from one fundamental view to another". The term is first used in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn in his famous book "The Structure of Scientific Revolution" to describe the process and result of a change in basic assumptions within the ruling theory of science.

The way that we have looked at Isaiah 6:1-9:6 and the prophecy it holds for today need an alternative optimism and faith in Christianity today. Kruger writes that the prophets had a prophetic optimism which he explains as: "Prophetical optimism makes it possible to look at the dire circumstances with clearer eyes and it is just this characteristic which carried them through the crisis times" (1999:74).

Christianity today , just like the prophets and people of the Ancient Near East, need to have a willingness to listen to God's word through the prophecies in the written word – the Bible. The ever changing environment poses constant challenges in a secular world. The text doesn't change, it is consistent, but how we see it through our current situation, will tint it a new shade of understanding. Schmidt (1995:177) writes that even in the later generations in antiquity, they read the collections of prophetic utterances as God's word, which was still valid for them and with the aid of these texts they interpreted their own present time, and they looked at the future through eyes supplied by these same texts. As a result they were able to introduce their own thoughts into the prophetic traditions. Brueggemann (2000:85) states that we must admit a "multilayered reading" of this passage. He further writes that:

> "The powerful, visionary poetry of this oracle permits more than
> one reading. For Christians, the decisive rehearing of the text
> pertains to Jesus, who is the great light in the darkness. But even

that rehearing with reference to Jesus is not exclusive. Alongside that we may entertain many rehearsing in which human agents enact the light that shines in the darkness. The transformative zeal of Yahweh for new peace and prosperity marked by justice and righteousness is undiminished and undeterred."

7.3 **The world today and a message of hope**

In our world today, how does one remain an optimist and a faithful believer in the messages of hope found in Isaiah (6:1-9:6). Brueggemann (1978:166) remarks that the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and in particular Isaiah, could surely sympathize with the person today who tries to keep things in proper perspective. Today as in the time of Isaiah, religion played an important role within the sosio-political circumstances. Sweeney (1996:141) remarks that the role of religion in the political circumstances during the time of Ahaz's reign, is evident in Isaiah's criticism of Ahaz and his political decisions as it is recorded in Isaiah 6:1-9:6.

The question that could therefore rightfully be asked is: must modern day politics adhere to religion? The answer from my perspective would be yes. Light (2001:419) rightfully remarks that religion promotes social stability and that is the most important role that religion could play in a sosio-political environment. Within the world today, prophecy became the irrelevant remnant, but the *Denkschrift* offers a promise and future hope. Isaiah's writings excel in their scope and in prophetic insight. Hanke (1997:224) observes that this book is often referred to as the fifth Gospel because of its Messianic content. In Isaiah 9:7, Isaiah views the Messiah as the heir to the throne of David. The mention of the Messiah's ministry in Isaiah 9:1 is an unusual prediction, according to Herbert (1999:72), because the Messiah was expected to set up his kingdom in Jerusalem, in the very heart of future Judaism. Isaiah's prediction proved to be true because Jesus did grow up in the village of Nazareth far removed from temple hierarchy.

Isaiah considered the events of the previous centuries and thus saw the coming Messiah. He, more than any of the Hebrew prophets, has given the most perfect history, mission, titles and characteristics of Christ (Hanke 1997:225). Barton (2003:65) writes that Isaiah spoke of the future, what the people of Israel could expect in the near future, but also what would happen in the remote future as is evident of the future Messiah. Van den Berg writes that the prophecy and in particular that of Isaiah 9 :5-6, makes it evident that this Messiah is far above human conception:

> "He rises far above the human dimension. It is also evident in His name: Wonderful Counsellor, His ability to create salvation plans and the execution thereof is so great that it begs adoration. Powerful God, one name that it becomes clear that one has to do with one exceptional King, eternal Father, that He is one Father over his subjects to eternity, Prince of Peace whose peace is greater and more far-reaching than Solomon's" (1990:74).

The memoirs or *Denkschrift* (6:1-9:6) contains various references to the coming Messiah and the following diagram is this writer's interpretation of the pericope section as an indication that a message of hope and salvation is like a golden threat evident throughout the so called *Denkschrift*.
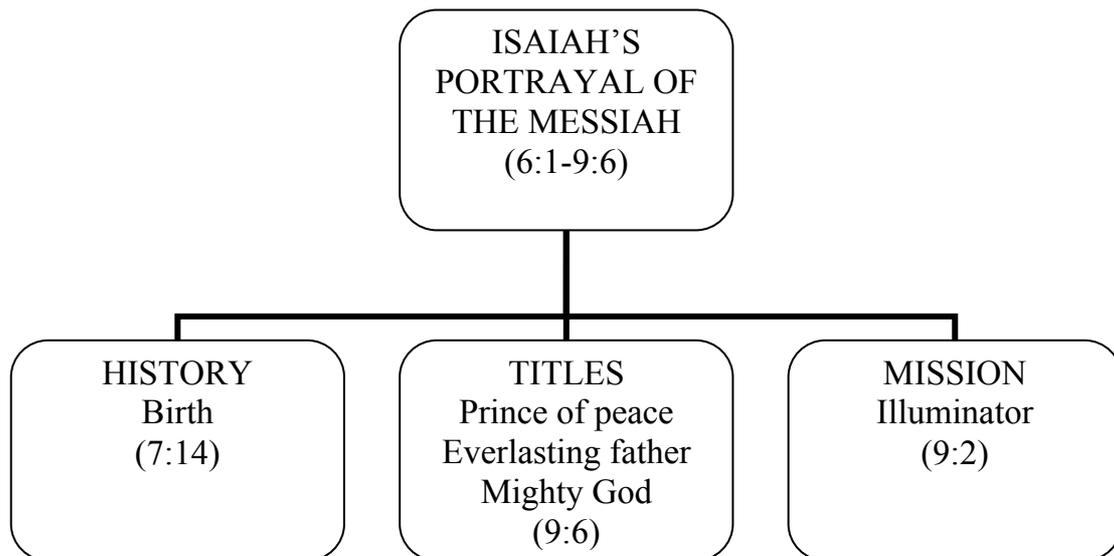

Figure 7.1 Characteristics of Messiah in Isaiah 6 :1- 9:6

Watts (1985:135) remarks that hope is a legitimate part of Israel's heritage. What the Old Testament, including Isaiah, can only record as a promise is in stark contrast to human reality today. Hope, it would seem, is a psychological necessity, if man would like to envisage the future at all as a believer or as a non believer. Tasker (1990:489) explains that even if there are no rational grounds for it, man still continuous to hope. In the light of what has been said, Light (2001:45) says it is not surprising that hope should so often be mentioned as a concomitant of faith. Hope therefore encompasses eschatology and imagination, both aspects of prophecy today.

The first aspect of eschatology is being described by Bauckman (1990:342) as the doctrine of last things. Therefore biblical eschatology is not limited to the destiny of the individual but concerns the consummation of the whole history of the world, towards which all God's redemptive acts in history are directed. Biblical writings understood history as a linear movement towards a goal. This movement was projected into the future, and Karras writes that it founds its fulfilment in Jesus the Messiah (2002:2). The movement towards a goal continues today, and prophecy is needed in a world where change is fast and paradigm shifts are a necessity. We need to listen to the voice of the Biblical prophets in a contemporary world. Bauckman is also of the opinion that the Christian lives between the "already" and the "not yet", between the resurrection of Christ and the future general resurrection at the coming of Christ. This accounts for the distinctive structure of Christian existence today, founded in the prophetical past and at the same time living in the hope of the future which is kindled and guaranteed by that past history itself (1990:348).

Imagination is the second aspect needed for prophecy today, and Brueggemann defines it as follows: "Imagination clearly means in evangelical terms the capacity to think beyond our taken-for-granted world to a world that is promised by God" (1978:13). What this means to the Christian of today, according to Brueggemann, is that we each have a zone of imagination which can be nurtured to supplement and enrich our understanding of the prophetical text and its meaning in a 21st-century world. He insists that we take seriously what the Bible teaches about the origin and purpose of the human person made in God's image, about the world He created, and refers to it as "the Imaginative Or", the imaged alternative to present-day accepted values and outlook (2000: 27).

7.4 **Hearing the message**

In the Hebrew Bible, Overholt (1986: 535) writes that prophecy came to an end when prophets lost their base of support in society. There can be no socially isolated prophets today, we have lost the message of prophecy, because the church does not preach it any more and hearing, let alone our understanding thereof, is deferred. Kruger (1999:11) correctly states that many times the prophet's word did not find a willing ear, received resistance, and was perceived as a stick in the mud. The audience of today is the same, and many times turns a blind eye to prophecy. " People today find their prophecy of a Messiah in the present world outlook of materialism, prejudice, power politics and its attitudes are rooted in fearful protectiveness" (Blackaby 2003: 218). Overholt (1986:538) forms the viewpoint that is based on a society's particular religious beliefs and past experiences. The dynamics of prophecy can be part of a modern world.

Too many of God's leaders are merely practicing religion. Kruger writes the following:
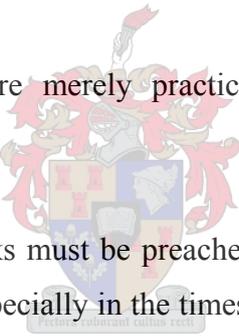
> "The prophetical books must be preached – the Church and the
> community need it especially in the times in which we are living
> today. The prophetical literature shows emphatically that God's
> claim on his people is a total claim No feature of life is excluded.
> Lots of the claims which were made in those days, are still just
> as valid " (1999:12).

A new way of listening is needed in our receiving and understanding of the prophecy. Grudem (1999: 413) writes that we should give prophecy the rightful authority that it needs and that it involves an active participation of the reader/receiver. Good listening or participation is the key to application.

The reader of the prophecies in a modern world becomes the audience in antiquity.

Revelation from God   Revelation in the Word of God


Prophecy = Report of revelation
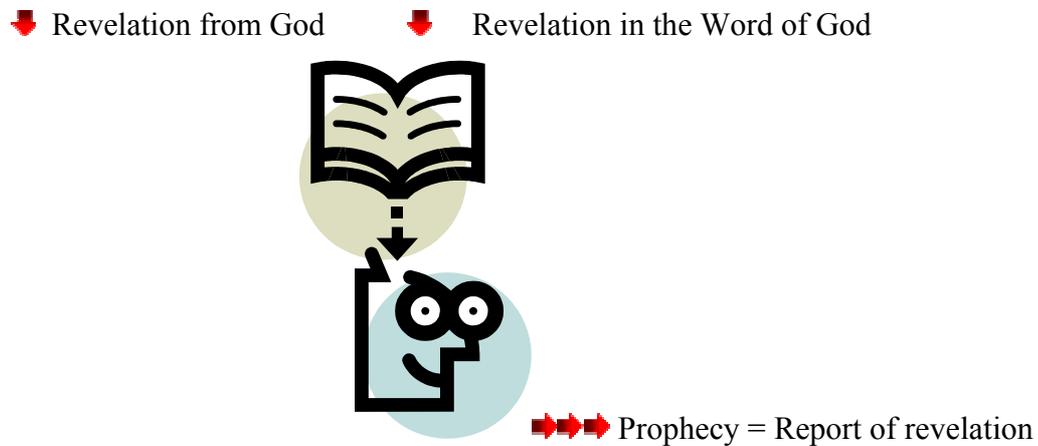
Figure 7.2 Receiving prophecies today

The above diagram is an illustration of how I perceive one to participate in receiving a prophecy. It also illustrates the application process within the so-called *Denkschrift* using Isaiah 9:5-6 as an example.

- God gave the revelation of the coming Messiah to Isaiah. This revelation gave character and purpose to the Messiah, namely Prince of peace, Righteous King, Everlasting Father and Mighty God.
- Today, we read in Isaiah 9 vv. 5-6 of the promise of salvation through the Messiah. The Bible proclaims a future hope of such a Messiah through faith and faith is to believe in something that you hope will happen.
- The prophecy in the Old Testament of the coming Messiah and the birth of Jesus fulfils this prophecy. Prophecy today involves our imagination, inspired by faith, and the hope of the Second coming of a Righteous King as is prophesied in vv.5-6. The application of this prophecy is to proclaim and draw men's eyes to the holiness of God and to call for conformity to his image.

Prophecy today does not only entail the prophetic messages of the Old Testament, or our own personal position in life, or how we interpret the message. We need to realise that there is a Living God present in the prophetic message, and that the prophecy of

the so-called *Denkschrift* is still our message of hope to meet the Messiah in the second coming. Balentine (1984:13) writes as follows in this regard:

"Like our predecessors in the early community of faith…we will hear in Old Testament prophecy many voices. Some will summon us to higher ethical standards; some will nurture in us the hope for a life beyond what even the best conduct can secure. Some will demand that we confront the injustice of structures that abuse and deny; some will lead us to invest in new kingdom building where justice and compassion can not be compromised."
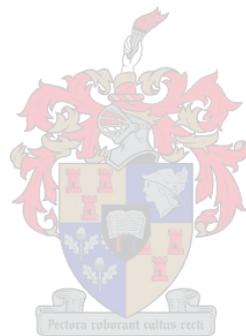
CONCLUSION

To this end, the thesis adopted an historical approach trough literature study as a strategy. The aim of the thesis has been to contribute towards the understanding of the so-called Isaiah- *Denkschrift* through an exegesis-historical study of the prophecy phenomenon in the Ancient Near East.

This conclusive chapter includes the literary research effort by analyzing how each chapter has contributed towards the hypotheses questions which formed the chapters of the thesis. The next section focuses on the literary research findings and their implications.

In Chapter 2, of the thesis examined the nature of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East. The terminology regarding prophecy was studied in various literatures. Studies have suggested that biblical literature used several terms to identify and describe prophecy and that the phenomenon of prophecy is well known not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in a number of Ancient Near eastern sources, which made the question arise who borrowed from who. Many scholars had various viewpoints that were discussed in the chapter.
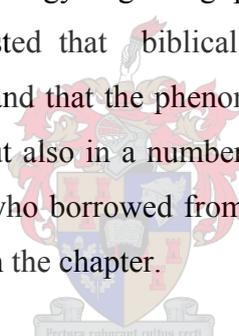
The application of the term also indicated similarities in prophecy in Israel and the Ancient Near East. Studies showed that these similarities included prophecies from West Semitic, Old Babylonian, Neo- Assyrian and Egypt prophecies. Out of the various literature studies, it also became eminent that there are cross- cultural differences as well. Here the study focused on the Mari-text and the titles which were given to prophets.

The literature review continued on the topic of the role of the social setting of the prophet. The society and culture of the prophet formed an important part of the role of the prophet. Various studied showed that the prophets were given, within their activity, various roles such as a call to prophecy because of a personal divine commission. From the literature review, Chapter 2 examined the role of politics and religion in the conception of the prophecy phenomenon as well. The review of this

topic demonstrated that prophets may function at any level of the social structure and may be found in connection with any group in society.

The rationale for the study of Chapter 2 was based on the hypotheses of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East and the influence this has on the politics and religion of that community. The two directional, two factor hypotheses, examined the nature of prophecy in the Ancient Near East, but also clearly highlighted the cross-cultural parallels with neighbouring religions. These influences were evident in the historical setting of Isaiah.

Chapter 3 focus on the so-called Isaiah- *Denkschrift* . The aim of this chapter is to outline the various aspects which form the personal memoirs of Isaiah. The main aspect in the so-called *Denkschrif* is the syro-Ephraimitic crisis and the relationship between the king and the prophet. The literature study revealed that the *Denkschrift* in its original form portrayed Isaiah's rejection and concluded with the announcements of disaster against Judah and Ahaz. The prophecy however also gave a message of hope. The influential work of Budde and Irvine formed the basis of this chapter.

Chapter 4 presented the calling of Isaiah to become a prophet. This particular Chapter forms the beginning of Budde's so-called Isaiah *Denkschrift*. The hypotheses in question asked if Isaiah's calling was a calling into prophecy. The literature study revealed that the calling process didn't reveal a lot about Isaiah, the man, but his encounter with Yahweh.

The aim of this Chapter was the exegesis of the text in Isaiah 6:1-13. This Biblical text served as the primary literature source with commentaries of various scholars as secondary resources. The works of Hans Wildberger and John Watts formed the basis for the literary research process. The hypotheses testing were based on the Throne room vision, its setting and structure and Isaiah's experience of Yahweh. The vision narrative and the heavenly throne room scene formed the frame of this chapter. This part of the literature review emphasized the calling, Isaiah' sinful reproach and Yahweh's imperative request for a messenger to be send to the king and people of Judah.

The final part of this chapter, where Isaiah answers Yahweh's call into prophecy, forms the framework for Chapter 4, where Isaiah had to confront king Ahaz as Yahweh's messenger. His call into prophecy was not only religious but political as well.

Chapter 5 outlined the symbolic conduct of Isaiah's naming of his children, underpinning his prophetic ministry. The aim of the research was to create a better understanding of the symbolic meaning of the Isaiah's children's name and the part it played in his prophecies. The symbolism within the political and religious contexts where addressed to show the role it played within Isaiah's prophecy. The dualism in regards to the conduct as well as the place it holds within the so-called Isaiah-*Denkschrift*, lend further support to the claims that this could be Isaiah's own memoirs, because of the first person conduct within the narrative.

Chapter 6 describe the relationship between Isaiah, king Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimite war. This relationship was directly influenced by Isaiah's prophecy and the consequent choices Ahaz made during the impending war. It was found in the literature review that Syro- Ephraimite war and the anxiety of the king Ahaz, had a direct influence on the choices he made in regards to his alliances with the Assyrians instead of Yahweh. Isaiah's prophecies held a threat and a promise for Ahaz and Judah. The symbolism if Isaiah's prophecy continues in his relationship with the king.

The final part of this chapter deals with the break in relationship between Isaiah and king Ahaz. This again forms the framework for Chapter 6, the need for prophecy today and the hypothetical question if we in a 21st century still hear and need it today. The research of the Biblical text in Isaiah 7 showed that a relationship with God is eminent in everyday life, to protect and to supply, fact that Ahaz, disregarded and consequently paid for.

In Chapter 7, the hypothetical question was asked if we still need prophecy in a modern world. A primary and secondary literature review showed a prominent feature in the *Denkschrift* where Isaiah not only speaks in the present time, but there is also a strong future reference as read in Isaiah 7:14 and 9:5-6.

The need for a paradigm shift was investigated, to assist in the measuring of the above hypothetical question if there is still a need for prophecy today. The purpose of a paradigm shift raised various other questions and interpretations which were addressed in this chapter. Within the framework of a paradigm shift the function and role of the prophetic message as well as the hearer of the message were discussed at the hand of various literary studies. This open-ended question gave rise to a host of exegesis opportunities which can not be addressed in this thesis because of the analytical extent thereof. These hypothetical questions leaves must room for further future studies. For the purpose of this thesis some closure has to take place. In the words of Van Maanen (1988:120) "…we know our analysis is not finished, only over".
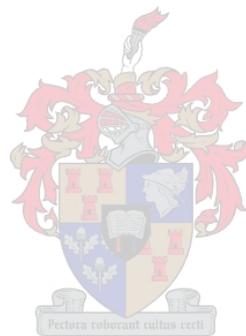
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