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PART ONE

The Presentation of Isaiah: Word and Prophet

ISAIAH 1—12

Overview

Before examining individual passages and commenting upon them, we will first look at the broader structural organization of larger sections in Isaiah, beginning with chapters 1—12. We will follow a similar procedure with other major sections in the book (chaps. 13—23; 24—27; 28—35; and 36—39). Recently much interest has been shown in the unity of the Book of Isaiah. We are interested in a related question: Does the text in its present organization provide clues for the exegesis of individual passages? This is more a question of simple coherence than one of unity. Is the text in its present shape meaningful? Is the text's coherence to be sought primarily on the basis of historical reconstruction, whereby an individual pericope is placed within a setting in past history and then related to the present; or can an individual text be illumined by attention to the broader context in which it is found? As we shall see, if the answer to this last question is positive, then we have our work cut out for us. For if the larger structure of the text manifests a coherence extending beyond individual passages, read against a reconstructed historical backdrop, then that coherence is also quite elusive and requires a careful reading to be properly appreciated.

Introduction

It has often struck me as unfortunate that those who put the final touches on the biblical books did not supply us with a key

as to how they were to be read: a kind of preface or instruction sheet, as it were. Presumably the final editors were also the first readers. The only keys available, however, have been supplied after the fact, in the form of midrash, New Testament interpretations, or in the ancient and modern commentary tradition. These various aids are of course based on clues provided in the text itself, though also with strong external principles that encourage certain types of reading (pedagogical; legal; christological; historical). At the same time, it is probably also of significance that such keys or instruction sheets have *not* been supplied within the presentation of the books themselves, in such an explicit sense. Apparently they were not seen as necessary for at least some portion of readership.

In the recent period one principal guide to interpretation has been based on a biographical model. This has been particularly true for the prophetic books. The interpreter seeks to understand the person of the prophet, the times in which he lived, and the end to which his prophetic activity was directed. The theological justification for this is clear: the prophets were inspired persons, and the closer one gets to the person of the prophet, the closer one stands to the revelation vouchsafed to him.

It became a commonplace in the last century to nuance this view of prophetic inspiration considerably in order to allow for the inspired activity of other forces at work in the making of a prophetic book. Due allowance was made for the derivative and at times contradictory nature of secondary inspiration, but on the whole this broader view of prophecy and prophetic books gained acceptance, in no small part because it seemed to be based directly on the evidence of prophetic books themselves. At several points we are able to glimpse in the biblical text clues as to how the original words of the prophet were transformed and reshaped—a process itself based on the conviction that the prophetic word had a vitality and relevance that outlived its own originating circumstances. A classic text in this regard is Jeremiah 36. The prophet's preaching is committed to writing, with the assistance of Baruch; after it is arrogantly destroyed by King Jehoiakim, the scroll is reconstituted by Baruch. Then we are told that "many similar words were added" to the words of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 36:32). So too the Book of Isaiah makes reference to the *process* of inspiration and the afterlife of the prophetic word, beyond the circum-

stances of its delivery (8:16–22; 29:11–12; 30:8). Unfortunately these various references in the prophetic books are random and, taken together, hardly form a comprehensive picture.

Prophetic Agency

It is no accident that in the Introduction a section on the life of the prophet was not provided. This is not because such a life, at least in some cursory form, is incapable of reconstruction from the Book of Isaiah itself; the evidence of commentary writing in this century clearly contradicts such an assertion. Rather, its omission is meant to signal the kind of proportion that interest in the person of the prophet is given by the Book of Isaiah itself. What does it mean, for example, that the book does not open with a call narrative of the prophet Isaiah? Instead, the reader must wait until the sixth chapter for the prophet to step boldly into view, and even here it is not clear that the chapter should be designated a call narrative in the same sense in which the opening chapters of Hosea, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel function.

In an intriguing study entitled *Pseudonymity and Canon*, David Meade has argued persuasively that matters of authorship, inspiration, and proprietary claim to "copyright" were handled much differently in antiquity than we might expect. The prophetic word was always at one remove from the prophet who uttered it; instead, it remained the "spiritual possession" of the one who inspired it, namely, Israel's God. As such it was capable of extension and reapplication, consistent with its own inherent authority and independence. Meade uses the Book of Isaiah as a classic example of this phenomenon, thus explaining in part how the massive extension of the message of Isaiah was accomplished and how the theological justification for "later additions" functioned. As noted above, this notion of the independent authority of the word of God is especially prominent in the Isaiah tradition (see the reference to the divine word going forth to "accomplish that which I purpose" at Isa. 55:11).

One might say that Meade has chosen the best example in the Book of Isaiah for his thesis. Other contrasting notions of the centrality of prophetic agency can be seen in the prophetic corpus. The Book of Jeremiah, for example, has developed into its present form with an explicit interest in the prophetic per-

sona; one thinks of the laments of Jeremiah, the "biographical" narratives found especially in chapters 37—45, the figure of Baruch, the genuine interest in dates and specific events in history. Ezekiel and Hosea also come to mind, if not also Amos. In these books the final editors are clearly concerned with the biographical and the sociohistorical reality of prophetic agency in a way that can be contrasted with what we see in the Book of Isaiah.

This is not to say that the figure of Isaiah plays no role whatsoever. Peter Ackroyd has probed this dimension of the Isaiah tradition, specifically in chapters 1—12, in his essay "Isaiah I—XII: Presentation of a Prophet." The allusion to his essay in the title of this section is not accidental; neither is the slight modification we have proposed. Ackroyd is not so much interested in the historical prophet, even as "the Isaiah of that historic period . . . stands behind the message" (p. 45); rather, he is interested in the prophet *as he has been presented to us*: "Whether the prophet himself or his exegetes were responsible, the prophet appears to us as a man of judgement and salvation" (p. 45).

We will have occasion to look more closely at Ackroyd's actual reconstruction of the presentation of Isaiah in due course. What is of more interest at this juncture is the point that both Ackroyd and Meade wish to make about the presentation of the prophet specifically in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah is less a prophet who presents himself to us than he is a prophet who has been presented by others to us. Prophetic agency in delivering the word of God is less central than the word of God itself and that word's own presentation of the prophet Isaiah. Here we may also find an explanation of why the book does not open with a call narrative of the prophet.

Isaiah 1—4: The Presentation of Word and Prophet

It would be more accurate to talk about Isaiah 1—12, the opening section of the Book of Isaiah, as concerned with the presentation of Isaiah's word as well as his person. This is made clear in the opening four chapters. We mentioned in the Introduction several sticking points that frustrate a clear interpretation of the structure of these opening twelve chapters: (1) two

superscriptions (1:1; 2:1); (2) delayed call narrative (chap. 6); (3) interruption of two series of refrains (woe: 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1; outstretched hand: 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4); and (4) Isa. 2:1—4 paralleled in Micah 4:1—4. Other structural problems could be mentioned as well.

When one moves to the area of content and interpretation, these problems are compounded: Are all three children the prophet's (7:3; 7:14; 8:1—4)? Are the sign names positive or negative? Are the messianic oracles (9:1—7; 11:1—9) directed to historical or eschatological figures? Are they birth or accession oracles? Trying to assign oracles in these opening twelve chapters to specific historical periods is a daunting task, with practically every period having been suggested for the material in chapters 1—4 alone. If one considers it likely that Isaiah's historical preaching has been placed in a new framework of interpretation, then the historical problem is not so much solved as relativized. New questions arise. How are we to interpret even a secondary presentation of the prophet's word and person?

I will make the following provisional suggestions, aware that they are proposals only and ones that follow from a certain working perspective on the Book of Isaiah. In this perspective, the prophet's word and person have been abstracted from straightforward historical presentation (namely, the chronological unfolding of the prophet's career) and have been placed in another framework meaningful to later readers and interpreters. The opening chapter is not so much an overture of the contents of the Book of Isaiah in its entirety as it is a summary recapitulation of Isaiah's vision relevant to the period mentioned at 1:1. Indeed, with the only clearly "historical" reference occurring at 1:7—9, concerning Zion's besieged but surviving existence, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the opening chapter summarizes Isaiah's preaching from the perspective of the 701 B.C. deliverance—or better, from a penitential perspective following upon that deliverance. That is, the opening chapter directs us just beyond the latest period of the historical Isaiah's preaching, such as can be found now in chapters 36—39.

The superscription at 2:1 attributes the oracle that follows (2:2—4) to the prophet Isaiah (so Ackroyd) and in so doing insists that Isaiah's message was one of ultimate salvation and the worship of the nations (2:1—5) as well as one essentially of judgement and exhortation (1:1—31). A statement is not so much

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being made about the Isaianic authorship of 2:2–5, as, say, against Micah authorship (contra Ackroyd), as there is a concern to spell out the widest range for Isaiah's preaching from the perspective of those shaping his message for posterity. In sum, we are arguing that the superscriptions found in 1:1 and 2:1 pertain to the material that follows them and specifically to that material. On the other hand, because 1:2–31 offers a summarizing statement of the prophet Isaiah's message in the form of a comprehensive vision, 1:1 also functions as a superscription for the entire book. What 1:1 states, however, is less a matter of authorship or proprietary claims made on behalf of Isaiah than it is a statement of belief, made on the part of those who shaped the Isaiah traditions, that what followed was a faithful rendering of the essence of Isaiah's preaching as vouchsafed to him by God.

The distinction is subtle, but it allows for the extension of Isaiah's message into the present textualized form, at the same time acknowledging important theological realities concerning continuity with Isaiah's preaching and the faithful representation of the word of God. Did Isaiah actually deliver the speech recorded in 1:2–31? This is impossible to determine with historical tools alone, standing outside the book's own presentation. Does the book present Isaiah as having delivered 1:2–31? Yes, though not with all the notions attending authorship and "copyright" familiar in the modern period. Here the observations of Meade are telling. The "vision" of chapter 1 remains the normative entry point for the Book of Isaiah, and because it is represented as a divine word (1:2), it also stands over the prophet Isaiah. It is not his "spiritual possession" but a divine word summarizing his historical preaching. We would also argue that it is meant to summarize that preaching from a very specific vantage point, namely, following the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. See more on this below.

The next major section of Isaiah (2:6–4:6) is held together by the refrain "in that day" and a perspective directed toward the future. In the latter sense it shares something of the same perspective of 2:1–5. However, only the closing section (4:1–6) recapitulates the tone and content of 2:1–5; the rest of this complex is concerned with a coming day that will lay bare the sins of Judah and Jerusalem, and where the nation will encounter the terrifying glory of the Lord. The opening four chapters, then, present the divine word as a sort of "chiaroscuro by which the prospect of the future is set out against the background of

failure and doom" (Ackroyd, "Presentation," p. 45). The future will be marked by salvation only after a cleansing "by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning" (4:4). A vision for the future is set forth using a recapitulation of the prophet's historical preaching, based on the latest period of his activity (1:2–31). Marvin Sweeney has summarized the message of chapters 2–4 as concerned with "the cleansing and restoration of Jerusalem and Judah so that Zion can serve as YHWH's capital for ruling the entire world" (Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4*, p. 134). This broader editorial perspective is based on a recapitulation of Isaiah's preaching during the reign of four Judahite kings, but it also ranges far beyond that preaching. This is the perspective that confronts the reader not just of First Isaiah but also of the wider book of sixty-six chapters. It is telling that the presentation of Isaiah 1–12 begins with a presentation of the prophet's word rather than with a presentation of the prophet as such. For that, we must wait until chapter 6.

Isaiah 5:1–30

Apart from the usual historical-critical argumentation, one can also detect several strong contextual reasons for interpreting chapter 5 as the historical proclamation of Isaiah, if not also the starting point of that proclamation in the presentation of chapters 1–12. In chapters 1–4 the focus remains on Judah and Jerusalem (1:1; 2:1; 3:1, 8) or Zion and Jerusalem (2:3; 3:16, 17; 4:3–6), a perspective that makes particular historical sense not just during the exile or in the postexilic period (Sweeney) but also following the fall of Israel in 721 B.C. The image of the vineyard is introduced in 1:8, yet it is a vineyard in which Zion alone remains "like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city." So we stand somewhere after both the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the 701 assault on Judah and Jerusalem.

In the Song of the Vineyard, with which chapter 5 opens (5:1–7), the fate of the vineyard still hangs in the balance, even as a final decision of judgment is rendered (5:5–6). Explicit reference is made to the house of Israel as "the vineyard of the LORD of hosts" (5:7) and Judah, perhaps more narrowly, as "his pleasant planting." The "in that day" perspective of chapters 2–4 gives way to present indictment, as the woe refrain already mentioned is taken up (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22).

Is it possible to date the material more specifically? Several

factors taken together suggest that chapter 5 was intended to be read as pre-Uzziah-period proclamation, with a specific focus on the Northern Kingdom. Again it is helpful to examine the historical perspective, not of modern reconstruction, but of Israel's own records, namely, those found in II Kings.

Prior to any mention of the death of Uzziah (II Kings 15:32), we hear of Tiglath-pileser annexing portions of the Northern Kingdom and carrying their population "captive to Assyria" (II Kings 15:29). This occurs during the reign of Pekah king of Israel. Reference to the Syro-Ephraimite pact between Pekah and Rezin, and the assault on Jerusalem (Isaiah 7—8), does not appear until II Kings 16:5. Here, then, we find confirmation of the specific reference to exile given at Isa. 5:13 and the wider description of judgment. In very broad terms, the presentation of Isaiah at this juncture conforms to the perspective of the Deuteronomistic History. That the fate of the Northern Kingdom was meant to be a warning to Judah/Jerusalem is a theme shared again by that History (II Kings 17) and the Book of Isaiah (Isa. 10:10–11). Also held in common is the notion of a gradual assault by God on the sinful Israel, beginning with the Northern Kingdom, then extending to Judah, and finally culminating at Zion's neck (II Kings 17:18–23). Here we find an explanation of why the theme of the outstretched hand (5:25) is introduced prior to chapter 6, separated from identical references after chapter 8. God raised a signal for Assyria (5:26–30) before the Syro-Ephraimite debacle and before Isaiah's specific commissioning "in the year that King Uzziah died." His anger was first turned against the Northern Kingdom. And it is stretched out still (5:25).

Isaiah 6:1—9:7

Attempts have been made since the time of Karl Budde (1928), or Bernhard Duhm before him (1892), to see within these chapters elements of a first-person memoir going back to the prophet himself. If such a memoir once existed, it has been all but obliterated in the final presentation of the material. First-person elements are now "very spasmodic and partial" (Clements, "Immanuel," p. 227), and the function of the chapters in their present form is now far removed from that of a memoir. Even the notion that chapter 6 represents a call narrative of Isaiah is not without its problems; we have referred to

these in the Introduction. Moreover, it is difficult to link the first-person reporting of 6:1–13 with that which is found in chapters 7 and 8.

We suggested above the strong possibility that the placement of chapter 6 within the presentation of chapters 1–12 was not accidental but was undertaken so that the word of God, in more comprehensive form, might provide the broader context in which to understand the depiction of the prophet and biographical aspects of his activity. We have also referred to chronological aspects of the presentation of chapters 1–12 that speak in favor of interpreting chapter 5 as divine speech delivered prior to the death of Uzziah and the episode depicted in chapter 6.

Features within chapter 6 confirm such an interpretation. Most telling in this regard is the objection of the prophet (6:5). The prophet exclaims that he is a man of unclean lips dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips. To be sure, an element of this confession is predicated on the fact that the prophet recognizes himself as having been transported to the divine realm, where his eyes see "the King, the LORD of hosts." But just as surely, the confession is a statement of simple fact. That Isaiah dwells in the midst of an unclean people is confirmed by the testimony of chapter 5. Even the prophet's ejaculation "Woe is me!" recalls the sixfold woe refrain found there.

This interpretation also eases some of the theological strain on the commission to Isaiah to "make hearts fat" (6:10, RSV). There had already been a period of prophetic warning. The time had come for the mature deliberation of the divine council to be shared with Isaiah. Here, however, the concern seems pastoral and specifically connected with the prophetic office. Isaiah leaves the divine council preaching warning and exhortation, not smug announcements of doom (see chap. 7). But he knows that refusals to hear are not indications of the vanity of his preaching or the impotence of his God but that they are, rather, signs of the extent of Israel's deafness and the accuracy of the divine diagnosis. The prophet also learns the time frame for the message of judgment. This involves a massive judgment, the survival of a tenth, and the further burning of that tenth, until only a holy seed is left (6:13). Once again, the graded character of the judgment is made clear, consistent with the image of the hand that "is stretched out still" (5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). If the language of 6:13 were to be more specifically inter-

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preted, we would take the massive destruction to refer to the fall of Israel, the tenth remaining and then burned to refer to Judah, and the final remnant, "the holy seed," as the survivors in Jerusalem following the 701 assault. Confirmation of this interpretation will require further substantiation in the commentary and in our treatment of chapters 36–39.

Chapter 7 opens with a notice resembling that of the Deuteronomistic History (II Kings 16:5) which moves the presentation directly ahead to the crisis of 734–732. Also in the manner of Kings, Isaiah 7:1 indicates the final outcome of the crisis from Jerusalem's perspective: "but [they] could not mount an attack against it." King Ahaz is on the throne, but a more specific date is not provided. The chapter wishes to do more than record history. Instead, in Ahaz we see a rather egregious example of the refusal to hear (7:1–9) and see (7:12), as the prophet had been warned (6:10), all the more critical because Ahaz represents the house of David to whom special promises had been made. The three sign-name children (7:3; 7:14; 8:1), rather than serving as vouchers of God's deliverance in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, become instead paradoxical signs (8:18), due to the refusal of Ahaz and "this people" (8:6) to accept God's word of promise (7:7–9). Assyria delivers Judah-Jerusalem from the Syro-Ephraimite threat but with a dark proviso: that of becoming the rod of God's fury against his own people. What deliverance Israel can now expect will follow only after the Assyrian assault (8:9–10) and a period of stumbling and testing (8:11–22). Only then will the oppressor be broken and Israel ruled by one worthy to claim the throne (9:1–7), in absolute contrast to Ahaz.

Isaiah 9:8–11:16

With this vision of future rule adumbrated, we then return to the chronological setting reminiscent of chapter 5. Explicit mention is made of the fate of the Northern Kingdom (Israel, Samaria, Ephraim) as the adversaries of Rezin (9:11) are raised up against them and Israel is slowly devoured (9:12). Yahweh's hand continues stretched out against Israel (9:12) until it is cut off "head and tail" (9:14). In the midst of their destruction they strike out, their own people devouring one another: "Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, and together they were against Judah" (9:21). Here we have clear reference to the Syro-Ephraimite intrigue.

In the next strophes (10:1–11), the fate of Judah-Jerusalem at the hands of Assyria, "the rod of my anger" (10:5), finds expression as Jerusalem is threatened with worse treatment than Samaria received (10:11). Yet precisely in the midst of such hubris, God draws a line on the mission of destruction he has decreed for Assyria (10:12–19). God will send a "wasting sickness among his stout warriors" (10:16), leaving a remnant so small "that a child can write them down" (10:19). Do we have here clear reference to the record of Assyrian defeat in 701 B.C., now found in Isaiah 36–37? The chapter closes with a vision of reunion and a promise of Assyrian defeat (10:20–27) as the Assyrian march against the daughter Zion is halted. "The lofty will be brought low" (10:33).

Chapter 11 then begins with a messianic oracle reminiscent of 9:1–7, even more expansive in its vision of coming peace and natural harmony. This "root of Jesse" will stand as an ensign to the dispersed of Israel, wherever they are found. Enmity between Ephraim and Judah will end as the nation is again reunited with its lost people and with itself (11:12–16).

Isaiah 12:1–6

This chapter is best understood as a hymn of thanksgiving. It clearly brings to completion the themes of reunion and messianic peace articulated in the previous chapter as it speaks of divine forgiveness and comfort. What was not said in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis is now proclaimed boldly: "I will trust [in God], and not be afraid" (cf. 7:4–9 and 12:2). The hymn then gives way to expressions of pure joy and thanksgiving (12:3–6). On this note, the presentation of Isaiah, word and prophet, comes to a close. What follows (chaps. 13–23) is an extended treatment of the nations theme, as this was briefly alluded to in 11:12–16.

Conclusion

Several distinct conclusions can be drawn from this structural overview of Isaiah 1–12. Chief among them is the overriding sense that the presentation of these twelve chapters has a coherence and significance that is the result of conscious editorial efforts. The historical preaching of the prophet Isaiah has been secondarily interpreted and presented in a new literary format.

Historical Structure

There is little evidence in chapters 5–12 of late, postexilic interpretation. The isolated instances (11:11) establish the general principle. On the other hand, one can see a conscious effort to relate the preaching of Isaiah during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis to the later events of Assyrian hegemony in the region, and especially the 701 assault on Jerusalem by Sennacherib. That assault, and its signal failure, underlie much of the text's concern to set a specific limit to Assyria's role as instrument of judgment. One also sees clear evidence that following that deliverance—which stood in such contrast to the events of 734–732—distinct hopes were expressed for the reunification of Israel and the return of the dispersed. What Assyria had begun even before the Syro-Ephraimite debacle, our text affirms will be reversed in equal measure. Assyria will only “shake his fist” at Zion; finally, all Israel will be restored.

On the other hand, the opening chapters present the deliverance of 701 B.C. and its abiding significance rather differently. Chapter 1 sees the deliverance as cause for repentance and change of heart. Only then will Jerusalem be called “the city of righteousness, the faithful city” (1:26). These two theological perspectives need not stand in opposition. But it is significant to note that the book opens, not with the visions of reunification and the limiting of Assyria, but with somber calls for repentance and obedience (1:20). Israel can refuse such calls, but with the same dire consequences as they experienced in the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis.

It is on the basis of this somber introduction that chapters 2–4 have developed their own vision of pending judgment, “in that day.” Here we may well have evidence of a later exilic (Babylonian) redaction that has adapted the penitential side of Isaiah's proclamation to the events of 587 B.C. and their aftermath. For then Zion was not just left as a booth in a vineyard; it was overrun completely. The vision of hope that chapters 1–4 finally embrace will take effect only after this later judgment and burning (4:2–6).

Theological Structure

The opening chapters (chaps. 1–4) certainly set the tone for what follows (chaps. 5–12). Visions of restoration and an end to Assyrian domination following the 701 deliverance can

only be seen as provisional, now to be interpreted within the context of the vision of restoration found in these opening chapters. So too the historical experience of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem during the Assyrian period—in terms both of judgment and of salvation—functions as a type for Israel's later experience in the Babylonian period. If the first royal oracle (9:1–7) has been presented in such a way as to point to Hezekiah and the deliverance accomplished in his day, the second oracle (11:1–9) looks even farther ahead. As such, it remains an eschatological statement in the book and functions together with visions such as are found in 2:1–5 to adumbrate the intention of God beyond the events of 701 and 587. Visions of restoration not fully fulfilled after 701 likewise retain an eschatological force.

If this is true, it is clear why the Book of Isaiah continued to call for new readings after the lifetime of the prophet. The visions of judgment and restoration remained so profound that they continued to call forth new interpretations in the light of later events. This must have been especially true of the latter. Israel continued to look for the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision of restoration, so eloquently stated in the presentation of chapters 1–12, long after Isaiah had himself passed from view. His message belonged not to himself but remained the “spiritual possession” both of God and of the generations who continued to look to him to fulfill this former vision of restoration and commonweal.

Isaiah 1:1–31

Like a Booth in a Vineyard

The opening superscription (1:1) makes clear that the Book of Isaiah will maintain a specific focus on Judah and Jerusalem, within the larger nation of Israel. So too the range of Isaiah's prophetic activity is stated with reference to Judah's kings. This perspective dominates the presentation that follows and is particularly germane in the opening chapter. Even where the larger book displays an interest in Israel and speaks of its wider reunification, these hopes are articulated with reference to Judah and Jerusalem. Another way of stating this is that Isaiah is fundamentally concerned with institutions, or theological

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perspectives, that are rooted in the Southern Kingdom: namely, kingship and Zion.

Previous study has spoken of Zion theology and royal theology as the two central traditions that affect the prophetic activity of Isaiah. Whatever they may mean in the abstract, they are used in a specific and individual way by the prophet Isaiah. In both cases, the responsibilities—not the prerogatives—attending God's election of Zion and choice of David come to the fore in the prophet Isaiah's handling of these traditions. Zion and David are expected to fill certain roles that nurture and sustain the life of Israel. By the same token, Zion's righteous deportment remains the responsibility of the king and the people. It stands as a concrete symbol of God's presence. Yet if the citizens of Zion deal corruptly, that presence is transformed into a judging and cleansing fire. Election comes with a special cost, not just with a special benefaction. Nowhere is this theme stated more clearly than in the opening chapter.

One matter is made particularly clear in the opening chapter. A rebellion has already taken place (1:2); the nation is sinful and utterly estranged (1:4) even as the book opens. Moreover, they have already received punishment for their corrupt dealings. Verse 5 questions why the nation would choose yet more punishment and then describes the present condition as "bruises and sores and bleeding wounds" (1:6). In quite explicit terms the next verse depicts military invasion and desolation: cities are burned, aliens inhabit the land and devour it. Only Zion is left. It too might have been destroyed and become like Sodom and Gomorrah, had God not left a few survivors (1:8-9). This description follows so closely the events leading up to 701, when Assyria ravaged the Judahite countryside until only Jerusalem was left (36:1), that the logic of a setting in this period would seem clear. Whether we stand before or after Jerusalem's deliverance has been debated, much of the question hanging on the depiction of religious rites in the following verses (1:10-17). Some argue that the seemingly routinized nature of the worship points to a period of peace, others that such elaborate practices were relevant—even as they are condemned by Isaiah—precisely in times of crisis. It is not clear that this criterion alone can decide the issue.

One feature of the text, especially in verses 10-26, that is frequently overlooked involves those to whom the indictment is directed. In 1:2-9 the people of Israel in general are ad-

dressed. In 1:10, however, the "rulers of Sodom" are specifically addressed as one segment of the broader population. So too, 1:23 singles out the "princes" as rebels, as failing to defend the fatherless and the widow—an indictment that seemed more general in 1:16d-17: "cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." And finally, when God speaks of cleansing judgment in verses 24-26, he has in mind the restoration of just leadership: "I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning" (1:26). It is clear that within the broader indictment God takes a particular interest in the leadership: how it has failed to defend the powerless and replaced righteousness with murder (1:21); how the "silver" of the nation has become dross (1:22) that must be smelted away (1:25).

In attempting to understand the setting and the occasion of the indictment, which might properly be called a lawsuit on the basis of the opening summons to witnesses (1:2), one other feature of the text is frequently overlooked. Are there not linkages with the description of assault and deliverance now found in chapters 36-37? Most telling in this regard is the sign oracle given by Isaiah prior to the turning back of Sennacherib (37:30-32). There we hear of a "surviving remnant of the house of Judah" and a band of survivors from Jerusalem who shall "take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (37:31-32). This remnant shall go forth out of Mount Zion, for the "zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." Isaiah 1:9 sounds like a confession linked to this promise: "If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah." Precisely because it follows so hard on the heels of this confession, the sharpness of the next verse is doubly underscored: "Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom!" The survivors of 701 B.C. were to have been a remnant that took root downward and looked back on the deliverance with thanksgiving and sobered wills. They were to have planted vineyards and eaten their fruit, a mere three years after the destruction of Judah (37:30). But now that promise must be predicated: "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land" (1:19). And more telling: "If you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword" (1:20).

As to the indictment directed against the leadership, there are also hints of a link to the depiction of chapters 36-38. Verse 21 looks back on a "faithful city" in which righteousness once

lodged, that was once “full of justice.” Are these just nostalgic reminiscences of a bygone day, or can the references to righteousness, justice, and faith have a more specific intention, namely, to recall the correct deportment of King Hezekiah? Righteousness did once lodge in Jerusalem, in the person of King Hezekiah, whose prayer saved the city from disaster (37:21). In the highly parabolic passage that follows the account of Jerusalem’s deliverance, accomplished “for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David” (37:35), Hezekiah falls deadly ill (38:1). Yet he prays again for deliverance, asking God to remember “how I have walked before you in faithfulness” (38:3). God hears the prayer of Hezekiah and reverses a sentence of death, for him and the city (38:6).

Where once there was righteousness, in the person of Hezekiah, now there are murderers (1:21). It is not necessary to press the historical argument in favor of a post-701 setting any further. We prefer instead to work with the clues provided in the text itself and with the larger literary context of the Book of Isaiah. But it should come as no surprise to learn from the Deuteronomistic History that the years following the death of Hezekiah proved to be the nadir of Judah’s existence (II Kings 21). That such a swift movement from righteousness to murder, from justice to bribery, from silver to dross could have taken place so soon after the deliverance of 701 is staggering—but the record of Kings is clear. There we see the transition from a king who is regarded without equal for trust in God (II Kings 18:5) to one who is without equal for the evil he seduced Judah into committing, worse even than the nations (II Kings 21:9). In this regard, it is interesting to read the enumeration of crimes in Isaiah 1 against the witness of II Kings 21, where we hear of hands full of blood (Isa. 1:15; II Kings 21:6, 16), of futile offerings (Isa. 1:13; II Kings 21:5), and of murderers (Isa. 1:21; II Kings 21:16). Who knows but that Manasseh’s name was chosen as an expression of hope for the return of the Northern Kingdom, a hope clearly articulated in Isaiah 11. If this was the case, those hopes were quickly dashed.

Following the long indictment in 1:2–23, Isaiah’s sentence of judgment comes in 1:24–26. The wrath of God that was meant to protect Zion from all assaults (Ps. 2:5) is here turned against his own people (1:25): “I will turn my hand against you; I will smelt away your dross as with lye.” Only then, afterward, will Zion again be called the faithful city. The sentence of judg-

ment at II Kings 21:12–13 is similar in intensity, if not also in content: “I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah [note the pairing!] such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. . . . I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.” The Isaiah text goes on (1:27–31) to tell of the possibility of redemption for those who repent; but for those who forsake God, there will be eternal punishment “with no one to quench them” (1:31).

The Book of Isaiah ends on a similar note of warning (66:24). It is interesting that there the same language is used as that which appears when God destroys the Assyrians in 701: “And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me” (cf. also Isa. 37:36). This is precisely the force of Isaiah’s judgment oracle in the opening chapter: the punishment God had reserved for his foes he now unleashes against his own people (1:24–25). In the eyes of the Deuteronomistic Historian, Manasseh did more evil to Israel than the nations (II Kings 21:9), thus leading to the same final treatment for Judah and Jerusalem that Assyria had received in 701 B.C. During the reign of Manasseh, Judah became like the nations, and as a consequence God determined to treat it as such. The very Zion theology that had served to protect Israel was turned against them, so “utterly estranged” (1:4) had they become. The indictment opened with the image of rebellious children (1:2) and of a nation that no longer recognized its master (1:3). It ends with that nation becoming unrecognizable, one with the other nations, and receiving the treatment reserved for them. The only hope held out is for those who repent (1:27). Their righteousness will not be overlooked by the One who is righteousness itself.

At the beginning we spoke of Isaiah’s use of Zion and royal theology. The former is evidenced in chapter 1. Yet the chapter also is interested in more than the restoration of Zion, narrowly defined. Murderers and dross are also to be replaced by righteous judges and counselors (1:26). If it is appropriate to read Isaiah 1 against the backdrop of II Kings 21 and the aftermath of 701 B.C., as is being proposed, then the chapter is clearly pressing for a proper understanding of royal theology as well. Are the leadership offices that are enumerated at 1:26 meant to be interpreted as a rejection of kingship and as a return to the judges and counselors of old, as in the days of Samuel? This is impossible to determine. The chapter does not single out the

king for special condemnation, however closely it is to be read against the backdrop of II Kings 21. The leadership in general is indicted (“rulers”; “princes”); so too in the language of restoration, more general terms occur (“judges”; “counselors”). Chapter 1 cannot be used to argue for a rejection of kingship, as such, in favor of another form of government. Something of the same ambivalence can be seen in the Deuteronomistic History, which depicts the end of Davidic kingship but never holds out for its absolute dissolution (see II Kings 25:27–30). Afterward Zion will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Will a new David rule in it? The text does not say; only that those who repent will be redeemed. On this note of warning and foreboding, the opening chapter draws to a close.

A final word is in order concerning the present form of the superscription at 1:1. Chapter 1 has been interpreted against the historical backdrop of post-701 Judah and the abysmal reign of King Manasseh. Yet Isaiah’s prophetic activity is clearly associated with the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. How does this historical notice square with our interpretation of the setting of the opening chapter of Isaiah? Related to this question is a broader form-critical issue concerning how the superscription at 1:1 is to be related to other superscriptions in the book (2:1; 13:1) and whether 1:1 refers to the entire Book of Isaiah or to just chapter 1.

Also relevant in this matter is the specific language used in 1:1, which describes what follows as a vision (*hāzôn*) that the prophet saw. This terminology is somewhat rare in the prophetic corpus as referring to an entire book. Only the Book of Obadiah is called a *hāzôn*, and it consists of just one chapter, comprising a unified vision twenty-one verses in length. Nahum opens with the words: “An oracle concerning Nineveh” and the further “The book of the vision of Nahum.” Again, however, the entire book is only three chapters in length and could be reasonably interpreted as a single vision, consisting of one long oracle against Nineveh. That an opening superscription can pertain only to the material that follows, not to the entire corpus, is demonstrated in the case of Habakkuk. “The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw” (1:1) extends to 2:20; a second superscription at 3:1 introduces what follows as “A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth.” In this case, it would be wrong to subsume the entire book under the opening superscription.

For these reasons a strong case could be made for regarding Isa. 1:1 as the superscription for chapter 1 alone. At the same time, the historical notice is comprehensive enough to suggest that the superscription also pertains to the book at large, or at least to chapters 1–39, which take us to the end of Hezekiah’s reign. Scholars have also noted that *hāzôn* frequently has a future character. This would explain why the vision of chapter 1 appears to suggest a setting in the post-701 period, during the reign of Manasseh. In sum, the superscription has a dual purpose: its historical notice serves to attach the prophet Isaiah to the material that follows in the larger book, where reference to these kings is made (6:1; 7:1; 36:1). At the same time, the term *hāzôn*, which generally means a single vision directed to the future, can apply to the contents of chapter 1 more narrowly, as a vision seen by the prophet Isaiah pertaining to coming days. In the course of time, 1:1 came naturally to be construed as the title of the Book of Isaiah, in something of the same way that the first words of books in the Pentateuch also came to function as titles (Genesis: “In the beginning”). But even in those books, the first words retained their primary function within the chapter they introduced. The situation in Isaiah is analogous.

The opening chapter of Isaiah presents a sober picture. The country lies in ruin. There is no one to press out the wounds, bind them up, or even soften them with oil. Israel’s rulers are murderers, with no time to worry about the widow or the orphan. Yet will its survivors continue to be smitten?

The irony is that God’s abiding promises to Zion were vindicated in the events of 701. While the Judahite countryside was ravaged by Assyrian forces, Assyria could only “shake his fist” at Zion, as Isaiah had promised (10:32). Jerusalem was dramatically delivered (37:36–38). Within the chapter we get only a brief glimpse at survivors who acknowledge their deliverance and give thanks for it (1:9). These voices are all but drowned out in the sustained indictment against a nation that has lost its bearings, against a leadership that ignores basic acts of justice and simple—not elaborate—acts of contrition and obedience (1:18).

Still, even within this picture Isaiah’s particular view of Zion theology is vindicated. God has in mind a new faithful city with new faithful leaders. Those repentant ones in its midst will be redeemed by the same righteousness that saved the city in 701 (1:27). The Book of Isaiah presents the dark side of Zion

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theology: what it means for God to treat Israel like the nations, whose assault on Zion was to be halted by God. Now the assault comes from within, and God must deal with it from within. This sober picture stands over all that follows, reminding the reader that Zion will be finally redeemed but those who forsake God will lose all protection Zion was to accord, until they finally stand outside the circle of God's grace (1:28–31).

Isaiah 2:1—4:6

In That Day

Zion and the Nations (2:1–5)

The superscription at 2:1 indicates that the following oracle is a word the prophet “saw” (*hāzāh*) concerning Judah and Jerusalem. That is, the same future perspective implied by the term “vision” at 1:1 (*hāzôn*) is carried over here. This is made explicit in the opening verse: “In days to come . . .” (2:2). Here Isaiah sees the destiny of Zion beyond his own days, beyond the cleansing judgment of 1:2–31. Because this future perspective can also be spotted in the following material, reinforced by the repetition of “in that day” and similar concepts (2:11, 12, 20; 3:7, 18; 4:1, 2), the opening oracle should be read in the context of chapters 2–4 rather than as a continuation of chapter 1. Chapters 2–4 clearly develop aspects of the opening vision in terms both of judgment and of salvation; yet they also go far beyond these.

In 2:1–5 the tone is set for what follows. Mount Zion shall be raised higher than any other mountain so that its prominence is clear to all—not just to Israel. The nations will then begin their pilgrimage to worship Israel's God and be taught his torah. A scene of judgment will be enacted and the God of Jacob will finally settle the divisions between the nations, bringing an end to warfare.

The oracle is remarkable in its own right, depicting a leveling, as it were, of national distinctions. What distinguishes Israel is God alone and his torah; like all the other nations, they must make their own way to Zion and be taught in God's ways. Indeed, the final verse (2:5) presents in direct speech the appeal