

## 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.

A<sup>1</sup> 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; its	The reign of the Davidic king; its

world-wide righteousness;  
 peace (world-wide  
 9:1– peace (11:1–16)  
 7  
 <8:23–9:6> )

A<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

A<sup>1</sup> The death of the king (1a)

B<sup>1</sup> 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)

B<sup>2</sup> 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)

B<sup>3</sup> Responding to the divine purpose (11–13a)

Isaiah enquires about the  
 course of events (11a)

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

A<sup>2</sup>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*,<sup>2</sup> 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* (*‘adōnāy*, ‘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

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

sovereignty is ‘earthed’ (*cf.* 66:1)<sup>3</sup>—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  $\sqrt{sārāp}$ , ‘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.<sup>4</sup> All three verbs, *covered*,

<sup>3</sup>The 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).

<sup>4</sup> 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

*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

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.

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.<sup>5</sup> Only here is a threefold repetition found.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> The etymology of the ‘holiness’ word-group ( $\sqrt{qādôš}$ ) is debated. The possibilities seem to be ‘brightness’ and ‘separatedness’. ‘Brightness’ suggests the unapproachable God (*cf.* 1 Tim 6:16 with Ps. 104:2);<sup>8</sup> ‘separatedness’ is the positive quality which distinguishes or defines God. On the whole, the latter provides the easiest summary of Old Testament evidence, but either way the question arises what it is that makes

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.

him unapproachable or what it is that constitutes his distinctiveness. The answer is that it is his total and unique moral majesty. When people fear before God (*e.g.* Jdg. 6:22; 13:22) it ‘is not the consciousness of ... humanity in the presence of divine power, but the consciousness of ... sin in the presence of moral purity’.<sup>9</sup> Isaiah is here the normative Old Testament man. This transcendent holiness is the mode of God’s immanence for *the whole earth is full of his glory/that which fills the whole earth is his glory*, *i.e.* it is not only the one thing that is capable of filling everything but the thing which actually does so. Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness.

4 Shaking is the customary reaction of earth to the divine presence (*cf.* Ex. 19:18; Hab. 3:3–10). Concentrated on *doorposts and thresholds* it specifically prohibits Isaiah’s entry to the divine presence, just as *smoke* forbids him to see God. The divine nature as such is an active force of total exclusion. Why is this?

5 Isaiah tells us how the facts of verse 4 are to be interpreted. He knows his loss, describes it and explains it. *nidmêti* (*ruined*) is from  $\sqrt{dāmâ}$  (‘to be silent’), which is used of the silence following

<sup>9</sup> Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (SCM, 1956), p. 66.

disaster or death.<sup>10</sup> ‘Silenced’ would be telling in this context, *i.e.* excluded from the heavenly choir, forbidden even to join from afar in adoration, but the silence of death must be included too. The explanation of this judgment is that what we might reckon the lightest of sins (*unclean lips*) is linked with what we might accept as the least threatening of privileges (*seen ... the Lord*) but the mixture is deadly. Isaiah adds the fact that he accepted unclean speech in society and made no attempt to separate himself from it (*live among*) as an aggravation of his guilt. But on reflection did he consider that if he can be forgiven, so can they? Did he here begin to see the solution to the national darkness of 5:30? *My eyes have seen* has the sense of ‘I have seen directly for myself’ (*cf.* Dt. 4:3). To think of the Lord as *the King, the Lord Almighty/‘of hosts’* was a commonplace. The vision, therefore, was not of something hitherto unknown but, so to speak, of the ‘ordinary’, what the Lord always is—‘the Holy One of Israel’, to use Isaiah’s special title for him.

6 *Then one of the seraphs flew, i.e.* by the command of God (*cf.* verse 2). The initiative has been heaven’s all along; revealing

<sup>10</sup> For  $\sqrt{dāmā}$  *cf.* Je. 14:17; 47:5 (mourning, tears); Ps. 49:12<13>, 20<21> (death).

(2–3), excluding and condemning (4–5) and now sending the seraph to the one he has chosen to save. In the Old Testament fire is not a cleansing agent<sup>11</sup> but is symbolic of the wrath of God (Gn. 3:24; Nu. 11:1–3), his unapproachable holiness (Ex. 3:2–6; 19:18–25) and the context of his holy law (Dt. 4:12, 33, 36). The *live coal* which was brought to Isaiah was fire *from the altar*. The perpetual fire (Lv. 6:12–13) on the altar went beyond symbolizing divine wrath, for the altar was the place where the holy God accepted and was satisfied by blood sacrifice (Lv. 17:11). It holds together the ideas of the atonement, propitiation and satisfaction required by God and of the forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation needed by his people. All this is achieved through substitutionary sacrifice and brought to Isaiah, encapsulated in the single symbol of the *live coal*.

7 The Bible does not deal in dumb signs; application leads to explanation (*he touched my mouth and said ...*). (i) The

<sup>11</sup> Nu. 31:21–24 might suggest purification by fire but note that verse 23 insists also on ‘the water of cleansing’. The fire ceremony probably symbolized the necessity that the wrath of God must be vented on everything to do with Midianite life before even inanimate objects could pass to Israelite use.

touching of the *lips* with the live coal shows how God ministers to the sinner at the point of confessed need (*cf.* verse 5). (ii) The effect is instantaneous. The two verbs, *has touched* and *is taken away*, are co-ordinate perfects, stressing that as soon as the one happened the other happened also. Isaiah contributes nothing; all is of God—‘This touched your lips and your iniquity went’. (iii) A comprehensive work of dealing with sin takes place. Isaiah confessed what he knows (*lips*) but God deals also with his *guilt/iniquity* (*‘āōn*), the inner reality of the deviant nature, and with his *sin* (*hattā'a*), the specific instances of shortcoming. (iv) All of this arises from the payment of the price. The verb *atoned for* (*kippēr*) means ‘to effect a *kōper*’ or ‘ransom price’,<sup>12</sup> the price which justice requires. *KB* remarks, ‘The Hebrew, considered for itself, leads to “cover” as the original meaning ... God covers guilt out of free grace, but his acting thus is less the pardon of a father than the releasing by a judge.’<sup>13</sup> As we speak of a sum of money as sufficient to ‘cover’ a debt, so

<sup>12</sup> For *kōper* *cf.* Ex. 21:30; 30:12–16 and note the idea of payment. For the verb, with the same idea of equivalent payment, see Ex. 30:15–16; Nu. 5:8; 31:50.

<sup>13</sup> *KB*, p. 452b.

*kippēr/kōper* is the payment of whatever divine justice sees as sufficient to cover the sinner’s debt, the death of the substitute sacrifice on the altar.

8 The immediate effect of atonement is reconciliation. Isaiah had heard and then lost the voice of the ‘burning ones’ in verse 3 but now he hears the Lord’s voice. *The Lord* (*‘ādōnāy*) was first seen afar off (1) but now Isaiah is near enough to overhear him *saying/* ‘as he said’. Isaiah had expressed his own ‘silencing’ (5) but now he is free to speak to God and to associate with his purposes. The *us* in *who will go for us?* is a plural of consultation (*cf.* 1 Ki. 22:19–23). The New Testament, however, relates this passage both to the Lord Jesus (Jn. 12:41) and to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), finding here that which will accommodate the full revelation of the triune God.

### **b. The future revealed in principle (6:9–13)**

Verses 9–10 describe the spiritual expectations Isaiah may have had regarding his ministry; verses 11–13a, his historico-political expectations; and verse 13b, his Messianic expectations.

9–10 Isaiah’s message (9) and his task (10) constitute, at first sight, the oddest commission ever given to a prophet: to tell people not to understand and to effect

heart-hardening and spiritual blindness!<sup>14</sup> There is, however, no way to evade the plain meaning of the verses. Verse 9 speaks of both the outer faculties (*hearing, seeing*) and the inner ones (*understanding/'discerning', perceiving/'knowing'*). Verse 10 arranges these into a rounded structure (*heart, ears, eyes, eyes, ears, heart*) thus emphasizing a total inability to comprehend. The use of these verses in the New Testament<sup>15</sup> is an additional reason to be concerned to interpret them correctly and a simple approach lies to hand: How did Isaiah obey them? According to the criticism levelled at him in 28:9–10, Isaiah taught with such simplicity and clarity that the sophisticates of his day scorned him as fit only to conduct a kindergarten. The Isaianic literature as it has come to us bears all the marks of a plain, systematic, reasoned approach. It is clear that Isaiah did not understand his commission as one to blind people by obscurity of expression or complexity of message. He, in fact, faced the preacher's dilemma: if hearers are

<sup>14</sup> The LXX evaded the rigour of the MT by softening the imperatives to indicatives: 'For the heart of this people is made fat ...'.

<sup>15</sup> Mt. 13:14–15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10 (of Jesus' parabolic method); Jn. 12:39ff.; Acts 28:26–27 (of people's failure to accept the message).

resistant to the truth, the only recourse is to tell them the truth yet again, more clearly than before. But to do this is to expose them to the risk of rejecting the truth yet again and, therefore, of increased hardness of heart. It could even be that the next rejection will prove to be the point at which the heart is hardened beyond recovery. The human eye cannot see this point in advance; it comes and goes unnoticed. But the all-sovereign God both knows it and appoints it as he presides in perfect justice over the psychological processes he created (cf. Ex. 4:21). It was at just such a point that Isaiah was called to office. His task was to bring the Lord's word with fresh, even unparalleled clarity, but in their response people would reach the point of no return. The imperatives of these verses must, therefore, be seen as expressing an inevitable outcome of Isaiah's ministry (cf. 2:9). And, of course, so it turned out to be, as is made clear in chapters 7–11. These were the days in which the decisive word was spoken and refused. 'Opportunity in human life is as often judgment as it is salvation.'<sup>16</sup>

11–13a *For how long ...?* is shorthand for 'How will things go and what will be the end?'. The Lord predicts cities and

<sup>16</sup> Smith, p. 82.

land devastated and emptied (11), deportation (12), and, even then, a further process of wasting (13a). Isaiah is left with no illusions about Jerusalem or any notion of its sacrosanctity. Presently he will learn that the Assyrians would not be the agent in this as far as Jerusalem was concerned and presently too the ultimate agent will be revealed to him. But here, at the outset of his ministry, he already knows the end: a colossal tragedy proceeding from a single cause—they heard and refused the word of the Lord. Isaiah is alerted to the fact but not to its timing. Assyria introduced the policy of deporting subject peoples (*cf.* 2 Ki. 17) and this was continued by the Babylonians (2 Ki. 24–25). The prediction was at home in its own times. The literal translation of *sent everyone* is ‘put humankind’, and that of *the land is utterly forsaken* is ‘abundant the forsaken [thing] in the midst of the earth/land’. *‘aśirîyyâ (tenth)* is used in Leviticus 27:32 of a tithe ‘holy to the LORD’. If the word carried overtones of a reserved portion, it would not now be so. For *laid waste* ( $\sqrt{bā'ar}$ ) see on 3:14.

**13b** Do the preceding verses, then, represent the final fall of the curtain on the Lord’s valiant efforts to save a people for himself? Ask another question: Was Isaiah’s deadly sin the end for him? The

‘burning one’ approached with fire but when the fire touched the voice said, ‘Forgiven’. So here too. The tree is felled but the voice says, ‘The holy seed’. Typically of Isaiah, hope is the unexpected fringe attached to the garment of doom. The comparison with the felled trees<sup>17</sup> starts by appearing to describe the meagre remains following the further attrition of verse 13a but suddenly it is found not to be the conclusion of the earlier sentence but the start of a new thought: within the stump there is life! The meaning of *’elâ (terebinth)* and *’allôn (oak)* is uncertain; they may be two species of oak. *The holy seed will be the stump* is (lit.) simply, ‘the seed of holiness its stump’. The saying is not self-explanatory, but the way in which verse 13b balances and forms an inclusio with verse 1a (see the outline on p. 75) suggests that already here the reference is to the shoot out of the stem of Jesse (11:1); the promise of the Messiah is the guarantee of a future people over whom he will reign. But Isaiah also uses ‘seed’ of the people who will finally enjoy the promises (41:8; 43:5; 45:25; 53:10; 59:21; 65:9, 23; 66:22). The ‘holy seed’

<sup>17</sup> *When they are cut down* is a correct translation of *b<sup>e</sup>salleket*. Nouns of this formation represent a state of being not (as *BDB*, *KB*) an activity (‘felling’).

could be the remnant, called holy and written unto life in Jerusalem (4:3).<sup>18</sup>

## 2. The King and his people (7:1–11:16)

The question mark put against the doctrine of hope by chapter 5 was erased by Isaiah's own experience. His sin was as the sin of the people (6:5). If the Lord dealt with his sin, will he not deal with theirs? Hope is restored (6:13b). Isaiah

<sup>18</sup> Q<sup>a</sup> supports the MT in verse 13b saving that it reads the definite article, *zera' haqqōdeš*. Dr N. T. Wright in an unpublished paper, ‘The idea of seed in Isaiah 6 and Mark 4’, argues that Is. 6:13 is the earliest use of these words and that the definite article in Q<sup>a</sup> arose from the influence of Ezr. 9:2. The LXX contains no reference to ‘the holy seed’ and some erase the words in consequence. The LXX, however, diverges from the MT throughout this verse (and passage) and is an unsafe guide. Kaiser represents others who believe that the words are a late addition following the survival of the people in exile. It is difficult, however, to think that anyone bold enough to make such an addition would not have had the additional courage to put his meaning beyond doubt! Furthermore, Kaiser destroys his case by saying the words are ‘entirely in accord with the tendency of 6:1–11’. How then can he tell that they are a later addition?

proceeds now to work this out. First, the moment of decision has come. Isaiah found himself faced with the word of God and the challenge to respond (6:8); so it would be for the people. For them the point of no return had arrived (6:9f.). Secondly, membership of the people of the Lord must now be evidenced by personal decision and commitment. It is not a matter of nationality. In these chapters the doctrine of the believing remnant flowers (*cf* 8:9–22). Thirdly, the dying kingship of Uzziah (6:1) provides the foil for the hope to come: David's house is sinking fast but the promised King will come (9:1–7; 11:1–16).

### a. *The word to Judah (7:1–9:7 <6> )*

#### **The moment of decision (7:1–17)**

For Isaiah, faith in the Lord's promises was a practical way of life for the here-and-now and it was as much a national policy as an individual exercise. The need for such a policy was created by the pressures of Assyrian imperialism on the lands of western Palestine. But, as Isaiah understood it, the real issue was not one of military ‘muscle’ nor of political cleverness in creating defensive alliances but whether the Lord could be trusted to do what his word promised. For the northern kingdom (called variously Israel, Ephraim or Jacob) the fatal decision had

already been taken (see 9:8–12 < 7–11a>), but for Judah the moment of decision was about to come. At this crux Isaiah confronted Ahaz. The shape of the passage enforces this truth:

A<sup>1</sup> The house of David threatened (1–2)

B<sup>1</sup> Isaiah's son: the plans of the northern powers (3–6)

C<sup>1</sup> The Lord's word of assurance (7–9)

D The response of unbelief (10–12)

C<sup>2</sup> The Lord's sign of judgment (13–15)

B<sup>2</sup> The virgin's son: the destruction of the northern powers (16)

A<sup>2</sup> The house of David destroyed (17)

1 Threatened by Assyrian expansion, Ephraim and Aram had formed an alliance and when Judah seemed disinclined to join started exerting pressure (2 Ki. 15:37) to achieve a defensive, anti-Assyrian united front of Palestinian states. This led to a large-scale invasion (2 Ch. 28:5–8), but in spite of much success the Assyrians were not able to take Jerusalem.

2 A second invasion followed (2 Ch. 28:17–18), this time with the avowed intention of bringing David's dynasty to an end (6). *The house of David* is not used elsewhere, as here, of the dynasty person-

ified in the current king.<sup>19</sup> The description here deliberately pin-points the particular crisis of the day. Ahaz is the 'house of David', and what he now does will be decisive for the future of the dynasty. The verb translated *has allied itself* ( $\sqrt{nāḥâ}$ ) occurs sixty-three times in the Old Testament, always, as in verse 19, meaning 'to settle down, to swarm'.<sup>20</sup> The ten-year-old alliance would not as such constitute news or a cause of panic, but intelligence reports of large-scale troop movements in Israel ('the place is swarming with them') would and did. Another invasion was impending before which king and people panicked.

3 The name *Shear-Jashub*, meaning 'a remnant shall return', with the noun emphasized, is a name of promise, for the Lord would never so desert his people that they would perish utterly (cf. 1:9). It is also, however, a name of disaster, for only a remnant would survive. So certain

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 2 Sa. 7:11; 1 Ki. 11:38 (a continuing dynasty); Ps. 122:5 (the judicial system); Zc. 12:10–13:1 (the royal family). Only here in Isaiah is the dynasty personified in the reigning king.

<sup>20</sup> For its use for the settling down of a swarm see Ex. 10:14; and with the preposition 'al see Nu. 11:26; Is. 11:2. An exact parallel to the present usage is 2 Sa. 21:10.

was Isaiah of coming events that he was prepared for the word to ‘become flesh’ in the person of his first son. Shear-Jashub was thus an ‘acted oracle’, a visual aid bringing home the word of God that much more clearly. He was also, by giving double expression to the word—sight as well as sound—making its fulfilment doubly sure.<sup>21</sup> Ahaz, a man of his own time, would have known and felt this. *The aqueduct of the Upper Pool* was part of Ahaz’s preparations for the coming siege. Before Hezekiah (cf. 22:9–11), Jerusalem’s water supply was overground and vulnerable.

4 *Be careful, keep calm/ ‘watch yourself and be still’* does not mean ‘watch out for the enemy but do not worry’ but rather (treating the second verb as auxiliary to the first) ‘Be careful to do nothing’.<sup>22</sup> Ahaz was under pressure from his advisers to play the astute politician by allying himself with Assyria against the threat of the northern powers (2 Ki. 16:7–9). But Isaiah’s word was equally astute: Aram and Ephraim were indeed spent forces, *smouldering stubs*. Their combined might

was as nothing compared to Assyria and they would soon be stamped out and no longer a threat. Beyond that, the issue was not one of politics but of faith. If only Ahaz could be persuaded to do nothing, to keep clear of compromising alliances, the Lord could be trusted to keep his promises to David and to deal with the Assyrian threat (as indeed he ultimately did; see 37:36–38). The issue is as clear-cut as that: will Ahaz seek salvation by works (politics, alliances) or by simple trust in divine promises?

5–6 Such nonentities are the men concerned that Isaiah feigns not to be able to recall their names and refers to them as *the son of Remaliah* and *the son of Tabeel*. This may be irony but certainly it prompts Ahaz to think in dynastic terms. If Pekah is the son of Remaliah, whose son is Ahaz? Ultimately, the son of David, the occupant of a throne with divine validation, resting on divine promises. *The son of Tabeel* is otherwise unknown, but he signifies the extra element of threat now imposed: to bring the dynasty of David to an end. Human purposes thus challenge divine promises.

7 We heard the plans of man (6); now we hear the word of the Sovereign LORD (*‘<sup>a</sup>dōnāy yahweh*) (cf. Pr. 16:1, 33). This emphasis on the sheer greatness of the

<sup>21</sup> For ‘acted oracles’ see 20:1–6; Je. 13:1–11; 19:1–15; Ezk. 4:1–5:17; 12:3–16. A key passage is 2 Ki. 13:14–19.

<sup>22</sup> For this auxiliary use cf. Gn. 24:6; 31:24; Dt. 4:9; 6:12.

Lord eases the pathway to faith, makes faith a practical policy in the hard realities of life—and also leaves unbelief without excuse.

**8–9** Isaiah turns to supportive argument. Doubtless in speech Isaiah elaborated his meaning but he left on record only this highly aphoristic utterance, leaving us to read between the lines:

A<sup>1</sup> The head of Aram is Damascus

B<sup>1</sup> And the head of Damascus is  
Rezin

C<sup>1</sup> And within sixty-five years  
Ephraim will be shattered,  
no longer a people

A<sup>2</sup> And the head of Ephraim is Samaria

B<sup>2</sup> And the head of Samaria is  
Remaliah's son

C<sup>2</sup> If you do not stand by faith,  
indeed you will not stand at  
all

In this perfectly balanced utterance,<sup>23</sup> the A and B lines refer to the confederate powers, their capitals (A) and their kings

<sup>23</sup> Many would excise C<sup>1</sup> on the grounds that it destroys the balance of the passage—a ‘reckless interruption’ (Kaiser)—and that it brings no message of comfort to Ahaz. The first charge is absurd. The second falls before the fact that the words are not comfort but warning.

(B). The C lines balance the coming dissolution of Ephraim with the possible dissolution of Judah. The general message of warning is plain: Ephraim chose the path of human collective security by its alliance with Aram and thus sealed its doom. It would, therefore, cease to be a nation (C<sup>1</sup>). To reject the way of faith for the collective security of an alliance with Assyria would likewise spell the end for Judah (C<sup>2</sup>). The way of faith (C<sup>2</sup>) stands in contrast with the stress on earthly, human power in the A and B lines. For all their boasted defensive alliance, their strength was, in the last analysis, only whatever Damascus or Samaria could offer in the final Assyrian onslaught ([2 Ki. 16:9; 17:5](#)) and the wisdom behind their policy was only whatever Rezin and Remaliah's son could devise! But what Isaiah left unsaid must have shouted as loudly to Ahaz as what he did say: The head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is David's son. Here was a situation of divine strength and a kingship sustained by divine promises. Hence the call to faith and the warning that to abandon faith is to lose all. On the supposition that the *sixty-five years* is the period 735–670 BC, the reference is to the fact that in 671 Esarhaddon imported foreign settlers into the area of the former

northern kingdom (*cf.* 2 Ki. 17:24; 2 Ch. 33:11; Ezr. 4:2). At that point those deported after the fall of Samaria (722 BC) were bereft of a land to return to and thus finally ceased as a sovereign people. With *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all* the NIV attempts to catch the assonance of the Hebrew (*ta'āmînû ... tē'āmēnû*). Faith is the central reality of the Lord's people, not just their distinctiveness but their ground of existence. No faith, no people. The MT includes an affirmative particle overlooked in the NIV: 'indeed (*kî*) you will not stand at all'. In the light of 6:9–13, this is the point of no return; to fail to respond now by trusting the Lord's promises is to bring about the final heart-hardening.

10–17 Isaiah's second message to Ahaz is first, an attempt to move Ahaz to faith (10–12). Secondly, following the failure of this, a denunciation of Ahaz as a traitor to his people's most treasured hopes (13–15), and thirdly, a forecast of a calamity greater than the schism of the ten northern tribes (16–17).

10 We are not told whether this message follows directly on from the foregoing or not. Either the king's immediate reaction or his subsequent commitment to a political solution necessitated a further ministry (*Again*). When *the LORD*

*spoke to Ahaz* the human messenger was forgotten and only the voice of 'the Sovereign' was heard (*cf.* verse 7). This is the reality of the verbal inspiration of the prophets.

11 Isaiah tells Ahaz to *Ask the LORD ... for a sign*. Gideon asked for a sign not because he doubted or disbelieved but because he wanted to be doubly certain that he was walking in the will of God (Jdg. 6:36ff.). In his case seeking a sign was in itself an expression of believing commitment. The reference to *the LORD your God* shows that Isaiah is appealing to Ahaz in this light. The opportunity remains open to affirm faith and to act as a believer. The Lord is ready to 'stop at nothing', *whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights*,<sup>24</sup> for the sake of the Davidic king and the chosen city. His later use of the 'stairway of Ahaz' (38:8) in confirming his word to Hezekiah recalls sadly the present situation, as if to say that the Lord would indeed have been as good as his word if only Ahaz had

<sup>24</sup> In what is lit. 'Go deep in asking', 'asking' (*še'ālâ*) may in fact be the place-name Sheol with *He locale*, i.e. 'Go deep to Sheol'. In other words, the Lord will act throughout the whole of reality, in the world to come as much as in heaven itself. (*Cf.* for the form, Dt. 33:23; GKC 29n).

responded with trust. The magnitude of the offer (as we might say, ‘to move heaven and earth’) highlights the seriousness of the crisis and also the importance the Lord attaches to the exercise of faith.

12 Ahaz refuses to *put the LORD to the test* and thereby shrouds his unwillingness to face the spiritual realities of the situation in a veil of piety (*cf. Jn. 4:16–20*). There is indeed a sin of ‘testing God’. Essentially it is the sin of unbelief. Characteristically it says, ‘I will trust if God proves himself trustworthy’ or ‘I will not believe unless God so proves himself’. At Massah (*Ex. 17*), according to *Psalm 81:7* *<8>*, the Lord tested his people; according to *Psalm 95:9*, they tested him. His test was whether, on the basis of all his recent past care, they would now trust him in a fresh threat; their test was to suspend belief, to doubt the goodwill of God. To ask a sign in this spirit is proof that one does not believe; it treats God like a performing animal, with faith as the sugar-lump rewarding the trick. But to refuse a proffered sign is proof that one does not want to believe. Pious though his words sound, Ahaz by using them demonstrated himself to be the wilfully unbelieving man—and since he would not believe, he could not continue. This was the moment of decision. Just as the

Lord loves to be trusted (*cf. Mt. 8:10*), so unbelief is the unforgiveable sin (*cf. Jn. 16:9*).

13 *Then Isaiah said* is a translation of ‘And he said’, but the words used (*e.g. my God*) show that the prophet is the speaker. It is not considered important to make a point of this because, through inspiration, what the Lord says (12) Isaiah says, and what Isaiah says (13) the Lord says. The threat to the *house of David* fills the passage (*cf. verses 2, 17*). In *try the patience of men* the verb, meaning ‘to weary’,<sup>25</sup> is plural. The failure of the house of David is wider than Ahaz. From the beginning it has failed to live up to its divine remit. It has produced neither the perfect king nor the golden age but rather the reverse. A whole history of human inadequacy suddenly passes before Isaiah’s eyes. With the change from the *your God* of verse 10 to *my God* here, Isaiah signals the new, disastrous turn of events. As Kaiser put it:

The only way we can have God is by relying on him and using him. For

<sup>25</sup>  $\sqrt{lā'â}$  (*cf. 1:14*) is not so much to ‘try patience’ as to ‘erode strength’. Wilderberger’s linking of the verb with the legal argument vocabulary ( $\sqrt{rib}$ ) rests on too narrow a basis of evidence and adds nothing to the present context.

the only way it is possible to accord God's deity to him is by using him and risking one's life upon God's word by trusting his promises and obeying the revelation of his will.

**14** The *sign* is no longer a matter of invitation but of prediction, no longer persuading to faith but confirming divine displeasure.<sup>26</sup> This is the other way in which the concept of 'sign' is used (see on verse **10**): a retrospective confirmation that an act or course of action has come from and been performed by the Lord.<sup>27</sup> The birth of *Immanuel* would confirm all

<sup>26</sup> S. Mowinckel (*He that Cometh* [Blackwell, 1959], pp. 111ff.) holds that since Ahaz refused a sign which would have moved him to believe he is offered a sign with the same intent. Logic does not require this and the words used resist it. Why does Isaiah emphasize divine exasperation and imply divine alienation ('my God') from Ahaz if not to introduce a sign with an opposite force? The assumption that the 'sign' is really the failure of the Assyrian attempt to destroy Judah fails to ask in what sense this would be a compelling sign, as from God to Ahaz? Would not the king (with some colour of verity) attribute this to the astuteness of his calculated risk in calling Assyria to his aid?

<sup>27</sup> On 'sign' as retrospective confirmation see e.g. Ex. 3:12; 1 Sa. 2:34; 10:7–9; Is. 37:30; 38:7.

that the Lord said through Isaiah to Ahaz—that this was indeed the moment of decision and that the consequences were divine retribution on unbelief. Commanding attention with 'Behold' (omitted in the NIV), Isaiah speaks of the *virgin* who *will be with child*. The translation *virgin* ('almâ) is widely disputed on the ground that the word means only 'young woman' and that the technical word for 'virgin' is *bētûlā*.<sup>28</sup> Of the nine occurrences of 'almâ those in 1 Chronicles 15:20 and the title of Psalm 46 are presumably a musical direction but no longer understood. In Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19<sup>29</sup> and Song of Solomon 1:3 the context throws no decisive light on the meaning of the word. In Genesis 24:43 and Exodus 2:8 the reference is unquestionably to an unmarried girl, and in

<sup>28</sup> *bētûlā* does not convey a precise meaning.

<sup>29</sup> Pr. 30:19 is frequently understood as referring to the mysterious processes of procreation (e.g. C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, ICC [Clark, 1899]). W. McKane (*Proverbs* [SCM, 1970]) interprets it rightly as 'the inexplicable attraction' of the sexes but gratuitously insists that 'almâ cannot mean 'virgin' and that an illicit relationship is in mind (cf. Watts). But D. A. Hubbard (*Proverbs* [Word Books, 1989]) correctly describes it as 'the positive picture of romance'.

[Song of Solomon 6:8](#) the ‘*alāmōt*, contrasted with queens and concubines, are unmarried and virgin. Thus, wherever the context allows a judgment, ‘*almâ* is not a general term meaning ‘young woman’ but a specific one meaning ‘virgin’. It is worth noting that outside the Bible, ‘so far as may be ascertained’, ‘*almâ* was ‘never used of a married woman’.<sup>30</sup>

[Genesis 24](#) is particularly important as providing a direct comparison of ‘*almâ* and *bētūlā*. Abraham’s servant’s prayer ([24:14](#)) is couched in terms of a ‘girl’ (*na‘arâ*), of marriageable age (*bētūlā*) and single (‘no man had ever lain with her’). The qualifying words indicate that by itself *bētūlā* is not specific. In the light of this accumulating knowledge of Rebekah, verse [43](#) finally describes her as ‘*almâ*, which is clearly a summary term for ‘female, marriageable, unmarried’. There is no ground for the common assertion that had Isaiah intended *virgo intacta* he would have used *bētūlā*. ‘*almâ* lies closer to this meaning than the other word. In fact this is its meaning in every explicit context. Isaiah thus used the word which, among those available to him, came nearest to expressing ‘virgin birth’ and which, without linguistic

<sup>30</sup> E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Tyndale Press, 1954), pp. 171ff.

impropriety, opens the door to such a meaning.<sup>31</sup>

*Will be with child and will give birth* is in essence the same as [Genesis 16:11](#) and [Judges 13:5](#). In the former the pregnancy is a present fact, in the latter it is future. The expression itself is timeless, awaiting the context in each case.<sup>32</sup>

Stemming from [2 Samuel 7](#) (especially verses [14–16](#)), rich expectations were treasured in the house of David. [Psalm 2](#), probably a coronation psalm greeting the new Davidic king at his enthronement, speaks of him as ‘son of God’ and [Psalm 45:6](#) [\(7\)](#) ascribes deity to the king. The case for the expectation of a divine Messiah is strong in the Old Testament and

<sup>31</sup> H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (SCM, 1956), pp. 26f. In Ugaritic cultic texts the words ‘the young woman will bear a son’ announces the birth of a divine/royal child. In Isaiah, Ringgren thinks the ‘*almâ* is the queen and Immanuel the royal son. Isaiah summons Ahaz to take his royal profession seriously: in the royal cult you say God is with you—why do you not believe it?

<sup>32</sup> *wēqārāt* is an unusual but not indefensible form of the third person singular feminine ([GKC 74g](#); see e.g. [Dt. 31:29](#)). Q<sup>a</sup> has *wqr* ‘(one shall call)’ and the [LXX](#) infers a second person singular masculine from the consonants of the MT.

was part of Jesus' understanding (cf. Mt. 22:41ff.).<sup>33</sup> The title *Immanuel* is peculiar to Isaiah but the thought is part of the Davidic-Messianic fabric. As a word it means 'God is with us/God be with us', and many believe it to be no more here than the pious affirmation or prayer of a mother in Judah in the envisaged troubles. We can weigh the probability of this interpretation by putting ourselves into the situation. Leaving aside the momentous possibilities that she is a *virgin* ('almâ), a young woman becomes pregnant and calls her child *Immanuel*, either as an expression of faith in the face of adverse facts or as a prayer for help. Where is the 'sign quality' in this—especially after Isaiah has spoken the name and set the idea in motion? Even supposing that *virgin* is collective and that a rash of Immanuels appears in the land, such naming would be cynically dismissed in the palace as the product of female hysteria and not seen as a heaven-sent sign. What a depressing anticlimax following the Lord's expressed willingness to 'move heaven and earth' and Isaiah's dramatic outburst about the Sovereign himself giving a sign! The passage requires something more and if we look to the wider context of this closely integrated section

<sup>33</sup> J. A. Motyer, 'Messiah', *IBD*.

we find it.<sup>34</sup> In 8:8 we read *your land*, O *Immanuel*. Nowhere else does the Old Testament exemplify 'land' with a possessive pronoun accompanied by the subject of the pronoun in the vocative. Furthermore, the singular possessive is linked with 'land' as a political unit only in the case of kings (e.g. Dt. 2:31; 2 Sa. 24:13), Israel personified or some other personification (e.g. Je. 2:15; Ho. 10:1), or of the Lord (e.g. 1 Ki. 8:36; Ezk. 36:5).<sup>35</sup> *Immanuel* cannot be simply any child whatever. Also, how could any 'ordinary' child become the ground of security of the Lord's people against the onset of the nations (8:10)? Finally, it is impossible to separate this *Immanuel* from the Davidic king whose birth delivers his people (9:4–7 <3–6>) and whose complex name includes the designation *Mighty God* (9:6 <5>). Following these pointers, we have a sign that lives up to its promise. Heaven and earth will truly be moved. Isaiah foresaw the birth of the divine son of David and also laid the foundation for the understanding of the unique nature of his birth.

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Motyer, 'Content and context in the interpretation of *Isaiah 7:14*', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 21 (1970), 118ff.

<sup>35</sup> In 1 Ki. 11:22; Is. 13:14; Jn. 1:8 'land' is equivalent to 'where you live'.

**15** *Curds and honey* was, according to verses 21–22, the food of poverty. Some, misled by a superficial resemblance to ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’, interpret it as the food of plenty.<sup>36</sup> The latter is, however, the spontaneous outflow of a land that cannot do enough for its inhabitants whereas the former is the monotonous diet of hard times (22). The divine child is to be born into the poverty of his people.

The meanings of *wrong* and *right* here range from the bad and good fruit of Jeremiah 24:2, through experience of bad and good fortune (e.g. 45:7; Ps. 34:12 <13>), to moral evil and good. At a very early age a child can distinguish nasty and nice tastes (cf. on 8:1–4), but equally Isaiah may mean the ‘years of discretion’ and the faculty of moral choice. The time factor is probably designedly vague. Within three years Damascus had fallen to Assyria, and thirteen years later Samaria was taken. The implication, however, is that Immanuel’s birth is imminent, and surely Isaiah’s

<sup>36</sup> Mowinckel and Ringgren note that mythologically ‘curds and honey’ is the food of the gods or describes the fertility of a land which Baal has fertilized. But it is also, according to Mowinckel, the food of distress, the diet of the child abandoned in the wilderness.

hearers would have understood it in this way; that some girl, at present an ‘almâ, would marry and in due course bear Immanuel. There are a number of suggestions how this might have been fulfilled.<sup>37</sup> A common idea is the ‘pious mother(s)’ theory noted above; a theory which perishes by requiring for a prophecy so solemnly announced a fulfilment so drab that no-one bothered to record it!<sup>38</sup> Weightier is the possibility that 7:14ff. was fulfilled in the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:1–4).<sup>39</sup> Both in its immediacy and in its relation to the fall of the northern powers to Assyria, the birth of Isaiah’s second son matches the Immanuel predictions. But there is a fatal difficulty. Not only does 8:1ff. fail to explain that Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is Immanuel but, even more seriously, the giving to this child of his own distinctive name is the whole

<sup>37</sup> The view is as old as Gesenius that the ‘almâ is Isaiah’s second wife, who would cry out ‘Immanuel’ as her child was born. For the collective view see Kaiser.

<sup>38</sup> S. H. Hooke in *The Siege Perilous* (SCM, 1956) urges that Immanuel’s mother is the girl chosen to take part in the ‘sacred marriage’ ritual (cf. Ringgren, n. 2 on p. 85).

<sup>39</sup> Oswalt espouses the Immanuel/Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz view. His discussion of the question is useful.

point of the incident. Isaiah's wife at the time was no 'almâ and she did not call her son Immanuel! In fact, in contrast to the mother of 7:14, who occupies centre stage, the 'prophetess' of 8:1ff. is almost marginal. Attention is wholly on Isaiah and his understanding of the Lord's word. It is he who gives the child a pre-arranged name significant not (like Immanuel) of spiritual reality but of earthly events. Another approach may be suggested.

Just as the full significance of the name *Immanuel* is found by relating verse 14 to other references within the unity of chapters 7–11, so the date of his birth in verse 16 should take note of what the section as a whole says on this point. This reveals a tension between the immediate and the remote. On the one hand, it seems Immanuel will be born within the immediate threat (7:14–16; 10:27–11:1) and on the other, that he will be born in the undated future, for before his birth Judah and Israel will be scattered and need regathering (8:11–22; 11:12.). These events must lie beyond the Assyrian times, for Isaiah knew that Judah would not suffer its coming exile (6:11f.) at Assyrian hands (10:27–34; 29:1–8; 31:4–9; 38:6). Specifically, the birth of the royal child is scheduled for 'the future', 'the afterwards' (9:1 <8:23> ). Isaiah does

nothing to resolve this tension between immediacy and remoteness. As for Ahaz, he was jeopardizing the Messianic hope resident in the house of David. Because of his unbelief the promised Messiah would be born into poverty, heir to a meaningless throne in a conquered land. Isaiah said this without qualification because at that moment this was the only way he could express the significance of what Ahaz had done and of the events which must now run their course. Every next king in David's line was the focus of a longing that he would be the Messiah, and every actual king was guardian of that longing inasmuch as he might be the Messiah's father. To all this Ahaz had played false. When Isaiah gave fuller expression to his Messianic thought he did so in the light of a more extended divine programme but he did not revise his words to Ahaz and that was for two reasons. First, because he would record accurately what he said on that occasion, and secondly, because of the essential truth of his utterance. From the time of Ahaz there never was again a 'house of David' in the true sense but only a line of puppet, pretend-kings under alien domination until, at the exile, even they disappeared into the sand of history never to re-emerge. The name of the overlord

power would change, from Assyria to Babylon to Persia to Greece and finally to Rome, before Immanuel would be born, but when he was born it was to share the poverty of his people, to inherit a non-existent throne and to feel the full weight of the oppressor. The blame for all this rested on Ahaz and his failure to believe the Lord's word. The promise awaited its time but the threat was immediate.

16 *Dread* (*qûṣ*) is used of paranoiac, sick fear, mortal terror.

17 A new factor is introduced by Ahaz's unbelieving power-politics. Seeking help from Assyria, he had in fact taken a tiger by the tail. The result was not the security which faith could have brought but unparalleled disaster. *The house of your father* points to the dynastic threat, as in verses 2 and 13. In 1 Kings 12 the defection of the northern tribes (*Ephraim*) to become the kingdom of Israel stripped David's house of five-sixths of its sovereignty. Only the loss of sovereignty altogether could be a worse disaster—which is exactly what happened. Many would omit the phrase *the king of Assyria*<sup>40</sup> but, as Watts points out,

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Kissane, Herbert, *BHS*, etc. Delitzsch perceptively remarks on the 'piercing force' of the words 'the king of Assyria' coming at the end of the verse.

it 'cannot be eliminated without dropping verses 18–28, which depend upon it for meaning. Its abrupt appearance may well be for dramatic effect.' Neither can it be eliminated without destroying Isaiah's brilliant irony: Assyria the national saviour turned executioner! The nemesis of unbelieving, untrusting human wisdom!

### The judgment (7:18–8:8)

The way of faith has been rejected. The king of Assyria has been adjudged a greater security than the Lord and his promises. What now follows has the inevitability of biblical logic: the alternatives to the way of salvation are always ways of destruction; those who hate wisdom love death (Pr. 8:36).

This mosaic of oracles follows the programme sketched in verses 15–17: the emptying and decay of the countryside, poverty, the elimination of the northern powers (Aram and Israel) and Judah submerged under the Assyrian flood. The catastrophe is total. Ahaz may have had every political skill, logic, the harvested results of diplomatic experience—all 'the facts of the real world'—but when the people of God operate by 'what stands to reason' rather than what proceeds from faith, when they seek safety in the resources, policies and powers of the

world—the king of Assyria instead of ‘the King, the LORD Almighty’ (6:5)—the things they trust guarantee their calamity. The dominating theme is Assyria (7:18) and its king (7:20; 8:4, 7). This was the power and the person on whom Ahaz trusted; this was the power and person of destruction.

Verses 18–25 probably belong to the address at the conduit (7:4ff.) and 8:1–8 to the time immediately following; verse 17 announces doom ‘on your people’ and Isaiah took steps to alert the public to the consequences of unbelieving politics. Four sections introduced by *In that day* (7:18, 20, 21, 23), followed by two sections introduced by *The LORD said* and *The LORD spoke* (8:1, 5), fall topically into three pairs.

1. The completeness of the conquest (18–20)
  - a. The land totally occupied (18–19)
  - b. The people stripped and humiliated (20)
2. The results of the conquest (21–25)
  - a. The people in poverty (21–22)
  - b. The land in decay (23–25)
3. The course of the conquest (8:1–8)
  - a. Imminent destruction of Aram and Israel (1–4)
  - b. Assyrian progress through Israel into Judah (5–8)

With his customary literary skill Isaiah has woven all this material into a compelling unity. We note the references to *the land of Assyria* (7:18) and *your land, O Immanuel* (8:8) as an inclusio within which a balanced picture of total victory on the one side and total loss on the other is painted:

A <sup>1</sup>	The assyrian’s land: two metaphors (18–20)	
	The bee: the land occupied (18–19)	a <sup>1</sup>
	The razor: the people stripped (20)	b <sup>1</sup>
B <sup>1</sup>	Judah crushed (21–25)	
	The people impoverished (21–22)	b <sup>2</sup>
	The land decayed (23–25)	a <sup>2</sup>
B <sup>2</sup>	Israel eliminated (8:1–7)	
	The people deported (1–4)	b <sup>3</sup>
	The land swamped (5–7)	a <sup>3</sup>
A <sup>2</sup>	Immanuel’s land: two metaphors (8)	
	The flood: the land engulfed	a <sup>4</sup>
	The bird of prey: the people under threat	b <sup>4</sup>

18 Cf. 5:26 where the foe was

unnamed; now his name is known and *the LORD will whistle for him*. Isaiah is applying the principles worked out in his preface. The vision of the easy sovereignty of the Lord is impressive. *Egypt*<sup>41</sup> has not hitherto figured in these oracles but has a coming part to play. Was there already a caucus among Judah's leaders anxious to secure Egyptian aid? Such a group had its way thirty years later (see chapters 28–31). The power of Egypt was a magnet to beleaguered politicians but the eye of faith saw it as only a source of disaster (cf. 30:6f.). The imagery of *flies* and *bees* is fitting for, according to Herbert, ‘The flooding of the Nile brought ... swarms of flies ... The hill districts of Assyria were well known for their bees.’ The word *streams* (plural of *y<sup>e</sup>'ōr*) is a semi-technical term for the Nile. The plural is the river with its system of irrigation canals. The

<sup>41</sup> Kaiser asserts that a later writer, ‘probably living in the time of the Seleucids and Ptolemies’ (323 BC), ‘felt the lack of the name of Egypt and added it’. Such a comment has no reality. Had Alistair Cook been writing contemporary ‘Letters from Jerusalem’ he could not have omitted to wonder what would be Egypt’s reaction to the rise of Assyria. We look, therefore, through Isaiah’s words and see a pro-Egyptian party in the court of Ahaz favouring a protective alliance with Pharaoh.

phrase, (lit) ‘at the extremity of the Nile-system’, refers to the whole land of Egypt. That Egypt, the first and mortal foe of God’s people, should ever be considered as a means of safety proves that when people cease to believe in the Lord they will believe anything!

**19** Settle is (lit.) ‘swarm’ (cf. on verse 2). Isaiah uses alliteration to drive home the message of a total land covered by this dreadful swarm: *nāḥū* ... *nah<sup>a</sup>lē* ... *n<sup>e</sup>qīqē* ... *na<sup>a</sup>ṣūṣīm* ... *nah<sup>a</sup>lōlīm*. Whether *steep/cut off* means ‘remote’ or ‘sheer’ (see on 5:6) the sense is that no place is too far or too unwelcoming to deter the swarm. The word *thornbushes* is only found here and at 55:13. Everywhere, from the inaccessible (*ravines*) to the frequented (*water holes*), from the place to flee to (*crevices*; cf. 2:21) to the place to shun (*thornbushes*), the enemy has taken over. Alternative salutations neither save nor allow escape.

**20** The change of metaphor to *razor* indicates a change of focus from land to people. Each individual falls to the attention of this barber. *The Lord* is *'aḏōnāy*, ‘the Sovereign’. For the significance of *hired* cf. 2 Kings 16:7–8; 2 Chronicles 28:21. *The hair of your legs* is (lit.) ‘the hair of the feet’. ‘Feet’ is a euphemism for private parts (cf. 1 Sa. 24:3 <4>) and is

indicative of the indignities heaped on the conquered. The contrast between *head* and *feet* and between the hidden hair of the body and the visible *beard* expresses totality. No part of the land (18–19), no part of the person (20) will be free of enemy occupation. The Lord would have saved Ahaz and his people for nothing; instead Ahaz bought a deceptive salvation—and the loss and humiliation that came with it.

21–22 The absence of reference to arable farming and dependence on animal husbandry points to a drastic reduction of available labour (*cf. 3:25–4:1*). *Keep alive* ( $\sqrt{hāyā}$ ) is only used twice elsewhere of the care of animals (2 Sa. 12:3; 1 Ki. 18:5) and may have been chosen to suggest a struggle to keep alive. The idea of *abundance* from only a *young cow and two goats* may be ironical. It may, however, actually point to high productive capacity resulting from free-range pasture (25). *Honey* is a natural product and is another pointer to the diminished population.

23–25 The picture of the devastated vineyard is reminiscent of 5:5–6 (note the telling repetition of *briers and thorns*, an exclusively Isaianic usage). Each verse speaks of an unprofitable, hostile landscape: of money spent, but all for nothing

(23); of how where once beasts were carefully excluded, now *men* are the intruders and must go armed (24); and of the intensive labour of viticulture (25; *cf. 5:6*). *Cultivated with a hoe* is (lit.) ‘hoed with a hoe’ and the repetition of verb and noun suggests minute care. But it was all to be for nothing—they may as well turn the cattle loose and let the sheep trample! It is not difficult to feel with this poor remaining population. They were deprived of dignity (20), reduced to hardship (21), and suffered loss of all they had ever saved for (23) or toiled for (24–25)—and all because faith and obedience had given place to unbelief and worldly wisdom.

8:1 *Large scroll* would be better translated as ‘large placard’. The word occurs elsewhere only in 3:23 where it is translated ‘mirrors’ (for the same idea see 30:8). We might paraphrase here, ‘Hire hoarding space’. Isaiah was to make his message as public and eye-catching as possible. *heret* (*an ordinary pen*) is found only here and in Exodus 32:4 and means (lit.) ‘with an engraving tool of man’, *i.e.* legible and comprehensible to all. The writing has to read (lit.), ‘To Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz’, maybe ‘Concerning ...’ or ‘Belonging to ...’ or ‘Dedicated to ...’. The name is impressionistic rather than grammatical: ‘Speed-spoil-haste-booty’.

It is intended to provoke questions, not to answer them. It combines ‘Speed’ (the same word group as ‘swiftly’ in 5:26) with such an assurance of conquest that the oncoming foe does not think of the fight but only of the booty.

2–3 *And I will call.*<sup>42</sup> Uriah and Zechariah (cf. 2 Ki. 16:10–16; 18:2) would subsequently testify that Isaiah had set up the placard and vouch for the date. Isaiah first preached the message of the speeding enemy (5:26–28; 7:18), next he gave it extra certainty and potency (cf. on 7:3) by writing it. But the word had yet to receive a final expression by ‘becoming flesh’ in Isaiah’s son. The fact that it needed a special word from the Lord to identify the new-born with the placard (3) shows that Isaiah had simply been walking in obedience, a model for the people of God (cf. on 8:20). *The prophetess* was not, says Herbert, a courtesy title but was given to Isaiah’s wife because she was literally the bearer of the Lord’s word, incarnate in her son.

4 Beginning with the explanatory ‘For’ (omitted by the NIV), this verse makes the boy a time-indicator in the

<sup>42</sup> For ‘and I will call’ (which translates the MT) Q<sup>a</sup> and LXX read an imperative. Kaiser and Kissane make a minute alteration to the text to read ‘and I called’ but no change is needed.

approach of that which his name declares. Kidner remarks:

The sign of Immanuel ... although it concerned ultimate events, did imply a pledge for the immediate future in that *however soon* Immanuel were born, the present threat would have passed before he would even be aware of it. But the time of his birth was undisclosed; hence the new sign is given to deal only with the contemporary scene.

The identical words *Before the boy knows ... link this child back to Immanuel* (7:16) from whom he took over the task of being an immediate time-indicator. His four-fold name of judgment distinguishes him from Immanuel, the bearer of the four-fold name of blessing (9:6 <5>). Thus Isaiah released Immanuel from the then present and pointed on to his birth ‘in the afterwards’ (9:1 <8:23>).

Isaiah speaks of the fall of Damascus and Samaria as taking place *before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’* ..., i.e. in about nine months or so.

In 734 BC Tiglath-pileser marched down the Israelite sea-coast, through Philistia, to the Egyptian border, cutting off Egyptian aid to the treaty powers. In 733 BC Israel lost Galilee, Transjordan (2 Ki. 15:29), Megiddo and other cities and it

was only the hasty submission of Hoshea which saved the kingdom for a few years more. Damascus fell to Assyria in 732.

5–8 In verses 1–4 Isaiah redrafted 7:16 in terms of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; the boy's birth would signal the imminent elimination of the northern powers before Assyria. In verses 5–8 he elaborates 7:17; the Assyrian domination of Israel (6–7) would be but a prelude to its domination of Judah (8).

6 Following the natural sequence from verse 4, *this people* is Samaria, the northern kingdom.<sup>43</sup> Shiloah was the stream from the Gihon spring into Jerusalem. First, it stood for the Davidic monarchy (for it was at Gihon that the monarchy passed from David to his sons; 1 Ki. 1:33–34, 45), and secondly, it stood for Jerusalem as the city of faith. In 7:3 Ahaz, under threat of invasion and siege, was

<sup>43</sup> Kissane says that 'this people' is a technical term for Judah. This is not so: in 23:13 it refers to a foreign power and in 9:16 to the northern kingdom. But consequent on interpreting 'this people' as Judah, *rejoices* (*m<sup>es</sup>sôs*) is emended to 'melts' (with fear) (*m<sup>es</sup>sôs*). See the RSV. The only advantage of such a change is to focus on the heart of the choice before Ahaz: the seeming feebleness of the way of faith (the trickle of Shiloah) and the seeming certainty of the way of worldly strength (the Euphrates).

looking at his vulnerable water supply. Though Jerusalem occupied one of the most impregnable sites of the ancient world, its source of water was outside the city walls and the supply ran overground in conduits into the city. To live in Jerusalem, therefore, required faith that the Lord would stand by his promises that this was the city he had chosen and which he would defend (see on 22:9–14). The defection of the northern tribes was their rejection of David, of the chosen city and of the way of faith. Instead they rejoiced in *Rezin* (i.e. when they looked outside their own resources it was not to the Lord but to the power of earthly kings) and in *the son of Remaliah* (i.e. not the divinely appointed monarchy of David but a monarchy of their own devising). Such comprehensive abandonment of the Lord, his city and his king must reap its reward.

7 With the words 'Therefore, behold' Isaiah calls dramatic attention to the consequence of choosing an alternative salvation. The people had chosen on a worldly basis: the collective security of military alliance (*Rezin*) and the leadership of men who rose to power not by divine appointment but by human artifice (2 Ki. 15:25ff.). The nemesis of choosing the world is to get the world, in full

and plenty: here, ‘the mighty and abundant waters of the River’ that is, the Euphrates. The motif of the two rivers Shiloah (6) and Euphrates (7) offers a telling contrast between the seeming weakness of faith and the seeming power of the world. To the human eye the way of faith (Jerusalem and its vulnerable water supply) is full of insecurity and hazard, but the believer sees all this and says, ‘He is faithful who promised’ (Heb. 10:23). But to choose the world is to be overwhelmed by the world. Isaiah will not allow people to escape the rigour of their own choices; to choose a saviour other than the Lord is to find a destroyer, in some form or another *the king of Assyria with all his pomp*.<sup>44</sup> Even *floodwaters* fulfil divine purposes. The rise of empire and the imperialist mind is itself a sinful thing (see 10:5–15) but this does not mean that it is apart from the Lord and his holy rule. The waters only overflow their banks to go where he directs them. Thus, northern

<sup>44</sup> Many insist (without explanation) that the reference to ‘the king of Assyria’ should be omitted as a later explanatory gloss (see BHS). This destroys the impact which Isaiah achieved by being his own interpreter here, as in 7:17. Alexander quotes Ewald that ‘every repetition ... makes the hypothesis of interpolation more improbable’.

Israel began in 734 to reap the rewards of 1 Kings 12:16 and decisions made two hundred years earlier.

8 *Sweep on* ( $\sqrt{hālāp}$ ) expresses change, one thing replacing another (cf. 21:1), something coming on newly and freshly. The floodwaters which have drowned Israel gather fresh momentum to break through into Judah. The menace cannot be halted (*sweep on ... swirling over ... passing through*), but it is controlled and there is a *ne plus ultra: reaching up to the neck*. Immanuel’s land is swamped but remains with its ‘head above water’. Unlike Israel, which was swept away by Assyria, Judah survived the flood. The fulfilment of 6:8–9 awaits other hands. Judah made essentially the same decision as Israel—to choose an earthly king (Assyria) as its security rather than the Lord—and therefore it merited the same fate. But the Lord is sovereign also in the application of judgment; he is not bound by inexorable laws but freely does his own holy will. *Its outspread wings* could refer to the outward spread of the floodwaters, but is more vividly seen as a change of metaphor: the Assyrian, like a huge bird of prey, overshadows the whole land, ready to pounce. *Your land, O Immanuel* sums up the tragedy of Ahaz’s decision. Immanuel is caught up in the ruination

brought about by unbelief. His kingship is stripped of earthly glory and he comes as a suffering king. Historically (*cf.* 2 Ki. 16), Ahaz's appeal to Assyria and his submission to Assyrian overlordship brought peace and the cessation of the northern threat. Isaiah, however, saw through to the reality: the glory had departed and David's throne was now a hollow unreality, never to return to sovereignty again. There was nothing now for Immanuel to inherit except suffering and loss.

### The remnant (8:9–22)

(See the outline on p. 74.) Two 'Immanuel' references link this section with the last. In 8:8 Immanuel shares the suffering of his land and in 8:9–10, though the nations world-wide prepare for battle their plan will be frustrated 'because God is with us' (*kî 'immānû 'ēl*). Immanuel is a truth as well as a name—the truth of the Lord's presence with his people and the security which it brings.

But who is kept secure? Isaiah's confrontation with Ahaz brought the issue of personal faith and commitment to the fore and exposed leader and nation alike as informed by a spirit of worldly reliance and lacking spiritual conviction. The importance of the present section is that it brings this to the point of definition in the doctrine of the remnant. 'A remnant

shall return' (Shear-Jashub; *cf.* 7:3; 10:20f.) no longer means simply that there will always be survivors to continue the nation on earth but that there is a distinction between the secularized, politicized professing people of God and those, within that people, who turn to him in repentance and faith, who look to his word and obey it.

#### 1. The Lord's presence as the point of differentiation (9–15)

##### a. Between the peoples and the people (9–10)

The peoples make alliances and hostile plans but without success 'for God is with us'

##### b. Between the people and the remnant (11–15)

In loyalty (11–13): one section lives in worldly fear, the other fears only the Lord

In experience (14–15): to one section the Lord is a sanctuary (14a), to the other (14b–15) an occasion of ruin.

#### 2. Faith as the mark of differentiation (16–22)

##### a. The way of faith (16–18)

The substance of faith is what God has testified (16); its object, God himself (17); its resting place, what God has

- declared regarding his purposes (18)
- b. The way of faithlessness (19–22)  
 Faithlessness rejects the Lord himself (19) and his word (20). Its consequences are calamity (21a), despair (21b) and hopelessness (22)
- The material gathered into this unit of instruction is diverse. Verses 9–10 could belong to any period of Isaiah's ministry for throughout it his people were threatened by the powers of the world. These verses well represent his ministry of consolation when the northern powers and Assyria alike loomed over Judah. Verses 11–12 and 17–18 appear to be excerpts from a 'spiritual diary' in which Isaiah kept notes of his own walk with God. Verses 13–15 and 19–20 are snatches of teaching given to his discipleship group concerning the pressures they experienced and the distinctive life they must live. Verse 16 is a command regarding the discipleship group, and verses 21–22 predict the coming desolation (*cf.* 6:11–12). It is a mark of perceptive editorial care that this conglomerate possesses not only the didactic unity demonstrated above but a structural unity as well:
- A<sup>1</sup> International collapse (9)
- B<sup>1</sup> Fruitless consultation (10)
- C<sup>1</sup> Isaiah set apart from the people by the word of the Lord (11)
- D<sup>1</sup> The fear of the ungodly (12)
- E<sup>1</sup> The fear of the godly (13)
- E<sup>2</sup> The privilege of the godly (14a)
- D<sup>2</sup> The fate of the ungodly (14b–15)
- C<sup>2</sup> Isaiah and the group separated unto the word of the Lord (16–18)
- B<sup>2</sup> Fruitless consultation (19–20)
- A<sup>2</sup> National collapse (21–22)
- The advantage of displaying a passage in this way is that it exposes the central truth or, as Watts would say, the 'key-stone'. There is a people within the people (E<sup>1</sup>, C<sup>2</sup>). In the conflict of the nations, they are secure (A<sup>1</sup>, B<sup>1</sup>) and in the collapse of the nation they hold on to what God has spoken (A<sup>2</sup>, B<sup>2</sup>). They are not, apparently, immune or cloistered when calamity befalls the people of which they are members but, unlike the hopelessness of the rest, they have a sure word to hold on to.
- 9–10 The ideas expressed in these verses recall Psalms 2:1–6 and 46–48. The theme of concerted international hostility ineffectual against the city where the Lord's king reigns and the Lord himself

dwells was part of temple worship. Isaiah may even be quoting here from a temple hymn.<sup>45</sup> There is, however, no example elsewhere of ‘Immanuel’ as a cultic usage or as a name for the Davidic king, but it is unthinkable that Isaiah would have used ‘*ēl* for *God* instead of ‘*elohîm* or (as in Psalm 46:7, 11) Yahweh if he had not intended to link the guardian presence of the God who rules the nations with Immanuel. Immanuel is thus the ruler of the world; in Immanuel, God himself is present as the security of his people. *Raise the war cry* interprets a verb which basically means ‘to be in uproar’. The verb is nowhere else exemplified in the simple active form used here but this cannot be regarded as a difficulty, especially when the meaning is so suitable in context.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Herbert. On the association of Pss. 46–48 with Isaiah see Kirkpatrick, *Psalms* (CUP, 1902).

<sup>46</sup> The form *rō‘û* might be from  $\sqrt{rā‘a}$  but the meaning ‘to break’ is unsuitable. If it is from  $\sqrt{rā‘a}$  (‘to be wicked’) a possible translation would be ‘do your worst’, but this stretches the meaning considerably.  $\sqrt{rūa}$  (‘to be in uproar’) could yield the form we have (cf. Mi. 4:13; GKC 72q) and is the best option, even though it is nowhere else exemplified in the qal. The LXX has *gnōte*, which presumes *d̄‘û* (‘to know’). Cf. the NEB and BHS, which offer a

The uproar of the nations is part of the cultic representation of international hostility (as Ps. 2). A second imperative often expresses the certainty with which one thing must follow another. So *be shattered* indicates that nothing is more certain than that the nations will destroy only themselves if they assail the people with whom God is. In verse 10 the futility of international enmity is extended from their collective strength (as in verse 9) to their planning. Nothing devised against Immanuel’s people can succeed (cf. 54:15–17).

11 According to Kaiser, with ‘For thus spoke the LORD to me’ Isaiah explains ‘how he attained an unshakeable peace, while the court and the people are seized by profound emotion’ (cf. 7:2). It was ‘not ... the consequence of a better political insight or a more robust nature but of divine inspiration.’ The hand symbolizes personal agency and power (cf. Ex. 6:1) and hence, here *with his strong hand*/‘with strength of hand’ means ‘with his compelling power’. The word of the Lord thus exerted pressure on Isaiah to distance himself from the people (cf. Je. 15:17). His separation was not self-appointed exclusivism but (like all true separation) obedience to the word of God. *The way* is good parallel with ‘listen’.

mainly the life-style but here includes the thoughts, ideas, fears, etc. characteristic of his contemporaries.

12 The verbs now become plural. Isaiah has others with him in the separated life. This is now explained as touching how they appraise the facts of contemporary life (12a) and how they react to its dangers (12b). On all its other thirteen occurrences (e.g. 2 Sa. 15:12; 2 Ki. 11:14) *qešer* (*conspiracy*) means internal treason. The  $\sqrt{qāšar}$  occurs in Nehemiah 4:8 <4:2> of an external conspiracy. We know of no internal treason against Ahaz—unless, of course, Isaiah's opposition was being classed as such (cf. Je. 37:11–13; 38:1–4). We do not know of this being the case, but if it were so then the command is not to be moved by popular slur from the pathway of obedience. The 'conspiracy' we do know about is that of the northern powers plotting to invade and terminate the Davidic monarchy. But since this actually was a conspiracy why should Isaiah and his group be instructed not to call it so? The reference could be to the 'alliance' (a possible meaning of the word) which Ahaz was negotiating with Assyria (see the NIV mg.). To Isaiah this was no alliance but submission, trading sovereignty for supposed safety, signing their own death warrant (as, later,

28:14f.). Those who lived under the word and promise of God were thus called to hold aloof from popular clamour for the supposed safety of political alliance and worldly armed strength.<sup>47</sup> *Fear* here relates to the northern threat (7:2). Isaiah and his disciples are to have no part in a fear-ridden society but to be conspicuous for a different life-style, unmoved by the fears around; a calm in the midst of life's storms and menaces.

13 The words *fear* and *dread* match those in verse 12. The fact that verse 12 is so non-specific indicates that it is not particularly important to know what the world fears; the important thing is that the world should know what the believer fears, namely, the Lord. In the midst of a fearful people, Isaiah and his disciples are not fearless but their fear is differently directed. Their lives are to be governed by a theological awareness of the *LORD*, Yahweh, the exodus God (Ex. 3:13–15; 6:6–8), who redeems his people and overthrows his foes. He is the *LORD Almighty*/‘of hosts’ (see on 1:9), the

<sup>47</sup> G. R. Driver ('Two misunderstood passages of the Old Testament (Is. viii. 11–14; Je. vi. 27–30)', *JTS*, 6 [1955], 82–87) suggests that *qešer* may mean 'difficulty', i.e. the remnant can live with and surmount problems in life that stump the rest.

omnipotent God, the holy One. To *regard* him as *holy* is to so respond to him as to live in constant awareness of his holy nature. That this God is to be feared, *i.e.* deeply reverenced, 6:3ff. shows.

14–15 *Sanctuary* is not a place of asylum but ‘a holy place’ (*miqdāš*), a place where God dwells in all his holiness. The *sanctuary* is the coming of the Lord to dwell among his people but, as in the tabernacle and in the temple, coming in all the reality of his holy presence (Ex. 40:34; 1 Ki. 8:10). And yet, because this sanctuary was a house of sacrifice, provision was made (6:6–7) for sinners to be safe and welcome before him. Just as ‘God is with us’ (10) marked off the people from the peoples, so here the holy presence marks off the remnant from the people. But while to some his presence offers a glad opportunity to repent, believe and by the appointed means of grace to enter into his fellowship and peace, to others his presence spells doom. To them he is ‘a stone of tripping, a rock of stumbling ... a trap and a snare’. The first pair of words express the people’s attitude to God—they ignore him and therefore trip over him; the second pair express his hostility to them. (For ‘tripping up’ cf. Ps. 91:12; for ‘the stumbling block’ cf. Je. 6:19–21; Ezk. 3:20; 7:19.) The

figure expresses a watchful divine providence whereby the sinner receives exactly what is due but does not do so without a warning having been raised to halt him on his disaster-course. It is as if a rock were put across a road to block the traveller from danger but, in carelessness or scorn, he refuses the warning and stumbles to his death. The stress in these verses is that what gives most offence to the sinner and what at the same time constitutes his greatest danger is the presence of the divine. The same God in his unchanging nature is both sanctuary and snare; it depends on how people respond to his holiness.

16–22 Contrasting attitudes to the Lord are now worked out in a fresh direction. The contrast is between *I will wait for the LORD* (17) and *they will curse ... their God* (21); between patient faith and impatient unbelief.

16–17 In the structure of the passage, these verses are linked with verse 11. It is the compulsion of the word of the Lord (11) that creates the separated remnant. Verse 16 expresses their common treasuring of God’s truth and verse 17 the personal and patient trust which animates each.

16 If a distinction is intended between *bind up* and *seal*, ‘bind’ means to ‘wrap

up', to safeguard from tampering and 'seal' means to attest as final and therefore guard from addition. The imperatives suggest a definite act, a precise (even legal) securing of Isaiah's message against any accusation that he did not say this or that and against subsequent tampering or addition by others. *Testimony* is what God has testified to as his truth (for *law* see on 1:10). *My disciples* are 'my instructed ones' (cf. 50:4; 54:13).<sup>48</sup> *My* could refer to Isaiah, and the whole verse would then be his prayer that the Lord would safeguard and preserve what the prophet has taught his disciples. But it is better to understand it as meaning that the Lord is claiming the remnant as his own. Their relationship is to him, their hallmark is to be under instruction (cf. 50:4) and their privilege is their possession of his testimony and law. Here, says Gray, is 'the emergence of a spiritual, as distinct from a national, religious society.'

17 Gathered round the written word of God (16), each testifies to an expectant faith which patiently awaits what the Lord will do. *Wait* ( $\sqrt{hākā}$ ) and *trust* ( $\sqrt{qāwā}$ ; e.g. 40:31) are both words of 'waiting', combining patience with confidence. The sense of *who is hiding* is 'who

<sup>48</sup> 96 Otherwise *limmûd* occurs only in Je. 2:24 and 13:23, not, however, in the sense 'disciples'.

is going to hide'. Faith is made for the dark day. A different attitude to darkness comes in verses 20–22. To 'hide the face' is a sign of disfavour—the opposite of 'making the face to shine' (Nu. 6:25). Ahaz alienated the favour of the Lord, and Isaiah and his disciples were not immune from the ensuing calamities. But within the gathering darkness they had a sustaining, expectant faith and a sure hope.

18 An initial 'Behold' commands attention as Isaiah offers himself as an example of the faith of the remnant in the dark hour. He fortifies himself by recalling first, the personal dealings of God with him and his family, and secondly, the objective reality of God's choice of Zion and the divine promise which that implies. *Signs* ('ōtot; e.g. Ex. 3:12) direct attention to truth and *symbols/portents* (*mōp̄tim*) arrest attention (e.g. Ex. 3:3). Thus the coincidence of the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and the message of the 'great tablet' (1–4) are a 'portent', but his name and that of his brother are 'signs'. Isaiah did not explicitly use his own name ('Yahweh saves') in his recorded preaching; he was both portent and sign in 20:1–6. The preposition 'from' in *from the LORD* is (lit.) 'from with', frequently used to stress 'from the very

presence of'. This is Isaiah's confidence in the divine origin and communication to him of the message he and his sons embody. Since God had thus dealt with him in personal experience, he can fortify his faith for the testing darkness ahead. Objectively, the Lord *who dwells on Mount Zion* had declared his choice of Zion and his intention to dwell there for ever. As in 28:16, this too is a ground of faith. What the Lord promised he would most surely keep and perform.

19–22 Isaiah's disciples have already been warned to avoid popular opinions and alarms (12); now he warns them against popular religion and superstition, the beasts which rush into the unprotected vineyard (5:5). As a careful pastor and teacher he forewarns of a pressure that will be mounted (19a); clarifies the issue (19b); exposes the absurdity (19c); puts the positive alternative (20a); and issues a clear warning (20b–22).

19 To *consult* is to 'seek unto' (cf. Dt. 4:29; 12:5) expressing a deliberate decision to go where such may be found. The Hebrew for *mediums* is '*ōbōt*' and the witch at Endor was a woman possessed of an '*ōb*', a 'familiar spirit' through which she contacted the dead. *Spiritists* (*yiddē'ōnîm*, from  $\sqrt{yāda}$ , 'to know') are those claiming 'inside knowledge', especially of the

future, prohibited in Leviticus 19:31; 20:2 and Deuteronomy 18:11 (where the spiritist is contrasted with the prophet who brings a sure word from the Lord). *Whisper* ( $\sqrt{sāpāp}$ ) is only in Is. 10:14; 29:4; 38:14; it is used of whispering, squealing (with fright).  $\sqrt{hāgā}$  (*mutter*) can mean 'to meditate' (Jos. 1:8), 'to moan' (Is 38:14), or just 'to speak' in a general sense (Ps. 35:28). Used in a derogatory way, 'squeak and moan' mocks alike the behaviour of the medium and the absurdity of relying on such guidance. The Hebrew of *should not* is inverted emphatic: 'A people to their God should they not seek?' *People* ('*am*') is the word often used of God's privileged people compared with the nations of earth. Isaiah here recapitulates the tragedy whereby 'my people' (3:12) have become 'this people' (6:9) and 'your God' (7:11) 'my God' (7:13). Their enthusiasm for fortune-tellers and spiritists evidences both their withdrawal, foolishly and treacherously, from their God and his withdrawal, justly and judgmentally, from them. *Why consult* is literally a biting exclamation: 'On behalf of the living, the dead!' In the Bible, to die is not to acquire powers or wisdom beyond those of earth. The dead greet the king of Babylon with, 'You too have become weak as we' (14:10). The dead Samuel (1 Sa.

[28:16ff.](#)) knows and says nothing other than what he knew and said on earth. Indeed, in the Old Testament the dead are weaker than the living for they are but shadows (see on [14:9](#)) of their former selves, half-persons, souls without bodies.

**20** This verse begins with another telling exclamation. The *law* and *testimony* (see verse [16](#)) are the sufficient resource of true disciples. As when the dead are sought a mediator is needed (*mediums and spiritists*), so when the remnant consult their God they have a mediator—the truth he has attested and taught, sealed and safeguarded among them. *If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn* accurately gives the ‘drift’ of a difficult piece of Hebrew. Possibly, *If ... not* is the idiom for making affirmative oaths and *dawn* is the metaphor for a hopeful future. If so, we might translate it, ‘For certain they will speak according to this word when none of them has a future’ (*i.e.* too late they will come to acknowledge what God has spoken). Alternatively, it could read ‘Indeed, according to this word they speak who are, each, without a future’ (*i.e.* ‘Indeed they speak’ [\(20\)](#) parallels ‘when they say’ [\(19\)](#) and their commitment to spiritism puts them outside the sphere of hope), or ‘If they do not speak according

to this word, surely none of them has a future’ or ‘... the result is that none of them has a future’.<sup>49</sup> This is the range of possibilities in Isaiah’s Hebrew as it has reached us. According to the first two, to embrace a merely human wisdom (even spirit-sought) is to reveal a hopeless state and to lose the possibility of repentance; according to the latter two, to reject the word of the Lord is to embrace hopelessness. Either way, the hopelessness is an objective fact; in the next verses Isaiah speaks of it as a subjective experience.

**21–22** So they go into exile, enduring privation [\(21a\)](#), politically and spiritually exasperated [\(21b\)](#), without hope from heaven [\(21d\)](#), from earth [\(22a\)](#) or from the future [\(22b\)](#). All the verbs in these verses are singular, individualizing the common lot: ‘they, each of them ...’.

**21** They will be *distressed, hungry* and *famished*, which is the lot of the captive;

<sup>49</sup> Following ‘If they do not speak according to this word’ the MT reads *“ašer ’ēn lō šāhar*. The relative pronoun is very flexible in use, arising from a basic meaning such as ‘the fact that’, ‘the fact is’ (*cf. 1 Sa. 15:20; Gn. 11:7*). It could also mean ‘inasmuch as’ (*cf. 37:21; Gn. 31:49*). This could link verses [20](#) and [21](#): ‘If they do not speak according to this word, inasmuch as none of them has a future, each will pass through ...’.

symbolically, the withholding of earth's good from those who rejected earth's God (*cf.* Gn. 3:17–19; Am. 8:13f.). *Through the land* is a translation of ‘through it’, which could refer to the land they traverse into exile or the time of hopelessness they are enduring. Kaiser takes ‘through it’ to mean ‘in accordance with it’, referring to the law and testimony, the rejected word of verse 20; by refusing its truth, they suffer its condemnations. *Curse their* is (lit.) ‘curse by’, *i.e.* they will invoke king and God in pronouncing a curse. The formula *qillēl b<sup>e</sup>* is not used in any other sense. It certainly adds to the pathos and despair of the situation if the people are heard invoking a curse on their lot in the name of a system (the Davidic kingship) they had betrayed and a God they had refused to trust.

22 The prevailing motif is darkness, for which Isaiah uses here three different words.<sup>50</sup> They had loved darkness, the darkened rooms in which they consulted the shrouded dead, and divine justice has given them what they loved: darkness all around and a dark future ahead, the

<sup>50</sup> Darkness is a standard word, *ḥašēkâ* (e.g. 50:10); gloom (the synonymous *mā'ûp*) is found only here. The related noun *'ēpâ* occurs in Am. 4:13 (*cf.* Jb. 10:22). Utter darkness suitably translates *'aḥpēlâ* (*cf.* Ex. 10:22).

nemesis of abandoning their God and of refusing his testimony and law.

### The glorious hope (9:1–7 <8:23–9:6> )

Throughout 8:11–22 the believing remnant are the people of hope. Their distinct orientation of life (8:12–13) brings different expectations (8:14); they acknowledge a different authority over their lives (8:16, 19–20a), with a different attitude to the future (8:17–18 contrast verses 21–22). For the present they know that God is with them (8:14a); for the future they await the day when the hiding of his face is past and the pledges inherent in Isaiah and his sons and in Zion are fulfilled (8:17f.). In a word, for the remnant, beyond the darkness of the hidden face and the distressful pathway there is the shining light of 9:1–7 <8:23–9:6> .

This hope is sure. 9:1–7 is couched in past tenses; the future is written as something which has already happened, for it belonged to the prophetic consciousness of men like Isaiah to cast themselves forward in time and then look back on the mighty acts of God, saying to us: ‘Look forward to it, it is certain, he has already done it!’ Because of this confidence, Isaiah can place the light of 9:1ff. in immediate proximity to the darkness of 8:22, not because it will immediately happen but because it is immediately evident to the

eye of faith; those walking in the darkness can see the light ahead and are sustained by hope.

The poem falls into two sections:

1. The hope described (9:1–3

⟨8:23–9:2⟩ )

a<sup>1</sup> What God does

A new situation by act of God: as he ‘treated with contempt’ so now he has ‘treated with honour’ (9:1 ⟨8:23⟩ )

b<sup>1</sup> What his people enjoy

A new situation for God’s people: darkness has become light (2 ⟨1⟩ )

c<sup>1</sup> What follows

A new situation between the Lord and his people: he has increased their joy and they rejoice before him (3 ⟨2⟩ )

2. The hope explained (4–7 ⟨3–6⟩ )

a<sup>2</sup> What God does

The first explanation: God’s act of deliverance (4 ⟨3⟩ )

b<sup>2</sup> What his people enjoy

The second explanation: entering into the fruits of victory (5 ⟨4⟩ ; this verse also begins with ‘for’)

c<sup>2</sup> What follows

The third explanation: the king and his rule (6–7 ⟨5–6⟩ )

All the activity is on God’s side. The Gideon motif ([Jdg. 6–8](#)) and the exodus overtones of verse 4 illustrate this while at the same time offering a contrasting set of circumstances. The exodus was a mighty act of God, revealing, redeeming and overthrowing, but the situation into which it introduced the people of God was far from ideal, and their wilderness hardships exposed their own meagre response to the grace of God. Equally in the case of Gideon, the victory was dissipated in apostasy ([Jdg. 8:27](#)) and in the anarchy ([Jdg. 9](#)) under far from perfect rulers. But in the day of the great hope, the response will match the act of God: when the light shines, they will see it (2), when joy is increased, they will rejoice (3), and they will enter into the kingdom of peace under the perfect king, an environment and a ruler productive of perfection.

The poem is full of royal and Davidic themes<sup>51</sup> but is significantly different

<sup>51</sup> Scott notes the following Davidic motifs: the dawn of great light (cf. 2 Sa. 23:4; Pss. 110:3; 118:24, 27); rejoicing (cf. Pss. 118:15, 24; 132:9, 16); the overthrow of foes (cf. Pss. 2:2, 8–9; 72:4, 14; 89:23; 110:1, 5–6; 132:18; burning with fire (cf. 2. Sa. 23:7; Pss. 21:9; 118:12); royal continuance for ever (cf. Pss. 2:8–9; 21:4; 61:6–7; 89:3–4, 28–29, 36–37; 132:11–12).

from the royal psalms which were used as coronation odes for the actual kings of Judah. Motifs of royal Messiahship are here taken with that extra degree of seriousness by being directly rather than theoretically linked with the king. The ‘sonship’ of Psalm 2:7, for example, is only wishful thinking in connection with the kings in Jerusalem. At best it is an adopted sonship, a ‘grace and favour’ title; likewise, the deity of the king in Psalm 45:7. But here is a born king (6; cf. Mt. 2:2), actually divine. In him everything that was envisaged is embodied; he is the eschaton.

Isaiah rests his vision on the devastation of the northern lands (1 <8:23>) about 733. The poem must be dated at this time. It would not have been appropriate to single out this one area after the whole northern kingdom had been deported in 722 or at any later date. Rather, in the first hurt of seeing homelands alienated and fellow-Israelites carried captive people would have looked to the prophet for a word from the Lord. His reply that where darkness had fallen light would shine received the most glorious fulfilment (Mt. 4:12–17).

1 <23> The verse begins (lit.) ‘Surely no gloom to her/it to whom/which distress’. With no verbs stated, the words

express a fact rather than a prediction. *Gloom* (*mû'āp*) is only used here and is directly related to *gloom* (*mā'ūp*) in 8:22. *Distress* (*mûṣāq*) is related to the word translated *fearful* (*sûqâ*) in 8:22. The eye of faith looks at all this but affirms that, real though it is, it is not the ‘real’ reality. As always, the people of God must decide what reading of their experiences they will live by. Are they to look at the darkness, the hopelessness, the dreams shattered and conclude that God has forgotten them? Or are they to recall his past mercies, to remember his present promises and to make great affirmations of faith? (Cf. Pss. 74:2–17; 77:5–15 <6–16>.) Isaiah insists here that hope is a present reality, part of the constitution of the ‘now’. The darkness is true but it is not the whole truth and certainly not the fundamental truth. We note that these opening words are *in the past* or *in the future* and lie outside the framework of the verse. They may be a piece of editorial stitching by which Isaiah sewed the poem of hope into place in his scheme. *Humbled* means ‘treated with contempt’. *The land of Naphtali* lay along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and extended northward; that of *Zebulun* was west and southwest of Naphtali, midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean

(Jos. 19:10–16, 32–39). These areas were the first to fall to Assyria. The people were deported and their lands, with Gilead in Transjordan, became three Assyrian provinces. The same areas are covered by the threefold description which follows: ‘he has determined to treat with honour the way of the sea [land between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean], over the Jordan [Gilead, Transjordania], Galilee of the nations [the northward extension of Naphtali]’. This last area is mentioned simply as Galilee in Joshua 20:7; 21:32; 1 Kings 9:11; 2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chronicles 6:76. It is nowhere else called *Galilee of the Gentiles*/‘nations’. We note first that when the hope comes even the old names will be changed, the old has passed away, and secondly that the reference to *the Gentiles*/‘the nations’ introduces a new idea, the involvement of the Gentiles in the time of hope. Solomon’s ceding of this area to Hiram (1 Ki. 9:11) or the failure of Zebulun and Naphtali (Jdg. 1:30, 33) to oust the original Canaanites may offer some background to the reference to Gentiles here, but the substantial fact is that no-one else who referred to Galilee found it necessary to call attention to Gentiles. But the Messiah is for the world (*cf.* 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 60:1–3) and Isaiah took the oppor-

tunity to introduce the topic here in his first major exposition of the coming King.

2–6 <1–5> The fundamental experiences of light and joy (2–3) are related to a threefold explanation (verse 5 as well as verses 4 and 6, begin with ‘For’). The first explanation is liberation (4), the second (5) is entering into the fruits of a victory past, and the ultimate explanation (6) is the birth of the child.

2 <1> Isaiah turns from lands transformed by divine blessing to *people* entering into the light of God’s favour. *Walking* means living out their lives. The remnant, caught up in the toils of national calamity, have been walking in *darkness*, enduring the hiding of the Lord’s face (8:17), even though reacting to the darkness not with curses and despair (8:21) but with the disciplined expectations of faith (8:17). In *shadow of death* usage probably juggled with the second syllable of the word *šalmût* (*darkness*) to make it into *šalmāwet* (*‘death-darkness’*, such trouble as casts a death-like shadow) but the relationship with death is metaphorical.<sup>52</sup> It is a very strong word. The dark-

<sup>52</sup> *šalmāwet* is used eighteen times. Only on a minority of occasions (*e.g.* Jb. 3:5; 10:21) does the idea of death approach the foreground. It refers to such trouble as casts a death-like shadow over life.

ness-light motif points to a creative work of God, who alone can make such a transformation (*cf.* 4:5; Gn. 1:2–3; 2 Cor. 4:6). The verbs *have seen* and *has dawned* bring together subjective experience (seen) with objective fact (dawned), divine action and human response matching each other.

3 <2> In the phrase *You have enlarged*/‘multiplied’ *the nation* Isaiah exhibits the same tension as the New Testament between the paucity of the remnant and the multitude of the redeemed.<sup>53</sup> The triumph of grace guarantees bringing many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10). The Hebrew of the MT translated *increased their joy* has what appears to be the negative particle ‘not’ (*lō*; *cf.* the AV), but it does not appear possible to find a suitable meaning for a negative verb. The most satisfactory solution is to see here one of the fifteen occasions where, according to the Massoretic notes, we should read *lō* as *lô* (‘for him’), here ‘for them’ referring to the collective noun *nation*.<sup>54</sup> The word order suggests ‘for them (of all

<sup>53</sup> Cf. 1:9; 3:25–4:1; 7:3 with 10:20–22; 26:15; 49:19–21; 54:1–3; 66:8–9; Mt. 7:13–14; Lk. 13:23–30; Rev. 7:9–17.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ex. 21:8; Lv. 11:21; 25:30; 1 Sa. 2:3; 2 Sa. 16:18; 2 Ki. 8:10; Ezr. 4:2; Jb. 13:15; 41:4; Pss. 100:3; 139:16; Pr. 19:7; 26:2; Is. 63:9.

people!) you have increased the joy!’ The multiplying of the nation is a Solomonic motif such as recurs in this poem. Solomon was the only one who ever truly sat on David’s throne, for the kingdom sundered immediately on his death. It is fitting that he should be memorialized as Isaiah foresees the true Davidic successor (*cf.* 1 Ki. 4:20 with its notes of the numerous and rejoicing (a cognate of *joy* in this verse) people). The objective fact of divine increase of joy is matched by subjective experience of it—*they rejoice*. The words *before you* speak of entrance to and acceptance in the Lord’s presence (*cf.* Ex. 23:15, 17; Dt. 12:7; 14:26), the fulfilment of all that the old feasts anticipated. Two contrasting spheres of joy, *harvest* and *plunder*, express the idea of every sort of joy, joy in its completeness. Both harvest and victory are divine gifts (*e.g.* Dt. 28:2–8). Harvest belongs in the sphere of ‘nature’, plunder in the sphere of history. The Messianic day promises deliverance from adversity brought through circumstances or by people. As verse 4 will explain, the gathering of plunder is a picture of entering into the fruits of a victory which they have done nothing to win, a non-contributory benefit.

4 <3> There are two sets of historical references in this verse. First, vocabulary

is used which recalls Egypt, e.g. *yoke* ([Lv. 26:13](#)), *burdens* ([Ex. 1:11; 2:11](#); [5:4–5; 6:6–7](#)), *shoulders* ([Ps. 81:6 <7>](#)) and *oppressor* ([Ex. 3:7; 5:6, 10–14](#)). The exodus, the pre-eminent act of God ([Ex. 3:7–8; 2 Sa. 7:23](#)), offers a background to the coming child. Secondly, the defeat of Midian recorded in [Judges 6–8](#) is remembered. This is apt, for Gideon was in particular the deliverer of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali ([Jdg. 6:35](#)), and the narrative labours to emphasize the victory as an act of God, excluding human glory ([Jdg. 7:2–14](#)), wrought by the sudden burst of light ([7:20](#)). Three aspects of suffering are included in the deliverance. *The yoke that burdens* is suffering as actually endured, a toilsome way of life. In *the bar across their shoulders*, ‘bar’ should be ‘rod’, ‘staff’ or ‘stick’, the only meaning *mattēh* has in non-metaphorical use. This is suffering that is inflicted as the stick is laid to their backs. *Rod of their oppressor* is suffering arising from personal hostility, as of a taskmaster. But there will now be no burdens, no blows, no tyrants.

**5 <4>** The metaphor of conquest ([3–4](#)) is brought to its climax with the final act of spoliation, but it is a metaphor. Since the vision is couched in kingly terms, the submission of the world to the King is viewed, after the manner of

kings, as a conquest. In reality, however, it is a spreading peace and, in its fulfilment (verse [7](#); cf. [Acts 15:13ff.](#)), the work of evangelism. Like verses [4](#) and [6](#), verse [5](#) opens with the word ‘For’ and is the second explanation of three (see pp. [98f.](#)). According to verse [4](#) the divine act liberates, and in verse [5](#) the liberated people enter freely into the fruits of the Lord’s victory. *Every warrior’s boot used in battle* is (lit.) ‘all the footgear that footed it into the turmoil’. The noun (*s<sup>e</sup>ōn, boot*) and the accompanying participle (*so’ēn, used in battle*) are found only here in the Old Testament and, are variously described as Egyptian, Assyrian or Aramaic loanwords. They are chosen here to express the breaking of the alien power which has gripped the Lord’s people. The *burning* of the military hardware, *every warrior’s boot* and *every garment rolled in blood*, corresponds to [2:2–4](#). There it became the tools of Edenic peace, here everything combustible goes to the bonfire or the domestic hearth; war is over (cf. [Zc. 9:10](#)). But the people have not fought the final battle, they have entered the battlefield only after the fighting is done.

**6 <5>** The third explanation traces all to its ultimate root. The emphasis falls not on what the child will do when grown up but on the mere fact of his birth. In his

coming all that results from his coming is at once secured. The Hebrew emphasis rests not on *to us* but on the coming one. *Child* (*yeled*) relates him to his ancestry; *son* expresses his maleness and dignity in the royal line. He is *born* as from human parentage and *given* as from God. *miśrā* (government) is found only here and in verse 7 and is related to *śār* ('prince', 'executive'). By its formation it means that wherein princeliness or executive authority is epitomized. *His shoulders* are a symbol of 'bearing rule' (cf. 22:22). Note also how 'their shoulders' are released from burdens (verse 4) when he shoulders the burden of rule. In commenting on *And he will be called*/‘and one will call his name’ or ‘and he will be called by name’, Ringgren notes a custom among Israel’s neighbours of giving ‘throne-names’, a ‘royal protocol’ ‘often with programmatic intent’. He suggests this may be the meaning of ‘decree’ in Psalm 2:7, a divinely given name indicative of what the new king and his rule are to be.<sup>55</sup> Solomon (cf. on verse 3) alone among the sons of David, had a God-given birth name. David, restored to peace with God, called the child *š̄elōmōh*, ‘the man of peace’; the Lord called him Jedidiah,

<sup>55</sup> H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 29.

‘Yahweh’s beloved’. In this way the child is the new Solomon, David’s perfect heir.

The book of Isaiah is noted for significant names (cf. 7:3; 8:1ff.) both foreshadowing coming events and also ‘embodying’ the word of the Lord. In the King’s fourfold name, the first two elements match his earlier name of Immanuel and the second two note the conditions he will bring about. *Wonderful Counsellor*<sup>56</sup> is (lit.) ‘wonder-counsellor’ and ‘wonder’ (see the additional note) means something like ‘supernatural’. The two possibilities are either ‘a supernatural counsellor’ or ‘one giving supernatural counsel’. Such was Isaiah’s first promise regarding the new Zion (1:26). At David’s court there was the more-than-humanly gifted Ahithophel (2 Sa. 16:23), and in the early days of Solomon his wisdom required supernatural explanation (1 Ki. 3:28). In particularizing this gift of the coming King, Isaiah was understandably reacting from Ahaz, the king who was able and clever but not wise. Much more, however, he was going to the heart of things—as did the young Solomon (1 Ki. 3:9). The decisions of a king make or break a king-

<sup>56</sup> Since the last three pairs in the fourfold title are linked by a genitive relation, parity of reasoning would suggest that the first two nouns belong together also.

dom and a kingdom designed to be everlasting demands a wisdom like that of the everlasting God. In this case, like God because he is God, the *Mighty God* ('ēl gibbōr), the title given to the Lord himself in 10:21 <22>. Plainly, Isaiah means us to take seriously the 'ēl component of this name as of Immanuel (see the additional note). *Mighty* (gibbōr, 'warrior') caps the military references in verses 3–5.

God has come to birth, bringing with him the qualities which guarantee his people's preservation (wisdom) and liberation (warrior strength). *Everlasting Father* and *Prince of Peace* describe the conditions the King's birth will bring. *Father* is not current in the Old Testament as a title of the kings. Used of the Lord, it points to his concern for the helpless (Ps. 68:5 <6>), care or discipline of his people (Ps. 103:13; Pr. 3:12; Is. 63:16; 64:8 <7>) and their loyal, reverential response to him (Je. 3:4, 19; Mal. 1:6). For similar ideas used regarding the Davidic King see Psalm 72:4, 12–14; Isaiah 11:4. Probably the leading idea in the name *Father* here is that his rule follows the pattern of divine fatherhood. As *eternal/of eternity*, he receives 'such an epithet [as] could, of course, be applied to Yahweh alone'.<sup>57</sup> Isaiah uses

'eternity' ('ad) more than any other author, sometimes in a general sense (e.g. 26:4; 30:8) but also in its unmistakable sense (e.g. 57:15; 64:9 <8> ; 65:18). When the people asked for a king they had in mind that a continuing institution would provide them with a security greater and more reassuring than the episodic rule of the judges. But total security requires more even than this stop-go rule and is achieved in a king who reigns eternally. With *Prince of Peace* the Gideon and Solomon motifs reappear and the negative 'no more war' of verse 5 is supplemented by a corresponding positive guarantee. On the personal level, peace means fulfilment; to 'die in peace' is to have lived a fulfilled life, to have achieved all God planned (e.g. Gn. 15:15; 2 Ki. 22:20). Peace is well-being (e.g. Gn. 29:6) and freedom from anxiety (1 Sa. 1:17). In relationships, it is goodwill and harmony (Ex. 4:18), the opposite of war (Lv. 26:6). Towards God, it is the full realization of his favour (Nu. 6:26), 'peace with God' (Nu. 25:12; Is. 53:5; Mal. 2:5–6). In 2 Samuel 11:7, 'David asked after Joab's peace and the peace of the people [army] and the peace of the war', i.e. well-being and progress. All this is related to the basic meaning of √šālēm, 'to be whole/complete'. The *Prince of*

<sup>57</sup> G. A. F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of*

*the Old Testament* (SCM, 1959), p. 303.

*Peace* is himself the whole man, the perfectly integrated, rounded personality, at one with God and humankind, but also as a Prince, these are the benefits he administers to his people.

7 <6> His kingdom will *increase* and occupy progressively all space until he rules over all.<sup>58</sup> *Government* (*miśrâ*) is princely reality, actual executive rule (see verse 6). The qualities which he perfectly embodies will not suffer loss or change by maladministration. Solomon, the man of peace, established his throne, in accordance with the appalling final directions of David, in savage bloodshed (1 Ki. 2), but now as the princely rule spreads, *peace* spreads. It is an empire indeed but there is no imperialism, there is rule but no

<sup>58</sup> The word *increase* contains the oddity that in the Hebrew the initial letter of *marbēh* is printed in the form elsewhere reserved for the final ‘m’ in a word. There is some long-standing uncertainty here. Q<sup>a</sup> has a different word division, *lmrbh*, but writes the now final ‘m’ in its medial form! BHS has *lāmō rabbâ hammiśrâ* (‘in regard to him, abundant is the princely rule’), which is a reasonable parallel to ‘and in regard to peace, no end’. The word *marbēh* does not occur elsewhere but is a correctly formed noun. It is best to accept the MT, leaving the form of the letter ‘m’ as an unexplained curiosity.

exploitation, rather the endless sharing of his own perfect ‘fulfilment’ in bringing those under his rule to perfection.

The focal point of the kingdom is *David’s throne*. In other words, the very promises which Ahaz refused to trust will be wonderfully fulfilled. In the light of this, we understand that ‘son’ in verse 6 must mean ‘son of David’. Here is the Old Testament Messianic enigma: how can a veritable son of *David* be *Mighty God* and ‘Father of eternity’? This was precisely the tension in Old Testament truth which the Lord Jesus tried to make the blinkered Pharisees face in Matthew 22:41–46. The moral foundation will be *justice and righteousness* (cf. the expectations of 1:26–27) and the lost glories of Zion (1:21) will be restored. Not only so, but the divine holiness will be perfectly manifested in true procedures (*justice*) which reflect righteous principles (*righteousness*) (cf. on 5:16). In describing the power of accomplishment Isaiah abandons the perfect tenses he has been using throughout for a future tense. He stands where he is, looking forward; it will all happen, the Lord’s *zeal* will see to it. *Zeal* (*qin’â*) is that ‘jealousy’ which is a component of all true love and pre-eminently of the Lord’s love. His love will brook no rival and is provoked by disloyalty (Nu. 25:11; Ps. 79:5). It

is equally, however, the power of love moving the Lord to make his people's cause his own ([Is. 42:13](#); [59:17](#); [63:15](#)) and the passionate commitment of his nature to fulfil his purposes for them ([37:32](#)). All this zealous determination is that of Yahweh, the exodus-God, whose nature it is to save his people and overthrow his foes. It is backed by divine omnipotence (for *Almighty*/‘of hosts’ see on [1:9](#)) and pledged to achieve *this*, the advent and kingdom of the Messiah.

*Additional note on 9:6 <5>*

*Pele'* (‘wonderful’) and its related adjective *pel’î* both derive from  $\sqrt{pālā'}$ . It is used fifteen times of human acts etc. where it means ‘what is out of the ordinary’, e.g. Jonathan’s love for David ([2 Sa. 1:26](#); cf. [2 Ch. 2:9](#); [Dn. 8:24](#)). Even where it has unfortunate overtones (e.g. [2 Sa. 13:2](#)) it means ‘more than he could bring himself to do’. It is used fifty-four times of the acts of God and there the meaning is ‘supernatural’, that which, for whatever reason, requires God as its explanation, for example his omnicompetence ([Gn. 18:14](#)), the way his acts confound human estimates ([Ps. 118:23](#)), the ranges of his moral providences ([Ps. 107:8, 15](#)) and when the beleaguered people felt only a ‘miracle’ could save them ([Je. 21:2](#)). In particular it describes God’s exodus-acts

([Ex. 3:20](#); [34:10](#)). Isaiah uses the verb in [28:29](#) of the Lord’s ‘counsel’ (linking with [9:6 <5>](#)) and in [29:14](#) of his work of changing the human heart. The adjective *pel’î* is used in [Judges 13:18](#) by the angel regarding his name being more than human ears may hear. The supernatural behaviour of the angel ([Jdg. 13:19](#), involving this verb) and Manoah’s recognition of the incident as a theophany ([Jdg. 13:22](#)) suggest that the angel’s name was ‘wonderful’ because divine. In [Psalm 139:6](#) it is used of knowledge which belongs to God, outstripping what humankind can comprehend. The noun *pele'* occurs thirteen times. Its only secular occurrence means ‘extraordinary’ ([La. 1:9](#)). It is used of God’s acts ([Ps. 88](#)), the exodus complex of events ([Ex. 15:11](#); [Ps. 77:11](#)) and the Davidic promises ([Ps. 89:5](#)). Isaiah links it with the Lord’s ‘counsels’ ([25:1](#)) and his work of changing the human heart ([29:14](#)). In [25:1](#) and [Psalm 88:10, 12](#) it is associated with central divine attributes. To designate the child as *pele'* makes him ‘out of the ordinary’, one who is something of a ‘miracle’. Isaiah’s use of the noun in [25:1](#) and the verb in [28:29](#) of the Lord’s ‘counsel’ suggests that he would not resist the notion of deity in [9:6 <5>](#), specially when it is contextually linked with *Mighty God* (*'ēl-gibbōr*).

*gibbôr* is an adjective but it is often used as a noun meaning ‘mighty man’, ‘warrior’, ‘hero’. Some have therefore suggested that *'ēl-gibbôr* ('God, a warrior') could mean ‘a godlike warrior’ (*cf.* the NEB). Can *'ēl* be used in this way with a reduced meaning?

It is used, presumably metaphorically, in the strange phrase ‘the god of my hand’ (Gn. 31:29; *cf.* Dt. 28:32; Pr. 3:27; Ne. 5:5). *KB* holds it an unproved assumption that *'ēl* in this phrase is the word elsewhere meaning ‘god’. But whatever the phrase may mean, it seems that the noun holds its place as a noun and does not diminish into an adjectival meaning like ‘my godlike [or very strong] hand’. *'ēl* is also used of supernatural beings (*e.g.* Ex. 15:11; 34:14). Psalm 29:1 calls on such to give glory to the Lord, describing them as ‘sons of gods’. (‘Sons of’ means ‘belonging to the category of’.) It is possibly adjectival in Psalm 36:6 in the phrase ‘mountains of God’, which could mean ‘very great mountains’, but the parallel ‘stars of God’ (Is. 14:13) suggests a reference to creation, *i.e.* mountains so great that only God could create them. In Psalm 82:1 ‘council of God’ is not ‘great council’ but the council God has summoned.

There are many examples identical in

form with Isaiah 9:6, *i.e.* *'ēl* with a following adjective or noun. With a following adjective *'ēl* always retains its full status as a noun (*e.g.* Ex. 20:5; Dt. 7:9; 10:17). With a following noun, there are many cases in patriarchal theology where *'ēl* has a qualifying or appositional noun after it, *e.g.* *'ēl 'olām* in Genesis 21:33, ‘the God [who is] eternity’. Compare Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5 <6> and the clearly appositional ‘the God [who is] our salvation’ of Psalm 68:19 <20>. <sup>59</sup>

So, if ever *'ēl* is used adjectivally, the phrase is never identical with Isaiah 9:6 <5> and its meaning is never diluted into ‘godlike’. Whenever we find a construction identical with Isaiah 9:6 <5> (*'ēl* with a following adjective or noun), *'ēl* is never adjectival but is always the ruling noun, more closely defined by the additional word.

<sup>59</sup> *'ēl* with a qualifying adjective but no definite article (*i.e.* the same form as Is. 9:6) occurs in Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 7:21; Jos. 3:10 (*cf.* Ps. 42:2<3>); Pss. 95:3; 45:21. With the definite article it occurs in Dt. 7:9; 10:17; Ne. 1:5 (*cf.* Dn. 9:4); Is. 5:16; Je. 32:18, and with a qualifying noun in Gn. 14:18; 16:13; 17:1; 21:33; 31:13; 33:20; Dt. 32:4; 1 Sa. 2:3; Pss. 29:3; 31:5<6>; 42:8–9<9–10>; 43:4; 68:19<20>; 35:36<6>; 136:26; 146:5; Je. 51:56. Is. 10:21 is identical in form with 9:6.

Regarding the usage of *gibbôr*, on probably 126 out of 149 occasions, it is used as a noun (though where it qualifies another noun it is not always possible to say whether it is an adjective or a noun in apposition). But [Daniel 11:3](#) ('a king, a mighty one'; the formation is the same as [Is. 9:6](#)), for example, could never be diminished to 'a kinglike warrior'. On a number of occasions *gibbôr* qualifies God or the Lord (e.g. [Dt. 10:17](#); [Ps. 24:8](#); [Je. 20:11](#); [32:18](#); [Zp. 3:17](#)).

To summarize: (i) There is no evidence supporting an adjectival use of '*ēl*' in [Isaiah 9:6](#). Nothing justifies 'godlike' or 'divine' in the modern sense of 'very remarkable'. If '*ēl*' is to be rendered 'divine' it must, therefore, be given its strictest sense. (ii) In the light of the linking of *gibbôr* with various appellations of the God of Israel, Isaiah cannot have been unaware that '*ēl-gibbôr*' would be understood in its plain meaning. He puts the matter beyond equivocation by using the identical title of the Lord himself in [10:21](#). [Ezekiel 32:21](#) is sometimes offered as evidence against 'Mighty God' as a possible meaning in Isaiah. In that verse those who died in battle and now live in Sheol are described as '*ēlê gibbôrîm*' (the same words in the same order as in Isaiah but plural and overtly linked in a genitive

relation), 'gods of mighty ones'; Eichrodt offers 'godlike heroes' as a possible translation but adds no comment.<sup>60</sup> This translation is unlikely in the light of biblical usage surveyed above. Wevers remarks that 'mighty chiefs' is the plural of the Messianic title in [Isaiah 9:6](#) and could be rendered 'mighty gods'. He holds that monotheism required the downgrading of such beings, who came in popular thought to hold limited sway in Hades.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, '*ēl*' is to be understood as 'god' but the context decides what sort of god. It is unlikely that Isaiah thought of the Messiah on the analogy of pagan gods, and there is no ground for reducing the full meaning of his words. In the light of the thrust of the evidence, and particularly in the light of Isaiah's own mind as seen in his use of the identical words in [10:21](#), it is hard to accept that a remote verse of uncertain meaning in Ezekiel should be given a determinative voice.

### b. *The word to Israel (9:8 <*

#### *7> -11:16)*

The prophets regularly saw both of the divided kingdoms as within their sphere of ministry. Theologically the reason for this is that human sins and errors cannot

<sup>60</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (SCM, 1970).

<sup>61</sup> J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCB, Nelson, 1969).

thwart the purposes or rewrite the promises of God. The northern tribes had thrown off their Davidic allegiance ([1 Ki. 12:16](#)) and apostasized from the Lord ([1 Ki. 12:25ff.](#)) but the Lord does not revise his plans in the light of this. All who are written unto life ([4:3](#)) will be brought home to Zion through the same Messianic policy and the same promised king. Consequently, Isaiah now traverses for Israel (Ephraim/Jacob) the ground just covered for Judah, but it is not mere repetition. As always in Isaiah's doublets there are points of significant development.

1. The Lord's immediate purposes for Judah and Israel are not identical. For Israel, Assyria is the conqueror ([10:4, 9, 11](#) but for Judah it is the chastiser ([10:12, 24f.](#)).

2. At Zion, Assyria will suffer a blow from which there is no recovery ([10:12, 16–19, 27–34](#)).

3. The coming of the Messianic King, dated 'in the future' ([9:1 <8:23>](#)), now lies beyond the deportation of Judah foretold in [6:9–13](#). In a regathered Judah and Israel ([11:12](#)) the old rivalry will be gone ([11:13](#)) and united action for world dominion initiated ([11:14ff.](#)).

4. The hint expressed in 'Galilee of the Gentiles' ([9:1 <8:23>](#)) is fulfilled in the gathering of the nations to the Messianic

banner ([11:10](#)).

### The moment of decision ([9:8 <7>](#) > [-10:4](#))

On the literary relationship of this passage to [5:25ff.](#) see the additional note below. This four-stanza poem is a classic of biblical social analysis, impressive in its logic, frightening in its inevitability. The *message/word* which *the LORD has sent* ([9:8 <7>](#)) has fallen on deaf ears and from this easily dismissed beginning everything else follows as certainly as night follows day. The poem is either a prophetic forecast of events (in which case it belongs to the earliest days of Isaiah's ministry) or a prophetic meditation bringing out the significance of events which have already taken place (the same genre as [Am. 4:6–11](#) or [Ezk. 20](#) or, in its special way, the book of Judges). The four stanzas show a coherent development:

1. National disaster ([8–12 <7–11>](#)). The Lord's word has been rejected in self-sufficient pride. Internal set-backs ([10 <9>](#)) will be followed by external attack ([11 <10>](#)).

2. Political collapse ([13–17 <12–16>](#)). Since there has been no repentance ([13 <12>](#)), the Lord will undermine the leadership ([14–16 <13–15>](#)). There will be widespread suffering ([17 <16>](#)).

3. Social anarchy ([18–21 <17–20>](#)).

Divine wrath manifests itself in a spirit of total self-concern (19 <18>) bringing with it no satisfaction (20 <19>). The nation tears itself apart, united only in hostility to Judah (21 <20>).

4. Moral perversion (10:1–4). The basis of morality, safeguarded by law, is overturned. The suffering of the helpless (2) brings as its reward the helplessness of its perpetrators in the day of judgment (3–4).

8–12 <7–11> The same issue faced Israel as Judah (7:3ff.): would they accept and live by the word of the Lord? The whole logic of Isaiah's social analysis stems from this question. Here is the spring of weal or woe for society for, as the Bible insists, large-scale national and international consequences follow from spiritual causes.

8 <7> *The Lord* ('<sup>a</sup>dōnāy, 'the Sovereign') *has sent* refers to the ministries of Amos and Hosea from 760 BC onwards. The emphasis in the sentence falls on the *message/word*; this is the issue—the Lord spoke. This message *will fall on Israel*, i.e. what the word predicted will come to pass. The translation could be 'and it fell' (the word coming home to those to whom it was sent) or 'and it kept falling' (divine mercy pleading over and over with the people; cf. Am. 4:6–11).

9 <8> There is no escape from the

word, 'All the people, every one of them' will know it. *Ephraim* is an alternative name, with Jacob and Israel, for the northern kingdom. The tribe of Ephraim was its most prominent constituent. *Will know* (cf. Ho. 9:7) indicates awareness of exactly what is happening when the punishment falls. The word spoken and refused (cf. 28:10–13) becomes the same message turned to chastisement. The verb *who say* is actually an infinitive ('to say') to be understood as a gerund: 'in spite of pride and arrogance of heart in saying',<sup>62</sup> i.e. their pride will not protect them against the coming fulfilment of the word. *Pride* (*ga'*wâ from √*gā'*â, 'to be high') is the 'haughtiness' of those who get their own way by their own devices (13:11). *Arrogance* (*gōdēl* from √*gādēl*, 'to be great') is the spirit of Moab in 16:6, not to be beholden to any, superiority blended with self-sufficiency. The *heart* is the organ of thought, feeling and response,<sup>63</sup> and is coupled here with

<sup>62</sup> On the gerundial infinitive cf. GKC 45f; 1 Sa. 14:33; 1 Ki. 5:8. Many commentators assume a mutilated text. Q<sup>a</sup> reads *wyr'û* ('and cried out ... in pride, saying ...') for *will know* (*weyād'û*).

<sup>63</sup> 'Heart' is used in the Old Testament in several ways: feeling, responses (Pss. 16:9; 39:3<4>); longing, ambition (Pss. 21:2<3>; 84:2<3>; Pr. 4:23); decision, commitment (Pss.

pride and arrogance to depict one who stubbornly backs his own judgment, trusts his own responses, depends on his own resources and puts his own policies to work.

**10 <9>** *The bricks* falling down could refer to the earthquake ([Am. 1:1](#); [4:11](#)) which took place in the reign of Jeroboam II (c. 786–746 BC). It was the voice of God, but they took it as a challenge to rise to the occasion: they were equal to it! On the other hand, the words may be metaphorical, indicating an awareness that ‘things are falling apart’ met by a spirit of self-confidence towards the future, never stopping to read the lessons of the past. Not only will the set-back be overcome but the future will outshine the past as *dressed stone* and *cedars* surpass (mud) *bricks* and (common sycamore) *fig-trees*.

**11 <10>** The tenses in this verse are difficult but it is best to understand a general reference to the past. The reign of Jeroboam brought prosperity and national self-confidence (see e.g. [Am. 6:13](#)). He restored the kingdom to Solomonic boundaries—but what went up like a rocket came down like a stick,

[57:7<8>; 119:10](#)); thought ([Dt. 4:39](#)); memory ([Dt. 11:18](#); [Ps. 119:11](#)); love ([Dt. 6:5](#)); conscience ([1 Sa. 24:5<6>](#)); a summary word for character ([1 Sa. 16:7](#)).

and in no time Israel was reeling under blow after blow. *Strengthened* (*✓šāgāb*, ‘*raised up, made high*’) is used in the sense of ‘*made secure*’. Rezin’s foes must be Assyria. The idea of the establishing of Assyria as a secure power fits the years following the accession of Tiglath-pileser in 745. Aram, Rezin’s kingdom, would be the first to sense the coming threat, in consequence of which they set out to create the Aram-Ephraim alliance. In being drawn into this alliance, Ephraim was meddling in trouble not its own—the hostility between Rezin and his powerful neighbour—and thus provoking a calamity it could have avoided simply by heeding the Lord’s word. The sudden imperfect tense of *has spurred* is probably exclamatory: ‘and their enemies—how he keeps inciting them!’ The irony of divine justice is unmistakeable. Instead of bowing to the word of the Lord they chose to be like any other ‘power’ in the world and they found the price of this was that they became what they chose, a nation among the nations, caught up in the world’s power struggle.

**12 <11>** The *Arameans* were ancestral foes of Israel ([1 Ki. 20, 22](#); [2 Ki. 6:8–7:20](#); [8:7–15](#); [10:32–33](#); [13:3–5](#)). These wars had continued until Jeroboam II at last ousted them from Israelite homelands ([2 Ki.](#)

**14:23–27**). But though there were no Aramean wars in the later years of Jeroboam the enmity would have continued unabated had not the Assyrian threat thrown them into each other's arms. The reference here to the Arameans as 'devouring' may even be a comment on the alliance: Israel doubtless saw itself as securing an ally; Isaiah saw that it was being swallowed up. We do not know of Philistine attacks on Israel in this period though **Amos 1:6** hints at such. *With open mouth/with [the] whole mouth* means greedily and at will. *Yet for all this/in spite of all this*, the looming Assyrian threat and the actual degradations of the powers on each side, the just wrath of the Lord over his spurned word remains unsatisfied. *Upraised/outstretched* is a word frequently used to describe the Lord's redeeming action at the exodus (**Ex. 6:6**; **Dt. 4:34**; **5:15**). The use of the word here underlines the alienation of the Redeemer when his word is refused.

**13–17 <12–16>** The bricks have fallen (**10**), now the leaders fall. Inexorably the consequences of rejecting the Lord's word unfold. Refusing revealed truth, and therefore relying on unaided human wisdom, they find that it is not enough. Their leaders become misleaders and everyone comes off the worse; from the

*young men* in their prime, who might be thought able to look after themselves, to the defenceless *fatherless and widows*, who are in any case without resource. Even the virtues which the Lord loves (**17**; cf. **Ps. 10:14**; **Ho. 14:3**) cannot be had without commitment to the Lord. When the word is rejected every grace is subject to erosion.

**13 <12>** *The people ('am)*, which is emphatic in the Hebrew, is almost a title for Judah and Israel, 'the people par excellence'. They who alone ought to have seen whose hand it was that *struck them* failed to read the lessons of their experience and to 'return', i.e. repent (cf. **Am. 4:6ff.**). The only way to flee from God is to flee to him, *to turn to him*. Before repentance wrath melts and mercy triumphs. *They sought the LORD* not as searching for what is lost but as deliberately making for the place where he can be found (cf. **Dt. 12:5**, **11**). *The LORD Almighty* is emphatic. Returning would have brought them redemption and liberation for *the LORD* (Yahweh) is the God who redeems his people and overthrows his and their foes; it would have linked them to omnipotence, to the *Almighty* ('of hosts'; see on **1:9**).

**14 <13>** One fatal day brings ruin throughout the nation. The metaphor of

verse 14 is spelled out in a balanced scheme in the following verses. Verse 15 describes the downfall of leadership and verse 16 the reason for it; verse 17 describes the ruin of the people and the reason for it.

*So the LORD* denotes divine sovereignty in direct management of national history. The pairs of opposites, *head and tail, palm branch and reed*, denote totality. Head and tail signify from one end to the other while branch and reed (tall growth and low growth) signify from the eminent to the lowly. The reference to *in a single day* may be to the fall of Samaria in 722 or possibly to the death of Jeroboam II which introduced a final period of anarchic collapse (2 Ki. 15:8–31; 17:1ff.).

15 <14> Isaiah often explains his metaphors (*cf. 8:7*). To have observed this stylistic feature would have prevented some commentators from finding glosses in this verse. The *prominent men*/‘uplifted of face’ are those ‘important’ people who add weight to the community though not holding official position. As in 3:1–4, inadequate leadership is one of the signs of divine judgment at work. Is *the prophets ... are the tail* a sly chuckle on Isaiah’s part? The false prophets played an ‘up front’ role but in fact were like tails wagging at public demand (*cf. 30:9–11; 1 Ki.*

22:6; Mi. 2:11).

16 <15> The verse begins with ‘And’, which is often used as here, in the explanatory sense ‘For’ or ‘You see’. See on 3:12b for the main words occurring here. Those who guided the people will be *led astray/ swallowed up*, *i.e.* they will disappear without trace; a vivid portrayal of the outcome of being directed on the wrong road.

17 <16> *Therefore* indicates that the situation of both leaders and led is culpable. The former need not have misled, for the divine word was available; the latter need not have followed, for God’s truth had been openly preached to them. (*Cf. Am. 7:10* for the wide publicity attending the preaching.) *The Lord will take no pleasure in the young men/*‘his young men’. The *young men* (*bahûrîm*) were young adults. ‘His’ may mean ‘the Lord’s’, suggesting that ordinarily he would delight in the youth of his people, but the possessive may mean ‘their’ referring collectively to ‘this people’. The *fatherless and widows* were the prime objects of divine concern (Ps. 68:5). When his compassion is withdrawn from such the nation is rejected indeed. The reference is probably to the military overthrow in which the nation ended, with young men losing their lives, children being orphaned and

women widowed. With *for everyone is ungodly and wicked* the theme of culpability is taken up again. Wrath is not inflicted without the reasons for wrath being made clear. The Lord is not a God of capricious fury. Behind his judgments lies the examination of the evidence (Gn. 18:20f.). *Ungodly* (*hānēp*) is used particularly of apostasy bringing divine abhorrence, defilement caused by disobedience (Je. 3:1) or religious error (Ps. 106:38; Je. 3:9). *Wicked/ ‘evil-doing’* is the general violation of the moral law. The only sin specified by name is the sin of speech (cf. 3:8; 6:5). *Vileness* (*nēbālā*) is insensitivity to moral and spiritual realities and obligations (1 Sa. 25:25; Ps. 14:1); not dogmatic atheism but the practical atheism which believes that life can be lived without God, that God and his word are irrelevant to the ‘real’ world. For *Yet for all this see on verse 12.*

**18–21 <17–20>** Under deficient leadership (13–17) the door is opened to unchecked self-seeking. This stanza exposes the betrayal of brotherliness (19), the essential barrenness of the acquisitive life (20) and the breakdown of social cohesiveness (21). All this is attributed to a twofold cause: it is the natural progress of wickedness (18) but it is also the implementation of the Lord’s wrath (19a).

**18 <17>** *Surely* is a possible translation, but ‘For’ would be equally valid. The stress in verses 13–17 was on leadership and the higher echelons of society. Now verses 18–21 explain the prolongation of the divine anger (17b) by exploring what is happening at the ground level of society. *Wickedness* (*rišâ*) covers all aspects of life astray from God and his law. Once admitted, it takes on a life of its own and *burns like fire*; it is self-destructive. *Briers and thorns* (cf. 5:6; 33:12; 2 Sa. 23:6; Mi. 7:4) symbolize either the results of wickedness or the persons of the wicked, the boomerang quality of sin. It infects the community; the picture changes from *briers* to *forest thickets*, and where it enters it destroys. The end is total destruction as all is carried away in a *column of smoke*.

**19 <18>** Wickedness is inherently self-destructive as the simile of verse 18 shows, but it is so by the will of God. Its outworking expresses his *wrath*. He presides over the cause and effect processes which he has built into creation so that they are expressions of his holy rule of the world. *Wrath* (*ebrâ*) probably denotes the outbursting of wrath which sweeps all before it.<sup>64</sup> *Scorched* is a possible meaning

<sup>64</sup> ‘*ebar* (‘to be carried away by strong feeling’) as in e.g. Dt. 3:26.

for *ne'tām*, a word otherwise unused. Some, however, suggest ‘is shaken’ and others, by emendation, ‘is set ablaze’ or ‘is led astray’.<sup>65</sup> See 2 Kings 15:8ff. for the civil wars which followed the death of Jeroboam II. Six kings reigned before Samaria fell in 722, five came to the throne by assassination and only one passed the throne to his son. This, at the top, was symptomatic of a grab-all society in which *people* are just so much *fuel*, i.e. an expendable commodity. For *no-one will spare his brother* see the introduction to verses 18–21 above.

20 <19> But for all this acquisitive activity no personal satisfaction or fulfilment ensues. *Devour* ( $\sqrt{gāzar}$ ) is ‘to cut off’ (53:8) or ‘to cut down’ (2 Ki. 6:4). The link with *still be hungry* suggests the metaphor of greedily carving food now in this direction (*on the right*) now in that (*on the left*), which, none the less, fails to satisfy hunger. *His own offspring* is (lit.) ‘His own arm’. The NIV possibly understands ‘arm’ metaphorically as first, personal

<sup>65</sup> *ne'tām* is a unique form, with enclitic ‘m’, from  $\sqrt{nū'a}$  meaning ‘to quiver’ (so Kaiser and Young). Cf. Ex. 20:18; Is. 19:1; Am. 9:9. Delitzsch proposes  $\sqrt{'ātam}$  (‘to be black, burnt out’), and others emend to *niṣṣ<sup>e</sup>tā* (‘is kindled’), the same verb as ‘kindles’ in verse 18 (e.g. Kissane). KB prefers *nit'â* (‘is led astray’).

strength (a regular usage) and then, the family (cf. Gn. 49:3).<sup>66</sup> But ‘arm’, literally understood, is suitable to the context: in this senseless mutual exploitation, each was in fact eroding what would be for his own strength in the time of trial. It was the same then as it is now: in the body of Christ we are made to belong to each other and to depend on each other; to devour my brother or sister is to devour myself.

21 <20> The scale of the mutual destruction was nationwide. Ephraim and Manasseh were the brother-tribes which inherited the portion of Joseph (Gn. 41:50–52; 48:5). It is the final condemnation of this society that with all the bonds of family relationship, shared experiences and divine blessing commonly enjoyed, the only thing which in the end united them was a common enmity. Even in those anarchic, perilous times, energy and resources were found to go to war with *Judah* (e.g. 2 Ki. 15:37).

10:1–4 This fourth—and as the poem

<sup>66</sup> Wilderberger supports the emendation of  $z'rō'ô$  (‘his arm’) to  $rē'ô$  (‘his neighbour’), which is an easy emendation making the thought pedestrian. Watts, however, in support, notes that ‘the Alexandrian group of LXX adds *tou adelphou*, i.e. ‘the flesh of his brother’s arm’. Cf. Ottley.

stands, final—stanza returns to the topic of leadership but not in the same way as verses 13–17 <12–16>. There the charge was general—inept, misleading leaders. Here the charge is of blatant misrule, the wilful making of decrees in the interest of class-division and personal advantage. In the end, social unruliness (13–21 <12–20>) resolves itself into the dominance of an unscrupulous clique who write laws for their own ends.

1 *Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees/‘Woe to those who enact mischievous statutes, and the writers who write trouble’*. The former are the law-makers ( $\sqrt{hāqāq}$ , ‘to engrave’ (as in the rock);  $hōq$ , ‘a fixed, permanent statute’) and the latter are the promulgators and administrators, drafting laws for publication and application. *Unjust* ( $\bar{ā}wen$ ) means first, ‘trouble, mischief’, then the specific mischief of idolatry, and then the trouble which sin brings. Here, therefore, is a complex thought: statutes which spell trouble because they have been framed in wickedness. *‘āmāl (oppressive)* never means ‘oppression’ as such but is used in a general way to mean ‘grievousness’, i.e. labour, sorrow.

2 The purpose of the legislation is now stated: the denial of justice (2a) and the

manipulation of justice for gain (2b). Possibly the rulers concerned would have denied such an uncaring purpose, but the Old Testament insists that everything foreseeable resulting from any action (the remote intention) is part of the purpose of that action (the immediate intention). Both *dal* (poor) and *‘ānī* (oppressed) have the same general ambience, ‘poor’ as contrasted with ‘rich’, and ‘weak’ as contrasted with ‘influential’. The latter, however, also includes the sense of ‘humiliated, downtrodden—not only uninfluential but because uninfluential manipulated by the authorities and treated as existing only for others’ advantage. Rights (*dīn*) is not ‘justice’ in the abstract but in the sense of getting a fair trial. To *rob* ( $\sqrt{gāzal}$ ) is ‘to tear away, grab’. In all this tragic deterioration, the outworking of his own wrath (19 <18>) as well as of sin’s inherent forces (18 <17>), the Lord has not forgotten *my people* (cf. 3:13–15). Robbing means ‘preying on, looting’. So grievous was the state of the nation that the Lord had to desert even his customary defence of the defenceless, the *widows* and *fatherless* (see 9:17 <16>), but this does not give anyone else the right to do so.

3 The four clauses fall into two pairs. The first pair, *What will you do on the day*

*of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar?*, concern the coming disaster. The word *reckoning* (*p<sup>e</sup>quddâ* from *√ pāqād*, ‘to take care of, review, muster, have oversight of’) has the basic sense of someone coming to ‘visit’ or ‘inspect’ and hence refers to the day when the Lord’s rule is directly brought to bear. *šō’â* (*disaster*) can mean either ‘devastation’ or the force, the ‘storm’, producing it. *From afar* (*cf. 5:26*) is a concealed reference to Assyria. The second pair of clauses describe the helplessness of the now all-commanding rulers in that day, with neither anyone to flee to for safety nor anywhere to make a safe-deposit. The contrasting ideas of ‘neither safety there nor safety here’ exclude all possible refuge. *Riches/glorious* has the same meaning as in *61:6* and *66:12*, but we should not forget the basic meaning, for it is not just a matter of cash but also all the self-importance, pride of position and authority which that day will bring to nothing.

4 The NIV here expresses the sense of the Hebrew. The change from the second person plural verbs of verse 3 to third person verbs is not a problem as it happens so often in the prophets (*cf. 1:29–30*). *Cringe* is third person singular and *fall*, third person plural. The singular particularizes, the fate of each; the plural

generalizes, the fate of all. *Cringe* is a perfect of certainty, ‘[each] is doomed to cringe’, and *fall* is imperfect in a future sense. *Nothing will remain* paraphrases a single word, *biltî*. This could mean ‘without me’, *i.e.* bereft of the Lord’s presence,<sup>67</sup> but the word’s general use is as a negative to what follows<sup>68</sup> (which would not suit here) or, following a negative verb, to express ‘except, only, nothing but’.<sup>69</sup> Seeing that the questions in verse 3 are equivalent to a negative statement, we can possibly understand the usage here, on the broad model of *Daniel 11:18*,<sup>70</sup> to be ‘nothing else but that each is doomed to cringe’. The usage of the preposition *among/under* (*tahat*) might stretch to mean ‘where the captives are ... where the slain are’,<sup>71</sup> or possibly it is used here in

<sup>67</sup> For *biltî* with pronominal suffix see *1 Sa. 2:2*; *Ho. 13:4*.

<sup>68</sup> It is found mostly before the infinitive (*Gn. 4:15*; *Lv. 18:30*) but also before the indicative (*Nu. 21:35*; ) and before a noun (*Is. 14:6*) and an adjective (*1 Sa. 20:26*).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Gn. 21:26*; *43:3*; *Jos. 11:19*. It recapitulates a foregoing negative (‘nothing but’) in *Ex. 22:20*; *Nu. 11:6*.

<sup>70</sup> In *Dn. 11:18* *biltî* is used in the sense of (lit.) ‘nothing but that he will turn his insolence back upon him’.

<sup>71</sup> *tahat* with a pronominal suffix is used to

an adverbial sense<sup>72</sup> meaning ‘... cringe down, a captive ... fall down, slain’. How very far from the future the magnates had in mind for themselves! *Fall*, the final verb in the poem (apart from the refrain in verse 4b), forms an inclusio with the beginning, where it was the Lord’s word that ‘fell’ (9:8 <7>). It is easy to refuse the Lord’s word and it could well have seemed a childish irrelevance to the harsh political world in which they operated (*cf.* 28:9). Wickedness is so often unimpressive in its inception, but what an end! For the refrain, *Yet for all this ...*, see on 9:12 <11>.

*Additional note on the relationship of  
9:8 <7> –10:14 to 5:25*

There are grounds for thinking that the material in and around 5:25 originally belonged with the poem 9:8 <7> –10:4.

1. The identity of the refrain, *For all this ...*, in 5:25; 9:12 <11>, 17 <16>, 21 <20>; 10:4.

2. The feeling of a missing climax following 10:4. As things stand, 10:5–15 has been deliberately edited in to provide a climax, but it is different in structure

express ‘where x was’ in, e.g. 2 Sa. 2:23. But can it be extended in this meaning to a case like the present with a following noun?

<sup>72</sup> For *tahat* as adverb see Gn. 49:25; Dt. 33:13.

from the poem. It is easy to believe that the poem originally had a climax of the same structure.

3. Commentators note a broad equivalence in length between the present four stanzas (seven or eight lines each) and the ten lines of say, 5:26–30.

4. 5:26–30 would provide a suitable climax. The storm *from afar* (*mimmerhāq*) in 10:3 would link with the foe *afar off* (*merāhōq*) in 5:26. The idea would catch the mind and the assonance the ear.

When, however, it comes to reassembling the poem there are diverse suggestions and little agreement either what material in the context of 5:25 is involved or where in the poem it could be included. A simpler solution than most would be to suggest that 5:22–30 was the original ending of the poem; a complete, eight-line stanza with the refrain (5:22–25) and a conclusion (5:26–30). *Woe* (*hôy gibbôrim*) as the opening of the fifth stanza (5:22) would match *woe* (*hôy hahōq<sup>e</sup>qîm*) at the beginning of the fourth (10:1). Topically, the abuse of the legislative process in stanza four (10:1) would lead into the abuse of the judicial process in stanza five (5:22–23). And, of course, 5:26–30 could not be bettered as the needed climax.

It is, of course, one thing to reassemble

the poem in this fashion but quite another to follow either translations or commentaries which reunite the sun-dered parts and thus dislocate the edited unity of the Isaianic literature. In Isaiah as we have it, the material is perfectly integrated into its present context and should be left there. If anything, the fact that some material was once ordered differently should make us full of admiration for the editorial skill behind the mosaic of the canonical book.

### The judgment (10:5–15)

In the place of whatever ending the foregoing poem may have originally had (see the Additional note above) Isaiah declares the coming judgment on Israel by means of this magnificent oracle of the two sovereignties: the sovereignty of the Lord ('*a*dōnāy) and of the king of Assyria (12). In doing so he creates one of the Bible's central utterances about the relation between heaven and earth in human history.

#### A<sup>1</sup> The Lord's instrument: Assyria and the Lord's purposes (5)

#### B<sup>1</sup> The Lord and Assyria: contrasting motives (6–11)

##### a The Lord's motive: just punishment (6)

##### b Assyria's motive: world dominion (7–11)

#### B<sup>2</sup> The Lord and Assyria: contrasting assessments (12–14)

##### a The Lord's assessment: pride and punishment (12)

##### b Assyria's assessment: ability and success (13–14)

#### A<sup>2</sup> The Lord's instrument: Assyria and the Lord's sovereignty (15)

The thrust of the passage is clear: the absolute sovereignty of the Lord in the world (A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>). Without forester and carpenter, axe and saw lie lifeless (15). There is a rigour about Isaiah's teaching. Assyria's was a savage imperialism, pursued without asking and without quarter: Was this the Lord's doing? No wonder Habakkuk was aghast at the thought (Hab. 1:5–13), even if in the end he would not have had it otherwise (Hab. 3:17–19). There is only one Agent and he does all things well. Under him, history is the outworking of moral providences. The Assyrian holocaust was not 'let loose' on the world; it was sent, directed where it was merited (6), kept within heaven's limits, and in the end Assyria was punished for its excesses (12). But if the Assyrian Empire is but an axe or saw, how is it culpable? It is only a bad workman who blames his tools. How can the master-craftsman hold his instruments responsible? How can a tool be an agent? At this

point we come face to face with the biblical paradox: the Lord is sovereign, but his instruments are morally responsible agents. Isaiah goes out of his way to show us a real human agent at work. We notice how long the two ‘b’ sections are compared with the ‘a’ sections. We are introduced to the Assyrians’ thoughts (8, 13), their mind (7) and their hand (10, 13–14). In six verses the first person verb is used seven times and the first person pronoun four. The affirmation of agency is unmistakeable. In 37:28–29 Isaiah uses the figure of the horse and its rider, which is the nearest the Bible comes to elucidating the mystery of sovereignty and responsibility. The Assyrians are the horse, the Lord is the rider. To the horse belongs all the restless energy and huge strength of its nature; to the rider belongs all direction and skill of management. The Assyrians give thought and then expression in action to the effectuation of that world dominion which expresses their mind and matches their assumed abilities and rights, but the Lord rides upon world history for the accomplishment of holy purposes.

In context, the passage fulfils three purposes. First, it shows that the threat against Ephraim was not idle. The outstretched hand finally fell (10:4). The

refusal of the Lord’s word was fatal (9:9 <8> ). Secondly, Assyria will be the Lord’s instrument against Zion (12), though we are not yet told how far the punishment will go. Thirdly, the attack on Zion will mark the zenith of Assyrian power. From then on Assyria will be under divine punishment.

This passage could be dated any time after the Assyrian inroads began seriously in 734. When people heard of real pressure on the northern kingdom, they would expect a word from the Lord through his prophet, even more so when Samaria fell in 722, and urgently so when Hezekiah played with anti-Assyrian rebellion about 713 and actually rebelled in 701.

5 *Woe (hôy)* forms a link with 10:1. An alternative translation ‘Ho’ (RV) notes dramatically that the time of the probation is over; the executioner has been summoned. The word translated *anger* is ‘*aþ*’, which means ‘nose’ and hence hard breathing or the snort that betokens exasperation. It is, therefore, anger as a felt emotion. *Wrath (za'am)* is expressed anger, in word or deed (the verb means ‘to scold, hurl imprecations’). Assyria is the *rod of my anger*, i.e. Assyria expresses the Lord’s anger. *Club of my wrath/‘and a club it is in the hand, my wrath’* means ‘in whose hand my wrath is the club’.<sup>73</sup> In

other words, the Lord's anger empowers Assyria.

**6** *I send* is intensive (*piel*), the commission of a superior to an underling. *I dispatch*/‘give him a command’ is not to be understood as a command openly spoken to the king of Assyria which he then failed to obey (**7**). Rather, we listen here to the Lord stating his secret, what he sovereignly intends to accomplish through Assyria. In this passage four verbs refer to the Lord: *send* and *dispatch*/‘command’ in verse **5** and *finished* and *punish* in verse **12**. Divine authority initiates (sends), briefs (commands), sets bounds (finishes) and passes judgment (punishes). For *godless* (*ḥānēp*) see on **9:17** <**16**> . *A people who anger me* is (lit.) ‘people of my anger’, *i.e.* those justly meriting my anger. It is an anger (‘*ebrâ*; cf. **9:19** <**18**> ) that cannot be contained. In the phrase *to seize loot and snatch plunder* (*lišlōl šālāl w'�ābōz baz*) the two components of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (**8:1ff.**) indicate the ongoing fulfilment of the message which became flesh in Isaiah’s son. The Lord’s word does not return empty (**55:11**). It cannot, therefore, be refused with impunity because it car-

<sup>73</sup> There is no need to consider emending the text here (cf. *BHS*). For the same word order as here see **51:19**; **Pr. 30:24**.

ries its own power of accomplishment. Property and people alike perish in the judgment.

**7** Isaiah points out the disparity between Assyria’s motives and the Lord’s. Here, matching verse **6**, are the Assyrians’ secret and wholly self-seeking ambitions. The Rabshakeh (‘field commander’; **36:4**) made obedience a means of scoring a debating point (**36:10**). To him the Lord was but a pawn in a game of psychological warfare. Maybe even, his sources of information had ‘leaked’ something of Isaiah’s word. But it was not a directive from heaven that moved Assyria against western Palestine and Zion; it was their own self-confidence. For *in mind*/‘in his heart’ and *his purpose is*/‘it is in his heart’ see on **9:9** <**8**> .

**8** *He says* is (lit.) ‘for he says’; there is ground for the confidence of verse **7**. The king has had much success to date, kingdoms have fallen to him and their *kings* have become his *commanders* (*śārim*), executives who carry out his edicts. Surely nothing can now stop him!

**9** *Has not* is more likely ‘Is not’. The king looks forward, seeing the future in the light of the past. Six cities are named in pairs. In each pair the first is further south than the second and the king is reasoning: ‘I took that; I can take this’.

*Carchemish* is on the upper Euphrates in the far north of Palestine; *Calno* and *Arpad* are fifty miles further south; *Hamath* is one hundred miles north of *Damascus*. The list (*cf.* verses 28ff.) is not a historical description of the march but an impressionistic expression of the idea of inexorable advance; disaster ever nearer—*Samaria* next!

10–11 Samaria and Jerusalem are all the more helpless, notes Isaiah ironically, since they were not such proficient idolaters! Verse 11 concludes the series by inferring the fall of Samaria and purposing that of Jerusalem. The sequence *idols* ... *images* ... *images* ... *idols* offers a theological comment on the whole episode. It was not failure in arms *etc.* that rendered them helpless before Assyria; it was spiritual falsity and, in the case of Samaria and Jerusalem, apostasy (*cf.* 37:17–20). *Idols* in verse 11 is *'e'lîlîm* ('no-gods'; *cf.* 2:8). Verse 10 has the same word but in the singular (*'e'lîl*), its only occurrence in Isaiah. 'The kingdoms of the no-god' is an unusual expression though not beyond the imaginative Isaiah. Maybe, however, the singular should retain its standard meaning of 'worthlessness' (Jb. 13:4; Zc. 11:17) and the phrase be translated 'worthless kingdoms', *i.e.* kingdoms lacking the true solidity of spiritual values.

12 This verse is usually represented as prose, though it is not on that account an interruption to the oracle as the structure outlined on p. 113 shows. The change from third person *has finished* to first person *I will punish* probably reflects faithfully how this word 'came' to Isaiah: a direct divine statement in response to his wondering 'what the Lord would do when ...'. But in 8:7 the Lord speaks of himself in the third person and we may have here simply an idiom of revelation. *Finished* ( $\sqrt{bāṣa}$ ) is a weaving term, to 'snip off' a thread and hence 'to terminate'. For all the Assyrian self-assertion of verses 7–11, it is nevertheless the Lord whose purpose controls all. *Punish* is from  $\sqrt{pāqad}$ , as is 'reckoning' in 10:3. *The wilful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes* is (lit.) 'the fruit of the arrogance of heart and the vainglory of the haughtiness of his eyes'. The 'heart' represents what he is inwardly and the eye, the organ of desire and ambition (what he has an eye to), the direction and 'way' of life. What the king of Assyria did conformed to the will of God; why he did it had nothing to do with the will of God, only with the king's arrogance and vain-glory.

13–14 Here we have the king's account of his abilities (13a), his achievements

(13b) and his irresistible power (14). He can change structures (*boundaries*), disregard rights (*treasures*) and depose *kings*. *Strength* (*kōah*) is not resources but ‘ability’. The *hand* is the symbol of personal action and *wisdom* the wise mind behind it. Together they emphasize ‘all my own work’. *Understanding* is the discernment that sees to the heart of a thing. *Mighty one* (*'abbîr*, used of the Lord in 1:24) may be a quasi-divine title, suggesting, ‘God-like, I bring down throned kings’. It was all as easy as bird-nesting.

15 This verse matches the ‘hand and mind’ claim of the king in verse 13a. In the relation between man and tool, where is the organizing mind found (15a) and where the strength of hand (15b)? The verb *raise itself/glorify itself* is related to the noun translated ‘vainglory’, and *boast* is related to the word ‘arrogance’ in verse 12. The king is a hollow man. He would have no standing except it had been given him from above (Jn. 19:11).

### The remnant (10:16–34)

This section is held together and its subsections marked by *the Lord*, *the LORD Almighty* (*hā'ādōn yahweh s̄ebā'ot* in verses 16 and 33 and *"adōnāy yahweh s̄ebā'ot* in verses 23 and 24). Each section (16–23 and 24–34) begins with *Therefore* (*lākēn*) and contains within it a division announced

by *in that day* (20, 27).

A<sup>1</sup> The Lord’s act of holiness (in verses 17, 20) (16–23)

a<sup>1</sup> Holy judgment on Assyria,  
leaving only a remnant (16–19)  
b<sup>1</sup> Holy judgment on Israel, leaving  
a penitent remnant (20–23)

A<sup>2</sup> The Lord’s act of power (*cf. LORD Almighty* in verse 26 and *Mighty One* in verse 34) (24–34)

b<sup>2</sup> Security for the Zion-people  
through the Almighty (24–26)

a<sup>2</sup> Destruction of the Assyrian by a  
Mighty One (27–34)

The a<sup>1</sup>b<sup>1</sup>b<sup>2</sup>a<sup>2</sup> scheme is particularly noteworthy. The pattern of the people of God surrounded by world threat and yet preserved so appeals to Isaiah that it is reproduced on a huge scale in chapters 13–27. The sin of God’s people never goes unpunished but neither does the opposing world ever manage to proceed to final triumph. Judgment and preservation kiss each other. This passage and its parallel in 8:9–22 express respectively promise and fulfilment. The pledge of 8:9–10 is here kept in the case of Assyria; the remnant waited through the dark day (8:17) and now they experience an intervening deliverance (24–34); the remnant was distinguished from the people (8:11–15, 16–20), now they return to God in trust

(20).

**16–18** Isaiah revels in mixed metaphors, cf. the ‘stubble-burning, bonfire, root-rot, spring-storm’ metaphor of 5:24. Here his metaphors are mixed but in an a-b-b-a pattern of sickness-fire-fire-sickness. The slow maturing of the evil day (the metaphor of sickness), the certain end (the raging fire) and the totality of accomplishment (scrubland, woodland, garden-land in verses 17b, 18a; soul and body in verse 18b) are all alluded to. The riot of imagery catches the confusion and many-sidedness of a day of overthrow. Those who fail to delight in a piece of literature such as this are indeed hard to please.<sup>74</sup>

**16** *Therefore*, i.e. since what has gone before in verses 5–15 is the true understanding of world history and the real relationship of divine to human

<sup>74</sup> For a moderate rearrangement of verses 16–18 see Mauchline. Gray’s comment that ‘it is incredible that even a bungling imitator of Isaiah should have made quite such a muddle’ is beyond belief. Kaiser thinks of ‘the scholarly work of a man who felt the need of a prophecy of punishment’ and made the addition about 312 BC. Kaiser’s list of comparisons, designed to show that the material used is Isaianic, does its job so well that he destroys the case for a later hand at work.

sovereignty, consequences follow. Isaiah suitably starts with a reminder of who the sovereign God is: *the Lord, the LORD Almighty*. *Lord* is *hā'ādōn* (cf. verse 33), ‘the [truly] Sovereign One’, ‘the Sovereign par excellence’. This solemn title looks back askance at the hollow sovereignty of the king of Assyria! *The LORD* is Yahweh, suitably to this passage, the exodus-God who saves his people and overthrows his foes. He is *Almighty*/‘of hosts’ (see on 1:9), i.e. possessed of every potentiality and power. For *send* see on verse 6. He directed Assyria’s course; he directs its end. The Hebrew idiom of expressing totality by a contrasting pair occurs twice: *disease* and *fire* are the inner and outer agents of destruction and therefore represent every destroying force; *sturdy warriors* and *pomp* represent the panoply of monarchy in its external resources and its personal dignities and therefore express total loss.<sup>75</sup>

**17** (Cf. 30:27–33.) The Assyrians marching triumphantly on Jerusalem are in reality jumping into a fire. Darkness is one of Isaiah’s motifs for the Assyrian times: the gathering darkness of 5:30 and the exit into darkness of 8:20–22. But Israel’s *Light* has not gone out.<sup>76</sup> The light

<sup>75</sup> The line should be noted as a typical Isaianic assonance: *tahat 'eš*.

which in its fullest sense is yet to come (9:1 <8:23> ; 30:26) is already present. In the darkness of calamity, faith walks in the light. For the link between light and holiness see 6:3. There ‘glory’ expressed the presence of the Lord in all his glory in every place; here light is the presence of the Lord in all his unapproachable holiness. But he is present as *their Holy One*, the God ever on his people’s side, however unworthy. *In a single day* (cf. 9:14 <13> ; 10:3) is very appropriate to the Assyrian judgment (37:36).

**18** The contrast of *forests* (uninhabited natural growth) and *fertile fields* ‘his garden-land’ (ordered cultivation) expresses totality of destruction. Completely is (lit.) ‘soul as well as flesh’. *Wastes away* (*m<sup>e</sup>sōs*) is from √ *māsas*, ‘to melt’. In *Joshua* 2:11 it appears in the phrase ‘our hearts sank’/‘melted’. The word translated *sick man* (*nōsēs*) is found only here and may be (*BDB*) a participle of √ *nāsas* (‘to be sick’). The unusual word was doubtless chosen to produce the stylish assonance *m<sup>e</sup>sōs nōsēs*.

**19** Isaiah adds a final metaphor. Follow-

<sup>76</sup> On the Lord as Light see Pss. 27:1; 84:11<12>; Is. 60:1ff., 19f.; Mi. 7:8. Light symbolizes God’s favour (Ps. 4:6<7>), guidance (Ps. 43:3), law (Ps. 119:105), revelation of truth (Is. 42:6) and presence (Ps. 104:2; Is. 4:5).

ing the debacle at Zion, Assyria limped on to its death (37:36ff.) but was so diminished that even *a child* could conduct a census! Isaiah summons to his aid another motif from the Gideon stories (Jdg. 7:14; cf. Is. 9:4 <3> ; 10:26).

**20–23** As in verses 16–19, thought still centres on the Holy One (20), significantly under the Isaianic title which relates him directly to his people, *the Holy One of Israel*. Though judgment begins at the house of God, a remnant remains. They are the *survivors* (20), characterized by faith (20) and repentance (21).

**20** The background to this verse is the Aram-Ephraimite alliance. Threatened by the rising power of Assyria, the northern kingdom (*Israel* ... *Jacob*) had turned for strength to one who had for a century been an enemy (see on 9:12 <11> ). But *in that day* such folly will be renounced and *the remnant ... will truly rely on the LORD*. *Survivors* is (lit.) ‘those who escaped’; the sense of threat and judgment is strong in these verses. *Rely* is ‘to lean on’ (cf. 2 Sa. 1:6 for an example of weakness resting on strength). Isaiah’s own experience had shown that *the Holy One of Israel*, the God whose holiness condemns (1:4), is the God who forgives and reconciles (6:3–7). He sees this working on a nation-wide scale.

**21** *A remnant will return* is the message of Shear-Jashub ([7:4](#)), applied here to the people of the northern kingdom. The verb *return* (*cf.* [1:27](#)) stresses the active as distinct from the mental side of repentance: a turning round and coming back. *Mighty God* ('*ēl gibbōr*) is the same as in [9:6](#) [9:6](#). The use of this title directly of the Lord shows that it cannot with integrity be reduced to 'godlike hero' in [9:6](#) [9:6](#). It could not be used so soon if anything other than the full meaning were intended there. The reference to the Lord as a Warrior God is suited to this context where the people have been under the heel of a conqueror and need liberation. He is a 'God of warrior prowess', as in [Joshua 5:13–6:27](#), and as Isaiah will see him again in [59:15b–20](#). Whatever his people's need, since the Lord 'of hosts' possesses every potentiality and power, he casts himself into the appropriate role.

**22** There is a continuation of the Shear-Jashub theme from verse [21](#). *Though* is a possible meaning of the conjunction *kî 'im* (*e.g.* [Am. 5:22](#)) but its majority meaning is not as a concessive but as a strong adversative, 'But'. In context, 'But' counters any implication that the *remnant*, mentioned twice in verse [21](#), implies fewness. On the contrary, the promise to Abraham stands

and 'your people, O Israel, will be' *like the sand of the sea* ([Gn. 22:17](#)). It is in this sense that (lit.) 'a remnant among them will return'. *Only* is an interpretative addition assuming that *remnant* is used here in a threatening sense but this does not suit the reference to the Abrahamic promise. *Destruction* (*killāyōn*) means 'a coming to an end', negatively 'a failing away' (its only other occurrence is in [Dt. 28:65](#)). Another form of the same word (*kālā*) is translated 'destruction' in verse [23](#). In both places it could be translated 'end' or 'consummation'; the Lord will consummate what he has decreed, whether promise or threat, and what he does will be (lit.) 'overflowing in righteousness'.

Overwhelming/overflowing ( $\sqrt{\text{šāṭap}}$ ) is used characteristically in Isaiah of the Assyrians 'flooding in' (*cf.* [8:8](#); [10:22](#); [28:2](#), [15](#), [17–18](#); [30:28](#)). The mercy which safeguards the remnant will be no less abundant! 'Righteousness' is the outworking of holiness in the application of righteous principles of world government (*cf.* [5:16](#)).

**23** An initial 'For' (omitted in the NIV) makes this verse explanatory of the consummation/judgment theme. It comes about not by human will (*e.g.* the imperialist Assyrian Empire) nor by chance or

the mechanical operation of historical forces but by divine decree. For *the Lord, the LORD Almighty* see the introductory note on p. 115 and the comments on verse 16. *Upon the whole land/in the midst of all the earth/land* indicates that the acts of God take place in the actuality of history and in the life of this world. ‘All’ is appropriate, for his acts encompass not only Judah and Israel but, contemporarily, the conglomerate peoples of the Assyrian Empire; all alike are subject to his decrees.

24 Isaiah turns to the other kingdom of the people of God, Zion. For Judah, hope occupies the foreground as they are certainly smitten but spared destruction. At this juncture it was part of sovereign wisdom to decree that, notwithstanding the decisive unbelief of Ahaz, the kingdom would not be wiped out by Assyria. The Judge of all the earth (Gn. 18:25) baffles our logic by his decisions but he does right. *Therefore*, since destruction is decreed (23), the Lord must proceed to say how it will work out. In addition to the note of hope which the title *the Lord, the LORD Almighty* (see verse 16) contains there are also other positive signs. First, God reminds them of the continuing covenant relationship (they are ‘*my people*’) and of the Davidic promise under which they *live in Zion* (the phrase ‘who

live in Zion’, where simply ‘in Zion’ would have sufficed, is clearly emphatic). Secondly, the implication of the words *as Egypt did* brings to mind a dreadful experience which eventually terminated in redemption and victory. Isaiah exhorts Zion, ‘*Do not be afraid of the Assyrians*’. He knows that the end will be destruction and deportation (6:11f.), but he also knows that the Assyrians will not be the agents in this. They will *beat* but not ultimately be a cause for fear.

25 The initial ‘For’ (omitted in the NIV) introduces an explanation of the call not to be afraid. Regarding *Very soon ...*, Kaiser has said, ‘... true faith is at the same time an imminent expectation ... For anyone who does not acknowledge that God can show himself gracious here and now is ultimately excluding God entirely from his life.’ For *anger* (*za'am*) and *wrath* (*'ap*) see 10:5. This anger is ‘bent on’<sup>77</sup> the Assyrians’ *destruction*, (*tab'lit*; a properly formed noun from √*bālā*, ‘to be worn out, consumed’, and only found here).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> The preposition ‘*al* can express direction of attention to something, e.g. Je. 22:17. See *BDB* on ‘*al* 7c(c). The NIV elaborates with *will be directed to*.

<sup>78</sup> *BHS*, however, emends to *tekel* is not found elsewhere in the Bible!

**26** The Gideon and exodus motifs are cleverly chosen. The reference to *Midian* and *Oreb* (*Jdg. 7:25*) focuses on the destruction of foes, especially their leaders; the reference to *waters* and *Egypt* emphasizes the deliverance of God's people. *Lash them with a whip* is (lit.) 'rouse up a whip' and the general use of  $\sqrt{^{\sim}ur}$  suggests the rousing of some agent of chastisement, in this case Sennacherib's son and assassin (*37:38*). *Whip* (*šōṭ*) is used here ironically. Its only other occurrence in Isaiah (*28:15, 18*) describes the Assyrians as the scourge of Judah! The Assyrians took the whip and perished by the whip! The rock of *Oreb* (*Jdg. 7:25*) was named after the Midianite prince Oreb who escaped death in the battle but was killed when he fled. It is an apt allusion for Sennacherib who did not perish with his army but after he reached home. *His rod* is another illustration that could hardly be more apt. The Egyptians then (*Ex. 14:15ff.*) and the Assyrians now were so confident of their prey, yet they were foiled, to their own destruction, by a divine deliverance timed to the second.

**27–34** This may be a description of the Assyrian march but it is much more likely to be a poetic impression (as in verse *9*) of an advancing foe.<sup>79</sup> The triumphalist

march from conquest to conquest is 'framed' with beautiful irony by statements of its ultimate ineffectuality, e.g. the lifting of the yoke (*27a*) and the felling of the tree (*33–34*).

**27** The *burden* (cf. *9:4 <3>*) is the symbol of 'rendering service', the *yoke* that of being 'under orders'. The removal of both speaks of the end of overlordship. The second part of the verse is full of difficulty. A literal translation would be 'and a/the yoke shall be broken because of oil'. 'Oil' symbolizes inherent richness or strength. In *5:1* 'fertile' translates 'son of oil'. Was there an inherent richness or strength in Zion making it invincible to Assyria? If so it was, presumably, the Lord's Davidic promises (*28:16; 37:33–35; 38:5–6*). This is hinted at in the rendering in the RV, 'because of the anointing'. But while oil was used in anointing, the word never elsewhere stands as a figure of anointing. Yet this is probably the nearest to a satisfactory meaning of the text as it stands<sup>80</sup> and matches the rather

(Macmillan, 1977). Wilderberger discusses the probable route of the Assyrian army and provides a map. See the article on 'Laishah' in the *IDB*, where Isaiah's words are described as a 'visionary and poetic portrayal of a hostile army's ... advance'. ('Emotive' would be better than 'visionary').

<sup>79</sup> See Y. Aharoni, *Macmillan Bible Atlas*

emphatic *who live in Zion* of verse 24. Poetry is inherently allusive, and the thought here is not unlike that in 2 Samuel 1:21 where David mourns that Saul perished in battle ‘as if not anointed with oil’—an equally terse comment (*cf.* Ps. 89:20 <21>). The reference to oil links with the opening section of the poem. In verse 16 the Lord sends a wasting among his ‘fat ones’ (*mišmannāw*) where the ‘oil’ (*šemen*) vocabulary is obvious. They have no preservative oil, but Zion has!

28 *Enter* and *pass* are both perfect tenses and probably should be translated in the past indicating that the march is

<sup>80</sup> Reconstructions of the text abound. Instead of the MT’s ‘... and his yoke from your neck; and [the] yoke will be destroyed ...’, another possibility is ‘and his yoke from your neck will be destroyed/will cease’ (*i.e.* instead of *w<sup>e</sup>hubbal* read *y<sup>e</sup>hubbal* or *yehdal*). An alternative to the MT’s ‘yoke because of oil’ (‘*ol mipp<sup>e</sup>nê šemen*’) is ‘he has gone up from Rimmon/from Samaria’ (‘*älâ mipp<sup>e</sup>nê rimmôn/šōm<sup>e</sup>rôn*’). (For Rimmon, see Jdg. 20:45.) The NIV (*because you have grown so fat*) preserves the MT but at the expense of making no sense (though Young supports it, ‘Israel is a fat animal, so fat indeed that his very fatness breaks the yoke’). The NASB, with a take-it-or-leave-it air, offers a sturdy ‘will be broken because of fatness’.

already on its way. *Aiath* is probably the town of Ai (Jos. 7:2), fifteen miles north of Jerusalem. *Migron*, if that of 1 Samuel 14:2, is south of Michmash, but *pass through* may indicate that it is here rather the name of a region. With *store* the tense changes to imperfect. The two perfect tenses represent reports brought back from the front of what has already happened; the imperfect has (so to speak) the sense of alarm as people learn that the key pass of Michmash has fallen. *They store supplies* is possibly more likely, ‘he reviews or examines his weapons’, *i.e.* preparatory to the final assault.

29 ‘They have crossed the pass’ refers to Michmash. The introduction of quasi-direct speech (“*We will camp overnight at Geba*”/“*Geba our billet*”) adds vividness and expresses the self-confidence of the foe. Far from delaying at Michmash to establish a supply-base, they have pushed on over the pass, descended 300 feet into the valley and are planning the occupation of Geba, 500 feet up the other side. The enemy has now entered Judah and is six miles from Jerusalem. *Ramah* and *Gibeah* were both fortress towns on the direct road to the capital, but far from preparing to halt the enemy, already, ‘*Ramah has panicked, Gibeah of Saul has been evacuated [has fled]*’ (note the use of

past tenses).

30 *Anathoth*, five miles north-west of Jerusalem, would not have been on the direct line of march but it falls to the invader along with the presumably neighbouring *Gallim* and *Laishah*. For *Cry out*/‘Scream with your voice’, we would say ‘at the top of your voice’. *Poor Anathoth*/‘O afflicted one, O Anathoth’ alludes to the consequences of the arrival of Assyrian soldiery. War is ‘an endless foulness masquerading under an honoured but obsolete name’.<sup>81</sup>

31 *Madmenah* is otherwise unknown and was possibly chosen to effect an assonance, *nād<sup>e</sup>dā madmēnā* (‘Madmenah has taken flight’). *Gebim* is also otherwise unknown.

32 *This day* means ‘before today is out’. *Nob* has been doubtfully identified as just over a mile from Jerusalem. With *they will halt*/‘it is the intention to halt’ we once more hear the report brought back by spies and scouts.<sup>82</sup>

33–34 Very probably these verses orig-

<sup>81</sup> O. Sitwell, *Laughter in the Next Room* (Reprint Society, 1950), p. 106. He does not explain why the name is ‘honoured’.

<sup>82</sup> The verb ‘halt’ is an infinitive, expressing tendency or aim (*GKC* 114k; Driver, p. 204) but was chosen here doubtless for assonance: ‘ōd.

inated as the opening line of the royal Messianic poem in 11:1–16. If the whole were now a entry in an anthology it would be hard to know what the lopping and felling in verses 33–34 represents—apart from its obvious significance of clearing the ground for the ‘shoot’ from the ‘stump of Jesse’ (11:1). As the poem stands, however, it is closely integrated into a context which began at 9:8 <7> and ultimately at 7:1. In the immediate context, verses 33–34 balance with verse 27. The cutting down of the lofty trees can only refer to the destruction of Assyria.<sup>83</sup> This provides the perfect foil for the Messianic shoot, but it is extremely dramatic after five verses of Assyrian self-confidence, inexorable progress and affrontery! In contrast to the bogus sovereignty of the king, the real Sovereign (*hā'ādōn*) takes centre stage. (On this divine title, see the outline on p. 115 and the comments on verse 16.) The forest felling matches the forest fire of verses 16b–17 as the motif of Assyrian destruction. It offers an ironic adaptation of the axe imagery of verse 15. A felling as colossal as the levelling of *Lebanon* is in hand. *Before the Mighty One* is actually ‘by the Mighty One’; the Lord is the agent.

<sup>83</sup> Clements has a succinct review of opinion on these verses.

The Assyrians were sovereign until they met the Sovereign—and at the very moment when the threat is at the gates of Zion! The view of history in verses 5–15 is neither an idle boast nor a splendid illusion. Isaiah will bring the book of the King to its climax with the incident itself (chapters 36–37).

### The glorious hope (11:1–16)

Here, for the second time, Isaiah extends to the remnant the hope of the royal Messiah. Again, it is specifically a word of assurance for the dark day of the Assyrian threat but contains in itself clear indications that its fulfilment is for time yet to come. Undated hope is a living, ever-present assurance for God's people, and it is at this point that the passage speaks as much to the church today as in Isaiah's time. The most obvious evidence of literary prehistory in verses 1–16 is the insertion of the (probably) prose section, verses 10–11, bridging between two self-contained poems, verses 1–9 and 12–16. We note how, in the first of these, the *Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of LORD* in the Messiah becomes, under his reign, the *knowledge of the LORD* (9) filling the whole earth. In the second, the threefold act of the Lord to *raise, gather and assemble* (12) is matched by his threefold act to *dry up, sweep and break* (15–16). These two

poems complement each other: the first deals with the King, the nature of his rule and the paradisal world where he reigns;<sup>84</sup> the second deals with the worldwide people gathered to the Lord's banner.<sup>85</sup> The bridge verses (10–11) are a very skilful piece of literature, in no way intrusive, a true uniting factor. Each verse opens with the words *In that day*; the former concludes the first poem and the latter opens the second. Verse 10 forms an

<sup>84</sup> Wilderberger accepts verses 1–5, 6–9 as two parts of the same poem. Others, however, see verses 6–9 as a late sixth-century or early fifth-century addition.

<sup>85</sup> Many commentators urge that a prophecy must belong to the circumstances which its contents presuppose. If this were so, then plainly verses 11ff. must be dated in the post-exile for they presuppose a dispersion of Judah as well as Israel. On the other hand, the list of place-names (11) and the objects of conquest (14) are distinctly pre-exilic. In a post-exilic passage surely a reference to Babylon by name (and not the poetic allusion to 'Shinar') would be obligatory, and a reference to the bygone Assyria would be pointless. But, in fact, the principle behind this reasoning is false. Prophecy arises from the prophet's presuppositions, which include both the circumstances of his day and his own God-given understanding of them and of the future.

inclusio with verses 1–2 by reintroducing *Jesse*, *Root* and *rest* (in verse 2 the Spirit rests on him; in verse 10 he provides a place of rest). Verse 11 lays the foundation for an inclusio with verses 15–16 in its reference to *day* (in verse 16, *when* is (lit.) ‘in the day when’, thus the great future day matches the great past day), *hand*, *the remnant*, *Assyria* and *Egypt* and *sea* (the gathering of the people from across the sea is made possible by the drying up of the sea). The glorious hope, therefore, is of a reconstituted world and people under a perfect king.

A<sup>1</sup> Jesse’s shoot: his ancestry and enduement (1–2)

B<sup>1</sup> His rule (3–5)

B<sup>2</sup> His world (6–9)

A<sup>2</sup> Jesse’s Root: his pre-eminence and world-wide status in that day (10)

A<sup>3</sup> The Lord’s hand. His second act: the world-wide remnant in that day (11)

C<sup>1</sup> The banner raised: the reconstituted people (12–13)

C<sup>2</sup> World dominion (14)

A<sup>4</sup> The Lord’s hand. The end of a divided world. Another exodus: the historic act as a model for the second act (15–16)

One of the most striking features of this remarkable passage is the dual title of

the coming King as both the *shoot* (1) and the *Root* (10) of *Jesse*. The reference to *Jesse* indicates that the *shoot* is not just another king in David’s line but rather another David.<sup>86</sup> In the books of Kings, successive kings were assessed by comparison with ‘their father David’ (e.g. 2 Ki. 18:3) but no king is called ‘David’ or ‘son of Jesse’. Among the kings, David alone was ‘the son of Jesse’ (e.g. 1 Sa. 20:27–33; 1 Ki. 12:16), and the unexpected reference to *Jesse* here has tremendous force: when *Jesse* produces a shoot it must be David. But to call the expected king *the Root of Jesse* is altogether another matter for this means that *Jesse* sprang from him; he is the root support and origin of the Messianic family in which he would be born. According to *Genesis* 3:15 the human family is kept in being, notwithstanding the edict of death (Gn. 2:16f.), because within it the conquering seed will be born. In the same way, here, the Messiah is the root cause of his own family tree pending the day when, within that family, he will shoot forth. In the Old Testament this is a dilemma awaiting resolution.

1 The imagery here is of a felled tree. All the former signs of vitality have gone but the hidden vitality of the root remains. Isaiah is taking seriously his

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Je. 30:9; Ezk. 34:23–24; Ho. 3:5.

own prediction that ‘the holy seed is its stump’ ([6:13](#)). When he was called to be a prophet he was forewarned ([6:9ff.](#)) of the empty land, the deported people and the felled tree and, furthermore ([7:9](#)), that the monarchy could not survive the unbelief of Ahaz. The present prediction, therefore, does not need the historical fall of the monarchy to prompt it. Isaiah would be a very odd person indeed if he was unaware of a tension within his own message between the predicted Davidic glory ([1:25–27](#)) and the predicted Davidic downfall (e.g. [7:17](#)). Out of this tension emerged such prophecies as [9:1–7](#) and [11:1–16](#). The Lord must either recall his promises or affirm them and the faithfulness of God requires the latter. *Shoot* (*hōter*) is only found here and at [Proverbs 14:3](#) and means ‘young growth’ or ‘twig’. For *stump* (*geza'*) see [40:24](#) and [Job 14:8](#). *Branch* (*nēṣer*) is from the verb ‘to grow green’ and hence means ‘a sapling’. It is not the word used in [4:2](#) but is the same metaphor, the ‘family tree’, referring here to the human ancestry of Messiah. In [9:1ff.](#) the emphasis rested on the Messiah’s birth; here it rests on the *fruit* of his adult life and character.

2 The main impression gained from the Old Testament is that the *Spirit of the LORD*<sup>87</sup> endows chosen people for special

tasks (e.g. [Ex. 31:2–3](#); [Jdg. 6:34](#)), but there are also individuals who enjoyed a permanent indwelling of the Spirit: Moses ([Nu. 11:17](#)), Joshua ([Nu. 27:18](#)), David ([1 Sa. 16:13](#)) and possibly Elijah and Elisha ([2 Ki. 2:15](#)). In Isaiah, the Messiah is the Spirit-endowed one ([42:1](#); [59:21](#); [61:1](#)). The sevenfold elaboration of the Spirit and his work here begins with his divine person as *the Spirit of the LORD* and continues with three pairs of characteristics. First, he is *the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding*. These are judicial and governmental attributes as in [Deuteronomy 1:13](#) and [1 Kings 3:9, 12](#). (In [1 Ki. 3:9](#), ‘to distinguish’ reflects the noun ‘understanding’, and in verse [12](#), the adjectives correspond to Isaiah’s nouns.) When the words are used together, ‘wisdom’ is the more general characteristic while ‘understanding’ is more particularly the power to see to the heart of issues; the former is the reservoir, the latter the judiciously directed outflow. These mental endowments of wisdom and understanding

<sup>87</sup> The Old Testament has the same general revelation of the Spirit of God as the New: personal qualities ([Is. 63:10](#); [Eph. 4:30](#)), distinctness ([Is. 63:11](#); [Mk. 1:9–11](#)), divine presence ([Ps. 139:7](#); [Jn. 14:16–17, 23](#)), indwelling ([Is. 63:11](#); [Hg. 2:5](#); [1 Cor. 3:16](#)) etc. Cf. J. A. Motyer, [NBC](#), pp. 28f.

contrast with the proud boast of the king of Assyria (10:13). Secondly, he is *the Spirit of counsel and of power*. The words translated here as *counsel*<sup>88</sup> and *power*<sup>89</sup> appear as ‘strategy and military strength’ in 36:5. This practical gift is the ability to devise a right course of action, coupled with the personal prowess to see it through. Thirdly, he is *the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD*. In its full sense, knowledge is truth grasped and applied to life. Evildoers are those who ‘do not know’ (Ps. 14:4)—if they had a real knowledge they would not behave as they do. Knowing a person involves a life relationship (Gn. 4:1) and when that person is the Lord, then the life must be religious and moral, conformed to him. Up to 1 Samuel 3:7 the young Samuel, for all his information, ‘did not know the Lord’ nor, for all their position, did Eli’s sons (1 Sa. 2:12). Here *knowledge* and *fear* are both subordinate to the single following noun, *the LORD*: true knowledge showing itself in a life of reverence. In relation to the Lord, fear is moral concern (Gn. 20:11); it motivates obedience (Ex. 20:20) and moulds conduct (Ne. 5:9, 15). It is the

<sup>88</sup> Cf. 2 Sa. 16:20, 23; 17:7, 14; Is. 5:19; 8:10.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. the adjective ‘mighty’ in 9:6<5>; 10:21; military (2 Ki. 14:15); general ability (Dt. 3:24; Jdg. 8:21).

spirit of true loyalty (Ps. 2:11) and worship (Ps. 5:7 <8>) and it marked the Spirit-endowed David (2 Sa. 23:2f.).

3–5 In this new section the thought turns from what the Lord bestows to how the royal *shoot* responds to the Lord, in his own person (3a, 5) and in his royal office as judge (3b, 4). Inwardly, he delights (3a), outwardly, he commits himself to *righteousness*, etc. The whole section shows how he is fully absorbed in exercising the divine gifts: *fear* forms a domino link between verses 2 and 3a, while at the same time revealing that what the Lord does for the shoot is at once met by his subjective response; *wisdom*, *understanding*, *counsel*, *power*, *knowledge* are evident in verses 3b–4. All is embraced by what the King is; his character is the binding force of his rule (3a, 5). In David’s line, king after king had failed, whether by character defect or administrative maladroitness. In this king character and rule are in total harmony. Whatever the Lord has given him is met by glad responsiveness. (Cf. Ps. 101, the coronation oath of the Davidic king.)

3 *He will delight* is from the noun ‘scent’. The verb ‘to smell a (pleasing) odour’ came to mean ‘to delight in’, ‘react pleasurable to’ (Gn. 8:21). Here the verbal noun, ‘his delighting’, suggests that all

his capacity for delight spends itself on this great object. For the verbs *judge* and *decide* see 2:4. He has the ability to distinguish between appearance and reality, a knowledge going beyond the evidence of *what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears* (e.g. 2 Sa. 14:20).

4 For the words *righteousness* and *judge* see on 1:21 and 5:16. Principles of righteousness are applied in just decisions. *Justice* (*mîšôr*) means what is ‘straight’ (in accord with right) and ‘equitable’ for people. A touch of emphasis falls on both *righteousness* and *justice*. The King does not favour *the needy* so as to sway decisions in their favour. Even in their case, what is right and fair must prevail but, unlike the degenerate princes he will replace (1:21ff.), he gives his full attention to their cause (Ps. 72:2–4, 12–14). But neither favour to the needy nor disfavour towards the wicked subvert the exact balance of justice. Under this king ideal justice will be realized as enshrined in the *lex talionis*: the penalty to match the crime (Ex. 21:23ff.). Justice is to be even-handed for all alike (Lv. 24:15ff.), and thus the honour of the law will be demonstrated (Dt. 19:20f.). The *needy* (*dal*) appear as the *poor* (*anwê*), who are virtually identical with the *oppressed* (*‘anîyyê*) in 10:2 (see the comment there). *The rod of*

*his mouth and the breath of his lips* are shorthand for pronouncing sentence. The King needs no other display of power and no other weapon of enforcement than the bare word that he speaks (Rev. 19:15, 21). *Breath*/‘spirit’ or ‘wind’ is a powerful, invisible force. When the reference is to the Lord’s Spirit, there is constantly the suggestion of power to effect change, to impose the divine will and order on things (Ps. 33:6). So, the King’s word is full of divine efficacy.

5 The motif of ‘clothing’ always has the same significance: the garments express the inherent realities and capacities of a person and the purposes to which he commits himself (59:16–17; 61:10; Ps. 132:9, 16, 18). The *belt* symbolizes readiness for action. Thus, matching what verse 3 says about the King’s emotions, verse 5 describes what is observable: one constantly purposing to act in the cause of *righteousness* and *faithfulness*.<sup>90</sup> *Righ-*

<sup>90</sup> Commentators note that *righteousness* (*sedq*) is anarthrous whereas *faithfulness* (*hâ’emûnâ*) has the article, and they suggest making one or the other conform. Objection is also made to the same word for *belt* and *sash* (*‘ezôr*) occurring twice, and it is suggested that one be changed to *’esûr*, a word never elsewhere used in this meaning (cf. Jdg. 15:14; ec. 7:26; Je. 37:15). This is tampering of the most

*teousness* is that ‘which follows the inviolable norm of the divine will’; *faithfulness* is that ‘which holds immovably to the course divinely appointed’ (Delitzsch) or, respectively, ‘moral integrity and steadfast loyalty’ (Mauchline).

**6–9** There is an ‘Edenic’ element in Isaiah’s thinking (see on 2:4b), and there is no ground for denying this present passage to him.

In 9:1–7 <8:23–9:6> Isaiah saw light breaking in on the dark earth, proceeding to illuminate the people, and finding its explanation in the birth of the Messiah. That order is now reversed: first the Messiah buds forth and then, through him, new life for people becomes possible on a world-wide scale and the life of nature itself is transformed. Verses 6–8 offer three facets of the renewed creation and verse 9 is a concluding summary. First, in verse 6 there is the reconciliation of old hostilities, the allaying of old fears; predators (*wolf*, *leopard*, *lion*) and prey (*lamb*, *goat*, *calf*, *yearling*) are reconciled. So secure is this peace that a youngster can exercise the dominion originally given to humankind. Secondly, in verse 7 there is a change of nature within the beasts themselves: *cow* and *bear* eat the same food, as do *lion* and *ox*. There is also a change in needless kind.

the very order of things itself: the herbivorous nature of all the creatures points to Eden restored (Gn. 1:29–30). Thirdly, in verse 8 the curse removed. The enmity between the woman’s seed and the serpent is gone (Gn. 3:15ab). *Infant* and ‘weaned child’ have nothing to fear from *cobra* and *viper*. Finally, in verse 9 the coming Eden is Mount Zion—a Zion which fills the whole earth. Peace (9a), holiness (9b) and ‘knowing the LORD’ (9c) pervades all.

**6<sup>91</sup>** *Live* is a delightful touch, meaning literally, ‘will be welcome as a temporary resident’ ( $\sqrt{gûr}$ ), like ‘the stranger (*gêr*) within your gates’, protected by the sacred rules of hospitality. *The lamb* calls out ‘Come in and welcome’ to the wolf! A *little child* (*na’ar qâtôن*) is used in 1 Kings 3:7 of Solomon confessing his youth and inexperience. The child will *lead* the animals, *i.e.* not just be safe among them but exercise leadership over them (cf. Gn. 1:28).

**7** On the *bear* as a predator see 1 Samuel 17:34–35. An attractive emendation alters *will feed* (*tir’êynâ*) to ‘will

<sup>91</sup> Q<sup>a</sup> has a verb (*ymrw* = *yimrû*) instead of ‘and the yearling’ (*ûmrî*). Many suggestions follow on this basis, noting that the LXX also exhibits a verb (*boskethesontai*) (cf. BHS). The MT is perfectly sound as it stands.

become friends' (*titrā'ēynâ*).<sup>92</sup> This must be resisted, however, as marring the purpose of this verse, making it say only what verse 6 has already said. The point now (see the introductory note on verses 6–9) is the identity of food and the change of nature and habit which that evidences. The mention of *their young* indicates that the change in the adult beast reappears in the next generation also, a permanently new state enjoyed by heredity.

8 The *infant* (*yōnēq*, the ‘sucking child’) is utterly helpless should danger threaten. The *young child* (*gāmûl*, ‘weaned’), the toddler, runs thoughtlessly into danger. These two contrasting ways of being at risk summarize all risks, but there is no danger now. In the human young, as in the animal young (7), there is a new heredity. *Cobra* is a possible translation in Deuteronomy 32:33 (NIV, ‘cobras’) and Job 20:14 (NIV, ‘serpents’; Dhorme offers ‘asp’). *Put his hand* is the perfect tense meaning ‘has actually put his hand ...!’ The *viper* (59:5; Je. 8:17) is another poisonous snake of some sort. Identity is not important, rather the truth they express: the wonder of the curse removed (see above on verses 6–9). *m<sup>e</sup>'ûrâ*

<sup>92</sup> P. A. Lagarde, *Kritische Anmerkungen zum Buche Isaias* (Kaestner, 1878). Cf. Watts.

(*nest*) is only found here and is of uncertain meaning. *KB*, from an Akkadian cognate, offers ‘young one’, which results in ‘... his hand on the viper’s young’. The emendation to *m<sup>e</sup>'ārâ* (‘cave’) is widely adopted.

9 This verse is both a summary of verses 6–8 (9a) and an explanation (9b). See Psalms 96:11–13 and 98:7–9 for the joy when the Lord comes to ‘judge’, to make those royal decisions which will set the world to rights (cf. 34:13–17; 65:25). The verbs *harm* and *destroy* are used ‘absolutely’, no object is stated. This results in the meaning ‘They shall neither act wrongly nor act corruptly’, i.e. neither do what is wrong nor mar what is good. For *my holy mountain* cf. 2:2. It is not that peace is restricted to one place but rather that a dramatic change has come over the whole earth. When the true order of creation is restored the whole earth is the Lord’s hill, indwelt by his holiness. *Will be full* is in the perfect tense, which is indicative either of certainty (‘will surely be full’) or of a future sense (‘will have become full’). *Knowledge of the LORD is a verbal noun* (cf. verse 3). It is more ‘alive’ than the abstract word ‘knowledge’ and could be translated ‘full of knowing the Lord’. (On ‘knowing’ see verse 2.) The holy God dwells with them, ungrieved,

welcoming them to his *holy mountain*; they enter into personal and intimate communion with him, ‘knowing the Lord’. *The waters cover the sea* by filling it to the fulness of its capacity. Everywhere God is present in holiness, and in every place the knowledge of him is enjoyed to its fullest extent.

**10** This verse forms an inclusio with verses **1** and **2** (see above). If it was not part of the original poem then Isaiah added it with consummate editorial skill. *The Root of Jesse* is the banner which draws all *peoples* and *nations* to himself (cf. **42:4** where the Gentile world is represented as ‘waiting’ for him). In the sentence, the emphasis falls on *the Root of Jesse* and the leading idea is Gentile incorporation. *Rally* is (lit.) ‘seek’ (see on **9:13**), i.e. gladly and determinedly coming to where they know he is to be found. For *Root of Jesse* see above and for the idea of the magnetism of the Lord’s hill see on **2:2–4**. The phrase *his place of rest* (*m<sup>e</sup>nuhâ*) occurs elsewhere. In **Ruth 1:9** it is translated ‘home’, and in **Psalm 23:2** ‘waters of home’ or ‘waters of a resting place’. It is used of the place where the ark rests (**Nu. 10:33**) and of the promised land, God’s ‘rest’ for his people, where they are ‘at home’ with him (**Dt. 12:9; Ps. 95:11**). So, the Messiah ‘comes home’, and where

he dwells there is ‘glory’ for God is there in all his glory (cf. on **4:5; 6:3**). In **9:1–7 <8:23–9:6>** as the light dispelled the darkness, it reached also ‘Galilee of the Gentiles/nations’; here *the nations* come seeking the Messiah. What begins the one poem (the outshining of his light) ends the other (the gathering of the people).

**11–16** These verses match the assurance in **9:7 <6>** that ‘the zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this’. The focus of attention swings from the *shoot* and *Root of Jesse* (**1, 10**) to the Lord’s *hand* (**11, 15**), the symbol of personal action. The Messiah ruled justly over people (**3–5**); now the Lord assembles the people and renews them (**12–13**). Under the Messiah the world was re-ordered and transformed (**6–9**); now the world-wide kingdom is realized (**14**). This subtle editing is the hallmark of Isaiah.

**11** *In that day* links with verse **10**. In both verses the formula emphasizes the eschatological nature of the vision. The MT has (lit.) ‘the Sovereign One will add a second time [with] his hand to take possession of ...’. The idiom ‘to add to do’ means ‘to do again’, here ‘will again take possession of’. For this verb in an exodus-conquest context see **Exodus 15:16; Psalms 74:2; 78:54**. *Hand* is used adverbially, as in **Psalm 44:2 <3>** (‘You your-

self, [with] your hand, dispossessed nations ...'), in the sense 'in your own person and strength'. The Lord's 'hand' is a primary exodus motif (see Ex. 3:19–20; 6:1; 13:3; Dt. 6:21). A second time emphasizes the thought of a repeated action and deliberately contrasts the coming act with the Lord's classic act at the exodus (cf. verse 16b). But this will be a wider exodus from a world-wide dispersion. Assyria and Egypt (*Lower* is an NIV addition) are mentioned first as the 'great powers' of Isaiah's day and also the contemporary and original foes of the Lord's people. Thus, no worldly strength and no worldly opposition can prevent the regathering. Further south lay Pathros (*Upper Egypt*) and Cush (*Ethiopia*); further east than Assyria lay Elam and 'Shinar' (*Babylonia*). Then, for completeness, Hamath in the far north and the far flung *islands* [*iyyîm*] of the sea to the west are added. (For *iyyîm* see on 40:15.)<sup>93</sup> Babylon is veiled under the ancient Hebrew name Shinar (cf. Gn.

<sup>93</sup> The word *iyyîm* occurs thirty-eight times in the Old Testament, of which seventeen are in Isaiah. In chapters 40–55 it is found nine times and is virtually a technical term for the Gentile world. Its cultic use (Pss. 72:10; 97:1) indicates that there is no need to query a pre-exilic date for the present or any other passage where the term occurs.

11:1–9; Zc. 5:5–11). There is no reason why Isaiah should have avoided a reference to the Babylon of his day. Shinar must have been used (in accordance with the references given) as symbolic of the world of self-confidence and wickedness, from which too God's people would be gathered.

12 On *banner* cf. verse 10. *The nations* are summoned into the great gathering (cf. 19:23–25; 45:22–24). The banner motif is developed in 49:22–26. The word translated *exiles* is a more general term, 'scattered ones' ( $\sqrt{nādāh}$ ), synonymous with *scattered people* ( $\sqrt{pûš}$ , 'dispersed') in the second half of the verse. Isaiah takes seriously what he has been forewarned of (6:11–13). The threats of the Lord must be fulfilled, and so must his promises. But the reference is wider throughout than the translation *exiles* would suggest and as *the four quarters of the earth* shows. Its ultimate fulfilment is in Matthew 24:31.

13 This verse refers to the restoration of David's kingdom when the two sections of God's people achieved such fragile unification as they ever, historically, enjoyed. But this now goes beyond unification to a true unity; *jealousy* and hostility are gone. The verse is a balanced statement; *Ephraim's jealousy*, i.e. 'the jealousy Ephraim suffers', matches the jealousy

Ephraim feels (13c). Similarly, the enmity ( $\sqrt{sārār}$ ) Judah experiences (13b) matches the enmity ( $\sqrt{sārār}$ ) Judah expresses (13d). Emotions (*jealousy*) and actions (*enemies, hostile*) are alike brought into unity.

14 The Davidic motif continues with the conquest of *Philistia* (2 Sa. 5:17–25; 8:1), *the people to the east* (probably recalling the mercenaries of Zobah and Tob hired against David in 2 Sa. 10:6), *Edom* (2 Sa. 8:14), *Moab* (2 Sa. 8:2–13) and *the Ammonites* (2 Sa. 10–12). Such warlike references jar against the forecast of the Prince and his kingdom of peace (9:6–7 <5–6>), but we must understand them as fidelity to a metaphor rather than predictive of a course of events. Isaiah foresaw the Messiah in royal and warrior terms. Consequently, his kingdom is depicted as spreading consonantly with the kingly concept, just as, in the fulfilment, the Christian wears the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10–18; cf. 2 Tim. 2:3), but the force to which the nations fall is the gospel (Acts 15:14ff.). Yet it is also true that, according to Kidner, ‘those who choose enmity will find, logically enough, destruction’, and this also is true of the coming king (63:1–6). God’s people will swoop down, i.e. like a bird of prey, and spread in every direction. An interest-

ing development in this verse is that the reconstituted people of God (12–13) become the agents in the spreading kingdom.

15 Divine action removes every obstacle to divine plans. The *Egyptian sea* (Ex. 14) would have frustrated the Lord’s redemptive purposes and kept his people in the place of death. *Will dry up* alters the Hebrew to  $w^eheh̄rib$  from  $w^eheh̄rim$  (‘will utterly destroy’). This pedestrian alteration loses the rigour of the MT. The root is *hāram* (‘to remove from human contact, to destroy utterly’) and is a typical post-exodus term,<sup>94</sup> used when something is so vile in the Lord’s sight that only total destruction will suffice. Just as the lofty features of creation became infected by human pride and must needs be judged (2:12–17), so here all natural barriers become manifestations of humankind’s sinful divisiveness and are therefore abhorrent to the Lord, an intolerable barrier to the fulfilment of his plans for one world. *Gulf/tongue* is an unparalleled use but a clear reference to the Red Sea. The word translated *scorch-*

<sup>94</sup>  $\sqrt{hāram}$  occurs twenty-nine times in Exodus-Joshua and twenty-four times in the rest of the Old Testament. The noun *hērem* occurs twenty-one times in Numbers-Joshua and seventeen times elsewhere.

*ing* ('*e*yām) is otherwise unknown. It possibly has the sense of 'heat' (Delitzsch, Kissane) but *BHS*, following the *LXX* (*biaio*), emends it to '*ōsem* ('force'). *Exodus 14:21* speaks of an east wind known for sultriness (*Joh. 4:8*). *Sweep* should be 'wave'. On *hand* cf. *Ex. 14:16, 21, 26–27, 31*. The reference to *the Euphrates River* indicates that this new exodus will be a world-wide movement. The word translated *streams* (*nahal*) means 'valley' (*Gn. 26:19*), 'brook' or 'river' (*Dt. 3:8*) or 'dried-up river valley' (*2 Ki. 3:17*). *nahal*, says Dhorme commenting on *Job 6:15*, 'is distinguished from ... *nāhār* "river" by reason of the intermittent flow of its waters.' The dried-up river bed suits the reference to crossing *in sandals*. *Seven* refers symbolically to the perfect and complete word of God, here the work of re-creation.

**16** The reference to *Israel* here suggests that there is more to this *remnant of his people* than was true in the original exodus. Then it was but one people out of all the peoples which was being redeemed and brought home to God, but now the remnant is world-wide, the summoning of the Gentiles, as in verse **12**. In verse **11** the thought was the geographical spread of the regathering; here it is the universal people.

### 3. The epilogue: individual

## and community, salvation, joy and proclamation (**12:1–6**)

Songs abound in the Isaianic literature and all of them, like the present one, are placed with exactitude. The words *In that day* (**1, 4**) link the song to the day when the old exodus will be superseded by the new (**11:10–11**). And just as the old exodus occasioned individual (*Ex. 15:1*) and communal (*Ex. 15:21*) song, so will the coming exodus (**1–2, 4–5**). But the song reaches back also to chapter **6**, so that together they are prologue and epilogue to this whole section.

1. Verses **1** and **2** could not be bettered as a poetic summary of **6:1–7**. The themes of divine anger turning to comfort (**1**) and the joy of trusting a saving God (**2**) reflect Isaiah's own experience.

2. In the same way, just as the Lord moved from forgiveness (**6:7**) to commissioning and proclamation (**6:8ff.**), so here those who drink from the wells of salvation (**3**) call one another to make his doings known to the world (**4–5**).

3. Within the poem there is a change from the second and first person singular of verses **1–2** to the second person plural of verses **3–5**. The saved individual is a member of the community of the saved. This feature too reaches back to chapter **6** and brings to a climax a thread of

thought in the intervening chapters. When the holiness of God made Isaiah aware of his sin (6:5) his eyes were opened, at the same time, to his membership of a sinful community. No conclusion was drawn from this at the time but if we were to sense an implication that what saved him will also save others our intuition is borne out by what follows. In chapter 8 we find Isaiah within the fellowship of a discipleship group, and in chapters 9 and 11 hope is held out of light shining in the darkness, people brought out of bondage into a kingdom of peace, a perfect Messianic king reigning over a worldwide people gathered by a new exodus. The tiny beginning of one man's salvation has grown into the company of the redeemed. In chapter 12 one man's song modulates into a singing community and the Holy One, who was the sinner's greatest threat (6:3–5), now dwells in the midst of an exultant city (6). The triumph of grace indeed! No doubt the whole collection, chapters 6–12, was put together by Isaiah for this purpose: to give heart to a beleaguered remnant of the Lord's people by sharing his own experience, reviewing and explaining the ways of God and the certainty of his promises, and strengthening them with a diet of truth, experience and sure hope.

The song is a most interesting composition. It is a prediction in which the prophetic voice first addresses an individual and puts a testimony in his mouth (1–2). He then turns to the community, describing their enjoyment of salvation (3) and putting in their mouths what they will say to each other (4–5). Finally, returning to the individual (the feminine singular of verse 6 balancing the masculine of verse 1), the Jerusalemitic woman is commanded to exult in the presence of the Holy One.

A<sup>1</sup> The prophet addresses a male individual (1a)

B<sup>1</sup> The individual testifies to salvation (1b)

C<sup>1</sup> Thanksgiving: divine anger has turned to comfort (1b)

D<sup>1</sup> The song of salvation (2)

A<sup>2</sup> The prophet addresses the community (3–4a)  
Community enjoyment of salvation (3)

The voice of the community introduced (4a)

B<sup>2</sup> The community calls itself to thanksgiving and proclamation (4b–5)

C<sup>2</sup> Thanksgiving, fellowship with God, proclamation worldwide (4b)

D<sup>2</sup>The song of the Lord's acts;  
universal proclamation (5)

A<sup>3</sup>The prophet commands a female  
individual: Zion exulting in the  
presence of the Holy One (6)

The masculine/feminine contrast in A<sup>1</sup> and A<sup>3</sup> is an idiom of totality (see on 3:1). Thus, every individual (1–2, 6) and the whole community (3–5) are alike absorbed in salvation, in its joy and its proclamation.

1 *In that day* links with 11:10–11. *You will say* is a masculine singular verb. *I will praise* comes from  $\sqrt{yādā}$  ('give thanks') as in verse 4. *Your anger has turned away* is a jussive form in the MT suggesting '... let your anger turn away and comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation ...'.<sup>95</sup> The basic situation facing the sinner is the wrath of a holy God (6:3ff.). This plight cannot be remedied unless that wrath is somehow allayed, what the Bible calls 'propitiation'. Reconciliation is not our willingness to have God but God's willingness to have us. On Passover night the

<sup>95</sup> GKC 109k and Driver (83f.) argue that jussive forms may stand for indicatives, but Driver (170–174) has hesitations. BHS would emend *yāšōb<sup>e</sup>nah<sup>a</sup>mēnî* ('and oh, comfort me') to *watt<sup>e</sup>nah<sup>a</sup>mēnî* ('and you have comforted me').

Lord, coming in judgment, stated in advance that he would be able to look with equanimity on those who took the blood of the lamb as their covering (Ex. 12:12f.). Thus wrath became comfort. From the human end, the mere plea ('Let your anger turn away') is the only and sufficient course. *Angry* and *anger* are from  $\sqrt{’āna\bar{p}}$  and its cognate *’ap* (cf. 10:5).

2 This verse is a self-contained statement. The opening and concluding truth that 'my salvation' is found in God himself forms a bracket round the four characteristics of the saved: trust, the end of fear, strength and song. 'Behold' (NIV, Surely) calls attention to the marvel that the angry God (1) is the Saviour. How this is so we are not told here, but 6:6–7 lies in the background and chapter 53 lies ahead. But the prayer for the end of wrath and the onset of comfort has been answered. *Salvation, trust* and not being *afraid* are the marks of the believing group of 8:9–18. For *God* ('ēl) see on 5:16. *Trust* is here  $\sqrt{bāṭah}$  whereas in 7:9 it is  $\sqrt{’āmēn}$ . The latter points to the reliability of that which is trusted, the former to the security brought to the one who trusts (it is followed significantly here by *not be afraid*). This is a soundly based confidence 'for [omitted by the NIV] my strength and song is Yah Yahweh'. Apart

from the final ‘Yahweh’ the words are from Exodus 15:2, the song of the exodus. This probably accounts for the archaic form of ‘song’ (*zimrāt*).<sup>96</sup> The objective mark of salvation and the fruit of trust is *strength*, durability in the face of life, and its subjective mark is *song*, an inner welling up of joy. The abbreviated ‘Yah’ first appears in Exodus 15:2, and therefore occurs in related passages such as Psalm 118:14 and here. In Psalms it occurs frequently in the cry ‘Hallelujah’, indicating its liturgical popularity. It is a shortening or diminutive, expressing endearment. The final line of the verse opens with ‘and’ in its explanatory sense, ‘that is to say’. It is not an idle repetition but a reaffirmation of the objective ground of personal experience. The Lord, who was under no obligation to do so and might well either have done nothing or acted otherwise, *has become my salvation*, i.e. freely cast himself into the role of Saviour. This stresses the element of divine decision as well as of divine action, without which no sinner is ever saved.

### 3 The prophet speaks again in his own

<sup>96</sup> Dissatisfied with *zimrat* here means ‘defence’. KB and G. R. Driver (‘Hebrew Scrolls’, JTS, 2 (1951), 25) suggest ‘energy, vitality’. This, of course, destroys the parallelism with verse 5 in the structure of the poem.

voice: ‘And so you will draw ...’. The *you* here is plural, indicating that while the experience detailed in verses 1b–2 is individual it is also common to the whole company who make up the community of the saved. The reference to *salvation* makes the link with verse 2 and the plural verb prepares for verses 4–5. *Water* is a recurring motif in the exodus story. The crossing of the Red Sea was followed by the disappointing waters of Marah (Ex. 15:22–24), but then came the wells (*‘ēn*, related to the present word, *ma‘eyān*) of Elim (Ex. 15:27) and the water from the rock (Ex. 17). This is the model Isaiah is following. The God who saves continues to minister salvation to his people as an ever available reality to enjoy. As throughout this song, the objective reality of God’s work of salvation is matched by the subjective element of responsive singing (2, 5), exultant shouts (6) and *joy*. It is the inner transformation of the saved.

4 The prophet now puts words into the mouth of the community. *You will say* is second person plural. These who drink salvation’s waters with *joy* (3) have a common mind which they express to each other in a series of imperatives. Their first thought is to *Give thanks to the LORD*, which, in context, must be thanksgiving for salvation (see on verse 1b).

Secondly, they are to *call upon his name*. The phrase ( $\sqrt{qārā'} b^ešēm$ ) has four meanings: to name a person for a function (Ex. 35:30); to call a person into fellowship (43:1); to invoke God by using his name (Gn. 12:8); and to proclaim the name (Ex. 34:5–6). The suitable meaning here is the third of these. God has made himself known by *name*, i.e. revealed himself and summed up the revelation in a significant name. Those to whom the revelation has been made can now use that name to enter into a worshipping intimacy with the God who has revealed himself. In response to the third imperative, the secret relationship of thanksgiving and worship must venture into the open to *make known among* ‘the peoples his deeds’. The word ‘ $a'lilōtāw$ , used of the Lord, occurs once of his general work of care (Ps. 9:11 <12>) but always elsewhere is used of his special electing, saving work (especially the exodus redemption, e.g. Pss. 66:5; 77:12 <13>). It is not only his deeds but *his name*, what he is himself, that is to be proclaimed. The phrase is (lit.) ‘bring to remembrance’ and is often used of making sure something is in the forefront of the mind. The saved community encourage each other to preach an *exalted* God. The same word is used in 2:11, 17 of the Lord in judgment, but here

it speaks of the majesty and transcendent dignity of the saving God.

5 *Sing* ( $\sqrt{zāmar}$ ) matches the noun ( $zimrāt$ ) in verse 2. Song is called for not as an expression of feelings of elation but as a response to the works of God. *He has done glorious things* translates  $gē'ūt$ , an abstract noun used adverbially (lit. ‘in accord with his high dignity’; another form of the word appears as ‘majesty’ in 2:10). *Let this be known* is a passive participle, meaning (lit.) ‘a thing worthy to be made known’ or ‘This must be made known’. For *to all the world/in all the world* cf. verse 4. This universalism matches 9:7 <6> and explains by what means Isaiah expected the Messiah’s kingdom to spread. This is the reality behind the military metaphor of 11:14.

6 The prophet speaks for the third time. *Shout*, a feminine singular, recalls how Miriam took the lead in the triumph song (Ex. 15:20f.; cf. 1 Sa. 18:6f.). Here, *people of Zion/inhabitant of Zion* means Zion herself, personified as an exultant woman, the people of God in their oneness (cf. 37:22). Once Isaiah had seen a different Zion with different ‘daughters’ (3:16–4:1) but now the promised cleansing (4:4) has taken place and the Holy One has come home as he said he would (4:5f.) to a delighted bride.

For *Shout aloud* ( $\sqrt{zāhal}$ ) cf. on 10:30 and for the *Holy One of Israel* see on 1:4.

## C. The universal kingdom (13:1–27:13)

This new section of Isaiah continues to focus on the king in Zion. It is sometimes expressed in terms of the city (14:32; 18:7; 25:6–7, 10; 26:1; 27:13), sometimes in terms of the Davidic king or of the Lord's reign in Zion (14:29; 16:5; 24:21ff.), and is a natural sequence of chapters 6–12. In that section Isaiah's leading concern was to show the triumph of divine grace for Judah and Israel whereby the Lord would bring back a remnant of his people, redeemed and rejoicing, into the realm of the perfect, divine king of David's line. But there was more to it than that, for Isaiah had a world vision: a Messianic kingdom extending in peace to the utmost limits of space and time (9:7  $\langle 6 \rangle$  ), a renewed world (11:6ff.), and the intriguing idea (especially in 11:11–16) of a world-gathering, wider than the national Israel of the exodus, capable of being described as 'the remnant of his people'.<sup>1</sup>

The particular needs of chapters 6–12

permitted no more than a sidelong glance at the universalism of the Lord's royal plans and it falls to the present section to open them up more fully. This is, in fact, a feature of the structure of the Isaianic literature, that the hints of one section become the leading theme of the next. Just as the Davidic hints in chapters 1–5 (e.g. 1:26) grow into the full-length portrait of the coming David of chapters 6–12, so the universalistic allusions in chapters 6–12 develop into a world-view in chapters 13–27, and the philosophy of history stated in 10:5–15 is shown not to be a 'one-off' exercise of divine sovereignty in relation to Assyria but the way in which the whole world lies in the executive hand of God. In summary, therefore, we find here that world history is organized in the interests of the people of God<sup>2</sup> and that the Gentiles are co-

<sup>1</sup> Universalism was implicit in Israel's cult. Pss. 46–48 thematically show the defeat of world-wide foes (46), the nations' princes becoming 'the people of the God of Abraham' (47:9) and the centrality of Zion (48). Ps. 87 universalizes the idea of a register of Zion's citizens to include Egypt, Babylon, Philistia etc. The sequence Pss. 95–100 begins with 'us' as the Lord's flock (95:7) and ends with a world-wide flock (100:3).

<sup>2</sup> See 14:1–2, 32; 21:10, 17; 23:8–9; 24:21–23;

equally incorporated<sup>3</sup> so that there will be one world, one people, one King and one God.

Turning to the structure of this section, chapters 13–23 consist of ten oracles.<sup>4</sup> The first five are given specific titles relating to identifiable historical peoples (13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1) whereas the second five have four enigmatic titles, which, in context, can be identified with particular peoples (21:1, 11, 13; 22:1), and one plain title (23:1):

Series 1	Series 2
Babylon (13:1–14:27)	The Desert by the Sea (Babylon) (21:1–10)
Philistia (14:28–32)	Silence (Edom) 21:11–12)
Moab (	Evening (Arabia) (21:13–17)

25:9; 26:1, 20–21; 27:13.

<sup>3</sup> See 16:4–5; 18:7; 19:19–25; 23:18; 25:6–7.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Oracle’ occurs eleven times in these chapters, and eight times in a derogatory sense in Je. 23:33–40, as a means whereby false prophets gave spurious authenticity to their words. Otherwise, it only occurs as a heading for prophetic speech (see Na. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zc. 9:1; Mal. 1:1). Such sparing use suggests that Isaiah uses it carefully here as an editorial ‘marker’.

15:1–16:14)

Damascus/Israel (17:1–18:7) The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem) (22:1–25)

Egypt (19:1–20:6) Tyre (23:1–18)

Formally, each list begins with Babylon and the oracle dealing with the Lord’s people comes fourth, but the balance of the lists goes beyond form. The two Babylon oracles deal respectively with the political and religious downfall of the city: the first is full of kings and armies while the latter refers only to idols. The first specifies that all is for the sake of Israel (14:1–2; note verse 1 begins with ‘For’) while the second brings news of the fall of Babylon as a message of comfort to crushed Israel (21:10). The Philistia and Edom oracles share a forward look: the former to a coming supremacy of the house of David (14:32) and the latter recording the passage of time without any clear end terminus (21:1f.). The Moab and Arabia oracles both concern Gentile fugitives seeking succour: Moab looks for help to Zion but is inhibited from finding it by its own pride (16:1, 6–7) and Gentile tribes attempt mutual support but gain no enduring security (21:13–17). The fourth pair reveals the people of God looking for help other than in the Lord and his

word: Israel in a Gentile alliance and Jerusalem in self-salvation (17:8, 10; 22:8, 12–14). Finally, for both Egypt and Tyre there is a remarkable ultimate turning to the Lord (19:18–25; 23:18). Other lines of connection bind the five pairs together but this suffices to indicate the general structuring of the double series. One feature of the structure bears on the meaning of the whole: in each case the people of God, occupying the fourth place in the lists, are surrounded by the peoples of the world. In the first list these are Babylon to the north,<sup>5</sup> Philistia to the west, Moab to the east and Egypt to the south. In the second list they are Babylon to the north, Edom to the south, Arabia to the east and Tyre to the west. Their position makes them vulnerable. Where will they seek security? But their position also makes them central—central to the way the Lord runs the world and very much at the centre of his eschatological world-view. In summary, this is what chapters 13–20 are about.

In chapters 24–27 there are no overt headings, and apart from references to Jerusalem (24; 23; 25:6ff.), Judah (26:1),

<sup>5</sup> Since the Mesopotamian empires always marched into Palestine from the north they are considered geographically as northern powers.

Moab (25:10) and the cluster of Assyria, Egypt and Jerusalem (27:12f.) there are no plain pointers to history. The whole is impressionistic, rhapsodic and full of song (24:16; 25:1–5; 26:1–6; 27:2); an eschatological cantata on the theme of world-wide overthrow and rectification. But there are indications of sub-divisions:

1. 24:1–3, 17–20 forms an inclusio on the topic of world overthrow. The focus of this is the fall of ‘the ruined city’ (‘the city of emptiness’) in verse 10.
2. 24:21–23 is an interlude before the song (25:1–5), which belongs to a unit (25:1–12) with the destruction of fortifications (verses 1, 12) indicating its limits. In this way the brief 24:21–23 makes the Lord’s operations cosmic and dates them ‘after many days’ (verse 22).
3. In chapter 25 the ‘ruthless’ have been ‘stilled’ (verse 5) and all the world, except for ‘Moab’ (verse 10) in its ‘pride’ (verse 11), gathers to the feast.
4. 26:1 introduces a ‘strong city’ contrasting with the ‘lofty city’ of verse 5—a vision to hold God’s people steady as they experience (verse 8) a final period of waiting (verses 20f.).
5. After this the Lord brings the sequence full circle, chapter 27 returning to the theme of chapter 24: the Lord’s war and victory. The stress falls, however, not

on the destruction of the city ([24:10](#)) but on a world-wide harvest, with Egypt and Assyria specified as the places of reaping. In this way the cantata yields five themes in sequence to be set alongside the two sets of five already reviewed:

A	B	C	Damascus/ Ephraim ( <a href="#">17:1–18:7</a> )	The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem) ( <a href="#">22:1–25</a> )	The city of God ( <a href="#">26:1–20</a> )
Babylon ( <a href="#">13:1–14:27</a> )	The Desert by the Sea (Babylon) ( <a href="#">21:1–10</a> )	The city of emptiness ( <a href="#">24:1–20</a> )	<i>Strong cities forsaken (9); the forgotten rock (10)</i>	<i>The city torn down (10)</i>	<i>The strong city (1); the everlasting rock (4)</i>
<i>Political overthrow</i>	<i>Religious overthrow</i>	<i>Broken laws (5) Broken gates (12)</i>	Egypt ( <a href="#">19:1–20:6</a> )	Tyre ( <a href="#">23:1–18</a> )	The final gathering ( <a href="#">27:1–13</a> )
Philistia ( <a href="#">14:28–32</a> )	Silence (Edom) ( <a href="#">21:11–12</a> )	Zion's King ( <a href="#">24:21–23</a> )	<i>Co-equal membership: Egypt, Assyria and Israel (</i> <a href="#">19:24–25</a> )	<i>Holiness to the Lord (<a href="#">23:18</a>)</i>	<i>The harvest from Egypt and Assyria (<a href="#">27:12–13</a>)</i>
<i>A Davidic king will yet reign in Zion</i>	<i>Indefinite continuance of things as they are</i>	<i>'After many days'</i>			
Moab ( <a href="#">15:1–16:14</a> )	Evening (Arabia) ( <a href="#">21:13–17</a> )	The great banquet ( <a href="#">25:1–12</a> )			
		<i>Desert tribes All nations</i>			

*Moab in need,  
but through  
pride refuses  
shelter in Zion*

*in need: no  
ultimate  
refuge in  
mutual  
security*

*feasted in  
Zion save  
Moab,  
excluded by  
pride*

The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem) ([22:1–25](#))

The city of God ([26:1–20](#))

*The city torn down (10)*

*The strong city (1); the everlasting rock (4)*

Tyre ([23:1–18](#))

The final gathering ([27:1–13](#))

*Holiness to the Lord ([23:18](#))*

*The harvest from Egypt and Assyria ([27:12–13](#))*

This diagram notes only the main links between the three series but even on this basis Isaiah's intention is clear. In the first series (the left-hand column) we see that

series (the left-hand column) we see that world-history is organized so as to care for the Lord's people (Babylon, 14:1–2) and though God's promises seem to languish they will be kept (Philistia, 14:28–32). The nations can find shelter in Zion but pride is their foe (Moab, 16:6), and there is even a poison at work within the people of God—a reliance on human works that can only end in destruction (Ephraim, 17:7–11). Ultimately, however, the Lord will bring all into one by uniting all with himself (Egypt, 19:18–25).

In the second series (the middle column) Isaiah begins to project these principles into the future. He moves from concrete historical names to enigmatic allusions as if to say that even when the future moves beyond our gaze there will still be a 'Babylon principle' at work in the world in relation to which the Lord will always care for his people (21:1–10). While to the human eye all is delay there is a 'come again' aspect because delay is not abandonment (21:11–12). The world will never find security within itself (21:13–17), and the virus of self-sufficiency and the sin of ignoring God's word will continue to blight his people (22:1–15), but the vision of even the vilest becoming holy to the Lord will be fulfilled (23:1–18).

Finally, in the third series (the right-hand column), where the last times, well below our horizon, harbour the day of the Lord, the same five principles continue. When the day finally dawns there will be a song of the redeemed as the world-city falls (24:10, 14–16a) and at last the King will reign on Zion's hill (24:21ff.). The world, except for those self-excluded by pride, will feast on the Lord's mountain (25:1–12), and throughout all this long waiting the believing people, the Lord's church, will inhabit a strong city (26:1–21). Right to the end they occupy the fourth position in the list, with world events swirling round them, but already they enjoy the security of that strong city 'with foundations, whose architect and builder is God' (Heb. 11:10), and within it they await the final harvest (27:1–13).

Here, then, is an Isaianic mosaic on a grand scale. Even in those cases where it is possible to suggest a date for a passage the date is no longer important.<sup>6</sup> What matters is the part the passage now has to play in its new setting. What Kaiser says about chapters 24–27 applies equally to the whole section:

<sup>6</sup> 14:24ff. is pre-701; 4:28ff. dates itself 715; 17:1ff. is pre-732, the fall of Damascus; 20:1 refers to an expedition of Sargon dated 711; 22:1ff. may have 701 in prospect.

We would argue that the previous history of individual sections is of no significance for the understanding of the composition as we possess it, for in every case they are given fresh significance within it.<sup>7</sup>

According to the structure outlined above that significance is sharp and practical.

## 1. The first cycle of oracles. The reality of the Lord's promises (13:1–20:6)

The preceding section (chapters 6–12) painted a Zion-centred picture of history and the present chapters seek to justify this in the actual historical situation. In particular, the divine procedures for ordering history stated in 10:5–15 are demonstrated in practice. The whole cycle takes the principles, blessings and warnings of chapters 7–11 on to the next stage, in particular seeking to affirm that the Lord is really and truly ruling history and guiding it to his predetermined end. Throughout, Isaiah deals with the present, the impending and the eschatological. For example, in the Babylon oracle, although Babylon is addressed as a

present power, the setting of the whole is eschatological (there are references to a gathering of the Lord's forces [13:2–3], a universal objective [verse 5], the day of the Lord [verses 6–8] and cosmic as well as world-wide results [verses 9–11]). In case the remote should appear unreal, Isaiah offers an interim fulfilment for which people can watch and which, when they see it, will guarantee that the greater purpose will also come to pass. The interim fulfilment is the overthrow of Assyria, which is an earnest that the hand which mastered Assyria masters the earth (14:24–27). In the series as a whole, now one of these elements and now another is stressed, but Isaiah is specially concerned to offer interim fulfilments (along with 14:24–27, see 16:13–14 and 20:1–6). This is of some importance for if God cannot demonstrate his management of history in what people see before them, why should they trust him for what they cannot see? Faith is not a leap in the dark but conviction reached on the basis of evidence. But if they actually live through what is demonstrably a work of God, they are without excuse if they withhold belief regarding coming days and the day of the Lord itself. Prediction and fulfilment provide the required demonstration, as in the case of the Assyrian

<sup>7</sup> Kaiser, p. 177. On 26:1 he remarks that 'any ... previous history of the song can be ignored as of no significance for its present context'.

overthrow. Before the event, Isaiah made a commitment in the name of the Lord about what had not yet happened (and, indeed, what was self-evidently against the odds). It is the nexus between the prior word and the later event that shows who rules the world. This gives confidence regarding that which is equally the subject of prediction and is yet to be the subject of action.

### **a. Babylon: appearance and reality in world history (13:1–14:27)**

This oracle is a mosaic of seven pieces:

1. The title, giving subject and author (13:1).
2. The day of the Lord, with no overt reference to Babylon. This is an oracle datable to any point in Isaiah's ministry (13:2–16).
3. The overthrow of Babylon by the Medes (13:17–22).
4. A connecting piece, possibly an editorial composition designed to provide a new integration for the other units in the complex. Its opening 'For' (omitted by the NIV) explains the Lord's motivation in history (14:1–4a).
5. A mocking song, introduced by verses 3–4a, about the king of Babylon and a meditation on human vanity (14:4b–21).
6. Divine hostility to Babylon,

matching section 3 (*cf.* verse 23 with 14:21–22), (14:22–23).

7. The overthrow of Assyria 'in my land', an interim fulfilment exemplifying divine sovereign rule (14:24–27).

As with all of Isaiah's mosaics, this diverse material has been brought into a new unity:

A<sup>1</sup> The day of the Lord: the beckoning hand, a universal purpose declared (13:2–16)

B<sup>1</sup> The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the kingdom, the fact of divine overthrow (13:17–22)

C The security and future of the Lord's people: a contrasting universal purpose (14:1–2)

B<sup>2</sup> The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the king, the explanation of divine overthrow (14:3–23)

A<sup>2</sup> The end of Assyrian power: the outstretched hand, a universal purpose exemplified and validated (14:24–27)

A<sup>1</sup> and A<sup>2</sup> raise the question of the locus of power in history. The appearance of things is the exercise of power by human will; the reality is the exercise of sovereign rule by the will of God. The human mind cannot always trace out the course of the divine purposes, and often

the believing mind cannot but agree that everything looks a terrifying mess. But beyond that comes the ‘nevertheless’ which only faith can speak: all is in the hand of God. B<sup>1</sup> and B<sup>2</sup> stress the moral dimension in the purposes of God. They contrast the appearance of human glory with the reality of human emptiness and expose the worm in the bud: the pride which invites and merits divine judgment. To all this there is a common hub (C): consideration of the care of the people of God. The power that gathers nations (13:2–5), overthrows kingdoms (13:17–19), breaks kings (14:5f.) and ends empires (14:24f.) is a power of compassion to the church. It is allied to a divine world-view whereby *aliens* become Israelites (14:1b), Gentile peoples co-operate in the Lord’s purposes (14:1b, 2a) and the captor-captive roles are reversed (14:2b).

### Introduction (13:1)

An *oracle* (*maśšā*) means a ‘lifting up (of the voice)’, a declaration.<sup>8</sup> *Babylon* looms large in this section of Isaiah as both the historical city and empire and as the ancient locus of arrogant self-sufficiency

<sup>8</sup> *maśšā*’ can mean ‘burden’ (Ex. 23:5) but there seems to be no thought of a prophet ‘burdened’ with a message here.

(Gn. 11:1ff.). In Isaiah’s time it was far from being a mere provincial town within the Assyrian Empire.<sup>9</sup> Under the vigorous Merodach-Baladan (see on 39:1ff.) it constituted a major threat to the Assyrian overlord and, politically speaking, a Babylonian Empire in Isaiah’s lifetime was a real probability. The circumstances of the Babylonian delegation (39:1–7; c. 702) demanded that Isaiah speak some word and, for all we know, it was at this point that the problem of 6:11–12 was solved.

Isaiah had known from the start of his ministry that Judah would be deported. He came to know that Assyria would not accomplish this but that, to the contrary, Assyria’s threat to Zion would in fact mark the beginning of the decline of the empire.<sup>10</sup> Maybe 39:6–7 was the first time he was able to give a name to the dark power whose destined task he had then known for thirty years. Of course, once he had named Babylon as the destroyer he would be under pressure to say more. It is unrealistic to think that the discipleship group would not press him (8:9ff.), needing to know how the promises of God would fare when, under an even greater threat than Assyria, Jerusalem itself fell to the foe. Such an

<sup>9</sup> See Erlandsson.

<sup>10</sup> See 10:24–34; 29:1–8; 30:27–33; 31:4f.

enquiry would not be mere curiosity about the future; it would be essential to faith since it touched on the reliability of the promises by which the remnant lived. Circumstances thus compelled Isaiah to include Babylon in his thinking and preaching. We need not hesitate, therefore, over the ascription *that Isaiah ... saw* (*cf. 1:1; 2:1*). The implication of this note of authorship is that **13:1–14:27** achieved some sort of contemporary publication or circulation—a not unreasonable thought in the light of chapter **39** and the notoriety accorded to the Babylonian delegation and the shocking thing Isaiah had said.

### The day of the Lord: universal purpose declared (**13:2–16**)

Isaiah stands within the Amos tradition of the day of the Lord (*cf. Am. 5:18–20*), and what he depicts matches what he says elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> There is, however, here a notable balancing of divine and human agency (*cf. 22:5–6*). The conflict is universal with neither one side nor the other as the Lord's weapon (**1–5**). Rather, the conflict as such is of his promoting and the armies are his instruments against each other. In a word, the culmination of his-

tory rests on the principles of **10:5–15**. At that day all the inherent destructiveness of sin, hitherto manifested in every individual act of animosity and every single act of war, will reach an unprecedented violence of mutual destruction. But over it all there is the presidency of a supreme Lord and moral governor of the world. There is a description of the summons to a holy war (**2–3**) and the mustering of a world-wide army (**4–5**), the terror this inspires (**6–8**) and the moral purpose in it all (**9–13**). It will be a day without escape (**14–16**).

**2** *Raise, shout and beckon* are all second person plurals, creating the impression that the Lord has his agents posted and ready to signal the muster for the last battle. The *banner* symbolizes divine direction of history (*cf. 5:26*). The same idea in **11:10–12** expresses the final gathering to God of his world-wide people. At that day these two functions will be synchronized. The *hilltop* is *bare* in order to secure visibility. *Beckon* is (lit.) ‘wave a hand’ and the reference to ‘hand’ here should not be lost as it is part of the inclusio of the whole section (*cf. 14:26–27*). See also *nations* (verse **4** and **14:26**), *mountains* (verse **4** and **14:25**) and ‘the whole world’ (not *lands*; verse **5** and **14:26**). *Nobles* (*nādīb*) can be a term of moral

<sup>11</sup> Cf. **13:1, 13** with **24:21**; **13:7–8** with **2:10, 19, 21**; **24:17–18**; **13:9, 11** with **24:5, 20**; **25:10–12**; **13:6** with **24:4**.

approval (e.g. 32:8) but it is also used of ‘the nobility’, leaders in general. ‘Entering the gates’ might describe the purpose of the war, to overthrow cities (cf. 28:6b), but probably here refers to the host assembling for enrolment at the nearest seat of government.

3 I is emphatic—‘As for me, I ...’. The Lord’s recruiting sergeants (2) have been posted in consequence of a divine decision. Note the continuing emphasis of *my holy ones, warriors, wrath* and *triumph*. *My holy ones* refers not to sanctity of character but to status, as set apart for a divine service, the ‘holy war’ (Dt. 20; 23:9 <10> ; 1 Sa. 21:5). *Warriors* (*gibbôrîm*; cf. 9:6 <7>) describes their prowess for the task in hand, *to carry out my wrath* (*'ap*; cf. 10:5). *Who rejoice in my triumph* is a dubious translation of *ga'awâ*. It means (lit.) ‘my exulting ones of arrogance’ as at 9:9 <8> (for the same thought see 10:12). The Lord calls them *my* not because he approves their arrogance but because, in all their arrogance, he owns them and directs the overflowings of their arrogance to his own ends.

4 Isaiah is drawing on traditional terminology depicting Zion as beset on all sides by enemies.<sup>12</sup> This was often true historically and it was also ideologically

true; the distinctiveness of the people of God made them an object of hostility to the surrounding world. It would be pre-eminently the case in the day of the Lord. Hence *mountains* is to be understood as the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, where the sound of the gathering forces would be heard. The *Almighty*/‘of hosts’ (*s<sup>e</sup>bā'ôt*) who is in himself every potentiality and power (see 1:9), includes within the sphere of his sovereignty all the powers of the world and their armies (*sâbâ'*). They gather at his command to do his bidding (cf. Acts 4:27f.).

5 This verse includes both the notions of the world-embracing sway of the Lord and also of world involvement in the last battle, the gathering to the battleground of every force the world knows. For *wrath* (*za'am*) see on 10:5. *The whole country* is a possible translation but contextually unsuitable. This is no national disaster but one embracing ‘the whole world’ (cf. the identical words in 14:26).

The two sections, verses 6–8 and 9–13, pick up the themes respectively of verses 4 and 5. The awesome forces (4) about to clash melt people’s hearts with *terror* (6–8), but the reason behind it all is *wrath* (5) against *sinners* (9), *evil, sins, arrogance* and *pride* (11).

6 For *Wail* cf. Amos 5:16f. *Near* (*qârôb*)

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Pss. 46:3<4>, 6<7>; 65:7<8>; 83:2–3.

is ‘close by’ rather than ‘imminent’.<sup>13</sup> It speaks not of necessary proximity in time or necessary tarrying but of the total preparedness of that day to dawn whenever the Lord declares that the time has come. *Destruction from the Almighty* is another lovely Isaianic assonance (*šōd miššaddāy*). The title *šaddāy*, found characteristically in the patriarchal narratives, is used there contextually for the God who is of power to keep his promises. His power does not flag like that of human beings, and he is at his most able when they are at their most impotent.<sup>14</sup> Here, therefore, the title refers to the God who can do whatever he wills.

7 The *hands* and the *heart* are the organs of personal action and reflection, the outer and the inner, hence totality. Paralysed by the terrors of the day, people will neither be able to act nor plan. For *melt* see on 10:18.

8 *Terror will seize them*/‘And they will be terrified’ is a single word in Hebrew. The very brevity of statement enhances the grim reality of what it describes.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14<4:14>; Ob. 15; Zp. 1:7, 14.

<sup>14</sup> See on 17:1; 28:3; 35:10; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25. See also J. A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (Tyndale Press, 1959) and Watts *ad loc.*

<sup>15</sup> Some consider the verb *wnbhlw* to be the

The picture of a *woman in labour* is not a simile of fruitful pain here but of that which is sudden, inevitable and inescapable; the end result of a process that cannot now be stopped (cf. 1 Thes. 5:2–3). *Look aghast* ( $\sqrt{tāmāh}$ ) ‘expresses in general the attitude of a person who is struck dumb by stupefaction’.<sup>16</sup> It does not mean, then, ‘aghast with fear’, but bereft of all certainty, in a state of confusion and indecision; they are baffled to know where to turn. Commenting on *Their faces aflame*/‘faces of flame their faces’, Oswalt says, ‘They will stare at each other in an agony of both indecision and recognition’—their recognition of having trusted in the wrong resources bringing belated shame, making their faces flame with embarrassment. Kaiser suggests ‘sweat with fear’.

9 See on verses 6–13 above. For *cruel*/‘savage’ (*'akzārī*) cf. Jeremiah 6:23;

vestige of a lost line, which (helped by 2 Sa. 4:1; Je. 6:24; 50:43) Kaiser reconstructs as, ‘The men of Babylon shall hear and shall be dismayed’. Such a reference to Babylon here would be ruinous of the structure and inexplicable in a ‘day of the Lord’ poem. Hebrew poetry is far from being metrically insistent. Its genius is to work with adaptable forms whereby meaning dominates all.

<sup>16</sup> See Dhorme on Jb. 26:11.

for *wrath* ('*ebrâ*) see 9:19 <18>; 10:6; and for *anger* ('*ap*) see 10:5. In turn, the words speak of a pitiless infliction of an overflowing anger that cannot any longer be contained, expressive of a burning personal passion. *The land* should rather be translated 'the earth' or 'the world' (cf. verse 5). The environment is caught up in human sinfulness and it too bears the consequences. For the first time in the poem the moral motivation of the day is stated, hinted at hitherto by the idea of 'holy war' (2–3) and divine indignation (5). The day is the point at which sin comes face to face with holiness and *sinners* are destroyed (cf. verse 10).

10 Many ideas combine in this verse: the denial to sinners of all the beneficent influences of creation, symbolized by *light*; the visitation of wrath on a whole creation corrupted by sin (cf. 2:12ff.; 5:5–6, 10); the withdrawal of light, an apt symbol of the oncoming darkness of divine judgment (cf. 5:30); the thought of darkness as a drawing near of the God of absolute holiness (Ex. 19:16; Dt. 4:11); and the exodus plague of darkness (Ex. 10:21ff.), which spoke of condign judgment on the Lord's adversaries but also of the separation off of the people he determined to save. The darkness, even of the day of the Lord, is within the purpose of

14:1–2.

11 To *punish* is 'to visit'. *The world* (*tēbēl*) is the inhabited world, the world of human beings and affairs (cf. Ps. 24:1b). The change from the Hebrew original 'evil' to *its evil* is simple and common but needless. *The wicked* (*r̄šā'îm*) is often used with forensic force (e.g. 1 Ki. 8:32) to mean 'those found guilty at law'. The day is not an indiscriminate outpouring of wrath; each has been tried and judgment pronounced in the light of the evidence. For *sins*/‘iniquity’ see on 6:7. *Haughty* comes from a verb meaning to 'boil or seethe', and hence means 'insolent, inflated with self-importance, conceited'. *Ruthless* ('*ārîšîm*, 'tyrannical') refers to the arrogance that makes one lord it over another.

12 This is a fearful image of extermination: people with the same scarcity value as the most precious metal. *Ophir*, which is of uncertain location, was famous for fine gold (cf. 1 Ki. 9:28; Jb. 28:16).

13 This verse forms the summary and conclusion. Because the Lord has set his hand to a moral judgment that is cosmic (10) and world-wide (11) in extent *the heavens tremble* and *the earth will shake*. The ordered movement of the heavens and the stability of the earth, all that was achieved by creation, will be undone in

judgment. *Wrath* and *anger* (as in verse 9) act as an inclusio for this subsection.

**14–16** The picture of gathering armies with which the poem of the day of the Lord began (2–5) is balanced by this concluding picture of people scattering from the disaster—and being overtaken by it.

**14** *Like a hunted gazelle and like sheep without a shepherd* are complementary similes. The first animal is endangered by the attentions of people, the second is endangered without their attentions. So, finding the Lord as their enemy and losing him as their shepherd, humankind is indeed helpless and hopeless, with everything to flee from and nowhere to flee to. They gathered with ‘exultant arrogance’ (3) but now all they can think to do is head for home, to their *own people* and their *native land*.

**15** In verse 14 there is no protector; verse 15 adds that there is no escape. *Whoever is captured*/‘everyone who is found’ is often used with the meaning ‘who happens to be there’, having survived the battle. *All who are caught* means ‘everyone who is swept away’, i.e. into flight from the battle. Whether in the battle, or as a survivor, or in flight, one fate awaits all.

**16** No protection (14), no escape (15) and now, no mercy. Should any reach

home it will be only to see all they held dear destroyed: the children they begat, the homes they built, the wives they loved. How is all this to be understood as the day of the *LORD* (6)? In a word, the answer is that this is what people are like to each other (*cf.* verse 18). When we consider the dovetailing of human and divine agency such as this passage describes, we need to remember what we think of human beings as puppets with the Lord as their puppet-master. On the contrary, they are being themselves to the full, with their natural acts fulfilling his supernatural purposes. In a very real sense, therefore, what the Bible speaks of as ‘the stretching out of his hand’ (14:26) would be more easily understood if we thought of it as the withdrawing of his hand—to leave sinners to implement all the inhumane savagery of fallen human nature, bereft of the restraining, humanizing efficacy of common grace. The Creator has so constituted humankind that sin progressively makes people less human and, therefore, less humane. The process, however, is not allowed to run its logical course in its logical way or else the race would have perished as soon as sin entered the world (Gn. 2:16–17). The Lord remains sovereign, operating his own rules, directing, restraining, prompting.

But the time will come—the day of the Lord—when in a climactic way sin will take the stage as the total destroyer it always is and sinful human beings, who for so long have determined their own destiny without God, will be left, and indeed directed, to do so.

### The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the kingdom (13:17–22)

The day of the Lord has many interim fulfilments. 14:24–27 will find one such in the overthrow of Assyria. Further on in history, it will be foreshadowed again in the fall of Babylon. In this way verses 17–22 are related to verses 2–16. It is not that Isaiah is here naming retrospectively the warriors who were summoned in verses 2–5; that summoning awaits the day which, even in our time, is yet to come. But the same principles that operate in that climactic day of history operate throughout. The God whom that day reveals is the God who directs history now, and sinful human nature, which will then be seen in its true colours, is the nature which drives people on today. Against the backdrop of the day we can read contemporary history with open eyes. So here, Isaiah shows us divine direction and human motivation at work (17), savagery between people (18), the overthrow of pride (19) and the endless

desolation which sin brings (20–22).

17 It is the Lord who *will stir up ... the Medes* (*cf. verse 3*). He is in executive control of every movement in history, just as he will be at the last day. The reference to *the Medes* as the destroyers of Babylon is at first sight surprising since we are accustomed to ascribe the conquest to Cyrus the Persian. However, phrases which give the Medes priority over the Persians (e.g. ‘the law of the Medes and Persians’, Dn. 6:8, 12, 15; *cf. Est. 10:2*) and the mysterious description of Babylon’s conqueror as ‘Darius the Mede’ (Dn. 5:30)<sup>17</sup> at least indicate that the Medes were by no means mere shadowy adjuncts to a Persian victory.<sup>18</sup> Isaiah doubtless had his own contemporary reasons for singling them out. They *do not care for*/‘think nothing of’ silver, *i.e.* they cannot be bought off. Their sole motivation is conquest.

18 *Strike down* means to ‘dash in pieces’ (✓ *rāṭāš*; *cf. 2 Ki. 8:12; Ps. 137:9*). It is an odd verb to use of the effect of bow-shot. *BHS*, by vowel adjustment, reads

<sup>17</sup> See D. J. Wiseman, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (Tyndale Press, 1965), pp. 9–16.

<sup>18</sup> Those who wish to date this oracle in some proximity to the fall of Babylon should find this reference to the Medes and the absence of reference to the Persians a great difficulty.

'and the bows ... shall be dashed in pieces', i.e. just as the Medes cannot be stopped by money (17b) neither can they be stopped by arms. But a reference to counter-attack is out of context in verse 18. It may be best to assume that the verb was chosen to make a link with its occurrence in verse 16 and that it is capable, poetically, of describing corpses mangled in the course of battle, as we say 'shot to pieces'. The sequence of *young men*, *infants*/‘fruit of the body’ and *children*/‘sons’ heaps up words to create a picture of remorseless slaughter. In the battle itself the Medes give no quarter and are devoid of human feeling. The verb *have no mercy* (*lō' yērahēmū*) contains the word for ‘womb’ and is used of compassion which stirs the emotions. Possibly, therefore, the phrase should be translated, ‘towards the fruit of the body they have no parental feeling’.<sup>19</sup> In refusing to ‘look with pity on sons’ they show unconcern for any future for their foes.

19 *Jewel* (*s<sup>e</sup>bî*) and *glory/* ‘beauty’ (*ti<sup>p</sup>'eret*) are the words used in 4:2 of the Lord’s Branch and in 28:5 of the Lord himself. This description prepares

<sup>19</sup> The phrase ‘fruit of the womb’ is always used of children in general and does not seem to refer to the atrocity of disembowelling pregnant women.

for the parallel passage (14:3–23) where the king of Babylon claims divine honours (14:12–14). The Babylonians (Heb. ‘Chaldeans’) were a long-established south Mesopotamian people, central to the rise of Babylon to dominance, as Isaiah rightly foresaw here. *The Babylonians’ pride* (*gā'on*; cf. verse 11) will be overthrown ‘like God’s overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah’ (cf. on 1:7). With this flick of scriptural allusion Isaiah lifts the edge of the curtain: the energizing power behind the Medes is the holy God effecting just and moral purposes.

20 This verse describes the local, historical equivalent of what will be universal on the day of the Lord (9, 13–16). In *never/‘to perpetuity’* and *all generations/‘unto generation and generation’*, the former speaks of what is unchanging, the latter of what will be experienced. The nomad *Arab* (Je. 3:2) will not make his seasonal enclave there, nor *the shepherd* give his flock an afternoon’s shelter. Thus the idea of endless, total abandonment is driven home.

21 *Lie* is the same verb as ‘rest’ in verse 20. There will be no human, friendly, domestic use but one terrifying to people. *Desert creatures* is more likely ‘desert wraiths’. *Wild goats* would be better translated ‘goat-demons’ (cf. Lv. 17:7). Bible

writers often use such heathen superstitions without extending credence to them, simply for effect.

**22** *Her time* ('ēt) is not the date on the calendar but the season appropriate for such an event. For *at hand* (*qārōb*) see on 'near' in verse **6**. This prediction looks far ahead in history. The Assyrians destroyed Babylon in 689 BC (see chapter **21**), after which it was restored. Cyrus took the city in 539 but left it intact. Its continued turbulence led to a determined attack by Darius Hystapes in 518, after which it declined to desolation.

### The security and future of the Lord's people (**14:1–2**)

In this work of *compassion* we see a contrasting universal purpose; there is the same blending of human and divine agency as in the work of wrath, for both *the LORD ... will settle them in their own land* (**1**) and *Nations will take them to their own place* (**2**). The return from Babylon fulfilled very little of all this. Cyrus' recognition of Israel and its God (**Ezr. 1:2–4**) was tongue-in-cheek. There was no popular acclaim, no influx of converts, no reversal of the captive-captor roles. But we are not to look back on the return and say that the great prophetic hopes failed any more than we look on the fall of Babylon and say that the day of the Lord did

not come. Just as Babylon, by providing mini-illustrations of the punitive aspects of the day, gave notice that the day was on its way, so the return foreshadowed some beneficent aspects of the day and provided an 'earnest' that the full promise would yet be kept.

**1** *Compassion* (cf. 'mercy' in verse **18**) is the highly-charged devotion of a mother. *Again he will choose Israel*, i.e. the Lord will implement his choice. The Bible offers no explanation of the divine choice other than 'he loved because he loved' (**Dt. 7:7f.**). *Settle them/give them rest* is a traditional expression for home and security (**Dt. 12:10; 2 Sa. 7:1**). The *gēr* ('alien') was the political or other refugee who came as a 'temporary resident'. In Israel such people had a specially protected status (cf. **Dt. 14:21, 29; 16:11**) arising partly from Israel's experience in Egypt (**Ex. 23:9; Dt. 10:19**) but ultimately from the example of the Lord (**Dt. 10:18; cf. Lv. 25:23**). The doubling of *join* and *unite* emphasizes the idea of a real and true union. For *join* ( $\sqrt{lāwā}$ ) see e.g. **56:3, 6**; for *unite* ( $\sqrt{sāpāh}$ ) see **1 Samuel 26:19**, where it is translated 'my share', and **Job 30:7**, where it has the meaning 'to be huddled together'.

**2** Again we see the reversal of roles (cf. **45:14–25; 49:22–26; 60; 66:19–24**). We