

## The Korean Peninsula-US Relations from the Perspective of Isaiah's Peace Discourse

Hye Kyung Park\*

### Abstract

New geopolitical order in East Asia challenges the relations between the Korean Peninsula and the U.S.A. After testing the nuclear and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), North Korea Chairman Kim Jong-un could meet U.S. President Donald Trump three times up until October 3, 2019 in Singapore, Vietnam, and at the Korean Demilitarized Zone. Meanwhile, South Korea President Moon Jae-in made three Inter-Korea Summits with Kim in 2018. President Trump even visited the Korean Demilitarized Zone on June 30, 2019, and met Kim along with South Korea President Moon Jae-In. One can recognize the

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\* Associate Professor, School of Theology, Chang Jung Christian University, Tainan City, Taiwan. Ph.D.

diplomatic thaw between the U.S. and North Korea. Christians should seriously interpret the politics and diplomatic new order in the Korean Peninsula. This paper analyzes the dynamic characteristics around the Korean Peninsula regarding denuclearization and deimperialization. I suggest that Isaiah's historical situation under the empires was not different from the diplomatic dynamics of the Korean Peninsula. This study urges Christians' transformation in current geopolitical phenomena in East-Asia from the perspective of Isaiah's peace discourse. I will bring up the issues of denuclearization for world peace and imperialist metanarrative in the world. This paper will interpret Isaiah's ultimate peace, justice, independent discourse by reading Isaiah 2, 5-12, and 36-39. In addition, it invites Christian's transformation throughout Isaiah's prophecy.

- Keywords

Isaiah, Peace Discourse, Inter-Korean Summits, Relations between North Korea and the U.S., Korean Peninsula, Deimperialization

## 1. Introduction

New geopolitical order in East Asia challenges the relations between the Korean Peninsula and the U.S.A. Up until October 3, 2019, US President Donald Trump and North Korea Chairman Kim Jong-un have met three times in Singapore, Vietnam, and at the Korean Demilitarized Zone. On June 12, 2018, President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un shook hands in Singapore and signed an agreement that established new U.S.- North Korea relations in order to bring peace and prosperity to the Korean Peninsula, provide a security guarantee to North Korea, and to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Their meeting was a major historic moment following the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953.

President Trump and Chairman Kim met in Hanoi, Vietnam on Feb. 27-28, 2019. In this meeting, the two leaders could not narrow their opinions on the denuclearization of North Korea as the US's suggestions were not acceptable for North Korea. Kim already rejected a proposal of surrender of nuclear weapons in the similar fashion of the Libya model. The luncheon meeting on Feb. 28 was cancelled without further substantive progress.<sup>1</sup> We now yearn to make a difference in the relationship between the two leaders. We do not want to only hear the bluffing of both sides as their words affect the lives of 80 million people in the Korean Peninsula.

President Trump visited South Korea after the G20 Osaka meeting on June 30, 2019 and he met Kim along with South Korea President Moon Jae-In at the Korean Demilitarized Zone on that day. There is a

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1 Jonathan Allen and F. Brinley Bruton, "North Korea Nuclear Summit Ends Abruptly With No Deal," accessed Oct. 4th 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-begins-one-one-kim-jong-un-tempering-expectations-n977466>.

high chance to have a new North Korea – US Summit before the end of 2019. There were working-level talks between the two nations on October 5th, 2019, in Stockholm, Sweden for preventing nuclear proliferation and securing North Korea's safety. However, the delegates from both nations broke off nuclear negotiations.<sup>2</sup> Their approach method of denuclearization has been differently recognized. North Korea's method is a step by step and single overall deal after making good relations with the US. Meanwhile, the US would like to confirm North Korea's denuclearization before easing sanctions.<sup>3</sup> The hostility between the two nations for seven decades could not be removed in several meetings.

The two leaders of South Korea and North Korea have been pushing for changes, even though the working-level officials of the US and North Korea are proceeding with difficulties.

The sign of the first diplomatic thaw on June 12, 2018 between the US and North Korea was a result of the two summits of South and North Korea: first, on April 27th, 2018, in the P'yŏnghwaŭi chip, the South Korean side of Panmunjom, second, on May 26th 2018 in The Unification Pavilion, the North Korean side of Panmunjom. While President Moon Jae-In of South Korea and Chairman Kim Jong-un of North Korea waited for the second summit between North Korea and the U.S.A., they finished the third summit of 2018 on September 18-20 in Pyongyang, North Korea. The agreements of the two Inter-Ko-

2 Johan Ahlander, Philip O'Conner, "North Korea Breaks off Nuclear Talks with U.S. in Sweden," accessed Oct. 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-sweden/north-korea-breaks-off-nuclear-talks-with-u-s-in-sweden-idUSKCN1WK074>

3 Connie Kim, "American Experts saying 'New Method,' Its Meaning and Negotiations of New Method, Step by Step Denuclearization," accessed Oct. 6, 2019, <https://www.voakorea.com/a/5092567.html>.

rean Summits on April 27 and September 19 are fully ready to be implemented by both sides.

The main purpose of these summits is to live with each other in peace on the peninsula. The two peoples of South and North Korea are the main subjects that are capable of peacemaking. However, the Inter-Korean meetings are not enough to build up their peaceful and beautiful peninsula due to the dynamic relations with neighboring nations. All the nations should pursue their own interests even though they emphasize diplomatic alliance with other nations. Isaiah's historical situation under the empires was not different from the diplomatic dynamics of the Korean Peninsula. This paper analyzes the dynamic characteristics around the Korean Peninsula regarding denuclearization and deimperialization. The vision of Isaiah enlightens us with the vision of ultimate peace. This study, from a biblical perspective, suggests a Christian transformation<sup>4</sup> in current geopolitical phenomena in East-Asia through the voice of Isaiah.

## 2. Denuclearization for World Peace or Power Collection?

Nuclear bombs became the hegemonic metaphor of US power after dropping the world's first nuclear bombs over Japan during World War II. The world realized the serious power of the lethal weapons which could destroy the world. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was signed in 1968 by most states.<sup>5</sup> Until

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4 For Christian transformation in the Korean Peninsula, one may refer to the paper by Ji-Seok Jung, "Theological Issues of Reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula," *Madang* 5 (2006): 7-22.

5 "Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," accessed Oct. 5, 2019, <https://www.nti.org/>

2010, 189 states in the world agreed to follow the NPT, however North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003.<sup>6</sup> The reason for their decision was “that the United States was threatening its security by hostile policy toward North Korea.”<sup>7</sup> North Korean leaders defined their self-reliance of national defense by nuclearizing and having nuclear bombs in 2006.<sup>8</sup> However, this nuclear policy was the cause of the US sanctions imposed upon North Korea.

North Korea sensed the strong tremor of the sanctions and the pressure of denuclearization, even though the US has hoped for progress on the current discussion with North Korea. Robert A. Wood, the US Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament and US Special Representative for Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) Issues, said that “it is important for all states to maintain pressure on Pyongyang until we achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea” at the UN’s First Committee for a Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons, Oct. 19, 2018.<sup>9</sup> And he continued his speech, “This is work that all states can, and must be engaged in US leadership has played an important historical role in contributing to past disarmament efforts, and our desire to engender

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learn/glossary/#nonproliferation-treaty.

6 Eun Ah Choi, “What is NPT?” accessed Oct. 5, 2019, <http://www.tongilnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=90025>.

7 Frederic C. Kirgis, “North Korea’s Withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty,” accessed Oct. 4, 2019, <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/8/issue/2/north-koreas-withdrawal-nuclear-nonproliferation-treaty>.

8 Choi, “What is NPT?”

9 Robert Wood, “Remarks to the UN’s First Committee for a Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons,” accessed Oct. 4, 2019, [https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-to-the-uns-first-committee-for-a-thematic-discussion-on-nuclear-weapons/?\\_ga=2.144267317.1035747769.1570160248-1072928141.1570160248](https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-to-the-uns-first-committee-for-a-thematic-discussion-on-nuclear-weapons/?_ga=2.144267317.1035747769.1570160248-1072928141.1570160248).

progress in this field is steadfast and enduring.”<sup>10</sup> Even though the US holds the leadership of the nuclear-free in the world, they have not effectively reduced their own nuclear weapons as they belong to the five exemption nations of NPT along with France, People’s Republic of China, Russia, and The United Kingdom.<sup>11</sup> The threats posed by the nuclear armament nations around the Korean Peninsula reminds us that the Korean people survive from the past and present imperial nations’ war game.

One can see the oppression and threats of wars by imperial powers not only in today’s world, but also in biblical history. Should North Korea be forced to abandon its nuclear weapons before knowing its safety guaranteed by Washington? Even though the “Final Fully Verified Denuclearization (FFVD) of North Korea” should be the main condition of peace in the Korean Peninsula, the request of the US regarding denuclearization will only guarantee temporary peace since imperial powers do not guarantee the safety of less powerful nations.

No one brings the issue of the denuclearization of the powerful nations in the world. People give the hegemonic states of the world implicit permission to have nuclear weapons. The nuclear deterrence as an index of imperialism continues to control international relations including peace and security in the Korean Peninsula. Can we prophesize that all nations in the world will abandon their nuclear weapons and give up their nuclear plans in the future? This situation induces us to interpret the history and prophecy of Isaiah ben Amoz, the prophet of the 8th Century BCE. Isaiah precisely announced, “And he

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10 Wood, “Remarks to the UN’s First Committee.”

11 NTI (Nuclear Threat Initiative), “Introduction,” accessed Nov. 2, 2018, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/reports/nuclear-disarmament/>.

shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

### 3. The Imperialistic Metanarrative<sup>12</sup>: Make America Great Again

In 2017, both Trump and Kim boasted nuclear buttons on their own desks, saying that "nuclear button is always on the table in my office"<sup>13</sup> by Kim and "my nuclear button is bigger than Kim Jong-un's."<sup>14</sup> Even though they might propose the words as political necessity for their own purpose, in reality no Koreans were reassured after hearing these "boasts." Wars are nothing bragging about their own "buttons," because the Koreans experienced the Korea War in 1950. The post-war trauma has affected them directly or indirectly. Having not lived in South Korea in 2017, I had little experience of war threats. However,

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12 I have learned the meaning of metanarrative from Leo G. Perdue quoting "The dominant imperial narrative that may be expressed in a variety of forms from instruction in the schools to the governmental rule of colonies to hymns and celebrations contains an ideology that is hierarchical, consisting of matters who dominate and rule the conquered and exploit their countries natural resources. By these means, empires attempt to control the diverse reality over which they rule. The desire is to inculcate among the colonials values conducive to the interests of the metropole and the importance of mimicking their civilization" (Leo G. Perdue and Warren Carter, *Israel and Empire, A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism* [London: Bloomsbury, 2015], 30).

13 Soo Seok Koh, "Kim Jong-un and Trump's Nuclear Button," accessed Nov. 3, 2018, <https://news.join.com/article/22255381>.

14 Lauren Gambino, "Donald Trump Boasts that His Nuclear Button is Bigger than Kim Jong-un's," accessed Nov. 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/03/donald-trump-boasts-nuclear-button-bigger-kim-jong-un>.



my Taiwanese friends kept asking me questions at that time. Do you think that a war will break out in the Korean Peninsula, sooner or later? Will you stay in Taiwan if it happens?

War seems imminent in the 21st century Korean Peninsula. A novelist Han Kang's New York Times op-ed titled "While the U.S. Talk about the War, South Korea Shudders: There is no War Scenario that Ends in Victory,"<sup>15</sup> on Oct. 17, 2017 thoroughly described the potential victims in the brutal war that the Koreans already experienced nearly seventy years ago, but the Americans did not. She quotes the American's thoughts on the distant war in the Korean Peninsula as follows "We have several scenarios." "Don't worry, war won't happen in America." "Only on the Korean Peninsula."<sup>16</sup> The South Korean people will never understand a war that occurs only on their land. As Han Kang points out "People who absolutely do not want another proxy war are living, here and now, on the Korean Peninsula."<sup>17</sup> Her opinion on the American's talk of war evokes the real diplomatic position of the two Koreas. It is the imperialistic relation with neighboring great powers as the Korean War occurred in 1950.

The U.S.A. has become the leading imperialistic power in the 21st Century. "Make America Great Again (MAGA)," a campaign slogan of Trump in 2016, presents the US's strong hegemony that makes the rest of the world fearful when it comes to the economic, military, and political imperialism of the U.S.A., because "'great' became interchangeable with white, heterosexual, male, hate, oppress, de-

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15 Han Kang, "While the U.S. Talk about the War, South Korea Shudders: There is no War Scenario that Ends in Victory," accessed Nov. 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/opinion/sunday/south-korea-trump-war.html>.

16 Kang, "While the U.S. Talk about the War."

17 Kang, "While the U.S. Talk about the War."

port,”<sup>18</sup> as marketing consultant Eva Van Brunt said. “‘It (MAGA) actually inspired me,’ Mr. Trump said, ‘because to me, it meant jobs. It meant industry, and meant military strength. It meant taking care of our veterans. It meant so much.’”<sup>19</sup> It may be called as new imperialism in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century as compared to the imperialism from the 15th to the early 19th century. The latter was heavily concerned with conquest and exploitation by invading the geographical regions. The former, focused on unfair economic trade and political pressure of weaker nations without too much focus on land, instead, being satisfied with creating a military presence in the weaker country. The citizens of this new imperialism are exiled in their own land because they have lost their own language, resources, culture, or sovereignty.

This phenomenon was described by Franz Fanon, who analyzes the colonized under the violence and pressure of the colonizers. Through his case studies of the mental disorder of either Algerians or Europeans, he highlights the French imperialism’s impact on the colonized. They were psychologically traumatized in their own land while living normal lives.<sup>20</sup> Imperialism has infiltrated into not only the political changes of the governmental sight, but also people’s outrages and frustration in daily life. Fanon also points out that there is a strong relationship between dignity and sovereignty saying, “The African peo-

18 Cf., Marissa Melton, “Is ‘Make America Great Again’ Racist?” accessed Nov. 3, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/is-make-america-great-racist/4009714.html>.

19 Luke Kinsella, “The Little-Known Story of ‘Make America Great Again,’” accessed Nov. 3, 2018, <https://www.news.com.au/world/north-america/the-littleknown-history-of-make-america-great-again/news-story/fb8a09b40aa59defd39ef0bcdeaeb281>.

20 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

ple were quick to realize that dignity and sovereignty were exact equivalent, and in fact, a free people living in dignity is a sovereign people.”<sup>21</sup> The principle of people’s dignity in a nation contains independence from imperial nations. However, the South Korean government cannot decide its own peace and prosperity in the Korean Peninsula, even though the South Koreans live as the subjects on the peninsula.

According to Gregory Elich, a member of Solidarity Committee for Democracy and Peace in Korea, the U.S.’s conventional view of diplomacy is that “cooperation is a sign of weakness, and results can be produced through punishment alone.”<sup>22</sup> During Mike Pompeo’s trip to Pyongyang on Oct. 7, 2018, the two parties’ intentions diverged as “Washington perceives talks as a surrender mechanism, whereas the DPRK is looking for normal diplomatic give-and-take.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, the war threats of the last year still remain in the Korean Peninsula of today because of Kim and Trump’s stale political plans.

Through the process of the peace talks in Inter-Korean agreements, we affirm that the dignity of the Korean Peninsula relies on the power of neighboring countries. However, the two Koreas have reached a comprehensive agreement to implement the easing of military tension and building of trust. On September 19, 2018, the Minister of National Defense of South Korea and Minister of People’s Armed Forces of North Korea signed the Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military

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21 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 198.

22 Gregory Elich, “Diplomatic Deadlock: Can U.S.-North Korea Diplomacy Survive Maximum Pressure?” accessed Nov. 4, 2018, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/10/16/diplomatic-deadlock-can-u-s-north-korea-diplomacy-survive-maximum-pressure/>.

23 Elich, “Diplomatic Deadlock.”

Domain. The key point of this agreement was “The two sides agreed to cease various military exercises aimed at each other along the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) from November 1, 2018.” On Nov. 1, 2018, 5 km of MDL, which was a historical powder keg in the Korean Peninsula, became the peace zone where “South and North Korean military authorities will suspend all mutually directed hostile activities on land and sea and in the air.” Two Koreas cannot achieve peace without a commitment to communicate with each other. Peaceful abode is not automatically compiled. There are usually two types of world powers. The first type brings up ethical suggestions regarding the other nations’ moral issue. The second type takes their own national benefits from neighboring countries which fall into turmoil. Trump’s words that I will quote below show that the imperialism metanarrative of the powers does not allow for the independence of a lesser power, even though they have strong alliances with other parties. The metanarrative of the imperialism appears not only in geographical or cultural dimensions, but also in the meaningful definition of peace. When you say peace, whose peace do you talk about?

We can witness the imperialistic metanarrative inside the U.S.A. “Well, they (South Korea) won’t do it without our approval. They do nothing without our approval” is Trump’s response to South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha’s remarks on Oct. 10, 2018 during a parliamentary audit. Kang said, “Seoul may lift some sanctions on North Korea,”<sup>24</sup> following a deadly attack on a warship that killed 45 South Korean sailors. The reason for this easing of the 5.24 sanction is “to create more momentum for diplomacy aimed at improving rela-

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24 Accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <http://time.com/5420248/south-korea-north-sanctions/>.

tions and defusing the nuclear crisis.”<sup>25</sup> The two Koreas plan to remove the obsolete conceptions of hostile relations between each other and seek for peace and prosperity. However, the words of Trump may create intransigency within North Korea and sovereign authority over South Korea.

In addition, the U.S. Embassy & Consultant in South Korea ordered the report of six CEO's on their visit to North Korea on September 18-20, 2018.<sup>26</sup> The U.S. Department of Treasury held telephone conference calls with seven South Korean banks including Nonghyup Bank, Woori Bank and Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) on Sept. 20-21 after Moon and Kim's third summit in 2018.<sup>27</sup> The main purpose of the call was to confirm that “the U.S. Treasury Department is ‘deeply concerned’ about planned financial cooperation between North and South Korea and has told South Korean banks that ‘U.N. and U.S. sanctions on North Korea remain valid.’”<sup>28</sup> Throughout these responses from the U.S.'s officials, we mainly recognize the imperial metanarrative of the U.S.A., since they tend to express an ideology of hierarchy and control over the Korean Peninsula. The metanarrative of Assyria had been experienced by the Israelites at the time of Isaiah. This prophet did not fall into silence, but spoke of peace in the Assyrian's grand-imperial order. Then, the Korean Christians learn the peace discourse

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25 Accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <http://time.com/5420248/south-korea-north-sanctions/>.

26 Seung Kwan Lee and Sung Ho Chung, “The US Government's Request of the Report on 6 CEO's Business with North Korea,” accessed Nov. 10, 2018, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2018/11/01/0200000000AKR20181101058300003.HTML>

27 Joyce Lee, “U.S. Treasury Calls Reveal ‘Deep Concern’ over South Korea Banks’ North Korea Plans: Document,” accessed Nov. 10, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-us-northkorea-southkorea-banks/u-s-treasury-calls-reveal-deep-concern-over-south-korea-banks-north-korea-plans-document-idUSKCN1MW19O>.

28 Lee, “U.S. Treasury Calls Reveal.”

from Isaiah. They can apply it to the current geopolitical order.

#### 4. Isaiah and Summit Statements

##### 4.1 Isaiah's Historic Background: Israel under Empire

Isaiah ben Amoz might experience six major events in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah of Judah: the Syro-Ephraimite War (736-732 BCE, 2 Kings 16:1-9, 18:9-12 Isaiah 7:1-8:15), Fall of Damascus (733 BCE/ 2 Kings 15:29/ Isaiah 9:1), Fall of Ephraim (721 BCE, 2 Kings 17:1-6, Isaiah 9:7-11, 28:1-4), Hezekiah's Reforms (715 BCE, 2 Kings 18:1-8), The Ashdod Insurrection (712 BCE, Isaiah 20), and The Sennacherib Invasion (701 BCE, 2 Kings 18:13-19:37, Isaiah 35-37). Isaiah's historical experiences were all related to the Assyrian Imperial powers directly or indirectly.

During the Syro-Ephraimite War, Pekah of Northern Israel and Rezin of Aram made an alliance and forced Ahaz of Southern Judah to join them against Assyria by invading Judah. Ahaz called Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrian king, for help. The Assyrian king complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death (2 Kings 16:9). Assyria invaded Damascus-Syria, and "large tracks of territory belonging to Israel on the coastal plain, in Galilee, and east and northeast of Galilee were annexed as Assyrian provinces,"<sup>29</sup> in the Fall of Damascus.

Samaria was defeated and captured by the Assyrians in 721 BCE. The entire Northern state became a province of the empire. During

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29 John W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets* (New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1987), 101.

these days, the crucial kings of Assyria were Shalmaneser V and Sargon II. In later times, Assyrian Kings who were prominent figures in the history of Israel and Judah included Sennacherib (704-681BCE), Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), and Ashurbanipal (668/9-631 BCE).<sup>30</sup> Hezekiah's reforms (2 Kings 18-1:8) were positively evaluated by the Deuteronomistic History. Meanwhile, Isaiah does not mention the internal events of Southern Judah. Sargon of Assyria captured Ashdod the Philistine coastal city. Ashdod was the center of the insurrection against Assyria.<sup>31</sup>

Sennacherib captured all the fortified cities of Judah, then King Hezekiah sent a message to the king of Assyria, saying "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; and I shall bear whatever you impose on me." So the king of Assyria imposed upon King Hezekiah of Judah a payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold" (2 Kings 18:14b, JPS). Hezekiah himself surrendered to the king of Assyria, and paid tribute to him. However, Isaiah's interpretation was different from the Hezekiah's situation since he proclaimed the protection of Jerusalem and the defeat of the Assyrian army because of the death of 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp (Isaiah 38:36).

These significant historical events with relations to the Empire provoked Isaiah (as a prophet) to pronounce God's oracle. The relations between an empire and a vassal state still occurs in the modern time. The Korean Peninsula is surrounded by the powerful nations—The U.S.A., China, Russia, and Japan—in the world. The Trump government seeks \$ 5 billion annually from South Korea to share the budgets of the U.S. troops in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>32</sup> The current geopolitical

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30 Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 38-39.

31 Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 102.

situation in the Korean Peninsula is similar to the Israelites' relations with the empires, thus, it evokes the responsibility of Christians to learn from the prophetic voices.

Isaiah could be described "as a royal counselor who advises the kings and people of Jerusalem and Judah during the crises of the latter half of the eighth century B.C.E."<sup>33</sup> The possibility of this prophethood came from his messages that were "intertwined with momentous political and religious events."<sup>34</sup> Hezekiah enacted reform by removing the high places and sacred stones, cutting down the Asherah poles and even by breaking the bronze snake of Moses called Nehustan (cf., 2 Kings 18:1-8). The reform's background was deeply related to the imperial coercion to his father King Ahaz. Ahaz demonstrated not only the political alliance with Assyria, but also the religious syncretism of Assyria in order to secure Judah from the empirical influences, since "religion, culture, and politics in the ancient world could not be separated."<sup>35</sup> The Deuteronomistic history was supportive of Hezekiah's reform (2 Kings 18:5-8) because of his loyalty to YHWH. Isaiah would have lived in this atmosphere. He also proclaimed positive words for Hezekiah who had to listen to the threatening and humiliation of Rabshakeh, the messenger of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Isaiah delivered YHWH's words regarding the fearlessness of the Assyrian king (2 Kings 18:6-7) and of Hezekiah's recovery from illness (2 Kings 20:9-11). However, it was arduous for him to

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32 Kyle Ferrier, "More Money? More Problems for the US-South Korea Burden-Sharing Talks," accessed Oct. 26, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/more-money-more-problems-for-the-us-south-korea-burden-sharing-talks/>.

33 Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 47.

34 Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 103.

35 Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 65.



achieve the reform successfully because of the attacks of the empires. In the fourth year of his reign and the seventh year of Hoshea of northern Israel, Shalmaneser the king of Assyria attacked Samaria. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, Sennacherib came up against the fenced cities of Judah. Hezekiah paid all the silver in the king's house and the Lord's house. He even cut off the gold from doors of his palace and Lord's temple (2 Kings 18:14-16). Hezekiah could not maintain the reformation based on the anti-Assyria policy and religion, but he needed to develop new diplomatic alliance with Babylonia by showing the Babylonian messengers his treasures in his palace (Isaiah 39). Hezekiah could set up the reformation in his internal bodies, because he liked to strengthen faithfulness to YHWH. Meanwhile, the dynamic external structures among Judah, Assyria, and Babylon did not allow him to sustain peace and faith. Ancient Israel, the weaker party than the Empires, was often confronted with difficulties in foreign politics, as North Korea is now facing in the world.

Isaiah was an active prophet during the time of the six events mentioned above ever since he received the prophetic call in the year of Uzziah's death (Isaiah 6:1-13). In particular, his messages were deeply related to the situations surrounding Southern Judah internationally and imperially. His prophetic activities stimulate Korean Christians to interpret political and international orders in the Korean Peninsula today, and to encourage the transformation of Christian perspectives and praxis.

#### **4.2 Pax Assyria and Sanctions on Neighboring Kingdoms**

As the people of the Korean Peninsula—South and North—have lived under the imperial flows, the Israelites—South and North—in

the time of Isaiah ben Amoz were surrounded by the influence of the Assyrian Empire. In his time, Assyria's territorial expansion and its controlling of securities in the 8th and 7th centuries may be recalled as Pax Assyria. Pax Assyria can refer to two agendas: one agenda meaning "good relations" and "peace making," and another which means "state of well-being, intact state."<sup>36</sup> The diplomatic alliances under the strong Assyrian hegemony made the peaceful era possible. King Bar-Rakib of Sam'al hailed Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III's protection which made him prosper economically and receive international acceptance, an example is the following quote:

"Due to the loyalty of my father, and due to my own loyalty, my Lord (the god) Rakib-el and my lord, Tiglath-pileser, placed me on my father's throne. And my household reinforced itself more than all (others). And I ran at the wheel (of the chariot) of Tiglath-pileser, among great kings, rich in silver and gold. And I took possession of my father's palace and made it more beautiful than the palace of any of the great kings."<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the international trade among neighboring kingdoms in the Mediterranean coastal areas was controlled by Tiglath-pileser III. According to the letter of the Assyrian appointment in 738-734 BCE, Tiglath-pileser III ordered the Sidon people not to trade with the Egyptians and the Philistines, since the Assyrian Empire wanted to seize

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36 Frederick Mario Fales, "On Pax Assyriaca in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries BCE and Its Implications," in *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 18.

37 Fales, "On Pax Assyriaca," 19.

power over the maritime trade.<sup>38</sup> The letter is as follows, “I spoke to them in these terms: ‘Bring down your lumber, do your work on it, but do not deliver it to the Philistines, or else I shall not allow you to go up the mountain.’”<sup>39</sup> This is a sanction from the great powers to the less ones. The Assyrian Empire banned trade with the Philistines by controlling lumber, even though they might say that the reason for the sanction was peace. The Assyrian Empire’s sanction the so-called peace protection illustrated today’s sanction of North Korea with powerful nations.

The control of the other subjects of the empire also appeared in not only economic trade, but also people’s deportation by the Empire and tribute to it. The kingdoms from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean needed to pay heavy tribute to the regime of Tiglath-pileser III after his newly established four providences in 738 BCE: Arpad, Kullani-Calneh, Hatarikka-Hadrach, and Simirra.<sup>40</sup> Pax Assyria demanded payment of the less powerful kingdoms.

Moreover, in the Sargon time, the qepu, assigned by the Assyrian Empire, watched over the economically important places in not only Phoenicia, but also Philistines.<sup>41</sup> The practice of Pax Assyria resulted in the economic control of Assyria over the subjugated kingdoms, since the less powerful kingdoms must follow the will of those in

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38 Joong Ho Jeong and Kee Soo Choi, “A Historical Study for Relations between Assyria and Egypt,” *Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 1, no. 4 (April 1998): 19.

39 Fales, “On Pax Assyriaca,” 23.

40 Nadav Na’aman, “Let Other Kingdoms Struggle with the Great Powers—You, Judah, Pay the Tribute and Hope for the Best: The Foreign Policy of the kings of Judah in the Ninth- Eighth Centuries BCE,” in *Isaiah’s Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 62.

41 Jeong and Choi, “A Historical Study for Relations between Assyria and Egypt,” 192.

power. However, the forceful deterrence of the Empire made them reluctant when they were supposed to follow “the terms of a previously agreed treaty—which implied providing men for the Empire’s primary needs—is overcome with comparatively little effort.”<sup>42</sup> Sargon, nevertheless, kept expressing his hegemony over the people, of which an example is as follows:

“I have made peace with them. Those who were obliged to provide labor have provided it, those who were obliged to provide soldiers for the king’s cohort have provided them. The whole mountains (now) observe the king’s treaty of allegiance; the king my lord can be glad.”<sup>43</sup>

Pax Assyria was unilateral peace, since one would wonder about the beneficiaries of peace. This peace was silent oppression from the imperial king and stealthy exploitation of the treaty. The one-sided Assyrian’s approach to treaties skewed the meanings of peace. Isaiah’s vision was for building up global peace under the Empire influences because there was no peace. Let’s see the meanings of peace in selected chapters of Isaiah as follows. The concept of Pax Assyria teaches us to infer whether today’s peace is for Pax America or not. Isaiah lets us seek the meanings of peace not only for the powerful, but also the weak through radical transformation, divine justice, and fearless independence.

#### 4.3 Isaiah 2: Ultimate Peace, the Request of Radical Shift from Nu-

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42 Fales, “On Pax Assyriaca,” 23.

43 Fales, “On Pax Assyriaca,” 24.

### clear to Life-Centered Equipment

The Hebrew word Shalom (peace in English), according to Isaiah, consists of several different meanings: safety (Isaiah 38:7), welfare (Isaiah 48:22, 57:2), tranquility (Isaiah 32:18), peace in human relationship (Isaiah 59:8), and peace with God (Isaiah 32:18).<sup>44</sup> In Isaiah 2:1-5, Isaiah proclaims the ultimate peace of YHWH,<sup>45</sup> saying “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4). There was no specific historical background for Isaiah 2-4 rather it “can be placed any time from the late 8th to the late 6th century.”<sup>46</sup> The historical setting of Isaiah 2:6-19 should be Hezekiah’s political alliance with Egypt, Philistia, and Phoenicia while he tried to oppose Assyrian hegemony.

Through the possibilities of the open historical background, Isaiah’s irenic statement could be interpreted by the modern people in two concepts: realistic uncertainty or illusive will. Can one experience his idealistic statement that the nations will beat their swords into plowshares in the world? One would give a negative answer, since wars are everywhere and every time. However, one of the prophetic roles is to deliver future hope for their audience. Thus, Isaiah affirmed the

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44 Hye Kyung Park, “The Plowshares Peace and Challenge: To Explore Peace for the Marginalized in Isaiah 2 and the Donghak Peasant Revolution,” in *Exploring the Relationship of Religions, Culture, and Peace in Christian Higher Education* (Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2017), 54.

45 Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature vol. XVI (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 97-99.

46 Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1-39, 103.

imaginative hope by telling the power of YHWH's justice and by requesting the performance of human justice. Each nation's efforts for peace will be the result of disarmament in international relationships and transformation. The relationship must "be based not on unilateral or even multilateral disarmament, but rather on omnilateral disarmament, covering the whole spectrum of instruments of war."<sup>47</sup> Omnilateral disarmament is not possible between North Korea and the U.S. Nevertheless, denuclearization of North Korea by the concept of complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID), was requested of North Korea only, not of the U.S.A. If so, the qualifications of reciprocal measures for North Korea should be guaranteed by the U.S. at least with public acknowledgement from the rest of world. For the Koreans, it is now time to realistically implement the radical shift from "swords into plowshares." Swords are nuclear weapon in the modern time. There is no peace without radical change that all the nations agree to abolish their nuclear weapons. Thus, a peaceful world comes from the achievement of their radical transformation. When Isaiah proclaims the shift from swords to plowshares, he is pointing to agricultural growth by using farming implements: peace-centered farming; instead of military antics. If this case is applied to the current issue in North Korea, denuclearization needs to lead towards beneficial results of the most necessary areas in Kim Jong-un's regime. In North Korea, healthcare is in need of urgent care.

Security Council 1718 Sanctions Committee approved implementation assistance notice on humanitarian exemption for North Korea on

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47 Adrian Hyde-Price, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition!: A Realist Response to Isaiah's Irenic Vision," in *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 214.

Aug. 6, 2018, and the UN Security Council announced the approval of implementation on Oct. 24, 2018.<sup>48</sup> According to the Committee, livelihood purposes such as medicine was an exemption. The health equipment and medicine totaling \$460,000 including X-ray equipment, medical vehicles and maternal-fetal medicine etc. will be sent to North Korea under the surveillance of the UNICEF authorities. In order to create a nuclear free Korean Peninsula, we must put life first, while continuing the process of achieving global peace.

Isaiah also proclaims the radical shift in not only military power, but also in human power. Isaiah 2:12, “For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.” In addition, one can read in 2:17, “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.” In 2018, South Korea ranked 7th in the world in military strength, while North Korea was placed at 18th.<sup>49</sup> After making the radical shift from military power to peaceful equipment and human resources, the Korean Peninsula can possibly focus on the economic development, therefore peace and prosperity cannot be different concepts. It is necessary for the Korean Christians to heed the hope of Isaiah’s radical message in Isaiah 2.

I appreciate the “Roundtable for Peace on the Korean Peninsula” meeting on Nov. 9-11, 2018 at Atlanta, GA, U.S.A. This meeting was sponsored by the World Methodist Council, The Korean Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church including delegated from

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48 KBS NEWS Nov. 9th 2018, accessed Nov. 20, 2018, <https://news.v.daum.net/v/20181109213737136?rcmd=m>.

49 “2018 Military Strength Ranking,” <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

NCKK, NCCUSA, WCC and other denominations. They adopted the Atlanta Statement on Nov. 11, 2018, proclaiming that,

“We pledge to work for peace.....This urgent and critical moment is an opportunity for God’s transformative redemption. Fostering replacement of the old system of division and power will enable the peace of Christ to flower in the Korean Peninsula. In this process, peace and prosperity among all will be celebrated, and we will be able to declare with awe, ‘A new heaven and earth appears before our eye. The era of force is gone, and the era of morality has come’ (a quote from ‘The March 1st Declaration of Independence in 1919’)”<sup>50</sup>

Isaiah invites us how to awaken God’s redemption by announcing ultimate and radical peace. After peaceful reunification in the Korean Peninsula, the Christians will meet a new heaven and earth.

#### **4.4 Isaiah 5-12: Peace, Immanuel, and Justice for Hanbandohin (New Humankind in the Korean Peninsula)**

The Christian’s most significant verse of the book of Isaiah should be Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” This is the sign of the birth of Immanuel which means “God is with us.” What kind of atmosphere offers such a great confirmation, “God is with us”? The analyses of structure and setting may give us answers. The structure of the synchronic approach reminds us

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50 Accessed Nov. 28, 2018, <https://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2018/november/declarations-and-statement-for-peace-korean-peninsula>



to emphasize peace in the Isaianic tradition and the setting of the diachronic approach focuses on peace in the relationship between Northern Israel and Southern Judah in the neighboring kingdoms under the Assyrian Empire.

Isaiah 7 belongs in the macro demarcation from chapter 5 to 12. These eight chapters are titled as "Prophetic Inscription concerning the Significance of Assyrian Judgment against Israel: Restoration of the Davidic Empire."<sup>51</sup> The demarcation begins with Zion's preparation as center for YHWH's world rule in 2:1-4:6, and ends with nations' preparations for YHWH's world rule in 13:1-27:13. In Isaiah 5-12, there are two major sections: 1) Isaiah 5:1-7 telling "Song of the Vineyard," and 2) 6:1-12:6 announcing "the Explanation of the Judgment against Israel and Judah."<sup>52</sup> Isaiah critically analyzed the wicked situations in Isaiah 5, "And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes" (Isa. 5:2). Then, Isaiah cursed the wicked ones, saying "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). This is a curse on unjust people. The cursing unto the evil in chapter 5 opens the prophetic call of Isaiah in chapter 6.

The structure of these chapters highlights Isaiah's reason for the prophetic message of Immanuel in Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah 8 emphasizes the mistakes of the Syro-Ephraimitic War telling, "Forasmuch as this people refuse the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin

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51 Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1-39, 112-121.

52 Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1-39, 114.

and Remaliah's son" (Isaiah 8:6). Then, "And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach oven to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel" (Isaiah 8:8). "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces" (Is. 8:9). In Isaiah 9, there is the reversal affirming the birth of the king of peace, saying "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

If the child in Isaiah 7:14 is the same one as in chapter 9 then peace is the signifying character of Immanuel. Peace being the focus here is more understandable since "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be on end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with in-judice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7). Isaiah 10 keeps highlighting the importance of justice telling "To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the fight from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!" (Isaiah 10:2).

The concept of peaceful Immanuel refers to the virtue of the leadership in the Israelites. The idealized kingship should control the human morality, meanwhile it should protect the wild nature for the peaceful momentum in Isaiah 11. Nowadays peaceful times will appear in ecological awareness like in Isaiah 11:1-9. These verses consist in two sections: human justice in vv. 1-5 and eco justice in vv. 6-9. The holy court demonstrates that the king will judge the poor with righteousness, re-

prove with equity for the meek of the earth (v. 4). The holy safari<sup>53</sup> will be a place for wild animals to dwell in peace and non-violent. Nowadays it should be the ultimate and idealized regime. The eco-friendly dwelling place is Isaiah's vision as follows, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah 11:6-7). His vision invites us to a subverted and radical transformation<sup>54</sup> illustrated through a little child's leadership and freedom from lion's appetite. Can you accept the leadership of a child? Moreover, if a lion keeps eating straw, it will die. Thus, Isaiah points out that the practice of peace is tremendously difficult just like the leadership of child or the sacrifice of a life. Without a full commitment to peace, it cannot be achieved by us. We learn from the sacrifice of the lion who will eat straw in Isaiah's vision. On the Korean Peninsula, people should decide to pay the financial contributions to make peace. Some Koreans are afraid of the payment of unification tax or the continual contribution to peace, because they do not want to give up their own interests. If a "lion" prefers to eat meat, it selfishly keeps being violent towards the weak.

God in Isaiah 12 will be praised because of excellent things, known in all the earth. This praise will also be the song for the Hanbandohin

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53 Hae-kwon Kim, "A Reading of Isaiah 11 in the Context of the Divided Korea with Focus on a Reunification Theology of Isaiah in His Messianic Prophecy," *Madang* 10 (Dec. 2008): 50.

54 Hye Kyung Park, "Violence and Resistance: A Hermeneutical Dialogue between 'A Shoot' in Isaiah 11 and 'The Sun-moon' in Asian Narratives for Justice," in *God's Words in God's World: A Contextual Application of Asian Biblical Theology* (Cherry Yeh Publication: Yangon-Myanmar, 2018), 85-86.

(New Humankind in the Korean Peninsula), since there will be no fear, “the Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:2-3). I could avoid a gap between South Korea and North Korea by saying Hanbandoin which includes all the people on the Korean Peninsula. How do we interpret the theological meaning of Immanuel while Isaiah brings up the judgment in a diachronic approach? The judgment against the two kingdoms is the ex-eventu prophecy in the Isaianic tradition after the two kingdoms’ fall. Thus, the concept of the peaceful Immanuel in chapter 7 reminds us God’s presence in the tremendous difficulties after the empires’ conquests on each kingdom.

The historical background of Immanuel in Isaiah 7 was the Syro-Ephraimitic War. As I mentioned before, the war was the major historic experience of Isaiah under the Assyrian Empire’s metanarrative. The anti-Assyrian coalitions of the Palestine occurred in the eighth century BCE. The Syro-Ephraimitic War, “in which the Pekah the king of Northern Israel participated, included an anti-Assyrian coalition of states: Kashpuna, Tyer, Ashkelon, and Damascus.”<sup>55</sup> Ahaz the king of Southern Judah rejected membership of the coalition, meanwhile Pekah of Northern Israel and Rezin of Damascus attacked Judah in order to force Ahaz to join the coalition. However, Ahaz called Tiglath-pileser III for help to protect Judah. Ahaz, the king of Southern Judah, provided a starting point for Tiglath-pileser III’s western campaigns. Even though Tiglath-pileser III saved Jerusalem by destroying Damascus and killing Rezin, he began Judah’s servitude to Assyria (2 Kings 16:1-20).<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Ahaz commanded Uriah the Priest to make cultic

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55 Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 38.

innovations such as a new altar among other things after meeting Tiglath-pileser III and visiting the altar in Damascus. The Deuteronomistic History evaluated his action in 2 Kings 16:18 as we read, “He took away the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the temple and removed the royal entryway outside the temple of the Lord, in deference to the king of Assyria.” For Ahaz, the power of the imperial king was more significant to follow than the traditional proper. Ahaz could save Jerusalem from the attack of the coalition, but he needed to forsake his faithfulness and pay tribute to the Empire. Although Ahaz saved Jerusalem from attack, his method did not yield the same peace that Isaiah spoke of in his messages.

Isaiah did not agree with Ahaz because he has not insisted on the coalition with neighboring kingdoms, neither has he agreed to the alliance with Assyria. In Isaiah 7: 4-7, Isaiah confirmed the promise of the Lord’s protections by saying “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these tow smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah” (Isaiah 7:4). His main message highlighted the alliance with God in light of political neutrality. Isaiah’s position was not of political limbo without progress and improvement. His message of neutrality emphasizes the righteousness of God because the political and economic tribute to Assyria made victims of the common people.<sup>57</sup> It was the local people who were victimized by the metanarrative of Assyria. The upper people of Judah intensified the economic victim-

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56 Burke O. Long, *2 Kings*. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature vol. X (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 177.

57 Tak Joo Woo, “Isaiah’s Political Neutrality in Syria-Ephraim Crisis: The Socio-Rhetoric Analysis of Oracles, the Interrelationship between Faith and Practice,” *Bokeum and Silchun*, 30, no. 1 (November 2002): 61-84.

ization of farmers and the lower people of Judah. The culture, labor, language, and economy were all absorbed by the empire.

Isaiah reminds us that war is useless, since any war cannot end without the bloodshed of people or tribute to empires. Therefore, the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula signed by the two leaders of South and North Korea on April 27, 2018 was a historic agreement for justice without the sacrifice of Hanbandohin (new humankind in the Korean Peninsula). This declaration exists in three timelines: past, present, and future. In the past timeline, it emphasizes a blood-based community of the two Koreas because of one family. In the present timeline, the two Koreas are trying to alleviate the current military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. In the future timeline, the Korean Peninsula will be filled with permanent and solid peace.

If Northern Israel considered Southern Judah as their own family, they might not have attacked Jerusalem. If so, Ahaz would not have asked Assyria for help which opened the imperial intervention of Assyria. Furthermore, the people of the two kingdoms might not experience difficult time in the Assyrian campaigns. The Syro-Ephraimitic War teaches us to appreciate the cooperation of the originally same family such as Northern Israel and Southern Judah. The Korean Peninsula should not split into two nations in order to achieve peace. The Panmunjom Declaration correctly highlights people's peaceful and stable lives, since the Koreans have learned the peace lesson after the Korean War. In addition, it looks forward to "seek the support and cooperation of the international community for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."<sup>58</sup>

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58 Accessed Nov. 26, 2018, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27\\_04\\_2018\\_korean\\_de-](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27_04_2018_korean_de-)

#### 4.5 Isaiah 36-39: Peace, Independent Discourse out of the Imperial Metanarrative

Isaiah 36-39 is titled as “Royal Narrative Concerning Hezekiah.”<sup>59</sup> The important points of Isaiah’s oracles are related to the threat of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, against Hezekiah, Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery, and Hezekiah’s reception of the embassies of Merodach-baladan, the Babylonian king. Hezekiah’s relationship with the empires—Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon— and Isaiah’s prophetic messages provide us the advice for diplomatic relationship. The dynamic power of the empires in Hezekiah’s time is quite similar to the powerful nations’ dynamics around the Korean Peninsula. Isaiah’s vision reinforces the assurance of divine grace and salvation, saying “Isaiah said to them, ‘Tell your master as follows: Thus said the Lord: Do not be frightened by the words of blasphemy against Me that you have heard from the minions of the king of Assyria’” (Isaiah 37:6, JPS). Before analyzing this verse, let’s look at the settings of these chapters.

Sennacherib intimidated Hezekiah and the Israelites into distrusting themselves and YHWH (Isaiah 36:1-22, 37:9-13). He intended for the Israelites to stay by his side. According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, the speeches of Rabshakeh were the same as “Sennacherib’s tone of self-confident braggadocio”<sup>60</sup> which also appears nowadays in the leaders in the world. Empire leadership never was defined by open and humble attitudes.

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claration.pdf.

59 Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1-39, 454.

60 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39 A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 475.

In Isaiah 36, Sennacherib captured the cities of Judah, and sent Rabshakeh with a large army from Lachish to Hezekiah at Jerusalem to deliver his threatening words: “On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have strategy and military strength – but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?” (Isaiah 36:4-5). He did not allow Hezekiah’s reliance on Egypt, however Hezekiah tried to depend on Egypt for military defenses. Sennacherib also commanded men not to be deceived by Hezekiah who persuaded men to trust in the Lord, saying “The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria” (Isaiah 36:15). Sennacherib wanted to control Judah’s diplomatic relationships with other nations and religious belief in the Lord. Meanwhile he concentrated his attention on the strong relationship between Assyria and Judah.

In Isaiah 37:1-7, Hezekiah put on mourning clothes because of the intimidation of Sennacherib, and sent a delegation of officers to Isaiah in order to request intercession. Isaiah’s prophetic oracle in Isaiah 37:6 is distinct, a confirmation written with the two prophetic formulas: messenger formula (kōh ’āmar YHWH) and oracle of salvation (’al- tîrā’). The kōh ’āmar YHWH (Thus said the Lord) confirms that Isaiah as a third party has practiced “the oral transmission” of commissioning and reiterating.<sup>61</sup> The formula ascertains that his words come from YHWH. The ’al- tîrā’ (Don’t fear) is an assurance formula “spoken by an authorized or powerful person to those who need help..... Frequently priests, prophets, or other religious officials that communicate divine assurance.”<sup>62</sup> Isaiah’s ’al- tîrā’ confidently delivers YHWH’s

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61 Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature vol. XIX (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 361.



grace and blessing since YHWH shall put a spirit in the Assyrian king so that he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there YHWH will have him cut down with the sword (Isaiah 37:7). This verse refers to the assassination of the Assyrian king (Isaiah 37:36-38).

Isaiah's vision encourages the Israelites to be independent without feeling threatened by Assyria. South Korea and North Korea have begun the withdrawal of guard posts within the DMZ<sup>63</sup> to follow the Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain<sup>64</sup> signed on September 19, 2018. Without courage, the military agreement cannot be implemented on the Korean Peninsula. This action has been also recognized by the world and the U.S.A. The Security Council of the UN has approved a joint study project on connecting railways of South and North Korea in easing of North Korea sanctions.<sup>65</sup>

In Isaiah 39, Merodach-baladan, the king of Babylon, sent embassies with a gift to Hezekiah who had recovered from the illness. Hezekiah welcomed them and showed them "his treasure house—the silver, the gold, the spices, and the fragrant oil—and all his armory, and every-

62 Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2 and Lamentations*. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature vol. XV (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 510.

63 Accessed Nov. 25, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/seoul-north-korea-explodes-10-guard-posts-to-lower-tensions/2018/11/20/f5bf4650-ec96-11e8-8b47-bd0975fd6199\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.ffd8dc71162d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/seoul-north-korea-explodes-10-guard-posts-to-lower-tensions/2018/11/20/f5bf4650-ec96-11e8-8b47-bd0975fd6199_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ffd8dc71162d).

64 Accessed Nov. 25, 2018, <https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/Agreement%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Historic%20Panmunjom%20Declaration%20in%20the%20Military%20Domain.pdf>.

65 Sang-Hun Choe, "North and South Korea Get U.N.'s Go-Ahead to Study Joint Rail Project," accessed Nov. 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/24/world/asia/north-south-korea-rail-un.html>.

thing that was to be found in his store houses. There was nothing in his palace or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them” (Isaiah 39:2, JPS). In the excess of his joy, Hezekiah uncovered his economic conditions and military power to Babylon. This reception of the embassies provoked Isaiah to proclaim punishment against Hezekiah, saying “A time is coming when everything in your palace, which your ancestors have stored up to this day, will be carried off to Babylon; nothing will be left behind, said the Lord. And some of your sons, your own issue, whom you will have fathers, will be taken to serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 39:6-7, JPS). However, Hezekiah added that there is peace and security in his time.

In Pyongyang, at the Joint Declaration of September 2018, the two leaders of South and North Korea,

“reaffirmed the principle of independence and self-determination of the Korean nation, and agreed to continuously develop inter-Korean relations for national reconciliation and cooperation, and firm peace and co-prosperity, and to make efforts to realize through policy measures the aspiration and hope of all Koreans that the current developments in inter-Korean relations will lead to reunification.”<sup>66</sup>

The declaration focuses on peace and prosperity in the Korean Peninsula and a nuclear free zone in a prompt manner. Thus, North Korea agrees to dismantle the Tongchang-ri missile engine test site and launch platform under the observation of experts from relevant

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66 Accessed Nov. 26, 2018, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/103\\_255848.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/103_255848.html).

countries. North Korea expressed her willingness to dismantle the nuclear facilities in Yongbyon as the U.S. takes corresponding measures. The contents of this declaration remind us that Hezekiah showed the embassies of Babylon his wealth and armory. Does Isaiah still disagree with the action of showing military power?

## 5. Conclusion

In the near future, is it possible for the Korean Christians to sing “Is that day you will say: ‘I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me..... In that day you will say: “Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world” (Isaiah 12:1, 4-5). This is the thanksgiving reprising the theme of the exodus.<sup>67</sup> The significant history of the Israelites was highlighted by Isaiah who experienced hardships from the empires. Moreover, it led him to sing God’s wonders which might not be expected for a while.

It was not easy for people to imagine the summit between the US and North Korea even two years ago. There were skeptical responses regarding this meeting in South Korea, U.S.A. and all around the world. These opinions were the results of thoughts about the sovereignty of the Korean Peninsula. Who could decide the destiny and dignity of the Korean people? I agree with Ajamu Baraka’s statement that “de-nuclearization should not be the focus—self-determination

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67 Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 115.

of the Korea peoples must be the center of our discussion.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the agreements made at the summits between the two Korean leaders—Moon Jae-In and Kim Jong-un— should be implemented soon without the surrendering of their peace and prosperity to imperial ideology.

De-nuclearization on the Korean Peninsula has been placed as the exterior issue on the negotiating table for leaders. By doing so, President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un agreed to four agendas on June 12, 2018: 1) to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity 2) to build a lasting and stable peace regime in the Korean Peninsula 3) to reaffirm the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula 4) to recover POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.<sup>69</sup> Peace-filled North Korea is the main theme to be agreed upon the name of denuclearization. When considering this, one cannot forget the people of South Korea as any kind of war on the Korean Peninsula would indeed affect the southern part of this peninsula.

Moreover, President Moon Jae-In proposed transforming the DMZ into an “International Peace Zone” at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, New York, on September 24, 2019.<sup>70</sup> The DMZ is no

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68 Ajamu Baraka, “North Korea Issue is Not De-Nuclearization But De-Colonization,” Black Agenda Report, accessed Nov. 27, 2018, <https://blackagenda.com/north-korea-issue-not-de-nuclearization-de-colonization>.

69 Accessed Nov. 27, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/12/politics/read-full-text-of-trump-kim-signed-statement/index.html>.

70 “Address by President Moon-Jae in at 74th Session of United Nations General Assembly,” accessed Oct. 6, 2019, [http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5674/view.do?seq=319947&srchFr](http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=319947&srchFr)

longer a bi-sect place of the Korean Peninsula, but is the most peaceful and ecological zone in the world.

Isaiah's vision of peace awakens us to consider that we cannot achieve peace, easily. However, the Christians make efforts for peace by committing radical transformation, asking for divine justice, and preserving fearless independence.

Is it possible for us to hear from Trump and Kim in the future? "My nuclear disarmament button is bigger than yours." If one follows the peace discourse of Isaiah, "yes" is the answer.

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