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ISAIAH'S ORACLE AGAINST PHILISTIA:
AN EXEGETICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF
ISAIAH 14:28-32

A thesis presented to the faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

Paul G. Wenz

May 2000

Approved by _____
Advisor

Reader

Reader

ABSTRACT

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

ISAIAH'S ORACLE AGAINST PHILISTIA: AN EXEGETICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF ISAIAH 14:28–32

by Paul G. Wenz

Thesis Advisor: Professor Paul R. Raabe
Department of Exegetical Theology

Isaiah's oracle against Philistia in 14:28–32 presents some unique problems to the exegete. It is the only oracle with a chronological marker in Isaiah, i.e., it is dated at King Ahaz's death (v. 28), which raises questions of authorship for some. Chapter 1 introduces Isaiah's use of "Oracles against the Nations" (OAN) and specifically how Isaiah's oracle against Philistia is a good example of the genre, yet points out some of its unique characteristics. The translation of the pericope, with its exegetical details, is treated in chapter 2. Chapter 3 gives comments on the oracle and its setting, which is Isaiah's dealings with Ahaz and his contemporaries during the Syro-Ephraimite conflict in the eighth century B.C. The main motifs of 14:28–32 touched upon in the comments are issues with the superscription of v. 28, the "flying serpent" (*seraph*) imagery in v. 29, and the Zion theology in v. 32. Chapter 4 deals with the problem of dating King Ahaz's death, which is key to dating Isaiah's oracle. Finally, some of the mysteries of this oracle are resolved in the concluding remarks of chapter 5.

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A person who also deserves recognition for encouraging me towards the ministry and, in particular, modeled for me the love of the biblical languages, was my grandfather, Rev. Ernst Wenz. The day I received approval of this thesis, April 14, 2000, my grandfather was called to the Church Triumphant. I regret I did not get the chance to share this paper with him and the joy of finishing it. However, I dedicate this thesis to him, with the aim of continuing in my grandfather’s spirit of theological scholarship, to the glory of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Paul G. Wenz

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב Gen 1:10b

Palm Sunday 2000

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANET	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (3 rd ed. with supplement; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969).
AJSLL	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
ANE	Ancient Near East
ARAB	Daniel David Luckenbill, ed., <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon</i> (2 vols.; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951).
Beck	William F. Beck, trans., <i>The Holy Bible: An American Translation</i> (New Haven, Mo.: Leader Publishing Co., 1976).
BETL	Biblioteca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1977).
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CC	Continental Commentary (Fortress Press).
ch(s).	chapter(s)
DSS	Dead Sea Scroll (i.e., the Isaiah scroll from Qumran—1QIs)
Dtr.	The Deuteronomist (hypothetically inferred editor/redactor of the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings)
ed(s).	editor(s)/edited by
fem.	feminine
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature (Eerdmans).
GKC	Heinrich F. W. Gesenius, <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , 2 nd edition, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910).
GSAT	<i>Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
impf.	imperfect
impv.	imperative
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPSA	<i>The Prophets, Nevi'im: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978).
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
LXX	Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament, ed. Alfred Rahlfs).
masc.	masculine
MT	Masoretic Text
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEB	The New English Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	The New International Version of the Bible
no.	number
NT	New Testament
OAN	Oracles against the Nations
OT	Old Testament
p(p).	page(s)
part.	participle
perf.	perfect
pl.	plural
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
sing.	singular
TDOT	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 12 vols., trans. J. T. Willis (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1974–).
trans.	translator/translated by
v(v.)	verse(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION—ISAIAH’S ORACLE AGAINST PHILISTIA

The Oracles against the Nations (hereafter, OAN) comprise up to twenty percent of the prophetic literature in the Old Testament,¹ and, therefore, deserve more attention than they have received in the past. Since they proclaim future punishment of foreign nations by God, they are written off by some scholars as xenophobia or nationalism.² But this cannot be reconciled with God’s self-revelation of love and mercy, which guides all that is said in His name. Thus, even the OAN can give us a glimpse of God’s purpose of saving for Himself a remnant of faithful Israel and proclaiming peace and comfort for His people. Therefore, the many occurrences of OAN in Scripture and Yahweh’s self-revelation of love for His people make the OAN worthy of being read and studied today.

A. Scope of the Thesis

Given the great attention that the Old Testament pays to OAN and the difficulty and complexity of their messages, this thesis will focus on Isaiah’s oracle against Philistia in 14:28–32. It will offer an original translation of the oracle, detailed exegetical notes on that

¹ Paul R. Raabe, “Why Prophetic Oracles against the Nations?” in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck, Andrew H. Bartelt, Paul R. Raabe and Chris A. Franke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 236.

² R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 443.

translation, comments on its themes, and a more detailed consideration of the historical problems involved with its title (v. 28).

Though short, this oracle plays a significant role in Isaiah's OAN corpus in chapters 13–23. Allen Jenkins' insight here is appropriate:

The importance of the passage does not however so much lie in what it reveals of the history of revolt, but in the way that it combines features of the OAN tradition and of the Isaiah tradition. Although it is brief, in many ways its [*sic*] stands as a paradigm of the OAN in Isaiah.³

In agreement with Jenkins' assessment of this oracles' role, this author believes Isaiah has given the oracle against Philistia a paradigmatic role in his overall collection by the very nature of its wording and genre. The following introductory remarks will help outline the methodology for this thesis.

B. Approach to the Text

The holistic approach has become more accepted in recent years, over against source critical cutting and pasting of texts.⁴ Scholars like John Oswalt, John Hayes and Stuart Irvine have taken this approach for studying Isaiah.⁵ However, there is more to this view than just an exegetical choice of looking at Isaiah in the form in which it has come down to us. New areas of linguistics have led to reevaluations of the specific genres within it, as Richard Weis

³ Allen K. Jenkins, "The Hand Stretched Out over All the Nations: A Study of the Presentation of the Isaiah Tradition in Is 13–23" (Ph.D dissertation, University of London, 1985), 29.

⁴ The need for "an increased respect for the received text of the Old Testament" was advocated by some scholars in the early part of the twentieth century as well (W. A. Irwin, "The Exposition of Isaiah 14:28–32," *AJSLL* 44 [1927–28], 74). For more on this topic, see David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold, eds., *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

⁵ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chaps. 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 17–23; and John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 13–15.

has shown in his dissertation on the נִצְוֶה genre, which is one of the best resources on this.⁶ Leaning on Weis' work, this thesis will apply the meaning and purpose of the נִצְוֶה genre found in Isaiah's OAN in general to the oracle against Philistia specifically.

Understanding the oracle as Isaiah's work means that information from the oracle's title can enlighten the interpretation of the oracle and vice versa, as will be seen in chapter 4. Taking the title and oracle together is what the Hebrew Bible presupposes. Besides, there are no other concrete options like the existence of a separate book of OAN, independent of Isaiah.⁷ Thus, one can reliably draw historical conclusions from the exegetical investigation of this oracle.

C. Possible Audiences for the Oracle against Philistia

An important question to ask of any of the OAN is, what is its intended audience? Of the parties mentioned in Is 14:28–32, two possible hearers can be identified: Philistia (v. 29a) and the “poor” and “needy” of Israel (v. 30a). Both of these give us insight into what Isaiah may have been trying to say. Paul Raabe has identified that, “If one assumes that the Israelites were the real addressees,” then the function of Isaiah's oracle against Philistia can be detected along with similar oracles, which “function as warnings against foreign alliances . . . [and] in effect urge Israel to reject such affiliations and instead to seek refuge in Yahweh

⁶ Richard D. Weis, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa* in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1986). For a thorough summary and critique of this work see Brian Jones, *Howling over Moab: Irony and Rhetoric in Isaiah 15–16* (SBL Dissertation Series 157; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 65–74.

⁷ However, Weis posits that Is 14:29–32 “meets the test that it is the present state of the text that was originally independent” (“A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,” 321).

and Zion.”⁸ Why warn Israel? Because God wants them to repent and turn back to Himself, which is an act of His love for His chosen people.

Yet even proposing Israel as the intended hearer is not always sufficient. Edgar Conrad subdivides Israel into the “implied community” and “a rival faction.”⁹ Two audiences for this oracle could then be Hezekiah’s court and Isaiah’s followers. Isaiah had proclaimed his message of repentance to the nation of Israel in Ahaz’s court earlier (ch. 7), but when he failed to listen, Isaiah turned his message to his close followers. The OAN corpus in Isaiah 13–23 falls in the book at a time after the nation and the king rejected Isaiah’s words. Thus Conrad sees the main audience for this oracle as Isaiah’s faithful disciples, since it is “the community of survivors who are the book’s implied audience.”¹⁰ This contention finds support in the way Isaiah described “Israel” as the “poor and needy” (v. 30a).

Since Yahweh’s work of salvation is seen as one of the central motifs in this oracle, it may indeed be directed at the faithful remnant, who are depicted as Israel’s “poor” and “needy.” Yahweh has not forgotten them. This oracle clearly portrays Yahweh’s intention of saving the “afflicted of his people [who will] find refuge” (v. 32c) in Zion. This is the opinion of W. A. Irwin and Hans Wildberger, too, that Israel was the main recipient of this oracle.¹¹ Thus, to whomever else OAN were addressed, it is certain that for many of them, Israel was *one* of their intended audiences—whether in the form of Judah, the royal court, or the prophet’s followers.

⁸ Raabe, “Why Prophetic Oracles against the Nations?” 249. OAN which are similar to Is 14:28–32 are Jer 49:1–2; 50–51; Ez 25; 28:24–26; Ob 18–21; Zeph 2:7–9; and Zech 9:8.

⁹ Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹¹ Irwin, “The Exposition of Isaiah 14:28–32,” 87; and Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 90, states, “the passage is addressed to Jerusalem/Judah, not to the Philistines.”

On the other side, Philistia, like other nations that tried to lead Israel astray, is condemned through such OAN. How can one know if they ever heard the message? Weis contends, contrary to Wildberger, that “the text is clearly addressed to the Philistines,” as the primary addressee.¹² Ways in which Philistia may have heard this report, along with what Isaiah may have been trying to say to the Philistines and the force it had upon them, will be explored in the comments on the text in chapter 3 below.¹³

Discovering the main recipient of this oracle is challenging, since many conceivable reasons for proclaiming it and its meaning for different audiences can be identified. Philistia may have been one of these possible hearers. Yet, it seems more likely that it was intended for Israel. Ultimately, if God can speak to His people and the nations through OAN such as the one directed at Philistia, His words will still hold meaning for people today, as they identify with those who are the intended audience.

D. The Significance of Isaiah’s Oracle against Philistia

As the second oracle in Isaiah’s series of ten OAN in chapters 13–23, the oracle against Philistia stands out as a good example of what the prophets are trying to say through the OAN genre. Though this is an immense topic, many useful motifs of the genre are seen in Is 14:28–32. Not all the scholarship on this subject matter can be delved into, but a few of the theories can be presented briefly in order to show that this oracle presents some unique characteristics, making it important for study. Other features will be examined in the notes and comments in chapters 2 and 3.

¹² Weis, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,” 321.

¹³ See comments especially under v. 32, “Importance of Ambassadors for the Oracle,” p. 63.

One way Hebrew literature signifies an important point or marks a division within a larger corpus is through a change in a given pattern. This is observable in Hebrew poetry and prophecy.¹⁴ The oracle against Philistia may contain such characteristics. The pattern in Isaiah's ten OAN is that each, with the exception of 14:28–32, begins with “[country] . . . נִשְׁבַּח,” that is, “An oracle against country X.” This oracle changes the pattern with נִשְׁבַּח in the absolute and the inclusion of a chronological heading in v. 28., perhaps to show a change in the sequence of Isaiah's OAN. Many writers have speculated on what these changes assert about patterns in Isaiah and what role the oracle against Philistia may play in them.

A. K. Jenkins has proposed that the oracle against Philistia marks off the first of “three broad groupings” in Isaiah 14:28–23:18, after the oracle against Babylon in 13:1–14:27.¹⁵ This makes the text, small though it may be, an important introduction to Isaiah's oracles against the “group of nations which were neighbors to Judah.”¹⁶ Jenkins goes further by saying that since Assyria is rarely mentioned after 14:27, which he believes was part of an older tradition that went with material from 5:1 to 14:27, the oracle against Philistia “marks a suitable starting point for the study of the OAN in Isaiah.”¹⁷ Thus 14:28–32 is the first oracle in Isaiah's corpus for him. Jenkins' conclusions, though, may be reading too much into the stylistic evidence, since few others studying this pericope have come up with

¹⁴ E.g., structural patterns can be seen in the book of Psalms, which is composed of five sections divided by a common concluding doxology (41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48; 150). However, the small change in the pattern of Isaiah's OAN in 14:28 is thought by Marvin Sweeney to mean a point that is to be “subsumed” into the previous oracle, and not be important enough to be counted with the other OAN in the corpus (*Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* [FOTL XVI] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 221). See arguments on p. 7, below.

¹⁵ Jenkins, “The Hand Stretched Out over All the Nations,” 19. The other pattern changes are identified by Jenkins in Isaiah 18 and 20. See Jenkins' dissertation, chapters 5 and 6 for their discussion, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

the same results.

Others have seen a different role for this oracle in its larger context. Marvin A. Sweeney has found significance in this oracle's superscription and believes that "its formulation with an introductory temporal clause corresponds to that of the introductory temporal statement in 20:1 (cf., 6:1; 7:1) and indicates that 14:28–32 is to be subsumed into the structure of the preceding material."¹⁸ Sweeney thus considers this oracle with the oracle against Babylon as having a combined purpose. Isaiah, he argues, is not starting a new section within his OAN, but places 14:28–32, along with the material about Assyria in 14:24–27, as an appendix to the Babylon oracle.¹⁹

Since the first **נבִּיאָה** unit for Sweeney is all of chapters 13–14 (counting only nine in the corpus), the oracle against Philistia only contributes to the overall message against Babylon. But how does a message for Philistia say anything to Babylon? He believes the purpose of this oracle is to point "to YHWH's foundation of Zion as an essential lesson to be drawn from YHWH's activities in relation to Babylon."²⁰ Sweeney's thesis could just as well lead to this pericope being directed at any or all the OAN in Is 13–23 by different interpretation of the data, since, if it is accepted that the oracle against Philistia can speak to Babylon, its purpose might be said to be applicable "to all nations of which Babylon was perceived as a leader."²¹

Similarly, Jenkins in an essay four years after his Ph.D dissertation, proposes that this oracle fits into Isaiah's OAN by introducing the first of two major groupings. Refining his

¹⁸ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 221.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 212 and 228.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

previous argument, he sees the overarching pattern of Is 13–23 as presenting oracles against neighboring states and then against the “great powers: Ethiopia, Egypt, Babylon.”²² The division of these oracles into these two groups is based on the common motifs of “affirming the security of Zion (14,32; 18,7), and conclud[ing] with an assault on Zion (17,12–14; 22,1–14—repelled by Yahweh in the former, but sanctioned by him in the latter).²³ Whether this is the correct interpretation of the wider context of this oracle is not the purpose of this thesis. Instead, Jenkins’ supposition is well taken “that there are patterns to be discerned which point to a deliberate arrangement [which] all for the attempt to interpret the prophecies not only in relation to their original historical context, but also in relation to their literary context within the book.”²⁴ One cannot interpret this oracle in isolation since its presence in Isaiah’s corpus has had an effect on the other oracles’ placement. While it is interesting that an element uncommon for the OAN such as Zion theology appears in this oracle and again in the oracle against Ethiopia, it is not enough evidence to claim the kind of arrangement Jenkins presents.

This leads to the last unique characteristic of the oracle against Philistia to be discussed in connection with the OAN: its inclusion of Zion theology. This profound reference in Isaiah’s OAN is elsewhere only mentioned at the end of the oracle against Ethiopia (Is 18:7) as mentioned above.²⁵ Many scholars have sought the significance of this

²² A. K. Jenkins, “The Development of the Isaiah Tradition in Isaiah 13–23,” in *The Book of Isaiah/Le livre d’Isaïe*, ed. Jacques Vermeylen, BETL 81 (Leuven: University Press, 1989), 239.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 238. Jenkins refers this argument to one proposed by B. S. Childs in *Introduction to the OT as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 316–38.

²⁵ Cf., Jenkins, “The Development of the Isaiah Tradition in Isaiah 13–23,” 239, as discussed above. There are other indirect references to Zion theology in Is 13–23 that do not use the word *Zion*, e.g., 19:21ff; 22; and 23:15–18.

motif here. For example, Sweeney and Kemper Fullerton see significance in this, with Fullerton calling it “the most explicit statement of the doctrine” of the inviolability of Zion to be found in Isaiah.²⁶ Yet Fullerton argued that this uncommon theme was reason for omitting vv. 30a and 32b from the rest of the original oracle.²⁷

Not all agree with this assessment. W.A. Irwin’s article on this text is a direct response to Fullerton, and refutes many of his claims. Irwin supports the Zion reference’s originality on the grounds of three literary devices: “We can rest our case, then, for the genuineness of 32 on the historic probabilities of the situation suggested, on the harmony of the verse with Isaianic utterances, and on the admitted relationship with 30a.”²⁸ Similarly, Richard Weis has also defended the whole oracle’s integrity on the grounds of semantics.²⁹ These issues show that the significance of this oracle lies in its complexity and the interplay between symbols of hope for God’s people and the fate of Philistia’s remnant.

E. Proposed Purpose of Isaiah’s Oracle against Philistia

The OAN do not all have the same aim, and neither do their similarities in style give us uniformity for the genre. Given the scope of each OAN, there could be multiple purposes for which it is spoken.³⁰ In general, it could well be asserted that of all the various themes in the OAN, weal and woe, comfort and punishment, Law and Gospel are to be found in every

²⁶ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 221; Kemper Fullerton, “Isaiah 14:28–32,” *AJSLL* 42 (1925–26): 86. Cf., also, Gunther Wanke, *Die Zionstheologie der Korachiten in ihrem traditionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

²⁸ Irwin, 80. Also see chapter 3, F, 2 “Zion Theology,” p. 65 below, for the view that Isaiah’s use of the “poor” and “afflicted” of Zion as religious terms support the whole oracle’s originality.

²⁹ Weis concludes that “Isa 14:29–32 is explicable as a whole; it is structurally integral” (“A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,” 322). See chapter 4, A, 2 “Evidence Connecting the Title and Oracle,” p. 71 below.

³⁰ Raabe, “Why Prophetic Oracles against the Nations?” 240.

one of them for *different* hearers. Law for the foreign nations can be understood as a Gospel message of hope for God's own people, as mentioned above. In other words, OAN were not proclaimed just out of hatred for the accused nations which attacked Israel, but to lead God's people to repentance and to trust in Yahweh for their salvation. As this is observable in the oracle against Philistia, it might be called the general purpose, but the intention is to focus on more specific purposes within this oracle.

Isaiah's motivation for this oracle is tied closely to its hearers. Unlike other OAN which sometimes do not identify their audiences, the oracle against Philistia gives us straight forward answers to whom its originally intended hearers were—the people of Philistia and “the afflicted of [Yahweh's] people.” So while some scholars have assumed that there was no way the nations, against whom the biblical prophets spoke, ever heard their words,³¹ this oracle challenges that thought. This oracle is not merely anti-foreigner rhetoric that strove to keep Israel's bloodlines pure and her defenses up. Instead, as Richard Weis shows in his dissertation, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*’ in the Hebrew Bible,” the purpose of such oracles is most likely tied up in the etymology of מַשָּׂאִי. He proposes three etymological options which highlight this oracle's purpose well. One can view מַשָּׂאִי as coming from

- 1) the verbal expression by the prophet of the revelation received from YHWH . . . which understands *massa*’ as a *maqal* form of *nasa* meaning ‘utter, recite.’
- 2) [Or the same root as above] but this time *nasa* meaning ‘bring, carry.’ The *massa*’ would then be ‘the thing brought back’ to the inquirer from the prophet's encounter with the deity.
- 3) [Or, using] the cognate to *massa*’, *mas’et*, in Judg 20:38, 40 and Jer 6:1. This term apparently refers to a ‘fire-signal’ or ‘smoke-signal’ employed in a military context.³²

³¹ John H. Hayes, in “The Usage of Oracles Against Foreign Nations in Ancient Israel” *JBL* 87 (1988): 81, exemplifies this view: “It is obvious that these speeches were not primarily spoken or written to be heard or acted upon by the nations mentioned in the texts. Their function and importance were not dependent on the foreign powers’ knowledge of or response to them.”

³² Weis, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*’,” 353–54.

All three ideas are found in this pericope. It certainly has the purpose of expressing Isaiah's understanding of Yahweh's revelation as illustrated by the first person report in v. 30b, implying Yahweh as the speaker. It is also a report which Isaiah brought back from God to Hezekiah's court in the form of a rhetorical device for "Philistine ambassadors" (v. 32a), but really intended for Israel. Finally, it also functions as a prophetic "smoke-signal" by Isaiah to warn Israel, as he fulfills his role "as a lookout" for Israel—Yahweh's appointed watchman warning God's people, as in "Hab 2:1 and perhaps Isa 21:8."³³ Whether Isaiah was also directing the oracle at Philistia or other nations is less likely, as the evidence will show below.

We can now propose that the purpose of Isaiah's oracle against Philistia was for Isaiah, as a faithful watchman, to warn Israel against any alliances with Philistia. Within both the historical context of the Syro-Ephraimite conflict and Isaiah's previous warnings to Ahaz against joining foreign alliances (Is 7), this seems correct.³⁴ Thus Isaiah, on the eve of Ahaz's son, Hezekiah's ascension, was giving the new king of Judah the same warning as was given to his father. This helps us to see this oracle as one of many attempts by Isaiah to lead Judah down the correct path of Yahweh's will and the source of safety.

³³ *Ibid.*, 354–55.

³⁴ Allen K. Jenkins, "Isaiah 14:28–32—An Issue of Life and Death," *Folia Orientalia* 21 (1980): 55, agrees with this, even going further in saying that any positive word to Judah in v. 32b, "seems to have served originally not primarily as a promise to Judah but as a warning not to become involved in a clash with Assyria."

Chapter 2

TRANSLATION AND TEXTUAL NOTES

A. Translation

28 In the year of the death of King Ahaz^a came^a this oracle:^b

29 A | [Yahweh:] ““Stop rejoicing, Philistia^a—all of you^b—

that the scepter,^c which struck^d you, is broken;

For from a stock^e of a snake^f will come forth a

poisonous snake^g

and its^h fruit,^h a strikingⁱ fiery serpent.^j

30 B | Then the first-born^a of the poor^b will pasture^c

and the needy^d will lie down in security.

C | But I^e will kill^e your^f [Philistia's] stock^f by famine

and your remnant^g it^h will slay.^{'h}

31 A' | [Prophet:] ‘Start wailing,^a O gate! Cry out,^b O city!

Melt^c away, O Philistia—all of you!

For from the North^d [the] smoke^e [of war] is coming

and there is no deserter^f in its^g train.’^g

32 B' | Now what will one say to ambassadors^a of a nation?^b

‘That Yahweh has founded^c Zion,^d

and in her the afflicted^e of his people find refuge.’^{'f}

B. Translation Notes—v. 28

28a: *BHS* proposes emending the text from אָחָז בָּרָא (‘‘Ahaz, came’’) to וַיִּרְאוּ אֲנִי (‘‘and I had a vision of’’).³⁵ This is put forth on the assumption that the superscription was not original to the oracle. Changing the oracle simply to refer to Isaiah’s ‘‘vision’’ during the ‘‘year of the death of a king,’’ takes away the oracle’s context at the expense of the MT. After all, what good is relating an oracle to a king’s death if the king’s name is not mentioned? Thus ‘‘Ahaz’’ is to be retained, since Isaiah had previously mentioned the ‘‘death of King Uzziah’’ in 6:1 to date that vision and there is no solid evidence for emending the MT.

28b: מַשָּׂא פֶה is found most often within prophetic literature, where it is usually translated ‘‘oracle’’ or ‘‘utterance,’’ but also may have the meaning ‘‘burden’’ in its other occurrences.³⁶ It is probably related to the verb מָשָׂא with the connotation, ‘‘to lift up [one’s hand] against’’ a person or nation, as a prophet might do, or figuratively, to lift up one’s hand against someone by use of a formal or solemn utterance as Balaam did in Num 23:7, 18.³⁷ According to the extensive survey of the מַשָּׂא פֶה genre by Weis, the best understanding of the word in Isaiah 13–23 is to ‘‘regard the term *massa*’ as the name in the Hebrew Bible of the genre to which the texts belong.’’³⁸ This simply directs us to the other texts of the מַשָּׂא פֶה genre for a definition, which Weis later proposes, ‘‘to bridge the gap’’ between an English translation and the genre definition, as ‘‘prophetic exposition (of YHWH revelation).’’³⁹

³⁵ Hans Wildberger notes in *Isaiah 13–27*, 88, that this reading was first proposed by J. A. Brewer in 1908.

³⁶ Not all scholars agree that מַשָּׂא פֶה II, ‘‘burden,’’ and III, ‘‘oracle,’’ in BDB, 672, are related. See arguments in chapter 3, B, 1 ‘‘Toward a Meaning of מַשָּׂא פֶה in Isaiah,’’ p. 35 and especially footnote 119 below, for opposing views.

³⁷ BDB, 670, מָשָׂא §1 b (6).

³⁸ Weis, ‘‘A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,’’ 262–3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 275–6.

The term *oracle* in the translation above is adequate for understanding Isaiah’s meaning, plus it fits with Weis’ findings by sufficiently indicating that this text *is* Isaiah’s “prophetic exposition.” Also, there is no doubt from whom the oracle comes, since Yahweh’s intentions are given in the first person pronouncement of v. 30b. Therefore, as an “oracle,” Isaiah is delivering Yahweh’s will to the two contrasted parties named in it.⁴⁰

It is also interesting to note that in this verse, **בְּשֵׁם** is in the absolute, while it is usually found in the construct, as in the nine other cases of Isaiah’s OAN in chapters 13–23. Since the **בְּשֵׁם** is found with the demonstrative pronoun *this*, it also indicates that “this oracle” is different from the previous and subsequent “oracles.” This form has been noted by commentators who believe it is a poetic device that ties the oracle into a pattern or serves a theological purpose in the corpus of Isaiah’s OAN.⁴¹

C. Translation Notes—v. 29

29a: **פְּלִשְׁתַּיִם**, from which the name “Palestine” comes, only occurs eight times⁴² in this singular form in the Old Testament, while the more normal plural form(s), **פְּלִשְׁתִּים**, occur 286 times.⁴³ In the singular, the word **פְּלִשְׁתַּיִם** may just be a convenient name for the collection of Philistine city-states on the coastlands of south western Canaan, but not necessarily designating a country. The more common Hebrew form was often translated by

⁴⁰ See chapter 1, C “Possible Audiences for the Oracle against Philistia,” p. 3 above.

⁴¹ E.g., Jenkins, “The Hand Stretched Out over All the Nations,” 19; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 212.

⁴² Ex 15:14; Ps 60:10; 83:8; 87:4; 108:10; Is 14:29; 14:31; and Joel 4:4.

⁴³ Avraham Even-Shoshan, *Konkordantsyah heda'shah le'torah nevi'im ukhetuvim: 'otsar leshon ha'mikra'-ivrit ya'eramit shara'shim, milim, shemot peratiyim tserufim yenirdafim* [transliterated, i.e., *A New Concordance of the Bible*] (Yerushala'yim [Jerusalem]: Kiryat-Sepher, 1980), 1764. He lists the construct form occurring 33 times and the plural 253 times.

the LXX as ἀλλόφυλοι (“strangers, foreigners”),⁴⁴ as in this verse. Why the LXX translated פְּלִשְׁתִּים as “strangers,” may have something to do with the Philistines’ origin since they were not the original inhabitants of the coastal region, or *shephelah*, but had sailed there most likely from Crete.⁴⁵ However, the original derivation of the Hebrew is unknown.

29b: כָּלְךָ, “all of you,” is a unique form in the MT, found only here and in v. 31 (in pause).⁴⁶ This noun, with a 2nd per., fem. sing. suffix, is seen in its regular form of כָּלְךָ, in Is 22:1 and Cant. 4:7. The fem. sing. suffix matches the referent, פְּלִשְׁתִּים, which is also fem. sing. This apparently redundant clause is most likely included to clarify that the whole “collection” of Philistine city-states, which consisted of five main areas of control each under its own leader along the Canaanite coast,⁴⁷ was included in this pronouncement of judgment, not just one area which might have actually attacked Israel.

29c: Isaiah uses the word שֵׁבֶט, “rod,” as a metonym of the adjunct (i.e., a possession that stands in place of its possessor) for a king who would wield such an object.⁴⁸ This mas. sing. noun in construct, refers to a king’s “scepter” here but also means “rod, staff, or club.” Isaiah

⁴⁴ As in Is 2:6 and 11:14. Yet note that in a few places in the LXX, פְּלִשְׁתִּים is transliterated as φυλιστιιμ, e.g., Gen 10:14; 21:34; 26:15; Ex 13:17; Josh. 13:2; etc.

⁴⁵ K. A. Kitchen, “The Philistines,” *People of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 54.

⁴⁶ Friedrich H. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd edition, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 127 §b–c (hereafter referred to as GKC); and Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblio, 1991), §94h.

⁴⁷ According to Judges 2:6–3:6, God sent the “five lords of the Philistines” to test Israel. This five-city coalition was broken up by David (cf., 2 Sam 23ff.) but they continued to cause problems for Israel individually, e.g., for Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18:8.

⁴⁸ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (1898, reprint; Michigan: Baker Book House, 1997), 603, § vi, “The SIGN is put for the thing signified.” E.g., “scepter” in Gen 49:10, which is the *Rod of tribal supremacy*, “is put for Him who is entitled to hold it,” namely, Yahweh as Israel’s king.

uses this symbol of a king’s authority for the king himself. Which king is meant depends on the context.⁴⁹ Similarly, Is 10:5 reads, “O Assyria, the *rod* of my anger—the staff in their hands is my wrath!” Here, מִשְׁבֵּט is a “rod” which clearly refers to the king of Assyria by the use of synecdoche of the whole, where the country is used in place of its leader and king.⁵⁰ Isaiah also uses מִשְׁבֵּט with the same connotation of this verse in Is 14:5, where Yahweh breaks “the scepter of kings.”⁵¹

29d: The verb מָכָה, meaning “struck you,” is a Hiph‘il participle with a 2nd per. fem. sing. suffix. Its root, מָכָה, means “to smite” and has four uses. The first of these uses, “to smite with a single non-fatal blow,” is in this passage, i.e., “to strike”—in contrast to “smiting fatally” in the other three uses.⁵² It can be seen that this is referring to a non-fatal striking of Philistia, because the oracle is threatening that, unlike how they were “struck” in the past, Philistia will finally be dealt the death blow in the future (v. 30b) for their many sins, i.e., the continued animosity between Israel and Philistia.

29e: מִשְׁטָרֶשׁ, “from a stock of,” is a mas. sing. noun in construct. While שֹׁרֶשׁ is usually translated as “root,”⁵³ it does not only mean the part of a plant below the ground. Thus, as

⁴⁹ See chapter 3, C, 2, “Who Is the ‘Broken Scepter?’” p. 47 below, for discussion of interpretations.

⁵⁰ Bullinger, 635.

⁵¹ The LXX translates מִשְׁבֵּט as ζυγός, “yoke.” An Assyrian king would certainly fit such a description, since only Assyria had laid a yoke of tribute and vassalage upon the Philistines during the eighth century B.C. (K. A. Kitchen, “The Philistines,” 66).

⁵² BDB, 645f. The other three uses are: with man as the subject, “killing;” with an army as the subject, “destroying;” and with God as the subject, “smiting [by plague, disease, blindness, etc.]”

⁵³ E.g., KJV, NEB, NIV, RSV.

seen in such passages as Is 40:24 and Mal. 4:1, it refers to the “roots and trunk below the crown” which is the part of the plant that is capable of regenerating itself, namely, the “stock.”⁵⁴ The “stock of the snake” refers back to the “scepter” in the previous colon, which is an Assyrian king.⁵⁵ It is out of this stock that the new oppression will arise, i.e., the successors of Tiglath-pileser III in the Assyrian empire.

There also seems to be some association between snakes and rods as seen in Num 21:8f. The bronze snake on a pole made by Moses in Num 21 may hold some ancient symbolism, which is unrecoverable. What is important, though, is that the “root-stock” metaphor is carried on in v. 30.⁵⁶ In v. 29, it is from the enemy of Philistia—Yahweh’s instrument—while in v. 30, it refers to Philistia.

29f: שׁוֹרֵף is the general term for “snake” or “serpent” in the Old Testament as used in the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3. It is variously used in the MT for a “snake,” figuratively for enemies (Jer 8:17), for ungodly oppressors (Ps 58:5), a mythological reference to the “eclipse-dragon” (Job 26:13), a symbol of world powers (Is 27:1), or a sea monster (Amos 9:3).⁵⁷

29g: The progression in this verse goes from the general term *snake*, to the more specific

⁵⁴ H. L. Ginsberg, “‘Roots Below and Fruits above’ and Related Matters,” *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver*, ed. D. W. Thomas and W. D. McHardy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 73. Cf., also Beck, JB, and JPSA Bible versions.

⁵⁵ See chapter 3, C, 2 “Who Is the ‘Broken Scepter,’” p. 47 below. Cf., also John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irving’s suggestion that “the root stock [is] used as a metaphor for the royal house (see 11:1),” *Isaiah the Eighth-century Prophet*, 237.

⁵⁶ See comments on 30g and 30h, p. 23f below.

⁵⁷ BDB, 638.

term here, **עַפְּעָפָה** (mas. sing. noun), which is any of a class of “poisonous snakes” common in the ANE, such as the cobra, adder, or viper. This is the only occurrence of this word in the MT, which is usually found in the plural.⁵⁸ Many commentators and translators become too specific by translating **עַפְּעָפָה** of this verse as any one of a particular species of poisonous snakes. The root of the word is dubious, with some linking the word to the Arabic for “to bend backwards.”⁵⁹ However, it makes more sense to understand it as onomatopoeic for the “hiss” a viper makes.⁶⁰

29h: The referent of the 3rd per., masc., sing. pronoun “it” in **וּפְרִיָּו** (“and its fruit”), is the “poisonous snake.”

Fruit in the phrase **וּפְרִיָּו**, is used in the Hebrew to designate the “offspring” of the previously mentioned “poisonous snake.” Isaiah uses successive plant metaphors like “fruit,” “root of a snake” (v. 29b) and “kill your root” (v. 30b) to show the progressively worsening punishment sent upon Philistia and toward the very foundations of their society.

29i: Modifying the word “seraph,” **מְעוֹפֵף** is a Polel participle from the root **עָפַף**, which means “to fly.” The Polel has the sense of “flying about, to and fro” which is usually used of birds (Gen 1:20),⁶¹ but here is a metaphor used to describe the “flying” or “swaying” (NIV, “darting”) appearance of a snake about to strike. Thus, it refers to the “striking” or characteristic lunging of a venomous snake. The phrase, **שָׁרְףֵי מְעוֹפֵפִים**, is only found twice

⁵⁸ In Is 11:8; 59:5 and Prov 23:32, where it is parallel to **שָׂרָף**.

⁵⁹ Karen R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield, N.J.: Haddonfield House, 1974), 5.

⁶⁰ BDB, 861.

⁶¹ BDB, 734.

in the MT—here and in Is 30:6. Some scholars have attempted to identify a species of flying snakes from these verses, but to no avail.⁶² While the phrase *flying serpent* may be a metaphor for a divinely sent punishment (see note 29j below), Isaiah’s choice of these words best fits the progressive snake imagery he is building. Toward this conclusion, D. J. Wiseman suggests that מְעוֹפֵי־אֵשׁ may come from the Akkadian *appu*, “tip or spur,” and “may simply denote ‘jab, prick’ [so] that Isaiah’s ‘fiery flying serpents’ are but ‘deadly poisonous snakes’ in general.”⁶³

29j: אֵשׁ־רֶמֶס is a mysterious word in the Old Testament and is sometimes just transliterated as *seraph*. Most likely it comes from the root אֵשׁ־רָץ, which means “to burn,”⁶⁴ or literally as a noun, “fiery ones.” In the context of Num 21:8, אֵשׁ־רֶמֶס seems to be interchangeable with אֵשׁ־רָץ, and thus means a “poisonous serpent” as in Num 21:8–9; Dt 8:15; and Is 30:6. The connection of “fiery” with “serpent” may simply be a matter of synecdoche, in which a part (in this case the burning sensation of a snakebite) is used to refer to the whole snake. Or the connection may come from any of a number of varieties of vipers, which are copper in color, and thus associated with the appearance of fire. However, אֵשׁ־רֶמֶס may also have the definitions of “fiery serpent,” “flying serpent,” or “dragon” with the word’s origin perhaps referring to “beings originally mythically conceived with serpents’ bodies (serpent-deities) . . . or personification of lightning.”⁶⁵

⁶² D. J. Wiseman, “Flying Serpents?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 109.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁴ BDB, 977.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Yet, in Isaiah’s Temple vision (6:1f, 6), שָׁרָף is in the plural and seems to refer to a type of angelic being. These six-winged “flying” beings may have a connection with the role of the progressively worsening penalties prophesied in this verse by referring to the divine origin of the chastisement. So the “fiery serpent” in this text may indicate a powerful entity⁶⁶ sent by Yahweh to carry out His punishment. This being would appear as deadly as a flying serpent, striking and killing its victims repeatedly by nature.

D. Translation Notes—v. 30

30a: בְּכוֹרֵי, “first-born,” is a masc. pl. noun in construct, which refers to something that is primary or superlative. It comes from the root בָּכַר, which literally means “to burst the womb,” i.e., “to bear” for women or “make early fruit” for plants.⁶⁷ Thus בְּכוֹרֵי can mean “eldest.” Here the “first-born of the poor” identifies those who are “the poorest,” even as the word used with “death” in Job 18:13 means “a deadly disease,” or when Yahweh, in Ex. 4:22, is identifying Israel as the *first* among the nations or “a chosen people.”⁶⁸ While this may have been a common metaphor in Israel,⁶⁹ others have tried to emend the text to make it more agreeable to the verbs. Begrich suggests that *pasture* and *lie down* originally went with כְּכֹרִים, “as lambs.”⁷⁰ However, such an emendation is unnecessary since the text is still understandable without it.

⁶⁶ See chapter 3, C, 4 “Serpent Imagery,” p. 52 below, for the argument of whether the imagery warrants translating שָׁרָף as an earthly or heavenly being.

⁶⁷ E.g., in the word בְּכֹרֵי, “firstfruits,” in Ex 23:16, 19.

⁶⁸ BDB, 114.

⁶⁹ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 88.

⁷⁰ Joachim Begrich, “Jesaja 14,28–32: Ein Beitrag zur Chronologie der israelitisch-judäischen Königszeit,” *ZDMG* 86 (1932): 72.

30b: דָּלִים, “poor, needy,” is a masc. pl. noun. It comes from the root, דָּלַל, which means “to slacken or be feeble,” or it can be used figuratively, “to be oppressed.”⁷¹ Thus, דָּלִים probably has the literal meaning of “dangling” and by implication means, “weak, thin, lean, or needy,” which points to those who are least powerful and prestigious.⁷² It does not just refer to the materially poor, but has the religious connotation of being under the care of Yahweh who “appears as a lawyer for the lower classes.”⁷³ This is seen by its use throughout the OT in parallel with the אֲבִיוֹן (“needy”) and עֲנִי (“afflicted”), both of which are in this pericope. While a דָּל is not the poorest economically, “he still needs mercy ([Prov] 28:8), material help (22:9), and legal protection, especially from the king, who is the executor of the divine will (29:14).”⁷⁴ In the prophets, the דָּלִים are then the “innocent poor,” as seen in Is 1:17.

30c: וַיִּרְעֵם, “and will feed or pasture,” is a Qal waw-consecutive perfect, 3rd per., common pl. from the root, רָעַם (“to pasture, tend, graze”). Because the previous phrase, “first-born of the poor,” is so uncommon, this verb has been used to support changing the text to something more understandable (see 30a above).

30d: אֲבִיוֹנִים is another common adjective for being “in want, poor, needy,” from the root אָבָה, which means “to be willing.” In its positive sense, the אֲבִיוֹנִים are those whose wills

⁷¹ BDB, 195.

⁷² However, TDOT states that this root, “*dl(l)*, Heb, *dll* I [should] be distinguished from *dll* II, ‘to hang’” (vol. 1:208).

⁷³ TDOT 1:221.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

are “pliant” to God’s will. It connotes being materially poor,⁷⁵ and thus subject to oppression and abuse (Amos 2:6; 5:12). The אֲבִי־וְנִים are also, then, in need of protection and care by God (Jer 20:13; Ps 107:41; *etc.*) and by the Davidic King (Ps 72:12). Greater consideration of this term will be discussed below in the comments on v. 30.

30e: The 1st per. sing. pronoun used here in the phrase, וְהָמַתִּי (“But I will kill”), is thought to be an emendation of the text⁷⁶ since there is an awkward change in person in the next colon to the 3rd per. sing. However, it is not uncommon in Hebrew poetry, or prophetic literature written in prose, to have a change of person in the same sentence.⁷⁷

וְהָמַתִּי is an Hiph‘il perf., waw-consecutive, 1st per., common verb from the root מוּת (“to die”). In the Hiph‘il, “to die” has a causative sense and means here, “to kill, put to death.”

30f: The referent of the 2nd per. fem. sing. suffix in שְׁרֵשֶׁךָ (“your stock”), is Philistia, which was also the case in the 2nd per., fem. sing. suffix in v. 29. There the referent is clear: “Stop rejoicing Philistia—all of you.” In both cases *you* refers to the individual city-states that make up the Philistine federation.

⁷⁵ Cf., וְקִיִּים, p. 21 above.

⁷⁶ The MT critical apparatus proposes emending the text to correspond with the third person, mas. sing., “he will kill” in the LXX and editions of the Targum. However, these manuscripts have most likely changed the MT in order to harmonize the verb with the last verb in the sentence, “he will slay.” Keeping the MT reading, as supported by the DSS, does not compromise the original text and keeps the integrity of Hebrew poetic forms intact (see next footnote).

⁷⁷ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), 40. Also see note on v. 30h below concerning Hebrew parallelism.

The word *stock* in שֶׁרֶשׁ is a mas. sing. noun from שָׂרַשׁ, “to root [up].” As in note 29e above, *stock* refers to more than the roots of a plant, but to enough of the trunk or stem above ground to provide for regeneration of the plant.⁷⁸ The OT writers also commonly use *stock* in a metaphorical sense. Here “your stock” is the same as “your remnant,” i.e., “the basis of your future existence.” In other words, it is what gives hope since future generations are dependent on the “stock” for life. Isaiah used שֶׁרֶשׁ this way in 11:10, when he referred to the Messiah as the “Root of Jesse that stands as a banner of peoples.” The “root-stock,” as it were, would be Israel’s future hope. In this oracle, Philistia and Israel’s future are contrasted not only through the oracle, but also in the choice of words. Israel’s future lies in the “poor” and “needy” who will feed and be secure, while Philistia’s “stock” will be killed “by famine” and their “remnant” will be slain.

30g: וְשִׁאֲרֵיהֶן, “and your remnant,” is a fem. sing. noun with a 2nd person fem. sing. suffix. The pronoun refers back to Philistia, as it did above. *Remnant* is an important word in the prophets and a theme in Isaiah when referring to Israel. Yet here, Isaiah is contrasting Israel’s poor (often called a *remnant*) with Philistia’s poor, which would be the remnant of their country/city-states after Assyria or any other large enemy’s army came through Philistia.

30h: The change in person from the previous colon’s 1st per. verb, “I will kill,” to the 3rd per. mas., יִהְרַג (“he/it will slay”), is not so unusual for Hebrew parallelism. Although such a purposeful change is usually found in the realm of poetry, Adele Berlin’s book on the subject

⁷⁸ H. L. Ginsberg, “‘Roots Below and Fruits above’ and Related Matters,” 73.

gives clear examples⁷⁹ showing that changes of person within the same Hebrew sentence can be witnessed throughout the OT. She confirms “that these shifts should be viewed not as isolated ‘poetic’ devices, but as examples of morphologic parallelism similar to those [grammatical aspects] already presented.”⁸⁰ Applying this point here, the 3rd per. subject would be Yahweh. Thus Isaiah is saying, “I [Yahweh] will kill . . . he [Yahweh] will slay.”

Another way to explain this phenomena is J. Watts’ unique approach to the book of Isaiah as “a sort of drama in which Yahweh and his aides (Heaven and Earth, 1:2) are the principle characters.”⁸¹ Commenting on this book, Brian Jones remarks: “This heuristic devise enables [Watts] to explain the sudden transitions and changes of speaker that are characteristic of many parts of [Isaiah].”⁸² By assuming an overall drama-like structure for Isaiah, Watts sees each pericope fitting into a larger scheme. Thus, he sees the change from first to third person in v. 31 as having meaning for the larger context. It adds to the “dramatic style of the vision to have Yahweh speak a line that interrupts another’s speech,” which makes it operate as a poetic device on an even greater level than Berlin described for Hebrew parallelism.

Then, there is the option of translating the 3rd per. pronoun as the neuter “it,” which more naturally points back to a referent within the sentence. Although Isaiah may be unclear as to exactly who or what the referent is here, this ambiguity may be intentional. Yet it does not change the sense of the passage, because the origin of the destruction ultimately lies with

⁷⁹ E.g., Ps 104:13 (3rd to 2nd person shift); Song 1:2 (3rd to 2nd person shift); Lev. 23:42 (2nd to 3rd person shift); Ps 20:8 (3rd to 1st person shift); Eccl. 5:1 (2nd to 3rd person shift); *etc.*

⁸⁰ Adele Berlin, *Parallelism*, 40.

⁸¹ Watts, xlix.

⁸² Jones, *Howling over Moab: Irony and Rhetoric in Isaiah 15–16*, 39–40.

Yahweh in either choice of referent. Therefore, keeping the identification of this pronoun's referent within the text, the prophet's thought shift is from God, from whom the destruction comes (v. 30c), to the instrument of that destruction (v. 30d). "It" is then the "famine," Yahweh's agent of destruction that will slay Philistia's rootstock.

The verb, **יָהַרְג**, "he will slay," is a Qal impf. 3rd per. mas. from the root **הָרַג**, "to kill."⁸³ Wildberger notes that it "is used frequently when describing the way death is inflicted in battle by means of a sword: Gen 34:26; Josh. 10:11; Amos 9:4."⁸⁴ This connotation lends support to the integral connection between this verse and the war motif in the following verse. In other words, "slaying" by both "famine" (v. 30b) and by an army "from the north" (v. 31b), is by the "sword" or an instrument of Yahweh's wrath.

E. Translation Notes—v. 31

31a: **הִיָּלֵל** is an Hiph'il impv., 2nd per., fem. sing. from **לָל**, "to wail, howl." This command to "Start wailing," can be understood as a sarcastic imperative, which mocks its object and offers no forgiveness.⁸⁵ The word is also considered to be a key word in the formulaic "Call to Communal Lament."⁸⁶ This explains why the verb is commonly used by the prophets, and especially Isaiah, in connection with OAN.⁸⁷ However, it is found as a command in the Hiph'il elsewhere only in Jer 48:20 and 49:3. It is parallel to **וַיִּבְקֵי** ("cry

⁸³ BDB, 246.

⁸⁴ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 97–98.

⁸⁵ Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1992), 68.

⁸⁶ Hans Walter Wolff, "Der Aufruf zur Volksklage," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 49. See chapter 3, E, "The Prophet's Lament and Oracle Forms—v. 31," p. 61 below.

⁸⁷ Isaiah uses this verb form 10 out of the 27 occurrences in the MT, all of which are by the prophets. The first 7 instances are in Isaiah's OAN in chapters 13–23 (Is 13:6; 15:2, 3; 16:7; 23:1, 6 and 14).

out”), which is in this verse and also in Jer 48:20. **יְהִי לְיָ** is a command to the “gate,” which is synecdoche that puts the gate of a city for the people within. However, it is not just directed at one city gate and people within, but collectively against *all* the cities and people of Philistia.

31b: **יִעַקֵּי**, “cry out,” is a Piel impv., 2nd per., fem. sing. from **יָעַקַּע**, “to shriek [from anguish or danger].” The subject of this verb is the vocative, “O city!” which is also fem. sing. “O city” makes this sentence emphatic by paralleling the previous phrase, “O gate.” Such emphasis fits the genre of the OAN, especially the “Communal Call to Lament.”⁸⁸

31c: **נִבְזַרְג**, “melt away,” is “to be regarded as [an] infinitive absolute” in the Niph‘al.⁸⁹ It comes from **בִּזַּרְג**, “to melt” and literally means “to soften, flow down, disappear,” from which comes the figurative meaning, “to be faint [hearted], to melt in fear.”⁹⁰ One can understand **נִבְזַרְג** as a Niph‘al in the reflexive rather than the passive voice. An infinitive absolute is often used as a substitute for a finite verb, either indicative or imperative.⁹¹ Here it substitutes for an imperative.

By translating **נִבְזַרְג** as a continuation of the two imperatives strung together by Isaiah in the first colon of v. 31, there is a smooth flow in the meaning. This is most likely what Isaiah had in mind. Therefore, **נִבְזַרְג** is a kind of shorthand for the expressed imperatives of

⁸⁸ See chapter 3, E, “The Prophet’s Lament and Oracle Forms,” p. 61 below.

⁸⁹ GKC, §72 v.

⁹⁰ BDB, 556.

⁹¹ GKC, §114 *bb*.

the previous colon. By compounding the imperative thought, this verb becomes an emphatic command. Such a use is more common in the MT than it may seem, as Gesenius shows:

The extraordinarily common use of the infinitive form קהל in the sense of an imperative, jussive, or cohortative has long since caused it to be compared with the Arabic *fa'ali*. It thus appears that the infin. קהל in Hebrew could be used from early times as a kind of fixed, invariable word of command.⁹²

Thus, this infinitive absolute is the “equivalent of the imperative,” in Niph'al here, and follows the pattern in the MT for “commands given by God or a military commander.”⁹³ This yields the translation, “[You] melt away, O Philistia!”

31d: מִצָּפוֹן, “from the North,” is a Hebrew idiom for the direction of judgment, i.e., the countries from which God sends foreign armies as instruments of His wrath. This is a form of synecdoche in which a part (one direction on the compass) is used for the whole (the countries in that direction in relation to Israel). Thus, the word “north,” in respect to Israel, is used to identify Assyria, “because all armies from beyond the Euphrates crossed high up and entered Palestine from the North.”⁹⁴

31e: עָשָׁן, “smoke,” is a mas. sing. noun with no definitive article. The translation includes the article and the implied source of the smoke to draw out the meaning of this obscure idiom. As in Song of Songs 3:6, “smoke” can be either a description of the dust cloud raised by an advancing army (as implied by the next colon’s reference to “no deserter in its train”), or actual smoke from an army burning cities as it advances. Even when “smoke” is translated

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 346, footnote 2, quoting F. Prätorius, *ZDMG* (1906): 547.

⁹³ Paul Joüon, §123 *u*.

⁹⁴ Bullinger, 639. E.g., Jer 1:13–15; 13:20; 47:2; and Zeph 2:13. Similarly, “east” is used to identify Persia and Media, and “south” for Egypt.

without the implied “of war,” it usually has the connotation of judgment and destruction, which the oracle clearly communicates.

31f: בִּוְדָד is a Qal active part. from בָּדַד (“to divide, be separate, isolated”) meaning literally “one standing alone.” This is a rare word which only occurs in two other places in the MT: Hos. 8:9 for a wild donkey “going alone for itself, (i.e., willfully,)”⁹⁵ and Ps 102:8 of a bird sitting “solitarily.” It has been translated as “straggler” (NIV), but this changes the connotation of willfully separating oneself, to that of straggling behind because of laziness or fatigue. Thus, in the context of Is 14:31, when one willfully separates oneself from an army’s “train,” they would be a “deserter.”

31g: בְּמוֹעֲדָיו causes some problems in terms of its pronoun suffix. The referent of “its” in the phrase is the “smoke,” which is a metaphor for the Assyrian army. This is clear from the idiom, “from the North,” used in the previous colon, which points to Assyria.⁹⁶ Its army is identified by the “smoke” signaling its approach.

בְּמוֹעֲדָיו, “in its train,” is a mas. pl. noun from מָעַד, “to fix upon [by agreement or appointment].” By implication it also means, “to meet [at a set time], assemble, or gather [at a set place].”⁹⁷ As a noun it can mean an “assembly” or in a military context, “troops or ranks.” Although it is a plural noun, the translation of “train” is really a collective plural, which pictures the “ranks” of an army marching together as one. Since the root has the connotation of an “appointed time or place,” the word, “train,” is better than “ranks,” since it

⁹⁵ BDB, 94.

⁹⁶ See comment on v. 31d, p. 27 above.

⁹⁷ The difficulty in translating this Hebrew word and disagreement among translations comes from the fact that this particular form is a *hapax legomena* as indicated by the MT marginal notes.

gives the implication of a charted or planned march by an army whose purpose is to go in ranks to a distant locale for war, which in this context is Philistia.

F. Translation Notes—v. 32

32a: מְלִאֲכֵי, “ambassadors of,” is a mas. pl. noun in construct. It comes from the root מִלַּךְ, “to dispatch as a deputy or messenger.” The noun is especially found with God as the sender or authorizing agent of the person’s work or words. Thus, it may mean “angel, prophet, priest, teacher, ambassador, king, or messenger” depending on the kind of work or message.⁹⁸ Since there are many possibilities for translating מְלִאֲכֵי, it is no wonder the LXX took the liberty of rendering it as βασιλείς (“kings”). However, from the context of this verse, where Isaiah asks the rhetorical question, “Now what will one say to the מְלִאֲכֵי of a nation,” one can imagine Isaiah speaking in the royal palace to Philistia’s “ambassadors, emissaries or envoys” who might be present, or to them in absentia, and not the “kings” of nations.

32b: The LXX has ἐθνῶν (“nations” or “peoples”) here for יָג. The change from sing. to the plural is probably a gloss to allow the oracle to be interpreted not just for Philistia, but all heathen nations. This brings out what is implicit in the indefinite sing., “a nation.” Isaiah’s response applies to proposals of alliance from any nation, in this case Philistia.

32c: יָסַד, “has founded,” is a Piel perf., 3rd per., mas. sing. from the root יָסַד, “to set, found, establish, fix.” It is considered to be a late Hebrew word, especially in the Piel, and as such, it

⁹⁸ BDB, 521.

really has no intensive meaning but is to be translated like the Qal perf.⁹⁹ However, BDB suggests that in Is 14:32, it should be read as $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$, a participle, which would be translated as, “Yahweh ‘is founding’ Zion.”¹⁰⁰ This loses the force of the MT, that Yahweh has *already* founded Zion. Yet, this is apparently what is behind Sweeney’s motivation for rendering $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$ as “will found,” over against most other Bible versions’ translation of it as a past perfect.¹⁰¹

32d: $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$ is the common name for the mountain upon which Jerusalem, or more specifically, the Temple, was built (also known as Mt. Moriah, Gen 22:2; 2 Chr 3:1).¹⁰² The name *Zion* took on much more symbolism from its connection with the Temple Mount built there. It was used as a metonym to refer to the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem or even to all of Israel.¹⁰³ That “Yahweh has founded Zion,” means that He has not only established the mountain or the Temple Mount as His dwelling place, but that He has established Israel to be His chosen people, gathered around His presence.

32e: $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$, “the afflicted,” is a mas. pl. noun from the root $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$, “to depress.” Those who constitute “the depressed” may be so in mind or circumstances. The word seems to be interchangeable with $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$ (which the MT margin explains as the subjective form, and $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$ the objective form). Isaiah often uses the word “to designate those who are economically oppressed,” for example, in 10:2 and 11:4, but not in this verse.¹⁰⁴ Although, the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 414.

¹⁰¹ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 229.

¹⁰² Mount Zion may possibly have gotten its name from the word, $\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}\text{׀}^{\text{׀}}$, “arid or parched,” as a physical description of the area.

¹⁰³ Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 575, §7.

¹⁰⁴ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 90f.

economically oppressed were also usually considered pious. This is bore out by the LXX, which reads “the humble of the people.” Thus, **”וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶי** can also mean “humble, lowly, needy, or poor” in a spiritual sense, because, as Wildberger points out, Isaiah’s use of the word here “is in fact a religious term” and might be best translated “pious,” though he prefers “wretched.”¹⁰⁵

32f: **וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶי**, “find, seek refuge,” is Qal impf. 3rd per., mas. pl. from **וַיִּפְּחֶי**, “to flee [for protection].” It is used figuratively to mean, “to confide in, have hope, make refuge, or (put) trust in.”¹⁰⁶ It is commonly used in the Psalms for trusting in Yahweh.¹⁰⁷ In the context of this verse, however, it is not that the people of Israel should “trust” in Zion as a safe place, but trust in the One who “has founded Zion.” Because Yahweh is trustworthy, Zion, then, is a place in which the afflicted can “find refuge” (literally, “put their trust”).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 91. Also see the discussion on the words parallel to **”וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶי**, in chapter 3, D, 1 “Yahweh’s Preference for the Poor?” p. 56 below.

¹⁰⁶ BDB, 340.

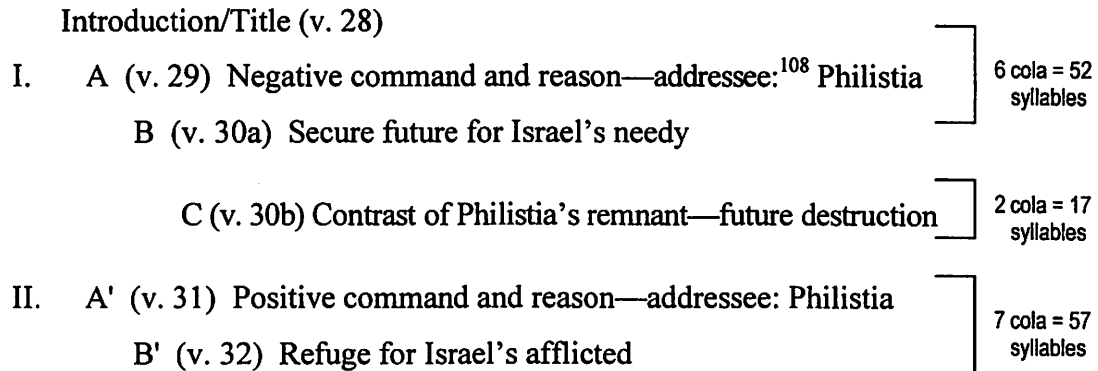
¹⁰⁷ E.g., (English verses) Pss 7:1; 37:40; 57:1; 64:10; 91:4, *etc.*

Chapter 3

COMMENTS ON THE TEXT

A. Oracle's Structure and Semantics

The oracle against Philistia displays a structure which is a variation of the chiasmic scheme. It may be outlined with the following pattern:



When diagrammed this way, the emphasis of the oracle is the contrast of Israel's poor with the condemnation of Philistia's remnant in the form of the future punishment in part C (v. 30b). Sections I and II are about equal in length of cola and display effective parallelism for bringing out this contrast. For example, parts A and A' correspond in their joint commands to Philistia, first in the negative, "Stop rejoicing," and then in a positive form, "Start wailing!" Further, these verses identify Philistia's real enemy and the source of their punishment.

¹⁰⁸ Upon first reading, the immediately perceived addressee is Philistia, however, Isaiah was using a rhetorical device to warn the intended addressee—Israel. See arguments below and Weis, "A Definition of the Genre *Massa*," 110.

Verse 29b identifies a fate worse than Philistia's previous enemy, using the metaphors of reptiles and trees.¹⁰⁹ The previous threat is compared to the "root of a snake" and the coming threat is likened to the "fruit" of the implied tree and a "striking fiery serpent." This seems to be directed at Philistia. However, the way in which it is expressed leaves this statement about "the stock of the snake" open for interpretation. By appearing to be addressed to Philistia, Israel can carefully listen to the warning without the initial defensiveness and rejection that results from such threatening statements.

Then, in v. 31b, Philistia's enemy receives greater attention when "he" is identified as coming "from the North" with "no deserter in its train." Using the metaphor of "smoke," an army is pictured here with the singular purpose of destruction—not even one of them will desert. Thus, the enemy of Philistia, which is also Israel's enemy, will set itself completely on annihilating them. This is directed on the surface at Philistia as a prophecy, but primarily at Israel as a warning, as the center strophe emphasizes.

What this additional threat may be is puzzling, but it is certainly related to the first threat—the "scepter" which is broken. While many scholars disagree on what these signs point to, most agree that v. 31 continues the motif of v. 29, as Fullerton so boldly states: "There can be no question that the enemy pictured by the smoke from the north is again the same enemy which is symbolized by the adder and dragon, and therefore, also, by the rod and serpent."¹¹⁰ If the enemy is the same as the "rod" or "scepter," then it is most likely that the "scepter" is Assyria as in Is 10:5.

¹⁰⁹ See chapter 3, C, 3 "Philistia's Future and God's Serpents—v. 29," p. 42 below.

¹¹⁰ Fullerton, "Isaiah 14:28–32," 88.

Parts B and B' give comfort to God's people in sharp contrast to what has been said in A and A' against Israel's enemy. While Philistia's people will be attacked by a "striking fiery serpent," (v. 29b) Israel "will pasture" and "lie down in security" (v. 30a). The parallel to this shows that while Philistia's people will face capture and enslavement, "the afflicted of [Yahweh's] people [will] find refuge" (v. 32b).

In C, the center strophe, the threat becomes certain, as God reveals that the punishment for Philistia comes from none other than Yahweh Himself (v. 30b): "I will kill your root by famine." The change of pronouns in the fourth colon of v. 30, "and your remnant *it* will slay," does not need to be emended, since the "famine," to which the pronoun points, is the instrument of God's wrath.¹¹¹ This strophe's powerful message was too important to be wasted on a Philistine audience that may never hear it. Thus it most likely serves as a warning to Israel,¹¹² in no uncertain terms, to avoid a country that cannot help in a rebellion against Assyria, because they are as good as dead.

Commenting on the $\text{N}\Psi\text{D}$ genre and its use in this pericope, Richard Weis presents a similar structure. He focuses attention on the semantics, which become clear in his description of the structure. As outlined above, Weis also understands the oracle as consisting of a prohibition (v. 29a) and its reason (vv. 29b–30), then a threefold command (v. 31a) and its reason (vv. 31b–32), with v. 31a functioning as a "summons to communal lamentation."¹¹³ He does not pull out a center strophe in v. 30b, but still emphasizes its importance as a part of the whole contrast between Israel and Philistia in vv. 31b–32. This

¹¹¹ See translation note on v. 30h, p. 23 above.

¹¹² Weis, "A Definition of the Genre *Massa*," 321.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 109, quoting Hans Walter Wolff, "Der Aufruf zur Volksklage," *GSAT* 22 (1973): 392–9.

section “is constructed for rhetorical effect so that the audience itself must draw the conclusion that the YHWH act is the real reason” for Philistia’s demise.¹¹⁴

B. The Superscription—v. 28

“The Death of King Ahaz” is central to this oracle’s enigma. Due to the many historical details involved in its interpretation, this issue will be considered separately in chapter 4.¹¹⁵ The superscription as a whole needs to be evaluated for a better understanding of the oracle. For example, whether the title was added later to an existing oracle, or, whether it was originally part of this one, is debatable. However, the fact that the oracle is headed by a death date of a king of Israel and not just “[country] . . . נְשִׁיבָה,” as are all the other OAN in Isaiah, is significant.¹¹⁶ Before looking at Isaiah’s unique use of this title, the term נְשִׁיבָה must be considered.

1. Toward a Meaning of נְשִׁיבָה in Isaiah

Of the sixty-two verses in which נְשִׁיבָה occurs in the OT,¹¹⁷ the translations are usually split between “burden” in the Torah and Writings, and “oracle or utterance” in the Prophets (see Table 1 below¹¹⁸). If this is the same word from the same root, why are the meanings so

¹¹⁴ Weis, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,” 110.

¹¹⁵ See chapter 4, “Dating the Oracle and King Ahaz’s Death,” p. 70 below.

¹¹⁶ See chapter 1, D, “The Significance of Isaiah’s Oracle against Philistia,” p. 5 above.

¹¹⁷ Evan-Shoshan, *A New Concordance*, 1329. Since some scholars do not accept all usages of נְשִׁיבָה as being from the same root, it is sometimes treated as a separate word in dictionaries. E.g., Walter C. Kaiser writes in his entry on נְשִׁיבָה, in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 602, that נְשִׁיבָה only occurs 27 times with the meaning of “a prophetic speech of a threatening or minatory character.” For arguments in favor of all occurrences of נְשִׁיבָה being related, see P. A. H. de Boer, “An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Term נְשִׁיבָה,” *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 5 (1948): 197–214.

¹¹⁸ For the most complete treatment of the נְשִׁיבָה genre and exegesis of all of the passages under the columns “oracle” and “oracle/burden (pun)” in this table, see Richard Weis’ dissertation, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*.” (*note continued*)

varied?¹¹⁹ Since נָשָׂא can mean *lifting, bearing, load, burden* in older and non-prophetic literature it is more likely the term took on a technical meaning when used by the prophets.

Table 1: Occurrences of נָשָׂא in the Old Testament

Translation/ Location	“oracle”	“burden”	“oracle/burden” (pun)	Other
<i>Torah</i>		12 times: Ex 23:5; Num 4:15,19, 24, 27, 31, 32, 47, 49; 11:11, 17; Dt. 1:12		Gen 25:14—a name
<i>Nebi'im</i> Former prophets	2 Kgs 9:25	4 times: 2 Sam 15:33; 19:35; 2 Kgs 5:17; 8:9		
Later prophets	13 times: Is 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 21:11; 21:13; 22:1; 22:25; 23:1; 30:6; Ez 12:10	6 times: Is 46:1, 2; Jer 17:21, 22, 24, 27	8 times in 4 verses: Jer 23:33, 34, 36, 38	Ez 24:25—“desire,” i.e., “lifting up of one’s soul”
<i>Ketubim</i> Minor prophets	5 times: Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1	Hos 8:10		
Poetic/Wis- dom literature	Twice: ¹²⁰ Prov 30:1; 31:1	Twice: Ps 38:4; Job 7:20		
Historical writings	2 Chr 24:27	4 times: Neh 13:15, 19; 2 Chr 26:25; 34:13		5 times: 1 Chr 1:30, name; 15:22 & 27, “music;” 2 Chr 17:11, “tribute;” 19:7, “partiality”
TOTALS	22 verses	29 verses	4 verses	7 verses

Because Weis distinguishes between נָשָׂא II and III (BDB, 672), he primarily deals with the prophetic occurrences of נָשָׂא. His definition of נָשָׂא appears based on a tautology: If “a *massa*’ is a prophetic speech . . . composed by a prophet,” (271) then only in the prophets will נָשָׂא mean a prophetic speech. This automatically excludes the other examples from Scripture from informing the evolution of the word, which we do not believe is supported. Weis’ own etymological conclusions support the possibility that נָשָׂא could be “a *maqtal* form of *nasa*...meaning ‘bring, carry,’” (353) and thus could still have developed from what is considered by BDB (672) as נָשָׂא III: “load, burden, lifting.” See the following footnote for more on this debate.

¹¹⁹ Richard D. Weis’ article, “Oracle,” in the *ABD* (vol. 5:28), maintains that נָשָׂא, meaning “oracle,” is an homonym of נָשָׂא, meaning “burden,” and thus does not have the same etymology. However, in P.A.H. de Boer’s article, “An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Term נָשָׂא,” he concludes, “The result of our examination of the translations of the term נָשָׂא is: the earliest of exegesis does not support a distinction of the two Hebrew words נָשָׂא with a different sense” (p. 209). This author accepts these arguments and assumes we are not dealing with unrelated homonyms in this thesis.

¹²⁰ In the *Ketubim* (Writings), נָשָׂא also appears as plural in Lam 2:14 with the sense of “oracle, vision.” See Richard D. Weis’ dissertation, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,” 78f, on this text.

This paper will focus on the meaning of נִשְׂרָדָה in prophetic literature, especially as used by Isaiah. A quick summary of the use of נִשְׂרָדָה in the Torah and the Writings will suffice for background. There it is almost exclusively used with the meaning of a “load or burden,”¹²¹ with the sense of a burden imposed by a master. Notable are the passages in Numbers 4 (see Table 1), where נִשְׂרָדָה is a “burden or load” imposed by Yahweh upon the priests as part of their cultic duty. However, there are also examples in the Writings where נִשְׂרָדָה is used in a superscription like the prophetic literature, for example, Prov 30:1 and 31:1. These passages are found in the sayings of kings Agur and Lemuel in Proverbs and may have a meaning similar to that of the prophets.¹²² Yet the best place to investigate the meaning of נִשְׂרָדָה is in the same genre—prophetic literature.

Key verses for linking the meaning “burden” to “oracle” are found in the eight occurrences in Jeremiah chapter 23 (see Table 1). Here נִשְׂרָדָה is used as a pun, or possibly a double entendre, because the double sense is meant as ironic sarcasm. By using נִשְׂרָדָה with its original sense and also making a word play using its acquired technical, prophetic sense, Jeremiah shows how the words spoken by false prophets (an “oracle” from either a “people, or a prophet, or a priest” [Jer 23:33]) become a “burden” of judgment to them. In essence, a false prophet’s own words bring down judgment upon his head!

This play on words is probably related to the word’s origin, which may be the verb נִשְׂרָדָה, with the sense of “lifting up.”¹²³ However, the special prophetic use of the word may be related to the actions of prophets:

¹²¹ One exception is Gen 25:14 where נִשְׂרָדָה is a name.

¹²² However, Richard D. Weis, in his dissertation, “A Definition of the Genre *Massa*,” 370f, shows that נִשְׂרָדָה is most likely a place name in these verses, since the kings’ names, which are not found elsewhere in Scripture, are best elucidated by a place of origin. Also these verses correspond “well with the structure typical of superscriptions in the prophetic books” in which there is a construct state, e.g. in Prov 31:1, “king of Massa” is less problematic than “a king, an oracle” (*Ibid.*).

¹²³ See translation note in chapter 2 on v. 28b, p. 12 above.

נִשְׁבַּע as a descriptive title for a threatening oracle is probably derived from the “lifting up” not of the voice but of the hand, in the gesture of a solemn oath or prophetic curse, e.g., Deut. 32:40–42; Ezek. 36:7; Rev. 10:5f. The same gesture may be meant by the outstretched hand in the refrains of Amos 1:3ff and Is 5:23ff. The parallelism in Isaiah 21:2 suggests that נִשְׁבַּע had a specific use to designate a “grim vision” or “harsh oracle.”¹²⁴

From these examples, one can see that נִשְׁבַּע most likely comes from the root נִשַׁב, and that “the etymology and application of the term נִשְׁבַּע in the Old Testament as well as its rendering in the ancient versions indicate a singular sense.”¹²⁵ Therefore, there is only one word, נִשְׁבַּע, which began with the connotation of “lifting, bearing, load, burden,”¹²⁶ and included the denotation of “an imposed burden” by a master. This helps in understanding the eventual technical use by the prophets, since a burden that is placed by “a master, a despot, or a deity on their subjects, beasts, men, or things” is clearly out of the control of the bearer nor can the bearer make the first move.¹²⁷ Weis agrees that נִשְׁבַּע’s etymology may have come from the root נִשַׁב, yet he does not agree on the meaning of the genre as any kind of burden.¹²⁸

Weis’ assessment of the נִשְׁבַּע genre comes to even more specific conclusions. Yes, it was a genre unique to the prophets, however, it was not in the form of the traditional prophetic messenger speech nor of the “accusation + announcement of judgment pattern of the prophetic judgment speech.”¹²⁹ Instead, by means of detailed analysis, Weis traces the genre through the prophets’ use (which is mostly in Is 13–23) to show that

¹²⁴ R. B. Y. Scott, “The Meaning of *massa*’ as an Oracle Title,” *JBL* 67 (1948): vi.

¹²⁵ P. A. H. de Boer, “An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Term נִשְׁבַּע,” 214.

¹²⁶ Martin Luther understood נִשְׁבַּע to mean “burden,” even in the OAN, along with many pre-modern scholars (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 295).

¹²⁷ De Boer, 214.

¹²⁸ See below, p. 40f, for a summary of Weis’ conclusions.

¹²⁹ Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 273.

In terms of the genre's constitution, at the level of the final form of the Hebrew Bible a *massa'* is a prophetic speech or text unit, composed by a prophet in order to show how YHWH's acting or intention will or does manifest itself in human affairs. It does this for the purpose of providing insight into the future or direction for human action in the present or near future.¹³⁰

This is helpful in showing that in Isaiah, and especially in our pericope, the נִשְׁבַּע functions as Yahweh's message, taking on the concrete form of history for its intended audience, for example, the broken scepter, famine, and smoke from the north. Thus Philistia sees its past, present and future in Yahweh's hands.

In particular, Weis notes that the נִשְׁבַּע against Philistia exhibits common patterns of the genre.¹³¹ For example, it connects "YHWH's acts, past, present and future, with events and affairs in the human sphere," it is a "summons to communal lamentation," and also contains "commands or prohibitions of various human actions, [which] are addressed to the audience of the text regardless of whether the audience is the topic of the text."¹³² These patterns help us understand נִשְׁבַּע as a genre much better and support some of the idiosyncrasies of this oracle, which some commentators are ready to dismiss as not original.

Finally, for the purpose of trying best to understand what Isaiah's נִשְׁבַּע against Philistia really means and what it does, Weis' work on the genre and specifically on this oracle is most valuable.¹³³ The more general pragmatic question of what a נִשְׁבַּע does or what its purpose may be, Weis' conclusions may be found in the introduction above.¹³⁴ The semantic question of a נִשְׁבַּע's meaning does not change the application of Weis' conclusions for our purposes, whether the word evolved from an initial meaning of "burden" or was ever

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹³¹ For discussion of these patterns, see chapter 3, E, "The Prophet's Lament and Oracle Forms—v. 31," p. 61 below.

¹³² Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa'*, 267f.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 109–12.

¹³⁴ See chapter 1, E "Proposed Purpose of Isaiah's Oracle against Philistia," p. 9 above.

a homonym. Weis' semantic boundaries still elucidate the passage because he primarily deals with נִשְׁבָּע in prophetic speeches.¹³⁵ He proposes the possible English translation, "in terms of the genre's constitution . . . , 'prophetic expression of YHWH's revealed will or activity.' . . . [or] If we focus on the definition of the genre . . . 'prophetic interpretation.'"¹³⁶ These definitions fit well with this pericope, and Isaiah and Yahweh (as reported by Isaiah) are rightly placed in brackets in this author's translation of the text as the speakers of the oracle.

2. Title's Chronological Marker

The use of chronological markers is nothing new for Isaiah. He had used a similar marker in 6:1 where he mentions the "year that king Uzziah died." This is exactly the same format used in 14:28, although, in chapter 6, it is used to introduce Isaiah's temple vision and commissioning. The importance of that event for Isaiah's ministry is not to be forgotten. Does that also mean that Isaiah's use of a chronological marker in 14:28 signifies some other important event or message? It at least emphasizes that this oracle plays a larger role in the OAN in Isaiah than its length suggests.

The title in v. 28 also plays a role in the rest of the book, functioning as a chronological tag for Isaiah's material. If this title were the only time a death date of a king or any other time element were mentioned, one could be more suspicious about its originality. However, since Isaiah has placed such historically intended descriptions at various points throughout the book, there must be more significance than simply inferring a later redactor.

¹³⁵ Weis points out that the genre is not limited to OAN, but prophecy in general, being a "derivative of, [and] based on, a *debar yhwh* or some other specific YHWH revelation," (*A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 265).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 275f.

Commenting on Isaiah’s dating here as being “very similar to 6:1a and 20:1a,” Wildberger even argues that “if one acknowledges that vv. 29–32 are substantively from Isaiah, then one cannot deny that v. 28 also could have come from Isaiah himself or, at the very least, that it correctly identifies the time period during which this message was delivered in public.”¹³⁷ All four places where Isaiah dates his material “in the year of” an event are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Chronological Markers in Isaiah

Verse	6:1a	14:28	20:1a	36:1
Text	“year of King Uzziah’s death”	“year of King Ahaz’s death”	“year that [Assyria’s] supreme commander . . . came to Ashdod . . . and captured it”	“the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked . . . Judah”
# of verses before marker	115	186	74	301 (616 after)
% of whole book	9%	14%	6%	23% (48% after)

These four chronological markers all fall in the first half of Isaiah (according to total verse numbers). Thus, such markers are *characteristic* of Isaiah 1–39, as mentioned by Wildberger above, and 14:28 is less likely to be a later addition.¹³⁸ Two are marked at the deaths of kings and two are at the attacks of foreign kings. Some commentators even see these markers as Isaiah’s way of arranging his material in a chronological sequence.¹³⁹ And

¹³⁷ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 92.

¹³⁸ R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 148, states that “the chronological reference is from a redactor;” Joseph Jensen agrees in *Isaiah 1–39* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984), 152.

¹³⁹ Jenkins, “The Hand Stretched Out over All the Nations,” 19; Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, 119f; and Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet*, 68.

A. Jenkins goes the furthest by citing all four of the texts in table 2 above, which demonstrate,

A basic chronological progression: the year of Uzziah's death prefacing the material from Ahaz's reign, Ahaz's death heading a prophecy which focuses on his successor, that is Hezekiah, and two dates in the reign of Hezekiah introducing material from the Ashdod revolt of 713/2 B.C. and from the later revolt against Sennacherib.¹⁴⁰

So, Isaiah's oracle against Philistia, which became associated with Ahaz's death and Hezekiah's ascension, also played the role of marking out the progression of Isaiah's words chronologically in his book.

C. Philistia's Future and God's Serpents—v. 29

1. History of Philistia from the Eighth to Seventh Century B.C.

Philistia is mentioned many times in Scripture. Isaiah mentions the Philistines twenty-one times in his book and six times¹⁴¹ in his collection of OAN (chapters 13–23). They were an important people in the ANE and had a long history of conflict with God's people. However, the discussion will be limited to Philistia's role in that history from Isaiah's ministry in the eighth century B.C. to the fulfillment of Isaiah's oracle against them at the end of the seventh century B.C. Some background material will suffice in helping to understand Philistia's role during Isaiah's time.

Their origin as a people is probably mixed, having come from several island locations in the Mediterranean to the coastlands west of Israel, which explains why they were called "Sea People" by the Egyptians and others.¹⁴² While Philistia consisted of a confederation of

¹⁴⁰ Jenkins, "Isaiah 14:28–32," 60.

¹⁴¹ Is 14:29; 14:31; 20:1, 6; 23:2, 6.

¹⁴² David M. Howard Jr., "Philistines," *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, eds. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 232f and 237.

five city-states,¹⁴³ it was not always a strong nation. They were only a real threat to Israel on its western border before the divided monarchy. During the life of David in the eleventh century B.C., the Philistines were unified against Israel, at which time, “David effectively eliminated the Philistines’ threat. The five-city coalition was broken: later appearances of Philistine cities show them isolated and on their own.”¹⁴⁴ In later centuries they were weakened and under foreign influences.

Is 14:29 leads one to believe that the Philistines were under some oppression during the eighth century B.C. They apparently had reason for rejoicing when it appeared that the “yoke” (LXX for יָכּוֹשׁ) was being lifted or the “scepter” (MT) broken. Was the source of that oppression Judah? Looking at the biblical record, Philistia was under Israel’s control only once, when David “succeeded in almost completely subjugating them, taking much of their territory (2 Sam. 8:1, 12).”¹⁴⁵ After that time, they only had smaller clashes with the kings of Judah and Israel. 2 Chr 26:6–7 records that Uzziah was successful in attacking Philistia, breaching the walls of Gath and Ashdod, as well as the smaller town of Jabneh and taking control of other Philistine occupied territory. This victory was short-lived since Uzziah’s grandson, Ahaz, lost both these and Hebrew territory to the Philistines (2 Chr 28:18). Thus Ahaz was far from being a “yoke” of burden to Philistia.

So there must have been a reason other than Ahaz’s death behind Philistia’s rejoicing over the “broken scepter.” This is to be found in the real threat to Philistia and all other nations in that area during the mid eighth century B.C.: “from c. 745 B.C., with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III, these interminable and indecisive petty struggles [between Judah and

¹⁴³ The Philistine city-states were Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza.

¹⁴⁴ Howard, “Philistines,” 241.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

Philistia] were overshadowed by the advance of Assyria.”¹⁴⁶ As the superpower at the time, Assyria forced nations to take a stand either for or against them—as vassals or enemies to be destroyed.

An earlier Assyrian king, Adadnirari III, had claimed to have conquered Philistia around 806 B.C. and placed it under vassaldom, but his recorded exploits were exaggerated, having only reached a little beyond Damascus in Syria.¹⁴⁷ The Assyrians finally conquered the Philistines in 734 B.C. as their armies swept down from the north. In that year, Tiglath-pileser III “sacked Gaza, but reinstated its King Hanun as a vassal. Next year he subdued Ashkelon.”¹⁴⁸

Tiglath-pileser III’s conquering of Philistia city by city in 734 B.C. is the background for “the scepter, which struck you” (v. 29b). This campaign into Philistia occurred before the “year of the death of King Ahaz,” which was in 727 B.C.¹⁴⁹ The oppression of the Philistines under Assyria was brutal, so when Tiglath-pileser III died in 727 B.C., it was appropriate that Isaiah described the event as a scepter being broken.¹⁵⁰ This was the reason for Philistia’s “rejoicing,” which seems apparent in that they “revolted against Assyrian hegemony just before or at the time of Tiglath-pileser’s death. This revolt was not suppressed until years later, when Sargon marched against Hanuna, king of Gaza in 720.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Kitchen, “The Philistines,” 66.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 4, D, 3 “Theories Upholding Ahaz’s Death in 727 B.C.” p. 82 below.

¹⁵⁰ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 252–8, *passim*; J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, eds., *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 335. Also see chapter 3, C, 2 “Who Is the ‘Broken Scepter?’” on p. 47 below.

¹⁵¹ Hayes and Irving, *Isaiah the Eighth-century Prophet*, 236. Pre-modern commentators opposed the idea of Philistia’s involvement in an uprising, perhaps because fewer primary records were available to them, cf., Fullerton, 104.

What Isaiah meant by the new threats coming from a “stock of a snake” in v. 29 can then be interpreted as Tiglath-pileser III’s successors: Shalmaneser V (727–722 B.C.) and Sargon II (722–705 B.C.) who also had to return to stop rebellions against Assyria.¹⁵² Miller and Hayes, commenting on this text as an example of “oracles against foreign nations in Isaiah [which] may stem from this period and suggest anti-Assyrian actions,” add that “Philistia’s ‘rejoicing’ involved plans for participating in revolt” and that Sargon II “finished the work of suppressing rebels in Syria-Palestine [in which] several kingdoms were involved.”¹⁵³ These kingdoms included “all” of Philistia, which were weakened further by these Assyrian kings. However, while Isaiah points to the historical fact of a “broken scepter,” which is Tiglath-pileser III’s death in 727 B.C., George Gray reminds us:

It can be no objection to this theory that Tiglath-pileser’s immediate successor, Shalmaneser, inflicted, so far as is known, no defeat on Philistia . . . [because] the “asp” is subject of prediction: in 727, Isaiah may have anticipated a renewal of Assyrian hostility against Philistia, which as a matter of fact did not take place till the reign of Sargon¹⁵⁴

The final blow to Philistia, which is prophesied in v. 30b did not come until the end of the seventh century B.C., when “the Philistines suddenly vanished from the historical record, almost without a trace.”¹⁵⁵ As Isaiah foresaw, Philistia’s “remnant” would be slain. Since this would mean the kind of annihilation from which Philistia would never recover, their disappearance from the historical record most likely points to these events. This can be witnessed from the records of the Philistines themselves. An ancient papyrus letter found in 1943 near Cairo dated to this period, “contains the desperate plea of a certain King Adon,

¹⁵² Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 335.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ George B. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner’s, 1912), 266.

¹⁵⁵ Seymour Gitin, “Last Days of the Philistines,” *Archaeology* 45, no. 3 (May/June 1992): 26.

ruler of a Philistine city, probably Ekron, who begs his lord the Pharaoh of Egypt to rescue him from the invading King of Babylon, whose forces are about to descend upon him.”¹⁵⁶

In an unusual reversal of events, the Philistines actually appeared to experience “urban expansion and unparalleled commercial and industrial growth” after the initial Assyria invasions of the eighth century B.C., during what might be called a *pax Assyriaca*.¹⁵⁷ However, this is only part of the picture:

Both Assyrians and Babylonians demanded tribute from the Philistine cities, but the Assyrians had a more long-term approach based on effectively exploiting the existing political structure and economic potential of Philistia. By transforming the Philistine cities into vassal states and replacing traditional dynasties with local leaders who owed their position to their Assyrian overlords, Philistia was effectively incorporated politically into the Assyrian empire.¹⁵⁸

Philistia may have survived for a while as a people under the Assyrians in the seventh century B.C., but they lost all their freedoms as well. All the hard work of the profitable olive oil industry at Ekron, for example, went for the benefit of Assyria.¹⁵⁹ When Assyria withdrew from the region at the end of the seventh century B.C., Philistia fell under the control of Egypt, but “this superpower realignment set the stage for the ultimate struggle between Egypt and Babylon, the rising power to the east, for control of Philistia.”¹⁶⁰ When some of the Philistine city-states tried to resist the onslaught of Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 B.C., the kings of Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ashdod, and other prominent Philistines, were exiled

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26f.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

in Babylon.¹⁶¹ In the end, because Babylon had no use for Philistia after it devastated and absorbed their city-states into its empire, and the Philistine people adapted themselves too well to their conquerors' culture, they vanished as a people,¹⁶² thus fulfilling Isaiah's oracle against them.

2. Who Is the "Broken Scepter?"

The scholarship on the issue of interpreting the broken "scepter" or "rod" of v. 29 is usually divided into two camps. The scepter either represents Ahaz or Assyria. Most of the pre-modern commentators considered it to be Ahaz, or more broadly, Judah as a whole.¹⁶³ On the surface, Ahaz seems to be a good candidate since his death, which was the occasion for this oracle, appears to refer to the "broken scepter." Supporters of this view point to the fact that the house of David, which Ahaz ruled, had once been a source of burden for Philistia (2 Sam. 8:1, 12). Theories such as William E. Vine's are common for this camp: "the rod is the scepter of David The cockatrice is Hezekiah . . . [and] the 'fiery flying one' [points] to the benign government of the Messiah."¹⁶⁴ Contrary to this notion, A. Jenkins is right in maintaining that since the rod here is connected to serpent imagery, and since serpents came to be associated with God's curse (Gen 3:14) and epitomized evil and chaos (i.e., the Leviathan, Is 27:1), "It is doubtful therefore that such imagery would

¹⁶¹ Kitchen, "The Philistines," 67. He also notes that mention of these Philistine kings in Assyrian records "are the last traces of Philistia as an entity, before her final disappearance as a political unit."

¹⁶² Gitin, "Last Days of the Philistines," 31.

¹⁶³ Fullerton, 93, note 3.

¹⁶⁴ William E. Vine, *Isaiah* (1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Lamplighter Books, 1971), 56.

originally have been used here of the Judean king.”¹⁶⁵ One must also consider that if Ahaz were the “rod,” when did he ever “strike” Philistia?

To resolve this, most scholars realize that the “broken scepter” must also be the same enemy who is related to the snake imagery in the rest of v. 29 and the imminent war machine in v. 31b.¹⁶⁶ This precludes Ahaz and his successors who were neither a worse threat to Philistia, nor a large menace “from the north.” This logical link did not always hinder earlier scholars from forcing “Judah” into the role of the “broken scepter.”

A variation of this view by nineteenth century scholars, for example, acknowledges the problem of two different enemies. Gesenius, Delitzsch and Orelli believed that while the “rod” was Judah, the “smoke” was Assyria, with the last two going further by identifying Hezekiah as the adder and the Messiah as the dragon (*seraph*).¹⁶⁷ The interpretation of the Messiah in this verse has the ancient support of the Targum, but most recent scholarship has tried to discover the answer from within Isaiah’s book.

Edward Young thus goes back to Is 10:5 and states, “Assyria had been that rod [that was broken] of God’s agency.”¹⁶⁸ Allen Jenkins also provides a strong argument from Isaiah, citing examples which support the contention that “In Isaiah ‘rod’ is always used . . . in connection with Assyria.”¹⁶⁹ With the many Assyrian kings who oppressed Philistia, whose death could it be—Tiglath-pileser III (died 727), Shalmaneser V (died 722) or Sargon II

¹⁶⁵ Jenkins, “Isaiah 14:28–32,” 52.

¹⁶⁶ E.g., Fullerton, 88.

¹⁶⁷ As quoted by Fullerton, 91, note 2.

¹⁶⁸ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 450.

¹⁶⁹ Jenkins, “Isaiah 14:28–32,” 51. E.g., Assyria as Yahweh’s rod, Is 10:5, 15, 24; and Assyria being struck by Yahweh’s rod, Is 10:26, 30:31, and possibly 14:5–6.

(died 705)?¹⁷⁰ Some, like Watts, choose a referent based on what is generally known about Assyrian oppression of Palestine: “The *rod* and the *snake* are best understood as references to Shalmaneser who laid siege to Samaria for so long and who dominated Palestine.”¹⁷¹ While for some the whole of v. 29 refers to something even more abstract. For example, Christopher Seitz writes that “the ‘rod which struck’ Philistia is not just any single individual Assyrian king, about to be replaced by some new obscure Assyrian ruler. Rather, Assyria as a whole is implied.”¹⁷²

Finally, the “scepter” interpretation comes down to the argument of when Ahaz died.¹⁷³ If one believes this occurred in 715 B.C. when no other Assyrian ruler died, then another sign is sought for the scepter’s being broken, for example, “a known Philistine revolt was beginning about then, [which] suggests that the broken staff is not in fact any dead monarch, but merely the general Assyrian weakness.”¹⁷⁴ If Ahaz’s death is believed to be in 727 B.C., then the “scepter” is thought to be Tiglath-pileser III.¹⁷⁵ This makes the most sense and is well supported by the commentators. However, the most important aspect for interpreting this, as Wildberger rightly maintains, is which chronology is accepted.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Miller and Hayes, 334–7.

¹⁷¹ Watts, 219.

¹⁷² Christopher R. Seitz, in *Isaiah 1–39* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 137, is perhaps following the argument earlier laid out by Fullerton, that v. 29 does “not allude to any particular Assyrian kings but to the Assyrian Empire” (94).

¹⁷³ See chapter 4, C “Fixing the Date of King Ahaz’s Death,” p. 76 below.

¹⁷⁴ Oswalt, 332.

¹⁷⁵ E.g., Begrich, 74; Gray, 266; Hayes and Irvine, 237; Kaiser, 52; and Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 93–96.

¹⁷⁶ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 96.

3. Mixing of Metaphors

Isaiah's diverse use and mixture of metaphors, that is, the "scepter," "root-stock," "snake," and "fruit" images, have already been addressed above with the interpretation of the "broken scepter" as Tiglath-pileser III, and his successors as the "poisonous snake" and the "flying serpent."¹⁷⁷ As the images get progressively worse, they reflect the outlook that each Assyrian king would bring more oppression to Philistia. But why were these Assyrian kings pictured like this? Fullerton attributes the rod/snake connection to a Hebrew colloquialism whose ancient connotation is now lost to us.¹⁷⁸ Yet, in identifying these images, one should not impose modern expectations of logic and coherence in prose and poetry on ancient Hebrew writings, as Fullerton has done when he labels this verse, "stylistically faulty."¹⁷⁹ Instead, the metaphors need to be understood in their own historical context¹⁸⁰ and through their semantic intentions. The cultural context of serpent symbolism in the ANE will be covered later, so now let us look at what the purpose behind Isaiah's metaphors was.

The use of mixed metaphors by the Hebrew prophets probably reflected the situations they described—the chaos of sin.¹⁸¹ As a prophet addressed his audience, the words he chose were a reflection of his intention. So besides describing sin, Isaiah probably also used other literary forms for the purpose of affecting his primary audience. These forms have been examined by Brian Jones and others whose studies can be applied to this oracle. More will be

¹⁷⁷ See explanation and critique of these signs on p. 45 above.

¹⁷⁸ Fullerton, 87.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸⁰ See next section, chapter 3, C, 4 "Serpent Imagery," p. 52 below.

¹⁸¹ Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*, 54. Cf., Luis Aronso Schökel, *A Manuel of Hebrew Poetry* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988).

covered under the discussion below on the lament character of the oracle, but let us consider Jemielity's insight on these matters:

Critical analyses of satire and prophecy recurrently point to the mixture of speech forms as a major feature of both, a fertile field for the appearance of all sorts of forms, each a form of forms using and subverting the shape of language familiar from other discourse and from other walks of life.¹⁸²

Isaiah's oracle against Philistia surely uses images from other forms of biblical material, such as poetry in the Psalms and narrative in the Torah. The images from these mixed sources are those of snakes, *seraphim*, and shepherding. Snakes and serpents in the Bible represented evil and chaos, while the *seraph* was probably a symbol borrowed from Egypt for royalty, and the shepherding motif was common for many cultures in the ANE for the care of people by their god.¹⁸³ Thrown together, these images have a new intention. When these metaphors came from scriptural sources,¹⁸⁴ they would have the greatest impact on those who had Scripture as their literary tradition.

Therefore, most of the metaphors support the intention that *Israel* was the intended recipient of this oracle, since they held the keys to understanding the oracle's intricacies in their own written traditions. Also, since much of what is said in this oracle against Philistia is "essentially rhetorical,"¹⁸⁵ it was not meant to illicit a response from Philistia, but mocks the Philistines in order to comfort Israel's faithful. The mixed metaphors in this oracle are thus

¹⁸² Jemielity, 58.

¹⁸³ For connection of the serpent as Leviathan, symbol of evil, see p. 47 above, and Karen Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the OT*, 26–30; on the *seraph* symbol from Egypt, see next section, "Serpent Imagery," below; and for shepherd imagery in OT, see *ABD*, vol. 5, 1189, which points out that in the OT, "God is pictured carrying in his bosom animals which cannot keep up, and mindful of the sheep which have young, he does not overdrive them (Isa 40:11; cf. Gen 33:13; Ps 28:9)."

¹⁸⁴ Another theory on the use of older forms is in Jenkins, "The Hand Stretched Out over All the Nations," 30f, which sees vv. 30a and 32b as additions to older material and examples of how "re-interpretation can take up words and images from the earlier prophecy," e.g., "first-born" reflects the "serpents progeny in v. 29."

¹⁸⁵ Jemielity, 58.

focused upon Israel's sinfulness, which is addressed in Ahaz's prior decision to form an alliance with Assyria (2 Kgs 16:5–18) and warning the new king, Hezekiah, through this oracle, not to follow similar alliances in the future—either with Assyria, Philistia, or any other foreign power.

4. Serpent Imagery

It is not at issue that the snake imagery in this verse symbolizes Philistia's enemy. What can lead to problems, as Wildberger explains, is when one tries "to make every detail fit logically."¹⁸⁶ As argued above, the general referents of the snake images are to be Yahweh's instrument of judgment. The "snake" (Tiglath-pileser III), that died and was replaced by a worse successor, "a poisonous snake" (Sargon II), and "its fruit" (Sennacherib) would be the worst threat imaginable to the Philistines. Allegorizing all the oracle's details, either spiritually or historically, can lead down incorrect paths of interpretation, as will be seen.

For example, if the *seraph* in 6:6 is a divine entity sent by Yahweh to cleanse Isaiah of his confessed sin (6:5, "Woe is me!"), is the *seraph* in 14:29 also a divine entity sent to punish the unrepentant sins of Philistia? Interpreting it this way, one could say that Sargon II was a literal "angel of death" or "demon of destruction," which is more than the text is saying. This is the trap Irwin falls into when he uses the anachronism of "Malachi's reference to a winged sun-symbol (4:2)," as Isaiah's correlation for the "symbol of the winged snakes in connection with the Yahweh cult."¹⁸⁷ With little evidence other than conjecture, he posits

¹⁸⁶ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 96.

¹⁸⁷ Irwin, 86–87.

from this later text that “Isaiah, speaking in a figure of snakes, vipers, and finally flying seraphim was using symbolism that would be readily understood throughout the environment of Jerusalem, perhaps as far afield as the Philistine cities, to connote Judea,” or more specifically, “the royal house of Judah.”¹⁸⁸ This is interesting but unlikely. And while Irwin has detected some genuine facets of the serpent symbolism, as discussed next, it is important to discover what Isaiah actually had in mind when using these metaphors.

The words under consideration here are: שָׂרָפִים (“snake”), זְרָעֵם (“poisonous snake”), and אֵשׁ־שָׂרָפִים (“fiery serpent”). Without repeating the text notes for verse 29 above, why did Isaiah use snake imagery in the first place? שָׂרָפִים and אֵשׁ־שָׂרָפִים are found in parallel in several places in the OT, including Is 30:6. This would seem to indicate that Isaiah is only talking about progressively worse types of snakes. On the other hand, why choose the word אֵשׁ־שָׂרָפִים, which seems to connote an angelic being in Is 6:2 and 6? Isaiah’s word choice may reflect the situation he faced in Judah at the time, and in order for his message to hit home, he used contemporary language and images to convey God’s intentions. John Geyer’s study of OAN in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel show that they “are steeped in mythological concepts.”¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, Wildberger sees just such a mythological quality in Isaiah’s use of אֵשׁ־שָׂרָפִים in chapter 6:

Since Jerusalem is the place where many Canaanite mythological elements were integrated into the faith and since Isaiah is more closely tied to the Jerusalem traditions than any other prophet, it is not surprising that these concepts have also been employed by Isaiah in his proclamation.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁸⁹ John B. Geyer, “Mythology and Culture in the Oracles against the Nations,” *VT* 36 (1986): 144.

¹⁹⁰ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 255.

Karen Joines' book, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament*, presents some of this background from the ANE. Reasoning from philology, royal symbolism, and archaeology, she writes, "The Seraphim are probably winged serpents drawn from Egyptian royal and sacral symbolism. In Egypt winged serpents represent sacral sovereignty whether of the pharaoh or of the gods."¹⁹¹ Does this mean that Isaiah was describing "winged serpents" in chapter 6 or divine beings in 14:29? If Isaiah were using the *seraph* image both as a serpent and as a symbol of royalty and divinity, then one may conclude with Hummel, that "it is not utterly impossible that some of the heavenly denizens were pictured on [the seraph/serpent] analogy."¹⁹² However, Joines' study shows that Isaiah probably was not using שֶׁרָפִים in a different sense in 14:29 compared to the temple vision, but that both were "flying serpents."¹⁹³

It must be remembered that the power of a symbol is not necessarily excluded when it is used in its regular sense. In other words, if it can be shown that Egyptian serpent symbolism for royalty and divinity was relatively well known to people in Isaiah's time, then, even if Isaiah talked of a שֶׁרָפִים in the context of other "non-poisonous and poisonous snakes," it still would have implied even greater meaning. Neither can one exclude any implied meaning to a word just because it is used in its regular sense, especially a word so provocative as "*seraph*." Consequently, it would be foolish to think that Isaiah was unaware of the implications of his word choice.

After describing in abundant detail such archaeological finds as an Egyptian throne carved out of six protective flying *uraei* (serpents) crested with solar disks from the

¹⁹¹ Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament*, 43.

¹⁹² Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 207.

¹⁹³ Joines, *Serpent Symbolism*, 44.

fourteenth-century B.C. tomb of king Tut-Ankh-Amen, the goal of showing that such images were common in Israel is hard to deny.¹⁹⁴ The close proximity of Egypt to Israel, the commerce that took place between these two countries, and Egypt's power over the region, engendered the crossing over of Egyptian symbols to Israel's national conscience, as Joines shows through her biblical survey.¹⁹⁵ This deep influence was especially true for Israel during the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. when Isaiah lived. Thus she deduces that, "At a period when Egyptian symbolism was so prevalent in Israel, it is not surprising to find it in the symbolism of Isaiah."¹⁹⁶

The Egyptian images of the royal, winged, fiery, and standing erect *uraei* are amazingly congruous to Isaiah's description of the *seraphim*, except for one "significant modification which Isaiah seems to have made [i.e., they also] are agents of divine redemption and healing."¹⁹⁷ This addition to the symbol comes from Is 6, but when one stays with what Joines has argued was the *common* understanding of the Egyptian symbol, the oracle against Philistia fits right in. As divinely sent protectors of the pharaoh, these winged serpents "belched consuming fire on the enemies of the pharaohs."¹⁹⁸ This is exactly the same tenor in the negative command given to Philistia to "Stop rejoicing!" There will be a divinely sent punishment. Philistia will not only be terrorized by enemies who act like snakes and poisonous serpents, but they will be destroyed by another fiery *snake* symbol which would remind them from whence their annihilation comes: from the true King and only God, Yahweh of Hosts!

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48–49.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

D. Visions of Blessings and Doom—v. 30

1. Yahweh's Preference for the Poor?

The **בְּכֹרֵי יְדֵלִים**, “first-born of the poor,” are singled out by Isaiah in this oracle as the recipients of Yahweh’s grace in contrast to Philistia’s remnant. This is not a new emphasis in Scripture, but reflects Yahweh’s concern for the poor and needy in general. This phrase may seem awkward because it is not well attested in the OT, but the plight of the **יְדֵלִים** and Yahweh’s preferential treatment of them is. Therefore, “first-born of the poor” is not only a metaphor for the poorest, but refers to those under Yahweh’s care who are the faithful remnant.

This can be seen in the use of **יָדֵל** in the OT. It is a word whose meaning evolved in Scripture, and even within the book of Isaiah. Occurring 48 times in the OT, five of those in Isaiah, **יְדֵלִים** is often in parallel with other nouns, such as **עֲנִיִּים**, (“poor, meek” in Is 10:2; 11:4) and **אַבְיָוֹנִים** (“needy” in 1 Sam 2:8; Is 14:30; *etc.*)¹⁹⁹ Since **יְדֵלִים** is commonly in parallel with **עֲנִיִּים**, it lends support to the contention that v. 30a is intentionally parallel to v. 32b,²⁰⁰ which contains the word, **עֲנִי**. These word pairs help in understanding its range of meaning as well. In earlier biblical usage, it was used to denote the social concept of the poor, who were denied justice, but whom the OT considered “the righteous ones of Yahweh [who] were granted juridical prerogatives for this reason.”²⁰¹

Studies of **עֲנִי** in Isaiah have revealed that this social view, with which Isaiah begins in a sermon against pride (2:9–17), and in the administration of justice by Yahweh as King (9:6; 11:4 based on Prov 29:14), “undergoes a change of emphasis in the direction of

¹⁹⁹ TDOT 1:215–6

²⁰⁰ See comments on structure in chapter 3, A. “Oracle’s Structure and Semantics,” p. 32 above.

²⁰¹ TDOT 1:218.

weakness and godliness.”²⁰² This change is thought to have happened in “Post-Isaianic traditions,” where the לְיְהוָה were interpreted “collectively as the whole ‘people of Yahweh’ . . . who feed in Yahweh’s pasture (Zion) in safety, while the enemy devastates neighboring Philistia (Is 14:30).”²⁰³ Isaiah, therefore, adds a religious connotation to the term, which more fully emphasizes the contrast between Israel and Philistia—Yahweh will protect the faithful “poor,” but will destroy Philistia’s “[unfaithful] remnant.”

Fullerton noticed this contrast as well, but was suspicious of its originality, because the words *poor*, *needy*, and *afflicted*, are “very rare in Isaiah.”²⁰⁴ However, rarity of vocabulary is not substantial enough proof, as Jenkins points out, for excluding these verses from the pericope, since there are also many rare “terms in primary Isaiah tradition” as well.²⁰⁵ Remarkably, Fullerton’s argument for identifying the poor is very thorough and persuasive, although his conclusion rejects its genuineness.²⁰⁶ On the other hand, his ideas help support the type of theological contrast Isaiah was evidently trying to make, as stated above. For example, Fullerton writes:

The poor must be identified with the Remnant, the true believers in Jahweh, who follow Isaiah as Jahweh’s prophet. The poor and afflicted would then take on a religious significance, and the reason for not joining the alliance [with Philistia] would be a religious reason, not a political one.²⁰⁷

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Fullerton considers these words rare based on his exclusion of other occurrences which he considered “spurious” (95). Cf., Irwin on this point, p. 78.

²⁰⁵ Jenkins, “Isaiah 14:28–32,” 50. He lists some examples of undisputed but rare word pairs in “First Isaiah” in his discussion.

²⁰⁶ Fullerton bases his conclusion on a comparison of 14:28–32 with an analogous passage on the “poor” in 8:11–18 (deemed original to Isaiah), in which the “poor” are strictly a social class (99–100). Thus he rejects “the offending clauses in verses 30a and 32b as later revisions of the original prophecy” (108).

²⁰⁷ Fullerton, 96.

While he takes this argument to its conclusion, Fullerton rejects any religious sense for the poor in the original prophecy.²⁰⁸

Another important term for revealing Yahweh's preference for the poor is אֲבִיּוֹנִים, "needy." More common in the OT than אֲבִיּוֹנִים, this word occurs 61 times and "often appears in the stereotyped formula 'ani ve'ebhyon, 'poor and needy.'"²⁰⁹ The evolution of the word is seen by its use in the Torah as a social class, then in the Psalms where it picks up religious connotations, and finally in the prophets where it becomes almost a technical word. For example, the אֲבִיּוֹנִים are in "need of material and legal assistance," then are pictured in the Writings as being "in expectation of divine help," and finally by the prophets as dependant upon and delivered by Yahweh, respectively.²¹⁰ Singling out the oracle against Philistia as an example of how this concept was fully developed, the TDOT concludes that "the *dallim*, *'ebhyonim*, and *'aniyyim* receive Yahweh's special attention; they enjoy his special care."²¹¹

Because the imagery of the poor in v. 30a is parallel to that mentioned in v. 32b, they support and interpret each other.²¹² The dual theme in these verses has led some scholars to believe that they once existed together in a previous tradition, and were subsequently divided in their present form.²¹³ Their purpose of giving Israel hope in the face of oppression is not inconsistent with the genre of such oracles, nor does it need to be consigned to the work of a

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 108f. An interesting turn on this is Irwin's argument that there is no religious sense to the "poor" and "afflicted," "So then the problem arising out of the supposed religious force of these words disappears, and with it [Fullerton's] argument" for excluding vv. 30a and 32b (78).

²⁰⁹ TDOT 1:29. Of those occurrences, 17 are in the prophets and five of those in Isaiah.

²¹⁰ TDOT 1:40. Examples are Ex 23:6, Dt 24:14, etc. (p. 30); Pss. 9:4; 35:3, etc. (p. 35f); and Is 14:30–32; 29:17–24, etc.

²¹¹ TDOT 1:40. The article sees this development as much later than Isaiah's time, positing that it took place just before Alexander the Great as dated by B. Duhm in his commentary, *Das Buch Jesaja*.

²¹² Wildberger makes his case for a religious understanding for these terms under his discussion of אֲבִיּוֹנִים in v. 32, which is covered in chapter 3, F, 3 "Hope for Yahweh's afflicted people," p. 66 below.

²¹³ Kaiser, 55; Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 94; and Begrich, 70.

redactor.²¹⁴ Neither should vv. 30a and 32b be deleted because it is thought to be an addition to the original oracle.²¹⁵ On the contrary, the evidence of the originality of these verses from the vocabulary and motifs of this positive message for Israel, is not only supported by “primary Isaiah tradition,”²¹⁶ but also by the very concrete ways in which Yahweh’s promise of protection for His people have been born out in salvation history, and especially in Isaiah.²¹⁷

2. Pasture Imagery—Israel as Yahweh’s Sheep

Yahweh’s people have often been described as sheep in Scripture. Isaiah is no exception.²¹⁸ That the metaphor of Israel being sheep and Yahweh being their shepherd is intended could be concluded by the way some commentators have tried to make sense of the phrase, “first-born of the poor.” One suggested change is “as lambs [they] will pasture.”²¹⁹ Instead of changing the MT, Isaiah’s wording reminds us of the association between the “poor” and “sheep,” both of whom are in need of care by a shepherd. The point for v. 30a is that “*those protected by Yahweh will pasture.*” This theme both draws upon and foreshadows passages showing Yahweh as shepherd.

For example, the verbs *to pasture* and *lie down* may hearken back to this theme as found in Pss 31:3 and 77:20, where Yahweh’s people are His sheep, led to pasture. Likewise,

²¹⁴ E.g., Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 129ff.

²¹⁵ E.g., K. Fullerton, “Isaiah 14:28–32,” 95; cf., Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. D. E. Green (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968). Also, Wildberger views v. 30a as a marginal gloss on v. 32b (*Isaiah 13–27*, 101).

²¹⁶ Jenkins, “Isaiah 14:28–32—An Issue of Life and Death,” 55.

²¹⁷ E.g., God spared Jerusalem from Sennacherib’s attack in Isaiah 37:36–37. Also see discussion below on p. 66.

²¹⁸ see Is 5:15; 8:9; 53:6; 61:5.

²¹⁹ See text note on v. 30a, p. 20 above

in Ez 34:23 Yahweh says, “I will set up my servant David over them as one shepherd, and he will feed them: he will feed them and be their shepherd.” This emphatic repetition underscores the imagery of Yahweh taking care of His sheep through chosen leaders. In addition, Yahweh is pictured as the implied shepherd of Israel by Ezekiel.

The oracle against Philistia also implies that Yahweh is Israel’s shepherd, perhaps echoing similar imagery from Psalm 23. Yet instead of a poetic description of Yahweh’s care, this oracle creates a new form for this metaphor, which highlights the contrast between Israel and Philistia. This use of the Psalms’ motifs is probable, as Thomas Jemielity has noted, since prophecy draws upon many forms and genres.²²⁰ Therefore, Isaiah’s purpose is to draw upon known depictions of Yahweh acting as a good shepherd. Yahweh thus protects His sheep, Israel, who wander, and warns them to avoid the pitfalls and dangers of associating with wolves like Philistia. Finally, the oracle shows that Yahweh is in control both to safeguard His sheep by offering refuge in Zion and to destroy the wolves by sending punishment to Philistia (Is 14:30b) like He promised to do for Assyria (Is 10:12).

3. Philistia’s Death Sentence

There is no written record of Philistia’s fall or of a specific famine which led to their destruction. However, as discussed above, Philistia was most likely destroyed by the Babylonian empire when they conquered the Assyrians and their vassals.²²¹ Verse 30b along with the parallel colon in v. 31b takes the form of a warning with two paths: the direct action of Yahweh’s wrath (“famine”), balanced in the next verse by the indirect action of His judgment through the Assyrian army, symbolized by the “smoke” from the north.

²²⁰ Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*, 59.

²²¹ See chapter 3, C, 1 “History of Philistia from the Eighth to the Seventh Centuries B.C.,” p. 42.

From the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C. to the Babylonians in the sixth, it became a Hebrew idiom to associate the north with disaster.²²² Isaiah 14:31 gives the best clue of whom Philistia's enemy really was, as Fullerton so clearly states: "The smoke from the north can only be Assyria, a power which we know threatened Philistia very gravely in Isaiah's day."²²³ With the images of "famine" and "smoke from the north," Isaiah predicted impending doom for Philistia. Their fulfillment may not have come in Isaiah's lifetime, but he may have said them for another purpose. For example, Isaiah was most likely pronouncing a "death sentence" on Philistia—for however their end would come, it would come from Yahweh!

Nevertheless, the immediate hearers would be Israel, or more specifically, the court of Hezekiah, so the oracle would serve primarily as a warning. As such, the oracle's pronouncement of punishment for Philistia is really a rhetorical device. Because it was a warning to Israel, Isaiah did not expect a response from the Philistines, nor was he trying to change their course of action. Instead, as Weis contends, it was directed at Israel as an "order" not to trust in Philistine alliances, but to put faith in Yahweh.²²⁴

E. The Prophet's Lament and Oracle Forms—v. 31

Is Isaiah trying to scare the people of Philistia into changing their ways, is he lamenting in advance over what is as good as done, or is this a prophetic satire? All these forms are found in the genre, however, the latter is the most appropriate category for this oracle. For example, the first word in v. 31, *הֲיִלֵּלִי*, is not just a command, but can be

²²² Cf., Jeremiah's graphic expression of the enemy from the north in 1:13ff.

²²³ Fullerton, 91. See also footnote 1 there for a list of supporting commentators of this position.

²²⁴ Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 321.

translated, as Wildberger suggests, “‘start singing a lament,’ [which] is the most commonly used term for summoning people to a communal lament when circumstances have reached a critical stage.”²²⁵ הַיְלִילִי is found in parallel with זַעֲקִי (“cry out”) in other such laments (e.g., Jer 48:20), and thus fits into a pattern of formal laments as labeled by Sweeney.²²⁶ But who is the subject of this “Call to Lament?” Philistia? Probably not. Judah? Yes, but why would they lament their old arch-enemy’s fall? Thus this is probably political satire, which is seen by the fact that the word הַיְלִילִי is usually a discourse marker for such satire.²²⁷

Imperatives are sometimes used by the prophets as commands to articulate a judgment that is as good as having been done, but which also ironically mocks the object of the oracle as well.²²⁸ This is because the “call to communal lament,” which is a genre all its own, according to Hans W. Wolff, was “usually addressed to Israel” so they could repent of their sins and change Yahweh’s mind, thus averting disaster.²²⁹ When such a lament was spoken to foreign nations, it was intended in an ironic sense, because of the improbability of that nations’ people gathering together for a special worship service to confess their sins to Yahweh.²³⁰ Thus in v. 31, one can say that Isaiah is underscoring the seriousness of Yahweh as judge of the nations, by mocking Philistia in this stereotyped “communal lament.” It also mocks the nations’ anti-Assyrian excitement and serves as a warning not to follow in Philistia’s ways.

²²⁵ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 21.

²²⁶ See Sweeney’s definition of the “CALL FOR A COMMUNAL COMPLAINT” in his glossary, (*Isaiah 1–39*, 516).

²²⁷ For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see Ze’ev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

²²⁸ Jones, 118–9.

²²⁹ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 22. He refers to H. W. Wolff’s commentary (Hermeneia Series), *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 32–33. See also Wolff’s original thesis on the Lament Form in “Der Aufruf zur Volkslage,” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 48–56.

²³⁰ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 98.

However, this is only one kind of literary device to be found in this oracle. Weis and Sweeney agree in generally identifying this oracle as an order, which “does not explain; it instructs.”²³¹ It goes about this through such forms as the satirical lament mentioned above and also the “response to inquiries,” which Weis also sees as being a form in such oracles.²³² Apparently, each of these forms would instruct Philistia to desist in their propositioning Judah to create an alliance against Assyria. This works when one accepts Philistia as the primary addressee, but this author is not as inclined to reject the oracle’s purpose for Israel as well. Both could possibly be intended by Isaiah. Yet, in agreement with Irwin, Wildberger, and Sweeney, this oracle is to be directed at Israel.²³³ Furthermore, Sweeney is correct in that the lament form in v. 31 functions rhetorically,²³⁴ allowing the people of Israel to “overhear” the comforting promise of Yahweh’s gift of Zion as a “refuge for his afflicted people.”

F. Answer to Philistia’s Ambassadors—Gospel of v. 32

1. Importance of Ambassadors for the Oracle

Whomever one believes the addressee to be will determine the importance of the presence of ambassadors for this oracle. It has been shown that Weis understands this oracle as being addressed to Philistia, which he bases on “the language of v. 32a, which could be taken to imply a Judahite addressee, [but] seems less likely to have that force since a similar

²³¹ Quote is from Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 321; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 229, subdivides the oracle into such fixed forms as a Prohibition (vv. 29–30), a Command (v. 31), which is also a Call To A Public Complaint Service, and a Rhetorical Question (v. 32).

²³² *Ibid.*, 267–8.

²³³ Irwin, 87; Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 90.

²³⁴ Sweeney, 229.

impersonal function is found in Edition 1 of Jer 23:37.”²³⁵ Thus ambassadors are assumed by some, to have been able to hear the message in one way or another.

It was not entirely uncommon for other “non-Israelite hearers” to be addressed by such OAN.²³⁶ Raabe offers examples of ways in which Philistia may have received these words about it, as seen by other situations. Two possibilities that may apply here are that, 1) “The Israelite prophet might have addressed non-Israelites who had journeyed to Israel,” as in Jer 27; Is 18:2 and 21:11–12; or 2) “Reports of a prophetic oracle might have informally spread and reached non-Israelite ears,” as seen in 2 Kgs 6:8–14 with the king of Syria and Jer 39 with Nebuchadnezzar.²³⁷ While Jer 27 is the closest parallel to v. 32, the second possibility could have happened too. Even if the oracle were originally addressed to Hezekiah’s court, Philistia might have heard the oracle by word of mouth. However, that would not make them the *intended* audience, which was probably Israel.²³⁸

Other commentators like Hayes and Irvine, put a different twist on this by stating that “Verse 32 no longer addresses the Philistines directly, but is the prophet’s response to the Philistine emissaries who come or might come to Jerusalem seeking cooperation and support for the rebellion.”²³⁹ Wrapped up in the political conspiracies of the eighth century B.C., Judah had to choose what to say to invitations of anti-Assyrian alliances. This oracle, then, was for Hezekiah and Judah’s benefit primarily with the purpose of telling the new king’s what to say to possible overtures by Philistia.

²³⁵ Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 321.

²³⁶ Cf. J. T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and the Message in the ANE*, BJS 169 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); and S. A. Meyer, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, HSM 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

²³⁷ Raabe, “Why Prophetic Oracles against the Nations?” 252.

²³⁸ See chapter 1, C “Possible Audiences for the Oracle against Philistia,” p. 3 above.

²³⁹ Hayes and Irvine, 237–8.

2. Zion Theology

The doctrine of the inviolability of Zion, in the OAN, finds one of its most powerful articulations in v. 32—“That Yahweh has founded Zion.” The theology is expressed most clearly in 2 Kgs 19:32–34 and its parallel passage in Is 37:33–35. Irwin summarizes: “It was the belief that Jerusalem could not be taken—perhaps not even assaulted—because of the presence therein of Yahweh whose honor demanded this vindication.”²⁴⁰ However, the expression of Zion as an inviolable sanctuary protected by Yahweh has been thought to be of later development and therefore could not have been included here by Isaiah.²⁴¹ This view is based on assumptions that teachings about Zion were influenced by post-exilic Psalms which express these ideas.²⁴² However, Brevard Childs believes that these views must be reassessed because of more recent research, which has given us “deeper understanding of the role of the Zion tradition in Isaiah.”²⁴³ Childs proposes that in Is 14:28–32, “The strong mythical flavor of the vocabulary reflects the ancient pre-Israelite source for the tradition, which has become identified with Zion.”²⁴⁴

Wildberger supports this theory by showing that, while the Psalms may have been the background for Isaiah’s words about Zion, Isaiah gave the doctrine a new meaning by

²⁴⁰ Irwin, 80.

²⁴¹ This is a main thesis of Fullerton’s whole article, in which he concludes on p. 109, that there is “no sure basis for a belief that Isaiah taught the doctrine of the inviolability of Zion.”

²⁴² Again, those who accept the late date of vv. 30a and 31b, follow Fullerton’s argument that these verses parallel the idea of the “poor” as found “in accordance with the frequent usage in later times, especially in the Psalms [which described] the Jews who suffered in the exilic and post-exilic times” (101). Cf., especially Ps 46.

²⁴³ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 61.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Childs cites Is 11:4 and 28:16f as examples, along with our text, which reflect such ancient sources of Zion tradition. One might also note Isaiah 1:27 and 33:5. Cf., also John Geyer who has identified some of the more common mythological motifs in the OAN as the “Mount,” the “North,” and the “chaos” motifs (“Mythology and Culture in the Oracles against the Nations,” 134), which may be expressed in this oracle through “Zion,” “smoke from the north,” and serpent imagery, respectively.

“highlighting the inviolability of the city itself” over against “refuge” simply in Yahweh.²⁴⁵ One can also come to the conclusion that Isaiah could have expressed Zion theology, as found in later traditions, on the book’s internal evidence as well. An example from Isaiah’s ministry shows that “he clearly taught on one occasion, at least, that Jerusalem specifically would be delivered from military menace by Yahweh” in chapter 7.²⁴⁶ As Yahweh saved the city once, so Isaiah proclaims in this oracle that He will do it again.

On this account, Sweeney is correct in his assessment that “the essential point of the *massa*’ is expressed as the answer to a RHETORICAL QUESTION in v. 32.”²⁴⁷ This literary form functions by the people of Israel “overhearing” the comforting promise of Yahweh’s gift of Zion as a refuge for his afflicted people. As a rhetorical question, it assumes that Philistine ambassadors do not necessarily have to be there to hear it, since its real function is in the third party’s applying the statement to themselves. With this “third party” being “the afflicted of Yahweh” who are the indirect, yet intended audience of the Zion theology, one can see how the oracle also applies to all other “third party” people of God who “overhear” the message as hearers of the Word today.

3. Hope for Yahweh’s Afflicted People

Some scholars place v. 30a after v. 32, because of the repeated issue of the “poor.”²⁴⁸ Verse 32b is not just an echo of v. 30a, it is a progression of the hope first offered there. Furthermore, it fits Isaiah’s style, especially in this oracle, where the prophet begins with an

²⁴⁵ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 101.

²⁴⁶ Irwin, 81.

²⁴⁷ Sweeney, 229. See his list of other fixed forms within this oracle in footnote 231, above.

²⁴⁸ Kaiser, 55; Begrich, 70f.; *et. al.* See Fullerton, 101, footnote 3 for list of others.

issue and takes it to its conclusion or completion in Yahweh's plan, that is, refuge for the afflicted in Zion. Such progression is first seen as Yahweh's instrument of judgment, the snake (Tiglath-pileser III) in v. 29, becomes the "smoke of war" in v. 31b, which is the Assyrian army. So here, the "first-born of the poor" are further described by the religious term "afflicted of Yahweh." These images are not subsequent thoughts added by a redactor, but as Weis argues, v. 32b is part of the originally independent oracle.²⁴⁹

Looking more closely at the עֲנִי, "afflicted," Wildberger holds that its use was within Isaiah's style by comparison with 3:14f, where Isaiah "clearly uses this term as a way to designate those who are economically oppressed."²⁵⁰ As was shown above in the study of אֲבִיּוֹנִים and דָּלִים, this word also had taken on a more religious sense in later usage, as is evident by the LXX's translation of the word as "the humbled of my people."²⁵¹ Though this change has been used as evidence for the verse's non-Isaianic origins, Wildberger defends it as part of the oracle on account of its relation to עַמּוֹ, "His [Yahweh's] people," which shows that it is being used as a religious term.²⁵² Thus there is a force here to this phrase similar to that of 7:9. Instead of just words of comfort to the "pious," Isaiah in this oracle (and v. 32b especially) "is calling for complete trust in Yahweh alone, and he formulates the answer that is to be delivered to others as a confession, to be repeated again and again: we believe!"²⁵³

The message of hope offered to the עֲנִי as a rhetorical answer to Philistia's ambassadors, is the climatic contrast of this oracle. The focus is not really any emissaries

²⁴⁹ Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 321.

²⁵⁰ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 90.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁵² *Ibid.* His defense is not necessarily for Isaianic authorship, but the oracle's unity.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 91

from Philistia, but the “afflicted of Yahweh,” who hear a message that is actually for them. This powerful word of comfort speaks to all hearers of the received text, and as Wildberger has shown, is a strong confession of faith for “the afflicted of Yahweh’s people.”

DATING THE ORACLE AND KING AHAZ'S DEATH

A. Connecting the Title with the Oracle

Since the title is original to the oracle, then clues from within the text can be used to match the historical circumstances around the death of King Ahaz in order to date it. The first challenge is to show that the title is an integral part of this oracle. While this cannot be proved beyond doubt, there is sufficient evidence to show that Isaiah's use of this oracle, whether original to Isaiah or used by him for the purposes seen in this context, fits with the title.

The second challenge is to locate Ahaz's death. This has usually been done by trying to synchronize the dates in the MT with the Assyrian Eponym lists.²⁵⁴ Because the Assyrian method of dating is better understood, these records are often given priority in the exercise of chronology. This bias is assumed by modern scholars because an accurate method for discerning the Hebrew kings' dating methods was not extant. When the MT did not agree with Assyrian records, co-regencies between a father and son were posited to harmonize the Hebrew texts. However, this method has led to inconsistencies among scholars.

Others have used the MT as the primary text in dating the Hebrew kings. This methodology does not degrade the text, but seeks to find an hitherto unknown procedure of

²⁵⁴ The Assyrian method of record keeping was based on a practice used by kingdoms of the ANE, whereby years and events in the kingdom were recorded together chronologically in a list. Because each year was named for a significant person in the government, these lists are called eponym lists since the person named is the "eponym" for that year. Also, since the Assyrian lists have the word *limmu* preceding each official's name, they are sometimes called *Limmu* lists.

reckoning the Hebrew kings' regencies. When Assyrian records do not coincide with the Hebrew dating (or differences within the MT itself), these should not be dismissed but explained. These methods will be discussed and critiqued below with the goal of finding the best system for dating Ahaz's death and the oracle's use.

1. Does the Title Belong to the Oracle?

There are two possibilities for this question. Either Isaiah used previously written material to which he added the title, or he composed the title and oracle together.²⁵⁵ Much of the scholarship on this subject rejects the idea that the title was original to the oracle, and asserts that it was added by a later redactor.²⁵⁶ However, Isaiah could have been his own editor or the editor could have been a disciple of Isaiah who used this material to highlight the date of Ahaz's death within the OAN corpus.

The oracle's superscription may be Isaiah's way of ordering his own material chronologically, for there are other dates mentioned at key points in the book.²⁵⁷ Others point out that the division of paragraphs in Isaiah are in dispute, which means v. 28 could be the ending note to the previous pericope. This is not likely though, since the Hebrew practice is to put the date at the beginning of a prophecy.²⁵⁸ Thus it is safe to assume that v. 28 was meant to go with vv. 29–32.

²⁵⁵ The same two possibilities exist if one posits an editor for the material. Either the editor found the title with the oracle or he added it to the oracle. The integrity of the title is not dependant upon Isaianic authorship, but on its acceptance in the Hebrew Bible as we have it today.

²⁵⁶ Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 148.

²⁵⁷ See chapter 3, B, 2 "Title's Chronological Marker," p. 40 above, for supporters of this thesis.

²⁵⁸ Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 308.

The title may also function, not just as a last editorial touch, but as a means of interpreting the oracle. Jenkins posits that Isaiah's use of the title for this oracle,

provides a theological understanding of the material that follows in relation to Isaiah's call for faith in Yahweh alone during the political crises of his day. It is intended to suggest to a later generation that faithfulness to Yahweh will bring "life" because for his part, God will remain faithful to his promises concerning his city and his people.²⁵⁹

Why else mention Ahaz's death unless it had some greater purpose for the whole oracle? Fullerton is right in his assertion that the title "assumes the genuineness of the oracle."²⁶⁰ This is especially seen when the most likely chronological interpretations of the title and the oracle are accepted, i.e., that Ahaz and the "broken scepter," Tiglath-pileser III's death, occurred in 727 B.C. Fullerton adds: "the chronology of the title fits into the implications of the oracle in a most extraordinary way. The title furnishes the key to unlock the meaning of the oracle at just the point where the internal evidence of the oracle fails us."²⁶¹ On both structural and theological grounds, then, the title most likely does go with the oracle.

2. Evidence Connecting the Title and Oracle

One way commentators try to date the oracle and King Ahaz's death is by demonstrating that the title and oracle go together. In other words, showing that they are both original to Isaiah and/or his use of them in the OAN corpus. Taken together, and assuming the broken scepter is Tiglath-pileser III,²⁶² the title supports the interpretation of Ahaz's death occurring when Tiglath-pileser III died in 727 B.C. Other ways of showing the superscription

²⁵⁹ Jenkins, "Isaiah 14:28-32," 62.

²⁶⁰ Fullerton, 106.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² See discussion in chapter 3, C, 2 "Who Is the 'Broken Scepter?'" p. 47 above.

to be connected to the oracle are through the work of form criticism and semantics, as discussed below.

An example of the former is Begrich, who correlates the superscription formula which *just* mentions “King Ahaz” as being proof that it is the work of Isaiah’s *time* and not from a redactor who would have added a “*zweifellos jüngerer Datumsformeln*” (undoubtedly earlier/more recent dating formula), like “king of Israel/Judah” after the name for clarity, which gave away the redactor’s distance in time from the events.²⁶³ Irwin also finds style comparisons helpful, but focuses more on the time element: “Biblical usage in regard to chronological notes exhibits a striking consistency that leaves small ground for doubt [that the superscription is not original].”²⁶⁴ Another proponent for the title’s style being in line with Isaiah’s, is Wildberger, who maintains that if vv. 29–32 are accepted as coming from Isaiah, then the title must also be original since it displays many Isaianic features.²⁶⁵ To reject so many similarities, as pointed out by a variety of scholars, would do violence to the text and read into it one’s own assumptions of what identifies this oracle as a legitimate prophecy of Isaiah.

The other method for connecting v. 28 to the oracle is using semantics. Weis has analyzed this oracle so as to show that its integrity as a whole is in the same form in which it appears in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶⁶ Looking closer at his insights, he describes that the oracle’s title is an “introductory sentence,” which gives the rest of the oracle more meaning, unlike

²⁶³ Begrich, “Jesaja 14,28–32,” 68. He argues that the superscriptions from Is 1:1; Amos 1:1; Hosea 1:1; and Micah 1:1 are from a redactor, while Is 14:28 is original since it does not follow the same pattern.

²⁶⁴ Irwin, 75.

²⁶⁵ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–37*, 92. For example, he cites its similarity to Is 6:1 and 20:1a.

²⁶⁶ Weis, *A Definition of the Genre Massa*, 321.

other superscriptions that simply state that the genre to follow is a **נִשְׁבַּר**.²⁶⁷ As a result, v. 28 “relates the *massa*’ to a concrete historical situation [which] clearly implies that a *massa*’ may be understood to communicate about concrete historical situations.”²⁶⁸ This is to say that Ahaz’s death had everything to do with the “broken scepter” in v. 29—not for identifying it with Ahaz, but locating it in the history of Israel and Assyria. Thus, the consensus among most recent scholars has been to show that v. 28 can reliably be taken with the rest of the pericope, which helps in the dating of the rest of the material to the time or situation of Ahaz’s death.

B. Theories for Dating Israel’s Kings

The key to fixing the date of Ahaz’s death has to do with understanding the chronology of the kings of Israel. This is a daunting task since many theories have been put forward and there is still no consensus. Some of the earliest critical work in this area was done by Rudolf Kittel in 1896.²⁶⁹ Other theories arose after that, but it was not until Edwin R. Thiele’s investigation, first proposed in his article on the subject in 1944 and later developed in his book in 1951,²⁷⁰ that any particular one became popular. To date, Thiele’s has become the most accepted system for determining the succession of the Hebrew kings’ reigns,²⁷¹ as

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁶⁹ Rudolf Kittel, *A History of the Hebrews* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896).

²⁷⁰ Edwin R. Thiele, “The Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel,” *JNES* 3 (1944): 137–86; *idem*, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings: a reconstruction of the chronology of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

²⁷¹ Cf., David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold, eds., *The Face of Old Testament Studies, op. cit.*, which gives up-to-date information on the continuing discussion of Israelite chronology.

attested to by the three editions and numerous reprints of his original book, almost 50 years after publication.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a full accounting of all Thiele's theories, so a brief summary of his methods follows. He begins with what he claims to be "the basic principles of chronological recording followed in the original records," in which he summarizes:

Israel began with the nonaccession-year system and later shifted to accession-year reckoning. Judah began with the accession-year system and at a time of collaboration with Israel adopted its nonaccession-year method. Later both nations simultaneously shifted to accession-year reckoning and followed it to the end.²⁷²

The point here is that sometimes the counting for kings' reigns was inclusive, depending on who was referencing whom. And when there was only one kingdom, the cross-referencing system was dropped. Along with this is the fact that the Hebrew calendar began in the spring of the year: on the first on *Nisan* in Israel and in the month of *Tishri* in Judah.²⁷³ The number of years a king reigned depended on how many "New Year's Days" had passed. Thus, theoretically if an Israelite king reigned from the day before *Nisan* to the day after *Nisan* in the next year when he died, he could be said to have reigned three years even though it was only one year and two days.

The other major point for Thiele is his recognition of "dual dating," which he claims was "used for the regnal data in five of the nine co-regencies, or overlapping reigns, in Israel and Judah."²⁷⁴ By suggesting four previously unrecognized co-regencies, Thiele believes he has found the key to finding the dates of the kings of Israel and Judah. Thus, he comes to the

²⁷² Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 23.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

date of 715 B.C. for the death of Ahaz.²⁷⁵ His calculations appear a bit complicated, though, and with too many exceptions to be able to claim to have the key to unlocking the mystery of the Hebrew kings' chronology.

An example of this is when Thiele ran into minor problems with his chronology, he assumed co-regencies to adjust it to fit his theory.²⁷⁶ E.W. Faulstich rejects Thiele's methodology on this because Thiele does not attribute the two kingdoms' changes from "accession-year" to "nonaccession-year" systems to any identifiable facts.²⁷⁷ Faulstich is not alone in observing this weakness in Thiele's argument.²⁷⁸ To correctly construct the chronology of the Hebrew kings, one must listen to Faulstich's point, which is entirely valid:

The scribal court recorders of the chronology of the Hebrew kings were aware of the chronological sequence of their history with which they were dealing. Consequently, the scribes did not record a history that was mathematically nonsense or in conflict with that of their contemporary neighbors. Concerned with the preservation of their history, the text was originally reliable both historically and chronologically for posterity.²⁷⁹

For the biblical scholar, Faulstich's premises are commendable, but not at the expense of authentic scholarship. The fact that many scholars have come up with the same date of 727 B.C.²⁸⁰ for the death of Ahaz using independent methods, should tell us that there may be too many variables for any single theory to encompass. At the same time, one should not

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 133, *passim*.

²⁷⁶ Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 54f.

²⁷⁷ Faulstich, 18, especially note 21. See footnote 272 above for Thiele's position.

²⁷⁸ E.g., Antti Laato notes that "in the Books of Kings there are allusions to only one coregency," (in "New Views on the Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel," *ZAW* 98 [1986]: 211); however, more recent support of Thiele's system can be found in Nadav Na'aman's article, "Historical and Chronological Notes on the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Eighth Century B.C." *VT* 36, no. 1 (1986): 83.

²⁷⁹ Faulstich, 13.

²⁸⁰ Faulstich arrives at 728 B.C. for the date of Ahaz's death (p. 65), by reason of his dating based on astronomical events and computer based calendar calculations (from Hebrew to Julian calendar).

consider the lack of a complete consensus to mean that this date is invalid. Instead, by looking at the various explanations below, the date of 727 B.C. is the most plausible.

C. Fixing the Date of King Ahaz's Death

1. Chronological Issues

The first thing needed for fixing an ancient event in Israel according to the modern, Julian calendar, is an anchor date. This would be a date of a verifiable event upon which Assyriologists and biblical chronologists alike can agree. Such an indisputable incident could be an astronomical event, which can be precisely dated by mathematical formulae. If, for example, a solar or lunar eclipse were mentioned in the records of a people in the ANE, then one could compare that culture's dates forward and backward from that event to the modern calendar. And when one culture interacted with another, as in a battle, and both recorded that event, then one can synchronize the dates in both.

One such event is a solar eclipse in Assyria mentioned in the eponym, *Bur (Ishdi-Sagale)*, which can be accurately dated by astronomical calculations to June 15, 763 B.C. at 11:00 A.M. over Ninevah.²⁸¹ This date enables the rest of the years in the Assyrian eponym lists to line up to modern dating and its importance is noted by Thiele, who wrote that

With the year of [this eponym] fixed at 763 B.C., the year of every other name of the complete canon can likewise be fixed. The Assyrian lists extant today provide a reliable record of the annual limmu officials from 891 B.C. to 648 B.C.²⁸²

Using dates of Assyrian contact with Israel and Judah's kings, one can synchronize their dates as well, thus it seems that the problems of chronology are solved. Yet further problems arise. The dates mentioned in Scripture and cross referenced between the kings of Judah and Israel do not line up because they employ a dating system which is not completely understood today.²⁸³ Also, some dates given in Scripture seem to contradict each other. The more important problem, to be covered next, is this latter issue of the

apparent contradictory dates in 2 Kgs 18 and how the commentators resolve them.

2. Ahaz's Death Date-Survey of the Research

When did King Ahaz die? Scripture is not clear on this, so commentators have come up with many theories for possible dates. Most are in favor of either 715 B.C., supported by 2 Kgs 18:13 or 727 B.C., supported by 2 Kgs 18:9-10. The following is a survey of the recent literature on these theories and a critique based on the supportable evidence, without resorting to changing the MT unnecessarily.

It may seem logical to connect the death of King Ahaz with the reference to the broken "scepter" or "rod" of v. 29. Yet this is not so certain. The imagery of a king as a "rod" is connected to the symbol of his authority—a scepter. However, Isaiah had earlier mentioned the "scepter" of Assyria being broken in 10:5. The superscription in 14:28 was most likely used to place this oracle into the historical context of Assyria's activity in Palestine, and not to link it with any oppression by Ahaz over the Philistines, which never happened anyway. Thus Ahaz's death needs to fit into the historical context of the time.

The arguments from Scripture and extra-biblical sources support the date of 727 B.C. for Ahaz's death well. Proponents of this date have often followed the lead of Joachim Begrich who early on argued for 725 B.C.²⁸⁴ Others using his arguments, have come up with dates around the same time: Ronald Clements, 725; John Hayes and Stuart Irving, 728/727; Christopher Seitz, "mid 720s;" and W.A. Irwin, Hans Wildberger, and Edward Young for 727 B.C.²⁸⁵ The main arguments for them are the dating from 2 Kgs 18:13 and treating the title as original to the oracle.²⁸⁶ The main weakness for 727 is the conflicting date inferred from 2 Kgs 18:13.

It should be noted that the dating of Ahaz's death and the oracle are not always seen as the same. Because of this, Otto Kaiser supports the dating of the oracle to either 727 or 705 B.C., not because he believes that the superscription is original, but that the title as a whole is secondary, so that "there is no longer any need to suppose that the death of the oppressor of the Philistines and that of King Ahaz took place at the same time."²⁸⁷ So Kaiser finds the dating of the oracle at the death of Tiglath-pileser (727) or Sargon II (705) as being the only real evidence for its setting.²⁸⁸

Some early twentieth century commentators have gone with dates for Ahaz's death other than the those mentioned above. Kemper Fullerton, following George Gray, asserts that "By combining the biblical and Assyrian data at hand for the preceding period, the accession year of Ahaz can be fixed with great probability for 735 . . . this would fix his death year for

²⁸⁴ Begrich, "Jesaja 14,28–32," 74.

²⁸⁵ Clements, 148; Hayes and Irving, 236; Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 136; Irwin, 85; Wilberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 93; and Young, 450.

²⁸⁶ See chapter 4, A, 2 "Evidence Connecting the Title and Oracle," p. 71 above.

²⁸⁷ Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 51f.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

720.”²⁸⁹ While he acknowledges that following 2 Kgs 18:9 leads to the year 727 B.C. for Ahaz’s death, which he also says is the year Tiglath-pileser died, he rejects it on the grounds that there is no proof of a “Philistine uprising in this year which would lead to dispatching an embassy to Jerusalem . . . [but] of more importance is the fact that this date entangles us in insoluble difficulties with the chronology of the preceding period.”²⁹⁰

Apparently, Fullerton believed that because of the contradiction of 727 with the date supported by 2 Kgs 18:13, neither was reliable, so that one had to look outside the Bible for the date. Thus his proposal of 720 B.C. is based on what he believes is supported by the Assyrian data and evidence of the same year as “the revolt of the West after the battle of Durilu.”²⁹¹ This only works if one abandons the interpretation of the broken “scepter” as being the death of a king. It is better to work through the inconsistencies of Scripture, which more recent scholars have done, than drop them for outside sources.

Those who support the date of 715 B.C. for Ahaz’s death usually follow the theories proposed by W. F. Albright and the further research by John Bright.²⁹² Those who agree with their conclusions are Joseph Jensen and J. Motyer for 715; John Oswalt, 716/715; and John Watts for 718 or 715 B.C.²⁹³ Jensen gets around the problem of finding no Assyrian king’s death in 715 for the “broken rod” in Is 14:29, by blaming the “serious problems surrounding

²⁸⁹ Fullerton, “Isaiah 14:28–32,” 105. Cf., G. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1, 267.

²⁹⁰ Fullerton, 104.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁹² W. F. Albright, “The Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel,” *BASOR* 100 (1945): 20ff; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 461ff.

²⁹³ Jensen, 151; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 147; Oswalt, 331; and John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* [Word Commentary] (Waco: Word, 1985), 219. Cf., also Horace Hummel, who agrees with 715 without giving supporting arguments, yet probably follows Albright’s findings (*The Word Becoming Flesh* [St. Louis: CPH, 1979], 207).

the Ahaz-Hezekiah chronology . . . , so no firm argument can be built around it.”²⁹⁴ This only sidesteps the issue and is a weakness of his argument, and there is further evidence to consider for supporting an accurate date for Ahaz’s death.

Jensen also brings up the “two campaigns” theory, which has been proposed by many scholars as another way of resolving problems surrounding the invasion of Sennacherib, recounted in 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37 and Is 36:1–37:38.²⁹⁵ The first campaign would be in 701 and the second in 688 B.C.²⁹⁶ He points out that if a second campaign for Sennacherib is conjectured around 688, then “this is compatible with an accession date for Hezekiah in 715.”²⁹⁷ Yet Cogan and Tadmor find both historical and methodological weaknesses in the “two campaign” theory that eliminates this as an option on valid grounds.²⁹⁸

J. Motyer and John Watts offer no arguments in favor of their choice for Ahaz’s death date besides the texts from Scripture, which imply many different years. Oswalt, on the other hand, is more reluctant to endorse any particular date. He notes the sense in marking 727 for Ahaz’s death, but then leans toward 716/715 because “then the time of this oracle coincides with the time of the preparations for the Philistine revolt against Assyria (Is 20:1–6).”²⁹⁹ This view is similar to Fullerton’s³⁰⁰ in its interpretation of the “broken scepter” as a time of

²⁹⁴ Jensen, 151.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁹⁶ Faulstich’s version of the theory suggests that the two attacks on Jerusalem by Sennacherib were in 715 and 702 B.C. The first, in Hezekiah’s fourteenth year, was while Sennacherib was “co-regent with his father, Sargon” (see 2 Chr 32:1–4), the second was during Hezekiah’s twenty-seventh year,” (109). However, most who support this theory date the two campaigns as Jensen notes above (30). John Bright adds to the discussion by proposing that the two campaigns were telescoped into the single biblical account (*A History of Israel*, 282–7).

²⁹⁷ Jensen, 30.

²⁹⁸ See Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation*, AB, vol. 11 (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1988), 249f, for these arguments.

²⁹⁹ Oswalt, 331.

³⁰⁰ See p. 46 above.

Assyrian weakness, signaled by a revolt, rather than an Assyrian king's death. Such a notion is a less desirable explanation for the "broken scepter" than found above in comparison to Is 10:5 and 14:5.³⁰¹

3. Ahaz's Death—727 or 715 B.C.?

Based on scriptural information, King Ahaz's death occurred either in 727 or 715 B.C. These are the most commonly accepted dates based on schemes of synchronizing the OT with Assyrian records.³⁰² If, as Is 36:1 and 2 Kgs 18:13 say, the fourteenth year of Hezekiah occurred when the Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 B.C.,³⁰³ then Ahaz's death would have been the same year as Hezekiah's accession to the throne, or 715 B.C.³⁰⁴ This does not agree with the date of Ahaz's death and Hezekiah's accession which can be inferred from 2 Kgs 18:9–10. There it states: "In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of King Hoshea of Israel, Samaria was taken." Assyriologists and most biblical chronologists alike agree that the date of Samaria's fall to Sennacherib was in 721 B.C.³⁰⁵ According to 2 Kgs 18:10 then, six years before this in 727, Hezekiah became king of Judah. Thus Ahaz died in 727 B.C.

³⁰¹ See translation notes on v. 29c, p. 15 above.

³⁰² However, see alternate dates proposed by commentators in chapter 3, B, 3 "Ahaz's Death Date," p. 77 above.

³⁰³ According to Thiele, everything hinges on this date for Sennacherib's attack of Jerusalem in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah for the rest of the regnal data of the kings of Israel and Judah (*Mysterious Numbers*, 174). However, while the year of the attack is correct, there are doubts about it happening in Hezekiah's fourteenth year, see below.

³⁰⁴ Martin Luther takes the biblical evidence without trying to date Ahaz's death and says that it occurred in the same year that Hezekiah took the throne (*Luther's Works*, vol. 16, 142).

³⁰⁵ The dates of the three year siege of Samaria (2 Kgs 18:9–10) come from the Assyrian record in *ARAB*, vol. II, § 1198, 437. However, the tablet is mutilated at the end of the line so that the word "Samaria" must be inferred by scholars, as Faulstich explains: "The coincidence of . . . the three years mentioned in the Biblical text regarding the siege of Shalmaneser would seem to justify the supplying of the word 'Samaria'" (note 47, p. 97).

Since Scripture leads to two different dates for Ahaz's death, the details in Is 14:28 help in deciding which is correct. Since the death year of Ahaz is given as the time when a ruler's oppression was broken, scholars have looked for an Assyrian king's death in the same year. There was no Assyrian ruler who died in 715 B.C., so for the date in Is 36:1 and 2 Kgs 18:13 to be correct, one would have to interpret the broken iscepter in Is 14:29, who has been shown to be a symbol of an Assyrian king, as meaning something other than a king's death. This is not the best solution. Rather, taking 727 as the correct date for Ahaz's death, the references in Is 36:1 and 2 Kgs 18:13 must now be reconciled.

4. Theories Upholding Ahaz's Death in 727 B.C.

John Hayes and Stuart Irvine have nicely summarized the theories which try to explain the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reference in Is 36:1. Many of these arguments could uphold the date of Ahaz's death in 727, but not all are consistent with respecting the form in which the biblical text has been handed down. The theories:

1. Many scholars assume that Hezekiah became king in 715; therefore, his fourteenth year would have been 701. The references to dates for his reign prior to the fall of Samaria are either in error or refer to the time when he was a co-regent with his father, Ahaz.
2. The number fourteen is a scribal mistake for some other number, either twenty-four, twenty-seven, or some other figure.
3. The reference to his fourteenth year originally concerned an invasion of Sargon in 713 or thereabouts, probably the Assyrian campaign to suppress the Ashdod-led revolt. The mistake is thus not in the number of the year but in the name of the Assyrian ruler.
4. . . . Hezekiah proclaimed that a new era had begun during his reign and thus the figure refers to the fourteenth year of that era.
5. Others understand [it] as the date when Hezekiah became ill.³⁰⁶

Under the same reasoning stated above for not accepting the arguments of those who simply accept 715 B.C. as the date of Ahaz's death because the chronology is irreconcilable, one can drop theories 1, 2, and 3 from consideration.³⁰⁷ They are intriguing, yet they make assumptions about the unreliability of the MT that are unsubstantiated and too convenient. Could there be a way of explaining the dates without changing the text? The theories in 4 and 5 provide alternatives along with the two campaign theory of

Sennacherib's attacks on Jerusalem, the three of which will now be discussed.

Whether Hezekiah ever proclaimed a new era is not recorded in Scripture. With little other evidence, there is only speculation left, which would lead to dozens of other improbable theories. However, the placement of the fourteenth year reference in the text has been thought by some to have been placed where it is by the hand of Dtr. or a still later chronographer,³⁰⁸ perhaps because they inferred that a new era began during that time and so moved the reference from elsewhere in 2 Kgs. Or there could be an implied new era if one interprets 2 Kgs 18:13 as, in the fourteenth year after the second phase of Hezekiah's reign, i.e., after he was sick unto death and received an extra fifteen years of life.

Yet, the fourteenth year was most likely a way of labeling a new section in 2 Kings to foreshadow later material. This is the position of both Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor's commentary on 2 Kings and John Hayes and Stuart Irvine's commentary on Isaiah. However, they each have their own spin on it, with the former finding the key in 2 Kings 20 with Hezekiah's illness, and the latter seeing the date as the time reference for the events behind [Is] chapters 38 and 39.³⁰⁹

Cogan and Tadmor persuasively argue against the chronological systems devised by W. F. Albright, John Bright, and Edwin Thiele on the basis of the many textual emendations that have to be made for Hezekiah's successors in order to make 715 the year of his accession.³¹⁰ What becomes the preferred date for Ahaz's death and Hezekiah's accession is 727/726, as they explain:

To avoid manipulation of the chronological data, the fourteenth year is taken as the date which originally introduced the prophetic story of Hezekiah's illness and his miraculous recovery, 2 Kgs 20, at which time he was granted an additional fifteen years (20:6).³¹¹

Similarly, Hayes and Irvine explain the discrepancy in dates in 2 Kings and in Is 36:1, by positing that the fourteenth year was when Hezekiah became ill, which was the same time as Isaiah's speeches in chapters 38-39.³¹² This section prepared for chapter 40

and was not chronological in nature. Their main point is that the editing of the portions of 2 Kings on Hezekiah's illness during the Babylonian exile resulted in an association of that material with the last major episode in Isaiah's and Hezekiah's lives, namely, Sennacherib's invasion. The illness and invasion thus came to be assigned to the same period.³¹³ They explain how the "fourteenth year" reference in Is 36:1 connects topically to the date described in 2 Kgs 18:9-10. They are not chronological inconsistencies, but have different aims—the former is thematic, the latter chronological. Thus Hayes and Irvine place Ahaz's death at 728/727 B.C. without sacrificing the MT through unsubstantiated emendations.

In the end, many of these theories for resolving the chronological issues involved with dating Ahaz's death have something to offer. They help in looking for ways to discover the truths of Scripture. The best method is to view the biblical discrepancies as differences in

literary intentions, as adopted by Hayes and Irvine, with Cogen and Tadmor's observations being taken into account. It is easy for scholars today to apply modern rules of historical writing and logic on ancient texts. But the arrogant implications of the judgment that the Hebrew Bible is full of errors must be resisted. Instead, realizing how important biblical history was to the Hebrew writers as Yahweh's actions in their lives, the inconsistencies can be taken as challenges. Then, by striving to understand the Bible's mysteries through scholarly investigation, God's Word will open up.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Isaiah's oracle against Philistia stands out as an example of what the OAN are trying to do, which, according to Weis' study of the נִשְׁבָּא genre, is to give a revelation of Yahweh's acts in the world. This is not just a general observation from another's research, but is clearly seen in this oracle. In Isaiah 14:28–32, the prophet's words connect with history. They proclaim Yahweh's past actions—implying that the “scepter” which “is broken” was done so by Yahweh's power. They tell of the present threat at the time, the “poisonous snake,” Sargon II, who would carry out Yahweh's will against the Philistines. Finally, Yahweh's future destruction of even Philistia's remnant was foretold, through extermination by the “fiery serpent,” Sennacherib. All these historically confirmed leaders of the Assyrian empire in the eighth century B.C., were part of Yahweh's plan and acts in the world, making this oracle an exceptional example of Yahweh's נִשְׁבָּא revelations.

The means by which Philistia was to be punished is given in Is 10:5, which reveals that Assyria is “the scepter of Yahweh's hand.” Assyrian arrogance (Is 10:12) is given as reason for Yahweh's promise to break the “scepter of kings” in Is 14:5. This came to pass with the death of Tiglath-pileser III in 727 B.C. Therefore, the very historical event, which precipitated Philistia's rejoicing, was also the work of Yahweh. The Philistines would not escape punishment at the hands of the Assyrians, and the Assyrians, who were always Yahweh's instrument, would also feel His wrath eventually. Yet focusing on Philistia or even Assyria would miss the purpose of the oracle altogether.

The key to the oracle's message is understanding its audience. This has been shown to be God's people, Israel. Evidence of this comes in the form of the superscription, which places the oracle within the context of *Israel's* history—"in the year of the death of King Ahaz" (v. 28). This chronological marker in the superscription links the oracle to concrete events for Israel at the time it was given—when Philistia may have made overtures for an alliance. The date of Ahaz's death in the same year as Tiglath-pileser III's in 727 B.C., lends support for interpreting the oracle and its setting. However, it especially reminded its original hearers that while kings may rise and fall, Yahweh's kingship will never fail, for He has "founded Zion."

Misidentifying the intended audience of this oracle has led many commentators to wrong conclusions. It was not written for Philistia's sake, since there was no guarantee they would ever hear it. Instead, by means of a rhetorical question to *possible* Philistine ambassadors, King Hezekiah, and by extension the people Hezekiah was to rule, were warned against anti-Assyrian alliances. Since Philistia was not the originally intended audience, the oracle is really a warning to Israel, who was wont to chase after false gods, commit idolatry by trusting in Assyria's power, or reject Yahweh through a joint Philistine venture for protection. This oracle reminded Israel in whom they should really place their trust.

Other exegetical mistakes are made by identifying Ahaz's death with the broken scepter. This has led some scholars into the pitfalls of allegory by trying to force the serpent imagery to fit the mold of the Davidic monarchy. Thus, even when Ahaz did not strike the Philistines, the broken scepter was labeled as a Judaic king from the line of David, who had struck the Philistines hundreds of years earlier. This confusion of referents led some eventually to label the "fiery serpent" as the Messiah, as even the Targum had done.

Yet, there are seeds of truth in these portrayals. Not that the “broken scepter” was from the Davidic line, but that the Messiah would have a role in meting out Yahweh’s judgment. Indeed, the *seraph* imagery most likely had a symbolism which connected the oracle’s message to Yahweh’s divine kingship and power. Illuminated by the Egyptian context of Isaiah’s day, the *seraph* image helps one to see that Philistia’s destruction came from Yahweh himself, since the symbol conveyed His royal and divine status. As the Assyrian armies “from the north” later came to destroy Philistia in 722 B.C. under the terrible leader, Sargon II, Israel would be reminded by this oracle’s pronouncement who was predicted to have sent them—Yahweh.

In terms of the royal and divine implication behind the *seraph* symbol, the oracle against Philistia did foreshadowed the Messiah, though not explicitly. This is only half of the truth about the Messiah. Portraying the Messiah as Yahweh’s agent who is separate from Him, as the Targum does, leads to the problem of not seeing the whole messianic view in this oracle. Without regarding the Messiah as one and the same as Yahweh, the oracle could only suggest that the Messiah would be a judge but not also a savior. Yet Isaiah himself leads us to consider that Yahweh’s servant could also be Yahweh in the flesh, as the servant songs suggest.³¹⁴ Therefore, the Messiah is not only characterized as an agent of Yahweh bringing His wrath, but is also pictured in this oracle as caring for His people like a shepherd.

The Messiah as a judge of the nations and a savior to “the afflicted” of Yahweh’s people carries out the roles for which Yahweh sends him: punishment and salvation, woe and weal, Law and Gospel. Pointing ahead to the New Testament’s portrayal of Jesus, we can

³¹⁴ The four servant songs are in Is 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12. Expressions like, “I will put my Spirit on him,” (42:1) show that the Messiah is more than just Yahweh’s representative in the world, but reveals Yahweh’s nature and plans to the world.

better understand Jesus' combined roles of judge and savior as pictured in Rev 1:17 and 6:10. For the most part, Jesus' messianic role as described in the Gospels, is not so much judge as savior. Jesus said He did not come to judge but to save humanity (John 12:47–48) and the gentle figure of Jesus caring for the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24) only gives half the story. At His Second Coming, Jesus *will* appear as a judge for those who have not looked to Him for refuge.

However, a unique feature of this oracle's *seraph* imagery is that it not only points to the Messiah as Yahweh's agent of judgment, but also to the sacrificial role of the Messiah. If the evil character of the first *seraph* (Sennacherib) made it less desirable for Christians to identify it with the Messiah,³¹⁵ then the NT should be consulted, for it has no reservations about connecting Jesus to humanity's evil, as 2 Cor 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.” Jesus became the sin sacrifice for His people by becoming the symbol of evil itself.

That is where this oracle enlightens one's understanding of Jesus, for the serpent/*seraph* in Is 14: 29 helps to interpret Jesus' identification of Himself in John 3:14, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.” We have seen how the word for snake and *seraph* in Num 21 were practically interchangeable.³¹⁶ So as Jesus draws the connection between His crucifixion and the bronze serpent to explain that the Messiah would be a symbol of evil—a serpent—yet have no evil in Him³¹⁷ (like the bronze serpent would have no poison), so this oracle correctly portrays the Messiah as a fiery

³¹⁵ The Jewish rabbis had no problem with this connection, as the Targum on Isaiah speculates that the *seraph* was indeed a messianic symbol, even though serpents in the OT usually represent evil.

³¹⁶ See Translation notes on 29j, p. 18 above.

³¹⁷ See 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5

serpent,³¹⁸ yet Yahweh's holy servant as well. It is especially the theme of judgment which the serpent/*seraph* image contributes to understanding the Messiah, for Jesus would be both priest (Yahweh's agent) and sacrifice (object of wrath), as described in Heb 13:11-14.

Furthering the picture of judgment is this oracle's contrast of the objects of Yahweh's wrath with those spared from judgment. This oracle's structure revolves around the biblical contrast of the sheep and the goats—Yahweh's chosen people with those opposed to Him. The "poor" and "needy" (v. 30a) are contrasted with the "remnant" of Philistia (v. 30b) in order to point to the foundation of safety—Zion. In v. 32b, Yahweh proclaims that it is not just political sanctuary He is offering, but refuge for "Yahweh's afflicted," a religious, and perhaps, technical term for the faithful remnant of Israel whom Yahweh will save. Thus, by being contrasted with Philistia through such literary forms as Prohibitions (v. 29a), Commands (v. 31a), and the taunting Communal Call to Lament (v. 31a), Israel is again warned against looking for safety in political alliances or other man-made solutions to worldly problems.

The "Communal Call to Lament" particularly brings this out by its satirical way of mocking Philistia. The possibility of their turning from their sins in a worship service of repentance to Yahweh was absurd. Israel would know this, since Philistia had a long history of calling upon their false gods.³¹⁹ The true worship of Yahweh was Israel's gift. Worship was their lifeline to God and His grace. So in the satire of this oracle, Israel is admonished against abandoning the benefits of worship too. The place for worshipping Yahweh, the

³¹⁸ A "messiah" did not have to be holy to be labeled as such, as seen by Isaiah's calling Cyrus, a pagan king of Persia, a messiah in 45:1.

³¹⁹ E.g., Goliath in 1 Sam 17:43.

temple, was known to His people and was probably brought to mind at the mention of Mount Zion.

Some older biblical motifs are thus tied together in this oracle. The Zion motif perhaps has mythological roots, but was already well developed by Isaiah, as seen in 2:1–4, as the place to which the nations would flow. They would find refuge even as the “afflicted of Yahweh” had done. The safety and refuge promised came from being shielded from sin through the sacrificial system at the Temple. That, after all, is where Yahweh “himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering” (Gen 22:8)—first in the forgiveness offered by animal sacrifices, and later through Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice for sins on the cross.

The other implied motif is of Israel’s chosen status in terms of Yahweh shepherding His people (Jer 50:6). While the words directed at Philistia serve as a warning for Israel, the words of comfort for the “first-born of the poor” celebrate Yahweh’s caring relationship for them. As He leads them to “pasture,” so Yahweh has also promised to lead Israel beside still waters, for the purpose of restoring Israel’s soul (Ps 23). As Israel accepted this oracle and heeded its warning, the “soul” of the nation was restored in the reforms of Hezekiah, who was not like his father, Ahaz (2 Kgs 18:5). Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, even in the face of Assyrian threats (Is 36:15), and by his faith, aligned himself with the “poor” and “needy” of this text.

Therefore, in the midst of the historical realities of Ahaz’s death, Isaiah delivered this oracle in order to send the same warning to the new king, Hezekiah: “Do not trust in Assyria as Ahaz had done, or in other foreign alliances, but only in Yahweh your Savior! For He has establish Zion for the poor and needy, who are the faithful of Yahweh.” As their shepherd, Yahweh only gives Israel His best, and Zion stands as an example of His love, for it is the plae where He offered His only Son for the sins of the world. Yahweh’s promised presence

in the Temple was the guarantee of His love in the OT, and Jesus came to fulfill that promise by being the heavenly temple (cf., John 2:21 and Heb 9:24). In Jesus' presence—the true Zion—Yahweh's faithful children find final and fulfilling refuge.

Isaiah also carries out his role as a “watchman” of Israel through this oracle. It warns God's people against the futility of trusting in that which has no hope of a future and whose very “rootstock” will be killed. Whatever is trusted in the most has become one's god, Luther taught in the meaning of the first commandment in his *Small Catechism*. This oracle says the same thing, but not just as Yahweh's command to “have no other gods before me.” It says this by condemning all other forms of trust which would place trusting Yahweh after it—whether it was turning to Philistia, Assyria, or one's own devices for help and safety.

Finally, as one looks at the closing words of this oracle, the images leading to them make the oracle against Philistia even more powerful than just a warning to Israel. They become, in the context of Isaiah's work, a *confession* for the faithful. Those who are the “afflicted of Yahweh,” are also the “poor in spirit” whom Jesus called “Blessed” (Matt. 5:3). The “afflicted” are all who endure this world's hatred for the sake of the Gospel and for Jesus (Mark 8:35), as well as the faithful. They can proclaim the truth that there is refuge in Yahweh alone! As this oracle rightly proclaims that Yahweh will protect His people, so too will Yahweh through His Son, Jesus, who is the “Good Shepherd,” protect all those whom His Father has given to Him (John 10:11).

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