importance of his message, the significance of his service, the originality of his thought, the literary skill with which he wrote, the discernment with which he analyzed the problems of his times, and his unique qualities as a statesman, Isaiah easily takes rank as one of the half-dozen greatest Hebrews of all time.

135. Where did he preach?

He was a resident, and probably a native, of Jerusalem. So far as we can discover he was never outside of the kingdom of Judah, and only on a few occasions outside of Jerusalem. In all this he occupies a peculiar position in Hebrew religion and politics.

136. In what sense is he peculiar?

Tradition has it that he was related to the king, but of that we have no confirmation. Certainly, however, he had been reared in the midst of the paganism of Jerusalem, with its imported altars, divinities, and rituals, and was familiar through daily contact with the political machine which ruled the land. Yet in spite of his privileged position he became one of the most severe critics of the government and of the social system that his day produced.

137. When did he minister to the nation?

It is impossible to fix the exact day on which he was born, but he says that "in the year that king Uzziah died" (6:1) he was called to his ministry by a vision that came to him in the Temple at Jerusalem. Though there is some small disagreement among historians, the year 740 B.C. can probably be taken as the date of Uzziah's death and the beginning of the prophet's spectacular career. We know that his ministry extended at least a short time beyond 700 B.C., which means that he was active through one of the most disastrous periods in all Hebrew history.

138. To whom did he prophesy?

During the early years of his ministry Isaiah addressed his sermons to both Israel and Judah, condemning their sins in the most vigorous manner. But in the year 721 B.C. the city of Samaria fell, and though some small resistance was offered to the Assyrians thereafter, Isaiah confined his interests and ministry to Judah. But throughout his long career as a preacher, and during his later years as confidential adviser of kings, he was immersed in the political movements of his day.

139. Was Isaiah a politician?

Not in the sense that he was an office seeker, for he had no aspirations in that direction. But as one who was interested in the welfare of the nation he was primarily a politician. He was living at a time when all politics were world politics, when the policy of every nation was, in some way, linked up with world affairs. No man could take an interest in

the destiny of his own people and ignore the significance of world movements.

140. Was Isaiah a professional prophet?

He was not. In fact, by social standing, training, and spiritual interest he was as far removed from the professional prophetic class as any man of his generation could have been. It is true that he saw a vision in the Temple and that that vision sent him out to prophesy; but unlike the professional prophets who relied upon trances, visions, and ecstatic states to convince the people of their prophetic status, Isaiah does not seem to have mentioned his Temple experiences until some years afterward, when his ministry was far along (chapter 6).

141. What was his social position?

He seems to have been a member of a family of some social standing because his father's name is mentioned, and the fact that his home was in Jerusalem would suggest that he belonged to the wealthy aristocracy of the capital (1:1). He had plenty of time for his prophetic work, and, since he makes no mention of any trade or profession by which he might have earned a livelihood, it is easy to believe that he was a man of leisure, with an independent income.

142. What was the political situation in Israel?

Amos preached at Bethel about 750 B.C., when the Assyrian invasion was still in the future. Hosea preached during those riotous years just before the final crash, when one ruling house of Israel was plunging headlong to its destruction. But Isaiah preached in Judah while the Assyrians were on their way, and then a few years later at the very moment they were breaking through the walls of Samaria. His closing ministry occurred during one of the most terrible episodes in all the long history of Jerusalem, when the little kingdom of Judah was threatened with destruction and saved itself only at the price of complete vassalage.

For almost one hundred years prior to the beginning of Isaiah's ministry Judah had been but little more than a vassal of Israel, but under the leadership of Uzziah something like independence had been achieved. In Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah the Hebrew people had two of the most competent kings in all their histories. In campaigns north and south Jeroboam had made Israel secure (II Kings 14:25), extending its borders and strengthening its internal defenses. Everywhere there was a feeling of confidence and faith in the future. The lavish sacrifices at the shrines were an expression of this general sense of security (Amos 4:4; 5:5, 21-23).

Jeroboam died in 747 B.C.; and for twenty-five years thereafter Israel was plagued with a succession of civil wars, uprisings, usurpations, and revolts which seated six different kings upon the throne, their reigns