

of this opening section (2-9) Isaiah did not look to the future but noted the element of divine preservation in the history of the people (9). In section two (10-20) alternative futures were offered (18-20), conditional on the people's response to the divine command. Here, however, the future is embraced by the same divine sovereignty which has preserved in the past: I *will* ... *purge* ... I *will* restore (25-26). In the last analysis, the Lord will not go back on his promises to David; the beginning is the paradigm for the end.

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

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

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

24 From the earthly princes (23) our gaze is turned to the supreme King. Even Isaiah never outdoes the emphasis on divine power expressed in this assemblage of divine titles. The Hebrew is emphatic in calling attention to the speaker. *Declares* (*n<sup>e</sup>um*) is a noun with the sense '[This is] the word of ...'. Here the word is of one who is sovereign in status (*the Lord, hā'ādôn*), omnipotent in power (*the LORD Almighty, 'Yahweh of hosts'*; cf. verse 9) and absolute ruler of his people (*the Mighty One of Israel*; cf. 49:26; 60:16).<sup>2</sup> *The Lord's* sovereignty and power are neither ornamental nor irrelevant but a force to be reckoned with in the affairs of his people. This power is specifically a power of vengeance. The Lord will get *relief* (*vrāḥam*) and avenge (*vrāqam*) himself. The former term, with its root idea of 'comfort', points to soothing the hurt given to God; the latter to the objective requital merited. Any facile statement that God always hates the sin but loves the sinner needs to be countered by Isaiah's insistence that those who transgress are *my* foes and *my* enemies. They have made themselves the adversaries of the helpless (23), *therefore* the sovereign Lord holds them as his enemies.

25 I *will* turn my hand against you is a phrase which always describes hostile

<sup>1</sup>Cf. verse 27; 5:7, 16; 9:7; 16:5; 26:9; 28:17; 32:1, 16; 33:5; 51:4-5; 56:1; 58:2; 59:9, 14.

<sup>2</sup>The title 'The Mighty One of Jacob' occurs in Gn. 49:24; Ps. 132:2, 5.

action (e.g. Ps. 81:14) yet here it introduces a work of restoration.' Even in the very exercise of his wrath the Lord remembers mercy (cf. 60:10), and mercy and justice are perfectly blended in the divine nature (45:21). *Thoroughly purge* is 'refine as with lye' (*kabbôr*).<sup>2</sup> As we have our chemical agents of cleansing, so the Lord knows what to apply to purge his people. In this context the removal of *dross* (cf. verse 22) is thus equivalent to the renewal of their nature.

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

#### *d. Explanation: tensions between threat and hope resolved (1:27-31)*

Verse 26 rounded off the poem which opened at verse 21. Two snatches of originally separate oracles now follow: verses 27-28 focus on the moral grounds of redemption and judgment respectively, and verses 29-31 on the inherent destructiveness of false religion. The material is plainly *Isaianic*.<sup>3</sup> So is the editorial style whereby originally disparate material is brought together (as in a mosaic) into a new integration yet retains the original meaning.

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

Verses 27-31 are delicately dovetailed into what has preceded:

- A<sup>1</sup> Judgment threatened (24-25a)
  - B<sup>1</sup> Restoration: the restored city (25b-26)
  - B<sup>2</sup> Restoration: the redeemed Zion (27)
    - (a) Redemption consonant with (divine) justice
    - (b) Repentance consonant with (divine) righteousness
- A<sup>2</sup> Judgment threatened (28-31)
  - (a) Its moral ground in rebellion and sin (28a)

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

<sup>2</sup>For *bôr* see Jb. 9:30. Scott alters it to *bakkûr* ('in the furnace'), a pedestrian amplification of the idea of 'refining'. BHS wisely follows the MT.

<sup>3</sup>Kaiser (*ad loc.*) is clear that verses 29-31 are *Isaianic* against allegations that they must be post-exilic saying. 'Tree worship must have existed in Israel at every period.' (Cf. Scott.)

- (b) Its relational ground in abandonment of the Lord (28b)
- (c) Its religious ground (29-31)
  - (i) The personal harvest reaped from false religion (29)
  - (ii) The self-destructiveness of false religion (30-31)

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

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

29-31 The charge of 'forsaking the LORD' (28) is now justified (verse 29 opens with 'for'). The people's formal religious allegiance was to the Lord (10-15) but their 'choice' and 'delight' (29) were the nature and fertility cults of the day (cf. 27:9; 57:3-6; 66:17). Isaiah did not believe that any religion was as good as any other. His insistence in verses 10-15 that religion must have moral commitment is amplified here by the implication that true religion is more than human preference and satisfaction (29) and reaches a source of life not subject to earth's withering and waning (30).

29 This verse is lit. 'For they shall reap shame from the trees which you **desired**',<sup>1</sup> i.e. those who live in the days of the shattering (28) will reap what their forebears have sown. The fundamental cause of disaster is false, inadequate religion. *Oaks* and *gardens* are the symbols of the life of 'nature' and of the fertility gods. *Ashamed* and *disgraced* convey more the thought of disappointment than of mere embarrassment, hence 'reaping shame' rather than just 'feeling ashamed'. The governing factor in their religion (cf. Am. 4:5) was what they found helpful (*in which you have delighted*) and what they determined upon (*that you have chosen*). According to Calvin, 'True religion must be conformable to the will of God as its unerring **standard**.'<sup>2</sup>

30 The evergreen tree aptly symbolized undying life and therefore became

<sup>1</sup>It would be easy to 'smooth out' the differences in person (cf. BHS; ICC; GKC, 144p) but such transitions from third to second person etc. are a frequent idiom (e.g. 42:20; 52:14; 61:7).

<sup>2</sup>J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), in the *Library of Christian Classics*, vols. XX and XXI, ed. J. T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster Press, 1960), I. v. 3.

the focus of nature religion and the gods of fertility. But such religion cannot keep its promises; it is 'a tree with fading leaves'. False religion has no inherent life. With a *garden without water* the picture turns to one of dependence upon an outside source of life-water. False religion has no external reality to nourish it. It is not a real contact with the divine.

31 In the context the *mighty man* is the one who fancies himself strong through his chosen gods: *his work* is the idol he has made, the garden he has planted as the locus of his god. Together they are *tinder* and *spark*, a deadly, combustible combination which illustrates the self-destructiveness of false theology and religion.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Sin and election (2:1–4:6)

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

- A' The ideal Jerusalem (2:2–4)
- B The actual Jerusalem (2:5–4:1)
  - B<sup>1</sup> Its religious condition (2:5–21)
  - B<sup>2</sup> Its social condition (3:1–4:1)
- A<sup>2</sup> The new Jerusalem (4:2–6)

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

#### a. Superscription (2:1)

Apart from 1:1 this is the only superscription in the Isaianic literature and this raises the question why it occurs here. It must indicate a collection of Isaianic

<sup>1</sup>It would be marginally easier to translate 'and his/its maker a spark', in which case 'the strong' refers ironically to the idol god, and 'its maker' is the idolater. The essential meaning, the inherent self-destructiveness of error, remains the same.

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

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

#### *b. The ideal Jerusalem (2:2-4)*

This poem appears in Micah 4:1-4 substantially as here and presents us with an insoluble problem whether Isaiah composed and Micah ‘copied’ or *vice versa*, or whether each prophet made use of a popular hymn.’ As far as the two versions are concerned, that in Isaiah feels and is a tighter literary composition, and the variations in Micah could have arisen through quoting from **memory**.<sup>3</sup> Wellhausen expressed the opinion that the poem, remarkable from any pen, is possibly less remarkable from Isaiah, and this is **true**.<sup>4</sup> The Assyrian Empire and its relationship to Judah forms the historical background to chapters 1-37. In particular, Isaiah lived to see his prediction that Zion would not fall to Assyria fulfilled in the overthrow of Sennacherib by the act of the Lord. Maybe this poem arose from his conviction, excited and confirmed by this deliverance, that the great Zion-based promises would yet be fulfilled. At all events, the fact that the poem is found in two prophets indicates its popular currency. In the present setting Isaiah uses it to challenge the people to face up to what, possibly, they were singing with glib detachment. If others are ever to say *Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD (3)*, Judah must heed the call *Come, ... let us walk in the light of the LORD (5)*.

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

- A Fact: Zion the centre of world-wide attraction (2)  
The undated future (2a)

<sup>3</sup>See Oswalt’s discussion. His view is that the superscription introduces chapters 24 (cf. Mauchline). P. R. Ackroyd argues (*Isaiah I-XII: Presentation of a Prophet*, VTS, 29 [1978], 16ff.) that the superscription expresses the confidence of a later editor and that verses 24 are by Isaiah, not Micah.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. J. Gray (‘The kingship of God in the Prophets and Psalms’, VT, 11 (1961), 15) says, ‘Both prophets made use of a passage which had become part of the liturgy in the eighth century.’ This contrasts, as to dating, with the once axiomatic assumption that what is eschatological must be late (cf. Kaiser). To the contrary, G. von Rad has said (‘The city on the hill’, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Oliver and Boyd, 1966), pp. 232-242) that this is ‘the first and the earliest expression of a belief in the eschatological glorification of the holy mountain. It cannot be doubted that the text is Isaianic [dealing with] a firmly grounded and already accepted eschatological conception.’

<sup>3</sup>As to whether the passage is more at home in Isaiah or Micah arguments are evenly balanced but comparison of the two texts weighs heavily in favour of an Isaianic origin. E.g. Micah’s opening (*yih’yeh har bëyt yahweh nākōn*) is pedestrian by comparison with the stylish and typically Isaianic *nākōn yih’yeh har bëyt yahweh*. Micah’s variation of wording as compared with Is. 2:2b, 3a, 4, his introduction of the conjunction ‘and to the house of the God of Jacob (4:2-3) and his use of the paragogic form *yilm’dūn* points to free quotation.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted by Skinner, vol. 1, p. 15.

Supreme exaltation (2bc)

Universal inflow (2d)

- B Recognition: Zion the centre of world-wide revelation (3)
  - Nationalism set aside and recognition of the God of Jacob (3a)
  - Pre-commitment to learn from the Lord and to walk in his ways (3b)
  - The reality of revelation in Zion (3c)
- C Blessing: Zion the centre of world-wide peace (4)
  - Divine authority imposed (4a)
  - International response: the transformation of weapons (4b)
  - The end of war whether in act or intent (4c)

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

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

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

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

### c. *The actual Jerusalem (2:5 - 4:1)*

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

Jerusalem is seen first in religious (2:6–21) and then in social (3:1–4:1) disorder.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Full of superstitions from the East* is lit. 'full from the east'. The verb 'to be full (*vmale*', the motif word of this section) is not elsewhere used with 'from'. If this is a meaningful ellipsis,<sup>2</sup> it must be understood as 'have found their fullness from' *the East*, i.e. derived all they need from eastern sources. Maybe there is the idea of the east as the source of light, in contrast with *the light of the LORD* (5). The *Philistines* (cf. 1 Sa. 6:2; 2 Ki. 1:2–6) may have been singled out as being to the west by contrast with the east to show Zion's cosmopolitan outlook,

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

\*Maybe the object of 'they are full' has dropped from the text (see *BHS*). Possibly it should read *miqsām* ('divination') or *qōs'mīm* ('diviners').

ready to find insights wherever they are on offer. More likely Isaiah hoped to sting his hearers by *like the Philistines*, meaning they are descending to the dregs in identifying with the world (Jdg. 14:3). *Clasp hands with* is another unique expression, perhaps meaning 'come to agreement with'. Since the verb (*ṣāpāq*) usually means 'to clap hands' (Nu. 24:10) it could mean 'engage in religious worship with' (though Ps. 47:1 uses a different verb). *KB* records a distinct verb, 'to abound in, be rich in', i.e. rich in what *pagans* (lit. 'sons of strangers', foreigners in culture rather than pagans in religion) have to offer.<sup>1</sup>

7-8 The ascending scale of condemnation (wealth, armaments, idolatry) is enhanced by the repetition *is full of* and by the fact that verse 8b unexpectedly does not repeat *there is no end*, used twice in verse 7. The Bible has no animus against wealth (*treasures*) as such. All depends on how it is acquired (3:14), how it is used (5:8) and whether it is seen as an alternative security to trusting the Lord. On Isaiah's view of military security, symbolized by *chariots*, see chapter 39. *Idols* (*ʿilīm*, 'nonentities') is always used dismissively of the 'gods' and is a deliberate pun on *ʾlōhīm*, 'God'. They registered the claim but failed of the reality! The 'no-gods' appear in verses 18, 20; 10:10-11; 19:1,3; 31:7 and ten times elsewhere in the Old Testament. *Their/'his' hands* and *their/'his' fingers* are distributive singulars meaning 'each to the work of ...'. Instead of the expected 'there is no end to' Isaiah underlines the sheer absurdity of idolatry. While the pagan idolater doubtless saw his idol as expressive of unseen spiritual forces, to Isaiah (and the Old Testament in general) there is nothing behind the idol. The material artefact is all there is (41:21-29; 44:6-20). The irony is savage: people, unable to face life unaided, seek help in earthly resources and human ingenuity (cf. 41:5-7). The repetition of *hands* and *fingers* focuses attention on the absurdity: the human creating the divine!

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

The Hebrew imperative not only commands but is frequently used to express an inevitable result.<sup>3</sup> In *do not forgive them* this idiom is used negatively. Isaiah is not commanding the Lord not to forgive but saying that forgiveness is unthinkable: 'and for sure you will not forgive them'.

10-21 The Lord has but to reveal his glory (10) and human arrogance is humbled (11), the whole world which human pride has infected is devastated (12-17), idols are exposed as useless (18-19) and people are left *defenceless* (20-21). Thus Isaiah continues the theme of divine judgment in a closely-structured poem. There are two main sections (10-17, 18-21) and four

<sup>1</sup>See Dhorme on Jb.36:18 for confirmation of a verb with this meaning.

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

<sup>3</sup>For the imperative used to express certainty of outcome see 6:10; 7:4; 8:9. The negative imperative is 'used to express the conviction that something cannot or should not happen' (GKC, 109e). See Pss. 34:5-6; 41:2-3.



subsections (10–11, 12–17, 18–19, 20–21). The first two subsections end with the **refrain** the LORD alone *will* be exalted in that day (11, 17); the second two with *when he rises to shake the earth* (19, 21). The first and third begin with the ‘enter the rock’ theme and the second and fourth with a reference to the Lord’s day (12, 20). The initial *from dread of the LORD* (10), reappearing in verse 19, forms an **inclusio** at verse 21. In the pairs of subsections, the first in each case states a fact and the second how that fact will be expressed.

- A The Lord exalted over man and his world (10–17)
  - A<sup>1</sup> Fact: The Lord exalted, man humbled (10–11)
  - A<sup>2</sup> Demonstration: The Lord exalted over every exalted thing (12–17)
- B The Lord exalted over the no-gods (18–21)
  - B<sup>1</sup> Fact: The Lord exalted, no-gods and men alike vanish (18–19)
  - B<sup>2</sup> Demonstration: The Lord exalted, the no-gods exposed (20–21)

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

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

13–17 Throughout, *for all* should be read ‘against **all/every**’. Verse 17 commences with ‘and’, the implication in context being ‘and thus’, *i.e.* every exalted thing, whether natural (13–14) or made with human hands (15–16), somehow reflects humankind’s arrogant pride and so falls when it falls. There is an ambivalence in the Old Testament view of the created world. As God’s world, it always sides with him (1:2), but as humanity’s world it is implicated in the curse humanity’s sin has brought. The thorns of Genesis 3:18 are at once nature’s hostility to the sinner and nature’s corruption by sin (*cf.* Rom. 8:20–23).

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

16 Trading *ship/ships* of Tarshish’ were the largest ships, capable of the greatest voyages and cargoes. ‘Tarshish’ is possibly a place-name, in Spain (Tartessos) or N. Africa and is possibly a word (from the Phoenician) meaning ‘mine, smelting plant’ and hence heavy, ore-carrying ships. It could also be a word meaning ‘the open sea’. Such ships represent humankind triumphant over environmental forces, creating great commercial empires (*cf.* Ezk. 28:2–5).

The word translated *vessel* (*šēkīyyôt*), found only here, is of uncertain meaning. If related to *maškīt* ('figure, visual representation'; Nu. 33:52; Ezk. 8:12) the phrase may mean 'figurines of desire' and indicate desirable human artistic achievements as another dimension in which pride raises its head. The RSV neatly catches the best of both worlds with 'craft'.

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

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

20-21 Further ignominy for the no-gods as their erstwhile devotees renounce them, recognizing their uselessness. At the same time, however, this is the climax of Isaiah's indictment of human pride. People's proudest achievement is to dispense with the living God and to become god-makers. Then indeed they have come of age! But the standard by which everything must be judged is how it will fare on the day of the Lord. On that day such 'gods' will be seen as good for nothing and thrown away. The idolater is no stronger than his idol and the idol no less helpless than he. *Throw away* is an expression of the idolater's disgust and the idol's lifelessness as a mere disposable object (cf. 41:5-7; 46:1-2). The meaning of *rodents* is uncertain and may refer to 'beetles' or some burrowing insect.

#### The second exhortation: 'Stop trusting in man' (2:22)

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

<sup>1</sup>The *sr* has an individualizing singular verb with a plural subject. Q<sup>a</sup>, however, divides the consonants differently between verses 18 and 19, reading *yhtwyrw b'w* (i.e. plural verb followed by imperative) instead of *yalt'lop' ūbbā'ū*.

<sup>2</sup>When the verb 'to cease' is followed by 'from' the meaning depends on the context. In Ex. 14:12 it means 'stop worrying us'; in 1 Sa. 9:5, 'stop being anxious about'; and here 'stop relying on'.

the gift of breath implies a giver and points to the wisdom of trusting, rather, the one who is the source of life.

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

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

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

- A' The act of the LORD, the Lord Almighty (1a)
- B<sup>1</sup> The collapse of leadership and social disorder (1b-5)
  - C<sup>1</sup> Vignette: leadership debased (6-7)
    - D<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem's collapse explained (8)
    - D<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem's judgment pronounced (9-11)
  - B<sup>2</sup> Social oppression and misleading leaders (12)
    - C<sup>2</sup> Vignette: leadership brought to trial (13–15a)
- A<sup>2</sup> The word of the Lord, the LORD Almighty (15b)

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

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

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

*The imminent collapse of society (3:1–7)*

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

1 The Lord (*hā'ādōn*) means 'the sovereign one', whereas the LORD Almighty/ of hosts' is 'Yahweh', the covenant God of Israel (see on 1:9). The sovereignty of God is not only the power which underwrites the end of history but also the power at work in the detailed ordering of earthly affairs in accordance with his

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

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

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

5 In society as a whole there is divisiveness and ruthless self-advancement (the ‘rat-race’) and within society’s natural groupings, teenage rebellion. *Rise up* speaks not just of revolt but also of its arrogant, loud-mouthed spirit (it comes from *vrāhab*, ‘to storm against’). In the moral order, honour is accorded without consideration of worth. *The base* is lit. ‘the one who ought to be thought nothing of’ and *the honourable*, the one ‘who merits honour’.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup>It comes from *v’ālal*, ‘to deal severely, ruthlessly, abusively’ (Ex. 10:2; Jdg. 19:25).

<sup>3</sup>The niphthal participle (like the *Latingerundivejis* express&of quality, what must or ought to be.

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

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

*Retributive justice (3:9b–11)*

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

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

**10** The *righteous* as always, are those who are right with God and therefore committed to a life of righteousness. They are not promised immunity from earth's troubles but that it will *be well*. Doubtless many of the righteous were among the six out of seven who fell in the predicted war (3:25–4:1) yet even the sword is not indiscriminate and Old Testament faith looks beyond earthly life (Ps. 73:23–24).<sup>2</sup>

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

*Retribution applied (3:12–4:1)*

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

<sup>2</sup>The use of 'wisdom' forms and themes does not imply a late date. Passages like 28:23–29 and 32:3–8 show Isaiah's facility with this genre.

<sup>2</sup>The MT does not need emendation in verse 10, but the suggestion is attractive that for 'tell (*'imrū*) we might read *'ašrē* ('happy/blessed are'). The alteration is small and the contrast with 'woe' in verse 11 is excellent.

inner reality of the offended Lord and 3:16–4:1 the experienced reality of **his wrath in action**.

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

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

13 This courtroom scene has theological importance. Plainly, in verse 12 the Lord is passionately concerned about the situation but he does not rush into action. First, charges must be laid, the case must be proved. The Lord is just in all his ways (cf. Gn. 18:20–21). *The people* should be 'peoples'. Divine judgment often has a universal setting (cf. 2:10–22 where the point at issue is his people's religious deviation but the act of judgment covers the whole world).<sup>2</sup> The reason for this is that judgment is one aspect of the day of the Lord when his just account is settled against all without exception.

14 *Elders and leaders* are respectively the legislative and executive arms of government. *ûbâ'ar* (*ruined*) strictly means 'to bum' but possibly 'to graze, strip by grazing'.<sup>3</sup> Since either is an unusual way of treating a vineyard, possibly the verb allows a metaphorical use, 'to strip bare'. The contravention of the law of Leviticus 19:9–10 and Deuteronomy 24:20–21 is precisely the charge the Lord lays against the rulers here. The *vineyard* is symbolic of the Lord's care in choosing, delivering and settling his people (Ps. 80:8–11, 9–12); the perfection of what he did (compared with what later eventuated; see 5:4; Je. 1:12) and his delight in his people (5:1–4; 27:2–3; Je. 12:10). The leaders not only left no

<sup>1</sup>If the MT is to stand, *m<sup>e</sup>ôlêl* must be related to *ûl* ('to nurse an infant') and to *ôlêl* ('a child'); cf. 13:16. The LXX has *kalamontai* ('glean') and the Vulg. has *spoliaverunt* ('have despoiled'). Possibly, *ôlêlâ* should be translated 'have gleaned you' - as we might say 'have fleeced you'.

\*This courtroom scene should be compared with Ps. 50, noting the same revelation of the Lord as Judge (50:6), the same universal setting (50:1), the same address ('O my people'; 50:7), the same words of prosecution (verse 15; Ps. 50:16); the parallel between verse 14 (*w<sup>e</sup>attem bi'artem*) and Ps. 50:17 (*w<sup>e</sup>attâ šâne'tâ*). Ps. 50 links itself with a covenant festival (verse 5), probably Tabernacles. It is likely that Isaiah here allowed the liturgical shape of the festival to dictate the arrangement of his material. Note also Ps. 82 for the same verb ('takes his place'; cf. verse 13 with 82:1), oppression of the poor (82:3) and the universal context.

<sup>3</sup>See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Magnes Press, 1967) on Ex. 22:5, 4.

gleanings for the poor, they ‘plundered’ what meagre possessions the poor had; giving nothing, taking everything. Poor, from *v'ānā* (‘to be low’ and hence to be lowly in the world’s estimation), refers to the financially poor, the underdog. It was a mark of true Israelite social morality to copy the Lord in his concern for the poor (Lv. 19:10; Dt. 15:7–11). They had forsaken both the letter and the spirit of the law.

15 *Crushing* (*v'dākā'*), always used metaphorically, denotes the severest maltreatment (cf. 53:5, 10). *Grinding* (*v'tāhan*) as in a mill (Nu. 11:8). The former is a picture of the bare fact of hostility; the latter of the motive of gain, milling a crop from the poor. For *declares* (*n<sup>e</sup>um*) see on 1:24 and for The Lord, the LORD see on 3:1.

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

The whole section moves to this climax. The ‘woes’ of verses 9b–11 proclaim coming judgment, the court scene (12–15) establishes the justice of it, and 3:16–4:1 sees the sentence executed. The divine title *Lord* (*‘dōnāy*; see on 3:1) and the divine name (*LORD, Yahweh*), which bracketed the opening oracle (3:1, 15), are used in verses 17–18. The same Sovereign Yahweh who pronounced judgment carries out the sentence. The overall movement is now from the womenfolk of Zion (16–25) to Zion herself (26) and back to the women again (4:1). What is true of them is true of their ‘mother’; they encapsulate the spirit of arrogant self-seeking which has already been judged (14–15) and is the death-warrant of the city. The reference to domineering women (12) is here taken up and brought to its sad conclusion. The passage is in three sections: two contrasts (16–17, 18–24) and the grim final reality (3:25–4:1). The title *Lord* (17–18) links the first two sections, and the introductory *in that day* (18; 4:1) links the second and third. The NIV is correct in presenting the section as a blend of poetry and prose, illustrating Isaiah’s literary versatility.

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

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

17 The related noun to *bring sores* (*v'sāpāh*) is used in Leviticus 13:2 of leprous tissue. The women set out to attract (16) but the act of judgment makes them repellent. *Make their scalps bald* is possibly correct, but the verb (*v'ārā*) is not elsewhere used of stripping off hair, and the noun translated *scalps* is of uncertain meaning. Maybe it means ‘expose their private parts’, so that they are both scarred (17a) and shamed (17b).<sup>1</sup> Thus sin and its due reward frustrate all life’s ambitions and would-be fulfilments.

18–24 In the second contrast life’s ease is lost in sorrow. Isaiah itemizes the luxury they now enjoy (18–23) but, we note, does not condemn it as such. It is no sin to enjoy life’s good. Their sin is their arrogance and pride of spirit (16). But *instead* (24) sounds out five times, like a death knell; their ease will be

<sup>1</sup>The word is *pothēn*. *-hēn* is not found elsewhere as a feminine plural suffix. The noun *pōt* (1 Ki. 7:50) is linked with the Akkad. *putu* (‘forehead’) hence ‘front’ (G. R. Driver, ‘Linguistic and textual problems: Isaiah I–XXXIX’, *JTS*, 38 [1937], 38). But others, e.g. G. H. Jones, 3 and 2 Kings (NCB, Marshall, 1984), link it with ‘hinge’ or ‘hinge socket’.

exchanged for mourning. (For *Lord*, <sup>2</sup>*dōnāy*, cf. 3:1.) Young notes an Arabic cognate of *šah<sup>2</sup>rōnīm* (*crescent necklaces*) as the name of the moon-god. Possibly, crescent-shaped 'charms' are what are referred to. *Perfume bottles* (*bātē hannepēš*) in verse 20 would be better translated as 'collars'.<sup>1</sup> All except one of the items in verse 24 are deliberate signs of the abstention from body-care associated with mourning (see 2 Sa. 12:20; 19:24; 1 Ki. 20:32; Je. 48:37). *Branding* is not a metaphor of mourning. Jerusalem's girls had devoted themselves to beauty and now even that is gone. Life's most cherished fulfillments are negated by sin. The word *branding* (*kī*)<sup>2</sup> is not found elsewhere, but by using it Isaiah typically achieves a telling rhyme (*kī taḥaṭ yopī*) to end his list. He also reverses the word order established in the previous four items (lit. 'branding instead of beauty') giving the effect of a 'dying fall', a tailing off into sadness.

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

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

#### d. The new Jerusalem (4:2-6)

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

Structurally, verses 2-6 follow the pattern established in 2:2-4 and 2:5-4:1. Here is a double vision (2-4, 5-6) of Zion with new people, cleansed personally and socially (see below) and with a religious life over which the Lord presides and within which he is intimately at one with his people. Topical and verbal links also bind these verses to the foregoing: (i) The 'daughters of Zion' were the embodiment of the degenerate spirit of their mother (3:16-23); they are now the focus of divine cleansing (4). (ii) The nadir of their fortunes was a travesty of marriage (1); the glory will be the (bridal) canopy of verse 5. (iii) Their

<sup>1</sup>*bātē nepēš* may be 'houses of soul', which I. Pedersen (*Israel, its Life and Culture* [OUP, 1954], p. 170) suggests refers to boxes supposedly filled with spiritual potency, worn as protective charms. But if *nepēš* is here understood as 'throat', then 'house' could mean 'housing' or 'holder for' (cf. Ex. 26:29; 37:14) and therefore 'high collar' may be the correct translation.

<sup>2</sup>The noun *kī* is an unexceptionable formation from *vkāwā* (see e.g. 43:2). Cognate nouns appear in Ex. 21:25 and Lv. 13:24.



frenzied pursuit of beauty (3:16, 18) will find satisfaction in a true beauty (2). (iv) The unveiling of the Lord's glory caused the city's overthrow (2:10, 19, 21) but now that glory resides within it (2, 5). (v) Failure of leadership marked the doomed city (3:2-7); the new city is overshadowed by the exodus symbols of divine leadership (5; cf. Ex. 13:21-22). (vi) The double divine designation – *the Lord* (<sup>a</sup>*ḏōnāy*) and *the LORD* (*yahweh*) – of the judge (3:17-18) is also that of the redeemer (4-5).

- A The Messianic day: The Branch of the Lord and the surviving people (2)
- B<sup>1</sup> Those who remain: their holiness and their destiny (3)
- C<sup>1</sup> The Lords work of cleansing and its means (4)
- C<sup>2</sup> The Lords work of creation and its result (5)
- B<sup>2</sup> The availability of shelter and the privilege of access (6)

2 *The Branch of the LORD*,<sup>1</sup> is always elsewhere a title pointing to the Messiah in his kingly and priestly offices (Je. 23:5; 33:15; Zc. 3:8; 6:12). In itself 'branch' is a 'family tree' metaphor. In Jeremiah, 'the branch' is 'for David' or (better) 'of David's'. Only here do we have 'the LORD's branch'. The Messiah springs from a dual ancestry as he belongs in the 'family tree' of both David and the Lord. The human side of his ancestry is taken over here by the metaphor *the fruit of the land/earth*' pointing to the Messiah as arising out of this created order (cf. 11:1; 53:2). Beautiful, *glorious*, pride and glory are nouns ('adornment', 'glory', 'pride' and 'beauty'). As qualities possessed by the Messiah in his divine and human nature they are lit. 'for' *the survivors*. All that he is he holds in trust for them. 'Adornment'/'ornament' (<sup>e</sup>*bî*; cf. 2 Sa. 1:19) is personal eminence and 'beauty' (*tip'eret*), attractiveness. In 3:18 they sought a false, transient 'beauty' ('finery', *tip'eret*) but now they discern true beauty in him and he beautifies them. The middle words 'glory' and 'pride'l'dignity' point to a great change. 'Glory' had been their destruction (2:10) and 'pride' (2:12; a related word) their ruin. Now the divine glory dwells among them (cf. on verse 5), they rightly pride themselves in him and he imparts a true dignity to them. *Survivors/escapées* is a theologically neutral word for those who have escaped a calamity which overwhelmed others. Why they 'escaped' we learn in verse 3. (See Additional note.)

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

<sup>1</sup>See J. G. Baldwin, '*šemah* as a technical term in the prophets', VT, 14 (1964), 93ff.

<sup>2</sup>The niphal from *v'amar* is found more often in Isaiah than in any prophet (4:3; 19:18; 32:5; 61:6; 62:4). It occurs three times in Jeremiah and once each in Ezekiel, Hosea and Zephaniah. Cf. its use in the Zion psalm (87:5) in a context markedly similar to the present.

<sup>3</sup>Ps. 69:28; Dn. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; cf. Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3.

4 *The Lord will wash away* is lit. 'Whenever the Lord shall have washed away'. The conditional particle *'im* (*'if*') is used when an event is certain but its timing unknown.' Sometimes the context is suited by 'if and when' but here 'whenever' fits best. (On *wash* see 1:16.) *Cleanse* (cf. 2 Ch. 4:6; Ezk. 40:38) means to 'rinse off', a thorough 'swilling away' of every stain. *Filth* means 'vomit' (cf. 28:8), i.e. inner uncleanness (Pr. 30:12), contrasting with the bloodstains or bloodshed of social violence, the outward misdemeanour; a total dealing with sin is here in mind. Is spirit being used impersonally as 'wind/blast'; generally as one of the many spirits at the Lord's disposal (e.g. 1 Ki. 22:21-23); or specifically to denote the Spirit of the Lord himself? Isaiah has already used storm imagery of the coming day (2:19, 21) and it is not unsuitable to see here the other (and unexpected) side of the Lord's intervention. But Isaiah does have a rich awareness of the Spirit of the Lord (30:1-2; 31:3; 63:10-14), specially in Messianic passages (11:2; 42:1; 59:21; 61:1), and this is the best understanding here: the divine Spirit, throughout the Bible the executive Godhead. Here he acts in *judgment/justice* and *fire/burning*, i.e. the Lord so acts as to meet alike the objective demands of absolute justice and the subjective demands of his own holy nature. On burning and fire as symbols of divine holiness see Exodus 3:2-5; 19:10-25. Cleansing by fire is not a standard Old Testament concept (cf. 6:6).

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

6 Another feature of the new creation is accessible shelter. Throughout this passage Isaiah has used exodus imagery.<sup>2</sup> Then, the Lord camped among his people but was not directly available to them (Ex. 29:42-46; 40:34-35); his glory was too overwhelming. But now, in the full reality of the glory (2, 5) there is open access into shelter. The very ordinariness of the needs enhances the idea of free access. The opposites (dry) *heat* and *rain* embrace every circumstance of life; *storm* ('inundation') and *rain* point to the extraordinary and the ordinary needs for shelter. For all needs alike there is shelter with the Lord.

#### *Additional note on 4:2*

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

(a) Vegetation. Both phrases express Messianic abundance (cf. 30:23-26; Je.

<sup>1</sup>E.g. Gn. 38:9; Nu. 21:9; Jdg. 6:3; Is. 24:13; 28:25.

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

31:12; Ho. 2:21-23; Am. 9:13-15). Sin diminished and restricted the natural world (Gn. 3:17-19), but when sin is removed nature will be renewed and released. (So, Calvin, Skinner, Kissane, Scott and Kaiser.) Against this is the consideration that the four nouns, 'adornment', 'glory', 'pride' and 'beauty' seem somewhat excessive as descriptions of (mere) vegetation. 28:5 suggests a more exalted reference.

(b) Remnant and vegetation. *The Branch* refers to the faithful remnant of Israel, just as 5:7 speaks of the people as a vineyard (cf. 60:20; 61:3). *The fruit* is the **Messianic abundance**. (So Barnes and Mauchline.) There is an awkwardness about this, however. The single verb in the sentence requires that both Branch and fruit are 'for' the survivors. How can the remnant be for the remnant?

(c) Salvation and vegetation. *The Branch* is the Messianic salvation which the Lord makes to sprout after the judgment, and fertile vegetation is the accompanying sign (cf. 45:8 which has the same verb). (So Orelli and Leupold.) As a view this cannot be faulted but why, in the light of the 'Branch' references in Jeremiah and Zechariah, should only Isaiah be allowed as vague a notion as 'the Messianic salvation'?

(d) Messiah and vegetation. Birks sensibly sees that there is no reason to detach Isaiah's reference to the Branch from those in Jeremiah and Zechariah. So here *the Branch* is the Messiah and *the fruit* is the plenty he brings. Note the same balance between person and plenty in 11:1-5, 6-9.

(e) Messiah. As compared with the foregoing, to allow both phrases to refer to the Messiah gives the four impressive nouns the personal reference which alone seems to accord with their weight. The parallelism, says Alexander, requires that the Branch springs from the Lord just as the fruit from the earth; and Delitzsch compares Ezekiel 17:5, where a Davidic king is described as a 'seed of your land' and urges that 'Branch' as a Messianic title is an Isaianic coinage fully in keeping with chapters 7-11. Young notes the use of *ṣāmah* in 2 Samuel 23:5. The choice ultimately is between views (a) and (e). The idea of the Messianic plenty, rich though its overtones are, falls short of the dimensions of the verse, whereas on the wholly Messianic view the wording of the verse is given full rein and the imagery is true to wider biblical usage. The Messiah's double ancestry is thoroughly Isaianic.

#### 4. Sin and grace (5:1-30)

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

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