Writing and Class Preparation: You should be prepared to answer and discuss the questions on this sheet, and there will be a short answer section on Test 2 dealing with some of the things called attention to on these blue sheets. But you will not have to submit written answers for homework. Instead, please bring two discussion questions of the kind you made up on the David-Solomon readings – questions pointing to themes or other things someone could write a test essay on.

Reading and Questions:

Harris, pp. 223-228

Since the history of Isaiah’s own time is so important to understanding him, it is useful to read Harris’s clear review of this history. You will certainly be expected to know about the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, which Harris discusses on pp. 225-226. Figure 6.2, pg. 228, is a fascinating picture of the kind of extra-biblical sources we have that tell about the wars discussed in Isaiah.

Isaiah 1.1-12.6

For a change, we have a straight shot through twelve consecutive chapters. But remember: they are a collection of different oracles and poems and should not be read straight through like a story. Pause over parts. Though there are quite a few questions on the first chapters (I spent too much time on them), it is the later chapters, from Ch. 6 on, that get really important! (As Harris tells us, scholars believe the entire long book of Isaiah contains the work of three different prophets. We’ll be reading some more in Isaiah next week.

1.1 See footnote. Visions, as you know, will become an important element of apocalyptic.

1.4-9 According to Isaiah, Israel is suffering “beatings” and devastation. (a) Why? (b) What specific historical events of his time is Isaiah referring to? This is another element you’ll remember from apocalyptic: it grows out of and addresses historical events of its own time.

1.10-17 You recognize this theme, right? Specifically, what does Isaiah’s YHWH wanted his people to do instead of ritual observance? Throughout this reading, keep track of the specific sins Isaiah addresses.

1.10-17 Keep some track of when Isaiah is speaking in his own voice and when he is communicating YHWH’s words. He doesn’t know about MLA citation rules.
1.18-20 So doom isn’t totally inevitable? “Come, let us argue this out” refers to legal proceedings. YHWH is using the metaphor of the court trial. The ancient Near East was full of judicial proceedings.

1.24-31 What apocalyptic language do you note here? (Note footnote to 1.27-31.)

2.2-4 These are extremely famous lines, especially 2.4. Assume that a prophet’s vision of an ideal age to come tells us something about conditions in his own time. A Seattle prophet, for instance, might envision a golden age in which YHWH had done away with traffic. What do these lines tell us about conditions in Isaiah’s time and place?

2.5-22 First a list of sins, then the punishment to come on the “day of the LORD.” What particular image is used several times for what people will do to hide from the terrors of YHWH? (I just want you to know the marvelous writing.)

3.1-8 Remember some of this kind of language from Hesiod? What seems to be happening in the social and political life of Judah at the moment? What is “this moment” – what year, probably?

3.16-24 What sins are the “daughters of Zion” guilty of? Major ones? To experience the rhetorical power of a long list, try reading 3.18-24 aloud. Is there any resemblance here to what the Taliban decreed when they controlled Afghanistan? If you want to build up a head of rhetorical steam, go on to 3.24-27!

4.2-6 VIP (very important part) for our course! You’ll be able to figure out why.

5.1-7 Who is the beloved? Who is the vineyard? Israel was full of vineyards, and we’ll see lots of grape imagery all the way to Revelation. John Steinbeck wrote a great novel about a time in the United States when the Depression left millions in hungry poverty while a few folks lived in ostentatious wealth. What is its title? Can you see why?

5.8-27 Keep keeping track of the sins. What’s wrong with joining house to house and adding field to field? Could Isaiah be accused of talking class warfare here? Why does he hate freedom? (Private joke. Instructor’s political leanings creeping in. Slap wrist.)

5.26-30 Which nation will YHWH “whistle” for to come punish Judah. Enjoy the poetry here! Gamma rays indeed! Try confronting “young lions” from Assyria! My guys are much scarier than Tracy’s guys!

6.1-8 VIP. An astounding vision of the heavenly throne room from which comes a central Jewish and Christian response to their God: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts.” What are hosts?

6.9-13 VIP+! (a) What specifically is Isaiah told to do here? (b) Is it part of a prophet’s job, then, to fail? (c) Can the stopping up of the Israelites’ ears and eyes be related to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart? (d) Remember, this is 600 years before Daniel, 700 years before Jesus, 800 years before Revelation. Is it sounding apocalyptic?
7.9 Get a grasp of the basic history here. It is full of complicated names, but the facts are simple. It’s about the Syro-Ephraimite crisis (see Elijah handout, note on 2 Kings 15.29-16.70). The footnote to 7.1-2 reviews it again. This leads right to next item:

7.10-17 VIP++! the super-famous prophecy. Again: What particular historical circumstances of Isaiah’s time is this prophecy referring to? There is demonstrable evidence for this. 700 years later, Christians looked back and reinterpreted the prophecy to be referring to the coming of Jesus. This, of course, is based completely on faith. Note that a choice isn’t necessary. Many faithful Christians see both references in Isaiah. (See attached.)

7.18-25 This is written out as prose rather than verse. What elements of poetry does it retain, however?

8.8 If “Immanuel” means “God is with us,” will YHWH be coming to Judah with the Assyrians? Is this a less comforting “Immanuel,” than the one in 7.14?

8.16 Another element of apocalyptic, no?

9.1-17 But there’s hope in the near future: “unto us a child a born,” and a new king is on the way to help Judah. Who is this, according to the footnote? Look up his dates in the chart on p. 196 of Harris.

9.8. One apocalyptic element missing here is division of people into good and bad. Here, everybody’s bad! This is about the Northern Kingdom, of course. Maybe there are some good people left in Judah.

10.5-19 YHWH is using Assyria to punish Israel and Judah. Does that make Assyria good? In 10.13, who is saying “By the strength of my hand I have done it,” and what will happen to him for saying it?

10.20-27a. The footnote seems important, and you can understand the big word in it!

11.1-9 (a) What does it mean to say that new ruler will come from the stump of Jesse? (b) what will be the chief attributes of the new ruler? Again, what could one glean from his about the rulers in Isaiah’s time?

11.6-9 Who can resist these lines? Has a lovelier vision been described?

11.10-16 (a) What specifically will the Davidic king accomplish? (b) Ephraim/Israel and Judah will be friends again – the wolf lying down with the lamb! And then what will they do together? See 11.14 for the answer! Do you find it a bit surprising, considering what came just before?
Isaiah 7:14 -- A Famous Sign

Like so many prophecies, this one probably held two meanings: one for Isaiah’s time and another much later. Isaiah urged King Ahaz to seek a sign from God about Judah’s safety from its neighbors. Ahaz, notoriously stubborn and ungodly, refused.

Isaiah told of the sign anyway: a young boy would be born, and before he grew out of childhood Judah’s feared enemies would be destroyed. Only 12 years after this prediction, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell. The New Testament sees a further meaning in this prophecy, applying it to the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23).

*Note: This student Bible is widely used within evangelical Christian churches and fellowships such as the Calvary Fellowship.*