Essay 4
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Hebrew language students: discuss an interesting feature of the text.

Isaiah 12-22 be disaggregated into two parts. First, chapter 12 is a song of thanksgiving for the salvation that God will give to Israel in the future. Second, chapters 13-22 are oracles of judgment toward the nations: Babylon (13:1-14:23), Assyria (14:24-27), Philistia (14:28-32), Moab (15:1-16:14), Damascus/Syria (17:1-14), Cush (18:1-7), Egypt (19:1-20:6), Duma/Edom (21:11-12), Arabia (21:13-17), and Jerusalem/Judah (22:1-25). These oracles attest to the folly of trusting the nations, something Ahaz has done (Oswalt 2003, 195). In the midst of this song and these oracles, Isaiah has used linguistic resources and expressions to enrich his message. Thus, it is possible to find chiasms, poems, and terms in the Hebrew text. They will be discussed in detail.

The oracles (messages from God) of chapters 13-23 and 27 can be separated into three groups of five oracles each. In the first group (oracles to Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Damascus/Ephraim, and Egypt), God shows that He has placed Israel at the center of His dealings with the nations. In the second group (oracles to the wilderness by the sea, Edom, Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tyre), God projects His message to the future. These oracles are related to what He said in the first group. The names of the places are more enigmatic than concrete. In the last group (oracles to the empty city, king of Zion, great banquet, the city of God, and final gathering), God points to the eschatological future and shows the same principles that applied to the previous groups (Constable 2021). Isaiah did not make this division. It is just a proposal. However, it points to the type of message that God was communicating to his people: the same judgment would be for the nations of that time and those to come.

Other structures identified in these chapters are chiasms. Constable notes a chiastic structure in the oracles addressed to Babylon and Assyria: A The day of the Lord: the beckoning hand, a declared universal purpose (13:2-16); B The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the kingdom, the fact of the divine overthrow (13:17-22), C The safety and future of the Lord's people: a contrasting universal purpose (14:1-2); B' The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the king and the explanation of the divine overthrow (14:3-23); and A' The end of Assyrian power: the outstretched hand, a universal purpose exemplified and validated (14:24-27) (Constable 2021). Biblical scholars have identified another chiasmus in the oracle to Egypt: A The preaching of God's punishment of Egypt (19:1-15); B The healing of Egypt by God (19:16-25); and A' The defeat of Egypt by God exemplified (20:1-6) (Constable 2021). In both chiasms, a message of hope characterizes its central part. The first chiasmus is a message of hope for the Lord's people. In contrast, the second chiasmus is a message of restoration for Egypt.

Another literary device used in the Hebrew text of Isaiah is the poems. The oracles were texts written in poetic language. However, these could have peculiar characteristics. For example, Isaiah 14:4b-21 is a lament poem. Its four

stanzas delineate a song of mourning for the death of someone, with the meter and vocabulary of a typical lament (Oswalt 2003, 208). Oswalt has pointed out that this poem is one of the best in Hebrew. He further adds that it is not a typical lament but a parody to express joy at the death of a tyrant. He divides this poem into four stanzas, where there is a reaction to this death from the earth (4b-8), from the underworld (9-11), from heaven (12-15), and an announcement about the terrible fate of the dead (16-21).

On the other hand, the Hebrew text employs expressions that evoke an eschatological time. For example, Isaiah 12:1-4 uses the "that day" (בַּיּוֹם) formula. In contrast to the use of this expression in the previous chapters (2:20; 3:18; 4:1; 7:18, 20-21, 23) for a time of "fear," in chapter 12, it is used for a time of "waiting." This expression is also present in Isaiah 19:16, 18, 18, 19, 23, 24. Constable points out that this expression evokes the eschatological "day of Yahweh" (יום יהוה) and evidences a time in the future when God will change the fate of these nations (Constable 2021). Also, other prophets have employed this expression. Isaiah 13:6 uses this "day of the LORD" to refer to His intervention in history. In addition, the text also mentions "that this day is near" (קָרוֹב). Constable points out that this Hebrew word describes the preparation for that day, in which God would send destruction.

In these chapters, Isaiah uses words to show the starkness of his oracles. In Isaiah 13:22 (oracle of judgment on Babylon), Isaiah mentions that the biggest city of the ancient world would be inhabited by hyenas (אִיִּים) and jackals (וְתַנִּים). Oswalt claims that these images show that Babylon would become a desolate and abandoned place. This prophecy has been fulfilled. After the Medo-Persian empire conquered Babylon, they did not take the city as their capital. After falling into the hands of Alexander the Great, he established his capital in Antioch, Syria. Over the centuries, the city fell into oblivion. Therefore, even in these last centuries, its exact location was unknown (Oswalt 2003, 201).

A recurring word in these chapters is prophecy (מַשָּׂא). This word occurs in Isaiah 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 11, 22:1 (Constable 2021). It is also possible to translate it as a "pronouncement." These pronouncements are of judgment for the previous nations directly or indirectly. Also, they function as a boundary for each section of the oracles. Also striking is the use of the word proverb (הַמָּשָׁל) in Isaiah 14:3-4. Constable cautions that this word has a sense of mockery (Constable 2021). Thus, it could be translated as satire. This meaning fits the oracle's message, as Israel mocks the disgrace in which Babylon and its ruler have ended up.

In Isaiah 16:7-11, the author uses a little allegory regarding the vine (גֶּפֶן), speaking about fields (שְׂדֵמָה) that were cut down and the branches (שְׁלֵחוֹת) spread out that were trampled down. Constable affirms that this reference to the vine fits with Moab. Vineyards covered Moab's fields. Also, it shows that they had extended their influence far beyond their borders. However, an enemy had broken up their vineyards (Constable 2021). The mention of the vine, the branches, the vines, the wine presses, and the vintage are intended to bring Moab to mind. In 16:7, there is a mention of grape cakes. Constable points out

that it is likely that raisin cakes were a national product of Moab known outside its borders (Constable 2021).

Isaiah 18:2 uses two expressions to refer to a specific nation. He calls them a high (מְמֻשָּׁךְ) and smooth-skinned (מוֹרָט) nation. According to Constable, this was a regular description of the Nubians (Constable 2021), people of southern Egypt and Sudan. "High" and "smooth-skinned" could also refer to what follows in the verse: a feared people, a powerful and oppressive nation whose land is divided by rivers. It is likely a description of a large and aggressive people (probably the Egyptians, Assyrians, or Medes). Isaiah 19:5 mentions that the sea (יָם) will dry up. It refers to the Nile River, the name by which the Egyptians knew it. Constable points out that Egypt's economy depended entirely on this river. If the Nile dried up, the economy and people would be strongly affected (Constable 2021). Egypt's crops, such as flax (19:9), need water. However, if there is no water, the industry that sustains Egypt's economy would suffer, and people would be unemployed.

In Isaiah 19:18, there is an expression that scholars have interpreted in two ways. The Hebrew term עִיר הַהֶרֶס could be translated as "the City of Destruction." It would be one of the five Egyptian cities mentioned verses above. Constable says this expression could refer to the future destruction Yahweh would bring upon Egypt. In addition, he points out that this term could also be read as "city of the Sun," changing the Hebrew letters ה to ח. If that were the case, this expression would refer to an Egyptian city bearing that name (Heliopolis). That place was a center of sun god worship in Egypt. The verse could refer to the end of idolatry in that place (Constable 2021). In Isaiah 20:1, there is a reference to the king of Assyria, Sargon (סַרְגוֹן). Constable points out that this name is mentioned only once in the Bible in this passage (hapax legomenon). Historians have long held that Sargon was not a real character since the lack of secular historical references. Later, archaeologists discovered that this person was Sharrukin, after his Assyrian name. Today we have a lot of historical material about his reign (Constable 2021).

Isaiah uses the word Dumah (דּוּמָה) as a reference to Edom. This word would be a play word. Constable notes that Dumah could also have been an Edom's place or the Akkadian designation for Edom, Udumu (Constable 2021). There is a mention of Dumah in Genesis 25:14 as a reference to the descendants of Ishmael, not Esau, who was the Edomites' ascendant. Constable also points out that the meaning of Dumah is silence, which fits with this silent oracle regarding the end of Edom. Isaiah also refers to Jerusalem as the Valley of Vision (גֵּיא חִזָּיוֹן). Jerusalem consisted of a valley (Kidron Valley) to elevated areas (Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives). However, Constable points out that the reference to Jerusalem as the "Valley of Vision" points to a depressing place where he received the sad vision of the inevitable judgment of this city (Constable 2021).

Bibliography

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