But the worship of Yahweh was well-nigh supplanted by the paganism which had come in with the caravans, and Isaiah's first sermons indicted the nations for their idolatry (2:10 ff.).

It would have been almost impossible for any man to mingle with the crowds of merchants, travelers, and traders in the market place without detecting the symptoms of impending world struggle. Gossip of world events was on every man's lips.

A sense of approaching disaster developed within the mind of the prophet. He knew that the nation's leaders were corrupt (3:1, 12), high-born citizens took no responsibility for the affairs of the state, allowing them to drift into the hands of the machine (3:6-8), and graft was common (3:14-15). Social life was thoughtless and superficial (3:16), and no one in authority seemed aware of the hideous dangers that threatened (3:17-24). There were times when he was so oppressed with the tragedy that lay ahead of the nation that his indignation ran riot, and he anticipated the time when seven women would clamor for the favors of one man, so depleted would the nation be in manpower.

Those early sermons were general in tone, condemnatory in spirit, social and political in their implications, and courageous in their manner and matter. But it was the crisis of 734 B.C. that ushered him into his real career as a prophet-statesman.

148. What happened in 734 B.C.?

When Tiglath Pileser III came to the throne of Assyria in 745 B.C. he immediately became the greatest political fact in the world. The political policy of every other nation was fashioned by the things he did and the plans he laid. With the might of Assyria behind him no nation in the East dared ignore him. He held the initiative and was capable of producing all the military surprises.

Through the first few years of his reign he organized the Empire's military forces until they became the greatest war machine the world had ever known. By bold strokes, rapid moves, forced marches, and military miracles, he soon had the stage set for an invasion of Egypt.

The envoys of Egypt were likewise feverishly active during this same period. Back and forth across the deserts they raced with glib promises of aid, bribes offered in exchange for resistance to Assyria, and extravagant assurances of help in emergencies. Egypt probably was least deluded of all as to the possibility of an invasion.

Then the mighty machine began rolling. In 743 B.C. Tiglath Pileser loosed his terrific blows on Syria and Israel, and by 738 B.C. both little kingdoms were paying him tribute though they still remained intact. An internal uprising called the Assyrian back east for a time and gave the Palestinian states two or three precious years in which to organize effective resistance.

The first shock of Assyrian arms was severe enough to convince Syria

and Israel that they must forget their ancient differences and unite in the common cause. Thereupon Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, who had fought his way to the throne of Israel on an Anti-Assyrian platform, set up an alliance in 734 B.C. and demanded that Judah should join them.

149. What was the situation in Judah?

Ahaz had just come to the throne as a youth of twenty, and he was altogether unprepared either by training or by temperament for the vast responsibilities that were suddenly thrust upon him (II Chronicles 28:1). Moreover, he was entirely inexperienced in war or administration. No one knows why, but for some reason the young king turned deaf ears to the appeals of Syria and Israel; and the two allies immediately organized an expedition against Judah for the purpose of putting Tabeal's son upon the throne (Isaiah 7:6), thus to insure the nation's co-operation in their alliance against Assyria. Edom in the east, quick to see the plight of Judah, revolted (II Kings 16:6; II Chronicles 28:17) and seized the seaport of Elath on the Red Sea and the coveted copper mines of the Arabah. Thus the commercial prosperity of Judah came to an end. In the midst of the crisis Isaiah came to the fore and began his political career.

150. What part did Isaiah play in the crisis?

Perhaps five years before, a son had been born to Isaiah to whom the symbolic name of "Shear-jashub" was given (meaning "a remnant will return"). This little lad, like the children of the prophet Hosea (Hosea 1:4, 6, 9), had gone about as a living sermon.

In 734 B.C. the armies of Pekah and Rezin appeared before the walls of Jerusalem, and the city was in a panic. Ahaz, the king, was probably worse terrified than any man in his kingdom, and in frantic fear was making tardy last-minute efforts to put the capital into a condition to withstand a siege.

Telling about it years afterward, Isaiah said that God instructed him to take the child with him as he went in search of the king to warn him against compromising with the allies (7:3). The child with the strange name was to be a sermon to the king. The fact that Ahaz would have known the child, his name, and its significance, indicates that Isaiah was well known at the court.

The king had gone to inspect the city's water supply and was at the reservoir when Isaiah found him. There the prophet made an impassioned plea that the king stand firm, keep free from any entangling alliances, and allow Yahweh to defend the city (Isaiah 7).

151. Was Isaiah's policy a wise one?

Judah was a small kingdom set back among the hills. If the Assyrians should set out to invade Egypt the armies would march down the great