

CONCORDIA COMMENTARY

A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture

ISAIAH 1-12

Andrew H. Bartelt



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Author's Preface

It is hard to overstate the importance and significance of the great vision (1:1) of Isaiah. Within the Hebrew canon, it stands at the head of the Latter Prophets. Isaiah is the prophet read most often in the synagogue *Haftarot* lectionary (the reading of prophetic texts that follows the reading of the *Torah*), and his book provides the most lectionary pericopes from the Old Testament in the Christian Common Lectionary. It is the most quoted book in the New Testament, both directly and in a host of indirect allusions. Jerome asserted that Isaiah “should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he describes all the mysteries [*ministeria*, ‘actions, activities’] of Christ and the Church so clearly that that you would think he is composing a history of what has already happened rather than prophesying about what is to come.”¹

The Christian tradition has dubbed the book of Isaiah the “Fifth Gospel” ever since, and certainly it is arguably so. This moniker is a wonderful ascription to the importance and role of these sixty-six chapters in biblical theology, but Isaiah was first a prophet to and for his own times, and such a direct connection to “the activities of Christ” can easily transpose a reading and understanding of this great prophet far beyond his times and directly (for Christians) into the New Testament.

In my own tradition, hearing the great texts of Isaiah as a child, especially as they were used in the Advent and Lenten seasons, often contributed to this concern. As a “PK” (“Preacher’s Kid”), I often heard preaching and teaching about how these prophecies were essentially about the future, held in place and in plan by the God of all history, whose plan of salvation for all *was*, in fact, the plan. And we of “New Testament faith” now also knew not only that the prophecies came true but also in greater detail how they played out. In my adult faith, I continue to affirm that these realities are profoundly and most certainly true. But what did that all mean for Isaiah and his family, including his “Prophet’s Kids” (7:3; 8:3), for his larger family of faith, and for all those who seemed to turn a deaf ear? Was there a difference between the faith of the Old Testament saints, who “without obtaining the things that were promised,” were “seeing and welcoming them from afar” (Heb 11:13), and us, to whom, “in these last days” (Heb 1:2, cf. Is 2:2) God “has spoken by his Son” (Heb 1:2), we who have the prophetic Word made sure and made flesh, yet who, by the way, have seen and heard only from a distance? Of course, we have God’s Word and sacramental signs, but didn’t they, too, in their day have his Word through the prophets and “sacramental” signs of God’s presence?

¹ From the prologue to Jerome’s translation of Isaiah in *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, cited in Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel*, 1.

Indeed, those of any age who trust in Yahweh live in the confidence that their salvation and life are secure in the God who holds the future in his hands. That is what Isaiah preached to his own disciples and “PKs” (8:16–20). But their faith also affected the present and the near future, which, as in the day-to-day life of God’s people in any age, had a more immediate relevancy. As the most obvious case study in these early chapters of Isaiah, the great promise of 7:14 speaks of a virgin who will conceive, but, reading this verse as a piece of chapter 7, of chapters 7–8, and of chapters 6–8, the context clearly relates that key moment in the lives of King Ahaz and Prophet Isaiah to the issues of that day, issues of king and kingdom, of leadership and trust in the face of fear and failure, of judgment and destruction.

Those are the fundamental questions that lie at the basis of a historical and theological commentary: how the past relates to the future and how both the past and the future relate to the present, not only of the interpreter and “hearer” in our day, but also—and first—to the “present time” of both the author and his original hearer in their day. The historical dimension also includes an understanding of the languages that were used then, since the language and other cultural idioms and media of “their day” remain at a distance from our day.

In my own day, I was fortunate to have been born into a tradition that not only took the Word of God seriously but also emphasized, especially in theological education and pastoral formation, the need for an understanding of the biblical languages, “the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained,” as Luther put it.² And with the languages came also a tradition of language teachers who brought an energizing awareness of the joy of searching the Scriptures, including Walter “Doc” Jennrich back in the old Milwaukee days (at then Concordia College, now Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon). John Ribar stands out among those who taught at that grand experiment in theological education that was Concordia Senior College (now the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.), and he first introduced those of us in his Hebrew Readings class to the complexities of Isaiah 7–8. Others at that time and place included Merlin Rehm, who later became a mentor-colleague in the Concordia “system”; Roddy Braun; and Herb Spomer. And I include my good friend and classmate Greg K. Smith for his encouragement in those years as we sat together at the feet of Walter Wenthe. As it would turn out, Pastor Smith would later join me for a time as the Greek/Hebrew teaching tandem at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Graduate work brought me into the larger world of scholarship, at the University of Cambridge with Ronald Clements, with whom I read much of Isaiah, and at the University of Michigan, where George Mendenhall put the Hebrew Bible into the context of ancient Near East languages and cultures and Peter Machinist helped place Isaiah into the world of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

² AE 45:360.

Most influentially, David Noel Freedman pushed his students into the discipline of a close and careful reading of the text in light of the artistry and creativity of Hebrew poetry. It was under his masterful guidance that I first worked through the detailed reading (and syllable counting!) of Isaiah 2–12.

And then came the masterful mentorship and later collegiality of those at Concordia Seminary. Now numbered with the saints who have gone before us, Horace Hummel, from whom we as students caught even more than he taught, cast a long and brilliant shadow of theologically rich typological hermeneutics over an entire generation of students and into generations to come. His theological influence and wisdom are well-woven into the fabric of this commentary. Fellow students and now lifelong colleagues include such scholars and teachers as Paul Schrieber (a colleague in Hebrew studies already from college days), Paul Raabe (with whom very much of this volume was discussed in light of our shared work in Isaiah, especially Isaiah 1–39), Reed Lessing (who also has shared many an insight through his work in Isaiah, especially Isaiah 40–66), James Voelz (in a most complementary way through his emphasis on Greek language and his focus on the more recent Testament and as an ever-ready consultant in hermeneutical issues), Tim Saleska (for encouragement in many ways, known and unknown to him), Phil Penhalleton (who carries on with the textbook he worked hard to edit), Andy Steinmann (for his complementary work in Hebrew and Aramaic and in counting new moons and regnal years), and Chuck Arand (who continues to bring into our conversation rich theological insights from the systematics perspective). Dear friends all, these colleagues have become trusted interlocutors for testing ideas and gaining insights, as iron sharpens iron and as multiple strands strengthen the cord.

And then there are the students, to whom I would dedicate this work, especially all those in the many years at Concordia Seminary who are now pastors and scholars throughout the church but also students among God's good people in the pews, most memorably the faithful group of Bible students at Christ Memorial Lutheran Church (in south St. Louis County) and those who joined us on the radio. I pray that they all may have learned a thing or two, but I give thanks that they, in turn, have given even more in their questions, insights, encouragement, and faithful and faith-filled study of this prophet. May they continue to proclaim the prophetic Word "becoming flesh" that is anchored and fulfilled in the prophetic Word now made sure and "become" flesh.

More personally, my parents remain, even in their earthly absence, influential in my life: my father, who modeled a love for God's Word in the pastoral ministry, and my mother, who instilled a love for language, both for its proper and powerful use and for its art and beauty.

Seeking to unpack and understand the Word of God is a lifelong task, but focusing on even a part of the great vision of Isaiah is particularly daunting and humbling. And this has taken, it would seem, a lifetime. My dear wife, Lucy, has been a patient partner in this journey, and she has often gently reminded me of this "other man" with whom she has shared much of our marriage. But

she has remained a daily reminder of the joy of the bridegroom and the bride in the steady and sturdy bond of faith, anchored in the generous, grace-full presence of our God, who rejoices over us as the bridegroom over the bride (62:5).

Finally, a word of deep appreciation and respect must be offered to the editorial staff at Concordia Publishing House, first to Christopher Mitchell not only for his keen theological and editorial insights but especially for his patient encouragement over far too many years. Adam Hensley was given my drafts as his first assignment as the newly appointed Old Testament editor, and he has proven more than worthy of the task. His careful reading and wonderful theological insights quickly became those of a trusted colleague with whom one works together to make a piece stronger, clearer, better. And finally (in editorial chronology but hardly in priority), to Julene Gernant Dumit, whose incredibly meticulous attention to details caught many typos and tumbles as she worked assiduously toward a clean text. Whatever slips and stumbles remain are due to my own doing.

Isaiah studies have come through a sea change in my lifetime, some of which I witnessed and worked with firsthand, some of which I observed more from afar. My attempt to summarize the major themes in that narrative is provided in the introductory sections. The collegial learning of both the Book of Isaiah Section (originally, as I recall, the Compositional Unity of the Book of Isaiah Group) and the Biblical Hebrew Poetry Section within the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature have provided much background and insight into the details of this work. So also the many years in the Hebrew Poetry seminar of the Catholic Biblical Association provided collegiality and methodological awareness, going back to the years under the leadership of Larry Boadt and Joe Wimmer, good friends who also encouraged close, careful reading of texts.

Lutheran hermeneutics, with an understanding of Scripture as the Word of God and an interpretive matrix of God's working his salvific plan of judgment and salvation ("Law and Gospel") centered in the presence of God in the midst of his people (or, better, the gathering of his people around his presence), are particularly helpful for the theological themes of Isaiah. I have tried to bring the best of that background—in biblical languages, a close reading of the text, the theological framework, and interaction with the current scholarship—to bear on this work, even as I hope it can find a worthy place not only as part of the Concordia Commentary series but among the myriad of scholarly and theological works on the vision of Isaiah.

To return full circle to what it means to be a prophet in one's own day, I feel as if I have gained a great friend and colleague in the ministry. Isaiah's courage in proclaiming the Word of God to many who had not ears to hear and his perseverance through a long life and ministry with very few apparent positive and lasting responses are encouragement to pastors and missionaries in any age. He was driven by a sure knowledge of a secure future "on that day." It was anchored in the Word and sacramental realities of the presence of Yahweh in his

own day, which were connected to that time when the people walking in darkness would see a great light and when an extraordinary Davidic King would establish the kingdom in justice and righteousness “into perpetuity.” The zeal of Yahweh Seba’oth would do this (9:1–6 [2–7]). The Word of Yahweh would not and will not return void (55:11). And in our everyday, day-to-day lives of faith, we know that Messiah has come, Messiah has died, Messiah has risen, and he will come again. And his presence is with us (Immanuel, “God with us”) now, the Holy God in the midst of his people, wherever that Word goes forth from Zion. “Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel” (12:6).

Isaiah, dear mentor and teacher, I am so much richer for your friendship over these many years and for the Word of God that you have delivered with humility, yet with strength, courage, and perseverance. You understood firsthand the holiness and glory of Yahweh (6:1–3), the Holy One of Israel, and now you, too, are numbered with the saints in glory everlasting. After many years of joining you here in the song of the seraphim sung in confident hope, anticipation, and waiting, I look forward to meeting you in person—finally (and it will be finally!)—in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we will all “rock the house” with the sounding and resounding of the echoing antiphon:

קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה יִצְבְּאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ (Is 6:3)

November 1, 2023

All Saints' Day

God's Plan of Restoration as Revealed through Isaiah (Means)

In reaction and response, Isaiah delivers the following plan, based on the seven theological assumptions discussed above, to restore Israel so that God's people will fulfill their mission:

1. As the *people of God*, Israel must come to grips with their sinfulness through humble repentance, as children to a stern but loving father. In fact, God himself will facilitate this, as he will pronounce judgment in his justice and righteousness. But as a loving and grace-full God, he will also restore them to their true identity and purpose.

Through his prophet Isaiah, God calls his people to repentance (1:2–20) and the covenant way of life (1:18–20). God makes his case and calls for washing and cleansing (1:16–17). God reminds them of his cleansing away the stains of sin (1:18) and offers the restoration of covenant life, a good life in the land (1:19).

Isaiah himself has known what it means to be a sinner in the presence of the holy God, the fearful side of “God with us” (“Immanuel”). Isaiah understood the true, frightening “woe” (אֵי, 6:5) of being unclean in the presence of the thrice-holy God (6:3). But upon Isaiah's humble confession, God dealt with his “iniquity” (יָצַו, 6:7) and “sin” (חַטָּאת, 6:7). His own life becomes a model for Israel: confession, cleansing, commission, which comes only from the Holy One of Israel (6:8). The prophet would make known this cleansing grace (1:18) and proclaim that a *remnant will repent* (שָׁבוּ, 7:3; 10:20–21).

But the people are blind and deaf to such exhortations. Instead of responding as God's people, they are not willing to listen and continue to “refuse and rebel” (1:19–20; 5:19; 30:9, 15). Despite the owner's best efforts, the vineyard produces only stench (5:2). At best, *only a remnant* will repent (1:27). So they must be shown—and come to realize—that they are, indeed, blind and deaf (6:10). They will experience what it is like for God to be blind and deaf to their prayers (1:15).

Zion on a hill, raised up as a light to the nations (2:2–4; 60:1–3), has instead become a *valley* of vision (22:1), a vision that they cannot see and do not understand. So they must realize that they cannot read and understand (29:11–12), that they cannot please God just by trying harder. Their attempts are futile (26:17–18); their righteous deeds are nothing (64:5 [6]). God must act for them (26:12; 57:1–13; 59:1–15a; 64:5–6 [6–7]). They cannot simply continue to take God's grace and presence for granted. “God with us” can also mean judgment, as it did for Isaiah in Isaiah 6 (and as Amos noted about “the Day of Yahweh” in Amos 5:18). They must recognize and realize the full weight of their unrighteousness, of the “woe” of being sinful and unclean in the presence of the holy God, the Holy One of Israel. God's hand is still outstretched (5:25; 9:7–10:4 [9:8–10:4]). Even if “a remnant will repent” (10:20–21) and a tenth of the land remains, it will be fully burned (6:13). They will be exiled from the presence of

God in Zion to learn what it means that “God is *not* with us” (the inverse message of “Immanuel”).

God’s ultimate solution will be more drastic, but it will be efficacious and permanent. The “Day of Yahweh” (“that day”) will come as a day of both judgment and salvation, an end and a new beginning. God’s judgment must be fully understood. His full judgment is destruction (27:10). The fruit of repentance will be the destruction of the false gods, false worship, and false trust even among his own people (26:9; 28:14, 18), and if this is not done by faithful believers in Yahweh, God will do it himself (27:8–9). This is his “strange work” (28:21–22). The vineyard and its royal stewardship will be destroyed (5:5–7). Zion will be refined and purified (1:25; 4:4). The temple, city, and land will be taken away (6:13a–b). God’s remedy is “radical,” to get to the “root” (*radix*) of the rot, to destroy so that he can rebuild and restore. God will purge so that he may purify (1:25; 4:3–4).

Through this judgment and from the darkness, God will save a humbled and repentant remnant who will show forth God’s true light (9:1 [2]; 60:1–3). Their sins will be forgiven (33:24). They will again see and hear (30:19–21). When God comes himself, their eyes will be opened (35:4–5)—by God’s graceful gifts of insight, not through their own human efforts. They will be purged by the judgment of God’s justice and righteousness and be restored according to God’s original intent (1:26).

God will take direct oversight of the vineyard (27:2–6). There will be no briars and brambles, and Jacob and Israel will take renewed roots and fill the earth with fruit (27:6). They will be restored to their special place in God’s design for all creation. A remnant will *repent* (שׁוּב) and will *return* (שׁוּב) to Zion (1:27; 6:13c). Zion and God’s people who dwell there will know God’s true justice and righteousness and bring forth the fruit of true justice and righteousness in the world (1:27; 9:6 [7]; 28:17; 32:16; 33:5; 42:1; 56:1). The vineyard will fill the whole earth with fruit (27:6). God’s people will declare his praise (12:4–5; 43:21). They will know God’s comfort and joy (12:2; 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13).

2. God will affirm his lordship as King over the kingdom of God (6:5; 7:7–9; 33:22; 40:9–10; 52:7) with a new, true King of the house of David as his Servant on earth.

God’s radical renewal will show both continuity and discontinuity with his ways and means of mediating his presence. “God with us” (“Immanuel,” 7:14; 8:10) will be fulfilled in an ultimate, final, and forever way. His lordship is affirmed; the King of Judah is Yahweh, not human kings like the nations (7:7–9). Yahweh Seba’oth will host the royal banquet (25:6). He continues to listen—and will answer (30:19–20). He will reign in righteousness (32:1). Yahweh alone will be Judge, Statute-Giver, and King, and “he will save us!” (33:22). He will come himself to work salvation (59:15b–17; 63:1–6). In short, God himself will reign as King (6:1; 33:22; 52:7).

But he will also continue his steadfast love and “perpetual covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם) with the house of David (55:3), but these promises will be fulfilled in a new thing (43:19), a new manner, beyond the ways and imagination of even his people (55:8–9). The role of king would be fulfilled as the true Servant (cf. 2 Sam 7:5, 8, 20, 26), one who would come not to be served but to serve, even to give his life as a guilt sacrifice (Is 53:10–12; cf. Mt 20:28 || Mk 10:45).

Yahweh will raise up a new David from the rootstock of Jesse (11:1) to be the true Servant-King. He will restore the monarchy, going back to its premonarchic roots as it was intended to be, the kingdom of *God* (8:23–9:6 [9:1–7]). Yahweh will tie his presence to a new son of Jesse, a new David (11:1), one who sits in the tent of David (16:5). He will combine divine characteristics with those of a human king (9:5–6 [6–7]) and restore all Israel from North to South (8:23b–9:6 [9:1b–7]), as the enemies had been allowed to destroy it.¹⁸²

The Servant-King will also be the embodiment of servant Israel (41:8; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3). As with Israel and the prophet himself, the Servant would appear to have failed (49:4; 50:6), even unto death (53:8, 11). But as also with Israel’s blindness, there is a greater purpose. Through such humiliation there will be restoration. The Servant suffers as Israel but also for Israel. The blind will see with renewed sight, and the deaf will hear with restored understanding (35:5; cf. 42:19). The Servant of Yahweh will bring forth justice and righteousness as the ultimate true King (42:1–4), but he will come as a humble Servant. This Servant is identified with Israel (41:8) and as one apart from Israel (49:3), with a mission to Israel and all nations, so that God’s light will extend to the end of the earth (42:6; 49:6).

But this Servant will not be just another king or prophet or even the renewed people of God. He will have unique characteristics. Unlike that of people, prophet, or king, his humiliation, suffering, and death has a vicarious mission: “Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6). The will of Yahweh to destroy in order to restore, to crush in order to rebuild, to kill in order to make alive is accomplished in this Servant; the Righteous one will make others righteous (1:26–27; 53:11). Thus “God with us” also means “God for us,” in our place, as both king and people, as Israel “reduced to One.”

Through his humiliation, he will become “high and lifted up” (52:13), a description otherwise ascribed only to Yahweh (2:11, 17; 6:1). A new day will follow, no longer as only “that day” of judgment but also a day of salvation. The ominous *hoy* (הוֹי), usually translated as “woe” but really having more a sense of “heh, look out,” of 5:8–25 and chapters 28–33¹⁸³ will not simply be threatening, but it will now become a grace-filled invitation (55:1). The covenant with

¹⁸² First Assyria removed the Northern Kingdom, and then Babylon, the foe from the north (e.g., Jer 6:22) that would destroy Judah.

¹⁸³ As the seventh *hoy*, “woe,” of 5:8–23 is deferred until 10:1, so the seventh *hoy*, “woe,” of Isaiah 28–33 (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1) is left open-ended for 55:1 to reverse the judgmental tone to one of invitation.

David for a son to rule without end (9:6 [7]) will be an everlasting one (55:3) that includes his witness also to the nations (55:4). In short, this Servant-King will fulfill the mission both of Israel and of the house of David as God's true and ultimate Servant.

This Anointed One (61:1) will establish a rule of good news, comfort, "release," joy, and renewed planting (61:1–3). God will establish a "perpetual covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם, 61:8) with his people. Indeed, Yahweh himself will come as the Warrior-King to work salvation and establish righteousness (59:15b–21; 63:5). This is the final Day of Yahweh, a day (and year) of vengeance and salvation (61:2; 63:4).

3. Zion will continue to be the citadel of the kingdom of God. Yahweh will be present in his temple in the midst of his people ("God is with us," "Immanuel," 7:14), on his terms, by his grace. Here alone is true peace, security, and salvation (2:2–4; 12:2, 6; 25:6–7; 26:1–3; 40:9–11; 60:1–3; 62:1).

Zion will be restored also in a radical way as Yahweh's earthly abode and the citadel of his kingdom. It will fulfill its role as a light to the nations (2:2–4; 60:1–3). But God will rebuild it his way, laying his own "cornerstone" (28:16) based on faith and trust. A *purified remnant will return* (35:10) to Zion, where God is again present (40:9). Zion will reflect the light of God's righteousness and salvation (62:1). God's holy mountain will be "higher than the hills" (2:2) and become the place of God's feast of salvation and life, even over death (25:6–9; 26:19). God will reverse the conditions from humility to exaltation but, on the other hand, also continue to punish human haughtiness with humiliation (Isaiah 2; 13–14; 47). The bride (previously described variously as virgin, barren, estranged) will not be divorced (50:1) but married with children (54:1–4; 60:4; 62:4–5). She will never be estranged again (54:5–8). His people and his holy citadel will be restored as the virgin bride of Yahweh, her Maker and Redeemer (1:21; 54:5–8; 62:1–5). They will be fruitful and multiply into new generations to fill the earth (54:3; 60:4). The "reversals" of 3:24 from good to bad will be reversed (61:3, 7), as from bad to good.

Those exiled in Assyria and Egypt, and then from Babylon, from east to west, will return to Zion and worship Yahweh on the holy mountain (11:12–16; 27:12–13). The cleansed of Yahweh, ransomed and redeemed, will return on the great highway of holiness back to Zion (35:8–10; 40:1–11). They will come as in the exodus from Egypt, but in an even greater way (4:5–6; 11:11–16; 40:1–11; 43:18–21; the "double" motif of 40:1–2; 61:7). In a twist from the first exodus (Exodus 14), where there was a way through the sea, there will be a (high)way though the desert (11:11–16; 35:8–10; 40:3–5), with streams in the dry land replacing dry land in the sea (43:14–21). In the end, God will again be proclaimed as King in Zion (Ex 15:18; Is 33:20–22; 40:9–11; 66:1).

4. Yahweh's rule is universal in scope. The nations stand under judgment and serve his purposes under his rule of power (e.g., Assyria, 10:5), but they are also included under God's peace and security in his rule of grace in Zion (2:3–4; 19:23–25; 56:3; 66:19–20).

Through God's activity to judge and to save, God's people will realize anew that their God is the God of all nations, indeed of all the earth (66:1). He rules over even the mighty powers of Assyria (14:24–27). He rules over Egypt, as he did at the time of the exodus. Contemporary Egypt can provide no earthly help (Isaiah 19–20; 31), and even this archenemy will acknowledge Yahweh, the God of Israel, as the God also of Egypt and Assyria (19:19–25). He rules over mighty Babylon, whatever the current iteration of this symbol of Mesopotamia power (13:1–14:27). There are no other gods (44:9–20); even the "gods" of the ultimate enemy Babylon are subject to Yahweh (Isaiah 46–47).

All nations fall under his judgment (Isaiah 13–23); their fundamental sin is the same pride and arrogance that Judah displays, and they will be humbled (10:5–19, 28–34; 14:12–15). God can even use the powers of the nations for his purposes, both to punish his people (through Assyria and the future Babylon) and to rescue and restore them by the hand of another nation, under a "Cyrus," who, even as a non-Israelite king, can be used as Yahweh's anointed one (44:28; 45:1).

But the nations can also find refuge in Zion (14:32). They will come to Zion to listen and learn (2:2–3). God's glory will fill the earth (6:3). It will be revealed to all flesh (40:5) and be declared among the nations (66:19). Outsiders will be joined to Israel (14:1), even facilitating the return of Israel to Zion (14:2; 60:4–22). The temple will be a house of prayer for all nations (56:7). They will see God's sign (66:19) and join in declaring God's glory among the nations.

5. *Israel* as his people and the *Davidic king* as his servant have a special place in God's design for all creation. They serve a mediating role in his mission to include all nations.

The special role of Israel, both corporately and individually and as incorporated in her king, is not just to restore the lost sheep of the house of Israel but also to become a light to the nations (12:4; 42:6; 49:6). The heir to the throne of David, coming as a new son of Jesse (11:10), will bring light to the darkness of Israel (8:22–9:1 [8:22–9:2]) and become a sign and banner to the nations (11:10). God will raise up one who "sits in the tent of David" to judge in justice and righteousness (16:5).

Israel's mediating role as a "kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6; Is 61:6) connects the holy God to those outside Israel. The Word of Yahweh will go forth from Zion (2:3) and his light to all nations, kings, and peoples (60:1–3). Israel will declare the praise of Yahweh (12:4–5; 43:21) and reflect his glory to the nations (60:1–3). Israel will be central among the nations of the earth as a "blessing in the midst of the earth" (19:24; cf. Gen 12:3). God's people Israel will be scattered in a great dispersion in order to gather the nations (66:19–20). The

Suffering Servant will sprinkle with blood¹⁸⁴ many nations; kings will come to new understandings (52:15). The righteous servant will make “many” righteous, including the nations (53:11).

6. God’s ultimate goal is for all nations to come to Zion.

The nations, in turn, will be drawn to Zion (2:2; 56:7), to the *torah* life of Yahweh (2:3), to the Davidic King (11:10; 55:4–5), and to his temple as a house of prayer for all nations (56:7). God will prepare a feast on his mountain for all nations (25:6–7). God’s people will gather the nations in a grand return to Zion and into a new communion around the presence of God in Zion (66:20–21). The Gentile nations will become evangelists who “declare [God’s] glory among the nations” (66:19). They will all live in the peace and righteousness of the new creation (2:4; 11:3b–9; 65:17–25).

The remnant that returns will grow into a new community that includes all nations (66:20–21). The nations will be grafted into Israel (56:3–7). Some will even become priests and Levites (66:21). They will bring all their “brothers,” both Israel’s remnant and those of all nations, to the holy mountain in Jerusalem (66:20). They will actually bring gifts as they facilitate the exiles’ return (18:7; 60:5–7).

7. God’s desire and plan will play out in *history*, within Isaiah’s lifetime and beyond it. But his ultimate judgment and salvation will engage all nations in an eschatological Day of Yahweh (2:12) that will still be anchored within the history of God’s people. This is an act of both judgment and salvation, in which God himself comes and yet works through his Servant as an anointed agent. God will devastate all the earth in judgment and create a new heavens and earth where he reigns as King in peace and security over his people, who now include those from every nation.

As God’s judgment was radical, so this restoration will be beyond normal expectations. It will be transformative, even of nature (Isaiah 35; 40; 65:17–25). That new day (“that day”) will be universal and cosmic in scope (Isaiah 24; 35). The God who is over all nations and even the heavens and the earth will judge all nations (Isaiah 13–23) and even all the earth (Isaiah 24). Yet it will also be a day of rejoicing and celebration by the people of Yahweh (25:1–5) for the “salvation of our God” (52:10), because Yahweh will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (24:23). His glory will be revealed to all (35:2; 40:5) and will draw all nations to Yahweh’s holy mountain (66:19–20). He will host his royal banquet for all nations, at which death will be swallowed up forever (25:6–9; 26:19). Sorrow and tears will be no more (25:8; 30:19). Leviathan, the embodiment and symbol of all forces opposed to the ways and will of God, will be slain (27:1). The city will be restored as the new Jerusalem (26:1–3; cf. Revelation 21).

¹⁸⁴ This verb (סִפַּק, Hiphil) often refers to the “sprinkling” of sacrificial blood (e.g., Lev 4:6; 5:9; 16:14–15). The blood is sprinkled on the priests in Ex 29:21; Lev 8:30.

Now the blind will see and the deaf will hear (32:3; 35:5); there will be singing and joy for the restored paradise on earth (35: 1–2, 10). Indeed, there will be a new heavens and earth (11:6–9; 65:17–25). God’s purpose is for all nations to be gathered to Zion (2:2–4; 14:1; 66:18). Those who refuse and rebel will be burned in unquenchable fire (1:31; 66:24).

Isaiah foresees God’s plan as it will play out in history. Some predictions will happen within his lifetime, such as the end to the Syro-Ephraimite threat (7:7–9; 8:4) and the renewed greater threat of Assyria (14:24–27), followed by its defeat in 701 BC (37:36–37). He predicts the decline of Moab “within three years” (16:14). He also looks beyond his own lifetime to the rise—and fall—of Babylon, both as the contemporary nation that will disrupt the house of David (39:5–7) and as the symbol of the nations that worship non-gods and rule by earthly powers (13:9–22; 14:4–23; 46:1–11). He also foresees a time beyond the return of the exiles from Babylon when God’s people will again struggle with being the people of God and showing forth his righteousness, salvation, and glory (56:1–59:15a; 64:5–7 [6–8]). God’s people will continue to struggle with the same problems even after Isaiah’s vision is proclaimed (e.g., vain ritual, 56:1; 58:3–8; a lack of justice and righteousness, 59:9, 14–15; 65:11–16), and they will wonder and wait for Yahweh to act (8:16–17; 26:8–21; chapter 64). “Iniquity” (עֲוֹן) and “sin” (חַטָּאת) remain (43:24; 59:2; 59:12), and there will be those who “rebel” (שָׁמַד) unto the end (66:24).

But Isaiah’s vision also looks beyond the present realities to a new era, when the Day of Yahweh becomes a day of new creation. His vision extends to the ultimate goal, when God will swallow up physical death (25:7–8) and his dead will bodily rise to eternal life (26:19) and when God will create a new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65–66). The punishment received in the destruction of land, city, and temple (586 BC) and the comfort of return from exile (539 BC) will be overshadowed by a time of peace beyond human experience of even the postexilic time (11:3–9; 61:1–3; 65:17–25). “Rebellion,” “sin,” and “iniquity” (שָׁמַד, חַטָּאת, and עֲוֹן) will have been dealt with (53:5, 11) by the Servant’s vicarious “guilt offering” (זֶבֶחַ חַטָּאת, 53:10). There will be “peace” (שָׁלוֹם, 53:5), and by his “wounds” (the plural of פְּרוּסוֹת, 53:5; cf. the singular in 1:6), “there is healing to us” (53:5; cf. 6:10).

For the “here and now” of Isaiah’s time, the only true hope is to seek Yahweh while he may be found (30:19; 55:6). God knows the times, even as a little while (26:20), but he is faithful, and his purpose and plan will prevail (25:1; 46:11; 55:10–11). So his people do not wait as those who have no hope. Yahweh “longs to be gracious” (30:18). There is a double portion of peace (26:3) and of comfort (40:1) for those who trust in Yahweh (26:3–4). They may feel as though they had “given birth to wind” (26:18), but it is Yahweh who will accomplish salvation (26:12). He will provide a feast of victory over death (25:6–8), and the dead who belong to Yahweh will live (26:19). Yahweh will be with them, answering their call with his own “here I am” (30:19; 40:9; 58:9; cf. Isaiah’s response in 6:8). The Anointed One will come to proclaim the Day of Yahweh



(61:1–3). Yahweh will reign as King in Zion (33:22; 52:7), even while his people wait for the full revelation of the kingdom (64:2–3 [3–4]). He will be there even for those who do not seek him (65:1). Zion will rejoice, for “great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst” (12:6).

In sum, the remnant that repents and will return comprises those who know (and do not deny!) that “in repentance and rest you will be saved, and in quietness and trust is your strength” (30:15). For those who “willingly listen” and do not refuse (1:19–20), their sins will be forgiven and “the goodness of the land” they will eat (1:18–19). But even for those who “are not willing” (30:15c), “Yahweh waits to be gracious to you; he exalts himself to show you compassion, for a God of justice is Yahweh. Blessed are all who wait for him” (30:18).

Isaiah 1–66: Outline and Thought Progression by Major Chapter Divisions

Continuing the overview of the entire book of the vision of Isaiah, in light of which the commentary on Isaiah 1–12 will be presented, the following seeks to summarize each major section of Isaiah 1–66 in its historical perspective (which considers both the situation addressed and the possible time of composition or compilation within the lifetime of Isaiah). The literary structure of each section will be considered, along with a concise summary, or *précis*, which is then fleshed out in slightly longer form. In no way is this a comprehensive review of the entire book, which is available in other commentaries on the parts or the whole of Isaiah. But some sense of the thought progression of the whole will provide some context for understanding the part that will be addressed in the commentary on Isaiah 1–12 that will follow.

Part 1: Isaiah 1–33

Isaiah 1

Historical perspective (ca. 700–680 BC): From the later years of Isaiah’s life, the prophet reflects on his ministry and introduces his vision toward the goal announced in 2:2–4, beyond his own lifetime.

Structure: In two steps (1:2–20, 21–31), Israel has moved from being called to repentance to being exposed as needing complete purification and renewal, from which a repentant remnant will be redeemed.

Précis: God’s people, called to repentance, will, in fact, need purging and renewal to be restored as God’s faithful city and a light to the nations.

Summary: Isaiah introduces the entire book. From the perspective near the end of his life, he recognizes that his preaching, Hezekiah’s reform, and the close call of 701 BC (37:36–37) have failed to turn the hearts of Judah to repentance in any lasting way. Daughter Zion is all but destroyed but still standing, her “inviolability” intact if nevertheless severely threatened and fragile. But Isaiah’s message of Yahweh’s commitment to Zion, seemingly validated by the deliverance from Sennacherib, has only confirmed the people in their

Translation

- 7:1 And as it happened, in the days of Ahaz ben Jotham ben Uzziyahu, the king of Judah, Rezin, the king of Aram, and also Pekah ben Remalyahu, the king of Israel, had gone up (to) Jerusalem for battle against her, but he had not been able to engage in battle against her.
- 7:2 It was reported to the house of David: “Aram has allied with [rested upon?] Ephraim.” And his heart, along with the heart of his people, trembled like the shaking of the trees of the forest because of the presence of the wind.
- 7:3 And YHWH said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and She’ar-yashub [‘A Remnant Will Return’] your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool at the highway of Fuller’s Field. (7:4) And then say to him, ‘Pay attention—be calm! Do not be afraid! Do not let your heart be timid because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, consisting of the hot anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remalyahu.
- 7:5 “‘Because Aram has plotted evil against you (along with) Ephraim and the son of Remalyahu, saying, (7:6) “Let us go up into Judah and terrorize it, and let us split it open for us, so that we will establish a king in its midst, namely, Ben Tab’el,”
- 7:7 thus has said Adonay YHWH,
“It [the evil] will not stand; it [the evil] will not come to be.
- 7:8 For the head of Aram is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
In sixty-five years, Ephraim will be dismayed at being a people.
- 7:9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remalyahu.
If you [plural] do not affirm, you [plural] will not be found firm!”’”
- 7:10 And YHWH continued speaking to Ahaz,
- 7:11 “Ask for yourself a sign from (that which is with) YHWH your God.
Make it deep to Sheol or make it high to above!”
- 7:12 And Ahaz said,
“I will not ask. I will not put YHWH to the test.”
- 7:13 And he said,
“Hear then, house of David,
is it too little for you [plural] to weary men
that you [plural] will weary also my God?
- 7:14 Therefore Adonay himself will give you [plural] a sign:
see this—the virgin is about to become pregnant and bear a son,
and you [feminine singular] will call his name Immanuel [‘with us (is) God’].

- 7:15 Curds and honey he will eat
(as he comes) to know (how) to refuse that which is evil
and choose that which is good.
- 7:16 For before the young man will know (how) to refuse the evil
and choose the good,
the land before whose two kings you are in terror will be abandoned.
- 7:17 YHWH will bring upon you, upon your people,
and upon the house of your father
days which have not come
since Ephraim turned away from upon Judah,
namely, the king of Assyria.”
- 7:18 It will happen, **on that day**,
YHWH will whistle for the fly that is in the distant river of Egypt
and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.
- 7:19 All of them will come and rest
in the wadis of the ravines and in the clefts of the rocks
and in all the thorny places and in all the watering places.
- 7:20 **On that day**, Adonay will shave
with a razor of one hired in Across-the-River—the king of Assyria—
the head and the hair of the feet
and even the beard [or “the bearded one”] it [the razor] will take away.
- 7:21 It will happen, **on that day**, a man will keep alive a young cow from the
herd and two [goats?] of the flock.
- 7:22 And because of the abundance of producing milk, he will eat curds.
For curds and honey he will eat—all who are left in the midst of the land.
- 7:23 It will happen, **on that day**,
every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels
will become briar, and bramble it will become.
- 7:24 With arrows and with bow, one will come to there,
for all the land will be briar and bramble.
- 7:25 And all the mountains which would be hoed with a hoe—
you will not go there (for) fear of briar and bramble.
It will become open land for cattle and a place of trampling for sheep.

Textual Notes

7:1 וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם—The *waw* consecutive וַיְהִי (LXX: καὶ ἐγένετο) indicates a continuation of the narrative begun in chapter 6, but here the narrative continues in the third person, as distinct from chapters 6 and 8, which are in the first person. In 6:1 (see the

discussion there), the initial temporal clause lacked the introductory *waw* consecutive וַיְהִי and began without any conjunction (asyndetically), both of which indicate a break from the previous material. Here in 7:1, the וַיְהִי signals a connection and continuation, but with an updating of the reference time from that described and set in 6:1.¹² It is difficult to mark this in translations, which often simply begin with the temporal element (“in the days of ...”), but the syntactical idiom might be rendered something like “and then, in the course of what this narrative relates, the next key moment was as follows.” The old KJV’s “and it came to pass,” now seemingly so archaic, may come close: “and in the course of events that are here recounted, it came to pass ...”

מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה—The singular “the king of Judah” refers to Ahaz, the current king, whose patronymic is given back to his grandfather Uzziah, which is another link back to 6:1.

עַל־יָרְדֵן מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם—By contrast to “the king of Judah,” “the king of Aram [= Syria]” is Rezin, and the singular verb suggests that he was the leader of the combined forces that included “also” Pekah. A singular verb is often used with compound subjects (see יָבֹל below in 7:1) in which the nearer subject is primary. For details on the kings themselves, see the commentary.

The use of the perfect עָלָה for the main verb and not a subsequent imperfect *waw* consecutive (after וַיְהִי) is unusual but not uncommon (cf. 1 Ki 14:25 for a similar construction). The “unconverted” perfect (no *waw* consecutive) suggests past action as related to the immediate situation (“in the days of Ahaz”), so the force is as a pluperfect: “Rezin had come up” already, and his presence was part of the historical background.¹³

The same force applies to the subsequent clause, “he had not been able ...” (see the second textual note below). The narrative then continues with the imperfect *waw* consecutive that begins 7:2, וַיִּגֵּד, which moves the narrative along: “it was reported” to the king.

וּפֶקֶח בֶּן־רֵמַלְיָהוּ—The patronymic is important in noting that Pekah was not the son of Pekahiah, the previous king, but of an otherwise unknown Remalyahu. According to 2 Ki 15:25, Pekah ben Remalyahu was a military leader from Gilead who led a successful coup against Pekahiah, claiming the kingship and adopting and adapting Pekahiah’s name, essentially dropping the theophoric element that would add the name of Yah(weh).

וְלֹא יָכֹל לְהִלָּחֵם עָלָיָהּ—The clause continues the anteriorization from the previous *qatal* verb (see the third textual note on 7:1 and footnote 13): “but he had not been able ...” These two clauses provide the background for the narrative that follows, again linking chapter 7 to chapter 6 by means of the וַיְהִי at the beginning of 7:1 compared to the disjunctive marker in 6:1 (which see), which set off chapter 6 from chapter 5.

¹² See “Overview and Structure” in the commentary on 6:1–13 and the first textual note on 6:1.

¹³ The technical term is “anteriorization.” See Harmelink, *Exploring the Syntactic, Semantic, and Pragmatic Uses of וַיְהִי in Biblical Hebrew*, 339–40: “The use of the QATAL indicates that the event or state of affairs expressed by that verb had already taken place or was already in effect (Anteriorization ...).”

The wording is similar to 2 Ki 16:5, except that in 2 Kings is added the additional clause *וַיִּצְרֹדוּ עַל-אַחָז*, “and they besieged Ahaz,” and the negated singular verb *יָכַל* in Is 7:1 is plural in 2 Ki 16:5, *וְלֹא יָכְלוּ*, “they were not able,” as it is in 1 QIsa^a. This would help support the traditional translation of *יָכַל לְהִלָּחֵם עָלָיו* as “he was [they were] not able to conquer/overcome it.” But the root *לחם* I (used in the Niphal) means “to fight, engage in battle” without any nuance of either victory or defeat. See Deut 20:10–12, where this phraseology introduces the engagement with the options remaining open for either peace or war. Apart from the 2 Kings 16 text, the idiom of *יָכַל* with *לְהִלָּחֵם* occurs only in Num 22:11 and 1 Sam 17:9, where the translation is neutral, and the narrative adds an additional verb to indicate the result of the fighting.

Since invading a city usually came after a long siege, the alternative was to draw out military forces to engage battle away from the city wall (cf. 2 Sam 11:17–21). This may be what they “were unable to do.” Another likelihood is that this was more a show of force than an attempt to conquer and subdue the entire city (see the commentary). A good translation might well leave the verb left with that same ambiguity, as Oswalt translates: “He went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but he was unable to do so.”¹⁴ Cf. ESV: “but could not yet mount an attack against it.” Williamson concludes, quite convincingly, that this describes more a “show of force” than a full-bodied attack, with the intent of replacing Ahaz (7:5–6) with the assistance internal infighting.¹⁵ So quite possibly by the time of 7:2, the forces had already withdrawn—for the moment.

7:2 *לְבַיִת דָּוִד*—The phrase *בֵּית דָּוִד* is first used in 1 Sam 19:11 for the literal house in which David lived. But by the next chapter, in 1 Sam 20:16, “the house of David” has taken on the larger sense of his family and potential lineage and dynasty (cf. 2 Sam 3:1, 6 and, of course, 2 Sam 7:11).

נָחָה אָרָם עַל-אֶפְרַיִם—The verb is often taken to be *נָחָה*, but, if so, the form *נָחָה* is third singular feminine. That is not impossible, but in 7:5, “Aram” takes a third singular masculine verb. If the verb is *נָחָה*, a literal translation, “Aram has rested upon Ephraim,” implies, in English idiom, that Syria has “leaned on” Ephraim, which was likely the inferior power in the alliance. But this is an otherwise unattested sense of the verb *נָחָה*, which means simply “to rest, settle,” as did the ark on the mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4) and the Spirit on Eldad and Medad in Num 11:26 and on the Shoot of Jesse in Is 11:2. Such a sense is not necessarily completely “neutral,” as the “resting upon” brings something external to bear on the one “rested upon.” This same sense may lie in the background as 2 Sam 17:12 interprets the idiom *נָחָה עָלָיו* with the simile “as the dew falls upon the ground,” but the text describes, very negatively, the intended attack of Absalom’s forces on David and his men. 2 Sam 21:10 uses the idiom to describe the “resting” of the birds of the air “upon” the dead bodies of Saul’s sons with the assumption that these, like the animals at night, were carnivorous and threatening.

A sense that Aram was threatening Ephraim may fit the context, but the *combined* forces had already come up and likely withdrawn (see previous textual note). Perhaps

¹⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 192.

¹⁵ Williamson, *Isaiah 6–12*, 113–14.

Aram was instigating a reluctant Ephraim into a renewed attack. If the resting is more neutral, the sense may be simply a description of location: Aram was “resting” upon the physical land of Ephraim. In either case, this was likely for the purposes of regrouping before the next move, and the continued presence of Aram “upon Ephraim” clearly added influence over Ephraim and increased potency over against Judah. This would be the situation as reported to Ahaz in 7:2.

A second approach takes the verb נָחָה to be third singular masculine from the root נָחָה . Appeals to an Akkadian root *nachu*, “make a treaty,” are attractive if insecure, but the LXX translates in this direction: $\text{συνεφώνησεν Ἀραμ πρὸς τὸν Ἐφραϊμ}$, “Aram has conspired with Ephraim.” Most English translations lean in this direction, some appealing to a less common meaning of נָחָה ,¹⁶ but otherwise נָחָה I carries the sense “guide, lead.”¹⁷ That Aram had “allied itself” with Ephraim would hardly seem to be news to the king, in light of what is already in the background in 7:1, but 7:1 is written from the perspective of the narrator, and 7:2 focuses in on the real interaction with the king, when, possibly for the first time, the full situation described in 7:1 is reported to him. That, in itself, could “make the heart of the king tremble.” But it does not relate well to the final clause of 7:1, which deals with both forces of the alliance unable to engage in battle and so reversing course, it would seem.

In either case, we don’t know the full context of the “reporting” in 7:2. In actual, real time, this may have happened even *before* the incidents of 7:1, which are presented as an overview of incident as an introduction to chapter 7. The key fact for the king was that this was an alliance that included Aram. Skirmishes and even battles with Ephraim were common enough, including frequent border disputes, but Aram adds an additional and ominous factor, especially in light of their combined goal of overthrowing Ahaz (7:5–6) and installing a puppet friendly to expanding this coalition. This translation makes good sense, and combined with the lexical support provided by *HALOT* and *DCH*, though uncertain and unconvincing in itself (see footnote 17), the “updated” translation to “make an alliance” has been adopted here. This also highlights the making of an alliance as the key problem, to which Ahaz will respond in kind with the king of Assyria.

One should also not rule out the ability of Isaiah to provide some wordplay, as נָחָה (root נָחָה) may well call to mind also נָחָה (root נָחָה), which also makes sense: Aram was allied with Ephraim and now “resting” there in preparation for the next advance. Aram was allied (*nachah*)—but now “resting” (*nuach*)—while Judah’s king and people were “shaking” (*noaʿ*) before the “wind” (*ruach*).

¹⁶ Williamson (*Isaiah 6–12*, 91–95) tentatively comes to this conclusion after a thorough discussion of the difficulties and various proposals.

¹⁷ So all three lexicons. Both *HALOT* and *DCH* cite a second root, נָחָה II, with the sense “support, stand by” and cite only Is 7:2 as evidence. *DCH* also lists a נָחָה III, “incline towards” (נָחָה), and a נָחָה IV, “ally oneself,” but both cite Is 7:2 as the only such use in all extant Hebrew. Thus Is 7:2 is cited under three different roots in *DCH*, under נָחָה II in *HALOT*, and under נָחָה in *BDB* as “rest, settle down and remain.”

וַיִּנְעַל לִבּוֹ וְלִבְבּוֹ עִמּוֹ—1QIsa^a omits the first subject, לִבּוֹ, “his heart,” likely due to haplography. As the MT reads, this is a good example of the dominance of the first term of a compound subject that takes a singular verb, as in 7:1 with Aram and Ephraim.

מִפְּנֵי רִיחַ:—My translation, “because of the presence of the wind,” is intentionally literal and wordy to bring out the idiom of פָּנִים along with the causal sense of מִן. Better English would be simply “in the wind.” In 6:4, the doors of the temple shook “because of” the sound of the shouting.

7:3 לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַם הַיְהוּדָה וְאָמַרְתָּ:—The imperative followed by וְאָמַרְתָּ in 7:4 is an echo of הֵלֵךְ in 6:9: “Go and then say to this people ...” Here the addressee is not “this people” but Ahaz as “the house of David,” along with “his people” (7:2).

וְשָׂאָר יָשׁוּב בְּנֵיךְ—The name of Isaiah’s son means “a remnant will return,” which is intentionally both ominous and promising. There is play on the double entendre of שׁוּב as both “return” and “repent,” and both meanings relate and interplay with the other: those who repent are those who return and vice versa. I have transliterated the Hebrew as the name itself, with the translation in brackets. The meaning of the “sentence name” should be represented in English as it would have been understood in Hebrew. The subject is fronted for emphasis, implying “*only* a remnant will return (but there will be a remnant!).”

אֶל-מִסְלַת שְׂדֵה כֹּבֵס:—Literally, “to the highway of the field of the launderer.” The location is specific, though the details are unknown to us. Wildberger translates with “on Fuller’s Field Street.”¹⁸

7:4 הַשְׁמִיר וְהַשְׁקֵט—The first verb is common as an introductory imperative, similar to “pay attention and then do something.” The pair may form a hendiadys, “be careful to ...” The verb שְׁקֵט means “be quiet, calm,” and in the Hiphil, “show quietness” or even “cause quietness,” perhaps with a hint of the king’s leadership. Perhaps a colloquial rendering of the second verb would be “calm down!” Cf. 30:15: “In returning and rest you will be saved. In staying quiet [בְּהַשְׁקֵט] and in trust will be your strength.”

יֵרֵךְ—The verb רָכַךְ, “be soft” (see רָכַכְהָ, “softened,” in 1:6), here has the sense “be weak” or “be faint.”

זֵנְבֹת הָאֵזִים—The noun זֵנֵב ordinarily means “tail” (see 9:13–14 [14–15]). The noun אֵז occurs only here and in Amos 4:11 and Zech 3:2. Those verses have similar expressions for “a brand plucked from the fire.”

בְּחַרְיֵאן—The noun חָרִי (cf. חָרוֹן) is from חָרָה, “burn,” and is regularly used with אָן, “nose” = “anger.” 1QIsa^a adds an initial כִּי, and the LXX seems to reflect that temporally but then has either interpreted very loosely or is reading a different text in rendering with ὅταν γὰρ ὀργῆ τοῦ θυμοῦ μου γένηται, πάλιν ἰάσομαι, “for when wrath of my anger is past [?], I will again heal,” which takes the anger as God’s and seems an interesting and more positive echo of 6:10.

If the initial כִּי in 1QIsa^a is causal, it may have been added to make sense of the odd use of כִּי, which seems parallel to the causal use of מִן in the previous phrase, but

¹⁸ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 282.

this would be an unusual sense of **כִּי**. It might better be understood as *beth essentiae*,¹⁹ describing the two firebrands: “*consisting of* the hot anger.”

7:5 **כִּי יֵעַן**—The force of this combination as a causal conjunction is not completely clear. Ordinarily, this expression simply means “because” (e.g., 3:16; 8:6; 29:13), but in the other cases, it introduces the protasis to be followed by the main clause. If this is the case here, then 7:5–6 serves to set up 7:7–9 as the apodosis in stark contrast.

Against this is the MT *setumah* marker (⊖ after 7:6) that indicates a break between 7:6 and 7:7 (possibly also noting the shift to poetry), suggesting that 7:5 connects to 7:4, but this is hardly the reason to “be calm” and “not be afraid” (7:4). The clause does provide the background information about what is really behind the planned attack, but the thought flow here should play down the threat of those just described as only glowing hot embers. One is tempted to translate “just because,” which fits the context, or “since” in 7:5 followed by a “then/therefore” in 7:7.

I have opted for “because,” the more usual use of the combination, and its use here actually does connect the thought of what is proposed in 7:6 to what Yahweh will dispose in 7:7, what the opponents “say” in 7:6 to the “thus said Adonay Yahweh” in 7:7–9.

אֲפָרַיִם וְבֶן־רִמְלֵיָהוּ—The subject of the verb is “Aram,” and, again, both “Ephraim” and “the son of Remalyahu” are included almost as an afterthought. Aram is the instigator (see also the third textual note on 7:1 and second textual note on 7:2).

7:6 **נִעְלָה ... וְנִקְרָעָהּ וְנִבְקַעְנָהּ ... וְנִבְלִיָּהּ**—The first three verbs are irregular (“weak”), and the imperfect and cohortative forms overlap, compounded by the object suffix added on **וְנִבְקַעְנָהּ** and **וְנִבְלִיָּהּ**. The final verb (**וְנִבְלִיָּהּ**) is clearly an example of the use of the non-*waw* consecutive imperfect that, following a cohortative, marks a purpose clause. If the second and third verbs are also non-*waw* consecutive imperfects, then the *one* cohortative precedes a triple purpose clause:

Let us go up into Judah in order to terrorize it, to split it open, and to establish a king.

If the first three verbs are cohortatives, then only the final one is purpose:

Let us go up into Judah, and (let us) terrorize it, and (let us) to split it open in order to establish a king.

Either makes similar sense, but the ultimate goal is to replace the king, and I have taken the others as cohortatives that enable the real purpose.

וְנִבְקַעְנָהּ—The verb **בָּקַע** means “to split open.” In military contexts, it means “to breach” and open up a country or city.

וְנִבְלִיָּהּ בְּלִיָּהּ—The Hebrew idiom is a cognate accusative, “to make as king a king.”

אֵת בֶּן־טַבְאֵל—The use of the direct object marker, though possibly simply as the object of the Hiphil verb **וְנִבְלִיָּהּ**, is set off at the end of the sentence for emphasis. This “epexegetical” (explanatory) use of the marker can often be translated with “namely” or set off with a colon or a dash. A similar expression occurs in 7:17.

¹⁹ So Williamson, who again offers a thorough discussion of the problems (*Isaiah 6–12*, 96–98).

The original name of the father is likely **טַבְאֵל**, “Tab’el,” Aramaic for “God [אֵל] is good [טַב; cf. Hebrew טוב].” See Ezra 4:7 for the same name of another person, in Aramaic. The Masoretic scribes have left their mark (and commentary, with a bit of a last laugh) in changing the final vowel to form the negative particle **אֵל**, thus “no/not good” or “good for nothing.” That the name is Aramaic suggests that the puppet king to be placed on the throne of Judah was from Syria, under the direct influence of Rezin. There is some evidence that the name also refers to a region north of Gilead, and the idiom “son of” can mean “from the region of.” Pekah (ben Remalyahu) had taken “fifty men from Gilead” in support of his coup over Pekahiah (2 Ki 15:25).

7:7 **כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה**—The perfect verb in this formula states what has already been said to the prophet as messenger. The Lord Yahweh “has said/spoken.” The function of the prophet, having heard God’s Word in the heavenly council (see the commentary on 6:2), was to deliver that message. The initial **כִּי יַעַן** in 7:5 (see the first textual note on 7:5) anticipates the “thus said Yahweh” as the correct response to the threat just described.

לֹא תִקְוּם וְלֹא תִהְיֶה:—This could be the impersonal sense of the third person (“it will not stand”; it will not happen”), but that idiom uses third singular masculine verbs. The subject of these two (singular feminine) verbs is likely **רָעָה**, the “evil,” Aram has “plotted against you” in 7:5.

7:8 **וּבְעוֹד שְׁשִׁים וְחֲמִשׁ שָׁנָה**—Literally, the idiom means “in yet sixty-five years,” i.e., *after* sixty-five years, not necessarily *within* the given time, as it is usually translated. The basic sense of **עוֹד** is durative, “still.” *HALOT* (s.v. **עוֹד**, 1 a) cites, e.g., Gen 40:13, 19 as instances of **בְּעוֹד** in the phrase “within three days,” but it is clear that the fulfillment happens *on* the third day. On the other hand, the more common idiom for time “after which” uses the preposition **אַחֵר**, although the sense is largely indeterminate, while “in yet three days” usually means “in three days.”

Whatever the translation, the meaning of the sentence that begins with this phrase is much discussed, as the “sixty-five years” is an odd number and the line seems an intrusion into the rich poetic repetition and parallelism (see the commentary). In a most creative attempt to emend the text back to a proposed original that has been garbled by scribal error, J. J. M. Roberts notes numerous cases of haplography in both the Qumran scroll (1QIsa^a) and the LXX just in 7:1–9,²⁰ several of which are noted above. He offers a very plausible process by which similar slips of the scribe’s eye led to the current state of 7:8b. He proposes the original text of 7:8–9a as follows (the verse numbers refer to the current MT, but his reordering of the lines is key to his reconstruction; the translations are his):

²⁰ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 112–13.

<p>כי ראש ארם דמשק וראש דמשק רצין <i>For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin.</i></p>	<p>7:8a, as per the MT</p>
<p>וראש אפרים שמרון וראש שמרון בן־רמליהו <i>And the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.</i></p>	<p>7:9a, as per the MT but originally following 7:8a</p>
<p>בעוד חמש שנה יחת אפרים מעם <i>Within five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.</i></p>	<p>7:8b, as per the MT but without שָׁשִׁים, which originally was שָׁשׁ in the following line</p>
<p>בעוד שש מסר דמשק מעיר <i>Within six Damascus will be removed from being a city.</i></p>	<p>7:8c, originally parallel to 7:8b, increasing the number from “five” to “six” and restoring the same expression about Damascus being “removed from being a city” as in 17:1 (דְּמָשֶׁק׃ מוֹסָר׃ מִעִיר)</p>

Roberts has reconstructed the poetic parallelism to a four-line unit of AA' BB'. His theory is that a scribe copied the first line, but due to the repetition of וראש in the second line, he thought that he had already finished it and skipped on to the third line. Similarly, the next two lines (7:8b–c) became garbled because of the repetition of the initial בעוד. After copying the initial word, his eye jumped to 7:8c (שש מסר), and he added the *mem* from מסר to שש and wrote ששם, turning “six” into “sixty.” The scribe jumped back to 7:8b and continued with חמש שנה and the rest of 7:8b. He skipped over the rest of 7:8c completely but then noticed that he had missed the second line (7:9a) and added it as the final line.

Though complicated, his explanation is possible, as haplography is the most common scribal error and the most common cause for confusion and then conflation, in this case, the combination of the numbers “five” and “six” into “sixty-five.” His restoration of the final line is based on the same clause in 17:1, “Damascus is about to be [מוֹסָר׃, Hophal participle] removed from being a city.” The reconstruction builds on the common poetic motif of using sequential numbers as “x, x + 1,” as featured in Amos 1:3–2:6; Prov 6:16; and elsewhere.

This makes very good sense out of the otherwise awkward “sixty-five.” A five-to-six-year timespan coordinates well with the saying in 8:4, a text that I will argue provides Isaiah’s personal commentary on 7:1–9. In the end, while this almost persuades me, it must remain tentative at this point, and the commentary here will work with the MT text as it stands, which can be intelligible and will be discussed below.

יַחַת אֶפְרַיִם מֵעַם׃—The difficulties in the verse continue, although most translations do not betray the problem of this clause. The usual translation is that “Ephraim will be shattered/destroyed from being a people” = “Ephraim will no longer be a people.” The verb יַחַת, from the root חתת, is either Qal (so BDB) or Niphal (so *HALOT* and *DCH*). The meaning of “be shattered, broken” in the sense of destroyed is given

for either form, but the more common meaning is to “be dismayed, terrified.” Under citations for “be shattered,” BDB notes that all passages cited, except for 7:8, are translated as “dismayed” (e.g., 8:9; 30:31; 31:4, 9, where it more likely is to be translated as “be terrified”), and *HALOT* cites the meaning “be broken” for the Niphal only here and Mal 2:5, where it certainly does not mean “be destroyed.” Both the Qal and Niphal regularly imply dismay and terror, not necessarily destruction (cf. 8:9; 30:31; 31:4; 51:6–7). The Hiphil (9:3 [4]) can mean to “shatter, break” in a transitive sense. But the most probable meaning here is “be dismayed,” possibly nuanced by a sense of distress at something having turned toward destruction.

The preposition לְ usually identifies the cause of the “dismay” (תַּחַת), as in Jer 10:2, “dismayed *at* them” (cf. Jer 3:9; 2 Chr 20:15; 32:7). The closest parallel to the usual translation “from being a people” = “no longer a people” is Jer 48:42, with reference to the destruction of Moab, but the verb is נִשְׁמַד, Niphal of שָׂמַד, which actually means “destroy”: “Moab will be destroyed *from a people*” = “from being a people.” The sense of Is 7:8–9 would support the fact that both Aram and northern Israel will cease to be a threat, and, in fact, they would be destroyed—and even cease to exist as a distinct people—by the very Assyrians from which they were seeking to defend themselves. The LXX has ἐκλείψει ἡ βασιλεία Ἐφραϊμ ἀπὸ λαοῦ, “the kingdom of Ephraim will be deserted from a people.” This is the usual sense that is given by English translations, “destroyed from [being] a people” = “no longer a people,” and it is certainly possible. But it is not the most common (nor certainly well documented!) use of this verb and preposition.

The most straightforward translation of the Hebrew would be “Ephraim will be dismayed at (being?) a people,” as though the sense is not so much destruction as fear and dismay at what has become of them as a people (which could certainly include and lead to destruction), perhaps for giving up their faithfulness to Yahweh by their alliance with Aram in fear of Assyria. (As discussed in the commentary, this is precisely the concern of Isaiah for Ahaz.) A paraphrase might be rendered as “Ephraim will be dismayed at what has become of them as (no longer) a people.”

7:9 אֲמֵן אֲמֵן לֹא תִאֱמָנוּ כִּי לֹא תִאֱמָנוּ—The line is another wonderful example of the prophet’s play on words, punning on the Hiphil and Niphal of the same verb, אָמַן, “to be sure” (cf. אָמֵן, “amen!”). Both verbs are plural; again, there is more in view than simply Ahaz as an individual. The Hiphil describes the affirmation of faith and trust, rightly translated as “believe.” The Niphal describes what is found to be true, faithful, trustworthy. The same play occurs in 2 Chr 20:20, and the incident recorded there may lie in the background (see the commentary).

As in 5:7, attempts to replicate the wordplay are almost impossible, but unlike 5:7, the translation presented makes an attempt to capture the same root in both verbs: “if you do not affirm, you will not be found firm!” It is important to keep the grounding of faith in God, not in our actions, and the sense of the second clause has to do with steadfastness. Wildberger rightly speaks of “permanency.” He cites Luther favorably

and quotes the Deutsche Bibel of 1545: *Gleubt [Glaubt] jr [ihr] nicht, So bleibt jr [ihr] nicht*, “if you do not believe, then you will not remain.”²¹

Other suggestions include the following:

- “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” (NIV; ESV and NRSV are similar)
- “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.” (NASB)
- “If you don’t remain faithful, you won’t remain standing.” (GW)
- “If you will not be sure, you cannot be secure.”²²

These are other attempts to replicate the wordplay: “if you do not believe, you will not be considered believable” or “if you do not say amen to God, you are without an amen to say!”

7:10 וַיִּזְכֹּרְךָ יְהוָה דְּבַר —The sense of the Hiphil of זָכַר, literally, “to add,” serves as a complement to the infinitive construct, “continued to speak” or “continued speaking” or, better, “spoke again.”

7:11 שְׂאֵל לְךָ —The preposition לְ for the so-called “ethical dative” (לְךָ, “for yourself”) is very common with an imperative and is more idiomatic than literal. It does highlight the relationship of the verbal action to the person. The verb form שְׂאֵל is singular, still addressed to Ahaz as a person, and “for yourself” reinforces that point of reference. In 7:13, the imperative שְׂמַעוּ will be plural.

בְּמֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ —Literally, “from with Yahweh your God,” the preposition בְּ seems redundant, but this common doubling up of prepositions, בְּמֵעַם, accents the location of the source as “that which is *with*” the object of the preposition מִן.

הַעֲמִיֵק שְׂאֵלָה אוּ הַנִּבְּהָ לְמַעְלָה: —The Hiphil forms הַעֲמִיֵק and הַנִּבְּהָ could be parsed either as infinitive absolutes or as imperatives. As vocalized, שְׂאֵלָה could be the Qal imperative of שְׂאֵל with a volitive *he*, echoing the initial request to שְׂאֵל, “ask,” at the beginning of the verse. This could be a hendiadys with הַעֲמִיֵק as the Hiphil infinitive absolute acting adverbially, “to ask deeply,” but this idiom is not otherwise attested. Parallelism with the following clause, “make high to above,” would suggest a counterpart expression, and already the early versions (Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion) and the Vulgate (see the note in *BHS*) translate שְׂאֵלָה as “to Hades.” Most likely, then, שְׂאֵלָה is a pausal form of the noun שְׂאוּל with (unaccented) *he directive*, “to Sheol,” pointed for assonance with the parallel term לְמַעְלָה (Joüon, § 32 c; cf. GKC, § 29 u). The parallelism with the following directional phrase, “to above” (לְמַעְלָה), also with *he directive*, makes a very strong case for this reading. The pair forms a merismus, from depths to heights. The LXX also reads שְׂאֵלָה in parallel with לְמַעְלָה but omits the two verbs: εἰς βάθος ἢ εἰς ὕψος, “to depth or to height.”

7:12 וְלֹא־אֶנְסֶה אֶת־יְהוָה: —Literally, “and I will not test Yahweh.” In the Piel, נִסָּה is used of “testing” in the sense of “proving,” not “tempting.” See the commentary.

²¹ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 302, citing WA DB 11/1.43.

²² Leupold lists this as a possible way to capture the wordplay (*Exposition of Isaiah*, 1:153).

7:13 שְׁמַעוּנָא בְּיַת דְּוֹרָה—The imperative “hear” is plural, possibly as a plural of formality (majesty), but Isaiah used the singular imperative in 7:11. More likely this imperative is rather sharply addressed no longer simply to Ahaz as a person but to the (whole) “house of David” and to the king as the representative of the people. The second person plural continues through the rest of the verse and into 7:14.

The force of אָנָּה is difficult to nuance, but it often serves as a connector, and the use of the English “then” is quite helpful.

הִלָּאִי . . . אֲנִי־שִׁיִּים הִלָּאִי—The verb לָאָה means “to be weary, exhausted” even to the point of giving up. The Hiphil can thus mean to “make weary” or “burden” but usually with a sense of “wear out,” “exhaust,” or even “render powerless” (see *HALOT*, citing, e.g., Jer 12:5). In Is 1:14, the Niphal describes Yahweh’s sense of being weary of the vain sacrifices. Micah 6:1 suggests its use in the context of the so-called covenant lawsuit (the verb רָיַב), which is also in the background in Isaiah 1. In Micah 6:3, the verb is predicated of Yahweh in his sarcastic rhetorical questioning of his people: “With what have I wearied you?”

“Men” is here used as human beings (as opposed to God), though Isaiah may have himself in mind as at least one man who has grown very weary of Ahaz.

7:14 אֲדֹנָי־הוּא—Again, the noun “Adonay” highlights the lordship of the true King, as in 6:1. 1QIsa^a reads the Tetragrammaton here. The redundant pronoun הוּאֵהוּ is emphatic, “the Lord *himself*.” Joüon, § 146 c, notes this emphatic “appositional” use but offers a nuance in passing, “the Lord *of himself*,” as though implying that God is acting completely on his own and by his own power and volition, almost in spite of whether Ahaz agreed to receiving a sign or not.

הִנֵּה—The particle calls attention to something that is critical to the present situation, with a sense of the “here and now” of what is described (see the first textual note on 3:1a). See also the fourth textual note on 7:14 on the “imminent future” expressed with הִנֵּה and the participle. “See here” gets at a similar expression in English, and the “here” is more literal: “there is something here!” Other paraphrase attempts might include the following: “Look at this!” “Consider this!” or “Pay attention to what follows!”

הַעַלְמָה—Much discussion has surrounded the translation of this word, influenced by the translation of the LXX as ἡ παρθένος and the quotation in Mt 1:23 (see the excursus “Prophecy and the Identity of Immanuel” following this pericope). The NT assertion that the prophecy and “sign” are fulfilled in the birth of the Messiah to the Virgin Mary is critical to the biblical and intertextual (and intertestamental) understanding. But the initial interpretative task is one of translation and meaning within the original context, which, in turn, is part of the larger biblical context.

In spite of the amount of ink spilled in discussing the basic meaning of הַעַלְמָה, the basic sense is clear: the word describes a young woman, sexually mature but unmarried and thus still considered to be a virgin.²³ Of these components of meaning, the

²³ The linguistic data is often rehearsed but short of conclusive. הַעַלְמָה occurs nine times. Five are plural, three of which refer to singers or singing in psalms (Pss 46:1 [ET superscription]; 68:26 [25]; similarly, 1 Chr 15:20). The two plural uses in Song of Songs refer to young maidens, likely (but not certainly) virgins in a strict sense (Song 1:3; 6:8). The singular הַעַלְמָה is

primary one is “young woman” (though presumed to be a virgin).²⁴ *DCH* offers “specifically uninitiated, unknowing female.”²⁵ By comparison, the word **בְּתוּלָה** implies “virgin” as its primary component,²⁶ not “young woman,” and therefore possibly of any age (though generally young). It is often claimed that if Isaiah intended to accent her virginity, he would have used **בְּתוּלָה**, and, in the original context, the “sign” is not necessarily a “virgin birth” as much as the birth and name of the son to be born. But **עַלְמָה**, the term in 7:14, also assumes virginity as a component of meaning. In a contemporary culture where that assumption is no longer clear, the translation “virgin” better carries the sense, even if it does not accent the primary component of the original, and this is the rationale behind my intentional use of “virgin.” “Young, unmarried, sexually mature virgin” would be both clear and the closest to a literal translation that captures the basic meaning, but it is far too cumbersome. If it were not archaic, the old English term “maiden” would be the most accurate one-word translation.

A second translational decision, often not discussed in detail, is the function of the definite article. The natural sense is, indeed, definite: “the specific one,” even used deictically, as “that one.” The English definite article is used in the NIV, ESV, NRSV,

used three other times in addition to Is 7:14. It is used for Rebekah (Gen 24:43), who is also called a **בְּתוּלָה** in Gen 24:16, with the further descriptor that “no man had known her,” as though that was not clearly indicated by **בְּתוּלָה**, a point that Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 85) overplays to argue that **בְּתוּלָה** is ambiguous. (The further description could simply be reinforcement of the basic meaning of the word.) In Ex 2:8, Miriam is called an **עַלְמָה**, appropriate to her situation without necessarily highlighting her virginity. Finally, Prov 30:19 cites the enigmatic “way of a man with an **עַלְמָה**.” Hummel summarizes: “For all the often tumultuous debate, the Hebrew *‘almah* appears technically to mean only ‘young woman’ of marriageable age, who as such may or may not be virginal, but (at least in that culture) normally would be (Hebrew has no word with the precise, technical meaning of *virgo intacta*)” (*The Word Becoming Flesh*, 203). Appeal is also made to the Ugaritic cognate *glmt*, used to describe a goddess with perpetual virginity. While a direct link to Ugaritic is unlikely (and this connection is often used to suggest that the “mythology” of a virgin birth can be traced to this mythical Canaanite motif), the Biblical Hebrew word does clearly suggest an understanding of virginity, and even Oswalt observes: “Without conceding that Isaiah has merely adapted a myth, one may still think that he adapted well-known linguistic forms which would make it plain that whatever might occur along the way, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy would be no ordinary event” (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 211).

²⁴ Thus the RSV translation “a young woman,” so controversial at that time (and even today in many circles), is not necessarily incorrect. (The RSV was first published in 1946 and revised in 1952 and 1971.) But in today’s world, it is certainly imprecise and may not carry the over-tone and assumption of virginity.

²⁵ Thus the LXX translation *παρθένος*, often assumed to be a bit off the mark and thus the false premise for Matthew’s use in Mt 1:23, is not incorrect, but it is, on the contrary and in fact, quite accurate.

²⁶ Again, the data does not make an airtight case. **בְּתוּלָה** seems to be used when the issue of virginity is stressed, such as in laws (Ex 22:15–16 [16–17]; Lev 21:3, 14; Deut 22:19), and the noun for virginity is the related **בְּתוּלִיָּה** (cf. Deut 22:24: “evidence of virginity”). Joel 1:8 is one case where a **בְּתוּלָה** is likely not a virgin, unless **בַּעַל** means “fiancé” and not “husband,” which would be unusual. In general, the sense of **בְּתוּלָה** is “young woman,” often paired with “young man” (**בְּחֹרִין**, e.g., Deut 32:25; Is 23:4; Jer 31:13; 51:22; Lam 1:18; 2:21). Isaiah uses **בְּתוּלָה** five times, twice for “young woman” (23:4 and the bride in 62:2) and three times to describe cities (Sidon in 23:12; Zion in 37:22; Babel in 47:1; cf. Jer 31:4; 46:11), but his only use of **עַלְמָה** is in 7:14.

NKJV. However, often the article is used in a generic sense, “one [anyone] of the specific category.” This would actually argue for the absence of the English definite article in translation, “a virgin,” i.e., one who is a virgin, but not necessarily any specific one. This is followed by KJV, RSV, NASB, GW. A third use of the Hebrew article, seemingly less likely but grammatically possible, is the vocative use, often in direct address: “O Virgin!”²⁷

A case can be made for all three possibilities. My translation has opted for the more traditional sense of the definite article, referencing a specific virgin, though the identity is not yet certain to the reader. (Whether it was clear to Isaiah's immediate audience is another question!) In this sense, the generic would also work well: one in particular who is a virgin, but not yet specified. The vocative possibility is directly related to the handling of the verb form *וְיִלְדָה*; see the fifth textual note on 7:14.

וְיִלְדָה וְיִלְדָה—The first of the coordinated pair, *וְיִלְדָה*, is analyzed as the feminine adjective, derived from the verb *וְיִלְדָה*, “to conceive, be/become pregnant.” The “tense” is both contextual and critical: is she “pregnant” already or “conceiving” as a future action, i.e., “will conceive” (and thus “will become pregnant”)? This is followed by the feminine singular participle of *וְיִלְדָה*, “to bear,” thus “bearing.” But neither provides a tense value apart from context. Together they simply say “pregnant and bearing a son.”

The introductory *וְיִלְדָה*, however, provides a sense of the near future. As noted earlier (see the first textual note on 3:1a), the idiom in which *וְיִלְדָה* is followed by a participle is that of the so-called “imminent future” (*futurum instans*), often best translated as “about to happen.”²⁸ Many translators apply this only to the second descriptive word (the participle) with a translation like this: “see this—the *‘almāh* is pregnant (already) and about to bear a son.”²⁹ This has a certain natural sense, as an observer might note an obviously pregnant young woman and realize the current time factor between being “pregnant” and then bearing a child. Why Isaiah, speaking in the name of Yahweh, would call such a pregnant young woman an *‘almāh* is another question, however (assuming the noun includes the virtue of virginity, even if that is not the major accent). This also assumes that the imminent future of *וְיִלְדָה* applies only to the participle and that the first “look at this” is simply describing the “here and now” situation of a young woman who is pregnant. On the other hand, many translations, including almost all English translations, take both the adjective and the participle as future: “see this—the *‘almāh* will conceive and will bear a son.”³⁰

²⁷ See Joüon, § 137 g, and GKC, § 126 d (e). Is 42:18 thus addresses “the deaf ones,” translated as “you deaf.”

²⁸ See Waltke-O'Connor, § 37.6f. Waltke-O'Connor, § 32.2.5a, example 5, translates this text as future. Also see GKC, § 116 p, where Is 7:14 is included in examples where *וְיִלְדָה* “is intended to announce the event as imminent, or at least near at hand (and sure to happen).”

²⁹ So, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 227; Childs, *Isaiah*, 61; Gray, *The Book of Isaiah: 1–XXVII*, 125; Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah, the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching*, 132; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 282; Williamson, *Isaiah 6–12*, 137, 140.

³⁰ See, e.g., Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12* (2nd ed.), 151, 160; Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (AE 16:84); Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 85; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 202; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 213; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 95, 97. Also, the LXX (and as cited

When the two verbal roots הָרָה , “conceive,” and יָלַד , “bear,” are coordinated as finite verb forms, they express the same time reference (commonly in imperfect *waw* consecutive, as in these examples, both in the past tense): “she conceived and bore” (e.g., Gen 4:1, 17; 21:2; 30:17; 1 Sam 2:21; Is 8:3; Hos 1:3, 6, 8; see also Judg 13:3, with two perfect *waw* consecutives, noted below). The adjectival form הָרָה is coordinated with the singular feminine participle of יָלַד , as in Is 7:14, four other times. In Jer 31:8, the pair describes both “the one pregnant” and “the one in labor” together. Three other occurrences appear in two similar contexts: Gen 16:11 and Judg 13:5, 7.³¹ In all three verses, the word pair is introduced with הִנֵּה .

In Gen 16:11, Hagar would seem to be pregnant already: “behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.” The Genesis context makes clear that Abram had already gone in to Hagar and that she had already conceived. But in Judg 13:5, 7, the wife of Manoah is told what is about to take place: “you will conceive and bear a son.” She is described as barren, certainly not a virgin but also not yet having conceived and borne a child. Judg 13:3 has already clearly set the context as future, reversing the present situation of barrenness with perfect *waw* consecutives (noted above): $\text{וְהָרִית וְיָלַדְתְּ}$, “and you will conceive, and you will bear.” So also in Judg 13:5 and Judg 13:7, the sense of both הָרָה and יָלַדְתְּ , introduced by הִנֵּה (הִנֵּה), is future.

All this suggests that the general sense of the use of both the coordinated verbs and of the participle plus adjective is naturally the same time frame for both actions of the pair, unless, as with Hagar, there is clear reason to assume otherwise.³² Here in Is 7:14, the context is clearly future: “Adonay himself *will give* you a sign: . . . and you *will call* his name Immanuel.” So the הִנֵּה introduces two actions that are also both in the future, as is the natural understanding of this “imminent future” idiom. And, of course, assuming עַלְמָה includes the sense of “virgin” and should thus be translated as such (see previous textual note), this is extremely strong contextual evidence that she has not yet conceived.

וְיָקַרְתָּ —The verb is a perfect *waw* consecutive of קָרָה , in sequence with the preceding participle, thus continuing the sense of the imminent future. The form is usually taken as a proposed archaic third singular feminine of the Qal perfect (regularly spelled

in Mt 1:23) has the future, $\epsilon\nu\ \gamma\alpha\sigma\tau\rho\iota\ \epsilon\tilde{\zeta}\epsilon\iota\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\acute{\epsilon}\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \upsilon\iota\acute{o}\nu$, literally, “she will have in (the) womb and will bear a son.”

³¹ The form of יָלַד in Gen 16:11 and Judg 13:5, 7 is pointed וְיָלַדְתְּ , a mixed form (*BHS: forma mixta*), as the consonants could be either the perfect second singular feminine, יָלַדְתְּ , with *waw* consecutive, or the participle singular feminine, יָלַדְתְּ , with conjunctive *waw*. If it is perfect with *waw* consecutive (Waltke-O’Connor call this *waw* relative; see Waltke-O’Connor, § 32.1.1.a), then the force would likely have a future sense or simply match and continue that of the previous verb (or here, הָרָה , as an adjective), so the pair clearly goes together.

³² Luther is unclear as to whether he is reading the Hebrew הָרָה as an adjective or taking it as a perfect finite form (in which case the form of הָרָה would have to be third singular masculine and thus incongruous with a feminine subject). He asserts that “in Hebrew it is ‘has conceived,’ and that is the indication of a miracle; it is as if the prophet were already seeing it.” He goes on to argue that the “sign” indicates that “it is necessary that that conception and birth be in a different manner than is commonly and naturally the case” (AE 16:84). See the commentary.

הַקָּרָאָה), as noted in GKC, § 74 g, with the *taw* explained as a restoration of the original *taw* of the third singular feminine afform (“suffix”).³³

This archaic form is possible, as the same form occurs in Deut 31:29 and Jer 44:23, where it must be third singular feminine, but in both cases, the root is קרא II, “meet, encounter,” which is really a by-form of קרה, not קרא I, “to call,” and thus is based on an actual III-*He* root (see footnote 33). Both passages have as subject the feminine noun הַרְעָה, “the evil,” so the verbs are clearly third singular feminine. The so-called archaic form of the third singular feminine makes sense as a form related to a III-*He* root, but not so obviously to a III-*Aleph*. Nowhere else does this form occur with קרא I, as proposed for Is 7:14.

The III-*Aleph* root אטא does appear in the form אַתְּטָאָה in Ex 5:16, but this is not necessarily third singular feminine (so NIV, ESV, NASB, but NRSV reads as second singular masculine: “you are unjust”). On this example, GKC, § 74 g, states that Ex 5:16 could only be the second singular masculine and that the text, “which is evidently corrupt,” should probably be emended to אַתְּטָאָה with the LXX.

There is no other use of קרא in the perfect third singular feminine in Isaiah, but he certainly knows the regular form in III-*Aleph* verbs (שָׁנְאָה in 1:14; מָצָאָה in 10:10; מָלְאָה in 11:9, three examples just within Isaiah 1–12). There are numerous uses of paradigmatic forms of the perfect second singular feminine throughout the book, but the exact duplicate form אַתְּקָרָאָה appears once, in 60:18, where it is clearly perfect *second singular feminine*: “but you [Zion] will call salvation (to) your walls.”

Thus while the traditional parsing as third singular feminine in 7:14 is defensible, it is not the normal or natural reading of the verb form. It does, however, make the simplest and smoothest translational sense in this context, and it is simply assumed that the subject has to be הַעַלְמָה, which would require a third person verb form. The verb is thus taken in agreement, often simply gapped in translation with the first clauses, “the virgin will conceive and bear a son *and will call* his name . . .” Appeal is then made to the “archaic third singular feminine” form as an explanation. 1QIsa^a reads וקרא, which is third singular *masculine*, “he will call his name,” although the subject would not be clear in that case. Ahaz, the most likely candidate, is being addressed, though indirectly as the “house of David” with plural verbs in 7:13 and in 7:14 with לָכֶם (“to you,” plural). More likely would be a Pual pointing, וקרא, with “his name” as subject and the passive meaning, “will be called” (cf. 62:2, though that idiom regularly uses the prepositional phrase with ל, “to it,” in the formula “x will be called to it” = “its name will be called x”).

But the MT of 7:14, taken at face value, is the Qal perfect *second singular feminine*, as translated by the LXX, καλέσεις (the Targum reads the word as וקרא, which, as in Hebrew, can be third singular feminine or second singular masculine). The Greek does not distinguish second masculine from second feminine, and the Hebrew verb could be

³³ The archaic *taw* is seen in III-*He* roots in the third singular feminine. GKC, § 75 m, cites אַתְּקָרָאָה (as paradigmatic) and אַתְּשָׁעָה (Lev 25:21), and the regular pattern then retained the *taw* and added the suffix הַ, which formed the paradigmatic אַתְּשָׁעָה (see GKC, § 75 i). But this applies to III-*He* patterns, and the verb in Is 7:14 is III-*Aleph*, with the final root letter *aleph* retained, not restored as *taw*.

repointed as second singular masculine, וְיִקְרְאוּ, which would offer yet a fourth possibility. Here Matthew 1 does not follow the LXX and has καλέσουσιν, “they will call,” taking the verb in the impersonal sense, similar to the passive, “the name will be called (by anyone or everyone).”

Gen 16:11 offers a clear parallel, continuing with וְיִקְרְאתָ שְׁמוֹ, “and you [singular feminine with reference to Hagar] will call his name” Ishmael. There would seem no reason not to follow the clear and simple reading of the text in Is 7:14 as well, except that there is no feminine singular person identified as a candidate to be addressed in the second person. The implications of this translation will be taken up in the commentary (see also the excursus “Prophecy and the Identity of Immanuel” following this pericope). But my translation will at least offer this as the actual reading of the text.

עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים—The name “Immanuel” is a nominal sentence, literally, “with us God.” The normal word order of such a sentence is subject—prepositional phrase: “God—with us.” The inverted order shows emphasis on the phrase: “with us—is God.”³⁴ Any further stress (“with us” or “with us”) cannot be determined, but the general sense is the emphasis on God’s presence.

7:15 חֶמְצָאָה וְדָבָשׁ—“Curds and honey.” חֶמְצָאָה is a general term for what milk (חָלָב) turns into (see 7:22), likely some sort of sour milk or curds, possibly even a form of butter. More important is the significance of this word pair, occurring here and again in 7:22 (see the commentary).

לְדַעְתּוֹ—The syntax is awkward, but the infinitive construct with a suffix is straightforward, either “to know him” or, here, “to his knowing,” with the object of the infinitive to follow. Waltke-O’Connor, § 36.2.3d, includes this use of the preposition לְ as a temporal clause marker and translates the clause here as “until he knows.”³⁵ Most translations indicate a temporal sense, but the precise nuance is not clear. The LXX has πρὶν ἢ γινῶσθαι, “before knowing.” ESV has “when he knows”; NRSV has “by the time he knows”; GW has “until he knows”; NASB has “at the time he knows.”

Literally, the preposition לְ is simply referential, “having (something) to do with his knowing.” The clause concludes with the direct object that deals with the discernment of good and evil (see the next textual note). So the sense certainly has to do with his maturing into accountability, in relation to which he will “eat curds and honey.” My translation suggests that the two actions simply go together in some way. Literally, one could offer “curds and honey he will eat with reference to the time when he will know . . .”

מִאֲיִם בְּרָע וּבְחֹרֵר בְּטוֹב:—Why infinitive absolutes (מִאֲיִם ... וּבְחֹרֵר) are used (and again in 7:16) is not clear. Both verbs can take objects marked by the preposition בְּ. The articles on “good” and “evil” are generic and almost serve as capitalization: “that which

³⁴ See Joüon, § 154 ff. Joüon, 154 a, note 1, as translated and revised by Muraoka in 1991, states, “the structure of the nominal clause has been one of the most hotly debated topics in Biblical Hebrew grammar during the past two decades or so.” Along with Andersen (*The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch*), Muraoka himself has been a major contributor to this debate (see *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew*).

³⁵ See Waltke-O’Connor, § 36.2.3d, example 22, at least through the tenth printing in 1999. However, 7:15 was eliminated as an example in that section by the time of the fifteenth printing (2010).

metaphor of “streams of water in the desert” to the new King (32:2) and noting how the new creation will be a time of abundant water in the desert (35:1, 6–7). This becomes a motif in chapter 40–55 (e.g., 41:18; 44:3; 49:10; cf. 58:11), often with a clear reference to a new exodus, as in 43:16–21.

As already discussed, the use of the plural verb in 12:3 also moves the poem from a focus on individual thanksgiving to that of corporate community, from part to whole, even as the communal life is made of individuals. Stanza 2 now follows in the plural.

Isaiah 12:4–6 (Stanza 2)

This second stanza begins exactly as the first, framing the time of this poem of praise in the future, “on that day,” but also anticipating “that day” within the present realities. The shift to second plural in 12:3 has anticipated the fact that stanza 2 is in the plural,²⁹ again highlighting the “both/and” of the individual and corporate identity of God’s people. In biblical thought, the individual is secondary to the corporate, so the two poems move from singular to plural, as the one is incorporated into the whole.

Structurally, this second song (12:4b–5) has only five cola, which I have scanned as an introductory monocolon (12:4b) and a well-worked quatrain (12:4c–5).³⁰ The first two cola of the song (“Give thanks . . . ! Make known . . .”) are an exact duplication of Ps 105:1 (cf. also Pss 145:4–7; 148:13), but I have extended the seconding line (“make known among the peoples his deeds”) to be the first line of the quatrain (12:4c–5) that follows, which may have served as a antiphonal response to the opening invitation by a cantor: “Give thanks to Yahweh; invoke his name!” The following four cola reflect their chiasmic structure ABB'A':

- A and A' use of the verb עָרַף (“to know” as “cause to know”/“be known”)
 “his deeds” || “this” as the object of “what is to be made known”
 “among [אֶרֶץ] the peoples” || “in [אֶרֶץ] all the earth”
 B and B' “for [אֶרֶץ] his name is *exalted*” || “for [אֶרֶץ] he has done a *majestic thing!*”

Further, the initial line of the song uses both “Yahweh” and “his name,” which are further articulated in B (“his name”) and B' (“Yahweh”)

The first song (12:1b–2) had six cola, which I scanned as seven by dividing the first one by thought (“I will give thanks [to] you, O Yahweh, for (although) you were angry at me”), though in Hebrew this could well be two very short cola (5 + 5 Hebrew syllables) or one slightly longer colon (10 Hebrew syllables).

there is enough water imagery in the nearer literary and historical context. But the sense that the words of Isaiah themselves were written to proclaim and preserve this message of life in the salvation of Yahweh is a theme consistent with the interpretation of 12:3 in any case.

²⁹ Although the plural form of the first verb in 12:4, “and you will say,” is not certain. This verb in 1QIsa^a is second masculine *singular*. See the first textual note on 12:4.

³⁰ BHS has included the first colon, “give thanks to Yahweh; invoke his name!” along with the introductory announcement “and you will say on that day” in 12:4, but that introduction stands as a separate line in 12:1, and so it should also in 12:4.

Overall, the second stanza has fewer longer lines, culminating in the final bicolon (12:6) of 20 Hebrew syllables. The sense is one of overall balance, with the complexity of the lines increasing as the psalm moves from an individual to the corporate people, all with a growing sense of gravity leading to the climactic final line.

12:4 The second song begins with the same verb as the first song (תַּתְּן, Hiphil), “give thanks” (12:1, 4). But in 12:4, it is an imperative, addressed to a plural audience (probably less as a true imperative and more, like its use in Psalm 105, as a corporate exhortation of the people to one another). Thanksgiving includes praise and confession before God, before one another, before the nations. The indicative of the individual expression, “I will give thanks” (12:1), gives way to the imperative, “O give thanks!” (12:4), as the community exhorts one another in the style of many songs and hymns. This may also reflect some kind of antiphonal worship practice, as the seraphim called back and forth in 6:3. It may also be possible, as has been proposed for Psalm 105 (and Psalm 106), that the voice is a Davidic one.³¹ In this case, Isaiah 12 also plays a role in the movement from the righteous King as individual (12:1–2) to a proper function as leader of community worship and praise, anticipating the *proper* priestly function of the true King (Psalm 110, and in contrast to Uzziah’s action in usurping the priestly role³²).

God’s name is to be invoked, called out; he is named by name. One cannot call upon a deity without knowing his name, and knowing one’s name implies a relationship and access (cf. Gen 32:29 [28]; Ex 3:13; Judg 13:17). To know the name Yahweh is to be his person, his people, in the covenant relationship of promise, grace, and salvation: “I am your God; you are my people” (Ex 6:7; Jer 11:4; Ezek 36:28).

This is not just another god with his or her own name. Ex 15:11 asks, “Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?” He is the only God, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth and of all nations, as has been assumed, inferred, and stated throughout Isaiah 2–12. It is Yahweh who has spoken to Ahaz through Isaiah (7:10). It is Yahweh who is King in Jerusalem (6:1). It is Yahweh who will rise to judge his people (3:13); it is Yahweh’s vineyard that has not brought forth good fruit (5:7). It is Yahweh who will “whistle for the fly” of Assyria (7:18) and who will destroy it when the ax and saw think they are the one who makes and uses them (10:15–19). It is the “zeal” of Yahweh that will establish

³¹ See again Hensley, “One Mediator between God and People: ‘David’ as the Speaker of Psalms 105–106.” He proposes that an individual Davidic voice (himself a suffering servant [Psalm 86; 89; 102]) leads the community as its head, calling on them to confess/give thanks. The movement in Isaiah from king to suffering servant to the restoration is similar to what Hensley proposes in arguing for a Davidic voice in Psalms 101–110, also taking on the Mosaic role of mediator. Considering these psalms together also shows a sense of continuity in binding books 4 and 5 of the Psalter.

³² 2 Ki 15:5; 2 Chr 26:16–21. See “Uzziah/Azariah (ca. 791–740 BC; 2 Ki 15:1–31; 2 Chronicles 26)” in “The Prophet in His World” in the introduction.

the house and lineage of David (9:6 [7]), and it is the Spirit of Yahweh who will rest upon the messianic Shoot from the rootstock of Jesse (11:2). It is the day of Yahweh Seba'oth against all the high and mighty (2:12), and it is the Word of Yahweh that will go forth from Zion to judge all nations (2:2–4) and establish his kingdom of peace (11:3–10).

But it is also Yahweh whom “they have forsaken” in the emphatic opening accusation in 1:4. Now, as God’s anger and with it the dread and panic have turned to comfort and joy in the God of salvation, it is Yahweh’s name that is exalted and to be proclaimed, indeed it is to be “caused to be remembered” in all the earth (12:4). When the proud are brought low, the name of Yahweh is exalted (2:11, 17) “*on that day*.” With his name come his deeds, what he has done, both in judgment and in salvation, both to Pharaoh and for Israel (Ex 15:3–4), to Judah and to Israel, to Assyria and to all the nations. Psalm 105 recounts his deeds from the time of Abraham through the exodus, making the connection between the promise of the land and fulfillment, from the land of Canaan to Egypt and back again to claim it for Yahweh’s kingdom. That is the pattern envisioned in the eighth century BC as well, from the land to Assyria, later to Babylon, but back again to the citadel of Yahweh (12:6; 40:9–10). A remnant would return (7:3; 10:21; 11:11, 16).

12:5 Yahweh’s name is also exalted within Zion, in the worship in the temple. The verb “sing” (זָמַר, *zamar*, 12:5) is used extensively and almost exclusively in the Psalms (including the cognate noun מִזְמוֹר, *mizmor*, as a name for a “psalm/song”), and it suggests the singing done in worship within the cultus. This is the only use of this verb in Isaiah, and not only does it fit the use of psalmic material, but it may also offer wordplay on the homonym *zimrat* (זִמְרָה), which is an archaic noun for “protection, strength” in 12:2 (and Ex 15:2). The “strength” of Yahweh exhibited in the exodus has led to a song of praise for his salvation in the future, in the “second” and “final,” eschatological exodus.

The singular “majestic thing” (גִּבּוֹרָה) which he has done is likely his overall claim to be the only true King (see the second textual note on 12:5), his royal “majesty” (מְגִלָּה), which is not regarded by the wicked (26:10). The closing lines of this second poem call to mind a reference to the song of Exodus 15, echoed also in the first poem, here to Ex 15:1: “for he is highly exalted” (גִּבּוֹרָה גְּבֹרָה) because of his majestic deed, “the horse and its rider he has thrown into the sea!” Isaiah uses the simple verb “to do” (עָשָׂה), as was thematic in the Song of the Vineyard (5:1–7) to highlight what needed “doing” but wasn’t done.³³ With God as the “do-er,” what is, in fact, his “everyday work” is actually a “majestic thing”! God makes it look so easy.

It is “this” (זֶה) which is to be made known in all the earth. But the “this” no doubt includes the sum total of all that his name and deeds entail, as has been implied throughout chapter 12, summarizing all that has gone before in

³³ The verb “do/yield” (עָשָׂה) occurs seven times in the Song of the Vineyard. See “Overview and Structure” in the commentary on 5:1–7.

chapters 2–12 (e.g., “the zeal of Yahweh Seba’oth will do *this*,” 9:6 [7]). In fact, the structure of 12:4 would match the “this” of 12:5 to the “deeds” of 12:4c, each related to the verb “know” (יָדַעַ), first in the (causative) Hiphil and then the (passive) Hophal, “make known what is to be made known!” In this quatrain, each of the two clauses in the middle cola with “for/that” (כִּי, 12:4cB and 12:5aA) follows an imperative, first with the object of what is to be brought to remembrance, “that his name is exalted,” then the reason to “sing,” “for he has done a great thing.” But, again, the proclamation and praise is not limited to Zion, even if it finds its focus in the God who dwells there. “This” is to be made known “in all the earth.” Delitzsch comments insightfully: “When God redeems His people, He has the salvation of all the nations in view.”³⁴

12:6 Finally, 12:6 serves as a concluding coda that closes the second stanza in a way similar to the function of 12:3 at the end of the first stanza, and the subject shifts one last time, to the Hebrew feminine singular “inhabitant of Zion.” Chapter 12 returns to the singular with which it began (12:1), but now it is a corporate whole.

The precise reference of “inhabitant” is not certain (see the textual note). It would seem to be a collective for “the inhabitants of Zion,” as Jer 51:35 would imply. In Is 5:3, the Hebrew masculine singular “inhabitant” is used in a similar way with “Jerusalem,” though it was suggested (see the first textual note and the commentary on 5:3) that the singular might also be an indirect reference to the king (cf. “the man of Judah” that follows in 5:3, 7; cf. 8:14; 9:8 [9]). By analogy, the singular feminine here might be the queen as another significant “resident of Zion,” but that would be a very unusual way of speaking. In fact, the people are “embodied” in the king, negatively in Ahaz and positively in King Yahweh, who is the proper Resident of Zion (Ps 9:12 [11]).³⁵ Yet the people are also personified as the queenly bride of the royal Bridegroom (Is 62:1–5 and hinted at in 7:14 if the “virgin” there is, at one level, identified as the princess who would marry the prince³⁶).

But “Zion herself” is really the focus of 12:6, indicated by the two Hebrew feminine singular imperatives, “cry out and shout for joy” (צִיְהִי וְשִׂיחִי). Those who dwell in Zion are identified with Zion and even described as the personified Zion. The expression “inhabitant Zion” is similar to “daughter Zion” (בִּתּוֹת צִיּוֹן) in 1:8, which is better translated as “daughter [which is] Zion.” Though a strict appositive may not function in translation in 12:6 (“inhabitant Zion”), the sense

³⁴ Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 1:294.

³⁵ There are several parallels between Psalm 9 and Isaiah 12 in terms of vocabulary, especially Ps 9:11–12 [10–11], with its theme of “trusting” (בָּטַחְתָּ, Ps 9:11 [10]), “knowing his name” (Ps 9:11 [10]), “singing” praises (שִׂחֵה, Ps 9:3, 12 [2, 11]), and “telling among the nations [בְּעַמְּוָה] his deeds [וְעַל־לִבְיָהוּ]” (Ps 9:12 [11]). See also the proposal of Hensley, “One Mediator between God and People: ‘David’ as the Speaker of Psalms 105–106,” noted above, and the connections to Psalm 105.

³⁶ See the discussion in the excursus “Prophecy and the Identity of Immanuel” following the commentary on 7:1–25.

of an “inhabitant which is Zion” may come closer to the nuance. Thus Zion herself, as the identification of all who dwell within her and including Yahweh as her King (8:18), is addressed with the double feminine singular imperatives, using two verbs for joyful “crying out” and “shouting,” often associated with victory and celebration. This “Zion” is the full kingdom of Yahweh, and it is the proper “resident” of all the earth. There is no longer any mention of the ordinary human king as the “resident.” That was the problem at the heart of the matter in Isaiah 6–8; the obstinance of “this people” was also embodied in their king, and all of them were unwilling to hear or see the ways and will of the true King, Yahweh. But now the people who are embodied as corporate Zion give Yahweh full attention. And in their proclaiming the great deeds of her God and true King, all nations are invited to come to Zion and learn the Word of Yahweh (2:2–4), for this is the heart and center of the kingdom of Yahweh. He is great in all the earth, but he chooses to dwell in the midst of Zion. But his kingdom, this Zion, his righteous rule, is properly extended in his people into all the earth.

This final affirmation brings this extraordinary poem to conclusion, and with it, the whole of chapters 2–12. Is 12:6aB uses the third וְ in these lines that close this final song, 12:4cB (“that”), 12:5aA (“for”), and 12:6aB (“for”). This conjunction was used twice in the first song (12:1bB, “for you were angry . . .” and 12:2bA (“for my strength and . . .”), but the triple use in ordered bicola in 12:5–6 call to mind this triple use elsewhere (6:5 [cf. 40:2]; 9:3–5 [4–6]).

Interestingly, this final line proclaims the only ascription of the adjective “great” (גָּדוֹל) to God in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah has used a variety of words that mean “exalted” (e.g., שָׁנַב in 2:11 [see also 12:4]; גָּאֹנִי in 2:21; גָּדוֹל in 6:1), but he otherwise does not call God simply “great.” The adjective is used for God often enough elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 7:21; 10:17; Jer 10:6; Pss 48:2 [1]; 77:14 [13]; 95:3). But the only other person called “great” in the book of Isaiah is the king of Assyria and that in the self-serving taunt of the Rabshakeh in 36:4, 13. The idiom of a “great God in the midst of his people” is also not common. The closest parallel is Deut 7:21, in bringing assurance of God’s presence with his people before conquering the nations of Canaan.

But the ascription is both simple and all-encompassing: God is “great.” And this God is Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Whereas “great” is used only once in describing God in Isaiah, “the Holy One of Israel” is a dominant title, used twenty-six times (see the textual note). Isaiah had experienced the holiness of God in chapter 6 (6:3), and as a sinner in the presence of the holy God, he cried out in despair (6:5). This holy God would “show himself holy” in righteousness (5:16). His fire would burn and devour (10:17). He alone is to be recognized as holy (8:13). But he will be the strength and hope of the remnant (10:20). Indeed, that remnant that is left in Zion will be called “holy,” “everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem” (4:3). For even in the tree cut down there is a “holy seed” (6:13). On that “mountain of his holiness,” there will be peace and safety (11:9). Yes, great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel! In

contrast to the opening accusation (1:4) that this “sinful nation” has forsaken *Yahweh* and despised *the Holy One of Israel*, this God is now proclaimed as the proper object of joyful worship and praise.

Thus the emphatic title of God at the very end is the ultimate focal point, but the key emphasis of the word order is that he is great *in your midst*, that is, in the midst of Zion and all who dwell there as a corporate whole. Yahweh is the Holy One of Israel, the King of all nations and of all the earth, but he is there, in the midst of his people. Zion stands securely, and it is the dwelling place on earth of God as the true, only, and ultimate King. In a final affirmation of the meaning of the name “Immanuel” (see 7:14; 8:8, 10), Isaiah proclaims that this God, called “God” (*El*, 12:2a) and “Yah Yahweh” (12:2b), called he who is thrice-“holy” (6:3), the *Holy One of Israel* whom Isaiah encountered in the temple in chapter 6, is “in your midst, Zion!” One might paraphrase thus: “God is with us! Immanuel, indeed!”

Isaiah 12 in Its Literary Context in the Vision of Isaiah

As the capstone to chapters 2–12, Isaiah concludes this first major portion of his great “vision” (1:1) with two short psalms of thanksgiving. The first is individual (singular), but it is followed by a corporate (plural) expression of thanksgiving and mission. This interplay and complementarity of singular and plural, individual and corporate, particular and even universal, culminate in the ultimate unity of all God’s people in the corporate personality of Zion in 12:6. This plays a role especially in chapters 6–8 as the historical focal point of Isaiah 2–12. Most significant is the personal, autobiographical accounts of Isaiah’s own confession and absolution in 6:1–7. What he experiences is personal, yet it is also a model for what needs to happen to Judah, both king and people, indeed to all Israel and ultimately to all nations. In chapter 8, the prophet enacts in his own marriage the sign of the next generation, and he connects his second child (8:3; cf. 7:3) also to the message of the Immanuel Child, which is the focus of chapter 7 (cf. 7:14; 8:8, 10). He concludes with a message to all nations in 8:9–10. Chapter 7 focuses on the corporate people as embodied in the king, addressed in both the singular and plural to highlight his larger role both in space (all the people at that time) and time (the larger Davidic dynasty throughout history). That royal role will also draw closer to Yahweh himself in a Son from the line of Jesse who will display both human and divine attributes (9:5 [6]) and usher in the everlasting reign of peace in the new creation (9:6 [7]; chapter 11). The failure of the house of David even under Hezekiah will lead to a new Davidic figure who will mediate the relationship between Yahweh and Zion as the Suffering Servant (chapters 40–55), all as part of God’s faithfulness to David (55:3). In the end, Yahweh will be acclaimed as the true King (32:1; 33:22; 52:7). He will rule in all the earth (24:23). The messianic and ideal David figure will embody the resident(s) of Zion and lead them in praise, both individually and corporately “on that day” (12:1–6).