

THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

An Introduction & Commentary

J. Alec Motyer

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To Beryl, with love

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Author’s preface

The sheer length of a book like Isaiah, not to mention the vast literature which has

accumulated around it, compels any commentator to decide what sort of commentary to write. With the absurd unrealism of the very young, I planned (long ago) to include everything! I was then, and for many subsequent years, privileged to lecture on the Hebrew text of Isaiah to classes in Clifton Theological College, Tyndale Hall and Dalton House—subsequently, to the praise of God, Trinity College, Bristol. All the material—linguistic, exegetical, expository, introductory—appropriate to a lecture course and all the evaluative comments on specialist work and debate was to find a place in my commentary. But, of course, the world is not big enough to contain such a book, no publisher foolish enough to undertake it, nor am I competent to write it.

There are three main thrusts in commentating: explanation (what the text means), encyclopaedia (the course of specialist debate) and exposition (the continuing reality of the text as God's word today). Of these, I decided to major on the first while by no means forgetting the last, for I would count it the highest privilege under God to assist every reader of Isaiah into fuller understanding and to be of some assistance to preachers. But, of course, it is impossible to ignore the wealth and course of the study of the book of Isaiah.¹ It will be evident throughout my commentary that I gratefully stand on the

¹ The course of Isaiah studies since Duhm is well catalogued in B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (SCM, 1979) and R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Tyndale Press, 1970). From Wellhausen (1869) onwards study concentrated on penetrating behind the text as received to the foundations of Israel's faith and the original setting of prophetic oracles. In Isaiah this process was given major impetus by the work of B. Duhm (1892) whose concern was mainly with underlying situations and the processes of redaction, the final form being of less importance; cf. R. E. Clements, 'Beyond tradition-history', *JSOT*, 31 (1985). The deserved fame of the *ICC* perpetuated the same emphasis, with considerable concern for emendation. It was assumed that the prophetic books were anthological, and the task of dividing obliterated any vision of the whole. Gunkel and the form critics helped to focus attention on individual pericopae; cf. S. Mowinckel, *Die Komposition des Jesaja-buches* (Acta Orientalia, 1933). More recently, the commentaries of Clements, Whybray, Kaiser and Westermann, though individually full of insight, bring little sense of a wholeness, and the same is true of the great work of Wilderberger. In 1969 J. Muilenberg coined the phrase 'rhetorical criticism' ('Form criticism and beyond', *JBL*, 88/1 [1969]) and introduced a welcome emphasis on the use of individual components analysed out of a text to display the artistry of the whole. The advent of 'canonical criticism' (Childs, *Intro-*

shoulders of many a predecessor; and while both space and competence have forbidden any prolonged engagement with the views of others, I have tried neither to be ignorant of what has been and is being said nor foolishly to fly in the face of those who are so very far my superiors. D. L. Peterson has put perfectly what I wish to say:

No commentary can hope to be truly exhaustive and at the same time coherent. This volume includes text-critical and philological notes when these appear necessary ... I have introduced notes which represent the dialogue between my own work and that of my predecessors. However, my primary goal has been ... interpretation ...²

For the same reasons I have not allocated space to an extensive specialist bibliography when such is readily available elsewhere to those who need it, and in general I have limited quotation to accessible English works which will in turn indicate wider areas of reading.

It is over thirty years since I was presumptuous enough to accept an invitation to contribute a commentary on Isaiah to the Tyndale series. The passing years have amassed material beyond what that useful series can accommodate, and it says much for the patience and tolerance of those in charge of the Inter-Varsity Press that they have waited so long and are now willing to accept so much. I remember with much gratitude the constant goading I received in years past from Ronald Inchley and rejoice that

duction) and the increasing interest in ‘integrative reading’ (cf. Johnson on *Is. 24–27*) promise a concentration on holism (concern for the complete text as inherited), which is already producing fruit beyond what has arisen from a century of historical criticism and tradition criticism. See P. R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*, *JSOTS*, 69 (1988) and *The Unity of the Twelve*, *JSOTS*, 97 (1990); B. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, *JSOTS*, 46 (1987); L. R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, *JSOTS*, 68 (1988); R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (NY Basic Books, 1981). As House remarks, ‘What is sought in literary analysis is the results of how that inspired Book is shaped as literature There is still room for explorations of the anatomy of whole books.’ See also R. J. Coggins, ‘History and story in Old Testament study’, *JSOT*, 11 (1979); J. F. A. Sawyer, *From Moses to Patmos* (SPCK, 1977); R. F. Melugin, ‘The formation of Isaiah 40–55’, *BZAW*, 141 (1976).

²D. L. Peterson, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (SCM, 1984), p. 7.

he is still with us on earth to learn that his gentle peremptoriness was not in vain. With affection and gratitude I acknowledge superb help from Frank Entwistle, the present Director of IVP and from David Kingdon, Theological Books Editor of the Press. I would like to mention also Sue Rebis who prepared my manuscript for publication. Her skill in turning many an incomprehensible comment into reasonable sense, her patience with me and with a very long text and her ever kind encouragement have meant more than can readily be expressed. To the people who checked the Hebrew and the Bible references I also extend warm gratitude. It would be impossible for an author to be more cared for and assisted than we who are privileged to achieve publication under the IVP imprint.

It has become conventional for authors to thank their wives for help and support, and in no case is this less a formality or more a reality than mine. My gratitude extends from the days long ago when, reminiscent of Edgar Alan Poe's raven (though neither in looks nor in voice), Beryl stung my conscience by repeated exhortations to 'Remember Ronald Inchley' right through to her readiness to see the early years of our retirement devoted to the cause of Isaiah. To dedicate my book to her is no more than love would wish and far less than debt requires.

As I look back now, and particularly over the intensive activity of the last three years, there rises unbidden the picture of a very small mouse nibbling heroically at a very large cheese. Indeed it is no picture but a reality, and now that all is at last done, like Reepicheep of Narnia (though, please God, without his endearing bumptiousness), I too lay my sword at the feet of him who alone is worthy of all praise, the Servant of the Lord, the reigning King and the coming Anointed Conqueror, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bishopsteignton

Alec Motyer

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Readers should appreciate that because the basis of my exposition is the Hebrew text of Isaiah, I have frequently offered a more literal translation than the NIV. In order to avoid a tiresome repetition of ‘lit.’, I have simply inserted an oblique (/) between the NIV and my own translation. I have used the convention of a square root sign ($\sqrt{}$) to indicate Hebrew verbal roots. Bible references cited throughout the commentary often relate to points of Hebrew grammar or vocabulary and their relevance may not be immediately obvious from the NIV translation.

Introduction

1. The Isaianic literature

While specialist study cannot agree about the place to be given to Isaiah of Jerusalem in the book that has always borne his name, it is now more acceptable than at any time in the last one hundred years to speak of a single literature. Throughout Old Testament study it is being recognized that, whatever view be taken of the prehistory of a text, it is the task of scholarship to pursue a holistic study. This means wrestling with the text as received, being unwilling to assume that ancient editors ordered their work with scant understanding of what they were doing, and searching out the message that emerges from the totality considered as a unit of Holy Scripture. The following commentary attempts this task in detail, but an initial overview will set the scene by tracing five unificatory lines which bind the Isaianic literature: the Messianic hope, the motif of the

city, the Holy One of Israel, history and faith and literary and structural features.

a. The Messianic hope

As the commentary shows in detail, the Isaianic literature is built around three Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1–37), the Servant (chapters 38–55) and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56–66).¹ It also shows how each of these portraits is integral to the ‘book’ in which it is set.² Standing back from the portraits, however, we discover the same features in each, indicative of the fact that they are meant as facets of the one Messianic person. Thus,

1. In each portrait the Messiah is revealed as endowed with Spirit and word.³
2. The concept of ‘righteousness’ recurs throughout, characteristic of throne and King (9:7) and the nature of his rule (11:4). Likewise, righteousness lies at the heart of the work of the Servant (53:11; 54:17), the character of the Anointed Conqueror (61:10; 63:1) and the outcome of his activity (61:3, 11).
3. While it is naturally emphasized that the King is of Davidic descent (9:6–7)—is indeed ‘David’ (11:1)—it is also true that the covenanting work of the Servant⁴ is the realization of ‘the sure mercies of David’ (55:3). Furthermore, in the case of the Anointed Conqueror the climax of his victory is presented under the Davidic motif of the conquest of Edom (63:1; see on 34:1–17).
4. Each of the Messianic representations embraces equally Israel and the Gentile world. In each case the movement is from a central work outwards: the restoration of Zion (1:26–27) merges into the inflooding of the nations (2:2–4); the royal ‘David’ of 11:1 rules over a new world (11:6–9) and his harmonized people (11:13–14) become the ‘troops’ which ‘assault’ Philistia (11:14) and bring the Gentiles into subjection.⁵ The

¹ The main Messianic passages are: 7:10–15; 9:1–7<8:23–9:6; 11:1–16; 14:28–32; 24:21–23; 32:1–8; 33:17–24 (on the King); 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12 (on the Servant); and 59:21; 61:1–3; 61:10–62:7; 63:1–6 (on the Anointed Conqueror).

² See pp. 37, 74, 131, 289, 326, 461, 493.

³ 11:1–2, 4; 42:1; 49:1–3; 50:4; 59:21; 61:1–3.

⁴ 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3.

⁵ The subjection motif belongs within the ‘kingly’ metaphor: kings conquer, and one state comes to terms with another by submission. The intended reality in the use of the motif is that of sub-

panoramic spread of David's rule over the world (chapters 13–27) includes the coequal membership of erstwhile outcasts and aliens (19:23–25; 27:12–13). The Servant is introduced as the vehicle of divine revelation to the Gentiles (42:1–4), but the developing portrait shows that he performs this work by restoring Israel/Jacob (49:1–6) and thus himself becoming the Lord's salvation to the ends of the earth (49:6). When he accomplishes his saving work (52:13–53:12) the call to enter into the benefits extends to both Zion (chapter 54) and the whole world (chapter 55). The advent of the Anointed Conqueror as a Redeemer to Zion (59:20–21) brings the nations into the light Zion enjoys (chapter 60), and the salvation that comes to Zion becomes a universal message (62:11–12). The explication of the Conqueror's role, implicit in 63:7–66:24, includes a Gentile hope as glorious as anything in the rest of Scripture, and much more the result of missionary enterprise (66:19) than appears elsewhere in the Old Testament.

5. The 'Messianic enigma'⁶ evidenced in the Old Testament is especially prominent in these three portraits with their implication of a Messiah who is plainly man and truly God. The King is born in David's line (11:1) but he is also the root from which David springs (11:10) and the 'Mighty God' (9:6). The Servant possesses a human ancestry and appearance (53:2) and had the common human experience of rejection (53:3) and a trial of suffering beyond any other (50:6; 52:14). But he was also 'the arm of the LORD', the Lord himself visibly present in saving action (53:1; cf. 51:9; 52:10). The 'arm' of the Lord reappears at the beginning of the 'Anointed Conqueror' sequence (59:16) as the Lord himself dons the garments symbolic of his capacity for and commitment to the effectuating of his righteousness and the working of salvation. But in fact the garments are passed to the Anointed One (61:10) and it is his righteousness, vengeance and redemption which are finally accomplished (63:1, 4). The sequence which began with the Lord's 'arm' ends with the 'arm' of the Anointed Conqueror (63:5).

The coinciding presentations of the portraits of the Servant⁷ and the Anointed Con-

mission to the truth and therefore submission, initially, to those who minister the truth. See on 11:14; 45:14–25.

⁶ Cf. Mt. 22:41. See J. A. Motyer, 'Messiah' (*IBD*); B. B. Warfield, 'The divine Messiah in the Old Testament', *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. S. G. Craig (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1952).

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

queror merit further exploration. The broad comparisons can be displayed in a diagram.

The Servant

42:1–4	49:1–6	50:4–9	52:13–53:12
Biography	Autobiography	Autobiography	Biography
The Servant's task	The Servant's task	The Servant's Commitment	The Servant's completion of his task

⁷ On the interpretation of the Servant Songs see North, *Suffering Servant*; H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord* (Lutterworth, 1952), pp. 3–88; E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Tyndale Press, 1954), pp. 103–141. The main trends of interpretation have been to see the Servant as personified or idealized Israel or a personification of the ‘remnant’ (collective views); as the prophet himself (autobiographical view); or as an individual, whether a known person within Israel’s history or the foreseen Messiah (individual views). Collective views find difficulty over the perfection attributed to the Servant, as ‘Israel’, including the remnant, is always classed as sinful and needy before God. On the convolutions to which a collectivist is driven, see Wade’s tabulation of the six contrasts between Israel and the Servant followed by his remarkable conclusion that they are, nevertheless, the same! (Wade, p. 267). The autobiographical view faces difficulty in chapter 53 where the Servant dies yet lives on and, of course, in 49:3 where the Servant is named ‘Israel’ (see Whybray). Attempts to identify the Servant with known (Jeremiah) or unknown (Duhm’s ‘leprous rabbi’) individuals make a mockery of the whole exercise of interpretation for no such individual can sustain the comparison and we would have to conclude that the Servant came and went without being recognized or without having achieved the task allotted to him. Here also Duhm set Isaiah studies off on an unproductive track by isolating the Songs from their context and treating them as later intrusions. Not every commentator who has adopted a ‘Messianic’ view has rectified this fault or shown the integration of the whole sequence of chapters 40–55. Only when this is done is the Servant rightly seen in the sort of developmental light that Rowley sketched. See also M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (SPCK, 1959).

He is endowed with the spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	He is endowed with the word	
	He experiences despondency	He experiences suffering	He experiences suffering
Tailpiece (42:5–9)	Tailpiece (49:7–13)	Tailpiece (50:10–11)	Tailpiece (54:1–55:13)

The Anointed Conqueror

	61:1–3	61:10–62:7	63:1–6
59:21			
Biography	Autobiography	Autobiography	Autobiography
The Conqueror's task	The Conqueror's task	The Conqueror's commitment	The conqueror's completion of his task
He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	
	He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation
Tailpiece (60:1–22)	Tailpiece (61:4–9)	Tailpiece (62:8–12)	Tailpiece (63:7–66:24)

The two presentations are:

1. *Continuous*, in that the ‘seed’ of the Servant appear for the first time in the final Servant Song ([53:10](#)) and reappear in the first Song of the Anointed Conqueror ([59:21](#)).
2. *Parallel*, as indicated above, but note also that in each series the first appearance of the Messianic personage is unheralded: he suddenly steps onto the stage. In each case the third Song is anonymous; only the context makes it clear who the speaker is.
3. *Contrasting*, in that in the Servant-series there is a mounting emphasis on self-submissiveness, reaching its climax in the last two Songs, whereas in the Conqueror-series there is a mounting emphasis on action, reaching its climax in the last two Songs.

The change from biography to autobiography in the fourth Songs must be seen as deliberately intended in order to bring out this same contrast between the one who ‘opened not his mouth’ in the final enacting of his task and the one who brings the work of vengeance and redemption to its spine-tingling conclusion. The most obvious explanation of the way the two figures are presented is that it is a conscious literary construction, deliberately devised. This suits the contexts, respectively chapters [40–55](#) and [56–66](#), which read like books with a plan and structure and the craft of the writer. By contrast, the diffused presentation of the King in chapters [1–37](#) has much more the feeling of a written deposit resulting from a spoken ministry.

These similarities and contrasts must be accounted for in any synthetic view of the Isaianic literature. King, Servant and Anointed Conqueror, however, make a single picture in which each needs the others. Both the King ([9:1–5](#)) and the Servant ([53:12](#); cf. [49:24–26](#); [52:3–6](#)) are victors, but without the Conqueror the victory is neither explained nor consummated. The King rules in righteousness over a righteous community ([32:1–8](#)), but how can he do so until the Servant provides righteousness for the Lord’s servants ([53:11](#); [54:17](#)) and the Conqueror effectuates righteousness and overthrows their enemies ([63:1–6](#))? The King rules over the whole world (see references above), but how can he do so until the Servant opens the way for all who will to come to feast and to enjoy the ‘sure mercies of David’ ([55:1–5](#)) and until the Conqueror creates a world free of opposition?

b. The motif of the city

Jerusalem first came into the traditions of the people of God with the person of Melchizedek ([Gn. 14:18](#)) and the recognition of his royal priesthood by Abraham. There-

after nothing significant happened until the capture and occupation of the city by David ([2 Sa. 5:6–10](#)) and his centralizing of the city politically and religiously in Israel ([2 Sa. 6](#)). David's understanding of the city as 'the place the Lord chose' is revealed in [2 Samuel 7:10–11](#). [Joshua 10:1](#) provides a hint that the Melchizedek/Adonizedek tradition was maintained in Jerusalem, and if this is the case then David, on setting his throne there himself became the successor to Melchizedek. This provides background for the use of the Melchizedek tradition as a vehicle of Messianic hope in [Psalm 110](#),⁸ just as the Abrahamic tradition leads into [Psalms 47, 87 etc.](#) Thus, through David (and Nathan) and under God, the Davidic monarchy, the Melchizedek priesthood, the Abrahamic promises and the chosen city all came together. But it fell to Isaiah to become the chief propagandist of this city-based royal eschatology. The Isaianic literature could be accurately described as 'the book of the city'. To be sure, its scope is 'Judah and Jerusalem' ([1:1](#)), but in its vision the fate of Judah is sealed in the city, and the restoration of the city is the restoration not merely of the people but of the world. Four Isaianic strands are woven together in this use of the city motif in which Jerusalem, Zion, mount/mountain and city are broadly interchangeable terms: divine judgment,⁹ preservation and restoration,¹⁰ the security of Zion and security in Zion ([14:32; 28:16](#)) and the centrality of the city in the divine thought and plan.¹¹

The most striking use of the city motif is 'the tale of two cities'. The ongoing history of the world produces a global society structured without God, the humanly-made, humanly-centred city, created by human cleverness for human salvation. The small beginnings in Shinar ([Gn. 11:1–4](#)) are thus a microcosm of what the whole earth will be at the end. Contemporaneous with the inevitable divine overthrow of this city there is created the 'city of God', a new world order constructed by God on his plan, with himself

⁸ See A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (University of Wales Press, 1967).

⁹ [1:8; 3:1, 8, 16; 4:3–4; 10:12, 24–25, 32; 22:1–14; 64:10; 66:6](#). This theme of judgment is reflected in the ruined city of [49:14–21; 54:1, 11](#).

¹⁰ The preservation of the city ([1:8; 26:1; 29:1–8; 31:5–9; 36:15; 37:10, 32–35; 38:6](#)); its restoration ([40:2, 9; 52:1; 57:13; 61:3; 66:8](#)); the Davidic restoration ([1:21, 26–27; 24:23; 33:20](#)); universal ([2:2–4; 11:9; 27:13; 60:14; 62:12; 65:25](#)); redeemed ([51:17; 52:1–2, 7–8; 59:20; 62:11](#)); Cyrus ([45:13](#)); sanctuary/divine dwelling ([4:3–5; 12:6; cf. 30:19](#)).

¹¹ E.g. [14:25; 41:27; 46:13; 60:14; 62:1, 6; 65:18–19; 66:13](#).

at the centre and from where he reigns over a universe of righteousness and peace. The central outworking of this striking idea is in chapters 13–27, particularly chapters 24–26 (e.g. 24:10; 25:2–3, 6–10 26:1–6). It is interesting to note that while chapters 40–55 share the city motif and are certainly not lacking in world vision, the main links are between chapters 1–37 and 56–66.¹²

c. The Holy One of Israel

The focal point of the call of Isaiah is the holiness of God. It is the only thing capable of ‘filling all the earth’ and the only quality in the whole Old Testament which has to be ‘cubed’ in order adequately to express its worth and magnitude (6:3). Within the call-narrative (6:1–13) the notion of holiness is applied in three directions. First, holiness and transcendence. The vision is of the exalted Sovereign (*Lord*, *'ādōnāy*, in verse 1; *King* in verse 5), and the nature of that sovereignty is defined in the ceaseless cry of the seraphim that the Lord is holy. Secondly, holiness and judgment. The clarity of the prophet’s reactions in verse 5 makes up for any uncertainty in translating verse 4. It is a deadly thing for a sinner to be found in the presence of the Holy One. No sentence need be pronounced from the throne; conscience declares personal and national guilt and its consequence. Thirdly, holiness and salvation. The smoke of holiness (*cf. Ex. 19:18*) left the means of salvation (the altar) still in view (verse 6), and from the presence and by the will of the Holy One a seraph flew to be the minister of cleansing and atonement to the sinner. The whole of the Isaianic literature has a theology of holiness exactly as if it all depended on the truth enunciated in chapter 6.

As far as general statistics are concerned Isaiah is the prophet of holiness. In the Isaianic literature the adjective ‘holy’ (*qādōš*) is used of God more frequently than in all the rest of the Old Testament taken together.¹³ Even when the adjectival use of the noun (only Is. 52:10) is taken into account the Isaianic literature still contains over one third of the total ascriptions of holiness to God in the Old Testament.¹⁴ It could even be sug-

¹² Note, however, the reappearance of 35:10 in 51:11 and of 11:6–9 in 65:25.

¹³ Thirty-three times in Isaiah compared with twenty-six times in the rest of the Old Testament.

¹⁴ Thirty-four times out of a total of ninety, of which two are in Psalms. ‘Adjectival noun’ means, for example, the attribution of holiness by the use of the idiom ‘God of holiness’. In general this is a stronger affirmation of the quality concerned than is achieved by the simple use of an adjective.

gested that the overwhelming preference for the simple adjective rather than the adjectival noun arises from the impression caused by the threefold ‘holy’ of 6:3.

The ambience of the references to the Holy God covers the topics raised in the prophet’s call. There are three notable statements of his transcendence in holiness (5:16; 40:25 57:15) to which may be added the implied transcendence of the Holy One as Creator (41:20), Potter (45:9) and Maker (45:11; 54:5). The emphasis in the Book of the King (chapters 1–37) is on the rejection of the Holy One¹⁵ and the judgment which follows (5:16, 24; 10:17 30:12–14). However, as in chapter 6, stress is placed equally on the Holy One as the Saviour who invites his people back (30:15), whom the remnant trust (10:20) and acknowledge as holy (29:23) and in whose salvation they rejoice (12:6; 29:19). The Book of the Servant makes a prevailing link between holiness and redemption¹⁶ and this is the topic of the two references in the Book of the Anointed Conqueror (60:9, 14). In continuance of this, the latter book carries a major stress on the holiness of the redeemed state (60:9, 14).

When we review these references we find that they do indeed reflect the holiness theology of chapter 6 and carry the same emphasis on the major truth that the Holy One is the Redeemer. The most impressive stress on the divine holiness comes, however, with the use of the title ‘the Holy One of Israel’, which occurs twenty-five times in Isaiah as compared with seven in the remainder of the Old Testament.¹⁷ The distribution of the title throughout the three sections of the book is 12:11:2. Whether this title is an Isaianic coinage can neither be proved or disproved. Its absence from Micah, the contemporary of Isaiah of Jerusalem, suggests that it was in some way an Isaianic peculiar not for general currency. Its use throughout the Isaianic literature is a unifying factor requiring explanation. As a title it is full of majesty and mystery: the God who is transcendent in holiness has brought himself into close relationship with a specified people whereby they may claim that he is theirs and he that they are his. The whole Isaianic literature is an explication of this basic situation: the awesome threat which holiness constitutes to an unworthy, careless, rejecting and unresponsive people (chapters 1–37); the lengths to which the Holy One will go to deal with sin, reclaim the sinner and

¹⁵ 1:4; 5:24; 30:11; 31:1; 37:23.

¹⁶ 41:14; 43:3, 14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 52:10; 54:5.

¹⁷ 2 Ki. 19:22; Pss. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Je. 50:29; 51:5; Ezk. 39:7. See also Is. 29:23.

create a righteous people for himself (chapters 40–55); and the eternal state of holiness which he will prepare for them and wherein they will enjoy him for ever (chapters 56–66).

d. History and faith

Isaiah of Jerusalem ministered from the year King Uzziah died (740/39), through the reigns of Jotham (740/39–732/31), Ahaz (732/31–716/15) and Hezekiah (716/15–687/86).¹⁸ The peace which in general prevailed throughout Uzziah's reign was politically occasioned by the dormant state of the Assyrian Empire. In 745, however, the energetic imperialist Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) acceded, and he was followed by three equally ambitious kings: Shalmaneser V (726–722), Sargon II (721–705) and Sennacherib (704–681).¹⁹ The westward pressure of Assyria first touched Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, but it was soon clear that Judah would have to make up its mind wherein its security lay in a day of threat. It was onto this stage that Isaiah stepped to minister in two parallel crises, the first under Ahaz and the second under Hezekiah.

The crisis under Ahaz

From the days of Jotham Judah had been under pressure from the north (2 Ki. 15:32, 37). It is evident that the Assyrian threat had driven Aram and Ephraim into each other's arms for collective security (Is. 17:3). It is not clear why they moved against Judah. Was Ahaz already moving towards the alliance with Assyria which he finally made and were they thus dealing with a potential danger in their own backyard? Or was Ahaz genuinely hesitant about joining in their defensive anti-Assyrian pact and they were exerting pressure so as to achieve a total 'West Palestinian Treaty Organization'? In any case, invasion brought success to them (2 Ch. 28:5–8) even though, for reasons not recorded, they failed to press their advantage to the point of taking Jerusalem (Is. 7:1). The invasion did, however, increase Judah's sense of isolation among the southern states, and when the second wave of attack was experienced Judah faced Edomite and Philistine incursion (2 Ch. 28:17–18; N.B. 'again') as well as the dreaded invasion from the north.

¹⁸ 2 Ki. 15:1–7, 32–38; 16:1–20; 18–20; 2 Ch. 26–32.

¹⁹ See Erlandsson.

It is with this second invasion, designed by its architects to be decisive even to the point of terminating the dynasty of David, that [Isaiah 7:2–9](#) is concerned. As the commentary explains, this element of dynastic threat was central to the situation as Isaiah sought to make Ahaz confront it. But in the face of invasion on three fronts, coupled with a deliberate threat to the royal house, it is no wonder that the current Davidic incumbent and his people panicked ([Is. 7:2](#)). However, the fact that at this juncture Ahaz should be found considering Jerusalem's water-supply shows that in political leadership he was determined not to be a loser. The fact also that Isaiah, facing a king looking after human means of security, should counsel quietness ([7:4](#)) and faith ([7:9](#)) exposes the decision the Davidic king had to make. Is the security of the Lord's people no different from that of nations to whom he has not revealed himself or claimed as his own? Is the Davidic king, sitting on the Lord's throne ([1 Ki. 1:27](#)), as dependent on water-supply, defences, arms and allies as other kings to whom no divine promises have been made and whose capital cities do not rest on a divinely placed rock foundation ([28:16](#))?

In the event, Ahaz refused Isaiah's call to faith, choosing instead the pathway of worldly security. He made his submission to Assyria on condition that Assyria would in return deal with the northern threat ([2 Ki. 16:5–9](#)). His short-term solution was purchased at the expense of a long-term price, for in every real sense the house of David ended with Ahaz. The remaining kings in David's line inherited a puppet throne by courtesy, first of Assyria, then Babylon, until the royal line disappeared into the sands of the exile, never to reign in Zion again.

The crisis under Hezekiah

During Hezekiah's reign the whole of west Palestine came into uneasy subjection to Assyria. Damascus fell in 732 and Samaria in 722, and the two northern powers vanished as Isaiah had said they would ([7:7–9](#)). The southern states found themselves, on the one hand, gripped by Assyria and, on the other, pressed by Egypt to front a concerted rebellion. The death of Sargon II and the accession of Sennacherib (704) seemed to offer an opportunity for revolt. The ancient conglomerate empires were held together only by the personality and ability of the current ruler, and it was almost *de rigueur* for subject peoples to revolt when the hand that had gripped them was relaxed and before a new hand could renew their servitude. Furthermore, the remarkable Merodach-Baladan was once more ruling in Babylon, and even in Mesopotamia itself

Assyria's continuance as the dominant power was by no means a certainty.²⁰ To the south, Egypt was vociferous in promising backing to a rebellion. What was Hezekiah to do? The independent sovereignty of the throne of David was a precious thing and an understandably enticing objective, but how to secure it? The alternatives were clear: Egypt was offering an alliance and Merodach-Baladan was sending ambassadors, presumably also offering an alliance but in any case suggesting that he and Hezekiah make common cause in opposition to Assyria (39:1–2). Against this, however, Isaiah, in the name of the Lord, was offering promises. During Hezekiah's illness the promise of recovery (38:5) was gratuitously amplified into a promise that the Lord would defend and deliver Hezekiah and his city from Assyria (38:6), and both promises received the double confirmation of the sign of the shadow and Hezekiah's return to the house of the Lord (38:7–8; 2 Ki. 20:5). Between the lines of Isaiah's recorded ministry we hear the reiteration of divine promises as the main thrust of his message (28:16; 30:15). Like his father before him, however, Hezekiah found the lure of politics and militarism too strong. His envoys signed the Egyptian alliance (28:14–15) and he raised the standard of rebellion. The inevitable followed. By 701 Sennacherib was secure enough to turn his attention to his western dominions and Hezekiah found that (in his own metaphor) he had conceived a baby he was not strong enough to bring to birth (37:3)!

The course of the Assyrian campaign is disputed and different interpretations of the biblical material are offered.²¹ The view taken in the commentary is that, following the battle of Eltekeh, at which Egypt's single attempt to redeem its promises was quashed, Sennacherib turned on Judah. His ferocious assault on Judah's defences demonstrated the futility of further resistance, and Hezekiah asked for terms. The Assyrians imposed a fine which strained Hezekiah's treasury to the limit (2 Ki. 18:13–16). But, having accepted this tribute, the king of Assyria at once returned to the attack (2 Ki. 18:17) and earned for himself and his empire a deserved reputation for treachery (see on 21:2; 24:16; 33:1). It is at this point that Isaiah takes up the narrative (see on 36:1), and every-

²⁰ See Erlandsson.

²¹ J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (SCM, 1972); H. H. Rowley, 'Hezekiah's reform and rebellion', *Men of God* ed. H. H. Rowley (Nelson, 1963); L. L. Honor, *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine* (New York, 1926); B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (SCM, 1967); R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, *JSOTS*, 13 (1980).

thing moves swiftly to its chilling conclusion ([37:36–38](#)). Belatedly taking up a position of faith, Hezekiah found the Lord to be as good as his word, and king and city were rescued. The period of Assyrian invasions of Judah was over and the empire itself began its slow decline. The history recorded in the Bible is history with a message, not because of a tendentious selection of available facts but because it isolates the grain which runs right along the wood. When, as in Isaiah's case, the grain is exposed it is stamped with the single word 'faith'. Putting the matter in a broad, scriptural perspective, 'justification by faith' is not a 'Sunday' truth bearing only on our relationship with God but also a 'Monday' truth for the conduct of life in all its challenges. This is what Ahaz refused to face and Hezekiah forgot. In each case the Lord offered promises backed by divine guarantees; in each case they chose the road of personal endeavour, a do-it-yourself salvation based on the worldly specifics of arms and alliances. With chapters [1–37](#) before us, Isaiah is a sort of Paul of the Old Testament, a prophet of faith and, in its truest sense, 'simple' reliance on what God has promised.

Faith denied, hope affirmed

By dividing the Isaianic literature at chapter [37](#) the commentary capitalizes on the observation often made that chapters [38](#) and [39](#) set the scene for the 'Babylonian' chapters which follow.²² Indeed they do. Flying in the face of the confirmed promises he had received on his sick-bed ([38:5–6](#)), Hezekiah was swept off his feet by the visit of Mero-dach-Baladan's men. Although what he said to them is not recorded, he certainly did not send them away with the message that the Lord, and not force of arms, would restore his sovereign freedom. Rather, in actions speaking louder than words, he conformed to their view that power must be met with power, arms with arms, and the Assyrians with an alliance they could not afford to ignore. As the discussion of chapter

²² This is usually assumed to be a 'bonus' arising from the editorial 'lifting' of these four historical chapters from 2 Kings into Isaiah. It may be, however, that chapters [36–37](#) and [38–39](#) were first given their unchronological order by the editor of Isaiah in order to provide, respectively, a rock of history under the promises of chapters [6–35](#) and an essential background to chapters [40–55](#) (see the additional note to chapter [37](#)). For differing views see R. E. Clements, 'The unity of the book of Isaiah', *Interpretation*, [36](#) (1982); J. P. Payne, 'The unity of Isaiah: Evidence from chapters [36–39](#)', *JETS* (1963); J. H. Walton, 'New observations on the date of Isaiah', *JETS*, [28](#) (1987).

³⁹ in the commentary shows, Isaiah meets all the canons of the modern study of forthtelling and foretelling in his handling of this situation. The name ‘Babylon’ was handed to him and he replied with a forecast about Babylon, a forecast of the future with a cruel relevance to the present,²³ no matter how much the unimpressive Hezekiah might have tried to soften its impact. The ‘Babylon’ in which this prediction was fulfilled was not the contemporary kingdom of Merodach-Baladan²⁴ but the Babylonian Empire which took Nineveh in 612 and replaced Assyria as the dominant world power. The end of David’s kingdom was as sudden as it was pathetic. Following the death of the able Josiah in 609, Judah tumbled to its doom under two incompetent kings until the fatuous Zedekiah, still hopelessly rebelling, provoked Nebuchadnezzar’s final assault. Deportations to Babylon in 597 and 586 left the city and kingdom depopulated and ruined and the monarchy a thing of the past.

The preface, then, to chapters ^{40–55} raises two interlocking questions: does banishment to Babylon mark the end of the history of the Lord’s people, and if so, does this mean that they have been guilty of a sin beyond the power and readiness of the Lord to redeem? Or, to put both issues positively, is he Lord of history (whereby he can recover his people from the hand of the enemy) and God of salvation (whereby sin will not have the last word)? The ‘feel’ of chapters ^{40–55} is that of reading a book, a conscious literary production, and one designed to answer precisely these two questions. Whatever be the prehistory of the poems that make it up, it seems the product of the study rather than of the market-place. If its substance was ever preached, it has now become detached from the pulpit. Its units are crafted with supreme literary artistry and not a word is out of place. Theologically, its message is encapsulated in the telling juxtaposition of ‘Nothing will be left, says the LORD’ (^{39:6}) and (lit.) ‘Bring comfort to my people, your God keeps saying’ (^{40:1}). Whether this is the message of Isaiah himself probing forward into the

²³ Mauchline allows the possibility that the Babylonian prophecy in ^{39:1–8} is Isaianic, proporary force (as indeed Erlandsson has now demonstrated). On ^{13:1–23}, however, he writes, ‘passages which speak of Babylon must be attributed to the sixth century BC at the earliest’. This reflects a general ambivalence among commentators.

²⁴ See Erlandsson. Childs (*Introduction*) seems to misunderstand Erlandsson’s purpose, which is not simply to discover the original historical setting of ^{Is. 13–14} but to show the extent to which Babylon under Merodach-Baladan was a threat to Assyrian dominance. In this he has succeeded.

future or, according to common theory, of an anonymous prophet in the thick of Babylonian life, the literature as we have inherited it calls for another exercise of faith in the face of life; not life as it rushes to meet us with all its threats and snares (as in chapters 1–37) but life as we have helped to shape it by our wrong choices, faithlessness and sin. The Lord is the God of Cyrus (44:24–48:22), ordering history in its magnitude as much as in its minutiae for the welfare of his people, and also the God of the Servant (49:1–55:13), providing for their iniquity, transgression and sin.

The disciplines and tensions of waiting

The evident link between chapters 40–55 and Babylon naturally suggests that there may be a parallel link between chapters 56–66 and the period after the exile. The section itself, however, lacks specific historical allusion. There is nothing parallel to the reference to Ahaz in 7:1 or the plain association with the period of the Egyptian alliance in chapters 30–31, or anything like the four references to Babylon in chapters 40–55 (43:14; 47:1; 48:14 20). Nevertheless, the more firmly specialists have dated chapters 40–55 in the time of the exile the more confidently they have written scenarios of the post-exilic period to accommodate the evidence of chapters 56–66. It is possible that this is not the most fruitful approach to the section and that we should rather understand the absence of historical reference to imply that Isaiah is dealing with principles rather than with situations—as is the case in other passages where names, implied dates and specific events are not evident.²⁵ For example, as Isaiah's vision takes him further and further from his immediate setting the names in chapters 13–20 become the cryptic allusions of chapters 21–23 and the unanchored eschatological vision of chapters 24–27. Disservice is done to chapters 24–27 by endeavours to name 'the ruined city' (24:10) etc. (see the commentary on chapters 13–27). But whatever view is taken of chapters 56–66, whether they allude to the post-exilic period or are a visionary outreach to the eschaton, they take over after the Lord has rescued his people from Babylon through Cyrus (chapters 40–48) and after he has redeemed them from sin through the Servant (chapters 49–55). To tie these chapters too restrictively to the post-exilic period is to lose touch with their link with the Servant, which is in fact stronger than their link with Cyrus and the return. Their theme is announced in 56:1. Historically, the people are

²⁵ See the introductory comments to chapters 1–5; 21–27; 28–29; 40:1–43:13.

back from Babylon ([48:20–22](#)); conceptually, they are the redeemed of the Lord, his servants, clothed with the righteousness of his Servant ([53:11](#); [54:17](#)). Under each heading they are still his waiting people, for what has already been done leaves some of their needs unsatisfied. Therefore, they are called to persevere in the disciplines of ‘judgment and righteousness’—the life the Lord decides and approves—until his salvation comes and his righteousness receives full expression. The Lord’s true people find themselves subject to oppression and tension within a mixed community ([56:6–57:21](#)). Experience teaches them that they cannot live up to what the Lord requires ([58:1–14](#)) because of inadequacies within themselves ([59:1–13](#)). There is set before them, however, the expectation of an anointed one ([59:14–63:6](#)) whose work of salvation meets their needs, whose work of righteousness fulfils all that God requires, and whose work of vengeance deals with every opposing force. Hence they pray ([63:7–64:12](#)) and hold on to the promises ([65:1–66:24](#)), confidently expecting the eternal glory of the new creation. In a word, once more the Isaianic literature centralizes faith—the faith that persists, prays and waits in hope.

e. Literary and structural features

Difference in style has been one of the continually urged reasons for the need to distinguish chapters [40–55](#) from chapters [1–39](#) but careful appraisal of the literature shows that, one way or another, more must be said. It is true that there is a high, poetic style chiefly concentrated in chapters [40–55](#) and that this contrasts with the more workman-like rhythmic prose or somewhat less artful poetry in which the remainder of the literature is expressed. It would be misleading simply to say that the one is the product of written poetic skill and the other the product of the preached message, for what we have throughout the prophets is not their verbatim messages as preached but a written distillation of their ministry. Anyone with any experience of preaching can see that this is so. There is not a single ‘message’ in all the prophets that could be preached simply by proclaiming it as it stands; it is too condensed, too closely argued and too brief for any congregation to take it in just like that.

Similarly, in the Isaianic literature both styles are literary products, but the fact remains that the one impresses as never having existed other than as a carefully crafted written exercise and the other as the preserved record of spoken ministry. These two styles, however, appear throughout the whole book.²⁶ On the one hand, we may com-

pare 4:2–6 and 35:1–10 with chapters 55 and 60 and, on the other hand, 1:10–15, 29–31 with 43:22–24 and 65:2–5, or chapters 28–32 with chapter 48 and 59:1–13. It is intolerably wooden and unimaginative to deny that one author could produce both these styles.²⁷ Many a preacher has turned his hand also to hymnology, and with equal expertise in each realm. Style as such, therefore, does not settle questions of authorship, though undoubtedly the majority of specialists are drawn to a multi-author solution along the lines of that proposed by Clements. This is the view that ‘at some stage’ the messages of Isaiah of Jerusalem and ‘Deutero-Isaiah’ were brought together because chapters 40–55 were felt to be appropriate and even necessary to complement the message of chapters 1–35 and that material like chapter 35 was introduced into the earlier prophecies as part of the integrative process.²⁸ Our present purpose, however, is satisfied by noting that style is one of the features that binds the whole Isaianic literature together, no matter how diversities of style are accounted for.

The literature also evidences identities of structure throughout. The present commentary is based on concentrated ‘structurist’ study. It is taken as axiomatic that in any part of the Bible sound exegesis is imperilled if errors are committed in discerning the structure of a book, passage or verse. On the other hand, properly noted structure provides a control, determining to a very large extent the ambience within which exegesis may move.²⁹ The Isaianic literature is notable for a structure which we may call the ‘extended doublet’. This consists in covering the same area of truth in the same consecutive steps twice over. For example, the Judah-based and Israel-based parallels in 7:1–9:7 <6> and 9:8 <7> –11:16 are viewed from two angles of perspective, and the

²⁶ 2:2–4; 4:2–6; 9:1–7<8:23–9:6>; 11:1–9; 12:1–6; 21:1–10; 25:1–10; 26:1–6; 33:17–24; 35:1–10; 40–55 (*passim*); 60:1–22; 61:1–3; 62:1–63:6.

²⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* contains high poetry and varied prose styles. Cf. also John Milton’s ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘An Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ with the majesty of ‘Paradise Lost’ and the rhythmic prose of ‘Areopagitica’, and Archbishop Cranmer’s Preface to the Book of Common Prayer (‘Concerning the Service of the Church’ and ‘Of Ceremonies’) and the Prayer of Humble Access—or the Table of Kindred and Affinity!

²⁸ Clements, ‘The unity of the book of Isaiah’.

²⁹ See, e.g. pp. 522f. A proper exegesis of 65:1 must take into account its structured parallelism with 66:18–21.

elucidation of principles in the three sections of 28:1–29:24 is paralleled by the application of these principles in the three sections of 30:1–35:10. Other extended doublets are 42:18–43:21 with 43:22–44:23 and 51:1–8 with 51:17–52:12.³⁰ Chapters 13–27 develop this feature into a vast extended triplet, the ultimate panorama of the Davidic hope (see pp. 133f.). The extended doublet does not seem to be used in chapters 56–66 where, instead, a large-scale ‘arch’ or ‘trajectory’ pattern binds the eleven chapters into a coherent presentation (see p. 461).³¹ Like the doublet, the arch/trajectory structure is used throughout the literature as the form of individual poems, very often undercutting allegations of intrusive material and adding literary dynamic to interpretation.

The arch/trajectory structure is by no means peculiar to Isaiah³² though it does pervade the whole literature. Certainly more distinctive is the neat insertion of usual (a-b-a-b-c; e.g. 35:4) or unusual (4:2–6; 32:5–8 44:24–28)³³ poetic formations and a use of rhyme unparalleled in subtlety and abundance elsewhere in the Old Testament.³⁴ The Isaianic ‘palindrome’ was noted as long ago as Delitzsch. As he used the term it did not apply to the use of an inclusio delimiting a passage but to sentences structured so as to begin and end with the same word. To an extent beyond what Delitzsch recorded in his

³⁰ There is also the extended parallel between Cyrus and the Servant (see on 44:24).

³¹ Watts finds ‘a marked structural resemblance to the arch in architecture ... with the block at the crown of the arch being called the keystone since it conveys balancing lateral pressures to the two sides ...’ (p. 15). This description matches what we find throughout the Isaianic literature: poems balanced, around and held together by, a central truth.

³² See my forthcoming commentaries on Zephaniah and Haggai in Baker Book House’s Minor Prophets series, ed. T. McComiskey; J. Baldwin, *Zechariah* (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, IVP, 1972), pp. 85–86. On general questions of structure see D. Clines *et al.*, *Art and Meaning*, *JSOTS*, 19 (1952); House, *Zephaniah* and *The Unity of the Twelve*; P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Analysis* (SPCK, 1989); T. Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Apollos, 1987). For consistent application of ‘structurist’ principles, see D. W. Gooding, *The Gospel of Luke* (IVP, 1989) and *True to Faith: A Fresh Approach to the Acts of the Apostles* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1990).

³³ E.g. 16:13; 21:1–2; 22:4; 30:25–26; 35:4; cf. 40:2; 40:20–30; 41:11–12; 47:11; 49:19; 60:19c–20; 63:9.

³⁴ E.g. 1:9cd, 13cd, 25; 5:14cd, 27cd; 6:11e; 10:6ab; 17:10 (chiastic rhyme); 33:22 (with cross-alliteration); 41:2ef, 17de; 46:11cd; 49:10cd, 19 (a-b- -a); 53:6ab; 57:6ab; 66:1de.

commentary, this palindromic feature too stamps its mark on the whole literature;³⁵ as also does the telling use of assonance and alliteration³⁶ and a penchant for making lists of one sort or another.³⁷

Doubtless there are other literary figures unifying the Isaianic literature, but even those noted have a bearing on the supposition that the literature could be the product of an Isaianic ‘school’ of writers/preachers/thinkers. Watts is more conservative than some in proposing a lower date of 435 for the completion of the book. But even this means that over a period of three hundred years there was a continuing group (of which there is no external evidence) so self-conscious in their unity that they maintained not only theological identity but also identity in presentational skills and in the minutiae of literary styles and figures. This would register for the Isaianic literature a claim to uniqueness beyond even what its inherent grandeur demands.

2. *Isaiah as author*

O. T. Allis is correct when he observes that the fragmentation of the Isaianic literature among multiple authors and along an extended time-line is historically the product of the nineteenth-century rationalism which refused to countenance predictive prophecy.³⁸ Sadly, in addition to this, the prevailing spirit of scholarship was disposed to fragmentation rather than to holism,³⁹ and in the case of Isaiah this meant that a literature bursting with internal evidence of its unity was rather made to burst into dis-

³⁵ E.g. 1:7, 18; 7:23; 13:12 (rhyming); 14:25; 11:13 (chiastic); 35:5; 40:19; 42:13; 49:13; 54:13; 57:1, 20–21; 60:16; 66:2.

³⁶ E.g. 1:21; 5:7, 16, 30; 7:9; 8:12, 22; 14:23; 15:9; 24:1, 3–4, 6, 16, 23; 27:7; 35:9; 37:30; 40:31; 41:2; 50:4; 54:11; 58:12; 59:7, 11; 60:18 (chiastic).

³⁷ E.g. 1:17–18 (eight imperatives); 2:12–16 (ten exalted things); 3:2; 10:9 (six place-names); 10:28–32; 11:11; 15:1–9 (seventeen place-names); 21:15 (four ‘from’s); 24:2 (six comparisons); 24:7–12 (thirteen items of sorrow); 33:15–16 (six qualifications); 37:33 (four ‘not’s); 41:11–12 (four statements of overthrow); 44:24–28 (thirteen attributive clauses); 52:7 (four participles); 65:11, 13–16 (five contrasts).

³⁸ O. T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (Tyndale Press, 1951). See also the defence of unity in Oswalt’s introduction.

³⁹ See H. Harris, *The Tubingen School* (Apollos, 1990).

parate pieces. The subsequent course of study has concentrated on the fragments until it is now widely assumed that the case for multiple authorship need no longer be argued but can be assumed. This is by no means so. The evidences of unity instanced above require explanation and we must now explore the simplest explanation—that the whole literature is the product of Isaiah of Jerusalem. This introduction can only deal with major points and principles; the possibility that the whole literature is pre-exilic and the product of one mind is tackled in detail, as appropriate, throughout the commentary.

Consequent on the separation of chapters 40–55 from chapters 1–39 and the allocation of the former to an anonymous prophet in a Babylonian milieu, it seemed reasonable to look further along the time-line for an origin for chapters 56–66, for, as Smart remarks, ‘if the assumption that chapters 40–55 were written in Babylon proves unfounded, the major ground for the separation of chapters 56–66 from chapters 40–55 is removed.’⁴⁰ Arguments in favour of a post-exilic Palestinian ‘Trito-Isaiah’⁴¹ were based on considerations of structure, style and background ideas. In contrast to the coherence of chapters 40–55, Gray, for example, could not find ‘any single dominating purpose’ in chapters 56–66. No commentator has been rude enough to style the chapters a ‘rag-bag’ but the anthological view has prevailed.⁴² As the present commentary shows, this is not the only possible view of the third section of the Isaianic literature, and the contrast between coherence and non-coherence cannot now be alleged as sundering the two parts.

The question of style has been alluded to above. The continuation of the style of chapters 40–55 into chapters 56–66 has always been noted but a different style also has been observed and only the conviction that 40–55 are exilic and that, therefore, 56–66 must be post-exilic has prevented the acknowledgment that this second style is markedly pre-exilic. In fact these passages may be attributed to a post-exilic ‘Trito-Isaiah’ only if on other grounds than style a pre-exilic date is impossible. This issue is explored in the commentary without finding any necessity to question the possibility of Isaianic

⁴⁰ Smart, p. 236.

⁴¹ R. S. Foster, *The Restoration of Israel* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970).

⁴² Johnson, ‘From chaos to restoration’ shows that winds in Isaianic study are blowing in the right direction.

authorship.

The Palestinian milieu of chapters 56–66 is plain. Since there is no reference to Cyrus or Babylon the assumption is made (on the basis of the assumed date of chapters 40–55) that both are things of the past. But both broadly and in detail⁴³ the facts in chapters 56–66 of people living in Palestine under native rulers match Isaiah's eighth-century BC date. Certainly the references to religious aberration (57:3–9; 65:2–5) belong directly to the pre-exilic period. They can only be made to refer to post-exilic Jerusalem by assuming first, that these practices still continued and secondly, that the people of the return would have been seduced into them, but the suppositions lack external validation. Much is made of the plainly divided state of society as suggested in chapters 56–57 and 65–66, and a busy scenario has been written about post-exilic cleavage between the pious and the ungodly. Again, this lacks external biblical evidence and is far from compelling. Such features were in evidence at every point in Israelite life and chapters 56–66 contain nothing that is not implicit in, for example, *Isaiah* 3:13–15; 5:12–16; 8:16; 28:7–8; etc. and in the pre-exilic prophets in general.

Chapters 1–39 and 40–55 are thus the main battleground in the matter of Isaianic authorship. As the commentary shows in detail, if chapters 40–55 (though referring to the exile) are not to be dated during the exile there is no insuperable difficulty in allowing chapters 56–66 a pre-exilic, Isaianic origin. Everything depends on the dating of chapters 40–55, and we will consider this under the headings of literature, geography, history, prophecy and theology.

a. Literature

In addition to the question of styles considered above other features must be considered.⁴⁴ The rest of the prophetic books show that the literary convention under which the Old Testament was assembled was to preserve separate identity rather than to allow the work of one prophet to merge with that of another—even down to fragments like Obadiah.⁴⁵ In the case of the pinnacle of Old Testament prophecy, however,

⁴³ The interpretation of 63:18 and 64:11–12 is considered in the commentary.

⁴⁴ See R. Margoliouth, *The Indivisible Isaiah* (New York, Yeshiva University, 1964). T. R. Birks, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* (MacMillan and Co., 1878), pp. 335–349 offers some telling comments on linguistic evidence.

we are invited to believe that this procedure was abandoned. It is easy to make up stories around the supposed anonymity of chapters 40–55 such as that since the prophet of the exile was forecasting the fall of Babylon he found it expedient to conceal his name. But even were this so (and it is a plain case of special pleading), it is one thing for identity to be concealed, another for a name to be lost and yet another for the work itself to be absorbed elsewhere. Clements' view (see p. 26) that Isaiah of Jerusalem needed the 'Isaiah' of the exile to complete his message and for this reason the later prophet was added to the earlier is equally a case of writing stories to support theories. Besides which, as House's 'The unity of the twelve' shows, there can be concern to develop the wholeness of the prophetic message without sacrificing the separate identity of books and the names of their authors. There is, however, no external, manuscript authority for the separate existence at any time of any of the three supposed divisions of Isaiah. In the case of the first Isaiah manuscript from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Q^a), for example, 40:1 begins on the last line of the column which contains 38:9–39:8.

b. Geography

The question of the topographical background of chapters 40–55 is important. Ellison remarks that 'while the background of Palestine has grown faint, that of Babylonia has not become clear'.⁴⁵ The latter part of this assertion is true, the former is not. A. Lods found the geographical evidence so weighty that, pressed equally by his inability to accept predictive prophecy, he insisted that 'Deutero-Isaiah' was a resident of either Phoenicia or Palestine. He wrote:

When he wants to portray an idolater, he shows him taking his hatchet and going into the forest to fell a tree ... this would apparently rule out Egypt or Chaldea, for in neither ... area there trees fit for carving ... The oils to be had from the trees mentioned are those of W. Asia (41:19; 55:13); The landscapes or the climates of W. Asia provide him with most of his metaphors—mountain, forest, sea, snow, land

⁴⁵ The supposition, often made, that 'Malachi' is a name invented to suit the book strengthens our awareness of the determination of the ancient archivists to conserve the individuality of prophetic texts.

^aThe St Mark's Isaiah Scroll from Qumran.

⁴⁶ H. L. Ellison, *Men Spake from God* (Paternoster Press, 1958), p. 44.

made fertile by rain and not by the overflow of rivers or by irrigation, drought ... frequent mention of Lebannon, the sea and the islands.⁴⁷

The claim that on entering chapters 40–55 we pass into a Mesopotamian milieu is not borne out by the evidence. ‘Babylonia’ has certainly not ‘become clear’.

c. History

At 43:14 the prophet enters the realm of history and allusions made in principle in 40:1–43:13 are found to apply to the Babylonian captivity, the reasons for it, its limited duration and forthcoming termination. G. E. Wright gave typically luminous expression to the principle on which modern study interprets this fact: ‘A prophecy is earlier than what it predicts but contemporary with or later than what it presupposes.’⁴⁸ On this basis it has been concluded that the prophet responsible for chapters 40–55 must have been resident in Babylonia because he presupposed the captivity and from his setting within it looked forward to its conclusion. The matter cannot, however, be settled quite so quickly.

Chapters 40–55 reflect a Babylonian social and historical milieu as little as they do Babylon’s geography. The chapters are not Babylonian in setting even though 43:14–48:22 is Babylonian in orientation. Babylon is mentioned four times—as the place of captivity (43:14), as a city doomed to fall (47:1), as a locus of divine punitive action (48:14) and as the point of departure of the returnees (48:20). Otherwise there is little that is exclusively or typically Babylonian about the chapters save that Cyrus is named as Babylon’s conqueror (44:28; 45:1). It is particularly important to note that when the chapters speak about the circumstances of the exiles (e.g. 42:22; 51:14) they bear no relation to what we know of the actual experience of those who were transported to Babylon (*cf. Je. 29; Ezk. passim*). In this, as indeed in the ‘description’ of the fall of Babylon (46:1–2; 47:1–15), the prophet is not offering reportage but using conventional stereotypes. ‘When we search for evidence of the prophet’s residence in Babylon, we are surprised how hard it is to find any that is convincing.’⁴⁹ In fact, when we examine the details it would seem, in the terms Wright’s dictum dictates, that ‘Babylon’ is predicted

⁴⁷ A. Lods, *The Prophets of Israel* (Kegan Paul, 1937), p.238.

⁴⁸ G. E. Wright, *The Book of Isaiah* (John Knox Press, 1964).

⁴⁹ Smart, p. 20.

rather than presupposed, and is something foreseen in very broad terms at that. It is no more than the name of the captor. There is no evidence of eyewitness participation. The sort of detail by which an eyewitness would betray himself is simply not there—observations about the city, the way its life is ordered, the structures of its society, the feel and smell of the place. Nor, Whybray admits, do we find attention given to problems existing within what he calls ‘the Jewish community’.⁵⁰ The mask definitely slips in 52:11 where the prophet adopts a position certainly not in Babylonia.

Wright’s dictum is more attractive than useful, begging questions rather than providing direction. For what in fact constitutes a ‘presupposition’? Suppose a prophet makes a prediction, which Wright’s dictum allows him to do, does not that still future event immediately become one of the presuppositions on which he bases his continuing ministry? For now everything he says must be shaped by his knowledge of what is yet to happen. But this takes us into the next section of our enquiry.

d. Prophecy

When we discuss the bearing of predictive prophecy on the question of Isaianic authorship we must at once rule out considerations based on time factors. It is commonplace to ask if a prophet could or, more importantly, would predict an event a century and a half after his own time and then take his stand within that future event and look further forward still, another seventy years on!⁵¹ Is it possible to predict on that time-scale? Is it meaningful to do so—to say to one’s contemporaries, ‘Be comforted, in 200 years all will be well.’? It is important to remember, however, that the ‘200 years’ is our contribution to the discussion, not Isaiah’s. It comes by our hindsight, not his foresight. He says nothing of it and, for all we know, knew nothing of it.

As the commentary insists, in 39:1–8 every condition laid down by modern understanding of the prophets and their work is met. Babylon is presented to Isaiah as a topic; he replies pointedly, addressing himself to the subject as given to him, and his message of coming Babylonian judgment (39:5–7) is as relevant to his contemporaries as is his

⁵⁰ Whybray, p.196.

⁵¹ The mere passage of time should not constitute a problem. Isaiah builds in time factors when it suits him (e.g. 16:1; 21:16) but generally the time of fulfilment is open. It was 130 years before 5:1–7 was fulfilled. The question of the prediction of the personal name of Cyrus is dealt with at 44:28.

prompt message of comfort ([40:1](#)). Wright's dictum is intact—all the more so in that Babylon was a contemporary power of potentially world proportions. It is not for us to ask if Isaiah knew or did not know that the captor would or would not be Merodach-Baladan's Babylon. Politically and militarily, it could have been. But once the word 'Babylon' is spoken we have a right to ask: Where then are the rest of Isaiah of Jerusalem's predictions? For he cannot now stop. He has created a new presupposition which appears to nullify all that he had previously said by way of promise and hope, the whole vision of the King and his universal, world-gathering kingdom. If 'Babylon' is the last word, then there will be no King, no kingdom and no gathering of the nations into the Lord's people. It is not, therefore, that Isaiah must transport himself a century and a half forward and then peer still further ahead into time. Rather, standing where he is, the prophet of Babylonian disaster dare not refuse to search out what will yet happen, for his own existing message is in jeopardy. We would be very unimaginative indeed if we failed to hear the disciples of [8:16](#) pressing him to seek further revelation—and to do so or to go down in history as a failed prophet. What is more natural than that he should do this? What is more unnatural than that he should not?⁵²

e. Theology

H. H. Rowley was a true prophet of the tradition of Isaiah studies in which he stood when he wrote regarding chapters [40–55](#) that 'the whole tenor of the message and of the ideas that lie behind it and especially the thought of God and its corollaries are here different' from what is found in chapters [1–39](#).⁵³ But it simply is not so, either broadly or

⁵² Clements is correct in seeing that a true understanding of the prophetic message requires that the word of judgment should 'modulate' into the message of hope (and it is in this cause that he insists that chapters [1–35](#) 'need' chapters [40–55](#), with chapter [35](#) editorially built in to create the bridge). But within the Isaianic literature the alternatives are either that chapters [40–55](#) are the continuation of Isaiah's own ministry (in which he answers the problems raised by his prediction of the Babylonian fiasco and its contradiction of his earlier message of royal hope) or that the words of another prophet have been used to replace those of Isaiah (either because they had got lost or because the anonymous prophet did a better job!). The grand unity of the Isaianic literature points to the former.

⁵³ H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament* (Hutchinson, 1950), p. 95.

in detail. The broad theological identity of the Isaianic literature is secured by its almost exclusive claim to the title ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (see pp. 17f. above). When we consider that such a distinctive insistence on a particular, national God is not in the least suited to a prophecy with such a universalistic message as chapters 40–55 we have to ask, not why but, how a prophet other than Isaiah could have decided to use it.

Coming more to theological detail, chapters 1–39 assert six main principles: the LORD as Lord of history (e.g. 10:5–15) and supreme over idols (e.g. 2:12–20); the promise of a remnant (e.g. 1:27; 4:3; 8:11–20 10:20); the reconciliation of God and sinner on the basis of atonement (6:6–7); the vision of the restored Zion (e.g. 1:26–27; 2:2–4 4:2–6); and the Davidic Messiah (e.g. chapters 7–12). These six areas are also the theological substance of chapters 40–55. Chapters 40–48 read like a set of variations on the first three of the themes but do so, of course, in their own characteristic vocabulary and literary style, and it is important that we do not mistake change of presentation for change of thought. They do not have, for example, a ‘remnant’ vocabulary as such but they are concerned with implementing the ‘remnant’ concept in a doctrine of redemption.⁵⁴ Again, the centre-piece of Isaiah’s inaugural vision is the truth of atonement by substitutionary sacrifice. In 6:1–8 this is related directly to the prophet’s personal needs but indirectly (verse 5) to the needs of the people. Apart from 52:13–53:12 this fundamental truth remains undeveloped in the Isaianic literature. But the predicted exile, brought about by the cardinal sin of abandoning the very doctrine of faith which was the core of his proclamation, must have challenged him deeply as to the wider validity of his own experience of God and motivated him to search out a full doctrine of atonement. The topic of the restoration of Jerusalem is obviously central to chapters 40–55 where (in chapters 49–54) Zion becomes explicitly the model of the redeemed, restored people.⁵⁵ And finally, the Davidic Messiah and the Servant are one (see the section on Messianic unity above and the commentary on 55:3–4).

3. *The book of Isaiah*

⁵⁴ Lordship over history (40:21–25; 41:1–4, 25–27; 42:24–25; 44:24–45:7; 46:8–13; 47:1–25); supremacy over idols (40:18–20; 41:5–7, 21–24; 42:17; 44:9–20; 46:1–7).

⁵⁵ 40:9; 41:27; 44:26–28; 46:13; 49:17–26; 51:11; 52:1–9; 54:1–3, 11–12. Cf. the city as the centre of world-wide religion, 40:5; 42:1–4, 6; 45:14, 22–29; 49:6–7; 51:5–6; 52:10.

Whatever view is taken of the issue of the authorship of Isaiah it is essential to arrive finally at a coherent appreciation of how the literature came into its present shape. On the view that there were (say) three main authors spaced along an agreed time-line, it is in many ways simplicity itself to explain the resultant book—provided one is prepared to make at least two assumptions. First, there is the assumption (totally lacking external support but essential to the theory) of a continuing ‘school’ of Isaianic disciples,⁵⁶ concerned for the perpetuation of their master’s message and busily adapting it to their situations. Secondly, there is the assumption (which the very existence of the Old Testament as a whole validates) that within the old covenant church there were at work careful activists and conservationists who gathered and finalized this growing material. Watts’ view of an editor and colleagues at work in 435 is similar: the ongoing company of disciple-preachers and the final unification of the growing corpus into a compendious twelve-act vision with a coherent view of God and history.

But how does the literature look if we seek to place the originating and organizing mind at the beginning rather than at the end—Isaiah himself in the eighth and early seventh century BC, rather than Watts’ anonymous editor in the late fifth?

The hesitancy of specialists and commentators to see the prophets as their own editors is very difficult to understand and, in the main, arises from overlooking a prophet’s own presuppositions about himself and his work. Today many would find it impossible to think of the books of the prophets as verbally inspired by God, that is to say, that the chosen human agent not only received from God (by processes never disclosed) the essence and ‘drift’ of the message he was to convey but was also so wrought upon and superintended by God that the human words which expressed the message (words natural to that man at that time with that personality) were also the very words of God himself.⁵⁷ This is an astonishing claim and it is no wonder that specialists who came to the

⁵⁶ W. J. Dumbrell (*The Faith of Israel* [IVP, 1988], p. 99) observes that the view that a continuing group of Isaiah’s disciples produced the Isaianic literature ‘is an interesting hypothesis but one that only “explains” one unknown by another’. Cf. Clements, *NCB*, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁷ The basic identification of the prophet’s word with the Lord’s words is seen in the movement from ‘The words of Amos’ ([Am. 1:1](#)) to ‘This is what the LORD says’ ([Am. 1:3](#)). The fundamental uniqueness of prophetic inspiration is stated in [Je. 1:9](#), ‘my words in your mouth’, and the underlying miracle is illustrated in [Ezk. 2:7–3:4](#) where we note how the passage is bracketed by the

prophets amid nineteenth-century rationalism should simply dismiss it. Nor is it to be wondered at if right up to the present there remains widespread hesitation. Our duty, however, at this point is not to enquire whether Isaiah was right or wrong in thinking himself to be verbally inspired but to ask what a man who had this conviction would be likely to do with the resultant material. Would he leave it, partly written and mostly oral, to the changes and chances of history? Or would he be more likely—indeed certain—to ‘bind’ it up and ‘seal’ it among his disciples, leaving them ‘this word’ as ‘law’ and ‘testimony’ for their future instruction and guidance ([8:16–20](#))? As the commentary shows, the significance of [8:9–22](#) is the self-conscious recognition of a people within the people, a church within the church, the believing remnant whose central principle is their attachment and obedience to the sealed, attested word of God they possess.

In such a circumstance (his conviction of verbal inspiration) and with such a mandate (to bind up and seal the testamentary teaching) what procedures might be adopted? We may assume that the command in [8:16](#) applied to the material of Isaiah’s ministry to date. The quiet days after the great Sennacherib event, the Indian summer of Hezekiah’s reign, or maybe the threat constituted by the advent of Manasseh ([2 Ki. 21](#)) to succeed his father would have given Isaiah opportunity (and in the case of Manasseh, motivation and urgency) to ‘bind up’ among his disciples the total output of the fifty years since ‘the year that King Uzziah died’. Would he adopt a chronological approach, giving dates and times, ordering his messages in their written conciseness along the time-line of his days? Would he adopt a topical approach, grouping his messages under headings? Or would he search for a unifying principle and use all this God-given material to elucidate it?

The evidence of the Isaianic literature, as sketched in this introduction and detailed in the commentary, is that Isaiah adopted the last approach and, in fulfilling it, used his material with masterly freedom. In the commentary, his method is described as that of the ‘mosaic’ in which stones from differing points of origin and with individual prehistories are brought into a new integration so that it is now not the prehistory but the new design that is significant. The whole book is a huge mosaic in which totally pre-exilic material is made to serve pre-exilic, exilic, post-exilic and eschatological purposes.

command to ‘speak my words … speak my words’ and the verbalized message is given in the written scroll. This is the conviction on which the prophets based their work.

Within it, Isaiah is capable of taking original poems (the material in 5:22–30 and 9:8 <7> –10:4, for example) and using sections of them in new contexts. He rarely offers dates because it is not useful or important that we should know the original setting of his oracles but only that we should discover how their inherent meaning subserves the unity of his message. Our task is to take this mosaic-editing seriously,⁵⁸ to shun the temptation to put pieces which have been editorially separated back together again and to sit before the text until its own perfection of ordering gradually comes to light.

The orientation from which Isaiah worked is stated in 8:16–17. He undertakes to provide his disciples with a sure word of God (a ‘testimony’ which God has attested, a ‘law’ which God has taught) for a period of waiting (‘I will wait for the LORD’) and expectancy (‘I will put my trust in him’/‘I will hope expectantly for him’). In the ultimate, expectation is centred on the eschaton, ‘that day’ when the true and divine Davidic King will reign and the divine Anointed Conqueror will have finally settled all outstanding issues. It is interesting to note that the Servant is not an eschatological figure in the same sense as the King and the Conqueror. There is no ‘in that day’ expectation about him, rather, when Isaiah wishes to relate the work of the Servant to the eschaton he reverts to the Davidic mode (55:3–4). The parallel with Cyrus (see p. 352) suggests a figure entering into the thick of history, and the call (following on the work of the Servant) to ‘Maintain

⁵⁸ The ‘fragmentarist’ approach to the text evident from Duhm onwards is partly based on the assumption that the text is in extensive disorder. It is thought to be the result of many ‘hands’ (chiefly pretty unintelligent apparently) who added bits and pieces to the text/tradition they inherited. If the dislocation between what is original and what is insertional is as plain as commentators have seemed to find it, why ever was it added in the first place? Was the ancient world so full of unperceptive disciples and editors? If only Duhm had been blessed with the spirit of holism the last century would have been immensely the richer for it. Watts (vol. 1, p. xxiii) says even of the great Wilderberger that ‘it was clear to him ... that what was finally paramount was the interpretation of the book as it now exists’. In spite, however, ‘of the invaluable worth of his commentary in summarizing and evaluating all the results of historical-critical results to date, it does not succeed in presenting an understandable interpretation of the book. He has followed the method of historical exegesis, and his work presents the tremendous results of that method. But it does not make the book come alive for the reader or student.’

justice' in expectation of a 'salvation ... and righteousness' yet to be revealed ([56:1](#)) indicates that after the Servant the people of God resume the demanding tasks of waiting and obeying. In modern parlance, the Servant is a medium-term expectation, in contrast with the long-term expectation of King and Conqueror. But each Messianic figure is focused appropriately to the situations the prophet is addressing. In the pre-exilic days of the Davidic monarchy, he kept before his disciples the expectation of the perfect king (chapters [1–37](#)). When circumstances made him a prophet of coming catastrophe ([39:1–8](#); foreseen in [6:9–13](#); [7:10–25](#); etc.) and he had to face the possibility that in abandoning the way of faith grace had been sinned away, his vision was of the coming Saviour from sin, the Servant (chapters [38–55](#)).⁵⁹ And finally, knowing as he did that the people would return from captivity morally and spiritually unchanged ([48:1–22](#)), the same mixture of believers and rebels ([45:8–13](#)) as they always had been but now without a king, he encouraged his disciples in the face of circumstantial stress ([57:1–21](#)), personal failure ([59:9–13](#)) and a divided community ([65:1–25](#)) to look forward to the great Saviour and Avenger and the final work of settlement ([63:1–6](#)). Always his expectation is undated and potentially imminent. The bright glory of the King shines immediately behind the clouds of the Assyrian darkness even though actually dated for 'the latter time' ([9:1](#) <[8:23](#)>); the Servant stands in close relation to the return from Babylon and the desolate Zion ([48:22–49:1](#); [49:14](#) [54:1](#)) even though the passages contain no hint of the time of his coming; and the Anointed Conqueror seems to stand ready at any time to intervene in vengeance and salvation. The people of God are ever in stress of one sort or another but ever buoyed up by the light that shines behind the clouds.

This seems to be what Isaiah meant his book to be to his immediate disciples and to the ongoing church. They on their part are the people of the word of God, called to patient obedience even though they fail, called to persist through opposition, threat and ceaseless odds. Guided by Isaiah, contemporaries looked forward to the exile, return and, at any moment beyond the exile, the medium-term and ultimate Messian-

⁵⁹ The movement from chapter [5](#) to chapter [6](#) and from chapter [39](#) to chapters [40–55](#) should be noted. Isaiah ends his Preface (chapters [1–5](#)) with the implied question: Has even grace come to an end? (cf. [5:4](#)). Immediately he moves to the experience and record of what grace can in fact do for one who is doomed by sin ([6:1–8](#)). In chapter [39](#) the cardinal sin of denial of faith is committed and at once the message moves into a redemptive mode climaxing in [52:13–53:12](#).

ism the prophet taught. Our position as still the people of the word of God and still taught by Isaiah is significantly different and significantly the same. In essence, Isaiah's book needs only simple adjustments to fit into our time-line. We stand precisely on 56:1, looking back to the work of the Servant (now fulfilled in the person, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus) and looking forward to the coming of the Anointed Conqueror. The only difference is that while we know that the King already reigns, his kingship is incognito to the world at large, and we await his coming who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and who will reign on the Mount Zion of Hebrews 12:22 and before his elders gloriously (24:23).

4. *The text of Isaiah*

The Hebrew text of Isaiah (the MT) has come to us in a fine state of preservation. In his valuable commentary on Haggai, P. A. Verhoef remarks that fifteen years' experience in Bible translation work 'has strengthened the conviction that the majority of proposed alterations to the text ... are really unnecessary'.⁶⁰ He says this as a general observation on the MT as a whole; it is certainly applicable to Isaiah. Few and far between are the cases where there is any real doubt what the text is intended to mean or where emendation demands serious consideration. Of the external witnesses to the text of Isaiah, the *Targum of Isaiah*⁶¹ (an early Aramaic paraphrase) would appear to witness to an underlying text close to if not identical with the MT. The bearing of the Septuagint (LXX)⁶² and Q^a is less easy to discern. Ottley ventured that LXX^B, while being the Greek MS to which preeminence is generally assigned, is nevertheless 'by common consent one of the worst translated parts of the LXX'.⁶³ This judgment, of course, assumes that the LXX translators were working from the MT and made a bad job of their task. This may be correct, for many of the LXX variants arise in places where the MT itself involves Hebrew unusual in idiom or vocabulary and (though with temerity) one wonders if the translators were linguistically up to it. But the possibility is now more strongly ventilated that

⁶⁰ P. A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NIC, Eerdmans, 1987), p. 18.

⁶¹ J. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (Clarendon Press, 1949).

⁶² A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart, 1935); Ottley, *Isaiah according to the Septuagint*.

^aThe St Mark's Isaiah Scroll from Qumran.

⁶³ Ottley, pp. 8–9.

the [LXX](#) was following a Hebrew original differing from the [MT](#).⁶⁴ Even were that the case, however, the tasks of recovering the Hebrew original on the basis of the [LXX](#) would be very uncertain. [Q^a](#) is our oldest Hebrew manuscript, possibly dating from 100 BC and taking us back a thousand years behind the Ben Asher text of the [MT](#) (AD 1009). The overwhelming identity of this text with the [MT](#) indicates the reliance we can place on what we have inherited and the astonishing care and accuracy of the copyists. At the same time study of the variations in [Q^a](#) as compared with the [MT](#) suggests to experts that we have here representatives of two distinct families of manuscripts. The points where [Q^a](#) would appear to have a significant bearing on our understanding of Isaiah have been taken into account in the commentary.⁶⁵ The observable trend in specialist study of the Old Testament text is to move away from the passion for rewriting what has been inherited and to adopt a basically more reverent, though still alert, attitude to the text as given. A former generation of commentators called ‘emendation’ what was many times at best a display of linguistic cleverness and at worst the indulgence of an occupational hazard. ‘Our mandate’, Oswalt wisely says, ‘is to interpret the text as it is before us unless there is manuscript evidence to correct that text. To do anything else is to build our interpretations upon air.’⁶⁶

Isaiah 1–37

The book of the King

1. Theme

A single theme binds the first thirty-seven chapters of Isaiah: the king who reigns in

⁶⁴ Cf. Oswalt, p. 30. F. M. Cross and S. Talmon, *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (Harvard University Press, 1975).

⁶⁵ [BH](#) footnotes the variants between [Q^a](#) and the [MT](#). [BHS](#) offers a selection of those considered to be the more significant. Cf. W. J. Martin, *The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah*, The Campbell Morgan Memorial Lecture 1954 (The Bookroom, Westminster Chapel, 1954).

⁶⁶ Oswalt, p. 31.

Zion. It is a complex theme, full of tensions. Sometimes the king is the Lord himself ([6:1](#), [5](#)), sometimes he is the current king of the house of David ([7:1–2](#)) and sometimes he is the king who is yet to come ([9:6–7](#)). On the whole, however, the future dominates the present, yet even here the tension continues, for at one time the vision is of the Lord's coming reign ([24:23](#)) and at another it is of a king born in David's line ([11:1](#), [10](#)). The resolution of these tensions animates the whole section and excites the reader with the breadth and glory of Isaiah's message.

a. Chapters 1–5

Isaiah often allows major themes to enter unobtrusively. The king theme illustrates this. In chapter [1](#) Isaiah seems absorbed in the current declension of Jerusalem (verses [21–23](#)) and its inevitable punishment (verses [24–25](#)) but, with that abruptness which so often marks his message of hope, he discerns also a coming restoration when all will be 'as in the days of old ... as at the beginning' (verse [26](#)). Since this 'beginning' happened under David when he captured the fortress of Zion and made it the political and religious focus of his kingdom ([2 Sa. 5](#)), the Davidic glory is on its way back. In chapters [2–4](#) the glories of Zion as the international city, religiously and politically ([2:2–4](#)), are far removed from what the prophet sees ([2:5–4:1](#)). Present reality mocks expectation but, nevertheless, there is a coming glory, a creative act of the Lord ([4:5](#)) through which he will preside over a renewed Zion in the ancient glory of his fiery-cloudy presence among his people (cf. [Ex. 13:21–22](#); [40:34–38](#)).

b. Chapters 6–12

In these chapters the theme is defined more closely. In what turns out to be an apt symbol of David's house itself, King Uzziah is dying ([6:1](#); cf. [2 Ki. 15:5](#); [2 Ch. 26:16–18](#)). But alongside the dying, defiled king there is the Holy One, 'the King, the LORD Almighty [of hosts]' ([6:5](#)). The interplay of these two kingships—the holy, divine King and the terminally-ill Davidic house—and their envisaged merger in a divine King of David's line ([7:14](#); [9:6–7](#); [11:1](#), [10](#)) becomes the unifying theme. Chapters [6](#) and [12](#) provide a framework with their common stress on the Holy One exalted in Zion ([6:1](#), [3](#); [12:6](#)) and, internally, two subsections climax with the vision of the King who is to come ([9:1–7](#); [11:1–10](#)). We are allowed to see the glory of his person, the perfection of his reign and the world-wide spread of his dominion ([9:7](#); [11:10](#)). This latter provides the link with the following chapters.

c. Chapters 13–27

This section is structured so as to reveal the people of God surrounded by the peoples of the world. To the outward eye they are as any other people, caught up in the historical changes and chances of earthly experience, involved too in failure and declension. There is, however, a story within the story: the Lord has not abandoned his David-centred plans. The dynasty will yet be productive (14:29) and the Zion-ideal achieved (14:32). The Zion that could even now spread its promises over the needy (15:1–16:14) will one day welcome in the nations when the Lord comes to reign (24:23), sets his Messianic banquet before all (25:6–9) and receives outcasts to worship at his holy mountain (27:13).

d. Chapters 28–35

Presented as a series of solemn denunciations (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1), this section recalls chapters 6–12 in its blend of current politics and visionary pictures. The time was one of challenge to the people of God, and their security of tenure was called into question. Notwithstanding that they failed under pressure, deserting the way of faith for that of political expediency, the Lord's promise does not fail: a king will reign (31:1), the object of his people's admiration (33:17). In the true Zion the Lord will be king (33:20–22), and his redeemed will enter the city with joy (35:9b–10).

e. Chapters 36–37

Finally, the rock of history is placed under the edifice of vision. Here was a specific occasion when the Davidic king and his city came under threat but the promises of the Lord, when put to the test, proved durable. The Lord stood by his king and city and did so for David's sake (37:35).

2. Structure

The unity of ‘The book of the King’ is, however, more than simply a unity of theme. There is also a united structure and a well-conceived integration of parts. We will discuss presently the reasons for considering chapters 1–5 as prefatory. For the moment we will set those chapters on one side and examine chapters 6–37. Within these chapters there are, as we have seen, four blocks of material: 6–12, 13–27, 28–35 and 36–37. These divisions are dictated by the text itself, as indeed is the separation off of chapters 1–5. Now, within this fourfold division, chapters 6–12 and 28–35 match each other. In them

Isaiah grapples with two identical historical and spiritual crises. He addresses himself directly to current leaders and policies, matching them all the while with related predictions of glory to come; balancing the fickleness of humankind coming under condemnation with the steadfastness of God holding firmly to his promises. In each section, the more plainly Isaiah roots himself in the present the more confidently he discerns the future.

The remaining passages, though differing in content, fulfil the same function of confirming the vision that has preceded them. Thus, chapters 13–27 work out the promise of the world-wide Davidic ruler by putting the promise (e.g. of 9:7) into universal, even cosmic, and eschatological perspective. In other words, what Isaiah has promised he now confirms by showing that it is part of a coherent world-view. By comparison with the mind-stretching scope of this vision, chapters 36–37 are almost homely! The preceding chapters 28–35 are centred on a period when Judah was squeezed between the two would-be superpowers, Assyria and Egypt. Contrary to the received political wisdom, Isaiah saw the security of the Lord's people not in politics and armed alliances, but in confidence in the Lord's promises. It is the function of chapters 36–37 to prove the earthly (and earthy) realism of this position: See what happened when the Assyrian might moved against Jerusalem! The Lord needs no help from Egypt, nor is he perturbed by Assyria. He is truly Lord of the nations.

This view of chapters 6–37 yields the following integration:

a¹ In the days of Ahaz: the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. History-based oracles with visions of the Davidic future (chapters 6–12)

b¹ Confirmatory oracles: the Lord's, Davidic, Zion-centred world-purpose (chapters 13–27)

a² In the days of Hezekiah: the Egyptian crisis. History-based oracles with visions of the Davidic future (chapters 28–35)

b² Confirmatory events: the Lord's demonstrated power to do what he will with world empires in the interests of David (chapters 36–37)

We can take one further step in exposing the careful schema of these chapters. Twice in chapters 13–27 Israel, Egypt and Assyria are associated. First, by the act of the Lord, world empires (typified in Assyria and Egypt) will be brought with his people to worship him (19:23–25), and secondly, from Egypt and Assyria the Lord will gather his dis-

persed people ([27:12–13](#)). Is this a credible vision or a fond imagining? The question is as important for us as for those who first heard the message from Isaiah. Is the Lord really sovereign on earth? Does he rule even the superpowers? Consequently, is faith a practical policy for life? Isaiah answers directly. In chapters [28–35](#), these three peoples—the Lord's people as represented by Judah and the Egyptian and Assyrian imperialists—confront each other, and the Lord's executive authority on each is made known. When the Lord intervenes it is no longer of significance whether Egyptian promises and Assyrian threats are real. The God of Israel is Lord indeed. This is the theological conviction of chapters [28–35](#) and the proved reality of chapters [36–37](#). With this in mind we can see the whole section as follows:

- a The theme is announced: the Lord's Zion-centred, world-wide Davidic purposes.
 - The coming king and his rule (chapters [6–12](#))
- b The theme is confirmed (chapters [13–37](#))
 - b¹ First confirmation: the subservience of all nations, typically Assyria and Egypt, to the Lord's world-purpose (chapters [13–27](#))
 - b² Second confirmation: Assyria and Egypt in their contemporary reality subservient to the Lord's sway (chapters [28–35](#))
 - b³ Third confirmation: an illustrative proof of the actual subservience of Assyria and Egypt to the Lord. He is Lord of all (chapters [36–37](#))

A. The preface.

Judah: diagnosis and prognosis

([1:1–5:30](#))

The fact that the call of Isaiah to be a prophet is not recorded until chapter [6](#) requires explanation. Are we to understand that chapters [1–5](#) report a pre-call ministry or that chapter [6](#) is a renewal of the call? The answer lies in the careful editing of the book. Chapter [6](#) is indeed Isaiah's call, but in order to depict the situation into which he was called he makes use of oracles originally preached after his call, constructing them here into an author's preface. His purpose is to present an 'anatomy' of Judah at the com-

mencement of his prophetic ministry.

Chapters 1–5 differ from chapters 6–12 in the absence of any historical markers. With 6:1 we enter upon stated historical situations in which dates (6:1; 7:1) and world powers (7:1, 17; 8:4) are mentioned but, apart from the title (1:1), the first five chapters have no dates and no names except those of Israel and Judah. This detachment of these oracles from the situations which first called them forth is deliberate. We have here a balanced presentation of truths about Judah whereby we enter with Isaiah into the initial circumstances of his ministry and share his fears and hopes. Like every author's preface these chapters are the 'backdrop' to the whole book.

Within chapters 1–5, chapters 2–4 make a subsection bracketed off by the two Zion poems of 2:2–4 and 4:2–6. On each side of this, chapters 1 and 5 both have coherent structures, giving a threefold division of the whole. The three divisions have the common theme of God's people in rebellion against him, but each section sets this rebellion in a different context. Chapter 1 reviews three facets of the contemporary scene: national calamity (verses 6–8), religious declension (verses 10–15) and social collapse (verses 21–23) arising from rebellion (verse 2), misdemeanour (verse 15) and infidelity (verse 21). Chapters 2–4 offer another view of Zion: the coming day when the city will be a place of international pilgrimage (2:2), the locus of the Lord's law (2:3) and the source of world-wide righting of wrongs and of peace (2:4). Against this the actuality of contemporary Jerusalem makes a frightful contrast, with its national (2:5–16), religious (2:17–22) and social (3:1–4:1) disintegration. Chapter 5 has another way of presenting the theme: the Lord's choice vine has become a degenerate plant (verses 1–7) bearing a foul crop, depicted in six 'woes' (verses 8, 11, 18, 20–22). The following analysis thus arises:

1:1–31 Sin and experience

Defection from the Lord nationally, religiously and socially resulted in
devastation

2:1–4:6 Sin and election

As inheritors of the Abrahamic promise, the Lord's people were called to be a
blessing to the whole earth but they chose rather the way of rebellion

5:1–30 Sin and grace

The Lord lavished his care on his people to the point where he could ask ‘what more?’ (5:4). They, however, degenerated into sin and produced a harvest of unrighteousness

These three sections have in common a contrast between the ideal and the actual. The Lord intended his people to live as his children (1:2), to be the city-community of world-wide blessing (2:2–4) and to produce the fruit of righteousness (5:1–7). The actuality proved to be very different, and we have to ask how will the Lord react as his ideal is corrupted? In 1:24–31 and 3:13–4:6 the divine reaction of wrath and punishment fills the foreground, but the background is full of the light of hope (cf. 1:24 with verses 25–26 and 3:13–4:1 with 4:2). Chapter 5, however, is very different. We must be careful here to enter into what Isaiah thus sensed about his nation as he launched on his ministry. Certainly, rebellion brings disaster as its reward but yet it does not exhaust the Lord’s capacity to redeem and restore (1:26–27). Likewise, Israel’s failure to magnetize the nations into Zion (2:2ff.) is lamentable and culpable but is, nevertheless, nothing that cannot be cleansed away (4:4). The Lord will create a new city and a new people fit for him to dwell among (4:3–6). But when the Lord has to say, ‘*What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?*’ (5:4) the situation is different indeed! The absence of the note of hope in chapter 5 compels the question whether sin has nullified grace. In this way chapters 5 is climactic. *The sword* (1:20) can yet be averted by returning to obedience. In 3:25–26 the situation is more desperate: enemy assault is inescapable, bringing dreadful casualties (4:1); but now the enemy is at the gates and *darkness and distress* are closing in on the land (5:24–30).

Is darkness, then, to have the last word? Is sin finally to issue in death? And if it does, what has become of all the promises of God? It is with these questions that Isaiah sets the scene for the ministry to which he was called.

1. The title (1:1)

For the histories of the four kings under whom Isaiah prophesied, see pp. 18ff. All thirty-five occurrences of *vision* (*hāzōn*) and thirty-six out of forty-eight of *saw* ($\sqrt{hāzā}$) refer to truth disclosed by God; not necessarily in visual experience (e.g. Dn. 8:2) but by

supernatural revelation (*cf.* 1 Sa. 3:1; Ps. 89:19; Is. 30:10). The title suitably covers all sixty-six chapters of Isaiah. Throughout the book the people of God and their city constitute Isaiah's 'story-line' and it is consonant with his mind that he should have devised this initial description of his work.¹ Arguments advanced against this view are not persuasive. It is urged, for example, that Isaiah always speaks of 'Jerusalem and Judah' (e.g. 3:1) whereas the title reverses the order. But it is natural that ministering in Jerusalem as he was he would first address the immediate audience before widening his reference, whereas in naming kings their country naturally takes precedence over their city (*cf.* 36:7).

2. Sin and experience (1:2–31)

Having introduced himself as a man whose message (*ḥāzōn*) and whose ability to perceive its truth ($\sqrt{ḥāzā}$) are both from God, Isaiah turns to expose the inner quality of the period whose outward shape he summarized in the names of its kings.

The oracles recorded here are undated and no advantage arises from devising hypotheses regarding their point of origin in Isaiah's ministry. Their significance does not arise from their historical setting but from their searching exposure of sin and its consequences in the people of God. They touch in turn the national, religious and social facets of contemporary life.

a. The national situation (1:2–9)

Isaiah begins his 'anatomy' of Judah with what is plain for all to see—the broken state of the nation (5–8). He does so by means of a courtroom drama:

A¹ Summons (2a)

The court convened. The dignity of the Lord whose voice commands all creation

B Arraignment (2b–8)

¹ To suggest that the title refers only to chapters 1–12 as a sort of interim Isaianic collection is unsatisfactory. While chapters 1–12 are obviously concerned with 'Judah and Jerusalem' so are 28–40. But in fact 'Jerusalem' and 'Zion' occur ninety-seven times in the sixty-six chapters and are quite evenly spread. Jerusalem-based prophets have significantly more references to the city than others, e.g. Micah has seventeen compared with four in Amos. Isaiah 40–55 has proportionately almost twice as many as Ezekiel.

B¹ The charge levelled: rebellion against the Lord. Sin contrary to nature ([2b–3](#))

B² Guilt exposed. Abandonment of the Lord. Sin contrary to privilege ([4](#))

B³ Experience ignored. Rebellion against divine discipline. Sin contrary to reason, productive of disaster ([5–8](#))

A² Comment

The situation reviewed. The faithfulness of the Lord, preserving a remnant ([9](#))

Isaiah teaches a theological and covenant view of national history: the relation between spirituality (obedience to God as the governing factor in the nation's life) and national prosperity and security. This is classically expounded in [Deuteronomy 28–29](#) as the foundation of life under the covenant. This view of life must not be understood as limiting God to our notion of what constitutes a suitable *quid pro quo*. Frequently life looks as if no link existed between morality and prosperity (*cf.* [Ps. 44:13–17](#)). Here a simplistic view of retribution is countered in a different direction, where divine mercy has inhibited due reward. Yet all such seeming 'deviations' belong on the divine side ([9](#)). On the human side the position of faith is paramount, that righteousness is the clue to a secure and prospering life (*cf.* [Ps. 1](#)).

2 In the Old Testament the *heavens* and *earth* are frequently summoned (*i*) as witness to an oath (*e.g.* [Dt. 4:26](#)); (*ii*) as witness for the prosecution when the Lord charges his people (*e.g.* [Ps. 50:4ff.](#)); (*iii*) to rejoice when the Lord's greatness is declared (*e.g.* as king, [1 Ch. 16:31](#); as Saviour, [Ps. 69:34–35](#)); (*iv*) to express abhorrence of Israel's sin (*e.g.* [Je. 2:12](#)). Thus the created universe is always on the side of the Creator (*e.g.* [45:8](#); [Je. 4:23ff.](#)), reflecting the relationship which exists between God and man—whether the thorns and thistles of [Genesis 3:18](#) or the Messianic abundance of [Amos 9:13](#). Here the heavens and earth are called in to underline the dignity of the voice which commands the attention of all creation, *For the LORD has spoken*/‘For it is the Lord himself who has spoken’. Thus Isaiah understands the significance of his *vision* ([1](#)): human though he is, he communicates what the Lord has spoken.

The nub of the Lord's charge is brought out by the emphasis in *I reared children*/‘Sons I have reared’. [Exodus 4:22](#) reveals sonship as a redemption concept. Unlike contemporary pagans, who considered themselves children of their god by some quasi-physical act of begetting, Israel was the Lord's son by historical divine choice and by the exodus as a work of redemption. Redemption initiated a process of divine providential care.

The picture of the attentive parent and the growing child covers the whole historical period from Exodus to Isaiah. The grace which saved and the love which cared were alike rebuffed when *they* ... *rebelled*. ‘They’ is emphatic—‘they of all people!’, the heirs of redemption, the recipients of parental care. In the vocabulary of rebellion, this verb (*pāša'*), and its noun (*peša'*), express wilful flouting of authority (cf. in secular use 1 Ki. 12:19).

3 Isaiah uses rich illustrations and, as here, often explains the allusion (e.g. 8:7). The Lord’s dealings with his people are designed to develop true spiritual instincts, a mind-set of attachment to the Lord as automatic and spontaneous as that seen in the animal creation. The nouns *Israel* and *my people* are emphasized, matching the ‘they of all people’ of verse 2. *Israel* is the man whom the Lord made new (Gn. 32:27–28), and *my people* indicates exclusive election (Ex. 6:6–7) with its consequent expectation of distinctive life (Ex. 19:4–6).

Know ($\sqrt{yāda'}$) frequently runs beyond head-knowledge to include personal relationships (Gn. 4:1; NIV ‘lay with’) and carries the implication of a different life-style (1 Sa. 2:12). *Understand* ($\sqrt{bîn}$) means ‘to see to the heart of a matter or discern’.

4 The charge (2b–3) continues as four nouns describe privilege and four adjectives describe how it was corrupted. The *nation*, intended to be distinct in holiness (Ex. 19:6), became (lit.) the ‘sinning nation’ (participle from $\sqrt{hāṭā}$, ‘to miss the target’; Jdg. 20:16); the *people*, redeemed and unique (Dt. 4:4–6; 2 Sa. 7:23–24), became ‘heavy with iniquity’, as if the Lord who carried them (46:3–4; Ex. 19:4) himself felt the burden. *'aôn* (guilt/iniquity) is sin as corruption of character and nature rather than an element in behaviour. *Brood/seed* is the word for Abrahamic descent (41:8) but is traced here to a line of *evildoers*. *Children/sons* (cf. verse 2b) indicates the relationship of the redeemed to God (Ex. 4:22) which was meant to issue in a distinctive life (Dt. 14:1–2) but is now manifested in *corruption* ($\sqrt{\check{s}āḥat}$, ‘to spoil or ruin’). They were designed to be special as the unique *nation* and *people*, special to God as the ‘seed’ of Abraham and his very own ‘sons’—and sin had ruined all! But the heart of this sinfulness is how they now stand in relation to the Lord. Only commitment to the Lord secures true values in life; when the commitment goes, values follow. To forsake the Lord is the opposite of to seek the Lord. Just as ‘seeking’ is not looking for him as though he were lost but showing a determination to be with him where he is to be found, so forsaking is deliberately distancing our-

selves from him. It arises from a change of heart whereby he who should be loved is rather *spurned*/‘treated with scorn’ ($\sqrt{nā'as}$, cf. Nu. 14:11, 23). *The Holy One of Israel* (see pp. 17f.) may well have been coined by Isaiah as a title for the Lord to express the revelation granted to him in his inaugural vision (see on 6:3). Holiness is the heart of the nature of God. Thus, in the full reality of all that makes him divine and marks him out as unique he had drawn near to and in a real sense become the possession of Israel, he was ‘Israel’s Holy One’. This was the one they had treated with scorn. In doing so they had, by implication, *turned their backs on him*/‘turned themselves back into strangers’ (lit. ‘have be-stranged themselves backward’!). $\sqrt{zûr}$ is ‘to turn aside’ (intransitive). The form here (niphil) is reflexive with the meaning suggested by the participle ($zār$) used throughout the Old Testament for ‘alien, foreigner, non-Israelite’ (see verse 7). God’s chosen people have ‘reverted to alien status’.

5–8 The folly of inviting further chastisement (5a) is underlined by a metaphor of sickness in the ‘body politic’ (6). The reality is described in verse 7 and the result by the similes of verse 8. Isaiah does not think it necessary to tell us who were the historical agents of this divine punishment, saving that they were *foreigners* (7). The choice probably lies between the Syro-Ephraimite incursions about 735 (2 Ki. 15:37–16:6; 2 Ch. 28:1–8. See p. 19 and on 7:1–2) or Sennacherib’s invasions in 701 (Is. 36–37; 2 Ch. 32). It is not important to decide. Whatever its historical reference, the function of the allusion is to display the ill-deserts of forsaking the Lord.

5 The form of the question requires it to be translated, ‘Why, seeing that you will be beaten again, do you rebel again?’ Sin is not only unreasonable (2b) but also unreasoning, unable to draw proper conclusions and make appropriate responses. It is blindness to what God is doing (cf. 5:19). *sārâ* (*rebellion*) emphasizes stubbornness rather than wilfulness (cf. verse 2; see Ho. 4:16).

6–7 None of the kings under whom Isaiah ministered were fools politically, economically or militarily. It is not, however, these factors which make for national well-being or security. For all their worldly wisdom, the country sickened unto death under them. The metaphors of the wounded man untended (6) and the land without defence (7) alike speak of the helplessness and hopelessness which forsaking the Lord brings.²

² The alteration of *overthrown by strangers* to ‘Sodom in its overthrow’ (see NEB, BHS, etc.) is unwarranted. The verb ‘to overthrow’ ($\sqrt{hāp̄ak}$) and its noun (*mahpēkâ*) are used typically of

8 Shelter/‘booth’ (*sukkâ*; cf. Lv. 23:39–43) and *hut*/‘lodge’ ($\sqrt{lîn}$, ‘to stay overnight, be a temporary guest’) point to the flimsy and transient, but matching this internal weakness there is enemy vigilance. The *city under siege*³ will not escape through any failure of human hostility.

9 Into this situation where forsaking the Lord has brought the nation to the end of its tether, internally (6) and externally (7–8), comes the unmerited factor of divine preservation. There is a point at which the Lord sets his fence around his people and says ‘No’ to the consequences of sin and the power of the foe. Merit may call for an overthrow *like Sodom* (Gn. 19) but mercy determines on survival. *The LORD Almighty* represents two nouns in apposition, (lit.) ‘The LORD [who is] hosts’. In other words, to think of the Lord is to think of power and resource unbounded ('hosts' being a 'plural of diversity') and indicating ‘every sort of’.⁴ Isaiah began his first discourse by emphasizing *The LORD* as the sovereign speaker (2); he rounds it off with an inclusio, an identical emphasis on the Lord as sovereign in mercy. Judge and Saviour are one.

b. The religious situation (1:10–20)

In this passage the opening *Hear the word of the LORD* is balanced by the concluding *For the mouth of the LORD has spoken, and says the LORD* (11) is matched by the same words in verse 18. In between there are two sections each with three main thrusts (12–15 and 16–17), and the topics in the opening and closing sections are arranged chiastically.

A¹ The first summons: The Lord’s displeasure (10–11)

a¹ The flouting of the law (10)

Sodom but this does not justify change. The sentence is a perfect Isaianic palistrophe: the first and sixth words are identical ('foreigners'), the second and fifth are words of destruction ('devour', 'overthrown') and the third ('it') and fourth ('desolate') refer to the land.

³ *Under siege* represents *n^eṣûrâ*. $\sqrt{\text{ṣûr}}$ means ‘to besiege’ but its passive (niphil) participle is not found elsewhere and would ordinarily be *n^eṣôrâ*, which is adopted by BHS. $\sqrt{nāṣar}$ ('to preserve') yields an active participle (qal) in the meaning ‘blockaders’ (Je. 4:16), and our word here could be the qal passive participle ‘blockaded’.

⁴ See Wade *ad loc.* ‘Yahweh of hosts ... the supra-mundane resources of the Lord ... power irresistible’. Cf. G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oliver and Boyd, 1953), p. 21.

a² Ineffective religion ([11](#))

B What the Lord has not asked: useless religion ([12–15](#))

b¹ No divine authorization ([12](#))

b² No divine acceptance ([13–14](#))

b³ No divine response ([15](#))

C What the Lord requires ([16–17](#)):

c¹ Towards God—cleansing ([16abc](#))

c² In personal life—reformation ([16d–17b](#))

c³ In society—concern ([17c–e](#))

A²The second summons: The Lord's invitation ([18–20](#))

a² Effective cleansing ([18](#))

a¹ Return to obedience ([19–20](#))

Every religion has its necessary outward forms, and every religion is susceptible to the same danger of defining the reality in terms of the form. Hebrew religion was no different, saving that the expenditure of time (*New Moons, Sabbaths, festivals, pilgrimages to Zion etc.*) and money (*bulls, lambs, goats etc.*) which their religion required may have made them proportionately the more affronted that such exercises meant nothing to the God whom they thus thought to honour. Was Isaiah, then, renouncing the tradition in which he had been reared, which held that all these religious practices were commands of the Lord? Was he advocating ‘morality without religion’? No, but he was issuing a call to return to the primitive integration of the two elements of ethics and rite. In the Mosaic deposit, redemption ([Ex. 12](#)), the giving of the law ([Ex. 20](#)) and the institution of religious observance ([Ex. 25:1–Lv. 27:34](#)) followed each other in that order. The law was given so that those who were already the Lord's people by redemption might know how to behave in ways acceptable to him who had redeemed them. The cultus was given so that those who were committed to the life of obedience might remain in the Lord's presence notwithstanding their failures and have recourse to mercy and forgiveness for their lapses from obedience. Outside the context of the law of obedience the law of sacrifice had no utility.⁵ This remains the abiding message of the

⁵ See further H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible* (Carey Kingsgate, 1953), pp. 30ff.; J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Blackwell, 1963), pp. 351ff.; J. A. Motyer, ‘Prophecy’ and ‘Prophets’, *IBD*.

passage.

10 *Hear and listen* are the same verbs as in verse 2. The identical divine voice, speaking through the prophet, now summons people, not the heavens. *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* forms a link with verse 9 which is intentional. It binds the two discourses together. This is what properly follows. The forsaking of the Lord which produced national disaster is to be traced out further. It also magnifies God's mercy which forebore to destroy his people altogether; but for that mercy they would have been *like Sodom and Gomorrah* (9). Here Isaiah says they are more than 'like', both *rulers* and *people*, are *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*. *Sodom* (see 3:9) is used as a symbol of sin paraded, sin as an accepted lifestyle. *tôrâ* (*law*) is 'teaching'. Although it is an authority-word (cf. Dt. 31:9–13), its context is the loving, family relationship in which parent 'instructs' child in life-values (cf. Pr. 6:20–35). The reference to *our God* brings out this element of tender concern, while at the same time suggesting that maybe he is not quite 'theirs' in the way they may think.

11 This verse makes three assertions: for all their plenitude, these sacrifices mean nothing to the Lord (*what are they to me?*); add nothing (*I have more than enough*) and do nothing (*I have no pleasure in the blood*). *Blood* was the core effectiveness of the sacrificial system (see e.g. Lv. 17:11) but here it failed to touch the heart of God. *Says the LORD* is in the imperfect tense and has the sense of 'keeps saying'.⁶ It is a matter so important to the Lord that he would drive it home by reiteration. *Fattened animals* were those reared specially for sacrifice and were the most expensive of beasts. The verb *ḥāpēš* (*I have no pleasure*) occurs in 53:10 (NIV 'it was the LORD's will'). Before Isaiah is finished he will have revealed a sacrifice in which the Lord does delight. But how can the Lord so persistently reject their sacrifices? Verses 12–15 supply the answer.

12 If Isaiah were denying that the sacrifices as such lacked divine authorization he would not here describe the temple as *my courts*. The Lord claims the house of sacrifice as his while at the same time rejecting the current sacrifices as something for which he never *asked/ sought*. The divine purpose in the sacrificial system is for his people *to appear before me* (MT *lērā'ōt pānāy*; cf. Ex. 23:17; 34:23) or, with altered vowels, 'to see my

⁶ The expression here with the imperfect ('The LORD keeps saying'), as distinct from the formula 'Thus says the LORD' using the perfect tense of the verb, is virtually peculiar to Isaiah (1:11, 18; 33:10; 40:1, 25; 41:21; 66:9). Outside Isaiah it occurs only at Ps. 12:6 (cf. Driver, 33 (a), Obs.).

face' (*lir^e'ôt pānāy*; cf. the same alternatives in Ex. 23:15; 34:20; Dt. 16:16; 31:11). Both ideas are biblical and express the wonder of worship. All had, however, been reduced to a *trampling of my courts*, which may be a reference to the abundant animals brought for sacrifice or to the mere physical attendance of those who brought them. This was all there was to it—the noise of feet on a pavement. A religion of rite and formalism has no divine authorization.

13 It is strong language to describe their temple worship as *meaningless, detestable* and unbearable! The accusation is not now of formalism (as in verse 12) but of religious commitment devoid of ethical resolve. *Your evil assemblies* is lit. ‘iniquity and obligatory assembly’. In Skinner’s memorable description it is the ‘unholy alliance’ of religious duty and personal iniquity. Cf. Jeremiah’s accusation that they had made the Lord’s house a robbers’ den (Je. 7:11)—a place to which they went as robbers and from which they came as robbers, a place of security without a moral intention to reform. *Meaningless offerings* is ‘a gift of nothing’. The inclusion of the Sabbath shows that Isaiah is condemning not the thing itself—how could he dismiss the Sabbath as lacking divine authority?—but its misuse (see his own commentary in chapter 58). *Assemblies* is from a root meaning ‘to restrain’ and hence contains the idea of an imposed obligation.

14 *My soul hates* is equivalent to ‘I hate with all my heart’. *Become* implies that once the festivals were no burden and is a further indication that Isaiah is challenging current abuse not the validity of the sacrificial system as such. Hence he decries *your* festivals—the festivals as you practise them. They had replaced the principle of conformity to the will of God with the principle of practising what was acceptable and helpful to themselves (cf. Am. 4:4–5).

15 The topic is now intercession. This too means that Isaiah is criticizing not use but abuse for he would not denounce prayer as such. *Hide my eyes* denotes the opposite of the Lord letting his face shine on them (Nu. 6:25; Ps. 4:6 <7>), i.e. the withdrawal of divine favour from the person interceding. Prayer itself has become unavailing. Thus both intercessor and intercession are invalidated because *your hands are full of blood/bloods*, i.e. deeds of blood-guiltiness. In Hebrew idiom to ‘consecrate’ people to the Lord is ‘to fill their hands’ (Ex. 28:41) and ‘to be consecrated’ is ‘to have one’s hands full’ (Jos. 14:8); it is expressive of total preoccupation with the Lord. The hands lifted up in prayer expressed different preoccupations.

16a–c Positive remedial action is now commanded beginning with a threefold command to get right with God. *Wash* ($\sqrt{rāhaš}$) appears seventy-three times in the Old Testament, of which fifty-two refer to ceremonial cleansing (e.g. Lv. 15:5–28). If Isaiah had intended the outright rejection of the cult he would have avoided this verb. *Make yourselves clean* is from either $\sqrt{zākā}$ (cf. Jb. 15:14; Ps. 74:13) or $\sqrt{zākak}$ (cf. Job. 15:15; La. 4:7). The meaning is the same: purity before God. In Isaiah's Hebrew *wash* and *make ... clean* are side by side without a connecting particle. This means that the second phrase expresses the leading idea and the first qualifies it, hence 'make yourselves clean before the Lord by the cleansing ordinances he has provided'. *Take ... out of my sight* indicates that the Lord's appointed means of cleansing can be guaranteed to remove every uncleanness which he would otherwise see. *Your evil deeds* is 'the evil of your doings'. The 'doings' themselves are past but their evil remains until removed by cleansing.

16d–17b The Lord gives three commands for the reordering of personal life. They are—decisive abandonment of the old life (*stop*), development of a new mind (*learn*) and setting new objectives and priorities (*seek*) conformed to the Lord's stated will. The underlying verb of *justice* (*mišpāṭ*) is $\sqrt{šāpāṭ}$ meaning 'to judge, come to a decision, determine authoritatively what is right'. *mišpāṭ* is often therefore used, as here, to express the sum total of what the Lord has adjudged to be right, in a word, the will of God (cf. Rom. 12:2).

17c–e The final triad of commands covers the reformation of society, beginning with (lit.) 'put right the oppressor'. It is easy to alter *ḥāmōṣ* ('oppressor') to *ḥāmūṣ* ('oppressed') as the NIV does but to do so destroys the contrast the three commands embrace. This is the contrast between the two ends of imperfect society, the oppressor and the needy, the one inflicting and the other suffering the hurt. Isaiah looks for a transformed society wherever it needs transforming.

18 *Reason together* is from $\sqrt{yākaḥ}$, which does sometimes have the legal overtones of a court decision (cf. 2:4; 11:4; Gn. 31:37). The parallelism between verses 2 and 10 may suggest that Isaiah is still thinking in forensic terms. How significant, then, that when the people are here called to the bar to hear the verdict it is expressed as an offer of free pardon and the chance of a new life! Isaiah will often later insist that the Lord's forgiveness accords with legal requirement (see e.g. on 49:24–26). For the tense of *says* see on verse 11. The emphasis in verse 11 that the ritual of sacrifice is unavailing is matched by

the emphasis here on free pardon. Scarlet and red are the colours of blood-guilt (*cf.* verse 15). The Lord applies the remedy where he discerns the need. The structure of the context requires us to take *they shall be as white as snow* as a promise not as an ironic question:⁷

- A¹ The command to enjoy cleansing (16a–c)
- B¹ The command to enter new life (16d–17)
- A² The invitation to enjoy cleansing (18)

B² The alternatives of death or life (19–20)

To deny verse 18 as a genuine promise is to deny verse 16 as a realistic command. Snow and wool exemplify what is naturally white. The Lord's promise is not only to deal with the stain of sin but with the nature from which it springs.

19–20 *Willing, obedient, resist* and *rebel* require a response of will and deed. Obedience is not salvation by works. The first obedience is to the command to *wash* (16) and to *come* (18), and only thereafter are they to obey in a life conformed to the law of God. *For the mouth of the LORD has spoken* is a direct attribution of Isaiah's word to the Lord himself (*cf.* verses 2, 10).⁸ Inspiration covered both what the prophet said and how he worded it. The Lord's judgments are to be executed by *the sword*, *i.e.* an invading enemy (*cf.* verse 7; 5:25–30).

c. The social situation (1:21–26)

In content this section is a lament over the collapse of Jerusalemitic society; in form it is a superbly constructed palistrophic poem.

- A¹ The collapse of the faithful city (21a)
- B¹ Past and present contrasted: justice replaced by murder (21b)
- C¹ Metaphor: values turned to dross (22)
 - D¹ The corrupt rulers (23)
 - D² The divine Sovereign (24)
- C² Metaphor: dross purged (25)

⁷ For the alternative views see Scott and Kaiser.

⁸ The precise expression *For the mouth of the LORD has spoken* (*kî pî yahweh dibbēr*) occurs elsewhere only at 40:5; 58:14; Mi. 4:4; *cf. e.g.* 21:17; 22:25; 25:8; Ob. 18.

B² Past and future identified: justice restored in true judges ([26a](#))

A²The restoration of the faithful city ([26b](#))

'The theme', comments Kidner, 'is vanished glory; even the metaphors for it tail off from the tragic to the trivial (wife ... silver ... wine). Only the moral loss is lamented: not David's empire or Solomon's wealth, simply their justice.'⁹ Alongside this theme, however, larger issues are afoot. In the first part of this opening section ([2–9](#)) Isaiah did not look to the future but noted the element of divine preservation in the history of the people ([9](#)). In section two ([10–20](#)) alternative futures were offered ([18–20](#)), conditional on the people's response to the divine command. Here, however, the future is embraced by the same divine sovereignty which has preserved in the past: *I will ... purge ... I will restore* ([25–26](#)). In the last analysis, the Lord will not go back on his promises to David; the beginning is the paradigm for the end.

21 'How' ('ēkā; cf. [La 1:1](#)), not *See how* (NIV), introduces a lament, and the opening line of verse [21](#) preserves the lament form ('qinah', a [3:2](#) structure of key words). The city was *faithful*/‘trustworthy’ as a true wife is trustworthy. Here and [23:15–18](#) are the only places the Isaianic literature uses the metaphor of harlotry, both in a setting of surprising restoration. Moral collapse begins in the person and the relationship with the Lord. The verse ends with the word *murderers* (✓ *rāṣah*; [Ex. 20:13](#)), indicating that the outcome of infidelity to the Lord is infidelity to people. *Justice* and *righteousness* (*mišpāṭ*; *sedeq*) are a frequent pair in Isaiah.¹⁰ They are equally rooted in divine holiness ([5:16](#)): righteousness embodies holiness in sound principles, and justice is the expression of righteousness in sound precepts (see [32:1](#)). When commitment to the Lord goes, the breach of the 'first table of the Law' (harlotry), breach of the 'second table' (murder) inevitably follows. Godly social values depend on commitment to God.

22 Silver can contain some alloy and still be silver, but *silver* which has *become dross* has suffered total degeneration. Similarly, as soon as wine is touched with water no particle of it remains undiluted. So when sin enters, in departing from the Lord ([21](#)), it destroys the nature it enters and leaves no part untainted.

23 Here is the same movement as in verse [22](#): the sin of rebellion towards God and the

⁹ D. Kidner, *NBC*, p. 592.

¹⁰ Cf. verse [27](#); [5:7, 16](#); [9:7](#); [16:5](#); [26:9](#); [28:17](#); [32:1, 16](#); [33:5](#); [51:4–5](#); [56:1](#); [58:2](#); [59:9, 14](#).

sins of self-seeking (theft and graft) and lack of care for others. The widow and orphan are test cases of the quality of biblical society ([Ex. 22:22](#); [Dt. 14:29; 16:11–14](#)). The Lord looks to his people to be like him (cf. [Dt. 10:18](#); [Pss. 10:4; 68:5](#)), but as in verse 21 no-one was allowed to stand in the way of self-advantage (*murderers*), so here everything is subordinate to self-interest so that those who bring needs rather than *gifts* are dismissed without thought.

24 From the earthly princes ([23](#)) our gaze is turned to the supreme King. Even Isaiah never outdoes the emphasis on divine power expressed in this assemblage of divine titles. The Hebrew is emphatic in calling attention to the speaker. *Declares* (*n^e'um*) is a noun with the sense '[This is] the word of ...'. Here the word is of one who is sovereign in status (*the Lord, hā'ādōn*), omnipotent in power (*the LORD Almighty*, 'Yahweh of hosts'; cf. verse [9](#)) and absolute ruler of his people (*the Mighty One of Israel*; cf. [49:26; 60:16](#)).¹¹ The Lord's sovereignty and power are neither ornamental nor irrelevant but a force to be reckoned with in the affairs of his people. This power is specifically a power of vengeance. The Lord will get *relief* ($\sqrt{nāḥam}$) and *avenge* ($\sqrt{nāqam}$) himself. The former term, with its root idea of 'comfort', points to soothing the hurt given to God; the latter to the objective requital merited. Any facile statement that God always hates the sin but loves the sinner needs to be countered by Isaiah's insistence that those who transgress are *my foes* and *my enemies*. They have made themselves the adversaries of the helpless ([23](#)), *therefore* the sovereign Lord holds them as his enemies.

25 *I will turn my hand against you* is a phrase which always describes hostile action (e.g. [Ps. 81:14](#)) yet here it introduces a work of restoration.¹² Even in the very exercise of his wrath the Lord remembers mercy (cf. [60:10](#)), and mercy and justice are perfectly blended in the divine nature ([45:21](#)). *Thoroughly purge* is 'refine as with lye' (*kabbōr*).¹³ As we have our chemical agents of cleansing, so the Lord knows what to apply to purge his people. In this context the removal of *dross* (cf. verse [22](#)) is thus equivalent to the renewal of their nature.

¹¹ The title 'The Mighty One of Jacob' occurs in [Gn. 49:24](#); [Ps. 132:2, 5](#).

¹² See also [Je. 6:9](#); [Ezk. 38:12](#); [Am. 1:8](#); [Zc. 13:7](#). Against this background of usage the immediate sounding of a note of hope in Isaiah is startling, an example of his brilliant literary skill.

¹³ For *bōr* see [Jb. 9:30](#). Scott alters it to *bakkūr* ('in the furnace'), a pedestrian amplification of the idea of 'refining'. *BHS* wisely follows the *MT*.

26 The climax of this section is a Davidic restoration. It was under David that Jerusalem first became the capital city ([2 Sa. 5:6–9](#)) and what Isaiah adumbrates here is the fulfilment of the Davidic promises ([2 Sa. 7; Ps. 89](#)); a theme which from now on will become increasingly dominant. The immediate connection of the Davidic theme ([26](#)) with that of redemption ([27](#)) should not be missed. In [11:1, 10–16](#) the promised Davidic king becomes the magnet of a new exodus, and in [55:3](#) the Servant of the Lord becomes the ground of fulfilment of the Davidic promises. Likewise, indeed, the awesome centrepiece of chapters [56–66](#) is the return of the triumphant victor to Zion. [1:26](#) is a veritable seed-thought.

d. Explanation: tensions between threat and hope resolved (1:27–31)

Verse [26](#) rounded off the poem which opened at verse [21](#). Two snatches of originally separate oracles now follow: verses [27–28](#) focus on the moral grounds of redemption and judgment respectively, and verses [29–31](#) on the inherent destructiveness of false religion. The material is plainly Isaianic.¹⁴ So is the editorial style whereby originally disparate material is brought together (as in a mosaic) into a new integration yet retains the original meaning.

Looking into the immediate past, Isaiah saw a divine preservative at work ([9](#)), but he knew ([18–20](#)) that such preservation could not be endlessly continued. The people's future depended on their response to the divine call to obey. Verses [25–26](#) seem to go back on this position because whereas a total degeneration of the nation has set in ([21–22](#)) and the Lord purposes to vent his anger on his enemies ([24–25a](#)), yet sovereignly he plans to bring David back to reign over a perfected city ([26](#)). In a word, there is a tension between divine sovereign purposes and human response, and between inevitable divine wrath and promised divine restoration. Isaiah uses the two oracles of verses [27–31](#), whatever their origin in his ministry, to resolve these tensions.

Verses [27–31](#) are delicately dovetailed into what has preceded:

A¹ Judgment threatened ([24–25a](#))

B¹ Restoration: the restored city ([25b–26](#))

B² Restoration: the redeemed Zion ([27](#))

¹⁴ Kaiser (*ad loc.*) is clear that verses [29–31](#) are Isaianic against allegations that they must be post-exilic saying, ‘Tree worship must have existed in Israel at every period.’ (Cf. Scott.)

- (a)Redemption consonant with (divine) justice
 - (b)Repentance consonant with (divine) righteousness
- A²Judgment threatened ([28–31](#))
- (a)Its moral ground in rebellion and sin ([28a](#))
 - (b)Its relational ground in abandonment of the Lord ([28b](#))
 - (c)Its religious ground ([29–31](#))
 - (i) The personal harvest reaped from false religion ([29](#))
 - (ii)The self-destructiveness of false religion ([30–31](#))

[27](#) To read from verse [26](#) into verse [27](#) is to continue the same topic but to move from fact to explanation. This is how the Lord will ‘restore’ Zion. There are two sides to restoration: objectively, the Lord’s work of redemption and subjectively, the human response of penitence. The adverbial phrases *with justice* and *with righteousness* (verse [21](#)) govern both aspects. When he redeems, the Lord does not overlook but satisfies the claims of his holy precepts. Human repentance is not a meritorious work offered to God to excite his pleasure but a response to the fact that his righteous claims have been met. *Redeemed* ($\sqrt{pādā}$) means specifically ‘to pay the ransom price’ (cf. [Ex. 13:13](#); [Lv. 27:27](#); [Is 29:22](#); [35:10](#); [51:11](#)). *Penitent ones*/‘returning ones’ stresses the practical side of repentence: a change of mind resulting in a new (Godward) direction of life. The word $\check{sābeyhā}$ (lit. ‘those of her who come back’) links with the double use of $\check{ašibā}$ (‘I will bring back’ *my hand* and *I will restore your judges*) in verses [25–26](#), binding the two passages together and giving primacy to the divine acts which make the human response possible and meaningful.

[28](#) In contrast to those who ‘come back’ to the Lord ([27](#)) there are those who *forsake* him. (The Hebrew is lit. ‘But shattering for those rebelling [participle] and sinful—all at once! Those forsaking the Lord will come to an end.’) *Rebels* ($\sqrt{pāšā}$; cf. verse [2](#)), *sinners* (‘sinful’, $\sqrt{hāṭā}$; cf. verse [4](#)) and *forsake* (cf. verse [4](#)) are an inclusio binding the end of the passage to the beginning and indicating its present unity. The words in turn speak of an unruly will, a life short of the ideal and an abandoned relationship. The verse denotes an act from outside (be *broken*) terminating the sinner’s course and, at the same time, a petering out (*perish*/‘come to an end’) of internal resources.

[29–31](#) The charge of ‘forsaking the LORD’ ([28](#)) is now justified (verse [29](#) opens with ‘for’). The people’s formal religious allegiance was to the Lord ([10–15](#)) but their ‘choice’

and ‘delight’ (29) were the nature and fertility cults of the day (*cf.* 27:9; 57:3–6; 66:17). Isaiah did not believe that any religion was as good as any other. His insistence in verses 10–15 that religion must have moral commitment is amplified here by the implication that true religion is more than human preference and satisfaction (29) and reaches a source of life not subject to earth’s withering and waning (30).

29 This verse is lit. ‘For they shall reap shame from the trees which you desired’,¹⁵ i.e. those who live in the days of the shattering (28) will reap what their forebears have sown. The fundamental cause of disaster is false, inadequate religion. *Oaks* and *gardens* are the symbols of the life of ‘nature’ and of the fertility gods. *Ashamed* and *disgraced* convey more the thought of disappointment than of mere embarrassment, hence ‘reaping shame’ rather than just ‘feeling ashamed’. The governing factor in their religion (*cf.* Am. 4:5) was what they found helpful (*in which you have delighted*) and what they determined upon (*that you have chosen*). According to Calvin, ‘True religion must be conformable to the will of God as its unerring standard.’¹⁶

30 The evergreen tree aptly symbolized undying life and therefore became the focus of nature religion and the gods of fertility. But such religion cannot keep its promises; it is ‘a tree with fading leaves’. False religion has no inherent life. With *a garden without water* the picture turns to one of dependence upon an outside source of life—water. False religion has no external reality to nourish it. It is not a real contact with the divine.

31 In the context the *mighty man* is the one who fancies himself strong through his chosen gods: *his work* is the idol he has made, the garden he has planted as the locus of his god. Together they are *tinder* and *spark*, a deadly, combustible combination which illustrates the self-destructiveness of false theology and religion.¹⁷

3. Sin and election (2:1–4:6)

¹⁵ It would be easy to ‘smooth out’ the differences in person (*cf.* BHS; ICC; GKC, 144p) but such transitions from third to second person *etc.* are a frequent idiom (*e.g.* 42:20; 52:14; 61:7).

¹⁶ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), in the *Library of Christian Classics*, vols. XX and XXI, ed. J. T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster Press, 1960), I. v. 3.

¹⁷ It would be marginally easier to translate ‘and his/its maker a spark’, in which case ‘the strong’ refers ironically to the idol god, and ‘its maker’ is the idolater. The essential meaning, the inherent self-destructiveness of error, remains the same.

Like chapter 1, this section is a mosaic of originally separate pieces, each undated, no longer bound to the historical circumstance which gave them birth but now woven into a fresh presentation. The opening poem (2:2–4) introduces the theme: the vision of Jerusalem as the centre of world pilgrimage, revelation and peace. It expresses poetically the ‘Abrahamic’ status of Israel (Gn. 12:3; 22:18) as the elect of God, chosen as the means of universal blessing. The whole section is coherently structured:¹⁸

A¹ The ideal Jerusalem (2:2–4)

B The actual Jerusalem (2:5–4:1)

B¹ Its religious condition (2:5–21)

B² Its social condition (3:1–4:1)

A² The new Jerusalem (4:2–6)

The development of this Zion-centred vision is Isaiah’s particular contribution to covenant thinking. It did not, of course, originate with him. Similar thinking is found in the Psalms (e.g. Pss. 87; 110), and we can only assume that the Davidic/Solomonic centring of the cult at Jerusalem, the pilgrimages to Zion (Pss. 84; 120–122), the exodus-orientation of the festivals (Ex. 12:17, 26–28; Lv. 23:41–44) with its related theme of the Lord’s triumph over the nations (cf. Ps. 47), and the royal ideology which expected the coming world-king in the line of David (Pss. 2; 72) all conspired together to re-express the Abrahamic promise of universal blessing in terms of this new focal point and new monarchic reality in the life of the Lord’s people. By what stages this understanding grew we cannot say; only that Isaiah gave it mature expression.

a. *Superscription (2:1)*

Apart from 1:1 this is the only superscription in the Isaianic literature and this raises the question why it occurs here. It must indicate a collection of Isaianic material which once had independent circulation and which has been simply incorporated here. Many sug-

¹⁸ The sequence in chapters 2–4 is found again in chapters 40–55: the place of the Gentile in the Lord’s purposes (2:2–4; 40:1–42:17); the moral and spiritual failure of Israel (2:5–4:1; 42:18–48:22); the redeeming act of the Lord for Israel (4:2–6, 49:1–54:17). In the present chapters Jerusalem becomes all that the Gentiles hoped for in 2:2–4, and in the later chapters the salvation of Israel becomes the basis of a world-wide invitation (55:1–13). In chapter 54, as in chapter 4, the outcome of the Lord’s salvation is seen as a restored Zion.

gestions have been made as to the extent of this once separate book but the most satisfactory is to think of 2:1–4:6 circulating as a ‘broadsheet’ or published as a ‘wall newspaper’ (cf. on 8:1; 30:6) under Isaiah’s imprimatur.¹⁹ *What Isaiah ... saw* is lit. ‘the word which Isaiah saw’ (cf. 1:1; Am. 1:1). ‘Word’ signifies ‘message’ or ‘truth’ and *saw* signifies ‘perceived by divine revelation’. Thus Isaiah repeats his conviction that revelation prompted his message and inspiration prompted his words.

b. *The ideal Jerusalem (2:2–4)*

This poem appears in *Micah 4:1–4* substantially as here and presents us with an insoluble problem whether Isaiah composed and Micah ‘copied’ or *vice versa*, or whether each prophet made use of a popular hymn.²⁰ As far as the two versions are concerned, that in Isaiah feels and is a tighter literary composition, and the variations in Micah could have arisen through quoting from memory.²¹ Wellhausen expressed the opinion that the poem, remarkable from any pen, is possibly less remarkable from Isaiah, and this is

¹⁹ See Oswalt’s discussion. His view is that the superscription introduces chapters 2–4 (cf. Mauchline). P. R. Ackroyd argues (*Isaiah I–XII: Presentation of a Prophet*, VTS, 29 [1978], 16ff.) that the superscription expresses the confidence of a later editor and that verses 2–4 are by Isaiah, not Micah.

²⁰ Cf. J. Gray (‘The kingship of God in the Prophets and Psalms’, VT, 11 (1961), 15) says, ‘Both prophets made use of a passage which had become part of the liturgy in the eighth century.’ This contrasts, as to dating, with the once axiomatic assumption that what is eschatological must be late (cf. Kaiser). To the contrary, G. von Rad has said (‘The city on the hill’, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Oliver and Boyd, 1966), pp. 232–242) that this is ‘... the first and ... the earliest expression of a belief in the eschatological glorification of the holy mountain ... It cannot be doubted that the text is Isaianic [dealing with] a firmly grounded and already accepted eschatological conception.’

²¹ As to whether the passage is more at home in Isaiah or Micah arguments are evenly balanced but comparison of the two texts weighs heavily in favour of an Isaianic origin. E.g. Micah’s opening (*yih^eyeh har b^ey_t yahweh n^akōn*) is pedestrian by comparison with the stylish and typically Isaianic *nakōn yih^eyeh har b^ey_t yahweh*. Micah’s variation of wording as compared with Is. 2:2b, 3a, 4, his introduction of the conjunction ‘and to the house of the God of Jacob’ (4:2³) and his use of the paragogic form *yilm^ed^aūn* points to free quotation.

true.²² The Assyrian Empire and its relationship to Judah forms the historical background to chapters 1–37. In particular, Isaiah lived to see his prediction that Zion would not fall to Assyria fulfilled in the overthrow of Sennacherib by the act of the Lord. Maybe this poem arose from his conviction, excited and confirmed by this deliverance, that the great Zion-based promises would yet be fulfilled. At all events, the fact that the poem is found in two prophets indicates its popular currency. In the present setting Isaiah uses it to challenge the people to face up to what, possibly, they were singing with glib detachment. If others are ever to say *Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD* (3), Judah must heed the call *Come, ... let us walk in the light of the LORD* (5).

Within the following outline, the ‘into Zion’ theme of verses 2–3a balances the ‘out of Zion’ theme of verses 3b–4. The presence and truth of the Lord (2–3a) exercises a supernatural magnetism, producing a reordered world (4a) and a new humanity (4b).

A Fact: Zion the centre of world-wide attraction (2)

The undated future (2a)

Supreme exaltation (2bc)

Universal inflow (2d)

B Recognition: Zion the centre of world-wide revelation (3)

Nationalism set aside and recognition of the God of Jacob (3a)

Pre-commitment to learn from the Lord and to walk in his ways (3b)

The reality of revelation in Zion (3c)

C Blessing: Zion the centre of world-wide peace (4)

Divine authority imposed (4a)

International response: the transformation of weapons (4b)

The end of war whether in act or intent (4c)

2 *In the last days* or ‘at the end/culmination of the days’ is the undated future, neither necessarily far nor certainly near. It is also known as ‘the day of the Lord’ bringing both judgment (2:12–21) and victory leading to peace (9:1–7); the consummation and enjoyment of God’s rule (Ho. 3:5). The prophets insist on the certainty of what God will do and the present necessity of readiness. What had always been known to be true of Zion (Ps. 48:1–2) will be universally recognized.

²² Quoted by Skinner, vol. 1, p. 15.

Mountains were widely held to be the homes of the gods. The exaltation of *the mountain of the LORD's temple*/‘house’, the mountain where he lives, typifies therefore a supernatural triumph of the Lord over all gods. The construction of *will be established* (*nākōn yih^eyeh*) stresses fact and continuance. For *all nations*, see on 45:14–24; 60; 66:23. The incongruity of a *stream* flowing upwards to earth’s highest point is intentional; a supernatural magnetism is at work.

3 The *peoples* come voluntarily, notwithstanding the supernatural magnetism stressed by verse 2. Their coming transcends nationalism: they acknowledge the God of a single nation, *the God of Jacob*, as the God of all nations. They are moved by the desire (lit.) ‘that he may teach’ (✓ *yārâ*; whence *tōrâ*, *law*/‘teaching’), and they affirm ‘and we will walk’. (This is true knowledge: a grasp of truth issuing in redirection of life.) They also come responsively (lit.) ‘for law/teaching will go forth’: Zion is the source of a ‘teaching’ (*law*; cf. 1:10) which is nothing less than *the word of the LORD*, veritable divine revelation.

4 In human political thinking the reduction of armaments is a hoped-for cause of peace and this is not without truth, but for Isaiah the abolition of armaments follows a divine reordering of the world consequent upon the transcending of nationalism by the recognition of the one true God. To *judge* means to ‘make authoritative pronouncements’, and to *settle disputes* means to ‘arbitrate’. The means of war (*beat their swords*), the practice of war (*take up sword*) and the mentality of war (*train for*/‘learn’ *war*) all alike disappear. The choice of agricultural implements (*ploughshares* and *pruning hooks*) is symbolic of the return to Eden (cf. 11:6–9): people right with God again; the curse removed; the end of the serpent’s dominion; an ideal environment.

c. *The actual Jerusalem (2:5–4:1)*

This section is introduced and divided into two subsections by transitional verses (2:5, 22) each of which is, first, an exhortation arising from what has preceded and, secondly, further justified by what follows (both 2:6 and 3:1 open with ‘for’). 2:2–4 provides a paradigm. In the ideal city a true relationship with the Lord (2:2–3a) issues in a true society (2:3b–4). The actual Jerusalem is seen first in religious (2:6–21) and then in social (3:1–4:1) disorder.

The first exhortation: commitment to the Lord (2:5)

The exhortation is linked to the foregoing vision. If ‘the God of Jacob’ (3) is to be

acknowledged by the world, those who know him already, the *house of Jacob*, have a special responsibility. Hence the call to the nations ‘Come, let us go up’ (3) finds an echo in *Come, ... let us walk*. For the thought that an obedient people are magnetic to the watching world see [Deuteronomy 4:5–8](#). Isaiah does not stand aloof from the call but says *us*. One with them in sin (6:5), he would have them to be one with him in aspiration. He calls them, not to ‘walk to’ but to *walk in the light of the LORD*, for already it shines around them symbolizing God’s presence ([Ps. 27:1](#)) and truth ([Ps. 43:3](#)).

The actual Jerusalem: its religious condition (2:6–21)

Beginning with ‘for’, these verses explain further the need to recall the people to the Lord. In a word, they are under threat of divine judgment. Two self-contained units of prophecy spell this out: verses 6–9 speak of facets of national life which are inviting judgment, and verses 10–21 are a poem on the nature and results of divine judgment.²³ The charge of idolatry forms the climax to each section (8, 18–20). The Lord has forsaken his people because they have departed from him (6).

6–9 In a piece as rhythmic and compelling as anything he ever wrote, Isaiah opens with *abandoned* (6) and ends with *do not forgive* (9)—an iron band of hopelessness gripping the apostates of verses 7–9. He makes five contrasts between the ideal and the actual: (i) the world is drawn to Zion (2); God’s people choose to conform to the world (6); (ii) the world seeks spiritual benefit (3); Zion heaps up material wealth (7a); (iii) the consequence of coming to Zion is world peace (4); Zion is full of armaments (7b); (iv) the world seeks to know the true God and commits itself beforehand to obey him (3); God’s people are busy inventing their own gods (8); (v) the world is received before the Lord’s tribunal (4); God’s people are abandoned and denied forgiveness (6, 9).

6 The sudden switch from speaking to the people (5) to speaking to the Lord (*you have* is lit. ‘For you have’) need not trouble us. Such swift changes of point of view are frequent in the prophets (and familiar to preachers). Here Isaiah simply brings together into a new mosaic passages once unconnected with each other. God has *abandoned*

²³ The evidence of national wealth and self-confidence possibly dates these oracles early in Isaiah’s ministry, before the Syro-Ephraimite invasions ([2 Ki. 15:27–30](#)). The poem (verses 10–21), however, is general and could belong to any period of Isaiah. It has been brilliantly edited into its present place.

($\sqrt{nāṭaš}$) them, left them to their own resources, left them free to go their own way.

Full of superstitions from the East is lit. ‘full from the east’. The verb ‘to be full’ ($\sqrt{mālē}$, the motif word of this section) is not elsewhere used with ‘from’. If this is a meaningful ellipsis,²⁴ it must be understood as ‘have found their fulness from’ *the East*, i.e. derived all they need from eastern sources. Maybe there is the idea of the east as the source of light, in contrast with *the light of the LORD* (5). The Philistines (cf. 1 Sa. 6:2; 2 Ki. 1:2–6) may have been singled out as being to the west by contrast with the east to show Zion’s cosmopolitan outlook, ready to find insights wherever they are on offer. More likely Isaiah hoped to sting his hearers by *like the Philistines*, meaning they are descending to the dregs in identifying with the world (Jdg. 14:3). *Clasp hands with* is another unique expression, perhaps meaning ‘come to agreement with’. Since the verb ($\sqrt{sāpāq}$) usually means ‘to clap hands’ (Nu. 24:10) it could mean ‘engage in religious worship with’ (though Ps. 47:1 uses a different verb). KB records a distinct verb, ‘to abound in, be rich in’, i.e. rich in what *pagans* (lit. ‘sons of strangers’, foreigners in culture rather than pagans in religion) have to offer.²⁵

7–8 The ascending scale of condemnation (wealth, armaments, idolatry) is enhanced by the repetition²⁶ *is full of* and by the fact that verse 8b unexpectedly does not repeat *there is no end*, used twice in verse 7. The Bible has no animus against wealth (*treasures*) as such. All depends on how it is acquired (3:14), how it is used (5:8) and whether it is seen as an alternative security to trusting the Lord. On Isaiah’s view of military security, symbolized by *chariots*, see chapter 39. *Idols* ($^{e}lilîm$, ‘nonentities’) is always used dismissively of the ‘gods’ and is a deliberate pun on $^{e}lōhîm$, ‘God’. They registered the claim but failed of the reality! The ‘no-gods’ appear in verses 18, 20; 10:10–11; 19:1, 3; 31:7 and ten times elsewhere in the Old Testament. *Their/his hands* and *their/his fingers* are distributive singulars meaning ‘each to the work of ...’. Instead of the expected ‘there is

²⁴ Maybe the object of ‘they are full’ has dropped from the text (see BHS). Possibly it should read *mīqsām* (‘divination’) or *qōs̄mîm* (‘diviners’).

²⁵ See Dhorme of Jb. 36:18 for confirmation of a verb with this meaning.

²⁶ Repetition is a characteristic of Isaiah e.g. 1:16–17 (eight imperatives); 2:12–16 (ten exalted things); 10:28–32 (thirteen place-names); 24:7–12 (fourteen asyndetic clauses); 33:15–16; 44:24–28 (thirteen attributive clauses); 52:7; 65:11 (four participles); 65:13–15 (five contrasts); and about thirty other places.

no end to' Isaiah underlines the sheer absurdity of idolatry. While the pagan idolater doubtless saw his idol as expressive of unseen spiritual forces, to Isaiah (and the Old Testament in general) there is nothing behind the idol. The material artefact is all there is (41:21–29; 44:6–20). The irony is savage: people, unable to face life unaided, seek help in earthly resources and human ingenuity (*cf.* 41:5–7). The repetition of *hands* and *fingers* focuses attention on the absurdity: the human creating the divine!

9 Verses 6–8 contain things on which nations pride themselves: broadminded tolerance (6), financial reserves (7a), military potential (7b), religious interest (8). These are not matters for pride, says Isaiah, but things which have *brought low* and *humbled* all alike. *Man* translates *'ādām*, the 'broad' word meaning the generality of folk, whereas *mankind* is *'īš*, the (known) individual, leaders in the community. When human beings depart from the Lord—no matter what they depart to—they progressively lose their true humanity. Their dignity, the image of God, is humiliated. This (*so* is a particle of consequence) is the inevitable outcome. Only in the Lord does humankind remain human.

The Hebrew imperative not only commands but is frequently used to express an inevitable result.²⁷ In *do not forgive them* this idiom is used negatively. Isaiah is not commanding the Lord not to forgive but saying that forgiveness is unthinkable: 'and for sure you will not forgive them'.

10–21 The Lord has but to reveal his glory (10) and human arrogance is humbled (11), the whole world which human pride has infected is devastated (12–17), idols are exposed as useless (18–19) and people are left defenceless (20–21). Thus Isaiah continues the theme of divine judgment in a closely-structured poem. There are two main sections (10–17, 18–21) and four subsections (10–11, 12–17, 18–19, 20–21). The first two subsections end with the refrain *the LORD alone will be exalted in that day* (11, 17); the second two with *when he rises to shake the earth* (19, 21). The first and third begin with the 'enter the rock' theme and the second and fourth with a reference to the Lord's day (12, 20). The initial *from dread of the LORD* (10), reappearing in verse 19, forms an inclusio at verse 21. In the pairs of subsections, the first in each case states a fact and the sec-

²⁷ For the imperative used to express certainty of outcome see 6:10; 7:4; 8:9. The negative imperative is 'used to express the conviction that something cannot or should not happen' (GKC, 109e). See Pss. 34:5⁶; 41:2³.

ond how that fact will be expressed.

A The Lord exalted over man and his world ([10–17](#))

A¹ Fact: The Lord exalted, man humbled ([10–11](#))

A² Demonstration: The Lord exalted over every exalted thing ([12–17](#))

B The Lord exalted over the no-gods ([18–21](#))

B¹ Fact: The Lord exalted, no-gods and men alike vanish ([18–19](#))

B² Demonstration: The Lord exalted, the no-gods exposed ([20–21](#))

10 As in Isaiah's experience ([6:3–5](#)), it is not an exercise of power that humbles humankind but simply that the Lord unveils himself as he always has been. The reference to *rocks* and *ground*/‘dust’ is heavily ironical: against human foes such expedients sufficed (e.g. [Jdg. 6:1–6](#))—but against God? Earthly resource was their boast ([6–8](#)) and now in the day of judgment they have only earth to turn to; the natural in the face of the supernatural. *Splendour* (*hādār*) is glory visibly displayed and *majesty* (from $\sqrt{gā'ā}$, ‘to be high’) is ‘exaltedness’.

11–12 Isaiah stands in the tradition of [Amos 5:18–20](#). Maybe for him too the people looked with complacency towards *that day* when the Lord would intervene notably and finally, as if the vengeful aspects of the day were for those outside the covenant while for those born inside there could be only blessing and joy. Privilege of birth, said Amos, only made judgment the more certain ([Am. 3:1–2](#)). Isaiah would agree and will presently declare the conditions on which ‘a remnant will be saved’ ([8:9–22](#); [10:16–23](#)). To say that the Lord has this day *in store* (a correct interpretative insertion by the NIV) reflects the Old Testament view of time as linear, not circular. Days do not simply ‘come round’. Rather, each day is a distinct act of covenant-keeping ([Gn. 8:22](#); [Ps. 74:16](#); [Je. 33:20, 25](#)), and within this series of divinely planned and sent days there is in reserve a day that is specially the Lord’s, to be inserted into the time-line at a point he alone determines.

13–17 Throughout, *for all* should be read ‘against all/every’. Verse [17](#) commences with ‘and’, the implication in context being ‘and thus’, i.e. every exalted thing, whether natural ([13–14](#)) or made with human hands ([15–16](#)), somehow reflects humankind’s arrogant pride and so falls when it falls. There is an ambivalence in the Old Testament view of the created world. As God’s world, it always sides with him ([1:2](#)), but as humanity’s world it is implicated in the curse humanity’s sin has brought. The thorns of [Gene-](#)

sis 3:18 are at once nature's hostility to the sinner and nature's corruption by sin (cf. Rom. 8:20–23).

15 The *tower* and *wall* represent every way in which people see themselves independent of God and the author of their own security (Gn. 11:1–9).

16 *Trading ship*/‘ships of Tarshish’ were the largest ships, capable of the greatest voyages and cargoes. ‘Tarshish’ is possibly a place-name, in Spain (Tartessos) or N. Africa and is possibly a word (from the Phoenician) meaning ‘mine, smelting plant’ and hence heavy, ore-carrying ships. It could also be a word meaning ‘the open sea’. Such ships represent humankind triumphant over environmental forces, creating great commercial empires (cf. Ezk. 28:2–5). The word translated *vessel* (*s̄ek̄iyyôt*), found only here, is of uncertain meaning. If related to *mâskît* (‘figure, visual representation’; Nu. 33:52; Ezk. 8:12) the phrase may mean ‘figurines of desire’ and indicate desirable human artistic achievements as another dimension in which pride raises its head. The RSV neatly catches the best of both worlds with ‘craft’.

17 *Arrogance* and *pride* (*gabhût*; *rûm*) are both words expressing ‘height’ and point to all the ways in which people think of themselves more highly than they ought to think (Rom. 12:3); the opposite of the virtue of the humble mind (Eph. 4:2).

18–19 The poem moves to its climax. First is the fact of the triumph of the Lord over the *idols* (*’elîlîm*) the ‘no-gods’ (8). Just as the mere unveiling of the Lord’s majesty overwhelms proud *mankind* (9–10), so the Lord only has to rise from his throne for the no-gods to *totally disappear*/‘and the no-gods will totally, each of them, move off’.²⁸ *Men will flee*/‘and they will go’ could equally be a reference to the no-gods sharing the ignominious helplessness of their creators (10) before the majesty of the only God. *Caves* and *holes* represents both the natural and the man-made; people *will flee* to wherever there seems to be a possibility of shelter.

20–21 Further ignominy for the no-gods as their erstwhile devotees renounce them, recognizing their uselessness. At the same time, however, this is the climax of Isaiah’s indictment of human pride. People’s proudest achievement is to dispense with the living God and to become god-makers. Then indeed they have come of age! But the stan-

²⁸ The MT has an individualizing singular verb with a plural subject. Q^a, however, divides the consonants differently between verses 18 and 19, reading *yhlwpw b’w* (i.e. plural verb followed by imperative) instead of *yah^alōp ūbā’û*.

dard by which everything must be judged is how it will fare on the day of the Lord. On that day such ‘gods’ will be seen as good for nothing and thrown away. The idolater is no stronger than his idol and the idol no less helpless than he. *Throw away* is an expression of the idolater’s disgust and the idol’s lifelessness as a mere disposable object (cf. 41:5–7; 46:1–2). The meaning of *rodents* is uncertain and may refer to ‘beetles’ or some burrowing insect.

The second exhortation: ‘Stop trusting in man’ (2:22)

For the place of this verse in the pattern of these oracles see pp. 52, 54. As in the case of verse 5, this transitional verse arises out of what has preceded and is further justified by what follows. The positive call for commitment to the Lord (5) is balanced by its negative counterpart to cease relying on *man* and what he can do. Such reliance has been the connecting thread of verses 6–21: reliance on the validity of human insights (6b), human resources (7), human ability to manipulate the divine (8) and human achievement (15–16). It is not man, however, that has to be faced but God and not man’s future but the day of the Lord. Against this neither man nor his gods have any substance. Therefore they should *stop trusting in man*.²⁹ *Who has but a breath in his nostrils* is ‘in whose nostrils is breath’. *Breath* is not a metaphor for transience but points to human life as derived (cf. Gn. 2:7; Is. 42:5; 57:15). *Of what account is he?* is not questioning intrinsic human worth but asking what value man has as an object of trust. He has neither an independent right to live nor a sure stake in life. But the gift of breath implies a giver and points to the wisdom of trusting, rather, the one who is the source of life.

The actual Jerusalem: its social condition (3:1–4:1)

For this section in the overall scheme see pp. 52, 54. Just as in 2:2–4 true religion produced true society so the corrupt religion of the actual Jerusalem (2:6–21) has produced a corrupt society. Thus a biblical logic links chapters 2 and 3; and, since 3:1 opens with ‘for’, chapter 3 further justifies the call to stop trusting in man. It does this by showing how human leadership has brought about the collapse of society. The contents of this section fall into two parts—3:1–15 and 3:16–4:1.

3:1–15, contained within the inclusio *the Lord, the LORD Almighty* (1, 15), forms a

²⁹ When the verb ‘to cease’ is followed by ‘from’ the meaning depends on the context. In Ex. 14:12 it means ‘stop worrying us’; in 1 Sa. 9:5, ‘stop being anxious about’; and here ‘stop relying on’.

unified composition:

- A¹ The act of the LORD, the Lord Almighty ([1a](#))
- B¹ The collapse of leadership and social disorder ([1b–5](#))
 - C¹ Vignette: leadership debased ([6–7](#))
 - D¹ Jerusalem's collapse explained ([8](#))
 - D² Jerusalem's judgment pronounced ([9–11](#))
 - B² Social oppression and misleading leaders ([12](#))
 - C² Vignette: leadership brought to trial ([13–15a](#))

A² The word of the Lord, the LORD Almighty ([15b](#))

In the way this material swings vigorously from one topic to another, in its telling use of illustration and in its sense of divine authority, we surely hear the authentic voice of Isaiah the preacher.

[3:16–4:1](#) has a double function. First, it shows how judgment will work out in divine action, transforming luxuriousness into poverty and slavery, making use of enemy assault resulting in a casualty rate of six men in seven and Zion herself being brought to the dust. Secondly, they prepare for the vision of what the Lord will yet do ([4:2–6](#)), for just as the ‘daughters of Zion’ ([3:16–24](#)) encapsulated the spirit of their mother, so they will be the primary objects of divine renewal ([4:4](#)).

The message of the whole section is solemn in the extreme. Divine judgment on society begins to manifest itself in the disappearance of solid leadership ([1–3](#)) and the appearance of immature, capricious leaders ([4](#)). Society becomes divided ([5a](#)), the age-gap opens up ([5b](#)), values are at a discount and those who should be despised take the initiative ([5c](#)). An air of despair dominates elections ([6–7](#)). All this arises from moral and spiritual causes. It is not the result of failures of policy but of speaking and acting against the Lord and provoking him; blatant sin inviting its just reward ([8–11](#)).

The imminent collapse of society ([3:1–7](#))

The Lord removes stable leadership ([1–3](#)) and introduces childish leaders ([4](#)). As a result fragmentation sets in, socially and morally ([5](#)), and the whole idea of leadership falls into disrepute ([6–7](#)).

1 *The Lord* (*hā'ādōn*) means ‘the sovereign one’, whereas *the LORD Almighty* ‘of hosts’ is ‘Yahweh’, the covenant God of Israel (see on [1:9](#)). The sovereignty of God is not only

the power which underwrites the end of history but also the power at work in the detailed ordering of earthly affairs in accordance with his immutable principles of righteousness. Here, when leaders fall and leaders arise, it is he who removes (1) and appoints (4) them. He does so not arbitrarily but through the election processes (6–7) and in accordance with justice (8–17). *Supply* and *support* are masculine and feminine forms of the same noun, an idiom of totality, meaning ‘every support without exception’. Isaiah begins his delineation of a collapsing society where people would most keenly begin to feel it—the breakdown of basic material supplies such as *food* and *water* (*cf.* the reference to food in verse 7),³⁰ but see on 2:12–17 (*cf.* Am. 4:6–8). Offence against the Creator results in the withholding of the blessings of creation. There is thus a theological reason for commencing here.

2–3 Beginning with military leadership, *hero* and *warrior* (the supposed evidences of national security), Isaiah heaps up titles, moving broadly from the national (*Judge* and *prophet*) to the local (*elder* and *craftsman*), and mixing the legitimate with the illegitimate (*counsellor* and *enchanter*). This creates an impression of the total collapse of the command structure of society. The dissolution of society and the abandonment of true religion is always the signal for superstitions and an obsessive interest in prognostication, hence the reference to the *soothsayer* or ‘fortune-teller’. *Captain of fifty* and *man of rank*, *the counsellor* refers to local government, and *skilled craftsman* to the disappearance of the local carpenter and plumber or of men whose work is reliable. The *clever enchanter* is one ‘instructed in whispering’, *i.e.* communicating with the dead, a practitioner of spiritism (*cf.* 8:19).

4 Boys are those lacking experience (*cf.* Je. 1:6) and *mere children* (*ta^alûlîm*; only found elsewhere at 66:4) possibly indicates ‘capriciousness’ or ‘ruthlessness’.³¹

5 In society as a whole there is divisiveness and ruthless self-advancement (the ‘rat-race’) and within society’s natural groupings, teenage rebellion. *Rise up* speaks not just of revolt but also of its arrogant, loud-mouthed spirit (it comes from $\sqrt{rāhab}$, ‘to storm

³⁰ Since the remainder of the list concerns only persons, many commentators remove this reference to economic resources. Scott (*ad loc.*) calls it ‘a later though legitimate extension’. If it is legitimate how can it be discerned to be unoriginal? But in fact a reference to food here anticipates the famine conditions of verse 7. Besides which the threat is of the removal of every sort of support.

³¹ It comes from $\sqrt{ālal}$, ‘to deal severely, ruthlessly, abusively’ (Ex. 10:2; Jdg. 19:25).

against'). In the moral order, honour is accorded without consideration of worth. *The base* is lit. 'the one who ought to be thought nothing of' and *the honourable*, the one 'who merits honour'.³²

6–7 In the political order there is a disinclination to treat leadership seriously and a breakdown in public spirit. Isaiah is not describing events but caricaturing attitudes where leadership merits not thoughtful but hasty action (*seize*), not a search for the best candidate but taking whatever is at hand (*brothers at ... home*), not qualification but show (*cloak*). Despair has set in (*heap of ruins*), infecting the candidate like the proposers. '*I have no remedy*'/'I will not be a healer/bandager' is the same picture of the wounded body politic (and the same word) as in 1:6. The candidate takes his proposition at face value and disclaims even the pathetic qualifications urged in his favour. Behind this caricature lies the reality of unwillingness to accept responsibility and for reasons as frivolous as those put forward in his favour. Isaiah is in reality describing a breakdown in national character and seriousness; the spirit which treats national welfare, politics and leadership as a joke.

The root cause of the collapse (3:8–9a)

Verse 8 reads 'For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, for their tongue and their deeds are against the LORD.' The first 'for' explains the evidences of social and character collapse just reviewed and the second explains the first, tracing all to a root cause: speech and conduct contrary to the Lord. Isaiah's own experience taught him the seriousness of sins of speech (6:3) but it is no more than the rest of the Bible affirms (cf. 59:2–3; Pss. 5:9; 10:7; 15:3). With the words *defying his glorious presence*/‘designed to offer rebellion to the eyes of his glory’, their speech and conduct are described as deliberately provocative, for in the Bible every known result is considered as part of the intention of the agent. The Lord’s ‘glory’ is shorthand for ‘the Lord present in all his glory’ (cf. 6:3), and *his glorious presence*/‘the eyes of his glory’ is his observation of everything offensive to his holiness. Isaiah sees this sin as compounded in the case of his people for it is not an occasional lapse nor a shameful secret but a public and unabashed way of life. They wear what they are on their faces and *parade*/‘tell of’ their sin. Moral factors

³² The niphil participle (like the Latin gerundive) is expressive of quality, what must or ought to be.

(words and deeds) and spiritual factors (*against the LORD*) are the cause of national breakdown.

Retributive justice (3:9b–11)

These verses are in the form of a ‘wisdom’ poem.³³ The general principle of just reward (9b) is applied first to *the righteous* (10) and then to *the wicked* (11). The same words appear at the beginning and the end (*woe, brought ... upon, paid back* [in each case ‘rewarded’], *disaster*) making the poem self-contained.

9b The boomerang quality of sin is highlighted and the sinner is his own paymaster (*brought ... upon, /gāmal*, means ‘to deal fully with, requite, pay in full’). *Disaster/evil* is his wage.

10 *The righteous* as always, are those who are right with God and therefore committed to a life of righteousness. They are not promised immunity from earth’s troubles but that it *will be well*. Doubtless many of the righteous were among the six out of seven who fell in the predicted war (3:25–4:1) yet even the sword is not indiscriminate and Old Testament faith looks beyond earthly life (Ps. 73:23–24).³⁴

11 The individualistic emphasis increases. In verse 10 the singular ‘righteous’ is made collective by the plural verb *enjoy* and the pronoun in *their deeds*, but here all is singular, ‘the full requital of his hands will be done to him’. Wickedness cannot lose itself in the crowd. *Disaster is upon them!* is lit. an exclamation, ‘Disaster!’

Retribution applied (3:12–4:1)

The situation of oppressed (12a) and misgoverned (12b) people is brought to the bar of divine justice and the rulers are arraigned before the Lord’s tribunal (13–15). But then metaphor becomes history and judgment falls on an errant people through military overthrow (3:16–4:1). Thus verses 13–15 display the inner reality of the offended Lord and 3:16–4:1 the experienced reality of his wrath in action.

The Lord enters into judgment (3:12–15)

³³ The use of ‘wisdom’ forms and themes does not imply a late date. Passages like 28:23–29 and 32:3–8 show Isaiah’s facility with this genre.

³⁴ The MT does not need emendation in verse 10, but the suggestion is attractive that for ‘tell’ (*imrû*) we might read *’ašrê* (‘happy/blessed are’). The alteration is small and the contrast with ‘woe’ in verse 11 is excellent.

12 This verse consists of an outraged exclamation (lit. ‘My people! Youths oppress them ...’; cf. 52:3–6) followed by an address (lit. ‘O my people, your guides ...’). The Lord’s people are precious to him. No-one touches them with impunity (cf. Zc. 2:8). Some details of the verse are, however, problematical. *Youths* (*m^eôlēl*) is a singular noun of uncertain meaning, possibly related to √‘ûl (‘to nurse a baby’) or to ‘ôlēl (‘a child’) (cf. 13:16). *Oppress* (*nōg^esāyw*, ‘his oppressors/taskmasters’; cf. Ex. 3:7) is a plural participle, possibly a plural of majesty: ‘their chief slaver is a mere infant’.³⁵ In other words, the divine ideal of kingship has been corrupted and the holder of the office is an inadequate. *Women* possibly refers to the royal harem. If the king was a spoiled brat then likely enough his wives were numerous and manipulative, fitting what we sense of the reign of Ahaz (but cf. Am. 4:1). The reference may be to dominant and demanding women, the ‘power behind the throne’ and not only in the palace! (cf. on verse 16). With the cry *O my people*, outrage becomes concern and we sense the Lord’s heart of love for his own. *Your guides* (*m^eaššreykâ*) are ‘those who set you right’ (cf. ‘set right’, 1:17). Isaiah’s choice of this word is heavily ironical. It expresses what is expected of a leader but the reality is the opposite; they *lead you astray*, i.e. they enact laws which misdirect. And this is only half of their mischief for also (lit.) ‘they swallow up the way of your paths’; the old established signposts for right living are as completely obliterated as if someone had swallowed them!

13 This courtroom scene has theological importance. Plainly, in verse 12 the Lord is passionately concerned about the situation but he does not rush into action. First, charges must be laid, the case must be proved. The Lord is just in all his ways (cf. Gn. 18:20–21). *The people* should be ‘peoples’. Divine judgment often has a universal setting (cf. 2:10–22 where the point at issue is his people’s religious deviation but the act of judgment covers the whole world).³⁶ The reason for this is that judgment is one aspect

³⁵ If the MT is to stand, *m^eôlēl* must be related to √‘ûl (‘to nurse an infant’) and to ‘ôlēl (‘a child’); cf. 13:16. The LXX has *kalamontai* (‘glean’) and the Vulg. has *spoliaverunt* (‘have despoiled’). Possibly, ‘ôlēlû should be translated ‘have gleaned you’—as we might say ‘have fleeced you’.

³⁶ This courtroom scene should be compared with Ps. 50, noting the same revelation of the Lord as Judge (50:6), the same universal setting (50:1), the same address (‘O my people’; 50:7), the same words of prosecution (verse 15; Ps. 50:16); the parallel between verse 14 (*w^e’ attem bi’ artem*) and Ps. 50:17 (*w^e’ attâ sâne’ tâ*). Ps. 50 links itself with a covenant festival (verse 5), probably

of the day of the Lord when his just account is settled against all without exception.

14 *Elders and leaders* are respectively the legislative and executive arms of government. $\sqrt{bā'ar}$ (*ruined*) strictly means ‘to burn’ but possibly ‘to graze, strip by grazing’.³⁷ Since either is an unusual way of treating a vineyard, possibly the verb allows a metaphorical use, ‘to strip bare’. The contravention of the law of [Leviticus 19:9–10](#) and [Deuteronomy 24:20–21](#) is precisely the charge the Lord lays against the rulers here. The *vineyard* is symbolic of the Lord’s care in choosing, delivering and settling his people ([Ps. 80:8–11 <9–12>](#)); the perfection of what he did (compared with what later eventuated; see [5:4](#); [Je. 1:12](#)) and his delight in his people ([5:1–4](#); [27:2–3](#); [Je. 12:10](#)). The leaders not only left no gleanings for the poor, they ‘plundered’ what meagre possessions the poor had; giving nothing, taking everything. *Poor*, from $\sqrt{'ānā}$ (‘to be low’ and hence to be lowly in the world’s estimation), refers to the financially poor, the underdog. It was a mark of true Israelite social morality to copy the Lord in his concern for the poor ([Lv. 19:10](#); [Dt. 15:7–11](#)). They had forsaken both the letter and the spirit of the law.

15 *Crushing* ($\sqrt{dākā}$), always used metaphorically, denotes the severest maltreatment (cf. [53:5](#), [10](#)). *Grinding* ($\sqrt{tāhan}$) as in a mill ([Nu. 11:8](#)). The former is a picture of the bare fact of hostility; the latter of the motive of gain, milling a crop from the poor. For *declares* (*nē’um*) see on [1:24](#) and for *The Lord, the LORD* see on [3:1](#).

Divine retribution on Zion, personified in her ‘daughters’ (3:16–4:1)

The whole section moves to this climax. The ‘woes’ of verses [9b–11](#) proclaim coming judgment, the court scene ([12–15](#)) establishes the justice of it, and [3:16–4:1](#) sees the sentence executed. The divine title *Lord* ($^{a}dōnāy$; see on [3:1](#)) and the divine name (*LORD, Yahweh*), which bracketed the opening oracle ([3:1](#), [15](#)), are used in verses [17–18](#). The same Sovereign Yahweh who pronounced judgment carries out the sentence. The overall movement is now from the womenfolk of Zion ([16–25](#)) to Zion herself ([26](#)) and back to the women again ([4:1](#)). What is true of them is true of their ‘mother’; they encapsulate the spirit of arrogant self-seeking which has already been judged ([14–15](#)) and is the

Tabernacles. It is likely that Isaiah here allowed the liturgical shape of the festival to dictate the arrangement of his material. Note also [Ps. 82](#) for the same verb (‘takes his place’; cf. verse [13](#) with [82:1](#)), oppression of the poor ([82:3](#)) and the universal context.

³⁷ See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Magnes Press, 1967) on [Ex. 22:5<4>](#).

death-warrant of the city. The reference to domineering women (12) is here taken up and brought to its sad conclusion. The passage is in three sections: two contrasts (16–17, 18–24) and the grim final reality (3:25–4:1). The title *Lord* (17–18) links the first two sections, and the introductory *in that day* (18; 4:1) links the second and third. The NIV is correct in presenting the section as a blend of poetry and prose, illustrating Isaiah's literary versatility.

16–17 In the first contrast Zion's daughters are blemished and the judgment of God falls on the person of the sinner.

16 Everything is designed to attract attention—posture, demeanour, movement, ornament. The literal translation of *women* is ‘daughters’ (as in verse 17; cf. 4:4) and is necessary to point up the ‘like mother, like daughter’ theme of the section. They are haughty (*gāb^ehû*; cf. *gabhût* in 2:11; 17, ‘arrogant’ and ‘arrogance’ respectively). True sisters of Zion's men! It is not their luxurious life-style that Isaiah condemns but the arrogant spirit which prompted it. The whole catalogue of judgment (3:16–4:1) contains only this one word of explanation. (For *The Lord* (17), see introductory paragraph above.)

17 The related noun to *bring sores* (✓ *sāpah*) is used in **Leviticus 13:2** of leprous tissue. The women set out to attract (16) but the act of judgment makes them repellent. *Make their scalps bald* is possibly correct, but the verb (✓ *‘ārâ*) is not elsewhere used of stripping off hair, and the noun translated *scalps* is of uncertain meaning. Maybe it means ‘expose their private parts’, so that they are both scarred (17a) and shamed (17b).³⁸ Thus sin and its due reward frustrate all life's ambitions and would-be fulfilments.

18–24 In the second contrast life's ease is lost in sorrow. Isaiah itemizes the luxury they now enjoy (18–23) but, we note, does not condemn it as such. It is no sin to enjoy life's good. Their sin is their arrogance and pride of spirit (16). But *instead* (24) sounds out five times, like a death knell; their ease will be exchanged for mourning. (For *Lord*, *‘adōnāy*, cf. 3:1.) Young notes an Arabic cognate of *śah^arōnîm* (*crescent necklaces*) as the name of the moon-god. Possibly, crescent-shaped ‘charms’ are what are referred to.

³⁸ The word is *pothēn.-hēn* is not found elsewhere as a feminine plural suffix. The noun *pōt* (1 Ki. 7:50) is linked with the Akkad. *putu* ('forehead') hence 'front' (G. R. Driver, 'Linguistic and textual problems: Isaiah I-XXXIX', *JTS*, 38 [1937], 38). But others, e.g. G. H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* (NCB, Marshall, 1984), link it with 'hinge' or 'hinge socket'.

Perfume bottles (*bātē hannepeš*) in verse 20 would be better translated as ‘collars’.³⁹ All except one of the items in verse 24 are deliberate signs of the abstention from body-care associated with mourning (see 2 Sa. 12:20; 19:24; 1 Ki. 20:32; Je. 48:37). *Branding* is not a metaphor of mourning. Jerusalem’s girls had devoted themselves to beauty and now even that is gone. Life’s most cherished fulfilments are negated by sin. The word *branding* (*kī*)⁴⁰ is not found elsewhere, but by using it Isaiah typically achieves a telling rhyme (*kī tahat yopi*) to end his list. He also reverses the word order established in the previous four items (lit. ‘branding instead of beauty’) giving the effect of a ‘dying fall’, a tailing off into sadness.

3:25–4:1 All imagery is dropped at this point; here is the actuality of a city bereft. By this switch from ‘daughters’ to ‘mother’ Isaiah indicates that throughout he has seen the women as the incarnate spirit of the community. While judgment was forecast in the light of the coming day of the Lord (cf. on 3:13), there are many ‘interim days’ of which this is one: a condign judgment with tragic loss of life. If verses 16–17 reveal how sin blights the sinner and verses 18–24 show how it blights life’s happinesses, verse 25 descends to the pit of sorrow as sin ends in death. For *gates* (26) cf. Lamentations 1:4 and for *sit on the ground* cf. 47:1.

4:1 In 3:6 the men ‘take hold of’ ($\sqrt{tāpās}$) a man, seeking a ruler, in 4:1 the women *take hold of* ($\sqrt{hāzaq}$) a man, seeking a husband. The men placed reliance on worldly social strength only to find such reliance always perishes for want of people fit to rely on; the women gave their all to allurement only to find that in the end there were no takers. How well Isaiah began this section with the call to refuse to put trust in man (2:22)! The women providing their own *food* and *clothes* (4:1) is the reversal of the due ordering of marriage (Ex. 21:10).

d. The new Jerusalem (4:2–6)

³⁹ *bātē nepeš* may be ‘houses of soul’, which J. Pedersen (*Israel, its Life and Culture* [OUP, 1954], p. 170) suggests refers to boxes supposedly filled with spiritual potency, worn as protective charms. But if *nepeš* is here understood as ‘throat’, then ‘house’ could mean ‘housing’ or ‘holder for’ (cf. Ex. 26:29; 37:14) and therefore ‘high collar’ may be the correct translation.

⁴⁰ The noun *kī* is an unexceptionable formation from $\sqrt{kāwā}$ (see e.g. 43:2). Cognate nouns appear in Ex. 21:25 and Lv. 13:24.

We have been led to this point by the momentum of the coming ‘day of the Lord’: its existence (2:12), its effects (2:17, 20) and its infliction (3:18; 4:1). And now once again the same words! The mind recoils in dread. But contrary to all expectation there follows a message about glory and survival (2), holiness and life (3), cleansing (4), new creation and divine indwelling (5) and an open shelter (6). How truly surprising is the saving work of the Lord! How contrary to expectation and desert!

Structurally, verses 2–6 follow the pattern established in 2:2–4 and 2:5–4:1. Here is a double vision (2–4, 5–6) of Zion with new people, cleansed personally and socially (see below) and with a religious life over which the Lord presides and within which he is intimately at one with his people. Topical and verbal links also bind these verses to the foregoing: (i) The ‘daughters of Zion’ were the embodiment of the degenerate spirit of their mother (3:16–23); they are now the focus of divine cleansing (4). (ii) The nadir of their fortunes was a travesty of marriage (1); the glory will be the (bridal) *canopy* of verse 5. (iii) Their frenzied pursuit of beauty (3:16, 18) will find satisfaction in a true beauty (2). (iv) The unveiling of the Lord’s glory caused the city’s overthrow (2:10, 19, 21) but now that glory resides within it (2, 5). (v) Failure of leadership marked the doomed city (3:2–7); the new city is overshadowed by the exodus symbols of divine leadership (5; cf. Ex. 13:21–22). (vi) The double divine designation—*the Lord* (*'aḏōnāy*) and *the LORD* (*yahweh*)—of the judge (3:17–18) is also that of the redeemer (4–5).

A The Messianic day: The Branch of the Lord and the surviving people (2)

B¹ Those who remain: their holiness and their destiny (3)

C¹ The Lord’s work of cleansing and its means (4)

C² The Lord’s work of creation and its result (5)

B² The availability of shelter and the privilege of access (6)

2 *The Branch of the LORD*,⁴¹ is always elsewhere a title pointing to the Messiah in his kingly and priestly offices (Je. 23:5; 33:15; Zc. 3:8; 6:12). In itself ‘branch’ is a ‘family tree’ metaphor. In Jeremiah, ‘the branch’ is ‘for David’ or (better) ‘of David’s’. Only here do we have ‘the LORD’s branch’. The Messiah springs from a dual ancestry as he belongs in the ‘family tree’ of both David and the Lord. The human side of his ancestry is taken over here by the metaphor *the fruit of the land/‘earth* pointing to the Messiah as arising out of

⁴¹ See J. G. Baldwin, ‘*šemah* as a technical term in the prophets’, VT, 14 (1964), 93ff.

this created order (*cf.* 11:1; 53:2). *Beautiful*, *glorious*, *pride* and *glory* are nouns ('adornment', 'glory', 'pride' and 'beauty'). As qualities possessed by the Messiah in his divine and human nature they are lit. 'for' *the survivors*. All that he is he holds in trust for them. 'Adornment'/ornament' (*s^ebî*; *cf.* 2 Sa. 1:19) is personal eminence and 'beauty' (*tip'ereṭ*), attractiveness. In 3:18 they sought a false, transient 'beauty' ('finery', *tip'ereṭ*) but now they discern true beauty in him and he beautifies them. The middle words 'glory' and 'pride'/'dignity' point to a great change. 'Glory' had been their destruction (2:10) and 'pride' (2:12; a related word) their ruin. Now the divine glory dwells among them (*cf.* on verse 5), they rightly pride themselves in him and he imparts a true dignity to them. *Survivors*/'escapees' is a theologically neutral word for those who have escaped a calamity which overwhelmed others. Why they 'escaped' we learn in verse 3. (See Additional note.)

3 This verse notes the fact that some are *left* (*niš'ār*) and *remain* (*nôṭār*) but does not explain it: after the calamity, there are some left over. With the word *holy* we enter the theological realities behind this survival; those left are a group spiritually changed. The adjective is emphatic and the clause is singular: "Holy" shall be said to each'.⁴² (On *holy* see 6:3.) In a way yet to be explained these survivors have each been made fit for the divine presence. *Recorded among the living*/'written for/unto life' reflects the concept of a Book of Destiny or, on a lower level, a register of citizens, known throughout the ancient world; likewise the Lord's book is referred to throughout Scripture (*e.g.* Ex. 32:32–33).⁴³ To have survived the calamity is no accident but arises from an elective decision of the Lord, a divine purpose expressed in the inscribing of the name in the book of life. Behind personal experience lies the predestinating mind of God.

4 *The Lord will wash away* is lit. 'Whenever the Lord shall have washed away'. The conditional particle '*im*' ('if') is used when an event is certain but its timing unknown.⁴⁴ Sometimes the context is suited by 'if and when' but here 'whenever' fits best. (On *wash* see 1:16.) *Cleanse* (*cf.* 2 Ch. 4:6; Ezk. 40:38) means to 'rinse off', a thorough 'swilling

⁴² The niphil from √'amar is found more often in Isaiah than in any prophet (4:3; 19:18; 32:5; 61:6; 62:4). It occurs three times in Jeremiah and once each in Ezekiel, Hosea and Zephaniah. Cf. its use in the Zion psalm (87:5) in a context markedly similar to the present.

⁴³ Ps. 69:28; Dn. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; *cf.* Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3.

⁴⁴ *E.g.* Gn. 38:9; Nu. 21:9; Jdg. 6:3; Is. 24:13; 28:25.

away' of every stain. *Filth* means 'vomit' (cf. 28:8), i.e. inner uncleanness (Pr. 30:12), contrasting with the bloodstains or bloodshed of social violence, the outward misdemeanour; a total dealing with sin is here in mind. Is spirit being used impersonally as 'wind/blast'; generally as one of the many spirits at the Lord's disposal (e.g. 1 Ki. 22:21–23); or specifically to denote the Spirit of the Lord himself? Isaiah has already used storm imagery of the coming day (2:19, 21) and it is not unsuitable to see here the other (and unexpected) side of the Lord's intervention. But Isaiah does have a rich awareness of the Spirit of the Lord (30:1–2; 31:3; 63:10–14), specially in Messianic passages (11:2; 42:1; 59:21; 61:1), and this is the best understanding here: the divine Spirit, throughout the Bible the executive Godhead. Here he acts in *judgment/justice* and *fire/burning*, i.e. the Lord so acts as to meet alike the objective demands of absolute justice and the subjective demands of his own holy nature. On burning and fire as symbols of divine holiness see Exodus 3:2–5; 19:10–25. Cleansing by fire is not a standard Old Testament concept (cf. 6:6).

5 Awaiting the new people of verses 3–4 there is the new-created Zion of verses 5–6. *Create* ($\sqrt{bārā}$) is used in the Old Testament only of divine action, to express those acts which by their greatness or newness (or both) require a divine agent. In this new creation there is divine indwelling as *Mount Zion* and (lit.) 'its assemblies' (cf. 1:13 where the word is used of the abhorrent religion of old Jerusalem!) are marked as the Lord's dwelling-place by the divine standard flying there, *a cloud ... by day and a ... flaming fire by night* (cf. Ex. 13:21–22). There is also the consummation of the covenant: *over all the glory will be a canopy*. *Canopy* (*huppâ*) always denotes the 'marriage chamber' (Ps. 19:6; Joel 2:16). The *glory* here is either the Messiah (see verse 2) lovingly joined to his bride-people or the whole glorious Zion with its holy people (3) joined in the consummation of love with the Lord under the overshadowing tokens of his presence. (For the covenant as marriage cf. 49:17–18; 54:1–13; Je. 2:2–3; 31:31–34; Ho. 2:14–20.)

6 Another feature of the new creation is accessible shelter. Throughout this passage Isaiah has used exodus imagery.⁴⁵ Then, the Lord camped among his people but was not directly available to them (Ex. 29:42–46; 40:34–35); his glory was too overwhelming. But now, in the full reality of the glory (2, 5) there is open access into shelter. The very

⁴⁵ The holy people (verse 3; Ex. 19:4); the Spirit of God (verse 4; cf. 63:11–14; Hg. 2:5); the cloud and fire etc.

ordinariness of the needs enhances the idea of free access. The opposites (dry) *heat* and *rain* embrace every circumstance of life; *storm* ('inundation') and *rain* point to the extraordinary and the ordinary needs for shelter. For all needs alike there is shelter with the Lord.

Additional note on 4:2

The phrases *the Branch of the LORD* and *the fruit of the land* have received varied interpretations:

- (a) Vegetation. Both phrases express Messianic abundance (*cf. 30:23–26; Je. 31:12; Ho. 2:21–23; Am. 9:13–15*). Sin diminished and restricted the natural world (*Gn. 3:17–19*), but when sin is removed nature will be renewed and released. (So, Calvin, Skinner, Kissane, Scott and Kaiser.) Against this is the consideration that the four nouns, 'adornment', 'glory', 'pride' and 'beauty' seem somewhat excessive as descriptions of (mere) vegetation. *28:5* suggests a more exalted reference.
- (b) Remnant and vegetation. *The Branch* refers to the faithful remnant of Israel, just as *5:7* speaks of the people as a vineyard (*cf. 60:20; 61:3*). *The fruit* is the Messianic abundance. (So Barnes and Mauchline.) There is an awkwardness about this, however. The single verb in the sentence requires that both Branch and fruit are 'for' the survivors. How can the remnant be for the remnant?
- (c) Salvation and vegetation. *The Branch* is the Messianic salvation which the Lord makes to sprout after the judgment, and fertile vegetation is the accompanying sign (*cf. 45:8* which has the same verb). (So Orelli and Leupold.) As a view this cannot be faulted but why, in the light of the 'Branch' references in Jeremiah and Zechariah, should only Isaiah be allowed as vague a notion as 'the Messianic salvation'?
- (d) Messiah and vegetation. Birks sensibly sees that there is no reason to detach Isaiah's reference to the Branch from those in Jeremiah and Zechariah. So here *the Branch* is the Messiah and *the fruit* is the plenty he brings. Note the same balance between person and plenty in *11:1–5, 6–9*.
- (e) Messiah. As compared with the foregoing, to allow both phrases to refer to the Messiah gives the four impressive nouns the personal reference which alone seems to accord with their weight. The parallelism, says Alexander, requires that the Branch springs from the Lord just as the fruit from the earth; and Delitzsch compares *Ezekiel 17:5*, where a Davidic king is described as a 'seed of your land' and urges that 'Branch' as

a Messianic title is an Isaianic coinage fully in keeping with chapters 7–11. Young notes the use of $\sqrt{sāmāh}$ in 2 Samuel 23:5. The choice ultimately is between views (a) and (e). The idea of the Messianic plenty, rich though its overtones are, falls short of the dimensions of the verse, whereas on the wholly Messianic view the wording of the verse is given full rein and the imagery is true to wider biblical usage. The Messiah's double ancestry is thoroughly Isaianic.

4. Sin and grace (5:1–30)

In this last, grimmest section of his preface Isaiah faces the seeming inevitability of divine judgment. The choice of the vineyard metaphor is significant. In 1:8 the vineyard reference pointed to a remnant which the Lord preserved; in 3:12–4:1, when the vineyard was despoiled, the Lord intervened to pass judgment on its behalf and against its despoilers. Now, however, the vineyard is the place where total destruction must be pronounced (1–7). The future seems like a great question mark, for even the Lord has come to the point where he asks what more is there that can be done (4). In 1:2–31 though sin blighted life yet a bright hope was sketched in 1:26–27 for the future; in 2:1–4:6 though sin marred life's highest purposes yet cleansing and new creation was held in view (4:2–6); but now sin takes even hope away and nothing is left but the gathering darkness (30).

The verses fall into two sections: the Song of the Vineyard (1–7) and the bitter crop produced (8–30).

a. The vineyard: a total work, a total loss (5:1–7)

According to Ezekiel 15:2–5 a vine is either good for fruit or good for nothing. Since the Lord's people are his vine, the same truth applies. By the Feast of Tabernacles the vintage would be gathered in. It may have been on such an occasion that Isaiah invited the crowd to hear him sing, first of his friend (1–2), then as his friend (3–4), then revealing who his friend is (5–6) and finally revealing who the vineyard is (7). Skilfully he draws his hearers on to the point where they can only utter a condemnation and discover that they have condemned themselves.

A¹ The vineyard depicted (1, four lines)

B¹ The vineyard cared for (2ab, five verbs)

C¹ Conclusion drawn and contradicted (2c)

C² Conclusion invited (3–4, Now, *w^eattâ*)

C³ Conclusion announced (5, Now, *w^eattâ*)

B² The vineyard neglected (6, five verbs)

A² The vineyard explained (7, four lines)

1 To is (lit.) ‘concerning’ and *the one I love* is ‘my loved one’. A *song*/‘my beloved’s song’ is the song of which he is himself the singer: Isaiah the singer is the minister of another’s words. Note the depth of his personal devotion. Did the hearers expect a marriage song (*cf. Ps. 128:3; Song 2:15; 4:16*)? At Tabernacles this would suggest the consummation of the covenant (*cf. 4:5*). It is precisely this hope which is to be dashed as the song and then the chapter proceeds.⁴⁶ A *fertile hillside* (*qeren ben šemen*)/‘a horn, son of oil’ is a naturally rich and fertile projection.⁴⁷

2 The details here are not to be allegorized, making each act represent something in the Lord’s care of his people. Rather, they paint the picture of a total work, leaving nothing undone. The fertility of the soil (1), its preparation (2), and the quality of the vines (which were the choicest, *sōrēq*; *cf. Jdg. 16:4*) could not be faulted. Nor could the beloved’s expectations, for so confident was he of the vintage that he actually *built a watchtower* (*cf. 1:8*), a solid residence as for one intending to live permanently there, and cut out a ‘winevat’ (not *winepress*), a permanent storage place. We further learn that the vineyard was double-fenced (5). What more indeed! *Looked*/‘waited confidently’ ($\sqrt{qāwā}$; *cf. 40:31*) is not the discipline of waiting but its restful expectancy. The word translated *bad fruit* (*b^eušim*), only found here and in verse 4, is related to $\sqrt{bā'aš}$ (‘to stink’) and means literally ‘stink-fruit’. Delitzsch notes that the difference between a wild and a domestic vine is only in the matter of care. This is exactly the point: what can now be done for the people of God when a total work of grace has been lavished on them and yet they remain as if grace had never touched them?

3–4 The mask begins to slip. Isaiah begins, in true prophetic fashion, to speak in the person of his beloved. The question, *What more could/‘ought to’ have been done?*⁴⁸ is not

⁴⁶ On vineyard see *Is. 3:14–15; 27:2–6; 63:1–6; 65:8–10; cf. Ps. 80:8; Je. 2:21; 12:10; Ho. 14:7*.

⁴⁷ Only here is *qeren* (‘horn’) used of a ‘hill’ or ‘peak’. ‘Naturally fertile’ translates *ben šemem* (‘son of oil/fatness’). ‘Son of’ is an idiom for the condition of something or someone (*cf.* ‘son of seventy-five years’ in *Gn. 12:4*).

addressed to divine power but to the divine conscience. *Why* (*maddua'*) points back to the root cause (not forward to the purpose): ‘What possible ground was there?’ This is the mid-point climax of the song. No conceivable blame can attach to the owner; it must lie elsewhere.

5–6 Fruitfulness and security belong together. If only the vineyard had been true to the beloved’s intention no hand could have touched it. The obedient are impregnable. But failing fruitfulness, there is first the external foe, the devouring beast. *Destroyed* has the sense of ‘available for devouring/cropping clean’ ($\sqrt{bā'}$ ar; cf. 3:14), and *trampled* of ‘available for trampling on’.⁴⁹ Secondly, there is divine antagonism: the hand of the Lord goes out against his unfruitful people, *I will make it a wasteland*.⁵⁰ Had they been fruitful no such danger could have arisen. *Briers* and *thorns*⁵¹ are true to the metaphor of the untended vineyard but they also look back to Genesis 3:18 where different words are used for the evidences of human rebellion and God’s wrath. Thirdly, there is circumstantial adversity. In the terms of the song, *rain* is everything that maintains the life of the Lord’s people. The mask has now slipped completely: only the Lord can withhold rain. Isaiah’s beloved is Israel’s God.

⁴⁸ Lit. ‘What to do more ...?’. Heb. uses the infinitive to express obligation.

⁴⁹ ‘Destroyed’ and ‘trampled’ are both infinitives construct with *lamed* meaning ‘to destroy/trample’ and hence ‘available for destruction/trampling’.

⁵⁰ In verse 5 ‘take away’ and ‘break down’ are infinitives absolute, not first person singular verbs. In this idiom the infinitive absolute receives whatever translation suits the context, but means lit. (like the Lat. gerund) ‘the taking away’, ‘the breaking down’. The sense could therefore be ‘Take away its hedge ... Break down ...’ leaving, for the moment, the agent undefined. In verse 6 ‘wasteland’ represents the otherwise unexemplified *bātā*. G. R. Driver (‘Linguistic ... problems’, 38) suggests a link with the Akkad. *bātu* (‘to turn into ruins’) and hence ‘a devastation’. The present noun could be a by-form of *battā* (cf. 7:19) from $\sqrt{bāt}$ (‘to cut off’, ‘something cut off’), therefore meaning desolate, destroyed. The gap in time between this threat and its fulfilment was about 130 years, yet this is not held by commentators to make such a prediction impossible or to question its point. Of what value, then, is the objection to the Isaianic authorship of chapters 40–66 based on the gap in time between a promise and its fulfilment?

⁵¹ *Briers* (*šāmîr*) and the use of *briers* and *thorns* together are peculiar to Isaiah (cf. 7:23–25; 9:18; 10:17; 27:4; 32:13).

⁷ Before the fall of Samaria in 722 BC *the house of Israel* meant either the whole divided nation or its northern component. The prophets did not countenance the division, and whether specifically called to prophesy to north or south they tended to embrace the whole in their ministry (*cf.* Am. 3:1). Isaiah thus addresses the whole nation and then narrows his vision to the specially privileged *men of Judah*, who are *the garden of his delight*/‘the plant of his intense pleasure’. The word *looked* ($\sqrt{qāwâ}$) is the same as in verses 2 and 4. His ‘restful expectation’ was for ‘justice but, behold, bloodshed; for righteousness but, behold, a cry of distress’. Isaiah’s mastery of language produces rhyming pairs, *mišpāt* ... *mišpāḥ* ... *s^edāqâ* ... *s^eāqâ*. Kidner offers a deft attempt to capture this assonance with ‘right ... riot ... decency ... despair’. *Bloodshed* (*mišpāḥ*) is found only here and is of doubtful meaning⁵² but the intention is clear. *Justice* is the righting of wrongs while *bloodshed* is the inflicting of wrongs. *Righteousness* is right living and right relationships while to *cry* (*s^eāqâ*, ‘scream’) indicates wrong relationships and the anguish of the oppressed. Yet the façade was maintained; all was apparently what it was meant to be—why, the words are hardly different!

b. The ‘stink-fruit’: the crop produced, the harvest to come (5:8–30)

Item by item, Isaiah penetrates the façade and gathers the offensive fruit from the Lord’s vine and pronounces a *woe* on each in turn (8, 11, 18, 20–22). The structure of the passage is interesting and important. The first two ‘woes’ (8–12), dealing with abuse of the material benefits of life, are followed by two ‘therefores’ (13–17); the final four ‘woes’ (18–23), dealing with failure in the moral and spiritual obligations of life, are likewise followed by two ‘therefores’ (24–30). The ‘therefores’ match each other. In each case the shorter of them (13; 24) explain how the judgment is suited to the foregoing sin, and the longer (14–17; 25–30) describe an act of God in total judgment.

The crop produced		The harvest to come
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A ¹ The property motive (8–10)		
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⁵² *KB* suggests that *mišpāḥ* means ‘deviation’ in the sense of a breach of law; *BDB* suggests ‘outpouring’ (of blood); and Delitzsch, ‘sweeping together’ (of the property of others). All these require either imagination or credulity.

B¹ Self-indulgence

(11–12)

C¹ Appropriate judgment: loss of land, hunger, thirst (13)

D¹ Total Judgment in divine action: death, humbling,
ruination (14–17)

E¹ Sin pursued

(18–19)

E² Sin justified

(20)

B² Self-conceit (21)

A² The money motive

(22–23)

C² Appropriate judgment: speedy disaster (24a) repays the call
for the Lord to hasten (19); acquiescing in sin (18, 20) issues
in helpless collapse into judgment (24bcd)

D² Total judgment: the Lord summons the invincible foe (25–30)

At the centre of Isaiah's 'anatomy of Judah' lies his exposure of sin and the reversal of moral values (18–20). When life consists of the following of sin, denial of the living God and rewriting the moral code, there is no stopping-place short of complete devotion to self-pleasing.

8 Israelite law saw *the land* as the gift of God (Lv. 25:23–24), and following the original allocation the assumption was that each holding would remain within the family (Lv. 25; Nu. 27:1–11; 36:1–12; Ru. 4:1–4). But by the time of Isaiah (cf. Mi. 2:2, 9) the day of the land-speculator had dawned. Amos 2:6–8 shows the powerful rich using legal processes to defraud the poor and enrich themselves, and the palistrophic arrangement of these 'woes' (matching verses 22–23 with verses 8–10) indicates the same operation of the system for self-advantage. Add *house to house*/cause house to touch house' means acquiring a house and adding to it to create a 'big house' in a huge estate from which all

the others have been evicted so that the new ‘squire’ lives *alone in the middle of the land*.

9 Old Testament thought does not condemn or despise wealth but appraises how it was acquired and how it is used. Isaiah is here in no doubt. *Has declared* is not in the MT but is an adaptation from 22:14. There is, however, dramatic intensity in the explosive effect of leaving the Hebrew as it stands: ‘In my ears! The LORD of hosts!’ How it expresses the outrage at the very heart of heaven! For *great houses*/‘many houses’ cf. Amos 3:10, 15. Wealth without justice confers no tenure (Je. 17:11) because fundamentally wealth is the Lord’s (Dt. 8:18).

10 A *bath* was about six gallons, presumably a meagre yield for ten acres or ‘yokes’, usually understood as the area ten oxen could plough in a day. A *homer* was the equivalent of ten ephahs, therefore the crop was only a tenth of the seed sown. There is a moral vitality in the environment whereby the character and conduct of the owners cause a retrenchment of what the created world is prepared to do for them. This is the opposite of the Messianic plenty (cf. on 4:2). The land-hungry end by being hungry, despite all their land.

11–12 Nothing could express more vividly the pursuit of intoxication (11–12a) or make a plainer link between sensual indulgence and loss of spiritual perception (12b). Drink is their life: it is what gets them out of bed (11a) and keeps them out of bed (11b). *Till they are inflamed with wine*/‘for wine to inflame them’, denotes not a result but a purpose. *And wine* at the end of verse 12a has the force of an exclamation, ‘... and wine!—a band does not make a party unless the wine flows. *No regard* suggests observing that the Lord is doing something, and *no respect* grasping the significance of what they see.⁵³ The *deeds* [pō’al] of the LORD are broadly his moral government of the world and, in respect of Israel, his work of blessing and redemption; while the *work* [ma’āśeh] of his hands is his work of creation and providence and, in respect of Israel, law-giving, redemption, inheritance, preservation and judgment.⁵⁴ Hence Isaiah sees these people as without spiritual perception, lacking the sense that ‘he made us and we are his’ (Ps. 100:3), blind to the reality of the ‘curses of the covenant’ (Dt. 29:19–21; cf. Am. 3:2).

13 Note how the judgment matches the foregoing ‘woes’. This verse, the first short

⁵³ On √ *rā’â* as ‘to see the significance of’ cf. Pss. 8:4; 52:6⁸.

⁵⁴ On ‘deeds’ (pō’al) see e.g. Dt. 32:4; Jb. 36:24; Ps. 44:1; 64:9¹⁰; on ‘work’ (ma’āśeh) cf. Ex. 32:16; 34:10; Pss. 8:3⁴, 6⁷; 19:1; 92:4–5 ^{5–6}; Is. 10:12; 29:23.

‘therefore’ section, forms a chiasmus with verses 11–12: drink, spiritual insensitivity ... want of knowledge, thirst. Thus the punishment fits the crime. *Will go* is a Hebrew perfect tense meaning either ‘have gone’ or ‘are doomed to go’. This may look forward to a captivity (*exile*) certain to come—and, according to Herbert, at Isaiah’s time ‘the international scene made exile a real possibility’—or it may mean that in every real way a captivity has already taken place. *The understanding/‘knowledge’* that the people lack is understanding of God (cf. verses 12b, 19; Lk. 19:42). The words could also mean ‘without knowing it’, which would suit the possible ‘have gone’ above. For *my people* see on 3:12 (cf. Lk. 11:52). The leaders, the *men of rank/‘their glory’*, should be the glory of those they lead as the Messiah will be (cf. 4:2). *Die of hunger* is a reading found in two MSS; the MT has ‘men of hunger’/‘hungry men’.⁵⁵

14–17 This first long ‘therefore’ section describes how the party is over (14) and pride has come to an end (15). Judgment is total and it is the act of God (16) resulting in an emptied, desolate land. Note again a chiastic relationship with the foregoing woes: vast estates (8) and feasting (12) balanced by the end of the party (14) and the destruction of the estates (17).

14 *The grave/‘Sheol’* (NIV mg.) is the place-name of the abode of the dead. The irony of *enlarges its appetite* is biting: to satisfy their appetites was all they lived for (11–12) but in the end only one appetite is met, only one *mouth* filled. ‘The judgment of the sensualists, like that of the fashion-crazed women of 3:16ff., will be to lose the one thing they have lived for ... and to find themselves the object of an even more insatiable appetite than their own’ (Kidner). *Their* in each case is a feminine singular suffix, ‘her’. In its original setting this section must have spoken of Jerusalem: ‘and down will go its nobility and its crowds and its noise and each one in it who exults.’

15 The Hebrew here is exactly the same as 2:9. ‘And ordinary folk (*’ādām, man*) will be humbled and particular or known individuals (*’iš, mankind*) brought low’. *The eyes* are the organs of desire (Gn. 39:7; Ps. 123:2), referring back to the covetousness of verse 8 and the greed of verses 11–12. Judgment falls where it is merited.

16 *Holy* (*qādoš*) is the divine nature in itself. In Genesis 38:21 a woman dedicated to the sexual practices by which her god was served is called a ‘holy’ woman (*qēdešâ*) for the word essentially means ‘separated’, ‘belonging to another (the divine) order of things’.

⁵⁵ MT *m^et*, ‘dead of hunger’.

What made Israel's God *holy* was his moral purity (6:3). This was his 'separatedness'. *Righteousness* is holiness expressed in moral principles; *justice* is the application of the principles of righteousness (*cf.* 1:21). Both *justice* and *righteousness* are the outshining of holiness. The noun '*ēl*' in the term *the holy God* (*hā'ēl haqqādoš*) is particularly used of God in his transcendence.

17 This is a fair scene of pastoral peace until we realize that the flocks are roaming free among the ruins of a prosperity devastated by divine judgment. The animals have made the formerly well-tended lawns their own, and (lit.) 'tramps eat in the ruins of the well-fed'.⁵⁶

The second group of woes (18–23) covers in turn the people's attitude to sin and to the Lord (18–19), to moral values (20), to themselves and the only authority they recognize (21) and to self-gratification and using the social system to their gain (23).

18–19 The picture is of a beast harnessed to and dragging a cart with *cords of deceit* (*šāw'*, 'falsehood'). By holding on to what is false they bind themselves in bondage to *sin*, and what starts as *cords* becomes *cart ropes*, unbreakable bondage. *Sin* ('āwōn) and *wickedness* (*hattā'â*) when used together point, respectively, to an inner state and to specific instances of sin (*cf.* on 6:7). The progressive nature of sin (from *cords* to *cart ropes*) leads to the arrogance which demands that God prove himself, the scepticism which doubts that he is active in the world and the blindness which cannot see him at work.

20 In sin's next stage the moral code is reversed; sin becomes an accepted way of life. This happens in public morality (*light* and *darkness* are common to all) and to private morality (*bitter* and *sweet* are matters of private taste).

21 Where does it all start? With humankind's insistence on autonomy. Both the wisdom that provides ruling principles for life and the cleverness (better 'discernment') that decides specific issues are their own unaided work.

22–23 So what is life like on the basis of unaided human wisdom? First, success is measured by the degree of self-satisfaction achieved and indulgence enjoyed. *Heroes* and *champions* is sarcastic use of terms of military honour, as if to say, 'See, they have medals for it!' Secondly, the safeguards of society, here the legal system, succumb to

⁵⁶ This is a verse much emended but unreasonably so. The NIV 'lambs' (presumably, *kārîm*) replaces *gārîm* (lit. 'incomers, temporary stayers') rendered above (contextually) 'tramps'. There have been many other suggestions (*cf.* BHS), but none to match the subtlety of the MT.

corruption.

24 The second short ‘therefore’ section describes how punishment fits the crime. They invited the Lord to hasten (19) and now judgment will be swift as *fire* in stubble (24a). They made themselves the ready slaves of sin (18, 20) and now they will be like the *dry grass* which falls helplessly into the fire (24b). They claimed autonomy (21) and now their *roots* will be exposed as rotten (24c). They produced the fruit of unrighteousness (22–23) and now their blossom will vanish (24d). The external foe of fire (God’s wrath) and the internal foe of rottenness will leave no remainder. While they were asking God to display himself (19) they possessed the very word of God and this, fundamentally, is their condemnation—not their indulgences, their revamped moral codes, their venality, but that they *rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel* (cf. Am. 2:4). On *law* see 1:10. *Word* (*'imrāh*, ‘saying’) is the actual ‘speech’ of God himself.

25–30 On the literary form of this second long ‘therefore’ section see on 10:4 and additional note. As it stands this section is unified by beginning and ending, figuratively, with an earthquake in verse 25 and the lion and the storm in verses 29–30. This display of the ‘natural’ forces at the Lord’s disposal brackets a description of yet another force he commands (26–29), the irresistible invader. Like the long ‘therefore’ in verses 14–17, God acts in total judgment.

25 Could this be the actual earthquake that took place in the days of Uzziah (Am. 1:1; Zc. 14:5)? Unburied bodies are typical of an earthquake situation. The Old Testament view of such an event as expressive of divine wrath does not testify to the quaintness of ancient thought but is an abiding instruction in how to understand natural catastrophe. The created world, in all the complexity, splendour and ferocity of its powers, is a controlled tool in the hand of the Creator, serving his righteous purposes. The tenses in verse 25ab can either point to a past fact or to a future certainty. If the latter, the earthquake is symbolic of the immense power and devastating effect of the Lord’s coming acts. And even so they do not exhaust his wrath (25c).

26–28 If verse 25 teaches how to understand our environment, these verses teach how to understand history (cf. 10:5–15). God is sovereign over the whole world (*distant nations ... ends of the earth*) so that he only needs to raise his *banner* and whistle for even the *nations* to come *swiftly and speedily* without question. In verses 27–28 the power of

this sovereign God is appreciated by observing the power of the nations at his command: progress is unimpeded by either natural failure (*tired, stumbles, slumbers, sleeps*) or enforced delay (*loosened, broken*). Their equipment is effective (*sharp*) and at the ready (*strung*); *like flint* it is not subject to wear and is capable of great speed (*whirlwind*).

29–30 These verses present a double picture of helplessness: the prey before the lion (29) and the storm-bound sailor with shelter on neither sea nor land (30). *Roar* ($\sqrt{\text{šā'ag}}$) denotes the ‘pouncing roar’ of the lion (Jdg. 14:5), designed to paralyse with terror. The *young lions* are not cubs but lions in their prime strength. Their *growl* ($\sqrt{\text{nāham}}$) is the satisfied growl when prey is captured and is being enjoyed. The message of the lion-picture is that ‘no-one can help’; that of the storm-picture is that ‘there is no help’. The animal roar ($w^e\text{yinhōm}$) becomes the roaring (k^enah^amat) storm. The despairing sailor looks from the threatening *sea* to the *land* but finds no comfort, only further *darkness and distress*, and *light* fast disappearing as the *clouds* gather.

Thus Isaiah ends his preface. The message of the first two sections (1:2–31; 2:1–4:6) is that human sin cannot ultimately frustrate God’s purposes and that, in God, mercy triumphs over wrath. But the third section (5:1–30) poses a shattering question: When the Lord has done all (5:4), must the darkness of divine wrath close in and the light flicker and fade? This was the day of crisis in which Isaiah ministered: a crisis for humankind, for the day of wrath has come and a crisis for God: can mercy be exhausted and defeated?

B. The triumph of grace

(6:1–12:6)

In chapters 1–5 Isaiah used the message he preached after he became a prophet to express his understanding of the situation into which he came to minister. He now offers a succinct statement of the message of judgment and hope which was his initial response to it. As a message of hope, he enlarges on the visions of kingship and of the city which began to emerge in the first two sections of his preface (cf. 1:25–26; 4:2–6; 9:1–6; 12:1–6). He takes as his starting point promises of personal spiritual renewal (1:27; 4:3–4) which he discovered through experience to be the foundation of the Lord’s

restorative action (6:1–7). As in 5:7, however, he is concerned for the whole people of God and he sees Judah and Israel as alike caught up in divine purposes of judgment and promise.

A¹ An individual brought, through cleansing, into God's fellowship and commissioned to preach (6:1–13)

	B The word to Judah (7:1–9:7 ⟨6⟩)	C The word to Israel (9:8 ⟨7⟩ –11:16)
The moment of decision	Ahaz challenged to believe: the dynasty at stake (7:1–17)	The word refused: punitive, judgment ahead (9:8 ⟨7⟩ –10:4)
The judgment	The Assyrian invasions: Israel ruined, Judah overwhelmed (7:18–8:8)	The Assyrian invasions: Israel conquered, Judah under threat; punishment of assyria (10:5–15)
The remnant	Opponents of God's people doomed; his people secure; the true people within the nation (8:9–22)	Assyria destroyed; the remnant saved; unexpected reprieve for Judah (10:16–34)
The glorious hope	The birth and reign of the Davidic king; world-wide peace (9:1–7 ⟨8:23–9:6⟩)	The reign of the Davidic king; its righteousness; world-wide peace (11:1–16)

A² An individual testifies of salvation and holds out the same blessing to others; a whole community in the divine fellowship (12:1–6)

This overview shows how Isaiah answered the problem which both his circumstances and his theology set for him.¹ The judgment will be as awful as he had already foreseen (e.g. the darkness of 5:30 and 8:22). The promises are, however, equally real, resting upon a divine work of salvation and enjoyed by a company of individual believers of

¹ The stylistic feature of 'doublets' (covering the same ground twice, as in B and C in this diagram) is characteristic of Isaiah (e.g. chapters 28–35; 42:18–44:23; 44:24–55:13; 51:1–52:12). See also the 'triplet' in 13:1–27:13. In all these cases the second statement is not a mere repetition but also a development of the first.

whom Isaiah, in his personal experience, is the exemplar. 6:1–13 is not simply his justification for being a prophet but is more particularly the heart of his answer to the problems raised by his preface. It speaks of the triumph of grace.

1. The prologue: reconciliation and commission (6:1–13)

As Isaiah tells the story of how he was reconciled to God (1–7) and called to be a prophet (8–13), he structures the account around three responses which he made, ‘and I said’ (*wā'ōmar*) in verses 5, 8 and 11.

A¹ The death of the king (1a)

B¹ Responding to the divine holiness (1b–7)

The Lord in his holiness (1b–4)

Isaiah pronounces his own and the people’s sentence (5)

Divine provision (6–7)

B² Responding to the divine concern (8–10)

The Lord overheard (8a)

Isaiah volunteers (8b)

The Lord’s commission: the message (9) and the task (10)

B³ Responding to the divine purpose (11–13a)

Isaiah enquires about the course of events (11a)

The Lord’s intention of total destruction (11b–13a)

A² The oak tree cut down and the life which remains (13b)

a. *Isaiah’s call (6:1–8)*

1a *The year that King Uzziah died* was about 740 BC. His notably long and prosperous reign (2 Ki. 15:1–7; 2 Ch. 26) had entered troubled waters internationally when the accession in 745 BC of the vigorous imperialist Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria threatened the sovereignty of the Israelite states. If Isaiah drew comfort from the fact that as the earthly king was dying he saw a vision of the heavenly king, he does not say so.

According to 1:1 Isaiah entered on the prophetic office while Uzziah was still alive. Why then does he not date his call from ‘the fifty-second year of Uzziah’? No other prophet dates an event by a death, though Isaiah does so twice (cf. 14:28) and each time with significance. He is a true Old Testament historian for whom the events of history, accurately recorded, are a declaration from and about God. Such an event was the death

of Uzziah. For years the king had lived in alienation and separation, under divine displeasure (2 Ki. 15:5; 2 Ch. 26:16ff.), and as his death approached he remained, to the human eye, uncleansed. Thus, Uzziah, as the darkness of death closed in upon him, was symbolic of Isaiah's view of the nation, its plight and its problem. The prophet saw in respect of one what he feared for all—that the time had come when even the Lord was saying 'What more ought I to have done?' (5:4). But in this hour of death Isaiah discovered that the Lord still had a word of new life to speak (*cf.* verses 7–8).

1b Isaiah says, *I saw the Lord*,² and though it is true that 'no-one has ever seen God' (Jn. 1:18) for in his essential being he is Spirit (Is. 31:3; Jn. 4:24), yet he graciously condescends to clothe now this side of his nature and now that with visibility for the instruction and comfort of his people (e.g. Jos. 5:13–15). Isaiah was thus allowed to see *the Lord* ('*dōnāy*, 'the Sovereign'; *cf.* Jn. 12:41). The reticence is notable. We learn of robes, a throne, attendants—all that fills the mind with a sense of majesty—but the Lord is not described. God's sovereignty is real; he sits *on a throne*, in the seat of authority and power, *high and exalted*. In 52:13 the same paired words refer to the Lord's Servant; in 57:15, to the eternal God himself. A personal reference is suitable here: the Lord is *high* in his own nature, *exalted*/‘lifted up’ by the acknowledgment of his sovereignty. This exalted sovereignty is ‘earthed’ (*cf.* 66:1)³—the phrase *filled the temple* expresses the general truth that God is present in all his majesty at the centre of his people’s life. The temple is no mere symbol of his indwelling presence; it is the reality of it. But there is also the specific truth that in the temple the Lord meets with his people on the basis of sacrifice. This in particular is the point where heaven touches earth. The vision thus prepares for its climax in verse 7.

2 The *seraphs* are *above him* in the position of servants standing and waiting on a seated master. The heavenly beings, *seraphs*/‘burning ones’ (from √ *sārap*, ‘to burn’; e.g. Am. 2:1), are found only here. Imaginatively, it is possible that with two wings folded downwards, two folded over their faces and two raised for flight, they seemed to Isaiah like huge flames but the reality is that he experienced their burning ministry (6–7) and for this he remembered them and named them accordingly.⁴ All three verbs, *covered*,

²The AV ‘I saw also’ is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew idiom.

³The Lord’s ‘footstool’ is sometimes the earth (66:1), the ark (1 Ch. 28:2; Ps. 132:7), Jerusalem (La. 2:1) or the temple (60:13).

covered and *were flying*, are of continuous action. The scene is one of constant motion (*cf.* Ezk. 1:14) at the divine bidding. They covered their eyes, not their ears, for their task was to receive what the Lord would say, not to pry into what he is like (*cf.* Dt. 29:29). We can only conjecture why they *covered their feet*. The foot is not particularly creaturely that they should hide their feet in humility before the Creator. The use of the euphemism of ‘feet’ for sexual parts (*e.g.* 7:20) would involve an inappropriate attribution of sexuality to these heavenly beings. The foot is, however, metaphorically the organ of activity and of life’s direction (Ps. 18:33 ‘34 ; Pr. 1:15–16; 4:27; etc.). In covering their feet they disavowed any intention to choose their own path; their intent was to go only as the Lord commanded.

3 The seraphim *were calling to one another*; are we to picture them standing each side of the throne and responding to each other in antiphonal song? At any rate, the song is continuous and its theme is the holiness of the Lord and his presence in all his glory in every place. Hebrew uses repetition to express superlatives or to indicate totality.⁵ Only here is a threefold repetition found.⁶ Holiness is supremely the truth about God, and his holiness is in itself so far beyond human thought that a ‘super-superlative’ has to be invented to express it.⁷ The etymology of the ‘holiness’ word-group (✓ *qādôš*) is debated. The possibilities seem to be ‘brightness’ and ‘separatedness’. ‘Brightness’ suggests the unapproachable God (*cf.* 1 Tim 6:16 with Ps. 104:2);⁸ ‘separatedness’ is the posi-

⁴ The use of *sārāp* in connection with snakes (*e.g.* 30:6) has led some to think of serpent guardians of the holy presence (*cf.* Kaiser, ‘naked winged serpents with human hands and feet’!). *sārāp* has, however, no necessary connection with serpents and, as Kissane says, the seraphim ‘have nothing in common with serpents except the name’. In the MT there is no definite article; ‘burning ones’ is a description, not a title.

⁵ In Gn. 14:10 ‘pits, pits’ is rendered ‘full of pits’, and in 2 Ki. 25:15 ‘gold, gold’ is rendered ‘pure gold’.

⁶ Cf. Leupold, ‘Heavenly beings ... are using this repetition. For them it may have reflected their insight into the Trinity.’

⁷ God’s ‘name’ is qualified by the adjective ‘holy’ in the Old Testament more often than by all other qualifiers put together.

⁸ Cf. T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Blackwell, 1960), p. 149; N. H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Epworth, 1944), pp. 24ff.