Essay 3
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Hebrew language students: discuss an interesting feature of the text.

Isaiah 7-11 begins with the oracles to Ahaz but goes beyond a message to the king of Judah. It puts a beautiful prophecy that is fulfilled in Jesus. The Hebrew text uses different resources to communicate these eschatological oracles to have a powerful impact on the reader. It uses idiomatic expressions, literary figures, wordplay, and key terms.

There are different idiomatic expressions, which for today's reader may go unnoticed in these chapters. In Isaiah 7:1, Constable warns that “son of someone” to refer to Pekah is a way of denigrating him (Constable 2021). Pekah was the “king of Israel.” However, Isaiah calls him בֶּן-רְמַלְיָהוּ “son of Remaliah” rather than king, which was his title. It contrasts with the references to the kings of Judah and Syria in the same verse. Another idiomatic expression appears in Isaiah 7:8. Isaiah mentions that Ephraim (Northern Kingdom) will be broken off from the people (יֵחַת אֶפְרַיִם מֵעָם). This expression refers to the fact that the northern kingdom would no longer be a nation (Constable 2021). These events would occur in 65 years. Although the Northern Kingdom was conquered thirteen years after Isaiah's prophecies, it was not until 671 B.C. (62 years later) that Esarhaddon resettled foreign populations in and around Samaria (Constable 2021). It made it difficult for Israelites to return and resettle there.

Isaiah 7:18-19 mentions that Jehovah would whistle (יִשְׁרֹק) at the horsefly of Egypt and the bee that is in Assyria. This idiomatic expression infers that Jehovah would summon the armies of Assyria and Egypt to do his bidding as one would whiz at insects (Constable 2021). This statement may sound strange in our day. However, the ancients could control flies and bees by whistling at them. Moreover, Egypt was known to be a land full of flies, and Assyria was known to be a beekeeping country. God would summon these enemy soldiers to swarm Judah. Next, Isaiah 7:20 uses another curious expression. Jehovah will shave (גלח) Judah using Assyria as a razor (תַּעַר). This expression evokes the custom of shaving prisoners and slaves as a sign of dishonor (Constable 2021).

Isaiah 8:3 mentions Isaiah approached (קרב) the prophetess (his wife), and she conceived a son. The expression "came near" is a euphemism used in the Old Testament for sexual relations between spouses (Constable 2021). Euphemisms are literary figures that use more decorous words or expressions to substitute for something considered inappropriate or taboo. Another idiomatic expression appears in Isaiah 9:12. The prophet mentions that God continues with his hand lifted (עוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה) against Israel. Oswalt claims this expression can have two meanings (Oswalt 2003, 166). It could be a judicial figure of speech, in which the judge raises his hand to pass the sentence. In addition, it could represent a king holding a mace to strike his enemies. It was a way of depicting kings in the ANE.

In Isaiah 10:15, the prophet uses four words to illustrate Assyria as a tool of God to punish His people for their sins. The axe (גַּרְזֶן), the saw (מַשּׂוֹר), the rod (שֵׁבֶט), and the club (מַטֶּה) symbolize Assyria. God is the woodcutter and punisher who employs Assyria for his purposes (Oswalt 2003, 175). Assyria must not think they move for their own sake and have more power than Israel. Without God's authorization, Assyria could not stand up to Israel. Isaiah also employs wordplay that is only evident in Hebrew. In Isaiah 7:9, he concludes his appeal to Ahaz to trust in God and not to be afraid with the following expression: "*If you do not stand firm (תַּאֲמִינוּ) in your faith, you will not stand (תֵּאָמֵנוּ) at all* (NIV)." Both Hebrew verbs have the root אמן in different stems (Hifil and Niphal). Given this statement, Oswalt points out that Ahaz has a way: He should give in to fear and put his trust in God. Thus, he will be able to remain calm despite the immediate circumstances (Oswalt 2003, 138). The other play on words is in Isaiah 7:11-13. When Isaiah requests Ahaz to ask his God for a sign (אֱלֹהֶיךָ), Ahaz replies that he will not tempt him. This reply evidences Ahaz's position in whom he will place his trust. Thus, Isaiah no longer refers to God as Ahaz's God but as my God (אֱלֹהָי). Constable points out that this change was ominous. It suggested that God would abandon the king. In light of this reading, Immanuel's prophecy indicates that God would raise his kingdom from the house of David (Constable 2021).

Throughout the Old Testament, names have much relevance. Isaiah 7:14 mentions Immanuel (עִמָּנוּ אֵל), God with us, for the first time. Constable notes that this name is probably a title or symbolic term for the child to be born (Constable 2021). Several scholars claim that Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (מַהֵר שָׁלָל חָשׁ בַּז), son of Isaiah, is the first to fulfill this prophecy (8:3). This name signaled that God was present in the history of Judah. Thus, Immanuel would be a symbolic name pointing to that presence. This same thought applies to Jesus. Immanuel was a symbolic name to declare God's personal intervention in history through the Incarnation in Jesus. Regarding the term Immanuel, this title demonstrated that God was with Israel through the child to be born (Constable 2021). Isaiah 9:6 calls him Wonderful Counselor (פֶּלֶא יוֹעֵץ), Mighty God (אֵל גִּבּוֹר), Everlasting Father (אֲבִיעַד), Prince of Peace (שַׂר-שָׁלוֹם). These titles point to his deity and humanity: the first two expressions suggest wisdom and divine power, and the last two affirm his fatherly care and sovereign peace (Constable 2021).

Another outstanding feature in Isaiah is the change of person (Jehovah-Isaiah) and the deictic references (אַתָּה, אַתֶּם). These resources are not only typical of Isaiah but appear in several prophetic and poetic books of the Old Testament. Regarding the idiomatic exchange (communicatio idiomatum), at one moment, the prophet speaks as if he were Jehovah, and at another, Jehovah speaks as if he were the prophet. An example of this is Isaiah 7:10 (Constable 2021). In addition, Isaiah refers to Ahaz (אַתָּה) and Israel (אַתֶּם) throughout the oracles. These small changes in person are relevant, as they infer to whom the prophecy affects or targets.

Finally, these chapters of Isaiah mention relevant terms worth studying in detail. Isaiah 7:14 talks about a virgin who will birth a child (עַלְמָה). The Hebrew word used is not the common word used for woman (אִשָּׁה) or girl (נַעֲרָה), but an

unusual word used for a young woman of marriageable age (Oswalt 2003, 140). This word does not mean virgin per se. The word virgin is בְּתוּלָה. Oswalt thinks that the use of virgin would have drawn too much attention (Oswalt 2003, 140). Furthermore, the use of the Hebrew word עַלְמָה allowed for the double fulfillment of this prophecy. A frequent term related to the virgin is a child (יֶלֶד). It appears seven times in these chapters. This child will have a pivotal role in peace and on the throne (9:6). A task that does not fit an ordinary child.

A curious term is curds and honey (חֶמְאָה וּדְבַשׁ) in Isaiah 7:15, 22. Oswalt points out that this term could refer to deprivation because of the destruction and depopulation of the land. In addition, it could refer to royal food. It implies that after the Assyrian raids, there would be few people left in the land that anyone could eat as a king (Oswalt 2003, 141). The last key term is in Isaiah 11:1. The prophet mentions that a shoot (נֵצֶר) would sprout from the roots of Jesse's stump. This idea of sprout or shoot also appears in Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, and Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 (Constable 2021). Some scholars claimed that Matthew had this Hebrew word in mind when he wrote that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy by being called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23).

Bibliography

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Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Isaiah, 2021 Edition*. Soniclight: 2021.