Essay 6
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Hebrew language students: discuss an interesting feature of the text.

Isaiah 29-35 continue Isaiah's message to the people about trusting God. Specifically, chapters 34-35 show a drastic contrast in the decision to trust in the Lord. If believers do not trust God, their lives will become a wilderness (Isaiah 34). However, if they trust God, He can turn that wilderness into a flower park (Isaiah 35). These chapters are an announcement that urges believers to order their priorities and put their trust exclusively in God (Oswalt 2003, 385). Literary figures and central terms have embellished this appeal to trust the Almighty.

Chapters 29-35 of Isaiah can be grouped into two groups: Isaiah 29-33 and Isaiah 34-35. Isaiah 29-33 talks about the superiority of God's counsel over human leaders. While chapters 34-35 show the results of serving the nations or serving God and speak of God's promise of restoration and redemption (Constable 2021). After a quick reading, some people might argue that the oracles of Isaiah are in disarray. However, a beautiful thread connects the prophecies and highlights that God is over idols and nations. Therefore, believers can trust Him wholly.

Like other chapters of Isaiah, scholars have found chiastic structures in these oracles. It is due to the thematic connections. Constable notes the presence of chiasmus in Isaiah 30: A Contemporary events: Egypt does not help (Isaiah 30:1-7); B Coming human events: the rejection of the Word, the way to death (Isaiah 30:8-17); B' Coming divine events: the waiting God, the sure glory (Isaiah 30:18-26); and A' Contemporary events: Assyria does not threaten (Isaiah 30:27-33) (Constable 2023). Unlike other chiasms, this structure does not contain a center. However, the relationship in the message is striking. At both ends, there is a reference to foreign nations that have no impact on Judah. They will neither help nor be a threat to Judah. However, this chiasmus shows hope. Even if the people reject God's Word (30:8-17), God will wait and show His grace (30:18-26).

The author of Isaiah also uses literary figures to make his oracles more impactful. In Isaiah 30:7, Isaiah calls Egypt "Rahab, the useless one" (רַהַב הֵם שָׁבֶת). This way of calling Egypt is sarcasm created based on an oxymoron. Rahab (רַהַב) is the name of a chaos monster (similar to Leviathan). A fearsome dragon threatens to destroy humankind (Oswalt 2003, 344). However, Isaiah uses "the useless one" to qualify this destructive dragon. Egypt, as an ally, would only be an old and toothless monster, too lazy to move. In addition, Oswalt also notices the presence of metaphors in these chapters. Isaiah 33:20-21 uses a tent (אֹהֶל) and a river (יְאֹר) to refer to Jerusalem (Judah). Isaiah uses the figure of a firm tent with stakes and ropes firmly in place to refer to a Jerusalem that her enemies will not destroy. In addition, Jerusalem is called a place of rivers. Oswalt points out that "the river" symbolizes peace and abundance in the Old Testament (Oswalt 2003, 380). Unlike a sea with waves that break and destroy, the river flows peacefully and provides water for human,

animal, and vegetable consumption. In addition, Constable notes the presence of hyperbole in Isaiah 34:3. The verse mentions that "the blood of the slain nations shall stink and drench the mountains of the earth." It is likely that this figure is not literal but seeks to represent a massive amount of unburied dead in the end times. Finally, Oswalt notes that "meter" (קָו) and "plummet" (אֶבֶן) are used ironically in Isaiah 34:11 (Oswalt 2003, 387). People use these tools in construction. However, God would use it to destroy (תֹּהוּ) and leave everything desolate (בֹּהוּ).

Just like the previous chapters of Isaiah, these chapters also use the expression "woe" (הוֹי) to introduce their message. The "woe" appears in Isaiah 30:1. This word shows the lament against the alliance with Egypt. This lament indicates that this alliance is senseless. Egypt can offer no real help to Judah. It is a toothless dragon (Oswalt 2003, 343). The other "woe" appears in Isaiah 31:1. However, it is absent in Isaiah 32:1. Therefore, if chapters 31 and 32 had been one, they would form a single unit with only one "woe" and with the same number of verses as chapter 30. However, Oswalt points out that the structure of chapter 32 shows a new emphasis: the coming King. On the other hand, Constable also notes the presence of the expression "in that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) (Isaiah 31:7). This expression generally introduces an eschatological condition or period. In this case, the people of Isaiah's time needed to return to God since Israel, as a whole, would do so in the future (Constable 2021).

A relevant term is Edom (אֱדוֹם). In chapter 34, Isaiah speaks about the effects of God's wrath on the proud nations. This judgment will be universal. However, Isaiah 34:6 addresses it to Edom (Constable 2021). Like Moab in the previous chapters, Edom serves as a nation representing other nations. Judgment will still be universal, Edom also received its punishment, but Edom is personifying the wicked nations of the earth. Constable also says that the Old Testament consistently treats Edom as the antithesis of Israel (Constable 2021). In Isaiah 33:4, Isaiah uses the term "locust" (גֵּבִים). The locusts would snatch the "spoil" from the nations (Oswalt 2003, 373). The writers of the Bible have used the locust extensively as a literary figure of destruction. The locust plague was deadly. These insects finished a harvest and left farmers and families without food. Locusts were synonymous with famine and death. The prophet Joel points to the plague of locusts as a punishment from the Lord (Joel 1).

Isaiah also uses vocabulary associated with semantic categories that the Israelites recognized. Isaiah 33:6-7 repeats the words "blood" (דָּם) and "fat" (חֵלֶב). These terms were related to sacrifices. They were usually parts of the animal offered to God, poured out to the altar, or burned. Oswalt points out that the nations of the earth, rejecting God's grace, have become the sacrifice because of their sin (Oswalt 2003, 387). Along with these sacrifices, "wild oxen" (רְאֵמִים) and "bulls" (וּפָרִים) will fall. These animals symbolize great strength and unbridled assertion (Oswalt 2003, 387). These strong creatures personify the mighty nations whom God will call to account.

In chapter 34, Isaiah refers to God's wrath against the nations. Some versions translate as "He will destroy them." The verb used in Hebrew is חרם. This verb appears in Joshua 6:17 and 1 Samuel 15:3 to refer to God's request to

consecrate something or someone to destroy for Him. It did not show a superior force but the consequences of a rebellion against God (Oswalt 2003, 386). Later, Isaiah 34:14-15 speaks about a depopulated land inhabited by sinister animals everywhere. One of these animals is the "night bird" (לִילִית). This being was a female night monster in Assyrian and Babylonian mythology that was especially harmful to children, according to the apocryphal book Tobit 8:3 (Constable 2021).

A frequent word in Isaiah is "redeemed" (גְּאוּלִים). This word appears 24 times throughout the book and for the first time in Isaiah 35:9-10 (Constable 2021). These redeemed ones will come happy to the New Jerusalem. In that Jerusalem, there will be no more sorrow and weeping but endless happiness, joy, and shouts of jubilation. This message of hope introduces the following 31 remaining chapters.

Bibliography

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