

Essay 5

Jenner Valdivia

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

In chapters 23 to 29 of Isaiah, the author continues his oracles to the nations and precedes an apocalyptic message for all humanity. From chapters 24 to 27, an Isaianic pre-apocalypse speaks about what will happen in eschatological times (Constable 2021). The Hebrew text, in these chapters, uses expressions, literary figures, and chiasms to impact its audience. In the following paragraphs, these linguistic resources will be discussed.

Bible scholars have found similarities between the message of Isaiah 23 and chapters 13-22. Isaiah 23 deals with oracles against Tyre, one of the nations surrounding Israel. This type of message resembles those oracles to Babylon, Moab, Dumah, Judah, Assyria, and Egypt addressed in earlier chapters of Isaiah. However, the content of chapters 24-27's oracles does not appear to point to a specific nation but to all humankind. The message of Isaiah 24-27 seems to be the previous chapters' continuation since it speaks of judgment and destruction. Constable likens it to a piece of music, where these chapters would be the culminating part that can be appreciated by itself (Constable 2021). In addition, Constable points out that many commentators refer to Isaiah 24-27 as "the Apocalypse of Isaiah" since it reveals the end of history but with an eschatological language (Constable 2021). Oswalt also points out that chapters 13-35 could be titled "Lessons in Trust," as Isaiah tries to show Hezekiah and his generation the folly of trusting in the nations rather than in the wisdom of the Lord (Oswalt 2003, 385).

Some authors have found a chiasmic structure in the so-called "Apocalypse of Isaiah" (Isaiah 24-27). They place the center of the chiasmus in Isaiah 25:6-12 which speaks about Mount Zion. The chiasmus is structured as follows: A Yahweh's harvest of a destroyed world (24:1-13); B The song of the remnant world (24:14-16a); C The sinful world overthrown (24:16b-20); D The waiting world (24:21-23); E The song of the ruined city (25:1-5); F Mount Zion (25: 6-12); E' The song of the strong city (26:1-6); D' The waiting people of God (26:7-21); C' The spiritual forces of evil defeated (27:1); B' The song of the rest of the people (27:2-6); and A' Yahweh's harvest of a destroyed people (27:7-13) (Constable 2021). This structure is a proposal when analyzing the passages according to the themes it addresses, but, likely, Isaiah did not intend to write it in this related form. However, the structure alerts us to the similarities of the message in a call to the nations and the people of God to come to Jerusalem (Zion), the land where God's presence dwelt. It is consistent with the vision of prophets such as Ezekiel.

In these chapters of Isaiah, some comparisons seek to generate an impact on the initial reader. An example of this appears in Isaiah 24:20. The prophet compared the land (אֶרֶץ) under divine judgment to a drunk (שָׁכָר) and a hut (מְלוּנָה). Constable points out that the drunk symbolizes an internal weakness, as the staggering drunk falls because of the effects of alcohol on the body. In addition, the old hut falls due to external pressures (Constable 2021). In other

words, these figures warn that the coming destruction is the fault of the transgression that weighs on the earth, which is irrevocable.

A literary tool that goes unnoticed in the translated Bible is onomatopoeia. This figure of speech describes an action or thing through the sound it emits or is attributed. Constable points out that the prophet chose onomatopoeic words in Isaiah 28:7-8 to imitate the drunkenness-induced staggering and stumbling of Judah's priests and false prophets (Constable 2021). The words used are: shagu-taghu, shagu-taghu, shagu-paqu (וְשָׁגוּ-וְשָׁגוּ, וְשָׁגוּ-וְשָׁגוּ, וְשָׁגוּ-וְשָׁגוּ). The use of onomatopoeias seeks to generate an impact on the reader rather than having a stylistic function. On the other hand, Constable also notes a synecdoche in these chapters. Isaiah 23 refers to Tyre (צֵר), the principal city of Phoenicia at the time. However, Tyre represents all the cities allied with it in the region (Constable 2021). This form of synecdoche (referring to the whole by a component) is usual in the Bible. This form of synecdoche is also used with Moab in Isaiah 25:10b-11 (Oswalt 2003, 292). Moab represents the human race that refuses to recognize God's authority. It should not imply that Moab is the worst nation. Isaiah used Jerusalem as a synecdoche to refer to all of Judah in several chapters.

In addition, Isaiah includes terms and expressions relevant to his message. This expression "woe" (אֵי) appears several times in these chapters. This expression is a term of lament and threat that expresses emotion, summons others, and connotes sympathy (Constable 2021). Oswalt mentions that Isaiah begins several sections with the funereal word "woe." such as in Isaiah 28:1, 29:1, 15; 30:1, 31:1, 33:1 (Oswalt 2003, 317). In chapters 28-29, the lament is directed at the exacerbated behavior of the foolish leaders of Ephraim and the condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Jerusalemites.

The recurring terms in Hebrew the text allow the reader to find the principal theme and aid in interpreting the text. The expression "that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) appears in Isaiah 26:1 and 27:1, 2, 12, and 13. This expression links the message expressed in both chapters. Moreover, it denotes a time not near at hand and has been frequently used to appeal to future and eschatological times. Constable points out that the reference is future, specifically to the reign of Jesus Christ on earth during the millennium (Constable 2021). Another recurring term is the word "earth" (אֶרֶץ). It appears sixteen times in Isaiah 24 (Oswalt 2003, 281). This land symbolizes all of humanity. The repetition of Yahweh (יְהוָה) in Isaiah 24:1, 3, 21 also makes it clear who would carry out the destruction. In Isaiah 25:7-8, the word "all" (כָּל) is intentionally repeated four times. Oswalt points out that Isaiah seeks to clarify that all earth's inhabitants are invited to God's banquet (Oswalt 2003, 290).

Metaphor is a frequent literary figure in the biblical text. Isaiah 26:4 uses the term "everlasting rock" (צוּר עוֹלָמִים) to describe God. This metaphor fits aptly with Isaiah's message, trust in the Lord. This trust is justified because the Lord is as sure as an eternal rock (Oswalt 2003, 298). Israel is not to trust in the temporal nations but to place herself in the shelter of the rock that never ends. Another metaphor appears in Isaiah 27:4. Isaiah calls these nations "thorns and

briars" (שְׁמִיר שֵׁית). These nations are not worthy enemies of the Lord since He can easily trample and burn them.

A frequent term in other books of the Bible (Job and Psalms) is Leviathan (לִיָּתָן). Isaiah 27:1 mentions that God will punish Leviathan. Job's author depicted this unknown being as a water monster (Oswalt 2003, 301). This monster was not only a belief of Israel. It was also present in Canaanite mythology (Constable 2021). The use of Leviathan here does not imply that Isaiah believed in this mythological character. On the contrary, the Leviathan symbolized the immense power rising against God's people.

Isaiah 28:14 uses another frequent term. "Scoffers" (אֲנָשֵׁי לָצוֹן) refers to one who not only rejects the truth but also mocks it (Oswalt 2003, 319). The scoffers of Judah have imitated the northern leaders' behavior. They have belittled trust in God after making covenants with death (28:15). In their folly, they thought that covenants will guarantee the persistence of their nation. However, these covenants will only bring them "death." Finally, a curious term is Ariel (אֲרִיאֵל). Isaiah uses this term in 29:1 to refer to Jerusalem. This term could mean "altar hearth" (Oswalt 2003, 329). The word "Ariel" could appeal to the idea that Jerusalem was the location for the cultic activity in Israel.

Bibliography

Oswalt, John N. *Isaiah. The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003.

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