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Hermeneutical Approaches to the Isaiah Apocalypse

An Examination of Form- and Redaction-Critical Interpretive Principles

and Foundations for a New Study of Isaiah 24-27

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

William W. Carr, Jr.

May 1997

Approved by Paul Raabe
Advisor

Glenn Nielsen
Reader

James W. Voelz
Reader

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INTRODUCTION

More than thirty years ago, in his “reconsideration” of Isaiah 24-27, G. W. Anderson ranked the so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse” near the four “Servant Songs” in terms of “the variety of . . . hypotheses of which it has been the subject.”¹ It seems appropriate to ask today whether this state of interpretation has changed. The answer is, basically, no. The intervening years have produced a substantial body of literature—commentaries on Isaiah (most often Isaiah 1-39), dissertations and articles of varying length on chapters 24-27 alone. But the situation persists in which the questions about the literary coherence (unity), date, and genre of Isaiah 24-27 receive an assortment of answers.

Why? The answer resides, I believe, in the hermeneutical presuppositions and principles of the interpreters. But these presuppositions and principles are generally tacit. The hermeneutical perspectives as well as the results of previous scholarship constitute a strong body of conventional wisdom that is carried forward, a kind of *Hermeneutiksüberlieferung*, without critique or contradiction. Even if the conclusions of a previous generation of interpreters are called into question, seldom are the underlying philosophical or hermeneutical conceptions or paradigms. These not only led to those conclusions, but

¹ “Isaiah xxiv-xxvii reconsidered,” in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 9 (Congress Volume, Bonn 1962 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963]), 118.

the conclusions are so dependent on these paradigms as to constitute a kind of symbiotic relationship in which the paradigm is the host.

This thesis is an exercise in detecting these underlying hermeneutical principles in the secondary literature as they have been applied to Isaiah 24-27, in relation to the three areas of investigation mentioned above: literary coherence (unity), date, and genre. Of primary interest are works produced since Anderson's watershed essay; however, since it is presupposed that the more recent researchers have relied considerably on an earlier scholarly tradition, it will be necessary to trace present principles to previous principals, especially of Isaiah studies, Bernhard Duhm, and of form criticism, Hermann Gunkel.

Anderson asserted that "bound up with the question of date, and, indeed, prior to it, is the question of structure and unity."² Consequently, although the three areas we will investigate overlap, the first order of business (chapter one) will be to ascertain what sort of criteria are used to establish the structure and to attribute or deny literary coherence (unity) to Isaiah 24-27, since the prevailing view is that the piece is incoherent. Even though there is a stated trend in the more recent literature to deal with biblical texts more holistically, the presupposition of incoherence (disunity) constitutes a fundamental and thoroughgoing distortion to such efforts, aided and abetted by critical theories about the history of prophetic speech and its eventual transposition to literature.

In chapter two, we shall address the matter of dating these chapters. While the literature shows a trend away from radically late, i.e., second century B.C., dates for these chapters, the position that they are post-exilic remains a given. Our aim will be to explore

² Ibid., 119.

the reasons for this position and whether it, too, should be liable to reconsideration. At the heart of this issue lies the question whether the historical hermeneutic (i.e., the paradigm or philosophy of history) in use by recent scholars, as it has been applied to the history of Israel and the “development” of its religion and theological ideas, is apposite.

In chapter three, we take up the issue of genre, including the question of the relationship between Isaiah 24-27 and “apocalyptic.” Key questions here concern how a genre is defined and by whom, and how terms such as “apocalypse,” “apocalyptic,” and “Apocalyptic” are defined and used.

This thesis does not include an exegesis of Isaiah 24-27; however, it is, frankly, a precursor to such a project. Therefore, in chapter four, we present some “Foundations for a New Study of Isaiah 24-27.” This chapter grows out of the findings from the first three but also takes up insights from the growing body of knowledge of the Hebrew language and poetry.

The recent history of exegesis of the “Isaiah apocalypse” shows a gradual retreat from the extreme positions regarding its literary (in)coherence, date, and genre, which were the leading edge of Isaiah scholarship about a century ago. The aim of this thesis is to take advantage of this shift in scholarly direction and to introduce recent developments in other areas of biblical studies, in order to offer a basis for new arguments in favor of Isaianic authenticity.

CHAPTER 1

LITERARY COHERENCE (UNITY) OF ISAIAH 24-27

While the priority of the coherence question has been widely acknowledged,¹ the question itself remains essentially unresolved, for there is no real consensus as to the structure of the chapters or the principle or principles which determine the structure.

The plan of this chapter is first to demonstrate via a brief survey that a key part of the problem regarding the coherence of Isaiah 24-27 has been and continues to be the failure to articulate a definition of literary coherence, and to respond to that part of the problem by discussing a multi-dimensional understanding of coherence as articulated especially by H. F. Plett. The second task of the chapter is to examine and respond to the exegetical procedures by which contemporary scholarship continues to determine that the unity of Isaiah 24-27 is the product of a redactional process rather than of original composition. This study will also examine the hermeneutical principles from which such exegetical procedures are derived. The point is that if Isaiah 24-27 is truly to be “reconsidered,” it is necessary to begin with a clear definition of the coherence of these chapters.

¹ See W. E. March, “A Study of Two Prophetic Compositions in Isaiah 24.1-27.1” (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1966), xxxi; Benedikt Otzen, “Traditions and Structures of Isaiah XXIV-XXVII,” *VT* 24 (Apr 1974): 198-199; R. J. Coggins, “The Problem of Isaiah 24-27,” *The Expository Times* 90 (Aug 1979): 328.

The Migration of Views re: Coherence

In the history of Isaiah scholarship, views regarding the literary coherence of the so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse” have ranged from original unity to complete incoherence. The present situation is one in which there is a general agreement *that* there is some kind of unity, but little agreement about *what* the unity is, that is, the basis or principle of unity. Clements describes the state of affairs: “This so-called apocalypse is not a literary unity at all [in the sense of a unity as originally composed] but has reached its present form [an apparent unity] by a process of additions and expansions of an original nucleus.”² What remains disagreed are the details of the process.

In his work on another widely-argued portion of Isaiah, chapters 2-4, Wiklander³ began a historical survey of Isaiah scholarship with Vitranga, whose commentary on Isaiah was regarded as the pre-eminent pre-critical work. Gesenius said “Vitranga’s commentary marks an epoch in the history of the interpretation of this prophet.”⁴ Vitranga regarded chapters 24-27 as a single address (*Rede*), the first of three in the third major part of the Book of Isaiah.⁵ A century later, Gesenius continued to maintain at least a fundamental

² R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 197.

³ Bertil Wiklander, *Prophecy as Literature: A Text-Linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to Isaiah 2-4*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series, no. 22 (Uppsala: CWK Gleerup, 1984).

⁴ Wilhelm Gesenius, *Philologisch-kritischer und historischer Commentar über den Jesaia*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Friedr. Christ. Wilh. Vogel, 1821), I: 132. Gesenius acknowledged that Vitranga's opinions about when and how far the Isaianic prophecies were fulfilled must be disregarded. But he credited Vitranga “mit . . . einer ausgezeichneten Kenntniß der Bibelsprache und des übrigen Alterthums, mit Benutzung des ganzen bis dahin vorhandenen gelehrten Apparats und einer oft bewundernswürdigen Sorgfalt und Umsicht erwogen” (133).

⁵ Campegii Vitranga, *Auslegung der Weissagung Jesaia*, übersetzt [from the original Latin] und mit Anmerkungen begleitet von Anton Friderich Busching, mit einer Vorrede Sr. Hochwürden Herr Johann Lorenz Mosheim (Halle: Verlag Johann Gottlob Bierwirth, 1749), I, *Abhandlung*, p. 18; *Auslegung*, p. 518. (There are three sections in volume I: a series of forewords [*Vorrede*], introductory material

unity: “These four chapters consist of a passage from the time of the exile, which is coherent, or at least belongs to one era and originates from one author.” At the same time, however, he acknowledged that “*Koppe* [had already] tried to carve this passage into various small, meaningless fragments, which he placed in various times, but without being successful in his speculations.”⁶

As is the case in so many aspects of Isaiah studies, Bernhard Duhm figures significantly in the determination that Isaiah 24-27 do not comprise a literary unity. While he admitted that this “booklet” (*Büchlein*) “gilt allgemein als einheitlich,” he insisted: “In order to find a solution [namely, for the problem of the date of composition], it is necessary first of all to distinguish its foreign components, because the booklet is plainly not uniform [*einheitlich*].”⁷ He considered the chapters to be comprised of one main eschatological oracle (24:1-23; 25:6-8; 26:20-27:1, 12-13), interrupted by several songs (*Lieder*) and “das kunstvolle Gedicht 26₁₋₁₉.”⁸ Although Duhm’s “view has

[*Vorläufige Abhandlung*], and the commentary proper [*Auslegung*]. Each section is paginated separately; therefore, I am including in my citations an abbreviated section title—here, for example, “*Abhandlung*”). In the Latin edition, the same section is called “*De Argumento Prophetiarum Jesaiaë*.”

⁶ “Diese 4 Kapitel enthalten ein zusammenhängendes oder wenigstens in Ein [*sic*] Zeitalter gehöriges, und von Einem Verfasser herrührendes Stück aus der Zeit des Exils. . . . *Koppe* hat auch dieses Stück in verschiedene kleine bedeutungslose Fragmenten zerlegen wollen, die er in verschiedene Zeiten setzt, ohne aber in seinen Vermuthungen . . . glücklich zu seyn” (Gesenius, I, 756, 760).

⁷ “Um eine Entscheidung zu finden, ist zunächst nötig, die fremden Bestandteile auszuschneiden, denn das Büchlein ist eben nicht einheitlich” (Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 5th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1968], 172). Among those who shared, at least in principle, Duhm’s analysis were Cheyne, who asked, “Are we not irresistibly led to the conclusion that it [Is. 24-27] is not really a single work . . . but a mosaic of passages . . . [which] appear to have been combined with less editorial skill than usual” (T. K. Cheyne, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895], 155). See also G. H. Box, *The Book of Isaiah* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1908), and G. B. Gray, *Isaiah*, Vol. I, ICC (New York: Scribners, 1912).

⁸ Duhm, *Isaiah*⁵, 172. Later, in his detailed treatment of chapter 26 (181), Duhm calls the poem *künstlich*, “artificial,” instead of *kunstvolle*, “artful” or “artistic.”

subsequently been extensively changed and his analysis in detail modified and refined, still he continues to deserve the credit for having pointed out the fundamental distinction between prophecies and songs.”⁹

Even granting a “fundamental distinction between prophecies and songs,” however, some investigators continued to look for a way to explain the received arrangement of the text. Hylmö introduced the view of Isaiah 24-27 as a “prophetic liturgy.”¹⁰ But while his argumentation has been considered rather weak, “his proposal was based on the important assumption that the disunity so often stressed by contemporary critics might in fact not be the result of faulty transmission but of poor understanding on the part of moderns.”¹¹ Lindblom’s alternative, a “cantata,” provided for an overall unity but allowed for differences in genre.¹²

G. W. Anderson’s 1963 article stated clearly the nature of the problem. He had become convinced “that there is a substantial unity in these chapters . . . [b]ut . . . not the unity of a carefully articulated argumentative poem,”¹³ but nowhere did he delineate the criteria necessary to constitute “carefully articulated” argumentation. He concluded simply that “these chapters [are] a prophetic composition in which the elements are

⁹ “Seine Sicht ist in der Folge stark abgewandelt und seine Analyse im einzelnen modifiziert und verfeinert worden, aber es bleibt sein Verdienst, auf die grundsätzliche Verschiedenheit von Prophezeiungen und Liedern hingewiesen zu haben” (Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27*, BKAT X/2 [Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978], 893).

¹⁰ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jesaja 24-27*, BWANT 62 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1933), 37.

¹¹ W. E. March, “Redaction Criticism and the Formation of Prophetic Books,” *SBL Seminar Papers 1977* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), 94.

¹² March, “Redaction Criticism . . .,” 95.

¹³ Anderson, “Isaiah xxiv-xxvii reconsidered,” 122.

blended in a somewhat unusual way.”¹⁴ This prompts the question whether this “somewhat unusual way” in actuality constitutes—precisely in its unusualness—“a carefully articulated” argument. For as Steck notes: The presupposition of “a strictly logical, consistent train of thought, in our sense” is an “exorbitant demand of modern logic upon an ancient text.”¹⁵ Anderson’s article licensed, in a sense, and certainly invited a number of new inquiries into the character of Isaiah 24-27.¹⁶

At the same time, however, under the influence of Duhm, and from the standpoint of technique or methodology even more so of Gunkel, scholars continued to insist that any coherence exhibited by the chapters was not original to the material. Among more recent commentators, Wildberger is adamant that “no one gets anywhere any more with the thesis of the fundamental unity of the apocalypse,” but must offer some sort of “supplementary or developmental hypothesis” (*Ergänzungs- bzw. Wachstumshypothese*).¹⁷ And yet he also acknowledges that “more recent researchers, who accept . . . a developmental process, are agreed about this: that the ‘basic text’ which they have supposed must always

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵ Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*, 9th ed., trans. James D. Nogalski, SBL Resources for Biblical Study 33 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 57.

¹⁶ The applicable studies include: March, “Two Prophetic Compositions . . . ;” P. L. Redditt, “Isaiah 24-27: A Form-Critical Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1972); William Elder, “A Theological-Historical Study of Isaiah 24-27” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1974); William R. Millar, *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*. Harvard Semitic Monograph Series (Missoula, Montana: The Scholars Press, 1976); Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24-27*. JSOT Supplement Series 61 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); and Samuel Pagán, “From Crisis to Hope: A Study of the Origins of Apocalyptic Literature” (D.H.L. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989). In addition, a number of other articles have appeared which place increased stress on the unity, function, and structure of Isaiah 24-27.

¹⁷ “Man kommt mit der These von der grundsätzlichen Einheitlichkeit der Apokalypse nicht mehr durch” (Wildberger, 896).

be viewed together with its ‘commentaries’ and likewise the ‘commentary’ must not be read without the ‘text.’”¹⁸

What Is the Text?

Wildberger’s remark makes it clear that the question of literary coherence is a question of textuality.¹⁹ What *is* the “text” of Isaiah 24-27? Are these chapters as a whole to be regarded as a text? Or are they a collection of texts—some “supponierte ‘Grundtext’” alone, or “mit seinen ‘Kommentaren’”?²⁰ Rendtorff defines the problem even more sharply: “The question arises which text [an interpreter] is going to interpret: the text he has before him or the text he himself has fabricated by his own critical analysis.”²¹ Wiklander summarizes the variety of textual approaches that have shaped studies not only of Isaiah 2-4, but of the rest of Isaiah as well. The same “broad spectrum of opinions on the delimitation, unity and function” that Wiklander describes for Isaiah 2-4 applies to chapters 24-27:

1. An original, coherent and well-formed discourse intended for reading and/or oral public discourse.

¹⁸ “Die neuern Forscher, die einen . . . Wachstumsprozeß annehmen, sind sich darin einig, daß der von ihnen supponierte »Grundtext« immer zusammzusehen sei mit seinen »Kommentaren« und ebenso die »Kommentare« nicht ohne den »Text« gelesen werden dürften. D.h., auch diese Forscher nehmen durchaus das Anliegen derer, die für Einheitlichkeit plädieren, auf. Die Unebenheiten sind als Spannungen zu begreifen, die sich im Ablauf des hermeneutischen Prozesses ergeben haben, und sind als Zeugnisse des jeweiligen Bemühens um Aktualisierung der Überlieferung zu werten. Es spricht für sich, daß gerade ein Text, der von der großen bevorstehenden Wende sprach, zu so intensiver Reflexion, Adaption an neue Situationen und darin Neuinterpretation herausgefordert hat” (Wildberger, 896-897).

¹⁹ Roy F. Melugin articulates the issue another way when he describes differences in interpretation as “the result of different reading strategies” (“Introduction,” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, JSOT Supplement Series 214 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 14).

²⁰ Wildberger, 896-897.

²¹ Rolf Rendtorff, “How to Read Isaiah 1-39 Against Its Historical Background,” *OTE* 1/1 (1988): 7.

2. A well-formed, redactional and literary unit consisting of originally self-contained speeches that were gradually shaped into a unified whole according to a fixed plan.
3. A loosely delimited, incoherent section of the book of Isaiah forming a collection of originally independent, poorly preserved sayings emanating from the prophet Isaiah and mingled with an abundance of later additions.
4. A series of originally independent units . . . , which were collected and placed together without any overarching, organising plan. . . .²²

The distinction between the third and fourth opinions appears to be that while according to the third opinion there is some kind of original plan—"poorly preserved," on the one hand, and interrupted by the "later additions," on the other—according to the fourth opinion there is no plan. This range of opinions, says Wiklander, is a consequence of "conflicting views on the coherence or inner consistency of the text taken as a meaningful and functional unit of language."²³

Wiklander applied a matrix of "orientations" used in critical theories or approaches to art, including literature, articulated by M. H. Abrams, as a way of measuring how previous generations of biblical scholars had approached the text of Isaiah 2-4..²⁴

Abrams' categories include:

- the mimetic orientation — "the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspect of the universe;"²⁵

²² Wiklander, 6-7.

²³ Ibid., 7. Paul R. Raabe describes three similar models, "each having its own set of expectations, assumptions, and criteria" (*Obadiah*, The Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1996], 14).

²⁴ Ibid., 8, citing Abrams' categories are: mimetic: text as "imitation of the universe;" pragmatic: text explained in terms of desired effect on reader-recipient; expressive: emphasizes "author's perceptions, thoughts, feelings," etc.; and objective: "texts as a self-contained entity." See also David Hellholm, *Das Visionenbuch des Hermas als Apokalypse*, Coniectanea Biblica 13:1 (Uppsala: CWK Gleerup, 1980), 18-19, who employs Plett's adaptation of Abrams's categories, replacing "pragmatic" with "receptive" and replacing "objective" with "rhetorical." Another insightful article is Martin Kessler, "An Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: Prolegomena," *Semitics* 7 (1980): 1-27.

²⁵ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp. Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1953), 8.

- the pragmatic orientation — which “looks at the work of art chiefly as a means to an end, an instrument for getting something done, and tends to judge its value according to its success in achieving that aim;”²⁶
- the expressive orientation — “in which the artist . . . becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged;”²⁷ and
- the objective orientation — “which on principle regards the work of art in isolation from all . . . external points of reference [author, universe, audience], analyzes it as a self-sufficient entity constituted by its parts in their internal relations, and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being.”²⁸

On the basis of his survey, Wiklander concluded that “since the contribution of Vitranga in the early 18th century, no comprehensive *analysis* of the text in its final shape has been issued. Hence, a definite lack of textual orientation has been a distinctive feature in earlier interpretation” (emphasis original)²⁹ What Wiklander meant by “a . . . lack of textual orientation” is the lack of a “comprehensive and open-ended” approach to the text, “in the sense that it allows for a study of the ‘textuality’ from a variety of possibly relevant points of view.”³⁰ However, the term “textuality” here confuses more than it clarifies. What is required is an approach to a given text—in Wiklander’s case, Isaiah 2-4; in the present study, Isaiah 24-27—that takes more fully into account all of the orientations toward texts: mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective. These constitute one way of matrixing what Wiklander called “possibly relevant points of view.”

²⁶ Ibid., 15.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁹ Wiklander, 21.

³⁰ Ibid., 23.

Wiklander asserted “that no *explicit* definition of ‘meaningful text’ or ‘textual coherence’ was permitted to govern the procedure of interpretation” (emphasis added).³¹ However, while it is true that previous generations of interpreters did not articulate “*explicit* definition[s] of ‘meaningful text,’” Wiklander’s own survey—a survey which we shall emulate below—did demonstrate the *implicit* definitions with which interpreters approached the material.

As a consequence of his observation regarding the lack of explicit definitions of textuality (i.e., “meaningful text”), Wiklander devoted considerable attention to establishing a definition of his own,³² which he would apply in his study of Isaiah 2-4.³³ Salient elements in his development of a definition of “meaningful text” include the ingredients of a basic model of literary communication: author, universe, text, and reader;³⁴ the characterization of three “dimensions” of texts: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic;³⁵ and the enumeration of seven “standards” of textuality, that is, conditions which must be satisfied in order to classify a specimen as a “meaningful text.”³⁶ He relied

³¹ Ibid., 45.

³² It is not as if Wiklander were trying to establish some kind of objective metadefinition for textuality. Rather, he is asserting, correctly in my view, that an interpreter’s operating definition of textuality is a crucial tool in his or her interpretive toolbox, because one’s view of what are the necessary or sufficient conditions for the constitution of a “meaningful text” will govern how one determines the boundaries of a literary specimen, its relation to its surroundings (as part of a larger literary specimen), and even certain of its internal relationships.

³³ Ibid., 21-48.

³⁴ Ibid., 39-44. Key components of the model he employs are the text, author, the universe (or world), and the audience/users.

³⁵ Syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (Ibid., 44-45).

³⁶ Cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability (or receptivity), informativity, situationality, and intertextuality (Ibid., 45-46).

heavily on H. F. Plett for definitions of extension, delimitation, and coherence in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, by which the constitution of a “meaningful text” can be determined. The syntactic constitution of a text is predicated on the connection of one linguistic sign (word, sentence, or larger unit) with another. The syntactically minimum text is two self-contained but connected signs (Plett says sentences). Syntactic coherence is “attested by the explicit (or implicit) presence of connecting links, which fulfill the condition of backward or forward reference.”³⁷

Plett addresses the pragmatic constitution of a text (*pragmatische Textkonstitution*) as a transaction between the text’s sender and receiver. In his definition of pragmatic coherence, coherence is little else than communicativity:

“Pragmatic textual coherence is grounded in the person of the sending or receiving communication participant. The latter fills in gaps that exist in the text on the basis of his foreknowledge (presuppositions) and creates thereby a coherent text-representation. This pragmatic coherence exists on the plane of a deep structure. The variability of their possible interpretations creates *coherences* and texts that are different from one another. *The concept of pragmatic coherence makes it clear that the text presents a changing phenomenon with different stages of development*” (translation and emphasis mine).³⁸

³⁷ H. F. Plett, *Textwissenschaft und Textanalyse: Semiotik, Linguistik, Rhetorik*, Uni-Taschenbücher 328 (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1975), 56-69.

³⁸ I think it important to reprint the German here also: “Textpragmatische Kohärenz ist begründet in der Person des emittierenden oder perzipierenden Kommunikationsteilnehmers. Dieser ergänzt (substituiert) auf Grund seines Vorwissens (Präsuppositionen) vorhandene Textlücken und schafft dadurch eine kohärente Textfolge. Diese pragmatische Kohärenz ist vorhanden auf der Ebene einer Tiefenstruktur. Die Variabilität ihrer möglichen Interpretationen schafft voneinander abweichende Kohärenzen und Texte. Der pragmatische Kohärenzbegriff macht deutlich, daß der Text ein prozessuales Phänomen mit unterschiedlichen Entwicklungsstufen darstellt” (Ibid., 91).

The crucial ingredient in the pragmatic constitution of a text is the strategy or illocutionary role (*illokutive Rolle*), which governs the extension of the text.³⁹ Consequently, the most difficult problem in pragmatic analysis is the identification of the presuppositions that apply for a given point of time.⁴⁰ In other words, what is the proper way to fill in the gaps?

The semantic constitution of a text has to do with what it denotes or designates—what it points to. “The semiotic perspective of the semantic approaches the text as a referential unity of meaning.”⁴¹ Semantic textual coherence has to do with signifiers referring to the same referents (people, places, things, situations). “The greater the mutual number (or quantity) of semantic signs, the greater the coherence.”⁴²

The text is delimited by its theme (including a hierarchy of part-themes). From it the sum of the co-references is considered derived. As far as the theme extends, so the reaches the extension of the text. A change of theme means a change of text. The signal for this is the termination of the identity of the referent, but even more a metasemantic expression (e.g., superscription, transition-formula).⁴³

The definitions of textuality (constitution of a literary specimen as a text) and especially of coherence (the internal consistency of a literary specimen), in terms of the syntactic, pragmatic, and semantic dimensions, are crucial. If a literary specimen is

³⁹ Ibid., 79-92, especially 91: “Die Textextension unterliegt . . . keiner quantitativen Mindestnorm, sondern der Dominanz einer funktionalen Mitteilungstrategie . . . , die der Vertextung (bzw. Textentschlüsselung) jeweils . . . ihren spezifischen kommunikativen Status verleiht.”

Plett does not address expressly the perlocutionary aspect of pragmatics, that is, what the discourse is to accomplish in its reader/hearer, but I take it to be subsumed in his use of the term “strategy.”

⁴⁰ “Zu den schwierigsten Problemen gehört die Eruierung der an einem gewissen Zeitpunkt jeweils geltenden Präsuppositionen” (Ibid., 92).

⁴¹ Ibid., 107.

⁴² “Je größer die gemeinsame Menge semantischer Merkmale, desto größer die Textkohärenz” (Ibid.).

⁴³ Ibid.

examined with only one concept of coherence (or coherence in only one dimension) in mind, the possibility that its coherence may have been based in a different dimension gets overlooked. As this chapter continues, I hope to demonstrate that existing scholarship vis-à-vis Isaiah 24-27 is deficient precisely because it has not employed a comprehensive view of the possible constitution of these chapters as a single text.

Approaches to Textuality Reflected in the Scholarly Literature

Wiklander began his historical survey with Vitringa and credited this early-eighteenth century commentator with “a comprehensive notion of ‘text,’” though with a pragmatic emphasis (that is, having a purpose or aim that is to be achieved in respect to the reader/hearer).⁴⁴ Vitringa did not neglect mimetic (meaning-as-reference) issues—for Isaiah 24-27 he concluded that their historical referent was the Maccabean era—nor did he ignore altogether the expressive and objective dimensions. However, his foregrounding concern for the prophet’s purpose is reflected in his treatment of the book of Isaiah as a whole and in its parts. The 1749 German edition of his commentary includes a subsection titled “Vom Zweck und Gebrauch dieses Buch.”⁴⁵ And with respect specifically to Isaiah 24-27, Vitringa determined that:

The purpose of this vision is mainly to comfort the church through the severe afflictions, which God had visited upon it for the purifying of the church, for the testing of the true believers, and for the ignominious destruction of the enemies of the church. The secondary aims are to convince the world and the church of their depravity . . . ; to deter the princes of the world, who persecute the church, . . .

⁴⁴ Wiklander, 9-10.

⁴⁵ Vitringa, I, *Abhandlung*, 11.

and to strengthen the faith and hope of the church in its adversities, and to encourage it to thankful praise of the consummation of God.⁴⁶

Vitringa's "rhetorical-pragmatic orientation"⁴⁷ is illustrated further by the layout of his commentary for Isaiah 24-27, which is always from the whole to the parts, not from the parts to the whole—this latter procedure a characteristic of subsequent critical scholarship.

The second major figure in Wiklander's overview is Wilhelm Gesenius, who represents the shift to

an increased preoccupation with thematic units of thought and meaning-as-reference, . . . mingled with a tendency to apprehend . . . discourse chiefly as a reflection of the author's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Thus, prominence was given to explorations of the mimetic and expressive dimensions of the text, while the pragmatic and objective dimensions . . . were gradually eliminated from the sphere of interest.⁴⁸

The question that must be posed here is what constitutes a "thematic unit of thought."

Vitringa treated the whole book of Isaiah as a "thematic unit," because he saw in it a unifying rhetorical-pragmatic purpose. And even if the various parts of Isaiah could also be described by the terms "text" or "thematic unit of thought," these parts were, nevertheless, to be viewed in relation to the whole. Gesenius, however, exhibited a pronounced shift. Individual words were his primary objects for examination; therefore,

⁴⁶ Ibid., I, *Auslegung*, 518. Der Zweck dieses Gesichts, ist überhaupt, die Kirche wider die schweren Trübsalen zu trösten, welche Gott zur Reinigung der Kirche, zur Prüfung der wa[h]ren Gläubigen, und zum schimpflichen Verderben der Feinde der Kirche, über sie beschlossen hatte. Die Nebenzwecke sind, die Welt und die Kirche in Ansehung ihres verdorbenen Theils, von ihren Lastern zu überzeugen; die Fürsten der Welt, so die Kirche verfolgen, von diesem Vorhaben abzuschrecken, und den Glauben und die Hofnung der Kirche in den Widerwärtigkeiten zu stärken, und sie zur dankbaren Erhebung der Vollkommenheiten Gottes, zu ermuntern.

⁴⁷ Wiklander, 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

they were essentially his “texts.”⁴⁹ Etymology, morphology and grammar pushed consideration of larger literary or thematic units to the margins. Thus, in the *Historisch-kritische Einleitung* to his Isaiah commentary, Gesenius examined the “condition of the oracle-collection” and the “condition of the text,”⁵⁰ but he ignored the issues of argument and purpose that had been significant to Vitranga. And in his commentary proper on Isaiah 24-27, after an initial chapter-by-chapter summary of the contents, only for 24:1-13 did he treat more than one or two verses as a unit. Although Gesenius retained a semblance of coherence for Isaiah 24-27,⁵¹ Wiklander’s assessment of his treatment of Isaiah 2-4 applies also here: “Hardly a word [is] said about genre, argumentative structure, and scope . . . [and] no attempt [is] made to explain the discourse *as a unified whole*” (emphasis mine).⁵²

The shift to a historical-critical emphasis, with its focus on meaning-as-reference, gathered strength throughout the 19th century. Alexander’s assessment is correct: “In this case [Isaiah 24-27], as in others, each writer first determines upon general grounds the age [historical setting] of the production, and then confirms it by internal proofs.”⁵³ Along with the growth of the emphasis on mimetic issues, the 19th century saw the emergence and development of interest in the “expressive” aspect of textuality, which

⁴⁹ That is, individual words could be approached as, in Wiklander’s terms, “thematic units of thought” or “meaningful units of communication.”

⁵⁰ “§ 2. Beschaffenheit der jesaianischen Orakelsammlung. Unächte Bestandtheile derselben.” “§. 8. Beschaffenheit des Textes von Jesaia.” Gesenius, I, 15, 42.

⁵¹ Gesenius, I, 756, 760.

⁵² Wiklander, 11.

⁵³ J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 2 vols. in 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1993), 404.

concentrated on the person(ality) of the author. Applied to biblical studies, this emphasis gave rise to a literature on the character of the prophets and the nature of the prophetic experience.⁵⁴

The monumental figure in critical studies of Isaiah is Bernhard Duhm. In the *Vorwort* to the first edition of his Isaiah commentary he outlined three “tasks” (*Aufgabe*) of the exegete and commentator. First is “the preparation of, if not the original then certainly a possible, text.”⁵⁵ In this connection Duhm described the importance he believed to reside in metrical studies—“that meter is just as important a text-critical resource as the comparison of ancient translations.”⁵⁶ The second task is to establish “what the authors really say and want to say,” a task which Duhm insists is never complete. “The best that one can do is to try to penetrate as deeply as possible into the personality of the writer himself.”⁵⁷ The prominence of the expressive dimension of textuality is clearly demonstrated here. This task requires the use of criticism (*Kritik*), which appears to be a task in itself, in order to arrive at a proper understanding of the historical development (*historisches Entwicklung*). Furthermore, criticism is “not casual reflections and considerations but a conscientious culture- and religion-historical

⁵⁴ Carl Heinrich Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, trans. Sutton F. Corkran (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1895); Bernhard Duhm, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitische Religion* (Bonn: Verlag von Adolph Marcus, 1875); Hermann Gunkel, *Die Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1917); Abraham Kuenen, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, with an Introduction by John Muir (Reprint; Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969).

⁵⁵ “. . . die Herstellung wo nicht des ursprünglichen, so doch eines möglichen Textes” (Duhm, *Isaiah*⁵, 3).

⁵⁶ Ibid. “. . . daß die Metrik ein ebenso wichtiges textkritisches Hilfsmittel ist wie die Vergleichung der alten Übersetzungen.”

⁵⁷ Ibid. “. . . was die Autoren eigentlich sagen und sagen wollen. . . . Das beste, was man kann tun, ist versuchen, in die Persönlichkeit des Schriftstellers selber so tief wie möglich einzudringen.”

criticism.”⁵⁸ Duhm has delineated here not simply key elements of his methodology—especially the influential role of the study of poetic meter—but has, above all, pointed toward the source(s) of his essential hermeneutical principles, namely *Kultur- und Religionsgeschichte*.

The “Problem” of Gunkel

Perhaps the leading development from the emphasis on the mimetic and expressive dimensions of textuality was the (re)construction of an oral background for the prophetic literature—not simply that the prophets were primarily speakers not writers, but also the hypothesis that prophetic oracles were necessarily brief. In his article on “Biblical Literary History” for *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Gunkel asserted: “Originally the oldest of them [*Gattungen*] occupied a well-established place in Israelite folk-life . . . and for this reason—that they had come into being not on paper, but in life—the oldest units are also brief, on account of the poor receptivity of the ancient hearer.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Ursprünglich haben die ältesten unter ihnen eine ganz bestimmte Stelle im israelitischen Volksleben besessen . . . und ebendeshalb, weil sie nicht auf den Papier, sondern im Leben bestanden haben, sind auch ihre ältesten Einheiten so kurz gewesen, entsprechend der geringen Aufnahmefähigkeit der alten Hörer” (“Literaturgeschichte, biblische,” *RGG²* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Seebeck), 1927]: 1679). It is important to note a pronounced contradiction in Gunkel's essay, “Die Grundprobleme der israelitischen Literaturgeschichte.” (In *Reden und Aufsätze* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1913]: 29-38; and in *What Remains of the Old Testament*, trans. A. K. Dallas [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928]: 53-68). In this essay Gunkel wrote: “Nun ist es eine bekannte Erfahrung, daß der Hörer viel größere literarische Einheiten aufzufassen vermag als der Leser, der ja beliebig aufhören und wider anfangen kann; zumal der antike Hörer, dessen Aufnahmefähigkeit sehr beschränkt ist. Daher sind die gesprochenen und gesungenen Einheiten der älteren Zeit viel kleiner als die papierenen der neueren. Das älteste hebräische Volkslied imfaßt nur eine oder zwei Langzeilen; mehr vermochten die damaligen Menschen nicht zu übersehen!” (“Die Grundprobleme,” *Reden*, 33-34). The English translation perpetuated this apparent misstatement: “It is a familiar fact that a hearer is able to grasp much longer literary units than a reader. . . . This is especially true of the ancient listener, whose receptive power was very limited” (*What Remains*, 62).

Gunkel was here already raising the issue of orality vs. literacy vis-à-vis the Bible, but not simply in terms of a presumed inferiority of orality to literacy. The presumption of the inferiority of the ancient hearer required an accommodation of brevity in oral communication. Other studies of cultures ancient and more modern, including classical Greece, have put forward essentially the same conception. Eric A. Havelock,⁶⁰ for example, had determined “that the so-called ‘fragments’ of Democritus did not appear to be quotations extracted from otherwise lost works, but on the contrary were intended by their author to serve as self-contained aphorisms.”⁶¹ From this he derived the conclusion that “[t]he rounded sentence began its career in the pre-literate days of oral communication, when indoctrination depended on word of mouth and retention of doctrine depended on the memory.”⁶² Havelock insists that in order to construct a “general theory of orality” one “has to come to terms with communication . . . as it is preserved in lasting form.”⁶³ “Primary orality” is the situation in which there is no literary (written) activity; everything is transacted orally and aurally. How, then are things “preserved in lasting form” in a primary orality society? Ostensibly in short statements, in “self-contained aphorisms.”

Havelock asserts further: “A general theory [of orality] must draw on an effort of *imaginative reconstruction* which relies heavily on extrapolation from our present literate

⁶⁰ *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1, quoting Eric A. Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 126.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 64.

condition” (emphasis mine). “A general theory of orality must build upon a general theory of society.”⁶⁴ This is precisely what Gunkel had done. His *Literaturgeschichte* was an “imaginative reconstruction,” dependent upon *kultur-* and *religionsgeschichtliche* extrapolations, whose roots were in Wellhausen’s equally imaginative reconstruction of the history of Israel. And all these historical-critical hypotheses were grounded in a larger framework, a particular *Weltanschauung*, indeed, a “metanarrative.”

Francis Watson⁶⁵ has described “metanarratives” as “[g]rand theories or narratives [which] attempt to encompass the whole of significant reality. . . . [They] are characteristically formed out of a single totalizing concept: Progress, Evolution, Science, Reason, Secularization, Humanity—all such concepts imply variant forms of a metanarrative stemming from the Enlightenment. . . .”⁶⁶ The metanarrative according to which the classical critical schools established their principles and methods of interpretation was grounded at least to some extent in each of the “totalizing” concepts noted by Watson. Progress (or Evolution) is the underlying supposition in Gunkel’s literary-historical scenario for the prophets, that moves from orality to literacy, from the “terse oracle” to longer addresses, even to some extent in the supposed move from poetry to prose. Classical critical scholarship sought to authenticate itself as *Wissenschaft*—Science. David F. Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus* symbolized the emphasis on Reason,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 67, 68.

⁶⁵ Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 81.

especially over against Revelation.⁶⁷ And the critical focus on the prophetic personality—on *das Erlebnis* or *die Erfahrung des (der) Propheten*—reflected the Enlightenment emphasis on Humanity, with its accompanying focus on the biblical writings as human productions. Finally the emphasis on history (*Geschichte*) constitutes an emphasis on Secularization—the centrality or primacy of human experience.

Classical criticism might be said to have enjoyed its “golden age” in the latter third of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th, and yet its more recent generations have not let go of the hermeneutical approaches derived from the Enlightenment metanarrative, even though that world-view is facing increasing skepticism.⁶⁸ In the matter of the history of literature (or of communication, oral and written), first of all, the paradigm used to explain the evolution from orality to literacy is suspect.⁶⁹ The existence of a completely oral-aural antecedent for a known literal (or literary) culture has not been established, except hypothetically. “Fifth-century Athens was not a ‘literate society,’ but nor was it quite an ‘oral society’ either.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 52-53, 233-234.

⁶⁸ For example, see James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: CPH, 1995). Voelz identifies four characteristics of the “contrast . . . between **modernism** and **post-modernism**,” two of which are of particular moment in the present discussion: “**lack of belief in objectivity** . . . , so that all attempts at understanding are perspectival; . . . and **loss of faith in the notion of ‘progress,’** including the loss of belief in the inevitability of progress” (15, n. 7, emphasis original).

⁶⁹ “Our current modern identification of literacy with civilization was crystallized during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment” (Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, Key Themes in Ancient History. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 2).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4. One of the fundamental disagreements in the debates about orality and literacy involves the respective definitions of these terms. Havelock insists: “Orality, by definition, deals with societies which do not use any form of phonetic writing.” He excludes hieroglyphics and pictograms from the definition of “writing.” He recognizes the “common use of the term ‘writing’ . . . to any and every form of symbolization without distinction,” but argues that this “has helped to blur the boundaries between

Gunkel's *literaturgeschichtliche* reconstruction conforms essentially to the paradigm for the "life-cycle" of virtually any institution, including the rise and fall of any civilization, viewed from a historical (human experiential) standpoint: a period of growth as the civilization or culture or religion or literature emerges from a prior primitive state, a "golden age," and finally a period of decline. Gunkel applied this conception in "Die Grundprobleme der israelitischen Literaturgeschichte," as he postulated an oral (pre-literary) period, which was succeeded by a gradual literalization—during which the original brief units were assembled into books by compilers (*Verschmelzen* or *Sammlern*), but including also genuinely creative writers—followed finally by a period when "we come to the tragedy of Hebrew literature":

The spirit loses power. The types are exhausted. Imitations begin to abound. Redactions take the place of original creations. Hebrew ceases to be the living language of the people. By this time the collections are grouped together into larger collections. The Canon has come into being.⁷¹

The extrapolative character of Gunkel's portrayal of Israel's literary history, and its dependence upon the "history-of religions" (*Religionsgeschichte*) movement, is indicated clearly in his essay "What Is Left of the Old Testament?" when he refers to the "inferiority

primary orality, [as] a distinct and separate condition of society, and its successors, the proto-literate, the craft-literate, the semi-literate, and the fully literate societies" (Havelock, *The Muse* . . . , 65). The problem is that while pictographs and hieroglyphics may not be "phonetic"—systems of symbols that represent sound by sound an aggregation of sounds (words)—they are very certainly "phonographic"—systems of symbols, each of which is capable of representing a complex or matrix of sounds. In *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), Walter Ong argues along the lines of the distinction between sound and sight, and Havelock acknowledges that "primary communication begins visually with the smile, the frown, the gesture," but insists that "these do not get us very far" (Havelock, 65). However, for Havelock's definition of primary orality to hold, communication would have to take place with no visual contact between the communicating parties. The nearest thing to primary oral communication is a telephone conversation. The point is that orality and literacy seem to be related to each other as the ends of a continuum on which neither ever entirely excludes the other.

⁷¹ Gunkel, "Problems . . . ," in *What Remains* . . . , 65-66.

of Old Testament religion and morality. . . . [T]he Old Testament contains conceptions which . . . have now been outgrown in the history of thought.” But while Gunkel readily acknowledged that such conceptions “can never be forgotten,” it is only “because they were necessary stages in the path of evolution.”⁷²

That orality and literacy exist in a relationship which is not consecutive but concurrent, with the possibility that one or the other will be more prominent at one time than at another,⁷³ has ramifications for the second major *literaturgeschichtliche* supposition: the sequential precedence of shorter oral addresses over against longer written compositions, i.e., Gunkel’s supposition of the inferior receptivity of the ancient hearer. Mortimer Adler has noted that both skillful reading and skillful listening, if they are not “native gifts,” require training.⁷⁴ Even if the primary mode of communication in the Old Testament era were oral-aural, there is a distinct possibility that the “receptivity of the [average] ancient listener” was in actuality superior to that of the average modern, not inferior. If the ancient wanted to learn something, he had no practical alternative but to listen to someone who knew it already. Gunkel’s hypothesis overlooks the reality that the Old Testament literature was not meant primarily to be read (*lesen*) by individual readers, but read aloud (*vorlesen*) to groups of listeners. As for Isaiah 24-27, its sixty-nine verses can be read aloud, even by a relatively unskilled reader, in a half hour or less. This is not exceptionally long for a sermon or address even by late-20th century standards. With a

⁷² Gunkel, “What Is Left. . . ?” in *What Remains . . .*, 33, 37.

⁷³ See note 69.

⁷⁴ Mortimer Adler, *How to Speak/How to Listen* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 3-4.

skilled reader that time can be reduced significantly. Even more, the poetics of this section—repetition, alliteration, assonance, paronomasias, all of which would have been accessible to the experienced listener—lend themselves extremely well to an expressive oral delivery. The address is designed to attract and maintain the attention of listeners whose experience would have enabled them to form the mind’s-eye pictures that contribute to understanding and retaining the point(s) of the message.⁷⁵

Of the Delimiting of Many Pericopes There Is No End

Nevertheless, the main tenets of Gunkel’s *literaturgeschichtliche* reconstruction—terseness, a definite place (*Stelle*) or situation (*Sitz*) in life, and more rigid conventions of genre⁷⁶—continue to set the boundaries and to determine the procedures for the study of the OT prophets today. The first task of any genetic (diachronic) investigation of a text is the determination of its component parts.⁷⁷ The crucial step is “delimitation.”

There is a serious difficulty here. The modern reader/exegete delimits a text into units and then ascribes to each unit an original and historical independence, even though the text provides no evidence of independent circulation. Identifiable units are construed *a priori* as independent units; consequently, unity (coherence) is marginalized at the outset.⁷⁸ Even among those who have begun to argue for a “redactional unity” or to

⁷⁵ With practice I reduced my own time to about 25 minutes. But I do not pretend to have achieved the level of dramatic reading effects—changes of pace, etc.—that are possible for this text.

⁷⁶ “In einem [antiken] Volke . . . ist . . . der einzelne Schriftsteller viel mehr als unter uns durch die für jede Gattung feststehenden Formen . . . gebunden” (Gunkel, *RGG*¹, 1192).

⁷⁷ “Alle literaturgeschichtliche Forschung hat damit zu beginnen, daß man die literarischen Einheiten feststellt” (Gunkel, *RGG*¹, 1191).

⁷⁸ Steck defines the critical assumption “that, as a rule, [a] text . . . has not arisen in a single stroke. Rather, . . . the text has undergone a multi-stage development . . . , an evolution which the methodological approaches ascertain and clarify” (17). Oswald is even more pointed: “Recent studies have tended to

investigate the “function” of a unit such as Isaiah 24-27 as a whole, the scholarly tradition retains as a cardinal doctrine of its received wisdom the composite (*versammelte*) character of the four chapters.⁷⁹ Thus, both the “analytical”—literary (source)-, form-, and historical-critical—and the so-called “synthetic”—transmission-, redaction-, and tradition-historical—disciplines have already determined in advance that coherence is not original. All operate from the presupposition of a final text that is the end product of an ostensibly identifiable process of compilation—and this only over a long period of time.⁸⁰

Early attempts at delimitation were based almost exclusively on referential determinations,⁸¹ although Duhm did make the first apparent effort to identify distinguishable independent units on the basis of genre-oriented considerations (*Orakel* vs. *Lied*). Subsequent studies have employed Gunkel’s presuppositions more heavily. The delimitation of proposed “layers” or “independent units” is based on the identification of inconsistencies in vocabulary, syntax, style, or theme (subject-matter). Such inconsistencies have become a kind of “grammar” for confirming proposed delimitations.

follow form-critical and redaction-critical lines, emphasizing the stages in the development of the segments [of the text]. This approach, by its very method, denies the literary unity of the chapters . . .” (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986], 441).

⁷⁹ “Daß sie jetzt, wie sie uns überliefert sind, eine einheitliche Komposition darstellen . . . ist evident, wobei allerdings »Komposition« betont werden muß” (Wildberger, 893).

⁸⁰ “The criticism of I. Isaiah . . . requires the hypothesis of a long-continued editorial activity.” Cheyne, xxii.

⁸¹ Referential (mimetic) issues remain at the heart of critical investigations, and these issues will be addressed more completely in the chapter on authorship and date. But referential concerns are used also to justify the distinguishing of independent units. Steck, for example, insists “that the question about the text’s presuppositions should be asked for each stage of its development. The changes of a text, or text complex during their oral or written transmission, do not make themselves known without determining each different historical setting or the linguistic patterns and theological streams affecting the text” (Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 20).

Syntactical and semantic features that are considered indicative of inconsistency and, therefore, of redaction include sentence types, vocabulary, word plays, and other poetic features such as alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. Thematic evidence of inconsistency is understood to be indicated by changes of subject matter or of grammatical subject or tense. On the other hand, the *absence* of the same features can also be considered as evidence to support the delimitation of units.⁸² Another important tool for the delimitation of texts is the presence of “organizational markers,”⁸³ which are virtually always understood as “redactional.” Among such markers are particles like הַנְּהַיָּה and independent pronouns, and phrases such as כִּי יְהוּהָ הַדְּבָרָה or בְּיָוֶם הַהוּא. The procedural confusion of form criticism, especially as it applies to Isaiah 24-27, is articulated fully by Redditt:

There is an unmistakably low level of agreement among form critics concerning the analysis of these four chapters. A certain amount of disagreement might be expected, but disagreement about the majority of the pericopes might call into question the suitability or capacity of form criticism to deal with these chapters. Such a conclusion would be unwarranted. There are four factors which contribute to the scholarly divergence of opinion. In some cases . . . , the disagreement is attributable to debates about certain forms. In the second place, these four chapters were skillfully redacted, so that it is not always easy to determine where pericopes begin and end. Differing delineations of the pericopes yield different classifications according to form. In the third place, some of the forms are mixed. One scholar may emphasize one aspect of the form, others a different aspect. . . . Moreover, the prophet(s) seem(s) to have taken numerous liberties with his forms. . . . [Here Redditt includes motifs and rhetorical devices as belonging to the

⁸² Gerald T. Sheppard critiques Marvin A. Sweeney's frequent argument that adjoining passages are “syntactically independent,” noting that all that “Sweeney signifies . . . is that he can find no connective particle, for example, the preposition *ki*” (“The Book of Isaiah: Competing Structures according to a Late Modern Description of Its Shape and Scope,” *SBL Seminar Papers 1992* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 556).

⁸³ Steck, 11.

mixture of forms.] The result of all this is to force the form critic to face the tenuousness of his own work.⁸⁴

The weaknesses indicated here go directly to the heart of Gunkel's *literaturgeschichtliche* presuppositions. The concession that forms might have been mixed raises two questions immediately: (1) whether the forms detected by form-critical approaches are identical to (or resemble even remotely) the original, ancient genres, and (2) whether the conventions of form (genre) were any more rigid among the ancient Hebrews than they are or might be for the modern (20th century) writer. In addition, the lack of precision in terminology⁸⁵ and the lack of clear criteria (or of consistent application of the criteria) for delimiting pericopes join not only to make form criticism's conclusions suspect, but also, contrary to Redditt's disclaimer, to make the question of "the suitability or capacity of form criticism to deal with these chapters" a thoroughly genuine and serious one.

Examining the Assertions of Incoherence of Isaiah 24-27

In this section we examine the evidence adduced by interpreters who regard Isaiah 24-27 as incoherent (not an original textual unity). The first part deals with the relationship of these chapters with the adjacent material, before and behind. The second part considers internal delimitations posited by form- and redaction-critical scholars.

⁸⁴ Redditt, 143-144.

⁸⁵ Redditt calls "motifs" and "rhetorical devices" "forms" (144), and the translator of Steck's handbook includes a note that tries to clarify the confusion of terms like *Form* and *Gattung*, especially when combined with *Geschichte* and *Kritik* (Steck, 105-106, esp. n. 100).

Delimitation of Isaiah 24-27 from its Surrounding Context

The first issue in form- and redaction-critical approaches concerns whether and how independent Isaiah 24-27 is from its surrounding material: the “Gentile oracles” of chapters 13-23 and the Ephraim and Judah materials in chapters 28-33. Duhm regarded the absence of a superscription as justifying the detachment of chapters 24-27 from the preceding.⁸⁶ Isolation of the chapters is considered a given: “Isaiah 24-27 . . . has been viewed as a more or less self-contained section . . . for at least the last one and one-half centuries.”⁸⁷ Wildberger calls the chapters “ein klar abgegrenzten Teil,” then elaborates:

The collection of foreign-nations messages [*Fremdvölkerworte*] is concluded with chapter 23, and with [chapter] 28 again a new part of the book begins, which clearly has nothing more to do with [chapters] 24-27. . . . Indeed, 24-27 announce in a certain sense what 13-23 [had announced] to other peoples, Yahweh’s judgment, however, these chapters are no longer to be counted with the collection of foreign-nation oracles, which has already been indicated, because the typical superscription for each [of them], *גזש*, no longer appears.⁸⁸

Later, however, although he calls it a gloss, Wildberger acknowledges the citation of a portion of 17:6 in 24:13.⁸⁹ Consequently, the certainty of the independence of 24-27 from 13-23 is hardly “undiskutabel.”⁹⁰ In addition, the nomenclature of a collection of “*Fremdvölkerworte*” or “*Fremdvölkerorakeln*” is difficult to sustain. Sweeney, for

⁸⁶ Duhm, *Isaiah*⁵, 172.

⁸⁷ Redditt, 1. See also March (“Two Prophetic Compositions”), where he asserts that “analysis of Isaiah 24-27 presupposes at the outset that these chapters can, in fact, be isolated from their present context” (1). He expands on this remark in a footnote that “though frequently the case is oversimplified and overstated, the basic separateness of 24-27 does seem established” (1-2, n. 1)

⁸⁸ Wildberger, 892.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 898.

⁹⁰ Jedenfalls steht undiskutabel fest, daß die Kapitel in einem gewissen noch näher zu bestimmenden Sinn im Ganzen des Jesajabuches einen klar abgegrenzten Teil für sich bilden” (*Ibid.*, 892).

example, has recognized that “Isaiah 17 begins as an oracle concerning Damascus but quickly shifts its concern to include Ephraim, that is, northern Israel, in v. 3.”⁹¹ Chapter 22, the “burden of (against) the valley of vision,” is an oracle against Judah and Jerusalem. The attempt to distinguish the two sections on the basis of a differentiation between the perceived “particularity” of 13-23 and “universality” of 24-27 fails, in view of the universal nature of remarks in 13:5, 9-13; 14:26; 17:12-14; and 23:9. Both sections treat the elect of YHWH and the **בְּרִיָּא**.

Sweeney says the chapters have “long been recognized as a distinct unit” and argues that the “initial *hinneh*” makes chapters 24-27 “syntactically independent from the preceding material.”⁹² This has been a fairly standard argument. However, Labuschagne has argued that in addition to their use as “deictic interjections,” **הִנֵּה** and **הִנֵּה־הִנֵּה** are used also as conjunctions.⁹³ Muraoka suggests that “the primary function of these particles lies in indicating that the speaker or writer wants to draw the special attention of the hearer or the reader respectively to a fact or object which can be said to be important, new, unexpected, etc.”⁹⁴ And Gibson includes **הִנֵּה־הִנֵּה** among what he calls “macrosyntactic devices”: It “signals a dramatic or noteworthy development. . . . [These particles] may occur in an extended speech or in smaller portions of an ongoing conversation. **הִנֵּה־הִנֵּה(ו)**

⁹¹ Marvin A. Sweeney, “Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27: Toward an Understanding of the Redactional Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah” *JBL* 107/1 (1988): 42-43.

⁹² Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 312.

⁹³ C. J. Labuschagne, “The particles **הִנֵּה** and **הִנֵּה־הִנֵּה**.” *Syntax and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Syntax and Biblical Exegesis*. Oudtestamentische Studien XVIII (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 1-14.

⁹⁴ T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), 138.

may draw attention either to something that has happened or to something that is about to happen.” He notes also that “[t]he participle is greatly employed in describing scenes of a striking kind and in circumstantial clauses . . . [and] used with such particles as הִנֵּה . . . , adding colour to a description or intention.”⁹⁵ Accordingly, while it is possible to read and understand chapters 24-27 apart from the preceding material—to see them as “self-contained”—they cannot totally be separated from that material. Even if הִנֵּה is viewed as a “deictic interjection,” it remains a syntactical connection; and in terms of the progression of an argument, chapters 13-23 form the basis of the prophet’s message in chapters 24-27.

In regard to the relationship between chapters 24-27 and 28-33, Sweeney points to הִנֵּה as an indication of syntactical discontinuity.⁹⁶ Further, he asserts as a distinction the fact that chapters 28-33 are “concerned with the Ephraimite kingdom and the implications of its experience for Judah.”⁹⁷ But when he attempts to demonstrate the “indications that 27:1-13 may have a different origin from that of 24:1-26:21,” he points out that “ch. 27 focuses especially on Israel.”⁹⁸ Consequently there is a definite semantic connection between the two units. In addition, it is to be noted that הִנֵּה can be translated simply (and appropriately) as a call to attention, “Ho!” as in Is. 55:1, and not necessarily as “Woe!”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ J. C. L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar Syntax*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 91.

⁹⁶ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 312.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁹⁹ Sheppard catches Sweeney here, too: “Sweeney is not so clear about how to evaluate the ‘woe’ at the beginning of a unit. . . . At one place it appears to work connectively . . . (e.g., 5:8-24), at another place (10:5-23) the *hoy* . . . is ‘a syntactically independent *hoy* exclamation . . .’” (Sheppard, “Competing Structures,” 556).

If “the wreath of Ephraim” (28:1) and “the city where David settled” (29:1) missed the “burdens” (in chapters 13-23) that included them, or if they think they can persist in ignoring the truth that YHWH’s judgment will encompass all nations (chapters 24-27) including them, chapters 28-33 are designed to disabuse them of their misconception.

In this admittedly limited review we find that the syntactic and semantic evidence used to identify Isaiah 24-27 as a “self-contained” or “independent” composition, which is to be distinguished from its surroundings, does not necessarily support such an isolation. In fact, the data offer strong evidence for syntactical and semantic coherence.

Internal Delimitations of Isaiah 24-27

Within the so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse,” there are so many variations in proposed delimitations that, rather than treat each case *in situ*, I have arranged the arguments into groups on the basis of the shared features which are commonly adduced to support delimitation. The main arguments for delimitation in Isaiah 24-27 refer to the following features:

- the use of “redactional formulas,” especially **כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר** and **בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא**
- changes of person (which may or may not be indicated by the presence of emphatic [independent] personal pronouns) or aspect (perfective, imperfective) or verbal forms (participle, infinitive)
- changes in “mood” (e.g., joy vs. sadness) or “perspective” (e.g., universal vs. particular)

Redactional Formulas

“YHWH speech formulas” occur twice in these chapters: at 24:3 and at 25:8. At 24:3 the formula **כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר** is supplemented or amplified by a specific object **הַיְזָה**

הַדְבָר. The celebrated phrase הַהוּא בְּיָוִם occurs seven times.¹⁰⁰ Redditt considers הַבְּאִים in 27:6 a “corrupt form”¹⁰¹ of הַהוּא בְּיָוִם, but there is no evidence to substantiate the proposal.

Despite the fact that the designation of these phrases as “redactional” is standard, their citation to confirm the delimitation of (independent) literary units is marked by a growing inconsistency. Duhm made his position clear from the first occurrence of the speech formula in Is. 1:2: “Der Satz: Jahwe redet! ist bei Jes. nicht Phrase.”¹⁰² At 24:3 he considered the phrase particularly prolix (*ungewöhnlich weitläufig*) because of the exactness indicated by its object הַדְבָר הַזֶּה. That he considered it redactional is clear in his treatment of 25:6-8, “die durch den Schlußsatz, ‘denn Jahwe hat’s geredet’ wieder als Zusammenfassung alter Weissagungen bezeichnet zu werden scheinen. . . .”¹⁰³ Millar is most extreme; he excises all of the formulas as redactional and “expansionistic.”¹⁰⁴ Not exactly opposite, but certainly poles apart is Sweeney, whose concentration on “syntactical connection,” i.e., the presence of simple conjunctions such as כִּי and וְ, renders the significance of the speech formulas marginal in his presentation.

Redditt applies his criteria for the speech formulas most consistently—he alone interprets both appearances of כִּי יְהוָה דְבָר as a “concluding formula”¹⁰⁵—but in neither

¹⁰⁰ In 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; and 27:1, 2, 12 and 13.

¹⁰¹ Redditt, 136. *BHS* suggests בְּאִי הַיּוֹם.

¹⁰² Duhm, *Isaiah*⁵, 224.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰⁴ Millar, 26, n.2; 42.

¹⁰⁵ Redditt, 70, 116.

case is it the decisive evidence for him. Wildberger remarks that in some places the formula occurs at the end of an oracle, in others at the beginning,¹⁰⁶ and so he concludes: “Es ist also keineswegs so sicher, wie manche annehmen, daß das Orakel von 1-3a bereits mit 3b zu Ende ist.”¹⁰⁷ March puts it bluntly: “[T]he phrase כִּי יְהוָה הִבְרִיךְ in itself proves nothing. . . .”¹⁰⁸

The role of בְּיָוֵם הַהוּא as a redactional formula is similarly uncertain. Duhm asserted in his commentary at Is. 2:11 that “בְּיָוֵם הַהוּא is so popular with the compilers [*Sammlern*] and interpolators [*Ergänzern*] of the prophetic books, that one must always regard it suspiciously at first.”¹⁰⁹ But he concluded that its authenticity (*Echtheit*) at 2:11 was assured (*geschützt*), “because of its position and continuation” (durch die Stellung und die Fortsetzung)—the “continuation” indicated by כִּי at the beginning of 2:12.¹¹⁰ In chapters 24-27, Duhm counts the following occurrences of בְּיָוֵם הַהוּא as authentic or original (though not Isaianic): 24:21; 27:1, 12, 13. He makes no comment at all about these instances. The remainder—25:9; 26:1; 27:1— are interpolations or glosses.¹¹¹ But there is no consistency between the position of בְּיָוֵם הַהוּא in the

¹⁰⁶ However, Raabe points out that there are only two occasions when the formula is used to introduce something that follows: at Is. 1:2 and Jer. 13:15, and in both instances is used with the imperative of a verb concerning hearing (Raabe, 249).

¹⁰⁷ Wildberger, 897.

¹⁰⁸ March, “Two Prophetic Compositions . . . , 104.

¹⁰⁹ Duhm, *Isaiah*², 19. In the 5th edition, p. 42, *Abschreibern* (“copyists”) appears in place of *Ergänzern*.

¹¹⁰ Duhm, *Isaiah*⁵, 42.

¹¹¹ This observation is based not on specific commentary by Duhm, but on the typeface plan described at the beginning of his commentary.

respective verses and Duhm's determination of their originality. In fact, his decisions about the originality or authenticity of these verses have nothing to do with the phrase itself and everything to do with Duhm's prior decisions about the historical referents—25:9-11 is the latest material in the section; according to Duhm, from the time of Alexander Jannaeus.¹¹²

Cheyne described **הַהוּא בַּיּוֹם** as “an interpolator's phrase,” but only in connection with its lone occurrence in Isaiah 40-66.¹¹³ He ignored it in its more frequent use in Isaiah 24-27 and in Isaiah 1-39 in general. Redditt, again, exhibits the most consistency, although even he does not always cite the appearance of **הַהוּא בַּיּוֹם** in justifying his delimitations. Wildberger insists that “[die] bekannte[] Einleitungsformel . . . ist im Jesajabuch fast durchgehend Kennzeichen von Nachträgen.”¹¹⁴ Sweeney's criterion for the redactional role of **הַהוּא בַּיּוֹם** appears to be: If **הַהוּא בַּיּוֹם** leads the sentence—as at 26:1; 27:1, 2—it “indicates clearly that . . . a new unit” begins.¹¹⁵ If the phrase follows an opening word, then it is not (necessarily) redactional. At 24:21 and 27:12, 13, **וְהָיָה** precedes **הַהוּא בַּיּוֹם**; at 25:9, **וְאָמַר**. Since these verbs include the conjunction **וְ**, they would appear to conform to Sweeney's prominent principle of “syntactical connection.” But this illustrates further the fact that the so-called “redactional” formulas are misnamed, for they are not in themselves sufficient to define pericopes or to indicate a redactional process at work. Erlandsson articulates a sensible approach:

¹¹² Duhm, *Isaiah*⁵, 172.

¹¹³ Is. 52:6. Cheyne, *Introduction*, 304.

¹¹⁴ Wildberger, 898.

¹¹⁵ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 334.

A survey of the use of the expression **בְּיוֹם הַהוּא** in the Book of Isaiah clearly demonstrates that only through distortion of the context can it be removed from the divers [*sic*] texts, as it is the vehicle for various subtleties in composition. To be sure, later editors may have availed themselves of this expression to supplement or underscore an important point in their exposition. But this expression in itself cannot serve as a criterion to enable one to determine whether editors long after the prophet's own time were responsible for such additions. If the content does not clearly point to a later period, then it is most likely that the prophet or his closest disciples are involved. One cannot rightfully speak of "the characteristically late expression 'On that Day'" and permit the bare occurrence of this expression to be decisive in the determination of the oracle's authenticity.¹¹⁶

Changes of Person, Aspect, or Verbal Mood

In the effort to identify and isolate originally independent blocks of material, another set of proposed indicators includes changes of grammatical person, aspect, or mood (indicative, participial, infinitive). Again, however, this approach exhibits no consistent criteria for deciding when such changes do indicate redaction and when they do not.

Sweeney's discussion of the larger structure of chapters 24-27 illustrates. He divides the section into two main parts: chapter 24, an announcement of judgment, and chapters 25-27, an announcement of salvation or blessings.¹¹⁷ He bases this division in part on his observation that "24:1-23 primarily employs descriptive language with 3rd-person references to YHWH . . . , whereas 25:1-5 employs a 1st-person perspective for its speaker together with a 2nd-person masculine singular address form directed to YHWH."¹¹⁸ But he acknowledges immediately that "the text shifts back to 3rd-person

¹¹⁶ Seth Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 4 (Uppsala: CWK Gleerup, 1970), 72.

¹¹⁷ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 311-312.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 327.

descriptive language about YHWH in 25:6. . . .” And he undermines his overview of the perspective in chapter 24 by acknowledging the occurrence of 1st-person speech in 24:16 and of 2nd-person address in 24:17—changes of person or perspective—but he qualifies these because they are not addressed to YHWH. In short, the problem is not simply that changes of grammatical person are not decisive as such, but that in one place a change is indicative of a breakpoint between literary units while in another it is not.

In his treatment of internal structure (subunits), there is a similar equivocation in the application of these kinds of criteria. Sweeney delimits 24:1-2 from 24:3 on the basis of the change of subject—from YHWH to the earth—even though he acknowledges that the two passages share a “common theme of earthly devastation.”¹¹⁹ Later, however, he ignores the shifts of person in 24:14-23, in order to preserve his proposed “prophetic disputation pattern.” The question must be posed that if a change in grammatical person is delimitive in one instance but not in another, on what grounds is such a decision to be made?

Elder’s treatment of the same passages amplifies the confusion. He argues for delimitation of 24:1-3 as a unit, first on the basis of a change in meter, but adds: “More significant is the striking shift in verb tense from imperfect to perfect.”¹²⁰ So, Sweeney delimits 24:1-2 from the following on the basis of a shift in person, Elder delimits 24:1-3 on the basis of a shift in tense. Which shift takes priority: person or tense? And why?

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Elder, 85.

Changes in Theme (Subject), Mood or Perspective

A third approach to the identification of redactional or independent literary units looks for changes in subject matter, in mood or tone, or in perspective. Changes in mood or tone include such moves as from sorrow (lament) to joy (praise). Changes in perspective include proposed shifts from particular to universal (or vice versa) and from description (of past or present) to prophecy (future), or vice versa. This approach is more thematic or content-oriented than the previous approach, which concentrated on formal (morphological) characteristics.

Once again, there are no consistent criteria in this approach. March and Sweeney divide the whole of Isaiah 24-27 into two main parts, but with different limits. An examination of their respective argumentation will demonstrate the weakness of the approach.

March defines the first prophetic composition as 24:1-20. He admits: "There are some things which 24:21-23 has in common with this poem [24:1-20], but for the most part it is quite different. The subject is no longer the same, a new vocabulary appears, the tone becomes a little less immediate, and . . . some of the material in 24:1-20 is given a new interpretation."¹²¹ He insists further that "24:16-20 is brought to a well-defined climax and . . . the following material introduces new themes controlled by a different purpose. . . ."¹²² In contrast, Sweeney is persuaded that "24:21-23 constitutes a

¹²¹ March, "Two Prophetic Compositions," 53.

¹²² Ibid.

concluding section, introduced by the [בְּיִוִּם יְהוָה] formula . . . , which explains the consequences of the previous material. . . .”¹²³

On the other hand, Sweeney divides chapters 24-27 into two “compositions” at the juncture between chapters 24 and 25. His arguments, as we have seen, include the absence of “syntactical connection” between 24:23 and 25:1, and the change of person and address—from description of YHWH to address to YHWH. In contrast, March sees, if not a “syntactical connection,” at least a connection on the basis of “a variety of cultic materials arranged in a purposeful manner.”¹²⁴

In response to the announcement of Yahweh’s reign (24:21-23) a song of praise is raised by the people. The song extols the great acts of God and . . . the overthrow of . . . Yahweh’s enemies. . . . The overthrow of all hostile powers will have a significant consequence. The nations will recognize the reign of Yahweh and yield to him (25:3). . . . The fact that they do turn to Yahweh prepares the way for the great feast that follows in 25:6-8. While the central function of this piece is to laud Yahweh, it also serves to stress the care that Yahweh extends to his people . . . and to bridge the gap between the judgment in 24:21-23 and the note of universalism that appears in 25:6-8.¹²⁵

Some questions arise: How much is “a little less immediate”? And how much less immediacy is necessary and sufficient to decide the break between the two compositions? What constitutes a “new interpretation” of previous material? If YHWH is to be extolled for his conquest (judgment) of his enemies, is he not also to be praised for his judgment of the earth (24:1-20)? March’s argument shows the thematic connections not only between

¹²³ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 327.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

his second proposed composition (24:21-27:1) and the first (24:1-20), but also between this material and the “Gentile oracles” of chapters 13-23.

At the other end, March’s second composition ends with 27:1, because he regards the balance of chapter 27 as secondary, “not integrally related to the compositions with which they now stand and with which they have been transmitted.”¹²⁶

The similarity of the theme of this song [27:2-6] and . . . 24:21-27:1 makes it . . . tempting to connect the two. . . . But . . . while 27:2-6 does express confidence in Yahweh and his care, the theme is actually quite different from that of 24:21-27:1. None of the mythological motifs encountered in 24:21-27:1 appear in 27:2-6, nor is there any emphasis on Yahweh’s kingship. Secondly, . . . the language . . . is unlike that of the preceding material. Apart from a few instances, none of the key terms of 24:21-27:1 are used here. Further, the manner in which proper names are employed in 27:2-6 is in strong contrast to 24:21-27:1. Finally, this song adds nothing to 24:21-27:1.¹²⁷

More questions arise: Are not YHWH’s kingship and his care for his people “integrally related”? Even if “[n]one of the mythological motifs” is repeated—an exception could be, in my estimate, the motif of war and peace (26:3, 12; 27:7-10)—there is an assortment of such metaphors (mythological motifs?)—the feast on the mountain (25:6-8), the level path (26:7ff.), peace (26:3, 12), the fruitful vineyard (27:2-6), the eschatological harvest (27:12) and the “great trumpet” (27:13)—all of which signify YHWH’s glory and reign. But the presence of an assortment of motifs does not constitute by itself a necessary and sufficient condition to deny literary coherence.

¹²⁶ March, “Two Prophetic Compositions,” 187.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

Summary Observations

The view of the literary coherence of the Isaiah Apocalypse has undergone a series of shifts from pre-critical presumption of unity through classical critical presumption of disunity to a point today where current biblical scholarship is attempting to use “synthetic” methodologies to reassemble the pieces created previously by the “analytical” critical disciplines. But there is a fundamental clash of “paradigms,” as the results obtained by synthetic methods contradicts the received wisdom of previous generations of analysis.

The results of an inquiry into the literary coherence of a block of biblical material depend thoroughly on the inquirer’s concept of “text.” Contemporary users of synthetic methods still operate principally on the assumption of a redacted unity. Their results are consequently predetermined by their (or others’) prior analytical work. Moreover, neither the analytical procedures nor the synthetic ones include any necessary and sufficient criteria, which direct equally the work of all inquirers into a given block of material. As a result, both the application of the methods and their results are inconsistent.

Work in Isaiah 24-27 has not advanced appreciably beyond G. W. Anderson’s perception that there is some kind of unity (coherence) to the chapters, but of a kind that is unusual. No one has approached the text with an allowance for the possibility that the coherence these chapters seem to exhibit might be original, and studied it on that basis. The present state of investigations into the coherence of Isaiah 24-27 remains incoherent. Consequently, there is a need for a fresh look at Isaiah 24-27, with a more comprehensive theory or perspective on textuality, one that allows for the full range of possible coherences, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.

CHAPTER 2

THE DATE OF ISAIAH 24-27

The question of the date of Isaiah 24-27 is a subset of the larger question of authenticity.¹ Authenticity includes other issues, for example, authorship² and purpose (as a function of historical setting), but the central concern is dating. However, the work of determining a date for the material is complicated by two factors: First, because the dominant view among scholars is that the chapters are not an original, unitary literary composition, the scholarly literature distinguishes between the date of the final form of the book—that is, its “received” or “canonical” shape—and the dates of its components (oracles and other forms). The second factor is a by-product of the first. It is the uncritical acceptance of post-exilic dating, which skews the interpretation of the evidence.

¹ R. Rendtorff writes: “Scholarly exegesis has attempted above all to use the resources of literary criticism to free the original, ‘authentic’ sayings of the prophets from later revisions. . .” (*The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 188). But he acknowledges also the problem that arises from such efforts, viz. “a canon within the canon, in that certain words of scripture are given a greater status than others, the criteria being derived from a historical judgment on the authenticity of a prophetic saying” (189).

² Kuenen insisted that authorship and date determine authenticity: “The highest point we can aim at, in a historical investigation, is . . . [when] we hear *the prophet himself* express his ideas, and we accept . . . unhesitatingly and unreservedly the testimony which he thus delivers concerning himself” (*Prophets*, 27, emphasis original).

The aim of this chapter is to identify and examine the exegetical practices and, above all, the hermeneutical principles which have governed the prevailing views of the date of the “Isaiah Apocalypse.”

Survey of Views and Argumentation

Assertions that a particular observation or conclusion is “obvious” or “clear” are usually dangerous; however, it is both clear and obvious that there is no unanimity about the dating of Isaiah 24-27. In fact, there is little that can even be described as a consensus in dating these chapters, except for the prevailing insistence that they are non-Isaianic,³ which always means post-Isaianic. Some might acknowledge the incorporation of Isaianic allusions, and surveys of the positions on dating will usually acknowledge that there are proponents of an Isaianic (that is, eighth-century BC) provenance, but the position is rarely examined in detail. Although it is now more than a hundred years old, Driver’s summary of the arguments against the authenticity of Isaiah 24-27 continues to describe the general critical view:

Modern critics agree generally in the opinion that this prophecy is not Isaiah’s: and (chiefly) for the following reasons: —

1. It lacks a suitable *occasion* in Isaiah’s age. . . .
2. The literary treatment (in spite of certain phraseological points of contact with Isaiah) is in many respects unlike Isaiah’s.
3. There are features in the representation and contents of the prophecy which seem to spring out of a different (and later) vein of thought from Isaiah’s . . . , which, though they may be found occasionally in Isaiah, are never aggregated in his writings as they are here.⁴

³ “Daß die Kap. 24-27 des Jesajabuches nicht von Jesaja, dem Sohn des Amoz, herzuleiten sind, gehört . . . zu den festen Resultaten der Literarkritik, die kaum mehr der Diskussion bedürfen” (Wildberger, 892).

⁴ S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1892), 208-209.

Today the commonly accepted range of dates for Isaiah 24-27 is from the sixth century BC (nominally the Fall of Jerusalem in 587/586) to sometime in the second century BC (based on the date ascribed to the Isaiah scroll discovered at Qumran).⁵ Reasons for the lack of consensus vary. Sweeney attributes the difficulty in part to the variety of forms: the “mixture of hymnic material, prose, and other forms of poetry.”⁶ But the main reason is the “lack of specific historical allusions”⁷ or the “ambiguity of . . . alleged . . . allusions.”⁸ The argumentation for or against a particular date is wide-ranging. On the one hand, this might be construed as signifying a large body of equally compelling data from which to draw, but in fact the argumentation—the interpretation of the evidence—is quite inconsistent.

Detailed historical surveys of dating proposals are in good supply;⁹ we need not retrace that ground here, except to describe the general movement in dating theories. It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that this movement is not uniform. At virtually any point in time, there were or are adherents to an assortment of dates, but we can speak of dominant or predominant views. The dominant pre-critical view held to a “traditional,” eighth-century, Isaianic date of composition, no matter when the date of fulfillment. Under the influence of the “scientific” approaches to the study of the biblical texts, not only the date of fulfillment, but also the date of composition, was pushed quickly into the

⁵ I am ignoring here the proposal attributed to van Gilse for a second century AD date. See Redditt, 268.

⁶ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 316.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Redditt, 245-246.

⁹ E.g., March, “Two Prophetic Compositions,” xi-xxviii; Redditt, “Isaiah 24-27,” 232-268; Wildberger, 905-906.

post-exilic period. Redditt attributes the initial proposal for a second-century BC date to Vatke,¹⁰ but this date received its most influential support from Bernhard Duhm.

March's arrangement of the "theories of provenance" reflects this overall movement in the history of dating the Isaiah Apocalypse. As March's arrangement indicates, and as the conclusion of his dissertation eventually reveals,¹¹ the overall trend has subsequently reversed course. Not even Duhm persuaded everyone of his time. Cheyne, for example, maintained a date in the second half of the fourth century, as the Persian empire went into decline,¹² and he cited Kuenen's observation of "a growing *consensus* of placing the prophecy in the Persian period."¹³ Rudolph's late fourth-century solution focused on the destruction of Babylon by Alexander in 331 BC as the key.¹⁴ A landmark study by Lindblom¹⁵ argued for early Persian (fifth century) dating of the Apocalypse.

The range of suggested dates has narrowed somewhat in studies conducted since G. W. Anderson reconsidered Isaiah 24-27. He assigned the chapters to "about the date to which Lindblom assigns them,"¹⁶ but not for all the same reasons. The primary insight

¹⁰ Redditt, 265. He (Redditt) also reports that Vatke changed his view, more than fifty years later, to a fourth-century date. Cheyne explains that Vatke's later view appeared in the posthumous publication of his *Einleitung* (Cheyne, 160).

¹¹ He develops a sixth-century date.

¹² Cheyne, 155-160. He reacts to Duhm's position, but his critique is quite mild: Duhm's view "disturbs well-grounded views of the history of the canon" (161).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴ W. Rudolph, *Jesaja 24-27*, BWANT 62 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1933), 62-63.

¹⁵ J. Lindblom, *Die Jesaja-Apokalypse, Jes. 24-27*, LUÅ N.N. 1, 34/3 (Lund: Gleerup; Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1938).

¹⁶ Anderson, "Isaiah xxiv-xxvii reconsidered," 125.

he derived from Lindblom's work was an impression of the Apocalypse's unity. Contrary to Duhm's segregation of the songs from the rest of the composition, Anderson argued that "it is to the precise and concrete allusions of the lyrical passages that reference must in the first instance be made in order to establish a date. . . ." ¹⁷ He looked to the affinities between the Apocalypse and the messages of "Deutero-Isaiah," Haggai, and Zechariah, as indications of a growing tendency in the prophetic literature to combine a cosmic outlook with down-to-earth historical realities. ¹⁸ For Anderson the transition from prophecy to apocalyptic is just getting underway in Isaiah 24-27 and what he believes to be its contemporary literature. They belong to the "age of prophecy," and yet they show the signs of a shifting paradigm.

Redditt satisfied himself with a broader range than most: between 515 and 380 BC. ¹⁹ The main ingredients in his argument are his perception that the perspective of chapter 27 is looking back at the exile as having been completed and his view that the opening colon of 26:21 refers to the postexilic temple, YHWH's "place." ²⁰ In the first instance the key verse is 27:8, but Redditt's conclusion is based on a proposal to recast הָרִי יִבְנֶה as a third-person singular perfect form, in order that it parallel הָרִי יִבְנֶה, for no other reason than that "it is the only instance in the last fifteen verses where God is addressed in

¹⁷ Ibid., 123.

¹⁸ In fact, most of the prophetic books perform this combination of the cosmic and the historical. Anderson does not specify what criteria establish or demonstrate such a move as a growing tendency.

¹⁹ Redditt, 283.

²⁰ Ibid., 277-278.

the second person.”²¹ It is much easier to accept Delitzsch’s solution of repointing הָגִיחַ as an infinitive. Thus the final colon serves as still another elaboration on YHWH’s main action of “contending” (root: רִיב). The -בִּי constructions in the verse can be translated as means (“by driving out,” etc.), but they can be temporal constructions also (“when”). The tenor of the verse actually tends more toward an action *not yet* complete; whether it is already in progress or yet to begin is not fully clear.

Redditt’s arguments for a *terminus ad quem* of 380 are no more compelling. He follows Plöger in general, by understanding chapter 27 in terms of “the reunification of the two Israelite states.” He employs an argument from silence: there is “no evidence of hostility toward the northern kingdom.”²² In actuality the passage quite defies assignment to any particular historical period. The nomenclature for the people of YHWH here is fundamentally timeless: “Jacob” and “Israel.” The passage has no necessary interest in political entities; the theological entity of the covenant people, the faithful who belong to YHWH, is what counts.²³ Redditt’s second point focuses on the מְבַנִּים mentioned in 27:9. His argument is essentially based on compressing the occurrences of the word מְבַנִּים into a common timeframe—“late seventh century or later.”²⁴ Emphasis should be placed on “later,” since it is the use of the word by “the Chronicler” that seems

²¹ Ibid., 54-55. Redditt refers to the possibility that “the verb has suffered in transmission.” However, the possibility of a scribal confusion of a ך and a ך cannot help him change the “well-supported” form of the text from second person to third.

²² Ibid., 279. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 350, employs basically the same argument.

²³ Redditt reflects on Plöger’s work about a supposed relationship between Judah and Ephraim (Samaria) and concludes that “the whole land (verse 12) will be cleansed and made holy” (Ibid., 280, n. 92). However, it is not the land that is (re)claimed in 27:12, but the people (“sons of Israel”).

²⁴ Ibid., 281.

to be determinative for Redditt, so that the term effectively becomes a static, technical one. Redditt suggests that “the Chronicler knew precisely what **מזבחות** were,”²⁵ and that they were late replacements for some other kind of pre-exilic altar.²⁶ However, the Chronicler employs the word to describe altars only in pre-exilic contexts: the reigns of Asa (ninth century!) and Josiah (seventh century). Therefore, either the Chronicler applied the term **מזבחות** anachronistically to preexilic altars, or in fact it was a term that had a much wider (and earlier) use than Redditt has allowed.

Wildberger narrows the range only slightly—between 500 and 400, vs. Redditt’s 515 and 380.²⁷ His argument along *wortgebräuchliche* grounds is sketchy at best. He refers to Mulder’s analysis but sees in it nothing to require late postexilic dating: “The language of the Apocalypse is that of the Persian epoch and belongs in general more to the early- than to the late-Persian period.”²⁸ He spends more time evaluating “Die eschatologischen Vorstellungen,” a topic which concerns also the questions of genre and the relation of Isaiah 24-27 to apocalyptic, to which we shall apply ourselves in more detail in chapter 3. But Wildberger includes here also the matter of the ideas or themes (*Motive*) in the section. The problem is the intermingling of universal concepts like world-judgment with motifs that are typically part of “prophetism.” His argument is a process of elimination: the absence of more typical apocalyptic themes and figures leads him to

²⁵ Ibid., 282.

²⁶ Ibid., 281, on the basis of de Vaux.

²⁷ Wildberger, 911. Although Clements (*Isaiah 1-39*) is regarded as a key commentator, he follows Wildberger so closely as not to warrant separate mention.

²⁸ Ibid., 908.

conclude that “die sogenannte Jesaja-Apokalypse ist eher weiter von der Apokalyptik entfernt als etwa Protosacharia.”²⁹ Wildberger’s third line of argumentation concerns the dependence of Isaiah 24-27 on earlier biblical literature. “The authors [*Die Verfasser*] of Is. 24-27 must have been familiar with the other parts of the Book of Isaiah, as well as with other prophetic books, and they speak their language.”³⁰ Like Cheyne a century ago, Wildberger lists a number of allusions to the rest of Isaiah and to other prophetic literature, whose dating becomes the measure for dating the material in the present section. This procedure assumes, of course, that the dating of the other literature is correct and that the dependence moves from the other literature to the Isaiah Apocalypse. Wildberger’s argumentation shows that a late date (fourth century BC or later) is not tenable, but the postexilic character is largely assumed.

Although Wildberger insists on an *Ergänzungs-* or *Wachstumsprozess* for the emergence of Isaiah 24-27, Sweeney is the commentator who postulates the most extended depiction of a redactional process for the development of the passage. In his view chapter 27 actually antedates the rest of the composition, stemming from the late seventh century during the Josianic reform. Chapters 24-26 belong to a sixth-century redaction.³¹

In addition to arguing that the use of the terms “Jacob” and “Israel” to the neglect of “Judah” and “Jerusalem” is evidence for a seventh-century date, Sweeney applies the

²⁹ Ibid., 910.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 51.

gathering of the “sons of Israel” in 27:12-13 to the attempt by Josiah “to bring the territory of the former northern kingdom . . . back to Davidic rule and worship of YHWH at Jerusalem (2 Kings 23).”³² Although he admits that “the motif of the return . . . can . . . relate to the late 8th century, . . . it receives special emphasis during the reign of . . . Josiah. . . .”³³ But if the distinction between an eighth-century setting and a sixth-century one is only a matter of “special emphasis,” then there is a reasonable case for suggesting that the *original* setting might have been the eighth-century one, because *emphasis* suggests that there is some prior occurrence to which a more emphatic occurrence can be compared. Sweeney argues further that “the references to Egypt and Assyria as locations of the Israelite exiles” are better suited to a late-seventh century date. He asserts that “Josiah’s program of national and religious restoration provides a fitting context for the return of exiles from Egypt and Assyria, especially since these countries proved to be Josiah’s major enemies at the time.” However, the same data can be interpreted to support an eighth-century date and weaken the case for a seventh-century one. First is the matter of Egypt and Assyria as locations of exile. Assyria’s final invasion of the northern kingdom was provoked by Hoshea’s renegeing on his commitment to pay tribute to Shalmaneser and instead sending envoys to So, king of Egypt (2 Kings 17:1-6). The resulting invasion and deportation of Israelites by Shalmaneser is clearly reported. But it seems at least possible, perhaps even probable, that Israelite refugees could have sought asylum in Egypt during the same time. This scenario is consistent with the data in the

³² Ibid., 350.

³³ Ibid.

texts and supports an eighth-century date. On the other hand, by the time Josiah consolidated his reforms, ca. 622 (his eighteenth year), Assyria was well into decline—within ten years of Nineveh’s fall. That Josiah was able to make an expedition into Samaria suggests Assyria’s weakening grip on the region and reduces the likelihood that Assyria was still a “major” enemy. Indeed, the projection of Assyrian power in the region seems to have been all but gone, so that within a few years (609 BC) Neco of Egypt had to mount a campaign to help Assyria against the rising power of Babylon, during which Josiah led his ill-fated attack on the Egyptians at Megiddo. Finally, with respect to the dating of chapter 27, Sweeney interprets the perspective of the chapter quite opposite to Redditt and Plöger.³⁴ He insists that “ch. 27 cites other Isaianic texts that condemn the northern kingdom,”³⁵ and he accepts a preexilic setting for the מִן־יָמֵינוּ.

For chapters 24-26 Sweeney accepts a date “in the early Persian period,” in company with Anderson, Hanson, Johnson, and Millar, though not necessarily employing the same arguments.³⁶ Sweeney employs a four-part argument, but he depends primarily on what he perceives as “affinities” between Isaiah 24-27 and Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah; and the fundamental affinity is the shared “universal outlook” of this literature.³⁷

³⁴ See above, p. 47.

³⁵ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 351.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 316-320. See also G. W. Anderson, “Isaiah xxiv-xxvii reconsidered;” Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*; W. Millar, *Isaiah 24-27*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 320.

Sweeney builds his case for a sixth-century composition of Isaiah 24-26 first on identifying the *קְרִיַת־תְּהוֹי* as Babylon. He points first to the relationship between Is. 24:17-18a and Jer. 48:43-44a, construing the Jeremiah passage as the earlier and original passage, which the Isaianic composer or redactor has cited.³⁸ However, there is no real evidence for making Jeremiah the original and Isaiah the copy;³⁹ the argument rests on the scholar's own suppositions about the history reflected in the passages and about the formation of ideas. Sweeney's second argument is that *קְרִיַת־תְּהוֹי* is a pun on *ti'amat* and alludes therefore to Babylon.⁴⁰ This is certainly possible, but it doesn't settle the matter of dating, unless it is assumed that Babylonian creation mythology remained essentially unknown to Judah until the Exile. While reconstructions of Israel's history have minimized the influence of the Solomonic kingdom in comparison to the biblical presentation, it seems highly unlikely that there was no interaction between Israel/Judah and the peoples of the eastern empires until the occasions of invasion and conquest. In fact, the material in Isaiah 36-39 (parallel 2 Kings 18-20) confirms that there was contact between Judah and Babylon in the Assyrian period.

The second part of Sweeney's argument is the key: He supposes that the "universal outlook of chs. 24-27 . . . corresponds to the ideology of the late 6th

³⁸ Ibid., 318.

³⁹ Cheyne acknowledges: "In comparing . . . parallels we may . . . be occasionally uncertain which is the original passage, and which the copy" (148). He insists that "in many cases the conjecture is a reasonable one that the writers of both [passages] belong to the same period, and that that period is a late one;" however, it remains conjecture, and a just as reasonable case can be made in our instance for Jeremiah's dependence on Isaiah. The supposition that things move from particular to universal is not an absolute.

⁴⁰ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 318.

century.”⁴¹ He focuses in particular on the similar use of traditions, motifs, and forms between Isaiah 24-27 and Deutero-Isaiah, and on the “anticipation of YHWH’s establishment of Zion at the center of the nations” shared with Haggai, Zechariah, and Trito-Isaiah. These observations depend on a uniform use of traditions, motifs, and forms at a particular period of time—a kind of prophetic trendiness that the modern investigator can presumably identify and discriminate. But in fact these things are not confined to the post-exilic prophetic literature; indeed, the motif of Zion as the gathering place of the nations appears in Isaiah 2.

Closely associated with his second line of argumentation are Sweeney’s third and fourth points: “citations of prophetic tradition” and the reference to Moab in 25:10b. In addition to the alleged citation of Jeremiah 48, Sweeney points to quotations of Hosea, Amos, and Micah. But these three are known to be eighth-century prophets. In the case of Hosea, for example, Andersen and Freedman conclude that the book of Hosea was probably available in its canonical shape by sometime early in the seventh century. There is no compelling reason why the writer of Isaiah 24-27 could not have had access to such a work. Nevertheless, Sweeney insists that

in each case, the quoted text is drawn from a context that deals specifically with the punishment of Israel (or Moab in the case of Isa. 24:17-18a/Jer. 48:43-44a), but each is universalized in that references to the punishment of Israel are replaced with references to the punishment of the earth. The motivation in each case appears to lie in the contexts from which they were cited. In those contexts, universal language or the implications of Israel’s punishment are expressed in relation to the earth at large. The author of chs. 24-27 is apparently applying a hermeneutic that sees the punishment of Israel as a paradigm for the punishment of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 319.

the entire earth. In the present instance, such a view is legitimized by the application of past prophecy to the present situation. . . .⁴²

Sweeney's approach ignores the context of chapters 24-27 in the book of Isaiah.⁴³

The oracles against the nations in chapters 13-23 constitute the particulars which are—in the context!—adduced as evidence for the writer's interpretive move from particular to universal. We see here the intertwining of the coherence and authenticity issues. As we noted in chapter 1, Sweeney determined that the *הנה* in 24:1 and the *הנה* in 28:1 are disjunctive; consequently, he brackets citations or allusions drawn from chapters 13-23,⁴⁴ which might show coherence with chapters 24-27 and, to the extent that chapters 13-23 are accepted as Isaianic, also indicate authenticity. Nevertheless, the crucial citation remains the Jeremiah passage. The hermeneutical principles in use are that the movement of thought is always from particular to universal, despite the fact that there is evidence in the literature that the opposite movement is also made,⁴⁵ and that the prophetic apprehension of the universal was achieved at a more-or-less singular period of time. No thought is given to the possibility that Jeremiah knew Isaiah's work and in his sermon about Moab particularized Isaiah's universal.

This survey of more contemporary proposals and the supporting argumentation shows that while the range of dates has narrowed somewhat, the same data continue to be

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ So also Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*, 11-17, 97-100. Where Johnson does refer to passages from chapters 13-23, he treats them as parallel but essentially independent from chapters 24-27.

⁴⁴ With the exception of the oracle against Babylon, which he places in the sixth century, Sweeney dates chapters 13-23 in a range from the late eighth century to the late seventh century (Josianic redaction of Isaiah) (*Isaiah 1-39*, 214-215).

⁴⁵ E.g., Zeph. 1; Obad 16-18; Isa. 13; Mic. 1:2-5; Nahum.

interpreted with conflicting results. Furthermore, while efforts continue to be made to establish—and have actually brought about a shift in—the *terminus ad quem*, there has been essentially no reexamination of the *terminus a quo*. A post-exilic provenance is simply accepted as a *fait accompli*.

Critical Criteria for Dating

In the survey of views and argumentation we have seen how the selection and interpretation of evidence for dating Isaiah 24-27 varies. However, the following categories of evidence and argument occur most often: vocabulary and literary style, the nature and degree of development of ideas, and historical citations or allusions.⁴⁶ Each of these categories has presented difficulties to the interpreter.

Literary Features (Vocabulary/Style)

Given impetus by Gesenius and others, philological interests enjoyed a prominent place in critical studies throughout the nineteenth century. Each word in a text was examined; each had its own history outside the text as well as in it, and consequently each word had to some extent the same value as every other. Cheyne denominated even “unique . . . verbal forms” as *hapax legomena*.⁴⁷

Studies of vocabulary or word usage, as they are employed in the effort to identify the date of a text, might be described as *Wortgeschichte*. The investigator is interested in the history of words—where and when they began to appear in the “host” language, the language of the text. In Old Testament studies, the *wortgeschichtliche* questions have to

⁴⁶ Redditt, 232.

⁴⁷ Cheyne, 148.

do with the relationship between Hebrew and other languages, not only earlier Semitic languages, but also languages whose influence is regarded as later rather than earlier—especially Aramaic, but also the languages of Assyria, Babylon, and their imperial successors, and finally Greek. What constitutes sufficient contact with a language, that its words begin to be borrowed by another language group? To what extent can the onset of the influence of one language on another be discovered and described as a discrete event? How much contact is required, and how long, until a “host” language begins to use a “borrowed” language in its literature? A century ago, Cheyne presented a lengthy list of “unique or otherwise singular words, verbal forms or phrases,”⁴⁸ the determination of whose lateness was based on prior hypothetical determinations of the lateness of biblical books in which the same words appear. Wildberger refers to a list of *hapaxes* prepared by E. S. Mulder, a list which overlaps Cheyne’s though not exactly or entirely, but contends that there is no necessity for taking any of the list as “late-postexilic” (*spätnachexilisch*).⁴⁹ March produces an even shorter list of “Terms Unique to Is. 24:1-27:1,”⁵⁰ but he acknowledges: “In each instance these terms do find some kind of parallel in the literature spanning the period from the eighth to the sixth century. . . .”⁵¹

However, the ability to argue for lateness based on *wortgeschichtliche* considerations is becoming increasingly impaired. The results of studies in extrabiblical

⁴⁸ Ibid., 148-149.

⁴⁹ Wildberger, 908.

⁵⁰ March, “Two Prophetic Compositions,” 201. Five of the seven words in March’s list appear also in Cheyne’s, and all of them are included by Mulder; but Wildberger refers only to two of them in his argumentation because they are the ones that occur in what he considers the *Grundschrift* of the Apocalypse.

⁵¹ Ibid., 202.

literature—Ugaritic materials, inscriptions, etc.—and in linguistics are describing a very different picture of the linguistic history of the Ancient Near East. At no time did Israel live in a linguistic vacuum. Her interaction with the surrounding nations introduced foreign “borrow words” at much earlier stages in her history than has previously been assumed.

Cheyne called the literary style of Isaiah 24-27 “artificial”.⁵² The “singularity of phrases . . . , the sixteen paronomasias . . . , the numerous rhymes . . . , the antitheses . . . , the emphatic doubling of words . . . indicate a consciousness of poverty in the writer (or writers), and point to an age much later than that of the true Isaiah.”⁵³ Although he does not cite or even allude to Gunkel here, Cheyne’s opinion falls into line with Gunkel’s description of the life-cycle of literature in a culture, and especially the “tragedy of Hebrew literature.”⁵⁴ In a footnote Cheyne expresses his conviction that critical analysis would probably reduce the number of paronomasias even in the true Isaianic parts of the book, because “Isaiah uses paronomasia with . . . tact and naturalness.”⁵⁵

What, however, are the criteria for judging “tact and naturalness”? Stylistics or poetics form a comparatively new field of enquiry. The critics of the “classical” period, for example, Duhm, Cheyne, and Driver, seem to have recognized such features, but their controlling interest was historical; consequently, they overlooked whatever contribution

⁵² Cheyne, 149. So also Duhm, who described Is. 26 at the beginning of his treatment of the Apoclyypse as an artful poem (*künstvolle Gedicht*), but in his more detailed treatment called it *künstlich* (artificial) (Duhm, *Jesaia*⁵, 172, 183).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

⁵⁴ See chapter 1, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Cheyne, 149-150.

poetics might make, not only from the standpoint of readability or “entertainment,” but also from the perspective of getting the message across effectively. The present scholarly landscape shows signs of investigating more closely the matter of literary style as an integral part of a text, but even fairly recent commentators such as Wildberger (1978) and Sweeney (1996) have not given such considerations a full share in their work. For them, stylistics and poetics are embellishments of a text, but they do not constitute an integral part of the communication of a message. Tova Meltzer has observed that “changes in . . . conception of style are directly dependent upon changes in how we perceive language and text.”⁵⁶ The existing state of scholarship vis-à-vis Isaiah 24-27 continues to perceive its often strange style as artificial, the signal of deteriorating skill with letters in the Israelite/Jewish community and, consequently, late in history. Advances in the study of Hebrew poetry make a thorough revision of this understanding necessary and call for a new look at these chapters that begins with a recognition of their stylistic excellence.⁵⁷

Ideas

Cheyne insisted: “The ideas and ideals of the prophecy are . . . conclusive as to the extreme lateness of the date.” He presented a catalog of eight ideas or categories of ideas, most of which have to do with a universal(istic) perspective, ostensibly a signal of religious development more advanced than Israel and her prophets were capable of

⁵⁶ Tova Meltzer, “Stylistics for the Study of Ancient Texts: Wanderings in the Borderlands,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter R. Bodine, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 131.

⁵⁷ It is true that Millar determines that the chapters are good Hebrew poetry (59), but after all his excisions and emendations what he considers the “good” text is actually his, not the Bible's.

conceiving before the Babylonian Exile.⁵⁸ However, Redditt acknowledges that “operative [throughout the debate on dating the Isaiah Apocalypse] is an evolutionary understanding of the history of religious thought in the Old Testament.”⁵⁹ And Coggins points out that “several studies in recent years [ca. 1979] suggest . . . that much of the characteristic thought of these chapters may have been possible at an earlier date than was once thought likely.”⁶⁰

The notion of a world judgment has been singled out as a characteristically late idea and evidence for the *Unechtheit* of Isaiah 24-27. “Jesaja kennt nicht . . . die Idee der Weltgerichts. Er hat es nur mit der Weltmacht Assur zu tun.”⁶¹ However, Otzen has noted that world judgment “is an ancient motif with deep roots in pre-exilic prophetic preaching.”⁶²

But the idea that has received most attention is the conception of the resurrection, the mention of which in 26:19 (and 25:8) has traditionally been considered in critical circles as the sure signal of a later, non-Isaianic date. However, opinions about the lateness of the development of a conception of resurrection have begun to moderate more

⁵⁸ Cheyne's list includes: “The view that mankind at large had broken a divine law . . . ;” the phrase “host of heaven” (actually, *צְבָא מְרוֹם*, not *צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם*); “visible enthronement of Israel's king on Mount Zion;” “the abolition of death . . . and the hope of the [individual] resurrection;” religious acceptance of all peoples; the “conception, at once so high and so low, of the relation of Israel to God;” and the “ideal of national life [as] a prolonged act of worship” (151-153). Driver echoes the prevailing interpretive position: “[G]eneralization of prophecy is . . . the mark of a later age” (*Introduction*, 210).

⁵⁹ Redditt, 232.

⁶⁰ Coggins, 330.

⁶¹ Rudolph, *Jesaja 24-27*, 60.

⁶² Benedikt Otzen, “Traditions and Structures of Isaiah xxiv-xxvii,” *VT* 24 (Apr 1974): 201. Wildberger also acknowledges motifs that are known in the apocalyptic literature, including world judgment, “aber sie knüpfen . . . doch an Vorstellungen an, die man auch im Prophetismus registrieren kann. . .” (909).

recently. Redditt surveyed briefly some of the Israelite perceptions of life and death, and especially the conception of Sheol: “Over and over in the Psalms, the individual cries for rescue from the power of Sheol. . . . This is not poetic exaggeration; the Israelite takes seriously the intrusion of Sheol into the land of the living.”⁶³ He opines that “[t]he step from rescue from the intrusion of Sheol into the land of the living to resurrection after death is quite significant, but it is impossible to state when that step was first made,” and concludes that “it is quite possible that Israel entertained the possibility of resurrection . . . much earlier than modern scholarship usually thinks possible.”⁶⁴ Consequently, it is increasingly hazardous to base proposals for dating the prophetic literature on suppositions about the history of ideas in Israel.

Historical Allusions

We cited earlier G. W. Anderson’s insistence that “it is to the precise and concrete allusions of the lyrical passages that reference must in the first instance be made in order to establish a date. . . .”⁶⁵ But we have referred also already to the difficulty that prevails because of the scarcity and vagueness of references to historical places or events. The mention of traditional enemies like Assyria and Egypt and even Moab does not provide any meaningful aid in the task of temporal triangulation. References to Judah, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, Jacob, and Israel are standard theological conventions in the language of the Hebrew Bible. Although considerable effort has been applied to identify the city or cities

⁶³ Redditt, 286.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 286-287.

⁶⁵ See note 16.

referred to such phrases as “fortified” (בְּצוּרָה) or “exalted” (נִשְׁבָּחָה) and especially the “city of chaos” (קְרִיַת־חֵהוּר), a set of solutions exists, none of which has been able to secure unanimous endorsement. Attempts to discern the most suitable setting on the basis of the interpretation of the social, political, and even theological conditions described in the text have not achieved success, either.

General Observations

Redditt states “one reason for [the] discrepancy in dating,” which has broad application. “Historical models assume a direct, unbroken line of development which is uniform for the whole Israelite community.”⁶⁶ He mentions this specifically in connection with the idea of the resurrection as it is presented in Isaiah 26:19, and he acknowledges the deficiency of such a model in the history of ideas: “The Old Testament gives evidence that uniformity is precisely what was missing in ancient Israelite thought about God and his dealings with man.”⁶⁷ However, it is not only a historical model of the development of ideas, a kind of *Begriffsgeschichte*, where the hermeneutical theorem of uniform development comes into play. Indeed, this interpretive principle informs all of the critical approaches to dating the prophetic literature, whether on the basis of the history of words, of literary style and genre, or on the basis of a reconstruction of Israelite history.

Nor is the principle of uniformity the only flaw in these approaches. The effort to maintain an understanding of a “direct, unbroken line of development” brings about a situation in which the textual data are artificially compressed in relation to time. The

⁶⁶ Ibid., 271-272.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

tendency is to look for the nearest (to the present) chronological setting first and then to consolidate by attraction toward this nearer setting what might still appear to be earlier referents, words, stylistic features, and ideas. How much or how little of the data is incorporated into the process depends on the interpreter and especially on his or her approach to the matter of literary coherence (unity), but the real problem is the inclination to establish the setting on the basis of the perspective from “our side” of the time line instead of from the side of the prophet to whom the literature is attributed.

Depth perception in physical vision includes nearer and farther horizons. The same principle seems to apply in the examination of the prophetic literature. From our vantage point, there are nearer and farther horizons in the matter of identifying the historical setting of a prophetic message. So, too, the prophet saw both horizons from his side, but it is his nearer horizon that must be decisive in establishing the date of the message. It is as if we—the prophet and now the interpreter—are looking at a transparency for an overhead projector that is composed of a number of overlays, but we are looking from opposite sides. We judge what we see in relation to which overlay is nearest to us. In examining the prophetic literature, to look for the latest applicable historical setting fails to look at the data from the prophet’s original perspective and fails also to consider the possibility that the prophet spoke in general enough terms that would apply to several other, later periods.

Date of Composition or Date of Historical Setting (Referent)?

There is an underlying issue to the standard approach to dating the prophetic literature. The scholarly literature generally does not allow for a distinction between the

date of composition of a prophecy and the date of what appears to be its provenance. March, for example, organized his “Review of Earlier Studies” around four basic groups determined by the suggested date of authorship,⁶⁸ and he included Vitringa among the proponents of a second-century BC “provenance.”⁶⁹ However, while Vitringa considered the fulfillment (*Erfüllung*) of the prophecies in Isaiah 24-27 to have taken place in the Maccabean period,⁷⁰ he maintained Isaianic authorship.⁷¹ He admitted that the time of publication or promulgation (*die Zeit der Bekanntmachung [sic]*) of the prophecy was questionable (*zweifelhaft*), but his own conclusion was “daß diese Prophezeiung vor dem Tode Ahas oder dem Anfang der Regierung Hiskia, bekanntgemacht [*sic*] sey.”⁷²

The operating principle in the mainstream of the scholarly literature throughout the critical era is that the identification of the historical “background” or “setting” of a prophetic passage is equivalent to the identification of its date of composition. The possibility of a kind of “narrative setting” that is different from the prophet’s own is rejected *a priori*.

⁶⁸ March, “Two Prophetic Compositions,” xi-xxviii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xv, citing Lowth. Samuel Pagán (“Apocalyptic Poetry: Isaiah 24-27,” *Bible Translator* 43/3 [July 1992]: 314-315) makes the same assertion.

⁷⁰ “Folglich ist nichts übrig, als daß ich mit einiger Zuversicht sage, daß diese Weissagung, ihrem ersten und buchstäblichen Verstande nach, auf die maccabäische Zeiten gehe. . .” (Vitringa, 521).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7. “Das Buch der Weissagung, das unter Isaiä Namen in dem Canon der heiligen Schrift angetroffen wird, gibt keinen unrichtigen Verfasser an, sondern ist von diesem Man wirklich geschrieben . . . : Und solten auch die darin enthaltene Weissagungen von andern gesamlet und in Ordnung gebracht seyn, so sind sie doch von ihm wirklich geschrieben und ausgesprochen.”

⁷² *Ibid.*, 522.

Driver's "Analogy of Prophecy"

S. R. Driver enunciated the hermeneutical touchstone for the critical approach to dating the prophetic literature, in the context of remarks on Isaiah 40-66:

[T]he analogy of prophecy . . . [presumes] that the author actually lived in the period which he . . . describes, and is not merely (as has been supposed) Isaiah immersed in spirit in the future, and holding converse, as it were, with the generations yet unborn. Such an immersion in the future would be not only without parallel in the OT, it would be contrary to the nature of prophecy. The prophet speaks always, in the first instance, to his own contemporaries: the message which he brings is intimately related with the circumstances of his time: his promises and predictions, however far they reach into the future, nevertheless rest upon the basis of the history of his own age, and correspond to the needs that are then felt. The prophet never abandons his own historical position, but speaks from it. . . . In the present prophecy [Isaiah 40-66] there is no prediction of exile; the exile is not announced as something still future: it is presupposed, and only the release from it is predicted. By analogy, therefore, the author will have lived in the situation which he thus presupposes, and to which he continually alludes.⁷³

It seems best to examine Driver's analogy with an analogy. The age of aviation is generally acknowledged to have begun with the Wright brothers' powered flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903. However, the possibility of human flight had been considered long before.

In Europe serious speculation about man flight occupied such thinkers as Roger Bacon (c. 1214-94) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). John Wilkins (1614-72) . . . forecast the evolution of the fixed-wing airplane. . . .

During the next 100 years, science-fiction writers popularized the idea of flight—including space flight. . . .

Toward the end of the 19th century, the greatest of aviation fiction writers, Jules Verne (1828-1905) . . . developed an extraordinarily prophetic feeling for the future of the inventions of his day. He wrote of exploratory voyages around the world by airship and by helicopter and forecast a trip to the moon from a launching

⁷³ Driver, *Introduction*, 224.

site in Florida. He even described in detail the weightlessness that space travellers were to experience in flight.⁷⁴

What the *Encyclopedia Britannica* documents as “serious speculation about man flight” took place three to seven hundred years before the Wright brothers’ flight. If we were to apply Driver’s analogy and the principles of historical analysis we have seen applied to Isaiah 24-27 to the texts of Bacon and Wilkins and to the sketches of Leonardo, we would have to conclude that these texts and sketches are not authentic and instead belong to a “later and imitative period” nearer in time to the actual achievements of fixed-wing, helicopter, and space flight.

Furthermore, Verne’s novel of a lunar voyage, *De la Terre à la Lune*, was published in 1865 (the English translation, *From the Earth to the Moon*, appeared in 1873),⁷⁵ a little more than one hundred years before the Apollo 11 spacecraft landed on the moon. His novel illustrates Driver’s principle of presupposition clearly, as he (Verne) describes in greater detail the setting in which he contemplates a first flight to the moon could and would take place. However, even his presupposed setting is a projection from his own time to another; he does not live in it. To be sure, Verne’s work is fiction. Nevertheless, it illustrates the point that Driver’s analogy is not a necessary principle. If Verne could project a presupposed future one hundred years in advance (about the same interval as between the ministry of Isaiah, son of Amoz, and the exile), why not Isaiah?⁷⁶

⁷⁴ “Air transportation,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* [hereafter *EB*] 28:821-822. Anticipation of the helicopter is often attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, “but it is now known that the Chinese and the Renaissance Europeans made helicopted toys before Leonardo's time” (“helicopter,” *EB* 5:812).

⁷⁵ “Verne, Jules,” *EB* 12:323-324.

⁷⁶ After all, as the saying goes, “Truth is stranger than fiction.”

Summary

Attempts to establish the date the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse in the critical (post-Enlightenment) era reached their forward limit in the late nineteenth century with the proposal for a second-century BC date by Duhm.⁷⁷ While there continue to be proponents of dates throughout the range from the eighth century to the second, the general trend has been to retreat from the later dates to a narrower range in the sixth and fifth centuries. However, even the present argumentation, which insists on a late exilic to early postexilic provenance, is unsound, because it is based on doubtful hypotheses for the histories of words, literary style, ideas, and equally doubtful suppositions about the history of Israel and of the whole Ancient Near East region.

Critical analysis has failed to take account of its own *ex eventu* perspective vis-à-vis the textually-asserted perspective of the prophet. The apparent precision and accuracy of prophecies are accessible to the modern exegete only because there are historical circumstances which can be compared to the prophecies. In the case of Isaiah 24-27, the absence of concrete historical allusions allows for a multiplicity of possible historical solutions, which make the determination of the date difficult.⁷⁸ The case for authenticity is not genuinely entertained, and the case for inauthenticity has not been critically examined. There is a need to reopen the case for authenticity by consciously adopting authenticity as a working hypothesis and analyzing the text on that basis. On the basis of

⁷⁷ I am still ignoring the van Gilse proposal of the second century AD.

⁷⁸ And the situation is aggravated even more by the presupposition of a non-unified text.

the weaknesses of the current range of proposals, an Isaianic (late-eighth to early-seventh century) date cannot be dismissed off-handedly.

CHAPTER 3

THE GENRE OF ISAIAH 24-27

The matter of the genre of Isaiah 24-27 may be the most elusive question of this study. “Does it belong to the genre *apocalypse*?” seems to be the first-order question, until the question behind this question begins to be asked: “What is the genre *apocalypse*?” And yet there is still another question that lies behind this one, namely: What is the proper procedure for identifying or defining any genre, including apocalypse? The plan of this chapter is to examine these questions in this order: First we shall survey the landscape of scholarly opinion, focusing on more recent views regarding the genre of Isaiah 24-27 and in particular its disputed relation to the genre *apocalypse*.¹ Then we shall examine the state of the definition of the genre *apocalypse* (and its related terms, “apocalyptic,” “apocalypticism,” etc.). Finally, we shall address the fundamental issue of defining genres for the biblical literature, especially since we hold nothing that constitutes a textbook or writer’s manual for the biblical material.

Survey of Scholarship Regarding the Genre of Isaiah 24-27

Redditt describes accurately the contingency or interdependence that prevails in scholarly treatment of the issues of date and genre.² The later the date an interpreter

¹ See, for example, Redditt, 232; Coggins, 332.

² Redditt, 232.

determines for Isaiah 24-27, the more likely it is that the same interpreter will call it an apocalypse or apocalyptic. If the issue is approached in reverse, the conclusion is: if apocalyptic, then late.

The strongest view of Isaiah 24-27 as an apocalypse comes from Bernhard Duhm, whose unequivocal assertion is almost always cited: “Das Orakel ist durchaus Apokalypse.”³ As we noted in chapter two, he also put forward one of the latest dating schemes for these chapters, placing the completed composition at the very end of the second century BC. However, the designation “Apokalypse” applied actually to not quite half (thirty-one) of the whole section’s sixty-nine verses; the remainder were taken up in the songs (*Lieder*), which Duhm treated as insertions.

Duhm asserted that no one could miss the similarities between Isaiah 24-27 and other, widely-acknowledged examples of apocalyptic: “die sibyllinischen Bücher, Daniel, Henoch usw.”⁴ He interpreted the serpent and the dragon in 27:1 as “apokalyptischen Figuren,”⁵ and he emphasized the contrast between the apparent celebration of 24:14-16a and the prophet’s response in 24:16b as a rejection of hope.⁶

³ Duhm, *Jesaja*², 143.

⁴ G.H. Box followed Duhm very closely in this regard: “The definitely apocalyptic character with which this composition is stamped is unmistakable” (112). But he comes to this conclusion only “when the lyrical passages . . . have been separated [that] an apocalypse, which may be regarded as a uniform composition, is revealed” (111). G. B. Gray (*Isaiah*) also concluded that in Isaiah 24-27 “we pass from prophecy to apocalyptic, on the basis of the shift from the fates of definite and particular nations in chapters 1-23 to the world at large in 24-27” (397).

⁵ These figures may be “apocalyptic,” but the discovery of their use in Ugaritic literature indicates that they are very early, not late.

⁶ Duhm⁵, 172. In chapter 4, I will offer a different take on these verses.

While Duhm's work in Isaiah became extraordinarily influential, not all his conclusions received unanimous endorsement. S. R. Driver adopted a more reserved position on the genre of Isaiah 24-27, saying only that "this prophecy . . . partakes of an apocalyptic character."⁷ Similarly J. Skinner observed: "There has perhaps been a tendency to exaggerate this [apocalyptic] feature; if we compare the passage with a typical apocalypse, like the book of Daniel, the differences are certainly more striking than the resemblances."⁸ At the same time, however, Duhm appears to have had in mind some idea of development in apocalyptic, as he points to thematic parallels between "unserer Verfasser" (of Isaiah 24-27) and "älterem Zeitgenosse" and "ältere Apokalyptikern."⁹

The issue of genre in the study of Isaiah 24-27 concerns in the main its generic identity vis-à-vis apocalyptic literature; however, it is worthwhile to take note of one completely different and probably little known approach from the same period, that of Richard G. Moulton.¹⁰ His work appears not to have been acknowledged by the mainstream of biblical scholarship, but his call for "a distinctively literary study of the Bible"¹¹ seems to have anticipated, at least in part, the "New Criticism"¹² that has

⁷ S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1892), 210. Cheyne also stopped short of calling Isaiah 24-27 an apocalypse: "The principal images are of the class which we may call apocalyptic; they, or images analogous to them, may be found in the imaginative descriptions which abound in the later prophecies and in apocalypses" (150).

⁸ J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*. The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: The University Press, 1896), 179.

⁹ Duhm⁵, 174, 176.

¹⁰ Richard G. Moulton, *The Literary Study of the Bible: An Account of the Leading Forms of Literature Represented in the Sacred Writings* (Boston/New York/Chicago: D. C. Heath & Co., Publishers, 1895 and 1899).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹² The "New Criticism" includes a broad range of approaches, such as "canonical criticism," "structural exegesis," and the like. Moulton anticipates these newer adaptations from nonbiblical literary criticism in

secured a more prominent place for itself in biblical scholarship in the latter part of the twentieth century. Moulton did not dispute the importance of historical analysis (criticism) of texts, but he did insist that

for priority in order of time the literary treatment has the first claim. The reason of this is that the starting point of historic analysis must be [the received text]. . . . The historic inquirer . . . will [have to] admit that the most important single element on which he has to work is the text *as it has come down to us*. . . . Biblical criticism at the present time is, not infrequently, vitiated in its historical contentions by tacit assumptions as to the form of the text such as literary examination might have corrected (*italics mine*).¹³

In his typology of literary forms, Moulton described Isaiah 24-27 as a “rhapsody.” He defined “rhapsodic literature” in terms of “an enlargement of dramatic machinery [i.e., dialogue] by the fusion with it of other kinds of literary treatment.”¹⁴ He compared the “rhapsody” in literature to the oratorio and the cantata in music, musical genres which incorporate a similar “fusion”: for example, J. S. Bach’s cantatas, which employ such musical “subgenres” as recitative, aria, and chorale. Moulton’s approach thus anticipates the concept of a *Rahmengattung* or macrogenre,¹⁵ and his nomenclature anticipates also

drawing the following important distinction between historical criticism and literary analysis: “It [historical analysis] goes beyond the text [the contemporary terminology is “*behind* the text”] . . . into the authority of the existing text, its mode of composition, the dates and surrounding conditions of its authorship. . . . Literary investigation stops short at the question *what* we have in the text, without examining *how* it has come to us” (Ibid., vi, italics original; today the emphasis would be on “what we have *in* the text”).

¹³ Ibid., viii-ix.

¹⁴ Ibid., 409.

¹⁵ Collins, *Daniel*, 3. See also Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*, trans. S. M. Cupitt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 23ff., for a representative discussion of “complex” and “component” literary types.

the generic conclusion of J. Lindblom, who described Isaiah 24-27 as a cantata (specifically, a *Festkantate*).¹⁶

Lindblom's conclusion was a variation on the move that had begun with Hylmö and Rudolph, toward a liturgical framework that would bind together the assortment of pieces perceived in Isaiah 24-27. Clements observes that Lindblom's "interpretation rests upon the assumption that we are dealing here with a basic unity of composition in which some overall plan can be discerned to account for the very different units which appear within it."¹⁷ This is only partly true, since Lindblom did not keep the text intact. However, while Lindblom's work has been criticized in its particulars, commentaries and specific studies of Isaiah 24-27 have not specifically or directly negated his overall conclusion or his willingness to approach the text as a coherent composition.¹⁸ March acknowledges the significance of Lindblom's work for approaching texts with "an initial assumption of unity . . . rather than the . . . notion of random growth so frequently assumed."¹⁹ Nevertheless, the mainstream of the scholarly community remains reluctant to allow the presupposition of literary coherence equal footing with the presupposition of incoherence. The nearest thing to a concession to unity is the position articulated by

¹⁶ Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27*, 894. But what is most striking about Moulton's work is how fundamentally opposite it is to the other main investigation into literary forms—the work of Hermann Gunkel—despite the overlapping vocabulary and categories of the two. Moulton's approach is synchronic: It seeks the contribution to interpretation (meaning) of texts offered by literary form. On the other hand, Gunkel's approach is diachronic. Its goal tends not toward the interpretation of texts, but toward acquiring the history behind the text. See Adele Berlin, "A Search for a New Biblical Hermeneutics: Preliminary Observations," in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the 21st Century, The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference*, ed. Jerrold S. Cooper and Glenn M. Schwartz (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996).

¹⁷ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 197.

¹⁸ E.g., Redditt, 186-188.

¹⁹ March, "Redaction Criticism," 95.

Wildberger: that the coherence of a received (final form) text is an acquired phenomenon.²⁰

Even while Hylmö, Rudolph, Lindblom, and eventually Fohrer were advancing the view of Isaiah 24-27 as belonging fundamentally to a liturgical (cultic) genre, including liturgy or prophetic liturgy as well as cantata, interest in the concept of apocalyptic never quite died.²¹ We will use once more Anderson's 1963 reconsideration of Isaiah 24-27 as a *terminus a quo* for contemporary study of this piece, including its genre. In addition to those whose primary area of study has been Isaiah as a whole or Isaiah 24-27 in particular, we consider now also Plöger and Hanson, key figures in the study of apocalyptic, who have included Isaiah 24-27 as part of their study.

It bears noting that no one presently holds that these chapters belong to the genre apocalypse. Individual interpreters such as Lindblom and Koch, and groups such as the Society of Biblical Literature Apocalypse Group, have constructed lists of characteristics for apocalypses. No matter which list or definition is applied, the conclusion is the same: The "Isaiah Apocalypse" is not a true apocalypse. And yet, as we saw in the efforts at dating this text, scholarly insistence on a post-exilic provenance removes it from the era of "classical" prophecy and places it instead in what is viewed as a transitional period from

²⁰ See chapter one.

²¹ A steady if not overwhelming flow of major works on apocalyptic began shortly after World War II: H.H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944; 1947²; New York: Association Books, 1963³); S.B. Frost, *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (London: Epworth Press, 1952); D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964); Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology*, trans. S. Rudman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968); K. Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalypik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1970; ET, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, trans. M. Kohl [Naperville: Allenson, 1972]); Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

prophecy toward apocalyptic. The differences in view tend to be the degree to which apocalyptic or potentially apocalyptic motifs are present. Some minimize such data; others consider it more significant.

March's conclusions about the apocalyptic character of chapters 24-27 are indicated quite clearly in the genre-oriented titles of his "two prophetic compositions": He describes 24:1-20 as "An Announcement of Judgment" and 24:21-27:1 as "A Liturgy of Praise and Promise."²² His argumentation draws first on the lists of apocalyptic characteristics drawn up by Lindblom and Frost, but he elaborates his reluctance to assign an apocalyptic label, because of "the prophetic insistence upon the historical process and the unwillingness to separate history and eschatology too sharply" and because the motifs usually noted as pointing toward apocalyptic are present in prophecy and in the cult.²³

Redditt follows the same basic approach of using a definition of apocalypse as a kind of template and he also concludes that "Isaiah 24-27 is not an 'apocalypse.' It does not combine . . . vision/audition with a paranetic or narrative exhortation. It has no panorama of history or the heavens, no interpreter, no coded speech."²⁴ Redditt asserts

²² March, "Two Prophetic Compositions," 1, 68.

²³ *Ibid.*, 241, 261-262. So also Elder, "Isaiah 24-27," 103-104, and especially 217:

Many of the motifs which became stylistic for apocalypses appear, but they are used in historical fashion. They are used to give hope to people concerning the historical realm, rather than to call for the end of that realm. . . . Even the mythological motifs are not employed to veil historical personalities and events but rather to reveal clearly theological truths. All that would be necessary for apocalypticism to flower would be for the sufferers to lose hope in the redemption of this historical realm.

²⁴ Redditt, 300. I think the last item in Redditt's list is somewhat suspect, because it depends heavily on what one calls "code." For example, the use of terminology like the "fortified city," etc., constitutes something of a code. While the identity of the city was probably clear to the first audiences of Isaiah 24-27, modern attempts at decoding the phrase—identifying with certainty whether it refers to a specific city (and which one) or not—continue to be thwarted.

also that the chapters are not apocalyptic; however, his argumentation shows signs of a semantic haziness between apocalypse, apocalyptic (as a noun), and apocalyptic (as an adjective): “The composition is concerned with the nation as the redeemed community; it proclaims no ‘secrets,’ and it is probably anonymous, not pseudonymous.”²⁵ He settles on “‘proto-apocalyptic’ . . . as an appropriate designation not only for Isaiah 24-27, but for those other post-exilic, eschatological prophets which take pronounced ‘steps’ toward features of the later apocalypses. . . .”²⁶

Wildberger, like Redditt, applies Koch’s criteria and, like the others to this point, concludes that chapters 24-27 are not an apocalypse but do contain motifs or themes that were or would be consolidated (*ausgebaut*) in *Apokalyptik*, but appear already in prophecy.²⁷ “It is not an apocalypse, but beginnings of the apocalyptic understanding of the world and history are there. Is. 24-27 stands at the beginning of a powerful movement, in which the faith of Israel once more has demonstrated its astounding, creative power.”²⁸

Sweeney also regards Isaiah 24-27, though not an apocalypse, as bearing some apocalyptic characteristics that “may represent an early stage in the development of apocalyptic literature;” nevertheless, the chapters “stand squarely in the prophetic tradition.”²⁹ He arrives at a generic designation for the chapters in something of a “back-

²⁵ Ibid., 309.

²⁶ Ibid., 310.

²⁷ Wildberger, 908-910. German holds a spelling advantage over English in distinguishing the terminology: *Apokalypse* (apocalypse), *Apokalyptik* (apocalyptic as a noun), and *apokalyptisch* (apocalyptic as an adjective).

²⁸ Wildberger, 1026. See also Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 196-197.

²⁹ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 314.

door” fashion, asserting only that “one cannot deny that chs. 24-27 may well constitute a prophetic liturgy designed to commemorate the fall of the ‘city of chaos’ . . . and to interpret the significance of that fall.”³⁰

The studies by Plöger, Hanson, and Millar build on each other, in this order, and thus we examine them together, but with only a slight distinction from the rest. Plöger advanced the notion that in the return from exile from Babylon two competing factions developed: one theocratic, whose hope rested in YHWH’s intervention; the second, more hierocratic, which pushed for a strong national order. Hanson adopted and developed this understanding. Key principles in Hanson’s development are his suppositions of an “unbroken continuum” and of “unbroken development” toward an apocalyptic eschatology.³¹ It is as if he draws the mathematical curve that he expects will describe this development, and then interprets the data (texts) to fit the curve.³² Hanson’s primary texts are Isaiah 56-66 (so-called “Trito-Isaiah”) and Ezekiel 40-48, and he considers other texts such as Isaiah 24-27 in relation to his conclusions about these primary texts. However, in order to achieve his “unbroken development” of the theocratic or visionary community, he undertakes a massive rearrangement of the last eleven chapters of Isaiah: beginning from chapters 60-62, moving back to parts of 57, then ahead to 63-64, and so forth. However, he fails to defend his rearrangement of the text by explaining why the

³⁰ Ibid., 315-316.

³¹ Hanson, 6, 7. Hanson’s principles have subsequently been largely discredited. See Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 56.

³² He uses the development of oil lamps as an illustration of an “unbroken continuum.” However, here he works from data to the mathematical (or logical) formulation that explains the accumulated data. Trying to work the same process in reverse brings with it the problem of what to do with data that don’t fit the hypothesized equation.

text was changed and has been preserved in its received form. Consequently, his work founders on his own acknowledgment: “The material [of Isaiah 56-66] is ambiguous enough to be amenable to most any hypothesis, given an ample amount of eisegesis in support of a stubbornly held reconstruction of Israel’s history in the sixth to fifth centuries.”³³

Millar recognized the shortcomings of “the methodology often used . . . to draw up a list of themes from late apocalyptic works such as the book of Daniel . . . [and then use them] to identify the genre of more debatable passages such as Isaiah 24-27.”³⁴ He argued that since there was no “historical event or personage that establishes the context,” he would “use prosodic style and thematic pattern to establish the context” of Isaiah 24-27,³⁵ and on the basis of the context thus determined, to locate the chapters in the “origin of apocalyptic.” His typology of style is in line with Gunkel’s: the movement is from shorter pieces to longer and from poetry to prose.

On the basis of his prosodic analysis, and referring to Hanson’s portrayal of the history of literature in Israel, Millar concluded that Isaiah 24-27 belonged to a period of “breakdown of poetic canons of Hebrew poetry.”³⁶ He used “Deutero-Isaiah” as his datum for analysis of thematic patterns, because he perceived in “Deutero-Isaiah” the “regrouping” of older forms and themes “into a new synthesis.”³⁷ On the basis of his

³³ Hanson, 32.

³⁴ Millar, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 103. When Millar refers to the “literary context of Isaiah 24-27,” he is not referring to the place (position and significance) of these chapters in the book of Isaiah, but to their place in the history of Hebrew/Jewish literature.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116. In chapter 1, we noted the excisions and other alterations to the text that Millar imposed.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-115.

known typologies of prosody and thematic development, he considered Isaiah 24-27 dependent on “Deutero-Isaiah.” Millar offers a tentative endorsement for calling Isaiah 24-27 “proto-apocalyptic.”³⁸

Most of the research we have considered here has alluded to a “substantial unity” (to use Anderson’s phrase); however, there is a general inability to articulate the nature of that unity, primarily because the form- and redaction-critical approaches presuppose the existence of units, not unity. A consequence of these approaches, then, is the difficulty if not impossibility of detecting a (or the) genre of the whole, because any such genre, if indeed, it does exist, is obscured by the (search for) genres of the parts.

The Identification and Definition of a Genre

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, a question that needs to be addressed prior to ascribing genres to particular pieces of literature has to do with the basic concept of genre. For nearly a century, the person and ideas of Hermann Gunkel have dominated the landscape of biblical studies of form (*Form*) and genre (*Gattung*).³⁹ But there has begun a growing readiness to rethink Gunkel’s theory of genre. Longman identifies four

³⁸ Ibid., 114.

³⁹ Several writers have underscored the necessity of this terminological distinction between form and genre, especially in the use of the German terms: See, for example, Tremper Longman III, “Form Criticism, Recent Developments in Genre Theory, and the Evangelical,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 48; and Steck, 105-106. David Greenwood (“Rhetorical Criticism and Formgeschichte: Some Methodological Considerations,” *JBL* 89 [1970]: 418-426) describes the “semantical distinction . . . that the *Gattung* is a literary type (e.g., a sermon), while the *Form* consists of the literary characteristics of a literary type considered collectively (in the case of the sermon, these would include the conventional introduction, different kinds of moral exhortation, various conclusions, and so on). Nevertheless, the two concepts of *Gattung* and *Form* are generally applied to the same tradition units, and when the semantical difference between them is not observed, confusion may sometimes result” (420). Sweeney’s discussion of genre in his “Introduction to the Prophetic Literature” (*Isaiah 1-39*, 15-30), illustrates how the two terms are used interchangeably.

points which made Gunkel's approach to genre "obsolete even while he was writing": his assertion of the purity of genres; his "criteria for the identification of the genre of texts;" his view that "the inscripturation of an oral composition . . . results in the degeneration of the text;" and finally his "contention" for the uniqueness of each genre's social setting (*Sitz im Leben*).⁴⁰ Critique of Gunkel's position finds fault principally in its rigidity, especially the failure to distinguish between the *Sitz im Leben* of the genre and that of the specific piece of literature. That is, while it is reasonable that the original setting of a "lawsuit form" is a "courtroom" or some similar judicial setting, the appearance of a "lawsuit form" in another literary context does not mean that this specimen of a "lawsuit form" was originally spoken in a court setting. The literary use of the form simply calls to mind the judicial setting. Tigchelaar calls attention to the ability of genres to "function in different settings."⁴¹

Longman employs several metaphors to describe a "communicative-semiotic approach to genre," with three main elements: "(1) Genre explains the possibility of communication in a literary transaction; (2) Genres rest upon expectations which arise in readers when they confront a text; (3) Authors can be coerced in composition to conform to genre expectations."⁴² Linton echoes and expands this approach in his "reader-oriented theory of genre,"⁴³ and it is probably somewhat easier to view the "literary

⁴⁰ Longman, "Form Criticism," 48-49.

⁴¹ Eibert C. J. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the Day of the End: Zechariah, the Book of Watchers and Apocalyptic* (OT Studiën XXXV; Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), 4.

⁴² Longman, "Form Criticism," 51-53.

⁴³ Gregory Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse as an Apocalypse," *SBL Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 161-173.

transaction” from the reader/interpreter’s perspective. While writers write in relation to “preexisting examples,” for readers genre constitutes a matrix by which “they . . . relate [a work] to other works that they have read.” Understanding a text is not simply a matter of understanding the words of the text or even the intention of the author, but also of understanding the generic matrix employed by the author. And especially in relation to ancient literature, the reader is the active agent in this transaction.

Longman points out also that there is no “finite set of genres which appears in the literatures of many cultures and of every historical period.”⁴⁴ Consequently, there are two approaches to determining genre: the “emic,” which “seeks native designations and classification of literature”; and the “etic,” “which employs “a non-native grid or classification scheme.”⁴⁵ To begin with the emic approach, there is not a lot to go on. However, if we accept Longman’s opinion that “the Israelite . . . scribes were not concerned with a precise and self-conscious generic classification of their literature,”⁴⁶ there are in the biblical literature some terms that at least hint at generic categories, such as *מְזִמֹּר* and *שִׁיר* in the Psalms. The title/superscript of the book of Isaiah designates it as a *תְּזוּזָה*, a designation which occurs also in the superscripts of Obadiah and Nahum. The study of these shorter examples might prove helpful in discerning the characteristics of the genre *תְּזוּזָה* and thus shed more light on the structure of Isaiah. In Isaiah 13-23 the term *מִשְׁאָה* at least entails a classification or genre for the oracles against the nations.

⁴⁴ Longman, “Form Criticism,” 54.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

Wildberger argues that the absence of a superscript signals the independence of chapters 24-27 from the oracles against the nations—that they are not a **נְשִׁיבָה**;⁴⁷ however, this argument supposes that the superscript is a, if not the, determining characteristic of the genre, without examining the structure of the piece and comparing that to the structure of other, clearly marked **נְשִׁיבָה**. Isaiah 24-27 might or might not be a **נְשִׁיבָה**, but the decision cannot rest solely on the presence or absence of a superscription.

The etic approach to Old Testament literary genres is based not only on present readings of the literature—and thus reflects our own expectations over against those of a reader/hearer contemporary to the literature—but also on the modern critical reconstruction of the history of prophetic communication, especially its ostensible origins in the “terse oracle.” For example, Sweeney says Isaiah belongs to a genre “prophetic book,” but he acknowledges that “this classification presents problems since research on the genre . . . remains in its infancy.”⁴⁸ The process of classifying whole works such as Isaiah is one that builds from the smallest literary units to the whole and, consequently, does not actually examine the whole.

Longman proposes “a fluid theory of genre,” because “the make-up and nature of a particular genre depends on the viewpoint which [a] researcher adopts. In other words, it is possible to speak of a broad genre of many texts which have few traits in common, or of a narrow genre of as few as two texts which are identical in many ways. It depends on the decision of the researcher.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Wildberger, 892.

⁴⁸ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 48.

⁴⁹ Longman, “Form Criticism,” 56-57.

Patterson⁵⁰ reviews the history of efforts to put a generic name on the prophetic literature. The earliest efforts concentrated on the personality and behavior of the prophets, followed closely by the attempts to discern particular prophetic *Gattungen* in the terse pronouncements which were regarded as the original mode of prophetic speech. However, efforts to isolate “any overarching criterion that distinguishes prophecy [on the whole] as a genre”⁵¹ have not been successful—at least, proposals of such criteria have not obtained scholarly consensus. The difficulty is, in large part, related to the problem of establishing a consensus on the structure of a biblical literary work (a biblical book or even of a section such as Isaiah 24-27). Linton regards “the question of a text’s genre . . . the most important question an interpreter can ask.”⁵² But presupposed is the coherence of the literary piece under consideration. One of the main reasons why consensus as to the genre of Isaiah 24-27 (and of virtually all the prophetic literature) remains so elusive is because the historical-critical disciplines (source, form, redaction, tradition) presuppose essential incoherence, especially in the prophets. Literary coherence in the prophetic literature is only an acquired trait.

⁵⁰ Patterson, “Old Testament Prophecy,” in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland A. Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 196-309.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁵² Linton, 163. Rolf Rendtorff (“How to Read Isaiah 1-39 Against its Historical Background: Some Hermeneutical Reflections,” *OTE* 1/3 [1988]: 1-10) also asserts that “the ‘*Gattung*’ of . . . [a] text is of fundamental relevance,” especially as function or intention is a characteristic of genre. On this basis he argues for a distinction between books like Ezra and Nehemiah, which “intend, at least to a certain degree, to give historical information,” and Isaiah, which, we may infer from Rendtorff’s presentation at this point, does not (3-4).

What Is Apocalyptic?

T. F. Glasson has described the advent of the terminology of apocalyptic:

The use of the word Apocalyptic as a noun seems to have originated in Germany early last century when *Die Apokalyptik* passed into widespread currency as covering the pseudepigraphs. . . . Some of these . . . were Apocalypses . . . , and so with a certain looseness of thought and expression the noun Apocalyptic was employed to cover a whole assortment of rather miscellaneous books.⁵³

He refers to an assortment of works to illustrate the broad use of the term and concludes that “the current use of the noun Apocalyptic is so vague and confusing that . . . for about twenty years I have tried to avoid it; I have not suffered the slightest inconvenience and have found no difficulty in expressing myself.”⁵⁴

Tigchelaar also describes the terminological confusion: “First the adjective was used to typify the compound of several features . . . [and] in due time not only the ensemble of . . . features, but also most of the features themselves were termed apocalyptic. Writings which contained a number of these characteristics were soon called apocalypses, and the train of thought which was believed to have given rise to these writings was also called apocalyptic.”⁵⁵

The year 1979 marked a kind of watershed in efforts to define the genre apocalypse and associated terms. The Society of Biblical Literature’s “Apocalypse Group” defined the genre as follows:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages

⁵³ T. Francis Glasson, “What Is Apocalyptic?” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1979): 98.

⁵⁴ Glasson, 99.

⁵⁵ Tigchelaar, 1.

*eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.*⁵⁶

In his commentary on Daniel, Collins acknowledges that the above “definition is based on a combination of form and content” and that it could have been narrowed (to refer to form only) or expanded (to include setting and function and intention).⁵⁷ The SBL Apocalypse Group adopted two main subgenres, on the basis of whether or not a given apocalypse contained “an otherworldly journey.” “The OTHERWORLDLY JOURNEY provides the context for the revelation and determines the form of the work. All the Jewish apocalypses which have no otherworldly journey have a review of history in some form, and so they may be conveniently labeled ‘HISTORICAL’ APOCALYPSES.”⁵⁸

Tigchelaar, on the other hand, argues that content is not “a constituent of the genre apocalypse. As a matter of fact apocalypses are able to convey several kinds of content.”⁵⁹

The complications grow. Tigchelaar asserts the flexibility of genres; they change. His description of the development of genres is not radically different from Gunkel’s basic concept of *Literaturgeschichte*, but Tigchelaar shows considerably more reserve as to the precision with which we can describe the stages of generic development. “First specimens” of a genre are not necessarily the epitome of the genre.

Features typical of later apocalypses might not yet be found in the roots of the genre. What is more, some features might be thought to be typical, but there is no

⁵⁶ John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9 (italics original).

⁵⁷ John J. Collins, *Daniel, with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*. *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, Vol. XX (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 4-5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ Tigchelaar, 4.

rule demanding that any feature should always be present. Precise definitions of genres are consequently impossible. Yet this does not preclude the possibility of identifying the members of a genre. Theoretically, this concept of genre solves the problem of mixed genres too. These are only a problem when one wants to draw clear-cut boundaries between different genres. The so-called mixed genres merely evidence that authors are relatively free to rearrange generic features.⁶⁰

Tigchelaar urges some useful distinctions in the vocabulary: “Usually nouns indicate genres, adjectives modes” in literary criticism. “Genres are separate entities characterized by structural features. Modes, however, do not exist on their own . . . [but] are extensions of genres.”⁶¹ He offers the following in an attempt to clarify usage of the nomenclature:

1. ‘Apocalyptic’ is a way of thinking neither performe structurally typical of the genre apocalypse, nor necessarily present in all apocalypses.
2. The apocalyptic mode of thought need not be confined to apocalypses.
3. ‘Apocalyptic’ as a mode has no substance of its own.⁶²

Tigchelaar concludes his treatment of the terminology by addressing the term “apocalypticism.”

If one sees “apocalyptic” as a mode, “apocalypticism” is a world view or complete set of beliefs centred around this mode. More specifically, it is a world view imbued with the ideas of apocalyptic eschatology. Groups sharing this view are called apocalyptic movements. “Apocalypticism,” then, is also a sociological term . . . [but] apocalypses do not always stem from apocalyptic movements, and apocalyptic movements do not necessarily use the literary genre apocalypse.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 6. See also Christopher J. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982): “Although . . . the word apocalyptic is still used to describe the literary form [genre] of the apocalypse, it is also more usual to find it being used to speak of a particular attitude to the world and history . . . , whose characteristic emphases are the imminent destruction of the world and utter despair about the condition of the present world order” (1-2).

⁶³ Ibid., 7-8. In my estimate, Tigchelaar has overstated the case a bit. While it is certainly possible that an apocalyptic movement might center its “complete set of beliefs around [an apocalyptic] mode,” it is by no means necessary.

Two other observations deserve mention: First is a caveat to the study of the historical development of genres that “[c]hanges seldom proceed in a direct line.”⁶⁴ In the previous chapter we noted Redditt’s observation of the supposition of direct lines of unbroken development in ideas, which has been used in the effort to determine the historical setting (date) of Isaiah 24-27. Tigchelaar’s observation brings a necessary and appropriate corrective to a false premise. The second principle recognizes that “[t]he first literary evidence of a given motif or idea does not necessarily mark the period of its introduction. . . . Materials may have entered Israel long before writers wrote them down.”⁶⁵

Finally, Linton makes it clear that caution is necessary when attempting to assign the genre apocalypse, because

apocalypse is a genre that did not exist at the time [that the main group of apocalypses is supposed to have been written] since its conventions had not yet been explicated. Apocalypse is an example of a genre whose conventions remained unformulated and implicit for many years . . . until a critic formulated them. . . . Apocalypse is an example of a genre that is an *a posteriori* construction, created by later interpreters. . . .⁶⁶

Linton shows persuasively that not even the New Testament “Apocalypse” (the book of Revelation) is an apocalypse, according to the prevailing definitions of the genre.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Linton, 178.

Summary Observations

Redditt hoped to eliminate as much as possible from his study the interdependence of the issues of date, ideas, and genre of Isaiah 24-27.⁶⁷ However, our review of the scholarly literature indicates that such is a Sisyphean task. Since clearer and more comprehensive—and objective, that is, not connected to any of the nations involved—external source(s) for the history of Israel/Judah (and of the whole Ancient Near East) or the history of ideas or the history of literature, the task of confirming these issues depends on the interpretation of data from each.

However, the hermeneutical assumptions of mainstream scholarship actually hamper rather than help the investigation. While linear models of genre development are easier to apply—straight lines are always easier to deal with than complex curves—they do not explain adequately the development of even modern literary types such as the novel. Why, then, should we expect that such models will serve any more satisfactorily in the study of ancient literature? But the assumption which continues to impede progress most is the position that denies the essential integrity of the received texts. As we observed above, the focus on the forms (or genres) of the component parts obscures the study of the whole. As long as the integrity (coherence) of a text is disparaged by *a priori* notions of *Wachstumsprozesse*, efforts at genre identification of the whole will remain stunted. The concepts of *Rahmengattungen* and *Mischgattungen* may be useful, as long as they are not construed pejoratively as artificial or signals of a literary impoverishment. The whole is not simply the sum of its parts. At present genre identification is largely just

⁶⁷ Redditt, 272.

one more tool that is being used to discern the history of a literary piece. That puts its use at odds with its use in nonbiblical literary scholarship as a tool for interpretation.

As to the genre of Isaiah 24-27, it is easy to agree with the mainstream that it is not an apocalypse by any existing definition. Does it contain apocalyptic motifs or at least reflect an apocalyptic mood or tone? The answer to that question depends heavily on how “apocalyptic” is defined. Tigchelaar’s approach—viewing “apocalyptic” as a mode—makes good sense, especially the understanding that the genre “apocalypse” and the mode “apocalyptic” are not mutually inclusive.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it must be emphasized that “apocalyptic” thinking cannot be confined to any particular period in history—certainly not the intertestamental period. From the end of World War II to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the in-breaking of the nuclear age and the tensions of the “Cold War”—these threats to “civilization as we know it”—fueled apocalyptic predictions and apprehensions. This twentieth-century example also illustrates how artificial the distinction is between “apocalyptic” and “eschatological.” Anything on the horizon that suggests that the present world order is about to end appears both apocalyptic and eschatological when viewed in advance. Thus the judgment that Isaiah understands YHWH is about to execute (and may already be beginning) is portrayed in such terms as to make the hearer/reader of this material think in terms of a radical change in the way he/she lives—the “end of life as we know it.” That is certainly one part of the message in Isaiah 24-27. However, the end of the present order is not annihilation; the prophet can describe the new order, too.

⁶⁸ See above, p. 85.

What is the genre of Isaiah 24-27? I think there is room for new proposals to be developed on the basis of consciously approaching the text in its present form as a whole, explaining its unusual twists and turns with a presumption of original literary wholeness rather than fragmentation. In the next chapter I will attempt to lay some of the groundwork for such a new proposal.

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW STUDY OF ISAIAH 24-27

In the previous three chapters we have examined especially the comparatively recent treatments of the so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse” with respect to three important issues—literary coherence, authenticity, and genre—in an effort to identify and react to the hermeneutical principles or approaches that have been employed.

G. W. Anderson’s reconsideration of Isaiah 24-27 triggered a flurry of new studies. The dissertations of March, Redditt, and Elder undertook ostensibly new studies of these chapters, but in actuality their approaches were basically only variations on a common hermeneutical scheme. Each saw or selected evidence that suggested greater literary coherence than had been described by earlier scholars, but none was really able to distance himself from the perspective that the text is an aggregation of more-or-less independent “pericopes” and that any apparent present unity is the result of “a process of [subsequent] redaction.”¹ Because of its essential emphasis on the identification of component units or layers, a form-critical approach cannot produce a truly “fresh” look at the text.

¹ Redditt, 152.

Likewise, while *redaction* is itself an innocuous term, whose simplest lexical meaning is to “put into writing” or “edit,” the approach called “redaction criticism” says more. Redditt, for example, described three kinds of evidence which he considered indicative of redaction in Isaiah 24-27: (1) repetition of the motifs of YHWH’s imminent judgment, the curse language of 24:4-13 and 27:10-11a, and the Jerusalem-centeredness of the composition; (2) use of the “temporal redactional phrase” בְּיֹם הַהֲרָאָה; and (3) “the appearance of certain stylistic features which are foreign to the material.”² However, neither of the first two kinds of evidence precludes the possibility that Isaiah Ben-Amoz (or at least a contemporary) was the redactor; and even the third has become questionable in view of more recent studies of Hebrew poetry and the development of approaches to the study of biblical texts that explore more closely matters of style and rhetoric.

A Different Perspective on Coherence

The crucial issue in my estimate is the matter of literary unity or coherence. Each of the other issues we have considered, viz., authenticity (date) and genre, is linked to this one. The scholarly literature often uses “unity” and “coherence” synonymously; however, the synonymity is not exact, as in some instances, especially in connection with the prophetic literature, “coherence” (or “incoherence”) appears to describe not a literary quality but a psychological one, i.e., what the reader/interpreter thinks makes sense.

² Ibid., 152-154. P. A. Munch (*The Expression Bajjom Hahu': Is It an Eschatological Terminus Technicus?* [Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1936]) offers the most straightforward explanation of בְּיֹם הַהֲרָאָה as redactional, especially in the book of Isaiah. He calls it “an editorial connective formula” and cites two reasons: “(1) Nearly all the promises that are to be found in the original isaianic collections are interpolations. (2) Where the presence of a metric scheme could be proved, the rhythm showed that בְּיֹם הַהֲרָאָה . . . is nearly always of a secondary nature” (17).

What criteria determine literary coherence? In an important essay on “Linguistic Coherence in Prophetic Discourse,”³ F. I. Andersen traces briefly the historical movement of scholarly perceptions of prophetic discourse and observes that “modern criticism has been governed more by rationalistic criteria than by romanticist judgments. . . . Evaluations of prophets as good or bad continued to be made in terms of normalcy and rationality and by the literary quality of their oracles.”⁴ The task of the exegete is complicated by the perceived failure of the prophetic literature in its received form to adhere to rules of logic and of grammar and literary technique. Many proposals for textual emendation have presupposed “that the prophet knew the rules of poetry and of grammar, and obeyed them perfectly.”⁵ On the other hand, a large part of the problem is the way that logical and grammatical and literary rules are applied. Two serious questions persist: One is whether we have accurately inferred the rules according to which ancient authors wrote. The other is whether those authors, knowing the rules, sometimes (or even frequently) abandoned them.⁶ Andersen’s remark is especially cogent:

Imposing our standards of correctness in either grammar or literary form, we might have obliterated precious evidence of deviant linguistic usage or of deliberate literary artifice. We should recognize that genuine utterances of living speakers rarely attain to the required standards of textbook grammar. Literature is artificial. . . . This leads one to ask whether part of the honesty and authenticity of biblical

³ In *Fortunate the Eyes that See. Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid H. Beck, Andrew H. Bartelt, Paul R. Raabe, Chris A. Franke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶ It used to be that the splitting of infinitives in English was regarded as an error to be avoided. But the existence of the rule meant that an author could determine *to intentionally split* one—to break the rule intentionally or to intentionally break it—and use the deviation to good effect. I suspect, however, that most of the effect that was formerly available is now lost; the previous exception has become the present commonplace.

authors lies in giving an exact transcript of real speech, even though it might be incoherent or ungrammatical.⁷

Using an example from the book of Proverbs and alluding to the “notorious difficulties of the book of Job,” Andersen presents a new perspective on coherence suggesting “that much . . . incoherence is due to . . . artistic representation. . . .”⁸ Andersen and his colleague D. N. Freedman applied this interpretive principle in the preparation of the Anchor Bible volume on Micah. They operated from the point of view that Micah 1 “is an effective rendition of the sobs of a person who has lost all self-control in paroxysms of rage and grief.”⁹ The question that remains to be answered is, however, whether such textual phenomena are “realistic documentation” or “brilliantly successful imitation . . . , deliberately composed.”¹⁰ Freedman has written independently along the same lines.¹¹

“Poetry is more evocative and emotive, it relies more on impact, whether visual or audile [*sic*], in the arrangement of words and phrases and the sequence of sounds. It also has a more complex, often confusing, grammar and syntax, along with a penchant for unusual words.”¹²

⁷ Andersen, 147.

⁸ Ibid. It is interesting to notice that Andersen uses “artificial” and “artistic” in such close proximity and, it appears, essentially synonymously. It calls to mind Duhm's description of the poem in Isaiah 26 as both *kunstvoll* and *künstlich*. If the two terms are compared, “artificial” can be construed as somewhat pejorative vis-à-vis “artistic.” But if artifices are understood as the tools by which, in this context, a literary artist plies his trade, then there is no pejoration.

⁹ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Discourse on Prophetic Discourse,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H.B. Huffmon, F.A. Spina, and A.R.W. Green, pp. 141-158 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983).

¹² Ibid., 141.

Consequently, there is a continuing need not only to comprehend correctly the basic rules of Hebrew poetry, but also to understand how and perhaps more importantly why poets, especially the prophets, might break the rules.

One particular effort to come to grips with the grammatical, syntactical, linguistic, and stylistic deviations of prophetic discourse is Daniel Block's essay on Ezekiel's inaugural vision (Ezek. 1:4-28).¹³ Among the kinds of difficulties he finds in the text, whose resolution is usually accomplished by proposals for alteration, he finds problems of grammar including confusions of gender and number, use of the infinitive absolute as a finite verb;¹⁴ problems of style including unusual forms of pronominal suffixes, asyndeton, "heaping up of similes;"¹⁵ and problems of substance, which include the text's tendency to deal with one subject, shift abruptly to another, return to the first, and so forth.¹⁶

After reviewing quickly the standard approaches to these problems, Block offers "an alternative approach" in four parts. He begins with "the nature of Ezekiel's experience," which he summarizes as "an unusual, unprecedented, unexpected encounter with divinity," and then poses the question: "Is it possible that this may have influenced the shape of the description?"¹⁷ that is, the twists and turns that make it deviate from a more modern approach to narrative. "Second, [he suggests] the language of the

¹³ Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 418-439.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 420-422.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 422-424.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 424-425.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 428-429.

description may reflect the nature of the experience.”¹⁸ Under the stress of such an experience (and its recollection), one’s ability to adhere to the normal rules of language might be expected to be impaired. A more “rational” report of such an event might come later, but not necessarily, and especially not if the one who experienced the event believes it important to preserve the impact not only for himself, but also for those who would hear about it later. Block also addresses Ezekiel’s response to the experience and finally to the recurrence of the vision in Ezekiel 10.¹⁹

Several of the difficulties Block identifies for Ezekiel 1, appear also in Isaiah 24-27. Awkward juxtapositions and the use of unusual forms and rare words combine to create vivid impressions. The character of the message (and not just its propositional content) influences the form of its presentation. Consequently, the images and figures employed by the prophet are important.

The poetic features of Isaiah 24-27, especially such phenomena as paronomasia and assonance, have sometimes been perceived positively, but more often negatively, in characterizing its writer’s art. Alonso-Schökel declares that “the composition of these chapters is confusing, with repetitions and twists and violent juxtapositions. . . .”²⁰ But it is precisely this structure that reflects the nature of the material: the upheaval of heaven and earth when and because YHWH enacts judgment. “Frequently [writes Alonso-Schökel], the poet strains for an effect, especially with an accumulation of sonorous

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 429.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 430-431.

²⁰ Luis Alonso-Schökel, “Isaiah,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 181.

qualities,”²¹ notably alliteration and onomatopoeia, and his own effort to imitate these stylistic features as they occur in Is 24:1-4, 19-20 is preserved nicely by the English translation of his essay:

the earth shivers and staggers,
stumbles and tumbles,
quivers and quavers and quakes,
jars and jerks and jolts.²²

Whether or not the poet had to “strain” to achieve certain effects, the use of picturesque speech (call it “artificial,” if you will) can be understood as belonging to the nature of the subject matter and therefore enhancing or even intensifying the communication.

Freedman refers also to the occurrence side by side of prose and poetic elements in the prophetic literature,²³ a feature which some have suggested occurs (or has seemed to) in Isaiah 24-27.²⁴ If one approaches a text insisting that it comply with a fixed notion of, say, poetic meter and alters the text according to that notion, then, as Andersen pointed out, there is a risk of erasing a texture that constitutes a level of meaning.

Dimensions of the Text that Warrant Further Exploration

Review of the secondary literature points up several dimensions of the text Isaiah 24-27 that warrant further exploration. In the following we take up some of these dimensions and offer at least one example for each, in which inquiry into this dimension of the text might lead to fresh insight about the text, its historical occasion, and its meaning.

²¹ Ibid., 182.

²² Ibid.

²³ Freedman, “Discourse,” 142.

²⁴ See, for example, Redditt (60), who refers to the RSV's printing of 25:6-12, 27:1, 12-13 as prose. He cites also Hylmö's attempt to address the problem by coining a category called “rhythmic prose.”

Linguistic and Literary (Generic) Conventions

At the level of “basic forms of prophetic speech,”²⁵ both form and redaction criticism operate with the same fundamental understanding of a prophetic text: A prophetic text is in actuality a collection. Form criticism focuses on the isolation of the “basic forms” while redaction criticism looks more closely at how these presumably originally short and independent units have been joined.²⁶ In the literature we have surveyed it is generally agreed that the occurrence of the “speech formula” כִּי יְהוָה נִבְּרָה in Is. 24:3 marks the delimitation of two adjacent textual units, although there is disagreement whether the formula concludes the unit 24:1-3²⁷ or introduces a unit that begins in 24:3.²⁸

There is, however, another approach.²⁹ D. R. Hillers has identified “a widespread literary convention [in biblical Hebrew literature] depicting the reaction to bad news, [in a manner] conceptually similar to that in . . . Canaanite poems. . . .”³⁰ Among examples from other prophetic literature, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Hillers cites Isaiah 13 and

²⁵ Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).

²⁶ Bernhard W. Anderson (“The Slaying of the Fleeing, Twisting Serpent: Isaiah 27:1 in Context,” in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe, 3-15 [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994]) confirms that “form criticism tends in the direction of dividing materials into smaller literary units rather than perceiving larger literary wholes” (8).

²⁷ E.g., Redditt, 68. This is the majority view. Elder’s argument for this option is significant:

[Because Isaiah 24:1-3] serves as a heralding preface, a separate handling is proposed. . . . The close relationship with 24:4-13 should not be minimized . . . , for . . . 24:1-3 does set the stage for the depiction which follows immediately. The point is that it also sets the stage for the rest of the booklet especially when 24:4-13 is seen as not being the appropriate referent for the immanent eschatological judgment heralded in 24:1-3 (84-85).

²⁸ E.g., Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 312. The extent of a unit that begins at 24:3 is also a matter of debate.

²⁹ Elder’s approach to Isaiah 24-27 was “concerned with discovering the most appropriate cultural provenance” by comparing the appearance of three motifs—world-suffering and judgment, mythological conflict, and the coronation banquet—in Isaiah 24-27 with the same motifs in Canaanite and Babylonian religious texts (8-61). However, by concentrating on these motifs and the apparent signs of their adaptation by the author of Isaiah 24-27, he did not adequately (re-)explore the structure. The brevity (approximately ten pages) of his treatment of the “Delimitation of Units” bears out my judgment. His delineation of the structure does not vary significantly from that of March or Redditt, except in his (Elder’s) decision to delete 26:10b-12.

³⁰ D.R. Hillers, “A Convention in Hebrew Literature: The Reaction to Bad News” *ZAW* 77 (1965): 87.

21 as illustrations of the convention.³¹ “Jes 13 describes the mustering of the hosts of the Lord for attack on Babylon. The day of the Lord is coming and the sound of the hosts is heard (vv. 1-6). Verses 7 and 8 depict the reaction. . . .”³²

The relationship between Is. 24:1-3 and 24:4ff. appears to fit this same pattern. Verses 1 through 3 are the “bad news”: The judgment of YHWH against the whole earth and its inhabitants is imminent, it will affect all classes and categories of people, and it is taking place in accordance with his word—because he has said so.

What is the response? In verses 4 through 13 the earth languishes, the “new wine” evaporates, the vine withers, and people stop celebrating (though probably only eventually). However, contrary to this conventional and logically appropriate response, the inhabitants of the earth (יְשָׁבְיָהּ, 24:1, 5; יְשָׁבֵי בָהּ, 24:6) go on for the present as if there is no danger (24:14-16a), to the prophet’s own dismay (24:16b). In terms of the original summary of Isaiah’s message, this is not unexpected; they hear and hear but do not understand. . . (Is. 6:9ff.).

Hillers emphasized that “there are few verbal correspondences” between the Hebrew and the Canaanite bad-news literature; it is the similarity of concept and convention that he sees as a “commonplace” in both literatures.³³ And so, while it must be admitted that Isaiah 24:1-20 is not an exact fit with the convention as Hillers presents it, that does not disqualify it from consideration. Form criticism acknowledges that

³¹ Ibid., 87, 89.

³² Ibid., 87.

³³ Ibid.

writers can adapt or modify literary forms or genres.³⁴ Consequently, it is also reasonable to surmise that the writer of Isaiah 24 has modified the convention of “bad news and its reception” by expanding it to include what should be the response (and is for the created order), the undiscerning response of “they” (the earth’s inhabitants and especially the prophet’s audience), and finally the contrasting, discerning response of the prophet himself (“I”). Thus the application of Hillers’s work is appropriate here and, if so, there are significant consequences for each of the avenues of approach—literary coherence or unity (structure), authenticity (date), and genre—to Isaiah 24-27 we have discussed. If the convention Hillers describes is applicable, then there is a basis for arguing that 24:1-20 (at least!) is an original unity and not merely a redactional one.³⁵ Moreover, the use of a Canaanite (Ugaritic) literary convention introduces a new degree of uncertainty about Elder’s conclusions on the basis of motifs about Babylonian provenance and, consequently, introduces new possibilities for arguing a pre-exilic date. Finally, if at a minimum 24:1-20 is a literary unit, the question of the genre of the whole becomes at least as important as of the forms or genres of the parts (subunits).

An associated matter is the use of mythological language as a convention. The usual approach to the presence of such language (or allusions) is to interpret it historically, that is, as a signal of influence in the development of Israelite religion. Elder, for example, sees Isaiah 24-27 as having “a very close linkage to the development of the doctrine of

³⁴ E.g., Redditt, 64-65.

³⁵ The scholarly landscape varies about this. This passage is one of March’s “two prophetic compositions,” and B.W. Anderson considers it one of four poems in chapters 24-27 (“Slaying,” 11).

monotheism.”³⁶ However, Geyer calls attention to an alternative approach in examining possible mythological language in the oracle against Babylon in Isaiah 13.³⁷ He shows how mythological *language* is used, but he also shows how incorporation of the *myth* (its ideology) is restricted;³⁸ Geyer insists that “the greatest caution must be used in claiming direct parallels.”³⁹ Nevertheless, the likelihood that Babylonian mythological language is used “against” Babylon furnishes another illustration of the linguistic and literary artistry of the Hebrew prophets. Elder acknowledged the presence of both Canaanite and Babylonian mythological motifs in Isaiah 24-27, but he downplayed the role of the Canaanite allusions. However, if chapters 24-27 serve as a kind of recapitulation of the oracles against the nations (chapters 13-23), then the use of mythological language that draws from both cultures needs to be regarded as an intentional and “conventional form of language accepted by contemporaries of the author of the text as a comprehensible way of speaking of those matters which go beyond the possibility of language limited to the description of the material universe locked in time and space.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Elder, 217.

³⁷ J. B. Geyer, “Twisting Tiamat’s Tail: A Mythological Interpretation of Isaiah XIII 5 and 8,” *VT* 37 (1987): 164-179. He focuses his attention on the root חבל (“twist”) in 13:5, noting the use of “many [other] common verbs . . . to express ‘destroy’ . . . but [suggesting] . . . that [חבל] was chosen because it also meant ‘twist’ and recalled the ideas of the Babylonian creation myth” (173). For 13:8, he comments on the use of similar radicals, בהל, חבל, and להב.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Dialectology

In chapter 2 we examined the study of vocabulary as a component of the criteria for determining the historical setting or provenance of the “Isaiah Apocalypse.” The general effect of such study has been a gradual recession from an extremely late *terminus ad quem* for these chapters. However, surveying the more recent commentaries on Isaiah and specific studies of Isaiah 24-27 leads to the conclusion that they either did not have access or did not resort to recent and substantial developments in the study of Hebrew as a language.⁴¹ Such developments include a growing appreciation that Biblical Hebrew was not monolithic or homogeneous, but was in actuality a “language group” with several dialects, the most familiar illustration of which is the *shibboleth*—*sibboleth* test in Judges 12.

Rendsberg⁴² studied several psalms for “linguistic evidence [of] northern origin.” He called attention to “the discovery of style-switching or code-switching,” describing and endorsing the work of S. A. Kaufman, who recognized “unusual grammatical forms and rare lexical items” in speeches of Transjordanian Hebrews, “many of which are typically classified as Aramaisms.” Kaufman concluded, however, that “we have not to do with late language or foreign authors, but rather with the intentional stylistic

⁴¹ The dissertations we have examined—by March, Redditt, and Elder—are twenty to thirty years old, and Wildberger's monumental commentary is approaching twenty. Sweeney's commentary, by virtue of its place as a volume in the “Forms of the Old Testament” series, concentrates on form- and redaction-critical issues.

⁴² Gary A. Rendsberg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*. SBL Monograph Series 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

representations of Trans-Jordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew texts.”⁴³

The implications of identifying Biblical Hebrew dialects and of the “intentional stylistic” use of one dialect in the literature of another dialectical group are substantial, and the findings of dialectology have been applied now also to Isaiah 24-27.⁴⁴ Noegel has found “numerous elements of the non-Judahite northern dialect of Hebrew”⁴⁵ in the chapters, and his findings have both general and more specific consequences.

First, northern Hebrew elements are distributed throughout the piece, not absolutely evenly, but even in sections such as 25:1-5, 9-11; 26:1-19; and 27:2-11—Duhm’s *Lieder*—which have usually been segregated from what is supposed to be the main structure of the apocalypse. This broad use of northern-dialectical features introduces an important additional line of evidence into the possibility that Isaiah 24-27 is an original unity.

Sweeney, among others, has asserted that “the citations of prophetic tradition outside Isaiah testify . . . to a 6th-century setting,” because the Isaiah passages “take up the punishment of Israel in [the] original contexts . . . [and apply it] to YHWH’s

⁴³ Ibid., 3, quoting Kaufman, “The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1988), 54-55.

⁴⁴ S.B. Noegel, “Dialect and Politics in Isaiah 24-27,” *Aula Orientalis* 12 (1994): 177-192.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 177. Noegel lists “three criteria used in determining a text’s dialect: 1) The IH [Israelian Hebrew] word or grammatical feature should have a more common JH [Judahite Hebrew] counterpart. 2) The IH feature should be distributed in biblical texts which scholars have shown to possess numerous IH elements or to be IH compositions. In some cases this involves what some scholars have called the “foreign factor,” or “addressee-switching,” i.e., a shift in language which reflects the dialect of foreign speakers or the addressee. . . . 3) Finally, the IH feature should have cognates with other ancient languages spoken to the north of Judah or in the transjordan” (179-180).

punishment of the entire earth in [the] new context in Isaiah 24-27.”⁴⁶ Among such citations is the parallel between Is. 24:2 and Hos. 4:9. However, Noegel points to the “*niph`al* infinitive absolutes הברז and הברק [and the] *niph`al* imperfects תברז and תברק [in 24:3 as] representing [an *a-* to *o-*vowel] shift,”⁴⁷ characteristic of Israelian (Northern) Hebrew. Although it is certainly possible, nevertheless, it seems unlikely that a sixth-century prophet would use a northern-Hebrew element, rendered anachronistic by the demise of the Northern Kingdom more than a century earlier, to communicate with a Southern Kingdom audience. And it seems even less likely that a reasonably-skilled redactor trying to contextualize an earlier message—to reinterpret it in a new situation—would retain such a feature.

Noegel identifies an assortment of Israelian Hebrew (IH) expressions distributed throughout Isaiah 24-27, though with somewhat greater concentrations in chapters 26 and 24, respectively. This leads him toward the conclusion that chapters 24-27 were recorded in Israelian rather than Judahite Hebrew (JH).⁴⁸ There is one particularly interesting gap in the occurrence of IH features in chapter 24. Noegel describes צבִי in 24:16 as an IH feature, but none occurs again until verse 19, after the prophet’s first-person speech in 16b-18. This appears to be an instance of “style-switching” or “code-switching,” the deliberate use of a foreign dialect either to address people who use that dialect or to use that dialect for effect in speaking to a “local” audience. In other words, some portion(s)

⁴⁶ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 319.

⁴⁷ Noegel, 180.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

of Isaiah 24, perhaps as much as 24:1-16a, 19ff., are to be understood as the prophet speaking to non-Judahites or speaking as non-Judahites. The latter alternative is intriguing in respect to verses 14-16a, as it raises the question whether these verses are northerners (Israelians) talking about southerners (Judahites). In any event, the literary posture of the text assumes there is still a northern kingdom.

Hebrew Poetic Style and the Prophets

Form- and redaction-critical approaches tend to apply the rules of Hebrew morphology, grammar and syntax rigidly; even the application of key principles of Hebrew poetry such as parallelism does not generally allow for exceptions. At the level of words, changes of person or aspect or address, for example, have invited emendation in order to preserve what has been understood as *parallelismus membrorum*. But this approach underestimates the nature of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Alter declares that “the greatest stumbling block in approaching biblical poetry has been the misconception that parallelism implies synonymity.”⁴⁹ Sometimes the value lies in the contrast between two (or more) textual elements, sometimes in their equivalence; and Alter argues that “the ancient Hebrew poets are constantly advancing their meanings. . . . The dominant pattern is a focusing, heightening, or specification of ideas, images, actions, themes from one verset to the next.”⁵⁰ Moreover, it is increasingly recognized that parallelism can occur

⁴⁹ Robert Alter, “The Characteristics of Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 615.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 615. “Verset” is Alter’s terminology.

also in lines (versets, cola) that are not immediately adjacent; consequently, Berlin urges “a global view, [being willing to find] equivalences anywhere in a text.”⁵¹

When March treats “Style and Form” of the individual pericopes in his “two prophetic compositions,” his focus is clearly on the form, i.e., the genre (*Gattung*), of each pericope. His considerations of style are confined mainly to metrical issues. When he does call attention to aural features, such as assonance and alliteration, he generally does not explore the potential impact of such stylistic devices. Redditt describes ten stylistic features in the text;⁵² however, from them he derives only the conclusions that all of Isaiah 24-27 is poetry⁵³ and that their distribution throughout the piece “should . . . put the interpreter on guard against a too-easy assignment of different literary forms to different writers.”⁵⁴ Elder⁵⁵ introduces a few *metris causa* changes to the text, but otherwise ignores stylistic features.

In his detailed exposition⁵⁶ Wildberger occasionally notes the presence of stylistic features, but generally does not explore their significance. Style or poetics do not figure very prominently at all in his approach to the text; his exegetical categories are *Text*,

⁵¹ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3.

⁵² Redditt, 56-60.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 60. Redditt acknowledges that some verses are problematic, notably 27:12-13. He solves the question for verse 12 by discounting the opening formulation, but offers no explanation to sort out verse 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁵ Elder, *passim*.

⁵⁶ Wildberger, 911ff.

Form, Ort, and in the detailed treatments *Ziel*.⁵⁷ Clements addresses the matter of style only in connection with the “alliterative effect” in 24:1, 3. He observes rather dismissively that “[a] similar alliterative effect is striven for also in the next verse, evidently with the intention of using sound repetition to create a specially imposing effect of impending doom.”⁵⁸ His description of elements of style and imagery includes words like “stilted,”⁵⁹ “forced,”⁶⁰ “strained and grotesque,”⁶¹ and “wooden and clumsy,”⁶² and he tends to regard such features as the work of a later and rather unskilled redactor(s).

Pagán⁶³ acknowledged the contribution of what he calls “literary” or “literary-historical” analysis “to the identification of the components of the text and to the metric evaluation of pericopes;” however, he insists that “they [*sic*] have made no substantial contributions to a historical understanding of the text.”⁶⁴ He acknowledged also the contributions of form-critical studies, which he said have freed the text from “any specific historical moment”⁶⁵ and “from late apocalyptic presuppositions.”⁶⁶ He described his

⁵⁷ Wildberger, *passim*. He does comment briefly about *Metrum* for each block of text, but seldom does he attribute any interpretive significance to metrical considerations. See also Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, whose categories are Structure, Genre, Setting, and Intention.

⁵⁸ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 201.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶³ Pagán, *From Crisis to Hope*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

own approach to the text as theological and sociological.⁶⁷ His concerns are primarily themes or motifs; consequently, textual details are treated minimally, and poetic features (including, for example, meter and style) are essentially ignored.

In this survey we see that while those who have studied Isaiah 24-27 have acknowledged its most elemental genre as poetry, none has addressed the consequences of its poetic identity. And yet Freedman has insisted: "Poetry is . . . central . . . for the study of the Hebrew Bible. . . . The form and style, the selection and order of words, all play a vital role in conveying content, meaning, and feeling. In poetry, the medium and message are inseparably intertwined to produce multiple effects at different levels of discourse and evoke a whole range of response: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual."⁶⁸

At the conclusion of his "Discourse on Prophetic Discourse," in which he illustrated the range of poetic complexity by studying two passages from Micah, one comparatively simple (3:1-8), the other notoriously difficult (1:10-16), Freedman observed:

Our investigation has shown that the passage [Mic. 1:10-16] cannot be analyzed or parsed according to the common rules of Hebrew syntax and grammar. At the same time, the more carefully we examine the components the more connections and structural patterns emerge. It is possible that such features are an aspect of the prophet's subconscious, expressed in the involuntary speech of an ecstatic experience. It is also possible that the passage in question is the result of a carefully planned presentation, which resembles ecstatic utterance but is deliberately designed that way. Our sense of its incoherence may be a reflection of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 101. He appears basically to follow the outlines of the post-exilic conflict put forward by Plöger and Hanson and echoed in Millar's *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (although Pagán disagrees with details of Millar's structure of the text).

⁶⁸ D.N. Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 1.

our ignorance, or failure to recognize more intricate patterns and arrangements, which differ from standard usage but have a subtle system of their own.⁶⁹

J. Cheryl Exum⁷⁰ describes the “great facility and versatility” with which the Hebrew poets and prophets used imagery and figures of speech. Several examples of what appears to be extended simile occur also in Isaiah 24-27. For example, there is a striking interplay among images in 25:10-12. YHWH’s trampling of Moab “like straw in manure” shifts to the spreading out of the people’s hands in the manure “like a swimmer.”

Exum also noted that “figurative language embraces ambiguity. In fact, much of its power derives from its . . . ability to be suggestive of multiple meanings.”⁷¹ Raabe has illustrated the presence of lexical, phonetic, and grammatical ambiguity in the Psalms;⁷² and it seems reasonable to expect similar technique by the prophets. In Isaiah 24:2, for example, we encounter the series of comparisons that illustrate the universality of YHWH’s judgment. The final comparison, כַּנְשָׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר נָשָׂא בּוֹ, has provoked considerable text-critical debate whether to change נָשָׂא to נָשָׂה or כַּנְשָׂה to כַּנְשָׂא.⁷³ March describes some manuscript evidence for the latter. In addition, since the third from last and next to last comparisons are economic (buyer-seller, borrower-lender), it has seemed reasonable to construe the last comparison also as an economic one, thus to see נָשָׂא as representing נָשָׂא I (“make a loan”) and to modify כַּנְשָׂה to match.

⁶⁹ Freedman, “Prophetic Discourse,” 158.

⁷⁰ “Of Broken Pots, Fluttering Birds and Visions in the Night: Extended Simile and Poetic Technique in Isaiah,” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 331-352.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁷² Paul R. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 213-227.

⁷³ See, for example, March, “Two Prophetic Compositions,” 2.

However, what if the final comparison should actually be paired with the first, “as for the people, so for the priest”? The MT reading is retained, but now instead of a third economic comparison one could read “as for those who forget” (נִשְׁה I), that is, the people, “so for those who give false hope” (אֲנִישׁ II), that is, those leaders of the people, sacred and secular, who insist that nothing will befall them. אֲנִישׁ and נִשְׁה sound alike, and lexically they overlap, especially the forms of נִשְׁה II with אֲנִישׁ I. Ambiguity appears to exist, and it might be deliberate.

We see here that a crucial ingredient of Isaiah 24-27’s identity as a text is its identity as poetry, and study of these chapters will remain incomplete until its poetry and the ramifications of its poetic character are thoroughly explored.

The Basic Stance of a New Look at Isaiah 24-27

G. W. Anderson was satisfied “that there is a substantial unity in [Isaiah 24-27] . . . but . . . not the unity of a carefully articulated argumentative poem.”⁷⁴ I concur. There is a substantial unity, and it is not “carefully articulated” as we measure argumentation. However, there is more to the unity of Isaiah 24-27 than what Anderson called “the unity of a prophetic response to a particular situation.”⁷⁵ Form- and redaction-critical approaches have been tried. Now there is a need to re-examine Isaiah 24-27 making more complete use of the characteristics that have been discovered in Hebrew and other Ancient Near Eastern poetry, in order to get at the “subtle system”⁷⁶ in these chapters that

⁷⁴ G.W. Anderson, 122.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Freedman, “Prophetic Discourse,” 158.

previous research has not been able to identify. But such a re-examination requires one major hermeneutical shift, namely, presupposing that the text is a coherent whole.

This presupposition has not been tried, though a number of contemporary scholars have proposed it. Collins urged that “our working assumption should favor the unity of a document, unless there is cogent evidence to the contrary. The burden of proof falls on the scholar who would divide a text into multiple sources.”⁷⁷ Sweeney emphasizes: “Only after the form, genre, setting, and intention of the final form of the text have been defined can the exegete look to the earlier forms that may or may not be present within that final form.”⁷⁸ However, having made that assertion, he reverts promptly to the presumption that inconsistency means incoherence (disunity):

In general, the identification of prior material is based on the detection of inconsistencies in the literary form, thematic concerns, or conceptual outlook of the prophetic book. Such inconsistencies may indicate the presence of work by different authors in the same text. But this does not account for the redactor who does his or her work so well that such inconsistencies are no longer evident, nor does it account for the redactor whose viewpoint or literary techniques are in fundamental agreement with those of the earlier form of the text.⁷⁹

Sweeney acknowledges some but not all of the things unaccounted for by this approach. In addition to his caveats, it needs to be recognized that “the detection of inconsistencies in literary form” is predicated on the literary form that the reader/interpreter supposes, which might not conform to the conventions of literary form under which it was composed. Nor does this approach allow or account for “inconsistencies” that are

⁷⁷ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 12-13.

⁷⁸ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 13.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

intentional: literary devices that illustrate or punctuate the nature of the material, even devices that might actually ambiguate the meaning of the text. “Parallelism [for example] is constituted by redundancy and polysemy, disambiguation and ambiguity, contrast within equivalence; and these devices can operate over a much wider range than simply between poetic cola.”⁸⁰

Poetic analysis does include “segmentation,”⁸¹ a procedure similar to the delimitation of units, but with one important distinction. Whereas the units delimited by form-critical analysis are construed as having circulated independently before being incorporated into the final composition, the segments are acknowledged to be integral parts of the whole—like paragraphs in a narrative, strophes in a poem. Alonso-Schökel discusses the difficulties of source- and form-critical approaches, especially the lack of consistent and common results, and argues for a different approach especially to the prophetic texts:

Thus I believe that one can challenge both principles presented at the outset [namely, terseness and orality of prophetic oracles] with the best scientific knowledge and can practice criticism of the criticism which dividing criticism [*Kritik an der einteilenden Kritik*]. Methodically we presuppose the possibility of units, which include one or more chapters. If we encounter in them a genuine inner structure, with traces of a composer’s work [*einer kompositorischen Arbeit*], then one may with complete justification assume the existence of one author [*Autor*] for the whole, or one writer [*Verfasser*], whether it is the actual bearer of the prophetic name or one of his pupils [*Schüler*], who has reworked the poem. Moreover, it might be very possible that the prophet himself has recorded his prophecies. At the least this position has as much going for its as the opposing

⁸⁰ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 99.

⁸¹ Wilfrid G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 16, *passim*.

view. And, together with Gunneweg, I believe that it is the more likely (translation mine).⁸²

Summary Observation

The current inventory of Isaiah commentaries and studies of Isaiah 24-27 lacks two important features. First, none of the current works takes into account the growing body of knowledge about Hebrew language or about Hebrew poetry. Second, while the most recent commentaries on Isaiah show some awareness that a more holistic approach to texts is necessary, none has actually made the necessary move of allowing for the possibility of an original unity for Isaiah or for major parts of the whole.⁸³ Developments in the study of Hebrew language and poetry, which have identified previously unrecognized principles or techniques of textual cohesion and coherence, require that a fresh look at Isaiah 24-27 with a presupposition of original unity be given an equal opportunity for consideration alongside the existing studies which have presupposed that the unity of the final form of the text is only the result of a longer editorial process.

⁸² Luis Alonso-Schökel, *Das Alte Testament als literarisches Kunstwerk*, trans. [from Spanish to German] Karlhermann Bergner (Köln: Bachem, 1971), 383-384.

⁸³ Potential exceptions are Robert H. O'Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 198 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) and Avraham Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (New York: Hebraeus Press, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse” offers considerable difficulties, but the approaches of studies presently available have tended to compound the difficulties rather than solve them.

The fundamental difficulty concerns the literary coherence (unity) of Isaiah 24-27. Since form- and redaction-critical approaches depend on incoherence and disunity, there is no way a piece of literature can get an unprejudiced examination as to whether it actually does possess coherence. To be sure, a presupposition of coherence will not obtain an unprejudiced examination, either. However, contemporary literary theory has begun to define coherence in three dimensions: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. Consequently, there is a need to reexamine the text to see whether it exhibits coherence in one or more of these dimensions. And it cannot be discounted in advance that the dimension in which coherence occurs may shift in the course of a literary work. The use of *Stichwörter*, often disparaged in earlier studies, might be precisely the writer’s tool.

One of the key hermeneutical principles in previous scholarship is a conception of uniform development, applied equally to literary genre, linguistics, and theological ideas. The findings of studies in Hebrew and other Ancient Near East languages and in the poetry of these cultures require a radical change in this principle. The lines of literary, linguistic, and even theological development are not straight, the curves are not smooth.

Rearrangement of materials to fit presupposed historical systems makes understanding them ostensibly easier, but it is not realistic.

Adele Berlin has proposed seven elements of a “new biblical hermeneutics,”¹ which will need to be applied if a truly fresh look, a genuine reconsideration of the “Isaiah Apocalypse” is to take place:

1. Respect the integrity of the text.
2. Assume that the text makes sense in its present form.
3. Take the wording of the text seriously.
4. Take the literary context seriously.
5. Take the historical and social context seriously.
6. Is the text to be read literally or metaphorically?
7. Decide which features of the text are hermeneutically significant and how they are to be used in the interpretive process.²

Form- and redaction-critical paradigms have not answered the questions raised by the text Isaiah 24-27. A new approach is in order. Anderson “reconsidered” this pivotal passage nearly thirty-five years ago, but it is time to do so again.

¹ “A Search for a New Biblical Hermeneutics: Preliminary Observations,” in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the 21st Century. The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference*, ed. Jerrold S. Cooper and Glenn M. Schwartz (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996).

² *Ibid.*, 201-206, *passim*.

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