

A third of a century ago, Thiele's Chicago PhD laid bare the processes the historians of Israel and Judah used in stranding "the acts" of God and humanity. Prophets of the time-line, one might call them, for they worked at chronology and philosophy of history together, using royal annals (some of which are, though their existence is mentioned in the Bible, now lost) and the written [and oral?] remains of prophets.

1. By the 6th c. BC, this weaving produced the most complex and sophisticated understanding of human existence in the world that the world had ever known. Second Isaiah's "Creator of the ends of the earth," "the Holy One of Israel," and "a light to the nations" is a breathtaking, all-inclusive vision of reality and temporality within reality and transtemporality as New Reality (become, in NT, "New Creation"). To feel the shock and freshness of this, let's look at the rest of the world (except primitive life, meaning nonurban, of which our knowledge is almost wholly conjectural) in that century. Moving westward, CHINA gives us Confucius and Laotze in that century [but no history], INDIA provides the Buddha and Jainism's founder Mahavira [but no history], PERSIA Zoroaster [but no history], and GREECE Pythagoras and Thales [but no history]. Astonishment increases as we realize that all these developments of that century were openings of the tribal onto the global: the bio-base of religion was rejected or at least modified enough to incorporate into the religious community believers of foreign origin. Kinship, race, and locale were rejected as constituent principles of religious belief and membership. But of these essential universalisms, only JUDAH's [as seen in 2Is.] incorporated history--and so led a half millenium later to Christianity and a millenium later to Islam.

2. The Gospels and Acts are the end-product, in the Bible, of this way of "doing history," this style of historiography. One of the methods of discovering and displaying the process thereof (methods called, from the German, "criticisms") is called "redaction criticism": through what stages did a particular oral tradition and its documentation go, so that the "tradition" could deliver into our hands the document as we now have it?

3. Bible readers become aware of this stranding process *internal* as they observe various sense-accounts given of the same event, simultaneous with or subsequent to becoming aware of the *external* stranding. E.g., Gn.2.5 begins the Bible over again instead of continuing the (hi)story begun in chapter one! And occasionally one bumps into verbal doublets (passages identical to each other, in addition to passages covering the same ground): e.g., Ps.14/53 and Is.36.1-39.8/2K.18.13-20.19 [fn.NAB: "except for (Is.)38.9-20," the two passages are parallel, and "The events are also recorded in substantially the same way in the cuneiform inscriptions of Sennacherib," though of course without the Jewish-prophetic interpretation].

4. Hanging in with this Is./1K. doublet, what provenance scenarios are we able to imagine, and which seems most probable? For the purpose of this thinksheet, I'll not set out the speculations, but only present THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE conclusion (3.292): First Isaiah (Is.1-39) ends with some tack-ons about the prophet; 36.1-39.8 is a pick-up from 1K.18.13-19.37, which itself contains a layering of three accounts: (1) an annal [18.13-16], ^{ra} story #1 of Hezekiah's deliverance [18.17-19.9a], and ^s story #2 of the same deliverance [19.9b-35]. In all this, can we unstrand out the "actual" facts? Tough luck: what we call "history" in the objective sense is only the stage for a four-way conversation: God, Isaiah, Hezekiah (and attendants), the the Assyrian king (and attendants). Then and now, for us biblical people, the Big Picture is not event but dialog, not objectivity but the stranding of objectivity and subjectivity, not "nature" but relationship, not history as past but history as heart-account for hope NOW.