

Isaiah 30

Overview

In each of the woes so far, we have had a mixture of direct divine speech and Isaiah speaking in the name of the Lord.

	Isa 28	Isa 29:1-14	Isa 29:15-24
Direct Divine Speech	14-20	1-4; 13-14	22-24
Isaiah	1-13, 21-29	5-12	15-21

So here, the woe begins with direct speech by the Lord, and concludes with a longer exposition by Isaiah. Isaiah's section may be in obedience to the Lord's command in v. 8.

1-11, God's Charge to Isaiah

This paragraph is punctuated by two accusations of rebellion (vv. 1, 9). Notably, the Hebrew words are different.

The word in v. 1 means “to turn away,” and emphasizes turning one's back on the Lord and refusing to hear his word.

Zec 7:11 But they refused to hearken, and gave a כַּתֵּף סוּרְרַת, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

In contrast, the word in v. 9 is used to describe positive acts of rebellion, such as the disobedience of Korah in Num 17, or Saul's unauthorized sacrifice in 1 Sam 15.

Significantly, the two roots are often used together, as in Deut 21:8, “a stubborn (v. 1) and rebellious (v. 9) son.” The term in v. 1 always comes first. First, one refuses to hear. Disobedience is the natural consequence.

It is well for us to keep this dynamic in mind. The first step to sin is a refusal to hear the Lord, an unwillingness to listen to his commandments. This unwillingness is serious, in itself and also because of the result to which it leads.

Conversely, if we would guard against sin, we must take heed to God's Word. The Psalmist wrote,

Psa 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psa 37:31 The law of his God *is* in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.

When our Lord was tempted in the wilderness, he met each temptation with Scripture. E.g., in Luke 4,

- Should he make stones into bread? “**It is written**, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”

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- Should he worship Satan in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world? “**it is written**, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”
- Should he cast himself down from the temple to force a miracle? “**It is said**, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

Consider how Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe the results of the new covenant:

Jer 31:33 After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;

Eze 36:27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.

The two are inseparable.

In introducing this woe (vv. 1-11), the Lord begins and ends with the refusal to hear his word, and in the center describes their active sin.

1, Refusal to Hear the Lord

1 Woe to the rebellious סוררים children, saith the LORD,--This word for “rebellious” emphasizes turning one's back to the authority.

that take counsel, but not of me;--They consult with everyone but the Lord. The king consults with his ministers. The ministers consult with the Egyptian ambassador. But no one consults with the Lord.

This condemnation is incredibly contemporary. The G8 and G20 nations gather to discuss the economy, but do they seek the Lord's guidance? The nations of the world gather in Copenhagen to consider climate change, but do they begin with prayer? Whenever the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve take counsel and do not begin with the Lord, they invite woe upon themselves.

and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit,--The “covering” is something woven: we might translate more literally, “that weave a weaving.” The reference is probably to the alliances that nations make with one another, weaving themselves together. God's Spirit is the only source of true unity among people, and those who seek unity apart from him are under God's woe.

Here, Israel's counsel and alliance are as a client, seeking the protection of Egypt. Joshua 9 shows that the problem is just as bad when the relation is reversed. The men of Gibeon came to make a treaty with Israel, contrary to Israel's law, and the elders agreed, “and asked not *counsel* at the mouth of the LORD” (v. 14). In doing so, they compromised their divine mission to cleanse the land, and left unbelievers in their midst. It doesn't matter in today's geopolitical setting whether you approach the problem from the perspective of the US as the most powerful nation on earth, or from the perspective of a third-world country. It is sin to take counsel and make alliances without consulting the Lord.

that they may add sin to sin:--The first sin is refusing to hear. The second is the iniquity that arises because they neglect his law.

2-7, Active Rebellion

These verses play with two ideas: the rebellious mission to Egypt, and Egypt's impotence. Three times Isaiah alternates them, the last in the form of a burden of judgment on Egypt. Behind the entire section is a pervasive biblical theme, the temptation to resort to Egypt in time of trouble.

The Temptation of Egypt

Throughout Israel's history, Egypt is a tempting refuge for Israel. The waters of the Nile made Egypt relatively immune to the droughts that brought periodic famine on Canaan (cf. Zech 14:17, 18). But the Lord almost always warns Israel against turning south for aid.

- God tells Abram, “go to a land that I will shew thee” (v. 1). He arrives there, but then (v. 10) “there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there.” Egypt is not the land that God shewed him, and he has no business going there. In the event, he sins by denying Sarai, and is thrust out by Pharaoh.
- The Lord forbids Isaac to go to Egypt during a later famine, in Gen 26:2.
- Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt in Gen 37-39, a foreshadowing of Israel's long bondage there.
- In Gen 46, Jacob takes his family down to avoid yet another famine. This is the only trip to Egypt that God explicitly permits, in 46:3, “fear not to go down into Egypt.”

Thus begin four centuries of exile from Canaan, which turn into hard bondage. When God brings them out under Moses, he selects their route with a specific intention:

Exo 13:17 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not *through* the way of the land of the Philistines, although that *was* near; for God said, **Lest** peradventure the people repent when they see war, and **they return to Egypt:**

And when the Egyptians pursue them, the people lament,

Exo 14:11-12 Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? 12 *Is* not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, **Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?** For *it had been* better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

But Moses promises,

Exo 14:13 the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, **ye shall see them again no more** for ever.

During the journey, the people repeatedly complain against Moses and against the Lord. They forget their sufferings in Egypt, and begin to think that maybe it wasn't so bad after all. When they tire of the manna, they recall fondly,

Num 11:5 We remember the fish, which we did **eat in Egypt freely**; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

When they hear the report of the spies, they whine,

Num 14:3-4 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? 4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and **let us return into Egypt**.

In Moses' great farewell book of Deuteronomy, he refers twice to the prospect of returning to Egypt, both times negatively.

Deu 17:16 But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor **cause the people to return to Egypt**, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

Deu 28:68 And the LORD shall **bring thee into Egypt again** with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is allowed to remain in Canaan, where he attempts to shepherd the remnant. After the murder of Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Babylon, the people fear reprisals and ask Jeremiah what they should do (ch. 42). The Lord instructs them that they should stay in the land, and specifically warns them not to flee to Egypt. They reject his counsel.

Jer 43:7 So **they came into the land of Egypt**: for they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: thus came they *even* to Tahpanhes.

The sequel relates how they fall into idolatry there.

The temptation to God's people now, as to Israel then, was to seek the help of worldly power rather than to trust in the Lord. Note that the prohibition is not without exception. God permitted Jacob to go down to Egypt. Paul appealed to Caesar. God can use the world in serving his people—but we must recognize that in general, it opposes him, and we must seek his counsel and be sure of his direction before we accept its help.

Now, three times, the Lord describes Israel's attempt to seek help from Egypt, and three times predicts its failure.

2-3, First Panel

2 That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth;--Though the English structure is parallel to the clauses in v. 1, the Hebrew grammar is different.¹ “Have not asked at my mouth” is transitional from v. 1, but the descent to Egypt is now the practical rebellion that results from their failure to consult the Lord.

to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!--The pairing of “strength” and “shadow” recalls 25:4, which is Isaiah's prediction of the praise that the world empires will bring to the Lord in the day of the Lord:

Isa 25:4 For thou hast been a **strength** to the poor, a **strength** to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a **shadow** from the heat,

¹ The verbs “take counsel” and “cover” in v. 1 are infinitives, while the leading verb here, “walk,” is a participle.

The empires themselves will recognize that the Lord has defended his people from them. How blasphemous, then, for Israel to turn to these very empires for help.

3 Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion.--Israel's trust in Egypt will be frustrated.

4-5, Second Panel

4 For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes.--Zoan is in the delta, Hanes is probably the later Heracleopolis, on an island in the Nile in central Egypt, below Memphis. God watches the Israelite ambassadors make their way south.

5 They were all ashamed of a people that could not profit them, nor be an help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach.--For the second time, the Lord warns them that the supposed help of Egypt will be to no avail.

6-7, Third Panel (Burden)

6 The burden of the beasts of the south:--We saw in ch. 13-23 that a “burden” is a prophetic message of doom concerning the one named. Isaiah describes Egypt as having a reputation as a fearful beast that in the end become impotent.

into the land of trouble and anguish,--The doublet appears only three times: here, 8:22, and Prov 1:27 (which may be where Isaiah got it). In all three cases, it is associated with the consequences of neglecting counsel:

Pro 1:24-27 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; 25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; 27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when **distress and anguish** cometh upon you.

Isa 8:19-22 And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? 20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them. ... 22 And they shall look unto the earth; and behold **trouble** and darkness, dimness of **anguish**; and *they shall be* driven to darkness.

Perhaps the words are also meant to recall the bondage in Egypt (to which צרה refers in Ps 81:8 [ET 7]).

from whence come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent,--Egypt is the home of powerful, violent forces, pictured as hostile animals. Israel's hope in sending an envoy is that the nation will launch these forces against the Assyrians, that the ravening lion and poisonous snakes will fall upon their enemies.

they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels,--Foreign protection never came cheap in the ancient world. The great empires

demanded tribute from their clients, and seeking protection amounted applying for client status.

to a people *that shall not profit them.*--Their investment will bring no return.

7 For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose:--Egypt's help will be vain and empty. She will be ineffective in the task for which Israel is engaging her.

therefore have I cried concerning [called] this,--The first clause is the standard Hebrew expression for giving someone a name. God is characterizing Egypt with an epithet.

~~**Their strength is to sit still [They are Rahab, Do-Nothing].**~~--“Strength” is **קִיּוּם**, the name of the legendary sea monster, applied to Egypt in Ps 87:4; 89:10. Egypt would like to think of itself as a powerful monster. But in fact God calls her, “Sit-still,” “Do-nothing.”

8-11, Command to Isaiah

In the previous verses, the Lord condemned Israel's decision to seek protection from Egypt. Now he commissions Isaiah to record his judgment. The judgment does not focus on the specific action of going to Egypt, but on the underlying refusal to hear the word of the Lord.

The message is to be delivered in two ways:

8 Now go, write it before them in a table,--How do you talk to a nation that refuses to hear? God commands Isaiah to set up a billboard, so that they cannot evade it. cf. 8:1.

and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever:--He is also to record it for future reference.

The charge against them has three components. The Lord presents it as a chiasm, with the first panel outlining the summary and the second the more detailed exposition (see handout). The outer elements in each panel are the two forms of rebellion that we considered above, while the central middle element transitions between them.

The first panel is in reverse chronological order, starting with the most mature form of rebellion and working back to the original neglect.

9 That [for]--The particle is ambiguous, and can indicate either the content of what Isaiah writes, or the motive for his writing. Either would fit here; the structure of 12-17 so closely follows vv. 1-7 that I prefer “for.”

this is a rebellious מַרִּי people,--This word is different from the one in v. 1. That term emphasized refusal to hear; this emphasizes the disobedience that results from that refusal. It is a summary of the behavior described in vv. 2-7, the embassy to Egypt.

lying children,--The second charge is in some way a transition between the other two. In some way, lying and deceit leads from refusing to hear the Lord, to active disobedience. The second panel will show how this transition works.

children that will not hear the law of the LORD:--The third component of the charge returns to the original complaint of v. 1. “Will” is not a helper verb, but emphasizes volition: “children that are not willing to hear”

What is it in the “law of the Lord” that might have restrained them from turning to Egypt? There are many possibilities among the verses we surveyed above that disparaged Egypt. But Deut 17:6 may be the most direct, since it is an instruction to the king not to rely on Egypt for military support:

Deu 17:16 But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor **cause the people to return to Egypt**, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

The second panel of the chiasm explains, in chronological order and in more detail, how this process develops. Isaiah presents their attitude in the form of a series of seven instructions that the people give to their spiritual instructors. The first six form three pairs, one for each of the charges in v. 9, but in chiasmic order. The seventh instruction is a summary of the whole process.

10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things,--This instruction corresponds to the final characteristic in v. 9, “children *that* are unwilling to hear the law of the LORD.” The seers and prophets are God's channels for revelation to the people, but the people tell them not to speak.

This error persists today in the attitude of many people toward their preachers. In the common church structure, the pastor is paid by the church, reports to the church, and must keep the church happy if he wants to keep his job. If the people in the church are not godly, they do not want to hear God's condemnation of their sin, and may exert pressure on the pastor not to speak the word of the Lord.

Speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:--This pair shifts from commands not to speak to commands to speak something that pleases the hearer. They correspond to the second characteristic in v. 9, “lying children.” Having refused to hear God's true word, they make up their own version of what they think he ought to have said. This version is described in two ways.

- It is “smooth,” pleasant, easy to hear.
- It is “deceits,” false and contrary to fact.

Because of our sinfulness, what God has to say to us is often not pleasant for us to hear. Being silent is not enough: a preacher is supposed to preach. In order to present a consistently positive and palatable message, the messenger must be deceitful.

This tendency is reflected in the tone of many modern churches, which try to “major on the positive” and be “seeker-friendly.” The gospel starts with the wrath of God against sinners, which is about the most seeker-unfriendly thing one can imagine. But to omit this part of the message in an effort to make the message “smooth” and palatable is to “prophecy deceits.”

11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path,--The pairing of “way” and “path” is most common in Proverbs, a book that Isaiah loves to quote. There, it refers not to a physical road, but to a pattern of life. We read in Prov 2:20 of “the way of good *men*, and ... the paths of the righteous,” and 4:14 warns us of “the path of the wicked, and ... the way of evil *men*.”

The reference here is probably to the way and path promised in Isa 2:3,

Isa 2:2-3 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the

mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his **ways**, and we will walk in his **paths**: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The great promise of the day of the Lord is that he will teach the nations his ways and his paths. The role of the prophet and of the teacher is to guide people in the way of righteousness. Here, the people ask the prophets to take them on a detour, to turn aside from the true way. These two clauses thus correspond to the first description in v. 9, “a rebellious people,” where “rebellious” emphasizes direct disobedience of God's law.

We see this tendency in modern churches when the pastor seeks to explain away the clear standards of Scripture, such as prohibition of sexual immorality, or the distinctive roles of women in the church, or the responsibility of believers to care for the poor. Such preaching soothes the conscience of sinners, but leads people out of the way of the Lord.

cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.--This seventh command describes the effect of the previous sequence, leading from ignoring God, through seeking surrogate instruction, and finally to turning away from conduct that pleases him. People do not want to be reminded of their creator, who demands their devotion. They insist that the teachers make him remote and distant. In Paul's words, “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom 1:28).

This is the objective of modern humanistic culture.

- The theory of evolution is not first of all about gaining a more accurate understanding of human origins. It is about causing the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.
- The separation of church and state is not first of all about constitutional fidelity. It is about causing the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.
- The idea of tolerance for other religions is not first of all about civility and politeness. It is about causing the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

Modern people, like the citizens in the Lord's parable (Luke 19:14), “will not have this one to rule over us.” The top priority of their life is to keep from thinking about their creator and his requirements. And ultimately, they will fall under his wrath for their arrogant rejection.

Contrast 12:6, where the motive for the community's enraptured praise is “Great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” This is the only source of true joy and satisfaction in life: to enjoy the presence of the Lord. To insist on alienation from him is the worst perversion and, ultimately, the most tragic form of self-abuse.

12-33, Isaiah's Announcement

This section falls into two distinct parts.

- vv.12-17 repeat the charge of vv. 1-11, that the nation's misplaced trust will lead to disaster. This part is Isaiah's response to the command of v. 8.
- vv. 18-33 look beyond the disaster to a coming time of blessing on Israel (mainly vv. 18-26, but

v. 25) and God's wrath on Israel's foes (mainly vv. 27-33, but v. 29).

12-17, Sin and Judgment

This section is an alternation of two panels, each with the same five elements (see the handout) :

- an introductory formula,
- a word from the Lord,
- the rejection of that word
- their confidence in some alternative authority
- a warning of sudden judgment

vv. 1-7 began by noting their refusal to hear (v. 1), then continued with a three-panel alternation of sin and judgment (vv. 2-3, 4-5, 6-7). These three elements are all reflected here, in Isaiah's obedient response to the charge in vv. 8-11.

12-14, First Panel

12 Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel,--The title, which originates in the Psalms (71:22; 78:41; 89:18, the latter dated to David's time), is predominantly Isaiah's (26x of 31 instances in the OT, including 2 Kings 19:22). Perhaps Isaiah is so drawn to it because this is how the angels announce God to Isaiah in ch. 6, when he received his commission:

Isa 6:3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory.

This title helps us understand Isaiah's message. The fundamental meaning of “holy” is “separate.” God is called “holy” because he is the creator, distinct from his creation. In ch. 6, the realization of God's utter holiness led Isaiah to exclaim,

Isa 6:5 Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Yet despite that distinction, he delights to dwell in the midst of his people. This title captures the paradox: “the Holy One” (separate one) “of Israel” (who chooses to associate with his chosen people).

Isa 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Recall from our study of ch. 12 that the pinnacle of our joy and praise results from just this paradox, the intimate presence of the infinitely separate one.

Isa 12:6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great *is* the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

Since creation, God's desire has been to dwell among his people. But sin has repeatedly separated us from him (Isa 59:2).

- He walked in Eden, seeking fellowship with his creature (Gen 3:8), but sin led to separation.

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First they hid themselves in shame from the Lord, then he cast out them from this place of fellowship (3:24).

- He had the nation build a tabernacle “that I may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). Later, the temple made this hope more tangible. But at the Babylonian conquest, the Shekinah reluctantly left the temple (Ezek 10).

But God is not taken by surprise by our sin. From the first, when the sin of Adam and Even tore apart the initial fellowship of the Holy God with his creatures, he promised to send the Messiah, the “seed of the woman” who would “bruise” the “head” of Satan (Gen 3:16). Thus amid the history of painful separation, there are repeated promises of restoration.

- When Israel returned from Babylon, God promised, “I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem” (Zech 8:3).
- The Savior promised that where two or three are gathered in his name, “there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20).
- The promise in the new heavens and new earth is, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God” (Rev 21:3).

The deepest desire of the human heart is for this intimate fellowship with our creator. Yet because we are unwilling to repent of our sin, our natural instinct, like Adam and Eve, is to hide from him. We saw this last week. The nation, in its self-confident quest for Egyptian support and its refusal to call on the Lord, instructed its teachers to push the Lord out of their consciousness (v. 11),

cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

Like Adam and Eve, they were aware of their sin, and embarrassed to be in the Lord's presence. But the Lord has a covenant with them, and they cannot simply dismiss him. He instructs Isaiah to post a “table” (tablet) to press his claims (v. 8). In these verses Isaiah is expounding that message.

Because ye despise this word.--“This word” is “the law of the Lord” (v. 9) that they refuse to hear. Deut 17:16 forbade Israel's king to seek military help from Egypt.²

But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor **cause the people to return to Egypt**, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

In describing their rejection of the Lord's word, Isaiah is proclaiming the message of v. 1.

and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon:--This is how Isaiah describes their trust in Egypt, condemned in vv. 2-7.

The alternative to trusting in the Lord is trusting in oppression and perverseness. It is striking to note that there is no middle ground, no way to abandon God and still be fair and moderate. There is no righteousness apart from the word of the Lord. If we abandon that word, we are not neutral; we are oppressive and perverse.

² The use of “word” to describe the law is consistent with the usage in 5:24.

The contrast reminds us of David's comment on Doeg the Edomite:

Psa 52:7 Lo, *this is* the man *that* made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, *and* strengthened himself in his wickedness.

vv. 2-7 described how iniquity led to judgment. Now Isaiah proclaims that judgment.

13 Therefore this iniquity—The “iniquity” is their decision to neglect the Lord's counsel. He illustrates its effect with the image of a stone wall.

shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.--Their iniquity is like a flaw in a stone wall. A stone wall must be absolutely vertical. If a portion of it bows out, gravity will inexorably pull on that protrusion until it tumbles down, bringing the entire wall with it.

The image of a high wall suggests a defensive mechanism; the only other use of חומה נשגבה in the OT, in Prov 18:11, is parallel with “strong city.” The Egyptian alliance is their intended defensive wall. Their failure to consult the Lord is a fatal flaw, which will bring the whole structure toppling down.

14 And he shall break it—That is, the wall. The verb is most naturally read as active (contrary to all modern translations). The wall falls, not only because of the intrinsic defect (representing their misplaced trust), but because of the Lord's active opposition by bringing judgment on them.

as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces;--Now the picture suddenly changes. The wall becomes a clay pot; its fall (a passive response to a flaw and the force of gravity) becomes shattering (the active work of the Lord). Isaiah may be alluding to the threat of Ps 2,

Psa 2:9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water *withal* out of the pit.--Even when a pot is broken, larger sherds can be used as tools. But this alliance will be shattered so completely that its residue will serve no purpose.

15-17, Second Panel

Once again, we have the same five elements, recalling the Lord's words of vv. 1-7:

- an introductory formula,
- a word from the Lord,
- the rejection of that word
- their confidence in some alternative authority
- a warning of sudden judgment

15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel;--The repeated title reminds us again what is at stake: the fundamental relation of the trice-holy, infinitely separate God to his chosen people.

In the first panel, what the people rejected was simply “this word.” Now Isaiah spells out in more detail what they have rejected.

In returning and rest shall ye be saved;--There are two steps to their deliverance.

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“Returning” שׁוּבָה appears only here, but is most naturally derived from שׁוּב “to turn, repent.” The first step in setting things right is to repent of their self-will. As we have seen, our sin separates us from God. As long as we refuse to acknowledge it, we feel alienated from him. The first step in setting things right is to acknowledge our sin and turn from it.

Once we acknowledge our sinful condition, we can rest in the Lord. Throughout the book, God has been exhorting his people to cease from their own efforts and trust in him. To Ahaz, facing attack from Syria and Samaria, he said,

Isa 7:4 Take heed, and **be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted** for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.

Isa 8:12-14 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all *them to* whom this people shall say, A confederacy; **neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.** 13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and *let him be* your fear, and *let him be* your dread. 14 And he shall be for a sanctuary;

Isa 26:3-4 3 Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he **trusteth** in thee. 4 Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH *is* everlasting strength:

These two steps to salvation are often expressed in the NT as repentance and faith:

Mar 1:14-15 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: **repent** ye, and **believe** the gospel.

Act 20:20-21 I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of **repentance** from dead works, and of **faith** toward God,

Salvation, whether from Assyrian invaders or from Satan's bondage, comes not from our own strength, but from turning from our willful self-wisdom and resting in the Lord.

Eph 2:8-9 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength:--These qualities amplify “rest.” Recall Moses' words to the nation on the shore of the Red Sea as they watched the Egyptians approaching:

Exo 14:13-14 And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, **stand still**, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. 14 The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall **hold your peace.**

The world meets disasters with a flurry of concern and activity. The believer begins with prayer, taking counsel with the Lord.

and ye would not.--Once again, as in v. 1, their sin is to refuse the Lord's instruction.

As in the first cycle, Isaiah continues by recalling the false confidence in Egypt and resulting judgment condemned in vv. 2-7. This time, the confidence and judgment alternate at first, before the judgment comes to predominate:

16 But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses;--Egypt was known as a major source for horses (Deut 17:16; 1 Kings 10:28), and the law prohibiting them from seeking military aid from Egypt (Deut 17:16) was concerned directly with horses. They are confident that Egypt will provide them with the resources they need to save themselves.

therefore shall ye flee:--Here is the judgment. In priding yourselves on having horses upon which to flee, you overlook the fact that in fleeing, you are admitting defeat.

and, We will ride upon the swift;--Again, their confidence: but our horses will be very fast.

therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.--Again, the judgment: the enemy will be even faster.

17 One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee:--Now the judgment is in full focus. Isaiah here reverses an ancient formula of blessing from the time of Moses. At Sinai, God promised the people,

Lev 26:3-8 If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;... 7 ... ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. 8 And **five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight:** and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.

In his farewell song, after Israel's victories over Sihon and Og (Num 21), Moses reminds the people,

Deu 32:30 How should **one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight**, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?³

And Joshua, in his farewell address, reminded the people how they conquered the Canaanites:

Jos 23:8-10 But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day. 9 For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but *as for* you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. 10 **One man of you shall chase a thousand:** for the LORD your God, he *it is* that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.

But now the tables are turned. Israel has chosen to neglect the Lord, and he will now fight on the side of their adversaries, and drive them out.

till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.--Only a tiny remnant will remain. But here is a glimmer of hope: that remnant will be like a beacon or an ensign, a token of the Lord's faithfulness to deliver and restore his people. And that hope is the transition to the next section, which describes this deliverance in more detail.

18-33, Eschatological Resolution

As the "beacon" and "ensign" of v. 17 anticipate, the next two sections look beyond the chastisement of

³ Alternatively, this may anticipate the same reversal as in Isa 30:17: in light of Israel's disobedience (the previous verses), they will be given over to their enemies. Cf. in this sense 2 Chr 24:24. But v. 31 favors the interpretation cited here.

God's people to the final day, when Israel is restored to her place of favor (vv. 18-26) and her adversaries are destroyed (vv. 27-33). The same events are here in view as in Rev 20 and 19, respectively, or Zech 14. The woe that was in view in vv. 1-17 now turns to weal.

18-26, God's Grace to his People

Isaiah now traces God's blessings to Israel, starting with delivery from Assyria, and reaching down to the millennium. The remnant at the end of v. 17 experiences the Lord's full blessing.

The section falls into two parts, distinguished by the rhetorical mechanisms that they use.

- In 18-19, Isaiah presents a *logical* analysis, marked by logical connectives (“therefore,” “that,” and “for”), to establish the fact that God's salvation will not come immediately. He will wait before showing his full mercy and grace toward them.
- 20-26 are a predictive *narrative*, marked by converted perfects, which walks us through the unfolding of God's purposes with his people, moving from chastisement to blessing.

18-19, Logical Presentation

The first two verses combine two streams of thought: divine delay, and ultimate blessing.

“Therefore” draws a conclusion from information that is logically prior. On what information do the two instances of “therefore” in v. 18 draw? The most likely explanation is to see them as parallel to the “therefore”s in vv. 13, 16.⁴ These conclusions are part of the alternation in vv. 12-14, 15-17.

- God offered you a word (12, 15).
- You refused it, and insisted on your own wisdom .
- Therefore you will fail (13-14, 16-17).

v. 18 gives a further perspective on the coming failure: the Lord has withdrawn his protection, and is waiting for you to come to your senses. This perspective extends a prediction that Isaiah made in 18:4, in the Burden of Damascus.

That burden ends with two woes. The first (17:12-14) is addressed to the Assyrian invader, whose strength will vanish. The second (18:1-7) is to the Ethiopians or Kushites, who ruled Egypt during the 25th dynasty. They sent “ambassadors” in “vessels of bulrushes” north to seek an alliance against Assyria (18:1). Given the context of ch. 17-18, this alliance was probably with the northern kingdom and with Syria, but Judah's attempts in ch. 30 to form an alliance with Egypt are a continuation of the same worldly tendency.

In ch. 18, the Lord responds to these human schemes with deliberate passivity. He sits back and lets the situation fully develop, before he steps in to intervene. Parents know that sometimes the best way for children to learn the folly of their ways is to experience the consequences, and the Lord sometimes uses this technique with his people.

⁴ The notes gather evidence to show that the logically prior information can actually *follow* the “therefore” in the order of the exposition, and thus be contained in vv. 18-19. But on balance I prefer the explanation in the body of the exposition.

Isaiah 30

Here is how this is expressed in ch. 18:4-5. Note the two steps. In v. 4, he sits back and waits, allowing the situation to develop:

For so the LORD said unto me, “I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, *and* like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”

Then, in v. 5, when the harvest is ripe, he steps in to judge:

5 For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away *and* cut down the branches.

We see the same principle of divine delay elsewhere in Scripture. After promising Abram the land, God said that his descendants would have to endure four generations of captivity before possessing it,

Gen 15:16 for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full.

In Isaiah's own day, the Lord says through his contemporary Hosea, 5:15,

I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

Peter generalizes the insight:

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Now that Judah is seeking Egypt's help, he repeats this pattern. v. 18a, b (each introduced by “and therefore”) describe his patient withdrawal from the scene, while 18c, 19 (each introduced by “for”) describe his final intervention.

18 And therefore—Because the nation is determined to solve its problems by itself, without seeking the Lord's counsel.

will the LORD wait,--As in 18:4, “I will take my rest.”

that he may be gracious unto you,--This common verb emphasizes the favor shown by a strong person to a weak one. As long as the people think they are strong, they cannot appreciate God's grace. His purpose is to glorify his own display of grace, and thus he waits for their situation to be truly dire before taking action.

and therefore will he be exalted,--This clause may be an echo of 18:4, “I will consider in my dwelling place.” He will sit high upon his throne and do nothing. Compare the use of the same root רום twice in 57:15 to describe how far off the holy Lord is:

thus saith the **high** and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the **high** and holy *place*

that he may have mercy upon you:--This verb emphasizes the inner feeling of compassion that motivates the gracious actions in the first part of the verse. Again, for God's actions to be seen as merciful, the people must recognize their own disastrous condition.

The pairing of “be gracious” and “have mercy” is common in describing God throughout the OT. See

the notes for examples. The first such pairing is in Exod 33:19,

I ... will be gracious **והנן** to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy **והרחם** on whom I will shew mercy.

Note the emphasis on the arbitrariness of God's actions. He is not obligated by some higher morality to be gracious and to show mercy. Miserable people have no claim on God's help just because they are miserable. He exercises these qualities as he pleases. In particular, he waits until the recipients recognize their need and turn to him, before he intervenes.

The next two paragraphs, introduced by “for,” describe his ultimate intervention, corresponding to 18:5. The chiasmic ordering moves from the Lord's action, to the people's trust, to their security in Jerusalem, and finally back to the Lord's action.

For—The logical force of the conjunction is to explain the first two lines. Those lines made two assertions:

- God will wait, and not intervene immediately.
- Once his people recognize their need of him, he will be gracious to them and deliver them.

What is the reason for his behavior? Both aspects have the same answer:

the LORD is a God of judgment:--God's characterization as a God of judgment explains both themes in 18a,b.

- It explains his waiting, because he will not ignore his people's sin, and thus he will not deliver them while they refuse to trust in him.
- It explains the ultimate deliverance, because the Assyrians are unjust and deserve his judgment.

blessed are all they that wait for him.--The Lord will not intervene as long as the people thrash about in their self-wisdom. The expression “wait for him” describes the attitude of heart spelled out in v. 15. Once they return in repentance, and rest in him in quiet confidence, they will see his blessing.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more:--This blessing will take the form of their secure and unthreatened residence at Jerusalem, delivered from the Assyrian, who has depopulated many other cities.

he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.--This verse does double duty.

- It is a chiasmic parallel to 18c, describing the Lord's intervention to defend his people who trust in him.
- It is the first in the narrative chain that is continued by the seven *waw* relative paragraphs in 20-26.

In the context of the following paragraphs, this verse refers to the Assyrian threat. As we will see, in the face of that invasion, when Hezekiah cast himself on the Lord, the enemy was repulsed, and the people continued to dwell at Jerusalem.

20-26, Narrative Presentation

Now Isaiah unfolds the nation's future in more detail, showing that even the immediate deliverance from Assyria is not the end of the story. The Lord will wait more before his purposes are achieved, for the people still need to show more returning and rest.

In a shift from the *logical* structure of vv. 18-19, these verses are a *chronological* narrative, whose seven stages are introduced by verbs in the perfect conjugation with *waw* relative (colored **green** in the citations below). The starting point is the condition described in v. 19, the deliverance of the people from Assyria. Seven stages follow. The last three are marked with the phrase “in that day.” This phrase is used throughout Isaiah to anticipate the coming day of the Lord. Thus the seven stages reach from Isaiah's time down to the Millennium.

Note the shift from plural to singular starting in v. 19 and throughout this section. The singular addresses the nation as a whole, and thus emphasizes their constitution as a single people, while the plural emphasizes the responsibility of the individuals within the nation.

20 And though the Lord [shall] give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction,--The first stage in the narrative sequence is renewed chastisement after the deliverance of v. 19. It may seem strange that God delivers them from Assyria, only to allow further disaster to fall upon them. In fact, the nation has experienced at least three such reversals, and one more is yet to come:

- After the Assyrians withdrew, the nation was taken captive into Babylon (586 BC).
- Cyrus allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 536 BC, but the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in AD 70.
- There followed a time of relative calm. In 130, the Roman Emperor Hadrian even rebuilt Jerusalem. But Simon Bar Kochba, a messianic figure, led a rebellion against Rome in AD 132-136, after which Jews were barred from Jerusalem.
- For nearly 2000 years, only a tiny remnant remained in the land. WWII stimulated a massive return of Jews to Palestine. In 1947 they gained their independence, and eventually recaptured Jerusalem in 1967. But Zech 14:2 anticipates a future battle of “all nations against Jerusalem,” in which “the city shall be taken and the houses rifled,” just before the Lord Jesus returns.

We see this same alternation of God's favor and judgment in Zech 1:16-17 (Heb),

Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. 17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities ~~through~~ from prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

Indeed, all of Israel's history is marked by such oscillations.

- The book of Judges records six complete cycles of Sin, Servitude, Supplication, Saviour, and Silence (seven if we include the initial outline in ch. 2).
- Ps 78 and Ps 106 reflect similar cycles of sin, judgment, repentance, and blessing throughout Israel's broader history.

yet shall not **thy** teachers be removed into a corner any more,--Recall 29:10, when the Lord shut the eyes of the nation's prophets. When judgment comes, the prophets once more become active. When God is chastising his people, he does not leave them without explanation.

but [and] thine eyes shall see thy teachers:--The second phase is the faithful prophetic testimony during chastisement. All three of the major prophets, and many of the minor ones as well, ministered during times of chastisement.

21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.--Isaiah returns to the image of "the way" from v. 11. The people had asked their teachers to turn aside from the godly way. But the prophets who speak during times of judgment will call them back to this path, even as they err.

The prophetic word is "behind" them because they are no longer following the prophets, but have departed from the way. The reference to turning "to the right hand" and "to the left" confirms that this is instruction in a time of error: the expression is a common one from Israel's earliest days.

Deut 5:32 Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside **to the right hand or to the left.**

Deut 17:20 [The king is to write himself a copy of the law,] That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, **to the right hand, or to the left:** to the end that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.

Josh 1:7 [The Lord encourages Joshua:] Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it **to the right hand or to the left**, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

Josh 23:6 [Joshua encourages the people:] Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom **to the right hand or to the left;**

Prov 4:27 Turn not **to the right hand nor to the left:** remove thy foot from evil.

While God's discipline is never pleasant, it is encouraging to know that he does not let us remain ignorant when we offend him.

Pro 3:11-12 My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For **whom the LORD loveth he correcteth;** even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.

22 [and] Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence.--The third stage in the history is their rejection of their idols. Historically, the Babylonian captivity marked the end of idolatry in Israel. The nation was guilty of many sins, but never did they go back to the idols against which Isaiah warned them.

23 Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth,--The fourth stage is a time of agricultural prosperity. The earthly nation of Israel

has enjoyed this during our time. The land has become exceptionally fruitful, compared with its prior productivity.

and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. 24 The oxen likewise and the young asses that ear the ground shall eat clean provender, which hath been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan.--The fifth stage sees the agricultural prosperity extended from plants to animals. At first, it's not clear why this should be a separate stage in the sequence, but note the introduction of the phrase "in that day," which is echoed in the last two stages as well. Perhaps Isaiah is here marking a shift from Israel's history in this present age, to the coming day of the Lord, after the return of the Lord Jesus. The "large pastures" may reflect an expansion in Israel's territory. Recall that Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh wanted to stay in Transjordan (the area today controlled by the kingdom of Jordan) because "the place *was* a place for cattle" (Num 32:1, cf. vv. 4-5). Israel cannot now graze its flocks there, but the time will come when "they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (Isa 11:14).

25 And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters--The sixth stage, and the second "in the day" of the Lord, is marked by abundance of water. Today, water is scarce in Israel, and is a major point of contention between Israel and her neighbors. But in the day of the Lord, water will be available in the most unlikely places. Springs never flow out of "high mountains" and "high hills," the poem of Jack and Jill notwithstanding. The water flows down through the hills and emerges at their bottoms. But in that day, the Lord promises,

Isa 41:18 I will open **rivers in high places**, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the **wilderness a pool** of water, and the **dry land springs** of water.

in the day of the great slaughter,--When the Lord Jesus returns, as depicted in Rev 19, the first order of business will be the destruction of the armies that have gathered against Jerusalem. This event is the focal point of vv. 27-33, where it is described as the Lord's sacrifice.

when the towers fall.--Throughout the Revelation, the advent of that day is accompanied with a great earthquake (Rev 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18), whose effects are seen in the topographical changes predicted in Zech 14 as well.

26 Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days,--The supernatural nature of the changes to the created order "in that day" include an intensification of light. In spite of this brightness, 24:23 says that the sun and moon will be "ashamed" because of the even greater glory of the Lord upon his throne, a glory that will ultimately replace the heavenly bodies in the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:23).

in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.--Isaiah recalls his prophecy of ch. 1,

Isa 1:5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

Then, the nation by its sin was inviting further chastisement, and they were so thoroughly beaten that the Lord could not find anywhere to lay a new stripe. But in that day, he heals their wounds and

restores them to health.

27-33, God's Wrath on the Nations

The narrative sequence of vv. 20-26 bridges two non-narrative sections. It starts with Israel's restoration in vv. 18-26, and ends with a picture of the Lord's wrath on his enemies, vv. 27-33, which was anticipated in v. 25 as “the day of the great slaughter.” v. 25. In the immediate historical context, the focus is on Assyria, but given the long perspective to the Day of the Lord in vv. 20-26, these verses clearly anticipate the future apocalypse.

There may be a chiasm here. Note recurring references to the Lord's voice/breath/message and fire at the extremes and the center, per Lund's third law.

The Lord's fiery message and breath ; shaking	27-28	32b-33
Musical accompaniment of the judgment	29	32a
The Lord's voice ; fire	30-31	

27 Behold, the name of the LORD—As often, the Lord's name represents his character;

cometh from far,--He has been withdrawn, waiting, exalted in his distant throne-room (v. 18), but in his own time he comes to deliver his people.

burning with his anger,--Or “his anger is burning.” When he does burst onto the scene, he is not neutral, but outraged with the pain caused to his people. Zechariah's metaphor is striking:

Zec 2:8 he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

The “apple of the eye” (the pupil) is extremely sensitive. Only a slight touch is very irritating. Those who abuse God's people, even as instruments of chastisement, harm those who are very dear to him, and when he responds, he does so in fierce wrath.

and the burden thereof is heavy:--The noun “burden” appears only here, but is the feminine⁵ of the common word “prophetic burden.” Turning a masculine noun into a feminine often marks it as intensive (Joüon &89b): this is a super-burden. In the context, the burden would be associated with Assyria, reflected in the translators' addition of “thereof.” The Lord is surging into the picture, burning with rage, with a message to deliver.

his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire:--The lips and the tongue are the organs with which a prophet delivers a burden. The Lord dispenses with the intermediary and brings the message himself, taking on human characteristics so that he can deliver the burden.

28 And his breath,--Note Ps 33:6, where רוח (as here) is parallel with the Lord's words:

Psa 33:6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the

⁵ Though masculine in agreement (Isa 14:28), the plural form of מִשָּׁה is feminine (Lam 2: 14 מִשָּׁאוֹת), suggesting a back-formation of the singular as feminine here. Attempts to relate the form to the column of smoke in Judg 20:38, 40 stumble on the doubling of the *w* here but not there—the morphology is different. There are numerous gender doublets in the Hebrew lexicon (Waltke-O'Connor &6.4.3), and the simplest explanation is that מִשָּׁה/מִשָּׁה is one of them.

breath of his mouth.

We should understand his breath as conveying the burden, the message of doom. The burden is now pictured using three idioms: an overflowing stream, a sacrifice, and a bridle.

as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck,--The first image is a flash flood. In the arid landscape of Judah, as in the American southwest, there are numerous dry river-beds (*wadi* in Arabic, *arroyo* in Spanish) that fill with water during intense but brief thunderstorms. The flooding, though brief, can be very intense and dangerous, and it is an important part of wilderness lore not to camp in such a riverbed or enter it if there are clouds on the horizon.

In 8:7,8, this image was applied to the Assyrian force itself, overwhelming the northern kingdom:

Isa 8:7-8 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, *even* the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach *even* to the neck;

Now the Lord will show that its victory was not due to Assyria's own strength, but a manifestation of the Lord's power behind it, a power that will now be directed against Assyria.

to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity:--All common English translations refer to sifting, but this meaning is not elsewhere attested in the OT. See notes for discussion. The context uses the root again, in v. 32. The form there is used commonly in the Law to describe the wave offering. This offering was not consumed on the altar, but merely lifted up and exhibited as belonging to the Lord. Our paragraph increasingly presents the Lord's conquest of Assyria under the image of a sacrifice, and this clause introduces that image. We should translate, "to wave nations like a sacrifice, in a waving of vanity."

The waving recalls 10:15, where Assyria is compared to a "saw [that] magnif[ies] itself against him that **shaketh** it." Once, God waved Assyria to bring judgment on Samaria. Now, he waves all nations to show their vanity, their emptiness before him. The plural reference to "nations" shows that the judgment anticipated here is broader than Assyria. Assyria's experience in 701 BC is the anticipation for the coming Day of the Lord.

and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err.--The third image is of a horse, led with a bridle to where it does not want to go.

29 Ye shall have a song,--Recall the joyful cantata of ch. 24-27.

as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept;--Literally, "when people sanctify themselves for a feast." The coming judgment is being pictured as a sacrifice, a wave offering (vv. 28, 32). The wave offering was not burned on the altar, but formed the basis for a communal feast among the people. The sacrifice of Israel's enemies will lead to similar celebration.

Isaiah is the first prophet to suggest that the destruction of God's enemies in the day of the Lord should be viewed as such a communal sacrifice (זבח). He makes it explicit in 34:5-6,

For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. 6 The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, *and* with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for **the**

LORD hath a sacrifice זבחה in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea.

As with so many other themes, later prophets pick it up and endorse it:

Jer 46:9-10 Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle *and* bend the bow. 10 For this *is* the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: **for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice זבחה** in the north country by the river Euphrates.

Zep 1:7-8 Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD *is* at hand: for **the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice זבחה**, he hath bid his guests. 8 And it shall come to pass in the day of **the LORD'S sacrifice, זבחה** that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.

Eze 39:17-19 And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my **sacrifice זבחה** that I do **sacrifice זבחה** for you, *even* a great **sacrifice זבחה** upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. 18 Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. 19 And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my **sacrifice זבחה** which I have **sacrificed זבחה** for you.

Ezekiel's version in particular forms the background for the picture in Rev 19:17-18,

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; 18 That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all *men, both* free and bond, both small and great.

This is another example of things that God can do, and that we cannot. Human sacrifice is strictly forbidden in the law (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Dt 18:10), but the Lord describes his great judgment on the nations as just that, a sacrifice, which his people are invited to celebrate with great joy:

and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe [flute] to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One [rock] of Israel.--Isaiah continues to emphasize the joy that God's people experience in this time of judgment.⁶ Isaiah learned this principle from David:

Psa 58:10-11 The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. 11 So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

In fact, the whole book of Isaiah ends on the note that the judgment of God's enemies is part of our worship of him (66:23-24).

Isa 66:23-24 from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh

⁶ One might also compare Jehoshaphat's organization of the people as they marched to meet the Moabites and Ammonites in 2 Chr 20:21-22, but that is not depicted as a sacrificial celebration.

Isaiah 30

come to worship before me, saith the LORD. 24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

As Ps 58 makes clear, our joy is not in the suffering of the wicked, but in the vindication of God's righteousness.

30 And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard,--The shift from "breath" in vv. 27-28 and 33 perhaps reflects the notion of the Lord singing along with the worshipers as he brings his judgment on Assyria.

and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.--Isaiah heaps up images for the coming judgment.

31 For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod [with the rod he will smite].--This is the only reference to the Assyrian in vv. 27-33. Assyria's experience in 701 BC is given as an example of the ultimate judgment on "nations" (v. 28).

The last clause, with the imperfect verb, is better understood as a summary of what the Lord will do than of what Assyria has done. Isa 10:5, 15 described the Assyrian as God's rod. But that does not make him immune to judgment. God has another rod, described in the next verse.

32 And in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him,--The word "grounded" מוסדה appears elsewhere only in Ezek 41:8, where it refers to the foundation of a building. But the verb יסד is used metaphorically in Hab 1:12 of the Lord's decree:

Hab 1:12 O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast **established** them for correction.

Habakkuk is prophesying of Babylon, and shows how the Assyria's disaster foreshadows the future. God has decreed a staff to punish the nations. It smote Assyria in 701, and Babylon in 538, and will smite all nations when the Lord returns.

it shall be with tabrets and harps:--Again, this sacrifice is the occasion of a great festival.

and in battles of shaking will he fight with it.--This clause picks up again the idea of shaking or waving from v. 28. The word here is the same as the name of the wave offering, an offering that was not burned, but lifted up and exhibited before the Lord, then consumed in a communal feast. The purpose of the Lord's battles with his enemies is not just to defeat them; he could do that in a far less dramatic fashion. They are here said to be "battles of exhibition," show-battles.

33 For Tophet—Tophet was a pagan sanctuary in the valley of Hinnom where the rebellious Israelites practiced child sacrifice.

Jer 7:31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which *is* in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire;

Now the Lord takes it over as the place where he will sacrifice his enemies.

is ordained--The verb reflects, not God's decrees, but arranging wood on an altar (Gen 22:9; Lev 1:7. 1 Kings 18:33).

of old; yea, for the king it is prepared;--These two phrases have double meanings. Each of them can be understood of the abominable sacrifices that Israel has been offering in Tophet for years. Each of them also applies to the coming sacrifice of the nations.

Historically, for years, sinful Israelites have been setting up their altars and arranging the wood at Tophet. The documented instances of human sacrifice in the Bible are all by kings (Mesha in 2 Kings 3:27; Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:3 = 2 Chr 28:3; Manasseh in 2 Kings 21:6 = 2 Chr 33:6). In their day, one might say that the altar was prepared for the king, so that he might make his gruesome sacrifice.

Now, Tophet is ready for the kings of the nations in another sense—not to make their offerings, but to be offered to the Lord.

he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.--The sacrificial pyre is huge. The destruction will be complete.

Notes

סרר (v. 1) vs. מרה (v. 9)

סרר is the rarer word (17x vs. 51x), and thus likely to be the marked form. Patterson in TWOT: “The root lays stress on attitude, whereas the synonymous *marad* emphasizes rebellious actions.” He hypothesizes that סרר emphasizes rebellion against God, but the article on מרה notes that this root shares this emphasis.

Hypothesis: a) סרר emphasizes refusal to hear, b) while מרה is persistence in one's own way.

Evidence for a)

The verb סור means “to turn aside.” Note the repeated idiom, “to give a כתף סוררת,”

Neh 9:29 they gave a כתף סוררת and hardened their neck and would not hear.

Zec 7:11 But they refused to hearken, and gave a כתף סוררת, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

In both cases this is associated with refusal to hear. We would say, “turn a cold shoulder.” They turn their backs on the source of advice. This fits very well with the context in Isa 30:1, and also with Isa 65:2, emphasizing their refusal of the divine entreaty:

Isa 65:2 I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way *that was* not good, after their own thoughts;

Evidence for b)

The term often describes specific offenses:

- Rebellion of Korah, Num 17:10

Isaiah 30

- Saul's offering of sacrifice, 1 Sam 15:23
- Desire to return to Egypt, Neh 9:17

Sometimes it is associated with refusal to hear, but mostly in Ezekiel, who dominates the term (16x out of 23): 2:5-8; 12:2.

Isa 30:9 offers three characterizations:

Isa 30:9 That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that* will not hear the law of the LORD:

But “lying children” is active; this seems to be a diagnostic sequence.

1. They are actively rebellious
2. They lie when asked about their action (cf. 29:15)
3. They refuse to hear

In this case, the section starts and ends with refusal to hear, with sinful actions in the center.

Joint Uses

Refusal to hear is the first step to active disobedience:

Neh 9:17 And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion מרים appointed a captain to return to their bondage:

Consistent with this, when סרר and מרה occur together in some verses, they always follow this order, suggesting that first one refuses to hear, and then persists in one's own way.

Deu 21:18 If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son בן סורר ומורה, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and *that*, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

Patterson in TWOT suggests that סרר emphasizes rebellion against God, and that the son in this case is guilty of some sin against God as well as of filial irresponsibility; cf. Deut 13:6-11.

This pairing appears again in Ps 78:8,

Psa 78:7-8 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: 8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation דור סורר ומרה; a generation *that* set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.

If Patterson is correct, the two clauses at the end of v. 8 may define the two terms in the first part of the verse in inverse order.

Compare also

Isaiah 30

Jer 5:23-24 But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart **לב סורר ומורה**; they are revolted **סור** and gone. 24 Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God,

Neh 9:17 And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion **מרים** appointed a captain to return to their bondage:

חנן vs. רחם

Verbs used together in

Exo 33:19 I ... will be gracious **חנן** to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy **רחם** on whom I will shew mercy. (emphasizes the arbitrary character of his mercy and grace)

2Ki 13:23 And the LORD was gracious **חנן** unto them, and had compassion **רחם** on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

Psa 102:13 Thou shalt arise, *and* have mercy **רחם** upon Zion: for the time to favour **חנן** her, yea, the set time, is come.

Isa 27:11 therefore he that made them will not have mercy **רחם** on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour **חנן**.

The adjectives **רחום** and **חנון** appear together first (along with **חסד ואמת**) in God's self-manifestation to Moses,

Exo 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful **רחום** and gracious **חנון**, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

These qualities are echoed repeatedly throughout the OT: 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 9:17,31; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2. The **נחם** paper considers this confessional formula in more detail.

Note the association in Ex 34:6 and elsewhere with **ארך אפים**, reflecting the Lord's waiting in Isa 30:18. This suggests a new meaning for “longsuffering.” Not only does he not bring judgment on his sinful people immediately, but he does not immediately destroy their adversaries until the chastisement has had its time to work.

Some initial thoughts: **חסד** and **רחם** describe the roots of God's action (faithfulness to his promise, and compassion, respectively), while **חנן** emphasizes the action that springs from those roots.

Prospective “Therefore”

Ordinarily, conjunctions that draw a conclusion (**לכן, על כן**) look backward to the previous context for the antecedent circumstances. But sometimes, it appears that they look forward, to a cause indicated by another particle:

לכן ... כי

2Ki 1:6 = 16 therefore לכן thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but כי shalt surely die.

Rather than adversative, the כי can be understood as giving the reason: “You shall not leave your bed, because you will die.”

Isa 52:6 Therefore לכן my people shall know my name: therefore לכן *they shall know* in that day כי that I *am* he that doth speak: behold, *it is* I.

A very strong example. The previous verse speaks of unbelief and oppression, and hardly gives a ground for why the people will know God's name. But if we take כי as explanatory rather than recitative, this verse becomes very much like 30:18.

Jer 8:10 Therefore לכן will I give their wives unto others, *and* their fields to them that shall inherit *them*: כי for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

The previous verses speak of their ignorance, but the punishment of deprivation is most appropriately explained by the following reference to their own covetousness.

Amo 5:13 Therefore לכן the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for כי it *is* an evil time.

Zep 3:8 Therefore לכן wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for כי my determination *is* to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, *even* all my fierce anger: for כי all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

על כן ... כי

Gen 11:9 Therefore על כן is the name of it called Babel; because כי the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth:

The confusion of tongues is also mentioned in v. 7, but this appears to be a summary in which the כי clause is the primary reference of על כן.

Gen 21:31 Wherefore על כן he called that place Beersheba; because כי there they sware both of them.

Very strong example.

2Sa 7:22 Wherefore על כן thou art great, O LORD God: for כי *there is* none like thee, neither *is there any* God beside thee,

Again, the reason is detailed in the previous context, but summarized in the following כי clause .

Jon 4:2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore על כן I fled before unto Tarshish: for כי I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Hab 1:15-16 15 They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: על כן therefore they rejoice and are glad. 16 Therefore על כן they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; כי because by them their portion *is* fat, and their meat plenteous.

In this example, the order is chiasmatic: Reason, Conclusion, Conclusion, Reason.

Zec 10:2 For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore על כן they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, כי because *there was* no shepherd.

Though the cause comes both before and after, the imagery of the flock and the shepherd is adopted only in the latter part of the verse, in which the reason follows the conclusion.

v. 28, “Sieve of Vanity” נפת שוא

Both forms from נפה “to shake” are used only here, though there is cognate evidence for the association with a sieve. The verb נוף means “to wave, to shake,” and is most common in reference to the wave offerings. Possible meanings:

- Two interpretations reject the translation as “sieve”:
 - The passage may refer to the action of shaking rather than to the object shaken. This appears to be most in keeping with the use of the root in Isaiah.
 - Compare תנופה (commonly used for “wave offering,” exhibited before the Lord)

Isa 30:32 And *in* every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him, *it* shall be with tabrets and harps: and in battles of **shaking** will he fight with it.
 - The verb נוף

Isa 10:15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? *or* shall the saw magnify itself against him that **shaketh** it? as if the rod should **shake** *itself* against them that lift it up, *or* as if the staff should lift up *itself*, as if it were no wood.

Isa 10:32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall **shake** his hand *against* the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

Isa 11:15 And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he **shake** his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make *men* go over dryshod.

Isa 13:2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, **shake** the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.
 - Both

Isa 19:16 In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the **shaking** תנופה of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he **shaketh** נוף over it.

The verb means to wave or brandish (“shake” in modern English is closer to רעש, as in Hag 2:6, 7). Perhaps because of its use for offerings, it comes to mean “offer” or “consecrate,” Ex 35:22.

Isaiah 30

- נֶפֶה is a topographical term in Jos 12:23; 1 Kings 4:11, where it appears to be related to Arabic *naf* “yoke.” In this sense, the word might be related to the bridle in the following clause, and perhaps to the neck in the previous one.
- Sieving is a selective process, and the expression might relate to the results of the selection.
 - שׂוֹא can mean “destruction”; the genitive might indicate what is done to the waste material discarded by the sieving.
 - In its sense of “vanity, worthlessness,” שׂוֹא might indicate the character of that which is removed. It separates good nations from bad ones (cf. Matt 25:31-46)
- A “worthless sieve” would be one that does not yield any good residue; here the value judgment would be transferred from the material sifted to the instrument.
- שׂוֹא might have the sense of “nothingness,” thus a sieve that doesn't let anything pass through to escape judgment. But most commentators assume that the sieve is used in winnowing grain, in which case what is retained is of value and what drops out is destroyed. There is a winnowing basket, but we don't know what that was called in Bible times.