History and Hope:
The Agrarian Wisdom of Isaiah 28–35

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern historical-critical study of the book of Isaiah succeeded in showing that the text emerged in stages over perhaps three hundred years, rather than as the fully formed product of a preexilic prophet. This mode of inquiry resulted in the widespread assumption that Isaiah is best approached as at least three distinct texts that express little if any intrinsic relationship with each other. The rise of literary criticism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, reminded readers that the Bible deserves to be studied as a body of theological literature regardless of the multiplicity of authorial contexts from which it derives. Overcoming Isaiah’s well-established fragmentation, however, has proven no straightforward task; readers have often and understandably resorted to thematic generalizations in their effort to describe the whole. The differences characteristic of these two approaches to Isaiah reflect the methodological splintering of biblical studies at large, where analysis of a text’s literary shape and theological message is frequently pitted against its rich history of composition.

Recent research has begun to ask a more profitable, interdisciplinary set of questions: What is the relationship between Isaiah’s diachronic development and its final form, and what might synchronic analysis of its final form teach us about its history of composition? Indeed, as several scholars have pointed out, a synchronic examination of Isaiah’s language and argument is a necessary first step in making accurate judgments regarding its diachronic development. Fresh inquiry into the book’s literary shape that
does not ignore the history and culture from which it arose therefore represents a leading edge in Isaiah studies today.

*History and Hope: The Agrarian Wisdom of Isaiah 28–35* examines the rhetorical function of Isa 28–35, a relatively overlooked series of six woe-oracles, in relation to the reader’s encounter with the book of Isaiah as a whole. At a diachronic level, the project seeks to improve the historical model that typically informs scholars’ perceptions of Isaiah’s construction. Through comparisons to the thought and practice of several contemporary agrarian thinkers, it draws attention to the holistic, agrarian worldview of the people who wrote and transmitted the Bible. This comparison suggests that an “agrarian hermeneutic” provides a historically- and phenomenologically-appropriate lens by which to examine the eight chapters in question. At a synchronic level, the project uses modern narratological theory to describe the written text’s “epistemological layering,” thereby accounting for important differences between characters and readers. When combined with an agrarian hermeneutic, this move opens scholarly understanding of Isaiah’s written rhetoric to the associative logic by which it is constructed, and which is everywhere evident in the “intratextual” web of Leitwörter, motifs, and recurring ideas that run throughout the book. Through careful, exegetical analysis of Isa 28–35 in its sequential unfolding relative to the book as a whole, the project argues that these eight chapters use the language of agrarian wisdom to issue a call to obedience that transports the reader from prior reflections on historical destruction into a vision of ultimate hope.
for my parents, who first put a Bible in my hands and taught me to read
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Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the excellent instruction and support of my committee. I am especially grateful to my wonderful adviser, Ellen Davis, whose *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (2009) inspired this project and brought me to Duke University in the first place. How five years have flown by! Ellen, your intellectual leadership and pastoral care have brought out the best in me. I am thankful for your rare combination of kindness, patience, and high academic standards.

This project is also deeply indebted to Stephen Chapman. Stephen, you taught me to think carefully about the Bible’s relationship with history. In a field full of muddy, methodological assumptions, I am grateful to have had such regular access to your sharp mind. Thank you for always making time for me.

I am blessed to have received guidance, inspiration, and support from all my teachers of Bible over the years, both at Duke University and at Princeton Theological Seminary. My sincere thanks also go to Norman Wirzba, Marc Brettler, Carol Meyers, Eric Meyers, Joel Kaminsky, Dennis Olson, and Jacqueline Lapsley.

Finally, I wish to express a special word of appreciation for Jacob Stromberg. Jake, your instruction in the classroom and the long hours we’ve spent hashing out the text have dramatically enhanced my appreciation for the written sophistication of the Book we study. I am grateful for your time, commitment, and sincerity. Above all, your friendship in faith during a season of great loss has meant the world to me. Thank you.
Introduction: Problems and Possibilities in Modern Isaiah Research

“Isaiah” is a biblical book that bears the name of the literary character its narratives depict. As theological literature, Isaiah threatens, cajoles, recollects, teaches, persuades, and inspires. It communicates to its readers a particular set of ideas, imparting a message, or messages, through the sum of its diverse parts. Comprehension of Isaiah therefore depends on an accurate appraisal of both its words and phrases as well as the rhetorical mechanisms by which those words are conveyed. The “how” of Isaianic discourse, in other words, is just as important as the “what.” This project aims to describe the rhetorical function of eight chapters in particular (Isa 28–35), with special attention to the way in which these chapters contribute to lexical and conceptual patterns operative in the book at large.

The question of Isaiah’s status as a single book worthy of analysis has been controversial for quite some time. As modern scholars adduced that the latter half of Isaiah was probably composed in the sixth or fifth centuries BCE, while the first half of the book seemed to preserve prophetic oracles authentic to the late eighth century BCE, the book gradually fragmented into three main parts. Throughout the twentieth century, historians increasingly viewed Isaianic passages as a sort of archaeological deposit in textual form, with special interest in how this deposit might shed light on the religio-political events of the eras in question. Various units were isolated and then “dated,” even to the year, and any serious scholar was bound to reckon with these reconstructed contexts before assessing the meaning of a given text. Moreover, because of the
perceived historical abyss between the book’s former and latter parts (which included the Babylonian destruction in 586 BCE), publishers responded by presenting Isaiah in two or three volumes and assigning each to a different author—a standard practice that continues to this day. “Isaiah” was no longer one book, but three.

The main benefit of this work, to which the present study is deeply indebted, was to show that the book of Isaiah did not emerge fully formed from the mind of a preexilic prophet. The historical-critical method’s insight into the book’s origins represents a staggering achievement indeed; the book’s several layers of composition suggest successively a complex world of collapse and devastation, almost unimaginable political reconstitution, and the ongoing struggle for Israel’s social and religious identity. However, the last forty years have seen widespread changes in biblical studies in general and Isaiah studies in particular, changes that raise significant challenges to historical criticism’s increasing dominance over the last few centuries of biblical research. Two major trends have special bearing on the rhetorical focus of this project.

First, redaction-critical scholars have shown—oftentimes in exquisite detail—the complexity of Isaiah’s transmission over time. Certain Isaianic oracles might well preserve the prophet’s original speech, but they have also frequently undergone changes at both micro- and macro-structural levels. It seems the Isaianic tradents were not interested merely in attaching new material to the old, whether by accident or by loose association; rather, in constructing the book that is read today, they pored over existing texts with extreme care, inserting addendums and restructuring the sequence of the material they had inherited. Even the act of preservation, where an older oracle goes “unchanged,” constitutes an act of rewriting and reinterpretation when it is juxtaposed
with a newer one. Redaction-critical scholarship of Isaiah therefore strongly suggests that the impulse to assign each bit of Isaianic literature to a discrete period of composition, and to interpret the text in light of that context alone, severely limits our understanding of the book as preserved by the Jewish and Christian traditions. If historical criticism shows that Isaiah was not written by a single prophet, redaction criticism shows that no part of the book can be restricted to a single moment, since the book developed through an ongoing process of oral inventiveness, written preservation and expansion, and intensive editing over several centuries. Origins are not irrelevant to Isaiah scholarship, but they are also not determinative of meaning and scope.

Second, the twentieth-century turn toward literary analysis of the Bible reinvigorated attention to Isaiah’s final form. New synchronic studies tended to focus on motifs and themes that occur in both the book’s preexilic and postexilic portions, giving rise to a fresh debate concerning the “unity” of the book at large. This debate eventually tapered off, in part because the concept was always too vague to be proven one way or the other. That said, synchronic research succeeded in showing that certain lexical and conceptual threads—such as the motif of blindness and sight—cast some doubt on historical criticism’s view of Isaiah as an anthology of unrelated fragments. Correspondingly, some readers observed that the redaction process seems to have pulled the book as a whole in the direction of a few, central, theological claims, such as Yhwh’s kingship or Torah obedience. Given Isaiah’s daunting complexity, however, literary-minded readers frequently suggested (wittingly or not) that these claims are best appreciated when the observer takes a step back from a previous generation’s hyper-detailed focus on the text’s individual “brushstrokes,” allowing his or her field of vision
to register an impression of the whole. Thus, such readers recused themselves of serious attention to Isaiah’s diachronic issues, since these appeared unrelated to the larger picture that sparked their interest. The weakness in such research lies in its propensity to drain the book of its interest in historical memory. Must “synchronic” automatically imply an “impression,” or can an in-depth account of the book’s terminology and motifs in its final form lead to a clearer portrait of its construction and its ongoing rhetorical effects?

Indeed, the single most pressing need in Isaiah studies today is the development of historically-appropriate hermeneutical models that can deliver accurate descriptions of Isaianic discourse in light of the total text’s complex self-presentation.

This study’s unique approach to Isaiah is born from the nexus of problems and solutions described above. At the diachronic level, it seeks to enhance the historical model that commonly informs scholarly notions of how the text came to be. Specifically, both historical-critical and redaction-critical scholars have tended to account for the text’s diachrony primarily in political and sociological terms—that is, the way in which the text reflects everything from Jerusalem’s eighth-century survival and the social conflicts that characterized fifth-century Persian Yehud, to the normal dynamics between ancient prophets and their support networks. Frequently missing from this discussion, however, is a proper appreciation for the holistic, agrarian phenomenology of the people who wrote, redacted, and transmitted the book of Isaiah in all eras of its construction. The historical-political distance between the Assyrian attack in 701 BCE and the fall of Babylon in 539 is important, but it is not the whole story. An improved historical model—one that better accounts for the way in which ancient Israelites regarded the world as materially,
historically, and morally integrated—sheds new light on the associative logic that drives the entire Isaianic corpus forward.

At the synchronic level, this project makes two important moves. First, it uses modern literary theory to describe the text’s “epistemological layering.” A short lexicon of terms (described in chapter two and provided again in Appendix B) helps to distinguish the experience of Isaiah’s readers from that of its characters. What the reader knows, and thus is encouraged to do, is different from what the prophet’s literary audience knows and does. Such a distinction actively resists the historical-critical tendency to assign the text’s meaning to the historical prophet’s intention, which inevitably produces an evaluation of the book’s rhetoric that remains lodged in the past. Second, the project observes that Isaiah, while constructed over several centuries, has been made available to its readers as a whole book that unfolds in a particular order. Exegesis of Isa 28–35 therefore proceeds in light of the whole book’s sequential use of key roots (Leitwörter), motifs, and recurring ideas. This “intratextual” method demonstrates that thick, lexical strands run from one end of Isaiah to the other, binding the diverse panels of Isaiah into a meaningful whole. Such patterns suggest the thoroughly self-referential nature of Isaiah, whereby the language that emerged in one era (e.g. 539 BCE) has been made responsible to language that emerged in another (e.g. 701 BCE), and vice versa. The rhetorical function of Isa 28–35 is consequently understood to depend on these eight chapters’ Sitz im Buch rather than their original Sitz im Leben. The text’s diachronic origins are not finally discarded, however. Through shared memories of Assyrian invasion and historical deliverance, Isaiah gazes intently into its readers’ lives
with the hope of actualizing the prophet’s words in the real world for generations to come.

* * * * *

The present study argues that Isa 28–35 comprises an organized series of six “woes” whose rhetorical function vis-à-vis the reader closely relates to their situation within the book as a whole. Through the language of agrarian wisdom, Isa 28–35 issues a call to obedience that, when accepted, transports the reader from prior reflections on historical destruction (Isa 1–27) into a holistic vision of ultimate hope (Isa 36–66). In the past, scholars have isolated individual wisdom elements and transitional cues in these eight chapters. This project, however, makes a more robust and precise set of claims, summarized below.

Chapter one, “Understanding Agrarian Hermeneutics,” lays out the interpretive framework on which the whole study is based. Inspired by the work of writers such as W. Berry and W. Jackson, an agrarian hermeneutic is a holistic reading strategy rooted in an integration of theory and praxis, where the universe is understood to be materially, historically, and morally meaningful. Three epistemological principles characterize this worldview: the importance of the creaturely body, the primacy of local places, and the necessity of proper action. The discussion then considers how these principles might inform biblical interpretation. For example, E. Davis argues that contemporary agrarians share a “mind-set” with the biblical authors, and thus contemporary agrarianism provides
a working *theōria* by which to describe biblical texts.¹ An extensive review of relevant anthropological and archaeological evidence supports Davis’ claim, showing that an agrarian hermeneutic provides an interpretive rubric that is historically and phenomenologically appropriate to the premodern text.

Chapter two, “Isaiah 28: A Matter of Food and Drink,” attempts an exegetical analysis of Isa 28 in keeping with the hermeneutical lens developed in chapter one. It argues that this first of six woe-oracles sets up a character contrast between the prophet’s adversaries in 28:1-22 and the “farmer-disciple” portrayed in 28:23-29 (the “Farmer’s Parable”). An agrarian perspective on this material suggests that the contrast may be defined as a way of life characterized by excessive consumption versus one characterized by diligent attention to the production of one’s food. Foolishness and wisdom, the text asserts, take shape according to specific behaviors relating to land use. Chapter two then offers a description of the book’s sequential unfolding in Isa 1–27. This overview argues that the text develops the notion of Yhwh’s plan in terms of two, historical trajectories (destruction and hope), both of which are characterized by agro-ecological language related to subsistence. On this basis, further analysis of Isa 28 reveals that its character contrast encourages participation in the trajectory of hope through the responsible production and consumption of food (i.e. agrarian propriety, or the necessity of proper action). Obedience is conceptualized as “a matter of food and drink.”

Chapter three, “Isaiah 29–32: The Creaturely Body in Place,” takes its point of orientation from the the Farmer’s Parable, arguing that Isa 29–32 (woes two through five)

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develops the parable’s regard for agrarian propriety in two important respects. First, the text emphasizes that salvation occurs “on location” in Zion, and thus explicitly advocates fidelity to that place in contrast to seeking aid in or from foreign lands. Second, the text highlights the necessity of acknowledging one’s creaturely identity before the Creator. To this end, several subtopics related to the notion of creatureliness are discussed: intransigence and instruction, idolatry, Yhwh’s restoration of the created order, and the healing of disabled bodies. In both senses (place and creatureliness), Isa 29–32 adheres to the epistemological foundation described in the project’s hermeneutical introduction. The sequential text proposes that only through acknowledgment of one’s “creaturely body” will durable land-inhabitation be realized.

Isa 28–32 therefore makes clear that participation in the book’s trajectory of hope requires affirmation of certain “geo-theological” realities, especially Yhwh’s status as Creator and humanity’s corresponding creatureliness. Chapter four, “Isaiah 33–35: A Geo-Theology of Dwelling,” develops this line of reasoning through a two-part, exegetical examination of the sixth and final woe in the series. Isa 33 proposes that stable and secure land-inhabitation derives only from the obedient submission of one’s whole person to Yhwh’s kingship. This idea sets up the content of Isa 34–35, a contrast between two parallel landscapes (Edom and Judah). Yhwh empties the former of humans, handing it over to wild animals, and then assigns the latter to his children as an enduring home. Taken in sum, Isa 33–35 demonstrates Yhwh’s royal status through his allocation of land, whereby Yhwh provides for Zion’s subsistence in perpetuity.

The sequential account of Isa 28–35 appearing in chapters two, three, and four of this project is, in a sense, only preliminary to its main goal: a description of the six woes’
agrarian rhetoric vis-à-vis their implied reader. This theoretical student of Isaiah by
definition maintains the ability to study the whole book in its entirety, and thus his or her
interpretation of Isaiah at large influences his or her reading of Isaiah at any single point.
An argument concerning the rhetoric of Isa 28–35 in written form therefore requires the
scholar to give some consideration to the greater book. Chapter five, “Isaiah 36–66:
Agrarian Patterns, Agrarian Hope,” demonstrates that the same lexical patterns that
reveal a historical trajectory of destruction in Isa 1–27, against which the farmer-disciple
of 28:23-29 is distinguished, also characterize the Hezekiah narratives of Isa 36–39, the
language of restoration in Isa 40–55, and the identification of Isaiah’s “servant-disciples”
in Isa 56–66. The book’s agro-ecological discourse builds toward a vision of
eschatological hope, made available to those disciples who obediently eat. Only after this
point, when all of Isa 1–66 has been analyzed, is the present project capable of reaching
conclusions regarding the reader-oriented rhetoric of Isa 28–35.

Chapter six, “A Call to Obedience: The Implied Reader Reads Isaiah 28–35,”
argues that Isa 28–35 persuades its reader to accept the geo-theological claims outlined
above by virtue of their coherence with the book of Isaiah in its total, written form. The
intratextual patterns identified in previous chapters encourage the reader to measure his
or her encounter with Isa 28–35 against the metahistorical universe that the sequential
text constructs. In defense of this claim, each woe is re-read in light of the whole. The
first woe (28:1-29)—the Farmer’s Parable in particular—is shown to mark an important
point of orientation to the agrarian hope envisioned in subsequent portions of the book.
The second and third woes (29:1-24) combine the notion of local salvation with the
Creator’s global rule; this union reflects the larger book’s synthesis of Isa 36–39 with Isa
40–55, implying that “the creaturely body in place” provides a conceptual foundation for Isaiah’s rhetoric writ large. A book-aware evaluation of the fourth and fifth woes (30:1–32:20) expands on similar notions of place, creatureliness, and land-inhabitation, concluding that these chapters constitute an agrarian template for obedience that remains a central precondition for the restoration to follow. Finally, analysis of the sixth woe (33:1–35:10) in light of the whole suggests that submission of one’s whole person to Yhwh functions as a key to the reader’s real-world actualization of the prophetic word. Isa 28–35 is finally understood to issue a call to obedience that transports the reader into a new hope for stable and enduring life in the land.
1. Understanding Agrarian Hermeneutics

As stated in the introduction to this study, the single most pressing need in Isaiah studies today is the development of historically-appropriate hermeneutical models that can deliver accurate descriptions of Isaianic discourse in light of the total text’s complex self-presentation. This chapter, which is divided into three main sections, describes the “agrarian hermeneutic” by which Isaiah 28–35 will be analyzed, and then defends the validity of that hermeneutic on historical, archaeological, and anthropological grounds.

The discussion begins with a description of contemporary agrarian epistemology—how agrarians think they know what they know—based on a selection of key thinkers at work in the world today. Three core principles structure this survey: the importance of the creaturely body, the primacy of local places, and the necessity of proper action relative to those local places. The common thread running between these principles is an anthropology that begins not with the autonomy of the subjective mind, but with the dependency of the body upon organic systems. Thus, agrarianism consciously marks out an alternative to Cartesian dualism, modernity’s epistemic foundation. Agrarian knowledge is defined as an integration of theory and praxis, and so presupposes a materially and historically meaningful universe shot through with moral value.

Next the discussion considers how contemporary agrarianism may be profitably joined to biblical studies. Through comparisons with several ecologically-minded schools of biblical interpretation, this study proposes that the work of E. Davis in her *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (2009) trailblazes an
important path in today’s hermeneutical marketplace. Guided by W. Berry, W. Jackson, and other agrarians, Davis proposes a general correspondence between these writers’ agrarian worldview and the worldview that informs the Bible’s composition and redaction. If that proposed correspondence is valid, contemporary agrarian thought may supply the reader with a lens that offers new insight on the premodern text. By contrast, modern lenses (such as historicism or romanticism) tend to see the Bible from within a Cartesian epistemology that “knows” through a process of isolation and fragmentation, perceiving sharp differences between the Bible’s various literary genres and theological concepts. Davis, however, shows that agrarianism provides a theōria by which to describe the Bible’s rhetorical coherence without dismissing its literary complexity.

Last, this chapter addresses the question of validity, arguing that the values characteristic of contemporary agrarianism are typical of what anthropologists find to be true of traditional, peasant cultures in general. Once this comparison is established, a raft of archaeological and anthropological evidence demonstrates that ancient Israel did not deviate appreciably from the norms associated with this peasant paradigm at any stage in its history, nor specifically during the timeframe when the book of Isaiah is thought to have been composed and redacted. A general correspondence between contemporary agrarian thought and the Bible’s authorial world is therefore plausible, suggesting that agrarianism offers a historically- and phenomenologically-appropriate lens on biblical discourse. This conclusion serves as a foundation for the exegetical analysis of Isa 28–35 to follow.
1.1 Agrarian Epistemology

What is agrarianism? What do agrarians believe, how do they behave, and how do they know what they think they know? N. Wirzba describes agrarianism as “a way of life attuned to requirements of land and local communities.”\(^1\) E. Hagenstein adds that agrarianism “stands as a set of political, economic, ecological, and social convictions.”\(^2\) In other words, it involves the \textit{practice of living}, not simply an abstract existential theory. Agrarian behaviors stem from a unique set of “convictions” regarding humanity’s relationship to the land. If agrarianism is written off as a quaint nostalgia for agricultural affairs, or is regarded as a purely historical interest in land use, this project’s hermeneutical foundation (and hence its contribution to biblical studies) will be largely missed. Agrarianism involves the \textit{conscious integration} of theory and praxis, values and ethics, thought and action; it presupposes a materially and historically meaningful universe shot through with moral value. The following discussion develops this thesis through an exploration of three epistemological principles common to contemporary agrarian thinkers: 1) the creaturely body, 2) localness, and 3) the necessity of proper action.

1.1.1 The Importance of the Creaturely Body

Modern epistemologies tend to assume that the mind’s perception of the world comprises an autonomous and independent action that precedes the body’s experience in


Two phenomenologists in dialogue with contemporary agrarians—E. Casey and T. Ingold—both challenge this worldview. Casey argues that, “The primacy of perception is ultimately a primacy of the lived body—a body that…is a creature of habitual cultural and social processes.” For Casey, bodies are emplaced in ecological and cultural habitats prior to the moment of sensory perception—thus sensory perception cannot be said to dictate the terms of what the body knows. Ingold similarly reframes the nature of perception as a “whole body” endeavor. For the person who “dwells,” he writes, knowledge “is not laterally integrated, since places…are not spatial locations, nor are they held together by point-to-point connections. They are rather topics, joined in stories of journeys actually made.” In short, the Cartesian duality between mind and body is radically undercut by the assertion that the interdependent, interconnected body rather than the autonomous mind is the ground of meaningful knowledge.

The “embodied” subversion of Cartesian dualism is an integral component also of the agrarian position. Agrarian thinkers often begin their reflections with the observation that human beings are ineluctably integrated within rather than distinct from the so-called “environment.” As Berry puts it, “Once we see our place, our part of the world, as surrounding us, we have already made a profound division between it and ourselves.” The creaturely body does not have an “environment” at all but rather is embedded in a host of integrated systems and relationships, and it is only in the context of this rich

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5 Ingold, Being Alive, 154.
6 Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977), 22 (his emphasis).
meshwork that a body can be said to “know” one thing or another. In his Life Is a Miracle (2000), Berry argues that modern thought tends to “objectify the world, dividing it from the ‘objective observer’ who studies it,” which irretrievably separates humans from the world in which they subsist. Jackson similarly critiques the Cartesian commitment to a reality in which “the part has priority over the whole,” he also sees such philosophical commitments as a basis for the objectification of the so-called environment. F. Kirschenmann, who often approaches the subject from a more theologically-oriented frame of reference than Jackson, contrasts the Cartesian and Baconian vision of becoming “masters and possessors of nature” with an incarnational, Eucharistic vision of dwelling in creation as an ecological and spiritual home. Finally, Wirzba embraces a view of knowledge founded on creaturely embeddedness in contrast to a “‘spectatorial’ model of knowledge, [in which] the paradigm of learning is the disinterested, objective observation of a world entirely distinct from the knower.” These statements reveal agrarians’ belief that something has gone dangerously awry in the modern epistemological program. To use Wirzba’s language, they propose agrarianism as an

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7 Wendell Berry, Life Is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2000), 25.  
8 Wes Jackson, Altars of Unhewn Stone: Science and the Earth (San Francisco: North Point, 1987), 68.  
9 Ibid., 71.  
“alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm,” and in so doing expose a correspondence between “the ahistorical and universalizing character of the modern economic mind” and the dualistic suppositions that support it.

The agrarian critique of modernity, however, does not end with Descartes. Agrarians perceive both the failure of Romanticism to break free of the modern problem and the essential lines of correspondence that lie between present-day industrialism and European colonialism.

First, Berry in particular leads the way in pointing out the shortcomings of nineteenth-century Romanticism, which, although “ignor[ing] economic facts and relationships,” has nonetheless “set[] the agenda for modern conservation groups.” The “giveaway” for Berry is that, “when conservationists try to be practical they are likely to defend the ‘sustainable use of natural resources’ with the argument that this will make the industrial economy sustainable.” Because Romanticism sees the “environment” as a zone separate from human labor, rather than as an integrated whole inclusive of the human bodies that inhabit it, Romanticism dooms itself to irrelevance with respect to the concrete problems inherent in industrial wealth creation. It encodes a fundamental distinction between wilderness as a kind of “holy shrine” versus a different sphere of unmitigated exploitation—a perspective Jackson describes as “a form of

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16 Ibid., 238.
schizophrenia.” Resources such as Hagenstein’s *American Georgics* (2011) and D. Worster’s *Nature’s Economy* (1994), insofar as they chart the history of environmental thought in the Western tradition, strongly suggest that Berry and Jackson are on the right track. Romanticism does not lie outside its roots in Cartesian dualism, even if it is capable of registering an authentic environmental lament.

The second point, that lines of correspondence run between present-day industrialism and European colonialism, begins with the assertion that industrial land use is best characterized as “profit-taking.” In relating such an “ethic” to its colonial past, Berry again leads by example. His “A Native Hill” (1969) explores the problems intrinsic to the notion that someone like himself—the descendent of slave-owning settlers—might live on Kentucky soil with affection and regard for the land. Similarly, in his “Rediscovering American Agriculture” (1993), Kirschenmann begins not with the usual agrarian critique of Descartes, but with the subtitle “Agriculture since 1492.” In this essay, Kirschenmann characterizes the colonial project as an effort in taking inventory. This point is supported by a number of anthropologists who have studied Native American cultures, such as W. Cronon, G. Nabhan, and P. Nabokov. Nabhan, for example, observes that the notion of wilderness, so important to the Romantic vision of a planet unspoiled by human hands, is actually a **colonial** concept presupposing

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18 Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1994), 67.
22 Ibid., 263.
exploitation.\textsuperscript{23} Similarly, Cronon makes a compelling case that the English agricultural system, when uprooted from its native context and superimposed on the North American continent, metastasized into an economic model founded on commodification.\textsuperscript{24} In acknowledging this legacy, agrarians run a thread from contemporary industrial practices (such as mountaintop removal or the intensive use of synthetic fertilizers) back through the Cartesian philosophical tradition to that tradition’s imperial foundation,\textsuperscript{25} a foundation that takes its moral direction from the theft of someone else’s home.

Working up from such observations, agrarians seek an alternative epistemology that is genuinely free of the suppositions encoded in twenty-first-century industrialism, nineteenth-century Romanticism, seventeenth-century Cartesianism, and late fifteenth-century colonialism. They step aside from the industrial present by attempting to access perspectives familiar to pre- or non-colonial cultures. That said, agrarianism is not, as Wirzba puts it, “a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future. It is, rather, a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past as they have been realized in our engagement with the earth and with each other.”\textsuperscript{26} Thus, where agrarians reflect on precolonial agricultural practices, they tend to do so not with the wistful nostalgia characteristic of Romanticism, but with a genuine eagerness to learn what true “nativeness” might mean\textsuperscript{27} and with a ready awareness that subsistence living

\textsuperscript{25} See Berry, \textit{Life Is a Miracle}, 55, 65.
\textsuperscript{26} Wirzba, “Introduction,” 4.
\textsuperscript{27} Jackson, \textit{Becoming Native}, 6-13.
can be extremely difficult. Depending on the cultural context in which the agrarian works, the language used to express such ideas will vary. M. Fukuoka, for example, employs concepts familiar to Zen philosophy, while Western agrarians tend to favor the Christian tradition’s language of creation, incarnation, and Eucharist. In any case, however, agrarians seek a non-colonial discourse that presupposes the sacrality of the created world—a universe shot through with historical significance and moral value—and that does not hope to transcend the concrete problems and possibilities associated with human subsistence.

In sum, agrarians know what they know not as detached, subjective minds, but through a total embrace of the self as an organic being wrapped into a dense network of ecological, social, and moral relationships. For agrarians, humans do not “have” bodies; humans “are” bodies. The mind is not a distinct, machine-like entity working to process, categorize, and label sensory data. Rather, it is an irreducible part of the “body in place,” and thus no account of the mind strikes the agrarian as plausible if it does not connect the mind to the body as the body develops through time, calibrated to the human needs to eat, drink, procreate, socialize, and love. For this reason, an agrarian theory of knowledge flows inexorably toward the admission that humans are creatures of limited information.


30 N. Wirzba writes, “We understand ourselves not in terms of our self-reflexivity but as we meet ourselves in our dealings in the world. Moreover, we understand the world primarily not in terms of an objective, theoretical stance but from within our practical engagement with it.” Wirzba, “Attention and Responsibility,” 94.
and profound ignorance. As Berry puts it, “[I]t is impossible…to know in any complete or final way what we are doing.”

1.1.2 The Primacy of Local Places

Because agrarians view the creaturely body as naturally integrated in a larger tapestry of systems and relationships, an accurate description of those systems and relationships becomes a central concern in their epistemological overhaul of the modern tradition. Agrarians claim that the body is enmeshed in local places rather than “homogeneous, isotropic, isometric, and infinitely…extended” space as Cartesian science asserts. A “place,” argues Casey, is “more an event than a thing,” and as such, remains intrinsically cultural. Just as the body precedes the mind, so too place precedes modern space: “The perceiver finds herself in the midst of an entire teeming place-world rather than in a confusing kaleidoscope of free-floating data.” If humans are indeed cultural beings before they imagine themselves to be objective ones, knowledge is always conditioned by the places of cultural inhabitation.


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34 Casey, “How to Get From Space to Place,” 26 (his emphasis).


36 Ibid., 17.
that place is “more an event than a thing.” “The notion that we can stand aside and observe the passage of time,” Ingold argues, “is founded upon an illusion.”37 In fact, time is fundamentally bound up with lived experiences, which Ingold calls “tasks.”38 In traditional, premodern societies, “time is intrinsic to the array of specific tasks that make up the pattern of quotidian activity of a community.”39 In such contexts, task and time are indistinguishable; each is defined by the other. If this is so, and if “tasks are the constitutive acts of dwelling,”40 then time meets the land where dwelling occurs among living bodies. Place, in this sense, is always historically conditioned, but that conditioning has more to do with lived, experiential memory than with an objective record of events. In his second volume, Being Alive, Ingold traces out how such a theory might affect the perception of materials, surfaces, and objects. Again and again, Ingold returns to the idea that objects are not just objects, and materials are not just materials. “Considered as tools,” he writes, “things are their stories.”41 Their properties are “not attributes, but histories.”42 One lengthier comment in particular serves to clarify his position:

In conventional accounts of the historical transformation of nature, the landscape tends to be regarded as a material surface that has been sequentially shaped and reshaped, over time, through the imprint of one scheme of mental representations after another, each reshaping covering over or obliterating the one before. The landscape surface is thus supposed to present itself as a palimpsest for the inscription of cultural form. My argument suggests, to the contrary, that the forms of the landscape—like the identities and capacities of its human inhabitants—are not imposed upon a material substrate but rather

38 Ibid., 195.
39 Ibid., 323.
40 Ibid., 195.
41 Ingold, Being Alive, 56.
42 Ibid., 32.
emerge as condensations or crystallisations of activity within a relational field.\textsuperscript{43}

On this view, the landscape bears not the inscription of external events, as if history took place above or outside the land in the realm of human political or social action, but rather constitutes with humanity a “relational field” that is inherently time-bound. Place is not merely a physical location (“my spot” versus “your spot”); it is a dense network of bodies, cultures, memories and land moving through time together.

For Ingold, Cartesian epistemology turns “occurrences into discrete, self-contained facts and their taking place into the occupation of enclosed sites.”\textsuperscript{44} Traditional knowledge, by contrast, is local knowledge, tied to a “meshwork” of storied strands.\textsuperscript{45} And it is the localness of such knowledge on which agrarians especially tend to focus.

Localness may be described as a confluence of two, key principles: nativeness and adaptation. Agrarians such as Berry, Jackson, and Kirschenmann all base their work on a conscious act of “homecoming” to their respective places. Berry begins his “A Native Hill” with a reflection on how his move to rural Kentucky was perceived as lunacy by his urban colleagues.\textsuperscript{46} More generally, Jackson proposes that “nativeness” will be realized only when courageous “homecomers” heed to the call to engage in the “most important work for the [twenty-first] century.”\textsuperscript{47} C. Falk observes that, “like Berry and Jackson, Kirschenmann’s work is based on a lifetime attachment to a specific farm and

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{46} Berry, “A Native Hill,” in The Art of the Commonplace, 3-8.
\textsuperscript{47} Jackson, Becoming Native, 103.
ecosystem, ‘becoming native’ to a place, in Jackson’s oft-quoted words.”

Attention to and dwelling within one’s local place is, for agrarians, a paramount concern.

The idea of nativeness implies that insights from aboriginal cultures around the world will be of interest. In particular, agrarians have found inspiration in how those cultures tend to adapt to the character of the places in which they subsist, employing subsistence strategies based on highly specific, locally relevant knowledge rather than on universal principles. In the same way, agrarians connect a general ethos of “homecoming” with conscious acts of local adaptation. For example, Berry’s “An Agricultural Journey in Peru” (1979) describes how Andean farmers have suited their agricultural choices to the unique, highland ecosystem they inhabit. From their example, Berry infers the necessity of bending one’s behavior to the standards set by nature. Perhaps Berry’s best known and most frequently cited expression of this principle is found in his essay “Two Economies” (1983) where he writes, “Whatever the name, the human economy, if it is to be a good economy, must fit harmoniously within and must correspond to the Great Economy; in certain important ways, it must be an analogue of the Great Economy.” For Berry, truly sustainable food production must

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51 Wendell Berry, “Conservation and the Local Economy,” in The Art of the Commonplace, 201.
52 Wendell Berry, “Two Economies,” in The Art of the Commonplace, 223.
match itself to natural systems; or to rephrase the same idea theologically, the human economy must seek analogical compatibility with God’s economy.

Berry’s focus on adaptation is picked up by other agrarians such as H. Daly and Jackson,\(^53\) and echoes the work of Fukuoka.\(^54\) Jackson in particular argues that although worthwhile knowledge begins with an admission of creaturely ignorance, it also “looks to nature as our standard and as a source that offers possibilities we can safely explore.”\(^55\) In other words, the agrarian insistence on ignorance has nothing to do with willful stupidity, but is instead a lateral move away from Cartesian hubris, toward a more realistic expression of humanity’s creaturely station.\(^56\) For both Jackson and Fukuoka, local ecology is elevated to the position of a teacher under whose tutelage the student is obliged to sit. Thus agrarian knowledge is always calibrated to its local context, and only in such circumstances can it truly flourish.

A short quote from Berry’s “Solving for Pattern” (1980) will serve to sum up the discussion thus far:

> The farmer has put plants and animals into a relationship of mutual dependence, and must perforce be concerned for balance or symmetry, a reciprocating connection in the pattern of the farm that is biological, not industrial, and that involves solutions to problems of fertility, soil husbandry, economics, sanitation—the whole complex of problems whose proper solutions add up to health: the health of the soil, of plants and animals, of farm and farmer, of farm family and farm community, all

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\(^54\) Fukuoka writes, “A life of small-scale farming may appear to be primitive, but in living such a life, it becomes possible to contemplate the Great Way.” Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution*, 96.

\(^55\) Jackson, “The Agrarian Mind,” 141.

involved in the same interested, interlocking pattern—or pattern of patterns.\textsuperscript{57}

These words express Berry’s conviction that durable farming practices do rely on knowledge rather than blind ignorance. In particular, they rely on pattern identification and imitation. From an agrarian perspective—which maintains the “body in place” at its epistemological core—pattern identification requires attention not only to local ecology, but as Ingold might say, to the story of bodies and land moving through time together. For this reason, Berry remains acutely aware that any effort to “solve for pattern” in his Kentucky context cannot ignore the history of land use in that same context.\textsuperscript{58} He cannot impose universally appropriate agricultural methods on the land, not simply because no such methods exist, but more precisely because no knowledgeable action can presume to avoid a conversation with prior acts of dwelling. Both land and human dwelling constitute the “pattern” in view. Place-based knowledge involves an integration of ecological, social, ethical, and historical considerations.

\textbf{1.1.3 The Necessity of Proper Action}

Crucially, agrarian epistemology is grounded in a “way of life” that involves specific “convictions” necessarily lived out through concrete behaviors. Such behaviors may be gathered under the idea of “propriety.” Agrarians think of propriety as a set of \textit{implicit responsibilities}, which may be elaborated in two ways: 1) affection and love, and 2) relational fidelity. More tangibly still, agrarians also think of propriety as \textit{right use}; that is, 3) good work and craftsmanship, and 4) economic health. All four of these values

\textsuperscript{57} Wendell Berry, “Solving for Pattern,” in \textit{The Gift of Good Land}, 137 (his emphasis).

\textsuperscript{58} For example, see Berry, “A Native Hill,” in \textit{The Art of the Commonplace}, 14-16; Wendell Berry, “A Rescued Farm,” in \textit{The Gift of Good Land}, 203-9.
reflect the agrarian assumption that knowledge is meaningful only if it meets the world as lived engagement.

Agrarian interest in love should not be misidentified as a nostalgic desire to reanimate a bucolic past that never was. Rather, agrarians insist that true knowledge is intrinsically relational rather than autonomous, and as such, involves responsibilities with respect to the land and all those life forms that subsist within it. E. Freyfogle, for example, in charting the philosophical roots of contemporary agrarianism, recalls Aldo Leopold’s important influence from the mid-twentieth century. For Leopold, Freyfogle notes, “Good land use required careful attention to the peculiarities of a given place. That attentiveness could arise only within a person who loved the land and felt attached to its many inhabitants.”

Because the living biosphere rather than the autonomous individual serves as the basis for Leopold’s ecological conscience, his perspective on “good land use” is reframed in terms of relations between species in places. Such love is eminently practical; it may involve deep feeling, but it is not a form of heady emotionalism.

Other writers dwell on similar ideas. For Berry, the land instantiates an act of love, from divine Giver to recipients, and simultaneously imposes a profound measure of responsibility on its inhabitants—“a gift given upon certain rigorous conditions.” Perhaps because Berry’s language of love and responsibility evokes theological reflection, no agrarian has stressed these concepts as keys to agrarian epistemology more than Wirzba. He argues that wisdom requires a “posture” open to the demands of love,

59 Freyfogle, Agrarianism and the Good Society, 41. See also Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
one that should move wisdom seekers in the direction of self-sacrifice.\(^{63}\) Whether one agrees with Wirzba’s Christian commitments or not, the point is that agrarians of all stripes express their conviction that knowledge cannot be equated with pure data, but rather involves felt responsibilities lived out through proper actions.

Agrarians frequently move from the notion of responsibility to the language of marriage, household, and fidelity. Once again, Berry has been especially influential here. In essays such as “The Body and the Earth” (1977) and “Men and Women in Search of Common Ground” (1985), Berry reflects on loving commitments as the ground of ecological and social durability, precisely because such commitments take seriously the person’s locally embedded situation.\(^{64}\) It is important to realize that localness lies at the heart of Berry’s reflections on this subject, not a neo-conservative desire to put women in their place. As Berry says, “To forsake all others does not mean—because it cannot mean—to ignore or neglect all others…If one is to have the power and delight of one’s sexuality, then the generality of instinct must be resolved in a responsible relationship to a particular person.”\(^{65}\) Regardless of whether or not one agrees, it is clear that Berry’s place-based view of knowledge produces a conversation around social ethics that remains true to its theoretical foundations. The person is a local being, and thus Berry conceives of behavioral propriety in thoroughly local terms.

Berry’s emphasis on fidelity has impacted his contemporaries especially in terms of how they think about community life. For example, Donahue’s “The Resettling of America” (2003) expresses a desire to move “a significant part of the agrarian landscape

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\(^{63}\) Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 110-43.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 117-18 (his emphasis).
into some degree of control by the community.” 66 “Control” here should not be understood in autocratic terms; rather, Donahue is guided by the notion that land care is best realized within a network of interpersonal relations where humans take on voluntary limitations for the good of the whole. A farmer might refrain from spraying a dangerous pesticide on his crop, for example, because he is relationally connected to his neighbor and is therefore invested in her livelihood along with his own. For the same reason, Freyfogle advocates a thorough reconsideration of “private property, ecology, and ethics together,” 67 wherein individual freedoms would be measured against the needs of community responsibilities. 68 Kirschenmann likewise states that, “In the ecological paradigm, adequate production is folded into a larger social goal” 69 that promotes the revitalization of rural communities. 70 These arguments are consistent insofar as they claim that durable human civilization requires social responsibility as opposed to unmitigated individualism. For agrarians, place-based knowledge not only encourages the language of affection and love, it instantiates as faithfulness among humans, their communities, and the land.

Agrarian propriety is expressed perhaps most concretely as good work or craftsmanship. As Wirzba observes, “In the activity of making itself we learn about good (useful, functional) design, the character (limits, possibilities) of the material world, and

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66 Donahue, “The Resettling of America,” 45.
67 Freyfogle, Agrarianism and the Good Society, 108.
68 Ibid., 117.
the overall fittedness (purpose) of things and our work in the larger whole.”71 Knowledge for Wirzba is actualized through craftsmanship that fits the relational meshwork agrarians presuppose. Indeed, as he states elsewhere, “When we become apprentices of creation, we let the health of the land serve as the measure of the quality of our overall work.”72 Similarly, Berry’s “An Agricultural Journey in Peru” reflects on Andean farmers’ attention to scale and appropriate timing in order to produce not a single pulse of maximum output, but a durable soil capable of supporting those farmers for years to come.73 Proper action for both Wirzba and Berry is action that adheres to voluntary limits, thus indicating an intelligent response to the reality of humanity’s creaturely ignorance. Jackson also illustrates this concept with the following anecdote: “You have probably heard the story about the Amishman who had just purchased an eighty-acre farm. His neighbor asked him if he thought he could make it on these eighty acres. The new owner replied that he didn’t know, but he knew he could make it on forty.”74 The point here is that the Amishman’s worldview is not based on a theory that “bigger is better,” but in fact “bigger” poses a substantial risk to his ability to make decisions that are appropriate to the health of his land and family. Whatever agricultural knowledge he possesses would be utterly bankrupt if he attempted to break free of the limits dictated by his physical body—and eighty acres may indeed have been too many.

In light of their high regard for social responsibility and right use, it comes as no surprise that agrarians consistently drive toward economic reformulations. The

74 Jackson, Altars of Unhewn Stone, 103.
Amishman’s choice exemplifies propriety at an individual level; the larger economic discussion, however, considers propriety at a structural and systemic level. On this front, agrarians make two related moves. First, they issue a sharp critique of industrial economics as the heir to modern colonialism; second, they propose a subsistence economy in its place.

The theoretical links between colonialism and industrialism are discussed above. At a more concrete level, Berry’s “Racism and the Economy” (1988) argues that the same forces that once declared some tasks to be “nigger work,” and which sought to free the white slave-owner from those tasks, have now been redrawn in industry. 75 Industrial economies like slave economies specialize human labor and then seek to liberate those deemed elite from the most undesirable of chores by extracting labor and material goods from those at the bottom and shuffling it up to those at the top. 76 As this extractive model has been applied to agriculture, it has wrought a global ecological catastrophe because of its fundamental incompatibility with the cycles of organic life. Industrial agribusiness seeks to extract wealth from soil much as an energy conglomerate might seek to extract coal from a mountainside. 77 As the soil’s health is gutted through successive years of forced production without rest, the agricultural product is termed a commodity 78 and the market, flooded. Farmers receive the minimum in cash for their work, while the real money to be made is transferred to intermediaries whose lives and livelihoods are not

75 Wendell Berry, “Racism and the Economy,” in The Art of the Commonplace, 47-64.
76 Berry’s agrarian evaluation of economics should not be misunderstood as neo-Marxism. See Freyfogle, Agrarianism and the Good Society, 107-70.
77 See Jackson, Altars of Unhewn Stone, 97-105; Frederick L. Kirschenmann, “Expanding the Vision of Sustainable Agriculture,” in Cultivating an Ecological Conscience, 48-62.
materially attached to the soil’s health in the long term. Thus, from a colonial-industrial point of view, “bigger” is always better, rather than “bigger” posing substantial risk, because the true cost of “bigger” is paid down in so-called acceptable levels of erosion and toxicity rather than in the bodies of friends and neighbors.

Against the colonial-industrial paradigm, agrarians propose a subsistence paradigm. The agrarian notion of “subsistence,” however, does not imply a voluntary return to the poverty and brutality of ancient life, which is well documented by archaeologists and anthropologists who study those periods. Rather, agrarians advocate a total recalibration of all economic norms to the Great Economy, as Berry so aptly put it—an economy responsible to creation rather than to human greed.\footnote{See Berry, \textit{The Unsettling of America}, 47.} The “subsistence principle,” Berry observes, “is the only guarantee of quality in practice” because it hinges not on the extraction of a tradable commodity from its context, but on “the use of the product by the producer.”\footnote{Wendell Berry, “Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems,” in \textit{The Gift of Good Land}, 124.} Value in a subsistence economy is measured not in terms of total production, but in craftsmanship and in health. Indeed, from an agrarian perspective, value is intrinsic to creation rather than something extracted from it.\footnote{See Norman Wirzba, “Caring and Working: An Agrarian Perspective,” \textit{Christian Century} 116.25 (Sep 22-29, 1999): 901.} A subsistence economy is based on integration, accrued fertility, and ecological resilience. Soils, trees, rivers, animals, and houses are perceived only through lived engagement, and never in the abstract. In short, an agrarian economic perspective envisions the real-world actualization of a prior commitment to embodied, place-based knowledge. Such
knowledge instantiates as right use oriented to the community’s health rather than as maximized production packaged for sale.

1.1.4 Conclusion

To repeat Wirzba’s definition, agrarianism is “a way of life attuned to requirements of land and local communities.” Agrarians typically make a lateral move away from Cartesian dualism, where the mind precedes perception, and instead embrace an epistemology based on embodiment, where the body precedes the mind. This reformulation has the two-pronged effect of grounding knowledge in a dense, interrelational network of other bodies while also overturning the presumption of detached objectivity. Agrarians orient their “ignorant” thinking around particular, local places, favoring concepts such as nativeness and adaptation. Such place-based knowledge takes its intelligence from a holistic approach to ecological, social, ethical, and historical realities. It meets concrete reality through the notion of community responsibility and proper use—that is, affection, fidelity, craftsmanship, and subsistence. As this survey relates to biblical hermeneutics, the most salient point to be gleaned is this: The agrarian epistemological foundation—the creaturely body in place—integrates theory and praxis, values and ethics, thought and action. Unlike the modern philosophical tradition, it presupposes a materially and historically meaningful universe shot through with moral value.

1.2 Agrarian Hermeneutics

The value of agrarian epistemology for biblical studies is only beginning to be realized. Davis’ Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible
represents perhaps the most sophisticated attempt thus far to develop an “agrarian hermeneutic” in direct conversation with the writers and thinkers cited above. In this volume, Davis argues that agrarians such as Berry and Jackson exhibit patterns of thought that correspond generally to those patterns of thought also exhibited by the biblical authors and redactors. If this proposed correspondence is valid, Davis has tapped into a legitimate reservoir of contemporary insight that promises to shed new light on the premodern Bible—a working theoria by which to account for the Bible’s canonical form and function through rather than in opposition to its literary complexity. The remainder of this chapter describes Davis’ hermeneutical work through comparisons with other ecologically-oriented (but non-agrarian) modes of biblical interpretation, and then defends the validity of that argument on historical and anthropological grounds. The result is a viable hermeneutical basis for the study of Isaiah.

1.2.1 Ecological Hermeneutics

Ecological hermeneutics is an interpretive strategy for biblical study developed in the 1990s, associated largely with the Earth Bible Project (EBP). According to N. Habel, ecological hermeneutics takes its orientation from the idea that, “we are heirs of a long anthropocentric, patriarchal, and androcentric approach to reading the text that has devalued the Earth and that continues to influence the way we read the text.” Given this history of interpretation, an ecological hermeneutic proposes a “radical reorientation to

the biblical text” involving a “radical change of posture in relation to Earth as a subject in the text.” The “change of posture” that Habel and other representatives of the EBP promote is one in which the reader understands him or herself to be a “member of Earth community in solidarity with Earth” (where “Earth” refers to a total ecosystem, not merely the spherical object). Reading then takes place under a rubric of “suspicion, identification, and retrieval.” The reader suspects the text of inherent anthropocentricity, identifies with Earth, and retrieves the text’s non-human subject as a way of upholding Earth’s intrinsic worth over against a tradition in which it has been devalued.

The hermeneutical suspicion characteristic of this reading strategy takes shape most clearly with respect to Genesis 1:26-28, which expresses the command to rule and subdue. Habel perceives these words as the fountainhead of a long trajectory of exploitation culminating in modern industrialism and all its accompanying ecological problems. Earth, argues Habel, develops quite peacefully in Genesis 1, up until the point at which humans impose upon it a divinely sanctioned hierarchy. Accordingly, the

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84 Ibid., 3.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 4-5. See also David G. Horrell, “Introduction,” in Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives, eds. David G. Horrell et al. (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 6-8.
88 As L. White famously argued, Christianity “bears a huge burden of guilt” precisely because it has upheld the prescriptive authority of such language. Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Science 155.3767 (1967): 1206.
concept of “dominion” is jettisoned from the ecological hermeneutics lexicon, along with its friendlier cousin, “stewardship.” 91

At its best, ecological hermeneutics issues a helpful corrective to the dominant interpretive tradition in the industrial West. Like feminist theory from which it takes its cues, ecological hermeneutics recognizes a social need that has resulted from abusive interpretations of the Bible, especially instrumentalist readings of Gen 1:26-28, and so represents an act of hermeneutic resistance against the unmitigated exploitation of the planet.

That said, two points speak against the value of ecological hermeneutics as an interpretive strategy that leads to a more complete description of the Bible’s compositional form and rhetorical function. First, its general reliance on Habel’s assumption that Gen 1:26-28 represents an attack on Earth’s intrinsic goodness cannot be sustained. While the language of Gen 1:26-28 is undeniably harsh, it speaks theologically to humanity’s position as a “patch-disturbing” species akin to elephants and beavers. 92 Like L. White before him, Habel conflates the text as it is with a particular strand of interpretation that has used the text to license ecological exploitation. Numerous other readers, however, debunk the notion that Baconian instrumentalism ultimately takes its point of orientation from Genesis 1. This implies that while ecological hermeneutics may indeed illumine an important problem within the history of reception, it is ultimately


based on a misreading of the text, just like the mode of interpretation it seeks to critique. Where that misreading remains unchallenged, it is doubtful ecological hermeneutics will produce new insight into the text as it is.

Second, ecological hermeneutics tends to encode a deep division between humanity and its environment even as it grasps for a theory capable of overcoming this perceived abyss. For example, J. Olley attempts to read Isaiah from a perspective that values “human interaction with animals which respects animals (rather than seeing animals as for human benefit).”93 With these words, Olley presupposes a dichotomy that is plainly Romantic and also plainly false when viewed from a non-colonial, premodern point of view. Traditional peoples the world over both respect and utilize their surroundings. Because ecological hermeneutics by definition abandons anthropological concerns in favor of ecological ones, it possesses no language to discuss what humanity might eat as it goes about preserving the rainforest.94 To reiterate Berry’s observation, “Once we see our place, our part of the world, as surrounding us, we have already made a profound division between it and ourselves.”95 Thus, in contrast to Habel’s desire for a “radical change of posture” within the history of tradition, ecological hermeneutics remains entrenched in the colonial-industrial dissociation of human beings from the places in which they subsist. If the Bible is a premodern document expressing ideas and values unknown to the modern tradition, it remains unlikely that any hermeneutic lens

95 Berry, The Unsettling of America, 22 (his emphasis).
that treats modern categories uncritically will offer the perspective needed to understand the text as it really is.

1.2.2 Responsible Stewardship and “Letting-It-Be”

Outside the ecological hermeneutics camp, many other interpreters agree that earth’s ecological problems have reached a tipping-point and that the history of biblical interpretation, insofar as it has promoted an overly anthropocentric and instrumentalist approach to creation, has only exacerbated this problem.\(^96\) The main difference, however, lies in the fact that these readers do not take Habel’s textual suspicion as a programmatic foundation for crafting their interpretive strategies.\(^97\) As J. Barr points out, the thesis that Gen 1:26-28 spawned the modern ecological crisis fails to explain why that crisis did not arise “until many centuries after the biblical heritage in Christianity had become culturally dominant in the world.”\(^98\) This observation suggests that scholars should not feel bound to counter-read the text in order to interpret it with ecological concerns in mind.

One key concept that many such readers champion is that of “responsible stewardship.” In this model, Genesis 1 is understood to provide a paradise picture—“the

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\(^{96}\) For example, see Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Sarum Theological Lectures (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 1-36.


way the world is supposed to be.” Readers typically downplay the violence inherent in the words “rule and subdue,” and often redefine the Hebrew roots (רדה and כּבשׁ) in terms of Christian compassion, or as S. Koetje suggests, “a rule rooted in his love.” Instrumentalism is then portrayed not as an intrinsic feature of the verse’s terminology, but as a function of modernity’s cooption of that terminology for self-serving ends. Dominion, it is thought, can be sufficiently bridled so as to remove any sense that the Bible might seem to condone environmental exploitation.

Not all readers are convinced. R. Bauckham, for example, expresses serious misgivings about the concept of stewardship. The idea that humanity is a priest or caretaker over creation seems to promulgate a degree of anthropocentrism that lies at the heart of the interpretive tradition he seeks to subvert. Following J. Lovelock’s and P. Santmire’s preference for human “partnership” with the earth, Bauckham proposes a more hands-off approach to creation through the language of “letting be.”

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102 Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology, 1-36.
104 Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology, 36.
shifts the focus of the discussion to texts that better promote awe, wonder, and praise, such as Psalm 104 or Job 38–41. D. Fergusson similarly argues that, “our role can be responsibly exercised on many occasions by leaving the world alone and letting it be.”

Others such as W. Brown and D. Coad advance Bauckham’s effort to refocus readers’ attention on texts that prompt wonder and praise rather than responsible use.

The most important contribution of these two related strands of thought lies in the fact that the readers mentioned above have not ceded the text to Habel’s assumptions. In general, those characteristic of the stewardship/letting-it-be spectrum attempt to read with rather than against the grain of the biblical text, and in so doing demonstrate an admirable willingness to wrestle with difficult passages such as Gen 1:26-28 from within a canonical frame of reference. Many such readers should also be credited with taking seriously the concerns characteristic of the ecological hermeneutics group, and in response have put forth valiant efforts to steer biblical interpretation away from environmental triumphalism.

 Nonetheless, evidence that these interpretive models cultivate especially incisive, biblical analysis is just as lacking as it is for ecological hermeneutics. Where some readers have retained the language of stewardship, it is not always clear that this concept succeeds in promoting anything more than a general “awareness” of ecological challenges and a more “judicious” approach to consumption. If this is so, ecological

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105 David Fergusson, *Creation*, Guides to Theology (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2014), 102.
107 For example, see Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 177-216. See especially pages 194 and 198 for comments on awareness and judicious buying, respectively.
hermeneutics’ complaint appears entirely justified: responsible stewardship remains an industrial wolf in sheep’s clothing. Conversely, as the language of stewardship has been exchanged for a greater emphasis on wonder and praise, it remains equally uncertain that a hands-off approach to creation is practically credible. It sounds nice, but how does one eat dinner while also “letting it be”? This inconsistency suggests that the Romantic schizophrenia identified by Jackson remains at work on both sides of the ecologically conscious aisle. In other words, the stewardship/letting-it-be spectrum seems to be infected with precisely the same colonial-industrial dissociation between humanity and the environment that also characterizes ecological hermeneutics. Again, if the Bible is a premodern document expressing ideas unknown to the modern philosophical tradition, it remains unlikely that any hermeneutic lens viewing such ideas uncritically will offer the perspective required to advance biblical research on the structure and function of the Bible as it is.

In sum, ecological concerns have given rise to a number of different lenses on biblical discourse. The evidence suggests, however, that these lenses do not offer scholars a viable avenue forward in the study of a premodern canon. Real headway will be made only when interpreters begin to work with a theōria that breaks free of modern assumptions.

1.2.3 Agrarian Hermeneutics

In his “The Bible Vs. Biodiversity: The Case Against Moral Argument From Scripture” (2009), J. Nash finds the Bible at particular fault for its agrarian orientation, which seems to prevent the expression of anything “that is directly and substantially
supportive of the integrity of wildlife in wild lands and seas.”\textsuperscript{108} The text, in other words, is saddled with irredeemable liabilities due to its genesis in an agricultural context. In her response to Nash, Davis flips this argument on its head. While Nash correctly notices the Bible’s agrarian character, Davis argues, he overlooks the need to give “primary attention to responsible agricultural practices” in order to achieve ecological integrity.\textsuperscript{109} In fact, the Bible’s local flavor—far from being a primitive relic that is best discarded—grounds its language in a particular landscape. For Davis, the text’s theological discourse necessarily involves its character as a \textit{place-based} book, a point contemporary readers ignore or resist at their peril.

This response to Nash underscores a central difference between Davis and both the ecological hermeneutics and responsible stewardship/letting-it-be groups. As an agrarian reader, Davis does not just harvest pithy insights from the likes of Berry and Jackson and then apply these within the normal interpretive rubrics. Instead, she proposes that Berry and Jackson share a distinctive “mind-set” with the biblical writers and that this “mind-set” is expressed in the text.\textsuperscript{110} In other words, she draws a general correspondence (not a one-to-one equivalence) between the \textit{theōria} that informs agrarian thinking today and the \textit{theōria} that informed the thinking of those who composed and redacted the Bible. If she is correct, contemporary agrarianism could serve as a useful lens through which to read and understand biblical discourse.

\textsuperscript{110} Davis, \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture}, 1, 22, 27. See also Wirzba, “Agrarian Ecotheology,” 36.
Her argument works as follows: Davis observes that contemporary agrarianism views agricultural praxis as having an “ineluctably ethical dimension.”\(^\text{111}\) Its “land ethic” contrasts against a “productionist ethic” in that it seeks not to maximize production, but rather “expresses itself in patterns of thought and life directed toward the long-term health (sustainability) of the ‘land community.’”\(^\text{112}\) An agrarian pattern of thought, argues Davis, is further characterized by the belief that, “humans are bound to the earth in an integrity that is biological, moral, and ‘spiritual,’ as well as political and economic.”\(^\text{113}\) She then details agrarianism under the following four headings: 1) the primacy of the land, 2) informed ignorance, 3) wholesome materiality, and 4) land as a trust given in covenant.\(^\text{114}\) These four points resonate with the survey of agrarian epistemology presented above. Parts one (the creaturely body) and two (the primacy of place) of that survey emphasize both the primacy of land and informed ignorance, while part three (the necessity of proper action) describe materiality and trust under the larger topic of conceptual and practical propriety. In short, Davis correctly identifies an agrarian worldview as a comprehensive integration of thought and praxis that stems from its theoretical foundation: the creaturely body in place. The rest of her monograph demonstrates why this description is characteristic also of the biblical authors and their book. Through a series of exegetical studies pertaining to all major parts of the Hebrew Bible, Davis shows how interpretation succeeds when the reader steps into an agrarian theōria similar to that which underwrites the text.

\(^\text{111}\) Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 22.  
\(^\text{112}\) Ibid., 24.  
\(^\text{113}\) Ibid., 25.  
\(^\text{114}\) Ibid., 28-41.
It is important to see precisely how Davis’ hermeneutical argument works because a cursory reading of her monograph may confuse its concern for current ecological issues with a form of ideological criticism akin to Habel. Such approaches to biblical scholarship (e.g. feminist or ecological hermeneutics) attend primarily to biblical discourse as it is thought to silence opposing ideologies. But Davis is not an ideological reader as such. Unlike the Earth Bible Project, she does not attempt to resuscitate a hidden (agrarian) voice suppressed by the text’s dominant agenda. Rather, she aims to provide the reader with a lens on biblical content that is responsive and appropriate to its premodern character. Thus, if the Bible does not actually reflect the agrarian worldview Davis claims that it does, the whole project fails, precisely because it is a work of textual rather than ideological criticism. In other words, Davis’ agrarian hermeneutic stands or falls on its correspondence to the Bible’s authorial context and resulting literary shape, not its ability to issue a relevant social critique, even if it may also have this effect.

Assuming that Davis’ effort to draw a general correspondence between contemporary agrarian thought and that of the biblical authors can be defended, the agrarian theōria she applies to biblical interpretation offers real potential to illumine the Bible’s literary self-presentation. Her approach resonates strongly, for example, with biblical interpreters’ pronounced turn toward creation in the last half-century. A number of other scholars have shown how the theoretical dichotomies characteristic of the early and mid-twentieth century—such as salvation versus creation, spirit versus nature, history versus myth, the desert versus the sown, and prophecy versus wisdom115—do not reflect

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115 G. von Rad is widely regarded as having solidified the view that creation theology is secondary to the Bible’s emphasis on salvation history, though it should be noted that by the end of his career and in a
bibal discourse as it really is. W. Brueggemann points out that the Bible consistently expresses its notion of salvation history through movements to, within, or away from the land. Similarly, T. Hiebert shows that the Bible belies an agrarian orientation to the rain-fed agricultural zones of the Levant’s central hill country. His work effectively demonstrates that the Pentateuch is thoroughly embedded in Canaan’s agro-ecology, where mixed-farming practices did not instantiate a hard and fast delineation between the desert and the sown. Many more scholars—representing a wide range of specialties—can be cited as participants in the effort to dissolve the rigid categories that an earlier


generation had supposed to distinguish biblical thought from its Mesopotamian context. One especially constructive result of this sweeping change is a flowering of new appreciation for conceptual threads that span seemingly disparate and otherwise unrelatable biblical texts. If creation and salvation are not distinct categories after all, and salvation indeed coheres in the material world, creational concepts such as Sabbath are potentially reinvigorated with new relevance within the history of God’s saving work. Davis’ scholarship contributes to this overall trend.

The shift toward large-scale integration within biblical theology has also impacted biblical ethics. Working up from the “socio-economic facts of life” that underpinned ancient Israel’s historical and theological self-understanding, C. Wright suggests a triangular schema by which to understand the relationship between Yhwh, Israel and Land, all coordinated through Family. H. Marlow capitalizes on Wright’s insight when arguing that the delineation of anthropocentric versus ecocentric concerns within

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environmental theory, “can be questioned on both philosophical and theological/biblical grounds.”\textsuperscript{123} She likewise suggests a triangular schema by which to understand the interpenetrating relationship between God, humanity, and non-human creation as reflected in the biblical prophets. \textsuperscript{124} This “three-way interaction of human beings, God and nature” also informs K. Dell’s evaluation of the wisdom tradition’s relevance to the ecological debate.\textsuperscript{125} Finally, Davis cites both Wright and Marlow’s triangular formulation in her recent book, \textit{Biblical Prophecy} (2014),\textsuperscript{126} as part of her argument that the Bible construes human health as bound up within the “‘entire human and nonhuman neighborhood.’”\textsuperscript{127} In short, new research on biblical ethics is now reaching beyond the atomizing tendencies characteristic of modern categorical thinking. Specifically, the framework Wright, Marlow, Dell and Davis propose opens a broad range of texts to a renewed potential for conceptual coherence. For example, at the outset of her \textit{Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment} (2010), M. Barker recasts the ecological question as, “Why is creation collapsing?” rather than its modern articulation, “Why is the environment changing?” Because her inquiry works from a theoretical perspective appropriate to the premodern text, Barker is able to move seamlessly between issues of

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\textsuperscript{124} Ibid. See also Hilary Marlow, \textit{Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Rereading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111.


\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 85, citing Wirzba, “Introduction,” 4.
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covenant loyalty, idolatry, land management, wisdom, morality, consumption and economy.\textsuperscript{128}

The distinctive contribution that Davis’ \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture} makes to this burgeoning conversation stems from its combination of an agrarian hermeneutic with a commitment to whole texts in their canonical setting. Her work tends not to isolate and quantify what might be considered important agrarian data (e.g. a motif of food and drink in the Bible), but rather situates various texts that have something to do with food and drink within a larger body of sacred literature. From Davis’ perspective, for example, the story of Naboth’s Vineyard reveals an interest not in \textit{either} royal politics \textit{or} land tenure, social injustice \textit{or} covenant, but in all of these together, bound within a single literary unit.\textsuperscript{129} Similarly, Davis shows that the book of Leviticus relies on a complex system of analogies that weave its sense of “spirituality” deeply within the material world—a “wholesome materiality,” as the chapter is titled.\textsuperscript{130} Where a historical-critical scholar might comb Leviticus for its dietary laws, Davis’ agrarian perspective offers a theoretical basis by which to understand those laws as one manifestation of a much wider range of concerns. Her conclusions arise directly from the observation that the Bible’s interest in everyday holiness is creation theology worked out on a material plane, and that creation as such (i.e. God’s work) places a practical imperative on humanity to engage the world in ways that remain responsible to its intrinsic sanctity. Thus for Davis, the

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\textsuperscript{129} Davis, \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture}, 101-19.
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\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 80-100.
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Bible’s agrarian language requires neither a counter-reading (ecological hermeneutics) nor a softening (responsible stewardship) nor an alternative emphasizing (letting-it-be). Rather, it requires that the reader \textit{step outside the colonial-industrial knowledge paradigm}. The Bible presents a matrix of theological, historical, political, social, and economic ideas. An agrarian hermeneutic opens the door to this complex and rewarding world.

\textbf{1.2.4 Conclusion}

Contemporary agrarianism is characterized by its concern for the creaturely body in place, and as a result, agrarian knowledge is defined as a comprehensive integration of thought and praxis. Similarly, Davis finds an agrarian worldview to be rooted in a “land ethic” that works toward community health through a practical union of biological, moral, spiritual, political and economic values. Her pioneering hermeneutical work relies on a general correspondence between an agrarian worldview and the worldview that informed those who composed and redacted the Bible. This move departs significantly from other strands of ecological interpretation, whose shortcomings stem from an inability to escape modern categories. By contrast, Davis’ turn to contemporary agrarianism allows for a lateral break with the modern philosophical tradition and thus opens the premodern Bible to an integrated conversation around ecology, theology, responsibility, and economics. Most importantly, because Davis joins an agrarian hermeneutic with her canonical interests, her work provides readers with a theoretical basis for understanding how seemingly discordant texts function harmoniously within book-wide literary patterns.
1.3 The Validity of Agrarian Hermeneutics

E. Davis’ work suggests that agrarian thought and praxis, when used as a lens on biblical discourse, reveals a wider degree of conceptual coherence in the Bible than modern interpretive lenses (such as historicism or Romanticism) have tended to detect. The lynchpin of this strategy is a general correspondence that Davis draws between the worldview characteristic of contemporary agrarians and the worldview of the biblical authors as reflected in their book. An agrarian hermeneutic succeeds, therefore, only if that perceived correspondence inheres in fact rather than in imagination alone.

The notions of “general correspondence” and “authorial worldview,” however, may suggest to some a theoretical red herring. Thus, before proceeding to the main argument of this section, two brief caveats are in order. First, an agrarian hermeneutic does not assume one-to-one equivalence between contemporary agrarian thought and that of the biblical authors. This would be absurd. Only a general correspondence is proposed, and thus this correspondence is not without difference. In other words, the application of an agrarian hermeneutic to biblical study does not claim to avoid anachronism altogether, as anachronism is an inevitable part of every reading strategy due to the passage of time and the reality of cultural change. Rather, agrarian interpretation claims to avoid particular types of anachronism, especially those that are characteristic of modern thought and which tend to inhibit appreciation for the Bible’s fluid movement between seemingly disparate concepts and literary genres.

Second, the comparison between contemporary agrarianism and the “mind-set” of the biblical writers should not be confused with a one-dimensional appeal to authorial intent. W. Wimsatt and M. Beardsley, in their influential article “The Intentional Fallacy”
(1946), argue that efforts to reconstruct the thought processes that lie behind texts mistake the nature of the analytical task. Preoccupation with the author’s psychology, they contend, is really a type of historical criticism, not literary criticism, and in fact the intention that lies behind a poem need not be known in order for the poem to be understood.\(^{131}\) But while Wimsatt and Beardsley’s article offered a timely warning to the historicist “eclipse” of biblical literature in general,\(^{132}\) it also problematically redefined the reading task in terms that tended to isolate the text from its grounding in culture and thus its relationship to actual authors and readers. Today, many scholars seem to think that they must choose among three options: 1) a reconstruction of the text’s background, 2) literary analysis strictly defined, or 3) a review of the reader’s ideological perception of the text’s meaning. Such trifurcation of the field is unfortunate and unfruitful. The point of drawing a general correspondence between contemporary agrarians and biblical authors is not to “consult the oracle” as Wimsatt and Beardsley put it,\(^{133}\) but rather to understand the sociocultural and theological context from which the Bible springs. This context does not determine the Bible’s meaning; rather it is one part of a greater endeavor to understand the Bible’s grammar in time (and across time).

An agrarian hermeneutic requires, therefore, a proper historical-cultural defense. The discussion below first uses ethnographic and anthropological comparisons to demonstrate that the epistemological framework typical of contemporary agrarians is


\(^{133}\) Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” 487.
strikingly similar to that of premodern, traditional cultures. Archaeological and other historical data further indicate that similar epistemological assumptions almost certainly characterized Israel’s agrarian base during its genesis and development in the Iron Age, and thus a general correspondence between contemporary agrarian values and the values typical of ancient Israel probably does obtain. That said, three potential objections to this argument may be raised: 1) the problem of massive social and demographic upheaval through Babylonian destruction and reconstruction in the Persian period, 2) the problem of deforestation and ecological “degradation” at the hands of Israelite farmers, and 3) the problem of the Bible’s composition by “elite” scribes. In each case, aspects of the perceived historical reality would seem to drive a hole in the general correspondence on which this study relies. In response, the discussion below argues for: 1) broad levels of cultural continuity from the Iron Age to the Persian period, 2) invasion, conquest, and imperial taxation as the driving forces behind what forms of agro-ecological change took place, and 3) a view of scribalism that does not divorce “elite” individuals from the daily life, diet, and economy of a town like ancient Jerusalem. The evidence does not imply that scribes worked and thought in isolation from the normal patterns of agrarian subsistence characteristic of the greater society. Thus at a historical-cultural level, the correspondence succeeds.

1.3.1 Agrarianism and Premodern Israel

To review briefly, agrarianism begins with an anthropology of the creaturely body in place rather than the detached, subjective mind. On this view, human beings are threaded into dense networks of relations with other bodies, plants, animals, and the land.
The result is an epistemology that is bound up with ethical propriety (responsibility and right use). Responsibility may be further characterized through the language of love and fidelity to both kin and community, while right use may be described in terms of craftsmanship, attention to scale, and economic imitation of organic realities (the Great Economy). Agrarians promote a “land ethic” or “subsistence ethic” that characteristically measures value against long-term community health and agro-ecological durability rather than maximum production. Thus, as a rule, agrarians integrate notions of virtue and goodness within their epistemological framework where Cartesian science does not.

This description is also generally applicable to traditional societies around the world. Contemporary agrarians tend to make this claim by inference, such as Berry’s appeal to the Peruvian potato farmers or Jackson’s regard for the Amishman’s sense of proper scale. Anthropologists and phenomenologists, however, approach the question more directly. For example, D. Abram—drawing on E. Husserl and M. Merleau-Ponty—describes the speech patterns of indigenous cultures as reflecting their embeddedness within natural systems. He observes that traditional cultures often express a “lived affinity between language and land” because of their being “corporeally immersed.” K. Basso’s study of Western Apache culture, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), is especially instructive on this point. In this short but remarkable volume, Basso highlights the power that Apache narratives have “to establish enduring bonds between individuals and features of the natural landscape.”

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135 Ibid., 173, 176.
significance is diminished. Insofar as these stories “open up thinking” for their listeners, they do so by running a conduit of meaning between local places and the moral conduct of their human inhabitants. Apache culture views knowledge as a productive activity whose main discourse is that of communal history drawn from experience in material geography. Or as one of Basso’s Apache friends, Dudley Patterson, puts it, “Wisdom sits in places.”

Neither agrarians nor aboriginal peoples automatically share a special virtue because they happen to be more in touch with “nature” than the average New Yorker. Rather, the question turns on how knowledge is defined and adjudicated within their communities. As agrarians point out, an embodied, place-based orientation to the world such as Abram and Basso describe bears immediately on how a culture recognizes true knowledge, tying it to proper use. J. Scott’s seminal work, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976), supports this claim through a probing examination of traditional, peasant politics in southeast Asia. Scott argues that needs pertaining to durable and dependable food production give rise to a “subsistence ethic” that is characterized first and foremost by a “safety-first” principle of engagement with the natural world. Practically speaking, “safety-first” manifests through patterns of risk avoidance and aversion, where the chance for high yields is foregone in an effort to minimize the possibility of

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137 Ibid., 45.
138 Ibid., 85.
139 Ibid., 80-81.
140 Ibid., 105-49.
141 Ibid., 121.
starvation. Additionally, risk avoidance cultivates risk spreading through the formation of social bonds within the household, village, and community. Peasant societies typically develop “patterns of reciprocity, forced generosity, communal land, and work-sharing.” They enter into social contracts that protect private property but do so without sacrificing corporately experienced ecological health. As R. Netting observes, “Communities of smallholders have the demonstrated capacity for cooperative management of environmental resources without the untrammeled individual competition that brings on a ‘tragedy of the commons.’” Moreover, because relationality underwrites all traditional forms of “dwelling” and “task” (to use Ingold’s language), peasant societies tend to experience subsistence security as a “pattern of moral rights or expectations.” From this vantage point, concepts of justice, profitability, and exploitation are defined relative to the subsistence principle, not market theory. This means that the manner of exploitation (e.g. taxation) on the peasantry is just as important as the degree; fixed claims on resources, without consideration for unusual droughts or other climatic factors, will be received with increased levels of indignation and resistance. In short, the universe in which both agrarians thinkers and traditional

143 Ibid., 6-7, 18-23.
144 Ibid., 3.
146 Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant, 6.
peasants know what they know, and in which they earn their daily bread, is ecologically, politically, historically, economically, and morally defined.\textsuperscript{148}

Assuming the epistemological likeness between contemporary agrarian and traditional cultures is valid, the question remains: can the culture that produced the Bible be characterized as similar to those described by Basso and Scott? Common sense suggests so. Archaeologists universally recognize that from the early Iron Age through the Persian period, Israelite society was characterized by a large, peasant base engaged in food production. There is no good reason to suspect that the epistemological norms characteristic of Cartesian industrialism would have been true also of a pre-medieval, pre-Roman culture in the Near East. Thus peasant societies of all kinds provide relevant analogies by which to understand Israel’s ancient culture. But while this point is widely accepted by anthropologists and archaeologists alike, its phenomenological implications are often occluded by debates concerning Israel’s ethnic identity, the scope of its state apparatus in Jerusalem, the existence of biblical kings, the reality of exile, so-called Persian authorization of the Pentateuch, and the sociopolitical strife said to have characterized Persian Yehud. All of these questions derive from the historicist preoccupation with correspondences (or lack thereof) between the Bible’s portrayal of events and the reality deduced from archaeological finds. The present study asks a different question: what do the data suggest was typical of perception in ancient Israel?

\textsuperscript{148} The general portrait presented here is supported by other anthropologists such as T. Shanin, and is further reflected in the publications of contemporary peasant movements such as La Via Campesina. See Teodor Shanin, \textit{Defining Peasants: Essays Concerning Rural Societies, Exploitation Economies, and Learning From Them in the Contemporary World} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Teodor Shanin, ed., \textit{Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Eduardo Sevilla Guzmán and Graham Woodgate, “Agroecology: Foundations in Agrarian Social Thought and Sociological Theory,” \textit{Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems} 37.1 (2013): 32-44.
How did individuals, families, and communities see the world? For the purposes of establishing a comparison with contemporary agrarianism, two points are especially relevant. The data show that 1) mixed farming strategies expressed sensitivity to local geography and climatic realities so as to promote agro-ecological durability in the land (a subsistence ethic), and 2) domestic patterns reflected a synthesis of everyday subsistence strategies with religious and social responsibilities (an integrated universe).

To the first point, the general portrait that historians paint of Israel’s emergent Iron Age society is characterized by mixed farming strategies (pastoralism, tillage, and perennial fruit trees). These strategies are best understood in connection with Israel’s unique geography and climate. The spine of calcareous ridges that runs north to south, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Great Rift Valley to the east, are dominated by chalky soils and a xeric climate regime. Parent material is supplemented by the annual deposition of airborne dust, resulting in the Terra Rosa soils especially associated with viticulture. As this dust collects in troughs on the pockmarked landscape, it typically supports a Quercus calliprinos-Pistacia palaestina (oak-terebinth) maquis. Depending on other factors such as human land use and orientation of slope, however, the vegetation and thus the soils themselves will vary considerably on a local scale.


150 Singer, The Soils of Israel, 102-4.

with differences in rainfall running from north to south and from west to east, these factors result in a dazzling array of micro-climates and ecological niches, all interwoven into a relatively thin strip of arable country.\textsuperscript{152}

Human interaction with this unique landscape extends back many thousands of years, and the imprint of that interaction is felt in the shape and dynamics of the plants and animals themselves, much as an elk’s body type registers the pressure exerted by millennia of hungry wolves. In fact, biodiversity in Israel peaks when light levels of disturbance are applied to the maquis,\textsuperscript{153} which mottles the canopy and allows light to penetrate to the otherwise empty forest floor. At the same time, the oaks have responded to the long history of human disturbance by enhancing their ability to regenerate after fire, grazing, and cutting, especially relative to other Mediterranean-type forests (i.e. chaparral) such as are found in California.\textsuperscript{154} The point is, Israel’s plant and animal ecological variability is mentioned widely and well understood. See Hopkins, \textit{The Highlands of Canaan}, 55-133.

\textsuperscript{152} The variability of Israel’s ecology is mentioned widely and well understood. See Hopkins, \textit{The Highlands of Canaan}, 55-133.


communities had been co-evolving with humans for many thousands of years before the
Israelite period, and thus it is within this rich dynamic of symbiosis and local diversity
that they and their children were compelled to make a living.

The archaeological evidence for local adaptation to such ecological variability is
widespread within the land. At the broadest possible level, palynological (i.e. pollen
analysis) and other proxy data demonstrate that human agricultural choices (e.g. olive
cultivation versus pastoralism) were coordinated to climatic shifts. Within one of these
cyclical oscillations, the nascent Israelite community took shape. D. Hopkins’ important
study, The Highlands of Canaan (1985), argues that the agro-ecological challenges facing
such people consisted primarily of the need to conserve and control water, the need to
maintain soil fertility, and the need to spread risk and optimize labor. The degree to
which these factors “determined” the rise of the Israelite state is a matter of debate, but
the fact that the material remains reflect the basic outline drawn up by Hopkins is not.
Agro-ecologically speaking, water and soil fertility are the two most important limitations

155 Elizabeth Bloch-Smith and Beth Alpert Nakhai, “A Landscape Comes to Life: The Iron I
Period,” NEA 62.2 (Jun 1999), 70-76.
156 Arie S. Issar and Mattanyah Zohar, Climate Change: Environment and History of the Near
East, 2nd ed. (Berlin; Heidelberg; New York: Springer, 2007); S. A. G. Leroy, “Pollen Analysis of Core
DS7-1SC (Dead Sea) Showing Intertwined Effects of Climatic Change and Human Activities in the Late
Holocene,” Journal of Archaeological Science 37 (2010): 306-16; Frank Harald Neumann et al.,
“Palynology, Sedimentology and Palaeoecology of the Late Holocene Dead Sea,” Quaternary Science
Reviews 26 (2007), 1476-98.
158 See William Dever, “From Tribe to Nation: State Formation Processes in Ancient Israel,” in
Nuove Fondazioni nel Vicino Oriente Antico, ed. Stefania Mazzoni (Pisa: Giardini, 1994), 213-30;
66.4 (2003), 147-161; Israel Finkelstein, “The Emergence of the Monarchy in Israel and the Environmental
and Socio-Economic Aspects,” JSOT 44 (1989), 43-74; Frank S. Frick, The Formation of the State in
Ancient Israel, SWBA 4 (Sheffield: Almond, 1985); David Hopkins, “Bare Bones: Putting Flesh on the
Economics of Ancient Israel,” in The Origin of the Ancient Israelite States, ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip R.
Davies, JSOTS 228 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 121-39.
that a xeric climate on nutrient-poor, calcareous soils present. The Israelite communities in Iron I, IIA, and IIB (1200–700 BCE) dealt with those limitations through a socially-conditioned combination of settlement planning and mixed agricultural methods. Villages and farms appeared at this time on rocky ridgelines near natural springs, preserving the best agricultural land in the valleys below.\textsuperscript{159} The classic pillared house that associates with the new settlement pattern met the needs of humans and animals alike.\textsuperscript{160} Its multifunctionality helped to mitigate drought and famine; livestock and orchards served as an insurance policy against the very real possibility that the grain crop might not come to fruition.\textsuperscript{161} Communities likely grazed their livestock on lands beyond what farmers could easily cultivate, incorporating organic material from these outermost pastoral zones into the local garden and field system through manure.\textsuperscript{162} Pastoral areas also provided a variety of other resources, such as wild game, wood, and medicinal plants, all of which


\textsuperscript{160} Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 28-31; William Dever, The Lives of Ordinary People: What the Bible and Archaeology Tell Us About Everyday Life in Ancient Israel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 142-69; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, Life in Biblical Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 34-35; Meyers, Rediscovering Eve, 104-9. Over against a purely functional hypothesis, A. Faust argues that the uniformity of the four-room house in Iron Age Israel is an indicator of ethnic identity. A. Maeir, however, has critiqued the degree to which Faust is able to make this conclusion on the basis of architecture and a relatively maximalist view of biblical texts. Whether or not Faust is correct, however, is somewhat beside the point of the argument presented here. Even if four rooms in a particular arrangement might have coordinated with “ethnic” cohesion, that idea is not mutually exclusive to the functionality of the form. See Faust, The Archaeology of Israelite Society, 213-29; Aren M. Maeir, “Avraham Faust: The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II,” RBL (Sep 2013): 1-24, http://bookreviews.org/pdf/8631_9464.pdf.

\textsuperscript{161} Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel, 101-33; Borowski, Every Living Thing, 231-36; Dever, The Lives of Ordinary People, 169-73; MacDonald, What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?, 50-60; Meyers, Rediscovering Eve, 55-57.

\textsuperscript{162} Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel, 145-48; Hopkins, The Highlands of Canaan, 202-8.
depended on communities’ intimate knowledge of wider agro-ecological relationships. It is important to realize that in this world, “wilderness” (biblical מִדְבָּר) would not have connoted ideas such as “pristine” or “unspoiled,” but rather limited use and relative inaccessibility; no crisp division between a sphere of human habitation and a sphere of non-habitation would have obtained in the minds of such people. In general, O. Borowski’s work on agriculture in Iron Age Israel, combined with N. MacDonald’s work on food, paints a portrait of daily life that revolved around a combination of gardens, fields, and pastures, with crops and tasks coordinated to seasonal cycles so that adequate nutrition could be procured through the year. Farmer-pastoralists seem to have practiced a subsistence ethic as described by Scott above, a feature of society especially evident in livestock kill-off patterns. MacDonald states, “In ancient societies the herd was a long-term investment not only for the herder but also for his entire family. Consequently short-term gains were sacrificed for the long-term maintenance of the herd.” Or as R. Boer puts it, “human survival was more important than maximal

163 King and Stager, Life in Biblical Israel, 80-82; MacDonald, What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?, 25-40; Meyers, Rediscovering Eve, 56.
164 D. Hillel is correct to note that desert areas would have been regarded as hostile to agricultural use and human civilization, even as they were used in limited ways. However, he overstates the case for a perceived ontological distinction between the “desert” versus the “sown,” as if the two were polar opposites. Tellingly, his description of this perceived distinction relies on language that belies a thoroughly colonial-industrial paradigm rather than an ancient subsistence paradigm. The desert according to Hillel represented “defiance of civilized man’s self-proclaimed mastery of the earth” and was a “barrier to human expansion, to progress, to economic development; a fortress holding out against colonization and civilization.” Daniel J. Hillel, Out of the Earth: Civilization and the Life of the Soil, (New York: Free, 1991), 108. On the relationship between pastoral and sedentary agricultural strategies, see also Roland Boer, The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 75-78; Oystein S. LaBianca, “Pastoral Nomadism,” OEANE 4:253-56; Sasson, Animal Husbandry in Ancient Israel, 60-61.
165 Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel; MacDonald, What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?.
166 Borowski, Every Living Thing, 231-36; Sasson, Animal Husbandry in Ancient Israel, 6-61.
167 MacDonald, What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?, 63.
Where local ecological constraints necessitated alterations to the basic paradigm, farmer-pastoralists responded by adapting their practices toward the most viable solutions that continued to meet their nutritional needs. In short, these were people whose feet were on the ground, whose hands were in the soil, and whose eyes watched the clouds.

To the second point, that Israelite communities combined their mixed agricultural practices with notions of religious and social responsibility, Hopkins’ work again provides a suitable starting point. The agricultural solutions employed in Iron Age Israel depended as much on organization (risk spreading and labor optimization) as they did on attention and sensitivity to local ecological realities. The family functioned as the basic economic unit and was socially recognized according to its relationship with, presence on, and use of the land (i.e. tenure). Gender was a task-related designation as is true in

168 Boer, The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel, 64.
traditional societies today. Additionally, C. Meyers’ work on Iron Age women notes the prevalence of food-processing installations in rural settlements that were shared by multiple households. In other words, households organized themselves through extended familial bonds to form small communities where agricultural labor could be optimized among persons according to age and average body-type so as to distribute and minimize risk.

Archaeologists and historians have also demonstrated that everyday life in Iron Age Israelite society was deeply intertwined with domestic religious activities and rituals, the responsibility especially of women. These included, according to R. Albertz and R. Schmitt, “votive and magic practices with figurines, libations, food offerings, and the burning of aromatic compounds.” It is important to note that these responsibilities were just that—responsibilities—less a system of abstract beliefs than a pattern of proper behaviors bound up with the success and wellbeing of the household, often involving food processing and distribution. Thus recurring feasts and basic foodways reflected both the seasonal, agro-ecological realities of the land and the religious dimension of everyday

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Cultural Studies, eds. Rainer Albertz et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 226-27; Wright, God’s People in God’s Land, 71-103.
174 Albertz and Schmitt, Family and Household Religion, 479.
life. Feasting also provided an opportunity to maintain and reinforce cooperative bonds through shared stories and corporate memories. As Meyers puts it, “The realm of the sacred is thus intertwined with features of everyday household life.” Albertz has added to this portrait of Iron Age religion a heuristic model he terms “internal religious pluralism.” This model imagines concentric spheres of religious activity extending out from the domestic cult toward the wider community (inner, middle, and outer), tying religious practices to social structures. Its importance lies in its ability to explain ways in which domestic religion was threaded into the village and regional spheres, where the official cult worked as an instantiation of activities already taking place at other levels of society. In sum, archaeological remains and anthropological comparisons combine to reveal an ancient society that took for granted a thorough interweaving of everyday subsistence patterns with religious and social responsibilities. As contemporary agrarians perceive an integrated universe shot through with moral order, so too did the Israelite peasant.

1.3.2 Objections and Counterarguments

Against the foregoing argument, three main objections may be posited. These concern: 1) demographic and social changes during Iron IIC and the Babylonian

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destruction, 2) environmental degradation at the hands of peasants, and 3) scribal authorship of the Bible.

First, the large-scale political changes that occurred in Israel are well known. Israel transitioned from a locally governed kingdom into an Assyrian client-state and eventually into a Persian province. On this basis it could be argued that such dramatic upheaval and political reorganization irretrievably altered the conditions of normal life, to the point that the description of the Israelite peasantry presented above was largely consigned to the dustbin of history. Any correspondence between contemporary agrarianism and Iron Age Israel—however strong—would therefore be irrelevant to the composition of the Bible (specifically Isaiah), which took place largely over the course of Iron IIC, the Babylonian period, and throughout Persian Yehud.

Certainly major demographic and social changes did occur. These especially entailed the destruction of many rural sites due to Assyrian invasion in the late eighth century and reconstitution of settlements near Jerusalem in the seventh (Iron IIC). Dwellings in the Repha’im and Soreq Valleys notably adhere to a different pattern than the hilltop villages described above, perhaps reflecting agricultural specialization that may have resulted from Assyrian taxation mediated through the Israelite crown. If so, an extractive economic regime such as the Assyrians imposed on Judah probably stressed

the subsistence-oriented mores of the agrarian base.\footnote{Boer, The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel, 149-56; Walter J. Houston, “Was There a Social Crisis in the Eighth Century?,” in In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar, ed. John Day (JSOTSup 406; London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 130-49.} When the Babylonians struck, food production in these two valleys was probably further upset, at least temporarily so, through the removal of the Judean aristocracy along with its claims to land ownership and taxation rights. Unfortunately, ongoing scholarly debate on exile—the so-called “myth of the empty land”—has mainly focused on the plausibility and nature of textual production in the aftermath of the Jerusalem’s destruction; attempts to defend or reimagine prior views of a “total” exile are often related to this end.\footnote{See Eric Meyers, “The Babylonian Exile Revisited: Demographics and the Emergence of the Canon of Scripture,” in Judaism in Crisis: Crisis as a Catalyst in Jewish Cultural History, eds. Armin Lange, K. F. Diethard Römhled, and Matthias Weigold, Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 9 (Göttingen; Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 61-73; Eric Meyers, “Exile and Restoration in Light of Recent Archaeology and Demographic Studies,” in Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd, eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Lester L. Grabbe, with Deirdre Fulton, LSTS 73 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 166-73; Eric M. Meyers, with the assistance of Sea Burt, “Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Beginnings of Hellenism,” in Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple, 3rd ed., ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011), 209-35; Jill A. Middlemas, The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the “Exile” (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox, 2007).} H. Barstad, for example, argues that, “it would have been nonsensical of Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Judah,” and that “the total annihilation of a conquered territory would in fact be an act against his own interest.”\footnote{Hans M. Barstad, The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the “Exilic” Period, SO 28 (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), 67-68.} Barstad’s polemic is a bit overstated. O. Lipschits more precisely observes that the Babylonians would have had “no reason to create a settlement vacuum, which would only have undermined stability in the region.”\footnote{Oded Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” in Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period, eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 24.} This assessment better allows for the destruction to which the archaeological record attests, as well as the ongoing presence of “vinedressers and tillers of the land” (Jer 52:16). As the debate stands, archaeologists
who examine Judah’s post-invasion population discuss numbers that range between 10% and 30% of the prior total,\(^{185}\) which implies that at least 70% of the population died, fled, or was deported. Thus, irrespective of postexilic textual production in Benjamin, it is simply untenable to suppose that the impact of the Babylonian conquest was comparable to a slap on the wrist. The life of the average Judean villager, in some important respects, must have been altered through the effects of Assyrian taxation and subsequent Babylonian conquest.

Nonetheless, the question of Israelite *epistemology* at this time is different than that of Israelite political collapse and recovery. Even if one is inclined to take a maximalist position on destruction alongside A. Faust, Faust’s conclusions put Israelite life in the sixth century BCE back at the level of “simple agriculture,”\(^ {186}\) a view basically consistent with his interlocutors on the other side of the continuity/discontinuity debate. J. Berquist sees the Israelite populace continuing its work as “laborers in the fields outside Jerusalem,”\(^ {187}\) while J. Betlyon proposes that agriculture in the “outlying areas…probably continued as it had for centuries, largely unimpaired.”\(^ {188}\) This state of things appears to be true also for Benjamin, which seems not to have suffered the same trauma as Jerusalem and its environs.\(^ {189}\) The Babylonian destruction did not cause immediate changes in

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Judah’s material culture,\textsuperscript{190} and the population gradually reestablished its highland way of life in relative isolation from the more cosmopolitan coast.\textsuperscript{191} C. Carter’s study finds settlement patterns in Persian Yehud to have been thoroughly integrated into local, ecological micro-niches,\textsuperscript{192} reminiscent of Israel’s first waves of settlement six hundred years prior. Seen in this light, Babylonian destruction seems to have promoted subsistence patterns rather than fostered their dissolution. Nothing suggests a radical break with traditional agrarian culture such as that which typifies the industrial West today.

Second, because the arguments above attempt to draw a line between contemporary agrarian thought (notably focused on land and community health) and the peasant culture at large in ancient Israel, the question arises as to whether land “health” is really an apt description of ancient agricultural practices. Specifically, historians have claimed that these same peasants were responsible for widespread deforestation and environmental degradation.\textsuperscript{193} In this model, the ravages of warfare may be acknowledged, but the real culprit is thought to be population density and a chronic pattern of plowing, cutting, and overgrazing.\textsuperscript{194} If this is true, the correspondence could

\textsuperscript{190} Carter, \textit{The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study}, JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 116.
\textsuperscript{192} Carter, \textit{The Emergence of Yehud}, 172-213.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
be perceived to die in anachronism—the agrarian ideals recruited by Davis are nothing more than a romantic pipedream mapped onto a gritty, ancient reality.\(^1\)

It is important to take seriously the fact that times of higher population density in Israel’s central hill country undoubtedly increased pressure on natural resources, and that Iron IIA/B did indeed see such an uptick in population.\(^2\) Written sources suggest that the Early Bronze Age Levant was forested to a greater extent than it is today, and sedentary populations probably have had a more significant impact on tree cover over the millennia than have pastoralists.\(^3\) Additionally, it cannot be denied that human overuse of Mediterranean lands drives vegetation profiles toward the phryganic end of the spectrum (a slow process of desertification).\(^4\)

That said, several points can be marshaled in response to this critique. At a theoretical level, “degradation” implies a “subject who suffers detrimental consequences from it.”\(^5\) A concept of degradation that fails to identify an Israelite perspective on the matter, in other words, belies a Romantic concept of pristine wilderness to which nature

\(^{1}\) Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield; Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2012), 15.


reverts in the absence of human activity. As stated above, this view contradicts ecological realities and also presupposes a colonial-industrial paradigm. Moreover, the argument for agrarian correspondence does not depend on the special virtue or goodness of individuals, but rather on the integration of responsibility and right use within a culture’s basic worldview. Just because some ecological changes undoubtedly did occur as a result of population growth does not mean that the description of Israelite epistemology presented above is faulty.

Most importantly, however, the characterization of Israelite farmers as unrestrained lumberjacks suffers from a lack of any positive evidence to support this claim, as well as the problem of negative evidence suggesting that the agro-ecological impact of foreign invasion and subsequent taxation should not be casually set aside. The Assyrians and Babylonians almost certainly took a serious toll on the rural landscape through pillaging of foodstuffs and the destruction of trees and harvests—time-tested battle tactics.²⁰⁰ At the same time, what few concrete data do exist on this subject imply

that Iron Age agriculture in the Levant maintained soil stability in stark contrast to
dramatic “pulses” of erosion correlated directly to siege and city destruction. In the
aftermath of such invasions, imperial powers levied taxes on local populations so as to
extract maximum wealth from the vanquished populace and funnel it home to the
imperial nucleus—a scheme later perfected by the Persians. Insofar as settlement
planning shifted in the Jerusalem environs during Iron IIC (700-586 BCE) to reflect a
more specialized mode of production, these changes appear to have been state-sponsored
so as to meet the expectations of the external imperial powers. Yet even in the midst of
this economic pressure, smallholders maintained their sensitivity to local topography.
Khirbet er-Ras, for example, a hamlet in the Repha’im Valley, is situated on a rocky spur
just above the valley floor, preserving the arable soils below for agriculture much as

References

Hellenistic World (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 121-29; Paul Erdkamp, Hunger and the Sword:
Warfare and Food Supply in Roman Republican Wars (264–30 B.C.), Dutch Monographs on Ancient
History and Archaeology 20 (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998), 11-26, 122-55; John Keegan, A History of
(264 B.C.–A.D. 235), Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 23 (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 1999),
Greece,” Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 42.3 (2001): 225-53.

201 Oren Ackerman et al., “Palaeoenvironment and Anthropogenic Activity in the Southeastern
Mediterranean Since the Mid-Holocene: The Case of Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel,” Quaternary International
328-329 (2014): 240. See also Oren Ackermann et al., “Landscape Archaeology in a Dry-Stream Valley
Near Tell es-Safi/Gath (Israel): Agricultural Terraces and the Origin of Fill Deposits,” Environmental
Archaeology 10.2 (Oct 2005): 199-215; Oren Ackerman, Hendrik J. Bruins, and Aren M. Maeir, “A Unique
Human-Made Trench at Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel: Anthropogenic Impact and Landscape Response,”

Berquist, Judaism in Persia’s Shadow, 51-61; Andrew R. Meadows, “The Administration of the
Achaemenid Empire,” in Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia, eds. John Curtis and Nigel Tallis

203 Dearman, Property Rights in the Eighth Century Prophets, 128-31; Edelstein and Gibson,
“Ancient Jerusalem’s Rural Food Basket,” 46-54; Gadot, “In the Valley of the King,” 3-26; Greenberg and
Cinamon, “Stamped and Incised Jar Handles,” 229-43; Hopkins, “Bare Bones,” 134-39; Welch, “God, Oil,
and Politics,” 55-77.
earlier Israelites settlers placed their villages on rocky ridge-tops. Indeed, hard data that suggest Iron Age smallholders willfully or wantonly orchestrated the destruction of their own agro-ecological life-support system simply does not exist. If and when those smallholders bore witness to agro-ecological misuse, that misuse probably reflected pressures exerted by external economies of extraction rather than fundamental changes in worldview.

Finally, the question of a general correspondence between contemporary agrarian thought and the Bible’s authorial context raises the question of socioeconomic class. If the “elite” scribes who wrote and redacted the canon existed in a kind of cultural bubble, sealed off against the wider world as is sometimes imagined, it could be argued that the epistemological comparisons proposed above are ultimately irrelevant. Perhaps peasant agriculture had nothing to do with the kind of scribal education to which only society’s upper crust had access.

In responding to this critique, it is important to acknowledge the central truth that scribalism in the ancient world was a phenomenon restricted to a minority population; the case for an agrarian Bible will not be served through attempts to place biblical composition directly into the hands of the agrarian base. Even W. Schniedewind’s efforts to locate writing among the middle classes in Iron IIC is probably a stretch. Moreover, restriction of writing to a certain socioeconomic minority is advisable, whether one

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204 Edelstein and Gibson, “Ancient Jerusalem's Rural Food Basket,” 46-51; Gadot, “In the Valley of the King,” 8-13; “Kh. Er-Ras,” Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, http://archaeology.tau.ac.il/?page_id=2384.
argues for the presence of scribal education in preexilic Judah or only in postexilic Persian Yehud and beyond. The question turns on how and to what degree scribes were cognitively isolated from society at large. For example, P. Davies argues that, “Scribes were in large measure insulated from the majority of the population: physically (they lived in cities), economically (they were supported by the taxpayer), and culturally.” All three of these claims warrant a closer look.

Davies is correct that ancient scribalism concentrated in urban centers. But how ancient “cities” (which were small towns, by any modern standard) functioned within the wider landscape needs to be treated with greater dexterity than his statement suggests. A. Faust is notable among archaeologists for suggesting that differences in rural versus urban Iron Age architecture represent major differences in social structure between these two sectors of the population. But as A. Maeir observes, Faust tends to combine his legitimate observations regarding architecture (his area of expertise) with the uncritical use of biblical texts and outdated sociological models. In contrast to Faust, Maeir suggests that ancient dwellings are better positioned on what has been called an “urban-

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209 Ibid., 74.
210 Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Heart, 131.
211 Faust, The Archaeology of Israelite Society, 39-177.
rural continuum,” a description that better accounts for the myriad ways in which city life was integrated economically and nutritionally into the surrounding landscape. In the end, however, their dispute may be nothing more than a matter of the emphasis falling on a different syllable; Faust himself makes no attempt to forge a total division between the two spheres. As L. Grabbe observes, the notion of a truly isolated urban sector is tied to M. Weber’s model of a “consumer city,” where urbanites simply consumed the wealth of the countryside without offering anything in return. Against this model, Grabbe argues that “the wealth of the elite was not based on commerce and capitalistic enterprises but came primarily from the land. The concept of an urban elite…comes from the model of the medieval city, whereas the elite in antiquity was undifferentiated.” In sum, the notion that scribes’ socioeconomic advantages corresponded to their physical isolation behind city walls finds little traction in the best archaeological reconstructions and sociological models available at this time.

Urban integration with agricultural life in Israel is most evident when diet and economy are taken into account. Davies implies that scribes’ reliance on taxation segregated them from greater society, but this description does not adequately account for the overwhelmingly organic reality of daily life in an ancient city. Wealth entered the cities directly from the land, usually in kind. Livestock shared living space with and were

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subsequently consumed by humans. The scribes’ own texts (i.e. the eventual Bible), which they assiduously copied and preserved, contains much discourse whose ostensive setting is an urban zone but which repeatedly refers to the needs of the country (e.g. Isaiah, Micah), or a rural setting but whose function might apply just as well in the city (e.g. various proverbs). Ancient scribes—however advantaged—were individuals who had never traveled faster than a horse, who had never flipped on the lights, who had never turned on the tap, and who had never thrown away a cellophane wrapper. On a daily basis they touched skin, fiber, leather, wood, earth, stone, paper, feathers, oil, seeds, and small quantities of metal. They witnessed firsthand the forms of life that sustained their occupation. Their advantages consisted mainly in a greater-than-average ability to procure whatever foodstuffs and luxury items the local community produced. The question of an agrarian worldview is not related to socioeconomic status.

These observations lead to the question of cultural isolation. Scribes, writes K. Van Der Toorn, were “recruited from the upper class” and underwent many years of training, locating them among the “clergy” of the day. If scribalism was indeed a clerical “family business,“ might the unique nature of this artisanal craft have promoted a subculture philosophically opposed to the agrarian society at large? The evidence suggests that such a scenario is highly improbable. First, scribal education in Israel was oriented toward the preservation and mastery of the cultural deposit of generations past, a “potentially realizable ‘present’ to which each generation seeks to

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217 Dever, The Lives of Ordinary People, 128-32
219 Toorn, Scribal Culture, 6.
221 Toorn, Scribal Culture, 39-40.
D. Carr describes this approach to learning as “education-enculturation,” with an emphasis on honoring “treasured tradition.” Insofar as their texts were rooted in the material culture to which these same scribes had fallen heir, the tradition-al ethos that governed their education would have strengthened rather than dissolved conceptual connections between the literature and the land. Nothing in the reconstructions put forth by Carr and Van Der Toorn suggests that the socioeconomically advantaged upper classes strove to break with the past in the name of “exploration” and “progress” as modernity has done. Second, the notion of scribal “clergy” points to an important aspect of their work. The office involved both public performance of written texts and various practical duties having to do with everyday aspects of life in the community, such as landholding, marriage, trade, and legal matters. E. Ben Zvi similarly describes Israel’s scribes as “brokers of divine knowledge.” The concept of “clergy” thus implies a mutual interest between broker and recipient, where the latter accepts the legitimacy of the former while the former cultivates his or her reception among the latter. Much as earlier prophets had relied on a shared view of reality between themselves and their audiences, so too scribes relied on shared assumptions with the community on which

222 Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Heart, 11.
223 Ibid., 12.
224 Ibid., 7.
225 Toorn, Scribal Culture, 12, 51, 99-100.
228 See Thomas Overholt, Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Robert R. Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).
their status depended. In sum, neither socioeconomic advantage nor the nature of scribal work suggests an epistemological insularity from Israel’s popular agrarian culture.

1.3.3 Conclusion

The preceding discussion defends the idea of a general correspondence between contemporary agrarian thinking and those forms of thought characteristic of the Bible’s authorial context. A variety of interdisciplinary evidence demonstrates that Iron Age Israel responded to the challenges of its local situation through a combination of mixed farming strategies, community organization, and corresponding social responsibilities. These life patterns strongly suggest that Israel’s farmer-pastoralists approached food production through a subsistence ethic that assumed the moral integrity of the universe, much as agrarians do today. Three objections that could be used to problematize this thesis include the reality of overarching social change, environmental degradation at the hands of rural folk, and cultural isolation among scribes. Archaeological evidence suggests, however, that the massive social and demographic upheaval Israel experienced through Assyrian clientship, Babylonian destruction, and Persian taxation did not destroy the Israelite peasantry’s agrarian way of life. Moreover, whatever ecological “degradation” may have taken place in Iron Age Israel is best understood as a function of superimposed economies of extraction, not the unrestrained activity of Israeliite lumberjacks. Finally, the scribes who wrote and redacted the Bible upheld traditional values and performed important labor that was in no way divorced from their society’s common forms of life. At a historical-cultural level, therefore, the analogy between the
mind-set of contemporary agrarians and that of the biblical authors does indeed obtain in fact.

If the Bible is premodern literature, biblical scholars bear a responsibility to develop strategies for its analysis and interpretation that are consistent with this definition. The present chapter argues that an agrarian hermeneutic makes an important contribution to this ongoing work. The discussion begins with a survey of contemporary agrarianism, focusing especially on three epistemological principles: the importance of the creaturely body, the primacy of local places, and the necessity of proper action. Consciously subverting Cartesian dualism, agrarian thinkers define knowledge as an integration of theory and praxis, and thus presuppose a materially and historically meaningful universe shot through with moral value. The discussion then argues that E. Davis’ *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* legitimately applies contemporary agrarianism to the study of the Bible. Davis’ mode of interpretation breaks with the modern philosophical tradition where other ecologically-oriented hermeneutical models do not, and so provides readers with an appropriate *theōria* by which to approach the Bible’s rhetorical and conceptual coherence without dismissing its literary complexity. Finally, an agrarian hermeneutic was shown to rest on a firm foundation of archaeological, historical, and anthropological evidence, suggesting that it does indeed provide a valid lens on the premodern Bible. Subsequent chapters in this study focus on the text itself (Isa 28–35), demonstrating the contribution that a historically- and phenomenologically-appropriate hermeneutic makes to the study of Isaiah.
2. Isaiah 28: A Matter of Food and Drink

The previous chapter described and defended the appropriateness of an agrarian hermeneutic for biblical analysis. This argument serves as a foundation for the present study, which advances the following claim: Through the language of agrarian wisdom, Isa 28–35 issues a call to obedience that transports the reader from reflections on historical destruction (Isa 1–27) into a holistic vision of ultimate hope (Isa 36–66). This chapter argues specifically that the Farmer’s Parable (Isa 28:23-29) provides an axial point of orientation by which to understand such a rhetorical shift. The discussion therefore begins by investigating the parable’s situation within Isa 28 as a whole. Scholars have contributed historical and literary theories on this topic; an agrarian-rhetorical analysis of Isa 28 supplements these by revealing that the text sets up a sharp contrast between a life of excessive consumption (28:1-22) versus one characterized by attention and responsibility (28:23-29). Next, an overview of Isa 1–27 demonstrates that the book depicts a sequence of theologically related events, which distill into two historical trajectories characterized by destruction and hope.¹ When Isa 28 is read in sequence with this material, its contrast of values may be understood to urge rejection of the former trajectory and acceptance of the latter, specifically through attention to land and food.

¹ This section (2.3) begins with an important discussion of Isaiah’s “epistemological layering” (see subsection 2.3.1 “Isaiah and the Transmission of Knowledge,” which provides a methodological rationale for subsequent analysis of the sequential text.)
2.1 Structure and Coherence of Isaiah 28

Where biblical scholarship has focused its energy on textual origins, the coherence of Isa 28 has not always stood up. Its generic diversity in particular presents an obvious challenge. The chapter begins with a standard woe-oracle: “Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of their glorious beauty, which is on the head of a fertile valley of those-hammered by wine!” (28:1). At the other end of the chapter, however, the prophetic voice issues an instructive appeal, not an attack: “Listen and hear my voice, pay-attention and hear my saying…” (28:23). The subsequent poem features rhetorical questions (28:24-25), typical of didactic discourse, and concludes with the following statement: “This too from Yhwh of Armies goes-out; he makes-wonderful the plan—he increases aptitude” (28:29). The perceived incongruity between these forms has led some scholars to conclude that Isa 28 reflects plural authorial circumstances, suggesting that its beginning and ending should be interpreted independently of one another.  

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2 All translations of biblical texts are the author’s own. An annotated translation of Isa 28–35 may be found in Appendix A.

Two points nonetheless suggest the plausibility of approaching Isa 28 as a whole. First, scholars frequently notice that Isa 28 begins a new block of material within the larger book. The woe-oracle against the “drunkards of Ephraim” (28:1) is the first in a series of six (28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1). This fact suggests a literary macro-structure that L. Laberge argues, “constitute[s] the backbone”[^4] of the book’s center. The series recalls the six woes that also comprise Isa 5:8-24, but unlike Isa 5, the woes of Isa 28–35 have been spread out over a larger body of text and also expanded to include content dealing with salvation and hope as well as judgment.[^5] Each woe may be understood to span whatever material appears up until the next woe, or in the case of the sixth (33:1), until the next macro-structural shift. The woe-oracle beginning in Isa 28:1, in other words, serves as a heading for all the material up until the second woe appears in 29:1. Thus the whole chapter may be read as a unit, even while admitting its generic diversity.

Second, scholars also notice that Isa 28 is something of a melting pot for other Isaianic texts; lexical and conceptual correspondences tie this chapter to dozens of other preceding passages. For example, 28:13 reads in part, “they will walk and stumble backward, and be fractured and ensnared and captured.” This locution is followed by the


[^5]: See Stansell, “Isaiah 28–33,” 70; Childs, Isaiah, 205.
image of “a stone of greywacke,⁶ a precious cornerstone” (28:16). Similarly, Isa 8 discusses a “rock of stumbling” (8:14) by which the two houses of Israel will “fall and be fractured and ensnared and captured” (8:15). Other obvious correspondences include the image of an “overwhelming scourge” (28:15, 18; cf. 8:7-8) and “certain annihilation” concerning “the entire earth” (28:22; cf. 10:23). The Farmer’s Parable also makes use of heavily freighted tropes such as the “rod” and “staff” (28:27; cf. 9:3; 10:5, 15, 24; 14:5) and the notion of Yhwh’s “wonderful plan” (28:29; cf. 9:5; 25:1). In other words, all parts of Isa 28 deploy material known from other Isaianic texts. This fact implies that while bits and pieces of Isa 28 may have been uttered in an “original” prophetic context, its written form probably reflects substantial scribal reworking. R. Kratz argues that Isa 28–31 may be understood as a form of rewriting or relecture, a “process of the productive reinterpretation of given texts to which explicit or implicit reference is made in supplementing or rewriting of these texts.”⁷ Combined with the observation of a literary macro-structure consisting of six woes, the overt “writtenness” of Isa 28 suggests that its generic diversity (and whatever historical circumstances that diversity reflects) presents no impediment to the reader’s engagement with the material as literary whole.

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⁶ See Appendix A for notes on this translation.
Most modern readers who have argued for the coherence of Isa 28 in its present form, however, have done so on historical rather than formal or literary grounds. Such interpreters frequently understand the text either to record or represent in hindsight a debate between the prophet and his eighth-century audience. This view is rooted in the assumption that the book of Isaiah, after depicting a historical progression from the Syro-Ephraimite crisis (Isa 7) to the Assyrian invasion (Isa 8–10) to the Babylonian destruction (Isa 13–27), then returns the reader to an eighth-century context starting in chapter 28.  

For example, J. Blenkinsopp argues that Isa 28–33 deals “with the events leading to Hezekiah’s rebellion and the rebellion itself, corresponding to the first four years of Sennacherib’s reign (705–701).” Similarly, J. Mauchline states that, “It seems clear beyond any reasonable doubt that [Isa 28–32] are concerned with events in Ephraim and in Judah during the final quarter of the eighth century BC.” Many others can be cited as holding a similar view, that Isa 28 must be screened through the events leading up to and immediately following Sennacherib’s attack.

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On this reading, the Farmer’s Parable tends to be seen as an effort to defend Yhwh’s variable actions in history over against the desire for theological predictability exhibited by Jerusalem’s aristocracy. Such a perspective traces out the text’s logic more or less as follows: The prophet first issues an indictment against the leaders of Ephraim (28:1-4). In 28:7, Ephraim’s example is then applied inferentially to Jerusalem, where the prophet criticizes his adversaries’ participation in a drunken orgy. In response, these individuals ridicule his incessant harping on Jerusalem’s doom (28:9). The prophet turns their intransigence against them, declaring that the word of Yhwh will henceforth become incomprehensible like their own drunken babble (28:13). The leaders of Jerusalem (28:14) are then indicted for having made a “Covenant with Death” (28:15), an evocative phrase understood as code for Hezekiah’s eighth-century alliance with Egypt. The prophet declares that the alliance is null and void (28:18), as Yhwh has planned destruction for Jerusalem instead. Such is Yhwh’s “strange deed” (28:21): a successful attack on his own people, which the city’s elite refuse to consider. So the events in question unfolded, but with a surprising twist. While the Assyrian invasion was indeed brutal, Israel’s enemy also retreated as a result of divine intervention (cf. 37:36-37), thus exposing the prophet to new criticism. Why could he not predict Yhwh’s miraculous salvation beforehand?

The Farmer’s Parable appears to provide his response. “Does the ploughman plough all day in order to sow?” the prophet asks (28:24). “Does he not put wheat in a row and barley in a strip and emmer in its patch?” (28:25). And, “Bread-kernels are crushed, but surely not forever are they threshed” (28:28). In other words, the prophet argues that Yhwh, like a farmer, performs tasks that are tailored to specific
circumstances. As those circumstances change, Yhwh’s actions too may change—certainly he does not go on “all day” in processing grain, but does so discriminately so as to effect the desired outcome. Thus the Farmer’s Parable seems to exonerate Yhwh’s messenger by justifying the fundamental flexibility and adaptability of divine action. As J. Burden puts it, “Isaiah’s basic intention in this parable is to defend his understanding of contemporary history as a prophet.”

Interpreters following some version of this outline tend to see the theological upshot of the Farmer’s Parable in terms of Yhwh’s “liberté” to act in history as he sees fit. Especially important is the poem’s enigmatic conclusion: “This too from Yhwh of Armies goes out; he makes wonderful the plan—he increases aptitude” (28:29).

According to Watts, the prophet “pleads for patience and understanding of the ways of God,” precisely because those ways are not “fixed and rigid.” Or according to H. Wildberger, the parable concludes that, “one cannot force God to fit into some schematic framework.” The Farmer’s Parable appears to relate the prophet’s prior predictions—now exposed as inaccurate—to a fundamentally unpredictable God. W. Beuken makes the point somewhat more forcefully: “YHWH’s policies concerning the nations and his

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15 Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 446, 443.

own people *transcend human expectation and assessment.* J. Jensen similarly argues that the parable ends with a statement upholding the “marvelous, incomprehensible nature” of Yhwh’s plan. In short, the historical-critical path to interpretation of Isa 28 tends to argue that the text coheres around the intrinsic *unpredictability* of Yhwh’s strange work.

These interpretations, however, suffer from several important difficulties. First, such proposals ultimately rely on reconstructions of late eighth-century events that are extrinsic to the text. While the “Covenant with Death” may indeed have been originally inspired by a political alliance with Egypt, the text offers no indication that it functions here in the same manner. It is methodologically misguided to posit interpretations of biblical texts that run against the self-presentation of its discourse, even if one’s interpretation correctly adduces the circumstances that gave rise to those texts in the first place. Second, it is not true that Isaiah schematizes Yhwh’s actions according to a one-dimensional period of judgment followed by “surprising” salvation, thus suggesting that the prophet’s prior message required a theological makeover. As Yhwh performs both judgment and salvation in the scope of the book, more often than not these concepts are rolled into one and the same event (e.g. 1:21-31; 4:2-6; 10:5-27). Other passages assert that Yhwh’s salvific work was, in fact, proclaimed from the very beginning (e.g. 44:6-8).

To suggest that Isa 28 defends Jerusalem’s salvation as fundamentally unpredictable clashes with the book’s larger perspective on the subject. Third and most importantly, the Farmer’s Parable makes its claims about Yhwh’s actions in history on analogy to

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17 Beuken, “Woe to Powers,” 31 (my emphasis).
agricultural work that is taken as normative for its implied readership. In other words, the agricultural analogy succeeds by presuming the reader’s firsthand knowledge of the activities involved: preparing the soil (28:24), sowing the crop (28:25), collecting the seed (28:27), and separating the chaff (28:28). If these tasks function as metaphors for Yhwh’s actions vis-à-vis Jerusalem, the reader’s knowledge so enlisted in the text works in precisely the opposite direction as does an argument for Yhwh’s inscrutability.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most important contribution that this strand of scholarship offers lies in its insistence that the Farmer’s Parable constitutes a response to real events. Key terms such as “rod” and “staff” align the farmer’s actions with Assyrian and Babylonian aggression:19 “Woe to Assyria, the staff of my anger; he is the rod—in their hands—of my indignation!” (10:5; cf. 10:15, 24). Similarly, with reference to the king of Babylon (14:4), Isaiah declares that, “Yhwh has fractured the rod of the wicked and the staff of governors” (14:5). The parable’s concern for history should not be discarded even while a more satisfactory explanation of the chapter’s rhetoric is pursued.

In response to the dominant, interpretive trend just described, some scholars have developed fresh perspectives on Isa 28 through literary rather than historical appraisals of its content. J. Exum, for example, argues that the coherence of Isa 28 is a feature of its instructional character and sapiential function.20 Noting the chapter’s lack of explicit historical cues, she advises the reader not to “pin down the metaphoric language” of 28:1-

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Key motifs such as drunkenness (28:1-4, 7-8) are deployed in moral terms: the drunkards “go-astray” (root תעה) and are “confused” (root בלע), and so “blunder” (root פוק) in making decisions (28:7). Exum understands the terms “teach” (root ירה) and “message” (root שמע; 28:9), with reference to the priests and prophets (28:7), to reflect “ironically upon the incompetence of these two groups.” Their unwillingness to hear (28:12) testifies against them, so that Yhwh’s instruction through the prophet threatens to become as meaningless to them as the senseless babble of their own drunken stupors (28:13). Thus Judah’s aristocracy models a grossly unfaithful response to the prophetic word as it flounders in its vomit (28:8) and disbelief (28:14, 22).

On this reading of Isa 28, the farmer’s example appears to provide the positive mirror image of the leaders’ immoral conduct. His character champions Yhwh’s wisdom in general but does not necessarily defend any specific, historical actions. K. Aitken, for example, summarizes the parable in the following way: “Strange and foreign though Yahweh’s work of judgment will be (v. 21), it is no less an expression of the marvelousness of his plan and the greatness of his wisdom than that reflected in the skills of the farmer—much as a perverse Israel might scoff (v. 22a).” W. Brueggemann likewise argues, “[I]t seems likely that this is a sapiential reflection on God’s own skillful, precise work,” but at the same time, it “makes no historical or theological

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21 Ibid., 116.
22 Ibid., 119.
23 Ibid., 121.
25 For a helpful review of the secondary literature in line with Exum, see Hom, The Characterization of the Assyrians in Isaiah, 111-19.
interpretive connection.”27 And as C. Seitz suggests, the Farmer’s Parable provides less an explanation of the past and more a possibility for the reader’s future: “Proper response is possible,” after all.28

There is much to commend this perspective. Literary interpreters highlight the extent to which Isa 28 sets up a contrast between the moral failure of the aristocracy versus the discretion of the humble farmer. Historians also notice this contrast, but tend to regard it as indicative of the prophet’s personality rather than as a meaningful feature of the written text. Literary interpreters also rightly notice the text’s lack of explicit historical cues as a relevant aspect of its composition rather than an authorial oversight. This observation frees the reader to understand Isa 28 as instruction by way of character portrayal rather than as a disputational transcript, and as a result, to appreciate that the text discloses information about Yhwh and his wise plan rather than arguing for his obscurity or unpredictability. Finally, literary interpreters tend to recognize the degree to which Isa 28 urges its reader to follow in the footsteps of the farmer over against the example of the priests and prophets, whose moral intransigence adumbrates their certain doom (28:22). Such an approach better captures a sense of the text’s parenetic call, the manner by which it seeks to elicit a faithful response.

Literary readings of Isa 28 are also not without their drawbacks, however. For example, Exum’s insistence on the text’s independence from historical events29 restricts her ability to describe its relationship to other Isaianic texts that clearly enjoin the reader

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28 Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 211. See also Exum, “‘Whom Will He Teach Knowledge?’,” 132.
29 Exum, “‘Whom Will He Teach Knowledge?’,” 131.
to reflect on the reigns of “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah” (1:1). The data already cited above suffices to make this point. Isa 28:13 states that Yhwh’s word will cause the priest and prophets to “walk and stumble backward, and be fractured and ensnared and captured.” This locution matches 8:15, closely associated with an impending Assyrian attack (8:1-10). That no explicit historical cues are put forward in Isa 28 should not obscure the fact that its content remains rooted in Israel’s history as remembered in the book. Similarly, while literary readers have rightly accented the parable’s function to disclose Yhwh’s great wisdom rather than to argue for his historical unpredictability, its careful word choice (“rod” and “staff,” 28:27) registers both Assyrian and Babylonian invasion (10:5, 15, 24; 14:5). In other words, the chapter contains lexical cues that place its content squarely in the pattern of events depicted in the book at large. The notion that the Farmer’s Parable discloses Yhwh’s wisdom does not finally require the reader to reach that conclusion over against equal appreciation for the poem’s figural citations of Yhwh’s historical acts to which the book’s first twenty-seven chapters bear witness.

From the preceding discussion, several points emerge that serve to orient the exegetical analysis below. Over against a tendency among some readers to treat 28:1-22 and 28:23-29 in isolation from each other, macro-structural details suggest that the whole chapter may be read as a single unit. That said, historical-critical readers have tended to understand the chapter as a recorded dispute between the historical prophet and his adversaries. While such an approach runs into difficulties, its emphasis on the text’s grounding in history should not be abandoned. Literary readers have also dealt with Isa 28 as a single unit, but on the basis of its didactic themes rather than its hypothetical *Sitz im Leben*. Three observations typical of this strand of scholarship warrant further
consideration: 1) the chapter’s reliance on contrasting characters to achieve literary coherence, 2) its disclosure of Yhwh’s wisdom, and 3) its parenetic function to elicit a faithful response. The following analysis of Isa 28 attempts to provide greater definition to the first of these three points, while subsequent examination of Isa 28 in its sequential context will expand on the latter two.

2.2 An Agrarian Perspective on Isaiah 28

Isa 28 may be understood as consisting of four subunits of differing lengths and styles: vv. 1-6, 7-13, 14-22, and 23-29. Literary analysis has tended to emphasize a contrast between the foolish drunkards depicted at the chapter’s outset and the wise farmer portrayed at chapter’s end. When understood from an agrarian perspective, this contrast may be defined more precisely as a way of life characterized by excessive consumption versus one characterized by diligent attention to the production of one’s food. In other words, the difference between the foolish drunkards and the wise farmer is not portrayed as a moral abstraction, but rather foolishness and wisdom inhere according to specific behaviors relating to land use. A proper assessment of the text’s rhetoric depends on recognition of these contrasting practices, related to but extending beyond the contrasting character types.

2.2.1 Isaiah 28:1-6

1 Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of their glorious beauty, which is on the head of a fertile valley of those-hammered by wine!
2 Behold, the Lord has a firm- and strong-one, like a hail storm, a disastrous tempest; like a storm of mighty overwhelming water he brings-to-rest upon the earth by hand.
3 By feet will it be trampled—
the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim.

4 And the fading flower of their glorious beauty,
which is on the head of a fertile valley,
will be like an early-fig before summer;
whichever see-er sees it—
while still in his palm—swallows it.

5 In that day, Yhwh of Armies will become
a beautiful crown
and a glorious diadem
for the remnant of his people,

6 and a spirit of justice
for the one-who-sits in justice,
and prevailing-power
for those-turning-back battle to the gate.30

The first line of 28:1 highlights pride (root נַפְּשָׁה), a well-known interest of the
book at large. The woe-oracle is directed at a band of drunkards via their “proud crown”
(גֵּאוּת עֲטֶרֶת) and the fading flower of their “glorious beauty” (תִפְאַרְתּוֹ יַצְבִּ), which sits on
the “head” (רֹאשׁ) of a fertile valley—language that suggests an upright, self-important
posture. Even the choice of גֵּיא (valley), which demonstrates parasonance with גֵּאוּת
(pride), assists the drumbeat of words that depict Ephraim’s drunkards not only as
inebriated, but as especially arrogant. Against this group Yhwh promises to bring a hail
storm, overwhelming water, and trampling feet (28:2-3), eventually replacing the

30 Scholars often understand 28:1-4 as deriving from a different source than 28:5-6 due to key
vocabulary such as “remnant,” “spirit of justice,” and “prevailing-power,” all of which are tied to oracles of
restoration such as 10:20-23 and 11:1-5. While this theory is plausible, the latter two verses have
nonetheless been written up so as to extend the thought of the former four, picking up roots such as יַצְבִּ (beauty), עֲטֶרֶת (crown), and נַפְּשָׁה (glory) from 28:1. Thus 28:1-6 self-presents as a single subunit, even if
these verses may reflect a complex compositional history.

31 The arrangement and repetition of roots in the book of Isaiah creates a web of lexical
connections that makes an important contribution to the written text’s rhetorical function. Throughout the
exegetical portions of this study (especially chapters two through five), parenthetical notation frequently
calls the reader’s attention to the Hebrew root in view, even where the larger importance of that root has
not yet been clarified. For example, in this case נַפְּשָׁה (pride/proud) appears in 28:1 and also in 2:12, a point
mentioned below. This approach will hopefully allow the reader to track more easily the lexical and
conceptual associations that the discussion seeks to examine. See Appendix A.
drunkards’ crown with a “diadem” (28:5) of his own and thus delivering justice and providing security for his remnant people (28:6).

The drunkards’ pride is associated with several concrete agro-ecological details: a fading flower, a fertile valley, and an early-fig (28:1, 4). Combined with the storm and trampling imagery (28:2-3), the text makes clear that pride produces an unsuccessful harvest. This same logic is also reflected in a variety of other Isaianic texts that demonstrate lexical correspondences with 28:1-6. For example, early in the book Yhwh is depicted as “having a day against everything proud (נָעָה) and high” (2:12) and reducing all such proud entities to the “dust” (עפר; 2:19). The text portrays the reduction of human “glory” (נצח; 3:18) through the language of bare scalps and baldness (3:17, 24) for the daughters of Zion (3:16), which the terms “crown” and “head” in 28:1 recall. These same daughters are finally cleansed of their “filth” ( ++) through a “spirit of justice” (4:4; cf. 28:6). Notably, in that day of cleansing, the text declares that the branch of Yhwh will be “beautiful” (לִצְבִי; 4:2; cf. 28:1) and that the “fruit of the land” will become the “pride and the glory” (וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת לְגָאוֹן; 4:2; cf. 28:1) of Yhwh’s “remnant” (הַנִּשְׁאָר; 4:2; cf. 28:5) people.32 The purification of human pride involves a lowering to the “dust,” while fruit-bearing replaces the people’s prior self-aggrandizement.

Related Isaianic material frequently makes the same point, that pride does not correspond to agro-ecological success. For example, 16:6 uses the key root נָעָה four times in rapid sequence: “We have heard of the pride of Moab, intense pride—his pride and his proudness and his umbrage—but this is only idle-talk” (16:6). As in 28:1-6, such pride

leads immediately to the destruction of vineyards (16:8-10; cf. 28:3). Phrasing such as “the masters (בַּעֲלֵי) of nations” who “hammer-down (הלם)” Moab’s soreq-grapes is matched in 28:1, which addresses those “hammered by wine” (28:1), individuals whose short-lived indulgence is compared to an early-fig that is “swallowed” (root בלע; 28:4). More subtle connections may be adduced as well. The failure of Moab’s “summer-ingathering” (קֵיצֵךְ; 16:9) relates to similar failures in 28:4 (קַיִץ) and 18:6 (וְקָץ).

The “fading (בֵל) flower” of 28:1 gestures toward a rich complex of polysemic and paronomastic roots including بلע (fade/fool), אבל (mourn), and אמל (languish). 16:8 states that the terraces and vines of Moab “languish,” while in 24:4, “the earth mourns and fades, the world languishes and fades,” phrasing that combines all three terms listed above. 24:7-9 connects those terms explicitly with vineyard destruction as previously depicted in 16:8-10: “The juice mourns, the vine languishes…beer (שֵׁכָר) has become bitter to its drinkers” (24:7, 9). Thus the “beauty” of the “flower,” which signals the drunkards’ pride in 28:1, “fades” according to a pattern of agro-ecological ruin already established in the larger text. Similarly in Isa 23, Tyre is characterized according to its renowned mercantilism, its “ships of Tarshish” (23:1), which appear as a paradigmatic symbol of pride in 2:16. Tyre is also a “crown-giver” in 23:8, the only use of the root שעֵר prior to 28:1. In response, Yhwh plans to “slay the proud (גְּאוֹן), to make-contemptible all beauty (צְבִי)” (23:9; cf. 28:1). Especially notable is the fact that Tyre’s economic

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33 Forms of the root שִׁכֹּרֵי are often translated “choice vine.” This study uses the term “soreq-grapes” to indicate what was possibly a specific variety (such as Chardonnay or Zinfandel) known in Israel at one time.

34 16:8 is the only occasion where the root בלע appears in Isa 1–27.

35 Root בלע, meaning “swallow” (28:4) or “confuse” (28:7), exhibits anagamic paronomasia with the root בלע, meaning “master” (16:8).

36 שִׁכֹּרֵי (drunkards; 28:1) shares the root שעֵר with שעֵר (beer).
grandeur is depicted at the outset of the passage according to its trade in agricultural products—the “seed” (זֶרַע) of Shihor and the “reaping” (ירָקְצִ) of the Nile are Tyre’s “produce” (תְּבוּאָתָהּ; 23:3). In Isaiah’s frame of reference, pride does not cohere with reliable food production.

Along with pride, drunkenness places the woe-oracle of 28:1 within a preexisting pattern of agro-ecological ruin. For example, 5:8-24 presents a series of six woes similar to the series that frames Isa 28–35. The second of these is directed at those who get up early to pursue beer and wine (5:11), while the sixth addresses those who are “champions” (root גּבר; cf. 28:6) at drinking wine and beer (5:22). Such drunkenness is strongly associated with harvest failure: “For a ten-feddan vineyard will make one bath, and a homer of seed will make an ephah” (5:10). Summarizing the preceding series, the text concludes:

5:24 Therefore as a tongue of fire eats straw, and stubble under a flame relaxes, their root will be like decay, and their blossom will go-up like particulate; for they rejected the Torah of Yhwh of Armies, and the saying of the Holy-One of Israel they spurned.

Inebriation results in incineration.

Drunkenness also plays an important role in the book’s indictment of Egyptian leadership in 19:1-15. This passage too presents an array of lexical correspondences linking it to Isa 28 and to agro-ecological catastrophe. The Egyptians are characterized especially in terms of their failure to “plan” (root יעץ) or to be “wise” (root חכם; 19:11). In 19:13, these same officials “lead-astray” (root תעה; cf. 28:7) the “cornerstone of her
tribes” (שְׁבָטֶיהָ; cf. 28:16, 27). They do so because Yhwh has “stirred” (מָסַךְ; cf. 5:22) into their midst a spirit of blindness, so that they “lead astray” the Egyptians “like the going astray of a drunkard in his vomit” (19:14; cf. 28:1, 4, 8). Immediately prior to this depiction, Egypt’s agro-ecological system collapses. Yhwh dries up the river (19:5), causing vegetation to rot away (19:6; cf. 5:24). Just as “the earth mourns and fades, the world languishes and fades” (24:4; cf. 16:8; 28:1), so too the Nile’s fishermen “mourn” and “languish” (19:8). Tellingly, the Egyptian officials are twice described as “buffoons” (root אול; 19:11, 13), a fourth root that participates in the paronomastic complex of terms earlier described (נבל, אבל, אמל). The destruction of Egypt’s agricultural base exposes the poor planning to which its officials’ intoxication further testifies (19:14).

Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7) further substantiates the fact that the agro-ecological ruin depicted in 28:1-6 expresses Yhwh’s characteristic response not only to pride and drunkenness, but to moral degeneracy in general. For example, 28:1 situates the proud drunkards at the head of a “fertile valley” (גֵּיא־שְׁמָנִים; 28:1), language that recalls the “fertile ridge” (קֶרֶן גֵּיא־שְׁמָנִים) appearing in 5:1. Here the Vineyard’s failure to produce good grapes results in its destruction due to Yhwh’s removal of its protective hedge (5:4-6). 5:7 reveals that a stark absence of justice and righteousness led to this outcome. 28:1-6 appears to access this conceptual background through careful word choice such as “trampled” (תֵּרָמַסְנָה; 28:3; cf. 5:5; 16:4), strengthening the connection between Ephraim’s “proud crown” (28:1, 4), Moab’s “intense pride” (16:6), and the destruction of its vineyards on paradigm with Yhwh’s actions in 5:1-7.

37 שְׁבָטֶיהָ (her tribes) shares the root with שֵׁבֶט (staff).
38 “Stirring” relates to the mixing of alcoholic drinks.
Specifically, Yhwh’s response involves a “firm- and strong-one” who is “like a hail storm, a disastrous tempest” and “like a storm of mighty overwhelming water” (28:2). Commentators typically detect here a thick allusion to Assyrian aggression, while a military threat is surely in view (cf. 8:7-8), such terminology relates as well to the book’s agro-ecological concerns. For example, Assyria’s surge against Judah is depicted in 7:18-25 as an army of insects (7:18) settling throughout the land. In this passage, Yhwh causes baldness (7:20) and ruins vineyards (7:23), which leads to unchecked “thorns and thistles” (7:23, 24, 25; cf. 5:6) and “trampling” (7:25; cf. 5:5; 28:3). Isaiah also frequently portrays destruction through images of violent weather (e.g. 5:28; 17:13) as indicated in 28:2 (שְׂעַר). Particularly in Isa 17, peoples and countries are destroyed before a “tornado” (אַשְׁפָּרָת; 17:13), and are themselves imagined as the crashing of “mighty waters” (כַּבִּירִים מַיִם; cf. 17:12), the only other use of this locution in Isaiah aside from 28:2. These “mighty waters” appear directly after a prime example of the failed harvest motif (17:4-11) described above. Finally, “like a storm” (כְּזֶרֶם; 28:2) presents an especially intriguing word choice in that the root appears only three times prior to Isa 28—once in 4:6 and twice in 25:4. The unique connection between these two, preceding passages is further strengthened by the repetition of “barren-heat” (חֹרֶב), appearing once in 4:6 and again twice in 25:5. Isa 25 fleshes out the picture of fruit-bearing and stability in Zion as presented in 4:2-6 through the image of a “feast of fatness” (שְׁמָנִים מִשְׁתֵּה; cf. 5:1; 28:1), wherein Yhwh “swallows Death” (25:8; cf. 28:4, 15, 18) forever. Over against

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the mighty waters and disastrous storm brewing on the proud drunkards’ immediate horizon, the text also reveals Yhwh’s plan for Zion’s agro-ecological salvation.

In sum, the “proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim” addressed in 28:1 does not describe human arrogance in the abstract. Judged on the basis of other Isaianic texts to which Isa 28 lexically corresponds, the drunken pride registered in 28:1 signals an integrated web of concerns where the problems of moral degeneracy and failed harvests cannot easily be teased apart. Over-consumption of agricultural products (in the form of beverages) raises the specter of agricultural ruin: a storm of mighty waters, trampling feet, a fading flower, and a premature fig gulped down at first sight. Ephraim’s vineyard is doomed.

**2.2.2 Isaiah 28:7-13**

7 But these also with wine stagger, and with beer go-astray; priest and prophet stagger with beer, they are confused from wine; they go-astray from beer, they stagger in seeing, they blunder in decision-making.

8 Indeed all the tables are full of vomit, no place without filth.

9 To whom is he teaching knowledge? And to whom does he make-comprehensible a message? To those-weaned from milk, separated from breasts?

10 “Yackity-yack, yackity-yack, yada-yada, yada-yada, a little there, a little there.”

11 Indeed with a stammering lip and with a backward tongue he will speak to this people,

12 to whom he said, “This is the resting-place—give-rest to the weary—
and this is the place-of-repose.”
But they were not willing to hear.

13 So the word of Yhwh for them will be:
“Yackity-yack, yackity-yack,
yada-yada, yada-yada,
a little there, a little there”—
so that they will walk and stumble backward,
and be fractured and ensnared and captured.

This subunit picks up the language of drunkenness from 28:1-4, declaring that “these also” (וְגַם־אֵלֶּה), stagger with wine and beer—that is, the “priest and prophet” together (28:7). Scholars often understand 28:7 to begin a new unit focused on the prophet’s historical contemporaries in Jerusalem, to which Ephraim’s example in 28:1-4 analogically applies. The text’s lack of specificity on this point, however, suggests that Ephraim’s example has been extended to two character types (priest and prophet), and only later in 28:14 are those types inferentially applied to those who govern Jerusalem. The text portrays these individuals as excessive drunks, intransigent in their skepticism of the prophetic word, and hence morally deluded in their failure to accept instruction. Like the drunkards of Ephraim, this character profile is deeply embedded within the book’s agro-ecological discourse.

28:7-8 expands on the drunkards’ character significantly, providing a rather grotesque depiction of elite partygoers losing control of their bodily functions. Historians frequently relate these details to a marzeah ritual, a type of upper-class drinking party known from a variety of ancient cultures. Among such scholars, a main

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41 For example, see Roberts, First Isaiah, 350.
concern has been to determine whether or not the text “refers” specifically to a marzeah; J. McLaughlin, for example, determines on the basis of several key criteria that 28:1-4 does not refer to a marzeah while 28:7-13 possibly does. The primary value of such research, however, lies less in scholars’ ability to pin the text to one historical referent as opposed to another, and more in their descriptions of the cultural background that probably inspired the literature as we now have it. Without a doubt, that both “priest and prophet” are depicted as filling their dinner tables with vomit and filth (28:8), “suggest[s] a ruling class that abuses its position.” F. Landy keenly observes that, “the orgy erases the differences between life and death, food and waste.” In other words, the decadence depicted in 28:7-8 is characterized by excessive consumption, which has the unforgettable effect of confusing (cf. root בּלע; 28:4, 7) food with feces and wine with vomit.

Such a critique makes clear that the priests’ and prophets’ behavior is not just gross, it is morally deluded. Again, intratextual data serve to illumine the point. The term “vomit” (קִיא; 28:8) appears elsewhere in Isaiah only in 19:14 (בְּקִיאוֹ), part of a larger passage (19:1-15) depicting agro-ecological ruin (19:5-10) as described above. Yhwh declares of the Egyptians that, “their plan I will confuse” (אֲבַלֵּעַוַּעֲצָתוֹ; 19:3; cf. 28:4, 7). These are individuals who seek “idols and necromancers, ancestral-ghosts and known-relatives” (19:3), a clear allusion to 8:19. 28:13 meanwhile repeats precise phrasing found

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44 McLaughlin, The Marzéah in the Prophetic Literature, 163-80.
in 8:15 (“be fractured, and ensnared and captured”), suggesting an inferential connection between 19:3 and 28:13. The Egyptians are criticized especially for thinking themselves wise when really they are foolish (19:11-15), and for “leading-astray” (תּעה) their people (3x, 19:13-14), a term denoting moral error. The text then associates תּעה with vomit and drunkenness (19:14). Similarly in 28:7-8, the elite leadership twice “goes-astray” with beer, twice “staggers” (root שׁגה) and also “blunders in decision-making” (פְּלִילִיָּה פָּקוּ; 28:7). Their orgiastic view of food and drink signals that, like the Egyptians, they are incapable of a proper appraisal of Yhwh’s plan.

The remainder of this subunit (28:9-13) has prompted much discussion pertaining to which parties (the prophet or his adversaries) should be assumed as speaking in 28:9-10, as well as the nature of the enigmatic babble found in 28:10 and 13. Scholars often understand the prophet to quote his adversaries beginning in 28:9. Thus, “To whom is he teaching knowledge?” refers to the prophet himself. Others find the quotation to start in 28:10, yielding a view of 28:9 where the rhetorical questions are the prophet’s own invention. On this reading, “he” most likely refers to Yhwh. Lacking any punctuation, however, the text is undetermined.

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47 Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, BDB 1073; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, HALOT 4:1766-67.
50 See Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 359; Sweeney, Isaiah 1–39, 363. Given its intrinsic ambiguity, the babble found in 28:10 may be understood as either the prophet’s quotation of his adversaries’ imitation of himself, or the prophet’s own imitation of his adversaries’ garbled speech. Many derivative theories have also been advanced as to the exact nature of the syllables לָקָו קַו לָקָו קַו לָצָו צַו לָצָו צַו. These include: drunken nonsense, a schoolmaster’s drill, literal translation of roots (command, line, hope, etc.), Assyrian speech,
quotation to begin in 28:10 and thus as an imitation of the drunkards’ senseless babble. In
the end, the priests’ and prophets’ speech is turned against them. Yhwh’s word promises
to become equally as opaque to their ears as their babble is to the prophet (28:13),
suggesting that they have forfeited their status as teachers and leaders of the people they
presume to represent.51

The relevant point to be gleaned from the observations above is this: the priests’
and prophets’ excessive consumption and grotesque evacuation of their bowels
constitutes a decisive rejection of Yhwh’s teaching. As it pertains to agro-ecology and
agrarian values, this rejection is portrayed as an outright repudiation of the land itself.
The text observes that the priests and prophets have been “unwilling” (אָבוּא וְלֹא) to hear
Yhwh’s message of rest and repose (28:12). In sharp contrast to such intransigence, the
book has already put forth a statement on willing obedience in Isa 1: “If you are willing
(תֹּאבוּ) and listen, the good of the land you will eat; but if you refuse and rebel, by a
sword you will be eaten” (1:19-20). These verses contain the only use of the root אָבוּא prior to 28:12. Much like the book of Deuteronomy, the choice they offer is simple and
straightforward: stable and productive land-inhabitation is available to those who
willingly obey Yhwh’s word. In fact, the opportunity to “eat the good of the land”
envisions the exact antithesis of the unholy “confusion” of beer and bile depicted in 28:7-

51 Numerous scholars note this irony. See Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 222; Exum, “‘Whom Will
He Teach Knowledge?’,” 121-22; Roy F. Melugin, “The Conventional and the Creative in Isaiah’s
13, as well as the failed harvests to which that mixture alludes. In Isa 28, the prospect of land-inhabitation is also signaled indirectly through the “resting-place” (הַמְּנוּחָה; 28:12; cf. 11:10) that the priests and prophets ignore.\(^\text{52}\) Similarly, 14:1 declares that “Yhwh will show-compassion to Jacob, and again choose Israel, and he will cause them to rest (וְהִנִּיחָם) upon their soil.” Thus 28:7-13 suggests that Israel’s leaders have made a grievous miscalculation with respect to what they ingest, and therefore with respect to their long-term survival in the land. Through excessive consumption they have rejected Yhwh’s teaching (cf. 5:24) and so have spurned the possibility of enduring rest. Their gluttony is their doom.

2.2.3 Isaiah 28:14-22

14 Therefore hear the word of Yhwh, scoffing men, who-govern this people which is in Jerusalem.
15 For you said, “We have cut a covenant with Death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge—when it passes—will not come to us, for we have put lies to be our shelter, and in falsehood we have been hidden.”
16 Therefore thus says the Lord Yhwh: “Behold, I am establishing in Zion a stone—a stone of greywacke, a precious cornerstone, a stable establishment; the one-who-trusts will not waver.
17 And I shall put justice as a measuring-line and righteousness as a measuring-tape; hail will sweep-away the shelter of lies, and the hiding-place water will overwhelm.
18 Then will be annulled your covenant with Death, and your pact with Sheol will not arise; the overwhelming scourge—when it passes—you shall be with-regard-to it a trampling-place.

As often as it passes, it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass, in the day and in the night, and it will be only panic to comprehend the message.”

For too short is the mattress for stretching-out, and the blanket too narrow for wrapping-up.

For like Mount Perazim Yhwh will arise, like the Basin of Gibeon he will shake; to do his deed—strange his deed!— and to work his work—foreign his work!

So now, do not show-yourselves-to-scoff, lest your fetters become-firm; for certain annihilation I have heard from the Lord Yhwh of Armies concerning the entire earth.

The third subunit of Isa 28 is internally coherent; it also shows unmistakable signs of having been crafted to extend the discourse of 28:1-13. Through a number of carefully deployed repetitions, the leaders of Jerusalem in 28:14 are indicted on analogy to the priests and prophets of 28:7 as well as the drunkards of Ephraim of 28:1. As it pertains to the contrast of values around which the whole chapter is finally structured, the passage’s main contribution lies in equating the earlier images of excessive consumption with a profound failure to trust Yhwh in the face of overwhelming threat.

The internal coherence of 28:14-22 is evident from its chiastic structure. For example, “scoffing men” (לָצוֹן אַנְשֵׁי) are addressed in 28:14; similarly in 28:22, this group is directed not to “show-yourselves-to-scoff” (תִּתְלוֹצָצוּ). They are depicted in 28:15 as having made a covenant with Death and a pact with Sheol; in 28:18 the prophet declares that the covenant with Death and the pact with Sheol will be annulled. In the same way,

the scoffers are described as having made “lies to be our shelter” so as to avoid the “overwhelming scourge” (28:15); thus the “shelter of lies” will be swept away (28:17) amid the very same “overwhelming scourge” (28:18).

At the center of these reversals stands a “precious cornerstone” that Yhwh lays in Zion (28:16). When interpreted in its literary context, this cornerstone functions as a proving stone—a kind of litmus test—by which some will fall and others will stand. Commentators have debated mainly the verse’s inclusion in the passage at a diachronic level and its “positive” or “negative” tenor. B. Childs, for example, understands the image to comprise an interpolated statement of hope, tucked neatly into the middle of an otherwise typical message of doom,54 while R. Melugin reads the cornerstone as a hopeful component of the original oracle.55 Alternatively, D. Petersen perceives the cornerstone to resonate rather than clash with the oracle’s foreboding tone, acting as a kind of scale by which Yhwh measures the city’s leaders and finds them wanting.56 It is important to understand, however, that a test in itself is neither good nor bad; rather, a test reveals what is good and what is bad. The key to the stone’s rhetorical function appears in the last colon of 28:16, a point also made by Exum:57 “The one-who-trusts (הַמַּאֲמִין) will not waver (יָחִישׁ).” In their larger literary context, these roots are heavily freighted. For example, “waver” expresses the root בחֵשׁ, which is polysemic with “hasten,” found together with “hurry” (root מהר) in both 5:19 and 8:1, 3. Significantly in 5:19, the root appears within the series of six woes and expresses skepticism among the

57 Exum, “‘Whom Will He Teach Knowledge?’,” 126.
prophet’s target audience: “Woe to…those who say, ‘Hurry-up! Let his deed hasten (יָחִישָׁה) in order that we might see. Let the plan (עַצַת) of the Holy-One of Israel draw close and come that we might know.’” As noted above, this disbelieving group is doomed to consumption by fire for having rejected Torah (5:24; cf. 28:7-13). Moreover, the use of חושׁ in the prophetic sign-child’s name (Hurry-spoil-hasten-plunder) in 8:1 and 3 strengthens the link between the cornerstone and the “rock of stumbling” of 8:14, a passage already observed to share several correspondences with Isa 28 (cf. 8:15; 28:13). The child’s name explicitly portends Assyrian aggression (8:3), suggesting an inferential connection between 28:16 and the prophet’s dealings with King Ahaz in 7:1-17. In this passage, Ahaz is warned that, “If you do not trust (תַאֲמִינוּ), then you will not be entrusted (תֵאָמֵנוּ; i.e. upheld, supported, or affirmed)” (7:9). The two key roots in 28:16 (אמן and חושׁ) are thus conspicuously related to the question of trust in the book at large, where trust serves as the measure by which the individual or group passes through catastrophe (or not) to participate in Yhwh’s purified, remnant community. This calculus appears to characterize the cornerstone’s function in 28:14-22 as well: “the one-who-trusts will not waver,” while the one who fails to trust (i.e. to scoff) will suffer “certain annihilation” (28:22).

If the problem of trust in 28:16 encapsulates the rhetorical focus to 28:14-22, it is important to see that the text develops that focus through an analogical extension of the excess and intransigence portrayed in 28:1-13, and not as a religious or political failure in isolation from these prior critiques. This connection is forged in a number of ways. First, much like 28:1 and 7, 28:14 addresses individuals of elite status, those who govern in Jerusalem. The chapter on the whole moves from the “proud crown” of Ephraim to
“priests and prophets” as types and then to the rulers of Judah specifically. In other words, while the text’s target seems to shift, at the same time that target’s social position does not, suggesting that the “woe” of 28:1 applies equally to all the groups in question. Further support for such analogical continuity is found in a number of lexical repetitions between the different subunits. For example, in 28:14 the scoffing men are told to “hear” (שִׁמְעוּ) the word of Yhwh, a word directly cited in 28:12 but which that group of leaders proved characteristically unwilling to “hear” (שְׁמוּעַ). The present addressees govern “this people” in Jerusalem (28:14), which picks up the appellation from 28:11 and elsewhere (cf. 6:9; 8:11). “Waver” (root שׁוּחַ; 28:16), as discussed above, suggests the staggering (root שׁכָה), going-astray (root שׁכָה), and blundering (root פּוּך) of the drunkards (28:7)—unrelated roots but all part of the same conceptual field. The prophet also declares that it will be panic to “comprehend the message” (שְׁמוּעָה יָבִין; 28:19), recalling a similar locution in 28:9 (בָרָד שְׁמוּעָה). Finally, mention of a “measuring-line” (קַו) echoes the senseless babble depicted in 28:10 and 13 (לָקָו קַו לָקָו קַו). In addition to this evidence, 28:14-22 also relates via lexical correspondence to 28:1-6. Repeated terms include “overwhelming” (root שַׁם; 28:15; cf. 28:2), “justice” (root שֵׁפֶט; 28:17; cf. 28:6), “hail” (ベַרָד; 28:17; cf. 28:2), “water” (מַיִם; 28:17; cf. 28:2), and “trampling” (root רַמְס; 28:18; cf. 28:3), all of which strengthen the text’s fluid transition between Ephraim’s drunkards, priestly and prophetic types, and finally the governors of Jerusalem themselves.

In sum, 28:1-22 analogizes between different groups of elite status so as to build a composite character profile of Israel’s corrupt leadership. These leaders are portrayed in the first place as proud drunks. Both traits relate to Torah disobedience (cf. 5:8-24), which, in the text’s holistic frame of reference, constitutes behavior incompatible with a
good harvest (28:2-4). Their excessive consumption has the effect of confusing food with excrement and vomit (28:7-8). The text’s notable similarities with 19:1-15 make clear that such an approach to eating and drinking equates to moral delusion, whereby the leaders become incapable of comprehending the prophetic message (28:9-13) and thus discerning Yhwh’s plan. Moreover, their decadence is portrayed as an outright rejection of Yhwh’s word and thus his gifts of good food and durable land-inhabitation (28:12; cf. 1:19-20). Such intransigence is further characterized as a “covenant with Death” (28:15, 18), suggesting that the leaders’ gluttony precludes the kind of trust by which Yhwh’s remnant community is finally measured (28:16). Excessive consumption is moral delusion, which leads to theological death. Judah’s vineyard is doomed.

2.2.4 Isaiah 28:23-29

23 Listen and hear my voice, 
pay-attention and hear my saying:
24 Does the ploughman plough all day in order to sow? 
He opens and harrows his soil;
25 does he not—when he has smoothed its face— 
distribute nigella and cumin broadcast? 
And does he not put wheat in a row 
and barley in a strip 
and emmer in its patch?
26 And he disciplines him with-regard-to judgment; 
his God teaches him.
27 For not with a sledge is threshed nigella, 
nor is a cart wheel over cumin circled; 
but with a rod is beaten nigella, 
and cumin with a staff.
28 Bread-kernels are crushed, 
but surely not forever are they threshed; 
and he jostles the rollers of his cart, 
but his steeds do not crush it.
29 This too from Yhwh of Armies goes-out; 
he makes-wonderful the plan— 
he increases aptitude.
Instead of a prophetic indictment, the discourse found in the chapter’s final subunit is at home in a more proverbial setting. Allowing for its generic difference from 28:1-22, the parable also shows clear signs of having been written up in light of (or placed adjacent to) this preceding material, as the discussion below will demonstrate. These facts suggest a contrast (i.e. similarity with meaningful difference) between the depiction of Israel’s leaders and the farmer’s character as portrayed in 28:23-29. From an agrarian point of view, this contrast may be understood more precisely in terms of subsistence practices, where excessive consumption is placed in contraposition to the farmer’s wise discretion and diligent work.

The Farmer’s Parable consists of two instructional strophes (28:23-26 and 28:27-29), both of which describe agricultural tasks. 28:24-25 depicts plowing and planting, whereas 28:27-28 portrays the processing of seed into an edible product. Exactly what the overall parable aims to teach has proved more difficult to pin down. One’s answer to this question depends largely on how one sees the poem vis-à-vis the expanded woe-oracle of 28:1-22. If the chapter’s parts are unrelated, then there is no compelling reason to explain its message with respect to the “proud crown” introduced in 28:1. But if the parts are related after all (diachronically and/or synchronically), that association would

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58 The parable’s didactic qualities are overt and indisputable. It concludes in a summary-appraisal statement (28:29), an insight of Childs’ on which other scholars have subsequently relied. Other features characteristic of biblical “wisdom” discourse include the initial imperative to “listen and hear” (וְשִׁמְעוּ הַאֲזִינוּ; 28:23), which is elsewhere related to instruction, specifically with respect to Torah (1:10). Prior to 28:23, these two roots are found together only in 1:2 and 10; the former (1:2-3) is also often read as a form of wisdom discourse. After this call to attention, a series of rhetorical questions in 28:24-25 urges assent; the implied reader is invited to agree that the typical farmer does indeed perform his work in the way that the parable describes. Furthermore, the text employs key instructional terminology in both 28:26 and 28:29: “discipline” (-root נָסָר), “judgment” (-root שְׁפָט), “teach” (root הָרָא), “plan” (root דָּרָא and “aptitude” (תּוּשִׁיָּה). The last of these terms appears outside Proverbs and Job only here and in Mic 6:9. See Aitken, “Hearing and Seeing,” 21; Childs, Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis, 128-31; Sweeney, Isaiah 1–39, 366; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 443; Whedbee, Isaiah and Wisdom, 53-55.
drive toward the opposite conclusion, where the poem’s instruction fits the text’s portrayal of Israel’s deluded leaders.

Perhaps the clearest connection between the chapter’s two main parts lies in the fact that both 28:1-4 and 28:23-29 portray agricultural activities, but of different types and with different results. The former text relies on language related to a failed fruit harvest (grapes and figs), whereas the latter employs images of grains and spices resulting in agro-ecological success. The farmer’s labor is also juxtaposed against Yhwh’s “strange” and “foreign” work as described in 28:21. By contrast, Yhwh instructs the farmer in a series of tasks that are familiar, even normative, for the implied reader. Moreover, if the farmer’s work in 28:23-29 is read as an image of the prophet’s ministry, directed by Yhwh himself (28:26), the chapter’s many correspondences with Isa 8 (e.g. “this people;” cf. 8:11; 28:11) suggest that the farmer’s character should also be read over against that of the priests and prophets (28:1-22). In addition to these conceptual contrasts (grapes vs. seed, failure vs. success, strange vs. familiar, and people vs. prophet), a variety of other syntactical and lexical correspondences also relate the Farmer’s Parable directly to 28:1-22. The rhetorical questions found in 28:24-25, while indicative of a parabolic form unlike the preceding indictment, nonetheless resonate with the two rhetorical questions posed in 28:9. The imperatives “listen and hear” (28:23) also recall the leaders’ refusal to do the same (28:12, 14).59 Lexical correspondences include “discipline” (rootısıר; 28:26; cf. 28:22, “fetters”), “judgment” (rootsָּפָּת; 28:26; cf. 28:6,

59 In fact, the verb “listen” (root אוזן) is relatively uncommon in Isaiah 1–27, appearing in 1:2, 10 (re: Torah), and 8:9. The only additional place that “listen” appears prior to 28:23 is 1:19, whose relation to 28:12 (root אוזן) is explained above.
On the basis of these data, it is safe to conclude that the Farmer’s Parable constitutes a rhetorical response to the material put forth in 28:1-22. The discussion may now turn to the nature of that response—in particular, the farmer’s character profile and the agrarian values that profile reflects. Two points stand out. The farmer 1) performs his tasks methodically and in the proper sequence, with tools suited to the precise nature of the work, and 2) limits the duration of his violent actions.

First, the parable begins by inviting its reader to consider a “ploughman” engaged in soil preparation and planting. He opens and harrows the soil (28:24), and only then, when he has “smoothed its face” (28:25), does he distribute the seed. The sequence of these activities is foregrounded. Moreover, allowing for the textual difficulties that 28:25 presents, the farmer appears to place three different seed types in three different locations: wheat in a row, barley in a strip, and emmer in its patch (28:25). Later, when the crop has come in and the harvest must be processed, particular tools are used to complete the task. Neither a sledge nor a cart wheel are used to thresh fine seed like nigella and cumin; their tiny grains must be loosened from the plant with a rod and staff. Childs observes: “The implied lesson is that the striking changes in the way in which the soil is handled—ripped open, broken up, leveled—is not at all inconsistent, but belongs to a larger agricultural plan…Each crop calls for special handling.”

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60 See Appendix A.

farmer’s methodical actions and proper treatment of each crop remain cued to a pattern of responsible behavior that is in turn calibrated to the whole of the growing season—from furrows to fruit, so to speak. Yhwh “disciplines him with-regard-to judgment; his God teaches him” (28:26). The farmer is a student, a disciple of the divine plan.

Second, the poem is careful to portray the farmer’s violent work as precise and discriminate, lasting only the required duration and no longer. That said, its harshness should not be underplayed. The terms “rod” (מַטֶּה) and “staff” (שֶׁבֶט; 28:27) are related to both Assyrian and Babylonian aggression (cf. 9:3; 10:5, 15, 24; 14:5). Additionally the poem employs language such as “wheel” (וְאוֹפַן; 28:27) and “roller” (גִּלְגַּל; 28:28) as objects engaged in threshing and crushing grain (28:8). Even if these tools do not destroy the produce entirely, it is not an arbitrary fact that prior to Isa 28, almost all images of circular objects or activities are related to violent action. Even the word “jostle” (וְהָמַם; root הָמַמ) may be translated “roar.” Finally, the “steeds” (root פּרָשׁ) of 28:28, a

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62 Brueggemann describes the poem as “irenic” in tone, “[carrying] no hint of threat,” while Mauchline argues that the crops are processed with “light instruments.” See Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 229; Mauchline, Isaiah 1–39, 201.
63 The root הָלֵה is linked to military invasion in 5:28 and 9:4, storm imagery in 17:4, and city destruction in 25:2. As described above, all four of these citations appear in texts that exhibit important lexical correspondences with Isa 28. The root הָלֵה, producing the noun “lasso” (נִקְפָּה) and the verb “go/hit-round,” is related to captivity, pride, and baldness in 3:24, Yhwh’s actions against Assyrian in 10:34, the destruction of Moab’s vineyards in 16:8, and agricultural failure in 17:6 and 24:13. Again, several of these citations appear in texts that have special bearing on Isa 28. Roots רוֹד (ring) and פּרָשׁ (ball) appear as part of a violent image in 22:18, where Yhwh, described as a “champion” (גָּבֶר; 22:17; cf. 5:22; 28:6), promises to hurl Shebna into another land (cf. Jer 22:26). The only exception to the conceptual motif of “round-thing = violence” appears in 23:16, where the forsaken prostitute Tyre is told to “circle” (root סַבַּב) the city while playing music. יָבֵן (wheel) does not appear in Isa 1–27.
64 The term suggests that the cart’s movement produces loud noise. הָמַמ participates in a polysemic and paronomastic complex of roots expressing noisy, chaotic action. For example, הָמֵס (“roar;” cf. 5:29-30) expresses the root מָמֵס and denotes the action of both lions and a turbulent sea. הָמֵס (“crowd/tumult;” cf. 17:12; 29:5, 7, 8; 31:4; 32:14; 33:13) expresses the root מָסָה. Both הָמֵס (“rumble;” cf. 16:11) and הָמֵס (“noise;” cf. 14:11) share the root מָסָה with forms of “crowd/tumult.” הָמֵס (“pandemonium;” cf. 22:5) expresses the root מָסָה.
term that is anachronistic to the parable’s agricultural content,\textsuperscript{65} is best explained as a figural indication of the “military” violence connoted by the farmer’s work. The point is not that the farmer’s actions are light, but indeed that they are heavy, and yet applied to the grain with precision so that the crop is not lost through over-processing. Just as the ploughman does not sow “all day” (28:24), neither does he thresh the grain “forever” (28:28).\textsuperscript{66} Yhwh’s instruction places an appropriate restriction on what exactly should be done to the crop and for how long.

Some scholars have discerned within this notion of limited duration a decidedly hopeful horizon to which the parable ultimately points.\textsuperscript{67} U. Berges, for example, argues that the poem portrays the farmer as able “to achieve the maximum possible output from the farming activity.”\textsuperscript{68} Though not without merit, such an interpretation risks pushing the poem slightly beyond what its language can support. Berges appears to have in mind Isaiah’s vision of including the nations within the restoration community, hence his term “maximum profits.”\textsuperscript{69} While such inclusion does indeed constitute the book’s ultimate hope, the Farmer’s Parable does not portray an explicitly bountiful harvest or rich feast.

\textsuperscript{65} Horses are nowhere else in the Bible described as treading out grain. The root פּרשׁ is used in all other contexts as a military term.


\textsuperscript{67} U. Berges, The Book of Isaiah, 207.

\textsuperscript{68} For example, R. Clements argues: “[T]here is a time for gentler, ‘saving’ work on the farm, and so also is this true of God in his dealings with Israel.” Clements,\textit{ Isaiah 1–39}, 234. O. Kaiser also, assessing the parable from the postexilic redactor’s point of view, suggests that, “apparently destructive actions really have a constructive purpose, and God’s acts of judgment have as their purpose the work of salvation.” Kaiser,\textit{ Isaiah 13–39}, 262. See also Sweeney,\textit{ Isaiah 1–39}, 364.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 208.
“Profits” are not in view, but rather the *process* by which the harvest (with no reference to its “maximum” status) is achieved.

That the process and not the return appears to be the focus of the farmer’s activities provides an important clue to the agrarian values they depict. Just as the initial call invites the implied reader to “pay-attention,” so too the farmer pays detailed attention to the proper sequence of his agricultural chores (28:24-25). He is attentive to place as well, to the precise location where each crop is best cultivated (28:25). He is aware of his own ignorance; the larger pattern reflected in his behavior comes not from his own calculation, but from Yhwh his God (28:25-26, 29). He employs appropriate tools, measuring the application of physical force with discretion (28:27-28). He takes responsibility for the crop from first to last, performing different activities in different seasons (28:24-28). No single action ensures the harvest, but all the tasks associated with cultivation are performed at the proper time and with due diligence so that the crop may go from field to table. Neither “maximum profits” nor a bumper crop appears in this text because the farmer knows that only through responsible action will he experience stability and longevity in the land. It is this core value that defines his character, and which is contrasted vividly against an overwhelming but ultimately fleeting surplus of beer and wine.

The Farmer’s Parable therefore presents a character profile that clashes with the character profile developed in 28:1-22. In the regress of their drunken stupors, Judah’s leaders lose control of their bodily functions. Their harvests are trampled, their flowers fade, and their fruit is prematurely consumed. They show no awareness of the patience, mental acuity, or physical skill required to bring a young vine to vintage or a handful of
seed to the threshing floor. They are depicted as morally and theologically deluded, unresponsive to Yhwh’s word and contemptuous of his gift of good land. They make a covenant with Death and entrust themselves to the grave. Conversely the farmer keeps his wits about him. He misapprehends nothing. He misplaces nothing. He works within prescribed limits, opening himself to sound judgment and wise instruction. He performs his tasks in due season, reliant on Yhwh’s “wonderful plan” (עֵצָה הִפְלִיא; 28:29). Thus the farmer’s “vineyard” remains.

2.3 Solving for Pattern: Isaiah 28 in Literary Context

The contrast of values around which Isa 28 is structured was discerned above in part through analysis of intratextual correspondences appearing in Isa 1–27. At this point in the argument, the direction of that exegetical procedure will reverse in order to analyze the role that agrarian interests play within the book’s sequential presentation. In particular, Isaiah’s marked interest in subsistence plays a crucial role in the book’s representation of events as adhering to a theologically coherent pattern. Over the course of Isa 1–27, Yhwh’s sovereign plan distills as two historical trajectories: destruction and

70 The use of these two roots in tandem (פּלא and יִיעֲצָה) suggests a range of important locutions found in Isa 1–27 that connect with language found in 28:1-22. For example, the discussion above demonstrates the central importance of 28:16, where “waver/haste” signals skepticism with respect to Yhwh’s “plan” (נְפֹלָה) as depicted in 5:19. “Planning” factors into several other texts already mentioned, including 8:10 (prophetic distinction), 16:3 (Moab’s vineyard), 19:17 (failed harvests, Egyptian delusion), 23:9 (Tyre’s merchant crown), and 25:1 (rich feast, Death). Additionally, Yhwh’s “plan” notably combines with “wonder” in only two other places—25:1 as cited above, and 9:5, where the appellation “Wonderful Planner” is put in parallel with “Prevailing God” (גִּבּוֹר אֵל). The latter of these appellations also features as a key phrase in the book’s early chapters, appearing again in 10:21: “A remnant (שָׁאָר) will return (יָשׁוּב), the remnant of Jacob, to the ‘Prevailing God’” (cf. 8:1, 3; see also 11:2). These data are relevant to Isa 28 in two important ways. First, 28:5-6 combines “remnant” (root שׁאר), “return” (root יָשׁוּב), and “prevail” (root גּבר) in rapid succession, suggesting a certain authorial or editorial awareness as to how these terms interrelate in 10:21. Second, 28:22 directly reiterates language appearing in 10:23, further hinting that all of 28:1-22 has been written up or redacted in light 10:20-23, which is in turn cued to 9:5 and Yhwh’s “wonderful plan.” Thus the idea of a “wonderful plan” in 28:29 responds directly to the content of 28:1-22, and does not introduce a concept foreign to the chapter at large.
hope. This pattern suggests that the contrast of values portrayed in Isa 28 functions to promote adherence to the latter trajectory through Torah obedience, which may begin by taking responsibility for one’s land and food.

2.3.1 Isaiah and the Transmission of Knowledge

The rationale for the sequential review of Isa 1–27 undertaken below is tied especially to the problem of knowledge in Isaiah and the highly sophisticated manner by which the book communicates. The text self-presents as a combination of poetry and prose, where “Isaiah” is both a prophetic voice speaking in and across time and a third-person (and sometimes first-person!) literary character. Much like biblical narrative, the book of Isaiah is therefore epistemologically layered; its characters speak in certain ways that may not reflect what the book’s narrator “thinks” or what the reader is intended to learn from watching the characters in action. Thus, in order to grasp how the rhetoric of the written text functions vis-à-vis its reader, those epistemological layers must be properly teased apart and analyzed. Having achieved some clarity on this issue, readers of this study will be better equipped to understand how the text builds toward Isaiah 28–35, and ultimately how this macrounit functions relative to the book as a whole.

Perhaps the best known text through which to engage the topic of knowledge in Isaiah is the “command to cause non-comprehension” found in 6:9-10:

9 And he said, “Go! And say to this people, ‘Be ever hearing, but do not comprehend, be ever seeing, but do not know.’
10 Make-fat the heart of this people, and its ears make-heavy, and its eyes smear-over!” (Lest it should see with its eyes and with its ears, hear, and with its heart, comprehend, and return, and he would heal it.)
Historical-critical scholars often view the prophet as a univocal harbinger of doom, whose pessimism was eventually reworked so as to include the elements of salvation found in Isa 1–39 today. Within this model, “making-fat” (6:10) could not have been his actual mission as this text seems to indicate, given the social reciprocity that ancient prophetic work demanded and the fact that the command to cause non-comprehension would have shut down the possibility of repentance for the prophet’s real audience. More recently, U. Becker and M. de Jong have argued that Isaiah’s words of salvation are most likely primary to the actual prophet and that the element of doom is secondary. Despite the radical reversal this newer model proposes, it nonetheless continues to read 6:9-10 as a scribal reworking, since “making-fat” does not comport well with a court prophet consistently supportive of the Judean crown. H. Williamson cautions scholars on both fronts, suggesting that the prophet probably uttered words of both weal and woe during his lifetime. Even still, Williamson’s interpretation of the material admits that the command to cause non-comprehension does not make much sense as a prophetic call.


to ministry, even if he differs in proposing that it effectively captures the nuanced character and effect of the prophet’s real message. In other words, historians of all stripes tend to regard 6:9-10 as reflecting the prophet’s “mature reflection” on his work in hindsight. Since he did not ultimately succeed in turning the people from their wicked ways, he (or a later redactor) reframed his career as a mission in heart-hardening. Thus for many readers, the command to cause non-comprehension does not determine how the prophet’s activities are understood to function in the text because its historical plausibility is ruled out from the start.

Rhetorical analysis of this text, however, makes a crucial distinction between the historical prophet and the prophet as a literary character. The repercussions are significant. The prophet-as-character is not automatically restricted by the social conventions of the ANE, nor is he automatically dependent on the support of his disciples. He is not bound to curry favor with kings. He can—and does—respond to Yhwh’s call, however strange. From this perspective, the prophet’s mission is indeed understood as intending to cause confusion among his countrymen, thus restricting their ability to repent. Because the prophet Isaiah has been identified traditionally as “Isaiah of Jerusalem,” the abbreviation IJ will appear throughout the remainder of this study, but it designates only the literary character as depicted in the book and not the historical person.

Important to this distinction is the fact that IJ’s heart-fattened contemporaries are also characters in the text every bit as much as he. They are sometimes identified as “this

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74 Williamson, “Isaiah: Prophet of Weal or Woe?,” 286.
people,” but also as leaders and aristocrats, whole nationalities, or specific individuals. Collectively, these characters may be understood as the prophet’s literary audience (LA)—that is, the persons or groups within the text to whom the prophet-as-character speaks. Thus IJ and his LA stand in parallel to one another, at a “level-one” situation within the text. Whatever they can be assumed to know remains totally encased in their text-world. Their circumstances should not be described as the “eighth century BCE,” as such a designation refers implicitly to a construction of history that is foreign to the characters’ literary portrayal during the reigns of “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” (1:1). Such characters do not relate to the events in which they are portrayed through hindsight. They are totally “text-interior,” swept along at the pace of the narrator’s will.

At level two, just above the IJ–LA dynamic, exist the narrator (N) and the implied hearer (IH). Like IJ, N is also a text-interior character, but with a crucial difference. N is responsible for the pacing, selection, and presentation of the prophetic word. It is N’s voice that speaks through the superscriptions in 1:1 and 2:1, and also the narratives in Isa 7, 20, and 36–39. In the case of 6:10b, N notes explicitly that Yhwh’s command to cause non-comprehension is designed to prevent the people’s repentance and healing. In other words, because N stands at one epistemological order above IJ and LA, N is able to comment on and explain IJ’s experiences for IH. N is the primary filter through which IH accesses information.

The crisp distinction between character and narrator is complicated, however, by material found in Isa 6 and 8, where IJ offers a first-person narrative account. Thus, the name “Isaiah” may describe IJ as a level-one character, but may also apply to the level-two narrator. The upshot of the prophet’s “double function,” as A. Van Wieringen argues,
is to make his discursive presence felt throughout the entire book, even where his presence as a level-one character recedes into the background. 76 “Isaiah” is both a character, who interacts with other characters (LA), and a narratorial voice, which controls IH’s access to information. “Isaiah” as IJ therefore operates without hindsight (but with insight and foresight), while “Isaiah” as N does operate with hindsight, which guides his presentation of those speeches and events deemed relevant to IH. The importance of these distinctions is best appreciated as a question of knowledge. Due to his implicit position after the fact, N discerns what IJ does not. Moreover, N’s mission is fundamentally different from IJ’s because his audience is also different (IH, not LA). N promotes comprehension rather than obstructing it.

IH is a text-interior character parallel to N, experiencing N’s message through the benefit of hindsight. IH is able to reflect on anything N presents as a past event or past word, but he or she can only anticipate those aspects of IJ’s word that N presents as yet to come, precisely because IH is wedded tightly to N at a second-level position within the text. Thus, just as IJ and LA are not properly described as inhabiting the “eighth century BCE,” so too N and IH do not inhabit the “seventh century BCE” or the “fifth century BCE” since these designations reflect a historical rather than rhetorical filter on the text. Additionally, IH experiences N’s presentation of IJ’s word in sequence, “discovering” what N tells him or her at the pace and in the fashion that N decides. IH may have the ability to reflect on Israelite history, but he or she still depends on N’s rendering of the information. IH does not, for example, have the ability to ask N to repeat or explain

himself. This passive position relative to N is nonetheless radically different from that of LA, which, in its blindness and deafness, has the benefit of neither N’s perspective nor the text’s kerygmatic structure. Finally, N assumes that IH needs to know what N has to say and in the order N chooses to say it, suggesting that IH’s understanding of N’s word is deficient at the book’s outset but can be perfected by the book’s end. IH, in other words, undergoes an epistemological change that is summarily withheld from LA at Yhwh’s command.

At the third communicative level are located the implied author (IA) and implied reader (IR). In contrast to both N and IH, IA and IR are not text-interior characters, but are text-exterior constructs. They do not inhabit the text, but rather they observe the text; it is in this crucial distinction that the book’s rhetorical power ultimately coheres.

IA may be thought of as the hypothetical fashioner of N’s voice. Traditionally speaking, “he” also bears the name “Isaiah.” Whether or not the reader chooses to maintain this designation depends on how he or she approaches Isa 40–66. If these chapters are understood to self-present as the construction of one or more exilic and postexilic authors—due to those authors’ familiarity with the name Cyrus (45:1) and the destruction of the temple (64:10)—then IA cannot bear the name Isaiah, and so instead must be thought of as a disciple in the school of Isaiah. If, on the other hand, the reader understands Isa 40–66 as having been put into the mouth of IJ, he or she plausibly maintains the name “Isaiah” as a designation befitting IA. Either way, IA inhabits a position that can be described as one of “double-reflection.” IA inhabits a place and time posterior not only to IJ’s interaction with LA, but also to N’s rendering of IJ’s word. IA is therefore able to construe N’s presentation of IJ within a book so as to deliver a specific
message or messages to the implied reader. Unlike N, IA does not simply relay IJ’s message; IA makes scripture for a scripture-conscious audience.

As with IA, IR stands at a doubly reflective position relative to the text, and is thus privileged with a unique set of epistemological advantages over the first- and second-order characters described above. Like IH, IR can reflect on N’s rendering of IJ’s interaction with LA in light of Israelite history. But unlike IH, IR has the added benefit of also observing N’s interaction with IH—IR “watches” IH encounter the text in sequence. This fact implies that IR inhabits a more active position relative to N. Rather than passively receiving the word as presented, IR has the ability to study IA’s book. He or she can read, reread, or read-in-reverse, and so draw a wide range of connections between all parts of the text in ways impossible for IH, since IH is a text-interior character bound to N’s pacing and presentation. What IR learns, therefore, is different from what IH learns; IR has the potential to reflect not only on the fraught relationship between IJ and LA summarized in 6:9-10, but also to contemplate how IH might come to understand N’s presentation of IJ’s work. IR, in other words, learns about learning itself. As a result, IR can theoretically respond to the prophetic word in ways that the lower-order characters cannot. Rhetorically speaking, it is here at the text-exterior third level that IJ’s book-bound hope for the future finally begins to gain traction in the real world.

A complete diagram of the preceding observations includes actual authors and readers who stand at a fourth-level position outside the text. It is at this stage that the

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book of Isaiah may be seen to interact with contemporary ideologies and politics unknown to the book as we have it. The present study, however, remains bound to an assessment of the implied reader’s encounter with Isaiah, and thus focuses mainly on levels three and below.

![Diagram of epistemological layers in Isaiah]

**Figure 1**

The foregoing discussion has delineated four epistemological layers in Isaiah prior to a sequential overview of Isa 1–27, as a proper understanding of Isaiah’s communicative function turns on the differences between the layers just described. When historians confuse actual persons with literary persons, this move leads to misinterpretations of characters’ actions and thus the misrepresentation of those actions’ rhetorical value. That said, neither have readers interested in rhetorical questions always made the necessary differentiations. For example, K. Darr’s monograph, *Isaiah’s Vision*
and the Family of God (1994), advocates a “reader-oriented approach” that takes seriously the sequential arrangement of the text. Problematically, however, Darr states that the “sequential reader engages Isa 27:10-11 without benefit of the ‘big-picture.’ Only in retrospect can he or she reconsider the significance of an earlier text in light of later ones.”\(^7\) While it is true that the sequential reader (i.e. the implied hearer) encounters Isa 27 without the benefit of knowing what Isa 28–66 reveal, Darr elides this text-interior encounter with the experience of the text-exterior implied reader. Citing J. Darr, she concludes that the sequential reader “oscillates between a full-scale involvement in the [world of the text] and a more detached observation of it.”\(^8\) In fact, as the analysis above suggests, it is more appropriate to say that the implied reader maintains his or her observational autonomy from the implied hearer as that hearer encounters the text in sequence. As a witness to IH’s sequential learning, IR recognizes the importance of the text’s sequential presentation while at the same time freely engaging its multidirectional intratextuality.

### 2.3.2 Agrarian Patterns in Isaiah 1–27

In view of these theoretical observations, a sequential analysis of Isa 1–27 may be understood as an account of IJ’s word as N reveals it to IH. The exegetical value in developing such an account lies in its ability to delineate precisely how and what IH learns over the course of N’s step-by-step presentation. Because this study aims to describe Isa 28–35 as a call to obedience with respect to IR, the text must be understood

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first at the level of IH, whose “hearing” of Isaiah functions as the data that IR observes, from which he or she learns, and to which he or she potentially responds. The following analysis demonstrates that over the course of Isa 1–27, IH learns about Yhwh’s coherent plan in history through reflection on the means by which subsistence is obtained.

2.3.2.1 Isaiah 1–4

N begins by stating that the material to follow is the “vision of Isaiah son of Amoz,” that it concerns “Judah and Jerusalem,” and that it took place in the days of “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” (1:1). Thus N signals that IJ’s prophetic word does not appear in a historical vacuum, but will be presented in relation to a particular sequence of four Davidic kings. For this reason, Clements argues that Isaiah is “a literature focused on events,” while J. Watts similarly understands the text to “chronicle” eighth-century developments.80 Nevertheless, the superscription is the only plainly historical information offered in the first four chapters of the book. Readers such as P. Miscall therefore argue that Isaiah “does not require a journey into the past but contemplation of a future.”81 Childs has skillfully cut between the two sides of this debate. While criticizing the effort to make biblical interpretation dependent on extratextual historical reconstructions (e.g. Clements’ approach), he also rejects the notion that the Bible is a “deposit of metaphors which contain inherent powers by which to interpret and order the present world of experience, regardless of the source of the

81 Miscall, Isaiah, 17.
imagery”\(^{82}\) (as Miscall imagines). E. Ben Zvi similarly observes that prophetic texts such as Isaiah deemphasize “historical uniqueness or the importance of narrowly defined historical events,”\(^{83}\) and that the relative absence of historical markers suggests to readers that such markers are “not the type of knowledge that should inform them as they read, reread, and study these books.”\(^{84}\) At the same time, however, prophetic texts demonstrate a parallel tendency for “partial historicizing,” where certain narratives provide “temporal anchors” for the purpose of grounding the reader in his or her communally remembered past.\(^{85}\) Thus for both Childs and Ben Zvi, two forces are at work. One promotes the limitless significance of the prophetic word, applicable to generations of readers in perpetuity, while the other embeds the prophetic word in a specific set of prior circumstances. Through precise but restrained use of historical cues, N suggests that IH’s past is theologically emploted.

Throughout Isa 1–4, N anticipates the “inner significance”\(^{86}\) of the events related in the book’s narrative sections by providing a theological blueprint that serves to orient IH to IJ’s total word. This blueprint 1) exposes the comprehensive nature of Israel’s sin, 2) addresses its need for purification, and 3) envisions Yhwh’s move to create lasting security in Zion for the remnant people. One of the key ideas argued in chapter one of this study is the notion that agrarian epistemology involves an integration of theory and

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84 Ibid., 46.
85 Ibid., 48-50.
86 C. Seitz observes that Isaiah attempts “to catch the inner significance of historical events across the ages.” Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 17.
praxis, presupposing a materially and historically meaningful universe. The following discussion demonstrates that such a worldview informs all three parts of N’s theological blueprint, beginning with the nature of Israel’s sin.

For example, N arranges IJ’s word to lead with the following statement (1:2-3):

2 Hear, heavens, and listen, earth, for Yhwh speaks!
   “Sons I made great and I made high, but they did-wrong against me.
3 A bullock knows its owner, and a donkey the trough of its masters; Israel does not know, my people do not comprehend.”

Yhwh has raised up children, but they have done Yhwh wrong (1:2b). Conversely, two common farm animals—a bullock and a donkey—“know” (root ידע) both owner and trough (1:3a). The state of “my people,” standing in parallel to the animals, is thus revealed by way of an analogical contrast. Both animals and humans have a master, but only humans revolt against their creaturely location. Much like the Farmer’s Parable, this text capitalizes on IH’s familiarity with the animals involved so as to complete its rhetorical function. N, in other words, permits IH to consider Israel’s sin only through

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reflection on the means of IH’s subsistence. Thus IH has learned something new already: to “know” Yhwh may have less to do with rational acumen than it has to do with posture and digestion.

The agrarian holism evident in this first example also characterizes N’s portrayal of Israel’s sin at large. Israel is sick, and so “your land (ארץ) is a desolation, your cities burn with fire; your soil (אדמה) before you, strangers consume (אכלים) it” (1:7). Later, Israel is portrayed as having clasped hands with foreigners, their wealth, their military strength, and their gods (2:6-8). Notably, Israel’s “land” (ארץ) is full of them—silver and gold, treasures, horses, chariots, and idols (2:7-8). All of these items are portrayed as a matter of willful hubris over against Yhwh. Thus the land itself is portrayed as participating in self-aggrandizement—cedars of Lebanon, oaks of Bashan, high mountains, and lifted hills (2:13-14). As Israel’s rebellion manifests itself as a failure to acknowledge the source of its food (1:2-3), so Yhwh removes “all reliable bread, and all reliable water” (3:1). Israel’s sin involves not one category of illicit behavior; it is comprehensive in scope, involving all aspects of society down to soil itself.

N takes care, however, that these disturbing images culminate in hope. In view of the people’s need for purification, IJ exhorts LA to repent. “Listen to the Torah of our God,” he pleads (1:10). “Wash and purify” (1:16); “learn to do-good” (1:17). As described in the last section of this chapter, a crucial aspect of IJ’s message appears in 1:19-20, where he puts a Deuteronomistic-like choice before the people: “If you are willing and listen, the good of the land (הארץ) you will eat (תאכלו); but if you refuse and

rebel, by a sword you will be eaten” (1:19-20). In other words, although strangers “eat” the “land” and the “soil” (1:7), IJ makes clear that another reality is possible, where the “good of the land” winds up in Israel’s own mouth. The key to that happy scenario, however, is Torah obedience (1:10). Wrongdoers and sinners may be burned away like a “fading leaf” (עָלֶהָ נֹבֶלֶת; 1:30), but simultaneously Yhwh remakes Zion in his own image, elevated at the “head of the mountains” (2:2; cf. 2:11, 17). As the nations stream in for instruction, the Torah “goes-out” (תֵּצֵא) to meet them (2:3). The nature of their education is then described by way of a dichotomy between training for battle and preparing for agricultural endeavors, namely plowing soil and pruning vineyards (2:4). Not by accident is agro-ecological activity portrayed here as the antithesis of foreign invasion, just as in 1:19-20. Since invasion results from sin and sickness (1:4-8), Torah obedience presents a viable remedy to the disease, restoring the penitent to the safety and security of the land.

IJ’s urgent call to repentance is further qualified by the dire state of the people’s compromised body. They are sick “from the sole of the foot to the head,” and their wounds have gone undressed (1:6). Against this seemingly hopeless situation, Yhwh initiates the city’s purification and restoration (1:21-26). Again in Isa 4, Yhwh takes the initiative to make the “fruit of the land” (הָאָרֶץ וּפְרִי) into the “the pride and glory” of Zion’s remnant community (4:2-3). Here the cleansing so desperately needed in 1:16 finally occurs, as Yhwh takes it upon himself to remove the filth of the daughters of Zion (4:4; cf. 3:16-24) by “a spirit of justice and a spirit of burning” (4:4). Afterwards he creates a stable dwelling in Zion, “a screen for shade by day and from barren-heat, and a shelter and a hiding-place from storm and rain” (4:6). Thus in these first few chapters of
Isaiah, IH observes IJ’s exhortation to repent, but recognizes also that salvation ultimately depends on Yhwh’s own designs for Zion’s future.

In sum, Isa 1–4 introduces a theological blueprint involving the exposure of Israel’s sin, the need for purification, and Yhwh’s resolve to protect his remnant in Zion. The analysis above demonstrates that agrarian values play a key role at all three points—sin (cf. 1:2-3, 7), obedience (cf. 1:19-20), and hope (cf. 2:2-4; 4:2-6) are all depicted as a matter of land and food. In the next major unit of the book, N expands on this blueprint with reference to the historical sequence of kings first mentioned in 1:1.

2.3.2.2 Isaiah 5–12

Isa 5 frames the so-called Isaianic Denkschrift (Isa 6–8) and thus operates as the first unit in the main body of the book, introducing a fresh iteration of the theological blueprint discussed above. It is vital to grasp how thoroughly this text relies on agro-ecological language in performing this function. For example, the Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7) portrays various activities such as clearing stones, planting soreq-grapes, and hewing a winepress (5:2). In 5:7, the failed Vineyard is revealed to be Israel and Judah, thus drawing another important analogy between farm life and the people’s status before Yhwh (cf. 1:2-3; 2:4). Again, N does not permit IH to consider Israel’s sin apart from simultaneous reflection on the manner by which IH’s subsistence is obtained. This point is made all the more concrete in 5:8-24, which begins with a woe-oracle probably inspired by episodes of unjust land consolidation: “Woe to those who touch house to house, field to field they draw-close” (5:8). These activities lead to agro-ecological

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88 Like 1:2–4:6, Isa 5 remains free of any explicit historical cues. Nonetheless, it shows clear signs of correspondence with the historical material to follow, such as the “extended hand” (5:25; cf. 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4), “banner to the nations” (5:25; cf. 11:10, 12), and “darkness, distress” (5:30; cf. 8:22).
failure (5:10), which is then directly associated with excessive consumption of alcohol and food (5:11-12). Such excess is equated with a lack of knowledge (5:13; cf. 1:2-3), which ironically portends hunger and thirst (5:13; cf. 3:1) while Sheol “gapes its mouth without limit” (5:14). Israel’s sin is a matter of skepticism regarding Yhwh’s plan (5:19), but it is also emphatically a matter of taste—“Woe to those…who put bitter as sweet and sweet as bitter!” (5:20). The people’s failure to recognize the theological blueprint to which IJ bears witness is portrayed as improper eating and drinking (5:11-13, 19-22), which is later summarized as a rejection of Torah (5:24; cf. 1:10). Just as the Vineyard was burned, trampled, and abandoned to “thorns and thistles” (5:5-6), so Israel’s “blossom” goes up as soot, “as a tongue of fire eats straw” (5:24). The land’s failure to bear good fruit mirrors Israel’s own failure to do the same (5:2, 4, 7).

LA’s intransigence seems only to worsen as Isa 5 unfolds, ushering in military invasion by way of a “banner to the nations far-off” (מֵרָחוֹק לַגּוֹיִם מִמֶּרְחָק) (5:26). Scholars frequently notice that this phrase appears within a larger unit (5:25-30) wherein the plural “nations” read as a singular actor. At the same time, they also date this text to the late eighth century BCE, when only one aggressive “nation” is thought to have concerned the historical prophet. As a result of these two observations, the plural noun in 5:26 seems to belie some form of textual corruption, and the reading “to a nation from far-off” (לְגוֹי מִמֶּרְחָק) comes to be preferred instead. Alternatively however, Williamson suggests that the use of “nations” instead of “nation” is not a random copyist’s mistake, but reflects a larger compositional strategy at work in the book. The redactor, argues Williamson, made

[89 The change is very subtle—the final-ו simply shifts to the left, forming a preposition on the front of “far-off.” See Roberts, First Isaiah, 160; Hans Wildberger, Isaiah 1–12, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 222.]
a small modification to this verse so as to coordinate it with 11:12 (“he lifts a banner to the nations”), and so “involves the nations at large in the judgement of his people just as he envisages the time when they will all assist in their restoration.” In other words, emendation toward the proposed “original” destroys the rhetoric and thus the communicative thrust of the text as N presents it. Isa 5:25-30 introduces the notion that Israel’s comprehensive sin incurs not a single invasion, but a whole paradigm of invasion. As it turns out, this is precisely the nature of those events N relates in the narratives to follow.

Depressing as these images may be, it is important to remember that Yhwh “hoped” (3x, root קוה) for a good result from his agricultural labor (5:2, 4, 7), even if that hope was ultimately dashed. Yhwh’s hope therefore maintains a thin horizon of possibility for those who do the same, a topic taken up especially in Isa 8. Hope in Isa 5 is keyed to Yhwh’s character and thus also to Torah obedience, which instructively “goes-out” from Zion (2:3) on analogy with vineyard cultivation and care (2:4). In sum, Isa 5 expands on prior images of Israel’s sin, foregrounding land ruination (5:1-7) and excessive consumption (5:8-24) and concluding with a paradigm of foreign invasion (5:25-30). But at the same time, the chapter retains an alternative trajectory in line with Torah obedience and Yhwh’s initiative to purify Zion as expressed in Isa 1–4. Isa 6–12 may be understood as N’s effort to differentiate these two historical trajectories for IH, presenting them in parallel so that IH may clearly recognize the choice with which the past confronts him (cf. 1:19-20).

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“In the year of the death of King Uzziah,” IJ reports, he sees a vision of Yhwh seated on his royal throne (6:1). This is the first cue since 1:1 that the presentation of IJ’s word involves a sequence of Davidic kings, the first of which promptly dies. The most important aspect of this vision has already been introduced above: after purifying the prophet, Yhwh orders IJ to cut off the possibility of repentance among “this people” (6:10). This instruction causes a profound separation between IJ and his LA. When IJ asks how long this state of affairs must persist, Yhwh replies that the destruction will continue until cities, houses, and “soil” (והאדמה) crash into desolation (6:11), and “many will be the forsaken-places in the midst of the land (הארץ)” (6:12). Yet amid this catastrophe, a “holy seed” (6:13) remains. The theological blueprint informing this scene suggests to IH two possible futures: destruction and loss of land or obedience, purification, and regrowth.

From here N moves to the reign of Ahaz. The king is confronted with a political crisis wherein Aram and Ephraim form a “plan” (root יַעֲצוּ) to break into Jerusalem and depose Ahaz from his throne (7:5). As noted above, trust is a key theme in this passage, functioning as the standard by which Ahaz’s security is ensured (7:9). But Ahaz does not trust, and so is given a sign in the form of a child who “will eat (יֹאְכֵל) curds and honey in order that he know (לְדַעְתּוֹ) how to reject trouble and choose good” (7:15; cf. 1:3). At the end of this same passage, IJ envisions the transition from one wave of invasion to the next, as Yhwh promises to bring upon Judah the “king of Assyria” (7:17; cf. 5:26). Analogical continuity between the two is strengthened through reuse of “curds and honey” in the next passage (7:22), which describes the damage inflicted by an invading army clearly identified as Assyria (7:18, 20), not the Syro-Ephraimite alliance. On track
with Isa 5, the effects of such an invasion—general vineyard destruction (7:23; cf. 5:5-6), “thorns and thistles” (7:23, 24, 25; 5:6), and “trampling” (root רמא; 7:25; cf. 1:12; 5:5) of mountains that were formerly “hoed” (root עדר; 7:25; cf. 5:6)—directly compromise the health and sustaining power of the land. IH observes that Assyrian attack is a kind of Syro-Ephraimite attack, which is a kind of Vineyard destruction. Each episode in the sequence is of a type, and that type is thoroughly subsistence-oriented in its basic form.

Isa 8 sees the threat of Assyrian invasion deepen. Again that threat is linked analogically to the so-called Syro-Ephraimite crisis through key lexical correspondences—“plan” (root עץ; 8:10; cf. 7:5), “arise” (root נס; 8:10; cf. 7:7), and “God-with-us” (אֵל עִמָּנוּ; 8:10; cf. 7:14). What happens in one era informs what happens in the next, so that history takes on a contiguous pattern. Amid these tense circumstances, however, Yhwh separates the prophet from the fate of “this people” (8:11) just as in Isa 6. Very clearly, IJ and his children/disciples are distinguished by their commitment to “hope” (root קוה; 8:17) and to Torah (8:16, 20), in line with Yhwh’s own character (2:3; 5:2, 4, 7) and in contrast to the character of “this people” as described in 5:8-24. Thus IJ becomes a prototype for all who would escape the Assyrian onslaught. LA may have forfeited its chance to be numbered among the obedient minority, but through N’s representation of IJ’s example as a “community-apart,” that chance is retained for IH.

The patterns established in Isa 5–8 unfold in Isa 9–10 through repetition of the key refrain, “In all this, his anger did not turn-away, and still his hand was extended” (9:11, 16, 20, 10:4; cf. 5:25). In view of the fact that this phrase initially helped to introduce a whole paradigm of invasion at the end of Isa 5, N capitalizes on that detail here to produce an avalanche of land-ruination and improper consumption. For example,
IJ declares that Aram and Philistia will “eat (וַיֹּאכָלֻ) Israel with every mouth” (9:11). The nation’s leaders incur a burning fire that “consumes (תֹּאכֵל) thorns and thistles” (9:17; cf. 5:6; 7:23, 24, 25). Even the people themselves become like a consuming fire (9:18), sliding into cannibalism and self-destruction (9:19). Ultimately the paradigm is turned against the agent of destruction, Yhwh’s “staff” and “rod” by which he made his people into a “trampling-place” (מִרְמָס; 10:5-6; cf. 5:5; 7:25). Yhwh sends against Assyria a burning fire as well, consuming thorns and thistles (10:17), destroying trees, and making its remnant a tiny minority (10:19).

Meanwhile, as prototypes for Israel’s restoration community, the prophet and his children/disciples stand apart. They are first to break free of the burdensome yoke, the rod across their shoulders, and the staff of oppression (9:3; cf. 10:27). They bow before the “Planner of Wonder” and the “Prevailing God” (9:5), in clear dissociation from those who would “plan a plan” in opposition to the overwhelming flood (8:10). Through Torah obedience and hope, the prophet and his children/disciples participate in a different historical trajectory, and thus look forward to a different future. They are the “righteous” who “eat the fruit of their actions” (3:10), the “escaped-ones” whose pride and glory is the “fruit of the land” (4:2). They “rejoice at harvest” (9:2), hoping for a day of restoration when the cow and bear graze together and the lion eats straw like the ox (11:7). For them also a banner is raised to the nations, but that banner is used to call home the remnant of Yhwh’s people from the four flanks of the earth (11:10-12). For them, the cannibalism that typifies the paradigm of destruction is removed (11:13; cf. 9:19-20), so that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yhwh, as waters cover the sea” (11:9; cf. 1:2-3; 5:13; 12:4-5). In sum, Yhwh’s one historical plan involves two possible outcomes.
Knowing how to “reject evil and choose good” is in no small part a matter of food and drink.

2.3.2.3 Isaiah 13–23

The next major block of text presents a series of oracles concerning the nations of the earth (the Oracles Concerning the Nations, or OCN), beginning with Babylon. The analysis offered below demonstrates that the Syro-Ephraimite/Assyrian paradigm established in Isa 6–10 is subsequently applied to Babylon, and then further extended to the nations. At the same time, key verses found throughout this body of texts retain a seed-like hope for a remnant group in continuity with IJ and his children/disciples. In both cases, language pertaining to subsistence continues to frame N’s progressive unfolding of Yhwh’s historical plan.

Isa 13–14 focuses primarily on the following idea: if Babylon can be shown to function as a type of Assyria in line with the historical paradigm of destruction, then Babylon’s demise, like Assyria’s, is also a foregone conclusion. Numerous Leitwörter produce the lexical continuity required to make such an argument work. To name only a few, the oracle concerning Babylon begins with imperatives to “lift a banner” (13:2; cf. 5:26) and “swing (root נופ) a hand” (13:2). נופ is strongly associated with the Assyrian “rod and staff” (10:5, 15, 24), terms also applied to Babylon (14:5). When finally Babylon is deposed from its arrogant throne, “the entire earth rests (נוח) quietly” (14:7)—particularly trees, which no longer fear being cut down (14:8; cf. 10:33). The key root nearest (rest) also characterizes the Syro-Ephraimite alliance (נוח; 7:2) as well as the Assyrian invasion (נוח; 7:19). More than any other factor, however, Babylon’s pretense to lift itself
“above the stars of God” and to compare itself to Eliyon (14:13-14) signals its precipitous fall. Arrogance is not only characteristic of sin in general (cf. 2:6-22), it is the precise reason for Assyria’s prior undoing: “For he said, ‘By the force of my hand I did this, and in my wisdom, even my comprehension; and I turn-aside the boundaries of peoples, and their valuables I ransacked, and like a robust-one (כַּאבִּיר) I brought-down inhabitants’” (10:13). In fact, self-aggrandizement is the one and only action that N permits Assyria to perform on its own; in all other capacities it is portrayed as Yhwh’s tool. Assyria purports to remake the boundaries of the land while taking on the title of “robust-one,” an appellation already ascribed to Yhwh (1:24). Finally, the concluding analysis of Babylon’s doom, wherein Yhwh promises to “cut-off name and remnant” (14:22), is explicitly presented on analogy to Assyria’s destruction (14:24-25). N’s message could not be clearer: “This is the plan which is planned for the entire earth, and this is the ‘hand extended’ against all the nations” (14:26; cf. 5:25; 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4). Yhwh’s historical actions vis-à-vis Israel adhere to a coherent and discernible pattern involving the rise and demise of the great Mesopotamian powers.

Tucked away in the middle of this material is a key passage describing Yhwh’s compassion for Jacob, his initiative to “cause them to rest (וְהִנִּיחָם) upon their soil (אדמָתָם)” (14:1). In parallel to Babylon’s trajectory of doom, Yhwh performs a corresponding work of salvific “rest” (cf. 11:2, 10). Thus, as the Assyria/Babylon paradigm of destruction is applied outward to the nations of the earth, an alternative trajectory of hope remains, wherein Zion functions as an island of security amid the invasive flood.
Leaving Babylon behind, the dichotomy between two possible futures continues to structure N’s presentation of IJ’s word, now with respect to the nations. N begins with an oracle that instructs Philistia not to rejoice because the “staff” is “fractured” (root שָׁבַר; 14:29), a clear allusion to Babylon’s fracturing in 14:5 and Assyria’s fracturing in 14:25. Moreover, Philistia’s “root” is killed with “hunger,” whereas the “firstborn of the weak will graze” (14:30; cf. 5:17; 11:7). A failed harvest, in other words, places Philistia’s fate in line with one historical trajectory and not the other. Moab, too, is “erased” (root דָּחַך, 15:1; cf. 6:5), suffering baldness (15:2; cf. 7:20), a “fractured” cry (15:5), drought (15:6), and a lion for the “remnant of the soil” (15:9). Moab’s vineyards then fail dramatically, particularly its soreq-grapes (16:8) in continuity with the Vineyard’s soreq-grapes of 5:2. Amid this destruction, however, Zion functions as an oasis for Moabite refugees (16:2). Safety in the “tent of David” (16:5) is also part of Yhwh’s “plan” (16:3), to see “trampling” (root רָמֵס; 16:4; cf. 1:12; 5:5; 7:25; 10:6) finally eradicated from the land (16:4). On paradigm with Assyria/Babylon, Moab’s remnant is small (16:14; cf. 10:19), but through contact with Zion, its hope endures.

In the remaining OCN, IJ issues oracles concerning Damascus (17:1-3), Jacob (17:4-11), abundant peoples (17:12-14), Cush (18:1-7), Egypt (19:1-25), Dumah (21:11-12), Arabia (21:13-17), and Tyre (23:1-18). The macrounit contains a short narrative in 20:1-6, and also addresses two enigmatic regions named as the “Desert by the Sea” (21:1-10) and the “Valley of Vision” (22:1-14). Space does not permit a detailed treatment of all the many lexical correspondences that situate these different groups in relation to the Assyria/Babylon model of destruction, though certain notable phrases and tropes stand out. For example, Jacob experiences a harvest wherein only “gleanings will be left (root
“remnant”) in it, like one who hits-round (root נָכַף) an olive—two or three berries at the head of its top, four or five in its fruiting limbs” (17:6). This phrasing associates Jacob with Moab as expressed in 15:8 (“For the cry has hit-round the territory of Moab”), on track with Assyria’s comeupance in 10:34 (“[Yhwh] will hit-round the thickets of the forest with iron”). Similarly, Egypt is told that there is nothing it can do to avoid its fate, whether by “head or tail, palm or pond-weed” (וְאַגְמוֹן כִּפָּה וְזָנָב רֹאשׁ; 19:15). The same locution characterizes Israel’s bad leadership in 9:13 (cf. 7:4, 8, 9), a passage recognized above to function as part of an avalanche of paradigmatic destruction. Like the harvest failures of Philistia (14:30) and Moab (16:7-10), Jacob’s agro-ecological base also collapses (17:5-6, 10-11), causing disease in step with both Assyria (10:18) and Babylon (14:10). Similar agro-ecological disasters appear in 18:5-6 and 19:5-10, while Tyre sees its trade in produce (23:3) reduced to hardscrabble plowing (23:10). Taken in sum, these data suggest that the OCN have been oriented to cohere with the Assyria/Babylon pattern. Concern for land and food constitutes a vital component of the conceptual fabric by which that continuity is achieved.

2.3.2.4 Isaiah 24–27

Through the so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse” (Isa 24–27), N expands on the preceding OCN in several important ways. First, N shifts the locus of destruction from individual nations to the entire “earth” (אֶרֶץ), terminology appearing sixteen times in Isa 24 alone. In doing so, N also demonstrates to IH that Yhwh maintains his commitment to an obedient minority in Zion, and that minority may look forward to its day of redemption when the symbolic “town of chaos” (קִרְיַת־תֹּהוּ; 24:10) is finally destroyed for
good. Thus, even as N moves to consider destruction on a universal scale, the basic blueprint of hope as known from Isa 1–4 remains intact. Language pertaining to subsistence continues to inform how these parallel trajectories may be recognized.

Continuity between Isa 24–27 and preceding material is achieved through numerous lexical correspondences. To name only a few, IJ declares that Yhwh “twists” (וְעִוָּה) the face of the earth (24:1) because its inhabitants “flush-away” (חָלְפוּ) its laws (24:5). Soon afterwards IJ states that, “Betrayers betray, and with betrayal betrayers betray” (root בּגד; 24:16). This language is probably taken up from 21:1-3, where high winds “flush-through” the Negev (21:1), the “betrayer betrays” (21:2), and the prophet finds himself “twisted” in distress over the vision (21:3). Moreover, the city appearing in 24:10 is “fractured” (נִשְׁבְּרָה), reinforcing the connection with Isa 21 where Babylon’s idols undergo the same fate (21:9; cf. 14:5). Other telling locutions include a description of “one who hits-round an olive” (24:13; cf. 10:34; 15:8; 17:6), repetition which has the effect of linking the global situation to the pattern of disaster already established (i.e. Assyria to Moab to Jacob). A further connection with Isa 17 appears in 27:9, where IJ declares that neither “asherim nor incense-altars” (וְחַמָּנִים) will stand; the only other occurrence of this phrase appears in 17:8, in connection with hitting-round the olive (cf. 17:6). 24:17 also describes the inhabitants of the earth as “captured in a trap” (בַּפָּח), recalling 8:14-15 where the rock of stumbling functions “to trap and to snare” (לְפַח וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ) Jerusalem’s inhabitants so that they are “fractured (נִשְׁבָּרוּ) and ensnared and captured (וְנִלְכָּדוּ).” In short, N presents Isa 24–27 as an organic expansion of the prophetic word previously spoken. Thus the continuity between Israel’s particular past and Yhwh’s demonstrably global plan for the future is a fact IH cannot overlook.
N impresses the reality of such destruction on IH by way of a symbolic “town of chaos” (24:10) that is characteristically spiteful of Torah (24:5; cf. 5:24) and as a result, experiences agro-ecological annihilation (24:4-7). For this city and its inhabitants, “the earth mourns and fades, the world languishes and fades” (24:4), a “curse consumes the earth” (24:6), and “the juice mourns, the vine languishes” (24:7). Such language puts the desolation of Isa 24 squarely on paradigm with both the languishing of Moab’s vineyards (16:8) and the mourning and languishing of Egypt’s riverine abundance (19:8). At the same time, this is a city where “the brawling of celebrants (בַּעֲלוֹת שְׁאוֹן) ceases (24:8) and where “beer has become bitter to the drinkers” (24:9). These locutions likewise cast the town of chaos within the orbit of Isa 5, where a “crowd” (וַהֲמוֹנָהּ) of “brawlers and celebrants” (עַלִּיזִים) slide down into Sheol’s open throat (cf. 13:3-4; 14:9-11). Not only does the motif of drunkenness relate the two passages (cf. 5:11-12, 22), but the relatively rare matter of “bitterness” also reinforces that correspondence (cf. 5:20; 22:4). 22:2 likewise states that “brawling (תְּשֻׁאוֹת) fills the crowded (הוֹמִיָּה) city, the celebratory town (עַלִּיזָה קוֹרְיָה),” collecting all three terms relevant to 5:14 as cited above. Importantly, the “celebratory town” is depicted later in Isa 22 as engaging in a faithless slaughter of large and small cattle so that the people may gorge on meat while awaiting their doom (22:13). All this suggests that the city’s destruction in Isa 24 is framed as a matter of subsistence—not simply the loss of food and drink, but the manner by which food and drink are obtained and consumed.

To summarize, Isa 24 caps off the first main trajectory within Yhwh’s “wonderful plan” (cf. 9:5; 25:1) through a portrait of agro-ecological doom, applied to a symbolic city characterized by Torah rejection and untimely feasts. Speaking directly to Yhwh, IJ
observes that, “You have put (i.e. you have effected a paradigm that can be described as) ‘from-city-to-pile’; the fortified town to a fallen-thing” (25:2). Shortly after this statement, strong lexical resonances link the demise of the “elevated wall” (25:11) and the “elevated town” (26:5) to the theological blueprint put forth in Isa 1–4. Key roots such as שָׁפָל (lower), גּאה (pride), שָׁבַב (elevate), שָׁכַח (cower), and עַפָּר (dust) (cf. 25:11-12; 26:5-6) especially correspond to the exposure of Israel’s comprehensive sin in 2:9-12. This point suggests that the historical account of the fate of nations appearing in Isa 6–23 has been given a distinctively theological interpretation in its final form. Destruction is not merely “what happened,” but “what might happen again” depending on the response of the one who hears.

The corresponding alternative to the town of chaos is a city where Torah-based instruction is the norm (cf. 2:2-5), where trust is the standard (cf. 7:9), and where an enduring hope for land-inhabitation characterizes all those who dwell within (cf. 8:17). In Isa 25–27, N relies on IJ’s first-person voice to emphasize the importance of an obedient response so as to activate this alternative reality. For example, in 25:1-5, IJ utters a psalm of thanksgiving focused initially on Yhwh’s power to effect the paradigm of destruction described above. The psalm then turns to extol Yhwh’s complementary resolve to create a “refuge for the weak” and a “shelter from the storm” (25:4; cf. 4:6). Unlike the town of chaos, Yhwh’s mountaintop dwelling (25:6; cf. 2:2-4) involves a rich feast that does not end in Sheol’s swallowing up the “brawlers and celebrants” (cf. 5:14), but in Death itself being swallowed (root בּלע) by Yhwh (25:8). Here the first-person prophetic voice declares: “Behold, this is our God; we hoped (קִוִּינוּ) in him and he saved us. This is Yhwh; we hoped (קִוִּינוּ) in him; let us exult and be glad in his salvation” (25:9). In the
same way that Yhwh distinguished IJ by “disciplin[ing] me from walking in the road of this people” (8:11), so also IJ and the “we” group that follows his example are distinguished by their adherence to the level path of the righteous (26:7-9). This same “we” group issues another first-person word in 26:12-18, openly admitting its failures: “We gave-birth to wind; we could not perform salvation for the land” (26:18). As in 1:21-26, where the city-as-prostitute is restored to its natural status as a “trustworthy town” (נֶאֱמָנָה קִרְיָה; cf. 25:1), and in 4:2-6, where Jerusalem’s impurities are cleansed, so too Yhwh initiates restoration of a new Vineyard (27:2-6; cf. 5:1-7). This Vineyard is irrigated regularly (27:3; cf. 5:6) and is free of “thorns and thistles” (27:4; cf. 5:6). In this Vineyard Jacob “roots” rather than decays (27:6; cf. 5:24; 14:30); he flowers and fruits and fills the world with his produce, as opposed to seeing his blossom go up like smoke (27:6; cf. 5:24). Having weathered the storm, IJ and his children/disciples emerge as the pioneering inhabitants of Yhwh’s garden fortress for generations to come.

A sequential reading of Isa 1–27 now nearly complete, it is appropriate to take stock of what IH has learned up to this point. Beginning with the superscription in 1:1, N makes it immediately clear that IJ’s word is to be heard in relation to historical memory. N does not, however, overload the text with historical markers; instead N encourages a theological reflection on the sequence of past events, providing in Isa 1–4 a blueprint that exposes Israel’s sin, addresses its need for purification, and envisions Yhwh’s move to create in Zion a lasting and stable remnant. Moreover, all three parts of this theological blueprint were shown to rely on language characteristic of an agrarian worldview. In subsequent chapters of the book, N characterizes the nature of sin through images of agro-ecological failure, excessive consumption, moral degeneracy, blasphemous pride,
and military destruction. Over against these destructive patterns, IJ and his children/disciples are distinguished by Torah obedience and hope. As events unfold, analogical continuity between different episodes of invasion produces a portrait of history wherein Yhwh’s actions adhere to a recognizable plan, within which two basic trajectories are possible. While the first paradigm of Vineyard destruction applies to Assyria, Babylon, and eventually the whole earth, a second, minority paradigm applies to those who trust in Yhwh’s power to achieve salvation. At the end of this account, the minority finally takes center stage. Yhwh restores his people with wine (25:6) and his Vineyard with rain (27:3).

At this precise moment, IJ declares: “You yourselves will be gleaned, one by one, O sons of Israel!” (27:12). The second-person discourse startles, as if IJ has momentarily broken from his level-one character to look directly into the camera, urging a decisive response (cf. 2:5). In light of the data presented above, the metaphor of “gleaning” (cf. 17:5-6) is not an insignificant detail. IH remembers that rejecting evil and choosing good is often a matter of food and drink.

2.3.3 Recognizing Yhwh’s Plan, Participating in Yhwh’s Future

Toward the beginning of the present chapter it was observed that modern historical-criticism tends to filter Isa 28 through political developments in Israel during the late eighth century BCE. The preceding overview of Isa 1–27, however, suggests that this approach overlooks the rhetorical force that those preceding texts exert on Isa 28, especially as Isa 24–27 clarifies and solidifies the theological nature of the choice with which IH is confronted. In fact, IH finds no explicit directive suggesting that further
reflection on “eighth-century” politics is required in order to understand Isa 28. Instead IH is confronted with two contrasting character portraits whose depictions are thickly woven with language and tropes familiar to the preceding material. This point strongly suggests that “the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim” does not throw IH back into a prior context, but instead leads IH to contemplate an entirely different question in view of the content N has hitherto related. How might IH recognize Yhwh’s plan in the ongoing present (long after the events of IJ’s day are past), thus avoiding destruction and adhering to the historical trajectory of hope?

If this reasoning is correct, the first character portrait presented in Isa 28 is best understood not as a real debate between competing political factions, but as a paradigmatic image of doom. In no uncertain terms, the language of pride and harvest failure situates the drunkards’ proud crown within the destruction that also characterizes the town of chaos (24:7-13), Tyre (23:1-14), Egypt (19:1-15), Moab (16:6-12), Babylon (14:4-21), Assyria (10:5-19), and Yhwh’s disappointing Vineyard (5:1-7). Over against this pattern, IJ declares that Yhwh will become a “beautiful crown” for the “remnant of his people” (28:5). Such language openly rejects the drunkards’ blasphemous posture (28:1, 4) and at the same time signals hope for the remnant minority, the “community-apart” for which IJ is the prototypical ancestor. 28:1-6, in other words, quickly demonstrates that the two historical trajectories developed over the course of Isa 1–27 remain operative for the present text. As the priests and prophets are “confused” (root בלע) and “go-astray” (root חשת) in their inebriated stupors (28:7), these key terms link their character profile not only to Egyptian foolishness (19:3, 13-14) and agro-ecological ruin (19:5-10), but also to the theological blueprint by which the two trajectories were
first distinguished (3:12-14). These are individuals who both *reject teaching/Torah* through their overconsumption of agricultural products (28:7-10; cf. 5:24; 24:5) and who also *repudiate the land* through their unwillingness to listen (28:11-13; cf. 1:19-20). For gluttons such as these—whether in the past, present, or future—annihilation is certain and doom, assured (cf. 10:23; 28:22).

Rhetorically speaking, therefore, 28:1-22 provides IH with another image of the antitype against which the trajectory of hope stands out. Understanding the epistemological growth that IH has undergone up to this point, N is careful to make explicit that the farmer’s activities adhere to the latter paradigm. His God “teaches him” (יְרֵנּוּ; 28:26). His attention to the process and location, his patience, discretion, and “discipline” (root יִסֵר; cf. 8:11) as described earlier in this chapter, all place the farmer’s example squarely in line with IJ and his “learners” (cf. 8:16). Simultaneously, terms such as “rod” and “staff” (and other military allusions) link the farmer’s activities with Yhwh’s own (28:27-28). This doubly referential effect—to both IJ’s example and Yhwh’s deeds—suggests that the farmer’s activities, insofar as they adhere to the pattern of hope put forth earlier in the book, provide a path by which subsequent “farmer-disciples” may clearly discern Yhwh’s actions in history. This point is reinforced in the parable’s concluding summary: “he makes-wonderful the plan—he increases aptitude” (28:29). Proper recognition of Yhwh’s “wonderful plan” (cf. 9:5; 25:1) continues to depend on sober regard for the means by which subsistence is obtained.

All that said, the Farmer’s Parable presents IH not simply with a lens by which Yhwh’s plan might be discerned, but with clear instruction on how IH might also *participate* in the historical trajectory of hope in contrast to IJ’s heart-fattened
contemporaries: obedience to Yhwh’s Torah. The examination of Isa 1–27 offered above demonstrates that Torah obedience is a distinguishing feature of IJ’s character (8:16, 20).

Despite the absence of this term (תּוֹרָה) from the Farmer’s Parable, several observations nonetheless suggest that it may be inferred from the farmer’s behavior, on pattern with the prophet’s. First, it is clear that the parable’s language conveys literal as well as non-literal meanings. Locutions such as “nigella and cumin” (28:25) indicate actual plants and do not seem to bear secondary importance, while other terms such as “wheel” (28:27) and “rollers” (28:28) recall military action depicted elsewhere in the book. Roots such as הָמִים (28:28; jostles) reinforce this suspicion, while the agricultural anachronism “steeds” (28:28) also strongly points to a figural meaning. “Rod” does not mean only “rod;” “staff” does not mean just “staff.” In short, the absence of תּוֹרָה in a parabolic text such as this is not strong evidence against its relevance to the farmer’s character if corresponding evidence suggests otherwise. To exactly this point, the parable makes “teaching” (root ירה) a prominent concern in 28:26, which contrasts with the drunkards’ example in 28:9—“To whom is he teaching (יָרֶה) knowledge?”—regardless of whose rhetorical question this line is understood to be. As noted above, the drunkards are presented as adhering to a well-developed pattern of destruction, stretching from Isa 5 to Isa 27. Torah rejection bookends that history in 5:24 and 24:5. By contrast, a positive response to teaching as portrayed in the Farmer’s Parable puts the farmer in line with IJ’s paradigmatic Torah obedience (8:16, 20).

Finally, the parable’s didactic form and overall interest in education suggest a strong correspondence with 2:2-3, where the nations of the world stream to Zion to be “taught” (וְיֹרֵנוּ) to walk in his roads and paths (cf. 8:11; 26:7-9). In this text, Torah
“goes-out” from Zion (תֵּצֵא; 2:3). While common in the Bible at large, the root יצא is used rather sparingly in Isaiah 1–27. Once Yhwh himself is seen to “go out” (26:21), but only here is the verb used with reference to something emerging from Yhwh’s location: “For from Zion goes-out the Torah, and the word of Yhwh from Jerusalem” (2:3). Correspondingly, 28:29 observes that, “this too (גַּם־זֹאת) from Yhwh of Armies goes out (יָצָאָה),” though the objects to which גַּם־זֹאת refer are left unspecified. If “this” is taken to be the parable itself, as Child’s assessment of the summary-appraisal statement suggests,92 “too” may indicate something else to which the parable is offered as a supplement. Given that the only other thing thus far in Isaiah to have “gone-out” from Yhwh’s presence is Torah, the Farmer’s Parable may be plausibly understood as a kind of “Torah 2.0.”

If this interpretation of גַּם־זֹאת stands up, the Farmer’s Parable appears to preach a unique message somewhat underappreciated in the secondary literature at this time. IJ’s example makes clear that adherence to the trajectory of hope requires Torah obedience. IJ’s parable, however, proposes that Torah obedience might begin by taking careful responsibility for the processes through which one’s food is produced—plowing, sowing, reaping, and processing. Such responsibility appears to depend on the farmer’s open admission of his natural ignorance (28:26), his willingness to listen and hear (cf. 28:12), and the humility to respect the natural limits inherent in the crops through which he acquires his daily bread (28:24-25, 27-28). Obedience, in other words, begins in the study of natural patterns, the created matter (the soil) from which human beings are formed and

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92 Childs, Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis, 128-31. See also Exum, “‘Whom Will He Teach Knowledge?’,” 131.
live. Such a statement reflects a decidedly agrarian worldview. Like the nations who stream to Zion for Torah-based instruction (2:2) and who “beat their swords into plowshares” (2:4) as a result of their education, so too the farmer casts a discerning eye upon the manner by which he subsists in the land. If participation in Yhwh’s historical trajectory of hope is a matter of Torah obedience, “this too” is a matter of food and drink.
3. Isaiah 29–32: The Creaturely Body in Place

Isa 29–32 consists of the second through fifth woe-oracles in the sixfold series identified in the previous chapter of this study. These four passages (29:1-14; 29:15-24; 30:1-33; 31:1–32:20) have almost certainly come together through a complex process of composition, expansion, and redaction. Inasmuch as the text’s earliest layers probably derive from the late eighth century BCE, it is nonetheless critical to remember that the book of Isaiah is not an ancient transcript of events. To the degree that Isa 29–32 prompts reflection on the past, it does so in the same manner as Isa 28: through an array of lexical correspondences and familiar concepts that link up with the content already put forth in the sequential text.

Isa 1–27 distinguishes two historical trajectories: destruction and hope. Isa 28 was shown to expand on this theological blueprint; specifically, the Farmer’s Parable emphasizes that Yhwh’s wonderful plan in history cannot be recognized (and thus the trajectory of hope cannot be activated) apart from attention to and responsibility for the production of one’s food. Moving forward from this point of orientation, Isa 29–32 may be understood to develop the parable’s rhetoric in two important capacities. First, the text emphasizes that salvation occurs “on location” in Zion, and thus advocates fidelity to that place in contrast to seeking aid in or from foreign lands. Second, the text highlights the necessity of acknowledging one’s creaturely identity before Yhwh. In both senses, Isa 29–32 adheres to the agrarian epistemological foundation described in the hermeneutical introduction of the present study. Only through acknowledgment of the “creaturely body in place” will the hope for durable land-inhabitation be realized.
3.1 The Second Woe (29:1-14): Location, Location, Location

Isa 29:1-14 may be understood to fall in two main units: vv. 1-8 and 9-14. The first of these begins with a woe-formula directed at “Ariel, town where David camped” (29:1)—that is, Jerusalem. The prophet (IJ) describes Yhwh’s plan to “besiege” (root צור) the city with an “entrenchment” (מֻצָּב; root נצב) and to raise siege-machines (מְצֻרֹת; root צור) against it (29:3). But then in 29:5, “instantly, suddenly” (פִּתְאֹם לְפֶתַע), a change takes place. Yhwh will “visit” (root פּקד) the city in “tempest and tornado and a flame of consuming fire” (29:6) so that the besieging army will vanish like a dream (29:7). In spite of her attackers’ overwhelming power, Ariel turns out to be a site of salvation, not destruction. This idea provides the conceptual basis for what follows, beginning with imperatives to “stupefy yourselves” (הִתְמַהְמְהוּ) and to “smear yourselves” (הִשְׁתַּעַשְׁעוּ). The turn of events in the first half of the passage, in other words, remains opaque to the “prophets” and “visioners” criticized in the next unit (29:10). Such individuals are portrayed as illiterate; their lack of understanding is total (29:11-12). Yhwh resolves the issue in a promise/threat to “deal-wonderfully: (לְהַפְלִיא) with “this people” while the “comprehension (root הבין) of its comprehending-ones will be hidden (root מסר)” (29:14).

In sum, Yhwh’s “salvation on location” in Ariel undermines the prevailing wisdom of the elite.

Isaiah 29:1-14

1 Woe to Ariel, Ariel,

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2 For notes on this form, see Appendix A.
town *where* David camped!
Add year upon year;
let festivals go-round-and-round.

2 “I will bring-strait upon Ariel,
and she will *experience* moaning and sighing,
and she will be to me like an ariel-altar.

3 And I will camp like a ring against you;
and I will besiege you *with* an entrenchment
and I will raise against you siege-machines.

4 And you will be lower than the earth—you will speak,
and *lower* than the dust will sink your sayings;
and like a ghost from the earth will be your voice,
and from the dust your sayings will chirp.

5 Like fine particulate will be the crowd of your strangers,
and like passing chaff the crowd of terrorizers.”
And it will be *that* instantly, suddenly,

6 by Yhwh of Armies she will be visited,
in thunder and in quaking and a great voice,
tornado and tempest
and a flame of consuming fire.

7 And like a dream, a vision of the night,
will be the crowd of all the nations
bringing-armament against Ariel,
and all who-bring-armament *against* her and her stockade,
and who-bring-strait upon her.

8 And it will be like when one-who-is-hungry dreams
and behold, he eats,
and he awakes and his throat is empty;
or like when one-who-is-thirsty dreams
and behold, he drinks,
and he awakes and behold, *he is* weary,
and his throat throbs.
Thus will be the crowd of all the nations,
those-who-bring-armament against Mount Zion.

9 Stupefy yourselves and be stupefied!
Smear yourselves and be smeared!
You-who-are-drunk, but not *on* wine;
you-who-quaver, but not *with* beer.

10 For Yhwh has poured on you a comatose spirit,
and he has shut your eyes, *you* prophets,
and your heads, *you* visioners, he has covered.

11 And the vision of all will be for you like the words of the sealed scroll,
which they give to one-who-knows scrolls,
saying, “Read this.”

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But he says, “I am not able, for it is sealed.”

12 Or the scroll is given to one-who-does-not-know scrolls, saying, “Read this.”
But he says, “I do not know scrolls.”
13 And the Lord said,
“Because this people approaches with its mouth and with its lips they honor me, but its heart it distances from me, and their fear of me has become the learned command of men,
therefore I will again deal-wonderfully with this people, wondrously and wonderfully; and will perish the wisdom of its wise, and the comprehension of its comprehending-ones will be hidden.”

3.1.1 A Question of “Surprise”

In the modern critical era, by far the most common approach to Isa 29 has involved an effort to interpret the text through the political developments that characterized the build-up and aftermath of the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem in 701 BCE.3 Perhaps the most important aspect of this type of scholarship is its insistence on the text’s grounding in real events. Readings that ignore those events tend to offer impressions of the text that are somewhat detached from its history of composition and thus its literary content. That said, pure historicism also trades in its own peculiar form of anachronism, wherein the text serves as archaeological data by which the past may be adduced. This approach typically fails to generate interpretations that remain responsible to the text’s theological self-presentation. While it is possible that 29:1-14 did originate in the period before and after Sennacherib’s attack (just like Isa 28), the narrator (N) offers

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no superscriptions or other cues that associate the material with “the year that Tartan came to Ashdod” (20:1) or “the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah” (36:1). Three important points follow from the text’s lack of historical anchoring, all pertaining to the nature of the city’s rescue as depicted in 29:1-8.

First, the modern version of events in 701 BCE has virtually canonized the view that Ariel’s salvation is depicted not only as sudden (נֶפֶן פִּתְאֹם; 29:5), but also as surprising. For example, J. Blenkinsopp states that the city’s change in fortune comes about “in a sudden and unanticipated way.”4 W. Brueggemann likewise suggests that, “we are not prepared for the radical turn in the prophetic rhetoric” and “abruptly, without a hint, [Yhwh]…will ‘visit’ Jerusalem.”5 Even an avowedly canonical reader such as C. Seitz suggests that the nations are put to flight in 29:5 “without warning.”6 The main problem with such readings, however, is that while the suddenness of Yhwh’s intervention is an indisputable feature of the text—a kind of “fulcrum” as Blenkinsopp argues7—noting explicitly states that the implied hearer (IH) of Isa 1–29 should find him or herself blindsided by Zion’s survival.

The issue can be resolved through more precise attention to the epistemological differences between IJ’s first-order literary audience (LA) and the narrator’s second-order IH. 29:9-14 expands on the first part of the passage with imperatives to “stupefy” and “smear yourselves” (29:9). The prophets and visioners of 29:10, who are level-one characters within the book, are apparently taken off guard by the events described in

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29:1-8. As a result, their wisdom is bankrupt and their comprehension, void (29:14). However, at one order of knowledge above the IJ–LA dynamic, IH perceives the same data quite differently. IH has already learned that survival is strongly associated with Zion\(^8\)—passages such as 1:21-27, 4:2-6, and 16:1-5 are all instructive here. Thus W. Beuken is correct to state that 29:1-8 is finally “comprehensible” in light of prior texts such as Isa 24–27.\(^9\) Yhwh protects his mountain (25:6-10a) and restores his vineyard (27:2-6) for the purpose of bringing home the banished to Jerusalem (27:13). B. Childs similarly points out that the notion of an “emerging remnant” is by no means unfamiliar at this point in the book.\(^10\) In short, 29:1-8 reads differently when the long view of salvation provides the interpretive lens. Suddenness does not automatically equate with surprise.

Second, emphasis on unanticipated salvation in 29:1-8 has fostered the view that the text promotes the fundamental inscrutability of the divine plan. For example, J. Watts argues that Yhwh’s miracles as registered in 29:1-8 “defy prediction or explanation.”\(^11\) Though Watts may be correct that Yhwh’s action cannot be explained by a discrete group of characters at a level-one situation within the text, it does not follow that the same miracle should baffle IH, who is now sufficiently educated to anticipate Zion’s rescue.

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Similarly to Watts, M. O’Kane avers that the text keeps Yhwh’s plan hidden within the vagaries of historical circumstance:

Isaiah 28–33 should not be seen as ‘working out,’ ‘reversing’ or ‘resolving’ the enigmatic commission of 6:9-10 nor does the section ‘lead towards clarity from confusion.’ Rather, the language of these chapters suggests that the reader can access only partially the plan and wisdom of Yahweh; the knowledge of Yahweh remains concealed as much as it is disclosed…  

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A more precise delineation of the text’s epistemological orders suggests that O’Kane’s statement is correct with reference to the text’s level-one LA, but incorrect with reference to IH. O’Kane has elided the two into a single exegetical claim. For LA, the command to cause non-comprehension remains in effect, and thus LA’s wisdom vanishes (29:14). For IH, however, the “wonderful” nature of Yhwh’s purpose in history (29:14) becomes increasingly clear as N’s presentation unfolds. As O’Kane observes, human knowledge is always incomplete, but that does not mean the text’s rhetoric functions to obfuscate or conceal.

Finally, the notions of surprise and inscrutability tend to distract from the most important rhetorical element in the received text: Yhwh’s salvation characteristically occurs in a particular place. The name Ariel is used four times in the first two verses of Isa 29 (the fourth occurrence is a pun with “altar”). Later the place name Ariel is repeated (29:7), and finally “Zion” concludes the unit in 29:8. That is, the text emphasizes and then reemphasizes that rescue does not happen just anywhere; salvation “takes place” in the City of David. It is Yhwh’s expressed devotion to Zion that puts the sudden rescue of 29:5-8 within the orbit of what IH might plausibly anticipate. Thus, when historians

describe 29:1-8 as depicting a sharp left turn in the course of eighth-century politics, defying both prediction and explanation, they ironically downplay what N deems most important about the oracle’s historical moorings: location, location, location. Repetition of the name Ariel signals to IH that he or she is in exactly the right spot to witness Yhwh’s miraculous intervention in time and space.

3.1.2 Hearing 29:1-14 in Sequence

The first four verses of this passage employ a variety of terms and images that put Ariel in an extremely precarious position. The most obvious of these are mentioned above: “camp,” “siege-machines,” and “entrenchment” are all military terms indicating that the city is under direct attack (29:3). Yhwh also promises to “bring-straits” (וַהֲצִיקוֹתִי; root צוק; 29:2) on Ariel, suggesting the suffocating pressure of a protracted siege. These statements do not merely comprise a historical record, however; textual details also interpret the attack theologically by placing it within the trajectory of destruction. For example, the root צוק (be in straits) appears prominently in 8:22, with reference to those who reject Torah and thus experience “distress and darkness and foggy straits” (צָרָה צוּקָה מְעוּף וַחֲשֵׁכָה). Moreover, Yhwh’s “entrenchment” (מֻצָּב; root נצב) suggests the only other occasion prior to Isa 29 where Yhwh specifically “takes-position” (root נצב) over against an adversary (3:13). In 3:14, he indicts the “elders and officials” (וְשָׂרָיו עַמּוֹ עִם־זִקְנֵי) of his people, specifically for having “burned the vineyard,” which adumbrates the paradigmatic motif of 5:1-7. Yhwh also “camps like a ring (כַדּוּר)” against Ariel (29:3), an apparent response to the fact that the city’s festivals “go-round-and-round” (root חַרָה;...
29:1; cf. 3:24; 10:34; 16:8; 17:6; 24:13). Finally, the text describes the city as being “lower” (root שָׁפַל) than the earth and “sinking” (root שָׁחַח) to the “dust” (עָפָר) from which, like a ghost (כְּאוֹב), “your sayings will chirp (תְּצַפְצֵף)” (29:4). These terms relate the scene both to the language of pride in 2:9-12 (cf. 25:11-12; 26:5-6) and to prior images of necromancy such as appear in 8:19 and 19:3 (cf. “ghost” and “chirp”). Both lexical associations suggest that the attack follows from the city’s rejection of Torah (cf. 2:2-5; 8:11-22; 24:5). Given that Yhwh has put into place a paradigm of “city-to-pile” (25:2), Ariel’s situation appears dire indeed.

All that being said, the very first colon of the passage presents the mitigating datum on which the city might pin its hopes amid the storm. Ariel is “the town where David camped” (29:1). This rhetorical strategy is not unlike the note that God “tested” (נִסָּה) Abraham in Gen 22:1, information that radically differentiates the reader’s perspective on the events to follow from that of the story’s characters. In combination with “straits” (29:2; cf. 8:22), “David” suggests that in fact there will be “no more fog for those who are in straits” (8:23) due to Yhwh’s zeal for David’s throne (9:6). By placing this information at the head of the unit instead of at the end, N defuses any potential anxiety at the outset, allowing IH to learn from the following oracle rather than to become caught in its crosshairs. No matter how desperate the situation is portrayed to be, IH remains confident that Zion ultimately does not belong to the trajectory of destruction.

13 As noted in the previous chapter of this study, the motif of “round-thing = violence” appears at a number of points, including 28:27-28.
14 See Roberts, First Isaiah, 364; Seitz, Isaiah 1–39, 214.
15 The root צָק is found prior to 29:2 only in 8:22 and 8:23.
These suspicions are confirmed starting in 29:5. “Like fine particulate” (דַּק כְּאָבָק), IJ declares, will be the “crowd of your strangers” (זָרָיִךְ הֲמוֹן). The vast, interconnected web of lexical correspondences sitting behind these precise terms confirms the verse’s basic point, that in fact the strangers will suffer annihilation while Jerusalem survives. For example, the only use of “particulate” (root אָבָק) prior to 29:5 appears in 5:24, an image of consuming fire due to the people’s Torah rejection (cf. 8:11-22). Likewise in 29:6, Yhwh “visits” (root פּקד) with a “flame of consuming fire” (אוֹכֵלָה אֵשׁ וְלַהַב; cf. 10:17). Also “crowd” (root חָמָם) features prominently in the trajectory of destruction, being conceptually related to “brawlers” (root שָׁה), “celebrants” (root עלז), and the “town of chaos” in 24:10. Key citations such as 5:13-14, 16:14, 22:2, and 24:8 build the “crowd = doom” motif into a recognizable pattern. Thus, the mere mention that the assault of 29:1-4 comprises a “crowd” suggests the attackers’ impending doom. “Strangers” (root זֹר) also appears at key points in 1:7 and 25:2, 5. Particularly in 25:5, the text states that the “brawling of strangers will be reduced” and that the “psalm of terrorizers (עָרִיצִים) will be humbled.” In 29:5, and in parallel to the “crowd of your strangers,” the “crowd of terrorizers (עָרִיצִים)” will be like passing chaff. The winnowing reference only deepens the conceptual relation with 5:24 (stubble, straw) and thus the paradigmatic sin of Torah rejection. At the same time, the root שָׂר חָרָה forges an important connection with 8:12-13, wherein Yhwh distinguishes the prophet over against “this people” (8:11; cf. 29:13) with an explicit command to be “terrified” (root שָׂר) of Yhwh alone. This command is later backed up by the fact that Yhwh “visits” (root פּקד) judgment upon Assyria precisely after he “has exacted all his deeds against Mount Zion and Jerusalem” (10:12; cf. 29:6). The light of Israel becomes a “fire” (שֵׁה) and the Holy-One a “flame” (לַהַב) that “consumes”
Assyria’s thistles and thorns in a single day (10:17; cf. 5:6; 9:17; 29:6). In sum, a panoply of key terminology turns the trajectory of destruction from Ariel and applies it to “the crowd of all the nations” who “bring-straits upon her” (29:7). IH’s educational investment in Isa 1–27 pays off handsomely.

The last image in the unit compares the invaders’ fate to the experience of dreaming about food and waking up hungry, or dreaming about drinking and waking up thirsty (29:8). The point is that the food and drink are elusive; thus on analogy, so too is the attacking army’s anticipated victory. This comparison strengthens the links between the fate of the “terrorizers” and the trajectory of destruction, for which food and drink function as an important indicator. 29:8 mentions “hunger” (root רעב), “eating” (root אכל), “thirst” (root צמא), and “drinking” (root שׁתה); it also twice uses the term “throat” (נפשה).

A telling correspondence appears in 5:12-14:

5:12 And lyre and lute (נבל), drum and pipe and wine are at their feasts (מִשְׁתֵּיהֶם)! But at the practices of Yhwh they do not look, and the deed of his hands they do not see.

13 Therefore my people go-into-exile without knowledge; and his honored-ones die of hunger (רָעָב), and his crowd (וַהֲמוֹנוֹ) is withered from thirst (צָמָא).

14 Therefore Sheol widens its throat (נפשה), and it gapes its mouth without limit; and its splendid-ones and its crowd go-down (יָרַד), and its brawlers and celebrants with it.

Closely related to Torah rejection (cf. 5:24), this image is echoed later in the demise of Babylon, whose “lutes” (נבל; 14:11; cf. 5:12) are likewise “brought-down” (root ירד; 14:11; cf. 5:14) to “Sheol” (14:11; cf. 5:14). Another image of hunger appears in 8:21-22, associated with 29:1-8 in the discussion above (cf. “distress and darkness and foggy straits;” 8:22). 8:21 describes the individual who experiences such distress as “harried
and hungry (וְרָעֵב);” overall the image portrays restless movement and banishment into darkness. Intriguingly, 29:8 describes the dreamer as waking to find himself “weary” (עָיֵף) and that his throat “throbs” (שׁוֹקֵקָה). Both terms are rare in Isa 1–28. עָיֵף appears elsewhere only in 28:12, a verse that signals repudiation of the land through concepts of “rest” and “unwillingness.” The root שׁקק does not appear in these chapters, though its use in 33:4 (a “rushing” of locusts) suggests a form of rapid movement (cf. Nah 2:5). When 29:8 is read in view of 5:13-14, 8:21-22, and 28:12, it becomes unmistakably clear that the attacking army will be relegated to annihilation and thus will experience no durable subsistence in the land. Zion, by contrast, remains secure (29:8).

At this point, the discourse turns sharply against an unidentified target, issuing several imperatives in quick succession: “Stupefy yourselves and be stupefied! Smear yourselves and be smeared (root שׁעע!” (29:9a). Textual details strongly suggest that this command not to comprehend, which shares a conceptual and lexical affinity with 6:9-10 (cf. root שׁעע; 6:10), should be read in sequence with Isa 28 and thus with reference also to Yhwh’s “salvation on location” as depicted in 29:1-8. For example, 29:9b refers to “you-who-are-drunken (root שכר) but not on wine (יַיִן); you-who-quiver (root נוע) but not with beer (שֵׁכָר).” Both wine and beer are characteristic of the priests’ and prophets’ behavior in 28:7; “quivering” is not lexically present in Isa 28, but nonetheless recalls the

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17 See Appendix A.
same priests’ and prophets’ propensity to be confused (root בליטך, go-astray (root בלע), stagger (root שלע), and blunder (root נעל). Also in line with 28:7, 29:10 specifies that the imperatives’ targets are “the prophets” and “the visioners” (root חזות; cf. 28:15, 18).

Scholars often read these terms as glosses, as their presence in the text seems to upset the meter of 29:10b, but this is speculative. Certainly they should not be deleted. The terms make explicit what the wine and beer only imply, that the imperatives of 29:9a address members of Jerusalem’s political and social elite in line with 28:1, 7, and 14.

In a variety of ways, 29:9-14 signals that the prophets and visioners fail not simply to recognize the nature of their immediate situation as described in 29:1-8, but also to comprehend the larger paradigms of destruction and hope to which that situation points. IJ declares that Yhwh has poured out a “comatose spirit” (תמדמה רוח), that he has “shut your eyes” (אתיעם עיניכם), and that he “has covered” (כסה) the visioners’ heads (cf. 28:1, 4). At the same time, the imperatives’ obvious affinity with 6:9-10 furnishes the prophets’ and visioners’ blindness with archetypal significance—IJ’s voice in 29:9 performs its divinely sanctioned mission to “make-fat the heart (לב) of this people” (6:10). That these individuals also “quaver” (root נוע; 29:9) deepens the connection with Isa 6 (וַיָּנְעוּ; cf. 6:4) and further implies that they fall in line with Ahaz’s example as recorded in 7:2: “And his heart (לבו) and the heart (לבב) of his people quavered (וַיָּנָע) like the quavering (כְּנוֹעַ) of the trees of a forest before a wind (רוח).” Moreover, Ahaz

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18 Scholars frequently note the theme of non-comprehension in both Isa 28 and 29. For example, see Robert P. Carroll, “Blindsight and the Vision Thing: Blindness and Insight in the Book of Isaiah,” in Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition, eds. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, VTSup 70/FIOTL I 1 (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1997), 84-85; Childs, Isaiah, 214.
19 See Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 404; Clements, Isaiah 1–39, 238; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 82.
20 O. Kaiser goes beyond most scholars in omitting both terms from his translation. Kaiser, Isaiah 13–39, 269.
famously commits the book’s premier act of false piety in 7:12; the prophets and visioners of 29:10 are similarly criticized for engaging in rote worship (29:13). It is crucial to grasp, however, that the lexical connections between Isa 6–7 and 29 are informed by the language of the intervening chapters—most notably Isa 19:1-15.²¹ In this oracle, IJ declares that, “the idols of the Egyptians will quaver (וְנָעוּ) before [Yhwh]” and that “the hearts (וּלְבַב) of the Egyptians will melt in his proximity” (19:1). Later Yhwh is said to have “stirred into [the Egyptians’] proximity (בְּקִרְבָּהּ) a spirit of blindness (רוּחַ עִוְרִים)” (19:14). The discussion above connects the necromancy of 29:4 with similar language in 19:3, while the previous chapter of this study identifies the Egyptian example (19:1-15) as vital in building a contiguous and thus comprehensible portrait of Yhwh’s actions vis-à-vis the nations (cf. 24:19-20; root רצום). In light of these points, the prophets’ and visioners’ failure to assess correctly their situation in Ariel may be understood as a failure to identify Yhwh’s historical plan. It is for this reason that IJ declares them illiterate (29:11-12; cf. 28:13), totally unable to access the meaning of the scroll’s “whole vision” (29:11) that was sealed up for a future generation of disciples (8:16) and to which IH has been granted unique access. As Yhwh saved on location in the past (29:1-8), so he will “deal-wonderfully again (לְהַפְלִיא)…wondrously and wonderfully (וָפֶלֶא הַפְלֵא; 29:14; cf. 28:29)” in IH’s present and future. Those in Zion need only stay put.

3.2 The Third Woe (29:15-24): Proximity to the Creator

Isa 29:15-24 may be read as three small units of similar size: vv. 15-16, 17-21, and 22-24. The first of these addresses “those-who-go-deep” (_Enter_חַפָּהמִים_ָמָש, root שָמָש), away

from Yhwh. This language suggests that just as 29:1-14 underscores the place where Yhwh’s miraculous rescue occurs, so too 29:15-24 reflects an interest in location. Unlike 29:1-14, however, the third woe’s geographical point of reference is Yhwh himself, portrayed as the Potter/Shaper (root יצר) of those who, in “hiding a plan” (.FindAsync; 29:15), would seek to deny Yhwh his status as Creator and thus their own creaturely identity (29:16). The next unit looks forward to a day when such theological perversity will be set aright. The first image of restored order is notably agro-ecological in nature: Lebanon will revert to orchard (כַּרְמֶל) and Carmel (רְמֶלכַּ) will be reckoned as a forest (29:17).22 Also the “deaf” (הַחֵרְשִׁים) will hear and the “blind” (עִוְרִים) will see (29:18), an image that registers important concern for the healing of human bodies. Finally, Yhwh issues a promise that Jacob will no longer be ashamed (29:22) when Yhwh sees “the deed of my hands” in his proximity (בְּקִרְבּוֹ) (29:23). The artisanal metaphor implicit in this phrase ties the text’s concluding hope for “comprehension” (בִּינָה) and “instruction” (לֶקַח; 29:24) back to the initial observation that Yhwh’s status vis-à-vis humans is much like a potter’s relationship with clay (29:15). Thus 29:15-24 expands the concept of “salvation on location” in Zion by focusing on the creaturely body’s proximity to the Creator as the basis for a right perception of reality.

Isaiah 29:15-24

15 Woe to those-who-go-deep from Yhwh to hide a plan! And in darkness are their deeds, and they said, “Who sees us?” and “Who knows us?”
16 How shifty of you! Should like clay the Potter be reckoned? Or should the thing-made say of its Maker, “He did not make me”?

22 Interpretation of this verse’s grammar and syntax is discussed below.
Or the thing-shaped say of its Shaper, 
“He does not comprehend’’?

17 Is it not that in a small, little while Lebanon will revert to orchard, and Carmel as a forest will be reckoned?

18 And in that day the deaf will hear the words of a scroll, and from gloom and from darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

19 And the vulnerable in Yhwh will again rejoice, and needy humans in the Holy-One of Israel will exult.

20 For the terrorizer will be nothing and the scoffer will be annihilated; and cut-off will be all who-anticipate evil, who-condemn a human with a word, and for the arbitrator at the gate set-traps, and divert into chaos the righteous.

22 Therefore, thus says Yhwh to the house of Jacob, who ransomed Abraham: “No longer will Jacob be ashamed, and no longer will his face be pale.”

23 For when he sees his children, ‘the deed of my hands’ in his proximity— “They will sanctify my name.” And they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and the God of Israel they will regard-as-terrifying.

24 And those whose spirit goes-astray will know comprehension, and those-who-grumble will learn instruction.

3.2.1 Hearing 29:15-24 in Sequence

Isa 29:15-16 is closely linked to the preceding woe-oracle through a number of lexical correspondences, to the degree that some scholars see it as an extension of 29:1-14, 23 much as 28:14-22 expanded upon 28:1-13. For example, 29:12 presents an analogy involving a person who “who-does-not-know (יֵּדַע) scrolls.” Soon after Yhwh promises to “deal-wonderfully” (זְכַל) with this people while the “comprehension

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23 For example, see Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 373-78.
of its comprehending-ones ( Heb: יֶבֶל צִיוֹנִי; root סָתַר; cf. 29:14). 29:15 then addresses those who “hide a plan” ( Heb: מַסְתָּר תִּסְתַּתָּר)—repetition of the root תִּסְתַּתָּר (hide) is fairly obvious, while the use of תִּסְתַּתָּר completes the motif of Yhwh’s “wonderful plan” (cf. 9:5; 25:1; 28:29). 29:16 then describes “those-who-go-deep” (29:15) as saying, “Who knows us ( Heb: יְדֹעֵנוּ)?” and, “He does not comprehend ( Heb: הֵבִין לֹא)” (cf. 29:12, 14). In this way the text’s interest in wisdom is carried over from the end of the second woe-oracle and made the conceptual basis for the third.

Nevertheless, the macro-structural scaffolding of the six woes in series suggests that 29:1-14 and 29:15-24 should still be maintained as separate units rather than collapsed into one. A degree of tension therefore arises from the third woe’s thematic continuity with (yet structural distinction from) the material that immediately precedes. This tension suggests that 29:15ff. promises fresh reflection on an old topic, and indeed, 29:16 infuses the now familiar trope of non-comprehension (cf. 28:7-13) with a crucial, new element:24 Yhwh is the “Potter” or “Shaper” (cf. 27:11) of those who presume to hide their plans. The analogy functions on two levels. First, it puts the difference between divinity and humanity into the highest possible relief—the Potter is sentient, animate, and creative, while the “thing-shaped” is only “clay” ( Heb: חֹמֶר; 29:16). This contrast emphasizes the radical otherness of Yhwh, who comes to Zion “in tempest and tornado and a flame of consuming fire” (29:6), while humans remain mere matter. Rhetorical questions in 29:16 invite IH to assent to the fundamental contrast that the analogy constructs. The “thing-made” should certainly not say of its Maker, “He did not make me,” nor should

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24 “New” refers here to the verse’s immediate context and sequential presentation within the series of six woes (Isa 28–33), not the book as a whole.
the “thing-shaped” say of its Shaper, “He does not comprehend” (29:16). Such a response would be absurd. Second, the comparison to ceramics also connotes tenderness—Yhwh is a craftsperson, shaping the vessel until it is perfectly suited to its purpose. Such a task requires intimate contact with the object being formed. The artisan is covered to his elbows in wet earth, her body melding with the body of the “thing-shaped.” The analogy’s complexity therefore provides a theological basis not only for asserting Yhwh’s creative power over Lebanon and Carmel in 29:17,25 but also Yhwh’s care for the disabled in 29:18 and compassion for “the deed of my hands’ in his proximity” in 29:22.

The next unit in the passage (29:17-21) presents a series of reversals that collectively envision the restoration of Yhwh’s world order. The first of these in particular has occasioned an important debate that bears on the unit as a whole.

29:17  (1) Is it not that in a small, little while
(2) Lebanon will return to orchard,
(3) and Carmel as a forest will be reckoned?

The verse appears in three cola. Of these, cola 2 and 3 form a neat ABC-CBA pattern, with verbs at the beginning and end and repetition of the place name “Carmel/orchard” at the center. At the B position, “Lebanon” stands in parallel with “forest.” Such grammatical simplicity, however, conceals a significant interpretive challenge. Commentators such as G. Fohrer (1962) and J. Mauchline (1962) find here two inversions: while Lebanon (famous for its forests) turns into a cultivated orchard, the

cultivated orchard will be thought of as an untamed thicket. B (wild) becomes C (domesticated) and C (domesticated) will be reckoned like B (wild). Clements (1980), however, finds it “strange” that “the reversed roles of woodland and grassland” would function as a wholly positive image of “increased fertility of the earth in the time of salvation” as the rest of the unit (29:17-21) seems to indicate. H. Wildberger (2002) agrees, arguing that, “According to the tenor of the entire poem, only good omens will herald the change.” Following similar logic, Blenkinsopp (2000) understands the verse to portray Lebanon as reverting to an agriculturally productive orchard, while orchards will be reckoned “as common as” forest scrubland. W. Beuken (1992) also argues that the verse’s second colon is not “antithetically parallel” with its third colon, “but progressively parallel.” In other words, the recent trend sees both colon 2 and 3 as imagining fruit trees in abundance: B (wild) becomes C (domesticated) in such a way that C (domesticated) will be reckoned like B (plentiful). This reading’s advantage lies in its ability to account for the difference between the parallel verbs “revert” (i.e. turn back into) and “reckoned” (i.e. be regarded as), which are admittedly non-synonymous. Its main drawback, however, lies in the fact that it must posit “Lebanon” (wild) as

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28 Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 110. Wildberger argues that the verse’s obvious similarities with 32:15 constitutes further evidence that its parallelism must be progressive rather than antithetical, but this point does not stand up. While 29:17 is indeed syntactically similar to 32:15, the latter verse uses the term “desert” instead of “Lebanon.” As such, there is no good reason why Fohrer is wrong to read the two verses differently as Wildberger contends.
conceptually unlike “forest/thicket” (plentiful)—to which it stands in parallel—a choice that runs against Lebanon’s association with trees in every other usage in the book.\(^{31}\)

Several additional factors suggest that the older model of reversal rather than progression remains more plausible than these commentators have allowed. For example, the phrase “small, little while” (מִזְעָר מְעַט עוֹד) appearing in the verse’s first colon also appears in 10:25. Importantly, its use in this prior context signals Yhwh’s decision to stop punishing Zion, and instead to address the outrageous blasphemy Assyria committed in 10:13:

10:13 For he said, 
    “By the force of my hand I did this
    and by my wisdom, even my comprehension;
    I turned-aside the boundaries of peoples,
    and their valuables I ransacked,
    and like a robust-one I brought-down inhabitants.”

Assyria’s presumption to invert the created order—to remake the land and to adopt the name of “robust-one” (אַבִּי ר) rightly ascribed to Yhwh (cf. 1:24)—serves as the rationale for Yhwh’s inversion of the Assyrian plan, the removal of its yoke, and the salvation of David’s city and throne (cf. 10:24-27; 11:1-9). Thus Yhwh’s response reverts the world to its natural state. Such a scenario implies that the humble will be elevated, but also that the high and haughty must necessarily be brought low, as both kings and peasants answer to the same God. That the paradigmatic reversal of Assyrian power in Isa 10 should inform interpretation of Isa 29:17 is further suggested by the conceptual similarity between 29:15-16 and 10:15 (both texts imagine the absurdity of an object elevating itself against the object’s user or creator), as well as repetition of key terminology such as

\[^{31}\text{Cf. 2:12; 10:34; 14:8; 33:9; 35:2; 37:24; 40:16; 60:13.}\]
“forest” and “orchard” in 10:18 (cf. 29:17), “fire,” “flame,” and “consume” in 10:17 (cf. 29:6), and “annihilated” in 10:22 and 25 (cf. 29:20). Dramatic changes in the land signal that the Creator’s leveling justice has gone forth.

From an agrarian perspective, non-progressive reversal in 29:17 may be understood as an unequivocally “good omen” (to use Wildberger’s phrase) while still allowing that it signals a negative outcome for those who find themselves wedded to the trajectory of destruction. The deaf hear, the blind see, the vulnerable rejoice, and the needy exult (29:18-19). At the same time, the “terrorizer” (root נָרַשׁ) is reduced to nothing (cf. 13:11; 25:4-5; 29:5) and the “scoffer” (root לָיתַק; cf. 28:14, 22) is destroyed, along with those who “set-traps” (root קַשׁ; cf. 8:14-15; 28:13) and divert their neighbors into “chaos” (תֹּהוּ; cf. 24:10) (29:20-21). N presents all of these outcomes as good news. This fact does not, however, require that 29:17 envision a universal fruit basket. Rather, some land that is now a forest will revert to an orchard; other land now under cultivation will be reckoned a thicket. The text’s emphasis at this particular moment lies not with fecundity, but with the restoration of order, which includes wild, uncultivated spaces (cf. 13:20-22). Rhetorically, the strategy used here is not unlike the way in which the Farmer’s Parable focuses on responsible action rather than on maximum yield. The process is far more important than the product, and the process is by definition calibrated to local limits rather than to human appetites. If IH wishes to tap into the trajectory of hope, he or she can do no better than to trust in the artisanal care of the Maker whose creative power restores the world to its right condition.

Attention to word choice in 29:15-21 suggests that these verses register a corresponding interest in the creaturely body alongside their interest in the Creator.
example, 29:15 uses the one-word phrase, הַפְכְּכֶם (root הָפַךְ), often translated with a form of “perverse” (e.g. “How perverse of you!”)\(^{32}\). The translation above—“How shifty of you!”—attempts to capture the root’s basic meaning, “to invert,” without losing a sense of the idiom’s critical edge. The root is characteristically applied to the cataclysmic “overthrow” (or “shifting-over”) of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19:29 and a variety of other biblical texts.\(^{33}\) In Isaiah, the root also associates with Sodom and Gomorrah in 1:7-9 and 13:19. The first of these two examples appears as part of the original “diagnosis” of Israel’s sin: “Your land is a desolation, your cities burn with fire; your soil before you, strangers consume it—desolation like a ‘shifting-over’ (כְּמַהְפֵּכַת) by strangers (זָרִים)” (1:7). IJ then laments: “If Yhwh of Armies had not left for us a small-amount (כִּמְעָט) of survivors, like Sodom we would have become, Gomorrah we would have resembled (כֹּמֶנָּה; root דִּמֵּה)" (1:9). Immediately prior to this grim image of invasion and destruction, IJ declares that, “Every head is sick (לָחֳלִי; root חָלָה) and every heart (לֵבָב) is ill (דַּוָּי)” (1:5). Thus Israel’s “perversity” vis-à-vis the Creator in 29:15 is notably linked to the destruction of the land by “strangers” (cf. 29:5) and also to the sickness of the body in the book’s theological introduction.

From its first iteration in 1:4-9, the sickness of the body plays an important role in the differentiation of the two historical trajectories (destruction and hope), often in association with food and hunger (cf. 29:8). For example, IJ declares that Israel’s wound is “not bound” (חֻבָּשׁוּוּ and לֹא) and “not soothed with oil (בַּשָּם)” (1:6); later the text depicts the people’s desperation for good leadership, to which a man replies that he is not an

\(^{32}\) Childs, *Isaiah*, 212.

\(^{33}\) Cf. Deut 29:22; Jer 49:18; 50:40; Am 4:11.
adequate “binding” or “remedy” (חֹבֵשׁ) for the problem, and that he has no bread in his house (3:7; cf. 4:1). The prevention of healing (root רaza) appears at a critical juncture in 6:10, with reference to the “fattening” (root שׁמן) of the “heart” (לב) and thus the “quavering hearts” of Ahaz and the people (cf. 1:5; 7:2; 29:13). Then in 10:16, IJ declares that Yhwh will send against Assyria’s “fatness” (בְּמִשְׁמַנָּיו; root שׁמן) a “disease” (רָזוֹן; root רזה), which, like a consuming fire (10:17; cf. 29:6), causes the “annihilation” of “his forest and his orchard” (10:18; cf. 29:17, 20). Babylon is later described as “shifted-over” on analogy to Sodom and Gomorrah (13:19; cf. 1:7-9; 29:15); it is also depicted as a “terrorizer” made low (13:11; cf. 29:20), impotent with respect to Lebanon’s cedars (14:8; cf. 29:17), and as “paralleling” (root מַשְׂל; cf. root דּמה, 1:9) the “sick” (רָהַל; cf. 1:5) in Sheol (14:10-11; cf. 5:13-14; 28:20). Illness is extended to the nations in 17:4, where the “fatness (בְּמִשְׁמַנָּו) of [Jacob’s] flesh will be diseased (רָזוֹנָו)” due to harvest failure (17:5-6), causing the reaper to wander “in a day of sickness (רָהָל)” (17:11). In sum, when 29:15 (בָּאַרְפָּן) alludes to the motif of sick and hungry bodies as introduced in 1:4-9, it implicitly suggests that the cause of that sickness is a failure to remain within the geographical vicinity of the Creator (cf. “those-who-go-deep”). As the two trajectories are differentiated in 29:17-21, not surprisingly the healing of the disabled characterizes those who emerge from the gloom and dark (29:18; cf. 8:23–9:1). The body made whole is a body “on location” with Yhwh.

The Assyrian paradigm in Isa 10 also makes pronounced use of the “small remnant” motif as carried over from 1:9 (cf. 10:19). As demonstrated above, the locution “a small, little while” connects 10:25 to 29:17. The key word “small” (מעַט) functions to extend the motif to the nations in 16:14 (Moab) and 21:17 (Kedar).
A second way in which the text demonstrates an interest in the creaturely body can be observed in the conceptual relationship between 29:15-16 and the final unit of the passage, 29:22-24. Both texts rely on the idea that human beings are Yhwh’s artisanal work—the former unit’s potter and clay language is self-evident, while the latter unit’s identification of “his children” as “the deed of my hands” refreshes the “people = pots” motif. The main difference between the two is a matter of parenetic stress. Whereas 29:15-16 focuses on the perversity of those who would deny the Creator’s power and thus their own creaturely state, 29:22-24 emphasizes that the admission of one’s creaturely identity is an important factor in how a body remains within Yhwh’s instructive presence.

Placed at the center of the text’s last unit, the phrase, “‘the deed of my hands’ in his proximity” (בְּקִרְבּוֹ יָדַי מַעֲשֵׂה; 29:23), provides the key data in support of this point. One must look first at 29:22, however, which characterizes Yhwh as the one who “ransomed Abraham.” Such a description is unusual: Abraham is not mentioned previously, while the root פּדה (ransom) appears only in 1:27 with reference to Zion. This correspondence signals an important clue to the reason why Yhwh says: “No longer will Jacob be ashamed (root בּושׁ), and no longer will his face be pale (root חֵר) (29:22). 1:27 transitions from an image of purification, on the one hand, to a declaration of “fracturing” and “annihilation” those who forsake Yhwh (1:28), on the other. The latter group is identified by cultic sins—terebinths and gardens—for which it will be “ashamed” (root בּושׁ) and “abashed” (root חֵר; 1:29). Thus the subtle cue to 1:27-29 suggests that the

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35 The discussion has demonstrated that Sodom and Gomorrah are echoed in 29:15. Thus Abraham’s name is not totally out of place. The text’s creational focus also suggests that stories about ancestral beginnings are conceptually close at hand.

36 The roots בּושׁ (pale) and חֵר (abashed) exhibit both homonymic paronomasia and parasonance.
conceptual opposite of Abraham’s “ransom” in 29:22 is idolatry. 29:23 then switches from direct citation of Yhwh’s word to a mix of first- and third-person discourse: “For when he sees his children, the ‘deed of my hands’ in his proximity, ‘They will sanctify my name.’” In light of the preceding verse, such phrasing deepens IH’s suspicion that idolatry functions as an important subtext, since “deed-of-hands” appears as a key marker of what Israel is emphatically directed not to worship (cf. 2:8; 17:8). In its present iteration, however, the phrase describes Yhwh’s artisanal work, not human idol-craft (cf. 5:12; 19:25). Thus 29:23 reminds IH of the position he or she properly inhabits as the “thing-made,” not the Maker (29:16). Simultaneously, the phrase “in his proximity” контрастит against the prior image of “going-deep” to evade Yhwh’s plan. Those who remain at Yhwh’s side will regard him as “terrifying” (root יערץ; 29:23), a term that differentiates Yhwh’s children from the “terrorizers” of 29:5 and 29:20 while also directly associating their identity with IJ (8:12-13) and his Torah-obedient “learners” (8:16; cf. 29:24). The hope for order (29:17-21) amid theological perversity (29:15-16) is finally realized in 29:22-23 through an image of the created body (which does not make for itself an idol) inhabiting in its proper place “in his proximity.”

The last verse in the passage returns to the idea of instruction and comprehension. Its tenor is resolutely positive: those whose “spirit goes-astray (רָעַץ רוּחַ) will know (root ידע) comprehension (root בֵּין)” (29:24). Each of these terms is heavily loaded. The root חֹוָעַץ (go/lead-astray) plays a crucial role in the book’s holistic integration of corrupt leadership (cf. 3:12; 9:15; 19:13-14; 28:7) and agro-ecological failure/impropriety (cf. 16:8; 19:14; 28:7). In association with רוּחַ, the phrase recalls the “comatose spirit” (רוּחַ תַּרְדֵּמָה) of 29:10, the “spirit of blindness” (רוּחַ עִוְרִים) of 19:14, and the tree-quavering וְלִמֵּדָי.
“wind” (רוּחַ) of 7:2; in other words, these are individuals who are otherwise strongly associated with the trajectory of destruction. The notion that they would eventually “know comprehension” (cf. 1:3; 29:11-15) maintains a profound hope in the midst of Yhwh’s world-leveling restoration (29:17-21). Just as the eyes of the blind peer out from the “gloom and darkness” (29:18), so too those who “go-astray” will find their way back to the Teacher in their midst (cf. 28:23-29). Yhwh heals body, mind, and spirit together.

At a level-two situation within the text, IH encounters the optimism of 29:24 from a unique position of choice (cf. 1:19-20) that is quite unlike the position of the level-one prophets and visioners whose eyes are “smeared” (29:9) and who “go-deep to hide a plan” (29:15). The related topics of creation and idolatry provide insight as to how this choice may be inferred from the oracle’s conclusion in 29:24. In Isa 2, for example, the call to Torah obedience (2:1-5) is set within a land filled up with silver and gold, treasures, horses and chariots (2:6-7). Moreover, “[Jacob’s] land is full of idols (אֱלִילִים;), to the deed of their hands (לְמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו) they bow-down, to what their fingers have made” (2:8; cf. 29:23). Yhwh’s “terrifying” (-root עִרְצָה) presence and power (cf. 2:19, 21), however, restores the world to its proper order by cutting down cedars and oaks and by lowering mountains and hills (2:13-14). Having witnessed the power of Yhwh in his role as Shaper and Creator of the land, the people respond by discarding their idols of silver and gold (2:20-21). Similar logic also appears in 17:7-8:

17:7 In that day a human will focus on his Maker (עֹשֵׂהוּ,), and his eyes the Holy-One of Israel will see.
8 And he will not focus on the altars (הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת, the deed of his hands (מַעֲשֶׂה יָדָיו), and what his fingers made he will not see—— neither asherim nor incense-stands (אֵשֶׂרִים,).
Several key terms found here also appear in 27:9-11, which states that Jacob’s atonement will occur when he discards the “stones of the altar (מִזְבֵּחַ)” along with “asherim and incense-stands” (חַמָּנִים וְאֲשֵׁרִים; 27:9). By contrast, those who remain wedded to a life of cultic impropriety are described as “a people without comprehension,” and for this reason, “its Maker” (עֹשֵׂהוּ) and “its Shaper” (יֹצְרוֹ) show it no grace (27:11). As pointed out in the last chapter of this study, it is precisely here that IJ turns from his level-one situation within the text to assert that, “You yourselves will be gleaned, one by one, O sons of Israel!” (27:12), urging IH toward a decisive response. Returning to Isa 29, the same language of “Maker” and “Shaper” reminds IH of the issue N is determined to force: either IH is willing to repudiate the “deed of his hands” (17:8), accepting that he or she is in fact the deed of Yhwh’s hands (29:23), or not. Either IH is prepared to acknowledge that Yhwh is his or her Maker (17:7; 27:11; 29:16), embracing his or her creaturely status, or not. Hope hinges on an admission of the creature’s position before the Creator (cf. 1:2-3); the alternative is hunger (29:8), blindness (29:9-10), illiteracy (29:11-12), and doom (29:20-21). A body must choose.

3.2.2 Summary of Woes Two and Three

The Farmer’s Parable in 28:23-29 serves as key point of orientation for the second and third woe-oracles by showing that recognition of (and thus participation in) Yhwh’s plan is dependent on the manner by which food is produced and consumed. From an agrarian perspective, this claim may be understood as promoting “propriety,” a holistic concept involving principles of care and responsibility for the land. As chapter one of the present study demonstrates, agrarian principles such as these rest on an epistemological
foundation having to do with the *creaturely body in place* in contrast to the modern era’s detached, spectatorial mind. The second and third woes of Isa 29 explore this foundation on two fronts.

The second woe (29:1-14) emphasizes the importance of *place* primarily through its depiction of Ariel’s salvation in 29:1-8. IH expects the city’s rescue precisely because the text focuses on the special location where the attack occurs. As the priests and prophets of Isa 28 remain obtuse to the principles of proper land-care (cf. 28:7-13), so too the prophets and visioners find themselves totally incapable of adducing the pattern to which Yhwh’s miraculous intervention adheres (29:9-10). Their utter failure in this sense warns IH against following their example. At the same time, by casting obduracy in terms of illiteracy (29:11-12), N suggests to IH that he or she has been granted the perspective required to avoid LA’s fate: IJ’s scroll clearly demonstrates that Yhwh saves “on location” in Zion.

The third woe (29:15-24) follows closely from the second, addressing “those-who-go-deep” from Yhwh to “hide a plan” (29:15). This language maintains the prior oracle’s interest in place, but switches the geographical center of the passage from Zion to Yhwh himself, especially in his role as “Maker” and “Shaper” (29:16). As the prophets and visioners fail to ascertain Yhwh’s work with respect to Ariel, so too “those-who-go-deep” fail to recognize that they are only clay vessels in the Creator’s powerful hands. Against their negative example, the third woe promotes the admission of one’s *creaturely identity* as a necessary step in moving from the opacity of gloom and darkness into the realm of hearing and sight (29:18). IH is finally pressed to accept that he or she is indeed
“‘the deed of my hands’ in his proximity” (29:23) in order to avoid the annihilation to which the terrorizer and scoffer are ultimately consigned (29:20).


The next two woe-oracles in the series signal their continuity with Isa 28–29 almost immediately. Set in the first-person voice of Yhwh, the fourth woe begins with these words: “‘Woe to stubborn sons (בָּנִים סוֹרְרִים)—an oracle of Yhwh—‘by making a plan (עֵצָה), but not from me…’” (30:1). Such phrasing recalls the words of 29:15—“Woe to those-who-go-deep (רֵעֵבִים רַעֲבִים) from Yhwh to hide a plan (עֵצָה).” The oracle also describes those who “proceed to go-down (לָרֶדֶת) to Egypt” (30:2); later the fifth woe addresses “those-who-go-down (רֵעֵבִים רַעֲבִים) to Egypt for help” (31:1). Soon after appears an exhortation to return to the one from whom the “sons (בָּנֵי) of Israel have deepened (מִיקוּ) defection (סָרָה)” (31:6). If the priests and prophets of 28:7, the scoffers of 28:14, the prophets and visioners of 29:10, and “those-who-go-deep” of 29:15, are all members of the same character set (II’s intransigent LA), these details suggest that the “stubborn sons” (30:1) and “those-who-go-down” to Egypt (31:1) also fit the literary mold. As in Isa 28, appellations ascribed to the target group shift and the criticisms issued against it range in topic; nevertheless, a plethora of lexical cues and conceptual analogies effectively threads the woe-oracles’ content into a contiguous sequence.

Working from this basis, the following exegetical analysis makes three important claims. First, it argues that an epistemological interest in place—crucial to the agrarian

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37 The form לַעֲשׂוֹת is an infinitive construct with prefixed ל. That is, woe to stubborn sons, who are considered stubborn “by their act of” making a plan. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 608-9.
rhetoric of woes two and three—remains a key component also of woes four and five. The text continues to emphasize that Zion is the proper site of Yhwh’s salvation and rule, now juxtaposed against the pseudo-refuge of Egypt, whose help is “vacuous and empty” (30:7). Correspondingly, woes four and five also maintain the text’s agrarian focus on creatureliness as an essential component of its parnetic call to obedience. As in Isa 29, this aspect of the text can be traced through several different topics, including ignorance and instruction, idolatry, Yhwh’s restoration of the created order, and the healing of disabled bodies. Finally, the text drives toward the prospect of durable land-inhabitation, a time when “my people will inhabit a peaceful home, in confident dwellings and in carefree places-of-rest” (32:18). The trajectory of hope “takes place” among the bodies Yhwh fashions from the soil and supports within the land.

### 3.3.1 A Question of Referent

The threefold argument stated above will be best understood by considering briefly the difference between this study’s agrarian-rhetorical approach to the text and the historical-critical model that has hitherto dominated the discussion associated with Isa 30–32. The secondary literature reveals that modern scholars usually assign 30:1-7, 31:1-3, and 32:9-14 to the earliest stratum of composition, linked to the events surrounding Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem in 701 BCE. The “stubborn sons” (30:1) who “go-down to Egypt” (31:1) are understood as a pro-Egypt faction in Hezekiah’s court, which sought a political alliance with their stronger neighbor to the south.38 Consequently, J.

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Roberts also interprets language such as the “helper” and the “helped-one” (31:3) as Egypt/Nubia and Judah, respectively.\textsuperscript{39} For Roberts and other historians, these terms are referentially specific and thus semantically determined—the “helped-one” is the actual nation of Judah and nothing else. Few Isaiah scholars would disagree that at least some of the words found here originated in the late eighth century BCE. The salient question, however, is whether the text in its present form requires (or even suggests) that its reader search for such historical referents in order to understand it. This inquiry is not intended to conceal an anti-historical agenda; rather, it cuts to the nature of the text as a historical document and theological statement. To what exactly does it refer?

One brief example from H. Wildberger’s reading of Isa 32:9-14 will illumine the interpretive stakes associated with this question. Dubbed the “last words of Isaiah” by G. Fohrer,\textsuperscript{40} the unit is a prophetic address to “carefree women” and “confident daughters” (32:9), instructing them to lament for the “desirable fields” (32:12) and the “celebratory town” (עַלִּיזָה קִרְיָה; 32:13). Following Fohrer, Wildberger concludes that the passage is original to the historical prophet, and as such, “the exegete has no choice but to assume that the ‘city’ being mentioned is Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{41} He finds it, “surprising that no explicit mention is made of Jerusalem or Zion...But since the message surely has its roots in Jerusalem, there can hardly be another city in mind when the carefree women are

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discussed.”\textsuperscript{42} On this reading, the appellation’s apparent non-specificity is deemed accidental; the prophet’s ancient audience presumably would have known that “celebratory town” referred to Jerusalem, but the term’s referential precision has been obscured by the cultural separation of the intervening millennia. Given that a variety of other Isaianic texts seem to regard Jerusalem as an inviolable refuge, Wildberger logically concludes that, “Isaiah 32:9-14 falls outside the parameters of the rest of the book of Isaiah insofar as this section announces the end of Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{43} Thus the search for the term’s historical referent finally produces irresolvable, literary fragmentation. The end product is perceived to be an anthology at best or an incoherent jumble at worst.

The issue turns on what kind of referent is appropriate to the text in its written form. A synchronic appraisal of the text is necessary in order to adjudicate this question, since the text must be understood first according to its literary self-presentation before its redactional seams can be accurately adduced and gently pulled apart.\textsuperscript{44} To this end, Childs notes that the term עַלִּיזָה קִרְיָה (32:13), “occurs only here and in a previous reference in 22:2, a reference that can hardly be accidental.”\textsuperscript{45} He also cites the unit’s similarity to 3:16-26 (a prior address to women).\textsuperscript{46} Thus for Childs, the “celebratory town” is not the geographical site known as Jerusalem that exists in real time and space;
it is language used as part of a paradigm, related to “brawlers” and “crowds” as the evidence presented earlier in this study suggests. “The hermeneutical implication,” he writes, “is that the context for interpreting chapter 32 does not lie in a historical reconstruction or a redactional trajectory, but in its setting as a literary, indeed theological, construct that offers a fresh prophetic rendering of Isaianic tradition.” In other words, the question pertains not to history *per se*, nor to notions of synchrony “versus” diachrony. Rather, it is a matter of what the historically-composed and historically-encountered text actually proposes to discuss. In light of overwhelming intratextual evidence, this study concludes that the scroll of Isaiah refers to itself (cf. 8:16; 30:8).

These observations cast a measure of doubt on the assumption that 30:1-7 and 31:1-3 are best understood with reference to the alliance Hezekiah probably attempted to forge with Egypt prior to 701 BCE. On the one hand, specific place names appear in these two texts, such as Egypt, Zoan, Hanes, and the Negev (30:2, 3, 4, 6, 7; 31:1, 3); also Pharaoh appears twice, in 30:2 and 3. Thus it is not unreasonable to assume that the two units emerged from the political milieu that scholars propose. On the other hand, Egypt and Pharaoh are well-known biblical tropes. Moreover, terms such as “plan” (30:1), “spirit” (30:1), “go-down” (30:2), “refuge” (30:2), “shelter” (30:2), “shade” (30:2), “shame” (30:3), and “help” (30:5, 7) all play important rhetorical and theological roles in other parts of the book prior to Isa 30. In other words, the text is heavily freighted, even

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47 Childs, *Isaiah*, 239. One common error made with respect to Childs’ views on this matter involves the belief that his canonical approach advocates a purely synchronic and thus ahistorical reading of the text. For example, see Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 6.
in the so-called “original” portions of these three chapters. Not once is Hezekiah mentioned in Isa 30–32; at the same time, Jerusalem and Zion pop up at several key junctures (cf. 30:19, 29; 31:4-5, 9). This evidence suggests that the text’s “geopolitical” discourse does not function “in the service of” theological reflection (as W. Brueggemann puts it); rather, the text’s discourse is *geo-theological* in its “original,” written iteration.

3.3.2 Isaiah 30:1–32:20: Emphasis on Place

The fourth and fifth woes unequivocally maintain that Zion is the location of Yhwh’s miraculous salvation, as expressed already in 29:1-8 and other prior texts. They do this in two ways: first, by decrying the effort to find refuge in Egypt, and second, by depicting Zion as the site of Yhwh’s sure defense. In pitting these two locations against each other, N encourages IH to reject of the former geo-theological paradigm while embracing the latter.

Numerous correspondences thread 30:1-7 and 31:1-3 together with preceding material in Isa 1–29. Careful attention to these data reveals that LA’s effort to “go-down” to Egypt—away from its proximity to Yhwh—is depicted as a serious, theological blunder. For example, 30:1 addresses “stubborn sons” (סוֹרְרִים בָּנִים); this language suggests a failure to comprehend on par with the “sons” Yhwh raised up but who, in contrast to farm animals, do not know the source of their subsistence (1:2-3). סוֹרְרִים (root סָרָר) exhibits parasonance with the root סָרָה, which may indicate “defection” (סָרָה; cf. 31:6) or a “turning-aside” from the proper path (cf. 30:11). Additionally, LA’s

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stubbornness consists of activities that are “not from me” and “not of my spirit (רוּחִי)” (30:1; cf. 28:6; 29:10; 31:3). While the phrases “making a plan” and “weaving a blanket” (30:1) have suggested to some the language of eighth-century political intrigue, it is important to recognize that the text qualifies these locutions with the phrase, “adding sin upon sin” (עַל־חַטָּאת; 30:1). This descriptor strengthens the verse’s connection to the animal metaphor of 1:2-3 (cf. root חטא; 1:4), while syntactically resembling IJ’s directive to “add year upon year” (עַל־שָׁנָה; 29:1). It therefore suggests an analogy whereby the city’s chief external threat as depicted in 29:2-3 is matched in 30:1 by an image of internal rebellion and theological betrayal.

In 30:2, LA’s disloyalty to Yhwh is further depicted as physical abandonment; the stubborn sons are those who “go-down (לָרֶדֶת) to Egypt,” who “take-refuge (לָעוֹז) in the refuge of Pharaoh,” and who “shelter (וְלַחְסוֹת) in the shade (בְּצֵל) of Egypt.” Such language echoes Isa 28 and the “shelter of lies” (28:15, 17), while simultaneously signaling a contrast with the “Zion = stable dwelling” motif as registered in 4:6, 14:32, 16:1-5, and 25:4-5. 31:1 similarly appeals to “those-who-go-down (לָרֶדֶת) to Egypt for help (לְעֶזְרָה).” The notion of “going-down” (root ירדה) in both cases puts the stubborn sons’ behavior in line with that of the drunkards (5:14), Assyria (10:13), and Babylon (14:11). Numerous other lexical cues combine to draw an unmistakable correspondence between the addressees of 30:1 and 31:1 and the trajectory of destruction as developed in Isa 1–29. For example, these are individuals who “rely” (root שׁען) upon horses and chariots (31:1), distinguishing their character from that of the remnant community who relies on Yhwh alone (10:20). Furthermore they do not “focus” (root שׁעה) on the Holy-One of Israel.

49 This phrase will be addressed in the discussion below. See also Appendix A.
(31:1; cf. 17:7-8), suggesting an affinity with those whose eyes are smeared over (root בַּשָּׂע) in 29:9-10 (cf. 6:9-10). The source of their supposed confidence (root בֶּטַח; 31:1) is not immune to the power of Yhwh’s extended hand (יָדָיו; 31:3; cf. 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4; 14:27); indeed, the “helper stumbles” (עֶזֶר וְכָשַׁל; 31:3) and the “helped-one falls” (עָזֵר וּנָפַל; 31:3). The language of reliance, confidence, and help links 31:1-3 to the previous woe-oracle (cf. 30:5, 7, 12-13) and also to other ominous texts such as 3:1, 10:3, and 20:6. When combined with the roots כָּשַּׁל (stumble) and נָפַל (fall), the idea of seeking out an alternate refuge is encoded with the language of paradigmatic doom (cf. 8:15; 28:13). For those who go down to Egypt, “annihilation” (root כַּלָּה) is certain (31:3; cf. 10:23; 28:22; 29:20). These are individuals who prefer a land of “distress and straits” (30:6; cf. 8:22; 29:2) to the proximity of Yhwh (cf. 29:23), and as such, will bear the “shame” (בֹּשֶׁת), “humiliation” (כְּלִמָּה), and “disgrace” (חֶרְפָּה) that their geo-theological defection incurs (30:3, 5; cf. 1:29; 20:5; 29:22).

The perverse “shiftiness” (cf. 29:16) of the stubborn sons’ preference for Egypt is made especially clear through its juxtaposition with IJ’s great esteem for Zion in these same chapters. For example, 30:8-17 expands on 30:1-7, ending with a rhetorical device whereby IJ quotes his adversaries’ suggestion that they will flee on horseback (30:16; cf. 31:1). As IJ sees it, however, “for this reason you will flee indeed” (30:16); their own words expose the strategy as bankrupt. At this point, N renders the sequence of IJ’s word so that in the next oracle, over against the stubborn sons’ failure to develop a viable plan, the following promise stands out: “For a people in Zion, who-inhabit Jerusalem—you will surely weep no more” (30:19). The verse is notably redundant with respect to location. Observing this, Clements argues that, “The identification ‘in Zion’ is
superfluous beside ‘at Jerusalem’ and should be deleted as a gloss.”

On the contrary, the verse is overloaded with synonymous terms for Jerusalem precisely because it aims to contrast “those-who-go-down” against those who stay put.

Two other units found in Isa 30–32 also point to Zion as the place where Yhwh saves. The first of these, 30:27-33, imagines Assyria’s demise as a kind of liturgical celebration. Scholars debate especially the location where the theophany takes place. Does Yhwh “come from afar” (30:27) to sift the nations (30:28) at Zion, or does he travel from Zion to do battle against Assyria (30:31-33) in some other region? Beuken’s excellent analysis of Isa 30 points out that the second-person addressees of this unit go up as religious pilgrims to “the mountain of Yhwh, to the Rock of Israel” (30:29; cf. 2:2-5). He argues: “Since v. 30…from a syntactic perspective is directly linked to v. 27…then Zion must also be the place where Yhwh will carry out his judgment against Assyria.”

This view is strengthened by the image of a “fire pit and abundant wood” (30:33), in line with Yhwh’s Ariel-altar of 29:2 and prior images of Zion’s fiery purification such as 1:31 and 4:4. Assyria falls at Zion’s walls, while the city is purified from within. In confirmation of this point, the last unit in Isa 30–32 to make explicit mention of Jerusalem is 31:4-9; this text culminates in another declaration of Assyria’s destruction (31:8), followed by, “an oracle of Yhwh, whose light is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem” (31:9). As in the case of 30:19, the verse’s geographical redundancy is rhetorically and theologically significant. Finally, the much-debated image of Yhwh

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50 Clements, Isaiah 1–39, 250.
51 Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 248.
attacking Zion like a lion, but then ultimately defending her “like flying birds” (31:5), has raised no end of speculation and redactional theories. But however one adjudicates the imagery, it is unavoidably clear that Yhwh does indeed protect Jerusalem in the end—“shielding, he delivers; sparing, he rescues” (31:5). Thus for good reason U. Berges contends that, “Zion is the bulwark against which the nations charge in vain.” In each case—30:19, 30:27-33, and 31:4-9—Zion stands as the proper refuge for those who maintain hope against the overwhelming flood. Place matters.

3.3.3 Isaiah 30:1–32:20: Emphasis on Bodies

The analysis of woes two and three presented above identified several topics through which human creatureliness is addressed, including: 1) intransigence and instruction, 2) idolatry, 3) Yhwh’s restoration of the created order, and 4) the healing of disabled bodies. Woes four and five expand on all four of these topics, reinforcing and developing the text’s parenetic aim to prompt admission of one’s creaturely identity as a foundational act of obedience.

3.3.3.1 Intransigence and Instruction

In the same way that Isa 30–32 plays on a contrast between two geo-theological paradigms (Egypt versus Zion), these texts associate with the former paradigm a sense of self-assured intelligence, and with the latter, humble ignorance and a willingness to be

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54 Berges, The Book of Isaiah, 221.
taught. As noted above, for example, the stubbornness of Yhwh’s children (30:1) recalls the difference in posture between themselves and farm animals as introduced in 1:2-3; moreover, that these stubborn sons “make a plan” of their own, “but not from me” (30:1), suggests a certain adolescent bravado as they take matters (political, theological, and otherwise) into their own hands. Like Ahaz, they fail to “ask” (root שָׁאָל; 30:2; cf. 7:11), marking their unwillingness to admit the limits of their knowledge. They attempt to use wealth and treasures to effect a desired outcome (30:6), but their Egyptian safety net IJ exposes as profitless (30:6). In short, their attention is misplaced, and thus their presumed wisdom is void.

LA’s failure to accept instruction is developed more fully in the next unit, 30:8-17. IJ declares that, “this is a rebellious people, sons (בָּנִים) of deception, sons (בָּנִים) not willing (לֹא־אָבוּ) to hear the Torah of Yhwh” (30:9). These words effectively pick up the concept of Yhwh’s intransigent children from 30:1 and tie that intransigence to the chronic problem of Torah rejection (cf. 1:10, 2:3, 5:24, 8:16, 8:20, and 24:5) as discussed with respect to Isa 28. This connection is strengthened through phrases such as, “because you have rejected (מָאָסְכֶם) this word” (30:12), as the key root מָאָס appears also in 5:24 with reference to Torah. That Yhwh’s “rebellious” (root מָרָה) children are “unwilling (root אָבוּ) to hear” produces a further link between LA’s present geo-theological error and its earlier repudiation of the land (cf. 1:19-20; 28:12).55 Later in the same unit, Yhwh states that, “Through return (root וְשָׁבַח) and rest (root נָחַה) will you be saved, in quietness

and in confidence is your prevailing-power (root גּבר—-but you were not willing (וְלֹא אֲבִיתֶם) (30:15). Obvious lexical correspondences tie this verse not only to 30:9 (and thus to 28:12 and 1:19-20), but also to 28:6 (e.g. return, prevailing-power) and the complex network of ideas associated with these key terms. LA’s failure to heed Yhwh’s instruction is not an isolated issue; to the degree that political affairs remain in view, they are clearly only one part of a much larger, theological problem.56

The topic of intransigence and instruction relates to the creaturely body specifically through the language of physical posture. IJ quotes his adversaries as saying, “Do not see,” and, “Do not envision for us straight-things (נְכֹחוֹת)” (30:10). The idea of “straightness” is then expanded through the well-known metaphor of a “road” (דֶּרֶךְ) and “path” (אֹרַח), indicative of error when “turned-aside” (root סָר; 30:11; cf. 30:1).

Correspondingly, the same metaphor imagines moral and theological soundness as face-forward, bipedal progression along a given route. The book relies on this stock concept at several earlier points. For example, in its theological introduction (Isa 1–4), the nations express their desire to learn Torah with the words, “and let us walk (root הָלַכָּה) in his paths” (2:3), which is followed by the first-person admonition: “Let us walk in the light of Yhwh!” (2:5). Conversely, the leaders of Yhwh’s people lead them astray by confusing the “road of your paths” (3:12; cf. 9:15), while IJ is notably disciplined “from walking in the road of this people” (8:11). Near the end of the theological history presented in Isa 1–27, first-person “hope” is associated with movement along a “path” and “track” (root עָגַל that is “level” (root יִשְׁרָה; 26:7-8). Thus IH is already primed to

conceptualize LA’s intransigence as depicted in 30:8-17 not only as geo-theological abandonment of one place in preference for another (cf. 30:1-7), but also as a body’s divergence from the physical orientation and route Yhwh’s status as Creator properly demands (cf. 29:15-16).

The next unit, 30:18-26, provides a parenetic supplement to 30:8-17. IJ’s second-person discourse in 30:18 invites IH to apply the prophetic word directly to him or herself as a potential member of that people which is “in Zion” and which “inhabits Jerusalem” (30:19).

30:20 For the Lord gave to you
bread of distress and waters of deprivation,
but no longer concealed will your Teacher (root ירה be,
and your eyes will see your Teacher.\(^{57}\)

21 And your ears will hear a word from behind you saying,
“This is the road; walk in it,”
whether you go-right\(^{58}\) or go-left.

\(^{57}\) Scholars debate especially the identity of the Teacher in this instance. Blenkinsopp, for example, argues that since “Lord” is just mentioned (30:20), the Teacher must be someone else. Moreover, since the Teacher’s word comes “from behind you” (מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ; 30:21), he reasons that it comes from the past, and thus the identity of the Teacher is the prophetic figure himself. See Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 421. The merit in this interpretation lies in Blenkinsopp’s attention to the fact that the term מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ carries both a temporal and spatial sense, and that the former should not be discarded in favor of the former. Nevertheless, several other factors suggest that the Teacher is probably best understood as Yhwh. First, nothing in the syntax of 30:21 requires that “Lord” must be someone different from “Teacher.” Second, the notion that מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ connotes the sense that the Teacher stands “behind you” in both a temporal and spatial sense is not evidence of identity one way or the other, since both the prophet and Yhwh have spoken in the past. Third, Yhwh is portrayed as the giver of Torah (root ירה) in 2:1-5 and elsewhere. In 8:17, for example—immediately after a command to seal up the Torah—IJ states that he will “wait” (root חכה) for Yhwh, “who-hides his face from the house of Jacob.” This is the only appearance of the root חכה prior to 30:18, immediately after which the Teacher is “no longer concealed” (30:20). Finally, Yhwh is expressly depicted as one who teaches (root ירה) in 28:26, a verse central to the Farmer’s Parable and which is keyed to the chronic problem of unwillingness as registered in 28:12, 30:9, and 30:15. Other scholars such as Berges, Beuken, Childs, and Laberge make similar points, arriving at the conclusion that Yhwh is most likely candidate for the Teacher in question. See Berges, The Book of Isaiah, 212-13; Beuken, “Woe to Powers,” 39; Beuken, “Isaiah 30,” 379-80; Childs, Isaiah, 227; Léo Laberge, “Is 30:19-26: A Deuteronomic Text?” Église et Théologie 2.1 (Jan 1971): 45-46.

\(^{58}\) תאמינו (go-right) is usually understood as תימינו, in parallel with תשמайл (go-left). See Roberts, First Isaiah, 393; William H. Irwin, Isaiah 28–33: Translation with Philological Notes, BibOr 30 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977), 91; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 467; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 168. Intriguingly, the variant hints at a form of the root ירה, which is thematically prescient to the unit, chapter, section, and book as a whole.
These two verses capitalize on the classic “instruction = journey” motif by literally “fleshing out” its physiological possibilities. In the past,\textsuperscript{59} IJ remarks, the Lord gave you the “bread of distress” and the “waters of deprivation.” Such language connotes mere rations, or as Mauchline puts it, “prisoners’ fare.”\textsuperscript{60} IH’s belly rumbles with the memory of hard times. But now, “your eyes will see” (30:20) and “your ears will hear” (30:21); IH recalls Yhwh’s potential to heal disabled bodies as expressed in 29:18. Additionally, the spatio-temporal term מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ (30:21), as well as the designations “right” and “left” (30:21), suggest to IH a body standing hesitantly in the road, wondering which way to go (cf. 1:19-20). Like a still, small whisper, the Teacher’s voice “from behind” converts the traveler’s anxiety into confidence: “This is the way; walk in it” (30:21). Such physiological details require that IH imagine him or herself in the posture of an obedient pilgrim in order to grasp the content N relates. A proper response to Yhwh’s instruction involves one’s muscles and stomach as much as one’s mind (cf. 1:2-3). Obedience is a corporeal pursuit.

3.3.3.2 Idolatry

Emphasis on the creaturely body in Isa 30–32 is likewise apparent through the language of idolatry. This topic shifts the focus slightly from the “body” to the “creature”—that is, to the human being’s proper regard for his or her created status and what cultic parameters that status naturally implies. The preceding exegetical analysis of 29:15-24 argued that one central problem with idolatry as portrayed in the text relates to

\textsuperscript{59} The temporal quality of the verb וְנָתַן, which begins 30:20, is debated in the secondary literature. Some scholars prefer to read it in the present tense, but nothing in the grammar precludes taking the form as a perfect plus conjunctive waw.

\textsuperscript{60} Mauchline, Isaiah 1–39, 210.
its misalignment of the human-divine relationship. By putting the human into the role of an artisan of god(s), idolatry denies Yhwh his rightful status as the Potter and Shaper of human “clay” (cf. 29:16, 23). On this logic, idolatry likewise distracts from the intrinsic “made-ness” and materiality of the human body.

The discussion may begin again with the “stubborn sons,” those who “weave a blanket (מַסֵּכָה ὑλὴν)” not of Yhwh’s spirit (30:1). This polyvalent phrase suggests that the sons’ geo-theological abandonment of Zion and their unwillingness to be taught is associated also with the problem of idol worship. It consists of an infinitive construct (וְלִנְסֹךְ) and a nominal form of the same root (מַסֵּכָה), creating a cognate accusative.

Scholars have put forth a number of different interpretations, such as “weave a web” (i.e. make an alliance)\(^ {61} \) and “pour out a drink offering.”\(^ {62} \) The latter translation has the advantage of interpreting the verb (וְלִנְסֹךְ) according to its commonest meaning, “pour-out.” The issue is complicated, however, by the fact that the second term, מַסֵּכָה, appears at two points prior to 30:1 and in both cases seems to indicate a fabric of some kind (cf. 25:7; 28:20). 25:7 in particular doubles the root נָסְך (yielding “woven blanket”) in parallel with “shroud” (לְוֵית), while 28:20 uses מַסֵּכָה to indicate bedding (cf. 14:11). H. Williamson’s insightful essay on this subject attempts to resolve the issue by associating the term מַסֵּכָה with its use later in the same chapter: “Then you will treat-as-unclean your images overlaid with silver, and your ephods ‘blanketed’ (מַסֵּכַת) with gold” (30:22). For Williamson, the term is a “molten image” in 30:22,\(^ {63} \) and thus מַסֵּכָה is most

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\(^ {61} \) Ibid., 207. See also Childs, who translates, “weaving alliances.” Childs, Isaiah, 220.


plausibly rendered in a similar fashion, yielding “cast an image.” All this demonstrates that however the interpreter converts 30:1 to English, its intrinsic polysemy points IH toward the topic of idolatry.

Other lexical clues appearing throughout Isa 30–32 support this point. For example, references to Egypt and Pharaoh in 30:2-3 naturally recall a similar interest in the African continent as recorded in Isa 18–20. 19:1 states that, “The idols (אֱלִילֵי) of the Egyptians will quaver before [Yhwh], and the hearts of the Egyptians will melt in his proximity” (19:1). The term “idols” (אֱלִילֵי) is self-evident, while the phrase “in his proximity” (בְּקִרְבּוֹ; 19:1) with reference to Yhwh hints at a correlation with 29:23, which, through association with the alleviation of shame (29:22) and the “deed of my hands” (29:23), suggests the language of idolatry in other parts of Isa 1–27 (e.g. 1:29). In 30:3-5, shame and disgrace are likewise used to qualify the stubborn sons’ efforts to “make a plan” and “weave a blanket” (30:1). These activities are depicted as producing no help or profit in 30:5-7, notably in relation to the sons’ attempt to transport “treasures” (אֹצְרֹתָם) to Egypt (30:6). Similarly in 31:1-3, those-who-go-down to Egypt rely on “horses” (סּוּסִים; 31:1), which are described as “not spirit” (31:1; cf. 19:14; 29:10; 30:1). In the next unit, a call is issued to the “sons of Israel” to return to Yhwh, from whom they have “deepened defection” (31:6; cf. 29:15; 30:1). Such repentance is then portrayed as willingness to “reject” (רָפֵא; cf. 5:24; 8:6; 30:12) one’s “silver idols (כַּסְפּוֹ אֱלִילֵי) and “gold idols” (זְהָבוֹ וֶאֱלִילֵי). Isa 2 threads together many of the relevant terms in the following passage:

2:7 And his land is full of silver and gold (כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב), and there is no end to his treasures (לְאֹצְרֹתָיו; וְזָהָב כֶּסֶף), and his land is full of horses (סּוּסִים),
and there is no end to his chariots.

8 And his land is full of idols (אֱלִילִים);
to the deeds of his hands (יָדָיו, לְמַעֲשֵׂה) they bow-down,
to what his fingers have made.

The hermeneutical upshot of such a rich, intratextual tapestry is complex but clear: in the
text’s final form, anti-idolatry rhetoric cannot be meaningfully isolated from other socio-
economic, political, and theological concerns. It therefore behooves the reader to interpret
references to idolatry in relation to these other interests, especially where the text’s
syntax signals an overt connection.

One such case appears in 30:21-22:

30:21 And your ears will hear a word from behind you saying,
   “This is the road; walk in it,”
   whether you go-right or go-left.
22 Then you will treat-as-unclean your images overlaid with silver,
   and your ephods blanketed with gold;
   you will scatter them like menstrual-cloth—
   “Go-out!”

Taken in sum, these two verses suggest that Isaiah’s anti-idolatry rhetoric relies on the
same conceptual basis as does the rhetoric of instruction: human beings are by definition
creaturely bodies walking before their Creator. On the one hand, IJ appears to shift topics
from one verse to the next. 30:20-21 portrays the willingness to learn as a kind of face-
forward progression along Yhwh’s designated path, while 30:22 addresses cultic
purification through the removal and destruction of idols. On the other hand, 30:20-21
capitalizes on the “instruction = journey” motif by fleshing out its physiological
possibilities, through references to food, hearing, sight, and movement. 30:22 follows that

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[64] Reading “dung.” Wildberger questions this form as an imperative of יצא, since he does not see
who or what is supposed to “go-out.” Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 168. In agreement with Wildberger, Watts
reads “filth.” Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 467. If נִזְזָה is taken as a substantive adjective meaning menstrual cloth,
however, this is precisely what would act as the subject of the imperative “go-out.” See Roberts, First
Isaiah, 392. The form exhibits parasonance with זָאָה (filth); cf. 4:4; 28:8.
logic by associating idol rejection with the disposal of menstrual cloth. In this way, the relationship between these admittedly different ideas is rendered complementary, not competitive—the result of an associative logic that comprehends reality in holistic terms. The same creaturely awareness that prompts right posture and right direction before Yhwh on the road of instruction also leads his students to bury their idols in the nearest landfill (cf. 2:20-21). The key point of contact between the two ideas is their shared regard for the human body.

A brief comparison with the book of Deuteronomy will help to enrich the foregoing observation. One of Deuteronomy’s most pronounced rhetorical features concerns the prospect of land-inhabitation as contingent on the prohibition against idols. The two ideas are frequently joined (cf. 4:22-26; 6:15; 7:5-13; 11:16-17; 12:1-3), but just as frequently their conceptual relationship is left unexplained. This discursive habit is rooted in the fact that, in the Bible’s frame of reference, Torah flows directly from creation.⁶⁵ Torah assumes the intrinsic value of fibers, flesh, water, and wind. It does not prescribe a set of religious feelings but rather guides its implied hearers in the proper treatment of material reality: seed as seed, livestock as livestock, blood as blood. To worship a block of wood, overlaid with precious metal, is to treat both the tree and the metal as something other than what they are. Idolatry, in other words, is presented as a theological breach of material reality. Equally, it is a material breach of theological reality. Thus idolatry has everything to do with land-inhabitation, because both worship and subsistence according to Torah are bound up with proper regard for created

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...substance. Likewise in Isa 30:22, idol-craft is portrayed as a kind of grotesque lunacy (cf. “filth/go-out;” 28:8) on par with a failure to discard one’s tampon, a galling miscalculation of both the precious metals and the human being as “things-made.” Right instruction of the person (understood as a body on pilgrimage, not a detached mind) elicits proper regard for material reality: proper disposal of one’s menstrual cloth, and correspondingly, proper disposal of those bizarre forms of gold and silver that suggest the metal is something other than it is. If humans are the “thing-shaped” and not the Shaper (cf. 29:16), then their fetishes really are nothing more than shiny compost.

3.3.3.3 Yhwh’s Restoration of the Created Order

The fourth and fifth woes’ instructional and anti-idolatry discourse is therefore rooted in a common source: a theological anthropology that sees human beings as creaturely bodies by definition. This same anthropology also affirms Yhwh as humanity’s Maker, capable of upholding the created order (cf. 29:17-21) that his “stubborn sons” frequently distort (cf. 29:16; 30:1). The text makes this rhetorical claim first by depicting the sons’ proclivity to upend reality, and second by positing Yhwh’s supreme power to restore the world to its right condition.

Beginning again in Isa 30, the sons’ first act of “inversion” is a matter of location: they go to Egypt when they should have stayed in Zion. To this criticism, 30:5 adds that the Egyptians are a people “which does not profit (root העל).” This term’s subsequent association with “wealth” and “treasures” in 30:6 paints the sons’ perverse effort to seek help from across the Negev in a distinctly economic hue. It is a mistake, however, to pin such language to a singular set of historical circumstances—for example, a particular
form of extractive mercantilism or an exchange of goods aimed at fostering a political alliance. Rather, 30:5-7 should be interpreted primarily in its literary context. To that end, several lexical and conceptual correspondences suggest a link with Isa 23, the oracle concerning Tyre and the premier example of economic critique prior to Isa 30. Tyre’s fame derives from the prowess of her “merchants” (סוחרי; 23:8) and “traders” (כינעניא; 23:8) who do not produce anything on their own, but instead simply transport “the seed of Shihor, the reaping of the Nile” (23:3) to other lands. In other words, Tyre as well has made a habit of seeking its fortune through the exchange of goods in Egypt! She is a city of “refuge” (מעזין; root עוז; 23:11, 14; cf. 30:2-3, 3x) characterized by “celebration” (עלז; 23:7, 12) against which Yhwh has “planned” (יעץ; 23:8-9; cf. 30:1) destruction through the extension of his hand (23:11; cf. 14:26). Such terminology strongly suggests that Tyre’s example fits the basic theological patterns laid down earlier in the book, and so also serves as a potential archetype for further economic critique. Two points regarding Tyre are especially important to grasp in relation to Isa 30–32: first, Tyre’s economic power is utterly neutered (23:11-14), and second, Tyre’s wealth is eventually repurposed for the good of those who “sit/inhabit” (ישב) before Yhwh (23:18; cf. 30:19; 32:18), to be “treasured-up” (אצר) and “fortuned-off” (חסן) for the merchant’s personal gain no longer (23:18; cf. 30:6). In other words, Tyre’s economic activities are portrayed as running directly counter to Yhwh’s historical plan; administration of that plan naturally implies Tyre’s diminishing returns and Zion’s corresponding gain. Thus, when the stubborn sons send their “treasures” (אצר) to

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66 The text should read, סוחרי.
Egypt in 30:6-7, the Tyrian example implies not simply the inevitable failure of the project, but more importantly, a blasphemous refutation of the divine order.

The economic critique continues in the next unit (30:8-17). Yhwh’s “sons” (בָּנִים; 30:9) “reject (root אָסַּק) this word” (30:12; cf. 5:24; 8:6) by putting “confidence in extortion (נָאָשָע) and in cunning” (30:12; cf. 23:12). This behavior leads to the “falling” (root נָפָל; 30:13; cf. 8:15; 21:9; 23:13) of an “elevated wall” (30:13; cf. 2:11, 15, 17; 25:12) and a “fracturing” (root שָׁבַר; 30:14; cf. 1:28; 8:15; 14:5, 25; 21:9; 24:10; 28:13) like the fracturing of a “potters’ (root יָצָא) jar” (30:14; cf. 27:11; 29:16). Heavily freighted in context, terms such as “fall” and “fracture” place the sons’ extortion squarely within the trajectory of destruction, while the comparison to a “potters’ jar” further implies that their economic abuse is anti-creational in character since it produces an anti-artisanal result (cf. 29:16).

The positive rectification of such wrongs begins in 30:18-26. The passage contains elements pertaining to place, instruction, and idolatry as discussed above, as well as an important vision of future healing and land-inhabitation to be discussed below (cf. 30:23-26). Setting aside the latter two topics for now, it is most important at present that the reality envisioned here understands future health and stability for some (30:23-24) as invariably matched by the cataclysmic downfall of others (30:25; cf. 23:11-18). In the same breath that IJ looks forward to commonplace “streams of flowing water”—an unambiguously life-giving idea—he also states that this reality occurs, “on a day of abundant killing, when towers fall (root נָפָל)” (30:25). Similar to 29:17-21, the contrast registers the fact that Yhwh’s judgment, which IH experiences as good news given his or her unique epistemological position vis-à-vis IJ’s past word, does not produce
paradisiacal conditions for all, but instead restores the world to its right condition. Yhwh’s judgment is bad news only for those who attempt to hijack material creation through idolatry or unjust economic gain. This point tends to go missing in the secondary literature; Wildberger, for example, finds the second half of 30:25 to be “most surprising.”67 Clements also registers the verse as “jarring,”68 while Blenkinsopp sees it in fundamental tension with the preceding image of a rural utopia.69 Approached with 29:17-21 in mind, however, the disjunction these scholars detect quickly fades. The text envisions universal humility before the Creator—not a universal spa—and simply lets the chips fall where they may.

Yhwh’s restorative justice is granted special attention in 32:1-8. This unit depicts the rule of a righteous king and his officials (32:1) in marked contrast to the leadership exhibited by the prophets, visioners, and stubborn sons. Strictly speaking, the king is not named as Yhwh, though numerous lexical cues point in that direction. For example, the unit begins with a form of הִנֵּה (הֵן); the last such deictic marker introduced the theophany in 30:27-33. Moreover, the nature of the king’s rule is characterized through a number of recycled locutions such as, “a hiding-place from the storm” (32:2; cf. 4:6; 25:4-5), “streams of water in a parched-place (בְּצָיוֹן)” (32:2; cf. 25:4-5; 30:25), “shade of a heavy ledge” (32:2; cf. 4:6; 25:4-5; 31:9), and “eyes…not smeared-over” (32:3; cf. 6:10; 29:9). Curiously, the Septuagintal translator—perhaps tuned in to Yhwh’s mountain refuge as depicted in 4:6 and 25:4-5—seems to have rendered בּציון (בְּצָיוֹן) as “in Zion” (ἐν Σιών = בְּצִיוֹן). All this data suggests that M. Hamilton is correct to

68 Clements, Isaiah 1–39, 251.
69 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 435.
argue that the “vagueness of the identity of the coming king allows the image to function as a standing critique of any given monarch,” while at the same time, “the focus on the ideal human ruler opens up the possibility of shifting kingly images primarily to YHWH.”

Life under a Ruler such as this produces sight, hearing, comprehension, knowledge, and clear speech (32:3-4); importantly, it also reverses the stubborn sons’ anti-creational economics (cf. 30:5-7, 12). The “fool” and “thug,” who characteristically “plan (root יִצֶּ֣ז) schemes” (32:7; cf. 30:1) against the poor and restrict justice from the needy (32:7), are finally taken down a peg. The world is made right again.

After an address to the “carefree women” of the “celebratory town” in 32:9-14, the final unit of the fifth woe (32:15-20) issues yet another image of Yhwh’s just rule, using creational language in step with 29:17-21 and 30:23-26. 32:9-14 and 32:15-20 are joined at a syntactical level; 32:15 picks up the previous thought with a preposition (עַד), extending the sentence into a new idea. It is in the relation between the two units, combined as one, that the nature of Yhwh’s restoration of the created order is fully expressed. Perhaps the most confusing aspect of 32:9-14 for modern critics to grasp (aside from its grammatical difficulties) is its conclusion in v. 14, where the destruction of the celebratory town (32:13) produces a wasteland described as “the gladness (מְשׂוֹשׂ) of onagers” (32:14). O. Kaiser, for example, views the phrase as “somewhat strange and unrealistic” given its function in the context of catastrophe. How is it that an abandoned palace and a forsaken city (32:14) results in joy?

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The answer appears in 32:15, a verse that clearly echoes 29:17. For the sake of comparison, both verses are presented below:

32:15  (1) Until upon us is laid-bare a spirit from on-high,
(2) and the desert becomes an orchard,
(3) and the orchard as a forest is reckoned.

(1) מִמָּרוֹם רוּחַ עָלֵינוּ וְיֵעָרֶה
(2) לָכַּרְמֶל מִדְבָּר וְהָיָה
(3) יֵחָשֵׁב לַיַּעַר לְכַרְמֶל.

The second and third cola of 32:15 are very similar to those of 29:17:

29:17  (1) Is it not that in a small, little while
(2) Lebanon will return to orchard,
(3) and Carmel as a forest will be reckoned?

(1) מִזְעָר מְעַט הֲלוֹא־עוֹד לַכַּרְמֶל לְבָנוֹן וְשָׁב
(2) יֵהָשֵׁב לַיַּעַר לְכַרְמֶל

With respect to 29:17, scholars were shown to follow one of two interpretive paths: the verse’s parallelism indicates either progression or reversal. A similar choice also obtains in 32:15. Blenkinsopp for example, who takes 29:17 as a form of progression (the orchard will be “as common as” the forest), maintains that view with respect to 32:15.73 By contrast, Berges argues that 32:15 indicates transformation that has both positive and negative effects.74 Both views have merit. The progression model applied to 32:15 has the advantage of better registering the subtle change from “Lebanon” (29:17) to “desert” (32:15). Whereas 29:17 put two forested areas (לְבָנוֹן and יַעַר) in parallel, 32:15 sets a decidedly treeless zone (מִדְבָּר) alongside the same יַעַר as appears in 29:17. Given this

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72 The Qere understands this form (לְכַרְמֶל) as having lost the definite article הַ. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 415; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 256. See note on 29:17 (“orchard”).
73 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 409, 432.
difference, Wildberger is very likely correct that the main point of comparison in 32:15 has to do with “the density of the stand of trees.”

Thus, B (treeless) becomes C (some trees) in such a way that C (some trees) will be reckoned like B (tree-filled). That said, the reversal model has the advantage of context—not only the enduring echo of 29:17, but also of 29:18-21, 30:27-33, 32:1-8, and 32:13-14, all of which record Yhwh’s justice as effecting a positive outcome for some and a negative outcome for others. Moreover, “forest” (יַעַר) anticipates the “forest” destruction expressed later in 32:19 (cf. “go-down;” root ירד), a verse that has caused no end of consternation to modern interpreters but which works well in context if the whole unit is understood to depict the restoration of order rather than Yhwh’s installation of a rural utopia.

B (wild) becomes C (domesticated) and C (domesticated) will be reckoned like B (wild). It may be best to conclude, therefore, that 32:15 exhibits a certain polyvalence that is capable of implying both reversal and progression at the same time. On the one hand, the social, political, and educational abnormalities that Yhwh’s rule irons out suggest that 32:15 identifies similar justice applied also to the agro-ecological sphere. On the other hand, the change from “Lebanon” to “desert” provides a clue that Yhwh’s justice sets in motion a linear

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75 Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 261.
76 Many commentators find 32:19 problematic not only because of its grammatical difficulties, but also because it seems to introduce a word of destruction into an otherwise positive image of peace and security. For example, Blenkinsopp compares 32:19 to 30:25 (cf. “towers fall”), suggesting in both places that the negative word of judgment does not harmonize well with its positive context. Brueggemann regards 32:19 as an “enigma,” while Clements considers the verse to read “strangely in this context.” Roberts finds both 32:19 and 32:20 to be unclear because he cannot determine their historical referents; Sweeney sees 32:19 to predict the downfall of the Davidic house and is thus anomalous to its present position in the text. Finally, G. Stansell argues that 32:19 is a “marginal note” and an “infelicitous addition.” The issue can be resolved simply by recognizing that Isaiah’s view of judgment involves positive outcomes for some and negative outcomes for others. See Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 435; Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 258; Clements, Isaiah 1–39, 264; Roberts, First Isaiah, 417; Sweeney, Isaiah 1–39, 412; Gary Stansell, “Isaiah 32: Creative Redaction in the Isaian Tradition,” Society of Biblical Literature 1983 Seminar Papers, SBLSPS 22 (Atlanta: SBL, 1992), 8, 12.
trajectory toward increasing vegetation and abundance. The stubborn sons’ corruption of
the created order now a thing of the past, Yhwh’s “new normal” is even better than the
original!

3.3.3.4 Healing of Disabled Bodies

The analysis above employs a topical sequence moving from the body
(instruction) to the creature (idolatry) to the Creator (restoration of order). The fourth and
final topic—the healing of the body—brings the discussion full circle. Most importantly,
the hope for healing as expressed in Isa 30–32 stems directly from these chapters’
identification of Yhwh as Creator, and thus his capacity to effect changes in the material
reality to which his “clay-like” children are confined. Anthropologically, healing focuses
IH’s attention on the corporeal frailty of the human being; theologically, it invites
contemplation of the mysterious God who comes to Zion in “tornado and tempest and a
flame of consuming fire” (29:6).

In the third woe (29:15-24), which focuses on the creature’s proximity to the
Creator, the healing of the body was shown to serve an important purpose in the context
of Yhwh’s world-leveling justice. The deaf hear and the blind see (29:18), establishing a
horizon of expectation for IH that reaches beyond the unhealed, heart-fattened fate of IJ’s
intransigent contemporaries (cf. 6:9-10; 29:10). As the fourth and fifth woes unfold,
several verses expand on the logical connection between Yhwh as Creator and the
healing of disabled bodies. For example, the weeping, distress, and deprivation of days
past are overcome when, “your eyes will see your Teacher” (30:20) and “your ears will
hear a word from behind you” (30:21). Framed as instruction of the body on pilgrimage,
this image picks up on the language of eyes and ears in 29:17-21. Similarly, when the restorative rule of the righteous king is introduced in 32:1, disabled eyes and ears are healed along with other body parts such as hearts and tongues (32:3-4). Perhaps most intriguingly, however, Yhwh’s justice as recorded in 30:25 (streams of flowing water, abundant killing, towers fall) is imagined as impacting the cosmos in 30:26a: “And the light of the white-moon will be like the sun-heat,” and the light of the sun-heat will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days…” To this image IJ adds, “Yhwh will bind-up (root חבשׁ) the fracture (root שׁבר) of his people, and the wound of his striking (root נכה), he will heal (root יְּחַבוּ) (30:26b). Two observations are relevant to the present topic. First, 30:26 is loaded with terminology such as חבשׁ (cf. 1:6; 3:7) and נכה (cf. 1:6) that places the healing in view on paradigm with Israel’s disease as outlined in 1:4-9. This association helps to achieve continuity between IH’s remembered troubles and future hope. Second, healing is expected to take place in the context of major cosmological changes. It is irrelevant that the sevenfold increase in light is not ecologically realistic, a point Blenkinsopp assigns to the poet’s “enthusiasm;” equally so, Clements is off-target when he deems such imagery “bizarre and pointless.” On the contrary, the connection between these two ideas is rooted in an associative logic rather than modernity’s obsession with historical realism. If Yhwh possesses power over the sun and moon, indeed over all creation, then he can also effectively bind-up the fracture of his people

77 לְבָנָה (white-moon) differs from two other terms found in the book of Isaiah that might be rendered with the English “moon”— יָרֵחַ (moon; cf. 13:10) and חֹדֶשׁ (new-moon; cf. 1:13). The translation “white-moon” attempts to highlight the object’s pale, cool light (root לבן is used for “white” and “Lebanon”), whereas the latter terms emphasize its character as a celestial body or as a temporal marker, respectively. חַמָּה (sun-heat), which could be rendered more simply as “sun,” suggests the object’s radiance rather than its status as a celestial object (שֶׁמֶשׁ; cf. 13:10).
78 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 421.
79 Clements, Isaiah 1–39, 251.
and salve their undressed wounds (cf. 1:6). That is the text’s rhetorical aim, to see bodies healed by activating their obedience to the Lord of history and Creator of all.

3.3.4 Isaiah 30:1–32:20: Emphasis on Land

IH has learned from the Farmer’s Parable (28:23-29) that recognition of and participation in Yhwh’s historical plan depends on careful attention to the soil. The parable’s sense of agrarian responsibility rests on an epistemological foundation that is fleshed out in woes two and three (Isa 29), through special regard for Zion as the site of Yhwh’s salvation and for the human being’s proximity to the divine Artisan. Further reflection on that epistemological foundation also runs throughout woes four and five (Isa 30–32): emphasis on place was identified especially through the rhetorical contrast between Egypt and Zion, while an interest in the creaturely body was traced through four different topics—instruction, idolatry, restoration of order, and healing. In all these ways, N leads IH to consider that he or she comprehends Yhwh’s plan only by virtue of the theological anthropology implicit in his or her status as a “creaturely body in place,” an identity that implies significant cognitive and behavioral limits. Pressing forward to the subject of land-inhabitation, the following analysis demonstrates that N also steers IH’s attention back to the parable’s original interest: propriety. Acknowledgment of one’s creaturely identity in place provides a basis for the actions and postures through which land-inhabitation endures.

Life in the land is not an obvious interest of woes two and three. The prophets’ and visioners’ blindness is characterized as illiteracy (29:11-12), not agro-ecological failure; similarly 29:17-21 emphasizes the healing of bodies and the rectification of social
wrongs, not agro-ecological success. That said, one subtle clue that Isa 29 maintains the parable’s agrarian concern for land is signaled in the last colon of 29:24: “And those-who-grumble (וְרוֹגְנִים) will learn instruction.” Wildberger relates the key root (רגן), which connotes rebelliousness and might be translated “murmur,” to the Israelites’ desert wanderings (cf. Deut 1:27): “Those who murmured will be moved to take seriously the teaching that God will lead the people to the promised land, to his place of rest…” The precise phrasing of the educational language appearing at the tail end of Isa 29 therefore prepares IH to engage similar such language in Isa 30 in terms of a geo-theological mythos whose goal is stable and enduring land-inhabitation.

Seen with this background in mind, the stubborn sons’ decision to seek refuge in Egypt (30:2-3) puts their actions squarely on paradigm with one of the Torah’s archetypal depictions of disobedience: the yearning for a better life in Egypt (e.g. Ex 16:3). Aspects of 30:8-17, which N takes care to relate immediately after 30:1-7, also suggest that the Torah’s prevailing interest in Israel’s movement from one land to another continues to inform the people’s rejection of Yhwh’s instruction (30:9). For example, they are described as a “rebellious people” (מְרִי עַם; 30:9), terminology Wildberger also relates to the desert wanderings in Num 17:25 and 27:14. Their “unwillingness to hear” is related in the first place to Torah (30:9), and then later to notions of return, rest, salvation, quietness and confidence (30:15). Especially in relation to “rest” (root נוח), their unwillingness signals repudiation of the land through correspondence with 28:12 and 1:19-20. The stubborn sons reject the “road” and “path” (30:11), behavior that culminates

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80 Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 117.
81 Ibid., 144.
in their being chased from the land (30:16), until they are left “like a pole on the head
(שׁרֹא) of mountain” (30:17; cf. 28:1-4) and “like the banner (וְכַנֵּס) upon the hill” (30:17).
The language of “banner” in association with “rest” (30:15) also appears in 11:10 with
reference to the Davidic king, whose “wisdom and comprehension” and “spirit of
knowledge” (11:2; cf. 32:4) effects homecoming for the banished (11:11). The Mosaic
Torah guides the people into the land; the Davidic promise keeps them there. Yhwh’s
children are unwilling to listen on both fronts.

The same teleological focus on land-inhabitation that underpins 30:1-17 also
shapes the next unit, 30:18-26. An initial clue appears in 30:19:

30:19  For a people in Zion, inhabiting (יֵשֵׁב) Jerusalem—
you will surely weep no more.
He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry;
when he hears it, he answers you.

This verse portrays the body at rest, literally “sitting” (root ישׁב) in Jerusalem. The
discussion above pointed out a contrast between the stubborn sons’ preference for Egypt
and this verse’s geo-theological focus on Zion. A more complete description of this
difference, in light of the mytho-historical tension between slavery in Egypt and life in
Canaan, accounts also for the happy reward to be gained in choosing the latter option:
“sitting” or “inhabiting” while Yhwh “answers” (root ענה; cf. Hos 2:23-25). Yhwh’s
responsiveness is portrayed later in the same unit as an act of providing rain for the soil
(30:23; cf. 5:6; Deut 11:13-15):\(^\text{82}\)

30:23  And he will give rain to your seed
with which you sow the soil,
and bread will be the produce of the soil,
and it will be rich and fertile.

Your cattle will graze in that day in a wide pasture.
The oxen and the asses working the soil—
chickpea fodder they shall eat,
which one scatters with a shovel and with a fork.

Three observations pertaining to this image merit mention. First, abundance follows from
Yhwh’s initiative. In a xeric land where months may pass without a drop of water from
the sky, the winter grain crop (cf. “seed” and “bread;” 30:23) remains utterly dependent
on Yhwh’s seasonal provision of rain. Second, the text focuses on the soil’s fertility and
the food it produces for humans and livestock alike (cf. 1:2-3). Third and most
importantly, the vision recorded here does not present land-inhabitation in utopian terms.
It is true that the text portrays an untroubled existence, but critically, that existence
imagines humans and animals as engaged in farm work:\textsuperscript{83} “sowing” seed, bringing forth
“produce,” “working” the soil, and “scattering” with a shovel and fork. Bearing the
Farmer’s Parable in mind, which depicts a similar series of agricultural tasks, IH is
encouraged to conceptualize salvation not as life on “Cloud 9,” but as labor properly
rendered so as to yield abundance for generations to come.

The next unit, 30:27-33, consists of a theophany that involves both pilgrimage to
the “mountain of Yhwh” (30:29) and the ultimate annihilation of Assyria (30:31). Beuken
argues that the “instruction = journey” motif appearing earlier in the chapter, which
30:18-26 sought to complete through an image of agricultural stability, left room for this
important addition. He concludes that 30:27-33 addresses the following question: “How
can the exiles return to a land that the Assyrian super-power, and other nations in its

\textsuperscript{83} See Kaiser, Isaiah 13–39, 302-3.
wake, has taken in possession?\textsuperscript{84} In other words, the unit expresses the action that Yhwh must necessarily take in order to realize the preceding vision of unfettered farm work—conclusive removal of the alien aggressor. The merit in this reading stems from its careful attention to the theophany’s expansion of imagery found earlier in the same chapter (e.g. pilgrimage; cf. 30:11, 21, 29), as well as its recognition of the associative logic through which N builds an argument (cf. 30:21-22).

Working from Beuken’s basic premise, that the theophany in 30:27-33 is conceptually related to the problem and prospect of land-inhabitation, one additional observation is relevant to the present discussion. Rhetorically, the unit capitalizes on the radical difference between Yhwh, whose “tongue is like a consuming fire (אֹכָלֶת כְּאֵשׁ)” (30:27), and mortal human beings, whose pilgrimage to Zion—“walking with a flute” (30:29)—is rendered almost quaint by comparison. Yhwh comes in “burning anger” and “heavy uplift” (i.e. clouds or smoke; 30:27); his spirit is like an “overwhelming torrent-bed” (30:28; cf. 8:8; 28:2) and he “sifts nations with a sieve\textsuperscript{85}” (30:27). Later his “descending arm” is portrayed as “raging anger and a flame of consuming fire (אֹכֵלָה אֵשׁ), pattering and storm and hail stone” (30:30; cf. 28:2; 29:6). Clearly these are actions that reach far beyond what any mere human is capable of doing. However, the fact that Yhwh “consumes” (root אָכַל) and “sifts” (root נָפַת; a reference to winnowing) suggests that his actions can be contrasted with those of the lowly farm inhabitants, who “eat” (root אָכַל) and “scatter/winnow” (root נָפַת) with a shovel and fork (30:24). In other words, as the text

\textsuperscript{84} Beuken, “Isaiah 30,” 392.

\textsuperscript{85} לַהֲנָפָה (to sift) denotes the final activity in the process of cleaning grain; cf. 29:5. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 66-67. לַהֲנָפָה (to sift) and בְּנָפַת (with a sieve) both express the root נָפַת, cf. 30:32.
ratchets up the incomparable power of the Holy One, it implicitly presses human beings
to the clay from which they are taken (cf. 29:16). Before Yhwh, humans remain bipedal
“walkers” (30:29), requiring food, water, and rest. Yhwh ensures their healing (30:26),
but he does not seek to elevate human bodies beyond their corporeal embeddedness in
natural systems.

The same contrast between human fleshliness and divine spirit that colors 30:18-33 also informs the next two units, 31:1-3 and 31:4-9. As noted above, the language
found here is in many ways similar to that found in 30:1-7, the beginning of woe four. A
similar emphasis on staying put rather than going down to Egypt obtains in both 30:2 and
31:1, while the terms “help,” “helper,” and “helped one” (root אָזָר; 31:2-3) recall use of
the same root in 30:5 and 7. In light of 30:18-33, however, the special attention 31:1
gives to reliance on creaturely “horses” and “steeds” (cf. 28:28) rings with a new note of
sarcasm: “They put-confidence in chariots that are abundant, and in steeds that are ‘quite
substantial’ (מְאֹד עָצְמוּ (…))” (31:1). The fleshly “substance”86 of Egypt’s military prowess
is exactly that—“flesh and not spirit” (31:3). Egypt is “human, and not God” (31:3), and
so belongs on the farm, not posing as a savior. Here IH may recall the parenetic
injunction of 2:22: “Restrain yourself from humans [i.e. from trusting in human power],
who are a breath in his nose—for on what account can he be reckoned?” Following this
rhetoric of Egyptian frailty, N relates a second image of Yhwh’s sure defense of Zion,
matching 29:1-8 and thus recalling Yhwh’s “consuming fire” (29:6; 30:27, 30; cf. 31:9).
As in 31:1-3, 31:4-9 goes out of its way to draw a sharp distinction between the
corporeality of human beings (and hence the lunacy of idol worship; 31:7) and the power

86 The root עֶצֶם, rendered as a segolate noun (עֶצֶם), means “bone.”
of Yhwh, who destroys Assyria with a “non-human sword” that “consumes him (תֹּאכֲלֶנּוּ) (31:8). Like the stubborn sons who deny their limitations and thus their need for divine instruction, and so may anticipate their fate as a “banner upon the hill” (30:17), so too Assyria’s officers “shatter because of the banner” (31:9). Both groups should have remembered that the “thing-made” does not casually vaunt itself over the one who wields it (10:15; 29:16).

Having explored the ontological differences between “substantial” humanity and the flame-like power of Yhwh, N now begins to drive the discussion back toward the material hope for land-inhabitation as expressed in 30:23-24. To this end, the prospect of a righteous king in 32:1-8 (cf. 11:1-16) includes corresponding safety from inclement weather as well as “streams of water in a parched-place, like the shade of heavy ledge in a weary land” (32:2). “Streams of water” (כְַפַּלְגֵי־מַיִם) in particular registers this image’s connection with 30:18-26 (cf. 30:25, “streams of flowing water”) and thus the image of untroubled farm work depicted there. While many aspects of 32:2 relate the king’s righteous rule to the “Zion = stable dwelling” motif found elsewhere in the book (cf. 4:6; 25:4-5), it is notable that neither Zion nor Jerusalem (nor any specific location) is mentioned in this context. This point suggests that the text’s geo-theological focus has shifted from the importance of place (cf. 30:1-7; 31:1-9) to the specific manner by which inhabitation may be actualized. Indeed, the rest of the unit focuses on social propriety: clear perception (32:3), honest speech (32:4), public truth (32:5), provision of food (32:6), protection for the poor (32:7), and moral virtue (32:8). In other words, land-inhabitation is put into focus, but again, not as a loose metaphor for utopian luxury. It is a
concrete hope that depends on Yhwh’s reconstruction of the heart, mind, body, and stomach.

The final two units of Isa 32 (vv. 9-14 and 15-20) function as a pair, syntactically joined at the center with the preposition עַד (32:15), and thus should be interpreted in relation to one another. Together they expand on the process by which humans undergo such “reconstruction” and so gain access to a life of confidence and rest (32:18). The text reads as follows:

32:9 Carefree women, arise!
    Hear my voice!
Confident daughters,
    listen to my saying.

10 In just days less than a year,
    those-who-are-confident will shake,
    for annihilated will be the vintage,
    and the ingathering will not come.

11 Tremble, carefree-women;
    shake, confident-daughters!
Strip and be bare,
    and gird your loins!

12 Upon your breasts, lamenting—
    for the desirable fields,
    for the fruitful vine,
13 for the soil of my people
    on which thorny briars go-up;
    indeed, for all the glad houses
    of the celebratory town.

14 For the palace is abandoned,
    the city’s crowd is forsaken;
    citadel and keep will become
    ever caves unto perpetuity—
    the gladness of onagers,
    the grazing-space of flocks…

15 …until upon us is laid-bare a spirit from on-high,
    and the desert becomes an orchard,
    and the orchard as a forest is reckoned.

16 Then will dwell in the desert justice,
    and righteousness will inhabit the orchard.
17 And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the work of righteousness, quietness and confidence unto perpetuity.

18 And my people will inhabit a peaceful home, and in confident dwellings and in carefree places-of-rest.

19 And when the forest goes-down, it will go-down, and when lowering, the city will be low.

20 Happy are you who-sow beside every body-of-water, who-send-forth the feet of the bullock and the donkey!

The first unit, 32:9-14, issues a call to mourn for a despoiled land. The women it addresses are described as “carefree” (root שָׁנָה) and “confident” (root בַּטְח; 32:9, 10, 11); their false sense of security is either overconfidence or confidence that has been misdirected, in line with other images of the same (cf. 30:12, 15; 31:1). In a very short while—within the year—the grape harvest (i.e. for wine-making) will be “annihilated” (root לִכָּה) and the summer fruit harvest (e.g. figs) will not come to pass (32:10). In light of this disastrous state of affairs, the carefree, confident women are directed to “tremble,” “shake,” “strip,” “be-bare” (root עֹרֶר), and “gird loins” (i.e. with sackcloth) (32:11)—all actions associated with “lamenting” as stated explicitly in 32:12. Similarities and differences with 3:16-26 help to reveal the present passage’s unique emphasis. In the former text, the “daughters (בְּנוֹת) of Zion” (cf. 32:9) are indicted for their proud posture and especially their fancy dress. As a result, IJ declares that Yhwh will “make-bare” (root עֹר; 3:17) and will “turn-aside” (root סָרָר; 3:18) their glory, pictured through a long list of ornamental clothing and accessories (3:18-23). Instead of this finery, the daughters are promised a “lasso,” “baldness,” and a “girding of sackcloth” (3:24; cf. 32:11), after which they are depicted as raped, “sitting” (root יָשָּׁב) on the “land” (אֶרֶץ) to “sigh and mourn” (וְאָבְלוּ וְאָנוּ; 3:24; cf. 19:8). Points of similarity with 32:9-14 include a rare address to
women, themes of pride and/or overconfidence, nakedness, and an interest in the earth. The main difference between the two, however, is a matter of rhetorical stress; the latter text does not indict the addressees (even if it assumes their overconfidence is unjustified), but instead instructs them to undergo mourning behaviors that result in a state of “bareness” similar to that which the former punishment simply enforces. Additionally, whereas the former address focuses on clothing as a symbol for pride, resulting in consideration for the land only at the very end of the unit (3:26), the latter unit makes the issue of subsistence a primary concern from the outset (32:10). The women of 32:9-14 are told to lament, “for the desirable fields, for the fruitful vine, for the soil of my people on which thorny briars go-up…” (32:12-13). “Thorns” link the land’s fate to the Vineyard paradigm (cf. 5:6), while the combination of mourning and viticulture suggests a correspondence with Moab (cf. 16:6-12). The interpretive importance of these textual data is threefold. First, the despoiling of the land in 32:9-14 is clearly aligned with the trajectory of destruction—the use of “celebratory town” (עַלִּיזָה קִרְיָה) in 32:13 (cf. 22:2) makes this association particularly plain. Second, the trajectory of destruction characteristically impacts humans’ capacity to subsist within the land. Here as well, fields and vines—even the soil itself—are affected (32:12-13). Finally, while IJ’s LA (in this case, carefree women) receives the injunction to lament as an immediate directive, IH registers the same content as a parenetic call to undergo mourning in hindsight. In light of Isa 28 and many other prior texts, IH recognizes that improper subsistence behaviors and destruction of the land go hand-in-hand. In 32:9-14, he or she is encouraged to rehearse the effects of that impropriety as a precondition to the hopeful reality that follows. Sorrow for the soil necessarily precedes the land’s regeneration and regrowth.
Before moving to 32:15-20, one further observation must be made pertaining to
the “gladness of onagers” and the “grazing-space of flocks” (32:14). It is vital to grasp
that destruction in Yhwh’s just economy does not entail a total annihilation of the earth.
Even in Isa 24, Yhwh drains the earth, devastating and twisting it so that it is plundered
(24:1-3); the earth mourns and fades (24:4), a curse consumes it (24:6), and gladness is
removed from it (24:11); the earth is troubled and frustrated, it totters and even quavers
like drunkard (24:19-20)—but nowhere in this passage is the bedrock underneath the
annihilated vintage (24:13; cf. 32:10) unmade. On this literal and figural ground IJ
declares that the demise of the celebratory town does not result in a lifeless finality, but
rather in the reallocation of space to other living things. The abandoned city’s “crowd”
wore out its welcome (32:14); therefore Yhwh decrees that the soil will now support a
different type of inhabitant altogether. From an agrarian perspective, this result is normal
and natural rather than confounding, as humans and their agricultures are understood to
be participants within larger ecological systems that continually interpenetrate, interact
with, and instruct human practices. The “environment” is not a zone sitting at the edge of
human exploitation; it is a web of agro-ecological relationships in which humans are
inescapably embedded. Insofar as the reallocation of space to onagers and flocks in 32:14
restores the earth to a more balanced condition, that restoration provides a foundation for
the new vision of land-inhabitation that follows.

32:15-20 relates directly to 32:9-14 through a number of lexical and conceptual
correspondences. For example, the spirit from on high is “laid-bare” (יֵעָרֶה; root רָעָה), a
term that is definitionally comparable to רָעָה (be-bare) in 32:11, and paronomasically
linked to מְעָרוֹת (caves; root רָעָה) and מִרְעֵה (grazing-space; root רָעָה) in 32:14. The
proclamation of restored order introduced in 32:15 goes on to state that, “the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the work of righteousness, quietness and confidence (root בּטח) unto perpetuity” (32:17; cf. 32:9, 10, 11). The people’s “peaceful home” is further described in terms of “confident (root בּטח) dwellings” and “carefree (root שא) places-of-rest” (32:18; cf. 32:9, 11). 32:19 describes the fall of a forest and “city” (רֵעָה; cf. 32:14), and finally 32:20 imagines the sending-forth of a bullock and donkey in step with the onagers and flocks (32:14). These data suggest that 32:15-20 should be read as a positive counterweight to 32:9-14. Indeed the latter text bursts upon 32:9-14 like the ray of light for which IH yearns in the midst of his or her remembered sorrow.

Matching the lament for the soil in 32:9-14, the focus of 32:15-20 lies with durable land-inhabitation and the proper actions and postures related to that hope. 32:15 begins by envisioning Yhwh’s restored order in increasing measures of vegetation: the barren desert becomes a fruit-filled orchard, while the orchard is reckoned to be thick with trees like a forest. That this image should not imply the annihilation of the desert, however, is clarified in the following verse: “Then will dwell in the desert justice (טמִשְׁפָּט), and righteousness (וּצְדָקָה) will inhabit (תֵּשֵׁב) the orchard” (32:16; cf. 30:19; 32:1). Both biomes remain intact. Together the two verses suggest that in the aftermath of the celebratory town’s demise and the subsequent reallocation of its space to onagers and flocks (32:13-14), Yhwh will make the land suitable again for human habitation of a different sort, a culture characterized by “justice and righteousness” (וּצְדָקָה מִשְׁפָּט) rather than “bloodshed (מִשׂפָּח) and outcry (צְעָקָה)” (5:7). The homes envisioned in this new

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87 Many scholars note the important connection between the biblical concepts of “justice and righteousness” and productivity and peace within the land, a notably royal responsibility (cf. 32:1-8). More
reality are characterized by “quietness” (root ﬀקָט; 32:17; cf. 30:15),
“confidence/security” (root בטח; 32:17, 18; cf. 30:15), and “rest” (root נוח; 32:18; 30:15),
a notably different picture than that of the brawlers and crowds whose improper feasting
welcomed their doom with open arms: “Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (22:13).
The laying-bare of the spirit produces an obedient way of life characterized by stability
and durability “unto perpetuity” (32:17).

In conclusion, IH has learned that security under a just and righteous Ruler
involves a comprehensive reconstruction of the human condition (32:1-8); to that end, IH
is also encouraged (even required) to undergo a period of mourning for the destruction of
the land that LA’s geo-theological apostasy incurred (32:9-14). Lament is not N’s
ultimate purpose, however. IH is finally invited to consider that the period of mourning ends when “upon us” a spirit is laid-bare (32:15). The first-person plural suffix signals
that hope remains available to IH through his or her participation in the “community-
part” for which IJ and his children/disciples serve as ancestral types. In this way, IH’s
future inhabitation of the soil remains ineluctably bound to that mode of just and
righteous decision-making portrayed in the work of a prophet-farmer who sows his crop
in season (28:24-25; cf. 30:23-24) and whose God teaches and “disciplines” with regard
to “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט; 28:26; cf. 32:1, 16). At the same time, the text reaches out to IH

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directly through second-person discourse in 32:20, on par with 27:12: “Happy are you who-sow beside every body-of-water, who-send-forth the feet of the bullock and the donkey!” Once again, the interdependent prosperity of humans and livestock is portrayed through an image of unmolested labor (cf. 1:2-3; 30:23-24). Land-inhabitation endures because of attention and responsibility to place; responsibility begins with the creaturely body’s admission of its genesis in the clay.

The first exegetical portion of this study demonstrated that Isa 28 initiates a series of six woes that prompt the implied hearer’s (IH) reflection on two historical trajectories (destruction and hope) that are developed in the first twenty-seven chapters of the book. The Farmer’s Parable (28:23-29) in particular presents a sharp contrast with prior images of improper eating, suggesting that food serves as an important standard by which IH may adhere to the trajectory of hope, along with the prophet (IJ) and his Torah-obedient “learners.” The second exegetical section showed that Isa 29–32 reminds IH that Yhwh’s salvation occurs “on location” in Zion, and so encourages IH to embrace his or her creatureliness en route to durable land-inhabitation. Taken in sum, the first five woes (Isa 28–32) make clear that IH’s participation in the trajectory of hope requires his or her affirmation of crucial geo-theological realities: Yhwh’s status as Creator and IH’s corresponding situation in the dust (29:16).

The present chapter develops this line of reasoning through an exegetical analysis of Isa 33–35. Five models used by scholars to describe this text’s structure are first evaluated for their strengths and weaknesses; the discussion argues for the reasonableness of engaging Isa 33–35 as a coherent sequence. Second, close examination of Isa 33 reveals that the text presents stable land-inhabitation as available to IH insofar as he or she affirms that Yhwh is king. In this way, Isa 33 acts as a “keyhole” through which IH must pass if he or she wishes to be included in the “community-apart” for which IJ remains the prototypical ancestor. Third, Isa 34–35 expands on this rhetorical base by portraying a contrast between parallel landscapes, Edom and Judah. Yhwh empties
Bozrah of human habitation, designating it for wild creatures, while assigning Zion to the community-apart as an enduring home. When read as a sequential whole, Isa 33–35 may be understood to combine the theological affirmation of Yhwh’s status as Israel’s true king (Isa 33) with a geographical description of IH’s hopeful future (Isa 34–35). The Lord of history and creation allocates dwelling space and so provides for his children’s subsistence forever.

4.1 Structure and Coherence of Isaiah 33–35

Isaiah 33–35 comprises material that is foundational to the shape and meaning of the overall book. However, due to the text’s frequent shifts in focalization and its generic diversity, modern scholarship has not well understood how these chapters function in sequence relative to Isa 28–32. While 33:1 seems to introduce the sixth and last woe-oracle in the series, it is often regarded as a different type than the preceding five, since 33:2 abruptly shifts to a first-person prayer in contrast to the more developed indictments of previous units such as Isa 28. Moreover, a distinct break is often perceived between chapters 33 and 34, where the latter moves in an apocalyptic-like direction that does not seem to resonate with the liturgical quality of the former. Isa 33–35 therefore tends to be read in fragments, as series of separate conclusions, or as a conclusion followed by a new beginning. Less frequently are the lines of literary correspondence that bind this group of texts into a meaningful whole adequately described.

The aim of the following chapter section is therefore to offer a brief overview of the state of research concerning the structure of Isa 33–35, thereby helping to clarify the unique contribution that an agrarian-rhetorical approach to the same material may make.
Scholarly views on this subject may be categorized according to five basic models: 1) anthology, 2) closure, 3) diptych, 4) bridge, and 5) open-sequence. The value of this typology is purely heuristic. Various scholars demonstrate the rationale for each model, but very few if any adhere to only one type in exclusion of the others, as sound arguments can be made for each. Indeed no model seems able to account for the textual data in its entirety. The goal of the present discussion is simply to develop one account of the text through which to highlight certain aspects of it that are often missed, not to discredit all other ways of viewing the text.

4.1.1 Model 1: Anthology

The anthology model emphasizes the text’s focal shifts and generic diversity, especially as these occur in Isa 33 and 34. For example, the initial, third-person “woe to the Destroyer” of 33:1 is abruptly replaced by a first-person plural voice in 33:2: “Yhwh, be gracious to us—in you we hope.” The verse continues with another imperative, but then refers to “their arm” (זְרֹעָם), a form that frequently prompts emendation to “our arm” (as reflected in other ancient sources) in order to match the first-person language found in the same verse. The pronominal confusion continues in 33:4, however, as the text mentions “your spoil” (שְׁלַלְכֶם) using a masculine plural suffix, while a prior reference to Yhwh (מֵרוֹמְמֻתֶךָ, “from your going-high”) in 33:3 uses the masculine singular. Thus it is unclear whose spoil is in view—Yhwh’s or an unstated plural audience. 33:5 then employs third-person forms with reference to Yhwh, followed by the phrase, “he will be trustworthiness of your times (עִתֶּיךָ)” in 33:6. Hence, the subject of “your times” cannot be Yhwh as in 33:3 (“your going-high”). To make matters worse,
33:6 concludes with the statement, “the fear of Yhwh is his treasure (אוֹצָרוֹ),” switching from the second person back to the third. Not surprisingly, scholars have adduced numerous redactional seams in Isa 33, of which vv. 1-6 are only the beginning.¹

Beyond its shifts in focalization, Isa 33 also appears to combine several different literary genres. H. Gunkel pioneered this observation, arguing that Isa 33 comprises a woe oracle, lament, theophany, liturgy, and prophetic promise, arranged as a prophetic liturgy grounded in a specific Sitz im Leben of the second-temple cult.² As B. Childs points out, Gunkel was quite successful in convincing the field of the text’s generic complexity, even as scholars have debated the nature of the end product that that complexity finally represents.³ For example, J. Blenkinsopp argues that the woe-oracle of 33:1, “has no immediately obvious link with what precedes or follows.”⁴ Blenkinsopp prefers to read 33:1 (“A Tyrant Condemned”) in relative isolation from 33:2-6 (“A Psalm of Petition and Praise”), and 33:7-13 (“A Scene of Social and Physical Disaster”) from 33:14-16 (“A Moral Catechism”).⁵ The generic differences Gunkel identified similarly lead R. Clements to read Isa 33 in five parts (vv. 1-6, 7-9, 10-13, 14-16, and 17-24), with special emphasis on the lack of connection between 33:1 and subsequent material.⁶ In this mode of interpretation, the anthological nature of the text is assumed, and so the interpretive task does not necessitate a synchronic account of the whole.

¹ For example, see Csaba Balogh, “‘He Filled Zion with Justice and Righteousness’: The Composition of Isaiah 33,” Biblica 89.4 (2008): 477-504.
³ Childs, Isaiah, 244-45.
⁵ Ibid., 435-43.
Further fragmentation of Isa 33–35 has resulted from O. Steck’s hypothesis regarding Isa 35 as described in his Bereitete Heimkehr (1985). Steck sees Isa 35 as having been composed in isolation from Isa 34, written up to form an editorial link between two discrete bodies of text (First and Second Isaiah) that preexisted their joining together. Once this compositional premise is granted, and the dissociation of Isa 34 from 35 accepted, the reader is free to interpret both chapters in relative isolation from one another. J. Lust, for example, believes that Steck “thoroughly demolished the communis opinio” regarding the literary bonds between 34 and 35, and thus proceeds to read Isa 34 on its own. The figure below provides a graphic “average” of the text as those scholars mentioned above tend to see it.

![Figure 2](image)

The primary strength of the anthology model is its close attention to compositional complexity. Any account of the text’s overarching coherence that does not

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wrestle with its shifts in voice and perspective runs the risk of describing the text as contemporary readers might like it to be rather than the text as it actually is. Moreover, no account of the text as a whole should downplay the fact that Isa 33 is clearly of a different genre (or genres) than Isa 34, which depicts a different and darker vision of the future than Isa 35. The material is unavoidably diverse.

Nevertheless, the anthology model suffers in several key respects. First, it is not self-evident that the focal shifts of Isa 33 should prompt the reader to isolate one verse or unit from another. As mentioned at several points in this study, Isa 27:12 seems to break from the surrounding third-person discourse in which it is embedded to address the book’s IH, but this does not mean it is out of place in its literary context. 29:22-24 also suggests a certain compositional ease with mixed pronouns and interpolated quotations that ultimately serve the message IH is to receive rather than the modern preference for focal consistency. In general, better appreciation for the text’s epistemological layering may resolve many of the “problems” that attract redaction scholars’ attention.

Second, the generic diversity of the three chapters should not be permitted to obscure the fact that the text presents no indisputable cues that the sixth woe terminates prior to the narrative prose account beginning in 36:1. 32:15 also uses a first-person plural form (us), but remains syntactically bound to the prior unit, which falls within the literary range established by the initial woe of 31:1 in sequence with the others. In the same way, a shift to the first-person plural in 33:2 does not automatically signal structural dissonance with 33:1. Additionally, the Farmer’s Parable issues a new call to pay attention and hear (28:23), but as chapter two of this study demonstrates, the generic differences between 28:1-22 and 28:23-29 by no means defeat the conceptual contrast by
which the first woe-oracle as a whole makes sense. Thus the new call to pay attention and hear in 34:1 does not necessarily place Isa 34–35 outside the range of the sixth woe introduced in 33:1. That the premodern text does not always conform to modern norms is simply not an adequate measure of its literary coherence.

Third, Steck’s thesis ultimately depends on the idea that Isa 34 and 35 provide a record of historical events arranged in diachronic sequence. Naturally the text must have been produced in time, in one order or another. But as the present chapter will demonstrate, its literary presentation now emphasizes a spatial and geographical contrast rather than any great temporal distance that may stand between the moments of its original composition. In other words, Steck’s reconstruction of the text’s authorship—even if true—is no reason to split Isa 34 away from 35 in its final form. It is worth remembering that Steck himself has cogently argued that a synchronic reading of the book at large is an essential first step to adducing its individual parts. For all these reasons, the assumption of textual fragmentation warrants significant caution.

4.1.2 Model 2: Closure

This model views Isa 33–35 as a series of conclusions to a proto-text that looked something like Isa 1–32, before the book was expanded to include the Hezekiah narratives (Isa 36–39) and other material (Isa 40ff.).

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9 See Mathews, Defending Zion, 145.
As the figure above suggests, scholars who see the text in this light tend to retain a sense of the chapters’ anthological independence from one another, but at the same time emphasize more coherence within each chapter than either Blenkinsopp’s or Clements’ analyses of Isa 33 allow. For example, U. Berges argues that Isa 33, 34, and 35 represent successive attempts to cap off the first part of the book, where each text spawned the next addition.\footnote{Ulrich Berges, \textit{The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form}, trans. Millard C. Lind, Hebrew Bible Monographs 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 222-42.} Berges’ hypothesis is assisted by the insights of W. Beuken, whose important article, “Jesaja 33 als Spiegeltext im Jesajabuch” (1991),\footnote{Willem A. M. Beuken, “Jesaja 33 als Spiegeltext im Jesajabuch,” \textit{ETL} 67.1 (1991): 5-35.} argues that Isa 33 constitutes a kind of \textit{mise-en-abyme}, wherein the whole of the book is presented in microcosm. For Beuken, the chapter’s focal shifts and generic diversity are of secondary importance to the manner by which Isa 33 as written prophecy synthesizes terminology found in Isa 1–32 and then redeployes this language for the purpose of granting the reader special insight into the book as a whole. While Berges ultimately disagrees with Beuken, describing Isa 33 not as a \textit{mise-en-abyme} but as the first of two “bridge-texts” (Isa 33 and 35; see model
Beuken’s work clearly undergirds Berges’ identification of Isa 33 as a coherent unit rather than a loose collection of unrelated parts.

Likeminded scholars who view Isa 33–35 in terms of closure express various opinions on the degree to which these chapters link up with other texts. For example, C. Balogh argues that Isa 33 does not function as a bridge, but as a “closure text.” By contrast, H. Williamson sees Isa 33 as having once been the conclusion, to which 34 was subsequently added, followed by 35 and 40ff. These debates signal both the strengths and weaknesses of the model. On the one hand, Beuken’s keen analysis of Isa 33 suggests that it functions as a kind of summary of what precedes. The closure model justifiably stresses this aspect of Isa 33, sometimes in parallel with Isa 12, which similarly seems to tie off a major unit of text. On the other hand, the persistent need to combine this model with the idea of a “bridge” suggests that the scholars who use these terms continue to interpret the text in terms of its history of composition rather than its self-presentation as a literary whole. At any point the Isaianic redactors could have added a gloss such as, “Here end the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem, part one of the book you are reading,” but they did not. Instead, Isa 33 flows relatively seamlessly into Isa 34 and 35, whose depiction of safety in Zion provides an apt (but certainly not new) foundation for subsequent chapters of the book. “Conclusions” and “bridges” must finally be regarded as descriptions of hypothetical proto-texts, not Isa 33–35 as it now stands. While a

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13 Berges, The Book of Isaiah, 228.
diachronic evaluation of the text’s composition remains a worthy goal, there is no reason to allow the character of the proto-text to influence one’s reading of the end product if the end product no longer fits the prior mold.

4.1.3 Model 3: Diptych

This model emphasizes a “hard break” between chapters 33 and 34, suggesting that the book as a whole falls in two main parts.

In this view, the series of six woes beginning in 28:1 are understood to end either in 33:1 or at the latest in 33:24, since 34:1 is thought to begin an entirely new macrostructural unit in parallel to 1:2. The diptych model satisfies the desire to see the book’s content—which often trades in binaries such as sickness versus health, water versus drought, light versus dark, etc.—as reflected in its literary structure at the largest scale.

The model’s rationale stems from several important observations on the shape of the text at present and in antiquity. As W. Brownlee argued, evidence from Qumran shows three blank lines between Isa 33 and 34, suggesting that ancient readers interpreted

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the book as falling in two parts. Here, Beuken’s work again helps to solidify the view that Isa 33 forms a kind of summary (and hence conclusion) for the preceding material. Following Brownlee, scholars such as C. Evans and J. Watts argue that the two halves of the book work according to a system of structural parallels and correspondences, often through reversal. M. Sweeney likewise understands Isa 34 to initiate a major temporal break with Isa 1–33, which only anticipates the future, as opposed to 34–66, which realizes it.

Several problems nonetheless obtain. The supposed parallels between blocks of text in the first half of the book and in the second, such as Isa 1–5 and 34–35, require a good deal of imagination and are far from self-evident. As mentioned above, the text does not announce a major break between Isa 33 and 34, though it well could have. Scholars who advance the diptych model also tend to overlook the rich array of textual and conceptual links between the chapters in question so as to support the literary macrostructure they have in mind. For example, Isa 34–35 seems to pick up on the call to hear (cf. 33:13; 34:1), rotting vegetation (cf. 33:9; 34:4), Yhwh as fire-producer (cf. 33:14; 34:9), and the use of particular place names such as Aravah, Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon (cf. 33:9; 35:1-2). Many other similar data will be presented later in this chapter.

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Most importantly, Isa 34–35 depicts the allocation of dwelling space to wild animals and to humans, an activity that is the purview of kings. Isa 32–33 appears to provide a basis for these actions by affirming Yhwh’s royal status (cf. 33:22). Overemphasis on a wedge between Isa 33 and 34 may jeopardize an accurate account of the text’s rhetorical function at this point.

4.1.4 Model 4: Bridge

If the diptych model imagines a hard break between Isa 33 and 34, splitting the book in two, the bridge model suggests a somewhat softer disjunction at this point. As a result, Isa 34–35 rather than the space between 33 and 34 transitions IH from one part of the book to the next.

This model’s broad appeal is evident from the wide range of scholars who subscribe to some version of it. For example, readers who otherwise champion the focal shifts and generic diversity of Isa 33, such as Blenkinsopp, Clements and Wildberger, nonetheless regard Isa 34–35 as “belonging together” as a “diptych.”

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whose canonical reading of Isa 33 could not be more different from Blenkinsoppp’s, likewise understands the two chapters, “to form an editorial bridge combining the first part of Isaiah with the second.”

Assisted again by Beuken’s insightful portrayal of Isa 33 as a mise-en-abyme, numerous other readers such as J. Dekker, B. Dicou, C. Mathews, P. Miscall, J. Roberts, C. Seitz, and M. Thompson all see Isa 34–35 as a unit unto itself, more or less related to the surrounding material depending on the scholar’s exegetical interests.

Furthermore, the bridge model is bolstered by the claim that Isa 34–35 stands in relation to Isa 28–33 (the six woes) in a similar fashion as Isa 24–27 stands in relation to Isa 13–23 (the OCN). This observation stems from the fact that Isa 24–27 and Isa 34–35 share apocalyptic-like features, such as a theophanic judgment corresponding with major cosmic change (e.g. cf. 24:1-6; 34:1-4). O. Kaiser, for example, begins his reading of Isa 34 with just this comparison: both units (24–27 and 34–35), he argues, are “concerned with the final fate of Jerusalem.”

C. Seitz also emphasizes the “much broader geographical sweep” that obtains in Isa 24–27 and 34–35 than in the intervening material

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22 Childs, Isaiah, 253.
By emphasizing these two units’ generic similarity, scholars enhance the perceived distinction between Isa 34–35 and the preceding six woes.\(^{26}\)

The merit of such an approach to Isa 33–35 begins with its correct identification of Isa 34–35 as a unified portrait of two starkly different landscapes. However the two chapters are related to their context, their primary literary bonds remain with each other. Moreover, by emphasizing the transitional function of Isa 34–35 relative to the book as a whole, the bridge model is better equipped than both the closure and diptych models to describe how these two chapters usher IH into the latter half of the book.

That said, a few significant problems remain. First, the description of Isa 34–35 as a “bridge” potentially encodes a historical judgment regarding the text as it was but not as it is, and thus can distract from the fact that no textual marker unambiguously indicates that 34:1 should be understood to launch a new literary movement.

Second, the notion that Isa 34–35 stands in relation to Isa 28–33 in much the same way that Isa 24–27 relates to Isa 13–23, and is thus a discrete unit unto itself, is undermined by the fact that Isa 28–33 does not self-present as a series of generically homogenous texts followed by a wholly different form in Isa 34–35. For example, 30:27-33 is also a theophany whose affinities with 34:5-15 are well recognized in the secondary literature (cf. 30:33; 34:9). Thus, Isa 34–35 may be described as cut from the same generic cloth as parts of the preceding six woes. Flat comparisons between Isa 24–27 and 34–35 likewise tend to rely on the erroneous assumption that chapters 28–33 do more or

\(^{25}\) Seitz, Isaiah 1–39, 236.

less the same rhetorical work as 13–23. In fact, Isa 13–23 and 28–33 perform very
different functions with respect to the overarching book, and thus do not provide a solid
base for assuming rhetorical likeness between Isa 24–27 and 34–35. As a result of these
observations, the notion that Isa 34–35 should be isolated from Isa 28–33 begins to break
down in the literary data. If the fourth woe (30:1-33) can resolve in an apocalyptic-like
vision, why not also the sixth (33:1–35:10)?

Third, the notion that generic likeness between Isa 24–27 and 34–35 constitutes a
marker of structural distinction is also complicated by the fact that Isa 33 exhibits several
important connections with these preceding texts. For example, the initial statement
concerning the Betrayer—“when you have completed betraying, they will betray you”
(33:1)—signals an important link with both 21:2 and 24:16, the only two places prior to
33:1 where the root נָבַּד appears. The subsequent first-person plural prayer—“Yhwh, be
gracious to us—in you we hope” (33:2)—corresponds uniquely to first-person plural
declarations of hope in 25:9 and 26:8. The root חָנָן (be gracious) appears prior to 33:2
only in 26:10, 27:11, and 30:18–19; furthermore, only in chapter 26 does it appear in
close proximity with the root קָוַּה (hope). Other data on this topic are presented below; for
the time being, the point is simply that Isa 33–35, not Isa 34–35 alone, evinces strong
lexical links with Isa 24–27. At the same time, due to the appearance of the sixth and
final woe in 33:1, which completes the parallel with the six woes of 5:8-24, Isa 33 must
be regarded as macrostructurally bound to Isa 28–32. In short, even a “soft break”
between chapters 33 and 34 potentially distorts the nature of Isa 28–35 in its written
form.
4.1.5 Model 5: Open-Sequence

The open-sequence model emphasizes the way in which Isa 33–35 fits within a much larger series of texts stretching from the beginning of the book to the end.

This view is supported by the work of scholars such as W. Brueggemann, who recognizes that chapter 33’s emphasis on Yhwh’s kingship provides the conceptual basis for chapters 34–35, which he titles, “The New Governance of Harshness and Joy.” Similarly, Dicou describes Isa 32–35 as the “thematic center of the book,” suggesting the degree to which Isa 34–35 is woven together with its preceding context. Seitz also highlights ways in which Isa 34–35 connects with previous texts, while Mathews emphasizes Isa 34–35 as leading out to the Hezekiah narratives and beyond. Taken in sum, such observations suggest that Isa 33–35 is best described as falling within a kind of sequential flow, where structural boundaries bear secondary importance to the development of thought that the text encourages through its sequential unfolding.

30 Mathews, *Defending Zion*, 157-79.
The open-sequence model is specially tuned to the threads of correspondence that Isa 33–35 shares with Isa 1–32 and 36–66. It is therefore best equipped to register the slow development of book-wide themes and lexical patterns; other models run the risk of crystallizing Isaianic motifs into static sets that take on one meaning in the first half of the book and are perceived to invert in the latter part of the book (e.g. blindness versus sight, deafness versus hearing, etc.). As preceding chapters of the present study have suggested, however, the well-known reversals of Isaiah do not turn on a dime, but are filtered through a process that necessitates IH’s acceptance of IJ’s message before he or she is permitted to hear subsequent texts (cf. 32:9-20). When Isa 33–35 is perceived as open to the book’s larger parenetic goals, its rhetorical function vis-à-vis IH better catches the exegete’s attention.

The main drawback to this model, however, lies in its potential to bury redactional and structural markers so far below the text’s thematic development that its subtleties go unnoticed. As mentioned above, any holistic reading of the text that does not attend to the focal shifts and generic diversity of Isa 33 will distort the manner by which the text communicates. Thematic readings of Isaiah are for this reason often dismissed as being of minimal scholarly value, since they tend to reduce a complex and challenging text into rather basic generalizations. Moreover, a total disregard for structural boundaries would seriously detract from an account of the sequential process IH undergoes in Isa 33–35, as the text’s function is bound up in its relation to the series of preceding woes, which are identified only by making a macrostructural observation. Like any of the other types, the open-sequence model can be pushed to extremes that ultimately undermine the unique perspective to which it is suited.
In sum, scholarly views on the (in)coherence of Isa 33–35 may be categorized according to five basic models: anthology, closure, diptych, bridge, and open-sequence. Virtually all readers mix and match aspects of two or more of these when describing the text, as its structure defies simplistic definition. Nonetheless, the review provided above suggests that Isaiah scholarship at large presently suffers from a shortage of exegetical analyses that are grounded within the open-sequence model but that are also conversant in the contributions made by readers who better fit the other four types. Especially absent from this discussion is a thorough inquiry into what IH can be expected to know as he or she encounters these chapters in sequence, and what IH can be expected to learn as a result. Combined with an agrarian perspective on the book’s content, a more sophisticated view of the text’s epistemological layering produces a description of Isa 33–35 that can begin to account for its focal shifts, generic diversity, structural complexity, sequential flow, and rhetorical function all at once.

4.2 The Sixth Woe, Part One (33:1–24): Dwelling with the King

The final woe in the six-part series is the most complex, and may be read in two main parts, 33:1–24 and 34:1–35:10. IJ begins by addressing an unnamed “Destroyer” and “Betrayer.” This indictment, however, gives way immediately to a prayer—a second-person request for Yhwh’s favor followed by a first-person declaration of hope (33:2; cf. 5:2, 4, 7; 8:17; 25:9; 26:8). Critically, 33:5-6 describes Yhwh as “filling Zion with justice and righteousness” (33:5), actions that form the basis for IJ’s statement that “he” (i.e. Yhwh) will be “the trustworthiness of your times” (33:6). These statements gesture towards Yhwh’s status as Zion’s true king, while the second-person possessive pronoun
(your) signals yet another rhetorical shift to a new addressee, a disciple (or collective of disciples, D) comprising the “community-apart” into which IH is also invited. In other words, IJ seems to be aware that his words have fulfilled their mission to distinguish between his LA and the “learners” (8:16) who follow in his obedient path. His focus therefore lies not on levying charges against his antagonists as in 28:1-22, but on ensuring that D gives Yhwh as king the honor he deserves.

For precisely this reason, IJ reminds D of the Betrayer’s fate in 33:7-12—desolation, frustration, rejection, mourning, languishing, miscarriage, and consumption. As the previous five woes demonstrate, some who are in Ariel also fit this destructive paradigm (33:7). In Yhwh’s voice, IJ then refocuses D’s attention on the requirements that his alternative trajectory demands (33:13). The next three verses outline a crucial “keyhole” through which D must pass if D hopes to avoid the consumptive properties of Yhwh’s fiery presence (33:14) by which the Betrayer and his ilk are destroyed (33:12). If D walks in righteousness and speaks “on-the-level” (33:15), then “he on-heights will dwell,” “his bread will be given,” “and his waters, trustworthy” (33:16). Stable land-inhabitation awaits. The final section of the chapter develops this premise by imagining Jerusalem as a “carefree home” (33:20; cf. 32:18) and an immovable tent (33:20), a place of flowing rivers (33:21), rock-solid security (33:18-19, 21, 23), bodily healing (33:24), and forgiveness of sins (33:24), all under the auspices of a “king in his loveliness” (33:17) who is identified as Yhwh himself (33:22). If IH is willing to follow IJ through the eye of the needle, he too will dwell “on-heights” (33:16; cf. 33:5) with the King.
4.2.1 Isaiah 33:1

1 Woe, Destroyer,
though you are not destroyed,
and Betrayer,
whom they have not betrayed!
When you have finished destroying,
you will be destroyed,
when you have completed betraying,
they will betray you.

The lyrical character of 33:1 is self-evident even in translation. Two key terms—
destroy (root שדד) and betray (root בגד)—appear four times in quick succession; the result
is a rhythmic, almost parabolic, statement on the fate of the “Destroyer” and “Betrayer.”
The term “destroy,” which appears also in 15:1, 16:4, 21:2, 23:1, and 23:14, adds one
more link in the chain of destruction that is slowly unveiled over the course of the OCN,
for which historical Assyria functions as an archetype.51 However, the text does not
require that the Betrayer’s identity be pinned to Assyria only; he can be Assyria and
Babylon and a drunkard and “those-who-go-deep from Yhwh to hide a plan” (29:15), all
at once. The verse’s memorable phonology (šōdēd, šādūd; bōgēd, bāgedū) helps
“Assyria’s” paradigmatic demise to linger in IH’s ears even as IJ moves on to the first-
person prayer of 33:2.

Scholars routinely observe that the language appearing in 33:1 strongly resonates
with language found in 21:2 and 24:16, as presented below.

21:2 שודד ובוד לשהודו לשהוד

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51 Historical-critical scholars such as Roberts and Wildberger are sometimes preoccupied with the
identity of this individual or entity, but as even Blenkinsopp points out, the tyrant of 33:1 is best understood
as an “idealized, abstract [portrayal].” See Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 436; Mary Katherine Y. H. Hom, The
Characterization of the Assyrians in Isaiah: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives, LHBOTS 559 (New
The betrayer betrays, and the destroyer destroys.

24:16

בָּגָדוּ בּוֹגְדִים וּבֶגֶד בָּגָדוּ בֹּגְדִים

Betrayers betray, and with betrayal betrayers betray.

Less commonly appreciated, however, is the fact that both corresponding texts link the key root בּגד to the “bodily sickness = land destruction” motif that introduces the book at large and which runs throughout the OCN. For example, IJ’s realization in Isa 21 that “the betrayer betrays” is followed by his complaint concerning sickness (חַלְחָלָה, root חלה) in his own body; “I am ‘twisted’ (נַעֲוֵיתִי) from hearing,” he adds (21:3). As noted in chapter two of this study, Yhwh similarly “twists” (עִוָּה) the earth in 24:1; later in 24:16, IJ cries out, “I am diseased, I am diseased (רָזִי־לִי),” at which point he uses the root בּגד (betray) fives times in a row. “Disease” (root רזה) and a “conflagration” (root יכד) of “consuming” (root אכל) fire are also reckoned upon Assyria in 10:16-17 (cf. 33:14), followed by the destruction of its forests in 10:18. For Israel as well, its body is sick and its land is ruined, its cities are blazing fire and its soil is consumed by strangers (1:5-7).

When heard in this context, 33:1 not only links the sixth woe to the trajectory of destruction in general, but to a more specific concern for the illness and recovery of the body as well as the illness and recovery of the agro-ecosystem in which the body subsists (cf. 30:23-26).

If this reasoning is on track, two further observations can be made concerning the function of 33:1 as it is rendered and positioned in relation to the chapter as a whole.

First, since “betrayal” is a form of sickness that prevents land-inhabitation, the text prepares IH in advance to compare a ruined landscape in vv. 7-12 with an image of stable dwelling in vv. 17-24, and moreover to anticipate the healing and forgiveness that
resolves the chapter in v. 24. 33:1 is therefore not unrelated to the material that precedes and follows, as scholars sometimes aver. Through precise word choice it cues up an important rhetorical concern of Isa 1–32 that simultaneously adumbrates the chapter’s overall vision of restoration. Second, the fact that IJ declares destruction and betrayal to circle back upon the one who deals them out (e.g. “you will be betrayed”) immediately encloses the Betrayer within a tight sphere of cause and effect. The verse’s satisfying symmetry, which is characteristic of Yhwh’s “just deserts” in the Prophets at large, is similar to material IH has already encountered in 28:7-13, where the drunkards’ babble ironically spells out the content of Yhwh’s incomprehensible message. Or similarly in 30:16-17, IJ reconfigures his adversaries’ plans for escape as incriminating evidence of their impending doom. The difference between 33:1 and these prior examples, however, lies in the poetic brevity of the deed-consequence formulation. Acting as a kind of micro-unit within the larger chapter, 33:1 suggests that IJ’s present focus lies not with the Betrayer’s demise in all its gory detail (contrast 28:1-22), but with D’s distinction from the Betrayer’s certain doom. By keeping the indictment portion of the sixth woe to a bare minimum, N likewise helps IH to focus on what now matters most—his or her participation in the prophetic prayer of 33:2. When some scholars register dissonance between 33:1 and the remainder of the chapter, they are simply noticing a well-planned “packaging” technique that protects IJ’s acolytes from becoming sidetracked in the wrong train of thought. 33:1 suits its present form and context perfectly well.

4.2.2 Isaiah 33:2-6

2 Yhwh, be gracious to us—in you we hope.
Be their arm in the mornings;
indeed our salvation in a time of distress.

3 From the voice of the crowd,
peoples retreat;
from your going-high,
nations disperse.

4 And your spoil is gathered
as the grasshopper gathers;
like a rushing of locusts,
one rushes on it.

5 Elevated is Yhwh,
for he dwells on-high;
he fills Zion
with justice and righteousness.

6 And he will be the trustworthiness of your times,
a fortune of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge;
the fear of Yhwh is his treasure.

As a liturgical subunit of Isa 33, vv. 2-6 contribute two main ideas to the larger chapter: first, these verses model the prophet’s distinct trajectory of hope in opposition to the “just deserts” doled out to the Betrayer in 33:1, and second, they orient that hope toward Yhwh as king. As is true of much biblical wisdom literature, the knowledge of Yhwh’s wonderful plan to which IH is granted access depends on his or her trust in Yhwh’s instructive rule.

IJ’s first-person plural voice—“in you we hope” (33:2)—provides the basis by which IH may come to understand him or herself as included in the community-apart as described in 8:11-22. “Hope” (root קוה) characterizes Yhwh’s posture toward his Vineyard, even if that hope is disappointed (5:2, 4, 7). Later IJ takes up Yhwh’s hope for himself in the first-person singular: “I will hope in him” (8:17). In chapter 8, however, the singular “I” is simultaneously attached to a group of “learners” (8:16) and “children”
(8:18); the plurality of the “we-group,” which stands apart from the culture in which it is embedded (8:11-15), is later expressed in 25:9: “Behold, this is our God; we hoped in him, and he saved us. This is Yhwh; we hoped in him.” Later IJ declares, “Yhwh, we hope in you” (26:8), and, “Yhwh, you ordain peace for us” (26:12). The effect of this shift between singular and plural forms is to suggest that IJ and D come to form a cohesive party that IH is encouraged to join. 33:2 is confused somewhat by the third-person pronoun on the form זְרֹעָם (their arm); this anomaly may be explained as either a copying mistake worthy of emendation, or perhaps as a kind of culturally specific citation (“Yhwh, be ‘their-arm-in-the-mornings’...”), which would leave the form intact. Either way, the verse returns to the first-person in its final phrase, “our salvation in a time of distress.” The text as liturgy sweeps IH into IJ’s theological orbit by proposing that the trajectory of destruction (33:1) is avoided in no other way except through active participation in the prophetic word.

IJ’s hope as expressed in 33:2-6 is clearly oriented toward Yhwh, whose character is portrayed through explicit statements as well as the manner by which the unit’s terminology links up with preceding material. For example, IJ implores Yhwh to be “gracious” (root חָנָן), to be an “arm” (cf. 30:30), and to be “our salvation (root ישׁע) in a time of distress (צוֹרָה)” (33:2). “From your going-high (root רוּם),” IJ adds, “nations disperse” (33:3). This cluster of terms uniquely echoes 30:18-21, where Yhwh is likewise

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33 The present analysis of Isaiah’s “we-group” is indebted to the work of both U. Berges and E. Conrad. See Berges, The Book of Isaiah; Edgar W. Conrad, Reading Isaiah, OBT 27 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 83-116.
depicted as “waiting” (root חכה) to be “gracious” (root חנן) and as “going-high” (root רום) to have compassion (30:18). In the past, Yhwh “gave you the bread of distress (צָר) and waters of deprivation” (30:20; cf. 33:16), but this prior reality is counteracted by a present vision of Yhwh guiding the pilgrim on a straight road (30:21; cf. 33:15). Yhwh is a Teacher (30:20). At the same time, IJ’s more overt concern in 33:2-6 is to affirm Yhwh’s saving power and royal status on behalf of the community-apart, while at the same time preserving the all-important declaration that “Yhwh is king” until later in the chapter (33:22; cf. 6:5). This delay preserves the statement’s rhetorical punch until just the right moment.\footnote{36} Meanwhile, Yhwh’s “elevated” status “on-high” (33:5; cf. 2:6-22) contrasts against the Assyrian monarch whose “great heart” and “high eyes” dared to coopt Yhwh’s identity for himself (10:13; cf. 1:24). Whereas Assyria turned-aside the boundaries of peoples and ransacked their valuables (10:13), Yhwh seems to apportion “spoil” (root שלל) like a Davidic king (33:4; cf. 9:2). Yhwh is further described as “the trustworthiness (אמות) of your times, a fortune of salvation (יְשׁוּעֹת), wisdom (חָכְמַת), and knowledge (וָדָעַת); the fear of Yhwh (יִרְאַת) is his treasure” (33:6). Such terminology factors prominently in the royal depiction of 11:1-9 (cf. esp. 11:2-3, 5; also see 32:1-4) as well as that depiction’s doxological supplement in 12:1-6 (cf. esp. 12:2-3). Hope for salvation centers on a Ruler who guides his children in the proper path.

Perhaps most central to Yhwh’s royal character as depicted in 33:2-6, however, is the claim that “he fills Zion with justice and righteousness” (וּצְרָקָה לֵאמֶר מִשְׁפָּ צִיּוֹן מִלֵּא; 33:5). The importance of this statement to the chapter’s unfolding sequence can be understood

\footnote{35 חכה is a synonym of קוה; both indicate expectation.} \footnote{36 Only once prior to 33:22 is Yhwh definitively named as king (6:5), even while the book as a whole is preoccupied with the shortcomings and blasphemies of human rulers (cf. 1:1).}
through a series of three related observations. First, justice and righteousness are well-known indicators of ideal kingship (cf. 9:6; 11:3-5; 16:5), as well as concerns typical of the Prophets at large. In particular, a just and righteous king upholds the structure of the cosmos by embodying, promoting, and enacting these two principles (cf. Ps 72), which are perceived as encoded in the fabric of material creation. Second, justice and righteousness specifically and especially refer to a king’s responsibility to fructify the land and to distribute its resources equitably rather than to use those resources for personal enrichment (cf. Deut 17:14-20). This cultural assumption provides an important basis for the prophetic accusation that Israel’s kings have not lived up to their God-given responsibilities with respect to the poor and vulnerable. Most commentators of Isa 33


emphasize that the chapter drives in the direction of Yhwh’s enthronement; few, however, connect that rhetorical progression with the notion that Yhwh, who “fills Zion with justice and righteousness” in 33:5, reveals his kingship primarily through the fair allocation of dwelling space, as the discussion below will demonstrate.

Third, Israel exhibits an archetypal failure with respect to justice and righteousness (cf. 5:7), due especially to the faithlessness and corruption of its human leaders. The command to “do justice” (1:17) characterizes the prophetic indictment of 1:10-20; accordingly the “trustworthy town” (נֶאֱמָנָה קִרְיָה), once “full” (root מלא) of justice and righteousness, is said to have become a prostitute. Israel’s land is likewise “full” of silver, gold, horses and chariots (2:7)—the precise content of royal self-enrichment programs outlined in Deut 17:14-20 and embodied in the downward trajectory of Israel’s wisest king (1 Chr 9:13-28). Over against such “fullness,” Yhwh is “elevated” (root שׂגב) by himself and “arises” (root קום) to terrify the earth (2:11, 17, 19, 21; cf. 33:5). “High and lifted-up” (ואנשׂ רם) on his throne, King Yhwh “fills” the Temple with his train (6:1); in 33:5, the claim that Yhwh is “elevated” and also “fills Zion” with the Bible’s premier indicators of good kingship strongly suggests that Yhwh’s status as Israel’s true king is being asserted as the theological basis for IJ’s present hope. As Ahaz’s example implies, the problem of bloodshed rather than justice and outcry rather righteousness (5:7) is a matter of trust (root תַּאַב; 7:9). IJ is therefore very much on point when adding that, “he


will be the trustworthiness (אמות) of your times” (33:6). Yhwh meets all the necessary criteria for which so many of Israel’s rulers have been found wanting.

In addition to its theological value in relation to Yhwh’s kingship, the concept of trust also serves the unit’s parenetic aims through its close association with the didactic terminology found in the remainder of 33:6: “wisdom,” “knowledge,” and “fear of Yhwh.” As a pilgrim on the road to the Promised Land (cf. 30:21), D is encouraged to entrust his or her education to Yhwh, who is a “fortune” (חֹסֶן) and “treasure” (אוֹצָר) in contrast to the silver and gold that captures Israel’s idolatrous heart (cf. 2:7-8; 30:22). As U. Berges observes, “If Jerusalem is to be the city of the heavenly world king, it must develop a population that corresponds to this vocation.”

That population—comprised of IJ, D, and IH together—gains “wisdom” and “knowledge” of Yhwh’s historical plan (i.e. “your times”) precisely by relinquishing power to the King. Perhaps more than any other of Isaiah’s claims, this principle in particular is difficult for Western readers to comprehend, since in the modern frame of mind the Cartesian-Baconian dictum “knowledge = power” goes largely unrecognized and unchallenged. That “knowledge ≠ power” is thus totally counterintuitive to modern thought, yet this is precisely what 33:6 suggests. Knowledge, IJ argues, is dependent on the “fear of Yhwh;” knowledge is trust. This point allies 33:6 with a huge range of biblical wisdom literature that promotes the

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same principle, from Gen 3 to Prov 3.\textsuperscript{45} From an agrarian perspective, the relinquishment of power may be described as a willing recognition of one’s ignorance as a corporeal being.\textsuperscript{46} As a result, to entrust “your times” to Yhwh opens the disciple to a different kind of knowledge altogether. Such an epistemology is grounded not primarily in the accumulation of raw data, but in the body’s identity as a creature subsisting from the land, which the righteous King justly allocates.

4.2.3 Isaiah 33:7-12

7 Behold, those-in-Ariel cry-out in the street; envoys of peace bitterly weep.
8 Highways are desolate, the wayfarer\textsuperscript{47} ceases; he frustrates the covenant, he rejects cities, he does not reckon men.
9 The land mourns, it languishes; Lebanon is abashed, it rots-away. Sharon becomes like the Aravah; Bashan and Carmel drop-their-leaves.


\textsuperscript{47} “Wayfarer” expresses the phrase פָּרָח עֹבֵר, which could be rendered more literally as “the one who passes by/on a path.” See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 423.
“Now I arise,” says Yhwh—
“now I go-high, now I am lifted-up!

11 You conceive stubble,
you give-birth to straw;
your spirit is a fire that consumes you.

12 Peoples will become blazes of lime;
as slashed briars in the fire they will be kindled.”

To some, the next unit seems a rhetorical non sequitur, as the encouraging, second-person discourse of 33:6 cuts away abruptly to a third-person prophetic critique of “those-in-Ariel” (יהואן הֶרֶמְלָם) in 33:7. This focal shift and generic difference does not, however, undermine the chapter’s literary coherence. Analysis of 33:7-12 reveals close lexical ties with material appearing in Isa 5, 15-16, 19, 22, and especially 24. As chapter two of the present study demonstrates, these texts rely on images of agro-ecological ruin to build the concept of destruction into a coherent, historical trajectory. Insofar as 33:7-12 recalls this textual chain in light of a just and righteous King, it affirms Yhwh’s right to establish order by burning away the Betrayer’s blasphemous attempts to assume control of Yhwh’s land and throne (cf. 10:12-19).

As Beuken argues, Isa 33 has been written up to suit its situation within the greater book, and indeed the language of vv. 7-13 seems to reflect meticulous literary craftsmanship. For example, 33:7 states that those-in-Ariel “cry (צָעֲקוּ) in the street (חֻצָה),” while the envoys of peace “bitterly weep (יִבְכָּיוּן מַר).” The root цָעֲק appears in only two

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48 This form is nonsensical as written and thus probably worthy of emendation. In view of the place name אֲרִיאֵל (cf. 29:1, 2, 7), most scholars agree that it is best rendered as “those-who-are-in/of-Ariel.” Wildberger even suggests that the parallel phrase, שָׁלוֹם מַלְאֵי (envoys of peace; 33:7), might be understood as “envoys of Salem.” From a canonical point of view, the term “peace” is best preserved, but his reading nonetheless identifies an important connotation that the phrase implies. Sacred geography creates a conceptual bridge from 33:5-6 (Zion) to 33:7 (Ariel and “Salem”), allowing for a point of comparison between the two units despite their obvious generic differences. In this way IH remains focused on the inward state of the city, particularly its need to be “ransomed” and “filled” with justice and righteousness (cf. 1:27; 33:5). See Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 283.

49 See Beuken, “Jesaja 33 als Spiegeltext,” 5-35.
places prior to 33:7—5:7 and 19:20. The first of these is a play on the root זָכַר, indicating the archetypal failure of the Vineyard to produce justice and righteousness as Yhwh had hoped. A related root, זָעַר, which may also be translated “cry” or “cry-out,” appears in 14:31, 15:4, 5, 8, and 30:19. קישון (street) and related forms appear in 5:25, 10:6, 15:3, and 24:11. The root בּכָה (weep) appears in 15:2, 3, and 5, 16:9 (2x), 22:4, 12, and 30:19. (bitter) is rare in Isaiah, appearing only in 5:20 (2x), 22:4, and 24:9. On the basis of these four terms alone, the manner by which 33:7-12 specially relates to those chapters listed above is difficult to dismiss. Indeed this observation is strengthened by the fact that פָּרָר (frustrate; 33:8) appears in 24:5 as well. It also shows up in 8:10 and 14:27—importantly, in relation to Yhwh’s plan—but only in 24:5 is it paired with בְּרִית (covenant) as it is in 33:8. Likewise אבל (mourn) and אַמְלָל (languish) are found individually in 3:26 (אַמְלָל) and 16:8 (אַמְלָל), while in 19:8, 24:4, 7, and 33:9 they are used in conjunction with each other. כִּיסֵל (rot-away) is found only in 19:6 and 33:9. מָסָר (reject) appears at a number of other places besides 33:8, though notably the term refers directly to Torah only in 5:24. 33:11 uses two terms—שָׁפֵן (stubble) and שִׁבָּה (straw)—that likewise occur only in 5:24, also in reference to a “consuming fire” (cf. 33:11). This tapestry of interwoven threads suggests that the fate of the group described in 33:7-12 should be characterized in association with the content of these particular texts.

The lexical data assembled above point to the trajectory of destruction, especially as that trajectory is understood according to a pattern of agro-ecological failure. The “outcry” and “bitter weeping” of 33:7, for example, place the Arielites on paradigm with the disappointing Vineyard and Moab’s corresponding ruin. “Desolation” (root שָׁמַם; 33:8) is characteristic of land-destruction in 1:7 (2x), 5:9, and 17:9, as well as the general
destruction to which IJ’s mission relates in 6:11. As described in chapter two of this study, the agro-ecological ruin described in Isa 5 and 16 is subsequently applied to Egypt in Isa 19, where the key terms אבל (mourn) and אמל (languish) appear together (19:8), and so expand on the notion of Moab’s vineyards “languishing” in 16:8. Most importantly, however, many of the relevant terms are then combined in Isa 24:1-13, where the “brawling of celebrants” (24:8) and the “town of chaos” (24:10) appear to pick up the idea of a “celebratory town” and its improper feasting from 22:1-14 (cf. 32:9-14). To isolate perhaps the most salient part of this larger unit, 24:4-7 reads as follows; lexical correspondences with 33:7-12 are underlined.

24:4 The earth mourns and fades the world languishes and fades; the high people of the earth languish.
5 And the earth is profaned under its inhabitants, for they pass-by the Torah(s), they flush-away its laws, they frustrate the perpetual covenant.
6 For this reason a curse consumes the earth, and the inhabitants in it are guilty; for this reason the inhabitants of the earth are seared, and a little men remain.
7 The juice mourns, the vine languishes; all who rejoice at heart are sad.

33:7-12 could not be more explicit, therefore, in attaching the Arielites to the agro-ecological ruin typical of the Vineyard, Moab, Egypt, and the whole world as reflected in the passage above. Yhwh then compares such people to “stubble” and “straw,” the flammable byproduct of the winnowing process (33:11; cf. 5:24; 30:28). They become “blazes of lime” and like “slashed briars in the fire” (33:12; cf. 10:17). In short, 33:7-12 portrays destruction in the language of failed subsistence. The “passing-by” of Torah and frustration of the perpetual covenant (24:5; cf. 5:24; 33:8) lead to annihilation in Yhwh’s
consuming fire (33:11-12; cf. 9:4, 18; 10:17; 26:11; 29:6; 30:27, 30). For such individuals as these, no land-inhabitation is possible.

IH, however, rises above this vision. He or she may reside in Jerusalem along with the אֶרְאֶלָּם, but for IH, the text’s rhetorical impact is experienced in light of the information he or she already possesses as a result of having accepted the text in N’s sequential rendering. Thus, despite the unmitigated ruin of the land and its inhabitants, IH remains aware that upheaval in regions such as Lebanon and Carmel also signals Yhwh’s ability as Creator to restore order (33:9; cf. 29:17; 32:15). Moreover, if the Betrayer and his kind can be thwarted, the altered boundaries of 10:13 should return to their right positions so that Israel can dwell safely in the land (cf. 30:23-26; 32:15-20). Indeed, IH takes comfort in the fact that:

30:19 For a people in Zion, who-inhabit Jerusalem—
you will surely weep no more.
He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry;
when he hears it, he answers you.

The word “gracious” (root חנן) connects this verse to IJ’s affirmation of Yhwh’s kingship in 33:2, while the idea of not “weeping” (root בּכה) or “crying” (root זעק) provides IH with the grounds by which to stand apart from the trajectory of destruction described in 33:7. Stable dwelling begins with Yhwh’s capacity to restore the world to its right condition. Insofar as Yhwh “goes-high” (root רם) and is “lifted-up” (root נשא) on his throne (33:10; cf. 6:1), IH’s hope endures (cf. 33:2).

4.2.4 Isaiah 33:13-16

13 “Hear, ones-far-away, what I have done;
acknowledge, ones-close-by, my prevailing-power.
14 In Zion sinners dread;
quivering seizes the profane.
‘Who of us can reside with the consuming fire?
Who of us can reside with the perpetual conflagration?’

15 The one-who-walks in righteousness
and speaks on-the-level,
who-rejects exaction and extortion,
who-drops his palms from grasping a bribe,
who-plugs his ear from hearing bloodshed,
and who-shuts his eyes from seeing trouble—

16 he on-heights will dwell,
a stockade of ledges is his elevated-place,
his bread is given,
his waters, trustworthy.’

33:13-16 represents the parenetic fulcrum of Isa 33 and Isa 28–35 at large. Often described as an “entrance liturgy” akin to Pss 15 and 24, the unit is related to its immediate context first by its continuation of Yhwh’s voice as introduced in 33:10, and second by its geographical focus on Zion (33:13-14). By addressing those who are both far away and nearby, the text directs IH to consider Yhwh’s “prevailing-power” (root גּבר; 33:13; cf. 9:5; 10:21; 11:2; 13:3; 28:6; 30:15) as a global phenomenon indicative of his royal prerogative to enact justice and restore the world to its right condition, just as 33:2-6 affirmed and 33:7-12 portrayed. 33:14 then turns IH’s attention to the crux of the matter: Two historical trajectories have been delineated, but how does the disciple finally align him or herself to the one and not the other? By what mechanism might D dwell in the Creator King’s proximity (cf. 29:15, 23)? The text specifies six stipulations (33:15) that form a rhetorical “keyhole” through which D must pass if he or she hopes to avoid the “consuming fire” (33:14; cf. 33:11-12). These stipulations conclude in the notion that the successful pilgrim will “dwell on-heights” (יִשְׁכֹּן מְרוֹמִים; 33:16) much as Yhwh also

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50 For example, see Balogh, “‘He Filled Zion’,” 489; Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 263; Sweeney, Isaiah 1–39, 428; Thompson, “Vision, Reality and Worship,” 328.
“dwell on-high” (מָרוֹם שֹׁכֵן; 33:5). For such a person, “bread is given” and “his waters are trustworthy” (33:16; cf. 3:1; 30:20; 33:6). Subsistence is ensured.

Even though it is D (and hence also IH) who passes through the rhetorical keyhole these verses construct, the unit’s central question may be read as the concern of Zion’s “sinners” (33:14). These individuals “dread” (root פּחד), “quiver” (root רעד) and are “profane” (root חנף; 33:14); such language puts them squarely within the orbit of destruction. Dread plays a refrain-like role in the image of Yhwh’s anti-pride campaign in 2:10, 19, and 21; it also characterizes the Egyptians in 19:16-17 and Yhwh’s cosmic upheaval in 24:17-18. The root רעד (quiver) does not previously appear, though the motif of trembling and tottering occurs in the same two passages (cf. 19:16; 24:19-20). חנף (profane) also appears at a critical juncture in 24:4 with respect to Torah rejection (cf. 5:24). The impact of these connections is felt in the latter half of the verse: “Who of us can reside with the consuming fire?” and “Who of us can reside with the perpetual conflagration?” (33:14; cf. 33:11; 5:24). On the one hand, if sinners are understood to pose these questions, the answer must be a resounding, “None of you!” Yhwh’s fire consumes them, purifying the city from within. On the other hand, the same questions—whose first-person plural voice recalls 33:2—also direct IH’s attention to the manner by which he or she might by allied with IJ, D, and the community-apart. In this second-order view of the text, the “sinners” add an appropriate measure of humility to IH’s consideration of the problem.

In response to the inquiry in 33:14, IJ presents six criteria by which D might survive the “perpetual conflagration.” These address matters of moral stature, social relations, economic justice, and cultural purity, encapsulating a portrait of D’s willing
submission to Yhwh as both Teacher and King. Here the language of the body is vitally important. Like 30:20-22, where the road to fruitful security in the land (cf. 30:23-26) is imagined as bipedal progression along a given path, 33:15 imagines D as “walking” (root רָחַל) and “speaking” (root דּוֹבֶר), someone whose fingers, ears, and eyes all perform litmus-like actions that tether him or her to the right road. Moreover, IH has also learned from 32:1-8 that good kingship effects a holistic renewal of land, health, and culture; subjects are imagined as seeing clearly, speaking honestly, providing food for others, protecting the poor, and maintaining moral virtue. In 33:15, the successful disciple is likewise portrayed as speaking and acting in such a way that economic corruption and thus exploitation of the poor is “shaken-off” (root נער) as a tree shakes off its leaves (cf. 33:9). Insofar as Isaiah imagines clear eyes and open ears as the embodiment of wise kingship (cf. 11:3-4; 32:1-4), 33:15 subtly flips this notion into one of plugged ears and shut eyes, but in both cases the senses are closed against cultural evils rather than perception in general. This ironic twist serves to link the social imperatives of 33:15 with D’s distinction from LA, insofar as D follows IJ in avoiding the misplaced fear of his people (8:12). To be a member of the community-apart is not a nominal endeavor (cf. 29:13); it requires a social commitment grounded in the submission of one’s ears, nose and throat to the King’s purview and plan (cf. 6:5-7).

If D does these things, IJ declares that “he on-heights (root רֹום) will dwell (root שָכַן),” and that his “elevated-place” (root שָׂגֶב) will be a “stockade of ledges” (33:16). Such language is not accidental—the three roots listed above put D unquestionably into

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51 The series’ connection with the previous unit is enhanced through use of the roots סָכַים (reject) and נָעַר (drop/shake-off) in 33:8-9 and 33:15.
Yhwh’s proximity as known from 33:5 (cf. 29:23). In other words, the unit resolves D’s pilgrimage with a portrait of safe and stable dwelling. Yhwh’s presence is portrayed as a (plural) “stockade” (מְצָדוֹת). This term appears elsewhere in Isaiah only in 29:7, where Yhwh visits Ariel in a “flame of consuming fire” (29:6) so as to protect it from “all who bring-armament against her” (29:7). Safe within the geo-theological bosom of David’s city, Zion’s population observes that its attackers experience food and drink as dream-like hallucinations (29:8). As a corollary to this image, Yhwh “fills Zion” with a “just and righteous” (33:5) community whose food is “given” and whose waters are “trustworthy” (root יָאמָן; 33:16). In short, IH observes in 33:16 that on the other side of IJ’s narrow gate, secure land-inhabitation obtains.

4.2.5 Isaiah 33:17-24

17 A king in his loveliness your eyes will envision; they will see an expansive land.
18 Your heart will ponder horror—
“Where is the one-who-counts?
Where is the weigher?
Where is the one-who-counts the towers?”
19 The insolent people you will not see—
the people of deep lip which prevents hearing
and a stammering tongue without comprehension.
20 Envision Zion,
town of our regular-assemblies;
your eyes will see Jerusalem,
a carefree home, a tent one does not pack-up,
whose tent-peg one never pulls-up,
and none of its ropes will be snapped.
21 But there Yhwh is magnificent for us,
a place of rivers, wide-handed canals;
no oar-ship will go in it,

52 On the importance of food in Isa 33, see Andrew Abernethy, *Eating in Isaiah: Approaching the Role of Food and Drink in Isaiah’s Structure and Message*, BibInt 131 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 86-90.
For Yhwh is our judge; Yhwh is our lawmaker; Yhwh is our king—he is the one-who-saves us.

Abandoned are your ropes—they cannot make-firm their pole, they cannot spread a banner. Then will be apportioned abundant spoil; the lame will plunder plunder.

And none dwelling there will say, “I am sick;” the people who-inhabit it will be lifted of iniquity.

The last unit of Isa 33 develops the premise on which 33:16 concludes: when Yhwh is enthroned as Zion’s true King (33:22), he makes Jerusalem into an unassailable refuge for the community-apart (33:20-21, 23), so that bodies might finally be healed and sins, forgiven (33:24; cf. 1:4-9; 6:10; 30:26). That kingship in general is in view is evident from the use of מֶלֶךְ in 33:17—“A king in his loveliness your eyes will envision” (cf. 32:1). Despite IH’s intuition for the main idea, however, even here IJ is restrained. A description of the effects of Yhwh’s rule precedes its overt affirmation in 33:22, creating a rhetorical crescendo rather than a thesis-like assertion that is then defended. This literary strategy serves to heighten IH’s anticipation, appealing to his or her desire rather than solely to the logic of Yhwh’s governance, thus involving IH personally in the theological goal of the unit and overall chapter.

The effects of good kingship are described in 33:17-20, with special emphasis on Zion’s security. In N’s rendering, IJ addresses the successful disciple directly, allowing IH to hear IJ’s discourse as one who is included in the second-person “your” of 33:17. Having shut his or her eyes to evil like D, IH’s eyes are now open to “envision” (root חז) a “king in his loveliness” and to “see” an “expansive land” (33:17). The text’s focus on
land cues IH to Yhwh’s royal responsibility to allocate dwelling space justly and righteously (cf. 33:5); that the land is expansive\(^53\) suggests a reversal of the vice-like siege described in 29:1-4, in line with the “stockade of ledges” proclaimed in 33:16. If IH were to ponder Zion’s former horrors, the text proposes, he or she would likewise not be able to find the “counter/scribe” (root וסס) or “weigher” (root הליך; 33:18). These terms are bureaucratic—probably related to taxation—and thus possibly inspired by the financial burdens related to foreign tribute or the state’s attempts to gather resources in preparation for a siege (cf. 22:8-11). That said, it is a mistake to identify the “people of deep (עמקי) lip” (33:19) exclusively as Assyrian suzerains.\(^54\) The rhetoric carefully avoids historical specificity so that these individuals may refer to Assyria as a type (cf. 33:1; 36:11) but also to “those-who-go-deep” (המאמיכים) from Yhwh to hide a plan (29:15). The effect is to draw a productive association between Zion’s protection and the pilgrim’s theological education: IH will not see a people that prevents comprehension (33:19), or in other words, IH will comprehend! Indeed, IH will “envision” (33:20; cf. 33:17) Zion, “town of our regular-assemblies” (מוֹעֲדֵנוּ קִרְיַת) and the king’s proper domain, to be a “carefree home” (שַׁאֲנָן נָוֶה) and a “tent one does not pack-up” (33:20). The first-person plural “our” again draws IH’s attention to his or her membership in the community-apart along with IJ and D. Additionally, the verse’s “town of” construction suggests an echo of 32:13 (עליזה קיריה), part of the critique of “carefree women” (נשים מרחיקים)\(^55\).

\(^{53}\) Some scholars, such as C. Balogh, suggest that the מַרְחַקִּים (expansive) should be translated as “distant,” a point usually tied to the notion that the text was originally composed as encouragement to the Babylonian exiles. “Expansive,” however, better suits the passage’s present focus on Zion. The ambiguity, which suggests applicability to audiences both far away and close by (cf. 33:13), is perhaps a functional part of the word’s rhetorical value. See Balogh, “‘He Filled Zion’,” 490-91; Roberts, First Isaiah, 421; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 302.

\(^{54}\) See Roberts, First Isaiah, 429.
that transitions into a declaration of justice and righteousness taking shape in the greater agro-ecological landscape (32:16-17; cf. 33:5), thus producing a “peaceful home” (ןְווֵה) and “carefree places-of-rest” (שַׁאֲנַנּוֹת; 32:18). On paradigm with the canopy that screens Zion from the storm and rain (cf. 4:5-6; 25:4-5), Jerusalem becomes a stable dwelling place for the subjects of the King. IH comes home.

33:21-23 introduces a naval image that has puzzled many scholars, as it contradicts Jerusalem’s location in the central hills. The usual solution is to propose redactional complexity; Wildberger, for example, treats parts of vv. 21 and 23 as editorial insertions. Even if such proposals are correct as a matter of compositional history, however, the text in its written form exhibits coherence under the rubric of Zion’s certain security, and should not be split into pieces or otherwise rearranged for the purposes of interpretation. It is true that IJ jumps from the topic of an immovable tent in 33:20 to a riverside metropolis in 33:21. This imaginary situation suggests all the benefits of life in a floodplain (e.g. commercial access, easy irrigation, alluvial soils) but without the liabilities (e.g. vulnerability to invasion). The “jump” is clarified in 33:23, however, where the enemy ship’s “ropes” (חֲבָלָיִךְ), pole, and banner are described as hanging loose in the wind, in direct contrast to the tent’s pegs and “ropes” (חֲבָלָיו), which are permanently cinched down against inclement weather (33:20). These images are figural and symbolic—the actual size difference between the Gihon Spring and the Euphrates River is hardly the point.

Rather, IJ’s concern is to proclaim the theological foundation on which Zion’s security rests. Finally in 33:22, he declares that Yhwh is “our judge,” “our lawmaker,” and “our king.” Indeed, he is the one who “saves us” (33:22). Rhetorically speaking, Yhwh is not “a” king or even “the” king—Yhwh is “our” King. In other words, Yhwh is not enthroned as a matter of predetermined fact, even if the book assumes this to be true from its outset. Rather, Yhwh is enthroned as a matter of IH’s involvement in the community-apart through a parenetic experience with IJ’s past word. If IH were not to affiliate with that community (which is impossible, as IH is a literary character), the text’s rhetoric would be bizarre and senseless. However if IH does affiliate with that community (as he or she must do), IH gains access to the King’s apportioning of abundant spoil (33:23; cf. 9:2; 33:4), bodily healing (33:24; cf. 1:5-9; 30:26), and the “lifting” or forgiveness of iniquity (33:24; cf. 33:14). In other words, the text is constructed in such a way that 33:23-24 (and all other subsequent words of IJ) remains inaccessible to IH apart from his or her prior assent to IJ’s theological claims in 33:22. The plural “we” of 33:22 demands participation in the reality it asserts.

4.2.6 Summary

The complexity of Isa 33 is daunting to say the least, but resolves in a rather simple theological claim: Yhwh is our King. Brimming with focal shifts, generic variety, and rich allusions to prior Isaianic texts, the chapter constitutes part one of the last woe-oracle in the series of six begun in 28:1. Unlike Isa 28, however, Isa 33 does not work the initial הוי into a lengthy indictment of IJ’s LA, but instead encloses the statement of woe in an alliterative summary-parable concerning the Betrayer, who is paradigmatically
linked to the historical trajectory of destruction as described in chapters 1–32. This rhetorical “enclosure” allows N to focus IH’s attention on the manner by which IJ and D (the plural “we” of 33:2) stand apart from LA through trust and hope in Yhwh who “fills Zion with justice and righteousness” (33:5). This phrase suggests that Yhwh’s kingship is in view, particularly his responsibility to fructify the land, though an explicit statement to this effect is withheld until later in the chapter. Such a delay creates the space N needs to carry IH through the prerequisite “keyhole” of 33:13-16 before Yhwh’s kingship is corporately affirmed. In anticipation of the upcoming keyhole passage, 33:7-12 portrays the utter futility of those who are attached to the trajectory of destruction. Strong lexical correspondences between this unit and chapters 5, 15–16, 19, 22, and 24 imply that it extends the pattern of agro-ecological ruin put forth earlier in the book, and thus captures a sense of the landless desolation to which the Betrayer and his followers are consigned. N then focuses IH on the essential question of how one might avoid such an unhappy fate and so manage to live in proximity with Yhwh’s “consuming fire” (33:14). Six criteria, which submit the pilgrim’s body to Yhwh’s rule through social responsibility, are laid down in 33:15. If IH also does these things, “he on-heights will dwell” (33:16; cf. 33:5). That such a living space promises reliable bread and water (33:16) expresses a notable difference with the agro-ecological doom portrayed in 33:7-12, and indeed the following unit expands on this contrast by depicting Zion’s security and stability. Finally, 33:22 delivers the kerygmatic climax of the whole chapter, wherein Yhwh’s instructive rule is openly affirmed by IJ, D, and all those who would participate in the community-apart. IH entrusts his or her fate to the King, and so the healing begins (33:24).
4.3 The Sixth Woe, Part Two (34:1–35:10): The Allocation of Land

When scholars perceive Isa 34–35 as distinct from the preceding series of six woes, two main questions tend to go unanswered or are given unsatisfactory solutions. First, how is Isa 34–35 situated within the book as a whole, and second, what is the point of naming Edom as the object of Yhwh’s intense wrath in Isa 34? The present chapter began by describing various models that scholars have developed in response to the first of these two questions—the text is usually thought of as an anthology, a series of compositional endpoints, the first unit in the second half of the book, or a hinge between preceding and succeeding texts. Noticing the language of desertification used in Isa 34, readers also sometimes propose that this text in coordination with Isa 13 creates a kind of scaffolding or “frame” for so-called “First Isaiah.”57 While there is merit in all of these suggestions, the proximity between Isa 33 and Isa 34–35 requires a more thorough explanation if the book is to be understood in its written form. What, if anything, does the annihilation of Israel’s “sibling” have to do with the first-person rhetoric of enthronement?

This question suggests the second deficiency of the scholarly literature on this topic—its inability to explain why Edom in particular is the target of Yhwh’s wrath at precisely this point in the text. Scholars typically understand Edom to function in Isa 34 as a representative type of enemy or as a specific example to the nations, a role perhaps inspired by Edom’s collusion with Babylon in 587/6 BCE.58 But neither solution

57 For example, see Dicou, “Literary Function,” 37-38; Lust, “Isaiah 34 and the Herem,” 284.
(historically rooted or not) typically addresses the question in terms of the text’s sequential unfolding. C. Mathews takes an important step forward in advocating a figural reading of the two chapters, wherein Edom functions as a representative type for all those “who exclude themselves from the blessings God conveys on the earth from Zion.”\textsuperscript{59}

While this explanation fits the six woes’ parenthetic thrust much better than either of the two explanations cited above, Mathews ultimately explains the placement and function of Isa 34–35 in relation to Isa 36–39, not Isa 28–33.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, the field of Isaiah studies in general still tends to regard the relationship between Yhwh’s kingship in Isa 33 and the appearance of Edom in Isa 34 with a proverbial shrug of the shoulders—why not? Brueggemann and Seitz have both asserted that the concept of Yhwh’s rule spans Isa 33–35,\textsuperscript{61} and indeed the present study concurs with this observation. Their arguments gain much more precision, however, when these chapters are approached as a macrostructural unit expressing Yhwh’s governance (Isa 33) through his allocation of land (Isa 34–35).

Isa 34–35 expands on the rhetoric of Isa 33 by providing IH with a textual instantiation of those rewards to which his or her affirmation of Yhwh’s kingship ultimately gains access. It was observed above that Isa 33 stresses the clarity of IH’s comprehension (i.e. hearing and sight; cf. 33:17-20) on the premise that he or she, as a pilgrim like D, submits his or her ears and eyes to Yhwh through social responsibility (33:15). 34:1-4 takes IH’s keyhole experience seriously, rolling back the heavens like a scroll and thereby granting IH insight into a world from which LA was cut off. The

\textsuperscript{59} Mathews, Defending Zion, 167.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 167-79.
\textsuperscript{61} See Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 259-80; Seitz, Isaiah 1–39, 235-36.
cosmic vision to follow in 34:5–35:10—IJ’s prophetic perspective on the “really real”—picks up from 33:4 and 23 the notion of Yhwh’s royal ability to “apportion spoil.” In 34:5-15, for example, King Yhwh turns Edom into a chaotic wasteland, divesting it of all domestic livestock, enriching the soil with their blood, and turning the land over to wild birds. 34:16-17 ensures that IH catches precisely what the preceding vision has emphasized, that Yhwh “apportions” dwelling space to these creatures for all time (34:17). The question of Edom’s particularity in Isa 34 is then answered through the chapter’s association with Isa 35, which provides a geographical counterpart to Isa 34. While the King who saves “us” destines one landscape to wilderness, he also fills another landscape with bubbling springs and healthy bodies, a joyful pilgrimage to IH’s ge-theological home in Zion (35:10; cf. 32:18; 33:20). From an agrarian perspective, the contrast between the two neighboring spaces suggests that Isaiah’s soteriological vision does not anticipate reality beyond material subsistence, but rather a kind of hyper-reality wherein Yhwh’s governance becomes the determining factor in everything from lilies (35:1) to liturgy (35:10). If the Farmer’s Parable enjoins IH to reflect on the responsibilities of subsistence, the keyhole passage of Isa 33 finally submits IH’s mouth and muscles to Yhwh, who alone possesses the royal authority to provide for his children in their proper place.

4.3.1 Isaiah 34:1-4

1  Draw-close, nations, to hear,  
and countries, pay-attention;  
let the earth and its fullness hear,  
the world and all its outgrowth.  

2  For wrath Yhwh has concerning all the nations,  
and hot-fury concerning all their armies;
he exterminates them—
he gives-them-up for slaughter.

3 And their slain will be expelled,
and from their corpses will go-up their stench;
and mountains from their blood will melt,

4 and the whole army of heaven will decay.
And like a scroll the heavens will be rolled-back,
and their whole army will fade
as fades a leaf from a vine,
or like the fading of a fig.

This apocalyptic-like unit creates a vital link between the affirmation of Yhwh’s kingship in Isa 33 and the portrait of Yhwh’s acts of land-allocation in 34:5–35:10. It functions in three rhetorical capacities: first, it portrays Yhwh as a global king who abolishes military imperialism; second, it grants IH special insight into the true nature of reality; and third, it focuses IH’s attention on the effects Yhwh’s enthronement will have in relation to the earth.

For the same two reasons that 33:2 is sometimes split away from 33:1 (focal shift and generic difference), 34:1 is frequently separated from 33:24. The imperatives to the nations and countries at large in 34:1 do indeed present a real change from both the first-person plural voice used in 33:2 and 22 and the second-person “you” of 33:6 and 18-20. Moreover, that the “whole army of heaven will decay” and “like a scroll the heavens will be rolled-back” (34:4) suggests a nascent apocalypticism that led to the production of texts that are generically distinct from biblical prophecy.\(^{62}\) Allowing for these differences, a number of factors nonetheless suggest that 34:1 should be read closely on

the heels of 33:24. Most importantly, the book presents the two verses in sequence; “draw-close, nations, to hear,” (34:1) is literally “heard” after the promise of healing and forgiveness in 33:24. Additionally, the coherence of Isa 33, which exhibits several focal shifts, argues against the notion that the focal shift in 34:1 constitutes a major break. Finally, the example of 30:27-33 provides evidence that apocalyptic-like texts are not distinct from the macrostructural series of six woes. Inasmuch as Isa 34–35 differs from Isa 33, it is equally true that both wisdom and apocalyptic-like elements may be found in many other prophetic texts. The generic difference between Enoch or Daniel and classical prophecy should therefore not determine one’s reading of Isa 34–35 in context. Focal shifts and generic differences alone do not constitute a sufficient reason to dissociate one text from the other.

Yhwh’s kingship provides the primary conceptual link between 34:1-4 and the preceding chapter. Nations and countries—indeed the whole world—are called to attention (34:1); as IJ later states in chapter 40, such nations “are like a drip from a bucket, and like powder on the scales are they reckoned” (40:15). Yhwh makes “potentates nothing” and “the rulers of the earth he makes like chaos” (40:23). Though IH has not yet heard these words, the sentiment he or she encounters in 34:1-4 is

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similar—Yhwh “has wrath concerning all the nations, and hot-fury concerning all their armies (הָעַמִּים)” (34:2). These armies Yhwh “exterminates” and “slaughters” (34:2), and from their corpses rises a stench (34:3). The key root here is צב (army). On the basis of his enthronement in chapter 33, Yhwh assumes control over the militaries of the world (cf. 29:7). While some modern readers may find the language of “extermination” and “slaughter” disturbing, it is important to remember that the overall effect of such actions is the abolition of military imperialism, on par with the images of Torah-obedience and “swords-to-plowshares” presented in 2:1-5. Yhwh’s royal status produces upheaval that results in peace (cf. 9:5-6).

A second conceptual link between Isa 33 and 34:1-4 is disclosure. It was argued above that 33:14-16 leads IH through a rhetorical keyhole, where he or she submits both ears and eyes to Yhwh; on the other side of this keyhole, eyes are opened and Yhwh’s royal status is affirmed (33:17-22). 34:1-4 expands on this epistemological progression. Mountains melt in blood (33:3), the “whole army (צבא) of heaven will decay,” and “like a scroll (סֵפֶר) the heavens will be rolled-back” (33:4). Such language indicates that Yhwh’s royal prerogative to destroy the world’s “armies” (33:2) also inheres in the fabric of the cosmos (33:4). In other words, Yhwh’s enthronement in 33:22 opens IH to a new perspective on the nature of reality, not just global politics. This point is supported by the metaphor of a “scroll.” Importantly, written documents help to distinguish IJ from his LA in both 8:11-22 and 30:8-17. In 34:4, the written “scroll” as a marker of group-distinction is transferred to the heavens. Insofar as IH throws in his or her lot with the first-person

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64 Lexical correspondences between this passage and 14:19-21, the annihilation of Babylon as a self-aggrandizing and blasphemous king, support this interpretation. Cf. roots שׁלך (33:2; 14:21), פּגר (34:3; 14:19), and טַיבָּה (33:3; 14:19).
rhetoric of 33:22, IH’s ears and eyes are opened to a cosmic reality that LA simply cannot comprehend (cf. 28:7-13). IH sees reality as it really is.

Finally, 34:1-4 emphasizes the fact that Yhwh’s just and righteous kingship (33:5), which IH has already observed to produce a stable dwelling place in Zion (33:17-24), has immediate repercussions for “the earth (אֶרֶץ) and its fullness (root מלא)” (34:1; cf. 33:5, 9, 17) as well. Images such as “mountains” melting from blood (34:3) ensure that IH gives attention to the land as well as the sky. Indeed the whole army of heaven “fades” (root נבל) “like the fading of a fig” (34:4; cf. 28:4). This language grounds the revelation IH receives through the cosmic “scroll” within a pattern of agro-ecological destruction known through concrete experience with food production. Perhaps the most important term to this effect, however, is “exterminate” (root חֶרְמָה), or “put to the ban.”

The concept of herem is closely associated with military action, and thus fits the destruction of the world’s armies as related in 34:2-3. It is not a form of sacrifice as S. Niditch argues, though the next unit draws a fruitful analogy between the two (cf. 34:5-6) that is examined below. Rather, as R. Nelson posits, biblical herem is better

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65 This point is supported by the apocalyptic-like character of the text. On the relationship between sapiential and apocalyptic writings, J. Collins states that there is, “a place for instructions and admonitions in the apocalypses, and these sometimes have a sapiential character. Both apocalyptic and wisdom literature aim to influence the behavior of the readers by instilling a view of the world.” In other words, apocalyptic like sapiential texts can have a similar parenetic aim, to convince the reader of a particular cosmology. Later in the same article, Collins analyzes the Testament of Dan, arguing that, “The wisdom tradition provides the ethical focus of the testament; the apocalyptic tradition provides the explanatory frame, the larger context of meaning.” In the same way, Isa 34:1-4 introduces to the six woes a “larger context of meaning” that sits behind the level of discourse with which IH is familiar to this point. Collins, “Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility,” 174, 179.

66 The root נבל appears in 28:1 and 4. הָרָם (early-fig; 28:4) is lexically unrelated to נבל (fig tree; 34:4), but shares the same conceptual field.

understood as a “culture map category” that signals a thing’s status as the “inalienable possession of [Yhwh].” The key is divine ownership—insofar as the thing is “exterminated,” it is wholly given over to Yhwh and cannot be ransomed (cf. 1:27; 29:22). P. Stern has contributed the important observation that when herem operates cosmologically, as it appears to do in this case, it represents a defense against chaos through the acquisition of land. As scholars of apocalyptic literature have shown, such texts often express an overriding concern for Yhwh’s capacity to restore global order through his unquestioned control of both time and space. Similarly, the use of herem in 34:2 signals that indeed Yhwh is in control of the land and may distribute it accordingly.


69 Ibid.


71 See Philip D. Stern, The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel’s Religious Experience, BJS 211 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991). Stern’s analysis is grounded in a view of Israelite cosmology that understands reality according to a “triple axis of land-man-god” (130). This point is important insofar as Stern’s work has come under fire for pressing herem’s cosmological dimension at the expense of the concept’s grounding in historical issues of land scarcity. While Stern’s emphasis certainly does lie with cosmology, his attention to this “triple axis” suggests that herem is part of a holistic phenomenology that does not lack a basis in subsistence agriculture. See T. M. Lemos, “Dispossessing Nations: Population Growth, Scarcity, and Genocide in Ancient Israel and Twentieth-Century Rwanda,” in Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives, ed. Saul M. Olyan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 27-65.

Having followed IJ into the throne room of the King of Kings, IH is privileged to watch that distribution unfold.

**4.3.2 Isaiah 34:5-15 and 34:16-17**

5 “For in the heavens my sword saturates—
  behold, upon Edom it goes-down,
  upon a people I exterminate justly.”

6 A sword Yhwh has,
  full of blood, enriched with lard,
  with the blood of sheep and bucks,
  with the lard of the kidneys of rams.
  For a sacrifice has Yhwh in Bozrah,
  and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

7 And aurochs will go-down with them,
  and bulls with mighty-bulls;
  and it\(^{73}\) will saturate their land with blood,
  and their dust with lard will be enriched.

8 For a day of vengeance Yhwh has,
  a year of settlement for Zion’s cause.

9 And its torrent-beds will be shifted into pitch,
  and its dust into sulfur,
  and its land will become burning pitch.

10 Night and day it will not be extinguished;
  perpetually will go-up its smoke.
  From generation to generation it will be barren;
  forever and ever no one shall pass through it.

11 And the pelican and the bustard will possess it,
  and the eared-owl and the raven will dwell in it;
  and he will extend against it
  a measuring-line of chaos and stones of entropy.

12 Its aristocrats—no kingdom is there *that* they proclaim,
  and all its officials will be nothing.

13 And *into* its palaces go-up brambles,
  prickers and barbs in its fortresses;
  and it will become the home of jackals,
  a grassy-abode for ostriches.

14 Wild-beasts with buzzards will meet,
  and the goat-demon to its mate will call;
  indeed there Lilith will take-repose,
  and find for herself a resting-place.

\(^{73}\) That is, Yhwh’s sword; cf. 34:5.
15 There will nest the sandgrouse, and it will lay, and hatch and brood in its shade; indeed there will collect kites, each with its mate.

16 Seek from the scroll of Yhwh and read: not one from among these is missing; each with its mate, they are not lacking. “For my mouth—it has commanded;” and his spirit—it has collected them.

17 And he has let-fall for them the lot, and his hand has apportioned it for them with the measuring-line; unto perpetuity they will possess it, from generation to generation they will dwell in it.

The true nature of reality to which IH has been granted insight (34:4) is subsequently portrayed as a contrast between parallel landscapes in Isa 34:5-15 and 35:1-10. These units are held together by 34:16-17, which provides the interpretive key to the whole: the “scroll” (סֵפֶר; 34:4) confirms that Yhwh’s “hand” (cf. 14:26-27) has “apportioned” (root חלק) with a “measuring line” (קָו) living space for wild animals in Edom, who “possess” (root יָרַשׁ) and “dwell” (root שָׁכַן) there forever. The critical idea is captured in the root חלק (apportion; 34:17; cf. 33:23). Insofar as Yhwh is King of the whole cosmos (34:1-4), he apportions land “justly” (root שָׁפֵט; 33:5, 22; 34:5) to its appropriate inhabitants. 34:16-17 breaks from the preceding third-person discourse, but because it provides such an important explanatory comment on 34:5-15, as well as demonstrating several lexical correspondences with the preceding material (cf. 34:10-11, 17), the two units are analyzed below in relation to each other.

34:5 reads as follows: “For in the heavens my sword saturates—behold, upon Edom it goes-down, upon a people I exterminate justly.” By situating Yhwh’s

74 Literally, “a people of my extermination (חֶרְמִי).”
instrument of justice in the “heavens/sky” (cf. 34:1, 4), but falling out of the sky to land
squarely on Edom like a bolt of lightning, 34:5 suggests that Yhwh’s global kingship as
depicted in 34:1-4 will be worked out on a local plane. This point—that the text portrays
Yhwh’s justice as locally experienced—cannot be overemphasized, as it introduces the
basic framework for the destruction imagined in 34:5-15. Insofar as the text’s
terminology recalls paradigmatic doom—especially Babylon’s example in Isa 13–14—it
locates that paradigm in geological and geographical parallel to Judah’s central hills.
Israel’s Transjordanian “siblings” (Ammon, Moab, and Edom), scholars should
remember, are visible from Jerusalem on a clear day. The text continues: “For a sacrifice
has Yhwh in Bozrah [the capital of Edom], and a great slaughter in the land of Edom”
(34:6). Importantly, the “land of Edom” (דֹּם אֵרֶץ) goes on to function as a feminine
singular subject, object, and possessive pronoun throughout the rest of the passage: “its”
torrent-beds, “its” dust, “its” land (34:9), “it” will not be extinguished, “its” smoke, “it”
will be barren, none will pass through “it” (34:10), and so on. Because the “land” of
Edom is the recipient of so much attention in 34:5-15 (and not, for example, its collusion
with Babylon in 587/6 BCE), it is reasonable to assume that the question of Edom’s
appearance immediately after Isa 33 will be answered best through a reading of the
passage that attends closely to its grounding in local geography.

Without question, Edom’s fate in 34:5-15 is not a happy one. The passage
presents a unique array of rare animal terminology combined with other, more common
words that factor importantly in the trajectory of destruction laid out in previous chapters
of the book. In tandem with explicit statements that Yhwh’s sword will saturate “their
land” with blood (34:7; cf. 34:3), and that “perpetually will go-up its smoke” (34:10),
such word choice makes abundantly clear that Edom adheres to one historical trajectory and not the other. Space does not permit every lexical thread its due, but a few of the more salient strands of evidence may be mentioned. For example, Yhwh’s sword “goes-down” (root רד; 34:5; cf. 34:7) on Edom, picking up an important series of images found in 5:14, 10:13, 14:11, 14:15, 14:19, 15:3, 30:2, 31:1, 31:4, and 32:19. The root helps to establish a pattern of blasphemy and doom in the book at large, of which Babylon is an important representative in Isa 13–14. Yhwh’s sword then effects a great slaughter of domestic livestock—sheep and goats and cattle (34:6-7)—which are described as a “sacrifice” (ץב) in 34:6. This image shares in IJ’s programmatic indictment of the “leaders of Sodom” and the “people of Gomorrah” in 1:10-20, as well as the “celebratory town” (22:2) and its act of unholy consumption in 22:13. IJ then declares that Yhwh has a day of “vengeance” (جماع) and a year of “settlement” (שלום) for Zion’s “cause” (ירבד; 34:8); these three roots together imply a further connection with Isa 1 (cf. 1:17, 23, 24).

At this point the land of Edom is raked over the coals; several terms such as “torrent-beds” (לנָה), “sulfur” (גפרית), and “burning” (בּוּרָה; 34:9) recall Yhwh’s annihilation of Assyria in 30:27-33. That the land is “shifted” (root הפה) into pitch (34:9) signals connections with 1:7 (Israel’s land) and 13:19 (Babylon), where the term is used in relation to Sodom and Gomorrah’s archetypal destruction (cf. 29:16). Edom’s fire “will not be extinguished” (root כבה; 34:10; cf. 1:31; 6:13), and “from generation to generation” (34:10; cf. 13:20) it will be barren. Instead of Edomites inhabiting Edom, in other words, a panoply of desert creatures and wild birds “possess” (root ירש) and “dwell” (root שכן) there instead (34:11; cf. 13:20-22; 14:23). Yhwh also extends a “measuring-line of chaos” (קַו־תוּהוּ) and “stones of entropy” (אַבְנֵי־בֹהוּ; 34:11). Aside from
the idea of a “stone” and “measuring-line” from 28:16-17, as well as the paradigmatic “chaos” of the celebratory town in 24:10. Thorns, jackals, buzzards, and even demons invade the landscape (34:13-14). Edom, in effect, is uncreated, swept away by the overwhelming scourge (28:15, 18) and consigned to the “city-to-pile” paradigm of 25:2.

That the Edomite state is wiped from the earth in Isa 34 is fairly obvious from the text (cf. 34:12) and thus is well recognized in the secondary literature. Historical-critical scholarship in particular, perhaps because of the modern assumption that history equals politics, has tended to understand Isa 34 as an unambiguous (if hyperbolic) description of the real bureaucratic collapse from which Edom never recovered. This reading comports relatively well with certain aspects of the textual evidence, such as brambles taking over administrative buildings previously occupied by Bozrah’s aristocracy. Roberts, for example, summarizes Edom’s fate as an “utterly desolate, inhospitable, and abandoned landscape, burning with unquenchable fire.” There is some truth in this claim, but problematically, it disguises the fact that the emptying out of the land’s human inhabitants opens up space for a virtual zoo of wild birds and other lively animals (34:13b-15). At a literary level (and also at an agro-ecological level), in other words, Edom’s fate is not quite so one-dimensional as “political-critical” scholars have imagined. While it is certain that these creatures do not characterize a landscape open to human dwelling, the poem’s careful choice of words suggests that their activities also do

75 Roberts, First Isaiah, 435-36.
not constitute a terminal hellscapework on par with slaughter and burning. Rather, Edom becomes the “home” (נְוֵה) of jackals and the “grassy-abode” (חָצִיר) of ostriches. These are positive terms (cf. 32:18; 33:20) on their own, even allowing for their reversal in 35:7. Moreover, the wild creatures have “mates” (34:14), and in the desert find a “resting-place” (מָנוֹחַ; 34:14; cf. 11:10; 14:1; 3; 28:12; 30:15; 32:18). The sandgrouse (or something like it) “lays,” “hatches,” and “broods in its shade” (34:15). Such language bubbles with life—not life that is conducive to human dwelling, but life nonetheless. The Edomite state’s end is a new beginning.

These observations suggest that the land of Edom is reapportioned in 34:5-15, not uniformly annihilated along with its political elite. An important clue in support of this thesis is found in an analogy that the text forges between “extermination” (root חֶרְמִי, herem) and “sacrifice” (root זָבַח, zebah). In 34:2, חֶרְמִי appears alongside בָּטָל (slaughter); 34:5 then mentions a “people of my extermination (חֶרְמִי),” lifting the concept from the destruction of the world’s armies and applying it specifically to Edom. 34:6, however, puts בָּטָל in parallel with זָבַח (sacrifice), just as associated with חֶרְמִי בָּטָל in 34:2. The root בָּטָל therefore acts as a binding agent that brings חֶרְמִי and זָבַח into conceptual proximity. It was stated above that herem is not a form of sacrifice as some scholars have argued; Nelson and Stern especially provide sound rebuttals to this view. That said, Stern can be criticized for failing to explain how the two terms function in relation to one another in Isa 34. He writes: “Both the ban and sacrifice shared the unusual property or quality of being sacralizations of death, so that even though the differences between the two in

76 J. Muilenburg makes a similar point. See James Muilenburg, “The Literary Character of Isaiah 34,” JBL 59.3 (1940): 352-56.
scale, circumstance, function, and underlying ideology were great, biblical writers were...sometimes drawn into making analogies between the two based on the degree of similarity that did exist.”

Stern does not appear to regard the analogy he identifies as worthy of much attention, as his overall aim is to dissociate at a historical level what the poetry has combined. This leaves open an obvious rhetorical question: if *herem* and sacrifice are not the same thing, why exactly does Isa 34 put them together?

The answer lies in Yhwh’s royal right to apportion land to its proper inhabitants. When Yhwh commits the land of Edom to *herem* in 34:5, the text signals that it becomes Yhwh’s rightful possession—as 34:12 states, “no kingdom is there that they (i.e. Edom’s aristocrats) proclaim.” Yhwh divests Edom’s rich and powerful of their geographical inheritance, much as he also abolishes the world’s armies in 34:2. In other words, he asserts total ownership and thus complete control of the land. The “sword” of Yhwh (34:5), which is *herem*’s weapon of choice, is then reconfigured as a tool used for the sacrificial butchery of domestic livestock (34:6). Close attention is given to the animals’ blood, fat, and kidneys—details that go beyond the use of blood as an indicator of *herem* in 34:3. Additionally in 34:7, Yhwh’s sword “saturates their land with blood, and their dust with lard will be enriched (root דּשֶׁן”).” In other words, as the animals’ blood spills out from their bodies, Edom is fertilized. Or as Kaiser rightly puts it, Edom’s soil is “manured with fat.”

The lifeblood of the domestic creatures is poured back into the dust

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from which they came, “enriching” it as one enriches a garden. This emphasis on agricultural fertility comports well with the idea of a sacrifice, which can be understood as a theologically-aware dietary restriction through which the consumption of meat is recognized for what it is—the death of one living creature so that another may live, each of which is bound to the other in a web of material and moral bonds. Working together, the two terms indicate that through the act of herem, Yhwh takes control of the land, despoiling the Edomites of their inheritance and slaughtering their cattle (i.e. their livelihoods) in the process; at the same time, however, Yhwh’s act of sacrifice returns the lifeblood of the living creatures to the soil, enriching it for future generations. These future generations cannot be Edomites, of course—34:10 makes that clear. Rather, Edom becomes a territory filled with wild creatures that flourish in the absence of its former lords. As a global king, Yhwh redistributes the land of Edom to its proper inhabitants.

34:16-17 picks up on the language of the preceding unit so as to explain and emphasize to IH the meaning of the images he or she has just encountered. For example, 34:14 mentions the goat-demon and “its mate,” while 34:15 portrays kites “collecting (root קבץ), each with its mate.” 34:16 repeats this same phrase—“each with its mate”—as well as the root קבץ, thus ascribing the desertification of Edom to Yhwh’s command (34:16). Moreover, Yhwh has assigned the land to these various creatures with a

80 Adding blood to the soil is an excellent way to lower its C/N ratio in particular.
“measuring-line” (קַו; 34:17), an important symbol of his cosmic justice (cf. 28:17; 34:11). The unit concludes by stating that the wild birds “possess” and “dwell” in Edom “from generation to generation,” language that appears also in 34:10-11 and that reemphasizes the animals’ occupation of the land. Edom is unequivocally “unransomable” as a space devoted to herem, but it is certainly not devoid of residents—the grand sacrifice of 34:6-7 has produced a home for pelicans, bustards, owls, ravens, jackals, ostriches, “wild-beasts,” buzzards, goat-demons, “Lilith,” sandgrouse, and kites!

As suggested above, one of the reasons why Isa 34 has been mischaracterized as a one-dimensional image of destruction, rather than a more complex portrait of land-allocation, is the historical-critical focus on the chapter’s political background at the expense of those agro-ecological realities that also undergird its form and function. In this mode of interpretation, the presence of unclean birds in the latter part of the unit (34:11, 13-17) simply extends the political horrors described in the former (34:5-10, 12).82 In tension with this view, however, 34:16-17 clarifies that the animals function instructively for audiences “after the fact,” not merely as artifacts of an ancient, political rant. Using an imperative, IJ tells D to “seek from the scroll of Yhwh and read: not one from-among these is missing” (34:16). Because this note seems to reflect a self-conscious appreciation for the book IH is hearing and readers have the ability to study, it has been called “one of the strangest passages in the prophetic writings” and “quite out of the blue.”83 If, however, the “scroll” of 34:4 is interpreted in line with idea of a “scroll” as a litmus test for IJ’s and IH’s membership in the community-apart (cf. 8:16; 30:8), and if Isa 33

82 For example, Sweeney suggests that the replacement of the domestic animals by the wild ones is intended to portray the historical displacement of Edom by the Nabateans. Sweeney, Isaiah 1–39, 446.
83 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1–39, 454.
functions as a keyhole for IH’s participation in that community, then a command to seek out another “scroll” in 34:16 for confirmation of the preceding vision is not so out of place after all. Since the “scroll” at this point in the sequential text may refer to both the sealed document (8:16; 30:8) and revealed creation (34:4), the directive strongly implies that the “entextualized” animals in 34:5-15 act as indicators of the cosmological reality to which IH has recently gained access, wherein Yhwh is enthroned as a just King and righteous fructifier of the land (Isa 33). If this is true, the epistemology that such rhetoric reflects is very similar to that of much biblical wisdom literature, in which wild creatures routinely serve as vehicles for instruction in the domestic sphere.  

More broadly, wilderness in biblical wisdom literature and associated texts is not denigrated, but upheld as natural and proper to the Creator’s design. Some of the creatures portrayed in Isa 34 are indeed fearful, and in particular the birds are unclean (cf. Lev 11:13-19; Deut 14:12-...

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18). But as M. Douglas argues, “unclean” does not connote “horror and disgust”—it is a “technical term for the cult.”\textsuperscript{86} Thus, while 34:5-15 portrays a chaotic landscape that no subsistence farmer in his or her right mind would want to cultivate, this does not mean that it should be perceived as wholly negative in contrast to the positive imagery of Isa 35. Rather, it is more accurate to say that in the day of Yhwh’s global justice, earth’s true King assigns his creatures—all of which are good—to their proper places.

4.3.3 Isaiah 35:1-10

35:1 Desert and parched-place will be glad, and the Aravah will exult and bloom like the lily.
2 It will surely blossom and exult—indeed with exultation and exclamation; the honor of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the honor of Yhwh, the splendor of our God.
3 Make-firm weak hands, and stumbling knees, strengthen!
4 Say to those-hurried at heart: “Be firm! Do not fear! Behold, your God comes with vengeance, the retribution of God—he will come and save you.”
5 Then will be opened the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf will be opened;
6 then will leap like a deer the lame, and will exclaim the tongue of the mute. For in the desert will crack-forth water, and torrent-beds in the Aravah.
7 The mirage will become a pond, and the hamada, springs of water; in the home of jackals, where it lies-down, a grassy-abode will become reeds and papyrus.
8 And there will be a highway and a road, and the “Holy Road” will it be called. No unclean-thing will pass-it-by.

\textsuperscript{86} Douglas, \textit{Leviticus as Literature}, 151.
but it will be for him who-walks the road, and no buffoons will stray upon it.

9 No lion will be there, and no violent animal will go-up on it—it will not be found there. And the redeemed will walk, and the ransomed of Yhwh will return. They will come to Zion with exclamation, with perpetual joy upon their head; gladness and joy will approach, while sorrow and sadness flee.

Isa 35 concludes the sixth and final woe with a climactic image of homecoming:

“The redeemed will walk (רָחַךְ), and the ransomed of Yhwh will return (שׁובּ)” (35:9-10). Numerous literary correspondences suggest that the chapter serves as a geographical counterpart to Isa 34, and thus a theological extension of Isa 33, and therefore a geo-theological capstone befitting the agrarian woes of Isa 28–35 at large. Specifically, the reassignment of Edom to desert creatures in Isa 34 provides the conceptual basis for the images of flowing streams, lush vegetation, and healed bodies that characterize the inhabitation of Zion in Isa 35. Taken in sum, Isa 34–35 represents a single act of just and righteous land-allocation performed by the Cosmic King (cf. 34:1-4). In the same way that IJ involves D and thus also IH in Yhwh’s enthronement (cf. 33:2, 5-6, 22), Isa 35 also demands IH’s affirmation of Yhwh’s power (cf. 35:3-4), which again leads to open eyes and healed bodies (35:5-6; cf. 33:17-24). Crucially, such healing is lexically coordinated with the regeneration of the landscape (35:1-2, 6-7); in the text’s agrarian frame of reference, humans are humus and plants are people.87 This principle—that the flourishing of human society goes hand-in-hand with land health—informs the

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image of joyful homecoming in 35:8-10, portrayed as pilgrimage and worship. As a “learner” (8:16) on the Holy Road, IH follows IJ to the local source from which the Torah “goes-out” (cf. 2:3; 28:29), and in so doing, “becomes native to this place.”

The chapter’s structure may be understood as a composition in four parts, vv. 1-2, 3-4, 5-7, and 8-10. The basic content of each is described below to provide a foundation for the contextual discussion to follow. The first subunit focuses on the regeneration of the land. The “desert” and “parched-place” will be glad, IJ declares, and the Aravah “will exult and bloom like the lily” (35:1). The “honor of Lebanon” and the “splendor of Carmel and Sharon” will be given to it (i.e. to the Aravah) (35:2). All three of these regions are known for their trees, in contrast to the Aravah’s barren rain shadow. Thus even in translation the text’s geographical and botanical interests are fairly plain. Also notable is the fact that an arboreal explosion in a site as unlikely as the Aravah produces theological perception (35:2), which foreshadows the healed eyes and ears of 35:5. The second subunit issues five imperatives in quick succession, two of which are nested inside the prior command to “say” (35:4). IJ’s shift to second-person plural discourse encourages D and hence also IH to adhere to the trajectory of hope through ongoing affirmation of Yhwh’s status and power—“your God” (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם) will come and save you (יֹשַׁעֲכֶם)” (35:4). The third subunit portrays the dramatic effects of Yhwh’s salvific work: blind eyes and deaf ears are opened, the lame leap, and mutes speak (35:6). Key terms employed here reflect the language of 35:1-2, while subsequent statements concerning

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88 This phrase is borrowed from: Wes Jackson, Becoming Native to This Place (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1994).
the “desert” and “Aravah” as flowing with water (35:6-7; cf. 35:1) also solidify the correspondence between the healing of human bodies and the regeneration of the land.

The fourth and final subunit depicts those restored bodies in movement along the “Holy Road” (35:8). This pilgrimage is physically safe from animal predators (35:9), as well as morally and theologically safe from errant “buffoons” (35:8; cf. 19:11, 13). Rhetorical emphasis centers on the people having been “ransomed,” and thus able to “return” to Yhwh in Zion (35:10). Those in literal and figural exile may finally come home.

The close relationship between Isa 34 and 35 is evident from a variety of lexical and conceptual clues, several of which point to a larger correspondence between Isa 34–35 and 32:9-20. For example, 35:1 declares that the “desert” (מִדְבָּר) and “parched-place” (נִיטָר) will be “glad” (root שׂושׂ). מִדְבָּר appears for the first time in association with Babylon (14:17); the discussion above notes the deep connections between Isa 34 and Isa 13–14. Moreover, the collection of birds and animals to which Edom is reallocated in Isa 34 are all quite at home in arid lands such as the Aravah (35:1). Hearing the text in sequence, IH also recalls that the most recent use of מִדְבָּר occurs in 32:15—the transformation of desert to orchard and orchard to forest. This event, described as the “just” and “righteous” (32:16-17; cf. 33:5) production of “confident dwellings” and “carefree places-of-rest” (32:18; cf. 34:11, 14, 17), is syntactically linked to the “gladness” (root שׂושׂ) of onagers in 32:14, which take over the “palaces” (32:14; cf. 34:13) of the “celebratory town” into which “thorny briars” go up (32:13-14; cf. 34:13). Additionally, 35:2 focuses on regions famous for their trees—Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon—suggesting that the present vision of abundant vegetation should be interpreted in contrast to the withering of these same regions in 33:9, and in coordination with Yhwh’s restoration of order in 29:17 and 32:15.
Thus 32:9-20 may be understood to provide a template for IH’s hearing of Isa 34 and 35 as a single event—the desiccation of one landscape followed by the irrigation of another. The two chapters in sum enjoin IH to acknowledge that Yhwh’s restoration of the created order involves both a “tearing down” and a “building up” (cf. Jer 1:10). Exultant flowers do not burst forth in the Aravah in isolation from Edom’s reallocation to wild birds, but precisely in light of that reallocation. In the same way that 29:17-21 presents the healing of human bodies and the annihilation of scoffers as alternative angles on the same “good news,” so too 35:4 happily declares Yhwh’s “vengeance” (root נקם) and retribution (cf. 34:8). Such judgment involves a great slaughter in Isa 34:5-7, but also leads to the healing of bodies in 35:5-6. Water “cracks-forth” (root בקע; 35:6; cf. 34:15) in the “torrent-beds” (35:6; cf. 34:9) of the Aravah, converting the “home of jackals” (35:7; cf. 34:11) and the “grassy-abode” (35:7; cf. 34:11) of ostriches into aquatic vegetation. Theologically, in other words, Isa 34–35 presents an organic synthesis of judgment and salvation whose effects are felt deeply in the shape and content of the land.

The blooming of the Aravah (35:1-2)—the scorched region south of the Dead Sea, on the border between Judah and Edom—signals the two chapters’ panoramic shift from one country to the other. The text’s reorientation to Jerusalem is completed at the end of the passage, where the redeemed and ransomed of Yhwh finally return to Zion (35:9-10). This overall interest in location, whose theoretical importance to agrarianism is explored earlier in this study, goes a long way toward answering the question of “why Edom” with regard to Isa 34. Edom and Bozrah provide a geographical counterpart to
Judah and Jerusalem,\textsuperscript{90} and indeed both texts concern themselves with the effects that Yhwh’s judgment has on local hydrogeology, native flora, and familiar wild animals. That is, in both cases, land-inhabitation remains in view. This observation does not yet solve the question of Isa 34–35’s position within the book as a whole, but it does point toward a deep conceptual affinity between the chapters’ function as a single unit and the acts of land-allocation begun by the just and righteous King in Isa 33.

That Yhwh’s kingship remains an important component of Isa 35 is strongly implied by a number of key terms and literary motifs that carry over especially from Isa 32 and 33. For example, 35:1 states that the “parched-place” (ץִיָּה) will be glad. This word and the related form צָיּוֹן are rare in Isaiah, appearing prior to Isa 35:1 only in 25:5 and 32:2. 25:5 links up with the “Zion = stable dwelling” motif of 4:2-6, which informs the image of the immovable tent in 33:20-21, after which Yhwh is enthroned (33:22). Similarly, 32:2-3 ties the parched-place to the concept of shelter, but also to the image of water springing forth in the desert, the healing of eyes and ears (cf. 35:5-7), and just and righteous kingship (32:1; cf. 33:5). Other similar threads may be adduced as well.

“Water” (מַיִם; 35:6, 7), “gladness” (רוֹחַ; 35:1) and “exclamation” (root רָעָה; 35:2, 6) are notably combined in Isa 12:3 and 6, part of the doxological supplement to the images of just and righteous kingship in Isa 11, which similarly imagines a “highway” (סְלָל; 11:16; cf. 7:3; 35:8; 36:2) by which Yhwh leads his children home. Shifting to imperative forms, 35:3-4 directs D to “make-firm (root חזק) weak hands” and to speak to those “hurried at heart” (נִמְהֲרֵי־לֵב; cf. 32:3), telling them, “Be firm! Do not fear!” (חזְקֵי אל). The root חזק is associated with Davidic leadership in 22:21, and later provides

\textsuperscript{90} See Dicou, “Literary Function,” 42; Mathews, Defending Zion, 120-39.
the basis for Hezekiah’s name, the king whose response to foreign invasion is clearly contrasted with the untrustworthiness (root אִים; 7:9; cf. 33:6) of Ahaz (cf. 7:3; 36:2), who is commanded not to fear (7:4) when his “heart…quavers like the quavering of forest trees before a wind” (7:2). The “fear of Yhwh” is also central to the image of kingship in 11:2-3, and is associated with justice, righteousness, wisdom, and trust in 33:5-6. Finally, by delivering this assemblage of terms in the second person, IJ associates the regeneration of the Aravah with the imperative discourse of 34:16-17. As described above, this rhetorical hinge interprets 34:5-15, which localizes 34:1-4, which in turn reveals reality to IH, who joins IJ’s chorus in 33:22: “He is the one who saves us!” (cf. 35:4). In sum, 35:1-4 echoes an important range of texts and ideas appearing previously in the book that point unambiguously to the problem of human kingship and the hope for Yhwh’s ultimate rule.

The effects of King Yhwh’s saving power as promised in 35:4 are described in 35:5-10. These include the “opening” (roots פּקח and פּתח; cf. 35:1-2, root פּרח, “bloom”) of eyes and ears (cf. 35:2, sight), the “strengthening” (35:3) of enfeebled legs (35:6), and the release of muted tongues (35:6; cf. 35:3, “say!”). Correspondingly, water “cracks-forth” in the desert while the imaginary “mirage” (שָׁרָב) becomes the real thing. This delightful scenario makes possible the “Holy Road” on which the pilgrim is protected from every “unclean-thing” (טָמֵא; cf. list of birds in 34:11), “buffoons” (אֱוִילִים; 35:8), and all predatory beasts (i.e. lions and violent animals; 35:9).

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In an effort to make sense of the rich confluence of ideas drawn together in such imagery, scholars have tended to advance one of the following two theories: 1) the text may indeed depict the transformation of both the land and human beings, but its main focus lies with humans’ political security and theological piety as described in 35:8-10, or 2) the images of healed bodies and safety from wild animals constitute an eschatological “paradise portrait” akin to Gen 1–2 that implies isolation or detachment from the real world. Both responses suggest modern confusion with the phenomenological problems that the text raises; namely, in what frame of reference does it make sense to discuss human physiology, geology, biology, zoology, theology, and eschatology, all in the same breath? While the first solution listed above recognizes the text’s driving interest in literal human dwelling, its tendency to relegate the chapter’s geological and zoological language from the level of real content to mere poetic flourish is problematic. If such language is indeed metaphorical, its secondary status cannot be sustained. If it is not metaphorical, then its relegation compromises the scholar’s effort to offer an accurate description of the text’s anthropological vision, which would appear to include real changes with respect to the land and its animals after all. The latter solution better recognizes that the language of Isa 35 does not differentiate between the metaphorical and the literal. However, its tendency to read Isa 35 as another version of Gen 1–2 severs the passage’s many lexical and conceptual bonds with the judgment of Isa 34 (cf. 34:8; 35:4), undermining the integrity of the literature and consequently...

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injecting Isa 35 with an alien sense of utopian leisure. Clearly, a methodologically-coherent approach to the text’s premodern language is needed.

From an agrarian point of view, Isa 35 portrays a holistic hyper-reality in which Yhwh’s saving rule becomes the determining factor in all spheres of existence, so that human behavior is drawn into proper correspondence with non-human creation (animals, plants, water, rock, etc.). For example, the language of vegetative “blooming” (root פּרח) in 35:1-2, which is tied to theological sight (35:2), exhibits telling paronomasia with the language of physiological “opening” (roots פּקח and פּתח) and sight in 35:5. The road by which the community-apart returns home is called “holy;” naturally, non-holy things (e.g. unclean animals) are categorically barred from using the road as well (35:8-9). In short, the chapter’s word choice and syntax emphasizes the deep correlation between human and non-human creation, not one aspect of human thriving (such as security or piety) for which the rest of the chapter functions as metaphorical code. Salvation is not “like” the greening of barren lands, in other words; it is actually wrapped up in literal reeds and papyrus plants (35:7). This observation is true also of Isa 34, where the natural world responds appropriately to the dissolution of the Edomite state. In both cases, human and non-human creation is perceived to comprise a unified whole, the entirety of which falls under the judgment of one Cosmic King (cf. 34:8; 35:4).

It is likely that the restriction on predators in 35:8-10 does indeed gesture in the direction of Gen 1–2, and may thereby suggest to some readers a certain disengagement from or even denigration of earth’s biodiversity.94 For this reason, the allusion’s

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94 See John Barton, “Reading the Prophets from an Environmental Perspective,” in Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives, eds. David G. Horrell et al. (London;
significance for the interpretation of Isa 35 requires special care in light of modern reception history. In an effort to solve the perceived embarrassment of the terms “rule and subdue” (roots רדה and כבש; Gen 1:26-28), scholars such as J. Barr have attempted to soften the violence and hierarchy intrinsic to these Hebrew roots. While Barr clearly states that such language probably reflects “the basic needs of settlement and agriculture,” this sort of reaction to L. White’s seminal (but misinformed) essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), has nonetheless helped to erode the relationship between the Bible’s vision of creation (Gen 1:1-25) and its appreciation for human land-management (cf. Gen 1:26-28; 2:15). The result is a strand of ecotheological discourse that lacks a proper theoretical framework by which to describe the Bible’s ubiquitous ecological interests and its equally robust hope for a future that involves agricultural work (cf. Isa 30:23-24). Such discourse obscures the fact that neither Gen


96 Barr, "Man and Nature,” 63-64.

1–2 nor Isa 35 portrays a “hands-off” approach to material reality. On the contrary, humans are described as being on pilgrimage through and into the land (cf. 30:18-26). Their movement is untroubled by predators (35:8-9), but they are still required to “walk” (root נָלַךְ; 35:9) in bipedal progression toward their destination. The restriction on dangerous animals does not, therefore, equate to disengagement from the natural world as described earlier in the chapter. Rather, the pilgrims enter Zion with “exclamation (root נָמַג)” (35:10), matching their song to the “exultation and exclamation (root רָנָה)” of the Aravah (35:2). Like all creatures that look to God for their food in due season, Zion’s inhabitants also have found their proper niche in a world bursting with life.

Finally, the text’s vivid portrayal of pilgrimage as ontologically coordinated with geological and biological “facts on the ground” provides a fitting conclusion to the wider series of woe-oracles oriented by the Farmer’s Parable. As if to signal this overarching literary structure, N ensures that the roots חזק (firm) and עַמֵּץ (strong), which introduced the drunkards of Ephraim to Yhwh’s “overwhelming storm” in 28:2, are here converted to a message of profound encouragement: “Make-firm (חזק) weak hands, and stumbling knees, strengthen (עַמֵּץ)!” (35:3). The road from one image to the other—from a history wracked by destruction to a future full of hope—is marked out for IH in the first place through a sharp contrast between the engorged stomachs and besotted minds of Israel’s political elite and the example of a patient farmer-disciple who submits to the judgment

and tutelage of his God (28:26). As in Isa 35, the farmer’s physical behaviors with respect to the soil correspond deeply with the actions of Yhwh, from whom goes-out the Torah according to his wonderful plan. Subsequent oracles provide the appropriate next steps in IH’s training. Like the farmer, all creaturely bodies (29:16) must come under the direction of Yhwh (30:20-21), who leads his children into “confident dwellings” and “carefree places-of-rest” (32:18). One cannot force one’s way into Zion (cf. 7:1; 29:1-8), in other words; one must walk there on one’s own feet and legs (cf. 33:15; 35:3, 6, 9). For precisely this reason, N does not simply render an enigmatic riddle in 28:23-29 and leave the listener to sort out its meaning for him or herself. Rather, N leads IH gradually into the throne room of the King. Submitting his or her creaturely body to Yhwh through social responsibility (33:14-15), IH gains entry into Yhwh’s elevated stockade where security is certain and subsistence, assured (33:16). Yhwh, meanwhile, is enthroned through the corporate voice of the community in which IH participates. As a result, IH sees the heavens roll back like a scroll (34:4). The “really real” proves to be an organic synthesis of judgment and salvation, desiccation and irrigation, death and resurrection, sadness and song. The just and righteous King reallocates one landscape to wild animals and another to his ransomed pilgrims traveling the Holy Road. As one of these, IH follows IJ home through the desert, into the land and up to Trustworthy Town (91:26). IH becomes a native son of Zion, a daughter of the Ruler and Restorer of the earth. “O house of Jacob,” says the prophet, “walk—let’s walk! (וְנֵלְכָה לְכֻמּ) in the light of Yhwh!” (2:5).
5. Isaiah 36–66: Agrarian Patterns, Agrarian Hope

The discussion thus far has provided an agrarian analysis of Isa 28–35 in its sequential unfolding, showing how the book’s implied hearer (IH, a second-order character within the text) experiences the narrator’s (N) rendering of the prophetic word. The present project, however, ultimately aims to account for the rhetoric of the six woes vis-à-vis their implied reader (IR), a third-order construct who, unlike IH, has the ability to study this material in light of the completed book to which it contributes. Thus, a survey of Isaiah’s total content is necessary before the woes’ parenetic force can be properly understood. The present chapter completes this penultimate task before moving to the reader’s experience of Isa 28–35 in the final installment of this study.

Two points of interpretation merit disclosure now, as these distinguish the following reading of Isa 36–66 from the great majority of others and also bear heavily on how the book’s overall coherence is finally assessed. Most modern analyses of Isaiah, especially through their focus on the text’s compositional history, dissociate Isa 35 from Isa 36 and Isa 39 from Isa 40. It is the perspective of this study, however, that Sennacherib’s attack on Judah in 36:1 occurs in light of Yhwh’s acts of land-allocation as represented in Isa 33–35. From a historical-critical perspective, this statement seems to defy the logic of the text’s construction, since it is well established that Isa 35 almost certainly derives from a much later time than the events that inspired Isa 36–39 actually occurred. However, from a rhetorical perspective—guided by an agrarian hermeneutic (and thus an integrated view of history, land, and people together)—a retelling of Sennacherib’s attack on Judah placed subsequent to an apocalyptic-like account of divine
land-allocation is perfectly logical indeed. The book’s compositional history is not
unimportant, but that history has clearly been made subservient to Isaiah’s parenetic
purposes. This study also argues that the word of comfort initiated in 40:1 self-presents as
the word of Isaiah of Jerusalem (IJ, the prophet-as-literary-character), spoken in reference
to Jerusalem’s salvation from Assyrian attack and Hezekiah’s typological sickness,
recovery, and enduring peace (Isa 36–39). From a historical-critical perspective, the
diachronic gap between 39:8 and 40:1 is enormous, necessitating that the reader undergo
a “very long pause” before hearing a new word of comfort in Isa 40ff.1 From a rhetorical
point of view, however, no such pause obtains. 40:1 appears immediately after Judah’s
paradigmatic salvation event and in view of future Babylonian exile (39:6–7), and it is
precisely from within this narrative context that Isa 40–66 rhetorically functions. More
will be said on both points as the argument develops below.

In addition to these key literary observations, an agrarian perspective on Isa 36–
66 further reveals that the agro-ecological language and agrarian principles
(location/place, the creaturely body, and propriety) deployed in the first half of the book
likewise inform the second. The same patterns that reveal a historical trajectory of
destruction, against which IJ and his “learners” are distinguished through their adherence
to hope, also characterize the Hezekiah narratives of Isa 36–39, the soaring language of
redemption in Isa 40–55, and the conclusive identification of IJ’s “servant-disciples” in
Isa 56–66. Without denying the book’s compositional history, the following discussion

1 Walter Brueggemann, Isaiah 40–66, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster
argues that these agrarian patterns build progressively and cumulatively toward a vision of “soil-bound” hope, made available to those disciples who obediently eat.

5.1 Isaiah 36–39: Peaceful and Trustworthy Land-Inhabitation “In My Days”

The single most important literary observation pertaining to Isa 36–39 is the fact that this unit is a *retelling* of events normally associated with Assyria’s attack on Judah at the end of the eighth century BCE. Like all biblical narrative, these chapters do not constitute a historical transcript in the modern sense;² they are better understood as an artistically-sophisticated, theologically-motivated re-presentation of events. This claim is based on observations made by both literary and historical critics alike. For example, readers frequently highlight the text’s odd dischronology relative to the narratives in 2 Kings from which the Isaiah text probably derives.³ In particular, the account of Hezekiah’s illness and recovery is portrayed as having taken place “in those days” (38:1)—that is, the days of Assyrian aggression—suggesting that it serves as a microcosm of the city’s similar near-death experience, a point supported by 38:6.⁴ It

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seems that the text has been composed for theological purposes, and that the actual sequence of historical events is of only secondary concern. Similarly, the “sign” (נְאָתוֹן) of the city’s salvation involves a multi-year window of agro-ecological recovery (37:30). As J. Blenkinsopp rightly points out, such a sign does not make good historical sense since it necessarily exceeds the timeframe of a real Assyrian attack. He solves this problem by interpreting the language of 37:30 as offering a “general sense of reassurance.”

However, a better solution defines the narratives in question as ancient, literary art, which are therefore not governed by the kind of time-bound considerations that Blenkinsopp assumes to be operative. Thus, while Isa 36–39 depicts events normally associated with the late eighth century, IH is free to consider those events in relation to texts that originated in a later period (such as return from exile), but that are positioned prior to the narrative retelling in question (e.g. Isa 35). 36:1 begins with a summary of Sennacherib’s attack on Judah’s cities: “In the fourteen year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria went-up against all the fortified cities of Judah and laid-hold of them.” Hearing the text in sequence, IH encounters this information in view of several important claims: Assyria, the archetypal blasphemer, characteristically seeks to redefine the geographical boundaries of the peoples (10:12-13); Yhwh is both King (6:1, 5; 33:22) and Creator (29:15-16), and as such, allocates lands to their rightful inhabitants (34:5–35:10); finally,


Judah and Jerusalem are designated expressly for those who, on paradigm with IJ and his disciples (8:11), follow the “Holy Road” home to Zion (35:8-10).

In view of these points, Isa 36–39 may be understood to depict in narrative form the essential contrast operative in preceding chapters of the book: a trajectory of destruction versus a trajectory of hope. N portrays a contest between two nations, two realities, and ultimately two outcomes with respect to land. On one side stands the Rab Shakeh as representative of the imperial exilic machine; on the other side stands Hezekiah as an exemplary disciple of IJ and first among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. From the perspective of IH, who has become a witness to King Yhwh’s acts of land-allocation in Isa 33–35, the contest between them is no contest at all; it simply throws the Creator’s sovereignty into high relief. In this way Isa 36–39 provides a narrative context for the rest of the book, asserting that Yhwh grants his people “peaceful and trustworthy” land-inhabitation as long as the days of their faithful king persist (39:8).

The trajectory of destruction can be identified in Isa 36–39 through the text’s carefully worded portrayal of the Assyrian threat, especially the speech issued by Sennacherib’s chief henchman, the Rab Shakeh. For example, in the Rab Shakeh’s estimation, Hezekiah’s confidence is founded on mere words, which do not constitute a “plan (עֵצָה) and prevailing-power (גוּבָּרָה) for battle (לַמִּלְחָמָה)” (36:5). This language is highly charged. IH already knows for certain that “just as I [Yhwh] have planned (יעץ), it will arise, to fracture Assyria in my land…” (14:24-25), and moreover, that Yhwh promises to become “prevailing power (גְּבוּרָה) for those-turning-back battle (מִלְחָמָה) to the gate” (28:6). From the outset of the narrative, IH encounters the Assyrian threat from within a completely different frame of reference than the first-order literary characters.
(such as Hezekiah and his servants), who see it as a serious political crisis indeed. By contrast, having accepted N’s rendering of IJ’s word, IH finds the Rab Shakeh’s intimidation laughable, since his language exposes the bankruptcy of his argument.7 Similarly, the Rab Shakeh asserts that, “Yhwh said to me, ‘Go-up to this land and ruin (root שׁחת) it’” (36:10; cf. 37:12). Within the world of the narrative, Hezekiah and his servants register the direness of this situation: Yhwh himself has called the Assyrian war machine into action. However, from IH’s second-order perspective, the Rab Shakeh threatens only by acknowledging the sovereign power of Yhwh, and moreover by ironically situating Assyria within a paradigm of “land-ruination” (1:4; 14:20), over against which Yhwh’s holy mountain remains secure (11:9). In short, Yhwh has already stated his commitment to protect Jerusalem (29:5-8; 31:4-5); speaking after rather than before Isa 1–35, the Rab Shakeh does little more than articulate his own doom.

36:10 strongly implies that the question of prosperous land-inhabitation (cf. 35:8-10) is fundamental to the Assyrian threat: Sennacherib intends to “ruin” and destroy.8 Indeed this topic is evident in the Rab Shakeh’s additional attempts to undermine the city’s confidence, in IJ’s pointed rebukes, and in Sennacherib’s ultimate demise. A non-exhaustive survey of supporting evidence is presented here:

1) The Rab Shakeh suggests that in the course of the looming siege, the Jerusalemites will be forced to “eat their feces and drink their urine” (36:12; reading the Qere). He therefore encourages the Jerusalemites to surrender themselves to deportation, at which point they will be transported to “a land

7 Childs notes that the Rab Shakeh’s speech functions as a kind of “parody on the divine promise to Israel of the land that God would give his people.” Childs, Isaiah, 274.
8 Brueggemann, Isaiah 1–39, 288-89.
like your land, a land of grain and juice, a land of bread and vineyards” (36:17). The geo-theology implicit in such logic is that Zion is a site of starvation, while Assyria is a natural site of prosperity.  

This claim has already been falsified in 30:18-26, where the inhabitants of Zion are promised rain, bread, grazing space, and streams of flowing water (30:23-25).

2) The Rab Shakeh reviews the Assyrian resumé of land-destruction, suggesting that Yhwh is unable to deliver Jerusalem (36:18-20). This argument logically contradicts the Rab Shakeh’s admission that it was Yhwh who called Assyria forth in the first place (36:10); thus it further exposes the absurdity of his geo-theological claims.

3) IJ delivers to Hezekiah a word of hope in response to the Rab Shakeh’s threats: the king of Assyria will “return to his land, and I will cause-him-to-fall (root נפל) by the sword in his land” (37:7). This statement unambiguously rejects the notion that Assyria enjoys the prerogative to redefine the boundaries of the peoples (cf. 10:12-13). Moreover, as demonstrated previously in this study, the root נפל is characteristic of the trajectory of destruction. IJ asserts, in other words, that Sennacherib will be restricted to his proper area of inhabitation (Assyria) and there he will suffer a death of typological significance.

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9 A. Abernethy emphasizes that this threat challenges Yhwh’s kingship, as explored in the previous chapter of this study. Andrew Abernethy, “Eating, Assyrian Imperialism, and God’s Kingdom in Isaiah,” in Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire, eds. Andrew T. Abernethy et al. (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 44-45; Andrew Abernethy, Eating in Isaiah: Approaching the Role of Food and Drink in Isaiah’s Structure and Message, BibInt 131 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 97-104.

4) When the Rab Shakeh returns to Jerusalem to reiterate Sennacherib’s threat (37:8), he claims that the kings of Assyria have been in the business of “exterminating” (root הָרָם) other countries (37:11). As chapter four of this study argues, Yhwh’s acts of herem (34:2, 5) against Edom constitute an act of land-allocation on behalf of wild animals. By asserting Assyria’s right to enact herem, the Rab Shakeh implies that Assyria has blasphemously overstepped its divine commission (cf. 36:10).

5) When Hezekiah prays to Yhwh in 37:16-20, he states that the Assyrians “truthfully (root אֶמֶן)…have made-barren (root הָרֵב) all lands and their land” (37:18). Such language is not accidental. Hezekiah reframes the Assyrians’ arrogant acts of “extermination” (root הָרָם) by subtly altering the Rab Shakeh’s word choice to “make-barren.” Despite their presumptions, Hezekiah argues, the Assyrians have not enacted divinely-sanctioned h-r-m at all; in truth, they have merely performed h-r-b. Moreover, Hezekiah observes that such activities have affected “all lands and their land.” Assyria’s comprehensive destruction portends its own doom (cf. 33:1).

6) IJ points out to Hezekiah that the Assyrians have ascended mountains, not only as a demonstration of their exceptional pride, but also for the purpose of cutting down trees (37:24). The Assyrians are excessive and extractive land managers.

7) IJ suggests that Yhwh raised up Assyria for the purpose of enacting the “city-to-pile” paradigm (root גּלָל; 37:26; cf. 25:2) discussed in chapter two of this study, in association with the trajectory of destruction.
8) IJ declares that Assyria will “return by the road by which you came” (37:29; cf. 37:7, 34). This repeated notion—that Assyria will travel a reverse road, and so exit the land—contrasts ominously with the pilgrimage described in 35:8-10. Assyria performs in Isa 36–37 a kind of “anti-pilgrimage” to its ultimate demise.

9) Finally, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers die at the gates of Jerusalem, a scene of unimaginable, apocalypse-like carnage. Sennacherib escapes, only to be assassinated by his own sons—an inglorious end suggestive of a failed dynasty.

In all these ways, Assyria executes, models, and finally experiences ultimate destruction in the land (cf. 14:25).

Over against the Assyrian pattern, Hezekiah emerges as an archetypal disciple of IJ (and thus the premier member of the prophetic “community-apart”), an exemplar of faithfulness for all those who would seek to inhabit Jerusalem in perpetuity. In other words, he models those behaviors strongly associated with the trajectory of hope for which IJ serves as the prototypical ancestor. Hezekiah is humble, tearing his garments and covering himself with sackcloth (37:1; cf. 33:14-15). He seeks out Yhwh’s word through IJ, who directs Hezekiah to remain unafraid (37:6) in the same way that IJ was distinguished from “this people” in 8:11-12. Hezekiah also twice “prays” (root פּלָל) in a fashion characteristic of a prophet (37:15; 38:2), suggesting his close allegiance to IJ. Moreover, when he prays, Hezekiah affirms the theological claims put forth in prior chapters of the book: Yhwh is a global King (enthroned among cherubim) and thus Lord over “all the kingdoms of the earth” by virtue of the fact that Yhwh is also the Creator,
the one who “made the heavens and the earth” (37:16). While it is true that the kings of Assyria have “made-barren” other lands and destroyed their gods, the Rab Shakeh misunderstands the evidence that Hezekiah interprets correctly: those other gods were merely the “deed of human hands,” nothing but “wood and stone” (37:19), whereas Yhwh alone is the “living God” (37:4, 17). As a disciple of IJ, Hezekiah demonstrates that he has accepted this truth and is thus empowered to resist the Assyrian threat even while lacking the normal military resources to do so (36:8-9). When Hezekiah later becomes ill, he appeals to Yhwh on the fact that he has “walked before you in trustworthiness (root אֵֽמָּן) and with a heart of peace (root שְׁלָם)” (38:3; cf. 39:8).

Hezekiah’s subsequent description of his illness emphasizes his humility (38:15), Yhwh’s forgiveness of his sin (38:17; cf. 33:24), and most especially the notion that Yhwh alone is the arbiter of life (root יִהְיֶה; 38:9, 11, 12, 16, 19, 20, 21), desiring to maintain Hezekiah’s progeny for the purpose of worship in the “House of Yhwh” (38:19-20).

Insofar as Hezekiah’s writing (38:9) culminates in the hope for ongoing, intergenerational, temple-based worship in contrast to Sennacherib’s temple-based patricide (37:38), he represents a worthy model of durable land-inhabitation over against the Assyrian paradigm of land-ruination. This point is made clear especially through the “sign” that IJ offers in response to Hezekiah’s prayer. The text reads:

37:30 And this is for you a sign:
  Eat this year whatever-germinates,
  and in the second year whatever-follows-that;
  but in the third year, sow and harvest,
  and plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
31 And the escapee of the house of Judah who remains will again take-root below and make fruit above.
32 For from Jerusalem the remnant will go-out and the escapee from Mount Zion.
The zeal of Yhwh of Armies will do this.

Although this timeframe for agro-ecological renewal does not make “simple” narrative sense in light of the siege, it provides a direct lexical and conceptual counterpoint to the threat of starvation in Zion (36:12) as well as to the Assyrian proposal that deportation will result in the provision of food (37:16-17). IJ declares instead that a “remnant” (root שׁאר) will survive in Jerusalem to take root (root שׁרשׁ) below and bear fruit (root פּרה) above. These words signal an important link with the “Zion = stable dwelling” motif described in previous chapters of this study (cf. esp. 4:2-3), and with the notion that a son of David catalyzes such an outcome (cf. 11:1, 10-11). In other words, the Assyrian assault is nothing but smoke and mirrors. With a disciple like Hezekiah on David’s throne, Zion survives despite her enemy’s overwhelming military strength.

Virtually all commentators observe that Isa 36–38 presents an idealized portrait of Hezekiah. His character in Isa 39, however, appears in a more ambiguous light. The passage is clear regarding a few, basic, literary facts: The king of Babylon sends envoys to Hezekiah, who gives them a tour of his treasury (39:1-2); this act serves as a point of reference for IJ’s predictive declaration that the treasury will be looted and that some of Hezekiah’s own sons will become eunuchs in Babylon (39:6-7). Hezekiah responds with a two-part statement that Yhwh’s word is “good” and that “there will be peace (root שלם) and trustworthiness (root אמן) in my days” (39:8; cf. 38:3). On the one hand, Hezekiah may be seen as innocent of any wrongdoing, receiving foreign envoys as any competent king should and then with humility acknowledging the goodness of Yhwh’s word.
regardless of the disaster to which it points. On the other hand, the language used in 39:1-8 also suggests a somewhat darker reading. Hezekiah seems to go out of his way to show off his “silver and gold” (39:2), vocabulary elsewhere associated with idolatry (cf. 2:7-8, 20; 30:22; 31:7). It is thus difficult to avoid the suspicion that Hezekiah has grown somewhat proud of his material resources. Most importantly, his final statement that “there will be peace and trustworthiness in my days” can be interpreted as an interior calculation, suggesting that he finds Yhwh’s word to be “good” out of political self-interest rather than piety. How might such ambiguity be explained? R. Clements argues that Isa 39 is “designed to tone down the high doctrine of providence which emerged with the Josianic Redaction of Isaiah’s prophecies…which related centrally to Jerusalem and the Davidic kingship, in the light of the experience of 598.” With some variation pertaining to the possibility of a “Josianic Redaction,” most scholars concur that Hezekiah’s conflicting characterization in Isa 39 results from an authorial effort to explain history—that is, it provides a reason why Yhwh’s protection did not extend to later attacks on Jerusalem. On this reading, the actual destruction of the city functions as an unstated pivot point in the book as a whole, a kind of historical elephant awkwardly filling up the “abyss” between chapters 39 and 40.

It is the position of this study that such interpretations obscure the rhetorical thrust of Isa 39 in conjunction with the other narratives to which it is bound. Rather than serving as a mere explanation for future Babylonian exile, Isa 39 has been crafted to overcome exile. In particular, the ambiguity of Hezekiah’s response in 39:8 is of critical importance to Isa 36–39 and to the remainder of the book. The story does appear to take Hezekiah down a peg—his “limited” recovery\(^{15}\) in conjunction with his interest in “silver and gold” suggests that Hezekiah does not fulfill the requirements for a lasting peace. That said, Hezekiah’s statement in 39:8 verbalizes a transtemporal insight on his own “days” that goes beyond what the literary character can be expected to perceive.\(^{16}\) However, that insight remains available to IH who enjoys a second-order perspective on the same events: in the days of Hezekiah, “peace and trustworthiness” reign indeed. P. Ackroyd makes the salient observation that unlike the narratives in Kings and Chronicles, Isaiah does not account for Hezekiah’s death.\(^ {17}\) Thus, even while the Davidic king’s character falters, the memory of salvation in his time functions as a typological foundation for salvation in any era,\(^ {18}\) projected onto the present and future as an “eschatological hope.”\(^ {19}\) The “days of Hezekiah” are not a scientifically calculable number of revolutions around the sun (cf. 38:8); rather, the “days of Hezekiah” function


\(^{16}\) A similar example of this sort of narrative device appears in John 11:49-50, where Caiaphas unwittingly prophesies regarding the importance of Jesus’ impending death.


\(^{19}\) Childs, *Isaiah*, 266.
as a state of enduring land-inhabitation accessible to all those disciples who submit themselves to IJ’s prophetic word. They offer a viable memory upon which communities familiar with deportation might base the restoration of their ruined home. Isa 36–39 does not finally explain Babylonian exile, concretizing a “deep break” and “historical discontinuity” between 39:8 and 40:1; instead, these critical chapters overwrite that discontinuity through the construction of a narrative antecedent out of which comfort springs.

5.2 Isaiah 40–55: Restoration, Repopulation, and the “Out-Going” Community-apart

Among modern scholars, B. Childs stands out for having realized that the context in which Isa 40–55 is read dramatically influences one’s perception of the total book’s rhetorical function. The vast majority of such scholars have assumed that that context is the late sixth century BCE, due to the text’s probable era of origin, over against a late eighth-century context for most of the preceding material. Childs correctly adduced, however, that Isa 40–55 has been dehistoricized and then recontextualized within a new, literary framework. He observes that despite the sixth-century provenance of Isa 40–55, the written text has been rendered as “a prophetic word of promise offered to Israel by the

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\[21\] Childs, \textit{Isaiah}, 295.
eighth-century prophet.” Blenkinsopp has criticized Childs for making an “arbitrary assumption” regarding the removal of historical particulars from Isa 40–55; he also claims that Childs must “minimize or disregard the historical references, either direct or indirect, that these chapters do in fact contain.” However, Blenkinsopp’s reasoning can be questioned on both fronts. First, the import of Childs’ work is not finally tied to his speculation on what data has been removed, but rather to the observation that explicit historical cues steering readers toward a sixth-century context are noticeably lacking. In other words, Blenkinsopp’s main objection misses the point: Isa 40:1 simply does not direct the reader to conceptualize a great leap forward by 150 years. Second, Childs is not required to “minimize” the text’s historical references as Blenkinsopp contends. On the contrary, the overt applicability of Isa 40–55 to exilic and postexilic contexts is precisely the point upon which the book capitalizes: IJ speaks a predictive word in the past whose relevance endures into the present and onward into the future. In fact, the main drawback to Childs’ observation—and a chronic point of confusion for Isaiah studies at large—is not his theory of dehistorization, but his misleading characterization of Isa 40–55 as the word of an “eighth-century prophet.” A modern-historical designation

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24 Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40–55, 49.

such as this is inappropriate to ancient, literary art; it is better to say that Isa 40–55 self-presents as the word of the prophet-as-literary-character (IJ), who is not restricted by modern notions of temporality. Against the background of Assyrian ruin (36:10), in light of Judah’s agro-ecological renewal (37:30), observing Yhwh’s sovereignty over time (38:8), and in view of the archetypal “days of Hezekiah” through which peace and trustworthiness endure (39:8), IJ utters the following words: “‘Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God” (40:1). Hope for the present and future emerges from a paradigmatic moment of salvation in Judah’s remembered past.

But what exactly is the content of this hope? And how might IH be convinced that hope obtains? It was observed above that the agrarian “sign” (אוֹת) offered to Hezekiah in 37:30-32 provides a direct counterpoint to the Rab Shakeh’s faulty geono-theological assumptions regarding Jerusalem and Assyria (cf. 36:12, 16-17). Zion is indeed a place of agro-ecological renewal and durable land-inhabitation for future generations. Moving forward from this point of orientation, the following discussion argues that 37:30-32 adumbrates three related aspects of Isaiah’s agrarian hope as expressed in Isa 40–55: 1) these chapters announce Yhwh’s determination to cause the land’s agro-ecological restoration (cf. 37:30); 2) the sign’s regard for land health together with human thriving (37:31) frames Yhwh’s purpose to repopulate Judah; and 3) Yhwh distinguishes the remnant nation as an extension of the community-apart (cf. 8:11-22) by virtue of its “going-out” (root יָצָא; 37:32) from the city, on paradigm with the farmer-disciple who responds obediently to Yhwh’s “out-going” (root יָצָא) Torah (28:29; cf. 2:3).

First, agro-ecological restoration as portrayed in 37:30 (i.e. sowing and eating) also constitutes a central activity of Yhwh’s in Isa 40–55, especially through his
commitment to restore barren lands, felled trees, destroyed crops, and dried-up watercourses. For example, Isa 40 begins with IJ’s recommissioning to prepare Yhwh’s “road” (דֶּרֶךְ) in the “desert/wilderness” (מדבר) and to “make-level in the Aravah (ערבָּה) a highway (root סָלָל) for our God” (40:3). As numerous readers point out, this language recalls the use of “desert” (מדבר) and “Aravah” (ערבָּה) in 35:1 and 35:6, combined with a “highway (root סָלָל) and a road (דֶּרֶךְ)” in 35:8, by which the ransomed walk to Zion in 35:9-10. These correspondences suggest that immediately after Jerusalem’s paradigmatic salvation event (Isa 36–39), IJ envisions the disclosure of Yhwh’s glory (40:5) as a direct extension of Yhwh’s allocation and renewal of the land as described in Isa 34–35. Throughout the rest of Isa 40–55, similar examples of agro-ecological renewal support this observation. In 41:17-19, Yhwh promises to answer Jacob by opening rivers on the bleak mountaintops, by turning the desert into ponds and the “parched” (צִיָּה; cf. 25:5; 32:2; 35:1) earth into water, and by planting “cedars” and “cypresses” (cf. 37:24) in the “desert” and “Aravah.” In 43:19, a similar image of rivers in the desert is again connected to the idea of a “road” as in 40:3-4. 44:3-5 sees Yhwh spilling water onto the thirsty ground so as to cultivate Jacob’s “seed” (זרע), which then “sprouts-up” (root צָמַח) to become a people identifiable as Yhwh’s own. In 44:26-28, Yhwh commissions Cyrus to rebuild the ruined “cities of Judah” (cf. 36:1) and to reinhabit Jerusalem (cf. 54:3); Cyrus gains the right and power to perform this work from Yhwh the Creator, who “opens”

26 Despite many scholars’ tendency to read this passage exclusively in light of Babylonian destruction (and thus as the call of a new prophet), Seitz correctly observes that Isa 40 has been drawn together with 36–39 so that it now responds to the destruction levied on Judah by Sennacherib in 36:1 (cf. 6:11-12). Jerusalem’s “tour-of-duty” (root כְּדַבָּר) now complete (40:2; cf. 29:7-8), the prophet (IJ) is recommissioned for a new phase of his ministry. Christopher R. Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40–66: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in NIB 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 327. See also Childs, Isaiah, 295-96; Christopher R. Seitz, “The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah,” JBL 109.2 (1990): 229-47.
(root פּוחַת) the earth (cf. 28:24; 35:5) so that it fruits salvation and “sprouts” righteousness (45:8). Yhwh makes Zion like Eden in 51:3, a passage that culminates in reentry to the land through what appears to be a direct citation of 35:10 (51:10-11). Finally, Isa 40–55 concludes with images of precipitation saturating the earth, “causing-it-to-sprout” and giving “seed for the sower (root זָרֶע, 2x) and bread for the eater” (55:10). As Yhwh’s people proceed outward in joy and peace, mountains and hills burst into “exclamation” (root רָנַשׁ; 55:12; cf. 35:1-2, 10). Taken in sum, these data function as a “perpetual sign” (アウלָם עֵוָט; 55:13; cf. 37:30) of Yhwh’s re-creative and historical salvation. The land’s agro-ecological redemption is unambiguously assured.

Second, the sign’s regard for land health (37:30) together with human repopulation (37:31) is likewise reflected in the content of Isa 40–55. Among those examples cited above, 44:3-5 is particularly notable in that it seamlessly blends the language of agro-ecological restoration with the reconstitution of a human worship community. Not only does Yhwh “spill” (root יַוצֵק) water on the “dry-ground,” he also promises to “spill-out (root יָצֵק) my spirit on your seed, and my blessing on your outgrowth” (44:3; cf. 32:15). As a result, human beings “sprout-up (root צָמַח) in between the grass, like willows by flowing water” (44:4). In much the same way that these verses do not distinguish sharply between the fate of people and the fate of land, 37:31 also anticipates that the remnant of Judah will “take-root below and make-fruit above” (cf. 4:2; 11:1), a direct result of the sign that crops will again be planted in Judah (37:30).

Additional evidence from Isa 40–55 suggests that throughout these sixteen chapters, recovery consistently fits the agrarian model of “land and people together” as expressed in 37:30-31. For example, Yhwh’s watering of the parched earth and his
replanting of trees in the Aravah (41:17-19) is done “in order that they would see and know” (41:20). Agro-ecological rejuvenation prompts human acknowledgement of Yhwh, while the formation of a viable community of worshipers (cf. 38:19-20) depends on the restoration of a viable landscape. Similarly, 43:19 envisions Yhwh as putting a road in the desert and rivers in the wilderness. This work is done expressly to “water/irrigate” (root שׁקה) a people who “will enumerate my praise” (43:21). As noted above, Cyrus’ commission to rebuild Jerusalem (44:26-28) is linked to the Creator’s gift of precipitation and fruit (45:6-8). Along these same lines, 45:18-19 states that such regenerative work will be done because Yhwh has made the world for inhabitation—not chaos—and specifically for the “seed” (זֶרַע) of Jacob (cf. 45:25). In 49:8-13, Yhwh reforms Israel to be a “covenant people” (49:8; cf. 24:5; 33:8) in order to “raise-up the land” and “desolate inheritances” (49:8). This image of land-reclamation is joined to the language of a “road” and “highway” in 49:9-11 (cf. 40:3-4; 35:8-10), and also to the language of “grazing-space,” “hunger and thirst,” a desert “mirage” (cf. 35:7), and “springs of water” (49:9-10). Shortly thereafter IJ declares that the land’s “barren-places” (root הָרָב; 49:19; cf. 4:6; 5:17; 25:4-5; 37:18; 44:26) and “desolations” (root שׁמם; 49:19; cf. 1:7; 5:9; 6:11; 33:8) will give way to a population too robust to be contained (49:19-21). 51:3 likewise sees Yhwh comforting Zion’s “barren-places” (root הָרָב; cf. 52:9), specifically by planting a garden in the midst of the Aravah for the purpose of bringing forth a Torah-obedient community (51:4, 7-8). Finally, remarriage and fertility are emphasized throughout Isa 54 (esp. 54:1-3). In advance of the mountains’ and hills’ “bursting” (root פּצח) into “exclamation” (root רָנָה) in 55:12, the one who has not given birth is likewise commanded to “burst into exclamation” (54:1; cf. 52:9) at the prospect
of filling a tent with children to re-inhabit Judah’s desolate cities (54:2-3; cf. 4:5-6). Thus
the land is restored through its human repopulation (cf. 37:31), the “perpetual sign” (םמע
שון) of which is a new flowering of human-friendly vegetation (55:13; cf. 37:30). There
is no vision of the land’s renewal in Isaiah 40–55 apart from human inhabitation of it.

Third, 37:32 adds to the hope for agro-ecological restoration (37:30) and
repopulation (37:31) the notion of a remnant “going-out” (root יצא) from Zion: “For from
Jerusalem the remnant will go-out.” The narratives in Isa 36–39 do not offer details on
what this image might mean beyond the exodus that presumably would have occurred in
the aftermath of a successfully repelled siege. Insofar as the sign offered in 37:30 exceeds
a realistic timeframe for such events, however, it implies that the remnant’s “going-out”
from Zion cannot be explained in purely historical terms. In fact, evidence appearing
throughout Isa 40–55 suggests that the key root יצא assists in distinguishing a
“community-apart” of obedient disciples who walk in step with the farmer-disciple of
28:23-29, whose parabolic example “goes-out” (root יצא) from Yhwh along with Torah
(28:29; cf. 2:3).27

Before turning to specific uses of יצא in Isa 40–55, it is helpful to observe first a
few other ways by which these chapters differentiate groups, so as to put into context the
rhetorical contribution made by the Hebrew root in question. For example, the frequent
characterization of human beings as plants28 appearing in these chapters performs an
additional function beyond simply registering the land’s restoration and repopulation;

27 See chapter two of this study: “Isaiah 28: A Matter of Food and Drink,” especially section 2.3.3.
28 See Patricia K. Tull, “Persistent Vegetative States: People as Plants and Plants as People in
Isaiah,” in The Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah, eds. A. Joseph Everson and Hyun Chul Paul
Kim, AIL 4 (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 17-34.
namely, the motif assists IJ’s effort to draw a sharp distinction between the “substantial” (cf. 31:1-3), transitory nature of creaturely bodies and their Creator, the ever-living God (cf. 37:4, 17). When IJ is recommissioned by a “voice” in 40:1-8, he appears to be at a loss for words in light of the destruction he has witnessed (cf. 36:1): “What can I proclaim? All flesh is grass, and all its loyalty is like a flower of the field. Grass dries-up, flowers fade, for Yhwh’s spirit breathes on them” (40:6b-7a; cf. 28:1-4). The “voice” does not dispute IJ’s observation, but implies instead that hope obtains precisely through the acceptance of humanity’s corporeal nature in contrast to Yhwh’s everlasting word: “Indeed the people are grass; grass dries-up, flowers fade, but the word of our God arises in perpetuity” (40:7b-8). Thus the notion that “people = plants” highlights IJ’s humble assessment of what is ephemeral “substance” and Who is not.

Crucially, IJ’s recognition of the ontological difference between Yhwh and his creatures distinguishes IJ and his disciples from those who engage in idol-craft. In 40:19-20, for example, the idol-maker’s attempt to set up a durable god by using rot-resistant wood appears farcical compared to Yhwh’s heavenly perspective on such activities (40:21-22). The nations are a “drip from a bucket” and “powder on the scales” (40:15); rulers and judges are planted, sown, and take root in the earth (40:23-24), but a “tornado lifts them away like straw” (40:24; cf. 5:24; 29:6). Graven images are “wind and chaos” (41:29), while the prefects of the earth are “like clay” that is “trampled” (41:25; cf. 5:5; 29:16). In 44:9-20, IJ delivers his most sustained critique of idolatry, which

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begins with the observation that idol-makers are “only human” (44:11). Indeed, such persons become hungry and tired (44:12; cf. 40:29-31); in their delusion, they ascribe divinity to objects that were once dependent upon precipitation (44:14; cf. 55:10). By contrast, IJ envisions for his disciples an idol-free existence where food is consumed “without silver and without cost” (55:1). Thus, just as in 29:15-24 (the third woe), proper recognition of humanity’s creaturely status remains an indispensible aspect of IJ’s character and thus also the character of the prophetic community-apart, over against those destined for annihilation.

Throughout Isa 40–55, IJ (in Yhwh’s first-person voice) calls Israel to follow his lead by bearing witness to Yhwh’s status as a global Creator and Israel’s historical Redeemer (cf. esp. 43:10, 12; 44:8). Assent to this theological claim is cultivated


31 In Isa 40, it is clear that an individual prophet (IJ) is commissioned toward this purpose (“What shall I proclaim?”, 40:6). At the same time, starting in 40:9, “herald Zion”—a singular feminine form—is likewise commanded to raise her voice and not to be afraid, saying to the cities of Judah (cf. 36:1), “Here is your God!” To simplify an extremely complex matter, it may be said that Isa 40–55 works with images of both an individual prophet and a collective body of disciples (the “remnant” inhabitants of Zion; cf. 37:31-32), which bears the name of Israel. While this problem has led to much debate and fostered the textual fragmentation of so-called “Deutero-Isaiah,” prior chapters in this study make clear that the difference between the singular voice of IJ and a plural body of his disciples is anticipated through the collective “we/our” language of 33:22 and other related passages. Thus at a rhetorical level, shifts between singular and plural points of view in Isa 40–55 introduce no special problems. Indeed, attempts to concretize the historical identity of the Isaianic “servant(s)” miss the forest for the trees, since in its present literary form, the servant’s identity cannot be equated with a single person or collective body. See Willem A. M. Beuken, “Servant and Herald of Good Tidings: Isaiah 61 as an Interpretation of Isaiah 40–55,” in The Book of Isaiah—Le Livre d’Isaïe: Les Oracles et Leurs Relecteurs: Unité et Complexité de l’Ouvrage, ed. Jacques Vermeylen, BETL 81 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 411-42; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Servant and the Servants in Isaiah and the Formation of the Book,” in Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition, eds. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, VTSup 70/FIOTL I 1 (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1997), 155-75; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The ‘Servants of the Lord’ in Third Isaiah: Profile of a Pietistic Group in the Persian Epoch,” in “The Place is Too Small for Us”: The Israelite Prophets in Scholarship, ed. Robert P. Gordon, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 392-412; R. N. Whybray, The Second Isaiah, OTG (Sheffield: JSOT, 1983),
through rhetorical questions (e.g. 40:26, 28; 41:4; 45:21)\textsuperscript{32} and the language of hoping and not-fearing, which lexically bonds the remnant nation to IJ’s disciples, on paradigm with 8:12 and 8:17 (cf. 40:31; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8; 49:23; 51:7).\textsuperscript{33} A fine example of such strategic discourse appears in 51:12: “I, I myself am he who shows-you-compassion; who are you that you should fear men who-die, or the son of a human who is made grass?” This verse poses a second-person question for which only one answer exists, and so demands that remnant Israel acknowledge the absurdity of offering reverence to anyone but Yhwh. It also uses the concept of appropriate fearing (root רָאָה) to ally Israel with the prophetic trajectory of hope (cf. 8:12). Finally, the criterion by which it makes that association relates directly to 40:7b-8, where humans are portrayed as “grass” (חָצִיר) in contrast to the word of “our God.” Proper recognition of humanity’s creatureliness before Yhwh differentiates the community-apart from the surrounding nations doomed to destruction.\textsuperscript{34}

The discussion may now turn directly to the root יצא and its extended function in Isa 40–55. In addition to those rhetorical tactics mentioned above (i.e. IJ’s humility in contrast to idol-makers, rhetorical questions, and an emphasis on appropriate fearing), Isa 40–55 cultivates Israel’s distinction by means of an overt directive: “Go-out (root יצא)


from Babylon! Retreat from the Chaldeans!” (48:20). Approached from a purely historical perspective, these imperatives almost certainly derive from the era of postexilic return under Cyrus in the latter half of the sixth century BCE, and thus have little do with Jerusalem’s survivors “going-out” (root יצא) from the besieged city in 701 (37:32). In literary context, however, the historical reality of leaving Babylon—commanded through the root יצא—now contributes to an agrarian template for obedience by which IJ’s true disciples can be identified. Evidence supporting this claim includes but is not limited to the following points:

1) The command to leave Babylon appears as part of a unit (48:16b-22) in which Yhwh identifies himself as the one “who-teaches (root לומד) you to profit (root יאל), who-causes-you-to-tread (root הורד) in the road (דריך) you should walk (root הלך) (48:17). Such a rich collection of roots places the subsequent imperative to “go-out” within a moral and theological frame (cf. 2:1-5; 8:11-12; 30:1-7, 11, 20-22; 35:8-10), including but not coterminous with the historical event to which it probably once referred.

2) The ideal of adhering to Yhwh’s road (48:20; cf. 30:21; 35:8-10) is closely tied to Torah obedience in 42:24, recalling discourse in 28:12 and 30:9-15. Such a correspondence encourages IH to relate the notion of “departure from Babylon” in 48:20 to a larger matrix of ideas that extends beyond the historical event.

3) The unit concludes with the key observation that “there is no peace (root שלם) for the wicked (רעים)" (48:22; cf. 39:8; 55:7). Likely a late redactional
insertion, these words strongly imply that in the course of the text’s composition, figural “departure from Babylon” had already begun to function as a model for right behavior.

4) The directive to “go-out” from Babylon corresponds lexically to the imperative to “cause-it-to-go-out” (root יָצָא), referring to the knowledge that “Yhwh has redeemed his servant Jacob” (48:20). Thus, even before the verse in question has concluded, Israel’s “going-out” informs its vocational purpose vis-à-vis the wider world, an idea subsequently taken up in 49:1-6. Here, IJ/Israel is designated as a “light to the nations” so that Yhwh’s salvation might extend “to the ends of the earth” (49:6; cf. 42:6; 48:20). Shortly afterwards, Israel’s calling to become a “covenant people” who “raises up the land” likewise involves an act of commanding prisoners to “go-out” (root יָצָא; 49:8-9; cf. 42:6-7).

5) Yhwh expressly states in 51:4 that, “from me the Torah goes-out (root יָצָא),” and moreover suggests that Torah obedience is a crucial indicator of the community-apart (51:7; cf. 8:12, 20) as previous chapters of this study argue. 51:4 therefore comprises the third instance in which instruction “goes-out” from Yhwh’s presence: 2:3 (Torah), 28:29 (Farmer’s Parable), and 51:4 (Torah).

6) 52:7-12 restates the imperative to “go-out” (root יָצָא; 52:11) but curiously, does not clarify the geographical point of departure as in 48:20. “Going-out”

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in this context is framed as an act of procession (52:11-12; cf. 2:5; 35:8) by which Israel bears witness to Jerusalem’s redemption (52:9-10; cf. 48:20; 49:6). It does not in the first place refer to a return from exile, even if historians are apt to make this inference. In fact, that 52:11 (מִשָּׁם צְאוּ; “Go-out from there!”) seems to echo 48:20 (מִבָּבֶל צְאוּ; “Go-out from Babylon”), but remains nonspecific regarding historical particulars, argues against the notion that in the book’s final form the historical event remains primary to the text’s rhetorical function. Procession is a principle informed by historical memory that can be reenacted in any era.

7) Finally, “walking” (root הָלַךְ) as a form of “witness” is suggested in the language of Isa 55 (esp. 55:1, 4; cf. 43:8-13), a chapter that encourages the “wicked” (שָׁוָא) person to forsake his or her “road” (דֶּרֶךְ) in favor of the forgiveness of “our God” (55:7; cf. 33:22; 40:3; 48:17-22). Isa 55 also suggests that agro-ecological restoration (55:10) provides an analogy for Yhwh’s “word that goes-out (root יצא) from my mouth” (55:11; cf. 40:8). In view of these two points, the chapter’s second-person declaration that “you will go-out” (root יצא; 55:12) indicates that adherence to Yhwh’s word may be conceptualized as an act of outward movement in step with the mountains and hills that burst with vegetative life (55:12; cf. 35:1-2, 10; 49:13; 52:9). Isaianic “going-out” is a form of agrarian propriety, just as 28:23-29 and 37:30-32 imply.

With these observations in view, it is reasonable to conclude that the memory of historical separation from Babylon, while not discarded, nonetheless contributes to a
larger goal of distinguishing between groups associated with trajectories of destruction and hope. IH perceives that the creaturely substance of those who “hope in Yhwh” (40:31; cf. 8:17) does not fail (40:31) in contrast to that of the idol-maker (44:12). Rather, such individuals “go-out from Babylon” (48:20) in step with those who “go-out…from Mount Zion” in 37:32, and on paradigm with the farmer-disciple’s example in Isa 28: “This too from Yhwh of Armies goes-out (root ייצא)” (28:29; cf. 2:3). Insofar as such Torah-obedient “going-out” remains “a matter of food and drink” (cf. 28:1-29), “going-out” (in any era) is bound up with proper subsistence practices, which are ultimately dependent on the recognition of one’s creaturely status before the Creator (cf. 29:15-24). In Isa 40–55, therefore, figural “going-out” comes to characterize the prophetic community-apart to which Yhwh allocates land in perpetuity (cf. 35:1-10).

In sum, 37:30-32 adumbrates three interrelated features of the agrarian rhetoric appearing in Isa 40–55: Yhwh’s determination to cause agro-ecological restoration (cf. 37:30), which is integrally connected to the land’s remnant community (cf. 37:31), and in turn distinguishes those who “go-out” as members of that community (cf. 37:32). Those who share the patterned hope of IJ and his disciples (8:17; 40:31) are those who obediently “plant and eat” (37:30; cf. 28:24-25; 55:1) and who also “go-out” (37:32; cf. 2:3; 28:29; 55:12) in response to IJ’s word.

5.3 Isaiah 56–66: Feeding on Hope

The reading of Isa 36–55 offered above suggests that the book of Isaiah employs agrarian discourse throughout these chapters to proclaim widespread salvation while simultaneously differentiating the obedient as members of the prophetic community-
apart. Working from this foundation, Isa 56–66 pursues two related questions: 1) By what specific means does Yhwh identify and preserve his “out-going,” Torah-obedient disciples in perpetuity? and 2) What is the ultimate horizon of Yhwh’s restoration and repopulation of the land? An agrarian perspective on these eleven chapters perceives a crucial focus on food consumption that is consistent with the theological-anthropology of preceding texts such as the Farmer’s Parable (28:1-29). The following discussion argues that “right eating” (i.e. the creaturely body’s proper action in place) functions as a conceptual refrain by which Isa 56–66 seeks to answer the two questions introduced above: eating serves as both the litmus test for participation in the community of hope and also as hope’s ultimate horizon.

The significant bearing that food consumption has on the rhetoric of Isa 56–66 is best understood by observing first the way in which imperatives to “eat” frame Isa 36–55.

It was argued above that remnant Israel’s “going-out” from Jerusalem (37:32)

37 In the past, the relationship between these two questions has been approached mainly from a historical-critical perspective, focusing on the sociopolitical situation in Persian Yehud that presumably lies behind the text’s composition (e.g. strife between competing eschatological groups). Such scholarship has rightfully emphasized the seam between Isa 55 and 56, even if it has tended to dissociate at a historical level what the book presents as sequentially contiguous literature. See Blenkinsopp, “The Servant and the Servants,” 155-75; Blenkinsopp, “The ‘Servants of the Lord’ in Third Isaiah,” 392-412; Paul D. Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Brooks Schramm, The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration, JSOTSup 193 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); Paul A. Smith, Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth, and Authorship of Isaiah 56-66, VTSup 62 (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1995). Of particular importance to the literary and rhetorical coherence of Isa 40–66 is the well-known discursive shift introduced in Isa 54:17, where the singular “servant” is first overtaken by the plural “servants.” In light of this observation, M. Sweeney theorizes that Isa 55 stands at a crucial juncture between Isa 40–54 and 56–66, where the latter unit focuses especially on the servant-community’s actualization of YHWH’s word. Similarly, W. Beuken argues that Isa 56–66 is concerned with the servant of Isa 40–55 “precisely in respect of the question: who are his offspring, in whom does he go on living?” For Beuken, the servant’s legacy is ultimately defined through a series of contrasts in 65:13-15 that distinguish Yhwh’s servants from those who are not. See Marvin A. Sweeney, Reading Prophetic Books: Form, Intertextuality, and Reception in Prophetic and Post-Biblical Literature, FAT 89 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 99-100; Willem A. M. Beuken, “The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah: ‘The Servants of YHWH’,” JSOT 47 (1990): 73.
adumbrates Yhwh’s “out-going” word (55:11), which fructifies the earth so that it “gives bread for the eater (root אכל)” (55:10). The agro-ecological sign in 37:30 likewise commands IJ’s audience to “plant vineyards and eat their fruit” (37:30). Correspondingly in Isa 55:1, IJ directs his disciples to “walk, buy, and eat…without silver and without cost” (55:1; cf. 2:3-5, 7-8). Actualization of the “sign” (37:30; 55:13) therefore appears to require a response (i.e. eating) that by definition affirms human creatureliness while also rejecting the use of idol-makers’ substances (i.e. silver), and thus the ontological confusion their craft engenders. In other words, the imperative diction in 37:30 and 55:1 strongly implies that if IJ’s audience were to “refuse and rebel” (1:20) by not eating, or by eating wrongly, the land’s repopulation as described in 37:31 would not occur. It is this conditional framing of Isa 36–55 that tends to go missing when Isa 36–39 and Isa 40–55 are approached without reference to each other or to their locations within the larger book. Such conditionality provides the rhetorical basis for subsequent texts that also employ the language of food and drink.

For example, examination of Isa 56 in its entirety (vv. 1-12) and in its sequential context reveals that eating functions here as a standard by which the trajectories of destruction and hope (and the groups associated with those trajectories) may be identified. This point is frequently overlooked in the secondary literature, not only because Isa 56–66 is often read in isolation from Isa 36–55, but also because historical

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38 On the importance of eating in Isa 55, see Abernethy, Eating in Isaiah, 119-43. The present study does not intend to comment on the historical-cultural form(s) of speech from which 55:1-3 may have been derived. In contrast to Abernethy, see Richard J. Clifford, “Isaiah 55: Invitation to a Feast,” in The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday, eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 27-35.

interests regarding the social situation in Persian Yehud prompt critics to separate vv. 1-8 from vv. 9-12. Typically, the first eight verses of Isa 56 are understood to signal a sociopolitical shift, whereby the text’s historical audience is newly identified along non-nationalistic lines. As U. Berges writes, “It is no longer ethnicity, but ethics that will be the decisive factor for or against admission to the Mount of God and the temple.”40 The key words employed here are “no longer,” by which Berges alludes to the history of religion in Israel rather than the book’s present form. Berges is certainly correct that eunuchs are joined to Yhwh’s community (56:4) along with the “sons of a foreigner” (56:6) in this passage, but it is equally true that IH already expects foreigners to stream to Zion for instruction (2:1-5), for Egypt and even Assyria to be included with Israel in that milieu (19:16-25), and for Israel to invite such attention through its vocation as a “light to the nations” (42:6; 49:6). Therefore, it is not the novelty of a trans-ethnic community in Isa 56 that arouses IH’s interest. Rather, IH is confronted with a passage that draws a stark contrast between the “dried-up trees” of Yhwh’s house, who are given a name “better than sons and daughters” (56:3-4; cf. 54:1-10), and those “dogs” who “do not know satiety (root שׂבע)” (56:11; cf. 23:18; 44:16; 55:2). Indeed, this latter group is placed on paradigm with the priests’ and prophets’ excessive consumption in Isa 28:7-8, insofar as it “does not know comprehension” (56:11; cf. 28:13; 29:9-14), “takes wine,” and “becomes inebriated with beer” (56:12; cf. 1:22; 5:11, 22; 24:9). In short, historical critics are not wrong that Isa 56 describes non-native inhabitants of the land as being included in Yhwh’s community. Interpreted in its literary context, however, the whole

chapter is more accurately described as employing the language of food and drink so as to contribute to and adjudicate between alternative trajectories of destruction and hope.

Isa 58 similarly proposes that participation in IJ’s prophetic legacy involves food: specifically, sharing one’s bread with the hungry and “satiating” (root שָׂבַע) the poor (58:7, 10; cf. 56:11). IJ argues that if his disciples do these things, Yhwh “will sate (root שָׂבַע) your person in a dazzling place, and your bones/substance (root עַמָּנוּ) he will equip, and you will be like a saturated garden (רָוֶה כְּגַן), like water that goes-out (root יצא)” (58:11). Such language corresponds to a host of other preceding passages. For example, Yhwh plants a similar “garden” (כְּגַן) in the Aravah in 51:3 (cf. 1:30); that it is “saturated” with water suggests Yhwh’s “saturation” (root לחם) of the earth in 55:10, which models the “going-out” (root יצא) of Yhwh’s word in 55:11. This evidence implies that the salvation of corporeal humans as depicted in Isa 40–55 has been understood in Isa 58 as conditional on obedience with respect to food. In line with this reasoning, IJ also points out that if his disciples refrain from pursuing their own “road” (cf. 56:11-12), Yhwh will “cause-you-to-ride upon the peaks of the land” and will “cause-you-to-eat from the inheritance of Jacob your father” (58:13-14). Eating functions as both the measure and the outcome of Yhwh’s salvation.

If Isa 56–59 mainly addresses the question of how Yhwh’s obedient community is identified, doing so in part through a conditional perspective on food consumption, Isa 60–62 at first glance seems to refocus IH’s attention on Yhwh’s unconditional determination to restore and repopulate Judah. The evidence suggests, however, that each of these rhetorical vectors has been calibrated to the other. In particular, the last verse of Isa 59 (v. 21) provides an important point of orientation to the next three chapters: ““And
as for me, this is my covenant with them,' says Yhwh; ‘My spirit that is upon you, and my word that I have put in your mouth, will not budge from your mouth or the mouth of your seed, or your seed’s seed,’ says Yhwh, ‘from now unto perpetuity’” (59:21). As noted above, Isa 55 commands eating (root אכָל; 55:1) as an act of participation in Yhwh’s “perpetual covenant” (ברית עוֹלָם; 55:3), wherein Yhwh’s “word” (דָּבָר) proceeds from his “mouth” (יִפְרָר) like precipitation, causing “seed for the sower (לַזֹּרֵעַ זֶרַע) and bread for the eater” (55:10-11). 59:21 appears to pick up on this language when describing Yhwh’s “covenant” (ברית) in terms of a “word” (דָּבָר) that he places in your “mouth” (י), and which remains in the “mouth of your seed (זַרְעֲךָ)” and “your seed’s seed (זַרְעֲךָ זֶרַע)” …from now unto perpetuity ( עוֹלָם).” In other words, the text’s vision of durable land-inhabitation in 59:21 links directly to 55:1 (and thus also 37:30) through an especially thick array of lexical correspondences. This connection suggests that the framing imperatives in Isa 37:30 and 55:1 remain operative in the texts at hand.

Consequently, the hopeful promises of land-renewal and confident declarations of satiation found immediately after 59:21 in Isa 60–62 function to distinguish IJ’s disciples as obedient eaters (cf. 58:7-11) over against the drunken “dogs” of 56:11, not simply as eaters in a positive but unqualified sense. For example, 60:16 states that “you will suck the milk of nations”; such language reassures those who are commanded to purchase “wine and milk” without cost (55:1). In Isa 61, IJ declares that those who mourn will be called “oaks of righteousness, a planting of Yhwh” (61:3), thus affirming the directive not to consider oneself a “dried-up tree” (56:3). The outcomes expressed in Isa 60–62, in other words, remain lexically and conceptually responsible to IJ’s prior directives, especially those regarding food. IH learns in 61:6-7 that he or she will “eat (rootăn) the
wealth of nations” and possess a double portion in the land. Indeed “their seed (זֶרַע) will be known among the nations, and their outgrowth (root יצא) in the midst of the peoples” (61:9; cf. 44:3). In keeping with the analogy between IJ’s disciples and a “saturated garden” (58:11), 61:11 declares that, “For as the earth brings-out (root יצא) its sprouting (root יצא), and as a garden sprouts-forth its seeded-earth (root זר), thus the Lord Yhwh will sprout-forth righteousness and praise before all the nations” (cf. 44:3-5; 55:10-13; 58:8). IJ’s disciples finally find security in Zion in 62:6-12 (cf. 58:12); notably, such protection is portrayed as a matter of food and drink:

62:8: Yhwh has sworn by his right-hand, and by his vigorous arm: “I will no longer give your grain to be the food (root אכל) of your enemies, and sons of a foreigner will not drink your juice, for which you have become-tired.

9: But the ones-who-gather it will eat (root אכל) it, and they will praise Yhwh; and those-who-collect it will drink it in my holy courts.”

The eating depicted here is utterly reliable: the agricultural practices that yield food remain unmolested by foreigners (e.g. marauding armies; cf. 3:1; 37:30). Importantly, however, it is also seen as proper, a point conveyed through the text’s obvious regard for a fair distribution of produce (cf. 58:7-11). Thus the vision of restoration appearing in Isa 60–62 fits within the conditions set forth in previous texts. In Isaiah’s estimation, hope for ultimate salvation is composed of the same conceptual fabric as a body’s present obedience with respect to food.

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41 Beukcn argues insightfully that the theme of landed property in these verses constitutes a practical development of the general language of restoration found in Isa 40–55. Beukcn, “Servant and Herald,” 428.
The discussion thus far has shown that the principle of “right eating” in Isa 56–62 combines the topic of hope with the conditions for participation in that hope. Insofar as Isa 63–66 provides a conclusion to the macrounit under review and to the book as a whole, it does so unsurprisingly through continued attention to creaturely bodies and the food on which those bodies properly rely. The unit begins with a vision of Yhwh’s “vengeance” (root נקם; 63:4; cf. 34:8) upon Edom (63:1-6), recalling the act of herem in 34:5-15. One of the main differences between these two passages, however, is the fact that 63:1-6 imagines Yhwh as treading and “trampling” (root רמס) grapes (63:3; cf. 5:5), implying an analogy between juice and blood, whereas 34:6-7 relies on an image of animal sacrifice. Such “similarity-with-difference” contributes rhetorically to the last stages of the book in two respects.

First, 63:1-6 links Edom’s demise to the book’s basic image for distinguishing between destruction and hope: the disappointing Vineyard (5:1-7). As argued in chapter two of this study, the Vineyard is tied closely to the idea of drunkenness, which also functions to identify those individuals and groups linked to the trajectory of destruction (63:3; cf. 16:6-12; 19:14; 28:1-4, 7-8; 29:9-10). The use of similar imagery (63:6) immediately after Isa 62 does not appear to be accidental. 62:8-9 imagines just, reliable food production in terms of grain and juice (62:8; cf. 36:17; 37:30). Subsequently in 62:10-12, “preparation” (root פنة) of the “road (דרכה) of the people” (62:10; cf. 40:3) involves stone-clearing (62:10). In all other cases in the Bible except Isa 5:2, the root קסנ indicates death by stoning; its rarer meaning in 5:2 and 62:10 (the root’s only two occurrences in Isaiah) suggests that the salvific “road of the people” sits in line with Yhwh’s act of vineyard preparation. Thus, 63:1-6 functions as an extension of Yhwh’s
acts of vineyard destruction in 5:5, but with special emphasis on the fact that “Daughter Zion” (62:11) now travels Yhwh’s original path toward hope (5:2, 4, 7).

Second, the garment-staining destruction of Edom in 63:1-6 also readily corresponds to the bloody slaughter of Edom’s livestock in 34:6-7. Importantly, Edom’s fate in Isa 34 is introduced through the rolling back of the heavens, whose army “fades as fades a leaf from a vine” (34:4), offering IH a cosmic window on Yhwh’s royal acts of land-allocation. This moment is recalled in the prophet’s corporate confession that “all of us fade like a leaf” (64:5; cf. 1:30) a little later on, suggesting that Yhwh’s dramatic activity as an global vintner does not merely add a new chapter to the Vineyard paradigm, but indeed drives that paradigm toward its eschatological horizon. By formulating the fate of Israel’s geographical sibling as typologically consistent with both 5:1-7 and 34:1-15, 63:1-6 combines the question of Zion’s distinction and preservation (62:8-12) with a vision of her enemy’s ultimate future, all within a single, agro-ecological frame of reference, namely viticulture.

The language of food consumption in Isa 65–66 furthers the differentiation of groups and the alternative trajectories to which those groups are assigned. Here, improper eating identifies those who “walk the road not good, after their own reckonings” (65:2; cf. 55:7); such individuals “eat the flesh of swine (65:4; cf. 66:17) and “arrange a table for Gad and fill a stirred-beverage for Meni” (65:11; cf. 5:22; 19:14). At the same time, food provides an analogy by which to signal the preservation of Yhwh’s “servants” (cf. 54:17) over against this first group of (wrong) eaters: “‘Just as juice is found in the cluster, and one says, “Do not ruin it, for blessing is in it,” thus I will do on behalf of my servants, not to ruin the whole’” (65:8; cf. 36:10; 62:8). Eating and drinking also mark
the separation of groups in 65:13: “‘Behold, my servants will eat, but you will be-hungry; behold, my servants will drink, but you will be thirsty.’” These servants later “suckle” and are “sated” (66:11-12), language that aligns their experience with 60:16 and thus implies their submission to the command to buy “milk” without cost in 55:1. Satisfied eating characterizes the obedient, whereas hunger, cultic drunkenness, and the consumption of pigs characterizes the “dogs” (56:11).

65:17-25 is a particularly important passage in light of the relationship between 62:8-12 and 63:1-6 as described above, wherein Zion’s agro-ecological security contrasts typologically (cf. 5:1-7) against her enemy’s eschatological doom (cf. 34:1-15). Much like 62:8-9, 65:20-23 imagines Jerusalem’s preservation as just and reliable food production. Her inhabitants will live full life spans (65:20); they will build houses and plant vineyards and “eat” (root אכל) the fruit of their labors (65:21-22). They will not build so that another may “inhabit;” they will not plant so that another may “eat” (65:22; cf. 62:8-9). Instead, they will be a “blessed seed (זרע)” (cf. 65:8) along with their “outgrowth” (root יצא; 65:23; cf. 44:3; 61:9). Food, and the land-inhabitation on which food depends, provides the language for imagining the ongoing preservation of Zion’s community-apart.

Simultaneously, IJ orients his vision of ultimate (food) security toward an eschatological horizon, to a time when Yhwh “creates a new heavens and a new earth” (65:17).42 65:25, which imagines predators grazing alongside their natural prey,43

42 Three uses of the root אכל in 65:17-18 imply that the language of Urzeit is used here with a view toward Endzeit.
especially suggests that here JI envisions a reality that extends beyond everyday, biological experience. As a result, scholars frequently describe this passage as depicting a “utopian future.” The language of “utopia” becomes problematic, however, if it implies a reality disconnected from the body, as 65:17-25 clearly grounds its hopeful vision within the real limits of subsistence agriculture (cf. 30:23-25; 32:15-20). The passage imagines long life but not the absence of death (65:20). It foresees reliable harvests but does not propose labor-free luxuries or entertainment (65:21-22). Zion’s future, in other words, remains as “soil-bound” as her present. The earth may be created anew, but importantly, a real cosmos supports the city’s community of servant-disciples in perpetuity. Such geo-theological continuity between past salvation and future hope provides the conceptual basis by which present obedience with respect to food remains critically important. Eating in Zion—the creaturely body’s proper action in place—functions as a conclusive sign of Jerusalem’s protection against her enemies, a decisive standard for membership in Yhwh’s community-apart, and the content of Isaiah’s ultimate hope.

37:30-32 signals Jerusalem’s agro-ecological preservation through right eating and Torah-obedient “going-out;” it therefore also signals the ultimate failure of Assyria’s plans to besiege and ruin David’s city. Thus the book concludes with a fitting vision of Yhwh’s servants and their “seed” (66:22) “going-out (root יצא) to look upon “the corpses

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Abernethy, Eating in Isaiah, 181.

(root פּּּרֶג) of the men who wronged me” (66:24; cf. 37:3646). Through the use of lexical and conceptual patterns—thick, interwoven strands of key roots, motifs, and recurring ideas—Isaiah imagines Zion’s obedient eaters as breaking free of the “ruinous” (root שׁחת; cf. 36:10; 65:25) Assyrian-Babylonian trajectory of destruction once and for all. The earth sprouts forth its seed. Yhwh’s farmer-disciples eat. Isaiah’s agrarian vision prevails.

46 The root פּּּרֶג appears only four times Isaiah, also in 14:19 (re: Babylon) and 34:3 (re: all the nations). Use of the root יצא in both 37:36 and 66:24 helps to forge an especially strong lexical correspondence between these the two passages, adding credibility to the argument that Isa 36–39 provides a narrative context for Isa 40–66.
6. A Call to Obedience: The Implied Reader Reads Isaiah 28–35

Analysis of Isa 28–35 in its sequential unfolding has contributed a number of new insights to our understanding of these enigmatic chapters: for example, the importance of proper land use in 28:1-29, Yhwh’s unsurprising attention to David’s city in 29:1-8, and the conceptual coherence of 33:1–35:10. Such conclusions result from a combination of two methodological choices: the application of an agrarian hermeneutic, which is characterized by an integrated view of the universe, and careful delineation of Isaiah’s four epistemological layers (literary characters, a narrator and implied hearer, an implied author and implied reader, and actual authors and readers). To this point, the text’s agrarian discourse has been described exclusively in terms of the first and second layers—that is, as the prophet’s speech to his audience(s) and as the narrator’s representation of the prophetic word. Only now, with a reading of the whole book in view, is it possible to return to the six woes so as to examine how the implied reader (a third-order textual construct) might approach and understand the same content differently. This task occupies the greater part of the present chapter.

The move from Isaiah’s second-order “implied hearer” (IH) to its third-order “implied reader” (IR) is an essential aspect of the project’s overall contribution to Isaiah studies. As various examples have shown, scholars often conflate the historical prophet with his literary portrayal in the book; such confusion frequently distorts Isaiah’s rhetoric by superimposing modern norms onto the premodern text’s literary art. Moreover, interpreters focused on Isaiah’s message vis-à-vis the reader have likewise not always
drawn adequate distinctions between the book’s sequential unfolding and the fact that that sequence can be accessed by readers in any order they choose. Again, a lack of methodological precision has introduced serious interpretive confusion into Isaiah studies that this project attempts to resolve. Unlike IH (who by definition encounters the prophetic word only through N’s sequential re-presentation of it), IR maintains his or her observational autonomy over the N–IH dynamic while “searching the scroll” (cf. 34:16) that the implied author (IA) constructs. In other words, IR is a student of the book. He or she may ruminate on the Farmer’s Parable (28:23-29) not only in light of Isa 1–27, but also in view of the parable’s extended relevance to the “sign” in 37:30, the imperative to “buy and eat” in 55:1, the directive to “share your bread with the hungry” (58:7), and the visions of untroubled agriculture presented in 62:8-9 and 65:21-22. For IR, the whole book may reverberate at every point. Any investigation of Isaiah that ignores this fact will fall short of an accurate account of the text’s rhetoric in its written form.

The following discussion therefore concludes this study in three parts. First, it offers a brief summary of the six woes in their sequential unfolding. These summaries provide a simplified backdrop against which to compare IR’s third-order encounter with the same material, and thus to account for the unique ways in which the six woes address Isaiah’s text-exterior implied reader as opposed to its text-interior characters. Next, the discussion re-reads each of the six woes in light of the whole, arguing that Isa 28–35 persuades IR to accept its geo-theological claims by virtue of those claims’ coherence with and contribution to Isaiah in its total self-presentation—a metahistorical frame of reference to which only students of the written book have access. Isa 28–35 is finally understood to issue a call to obedience that transports the reader from prior reflections on
historical destruction into a new hope for stable and enduring life in the land. Last, a few suggestions for ongoing research in light of this finding, at both the diachronic and synchronic level, conclude the project as a whole.

6.1 Summaries of the Six Woes in Their Sequential Presentation

Chapter two of this study (“A Matter of Food and Drink”) argues that Isa 1–27 sets forth two historical trajectories—destruction and hope—that can be traced through typologically-related representations of political events, such as the Syro-Ephraimite conspiracy, the Assyrian invasion, and the fall of Babylon. This overview reveals that agrarian concepts play a crucial role in how the two trajectories are constructed and also differentiated; in particular, Zion emerges as a pillar of safety in the midst of global, agro-ecological devastation. Correspondingly, Isa 28 appears to set up a contrast between the prophet’s adversaries and the farmer-disciple portrayed in 28:23-29. The former character profile is linked to the trajectory of destruction through improper eating (i.e. excessive consumption, a form of agro-ecological abuse), while the latter extends the trajectory of hope through the farmer’s acts of agrarian propriety. The concluding remark that “this too goes-out (root יצא) from Yhwh” (28:29), with allusive reference to Yhwh’s “out-going” Torah in 2:3, suggests that the farmer-disciple’s behavior functions as an obedient ideal. By structuring the prophetic word in such a way that the two trajectories are distinguished through a clear contrast in character, N encourages IH to pursue the latter trajectory by mimicking the farmer-disciple’s responsible approach to land and food.
Chapter three of this study ("The Creaturely Body in Place") covers the second through fifth woes in the series. The first half of this chapter analyzes woes two (29:1-14) and three (29:15-24), arguing that the former oracle emphasizes the localness of Yhwh’s salvation in Zion, while the latter oracle focuses on Yhwh’s status as Creator and the bearing that status has upon created beings. Two main ideas summarize this material. First, insofar as 29:1-14 presents Yhwh’s salvation as Zion-centered (29:1-8), it suggests that a failure to recognize Yhwh’s local deliverance remains a key factor in obduracy to the prophetic word (29:9-14; cf. 6:9-10). Second, such failure of perception is subsequently related to the idea of “going-deep,” away from the Creator (29:15-16). As a result, IH discovers that he or she may “learn instruction” (29:24; cf. 8:16) and so adhere to the trajectory of hope by acknowledging his or her status as the “deed of my hands” and by staying put “in his proximity” (29:23). Recalling the farmer-disciple’s willingness to receive instruction in 28:26, Isa 29 makes knowledge dependent on the agrarian principle of acting within the limits of one’s creaturely station.

The latter half of chapter three traces “the creaturely body in place” through woes four (30:1-33) and five (31:1–32:20). These texts simultaneously decry the effort to find security in Egypt (30:1-5; 31:1-3) while also promoting Zion as the place of Yhwh’s sure salvation (30:19; 30:27-33; 31:4-9). The oracles also persuade IH to acknowledge his or her creatureliness as a basic act of obedience. Attention to four related topics—intransigence and instruction, idolatry, Yhwh’s restoration of the created order, and the healing of disabled bodies—makes this interest clear. Finally, both woe-oracles drive toward the idea of land-inhabitation, and so bring the epistemological concepts expressed in Isa 29–32 in line with Isa 28 and the agrarian notion of proper land use. IH is led to
conceptualize his or her distinction from those who “go-deep from Yhwh to hide (root רָתַּה) a plan” (29:15) in terms of a concrete “hiding-place” (root רָתַּה; 32:2), characterized by acts of sowing seed, reaping produce, grazing cattle, and safely inhabiting “carefree places-of-rest” (32:18; cf. 30:23-26; 32:15-20).

In step with the first five woes’ agrarian values, chapter four of this study (“A Geo-Theology of Dwelling”) argues that the sixth woe (Isa 33–35) comprises a focally complex and generically diverse unit centering on Yhwh’s kingship as a theological prerequisite to security and longevity in the land. Crucially, six stipulations necessary for land-inhabitation appearing in 33:15 function as a kind of rhetorical “keyhole” through which IH must pass in order to “dwell on-heights” (33:16) with Yhwh, who also “dwells on-high” (33:5), and so join the first-person plural exaltation of “our king” in 33:22. The effects of Yhwh’s enthronement are felt immediately. In 34:4, the heavens roll back like a scroll, disclosing the true nature of reality in which Yhwh allocates the land to its proper inhabitants. Edom is consigned to wild animals (34:5-15), while Judah is regenerated and repopulated with a procession of obedient pilgrims making their way to Zion (35:1-10; cf. 30:20-21, 29). Thus Isa 34–35 constitutes a single act of Yhwh’s world-leveling justice (cf. 29:17-21), available to those who affirm the prophet’s vision of the “really real” through submission to Yhwh’s rule.

In sum, the rhetoric of Isa 28–35 in its sequential unfolding clearly expands upon the discourse put forth in Isa 1–27, especially as these prior chapters distinguish between historical trajectories of destruction and hope through reference to agro-ecological matters. The six woes begin with the farmer-disciple’s willingness to receive instruction from Yhwh (28:23-29); they end with a joyous celebration of homecoming (35:1-10) that
Yhwh makes possible for those who obediently submit their bodies to the “keyhole” stipulations of 33:15. Through Isaiah’s six woes, the memory of Zion’s survival amid the overwhelming flood gradually yields a new hope for land-inhabitation under Zion’s true King.

6.2 Re-reading the Six Woes in Light of the Whole

The preceding summaries offer a foundational point of reference through which to investigate IR’s book-aware perspective on the same material. It is important to bear in mind that Isaiah’s implied reader does not abdicate his or her responsibility to the text’s sequential logic; rather, the sequential text constitutes precisely the body of information that IR measures against the book at large, in order to determine whether or not N’s re-presentation of the prophetic word is believable and sound. Through a re-reading of the six woes in view of the whole, the following discussion demonstrates various ways in which Isa 28–35 fits within the total book’s metahistorical universe. Insofar as that universe is brought to bear on IR’s interpretation of Isa 28–35, the six woes are understood to issue a persuasive call to obedience that, when accepted, promises IR hope for stable and enduring life in the land (cf. 1:19-20).

6.2.1 The First Woe: Isaiah 28:1-29

With access to the overall book, IR observes that Isa 28 plays a lead role in the transition from historical memory to a new consideration of the eschatological future. In particular, IR notes two contributions that Isa 28 makes to the book at large: 1) proper land use as a criterion for participation in the prophetic community-apart, and 2) local practice as an essential feature of Isaiah’s global vision. Consequently, IR interprets the
farmer-disciple’s propriety as an indispensable point of orientation to Isaiah’s agrarian hope, and thus also as a model by which to evaluate IR’s own “soil-bound” participation in that hope.

6.2.1.1 Proper Land Use as Criterion for Participation

Chapter two of this study reveals that Isa 28 sets up a character contrast between the prophet’s adversaries and the farmer-disciple as depicted in 28:23-29, where the former profile is linked to destruction through improper eating while the latter exemplifies the trajectory of hope through the farmer’s acts of propriety. IR perceives that this contrast not only capitalizes on paradigms operative in prior portions of the book; it also furnishes Isaiah with a “predictive” capacity to apply the meaning of past events toward the present and future. For example, IR sees that the woe-oracle of Isa 28:1 introduces a new body of text (the series of six woes) that runs up to the Hezekiah narratives in 36:1. This macrounit concludes with an apocalypse-like disclosure of the “really real” in Isa 34–35, which matches the revelation of Yhwh’s glory to “all flesh” in 40:5. IR is therefore primed to consider Isa 28 in relation to these subsequent images of divine disclosure. Specifically, several key terms appearing in Isa 28 seem to adumbrate the memory of Zion’s paradigmatic salvation event (Isa 36–37), out of which restoration springs (Isa 40–55): Yhwh’s “glorious diadem for the remnant (root שׁאר) of his people” (28:5; cf. 37:31-32) and his “prevailing-power (גְּבוּרָה) for those-turning-back battle (מִלְחָמָה) to the gate” (28:6; cf. 36:5). Thus the character contrast of Isa 28 fixes one eye to the historical trajectories on which it is based and another to Yhwh’s redemption in texts to come.
IR is particularly struck by the fact that a contrast in character with respect to food consumption such as Isa 28 portrays corresponds to the way in which groups are separated in the book’s final frames (cf. 65:13). This information confirms for IR that the written rhetoric of Isa 28 focuses not on Judah’s military vulnerability, but on competing modes of “dwelling” that the memory of attack and deliverance helps to reveal. That is, historical events (which include but are not limited to politics) remain relevant through their typological extension as two different approaches to land-inhabitation. Thus for IR, Isa 28 stands out as the first unit in a transitional series that orients his or her attention away from reflection on past destruction to a new consideration for how one might avoid that destruction through attention and responsibility to Yhwh’s word. This reasoning is supported by the recognition that the farmer-disciple’s example (in parabolic form) “goes-out” from Yhwh (28:29) in addition to Torah (2:3), an interpretation that is reinforced by the frequent use of יָצָא in subsequent stages of the book (e.g. 51:4; 55:10). Proper land use is the manner by which the trajectories of destruction and hope may be adjudicated in IR’s ongoing present.

To the reader who remains aware of “right eating” as an imperative crucial to the conditional framing of Isa 36–66, details pertaining to the soil in Isa 28 that went unexplored in chapter two of this study now appear significant in new ways. For example, IR may notice a conceptual correspondence between the farmer-disciple’s acts of soil preparation—“opening” (root פּתח) the earth and smoothing its “face” (root פּנה; 28:24-25)—and Yhwh’s hopeful acts of stone-clearing in 5:2 and 62:10. Additionally, IR may recognize that Yhwh’s promises to “open” the earth (root פּתח; 41:18; 45:8) as a precursor to “preparing” (root פּנה) for pilgrimage (62:10; cf. 35:8-10; 40:3). With the
whole book in view, in other words, Isa 28 self-presents not as an allegory for the inscrutability of Yhwh’s historical change-of-plans; rather, the farmer-disciple symbolically “prepares the earth” for Yhwh’s preservation of his disciples in Zion. Though IH cannot yet perceive it, IR knows that the farmer-disciple of 28:23-29 sows seeds of profound, eschatological importance. His agro-ecologically responsible, Torah-obedient behavior serves as a model for participation in the prophetic community-apart.

6.2.1.2 Local Practice, Global Vision

Insofar as IR is able to trace those lexical and conceptual threads mentioned above (e.g. “going-out,” soil “preparation,” right eating, etc.) through the book at large, he or she perceives that the farmer-disciple’s local practice with respect to seeds (28:25) informs the book’s global vision of Yhwh as Creator and King of “all nations” (cf. 2:2; 14:26; 66:18). The relationship between the particular and the universal in Isa 28 will be best understood by returning to one of the key points made in chapter two of this study: Isa 28:23-29 highlights the process by which the farmer produces food, not the outcome. It was argued that U. Berges allows the book’s inclusive vision to distort his reading of the Farmer’s Parable, in such a way that he describes the farmer’s actions as achieving “the maximum possible output from the farming activity.”¹ The problem with this interpretation lies in the fact that the parable focuses exclusively on the manner by which the crop is cultivated and processed, while saying nothing about the magnitude of the yield. In light of the whole book, however, readers may be tempted to declare Berges’ analysis correct after all. Does not the farmer-disciple’s success adumbrate the

flourishing of Israel’s “seed” (59:21) and the corresponding ingathering of the nations (60:3)?

This question demonstrates why careful attention to Isaiah’s epistemological layering remains vital to a precise description of its rhetoric vis-à-vis the reader. As a third-order textual construct, IR’s perspective does not override IH’s hearing of the prophetic word; rather, IR observes and learns from IH’s sequential education. For example, IR notes that certain texts, such as those that anticipate a Davidic king (9:1-6; 11:1-9), have not been subsumed under a rubric of so-called “democratization,” whereby the Davidic covenant is extended to the community at large (55:3). On the contrary, both visions presently stand within a single metahistorical frame and therefore function stereoptically in relation to each other, in such a way that the book’s Davidic promises operate “democratically” even while the prophetic community-apart retains its hope for a Davidic savior. Similarly, Isaiah’s “late” universalism annuls neither the local particularity of the farmer-disciple’s work nor the specificity of Jerusalem’s miraculous rescue during the reign of Hezekiah. To say it differently, Isaiah’s horizon of expectation is not materially distinct from the history in which it arises; the two are connected by a

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4 Similarly, Isaiah’s vision of global worship should not be split away from the book’s concern for Israel as some readers have suggested. See James M. Ward, “The Servant’s Knowledge in Isaiah 40–55,” in Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien, eds. John G. Gammie et al. (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1978), 121-36. While Y. Kaufmann’s reading of Isa 40–55 suffers from its dependence on a historical model unsupported by the best archaeological and other historical data available at this time, his complaint against the Christian proclivity to seek the text’s meaning apart from its moorings in Israel’s national welfare, such as Ward’s reading represents, remains a valid point. He writes: “[W]e must reject the tendency of Christian theology to view the struggle against gentile idolatry, the ‘mission to the gentiles,’ as a renunciation of the hope of national redemption.” Yehezkel Kaufmann, The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah, trans. C. W. Efroymson, History of the Religion of Israel 4 (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1970), 51.
single stretch of ground. Whatever may be concluded about the book’s eschatological hope for Yhwh’s “out-going,” precipitation-like word (55:10-11), the Farmer’s Parable orients IR to the fact that that word remains ineluctably bound up with a local endeavor of scratching one’s living from the earth in a manner appropriate to the topography, biology, and human physiology involved. It is for precisely this reason that the nations stream toward Zion for instruction, just as Yhwh’s word proceeds outward to meet them (2:2-3; cf. 37:32; 55:10-13; 66:18). In Isaiah’s world, global salvation takes place “on location” in the dirt.

In sum, a third-order, readerly perspective on the rhetoric of Isa 28 leads to interpretive conclusions beyond those available to the text’s second-order implied hearer. Isa 28 provides an important point of orientation to the book as a whole: historical patterns manifest as agro-ecological behaviors, suggesting that proper land use serves as an essential criterion for participation in the community-apart. Inasmuch as Isaiah places that community’s future within an eschatological horizon, wherein “all the nations” stream to Yhwh for instruction (2:2-3), IR perceives that such a vision is born from and remains responsible to the prophetic community’s local attention to the land (28:25). A book-aware perspective on Isa 28 confirms that Isaiah’s historical memories function as a sophisticated system of typological paradigms; channeled into the earth, these paradigms supply hope to those who adhere to the limitations and responsibilities modeled in the farmer-disciple’s “soil-bound” obedience to Yhwh’s word (28:26; cf. 1:19-20).
6.2.2 The Second and Third Woes: Isaiah 29:1-24

Chapter three of this study shows that Isa 29 associates Zion’s salvation with Yhwh’s identity as Creator; the priests’ and prophets’ failure to recognize this association supplies a negative example by which to spur IH toward humble admission of his or her creaturely status. Reading the larger book, IR perceives that the chapter’s combination of local place with affirmation of a global Creator functions as a “mirror” or mise-en-abyme of Isa 36–55. The first macrounit in this body of text (Isa 36–39) focuses on Yhwh’s deliverance of Jerusalem, whereas the second macrounit (Isa 40–55) reveals a sustained, first-person encounter with the Creator of the earth and the Arbiter of human history, with frequent reference to the corporeal nature of human beings. This correspondence suggests that IR’s ability to “search the scroll” (34:16)—the very thing that distinguishes his or her third-order knowledge of it—constitutes exactly the perspective required to understand the prophet’s agrarian wisdom and thus to participate in the community-apart along with IH.

The argument stated above relies on the view that Isa 40–55 stands in referential relationship to the memories related in Isa 36–39, rather than the historical context scholars are apt to reconstruct with respect to so-called “Deutero-Isaiah.” As explained in chapter five of this study, most modern interpreters see the seam between Isa 39 and 40 as a cavernous gulf of 150 years; the book itself, however, offers no indication that such a disjunction should be conceptualized by the reader. This point is crucial to a proper

understanding of the book as a whole because it places the theological claim that Yhwh is Creator inside the memory of Zion’s paradigmatic salvation event. As the text stands, the two ideas are not stratified along a historical timeline and set on opposite sides of Babylonian destruction. Rather, the hope for local, particular, historical salvation wells up from the claim that Yhwh is the Maker of both heavens and earth (cf. 37:16), and moreover, the claim that Yhwh as Creator cares for creaturely bodies (cf. 51:12-13) springs out of the fact that Yhwh performs salvation in a particular place.

Because IR maintains access to this material, he or she is prepared to notice the intrinsic, complementary relationship between local and global salvation also depicted in Isa 29. For example, IR observes that 29:1-8 provides assurance of Yhwh’s commitment to defend Zion in accordance with the promises to Hezekiah in 36:6-7, 37:33-35, and 38:6. At the same time, non-comprehension is portrayed as confusion between what is created and Who is Creator (29:15-16; cf. 10:15; 45:9); Yhwh’s status in this respect is confirmed by his ability to restore the world to its right condition (29:17), meaning comprehension and deliverance for some (29:18-19) but annihilation for others (29:20-21). IR observes that Isa 40–55 similarly proclaims the Creator’s determination to restore the earth within a conditional framework (cf. 37:30; 55:1) that exposes the ontological confusion characteristic of idolatry. Thus, IR is led to affirm Hezekiah’s observation that Yhwh’s local defense of Zion indicates his identity as Creator of the cosmos (37:16). The “creaturely body in place” functions as an interpretive key to the greater book.

At the same time, because Isa 29 mirrors the conceptual combination of Isa 36–39 with Isa 40–55, IR sees that knowledge of the book writ large is required to make sense of Isaiah’s wisdom writ small. Thus the aspect of IR’s character that potentially distances
him or her from the text’s sequential logic—observational autonomy—is transformed from a rhetorical obstacle into an asset. IR can follow the farmer-disciple’s lead and so join the community-apart by reading. To make this point clear, the text employs a motif of illiteracy in 29:11-12. IR observes that the “comatose” spirit of the priests and prophets (29:10), which corresponds to their drunken stupors and non-comprehension of the prophetic word (28:7-13), is imagined as an inability to access the content of written documents (i.e. scrolls, root רָאָס; 29:11-12). Because of their illiteracy, the priests and prophets cannot discern the “wonderful” nature of Yhwh’s salvation, salvation to which IH and IR are granted special insight (29:13-14). Moreover, Yhwh’s world-leveling justice causes the deaf to “hear the words of a scroll” (29:18), implying that some will comprehend and others will not. Consistent with this idea, writing serves a prophetic purpose in 8:1-4, and also informs the “sealing” (root חַתָּם) of the Torah, a key factor in distinguishing the “learners” who comprise the prophetic community-apart (8:16; cf. 30:8-15). 6 29:11 points to this literary context when describing the priests’ and prophets’ non-comprehension as a “sealed” (root חַתָּם) scroll. All these lexical and conceptual correspondences are so far available also to IH, but IR additionally observes that “scrolls” play a unique role in Isa 34, both as a metaphor for the unveiling of reality in 34:4 and as a directive to “search the scroll” in 34:16. As an addendum to the disclosure of the “really real” (34:1-15), 34:16-17 suggests that “scroll-searching” will provide access to the prophetic word. It is no mistake that Hezekiah (the exemplary disciple of IJ) turns out to be a reader of scrolls (37:14; 39:1), and a writer as well (38:9). Likewise, it is precisely

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6 Readers may also note that both 8:20-22 and 29:18 work with images of “gloom” (root בָּלַע) and “darkness” (root שָּאָר).
IR’s ability to read the scroll that allows him or her to remember Jerusalem’s deliverance and so distinguish him or herself from the delusional priests and prophets (cf. 29:9-14). Thus the language of Isa 29 suggests that IR enjoys special insight on the woe-oracles at hand by virtue of the fact that he or she can do what the prophet’s adversaries cannot: *study*. In contrast to many modern scholars’ quest for the historical prophet’s *ipsissima verba*, IR is encouraged to believe that the prophetic word in book form actually clarifies the prophet’s message for future generations rather than obscuring it.

In sum, Isa 29 combines two epistemological principles into one: the primacy of local place (29:1-14) and the importance of the creaturely body (29:15-24). Reading Isa 29 in light of the larger book, IR sees that this combination—“the creaturely body in place”—informs the union of Isa 36–39 and Isa 40–55. Isa 29 therefore functions as a mirror for Isaiah writ large, suggesting that agrarian values provide an interpretive key necessary for understanding the prophetic word in book form. At the same time, the motif of illiteracy in 29:11-12 suggests that access to the overall book provides essential insight on the prophet’s agrarian wisdom writ small. The mutual reinforcement these interpretive vectors share finally contributes to Isaiah’s rhetorical and theological coherence, thus strengthening the metahistorical universe in which IR is invited to participate by reading and studying the book he or she has inherited.

6.2.3 The Fourth and Fifth Woes: Isaiah 30:1–32:20

The fourth (30:1-33) and fifth (31:1–32:20) woes in the series pursue the topic of “the creaturely body in place” by depicting Zion as the site of Yhwh’s salvation, by promoting acknowledgment of one’s creatureliness as a basic act of obedience, and by
envisioning safe and secure land-inhabitation for those disciples who adhere to the trajectory of hope. IR’s book-aware perspective allows him or her to adduce at least three additional elements of Isaiah’s overarching vision: 1) “disregard for Egypt” as figural language for place-based obedience, 2) pilgrimage as symbolizing the creaturely body’s submission to the Creator, and 3) hope for land-inhabitation extending to an eschatological horizon. Thus IR perceives that the fourth and fifth woes constitute an agrarian template for obedience as a central precondition of Isaiah’s ultimate hope for enduring life in the land.

6.2.3.1 “Disregard for Egypt” as Place-Based Obedience

Especially in Isa 30 and 31, the prophetic call to “disregard Egypt” functions in tandem with the corollary principle of “fidelity to Zion;” IR is led to conceptualize such “disregard” as a place-based expression of obedience. Like IH, IR observes that Egypt’s help is worthless (cf. 30:1-7; 31:1-3; cf. 20:1-6), in contrast to Zion as a stable home (30:19; 30:27-33; 31:4-9). IR likewise notes Zion’s status as a secure refuge in passages appearing throughout Isa 1–29 (cf. 4:2-6; 12:1-6; 16:1-5; 18:7; 25:6-10a; 29:1-8). Unlike IH, however, IR maintains the added advantage of remembering Zion’s paradigmatic salvation event as portrayed in Isa 36–39. These narratives describe Tirhaqah king of Cush (south of Egypt) as “going-out” (root יצא) to do battle with the Assyrian army (37:9), but this endeavor only emboldens Sennacherib to threaten Jerusalem a second time (37:10-13). Indeed the real rescue comes from Yhwh, whose angel “goes-out” to destroy the Assyrian army (37:36), allowing Zion’s besieged inhabitants to “go-out” (37:32; cf. 55:12-13) in response to the agro-ecological imperative of 37:30.
Correspondingly in 51:17–52:12, IJ directs Jerusalem’s inhabitants to “go-out” (52:11; cf. 37:32; 48:20) in step with Yhwh’s “out-going” Torah (51:4); later Yhwh ensures that Zion’s righteousness will likewise “go-out” (62:1) through the rebuilding of her walls (62:6) and her sure identity as the home of Yhwh’s servants (62:10-12; 65:18-19). Thus the geo-theological assertion that Egypt is no help whatsoever while Zion remains the durable site of Yhwh’s deliverance is reinforced in the larger book—notably, through connection with the important Leitwort "יצא" as described in chapters two and five of this study. Because “going-out” is intimately connected to the language of Torah (cf. 2:3; 28:29; 51:4), IR naturally associates fidelity to place with fidelity to Yhwh’s instruction.

The fact that fidelity to Zion is tied to a pattern of “out-going” Torah obedience implies that “disregard for Egypt” in Isa 30–32 is figural language on par with “going-out from Babylon” (48:20; cf. 52:11), both of which indicate a posture of trust that disciples of the prophetic word in any era may adopt. For example, as chapter three of this study observes, 30:1-7 is freighted with Leitwörter such as “plan” (30:1), “go-down” (30:2), “shelter” (30:2), “shade” (30:2), and “help” (30:5), rather than markers of historical specificity. The fifth woe picks up on this same language by calling attention to “those-who-go-down to Egypt for help” (31:1). The passage then considers that while some rely on horses (31:1) and on military “flesh” (31:3), the disciples of Yhwh are those inhabitants of Zion who, having proven trustworthy and unwavering on the “cornerstone” of 28:16 (cf. 7:1-17; 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8), clearly perceive Yhwh’s ability to rescue in the face of overwhelming danger (31:5). Such language may indeed have arisen with reference to Judah’s political machinations in the late eighth century BCE, but now within its Sitz im Buch, it speaks to a set of concerns relevant to all subsequent
generations who would read and study the words of Isaiah. Like “departure from Babylon,” figural “disregard for Egypt” implies geo-theological confidence in Yhwh’s past, present, and future commitment to David’s city.

The book of Isaiah finally provides IR with the interpretive framework necessary to perceive the transtemporal significance of the discourse concerning “Egypt” in Isa 30–31, and through its logic to consider him or herself a native inhabitant of Zion. As the prophet himself points out, history comes and goes, kingdoms rise and fall, but “the word of our God arises in perpetuity” (40:8). IR’s own “disregard for Egypt” is a matter of trust-filled obedience in the reader’s here-and-now.

6.2.3.2 Pilgrimage as the Creaturely Body’s Submission to the Creator

The fourth woe—30:20-22 in particular—imagines instruction as idol-free, bipedal progression along a given route. With access to the book as a whole, IR perceives that such travel symbolizes the creaturely body’s submission to Yhwh, an act of pilgrimage that can be rehearsed even in historical periods beyond those that catalyzed the text’s earliest compositional layers or are represented narratively within its pages. This conclusion arises from IR’s observation along with IH that such activity must be taught (30:20), implying that the successful “walker” or pilgrim is a type of “learner” on paradigm with the prophet’s disciples (cf. 2:5; 8:16). Moreover, the pilgrim’s education is portrayed as a “full-body” endeavor, whereby the pilgrim submits his or her whole person to the Teacher’s guidance (30:21; cf. 33:15). As a result, IR justifiably associates pilgrimage with figural “disregard for Egypt” as depicted in 30:1-7 and 31:1-3, even though these passages seem to talk about very different kinds of activities (e.g. staying
put versus heading out). Both express trust through the body’s orientation to place. Thus the crucial issue for IR with respect to Isa 30 is not finally a matter of Jerusalem’s political-historical engagement with Egypt in the late eighth century BCE, but rather of his or her present confidence in Yhwh’s sovereign plan, demonstrated outwardly through the body’s physical and intellectual dependence on the Teacher’s instruction (cf. 1:2-3).

In view of the fact that “disregard for Egypt” is tied to the notion of Yhwh’s “out-going” Torah (see above), IR is led to associate pilgrimage as depicted in 30:20-22 also with obedience to Yhwh’s instruction. Two observations accessible to readers of the whole book make this inference especially plausible. First, the pilgrim is guided by a revealed “Teacher” (root יָרָה; 30:20), suggesting a correspondence with 28:26 (“his God teaches him”). In this prior context, the root נָתַן places the Farmer’s Parable in line with Yhwh’s “out-going” Torah (2:3; 28:29; 51:4). Similarly, the disposal of idols in 30:22 is performed with a sharp imperative: “‘Go-out!’ you shall say of it” (30:22; cf. 28:8); the form used here (צֵא) probably also derives from the root נָתַן, strengthening the connection between the two texts and the book’s overarching interest in Torah-obedience. Second, 30:20-22 anticipates a range of other passages depicting travel along a road, including but not limited to 35:8-10, 48:17-22, and 52:7-12. As discussed in chapter five of this study, 52:7-12 uses language akin to 48:17-22 (the command to “go-out;” 52:11) and 35:8-10 (the command to “touch no unclean-thing;” 52:11), but notably does not use the place name “Babylon” as in 48:20. This rhetorical choice suggests that “departure from Babylon” indicates a figural activity regardless of the disciple’s actual political circumstances or location. The historical memory provides a model for obedience in the present, in much the same way that the language of “disregard for Egypt” now promotes
trust in Yhwh’s saving power rather than actual disdain for the country itself. In the same way, “out-going” pilgrimage in 30:20-22 contributes to the book’s larger goal of catalyzing a prophetic community of Torah-obedient disciples.

As a result of these observations, IR also infers that the concept of Torah-obedient pilgrimage expresses confidence in the Creator’s capacity to restore the world to its right condition. For example, immediately after the pilgrim discards his or her idols with a sharp imperative to “go-out” in 30:22, he or she experiences crop production, soil fertility, healthy cattle, and access to water in 30:23-25. Similarly in Isa 40–55, clear delineation between what is created substance and Who is Creator constitutes an essential precondition to agro-ecological renewal and repopulation. IR also remembers that Yhwh allocates Judah and Jerusalem to the “walking” redeemed in 35:8-10, a community of disciples that likewise experiences transformation of dry ground into an effervescent water-world (35:1-2, 6-7; cf. 30:25). Moreover, IR knows that regeneration of the agro-ecological landscape involves an act of obedient planting and sowing (37:30) as well as an act of “going-out” (37:32) that, in coordination with 55:1-2 and 55:12-13, frame Yhwh’s regeneration of the land as conditional upon the prophetic community’s willingness to obey. Most importantly, IR perceives from 65:1-16 that such obedience, contrasted against the behavior of the “dogs” who eat and drink improperly (56:11; cf. 28:7-8), ultimately ensures the same sort of land-inhabitation signaled in 30:23-25: safely sowing and reaping the earth’s abundance in perpetuity (65:17-25). Thus IR comes to view pilgrimage in Isa 30 as an embodied form of obedience oriented toward the hope of dwelling with the Creator, who restores the land to its proper inhabitants and its proper inhabitants to the land.
6.2.3.3 Eschatological Hope for Land-Inhabitation

The vision of landed dwelling in 30:23-25 is matched in 32:15-20, where Yhwh’s people inhabit “confident dwellings” and “carefree places-of-rest” (32:18). IR experiences this language in light of the total metahistory Isaiah constructs, which culminates with similar images appearing in 62:8-9 and 65:17-25. The book’s overarching frame therefore grants IR special insight into the rhetorical function of the fourth and fifth woes as written prophecy: to persuade IR toward obedience in the present as a way of pre-enacting Isaiah’s ultimate future.

30:23-25 and 32:15-20 correspond both lexically and conceptually to key passages in the book’s second half. Isa 65 in particular envisions planting and eating (65:21; cf. 30:23-24; 37:30), the building of houses (65:21-22; cf. 32:18), and safety from predation on domestic livestock (65:25; cf. 30:23; 32:20). As in 30:19, wherein the inhabitants of Jerusalem “weep (root בּכה) no more,” the new Jerusalem of Isa 65 is characterized by a similar eradication of “weeping” (root בּכה) and “outcry” (root זעק; 65:19). The combination of these terms echoes 33:7 (alternate root פָּזא) as described in chapter four of this study, implying that 65:17-25 offers an eschatological counterpoint to the trajectory of destruction. 30:19 likewise promises that Yhwh will “hear” and “answer,” a concept reiterated in 65:24 and other passages such as 41:17, 49:8, and 58:9 (cf. 46:7; 65:12; 66:4). These correspondences suggest that 65:17-25 constitutes a portrait of life on the “far side” of 33:13-16, the crucial keyhole through with IH passes by way of obedience and so gains access to the “really real.”

Learning from the text’s sequential logic, IR discerns that the hyper-reality of 65:17-25 does not abandon the hope for material security and concrete land-inhabitation
depicted in Isa 30 and 32. Unlike IH, however, IR is able to return to Isa 30–32 with 65:17-25 in mind. Insofar as the latter passage envisions “new heavens” and a “new earth” (65:17), IR may consider that his or her present response to the six woes lies within a metahistorical continuum that extends unbroken from IR’s remembered past to the ultimate horizon of his or her imagined future. This observation helps IR to appreciate the rhetorical coherence of both woes in question, which begin with words and ideas (such as “disregard for Egypt”) that seem to emerge from particular historical circumstances (such as are depicted in Isa 36–39), but which now promote trust with an eye toward peaceful and secure land-inhabitation in the ongoing future. In Isaiah’s world, it is therefore perfectly reasonable for a disciple of the book to use the language of “disregard for Egypt” or “departure from Babylon” as a way of signaling his or her responsible attention to the soil from which he or she subsists (cf. 28:23-29). Such obedience to Yhwh’s instruction in the material present accurately anticipates life in the new Jerusalem to come.

In sum, a book-aware perspective on Isa 30–32 allows for at least three important inferences beyond what is available to the book’s sequential hearer. These two woes: 1) promote place-based obedience through the figural language of “disregard for Egypt,” 2) regard pilgrimage as a symbolic expression of creaturely submission to the Creator, and 3) imply that both concepts pre-enact the prophet’s hope for untroubled land-inhabitation in days to come. IR is thus encouraged to recognize “the creaturely body in place” in Isa 30–32 as an agrarian template for obedience that anticipates the book’s eschatological horizon.
6.2.3 The Sixth Woe: Isaiah 33:1–35:10

Chapter four of this study demonstrates that the sixth woe turns on six stipulations (33:15) necessary for inhabitation of Zion—a kind of rhetorical “keyhole” through which IH must pass before the heavens roll back like a scroll, the “really real” nature of Yhwh’s kingship is exposed, and the land is allocated to its rightful inhabitants. In light of this observation, IR recognizes that Isa 33–35 mirrors the organic combination of Isa 40–55 and Isa 56–66, much as Isa 29 reflects the union of Isa 36–39 and Isa 40–55. Thus the final woe in the series opens a door to hope in the book’s second half that, once set ajar, will never again be shut. The pilgrim’s “full-body” submission in 33:15 constitutes not only a key to the cosmic disclosure of Isa 34–35, but also a key to the total prophetic word in its written form.

Large-scale “mirroring” between Isa 33–35 and Isa 40–66 is evident in several respects. First, Isa 40–55 is characterized by a sustained, first-person encounter with Yhwh. The cosmic disclosure of Isa 34:4—the rolling back of the heavens like a scroll—provides an apt introduction to just such an encounter, the revelation of Yhwh’s “honor” to “all flesh” (40:5) through the proclamation, “Here is your God!” (40:9). Second, Isa 40–55 also portrays the agro-ecological restoration and human repopulation of Judah, which closely matches images of regeneration and homecoming in Isa 35. Third, it was shown that restoration as depicted in the book’s latter half remains conditional on

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8 K. Heffelfinger observes that the “strongest cohesive device” in Isa 40–55 “is not a thematic or discursive claim like homecoming or comfort but the overwhelming presence of the speaking deity.” Katie M. Heffelfinger, I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah, BibInt 105 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 33.
obedience, especially as expressed in 37:30 and 55:1, whose imperatives to “eat” anticipate “right eating” as an important criterion by which to differentiate the community-apart from the unsatiated “dogs” (56:11) in Isa 56–66. As discussed in chapter four of this study, obedience as a prerequisite to secure land-inhabitation is also precisely the dynamic by which Isa 33 relates to Isa 34–35 (cf. esp. 33:15).

The third of these points encourages IR to attach special importance to the “keyhole” passage of 33:13-16. The position of this text at the climactic conclusion to the six woes, but also at the cusp of Yhwh’s self-revelation, suggests that it completes the rhetorical transition begun in Isa 28. As noted above, the book coordinates historical memories into a contiguous typology of agro-ecological destruction. This trajectory is imagined as agrarian impropriety in Isa 28, against which the chapter’s “out-going,” Torah-like parable invites fresh consideration of one’s actions in the present. The importance of Torah obedience to the eight chapters in question was fleshed out through the principle of “the creaturely body in place” in relation Isa 29–32. As a student of the book as a whole, IR realizes that the obedience on which membership in the community-apart depends constitutes not just “good behavior,” but rather a creaturely posture before the Creator (29:15-16, 23; cf. 1:2-3), which is exemplified in “right eating.” Finally, much as the farmer-disciple submits himself to Yhwh’s instruction (28:26; cf. 30:20-22), IR finds in 33:15 that submission of the creaturely body—feet, mouth, hands, ears, and eyes—leads to security (33:18-21), healing (33:24), and forgiveness (33:24). Insofar as 33:15 results in dramatic insight into the prophet’s cosmic horizon (34:1-4), carried forward in the Creator’s self-disclosure to “all flesh” (40:5), the transition introduced in Isa 28 here reaches its rhetorical consummation. Obedience is the door (Isa 28:1–32:20),

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submission, the key (Isa 33:1-16), and hope, the bright, new world that greets Isaiah’s reader-disciples on the other side (Isa 33:17–35:10).

6.2.4 Conclusion

Isa 28–35 persuades its reader to accept its geo-theological claims by virtue of those claims’ coherence with and contribution to the book’s grand, metahistorical vision. Complex patterns of recurring language and concepts prompt the reader to measure his or her interpretation of Isa 28–35 against this larger universe to which only students of the book have access, and as a result, to actualize with confidence the six woes’ call to Torah obedience (a matter of food and drink) in his or her own present. Real readers of the book of Isaiah will obviously differ in their response to the implied author’s accomplishment. Insofar as some do indeed assent to Isaiah’s vision, however, they align themselves with the text’s implied reader, whom the book presumes to persuade. Such readers also become trustworthy disciples of Isaiah of Jerusalem, who, upon admitting complicity in his people’s unclean speech (6:5), “hears the voice of Yhwh” and responds accordingly (6:8). In view of Isa 28–35, real readers sympathetic to Isaiah’s agrarian hope may wish to respond with a similar expression of “out-going” yet place-based trust: “Here I am—send me!” (6:8).

6.3 Avenues for Ongoing Research

This project addresses one of the most bedeviling problems in modern Isaiah studies: the relationship between the text’s diachronic history and its synchronic form. At the diachronic level, it enhances the historical model that is usually applied to the book’s construction. Modern scholars have typically worked with political and sociological data
and have thereby situated Isaiah’s language variously within Judah’s eighth-century political survival, the nation’s reconstitution under Cyrus, or the social conflicts that characterized fifth-century Persian Yehud. While valuable, such research frequently overlooks the agrarian experience and mindset of the people who composed, expanded, edited, and transmitted the biblical canon. Better appreciation for the holistic worldview expressed in the book helps to shed new light on its conceptual coherence. At the synchronic level, this project relies on modern literary theory to describe the book’s “epistemological layering,” which observes a crucial distinction between the knowledge possessed by Isaiah’s characters versus that of its readers. A precise description of this difference is necessary in order to understand the book’s rhetoric vis-à-vis its implied reader rather than the historical prophet’s rhetoric vis-à-vis his hypothetical audience(s). With the distinction between characters’ and readers’ knowledge always in view, I have sought to demonstrate that a complex system of lexical and conceptual patterns binds the diverse panels of Isaiah into a meaningful whole. These patterns suggest the self-referential nature of Isaiah, whereby its language at any given point has been made responsible to the larger book, and vice versa. A historically-informed, phenomenologically-appropriate study of Isaiah’s final form results in a much more precise description of the six woes’ rhetorical and theological centrality to the book than has hitherto been attempted: *Through the language of agrarian wisdom, Isa 28–35 issues a call to obedience that transports the reader from prior reflections on historical destruction into a holistic vision of ultimate hope.*

The following discussion proposes a variety of ways in which Isaiah scholars in particular, and biblical scholars more generally, might profit from these findings and
build upon them. Suggestions for both diachronic and synchronic study of the book are presented below.

6.3.1 Diachronic Study

This project seeks to improve the historical model—normally focused on political and sociological factors—that scholars typically apply to Isaiah’s construction. It argues that the biblical tradents’ premodern worldview can be understood to correspond in several key respects to that of selected agrarian thinkers at work in the world today. These contemporary agrarians value the importance of the creaturely body, the primacy of place, and the necessity of proper action; the Bible similarly regards creation as materially and historically shot through with moral value. This correspondence was defended through a wide range of comparative data gathered from archaeological, anthropological, and ethnographic sources, especially those that pertain directly to the historical periods relevant to the text’s construction. However, this defense also exposed the fact that phenomenologically “noisy” data is currently much more abundant for Judah’s Iron IIB and IIC than it is for Judah’s Persian Period. What evidence we have strongly suggests that the agrarian world of preexilic Israel more or less carried over through the Babylonian destruction; additional research focused on daily life in Persian Yehud could prove highly beneficial for strengthening our understanding of Isaiah from a diachronic perspective, since it is now generally agreed that much of Isaiah’s composition and canonical shaping took place in a postexilic context. For the time being, Isaiah scholars interested in compositional issues will benefit from this study’s portrait of
the relevant past, especially as pertains to the premodern, agrarian values common to Isaiah’s authorial world.

Without denying that multiple authors composed Isaiah over perhaps two or three hundred years, this project argues that better attention to their holistic worldview brings new clarity to the intratextual sophistication and conceptual coherence reflected in the book’s agro-ecological discourse. As a result, source- and redaction-critical scholars may wish to reexamine the criteria by which various compositional strata in the text are commonly identified. For example, Isa 30:20-22 offers an image of pilgrimage that is linked to the topic of idolatry through the language of the body. I do not claim to evaluate the diachronic origins of this text, and it may be that the language found here does in fact derive from two or more sources. Nevertheless, an agrarian hermeneutic suggests an associative logic that naturally leads from one image to the next. If the epistemological values discussed in chapter one of this study are incorporated into ongoing research on Isaiah’s compositional history, some redactional seams now taken for granted may need to be reassessed.

Finally, a historical model that remains sensitive to the Isaianic tradents’ agrarian worldview may have serious implications for research on other biblical texts, especially books (such as Hosea) that also seem to combine preexilic sources with postexilic expansions. Although a historical model that better accounts for the authors’ and redactors’ agrarian culture may not overturn the scholarly consensus regarding a book’s compositional diachrony, it will likely foster new insights regarding that book’s literary coherence.
6.3.2 Synchronic Study

At the synchronic level this study seeks to refine the application of modern literary theory to the book of Isaiah. Such theory proves to be an invaluable heuristic tool by which to understand the vast differences in knowledge that stand between Isaianic characters (cf. 6:9-10) and readers of the Isaianic “scroll” (cf. 34:16). Careful attention to these differences actively resists the tendency to assign a given text’s rhetorical function to a single historical situation, while at the same time it preserves the book’s literary complexity and diachronic depth. Scholars such as E. Conrad, K. P. Darr, and A. van Wieringen have already blazed this trail; building on their work, the present study may add a measure of precision to our appreciation of the book’s epistemological layering. In particular, by applying a four-part literary model (made up of characters, a narrator/hearer, an implied author/reader, and actual authors/readers) to the rhetoric of Isa 28–35, this project demonstrates that the six woes should not be assigned to late eighth-century Judah and read against a reconstruction of that era’s political events (which are nowhere made explicit in the text). Instead, the Isaianic tradents have redirected the prophetic word toward an implied reader of the book at large. A proper understanding of the woes’ rhetoric in written form therefore remains unavoidably dependent on a clear differentiation between the characters that the text depicts and the implied readership for whom the book is composed.

Future students of Isaiah—whether or not they aim to describe the implied reader’s encounter with the book—will benefit from this literary model, since Isaiah’s epistemological layering so dramatically determines the message it is perceived to convey. Scholars attempting to reconstruct the historical prophet’s sociopolitical context
should remember that as far as the book is concerned, the prophet self-presents as a literary character; what he says to his literary audience should not be conflated with or judged against modern reconstructions of eighth-century prophetic activity. To the degree that scholars may perceive a similarity between those reconstructions and certain events or discourses depicted in the book, they should also remain cognizant of the fact that Isaiah’s earliest compositional strata have been rolled together in such a way that individual passages are woven into a larger tapestry of language that determines their rhetorical function at any given point. This fact does not imply, however, that historical memory in Isaiah is discarded or eradicated; rather, the concept of memory is directed toward questions beyond those that modern historians typically ask.

Correspondingly, scholars who examine Isaiah’s rhetoric must remember that the book assumes that its reader learns through careful attention to and participation in its sophisticated epistemological layers (cf. 6:9-10). One’s assessment of the book’s message turns on what he or she sees the characters doing, how they respond to the prophetic word, and how the narrator’s sequential rendering of that word unfolds. A synchronic evaluation of Isaiah that ignores such details, so as to render an “impression” of the whole, will ultimately achieve little insight into the book as it has been transmitted and received. Conversely, new studies of Isaiah that rigorously investigate modern literary theory and apply it heuristically to the whole book will add to the work begun in the present study. In particular, if the conclusions reached regarding the implied reader’s encounter with Isa 28–35 are on target, these will have significant bearing on how the reader-oriented rhetoric of Isa 36–39 is understood to function within the book at large, with additional repercussions felt throughout Isa 40–66.
In addition to Isaiah’s epistemological layering, this project demonstrates that the book constitutes a complex web of interlocking *Leitwörter*, motifs, and recurring concepts. Agrarian values provide an especially important entry point into the associative logic through which the book’s intratextual patterns and typologies take shape. Further study of contemporary agrarianism by scholars fluent in biblical literature, in conversation with ongoing investigation into the book’s compositional history, will likely show with increased clarity the multitudinous ways in which Isaianic utterances have been built together to form a “scripture” serviceable to the Second Temple community in Judah and beyond. Attention to the text’s agrarian holism, in other words, makes a vital contribution to the work of scholars such as B. Childs, who correctly adduced that the Bible’s theological traditioning is an intrinsic feature of its compositional form, rather than a set of dogmatic conclusions mapped onto the Bible at a later date. If conceptual association, analogy, and typological patterning constitute the figural “leather and glue” by which the Isaianic tradents brought together their book, a historically- and phenomenologically-appropriate hermeneutic such as contemporary agrarianism inspires may prove invaluable to a more precise description of the Bible’s canonical shape at large.

Finally, insofar as this project makes a significant contribution to scholarly (and eventually popular) understandings of Isaiah, it has the potential to affect real readers of Jewish or Christian scripture in any number of unforeseen ways relevant to their religious thought and practice. One of these pertains to discussions concerning the intersection of the Bible and the world’s growing ecological crisis. In an age of rampant deforestation and biodiversity loss, warming temperatures and urban sprawl, confessional readers are
asking an important question: Is the Bible good for the planet? Christian readers in particular often express one of two minds: either the Bible in its canonical form is perceived as harmful, and thus it falls under an interpretive rubric of suspicion, or it is deemed to contain a variety of resources helpful for promoting ecological responsibility, and so is approached with a comparatively higher measure of commendation. In both cases, however, interpretation tends to proceed from a description of the ecological problem to a reading of isolated texts, rather than from a description of whole books to an interpretation of the problem. The result of such a procedure is biblical prooftexting, where both parties attempt to gather evidence from a micro-canon of passages such as Gen 1, Ps 104, and Job 38–41, thereby diverting attention from the rhetorical and theological integrity of the Bible they hope to read. By contrast, this study proposes an interpretive strategy that may assist readers in finding fresh answers to the globe’s most pressing dilemma, but in ways that remain responsible (even “submissive”) to whole biblical books. An agrarian hermeneutic applied to Isaiah suggests that readers miss its message of hope unless they take seriously the premodern, preindustrial text as it is. If we apply this strategy to the canon at large, the Bible’s geo-theological witness may indeed enliven our hearts, bodies, and souls in ways no Cartesian eye has yet perceived, nor any modern mind has yet imagined.
Appendix A: Annotated Translation of Isaiah 28–35

The following translation attempts to render transparent the style of Isa 28–35 to the English-language reader. I intend not to reconstruct a theoretical Urtext through emendation, but to read the received text (MT), with an eye for its most important literary characteristics. Exceptions to this rule involve translation of incomprehensible forms (e.g. 35:7, “lies-down”) and rare divergence from the MT’s breath marks. Use of the LXX is limited to those places where a difference between the MT and LXX serves to illumine a noteworthy translational choice or a lexical connection. The following describes my approach to the most relevant issues.

First, I use consistent English terminology for a given Hebrew root, even where the English-language reader might find such repetition odd or unnatural, such as a cognate accusative (e.g. “plunder plunder”; cf. 33:23). The arrangement and repetition of these roots (Leitwortstil) creates a web of lexical connections between various units of text. Preservation of this literary tapestry is crucial to the reader’s ability to access the Bible’s discursive style, not merely its basic content. The uniqueness of each Hebrew root is preserved by restricting unavoidable English variety (e.g. speak/word = root דּבר) to a certain “word cluster,” which then corresponds to a particular root. In other words, if a root requires multiple English words in order to capture the full range of its uses across Isaiah 28–35,
this variety is footnoted. Moreover, none of the words in the cluster are used for other Hebrew roots, with one exception (see note on 35:5, “opened”).

For all its benefits, however, a “root-oriented” approach to translation still fails to capture the vast majority of the text’s puns. Isaiah employs two main types of wordplay—polysemy and paronomasia. Polysemy refers to the capacity of a root to express two or more different concepts. Paronomasia, by contrast, involves two or more different words or roots brought into meaningful contact with one another through a particular kind of similarity, such as alliteration, assonance, or anagramic rearrangement of the radicals. The combination of these two forms of wordplay produces a dazzling network of intratextual relations. Some occurrences of polysemy and paronomasia are recorded in the footnotes, particularly those that are not easily reflected in translation but which bear upon the discussion in the body of this project. However, the text’s network of puns is far too dense (and subjectively determined) to note every one.

This translation regularly uses hyphenation in order to represent the total idea conveyed by the Hebrew form. For example, the roots ראה and שמע, when appearing in the Hiphil stem, might be translated “show” and “announce,” thus expressing the causative sense. In an effort to help the English-language reader to track the use of these and other Leitwörter, I render such forms by means of an English auxiliary verb (e.g. “make-”), yielding “make-seen” (= Hiphil ראה) and “make-heard” (= Hiphil שמע).
With respect to particles, prepositions, and conjunctions, I have not attempted one-to-one lexical correspondence with English. The variety of semantic relations in both languages is too varied and too fluid to make such a goal realistic. Nevertheless, for the sake of consistency, forms of הִנֵּה are always and exclusively rendered, “behold.” “Indeed” reflects asseverative syntax (regardless of the particle used), and “surely” always and exclusively reflects an intensifying infinitive absolute.

The character of Hebrew poetry poses an especially bedeviling challenge to the translator who seeks to represent emphasis. Hebrew verse denotes emphasis not with an easily translatable sign (such as an exclamation point), but rather through a word’s placement at the beginning or end of a phrase and the manner by which that word is reinforced through parallelism. For example, a colon may put its verb (A) first and a key noun (B) last. In the parallel colon, this order may repeat (yielding an ABAB pattern) or may be inverted (ABBA). Because meaning in English is heavily dependent on adherence to a specific word order, the translator is sometimes forced to choose between the emphasis encoded in the Hebrew phrase in isolation or the emphasis suggested through its parallel relation. The reader will find both strategies at work in my translation; the choice for one over the other is admittedly subjective, and often reflects what I deem to be the more important emphasis relative to the larger unit of text.
Like all poetry, Isaiah’s language is dense and more grammatically flexible than prose. Where a word is needed to render a phrase or clause comprehensible to the English-language reader, these appear in *italics*. I have followed the Hebrew’s marking for determination wherever possible, but an overly strict approach to this aspect of Hebrew verse is not advisable.¹ Likewise, verbal forms do not always agree in gender and number with their subjects. The smoothing-out of these disagreements is a subjective endeavor. Where I believe the discrepancy is a feature of biblical Hebrew’s natural tolerance for this kind of variation, I allow for agreement in English. In other cases, where the text may reflect corruption or an important redactional or text-critical issue, I let the discrepancy stand so that the English-language reader may encounter it for him or herself.

28:1-29: The First Woe

1 Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards² of Ephraim,

and the fading³ flower of their⁴ glorious beauty,

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² שִׁכֹּרֵי (drunkards) shares the root שֶׁכֶר with שֶׁכֶר (beer); cf. 28:7; 29:9. See: J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary*, ed. Peter Machinist, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 79-80. The word “drink” (root שָׁתָה; cf. 29:8) may denote the consumption of any liquid and is lexically unrelated.

³ נֹבֵל (fading) is part of a polysemic and paronomastic complex of terms. These radicals are used for forms of “fade” (cf. 1:30; 24:4; 28:4; 34:4), “fool” (cf. 9:16; 32:5-6), “jar” (cf. 22:15; 30:14), “lute” (cf. 5:12; 14:11), and “carcass” (cf. 5:25; 26:19). Root נַבֵּל further exhibits parasonance with אבל (mourn); cf. 3:26; 19:8; 24:4; 7; 33:9. Note that אבל is paired with נבֵל in 24:4. נבֵל further demonstrates homonymic paronomasia and parasonance with אבל (buffoon), which in turn shares its conceptual field with אבל; cf. 19:11, 13; 35:8.
which is on the head of a fertile valley\(^5\) of those-hammered by wine!

2 Behold, the Lord has a firm- and strong-one,
like a hail storm, a disastrous tempest;
like a storm of mighty overwhelming water
he brings-to-rest upon the earth\(^6\) by hand.

3 By feet will it be trampled\(^7\)—
the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim.

4 And the fading flower of their glorious beauty,
which is on the head of a fertile valley,
will be like an early-fig\(^8\) before summer;\(^9\)

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\(^4\) Masculine singular pronoun \(וֹ\), literally “his;” also in 28:4. Biblical Hebrew commonly uses singular pronouns for plural referents, and plural pronouns for singular referents. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 302-3. Throughout this translation, other examples of this grammatical characteristic will not be mentioned unless relevant.


\(^6\) אֶרֶץ may be translated as “earth” and “land.” This translation relies on context to determine which meaning is more appropriate.

\(^7\) קְשָׁרָה is a feminine plural form, literally, “will they be trampled.” Roberts finds a copying mistake, caused by the influence of בְּרַגְלַיִם (with feet), or as a second masculine form (you will be trampled) ending with the energetic suffix נָה, as suggested in BHS. See Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 342; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 4. In my view (following Watts), the action is expressed through a plural form because the feminine singular subject (עה, crown) functions as a collective for the “drunkards of Ephraim.” See Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 427; Waltke and O’Connor, 109. Throughout this translation, other examples of this grammatical characteristic will not be mentioned unless relevant.

\(^8\) This form’s final dagesh (כְּבִכּוּרָהּ) confuses the verse’s syntax with an unnecessary object pronoun; commentators leave it untranslated. See Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 427; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 4. כְּבִכּוּרָהּ (like an early-fig) exhibits homonymic paronomasia with כַּבִּירִים (mighty; 28:2); both images suggest destruction. כְּבִכּוּרָהּ is lexically unrelated to כִּבְרָה (fig tree; cf. 34:4), but shares the same conceptual field.
whichever see-er sees it—
while still in his palm—swallows it.

5 In that day, Yhwh of Armies will become
a beautiful crown
and a glorious diadem
for the remnant of his people,

6 and a spirit of justice
for the one-who-sits in justice,¹⁰
and prevailing-power
for those-turning-back battle to the gate.

7 But these also with wine stagger,
and with beer go-astray;
priest and prophet stagger with beer,
they are confused¹¹ from wine;
they go-astray from beer,

⁹ That is, the annual ingathering of fruit (late-summer). אֹסֶף (ingathering; cf. 32:10) and קַיִץ (summer; cf. 16:9; 18:6) probably both refer to the same event—the annual ingathering of fruit in late summer. The former term found here emphasizes the act of harvesting, whereas the latter term emphasizes the time of year during which it takes place. Its success was critical for one’s health and prosperity in the Judean highlands. The fruit was preserved through drying and served as a critical source of nourishment while the previous year’s grain supply began to dwindle and the coming year’s supply had yet to mature. See Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 38-42, 114-16; David J. A. Clines, ed., DCH 1:350.

¹⁰ The MT puts this verse’s main break (the atnach) under “justice” (#1) not “justice” (#2) as the translation suggests. Shifting the break better reflects the text’s natural meter.

¹¹ נִבְלְעוּ (confused) expresses the root בָּלוּ, which is polysemic with בָּלָה (swallows it); cf. 28:4. נִבְלְעוּ also exhibits parasonance with the root בָּלָל, meaning “mix-up/confound” in the sense of language (cf. Gen 11:7, 9) or in the sense of materials (cf. Num 6:15; Isa 30:24), which suggests the unit’s emphasis on alcohol (mixed drinks) and its effects. See Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 16; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 427; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 15.
they stagger in seeing,

they blunder in decision-making.\(^{12}\)

8  Indeed all the tables are full of vomit,

no place without filth.\(^{13}\)

9  To whom is he teaching knowledge?\(^{14}\)

And to whom does he make-comprehensible a message?\(^{15}\)

To those-weaned from milk,\(^{16}\)

separated from breasts?

10  “Yackity-yack, yackity-yack,
yada-yada, yada-yada,\(^{17}\)

\(^{12}\) Watts, following Irwin, observes that פֶלִילִיָּה (decision-making, root פָּל) exhibits parasonance with בלל (mix-up; see note on 28:7, “confused”), and translates “booze.” In my judgment this decision stretches the most straightforward meaning of the text, but attention to the word’s connection with “confused” and “swallow” (28:4) is nonetheless valuable. See Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 19–20; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 428.

\(^{13}\) The MT places the verse’s main break (the atnach) under צֹּא (filth), including it in the previous colon (“all the tables are full of vomit”). As in 28:6, moving the break better satisfies the text’s natural meter. See Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 20–21; Roberts, First Isaiah, 349; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 428; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 16. צֹּא expresses either the root יצא or צוא (cf. 4:4). The former of these is translated elsewhere as “out/go-out” (cf. 2:3; 28:29). Thus צֹּא might be translated plausibly as “spew,” “discharge,” or “excrement” in parallel with “vomit.” See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, HALOT 3:992; Clines, DCH 7:59.

\(^{14}\) While scholars generally agree that at some point in this passage the prophet appears to quote his adversaries, debate has occurred with respect to where that quote likely begins. Roberts and Wildberger, for example, take the quotation to begin at this colon, yielding “To whom is he teaching knowledge?...” As a result, the subject “he” must therefore refer to the prophet himself, meaning something like, “Who does this prophet think he is, trying to teach us? Does he think he is teaching mere children?” On this reading, 28:10 (“yackity-yack...”) may continue the prophet’s quotation, now a caricature of his adversaries’ babble, or it may be understood as the adversaries’ own attempt to mock the prophet for having spoken babble (a quote within a quote). By contrast, the translation offered here begins the quotation at 28:10, not 28:9. On this reading, the prophet simply quotes his adversaries’ drunken babble in 28:10; there is no quote within a quote. This decision suggests that the subject of 28:9 (“he”) is Yhwh, teacher to these individuals who have prattled on as nonsensically as babies. All that said, the text’s ambiguity on this front is unresolvable, as both options fit well within Isaiah’s overall vision and themes. Thus the text leaves open to the reader the option to consider various interpretations. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 348; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 14; contrast Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 426.

\(^{15}\) הבשׁ (message, cf. 28:19) shares the root שָׁשׁ with all forms of “hear” used in this translation.

\(^{16}\) מֵחָלָב (from milk) expresses the root חָל, translated elsewhere as “lard” (cf. 34:6–7).

\(^{17}\) Here צ enters direct speech (the drunkards’ babble) and is therefore best left untranslated.
a little there, a little there.”

11 Indeed with a stammering lip
and with a backward tongue
he\textsuperscript{19} will speak\textsuperscript{20} to this people,
to whom he said,

“This is the resting-place—
give-rest to the weary—
and this is the place-of-repose.”

But they were not willing\textsuperscript{21} to hear.

13 So the word of Yhwh for them will be:

“Yackity-yack, yackity-yack,
yada-yada, yada-yada,

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\textsuperscript{18} This line and the next seem to be a kind of nonsense speech or babble, with repeated syllables transliterated here: tsav lātsāv tsav lātsāv, qav lāqāv qav lāqāv. A literal translation being problematic, Childs renders the two lines as, “That same senseless refrain, over and over,” and notes the point. Both Kaiser and Watts leave the words in place as repeating syllables (“Saw to saw”), while Irwin and Wildberger uses transliteration plus a note on the possibility that the syllables represent a schoolchild’s drill. See Brevard S. Childs, \textit{Isaiah}, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 202-3; Irwin, \textit{Isaiah 28–33}, 22-23; Otto Kaiser, \textit{Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary}, trans. R. A. Wilson, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 243; Watts, \textit{Isaiah 1–33}, 426; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 15-17. Emerton has laid out the variety of interpretations that these difficult lines have suggested to readers over the centuries; see John A. Emerton, “Some Difficult Words in Isaiah 28.10 and 13,” in \textit{Biblical Hebrews, Biblical Texts: Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman}, eds. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Gillian Greenberg, JSOTSup 333; The Hebrew Bible and Its Versions 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 39-56. While Emerton ultimately opts for “filth and vomit” as the most plausible reading of the two repeated syllables צו and קו (cf. 28:8, קיו and קיו), he nonetheless notes the plausibility that the sounds constitute senseless babble, the view reflected in the translation here (Emerton, 45). A form of gibberish highlights the prophet’s criticism of his adversaries’ inebriated state. The first repeating syllable may also derive from the root צוה, translated elsewhere as “command;” cf. 29:13; 34:16. The second suggests both קו (measuring-line) and the root קוה, translated elsewhere as “hope” and which is reflected in the Greek and Latin.

\textsuperscript{19} That is, Yhwh (through the prophet).

\textsuperscript{20} Forms of the root דבר are translated “speak/speech” or “word.” Root רומ (say/saying) and root קרא (call/read/proclaim) are lexically unrelated, but share the same conceptual field.

\textsuperscript{21} The form אב (they were willing) is universally taken as a corrupt or variant form of the root אבה, especially as Q\textsuperscript{5} reads אבה. Cf. 1:19-20; 30:9, 15. See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 349; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 17.
a little there, a little there”—
so that they will walk and stumble backward,
and be fractured and ensnared and captured.

Therefore hear the word of Yhwh, scoffing men, who-govern this people which is in Jerusalem.

For you said,
“We have cut a covenant with Death,
and with Sheol we have made a pact.
The overwhelming scourge—when it passes—will not come to us,
for we have put lies to be our shelter,
and in falsehood we have been hidden.”

22 “Men” expresses the plural form אַנְשֵׁי, elsewhere “man” according to the singular אִישׁ; cf. 31:8. “Men” also expresses the form שָׁם, used as a collective in 33:8. אדם (human) is lexically unrelated, but shares the same conceptual field.

23 מֹשְׁלֵי (governors or those-who-govern) expresses the root משל, which is polysemic with “form-a-parable.” See Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 2:647; Clines, DCH 5:531-39. Roberts translates the form according to the former option, while Wildberger reads the latter option, citing the chapter’s overall emphasis on wisdom. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 349; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 28-29. The root’s equal footing in both conceptual fields (i.e. wisdom and governance) adds to the chapter’s complexity and density. Cf. 14:4-5, 10.

24 Translations “make,” “do,” “deed,” and “effect” all express the root עָשָׂה; cf. 28:21; 32:17. The roots יִצְתָּר (potter/shape), עַבֵּד (serve/work), and עַפֵּל (practice) are lexically unrelated but share the same conceptual field. “Indeed” always expresses asseverative syntax and is likewise unrelated.

25 הָזָה (pact) expresses the root חזה, which is polysemic with חֲזוֹן (vision, root חז). Various forms of the two words also exhibit homonymic paronomasia. For example, חז is identical with the participle meaning “visioner,” forms of which appear in 29:10 and 30:10. An alternate form חזתֶכֶם appears in 28:18; חזַת likewise indicates a vision in 22:2 and 29:11. See Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 1:301; Clines, DCH 3:182-83; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 434; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 29.

26 This translation follows the MT Qere ( desper) though the consonantal Ketib ( desper) may indicate an oar. Cf. 28:18, where the form is not defective. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 349; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 434; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 30.

27 This translation follows the MT Qere ( desper). See Roberts, First Isaiah, 349; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 434. Contrast Irwin and Wildberger, who read the Ketib ( desper): Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 27; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 30.
Therefore thus says the Lord Yhwh:

“Behold, I am establishing a stone—
a stone of greywacke,—
a precious cornerstone, a stable establishment;
the one-who-trusts will not waver.

And I shall put justice as a measuring-line
and righteousness as a measuring-tape;
hail will sweep-away the shelter of lies,
and the hiding-place water will overwhelm.

Then will be annulled your covenant with Death,
and your pact with Sheol will not arise;
the overwhelming scourge—when it passes—
you shall be with-regard-to it a trampling-place.

As-often-as it passes, it will take you;

28 Read as a participle, and thus a circumstantial clause following מתי. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 349; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 434; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 30. Contrast Irwin, who reads the perfect. Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 30-31.
30 פינת (cornerstone) is lexically unrelated to אבן (stone), but shares the same conceptual field.
31 יחש (waver) expresses the root חוש, which is polysemic with “hasten.” This correspondence suggests a conceptual similarity with the heart of those who “hurry” (root מהר; cf. 32:4; 35:4). The two roots appear together in 5:19 and 8:1, 3. See Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 1:300; Clines, DCH 3:178-79; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 435; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 32.
for morning by morning it will pass,
in the day and in the night,
and it will be only panic\textsuperscript{33}
to comprehend the message.”

20 For too short is the mattress for stretching-out,
and the blanket\textsuperscript{34} too narrow for wrapping-up.\textsuperscript{35}

21 For like Mount Perazim Yhwh will arise,\textsuperscript{36}
like the Basin of Gibeon he will shake;
to do his deed—strange his deed!—
and to work his work—foreign his work!

22 So now, do not show-yourselves-to-scoff,
lest your fetters\textsuperscript{37} become-firm;
for certain annihilation\textsuperscript{38} I have heard
from the Lord Yhwh of Armies concerning the entire earth.

\textsuperscript{33} 

\textsuperscript{34} 

\textsuperscript{35} 

\textsuperscript{36} 

\textsuperscript{37} 

\textsuperscript{38}
Listen and hear my voice, pay attention and hear my saying:

Does the ploughman plough all day in order to sow? He opens and harrows his soil; does he not—when he has smoothed its face—distribute nigella and cumin broadcast?

And does he not put wheat in a row and barley in a strip and emmer in its patch?

And he disciplines him with regard to judgment; his God teaches him.

For not with a sledge is threshed nigella,
nor is a cart wheel over cumin circled;
but with a rod is beaten nigella,
and cumin with a staff.

28 Bread-kernels\textsuperscript{48} are crushed,
but surely\textsuperscript{49} not forever are they threshed;
and he jostles\textsuperscript{50} the rollers of his cart,
but his steeds\textsuperscript{51} do not crush it.

29 This too from Yhwh of Armies goes-out;
he makes-wonderful the plan—
he increases\textsuperscript{52} aptitude.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{47}בֶחָרוּץ (with a sledge) expresses the root חרץ, which is polysemic with נֶחֱרָצָה (certain); cf. 28:22. The idea of “sharpness” connects the two terms, which may share their root.

\textsuperscript{48}םלֶחֶ (bread-kernels) is elsewhere translated more simply as “bread;” cf. 30:22, 23; 33:16. Here the term specifies the actual grains that will be made into the edible pita, hence the addition of “kernels.”

\textsuperscript{49}“Surely” indicates an intensifying infinitive absolute throughout this translation. In this construction, the verb appears twice; literally, “to thresh be threshed.” Cf. 30:19, 35:2. The Hebrew root שׁדּו (to thresh) appears unexpectedly as אָדוֹשׁ, which is probably a typographical anomaly. Scholars generally read an infinitive. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 358; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 442; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 50.

\textsuperscript{50}וְהָמַם (and he jostles) expresses the root המם, translated elsewhere as “roar;” cf. 30:6. The cart’s movement produces noise. More broadly, המם participates in a polysemic and paronomastic complex of roots expressing noisy, chaotic action. For example, המ (also translated “roar”) expresses the root המ and denotes the action of both lions and a turbulent sea (cf. 5:29-30), וָלַמ (crowd/tumult; cf. 17:12; 29:5, 7, 8; 31:4; 32:14; 33:13) expresses the root המ. Both רָמָה (rumble; cf. 16:11) and אָרֶם (noise; cf. 14:11) share the root המ with forms of “crowd/tumult.” קִולָה (pandemonium; cf. 22:5) expresses the root קול.

\textsuperscript{51}יוו (but his steeds) indicates the animal (horse), but the term may also denote the individual who drives the animal from a chariot. See Clines, DCH 6:787-88. The term is highly unusual in this context, as nowhere else in the Bible are “steeds” mentioned as providing traction for agricultural labor. In all other cases they function as indicators of military power.

\textsuperscript{52}הִגְדִּיל (he increases) shares the root גדל with forms of “great” and “tower;” cf. 29:6; 30:25; 33:18; 34:6.

29:1-14: The Second Woe

1 Woe to Ariel, Ariel,
town where David camped!
Add\textsuperscript{54} year upon year;
let festivals go-round-and-round.\textsuperscript{55}

2 “I will bring-straits upon Ariel,
and she will experience moaning and sighing,
and she will be to me like an ariel-altar.\textsuperscript{56}

3 And I will camp like a ring against you;
and I will besiege you \textit{with} an entrenchment\textsuperscript{57}
and I will raise against you siege-machines.

4 And you will be lower than the earth—you will speak,
and \textit{lower} than the dust will sink your sayings;
and like a ghost from the earth will be your voice,
and from the dust your sayings will chirp.

\textsuperscript{54} Masculine plural imperative; the form probably addresses Ariel’s collective inhabitants or leadership.
\textsuperscript{55} יִנְקֹפוּ (go-round-and-round) shares the root נקף with “hit-round;” cf. 10:34; 15:8; 17:6; 24:13. The term appears in 17:6 and 24:13 according to its agricultural usage; the one who “hits-round” uses a stick to loosen olives from their branches in order to harvest the fruit. See Borowski, \textit{Agriculture}, 119. The term is therefore related conceptually both to the “beating” of grain (root חבט; cf. 27:12; 28:27) and to the act of “encircling” (e.g. roots סבב, גלל, עלון, etc.).
\textsuperscript{56} אֲרִיאֵל (ariel-altar) is identical to the place name “Ariel” (cf. 29:1-2, 7; 33:7). The term denotes an altar specifically for burnt offerings, and thus shares a conceptual field with both sacrifice (cf. 34:5-7) and fire (cf. 29:6 and elsewhere). Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:87; Clines, \textit{DCH} 1:377.
\textsuperscript{57} בֶּצֶמֶשׁ (entrenchment) expresses the root הצמ, which is used to denote one’s physical or conceptual position relative to others; cf. 3:13; 21:8; 22:19. See: Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 65.
Like fine particulate will be the crowd of your strangers, and like passing chaff the crowd of terrorizers.” And it will be that instantly, suddenly, by Yhwh of Armies she will be visited, in thunder and in quaking and a great voice, tornado and tempest and a flame of consuming fire.

And like a dream, a vision of the night, will be the crowd of all the nations bringing-armament against Ariel, and all who-bring-armament against her and her stockade, and who-bring-straits upon her.

And it will be like when one-who-is-hungry dreams and behold, he eats, and he awakes and his throat is empty; or like when one-who-is-thirsty dreams

60 The versification disrupts the logic of this colon. The thought in 29:5c should be ascribed to the next idea in 29:6 rather than the previous one in 29:5a-b.
61 תיפקד (she will be visited) shares the root פקָד with פָּקָדוּ (lacking); cf. 34:16. See Brown, with Driver and Briggs, *BDB* 823. Roberts observes that the form is best understood as a third-person feminine form rather than a second-person masculine form (you will be visited) as the addressee is the feminine city, and the switch from second to third person speech follows in the subsequent verse. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 362.
62 אוֹכֵלָה (consuming) expresses the root אכל, translated elsewhere as “eat;” cf. 29:8 and elsewhere.
63 The form צֹבֶיהָ is defective. The simplest solution is to read it in coordination with the previous term “bringing-armament” (הַצֹּבְאִים), the ה having dropped out. See Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 66-67.
64 וְנַפְּשׁו (his throat) expresses the root נשׁ, translated elsewhere as “person.”
and behold, he drinks,
and he awakes and behold, he is weary,
and his throat throbs.65

Thus will be the crowd of all the nations,
those-who-bring-armament against Mount Zion.

9 Stupefy yourselves66 and be stupefied!
Smear yourselves and be smeared!67
You-who-are-drunk,68 but not on wine;
you-who-quaver, but not with beer.69

10 For Yhwh has poured70 on you a comatose spirit,
and he has shut your eyes, you prophets,71
and your heads, you visioners, he has covered.72

11 And the whole vision will be for you like the words of the sealed scroll,
which they give\textsuperscript{73} to one-who-knows scrolls,\textsuperscript{74} saying, “Read\textsuperscript{75} this.”

But he says, “I am not able, for it is sealed.”

12 Or the scroll is given to one-who-does-not-know scrolls, saying, “Read this.”

But he says, “I do not know scrolls.”

13 And the Lord said,

“Because this people approaches with its mouth\textsuperscript{76} and with its lips they honor me, but its heart it distances\textsuperscript{77} from me, and their fear of me has become the learned command of men,

therefore I will again\textsuperscript{78} deal-wonderfully with this people, wondrously and wonderfully;\textsuperscript{79} and will perish the wisdom of its wise,

\textsuperscript{73} Literally, “give it” (i.e. the scroll). English prefers to omit the resumptive pronoun.

\textsuperscript{74} That is, someone who knows “how to read” the scroll (singular).

\textsuperscript{75} קְרָא (read; cf. 29:12) expresses the root קָרָא, translated elsewhere as “call” (cf. 30:7; 31:4; 32:5; 34:14; 35:8) or “proclaim” (cf. 34:12, 16). See note on 28:11 (“speak”).

\textsuperscript{76} The MT places a break (a zageph) on הָעָם (this people), indicating that יִפְרֹּך (with its mouth) should be included in the next phrase. Moving the break to בְּפִיו better fits the parallelism of the consonantal text.

\textsuperscript{77} רִחַק (distances) expresses the root רָחַק, translated elsewhere as “far/afar;” cf. 30:27.

\textsuperscript{78} יֹסִיף (again) expresses the root יְסִיף. This form is best understood as a defective participle after הִנְנִי (cf. 38:5) conveying imminent action, whose verbal complement is found in the infinitive construct לְהַפְלִיא (deal-wonderfully with). See Waltke and O’Connor, An Introduction, 602, 627. Elsewhere יָסִיף is translated “add;” cf. 29:1.

\textsuperscript{79} In this colon, the verbal complement לְהַפְלִיא (deal-wonderfully with) is directed at the object “this people.” The final two words, וָפֶלֶא הַפְלֵא (wondrously and wonderfully) are cognate adverbial accusatives; the former is an infinitive absolute acting as a noun, and the latter is simply a noun. Both express the manner in which the Lord will “deal-wonderfully with this people.”
and the comprehension of its comprehending-ones will be hidden.”

29:15-24: The Third Woe

15 Woe to those-who-go-deep\(^{80}\) from Yhwh to hide a plan!
And in darkness are their deeds,
and they said, “Who sees us?” and “Who knows us?”

16 *How shifty of you!*\(^{81}\)
Should like clay the Potter\(^{82}\) be reckoned?
Or should the thing-made say of its Maker,
“He did not make me”?
Or the thing-shaped say of its Shaper,
“He does not comprehend”?

17 Is it not\(^{83}\) *that in* a small, little while\(^{84}\)
Lebanon will revert to orchard,\(^{85}\)

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\(^{80}\)הַמַּעֲמִיקִים (those-who-go-deep) expresses the root עָמֶק, which is polysemic with עַמֵּק (like the Basin); cf. 28:21.

\(^{81}\)הַפְכְּכֶם (how shifty of you!; root פָּכַךְ) is a one-word phrase often translated with a form of “perverse,” such as, “How perverse of you!” See Childs, *Isaiah*, 212. “Shifty” attempts to register both a sense of moral perversion but also to preserve the root’s basic meaning (i.e. change), and thus any intratextual connection it may suggest with 34:9, where a form of “perverse” would not be adequate to the root’s use in that context. See Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* 1:254; Clines, *DCH* 2:582.

\(^{82}\)יָצֶר (the Potter) expresses the root יָצָר, translated elsewhere “shape/Shaper.” See note on 28:15 (“made”).


\(^{84}\) For the syntax of this phrase, see Clines, *DCH* 6:291-92.

\(^{85}\) The agricultural term כַּרְמֶל may refer either to an “orchard” or to the place name “Carmel;” interpretation of the text is subjective on this point. Cf. 32:15-16; 33:9; 35:2. As “orchard,” the term
and Carmel as a forest will be reckoned?

18 And in that day the deaf will hear the words of a scroll, and from gloom and from darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

19 And the vulnerable in Yhwh will again rejoice, and needy humans in the Holy-One of Israel will exult.

20 For the terrorizer will be nothing and the scoffer will be annihilated; and cut-off will be all who-anticipate evil, who-condemn a human with a word, and for the arbitrator at the gate set-traps, and divert into chaos the righteous.

22 Therefore, thus says Yhwh to the house of Jacob, who ransomed Abraham:

“No longer will Jacob be ashamed, and no longer will his face be pale.”

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designates a perennial fruit-producing area, and can include vines as well as fruit and nut trees. Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 2:499; Clines, DCH 4:462.

86 הַחֵרְשִׁים (the deaf) expresses the root חֵרְשָׁה, which is polysemic with “ploughman;” cf. 28:24; 35:5.


88 מַחֲטִיאֵי (those-who-condemn) shares the root חֹטָא with “sin;” cf. 30:1; 31:7; 33:14.

89 יְקֹשׁוּן (set-traps) expresses the root קְשׁוּנ, which is probably related to the root קְשׁוּ (parasonance), the latter translated as “ensnare.” Both terms relate to the practice of fowling. Cf. 28:13. Clines, DCH 7:238; Clines, DCH 4:276. See Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 457; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 105.

90 וַיַּטּוּ (divert) expresses the root נָטָה, translated elsewhere as “extend;” cf. 5:25; 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4; 14:27; 31:3; 34:11.

91 Wildberger argues that this idiomatic phrase understands “justice” as part of a “pregnant expression” meaning something like, “to bend justice as regards the righteous by bringing forth worthless arguments.” Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 105.
For when he sees his children,

the deed of his hands in his proximity —

“They will sanctify my name.”

And they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,

and the God of Israel they will regard-as-terrifying.

And those whose spirit goes astray will know comprehension,

and those who grumble will learn instruction.

30:1–33: The Fourth Woe

“Woe to stubborn sons”—an oracle of Yhwh—

“by making a plan, but not from me,

and by weaving a blanket, but not of my spirit,

92 יֶחֱוָרוּ (be pale) expresses the root חור, which (in parallel with the root בושׁ, translated “shame”) exhibits both homonymic paronomasia and parasonance with חפר (abashed); cf. 33:9. See Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 106.

93 בְּקִרְבּוֹ (in his proximity) expresses the root קרב, translated elsewhere as “close;” cf. 33:13; 34:1.

94 קְדוֹשׁ (holy) expresses the root קדשׁ, translated elsewhere as “sanctify;” cf. 29:23; 30:29.


96 סֹרְרִים (stubborn) expresses the root סרר, which exhibits parasonance with the root סר (turn-aside/defection; i.e. the errant movement from a right road or direction). Cf. 30:11; 31:2, 6. See note on 30:11 (“turn-aside”).

97 The form לַעֲשׂוֹת is an infinitive construct with prefixed ל. That is, woe to stubborn sons, who are considered stubborn “by their act of” making a plan and “by their act of” weaving a blanket.

98 מַסֵּכָה וְלִנְסֹך (by weaving a blanket) is a polysemic, cognate accusative construction (root נסך) that can be translated in several different ways. Wildberger suggests a cultic interpretation—“pour out an offering”—which reads the main verb as “pour” rather than “weave” (cf. 29:10). Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 119-20. His suggestion is plausible; certainly the phrase’s connotations of idolatry should be recognized (cf. 30:22). Irwin similarly suggests, “casting an image.” Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 68, 72. The idiom may also denote the idea of “making alliances,” a political dimension that should likewise not be overlooked (cf.
in order to add\textsuperscript{99} sin upon sin!

2 Who-proceed\textsuperscript{100} to go-down to Egypt—
but of my mouth they do not ask—
to take-refuge in the refuge of Pharaoh,
and to shelter in the shade\textsuperscript{101} of Egypt.

3 So the refuge of Pharaoh for you will become shame,
and the shelter in the shade of Egypt, humiliation.

4 Though in Zoan are his officials,\textsuperscript{102}
and his envoys Hanes reach,

5 all are shamed\textsuperscript{103}
on account of a people which does not profit him—
not for help and not to profit,
but for shame and also for disgrace.”

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\textsuperscript{99} As Wildberger notes, the form סְפֹּת seems to derive from the root סָפָה (“sweep away”), but this would not make much sense in context. Reading some form of יִסָּפֶה—probably an infinitive—is best. Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 120. Cf. 29:1.

\textsuperscript{100} הַהֹלְכִים (who-proceed) expresses the root הָלַךְ, translated elsewhere as “go” and “walk.”

\textsuperscript{101} צֵל (shade) as a zone of protection suggests the fowling language (imagine: birds’ wings) introduced in 29:21. Cf. 34:15.

\textsuperscript{102} Presumably these are officials sent from the stubborn sons’ context to serve as envoys in Egypt. See Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 120-21. Roberts suggests that the officials are envoys sent from Nubia, based in part on textual correspondence with Isa 18:1-2. Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 383. But M. Lavik argues that the group designated as מַלְאָכִים in 18:2 (cf. 30:4) is best understood as messengers/envoys sent to Cush rather than from Cush, weakening Roberts’ argument. Marta Høyland Lavik, \textit{A People Tall and Smooth-Skinned: The Rhetoric of Isaiah 18}, VTSup 112 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 64.

\textsuperscript{103} As Wildberger points out, the form ההוביאשׁ is probably best read as a Hophal of the root בָּושׁ in keeping with the Qere and the theme established in 30:3. Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 121. However, if the Ketib is followed, the text reads, “all he caused-to-stink,” from the root בָּשׁ. This interpretation would bear conceptual similarity with 19:6, where the agro-ecological undoing of Egypt is imagined in part as “reeking” (root זָנַח). See also Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 381-82; Watts, \textit{Isaiah 1–33}, 462.
A dictum\textsuperscript{104} concerning the livestock of the Negev:

In a land of distress and straits,\textsuperscript{105} of lionesses and roaring\textsuperscript{106} lions,\textsuperscript{107} of asps and flying serpents,\textsuperscript{108} they lift upon the flanks of asses their wealth, and upon the humps of camels their treasures, to a people which does not profit,

And Egypt—vacuously and emptily they offer-help.

Therefore I call this-one:

“They are Rahab\textsuperscript{109} who sits.”\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{104} While 30:6-7 are somewhat opaque by any standard, Wildberger’s argument that מַשָּׂא (dictum/verdict) should be translated as “burden” is ultimately unconvincing. Because the term does not appear in a unified series (cf. 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1), he assumes that a redactor who did not understand the text must have inserted it. Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 130-31. This suggestion only strengthens the credibility of the translation offered above, since it admits the meaning it avoids. Biblical texts in general, and the book of Isaiah in particular, reflect greater interest in conceptual and thematic connections than in maintaining the purity of literary genres. That said, Wildberger’s choice highlights the fact that this word’s root (_means) figures in the description of the Negev’s trading economy (“lifting” goods onto the backs of livestock), and further links this unit to the description of idols being carried on the backs of livestock in 46:1. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 6 (trans. “oracle”); Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 460 (trans. “burden”).

\textsuperscript{105} “Distress and straits” evokes the Negev’s rugged topography and dangerous scarcity of water. צָרָה (distress) expresses the root צרר, which exhibits parasonance with the צָרָה, translated as “siege/besiege.” In combination with וְצוּקָה (straits; root צָוָּק), the Negev’s unique challenges to human life are made to recall the military threat against Ariel; cf. 29:2-3.

\textsuperscript{106} The form מֵהֶם (literally, “from them”) does not make sense in context. A form of המם (roar) is usually proposed instead. See Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 76-77; Roberts, First Isaiah, 385; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 460; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 131.

\textsuperscript{107} For the sake of convention, this translation follows the terminology for lions offered in HALOT, but the precise differences between these terms are largely unknown. Oded Borowski, Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1998), 208. Cf. 31:4; 35:9. See also Clines, DCH 4:513, 545.

\textsuperscript{108} (and… serpents) expresses the root סָרָף, translated elsewhere as “blaze;” cf. 33:12.


\textsuperscript{110} The enigmatic last line of this unit (רָהַב שָׁבֶת הוא) has drawn a good share of controversy and suggested emendations. First and third person forms are confused as the text moves freely between genders and numbers when referring to collective subjects. In the plural verbal form יַעְזֹרוּ (they help) probably refers to a collective body of Egyptians. The prophetic voice then says of “this-one” (feminine singular)—meaning Egypt—that “they” (masculine plural) are “Rahab” (a mythical...
8 Now come, write it on a tablet for them,
and on a scroll, etch it;
and it will become in a future day
a witness\textsuperscript{111} unto perpetuity.

9 For this is a rebellious people,
sons of deception,
sons not willing to hear the Torah\textsuperscript{112} of Yhwh,
who say to the seers, “Do not see,”
and to the visioners, “Do not envision for us straight-things.
Speak to us flattery,
envision delusions;

10 turn-aside\textsuperscript{113} from the road,
divert from the path,
let us have no more of\textsuperscript{114} the Holy-One of Israel.”

12 Therefore, thus says the Holy-One of Israel:

“Because you have rejected this word,
and you have put-confidence in extortion and in cunning,\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{111} Ancient manuscripts suggest that the form לָעַד is better read as לְעֵד. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 388; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 463; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 140.

\textsuperscript{112} תּוֹרַת (Torah of) expresses the root ירה, translated elsewhere as “teach;” cf. 28:9, 26; 30:20.

\textsuperscript{113} סֻרוּ (turn-aside) shares the root סָרָה, translated “defection”; cf. 31:2, 6. This term is unrelated to שׁוב (return), its conceptual opposite. However “turn-aside/defection” shares a conceptual field with “go-astray” (root צפה), i.e. physical and moral wandering. See note on 30:1 (“stubborn”).

\textsuperscript{114} Literally, “cause-to-cease (root כשָׁבַה) from us...” The Hebrew terminology is not easily reflected in English.
and you have relied on them,

13 therefore this iniquity will be for you
like a falling breach,

swelling in an elevated wall,
in which—suddenly, instantly—its fracture comes.

14 And its fracture is like the fracturing of a potters’ jar—
smashed, he does not pity it—

and among its smashed-pieces not a sherd is found

to scoop fire from a hearth—
or to skim water from a puddle.”

15 For thus says the Lord Yhwh, the Holy-One of Israel:

“Through return and rest will you be saved,
in quietness and in confidence

is your prevailing-power—

but you were not willing.

16 And you said, ‘No, on horses we will flee’—

for this reason you will flee indeed;

‘and upon a swift-horse we will ride’—

for this reason your pursuers will be swift.

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116 See note on 32:5 (“fool”).

117 מִיָּקוּד (from a hearth) expresses the root יָקוּד, translated elsewhere as “conflagration;” cf. 33:14.


119 נִרְכָּב (we will ride) expresses the root יֶרְכָּב, translated elsewhere as “chariot;” cf. 31:1.
One thousand before the rebuke of one,
before the rebuke of five you will flee,
until you are left
like the pole on the head of the mountain,
and like the banner upon the hill.”

And therefore Yhwh waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he goes-high to-have-compassion on you;
for a God of justice is Yhwh—
happy are all who-wait for him.

For a people in Zion, inhabiting Jerusalem—
you will surely weep no more.
He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry;
when he hears it, he answers you.

For the Lord gave to you
bread of distress and waters of deprivation,
but no longer concealed will your Teacher be,

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18 (and like the banner; root נסס) exhibits parasonance with ננס (we will flee; root נסנ) at the level of both its form and its root. Cf. 30:16; 31:8-9; 33:23; 35:10. Note also that the form נסס exhibits anagramic parasonance with the root נסנ; see notes on 28:20 and 30:1 (“blanket”).
20 See note on 30:6 (“straits”).
21 Sometimes translated “oppression,” the form לוחץ interpreted here as “deprivation” denotes “scanty” (Clines, *DCH* 4:539) or “minimal survival rations” (Coehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* 2:527).
22 (be concealed) expresses the root נסנ, which exhibits parasonance with the root נסס, translated with various forms of “blanket,” “weave,” and “pour.” See notes on 28:20 and 30:1 (“blanket”).
and your eyes will see your Teacher.

21 And your ears will hear a word from behind you saying,

“This is the road; walk in it,”

whether you go-right\(^{126}\) or go-left.

22 Then you will treat-as-unclean your images overlaid with silver,

and your ephods blanketed with gold;

you will scatter them\(^{127}\) like menstrual-cloth—

“Go-out!”\(^{128}\) you shall say of it.

23 And he will give rain to your seed

with which you sow the soil,

and bread \textit{will be} the produce of the soil,

and it will be rich and fertile.

Your cattle will graze\(^{129}\) in that day \textit{in} a wide pasture.

24 The oxen and the asses working the soil—

chickpea fodder\(^{130}\) they shall eat,

\[^{126}\] הָאַמְיִינוּ (go-right) is usually understood as הָיִימִינוּ, in parallel with פְּשַׁמְאִילוּ (go-left). See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 393; Irwin, \textit{Isaiah} 28–33, 91; Watts, \textit{Isaiah} 1–33, 467; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 168. Intriguingly, the variant hints at a form of the root נָמַק, which is thematically prescient to the unit, chapter, section, and book as a whole. הָאַמְיִינוּ (go-right) is lexically unrelated to forms of צָדָך, translated “righteous/ness.”

\[^{127}\] הָזֵרָם (you will scatter them) expresses the root הָזָרָה, which can be translated “winnow.” Cf. 29:5; 30:24, 28; 33:11.

\[^{128}\] Reading “dung,” Wildberger questions this form as an imperative of יָצָא, since he does not see who or what is supposed to “go-out.” Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 168. In agreement with Wildberger, Watts reads “filth.” Watts, \textit{Isaiah} 1–33, 467. If יָצָא is taken as a substantive adjective meaning menstrual cloth, however, this is precisely what would act as the subject of the imperative “go-out.” See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 392. The form exhibits parasonance with הָזָה (filth); cf. 4:4; 28:8.

\[^{129}\] הָרָה (graze) expresses the root הָרָה, translated elsewhere as “shepherds;” cf. 31:4.

\[^{130}\] Wildberger reads חָמִיץ as “silage” and בְּלִיל as “stirred.” Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 179. Other interpretations such as Roberts’ render חָמִיץ as “seasoned” and בְּלִיל as “fodder.” Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 392-93. See also Watts, \textit{Isaiah} 1–33, 468. This translation reads בְּלִיל as the noun “fodder” (which encodes a sense of “mixing” in the root; see Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:133) and חָמִיץ according to
which one scatters with a shovel and with a fork.\textsuperscript{131}

25 And on every lofty mountain
and on every lifted hill
will be streams of flowing water,
on a day of abundant killing,
when towers fall.

26 And the light of the white-moon\textsuperscript{132} will be like the sun-heat,\textsuperscript{133}
and the light of the sun-heat will be sevenfold,
like the light of seven days;
in a day \textit{when} Yhwh binds-up the fracture of his people,
and the wound\textsuperscript{134} of his striking, he will heal.

27 Behold, the name of Yhwh comes from afar—
his anger burning with heavy\textsuperscript{135} uplift!\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{131}וּבַמִּזְרֶה (and with a fork) expresses the root זרה, translated elsewhere as “scatter,” cf. 30:22, 24.

See Borowski, \textit{Agriculture}, 66-69.

\textsuperscript{132}לְבָנָה (white-moon) differs from two other terms found in the book of Isaiah that might be rendered with the English “moon”—יָרֵחַ (moon; cf. 13:10) and חֹדֶשׁ (new-moon; cf. 1:13). The translation “white-moon” attempts to highlight the object’s pale, cool light (root לבנ is used for “white” and “Lebanon”), whereas the latter terms emphasize its character as a celestial body or as a temporal marker, respectively.

\textsuperscript{133}חַמָּה (sun-heat), which could be rendered more simply as “sun,” suggests the object’s radiance rather than its status as a celestial object (שֶׁמֶשׁ; cf. 13:10). Cf. 34:2. See note on 30:26 (“white-moon”).

\textsuperscript{134}וּמַחַץ (and the wound) exhibits parasonance with לָחַץ (deprivation); cf. 30:20.

\textsuperscript{135}וְכֹבֶד (and heavy) expresses the root כֹּבֶד, translated elsewhere as “honor;” cf. 29:13; 32:2; 35:2.

\textsuperscript{136}מַשָּׂאָה (uplift) is a much debated form, but its root נשא (lift) is clear if the text is not emended. Both Clines and Wildberger read “burden.” Clines, \textit{DCH} 5:499; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 186. Koehler and Baumgartner, however, read “lifting up” or “exaltation.” Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 2:640. Other suggestions include Roberts’ “a thick column of smoke” (Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 396-97) and Irwin.
His lips are full of indignation
and his tongue is like a consuming fire;

and his spirit is like an overwhelming torrent-bed—
up to the neck it splices—
to sift\textsuperscript{137} nations with a sieve of catastrophe,
and a bridle leading astray
upon the jaws of peoples.

A song you will have,
like on a night when one sanctifies himself for a festival,
and a joyful heart,
like the one walking with a flute,
to come to the mountain of Yhwh,
to the Rock of Israel.

And Yhwh will make heard his majestic voice
and his descending arm he will show,\textsuperscript{138}
in raging anger and a flame of consuming fire,
pattering and storm and hail stone.\textsuperscript{139}

For because of the voice of Yhwh, Assyria is shattered;\textsuperscript{140}

and Watts’ “liver raging” (Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 97; Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 472-73), though the latter requires emendation.

\textsuperscript{137}לַהֲנָפָה (to sift) denotes the final activity in the process of cleaning grain; cf. 29:5. Borowski, Agriculture, 66-67. לַהֲנָפָה (to sift) and בְּנָפַת (with a sieve) express the root נוף, translated elsewhere as “swing;” cf. 30:32.

\textsuperscript{138}יַרְאֶה expresses the root ראה, translated elsewhere as “see.”

\textsuperscript{139}When Yhwh comes with a “heavy uplift” in 30:27, the image is a brewing storm. Here the precipitation is released through a linear progression of thought. נפץ (pattering; Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 2:711) suggests the front edge of the precipitation, while זֶרֶם (storm) suggests a heavy downpour or cloudburst, followed by even heavier and more destructive hailstones. Cf. 32:15 and 35:7 for similar syntax. נפץ (pattering) expresses the root נפץ, which is polysemic with “disperse;” cf. 33:3.
with a staff he strikes.\textsuperscript{141}

32 And every pass of the rod of discipline\textsuperscript{142} which Yhwh rests upon him will be to drums and to lyres, when in swinging\textsuperscript{143} battles\textsuperscript{144} he battles against it.\textsuperscript{145}

33 For arranged already\textsuperscript{146} is Tophteh, moreover for the king it is made-solid— deep and wide, its fire pit and abundant wood. The breath of Yhwh is like a torrent-bed of sulfur burning in it!

\textsuperscript{140}יֵחַת (shattered; root חתָה) conveys not only a physical breaking apart, or fracturing, but also emotional and psychological terror. Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:365; Clines, \textit{DCH} 3:337-38.

\textsuperscript{141} In this case, Yhwh most likely does the striking, not Assyria, especially given the context supplied by the next verse. However, the ambiguity of the masculine singular form יָכֶה (he strikes) gestures toward a larger theme in the book as a whole. Yhwh’s chosen instrument of destruction is Assyria, but Assyria eventually receives from Yhwh the same “striking” it once was commissioned to administer to others. Cf. 10:5-19.

\textsuperscript{142} As it appears, the form לִמְסֶדָה denotes an “establishment” or “foundation,” which makes little sense in context. A relatively minor change to the consonantal text (ד into ר) reads “discipline.” If this change is made, however, the form’s final-ה presents a new problem, as מוּסָרָה is otherwise unattested (whereas מוּסָר is common). Wildberger suggests repointing the emended form as מוּסָרֹה, yielding “its discipline.” See Irwin, \textit{Isaiah} 28–33, 103; Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 397; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 188. Watts attempts no emendation and translates “appointed staff.” Watts, \textit{Isaiah} 1–33, 472-73.

\textsuperscript{143} See note on 30:28 (“sift”).

\textsuperscript{144} The text is admittedly confusing, but there is no reason to emend וּבְמִלְחֲמוֹת (when in battles) to וּבִמְחֹלוֹת (dancing) as Wildberger and Irwin argue. Irwin, \textit{Isaiah} 28–33, 103; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 188. Yhwh’s battle with Assyria is imagined as a festal occasion.

\textsuperscript{145} A dagesh can supply the final pronoun to the form יַכֶּה (probably in reference to Assyria) needed to make sense of the syntax.

\textsuperscript{146} Literally, “from yesterday.” Hebrew uses this adverb idiomatically to refer to the past. See Waltke and O’Connor, \textit{An Introduction}, 658.
31:1 Woe to those-who-go-down to Egypt for help,
upon horses they rely!
And they put-confidence in chariots that are abundant,
and in steeds that are quite substantial,
but they do not focus\textsuperscript{147} on the Holy-One of Israel,
and Yhwh they do not seek.

2 But he too is wise, and he brought\textsuperscript{148} trouble,
and his words he did not turn-aside;\textsuperscript{149}
and he arose against the house of trouble,
and against the help of those-who-practice evil.

3 For Egypt is human, and not God,
and their horses are flesh and not spirit;
and Yhwh extends his hand,
and the helper stumbles and the helped-one falls;
and together all of them will be annihilated.

4 For thus said Yhwh to me:
“Just as the lion\textsuperscript{150} growls or the young-lion over its prey,
which, when a group of shepherds is called-together against it, because of their voice the lion is not shattered, and their tumult it does not answer—thus Yhwh of Armies goes-down to bring-armament against Mount Zion and against its hill.

5 Like flying birds, thus Yhwh of Armies will shield Jerusalem; shielding, he delivers, sparing, he rescues.”

6 Return to the one-from-whom the sons of Israel have deepened defection!

7 For in that day, each will reject his silver idols and his gold idols, which your sinful hands have made for yourselves.

8 And Assyria will fall by a sword not of man, and a non-human sword will consume him; and he himself will flee from before the sword, and his chosen-warriors forced-labor will become.

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150 This translation uses the English “lion” five different times, either on its own or as part of a related term (e.g. “lioness”). Only in this case and in 35:9 are two of the terms identical (אריה), though all share the same conceptual field. See note on 30:6 (“lion”).

151 מְלֹא (group of) expresses the root מלא, translated elsewhere as “full/full-of.”

152 Literally, “because of their tumult,” in the sense of, “with regard for their tumult” in parallel with, “because of their voice.” The preposition does not translate well alongside “answer.”

153 See note on 30:11 (“turn-aside”).

154 אֱלִיל (idol) exhibits parasonance with אֵל (god/God), suggesting a faux-god.

155 Wildberger points out that the shift from third to second person suggests that at some point in the future (“in that day”) each person will reject the idols which your hands (in the implied present) have made. Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 218. Contrast Roberts, First Isaiah, 401-3.
And his ledge will pass away from dismay,
and his officers will shatter because of the banner.
An oracle of Yhwh, whose light is in Zion
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

32:1 Behold, righteously a king will reign,\(^{156}\)
and as for officials,\(^{157}\) judiciously they will officiate;
and each will be like secret-haven \textit{from} the wind\(^{158}\)
and a hiding-place \textit{from} the storm,
like streams of water in a parched-place,\(^{159}\)
like the shade of heavy ledge in a weary land.

And the eyes of those-who-see will not be smeared-over,\(^{160}\)
and the ears of those-who-hear will pay-attention.

And the heart of those-who-are-hurried\(^{161}\) will comprehend knowledge,
and the tongue of those-who-stammer\(^{162}\) will hurry to speak clearly.

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\(^{156}\) יִמְלָךְ (will reign) shares the root מֶלֶךְ (king).
\(^{157}\) LXX reads more simply, “and officials” (καὶ ἄρχοντες = וְשָׂרִים), but the MT (וּלְשָׂרִים) is not incomprehensible as written.
\(^{158}\) רוּחַ (wind) is translated elsewhere as “spirit;” cf. 28:6 and elsewhere.
\(^{159}\) צָיוֹן (parched-place) expresses the root ציו. In 35:1, an alternate form of the same root (צִיָּה) is also rendered “parched-place.” See note on 34:14 (“wild-beasts”). LXX reads “in Zion” (ἐν Σιων = בְּצִיוֹן; cf. 31:9), which serves to highlight the paronomastic connection between the two consonantal forms. As Yhwh causes streams to gush forth in the desert, so too he causes streams to flow in Zion.
\(^{160}\) תִשְׁעֶינָה (smeared-over) as written appears to derive from the root שׁעה (focus), but this cannot be correct (“the eyes of those-who-see will not focus”) in light of the verse’s wholly positive message. Readers sometimes remove the negative, but as Wildberger points out, this requires a rather drastic change to the consonantal text; a better option is to understand תִשְׁעֶינָה as a form of שׁעע. Cf. 29:9. Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 231. See also Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 409.
\(^{161}\) נִמְהָרִים (and the heart of those-who-are-hurried) may be an idiom that refers to a rash or thoughtless individual, as translated by Irwin and Roberts. Irwin, \textit{Isaiah 28–33}, 121-22; Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 409. Watts and Wildberger preserve a literal rendering of the root מהר (hurry) as in the translation above. Watts, \textit{Isaiah 1–33}, 480; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 230. Cf. 35:4.
No longer will a fool\textsuperscript{163} be called noble, and a thug will not be described\textsuperscript{164} as reputable.\textsuperscript{165}

For a fool foolishness speaks, and his heart does evil—

doing profanity,\textsuperscript{166} and speaking to Yhwh a stray-thing, leaving-empty the hungry person and liquid from the thirsty he withholds.

And the thug—his weapons\textsuperscript{167} are trouble; he plans schemes to thwart the poor\textsuperscript{168} with false sayings, and with a word to restrict justice from the needy.\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{162} According to Koehler and Baumgartner, the substantive adjective translated as “those-who-stammer” shows metathesis: עִלְּגִים = root לְנָב ְל. Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 2:828. Clines, on the other hand, gives this form its own entry and does not cross-reference the two roots. Clines, \textit{DCH} 4:555; Clines, \textit{DCH} 6:400. Even if \textit{HALOT} is wrong on this point, at a minimum עִלְּגִים exhibits anagramic paronomasia with the forms of לְנָב found in 28:11 and 33:19, also translated as “stammer.”

\textsuperscript{163} לְנָב (fool; cf. 32:6) expresses the root נבל, which is part of a polysemic and paronomastic complex of terms. These radicals are used for forms of “fade” (cf. 28:1, 4; 34:4), “jar” (cf. 30:14), “lute” (cf. 5:12), and “carcass” (cf. 5:25). Further exhibits parasonance with the root אָל (mourn); cf. 3:26; 19:8; 24:4, 7; 33:9. Note that אָל is paired with לְנָב in 24:4; see note on 33:9 (“mourns”). Further demonstrates homonymic paronomasia and parasonance with the root נָב (buffoon), which in turn shares its conceptual field with אָל; cf. 19:11, 13; 35:8.

\textsuperscript{164} יֵאָמֵר (described) expresses the root אמר, translated elsewhere as “say.”

\textsuperscript{165} שׁוֹעַ (reputable) shares the root ישׁע with “save/salvation.”

\textsuperscript{166} See note on 33:14 (“profane”).

\textsuperscript{167} כֵּלָיו (his weapons) expresses the root כלה, which exhibits several paronomastic links with the two forms of “thug” offered in 32:5 and 32:7 (כֵּל and כִּלַי, respectively; root נכל).

\textsuperscript{168} לְחַבֵּל (to thwart) shares the root חַבֵּל with חֶבֶל (rope); cf. 33:20, 23. One might say that the thug “ropes-up” the poor.

\textsuperscript{169} עֲנִוִּים (poor) is a mixed form likely resulting from the confusion between the roots עָנָי (“poor”) and עֶנָיו (“vulnerable”). This translation follows the \textit{Qere} (עֲנִיִּים); cf. 29:19 for “vulnerable” (עֶנָיו). \textit{BDB} conflates the meanings (and the roots), but as Wildberger argues, some distinction should be drawn between them even while their relatedness is observed. See: Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 104, 232; Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:355-56.

\textsuperscript{170} Wildberger interprets this colon as, “even when the poor one says what is just,” arguing that it is arbitrary to supply a verbal form. Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 232-33. Roberts’ rendering (“Even when the needy speaks what is just”) is similar. Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 409. Watts follows Irwin in translating, “and
But one-who-is-noble plans noble-things,
and he on-account-of noble-things will arise.

Carefree women, arise!
Hear my voice!
Confident daughters,
listen to my saying.

In just days less than a year,
those-who-are-confident will shake,
for annihilated will be the vintage, and the ingathering will not come.

Tremble, carefree-women;
shake, confident-daughters!
Strip and be bare,

by slandering the needy in court.” Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 125-26; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 481-82. The translation above suggests that the verb לְחַבֵּל has gapped from the previous colon. The thug thwarts or “ropes-up” the poor with false sayings. Then in reverse parallel, with a word the thug [verbal idea] justice from the needy. The implied verbal idea in the latter colon should reflect the meaning of the verb given in the former colon, hence “restrict.”

That is, the annual grape harvest (midsummer). See Borowski, Agriculture, 109-10; Clines, DCH 2:245.

אֹסֶף (ingathering) and קַיִץ (summer; cf. 28:4) both probably refer to the same event—the annual ingathering of fruit (late summer). The former term found here emphasizes the act of harvesting, whereas the latter term emphasizes the time of year during which it takes place. Its success was critical for one’s health and prosperity in the Judean highlands. The fruit was preserved through drying and served as a critical source of nourishment while the previous year’s grain supply began to dwindle and the coming year’s supply had yet to mature. Cf. 28:4; 34:4. See Borowski, Agriculture, 38-42, 114-16; Clines, DCH 1:350.

The gender and number of the imperative forms in 32:11 are somewhat confused. חִרְדוּ (tremble) is masculine plural, but logically must be directed at the feminine plural group of carefree individuals (“carefree-women”). Roberts suggests a copyist’s mistake. Roberts, First Isaiah, 414. The other imperatives may be Aramaicized feminine singular forms, again directed at a plural group (“confident-daughters”). See Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 245.
and gird your loins!\textsuperscript{174}

12 Upon your breasts, lamenting\textsuperscript{175}—
for the desirable fields,
for the fruitful vine,

13 for the soil of my people
on which thorny briars\textsuperscript{176} go-up;
indeed, for all the glad houses
of the celebratory town.

14 For the palace is abandoned,
the city’s crowd is forsaken;
citadel\textsuperscript{177} and keep\textsuperscript{178} will become
ever\textsuperscript{179} caves\textsuperscript{180} unto perpetuity—

\textsuperscript{174} After חֲלָצָיִם (loins), something like “with sackcloth” is probably implied.

\textsuperscript{175} LXX reflects a feminine imperative rather than the MT’s masculine plural participle, which better accords with the preceding forms and the present syntax. Both Roberts and Wildberger translate accordingly. The MT is not incomprehensible, however. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 413-14; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 244-45.

\textsuperscript{176} שָׁמִיר קֹץ (thorny briars), as well as וָחוֹחַ קִמּוֹשׂ סִירִים (brambles, prickers and barbs; cf. 34:13), all reflect the abundant diversity of thorn-bearing plants found in Israel-Palestine today. At one time they may have specified specific species or categories of thorny or stinging plants, but not enough information is available in the biblical text to assign them names with certainty today. Borowski, Agriculture, 162; Zohary, Plants, 153. The English translations are intended to provide a sense of the rich vocabulary Isaiah uses, but their association with each Hebrew term is admittedly arbitrary. Elsewhere in Isaiah, the term שָׁמִיר (thorns) is frequently paired with קַשׁ (thistles); e.g. 5:6.

\textsuperscript{177} עֹפֶל (citadel) exhibits parasonance and homonymic paronomasia with לֶב (gloom); cf. 29:18.

\textsuperscript{178} Sometimes translated “watchtower,” בַחַן (keep) is a hapax legomenon and possible Egyptian loanword. Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 246. The translation “keep” seeks to avoid conceptual confusion with either “watch” (root עָצַב) or “tower/great” (root גָּדַל). Alongside עֹפֶל (citadel), the term most likely indicates an area of urban human dwelling, with an emphasis on its stability and security. בַחַן is polysemic with בֹּחַן (greywacke); see note on 28:16 (“greywacke”). See Clines, DCH 2:137; Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 1:119.

\textsuperscript{179} בְעַד (ever) is confounding in this context. The preposition usually means “away from,” “behind,” “about,” “on behalf of” and the like. See Brown, with Driver and Briggs, BDB 126). None of these options makes good sense, and so some scholars prefer to delete it. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 413-14. Some form of “forever,” an expansion of עַד עֹלָם (unto perpetuity), appears to be best. See Irwin, Isaiah 28–33, 131; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 246.
the gladness of onagers,
the grazing-space\textsuperscript{181} of flocks…

15 …until upon us is laid-bare\textsuperscript{182} a spirit from on-high,
and the desert becomes an orchard,
and the orchard\textsuperscript{183} as a forest is reckoned.
16 Then will dwell in the desert justice,
and righteousness will inhabit the orchard.
17 And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the work of righteousness,
quietness and confidence unto perpetuity.
18 And my people will inhabit a peaceful home,\textsuperscript{184}
and in confident dwellings
and in carefree places-of-rest.
19 And when the forest goes-down, it will go-down,\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{180} Wildberger notes that מְעָרוֹת (caves; root עָרָה) has caused problems for translators who would instead prefer to read “bare-places” or “cleared-fields” (root עָרָה; see Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 2:616), since it may be difficult to conceive of how a citadel and keep could become a cave. Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 246. See Roberts’ translation for an example of this emendation. Roberts, First Isaiah, 413-14. Such an alteration, however, requires one to define an otherwise unattested form. It is not needed—human dwellings, when devoid of human inhabitants, often become homes for wild creatures in the same way that a natural cave functions. That said, מְעָרוֹת (caves) and וְעֹרָה (be-bare; cf. 32:11) share the root עָרָה, which exhibits parasonance with the root עָרָה (lay-bare; cf. 32:15), paranomasia that is not easily captured in English if the translation “bare-places” is avoided.

\textsuperscript{181} מִרְעֵה (grazing-space) exhibits homonymic paronomasia with מְעָרוֹת (caves; cf. 32:14), while its root (עָרָה) exhibits anagramic paronomasia with root עָרָה (lay-bare; cf. 32:15). See note on 32:14 (“caves”).

\textsuperscript{182} מִיִּעֶרֶה (laid-bare) expresses the root עָרָה, which exhibits parasonance with the root עָרָה (be-bare). See note on 32:14 (“caves”).

\textsuperscript{183} The Qere understands this form (לְכֵרִים) as having lost the definite article ה. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 415; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 256. See note on 29:17 (“orchard”).

\textsuperscript{184} נֶוֶה (home) could be translated “settlement,” “dwelling,” or “meadow.” The term connotes a rural, pastoral location rather than an urban house; cf. 34:13; 35:7. Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 2:678-79.
and when lowering, the city will be low.

20 Happy are you who-sow beside every body-of-water,

who-send-forth the feet of the bullock and the donkey!

33:1–35:10: The Sixth Woe

1 Woe, Destroyer, 186

though you are not destroyed,

and Betrayer,

whom they have not betrayed!

When you have finished destroying,

you will be destroyed,

when you have completed187 betraying,

they will betray you.

2 Yhwh, be gracious to us—

in you we hope.

Be their arm in the mornings;

indeed our salvation in a time of distress.188

185 The Hebrew appears confused: נֶסֶךְ בְּרֶדֶת וּבָרַד. “And it hails” makes little sense; both Roberts and Wildberger suggest reading דָּרָד. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 415; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 257.

186 שׁוֹדֵד (Destroyer) expresses the root שׁדד, which exhibits parsonance and homonymic paronomasia with “harrow” (root שׂדד). See note on 28:24 (“harrow”).

187 BDB posits this form, כַּנְּלֹתְךָ, to be a Hiphil infinitive of an otherwise unattested root, נלה. Scholars often read a form of הנָה announcet elsewhere as “annihilate.” See Brown, with Driver and Briggs, BDB 649; Roberts, First Isaiah, 421; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 490; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 266.
3 From the voice of the crowd, peoples retreat; from your going-high, nations disperse.\(^{189}\)

4 And your\(^{190}\) spoil is gathered as the grasshopper gathers; like a rushing of locusts, one rushes on it.

5 Elevated is Yhwh, for he dwells on-high; he fills Zion with justice and righteousness.

6 And he will be the trustworthiness of your times, a fortune\(^{191}\) of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of Yhwh is his\(^{192}\) treasure.

7 Behold, those-in-Ariel\(^{193}\) cry-out in the street;

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\(^{188}\) See note on 30:6 ("strait").

\(^{189}\) נָפְצוּ (disperse) expresses the root נָפַץ, of which נָפַץ ("distribute;" cf. 28:25) is possibly a secondary form and with which it exhibits parasonance. Brown, with Driver and Briggs, BDB 659; Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 2:711; Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 3:918-19. See note on 30:30 ("hail stone").

\(^{190}\) Masculine plural. The referent is unclear.

\(^{191}\) חֹסֶן (fortune) connotes stored-up and protected treasure/wealth. See Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 1:338; Clines, DCH 3:283-84.

\(^{192}\) One expects a second-person masculine singular pronoun instead of a third-person pronoun, to match “your times.”

\(^{193}\) אֶרְאֶלָּם (those-in-Ariel) is confounding, with no solution that stands out. Clines understands it as a gentilic of the place name “Ariel” (cf. 29:1, 2, 7). The final-ם may be a masculine plural suffix, or an odd
envoys of peace\textsuperscript{194} bitterly weep.

8 Highways are desolate,

the wayfarer\textsuperscript{195} ceases;

he frustrates the covenant,

he rejects cities,\textsuperscript{196}

he does not reckon men.\textsuperscript{197}

9 The land mourns,\textsuperscript{198} it languishes;

Lebanon is abashed,\textsuperscript{199} it rots-away.

Sharon becomes like the Aravah;

Bashan and Carmel\textsuperscript{200} drop-their-leaves.

10 “Now I arise,” says Yhwh—

“now I go-high, now I am lifted-up!

11 You conceive stubble,

you give-birth\textsuperscript{201} to straw;\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{194} Wildberger reads “messengers from Salem” in parallel with “people of Ariel,” both being alternate names for Jerusalem. The text more clearly reads “peace” than “Salem,” but the observation at least suggests the possibility of a pun. Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 423; Watts, \textit{Isaiah 1–33}, Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 277.

\textsuperscript{195} “Wayfarer” expresses the phrase אֹרַח עֹבֵר, which could be rendered more literally as “the one who passes by/on a path.” See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 423.

\textsuperscript{196} Readers sometimes emend עָרִים (cities) to עדִים (witnesses), which is thought to fit the immediate context concerning covenant somewhat better. See Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 277.

\textsuperscript{197} “Mourner” expresses the root עֶבֶר, which exhibits parasonance with נבל (fade/fool). See note on 32:5 (“fool”).

\textsuperscript{198} הֶחְפִיר (abashed) expresses the root חפר, which exhibits anagramic paronomasia with חָרָם (disgrace), as well as sharing the same conceptual field. Cf. 30:5. See note on 33:14 (“profane”).

\textsuperscript{199} See note on 29:17 (“orchard”).

\textsuperscript{200} See note on 29:17 (“orchard”).

\textsuperscript{201} תֵּלְדוּ (give-birth) shares the root דָּוִי with בָּנִים (children); cf. 29:23.
your spirit is a fire that consumes you.

12 Peoples will become blazes of lime;
as slashed briars in the fire they will be kindled.”

13 “Hear, ones-far-away, what I have done;
acknowledge, ones-close-by, my prevailing-power.

14 In Zion sinners dread;
quivering seizes the profane.203

‘Who of us can reside-with the consuming fire?
Who of us can reside-with the perpetual conflagration?’204

15 The one-who-walks in righteousness
and speaks on-the-level,
who-rejects exaction205 and extortion,
who-drops206 his palms from grasping a bribe,
who-plugs his ear from hearing bloodshed,
and who-shuts207 his eyes from seeing trouble—

16 he on-heights will dwell,
a stockade208 of ledges is his elevated-place,

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202 שׁעַי (stubble) and שׁוֹ (straw) are alternate terms for the same large-sized byproduct of the winnowing process. Cf. 29:5; 30:22, 24, 28. Borowski, Agriculture, 69.
201 שׁנַי (profane; cf. 32:6) expresses the root ןִיט (abash) and חֲנֵפִים (disgrace). See note on 33:9 (“abashed”).
204 See note on 30:14 (“hearth”).
205 וּבֶצַע (exaction) can be understood as “profiteering,” and thus shares the same conceptual field as roots עָלִי (profit) and עֵשֶׁק (extortion); cf. 30:5-6; 12.
206 The basic meaning of this participle מָעַר is “shakes out.” English “drops” differentiates from “shake” in the sense of trembling (cf. 32:10) while also preserving the correspondence with the root’s use in 33:9.
207 מַעְבַּר (and shuts) expresses the root מַעְבַּר, which is polysemic with מַעְבַּר (be substantial); cf. 31:1.
his bread is given,
his waters, trustworthy.”

17 A king in his loveliness your eyes will envision;
they will see an expansive\textsuperscript{209} land.

18 Your heart will ponder\textsuperscript{210} horror—
“Where is the one-who-counts?\textsuperscript{211}
Where is the weigher?
Where is the one-who-counts the towers?”

19 The insolent\textsuperscript{212} people you will not see—
the people of deep lip which prevents\textsuperscript{213} hearing
and a stammering tongue without comprehension.

20 Envision Zion,
town of our regular-assemblys;
your eyes will see Jerusalem,
a carefree home, a tent one does not pack-up,\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{208} Literally, “stockades;” the plural form confuses the singular “elevated-place” to which it corresponds.
\textsuperscript{209} מַרְחַקִּים (expansive) shares the root מַרְחִיק with forms translated elsewhere as “far/far-away,” and is sometimes translated “broad.” See Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 302. Roberts translates, “stretches afar.”
\textsuperscript{210} יֶהְגֶּה (ponder) expresses the root הָג (growl); cf. 31:4. The term implies vocal muttering while meditating. Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:237-38; Clines, \textit{DCH} 2:487-88.
\textsuperscript{211} סֹפֵר (one-who-counts) shares the root סֵפֶר with סֵפֶר (scroll); cf. 29:11-12; 34:4, 16.
\textsuperscript{212} נוֹעָז (insolent) expresses the root עָז (refuge); cf. 30:2-3. See Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 2:420, 797, 808-9; Clines, \textit{DCH} 4:241; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 295. Irwin, Roberts and Watts translate “barbarous/barbarian” in relation to the people’s “deep lip” (i.e. foreign speech). See Irwin, \textit{Isaiah 28–33}, 156-57; Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 424; Watts, \textit{Isaiah 1–33}, 497.
\textsuperscript{213} The privative sense is communicated through the preposition מ, not a primary verb.
whose tent-peg one never pulls-up,
and none of its ropes will be snapped.

21 But there Yhwh is magnificent for us,
a place of rivers, wide-handed canals;
no oar\textsuperscript{215} will go in it,
and no magnificent vessel\textsuperscript{216} will pass it by.

22 For Yhwh is our judge;
Yhwh is our lawmaker;\textsuperscript{217}
Yhwh is our king—
he is the one-who-saves us.

23 Abandoned are your ropes—
they cannot make-firm their pole,\textsuperscript{218}
they cannot spread a banner.

Then will be apportioned abundant spoil;\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{214} The hapax legomenon יִצְעָן (pack-up; root צען) seems to convey the packing or rolling up of a tent for the purpose of traveling to a new location. Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 3:1041-42; Clines, DCH 7:141; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 296.

\textsuperscript{215} שַׁיִט (oar) expresses the root שׁוט, which is polysemic with שׁוֹט (scourge). Cf. 28:15 and 28:18, where the “scourge” is described as overwhelming, characteristic of a flood. שַׁיִט further exhibits parasonance and homonymic paronomasia with שַׁיֵת (thistle) used elsewhere in Isaiah (e.g 5:6), though not in chapters 28–35. See note on 32:13 (“briars”).

\textsuperscript{216} צִי (vessel) is polysemic with צִי (wild-beast); cf. 34:14.

\textsuperscript{217} מְחֹקְקֵנוּ (our lawmaker) shares the root חֻקָּה with חֻקָּה (etch it); cf. 30:8. That is, the lawmaker is one who inscribes laws or delivers edicts. Wildberger argues against this translation, opting instead for “one who leads us” (Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 297), while Roberts and Watts both translate “commander.” Roberts, First Isaiah, 424; Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 496. Though the sense is indeed leadership, the root חֻקָּה ties that leadership to the prescription of written decrees. Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 1:347; Clines, DCH 3:303-4.

\textsuperscript{218} The Hebrew includes a deictic marker; literally, “make-firm thus (כֵן) their pole,” whose root כּון also means “be firm.”

\textsuperscript{219} Literally, “will be apportioned even-unto/up-to (עַד) abundant spoil.” The preposition עַד expresses measure or degree, but in this case does not translate well into English. See Waltke and O’Connor, An Introduction, 215-16.
the lame\textsuperscript{220} will plunder plunder.

24 And none dwelling \textit{there} will say, “I am sick;”
the people who-inhabit it will be lifted of iniquity.\textsuperscript{221}

34:1 Draw-close, nations, to hear,
and countries, pay-attention;
let the earth and its fullness hear,
the world and all its outgrowth.

2 For wrath Yhwh has concerning all the nations,
and hot-fury\textsuperscript{222} concerning all their armies;
he exterminates them—
he gives-them-up for slaughter.

3 And their slain will be expelled,
and from their corpses will go-up their stench;
and mountains from their blood will melt,

4 and the whole army of heaven will decay.\textsuperscript{223}
And like a scroll the heavens will be rolled-back,
and their whole army will fade
as fades a leaf from a vine,

\textsuperscript{220} פִּסְחִים (lame) expresses the root פָּסֹחַ, which is polysemic with פִּסָח (spare); cf. 31:5.
\textsuperscript{221} To “lift” (root נָשָׂא) iniquity/sin is a common idiom denoting forgiveness.
\textsuperscript{222} At the level of form, חֵמָה (hot-fury; root חָמָה) exhibits anagromatic paronomasia with חַמָּה (sun-heat; root חָמָה). The two roots additionally exhibit parasonance; cf. 30:26.
\textsuperscript{223} The versification defeats the text’s natural meter by separating the first colon of 34:4 from the last colon of 34:3. והם אובדים (and they will melt) parallels והם ימתו (and they will decay). See Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 312.
or like the fading of a fig.

5 “For in the heavens my sword saturates\(^224\) —
behold, upon Edom it goes-down,
upon a people I exterminate\(^225\) justly.”

6 A sword Yhwh has,
full of blood, enriched with lard,
with the blood of sheep and bucks,\(^226\)
with the lard of the kidneys of rams.
For a sacrifice has Yhwh in Bozrah,
and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

7 And aurochs will go-down with them,
and bulls with mighty-bulls;\(^227\)
and it\(^228\) will saturate their land with blood,
and their dust with lard will be enriched.

8 For a day of vengeance Yhwh has,

\(^{224}\) As Wildberger points out, one would expect a Qal form, or perhaps even a Niphal, instead of the Piel רִוְּתָה (saturate; root רַה) in this context. The form may be a copyist’s mistake, or a mistake may lie elsewhere in the verse. At any rate, the solutions are pure conjecture, and so the text’s difficulty is best preserved for the reader. The resultative sense of the Piel stem may simply be suspended until the verb is repeated in 34:7. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 434; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 313.

\(^{225}\) Literally, “a people of my extermination (חֶרְמִי).”

\(^{226}\) The two animals mentioned here, sheep and bucks, are adult males—robust animals in their prime. The sheep in particular should be understood as well-pastured, fattened up for the sacrificial purposes reflected in the passage. כָּרִים (sheep; root כָּר; cf. 30:23. Borowski, Every Living Thing, 83-84.

\(^{227}\) “Mighty-bulls” is an admittedly deficient translation for the Hebrew אַבִּירִים. Perhaps because English has not evolved alongside a system of animal sacrifice, it lacks the vocabulary to reflect correctly the nuances of the Bible’s different terms for “bull.” See Borowski, Every Living Thing, 211-13.

\(^{228}\) That is, Yhwh’s sword; cf. 34:5.
a year of settlement\textsuperscript{229} for Zion’s cause.

9 And its torrent-beds will be shifted\textsuperscript{230} into pitch,
and its dust into sulfur,
and its land will become burning pitch.

10 Night and day it will not be extinguished;
perpetually will go-up its smoke.
From generation to generation it will be barren;\textsuperscript{231}
forever and ever no one shall pass through it.

11 And the pelican and the bustard\textsuperscript{232} will possess it,
and the eared-owl and the raven\textsuperscript{233} will dwell in it;
and he will extend against it
a measuring-line of chaos and stones of entropy.

12 Its\textsuperscript{234} aristocrats—no kingdom is there \textit{that} they proclaim,\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{229}שִׁלּוּמִים (settlement) shares the root 
שָׁלוֹם with "peace;" cf. 32:17. The term is both economic and judicial.

\textsuperscript{230}See note on 29:16 ("shifty").

\textsuperscript{231}תֶּחֱרָב (barren) expresses the root
חרב, which is polysemic with \textit{חֶרֶב} (sword); cf. 34:5. It is unrelated to those roots translated "bare" (ערר and \textit{ערה}) found elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{232}Three of the four birds found in this verse are also mentioned in the lists of unclean birds found in Lev 11:13-19 and Deut 14:12-18—the pelican, eared-owl, and raven. See Borowski, \textit{Every Living Thing}, 150. Schwartz’s identification of \textit{קִפּוֹד} as “bittern” is plausible given the context, though \textit{HALOT} translates it as a porcupine or hedgehog. Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 3:1117; Donald R. Schwartz, \textit{Noah’s Ark: An Annotated Encyclopedia of Every Animal Species in the Hebrew Bible} (Northvale, NJ; Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 2000), 350-51. If \textit{HALOT} is correct, \textit{קִפּוֹד} is probably included alongside the birds for phonological reasons, in parallel with “pelican” (קָאַת). Clines also offers the more traditional “hedgehog,” but includes more recent suggestions of various types of owls or a bustard. Clines, \textit{DCH} 7:274, 603-4. In short, the term is unknown, though some type of unclean bird seems the likeliest solution.

\textsuperscript{233}וְעֹרֵב (and the raven) expresses the root \textit{ערב}, which is polysemic with \textit{ערָבָה} (Aravah); cf. 33:9; 35:1, 6). It further exhibits anagramic paronomasia with forms of \textit{עבר}, translated “pass;” cf. 34:10.

\textsuperscript{234}That is, the land of Edom’s aristocrats.

\textsuperscript{235}This colon is problematic and possibly corrupt. Literally, “It’s aristocrats—\textit{and no} kingdom is there…” English does better to communicate the conjunction simply through a long dash. Scholars frequently make changes so as to render the idea more straightforward. See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 434; Watts, \textit{Isaiah 34–66}, 529-30; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 314-15.

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and all its officials will be nothing.

13 And into its palaces go-up brambles, prickers and barbs\(^\text{236}\) in its fortresses; and it will become the home of jackals, a grassy-abode for ostriches.

14 Wild-beasts\(^\text{237}\) with buzzards\(^\text{238}\) will meet, and the goat-demon\(^\text{239}\) to its mate will call; indeed there Lilith will take-repose, and find for herself a resting-place.

15 There will nest the sandgrouse,\(^\text{240}\) and it will lay,\(^\text{241}\) and hatch\(^\text{242}\) and brood in its shade;

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\(^{236}\) See note on 32:13 (“thorny briars”).

\(^{237}\) צִיִּים (wild-beasts; root צי, sometimes translated “desert creatures,” may be related to those terms translated elsewhere as “parched-place” (both צָיוֹן and צָיוָה, root ציו— the beasts’ natural habitat; cf. 32:2; 35:1. See note on 32:2 (“parched-place”). At one time, the term may have applied to a species or group of species, but if so, this meaning is now lost. It is generally understood to denote desert-dwelling creatures of one kind or another. Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 3:1020; Clines, DCH 7:113.

\(^{238}\) אִיִּים (buzzards) may appear in the singular (איyah) in Lev 11:14 and Deut 14:13, as part of the list of unclean birds (see note on 34:11, “bustard”), though it should be noted that neither HALOT nor Clines finds a connection between the forms. Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 1:38-39; Clines, DCH 1:204, 208). Both read the more traditional “jackals” or “dogs.” See also Schwartz, Noah’s Ark, 343). Wildberger translates the two zoological terms found here (“wild-beasts” and “buzzards”) as mythical “demons” and “goblins,” in parallel with the goat-demon and Lilith, but this interpretation is far from certain, and disregards the latter term’s appearance in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Wildberger, Isaiah 23–29, 315. This translation follows Borowski, who associates the term with the avian genus Buteo [sic], but, following Shulow (1967), he mistakenly names it a kite (genus Buteo = “hawk/buzzard,” whereas genus Milvus = “kite”). Borowski, Every Living Thing, 149. In short, identification of אִיִּים is both textually uncertain and further confused by scholars’ imprecise English terminology.

\(^{239}\) שָׂעִיר (goat-demon) appears elsewhere simply as a young, male goat; cf. 13:21. See Borowski, Every Living Thing, 57, 63. In parallel with לִּילִית (Lilith), the translation “goat-demon” is probably justified.

\(^{240}\) קִפּוֹז (sandgrouse) is an unidentified hapax legomenon often translated “arrow-snake.” See Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT 3:1118; Clines, DCH 7:274. The sandgrouse (e.g. Pterocles orientalis) is a desert resident whose behaviors fit the immediate context (lay, hatch, brood), as well as the unit’s overall interest in wild birds and mammals, somewhat better than a snake.

\(^{241}\) וַתְּמַלֵּט (lay; i.e. eggs) expresses the root מلن, translated elsewhere as “rescue;” cf. 31:5.

\(^{242}\) וּבָקְעָה (hatch) expresses the root בקע, translated elsewhere as “crack-forth;” cf. 35:6.
indeed there will collect kites,\textsuperscript{243} each with its mate.

16 Seek from the scroll of Yhwh and read: not one from-among these is missing; each with its mate, they are not lacking. “For my mouth—it has commanded;” and his spirit—it has collected them.

17 And he has let-fall for them the lot, and his hand has apportioned it for them with the measuring-line; unto perpetuity they will possess it, from generation to generation they will dwell in it.

35:1 Desert and parched-place will be glad,\textsuperscript{244} and the Aravah will exult and bloom\textsuperscript{245} like the lily.\textsuperscript{246}

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\textsuperscript{243} דַיּוֹת (kites) presents yet another lexical riddle. It is almost certainly a bird, in that its singular form (דַיָּה) appears in the list of unclean birds in Deut 14:13. Borowski relates the term to the genus Milvus (red or black kite), which comports with ancient translations and the work of other contemporary scholars. Like the “buzzards” of 34:14, however, he follows Shulow (1967) in calling the bird a falcon (genus Milvus = “kite,” not Falco = “falcon”). Borowski, \textit{Every Living Thing}, 149-50. See also Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 316; Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:220; Clines, \textit{DCH} 2:433; Schwartz, \textit{Noah’s Ark}, 256, 259-60; Richard Porter and Simon Aspinall, \textit{Birds of the Middle East}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., illus. John Gale, Mike Langman, and Brian Small, Princeton Field Guides (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 76-77.

\textsuperscript{244} What appears to be an object suffix $ם$ on the end of יְשֻׂשׂוּם (they will be glad) is possibly an enclitic (see Waltke and O’Connor, 158-59), or dittography, now functioning like a paragogic-$נ$ that has assimilated to the following $מ$. See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 439; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah 28–39}, 341.

\textsuperscript{245} תִפְרַח (bloom) expresses the root פְּרַח, which exhibits parasonance with פָּקַח (open) and פָּחַד (open); cf. 35:6. The three roots all share the same conceptual field.

\textsuperscript{246} For כַּחֲבַצָּלֶת (like the lily; cf. Songs 2:1), both \textit{HALOT} and Clines read “asphodel,” or meadow saffron. Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 1:287; Clines, \textit{DCH} 2:373. Zohary reads “lily,” but distinguishes the term from the “true” white lily (\textit{Lilium candidum}), which he associates with the Hebrew שׁוּשַׁן. Zohary, \textit{Plants}, 176. Musselman likewise does not assign the term to a single species, but does put it
It will surely blossom and exult—
indeed with exultation and exclamation;
the honor of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon.
They will see the honor of Yhwh,
the splendor of our God.

Make-firm weak hands,
and stumbling knees, strengthen!

Say to those-hurried at heart:247
“Be firm! Do not fear!
Behold, your God comes with vengeance,
the retribution248 of God—
he will come and save you.”

Then will be opened249 the eyes of the blind,
and the ears of the deaf will be opened;
then will leap like a deer the lame,
and will exclaim the tongue of the mute.
For in the desert will crack-forth250 water,
and torrent-beds in the Aravah.

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247 This phrase, לְנִמְהֲרֵי־לֵב, is probably idiomatic for fear, rashness, or confusion. See Roberts, First Isaiah, 439; Watts, Isaiah 34–66, 529; Wildberger, Isaiah 28–39, 340. See note on 32:4 (“hurried”).
248 גְּמוּל (retribution) expresses the root גמל, which is polysemic with גְּמוּלֵי (weaned); cf. 28:9.
249 Openation “opened” expresses two different roots in 35:5—םָפַק (re: eyes) and הפִּים (re: ears), the latter matching “open” as used in 28:24. See note on 35:1 (“bloom”).
250 See note on 34:14 (“hatch”).

within the genus Tulipa. Musselman, A Dictionary, 123-24. The exact species being unidentifiable, “lily” is appropriately general enough to fit a range of different species to which the term might have applied.
The mirage\textsuperscript{251} will become a pond,
and the hamada\textsuperscript{252} springs of water;
in the home of jackals, \textit{where} it lies-down,\textsuperscript{253}
a grassy-abode\textsuperscript{254} \textit{will become} reeds\textsuperscript{255} and papyrus.

And there will be a highway and a road,
and the “Holy Road” will it be called.
No unclean-thing will pass-it-by,
but it will be for him who-walks the road,\textsuperscript{256}
and no buffoons\textsuperscript{257} will stray \textit{upon it}.

No lion will be there,
and no violent\textsuperscript{258} animal will go-up on it—

\textsuperscript{251} The word \textit{שָׁרָב} is obscure, and could be translated as “dry, thirsty land.” “Mirage” is suggested by its Arabic counterpart, and fits with the notion that it becomes an actual (rather than illusory) pond in the prophet’s estimation. See Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 4:1651; Clines, \textit{DCH} 8:559; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–29, 342.

\textsuperscript{252} In parallel with \textit{שָׁרָב} (mirage), \textit{צִמָּאוֹן} (hamada) denotes a waterless region. Koehler and Baumgartner, \textit{HALOT} 3:1032; Clines, \textit{DCH} 7:128. Translation “hamada” is the contemporary term used for desert pavement—the pebbly surface characteristic of the Negev that is notoriously bereft of running water.

\textsuperscript{253} The \textit{dagesh} appearing in this form (\textit{רִבְצָהּ}) may suggest “its lying-place,” in which case the vowel pointing would need to be emended. Either way, some alteration is needed to make sense of the form in this context. See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 440; Watts, \textit{Isaiah} 33–66, 531; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 342-43.

\textsuperscript{254} Wildberger avoids the translation “grass” for \textit{חָצִיר}, opting instead of “place,” based on the colon’s syntactical similarity with 34:13, where \textit{חָצִיר} denotes the abode of ostriches. Similarly Watts translates “enclosure,” while Roberts reads “home [of ostriches].” While the term certainly does connotate living space rather than vegetation alone, “grass” should not be lost from the text. The three botanical terms in order are grass, reeds, and papyrus. Each requires more water than the last—grass requires only rainfall, reeds must have their roots in the water, and papyrus is thoroughly aquatic. This linear progression drives home the concept in view—abundant water pouring through a previously arid land. See Roberts, \textit{First Isaiah}, 440; Watts, \textit{Isaiah} 34–66, 531-32; Wildberger, \textit{Isaiah} 28–39, 343.

\textsuperscript{255} Probably \textit{Phragmites australis}, a common water-loving reed also called “cane.” Zohary, \textit{Plants}, 134; Musselman, \textit{A Dictionary}, 121-22.

\textsuperscript{256} The verse’s main break (the \textit{attach}) falls on \textit{לָמוֹ} (for him) not \textit{דֶּרֶךְ} (road) as the translation suggests. The problem may stem from some words having been added as glosses. Moving the breathmark makes better sense of the consonantal text’s pacing and syntax as we now have it.

\textsuperscript{257} See note on 32:5 (“fool”).

\textsuperscript{258} \textit{וּפְרִיץ} (violent) expresses the root \textit{פּרץ}, translated elsewhere as “breach;” cf. 30:13.
it will not be found there.

And the redeemed will walk,

10 and the ransomed of Yhwh will return.²⁵⁹

They will come to Zion with exclamation,

with perpetual joy upon their head;

gladness and joy will approach,

while sorrow and sadness flee.

²⁵⁹ The versification upsets the text’s natural meter. The last colon of 35:9 is better understood in connection with the first colon of 35:10 rather than the content of 34:9.
Appendix B: Glossary of Abbreviations Pertaining to the Text’s Epistemological Layering

The following list of terms and their descriptions appears in greater detail in chapter two of this study (“Isaiah 28: A Matter of Food and Drink”), under the subsection titled “Isaiah and the Transmission of Knowledge.” They are provided here in abbreviated form as a reference aid.

IJ  Isaiah of Jerusalem. IJ does not refer to the actual historical prophet, but to the prophet as literary character. IJ stands at a “level-one” situation within the text. He is not bound by modern notions of how prophets typically relate to their communities, nor to modern notions of chronology or cause and effect. He prophesies during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1), not in the “eighth century BCE” (a modern description of history foreign to the text’s self-presentation). Whatever IJ knows or does not know remains totally encased in the text-world in which he appears.

LA  The Literary Audience. LA designates the individuals, groups, or nations that IJ addresses. Like IJ, LA is a “level-one” character in the text, and thus whatever LA knows is encased in the text-world in which LA appears. In the present study, LA often refers to those members of IJ’s audience who remain resistant to his message.
D  The Disciple(s) of IJ. D refers to the group that subscribes obediently to IJ’s message at a “level-one” situation in the text, and may include his children (cf. 8:16-18).

N  The Narrator. N re-presents IJ’s prophetic word to an implied hearer (IH), and is thus responsible for the pacing and selection of IJ’s prior message. Like IJ, N is a character in the text but stands at one epistemological level above IJ, LA, and D (level two). This means that N relates to IJ’s words in hindsight and is therefore able to comment on and explain them. Occasionally IJ and N are conflated through first-person narration (cf. 8:1-4). Notably, N aims to cultivate comprehension among N’s audience (IH), whereas IJ is given a divine directive to prevent comprehension among his LA (cf. 6:9-10).

IH  The Implied Hearer. IH is a “level-two” character in the text, standing parallel to N. IH experiences the re-presented word of IJ at N’s discretion and relates to that word in hindsight along with N. IH hears the text in sequence, and therefore “discovers” the prophetic word in the form and fashion that N chooses.

IA  The Implied Author. IA is a textual construct inhabiting a “level-three” situation above N and IJ. IA is the theoretical fashioner of N’s voice and thus observes the text in its canonical form rather than inhabiting it as a first- or second-level character. IA makes scripture for a scripture-conscious audience (i.e. an audience that has the ability to study the whole book).
The Implied Reader. IR is a “level-three” textual construct standing in parallel to IA, observing the text rather than inhabiting it. IR therefore has the ability to study IA’s book intertextually and so draw a wide range of connections between its diverse parts in ways that are impossible for IH, who is bound to N’s pacing and presentation of the prophetic word. In other words, IR is not bound to a sequential reading of the text, but importantly, learns by observing IH’s sequential education. IR “learns about learning,” and can theoretically respond by actualizing the book of Isaiah in the real world.

A complete diagram of the preceding definitions includes actual authors and readers who stand at a level-four position outside the text.¹ This study, however, remains bound to an assessment of the implied reader’s present and thus focuses on levels three and below.

Figure 7

actual author(s)

implied author (IA)

Isaiah of Jerusalem → literary audience (LA) and disciples (D)

narrator (N)

implied bearer (IH)

implied reader (IR)

actual reader(s)
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Biography

Daniel John Stulac was born in Wichita, KS, on January 15, 1979, and grew up in University City, MO, a suburb of Saint Louis. Graduating as valedictorian from Westminster Christian Academy in 1997, he subsequently attended Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH, from which he earned a BA (English and Creative Writing) with honors in 2001. After living and working in Rwanda as the Director of Agricultural Development for Partners in Health, he returned to the United States in 2009 to begin studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. Stulac was selected for a ministry fellowship through the Forum for Theological Education in 2010; he also received the Benjamin Stanton Award in Old Testament through the Seminary in 2011 and earned his MDiv in 2012. Since matriculating at Duke University, Stulac has published one peer-reviewed article, “Rethinking Suspicion: A Canonical-Agrarian Reading of Isaiah 65” (*JTI* Fall 2015), and two magazine articles, “Dead Men Live” (*Plough Quarterly* Spr 2016) and “A Gospel of the Ground” (*Plough Quarterly* Spr 2015). He has presented his research at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016, and frequently serves as a guest speaker and lecturer in ecclesial settings. Stulac received two graduate research fellowships from Duke’s Graduate School in 2015 and 2016, and has also been awarded three Perilman Summer Fellowships through Duke’s Jewish Studies Program (2014, 2015, and 2016).