

3. The third cycle. Two cities in contrast: endurance through to glory (24:1–27:13)

Each element in this title is important. The first concerns the form of the section; the second its central theme; and the third its relation to the two preceding cycles.⁷⁴

It is ‘The third cycle’, not ‘The third cycle of oracles’, because the oracle structure is not used. This is a continuous whole, incorporating poetry, prose and song. It is, nevertheless, closely integrated with the preceding cycles.

The central theme is a city destroyed and a city established. The former is ‘the ruined city’ (24:10; cf. 25:2, 12; 26:5; 27:10) and the latter is referred to by location, e.g. Mount Zion (24:23; 25:6–7, 10; 27:13), or simply as a city or as Jerusalem (24:23; 26:1; 27:13). Of all sections of Isaiah this offers the least help in discerning the situations which prompted the individual units. It is very likely, for example, that 25:10–12 originated with the Moab material in 15:1–16:14, and indeed if the initial ‘For’ of 25:10 is translated ‘When’, it follows well after 16:12, matching the ‘when’ clause in 16:4b. Equally, much of this material seems to have been composed for its present place, as Kaiser holds

⁷⁴ These chapters have often been called ‘The Isaiah Apocalypse’, but even where the title is retained today it seems to be accompanied by an increasing awareness that it does not suit the content. Clements urges that it is their ‘thoroughgoing eschatological character that has allowed several interpreters to describe ... chapters 24–27 as apocalyptic.’ J. Lindblom, though he called his book *Die Jesaja-Apokalypse* (Lund, 1938), gives these chapters the correctly descriptive title of ‘cantata’—for they are indeed eschatological poems mingled with songs. To be sure, apocalyptic is an outgrowth from prophetic eschatology (see Johnson; P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Fortress, 1975]), but *Isaiah 24–27* lies far nearer to prophecy than it does to apocalyptic. The characteristics of apocalyptic (H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* [SPCK, 1943]; L. Morris, *Apocalyptic* [IVP, 1972]) are notably absent. W. R. Millar (*Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* [Scholars Press, 1976]) undertook a close study of prosodic style, patterns of themes and historical setting. He found reason to place the author ‘close to Second Isaiah’ and urged that on many levels the writer of *Isaiah 24–27*, Second Isaiah and Canaanite poets exhibit ‘similarity in prosodic style’; that the ‘thematic pattern’ is ancient, ‘even having its origin in Canaanite religion’; and that the whole is ‘proto-apocalyptic’ and by ‘a disciple of Isaiah ... who shared his vision for the reconstruction of Israel’.

regarding 24:7–12; 25:1–5; 26:1–6. In any case, context is all important, and the hunt for ‘original’ settings is both indecisive and unhelpful. To understand chapters 24–27 we must first see it as a single complex and then place it in the ‘grand strategy’ of chapters 13–27. In 2:2–4 a Zion hymn expressed a universal hope centred on the city as a magnet to the whole world. The companion truth, however, to the call to the nations (‘Come, let us go up’; 2:3) is a call to the Lord’s people, ‘Come, let us walk’ (2:5). Though they lived in Zion they had already lost the Zion ideal and they too must come on pilgrimage back to the Lord. Chapters 24–27 express this double pilgrimage on a grand scale:

A¹ The Lord’s harvest from a destroyed world (24:1–13)

Destruction (1–12)

Gleanings (13)

B¹ The song of the world remnant (24:14–16a)

C¹ The sinful world overthrown (24:16b–20)

D¹ The waiting world (24:21–23)

E¹ The song of the ruined city (25:1–5)

F MOUNT ZION (25:6–12)

E² The song of the strong city (26:1–6)

D² The waiting people of God (26:7–21)

C² Spiritual forces of evil overthrown (27:1)

B² The song of the remnant of the people (27:2–6)

A² The Lord’s harvest from a destroyed people (27:7–13)

Destruction (7–11)

Gleanings (12–13)

Note that:

a. Parts A¹–E¹ are concerned with the outside world and E²–A² with the Lord’s people. Mount Zion is central to both, thus fulfilling the vision of 2:2–4:5. Part F stresses universality with ‘all peoples’ (25:6–7), ‘all nations’ (25:7), ‘all faces’ and ‘all the earth’ (25:8).

b. While the world is drawn to Mount Zion (A¹–E¹), the Lord’s people start there (E²). The believing people know the strength of the city to begin with (26:1) but know also that it needs faith and patience to inherit the promises (D²). Great spiritual issues have to be settled (C²) and, even though they are in the Lord’s care (B²), judgment must come

to the house of God before the final harvest (A²).

c. Parts E¹ and E² reflect this situation. The world remnant is conscious of what it has been saved from; the Lord's people are concerned to secure all that has been promised to believers.

d. Parts C¹ and C² not only have matching themes but share the motifs of flood (24:18b) and sea (27:1).

e. Parts D¹ and D² are linked by the theme of waiting: 'after many days' (24:22), 'we wait' (26:8). Note also the link of 'punished' (24:22) and 'punish' (26:21).⁷⁵

The third element in the title places this cycle in the context of chapters 13–27. Many attempts have been made to identify the unnamed city of 24:10 etc.,⁷⁶ and no doubt

⁷⁵ Clements offers an excellent note covering current approaches to *Isaiah 24–27* and urges correctly that the thematic approach is 'more credible and satisfactory'. Multiple authorship is widely advocated, one building on another in a sustained attempt to express their sense of imminent eschatological events. Wilderberger adopts the same line. He thinks that 24:1–6, 14–20; 26:7–21 provided a 'groundwork' and that it was developed by successive insertions: eschatological images (e.g. 24:21–23), songs (25:1–5; 26:1–6) and other additions, such as 27:1. Johnson challenges this 'growth process' (*Wachstumsprozess* is Wilderberger's word) on two grounds. First, that those who advocate it have failed to agree as to the units which were progressively added and to offer a convincing rationale for their addition; and secondly, that the hypothesis is inadequate to account for 'the unified work which comprises *Isaiah 24–27*'. He speaks of 'an emerging consensus that *Isaiah 24–27* is an ordered composition'. His own view is that a single author produced 24:1–20 on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587; during the exile he added 24:21–27:1 in confidence of the victory of the Lord and the destruction of Babylon; and finally brought the triumph theme to a conclusion with 27:2–13.

⁷⁶ E.g. an unknown Moabite city (Eissfeldt); Babylon, at various dates (Lindblom; cf. G. W. Anderson, *Isaiah 24–27 Reconsidered*, VTS, 9 [1963]); Jerusalem (Millar, Johnson). Clements, Wilderberger and Kaiser advocate a symbolic view—the city as a 'representation of the larger reality of world evil'. The unity of the whole section (chapters 13–27) and the development displayed above substantiate this view. The city theme is suited to Isaiah as to no other prophet, and arguments against his authorship are not strong when weighed against this suitability and against the intrinsic likelihood that his own predictions must have driven him to probe the future in the way these chapters do. It is impossible to think of Isaiah silently acquiescing in the end of Zion, accepting

elements in the description are suited by these various locations, but all such identifications are beside the point. Nowadays we use the expression ‘global village’ to describe how, in the twentieth century, the world has contracted so that what concerns one touches all; everything is potentially of world importance. Isaiah’s concern is similar but not identical. He has in mind the ‘global city’, the whole world organized on a human-centred, non-spiritual basis. He has now taken us past the point where we say, ‘Babylon has fallen’, and brought us to the point where the spirit of Babylon is encapsulated in ‘the city without meaning’ ([24:10](#)), in whose fall the earth itself returns to primeval meaninglessness ([24:18b–20](#); cf. [Gn. 1:2](#); [Je. 4:23ff.](#)) and beyond which shines the city where the Lord reigns ([24:21–23](#)). This cycle, therefore, is the fitting climax of the whole series. The historical structures of Isaiah’s time (chapters [13–20](#)) yielded to a picture, blurred round the edges but clear in its essentials (chapters [21–23](#)), but now the prophet strains forward to the eschaton where there are still five strands of truth:

- a. Preservation of the Lord’s people amid a crashing world ([24:1–20](#); esp. verses [13–16a](#)).
- b. The certainty of the promises even when they seem to delay ([24:21–23](#)).
- c. The satisfaction of the whole world on Mount Zion ([25:1–12](#)).
- d. The people of God caught up in all the turmoil of history but already within the secure city ([26:1–20](#)).
- e. The final gathering ([27:1–13](#)).

In the first series, Moab turned, through pride, from security in Zion (chapters [15–16](#)); in the second, Gentile needs remained unmet by mutual aid ([21:13–17](#)); now, on Mount Zion, every need is met, though Moabite pride still excludes ([25:1–12](#)). The first two series exposed the collapse of the people of God into worldly securities ([17:1ff.](#)) and self-sufficiency (chapter [22](#)), but now the picture is wholly positive (chapter [26](#)). There is security in the Lord, waiting, the discipline of patience, mourning over shortcomings, and protection—a picture of a true church expecting the final harvest. Within the Isaianic literature as we have received it these chapters show how in the end the world’s king will come to his throne.

a. The city of meaninglessness: world history planned around the people of God ([24:1–20](#))

At the heart of this passage lies a truth found also in the parallel passages in the preceding cycles: the centrality of the Lord's people in the Lord's plans for the world (see on 14:2; 21:10). When the final crisis comes on the world, this principle holds firm: safety for the Lord's remnant. Thus we hear the stilling of the song of the world (verses 7–12) and the rising of the song of the remnant (verses 13–16a). In a collapsing world the people whose joy is in the Lord are secure.

A¹The earth devastated: divine action (1–3)

B¹ The withering of the world: sin and the curse (4–6)

C¹ The song stilled: the fall of the city (7–12)

C² The song heard: world-wide gleanings (13–16b)

B² Personal wasting away: grief over treachery and its outcome (16c–18d)

A² The earth broken up: moral/spiritual causation (18e–20)

Further elements of the integrity of this poem are detailed below, but first its general background in the flood narrative (Gn. 6–9) should be noted. Both have references to the ‘windows [NIV, ‘floodgates’] of the heavens’ being ‘opened’ (cf. verse 18c and Gn. 7:11); both refer to the ‘everlasting covenant’ (cf. verse 5 and Gn. 9:16); and in verse 6 the ‘curse’, in the context of the wine/vine theme of verse 7, links with Noah the vine-dresser and the imposition of the curse in the post-diluvian world (Gn. 9:20, 25).

The earth devastated: divine action (24:1–3)

This section is bracketed by the inclusios *lay waste* (1), *laid waste* (3; √ *bāqaq*) and *See, the LORD* (1; *hinnēh yhwh*), ‘For’ the *LORD* (3; *kī yhwh*; the NIV omits ‘For’). The emphasis is on total devastation, including both natural and human worlds (1). No-one will escape, yet no charge is levelled. The word of the Lord has been spoken (3) but the verses offer no justification for it. Thus the section cannot stand alone but needs the remainder of the poem, and especially the matching verses 18b–20, to complete the picture.

1 On *See, the LORD* (*hinnēh yhwh*), Wilderberger notes that “Behold” with the divine name and a following participle is typical of Isaiah (3:1; 8:7; 10:33; etc.) but rare elsewhere’ (cf. Johnson).⁷⁷ For the involvement of the world itself as caught up in the

⁷⁷ See 3:1; 8:7; 10:33; 19:1; 22:17; 24:1; 26:21. Outside Isaiah, only Mi. 1:3 and Am. 7:4 has this. The construction of *hinnēh* with the first person suffix referring to the Lord, who following participle is widespread throughout the prophets.

judgment about to fall on its inhabitants see on 2:12ff. It is intrinsic to the doctrine of creation that human beings in sin are the supreme environmental threat. *Lay waste* is a participle of imminent (though undated) action. $\sqrt{bāqāq}$ (cf. 19:3; Ho. 10:1) used to be translated ‘to empty’ (*BDB*) but means ‘lay waste’ (*KB*). The word *devastate* ($\sqrt{bālaq}$) is found only here and in Nahum 2:10 <11>. This vocabulary of destruction of the physical world is preparing for the description of the *city* in verse 10 as ‘of emptiness/meaninglessness’, the *tōhû* of Genesis 1:2. *Scatter* ($\sqrt{pūš}$; as Gn. 11:4, 8–9) also sets the scene for the *city*, looking back to the original Babel, the city where people began their still-continuing search for a cohesive society based on their own abilities and technologies.

2 See the note above on verses 1–3 and cf. Hosea 4:1–10, especially verse 9.⁷⁸ The contrasting pairs form an idiom of totality (see on 3:1), viewing humankind religiously (priests ... people), domestically (master ... servant, ... mistress ... maid) and commercially (seller ... buyer etc.). Every aspect of life is under sentence along with every group and individual.

3 *The earth will be completely laid waste* uses the same words as verse 1 but alters the active (what the Lord will do) to passive (what the earth will endure). See 3:1; 8:7; 10:33; 19:1; 22:17; 24:1; 26:21. Outside Isaiah, only Mi. 1:3 and Am. 7:4 has this. The construction of *hinnēh* with the first person suffix referring to the Lord, with following participle is widespread throughout the prophets. The threatened deed will come to fruition. *Completely laid waste* and *totally plundered* are both infinitive absolute constructions. *Completely* and *totally* qualify not *earth* (i.e. meaning that whole earth will suffer plundering) but the verbal idea: it will be an act of devastation which includes everything that devastation implies. *Plundered* ($\sqrt{bāzaz}$) is not used in a general sense of ‘destroying’ but always with the idea of someone carrying off spoil. The enemy is left unnamed. Here again this opening section cannot stand alone. The creation, flood and Babel imagery of the remainder of the poem make the Lord the adversary and victor. *The LORD has spoken this word/For it is the Lord who has spoken this word* is typical of Isaiah (cf. 1:2, 20; 21:17; 22:25; 25:8; 40:5; 58:14).

⁷⁸ Kaiser holds that the present passage arose when a late post-exilic writer made use of Ho. 4:1ff. to develop a picture of world ruin. But the language here is typically Isaianic, e.g. his love of lists (cf. 3:1–3, 16; 10:9–11, 28–32).

The withering of the world: sin and the curse (24:4–6)

Johnson perceptively notes that the imagery of these verses changes from that of verses 1–3: earthquake (1) and military conquest (3) become ‘withering’. He goes beyond what is required, however, when he suggests that this may hint at a difference of authorship. As we noted above, verses 1–3 predict devastation but offer no justification of it, and it is to this that the present verses proceed. Since the justification proffered is the inner, personal reality of sin, the vision of a blighted nature is suitable, humankind communicating their contagion to the world. The section is bracketed by references to the fading world (4; *ha’āres*) and a diminishing humanity (6; *yōše’bē’erēs*). These verses, full of Isaiah’s deliciously assonantal Hebrew, enclose the central accusations of verse 5.

4 In *dries up and withers* (*’ab^elā nāb^elā*), the first verb could be $\sqrt{’ābēl}$ ('to dry up'; see *KB*) but is more suitably the much more frequent verb of the same spelling meaning 'to wither'. The problem is not the external factor of drought but the internal factor of blight. On *world* (*tēbēl*) see 13:11. *The exalted of the earth*/‘the height of the people of the earth’ is an unparalleled expression. Taken at face value, it means that even earth’s exalted ones are infected with this deadly blight. A frequent emendation leads to ‘Height as well as earth languishes,’⁷⁹ but a reference to people rather than place is suitable here, bridging over to the explanatory verse 5.

5 *Defiled* ($\sqrt{hānēp}$) is used with a strong meaning, ‘to pollute’. (On the idea of ‘polluting’ the earth see Nu. 35:33; Ps. 106:38; Je. 3:1–2, 9.) As God’s creation, the world itself is morally sensitive, and the ‘thorns and thistles’ of Genesis 3:18 illustrate the two sides of this sensitivity. On the one hand, they evidence the way in which earth itself fights against sinners. It does not readily yield its bounty to them but turns its productive powers to their disadvantage. On the other hand, the fact that an earth which the Lord pronounced good can produce thorns and thistles is evidence that its nature has been damaged and the garden is in the process of becoming the wilderness. The earth has been defiled *by its people*/‘under its people’, i.e. under their domination, their misuse, under the burden of them. Yet it was not so in Eden, where Adam (lit.)

⁷⁹ Q^a reads a singular verb (*’mll*), leading *BHS* to suggest *’umlal mārōm ’im hā’āres* ('the height wilts along with the earth'). This could refer to the upper or spiritual world (see verse 21; Ps. 144:7). The thought is not unsuitable to the present context. The city typifies a world structured without God but behind this lie dark spiritual forces and they too will be destroyed.

‘served’ ([Gn. 2:15](#)) the garden. So what has happened? Three charges are abruptly stated (the *and* in verse [5d](#) should be omitted):

1. Transgression of revealed truth. *Disobeyed* ($\sqrt{\text{ābar}}$, ‘crossed over’) is widely used to mean ‘to transgress’ (cf. *parabainō* in the New Testament). They have transgressed *the laws*.⁸⁰ The basic idea of *tōrâ* is not ‘authoritative imposition’ (*lex*) but authoritative instruction. The first charge, therefore, is that they refused to hold to and live by divine revelation.

2. Changing what was intended for perpetuity. *Violated* is (lit.) ‘they altered’. The verb ($\sqrt{\text{hālap̄}}$) is used of one thing replacing another (cf. [21:1](#)). The noun *ḥōq* (translated *statutes*) comes from $\sqrt{\text{ḥāqaq}}$ meaning ‘to carve’ or ‘to engrave’ and hence has the idea of perpetuity. The second charge is of introducing an innovative morality.

3. *Broken* ($\sqrt{\text{pārar}}$) is a technical term in covenant vocabulary, deeper than transgressing or disobeying, actually annulling, nullifying or setting aside the whole concept of covenant relationship and life (e.g. [Dt. 31:20](#); cf. for the force of the verb, [Nu. 30:8 <9>](#)). The expression *the everlasting covenant* is used of the Noahic covenant ([Gn. 9:16](#)), the Lord’s covenant dispensation reaching back to Abraham ([Ps. 105:10](#)), the Sabbath within the Mosaic covenant ([Lv. 24:8](#)) and the Davidic covenant ([2 Sa. 23:5](#)) and its future Messianic counterpart ([Is. 55:3; 61:8](#)). While this whole passage is resonant with flood motifs, it would be mistaken to tie this covenant reference in any way exclusively to Noah, even though its ambience starts with him.⁸¹ Every covenant

⁸⁰ The plural of *tōrâ* only occurs eleven times out of 220 (e.g. [Gn. 26:5](#); [Ex. 16:28](#); [Ps. 105:45](#)). It is either a generalizing plural ('laws whatever they may be') or a plural of application ('laws covering every aspect of life').

⁸¹ Johnson argues that the reference to laws and statutes rules out the Noahic covenant. He rightly observes that this covenant was a unilateral dispensation of divine promise and feels that the idea of imposed obligation would be unsuitable. But every covenant dispensation was a unilateral divine promise, with its legal counterpart—not making the covenant a reciprocal arrangement but an outreaching of grace meeting a response along divinely ordained lines. The Noahic covenant too, therefore, had its ‘law’ ([Gn. 9:1–7](#)), and the use in [Nu. 35:33](#) of the verb *ḥānēp* of polluting the land by blood-guilt is not unsuited to the content of [Gn. 9:1ff](#). Cf. also the wide, generalized use of the plural ‘laws’. But, as noted above, the ambience of this covenant reference only starts with Noah, it does not terminate there.

dispensation had its regulatory aspect, however undeveloped it may have been in comparison with the normative Mosaic system. This may be why Isaiah used the plural *laws*, so as to cover every period and aspect of covenant law-giving. Even Abraham, who lived under the broadest of divine precepts ([Gn. 17:2](#)), is said to have kept the Lord's 'laws' ([Gn. 26:5](#)). In essence, the annulling of the covenant was the refusal to live in the fellowship which God opened.

6 This verse rounds off the section.⁸² Verse 4 dealt with earth and people languishing and wilting and verse 5 noted the moral cause—the earth was burdened by its apostate people. Verse 6 takes matters to their final diagnosis. Sin has the effect described because there is a divine agency at work, a *curse*. The idiom of 'indefiniteness for the sake of emphasis' implies 'a curse—you know the one I mean!'. This is 'the curse of the covenant' ([Lv. 26:25–45](#); [Dt. 11:26–28](#); [28:15ff.](#); [Dn. 9:11](#); [Zc. 5:3](#)), not the Lord breaking off his covenant but operating in covenant wrath to rid the covenant community of false or pretended members. But though (lit.) 'its inhabitants are guilty' yet the outcome is not total destruction but diminishment. The translation *are burned up* is very doubtful. The root $\sqrt{hārā}$ ('to be hot') is used almost exclusively to mean 'to grow hot with anger'. *KB* suggests the sole appearance here of a verb found in Arabic meaning 'to diminish in number' is contextually suitable.⁸³ In *very few are left/ 'humankind, a few'*, 'humankind' ('^enôš) is often used of people in their human frailty. Both word and idea appear in the parallel oracle in [13:7](#), [12](#). If we ask how it is that when earth's inhabitants are guilty (apparently without exception) any at all survive, the Noahic parallel must be invoked. For Noah was part of a totality under condemnation ([Gn. 6:5–7](#)) but was brought within a working of grace ([Gn. 6:8](#)). Thus here too 'gleanings' ([13–16](#)) will remain.⁸⁴

⁸² This verse could be taken as a case in point for Isaiah's use of assonantal and rhyming techniques referred to in the introductory note on verses 4–6.

'al-kēn 'ālā 'āk^elā 'eres
wayye's^emû yōš^ebē bāh
'al-kēn hārû yōš^ebē 'eres
w^eniš^ear ^enôš miz^eār

⁸³ Q^a reads *hāw^erû* ('grew pale'; cf. [29:22](#)) and hence, 'paled with fear'.

⁸⁴ However the formulaic 'These are the generations of ...' is to be understood, it does act as some

The song stilled: the fall of the city (24:7–12)

This is the first of the two contrasting sections which lie at the heart of this poem: the end of the world's song. Verse 7 uses the same words as verse 4 (*dries up*/‘mourns’ and *withers*), so the two sections are linked together. According to verses 4–6, sin brought a curse on the earth and its people. Now we trace the progress of the deadly contagion as it kills the sources of joy (7), ends the experience of joy (8–9) and banishes joy itself (11), while the city lies ruined and defenceless (10, 12).

A¹ The source of joy gone (7a, 2 lines)

B¹ Joy stilled, satisfaction gone (7b–9, 6 lines)

C The city broken and empty (10, 2 lines)

B² Satisfaction lost, joy banished (11, 3 lines)

A² The source of security gone (12, 2 lines)

The line enumeration is based on setting out the Hebrew text in fifteen lines, mostly of three words each. The ‘feeling’ is as of a series of hammer blows, as if we were watching the city being brought to ruins. The subtle use of assonance cannot be reflected in translation but proclaims Isaiah’s authorship in every division of the poem, if not in every line.

7 The ‘party atmosphere’ of the city as it once was (*cf.* 5:11ff.) exposes its this-worldly philosophy of life. This is the serious backdrop to a picture of revelry. The only thing we need to know about their life was its dependence on the elation of alcohol. Not that the passage sets out to be a temperance tract (its stress on wine may owe everything to its Noahic background) but to instance a life-style looking wholly to what this world provides and seeking wholly an immediate and earthly satisfaction. The flaw in such a philosophy has already been exposed in verses 4–6. As God’s creation, the earth itself is morally sensitive and in the ultimate it will not ‘work’ for those who exclude its Creator. The irony, however, is this, that their spiritual state (5) is itself the blight which makes

sort of divider. Thus, Gn. 6:9 makes a new beginning, distinguishing Noah as the man of grace (verse 8) from Noah the man of righteousness (verse 9b). The wording ‘... found grace’ (verse 8) always points to the unworthiness, or felt unworthiness, of the recipient (e.g. Ruth 2:10). Thus, in reality, unmerited grace ‘finds’ Noah, and as a result of this he becomes the distinctive man among his contemporaries (verse 9).

the earth mourn and wither so that, at one and the same time, they are depending on earth's productive powers and destroying them. As verse 7a puts it, not only the fruit (*new wine*) but also the source (*vine*) are blighted. With this failure, life grinds to a halt. Even *the merrymakers*/‘joyful of heart’, those who have a naturally joyful temperament, need the help of alcohol and without it their natural joviality turns to its opposite (*groan*).

8 The outward evidence of revelry is the next victim. Lines a and c are exact images of each other in the MT: ‘the gaiety of the tambourines has ceased ... the gaiety of the harp has ceased’. The repetition conveys a sense of inevitability.

9 Even while this is happening the point is reached, within the revellers themselves, where their way of life ceases to give them any satisfaction. They drink their wine but cannot bring themselves to sing! Their beer is flat! To want nothing but this world is to end up with nothing but want.

10 What multitudes experience in the microcosm of personal experience (7b–9) will finally reach its appointed universal climax in the collapse of the whole this-worldly fabric of life, built on earth's resources by human wit and work, without recourse to God. What could encapsulate this better than a city—the largest and most distinctive human product and the setting and would-be realization of humankind's earliest endeavour to structure life (Gn. 11:1–9). *The ruined city* is an extremely unhappy translation, with ‘the city of chaos’ (RSV) a narrow second! It is the city of *tōhû*, the word translated ‘formless’ in Genesis 1:2 where the first stage of the creative process was the material substrate of the world and it was *tōhû wābōhû* (‘formless and empty’). The divine potter had brought into being the clay but as yet it was without the impress of his hands; it did not contain inherently any meaning or purpose, nor any tendency towards them; it had no stability and no life; it was *tōhû*.⁸⁵ Jeremiah (4:23) had a vision of the world reverting to this state, deprived of all that makes it habitable and meaningful, dark, unstable, empty of life and without a hint of purposeful activity. In a word, without what only God can provide. The ‘city of *tōhû*’ lives without the ordering, life-giving hand of God, opting for a life on its own, within itself, depending on itself. Consequently, it is unstable and without purpose, spinning on the wheel but having

⁸⁵ See Gn. 1:2; Dt. 32:10; 1 Sa. 12:21; Jb. 6:18; 12:24; 26:7; Ps. 107:40; Is. 24:10; 34:11; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:18, 19; 49:4; 59:4; Je. 4:23.

dismissed the potter, its ever changing shapes and fashions not dictated by purpose but by whimsy. Life is simply one thing after another. Rejecting the moral absolutes of verse 5, everything is relative and ultimately individualistic. Humankind's great world city is 'the city without meaning'—a veritable Babel—*redivivus* (Gn. 11:1ff.), where they thought they could find on earth and in themselves all they needed for secure community and a future, and they found only disorder, division and meaninglessness. Thus Isaiah looked through the Babylon he knew (13:1ff.) to the ongoing spirit of Babylon ever-present in world history (21:1–10), and finally to the ultimate Babel where at length humankind's self-sufficiency would bring their whole world about their ears. Within the ruin one feature is noted that *the entrance to every house is barred*. This speaks of the spirit of fear which pervades. Life in the city of meaninglessness is a lonely and scary thing. If it is no longer possible to get away from people (Gn. 11:8) then best shut oneself away from them!

11 This verse corresponds to verses 7b–9, sharing the same vocabulary, *wine* (9), *joy* (*śimḥâ*; a component of *merrymakers*, see on verse 7) and *gaiety* (8ac). In the parallel passage we saw the failure of stimulants, in both supply and effect. Here, with grim sadness, Isaiah observes the people of the city of meaninglessness crying out for failed remedies. For in that city, humankind, shut up to themselves, can only turn to what has already been tried and failed. Note also the three lines of verse 11 compared with the six lines of the parallel verses. This is deliberate; following the revelation of the broken city (10) the poem seems to tumble to a quick conclusion. Johnson translates *turns to gloom* more exactly as 'all rejoicing has reached its eventide'. *All gaiety is banished from the earth/ 'the gaiety of the earth has gone into captivity'*, i.e. has passed into other hands from which it cannot be recovered; it is, therefore, irretrievably lost.

12 This verse, (lit.) 'Ruin is left in the city, and to ruination the gate is crushed', speaks of destruction coupled with defencelessness. The two lines with which the section opened (7a) said that life in the city of meaninglessness is unsatisfying; the concluding two lines say that it is impossible.

The song heard: world-wide gleanings (24:13–16b)

Isaiah is a master of the unexpected note of hope (e.g. 6:13; 28:5). The 'cutting down' ($\sqrt{kāṭat}$) of the gate (12) merges into a different sort of 'striking down' ($\sqrt{nāqap}$; see below)—the blows which harvest the olive crop (13). The remaining few of verse 6

becomes a world-wide ingathering and, as the song of the city fades (9, 11), its place is taken by a different song rising from all over the earth (16). The verses have an almost eerie quality, as if we could see the few picking their way through the ruins, singing to the *Righteous One* as they go. Stylistically the section is marked by repetitions—*on the earth, among the nations* (13); *they raise, shout, acclaim* (14); *in the east, in the islands of the sea; the LORD, the LORD, the God of Israel* (15). In structure it consists of an explanation (verse 13 opens with ‘For’), a description (14), a command (15) and a comment (16ab). Double statements of place link verses 13 and 15; *they* and *we* create a balance between verses 14 and 16ab.⁸⁶

13 The initial ‘For’ looks back over the whole preceding context, where statements of total destruction (1–3, 7–12) bracket the survival of a ‘few’ (4–6). This is now explained. Immediate connection with the foregoing is made by the double reference to *earth* and *nations/peoples* (see verse 4). Initially, the theme of total loss is continued. The ‘beating off of olives’ was the correct way to harvest them, and we are allowed to assume that this is the ‘grim reaper’ at work world-wide. But suddenly harvesting becomes gleaning, the careful gathering of what is left after (lit.) ‘grape harvest is finished’.

14 The emphatic pronoun merits translating as ‘These are they who ...’, identifying these newcomers on the scene with the ‘gleanings’ of verse 13 and the ‘few’ of verse 6, who now ‘lift up their voice, shout aloud of the majesty of the Lord, having raised a festal cry from the west’. The second verb ($\sqrt{rānan}$) points to loudness rather than joy. The last verb ($\sqrt{sāhal}$) is usually used of highly-charged, excited cries (10:30) or of praise (12:6). It is a perfect tense used as a participle.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Johnson links verses 14–16a with verse 16bff. as contrasting reactions, comparable to those in 22:1–14 where the prophet dissociates himself from the superficial and ill-considered joy of the city. But the joy of verses 13–16a is very different from that evidenced in chapter 22. There the sentiment expressed was of eating and drinking ‘for tomorrow we die’ (22:13), whereas here it is ‘Splendour to the Righteous One’. Could Isaiah fault this? Secondly, linking these two sections (verses 13–16a and 16bff.) destroys the internal balance of this section (see the outline on p. 197). Finally, the cry of verse 16b must be linked with 21:2 if the overall cohesion of chapters 13–27 is to be honoured.

⁸⁷ The perfect tense ($sāh^alû$) is often (BHS, Johnson) altered to imperative by a simple adjustment

15 The imperative *give glory* is a device to indicate the prophet's own excitement in what he is hearing. The songs from *the west* (14) make him want world-wide praise to begin, therefore he calls for matching songs from *the east* and then from *the islands*. For similar personal interventions, cf. Zephaniah 2:13 (MT); Zechariah 3:5. *East* is 'urîm and is found only here in the plural. The word 'ûr, apart from Ezekiel 5:2 (where it means 'fire', 'fireplace'), occurs only in Isaiah (31:9, translated 'furnace'; 44:16; 47:14; 50:11, all translated 'fire'). Here, contextually, it refers to the 'place of fire', the east. On *islands* ('îyyîm) see 11:11; 40:15; 'ocean's furthest coast'.⁸⁸ The ultimate gathering from the world is religiously focused on the one true God, *the name of the LORD, the God of Israel* (cf. 2:2–4). The nations will bring their glory with them (Rev. 21:24). They do not come to contribute religious insights into a common pool of truth but rather they have jettisoned whatever belonged to them nationally in favour of that which belongs to Israel, whose God alone they will name. 'Thus', says Kaiser, 'the nations set forth, singing, upon their journey to Zion, and the great pilgrimage of the nations begins.'⁸⁹

16ab The prophet envisages himself in a listening company saying to one another, 'From the ends of the earth we hear songs' the theme of which is '*Glory to the Righteous One*'. Glory (*s̄ebî*; cf. 4:2; 28:5) means anything which adorns or beautifies; 'splendour' is a good equivalent. Only Isaiah uses this word of the Lord. *Righteous* could refer to the ingathering people (Skinner, Kissane), but it is unlikely that they would sing of themselves, no matter how aware they might be of the adorning that had come to them. Parallelism with verse 15 indicates a reference to the righteous Lord. Isaiah will use the title again in 41:2 and when he speaks of 'that righteous one, my servant' (53:11). Theologically it is noteworthy that the incoming remnant are primarily aware of the righteousness of the God who has saved them. In other words, his saving mercies are grounded in the satisfaction of his justice, not in the expression of his love.

of a vowel. If this is done, however, *Therefore* (verse 15) must either be excised or emended, and the drama of the prophet's call in verse 15 is ruined. The perfect tense can be understood as a circumstantial participial use (see Driver, 163; Davidson, 41; cf. Pss. 7:7; 11:2; 57:4,5).

⁸⁸ The hymn, 'For all the saints who from their labours rest'. Verses seven and eight of the hymn are a glorious commentary on this passage.

⁸⁹ Kaiser, p. 188.

Personal wasting away: grief over treachery and its outcome (24:16c–18d)

Parallel to the world and its people withering under the blight of sin (4–6), another voice speaks of personal wasting away. Within chapters 13–27, this cry is parallel to 21:3–4, where Isaiah, even though he had wished the destruction of Babylon, went into shock at the horror he foresaw. So here, the implications of the fall of the world city—the curse falling on earth and people alike (4–6) and no escape possible (17–18)—are like a wasting disease within himself. Though he has heard and called for the song of the remnant (15–16), he cannot abandon himself to joy because he has also seen the reality of sin and the curse.

16c *I waste away* (*rāzî*, ‘leanness is mine’) occurs nowhere else and is refused by KB. $\sqrt{rāzâ}$ means ‘to make lean’ (17:4; Zp. 2:11) and gives rise to *rāzôn* (‘leanness’; 10:16). Possibly, a form *r^ezi* might have been expected, but maybe Isaiah lengthened it out for effect. It seems unreasonable to quibble over it. *Woe to me* is exactly as at 6:5. Isaiah now feels the condemnation of others as deeply as once he felt his own. *The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!* is (lit.) ‘For betrayers betray: with betrayal betrayers betray.’ Possibly only Isaiah would dare to multiply the same word like this and achieve such literary effect. What sounds overdone in English is very powerful in Hebrew. See 21:2 in the parallel oracle, where the intention is the same as here: the immoral, dishonest, unreliable world continues on its way unchanged, unchanged too in its destination of destruction. The Bible seems to pick as the damning sins things which the world takes in its stride: the unclean speech of 6:5 and here petty unreliability and deceitfulness—the covenant breakers of verse 5.

17–18d Johnson’s ‘panic and pit and pitfall’ catches the assonance of *pāħad wāpāħat wāpāħ*. The final word actually means ‘trap’, *i.e.* not a chance accident but a deliberately set snare. The assonance hints that they belong to a single system of doom, as verse 18 elaborates. For similar pictures see Amos 5:19; 9:1–4. Compare the singular *O people of the earth/’O inhabitant of the earth* with the plural in the matching section (6): judgment is individualized.

The earth broken up: moral and spiritual causation (24:18e–20)

Matching the statement of destruction by the will of God (1–3), this final section of the poem, consonantly with the developing theme, repeats the emphasis on universal destruction but indicates its moral causation by the impressive understatement of a

single word, *rebellion* (20c). The section opens with ‘For’ (18e), explaining why the judgment is inescapable (17–18d). It is like the flood, with the forces of heaven and earth combining (18e), under which the earth shatters (19ab) and loses its solidity (19c) and stability (20ab). From all this it will never recover (20d). The section opens with two lines (18ef) stating the physical forces of destruction and ends with two lines (20cd) stating the moral force of destruction. In between come three lines (19) united by the adverb ‘utterly’ (see below) and followed by two similes (20ab).

18ef The word translated *floodgates* is (lit.) ‘windows’ as in [Genesis 7:11](#). This external assault (so to speak) from above is matched by the unleashing of the forces of the earthquake below. The contrast expresses totality. There is no reference in the flood narrative to the foundations of the earth (lit.) ‘quaking’. In [2 Samuel 22:8](#) both noun (foundations) and verb ($\sqrt{rā'aš}$, ‘to quake’) are used as motifs of theophany (cf. [Jdg. 5:4](#); [Ps. 68:8 <9>](#)). This is the intention here, picking up the theme of verses 1–3 that the Lord is himself the agent in destruction.

19–20b These verses are linked by three matching infinitive absolute formations—‘utterly broken down ... utterly shattered ... utterly destabilized’. If we think of a tall building we will see the developing picture: with the first verb ($\sqrt{rā'a}$, ‘to break up’)⁹⁰ the cracks appear, with the second ($\sqrt{pārar}$, ‘to be stirred’) movement away from the perpendicular is seen, and with the third ($\sqrt{mūt}$, ‘to slip, slide’) segments begin to fall away until the whole is gone. The whole picture (cf. [Je. 4:23–25](#)) is of earth once again becoming *tōhû* (see verse 10). This is what they chose: a world without the ordering hand of God and this, in faithful divine justice, is what they got. The two similes (20ab) add further dimensions to the picture of collapse. The *drunkard*⁹¹ falls through loss of internal factors of balance and co-ordination; the *hut*, though

⁹⁰ The form here (*rō'â*) is ‘quite abnormal’ for the infinitive absolute qal ([GKC 113w](#)). The final ‘*h*’ could, of course, be a paragogic formation (for literary or rhetorical reasons) such as we find with imperatives of double *ayin* verbs (e.g. [Nu. 22:11](#); [23:7](#)). On the use of the infinitive absolute qal with a non-qal indicative see [GKC 113w](#).

⁹¹ Interestingly, the Hebrew for *reels* (*nōa' tānūa'*; another infinitive absolute construction meaning ‘reels uncontrollably’) is reminiscent of the name Noah (*nōah*). With Isaiah’s sharp ear for words, this could be deliberate. The passage opens by recalling the flood (verse 18e) and ends by virtually naming the drunken Noah, whose drunkenness reintroduced the curse.

essentially fragile (*cf.* 1:8), is only shattered by the external factor of wind and storm.

20cd So is (lit.) ‘and’, the conjunction used to introduce an explanation, hence ‘because/see, then, how ...’. *The guilt of its rebellion* is (lit.) simply ‘its rebellion’ (*peša'*), the stark, single cause of all the woe. For the word (*peša'*) see on $\sqrt{pāša'}$ in 1:2. *Upon it* indicates a crushing load. According to verse 18ef creation itself is the adversary, but ultimately (20c) doom comes simply through wilfulness—and that irrecoverable, *never to rise again*.

b. The end of waiting: the King shall reign (24:21–23)

In the parallel oracles (see p. 133), Isaiah was faced by foreign audiences: Philistines in glee and an Edomite in gloom (14:28ff.; 21:11f.). He warned the Philistines against premature rejoicing, for the throne of David would yet prosper to the detriment of its foes, and to the Edomite he offered glimmering hope after an unspecified wait. The prediction of the king deadly as a serpent (14:29) leads to the punishment theme here in verses 21–22; the waiting (21:11f.) is recalled in the words ‘after many days’ (22); the darkness of 21:11f. is banished by brightness (23); the long progression of day and night (21:11–12) leads to a situation where day ('sun') and night ('moon') are transcended (23); and the king promised to Zion (14:30, 32) is in fact the Lord himself (23).

In its immediate context, this oracle continues and confirms the message of overthrow, with the Lord as agent (21; *cf* verse 1); amplifies the scope of the judgment by including ‘the powers in the heavens’ (21; but *cf.* verse 4); and particularizes the overthrow of kings (21). It cautions patience because, though imminent (see on verse 1), the fulfilment will be ‘after many days’ (22), and implies that the Lord’s throne in Zion is the goal of the world-wide pilgrimage of verses 13–16a. This will become explicit in chapter 25. The formula ‘In that day’ occurs seven times (24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 13), each time enlarging on some aspect of the general situation sketched in 24:1–20 and offering a balanced presentation of the theme:

The Lord’s victory, particularly on earth
(24:21)

The Lord’s saved people and those who are excluded (25:9)

The Lord’s victory over supernatural forces (27:1)

The Lord’s vineyard-people and his foes (27:2)

The strong city with open gates ([26:1](#))

The world-wide gathering in Jerusalem
([27:12–13](#))

The passage has the following structure:

A¹ Divine visitation ([21](#))

a¹ in the heavens

b¹ on earth

B¹ Dungeon darkness ([22ab](#))

C The undated future ([22cd](#))

B² Unparalleled brightness ([23a](#))

A² Divine reign ([23b–d](#))

b² in Jerusalem

a² gloriously

[21](#) On *In that day* see above.⁹² *Punish* ($\sqrt{pāqad}$) has a base meaning, ‘to pay attention to’ and hence to weigh the issues and take appropriate action. This develops in many directions and the verb must always be adjudged contextually.⁹³ Here the context requires ‘a visitation of judgment’. The broad application of judgment in verses [1–20](#)

⁹² Wilderberger sadly supports the view that formulaic statements like ‘In that day’ may be assumed to be editorial, intrusive and late. In the present case, Johnson would demur, believing the formula to be used with the deliberate intent of allowing verses [21–23](#) to introduce an expansion of what has preceded, e.g. [28:5](#), where ‘the announcement of judgment against Ephraim is expanded to include a prophecy of Yahweh’s benevolent reign’. Cf. P. R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*, JSOTS, 69 (1988), on [Zp. 1:8](#), ‘The phrase ... is considered as addition ... Apparently editors believe most formulaic sayings of this nature are additions. No textual or contextual evidence supports this claim, and it must be rejected ...’.

⁹³ $\sqrt{pāqad}$ has a basic meaning, ‘to visit, inspect’ (cf. Dhorme on [Jb. 34:13](#)). From this comes ‘give care, attention to’ ([Ex. 3:16](#)) and hence ‘visit with benefit’ ([Gn. 21:1](#)) (but also ‘visit with punishment’; [Ex. 32:34](#)). From ‘inspect’ arises ‘to number’ ([Nu. 4:27](#)) and hence ‘to find to be absent, missing’ ([1 Sa. 25:15](#)), ‘number off for duty, appoint’ ([Dt. 20:9](#)) and ‘lay responsibility on’ ([2 Ch. 36:23](#)).

(where ‘earth’ occurs sixteen times) is exchanged for a focus on powers heavenly and earthly—*the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below*/‘the host of the height in the height and the kings of the earth on the earth’. ‘Height’ (*mārōm*) makes a link with the same word in verse 18 and thus establishes a reference here to celestial powers opposed to the Lord. They will be dealt with ‘in the height’, *i.e.* in their own sphere and at their most powerful; the kings of earth likewise. The present passage does not link heavenly and earthly powers in the manner of Daniel 8:3ff.; 10:13, 20f., but simply alludes to guilty spiritual forces who will be dealt with in a comprehensive settlement over the whole field of divine creation. Isaiah’s assertion of the punishment of every power wherever located is the more impressive by its calm assumption of total divine sovereignty.

22–23a The middle section of the poem consists of three pairs of lines with the equivalent of two words in each. The contrast between *dungeon* (22) and ‘brightness’ (23ab) makes *after many days* the focal point of the whole poem. (See the introduction to verses 21–23 above.) *They will be herded together/gathered in a gathering like prisoners bound in a dungeon* (bluntly, ‘captive to dungeon’). ‘assîr’ (‘one bound’) is found only in Isaiah (10:4; 42:7). *Punished* ($\sqrt{pāqad}$) is the same as in verse 21. *After many days* makes a connection with 21:11f. (see p. 176 and the introduction to verses 21–23 above). For the motif of exceeding brightness (cf. 30:26; 60:19f.) Isaiah uses here not the astronomical words for *moon* and *sun* but the poetic equivalents, calling attention to their inherent brightness. *Moon* is *lēbānâ* (‘the white one’; cf. 30:26; Song 6:10) and *sun* is *ḥammâ* (‘the hot one’; cf. 30:26; Jb. 30:28; Ps. 19:6 〈7〉 ; Song 6:10). They will be *abashed* and *ashamed*, hanging their heads in shame at being such poor things by comparison!

23b–d For explains the unparalleled brightness of ‘that day’—it is attributable to the mere fact of the divine reign. From the time when David made *Zion* the national capital, it was recognized as the fulfilment of Deuteronomy 12:10–12 and began to gather to itself the reality inherent in all the earlier experiences of the people of God. Thus Psalm 68:17 〈18〉 identifies Sinai with the temple sanctuary. Isaiah here looks back to Exodus 24:9–11. The Sinai covenant was consummated by a theophany, with the Lord among the elders of Israel. There, they saw but his feet; here, they will see his glory. Thus Isaiah sees the Zion-to-be as the fulfilment of all that the covenant implied. The adverbial

translation *gloriously* is acceptable but Isaiah's Hebrew is exclamatory: 'and before his elders, glory!' (cf. 4:5).

c. *The world rejoicing in salvation: the blessings of Mount Zion (25:1–12)*

The world-wide song, entitled 'Glory to the Righteous One' (24:16a), is now heard in detail as the world pilgrimage arrives in Zion. The city will be ready for them (24:23) and the feast prepared (6). The passage thus suits its immediate context and equally holds its place in the whole pattern of chapters 13–27. The companion oracles exposed a troubled Gentile world, with Moab in crisis, held back by pride from embracing safety in Zion, choosing the way of self-reliance (chapters 15–16), and with Gentile perturbation unpacified by collective security (21:13–17). In each case 'few' remained (16:14, 21:17). These are now among the 'few' of 24:6, and the true Zion awaits them to give freely all that self-reliance and collective security could never provide—with the sad exclusion of those who, like Moab, cling to the way of pride (25:10b–11).

In this song, as in 12:1, 4, the individual voice (1–5) becomes a communal voice (9–10a). This enables us to see the world-wide pilgrimage entering the gates of Zion one by one (each with a song of deliverance) but within Zion's walls becoming the company of the saved with a common testimony.

A¹ Joy in the Lord. Individual praise: his supernatural acts (1–5)

a¹ Overthrow (2)

b¹ Defence (3–4)

B Blessings in Zion. Description: the Lord's provident acts (6–8)

b² Supplying (6)

a² Removing (7–8)

A² Joy in the Lord. Communal praise: his saving acts (9–12)

b³ Salvation (9–10a)

a³ The humbling of pride (10b–12)

The internal structure of the poem favours triadic formations. There are three aspects of overthrow (2) and of defence (4), and a reference to people, place and provision (6) and to the removal of death, sorrow and shame (8). There follow three nouns of height and three verbs of humbling (12).

Joy in the Lord (25:1–5)

The doctrine of salvation, rooted in the exodus revelation of the Lord as the God who saves his people and overthrows his enemies, contains a strong sense of having been ‘saved from’. Salvation is not complete without victory (*cf. Ex. 14:13–14, 30*). This is the emphasis in the present verses. In the imagery Isaiah is using, the pilgrims to Zion move through a ruined world, and their song dwells on the marvel of their rescue and the power of the Lord over all the power of the enemy—‘out of the depths of ruin untold, into the peace of thy sheltering fold’.

1 Personal knowledge of God marks Isaiah’s remnant concept (*cf. 8:9ff.*). *Praise* is from $\sqrt{yādā}$, meaning ‘give thanks to’ (*cf. tōdā*, a ‘thank-offering’). *Marvellous things (pele’)* are acts which bear the mark of the ‘supernatural’, beyond human power and originating in another world (see *9:6 <5>*). *Planned* is a noun (‘plans’, ‘ēṣōt’) related to the verb which supplies ‘Counsellor’ in *9:6 <5>*. This identity of wording links the gathering of the world remnant with the royal Messiah. Cf. on *41:21–42:9* for Isaiah’s insistent appeal to the Lord’s pre-planning of his acts *long ago*. *Perfect faithfulness* has two related nouns in apposition (*“emûnâ ’ōmen*), the latter being found only here. The use of two distinct forms is an idiom of totality and/or perfection, *i.e.* every imaginable faithfulness or perfect or quintessential faithfulness (*cf. 3:1*).

2 This verse is made up of four lines in an a-b-a-b formation. The ‘a’ lines describe the fall of the city and the ‘b’ lines the end of its strength. The overthrow of the city, as in *24:10* and *Genesis 11:1–9*, is the nemesis of self-salvation.⁹⁴ The reference to *foreigners* suits the link between this passage and chapters *15–16* and *21:13ff.* where pagan nations were under threat. Both those earlier oracles in this sequence portrayed fear of human foes; the recurring historical danger of the rapacity of the strong. In the eschaton, however, it is not human power that the world has to fear but that of God and before him all humankind’s securities and do-it-yourself salvation are helpless.

3 The singular ‘people’ and ‘city’ must be restored in this verse. Isaiah is referring to the ‘city of meaninglessness’ of *24:10*, the city which stands for the world structured without reference to God. The citizens of this world city are one ‘people’ though composed of many *nations*. Neither *honour* nor *revere* require us to understand that these people have come to faith in the Lord. As a result of the mightiness of his power,

⁹⁴ The *LXX*’s ‘cities’ is mistakenly followed by *BHS*. Presumably, the *LXX* erroneously supposed that *mē’ir* (‘from being a city’) should be rearranged to *‘ārîm*. This destroys the city theme at this point.

evidenced in the overthrow of their system, they ‘respect’ and ‘fear’ this mighty God (*cf.* Phil. 2:10). *Strong* and *ruthless* is their self-estimate. The meaning of the former (‘*aμz*’) tends towards the possession of strength and hence, *mā’iôz* (‘a stronghold’) in verse 4. The meaning of the latter (‘*ārîš*; *cf.* 49:25) tends towards the unsparing use of strength against others. On the Lord’s Zion-centred triumph over the nations see e.g. Psalms 46:6 ⟨7⟩ ; 47:3 ⟨4⟩ , 8 ⟨9⟩ ; 67:4 ⟨5⟩ ; 68:29ff. ⟨30ff⟩ ; 86:9; 96:7ff.

4–5 The two sides of salvation are here brought together: what the Lord is to his people (4a–d); the overwhelming threat from which he rescued them (4ef); and the consummate ease with which he performed this work (5).

4 On *refuge* (‘place of strength’ or ‘fortress’) see immediately above. On *poor* (*dal*) see 10:2, and on *needy* (*ebyôn*) see 14:30. *Shelter* (*mâh’seh*) is from √ *hāsâ* (‘to seek or take refuge’) and it expresses the idea of available security, a place at hand to turn to. *Storm* (*zerem*, ‘inundation’) is found elsewhere in Isaiah (4:6; 28:2; 30:30; 32:2) but otherwise only at Job 24:8 and Habakkuk 3:10. Here, as in 4:6, it is contrasted with *heat* (*hōreb*, ‘dry, exhausting heat’). The contrasting dangers express totality: the Lord is sufficient for every threat. *For* could be translated ‘When’. With *breath* (*rûah*, ‘blast [of wind]’) Isaiah is still thinking in storm images and brings us to the moment when the threatening storm actually breaks and the protecting wall shakes under the impact. But even if the ruthless come as close as this to victory it will be snatched from them. To blend together wind and flood in one mixed metaphor is typically Isaianic (*cf.* 5:24).

5 Reality replaces metaphor here: the *uproar of foreigners* against the Lord’s weak (*poor*; verse 4) and resourceless (*needy*; verse 4) people and their triumphal song. The verse has an a-b-a-b formation in which the ‘a’ lines are a simile and the ‘b’ lines are the reality:

Like heat in an arid land,
You subdue the uproar of foreigners—
heat by the shadow of a cloud—
the song of the ruthless is humbled

According to Skinner, competence and ease combine in the simile, ‘as natural heat

however intense, is abated by an intervening cloud'. To those under attack the sound is a fear-inspiring *uproar*; to the self-assured attackers it is their war *song*. *Foreigners* represent the world in its alien hostility to the Lord's people. On *ruthless* see verse 4.

Blessings in Zion (25:6–8)

Isaiah looks back to the covenant banquet of Exodus 24:11. Moses had promised the people that their exclusion from the holy mountain was temporary (Ex. 19:11), but the ascent by all Israel was never a practical option and the meal was enjoyed by the elders as representative of the whole. But on the true Zion (cf. Heb. 12:22–24) there is no element of representation; all come, all participate. These verses are the counterpart of 2:2–4. The nations gather neither to make offerings nor to serve (cf. 60:9–10) but to enjoy what the Lord has provided: the covenant sealed in the banquet. The contrast with the related passage (21:13–17) cannot but be deliberate: beset Gentiles needing the meagre succour of bread and water are compared with *all peoples* and *all nations* at the Lord's feast, without money and without price. The verses are divided into the two actions of the Lord *on this mountain*: the act of provision (6) and the act of destruction (7–8). The theme of universality is stressed—*all peoples* (twice), *all nations*, *all faces*, *all the earth*. Note the sequence—*peoples* (ethnic groups), *nations* (political entities), *faces* (individuals)—and how all these become *his people* (8b).

6 Neither here nor in verse 7 does *on this mountain* have quite the emphasis the NIV accords it. Here it is simply part of a tripartite statement: guests (*for all peoples*), place (*on this mountain*) and provision (*rich food*). *The best of meats* is (lit.) 'rich food, filled with marrow', i.e. a picture of nourishment. *Aged wine* can mean the sediment (lees) that forms when wine is left to settle in the process of fermentation (cf. Zp. 1:12) but here it is rather the wine itself, matured in this process of settling and then racked. *Finest of wines* is (lit.) 'lees thoroughly filtered'.

7 This verse and the next both begin with the same verb ($\sqrt{bāla}$, 'to swallow down'), here translated *destroy* (see 3:12). *The shroud*/‘the face of the covering’ (cf. Gn. 1:20; Job 41:13 <5>) means here ‘the outer veil’ or ‘the overspreading veil’. *Shroud* is a contextual translation, anticipating the reference to *death* in verse 8.

8 The verb *he will swallow* is the perfect tense without conjunction, and is to be understood as a participial perfect, ‘having swallowed’ (cf. 24:14). Verse 8 is thus the explanation of verse 7. *Death* is not used just in the sense that every life is to some

extent blighted by transience and brevity or that every thoughtful person fears death (unless and until salvation in Christ has removed that fear). Rather, it is principally *death* as evidencing the curse imposed in consequence of sin ([Gn. 2:17](#); [Rom. 3:23](#); [Heb. 2:15](#); [Rev. 21:4](#); [22:3](#)). Herbert comments: ‘What in Canaanite myth was a dramatic portrayal of the annual death and revival of vegetation was transformed into a once-for-all event, the fulfilment of God’s majestic purpose for his people.’ For Isaiah’s use of current mythologies cf. [51:9ff.](#)⁹⁵ The exalted title *the Sovereign LORD* calls attention to the fact that in all the dignity of his divine sovereignty, it is the Lord himself who will attend to our tears, moving from person to person until each eye has been dried. On *the disgrace of his people* cf. [Joshua 5:9](#) where the rite of circumcision was renewed for the Lord’s people. It symbolized that the days of covenant abeyance were over and that the ‘disgrace of Egypt’ was gone—the disgrace to the Lord’s people of living in slavery, bondage and misery. So also, as long as life in this world endures, there are innumerable ways in which the people of God are under reproach and hindered, by circumstances and sin, from living according to their true dignity. All this will be taken away. The new nature will be given full and glorious expression in an environment where everything conduces to holiness (cf. [Phil. 3:20–21](#)). Covenant promise will have become covenant reality. [‘For’] *the LORD has spoken* is an Isaianic key signature (see [24:3](#)).

Joy in the Lord ([25:9–12](#))

The concluding section of the oracle returns to the theme of joy in the Lord, joy that salvation has come at long last. But there is a darker reality too; there are those whose pride brings them under condemnation ([10b–12](#)) and who suffer overthrow.

9–10a With *In that day* (cf. [24:21](#)) Isaiah holds the whole scene in the perspective of the last day. In the Hebrew *they will say* is singular. It resumes the singular testimony of verse [1](#) but also leads to the plural testimony of verse [9c–e](#) and, therefore, a better

⁹⁵ It is often urged that the idea of the conquest of death is a late arrival (introduced, according to Skinner, ‘by degrees and at a late period’) in Hebrew thought possibly, with longevity ([Zc. 8:4](#)) as a mid-point in the process. This makes no sense. The same specialists would have us believe, for example, that the hope of a (Messianic) revival of David’s throne needed the disaster of 586 to prompt it, yet seem to think that people lived in daily contact with the experience of death and knew the Lord as the living God and never put two and two together! Not even Isaiah!

translation would be, ‘each will say’. The testimony of all is the response of each. They are (at last!) face to face with God in Zion ([Ps. 84:7](#) [8](#)). In wonderment they say to each other, ‘surely/‘look’ *this is our God ... This is the LORD* [Yahweh]!’ Subjective experience, *our God*, joins hands with objective reality, *this is the LORD*. The work of salvation is all his; no human action, co-operative or contributory, was needed, only waiting (*trusted* [$\sqrt{qāwâ}$] means ‘waited in confidence’; cf. [40:31](#)) for what the Lord would do and rejoicing in it when he did it. The verb *saved* ($\sqrt{yāšā}$) and the noun *salvation* ($y^ešû'a$) denote the work of God whereby he rescued his people from the enmities and hardships of the world ([Ex. 14:13](#); [15:2](#); [Ps. 68:19](#) [20](#)), made them his people ([Dt. 32:15](#); [Ps. 98:2–3](#)), restored them to his favour ([Pss. 13:5](#) [6](#); [106:4](#)) and brought them under his rule ([Is. 51:6](#)) and care ([Ps. 119:123](#), [155](#)). The meaning of this word group tends towards ‘deliverance unto’ as compared with the *nāṣal* group with its sense of ‘deliverance from’.

The NIV associates [10a](#) with the rest of verse [10](#), presumably on the ground that it expresses the agent in the suppression of Moab ([10b](#)), but it really belongs with what has gone before. It begins with ‘For’ (which the NIV omits), and this makes it explanatory of what precedes. Also, the verb *rest* appears here in the simple active (the qal), which never expresses violent action (contrast the hiphil in [28:2](#)). Furthermore, in [10a](#) the action of the divine hand is *on this mountain*, forming an inclusio with verse [6](#) and binding together the whole series of promises, while Moab ([10b–12](#)) is in fact not on the mountain of blessing but still caught up in world disaster. The line thus describes a gesture of benediction: the Lord lays hands on his mountain and his saved people in token of his perfect acceptance of them and his intention to pour every blessing on them. For *rest* meaning ‘to be at peace, satisfied’ see [Zechariah 6:8](#).

10b–12 The Lord’s *hand* rests on Zion ([10a](#)), his foot on Moab ([10b](#)). Two striking similes in verses [10c](#) and [11ab](#) lead into a threefold statement of divine action, opposing the pride and cleverness of humankind ([11cd](#)), destroying their self-made security ([12ab](#)) and putting an end to it ([12cd](#)).

10bc *Moab* was the subject of the parallel oracle in the first series (chapters [15–16](#)).⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Johnson says that ‘Most scholars have recognised the Moab pericope ... as a polemical intrusion into the text which has nothing to do with the context and is uncharacteristic of the rest of the composition; it is to be excised.’ This view can hardly be sustained in the light of the parallel with

As in the case of Tyre (see p. 189), Moab is mentioned here by name to remind us that eschatological disaster happens to real people. The same pride which held Moab back from seeking security in the divine promises in an earthly crisis (cf. 16:6) will exclude Moab from partaking of the heavenly promises. This is the ultimate tyranny of false choices. The NIV translates the Hebrew *taḥtâw* as *under him*, referring to the Lord's punitive action but it can also mean 'in his place' (e.g. Ex. 16:29). Moab chose to remain outside, and in the place he chose he will be trodden down. The first simile disgusts us, as it was intended to. The alternative to the banquet (6–7) is the midden (10c),⁹⁷ the world of rottenness and corruption, the world without God. The banquet is real and so, sadly, is the midden.

11 The second simile puts its finger exactly on Moab's character. In chapters 15–16 the alternative to sheltering in Zion was self-reliance and self-effort. So here, fallen in the midden, Moab will (of course!) find strength in himself to swim out. He can prevail over his circumstances, conquer his environment. Swimming provides a superb illustration of a go-it-alone policy. But the Lord does not admire Moab's *cleverness*.⁹⁸ Indeed the very thing which in human terms would have saved is the very heart of offence to God, epitomizing the *pride* (*ga'awâ*, as in 16:6) which is always competent, self-assured, needing no external salvation.

12 Here three nouns of height are matched by three verbs of bringing down, leading to total destruction. *High fortified walls* is (lit.) 'the fortified place of the top security of your walls'. Not even the ruins of a fort will be left, not even a heap of rubble. Just level ground, *the very dust*.

d. The strong city: waiting in hope (26:1–21)

chapters 15–16 within the total pericope of chapters 13–27. 25:10b–12 has clearly been put in its present place with great acuteness.

⁹⁷ The Massoretes have directed that the consonants *bmy* (which suggest *b'mê*, 'in the waters of') should be read as *bmw* (*b'mô*, 'in'). Q^a supports 'in the waters of', which has the advantage of increasing the disgusting nature of Isaiah's imagery. Perhaps it was to spare us this that the Massoretes ordained as they did!

⁹⁸ The word ('*arbôt*) need no longer be questioned (cf. KB), being known from Arabic sources (Kaiser).

An oracle on the people of God is to be expected here in the light of the parallel structure of chapters 13–20, 21–23. In chapters 17–18, Isaiah found that Israel had abandoned the way of faith for collective strength, an alliance with Aram. Jerusalem's failure (22:1–14) was an abandonment of faith in favour of self-reliance. Here at last the people of the Lord are secure within the bulwarks of salvation, enjoying a faith-based peace (verses 1–4). Here is the 'strong city', in contrast to a city that is no more (17:1), forsaken cities (17:2), strong cities deserted (17:9) and a broken, cannibalized city (22:9–10). Security is not attained by associative strength or sturdy self-reliance; it is a matter for song (verse 1), *i.e.* a divine provision received with joy.

A¹ Secure in peace (1–4)

The strong city, within the security of salvation (1). The gates are open to the righteous and the trusting (2). Peace is assured to those who trust in the divine Rock (3–4)

B¹ Down to the dust (5–6)

The lofty city humiliated (5a) to the ground, into the dust (5b), downtrodden by the oppressed and poor (6)

C¹ The divinely smoothed pathway (7–9)

The righteous walk in the smoothed way of divine laws (7–8a), waiting for and desiring the Lord, communally (8b) and personally (9a), accepting that this gives the world its best chance of 'learning righteousness' (9b)

D Impenetrable blindness (10–11)

Neither grace (10a), nor straightforward circumstances (10b), nor divine action (11a) make any impression. But they will yet recognize that the Lord is on the side of his people and experience the fire due to his enemies

C² The divinely ordained peace (12–15)

Everything the Lord's people have he has done for them (12). This is the lesson of their history. Rulers who formerly dominated them are dead and gone (13–14) and the people have known numerical, and territorial increase (15)

B² Out of the dust (16–19)

The people of God are often in extreme distress (16), pained but fruitless

(17–18a), achieving neither salvation for, nor dominion over, the world (18b).

Yet hope is sure: resurrection from the dust of the earth

A²Secure from wrath (20–21)

The doors are locked for a last, brief waiting period while wrath is executed over
the whole earth

No theme could be more suited to the place of this oracle in the scheme of chapters 13–27 than that the people of God owe everything to him and that in the last analysis no credit, merit or achievement can be put to their account. It must be for this reason that the centre-piece of the oracle (D, verses 10–11) is the impenetrable blindness of the wicked. No earthly experience can open their eyes to see the Lord, and it seems they are irretrievably bound for judgment. How does it come about, then, that there is such an entity as the Lord's people who walk by his laws and desire and long for him (C¹, verses 7–9)? Their peace with God (C², verse 12a) is explained in verse 12b which is (lit.) 'for indeed all our works you have done for us'. Consequently, the forward look (B¹, B²) is entirely preoccupied with what the Lord will do for his helpless, fruitless people in conquest (verses 5–6) and resurrection (verses 16–19). Meanwhile, they themselves are secure (A¹, A²).⁹⁹

Secure in peace (26:1–4)

Following the introduction of the song (1a) there are four three-line stanzas: the city's strength (1b–d), the entrance qualifications (2), perfect peace and its ground (3) and a

⁹⁹ Johnson (pp. 67ff.) offers a useful review of many views adopted of chapter 26—its literary genre, its unity and its *Sitz im Leben*. Many of these views suffer from following one or both of two false trails. On the one hand, they make too insistent an attempt to find the original setting of the poem and to allow this to dictate its present meaning. Johnson's own preoccupation with the exile is a case in point. As the passage comes to us, it is now essentially visionary and loosened from any original historical moorings it may have had, either in whole or part. Just as the Jerusalem which can play host to the whole world (25:6ff.) cannot be any historical or future localized city, so neither is the 'lofty city' (26:5–6) a particular location. On the other hand, they are too influenced by the 'Isaiah Apocalypse' theory. This is unhelpful, even to those who see that the chapters are not apocalyptic, in that it separates 24–27 from 13–23, depriving them of the wider context which shapes their meaning.

call to maintain trust in the trustworthy Lord (4).

1 This, the second elaboration of the basic theme of 24:1–20, brings us into the experience and inner consciousness of those who are the Lord’s people. Upon them the last days have come as they possess their possessions (1), expect the coming divine victory (5–6), wait and endure (7–9), mourn over a continuingly unresponsive world and their own fruitlessness (10–18), look forward to a life-giving act of God (19) and shelter securely through the final divine Passover (20–21). This well illustrates the meaning of the song motif: response to and enjoyment of benefits freely bestowed—here salvation, security, peace, etc. as the Lord’s free gifts. A *strong city* is (lit.) ‘a city of strength’. Whereas an adjective such as ‘strong’ could refer to a city that just happens to be strong at this moment, the adjectival use of the noun (‘of strength’) attributes strength as an intrinsic quality. Though the Lord is not named in the Hebrew, (lit. ‘Salvation he makes ...’) only he can be the author of *salvation* (see 25:9) and his saving power surrounds the city like *walls and ramparts*. For the use of this imagery see 60:18b and Zechariah 2:5. Here possibly a double line of fortification is meant (total security), or the (lit.) ‘walls and encirclement’ may mean ‘encircling walls’.

2 This poem may well have started life as an ‘entrance liturgy’ connected with one of the festival processions of Zion (cf. Pss. 15; 24) and the call to *open the gates* retains the same significance. It is a vivid way of stating the qualifications of those who may enter. But at the same time it stresses the ‘givenness’ of the city. The people do not create it; it is there awaiting their occupation. *Righteous* can only mean, as it so often does, ‘right with God’, for the picture of the city’s inhabitants in this chapter shows them far from sinlessly perfect. They merit divine discipline (16a) and are conscious of ineffectiveness (18). They have, however, a common characteristic, they are *the nation that keeps faith*. The noun *faith* (‘emunîm) is plural, expressing amplitude, and it is used of those who are committed to the Lord (Pss. 12:1 <2>; 31:23 <24>). It is the opposite of those who turn the Lord’s ways upside-down (Dt. 32:20). Righteousness and faithfulness are linked as the marks of the true Zion in 1:21, 26.

3 *Perfect peace* is (lit.) ‘peace peace’, and for the idiom of duplication see 6:3. Here it is true peace, as compared with pseudo-peace, and total, as excluding every disturbing element. *Mind* (*yēṣer*) means the constitution and tendency of the mind (Gn. 6:5), meditated purposes (Dt. 31:21) or the human constitution (Ps. 103:14). It is an artefact

formed (29:16), thus what we might call a ‘frame of mind’ or a ‘mind-set’, a total way of looking at things. *Steadfast* (*səmûk*) is a passive participle (as in Pss. 111:8; 112:8) and hence means ‘maintained, steady, undeviating’. The words *him whose* are added for convenience of translation. The Lord keeps in peace ‘the undeviating cast of mind’, i.e. the focus is not on the person as such but on that essential element within the person which makes all the difference and is the key to divine peace. *Because he trusts* is (lit.) ‘because in you [emph.] trust is reposed’. Once more the person is hidden behind the faith. Of course, there cannot be belief without a believer, but what matters is not who is exercising faith but the fact that faith is being exercised.

4 Having emphasized in verse 3 that faith is the essential thing, Isaiah now turns to the persons who exercise faith, calling not for a once-for-all act of faith but an ongoing life of faith. *The LORD, the LORD* is *yāh yahweh*, and for the diminutive of the divine name see 12:2. A literal translation would be ‘in Yahweh is an everlasting rock’, i.e. ‘Yah Yahweh is the very essence of what an everlasting rock should be.’¹⁰⁰ On ‘rock’ as a divine title see the parallel passage, 17:10.

Down to the dust (26:5–6)

Peace is in part secured by the ending of external threat. This explains the ‘For’ (omitted by the NIV) with which verse 5 opens. The ‘strong city’ is secure in this respect, that the *lofty city* has been laid low. The verses hold together thoughts familiar throughout this whole section: victory is solely the Lord’s work (5) and his people’s part is to enter upon what he has accomplished. Here they do not fight but simply trample the dust left by the divine overthrow. The first verb in verse 5 is a prophetic perfect (‘has determined to’) and is followed by three imperfects of the future acts of the Lord.¹⁰¹ The verbs are the same as those in 25:11cd, 12 (*šāpal* [twice], *šāḥâ* and *nāḡa'*), which leads to a neat integration of the two passages.

5 *On high* (*mārōm*) may refer to the pride of the city’s inhabitants (cf. 22:16; 24:4), or it

¹⁰⁰ The *Beth essentiae* construction (see GKC 119i).

¹⁰¹ *He lays ... levels* is a duplication of verbal forms (*yašpîlennâ yašpîlâ*). On this second formation, occasional but unexceptionable, cf. Gn. 37:33; 2 Sa. 11:27. These verses are marked by duplications: ‘peace, peace’ (3); *trusts ... trust* (3b, 4a); *lays ... levels* (5); *feet ... feet* (6); *level ... upright* (7); *desire ... yearns* (8–9; a cognate noun and verb). The NIV does not always reproduce this feature.

may be a glance at the supernatural dimensions of the victory ([24:21](#)). Did Isaiah originally have Babylon in mind here, or (more likely) the Nineveh of Sennacherib? The matter is no longer of importance. Just as his Jerusalem in these chapters has become an idea rather than a place (what Jerusalem could entertain the whole world to a banquet?; [25:6ff.](#)), so the *lofty city* is an ideal construction, symbolizing the world organized without God.

6 The Lord's people are described in a way that rules out any contribution by them to his victory (see on verses [5–6](#) above). They are the *oppressed* ('ānî) and *poor* (dāl), the 'downtrodden' and 'feeble or resourceless' (cf. [3:14](#); [10:2](#); [14:30](#)).

The divinely smoothed path ([26:7–9](#))

A striking contrast to verses [1–5](#)! Very far from peace, it would seem, is the way in which the *righteous* have to walk. They are still waiting for the Lord to act ([8](#)), filled with longing ([9ab](#)) and still in this world ([9cd](#)). But the spirit which fills the verses is faith. They look on their earthly path as God-given ([7](#)), they hold on to him in believing expectation and desire ([8–9b](#)) and they are steadfast in obedience ([8a](#)).

7 This verse is (lit.) 'The path belonging to the righteous is altogether right: Upright One, you smooth the track for the righteous', *i.e.* it makes straight for the target (*level/*'right, direct') and is easy to traverse (*smooth*). This is the voice of faith, not a description of experience. It is how those who are 'right with God' look at life—like the pilgrim of Psalm [84:6](#) who treats the valley of Baca as if it were full of springs! So, life is in the hands of the Lord; the path runs in a direct line from conversion to glory ([Ps. 107:7](#)) and places rough in prospect are smooth in retrospect. For *righteous* see on verse [2](#). *O upright One* (*yāšār*) is not used elsewhere as a divine epithet and is sparingly used ([Pss. 25:8; 92:15 <16>](#)) of the Lord. It was chosen here to make a link between the divine nature (*yāšār*, 'right, straight') and the planned pathway (*mēšārîm*; a plural of amplitude meaning 'altogether right, straight'). Life's path is one of the ways in which the Lord shares his nature with us.

8 Yes ('*ap*') does not just add a fact but heaps one fact on another—'Yes indeed!', 'What's more ...'. *Laws* (*mišpāṭîm*) is used to mean 'commandments' (what the Lord has authoritatively decided) and thus signifies his 'law'. It can also mean judgment pronounced and executed (*i.e.* the Lord's judgmental acts). Either meaning suits here—the Lord's people walking in obedience or the Lord's people amid his earthly

disciplines and punishments. The use of the same word in verse 9c does not point one way or the other. Either way, whether they are holding to the path of obedience or proving durable amid life's providential orderings, the Lord's people *wait for him*, exercise believing patience till the Lord performs his final act (5–6). They do not long for altered circumstances but for fuller experience of him. To *desire* his *name* means that true experience is controlled by revelation (the name of the Lord is what he has revealed himself to be). His *renown* (*zēker*, 'remembrance, memorial'; cf. Ex. 3:15) is the preservation in memory of what he has revealed himself to be. The desire of our *hearts* (*nēpes̄*) means 'our deepest, truest desire'.

9 The change to first person singular is unexpected but apt. There is no such thing as the people of God apart from the individuals composing it; there is no genuine corporate spirituality unless it is true of every member. Hence *my soul* matches the corporate 'soul' of verse 8, and *yearns* is the cognate verb to 'desire' in verse 8. *Soul* is the individual with possibly particular reference to the affective aspect; *spirit* is the energy to effectuate desires in actually seeking after God. The yearning soul is here matched by (lit.) 'my spirit within me', which is a notable stress on the inwardness of true religion, just as the contrast between *night* and *day* stresses constancy. Verse 9b opens with '*ap*' (see verse 8a) and hence is (lit.) 'And yes, in the morning how my spirit within me ...!'. Verse 9c begins with 'For', which is omitted by the NIV. One of the things that holds the people of God in this patient continuance and spiritual longing is the fact that the *judgments* of the Lord on earth enable its *people/inhabitants* to *learn righteousness*. Once more *judgments* are either the law of God as lived out by his people or the moral providences of God as accepted by his people. Obedience, a different way of life based on a supernatural code, is a telling testimony (Dt. 4:5–6); so is a demeanour of peaceful acceptance amid the often inexplicable providences of God.

Impenetrable blindness (26:10–11)

In seeking to enable the 'inhabitants of the world' to 'learn righteousness' the people of God have a hard task! The world is impenetrably unaware of God. In the sequence of the poem this unexpected section forms an essential bridge to verse 12 (the sole work of God bringing people into peace) and verses 16–19 (the fruitlessness of God's people in the world).

10–11a These verses instance three 'ways' of God with the world: *grace*, his favour and

goodness; *a land of uprightness*/‘straightforwardness’, favourable circumstances where everything is ‘plain sailing’; and *your hand is lifted high*,¹⁰² some signal act of God for benefit or bane. These ‘ways’ meet, respectively, with an uncomprehending mind (*do not learn*), perversity of will (*go on doing evil*/‘wrong, what deviates’) and spiritual blindness (*do not see*). *The majesty of the LORD* is singled out as remaining unobserved. For even when in life’s circumstances people have a fleeting recognition of God he remains marginal, incidental, in reality insignificant.

11b *Let them see* is better ‘They shall see’; the form allows the jussive ‘let them’ but the meaning is hard to explain. Continuation in ignorance and ignoring God can have only one outcome: it is a fact not a desire that they will, one day, *see!* The coming day will reveal a distinction between those who are the Lord’s people and those who are not. He will manifest his *zeal* for his people’s welfare (16–19), whereas those who remained obdurate in the face of testimony (7–9) and providence (10–11ab) will find that they are *put to shame* (see on 23:4). *Let the fire* is (lit.) ‘Oh yes, the fire ... will’ (it begins with the participle *’ap*, ‘yes’: cf. verses 8a, 9b). The contrast between *your people* and *your enemies* gives precise point to Isaiah’s teaching. The world continued in ignorance when it might have been instructed, following perverted moral choices when things were plain before them etc. They failed to recognize not only the greatness of the God they were ignoring but also the nature of their relationship with him, which was one of enmity with eternal consequences. *Fire* (from Ex. 3:2 onwards) is the symbol of active divine holiness (cf. 6:6; 30:27; 33:14; 66:24).

The divinely ordained peace (26:12–15)

The thought of the Lord’s zeal for his people, to be demonstrated climactically on the last day, prompts the recollection that his people owe everything to the fact that he has concerned himself with them. Verse 12, in this context, must refer primarily to spiritual blessings and verses 13–15 look back into history for examples of what the Lord has done for his people. The message is consistent: everything has been undertaken by the

¹⁰² The motif of the lifted hand expresses triumphant power (Dt. 32:40; Ps. 89:13, 42 <14, 43>), asserting power against (1 Ki. 11:27), taking an oath (Gn. 14:22) and confidence or superiority, including the bad sense of acting with a complacent sense of impunity (Ex. 14:8; Nu. 15:30; 33:3). Here it is used of the Lord acting in some obvious way which even so goes unrecognized.

Lord.

12 Establish is *šāpat*, ‘to put something in place’ ([2 Ki. 4:38](#)) or ‘to appoint someone to some experience’ ([Ps. 22:15 <16>](#)) and hence ‘You make peace our portion’. Peace, as in verse [3](#), is the peace which arises from a trusting relationship with the Lord and membership of the strong city. All that we have accomplished you have done for us is (lit.) ‘For indeed all our works you have done for us’. An identical Hebrew form in [2 Chronicles 4:6](#) (lit. ‘all that was involved in the burnt offering’) establishes the meaning as ‘whatever concerns us’. This makes an important connection with verses [10–11](#) with their emphasis on the impenetrable condition of the wicked in mind, will and spiritual perception. Only if the Lord undertakes ‘everything that concerns us’ can anyone be brought from darkness to light. Salvation has to be all of God.

13 The Lord has been loyal to his people in times of adversity. The reference to *other lords* includes Pharaoh, the many alien rulers in the period of the Judges, the Philistines and, more proximately, the Assyrians. Elsewhere the preposition *besides* (*zûlat*) is only used following a negative.¹⁰³ Possibly we could accommodate this general usage by translating, ‘Did other lords rule over us? None but you!’, i.e. even in times when alien powers dominated, the Lord had not abdicated or given up his ultimate Lordship. Maybe we should simply leave *besides you* as an acceptable if exceptional usage. The words *but your name* impute a loyalty to the Lord at variance with the facts. The Hebrew really requires ‘only by you do we keep your name in remembrance’; fidelity is not an attribute native to the people of God but a gift which he enables them to exercise.

14 The Lord has carried out a total deliverance. On *departed spirits* (*rēpā'îm*, ‘the shadowy ones’) see [14:9](#). You punished is (lit.) ‘Therefore you visited’ (see on [24:21](#)). Such complete obliteration can only be explained by an act of God, blotting them out even from *memory*. Who, for example, is the Pharaoh of the exodus?

15 The Lord has brought about increase and enlargement for his people (cf. [9:3 <2>](#)), and through this he has gained glory. Ezekiel would say that throughout the history of his people the Lord ‘acted for his own name’s sake’ ([Ezk. 20:9, 14, 22](#)). Even here they can claim no merit. It was not for their worthiness that he acted in increase of the

¹⁰³ On *zûlatā* cf. [45:5, 21](#); [Dt. 1:36](#) (an implied negative); [Ps 18:31](#)[32](#). In the present case *BHS* follows the *LXX* (‘we know none other’) by altering *zûlât^ekā* (‘besides you’) to *bal nêdâ’* ([whom] we know not’).

people and enlargement of the land but only for reasons within his own nature.

Out of the dust ([26:16–19](#))

Like the last stanza ([12–15](#)), this one begins with the vocative, *LORD*. This link enhances the contrast between the two: what the Lord achieved ([12–15](#)) and what his people achieved ([16–18](#)). It also brings out the similarity: the Lord has done all that is needed ([12](#)), and the Lord will do all that is needed ([19](#)). In addition, there is a link with verses [5–6](#). There, the Lord brought down the lofty into the dust; here ([19](#)) he will yet bring his people out of the dust.

16 The NIV switches the order of verse [16bc](#). *Came to you* is from $\sqrt{pāqad}$ ('visited'; see [24:21](#)) and there is no other example of this being used of people coming to God. 'They cultivated you' would suit the verb and the sense of it here. Isaiah may have the period of the Judges in mind with its recurring bouts of penitence and seeking God. *Could barely whisper a prayer* is possibly 'they poured out a whisper'.¹⁰⁴ While the NIV makes divine discipline the cause of their distress, the Hebrew makes it the consequence of their sorrowing return to the Lord. As in Judges, the Lord did not reject his crushed people but brought them back within the constraints of his law.

17 The story is now brought more up to date. *They* ([16](#)) becomes *we*. 'Have we been' would be more suitable than *were we*. The *distress* ([16](#)) of the past has continued in pains as severe as those of childbirth. Isaiah could certainly be thinking of the Assyrians, the

¹⁰⁴ The form *ṣāqûn* is possibly a paragogic formation from $\sqrt{ṣ̄ūq}$, which *KB* refuses to acknowledge but *BDB* translates as 'to pour out'. Dhorme (on *Jb. 28:2*) would appear to concur. On the formation see *GKC 441* and Driver, 6. The noun *laḥaš* is urged as a difficulty in that it is only elsewhere used of a 'magic spell', but the noun itself means 'whisper' and could well be used here of the almost strangled, inarticulate whimper for help which was all they could manage. Watts notes the *LXX*'s *en thlipsei* ('in affliction'), choosen apparently instead of the verb *qāṣun*, and offers 'they [sought to] deter by a whispered charm your chastening ...'. Apart from the extreme unlikelihood of this, and the risk involved in appealing to the *LXX* where the Hebrew is at all difficult, the meaning suggested for the verb is far from secure. Much less risk is involved in allowing an unusual verbal form to express a satisfactory meaning! Kaiser suggests *b^eṣar p^eqūdāt^ekā ṣā'aqnū b^elaḥaš* ... ('in the distress of your visitation we cry out; in the affliction of thy chastening to you'). When all comes to all, the present text seems to be no more than poetic licence may allow.

enslavement of northern Israel, and all the contemporary trauma. *In your presence* (*mippāneykā*) is possibly better ‘because of you’, because of the divine ordering of history (see 10:5–15).

18 The reference to travail in verse 17, there used only of the severity of suffering, prompts here an enquiry whether any fruit came of it all. But sadly there was no other parallel to childbirth except the pain. They were aware of the need for the world to ‘learn righteousness’ (9) through the lives and witness of the people of God but no salvation came to the earth. *Salvation*, a plural of amplitude, means ‘no salvation of any sort’. In terms of verse 1, earth was not brought within the ramparts of the city of God. *Earth* and *world* are mentioned as in verse 9 (cf. on 24:4). *We have not given birth* is (lit.) ‘The inhabitants of the world have not fallen’. The verb ‘to fall’ (*nāpāl*) has eighteen or nineteen shades of meaning.¹⁰⁵ Among them is ‘to be born’, here ‘to come to new life’. This prepares for the same usage at the end of verse 19.

19 This verse has attracted much discussion, in particular focusing on three issues. First, does it properly belong to this context or not? Secondly, does it expect national survival or individual resurrection from the dead? And thirdly, is it Isaianic or must it be dated later? Respected opinion can be assembled for all these points of view.¹⁰⁶ In the light of the outline on p. 212, the place of the verse in context seems secure. While we might not have expected this particular word of encouragement, some word of encouragement is appropriate, even essential, following the despair of verses 16–18. This particular encouragement is obviously tailored for its place in the poem, with its theme of ‘out of the dust’ balancing the ‘into the dust’ theme of the matching section, verses 5–6.

¹⁰⁵ √*nāpāl* can mean ‘to be defeated’ (Lv. 26:7f.), ‘to desert to an enemy’ (2 Ki. 25:11), ‘to suffer loss’ (Pr. 11:14, 28) or ‘to be inferior to’ (Jb. 1:3). The noun *nēpel* (‘a birth by miscarriage’; Jb. 3:16; Ec. 6:3) would support the verbal meaning ‘to be born’.

¹⁰⁶ Gray, Box and Kaiser see this verse as a reference to the resurrection of the righteous dead; Wade, Kissane, Wilderberger and Johnson to a national resurrection. Rowley says that while there is no thought of individual resurrection the passage may have prepared for such an idea (H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* [SCM, 1956], pp. 116f.). Skinner, Mauchline and Herbert do see here the promise of individual resurrection. Many who espouse the thought of genuine resurrection automatically date the passage very late (e.g. Kaiser).

Those who hold to a national resurrection (on the lines of [Ezk. 37:1–14](#)) and those who find here individual resurrection from the dead mainly agree on the subjects involved: ‘the resurrection of the community’ (Clements), the individual resurrection of ‘the faithful in Israel’ (Mauchline). But is this correct?

First, it does not respond to the depression of verses [16–18](#), which reached their climax in the thought of ineffectuality. For all the Lord’s patient continuance with his people ([16](#)) and the similarity of their pangs to those of childbirth ([17](#)), the world was not brought to birth in God ([18](#)). The cordial for that particular heartache is the assurance of success where the record is failure. *Your dead* may then very well signify ‘the dead you are concerned about’. Secondly, if we trace those who *dwell in the dust* and who will emerge from *earth* like babes from the womb back to the matching wording of verses [5–6](#), it is the ‘lofty city’ which has been ‘laid low to the earth’ and ‘levelled to the dust’. The Lord’s people are already in secure possession of the ‘strong city’ ([1](#)) with its assurance of ‘salvation’. It is the world which needs this assurance. It would seem then, that, whatever this verse promises, its purpose is to give assurance that the world-wide gathering of [25:6–10a](#), with its assurance of salvation, is no mirage but rests on secure promises of divine action. This would explain why the reference to ‘the dead you are concerned with’ ([19a](#)) is capped by the assurance from the Lord that they are, not as the NIV, (lit.) ‘my corpses’, the ‘totally dead with which I am concerned’. ‘Corpse’ (*n^ebēlā*) is often used, as it is here, as a singular collective (*cf.* [5:25](#); [Dt. 14:8](#); [Ps. 79:2](#)). The word is chosen to stress deadness. To say that they will *live* and *rise* is therefore to speak of resurrection, though this could be as well figurative (of what the New Testament would call the new birth, or having been raised with Christ; [Eph. 2:6](#)) as literal. The call to wake up to joy ([19d](#)) is explained (verse [19e](#) begins with ‘For’) by the motifs of *dew* and ‘lights’ (*morning*). *Dew* has a wide metaphorical coverage¹⁰⁷ but, very significantly, it is linked with the manna of [Exodus 16](#) (verses [13–14](#); *cf.* [Nu. 11:19](#)), the divine gift which cancelled the threat of death ([Ex. 16:3](#)). *Morning* is (lit.) ‘lights’, a plural of amplitude meaning ‘full light’. Death is darkness, life is light ([Jb. 3:16](#); [Pss. 49:19 <20>](#); [56:13 <14>](#)), the light of salvation ([Ps. 27:1](#)).¹⁰⁸ The association of light and life ([Ps.](#)

¹⁰⁷ *Dew* is symbolic of the heavenly contribution to earthly well-being ([Gn. 27:28, 39](#); [Dt. 33:13, 28](#)), royal favour ([Pr. 19:12](#)) and divine blessing ([Ho. 14:5<6>](#)).

¹⁰⁸ ‘Light’ is life-giving ([2 Sa. 23:4](#)), a symbol of life ([Jb. 3:16](#)), especially spiritual life ([Ps. 27:1](#)), of

[36:9](#) <10>) and dew and life ([Ho. 14:5](#) <6>) is noteworthy. See also the reference to the Lord's presence as dew and light in the parallel oracle ([18:4](#)). Here, as dew descends, so he will come to his dead, bringing heavenly refreshment and vitality; with the light of his presence he will impart the light of salvation. For *will give birth to*/'cause to fall' see on verse [18](#). On *her dead* (*rēpā'îm*, 'its shadowy ones') cf. verse [14](#).

In sum, therefore, the verse is a promise of life for the world, the fulfilment of [25:6–10a](#). But if this is so, then while the main thrust of the terminology is used figuratively of the resurrection of the wicked into salvation and the strong city, we need to recall that [25:7–8](#) looked forward to the abolition of death itself. In this regard, the terms of the present verse go beyond the figurative to the literal and declare a full resurrection, including the resurrection of the body. Within the progressive revelation of the Old Testament only [Daniel 12:2](#) is comparable. The reigning hypothesis dates Daniel in the second century BC and this, coupled with the continuing supposition that Old Testament doctrine is subject to an evolutionary development from poor beginnings to brilliant endings, has led some to propose a very late date for verse [19](#). How insubstantial this is! The Egyptians had an intricate and highly developed mythology of the dead and the life to come centuries before Isaiah. Even Canaanite religion, with all its brutishness, ascribed to its executive god an annual victory over death. We are expected, however, to accept that Israel's 'emphasis on Yahweh as the living God' put 'the shadowy realm of the dead ... outside his jurisdiction' (Herbert). In the name of all logic, how could this be so? Mauchline observes that,

the faithful in Israel must often have despaired of seeing the salvation of God in the land of the living; here, therefore, is expressed the conviction that they shall rise again ... the great hope ... must have required a great prophet ... it may easily be described as too high a doctrine for Isaiah's days; but that is always a precarious basis for judgment in the case of a prophet who was, in spiritual stature, far above the common levels of his day.

In a word, why look for a great unknown when it is our humbling privilege to have the greatest of all before us?

God's presence ([Ps. 104:2](#)) and his drawing near to end his people's darkness ([Is. 9:2<1>; 59:9; 60:1, 3](#)) and of his favour ([Ps. 4:6](#)) and truth ([Ps. 43:3](#)).

Secure from wrath ([26:20–21](#))

20 The call to ‘open the gates’ with which the poem began ([2](#)) is matched here by *shut the doors*. Security in peace ([1–4](#)) is matched by security from wrath. The wording *Go ... shut* recalls [Genesis 7:1, 16](#) and the safety of the Noahic community in the flood. The picture of going indoors recalls [Exodus 12:22–23](#) and the safety of the Passover community while judgment was in process. *Passed by* is the Passover verb, ‘*ābar* ([Ex. 12:12, 23](#)).

21 This verse begins with an explanatory ‘For’. On *to punish*/‘to visit’ see [24:21](#). *Sins* (‘*āwōn*’) is the most ‘internal’ word in the sin vocabulary (see on [1:4; 6:7](#)) and *blood shed* is the most flagrant outward violation of God’s law. Concealed sin, long undiscovered, will be exposed. Thus, Isaiah indicates a divine settlement with all and every sin. *The earth* is seen as actively participating with God by exposing what lay hidden. This is part of the ‘moral vitality’ of creation, which is inevitably infected with human sin but never fails to be on the side of the holy purposes of its Creator (cf. on [1:2–3; 24:5](#)).

e. *The final gathering: the universal Israel ([27:1–13](#))*

In literary content this is as fascinating a piece of Isaianic ‘mosaic’ as anything in the whole literature, carefully composed (note how it begins and ends with two ‘In that day’ oracles in verses [1–2](#) and [12–13](#)) and using pieces from many points in Isaiah’s ministry. Verse [1](#) describes the Lord’s victory in the supernatural realm.¹⁰⁹ It is impossible to say at what point this might have originated in Isaiah’s ministry, and it may have been composed for its present place and function. The vineyard song in verses [2–6](#) is complementary to [5:1–7](#).¹¹⁰ In the earlier passage the emphasis lay on what Israel-Judah

¹⁰⁹ Many try to identify the three allusions to *Leviathan* with historical nations. Delitzsch thinks of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt respectively. Watts finds in all three a reference to Tyre. Johnson notes that ‘with the discovery of the mythological texts from Ugarit, there can be no doubt that the various descriptions ... refer to one chaos monster’. This fits in with Isaiah’s inclusion of supernatural foes within the Lord’s victory in chapters [24–27](#) and also with his use of myth in the interests of truth (cf. [51:9–11](#)).

¹¹⁰ The fruitful hill ([5:1](#)) is matched by the ‘vineyard of delight’ here. There are the same elements of total divine commitment ([5:2; 27:3–4](#)), the judgmental removal of protection and withholding of rain ([5:5–6](#)) contrasts with the watering and protectiveness of [27:3–4](#), and the unfruitful Israel-Judah ([5:7](#)) contrasts with the Jacob-Israel filling the earth with fruit ([27:6](#)).

made of the Lord's vineyard, but here it is on what the Lord will yet make of Jacob-Israel, his vineyard-people. Verses 7–11 are a historical glance at the Lord's dealings with 'Jacob' merging into a promissory message of purging arising out of the overthrow of the city.¹¹¹ Finally, verses 12–13 are two oracles of ingathering, identical in geographical scope (Mesopotamia and Egypt), the first of which has Israel as its topic and the second an unidentified world community. The first does not say to what place the Lord will gather his harvest but the second specifies Jerusalem.

This heterogeneous collection has been fashioned into a coherent presentation:

A¹ The Lord's victory in the heavenlies: the great sword (1)

B¹ The Lord's vineyard people, destined to fill the world (2–6)

C The Lord's dealings with his people (7–11)

Past forbearance (7–8)

Future atonement (9)

Overthrow of the world city (10–11)

B² The Lord's harvested people, gathered from the world (12)

A² The Lord's jubilee on earth: the great trumpet (13)

Within chapters 13–27 the companion passages are chapters 19–20 and 23, both of which climax on the thought of the Lord's world-wide people (19:24–25; 23:18). It is this comparison which justifies the heading suggested above, 'the universal Israel' (see on verse 13, below). The construction of this section, making the Lord's cosmic work focus on what he proposes to do for his people (verses 7–11), forms a thematic inclusio with the opening section 13:1–14:27 (see on 14:1–2). Note also how the consequence of the overthrow of Babylon (14:21; they cannot now 'fill the face of the earth with cities',

¹¹¹ Johnson correctly notes the many links which bind verses 7–11 with 17:2–11 and concludes that in the present passage a later writer was reworking the earlier material in order to say something about the northern kingdom and its erstwhile capital city. His observations of the links between the two passages are a model of careful study but his conclusion is surely not required. Such links speak of one author and one common time of writing. But what originally referred to Samaria is now allowed to become a reference to the world city and its ultimate fall. Johnson's arguments against Wilderberger's attempt to relate this passage to the later Samaritans are decisive and should be noted.

ûmâle'û p^enê tēbēl 'ārîm) is replaced by the Lord's purpose that his vineyard people should 'fill the face of the earth with produce' (*ûmâle'û p^enê tēbēl t^enûbâ*).

The Lord's victory in the heavenlies: the great sword (27:1)

The entities called 'the powers in the heavens'/'the host of the height in the height' in 24:21 are here described mythologically as two Leviathans and *the serpent* (or 'dragon'). For Isaiah's use of mythology see on 51:9–11. Note how the triple description of the Lord's sword as *fierce* (*qāšâ*, 'harsh, severe, unsparing'), *great* (enough for any task) and *powerful* (enough for any foe) matches the triple description of his foes (*serpent* ... *serpent* ... *monster*), i.e. an image of power matching the task. *Leviathan* is used in various ways in the Old Testament. In Job 41:1 <40:25> and Psalm 104:26 it denotes a water beast, real or imaginary; in Psalm 74:14 it is used figuratively of Egypt; and in Job 3:8 it is a picture of the truly horrific (to awaken Leviathan is to 'annihilate the existing order and to plunge into catastrophe').¹¹² Whether the actuality of dreaded beasts like the hippopotamus and crocodile emerging from the waters gave rise to the thought of a 'great' beast of the waters, or whether the name of the 'great beast' of unruliness was figuratively applied to these huge animals, the substantial fact is that Leviathan stands for an immense power (like that of the sea) ranged against the Lord. But God's power as Creator (Ps. 104:26) and exodus Saviour (Ps. 74:14) is ever greater, and the eschatological day will see his victory. The link made here between the mythological names (*Leviathan*, 'dragon') and the factual name (*serpent*) points to these forces, however immense, as created beings. *Monster* (*tannîn*) can mean a created sea monster (Gn. 1:21), a serpent or crocodile (Ex. 7:9; Ps. 91:13), or have a figurative use signifying overwhelming power (Je. 51:34). *Gliding*/‘fleeing’, ‘swift’ (cf. Jb. 26:13) suggests an aerial power. *Coiling* (“*qallâtōn*”) is found only here and comes from √‘*āqal*’ (‘to twist’; e.g. Jdg. 5:6; Ps. 125:5; Hab. 1:4). The present reference can be either factual (twisting) or moral (twisted) or both. The word *nâhâš* (‘serpent’) occurs in Genesis 3:1 and doubtless for that reason is used here. The picture of the power of the air, the coiling serpent on the ground and the ‘dragon which is in the sea’ shows the whole creation infested with alien powers which will be sought and destroyed wherever they are.

The Lord's vineyard people, destined to fill the world (27:2–6)

¹¹² Dhorme on Jb. 3:8.

This is the final song in the great cantata of chapters 24–27. This vineyard is a delight (2); is under the Lord’s constant provision and protection (3); enjoys peace with God (4a); is free of the intrusive or corrupting (4b); and offers peace with God to all, even *thorns* if they will. (See p. 220, n. 2.) Verses 4–5 are an Isaianic mixed metaphor: hypothetically ‘battling’ with weeds (4) develops into the war-peace motif of verse 5.

2 The Hebrew is exclamatory: ‘In that day! A delightful vineyard! Sing of it!’ There is no need for suspicion about the text or to search for a verb (see *BHS*). The cantata sequence is reaching its climax, and we too are expected to share the excitement. On *In that day* see 24:21. There is an unsettled doubt about *fruitful* in the Hebrew text. The choice hovers between ‘a vineyard of delight’ (*kerem hemed*) and ‘a vineyard of foaming or sparkling wine’ (*kerem hemer*; Dt. 32:14; cf. Ps. 75:8 <9>).¹¹³ The latter forms an excellent contrast with the undrinkable wine of 5:2, 4.

3 This verse speaks of a total divine work (cf. 5:1–4). In the NIV lines c and d should be switched to restore the Hebrew order with its a-b-b-a formation. In the ‘a’ lines, *watch over* and *guard* are the same verb ($\sqrt{nāṣar}$, ‘to preserve intact’) and the ‘b’ lines are two aspects of care, watering (meeting needs) and protecting (excluding foes).¹¹⁴ This work is carried on without intermission, *continually*/‘moment by moment’, *day and night* (cf. Ps. 121:3–8). On *harm* meaning ‘visit’ see 24:21.

4 *I am not angry* is (lit.) ‘anger there is not to me’ meaning ‘I have no anger at all’. *ḥēmā* is specifically the heat of anger, angry feeling. It contrasts sharply with 5:5–6 and renews the peace motif of 26:3, 12, except that here the peace is in the heart of God. Such is the Lord’s zeal for his vineyard that he longs for a chance to prove how much he cares: just let a weed appear!

5 The invitation to *come to me for refuge*/‘take hold of my stronghold’ is to the hypothetical ‘weed’, the opponent of the vineyard, hence indicating that vineyard membership is open to all co-equally. The picture is reminiscent of the invitation to Moab to find shelter in Zion (16:4–5). In the parallel oracle, Tyre is spoken of as a ‘stronghold’ (*mā’ōz*; 23:4, 11, 14). The word frequently describes the Lord himself (Pss. 27:1; 37:39; Je. 16:19; Na. 1:7) and is not used of Jerusalem or its temple.¹¹⁵ Here,

¹¹³ The difference between *hemed*.

¹¹⁴ Verse 3 exhibits Isaiah’s liking for rhyme, here an a-b-c-b pattern.

¹¹⁵ Wilderberger makes ‘my stronghold’ refer to the temple and sees the passage as inviting the

therefore, it is equivalent to ‘find protection in me’. The emphasis changes in each half of this repetition. First it lies on *with me* and secondly on *peace*, i.e. what is on offer is peace with God and it is real peace.

6 The implications of verses 3–4a and 4b–5 are now developed. The divinely nurtured vine fills the earth so that the whole world becomes the Lord’s vineyard. That this was always the Lord’s intention for his people but was previously frustrated by their sin and its just punishment is shown in Psalm 80. But now the Lord is at peace with his people and invites every erstwhile enemy into peace. *In the days to come* (*habbā’im*, ‘the coming ones’; masculine plural) is a unique expression, possibly an ellipsis for *hayyāmīm habbā’im* ([in] the coming days; Ec. 2:16). It may be exclamatory, ‘They are coming!’, matching the exclamations with which the vineyard song began (2). The phrase might be designedly vague (‘the days are coming’) or be a reference to people who have just been invited to come into the Lord’s peace (5).¹¹⁶ The total vine system (*root, bud, blossom* and *fruit*) is wholesome and effective in every part (cf. 5:24). The names *Jacob* and *Israel* would most directly apply to the northern kingdom and could suggest that the verse originated as an oracle of hope related to the time of the fall of Samaria and the deportation of the northern people (cf. 28:5–6 following on the Ephraim oracle, 28:1–4). In the present context, of course, the names have their original and time-honoured reference to the whole people of God as tracing their birth to Jacob-Israel (cf. 29:22–23).

The Lord’s dealings with his people (27:7–11)

But how will the people of the Lord come into the Eden-restored of verses 2–6? The answer comes in this central section of the poem. The writing is compressed and highly

later Samaritans to abandon their schismatic temple for the true shrine in Jerusalem. Johnson notes that the reunification ideal was well established by the exilic period (Je. 31:1–9, 15–22; Ezk. 37:15ff.) and that there is no reason to propose a later date. He adds that the Samaritan ‘schism would all but preclude the note of reconciliation that is struck in these verses’. The fact of the matter is, however, that the prophets (from Elijah onwards; 1 Ki. 18:31) refused to countenance the separation of north and south.

¹¹⁶ A translation ‘These things are coming’ would be suitably effective in context but would require a feminine plural participle.

allusive but the verses have a coherent and relevant meaning. The Lord has never been as harsh with Israel as he has been with its foes (7);¹¹⁷ scattering ('by shooing away and sending her off') rather than destruction has been its portion (8). This same divine forbearance will yet be shown in a work of atonement to which Israel will respond by rejecting all false religion (9), but typically of this kingly section of Isaiah (chapters 1–37), the thought of atonement is not pursued (10–11). The explanation (verse 10 begins with 'For') of the transformation of Israel's fortunes is found in the overthrow of the city.

7 The Hebrew is rhythmic and beautiful but at the expense of clarity. The first question is (lit.) 'Like the smiting of the one who smote him did he smite him?', *i.e.* did the Lord smite Israel to the same extent as he smote its conquerors? For example, was Israel ever shattered as the Lord shattered Egypt at the Red Sea? The purport of the second question is the same, (lit.) 'or like the slaughter of his slaughtered ones was he slaughtered?', *i.e.* has Israel ever suffered casualties such as the Lord inflicted on those whom he overthrew, *e.g.* the Assyrian slaughter of 37:36? Always there was a divine restraint (*cf.* Je. 4:27; 5:10, 18).

8 With *By warfare* the NIV follows the LXX.¹¹⁸ The Hebrew has the otherwise unexemplified word *besa'sâ*. Cognate languages (see KB and Driver) support the translation, 'to cry sa-sa', 'to scare off by shouting' (hence the translation suggested above 'by shooing away').¹¹⁹ *Exile*/‘by sending her off’ is not a reference to the great exiles (the northern kingdom to Assyria, the southern to Babylon) but to all occasions when enemies invaded and took captives. On every such occasion divine wrath could justly have exacted the full penalty but forbearance intervened, and even when the great exiles came they did so under the promise of return! The chastisement was like a *fierce blast*, never negligible, for divine standards had to be honoured, but it was ‘as on a day of east wind’, sharp but not endless. With *he drives*/‘he expelled’ Isaiah is still

¹¹⁷ On *He*-interrogative with following *Daghes forte* see GKC 100l.

¹¹⁸ The LXX reads *machomenos*, but the general hesitancy which one ought to exercise regarding the evidence of the LXX becomes acute in cases where there is any difficulty or unusualness in the Hebrew.

¹¹⁹ Delitzsch relates the foundational form *sâ'sâ* to *s'â* ('a measure', a third of an ephah), making it equivalent to 'by measure' or 'in due measure' (*cf.* the RSV).

looking back at earlier divine discipline. The verb ($\sqrt{hāgā}$) is used in [2 Samuel 20:13](#) of shifting a corpse off the road and in [Proverbs 25:4](#) of refining. Here ‘shifted and sifted’ would suit the verb and the context.

9 *By this* looks back to the substantial point just made: the Lord has ever acted towards his people with restraint, not according to their deservings. This same principle of divine action will yet operate to effect atonement. On *guilt* (‘āwōn , ‘iniquity’) see [5:18](#); [6:7](#); [53:5](#). On *atoned for* ($\sqrt{kāpar}$) see [6:7](#). Thus the Lord will pay the atonement price for the inner reality of the sinful nature, but this divine act will also bring about *the removal of his sin* ($haṭṭāt$), his actual wrongdoing (see on [5:18](#); [6:7](#); [53:12](#)). This will be seen taking full effect, *full fruitage, when he makes all the altar stones to be like chalk stones crushed to pieces*. He is ‘Jacob’ and therefore might be translated ‘they’ but the singular has value in underlining that the effect of atonement is primarily individual and personal. For this reason we find Isaiah using here the vocabulary (*sin*, ‘iniquity’, ‘atonement’) of his own experience. The ‘full fruit’ of atonement is borne in sole loyalty to the Lord, evidenced by the destruction of all that belongs to false gods. On *Asherah poles* and *incense altars* see [17:8](#). It may be that since the work of destruction includes the *poles etc.* of false gods we are to understand the *altar stones* in the same way but the text does not actually say this. It is certainly capable of meaning that when the full atonement has been made, the worship of the Lord himself will no longer require sacrifice, so that the very altar of the Lord will be as totally removed as if its stones became (lit.) ‘like pulverized limestone’.

10–11 Whatever the origin of this oracle and the primary identity of the city, it now refers to the world city which has been the theme of chapters [24–27](#). Isaiah does not develop any further the atonement theme of verse [9](#). This is ‘The book of the King’ (chapters [1–37](#)), and the Lord’s future act is suitably seen as a work of conquest, bringing the whole world under his appointed king. In spite, therefore, of people’s best endeavour to make themselves secure (*fortified*) all is lost. Four pictures reveal the extent of the overthrow. The *settlement* is so utterly *abandoned* by humankind that *calves graze there* ([2](#); cf. [5:17](#)). This picture of grazing suggests that of leaving *branches stripped bare* (lit. ‘they finish off’) and this in turn becomes the picture of the *women* gathering dry wood for their fires. Possibly *for this is a people* originally referred to the northern kingdom under judgment as noted above, but now it describes those who have shared

the overthrow of the world city. Their lack of understanding (11c) led to forfeiture of the *compassion* and *favour* of their Creator. First, Isaiah exposes their inner heart, their *understanding* (lit.) ‘this is not a people of true discernment’. ‘Discernment’ (*bînôt*, $\sqrt{bîn}$; see on 1:3) is plural, expressing the essence of the thing. Secondly, he exposes the heart of God, who has *no compassion* ($\sqrt{râham}$; see on 13:18; 14:1). The relation of Creator to creature is like that of mother to child, but the divine love has been alienated by people’s determination to trust their own discernment. Thirdly, the tragic consequence is that they have put themselves even beyond the reach of *favour* ($\sqrt{hânan}$), the outreaching of unmerited, saving grace to sinners (cf. Gn. 6:8; Ps. 51:1 <3>). *Their Creator* is (lit.) ‘he who moulded them’, ‘their potter’ (as Gn. 2:7), and the picture conveyed is of the personal, painstaking care of the Creator, the very pressure of his hands.

The Lord’s harvested people (27:12–13)

The sequence ends, as it started, with two ‘In that day’ oracles. The first (12) is, like verses 2–6, an oracle of sowing and reaping. The second (13) contrasts the *great trumpet*, which gathers the Lord’s people, with the *great sword* of verse 1, which destroys his foes. Both are oracles of specifically divine harvesting. In verse 12 the Lord is pictured patiently gathering his harvest home one by one, and verse 13 recalls the institution of the fiftieth or Jubilee year (Lv. 25:8ff.). On the most obvious computation, the Jubilee followed the sabbatical forty-ninth year and was, therefore, a year in which there had been no human preparations for harvest, a year of dependence on what God would supply.¹²⁰ Such a background is extremely apt here as we recall 26:18 (the mourning of the unfruitful people) and 26:19 (the Lord’s promise of ingathering). He is himself the guarantor of the harvest.

12 On *In that day* see 24:21. The verb $\sqrt{hâbāt}$ can mean to *thresh* (Jdg. 6:11; Ru. 2:17) but it is also used of harvesting olives and dill by beating (Dt. 24:20; Is. 28:27). This suits the one by one emphasis here, and we should think, therefore, of ‘picking’ or ‘gathering’. *The flowing Euphrates/‘the streams of the River’ to the Wadi of Egypt* were the traditional boundaries of the promised land (Gn. 15:18; Ex. 23:31; cf. Jos. 1:4; Ps. 72:8) and represent, therefore, the gathering by the Lord of every true member of his people, ‘the sons of Israel’. *Gathered up* ($\sqrt{lâqat}$) is used of gleaning (17:5) and is the

¹²⁰ See, however, G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Eerdmans, 1979), *ad loc.*

original metaphor of 24:13.

13 On the *great trumpet* cf. Zechariah 9:14; Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16. The Jubilee trumpet (Lv. 25:9) was sounded on the Day of Atonement, linking verses 13 and 9 of the present passage. The reference to *in Assyria* and *in Egypt* is to people living within Gentile boundaries, a different picture from verse 12. This is the ingathering of the people of the world to Jerusalem. *Perishing* ($\sqrt{\text{'}ā\bar{b}ad}$) is used in Deuteronomy 26:5 of pre-redemption Israel: so there will be Gentiles awaiting the great trumpet heralding their full atonement. The verb *exiled* ($\sqrt{nādā}$) is used of Israelites driven from their land (e.g. 8:22), but this thought would destroy the balance between verses 12 and 13. It is also used in the general sense of ‘straying’ (e.g. Dt. 22:1) and of people homeless before the enemy (16:3–4). The thought, therefore, is not of exile from the land of Israel but of being distraught and harassed in their spiritually alien environment. They will, at last, experience the fulfilment of the parallel passage, 19:24–25. The use of historical names (*Assyria, Egypt*) here is like the use of ‘Moab’ in 25:10. Just as eschatological judgment falls on real people, so here does eschatological blessing. Isaiah relates the eschaton to the map of his own world. From the ends of the earth, and even from the supreme oppressors themselves (Egypt the first, Assyria the contemporary), there will be those whom the atonement trumpet calls to Zion. The gathered Gentiles will *worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem*. They will be united to the Lord in worship, full participants in the holy community and welcomed in Jerusalem as members of the strong city itself (cf. Eph. 3:6).

D. The Lord of history (28:1–37:38)

From the vision of divine purposes (chapters 13–27) Isaiah turns to the reality of divine power. It is the task of chapters 28–37 to demonstrate that the Lord does actually rule world history and that, therefore, his as yet unfulfilled promises and purposes are sure.

At two climactic points in chapters 13–27 (19:24–25; 27:13), Isaiah predicted the gathering of Egypt and Assyria into full membership of the Lord’s people: the first and the contemporary oppressive superpowers would alike come under the sway of the Lord as

king. To Isaiah's contemporaries this must have seemed both marvellous and unlikely—that aliens should become members, inveterate enemies friends, and imperial powers quietly submissive! Isaiah, therefore, offers the greatest of his interim fulfilments,¹ a period of history in which divine sovereignty over Judah, Egypt and Assyria would be demonstrated before their very eyes. As far as the three nations were concerned, each would be determined on its own way but the outcome would be what the Lord willed, and that by direct divine action. As we shall see, the occasion is that of the 'Egyptian alliance' (see p. 20) in the days of Hezekiah. Judah is seen wilfully refusing the way of trust in the Lord for trust in Egypt; Egypt is revealed as blustering and ultimately ineffective; and the Assyrian army, bending its colossal power to punish the rebels, is destroyed by the/ (an) angel of the Lord.

In the first section (chapters 28–29), though the material is woven round the episode of the Egyptian alliance, neither Egypt nor Assyria is named and Isaiah's purpose is to elucidate the principles involved in the situation and in the Lord's dealings with his people (as in chapters 1–5). Then in chapters 30–32 Isaiah comes to grips with Egypt and Assyria by name, but the more plainly he engages with history the more easily he moves into eschatology (as, e.g. chapters 7–11), placing the Messianic kingdom side by side with the downfall of Assyria (31:8–32:1; cf. 10:33–11:1ff.). In chapters 33–35 the acts of God in history become the pattern of his eschatological acts (as in chapters 13–27), and in chapters 36–37 the firm rock of history is offered as a secure foundation for the hopes just outlined. It is as if Isaiah were saying, 'See what he has done. Now trust him, for he will yet do all he has promised.'

Though the section can be thematically outlined like this, chapters 28–35 have their own six-part unity, marked by the recurrence of the word 'Woe' or 'Ho!' (28:1, 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1). The presentation is balanced between the first three woes, offering principles of divine action, and the second three, giving matching applications to history and eschatology.

Principles

28:1–29 When God's people reject his

Applications

30:1–33 Refuge is sought in Egypt (1–7),

¹ Cf. 14:24–27; 16:13–14; 20:1–6; 21:16–17; 22:15–25; 23:17.

word (9–13) and covenant (14–15), destruction follows (18–22), held within divine purposes (23–29)

29:1–14 There is disaster and deliverance (1–8) but historical deliverance does not change people spiritually. This needs a further divine action (9–14), which is already planned

rejecting the Lord's word (8–12), but his ultimate (13–26) and immediate (27–33) purposes are settled

31:1–32:20 Divine deliverance scorns both Egypt's help and Assyria's enmity (31:1–9). Beyond lies the perfect kingdom with true king (32:1) and transformed people (3–8). The pattern of history will be repeated: overthrow (9–14) and transformation (15–20)

29:15–24 People may think to run the world without God (15), but he is the sovereign and his transforming purposes (16–17) will work out spiritually (18–19), morally and socially (20–21), fulfilling what began in Abraham (22) and establishing a truly renewed people (23–24)

33:1–35:10 Treacherous people (33:1, 8) may seem to rule but divine sovereignty remains (33:3, 10). The perfect kingdom (33:13–24), morally and socially (33:15) and spiritually (33:24), will come. The enemy will finally be destroyed (chapter 34) and the redeemed will gather to Zion (chapter 35)

We have here a typical Isaianic mosaic, cleverly integrated to present a unified message: the total sovereignty of the Lord over every situation, up to and including the eschatological climax. Each historical situation faces the Lord's people with the same issues, which will come to climactic expression at the last day. Therefore, the faith which trusts a sovereign and gracious God is the only practical course for life now, just as (and because) it will be the only saving course then.

1. The one foundation (28:1–29)

The most accurate description of the literary genre of this passage is 'rhythmic prose'. Rhythmic it certainly is, but it does not seem to subserve any regular poetic forms.²

² See Watts for a brave attempt to elucidate the line-by-line scansion of this chapter. Compare the much more significant results J. C. Exum obtains by close rhetorical analysis ('A literary approach

Possibly, we have an original poetic base consisting of poems Isaiah wrote bearing on the last days of the northern kingdom (1–6) and on Judah at the time when the Egyptian alliance was being negotiated (7–22). These were then reshaped with adjustments, omissions (the mid-section clearly belongs to the days of the alliance but Egypt is nowhere named) and additions to fit them for the present context, where the purpose is not to comment on history so much as to offer a rationale for the way of faith. At all events, the section begins (1–6) and ends (23–29) with double illustrations drawn from nature and agriculture. Between lies a meditation in eight broadly equal parts on how Jerusalem's leaders refused the word of invitation and inherited the word of wrath (7–22):

A¹ Ephraim: an end and a beginning (1–6)

a¹ The fading garland and the flood (1–3)

a² The fading garland the the first-ripe fig (4)

a³ The true garland: the Lord bestows 'judgment' (5–6)

B No trust, no security (7–22)

Introduction: a sinister parallel (7–8)

The inescapable word (9–13)

b¹ The simple word despised (9–10)

b² The simple replaced by the unintelligible (11–12)

b³ The word enforced (13)

c The security that failed (14–19)

c¹ Chosen security (14–15)

c² True security and its alternative (16–17)

c³ Failed security (18–19)

Conclusion: a strange deed (20–22)

A²True discrimination in sowing and reaping (23–29)

a¹ The work of sowing: the Lord teaches 'judgment' (23–26)

a² The work of reaping: the Lord, the source of wisdom (27–29)

a. Ephraim: an end and a beginning (28:1–6)

The hill of Samaria (1 Ki. 16:24), with its terraced vineyards and fertile valleys, is seen as

to Isaiah 28', *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, edd. D. J. Clines *et al.*, JSOTS, 19 [1982], pp.108–139).

J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

a garlanded reveller whose time has all but run out (1). The Lord has in hand an irresistible foe (2–3) and Samaria will be gobbled up with the same alacrity and unthinkingness as a passer-by picks and swallows a first-ripe fig (4). But a better day has yet to dawn (5–6), on which the Lord will be the true crown of his people and their city will be impregnable.

1 *Woe* (*hôy*) is a word of summons (55:1), emotion ('Ah!'; 1:24) and sympathy (1 Ki. 13:30). Possibly, throughout this present series of six 'woes' (29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1) the idea is of summons to the bar of judgment (cf. the six 'woes' [same word] in 5:8ff., the harvest of foul grapes). The identity of number here indicates that the bitter harvest continues. On *wreath* ('crown', 'garland') see the introductory paragraph immediately above. The charge is not directly of the dissoluteness for which Samaria was known (Am. 4:1; 6:6; cf. Jerusalem, 5:11–12, 22) but the *pride* (lit. 'crown of pride of') which led them into complacent revelry (Am. 6:1–7). *Fading* indicates that the party is almost over! *To that city, the pride of* is an NIV addition and is not in the MT.³ There should be a full stop after *valley* and *laid low by wine!* should be treated as an exclamation of disgust. Pride is the deeper sin but dissoluteness also is culpable.

2 *Lord* ('*adōnāy*) stresses God's sovereignty (cf. 6:1). Instead of the ambiguous *one who is*, Isaiah could have named Assyria as the power which would overthrow Samaria, but in chapters 28–29 (see above) he is concerned with the principles embodied in the events, not the agents. Consequently, we find here the idiom of indeterminateness for the sake of emphasis. The Lord always has at his disposal some power more than adequate. The spirit of Samaria is an affront to him and he will sovereignly reply to it. *Powerful* (*hāzāq*) is power in relation to the task to be done (cf. Ex. 10:19; Is. 27:1); *strong* ('*ammiṣ*) is power resident in the agent (cf. 40:26; Am. 2:16). The 'forces of nature' (*hail-storm, wind, rain*) are, as ever, elements in a theophany, motifs of direct divine action (cf. verses 15, 17–18; 8:7–8). *He will throw* (i.e. the Lord) is a prophetic perfect meaning 'has determined to'. *Forcefully* is (lit.) 'by hand', with the hand as the organ of personal action and strength.

3 Verse 2 ends with 'by hand', verse 3 opens with 'by foot'. This association of differ-

³ Instead of 'fertile valley' etc. G. R. Driver, ('Another little drink—Isaiah 28:1–22', *Words and Meanings*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd [CUP, 1968], pp. 47–67) suggested, with minimal alteration, 'those streaming with unguents', after which 'laid low' etc. is a second description.

ing aspects of personal agency implies ‘by every sort of destruction’, ‘by every available means’. *Wreath*, *pride* and *drunkards* echo verse 1.⁴

4 With *like a fig ripe before harvest*/‘like its own fig ...’ Isaiah appeals to something familiar. The Hebrew flows rapidly so as to suggest ‘no sooner seen than eaten’, as if the person concerned was hardly aware of what he had done. So ripe is Samaria for picking, so destined for total disappearance! Note how verses 3–4 repeat the accusations respectively of pride and dissoluteness from verse 1. It is precisely these that render the subject worthy of divine judgment and helpless when it comes. On the sinister overtones of *swallows* cf. on 3:12; 25:7–8.

5–6 Delitzsch entitles these verses ‘the fringe of hope’. Isaiah customarily introduces hope as a surprise. On *In that day* cf. 24:21. No sooner is the day of being swallowed up announced (4) than the day of new beginnings takes over. This also then is true: while the Lord brings punishment, he never goes back on his promise to preserve his people. *Crown* was translated (aptly) *wreath* in verse 1 and should be so here. *Wreath* is a different word (*ṣeṣpirāh*) meaning ‘chaplet’, ‘diadem’.⁵ The adjectival nouns ‘glory’ and ‘beauty’ are repeated from verse 1, i.e. the replacement of the false by the true, the fading by the durable, the human by the divine. It is a mark of the people of the Messianic day that they see the Lord himself as their true adornment. Furthermore, the Lord is actively present to create a true and secure society, becoming himself ‘a spirit of judgment to him who sits in judgment and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate’. ‘Judgment’ is more than the narrow concept of *justice*. It is ‘a right judgment in all things’,⁶ a truly kingly quality. *Sits in judgment* (cf. Ps. 122:5) is a hint of Davidic restoration, as 1:26. The prophets never came to terms with the divided nation (cf. 1 Ki. 18:31; Am. 9:11). *At the gate* could be ‘to the gate’, the former expressing impregnable defence, the latter the power of conquest against the gate of the enemy (the gate symbolizes the defence structure of the city). The former reflects the ‘strong city’ motif of 26:1.

⁴ *Be trampled* (*tērāmasnâ*) is a third person singular feminine (with emphatic *-nâ*); cf. Jdg. 5:26; Ob. 13. See Driver, ‘Another little drink’, p. 50.

⁵ A word *ṣeṣpirâ* occurs in Ezk. 7:7, 10, meaning something like ‘doom’.

⁶ Taken from the Collect for Whitsunday in the Book of Common Prayer (1662) of the Church of England.

b. No trust, no security (28:7–22)

The heart of the initial ‘woe’ is contained in this eight-part meditation on Jerusalem’s leaders (see the outline above). Their drunken dissipation (7–8) gives Isaiah a starting point of comparison with Samaria, but the gravamen of the charge (corresponding to the undefined ‘pride’ of Samaria, verse 1) is their refusal of the word of the Lord, the ‘message’ (9, 19) which Isaiah brought. Their attitude is described as scoffing (14) and mocking (22; where the same verb is involved). The word (see below) expresses an advanced stage of practical atheism: the world has to be run by human common sense—what would God have to do with that? To this Isaiah replies (9–13) that experience will prove the scorned word to be inescapable and that to turn from the way of faith is to embrace death (14–19). This core section ends (20–22) with a restatement of human inability to achieve a satisfying life (20) and a final appeal to the rulers based on certain divine retribution (21–22).

Introduction (28:7–8)

Was Isaiah an eyewitness at this scene? He does not say so but it would be easy to write a scenario for a leadership banquet celebrating the return of the ambassadors from Egypt (*cf.* 30:1–7), secure in the agreement they have signed (14–15), with Isaiah intruding as a disgusted watcher. He sees their indulgence as personally tragic. They are *befuddled/swallowed up* (*cf.* 3:12), *i.e.* what they swallow is in reality swallowing them, as is ever the secret history of bodily indulgence.⁷ It is also spiritually disastrous. The prophet was the organ of immediate revelation (*visions*);⁸ the priest gave ‘judgment’, the application of the law to individuals and situations (*decisions*; *cf.* Mal. 2:5–7). In this function, however, they *stagger* and *stumble*, they are in ministry what they are in private. Cf. on 5:8–23 (especially verses 11–12, 22–23), for Isaiah’s insistence that bodily indulgence saps spiritual perception. The whole thing is degrading, as verse 8 shows.

The inescapable word (28:9–13)

The three subsections here (9–10, 11–12, 13) are united by the identical wording in verses 10 and 13 and by the link between verses 10 and 11. In Hebrew the same word (*kî*)

⁷ Driver (‘Another little drink’) finds dramatically different meanings for the words in verses 7–8, on the ground that the metaphors are strangely mixed!

⁸ The word *rō’eh* always elsewhere means ‘seer’ and only here ‘vision’.

opens each verse, and its force here is well caught by the NIV with *For* and *Very well then*. The thrust is plain: the word of grace rejected becomes the word of condemnation.

9–10 Do the revellers suddenly notice the watching prophet and round on him in mockery? In any case, Isaiah is obviously recalling criticisms directed against his ministry and, in particular, against its simplicity of content (9) and of expression (10). *He is trying to teach* is (lit.) ‘he is teaching knowledge’. *Message* is probably used here, as in 53:1, in the narrow sense of a prophetic message from God. The sophisticated, worldly priests and prophets of verse 7 thus dismiss the thought that anyone can add to their store of information or be their teacher in the things of God, least of all one whose teaching seems to them so elementary as to be mere playschool material, suitable for those in the earliest stage of learning, *weaned from their milk*. For the significance of this insistent simplicity in Isaiah’s ministry see on 6:9ff. The Hebrew of *Do and do* and *rule on rule* is, respectively, *šāw* and *qāw*. The former may occur in Hosea 5:11 (see the RV and cf. the NIV) but is an obviously possible noun formation meaning ‘command’. The latter is well established as ‘line’ (1 Ki. 7:23), understood by the NIV in the sense of ‘rule’, which is unexemplified elsewhere. Yet the sense is suitable, reflecting the patience of a teacher building up the pupil’s knowledge bit by bit, watching for growth points and adding *a little here, a little there*. What they mocked was exactly what Isaiah aimed to achieve and what is the worthiest goal of preacher and teacher: capturing and sharing the essential simplicity of revealed truth, engaging in systematic edification. It is possible that the jingling Hebrew here is intended simply as a medley of sounds, noises made to a tiny baby.⁹ This finds support in 18:2, 7 where (lit.) ‘a nation of *qāw qāw*’ is rightly interpreted as *a ... nation of strange speech* and, of course, it reinforces Isaiah’s critics’ charge of teaching that is pre-kindergarten. It also leads suitably into verse 11.

11–12 If we continue the idea of Isaiah gate-crashing the leaders’ celebratory banquet, then we have here his thoughts as they mocked his simple recipe for national security. His *Very well then* (*kî*) picks up their scornful *For* (*kî*; verse 10), as he foresees the ‘message’ they will hear (11) and contrasts it with the simple message they refused (12). *Foreign lips and strange tongues* is (lit.) ‘with stammering/babbling lips and with a different tongue/language’. When the simple intelligibility of the word of God is refused, divine judgment falls in the shape of the unintelligible (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20ff.). With his emphasis

⁹ Driver (‘Another little drink’), pp. 53f.

on rest Isaiah is reminding the leaders of the nation (7) of their duty of example and ministry, the example of entering the *resting-place* themselves and encouraging others to do the same. The idea of entering into rest is spelled out in 30:15 as ‘returning [to God] ... rest ... quietness ... trust’; it is the message preached to Ahaz in 7:4, 9. Trusting the Lord is not only an interior exercise of the soul in the calm of Sunday but a repose of the soul in the hard pressures of Monday. More immediately, the *resting-place* is the stone the Lord has placed in Zion (16), offering a firm foundation for trust. He has made promises; his people are called to trust. In contrast to the frenzy of political expedient and human self-reliance (30:1–7), here is rest and repose. *Would not* is (lit.) ‘were not willing to’.¹⁰

13 This verse rounds off the series of three subsections opening at verse 9 by forming an inclusio with the words *Do and do etc.* (see verse 10). Isaiah repeats their jingle to them but now it is the babble of foreigners, thrust on them by invasion, ending in captivity. The word of God, once spoken, cannot be evaded. They chose not to heed (12d), now they must go the way they have chosen, but they will find it to be ‘stumbling’ and full of hazards, *backwards* not forwards. The power in which they chose to trust will be broken and they will end snared, with no hope left of escape, and *captured*.

The security that failed (28:14–19)

A second set of three subsections draws conclusions from the first. Refusing the true resting-place, they will find that there is no other security. Common wording binds the sections: *Therefore, So* (*lakēn*; 14, 16); *covenant, death, grave, agreement; overwhelming scourge sweeps by* (15, 18), *overwhelming, overflow* (lit. ‘overwhelm’; 15, 17, 18); *we have made, I will make* ($\sqrt{s̄im}$; 15, 17); *lie, refuge, hiding-place* (15, 17). In verse 19, *understanding of this message* (*hābîn š̄emû'â*) forms an inclusio with *explaining his message* (*yābîn š̄emû'â*) in verse 9, bracketing the two sets of subsections (see the outline).

14–15 What is in reality the security they have chosen? Nothing but signing their own death warrant! Isaiah is not quoting their words, for who would boast that he had made *a covenant with death?* We can envisage the envoys (30:1–7) returning in triumph,

¹⁰ ‘Not willing to hear’ is *lō' 'ābū' š̄emô'a*. The use of the infinitive without prefixed *l^e* generalizes the statement: they are not just unwilling to hear on this occasion or to this message but totally unwilling to hear, unbiddable.

flourishing their bit of paper (proclaiming ‘Peace in our time’?), trumpeting their alliance with Egypt. Isaiah names no names, he is concerned with the principle of what they have done. They have covenanted for their own death! Outside trust in the Lord and his promises there is only death; there is no alternative salvation.

14 *Scoffers* ($\sqrt{lîṣ}$) is a Wisdom Literature term for someone far gone in spiritual cynicism, self-assured (Pr. 1:22), beyond correction (Pr. 13:1), arrogant (Pr. 21:24) and scorning spiritual realities (Ps. 1:1; Pr. 14:9). *In Jerusalem* makes a deliberate contrast; they live as scoffers in the very city of faith!

15 *You boast* is (lit.) ‘For/Because you say’. The *grave* ($š̄ôl$) is not the place of burial but the abode of the soul after death. *An overwhelming scourge* is a gloriously mixed metaphor of both flogging and drowning. The reference undoubtedly is to the Assyrian invasion (see the metaphor in 8:6–8). They would have spoken plainly: ‘When Assyria invades, it will not touch us’. Isaiah exposes the simplistic element in their forecast. They (who accused him of being simplistic! verses 9–10) are totally underestimating what is about to come. They might escape the whip or survive the flood, but both together? If a distinction between *lie* and *falsehood* may be pressed, the former (*kâzâb*; e.g. 58:11) is the deceitful in contrast to the trustworthy, while the latter (*šequer*; e.g. 2 Ki. 9:12) is the untruth in contrast to the truth. *Our hiding-place* is (lit.) ‘with falsehood we have covered ourselves’.

16–17 The true security (*a sure foundation*), which they refused, and the simple way of trust which is its corollary (16) are contrasted with the fragility and ultimate worthlessness of human alternatives (17).

16 The initial *So* (*lākēn*) recapitulates the *Therefore* of verse 14. The affirmation there of the *word of the LORD* is enhanced here by the stress on his sovereignty. *See, I lay* couples the first person pronoun (*I*) with a third person verb (‘am he who lays’),¹¹ thereby calling attention to the divine agent. A *stone in Zion* could be ‘a stone, namely Zion’.¹² The latter accords well with Isaiah’s focus on the city as the centre of divine purposes (2:2–4; cf. Ps. 87). The city embodies all the royal promises and therefore summons its inhabitants to faith. Of course, the *stone* could refer to the Lord himself (8:14) as the great resident in Zion, inviting his citizens to trust him to look after the city he has cho-

¹¹ For this use of an emphatic relative clause see 29:14; 38:5; 47:8; 54:1.

¹² Understanding *b^eṣîyōn* as *Beth essentiae*, see GKC 119i.

sen to indwell. Or again (*cf.* Pss. 2:6; 118:22), the stone might be the Davidic monarchy as the formal bearer of the promises.¹³ But the heart of the matter remains the same: promises have been made and the people are summoned to trust. A *tested stone*/‘a stone of testing’ is either one ‘which has undergone tests’, or ‘which imposes tests’ by offering the opportunity either to build upon it or to turn to another foundation. *Precious* signifies the intrinsic value of it, the privilege of the way of faith. *Sure foundation* is ‘(well)-founded foundation’. Note the emphasis on ‘foundation’ throughout; the superstructure is not yet there (see 1 Pet. 2:4–8a). This underlines the call to faith in the Lord when he declares that he has completed the substructure, that which lies out of sight, below ground. They must trust him that it is so. *Never be dismayed* ($\sqrt{hûš}$) is found twenty times elsewhere in Isaiah, always with the sense of ‘hurrying’. Here it means ‘rushing hither and yon’ (as of the ambassadors hurrying off to Egypt), all haste and flurry (even ‘being in a flap’; *cf.* 7:2) in contrast to the *rest* and *repose* (12; *cf.* 7:4; 30:15) they could have enjoyed.¹⁴

17 ‘And’ *I will make* deliberately takes up ‘For’ *we have made* (15). *Justice* and *righteousness* either describe the quality of life the Lord desires in his believing people and to which he will apply his *measuring line* and his *plumb-line* (the tests of horizontal and vertical exactitude), or else they describe how the Lord will act in judgment against the scoffers. These two meanings are obviously complementary. On *justice* and *righteousness* see 1:21. *Hail* and *water* are forces of nature symbolizing theophanic action (*cf.* verse 2). These are only one of the components of the metaphor of the ‘overflowing whip’ in verse 15, but enough to devastate the people’s supposed security. *Measuring line* is *qāw*, as in verses 10, 13.

18–19 The final subsection is a point by point contradiction of their proud confidence. Their signed agreements will prove meaningless (*cf.* verses 18ab and 15a–f); their boast of immunity will be exposed as hollow, morning and night (*cf.* verses 18cd, 19a–c and 15cd). They mocked a message of rest and by doing so embraced a message of terror (*cf.* verses 19ef and 9). *Beaten down by it* is (lit.) ‘a place for it to trample on’ (*mirmās*; *cf.*

¹³ By the time of Zc. 3:9 ‘stone’ is a Messianic symbol, a development that could have had this passage as its starting point. See also Ps. 118:22.

¹⁴ Driver (‘Another little drink’, p. 60) proposes an Akkadian cognate, ‘to be agitated’ and an Arabic one ‘to be bewildered’.

[5:5](#)). To the metaphor of flood and whip is added that of marauding beast. *Comes* ($\sqrt{\text{ābar}}$) was translated *sweeps by* in verses [15](#) and [18](#) and requires the same translation here to maintain the motif. It is a ‘Passover’ verb ([Ex. 12:12](#)) used now in a grim reversal of significance (*cf.* [Am. 8:2](#)).

Conclusion: a strange deed ([28:20–22](#))

The introduction (verses [7–8](#)) implied a question. There was a suggestive parallel between Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria was doomed. What of Jerusalem? The question has been pressed home by the intervening sections: the inescapable word ([9–13](#)) and the refused security ([14–19](#)). Thus we come prepared for the conclusion that the Lord has determined upon a *strange* and *alien* course of decisive action ([21](#), [22cd](#)). Yet there is room for an appeal to the scoffers ([22ab](#)).

20 An opening ‘For’ introduces this verse as explanatory of verse [19](#). Part of the terror of the message will be the exposure of the inadequacy of their efforts after security. The metaphor of the *bed* reflects ironically the refused *resting-place* of verse [12](#). They have made their own bed and must now lie on it, but only to find that if they lie full stretch the bed is too short, and if they curl up the blanket is too narrow! *To wrap around you* is ‘when one curls up’.

21 This verse also begins with ‘For’, adding a second reason for the terror of verse [19](#):¹⁵ the awesome reality of divine hostility. In *The LORD will rise up* the verb *yāqûm* reflects *will not stand* (*lō' tāqûm*, ‘will not rise up [in fulfilment]’) in verse [18](#). Nothing can rise to our defence if the Lord rise against us. The background to the reference to *Mount Perazim* is [2 Samuel 5:17–20](#), and that to the *Valley of Gibeon* is [2 Samuel 5:22ff.](#) (*cf.* [1 Ch. 14:16](#)).¹⁶ The Lord once masterminded the Davidic triumphs, which were a stepping-stone to national security and the foundation of Zion as the national capital ([2 Sa. 6](#)), but those who now reject the Davidic-Zion foundation of the divine promises will find that their portion is wrath on the same scale, a *strange* and *alien task* indeed!

¹⁵ The initial ‘For’ could equally be explanatory of verse [20](#), *i.e.* human expedients cannot succeed in the face of divine hostility.

¹⁶ The more obvious back reference for *Gibeon* is [Jos. 10:6–13](#), making a neat contrast between the Lord’s work then in using the forces of nature on the side of his people and the ‘alien work’ here of using them against. But a pervasive Davidic reference suits the context.

22 Mocking (*√*līš**) is the same word as in verse [14](#), but here it means ‘showing yourselves to be scorners’; the sense of the hithpoel going beyond the outward act to the character of the person. *Or your chains will become heavier* is ‘lest your bonds be strong’. Deliberate action fixes character and the point comes where there is no return, the point of bondage. The coming *destruction* is ‘something definite and decisive I have heard from the Sovereign [*'aḏōnāy*], the LORD Almighty [Yahweh of hosts] over all the earth.’ Isaiah’s call to reform is based on what he knows is coming (he has heard it from the Lord); he advocates repentance not because repentance will prevent it (it is definite) but because there is no other way to prepare. The only way to flee from God is to flee to him.

c. True discrimination in sowing and reaping ([28:23–29](#))

As the chapter opened with an implied question so it closes with an open question. Jerusalem’s life-style mirrors that of Samaria but will Jerusalem’s history follow the same immediate path? Samaria paid for its pride by overthrow; is Jerusalem similarly to fall? Like many prophets, Isaiah could take up the role of the ‘wise man’ when it suited his purpose (cf. Nathan in [2 Sa. 12:1ff.](#)). He does so here, replying to these implied questions with two parables. The first ([23–26](#)) is one of sowing. The harsh activity of ploughing, breaking, harrowing is not an end in itself; it is purposeful, aiming at sowing the carefully planned crop. This corresponds to verses [1–6](#), the harsh judgment on Samaria with the ‘fringe of hope’ in view at the end. The second parable ([27–29](#)) is one of reaping. Each crop has to be gathered in a way appropriate to it; the wrong treatment would destroy the crop. This corresponds to verses [7–22](#) and the question how far to take the parallel between Samaria and Jerusalem. It gives an indefinite reply, implying only that what happened to Samaria is not necessarily what will happen to Jerusalem, for the farmer has learned his discriminating ways from God ([26](#)), who is *wonderful in counsel* ([29](#)). He will act purposefully and with divine discriminating wisdom.

23 Here we have the call of the wisdom teacher (cf. [Ps. 49:1](#) <[2](#)>). *What I say* is ‘my speech’.

24 The Hebrew emphasis falls on *continually* (‘all the day’). *The farmer ploughs for planting/in order to plant*; the harshness is wedded to purpose.

25 The different verbs, *sow*, *scatter* and *plant*, indicate careful action. Each seed is dealt with discriminately. Both *In its place* (*sōrâ*) and *in its plot* (*nismān*) are otherwise

unknown (and lacking in the LXX). *In its place* is often translated ‘in rows’,¹⁷ but in any case the intention is to develop the idea of planned, purposeful action. Likewise *in its field* is ‘as its border’. There is a master-plan governing all.

26 Here is an aspect of the Bible doctrine of creation. What appears as a discovery (the proper season and conditions for sowing, farm management, rotation of crops etc.) is actually the Creator opening his book of creation and revealing his truth—but revealing himself also, for can the God who teaches purpose be less than purposeful himself? When he harrows his people, is it not in order to sow?¹⁸

27 The initial ‘For’ shows that this verse is drawing some conclusion from the thought of the purposeful farmer of verse 26. In harvesting, the threshing sledge was a heavy wooden platform, studded underneath with sharp stones and metal and weighted on top. It was dragged to and fro over the crop. The *cartwheel* was probably a roller fitted with cutting discs. Such treatment would be disastrous for caraway and cummin, which need hand harvesting with *rod* and *stick*.

28 But even the appropriate method must be kept within appropriate bounds, for used to excess it too would destroy. Hence *grain must be ground* ‘but one does not go on threshing and threshing it, nor keep driving the wheels of his threshing cart over it, nor keep grinding it with his horses’.¹⁹

29 Such purposeful, knowing action is a revelation from the Lord (29a) and a revelation of the Lord (29b). On *wonderful in counsel* see 9:6 <5>, where the same word groups are involved. As there, *wonderful* points to that which is beyond the human,

¹⁷ Exum (‘A literary approach to Isaiah 28’, pp. 129, 138) concurs with this translation, noting that it is conjectural.

¹⁸ On the verbal forms in verse 26, cf. GKC 112rr.

¹⁹ The contextual sense of verse 28 is plain but there are difficulties in deciding how it is being expressed. The initial verb (*ground*, $\sqrt{dāqāq}$) is not used elsewhere of threshing (cf. Ex. 30:36 where it is used of the intensely fine grinding required for perfumery, and Is. 41:15 where it is used of a grinding that exceeds threshing). Maybe, therefore, the opening words should be a question: ‘Is bread-corn ground to powder?’ (the NIV’s *to make bread* is an interpretative addition). Such a question would lead easily into the next words: ‘Indeed (*ki*) not endlessly does one thresh and thresh away’. ‘Thresh and thresh’ is an infinitive absolute construction involving (as the MT stands) the infinitive absolute of $\sqrt{\text{`ad}tives}$, ‘keep agitating ... grinding’.

belonging to another realm, supernatural. *Wisdom* (*tûšîyyâ*) ‘denotes the foresight which plans ahead’,²⁰ hence ‘effective wisdom’, the wisdom which knows how to achieve results.

2. A problem solved, a problem stated (29:1–14)

In the outline of chapter 28 there is an imbalance between sections A¹ and A². Samaria is guaranteed a future hope beyond the calamity, but of the future of Jerusalem (beyond the fact that it is settled; 28:22) nothing is said, saving that it is within the Lord’s purposeful and individual working (28:23–29). The detailed answer is reserved for the present passage. It consists of two oracles which, whatever their individual origins, are now paired with complete ease:

The Lord acting in judgment	Reducing the city to the dust (1–4)	Inducing coma in those who have chosen blindness (9–12)
The Lord acting in transformation	Dispersing the foe in an eleventh-hour rescue (5–8)	Performing a supernatural act of changing hearts and imparting new wisdom (13–14)

The metaphor of ‘sleep’ unites the two sections (7–8, 10), as they deal in turn with the Lord’s care of Zion, first in a historical crisis and secondly in a spiritual need. This double focus gives rise to the title of the section. The Lord purposed an eleventh-hour deliverance for Zion, but historical deliverances do not change hearts and the problem (according to 28:14, 23) is spiritual and needs a deeper solution.

a. Chastisement and deliverance (29:1–8)

We cannot read these verses without seeing Sennacherib, the assault of 701 and the dramatic, last-minute, divine deliverance (chapters 36–37). If verse 1 implies ‘after one more year’, then the oracle is to be dated 703/702 BC. But typically of the opening series of three ‘woes’, Isaiah does not name Assyria and clouds Zion under the pseudonym

²⁰ Dhorme on Jb. 5:12 (cf. Jb. 6:13; Pr. 8:14; Mi. 6:9). According to Smith it is ‘[the wisdom] which carries things through’.

'Ariel'. He is not concerned to describe events but to elucidate principles. The Lord is sovereign in history and his will dominates. He has the last word, and it is a word of deliverance. His people are never left to destruction; though they be humbled by the foe, it is the foe who is ultimately humbled.

- 1 Divine assault: Ariel under imminent threat ([1–2](#))
- 2 Divine humbling: Ariel reduced to the dust ([3–4](#))
- 3 The assembled nations and the sovereign Lord: Ariel delivered by dramatic divine action ([5–6](#))
- 4 Disappointed hopes: Ariel identified as Zion ([7–8](#))

This bald statement of contents does not do justice to the literary interlocking of the sections. 1 and 2 are united by the first person verbs of divine action; 2 and 3 by the direct address to *you* (feminine singular, the city); 3 and 4 by common references to the enemy 'throng' (*hāmōn*; verse [5a](#) *many*; verses [5b](#), [7a](#), [8e](#) *hordes*). Section 1 has Ariel as an inclusio (verses [1a](#), [2c](#); see the NIV mg.), and section 5 has a parallel inclusio, *the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel* ([7a](#)) and *the hordes of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion* ([8ef](#)).

1 For *Woe* see on [28:1](#). *Ariel* is first David's city ([1ab](#)), secondly the city under divine duress ([2a](#)), then a title that somehow typifies that distress ([2c](#)), and finally the Zion which the Lord delivers ([7–8](#)). The meaning best combining distress and favour is that of 'altar hearth' (as [Ezk. 43:15](#)), according to *KB*, 'the hearth of a sanctuary in whose ever-burning fire the offerings are burnt'. It was the privilege ([Ps. 84:3f.](#)) and the peril ([Is. 33:14](#)) of Zion to live in the presence of this fire, alike a danger to sinners ([6:4](#)) and the means of their salvation ([6:6–7](#)). It was the outward and visible sign of the Lord's indwelling presence. As a title *Ariel* holds together the two sides of the relationship between the Lord and his people, both holy wrath and preserving favour. *Add year to year* is either 'Add one more year to this year; let the cycle of festivals go round once more' or 'Let the years roll on, the circling festivals come and go'. The ambiguity is designed. Isaiah is not dating the calamity but affirming its certainty. Neither the passage of time nor the practice of religion (*cf. 1:11–15*) will avert it.

2 Yet is 'And'. *Besiege* ($\sqrt{\text{ṣ} \hat{\text{u}} \text{q}}$, 'to distress, bring into straits') is never used specifically of besieging. *She will mourn and lament* is (lit.) 'and there will be moaning and groaning' (*ta'añiyâ wa'añiyâ*). *Like an altar hearth/like Ariel*, 'a veritable Ariel' (*kaph*

veritatis), a place where holy wrath is aroused and active.

3 Typically of the Bible, even when the action is mediated through earthly forces (5) it is still the direct action of the Lord. It is not that the Bible is ignorant of second causes or minimizes their culpability (see 10:5–15; Acts 2:23), but it refuses to allow us to live on earth as though we were dealing with second causes. We are always directly faced (in blessing as well as bane) by the Lord himself. We live by faith, not by working the system. *Encircle* ($\sqrt{\text{sûr}}$) means ‘to besiege’ (cf. *siege works*, *m̄surōt*). The *my* should be omitted.

4 The first two lines describe reduction of status, the last two reduction of strength. *Whisper* is ‘squeak’ or ‘squeal’ (cf. 8:19).

5 *Your many enemies* is ‘the throng of your enemies’.²¹ The word *hāmōn* (‘throng’) links verses 5–8. *Blown chaff* is never used simply as a simile of speed but always of swift-acting divine judgment before which the guilty are helpless.²² The best commentary is, of course, the immense power of Sennacherib and the awesome ease of divine action (37:36–38). Isaiah is, however, not describing an incident here but asserting a principle. This is what the Lord is like towards his people and their foes. *Suddenly, in an instant* is ‘Suddenly, instantly, it will happen’.

6 The verse begins (lit.) ‘From the LORD of hosts she will be visited’. On *pāqad* (‘to visit’) see 24:21. *Thunder, earthquake etc.* are examples of natural forces significant of theophany (cf. 28:2, 17). The Creator remains in direct control of what he has created, and it lies, in all its huge force, at his disposal: the audible (*thunder, noise*), the visible (*fire*), the invisible (*windstorm, tempest*), with power to shake (*earthquake*), remove (*windstorm*) and consume (*fire*). But it is all a motif of power. There was no actual noise or upheaval when the Lord dispatched Sennacherib!

7–8 In verse 7 the dream simile turns on the complete removal of the threat—‘fly forgotten as a dream’. In verse 8 it turns on the unreality of dream experience—how certain the foe considered himself to be of accomplishment, how completely he was deceived!

7 *Fight against* and *attack* both translate $\sqrt{\text{sâbâ}}$ meaning ‘to crowd against’ and

²¹ For *enemies* the MT reads not *ṣārayik* (‘your aliens’), i.e. ‘the aliens against you’. Q^a reads *zdyk* (*zēdayik*), ‘your arrogant ones’.

²² See Jb. 21:17–18; Pss. 1:4; 35:5; Is. 17:13; Ho. 13:3.

emphasizing numerosness. *Besiege*/‘distress’, ‘bring into straits’ (cf. verse 2) speaks of the reality of the threat.

8 On both occasions *dreams that* is (lit.) ‘... dreams, and look! ...’, illustrating the vividness of the dream experience. Likewise, we should read ‘... awakens, and look! he is ...’ for *he awakens*. *Fight against* is the same as in verse 7.

b. Crisis: blindness and illumination (29:9–14)

At his inauguration (6:9ff.) Isaiah was warned that he was called to prophetic office at a crisis point. Those who have resisted the word of the Lord can only be won by yet another offer of the word. Yet that very offer also gives them the dreadful opportunity to go beyond the point of no return into irretrievable heart-hardening. It is upon this moment that Isaiah now meditates:

A Warning of crisis (9ab)

B¹ Divine reaction: torpor and blindness (9c–10)

C¹ Human condition: mind without knowledge (11–12)

C² Human condition: heart far from the Lord (13)

B² Divine reaction: wisdom and discernment (14)

Did Isaiah have Sennacherib in mind again? To hesitate in the face of such a signal act of divine deliverance would surely be the point of no return. Yet it is by no means a fore-gone conclusion that every Jerusalemite, leaders or people, would have perceived the Lord’s hand. To some it may have seemed but a vindication of the Egyptian policy (cf. 37:8–9); to others no more than a happy chance. An event does not carry its own explanation. But the prophet does not link this present collection of brief oracles with the Sennacherib incident. Rather, they form a meditation on the fact that hesitation can indicate wilful blindness to the things of God (9ab), and this carries with it the possibility of the ultimate divine reaction of judgment (10). This is the sobering heart of this ‘woe’. What the original setting of its five parts may have been who can tell? There is no reason to question that they belong with Sennacherib-oriented material at the time of the Egyptian alliance. There are only two lines of undoubted poetry (the rest being rhythmic prose), namely verses 10bc and 14bc. Each of these evidences the structure of the classical poetic line found throughout biblical poetry, a-b-b-a: ‘He has sealed your eyes, the prophets and your heads the seers he has covered ... and perish will the wis-

dom of their wise and the discernment of their discerning will hide itself away.' This is a very telling structural linking of the two B sections.

9 Be stunned ($\sqrt{māhā}$) is only used in the reflexive (e.g. Gn. 19:16; 43:10; Jdg. 3:26; 19:8; Hab. 2:3) and means 'to delay, hesitate, be indecisive'. The reflexive here (as in 28:22) means 'adopt the attitude of'. Amazed ($\sqrt{tāmā}$) can mean 'to marvel' (Ps. 48:5 <6> or 'to be bewildered' (Gn. 43:33). If the Jerusalem leaders are indecisive now in the face of the Lord's call they will condemn themselves to bewilderment, the inability to make sense of things.²³ Blind yourselves ($\sqrt{\text{ša}'a'$, 'to smear over' [of eyes]) is 'Blind yourselves and become blind' (cf. 6:10). Wilfully to refuse to see induces blindness. The MT has a perfect tense ('they are drunk ... stagger'), and though the change to imperative (*be drunk ... stagger*) following the LXX is only vocalic, nothing is gained by making it. Isaiah passes from the warning imperatives of verse 9ab to a description, a tacit admission that his appeal has gone unheard. Note the link with 28:7–8, where indulgence promoted refusal of God's word. Here, refusal of the word (9ab) promotes a different intoxication (explained in verse 10).

10 The verse explains the strange intoxication of verse 9cd (it begins with 'For'). *Brought over/‘poured out’* as of the drink offering ($\sqrt{nāsak}$; cf. Nu. 15:10) forms a subtle link with *Ariel*, the 'altar hearth' (1–2). With the drink offering, the sacrifice is complete. A *deep sleep/‘spirit of coma or torpor’* is the spiritual equivalent of the physical reality of 1 Samuel 26:12. The theology is identical with 1 Kings 22:22 ('a spirit of falsehood'), where Ahab's determination to embrace falsehood brought on him a judicial visitation of the very spirit he chose (cf. 2 Thes. 2:9–12). So here, determined spiritual insensitivity becomes judicial spiritual paralysis. The MT punctuation of *your eyes (the prophets) ... your heads (the seers)* is not so neat but contextually more appropriate: 'he has sealed your eyes; the prophets and your heads, the seers, he has covered'.²⁴ The NIV

²³ The NIV appears to follow BHS in confirming the text here to Hab. 1:5 (*hitam^ehû* instead of *hitmahm^ehû*). There is no problem to be solved by doing this, nor gain to be made.

²⁴ Many (e.g. BHS, Kaiser) would remove *prophets ... seers* as glosses. It is, however, typical of Isaiah to explain his metaphors (cf. 7:20; 8:7; 9:14–15). Also, why would a glossator explain *eyes* and *heads* by the same sort of person (*prophets, seers*) rather than (say) by 'prophets ... rulers/princes' (see the LXX)? There is no objective evidence for altering the text and, if the punctuation of the MT is followed, strong ground for leaving it alone.

appears to follow BHS in conforming the text here to [Hab. 1:5](#) (*hittam^ehû* instead of *hitmahm^ehû*). There is no problem to be solved by doing this, nor gain to be made. This division of the spiritual blindness into two categories—general (*your eyes*) and specific (*prophets ... seers*)—matches, in reverse order, the categories in verses [11–12](#), the learned and the unlearned. The reader who is able to discern the vision ([11](#)) corresponds to the seers ([10](#)).

[11–12](#) The double illustration covers those who can but cannot be bothered and those who cannot and do not care. Basic to both is a spirit of unconcern. The one will not exert himself to break the seal and read, nor does the other urge him to do so. Thus self-adopted and Spirit-induced spiritual somnolence is evidenced in indolence ([11](#)) and disinterest ([12](#)).

[13](#) *The Lord*/‘Sovereign One’ (^a*dōnāy*) expresses his reaction. He notes how religion remains but reality has perished. People continue with observances (they *come near*; cf. [Ex. 28:43](#)), use all the correct words (the MT punctuation suggests ‘with their mouth and with their lips honour me’) but without heart reality. And even when their religion ventured upon something inward (*their worship*/‘fear’) it was not a response to the reality of God but a formal correspondence with human instruction: the nemesis of religion without a foundation in the revealed word of God (cf. [Mt. 15:1–9](#)).

[14](#) This verse begins ‘Behold, I am the one who will again do marvels/perform another marvel ...’. For the change of person from first to third for emphasis see on [28:16](#). What the new act will be we are not told, only its supernatural quality. Three times the ‘wonder’ word group²⁵ is used ($\sqrt{pāla}$; see on [9:6](#) <5>), linking this oracle with [28:29](#). The result of the act, however, will be the destruction of human *wisdom* and *intelligence*. The former (*hokmâ*) covers the whole ‘mind’ with which one views life and makes plans; the latter (*bînâ*) is the ability to ‘discern’ the heart of a matter. Human *wisdom* will *perish* and *vanish*/‘hide itself away’, i.e. it will neither remain as an operative factor nor be willing to expose itself to examination. As the outline shows, this further act of the Lord is aimed at dealing with the spiritual blindness of his people, just as the sovereign action of verse [6](#) was aimed at earthly deliverance. It is specifically spoken of as a fresh divine action (lit. ‘I will add to act ...’). This divine remedying of the people’s

²⁵ *l^ehaplî’ ... haplē’ wāpele’* means ‘[I will add] to act wonderfully ... acting wonderfully and [with] a wonder’.

spiritual state is the subject of the next ‘woe’ (15–24).

3. Spiritual transformation (29:15–24)

The rhythmic prose which constitutes the main style of these chapters continues, as does the theme of the opening three ‘woes’. The second ‘woe’ underlined the need for a work of spiritual rectification every bit as divine and dramatic as the Lord’s historical deliverances. The third ‘woe’ does not say what that work will be but asserts its certainty and describes its achievements. The three sections of the poem offer a meditation on the theme of transformation.

A The first transformation: the subverting of reason (15–16)

Stated (15)

Illustrated (16)

B The second transformation: coming world renewal (17–21)

Illustrated (17)

Applied: individually (18), spiritually (19), socially (20–21)

C The third transformation: the changed fortune of Jacob (22–24)

In principle: ancient purposes fulfilled (22a)

In effect: Jacob recovered (22bc), God acknowledged (23), individuals transformed (24)

The contrasting themes ‘hiding from the Lord’ (15) and ‘acknowledging the Lord’ (23) bracket the poem, and the words ‘their work’ ‘sees’, ‘know’ (15) and ‘see’, ‘work’ (23), ‘gain’ (lit. ‘know’) (24) form an inclusio. The first and second sections have a domino link in the two juxtaposed illustrations (16–17), each using the verb ‘thought to be’ (see below), and are also linked by the contrasting use of the motif of darkness (15, 18). The second and third sections have a verbal link in ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (19), ‘the Holy One of Jacob’ (23) and a thematic link in the shared threefold (individual, spiritual, social) transformation. Once more the contrast between political astuteness and revealed wisdom, which became critical at the time of the Egyptian alliance, forms a perfect background to these verses but no names are named. Rather, Isaiah identifies the principle involved: life must be lived in the light of the wisdom of God. The proper course is to submit to his designs and his timetable, to eschew self-will and a do-it-yourself approach to life’s problems. The word of the Lord holds up the mirror of the future

(17) so that we may walk towards it, and the mirror of the past (22) so that we may rest on divinely expressed intentions. Thus this third ‘woe’ brings the initial series of three to a climax. In his dealings with his people, the Lord does not act with accommodating favouritism but justly and in relation to whether they heed his word or not (28:1–22). Yet he always acts purposefully (28:23–26) and with a view to reaping his intended crop (28:27–29). Though his mercies may seem delayed, he will never fail to preserve his people in the exigencies of history (29:1–8), nor will he fail in his ultimate spiritual purposes (29:9–14). Rather, the day of spiritual transformation is sure to come (29:15–24).

a. The first transformation: the subverting of reason (29:15–16)

15 *Go, do, and think* are respectively, participle, imperfect and perfect, reflecting in turn an unvarying state, habitual behaviour and settled decision. Isaiah does not mean that the people actually burrowed underground or worked only by night; he is not describing actions but exposing attitudes, and he does so in a way that exposes their folly more than their culpability. He does not name his addressees, for his target is not this or that individual but the worldly mind that thinks to live without recourse to the Lord. *And think* is ‘and they have said’, i.e. ‘have decided’. The two questions (*Who sees us?* and lit. ‘Who knows us?’) reflect not a guilty conscience but the people’s determination to be their own unfettered masters.

16 *You turn things upside down* is a derisive exclamation. The noun (*hēpek*) is found only at [Ezekiel 16:34](#), where the sense is ‘the very opposite’. Hence here, ‘Oh your reversal!’, ‘How you turn things upside down!’ They deny the Lord’s distinctiveness (*as if the potter ... like the clay*), his sovereignty (*He did not make me*) and his wisdom (*He knows nothing; √ bīn, ‘he does not discern’*). This forms a link between this ‘woe’ and the preceding one (see verse 14).

b. The second transformation: coming world renewal (29:17–21)

17 Abruptly the Lord announces his plans for the future. People may not accord him his place, sovereignty and wisdom but all three remain his, and he needs to ask no permission regarding what he will do. *In a very short time*, as the Lord reckons history, total renewal will take place and ‘Lebanon will turn into a garden-land.’ Even the seemingly ordered creation is in fact part of the human upside-down world and needs to be put to

rights. *Lebanon* is typical of what has always been so and is not the product of human cultivation ([Ps. 104:16](#)). The true beauty and order of the world will not be evident until the Lord rectifies everything. *Seem like* (*yēhāšēb*) is the same verb as ‘were thought to be’ ([16](#); see the outline above).

18 This is the individual aspect of the great transformation. The meaning of the metaphors was established in verses [9–12](#) where the closed eyes and book are in contrast to the open ears and book here. This is a picture of people with new faculties and new appetites, finding satisfaction in God’s book. Each part of these two lines is emphatic: circumstances are changed (*out of gloom!*), faculties are renewed (*the eyes of the blind!*) and the results are marvellous (*will see!*). For the reality see [Ephesians 5:8](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:4](#).

19 This is the spiritual aspect of the transformation. The translation *once more ... will rejoice* would require ‘will add to rejoice’ in the Hebrew, but it simply says ‘will add joy’, i.e. ‘will find fresh joy’, ‘will have enhanced joy’. Under their former circumstances (as in verses [20–21](#)), doubtless there were those who rejoiced in the Lord but now their joy will far exceed what they then experienced. *The humble* (*‘a�āwîm*) are the underdogs, those at the bottom of life’s heap (see the virtually identical word in [10:2](#)); *the needy* (*‘ebyōnîm*) are those capable of being pushed around by stronger, more influential people and vested interests (*cf.* [14:30](#)). On *the Holy One of Israel* see [1:4](#).

20–21 Thirdly, there is the social aspect of the transformation. A change in society is offered as an explanation for the enhancement of joy in the Lord just described (verse [20](#) begins with ‘For’). These verses look forward to the disappearance of trouble-makers ([20](#)) and to the end of the misuse of social structures ([21](#)).

20 The *ruthless* (*‘ārîṣ*) are the unscrupulous, unsparing in their use of power (*cf.* verse [5](#); [13:11](#); [25:3–5](#)). *Mockers* (*lēṣ*) are those who recognize no moral absolutes (*cf.* [28:14](#), [22](#)). *All who have an eye for evil/are watchful for trouble* are those who are alert to make trouble, those whose interests are served by the breakdown of law and order.

21 Three abuses of the legal system are mentioned: false testimony, tampering with witnesses and denying the innocent the protection of the law. In *make a man out to be guilty*, the verb (the hiphil of *hāṭā’*) is not used elsewhere in a forensic sense. The ordinary usage would require ‘lead a person astray by a word’, i.e. prompt others into error and deviancy of life. But the forensic use best suits the context. *The defender/‘the one*

'who reproves' is the person who stands up in court (lit. 'in the gate', the place where cases were heard) to oppose the wrong. *With false testimony* (*tōhû*; see 24:10), here means 'on no ground at all', 'for some meaningless triviality'. *Deprive/turn aside* is a regular usage for dismissing a case. In the three lines of verse 21 we meet in turn the false witness, the bent lawyer and the corrupt judge. When values decline in society at large (20) the legal processes and guardians are not immune. For the setting of all this in pre-exilic Israel see [Hosea 4:1–2](#); [Amos 2:6–8; 5:10–11](#); [Micah 2:1–2](#).

c. The third transformation: the changed fortune of Jacob (29:22–24)

The forecast of the great transformation is now made both wider and narrower. Wider in the sense that its origin is traced back to the purposes of God seen in Abraham and narrower in that the focus is exclusively on 'Jacob'.

22 There is a certain awkwardness in the opening line of the verse,²⁶ but it is inherent in what Isaiah wishes to express and the emphasis he wishes to lay: '... the *LORD* says to the house of Jacob—[the *LORD*] who redeemed Abraham!' The deferring of the relative clause throws heavy emphasis on it, calling attention to age-old purposes, reaching right back to their beginning in Abraham. The address to the *house of Jacob* reminds them that they stand in the direct line of inheritance of all that the Lord did and promised at the point of origin of their family. *Redeemed* ($\sqrt{pādā}$; see 1:27) is not elsewhere used of Abraham, but [Genesis 48:16](#) uses the parallel $\sqrt{gā'al}$ of divine 'guardian care' of Jacob over his long life.²⁷ Both verbs have a general use of caring for those in trouble. The implication of the Lord's providential care of Abraham is to ask would he have done all that if he had not intended to complete what he thus began? Indeed not, and when that day comes, (lit.) 'Not now will Jacob be ashamed; not now will his face grow pale.' Imaginatively, Jacob is pictured as the anxious observer of the experiences of his descendants, often embarrassed and abashed by what he sees in them, paling with

²⁶ BHS would alter '*el* (to) into '*ēl* ('God'), i.e. '... the *LORD*, the God of the house ...'. Kissane reorders the word to read 'the God of Abraham who redeemed the house ...'. Skinner omits 'who redeemed ...' as a gloss. There is no objective evidence for any of this. The same awkwardness occurs in [Am. 1:1](#), where again the difficulty lies in the complexity of what is being expressed.

²⁷ With the general use of 'to redeem' (an essentially price-paying verb) cf. our use of the price-paying conception of 'to bail out' in the broader sense 'to rescue from trouble'.

fright lest at any point they have forfeited the promises. But in the day of fulfilment all that will be in the past.

23 The opening ‘For’ explains Jacob’s release from embarrassment and fear, (lit.) ‘When he sees in his midst his children’. Their downward course, which so frightened their founding father, has been halted by the Lord’s action. Though they are ‘his children’, they are also ‘the work of my hands’—the transformation (*cf. verse 17*) is all of God. Jacob is both the founding father and the name of the total company:²⁸ all, father and children, are gathered into one family, bearing one name. In *they will keep ... they will acknowledge* the same verb is used twice (the hiphil of *qādēš*, ‘to acknowledge as holy’). The difference between ‘acknowledging the holiness of the name’ and ‘acknowledging the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob’ is that the former is the nature of God as he has revealed himself, and the latter is the presence of the Lord among his people. They will at last confess that he is holy and acknowledge his holiness as central to their lives. *Stand in awe* ($\sqrt{\text{āras}}$) is the parent of the adjective ‘ruthless’ (**20**), an enormously strong expression of reverential, trembling dread before the awesome *God of Israel*.

24 This verse describes two aspects of transformed individual life in those who are *the work of my hands* (**23**). They will exhibit steadiness of life. The *spirit* is the energy (even ‘gusto’) in which life is lived. The *wayward* exhibit restlessness, unpredictable fickleness, lack of steady purpose. They will come, however, to ‘know discernment’ (*bînâ*; *cf. verse 14*) and to possess a true insight into the real meaning of life. There will also be a teachableness, an openness to the truth. *Those who complain* ($\sqrt{\text{rāğan}}$) is found only at **Deuteronomy 1:27; Psalm 106:25**, and is used of bitter refusal of the Lord’s word, self-pitying determination to put the worst construction on things, paranoic inflexibility in the understanding of life. Such will *accept instruction*/‘learn conviction’, exchange their stubbornness for true *instruction* (*leqaḥ*, from $\sqrt{\text{lāqah}}$, ‘to take’, hence ‘grasp’ [of truth]). *Cf. Deuteronomy 32:2; Job 11:4; Proverbs 4:2; 7:21; 16:21, 23*.

4. Human faithlessness and the faithfulness of God (**30:1–33**)

²⁸ With this use of *b^eqereb* with singular suffix *cf. Ex. 10:1*, where ‘in the midst of him’ refers directly to Pharaoh but associates him with the totality of his people as the company within which the Lord’s signs will be performed. In the same way here, ‘in his midst’ implies ‘associated with him in one company’.

Isaiah now turns from principles to applications, as the references to Egypt and Assyria show (2, 31). This fourth ‘woe’ takes up the theme of the first (28:1–29) and applies it to the alliance with Egypt (1–7) and the assault of Assyria (27–33). The principle enunciated in chapter 28 is that there is only one foundation (28:16). Outside the promises of the Lord there is no salvation, only destruction. Refusal of the word brings the judgment of the word, and self-wrought securities are ways of death. But chapter 28 also teaches that the Lord always works purposefully (28:23ff.), and here his immediate purposes with Egypt (1–7), Judah (8–17) and Assyria (27–33) are blended with a vision of the eschatological fulfilment of all he ever promised (18–26).

A¹ Contemporary events: Egypt no help (1–7)

B¹ Coming human events: the refusal of the word, the way of death (8–17)

B² Coming divine events: the waiting God, the sure glory (18–26)

A² Contemporary events: Assyria no threat (27–33)

Within this framework, A¹ and B¹ together describe human faithlessness and B² and A² the faithfulness of God.

Links with chapter 28 abound. The ‘inundation’ motif also occurs at 4:6; 25:4; 32:2 but ‘hail’ only in 28:2, 17; 30:30. Other common themes are the scornful rejection of the prophetic word (28:9–10; 30:9–12); rest (28:12; 30:15); seeking false security (28:15; 30:2–3; the only occurrences of ‘taking refuge’ in this series of woe oracles); the discerning God (28:26, 29; 30:18). The ‘fringe of hope’ in 28:5–6 offers a pattern for the surprising message of hope in 30:18. The remarkable ‘Therefore’ (NIV *Yet*) with which verse 18 begins makes a causal link between devastating punishment (verses 12–17) and glorious hope (verses 18–27). The background to this is the purposeful farmer of 28:23–29, whose severest harrowing and beating is related to the benign exercises of sowing and reaping. Comparison of 30:1–5 with 31:1–3 and 29:15–17 (*cf.* 28:11–13 with 30:15–17) reveals a common style and vocabulary which we may take to be typical of Isaiah’s ministry regarding the 701 crisis. The separate oracle at verse 6 authenticates itself, with its title in Isaiah’s best cryptic style. 30:8, compared with 8:1, 11, 16, suggests an original ‘diary’ or ‘memo-book’. 30:29–33 acceptably dates the present section in relation to 701, but verses 19–26 could belong to any period of Isaiah’s ministry, owing its place here to the theme of ‘hearing the word’. Possibly, Isaiah wrote verses 18, 27–28 as connecting pieces when the ‘woe’ was assembled in its present form.

a. Contemporary events: Egypt no help (30:1–7)

This section is divided into two subsections by the title at verse 6. There is first the embassy to Egypt (1–5), a fact not recorded elsewhere but perfectly suited to the situation, and then the mocking poetry of ‘the oracle/burden concerning the animals of the Negev’. The uniting theme of the whole is profitlessness (3, 5, 6–7). To seek protection other than the Lord (1), to plan without divine direction (2), is to find no protection (3) but only to reap shame (5, 7), irrespective of effort (4) and expenditure (6). The three stanzas of verses 1–5 have four lines each, of varying length. *Not mine, not my Spirit* (1) and ‘not for help and not for profit’ (5) form an inclusio. The three stanzas in the oracle of the animals have three lines each, for the most part with three words to a line.

A The embassy to Egypt (1–5)

a¹ Rebellion: action without authorization (1)

a² Folly: safety sought where there is no safety (2–3)

a³ Fact: appearance that deceives (4–5)

B The oracle concerning the animals of the Negev (6–7)

b¹ Hazards (6a–c)

b² Cost without gain (6d–f)

b³ Egyptian emptiness (7)

The embassy to Egypt (30:1–5)

1 *Obstinate children* is ‘rebellious [$\sqrt{sārār}$] sons’ (cf. 1:2, 5, 23). Declares [$n̄eum$] the LORD is ‘[This is] the word of the LORD’ (see on 1:24). *To those who carry out plans* is an infinitive of intention, therefore, those ‘bent on making plans!’. The wording combines divine indignation and human wilfulness. *Not mine* is ‘not from me’; the plans did not originate in the Lord. *Forming* is again ‘bent on forming’. The word *alliance* (*massēkā*) was translated *blanket/“covering”* in 28:20 (cf. noun and verb in 25:7). The meaning ‘protective covering’ is more suitable here than ‘alliance’.²⁹ On *my Spirit* see 31:3. The word *by* is perfectly allowable here according to the rules of parallelism, giving the sense that there has been no divine prompting behind the seeking of this covering, but the literal

²⁹ Or ‘to weave a web’, i.e. the web of diplomatic intrigue leading to an alliance. The verb ($\sqrt{nāsak}$) is used of pouring drink offerings, maybe the ratifying of an alliance with appropriate religious ceremony.

‘not my Spirit’ rebukes seeking other covering than the covering Spirit himself. *Heaping sin upon sin* is (lit.) ‘in order that they may add sin to sin’. The first sin of acting without divine prompting, compounded by the second sin of seeking a covering other than the Spirit, is described as a deliberate intention to sin. In biblical ethics, to do what is known to be wrong, from whatever motive, is to will the wrong. They might well have pleaded national security but the reality, as distinct from the claim (cf. 28:15), is sin (*hattāt*), falling short of the true target.

2 *Who go down* is ‘who journey to go down’ or ‘who set out to go down’, expressing the deliberateness of action. *Egypt* is the place of death (Ex. 1:22). What a place to expect life (28:15)! *Without consulting me* is (lit.) ‘and my mouth they have not asked’, exactly as at Joshua 9:14. The ‘mouth’ is the organ of expressed opinion. The Lord would have spoken if asked. *Who look for* expresses the purpose of the exercise, ‘to find safety in Pharaoh’s stronghold³⁰ and to take refuge in Egypt’s shadow’.

3 Note the effective use of the same terms as verse 2cd.³¹ Point by point what they sought will prove delusive. Isaiah lives with the exodus tradition of Egypt as the enslaving power and Pharaoh as the genocidal king. The words *shame* (*bōšet*) and *disgrace* (*k'limmā*) are synonymous. They place more emphasis on ‘reaping shame’, the objective disappointment of hope, than on ‘feeling embarrassed’, though the latter is never absent.

4 *Zoan* was in the northern Delta and *Hanes* was well below the apex of the Delta. The reference points to the union of Egypt under the strong Ethiopian dynasty. Shabako (716–702) had all Egypt under his control by 715. Isaiah’s point is that though to the outward eye Egypt may now appear strong there will be no result except disappointment. The *officials/princes*, the executives of government, and *envoys* could be those of Hezekiah (the Hebrew reads ‘he has ... his envoys’) but the reference is more likely to the Pharaoh whose writ now runs throughout the country. *Have* is in the perfect tense denoting a settled fact, whereas ‘have arrived’ is imperfect denoting a continuing expe-

³⁰ *Help to ... protection* translates two assonantal but different roots—*lā'ôz b̄mā'ôz*. On the form *lā'ôz* see GKC 72q. BHS would emend this to the more usual *lā'ûz*.

³¹ Kaiser, however, makes verse 3 secondary, describing it as ‘a later explanatory comment’. This is needless, not least in the light of Kaiser’s own admission that ‘there is no real reason for not attributing’ verses 1–5 to Isaiah.

rience.

5 *Will be put* is a perfect of certainty meaning ‘is bound to be’.³² *Useless to them* is ‘that cannot profit’ (a potential imperfect) or ‘that never profits’ (a characteristic imperfect). From the feared killer (Assyria) they seek help in the proved killer (Egypt)! It is ever so when alternatives to the Lord’s salvation are chosen.

The oracle concerning the animals of the Negev (30:6–7)

The command in verse 8 to write *it* on a tablet may refer to this oracle. What a striking piece of publicity it would make, beautifully crafted, sharp, compulsive! On the poetic form of the verses see above. While this is clearly a separate oracle attached to the foregoing, its contextual suitability is unchallengeable, climaxing as it does (6f.) with words identical to verse 5b, ‘*al ‘am lō’ yō‘ilū* (‘of/to a people of no profit’). Verses 1–5 emphasize the Egyptian policy as the product of human planning (1), taking advantage of what they think to be Egyptian strength (4), and verses 6–7 emphasize human costly effort. But neither by sacrifice nor wisdom can people achieve their own security.

6 Compare the cryptic titles of 21:1; 21:11; and 22:1; the form of words is identical. While the politicians in Jerusalem were doubtless wondering, ‘How will our ambassadors fare?’, Isaiah suggests ironically, ‘Never mind them, what about the pack animals?’, as though their welfare was the only important thing in a whole human waste of time. Herbert interestingly suggests that in the interest of secrecy the ambassadors did not take the ordinary route through Philistia but the perilous route *through a land of hardship and distress*, i.e. the Negev. The irony of this would not have escaped the prophet. The Lord would not let his exodus people journey through Philistia lest opposition would turn their minds from Canaan to Egypt (Ex. 13:17); now those who refuse security in a saving God reverse the exodus precisely! *Of lions* is ‘whence are lions’ (lit. ‘from them’), the plural pronoun referring to the single antecedent, ‘land’.³³

7 The verse begins (lit.) ‘And Egypt’ and the force is exclamatory: ‘Egypt! futile and empty is their help!’ Their promises will come to nothing (‘futile’) because they contain

³² *Put to shame* translates *hb’yš*, which would seem to be *hibiš* (‘everyone who goes is certain to reap shame’).

³³ On plural pronouns with singular antecedents see 38:16; Jb. 22:21; Ezk. 18:26; Zp. 2:7. But *BHS*, *BH* and Kaiser emend to various words meaning ‘growing’, which is more than a shade banal.

nothing ('empty'). *Her* is 'that one'. Psalm 87:4 shows that *Rahab* had some currency as a by-name for Egypt. A deeper significance is touched on in 51:9 but here it is simply the meaning of the word, 'turbulence, arrogance, boastfulness'. Egypt ever the trouble-maker, full of promises but in the event *the Do-Nothing*.

b. Coming events: the refusal of the word, the way of death (30:8–17)

As this passage now proceeds to show, the action of Judah in relation to Egypt is only a symptom; the cause is fundamental refusal to hear the Lord's word. Isaiah is commanded to make a written record (8), and the command is backed up by two parallel explanations (9–14, 15–17):

A The command to write (8)

B¹ The first explanation (9–14)

Refusal of revealed truth (9–11)

Consequence: an internal cause, the sin of refusing the word (12–13a)

leading to destruction (doubly illustrated, 13b–14)

B² The second explanation (15–17)

Refusal of a specific message (15)

Consequence: an external cause, the attacking foe (16–17d)

leading to destruction (doubly illustrated, 17e–g)

The command to write (30:8)

Tablet and *scroll* suggest, respectively, a public and a private record (*cf.* 8:1, 16). It is possible that what Isaiah recorded in this way is the material in verses 9–17, if we understand the opening *kî* of verses 9, 15 (omitted in each case by the NIV) not as 'for' (offering an explanation) but as 'that' (introducing the substance of the message to be written down). It is better, however, to understand the contents of verses 9–14, 15–17 as explanatory of the coming judgment and to guess that the command to record refers to verses 6–7. Alternatively, verses 6–7 may have been the public placard and Isaiah

recorded privately all his ministry touching the Egyptian alliance (chapters 28–37). *For them* is ‘with them’, where they are, where they cannot miss it. Isaiah realized that his ministry was significant beyond his own times and that its immediate relevance did not exhaust its meaning. Indeed, it is part of the imperishable word of God (lit.) ‘for perpetuity unto eternity’ (*lā'ad 'ad 'ôlām*). The NIV follows *BHS*, Kaiser etc. in altering *lā'ad* to *lē'ēd* (‘for a witness ...’), which is a harmless but needless exercise. The preserved word will inevitably be a witness; there is no need to point this out, Isaiah strongly emphasizes its perpetuity.

The first explanation (30:9–14)

These verses are a general statement of refusal of God’s word (9–10d), its replacement by a humanly contrived acceptable message (10e–11b) and the rejection of the Lord as the Holy One (11cd).

9 The NIV has omitted the initial ‘For’, introducing the first explanation. On *rebellious* (*m̄rî*) see 1:20. *Deceitful* is (lit.) ‘disappointing’, ‘failing to be what they ought to be’. *Children* is (lit.) ‘sons’ (see 1:2). For the vocabulary and idiom of *unwilling to listen* see on 28:12 and the accompanying footnote. Hearing is unacceptable to them, no matter what the Lord might say. *Instruction* is *tôrâ* (see 1:10).

10–11 Most of this they would not, of course, have said in the words here attributed to them. People do not openly request to be told what is wrong and illusory. Isaiah is putting their attitudes into words, verbalizing the implications of their actions and reactions (cf. 28:15). They did not want a supernatural message (10ab), nor a message of moral demand (10cd), but a ministry that left the surface of life unruffled (*pleasant*/‘smooth’), a ministry of trifles (*illusions* is an otherwise unexemplified noun, *mah^atallôt* from $\sqrt{tālā}$ meaning ‘to mock, trifle with’; cf. Jdg. 16:10). They did not want holiness, in a life that follows ‘the way ... the path’ (11ab); and certainly not the holiness of God himself (11cd). *Leave this way* requests the preachers to pioneer a new morality. *Get off* should be ‘lead [us] off’ (the hiphil of $\sqrt{nātā}$ is always transitive), i.e. bring us into the practice of novelties. On *the Holy One of Israel* see 1:4. They did not ask that preaching should cease but only that it be innocuous, void of moral imperatives and without the backing of the ultimate moral absolute of the nature of God.

12 Note the immediate repetition of *the Holy One of Israel*. They would be rid of him and his word but (*therefore*) neither he nor it can be escaped. *Rejected* ($\sqrt{mā'as}$) means

‘despise’ or ‘spurn’, as illustrated by verses 9–10b. On *message/word* see verse 21. *Relied on* is ‘put your trust in’ and is parallel to the refusal of trust in the corresponding verse 15 (see the outline above). Once more Isaiah is reading to them the implications of their choices. They chose to have a new morality (10e–11b) and every humanly devised morality is sooner or later a bondage and a cruel master. The MT reads ‘trusted in oppression and what is devious/crooked/perverted³⁴ and sought your support on it.’ The ‘perverted thing’ could refer to the third element in their new religion: their refusal of the holiness of the Lord. To refuse the Lord as he has revealed himself is to worship a perversion.

13–14 The initial ‘Therefore’ of verse 13 (omitted by the NIV) resumes the corresponding word in verse 12, giving a typically Isaianic formation, ‘Therefore ... because ... therefore ...’. The prophets were reasoned preachers. With *sin* (‘āwōn; cf. 1:4; 6:7) the internal factor of ‘iniquity’ is stressed, suitably to the accusation of unwillingness to hear (9). Two illustrations follow. First, a wall collapsing under its own weight and secondly, a pot smashed by external force. Thus iniquity both destroys itself and also invites judgment. *Like a high wall, cracked and bulging* is (lit.) ‘like a crack running down, bulging out, in a high wall’. *It will break* is ‘And he will break it’. This could be third person singular indefinite, ‘one will’, equivalent to a passive, but more likely it refers to the Lord as agent. *Taking* and *scooping* presumably refer to familiar practices: a fragment used to take an ember from a fire to light a fire elsewhere and the bottom of an old jar kept by the cistern to use for dipping. This double figure of brokenness stresses completeness.

The second explanation (30:15–17)

The initial ‘For’ of verse 15 introduces a second and parallel explanation of Judah’s sin. Now we hear the specific message that was rejected (15) and learn of inescapable judgment falling from outside (16–17d). Two illustrations of total disaster complete the description (17e–g).

15 The reiteration of *the Holy One of Israel* is a further rebuke of their desire to hear no more of him (11). But he is also *the Sovereign LORD*, and this rebukes their failure to trust him and the sinful folly of choosing Egypt instead. Isaiah’s recipe for national security had remained unchanged since the days of Ahaz (7:4, 10–12; cf. 28:12). First, there should be *repentance/returning*, the active pathway of coming back to the Lord (cf.

³⁴ ‘A perverted one/thing’ translates *nālōz*, a niphil participle from \sqrt{luz} (cf. Pr. 2:15; 3:32; 14:2).

[1:27](#)); such a return as brings them to ‘rest down’ on the Lord. Then there is the *quietness*, the absence of frenzy and restless anxiety that evidences a true *trust*. There is a realism about this way of life. It brings *strength* (*g^ebûrâ*, ‘warrior strength’), strength for life’s battles and challenges. His people were in a military situation but the prophet did not recommend armaments, only the armament of faith. As G. A. Smith says, ‘Not alliance but reliance’.³⁵ You would have none of it is (lit.) ‘you were not willing’ (verse [9](#); [28:12](#)).

16 Their refusal of the way of faith committed them to militarism, and they would experience the truth of [Matthew 26:52](#). Isaiah makes use of the two sides of $\sqrt{nûs}$, ‘to more swiftly’ (*we will flee*) and ‘to flee in the face of the enemy’ (*you will flee!*). But when we refuse the way of faith, whatever we choose turns against us. We seek to be swift only to find how swift are our foes!

17 The promise of [Leviticus 26:8](#) is reversed and the threat of [Deuteronomy 32:30](#) realized. *A flagstaff on a mountaintop* and *a banner on a hill* are not natural features. They speak of human activity, but if they are all that is left, they only prove that people once lived there and are now gone. Doubled for completeness, the picture is of the end of the nation, the disappearance of the people (*cf.* [6:11–12](#)).

c. Coming events: the waiting God, the sure glory ([30:18–26](#))

With verse [18](#) the emphasis falls on the faithfulness of God, ultimately ([18–26](#)) and imminently ([27–33](#)). He is such that his purposes cannot be frustrated by human faithlessness. In verses [18–26](#) we are allowed to look beyond a waiting period to the moment when Messianic glory will dawn on a new creation. The style is poetic prose or free verse and the poem is arranged in seven divisions.

A¹ Blessedness when the waiting is over ([18](#))

B¹ Comfort and care after tears ([19](#))

C¹ Spiritual blessing: revelation and receptivity ([20–21](#))

D Response: the end of false religion ([22](#))

C² Earthly blessing: abundance of food ([23–24](#))

B² Abundant water in the day of victory ([25](#))

A² Abundant light in the day of healing ([26](#))

³⁵ Smith, p. 128.

The divine name, Yahweh, is used only in the opening line of A¹ and the closing line of A², forming an inclusio. A¹ and B¹ form a contrast between future blessedness and present tears; B² and A² contrast slaughter and healing. The opening three sections focus on spiritual blessings; the closing three sections on the Messianic abundance. The two sets of three are linked by the matching C sections, as shown above. Section D stands apart, wholly devoted to human response: the utter rejection of the false implying a visible and practical adherence to the Lord. The A and B sections are each four lines long; the C sections are five lines long and both begin with ‘and he will give’; the central D section is three lines long.

18 *lākēn* is ‘Therefore’ (not Yet) and is repeated at the start of verse 18b (omitted by the NIV). The double ‘therefore’ of waiting and blessing matches the double ‘therefore’ (*‘al kēn*) of inevitable judgment in verse 16. A logic of God is at work. Judge and punish he must, but forsake his purposes he will not! Since judgment must intervene, ‘therefore’ he (lit.) ‘will wait in order to be gracious ... Therefore he will rise to show you compassion’. His grace is his sovereign determination to bless the undeserving (e.g. Gn. 6:8); his *compassion* is the overflowing of his passionate love for his people (14:1). *Justice* (*mišpāṭ*) is the same as in 28:26 (NIV ‘the right way’) and means making exactly the right decisions at exactly the right time. On *wait* see 8:17.

19 The repetition *Zion ... Jerusalem* is deliberate, stressing the exact fulfilment of the promises: in Zion the foundation was laid (28:16) and ‘in Zion ... Jerusalem’ the fruition will be enjoyed. *Weep no more/’not weep at all’* is a statement of unalloyed bliss as the prevailing grace of that time manifests itself in perpetual, immediate divine attention to welfare in answer to prayer. Joy and prayer are the marks of the people of the Lord.

20–21 In *bread of adversity* and *water of affliction* the nouns are in apposition—‘bread, that is, adversity’, ‘water, that is, affliction’. The sense, therefore, is ‘adversity as your bread ... affliction as your drink’. This contrasts with the abundant food of verses 23–24. The period of affliction will be a time of divine self-concealment (8:17), but it will be followed by a time of direct relationship. The translation *teachers* is permissible, but the context requires the singular, which the form also allows, i.e. ‘your Teacher’, referring to the Lord as the law/instruction-giver.³⁶ This divine self-revelation will be matched by

³⁶ The form is *mōreykā*, but after the manner of *Lamedh-He* forms the *yodh* preceding the suffix may indicate a plural form. It may, however, equally be the original *yodh* of the stem, giving a

powers of receptivity, *eyes* to see and *ears* to hear. The period of rejecting the word of the Lord will also be a thing of the past (9–11). Furthermore, divine care will be such that deviation right or left will be at once corrected. In that perfect day, the Lord's people are still potential sinners but they come under a divine ministry of preservation in righteousness. See how the Teacher who is ‘before your very eyes’ is also *behind*, providing detailed, watchful, individual care (*cf.* 52:12). *Voice*/‘a word’ is a deliberate contrast with the ‘spurned word’ of verse 12.

22 There will be a change of attitude (care replaced by disrespect), of feeling (devotion replaced by revulsion) and of commitment (choice replaced by rejection). This is a negative statement of return to sole loyalty to the Lord (*cf.* 27:9). *Defile* is second person plural, while *throw* and *say* are second person singular; the decision of all is also the decision of each (*cf.* 2:20).

23–24 The bounty of the coming great day is not a descent into a materialistic bonanza but is to be understood in the context of the doctrine of creation. The entrance of sin imposed restraint on the productive forces of the earth, consequent upon the divine curse (Gn. 3:17–19). The outpouring of creation’s bounty speaks, therefore, of the end of sin and the curse and of the return of Eden (*cf.* Am. 9:13ff.). Abundant food contrasts with the afflictive bread of the matching verse 20. Both are given by the Lord. The Lord’s beneficent management of the fertilizing processes (23a) is met by a richly productive response on the part of the earth (23b). In this the beasts too share, contrasting with the toiling beasts of the Negev (6–7). The main idea behind *broad meadows* is that of plenty but also that of safety as the beasts roam free. Their food is *fodder and mash*/‘well-flavoured fodder’ which has been subjected to a double sieving (*spread out*/‘sifted’) with ‘both fork and sieve’.

25–26 These verses have a parallel structure utterly lost in the NIV. The opening lines match each other (25, ‘And there will be on every high mountain ...’; 26, ‘And there will be the light of the moon like ...’); and the closing (fourth) lines match (‘In the day when’). The effect of this is to contrast the day of slaughter and the day of healing.

25 Contrasting with the water of tears (19), here is a rearranging even of the face of the earth, whereby the formerly arid hilltops will be lavishly watered. The significance of the *slaughter* and the falling *towers* is not explained here, but see 2:12–17; 25:1–5. It is

singular meaning.

the day of the Lord's victory over all the power of the enemy.

26 The contrasting day brings healing for the people whom both their own sin and his righteous judgment have wounded. 24:23 explains the intense light of the day as that of the Lord's radiant glory 'shaming' sun and moon, but here it is the restoration of creation to its true powers, when it also is delivered from the bondage of corruption (cf. Rom. 8:21).

d. Contemporary events: Assyria no threat (30:27–33)

This second movement in the section on the faithfulness of the Lord turns from eschatology to imminent history. The parallel 'woe' (chapter 28) ended by leaving the future of Jerusalem an open question as the careful farmer harvests each crop according to its individual requirements. Though Judah's dallying with Egypt (30:1–7) is deeply offensive to the Lord and useless in respect of the Assyrian threat, yet Jerusalem will not fall to Assyria. Rather, the Assyrian king, thundering towards Zion, is in fact climbing his own funeral pyre! The poem is in three seven-line stanzas:

A¹ Divine action: the shaking of the nations (27–28)

B The song and the shout: Judah's festivity and the Lord's rage (29–30)

A² Divine action: the overthrow of Asshur and its king (31–33)

Verse 27a, *the name of the LORD* (*šēm yahweh*) and verse 33e, *the breath of the LORD* (*nišmat yahweh*), the first and last lines in the Hebrew, form an inclusio. Anthropomorphisms abound. In the first stanza, the Lord's *Name*, *anger*, *lips*, *tongue* and *spirit* (NIV, *breath*) are mentioned; in the second, his *voice*, *arm* and *anger*; and in the third, his *voice* and *breath*. There is also a sharing of words. Stanzas one and two both have *consuming fire* and stanzas one and three share *burning*. *Sieve* (28) and *blows of his arms*/‘shaking’ (32) are the same root, and *torrent* (28) and *stream* (33) are the same word. Stanzas two and three both have references to musical instruments: *flutes*, *tambourines*, *harps*. Note also how stanza one ends with the Lord as master of history on a universal scale (*nations*, *peoples*) and stanza three with the Lord as master of history on an age-long scale (*long been prepared*). The structure of the poem puts the Lord's people at the centre of his sovereign rule, the glad recipients of his victory.

Divine action: the shaking of the nations (30:27–28)

This opening stanza makes the fullest use of the sort of anthropomorphic language

which marks the whole poem. Its intention is to show the Lord wholly involved in action and reaction in world history and the inevitability of a final moral settlement because of what he is and can do. His *Name* is the summary of his revealed character ([Ex. 3:15](#)). He comes as the God who judges his foes and redeems his people. *From afar* is firstly part of the storm motif of the passage (the approaching storm heralds its coming by far-off signals; cf. [Ezk. 1:4](#)), but also it suits the note of the long preparation of historical events on which the poem ends ([33](#)). *Smoke* and *fire* were exodus symbols of divine presence ([Ex. 13:21](#)) and holiness ([Ex. 19:18](#)). The Lord acts not arbitrarily but in accordance with what he has said and by his authoritative word. *Breath*/‘spirit’ (*rûah*) accords with the storm metaphor and also indicates the mode of divine personal action. *Rushing* is the word translated ‘overwhelming’ in [28:15](#), [18](#). [8:8](#) uses the same symbolic wording, *to the neck*, in connection with the Assyrian invasion. The *sieve of destruction* (*šāw*, ‘falsehood/worthlessness’; [1:13](#); [5:18](#)), in which the Lord *shakes*/‘sieves’ *the nations* is designed to sieve out and expose the false and worthless. The mixture of metaphors—the sieve to discriminate (cf. [Am. 9:9](#)) and the bridle to control and direct (cf. [37:29](#))—is truly Isaianic.

The song and the shout: Judah’s festivity and the Lord’s rage ([30:29–30](#))

The motif of song typifies, as always, glad entrance into a freely provided deliverance. Here, in the central stanza, the Lord’s people rejoice ([29](#)) while all the victorious action ([30](#)) is his. The prime night festival was Passover, which suits this context with its exodus symbolism of fire and cloud ([27](#)) and the reference to the Lord as *the Rock* ([Ex. 17:1–7](#); see on [Is. 17:10](#)). The reference to song looks back to [Exodus 15:21](#). *Your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes*/‘You will have a song as on the night ... and joy of heart as when ...’ refers to no formal religious procession with time-honoured ritual formally observed but to a response of heart, expressing itself in song and music. The Psalms evidence abundant music in the festivals of Israel even though we do not know the shape the ceremonies took. His *majestic voice*/‘voice of his majesty’ is a voice appropriate to one as majestic as he. *Arm* is the organ of personal strength in action and is an exodus symbol ([Ex. 6:6](#)). *Raging* (*za’ap*, ‘rage of’) is from a verb meaning ‘to be enraged with or feel bitter against’ ([2 Ch. 26:19](#); [Pr. 19:3](#)), and hence is expressive of personal animosity. *Anger* (*’ap*) is the snorting or outbursting of anger. On *consuming fire*/‘flame of consuming fire’ cf. [Exodus 3:2](#) where, however, the word is different. For

the motif of storm see 28:2, 17. There the hail was punitive of Israel/Judah through an outside foe (the ‘strange’ use of the divine arsenal; 28:21), here (as in 10:12) the rage turns against the foe as the Lord refuses finally to destroy his people. The strange mixture of lightning (‘fire’, RV) and hail is found in Exodus 9:23.

Divine action: the overthrow of Asshur and its king (30:31–33)

Verse 31 begins (lit.) ‘For by the voice of the Lord Assyria will be shattered’. The concluding stanza explains and applies the poem to the immediate situation. The second line may have the Lord as its subject (as the NIV; so Delitzsch), but Buber is more correct in suggesting a description of Assyria, ‘with whom as rod he smote’ or, more idiomatically, ‘who, as [the Lord’s] rod, was smiting’.³⁷ The vocabulary here is as in 10:5. *His punishing rod* is ‘the rod of foundation’, i.e. founded for the purpose, a predetermined or predestined rod.³⁸ The balance between *tambourines and harps* and (lit.) ‘battles of shaking or sieving’ takes up the balance in verses 29–30 between the song and shout. ‘Shaking’ makes the Lord’s action against Assyria typical of his final settlement with all nations (28).

Verse 33 begins with ‘For’ as a further explanation, namely, that what is about to happen has long been determined upon. The name *Topheth* (cf. 2 Ki. 23:10; Je. 7:31–32; 19:6, 11, 14) possibly arose from giving the noun *t^epāt* (‘fire-place’) the vowels of *bōšet* (‘shame, disgrace’), resulting in the ‘disgraceful burning-place’. Here the Hebrew has the unique form *topteh*, which may be an alternative designation.³⁹ Little did the Assyrians know that their imperial progress to Zion (10:8–11) was their funeral procession with the pyre long since laid! The simple use of the definite article indicates that *the king* refers to the king of Assyria (36:14). For all that he may think of himself as ‘the’ king, he now meets a greater King than himself, the one whose predetermination built the pyre and whose *breath* will ignite it. *Its fire pit has been made* is ‘he [the Lord] has made its fire

³⁷ M. Buber, *The Kingship of God* (George, Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 183.

³⁸ Many would alter the MT’s *mūsādā* to *mūsārōh* (‘his discipline’) but, as Skinner remarks, ‘this only replaces one singular expression with another and, besides, is too easy to be worth much.’ However unusual the text, the meaning it affords is contextually apt.

³⁹ KB and others would alter *topteh* to *toptō* (‘his Topheth’/‘his disgraceful pyre’). Nothing is achieved by this.

pit'.

5. Deliverance and renewal ([31:1–32:20](#))

Divine sovereignty over history, which was the point at which the fourth ‘woe’ ended ([30:33](#)), is the bridge to this fifth ‘woe’. The Lord never merely reacts to events as if sprung on him. He has prepared all beforehand and is totally master of the situation. The merest movement of his hand ([31:3](#)) is sufficient to dispose of Judah and its supposed helper, Egypt. The dreaded Assyria too is subject to the word of Zion’s God ([31:8–9](#)). But equally, as the gaze probes forward, the nearer future of the Assyrian devastation ([32:10](#)), the expected future of Jerusalem’s fall ([32:11–14](#)) and the undated future of the coming King ([32:1](#)) and the outpoured Spirit ([32:15](#)) are all alike part of sovereign pre-arrangement. Thus the fifth ‘woe’ is continuous with the fourth, while at the same time its main affiliation is with the second ([29:1–14](#)).

In [29:1–8](#) the principle was enunciated that the Lord never leaves the last word to the destroyer, even if to the human eye his intervention comes at the eleventh hour. [31:1–5](#) applies this to the Assyrian crisis as the Lord comes down on Mount Zion for its deliverance. [29:9–15](#) indicated that there is also a need for a divine transforming work bringing a change of heart and that this too the Lord will do. This work of transformation is the topic of [31:6–32:20](#): the King ([32:1](#)) and the Spirit ([32:15](#)) bringing in new people and a new society of righteousness, peace and security. Many coincidences of wording and thought reinforce the link between these two ‘woes’:

- ‘Ariel’/‘God’s fire-place’ ([29:1–2](#), [7](#)) is recapitulated in the ‘fire’ and ‘furnace’ of [31:9](#).
- in the sequence of six ‘woes’, ‘Mount Zion’ occurs only in these two ([29:8](#); [31:4](#)).
- the imagery of hunger and thirst, unsatisfied needs, is common to both ([29:8](#); [32:6](#)).
- by a neat turn, the ‘nations that fight [$\sqrt{\text{š}\bar{a}\bar{b}\bar{a}}$] against Ariel’ ([29:7](#)) are matched by the Lord Almighty doing ‘battle’ ($\sqrt{\text{š}\bar{a}\bar{b}\bar{a}}$) on Mount Zion.
- the wisdom theme is common to [29:14](#) and [31:2](#).
- the unseeing eye ([29:10](#)) matches the seeing eye ([32:3](#)), the far-off heart ([29:13](#)) matches the understanding heart (*mind*; [32:4](#)) and the outpouring of deep sleep ([29:10](#)) matches the outpoured (a different word) Spirit ([32:15](#)).

The fifth ‘woe’ is a balanced presentation:

A¹ Prologue: disaster and deliverance ([31:1–5](#))

B¹ Call to return in the light of future and immediate prospects (6–9)

C¹ The King and the new society (32:1–8)

B² Call to hear in the light of immediate and future prospects (9–14)

C² The Spirit and the new society (15–18)

A² Epilogue: humiliation and blessedness (19–20)

a. Prologue: disaster and deliverance (31:1–5)

This prologue section, matching the terms and applying the principle of 29:1–8, falls into two separate parts, with the ‘coming down’ ($\sqrt{yārad}$) motif (1, 4) forming an inclusio. The versification marks the divisions of verses 1–3. The separate oracle in verses 4–5 consists of two similes, the first of unperturbed sovereignty, the second of gentle protection.

1 *Go down* is a participle denoting the existing state of affairs; *rely* is an imperfect denoting characteristic behaviour; and *trust*, *look* and *seek* are all perfects denoting settled attitudes. Thus, act reveals character and expresses decision. On the history of the times and the significance of *Egypt* see p. 20. *Rely* means to lean on for support (2 Sa. 1:6). *Horses* and *chariots* (cf. Ex. 14:6, 9; Dt. 17:16) were a known Egyptian strength. For the attitude and policy of Judah here cf. 2:7. These images are of the adoption of worldly security: *horses* represent brute strength; *chariots*, military might; and *horsemen*, trained personnel. On *not look* see 17:7 and on *seek help from the LORD*/‘seek the LORD’ see 9:13. The idea is not looking for what the Lord can give ‘but just’ looking to the Lord, cultivating his person and presence. *The Holy One of Israel* is the God who, in all his divine reality, has made himself near and available. *The LORD*, Yahweh, is the God who long since proved his sovereignty over Egypt.

2 All the verbs are in the perfect tense, describing what never changes. The choice of *wise* is an irony directed against the ‘wise’ politicians behind the Egyptian alliance, astute children in their own generation that they were. *Can bring* should be ‘brings’. *Disaster* (*rā'*) is as in 45:7; the wisdom of the Lord can be seen in his apportionment of this world’s troubles (cf. Am. 3:7). Thus, if his people see the dreaded Assyrians on the march, the Lord is in it in all his wisdom, and the way of trust and obedience will carry them through (cf. Dt. 8:2–4). The Lord *does not take back*, he is unchangeably what he has revealed himself to be and will never be untrue to his promises or his standards. He is, therefore, the inveterate foe of *the wicked*/‘wrong-doers’. *Those who help evildoers* is

‘the help of evildoers’. Contextually, this refers to the supposed help that Egypt will bring. Judah has sought help in Egypt but the Lord will not have his people helped other than by himself or on any other basis than trust in himself.

3 The incredible folly of choosing Egypt instead of the Lord! *Men* (*'adām*) is ‘human’. *God* (*'ēl*) is the most transcendent of the ‘God words’, meaning God in exalted majesty, power and glory. The contrast between *flesh* and *spirit* is between what needs life and possesses none, and the life-principle itself (40:6; 42:5). Theologically, this verse matches John 4:24a. *The LORD* is sovereign, not just positionally but actually. His omnipotence is not a theory but a practice. *Stretches out*—a mere hand movement is enough!⁴⁰ *He who helps* is Egypt and *he who is helped* is Judah. Even supposing all the might of Egypt had come to Judah’s aid, one divine touch would have reduced it to nothing. *Perish* is ‘come to an end’, ‘be finished’.

4–5 Opening with ‘For’, the similes explain the foregoing. The Lord is both unabashed lion and protecting bird! For the opening phrase cf. 8:11; 21:6; 22:14. The *as ... so* construction identifies the Lord with the marauding *lion*. As the lion, he seizes Zion as his prey. The *shepherds* (what irony! See Gn. 43:32; 46:34; Ex. 8:26) are the ineffectual aid of Egypt. In 29:8, the parallel movement, *sābā* ‘al meant ‘to assemble, fight against’ and so it must do here, rather than *to do battle on*. Isaiah is expressing the same truth as 10:5–6, with the Assyrians as the manifestation of the Lord’s wrath. With an abruptness deliberately copying 29:5 the picture changes. Zion had despised the Lord and his power in favour of Egypt. Did they say ‘About as much use as a sparrow’? But the ‘sparrow-strength’ of the Lord is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:25), and it represents here his gentleness towards his errant people, sufficient to *shield*, *deliver*, ‘*pass over*’ and *rescue*. Four is often the number symbolic of ‘on every side’. Here four verbs point to surrounding, sufficient help. *Pass over* is the same as in Exodus 12:13, 23, 27. The blood of

⁴⁰ Cf. Herman Wouk, *The Caine Mutiny* (The Companion Book Club, 1953), p. 304: ‘Giant after giant, the new battleships ... were ranked in Ulithi lagoon, an orderly multitude of floating iron skyscrapers: the most formidable sea force that the planet has ever borne ... all the brute energy of human history concentrated and made visible ... [Yet] what was Ulithi after all? A ship sailing within ten miles of it would not even have seen it; and all the great Third Fleet, sinking at once, would not have raised the level of the sea by a thousandth of the breadth of a hair.’ This compares human power only with the immensity of creation; compare it then with the Creator!

the lamb might have seemed ineffectual and irrelevant to a people under sentence of death but it was enough! So, against the unwisdom of Judah, the pretences of Egypt and the threats of Assyria the hovering God will prove his sovereign strength.

b. The work of transformation (31:6–32:18)

Corresponding to the revelation in 29:9–14 that the Lord has in mind a ‘marvellous work’ to deal with the spiritual problem of closed eyes and ears and an undiscerning heart, Isaiah now looks forward to a King who will reign in righteousness (32:1) and a Spirit outpoured (32:15). But the vision is not declared pure and simple. It is brought into relation (like the Messianic forecasts in chapters 9 and 11) with the times of the Assyrians (31:8), with the calls to repent (31:6) and hear (32:9), and with future events beyond the Assyrian threat (31:7; 32:12–14). 29:9–10 suggests Isaiah’s awareness that the days leading up to the Assyrian invasion would constitute the spiritual point of no return of which he was warned at the time of his call (see on 6:9f.). The element of appeal here (31:6; 32:9, 11) may well reflect the urgency of his ministry at this period, but at a deeper level it reminds us, like the ministry of John the Baptist, that penitence and hearing the word of the Lord constitute the only true preparation for the coming and the eschatological acts of God.

Call to return in the light of future and immediate prospects (31:6–9)

The call to repent is based on the certainty of *that day* (note the initial *For* of verse 7), the eschatological act of God, and also on the more immediate overthrow of the Assyrians (8–10). The Lord seeks a believing penitence, that is to say, not one compelled by events but one arising from sure confidence that God will so act and from the need to be prepared.

6 *Return* is penitence that is more than mental, the practical redirection of life (see 1:27). *You have so greatly/‘deeply’ revolted/‘you [are they who] have deeply revolted’* is an emphatic attribution (‘you are the very ones who ...’), achieved by changing from the second to third person. On *revolted* (*sārâ*) see 1:5.

7 Cf. 2:20. This comparison determines that Isaiah means the day of the Lord, not some interim visitation. The reference is unexpected but at the same time biblically typical in that it keeps ultimate issues in view. Biblical faith seeks to be ready not simply to surmount the next crisis but to stand before God. Therefore, since *that day* will (too late!) cause people to reject in disgust what they have so long cultivated, the time for

decisive action is now. *Every one of you ... is* (lit.) ‘They will, each one, reject his idols of silver and his idols of gold—which your hands have made for you. Sin!’ On *reject* ($\sqrt{mā'as}$) see 30:12. *Idols* is ‘no-gods’, as at 2:8.

8 Now Isaiah turns to the immediate crisis. Historical threats as well as eschatological ones must be faced by repentance and getting right with God. Expressing the truth by contrast, Isaiah indicates that God by himself alone will banish *Assyria*. *Not of man* ($'îš$) ... *not of mortals* ($'ādām$) means no individual, no human being. The Assyrians will flee⁴¹ and be *put to forced labour*. Following the debacle of 701, the Assyrian Empire entered on its last stages, a long and then accelerating process of decline to extinction.

9 *Their stronghold will fall* is (lit.) ‘Their rock will pass [away]’. Their ‘rock’ is the king of Assyria, contrasting with ‘the Rock of Israel’ (30:29).⁴² The Lord ‘passes over’ ($\sqrt{pāsah}$) in deliverance (31:5); Assyria passes ($\sqrt{'ābar}$) off the stage of history. *At the sight* ... is an extremely compressed piece of Hebrew. The NIV translation is possible and would mean that when the Lord lifts up his banner against the Assyrian host there will be a complete collapse of power to resist. Alternatively, we could translate ‘and his princes will be shattered far from the banner’, *i.e.* having deserted their colours. On *declares* (n^eum) see on 1:24, and on *fire* see on ‘Ariel’ (29:1). Zion itself cannot escape the threat of its own privileges: it lives, indwelt by the God of fiery holiness. But when the Assyrians attacked Zion they brought themselves within the ambit of that same holy fire.

The king and the new society (32:1–8)

In the final three ‘woes’ of the sixfold series eschatology is ever more plainly interwoven with history. Just as the call to prepare for the interim day of the Lord, the Assyrian threat (31:8–9), was preceded by a reminder of the real day of the Lord (31:7), so the passing of the earthly king (31:8–9) now merges into the reign of the true king (cf. 9:1 <8:23> ; 11:1). It is part of the purpose of biblical eschatology to allow the ultimate

⁴¹ The Hebrew form $w^enās lô$ contains the dative pronoun $lô$ (‘for himself’) as a dative of advantage. Here it means ‘and he/they will fly for his/their life’.

⁴² *Rock* could also be metaphorical of the strength of Assyria or of Assyria’s god (cf. Dt. 32:31, 37). Reference to the king himself offers the richest understanding in context, contrasting with the righteous king of 32:1.

vision to brighten the intermediate dark days. Two separate poems are tied together by the *For* of verse 6. The first (1–5) deals with new rulers and transformed people; the second (6–9) with transformed social values. The whole is a vision of the new society, contrasting vividly with 29:10–13, and describing part one of the coming ‘marvellous work’ (29:14).

New rulers and new people (32:1–5)

A¹ The securing of true values: the king and the princes (1)

B¹ True rule—four comparisons (2)

B² New people—four transformations (3–4)

A² The end of false values: the fool and the scoundrel (5)

1 A *king* is the Messianic king of chapters 9 and 11. In 9:7 <6> ‘righteousness’ marks his throne, in 11:1ff. his character, and here his government. Sound moral principle (*righteousness*) is allied to sound moral practice (*justice*). The *king* embodies righteousness; the *rulers/‘princes’*⁴³ are his executives, applying his principles of righteousness in correct decisions (*mišpāṭ*; see on 28:26).

2 *Each man* (lit. ‘a man’) is idiomatically correct, i.e. true ideals of leadership animate every member of the government—for once, a barrel without a bad apple. But it is more telling to find here the idiom of indeterminateness for the sake of emphasis—‘the unique, special man’ (cf. Alexander, Smith and Snaith).⁴⁴ This view is confirmed by comparison of the benefits of the king’s reign with those mentioned in 4:6 as accompanying the Lord’s own presence among his people (see also 25:4). On this view, 9:6–7 <5–6> declares the king’s deity, 11:1–5 his full enduement of the divine Spirit in the context of a human ancestry, and this verse his true humanity. Completeness is expressed by the contrasting dangers of *wind* and water; there is protection from every threat. *Storm* is *zerem* (‘inundation’; 4:6; 28:2). *Water* and *shadow* are the two components of provision and refreshment, therefore symbolizing every beneficial care.

3–4 There are four transformations in the realms of the perception (*eyes*), reception (*ears*), grasp (*mind*) and communication (*tongue*) of truth. On the assumption that

⁴³ The MT prefixes *l^e* to the noun ‘princes’ (see GKC 143e; 1 Ch. 7:1; 24:20; Ps. 16:3; Ec. 9:4). It has the effect of emphasizing ‘and with reference to princes’. GKC and BHS would omit it.

⁴⁴ N. H. Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Isaiah xxviii–xxxii* (Epworth, 1945), pp. 251–257.

*closed*⁴⁵ is $\sqrt{\text{šā'a'}}$, it is used in 6:10 of judicial blindness inflicted on the people. In the parallel 29:9 it is the result of their wilful self-deception and the Lord's visitation of 'deep sleep'. This is now reversed. Verse 4 instances two contrasting classes: those who precipitately rush forward and those who through incapacity hold back. These opposites express totality; a wholly transformed society. *Mind* is the 'heart' as the organ of comprehension. *Rash* means hasty, rushing to ill-thought-out conclusions and actions. To *know and understand*/‘discern so as to know’ is to see to the heart of a thing and so come to true knowledge. *Fluent and clear* is ‘be quick to speak with clarity’.

5 An imperfect society imperfectly accords honours. Isaiah looks forward to a true aristocracy of character. *Fool* (*nābāl*) is the one who lives without acknowledgment of moral or spiritual obligations (see 9:17 <16>). *Scoundrel* (*kīlay*) and its cognate *kēlay* (7) are found only here. If they derive from $\sqrt{nākal}$ ⁴⁶ the idea is deception, devious working for self-advantage and the hurt of others (Gn. 37:18; Nu 25:18; Ps. 105:25). The ‘fool’ is such by what he lacks—moral sensitivity; the ‘scoundrel’ is such by what he has—a determination to promote himself at all costs. The fool is amoral; the scoundrel is unscrupulous.

New values (32:6–8)

This poem is added in further explanation of the foregoing, and specially of verse 5, which introduced the *fool* (6) and the *scoundrel* (7). It concludes by making the positive point that in the new society it is true nobility that will find honour and security:

- Stanza a For a fool—foolishness he speaks;
- b and his heart practices mischief;
- c to practice profanity, and to speak error about the Lord, to leave the appetite of the hungry empty, and deprive the thirsty of drink.
- Stanza a And a scoundrel—his methods are bad;

⁴⁵ For *be closed* the MT actually reads ‘see’ (*tiš'eynâ*) from $\sqrt{\text{šā'āh}}$ (see 31:1), but this must be read rather as *t'šō'eynâ* from $\sqrt{\text{šā'a'}}$ ('to be smeared over, be blind').

⁴⁶ Seale (pp. 124ff.) urges that *kīlay* derives from $\sqrt{kālā}$ ('to restrain, keep back') and hence means ‘stinginess, avarice’.

- b He? Schemes are what he plans:
 - c to ruin the uninfluential by false speech and by speaking (to ruin) the helpless in court.
- Stanza a And a noble person—true nobility is what he plans
 b and he it is who upon true nobility stands secure.

It is easiest to display the interesting structure of this poem by offering this baldly literal rendering. Each successive stanza is two lines shorter than the preceding one, giving strong climactic force to the brief third stanza. The ‘a’ lines are identical in form, focusing on characteristic activity. The ‘b’ lines focus on the person inwardly. In stanzas 1 and 2, the ‘c’ lines consist of infinitives in pairs, indicating aspects of the life of the person concerned. The absence of ‘c’ lines in the third stanza indicates that all we need to know here is nobility of character; everything else follows from this.

6 On *fool* see verse 5. *Speaks* is an imperfect of characteristic behaviour. Note the emphasis on sins of speech here and in verse 7 and contrast verse 4. *Mind* is ‘heart’ (see on verse 4; 9:9). *Evil* (‘āwen) is basically ‘trouble’ or ‘mischief’ (see 10:1; Gn. 35:18) and is often used of that which troubles God and brings his displeasure (31:2; Ps. 92:9 <10>) or of offences within the cult (1:13). It is very close to the idea of iniquity seen as trouble (to others), offence (to God) and retribution (to the sinner). Here it well characterizes the life-style of the person who sits loose to moral and spiritual obligations. It is spelled out in the following four infinitives (see the translation above). The first two deal with opposition to the Lord, the second two with carelessness about people. *Ungodliness* is apostasy in theory and practice, profanity. *Spreads* is (lit.) ‘speaks’. *Error* (*tō’â*) is found only in Nehemiah 4:8 <2> and is used of turning people from the course on which they were set, distracting them and leaving them so that they do not know what to think. The end of the verse describes a streak of miserliness, the opposite of generosity, which is strong in the character of the fool (1 Sa. 25:11, 25), who is greedy for wealth (Je. 17:11).

7 On *scoundrel* see verse 5. He is a mixture of spiv and social climber; a person on the make. Certainly the opposite (in the eyes of the world) of a loser.⁴⁷ *Evil schemes* (*zimmâ*,

⁴⁷ The opening of verse 7 is a typically Isaianic assonance: *w̄kēlāy kēlāw* (‘and as for the

from ‘to meditate, plan’) apart from [Job 17:11](#), has a uniformly bad meaning. It is used nineteen times of sexual misconduct (e.g. [Lv. 18:17](#)) and particularly of planning to get one’s own way at all costs. On *poor* see [10:2](#), and on *needy* see [14:30](#). With *even when ...* the NIV represents the most direct translation of the Hebrew but it is, nonetheless, contrary to the way this poem uses the infinitive clauses in the ‘c’ lines. For this reason, the translation above continues to describe the sins of speech practised by the *scoundrel* (‘and by what he says, to ruin’), understanding the verb from the previous line. He is cynically manipulating the legal process in his own interests.

8 *Noble* (*nādīb*) means to be liberally outgoing to God ([Ex. 35:5, 22](#)) and other people ([Pr. 19:6](#)). It is often used simply of ‘noble’ rank ([13:2](#)), but here it refers to the personal, spiritual and social characteristics which truly merit commendation. In the perfect future society, this is the way of continuance and stability—*he stands*, i.e. he comes safely through life’s pressures ([Ps. 20:8 <9>](#)) and knows he is accepted before God ([Ps. 24:3](#)).

Call to hear in the light of immediate and future prospects ([32:9–14](#))

In [3:16](#) Isaiah addressed the ‘daughters of Zion’ because he found them the epitome of their ‘mother’s’ character. Maybe this appeal to the *women* springs from the same reasoning, and they are seen as embodiments of the complacency and carelessness which inhibits spiritual concern and urgency. Once more the appeal is based on a double forecast of coming events (*cf. 31:7, 8*): the Assyrian devastation in which harvests are lost ([10](#)) and a further disaster involving loss of land, houses, palaces and city ([13–14](#)). Again, faith to face coming exigencies is strengthened by an eschatological forecast, now of the outpoured Spirit and ensuing transformations ([15–18](#)).

9 *Complacent* is the bad sense of the word *sūa^anaun* translated *undisturbed* in verse [18](#). It speaks of outward circumstances of ease but, in the present verse, complacently assumed as a perpetual right. *Secure/trusting* is actually a perversion of real trust, a bland assumption that nothing can happen to disturb. Clearly, these are the same women as in [3:16](#), with no thought beyond their wardrobes.

10 For *In a little more than a year* see on [29:1](#). *Secure* is as in verse [9](#). *Will fail* is the perfect of certainty, (lit.) ‘For the grape harvest is doomed to fail’. Is it the implication that

scoundrel his instruments ...’).

the women would be notably deprived if the vines failed? (Cf. Am. 4:1.) *Harvest of fruit* is ‘ingathering’, and *will not come* is ‘will come to nothing’.⁴⁸

11–14 The renewed call (11) rests on a different ground. In verse 10 the vintage was lost, here the vines, the land (12–13) and the city (13d–14) are gone. The free life of the animals (14d) bespeaks the absence of people. This is the total loss foretold in 6:11ff., implied in 11:11 and predicted in 30:8–17.⁴⁹

11 *Strip off your clothes* is (lit.) ‘Strip and go bare’. Neither verb is used as a sign of mourning, rather as a sign of enslavement or captivity (cf. 20:2–3). Isaiah is calling the women to prepare for this, as the following verses imply.

12 *Beat your breasts* is an unusual ellipsis, (lit.) ‘mourning upon the breasts’, meaning ‘as you lament with beating upon your breasts’.

13–14 The Hebrew of *thorns and briers* has no conjunction. According to Snaith the ‘thorn’ (*qôš*) could grow anywhere but the ‘briar’ (*šāmîr*) ‘belongs definitely to the waste-land’. He offers ‘thorn-briar’ for the present passage. The thought certainly is that land once cultivated will have become waste (cf. 5:6). Verse 14 opens with ‘For’ or ‘Indeed’. *Fortress/palace*, ‘large house’ may be referring here to Zion’s royal palace. *The noisy city* is ‘the bustle of the city’. The *citadel* (or as a place-name, Ophel; Ne. 3:26) was a southern projection of the temple mount. *Watchtower* could refer to what is called ‘the tower of the flock’ in Micah 4:8 although the actual word *bahan* is found only here.⁵⁰ For the

⁴⁸ ‘Will come to nothing’ understands the negative particle *b^elî* in its full significance as a noun.

⁴⁹ The verb forms in verses 11–12 are difficult. *Tremble* is masculine in form but is addressed to women. The following four imperatives (11) are unusual in form (*r^egāzâ* ... *p^ešōṭâ* ... ‘ōrâ *h^aḡōrâ*), and GKC 48i notes them as aramaized second person plural feminine. In verse 12, ‘beating on the breasts’ is a masculine plural participle. BHS would read *h^aṛādîm* in verse 12. Dislocations of gender are common in Hebrew (e.g. 23:1 where there is a masculine imperative with a feminine plural noun). It is not certain that the four imperatives are aramaized second person plurals; they possibly could be masculine singular with emphatic endings (cf. Dt. 33:23; GKC 48i; Davidson, 113b). We may have no more here than Isaiah failing to maintain the fiction of addressing the women when his words are meant for all. The emendation, however, is unexceptionable.

⁵⁰ ‘Become wasteland’ is the unusual expression *hāyāh b^ead* (lit.) ‘become on behalf of wasteland’. The usage is unexemplified but could intend ‘become but wasteland/be counted as ...’. It seems too easy (with BHS) simply to delete the word, and to do so ‘on account of metre’ implies a

idiom of animals replacing humans see 5:17; the former inhabitants would no longer be there.

The Spirit and the new society (32:15–18)

The reversals of verses 13–14 are not final; an even greater reversal awaits, through the promised agency of the divine Spirit. There will be a new earth (15bc), new absolutes in a new society (16–17) and new security of tenure (18).

15 The *Spirit* is the Spirit of the Lord in his function as life-giver, in respect of creation (Ps. 104:30) and in respect of sinners (Ps. 51:11f. <13f.>). On the transformed earth cf. 30:23–26. Here there is a pointed contrast with the disastrous transformations of verse 14. In combination there are, then, three lines of thought: the Messianic plenty seen in the burgeoning of creation, the removal of the divine curse and the reversal of all the damage sin has done. *Desert* (*midbār*) can also mean ‘open country’, ‘green-belt’. *Fertile field* (*karmel*) is (lit.) ‘garden-land’, land under planned cultivation. *Forest*/‘woodland’, ‘scrub’ is land producing its own wild growth. When that which is perfect comes, what now seems like ordered cultivation will look like scrub!

16 From *desert* to *fertile field* covers the whole new world of verse 15, which will be marked by *justice* and *righteousness*, characteristics common to the two Messianic forecasts (see 32:1). On the two words see 1:21, 27; 9:7 <6> ; 11:4.⁵¹

17 Cf. 30:15, where the blessings promised here were offered on the basis of a penitent and believing relationship with the Lord. This *righteousness*, therefore, which has peace, rest and security as its outcome, is more than moral integrity; it is the righteousness of being right with God (cf. Gn. 15:16; and see on 53:11; 54:17). On *peace* see 9:6 <5>. *Quietness* is ‘rest’ or ‘restfulness’ (cf. 28:12, 16). *Confidence* is both ‘trust’ and ‘security’.

18 The spiritual realities enjoyed in verse 17 are now seen as securing the community from extraneous threat (cf. 30:15 on ‘strength’). *My people* (see 1:27; 8:9–18) are those who respond to the appeals of 31:6 and 32:9. In the Hebrew the last word of verse 18

knowledge of Hebrew metrical arrangements far in excess of what we have.

⁵¹ The paired words occur thirteen times in Isaiah (1:21, 27; 5:7, 16; 9:7; 28:17; 32:1, 16; 33:5; 51:4f.; 56:1; 58:2; 59:4), compared with sixteen times in the remainder of the Bible. Of these, six are in Jeremiah.

(*undisturbed*) links with the second word of verse 9, where this section of appeal began. *Secure* is the same word-family as *secure* (in verse 9). The prophet would disrupt their empty complacency in order to replace it with true security.

c. Epilogue: humiliation and blessedness (32:19–20)

This is an epilogue recapitulating the abrupt transition from disaster to blessing with which this ‘woe’ began. For Isaiah the great hope is never a mere future bliss. It is unconditional in its coming but not in its enjoyment. Therefore, he does not allow us to forget that if there is a glory (20), there is also its opposite (19), the falling towers of 30:25. He disabuses us of complacency as much in regard to the future as in regard to the present (9–14). That is the power of this concluding reiteration of the theme: both judgment and glory lie ahead and now is the time to choose.

19 This verse is (lit.) ‘Though it will hail, when the forest comes down, and in humiliation the city will be humbled ...’. Only here does the verb ‘hail’ occur; for the noun see 28:2, 17. The forces of nature are the agents of judgmental theophany. With reference to the then impending future, the falling *forest* (10:18, 33–34) is the cutting down of Assyria, and the humiliated *city* is the Jerusalem of verses 12–14. In the ultimate future, the *forest* is the given world infected by human sin and falling under judgment (2:12–13), and the *city* is life organized by human beings without God (24:10). Both the impending and the ultimate are fixed in the divine programme. They are made known in order that we may repent (31:6) and listen (32:9). Only those who come to terms with the wrath of God can enter the promised glory.

20 This pastoral scene recalls the Messianic motifs of 30:23–26, where cattle range free and mountaintops run with water. Sowing crops and tending beasts is the life of those who have home and tenure in such a land. The word translated *how blessed* (*'ašrē*) has three shades: under divine blessing (Ps. 32:1); enjoying fulfilment in life (Ps. 112:1); and doing the right thing at the right time (Pss. 2:12; 137:8–9). In the present verse all three meet: divine favour, personal fulfilment and total rectitude.

6. Victory, proclamation and pilgrimage (33:1–35:10)

The balanced presentation of the six ‘woes’ in this series continues into this final ‘woe’. We note the following broad comparisons between it and the matching third ‘woe’ (29:15–24): the Lebanon motif (29:17; 33:9; 35:2); the blind and the deaf (29:18;

35:5); joy in the Lord (**29:19; 35:10**); redemption (**29:22; 35:9–10a**); holiness (**29:23; 35:8**); salvation as an act of God (**29:23; 33:3–6; 35:4, 9f.**); the end of oppression (**29:20; 33:19**); spiritual transformation (**29:24; 33:24; 35:8**); the law established (**29:20f.; 33:14–16**); and the future seen in terms of the past (**29:22; 34:5–15**). The main thrust of the third ‘woe’ was transformation, both of the world and of ‘Jacob’. Both these lines are now developed in typical Old Testament terms, which means that the emphasis is on the transformation of Zion, which in turn becomes a universal message.

A¹The salvation of Zion (**33:1–6**)

B¹ The judgment of the peoples (**7–12**)

A²The first universal proclamation (**13; hear**): Zion and its King (**13–24**)

B² The second universal proclamation (**1; Come near**): the final overthrow (**34:1–17**)

A³The pilgrimage of the redeemed to Zion through a renewed world (**35:1–10**)

33:1–12 is significantly rooted in the time of the Assyrian threat and thus anchored in contemporary history, but by verse **12** the canvas is widening and thereafter the themes are eschatological. The basic motifs are provided by such Psalms as **46, 47, 48, 74, 83**. The gathering of the nations in hostility against Zion is a concept rooted in the pre-exodus Egyptian situation, where the power of the ‘world’ threatened the extinction of the people of God; yet it was they who emerged unscathed. Entry into Canaan had not changed this situation, but history showed that in this matter the Lord had taken sides and that hostility to his people was hostility against himself. This faith was given poetical and religious expression in the Psalms and the cult. It was the faith Isaiah preached during the Sennacherib crisis and which he now sees in its final eschatological manifestation. To the last, the Lord remains the God who comes down to Egypt to redeem.

a. Ultimate realities: salvation and wrath (33:1–12**)**

In **30:27–33** Isaiah used the historical Assyrian threat as a ‘trailer’ of the fiery action of the Lord against ‘nations’ and ‘peoples’ (**30:28**). This balance is now reversed. Assyria is veiled behind the description *destroyer* and *traitor* (**1**), and the climax is a fire of judgment upon *the peoples* (**3, 12**). There is, however, the same sense of an ‘eleventh hour’ divine rescue, with the people of God just managing to live one day at a time (**2**), despair taking hold within a wasted world (**7–9**) and the dramatic threefold divine *Now* of verse **10**.

- A¹ The destroyer who will be destroyed (1)
- B¹ Appeal for divine grace and salvation (2)
- A² The peoples become the Lord's plunder (3–4)
- B² The new Zion, abundant salvation (5–6)
- A³ Mourning over treachery, the world desolate (7–9)
- B³ Divine decision and action (10–12)

The salvation of Zion (33:1–6)

1 As in 21:2 and 24:16, Isaiah uses the moral inconsistency of Assyria as the hallmark of life in the last days. The background is Assyria's apparent acceptance of Hezekiah's attempt to buy himself out of trouble (2 Ki. 18:13–18), yet the attack on Jerusalem was continued as if no agreement had been reached. The one who has *not been destroyed*, i.e. the one acting on the principle that might is right, seems so far to have 'got away with it'. The second *Woe to you* (1c) is an NIV addition. The charge moves from physical destructiveness to moral unscrupulousness. The use of every means to secure domination is accompanied by a willingness to use any means to achieve his end. *Who have not been betrayed* is (lit.) 'O betrayer ... whom they [people/others] have not betrayed'. Nothing provoked the treacherous action except the treacherous one's own lack of scruple. 'When you stop⁵² betraying, they will betray you'—not that the Lord would or will reply with any lowering of his standards but that the punishment will be exactly what the crime merits (*cf.* Dt. 19:18–19). The Lord's perfect management of human affairs guarantees that for every trickster there is a trickster to outdo him, until in the end all alike perish in their cleverness.

2 By *Woe* (1) the people of God dissociate themselves from the code by which the world lives; by *O LORD* they dissociate themselves from the resources by which the world lives. Both the moral code for life and the resources for living are from heaven. On *gracious* see 30:18. *Long* ($\sqrt{qāwā}$), 'wait'; (8:17) is a mark of the remnant, combining the restfulness of waiting with the confidence of sure expectation. *Our strength*/‘their arm’ is the organ of strong personal action (52:10), strength for life. There may be here a snatch of liturgical form, with the leader saying, ‘be their arm’ and the congregation

⁵² *Stop* (in *stop betraying*) translates *kann^elōtā* (from $\sqrt{kālā}$), and this is adopted by Kissane, KB, BHS, etc. It is such an obvious solution to a difficulty that it would be hard to affirm its originality.

replying, ‘Be our salvation indeed ...’. In any case, instead of a prosaic statement that in such a time of crisis the believing church resorts to prayer (*cf. Acts 12:5*) Isaiah inserts a telling cameo of prayer taking place. The alteration to ‘our arm’ is the worst sort of pedantic tampering. *Every morning* speaks of daily strength for daily needs. *Our salvation* is preceded by the particle *’ap* (unrepresented in the NIV), which has the sense ‘yea more’.

3 *The thunder of your voice*/‘the sound of tumult/multitude’ may be a reference to the rumoured Egyptian advance in *2 Kings 19:9*. The word *hāmōn* is not used of the noise of thunder. *Flee* and *scatter* are both perfect tenses (perfects of certainty), as if the praying people had already seen their prayer answered. *Rise up* is ‘because of your exaltedness’. The noun does not occur elsewhere but is unexceptionable. The idea matches the cognate verb in verse 10. However great the threat in human eyes, all that is needed is for the Lord to stand up!

4 The battle is over (*plunder* is being taken) as soon as it started (*cf. Rev. 19:19–20*). *O nations* is an NIV addition. There is no certainty of identification but *young locusts* represent some stage of locust development (*1 Ki. 8:37; Ps. 78:46; Joel 1:4*). *Men pounce*⁵³ is the enthusiastic entering upon the fruits of the Lord’s victory.

5 This verse continues the thought of the ‘rising up’ of verse 4. *Exalted*/‘proves himself to be high’ ($\sqrt{sāgab}$) is exactly as at 2:11, 17. The uprising of the Lord may astonish his enemies and fill his people with fresh excitement, but in itself it is nothing remarkable: it expresses what has always been true. *Will fill* is a perfect of certainty, meaning ‘is sure to/has determined to’. On *justice* and *righteousness* see 1:26–27; 32:1, 16.

6 The Lord will be the *sure foundation*/‘the stability’ of the new Zion. In contrast with the ‘time [*’ēt*] of distress’ (2), the Lord’s people, following his victory (5), will enter upon their characteristic ‘times’, marked by immunity from danger and alarm and grounded in the Lord himself. He will also be the city’s resources, ‘a store of full salvation’. *Store* (*hōsen*) is from $\sqrt{hāsan}$ (‘to be strong’; *cf. 1:31*), and hence ‘store’ as practical resource for life. In verse 2 *salvation* was the divine supply sufficient for every emergent need. So here, the plural ‘salvations’ emphasizes the rich variety of divine resource. In particular, *wisdom*⁵⁴ for the true guidance of life and *knowledge* of the truth, which gives foun-

⁵³ *Pounce* is a participle without any subject expressed (*cf. 21:11; 32:12*; Driver 135:6).

⁵⁴ The form here is *ḥok*, 51:21). Possibly these are ‘cases of intentional reversion to the old

dation to wisdom (29:14, 18). *The fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure* is (lit.) ‘the fear of the LORD, that is his treasure’. To whom does *his* refer? Zion is feminine and Judah is not mentioned in this context, therefore, the reference must be to the Lord and what he has treasured up in store for his people. The climax of the state of bliss promised in the matching ‘woe’ (29:23) was to acknowledge the holiness of the Lord and sense his awesomeness. To fear him with a true fear is not a human emotion worked up but a gift he has in store for those he delights to bless.

The judgment of the peoples (33:7–12)

The background to this is the Assyrian times. The *brave men* are the military leaders coming belatedly, like Hezekiah (37:3), to a realization of their ineffectiveness. The *envoys*, those sent to negotiate the terms of surrender (2 Ki. 18:14), now weep as they discover how they have been duped. Neither human power nor human wisdom have proved sufficient. The invasion has left *highways* and *roads* deserted, and the prospects of peace by *treaty* are in ruins along with the whole landscape. Humankind without God only brings desolation.

7 *Their brave men* ('er'ellām) is found nowhere else but is best understood (with Delitzsch) as a form of the word '*ari'ēl* (2 Sa 23:20; 1 Ch. 11:22; cf. on 15:9) with a base meaning ‘their warriors’.⁵⁵ In context it is impossible not to hear an echo of the ‘Ariel’ of 29:1, 7, probably with the thought of humankind usurping the prerogative of the Lord and trusting their own ‘fire-power’. Both ‘hawks’ (*brave men*) and ‘doves’ (*envoys of peace*) are equally at their wits end. *In the streets* (i.e. openly, publicly) there is no ‘cover-up’ of this crisis.

8 When people choose to live by their own abilities and policies, it is not only the great issues of life which become unmanageable (the weeping of verse 7), but the ordinary activities of life (*highways* … *travellers* … *roads*) also grind to a halt. The passive translation, *the treaty is broken*, is idiomatically possible, but the reference in verse 1 to an individual betrayer favours the literal translation ‘He has nullified the covenant, despised cities.’⁵⁶ In other words, he has set no value on people, acted without moral

feminine ending’ for euphonic reasons.

⁵⁵ Kissane alters the vowels to '*a'rī'ēlīm* ('the Arielites', 'people of Ariel'; 29:1) and in the following line changes *šālōm* ('peace') to *šālēm* ('Salem').