

a. *The vineyard: a total work, a total loss (5:1-7)*

According to Ezekiel 15:2-5 a vine is either good for fruit or good for nothing. Since the Lord's people are his vine, the same truth applies. By the Feast of Tabernacles the vintage would be gathered in. It may have been on such an occasion that Isaiah invited the crowd to hear him sing, first of his friend (1-2), then as his friend (3-4), then revealing who his friend is (5-6) and finally revealing who the vineyard is (7). Skilfully he draws his hearers on to the point where they can only utter a condemnation and discover that they have condemned themselves.

- A¹ The vineyard depicted (1, four lines)
- B¹ The vineyard cared for (2ab, five verbs)
 - C¹ Conclusion drawn and contradicted (2c)
 - C² Conclusion invited (34, Now, *w^eattâ*)
 - C³ Conclusion announced (5, Now, *w^eattâ*)
- B² The vineyard neglected (6, five verbs)
- A² The vineyard explained (7, four lines)

1 To is (lit.) 'concerning' and the one I love is 'my loved one'. A *song* 'my beloved's song' is the song of which he is himself the singer: Isaiah the singer is the minister of another's words. Note the depth of his personal devotion. Did the hearers expect a marriage song (cf. Ps. 128:3; Song 2:15; 4:16)? At Tabernacles this would suggest the consummation of the covenant (cf. 4:5). It is precisely this hope which is to be dashed as the song and then the chapter proceeds.¹ A *fertile hillside* (*qeren ben šemen*) 'a horn, son of oil' is a naturally rich and fertile projection.²

2 The details here are not to be allegorized, making each act represent something in the Lord's care of his people. Bather, they paint the picture of a total work, leaving nothing undone. The fertility of the soil (1), its preparation (2), and the quality of the vines (which were the choicest, *šōrēq*; cf. Jdg. 16:4) could not be faulted. Nor could the beloved's expectations, for so confident was he of the vintage that he actually *built a watchtower* (cf. 1:8), a solid residence as for one intending to live permanently there, and cut out a 'winevat' (not *winepress*), a permanent storage place. We further learn that the vineyard was double-fenced (5). What more indeed! *Looked/awaited* confidently' (*vqāwâ*; cf. 40:31) is not the discipline of waiting but its restful expectancy. The word translated bad fruit (*b^eušim*), only found here and in verse 4, is related to *vba'as* ('to stink') and means literally 'stink-fruit'. Delitzsch notes that the difference between a wild and a domestic vine is only in the matter of care. This is exactly the point: what can now be done for the people of God when a total work of grace has been lavished on them and yet they remain as if grace had never touched them?

3-4 The mask begins to slip. Isaiah begins, in true prophetic fashion, to speak in the person of his beloved. The question, *What more could I ought to have been done?*³ is not addressed to divine power but to the divine conscience. *Why (maddua)* points back to the root cause (not forward to the purpose):

¹On vineyard see Is. 3:14-15; 27:2-6; 63:1-6; 65:8-10; cf. Ps. 80:8; Je. 2:21; 12:10; Ho. 14:7.

²Only here is *qeren* ('horn') used of a 'hill' or 'peak'. 'Naturally fertile' translates *ben šemen* ('son of oil/fatness'). 'Son of' is an idiom for the condition of something or someone (cf. 'son of seventy-five years' in Gn. 12:4).

³Lit. 'What to do more. .?'. Heb. uses the infinitive to express obligation.

‘What possible ground was there?’ This is the mid-point climax of the song. No conceivable blame can attach to the owner; it must lie elsewhere.

5–6 Fruitfulness and security belong together. If only the vineyard had been true to the beloved’s intention no hand could have touched it. The obedient are impregnable. But failing fruitfulness, there is first the external foe, the devouring beast, *Destroyed* has the sense of ‘available for devouring/cropping clean’ ($\sqrt{b\bar{a}ar}$; cf. 3:14), and *trampled* of ‘available for trampling on’.¹ Secondly, there is divine antagonism: the hand of the Lord goes out against his unfruitful people, *I will make it a wasteland*.² Had they been fruitful no such danger could have arisen. *Briers* and *thorns* are true to the metaphor of the untended vineyard but they also look back to Genesis 3:18 where different words are used for the evidences of human rebellion and God’s wrath. Thirdly, there is circumstantial adversity. In the terms of the song, rain is everything that maintains the life of the Lord’s people. The mask has now slipped completely: only the Lord can withhold rain. Isaiah’s beloved is Israel’s God.

⁷ Before the fall of Samaria in 722 BC *the house of Israel* meant either the whole divided nation or its northern component. The prophets did not countenance the division, and whether specifically called to prophesy to north or south they tended to embrace the whole in their ministry (cf. Am. 3:1). Isaiah thus addresses the whole nation and then narrows his vision to the specially privileged *men of Judah*, who are the garden of his *delight* / ‘the plant of his intense pleasure’. The word *looked* ($\sqrt{q\bar{a}w\bar{a}}$) is the same as in verses 2 and 4. His ‘restful expectation’ was for ‘justice but, behold, bloodshed; for righteousness but, behold, a cry of distress’. Isaiah’s mastery of language produces rhyming pairs, *mišpāṭ . . . mišpāḥ . . . šēdāqā . . . šēāqā*. Kidner offers a deft attempt to capture this assonance with ‘right . . . riot . . . decency . . . despair’. *Bloodshed* (*mišpāḥ*) is found only here and is of doubtful meaning* but the intention is clear. *Justice* is the righting of wrongs while *bloodshed* is the inflicting of wrongs. *Righteousness* is right living and right relationships while to cry (*šēāqā*, ‘scream’) indicates wrong relationships and the anguish of the oppressed. Yet the façade was maintained; all was apparently what it was meant to be - why, the words are hardly different!

“Destroyed’ and ‘trampled’ are both infinitives construct with *lamed* meaning ‘to destroy/trample’ and hence ‘available for destruction/trampling’.

²In verse 5 ‘take away’ and ‘break down’ are infinitives absolute, not first person singular verbs. In this idiom the infinitive absolute receives whatever translation suits the context, but means lit. (like the Lat. gerund) ‘the taking away’, ‘the breaking down’. The sense could therefore be ‘Take away its hedge Break down. . . leaving, for the moment, the agent undefined. In verse 6 ‘wasteland’ represents the otherwise unemolified *bātā*. G. R. Driver (‘Linguistic . . . problems’, 38) suggests a link with the Akkad. *batu* (‘to turn into ruins’) and hence ‘a devastation’. The present noun could be a by-form of *battā* (cf. 7:19) from $\sqrt{b\bar{a}ṭat}$ (‘to cut off’, ‘something cut off’), therefore meaning desolate, destroyed. The gap in time between this threat and its fulfilment was about 130 years, yet this is not held by commentators to make such a prediction impossible or to question its point. Of what value, then, is the objection to the Isaianic authorship of chapters 40–66 based on the gap in time between a promise and its fulfilment?

³*Briers* (*šāmīr*) and the use of *briers* and *thorns* together are peculiar to Isaiah (cf. 7:23–25; 9:18; 10:17; 27:4; 32:13).

⁴KB suggests that *mišpāḥ* means ‘deviation’ in the sense of a breach of law; BDB suggests ‘outpouring’ (of blood); and Delitzsch, ‘sweeping together’ (of the property of others). All these require either imagination or credulity.

b. The 'stink-fruit': the crop produced, the harvest to come (5:8-30)

Item by item, Isaiah penetrates the façade and gathers the offensive fruit from the Lord's vine and pronounces a *woe* on each in turn (8, 11, 18, 20-22). The structure of the passage is interesting and important. The first two 'woes' (8-12), dealing with abuse of the material benefits of life, are followed by two 'therefores' (13-V); the final four 'woes' (18-23), dealing with failure in the moral and spiritual obligations of life, are likewise followed by two 'therefores' (24-30). The 'therefores' match each other. In each case the shorter of them (13; 24) explain how the judgment is suited to the foregoing sin, and the longer (14-17; 25-30) describe an act of God in total judgment.

The crop produced	The harvest to come
A ¹ The property motive (8-10)	
B ¹ Self-indulgence (11-12)	
	C ¹ Appropriate judgment: loss of land, hunger, thirst (13)
	D ¹ Total judgment in divine action: death, humbling, ruination (14-17)
E ¹ Sin pursued (18-19)	
E ² Sin justified (20)	
B ² Self-conceit (21)	
A ² The money motive (22-23)	C ² Appropriate judgment: speedy disaster (24a) repays the call for the Lord to hasten (19); acquiescing in sin (18, 20) issues in helpless collapse into judgment (24bcd)
	D ² Total judgment: the Lord summons the invincible foe (25-30)

At the centre of Isaiah's 'anatomy of Judah' lies his exposure of sin and the reversal of moral values (18-20). When life consists of the following of sin, denial of the living God and rewriting the moral code, there is no stopping-place short of complete devotion to self-pleasing.

8 Israelite law saw the land as the gift of God (Lv. 25:23-24), and following the original allocation the assumption was that each holding would remain within the family (Lv. 25; Nu. 27:1-11; 36:1-12; Ru. 4:1-4). But by the time of Isaiah (cf. Mi. 2:2, 9) the day of the land-speculator had dawned. Amos 2:6-8 shows the powerful rich using legal processes to defraud the poor and enrich themselves, and the palistropic arrangement of these 'woes' (matching verses 22-23 with verses 8-10) indicates the same operation of the system for self-advantage. Add house to house/'cause house to touch house' means acquiring a house and adding to it to create a 'big house' in a huge estate from which all the others have been evicted so that the new 'squire' lives alone in the middle of the land.

9 Old Testament thought does not condemn or despise wealth but appraises how it was acquired and how it is used. Isaiah is here in no doubt. Has declared is not in the MT but is an adaptation from 22:14. There is, however, dramatic intensity in the explosive effect of leaving the Hebrew as it stands: 'In my ears!

The LORD of hosts! How it expresses the outrage at the very heart of heaven! For great houses' many houses' cf. Amos 3:10, 15. Wealth without justice confers no tenure (Je. 17:11) because fundamentally wealth is the Lord's (Dt. 8:18).

10 A bath was about six gallons, presumably a meagre yield for ten acres or 'yokes', usually understood as the area ten oxen could plough in a day. A homer was the equivalent of ten ephahs, therefore the crop was only a tenth of the seed sown. There is a moral vitality in the environment whereby the character and conduct of the owners cause a retrenchment of what the created world is prepared to do for them. This is the opposite of the Messianic plenty (cf. on 4:2). The land-hungry end by being hungry, despite all their land.

11-12 Nothing could express more vividly the pursuit of intoxication (11-12a) or make a plainer link between sensual indulgence and loss of spiritual perception (12b). Drink is their life: it is what gets them out of bed (11a) and keeps them out of bed (11b). Till they are inflamed with wine! for wine to inflame them', denotes not a result but a purpose. And wine at the end of verse 12a has the force of an exclamation, '... and wine!' – a band does not make a party unless the wine flows. No regard suggests observing that the Lord is doing something, and no respect grasping the significance of what they see.¹ The deeds [pō'al] of the LORD are broadly his moral government of the world and, in respect of Israel, his work of blessing and redemption; while the work [ma'šeh] of his hands is his work of creation and providence and, in respect of Israel, law-giving, redemption, inheritance, preservation and judgment.² Hence Isaiah sees these people as without spiritual perception, lacking the sense that 'he made us and we are his' (Ps. 100:3), blind to the reality of the 'curses of the covenant' (Dt. 29:19-21; cf. Am. 3:2).

13 Note how the judgment matches the foregoing 'woes'. This verse, the first short 'therefore' section, forms a chiasmus with verses 11-12: drink, spiritual insensitivity ... want of knowledge, thirst. Thus the punishment fits the crime. Will go is a Hebrew perfect tense meaning either 'have gone' or 'are doomed to go'. This may look forward to a captivity (exile) certain to come – and, according to Herbert, at Isaiah's time 'the international scene made exile a real possibility' – or it may mean that in every real way a captivity has already taken place. The understanding/'knowledge' that the people lack is understanding of God (cf. verses 12b, 19; Lk. 19:42). The words could also mean 'without knowing it', which would suit the possible 'have gone' above. For my people see on 3:12 (cf. Lk. 11:52). The leaders, the men of rank/'their glory', should be the glory of those they lead as the Messiah will be (cf. 4:2). Die of hunger is a reading found in two MSS; the MT has 'men of hunger'/'hungry men'.³

14-17 This first long 'therefore' section describes how the party is over (14) and pride has come to an end (15). Judgment is total and it is the act of God (16) resulting in an emptied, desolate land. Note again a chiasmic relationship with the foregoing woes: vast estates (8) and feasting (12) balanced by the end of the party (14) and the destruction of the estates (17).

14 The grave/'Sheol' (NIV mg.) is the place-name of the abode of the dead. The irony of enlarges its appetite is biting: to satisfy their appetites was all they lived for (11-12) but in the end only one appetite is met, only one mouth filled. 'The judgment of the sensualists, like that of the fashion-crazed women of 3:16ff.,

¹On vā'ā as 'to see the significance of' cf. Pss. 8:4; 52:6:8.

²On 'deeds' (pō'al) see e.g. Dt. 32:4; Jb. 36:24; Ps. 44:1; 64:9:10; on 'work' (ma'šeh) cf. Ex. 32:16; 34:10; Pss. 8:3:4, 6:7; 19:1; 92:4-5; 5:6; Is. 10:12; 29:23.

³MT mē'ē rā'āb, 'men of hunger'; two MSS often adopted have mē'ē rā'āb, 'dead of hunger'.

will be to lose the one thing they have lived for ... and to find themselves the object of an even more insatiable appetite than their own' (Kidner). *Their* in each case is a feminine singular suffix, 'her'. In its original setting this section must have spoken of Jerusalem: 'and down will go its nobility and its crowds and its noise and each one in it who exults.'

15 The Hebrew here is exactly the same as 2:9. 'And ordinary folk (*'ādām*, *man*) will be humbled and particular or known individuals (*'iš*, *mankind*) brought low'. *The* eyes are the organs of desire (Gn. 39:7; Ps. 123:2), referring back to the covetousness of verse 8 and the greed of verses 11-12. Judgment falls where it is merited.

16 *Holy* (*qādoš*) is the divine nature in itself. In Genesis 38:21 a woman dedicated to the sexual practices by which her god was served is called a 'holy' woman (*q'āšā*) for the word essentially means 'separated', 'belonging to another (the divine) order of things'. What made Israel's God *holy* was his moral purity (6:3). This was his 'separatedness'. *Righteousness* is holiness expressed in moral principles; *justice* is the application of the principles of righteousness (cf. 1:21). Both *justice* and *righteousness* are the outshining of holiness. The noun 'ēl in the term *the holy God* (*hā'el haqqādoš*) is particularly used of God in his transcendence.

17 This is a fair scene of pastoral peace until we realize that the flocks are roaming free among the ruins of a prosperity devastated by divine judgment. The animals have made the formerly well-tended lawns their own, and (lit.) 'tramps eat in the ruins of the well-fed'.¹

The second group of woes (18-23) covers in turn the people's attitude to sin and to the Lord (18-19), to moral values (20), to themselves and the only authority they recognize (21) and to self-gratification and using the social system to their gain (23).

18-19 The picture is of a beast harnessed to and dragging a cart with *cords of deceit* (*šāw'*, 'falsehood'). By holding on to what is false they bind themselves in bondage to *sin*, and what starts as *cords* becomes *cart ropes*, unbreakable bondage. *Sin* (*āwôn*) and *wickedness* (*ḥattā'ā*) when used together point, respectively, to an inner state and to specific instances of sin (cf. on 6:7). The progressive nature of sin (from *cords* to *cart ropes*) leads to the arrogance which demands that God prove himself, the *scepticism* which doubts that he is active in the world and the blindness which cannot see him at work.

20 In sin's next stage the moral code is reversed; sin becomes an accepted way of life. This happens in public morality (*light* and *darkness* are common to all) and to private morality (*bitter* and *sweet* are matters of private taste).

21 Where does it all start? With humankind's insistence on autonomy. Both the wisdom that provides ruling principles for life and the cleverness (better 'discernment') that decides specific issues are their own unaided work.

22-23 So what is life like on the basis of unaided human wisdom? First, success is measured by the degree of self-satisfaction achieved and indulgence enjoyed. *Heroes* and *champions* is sarcastic use of terms of military honour, as if to say, 'See, they have medals for it!' Secondly, the safeguards of society, here the legal system, succumb to corruption.

24 The second short 'therefore' section describes how punishment fits the crime. They invited the Lord to hasten (19) and now judgment will be swift as *fire* in stubble (24a). They made themselves the ready slaves of sin (18, 20) and

This is a verse much emended but unreasonably so. The NIV 'lambs' (presumably *kārim*) replaces *gārim* (lit. 'incomers, temporary stayers') rendered above (contextually) 'tramps'. There have been many other suggestions (cf. BHS), but none to match the subtlety of the MT.

now they will be like the *dry grass* which falls helplessly into the fire (24b). They claimed autonomy (21) and now their *roots* will be exposed as rotten (24c). They produced the fruit of unrighteousness (22-23) and now their blossom will vanish (24d). The external foe of fire (God's wrath) and the internal foe of rottenness will leave no remainder. While they were asking God to display himself (19) they possessed the very word of God and this, fundamentally, is their condemnation – not their indulgences, their revamped moral codes, their venality, but that they *rejected the law of the LORD Almighty* and *spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel* (cf. Am. 2:4). On *law* see 1:10. *Word* (*'imrāh*, 'saying') is the actual 'speech' of God himself.

25-30 On the literary form of this second long 'therefore' section see on 10:4 and additional note. As it stands this section is unified by beginning and ending, figuratively, with an earthquake in verse 25 and the lion and the storm in verses 29-30. This display of the 'natural' forces at the Lord's disposal brackets a description of yet another force he commands (26-29), the irresistible invader. Like the long 'therefore' in verses 14-17, God acts in total judgment.

25 Could this be the actual earthquake that took place in the days of Uzziah (Am. 1:1; Zc. 14:5)? Unburied bodies are typical of an earthquake situation. The Old Testament view of such an event as expressive of divine wrath does not testify to the quaintness of ancient thought but is an abiding instruction in how to understand natural catastrophe. The created world, in all the complexity, splendour and ferocity of its powers, is a controlled tool in the hand of the Creator, serving his righteous purposes. The tenses in verse 25ab can either point to a past fact or to a future certainty. If the latter, the earthquake is symbolic of the immense power and devastating effect of the Lord's coming acts. And even so they do not exhaust his wrath (25c).

26-28 If verse 25 teaches how to understand our environment, these verses teach how to understand history (cf. 10:5-15). God is sovereign over the whole world (*distant nations* .. *ends of the earth*) so that he only needs to raise his *banner* and whistle for even the *nations* to come *swiftly and speedily* without question. In verses 27-28 the power of this sovereign God is appreciated by observing the power of the nations at his command: progress is unimpeded by either natural failure (*tired, stumbles, slumbers, sleeps*) or enforced delay (*loosened, broken*). Their equipment is effective (sharp) and at the ready (*strung*): *likeflint* it is not subject to wear and is capable of great speed (*whirlwind*).

29-30 These verses present a double picture of helplessness: the prey before the lion (29) and the storm-bound sailor with shelter on neither sea nor land (30). *Roar* (*všā'aḡ*) denotes the 'pouncing roar' of the lion (Jdg. 14:5), designed to paralyse with terror. The *young lions* are not cubs but lions in their prime strength. Their *growl* (*v'nāham*) is the satisfied growl when prey is captured and is being enjoyed. The message of the lion-picture is that 'no-one can help'; that of the storm-picture is that 'there is no help'. The animal roar (*w'yinhōm*) becomes the roaring (*k'nah'mat*) storm. The despairing sailor looks from the threatening sea to *the land* but finds no comfort, only further *darkness and distress*, and *light* fast disappearing as the *clouds* gather.

Thus Isaiah ends his preface. The message of the first two sections (1:2-31; 2:1-4:6) is that human sin cannot ultimately frustrate God's purposes and that, in God, mercy triumphs over wrath. But the third section (5:1-30) poses a shattering question: When the Lord has done all (5:4), must the darkness of divine wrath close in and the light flicker and fade? This was the day of crisis in which Isaiah ministered: a crisis for humankind, for the day of wrath has come and a crisis for God: can mercy be exhausted and defeated?

B. The triumph of grace (6:1—12:6)

In chapters 1-5 Isaiah used the message he preached after he became a prophet to express his understanding of the situation into which he came to minister. He now offers a succinct statement of the message of judgment and hope which was his initial response to it. As a message of hope, he enlarges on the visions of kingship and of the city which began to emerge in the first two sections of his preface (cf. 1:25–26; 4:2–6; 9:1–6; 12:1–6). He takes as his starting point promises of personal spiritual renewal (1:27; 4:3–4) which he discovered through experience to be the foundation of the Lord's restorative action (6:1–7). As in 5:7, however, he is concerned for the whole people of God and he sees Judah and Israel as alike caught up in divine purposes of judgment and promise.

A¹ An individual brought, through cleansing, into God's fellowship and commissioned to preach (6:1–13)

B The word to Judah (7:1–9:7<6>)	C The word to Israel (9:8<7>–11:16)
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The moment of decision	Ahaz challenged to believe: the dynasty at stake (7:1–17)	The word refused: punitive, judgment ahead (9:8<7>–10:4)
The judgment	The Assyrian invasions: Israel ruined, Judah overwhelmed (7:18–8:8)	The Assyrian invasions: Israel conquered, Judah under threat; punishment of Assyria (10:5–15)
The remnant	Opponents of God's people doomed; his people secure; the true people within the nation (8:9–22)	Assyria destroyed; the remnant saved; unexpected reprieve for Judah (10:16–34)
The glorious hope	The birth and reign of the Davidic king; world-wide peace (9:1–7<8:23–9:6>)	The reign of the Davidic king; its righteousness; world-wide peace (11:1–16)

A² An individual testifies of salvation and holds out the same blessing to others; a whole community in the divine fellowship (12:1–6)

This overview shows how Isaiah answered the problem which both his circumstances and his theology set for him. The judgment will be as awful as he had

already foreseen (e.g. the darkness of 5:30 and 8:22). The promises are, however, equally real, resting upon a divine work of salvation and enjoyed by a company of individual believers of whom Isaiah, in his personal experience, is the exemplar. 6:1–13 is not simply his justification for being a prophet but is more particularly the heart of his answer to the problems raised by his preface. It speaks of the triumph of grace.

1. The prologue: reconciliation and commission (6:1–13)

As Isaiah tells the story of how he was reconciled to God (1–7) and called to be a prophet (8–13), he structures the account around three responses which he made, 'and I said (*wā'ōmar*) in verses 5, 8 and 11.

- A' The death of the king (1a)
 - B¹ Responding to the divine holiness (1b–7)
 - The Lord in his holiness (1b4)
 - Isaiah pronounces his own and the people's sentence (5)
 - Divine provision (6–7)
 - B² Responding to the divine concern (8–10)
 - The Lord overheard (8a)
 - Isaiah volunteers (8b)
 - The Lord's commission: the message (9) and the task (10)
 - B³ Responding to the divine purpose (11–13a)
 - Isaiah enquires about the course of events (11a)
 - The Lord's intention of total destruction (11b–13a)
- A² The oak tree cut down and the life which remains (13b)

a. Isaiah's call (6:1–8)

1a *The year that King Uzziah died* was about 740 BC. His notably long and prosperous reign (2 Ki. 15:1–7; 2 Ch. 26) had entered troubled waters internationally when the accession in 745 BC of the vigorous imperialist Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria threatened the sovereignty of the Israelite states. If Isaiah drew comfort from the fact that as the earthly king was dying he saw a vision of the heavenly king, he does not say so.

According to 1:1 Isaiah entered on the prophetic office while Uzziah was still alive. Why then does he not date his call from 'the fifty-second year of Uzziah'? No other prophet dates an event by a death, though Isaiah does so twice (cf. 14:28) and each time with significance. He is a true Old Testament historian for whom the events of history, accurately recorded, are a declaration from and about God. Such an event was the death of Uzziah. For years the king had lived in alienation and separation, under divine displeasure (2 Ki. 15:5; 2 Ch. 26:16ff.), and as his death approached he remained, to the human eye, uncleaned. Thus, Uzziah, as the darkness of death closed in upon him, was symbolic of Isaiah's view of the nation, its plight and its problem. The prophet saw in respect of one what he feared for all – that the time had come when even the Lord was saying 'What more ought I to have done?' (5:4). But in this hour of death Isaiah discovered that

52:12). See also the 'triple' in 13:1–27:13. In all these cases the second statement is not a mere repetition but also a development of the first.

the Lord still had a word of new life to speak (cf. verses 7-8).

Isaiah says, I saw the Lord,* and though it is true that 'no-one has ever seen God' (Jn. 1:18) for in his essential being he is Spirit (Is. 31:3; Jn. 4:24), yet he graciously condescends to clothe now this side of his nature and now that with visibility for the instruction and comfort of his people (e.g. Jos. 5:13-15). Isaiah was thus allowed to see the Lord (^a*ḏōnāy*, 'the Sovereign'; cf. Jn. 12:41). The reticence is notable. We learn of robes, a throne, attendants – all that fills the mind with a sense of majesty-but the Lord is not described. God's sovereignty is real; he sits on a throne, in the seat of authority and power, high and exalted. In 52:13 the same paired words refer to the Lord's Servant; in 57:15, to the eternal God himself. A personal reference is suitable here: the Lord is high in his own nature, exalted/lifted up' by the acknowledgment of his sovereignty. This exalted sovereignty is 'earthed' (cf. 66:1)² – the phrase filled the temple expresses the general truth that God is present in all his majesty at the centre of his people's life. The temple is no mere symbol of his indwelling presence; it is the reality of it. But there is also the specific truth that in the temple the Lord meets with his people on the basis of sacrifice. This in particular is the point where heaven touches earth. The vision thus prepares for its climax in verse 7.

2 The seraphs are above him in the position of servants standing and waiting on a seated master. The heavenly beings, seraphs/burning ones' (from *ṡārap*, 'to burn'; e.g. Am. 2:1), are found only here. Imaginatively, it is possible that with two wings folded downwards, two folded over their faces and two raised for flight, they seemed to Isaiah like huge flames but the reality is that he experienced their burning ministry (6-7) and for this he remembered them and named them accordingly.³ All three verbs, covered, covered and were flying, are of continuous action. The scene is one of constant motion (cf. Ezk. 1:14) at the divine bidding. They covered their eyes, not their ears, for their task was to receive what the Lord would say, not to pry into what he is like (cf., Dt. 29:29). We can only conjecture why they covered their feet. The foot is not particularly creaturely that they should hide their feet in humility before the Creator. The use of the euphemism of 'feet' for sexual parts (e.g. 7:20) would involve an inappropriate attribution of sexuality to these heavenly beings. The foot is, however, metaphorically the organ of activity and of life's direction (Ps. 18:33-34; Pr. 1:15-16; 4:27; etc.). In covering their feet they disavowed any intention to choose their own path; their intent was to go only as the Lord commanded.

3 The seraphim were calling to one another; are we to picture them standing each side of the throne and responding to each other in antiphonal song? At any rate, the song is continuous and its theme is the holiness of the Lord and his presence in all his glory in every place. Hebrew uses repetition to express superlatives or to indicate totality.⁴ Only here is a threefold repetition found.⁵ Holiness is

*The AV'I saw also' is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew idiom.

²The Lord's 'footstool' is sometimes the earth (66:1), the ark (1 Ch. 28:2; Ps. 132:7), Jerusalem (La. 2:1) or the temple (60:13).

³The use of *ṡārāp* in connection with snakes (e.g. 30:6) has led some to think of serpent guardians of the holy presence (cf. Kaiser, 'naked-winged serpents with human hands and feet!'). *ṡārāp* has, however, no necessary connection with serpents and, as Kissane says, the seraphim 'have nothing in common with serpents except the name'. In the ^{ms} there is no definite article; 'burning ones' is a description, not a title.

⁴In Gn. 14:10 'pits, pits' is rendered 'full of pits', and in 2 Ki. 25:15 'gold, gold' is rendered 'pure gold'.

⁵Cf. Leupold, 'Heavenly beings are using this repetition. For them it may have reflected their insight into the Trinity.'

supremely the truth about God, and his holiness is in itself so far beyond human thought that a 'super-superlative' has to be invented to express it.¹ The etymology of the 'holiness' word-group (*ṡqādōs*) is debated. The possibilities seem to be 'brightness' and 'separatedness'. 'Brightness' suggests the unapproachable God (cf. 1 Tim 6:16 with Ps. 104:2);² 'separatedness' is the positive quality which distinguishes or defines God. On the whole, the latter provides the easiest summary of Old Testament evidence, but either way the question arises what it is that makes him unapproachable or what it is that constitutes his distinctiveness. The answer is that it is his total and unique moral majesty. When people fear before God (e.g. Jdg. 6:22; 13:22) it 'is not the consciousness of... humanity in the presence of divine power, but the consciousness of... sin in the presence of moral purity'.³ Isaiah is here the normative Old Testament man. This transcendent holiness is the mode of God's immanence for the whole earth is full of his glory/that which fills the whole earth is his glory', i.e. it is not only the one thing that is capable of filling everything but the thing which actually does so. Holiness is God's hidden glory; glory is God's all-present holiness.

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

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

6 Then one of the seraphs flew, i.e. by the command of God (cf. verse 2). The initiative has been heaven's all along; revealing (2-3), excluding and condemning (4-5) and now sending the seraph to the one he has chosen to save. In the Old Testament fire is not a cleansing agent but is symbolic of the wrath of God (Gn. 3:24; Nu. 11:1-3), his unapproachable holiness (Ex. 3:2-6; 19:18-25) and

'God's name' is qualified by the adjective 'holy' in the Old Testament more often than by all other qualifiers put together.

²Cf. T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Blackwell, 1960), p. 149; N. H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Epworth, 1944), pp. 24ff.

³Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (SCM, 1956), p. 66.

⁴For *ṡdāmā* cf. Je. 14:17; 47:5 (mourning, tears); Ps. 49:12-13, 20-21, (death).

⁵Nu. 31:21-24 might suggest purification by fire but note that verse 23 insists also on 'the water of cleansing'. The fire ceremony probably symbolized the necessity that the wrath of God must be vented on everything to do with Midianite life before even inanimate objects could pass to Israelite use.

the context of his holy law (Dt. 4:12, 33, 36). The *live coal* which was brought to Isaiah was *fire from the altar*. The perpetual fire (Lv. 6:12–13) on the altar went beyond symbolizing divine wrath, for the altar was the place where the holy God accepted and was satisfied by blood sacrifice (Lv. 17:11). It holds together the ideas of the atonement, propitiation and satisfaction required by God and of the forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation needed by his people. All this is achieved through substitutionary sacrifice and brought to Isaiah, encapsulated in the single symbol of the *live coal*.

7 The Bible does not deal in dumb signs; application leads to explanation (*he touched my mouth and said ...*). (i) The touching of the *Zips* with the live coal shows how God ministers to the sinner at the point of confessed need (*cf.* verse 5). (ii) The effect is instantaneous. The two verbs, has touched and *is taken away*, are co-ordinate perfects, stressing that as soon as the one happened the other happened also. Isaiah contributes nothing; all is of God – ‘This touched your lips and your iniquity went’. (iii) A comprehensive work of dealing with sin takes place. Isaiah confessed what he knows (*lips*) but God deals also with his guilt/iniquity’ (*‘āḏn*), the inner reality of the deviant nature, and with his *sin* (*ḥaṭṭā’a*), the specific instances of shortcoming. (iv) All of this arises from the payment of the price. The verb atoned for (*kippēr*) means ‘to effect a *kōpēr*’ or ‘ransom price’, the price which justice requires. KB remarks, ‘The Hebrew, considered for itself, leads to “cover” as the original meaning ... God covers guilt out of free grace, but his acting thus is less the pardon of a father than the releasing by a judge.* As we speak of a sum of money as sufficient to “cover” a debt, so *kippēr/kōpēr* is the payment of whatever divine justice sees as sufficient to cover the sinner’s debt, the death of the substitute sacrifice on the altar.

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

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

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

9–10 Isaiah’s message (9) and his task (10) constitute, at first sight, the oddest commission ever given to a prophet: to tell people not to understand and to effect heart-hardening and spiritual blindness!³ There is, however, no way to evade the plain meaning of the verses. Verse 9 speaks of both the outer faculties (*hearing, seeing*) and the inner ones (*understanding*/‘discerning’, *perceiving*/‘knowing’). Verse 10 arranges these into a rounded structure (*heart, ears, eyes, eyes, ears, heart*) thus emphasizing a total inability to comprehend.

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

²KB, p. 452b.

³The Lxx evaded the rigour of the MT by softening the imperatives to indicatives: ‘For the heart of this people is made fat’.

The use of these verses in the New Testament’ is an additional reason to be concerned to interpret them correctly and a simple approach lies to hand: How did Isaiah obey them? According to the criticism levelled at him in 28:9–10, Isaiah taught with such simplicity and clarity that the sophisticates of his day scorned him as fit only to conduct a kindergarten. The Isaianic literature as it has come to us bears all the marks of a plain, systematic, reasoned approach. It is clear that Isaiah did not understand his commission as one to blind people by obscurity of expression or complexity of message. He, in fact, faced the preacher’s dilemma: if hearers are resistant to the truth, the only recourse is to tell them the truth yet again, more clearly than before. But to do this is to expose them to the risk of rejecting the truth yet again and, therefore, of increased hardness of heart. It could even be that the next rejection will prove to be the point at which the heart is hardened beyond recovery. The human eye cannot see this point in advance; it comes and goes unnoticed. But the all-sovereign God both knows it and appoints it as he presides in perfect justice over the psychological processes he created (*cf.* Ex. 4:21). It was at just such a point that Isaiah was called to office. His task was to bring the Lord’s word with fresh, even unparalleled clarity, but in their response people would reach the point of no return. The imperatives of these verses must, therefore, be seen as expressing an inevitable outcome of Isaiah’s ministry (*cf.* 2:9). And, of course, so it turned out to be, as is made clear in chapters 7–11. These were the days in which the decisive word was spoken and refused. ‘Opportunity in human life is as often judgment as it is salvation.’²

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

13b Do the preceding verses, then, represent the final fall of the curtain on the Lord’s valiant efforts to save a people for himself? Ask another question: Was Isaiah’s deadly sin the end for him? The ‘burning one’ approached with fire but when the fire touched the voice said, ‘Forgiven’. So here too. The tree is felled but the voice says, ‘The holy seed’. Typically of Isaiah, hope is the unexpected fringe attached to the garment of doom. The comparison with the felled trees³ starts by appearing to describe the meagre remains following the further attrition of verse 13a but suddenly it is found not to be the conclusion of

²Mt. 13:14–15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10 (of Jesus’ parabolic method); Jn. 12:39ff.; Acts 28:26–27 (of people’s failure to accept the message).

*smith, p. 82.

³When they are cut down is a correct translation of *b’šalleket*. Nouns of this formation represent a state of being not (as BDB, KB) an activity (‘felling’).

the earlier sentence but the start of a new thought: within the stump there is life! The meaning of *'elā* (*terebinth*) and *'allōn* (*oak*) is uncertain; they may be two species of oak. *The holy seed will be the stump* is (lit.) simply, 'the seed of holiness its stump'. The saying is not self-explanatory, but the way in which verse 13b balances and forms an *inclusio* with verse 1a (see the outline on p. 75) suggests that already here the reference is to the shoot out of the stem of Jesse (11:1); the promise of the Messiah is the guarantee of a future people over whom he will reign. But Isaiah also uses 'seed' of the people who will finally enjoy the promises (41:8; 43:5; 45:25; 53:10; 59:21; 65:9, 23; 66:22). The 'holy seed' could be the remnant, called holy and written unto life in Jerusalem (4:3).¹

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

The question mark put against the doctrine of hope by chapter 5 was erased by Isaiah's own experience. His sin was as the sin of the people (6:5). If the Lord dealt with his sin, will he not deal with theirs? Hope is restored (6:13b). Isaiah proceeds now to work this out. First, the moment of decision has come. Isaiah found himself faced with the word of God and the challenge to respond (6:8); so it would be for the people. For them the point of no return had arrived (6:9f.). Secondly, membership of the people of the Lord must now be evidenced by personal decision and commitment. It is not a matter of nationality. In these chapters the doctrine of the believing remnant flowers (*cf* 8:9–22). Thirdly, the dying kingship of Uzziah (6:1) provides the foil for the hope to come: David's house is sinking fast but the promised Ring will come (9:1–7; 11:1–16).

a. *The word to Judah (7:1 – 9:7·6)*

The moment of decision (7:1–17)

For Isaiah, faith in the Lord's promises was a practical way of life for the here-and-now and it was as much a national policy as an individual exercise. The need for such a policy was created by the pressures of Assyrian imperialism on the lands of western Palestine. But, as Isaiah understood it, the real issue was not one of military 'muscle' nor of political cleverness in creating defensive alliances but whether the Lord could be trusted to do what his word promised. For the northern kingdom (called variously Israel, Ephraim or Jacob) the fatal decision had already been taken (see 9:8–12·7–11a), but for Judah the moment of decision was about to come. At this crux Isaiah confronted Ahaz. The shape of the passage enforces this truth:

A¹ The house of David threatened (1-2)

B¹ Isaiah's son: the plans of the northern powers (3-6)

¹Q^a supports the *MT* in verse 13b saving that it reads the definite article, *zera' haqqōdeš*. Dr N. T. Wright in an unpublished paper, 'The idea of seed in Isaiah 6 and Mark 4', argues that Is. 6:13 is the earliest use of these words and that the definite article in Q^a arose from the influence of Ezr. 9:2. The LXX contains no reference to 'the holy seed' and some erase the words in consequence. The LXX, however, diverges from the *MT* throughout this verse (and passage) and is an unsafe guide. Kaiser represents others who believe that the words are a late addition following the survival of the people in exile. It is difficult, however, to think that

C¹ The Lord's word of assurance (7-9)

D The response of unbelief (10-12)

C² The Lord's sign of judgment (13-15)

B² The virgin's son: the destruction of the northern powers (16)

A² The house of David destroyed (17)

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

2 A second invasion followed (2 Ch. 28:17–18), this time with the avowed intention of bringing David's dynasty to an end (6). The *house of David* is not used elsewhere, as here, of the dynasty personified in the current king.* The description here deliberately pin-points the particular crisis of the day. Ahaz is the 'house of David', and what he now does will be decisive for the future of the dynasty. The verb translated has *allied itself* (*vnāhā*) occurs sixty-three times in the Old Testament, always, as in verse 19, meaning 'to settle down, to swarm'.² The ten-year-old alliance would not as such constitute news or a cause of panic, but intelligence reports of large-scale troop movements in Israel ('the place is swarming with them') would and did. Another invasion was impending before which king and people panicked.

3 The name *Shear-Jashub*, meaning 'a remnant shall return', with the noun emphasized, is a name of promise, for the Lord would never so desert his people that they would perish utterly (*cf* 1:9). It is also, however, a name of disaster, for only a remnant would survive. So certain was Isaiah of coming events that he was prepared for the word to 'become flesh' in the person of his first son. Shear-Jashub was thus an 'acted oracle', a visual aid bringing home the word of God that much more clearly. He was also, by giving double expression to the word – sight as well as sound – making its fulfilment doubly sure.³ Ahaz, a man of his own time, would have known and felt this. *The aqueduct of the Upper Pool* was part of Ahaz's preparations for the coming siege. Before Hezekiah (*cf* 22:9–11), Jerusalem's water supply was overground and vulnerable.

4 *Be careful, keep calm!* 'watch yourself and be still' does not mean 'watch out for the enemy but do not worry' but rather (treating the second verb as auxiliary to the first) 'Be careful to do nothing'.⁴ Ahaz was under pressure from his advisers to play the astute politician by allying himself with Assyria against the threat of the northern powers (2 Ki. 16:7–9). But Isaiah's word was equally astute: Aram and Ephraim were indeed spent forces, *smouldering stubs*. Their combined might was as nothing compared to Assyria and they would soon be stamped out and no longer a threat. Beyond that, the issue was not one of

anyone bold enough to make such an addition would not have had the additional courage to put his meaning beyond doubt! Furthermore, Kaiser destroys his case by saying the words are 'entirely in accord with the tendency of 6:1–11'. How then can he tell that they are a later addition?

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

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

³For 'acted oracles' see 20:1–6; Je. 13:1–11; 19:1–15; Ezk. 4:1–5:17; 12:3–16. A key passage is 2 Ki. 13:14–19.

⁴For this auxiliary use *cf.* Gn. 24:6; 31:24; Dt. 4:9; 6:12.

politics but of faith. If only Ahaz could be persuaded to do nothing, to keep clear of compromising alliances, the Lord could be trusted to keep his promises to David and to deal with the Assyrian threat (as indeed he ultimately did; see 37:36–38). The issue is as clear-cut as that: will Ahaz seek salvation by works (politics, alliances) or by simple trust in divine promises?

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

7 We heard the plans of man (6); now we hear the word of *the Sovereign LORD* (*ʾn dōnāy yahweh*) (cf. Pr. 16:1, 33). This emphasis on the sheer greatness of the Lord eases the pathway to faith, makes faith a practical policy in the hard realities of life – and also leaves unbelief without excuse.

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

- A' The head of Aram is Damascus
- B¹ And the head of Damascus is Rezin
- C¹ And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people
- A² And the head of Ephraim is Samaria
- B² And the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son
- C² If you do not stand by faith, indeed you will not stand at all

In this perfectly balanced utterance,¹ the A and B lines refer to the confederate powers, their capitals (A) and their kings (B). The C lines balance the coming dissolution of Ephraim with the possible dissolution of Judah. The general message of warning is plain: Ephraim chose the path of human collective security by its alliance with Aram and thus sealed its doom. It would, therefore, cease to be a nation (C¹). To reject the way of faith for the collective security of an alliance with Assyria would likewise spell the end for Judah (C²). The way of faith (C²) stands in contrast with the stress on earthly, human power in the A and B lines. For all their boasted defensive alliance, their strength was, in the last analysis, only whatever Damascus or Samaria could offer in the final Assyrian onslaught (2 Ki. 16:9; 17:5) and the wisdom behind their policy was only whatever Rezin and Remaliah's son could devise! But what Isaiah left unsaid must have shouted as loudly to Ahaz as what he did say: The head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is David's son. Here was a situation of divine strength and a kingship sustained by divine promises. Hence the call to faith and the warning that to abandon faith is to lose all. On the supposition that the *sixty-five years* is the period 735–670 BC, the reference is to the fact that in 671 Esarhaddon imported foreign settlers into the area of the former northern kingdom (cf. 2 Ki. 17:24; 2 Ch. 33:11; Ezr. 4:2). At that point those deported after the fall of Samaria (722 BC) were bereft of a land

'Many would excise C¹ on the grounds that it destroys the balance of the passage – a reckless interruption' (Kaiser) – and that it brings no message of comfort to Ahaz. The first charge is absurd. The second falls before the fact that the words are not comfort but warning.

to return to and thus finally ceased as a sovereign people. With *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all* the NIV attempts to catch the assonance of the Hebrew (*ta'ā minū. . . tē'āmēnū*). Faith is the central reality of the Lord's people, not just their distinctiveness but their ground of existence. No faith, no people. The MT includes an affirmative particle overlooked in the NIV: 'indeed (*kī*) you will not stand at all'. In the light of 6:9–13, this is the point of no return; to fail to respond now by trusting the Lord's promises is to bring about the final heart-hardening.

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

10 We are not told whether this message follows directly on from the foregoing or not. Either the king's immediate reaction or his subsequent commitment to a political solution necessitated a further ministry (*Again*). When *the LORD spoke to Ahaz* the human messenger was forgotten and only the voice of 'the Sovereign' was heard (cf. verse 7). This is the reality of the verbal inspiration of the prophets.

11 Isaiah tells Ahaz to *Ask the LORD. . . for a sign*. Gideon asked for a sign not because he doubted or disbelieved but because he wanted to be doubly certain that he was walking in the will of God (Jdg. 6:36ff.). In his case seeking a sign was in itself an expression of believing commitment. The reference to *the LORD your God* shows that Isaiah is appealing to Ahaz in this light. The opportunity remains open to affirm faith and to act as a believer. The Lord is ready to 'stop at nothing', *whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights*,¹ for the sake of the Davidic king and the chosen city. His later use of the 'stairway of Ahaz' (38:8) in confirming his word to Hezekiah recalls sadly the present situation, as if to say that the Lord would indeed have been as good as his word if only Ahaz had responded with trust. The magnitude of the offer (as we might say, 'to move heaven and earth') highlights the seriousness of the crisis and also the importance the Lord attaches to the exercise of faith.

12 Ahaz refuses to *put the LORD to the test and thereby shrouds his unwillingness* to face the spiritual realities of the situation in a veil of piety (cf. Jn. 4:16–20). There is indeed a sin of 'testing God'. Essentially it is the sin of unbelief. Characteristically it says, 'I will trust if God proves himself trustworthy' or 'I will not believe unless God so proves himself'. At Massah (Ex. 17), according to Psalm 81:7–8, the Lord tested his people; according to Psalm 95:9, they tested him. His test was whether, on the basis of all his recent past care, they would now trust him in a fresh threat; their test was to suspend belief, to doubt the goodwill of God. To ask a sign in this spirit is proof that one does not believe; it treats God like a performing animal, with faith as the sugar-lump rewarding the trick. But to refuse a proffered sign is proof that one does not want to believe. Pious though his words sound, Ahaz by using them demonstrated himself to be the wilfully unbelieving man – and since he would not believe, he could not continue. This was the moment of decision. Just as the Lord loves to be trusted (cf. Mt. 8:10), so unbelief is the unforgiveable sin (cf. Jn. 16:9).

13 *Then Isaiah said* is a translation of 'And he said', but the words used (e.g. *my God*) show that the prophet is the speaker. It is not considered important to

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

make a point of this because, through inspiration, what the Lord says (12) Isaiah says, and what Isaiah says (13) the Lord says. The threat to the *house of David* fills the passage (cf. verses 2, 17). In *try the patience of men* the verb, meaning 'to weary',¹ is plural. The failure of the house of David is wider than Ahaz. From the beginning it has failed to live up to its divine remit. It has produced neither the perfect king nor the golden age but rather the reverse. A whole history of human inadequacy suddenly passes before Isaiah's eyes. With the change from the *your God* of verse 10 to *my God* here, Isaiah signals the new, disastrous turn of events. As Kaiser put it:

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

14 The *sign* is no longer a matter of invitation but of prediction, no longer persuading to faith but confirming divine displeasure.² This is the other way in which the concept of 'sign' is used (see on verse 10): a retrospective confirmation that an act or course of action has come from and been performed by the Lord.³ The birth of *Immanuel* would confirm all that the Lord said through Isaiah to Ahaz – that this was indeed, the moment of decision and that the consequences were divine retribution on unbelief. Commanding attention with 'Behold' (omitted in the NIV), Isaiah speaks of the *virgin* who will be with child. The translation *virgin* ('*almâ*') is widely disputed on the ground that the word means only 'young woman' and that the technical word for 'virgin' is *b'tûlâ*.⁴ Of the nine occurrences of '*almâ*' those in 1 Chronicles 15:20 and the title of Psalm 46 are presumably a musical direction but no longer understood. In Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19⁵ and Song of Solomon 1:3 the context throws no

¹*lā'â* (cf. 1:14) is not so much to 'try patience' as to 'erode strength'. Wilderberger's linking of the verb with the legal argument vocabulary (*vrîb*) rests on too narrow a basis of evidence and adds nothing to the present context.

²S. Mowinckel (He that Cometh [Blackwell, 1959], pp. 111ff.) holds that since Ahaz refused a sign which would have moved him to believe he is offered a sign with the same intent. Logic does not require this and the words used resist it. Why does Isaiah emphasize divine exasperation and imply divine alienation ('my God') from Ahaz if not to introduce a sign with an opposite force? The assumption that the 'sign' is really the failure of the Assyrian attempt to destroy Judah fails to ask in what sense this would be a compelling sign, as from God to Ahaz? Would not the king (with some colour of verity) attribute this to the astuteness of his calculated risk in calling Assyria to his aid?

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

⁴*b'tûlâ* occurs fifty times in the Old Testament. Of these, twelve are metaphorical (e.g. Is. 37:22) and, therefore, their evidential value is patchy. Many could refer to the plight of any young woman, whatever her status, violated in war. Fourteen other cases are non-committal, mainly where *b'tûlôt* is linked with 'young men' (always *bāhūr*) in the general sense of 'young people' (e.g. Dt. 32:25; Am. 8:13). The largest group (twenty-one cases) virtually certainly refer to 'virgins' (Ex. 22:16; 15, 17; 16; Lv. 21:3, 14; Dt. 22:19, 23, 28; Jdg. 19:14; 2 Sa. 13:2, 18; 1 Ki. 1:2; Est. 2:2–3, 17, 19; Ps. 78:63; Is. 23:4; 62:5; Je. 2:32; Ezk. 44:22; Joel 1:8). We note that it is not the word itself but its context which indicates its meaning. According to G. I. Wenham (*b'tûlâ*: 'A girl of marriageable age', VT, 22 (1972), 325–348), the word has no more reference to virginity than the English word 'girl'. His survey of Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates supports this conclusion. 'It is not until the Christian era that there is clear evidence that *b'tûlâ* had become a technical term for "virgin". It is not easy to know when this semantic shift took place.' In the three remaining references (Gn. 24:16; Lv. 21:3; Jdg. 11:39) it is clear that without a descriptive clause added *b'tûlâ* does not convey a precise meaning.

⁵Pr. 30:19 is frequently understood as referring to the mysterious processes of procreation (e.g. C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, ICC [Clark, 1899]). W. McKane (*Proverbs* [SCM, 1970]) interprets it rightly as 'the inexplicable attraction' of the sexes but gratuitously insists that '*almâ* cannot

decisive light on the meaning of the word. In Genesis 24:43 and Exodus 2:8 the reference is unquestionably to an unmarried girl, and in Song of Solomon 6:8 the '*lāmôt*', contrasted with queens and concubines, are unmarried and virgin. Thus, wherever the context allows a judgment, '*almâ*' is not a general term meaning 'young woman' but a specific one meaning 'virgin'. It is worth noting that outside the Bible, 'so far as may be ascertained', '*almâ*' was 'never used of a married woman.'

Genesis 24 is particularly important as providing a direct comparison of '*almâ*' and *b'tûlâ*. Abraham's servant's prayer (24:14) is couched in terms of a 'girl (*na'arâ*) who is to marry Isaac. In verse 16 the approaching Rebekah is described as female (*na'arâ*), of marriageable age (*b'tûlâ*) and single ('no man had ever lain with her'). The qualifying words indicate that by itself *b'tûlâ* is not specific. In the light of this accumulating knowledge of Rebekah, verse 43 finally describes her as '*almâ*', which is clearly a summary term for 'female, marriageable, unmarried'. There is no ground for the common assertion that had Isaiah intended *virgo intacta* he would have used *b'tûlâ*. '*almâ*' lies closer to this meaning than the other word. In fact this is its meaning in every explicit context. Isaiah thus used the word which, among those available to him, came nearest to expressing 'virgin birth' and which, without linguistic impropriety, opens the door to such a meaning.²

Will be with child and *will give birth* is in essence the same as Genesis 16:11 and Judges 13:5. In the former the pregnancy is a present fact, in the latter it is future. The expression itself is timeless, awaiting the context in each case.³

Stemming from 2 Samuel 7 (especially verses 14–16), rich expectations were treasured in the house of David. Psalm 2, probably a coronation psalm greeting the new Davidic king at his enthronement, speaks of him as 'son of God' and Psalm 45:6:7 ascribes deity to the king. The case for the expectation of a divine Messiah is strong in the Old Testament and was part of Jesus' understanding (cf. Mt. 22:41ff.).⁴ The title *Immanuel* is peculiar to Isaiah but the thought is part of the Davidic-Messianic fabric. As a word it means 'God is with us/God be with us', and many believe it to be no more here than the pious affirmation or prayer of a mother in Judah in the envisaged troubles. We can weigh the probability of this interpretation by putting ourselves into the situation. Leaving aside the momentous possibilities that she is a *virgin* ('*alma*'), a young woman becomes pregnant and calls her child *Immanuel*, either as an expression of faith in the face of adverse facts or as a prayer for help. Where is the 'sign quality' in this – especially after Isaiah has spoken the name and set the idea in motion? Even supposing that *virgin* is collective and that a rash of *Immanuels* appears in the land, such naming would be cynically dismissed in the palace as the product of female hysteria and not seen as a heaven-sent sign. What a depressing anticlimax following the Lord's expressed willingness to 'move

mean 'virgin' and that an illicit relationship is in mind (cf. Watts). But D. A. Hubbard (*Proverbs* [Word Books, 1989]) correctly describes it as 'the positive picture of romance'.

¹E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Tyndale Press, 1954), pp. 171ff.

²H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (SCM, 1956), pp. 26f. In Ugaritic cultic texts the words 'the young woman will bear a son' announces the birth of a divine/royal child. In Isaiah, Ringgren thinks the '*almâ*' is the queen and *Immanuel* the royal son. Isaiah summons Ahaz to take his royal profession seriously: in the royal cult you say God is with you-why do you not believe it?

³*w'qārā't* is an unusual but not indefensible form of the third person singular feminine (GKC 74g; see e.g. Dt. 31:29). *Q* has *wqr'* ('one shall call') and the *xxx* infers a second person singular masculine from the consonants of the *wt*.

⁴J. A. Motyer, 'Messiah', *IBD*.

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

15 *Curds and honey* was, according to verses 21-22, the food of poverty. Some, misled by a superficial resemblance to 'a land flowing with milk and honey', interpret it as the food of plenty.³ The latter is, however, the spontaneous outflow of a land that cannot do enough for its inhabitants whereas the former is the monotonous diet of hard times (22). The divine child is to be born into the poverty of his people.

The meanings of wrong and *right* here range from the bad and good fruit of Jeremiah 24:2, through experience of bad and good fortune (e.g. 45:7; Ps. 34:12:13), to moral evil and good. At a very early age a child can distinguish nasty and nice tastes (*cf.* on 8:1-4), but equally Isaiah may mean the 'years of discretion' and the faculty of moral choice. The time factor is probably designedly vague. Within three years Damascus had fallen to Assyria, and thirteen years later Samaria was taken. The implication, however, is that Immanuel's birth is imminent, and surely Isaiah's hearers would have understood it in this way; that some girl, at present an *'almâ*, would marry and in due course bear Immanuel. There are a number of suggestions how this might have been fulfilled.⁴ A common idea is the 'pious mother(s)' theory noted above; a theory which perishes by requiring for a prophecy so solemnly announced a fulfilment so drab that no-one bothered to record it!⁵ Weightier is the possibility that 7:14ff. was fulfilled in the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:1-4).⁶ Both in its immediacy and in its relation to the fall of the northern powers to Assyria, the birth of Isaiah's second son matches the Immanuel predictions. But there is a fatal difficulty. Not only does 8:1ff. fail to explain that Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is Immanuel but, even more seriously, the giving to this child of his own distinctive name is the whole point of the incident. Isaiah's wife at

¹J. A. Motyer, 'Content and context in the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 21 (1970), 118ff.

²In 1 Ki. 11:22; Is. 13:14; Joh. 1:8 'land' is equivalent to 'where you live'.

³Mowinckel and Ringgren note that mythologically 'curds and honey' is the food of the gods or describes the fertility of a land which Baal has fertilized. But it is also, according to Mowinckel, the food of distress, the diet of the child abandoned in the wilderness.

⁴The view is as old as Gesenius that the *'almâ* is Isaiah's second wife, who would cry out 'Immanuel' as her child was born. For the collective view see Kaiser.

⁵S. H. Hooke in *The Siege Perilous* (SCM, 1956) urges that Immanuel's mother is the girl chosen to take part in the 'sacred marriage' ritual (*cf.* Ringgren, n. 2 on p. 85).

⁶Oswalt espouses the Immanuel/Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz view. His discussion of the question is useful.

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

Just as the full significance of the name *Immanuel* is found by relating verse 14 to other references within the unity of chapters 7-11, so the date of his birth in verse 16 should take note of what the section as a whole says on this point. This reveals a tension between the immediate and the remote. On the one hand, it seems Immanuel will be born within the immediate threat (7:14-16; 10:27-11:1) and on the other, that he will be born in the undated future, for before his birth Judah and Israel will be scattered and need regathering (8:11-22; 11:12f.). These events must lie beyond the Assyrian times, for Isaiah knew that Judah would not suffer its coming exile (6:1ff.) at Assyrian hands (10:27-34; 29:1-8; 31:4-9; 38:6). Specifically, the birth of the royal child is scheduled for 'the future', 'the afterwards' (9:1:8:23). Isaiah does nothing to resolve this tension between immediacy and remoteness. As for Ahaz, he was jeopardizing the Messianic hope resident in the house of David. Because of his unbelief the promised Messiah would be born into poverty, heir to a meaningless throne in a conquered land. Isaiah said this without qualification because at that moment this was the only way he could express the significance of what Ahaz had done and of the events which must now run their course. Every next king in David's line was the focus of a longing that he would be the Messiah, and every actual king was guardian of that longing inasmuch as he might be the Messiah's father. To all this Ahaz had played false. When Isaiah gave fuller expression to his Messianic thought he did so in the light of a more extended divine programme but he did not revise his words to Ahaz and that was for two reasons. First, because he would record accurately what he said on that occasion, and secondly, because of the essential truth of his utterance. From the time of Ahaz there never was again a 'house of David' in the true sense but only a line of puppet, pretend-kings under alien domination until, at the exile, even they disappeared into the sand of history never to re-emerge. The name of the overlord power would change, from Assyria to Babylon to Persia to Greece and finally to Rome, before Immanuel would be born, but when he was born it was to share the poverty of his people, to inherit a non-existent throne and to feel the full weight of the oppressor. The blame for all this rested on Ahaz and his failure to believe the Lord's word. The promise awaited its time but the threat was immediate.

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

17 A new factor is introduced by Ahaz's unbelieving power-politics. Seeking help from Assyria, he had in fact taken a tiger by the tail. The result was not the security which faith could have brought but unparalleled disaster. *The house of your father* points to the dynastic threat, as in verses 2 and 13. In 1 Kings 12 the defection of the northern tribes (*Ephraim*) to become the kingdom of Israel stripped David's house of five-sixths of its sovereignty. Only the loss of sovereignty altogether could be a worse disaster – which is exactly what happened. Many would omit the phrase *the king of Assyria* but, as Watts points out, it 'cannot be eliminated without dropping verses 18-28, which depend

¹*Cf.* Kissane, Herbert, *BHS, etc.* Delitzsch perceptively remarks on the 'piercing force' of the words 'the king of Assyria' coming at the end of the verse.

upon it for meaning. Its abrupt appearance may well be for dramatic effect.' Neither can it be eliminated without destroying Isaiah's brilliant irony: Assyria the national saviour turned executioner! The nemesis of unbelieving, untrusting human wisdom!

The judgment (7:18 – 8:8)

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

This mosaic of oracles follows the programme sketched in verses 15-17: the emptying and decay of the countryside, poverty, the elimination of the northern powers (Aram and Israel) and Judah submerged under the Assyrian flood. The catastrophe is total. Ahaz may have had every political skill, logic, the harvested results of diplomatic experience – all 'the facts of the real world' -but when the people of God operate by 'what stands to reason' rather than what proceeds from faith, when they seek safety in the resources, policies and powers of the world – the king of Assyria instead of 'the King, the LORD Almighty' (6:5) – the things they trust guarantee their calamity. The dominating theme is Assyria (7:18) and its king (7:20; 8:4, 7). This was the power and the person on whom Ahaz trusted; this was the power and person of destruction.

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

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

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

- | | | |
|----------------|--|----------------|
| A ¹ | The Assyrian's land: two metaphors (18-20) | |
| | The bee: the land occupied (18-19) | a ¹ |
| | The razor: the people snipped (20) | b ¹ |
| | B ¹ Judah crushed (21-25) | |
| | The people impoverished (21-22) | b ² |
| | The land decayed (23-25) | a ² |

- | | | |
|----------------|---|----------------|
| | B ² Israel eliminated (8:1-7) | |
| | The people deported (14) | b ³ |
| | The land swamped (5-7) | a ³ |
| A ² | Immanuel's land: two metaphors (8) | |
| | The flood: the land engulfed | a ⁴ |
| | The bird of prey: the people under threat | b ⁴ |

18 Cf. 5:26 where the foe was unnamed; now his name is known and *the LORD will whistle for him*. Isaiah is applying the principles worked out in his preface. The vision of the easy sovereignty of the Lord is impressive. *Egypt* has not hitherto figured in these oracles but has a coming part to play. Was there already a caucus among Judah's leaders anxious to secure Egyptian aid? Such a group had its way thirty years later (see chapters 28-31). The power of *Egypt* was a magnet to beleaguered politicians but the eye of faith saw it as only a source of disaster (cf. 30:6f.). The imagery of *flies* and *bees* is fitting for, according to Herbert, 'The flooding of the Nile brought. . . swarms of flies. . . The hill districts of Assyria were well known for their bees.' The word *streams* (plural of *y'ôr*) is a semi-technical term for the Nile. The plural is the river with its system of irrigation canals. The phrase, (lit) 'at the extremity of the Nile-system', refers to the whole land of Egypt. That Egypt, the first and mortal foe of Gods people, should ever be considered as a means of safety proves that when people cease to believe in the Lord they will believe anything!

19 *Settle* is (lit.) 'swarm' (cf. on verse 2). Isaiah uses alliteration to drive home the message of a total land covered by this dreadful swarm: *nāḥû . . . nāḥ'lē . . . n'qîqê . . . nā'sûšîm . . . nāḥ'lôlîm*. Whether *steep*'cut off' means 'remote' or 'sheer' (see on 5:6) the sense is that no place is too far or too unwelcoming to deter the swarm. The word *thornbushes* is only found here and at 55:13. Everywhere, from the inaccessible (*ravines*) to the frequented (*water holes*), from the place to flee to (*crevices*; cf. 2:21) to the place to shun (*thornbushes*), the enemy has taken over. Alternative salvations neither save nor allow escape.

20 The change of metaphor to *razor* indicates a change of focus from land to people. Each individual falls to the attention of this barber. *The Lord* is 'aḏōnāy, 'the Sovereign'. For the significance of *hired* cf. 2 Kings 16:7-8; 2 Chronicles 28:21. *The hair of your legs* is (lit.) 'the hair of the feet'. 'Feet' is a euphemism for private parts (cf. 1 Sa. 24:3-4) and is indicative of the indignities heaped on the conquered. The contrast between *head* and *feet* and between the hidden hair of the body and the visible *beard* expresses totality. No part of the land (18-19), no part of the person (20) will be free of enemy occupation. The Lord would have saved Ahaz and his people for nothing; instead Ahaz bought a deceptive salvation-and the loss and humiliation that came with it.

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

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

(25). *Honey* is a natural product and is another pointer to the diminished population.

23-25 The picture of the devastated vineyard is reminiscent of 5:5-6 (note the telling repetition of *briers and thorns*, an exclusively Isaianic usage). Each verse speaks of an unprofitable, hostile landscape: of money spent, but all for nothing (23); of how where once beasts were carefully excluded, now *men* are the intruders and must go armed (24); and of the intensive labour of viticulture (25; cf. 5:6). *Cultivated with a hoe* is (lit.) 'hoed with a hoe' and the repetition of verb and noun suggests minute care. But it was all to be for nothing – they may as well turn the cattle loose and let the sheep trample! It is not difficult to feel with this poor remaining population. They were deprived of dignity (20), reduced to hardship (21), and suffered loss of all they had ever saved for (23) or toiled for (24-25) – and all because faith and obedience had given place to unbelief and worldly wisdom.

8:1 Large scroll would be better translated as 'large placard'. The word occurs elsewhere only in 3:23 where it is translated 'mirrors' (for the same idea see 30:8). We might paraphrase here, 'Hire hoarding space'. Isaiah was to make his message as public and eye-catching as possible. *hereṭ* (an *ordina y pen*) is found only here and in Exodus 32:4 and means (lit.) 'with an engraving tool of man', i.e. legible and comprehensible to all. The writing has to read (lit.), 'To Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz', maybe 'Concerning ...' or 'Belonging to ...' or 'Dedicated to ...'. The name is impressionistic rather than grammatical: 'Speed-spoil-haste-booty'. It is intended to provoke questions, not to answer them. It combines 'Speed' (the same word group as 'swiftly' in 5:26) with such an assurance of conquest that the oncoming foe does not think of the fight but only of the booty.

2-3 *And I will call*.¹ *Uriah* and *Zechariah* (cf. 2 Ki. 16:10-16; 18:2) would subsequently testify that Isaiah had set up the placard and vouch for the date. Isaiah first preached the message of the speeding enemy (5:26-28; 7:18), next he gave it extra certainty and potency (cf. on 7:3) by writing it. But the word had yet to receive a final expression by 'becoming flesh in Isaiah's son. The fact that it needed a special word from the Lord to identify the new-born with the placard (3) shows that Isaiah had simply been walking in obedience, a model for the people of God (cf. on 8:20). *The prophetess* was not, says Herbert, a courtesy title but was given to Isaiah's wife because she was literally the bearer of the Lord's word, incarnate in her son.

4 Beginning with the explanatory 'For' (omitted by the NIV), this verse makes the boy a time-indicator in the approach of that which his name declares. Kidner remarks:

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

The identical words *Before the boy knows* . . . link this child back to Immanuel (7:16) from whom he took over the task of being an immediate time-indicator. His fourfold name of judgment distinguishes him from Immanuel, the bearer of the fourfold name of blessing (9:6:5). Thus Isaiah released Immanuel from

'For 'and I will call' (which translates the ^{M^T} Q^a and ^{LXX} read an imperative. Kaiser and Kissane make a minute alteration to the text to read 'and I called' but no change is needed.

the then present and pointed on to his birth 'in the afterwards' (9:1:8:23).

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

In 734 BC Tiglath-pileser marched down the Israelite sea-coast, through Philistia, to the Egyptian border, cutting off Egyptian aid to the treaty powers. In 733 BC Israel lost Galilee, Transjordan (2 Ki. 15:29), Megiddo and other cities and it was only the hasty submission of Hoshea which saved the kingdom for a few years more. Damascus fell to Assyria in 732.

5-8 In verses 14 Isaiah redrafted 7:16 in terms of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; the boy's birth would signal the imminent elimination of the northern powers before Assyria. In verses 5-8 he elaborates 7:17; the Assyrian domination of Israel (6-7) would be but a prelude to its domination of Judah (8).

6 Following the natural sequence from verse 4, this people is Samaria, the northern kingdom.* *Shiloah* was the stream from the Gihon spring into Jerusalem. First, it stood for the Davidic monarchy (for it was at Gihon that the monarchy passed from David to his sons; 1 Ki. 1:33-34, 45), and secondly, it stood for Jerusalem as the city of faith. In 7:3 Ahaz, under threat of invasion and siege, was looking at his vulnerable water supply. Though Jerusalem occupied one of the most impregnable sites of the ancient world, its source of water was outside the city walls and the supply ran overground in conduits into the city. To live in Jerusalem, therefore, required faith that the Lord would stand by his promises that this was the city he had chosen and which he would defend (see on 22:9-14). The defection of the northern tribes was their rejection of David, of the chosen city and of the way of faith. Instead they rejoiced in *Rezin* (i.e. when they looked outside their own resources it was not to the Lord but to the power of earthly kings) and in *the son of Remaliah* (i.e. not the divinely appointed monarchy of David but a monarchy of their own devising). Such comprehensive abandonment of the Lord, his city and his king must reap its reward.

7 With the words 'Therefore, behold' Isaiah calls dramatic attention to the consequence of choosing an alternative salvation. The people had chosen on a worldly basis: the collective security of military alliance (*Rezin*) and the leadership of men who rose to power not by divine appointment but by human artifice (2 Ki. 15:25ff.). The nemesis of choosing the world is to get the world, in full and plenty: here, 'the mighty and abundant waters of the River' that is, the Euphrates. The motif of the two rivers Shiloah (6) and Euphrates (7) offers a telling contrast between the seeming weakness of faith and the seeming power of the world. To the human eye the way of faith (Jerusalem and its vulnerable water supply) is full of insecurity and hazard, but the believer sees all this and says, 'He is faithful who promised' (Heb. 10:23). But to choose the world is to be overwhelmed by the world. Isaiah will not allow people to escape the rigour of their own choices; to choose a saviour other than the Lord is to find a destroyer, in some form or another *the king of Assyria with all his pomp*.² Even

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

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

floodwaters fulfil divine purposes. The rise of empire and the imperialist mind is itself a sinful thing (see 10:5–15) but this does not mean that it is apart from the Lord and his holy rule. The waters only overflow their banks to go where he directs them. Thus, northern Israel began in 734 to reap the rewards of 1 Kings 12:16 and decisions made two hundred years earlier.

8 *Sweep on* (*vāḥālap*) expresses change, one thing replacing another (cf. 21:1), something coming on newly and freshly. The floodwaters which have drowned Israel gather fresh momentum to break through into Judah. The menace cannot be halted (sweep on .. *swirling* over ... passing through), but it is controlled and there is a *ne plus ultra*: *reaching up to the neck*. Immanuel's land is swamped but remains with its 'head above water'. Unlike Israel, which was swept away by Assyria, Judah survived the flood. The fulfilment of 6:9–8 awaits other hands. Judah made essentially the same decision as Israel – to choose an earthly king (Assyria) as its security rather than the Lord – and therefore it merited the same fate. But the Lord is sovereign also in the application of judgment; he is not bound by inexorable laws but freely does his own holy will. *Its outspread wings* could refer to the outward spread of the floodwaters, but is more vividly seen as a change of metaphor: the Assyrian, like a huge bird of prey, overshadows the whole land, ready to pounce. Your land, O Immanuel sums up the tragedy of Ahaz's decision. Immanuel is caught up in the ruination brought about by unbelief. His kingship is stripped of earthly glory and he comes as a suffering king. Historically (cf. 2 Ki. 16), Ahaz's appeal to Assyria and his submission to Assyrian overlordship brought peace and the cessation of the northern threat. Isaiah, however, saw through to the reality: the glory had departed and David's throne was now a hollow unreality, never to return to sovereignty again. There was nothing now for Immanuel to inherit except suffering and loss.

The remnant (8:9–22)

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

But who is kept secure? Isaiah's confrontation with Ahaz brought the issue of personal faith and commitment to the fore and exposed leader and nation alike as informed by a spirit of worldly reliance and lacking spiritual conviction. The importance of the present section is that it brings this to the point of definition in the doctrine of the remnant. 'A remnant shall return' (Shear-Jashub; cf. 7:3; 10:20f.) no longer means simply that there will always be survivors to continue the nation on earth but that there is a distinction between the secularized, politicized professing people of God and those, within that people, who turn to him in repentance and faith, who look to his word and obey it.

1. The Lord's presence as the point of differentiation (9-15)
 - a. Between the peoples and the people (9–10)

The peoples make alliances and hostile plans but without success 'for God is with us'
 - b. Between the people and the remnant (11–15)

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

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

2. Faith as the mark of differentiation (16-22)
 - a. The way of faith (16–18)

The substance of faith is what God has testified (16); its object, God himself (17); its resting place, what God has declared regarding his purposes (18)
 - b. The way of faithlessness (19-22)

Faithlessness rejects the Lord himself (19) and his word (20). Its consequences are calamity (21a), despair (21b) and hopelessness (22)

The material gathered into this unit of instruction is diverse. Verses 9-10 could belong to any period of Isaiah's ministry for throughout it his people were threatened by the powers of the world. These verses well represent his ministry of consolation when the northern powers and Assyria alike loomed over Judah. Verses 11-12 and 17-18 appear to be excerpts from a 'spiritual diary' in which Isaiah kept notes of his own walk with God. Verses 13-15 and 19–20 are snatches of teaching given to his discipleship group concerning the pressures they experienced and the distinctive life they must live. Verse 16 is a command regarding the discipleship group, and verses 21-22 predict the coming desolation (cf. 6:11–12). It is a mark of perceptive editorial care that this conglomerate possesses not only the didactic unity demonstrated above but a structural unity as well:

- A¹ International collapse (9)
- B¹ Fruitless consultation (10)
 - C¹ Isaiah set apart from the people by the word of the Lord (11)
 - D¹ The fear of the ungodly (12)
 - E¹ The fear of the godly (13)
 - E² The privilege of the godly (14a)
 - D² The fate of the ungodly (14b–15)
 - C² Isaiah and the group separated unto the word of the Lord (16-18)
 - B² Fruitless consultation (19–20)
 - A² National collapse (21-22)

The advantage of displaying a passage in this way is that it exposes the central truth or, as Watts would say, the 'keystone'. There is a people within the people (E¹, E² bracketed by D¹, D²), marked off by their deep reverence for the holy Lord (E¹) and his holy presence among them (E²; on 'sanctuary', see below), and by their hearing and treasuring of his word (C¹, C²). In the conflict of the nations, they are secure (A¹, B¹) and in the collapse of the nation they hold on to what God has spoken (A², B²). They are not, apparently, immune or cloistered when calamity befalls the people of which they are members but, unlike the hopelessness of the rest, they have a sure word to hold on to.

!3–10 The ideas expressed in these verses recall Psalms 2:1–6 and 46 – 48. The theme of concerted international hostility ineffectual against the city

where the Lord's king reigns and the Lord himself dwells was part of temple worship. Isaiah may even be quoting here from a temple hymn.* There is, however, no example elsewhere of 'Immanuel' as a cultic usage or as a name for the Davidic king, but it is unthinkable that Isaiah would have used 'ēl for God instead of *lōhīm or (as in Psalm 46:7, 11) Yahweh if he had not intended to link the guardian presence of the God who rules the nations with Immanuel. Immanuel is thus the ruler of the world; in Immanuel, God himself is present as the security of his people. *Raise the war cy* interprets a verb which basically means 'to be in uproar'. The verb is nowhere else exemplified in the simple active form used here but this cannot be regarded as a difficulty, especially when the meaning is so suitable in context.² The uproar of the nations is part of the cultic representation of international hostility (as Ps. 2). A second imperative often expresses the certainty with which one thing must follow another. So *be shattered* indicates that nothing is more certain than that the nations will destroy only themselves if they assail the people with whom God is. In verse 10 the futility of international enmity is extended from their collective strength (as in verse 9) to their planning. Nothing devised against Immanuel's people can succeed (cf. 54:15–17).

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

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

¹Cf. Herbert. On the association of Pss. 46–48 with Isaiah see Kirkpatrick, *Psalms* (CUP, 1902).

²The form *rō'ū* might be from *ṽrā'ā'* but the meaning 'to break' is unsuitable. If it is from *ṽrā'ā'* ('to be wicked') a possible translation would be 'do your worst', but this stretches the meaning considerably. *ṽrā'ā'* ('to be in uproar') could yield the form we have (cf. Mi. 4:13; GKC 72q) and is the best option, even though it is nowhere else exemplified in the qal. The LXX has *gnōte*, which presumes *dē'ū* ('to know'). Cf. the NEB and BHS, which offer a good parallel with 'listen'.

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

13 The words *fear* and *dread* match those in verse 12. The fact that verse 12 is so non-specific indicates that it is not particularly important to know what the world fears; the important thing is that the world should know what the believer fears, namely, the Lord. In the midst of a fearful people, Isaiah and his disciples are not fearless but their fear is differently directed. Their lives are to be governed by a theological awareness of *the LORD*, Yahweh, the exodus God (Ex. 3:13–15; 6:6–8), who redeems his people and overthrows his foes. He is the *LORD Almighty*' of hosts' (see on 1:9), the omnipotent God, the holy One. To regard him as *holy* is to so respond to him as to live in constant awareness of his holy nature. That this God is to be feared, i.e. deeply revered, 6:3ff. shows.

14–15 *Sanctuary* is not a place of asylum but 'a holy place' (*miqdāš*), a place where God dwells in all his holiness. The *sanctuary* is the coming of the Lord to dwell among his people but, as in the tabernacle and in the temple, coming in all the reality of his holy presence (Ex. 40:34; 1 Ki. 8:10). And yet, because this sanctuary was a house of sacrifice, provision was made (6:6–7) for sinners to be safe and welcome before him. Just as 'God is with us' (10) marked off the people from the peoples, so here the holy presence marks off the remnant from the people. But while to some his presence offers a glad opportunity to repent, believe and by the appointed means of grace to enter into his fellowship and peace, to others his presence spells doom. To them he is 'a stone of nipping, a rock of stumbling . . . a trap and a snare'. The first pair of words express the people's attitude to God – they ignore him and therefore trip over him; the second pair express his hostility to them. (For 'tripping up' cf. Ps. 91:12; for 'the stumbling block' cf. Je. 6:19–21; Ezk. 3:20; 7:19.) The figure expresses a watchful divine providence whereby the sinner receives exactly what is due but does not do so without a warning having been raised to halt him on his disaster-course. It is as if a rock were put across a road to block the traveller from danger but, in carelessness or scorn, he refuses the warning and stumbles to his death. The stress in these verses is that what gives most offence to the sinner and what at the same time constitutes his greatest danger is the presence of the divine. The same God in his unchanging nature is both sanctuary and snare; it depends on how people respond to his holiness.

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

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

16 If a distinction is intended between *bind up* and *seal*, 'bind' means to 'wrap up', to safeguard from tampering and 'seal' means to attest as final and therefore guard from addition. The imperatives suggest a definite act, a precise (even legal) securing of Isaiah's message against any accusation that he did not

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

say this or that and against subsequent tampering or addition by others. *Testimony* is what God has testified to as his truth (for *law* see on 1:10). *My disciples* are 'my instructed ones' (cf. 50:4; 54:13).¹ *My* could refer to Isaiah, and the whole verse would then be his prayer that the Lord would safeguard and preserve what the prophet has taught his disciples. But it is better to understand it as meaning that the Lord is claiming the remnant as his own. Their relationship is to him, their hallmark is to be under instruction (cf. 50:4) and their privilege is their possession of his testimony and law. Here, says Gray, is 'the emergence of a spiritual, as distinct from a national, religious society.'

17 Gathered round the written word of God (16), each testifies to an expectant faith which patiently awaits what the Lord will do. *Wait* (*vḥākā*) and *trust* (*vqāwā*; e.g. 40:31) are both words of 'waiting', combining patience with confidence. The sense of *who is hiding* is 'who is going to hide'. Faith is made for the dark day. A different attitude to darkness comes in verses 20-22. To 'hide the face' is a sign of disfavour – the opposite of 'making the face to shine' (Nu. 6:25). Ahaz alienated the favour of the Lord, and Isaiah and his disciples were not immune from the ensuing calamities. But within the gathering darkness they had a sustaining, expectant faith and a sure hope.

18 An initial 'Behold commands attention as Isaiah offers himself as an example of the faith of the remnant in the dark hour. He fortifies himself by recalling first, the personal dealings of God with him and his family, and secondly, the objective reality of God's choice of Zion and the divine promise which that implies. *Signs* (*ōtōt*; e.g. Ex. 3:12) direct attention to truth and symbols' portents' (*mōp̄'tim*) arrest attention (e.g. Ex. 3:3). Thus the coincidence of the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and the message of the 'great tablet' (14) are a 'portent', but his name and that of his brother are 'signs'. Isaiah did not explicitly use his own name ('Yahweh saves') in his recorded preaching; he was both portent and sign in 20:1-6. The preposition 'from' in *from the LORD* is (lit.) 'from with', frequently used to stress 'from the very presence of'. This is Isaiah's confidence in the divine origin and communication to him of the message he and his sons embody. Since God had thus dealt with him in personal experience, he can fortify his faith for the testing darkness ahead. Objectively, the Lord *who dwells on Mount Zion* had declared his choice of Zion and his intention to dwell there for ever. As in 28:16, this too is a ground of faith. What the Lord promised he would most surely keep and perform.

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

19 To *consult* is to 'seek unto' (cf. Dt. 4:29; 12:5) expressing a deliberate decision to go where such may be found. The Hebrew for *mediums* is *ōbōt* and the witch at Endor was a woman possessed of an *ōb*, a 'familiar spirit' through which she contacted the dead. *Spiritists* (*yidd^eōnīm*, from *vḡāda*, 'to know') are those claiming 'inside knowledge', especially of the future, prohibited in Leviticus 19:31; 20:2 and Deuteronomy 18:11 (where the spiritist is contrasted with the prophet who brings a sure word from the Lord). *Whisper* (*vṣāpāp*) is only in Is. 10:14; 29:4; 38:14; it is used of whispering, squealing (with fright). *Vḥāgā* (*mutter*) can mean 'to meditate' (Jos. 1:8), 'to moan' (Is 38:14), or just 'to

speak' in a general sense (Ps. 35:28). Used in a derogatory way, 'squeak and moan' mocks alike the behaviour of the medium and the absurdity of relying on such guidance. The Hebrew of *should not* is inverted emphatic: 'A people to their God should they not seek? *People* (*am*) is the word often used of Gods privileged people compared with the nations of earth. Isaiah here recapitulates the tragedy whereby 'my people' (3:12) have become 'this people' (6:9) and 'your God' (7:11) 'my God' (7:13). Their enthusiasm for fortune-tellers and spiritists evidences both their withdrawal, foolishly and treacherously, from their God and his withdrawal, justly and judgmentally, from them. *Why consult* is literally a biting exclamation: 'On behalf of the living, the dead!' In the Bible, to die is not to acquire powers or wisdom beyond those of earth. The dead greet the king of Babylon with, 'You too have become weak as we' (14:10). The dead Samuel (1 Sa. 28:16ff.) knows and says nothing other than what he knew and said on earth. Indeed, in the Old Testament the dead are weaker than the living for they are but shadows (see on 14:9) of their former selves, half-persons, souls without bodies.

20 This verse begins with another telling exclamation. The *law* and *testimony* (see verse 16) are the sufficient resource of true disciples. As when the dead are sought a mediator is needed (*mediums and spiritists*), so when the remnant consult their God they have a mediator – the truth he has attested and taught, sealed and safeguarded among them. *If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn* accurately gives the 'drift' of a difficult piece of Hebrew. Possibly, *If .. not* is the idiom for making affirmative oaths and *dawn* is the metaphor for a hopeful future. If so, we might translate it, 'For certain they will speak according to this word when none of them has a future' (i.e. too late they will come to acknowledge what God has spoken). Alternatively, it could read 'Indeed, according to this word they speak who are, each, without a future' (i.e. 'Indeed they speak' (20) parallels 'when they say' (19) and their commitment to spiritism puts them outside the sphere of hope), or 'If they do not speak according to this word, surely none of them has a future' or '... the result is that none of them has a future'. This is the range of possibilities in Isaiah's Hebrew as it has reached us. According to the first two, to embrace a merely human wisdom (even spirit-sought) is to reveal a hopeless state and to lose the possibility of repentance; according to the latter two, to reject the word of the Lord is to embrace hopelessness. Either way, the hopelessness is an objective fact; in the next verses Isaiah speaks of it as a subjective experience.

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

21 They will be *distressed, hungry and famished*, which is the lot of the captive; symbolically, the withholding of earth's good from those who rejected earth's God (cf. Gn. 3:17-19; Am. 8:13f.). *Through the land* is a translation of 'through it', which could refer to the land they traverse into exile or the time of hopelessness they are enduring. Kaiser takes 'through it' to mean 'in accordance with it', referring to the law and testimony, the rejected word of verse 20; by refusing its truth, they suffer its condemnations. *Curse their* is (lit.) 'curse

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

¹Otherwise *limmāḏ* occurs only in Je. 2:24 and 1323, not, however, in the sense 'disciples'.

by', i.e. they will invoke king and God in pronouncing a curse. The formula *qillēl b'* is not used in any other sense. It certainly adds to the pathos and despair of the situation if the people are heard invoking a curse on their lot in the name of a system (the Davidic kingship) they had betrayed and a God they had refused to trust.

22 The prevailing motif is darkness, for which Isaiah uses here three different words.¹ They had loved darkness, the darkened rooms in which they consulted the shrouded dead, and divine justice has given them what they loved: darkness all around and a dark future ahead, the nemesis of abandoning their God and of refusing his testimony and law.

The glorious hope (9:1-7:8:23-9:6)

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

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

The poem falls into two sections:

1. The hope described (9:1-3:8:23-9:2)
 - a' What God does
A new situation by act of God: as he 'treated with contempt' so now he has 'treated with honour' (9:1:8:23)
 - b¹ What his people enjoy
A new situation for God's people: darkness has become light (2:1)
 - c¹ What follows
A new situation between the Lord and his people: he has increased their joy and they rejoice before him (3:2)
2. The hope explained (4-7:3-6)
 - a² What God does
The first explanation: God's act of deliverance (4:3)
 - b² What his people enjoy
The second explanation: entering into the fruits of victory (5:4); this verse also begins with 'for'

¹Darkness is a standard word, *h'šēkā* (e.g. 50:10); gloom (the synonymous *mā'ûp*) is found only here. The related noun *'ēpā* occurs in Am. 4:13 (cf. Jb. 10:22). Utter darkness suitably translates *'pēlā* (cf. Ex. 10:22).

c² What follows

The third explanation: the king and his rule (6-7:5-6)

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

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

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

1:23> The verse begins (lit.) 'Surely no gloom to her/it to whom/which distress'. With no verbs stated, the words express a fact rather than a prediction. *Gloom* (*mū'ûp*) is only used here and is directly related to *gloom* (*mā'ûp*) in 8:22. *Distress* (*mūšāq*) is related to the word translated *fearful* (*šūqā*) in 8:22. The eye of faith looks at all this but affirms that, real though it is, it is not the 'real reality'. As always, the people of God must decide what reading of their experiences they will live by. Are they to look at the darkness, the hopelessness, the dreams shattered and conclude that God has forgotten them? Or are they to recall his past mercies, to remember his present promises and to make great affirmations of faith? (Cf. Pss. 74:2-17; 77:5-15:6-16.) Isaiah insists here that hope is a present reality, part of the constitution of the 'now'. The darkness is true but it is not the whole truth and certainly not the fundamental truth. We note that these opening words are *in the past* or *in the future* and lie outside the framework of the verse. They may be a piece of editorial stitching by which Isaiah sewed the poem of hope into place in his scheme. *Humbled* means 'treated with contempt'. *The land of Naphtali* lay along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and extended northward; that of *Zebulun* was west and south-west of Naphtali, midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean (Jos. 19:10-16, 32-39). These areas were the first to fall to Assyria. The

²Scott notes the following Davidic motifs: the dawn of great light (cf. 2 Sa. 23:4; Pss. 110:3; 118:24, 27); rejoicing (cf. Pss. 118:15, 24; 132:9, 16); the overthrow of foes (cf. Pss. 2:2, 8-9; 72:4,

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

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

2-1 Isaiah turns from lands transformed by divine blessing to *people* entering into the light of God's favour. *Walking* means living out their lives. The remnant, caught up in the toils of national calamity, have been walking *in darkness*, enduring the hiding of the Lord's face (8:17), even though reacting to the darkness not with curses and despair (8:21) but with the disciplined expectations of faith (8:17). In *shadow of death* usage probably juggled with the second syllable of the word *šalmūt* (*darkness*) to make it into *šalmāwet* ('death-darkness', such trouble as casts a death-like shadow) but the relationship with death is metaphorical. It is a very strong word. The darkness-light motif points to a creative work of God, who alone can make such a transformation (cf. 4:5; Gn. 1:2-3; 2 Cor. 4:6). The verbs *have seen* and *has dawned* bring together subjective experience (seen) with objective fact (dawned), divine action and human response matching each other.

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

14; 89:23; 110:1, 5-6; 132:18); **burning with fire** (cf. 2 Sa. 23:7; Pss. 21:9; 118:12); **royal continuance for ever** (cf. Pss. 2:8-9; 21:4; 61:6-7; 89:3-4, 28-29, 36-37; 132:11-12).

²*šalmāwet* is used eighteen times. Only on a minority of occasions (e.g. Jb. 3:5; 10:21) does the idea of death approach the foreground. It refers to such trouble as casts a death-like shadow over life.

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

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

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

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

5-4 The metaphor of conquest (34) is brought to its climax with the final act of spoliation, but it is a metaphor. Since the vision is couched in kingly terms, the submission of the world to the King is viewed, after the manner of kings, as a conquest. In reality, however, it is a spreading peace and, in its fulfilment (verse 7; cf. Acts 15:13ff.), the work of evangelism. Like verses 4 and 6, verse 5 opens with the word 'For' and is the second explanation of three (see pp. 98f.). According to verse 4 the divine act liberates, and in verse 5 the liberated people enter freely into the fruits of the Lord's victory. *Every warrior's boot used in battle* is (lit.) 'all the *footgear* that footed it into the turmoil'. The noun (*s'ōn*, *boot*) and the accompanying participle (*so'ēn*, *used in battle*) are found only here in the Old Testament and, are variously described as Egyptian, Assyrian or Aramaic loan-words. They are chosen here to express the breaking of the alien power which has gripped the Lord's people. *The burning of the military hardware*, every *warrior's boot* and every *garment rolled in blood*, corresponds to 2:2-4. There it became the tools of Edenic peace, here everything combustible goes to the bonfire or the domestic hearth; war is over (cf. Zc. 9:10). But the people have not fought the final battle, they have entered the battlefield only after the fighting is done.

6-5 The third explanation traces all to its ultimate root. The emphasis falls not on what the child will do when grown up but on the mere fact of his birth. In his coming all that results from his coming is at once secured. The Hebrew emphasis rests not on us but on the coming one. *Child* (*yeled*) relates him to

his ancestry; *son* expresses his maleness and dignity in the royal line. He is *born* as from human parentage and *given* as from God. *mišrâ* (government) is found only here and in verse 7 and is related to *sâr* ('prince', 'executive'). By its formation it means that wherein princeliness or executive authority is epitomized. *His shoulders* are a symbol of 'bearing rule' (cf. 22:22). Note also how 'their shoulders' are released from burdens (verse 4) when he shoulders the burden of rule. In commenting on *And he will be called/and one will call his name* or 'and he will be called by name', Ringgren notes a custom among Israel's neighbours of giving 'throne-names', a 'royal protocol' 'often with programmatic intent'. He suggests this may be the meaning of 'decree' in Psalm 2:7, a divinely given name indicative of what the new king and his rule are to be.¹ Solomon (cf. on verse 3) alone among the sons of David, had a God-given birth name. David, restored to peace with God, called the child *š'lomōh*, 'the man of peace'; the Lord called him Jedidiah, 'Yahweh's beloved'. In this way the child is the new Solomon, David's perfect heir.

The book of Isaiah is noted for significant names (cf. 7:3; 8:1ff.) both foreshadowing coming events and also 'embodying' the word of the Lord. In the King's fourfold name, the first two elements match his earlier name of Immanuel and the second two note the conditions he will bring about. *Wonderful Counsellor*? is (lit.) 'wonder-counsellor' and 'wonder' (see the additional note) means something like 'supernatural'. The two possibilities are either 'a supernatural counsellor' or 'one giving supernatural counsel'. Such was Isaiah's first promise regarding the new Zion (1:26). At David's court there was the more-than-humanly gifted Ahithophel (2 Sa. 16:23), and in the early days of Solomon his wisdom required supernatural explanation (1 Ki. 3:28). In particularizing this gift of the coming King, Isaiah was understandably reacting from Ahaz, the king who was able and clever but not wise. Much more, however, he was going to the heart of things – as did the young Solomon (1 Ki. 3:9). The decisions of a king make or break a kingdom and a kingdom designed to be everlasting demands a wisdom like that of the everlasting God. In this case, like God because he is God, the *Mighty God* ('*el gibbôr*'), the title given to the Lord himself in 10:21-22. Plainly, Isaiah means us to take seriously the '*el*' component of this name as of Immanuel (see the additional note). *Mighty* (*gibbôr*, 'warrior') caps the military references in verses 3-5.

God has come to birth, bringing with him the qualities which guarantee his people's preservation (wisdom) and liberation (warrior strength). *Everlasting Father* and *Prince of Peace* describe the conditions the King's birth will bring. *Father* is not current in the Old Testament as a title of the kings. Used of the Lord, it points to his concern for the helpless (Ps. 68:5-6), care or discipline of his people (Ps. 103:13; Pr. 3:12; Is. 63:16; 64:8-7) and their loyal, reverential response to him (Je. 3:4, 19; Mal. 1:6). For similar ideas used regarding the Davidic King see Psalm 72:4, 12-14; Isaiah 11:4. Probably the leading idea in the name *Father* here is that his rule follows the pattern of divine fatherhood. As *eternal*/'of eternity', he receives 'such an epithet [as] could, of course, be applied to Yahweh alone'.³ Isaiah uses 'eternity' (*ad*) more than any other author, sometimes in a general sense (e.g. 26:4; 30:8) but also in its unmistakable sense (e.g. 57:15; 64:9-8; 65:18). When the people asked for a king they had in mind that a continuing institution would provide them with a security

¹H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 29.

²Since the last three pairs in the fourfold title are linked by a genitive relation, panty of reasoning would suggest that the first two nouns belong together also.

³G. A. F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament* (SCM, 1959), p. 303.

greater and more reassuring than the episodic rule of the judges. But total security requires more even than this stop-go rule and is achieved in a king who reigns eternally. With *Prince of Peace* the Gideon and Solomon motifs reappear and the negative 'no more war' of verse 5 is supplemented by a corresponding positive guarantee. On the personal level, peace means fulfilment; to 'die in peace' is to have lived a fulfilled life, to have achieved all God planned (e.g. Gn. 15:15; 2 Ki. 22:20). Peace is well-being (e.g. Gn. 29:6) and freedom from anxiety (1 Sa. 1:17). In relationships, it is goodwill and harmony (Ex. 4:18), the opposite of war (Lv. 26:6). Towards God, it is the full realization of his favour (Nu. 6:26), 'peace with God' (Nu. 25:12; Is. 53:5; Mal. 2:5-6). In 2 Samuel 11:7, 'David asked after Joab's peace and the peace of the people [army] and the peace of the war', i.e. well-being and progress. All this is related to the basic meaning of *š'ālēm*, 'to be whole/complete'. The *Prince of Peace* is himself the whole man, the perfectly integrated, rounded personality, at one with God and humankind, but also as a Prince, these are the benefits he administers to his people.

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

The focal point of the kingdom is *David's* throne. In other words, the very promises which Ahaz refused to trust will be wonderfully fulfilled. In the light of this, we understand that 'son' in verse 6 must mean 'son of David'. Here is the Old Testament Messianic enigma: how can a veritable son of *David* be *Mighty God* and 'Father of eternity'? This was precisely the tension in Old Testament truth which the Lord Jesus tried to make the blinkered Pharisees face in Matthew 22:41-46. The moral foundation will be *justice and righteousness* (cf. the expectations of 1:26-27) and the lost glories of Zion (1:21) will be restored. Not only so, but the divine holiness will be perfectly manifested in true procedures (*justice*) which reflect righteous principles (*righteousness*) (cf. on 5:16). In describing the power of accomplishment Isaiah abandons the perfect tenses he has been using throughout for a future tense. He stands where he is, looking forward; it will all happen, the Lord's *zeal* will see to it. *Zeal* (*qin'â*) is that 'jealousy' which is a component of all true love and pre-eminently of the Lord's love. His love will brook no rival and is provoked by disloyalty (Nu. 25:11; Ps. 79:5). It is equally, however, the power of love moving the Lord to make his people's cause his own (Is. 42:13; 59:17; 63:15) and the passionate commitment of his nature to fulfil his purposes for them (37:32). All this zealous determination is that of Yahweh, the exodus-God, whose nature it is to save his people and overthrow his foes. It is backed by

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

divine omnipotence (for *Almighty* of hosts' see on 1:9) and pledged to achieve this, the advent and kingdom of the Messiah.

Additional note on 9:6-5

Pele ('wonderful') and its related adjective *pel'i* both derive from *ṣpālā*. It is used fifteen times of human acts etc. where it means 'what is out of the ordinary', e.g. Jonathan's love for David (2 Sa. 1:26; cf. 2 Ch. 2:9; Dn. 8:24). Even where it has unfortunate overtones (e.g. 2 Sa. 13:2) it means 'more than he could bring himself to do'. It is used fifty-four times of the acts of God and there the meaning is 'supernatural', that which, for whatever reason, requires God as its explanation, for example his omniscience (Gn. 18:14), the way his acts confound human estimates (Ps. 118:23), the ranges of his moral providences (Ps. 107:8, 15) and when the beleaguered people felt only a 'miracle' could save them (Je. 21:2). In particular it describes God's exodus-acts (Ex. 3:20; 34:10). Isaiah uses the verb in 28:29 of the Lord's 'counsel' (linking with 9:6-5) and in 29:14 of his work of changing the human heart. The adjective *pel'i* is used in Judges 13:18 by the angel regarding his name being more than human ears may hear. The supernatural behaviour of the angel (Jdg. 13:19, involving this verb) and Manoah's recognition of the incident as a theophany (Jdg. 13:22) suggest that the angel's name was 'wonderful' because divine. In Psalm 139:6 it is used of knowledge which belongs to God, outstripping what humankind can comprehend. The noun *pele* occurs thirteen times. Its only secular occurrence means 'extraordinary' (La. 1:9). It is used of God's acts (Ps. 88), the exodus complex of events (Ex. 15:11; Ps. 77:11) and the Davidic promises (Ps. 89:5). Isaiah links it with the Lord's 'counsels' (25:1) and his work of changing the human heart (29:14). In 25:1 and Psalm 88:10, 12 it is associated with central divine attributes. To designate the child as *pele* makes him 'out of the ordinary', one who is something of a 'miracle'. Isaiah's use of the noun in 25:1 and the verb in 28:29 of the Lord's 'counsel' suggests that he would not resist the notion of deity in 9:6-5, specially when it is contextually linked with *Mighty God* ('*el-gibbôr*).

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

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

There are many examples identical in form with Isaiah 9:6, i.e. '*el* with a following adjective or noun. With a following adjective '*el* always retains its full status as a noun (e.g. Ex. 20:5; Dt. 7:9; 10:17). With a following noun, there are many cases in patriarchal theology where '*el* has a qualifying or appositional

noun after it, e.g. '*el'olām* in Genesis 21:33, 'the God [who is] eternity'. Compare Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5-6 and the clearly appositional 'the God [who is] our salvation' of Psalm 68:19-20.¹

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

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

To summarize: (i) There is no evidence supporting an adjectival use of '*el* in Isaiah 9:6. Nothing justifies 'godlike' or 'divine' in the modern sense of 'very remarkable'. If '*el* is to be rendered 'divine' it must, therefore, be given its strictest sense. (ii) In the light of the linking of *gibbôr* with various appellations of the God of Israel, Isaiah cannot have been unaware that '*el-gibbôr* would be understood in its plain meaning. He puts the matter beyond equivocation by using the identical title of the Lord himself in 10:21. Ezekiel 32:21 is sometimes offered as evidence against 'Mighty God' as a possible meaning in Isaiah. In that verse those who died in battle and now live in Sheol are described as '*elē gibbôrîm* (the same words in the same order as in Isaiah but plural and overtly linked in a genitive relation), 'gods of mighty ones'; Eichrodt offers 'godlike heroes' as a possible translation but adds no comment.² This translation is unlikely in the light of biblical usage surveyed above. Wevers remarks that 'mighty chiefs' is the plural of the Messianic title in Isaiah 9:6 and could be rendered 'mighty gods'. He holds that monotheism required the downgrading of such beings, who came in popular thought to hold limited sway in Hades.³

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

b. The word to Israel (9:8-7) – 11:16

The prophets regularly saw both of the divided kingdoms as within their sphere of ministry. Theologically the reason for this is that human sins and errors cannot thwart the purposes or rewrite the promises of God. The northern tribes had thrown off their Davidic allegiance (1 Ki. 12:16) and apostasized from the Lord (1 Ki. 12:25ff.) but the Lord does not revise his plans in the light

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

²W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (SCM, 1970).

³J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCB, Nelson, 1969).