

# The Challenges of Reading the “Gospel” of Isaiah for Preaching

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Last year William L. Holladay published a stimulating little book with the intriguing title, *Unbound by Time: Isaiah Still Speaks*.<sup>1</sup> In this book, he explores how Jews and Christians have heard and may still hear the powerful message of “The Vision of Isaiah,” as the superscription of Isaiah 1:1 (cf. 2 Chron. 32:32) entitles the book. Holladay’s basic premise is that although the Vision of Isaiah is historically bound to specific times and places, as indicated by the superscription of Isaiah 1:1, nevertheless, as part of the canon of Scripture, this greatest of prophetic books is, in Holladay’s words, “equally *unbound by time or place*”<sup>2</sup> and still speaks! Isaiah still speaks, in Holladay’s judgment, “when it is properly proclaimed by people of faith.”<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted, however, that a key element of Holladay’s conviction that Isaiah still speaks is “when it is properly proclaimed by people of faith.” This raises the crucial question of how the Vision of Isaiah should be preached.

The answer to this important question depends, of course, on one’s view of the nature and task of preaching. For Walter Brueggemann, for example, preaching is *subversion* of the *dominant version* of reality.<sup>4</sup> Another interesting concept of preaching comes from the pens of Patrick J. Wilson and Beverly Roberts Gaventa. In reaction to the “from text to sermon” approach, they propose that preaching is essentially a rereading of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Their interesting suggestion, however, invites another crucial question with respect to the theme

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Holladay, *Unbound by Time: Isaiah Still Speaks* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Holladay is convinced “that ordinary Christians are capable of grasping how texts which functioned in one way in the past can function in fresh ways in the present, and that this understanding will allow the texts maximum communicative power for Christian believers.” Although Holladay does not define the nature of these “fresh ways” at the beginning of his book, toward the end of the book (pp. 175-76) the reader discovers that he endorses Brevard S. Childs’s canonical approach. For this approach, see note 105.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick J. Wilson and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Preaching as the Re-reading of Scripture,” *Interpretation* 52 (1998): 392-404.

of our conference: How must one read the Vision of Isaiah in order to rediscover its compelling power for Christian proclamation?

To answer this key question is a daunting task because a survey of the history of interpretation of the Vision of Isaiah shows that the reading of this vision entails special challenges. In this article we will first (section 1) survey the challenge of the enduring role of the “the Vision of Isaiah” in the doctrine, liturgy, and practice of the Jewish and Christian communities. The aim of this survey will be to convince preachers that the message of this important prophetic book ought still to be heard in the twenty-first century. Next (section 2) we will examine the special methodological challenges readers face in the reading of the vision. Its purpose will be to outline the main obstacles a reader must surmount to hear the compelling message of Isaiah’s vision. Finally (section 3), in an attempt to assist preachers to meet the challenge of preaching the message of Isaiah’s vision, we offer an exercise in reading Isaiah 2:2-4(5) for Christian proclamation, along with a few pointers on how to apply that message to today’s audience by way of the New Testament.

## I. The Challenge of Isaiah’s Enduring Significance

In his interesting book, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity*,<sup>6</sup> John F. A. Sawyer documents that the Vision of Isaiah has had a peculiarly prominent place in the life and faith of Jewish and Christian communities. Except for the Torah, no other book of the Old Testament had a greater impact on the faith of early Judaism and Christianity than the Vision of Isaiah.

In part, the prominence of Isaiah’s vision is due to the fact that this impressive vision occupied first place in the Latter Prophets.<sup>7</sup> Its prominence is also due to the fact that Isaiah has entered the liturgies of Jewish and Christian communities. The solemn “Holy, holy, holy” of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3, for example, became part of the Jewish prayer called *Kedushah*, and, in Christian communities, it occupied a central place in the eucharistic liturgy, either as the *Trisagion* (from the Greek *tris*, “three times,” + *hagion*, “holy”), in the East, or the *Sanctus* (Latin for “holy”), in the West.

Early documentary evidence for Isaiah’s popularity in the Jewish community comes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation for the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt. Isaiah receives an important place in the book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach). Except for Elijah, Isaiah receives more attention in the long hymn “in praise of famous men” (cc. 44-50) than Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve.<sup>8</sup> According to Sirach 48:22, Isaiah “was great and faithful in his vision.” Moreover, in verses 23-25 we find the following description of Isaiah’s ministry:

<sup>6</sup> John F. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, INTERPRETATION: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 24.

<sup>23</sup>In his days the sun went backward, and he lengthened the life of the king. <sup>24</sup>By the spirit of might he saw the last things, and comforted those who mourned in Zion. <sup>25</sup>He revealed what was to occur to the end of time, and the hidden things before they came to pass.

Further documentary evidence for Isaiah's influence is found in the Septuagint book of 4 Maccabees 18:14. In this passage, a Jewish mother, who endured the martyrdom of her seven sons during Seleucid persecutions, reminds her children that her husband had taught them the Scripture of Isaiah, "Even though you go through the fire, the flame shall not consume you" (Isa. 43:2).<sup>9</sup>

This evidence from the Septuagint is extremely important because every translation represents an interpretation. The translation of the Hebrew text of the Vision of Isaiah constitutes, therefore, also the earliest Jewish interpretation of Isaiah.<sup>10</sup>

For our purposes it is important to note that the Septuagint contains translations that represent distinct theological interpretations. We believe that the Christian preacher must be aware of these interpretations because the Septuagint constituted, for all practical purposes, the Bible for the early church.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, most of the New Testament's quotations of texts from Isaiah are based on the Septuagint. As a result, several of the Septuagint's distinct theological interpretations entered the New Testament.

We shall offer two examples of theological interpretations from the Septuagint that entered the New Testament. The first is the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 6:9-10, which reports the LORD's commission of Isaiah to announce to Israel God's unmitigated resolve to make Israel's heart obdurate and to obfuscate her eyes and ears. To facilitate comparison, our English translation of the Hebrew text and of the Greek text of these verses have been placed in parallel columns:

Translation of Isaiah 6:9-10 MT	Translation of Isaiah 6:9-10 LXX
<sup>9</sup> He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."	<sup>9</sup> And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'You shall hear indeed, but you shall not understand; you shall see indeed, but you shall not perceive.' <sup>10</sup> For the heart of this people has become dull and their ears are hard of hearing and they have shut their eyes, so as not to see with their eyes, or hear with their ears, or understand with their heart, or repent and I shall heal them."

<sup>9</sup> Holladay, *Unbound by Time*, 138.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002).

A comparison of these two translations shows that the imperative verbs in Isaiah 6:10 of the Hebrew text were translated as indicatives in the Septuagint. In the Hebrew text, the LORD is the cause of Israel’s obduracy in a manner similar to the way in which the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh. In fact, the problem of God’s hardening Israel’s heart becomes even more complex if one reads the last two verbs in verse 10, אָשָׁב וְרָפָא, as a verbal hendiadys, “and be healed again.”<sup>12</sup> However, in the Septuagint’s translation, as Holladay notes, “the impetus does not come from God but rather from the people.”<sup>13</sup> According to Jan Lust, this translation is an example of how the translator edits out theologically offensive themes from the book of Isaiah.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the Jewish translator’s reason for the mitigating modification may have been, the important fact is that the Septuagint’s translation of Isaiah 6:9-10 was cited verbatim in Matthew 13:15 (ALAND 123) in connection with Jesus’ explanation of why he speaks in parables.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, according to Acts 28:26-27, Paul also cited these words to the unbelieving Jews in Rome.<sup>16</sup>

The second example is the Greek translation of Isaiah 40:3-5, well known from George Frederick Handel’s *Messiah*. Two features of the Septuagint’s translation claim our attention.

The first feature is the punctuation and stichometry of Isaiah 40:3. The accentuation of the Masoretic text of Isaiah 40:3 suggests the following stichometry of this poetic line:

<sup>a</sup> A voice of one calling:

<sup>b</sup> “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD;

<sup>c</sup> make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”

קוֹל קוֹרֵא  
בְּמִדְבָּר פְּנֵי הַרְדֵּךְ יְהוָה

יִשְׁרְרוּ בְּעֶרְבָה מִסְלָה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ:

However, the Septuagint reads the Hebrew prepositional phrase בְּמִדְבָּר, “in the desert,” with קוֹל, “voice,” and omits the Hebrew prepositional phrase בְּעֶרְבָה, “in the wilderness,” thereby eliminating the parallelism:

<sup>12</sup> For this syntactical construction, see Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), § 173. In support of this reading, James M. Ward (*THUS SAYS THE LORD: The Message of the Prophets* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1991], 48) also refers to the use of verbal hendiadys in Isa. 6:13: לְבַעַר וְהִיתָה לְבַעַר, “it will be burned again.”

<sup>13</sup> Holladay, *Unbound by Time*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Lust, “The Demonic Character of Jahweh,” *Bijdragen* 40 (1979): 2-14.

<sup>15</sup> Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 37. For a discussion of the appropriation of Isa. 6:9-10 in the Synoptic Gospels, see Bastiaan Van Elderen, “The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 180-90, especially 188-89. Unlike Matt. 13:15, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10, the quotation of Isa. 6.10 in John 12:40 retains the idea of unmitigated rejection.

<sup>16</sup> Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 38. For a more detailed discussion of the use of Isa. 6:9-10 LXX in Acts 28, see Bart J. Koet, “Paul in Rome (Acts 28,16-31): A Farewell to Judaism?” in *Five Studies on Interpretation of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia, 14 (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 119-39.



the priest and of Elizabeth, daughter of Aaron—teaching Torah to the crowd that, significantly, includes soldiers (Luke 3:14).

The above brief consideration of select examples of the Septuagint’s translation are sufficient to demonstrate that this translation of the “prophecy of Isaiah,” as 2 Chronicles 32:32 LXX refers to the book, constitutes an early important witness to the appropriation of the message of this prominent Old Testament book. Clearly, therefore, in preparing a sermon on a text from Isaiah, a Christian preacher ought to consult the early translation efforts of the Septuagint!

Additional early documentary evidence for the prominent role of the Vision of Isaiah in the life of the Jewish community comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls. That Isaiah’s vision was important for the faith, life, and prayer of the Essene community is evident, first of all, from the fact that, according to Peter W. Flint, twenty-one Isaiah manuscripts were found in the Qumran caves,<sup>18</sup> premier among them, of course, is the Great Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1.

The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) is important because it contains various readings that differ from both the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text. For our purposes, it is important to note that 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> has a more positive reading of the LORD’s commissioning words to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9-10. William Hugh Brownlee translates this text as follows:<sup>19</sup>

Keep on listening,	שמעו שמוע
because you may understand;	ועל תבינו
keep on looking,	ראו ראו
because you may perceive!	ועל תרעו
Make the heart of this people appalled:	השם לב העם הזה
Stop its ears	ואזניו הככר
and turn away its eyes	ועיניו השע
lest it see with its eyes	פן יראה ביניו
and hear with its ears.	ובאזניו ישמעו
Let it understand in its heart	בללבבו יבין
and return	ושב
and be healed.	ורפא לו

Needless to say, this different reading complicates matters for preachers who would preach a sermon on this popular chapter. We shall return to this issue later.

The prominence of the Vision of Isaiah in Qumram is also evident from other texts produced by the Essenes. These writings contain various quotations

<sup>18</sup> Pieter W. Flint, “The Isaiah Scrolls from the Judean Desert,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 70 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2:481.

<sup>19</sup> William Hugh Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumrân Scrolls for the Bible with Special Attention to the Book of Isaiah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 186-88. Cf. Paulson Pulikottil, *Transmission of Biblical Texts in Qumran: The Case of the Large Isaiah Scroll 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 34 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 139-41.

of texts from Isaiah and are important because they show us how the Essenes interpreted Isaiah.

For our purposes, we will cite the reference to Isaiah 61:1 in *11 Q Melchizedek* because of its relevance for interpreting the citation of Isaiah 61:1-2a in Luke 4:18-19 (ALAND 33). Scholars debate the extent to which the Jubilee theme and the theme of manumission are present in Isaiah 61:1-3.<sup>20</sup> The reference to Leviticus 25:13 and Deuteronomy 15:2 in the following quotation from *11 Q Melchizedek* II.2-4 shows clearly that Isaiah 61:1-3 was interpreted in terms of Jubilee legislation:

And as for what he said: *Lev 25:13* "In this year of jubilee, [you shall return, each one, to his respective property," as is written: *Dt 15:2* «"This is] the manner (of effecting) the [release: every creditor shall release what he lend [to his neighbour or his brother when] the release for God [has been proclaimed]". [Its inter]pretation for the last days refers to the captives, about whom he said: *Isa 61:1* "To proclaim liberty to the captives.»" And he will make their rebels prisoners.<sup>21</sup>

It also shows that Isaiah 61:1-3 was interpreted eschatologically. We will return to this text shortly because of its relevance for the interpretation of the composite citation of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 in Luke 4:18-19.

A third strand of evidence for the popularity of the Vision of Isaiah in early Judaism is the fact that this book also occupied a prestigious place in the traditional readings of the prophets in the liturgy of the synagogue. In these readings, the entire Pentateuch is read in one year and to each of the Pentateuchal readings are matched various passages from the *haftaroth* (readings from the Prophets). Significantly, more *haftaroth* readings are taken from the Vision of Isaiah than any other prophetic book.<sup>22</sup>

In the foregoing, we have surveyed three pre-Christian sources to demonstrate the prominence of the Vision of Isaiah in the faith and life of the Jewish community. We have also indicated the importance of the interpretive traditions in these sources for understanding the New Testament's interpretation of this important book. We shall now survey the place of Isaiah in the New Testament and the early church.

Because the Vision of Isaiah occupied a prominent place in early Judaism, it comes as no surprise that this book also became very popular in Christian circles. The special popularity of the Vision of Isaiah in early Christianity is evident, first of all, from its pride of place in the New Testament. In the New

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. H. G. L. Peels, *De Wraak van God: De Betekenis van de Wortel NQM en de Functie van de NQM-Teksten in het kader van de Oudtestamentische Godsopenbaring* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum B.V., 1992), 135.

<sup>21</sup> Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 139.

<sup>22</sup> Holladay, *Unbound by Time*, 141.

Testament writings, the book of Isaiah is quoted, paraphrased, and alluded to more than any other Old Testament book—even more than the Psalms.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the index of quotations in UBSGNT<sup>2</sup> cites more than 400 instances where the New Testament writings quote, paraphrase, or allude to Isaiah texts.<sup>24</sup> The ubiquity of Isaiah is particularly evident in the Revelation of John.<sup>25</sup> According to Jan Fekkes' recent estimate, Revelation contains 49 authentic and 9 probable allusions to Isaiah,<sup>26</sup> the most familiar being the well-known modified quotation of Isaiah 6:3 in the Revelation 4:8.

Because the citation of Isaiah 61:1-2a LXX in Luke 4:18-19 (ALAND 33) has become an important text for the advocates of liberation theology and is also prominent in contemporary discussions concerning the practice of Jubilee, we will examine two features of this citation. First, the following synoptic comparison of our translation of Isaiah 61:1-2 LXX and Luke 4:18-19 shows that Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue of Nazareth is not a verbatim quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 LXX:

Isaiah 61:1-2 LXX	Luke 4:18-19
<sup>1a</sup> The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,	<sup>18a</sup> "The Spirit of the LORD is on me,
<sup>b</sup> because the LORD has anointed me.	<sup>b</sup> because he has anointed me.
<sup>c</sup> To preach good news to the poor,	<sup>c</sup> To preach good news to the poor,
<sup>d</sup> He has sent me; <sup>27</sup>	<sup>d</sup> He has sent me; <sup>28</sup>
<sup>e</sup> to bind up the brokenhearted,	<sup>e</sup> to proclaim release for the prisoners
<sup>f</sup> to proclaim release for the captives	<sup>f</sup> and recovery of sight for the blind,
<sup>g</sup> and recovery of sight to the blind,	<sup>g</sup> to release the oppressed,
<sup>2a</sup> to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD	<sup>19a</sup> to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."
<sup>b</sup> and the day of vengeance of our God,	
<sup>c</sup> to comfort all who mourn."	

Isaiah 61:1e was omitted and a slightly modified form of Isaiah 58:6e was inserted after Isaiah 61:1f by a midrashic exegetical technique based on the

<sup>23</sup> For a representative bibliography, see Craig A. Evans, "From Gospel to Gospel: the Function of Isaiah in the New Testament," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, 2:651, 654.

<sup>24</sup> Evans, "From Gospel to Gospel," 2:651.

<sup>25</sup> James A. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 14, n. 1) lists 155 occurrences.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNT Supplement Series 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 279.

<sup>27</sup> For this punctuation and stichometry of Isa. 61:1, see Claus Westermann (*Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, OTL, trans. David M. G. Stalker [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969], 364, 366), Jan Leunis Koole (*Isaiah Part III*, vol. 3, *Isaiah Chapters 56-66*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. Anthony P. Runia [Leuven: Peeters, 2001], 270) and the NRSV. The NIV and John N. Oswalt (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 565) disagree.

<sup>28</sup> For this punctuation of the text, see I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 183.



repetition of the hook word *release* (ἄφεσις).<sup>29</sup> Second, in his reading of Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus only quotes the first clause, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,"<sup>30</sup> but significantly omits the second clause, "and the day of vengeance of our God," that constitutes the second member of the poetic line. This striking omission of any reference to the day of vengeance at this point was not arbitrary but intentional; it reflects Luke's "already" and "not-yet" eschatological perspective.<sup>31</sup> This arresting deletion ought not to lead the reader to the erroneous conclusion that Luke wants to foreground grace and that any reference to judgment has been discarded<sup>32</sup> because it conflicts with the Lucan emphasis on universal salvation.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, as is evident from Luke 18:7 and especially from Jesus' assertion in Luke 21:22, "for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written," the days of vengeance have only been postponed.<sup>34</sup> The "today" of Luke 4:21 marks the beginning of the time of God's gracious visitation (Luke 19:44) to Israel through Jesus' preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (Luke 4:43).

To appreciate Luke's appropriation of Isaiah 61:1-2a in the composite citation of 4:18-19, a comparison with the interpretation of Isaiah 61:1-3 in *11 Q Melchizedek* is instructive. As Joel B. Green notes,<sup>35</sup> such a comparison shows two interesting points of agreement in their interpretation of Isaiah 61:1-2. First,

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<sup>29</sup> Koet, *Five Studies*, 31-32 and 33-34. From the fact that the noun ἄφεσις is employed in the LXX to translate the Hebrew words יוֹבֵל, יָרֵד, and שְׁנוּטָה, terms associated with the Sabbatical or Jubilee Year, Koet (p. 31) infers that Jubilee legislation provides an important background for Isa. 58:6, 61:1 LXX, and Luke 4:18-19. The repetition of ἄφεσις in Luke 4:18 emphasizes the jubilee theme. However, Koet (p. 34) also recognizes that, with the exception of Luke 4:18, the noun ἄφεσις is linked especially with the concept of the forgiveness of sins in the gospel of Luke and Acts. Cf. Luke 1:77; 3:3; 4:18 *bis*; 24:47; Acts 3:28; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; and 26:18.

<sup>30</sup> Apparently the NIV, NRSV, and other translations prefer to translate ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου as "the year of the Lord's favor" in order to capture the sense of Jubilee. However, in Lev. 25:10 LXX, the term is ἐνιαυτὸς ἀφέσεως (יָרֵד). Moreover, the adjective δεκτός means "acceptable" and is repeated deliberately in Luke 4:24. Furthermore, in the LXX the adjective δεκτός is used predominantly to translate the Hebrew noun רָצוֹן. Significantly, neither רָצוֹן nor δεκτός are used in connection with Jubilee. Finally, in Isaiah, the noun רָצוֹן occurs only in 49:8, 56:7 (sacrifices), 58:5 (fast), 60:7 (sacrifices), 60:10 (//God's wrath), and 61:2 (//vengeance). In our judgment, the occurrence of רָצוֹן in 61:2 should be read in the light of 49:8 and 60:10. In the light of these texts, therefore, Peels (*Wraak van God*, 134), argues that שְׁנוּטָה refers to the time of deliverance after judgment.

<sup>31</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 411; Peels, *Wraak van God*, 260.

<sup>32</sup> Green, *Luke*, 213.

<sup>33</sup> Koet, *Five Studies*, 33, n. 22.

<sup>34</sup> H. Baarlink, "Ein Gnädiges Jahr des Herrn—und Tage der Vergeltung," *ZNW* 73 (1982): 219. Baarlink writes: "Der in Luke. 4 19 ausgelassene Teil der Prophetie aus Jes 61 wird beinahe wörtlich aufgenommen in 21 22 und ergibt dort zusammen mit der in 4 21 genannten Erfüllung von allem, was geschrieben ist."

<sup>35</sup> Green, *Luke*, 213.

both texts interpret Isaiah 61:1-2 eschatologically as the dawn of an epoch of salvation. Second, in both texts, this epoch of salvation will be inaugurated by a messianic figure. In *11 Q Melchizedek* it is Melchizedek; in Luke 4:16-21 it is the spirit-endowed Jesus. However, there is also a sharp difference between the two texts. In *11 Q Melchizedek* II, 13, it is clearly stated that Melchizedek “will carry out the vengeance of God’s judgments” against those who turned aside from the commandments of God (line 12). However, in Luke 4:19 the aspect of judgment has been intentionally omitted for reasons explained above.

The second important feature of Luke’s composite quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 concerns the presence of the Jubilee motif. As we have noted, scholars debate whether or not Isaiah 61:1-2 denotes Jubilee. Consequently, it is not surprising that they also debate the extent to which the Jubilee motif is present in Luke 4.<sup>36</sup> We have also noted that *11 Q Melchizedek* clearly interprets Isaiah 61 in terms of Jubilee. In our judgment, this also fits Lucan theology.<sup>37</sup> In Luke 19:1-10 (ALAND 265), Zachaeus models this practice. Moreover, Acts 4 reports that after the apostles John and Peter were released from prison (4:23), the church prayed (4:24-30) and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (4:31). As a result, they were one in mind and shared their possessions (4:32). Moreover, according to verse 34, “there were no poor among them” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς). Significantly, this report is worded in terms of Deuteronomy 15:4 LXX, “there should be no poor among you” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς), a text that constitutes part of the legislation for the year of cancelling debts. Empowered by the Spirit, therefore, the early church was enabled to practice Jubilee.

A second strand of evidence for the prominence of the Vision of Isaiah in early Christianity comes from the church fathers. They used Isaiah’s vision as a primary source for their christological reading of the Old Testament. Like Sirach 48:23-25, they, too, interpreted the Vision of Isaiah as a book that spoke of the future, especially of the birth and ministry of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, the early church fathers rated Isaiah not only as the greatest prophet but also more as the first evangelist. In the prologue to his translation of Isaiah, Jerome (ca. 342-420) writes: “he should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the Church so clearly that you would think he is composing a history of what has already happened rather than prophesying about what is to come.”<sup>38</sup> A similar assess-

<sup>36</sup> For example, Sanders (“From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” *Luke and Scripture*, 62), François Bovon (*Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary, trans. Christine M. Thomas [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 154), and Matthias Wenk (*Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 19 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 208) argue for it. However, Luke Timothy Johnson (*The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991], 81) is much more cautious.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. James A. Sanders, “Sins, Debts and Jubilee Release,” in *Luke and Scripture*, 84-92.

<sup>38</sup> Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 1.

ment of Isaiah is found in Augustine's report of the advice he received from bishop Ambrose in response to his written request as to which book he should read from Scripture to make him fitter to receive God's grace. Ambrose instructed him to read Isaiah, so Augustine interprets, "because more clearly than others he foretold the gospel and the calling of the Gentiles."<sup>39</sup>

The popularity of Isaiah as evangelist endured right into the seventeenth century. In fact, Matthew Poole, a seventeenth-century commentator, informs his readers, "some ancients called him [Isaiah] *the fifth evangelist*."<sup>40</sup>

Isaiah's popularity and great impact upon the faith and life of the church continues to today. According to Elizabeth Achtemeier, the reason for its prominence in the church extends beyond the fact that it is frequently quoted in the New Testament. In her opinion, "Isaiah of Jerusalem is one of the greatest theologians in the Old Testament." As such, "Isaiah marks a watershed in the history of Israel." Moreover, because Isaiah preached in a turbulent world, his powerful message is very pertinent to our day.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the wide range of theological themes in his preaching leads Ronald E. Clements to claim that the book of Isaiah represents a "Bible in miniature."<sup>42</sup>

## II. The Challenges Facing the Reader of the Vision of Isaiah

In view of the enduring popularity and influence of the Vision of Isaiah and the fact that, in the opinion of Gerhard von Rad, "the preaching of Isaiah represents the theological high water mark of the whole Old Testament,"<sup>43</sup> one would expect that in our day this powerful prophetic book would attract the modern preacher. However, a survey of the lectionaries and the sermon index in the Hekman library of Calvin College and Seminary contradicts this expectation. To be sure, there are more sermons on Isaiah than on the other prophets. Nevertheless, in the lectionaries' references to the Psalms far outnumber those on Isaiah. Moreover, the references to Isaiah texts in the lectionaries are usually comforting texts for Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Holy Week, and Easter. Curiously, the lectionaries contain few references to the powerful texts that deal with matters of social justice.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, v.13.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 2: *Psalms-Malachi* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 326. For this reference, I am indebted to Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 2. Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate the names of the ancients.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Isaiah of Jerusalem: Themes and Preaching Possibilities," in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 23-24.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald E. Clements, "A Light to the Nations: A Central Theme of the Book of Isaiah," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House, JSOT Supplement Series 235 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 61.

<sup>43</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 147. Hereafter cited as *OTT*.

<sup>44</sup> Holladay, *Unbound by Time*, 33.

What are the reasons for this peculiar situation? A survey of the history of interpretation of the Vision of Isaiah suggests various reasons. For convenience sake, we have classified them into two types: first, the internal reasons that are inherent to the complex nature of the document; second, the external reasons that depend on the reader's hermeneutic.

### A. Internal Reasons

The first internal reason that faces the reader is the sheer length of the book, sixty-six chapters. It is difficult to read through these sixty-six chapters in one sitting! In fact, this difficulty leads Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart to suggest that perhaps the longer prophetic books were not intended to be read in this way.<sup>45</sup>

A second reason why the Vision of Isaiah is not preached as much as one would expect is that the content of these chapters is sometimes difficult to comprehend. As Christopher R. Seitz observes correctly, the book's prominence in Christian tradition did not translate into easy interpretation.<sup>46</sup> Augustine, for example, already found the book of Isaiah difficult to understand. In his *Confessions* he writes: "But I did not understand the first passage of the book, and thought the whole would be equally obscure. So I put it on one side to be resumed when I had had more practice in the Lord's style of language."<sup>47</sup>

A third reason why reading the Vision of Isaiah presents a special challenge is the breadth of its historical coverage. It includes material that traverses from the epoch of the Judean kings mentioned in the superscription (1:1) during the time of the Assyrian empire to the time of Cyrus, the Persian emperor who liberated the exilic community.

A fourth reason is the fact that this book contains disparate material, including sources shared with other documents.<sup>48</sup> As with most prophetic books, the Isaiah corpus is a collection of words from the LORD to the prophet, words from the prophet and/or Israel to the LORD, and narrative sections.<sup>49</sup> For example, Isaiah 5 begins with a tone-setting parable-like song (5:1-7) and continues with a series of six cumulative sad "woe-oracles" (5:8-25) that reach their climax in a double threat of judgment (5:24-25e) and a concluding prophetic lament (5:25fg):

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<sup>45</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 150.

<sup>46</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, v.13. I owe this reference to Seitz (*Isaiah 1-39*, 1).

<sup>48</sup> Isa. 2:2-4//Micah 4:1-4; Isa. 36:1-11//2 Kings 18:13, 17-37//2 Chron. 32:9-19; Isa. 37:1-20//2 Kings 19:1-19; Isa. 37:21-38//2 Kings 19:20-37//2 Chron. 32:20-21; Isa. 38:1-8//2 Kings 20:1-11//2 Chron. 32:24-26; Isa. 39:1-1-8//2 Kings 20:12-19.

<sup>49</sup> For these major forms of prophetic speech, see Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh C. White (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 90-92.

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away,  
his hand is still upraised.

בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב אַפּוֹ  
יְשׁוּד יָדוֹ נִמְוָה:

The judgment to come is then described vividly in 5:26-30 as “an imminent Assyrian *Blitzkrieg*.”<sup>50</sup> Chapter 6 is autobiographical but chapter 7 is biographical. It is about Isaiah. Chapter 8:1, however, begins another autobiographical section. Isaiah 8:19-11:16 is a block of oracles that reach their climax in chapter 12. Chapter 13 then begins with a new superscription and an oracle concerning Babylon (13:1-14:23), which seems out of place because 14:24-27 deals with Assyria.

A first reading of chapters 5-12, therefore, suggests that they are a patchwork. The isolated woe-oracle in 10:1-4, for example, seems to have been displaced.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the prophetic lament of 5:25fg recurs as a refrain in 9:12, 17, 21, and 10:4. These two features of chapters 5:1-10:4 naturally raise the pertinent question of how chapter 5 is related to 9:7-10:4. In an apparent attempt to solve the problem, the New English Bible reads 5:24-25 after 10:4.

A fifth and related challenge is the fact that the dissimilar content of the Vision of Isaiah is presented in a wide variety of literary genres. It contains, among others, announcements of judgment against a nation (8:6-8); woe-oracles<sup>52</sup>; lawsuit (3:13-15); prophetic torah (1:10-17); narrative (cc. 36-39); disputation (40:12-31); trial speeches (41:1-7, 21-29; 43:8-13; 44:6-8); oracle of salvation (41:8-16); announcements of salvation (41:17-20); description of salvation (2:2-4); imperatival summons to praise (42:10-13; 44:23; 49:13); individual songs of thanksgiving (12:1-2; 38:10-20); and so forth. As a result, the book reads like an anthology of disconnected prose and poetic sections.

This complicates matters for preachers because each literary genre has its own hermeneutic and requires a special homiletical approach. In a sermon on one of the trial speeches in chapters 40-48, for example, one may want to explore the use of a court case.

To complicate matters even more, the great variety of literary genres incorporated in the Vision of Isaiah also lack a clear chronological sequence. Sometimes a unit is introduced with a specific time formula. Such is the case, for example, with the important vision that Isaiah reports in chapter six: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD seated on a throne.”<sup>53</sup> Often, however, there are no specifics about the exact historical context of a message. For

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 221.

<sup>51</sup> For this reason, Otto Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, 1st ed., trans. R. A. Wilson, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], 64-71) and Joseph Jensen (*Isaiah 1-39*, Old Testament Message 8 [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984], 75) treat 10:1-4 in connection with the woe-oracles in chapter 5.

<sup>52</sup> Isa. 5:8-10, 11-17, 18-19, 20, 21, 22, and 22-25; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; and 33:1.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Isa. 7:1; 20:1; and 36:1.

this reason, it is difficult to determine the specific historical background of many passages. Christopher R. Seitz, for example, writes: “Trying to assign oracles in the opening twelve chapters to specific historical periods is a daunting task.”<sup>54</sup> As a result of this sixth challenge, the Isaiah corpus has the appearance of a jigsaw puzzle, just like other prophetic books.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth challenges are intimately related to the seventh challenge that confronts the attentive reader of the Isaiah corpus, namely, the complexity of its compositional structure. Attentive readers soon recognize that the diverse material in the Isaiah corpus is not presented as an organized lecture. In the preface of his commentary on Isaiah, Calvin, for example, wrote: “Those who have carefully and judiciously perused the Prophets will agree with me in thinking that their discourses have not always been arranged in a regular order, but that the roll was made up as occasion served.”<sup>55</sup> Sometimes superscriptions (1:1; 2:1; 13:1) and titles are used to organize the material.<sup>56</sup> At other times, date formulae are used (6:1; 7:1; 14:28; 20:1; 36:1), which suggested a chronological arrangement of the material to Jerome. On a first reading, however, most of the material appears presented in a run-on fashion, sometimes even without clear indicators of where a section begins and ends. This is especially the case in chapters 40-66. As a result, it is very difficult to discern the overall compositional structure of the Vision of Isaiah. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that various outlines have been proposed for this book and that Seitz laments that “a convincing description of the final structure of the book remains a desideratum for those who argue for some form of unity” in the book.<sup>57</sup> This fact complicates matters for preachers because, as James M. Ward underscores, to expound the message of Isaiah “it is first necessary to describe the understanding of the book’s composition.”<sup>58</sup>

As a result of the book’s disparate material and complex literary structure, its readers are also faced with another challenge. This challenge, the eighth, involves the difficulty of defining “the mutual relations between the different parts of the message of Isaiah.”<sup>59</sup> Needless to say, this difficulty complicates attempts to delineate the theology of this sixty-six-chapter book.

For preachers who employ the original languages in their sermon preparation, there is yet another challenge. This ninth challenge concerns the problem of the different manuscript traditions of the Isaiah corpus. For example,

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<sup>54</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Isaiah*, xxxii.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 21:11; 21:13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6; and 38:9.

<sup>57</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Ward, *THUS SAYS THE LORD*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> Theodore C. Vriezen, “Essentials of the Theology of Isaiah,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 128.

Isaiah 6 is a popular preaching text, especially for mission emphasis. However, if, as Willem A. M. Beuken has argued convincingly,<sup>60</sup> Isaiah 6 must be read as a unit, then the preacher cannot stop the sermon at the well-known verse, "Here am I. Send me!" (6:8).<sup>61</sup> Instead, the whole chapter must be treated. In this case, the preacher will have to face the complex issue of different manuscript traditions in 6:9-10.

As we noted previously, the Septuagint text of 6:9-10 differs radically from that of the Masoretic text. We also noted previously that, to complicate matters, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> also has a different reading. This complex fact invites an obvious question: Which manuscript tradition should the preacher use? In answer to this difficult question, we agree with Jan de Waard's opinion that preference should be given to the *lectio difficilior*, the Masoretic text.<sup>62</sup>

Needless to say, the lengthy list of internal challenges, as outlined previously, complicates the task of the preacher. How is the preacher to proclaim the message of this prominent book when the book is arranged like a conglomeration of different materials, packaged in diverse literary genres, and without chronological or logical order?

## B. External Challenges

The increasing awareness of these internal challenges during the Renaissance and Reformation resulted in a radical change in the way the Vision of Isaiah was read. As we have noted, the New Testament writers and the early church fathers read the book of Isaiah in continuity with Sirach. Like Sirach, the New Testament writers assumed the unity of the book and that it was written by one person—the prophet Isaiah. This is evident from the references to the book of Isaiah in Luke 3:4 (ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ Ἰσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου) and Luke 4:17 (βιβλίον τοῦ προφήτου Ἰσαΐου). Moreover, like Sirach, they, too, read the book as predictive prophecy.<sup>63</sup> Unlike Sirach, however, they drew the line directly to Jesus of Nazareth and claimed that he was the promised Messiah (=Christ). In their reading of the prophecy of Isaiah, therefore, they looked primarily for predictions and anticipations of the coming of Jesus and his life and ministry. After all, according to Luke 4:16-21, this is precisely what Jesus himself did. After he read

<sup>60</sup> W. A. M. Beuken, "The Manifestation of Yahweh and the Commission of Isaiah: Isaiah 6 Read Against the Background of Isaiah 1," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): ??.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. W. Randall Lolley, "Isaiah: 'I saw the Lord': Isaiah 6:1-8," in *Interpreting Isaiah for Preaching and Teaching*, ed. Cecil P. Stanton, Jr., Kerygma and Church, (Greenville: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1991), 53-60.

<sup>62</sup> Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Isaiah*, Textual Criticism and the Translator, vol. 1 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 28-29.

<sup>63</sup> For a similar perspective see the substitution of וְיִשְׁעֵי שְׁמַיִם וְיִרְאוּ, "in the vision of Isaiah," in 2 Chron. 32:32 MT with ἐν τῇ προφητείᾳ Ἰσαίου, "in the prophecy of Isaiah," in the Septuagint. See also ἡ προφητεία in Matt. 13:14.

Isaiah 61:1-2a, he claimed, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). Obvious examples of this New Testament practice are the citation of Isaiah 7:14 LXX in Matthew 1:23 (ALAND 7) and Isaiah 8:23-9:1 in Matthew 4:14-16 (ALAND 32). A more subtle example of this practice is the substitution of phrase τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, “of our God,” in the quotation from Isaiah 40:3 LXX with the pronoun αὐτοῦ, “his,” in the synoptic gospels (ALAND 13).

This traditional one-book and one-author approach along with the christological-promise-and-fulfillment-hermeneutic reading of Isaiah continued until the Renaissance and the Reformation. This is evident from the opening lines from the second stanza of the fifteenth-century German Christmas song, “Lo, How a Rose E’re Blooming”: Isaiah ’t was foretold it; the Rose I have in mind.

In connection with this traditional reading, we would observe that it is an important external reason as to why the Vision of Isaiah is not preached more. Once the prophecies were considered to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, they had little relevance, except to be celebrated liturgically during Advent, Epiphany, Holy Week, and Easter. For this reason also, one finds few Isaiah texts dealing with social injustice in the lectionaries.

However, a major change was introduced to the traditional predictive christological reading of the Vision of Isaiah during the Renaissance and the Reformation. With the Renaissance and the Reformation, a historical way of reading biblical texts emerged. The advocates of this new approach assumed that, as the superscriptions (1:1; 2:1; and 13:1) and date formulae indicate,<sup>64</sup> Isaiah’s messages were addressed first of all to his contemporaries. Consequently, the Isaiah texts are time-bound by their own particular historical situation.

### 1. *The Grammatical Historical Approach*

This historical reading of Isaiah developed in two diametrically opposed directions. We will briefly sketch the trajectory of each and mention its main representatives.<sup>65</sup> This is necessary because preachers participate ineluctably in reading traditions and should be conscious of their tradition.

The first direction is the grammatical-historical approach. Martin Luther is an early representative of this approach. He clearly argued for it in his “Preface to the Prophet Isaiah” when he wrote:

Two things are necessary to explain the prophet. The first is a knowledge of grammar, and this may be regarded as having the greatest weight. The second is more necessary, namely, a knowledge of the historical background,

<sup>64</sup> This is also evident from the effective rhetorical use of *we*, *us*, and *our* in the Isaiah corpus. Cf. Edgar W. Conrad, “Chapter 4, Who Are ‘We’ in Isaiah?,” *Reading Isaiah*, Overtures in Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 83-116.

<sup>65</sup> For an excellent survey of the history of interpretation of Isaiah, see Marvin E. Tate, “The Book of Isaiah in Recent Study,” in *Forming Prophetic Literature*, 22-56.



not only as an understanding of the events themselves as expressed in letters and syllables but as at the same time embracing rhetoric and dialectic, so that the figures of speech and the circumstances may be carefully heeded.<sup>66</sup>

John Calvin was also a representative of this approach. His comments on Isaiah 61, the text that, according to Luke 4:16-21, Jesus read in the synagogue of Nazareth, illustrates this method:

As Christ explains this passage with reference to himself (Luke 4:18), so commentators limit it to him without hesitation, and lay down this principle, that Christ is introduced as speaking, as if the whole passage related to him alone. The Jews laugh at this, as an ill-advised application to Christ of that which is equally applicable to other prophets. My opinion is, that this chapter is added as a seal to the former [that is, chapter 60], to confirm what had hitherto been said about restoring the Church of Christ [that is, the nation of Israel]; and that for this purpose Christ testifies that he has been anointed by God, in consequence of which he justly applies this prophecy to himself; for he has exhibited clearly and openly what others have laid down in an obscure manner. But this is not inconsistent with the application of this statement to other prophets, who the Lord has anointed.<sup>67</sup>

Calvin, therefore, is willing to apply the text both to Isaiah and to Christ, not just to Christ. Calvin's approach was followed by, among others, Campegius Vitranga, Franz Delitzsch, Joseph Addison Alexander, Jan Ridderbos, and Edward Joseph Young.

## 2. *The Historical-Critical Approach*

However, parallel to the emergence of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis there emerged also a historical-critical line of exegesis. Its precursors were Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677). In reaction to the theological readings of Isaiah, both insisted that Isaiah be read in a strict historical and literal sense. Under the influence of René Descartes (1596-1650), Spinoza insisted that theology should accord with human reason.

The challenge of the book's temporal range and the challenge of its literary complexity led Johann Christoph Döderlein (1746-1792) to postulate in 1773 that Isaiah 40-66 was written by someone other than Isaiah, namely, Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah. His seminal hypothesis was adopted in the influential

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1-39," *Luther's Works*, vol. 16 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), 3.

<sup>67</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 4: 303.

*Introduction to the Old Testament* by Joannes Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827)<sup>68</sup> and accepted in Wilhelm Gesenius' commentary on Isaiah in 1821.<sup>69</sup>

The two-Isaiah hypothesis stirred a vigorous debate in Old Testament scholarship. For example, Joseph Addison Alexander (1809-1860), the renowned Isaiah scholar from Princeton Theological Seminary and defender of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis, launched a strong critique against Gesenius' acceptance of the multiple authorship of the Vision of Isaiah. However, his critique had little impact.

The most profound challenge to the unity of the book of Isaiah came from the pen of Bernhard Duhm in 1892.<sup>70</sup> In his landmark literary-historical critical commentary, Duhm took Döderlein's hypothesis two steps further. First, Duhm argued for the separation of Isaiah 56-66 from chapters 40-55. To the author of chapters 56-66, he gave the name Trito-Isaiah. Second, Duhm also isolated the so-called four servant songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12) and interpreted them independently from chapters 40-55.<sup>71</sup>

However, a critical evaluation of Duhm's hypothesis suggests that the novelty of his three independent Isaiah documents centered not so much on authorship and sources as on a major paradigmatic shift in the understanding of prophetic literature. With respect to the question of sources and possible redactions, for example, Calvin was well aware of this complex issue. In the preface of his commentary on Isaiah he opined the following:

A question may arise, Was it Isaiah himself, or some other person, that wrote this inscription to his Prophecy? Not one of the commentators whose writings I have hitherto perused answers this question. For my part, though I cannot fully satisfy my mind, yet I shall tell what I think. The Prophets, after having publicly addressed the people, drew up a brief abstract of their discourse, and placed it on the gates of the temple, that all might see and become more fully acquainted with the prophecy. When it had been exposed for a sufficient number of days, it was removed by the ministers of the temple, and placed in the Treasury, that it might remain as a permanent record. In this way, it is probable, the books of the Prophets were compiled; and this may be inferred from the second chapter of the book of Habakkuk, if it be properly examined, and likewise from the eighth chapter of this Prophecy. (Hab. ii.2; Is. viii.1.) Those who have carefully and judiciously

<sup>68</sup> Joannes Gottfried Eichhorn, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* (Spottiswoode: n.p., 1888).

<sup>69</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Uebersetzt unde mit einem vollstandigen philologisch-kritischen und historischen Commentar begleitet von D. Wilhelm Gesenius*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1821-1829).

<sup>70</sup> Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, HKAT 3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

<sup>71</sup> For a critique of Duhm's servant-song hypothesis, see Christopher R. Seitz, "'You are my Servant, You are the Israel in Whom I will be glorified': The Servant Songs and the Effect of Literary Context in Isaiah," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 117-134.

perused the Prophets will agree with me in thinking that their discourses have not always been arranged in a regular order, but that the roll was made up as occasion served. That these writings have come down to us through the agency of the Priests, whose duty it was to transmit the prophecies to posterity, though the Priests were often the bitterest enemies of the Prophets, is a remarkable instance of the providence of God.<sup>72</sup>

The quotation above shows clearly that Calvin was fully aware of the use of sources and (priestly) redaction. Nevertheless, following Sirach, the New Testament writers, and the early church fathers, Calvin and the other Reformers read the disparate material as the voice of Isaiah.

Duhm's three-Isaiah hypothesis was governed primarily by factors external to the text of Isaiah. It was caused by a major paradigmatic shift regarding the very nature of biblical prophecy. This new hermeneutical understanding of prophecy incorporated key principles from the Enlightenment.

We wish to highlight four features of this new understanding. First, critical reason denied predictive prophecy. In our judgment, this factor, more than any other, motivated Duhm's three-Isaiah hypothesis. Second, Duhm's dating of Third Isaiah was motivated by the Wellhausenian concept of the relationship between the law and the prophets as well as a low view of Scripture. Third, under the influence of Schleiermacher, Duhm substituted for the term *revelation* the term *religion*. This is evident from the title of Duhm's pioneering work on the prophets published in 1875, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (The Theology of the Prophets as Foundation for the Inner Historical Development of Israelite Religion). How different is this title from Jan Ridderbos' *Het Godswoord der Profeten* (The Word of God through the Prophets) published in 1932! Fourth, this subtle shift accounts for the emphasis on the person of the prophet and his concern to separate "authentic" words of the prophet from "inauthentic" material that had been added.

Duhm's three-authors, three-books approach caused alarm in the Christian church and a battle for the place of the historical-critical method in Old Testament studies approach ensued. The advocates of the historical-critical method eventually won the battle in the academy.<sup>73</sup> As a result, Duhm's "epoch-making" three-independent-Isaiah model became the regnant hypothesis for

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<sup>72</sup> Calvin, *Isaiah*, 1: xxxii.

<sup>73</sup> In this connection, it is important to note that in the 1980s Duhm's hypothesis was also accepted by Reformed biblical scholars in the Netherlands (Jan Leunis Koole, *Isaiah*, 3 vols., trans. Anthony P. Runia, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament [Leuven: Peeters, 1998] and Hendrik Leene, *De vroegere en de nieuwe dingen bij Deuterocesaja* [Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1987]) and more recently by evangelical biblical scholars (Cecil P. Stanton, Jr., "Introducing the Book of Isaiah," in *Interpreting Isaiah for Preaching and Teaching*, 1-26; John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001]). Staton (p. 9), for example, claims that by connection Isaiah 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66 "with their setting in time and their setting in the life of the community we will be in a better position to interpret the book of Isaiah for our lives and our communities of faith."

further scholarly study of Isaiah ever since. Since then, critical biblical scholars separated the Vision of Isaiah into three different parts, each with a different author and each belonging to a different historical period: First Isaiah (1-39) dated to the late eighth century B.C., Second Isaiah (40-55) to the Babylonian exile, and Third Isaiah (56-66) to the restoration period under Persia.

Although Duhm's three-Isaiah hypothesis dominated the academy, his historical-critical exegetical method and Enlightenment-inspired hermeneutic "has had a deleterious effect on the interpretation of the whole"<sup>74</sup> and has proved to be inadequate for Christian proclamation of the message of Isaiah. The fact that the practitioners of this method focused their attention on genuine and nongenuine oracles in Isaiah resulted in a fragmentation of the text and the dismissal of much material as theologically irrelevant because they judged that the redactors misunderstood the message of Isaiah. Consequently, the application of the historical-critical reading of Isaiah produced few positive fruits for preachers. In fact, we judge that it became one of the major hurdles for preachers. Preachers became reticent to preach texts from Isaiah, other than the well-known celebrative passages. With its emphasis on genuine and nongenuine oracles, historical criticism ran into an impasse.

### 3. *The Form-Critical Approach*

To break through this impasse, Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) developed the form-critical method. Unlike the practitioners of the historical-critical method, Gunkel focused attention on the literary form of the oral (not documentary!) traditions that could be isolated from the biblical documents through a five-step procedure: (1) delimitation of the original literary unit, (2) discernment of the compositional structure of the original unit, (3) classification and description of its literary genre, (4) definition of its *Sitz-im-Leben*, and (5) definition of its aim and function. A gain of this procedure was the basic presupposition that the *form of speech* corresponds to the social *setting* in which it is employed and to the *content* that is being communicated.

Gunkel never wrote a commentary on a prophetic book. Nevertheless, his form-critical approach provided invaluable new insights for the interpretation of prophetic literature. Joachim Begrich (1900-1945) and Claus Westermann, for example, used Gunkel's method and produced influential studies of Second Isaiah.<sup>75</sup> Of these, Westermann's classic commentary on Isaiah 40-66 continues to be an important contribution because in it he isolated a variety of literary genres.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, xi.

<sup>75</sup> Joachim Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterjesaja* (Munich: Kaiser, 1963); Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*.

<sup>76</sup> Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 11-21. Cf. Oracle of salvation (pp.11-13); proclamation of salvation (pp.13-14); praise (pp.14-15); polemic against foreign nations and their gods (pp.15-17); polemic against Israel in disputations and trial speeches (pp.17-19); hymnic praise and cries of exultation (pp.19-20); and servant songs (pp. 20-21).

Even though the application of the form-critical method to prophetic texts continues to be an important step in the exegetical process and has received enthusiastic endorsement from Donald E. Gowan in his book, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit*,<sup>77</sup> James Muilenburg argued already in 1968 in his defining SBL address, "Form Criticism and Beyond,"<sup>78</sup> that this important exegetical method has serious limitations.<sup>79</sup>

We believe that one of the limitations that is critical for preaching is the insistence of the practitioners of the form-critical method that oral tradition is passed along in small independent units. This assumption was also adopted by evangelicals such as Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, in their book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*.<sup>80</sup> In their interesting chapter on interpreting prophets, they emphasize that one must learn to *think oracles*.<sup>81</sup> For them, the arduous task of isolating individual oracles is an important key to understanding the message of prophetic books.<sup>82</sup>

Although we would agree that the preacher must delimit a pericope from the book of Isaiah,<sup>83</sup> a strict application of the form-critical method in this crucial exegetical step frequently results in an unnecessary fragmentation of the text. Practitioners of this method frequently isolate the text in question completely from the context in the book.

A case in point is Westermann's analysis of the so-called first servant song (Isa. 42:1-4). Westermann claims that Isaiah 42:1-4 constitutes an independent unit.<sup>84</sup> Curiously, Westermann does not defend that claim! He simply assumes Duhm's servant-song hypothesis and informs the reader that this passage should be read in conjunction with the other servant songs that owe their origin to one of Deutero-Isaiah's disciples. Ideally, therefore, he observes, that these passages "would be better taken and commented on as forming a group by themselves."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

<sup>78</sup> James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Rolf Knierim, "Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered," *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 435-68; Marvin A. Sweeney and Edud Ben Zvi, *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>83</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 126, 251.

<sup>84</sup> Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 92.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Be that as it may, is Westermann’s proposed delimitation of the pericope correct? While we would agree with Westermann that Isaiah 42:1-4 constitutes a paragraph, does his proposed isolation of the text from its context do justice to the text’s special character and place in the context? Does the pericope really begin at 42:1? Or, should one observe with Mulenburg, Willem A. M. Beuken, Jan Leunis Koole, John N. Oswalt, and J. Alec Motyer that the very first word of 42:1, the deitic particle הַיְיָ, “look,” establishes a connection with the previous occurrence of this word in 41:24 and 41:29?<sup>86</sup> If they are correct, then Isaiah 42:1 and following must be read in connection with the two-stage trial speech of Isaiah 41:21-29<sup>87</sup> that ends at 41:24 and 41:29 respectively.

We believe that they are correct and for that reason suggest that the particle הַיְיָ in 42:1 serves a double function. First of all, it functions to introduce dramatically the LORD’s servant, just as Samuel introduced Saul in 1 Samuel 9:17, “This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”<sup>88</sup> Second, it also serves as the climax of a series of three repetitions of this emphatic deitic particle in 41:24, 41:29, and 42:1 and establishes a dramatic contrast. In Isaiah 41:24 and 41:29 the particle הַיְיָ introduced the unmasking of the idol-gods and the idolaters respectively:

Isaiah 41:24	Isaiah 41:29
Look (הַיְיָ), you are nothing, and your works are utterly futile; an abomination is the one who chooses (בְּחַרְתָּ) you.	Look (הַיְיָ), all of them are iniquity! Futile are their deeds; wind (רוּחַ) and emptiness (וְתִרְוָה) are their images.

In our opinion, the preacher who slavishly follows Westermann’s commentary on this passage runs the risk of missing important catchword connections between Isaiah 42:1-4 and its preceding context. The preacher would miss, first of all, the ironic use of the root בחר, “to choose,” in 41:24 (בְּחַרְתָּ, “he chooses”) and 42:1 (בְּחַרְתִּי, “my chosen one”).<sup>89</sup> Next, the preacher would miss the ironic use of the Hebrew word רוּחַ, “wind, spirit,” in 41:29 and 42:1 (cf. 42:5). With respect to the impressive tricola of 41:29,<sup>90</sup> it is important to note, first of all,

<sup>86</sup> Mulenburg, “Isaiah 40-66,” IB 5: 447, 464; W. A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja deel II*,<sup>2</sup> De Prediking van het Oude Testament (Nijkerk: Callenbach BV, 1986), 108; Koole, *Isaiah 40-48*, 211; Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 109; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 315.

<sup>87</sup> For the trial speeches, see Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 82. For the parallel compositional structure of this two-stage trial speech, see Motyer, *Isaiah*, 315.

<sup>88</sup> Beuken, *Jesaja deel II*, 108.

<sup>89</sup> Koole, *Isaiah 40-48*, 212.

<sup>90</sup> Oswalt (*Isaiah 40-66*, 105) describes the rhetorical effect as follows: “The effect of the tricola structure is like a series of hammer blows. Each of the three phrases drives the point farther home by means of increasing concreteness.”

that the Hebrew word for "wind" is רִיחַ. It is even more important to note that the next words "and confusion" translate the Hebrew word חֲרָהוּ. Significantly, both of these terms are found in Genesis 1:2!<sup>91</sup> The use of these words sets up a beautiful contrast with the רִיחַ that Yahweh has placed upon his servant. While the works of idols are but an empty bag of wind that produces only chaos, the powerful Spirit that the LORD gives to his servant will cause justice to go out to the nations. Indubitably, justice is the opposite of chaos!

Let us repeat, if a preacher employs only the form-critical method in his sermon preparation, this important, crucial, dramatic contrast between Isaiah 41:29 and 42:1 will be lost. However, another important lexical and thematic link with the subsequent context will also be lost.

For Westermann, Isaiah 42:5-9 constitutes a later expansion of 42:1-4. In his judgment, verse 8 constitutes the conclusion of this oracle and corresponds with verse 5. Consequently, verse 9 is a fragment that in the underlying Deutero-Isaianic oracle served as part of an introduction "to a trial speech addressed to the gods of the nations."<sup>92</sup> In this verse, Westermann finds the second person plural suffix ׀ֿ particularly troublesome because it does not agree with the second person singular suffix ׀ֿ in verse 6.<sup>93</sup>

Let us pause here to consider the implications of Westermann's position for the preacher. According to Westermann, we have basically two independent pericopes in Isaiah 42:1-9, namely, verses 1-4 and verses 5-8, together with the orphan-like verse 9. To complicate matters, each pericope has an independent origin. Our question is: How does one preach the message of these independent pericopes? With respect to 42:5-9, Westermann admits that critical scholars "are still extremely divided as to the meaning of the passage."<sup>94</sup> This fact, it would seem, exponentially increases the difficulty of preaching the passage.<sup>95</sup>

More recent biblical scholarship suggests that Westermann's delimitation of the pericopes is not satisfactory. The reference to פְּסִלִים, "idols," in 42:8 recalls נִסְכֵי־הֵם, "their images," in 41:29.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the word pair הַרְאֵשׁוֹת, "former things" and הַרְאֵשׁוֹת, "new things," in 42:9 stands in contrast to הַרְאֵשׁוֹת and הַבָּאִוֶּת, "coming things," in the LORD's challenge to the gods in 41:22.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 105, n. 115.

<sup>92</sup> Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 101.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>95</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 237. Goldingay notes that Duhm's servant-song hypothesis leads to a dead end and must be buried. His proposal to bury the servant song is based on the work of Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *A Farewell to the Servant Songs: A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1983).

<sup>96</sup> Beuken, *Jesaja deel II<sup>A</sup>*, 127; Koole, *Isaiah 40-48*, 1:237.

<sup>97</sup> Beuken, *Jesaja deel II<sup>A</sup>*, 129; Koole, *Isaiah 40-48*, 1:237.

Bring in [your idols]  
to tell us  
what is going to happen.  
Tell us what the former things were,  
↳ so that we may consider them  
and know their final outcome.  
Or declare to us the things to come.

יְגִידוּ  
יִגְדוּ לָנוּ אֵת  
אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִינָה  
הַתְּרַאשׁוֹת מִזֶּה הַנְּהַ הַיְגִידוּ  
וְנִשְׂמָה לְבָנוּ  
וְנִדְעָה אַחֲרֵיתָן  
אֵלֵי הַבְּאוֹת הַשְּׂמִיעֵנּוּ:

Furthermore, the verbs נָגַד, “to tell” and שָׁמַע, “to hear” in 42:9 also echo 41:22.<sup>98</sup> This repetition highlights an important contrast: what the gods were unable to predict (41:22), the LORD is able to do. In fact, the ability to predict events even before they happen is essential to the LORD’s claim to his exclusive divinity.

On the basis of these lexical connections, therefore, we suggest that verses 8-9 confirm that Isaiah 42:1-9 is a unit that must be read in connection with the preceding trial speech (41:21-29).<sup>99</sup> Against Duhm *cum sui*, therefore, we infer that 42:1-9 cannot be isolated from its immediate context. On the contrary, in the light of the occurrences the noun מִשְׁפָּט, “justice,” in 40:17, 40:27 and 41:1, the threefold repetition of this key word in 42:1-4 suggests that 42:1-4 must be read as the LORD’s answer to Israel’s complaint in 40:27.<sup>100</sup>

The foregoing exercise in the demarcation of a pericope for preaching has demonstrated that the application of the form-critical method has its limitations for effective Christian proclamation of the message of Isaiah. Westermann’s analysis of Isaiah 42:8-9 is a clear example of how, in Brevard S. Childs’s opinion, the form-critical approach “did little to halt the atomizing” of the book of Isaiah “and at times even exacerbated its fragmentation.”<sup>101</sup>

#### 4. The Move Toward Holistic Approaches

Although the historical and form-critical approach to the book of Isaiah continues to have its advocates,<sup>102</sup> in the last three decades of the twentieth century there has been another major shift in biblical studies that resulted in the

<sup>98</sup> Koole, *Isaiah 40-48*, 1:238.

<sup>99</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 315; Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 119; Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 124; Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 236; Hendrik Carel Sytperboer, *The Structure and Composition of Deutero-Isaiah: With Special Reference to the Polemics Against Idolatry* (Meppeel: Krips Repro B.V., 1976), 92.

<sup>100</sup> Beuken, *Jesaja deel I<sup>A</sup>*, 107, 110. Beuken (p. 110) also points to the connection between רָרַר and מִשְׁפָּט in 40:13-14 and תָּרַר in 40:17.

<sup>101</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 9.

<sup>102</sup> For example, in his revised addition of his commentary on Isaiah 1-12, Otto Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, 2d ed., trans. John Bowden, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983]) is of the opinion that it is impossible to discover “authentic” Isaianic sayings.



emergence of a plethora of different methods.<sup>103</sup> This shift in methodologies also had considerable impact on the study of prophetic literature, especially the book of Isaiah.

In Isaiah studies, an increasing number of voices raised objections against the dominant three-Isaiah hypothesis. An important anchor point in this shift is the *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* by Brevard S. Childs.<sup>104</sup> In this important book, he surveys the historical-critical approach to Isaiah, notes its shortcomings and calls for an analysis of the "canonical shape" of the book of Isaiah. In a later article, Childs critiques the assumption of the historical- and form-critical approaches that "the prophets can be understood only if each oracle is related to a specific event or located in its original cultural milieu."<sup>105</sup> In his opinion, this assumption introduces "a major hermeneutical confusion" into the exegetical discipline and renders "an understanding of the canonical Scripture virtually impossible." Once one locates the meaning of a text in the bedrock of a reconstructed "original" historical context, it is very difficult to cross Lessing's ugly ditch! Childs insists that "the true referent of the biblical witness can only be comprehended from *within* [emphasis mine] the biblical literature itself."<sup>106</sup> In the case of Isaiah, Childs calls attention to the fact that oracles that may have functioned originally in various historical settings have been arranged in set thematic patterns.<sup>107</sup> Clear examples of this patterning are the framing of oracles of judgment in Isaiah 2:6-4:1 by the descriptions of salvation in 2:1-5 and 4:2-6 and the juxtaposition of oracles of judgment and salvation in the six woe-oracles of chapters 28-33.<sup>108</sup> According to Childs, the effect of this patterning is "that a typological sequence subordinates the original historical one and refocuses the material on the dominant theological purposes undergirding all prophetic proclamation."<sup>109</sup> For this reason, Childs claims boldly that attempts to write a theology of the prophets on the basis of the prophet's *verba ipsissima* or the prophet's self-understanding, without due atten-

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<sup>103</sup> Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, eds. *To Each Its Own Meaning. An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and Their Application* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) describe thirteen different critical methods.

<sup>104</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 311-38.

<sup>105</sup> Brevard S. Childs, "The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 48.

<sup>106</sup> Childs, "Canonical Shape," 48.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>108</sup> Isa. 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; and 33:1. For a diagram of this pattern, see Gary Stansell, "Isaiah 28-33: Blest Be the Tie that Binds (Isaiah Together)," in *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, JSOT Supplement Series 214 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 71.

<sup>109</sup> Childs, "Canonical Shape," 46.

tion to the canonical shaping described above, can only produce formulations that have little to do with the prophets of the Old Testament.<sup>110</sup>

Childs's writings provided a major impetus for additional critical evaluations of historical and form critical approaches to Isaiah. For example, in 1991, Christopher R. Seitz presented a trenchant critique of Duhm's three-Isaiah hypothesis.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, on the basis of recent studies by Seitz, Marvin A. Sweeney, and H. G. M. Williamson,<sup>112</sup> Ronald E. Clements concludes that Duhm's hypothesis is obsolete.<sup>113</sup> In his judgment, the underlying assumptions and procedures of the historical-critical approach to Isaiah need radical revisioning.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, in 1999, Roy F. Melugin acknowledged that critical biblical studies have their roots in the Enlightenment<sup>115</sup> and that this rootage engendered the habit among critical biblical scholars to look for the original meaning of a passage such as Isaiah 9 in the historical context of ancient Israel. Apparently they believed that the original meaning of this passage in its historical context was the bedrock of faith to the point that they neglected to show how this Scripture might inform the life and faith of the present-day worshipping community. Melugin claims that this predilection for the original meaning of a text conflicts with the practice of the final redactors of the book of Isaiah and the performative nature of its language.<sup>116</sup> For example, the following passionate and short (except for 1:16c) asyndetic series of rhetorically effective exhortations in Isaiah 1:16-17 clearly seeks to evoke a response from the implied reader:

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>111</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 1-35.

<sup>112</sup> Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny*; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, BZAW 171 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988); H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>113</sup> Ronald E. Clements, "A Light to the Nations: A Central Theme of the Book of Isaiah," in *Forming Prophetic Literature*, 58.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>115</sup> For a penetrating critique of these principles, see the excellent chapter, "Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture," in Alvin Plantinga's book *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 374-421.

<sup>116</sup> Roy F. Melugin, "Isaiah in the Worshipping Community," in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Rick R. Marrs, and Steven L. McKenzie, JSOT Supplement Series 284 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 244-64, especially 244-47. In connection with Melugin's description of biblical scholarship's infatuation with the original meaning of a text, the following observations by Brevard S. Childs ("The Canonical Shape," 43-44) should be noted: "The usual critical methodology of restoring an original historical setting often involves stripping away the very elements which constitute the canonical shape. Little wonder that once the text has been anchored in the historical past by 'decanonizing' it, the interpreter has difficulty applying it to a modern religious context."

16a	Wash yourselves!	רְחֹצוּ	16a
b	Make yourselves clean!	הִזְכְּרוּ	b
c	Take your evil deeds out of my sight!	הִסְרֹו רַע מִעֵלְיִכֶם מִנֶּגֶד עֵינַי	c
de	Stop doing wrong!	לִמְדוּ הַרְעָה:	de
17ab	Learn to do right!	לִמְדוּ הַיָּשָׁר:	17ab
c	Seek justice!	הִרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט	c
d	Put right the oppressor!	אֲשֶׁר הַמּוֹזֵן	d
e	Defend the cause of the fatherless!	שִׁפְטוּ יָתוֹם	e
f	Plead the case of the widow!	רִיבוּ אֶלְמָנָה:	f

These critical voices also called for greater concern for the final, canonical shape of the book of Isaiah. Clements, for example, calls for “far more attention . . . to the canonical form of the book . . . to understand its essential character and purpose.”<sup>117</sup> These calls to interpret the sixty-six-chapter corpus as a literary and theological unit have resulted in the output of an imposing series of articles<sup>118</sup> and various books<sup>119</sup> that emphasize the compositional or redactional links within the book of Isaiah.<sup>120</sup> Barry G. Webb, for example, argues for a sustained focus on Zion/Jerusalem throughout the sixty-six-chapter corpus.<sup>121</sup> More specifically, on the basis of the thematic connections between chapters 1 and 66 as well as the pivotal chapters 36-39, he seeks to demonstrate that a principal theme of the book is the transformation of Zion/Jerusalem through a radical purifying judgment (1:27-28).<sup>122</sup> As is evident from threefold repetition of the verb בָּרָא, “to create,” in 65:17-18, this transformation is intimately related to the transformation of heaven and earth.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, Rolf Rendtorff has demonstrated the important compositional position of Isaiah 6 in the framework of the book as well as the thematic importance of the concepts “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט) and “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) in Isaiah 56:1 as important keys to the formation of the book of Isaiah.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Clements, “A Light to the Nations,” 57.

<sup>118</sup> See the articles in *New Visions of Isaiah*.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Edgar Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *New Visions of Isaiah*; Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994); Peter D. Quinn-Miscall, *Reading Isaiah: Poetry and Vision* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001).

<sup>120</sup> See the literature review by Tate (“The Book of Isaiah in Recent Study,” 43-50).

<sup>121</sup> Barry G. Webb, “Zion in Transformation: A Literary Approach to Isaiah,” in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter, JSOT Supplement Series 87 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 65-84.

<sup>122</sup> For a similar concern, see Ronald E. Clements, “Zion as Symbol and Political Reality: A Central Isaianic Quest,” in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift W. A. M. Beuken*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 132, eds. Jacques van Ruiten and Marc Vervenne (Leuven: University Press, 1997), 3-17.

<sup>123</sup> Weber, “Zion in Transformation,” 69.

Furthermore, Walter Brueggemann admits that “it becomes increasingly plausible to suggest that the book of Isaiah, in its final form, has some intended architectural wholeness”<sup>125</sup> and argues for the importance of the concept of God’s plan (תַּכְּוָן) to establish his worldwide sovereignty at Zion.<sup>126</sup> More recently, Childs has published his long-awaited commentary on Isaiah. The fact that this one-volume work replaces the two volumes on Isaiah 1-39 by Otto Kaiser<sup>127</sup> and one volume on Isaiah 40-66 by Claus Westermann in the Old Testament Library Series marks an important paradigm shift in Isaiah studies—a shift that may be described as a shift from a three-author, three-book interpretation to a multiple-redactors, one-book interpretation.

This recent shift from historical- and form-critical studies to a more holistic interpretation of the canonical shape of Isaiah represents a gain for the reading and preaching the “gospel” of Isaiah.<sup>128</sup> We will illustrate this gain with examples of two features of this new trend in Isaiah studies.

The first feature is a more positive appreciation for the use of key words and hook words at the end and beginning of units to establish a sense of rhetorical coherence between form-critically discrete units.<sup>129</sup> A clear example of this phenomenon is Isaiah 1:2-31, which historical and form-critical treatments usually separate into the following independent units: 1:2-3, 4, 5-9, 10-15, 16-17, 18-20, 21-26, and 27-31. However, 1:2-3 is connected to 1:4-9 via the chiasmic repetition of בָּנִים, “sons” (1:2, 4) and אָמ, “people” (1:3, 4). Moreover, 1:4-9 is linked to 1:10-15 by way of the sarcastic repetition of the city names Sodom and Gomorrah in 1:9 and 1:10. Chapter 1:2-9, in turn, is linked to 1:10-15 by way of the repetition of the imperative verbs שִׁמְעוּ, “Hear!”, and הִשְׁמַעוּ/הִשְׁמַעוּ, “Listen!”, in 1:2 and 1:10 respectively. Furthermore, 1:10-15 is joined to the stunning asyndetic commands in 1:16-17 by way of the repetition of the noun עֵינַי, “my eyes,”

<sup>124</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, “Isaiah 6 in the Framework of the Composition of Isaiah,” in *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 170-80; idem, “Isaiah 56:1 as Key to the Formation of the Book of Isaiah,” *Canon and Theology*, 181-89.

<sup>125</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Planned People/Planned Book,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, 1:36.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:19. For this important theme in the Isaianic corpus, see also Gerhard von Rad, *OTT* 2: 161-65; Joseph Jensen, “Yahweh’s Plan in Isaiah and the Rest of the Old Testament,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 443-55; Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 128-32.

<sup>127</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 2d ed. completely rewritten; idem, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

<sup>128</sup> For a critical review of this trend, see David M. Carr, “Reaching for Unity in Isaiah,” in *The Prophets: A Sheffield Reader*, ed. Phillip R. Davies, The Biblical Seminar 42 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 164-83.

<sup>129</sup> For this phenomenon, see Sigmund Mowinckel, “Die Komposition des deuterocesajanischen Buches,” *ZAW* 49 (1931): 87-112, 242-60; Leon J. Liebreich, “The Compilation of the Book of Isaiah,” *JQR* 46 (1955-56): 259-77; 47 (1956-57): 114-38.

in 1:15 and 1:16. Chapter 1:16-17, in turn, is connected to 1:2-9 by way of the repetition of the verbal root רעע, "to be evil," in 1:4 (מַרְעִים) and 1:16 (הָרַע, רָע). A more complex instance of this phenomenon is the inverted repetition of the words of the following concluding double command in 1:17 in 1:23:

Isaiah 1:17	Isaiah 1:23
Defend the fatherless! Plead for the widow.	The fatherless they do not defend; and the widow's cause, it does not come to them.
שָׁפְטוּ יתום רִיבוֹ אֶלְמָנָה	יתום לא ישפוטו ורב אלמנה לא יבוא אליהם:

This contrastive repetition clearly frames 1:18-20. This framing function of 1:16-17 and 1:21-26 is underscored by the repetition of the noun מִשְׁפָּט in 1:16 and 1:21 (cf. 1:27). As a result of this frame, 1:18-20 functions as a pivot in 1:2-31 and centers this chapter on repentance.<sup>130</sup> Finally, 1:21-26 is linked to 1:28-31 by way of the repetition of the root צדק, "rightness," in 1:21, 26, and 27 and the repetition of the noun מִשְׁפָּט, "justice," in 1:21 and 27. This concluding unit (1:28-31) elaborates the two consequences of the possible responses to the LORD's call to repentance outlined in 1:18-20. The repetition of the roots פשע, "to rebel," חטא, "to sin," and עזב, "to abandon," from 1:2 and 4 in 1:28 shows that this concluding unit brings chapter 1 to closure and serves as an additional incentive to repent,<sup>131</sup> a theme that, as David M. Carr has argued convincingly, lies at the heart of this introductory chapter and provides the reader with an important lens through which to read the subsequent chapters.<sup>132</sup>

The second feature is the tendency to bring together texts that would otherwise be separated and attributed to different authors and books. A clear example is the striking compositional relationship between Isaiah 6:1-13 and Isaiah 40:1-11.<sup>133</sup> These two passages are linked as contrasting parallels by way of the repetition of several key terms קרא, "to call" (6:3; 40:3), קבוד, "glory" (6:3; 40:5), עוֹי, "iniquity" (6:7; 40:2), and חטאת, "sin" (6:7; 40:2). Isaiah 6 announces the inescapability of divine judgment, and Isaiah 40:1-11 proclaims the gospel of salvation.<sup>134</sup> An Advent sermon on the comforting text of Isaiah 40:1-11 should explore the obvious thematic contrast between these passages.

<sup>130</sup> On the one hand, Isa. 1:18-20 is linked to the preceding verses (1:2-17) by way of the fact that the imperative verb קָבוֹ in 1:18a constitutes the tenth imperative in 1:16-18a and the repetition of the root חטא (1:4, 18) and the verb שָׁמַע (1:2, 10, 19) and the clause כִּי [פְּתִיחַתָּהּ הַבַּיִת] in 1:2, 20. On the other hand, it is also connected to subsequent verses by way of the repetition of the root חטא in 1:28.

<sup>131</sup> Pace R. B. Y. Scott ("Isaiah 1-39," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 5 [Nashville: Abingdon, 1956], 179) who considers 1:27-31 to be an addendum with a different theology.

<sup>132</sup> David M. Carr, "Reading Isaiah from Beginning (Isaiah 1) to End (Isaiah 65-66): Multiple Modern Possibilities," *New Visions of Isaiah*, 197-204.

<sup>133</sup> Rendtorff, "Isaiah 6," 177-79; Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 229-47.

<sup>134</sup> Rendtorff, "Isaiah 6," 179.

### III. The Challenge of Preaching the Vision of Isaiah

As a result of the tendency to a more holistic interpretation of the book of Isaiah, especially the canonical approach associated with Childs, Seitz, and Rendtorff, we are in a better position to pose once more the question of how a Christian preacher should proclaim the message of the book as a whole. One's answer to this crucial question depends on two important issues. The first issue concerns the preacher's concept of prophecy. This is important because, as Achtemeier notes, "our understanding of the prophetic office and message influences the way we preach from the prophetic literature."<sup>135</sup> The second issue involves obviously one's concept of preaching.

With respect to the first issue, we follow Calvin. In the preface to his commentary on Isaiah, Calvin claims that the prophets interpreted the Law in its threefold aspect: (1) doctrine of life, (2) threatenings and promises, and (3) the covenant of grace founded in Jesus Christ.<sup>136</sup> This is also true for Isaiah.<sup>137</sup> According to von Rad, "Isaiah watches inexorably over the divine law of which he is a spokesman."<sup>138</sup> In fact, von Rad claims, "Isaiah's concern for the divine law cannot be stressed too strongly."<sup>139</sup> Calvin claims that teachers and preachers of the Word should emulate the prophets.<sup>140</sup>

As for the second issue, we find Brueggemann's notion of preaching as a subversion of the dominant version of reality a most interesting concept. This concept of preaching requires that the preacher engage the text, reread it, and present its message in an engaging way to subvert the dominant view of reality.<sup>141</sup>

For this reason, we also find constructive the suggestion of Wilson and Gaventa that preaching is a rereading of the text. Methodologically, Wilson and Gaventa suggest that rereading a text for preaching means, first of all, that preachers must pay attention to the codes in the text itself in order to avoid misconstruals.<sup>142</sup> The repetition of key words, for example, is an important indica-

<sup>135</sup> Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 109.

<sup>136</sup> Calvin, *Isaiah*, 1:xxvi. For a similar view during the Reformation, see the comments of Theodore Beza in the preface to Isaiah in the Geneva Bible of 1560.

<sup>137</sup> For Torah in Isaiah, see Joseph Jensen, *The Use of Tôrah by Isaiah: His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition*, CBQ Monograph Series 3 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1973); Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Book of Isaiah as Prophetic Torah," in *New Visions of Isaiah*, 50-67; Roy D. Wells, Jr., "'Isaiah' as an Exponent of Torah: Isaiah 56.1-8," in *New Visions of Isaiah*, 140-55.

<sup>138</sup> von Rad, *OTT*, 2:149.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* According to von Rad, this is evident from Isaiah's use of the terms *righteousness* and *justice*.

<sup>140</sup> Calvin, *Isaiah*, 1:xxx.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Brueggemann's (*Deep Memory*, 10-12) paraphrase of Yahweh's conversation with the gods in Isa. 41:21-29.

<sup>142</sup> Wilson and Gaventa, "Preaching as Re-Reading," 398.

tor for discerning the theme of a text. A sermon on Isaiah 42:1-9, therefore, will want to explore the threefold repetition of the Hebrew word **נִשְׁפָּט** in 42:1-4 because, as John N. Oswalt has demonstrated in his article in this journal,<sup>143</sup> this is a key theme in the book of Isaiah. A sermon on Isaiah 42:1-9 will also want to link the triple repetition of **נִשְׁפָּט** in 42:1-4 to Israel's complaint in 40:27 that God does not care about her **נִשְׁפָּט**.<sup>144</sup> Next, preachers should take careful note of the *location* of the text in its contexts.<sup>145</sup> This means that a sermon on Isaiah 42:1-9 should, as we have argued previously, reread this text in connection with the preceding trial speeches (41:21-29) and the subsequent imperatival song of praise (42:10-13). Furthermore, preachers should observe carefully the *direction* of the text.<sup>146</sup> The text intends to impact its reader. A clear example is the movement from trial speeches in Isaiah 41:21-29 to the presentation of the servant in 42:1-4 and the strategic triple repetition of the deitic particle **נָא** in 41:24, 41:29, and 42:1. Intimately related to discerning the trajectory of the text is, finally, a careful consideration of the *traction* between the text and its readers and/or hearers.<sup>147</sup> In other words, how does the text "grab" the reader and/or hearer? To discover the *traction* of a text, preachers must carefully examine the rhetorical structure and movement of the text and ask: What is its goal? Commands or exhortation to the implied readers in a text are important clues from within the text of how the reader and/or hearer should respond. A sermon on Isaiah 1:2-31, for example, should carefully note the movement from the accusation of Israel's persistence in sin in 1:2-4 to a description of the two groups of people that make up Israel in 1:27-31 and observe the key move in the startling, short commands in 1:16-17, including the pivotal divine appeal (1:18-20) to participate in this opportunity of repentance.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, a sermon on Isaiah 42:1-9 should take careful note of the imperatival song of praise in 42:10-13 as the intended response. The strategic repetition of the nouns **אִיִּלִּים** "islands" (42:4, 10, 12) and **כְּבוֹד**, "glory" (42:8, 12) argue for it.

Using these methodological guidelines, we will offer one exercise in moving from a close reading of a text from Isaiah to suggestions for Christian procla-

<sup>143</sup> For this important theological theme in Isaiah, see also in this issue of the journal, John N. Oswalt, "The Book of Isaiah: A Short Course on Biblical Theology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 54-71.

<sup>144</sup> To emphasize the relevance of this complaint, the preacher may want to use Elie Wiesel's recollection of the hanging of a young boy with two older men in the Buchenwald concentration camp in his book *Night* (trans. Stella Rodway [New York: Bantam Books, 1982], 60-62). As the three victims were mounted for execution, the two older men cried, "Long live liberty!" But, the young boy, remained silent. A man behind Wiesel cried out, "Where is God? Where is He?"

<sup>145</sup> Wilson and Gaventa, "Preaching as Re-Reading," 399-400.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 398-99.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>148</sup> The reader and/or preacher should note especially the frequentative YQTL verb **אִמַּר**, "[the LORD] keeps saying," in 1:18. Cf. Isa. 1:11; 33:10; 40:1, 25; 42:21; 66:9.

mation through the lens of the New Testament. For this exercise, we have chosen the well-known swords-into-plowshares passage in Isaiah 2:2-4[5]. This exercise will demonstrate that the pericope to be read has been strategically placed as the leadoff pericope of 2:1-4:6 and serves as a subversive visionary alternative to Israel's militaristic international politics.

The first step of our reading is to establish the compositional limits of the pericope under investigation. Most commentaries agree that 2:2-4 constitutes a distinct poetic unit.<sup>149</sup> This is evident, first of all, from the new, unique superscription in 2:1.<sup>150</sup> Consequently, the poem proper begins with the unusual WeQTL verb  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח}$ .<sup>151</sup> Second, the fact that, with slight variations, 2:2-4 also occurs in Micah 4:1-3 supports this delimitation.

Opinions differ, however, with respect to the inclusion of 2:5 in the pericope.<sup>152</sup> The facts that 2:4 concludes with a disjunctive thematic-final clause,<sup>153</sup> that the MT reads a *petucha* divider ( $\text{פְּתֻחָה}$ ) after 2:4, and that the subject and mood of the verbs change in 2:5 certainly set this asyndetic exhortation off from the poem proper (2:2-4). Moreover, the repetition of the emphatic vocative, "house of Jacob," in 2:5 and 2:6 and the fact that 2:6 is introduced by the conjunction  $\text{וְ}$  suggests to some that 2:5 should be read with 2:6-9.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, BZAW 151 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 135.

<sup>150</sup> Gene M. Tucker, "Isaiah 1-39," *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 6: 65. The superscription of 2:1 is unique in three ways. First, a comparison with the superscription of 1:1 shows that the superscription of 2:1 is an abbreviation of the superscription in 1:1. Significantly, the phrase "during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" has been omitted. This omission represents an important canonical move whereby the meaning of the vision that follows is not limited to the days of these Judean kings. Second, instead of the title proper of the superscription in 1:1, "The vision of Isaiah," the title proper in the superscription of 2:1 is  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח}$ . Third, a comparison with the superscriptions in Hos. 1:1, Micah 1:1, and Zeph. 1:1 shows that, as John N. Oswalt (*The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 114) notes, the words "the word which Isaiah. . . saw is an uncommon construction." According to Edward Joseph Young (*The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 1, *Chapters 1-18*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 95), the definite article is anaphoric, and this makes it emphatic.

<sup>151</sup> Franz Delitzsch, "Isaiah," in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 111. For the use of  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח}$  at the absolute beginning of a prophecy, see Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew Part Three: Syntax* (Rome: Pontifical Institute Press, 1991), §119c.

<sup>152</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, 135.

<sup>153</sup> For this type of clause see: Lambdin § 132.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. NRSV; NJPS; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 25. Brueggemann reads 2:5 with the following section because he considers 2:2-4 to be the climax of 1:2-2:4. In his opinion (p. 9), 1:2-2:4 parallels 2:5-4:6, each of which consists of a series of indictments that reach their climax in a promise of restoration.



However, there are also three contextual reasons why 2:5 should be read with 2:2-4.<sup>155</sup> First, the emphatic phrase, house of Jacob, recalls the phrase, God of Jacob, and supports the proposed reading.<sup>156</sup> Second, the repetition of the verb  $\text{לָּכָד}$ , "to walk," in 2:3 (3x) and 2:5 (2x) argues for it. In fact, the self-summons "Come! Let us walk" in 2:5 clearly echoes a similar self-summons by the nations in 2:3, "Come! Let us go up."<sup>157</sup> Third, the subtle play on words between the noun  $\text{אֹר}$ , "light," in 2:5 and the verb  $\text{וַיִּלְמַד}$ , "and he will teach," in 2:3 (cf. Prov. 6:23) also supports the proposed connection.<sup>158</sup>

In the light of the above considerations, therefore, we infer that 2:5 should be read as a pivotal transitional verse.<sup>159</sup> As such, it serves as an exhortation that arises out of 2:2-4 and is justified by what follows (2:6-4:1).<sup>160</sup> The implications of this inference for preachers will be discussed later.

The transitional function of 2:5 obliges preachers to consider the location of 2:2-4 in its subsequent context (2:6-4:6)—an important step in the rereading process. This conclusion conflicts with the position of Wolfgang Roth and Barry G. Webb, who read 2:2-5 as the tailpiece to chapter 1.<sup>161</sup> In their judgment, 1:2-2:4 and 2:5-4:6 form parallel units with a castigation-consolation thematic sequence.<sup>162</sup>

Three factors argue against their reading. First, the superscription in 2:1 with its unique title,  $\text{דְּבַר}$ , "the word," suggests that 2:2-4 must be read as the leadoff pericope with what follows instead of with chapter 1.<sup>163</sup> Second, 2:2-4 describes the destiny of Zion "in the end of the days," and this future perspective is continued in the following section (2:5-4:6) through the sevenfold repe-

<sup>155</sup> NIV; NAB; REV; CEV; Tucker, "Isaiah 1-39," 6:68; James Limburg, "Swords to Plowshares: Text and Context," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, 1:280.

<sup>156</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 119.

<sup>157</sup> Delitzsch, "Isaiah," 117.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. For this thematic connection see: BDB, s.v.  $\text{אֹר}$ , #9, p. 21.

<sup>159</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 54; Childs, *Isaiah*, 31; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 191; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, 138-39.

<sup>160</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 54.

<sup>161</sup> Wolfgang Roth, *Isaiah*, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 9, 28; Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 46. Cf. Scott, "Isaiah 1-39," 5:166; Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 33.

<sup>162</sup> Brueggemann (*Isaiah 1-39*, 9, 25) has a similar position. However, as we noted earlier, he reads 2:5 with 2:6-4:6 so that 1:2-2:4 parallels 2:5-4:6.

<sup>163</sup> In view of the fact that the next superscription occurs in 13:1, we infer that the superscription in 2:1 introduces 2:1-12:6. Cf. John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah*, vol. 1, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 23; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 189. For a discussion of the options, see Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 114; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 87-88.

tion of the phrase, “in that day” (2:11, 12, 20; 3:7, 18; 4:1, and 2).<sup>164</sup> It is important to note that the first six occurrences of this refrain refer to the punitive side of the Day of the Lord, whereas the climactic seventh instance introduces a promise of restoration (4:2-6).<sup>165</sup> Because both 2:2-4 and 4:2-6 deal with the future restoration of Jerusalem, these two sections serve as bookends around the intervening material that deals with the Day of the Lord.<sup>166</sup> The first section (2:2-4) emphasizes the goal of Jerusalem’s restoration, and 4:2-6 describes the means of this restoration. Together these sections underscore the important fact that judgment is not the LORD’s last word!

The next step in the rereading process is to examine carefully the contour of the pericope itself. Our analysis of the clausal structure of the magnificent vision proper (2:2-4) leads to the conclusion that 2:2-4 consists of a series of three vivid images in video-clip-like fashion that naturally capture the reader’s attention. It begins in 2:2abc with a surprising dreamlike image of a supernatural cosmic event: in the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple, which is not especially high, will be elevated and firmly established as chief among the mountains. As Ronald E. Clements notes, this unusual image may have been borrowed from the ancient mythical traditions concerning the cosmic mountain that stands at the center of the world and “from which the divine order and truth were given to the world.”<sup>167</sup> The second dramatic image is that all the nations (כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם<sup>168</sup>) will see it (2:2d)<sup>169</sup> and that many peoples will make a pilgrimage to the mountain of the LORD (2:3a). The important feature of this second image that demands the reader’s careful attention is the quotation of the peoples’ mutual exhortation in 2:3:<sup>170</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 38.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 89.

<sup>166</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 41. Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 190.

<sup>167</sup> Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 40. For this concept, see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 156-57.

<sup>168</sup> Micah 4:1 reads עַמְּנוּיִם. The use of כָּל־ + the definite article הַ in Isa. 2:2 makes it more emphatic.

<sup>169</sup> The translation of the Hebrew verb נָהַר in 2:2 is debated. The traditional translation, “they will stream,” is based on the noun נְהָר, Jonathan Magonet (“Isaiah’s Mountain or The Shape of Things to Come,” *Prooftexts* 11 [1991]: 176) assumes the correctness of this translation and highlights that this is highly unusual because streams naturally descend from mountains. However, Baruch J. Schwartz (“Torah from Zion: Isaiah’s Temple Vision [Isaiah 2:1-4],” in *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition and Modernity*, ed. A. Houtman, M. J. H. M. Poorthuis, and J. Schwartz, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, vol. 1 [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 14-15) argues against this translation. On the basis of its occurrence in Isa. 60:5 (//וְנָהָר), Ps. 34:6 (//וְנָהָר) and Jer. 31:12, he argues for the second root נָהַר II, “to shine, beam,” and translates וְנָהָר as “they will see.” This translation is also adopted by Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, 88.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Zech. 8:21.

Come,  
 let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
 to the house of the God of Jacob;  
 that he may teach<sup>171</sup> us his ways  
 and that we may walk<sup>172</sup> in his paths.”

לְכוּ  
 וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל-הַר-יְהוָה  
 אֶל-בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב  
 וְיָרִינוּ מִדְרָכָיו  
 וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַדְרָתָיו

This pivotal quotation calls for three additional observations. First, the peoples' resolve to make a pilgrimage to the mountain of the LORD uses language that one would expect on the lips of an Israelite (Ps. 122:1). Second, the reason they want to go to the house of the God of Jacob is that he may teach them from his ways.<sup>173</sup> This resolve on their part implies, of course, a rejection of other ways! As a result, the people will walk voluntarily in his paths. Imagine, according to Deuteronomy 4:5-8, Israel was to practice Torah and become the LORD's showcase so that the nations would hear about it and recognize the unique righteousness of Israel's bill of rights and constitution.<sup>174</sup> However, Israel failed miserably in its crucial mission to be an international exemplar. Now, through this supernatural cosmic event, the nations themselves are resolved to ascend the mountain of the LORD to be taught by the LORD. Third, their being taught by the LORD forms an analogy to the revelation of Torah to Israel on Mt. Sinai.<sup>175</sup> Just as Israel once journeyed through the desert to receive Torah, so now the nations make a pilgrimage to the royal palace of the God of Jacob to be taught Torah. What draws them? The climactic and centrally located chiasmic poetic line in 2:3 explains: The magnetic force that draws the nations is the fact that Torah—the word of the LORD is going out from Zion. What an astonishing fact! The centrifugal movement of the LORD's Torah to the nations causes the centripetal movement of the nations to the LORD's royal palace for private instruction. The final clip of this series (2:4) shows the remarkable results of the LORD's teaching Torah to the nations. The first poetic line (2:4ab) describes the LORD's successful arbitration of international disputes. The second line (2:4c) describes the wondrous result of the resolution of international disputes:

They will beat their swords into plowshares,  
 their spears into pruning hooks.

וְכָתְתוּ חַרְבֹתָם לְאֵתִים  
 וְחַנְיֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֵרוֹת

<sup>171</sup> According to Lambdin § 107c, in the volitional sequence cohortative + W<sup>e</sup>YQTL the verb וְיָרִינוּ expresses purpose.

<sup>172</sup> According to Delitzsch (“Isaiah,” 115), the cohortative verb וְנִלְכֶה expresses intention. Cf. GKC §108d.

<sup>173</sup> For the LORD as a teacher, see also Isa. 30:19-22.

<sup>174</sup> For Israel's mission, see Jan Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 83.

<sup>175</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, 1st ed, 27; Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Book of Isaiah as Prophetic Torah,” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, 64; Limburg, “Swords to Plowshares,” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, 1:282.

This poignant motif has become one of the most famous calls for universal disarmament.<sup>176</sup> The final line (2:4de) describes the universal abolition of military schools.<sup>177</sup> In short, the final clip (2:4) calls upon the reader to imagine an effective “United Nations” in which the LORD brokers Torah-based peace.<sup>178</sup>

An essential question that the reader and/or preacher must ask at this point is: Besides a natural wonder and longing for this Torah-based peace, what response does this rhetorically powerful prophetic vision seek to evoke? In other words, what is the goal of this graphic and compelling short drama of peace in which the LORD as teacher and the nations as students are the only actors?

The answer to this key exegetical question is found in the emphatic exhortation of 2:5 and the injunction in 2:22. We suggest that the exhortations in 2:5 and 2:22 frame 2:6-21.<sup>179</sup> Because 2:5 functions as a transitional verse, we also infer that 2:2-4 must be read in connection with 2:6-22. Moreover, the injunction to the audience in 2:22 is connected to 3:1-4:6 by way of the conjunction “ו” in 3:1. This important fact confirms that 2:2-4 must be read in the context of 2:1-4:6.

Reading a preaching pericope in its literary context is another essential step in the rereading process. This step is also necessary to avoid the impression that the book of Isaiah consists of a collage of disjointed oracles.<sup>180</sup> To demonstrate the thematic unity of 2:1-4:6, we will highlight several important aspects of the compositional structure of 2:5-4:6.

The first feature to which we want to call attention is the fact that, as Joseph Jensen has argued convincingly, the collocation of 2:2-4 and 2:5-22 was no accident.<sup>181</sup> The following thematic links between the two sections suggest that it was purposeful:

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<sup>176</sup> Limburg (“Swords to Plowshares,” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, 1:280) notes that the words of this poetic line and the last poetic line of 2:4 are engraved in large letters on the wall opposite the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. Moreover, he (pp. 291-92) observes that in the north garden of the United Nations complex there is also a nine foot bronze sculpture of a blacksmith beating a sword into a plowshare and that in the 1980s East German students made a reproduction of that sculpture as the symbol of the peace movement.

<sup>177</sup> Norman Karol Gottwald (*The Church Unbound* [New York: Lippincott, 1967], 72-73) emphasizes that nations learn war. I owe this reference to Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel’s Communal Life*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 95, n. 11.

<sup>178</sup> Norman Karol Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 199-203.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 31-32.

<sup>180</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 174.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Joseph Jensen, “Weal and Woe in Isaiah: Consistency and Continuity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 185; F. E. Deist, “Notes on the Structure of Isa. 2:2-22,” *Theologia Evangelica* 10 (1977): 1-6; John T. Willis, “Isaiah 2:2-5 and the Psalms of Zion,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, 1:308-9.

**Isaiah 2:2-5**

1. The mountain of the LORD will be lifted up (2:2)
2. The LORD's mountain will be set chief of the mountains and be lifted above the hills.
3. Seeking guidance from Torah
4. Worship the LORD
5. Destruction of weapons as a result of submitting to Torah

**Isaiah 2:6-21**

1. Polemic against all that is high and lifted up (2:9, 11, 17)
2. The day of the LORD against the lofty mountains and raised up hills (2:14)
3. Seeking guidance from diviners (2:6)
4. Worship of idols (2:8, 18, 20)
5. Judgment upon weapons (2:7)

Next we note that the compositional function of the mutual exhortation in 2:5, in which the prophet employs the rhetorically effective *us*,<sup>182</sup> is radically different from the concluding verses of its parallel in Micah 4:1-5. As we noted above, 2:5 functions as a transitional verse. Consequently, the urgent, yet empathetic, exhortation in this verse has a double rhetorical function in the Isaianic context.

The mutual exhortation in 2:5 serves, first of all, as the application of the preceding powerful vision.<sup>183</sup> The similarity between the mutual summons in 2:3, "Come! Let us go up to the mountain of the LORD" (לָבוֹ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל־הַר־יְהוָה), and the mutual summons in 2:5, "Come! Let us walk" (לָבוֹ וְנִלְכֶה); the similarity between the resolve in 2:3, "and let us walk in his paths" (וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַדְרֹתָיו), and the self-summons in 2:5, "Come! Let us walk in the light of the LORD" (בְּאֹר יְהוָה); and the subtle word play between the noun אֹר, "light," in 2:5 and the verb וְיִרְנֵי in 2:3 suggests that 2:2-4 serves as a paradigmatic foil and that the emphatic self-summons in 2:5 aims to evoke Israel to jealousy.<sup>184</sup> If the nations are going up to Zion to be taught by the LORD and to adjudicate their differences at the LORD's United Nations building, should not Israel, the LORD's elect nation join them in their pilgrimage? Of course, Israel's joining the nations entails a leveling of election privileges.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, the subtle word play between the noun אֹר in 2:5 and the verb וְיִרְנֵי in 2:3 suggests that the exhortation in 2:5 invites the "house of Jacob" to join the nations in their resolve to practice the LORD's Torah, the implication being, of course, that they are not.

Israel's failure to embrace Torah practice is obvious from the verses that follow, and this leads us to the second rhetorical function of 2:5. The repetition of the emphatic phrase, house of Jacob, in 2:6 and the fact that 2:6 begins with a conjunction וְ shows that this exhortation is also intended to lead the reader into the next subunit (2:6-9) of 2:2-4:6. This section consists of a catalog of stinging censures of the house of Jacob and serves as the basis for the summons in 2:5.

Three features of this subunit (2:6-9) call for special consideration. First, 2:6 begins with the prophet's emphatic address to God, "Truly, you have rejected

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Motyer, *Isaiah*, 55.

<sup>183</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 44.

<sup>184</sup> Delitzsch, "Isaiah," 117.

<sup>185</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 38.

your people, the house of Israel” (2:6a) and concludes with another odd address to the God in 2:9c, “Forgive them not!” Second, the intervening material (2:6b-9b) between the framing addresses to God supplies the reason for the LORD’s rejection of Israel.<sup>186</sup> Third, the reader should note the loud drumbeat of the fourfold repetition of the verb מָלֵא, “to be full,” in 2:6-8. The land is full of diviners, a practice clearly prohibited in Deuteronomy 18:9-13, and foreign businessmen, each providing mutual reinforcement in their joint project to corrupt Israel.<sup>187</sup> As a result of this joint project, the land is also full of silver and gold, horses and chariots for military purposes, and idols of their own making. Implicitly this means that Israel has defaulted on her vital mission to the nations and has become instead like one of the nations, a militaristic security state.

In this connection it is important that readers and/or preachers hear the loud drumbeat “full of...,” “full of...,” “full of...,” “full of...” as an echo of the occurrence of the root מָלֵא in the lament of Isaiah 1:21. In this lament, the prophet describes the faithful city as one that once was full of justice (מִשְׁפָּט מְלֵא). Indeed, righteousness used to overnight in her, but now she is full of murderers. Read in the light of the lament of 1:21, therefore, the fourfold repetition of the verb מָלֵא in 2:6-8 serves to underscore that this fullness has changed the character of the city dramatically.<sup>188</sup>

In the light of the above observations, we infer that, as a result of its intimate connection with 2:6-9, the mutual summons in 2:5 is not only an injunction *to Torah* “thanksgiving” but also an urgent call away *from* the religious, economic, and militaristic accommodations described in 2:6-8. From this double function of 2:5, we conclude that, if 2:5 represents the *goal* of Isaiah’s powerful vision, 2:6-9 establishes the specific *need* and *occasion* for the powerful alternative view of reality presented in 2:2-4. The recognition of these two factors is important for the readers and/or preachers as they prepare a sermon on 2:2-4(5).

The loud drumbeat of the fourfold fullness in 2:6-8 is broken in the next subunit (2:10-22) by the cadence of the refrain in 2:10, 19, and 21 that repeats the words, “from the dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty.” We call attention to the following features of this new subunit. First, the thematic refrain of this new subunit is introduced by a double sarcastic command, “Go into the rocks; hide in the ground!” Second, this subsection is intimately connected with the preceding subunit (2:6-9) because it develops the theme of “humbling” from 2:9ab by way of the inversion of the verbs “brought low” and “humbled” in 2:11 and again in 2:17. Third, it also repeats the noun אָדָם, “humankind,” from 2:9a in 2:11, 17 and 20, which gives 2:10-22 a universal scope. Together with the reference to the whole earth in 2:19, 21 (לְעֵרֵץ הָאָרֶץ), the repetition of the noun אָדָם, “when he rises to terrify the earth”), the repetition of the noun אָדָם

<sup>186</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 40.

<sup>187</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 28.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

underscores the universal nature of divine judgment.<sup>189</sup> In fact, the fourfold repetition of אָדָרָם and the repetition of הָאָרֶץ suggest that 2:10-22 describes the awful consequences of Israel's default on her mission for the nations.<sup>190</sup> Fourth, this subsection also introduces the sevenfold repetition of the phrase, in that day, in 2:2-4:6. This is the day in which the LORD will reassert decisively his righteous governance over against the proud (2:12). Fifth, this key verse begins the rhetorical center of this subsection with the tenfold repetition of the phrase עַל כָּל־, "against every," nine of which use polysyndeton (עַל כָּל־).<sup>191</sup> Brueggemann suggests that the cumulative rhetorical effect of this sonorous repetition must be heard in the light of the fullness of 2:6-8.<sup>192</sup> Sixth, the second subunit reaches its climax in the direct appeal of 2:22,<sup>193</sup> which, as we noted previously, stands as a counterpoint to the mutual exhortation in 2:5 and is readily transferable to today because it employs the generic term אָדָרָם, this being its final occurrence in 2:6-22:

Stop regarding man

    L who has breath in his nostrils

    L because of what account is he?

אֲדַרְלוּ לְכֶם מִן־הָאָדָם<sup>a</sup>  
 לְאִשֶׁר נִשְׁמָה בְּאַפּוֹ<sup>b</sup>  
 לְכִי־בְמָה נִחָשֵׁב הוּא:<sup>c</sup>

As Brueggemann correctly underscores, this imperative constitutes a haunting exposé of human frailty.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, together with its counterpoint (2:5), the appeal of 2:22 forces the audience and reader to make a radical choice: either accept the alternative vision of 2:2-4 and practice Torah peace or face the powerful, horrible threat of the great day of the LORD in which the idols and military of the dominant vision of *Realpolitik* are of no avail.

As with the mutual exhortation in 2:5, the climactic appeal of 2:22 is connected to the subsequent subsection of 3:1-4:6 by the conjunction כִּי. While 2:10-22 was more general in scope, this new section (3:1-4:1) returns to specifics<sup>195</sup> and introduces dramatically (הַגִּידָה) the portentous theme of what the LORD, Yahweh of host (הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת), the mighty divine warrior, will take away from Jerusalem and Judah. This key take-away (cf. *Hiphil* of סוּר in 3:1, 18) theme reaches its climax in the great instead (תַּחַת) theme of the final subsection in 2:2-4:6. The relentless repetition of the preposition תַּחַת in 3:24

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Paul R. Raabe, "The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 654.

<sup>190</sup> Millard C. Lind, "Political Implications of Isaiah 6," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, 1:330.

<sup>191</sup> According to Ulrich Berges (*DAS BUCH JESAJA: Komposition und Endgestalt*, HBS 16 [Freiburg: Herder, 1998], 77), 2:6-22 has a chiasmic structure with 2:12-16 as its center. Goldingay (*Isaiah*, 45), however, limits the chiasm to 2:10-22.

<sup>192</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 30.

<sup>193</sup> This appeal is missing in the LXX. In typical historical critical fashion, Scott ("Isaiah 1-39," 5:183) calls vs. 22 "a clumsy annotation" and suggests that vs. 17 should be read in its place.

<sup>194</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 32.

<sup>195</sup> For a more general statement see Isa. 3:13, which then becomes specific again in 3:14.

stands in stark contrast to the fourfold repetition of the verb **נִלְאָ** in 2:6-8, and preachers should incorporate it in their sermons to support their proclamation of the mutual exhortation in 2:5.

Two features of 3:1-4:1 call for further comment. First, the first subunit (3:1-7) refers to the removal of military personnel and occult practitioners in 3:2-3. This constitutes an obvious cross-reference to 2:6-8 and cuts at the very heart of the militaristic security state that oppresses its own people in the manner of Pharaoh.<sup>196</sup> Second, according to Goldingay, the second subunit (3:8-12) is not a disjointed collage of sayings. Instead, these verses form the following chiasm:<sup>197</sup>

- A Judah, Jerusalem and their deeds (**וּמַעַלְלֵיהֶם**) (vv. 8-9c)
- B Alas (**אֵי**) for those who have earned disaster (**כִּי־נִמְלִי לָהֶם רָעָה**) [vs. 9de]
- C Good news for the righteous given their deeds (**מַעַלְלֵיהֶם**) [vs. 10]
- B' Alas (**אֵי**) for those whose earning is disaster (**וְגִמְוֹל רָע**) [vs. 11]
- A' My people, my people and what is done to them (**מַעַלְלֵי**) [vs. 12]

With respect to this subunit, we would note, first of all, that, according to 3:8-9, the wicked in Jerusalem and Judah defy God's glorious presence and parade their sins as did Sodom. This reference to Sodom represents an obvious echo of 1:10. Next we observe that, according to the wisdom maxims in 3:9de and 3:11, the threatened judgment will not be an unbridled outburst of divine anger. On the contrary, this judgment is a natural result of their action (3:9), and it will obey the principle of *lex talionis* (3:11). Finally, we call attention to the pivotal command in 3:10 to address an assuring message to the righteous. As with the mutual exhortation in 2:5 and the incisive command in 2:20, preachers should incorporate this verse in the formulation of the goal of their sermon.

In this connection it is important to recognize that the sapient statements in 3:9-11 show that wisdom was employed as a hermeneutical construct in the final shape of the book of Isaiah. They serve as a canon-conscious interpretation for the implied readers so that they can appropriate the message of 2:2-4:6 to their situations.<sup>198</sup>

The foregoing close reading of Isaiah 2:1-5 in its immediate context (2:6-4:6) suggests that Sweeney has correctly formulated the *theme* of 2:1-4:6 as "the cleansing and restoration of Jerusalem and Judah so that Zion can serve as YHWH's capital for ruling the entire world."<sup>199</sup> As such, it elaborates the promise of restoration in 1:26-27. Our reading has also demonstrated that the

<sup>196</sup> Lind ("Political Implications, 1: 332-333) calls attention to the fact that the verb **נִלְאָ** in 3:5 and 3:12 is used in Ex. 3:7, 5:6, 10, 13, and 14.

<sup>197</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 47.

<sup>198</sup> For this phenomenon, see Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament*, BZAW 151 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

<sup>199</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, 134.



goal of the pericope comes to clear expression in 2:5 and its counterpoint 2:22 and 3:10. Moreover, our reading of 2:1-4:6 also suggests that the specific *need* addressed by 2:2-4 is specified in 2:6-9 and 3:1-4:1. Furthermore, 2:1-4:6 also shows that judgment is not an end in itself. The LORD's judgment is a means to purify Jerusalem so that she may be what she was designed to be, a city full of justice. Finally, the placement of 2:2-4 at the beginning of 2:1-4:6 instead of its end, emphasizes the LORD's concern for the nations right from the beginning.<sup>200</sup> In fact, if one reads 2:2-4 in conjunction with 12:4-6, then the nations are in focus from beginning to end in chapters 2-12.

To conclude this exercise in moving from a close reading of Isaiah 2:2-4 to Christian proclamation, a crucial question remains: How can preachers use this powerfully subversive Isaiah text in Christian proclamation of the gospel? The answer to this decisive question depends, of course, on the application of the hermeneutical principles adopted by the Christian preacher.<sup>201</sup>

In agreement with Hans Wildberger, we hold that the message of the wondrous vision of Isaiah 2:2-4 "still remains in force"<sup>202</sup> (cf. Rev. 15:4) and should, therefore, be preached so that Isaiah still speaks. However, as Sidney Greidanus has noted correctly, a sermon is more than a rereading of the original words of 2:2-4(5) because these words were embedded in the Vision of Isaiah and this corpus, in turn, was incorporated into the larger canon of Scripture.<sup>203</sup> Consequently, 2:2-4(5) must also be read in the light of this larger canonical context.

This means, first of all, that Isaiah 2:2-5 must be read in the context of the book as a whole. Because the constellation of concepts Torah, light, judge-justice, and nations occur only in 2:2-5, 42:1-9, and 51:4-5,<sup>204</sup> it is important to examine these texts together. Moreover, it is important to recognize that in Isaiah the concepts Zion and Jerusalem represent, first of all, the land and the people. In the promises of salvation, however, this city is to become a universal city, a capital city, from which the LORD will rule over the nations. In fact, as is evident from Isaiah 65:17-18, especially the threefold repetition of the verb בָּנֵה (cf. 4:5), Jerusalem will encompass the new heaven and new earth.

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<sup>200</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 39-40.

<sup>201</sup> For the principles adopted in this article, see John H. Stek, "The Message of the Book of Jonah," *Calvin Theological Journal* 4 (1969): 46-50.

<sup>202</sup> Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 96. According to Otto Eissfeldt (*The Old Testament: An Introduction* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965], 318), the words of Isa. 2:2-4 "carry their value within themselves, quite independently of the period or the author from which they derive."

<sup>203</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 238.

<sup>204</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 3, *Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 11, n. 6.

Reading Isaiah 2:2-5 in the larger canonical context means, in the second place, that this pericope must also be read in connection with Psalms 46:9, 76:2-3, and 122. A comparison of Psalms 46:9 and 76:2-3 with Isaiah 2:4, for example, emphasizes the fact that in Isaiah 2:4 it is the nations themselves that will destroy their arms. Moreover, in view of the fact that the concept of Jerusalem has been enlarged in Isaiah, the injunction of Psalm 122:6, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," is especially relevant. Indeed, this psalm should be used in the liturgy to accompany the sermon.

For Christian proclamation, of course, it is necessary, in the third place, to verify the relationship of Isaiah 2:2-5 to the New Testament. Christian proclamation of Isaiah 2:2-4 must take seriously the fact that in the progression of the history of divine revelation the message of this text has begun its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. However, a sermon on Isaiah 2:1-5 during the Advent season should resist the temptation to limit the fulfillment of this passage to the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ.<sup>205</sup> The obvious fact is that nations are still engaged in war and that, therefore, the vision of Isaiah 2:1-5 has not reached its complete fulfillment. It awaits complete fulfillment when Christ shall return as the Divine Warrior (Rev. 19:11-16). Christian proclamation of Isaiah 2:1-5, therefore, must apply this text to a period beyond Christ's first coming in the eager expectation of his return.

In making this application, preachers should avoid two dangers. First, as Otto Kaiser has underscored, "Christians cannot simply take over [the] expectations in the concrete form in which they are expressed" in Isaiah 2:2-5.<sup>206</sup> The temple, for example, is now the body of Christ (John 2:20). Moreover, Jerusalem has been destroyed once more, as Jesus predicted, and, as is evident from Revelation 21 (cf. Isa. 65:17-18), its meaning has been enlarged beyond its limited geographical sense to include the new heaven and the new earth. Second, preachers should resist the temptation to make a direct application from Isaiah 2:2-5 to the nation of which they are citizens.<sup>207</sup> Isaiah 2:2-4 was addressed to the house of Jacob, which is now in Christ "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), the church, an international community. The subversive message of Isaiah 2:2-4 should, therefore, be addressed first to the church and only then to militaristic security states.

To avoid these common mistakes, preachers should pair Isaiah 2:2-4 with important New Testament texts.<sup>208</sup> The index of Old Testament quotations in the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, for example, lists Matthew 5:14, John 4:22, Acts 2:17, and Revelation 15:4. Acts 2:17 claims that the last days

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<sup>205</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 44.

<sup>206</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 1st ed., 30.

<sup>207</sup> For this danger, see Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 132-133; Gowan, *Reclaiming*, 126.

<sup>208</sup> For this practice see: Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 123-32.

(Isa. 2:2) have begun, and John 4:22-24 points to the inclusion of the nations in the worship of God. Moreover, Revelation 15:4 still awaits the pilgrimage of the nations in response to the preaching of the eternal gospel (14:6-7). For our purpose, the reference to Matthew 5:14 is most interesting because it agrees with Gerhard von Rad's interesting suggestion that Isaiah 2:2-4 should be related to the city-on-a-hill passage in Matthew's version of Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:14).<sup>209</sup>

This text and its context have several important themes in common with Isaiah 2:2-5. First, Isaiah 2:2-3 pictures nations going up to the mountain of the house of the LORD to be taught Torah. According to Matthew 4:25-5:2, "large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed" Jesus and he went up to the mountain (Matt. 5:1). Second, in Isaiah 2:3, the nations express the expectation to be taught by the God of Jacob. According to Matthew 5:2, Jesus, the Spirit-empowered servant (Isa. 42:1-4), taught them Torah. Significantly, in the seventh beatitude he taught them, "Happy are the peacemakers because they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). Third, in Isaiah 2:5, the house of Jacob is exhorted to walk in the light. In Matthew 5:14-15, Jesus informs the international crowd of disciples that they are the "city on a hill" (5:14) and exhorts them that they ought to let their light shine (5:15) to win others for the kingdom. Intimately connected to this mountain scene, of course, is the final mountain scene in the gospel of Matthew in which the risen Lord commands the disciples to go and start making disciples of all the nations. When these two mountain scenes are read together, it becomes clear that the mission of the disciples to make disciples of the nations and to teach everything that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:19-20) represents the ongoing fulfillment of the vital role of Jerusalem among the nations.<sup>210</sup> As the disciples had been taught Torah by the Servant (42:1-4), so they must now go out and teach Torah righteousness to the nations for the establishment of true peace (שְׁלוֹמִים). For preachers, this means that they must have the same passion and concern to teach Torah as did Isaiah. In a manner similar to Isaiah, preachers could apply this text to the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) today by pairing Isaiah 2:5 with John 3:19-21, Romans 13:11-14, Ephesians 5:8, or 1 John 1:7. Moreover, preachers should urge Christ's disciples to strive for peace and righteousness. To that end, they should remind today's disciples that the vivid description of the Day of the Lord in Isaiah 2:10-22 was used in Revelation 6:12-17.

Hopefully, sermons on this magnificent vision of Isaiah will have the same impact as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" sermon. If enough preachers share the same vision as Isaiah, then perhaps true peace may come to the Israel of God. "Happy are the peacemakers!"

<sup>209</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 242.

<sup>210</sup> David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 112.