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1/ **The vision of^a Isaiah, son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah,^b Jotham, and Hezekiah,^c kings of Judah.**

Textual Notes

- a LXX differs from MT in having two relative clauses: “The vision which Isaiah son of Amoz saw, which he saw” This is clearly secondary.
- b For MT’s עֵזְיָהוּ (*‘uzziyāhū*), 1QIsa^a has עוּזִיָּה with a plene writing of the initial short vowel and the shortened form of the theophoric ending.
- c MT has יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ (*yēhizqiyāhū*), while 1QIsa^a has חִזְקִיָּה (*hizqiyā*) corrected to יְחִזְקִיָּה (*yēhizqiyā*). Elsewhere in MT this

king’s name is spelled four different ways: יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ (as here, 2 Kgs 20:10; Jer 15:4; 1 Chr 4:4; 2 Chr 28:27; 29:1, 20, 30-31, 36; 30:1, 18, 20, 22; 31:2, 8, 13, 20; 32:2, 8-9, 11-12, 16, 17, 20, 22-27, 30, 32-33; 33:3), יְחִזְקִיָּה (*yēhizqiyā*, Hos 1:1; Mic 1:1), חִזְקִיָּהוּ (*hizqiyāhū*, 2 Kgs 16:20; 18:9, 17, 19, 22, 29, 30-32, 37; 19:1, 3, 5, 9-10, 14-15, 20; 20:1, 3, 5, 8, 12-16, 19-21; 21:3; Isa 36:1, 2, 4, 7, 14-16, 18, 22; 37:1, 3, 5, 9-10, 14-15, 21; 38:1-3, 5, 9, 22; 39:1-5, 8; Jer 26:18-19; 1 Chr 3:13; 2 Chr 29:18, 27; 30:24; 32:15), and חִזְקִיָּה (*hizqiyā*, 2 Kgs 18:1, 10, 13-16; Zeph 1:1; Prov 15:1).

Commentary

By analogy to the superscriptions at the beginning of a number of other prophetic books (Jer 1:1-3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1; Obad 1:1; Mic 1:1; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zeph 1:1), the superscription in Isa 1:1 is probably intended as a heading for the whole book, or at least as much of the book as existed at the time the superscription was added. It seems clear that it was added after the time of Isaiah. Not only would the information contained in the heading be more important for a later audience than for Isaiah’s contemporaries, but the diction is not that of Isaiah. Here, in the superscription in 2:1, and in the prose material in 36:7, the word order “Judah and Jerusalem” is found. Elsewhere in the genuine Isaianic oracles the order is always “Jerusalem and Judah” (3:1, 8; 5:3; 22:21). As the preceding reference to 2:1 indicates, the heading in 1:1 is only one of a number of superscriptions found in the book. In contrast to 1:1, however, these other superscriptions (2:1; 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6) serve only as introductions to single oracles or, at most, to small groups of closely related oracles. Though assigning even relative dates to redactional work involves highly subjective and hypothetical reconstruction of an essentially private process, it would appear that these other superscriptions, attached

as they are to individual units incorporated in the final collection, existed prior to the creation of 1:1.

In fact, one may argue that the superscription in 2:1 provided the model for the creation of 1:1.¹ Starting with הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר חָזָה יִשְׁעִיָּה בֶן־אֲמוֹץ עַל־יְהוּדָה וְיְרוּשָׁלַם (*haddābār ‘āšer ḥāzā yēša‘yāhū ben-‘āmōš ‘al-yēhūdā wīrūšālāim*), “The word which Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem,” the redactor replaced הַדְּבָר (*haddābār*) “the word,” with חִזְוֹן (*ḥāzôn*) “vision,” to go with the verb חָזָה (*ḥāzâ*), “to see.” He then shifted the prophet’s name and patronym immediately after the noun חִזְוֹן to create a construct chain before the relative clause with the verb. Finally, he added the temporal element with the list of kings at the end of the superscription on the analogy of Hos 1:1 and Amos 1:1. The editor was able to create the list of kings by the references to three of these kings in the Isaiah corpus with which he was working: Uzziah (Isa 6:1), Ahaz (Isa 7:1, 10; 14:28), and Hezekiah (repeatedly in Isaiah 36–39). To fill out the list he only needed to insert Jotham between Uzziah and Ahaz, following the sequence he would have known from 2 Kgs 15:32-38.

Such a process behind the creation of Isa 1:1 might explain some of the peculiarities of this heading and its general inadequacy as a superscription even for all of chaps. 1–39, much less the whole of the present book of Isaiah. The heading suggests that Isaiah’s ministry was

1 See the discussion in Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe*, 1:38–41.

directed to Judah and Jerusalem, not to the northern kingdom, which may explain why none of the kings of Israel are listed, as they are in the superscriptions to Amos (1:1) and Hosea (1:1).² Nonetheless, the northern kingdom Israel figures prominently in a number of Isaiah's oracles (9:7-20; 10:10-11; 17:1-6; 28:1). Moreover, there is a whole series of oracles against foreign nations (chaps. 13-23). One would never guess this from the heading in Isa 1:1. This odd limitation of Isaiah's proclamation to Judah and Jerusalem may be the result of the redactor's using the older superscription in 2:1 as his model. Unlike Isa 1:1, the superscription in 2:1 was never intended as a superscription to the whole collection; it was apparently attached to a much shorter collection of oracles primarily concerning Judah and Jerusalem, that is, the major portion of the material in chaps. 1-5. One may question, however, whether the superscription in 2:1 is in its original position. It is possible that, when the redactor created the superscription for the book in 1:1, he moved the superscription for chaps. 1-5 to its present position at 2:1. He might have dropped this now-repetitive superscription entirely, but the insertion of 1:29-31 created a disjunction between the material about Jerusalem and Judah in 1:2-28 and its continuation in 3:1. Moreover, the same editor may have been responsible for inserting 2:2-22 before 3:1. Since, as I will argue in my treatment of 2:2-22, this material is addressed, at least fictively, to a northern Israelite audience, it creates a similar disjunction to Jerusalem and Judah in 3:1. Thus, placing the heading before this insertion was a way of recontextualizing this material so that it would be relevant to the

Judean audience of the redactor's day. The redactor may also have wanted to claim 2:2-4 for Isaiah, since he was probably aware that the same oracle occurs in Mic 4:1-4.³

As a heading to the whole book, Isa 1:1 makes the theological claim that the message contained in this book came to Isaiah by divine revelation. It also purports to give us information about the prophet, the people to whom he prophesied, and the period of his prophetic ministry. Unfortunately, the information about Isaiah's family is not very helpful to the modern reader; all we know about this Amoz is that he was Isaiah's father. Moreover, I have already noted the inadequacy of the heading's information about the people to whom Isaiah prophesied. Finally, the information about the period of Isaiah's ministry does not seem to reflect any independent knowledge of the redactor that a modern reader could not obtain just by reading the book and its parallels in 2 Kings.

Nevertheless, it does serve as a healthy reminder of a very important fact. Isaiah's ministry began during the reign of Uzziah (c. 790-738 BCE), probably in the year of his death (6:1), and extended into the reign of Hezekiah (c. 715-687/686 BCE), how far we are not told, but at least through 701 BCE and the Sennacherib campaign. Thus, Isaiah's ministry spanned almost forty years and possibly another decade. This must be remembered when dealing with the Isaianic material. One cannot expect the same homogeneity in the literary deposit of a forty-year ministry as one might in that of a much shorter ministry such as that of Amos.

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2 One should note, however, that Hosea does not list any contemporary Israelite king after Jeroboam II, which may suggest that the redactors of Hosea and Isaiah did not consider any of the later final six kings of Israel to be legitimate. See Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; Garden

City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) 148-49; see also C. van Gelderin and W. H. Gispen, *Het Boek Hosea* (COuT; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1953) 19; and Hellmuth Frey, *Das Buch des Werbens Gottes um seine Kirche: Der Prophet Hosea* (BAT 23/2; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1957) 8. See also P. R. Ackroyd, "A Note on Isaiah 2:1," *ZAW* 75 (1963) 320-21.

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- 2/ Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth,
for Yahweh has spoken:
"Sons I have begotten^a and reared,
but they have rebelled against me.
- 3/ An ox knows its owner,^b
and an ass the trough of its lord,^c
But Israel does not know,^d
my people does not perceive."^d
- 4/ Hey,^e nation who keeps sinning!^f
People heavy with iniquity!
Offspring who do evil!^g
Children who behave corruptly!
Who have abandoned^h Yahweh,
Have spurned^h the Holy One of Israel,
Have become thoroughlyⁱ estranged!^h
- 5/ Why^j would you be beaten any longer?
Why do you continue to rebel?
The whole head has become a wound,
The whole heart faint.
- 6/ From the sole of the foot to the head
There is no soundness in it;
Just a bruise and a welt,
And a bleeding wound—^k
They^k have not been drained nor bound up,
And it^k has not been softened by oil.
- 7/ Your country is a desolation,
Your cities are burned with fire.
Your land—in your very presence
Foreigners devour it,
And it is a desolation^l like the overthrow of Sodom!^m
- 8/ And daughter Zion is left
like a booth in a vineyard,
like a hut in a cucumber patch,
like a blockaded city.ⁿ
- 9/ Had not Yahweh of hosts left a remnant for us,
soon^o we would have become like Sodom,
we would have resembled Gomorrah.
- 10/ Hear the word of Yahweh,
O rulers of Sodom,
Listen to the word of our God,
O people of Gomorrah.
- 11/ "What use do I have for the multitude of your sacrifices?"
says Yahweh.
"I am sated with burnt offerings of rams
and the suet of fattened cattle;
The blood of bulls and lambs^p and goats
I do not desire.
- 12/ When you come to see^q my face,
who sought this from your hand?
- 13/ Do not continue trampling my courts.^r
Bringing offerings is futile,^s
Incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath, the calling of an assembly
I cannot endure.
Fast^t and solemn assembly,^u 14/ your festivals^v and fixed seasons
My soul hates.
They^w have become a burden to me
I am tired of bearing.^x
- 15/ When you spread out your hands,^y
I will hide my eyes from you;

Even if you pray at length,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood.²
16/ Wash, cleanse yourself,
Remove the evil of your deeds**
From before my eyes.
Cease to do evil;
17/ Learn to do good.
Seek justice;
Right the wronged.*^b
Render judgment for the orphan,
Plead the case of the widow.
18/ Come, let us reach an agreement,"
says Yahweh.
"Though your sins are like scarlet,"^c
They*^d can be white as snow;
Though they are red as crimson,
They*^d can be like wool.
19/ If you are willing and will listen,*^e
You will eat the good of the land;
20/ But if you refuse and rebel,*^f
You will be eaten by the sword,*^g
For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken."

Textual Notes

a MT, supported by 1QIsa^a and by the traces in 4QIsa^a, has יָרִימָתִי וְרוֹמַמְתִּי (*giddaltī wērōmamtī*), "I reared and brought up." Despite the occurrence of the same two verbs as parallel terms in Isa 23:4, this usage seems curiously redundant here. The LXX has ἐγέννησα, "I begat," for the first verb, a reading that presupposes only a very slight change in the Hebrew text, יָלַדְתִּי (*yāladtī*) instead of יָרִימָתִי וְרוֹמַמְתִּי (*giddaltī*).¹ This may be original. Deuteronomy 32:18 uses the same Hebrew verb, יָלַד (*yālad*, "to beget"), to describe Yahweh's creation of his people, and the LXX of Deut 32:18 translates the Hebrew verb with the same Greek verb used in Isa 1:2, γεννάω. The usage is a little unusual, since Hebrew normally uses the *hiphil* הוֹלִיד (*hōlīd*) to refer to the father's role in childbearing, while the *qal* יָלַד (*yālad*) normally designates the mother's role. The use of the *qal* to express the father's role is well attested, however. See Gen 4:18; 10:8, 13, 15, 24, 26 (= 1 Chr 1:10, 11, 13, 18, 20); 22:23; 25:3; Prov 17:21; 23:22, 24. Nonetheless, the unusual

character of this usage may explain the corruption in the MT. The change from יָלַדְתִּי, "I begat," more normally, "I gave birth," to יָרִימָתִי וְרוֹמַמְתִּי, "I reared," could be a tendentious attempt to avoid using what was perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be feminine imagery for Yahweh.²
b MT's singular noun קִנְיָהוּ (*qōnehū*), "his owner," 1QIsa^a corrects to the plural קִנְיָהוּ (*qōn' hū*), "his owners" (with *yod* written above the word) to agree with the following plural בְּעָלָיו (*bē'ālāyw*), "his lords."
c The reason for the grammatical plural בְּעָלָיו (*bē'ālāyw*), "his lords," is not clear. Because the lord in the metaphor clearly refers to God, this could be a plural of majesty similar to the use of the plural *ʾēlohīm* to refer to God, but the noun בַּעַל (*ba'al*) in the sense of a human owner is sometimes written as a plural before a singular suffix even when the context shows that a single human owner is meant (see Exod 22:10-14), so the plural here may be no more than a grammatical oddity.
d The LXX was bothered by the lack of the direct object and supplies με, "me," thus making God the object of the verbs

1 Contra Wildberger, 1:8, the LXX reading does not presuppose the *hiphil* הוֹלִיד. As noted above, Deut 32:18 uses the *qal*, יָלַד, with Yahweh as the subject, and the LXX translates the term with γεννάω, just as it does here. Given the close literary ties between Isa 1:2-20 and Deuteronomy 32, one might well expect the same usage in Isaiah. Both texts begin with an appeal to heaven and earth to listen (Deut 32:1; Isa 1:2); both refer to Israel as God's rebellious and foolish children (Deut 32:5; Isa 1:2-6); both may use birth imagery of God (Deut 32:18; Isa 1:2 [see above]); both mention Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut

32: 32; Isa 1:9); and both present a choice between life and death (Deut 32:39; Isa 1:18-20)—to mention only the most obvious parallels.
2 It is dubious that Isaiah was concerned about the use of feminine imagery for God; Second Isaiah certainly made use of blatantly feminine imagery for God (Isa 42:14; see Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God* [Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994] 104-10), but that is no guarantee that later tradents would be as comfortable with such imagery.

- “to know” and “to perceive”: “but Israel did not know me, my people did not recognize me.” The Targum also supplies direct objects, but the MT is to be preferred. The ambiguity created by its lack of an explicit object appears to be intentional. See the commentary.
- e The particle הוֹי (*hōy*) does not mean “Woe!” It is a vocative particle used to get the attention of the party or parties being addressed. It typically introduces direct address and is followed by nouns or participles in the vocative identifying the addressee(s). Thus, it is often followed by forms in the second person, as one sees in the following verse. See the excursus on the *hōy*-oracles at Isa 5:8.
- f The form חֹטֵא (ḥōtē), “who keeps sinning,” is a participle and thus characterizes the addressees by their continual behavior just like the following מַרְעִים (*mēvēcīm*), “who do evil,” and מַשְׁחִיתִים (*mašhītīm*), “who behave corruptly.”
- g The singular noun זֶרַע (*zeraʿ*), “seed, offspring,” is not in contrast with the following participle and should not be rendered “offspring of evildoers.” As a collective noun, זֶרַע can be modified by a plural adjective or participle, and that is the case here as the parallelism with בָּנִים מַשְׁחִיתִים (*bānīm mašhītīm*), “children who behave corruptly,” shows quite clearly. It is not the parentage that is being attacked—God is the father (v. 2)—but the behavior of the children.
- h The final three verbs in the verse are all third person plurals, but they stand in unmarked relative clauses and in no way interrupt the direct address. The LXX, which lacks the last clause, and the Syriac, which has all three, actually translate these verb forms with the second person plural in order to make the direct address even clearer.
- i “Thoroughly” is an attempt to capture the sense of the Hebrew אָחֹר (*ʾāḥōr*), “(to be estranged) behind.”
- j The phrase עַל מֶה (*ʿal meh*) normally means “Why?” (see esp. Num 22:32), but in a couple of passages it has the sense “upon what” (Job 38:6; 2 Chr 32:10). Isaiah may be exploiting that ambiguity here. The obvious meaning is, “Why be beaten any further?,” but one may hear overtones of, “Upon what/where would you be beaten further,” since there is no longer a single sound spot to strike.
- k I have tried to maintain the poetic parallelism of the original in my translation. The three different nouns signifying types of wounds are all in the singular, despite the normal English translation of them as plural. The first two nouns, a masculine followed by a feminine, פָּצַע וְחַבּוּרָה (*pešaʿ wəḥabbūrā*), “a bruise and a welt,” are taken as a unit, so the verbs in the parallel line that refer to them are placed in the masculine plural, לֹא יִדְרוּ וְלֹא תִבְשּׁוּ (*lōʾ-zōrū wəlōʾ ḥubbāšū*), “they are not drained nor bound up.” The third noun, a feminine singular, forms a unit with its modifying adjective, וּמַכָּה טְרִיָּה (*umakkā ṭērīyā*), “and a bleeding wound,” so the verb in the parallel line that refers to it is placed in the feminine singular, וְלֹא רִבְּכָה בְּשֶׁמֶן (*wəlōʾ rikkēhā baššāmen*), “and it is not softened by oil.”
- l For MT’s וּשְׁמָמָה (*ušēmāmā*), “and it is a desolation,” 1QIsa^a has וּשְׁמָמוּ עֲלֶיהָ (*wəšāmēmū ʿalēhā*), “and they will be appalled over it” (for the idiom, see Isa 52:14; Lev 26:32; Jer 2:12; et passim), but the Qumran reading has no other support in the textual tradition.
- m Reading סְדוֹם בְּמַהֲפֶכֶת (*kəmahpēkat sēdōm*), “like the overthrow of Sodom,” for MT’s זָרִים בְּמַהֲפֶכֶת (*kəmahpēkat zārīm*), “like the overthrow of foreigners.” The versions all support the MT, but the repetition of זָרִים from the preceding line is harsh, and in the four other occurrences of בְּמַהֲפֶכֶת, the construction is either סְדוֹם בְּמַהֲפֶכֶת, “like the overthrow of Sodom” (Deut 29:22; Jer 49:18), or אֱלֹהִים בְּמַהֲפֶכֶת (*kəmahpēkat ʾēlōhīm ʿet-sēdōm*), “like God’s overthrow of Sodom” (Isa 13:19; Jer 50:40). The word סְדוֹם occurs twice in the context in vv. 9-10, so a comparison of Jerusalem’s fate with the fate of that city is clearly present in this passage. Since ו (*w*) and י (*y*) are often confused, as are ד (*d*) and ר (*r*), the corruption is relatively easy to explain. The confusion between ס (*s*) and ז (*z*) is a little more difficult, at least in the square script, but if the writing were slightly damaged, it is possible. If one assumes that the offending scribe was coping from a manuscript with a plene orthography, סְדוֹם was misread as זָרִים by homoioteleuton due to the influence of the preceding זָרִים. Note, however, that 1QIsa^a has the plene writing סְדוֹם for the city name Sodom.³
- n This translation of כְּעִיר נְצוּרָה (*kəʿīr nešūrā*), “like a blockaded city,” tries to maintain the normal meaning of the verb נָצַר (*nāšar*), “to guard” or “to watch,” assuming the enemy’s hostile guarding of a blockaded city (see Ezek 6:12; Jer 4:16), but this rendering is uncertain. The versions are consistent in translating the expression as “like a besieged city”; thus, commentators often suggest the emendation of נְצוּרָה (*nešūrā*) to נְשֻׁרָה (*nešūrā*) from צוּר (*sūr*), “to besiege,” but צוּר is not otherwise attested in the *niphal* conjugation. Moreover, either of these translations would seem to mean abandoning the metaphorical formulation of the two parallel lines for reality, since at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion, Jerusalem was, in fact, a blockaded or besieged city, but see below. It would also mean abandoning the syntactic and poetic pattern of the two parallel lines, “like a . . . in a . . .” To avoid these problems Wildberger adopts the emendation of כְּעִיר נְצוּרָה (*kəʿīr nešūrā*) to כְּעִיר בְּצִירָה (*kəʿayir bešīrā*), “like a donkey in a pen” (Wildberger, 1:19). The emendation of נְצוּרָה to בְּצִירָה is plausible, as is the meaning “pen” or “sheepfold” for בְּצִירָה, based on the Arabic cognate and the parallel in Mic 2:12.⁴ But the introduction of a donkey, where the two parallel lines have a structure of some sort, is awkward. Sennacherib speaks of shutting up Hezekiah “like a bird in a cage,” but the expression “like a donkey in a sheepfold” is otherwise unknown to me. Sheep growers in Texas sometimes put

3 See the discussion of this writing for *sodom* in E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a)* (STDJ 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974) 109–10, 504.

4 See Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 38.

an isolated donkey with a flock of sheep to ward off predators, but I am aware of no evidence that this practice was known in ancient Israel. The text may be corrupt, but none of the emendations so far suggested seems convincing. On the other hand, if the text dates to the time after Sennacherib's withdrawal, when Jerusalem was no longer under blockade, one could easily compare the isolated position of this surviving city in Hezekiah's decimated state of ruined cities with a besieged or blockaded city. Jerusalem's isolation remained just as palpable as when she was surrounded by Assyrian forts.

- o The *athmach* is under כַּמָּעַט (*kim'at*), which indicates that the MT read it with the preceding line, "Had not Yahweh of hosts left a remnant for us, just a little bit, we would. . . ." The syntactical parallel with Ps 94:17, however, suggests that כַּמָּעַט begins a new line. The versions' failure to represent כַּמָּעַט with a specific word in their translations is not sufficient textual evidence to delete the word.
- p LXX omits וּזְבָבִים (*ūkbāsīm*), "and lambs," but, given LXX's tendency to shorten lists, this omission is hardly evidence that LXX was following a shorter Hebrew *Vorlage*.⁵ Since the Greek translator had already used the word for lambs in the same verse to translate מְרִיאִים (*mērī'im*), "fattened cattle," he probably just opted not to repeat the word.⁶
- q The idiom "to see the face of" is widely used of a supplicant gaining an audience with a superior—a king, high official, or God. When used of a human superior, the verb רָאָה (*rā'ā*), "to see," in this idiom is always in the *qal* conjugation (Gen 43:3, 5; 44:23; Exod 10:28; 2 Sam 3:13; 2 Kgs 25:19; Jer 52:25). The same construction with the *qal* is also used when God tells Moses, "You cannot see my face, for no human can see me and live" (Exod 33:20). But in passages where a supplicant is seeking an audience with God, that is, visiting the sanctuary to worship, make offerings, and pray, the vast majority of MT manuscripts point the verb רָאָה as a *niphal* (Exod 23:15; 34:20, 24; Deut 31:11; Isa 1:12). This is clearly a secondary vocalization of the original idiom to avoid the notion that anyone could actually see God. In none of these texts does the consonantal form of רָאָה require that one analyze it as a *niphal*. In Isa 1:12, though the form is pointed as a *niphal* לְרִאֹת (*lērā'ot*), "to appear, be seen," the consonantal form, לְרִאוֹת, suggests that the form should be analyzed as a *qal* infinitive construct, לְרִאוֹת (*lir'ot*), "to see." The pattern for the *niphal* infinitive construct is normally either לְהִרְאֶה (*lēhērā'ō*, Judg 12:21; 1 Sam 3:21) or לְהִרְאוֹת (*lēhērā'ot*, 2 Sam 17:17; 1 Kgs 18:2; Ezek 21:29; Mal 3:2), not the anomalous לְרִאוֹת (*lērā'ot*) of the MT of Isa 1:12. It is possible that the initial *heh* of the *niphal* infinitive construct could be omitted by syncopation following a preposition, if בְּעֵטָה in Lam 2:11 is correct, but it is possible that the *qal* infinitive בְּעֵטָה, "to languish," should be read even there. In any case, Syriac's *lmhʒ* supports the analysis of לְרִאוֹת as a *qal*, and even the LXX's ὀφθῆναι μοι may be taken that way, since the LXX

uses the same idiom in Exod 10:28 (ἦ δ' ἂν ἡμέρα ὀφθῆς μοι ἀποθανῆ) to translate the *qal* construction בְּיָדֶיךָ יָרֵאֶנְיָ בְּפָנַי וְתָמוּתָה (bēyōm rē'ōlēkā pānay tāmūt), "On the day you see my face you will die." When the LXX follows the exegetical tradition behind the MT in avoiding the notion of seeing God, it uses the idiom ὀφθῆσι ἐνώπιον (Exod 23:15; 34:20; Deut 31:11) or ὀφθῆναι ἐναντίον (Exod 34:24), "to appear before."

- r The line division here follows the LXX. The MT line division in vv. 12-13 produces awkward syntax and poor parallelism:
 - When you come to see my face,
 - who sought this from your hand—the trampling of my courts?
 - Do not continue bringing a vain offering,
 - Incense is an abomination to me. . . .
 Wildberger wants to keep the MT line division, but "from your hand" does not fit very well if the demonstrative "this" is anticipating "the trampling of my courts." Thus, to save the MT's line division, he assumes that a whole line has been omitted between "face" and "who sought this," and he emends מִיְדֵיכֶם (*miyyedkem*), "from your hand," to מִנְחַתְּכֶם (*mē'ittēkem*), "from you":
 - When you come to see my face,
 -
 - Who demanded such from you,
 - so that one tramples my courts? (Wildberger, 1:32-33)
 Such radical textual surgery is too high a price to pay to preserve the MT's line division. With the line division suggested in my translation, "this" refers back to the multitude of animal sacrifices mentioned in v. 11, with which Yahweh was sated and which he did not desire.
- s The LXX suggests reading this line as a nominal clause, which requires only the minor change of deleting the *maqṣef*, which IQIsa^a does not have, and repointing מְנַחַת as a defectively written plural, which Syr. seems to have read—that is, correcting MT's מְנַחַת־שָׂוָן (*minhat-šāw*), "vain offering," to מְנַחַת־שָׂוָן (*minhōt šāw*), "bringing offerings is futile."
- t MT's וְעֵצְרָהּ וְאָשָׁרָא (*'āwen wa'āšārā*), "iniquity and solemn assembly," offers an odd parallelism that seems strangely out of place in a long list of cultic gatherings and activities. One could understand the phrase to mean that God cannot abide the mixture of cult and iniquity, but such an understanding anticipates too soon the explanation for Yahweh's disgust with the cult, which should be given only at the end of v. 15. Though the versions, apart from the LXX, support the MT's reading, the oddity of the MT's parallelism is reflected in the Syriac's mistranslation of the final term of the phrase, *d'p wdh bwšy*, "depravity and imprisonment." The LXX has *νηστείαν* for the first term, a reading that presupposes צוֹם (*sōm*), "fast," in its Hebrew *Vorlage*. This offers better parallelism, since צוֹם, "fast," and עֵצְרָהּ, "solemn assembly," are paired elsewhere (Joel 1:14; 2:15), and it keeps the first term in line with the other cultic terminology in the series.

5 H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah 1.11 and the Septuagint of Isaiah," in A. Graeme Auld, ed., *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George*

Wishart Anderson (JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 401-12.

6 *Ibid.*, 408.

- u The MT takes אָן וְעֶצְרָה as the concluding phrase of the preceding sentence, but that creates a very awkward construction with objects both before and after the verb, which would appear to require an anacoluthon: “New moon and sabbath, the calling of an assembly—I cannot endure iniquity (or fast) and solemn assembly.” The LXX, by contrast, allows the predicate לֹא-אֶחְבֵּל (*lōʾ-ʾákal*), “I cannot endure,” to conclude the sentence, and then begins the next sentence with וְעֶצְרָה צוֹם. This avoids the anacoluthon and allows the last sentence of v. 13 and both sentences of v. 14 to end with two-word predicates:
 לֹא-אֶחְבֵּל (*lōʾ-ʾákal*), “I cannot endure”
 שְׂנֵאָה נַפְשִׁי (*šānēʾā nāpšī*), “My soul hates”
 נִלְעִי נֶשֶׂא (*nilʾēti nēšōʾ*), “I am tired of bearing”
 This is certainly an improvement over the poetic structure of the MT.
- v The MT and the versions all seem to presuppose הַדְּשִׁיכֶם (*ḥodsēkem*), “your new moons,” but this is an awkward repetition of the same word from v. 13. Wildberger (1:34), following N. H. Tur-Sinai, suggests emending to הַחֲגִיכֶם (*ḥaggēkem*), “your festivals.” Since both words begin with the same letter, an early scribe could have miscopied the word due to the influence of the preceding חֲדָשׁ. One should also consider the possibility that the difficulties in vv. 13-14 are the result of secondary expansion of an originally shorter list of cultic events.
- w The antecedents that provide the third person plural subject of the verb הָיָה (*hāyū*), “have become,” are the fast, solemn assembly, festivals, and fixed seasons of the preceding sentence. It is these festivals that have become a burden to Yahweh. Because the LXX construes the following verb נָשָׂא (*nēšōʾ*), “to bear, carry,” as meaning, “to forgive,” it has taken the subject of הָיָה (*hāyū*) to be the people, and to make the sense clear, it has introduced the second person and has added three words not in its *Vorlage*: ἐγενήθητέ μοι εἰς πλησμον ἢν οὐκέτι ἀνήσω τὰς ἀμαρτίας ὑμῶν, “You have become a surfeit to me; I will no longer forgive your sins.” The Vulgate and the Syriac support the MT.
- x MT’s נִלְעִי נֶשֶׂא (*nilʾēti nēšōʾ*) is an unmarked relative clause with its understood object the burden consisting, as already noted, of the various religious celebrations mentioned in the preceding sentence, that is, “your festivals . . . have become a burden to me (that) I am tired of bearing.” Nonetheless, Isaiah may have chosen the verb נָשָׂא here because of a possible double entendre. Though, given the preceding subject, the primary sense of the verb here seems to be “to bear” or “to carry,” the same verb is often used in the sense “to carry away or forgive sins,” and there may be undertones of the reading suggested by LXX and Tg.: if God is weary of Israel’s rituals, God may also be weary of forgiving.
- y LXX adds “to me” to make it clear that this is a gesture of entreaty and prayer to God.
- z 1QIsa^a adds a parallel line, אֲצַבְעוֹתֵיכֶם בְּעָוֹן (*ʾešbēʿōtēkem beʿāʾwōn*), “your fingers with iniquity,” but this seems to be a secondary expansion under the influence of Isa 59:3, where the verb is נָגַאֵל and both דָּם and עוֹן are construed with the preposition:
 כִּי כַפֵּיכֶם נִגְאָלוּ בַדָּם (*ki kappēkem nēgōʾālū baddām*), “Because your hands are polluted with blood,”
 וְאֲצַבְעוֹתֵיכֶם בְּעָוֹן (*wəʿešbēʿōtēkem beʿāwōn*), “and your fingers with iniquity.”
- *a Instead of “of your deeds,” LXX has “from your souls.”
- *b MT has הַמּוֹץ (*hāmōš*), which by form should either designate the action, “oppression,” or perhaps the agent of the action, “the oppressor.” The versions, however, are consistent in rendering this word with a passive, which suggests that one repeat the word to הַמּוֹץ (*hāmūs*), “the oppressed, the wronged.” A rendering, “right the oppression,” however, remains possible.
- *c MT has שָׁנִים (*šānīm*), “scarlet,” which is presumably the plural, though one might explain the final *mem* as the enclitic *mem* on a singular form. 1QIsa^a has the singular שָׁנִי, and since LXX, Syr., and Vg. all reflect the singular, it is probably the better reading.
- *d Instead of MT’s two distinct third person plural verbs, LXX repeats the same first person singular verb with God as the subject: λευκανῶ, “I will make white.”
- *e LXX adds the first person pronoun for clarity: ἐὰν θέλητε καὶ εἰσακούσητέ μου, “if you are willing and will obey me.”
- *f LXX repeats the same verbs from the contrasting line in v. 19 and again attaches the pronoun: ἐὰν δὲ μὴ θέλητε μηδὲ εἰσακούσητέ μου, “but if you are not willing and will not obey me.”
- *g MT’s הָרֶבֶץ (*herēb*), “sword,” is to be construed as an adverbial accusative and is probably original. 1QIsa^a adds the preposition, בַּחֶרֶב, “by the sword,” and Syr. does the same, but the preposition is probably a later addition to clarify the sense of the more difficult accusative construction. Neither LXX nor Vg. had the preposition in their Hebrew *Vorlage*, since they make sword the subject of the verb, “the sword shall eat you.”

Commentary

Many scholars divide this speech into as many as four separate units: (1) vv. 2-3; (2) vv. 4-9; (3) vv. 10-17; and (4) vv. 18-20.⁷ Verses 4-9 may also have existed at one

time as a separate oracle independent of this context, since the introductory particle הִיָּהוּ (*hōy*), “Hey!” normally introduces a new unit. This is not always the case, however, as J. T. Willis points out with reference to Jer 47:6;

7 Wildberger, 1:9, 18–20, 32–37, 50–51; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 30–35; Joseph Jensen, *Isaiah*

1–39 (Old Testament Message 8; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984) 39-47.

50:27; Zech 11:17; and Isa 1:24.⁸ Verses 10-17 may also have once been an independent piece, but the case for vv. 2-3 and 18-20 ever existing as complete, independent oracles is not very strong. In the present context, vv. 2-20 form a literary unit; there are transitions at vv. 4, 10, and 18, but these transitions are better explained as rhetorical shifts within a single speech. There are numerous indications of literary unity in the passage. Verses 4-9 are linked to vv. 2-3 by the shared motif of disobedient “sons” (1:2, 4) and to vv. 10-17 by the repetition of “Sodom” and “Gomorrhah” (1:9,10). Verses 18-20 are linked to vv. 10-17 by the continuation of the series of imperatives in vv. 16-17 (1:18), and the theme of ritual purification. They are connected to vv. 4-9 by the motif of eating the good of the land (1:7, 19), and they are tied to vv. 2-3 by a striking literary and ideological *inclusio*, since both v. 2 and v. 20 have the phrase יהוה דבר כי (פי) *(kî [pî] YHWH dibbēr)*, “for (the mouth of) Yahweh has spoken,” and v. 2 opens with a typical lawsuit formula (see below) while vv. 19-20, with their choice of life or death, the blessing or the curse, conclude on the same note.

Moreover, the parallels with Deuteronomy 32, Mic 6:1-8, and Psalm 50 support the analysis of Isa 1:2-20 as a single speech. All of these texts involve a lawsuit between God and the people, and all of them call on heaven and earth, or other personified elements of the natural world, to listen to the case. Following this appeal in each of

these texts, the prophet, or God, or both in turn, address God’s people directly. This address is characterized by direct questions to Israel. It may concentrate on Yahweh’s gracious treatment of Israel in the past, on Israel’s disobedience, or on both, Yahweh’s graciousness serving as a foil to make Israel’s sin even more heinous. Just as in Isa 1:11-15, Psalm 50 and Micah 6 play down sacrifice in discussing what Yahweh really demands of his people. The recognition of the lawsuit in 1:2-20 clarifies the way in which these verses fit together as a coherent structure, in which the narrative moves logically from v. 2 to v. 20.

Even when one allows for individual variation in formulation, the striking similarities in thought and structure between this group of texts suggest that they represent a single genre rooted in the same ideological background. Psalm 50:5, 16 explicitly connect God’s lawsuit to the covenant, so if one is willing to recognize the commonality of these texts, it is difficult to fault the designation of the genre as a “covenant lawsuit.”⁹ All these texts are presented as lawsuits filed by God against the people based on the conception that lies behind Deut 4:23-26; 30:19; and 31:24-30, where heaven and earth are called upon to be witnesses to the covenant between Yahweh and his people. The covenant established between Yahweh and Israel by Moses was in many ways analogous to ancient political treaties made between great kings and their vassals.¹⁰ Those treaties typically contain a long

8 J. T. Willis, “The First Pericope in the Book of Isaiah,” *VT* 34 (1984) 63–77.

9 Julien Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l’alliance* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962); Harvey, “Le ‘Rib-Pattern’: Réquisitoire prophétique sur la rupture de l’alliance,” *Bib* 43 (1962) 172–96; H. B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *JBL* 78 (1959) 285–95; J. J. M. Roberts, “Zion in the Theology of the Davidic and Solomonic Empire,” in Tomoo Ishida, ed., *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5–7 December 1979* (Tokyo: Yama-kawa-Shuppansha; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982) 93–108; G. Ernest Wright, “The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32,” in Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson, eds., *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (New York: Harper, 1962).

10 There are scores of such treaties extant from second-millennium BCE Mesopotamia (Dominique

Charpin, “Une alliance contre l’Elam et le rituel du *lipit napištim*,” in François Vallat, ed., *Contribution à l’histoire de l’Iran: Mélanges offerts à Jean Perrot* [Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1990] 109–18; Dominique Charpin, “Un traité entre Zimri-Lim de Mari et Ibâl-pî-El II d’Ešnunna,” in Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannés, eds., *Marchands, diplomates et empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Gareil* [Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1991] 139–66, 7 plates; J.-M. Durand, “Fragments rejoints pour une histoire élamite,” in L. de Meyer, H. Gasche, and F. Vallat, eds., *Fragmenta Historiae Elamicae: Mélanges offerts à M. J. Stève* [Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1986] 111–28; J. Eidem, “An Old Assyrian Treaty from Tell Leilan,” in Charpin and Joannés, *Marchands, diplomates et empereurs*, 185–207; and, in the same volume, F. Joannés, “Le traité de vassalité d’Atamrum d’Andarig envers Zimri-Lim de Mari,” 167–77) and from the region controlled by the Hittites (Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* [WAW

list of the gods of both states as well as personified elements of the natural world that were to serve as witnesses and guarantors of the treaty. If either party broke the treaty, the divine witnesses were to give their judgment against the guilty party. Given Yahweh's demand for sole allegiance, his treaty with Israel could hardly invoke other gods as witnesses and guarantors of this legal contract, but apparently the invocation of personified elements of the natural world such as heaven and earth, hills and mountains, did not create the same theological problems. Since these elements of nature had witnessed Israel's acceptance of the covenant, Yahweh could summon them, when Israel broke the covenant, to testify in his legal process against Israel. Nature was not only a witness to the covenant, however; it was also a guarantor. According to the prophets, human rebellion led to convulsions in nature—drought, famine, and plague (Jer 4:19-26; Hos 4:1-3; Amos 4:6-11), some of the curses for breach of covenant listed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28.

The covenant lawsuit in Isa 1:2-20 has the following structure. It begins with the prophet's appeal to heaven and earth to hear God's complaint about his foolish children, which the prophet quotes (vv. 2-3). Then the prophet appeals directly to those children, berating

them and pointing out the consequences of their foolish behavior (vv. 4-9). The speaker in this whole section must be the prophet, since he identifies himself with his people in v. 9. In v. 10 the prophet again calls for the attention of the people, and especially of the leaders, since he is about to give another direct quotation from Yahweh. The import of Yahweh's word is to reject sacrificial ritual as an inappropriate response to Israel's sin; obedience is what is demanded (vv. 10-17). Yahweh's speech continues with an invitation to Israel to think over the divine terms; their response will determine whether they live or die. That is Yahweh's final word (vv. 18-20).

Isa 1:2-3

The reason for the appeal to heaven and earth is that, as already noted, heaven and earth were invoked as witnesses when God made his covenant with Israel (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Ps 50:4; cf. Mic 6:1-2).¹¹ Now they are invoked as witnesses to Israel's breach of that same covenant. The formula is part of the old traditional language inherited from the realm of international treaty making,¹² the political model early Israel adapted to express its relationship to Yahweh, but the theologically significant point is that Israel's behavior is sinful precisely

7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996]). For a treatment of the these earlier known treaties, see Guy Kestemont, *Diplomatique et droit international en Asie occidentale: 1600-1200 av. J. C.* (Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 9; Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1974). There are also numerous Assyrian treaties from the first millennium BCE (Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* [SAA 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988]). Though there are parallels between the Israelite material and the Assyrian treaties, particularly with regard to the covenant curses, the closest parallels to the Israelite material are the earlier Hittite treaties, which contained not just curses but both a blessing if one kept the treaty and curses if one did not, and which rooted the vassal's obedience in his gratitude for the prior graciousness of the suzerain, not in the sheer terror that was the motivating factor in the Assyrian treaties. The Hittite treaties typically contain a historical narrative or prologue detailing the previous gracious actions of the suzerain to his vassal, and this element is conspicuously lacking in the preserved Assyrian treaties. In addition to the extant treaties, there are references

in extrabiblical texts to lawsuits decided by the gods due to the breach of treaty on the part of one of the parties to the treaty (see esp. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*).

11 Despite claims to the contrary (Clements, 30), there is not the slightest evidence for the appeal to heaven and earth in ordinary legal practice at the village gates. One called human witnesses to testify to the truth or falsity of competing claims in ordinary village law. The appeal to the gods and deified elements of the universe comes from international law, where a dispute between two nations can be settled only by a decision of the gods who witnessed the prior agreement between the nations.

12 As an example of summoning the gods as witnesses to the breach of treaty, note the language of the treaty between Suppiluliuma of Hatti and Shattiwaza of Mittanni: "Whoever . . . alters this tablet, or sets it in a secret location—if he breaks it, if he changes the words of the text of the tablet—we have summoned the gods of secrets and the gods who are guarantors of the oath. They shall stand and listen and be witnesses" (Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 42-44). There follows then a long list of gods, including

because it involves a breach of contract. It is not the behavior God could legitimately expect of his people.

This is elaborated in the following lines about the rebellious sons. The shift to familial imagery has suggested to some scholars that Isaiah's imagery is rooted in the language of family law (Deut 21:18-21), not covenantal law,¹³ but the shift does not represent a real shift in thought. Familial imagery was widely used in covenant language. A great king was typically referred to as his subordinate's "father" (*CAD* A1, *abu* 2.b, 71) while his subordinate vassal was typically referred to as the great king's "son" (*CAD* M1, *māru* 3.a, 314). Moreover, the designation of Israel as Yahweh's "son" or "sons" in the earlier literature is closely tied in with the exodus and covenant that created the people Israel (Exod 4:22-23; Hos 1:10; 11:1-5; Deut 32:5-18). The parallels with the old poem in Deuteronomy 32 are particularly striking.¹⁴ Both texts begin with an appeal to heaven and earth (Deut 32:1//Isa 1:2); both refer to Israel as God's rebellious and foolish children (Deut 32:5-6//Isa 1:2-6); both use birth or child-rearing imagery of God (Deut 32:18//Isa 1:2); both mention Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut 32:32//Isa 1:9); and both present a choice between life and death (Deut 32:39//Isa 1:18-20).

Just as children should obey their parents or vassals their overlord, so Israel should have obeyed Yahweh, but instead they rebelled against him. "Rebelled" is primarily

a political term and shows again that the prophet is thinking in legal categories derived from international law.

The invidious comparison of Israel to dumb animals in v. 3 is intended to underscore how foolish the people's rebellion against God is. Even oxen and asses show more sense; they at least recognize their owner and the source of their food. A similar use of animal imagery involving the verb "to know" is found in Jer 8:7. Both texts underscore the biblical conception that righteousness and wisdom go together, that wickedness is folly. This is a favorite theme of the wisdom literature (Prov 1:20-33; 2:1-22), and Isaiah's almost proverbial reference to the ox and the ass may reflect the influence of that tradition on Isaiah.¹⁵

Isaiah, however, seems to be playing with different meanings of the verb "to know." The ambiguity in his use of the verb is underlined by the lack of an explicit object in v. 3b. What does Israel not know? What do the people not perceive? The LXX was bothered by the omission of the object and supplied the word "me." Israel did not "know" God. That would correspond to the ox "knowing" its owner, but it also comes close to the technical use of "to know" in treaty texts where the verb has the meaning "acknowledge" or "recognize someone as overlord or vassal," that is, to protect a vassal or obey an overlord.¹⁶ Israel's problem was not religious ignorance in the sense that they failed to acknowledge God with the confession of their lips—they honored God with their lips

among the specifically named gods of Hatti, Mittanni, and the wider region, the deified mountains Nanni and Hazzi, the mountains, the rivers, the sea, the Euphrates, heaven and earth, the winds, and the clouds. The text then continues, "They shall stand and listen and be witnesses to these words of the treaty. If you, Prince Shattiwaza, and you Hurrians do not observe the words of the treaty, the gods, lords of the oath, shall destroy you [and] you Hurrians, together with your land, your wives, and your possessions. . . . If you, Prince Shattiwaza, and you Hurrians observe this treaty and oath, these gods shall protect you, Shattiwaza, together with your wife, [daughter of the King] of Hatti, her sons and grandsons, and you Hurrians. . . ."

13 Clements, 30; Jensen, 39; Hayes and Irvine, 71.

14 Paul Sanders notes the "remarkable correspondences" between Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 1:2-20, and comments that "if there is a direct relationship Deut. 32 would probably have the priority," though

Sanders thinks the relationship is indirect (*The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* [OTS 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996] 355. He is arguing against H. Louis Ginsberg, who argued that Deuteronomy 32 was itself largely inspired by Isaiah (*The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* [Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 24; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982] 93). In contrast, I think the relationship between Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 1:2-20 is direct, and that Isaiah was influenced by the Deuteronomic text. See also L. G. Rignell, "Isaiah Chapter I: Some Exegetical Remarks with Special Reference to the Relationship between the Text and the Book of Deuteronomy," *ST* 11 (1957) 140-58.

15 The wisdom tradition delighted in speaking of the animal world in comparisons relevant for instructing humans in wise behavior (1 Kgs 5:13 [Eng. 4:33]; Prov 6:6; 7:22; 14:4; 15:16; 26:2-3; 30:25-28; Sir 33:25; cf. Wildberger, 1:14-15).

16 H. B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew

(Isa 29:13)—their problem was the failure to acknowledge God by the obedience of their lives. The same point is expressed very well by Jesus in Luke 6:46: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” This concept that knowing God involved obedient submission to the divine will was a major theme of Hosea’s message as well (Hos 4:1-2).

One could also supply an object on the analogy of the ass knowing “its master’s crib.” The ass knows where it is fed, but Israel does not recognize the source of its blessings. Like the faithless wife in Hos 2:10, Israel does not know that it was Yahweh who gave it its grain, wine, oil, silver, and gold. Hosea and Isaiah both speak of the people perishing “for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6; Isa 5:13), but, although they deal with the same problem and Isaiah was probably influenced by Hosea,¹⁷ the source of the problem is different in the two cases. Hosea’s northern audience falsely attributed their blessings to the pagan deity Baal. Isaiah’s southern audience, at least as envisioned by the final shape of this text, does not appear to have consisted of idolaters of quite the same sort. Their selfish indulgence in God’s gifts had simply obscured their vision of the giver and his purpose for the gifts (Isa 5:12). A socially oppressive materialism rather than simple idolatry was the source of their willful ignorance (Isa 30:9-11).

Finally, one could supply an object for the verb “to know” in terms of the following context, particularly vv. 5-9. Israel does not perceive the predicament it is in. Like Ephraim in Hos 7:9, Israel has not recognized the precariousness of its position.¹⁸ Israel is unwilling to face up to the unpleasant reality and persists in living in a fool’s paradise (cf. Isa 9:9).

One need not decide among these candidates for the object of the verb. Isaiah’s omission of the object with the resulting ambiguity is probably intentional; it invites the reader to reflect on each of these ways in which Israel has not understood and to ask the question whether we too may not be characterized by similar willful ignorance.

Isa 1:4-9

The vocative particle הוּי (*hōy*) has its closest English correspondence in the colloquial interjection, “Hey!” It normally introduces a new oracle, except when it occurs in a series, but in Isa 1:4, as in 1:24, it simply calls attention, perhaps in a spoken context, to a logical shift in the larger composition. The oracle began with an address to heaven and earth as witnesses. Now the prophet turns and directly addresses God’s people, the accused, as in the parallels Deut 32:6; Mic 6:3; Ps 50:7. Since v. 4 opens with a vocative particle and leads up to the second person address in v. 5, everything in between should be read as direct address, as the NEB and TEV have correctly seen.

The series of epithets that Isaiah hurls upon his audience underscores both the enormity and the ongoing character of their rebellion. Moreover, if Isaiah’s horrible epithets for Israel underscore their alienation from God, the prophet’s epithet for God, “the Holy One of Israel,” expands that gulf while pointing to the relationship that should exist between God and his people. This epithet occurs twelve times in First Isaiah (1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11-12, 15; 31:1; 37:23) and thirteen times in the later Isaianic tradition (41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14), but otherwise its occurrence is limited to one passage in Kings (2 Kgs 19:22), a couple of passages in Jeremiah (Jer 50:29; 51:5) and three times in the Psalms (Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:19). It is one of Isaiah’s favorite epithets for God, and if Isaiah did not coin the epithet, it nonetheless reflects the impression his inaugural vision of Yahweh’s holiness (Isa 6:1-5) had on the prophet’s understanding of God. For Isaiah, Yahweh alone was exalted, unapproachable in his majesty and sanctity; yet he had condescended to bring Israel into his awesome fellowship (cf. Exod 24:9-11) and had made his abode in Israel (Isa 12:6). How shocking, then, that Israel had deserted, despised, and turned its back on such a God.

Yādaʿ,” *BASOR* 181 (1966) 31-37; S. B. Parker, “A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yādaʿ*,” *BASOR* 181 (1966) 36-38. Contrast Dennis J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Richmond: John Knox, 1972) 78.

17 There are several points of contact between the two books on the theme of knowledge in this section (see

below), and one will find additional points of contact between Isa 1:21-26 and Hos 4:15-19 and 9:15.

18 Note that in both Hos 7:9 and Isa 1:7 the verb *ʾākal* (“devour”) is used with the subject *zārīm* (“foreigners”) to describe the destruction of God’s people.

Such foolish behavior brings its appropriate punishment, and this provokes Isaiah's question why Israel persists in behavior that can only lead to more suffering. Verse 5, which finally introduces the main clause following the vocative epithets and relative clauses in v. 4, actually contains a double question, "Hey, sinful nation . . . , why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you continue to rebel?" The folly of continuing this behavior is spelled out by describing God's people under the metaphor of a body that is just covered with a mass of untreated wounds and bruises. Enough is enough. It is time Israel learned from their punishments.

In v. 7, the body metaphor is dropped for a realistic description of a land devastated by war. The description in its present form appears to reflect and show dependence on the common rhetoric of Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions—*āla appul aqqr ina išati ašrup ākulšu*, "The city I devastated, destroyed, burned with fire, consumed it,"¹⁹ but at the same time it probably reflects the actual desolation caused by Sennacherib's campaign against Hezekiah in 701 BCE, when Sennacherib took forty-six of Judah's walled cities, exiled 200,150 of its citizens, and

shut Hezekiah up in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage."²⁰ Sennacherib also took away part of Hezekiah's territory and imposed a heavy tribute. Zion, a poetic name for Jerusalem, was actually left standing as the only significant unconquered city in Judah.

Against this background of military defeat, Isaiah's designation of God in v. 9 as Yahweh of hosts sounds polemical. The original meaning of the epithet is still debated,²¹ but "hosts" probably refers to Yahweh's heavenly army of royal attendants (1 Kgs 22:19),²² and the epithet points to Yahweh's great imperial power. It was closely associated with the cherubim throne on the ark of the covenant at Shiloh (1 Sam 1:3, 11; 2 Sam 6:2). Later, when the ark was moved to Jerusalem, the epithet came to figure prominently in the imperial theology of Jerusalem (Pss 24:10; 46:8, 12; 48:9; 84:2, 4, 9, 13; 89:9). It is one of Isaiah's favorite designations for God, occurring some fifty-six times in Isaiah 1–39, but its occurrence here is hardly by chance. Judah's devastating defeat could have been seen as Yahweh's defeat at the hand of more powerful Assyrian gods, but Isaiah suggests instead that it was Yahweh's own might that was behind Judah's defeat.

19 Peter Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983) 719–37, here 724–25.

20 *ANET*, 288; Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924) 32–34; A. Kirk Grayson and Jaime Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC)*, Part 1 (RINAP 3/1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

21 The most promising suggestion is that of Frank Moore Cross, who argued that *yahweh šēbā'ôt* originated as a verbal epithet for the god El, *ʿēl dū yahwī šēbā'ôt*, "El who creates the heavenly armies" (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973] 68–72). For other views, see Wildberger, 1:28–29. Once the epithet had become an independent divine name for the deity, and *yahweh*, without the following expression, had become the most common name for Israel's deity, the meaning of the original verbal expression, especially as late as the late eighth century, was probably forgotten, and *yahweh šēbā'ôt* was probably understood, however anomalously from the standpoint of ordinary Hebrew grammar, simply as a proper name in construct with the following noun, "Yahweh of hosts." One might compare the similarly anoma-

lous, but inscriptionally attested construct chains, "Yahweh of Samaria" and "Yahweh of Teman," or more directly, *ršp šbi*, "Resheph of the Host" (F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow, and R. E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005] 285, 290–92). It is true that 1 Kgs 22:19 uses the singular *šēbā'*, "host," not the plural *šēbā'ôt*, "hosts," and that only the singular is attested in the twenty-two or so references to the "host of heaven," but I doubt that much significance should be attached to that observation. Apart from the divine epithet, the singular form is far more common in general, but where variation between the singular and plural is attested, it does not appear to alter the meaning. Note the variation in reference to Abner and Amasa, the commanders of the hosts (*šārē šib'ôt*) of Israel (1 Kgs 2:5), versus Abner, the commander of the host (*šar-šēbā'*) of Israel, and Amasa, the commander of the host (*šar-šēbā'*) of Judah (1 Kgs 2:34). One should also note the variation between the singular and the plural when referring to the host or hosts of the tribes of Israel (Num 1:45, 52; 2:3–4; et passim). See also Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 70–71; and Wildberger, 1:28–29.

Had it not been for the grace of the divine ruler of the heavenly hosts, the destruction of Jerusalem would have been as complete as the proverbial destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Isa 1:10-17

In v. 10 the prophet again calls for attention before quoting Yahweh's words in vv. 11-20. This time, however, he narrows in on the leaders as well as the people of Judah. He calls them "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah," thus creating a link with v. 9; but in doing so the prophet picks up another undertone in this ancient parallel to the Jerusalem of his day. The rulers and people were citizens of a devastated state, but that state had been destroyed because of its wickedness, a wickedness that, like its desolation, rivaled that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The ritual activity described in vv. 11-15 is probably to be seen as Judah's reaction to the disaster. Such disasters normally led to public fasts and additional sacrifices, as well as more punctilious observance of the regular rituals in an attempt to placate the anger of God and so prevent further losses (Hos 5:6; 5:15–6:3; Jer 14:1-12). In the context of such public assemblies, prophets would arise to give Yahweh's response (Jer 14:10-12; 15:1-4; Hos 6:4-6), and Isaiah's words are best understood as such a response. In God's lawsuit against Israel, he not only points up Israel's rebellion as the cause of its troubles; he also rejects the sacrificial ritual as an adequate remedy for the situation. Yahweh, who ordained the cult, is tired of church services. Sacrifices, regular festivals like sabbaths and new moons, special assemblies for fasting and public lamentation, and even the great yearly festivals had become a burden to God.

The purpose of the sacrificial ritual was to maintain the relationship with the deity, and that involved, among other things, seeking forgiveness for any sins that might rupture the relationship. As long as the relationship was maintained, one could hope and expect that the deity would respond to the people's needs and desires. But God threatens to refuse to look when the Israelites

spread out their hands in prayer and to refuse to listen even if they persist in their supplications. God's refusal to hear prayer underscores, as nothing else would, the failure of the cult, but it also shows that Isaiah's criticism was not a rejection of the sacrificial cult per se; he was hardly against prayer. Why had the cult and prayer failed? The answer is graphically given in v. 15. The hands stretched forth in prayer were full of דָּמִים (*dāmîm*), "blood." This is not the דָּם (*dām*), "blood," of the sacrificial animals mentioned in v. 11, since the plural דָּמִים has a more precise meaning. It refers primarily to human blood shed by violence, particularly unjustified violence, and the blood guilt that splatters on the one guilty of such bloodshed. Thus, if one kills a burglar in the act of breaking in, presumably at night, there is no דָּמִים, but if one kills the thief the next day, presumably after the thief has left one's home and is therefore no longer a threat to one's person, there is דָּמִים (Exod 22:1-2).²³ As the following verses show, Isaiah was thinking primarily of acts of violence perpetrated against the weakest members of Israelite society.

The relationship with God sustained by the cult had been shattered by the people's mistreatment of the powerless. Ritual was meaningless until that relationship was restored by a dramatic change in the people's behavior. Ritualistic language is used in v. 16, "wash, cleanse yourself," but the following imperatives show that this language is metaphorical. They are to cleanse themselves not by ritual ablutions and bloody sacrifices but by turning away from their evil deeds and learning to do good, by saving the oppressed and seeing justice done for the powerless. The call for repentance here is a call to reverse the pattern of rebellious behavior attacked in vv. 2-4.

The formulations in v. 17 are very terse and require some comment. There is considerable uncertainty about the correct translation of אֲשֶׁרֵי תְמוּן (*'aššērū ḥāmôš*), "right the wronged." In addition to the problem discussed in the textual notes whether to take תְמוּן as the action, the agent, or the passive recipient of the action, there is debate about the meaning of the verb אֲשֶׁר. G. R.

23 Or, perhaps, if the incident happened at night, the thief may be killed, because the owner could not be sure whether it was a thief or a potential murderer, whereas in the daylight it should have been clear that it was merely a thief, and thus not deserving of death. For a discussion of the passage and the

sources, see Samuel Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011) 215–18.

Driver, on the basis of the Aramaic root, renders it as “strengthen,”²⁴ though looking to the Aramaic or the Syriac root, as Rignell’s “be good to the oppressed” does, is rightly criticized by Wildberger.²⁵ The versions give widely varying translations. The LXX translates the term with *ῥύσασθε*, “deliver, save, rescue”; Vg. has *subvenite*, “come to the assistance of”; Syr. *ʿḥbw*, “treat well”; and the Tg. *זכו*, “acquit.” The Hebrew verb sometimes has the meaning “proceed, go on, advance” (Prov 4:14), and it sometimes means “to lead on” (Prov 23:19; Isa 3:12; 9:15). The last meaning has overtones of leading in the right direction, as is clear from its ironic juxtaposition with its opposite in the two Isaiah passages, that is, Israel’s leaders (*מְאַשְׁרִים*, *mēʾaššērîm*) are misleaders (*מַתְעִים*, *matʿîm*) who lead Israel astray from the right path (Isa 3:12; 9:15). Since injustice is often portrayed as turning someone aside (*hiphil* of *נָטָה*, *nāṭâ*) from justice, the way, or into ruin (Isa 10:2; 29:21; Amos 5:12; Mal 3:5; Job 24:4; Prov 18:5), one should probably understand the verb *אָשַׁר* in Isa 1:17 as the corrective to such action, that is, “to set the mistreated back on the road to justice.”

A similar background lies behind the usage of the following two verbs. While the verb *שָׁפַט* (*šāpat*) can mean simply “to render judgment,” and *רִיב* (*riḇ*), “to plead or conduct a legal case,” it is clear from the context that this action is for the benefit of the widow and the orphan (cf. Ps 82:2-3). Part of the reason for this usage is that the major obstacle in the way of the widow or the orphan getting justice was the difficulty of ever getting one’s case heard in court. Even today, the wealthy and powerful can delay cases brought against them by the poor until most give up in despair, and in ancient Israel the situation was even worse. Unless the widow or orphan had an influential advocate, they had little hope of even having their case heard, much less decided in their favor.

Isa 1:18-20

Verse 18 continues the preceding sequence of imperatives, but there is a slight transition, as Yahweh now invites Israel to consider the alternatives. The word *וְנִכְחְתָּהּ* (*wəniwwākēhâ*), translated “(and) let us reach an agreement,” has a legal background and refers to the arbitration of legal disputes (Job 23:7). Yahweh offers to resolve his dispute with Israel on the basis of the change of behavior demanded above. No matter how red their sins—an allusion to the blood-stained hands of v. 15—they can become clean, if the people will respond in obedience. If they obey, God will hear their prayers and cure their distress. They, rather than the foreign oppressor (1:7), will eat the good of the land. If they refuse, however, the present distress will reach its climax, and they themselves will be eaten—by the sword. This is a clear, powerful metaphor, and there is no justification for correcting the text.

The choice is clear: life or death, the blessing or the curse. It is the choice of living in covenant with Yahweh or rejecting that fellowship (Deut 30:15-20). With this offer, the covenant lawsuit concludes almost as it began (1:2), “for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”

This passage has been characterized as a summary of Isaiah’s message used to introduce the whole following collection of his oracles, and, correctly understood, this characterization is appropriate.²⁶ It invites God’s people today to reflect on their own relationship to the deity. In light of God’s prior graciousness and acceptance of us, he could legitimately expect the grateful response of obedient lives. When we fail to acknowledge God in this way, we are choosing the foolish way of the man who built his house upon the sand (Matt 7:24-27). Not every sorrow that afflicts us can be attributed to our rebellion, and Isaiah’s condemnation of Israel should not be twisted in this

24 G. R. Driver, “Linguistic and Textual Problems: Isaiah I–XXXIX,” *JTS* 38 (1937) 37.

25 Rignell, “Isaiah Chapter I,” 151; Wildberger, 1:34.

26 This characterization has become a scholarly commonplace for Isa 1:2-31 since G. Fohrer’s “Jesaja I als Zusammenfassung der Verkündigung Jesaja,” *ZAW* 74 (1962) 251–68, though John Willis (“First Pericope,” 77) has made some necessary corrections to the way this view is often understood. Willis restricts the passage to vv. 2-20, rejects the notion

that this is the summarizing rearrangement of a later redactor, and notes, “[I]t may be that vv. 2-20 appear to be a summary of the prophet’s message because he delivered this oracle near the end of his long career, when the various major emphases of his earlier oracles were paramount in his mind and seemed to be appropriate to the new situation with which the people were faced, a situation strikingly similar to several former ones experienced during his lifetime.”

false and harmful way; but often we do destroy our own lives, our churches, and even our nation by our refusal to give up sinful, self-destructive behavior. Nor does church and religious activity provide an easy fix. Ritual is not a substitute for ethical and moral transformation but, properly understood, an enabler of such change. God

calls us to a hard choice. We may choose life by paradoxically surrendering our autonomy in obedience to God as suzerain, or choose death by refusing to give up the foolish illusion that we are masters of our own lives (Matt 10:39; Gal 2:20). These are the narrow and broad ways of which Jesus also spoke (Matt 7:13-14).

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1

- 21/ **How she has become a whore!**
The faithful city,^a
That was full of justice,
Where righteousness dwelled—
But now murderers!
- 22/ **Your silver has become dross,**
Your beer^b is diluted^c with water.
- 23/ **Your royal officials are rebels**
And companions of thieves;
Everyone loves a bribe
And runs after gifts.
They do not render judgment for the orphan,
And the widow's lawsuit never reaches them.
- 24/ **Therefore says the Lord, Yahweh of Hosts,**
the Mighty Bull of Israel:^d
"Hey! I will console myself against my foes,
I will avenge myself on my enemies!
- 25/ **I will turn my hand against you,**
And smelt your dross like a furnace,^e
And remove all your slag.
- 26/ **I will restore your judges as at the first,**
And your counselors as in the beginning.
After that you will be called
The city of righteousness, faithful city."
- 27/ **Zion will be redeemed by justice,**
And those in her who repent^f by righteousness;
- 28/ **But rebels and sinners will be shattered^g together,**
and those who forsake Yahweh will perish.

Textual Notes

- a The Hebrew noun *qiryā* and the participle modifying it *neʾēmānā*, "the faithful city," lack the article, but the absence of the article is common in Hebrew poetry. It is clear that the text is referring to the particular city Jerusalem; the LXX even adds *Σιων*, "Zion," to identify explicitly the city in question as Jerusalem. Thus, a translation with the indefinite article such as "a faithful city" can hardly be correct.
- b LXX (*οἱ κάπηλοί σου*) and Syr. (*hnyyky*) appear to take MT's *סֹבְיָן* (*sobʾēk*) not as a suffixed word for a drink but as a suffixed word for the dispensers of the drink, "your tavern keepers." The Syriac has no word for the drink, "Your tavern keepers mix (drinks) with water." The LXX has *τὸν οἶνον* for the drink, "Your tavern keepers mix the wine with water." Hebrew *סֹבְיָן* (*sōbeʾ*), however, clearly means the drink, not its dispensers, though there is debate whether it designates a kind of beer or a kind of wine. The JPS and the NRSV translations follow the LXX and the Vg. in rendering the word as "wine." The Akkadian cognates, however, suggest a beer, perhaps even a distinctive kind of beer sold in taverns. See Akk. *sibu*, *sābu* (beer); *būt sibi* (house of beer, tavern); *sābu*, *sābitu* (innkeeper, beer merchant); *sabū* (to draw beer) (*CAD* S, 5), to brew beer (*AHW*, 1000a). The word *sibu* is probably to be identified with the *ši-kar si-bi-i* beer served in a tavern, and this "tavern beer" must have had a distinctive flavor; compare modern draught
- beer (M. Stol, "Beer in Neo-Babylonian Times," in Lucio Milano, ed., *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East. Papers of a Symposium Held in Rome, May 17–19, 1990* [HANE/S 6; Padua: Sargon, 1994] 164–65). Regardless of whether there is any linguistic connection, one should note that in Jerome's day there was a beer drunk in Illyria with a very similar name, *sabaium* (Hieronymus *Comm. Isa.* 7.19.10, lines 48–51; see also Ammianus Marcellinus 26.8.2).
- c The form *מְהוּל* (*māhûl*) is the *qal* passive participle from a very rare verb meaning "to dilute." It may be a biform of the verb *מול* (*mûl*), "to circumcise," with the semantic development "to cut something with water," hence "to dilute." See the discussion in H. G. M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27* (3 vols.; ICC 23; London: T&T Clark, 2006–) 1:121, 138.
- d The LXX mistakenly construes the following הוֹי (*hōy*) as addressing the preceding *יְשָׁרְאֵל אֲבִיר* (*ʾābîr yiśrāʾēl*) and translates, *οὐαὶ οἱ ισχυροὶτες Ἰσραηλ*, "Ah, O strong ones of Israel," apparently misreading the expression *יְשָׁרְאֵל אֲבִיר* as a plural form *יְשָׁרְאֵל אֲבִירי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (*ʾābîrê yiśrāʾēl*) and taking it as a designation for God's enemies. In fact, it is an epithet for God. Normally the divine epithet is *יְשָׁרְאֵל אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב* (*ʾābîr yaʿāqōb*, Gen 49:24; Isa 49:26; 60:16; Ps 132:2, 5); this is the only occurrence of *יְשָׁרְאֵל אֲבִיר*. The epithet *אֲבִיר* underscores God's strength, but it appears to do that by comparing God to a mighty bull. The

words אַבִּיר (*ʿabbîr*) and אָבִיר (*ʿābîr*) appear to be artificially distinguished by the later scribes to avoid this animal imagery for God, since, in contrast to אַבִּיר, used only as an epithet of God, אָבִיר is often used of powerful bulls (Isa 10:13; 34:7; Pss 22:13; 50:13; 68:31; 78:25) and sometimes of stallions (Judg 5:22; Jer 8:16; 47:3; 50:11).

- e Reading כְּבֹר (*kēkûr*), “like a furnace,” in place of MT’s כַּבֹּר (*kabbôr*), “like the lye.” Another possibility is בְּכֹר (*bēkûr*), “in a furnace;” a reading that occurs in Isa 48:10, where the later writer is apparently developing the thought he found in Isa 1:25. The versions all appear to have MT’s reading, though apart from the Tg., which renders “with lye,” they tend to take בֹר (*bôr*) as the word meaning “purity” and translate the expression as “unto purity.” While lye or potash was used for washing hands (Job 9:30), there is a serious question whether it was ever used in the ancient smelting process and, if it was, how important an element it was in the process. L. Köhler (“Miszellen: Alttestamentliche Wortforschung. *Sig. sigîm* = Bleiglätte,” TZ 3 [1947] 232–33) argues that it was used as a flux in removing lead oxide from silver in the smelting process. Robert J. Forbes does not mention lye or potash, but he does refer to the role of bone ash in separating silver from lead. The crude lead produced by primitive smelting was put in a crucible or furnace
- f For MT’s וְשִׁבְיָהּ (*wəšābēhā*), “and her (people) who repent,” LXX has ἡ αἰχμαλωσία αὐτῆς, “her captivity,” which presupposes שִׁבְיָהּ (*šibyāh*), and Syr. appears to follow LXX in this reading. This would appear to imply an exilic date, and one could arrive at the same conclusion were one to take the MT to refer to a physical return to Jerusalem, “and her returnees.” As Wildberger (1:56) has keenly observed, however, since v. 27 stands in negative parallel to v. 28, the interpretation “those in her who repent” is required as a contrast to the פְּשָׁעִים וְחַטָּאִים (*pōšēʿim wəḥattāʿim*), “rebels and sinners” of v. 28.
- g The construct noun וְשִׁבְרָה (*wəšēber*) at the beginning of v. 28, in a construction without any verb (lit., “and the shattering of rebels and sinners together”), is jarring, and most critics, following the translations of the versions, emend the noun to a passive verbal form.

Commentary

A new unit begins in v. 21. It opens with a lament over the terrible change in character that has turned Jerusalem into a city of sin. The nature of her sin is spelled out, and then, in vv. 24-28, Yahweh declares how he will correct the situation and restore Jerusalem to her original sanctity. Though these verses make up a separate prophetic composition, their placement in the present context is appropriate. It was suggested by the image of the desolate Zion in 1:8 and the comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah in vv. 9-10. Moreover, the references to orphans and widows in v. 23 provides a nice catchword reference back to v. 17. The end of the oracle is more difficult to determine. Some scholars regard vv. 27-28 as a later expansion (see further below).¹ There may also be some connection between this oracle, with or without vv. 27-28, and the famous passage in 2:2-5; Isa 1:29-31

is clearly a later intrusion, awkwardly connected to 1:28 by the common theme of the total destruction of the wicked. These issues will be discussed separately, under units 1:29-31 and 2:1-5.

The background to 1:21-28 is to be sought in the Zion Tradition’s (see introduction) glorification of Jerusalem as the city of God. As the place where God dwelled, it was a place of righteousness and security, a place where evildoers were not tolerated (Pss 101:8; 132:13-18; Isa 33:14-16). What the tradition claimed for Jerusalem, however, Isaiah laments as no longer true. The faithful city of tradition had become a whore. Here Isaiah, like his contemporary Hosea, uses sexual imagery to characterize the city’s fall, but his use of that imagery does not imply that the sins of Zion were the same as those Hosea attacked in the north or that Isaiah was necessarily dependent on Hosea for this imagery.² The specific accusations leveled in the following verses are concerned with social

1 Wildberger is among those who see these verses as a later expansion, and though he argues that the language could be Isaianic, he says, “But it is improbable that Isaiah himself would have expanded an earlier word through a supplement in this fashion, so that one must indeed see in the two verses the

hand of a disciple at work” (1:57). In contrast, I would argue the Isaiah often did supplement his earlier oracles in similar fashion (see especially the expansion and redirection of 28:1-6 by the later supplement in 28:7-15).

2 Hosea 4:15-19 uses the masculine term *zōneh*,

justice. They do not mention idolatry or cultic prostitution, the targets of much of Hosea's preaching and the source of his imagery. Isaiah simply uses the sexual metaphor alongside the metaphors of impure silver and watered down beer to suggest that Jerusalem is no longer the genuine article. What had been honorable, precious, and delicious has lost its honor, worth, and taste. Concretely, the traditional city of justice now houses evildoers, even murderers. Its high officials are scoundrels who associate with crooks and allow bribes and gifts to dictate government policy. The idiom "to run after gifts" vividly expresses how eagerly they court corruption. In such a climate the poor and powerless, the proverbial orphans and widows, cannot obtain justice.

It is worth noting that Isaiah attacks the high officials but not the king. These officials might be members of the royal family, "princes" as the RSV renders, but they need not be. The word שַׂר (*sar*) simply means officer, commander, or official. Isaiah, here perhaps influenced by Hosea (9:15), calls them סוֹרְרִים (*sōr'rîm*), "rebels." The term was no doubt chosen partly for its alliteration with the word for "official," but its precise meaning in this context is important to specify. The term is used religiously to describe Israel as rebellious against God, but this is secondary religious usage and is probably not what the prophet has in mind. On a more primary level it is used of a disobedient child who rejects parental authority and goes his own way (Deut 21:18-20; Isa 30:1), of a faithless wife who refuses to stay at home in her husband's bed (Prov 7:11), and of a stubborn heifer that refuses to be herded (Hos 4:16). In each of these cases the rebel is one who subverts legitimate human authority by going his or her own way. Used of a government official in a monarchical system, therefore, it designates one who acts on his own, subverting the stated policies of the king. The prophet's failure to mention the king implies that he saw the problem not in the royal office but in the corrupt

bureaucracy that stood between the king and the people and subverted the good intentions of the king. That might suggest a date for the oracle in the reign of Hezekiah, who, unlike Ahaz, was respected by Isaiah, though the prophet criticized his officials severely and even singled one out as the subject for a whole oracle (22:15-25). The problem in the corrupt bureaucracy clearly does suggest an analogy to the contemporary disdain in which the institutional church is held. The problem is not with the teachings of Christ, the royal head of the church, but with his clerical officials, enough of whom have self-seekingly subverted Christ's instructions so as to bring the whole church into disrepute.

Yahweh's response to this situation is violent. As already explained in the textual notes, the epithet "Mighty Bull of Israel" occurs only in this passage. It appears to be a simple variant of the more common "Mighty Bull of Jacob," which occurs in texts associated with the early monarchy (Gen 49:24; Ps 132:2, 5) and in the later Isaianic tradition (49:26; 60:16). The epithet portrays God as a warrior, and his opening remark in v. 24 is that of a warrior. God's statement, "I will console myself," is a unique use of the *niph'al* of the root *nhm*; the closest parallels are in passages where the subject finds consolation after the death of a loved one (Gen 24:67; 2 Sam 13:39), finds new hope after severe suffering (Ezek 14:22), or, following death, is consoled by the death of those who afflicted him (Ezek 31:16; 32:31). The parallelism with *wē'innāqēmā mē'ōyēbāy*, "and I will avenge myself from my enemies," makes clear that here *'ennāhēm miššāray*, "I will console myself from my enemies," means that God will relieve his rage and frustration by taking them out on the enemy who caused them. One should note that the enemy against whom the divine warrior is declaring war is his own people.

This military imagery is dropped in v. 25, however, for the imagery of metal refining, no doubt suggested by the

"fornicator, lecher," to refer to Israel, characterizes Israel as rebels using the verb *sārar* (see also Hos 9:15), and mentions *sobām*, "their beer." These resemblances with Isa 1:21-26 leads Vermeylen (*Du prophète Isaïe*, 101) to posit that the Isaiah passage is dependent on Hos 4:15-19 and 9:14-17. Vermeylen sees a late Deuteronomic influence on Hosea. Therefore, if Isa 1:21-26 is dependent on Hosea, then the Isaiah passage must be even later, and certainly not

from the eighth-century Isaiah of Jerusalem. The argument is not compelling, even assuming a clear influence of Hosea's vocabulary on Isaiah. It would not be surprising if the eighth-century Isaiah knew the work of his northern contemporary, who probably came south after the collapse of the northern kingdom. Certainly Hosea's work was preserved in the south, so such contact between Isaiah and Hosea by no means requires a late dating of Isa 1:21-26.

earlier metaphor of impure silver. When God is the subject, the idiom *hāšēb yād ʿal*, “to turn the hand against,” is a general expression for divine judgment (Zech 13:7; Ps 81:15; cf. Isa 5:25; 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4 for the related idiom, *wēʿōd yādô nēṭūyâ*, “and his hand is still stretched out”), but the two following verbs specifically relate to the smelting process. The reading “as with lye” is problematic (see the textual note), since the evidence that it was used in the refining process for silver is disputed. Many scholars, therefore, correct the reading to “in a furnace” or “like a furnace.” Either emendation is orthographically easy, and the first is perhaps supported by the occurrence of that expression in Isa 48:10, where Second Isaiah is apparently commenting on the earlier passage from First Isaiah. The smelting imagery, as Second Isaiah correctly saw, is a metaphor for God’s refining judgment on his city, and it implies both punishment and a remnant who will survive the ordeal.

To solve the problem of rebellious, self-willed officials, Yahweh will restore the kind of judges and counselors that Jerusalem had in the beginning, that is, in the glory days of David and perhaps Solomon. There is a certain idealization of the past here—David’s era was not without its problems in the administration of justice (2 Sam. 15:1-6)—but such idealization can serve a useful function as a goal to actualize, even if, as a historical portrayal of the past, it is inaccurate. Isaiah presents a similar vision of the future in 32:1, where he envisions both a king reigning in righteousness and officials ruling in justice. After the refining process, after the restoring of just officials, Jerusalem will once more be known as a city of righteousness. Her reputation, now besmirched, will again be above reproach.

The final “faithful city” of v. 26 forms a nice *inclusio* with the opening “faithful city” of v. 21 and suggests that the oracle originally ended at v. 26. Verses 27-28 appear to be an expansion, but whether by Isaiah himself or by

a disciple is impossible to say. The direct quotation of Yahweh ends in v. 26, since in v. 28 Yahweh is referred to in the third person, “those who forsake Yahweh,” not “those who forsake me.” This suggests that the expansion could be by the prophet himself, further interpreting the words of Yahweh. The verses are certainly compatible with Isaiah and correctly interpret the preceding text as proclaiming a purifying judgment on Zion in which the righteous would be saved while the wicked perished.

The precise meaning of “by justice” and “by righteousness” in v. 27 is debated; do “justice” and “righteousness” refer to God’s justice and righteousness, or to the justice and righteousness of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.³ Some scholars think it means that Zion will be saved by or in God’s refining judgment, but it is more likely that the terms *justice* and *righteousness* refer primarily to the justice and righteousness of Zion’s inhabitants. Isaiah 33:14-16, which specifies who can live in Zion with Yahweh, the devouring fire, provides the best commentary on this passage. It proclaims that only the repentant ones in Zion, those characterized by justice and righteousness, will be saved. The rest—the rebels, the sinners, and those who forsake Yahweh—will utterly perish.

Our present passage, 1:21-28, offers significant material for further reflection. First, with regard to Isaiah’s theology, it indicates the importance of the Zion Tradition and Jerusalem in the prophet’s thought. It also provides a standard for comparison for the many other passages in Isaiah where the prophet returns to the theme of God’s plan for Jerusalem, a plan that involves both judgment and the salvation of a remnant. The extent and/or authenticity of many of these passages are disputed, and in evaluating that debate it is helpful to keep in mind this oracle, which, apart from vv. 27-28, is almost unanimously considered genuine.⁴

Second, the implications of the passage for the modern believer are numerous. Isaiah’s condemnation of

3 See the discussion in Wildberger, 1:67; and John Oswalt’s thoughtful comments (*The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 110).

4 A notable exception is Vermeylen, who dates the passage late, claiming that it is dependent on passages in Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (*Du prophète Isaïe*, 100–105), but his analysis is not very compel-

ling. As already noted, any influence of Hosea on Isaiah says nothing about the date of the Isaianic passage, and Vermeylen’s argument that Isa 1:21-26 is dependent on Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in contrast to the common view that the influence flows in the other direction, is highly subjective and totally unconvincing.

governmental corruption touches on a recurrent evil in human society. His idealization of Zion, however, rooted as it is in the Zion Tradition's identification of Jerusalem as the city of God, is difficult to accord with any contemporary secular government. If Israel's notion of Zion as the city of God has any continuity in the Christian faith, it is in terms of the community of the new covenant, the church (Heb 12:22-24), and Isaiah's oracle raises the

issue of that community's responsibility to maintain its character as God's holy abode (1 Pet 2:4-10). Does it, like the Jerusalem of Isaiah's day, require the purging fire of judgment to restore it to its visionary ideal? Finally, if one speaks of restoring such an ideal, does it matter that the ideal never existed except in vision and in the nostalgic or didactic recasting of history?

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1

- 29/ **For you^a shall be ashamed of the strong trees^b
which you desired,
And you shall be embarrassed by the gardens
which you chose.**
- 30/ **For you shall be like a terebinth
whose leaf wilts,
And like a garden for which
there is no water.**
- 31/ **The strongest^c will become tow,
and his work^d a spark,
And both of them shall burn together,
with none to quench.**

Textual Notes

- a The third person form יבשו (yēbōšū, “they will be ashamed”); MT 1QIsa^a [plene] 4QIsa^f followed by a series of second person forms is difficult. Some Hebrew manuscripts have the second person תבשו (tēbōšū), “you will be ashamed,” and the Tg. follows this tradition. By contrast, LXX and Syr. change all the verb forms in vv. 29-30 to third person to avoid the difficulty, while the Vg. limits this change to the immediately following verb. The original oracle must have had the second person; the change to the third person was an attempt to ease the connection between vv. 28 and 29, perhaps from the time when this oracle was inserted in its present context.
- b For MT’s אֵלִים (ʿēlīm), the plural of אֵיל (ʿayil), “strong tree,” 1QIsa^a has אלים, which is probably just a defective orthography, not the word “gods.” LXX, Syr., and Vg. translate the word as “idols,” but that is probably because they considered worship associated with these trees to be idolatrous. The Tg. has “the oaks of the idols.”
- c For MT’s הַחֲסֹן (heḥāsōn), “the strong one, the strongest,” supported by 4QIsa^f, 1QIsa^a has הַחֲסֹנֶם (haḥāsōnkem), “your strong one,” with the oddity of suffixed noun with the article. The Vg. seems to be following this reading with its *fortitudo vestra*, “your strength,” though it misconstrues the nominalized adjective as an abstract noun. The LXX, Syr., and Tg. make the same mistake with the slightly different reading, “their strength.” The addition of a pronominal suffix is a secondary development to ease the translation.
- d For MT’s וּפְעָלוֹ (ûpōʿālō), lit., either “and his maker” or “and his work,” 1QIsa^a has וּפְעָלְכֶם, “and your work,” which Vg. follows. The LXX and Syr. have “their works.”

Commentary

Verses 29-31 disturb the context. Both the preceding and following verses deal with the theme of Zion as the city of God. This related material is split apart, however, by the insertion of the present pericope, which introduces a totally unrelated condemnation of sacred groves. The secondary character of this insertion is indicated also by the harsh stylistic feature of a sudden shift to the second person. These verses probably represent a floating oracle that was secondarily inserted here by the catchword principle. Verses 28 and 31 both pronounce judgment on certain parties “together,” and the “burning” in v. 31 picks up on the judgment by fire in the smelting imagery in v. 25. When the floating oracle was inserted, its original second person address, as noted above, was slightly altered by the change of the first verb to the third person,

apparently to ease its link to v. 28, which ends with a third person verb form.

The “terebinths” probably refer to the sacred groves usually associated with the cultic installations at the high places (cf. Isa 17:8), while the gardens may refer to the so-called Adonis gardens (cf. Isa 17:10-11). The sacred groves are often referred to in connection with idolatrous worship and probably have some relationship, if not identity, with the Asherim, which were cult symbols of the Canaanite goddess Athirat (1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 17:10). Hezekiah cut down such symbols during his reform (2 Kgs 18:4), so they were a religious issue during Isaiah’s ministry, and that historical information suggests that this oracle dates prior to Hezekiah’s reform. Isaiah condemns the people’s devotion to these pagan symbols and, by implication, their participation in the cultic activities associated with these symbols.

Verse 31 is often treated as a crux, since it has been claimed that the usual reading of the nominalized adjective הַחֲסִינָה (*heḥāsōn*) as referring to a powerful human, “the strong person,” and the analysis of פְּעָלָהּ (*pō‘ālô*) as the suffixed noun פֶּעַל (*pō‘al*), “his work,” has the disadvantage of a rather abrupt introduction of a strong person into the context. The suggestion picked up by M. Tsevat¹ and modified and elaborated by S. E. Loewenstamm² that חֲסִינָה means “semi-processed flax” is even less compelling. Loewenstamm admits that such an interpretation would totally isolate v. 31 from its context, destroying any original connection to the preceding verses.³ The context is about sacred groves and gardens; this verse should have some connection to that topic.

The only other occurrence of the word חֲסִינָה (*hāsōn*), “strong,” is in Amos 2:9, where it is used to compare men’s strength to that of trees. In Isa 1:30 the prophet

tells his audience that they will become like a dried-up terebinth. The continuation in v. 31 that “the strongest” (חֲסִינָה) will become tow plays on the ambiguity of a double entendre: does the prophet mean the strongest tree in the grove, or does he mean the strongest person in his audience, who he has already said will become like a dried-up tree. NEB takes it as referring to “the strongest tree” and understands the form פְּעָלָהּ (*pō‘ālô*) as “what is made of it,” but it is more likely that the prophet is addressing “the strongest person” in his audience under the image of the dried-up tree. Like the dried-up terebinth, even the strongest, most oak-like person, will become like tow, and “his work” in constructing such pagan groves and gardens will become like a spark. Both the worshiper and his dried-up aids to worship will burn and perish together. For further discussion on Isaiah’s attitude toward idolatry, see the treatment of Isa 17:7-11.

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- 1 M. Tsevat, “Isaiah I 31,” *VT* 19 (1969) 261–63.
 - 2 S. E. Loewenstamm, “Isaiah I 31,” *VT* 22 (1972) 246–48.
 - 3 *Ibid.*, 248.