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Title of extract: **Isaiah 6 – 10:4**

Name of Author: **Brueggemann, W.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Isaiah 1 – 39. Brueggemann, W.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **John Knox Press.**

Pages scanned: **57 - 91**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **The Book of Isaiah TRDL7050**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E. L. Hamb*

Date authorised: 17.05.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

make sense only in a world of Yahweh's intentionality. They are linkages about which the people in this text are always relearning, always being re-instructed, always reobserving in the arena of our own life in the world. We finish with this long announcement of governing themes diminished, bereft, in darkness and distress, hardly daring to hope. That is, in my judgment, exactly where this poetry intends to leave us.

A VISION, A CALL, A NULLIFICATION 6:1-13

This unit of text consisting in the commissioning of the prophet may be divided into two parts: the *commissioning* (vv. 1-8), and the *message* entrusted to the prophet as the message bearer of the heavenly government of Yahweh (vv. 9-13).

A Vision that Recruits (6:1-8)

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.³ And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

The vision report purports to be an immediate and direct experience of God's holiness on the part of the person of Isaiah. A great deal of scholarly attention has been given to the possibility that the narrative reports on a direct, personal, emotional experience of God, or alternatively, an experience that is cultic in nature, for the symbolism of the Jerusalem temple is paramount in the account.

Whatever may have been the personal dimension of the reported experience (in which the text seems to have no special interest), it is generally recognized that the call narrative is a highly stylized, intentionally structured literary unit. On the one hand, the text is commonly taken as a *classic outline of right worship*, which is sequenced as (a) praise (vv. 1–4); (b) confession (v. 5); (c) forgiveness (vv. 6–7); and (d) commissioning to a prophetic vocation (v. 8). On the other hand, if one reckons with the highly stylized character of the text, one may consider that the chapter concerns not its impact upon the *person* of the prophet who is here authorized, but its impact upon the *prophetic book*. That is, the narrative account seeks to claim that the prophetic book—understood as utterance from a divinely called and appointed prophet—can claim continuing “prophetic authority” from on high, long after the prophetic personality has departed the historical scene. In a canonical approach to the book of Isaiah, this unit makes a claim that its utterance is indeed divinely authorized, for the authorization pertains not only to the immediate utterance of verses 9–13, but also to the entire text of Isaiah in which this specific account is embedded. Thus we may look past the authorization of the prophet (which is indeed evident) to the authorization of the book that continues to speak authoritatively to the faithful for the coming generations of the community that heeds the text. The prophetic word and the prophetic book that continue to haunt us are derived from and witness to the intention of God’s own purposes for the world.

The account reports an activity in the throne room of heaven where the holy God sits, high and elevated in splendor, surrounded by awesome and impressive attendants to the divine presence. The account assumes a polytheism that peoples the heavens with many gods, angels, and servants of the high God (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–23 and the reference to God’s “ministers” in Psalm 103:20–21). The scene is royal; this is “The King.” The mention of King Uzziah, who died in 742 (cf. 1:1), serves perhaps simply to date the reported experience or perhaps to contrast the transitoriness of human kings with the abiding quality of the divine king.

In the vision, Yahweh massively occupies and dominates the heavenly throne room to which “Isaiah” (person, book?) is wondrously given access. This earthly intruder into the heavenly scene observes the seraphim, the heavenly winged servants of Yahweh in rapt attentiveness, utterly devoted to Yahweh, fluttering around the Holy One, honoring him and covering him in order to guard and enhance Yahweh’s holiness. The primary activity that fills the throne room with glad surrender is the seemingly unending doxology of the divine choir. It sings of the holiness, the splendor, the

glory, the unutterable majesty of the ruler of heaven whose awesome governance extends over all the earth. (This vision of doxology is echoed in the scenario of heaven in Rev. 4:8 where the same threefold “holy” is sounded again to the same overwhelming God.) This moment of praise (which the prophet observes) is indeed an event behind which it is not possible to go for explanation. We are here at the core of holiness from which is decreed all that happens everywhere in creation. The song of the heavenly choir begins in holiness and ends in glory, both terms acknowledging the odd, overwhelming otherness of God. The attempt to verbalize the effect of God’s holiness evidences that God’s presence is incalculable, before which everything must yield. The characterization may be *cultic*, that is, in ritual routinization, but the rhetoric is that of a disruptive sudden and direct appearance of God.

The overwhelming sense of God’s holiness (vv. 1–4) evokes a massive contrast in verse 5. The prophet-observer, in the presence of Yahweh’s holiness, has a fresh sense of himself, his inadequacy, his lack of qualification to be in the holy presence. As the words have clustered to name Yahweh’s majesty, so the terms converge to bespeak inadequacy—“woe, lost, unclean!” The terms indicate that the prophet-observer is in dire straits, now put profoundly at risk. He is “reduced to nothing” (Calvin). There is no coziness here, for God’s presence is a source of deep jeopardy. Indeed, in his lack of competence, these inadequate eyes have seen “the King,” “the Lord of hosts!” Both of these terms articulate majestic sovereignty, likely reflecting the liturgic cadences of the Solomonic temple (cf. Psalm 24:7–10). The vision of God evokes the undoing of the human participant. Already in 1:4, the prophet had condemned the community. Now he stands within that community, condemned along with all the others.

In verses 6–7, however, we learn that the God whose royal person undoes and dismantles is also the God who has procedures and means for reclamation of the one undone. The seraph, one of the awesome functionaries of Yahweh’s royal court, effectively ministers to the overwhelmed and disqualified human speaker. The application of live coals to the person of the human speaker is a dangerous, painful, perhaps cultic enterprise (cf. Jer. 1:9). The effect is a complete purgation and rehabilitation, expressed in parallel terms, “guilt departed, sin blotted out.” In this act, which overrides human circumstance, the human participant is now qualified with all disability overcome. The rehabilitation permits the human agent a legitimate place in the very presence of God.

However, the legitimate admission is not, as verse 8 immediately makes clear, for enjoyment of the divine presence. The throne room of God is

the policy room of world government. There is business to conduct. There is creation to manage. There are messages to be sent. The government of Yahweh (notice the plural "we," not unlike the plural for "government" in British English) needs a carrier. There is a discussion about whom to dispatch, not unlike 1 Kings 22:20. Immediately, apparently without reflection upon the cost, the recently rehabilitated human agent is promptly recruited into the work of God's government: "Send me." He could not, we may imagine, resist the chance. He got all he bargained for and more!

This well-known narrative moves quickly from *the vision of splendor* to *the awareness of inadequacy* to *readiness for dispatch*. Because the movement is so clear and the drama is so profound, as I have indicated, the text has often been taken to be either biography—that is, the commissioning of a prophet—or a model for worship. Without gainsaying either of these two perspectives, more recent scholarship, in addition, suggests that this visionary report has a literary function in the shape of the book of Isaiah. That is, what is here enacted is not personal message, but canonical-literary authorization. Thus the narrative legitimates some extended portion of the book of Isaiah, the portion that announces judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. (See the counterpart positive authorization of the book of Isaiah in 40:1–11.)

A Message of Nullification (6:9–13)

- 6:9 And he said, "Go and say to this people:
'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.'
10 Make the mind of this people dull
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed."
11 Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said:
"Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
12 until the LORD sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.
13 Even if a tenth part remain in it,

it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing
when it is felled."
The holy seed is its stump.

The "message" of verses 9–13 constitutes a focal point and epitome for "the message" of the book of Isaiah. This perspective moves in the direction of literary authorization and away from the biographical or liturgical.

And what a message it is! The prophetic message is that "this people," presumably Judah and Jerusalem, should "not comprehend," "not understand," "not look," "not listen," "not comprehend." It is the decree of Yahweh's government that Israel should have all of its senses dulled and numbed beyond notice. All of its organs of perception—heart, eyes, ears—must fail. And the reason: If they *notice*, they will *turn*. And if they *turn*, they will be *healed*. But the intent of the government of God is negative: Not to notice and so not to turn; not to turn and so not to be healed! The intention of the decree of Yahweh is that Judah and Jerusalem should be narcotized so that they will not be healed. God wills an unhealed people!

This is not what we might expect, but of course prophetic assertion is most often not what is expected. This is indeed a countermesssage, countering official religious assumptions that God always wills good.

The shock of the message is enough to evoke a questioning protest from the prophet: "How long?" (v. 11). The question is a characteristic utterance of complaint in Israel (cf. Psalm 13:1–2). The question does not want an answer about length of suffering, but it suggests that God is unfair or inattentive, and that the speaker (prophet, Judah, Jerusalem) deserves something better from God.

The answer from God, given immediately, without hesitation or qualification, is *until!*

until the failure of cities, houses, land;
until the land has a profound massive abandonment;
until only 10 percent remain,
and then a fire,
and then only a stump.

That is, until . . . termination! The message resulting from this vision of God's majesty is an Israelite future of nullification, a ceasing to be in the world. The burden of the oracle is that God has given up on this beloved

people and will no more protect them, but will actively intervene to undo them.

The nullification is qualified only with the enigmatic statement at the end of verse 13 (not unlike the modest hope of 4:3). The three words that comprise this last statement are not clear, something about holy seed from stump, something about the impossible possibility of new life from deep failure, something that the book of Isaiah, as we have seen in 2:1–4 and 4:2–6, relentlessly asserts, never able to leave the terrible message finally at nullification and termination.

It is possible to take this defining oracle simply as judgment, harsh and unqualified. If, however, we take this oracular announcement in the context of the entire book of Isaiah, we already know that the long-term vision of the book concerns the deep loss of Jerusalem *and its fragile restoration*. The first part of the book concerns the devastating loss of the holy establishment, the most trusted place (Jerusalem and its temple), the very place where God's vision of presence is given. The last line of verse 13 looks quickly beyond the loss, but with only an enigmatic trace of assurance. The focal disclosure dominating "Isaiah" in the eighth century is nullification, an anticipation two centuries in fruition, but as sure as a decree from the heavenly throne.

It is stunning that this harsh, pivotal statement from Isaiah looms large in the use of the Old Testament in the New. In all four Gospels, verses 9–10 are quoted with reference to Jesus. It is evident that prophetic faith in ancient Israel was not heeded or accepted by kings or people, and this led to the wholesale rejection of Israel as God's people. Similarly, it is evident that the demanding message and person of Jesus were widely rejected; the early church had to ponder long that rejection. In the Synoptic tradition (Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10), our verses are quoted as judgment upon those who do not properly understand and receive Jesus. In John 12:37–43, the same verses are quoted to comment negatively on those who suffer from spiritual blindness and do not properly discern Jesus—who he is and what he requires. And in Acts 28:26–27, it is the reality of Jewish resistance to Jesus that opens the way for Paul's Gentile mission. The imagination of the early church is saturated with the realism of the oracle of Isaiah. The early church is able to see that the *rejection of Jesus* is parallel to the *rejection of the prophetic word*. In both cases, the texts are haunted by the awareness that the resistance is in some odd way initiated by God's own negation.

The oracle that results from this large vision of God is harsh—harsh in its nullifying of Jerusalem and harsh in its second usage concerning Jesus.

It is harsh to recognize that the rule of God is rejected by God's own people. It is enigmatic to see that the rejection is not only willful hard-heartedness, but is decreed by God, decreed because God wanted(?) the defeat of Jerusalem; wanted(?) the resistance of unbelievers to Jesus.

It is clear in this hard saying, even if much else is not clear here, that the purposes of God are at work in the midst of severe human obduracy. There are no easy healings. There are no ready turnings. The healings are not readily available, and the turnings are too demanding. There is no easy gospel, no cheap grace, no good word that gives assurances to those who drop by hoping for a quick and comfortable deal. And that leaves, in these cases, only obtuseness and its terrible consequences.

Those dulled and numbed are headed toward termination. These words sound ominous in a society like ours, deeply narcotized not only by chemical dependence, but by a host of numbing dependencies: poverty and wealth in the extreme, brutality, militarism, self-indulgence—the same list of which the ancient poets spoke so relentlessly. *Not noticing* leads to *termination*. Not noticing may not evoke a supernatural swoop of nullification directly from heaven. It may come more like a thief in the night, too quiet to be noticed until it is too late.

To be sure, there is comfort at the end of the oracle. But it is only late, a seeming afterthought. It is a small, thin comfort of a holy seed from the stump. But first the stump! The stump of failure and termination rooted in numbness and hard-heartedness. The book of Isaiah knows the stump of 587 B.C.E. when all was lost. The Gospel writers know the Friday stump of crucifixion. It will not surprise us that our verses of narcotization leave us deeply stumped. The prophetic drama does not permit a rush to post-exile, even as the gospel does not permit a rush past Friday to arrive too early and too easily at Sunday.

AN UNCOMPROMISING EITHER/OR FOR JERUSALEM 7:1–25

This long chapter is one of the most complex and elusive in the entire book of Isaiah. We may consider it in three parts: (1) a narrative of confrontation between the prophet and the king, Ahaz, in the midst of an acute political-military crisis (vv. 1–9); (2) continued confrontation around the much-noticed "prophetic sign" (vv. 10–17); and (3) a collection of four enigmatic prophetic anticipations for Jerusalem (vv. 18–25). The entire

chapter makes clear that prophetic faith is inescapably situated midst the vagaries of the historical-political process, and it is in such a context that the concrete risks of faith must be run.

The Demands of Faith (7:1–9)

7:1 In the days of Ahaz son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not mount an attack against it.² When the house of David heard that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field,⁴ and say to him, Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah.⁵ Because Aram—with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah—has plotted evil against you, saying,⁶ Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it;⁷ therefore thus says the Lord GOD:

It shall not stand,
and it shall not come to pass.

⁸ For the head of Aram is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.

(Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people.)

⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you do not stand firm in faith,
you shall not stand at all.

The occasion for the meeting of prophet and king is the threat of attack upon Jerusalem by its two small northern neighbors, Israel and Syria (Aram) (cf. 2 Kings 16:5–9). (In passing, it may be noticed that the contemporary geopolitics of the region are unchanged. The government in Jerusalem continues to be threatened by its small northern neighbors, Lebanon and Syria.) King Ahaz is inspecting the city waterworks, likely in anticipation of a siege on the city. It is clear that the king is not only worried about security, but in fact is deeply frightened and intimidated by this northern threat. Indeed, he is so frightened that he is about to make a major policy decision to appeal for help to Assyria, the great and awesome empire to the north of Israel and Syria. (Assyria was situated in the territory of present-day Iraq.) Thus the king is about to appeal to a greater

threat (Assyria) against a lesser threat (Israel, Syria), a decision that reflects short-term panic and long-term foolishness. But because his heart shook “as the trees of the forest shake before the wind,” such panic and foolishness become the ground for policy formation (v. 21; cf. Lev. 26:36).

It is to be noted that in verse 2, the king is referred to not merely by his name, but formally as “The House of David.” This appellation suggests that our narrative is concerned not only with this specific military crisis, but also with the long-term reality of the Davidic dynasty, with all of the theological freight that is carried by that dynasty. As long ago as 2 Samuel 7:11–16, the House of David received an unconditional, long-term assurance of support from Yahweh, that is, a theological support for a sociopolitical institution. The House of David may rest secure in Yahweh's steadfast loyalty. That is the core truth of the regime and its core ideological claim, indeed its *raison d'être*. Only now, in panic and foolishness, the House of David considers alternative means of security that in effect deny the cruciality of Yahwistic fidelity, that is, alternative to reliance upon Yahweh. Thus a concrete policy decision is understood to be a far-reaching theological departure whereby the state forfeits its Yahwistic ground for existence.

Into that situation of threat, panic, and foolishness comes the prophet, dispatched by Yahweh. He meets Ahaz, who functions in the book of Isaiah as a representative embodiment of fickleness and unfaith. The prophet is accompanied at this meeting by his son, “*Sheár yashub*.” The name of the boy is reckoned by interpreters to be a powerful assertion. The translation of the name, “a remnant shall return,” introduces a special notion of Isaiah, namely, “a remnant.” In context the term is ominous. It alludes to the conviction of the Isaiah tradition that Jerusalem will be destroyed and its inhabitants will be deported into exile, which is tantamount to death. And from the death of exile only a small portion of the population will eventually be returned to Jerusalem in order to resume life. Thus the name of the boy might be more fully “[Only] a remnant shall return [from exile].” The reference is essentially bad news, because in the long-term perspective of the book, *the exile is certain*, and from exile *only a small portion will survive* as identifiable Jews.

To be sure, in a later context, the “remnant” might be taken as assurance, when it is understood as “[at least] a remnant will return [to the homeland].” But it can be heard as assurance only in the actual context of exile, an actual context not yet even on the horizon of the king. So the presence of the little boy along with the prophet and the king adds to the gravity of the exchange. The name of the boy puts the king on notice. The king is well advised to consider a greater threat than these small neighbors.

The centerpiece of the exchange between prophet (the voice of Yahweh's sovereign rule) and the king (the panicked carrier of Davidic possibility) is the prophetic oracle that radically redescribes the context of the city (vv. 7–9). The prophet is instructed by Yahweh to address the king with a characteristic salvation oracle that offers assurance (v. 4). The assurance is given in four invitational imperatives urging the king to move out of his panic. The ground of this assurance is that the threatening powers are “smoldering stumps.” (Calvin says “tails.”) That is, the prophet employs derisive rhetoric about “a burnt out case” in order to mock the threat.

The prophet invites the king to courage, based on a reassessment of political reality. The continuing assertion of the prophet is that these two posturing kings—Rezin and “the son of Remaliah” (he refuses to utter the name of the illegitimate claimant of power, Pekah)—will not last and do not in fact constitute a serious threat. Therefore Ahaz would be foolish indeed to shape policy in response to them. The prophet engages in political analysis of the international scene. He offers a scenario that is quite at odds with that of the king, for the king's perception is completely skewed by fear. The judgment made here about Judah's true military situation is perhaps “disclosed” by Yahweh, for this is “Thus saith the Lord.” Whatever such a phrase might mean, it seems clear that the prophet (and the prophetic tradition generally) is capable of acute social analysis, international as well as domestic. The world looks very different when the observer is not consumed by fear.

The political analysis offered by the prophet to the king, moreover, is drawn to a rhetorical climax in verse 9b, wherein the prophet issues one of his most pivotal utterances. We may notice two rhetorical features of this utterance. First, the last two lines of verse 9 begin with “if.” The prophet lays upon the policy making of the dynasty a condition. Indeed, it is a Yahwistic condition. The future depends upon the king's trusting and acting in certain ways that preclude policy formation out of Yahweh-denying panic and foolishness. This conditionality is astonishing, for the entire Davidic theology since 2 Samuel 7 is without condition, as though the dynasty enjoyed a blank check of Yahwistic assurance. No, maintenance of the Jerusalem regime is based on an elemental theological requirement.

Second, the oracle contains the double use of the term “have faith” (*’āman*), that is, “rely, trust.” This usage of the term is important because this same term is at the heart of Davidic theology upon which the Jerusalem regime heavily relies:

Your house and your kingdom shall be *made sure* (*ne’ēmān*) forever before me.
(2 Sam. 7:16a)

My *faithfulness* (*’āmūnā*) and steadfast love shall be with him; . . .
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
or be false to my *faithfulness* (*’āmūnā*).

(Ps. 89:24a, 33)

King Ahaz is invited, in the midst of this pressing concrete crisis, to reconsider and reembrace the profound assurance of Yahweh given long ago to his family and his regime. And now the king is required by the prophet, by appeal to the very ideology upon which the king relies, to get his mind off the immediate threat and off the pseudo-help of Assyria (which is no help at all), and to focus upon the single true source of assurance and well-being. Yahweh's fidelity is rooted in the decree of heaven but impinges directly and poignantly upon worldly decisions.

It is commonly agreed that this utterance of the prophet is a (the?) pivotal text upon the meaning of *faith* in the work of Isaiah and, indeed, in the entire Old Testament. Faith (“stand firm in faith”) is not a matter of intellectual content or cognitive belief. It is rather a matter of quite practical reliance upon the assurance of God in a context of risk where one's own resources are not adequate. It means to entrust one's security and future to the attentiveness of Yahweh—to count God's attentiveness as adequate and sure, thereby making panic, anxiety, or foolishness unnecessary and inappropriate. It is to know one's self safe in risk because of an Attending Other whose resources are mobilized and whose commitments are unfailing. It is to place one's self into the reliable care of another.

The affirmation of verse 9b is the completion of the summoning imperatives of verse 4. These imperatives—take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint—are commonly understood as the sort of rhetoric used in ancient Israel when Israel is engaged in military conflict or is being mustered for battle that is filled with great threat (cf. Deut. 20:3). The importance of this parallel to a situation of war is that the invitation *not to fear* but *to faith* is not a bourgeois notion of safety when “all is well,” as though it were an invitation to complacency. It is, rather, precisely for times of conflict, threat, and danger, when circumstance dictates fear rather than trust. The prophetic summons to faith is an urging that the king engage in an attitude and a practice of confidence that flies in the face of an unambiguous circumstance of danger. Faith is a refusal to give in to the threats of undoing posed by these small northern neighbors, and to proceed in confidence in the face of such self-evident danger. Notice,

moreover, that Ahaz is not called to a spiritual enterprise but to a concrete, public action as king that proceeds on the conviction that Yahweh stands at the center of the crisis and will prevail. The crisis revolves around this Yahweh upon whom the dynasty in Jerusalem is founded, but about whom Rezin and "the son of Remaliah" know nothing.

The importance of this assertion of trust can hardly be overstated. It is most unfortunate that, in the long history of the church, "faith" has been almost everywhere transubstantiated into "belief," which transposes the concrete practicality of trust into a cognitive enterprise. How ludicrous that in the long, oppressive history of orthodoxy—which guards cognitive formulations—that those who enforce *right belief* seem most often to be themselves unable or unwilling to engage in *deep trust*. It is this deep trust in the midst of risk, so deep that it redefines the situation, that is reiterated in the lyrical words of Paul, that great voice of faith. Notice how Paul employs a military metaphor not unlike that of Isaiah: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced . . ." (Rom. 8:37–38). Paul's key insight on faith (cf. Gal. 2:16), moreover, is echoed in Martin Luther, who understood Isaiah precisely. Luther casts his great hymn of faith in military metaphor:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing.

The negative counterpart sounds like it is addressed directly to Ahaz:

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing.

Luther continues the military imagery as he turns his poetry in a christological direction:

Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his Name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.

The assurances of Paul and Luther, which have dominated the mind of much of the church, stay close to Isaiah. Ahaz is called to live in an alternative world governed by this faithful God and by none other. Habitation in this alternative world, moreover, has immediate and concrete implications for the practice of life. The dynasty is being summoned back to its radical roots.

A Sign of Assurance (7:10–17)

7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. ¹³ Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria."

The confrontation of prophet and king continues. It is a continuation of "faith versus fear" and the two worlds that result from faith or from fear. We are not given the reaction of the king to the prophetic summons of verse 9b. What follows in verses 10ff. suggests that King Ahaz refused the call of Isaiah to radical faith. Thus, in verse 10 an apparent refusal escalates the encounter. Now it is "the Lord" (not Isaiah) who takes the next step. God says, "Ask a sign." That is, defiantly, "Do you want me to prove it to you?" "Do you want me to give evidence?" (v. 11). The king piously refuses the offer (v. 12). The prophet (now prophet, not God) reprimands the king for refusing to engage the offer, and now he proceeds with a sign that the king had not requested and did not want. The sign is "a visible gesture" whereby the theological claim of God is made concrete and therefore inescapable. (Notice the like function of "signs" in the Exodus narrative [Exod. 4:8–17, 28–30; 10:1–2] and in the Fourth Gospel [4:48; 20:30].)

The sign in this utterance has become one of the pivots of theological interpretation (vv. 14–17). We may comment on four issues related to the sign. First, *a young woman* will bear a child. The woman seems incidental for the sign, for it is the child and not the woman that claims attention. Nonetheless, "the young woman" has been an important issue in interpretation, largely because of the way in which she turns up in the New Testament as "the virgin Mary." Concerning "the young woman," scholars have used great energy attempting to identify her, variously proposing that she is the wife of the prophet, the wife of the king, an incidental woman without special identity, or even a mythical being. There is no compelling or decisive evidence in any of these directions. Her identity is not important.

Her status has been of as much interest to interpreters as her identity. The phrase "young woman" (*almā*) means a woman of marriageable age,

but it completely begs the question of virginity. It is undoubtedly clear that a status of virginity is not of any interest or importance for the sign of Isaiah. Indeed, most of the ancient translations of the term have left that question open. But the Septuagint and, derivatively, the Vulgate, which have dominated Christian reading of the text, have rendered "virgin." It is this reading that has become decisive for New Testament usage (cf. Matt. 1:123; Luke 1:17), and that has then led to a rich tradition of church theology on "The Virgin Mary," articulated as it is, even in the creed (see Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel*, 65–82). Two matters are clear: (1) The Isaiah passage per se has no interest in the virginal status of the woman. It is not interested because the focus is not on the birth but on the child. (2) The church's subsequent development of the interpretation of the virgin, rich tradition as it is, cannot be said to be "wrong," but it can be said to go in a quite fresh direction, surely other than the Isaiah text itself.

Second, the crucial element in the sign concerns the child whose name is "Immanuel," that is, *God is with us*. We have seen a particular child's name in 7:3, there a quite ominous name. Here this child's freighted name is positive and reassuring, for it asserts the entire affirmation of Davidic theology rooted in the ancient oracle of 2 Samuel 7. The child is to be a visible, physical, concrete reassertion of the core conviction of royal Israel that God is present in and with and for Israel as defender, guardian, and protector, so that Israel need not be afraid. Indeed, Ahaz in this context need not be afraid and, therefore, need not turn to the savage resource of Assyria. It is this confidence about which Israel sang in the temple:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; . . .
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns
The LORD of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our refuge.

(Psalm 46:1–2, 5, 7)

(This psalm is conventionally linked to the time of Isaiah, and it is the source of Luther's great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*.) Thus the child is a visible summons to faith, the faith to which Ahaz has been summoned in verses 4 and 9, and that he has, in his fearfulness, completely abandoned.

Third, the function of the child is to *monitor the time* of the current

threat of the northern neighbors, a time that will be short indeed (v. 16). It is conventionally reckoned that a child knows the difference between "good and evil," right and wrong, by two years of age. Thus by two years of age, that is, two years from the moment of utterance by the prophet, the two kings—Rezin and "the son of Remaliah"—will be terminated. That is, the threat noted in verses 7–9a, which preoccupies the king, is a short-term danger and should not be taken as seriously as does the king. It is the lack of trust in Yahweh and his consequent fearfulness that causes the king to misassess his true circumstance and tempts him with the pseudo-help of Assyria. His is *not* a world without Yahwistic reliability. It should be noted, in the move from the reassuring name in verse 14 to the reassuring time in verse 16, that verse 15 is odd. It is most likely that "curds and honey" refer to a time of abundance, prosperity, and well-being. If so, then the lines suggest that this child, by two years, will face no threat of war but will live in peace and prosperity. There will be a return to glad normalcy, because "God is with us."

Thus *the woman*, *the named child*, and *the time* all converge to offer the king assurances that may override his panic and his dangerous misreading of military-political reality. Isaiah issues an offer of well-being that the king cannot accept. King Ahaz comes to represent, in the tradition of Isaiah, not simply a weak, vacillating king, but *Judah in its unfaith*, Judah in its disregard of Yahweh, and so Judah that chooses for itself the troubles of forsaking Yahweh. It is likely that Ahaz's resistance to faith—and the sign of faith—leads to verse 17, our fourth consideration. Ahaz refuses "God with us." Ahaz proceeds to live and conduct policy minus Yahweh, that is, minus the assurance and guarantees of Yahweh. From a Yahwistic-prophetic perspective, of course, such a decision is a disaster.

In the context of this wondrous sign and assurance, we are not prepared for the harshness of verse 17. The verse makes sense only on the basis of the refusal of Ahaz. There is now going to come trouble in Judah not known since the split of the kingdom in 922, big trouble. The rhetoric of trouble, even on the lips of this eloquent poet, fails. The real danger—which Ahaz does not yet perceive—defies rhetoric. And so the announcement breaks off in midsentence, and the poet blurts out, "the King of Assyria"! That is the big trouble to come. Geopolitically, Assyria is the great threat of the north, which makes northern Israel and Syria look completely unimportant. Specifically, this king is Sennacherib, the ruthless monarch who assaulted Jerusalem (cf. 36:1; 37:17–37). The naming of Assyria, the great, brutal superpower, abruptly undoes all the assurance of verses 4, 9b, 14–16. The book of Isaiah plunges the hopeless king—with hopeless people—into the

cauldron of Assyrian rapaciousness and brutality. It could have been otherwise! But the king could not trust. And so comes devastation at the behest of Yahweh, the very God who offered to be “with us,” but is now “against us,” concretely, devastatingly in the form of Assyria. The awesomeness of the tradition of Isaiah is that it asserts the issue of faith/fear as a great public policy issue. Faith matters to life and death, to war and peace, to prosperity and destruction, to concrete decisions in the real world. This tradition dares to assert that the future of Jerusalem—seat of David, seat of Yahweh—depends upon adjudicating the offer of faith and the temptation of fear. As belated readers, we may ponder how the fear/faith issue is yet at work in other cities and other nation states. Decisions for life and death, war and peace, prosperity and devastation, now as then, are made without even a recognition that faith is not a churchy thing, but it is a basis for radical alternatives in socioeconomic, political, military policy. As the prophet said, “No faith . . . no future!” (v. 9b).

Unwelcome Futures (7:18–25)

7:18 On that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.¹⁹ And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures.

²⁰ On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well.

²¹ On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep,²² and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey.

²³ On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns.²⁴ With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briers and thorns;²⁵ and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.

There have now been collected as an addendum to the prophet-king encounter four anticipations of the future of Judah, all introduced by “on that day,” a day not yet known but already decreed by Yahweh (vv. 18–19, 20, 21–22, 23–25). The concrete decisions the king makes—in fear and not in faith—have drastic, far-reaching consequences. Either way—in fear or in faith—the king sets the future in motion. These oracles, ostensibly a con-

tinuation of verse 17, articulate the ominous future Ahaz has chosen for his city and his people. These oracles are all Yahweh-driven, though only the first two (vv. 18–19, 20) explicitly name Yahweh; the other two (vv. 21–22, 23–25) voice the outcomes understood as deriving from the will of Yahweh. They are not, however, simply decrees from *the government of Yahweh*. They are, at the same time, characteristically, situated in *the real world of geopolitics*. Isaiah will not permit Judah to withdraw into a religious cocoon, because Yahweh is ruler in the real world of power.

The first oracle appeals to vivid imagery to imagine the invasion of Egypt and Assyria upon the land of Judah (vv. 18–19). To be sure, the Isaiah tradition is primarily preoccupied with Assyria. The inclusion of Egypt as the alternative superpower is perhaps hyperbole, in order to exhibit Judah as completely exposed and vulnerable to international threats. Judah is under assault and helpless. The oracle seems to explicate the abrupt “the king of Assyria” in verse 17.

The second oracle again bespeaks devastation at the hand of Assyria (v. 20). The “razor” here refers to the standard brutal military practice of shaving captives in order to humiliate them and reduce them visibly to servility (cf. 2 Sam. 10:4–5; Isa. 3:17). The process includes the shaving of head and beard; the “hair of the feet,” moreover, is a euphemism for the shaving of genital hair, all the more to contribute to humiliation. Judah will be made completely servile to Assyria! The anticipation is reflective of the reported public submission of Ahaz to Assyria: “I am your servant and your son” (2 Kings 16:7). The single source of freedom of action in the world is Yahweh. That source rejected, Ahaz and his people must live in an Assyrian world, on Assyrian terms, which are terms of subjugation, servility, and humiliation.

The third oracle echoes verse 15 and seems not so negative as its counterparts (vv. 21–22). Indeed, it may be a positive anticipation of a new beginning of well-being. If so, it is an odd and unexpected statement here. But perhaps even if it is positive, one is struck by the modesty of the vision, modest after devastation. Thus it may be that here the devastation is past, and one begins again, lowly, in new life. This anticipation is perhaps congruent with the “remnant shall return” of 7:3. The bad news is *only* a remnant. The good news is *a remnant*. The bad news is only one cow and two sheep. The good news is an abundance of milk for “everyone that is left”!

The fourth oracle completes the picture of devastation that Ahaz has brought upon his people (vv. 23–25). This brief unit is dominated by the threefold use of “briers and thorns.” Now, there are still a thousand vines, rich, prosperous agriculture. Then, in an awful time sure to come, the rich

vines will be displaced by briars and thorns. All agricultural abundance will cease. The land so fertile and blessed will revert to desolation and abandonment. The routines that make for life will be terminated. There will be hunting there, but no cultivation, only an open grazing land (cf. Mic. 3:12). Israel is abandoned, left to the elements. Life is no longer viable.

The chapter moves from the crisis of invasion and siege by Israel and Syria (v. 5) to the final devastation by Assyria (vv. 18–25). Between these ominous options of Israel-Syria at the beginning and Assyria at the end, there has been a third alternative. The alternative of *faith in Yahweh* offered by the prophet has given Judah a chance for well-being. It was a chance made viable by a child named *God with us*. But Ahaz, emblem of fickle Israel, could not choose it. There was “a road less traveled,” but he could not take it. And so death. The book of Isaiah moves its inexorable way to nullification.

Two readings have dominated this text. One can make a *historical reading* of Ahaz in the eighth century B.C.E., where the issues are clear enough. Or one can make a *christological reading* and draw this text toward the story of Jesus and his virginal mother. Both of these readings have long-established legitimacy. My urging, however, is that we keep focus upon *the offer of faith*. The enduring community of this text—synagogue and church—still lives in a world of ominous circumstance and is ever again invited to accept at face value the threat of circumstance. But faith is to resist circumstance and to continue “a more excellent way,” a way with no guarantees beyond promises and the One who makes those promises. When and where church and synagogue embrace such assurances and act publicly upon them, the governments of the world could not long resist or refuse. Evidently, in the wake of Ahaz, we have been choosing—in panic and foolishness—the way of the bee and the fly, the razor, and the brier long enough. The non-negotiable verdict of the prophet still lingers: No faith . . . no future! The news is that the people of this text—in panic and foolishness—all too often choose against their own future, the one Yahweh would give.

PUBLIC JUDGMENTS, HIDDEN HOPES 8:1–22

This chapter is even more obscure and problematic than the preceding one. The geopolitical context is the same as that in chapter 7, namely, a threat by Israel and Syria against Judah, and a temptation to appeal to As-

syria for aid against Israel and Syria (see chapter 7 for a fuller comment). This chapter is most difficult to interpret for two reasons. Many of the phrases and images in the text are obscure and beyond recognition. More than that, some of the governing metaphors are seemingly ambiguous, so that one cannot be certain when the intention is judgment and when it is hope. Whatever can be said in this chapter is of necessity provisional.

Perhaps the greatest learning from this difficult chapter is how tentative our reading and interpretation of the Bible must be. If one did not notice this, one could be overly impressed by those who seem to know completely and without question what the Bible says, what it means, and how it applies. Closer examination of such absolutism discloses that such certainty applies only to a few selected portions of the Bible, and then often by overriding and disregarding the elusiveness that is intrinsic to the text. That elusiveness stems in part from the fact that we are dealing with very old texts in phrasing and imagery that are remote from us, plus a long process of not very adequate textual transmission. In addition to that, however, the elusiveness concerns the very elusiveness of God, so that voices like Isaiah, authoritative as they are, are not always clear on what must be said. Their saying is couched in rhetoric that is open. In any case, we see enough of elusiveness to be cautious and reluctant toward interpretations that are too loud, too certain, and too unforgiving of alternatives.

The large issue of the chapter concerns *faith in Yahweh*. As a countertheme we may notice several places at which the prophet stands apart from his community, so that we see hints of an emerging alternative community. We may divide the chapter into five elements that in part seem to be floating literary/rhetorical fragments that form no sustained or coherent argument.

Fear and Faith . . . Again (8:1–8)

8:1 Then the LORD said to me, Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, “Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz,”² and have it attested for me by reliable witnesses, the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah.³ And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz;⁴ for before the child knows how to call “My father” or “My mother,” the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria.

⁵ The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶ Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and melt in fear before Rezin and the son of Remaliah;⁷ therefore, the Lord is bringing up against it the mighty flood waters of the River, the king of Assyria and all his glory; it will rise above all its

channels and overflow all its banks; ⁸ it will sweep on into Judah as a flood, and, pouring over, it will reach up to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

These verses may be divided into two parts, between which King Ahaz apparently made his decision for Assyria, a policy decision the prophet regards as a disastrous rejection of Yahweh. Verses 1–4 continue the argument of 7:1–17, in which the king is urged not to fear excessively the momentary threat of Syria and Israel. We are here introduced to the name of yet a third child, “Spoil speeds, prey hastens.” This child and the name are applied precisely to the political crisis facing Judah. The name is taken to assert that the wealth of Damascus (capital of Syria = “spoil”) and the spoil of Samaria (capital of Israel = “prey”) will all be promptly carried away to Assyria. That is, these nations will be overcome by Assyria, and therefore Ahaz need not fear them. Moreover, the threat of these two small kingdoms will evaporate in nine months, that is, by the time this baby can say “mamma” and “daddy.” (Notice that the time here is less than the two years given as an assurance in 7:16.) Thus the assurance given yet again by a child is parallel to that of 7:14, 16.

After verse 4 and before verse 5 everything has been decided. Ahaz has capitulated to the pressure of Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 16:7–8). Now in verses 5–8, the fateful decision is underscored and condemned, and is shown to be a foolish and devastating one. Judah (and the king) had a choice (cf. Deut. 30:15–20). One choice—now rejected—was to choose “the waters of Shiloah” (v. 5). This enigmatic phrase apparently refers to an internal water supply in Jerusalem (the river Gihon?), which made Judah safe from siege (cf. 1 Kings 1:33, 38; Psalm 46:4). The reference seems to cohere with Yahweh’s promise to keep Jerusalem safe, a promise made precisely to the dynasty of David.

Ahaz, however, is too fearful. The choice alternative to the peaceable stream of sustenance is a raging river, ostensibly the Euphrates but in substance the massive, brutalizing power of Assyria. Verses 7–8 explicate the metaphor of raging waters to the fullest in order to bespeak the coming rule that will be savage and chaotic. The imagery refers to the surging of chaos that will flood all of Judah and wash away all of its certitudes. Judah has made the wrong choice by being excessively reliant upon military power to the neglect of its own peculiar assurance from Yahweh. The last phrase of verse 8—“Immanuel”—seems to be a mocking reminder of what might have been. It asserts that Judah is the people with whom Yahweh is reliably present. Ahaz, now having disregarded that fundamental assertion,

has concluded that Yahweh is *not* with Judah. And where Yahweh is not!?, other choices may be exercised, even if they lead to death.

An Interlude of Assurance (8:9–10)

8:9 **Band together, you peoples, and be dismayed;
listen, all you far countries;
gird yo urselves and be dismayed;
gird yourselves and be dismayed!**
¹⁰ **Take counsel together, but it shall be brought to naught;
speak a word, but it will not stand,
for God is with us.**

These poetic verses form an interlude in this devastating message. Until now, the address of Yahweh has been variously the prophet Isaiah, the king, or the people Judah. But now the address is “you peoples” (plural), presumably Assyria and the other states that prey upon Judah. The imagery is reminiscent of Psalm 2, which portrays the nations making a concerted assault on Yahweh’s rule, attacking Jerusalem and the Davidic king who resides there. As in Psalm 2, all of the enemies of Yahweh gang up on the city, except here the poetry is dominated by “be dismayed!” Three times the nations are invited to “be dismayed,” because their assault upon Yahweh and upon Jerusalem is futile. And why? Because of *Immanuel!* It is striking that whereas “Immanuel,” the theological slogan that mobilizes all of Davidic theology, is used ironically as rebuke in verse 8, it is here used seriously and affirmatively. In verses 7–8 we are given a picture of a *whole-sale defeat* of Jerusalem. In verses 9–10, in stark contrast, we are given *massive assurance* of the well-being of Jerusalem. Perhaps the two themes are sequential: first the devastation; then the assurance. Or perhaps they simply reflect the intrinsic ambivalence of the theological tradition, perhaps—now a greater perhaps—reflective of Yahweh’s own ambivalence toward this utterly beloved, utterly recalcitrant people. The remarkable reality is that the tradition of the text does not permit either sentiment to defeat the other. Both judgment and assurance are there. Both are real. Both must be heeded. Yahweh is serious, and the historical process is open.

Yahweh as Judah’s Only Real Problem (8:11–15)

8:11 **For the LORD spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: ¹² Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or**

be in dread.¹³ But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.¹⁴ He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over—a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.¹⁵ And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.

The text takes an intimate, confessional turn in these verses. Now the prophet declares what he himself has heard from Yahweh. God has compelled him to distinguish himself from “this people.” Isaiah now offers himself as a counterforce, operating at odds from the people. The people, especially the king, are preoccupied with the Israel-Syria “conspiracy.” But they have it all wrong. Here the text reiterates the verbs of 7:4: “Do not fear” what they fear. “Do not be in dread” of what they dread. It is not Israel and Syria that must be feared, for their days are numbered. For the prophet, it is Yahweh who requires all attention, no one else. “Lord of hosts”—the title bespeaks great military power—is the one to fear, the one before whom to be in dread; that is, Yahweh is the real “conspirator” against Judah. Yahweh is the one who is causing trouble for Judah, and the king misconstrues everything because the king does not acknowledge Yahweh to be so crucial. In verses 14–15, it is evident that the prophet takes up the old reassuring theology of Zion, the one sung about in the Psalms, and turns it against Zion. Yahweh, the rock of security, is now the rock for stumbling. Yahweh, the one who protects from snare and trap, has now become snare and trap. And because Yahweh is a powerful adversary, big trouble comes to Judah. The words pile up: stumble, fall, broken, snared, taken! The book of Isaiah sees clearly the deathly slope of Judah at the hands of Assyria, then at the hands of Babylon, all the time at the hands of Yahweh.

Yahweh as Jerusalem's Only Real Possibility (8:16–22)

8:16 Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples.¹⁷ I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.¹⁸ See, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.¹⁹ Now if people say to you, “Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living,²⁰ for teaching and for instruction?” Surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn!²¹ They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will

curse their king and their gods. They will turn their faces upward,²² or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.

In verse 11, Isaiah has been “seized” to see differently. And now, in verse 16, he acts to give evidence of his alternative view. He not only has discerned reality differently, Yahwistically, but he also makes provision to assure that his alternative vision of reality will endure and continue to be available and authoritative. Verse 16 is of special interest because it suggests that the prophet had a circle of colleagues (followers?) who shared his vision. Among them, moreover, he left affidavits of his alternative view of reality. Scholars speculate that this might be the seed of the book of Isaiah, or perhaps at least 6:1–9:7, which oddly contains first-person statements. The testimony of the prophet, which is to endure into the future, is left as an enduring evidence that Judah need not practice its self-destructive panic. There is “a more excellent way,” a way loaded with risks, a way of faith. Isaiah’s enduring warning is not unlike the categories of Barbara W. Tuchman in *The March of Folly*, who understands “folly” to be public policy operating even in the face of compelling, wise opposition. The record of Isaiah testifies to the compelling evidence that exhibits current royal policy as foolishness.

In these verses, the prophetic stance on Judah’s life is contrasted to that of “official Jerusalem.” There is a strong urging from the populace to enlist other, that is, non-Yahweh religious authorities, in order to consult other religious techniques. To no avail, says the prophet! Those who do that will end in despair and desperation, for there is no such help. Those who go down the road of self-help—religious or any other technology—will end in distress, darkness, gloom, anguish, thick darkness, the darkness of inscrutable absence, of failure, of silence. The phrases are heaped up to make the negative point.

There is, however, an alternative that the prophet champions: “I will wait for the LORD, . . . I will hope” (v. 17). To be sure, Yahweh is hiding his face. And where Yahweh’s face is hidden, deathly trouble is sure to come. But the hiddenness of Yahweh is not forever! The hiddenness is for now in all its severity, but there will be an “afterward” (cf. 1:26). Isaiah—and so he urges his followers—will not submit to this frantically chosen gloom but will live in determined and unflinching anticipation that Yahweh will yet enact another, alternative, new thing.

Indeed, it is definitional to the book of Isaiah that judgment is regularly juxtaposed to hope. The prophet never for an instant doubted a devastation

to come from Yahweh because of massive unfaith. But the prophet knew with equal certainty that newness from Yahweh would follow. The capacity of the prophet to say both things, to insist fully upon both without either eliminating or silencing the other, is the measure both of his theological conviction and of his rhetorical eloquence.

The text pertains, on the face of it, to the crisis of Ahaz with Israel, Syria, and Assyria. The history lesson warrants our attention because we notice in this history traces of our own time and place and of our God in that time and place. Theological interpretation, however, does not linger in history lessons. "The testimony" is "bound up" (cf. v. 16) and kept available even until now, even until our own reading, until our own time and place. When we read in our time and place, we do not read in escapist fashion back to the circumstance of Ahaz. We read, if we read seriously at all, of testimony preserved for us.

We read about this Yahweh, who is fear and dread in our own world of alarm and dismay. We ourselves read as a nation state now warmly embraced by a powerful military ideology. We United States citizens are not, to be sure, the suppliants of a great superpower as Ahaz was of Assyria, for we *are* the superpower recruiting and seducing suppliant states for our grand designs of a "new world order." We ourselves are now members of churches so secularized that Isaiah's rhetoric sounds obscurantist, if we hear it at all. And then we are given pause over the simplicity of the claims enduringly made here. What if it is true that the story of the world has at its center this Force of power and purpose who is our only Problem and our only Possibility? One cannot move readily from the savage abruptness of Isaiah to the smoothnesses of modernity or to the vagaries of theology given with too much scholastic certitude. One must decide to host the abruptness and then to wonder, What if Yahweh is the only "conspiracy," and all else is paranoia?

There is no overwhelming evidence for this alternative construal of reality, only three children named "A Remnant Shall Return," "Immanuel," "Spoil Speeds, Prey Hastens." These odd, seemingly quixotic names stand against the insistence of Assyrian superpower and endless religious consultation. What gives us pause is that we hear the sounds of "the mighty flood waters," and we have less reason to be certain. We wonder and are perplexed, even like those ancient Israelites—only now in our time and place, in our circumstance and our rationality. The "testimony sealed up" for now requires us, in any case, to wonder. Moreover, it authorizes our being haunted in ways that refuse explanation by any of the interpretive "civil engineers" who explain away the flood waters.

A GREAT DAVIDIC NEWNESS

9:1–7

9:1 But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

- 2 The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
- 3 You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
- 4 For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
- 5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
- 6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- 7 His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

This familiar and beloved oracle offers to Judah, driven as it is to distress, darkness, gloom, and anguish, yet another chance in the world. The poetic oracle beginning in 9:2 is introduced by what seems to be a prose transition in 9:1. In the Hebrew text this verse 1 is the final verse of chapter 8, so that it looks back to the ominous judgment of 8:22 as well as forward to the promised well-being of the oracle.

Verse 1 is organized around the contrast between "former time" and

"latter time." In the context of chapters 6–8, the "former time" is apparently the time of failure and oppression under the rule of Ahaz. The "latter time" apparently is the time after Ahaz when new royal leadership (Hezekiah) makes new "peace and prosperity" possible. Thus the oracle articulates a radical and decisive break in the fortunes of Judah, when all that is "dark" will be overcome by "a great light," namely, a new David.

When this contrast of "former/latter" is read in the larger context of the book of Isaiah (as in 43:18–19), then the "former time" is apparently the entire preexilic and exilic experience of abuse and suffering, and the "latter time" is the time of homecoming and restoration in the land. Because this oracle has been taken over by the church and read christologically, this same contrast can be understood as "B.C.E." (B.C.) and "C.E." (A.D.), so that it is the coming of Christ that marks the decisive turn toward well-being.

It is evident that this eloquent poetry admits of a multilayered reading. In the first instance, nonetheless, the oracle apparently concerned the joyous announcement of the birth of a new Davidic king who would have the authority, resolve, and capacity to reverse the fortunes of Judah. Because Ahaz, in this part of the book of Isaiah, is the embodiment of failed leadership, his son Hezekiah is reckoned to be the celebrated subject of this oracle. And indeed Hezekiah became, as we will see (cf. Isaiah 36–39), a vigorous agent for the recovery of Judah, even in the face of Assyrian power. But because the poetry is lyrical and was no doubt liturgical in its setting and has since been resituated in the canonical book of Isaiah, we need not insist too closely on the Hezekiah connection. Rather, what we have is a glorious, celebrative affirmation that Yahweh, through a human Davidic king, will create a wondrous new possibility for Judah that is unqualified and unconditional. The theological point is Yahweh's capacity and resolve for a newness that is completely fresh and without extrapolation from anything that has gone before.

The poem may be marked by three moments. First, verses 2–3 announce the spectacular newness that will be visible in the sociopolitical horizon of Judah. The "darkness" refers to a situation of despair and oppression at the hand of Assyria (cf. 8:11; 9:1). And now light! "Light" is regularly linked to the coming of Yahweh's "glory," that is, to the visible evidence of Yahweh's splendor, majesty, and sovereignty. This is the coming of Yahweh vigorously into the life of Judah where there had been only absence.

That "darkness into light," moreover, evokes unrestrained celebration and rejoicing (v. 3). The poet, in an attempt to voice the depth and power of joy, cites two parallel situations of joy, the most extreme, exuberant cases thinkable. One is *the joy of harvest*, when the crops are secure from

the threats of weather and abundance is guaranteed for another season. Such an occasion of harvest regularly evokes much drinking, after the fear and anxiety that the crop would be lost (cf. Psalm 126:6). The second parallel is *the division of conquered booty*, when an enemy has been defeated. The joy is in part the celebration of goods long coveted and now finally available, and in part simply the exultation of conquest and triumph. It is like harvest and like conquest when "the light" comes.

Second, the transformation to be wrought is a vigorous military one (vv. 4–5). The "yoke" and "rod" bespeak oppression, perhaps in the form of heavy imposed imperial taxes by the Assyrians. The turnabout here anticipated is like "the day of Midian," when Gideon won a great and completely unexpected victory over the oppressive Midianites (see Judg. 6:2–6). Overcoming Assyrian oppression is as inexplicable as was the defeat of Midian, but in the same miraculous way, it is here assured. The expected and welcome defeat is not a spiritual or religious or "nice" one. It is brutal military activity whereby the equipment of the enemy soldiers, all bloodied in the much killing, is burned as an act not only of elimination of weapons, but also of gloating and consequent humiliation of the enemy (cf. Psalm 46:8–9). Through a historical agent, Yahweh will terminate the hated empire in a violent, forcible way.

Only in the third and final section of the poem is the royal agent mentioned (vv. 6–7). Until now no agent is named; the newness is the work of Yahweh. But now it is a child, a son, an heir to the throne! The birth of an heir to the throne of David, expected to be more effective than his predecessor, is of course cause for great celebration—partly authentic joy, partly managed royal propaganda. The well-known series of royal names for "the new king" is likely ritualized hyperbole. It asserts that the new king will meet every expectation of the populace and will perform well every responsibility of the royal office. Thus the king will be wise, shrewd, and discerning ("*wonderful counselor*"), able to do incredibly shrewd things, surely a contrast to the foolish policies of his predecessor. The second title, "*mighty god*," should not be understood in a belatedly substantive, trinitarian category nor as a claim of divinity. Rather, the language means that the new king will be filled with all the powers (especially military) that are required. The phrase "*everlasting father*" is not easy, but likely relates to the generative, guaranteeing powers of the king, a massive antidote to anxiety when things seem to be out of control. Nothing will be out of control in the new administration. "*Prince of peace*" characterizes the new ruler as one who will preside over, maintain, and perhaps impose an order on reality that is in stark contrast to the chaos of the regime of Ahaz. These royal

titles are conventional in such displays of dynastic authority and are often thought to be derived from antecedent Egyptian liturgies. Be that as it may, the titles are now laden with Israel's covenantal lore, and for Christians they have been preempted by the claims of Jesus. The force of the titles is cumulative. All of them together assure a new, well-ordered, properly functioning, reliable, life-giving public domain. There is nothing privatistic or personalistic about this vision. It concerns a new deployment of positive public power and embodies "the kingdom of God."

The follow-up of the titles anticipates an awesome regime, with three important marks (v. 7). First, there will be no limit. The scope of "peace and prosperity" will be enormous. There are no doubt traces of latent imperialism here, a dream of "Greater Israel" (cf. Gen. 15:18–21). Second, the seductions of imperialism are checked by the qualities of "justice and righteousness." These two terms, rooted in the covenantal-prophetic tradition, bespeak a social order and arrangement of public power that are equitable and humane, with institutional safeguards and passionate communal commitments that preclude acquisitive avarice and exploitation of the little ones by the big ones. The same word pair, justice and righteousness, is reflected in the liturgical-ideological program of the regime in Psalm 72:1; and in an assertion requiring shameless inventiveness, the tradition dares to claim, in the mouth of the queen of Sheba, that Solomon has ruled in justice and righteousness (1 Kings 10:9). Moreover, the same word pair in Isaiah 5:7, as part of a wordplay, makes clear that it is precisely "justice and righteousness" that is the intention of Yahweh for Israel. Indeed, the prophetic tradition dares to claim that it is justice and righteousness, that is, properly deployed social power, and not arms, that will make the nation secure. Thus the new king will govern in a way that gives sustained well-being to the realm. Third, this new rule will endure "now and forever," as only a regime of justice and righteousness could.

The final phrase of the oracle is unexpected and powerful (v. 7b). This new regime, which gives an entirely new possibility for life in Judah, is because of Yahweh's jealousy. The term rendered "zeal" appeals to Yahweh's passionate, emotionally driven commitment that is twofold. On the one hand, Yahweh is zealous for Judah and Jerusalem, and will see that the city prospers. On the other hand, Yahweh has zeal to maintain Yahweh's own reputation and credibility. Those two passions converge, and Yahweh will act forcibly in behalf of Judah and in behalf of self-regard. That is, the new social possibility for Judah is rooted in Yahweh's most elemental intensity.

The phrase of verse 7b, however, as it offers and assures, also warns. It retains for Yahweh the credit for the newness and refuses to cede too much

credit to the coming king or to the dynasty. The king is a key player in the newness, for the newness is indeed social, political, and military. It is not, however, the "zeal of the king" that will do this. The resolve and passion is deeper than that of the king. The determination for social newness is rooted in "The Lord of Hosts." The phrase alludes to Yahweh's limitless military capacity. It also recalls the vision of Isaiah 6:5: "Yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts!" The newness of Judah is indeed a massive decree made by the government of heaven. The new David will enact on earth a chance for justice, righteousness, and peace—the key marks of viability, the very marks forfeited in the foolishness and panic of Ahaz.

The powerful, visionary poetry of this oracle permits more than one reading. It takes on a life of its own, claiming freedom from the Ahaz/Hezekiah matrix of the eighth century. Such a freeing from the Ahaz context has already happened in the book of Isaiah, wherein the notion of "former/latter" moves in larger scope to exile and homecoming. And in the usage of Matthew, the interpretive freedom taken with this passage is immense (Matt. 4:13–17). According to Matthew, Jesus relocates so that "what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled." This claim of course does not mean that the poet in Isaiah 9:1–7 had Jesus in mind or "predicted" Jesus. It means rather that the text, powerful and generative as it is, surges beyond its "original setting" to illuminate and redescribe new situations. The text is "reheard" in the Matthew community as a disclosure of Jesus' ministry. In this rehearing, the text speaks of the great reversal now to be caused by Jesus. He is now the "great light" that will transform. We notice, moreover, that the action of Jesus, as given us in Matthew, takes place amidst the ominous arrest of John the Baptist, that is, in the face of oppressive, imperial power. And we note that Jesus, out of that Isaiah text, preaches "the kingdom of heaven," that is, proclaims a counterreality that challenges even the rule of Herod.

The text permits many such rehearsals, because God is always recruiting human agents to enact the Great Reversal about which Yahweh had persistent "zeal." For Christians, the decisive rehearing of the text pertains to Jesus, who is the great light in the darkness. But even that rehearing with reference to Jesus is not exclusive. Alongside that we may entertain many rehearsals in which new human agents enact the light that shines in the darkness. The transformative zeal of Yahweh for new *peace and prosperity* marked by *justice and righteousness* is undiminished and undeterred. For that reason, new contexts for joy, evoked by Yahweh's unconditional, unqualified newness well up in places where the darkness seemed to perpetuity. It is not, for the darkness has not overcome the light.

ANGER STILL "STRETCHED OUT"

9:8-10:4

- 9:8 The Lord sent a word against Jacob,
and it fell on Israel;
9 and all the people knew it—
Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria—
but in pride and arrogance of heart they said:
10 "The bricks have fallen,
but we will build with dressed stones;
the sycamores have been cut down,
but we will put cedars in their place."
11 So the LORD raised adversaries against them,
and stirred up their enemies,
12 the Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west,
and they devoured Israel with open mouth.
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.
- 13 The people did not turn to him who struck them,
or seek the LORD of hosts.
14 So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail,
palm branch and reed in one day—
15 elders and dignitaries are the head,
and prophets who teach lies are the tail;
16 for those who led this people led them astray,
and those who were led by them were left in confusion.
17 That is why the Lord did not have pity on their young people,
or compassion on their orphans and widows;
for everyone was godless and an evildoer,
and every mouth spoke folly.
For all this his anger has not turned away,
his hand is stretched out still.
- 18 For wickedness burned like a fire,
consuming briars and thorns;
it kindled the thickets of the forest,
and they swirled upward in a column of smoke.
19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts
the land was burned,
and the people became like fuel for the fire;
no one spared another.
20 They gorged on the right, but still were hungry,
and they devoured on the left, but were not satisfied;

- they devoured the flesh of their own kindred;
21 Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh,
and together they were against Judah.
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.
- 10:1 Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
2 to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!
3 What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the calamity that will come from far away?
To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth,
4 so as not to crouch among the prisoners
or fall among the slain?
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.

Back-to-back with the wondrous anticipation of verses 1-7, we are hit heavily with a long speech of judgment against "Israel/Jacob." It is likely that poetry concerning "Jacob/Israel" originally concerned the Northern Kingdom, Israel. In the final form of the text, the same poetry is reappropriated for the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Thus the usages are not always consistent. The juxtaposition of hope and judgment is characteristic of the tradition of Isaiah. Indeed, it is this juxtaposition that constitutes the primary mystery of Israel's faith and the primary rhetorical achievement of the Isaiah tradition.

The most prominent feature of this extended poetry is the fourfold refrain that we have already encountered in 5:25: "For all this his anger has not turned away/his hand is stretched out still" (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). We can begin our discussion with the refrain and then work backward to the declarations that result in the refrain. The poem is tightly disciplined around these reiterated refrains.

The cause of Judah's coming trouble, the "all this" of the refrain, concerns its refusal to attune its life to Yahweh's intention. The God who governs the life processes of Israel, according to Isaiah, is awesome, ferocious, and uncompromising. "All this" evokes on Yahweh's part enduring anger, because Yahweh will not tolerate the mockery of Yahweh's sovereignty. The means of sovereign anger is "his hand is stretched out still." The phrase is of special interest because it is the phrase used positively for the Exodus (6:6).

Israel is rescued from Egyptian slavery because of Yahweh's "outstretched arm." What is astonishing is that the same "outstretched arm" that saved is now extended in hostility against Israel, Yahweh's current adversary (cf. Jer. 21:5). The same determined energy that saved Israel at the outset of its life is now determined energy to punish, if not to destroy.

It is self-evident that this is an odd way of speaking and an odd way of understanding the public processes of power. It is nonetheless a way that is standard in the Old Testament. Israel has rhetoric whereby it voices observed reality as a mode of Yahweh's governance. Others might see the danger of the Arameans and Philistines differently, but not Israel, because for Israel everything is referred to the agency of Yahweh. In freedom and determination Yahweh responds harshly to Israel's unresponsiveness. And so the crisis of the eighth century is understood as a covenantal-theological-Yahwistic crisis that cannot be overcome or relieved, except by dealing with the demands of Yahweh.

Israel, even until late, could have avoided this turn of affairs. Israel could have "turned," that is, repented (v. 13; cf. 6:10). Israel could seek Yahweh, that is, direct its attention wholly to the presence and purpose of Yahweh (Amos 5:4, 6). But, says the prophetic tradition, Israel not only offended Yahweh, but when warned, refused to change and continued in its recalcitrance (cf. 2 Kings 17:13–18).

It is likely that the tradition of Isaiah, in its use of this refrain, appeals to conventional, stylized forms of speech, suggesting that each "blow from Yahweh" is designed to elicit repentance. And if it does not, then comes another blow. Thus, in Leviticus 26 we have a reiteration of this process:

And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. . . . If you continue hostile to me, and will not obey me, I will continue to plague you sevenfold for your sins. . . . If in spite of these punishments you have not turned back to me, but continue hostile to me, then I too will continue hostile to you: I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins (Lev. 26:18, 21, 23–24).

Many scholars, moreover, believe that our text reflects and is parallel to Amos 4:6–11, wherein a series of smitings is said to be motivation for turning. Amos concludes each one with the formula: "Yet you did not return to me" (vv. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). Where Israel does not return, Yahweh remains angry. Where Yahweh remains angry, trouble comes, and Israel continues in jeopardy.

The long recital of judgment (marked by the reiterated refrain) touches

upon familiar themes: Israel and its leadership have been arrogant and irresponsible, so that Yahweh must punish. Thus "pride and arrogance" are named in verse 9, obtuseness and a refusal to recognize trouble in verse 10, a refusal to "turn" or "seek" in verse 13, all are "godless and evildoers" in verse 17, and because of greediness they devour each other in internecine conflict (vv. 20–21a). The irresponsible conduct of Judah sets it in profound opposition to Yahweh.

As a consequence that is inescapable, according to Israel's prophetic calculus, judgment must surely come. This punishment comes in the form of threatening foreign armies that are at the behest of Yahweh (v. 12a). The punishment, instigated by Yahweh and executed by foreigners, has caused a brutal diminishment of the people, especially the leadership (vv. 14–18), so that Israel must now live in a context where there is no pity, compassion, or mercy (v. 17a). In an alternative image, "wickedness" has broken out like a consuming fire, so that the whole land is burned and none is spared (vv. 18–19). This vexing characterization appeals to a variety of metaphors that are rich and elusive. Among them, one more time, is "briers and thorns" (v. 18; cf. 7:23–25). And yet for all their variation, we may judge that all these several images speak primarily of war and invasion. There is explicit reference to the Arameans and Philistines as threatening adversaries (v. 12). It is most likely, moreover, that "cutting off head and tail" relates to the brutality of war (v. 14), and that the absence of compassion, which thereby exposes the vulnerable (v. 17), is a consequence of military action, as is the wholesale burning. Without being reductionist, the punishment is enemy intrusion before which Israel is helpless.

As is often the case, one may notice the daring linkage uttered by the prophet:

Cause: Refusal to live as Yahweh commands.

Result: Brutality at the hands of foreign enemies.

The prophet insists that the public process is a moral fabric. There are deep costs for the violation of the purposes of Yahweh, costs that are assessed not "supernaturally" but through the ongoing affairs of nations. Thus the prophet manages to keep together, as Israel's prophets regularly do, the uncompromising theological *claim of Yahweh* and the seeming *vagaries of life* through which that theological intentionality is enacted.

Although 10:1–4 belongs to the sequence of 9:8–21 because of the refrain in verse 4, we may also notice its very different rhetorical character. It is linked to 9:8–21 by the refrain. Verses 1–3, however, have more in

common with the “woe series” of 5:8-23. As we have seen in those sayings, here as well the term “woe” (“ah”) introduces a warning that those who act *foolishly* will come to a sorry end. It is characteristic of woe sayings that the bad consequences come intrinsically with the foolishness, that is, without any intervening, punishing agent.

The “foolishness” chosen here concerns the practice of social exploitation by the manipulation of the legal process. The prophet understands—long before Karl Marx—that “law making” is the privilege of the powerful, most often done to their own advantage. The writing of law turns out to be “the writing of oppression” whereby exploitation of the vulnerable—widows and orphans—is completely legal. However, here the distorting process of such law making is brought under the aegis of “woe.” Such a process ensures trouble, vexation, and eventually death.

In verse 3, as we have seen in 5:9, 13-17, 24-25, the “pure woe saying” is reinforced by prophetic threat, thus introducing an agent of punishment. There will be “a day of punishment.” Such actions as those here condemned do not go unnoticed or unrequited! There is coming a *Shoah*, a devastating storm, and there will be no safe place, no place to hide, no refuge. The imagery is reminiscent of 2:20-21, wherein even the wealthy and powerful are forced to run and hide, without their wealth. When the judgment comes, as it surely will, the wealth secured by legal but unacceptable means will be abandoned. The poet anticipates a drastic social reversal wherein the wealthy, powerful, and manipulative will be recast as desperate fugitives, now placed in enormous jeopardy.

It is important, in my judgment, that the prophets be understood as poets. They are seeking, with enormous inventiveness, to enable their listening contemporaries to construe their lives Yahwistically. They insist (and so they utter) that Yahweh is an active and defining focus for life, without which focus public life in Israel is sure to be misconstrued, falsely understood, and faithlessly lived. It is easy in our secularized time and place to find such a Yahweh-reference more than a little naive, and surely life can be well imagined and well understood without reference to Yahweh. But it must have been equally easy to do so in that ancient context. It is easy (easier!) to perceive reality in terms of practical politics than it is to situate a decisive Yahweh at its center. According to this prophetic tradition, however, such a construal of reality is deeply misjudged and will never bring security, well-being, or joy. Yahweh is the inescapable Character at the center of things. Yahweh is, insists the poet, currently deeply offended and mobilized to wound. All this from Yahweh can be avoided, but the requirement for such avoidance is taken by Judah to be too heavy,

for it entails the complete reorientation of public life. For that reason the hand of Yahweh remains vigorously and hostilely stretched out. Such poetry is an odd rendering of reality. But Bible believers do indeed operate with such an odd sense of reality as the only version of reality that makes sense of the world at hand.

FAITH REQUIRED IN THE MIDST OF GLOBAL THREAT 10:5-34

The tradition of Isaiah articulates faith on a large scale, resisting any safe, private, or conventional categories. We have already seen that the Isaiah tradition thus far has had Assyria in purview as the defining reality of geopolitics (5:26; 7:17; 8:4, 7). Now in yet another complicated and unclear chapter, the hearer of this text is plunged into the large, demanding world of geopolitics, face-to-face with the threats and temptations of a superpower. The text consists of a variety of fragmentary pieces that were likely accumulated over a long period of time; some of the “superpower” texts likely are addressed to superpowers later on the horizon of Israel, for whom Assyria is now a metaphor. We may divide the chapter into four parts, even though any such division must override and ignore some of the complexities of the rhetoric.

A Tool Become Too Arrogant (10:5-19)

10:5 Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger—
the club in their hands is my fury!

⁶ Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

⁷ But this is not what he intends,
nor does he have this in mind;
but it is in his heart to destroy,
and to cut off nations not a few.

⁸ For he says:
“Are not my commanders all kings?

⁹ Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?

¹⁰ As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols