other words, we shall first review the history surrounding each prophet and then examine his work in some detail, noting textual inconsistencies and relevant editorial points. This approach assumes at the outset that the book contains three separate collections that were produced at different times and places, and that a final, unknown redactor illuminated and enhanced the revelation embedded in the writings.

As we make our way through the collections, we shall once again encounter a deity who upholds key components of his pedagogical program while introducing innovative changes that address the specific situations and needs of his people. Collectively, the writings of the three Isaiahs—whether they existed as historical individuals or not—present a progressive program for human development that is designed to transform the people of Israel from demoralized victims of war to a nation of humble servants who are given a central role in God's redemptive plan. Our journey begins with an overview of the events that prompted First Isaiah's mission to Israel.

## The Historical Background

### *The Rise of the Monarchy in Israel*

The historical books of the Old Testament (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings) detail the story of the conquest of Canaan and the rise and fall of Israel's monarchy. While scholars still debate the historical accuracy of the books, the general consensus is that after the people settled in Canaan, they formed loose tribal federations that were united in their worship of Yahweh and in their mutual struggle for survival. Tribal leaders would meet periodically at central sanctuaries (for example, Shechem and Shiloh) to renew their religious and tribal loyalties and settle disputes, chiefly over land, water, and trade. But the continued growth and expansion of Israelite settlements and the increasing threat of the Philistines (the quintessential "bad guys" of the narrative) prompted tribal leaders to form a more centralized state. While the biblical writers looked upon kingship as a mixed blessing (as witnessed in the short and tragic reign of Saul), there is no question that the tribes benefited from a strong central government, which offered the people protection from military threats as well as greater social stability, and reliable access to necessary resources.

The kingdom reached its zenith during the reigns of David and Solomon in the tenth century BCE. David was a warrior king who unified the nation, established Jerusalem as the capital, and made Israel a military power to be reckoned with. Solomon, who was known for his great wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34), negotiated treaties and trade agreements with neighboring kingdoms, thus bringing peace and prosperity to Israel for many years. Solomon's palace and the Temple complex in Jerusalem were glorious signs of Israel's success. But after Solomon died, his son, Rehoboam (922–915 BCE), made a costly diplomatic blunder in his initial meeting with the tribes. Rather than rescind his father's policies of heavy taxation and forced labor

(which had made the king's glorious building projects possible), the young king callously informed the people of his intention to increase their burdens. Their reaction was swift and predictable: "When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem" (1 Kings 12:18). With the king's hasty retreat, the tribes felt emboldened enough to withdraw from the Davidic monarchy altogether, forming the independent state of Israel (often called "Ephraim"), with the city of Samaria as the capital. The remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom of Judah, retaining Jerusalem as their capital and the Temple as the central shrine of Yahweh's cult.

Over the next two centuries, the rivalry between Israel and Judah was intense and not always peaceful. Skirmishes over disputed border lands were frequent and often deadly. The rivalry between the two kingdoms also extended to religion. Determined to develop their own religious identity (and keep pious Israelites at home), the northern kings established numerous shrines (e.g., Bethel and Dan) to compete with the Jerusalem Temple. To that end, northern priests and prophets developed their own interpretations of Israel's past to suit their anti-establishment outlook, producing materials that would eventually become the Elohist source. Despite these ongoing tensions and periodic wars with neighboring kingdoms (chiefly Moab, Edom, and Aram-Damascus), Israel and Judah survived in relative prosperity, but in a much weakened state from the glory days of the Davidic house. Their unsteady peace would end, however, with the expansionist plans of the Assyrian Empire.

### *The Destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel*

Assyria had been an unwelcome predator in the region for much of the ninth century BCE, conquering small states in Syria-Palestine and applying pressure on neighboring ones, but the threat was sporadic and largely determined by the strength of each particular Assyrian king. By the eighth century, the region had experienced a welcome lull in Assyrian activity. However, when the Assyrian general, Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE), seized power in a military coup, he immediately launched a series of highly successful campaigns of conquest that gobbled up much of the ancient Near East, including Babylonia and Syria-Palestine. John Bright explains why Tiglath-pileser was so successful and so greatly feared.

> The campaigns of Tiglath-pileser differed from those of his predecessors in that they were not tribute-gathering expeditions, but permanent conquests. In order to consolidate his gains, Tiglath-pileser adopted a policy which, although not wholly novel, had never been applied with such consistency before. Instead of contenting himself with receiving tribute from native princes and punishing rebellion with brutal reprisals, Tiglath-pileser, when rebellion occurred, habitually