

Isaiah Chapter 10:5-34, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes¹

Divine Judgment on Arrogant Assyria, YHWH's Tool for Divine Punishment on Israel and Judah A Remnant of Israel / Jacob Will Return-- Still, Assyria's Army Is Marching, But Will Be Cut Down!

10:5², ¹ הוֹי אֲשׁוּר שְׂבַט אֲפִי

¹There are two end-notes for this passage: (1) Allegorical Use of Horses and Chariots for Depicting Human Behavior; and (2) Fall of the Assyrian Empire.

²Alexander comments on **10:5-34** That [the prophet] “turns to the Assyrians themselves, God’s chosen instruments, whom He had commissioned against Israel to punish and degrade it, but whose own views were directed to universal conquest, to illustrate which, the Assyrian himself is introduced as boasting of his tributary princes and his rapid conquests, which had met with no resistance from the people or their Gods, and threatening Judah with a like fate, unaware of the destruction which awaits himself, imputing his success to his own strength and wisdom, and glorying, though a mere created instrument, over his Maker and his Mover (**verses 5-15**)...

“His approaching doom is then described under the figure of a forest suddenly, and almost totally consumed by fire (**verses 16-19**)...

“This succession of events is to have the effect of curing the propensity to trust in man rather than God, at least among the elect remnant who survive; for though the ancient promises of great increase shall certainly be verified, only a remnant shall escape God’s righteous judgments (**verses 20-23**)...

“To these [the remnant] the prophet now addresses words of strong encouragement, with a renewed prediction of a judgment on Assyria, similar to that on Midian at Oreb, and on Egypt at the Red Sea, which is then described, in the most vivid manner, by an exhibition of the enemy’s approach, from post to post [military station to military station], until he stands before Jerusalem, and then, with a resumption of the metaphor before used, his destruction is described as the prostration of forest-trees and thickets—by a mighty axe (**verses 24-34**).

Alexander adds that “It is commonly agreed that the close of the chapter relates chiefly, if not wholly, to the destruction of Sennacherib’s army, recorded in **chapters 37-36**.” (P. 220)

Slotki comments that **verses 5-34** have to do with: “The Assyrian onslaught on Judah, Sennacherib’s arrogance and self-glorification, and the consequent destruction of his power. The date of this oracle may be some time between 717 and 701 B.C.E.”

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He states that in **verses 5-15** “Assyria is entrusted with a mission to execute the Divine judgment, but abuses it,” and that in **verses 5-7** that “A contrast is drawn between God’s plan and Assyrian ambition and brutality.” (P. 49)

Motyer entitles **verses 5-15** “The judgment,” and comments that “Isaiah declares the coming judgment on Israel by means of this magnificent oracle of the two sovereignties: the sovereignty of the Lord (יְהוָה [‘my Lord,’ **verse 12**]) and of the king of Assyria (**verse 12**). In doing so he creates one of the **Bible’s** central utterances about the relation between heaven and earth in human history...

“Without forester and carpenter, axe and saw lie lifeless (**verse 15**). There is a rigor about Isaiah’s teaching. Assyria’s was a savage imperialism, pursued without asking and without quarter: Was this the Lord’s doing? No wonder Habakkuk was aghast at the thought (**Habakkuk 1:5-13**), even if in the end he would not have had it otherwise (**Habakkuk 3:17-19**)...

“There is only one Agent and He does all things well. Under him, history is the outworking of moral providences. The Assyrian holocaust was not ‘let loose’ on the world; it was sent, directed where it was merited (**verse 6**), kept within heaven’s limits, and in the end Assyria was punished for its excesses (**verse 12**). But if the Assyrian Empire is but an axe or saw, how is it culpable? It is only a bad workman who blames his tools. How can the master-craftsman hold his instruments responsible? How can a tool be an agent? At this point we come face to face with the biblical paradox: the Lord is Sovereign, but His instruments are morally responsible agents...

“In Isaiah **37:28-29** Isaiah uses the figure of the horse and its rider, which is the nearest the **Bible** comes to elucidating the mystery of sovereignty and responsibility. The Assyrians are the horse, the Lord is the Rider. To the horse belongs all the restless energy and huge strength of its nature; to the Rider belongs all direction and skill of management. The Assyrians give thought and then expression in action to the effectuation of that world dominion which expresses their mind and matches their assumed abilities and rights, but the Lord rides upon world history for the accomplishment of holy purposes.” (Pp. 112-13)

Isaiah 37:28-29 depicts YHWH addressing the Assyrians under Sennacherib’s command:

- 28 I knew your sitting, and your going forth, and your coming,
and your exciting yourself / raging against Me.
29 Because of your exciting yourself / raging against Me,
and your being at ease went up into My ears--
and I will place My hook in your nose,
and My bridle in your lips,

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and I will cause you to return
by the way on which you came!

What do you think? Can you explain what happened in the twentieth century—specifically in World War II—in terms of this illustration of horse and Divine Rider? We think it fits, hand in glove. The Hitlers and Mussolinis and Stalins and Hirohitos have seen their day of raging tumult, resulting in the murder of millions; but their brief periods of sovereignty have come to an end, and in their place has come justice, at least for a while. Do you agree? And have not those “horses” been replaced by others, which are seeing their day in this 21st century, only, we hope, to come to an end, to be replaced by Divine justice? See our end-note 1, for different ways of using the allegory of the horse with regards to human behavior.

Watts entitles **verses 5-19** “Assyria, Rod of My Anger.”

He comments that “A formal similarity ties this new section to the last episode: the use of ‘woe.’ But the subject and orientation turn from Israel to Assyria. The episode comes to grips with the anomaly that God is using the enemy—is claiming to own and control the enemy—against His Own people. The problems God faces in doing so are portrayed from the viewpoint of those who believe that God has a special relationship with Jerusalem.

“The passage has one theme: Assyria, God chosen instrument. But the disparity in character and intention between God and His instrument tests the unity of the passage. Yahweh speaks twice on the issue. In **verses 5-6** He announces the Assyrian’s commission. In **verse 12b** He promises to punish the Assyrian king’s ambition. The rest of the section reacts to these announcements...

“The composition is a masterpiece in which the choice and balance of the vocabulary and grammar, not to mention the sounds of the words, work together to achieve the effect intended. It is one of the strongest literary pieces in the entire [**Book of Isaiah**].

“It begins as though it would continue the ‘woes’ that precede. But the Yahweh-word breaks in to turn attention to the active perpetrator of the violence instead of its victim.” (P. 147)

Watts comments on **verses 5-7** that “The objection turns to the subject, the Assyrian, by using ‘but as for him.’ **Verses 5-6** have spoken of God’s intention. The response is concerned about the Assyrian’s intention.” (Pp. 147-48)

Alexander comments on **verse 5**: The Assyrian is now distinctly brought into view, as the instrument which God would use in punishing His people. But instead of simply executing this task, the Assyrians would seek their own ends and exceed their

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commission, and for this they must themselves be punished. The prophet begins therefore with a woe against them. *Woe unto Asshur* (the Assyrian or Assyria itself), *the rod of My anger, and the staff in their* (the Assyrians') *hand is My indignation*, i.e. its instrument...

“The words **הוּא בַיָּדָם** [literally, ‘it (the staff / rod) in their hand’] are rejected by [the German commentators] Hitzig and Ewald as a gloss, on the ground that they render the two clauses inconsistent, one describing Assyria as itself the rod, the other putting a [staff, or] rod into Assyria’s own hand, whereas in **verse 14** Assyria is still represented as the rod and not as the rod-bearer...

“The chief point and beauty of the verse...lie in the alleged inconsistency of representing the Assyrian, by whose rod the Israelites were smitten, as himself a mere rod in the hand of God. Such emendations are as puerile [childishly silly and trivial] in taste as they are inconsistent with the favorite German canon [rule], that the harder reading is presumptively the true one. Any school-boy can expound the hardest passage in the classics by omitting what he pleases on the score of inconsistency.” (P. 223)

We say Yes!, and think that modern critics and commentators should take this advice of Alexander seriously. What kind of serious commentary is it if the one commenting has changed the original text to his liking before commenting on it?

Gray entitles **verses 5-17** “The fatal arrogance of Assyria.”

He comments that “Assyria, who was being used by Yahweh to punish His disobedient people (compare **9:7-10:4 + 5:26-29**), had arrogantly attributed its success to its own power, not discerning that it was a mere instrument in Yahweh’s hands: therefore it must be destroyed.” (P. 198)

Oswalt entitles **10:5-11:16** “Hope Despite Destruction.” He entitles **10:5-34** “The Destroyer Destroyed.” And he entitles **10:5-11**, “Assyria, God’s Tool.”

He comments on **verses 5-11** that “At this point in the discourse the tone changes radically. Assyria remains a key figure (**10:5, 12, 24; 11:11, 16**), but now the destroyer is the destroyed...

“It is true that what is trusted in the place of God will destroy us (**7:1-8:22**), but that does not mean the destroyer is supreme, nor that he or it holds our destiny. No, whatever may happen to us, it is still God Who is Supreme, it is still He to Whom we look...

“This is the theological issue which undergirds this segment of **chapters 7-12**. It is the necessary continuation of the truth that the Sovereign Lord is with us. To be

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sure, we ignore Him at our peril, for He is with us. But by the same token, when we have brought destruction upon ourselves He is still with us, and His purposes are always for good. Yes, Assyria may come with all her engines of war, but she comes at God's command, and unless she bows to the same morally consistent law which is incumbent upon all God's creatures (**9:7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}-10:4**), she will disappear at the same command (**10:5-34**)...

"In her place will rise the kingdom of true power, of righteousness and peace (**11:1-16**). In that hour, the folly of trusting Assyria, the creature, and the wisdom of trusting God, the benevolent Creator, will be fully manifest." (Pp. 261-62)

Oswalt adds that "In **10:5-34** the amazing doctrine is stated that the Gods are not necessarily on the side of the victors and that defeat for us is not defeat for God. Although this understanding has been a part of the western philosophy of history for sixteen hundred years, it is still difficult for us to translate it into feelings. Like our ancient Near Eastern forebears we instinctively believe that the victor's Gods are God indeed and that the defeated's God is unmasked as a charlatan [Yes—for many Americans it was a bitter pill to swallow when America's armed forces were withdrawn from Viet-Nam!]...

"Against this, Isaiah envisions a God Who is not the prisoner of history, Who is not the alter ego of either victor or vanquished, but Who guides all events to an outcome in keeping with His Own joyous and beneficent plan. All are under His hand. He is neither the possession nor the manifestation of any of His creatures...

"This is the doctrine of transcendence, a truth of unparalleled importance for life and understanding...Isaiah was not the first to formulate it (contra the evolutionary theory of Israelite religion), for it is implicit in the first three commandments of the Decalogue [Ten Commandments], but it may be fair to say that he was the first to apply it to the historical process in a thoroughgoing way." (P. 262)

Yes...but we wonder, is the prophet Isaiah writing "doctrines"? If "doctrine" means "a belief or set of beliefs held and taught by a church, political party, or other group," is it not anachronistic to hold that Isaiah is "formulating doctrine"? Should we not say that what Isaiah insists on became a basis for the later formulation of the doctrine of transcendence by theologians, but not a statement of that doctrine itself? He certainly does not use such a word!

Oswalt adds that "In **10:5-19** Isaiah states dramatically the twofold truth that the people are about to feel the rod of Assyria, but that Assyria is only a rod, and as such is subject to the will and purpose of One Who swings it...Assyria's power and glory do not make her immune from destruction, for she too is responsible to One Whose power and glory are greater than hers. As the statement is now constituted it is divided into three parts: **Verses 5-11** assert that Assyria is God's tool, though she has no thought of that;

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Verses 12-14 express the pride of Assyria for which judgment is promised; **Verses 15-19** tell the nature and extent of the coming judgment.” (Pp. 262-63)

Kaiser entitles **verses 5-15** “Woe to Over-confident Assyria,” and comments that “By the standards of the sayings of classical prophecy, the woe against Assyria is a remarkable construction. It resorts to the means of dramatic presentation by taking up the thoughts—which for this period means the words—of the party threatened, and ends with a series of didactic questions [didactic questions ask ‘Who?’, ‘What?’, ‘Where,’ ‘When,’ and ‘How?’ of students as a means of teaching], instead of in a clear announcement of judgment...The address in **verses 5-6** contains no accusations as such, but indicates the Divine control over the one affected by the woe...The accusation contains a threefold grounding before two didactic double questions bring the section to an end.” (Pp. 229-30)

Kaiser comments on **verses 5-7**, which he entitles “Yahweh’s woe over Assyria,” that “It is a characteristic feature of the audacity of Israel’s assurance of God that it saw in its own impotence, and the way in which it was delivered-over to the world power of its time, evidence that the latter was Yahweh’s instrument by which He acted on His Own people and at the same time gained glory in the world. Thus Jeremiah is said to have declared that Yahweh Himself had given rule over the world to His servant Nebuchadnezzar (**Jeremiah 27:5ff.**), and **Second Isaiah** saw the Persian king Cyrus, who conquered the kingdoms of Media and Lydia and the Neo-Babylonian empire, as the anointed one (messiah), called by Yahweh for the sake of His people Israel and His Own glorification over the people of this earth (**Isaiah 45:1ff.**)...

“There developed out of the helplessness of Israel a theology of history according to which Yahweh deliberately goaded the enemies of His people against His Own people (compare **Isaiah 9:10^{Heb} / 11^{Eng}**), and summoned them from afar to annihilate His faithless people (**Isaiah 5:26; 7:18-20**). In this way the defeated people assured themselves of the power of their God in the past for the sake of His future. The present woe against Assyria should also be seen against the background of this theology of history, which understands Assyria as the punitive instrument of Yahweh to annihilate His apostate people...

“As **verse 6** envisages a present event and **verses 9, 13-14** show that the northern kingdom, Israel, had already been destroyed, Assyria’s task on this occasion involves Jerusalem and Judah, as now the authentic Israel. Its ravaging...and annihilation...are in accordance with God’s purpose...

“However, the great king, who is named simply after his God and his kingdom, does not understand himself as an instrument of Yahweh, but sees the possibility offered to him of incorporating yet another kingdom simply as a confirmation of his arrogant self-understanding. He believes that he can subdue any kingdom he likes and

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וּמַטֵּה הָהוּא בְיָדָם זַעֲמִי:

Alas, Assyria—rod of My anger!³

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incorporate it into his empire. Thus the Divine instrument of punishment has turned into the tyrant concerned for the annihilation of all peoples.” (Pp. 234-35)

³Gray comments on **verses 5-6** that “Assyria is the [שֵׁבֶט] rod (see **Proverbs 23:13-14**,

- 13 You (singular) shall not withhold from a youth discipline / correction;
if you strike him with the rod, he will not die!
- 14 You with the rod shall strike him,
and his innermost-being from sheol / (the) grave you will deliver!)

with which Yahweh whips His rebellious children (**Isaiah 1:2**) for their good; in order to satisfy His righteous anger with His people, He suffers Assyria to plunder Judah and trample it down.” (P. 196)

Watts concurs that the שֵׁבֶט, “rod,” “may refer to the disciplinarian rod of punishment as in **Job 9:34** and **21:9**...**Proverbs 13:24**; **2 Samuel 7:14**; **23:21**; **Isaiah 14:29**.” But it can also refer to “a ruler’s scepter as it does in **Genesis 49:10**; **Numbers 24:17**; **Judges 5:14**; **Isaiah 9:3 / 4**; **11:4**; **14:5** and **Amos 1:5, 8**.” (P. 149)

Oswalt comments on these two verses that “the concept that the enemy, who did not even acknowledge God, could be a rod in [YHWH’s] hand had a revolutionary flavor in Isaiah’s time. It spoke of an overriding moral purpose in history that went beyond local or national Gods and their Self-serving natures...

“Undoubtedly the Hebrew people considered the Assyrians to be the most ‘Godless’ and ‘profane’ people they knew. Yet, Isaiah has the audacity to say that the Assyrians are God’s tool to punish them and that they are the Godless and profane ones! How could this be?...

“First, it is plain that the prophet considers all people to be instruments of the Sovereign. Even the vilest of persons is serving God’s purposes, if only to illustrate the ultimate results of evil...God is present in and through the processes of history, bringing out of them that which will most effectively serve goodness and truth...Relatively speaking, Israel is more profane and Godless than Assyria because she has had more light to reject...So Jesus’ words, ‘To whom much is given, much is required’ (**Luke 12:48**), apply to Israel and Assyria; they also apply to the modern West.” (P. 263)

What do you think? Do you agree that “even the vilest of persons is serving God’s purposes”?

And he (is) a staff / scepter⁴ in the hand⁵ of My indignation!⁶

10:6⁷ בְּגוֹי חֲנֹף אֲשַׁלְּחֵנּוּ

וְעַל-עַם עֲבָרְתִי אֲצַוֶּנּוּ

לְשַׁלֵּל שַׁלָּל וְלִבְזוֹ בְּזוֹ

(וְלְשִׁימוֹ) [וְלְשׁוּמוֹ] מִרְמָס כְּחֶמֶר חוּצוֹת:

⁴The noun used here, **מִטָּה**, has numerous meanings, from “staff,” to “rod,” to “shaft,” to “branch,” or “tribe.” Watts translates by “staff,” and comments that it “may also refer to a scepter as it does in **Jeremiah 48:17; Ezekiel 19:11-14; Psalm 110:2**, but not to an educator’s tool.” (P. 149)

⁵Watts notes that “The problem pair of words is **הוּא בְיָדָם** [literally, ‘he in their hand’]. By itself this means ‘he (is) in their hand.’ Joined to **מִטָּה**, ‘staff’ [masculine singular noun] it may be rendered ‘[staff] which (is) in their hand.’” (P. 146) He comments, “That God’s work should be placed in the power and authority of the Assyrian raises a serious issue of faith.” (P. 149)

Yes...it is the same issue that troubles the prophet Habakkuk, as he sees YHWH using the Chaldeans / Babylon to punish Judah—see **Habakkuk 1:12-15**.

⁶Slotki comments that “It is not the military power of the Assyrians that conquers a people, but God’s indignation resulting in the chastisement of that people and in the use of the Assyrians as His instrument for that purpose.” (P. 49)

⁷Watts comments on **verse 6** that “The verse precludes the obvious objection that Israel is elect, the children of Abraham. Not so—they are that no longer. They are *a godless nation* or a profane nation. The use of **גוֹי**, ‘nation’ [or ‘gentile’] is deliberate. (Compare **Isaiah 1:2b-4; 2:6-8**).

“They are a people of God’s wrath. This implies not only rejection but active measures toward extermination. That is the role of the Assyrian.” (P. 149)

So you agree with Watts, that Israel / Judah were no longer YHWH’s “elect”? Compare the opening chapter of **Hosea**, where “My people” become “Not My people,” and then once again become “My people.”

Against a profane nation⁸ I will sent him forth!⁹

And to a people of My wrath¹⁰ I will command him--
to spoil spoil, and to plunder plunder,¹¹

and to place him¹² as a trampling-place, like clay of (the) streets.¹³

⁸Slotki, the Jewish commentator on **Isaiah**, states that the phrase “an ungodly nation” is “an allusion to Israel.” (P. 49) The adjective is אֲנִיָּהּ, which **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines as meaning “profane,” “irreligious.” Holladay says it means “estranged from God,” “godless.”

⁹Motyer comments that the 1st person piel verb אֲשַׁלְּחֵנּוּ, “I will send him forth,” is “intensive...the commission of a superior to an underling. *I dispatch / ‘give him a command’* is not to be understood as a command openly spoken to the king of Assyria which he then failed to obey...Rather, we listen here to the Lord stating His secret, what He sovereignly intends to accomplish through Assyria.” (P. 114)

¹⁰Slotki states that “the people of My wrath” means “the people against whom My wrath is directed.” (P. 49)

¹¹Motyer comments that “the two components of Maher-Shalal-Chash-Baz (**Isaiah 8:1ff.**) indicate the ongoing fulfilment of the message which became flesh in Isaiah’s son.” (P. 114) In **verse 6**, the words *shalal* and *baz* both occur twice.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “*Upon (or against) an impious nation (i.e. Israel, including Ephraim and Judah) will I send him (the Assyrians), and against the people of My wrath (i.e. the people that provokes it and deserves it, and is to experience it) I will commission him (or give him his orders), to take spoil and to seize prey (literally to spoil spoil and to prey prey), and to place (or render) it (the people) a trampling (a thing to be trodden under foot, a common figure for extreme degradation), like the mire of streets.*” (P. 224)

Verse 6 is translated by **Rahlfs** as: τὴν ὀργὴν μου εἰς ἔθνος ἄνομον ἀποστελῶ καὶ τῷ ἐμῷ λαῷ συντάξω ποιῆσαι σκῦλα καὶ προνομὴν καὶ καταπατεῖν τὰς πόλεις καὶ θεῖναι αὐτὰς εἰς κονιορτόν, “the anger of Mine [taking this phrase from the end of **verse 5**] into / against a lawless nation I will send forth, and to the people of Mine [the Assyrians, who are YHWH’s ‘rod’] I will order to make spoils and foraging, and to trample-under-foot the cities, and to place / make them into dust.”

¹²The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” וְשַׁלְּחֵנּוּ, “and to put / place him,” with the letter *yodh*, ך; second the *qere*, “to be read,” וְשַׁרְחֵנּוּ,

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וְהוּא לֹא־כֵן יִדְמֶה 10:7

וּלְבָבוֹ לֹא־כֵן יַחְשֵׁב

כִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד בְּלִבּוֹ

וּלְהַכְרִית גּוֹיִם לֹא מֵעַט:

And he—not in this way does he think;

and his heart—not in this way does he plan.

But to exterminate (is) in his heart,¹⁴

¹²(...continued)

with the same meaning, but spelled with the letter *waw*, ך.

¹³Gray comments on **verses 6-7** that “Yahweh’s will is that His people shall be plundered...and downtrodden (compare **Isaiah 28:18; 5:5; 7:25**); but...Assyria thinks otherwise; it is in his heart...i.e., he intends...to destroy and not only to plunder and trample down; [he intends] to exterminate many nations irrespective of their having provoked Yahweh’s anger.” (P. 196)

Watts comments on **verse 7** that “Attention is drawn to the character and intention of the instrument. His interest is in violence and slaughter for its own sake—to build up his own image, to expand his ego.” (P. 149)

Yes...but our reading of the Assyrian annals in Pritchard’s **Ancient Near Eastern Texts** reveals another side to the intention of the Assyrians—that of bringing glory and honor to their Warrior Gods, as well as gaining lasting glory for themselves, an intention not so different from that of Israel’s King David. See footnote 32.

Oswalt comments on **verse 7** that “It is not necessary to know oneself commanded in order to be commanded. Assyria did not see herself as the servant of Yahweh, but she was. Her purpose was not purgative [laxative-like] or cathartic [providing psychological relief through the open expression of strong emotions] or judgmental. It was merely conquest and aggrandizement...

“In fact, none of us has anything that we did not receive. Assyria, failing to realize this truth, believed her superior wealth and power gave her the right to sack the world (compare **Romans 1:19-21; 1 Corinthians 4:7**).” (Pp. 263-64)

¹⁴Gray comments that “Assyria is guided not by the will of Yahweh, but by its own cruel lust; consequently it exceeds its commission.” (Pp. 196-97)

and to cut off nations—not a few!¹⁵

10:8¹⁶ כִּי יֹאמֶר

¹⁵Translations of **verse 7** vary:

King James, “Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but *it is* in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.”

Tanakh, “But he has evil plans, His mind harbors evil designs; For he means to destroy, To wipe out nations, not a few.”

New Revised Standard, “But this is not what he intends, nor does he have this in mind; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few.”

Rahfs, αὐτὸς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐνεθυμήθη καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ οὐχ οὕτως κελόγισται ἀλλὰ ἀπαλλάξει ὁ νοῦς αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἔθνη ἔξολεθρεῦσαι οὐκ ὀλίγα, “But then he, did not think / consider this way; and in the innermost-being he did not reason in this way, but rather he will change his mind, and / even of the nations to utterly root out / destroy not a few.”

Watts notes that the phrase מְעַט לֹא, “not a few,” is changed by the Aramaic Targum to “without protection.” (P. 146)

Slotki comments on **verse 7** that “Assyria does not recognize the Divine commission with which she has been entrusted, and acts in sheer self-interest and lust for conquest.” (P. 49)

Motyer states that “Isaiah points out the disparity between Assyria’s motives and the Lord’s. Here, matching **verse 6**, are the Assyrians’ secret and wholly self-seeking ambitions...It was not a directive from heaven that moved Assyria against western Palestine and Zion; it was their own self-confidence...in his heart.” (P. 114)

Alexander comments on **verse 7**: “The Assyrian is now described as an unconscious instrument in God’s hand, and as entertaining in his own mind nothing but ambitious plans of universal conquest. *And he* (Assyria personified, or the king of Assyria) *not so will think* (will not imagine for what purpose he was raised up, or will not intend to execute My will), *and his heart not so will think* (or purpose); *for* (on the contrary) *to destroy* (is) *in his heart, and to cut off nations not a few*, i.e. by a litotes [a figure of speech wherein understatement is used to emphasize a point by stating a negative to further affirm a positive, often incorporating double negatives for effect] common in Hebrew, *very many nations.*” (P. 224)

¹⁶Slotki comments on **verses 8-11** that they depict “The Assyrian boast of successes in the past and confident assurance of easy victories in the future.” He adds that in **verse 8** the speaker is the Assyrian king.” (P. 50)

Oswalt comments on these same verses that “Isaiah now speaks for the Assyrian king and demonstrates how far he is from considering himself the servant of

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¹⁶(...continued)

Jerusalem's God...In a masterful survey of recent history, the prophet has the Assyrian list his conquests, beginning at the Euphrates and coming steadily southward until the wave crests upon Samaria just to the north (The conquests are listed not in chronological but in geographical order. The farthest north is Carchemish on the bend of the Euphrates about 350 miles from Jerusalem...Calneh is probably Kullani...about 50 miles south of Carchemish...Nor far away is Arpad...Hamath...is situated on the Orontes about 100 miles south of Arpad...Another 100 miles southward is Samaria)...

“How were any of these cities different from another? They all fell before me.’ Servant? No, conqueror. So it is always to a conqueror...

“As for serving Yahweh, what is He but one more of the worthless idols (אֱלֹהִים, ‘good for nothing(s)’) of the nations? The Assyrians had subdued Marduk and Hadad, Baal and El. What could the God of some out-of-the-way place like Jerusalem have over these great Gods? In any event, Yahweh had already been defeated at Samaria, so Jerusalem was as good as lost.” (P. 264)

Watts comments on **verses 8-11** that “The quoted speeches (**verses 8-11** and **verses 13-14**) are modeled on those of Rab-shekah (**2 Kings 18:19-25, 28-35; 19:10-13; Isaiah 36:4-10, 13-20; 37:10-13**)...The comparison that follows is deliberately insulting and denigrating in likening the idolatrous nations to Samaria and Jerusalem.” (P. 148)

Motyer comments on **verse 8** that “There is ground for the confidence [expressed in] **verse 7**. The [Assyrian] king has had much success to date, kingdoms have fallen to him and their *kings* have become his *commanders*...executives who carry out his edicts. Surely nothing can stop him!” (P. 114)

Alexander comments on **verse 8**: “This verse introduces the proof and illustration of his selfishness and pride. *For he will say* (or giving it a descriptive form, *he says*) *are not my princes altogether kings, or at the same time kings*, mere princes with respect to me, but kings as to all the world besides?...

“By exalting his tributary princes or the nobles of his court, he magnifies himself the more. The oriental monarchs, both in ancient and modern times, have affected the title of *Great King* (**Isaiah 36:4; Hosea 8:10**), and *King of kings* (**Ezekiel 26:7; Daniel 2:37**)...This is the more offensive because such titles properly belong to God alone (**Psalms 95:3; Daniel 2:47; 8:25; Matthew 5:35**).” (P. 224)

Kaiser entitles **verses 8-9** (+ **13-14**) “The ungodly ruler of the world.” He comments that “To illustrate this arrogant attitude of the ruler of the world, the poet allows the reader to share in the thinking of the king who, in seeing all his officials and officers as kings, puts himself on earth in the position of God. In its contemptuous rhetorical questions, the list of subjected kingdoms in **verse 9** expresses the arrogance

(continued...)

הֲלֹא שָׂרֵי יַחְדּוֹ מַלְכִים:

Because he says,

Are not my princes altogether¹⁷ kings?¹⁸

10:9¹⁹ הֲלֹא כְּכַרְכַּמִּישׁ כָּלְנוּ

¹⁶(...continued)

of the king and at the same time provides the specific background for the boasting in **verses 13-14**. In content, this passage is not oriented on the historical course of events, but on the approach of the Assyrian army from across the Euphrates at Carchemis to the frontiers of Judea.” (P. 235)

¹⁷The adverb יַחְדּוֹ most often means “together,” “all together,” or possibly “all alike.” Watts states that M. D. Goldman has shown that it can also mean “alone,” or “separately.” (P. 146)

¹⁸Slotki comments that “Assyrian rulers had by that time already assumed the title of ‘king of kings,’ and many of their princes and officers were in fact kings whose territories they had conquered and whom they pressed into their service.” (P. 50)

“The first king known to use the title ‘king of kings’...was Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria (13th century B.C.E.). The title used to be intended quite literally, as a [prince or king] was the title of a city-state, and with the formation of an empire in the Late Bronze Age, the Assyrian rulers installed themselves as rulers over the existing structure of rulers (kings) of city-states.” **Wikipedia**, “King of kings,” 6/6/2016.

Watts holds that in Akkadian there was a distinction “between *malku* or *maliku*, which refers to the king of a city and *sarru* the king of a country. The Assyrians allowed the defeated city-kings to keep their titles [if they swore allegiance to the Gods of Assyria].” (P. 149)

¹⁹Slotki comments that in **verse 9** “A number of cities north of Judah, conquered by Assyrian kings, are enumerated: Calno, presumed to be Kullani near Arpad, and captured about 738 B.C.E. by Tiglath-Pileser; Carchemish, identified with the ruins of Jerabis on the right bank of the Euphrates. Formerly the capital city of the Hittites, in 717 B.C.E. it was incorporated by Sargon in the Assyrian empire; Hamath, the modern Hamah, half-way between Carchemish and Damascus on the river Orontes; it was captured in 738 B.C.E. by Tiglath-Pileser and again in 720 B.C.E. by Sargon; Arpad, the modern Tell Erfad, some fifteen miles north of Aleppo, captured by Tiglath-Pileser about 720 B.C.E.; Samaria, taken by the Assyrians in 732 B.C.E.; Damascus, conquered by them about 732 B.C.E.” (P. 50)

Gray comments on **verse 9** that “All cities are alike before it, is the boast of Assyria. The six capitals of states here mentioned represent the ominous extension of Assyria’s conquest towards Jerusalem. Carchemish, the most remote, begins the list;

(continued...)

¹⁹(...continued)

each following name is nearer Jerusalem than that which precedes, and the list ends with Samaria nearest both geographically and by the tie of kinship of its inhabitants... The order is clearly geographical; it is not chronological.” (P. 197)

Motyer comments that in this verse, “The king looks forward, seeing the future in the light of the past. Six cities are named in pairs. In each pair the first is further south than the second and the king is reasoning: ‘I took that; I can take this...The list...is not a historical description of the march but an impressionistic expression of the idea of inexorable advance; disaster ever nearer—Samaria next!’” (P. 114)

Alexander comments on **verse 9**: “Having boasted of his princes, he now boasts of his achievements. *Is not Calno like Carchemish? Have they not been equally subdued by me? Or is not Hamath like Arpad? Or is not Samaria like Damascus? ...*

“Similar boastings were uttered by Rabshakeh (**Isaiah 36:29-20; 37:12-13**). These conquests were the more remarkable because so speedily achieved, and because the Assyrians had before confined themselves within their own limits. All the towns named were farther north than Jerusalem and probably commanded the navigation of the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. Carchemish was a fortified town on an island in the Euphrates, at the mouth of the Chaboras...It had its own king (**Isaiah 37:13**) and its own Gods (**Isaiah 36:19**), and was taken by Tiglath-pileser (**2 Kings 15:29**). Calno was the Ctesiphon of the Greeks, on the east bank of the Tigris opposite Seleucia...Hamath was a city of Syria on the Orontes.” (Pp. 224-25)

Gray states that “Some of these places were frequently made tributary and even captured by Assyria; but it is difficult to believe that the mention of Damascus and Samaria refer to anything but the capture of the former in 734 B.C.E. by Tiglath-pileser, and of the latter in 722 B.C.E. by Sargon. Consequently we have here the conquests of Assyria...not of a single Assyrian king.” (P. 197)

Watts states that “*Carchemish* was a city on the Euphrates near the boundary between modern Turkey and Syria. It was known in the early second millennium and its history touched that of Egypt in the fifteenth century and that of the Hittites in the fourteenth. The city was sacked by the Assyrians repeatedly in the ninth and eighth centuries. Tiglath Pileser III received tribute from it. In 717 B.C.E. Sargon finally destroyed the city and deported its inhabitants...

“*Hamath* lies well to the south on the Orontes River [see the article by this name in **Wikipedia** with numerous photos of sites long the Orontes]. It was an important independent city. David collaborated with its king. It was subdued by Assyria in 738 B.C.E., and a brief uprising was totally put down in 720 B.C.E. *Arpad* is always paired with Hamath...They are mentioned as cities destroyed by Tiglath-Pileser III...It was located about twenty-five miles north of modern Aleppo [see the **Wikipedia** article ‘The Ancient City of Aleppo’]...

(continued...)

אִם-לֹא כַּאֲרַפָּד חַמַּת

אִם-לֹא כְּדַמְשֶׁק שְׁמָרוֹן:

Is not Calno²⁰ like Carcemish?

Or (is) not Chamath like Arpad?

Or (is) not Samaria like Damascus?

10:10 כַּאֲשֶׁר מִצָּאָה יָדַי לְמַמְלַכַת הָאֱלִיל

וּפְסִילֵיהֶם מִירוּשָׁלַם וּמִשְׁמָרוֹן:

¹⁹(...continued)

“*Samaria* was the city built by Omri to be the capital of [Northern] Israel. It had come under pressure from Tiglath-Pileser as early as the reign of Menahem (745-738 B.C.E. (**2 Kings 15:19-20**). In 738 B.C.E. Tiglath-Pileser invaded [Northern Israel] (**2 Kings 15:29**). Pekah was murdered, and the Assyrian put Hoshea on the throne and imposed tribute. When Tiglath-Pileser died (727 B.C.C.) Hoshea rebelled. Shalmaneser threw him in prison and besieged the city, finally subdued by his successor Sargon II in 722 B.C.E.

“*Damascus* was the capital of Aram [modern Syria] and one of the oldest cities in the world. In 732 B.C.E. Tiglath-Pileser conquered Damascus and its territory. He made it an Assyrian province with an Assyrian governor.

“*Jerusalem* apparently paid tribute to Assyria under Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz. But there is no record of a specific threat during this period. Under Hezekiah the threats became serious (compare **chapters 20** and **36-37**).” (Pp.149-50)

²⁰Watts notes that Calno “is usually pronounced ‘Calneh.’” (P. 146) **Rahfs** has *Χαλαννη οὐ ὁ πύργος ὠκοδομήθη*, “Chalanne, where the tower was built.”

Amos 6:2 has the name of the city as כַּלְנֵה, Chaleneh, in a statement of Amos challenging Northern Israel in a very similar way to this challenge by the Assyrian to look at what is happening to other cities in the Near East:

Cross over (to) Calneh, and look!

And go from there (to) Great Fortress (חַמַּת רַבָּה, chamath rabbah)!

And go down to Gath of the Philistines!

Are they any better than these kingdoms?

Or is their territory greater than your territory?

Just as my hand found for / at kingdoms of the worthlessness / no-God,
and their idols from Jerusalem and from Samaria.²¹

²¹Motyer comments on **verses 10-11**, that “Samaria and Jerusalem are all the more helpless, notes Isaiah ironically, since they were not such proficient idolaters! **Verse 11** concludes the series by inferring the fall of Samaria and purposing that of Jerusalem...

“It was not failure in arms etc. that rendered them helpless before Assyria; it was spiritual falsity and, in the case of Samaria and Jerusalem, apostasy.” (P. 114)

Translations of **verse 10** vary:

King James, “As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria”;

Tanakh, “Since I was able to seize The insignificant kingdoms, Whose images exceeded Jerusalem's and Samaria's”;

New Revised Standard, “As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols whose images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria”;

Rahfs, ὃν τρόπον ταύτας ἔλαβον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ μου καὶ πάσας τὰς ἀρχὰς λήμψομαι ὀλολύξατε τὰ γλυπτὰ ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ καὶ ἐν Σαμαρείᾳ, “in the same way I took these in my hand and all the rulers I will take! Wail, the carved images in Jerusalem and in Samaria!

Slotki comments that in the phrase מְמַלְכֵת הָאֱלִילִים, “kingdoms of the insufficiency / worthlessness,” the word אֱלִילִים is “a term of contempt.” The proud king of Assyria, who so easily subdued their lands and peoples, naturally regarded himself as much superior to all of them.” (P. 50) This same word, in the plural, is used for the “non-Gods” of the nations surrounding Israel. See footnote 23.

Motyer states that “The kingdoms of the no-God’ is an unusual expression, though not beyond the imaginative Isaiah. Maybe, however, the singular should retain its standard meaning of ‘worthlessness’...and the phrase be translated ‘worthless kingdoms,’ i.e. kingdoms lacking the true solidity of spiritual values.” (Pp. 114-15)

Alexander comments on **verse 10**: “As my hand hath found (i.e. reached and seized) the idol-kingdoms (worshippers of idols)—and their images (...whose images were more) than (those of) Jerusalem and Samaria—the apodosis of the sentence follows in the next verse...

“The heathen nations of antiquity do not seem to have denied the real existence and Divinity of one another’s Gods, but merely to have claimed superior honors for their own. Instead of the comparative sense *than*, the Vulgate gives to מִן [‘from,’ the prefix

(continued...)

10:11 הֲלֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְשִׁמְרוֹן וְלֵאלֵלִיָּהּ

כִּן אֶעֱשֶׂה לִירוּשָׁלַם וְלַעֲצָבֵיהָ:

²¹(...continued)

in the phrase מִירוּשָׁלַם, 'from Jerusalem] its local sense of *from*...which seems to mean that the idols of the kingdoms were derived from Israel, a fact which...though not only unsupported...[is] directly contradicted by all history...

“On the whole...though the sentence [verse 10] is at best obscure, the most satisfactory construction, both in a grammatical and historical point of view, is that adopted by the great majority of writers, not excepting the most learned of the Rabbins, David Kimchi, and which takes מִן as a particle of comparison...

“As my hand hath found the idol-kingdoms (*so shall it find Samaria and Jerusalem*)...As if he had said, ‘Since my hand has found the idol-kingdoms whose images exceeded those of Jerusalem and Samaria, much more shall it find Jerusalem and Samaria themselves.’ (Pp. 225-26)

Gray similarly states, “Since the great cities mentioned in **verse 9** have fallen, Jerusalem need not expect to stand.” (P. 197)

Kaiser comments that “The experience of Assyria that all these kingdoms without distinction were in its power is in accordance with its feeling that it owed the fact solely to its own strength and its own competence...Instead of recognizing Yahweh’s commission and disposition in the facts, Assyria attributes its success solely to its own competence, supposing that it alone is responsible for the fact that the frontiers of the nations do not hold up...and kings fall from their thrones.” (Pp. 235-36)

But Kaiser is mistaken, as can be quickly seen from the Assyrian annals in Pritchard’s **Ancient Near-Eastern Texts**. The Assyrian rulers attributed their success to their Warrior Gods, Who they claim constantly gave them oracles for guidance and supplied them with their strength. For one example, see the following quotation:

But I, Esarhaddon, who never turns around in a battle, trusting in the great Gods, his Lords, soon heard of these sorry happenings and I cried out “Woe!” rent my princely robe and began to lament loudly. I became as mad as a lion, my soul was aflame and I (called up the Gods by) clapping my hands, with regard to my (intention of) assuming the kingship, my paternal legacy. I prayed to Ashur, Sin, Shamash, Bel, Nebo and Nergal, (to) the Ishtar of Nineveh, the Ishtar of Arbela, and they agreed to give me an (oracle-)answer. By means of their correct (and) positive answer, they sent me the (following) trustworthy oracle (received by) extispicy [study and divination by means of animal entrails, especially the victims of sacrifice]: “Go (ahead), do not tarry! We will march with you, kill your enemies!” (**ANET**, p. 289)

Is it not just as I did to Samaria²² and her worthlessnesses / no-Gods--²³

in this way I will do to Jerusalem and her idols!²⁴

10:12²⁵ וְהָיָה כִּי־יִבְצַע אֲדָנָי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו

²²Watts states that the Assyrian's speech "indicates a threat to Samaria (i.e., prior to 722 B.C.E.)." He translates by "as I do to Samaria." But the Hebrew qal is past tense, כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְשָׁמְרוֹן, "just as I did to Samaria." This is not a threat of future action, but rather, a reminder of his past action against Samaria.

²³"Motyer explains that "[her] idols in **verse 11** is אֱלֹהֵיהָ '[her] no-gods'...**Verse 10** has the same word but in the singular (אֱלֹהִים), its only occurrence in **Isaiah**. (P. 114)

²⁴The noun here is עֲבֹדָה, "her idols," which also occurs at **Jeremiah 50:2** (the "idols" of Babylon, and **Micah 1:7** (the "idols" of Samaria, i.e., Northern Israel). The king of Assyria assumes that Jerusalem has idols just like Babylon does. In **verse 10** the king speaks of Jerusalem's פְּסִילֵיהֶם, another word for "idols."

Alexander translates, then comments on **verse 11**: "Shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and to her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?..."

"The English version [he means **King James**] and some others use the same word to translate אֱלֹהֵיהָ and עֲבֹדָה, which are in fact synonymous, although the latter signifies originally trouble, sorrow, with reference perhaps to the ultimate effect of image worship on the worshipers. The two words are differently rendered by [**Rahlfs**] (χειροποίητοις, ['hand-mades'], εἰδώλοις ['images,' 'idols'])." (Pp. 226-27)

Gray comments that these words, "In the mouth of Assyria...are blasphemy against Yahweh, for they imply that He is but one of the not-Gods." (P. 198)

²⁵Slotki comments that **verse 12** is "the indignant answer of the prophet, interrupting the blasphemy of the Assyrian who ventures to compare the God of Israel with the useless heathen idols." (P. 50)

Alexander comments: "To the boastful speech of the Assyrian succeeds a prediction of his fate. Although he had been suffered [?—we say, Divinely commissioned] to proceed so far, and would be suffered to proceed still further, in the work of subjugation, till he reached the very verge of Zion and the portals of Jerusalem; God had determined that the work should go no further, but be there cut short by the infliction of a signal vengeance on the selfishness and pride of the invader. And it shall be (i.e. the end of all his glorying shall be) that the Lord will cut all his work short at mount Zion and at Jerusalem. (Yes, even there) *will I visit* (i.e. manifest My presence

(continued...)

²⁵(...continued)

for the purpose of inflicting punishment) *on the fruit* (or outward exhibition) *of the greatness of heart* (i.e. arrogance and pride) *of the king of Assyria, and on the ostentation* (or display) *of his loftiness of eyes* (or looks, a common Scriptural expression for great haughtiness...

“By the destruction of Sennacherib’s army, God may be said to have cut short the work of that invader, or to have cut short His Own work by accomplishing His purpose of destruction, or to have cut short His Own work of punishing His people, by relieving them from danger...

“Here, as in **Isaiah 9:8**, *greatness of heart* is a temper opposite to that of the *lowly in heart* and the *poor in spirit*, who are represented in the **New Testament** as peculiarly acceptable to God (**Matthew 5:3; 11:29**.)” (Pp. 227-28)

Gray states, “Yahweh, having punished Jerusalem by means of Assyria (**verse 5**), will round off His work in Mount Zion by punishing the king of Assyria for his arrogance. In **verses 13-14** this arrogance appears to consist in attributing his success to his own power...The punishment of Assyria in Jerusalem will be the finishing touch in the work that Yahweh has to do there.” (P. 198)

Oswalt entitles **verses 12-19** “Assyria under judgment.”

He comments, “But what is so sinful about failing to realize that one’s role in history is not conqueror but servant? Why should the ‘woe’ fall upon us merely for ignorance? Isaiah makes it plain that Assyria was not merely ignorant. Rather, she was strutting, arrogant, and cruel in ways which earned her the cheerful hatred of peoples all over the Near East, most of whom had never heard of Yahweh. Yet, arrogance and cruelty are not wrong because people dislike them. People dislike them because they are doing wrong. They sense them to be contradictions of life as God has designed it. Thus, when the Sovereign has finished His work on Mount Zion (not Assyria accomplishing her rapacious intent), then Assyria herself will come under the judgment of God...

“**Verse 12** functions as a transitional element making it plain that what is done to Jerusalem and Samaria (and their idols, **verses 8-11**) is not done in spite of Yahweh but because of Him, and that the coming punishment upon Assyria is fully justified by her rapacious and arrogant attitude (**verses 13-14**.)” (Pp. 265-66)

Watts comments that “Throughout this section the **Vision [Book of Isaiah]** has recognized the unity of the Assyrian’s task. First the destruction of Samaria, including exile of its people, followed by the chastising purification of Jerusalem. Only after this is complete will Yahweh turn His attention to the Assyrian.” (P. 150)

אֶפְקֹד עַל-פְּרִי-גֹדֶל לִבָּב מֶלֶךְ-אַשּׁוּר

וְעַל-תְּפָאֶרֶת רוּם עֵינָיו:

And it will happen when my Lord will finish all His work
in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,

I will visit (with punishment)²⁶ upon (the) fruit of greatness of heart–Assyria’s king,
and upon (the) beauty of his eyes’ haughtiness!²⁷

10:13²⁸ כִּי אֶמַר בְּכַח יָדַי עֲשִׂיתִי

²⁶Where our Hebrew text has the first person singular imperfect, אֶפְקֹד, “I will visit (with punishment), **Rahlfs** has the third person masculine singular imperfect, ἐπάξει, “He will visit (with punishment).” **Tanakh, New Revised Standard** and **New Jerusalem** all translate by the third person, while **King James** and **New International** have the first person.

The Hebrew text has the first two lines of **verse 12** as a third person statement concerning YHWH, ‘my Lord will...’ and the next two lines as a first person statement, evidently attributed to YHWH, “I will...” Watts explains this by assuming that in the first two lines, the heavens are speaking, while in the last two lines, Yahweh is speaking.

²⁷Motyer comments that “For all the Assyrian self-assertion of **verses 7-11**, it is nevertheless the Lord Whose purpose controls all...What the king of Assyria did conformed to the will of God; why he did it has nothing to do with the will of God, only with the king’s arrogance and vaingloriousness.” (P. 115)

²⁸Slotki states that **verses 13-14** are a “resumption of the speech of the king of Assyria loud with self-glorification and the parading of his wisdom and brutal power.” (P. 51)

Motyer states that in these verses, “we have the king’s account of his abilities (**verse 13a**) and his irresistible power (**verse 14**). He can change structures (*boundaries*), disregard rights (*treasures*) and depose kings...”

“*Mighty one* (אֱבִיר), used of the Lord in **Isaiah 1:24**) may be a quasi-Divine title, suggesting, ‘God-like, I bring down throned kings.’ It was all as easy as bird-nesting.” (P. 115) We say “as easy as robbing birds’ nests on the ground.”

Gray comments on **verses 13-14** that Assyria attributes its conquests, so easily and completely obtained (**verse 14**) to its own power and wisdom (**verse 13**)...In **verse 14**, in vivid figures, the speaker enforces **verse 13**; he has robbed, captured, and silenced the whole earth.” (P. 199)

(continued...)

²⁸(...continued)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 13**: “The Assyrian is again introduced as speaking, and as arrogating to himself the two necessary qualities of a successful ruler, to wit [that is to say], energy and wisdom, military prowess and political sagacity. The last clause give the proofs of the assertion in the first, and mentions three things which the boasters had disposed of at his pleasure, political arrangements, money, and men. *For he saith* (in heart and life, not in words) *by the strength of my (own) hand I have done* (all this), *and by my (own) wisdom, for I am wise* (as well as strong), *and* (in the exercise of these two attributes) *I remove the bounds of the nations, and rob their hoards, and bring down, like a mighty man* (as I am), *the inhabitants...*”

“The removing of the bounds appears to be explained in the [Aramaic] Targum as descriptive of his conquering progress from one province to another...but the true sense is the more specific one of destroying the distinctions between nations by incorporation in a single empire.” (Pp. 228-29)

Watts states that “the king’s second poem of self-praise supplies the evidence to support Yahweh’s judgment of him.” (P. 150)

Oswalt comments on **verse 13** that “God is at work in His world, even when persons in whom He is at work do not know Him...That is what the Assyrian monarchs have done. Nominally thanking Ashur [an East Semitic god, and the head of the Assyrian pantheon in Mesopotamian religion, worshiped mainly in the northern half of Mesopotamia, and parts of north-east Syria and south east Asia Minor which constituted old Assyria, He was a deified form of the city of Assur, the capital of the Old Assyrian kingdom” (**Wikipedia**, 6/20/16)], they in fact praised themselves for the strength and skills which made them rulers of the world. (See the **Assyrian Annals** in Pritchard’s **Ancient Near-Eastern Texts**, pp. 274-301)...

“The superior person has the right to take from the inferior (so Nietzsche, and then Hitler). Such taking is not a matter for shame, then, but an entirely justified accomplishment. The superior race has a right to determine the boundaries of the conquered, just as it does to sack all that the inferiors have diligently stored up. The very possession of such superior skills and abilities is the justification for the rapacity...”

“To take such a position is, in fact, to usurp the place of God...But the fact that there are those not as blessed as others, that pillaging them is possible (like picking abandoned eggs out of a nest when there are no parents who seek to protect them) does not make pillage right. Superior skills and abilities are a gracious gift from God given for His purposes. They do not represent an innate superiority over other persons and are not grounds for devaluing and destroying those persons.” (Pp. 266-67)

We say, Yes, indeed! And we are impressed with the way attention to the text leads to the formation of powerful ethical statements.

וְאָסִירָה גְבוּלַת עַמִּים

(וְעֵתִידֹתֵיהֶם) [וְעֵתוֹדוֹתֵיהֶם] שׁוֹשֵׁתִי

וְאוֹרִיד כְּאַבִּיר יוֹשְׁבִים:

Because he said, With strength of my hand I did (it);
and by my wisdom, because I was discerning!²⁹

And I turned aside boundaries of peoples,³⁰
and their preparations³¹ I plundered.

And I will bring down those sitting (enthroned) like a mighty man.³²

²⁹Slotki's translation of this line is "And by my wisdom, for I am prudent," and suggests the translation "I have insight," that is "to plan successful campaigns." (P. 51)

³⁰Slotki comments that this line means "removed the bounds," we assume meaning "boundaries of countries." He states that "to prevent possible rebellion, conquering despots deported entire populations from one country to another, or amalgamated several small countries under a single administration." (P. 51)

On the Internet, see "Assyrian Empire Builders" which states that "mass deportation" was "the Assyrian resettlement policy." "The practice of resettling population groups was a key constituent of Ancient Near Eastern states, including the Assyrian Empire. This policy underpinned the high degree of cultural homogeneity and economic balance that characterized Assyria in the late 8th and the 7th centuries B.C.E., despite the vast climactic and geographical differences within the region." (6/7/2016)

³¹The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, "what is written," וְעֵתִידֹתֵיהֶם, "and their preparations," spelled with a *yodh*, י; second, the *qere*, "to be read," וְעֵתוֹדוֹתֵיהֶם, with the same meaning, but spelled with a *waw*, ו. Watts claims that the *qere* means "and their he-goats," meaning "and their leaders," but states that "parallelism is better served by the *kethibh*." (P. 146)

³²The last half of **verse 13** is given varying translations:

King James, "and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*";

Tanakh, "I have erased the borders of peoples; I have plundered their treasures, And exiled their vast populations."

New Revised Standard, "I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones."

(continued...)

³²(...continued)

New International, “I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings.”

New Jerusalem, “I have abolished the frontiers between peoples, I have plundered their treasures, like a hero, I have subjugated their inhabitants.”

Rahfs, ἀφελῶ ὄρια ἐθνῶν καὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν αὐτῶν προνομεύσω καὶ σείσω πόλεις κατοικουμένας, “[by my wisdom] I will take away / remove boundaries of nations, and I will go foraging (in) their strength, and I will shake inhabited cities.”

Darnell, “And I turned aside boundaries of peoples, and their preparations I plundered. And I will bring down those sitting (enthroned) like a mighty man.

Again we note the fact that the different translations of the same text indicate the lack of clarity, the vagueness, the enigmatic nature of the prophetic message.

Watts states that the **Aramaic Targum** has “and I subdued with force inhabitants of strong cities.” (P. 146)

³³Kaiser entitles **verses 14-15** “The blindness of human boasting.”

He comments that “The boasting and blindness of Assyria reaches its climax in the comparison of its victorious course, which secures for it the treasures of the nations and rule over the world, with the easy, carefree assembly of a debauched feast. Denying the resistance which is in fact offered by the peoples, it claims to be the absolute Lord of the earth; and with this confidence it will also launch an attack on Jerusalem. While the experience may justify its own conviction, Assyria has nevertheless transgressed the limits imposed on human beings and overlooked the fact that even the mightiest is only an implement in the hands of a Superior Power...

“The didactic rhetorical questions, which invite the judgment of the reader and hearer, have their closest parallel in the **Sayings of Ahikar**, a wisdom poem presumably going back to an Akkadian original, which was found among the ruins of the Jewish military colony in Elephantine in Upper Egypt. There the subordination of the courtier to the will of the king is stressed with the triple rhetorical question: ‘Does wood dispute with fire? Or flesh with the knife? Or a man with the “king”?’ [See Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 427-30.]

Assyria is in fact a rod in Yahweh’s hands and no more...If it forgets this limitation and dependence, it inevitably falls victim to the Divine wrath...

“What happened before the gates of Jerusalem according to the legendary tradition, in the year 701 B.C.E., the mysterious destruction of the Assyrian army (compare **37:36**), gave the poet justification for his woe...Every period could see this ruler as the embodiment of its tyrants and could ask whether it had been chosen once

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

again to inflict Yahweh's wrath on His Own people and thus meet its downfall, to the glory of His name.

"The reader may not [?] ask whether the picture drawn here corresponds with the Assyrian king's own understanding of himself. If we look through the annals of this ruler, we shall find, for example in those of king Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.E.), almost a mirror-image of the role assigned to Assyria in **verse 5**: the only difference is that his own God, Assur, has taken the place of Yahweh. As he boasts to his own glory, the Gods themselves have sent him against any land which had sinned against Assyria. Assur Himself had called him to extend the frontiers of his kingdom. And the great cosmic Gods, the moon God Sin, the sun God Shamash, Marduk the king of the Gods, Nergal, Who as king of the underworld was omnipotent among the Gods, and Ishtar the queen of battle, had made possible his victorious course by bestowing on him strength, boldness, praise, fear which casts men down, and weapons which reach their mark...

"So this woe is not concerned with 'Assyria' [what a strange conclusion to draw!] but with those world powers which have taken its place, smugly regard themselves as being superior to the tiny people of God, and will ultimately fall before the gates of Jerusalem, as did once, according to legend, the army of Sennacherib. Thus those who are really addressed by this woe are not Assyria but the people of God who suffer under the rule of that pagan power, who take comfort in a dark present from the future liberation which is reflected in the former act of deliverance performed by their God." (Pp. 236-37)

For recorded statements of Assyrian kings, see Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 274-301; for Esarhaddon, pp. 289-84. It is very strange to us that Kaiser can say the passage is not concerned with Assyria. Esarhaddon was certainly an Assyrian, and the context has to do with Assyria, not with any other worldly power. What do you think?

Reading the various statements of the Assyrian kings, do you think it is fair to accuse them of "vain glory" as Kaiser and other commentators do? They attribute their success to the Gods, and claim that they act in response to Divine oracles telling them what to do; and they denounce those who depend upon their own strength—or on the mutual assistance of others, or on bold actions, or on Tirhakah the king of Nubia, (Pritchard, pp. 277, 287, 289, 290, 292, 294, 296)--"they [the others] put their trust upon their own force while I [the Assyrian king] trusted Ashur, my Lord."

Are they so different from King David, who certainly attributed his success to YHWH, but who also depicted his own power and might in numerous passages. For example, in **2 Samuel 22:21-43** David claims that it was his righteousness and cleanness that caused YHWH to bless him, and while he attributes his success to Divine gifts, he is not shy to tell about his strength and fighting abilities, or to tell about the exploits of his "mighty men"—see **2 Samuel 23:8-39**—without mentioning YHWH's gifts or assistance in their victories. Is this so different from the claims of the Assyrian

(continued...)

וְכַאֲסֹף בִּיַצִּים עֲזֹבוֹת כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֲנִי אִסַּפְתִּי
וְלֹא הָיָה נֶרְדַּר כְּנֶגֶד וּפְצָה פֶּה וּמִצְפֵּצֵף:
And my hand found like the nest³⁴—(the) wealth of the peoples;
and like gathering eggs left behind, all the land / earth I, I gathered;
and there was no one fluttering a wing and opening a mouth and chirping!³⁵

³³(...continued)

kings who tell about the peoples they have conquered by their might with the help of their Warrior Gods? See footnotes 35 and 48.

Watts comments on **verse 14** that “the changing of boundaries was a fixed part of Assyrian imperial practice along with the exchange of peoples. He is proud of his ability to extort tribute and raise funds for his campaigns and the empire. He finds it as easy as taking eggs from under a nesting hen. No complaint is raised. No resistance dares raise it head.” (P. 150)

³⁴The phrase in Hebrew is “like the nest,” and we are reminded of the common phrase, “like a bird-nest on the ground,” that is, something easily found and emptied of its content of eggs. There are “ground-nesting birds” that lay their eggs and incubate their young in those nests, so vulnerable to any predator, especially ostriches.

See the article “Bird Nest” in **Wikipedia**, which states that “For some species, a nest is simply a shallow depression made in sand; for others, it is the knot-hole left by a broken branch, a burrow dug into the ground, a chamber drilled into a tree, an enormous rotting pile of vegetation and earth, a shelf made of dried saliva or a mud dome with an entrance tunnel.” (6/7/2016)

The Assyrian conqueror brags that the wealth and power of other nations that he has conquered and deported has been easily accomplished, like reaching down his hand and scooping up the eggs / treasures of a bird nest on the ground.

³⁵Slotki states that this is “descriptive of the ease of the Assyrian conquests, and pictures the helplessness of the stricken victims [fluttering chicks in the nest] created by terror of their formidable enemy.” (P. 51)

Alexander comments on, and translates **verse 14**: “The rapidity and ease of the Assyrian conquests is expressed by a natural and beautiful comparison. In seizing on the riches of the nations, the conqueror had encountered no more difficulty than if he had been merely taking eggs from a forsaken nest, without even the impotent resistance which the bird, if present, might have offered, by its cries and by the flapping of its wings. *My hand has found* (i.e. reached and seized) *the strength* (or more

(continued...)

³⁵(...continued)

specifically, the pecuniary [relating to, or consisting of, money]) *strength*, the wealth of the nations, *and like the gathering of (or as one gathers) eggs forsaken, so have I gathered all the earth* (i.e. all its inhabitants and their possessions), *and there was none that moved a wing, or opened its mouth, or chirped...*

“The language is designed to be descriptive of entire non-resistance to the progress of the Assyrian conquests, and although designedly exaggerated in expression, agrees well with the historical statements, not only of the Scriptures, but of Ctesias, Berosus, Herodotus, Diodorus, Justin, and Trogus.” (Pp. 228-29) See the articles in **Wikipedia** on each of these ancient historians.

Yes, the Assyrians were robbing the possessions of their neighbors, like a man taking eggs from a nest, with no resistance. But we should not forget the biblical picture of David while fleeing from Saul, and living with the Philistine king Achish—see **1 Samuel 27:8-12**--where David and his men are depicted as raiding the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, long time inhabitants of southern Israel, and then lying to Achish about what they had done.

“And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, and donkeys, the camels, and the garments” (**verse 11**)—but when returning to Achish, would claim that he had raided the Judeans and their friends. We think that the great Israelite King was “taking eggs from a forsaken nest,” only he had first killed the owners, making the nests forsaken--and then covered up what he had done by pretense. Is that so different from what the Assyrian kings were doing? At least, they didn’t lie about what they did!

³⁶Oswalt comments on **verses 15-19**, “Because Assyria has arrogated [taken or claimed without justification] to herself what was in fact a gift from God, because she did not see herself as the tool of God...the word of judgment is announced. Two metaphors are mixed in this announcement: sickness and fire. Because of this mixing some commentators have believed that the text is corrupt...”

“At issue is whether the two metaphors serve the same point, and they clearly do. All the health, vigor, and glory in which Assyria exulted will be eaten away by disease or by fire. All that will be left will be a wasted, burned-out hulk (a prophecy which came true with devastating suddenness between 629 and 605 B.C.E.” (P. 267)

See our end-note 2 for an article from **Wikipedia** on the fall of the Assyrian Empire.

Alexander comments on and translates **verse 15**: “Yet in all this the Assyrian was but an instrument in God’s hand, and his proud self-confidence is therefore as absurd as if an axe, or a saw, or a rod, or a staff, should exalt itself above the person wielding it. *Shall the axe glorify itself above the (person) hewing with it? Or shall the*

(continued...)

אִם-יִתְגַּדֵּל הַמְּשׁוֹרׁ עַל-מְנִיפוֹ
כְּהַנִּיף שֵׁבֶט וְאֶת-מְרִימָיו
כְּהָרִים מִטָּה לֹא-עֵץ:

Shall the ax glorify itself over the one hewing with it?
Or shall the saw magnify itself over one moving it?
Like swinging a club—and (aiming) at one raising it;
like raising a staff—not wood!³⁷

³⁶(...continued)

saw magnify itself above the (person) handling it? (This is indeed) like a rod's wielding those who wield it, like a staff's lifting (that which is) no wood (viz. A man). The idea is not merely that of boastful opposition but of preposterous inversion of the true relation between agent and instrument, between mind and matter." (P. 230)

Watts comments that "The parable of the ax and the workman has a flavor of the wisdom schools. The use of metaphor, the question, and comparison make the point." (P. 148) He adds that "It is not the violence or the destruction to which the protest is directed. It is only that he claims full credit, putting himself in the place of God." (P. 150)

But as anyone who reads the Assyrian annals in **ANET** knows, this was not at all the case. The Assyrian monarchs again and again expressed their absolute dependence on their Warrior Gods. We wonder why Watts and other interpreters don't acknowledge this fact.

Gray comments that "As a matter of fact, and as everyday life proves, implements such as the axe or the saw have no power of themselves, everything depends on the purpose and power of the man who uses them. So the boast of Assyria is vain: history is the revelation of Yahweh's purpose, not of Assyria's might." (P. 199)

³⁷Translations of the second half of **verse 15** vary:

King James, "as if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, *or* as if the staff should lift up *itself*, *as if it were* no wood."

Tanakh, "As though the rod raised him who lifts it, As though the staff lifted the man!"

New Revised Standard, "As if a rod should raise the one who lifts it up, or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood!"

New International, "As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood!"

New Jerusalem, "As though a staff controlled those who raise it, or the club could raise

(continued...)

³⁷(...continued)

what is not made of wood!"

Rahfs, the entire verse: μὴ δοξασθήσεται ἀξίνη ἄνευ τοῦ κόπτοντος ἐν αὐτῇ ἢ ὑψωθήσεται πρίων ἄνευ τοῦ ἔλκοντος αὐτόν ὡσαύτως ἐάν τις ἄρη ῥάβδον ἢ ξύλον, "Should an ax be glorified without the one cutting with it; or should a saw be exalted without the one dragging it? Likewise if anyone should raise up a rod or wood."

The verse depicts the Assyrian conqueror as an "ax," or "saw," or "club," or "staff" in the hand of YHWH.

Slotki comments that "All the metaphors in the verse symbolize Assyria's impotence in the absence of the directing hand of the Ruler of the universe." (P. 52) Motyer states, "The king is a hollow man. He would have no standing except it had been given him from above." (P. 115)

See **John 19:11**,

Jesus answered [him], (Pilate):

You do not have power against me at all,
except it was having been given to you from above.

For this reason, the one handing me over has greater sin!

Again, we wonder why Motyer, along with Watts, does not recognize or admit the obvious fact that the Assyrian emperors constantly expressed their dependence upon their Gods, Ashur and others, Who they claimed had called them to their position and both guided them in all they did through constant oracles and gave them the power to make their conquests. Though they boasted in their strength and achievements, they never claimed to have done it all on their own, without Divine guidance and assistance!

Slotki adds that the phrase לֹא-עֵץ, "not-tree / wood," is "a compound noun... denoting a human being. It is the man that lifts up the staff, but the staff does not lift up the man." (Pp. 51-2)

³⁸Slotki comments on **verses 16-23** that they depict "the fall of Assyria and the return of the survivors of Israel unto God." He comments on **verses 16-19** that "Assyria will be destroyed by disease and fire." (P. 52)

Gray entitles **verses 16-19** "The punishment of Assyria." He comments that "Something like the substance of these verses is certainly required at this point to carry out the threat suggested by the previous verses; but a number of scholars have agreed ...that this section cannot be in its present form the work of Isaiah...For it seems

(continued...)

³⁸(...continued)

incredible that even a bungling imitator of Isaiah would have made quite such a muddle of borrowed material as is found in the present text...The coming destruction is expressed by means of two figures—the one of fatal disease attacking a healthy body, the other of a destructive fire, consuming everything before it save for a few trees that escape. At present the clauses referring to illness...stand in the middle of the description of the forest fire. It is reasonable to suppose they are misplaced.” (Pp. 199-200)

What do you think? As you read and seek to understand the text, does this appear to you as a “muddle of borrowed material”? Perhaps—but we say many authors use “mixed metaphors,” and it is impossible to know exactly whether materials such as this are original or not. The fact is, such literary criticism is highly subjective, leading to no sure results, and causing many readers to turn away from the **Book of Isaiah**. Why not just admit that there are difficulties in making sense of the text as we have it, but reminding ourselves that the language is that of an ancient culture which we do not fully understand—and that there may be hidden meanings and references in the metaphors that are unknown to us?

When the biblical authors tell us that the prophetic message is based on visions and dreams, and that it is not “face-to-face” in nature, but rather vague and puzzling, why should we expect exact clarity of language?

Kaiser entitles **verses 16-19** “Yahweh’s Punitive Judgment on Assyria,” but then goes on to interpret the passage as referring to the final “eschatological” judgment of the nations, with Assyria standing for the “eschatological onslaught of the nations upon the city of God” (P. 239)

But there is no mention of the eschaton [final event in the divine plan; end of the world] in the passage, and nothing to indicate that Assyria is being used as a metaphor for the world powers of the end-time. We think Kaiser is guilty of reading all of this into the text.

Watts states concerning **verses 16-19** that “The statement of judgment picks up its theme from **verse 12**. The announcement uses Yahweh’s full title, as it was used in Holy War of old. As in the old Holy War themes, the application of power is indirect. As wasting disease appropriately attacks the result of rich living in Assyrian subjects, a fire will destroy the similar signs of a rich land—his forests.” (P. 150)

Motyer entitles **verses 16-34** “The remnant,” and comments that “The pattern of the people of God surrounded by world threat and yet preserved so appeals to Isaiah that it is reproduced on a huge scale in **chapters 13-27**. The sin of God’s people never goes unpunished but neither does the opposing world ever manage to proceed to final triumph. Judgment and preservation kiss each other.” (P. 115)

Gray comments on **verse 16** that “Assyria, like Israel in **1:2**, is compared to a

(continued...)

וְתַחַת כְּבֹדוֹ יִקַּד יְקָד כִּי קוֹדֵר אֱשׁ:

Therefore³⁹ the Lord YHWH of Armies⁴⁰ will send forth with His stout ones⁴¹ leanness;
and beneath His glory will be kindled a burning, like a burning of fire.⁴²

³⁸(...continued)

human body; at present it is in lusty health, *fat* and flourishing. But into this body Yahweh dispatches *leanness* that it may waste the man away...The idea is

independently expressed, and with freshness and vigor which by no means suggest a mere imitator...

“Assyria is conceived as a man not only fat and strong, but gloriously appareled; under the outward *glory*, i.e. the splendid raiment...the body burns with fever which *consumes both soul and body (verse 18c)*; compare ‘consumption and fever which consume the eyes and make the soul pine away (**Leviticus 26:16**). **Verse 18** indicates that Assyria will rapidly decay; the figure of fire (**verse 17**) suggests even more sudden destruction.” (P. 200)

³⁹Watts comments that “לְכֵן^p ‘therefore’ corresponds to כִּי, ‘because’ in **verse 13** and introduces the announcement of Yahweh’s punishment of Assyria which is elaborated in two forms. The first decrees a wasting illness to replace his plump good health (**16a** and **18c**). The second announces a searing fire that will destroy his forests (**verses 16b-18a** and **19**).” (P. 148)

⁴⁰For this rather unique phrase for God, found four times in **chapters 1-19** of the **Book of Isaiah**, הַאֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת, “the Lord YHWH of Armies,” see **Isaiah 1:24; 3:1; 10:16** (here); **10:33** and **19:4**. The phrase does not occur in **chapters 40-55** or **chapters 56-66**. Rahlfs shortens the phrase to κύριος σαβαωθ, “Lord Sabaoth,” showing that the Greek translator did not know the meaning of צְבָאוֹת, and since the translator normally translates YHWH by κύριος, did not want to have the name as κύριος κύριος σαβαωθ, “Lord Lord Sabaoth.”

⁴¹Slotki has “among his fat ones,” and suggests the reading “into his fat limbs.” He states that “the reference is to the Assyrians who have grown fat on what they had extorted from their victims. They will have to disgorge the spoils and as a consequence, become lean.” (P. 52)

⁴²Translations of **verse 16** vary:

King James, “Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.”

(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

Tanakh, “Assuredly, The Sovereign LORD of Hosts will send A wasting away in its fatness; And under its body shall burn A burning like that of fire, Destroying frame and flesh. It shall be like a sick man who pines away.”

New Revised Standard, “Therefore the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts, will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire.”

New International, “Therefore, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame.”

New Jerusalem, “That is why Yahweh Sabaoth is going to inflict leanness on his stout men, and beneath his glory kindle a fever burning like a fire.”

Rahfs, καὶ οὐχ οὕτως ἀλλὰ ἀποστελεῖ κύριος σαβαωθ εἰς τὴν σὴν τιμὴν ἀτιμίαν καὶ εἰς τὴν σὴν δόξαν πῦρ καιόμενον καυθήσεται. “And not in this way, but rather, Lord Sabaoth will send forth into the honor of yours dishonor, and into the glory of yours a fire burning—it will be burned up!”

Alexander translates then comments on **verse 16**: “*Therefore (on account of this impious self-confidence), the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will send upon His fat ones leanness, and under His glory shall burn a burning like the burning of fire ...*

“The accumulation of Divine names calls attention to the source of the threatened evil, and reminds the Assyrian that Jehovah is the only rightful Sovereign and the God of Battles. This combination occurs nowhere else, and even here above fifty [Hebrew] manuscripts and twelve printed editions [of the **Hebrew Bible**] read YHWH for יהוה, the Lord, and thereby assimilate the form of expression to that used in **Isaiah 1:24; 3:1; 10:33; 19:5.**” (P. 231)

⁴³Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: “*And the light of Israel shall be for a fire (i.e. shall become one, or shall act as one), and his Holy One for a flame, and it shall burn and devour his (the Assyrian’s) thorns and briers in one day (i.e. in a very short time)...*

“According to Jarchi [i.e. Rashi], the Light of Israel is the Law of God, while another rabbinical tradition applies it to Hezekiah. It is no doubt intended as an epithet of God Himself, so called because He enlightened Israel by His Word and Spirit, and cheered them by the light of His countenance. There may be an allusion to the pillar of cloud, and some think to the angel of His presence who was in it...

“Here, as in the foregoing verse, fire is mentioned as a rapid and powerful consuming agent, without express allusion to the manner or the means of the destruction threatened.” (Pp. 232-33)

Gray comments that **verse 17** introduces “a fresh figure: Yahweh the light of

(continued...)

וְקִדְוֹשׁוֹ לְלֵהֲבָה
וּבַעֲרָה וְאֹכְלָה שִׁיתוֹ וְשָׁמִירוֹ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד:

And the Light of Israel⁴⁴ will become a fire,
and its Set-apart One a flame,
and it will burn and it will devour its thorn-bushes and its thorns,⁴⁵ in one day.⁴⁶

⁴³(...continued)

Israel (compare **Psalm 27:1**,

O YHWH, my light, and my deliverance--
of whom shall I be afraid?

O YHWH, stronghold of my life--
of whom shall I be fearful?),

illuminating the way along which His people should walk (**Isaiah 2:5**), is also a destructive fire, destroying their enemies (**Deuteronomy 9:2**,

And you will know today that YHWH your God,
He is the One crossing over before you;
a devouring fire;
He will destroy them (Israel's enemies, the Anakim);
and He will humble / subdue them before you;
and He will dispossess them,
and He will destroy them quickly,
just as YHWH said to you.)

the Assyrians." (P. 201)

⁴⁴Slotki notes that by the "light of Israel" some explain the phrase "as God, others as the **Torah**." (P. 52) We think the next line makes it clear that it is the "Holy One of Israel" that is meant. But Slotki mentions that some understand this last phrase to be referring to "the righteous men of the time." (**ibid.**)

Surely if this is what Isaiah meant, he would have used the plural "holy ones," not the singular "Holy one / One."

⁴⁵Slotki holds that the "thorns and briars" are symbolical of the "rank and file, as in **9:17**." (P. 52) But **9:17** does not use the metaphor of "thorns and briars."

⁴⁶Motyer comments on **verse 17** that the reader should compare **Isaiah 30:27-33**. He then states that "The Assyrians marching triumphantly on Jerusalem are in

(continued...)

⁴⁶(...continued)

reality jumping into a fire. Darkness is one of Isaiah's motifs for the Assyrian times: the gathering darkness of **Isaiah 5:30** and the exit into darkness of **Isaiah 8:20-22**. But Israel's *Light* has not gone out. The light which in its fullest sense is yet to come (**8:23** Heb / **9:1**^{Eng}) is already present. In the darkness of calamity, faith walks in the light." (Pp. 115-16)

⁴⁷Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: "*And the glory (i.e., beauty) of his (the Assyrian's) forest and his fruitful field, from soul to body (i.e. totally) will He (the Lord) consume, and it shall be like the wasting away of a sick man...*"

"The prophet meant to represent the greatness of Assyria under figures borrowed from the vegetable world, and for that purpose uses terms descriptive of the most impressive aspects under which a fruitful land presents itself, forests and harvest-fields, the two together making a complete picture, without the necessity of giving to each part a distinctive import..."

"As the terms soul and flesh are strictly inapplicable to the trees and fields, we must either suppose that the prophet here discards his metaphor, and goes on to speak of the Assyrians as men, or that the phrase is a proverbial one, meaning body and soul, i.e., altogether, and is here applied without regard to the primary import of the terms, or their agreement with the foregoing figures." (P. 233)

Gray states that the phrase "consuming soul and flesh," "being inapplicable to trees (**verse 18a**), is out of place." (P. 201) Perhaps...but since the "trees" are metaphors for the armies of Assyria, those who understand the metaphor can quickly discern the meaning. They will be totally destroyed.

New International's translation of the phrase מִנֶּפֶשׁ וְעַד-בָּשָׂר יִכְלֶה, literally "from innermost-being and as far as flesh will be finished" by "completely" is not wrong, but is not nearly as descriptive as the original. Perhaps a better alternative would be "the whole person." What do you think?

The last two words of the verse, כִּמְסֹס נֶסֶס, **kimesos noses** have a striking assonance. It means "like melting / dissolving, one being sick." We suspect that the Greek translator didn't know what to make of this phrase, and just guessed at its meaning: "like one fleeing from a flame." Translations of these last two words vary:

King James, "and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth";

Tanakh, omits any translation of these two words;

New Revised Standard, "and it will be as when an invalid wastes away";

New International, "as when a sick person wastes away";

New Jerusalem, "it will be like a consumptive wasting away";

(continued...)

מִנְפֵשׁ וְעַרְבֵשׁ יִכְלֶה

וְהָיָה כַּמָּסַס נֶסֶס:

And its forest's abundance / glory and its garden,⁴⁸

He will finish (both) from innermost-being and as far as flesh;⁴⁹

and it will be like a sick person's declining / melting away.⁵⁰

⁴⁷(...continued)

Rahlf's, "and the one fleeing will be like the one fleeing from a burning flame."

These differences in translation again demonstrate the lack of clarity, the puzzling nature of Isaiah's prophetic, visionary language.

⁴⁸Slotki, in line with his view of the briers and thorns meaning "the rank and file," holds that in this verse, the forest and the fruitful field are metaphors "alluding to the captains and officers" of Assyria's armies.

Motyer states that "the contrast of *forests* (uninhibited natural growth) and *fertile fields* 'his garden-land' (ordered cultivation) expresses totality of destruction." (P. 116)

⁴⁹This line makes Slotki's view obviously correct, as forests and fruitful fields are hardly understood as having נִפְשׁ, "innermost-being," or בָּשָׂר, "flesh."

⁵⁰Translations of **verse 18** vary:

King James, "And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth."

Tanakh, "And the mass of its scrub and its farm land." (Quite a reduction of the Hebrew text!)

New Revised Standard, "The glory of his forest and his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when an invalid wastes away."

New International, "The splendor of his forests and fertile fields it will completely destroy, as when a sick person wastes away."

New Jerusalem, "He will consume his luxuriant forest and productive ground, he will ravage body and soul: it will be like a consumptive wasting away;"

Rahlf's, ἀποσβεσθήσεται τὰ ὄρη καὶ οἱ βουνοὶ καὶ οἱ δρυμοὶ καὶ καταφάγεται ἀπὸ ψυχῆς ἕως σαρκῶν καὶ ἔσται ὁ φεύγων ὡς ὁ φεύγων ἀπὸ φλογὸς καιομένης, "The mountains and the hills and the woods will be extinguished, and the hills and the oak-woods, and it will be devoured from innermost-being as far as fleshes; and the one fleeing (will be) like the one fleeing from a flame." (Having two verbs where our Hebrew text has only one.)

Compare footnote 47.

10:19 וְשָׂרְיָ עֵץ יַעֲרֹוּ

מִסְפָּר יִהְיוּ

וְנַעַר יִכְתְּבֵם:

And a remnant of tree(s) of its forest—
they will be in few number—
and a youth will write them down.⁵¹

⁵¹Slotki holds that the trees of the forest is again “alluding to the captains and officers,” and the child’s writing them down means that “so few of them will remain that even a child could write down all their names. There is a rabbinical tradition that only ten men survived, and, as this number is represented in Hebrew by ך, *yodh*, which is a mere stroke, a little child could do it.” (Pp. 52-3)

Motyer comments that “Following the debacle at Zion [that is, Sennacherib’s sudden withdrawal and return to Assyria], Assyria limped on to its death (**Isaiah 37:36ff.**) but was so diminished that even a child could conduct a census!” (P. 117)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 19**: “*And the rest (or remnant) of the trees of his forest shall be few, and a child shall write them, i.e. make a list or catalogue, and by implication number them...*”

“In Hebrew, ‘men of number’ is a few men (**Genesis 34:30; Deuteronomy 4:27; 33:6**). The idea seems to be that small amounts may easily be numbered.”

Watts explains **verses 5-19** overall as follows: “God is not reacting to the events of that time. His decision and action activate the scene. Assyria is His agent. The Assyrian invasions are identified as God’s work to accomplish His destructive judgment...”

“But the protest is raised: the Assyrian does not know that. His drives and ambition are totally selfish. How can one identify God’s work in one so ungodly? God will judge the Assyrian in time. One thing at a time. The limitations that time imposes are accepted, even as they apply to the work of God...”

“With this passage a major thesis of the [**Book of Isaiah**] has been fully stated and defended. God uses the pagan empires to further His purpose. (Compare Cyrus in **chapters 45-46**). This is a change from the Kingdom of God theology of the United Monarchy and the **Psalms**. There God ruled the world through the Davidic king in Jerusalem. In **Isaiah** a part of that rule is delegated to the empires and Israel’s role is radically redefined.

(continued...)

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“The basic issue of faith as it relates to history is faced directly in this scene. The fact of Assyria’s ascendancy, power, and tyranny in the latter eighth century is unchallenged. The question probes the deeper explanation of the factors which made that possible. Yahweh claims that Assyria belongs to Him: ‘Rod of My anger! Staff of My wrath!’ He claims authority over him: ‘I send him! I command him!’ He accepts responsibility for the [Assyrian] king’s excesses: ‘I will punish him!’ But the speakers insist that another view be heard. The Assyrian proclaims his own autonomy, integrity, and credit: ‘My vassals,’ ‘my hand,’ ‘I do.’ He will not share credit or responsibility: ‘I acted by the strength of my hand. I decided by my wisdom!’ He wants full recognition and credit for his acts: ‘I changed people’s boundaries. I plundered their treasures. I knocked down inhabitants. I myself gather the whole earth.’

“God’s commitment that ‘the arrogance of man will be brought low—Yahweh alone will be exalted’ (**Isaiah 2:17**) is challenged by the very one that He has chosen and used to do His work of judgment. The doctrine that God works through human agency faces this dilemma. When God strengthens and guides someone to accomplish God’s will He runs the risk of convincing the person of his own importance and ability which complicates his usefulness to God or at that point makes him the object of God’s judgment.

“The stark presentation of the problem here (and in **chapter 2**, **chapter 14**, and **chapter 27**) forms a background to the argument for the ‘servant’ role which could help Israel and Jerusalem break this vicious cycle.

“R. Kittel (**Geschichte des Volkes Israel** II, 6th edition [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1925] characterizes this as ‘one of the strongest of Isaiah’s speeches and at the same time the first attempt to enunciate a philosophy of history in grand style which is built on the law of a moral world-order in history. World history is world judgment.’” (Pp. 150-51)

⁵²Slotki comments on **verses 20-23** that “The survivors in Israel will return to God and henceforth place their trust in Him alone.” (P. 53)

Motyer states concerning these four verses that “As in **verses 16-19**, thought still centers on the Holy One (**verse 20**), significantly under the Isaianic title which relates Him directly to His people, *the Holy One of Israel*. Though judgment begins at the house of God, a remnant remains. They are the survivors (**verse 20**), characterized by faith (**verse 20**) and repentance (**verse 21**).” (P. 117)

Kaiser entitles these verses “Only a Remnant will Return.” Watts’ title is similar: “Only a Remnant.”

Kaiser comments that here the author “works with the name of Isaiah’s son Shear-Yashubh, ‘Only a Remnant Returns’ (**Isaiah 7:3**) [Kaiser and Watts are

(continued...)

⁵²(...continued)

interpolating the word 'only,' which does not appear in the text, either here or in **7:3**...[The passage] echoes the promise given in **Genesis 32:12** that [Jacob's] seed will be as numerous as the sand of the sea. Again, the existing notion is turned into its opposite: even if the descendants of the patriarch Jacob-Israel were as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them would be left, because the annihilating judgment of Yahweh summoned up with reminiscences of **Isaiah 28:17, 22**, is inexorable...

“Even the people of God will not be spared in the imminent judgment, but will be measured by God with the measure of righteousness...”

“What could not be brought about by the Divine visitation in the past and the prophetic preaching to repent will be achieved by the last great crisis of history [such a phrase is not found in the text!] with its unexpected Divine help, annihilating the powers of the world like a specter [something widely feared as a possible dangerous occurrence; ‘the specter of nuclear holocaust’]: the return of the remnant to Yahweh...However, judgment stands like an inexorable doom before repentance.” (Pp. 241-42)

Kaiser goes on to ask, “Does his verdict still apply today? Is it still the case that we take God as seriously as He means to be taken only when we have no other expedient? And does this justify hope for peace among the nations before they have experienced the hopelessness of their politics of power and violence?” (P. 242)

Watts comments on these four verses that they “expressly speak of Israel / Jacob, i.e., Northern Israel, while **verses 24-27** speak to Jerusalem. Commentators have often created confusion by ignoring this distinction.

“The time, ‘that day,’ refers to the Assyrian invasion which has dominated **chapters 8-10**. That is the [Assyrian] incursions from 733 to 721 B.C.E.” (P. 153)

Oswalt entitles **verses 20-27** “Restoration promised.” He comments that “The focus changes abruptly from Assyria to Israel with the promise that, since Assyria is under God’s hands, the destruction which she brings will not be total but will be subject to God’s larger purposes. Although the passage is unified by the recurring idea of deliverance, it is apparent that there are two parts to it, neither of which is necessarily dependent upon the other. The first, **verses 20-23**, concentrates upon the remnant, a concept with both negative and positive aspects. The second part, **verses 24-27**, offers the hope that, as the Egyptian oppression was ended by Divine deliverance, so too will the Assyrian [oppression] be...Assyria’s destruction by God necessarily means that there is hope for Israel; but that destruction is not arbitrary. It is an expression of a Divine consistency which will result in Israel’s deliverance.” (Pp. 268-69)

Gray entitles **verses 20-27** “An Appendix to the preceding poem,” and states that

(continued...)

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it explains that “Yahweh’s anger against His people is all but spent; that immediately those of them who have escaped and remain, will be set free from the bondage of ‘Assyria,’ which will in turn become the object of Yahweh’s anger.” (P. 203)

But then Gray adds, in what we consider a hyper-critical way, “Isaiah wrote prose as well as poetry, but there is no reason to believe that he allowed fine poems to dribble out in prose conclusions. Either:

- (1) **verses 20-27** are due to some disciple of Isaiah, who recalled the substance, but no longer the form, of the conclusion of the poem, preserved fragmentarily in **verses 5-19**; or, more probably,
- (2) the verses are the work of some late student of Scripture, who sought, mainly by compiling a cento [a literary work made up of quotations from other works] of Scripture texts and phrases...to give the old poem greater suitability in an age which required positive comfort for itself, as well as a promise that Assyria should be destroyed.” (P. 203)

We say, Perhaps...but we remain unconvinced. The Masoretic pointing, which many scholars rely on to determine the rhythm of “poetry,” was unknown to the authors of the biblical books; the pointing—supplying of vowel points, pronunciation marks and stress accents--was a work done between the seventh and eleventh centuries C. E. by Jewish scholars in Tiberias and Jerusalem, Israel, and in Babylonia.

We deeply appreciate the work of the Jewish Masoretes in carrying on Jewish traditions concerning the text of the **Hebrew Bible**—but do not consider their work any more authoritative than the work of other scholars of the text.

What has led to the distinction between Hebrew “poetry” and “prose” has largely been the recognition of “parallel phrases,” short groupings of two to four or sometimes more words that say the same thing as a previous group, or contrast with one another, or supplement one another. It is not our common English way of speaking or writing, but it is a beautiful and powerful way of communicating / teaching.

However, even in those portions of the **Hebrew Bible** that are considered “prose,” there is still a constant use of short groupings of words, that may not be considered “poetry,” or may not be considered “parallel,” but that can easily be recognized and divided from one another. As a result, where one translation gives a passage as “poetry,” another translation may give the same passage as “prose.” Here in **Isaiah 10:20-27**, **English Standard Version** prints the text as “prose,” while **New International** prints the text as “poetry,” and numerous other examples could be given.

We think it much better to translate the **Hebrew Bible** in short groupings of words, wherever those groupings appear, without attempting to make an exact

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distinction between poetry and prose. It is our conviction that all of the books of the **Hebrew Bible** can be much more easily translated and read when this is done.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 20**: “*And it shall be (or come to pass) in that day (that is, after these events have taken place), that the remnant of Israel, and the escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no longer add (i.e. continue) to lean upon their smiter (him that smote them), but shall lean upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, in truth...*”

“There is here an allusion to the circumstances which gave rise to this whole prophecy. Ahaz, renouncing his dependence upon God, had sought the aid of Assyria, which secured his deliverance from present danger, but subjected the kingdom to worse evils from the very power to which they had resorted. But even these oppressions were to have an end in the destruction of the hostile power; and when this should take place, Judah, now instructed by experience, would no longer trust in tyrants, but sincerely in Jehovah...”

“Cocceius, Brentius, and Schmidius, refer this promise to the times of Christ exclusively, because this is the usual application of the phrase *that day*: because reliance upon God in truth is a peculiar promise of the new dispensation; because Israel did continue to rely on foreign aid, even after the decline of the Assyrian power; and because **verses 22-23** are referred to by Paul (**Romans 9:27-28**) to the times of the **New Testament.**” (Pp. 235-36)

27 But then Isaiah cries out concerning the Israel:

If the number of the sons of Israel should be like the sand of the sea,
the remnant / small surviving group will be saved.

28 For completing and cutting short,

Lord will make a word / an accounting upon the earth.

Alexander states, “But since this prophecy (in **Isaiah 10**) immediately follows and precedes predictions of the downfall of Assyria, and since that power seems distinctly mentioned in the phrase **בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא**, it is not unreasonable to conclude, that *in that day* means *after that event*, and that the reference is not to a sudden and immediate effect, but to a gradual result of the Divine dispensations, so that what is here predicted, though it began to be fulfilled from the time of that catastrophe, did not receive its final consummation before Christ’s appearance...”

“On this supposition, we are better able to explain the remnant of Israel, as meaning not merely those left in Judah after the carrying away of the ten tribes—nor the Jews themselves who should outlive the Assyrian oppressions, and to whom the same phrase is applied, **2 Kings 19:4, 31; 21:14**—nor merely the Jews who should return from the Babylonish exile, and to whom it is applied, **Haggai 1:2, Zechariah 8:6**—nor merely the spiritual Israel, the remnant according to the election of grace, **Romans**

(continued...)

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9:5—but all these at once, or rather in succession, should be taught the lesson of exclusive reliance upon God, by His judgments on His enemies.” (Pp. 235-36)

We say, all that **Isaiah 10:20** predicts is that a remnant of Israel and Jacob will return, and it will lean upon YHWH—nothing more. There is no mention of “dispensations” as Alexander claims. And in fact, that is all that Paul says this statement in **Isaiah** means. All the rest—concerning its being fulfilled in Christ, is being read into the text, not genuinely derived from the text. What do you think?

We truly believe that the coming of the Messiah is predicted in the **Hebrew Bible**, and that Jesus Christ is in truth the fulfillment of the **Hebrew Bible's** hope for a coming king / messiah. But we think it is irresponsible to try and read Jesus Christ into passages which in fact contain no such prediction. That Israel's / Jacob's remnant will return from the Assyrian oppression, is what this text is depicting. It was fulfilled, especially in the aftermath of Sennacherib's sudden retreat from Jerusalem and return to Nineveh. A remnant remained of Judah. As Alexander states, the **Hebrew Bible** constantly emphasizes the truth of this statement that a remnant will remain following disastrous experiences. But we should not try to read more than this into this text.

Motyer comments on **verse 20** that “The background to this verse is the Aram-Ephraimite alliance. Threatened by the rising power of Assyria, the northern kingdom (*Israel...Jacob*) had turned for strength to one who had for a century been an enemy [that is, they turned to Syria].” (P. 117)

Oswalt comments that “The concept of a remnant seems to have been part of Isaiah's understanding from the beginning of his ministry, for it is already there in the call narrative (**Isaiah 6:13**). Likewise, it appears in the name of his son, Shear-Yashubh, ‘A Remnant Will Return’...There is negative overtone to this name as it applies to Ahaz. It points to a destruction from which only a portion of Ahaz's people will return. Yet it has also a positive connotation in its promise that some *will* survive. In this sense, while the term ‘remnant’ does not appear again after **17:3**, it is still perhaps the most apt summary of the entire **book**, since it captures the interwoven themes of redemption and judgment that prevail from beginning to end.

“As G. Hasel has shown, the remnant motif occurs frequently in Assyrian texts, where it was used in a wholly negative sense to describe the thoroughness of their conquest. Isaiah takes the Assyrian term, agreeing with their estimate of the situation, but then shows that even a remnant, in God's hand, is more enduring than all Assyria's might.” (Pp. 269-70)

לְאִיּוֹסִיף עוֹד שָׂאֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וּפְלִיטַת בֵּית־יַעֲקֹב
 לְהִשְׁעוֹן עַל־מַכֵּהוּ
 וְנִשְׁעוֹן עַל־יְהוָה קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
 בְּאֱמֻנָה:

And it will happen on that day,
 a remnant of Israel will not again,
 and (the) house of Jacob's escaped remnant,
 support itself / lean upon⁵³ its slayer;⁵⁴
 and it will be supported / lean upon YHWH, Set-apart One of Israel,
 in true faithfulness!⁵⁵

⁵³The Hebrew root שִׁעַן means (in the niphal) “lean, support oneself upon,” or “depend on.”

Watts comments that “In **Isaiah 30:12** the word is parallel to בְּטֹחַ, ‘trust’ and describes those who reject God’s word and then ‘depend on deceit and oppression.’ In **31:1** it again is parallel to ‘trust’ and speaks of those who ‘rely’ on horses and Egypt. So the term is current in a religious context to mean a frivolous reliance on God to get them through [difficulties] regardless of their behavior. It was also current in referring to political reliance on arms, alliances, or authoritarian methods...

“The [**Book of Isaiah**] emphasizes Isaiah’s view that faith and the confirmation related to it...בְּטֹחַ, ‘trust’ and שִׁעַן, ‘dependence’ on Yahweh, which are genuine, are essentials of life under God.” (P. 153)

⁵⁴Slotki holds that “The reference is to Assyria with whom Ahaz had made an alliance (compare **2 Kings 16:7ff.**) against the wish of Isaiah.” (P. 53)

Watts translates מַכֵּהוּ by “their oppressors,” and states that it is “literally, ‘those striking it.’” (P. 153) But the entire phrase is singular—with a hiphil masculine singular participle, “one striking,” and with a singular suffix, “him” or “it.”

⁵⁵Translations of **verse 20** vary:

(continued...)

10:21 שָׂאֵר יָשׁוּב שָׂאֵר יַעֲקֹב

אֶל-אֱלֹהֵי גְבוּרָה:

A remnant will return,⁵⁶ a remnant of Jacob,

⁵⁵(...continued)

King James, “And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.”

Tanakh, “And in that day, The remnant of Israel And the escaped of the House of Jacob Shall lean no more upon him that beats it, But shall lean sincerely On the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.”

New Revised Standard, “On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.”

Rahfs, “And it will be in that day, the remainder of Israel will no longer be added, and the ones of the Jacob having been saved / delivered no longer having placed trust / confidence upon / in the ones wronging them; but rather, they will be having placed trust / confidence upon / in the God, the Set-apart One of the Israel, in the truth.”

Watts entitles **verses 20-23** “Only a Remnant,” and comments that “The scene returns to an ‘earthly’ setting. Traditional words of hope are offered, interrupted by heavenly reminders of God’s true intentions.” (P. 152)

Motyer comments that “the background to this verse is the Aram-Ephraimite alliance. Threatened by the rising power of Assyria, the northern kingdom (*Israel... Jacob*) had turned for strength to one who had for a century been an enemy [that is, Syria]...*But in that day* such folly will be renounced and *the remnant...will truly rely on the Lord*. *Survivors* is (literally) ‘those who escaped’...*Rely* is ‘to lean on’...Isaiah’s own experience had shown that *the Holy One of Israel*, the God Whose holiness condemns (1:4), is the God Who forgives and reconciles (6:3-7). He sees this working on a nation-wide scale.” (P. 117)

Oswalt comments on the last phrase **בְּאֵמֶת**, which he translates by “in truth,” that “the root meaning is of dependability and consistency as in the English ‘be true to.’ So the idea here is of a loyal, enduring trust in God, not one which is fickle and wavering.” (P. 270) We translate by “in true faithfulness.”

⁵⁶This line begins with the phrase **יָשׁוּב שָׂאֵר**, “a remnant shall return,” which is the name which Isaiah gave to one of his sons—see **Isaiah 7:3**; and, as Slotki observes, its usage here shows that the sign and prediction “is now being fulfilled.” (P. 53)

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

Motyer comments that the message of Shear Yashubh, “A Remnant Shall Return,” is “applied here to the people of the northern kingdom.” He adds that “The verb *return* [שׁוּב] stresses the active as distinct from the mental side of repentance: a turning around and coming back.” (P. 117)

Watts comments that “The chorus picks up the hint of hopeful content and they understand it in their own way. They begin by chanting the name of Isaiah’s son שְׂאֵר יִשׁוּב, “A Remnant Will Return.” The words are packed with connotations and meaning, some of which are ambiguous and self-contradictory. It is just the kind of thing which makes a good slogan. There are several meanings that elements of the crowd could have understood from the slogan.

“שְׂאֵר [a remnant] can mean the pitiful remainder of a decimated people or army which survives a battle or a war. But it also apparently had a technical (perhaps cultic) meaning of the authentic and integral core of the people who were the genuinely elect, the genuine Israel. The rest of the nation depended on this core and assumed that all would be saved, or prosper because of it. They are the ‘pious remnant,’ the ‘righteous remnant,’ the ‘faithful remnant.’ Many would have felt that this second meaning cancelled out the first. (Compare G. F. Hasel, “Remnant,” **Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible Supplement**, pp. 730-36).

“יִשׁוּב, ‘will return’ is equally ambiguous. It means simply ‘to turn’ or ‘to return.’ It can mean to physically come back, as from exile, or it can refer to a change of mind or policy. It may become ‘repent’ when related to God. The doctrine of repentance becomes widespread from **Jeremiah** onward (compare J. Milgrom, ‘Repentance in the Old Testament,’ **Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible Supplement**, pp. 736-38).

“The slogan is applied and narrowed in the second line: ‘A remnant of Jacob.’ It is applied specifically to Northern Israel as **verse 20** had done.

“The third line adds another ambiguous expression... ‘God, the Heroic Warrior.’ [Compare **Isaiah 9:5**^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng}]...The hint that the misfortunes of the Northern Kingdom might open the door to a reunited Kingdom under Jerusalem and its king.” (Pp. 153-54)

This use of ambiguous words, with double meanings, adds to the sense of vagueness and puzzlement that characterizes the prophetic message. All is not clear and precise, exact!

⁵⁷Slotki observes that this name, אֵל גִּבּוֹר, our “Supreme God, Mighty One,” is “similarly a reference to the name assigned to the young Hezekiah in **Isaiah 9:5**.” (P. 53)

Of course, this conflicts with the Christian view that **Isaiah 9:5**^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng} is giving the names assigned to the Messiah, not to King Hezekiah. But while Christians have welcomed such a title as belonging to the Messiah, Who is truly for them, in the light of claims made in the **Gospel of John**, “Supreme God, Mighty One,” it seems to them very difficult if not preposterous to assign such a name / title to the ancient Jewish king, Hezekiah—and when Jews do so, they have to “water down” these names / titles.

Alexander comments on **verse 21**: “A remnant shall return, a remnant of Jacob, to God Almighty...

“There is an obvious allusion in these words to the name of the prophet’s son Shear-Yashubh, mentioned in **Isaiah 7:3**...

“The [Aramaic] Targum expounds the remnant of Jacob to mean ‘those who have not sinned, or have turned from sin.’ It really means those who should survive God’s judgments threatened in this prophecy, not merely the Assyrian invasion or the Babylonish exile, but the whole series of remarkable events, by which the history of the chosen people would be marked.” (P. 236)

⁵⁸Alexander translates / comments on **verse 22**: “The prophet now explains his use of the word *remnant*, and shows that the threatening which it involves is not inconsistent with the ancient promises. *For though thy people, O Israel (or Jacob), shall be like the sand of the sea (in multitude), only a remnant of them shall return. A consumption is decreed, overflowing (with) righteousness...*

“There seems, as Calvin says, to be allusion to the promises given to the patriarchs (e.g. **Genesis 13:16; 22:17**), and repeated by the prophets (e.g. **Hosea 2:1**), the fulfilment of which might have seemed to be precluded by the threatening in **verse 21**—to prevent which false conclusion, Isaiah here repeats the threatening with the promise—‘though thy people shall indeed be numerous, *yet*, etc...

“That a remnant only should escape, implies of course a general destruction, which is positively foretold in the last clause.” (Pp. 237-38)

Gray comments on **verse 22** that “Here the writer seems to reflect on two prophecies, one foretelling that the people of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea (**Hosea 2:1**^{Heb} / **1:10**^{Eng}; compare **Genesis 22:17; 32:13**), the other that only a remnant of them will return...

“This double aspect of the future will certainly be realized, for Yahweh has

(continued...)

שֵׁאֵר יִשׁוּב בּוֹ

כְּלִיּוֹן חֲרוּץ שׁוֹטֵף צְדָקָה:

Because if your people, Israel, shall be like sand of the sea,
a remnant will return in it,⁵⁹

⁵⁸(...continued)

irrevocably determined a judgment which, taking place in the midst of the earth, will be universal in its scope; it will give *overflowing* proof of Yahweh's righteousness (compare **Isaiah 1:27; 5:16**) by working deliverance of the elect, and accomplishing 'the annihilation already decisively determined' (**Isaiah 28:22**), of the wicked, whether Israelite or heathen (compare **Isaiah 59:13-14, 21**).” (P. 204)

Oswalt comments on **verses 22-23**, that “Nevertheless, despite the ring of assurance that the people will not be annihilated, it is still true that the remnant will be but a fragment of the original. The promises to Abraham will not be abrogated; indeed, they will be fulfilled (**Genesis 22:17; 32:12**). But they cannot be used as a hedge to protect oneself from judgment (**Luke 3:7-9**), which is apparently what some were doing in Isaiah's day.” (P. 271)

See this passage from **Luke**, where John the baptizer / immerser is depicted as saying to the people coming to him for baptism:

- 7 He was saying therefore to the crowds going out to be immersed by him,
Offspring of poisonous snakes—
who gave you people directions to flee from the soon-coming wrath?
- 8 Therefore produce fruits corresponding to (your) turning-around;
and do not begin to say within yourselves,
We have Abraham (as) father.
For I tell you people that God is able out of these stones
to raise up children for Abraham.
- 9 But then also, already the ax lies at the root of the trees;
therefore every tree not producing good fruit is being cut out,
and is being thrown into fire.

⁵⁹Translations of **verse 22** vary:

King James, “For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, *yet* a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.”

Tanakh, “Even if your people, O Israel, Should be as the sands of the sea, Only a remnant of it shall return. Destruction is decreed; Retribution comes like a flood!”

New Revised Standard, “For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.”

(continued...)

⁵⁹(...continued)

New International, “Though your people be like the sand by the sea, Israel, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous.”

New Jerusalem, “Israel, though your people are like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return: a destruction has been decreed which will make justice overflow”;

Rahfs, καὶ ἐὰν γένηται ὁ λαὸς Ἰσραηλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης τὸ κατάλειμμα αὐτῶν σωθήσεται λόγον γὰρ συντελῶν καὶ συντέμνων ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, “and if the people Israel may become like the sand of the sea, the residue / remainder of them will be saved / delivered—for a word completing and cutting off / short in righteousness.” (But what does this last phrase mean? We are reminded of YHWH’s statement that the revelation given through prophets will be enigmatic!

Slotki notes that becoming “as the sand of the sea” is “in fulfillment of the promise made to the patriarchs (compare **Genesis 22:17; 32:13**).” (P. 53)

Motyer comments that “There is a continuation of the Shear-Yashubh theme from **verse 21**.” He argues that the opening phrase of the verse, כִּי אִם, should not be translated “because if,” which is our translation (compare the Greek, καὶ ἐὰν, “and if”) or “though,” but instead should be understood as a “strong adversative, ‘But’... countering any implication that the *remnant*, mentioned twice in **verse 21**, implies fewness. On the contrary, the promise to Abraham stands and ‘your people, O Israel, will be *like the sand of the sea* (**Genesis 22:17**). It is in this sense that (literally) ‘a remnant among them will return.’ Only [found in **Tanakh, New Revised Standard, New International** and **New Jerusalem**] is an interpretative addition assuming that *remnant* is used here in a threatening sense but this does not suit the reference to the Abrahamic promise.” (P. 117)

Perhaps...but the Abrahamic promise can be fulfilled in the later growth and universal expansion of the remnant that returns. It seems obvious that “remnant” implies less than the whole, the “residue,” “what is left” following a disastrous experience of a nation’s being conquered. What do you think?

None of the translations we are looking at have anything for the Hebrew בְּיָמָיו, “(a remnant shall return) in it, or with it.” We are uncertain what this refers to, but think it most probable means “a remnant in the decreed destruction.”

Alexander translates by “a consumption is decreed—or...’the consumption decreed (is) overflowing, i.e. overflows—a metaphor frequently applied to invading armies (**Isaiah 8:8; 28:15, 18; Daniel 11:20, 22**)...The sense is not that the remnant of Israel should be the means of flooding the world with righteousness (Calvin), nor that they should be full of it themselves (Grotius), but that the destruction of the great mass

(continued...)

a destruction decreed, overflowing righteousness!

10:23⁶⁰ כִּי כֻלָּה וְנַחֲרָצָה

אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה עֲשֵׂה צְבָאוֹת

בְּקֶרֶב כָּל-הָאָרֶץ:

because a complete destruction⁶¹ and one Divinely decreed,⁶²

⁵⁹(...continued)

of the people would be an event involving an abundant exhibition of God's justice [? righteousness!] This clause is therefore not, as De Dieu alleges, a direct promise of deliverance to the elect, but a threatening of destruction to the reprobate." (P. 238)

And we ask, is this an example of "righteousness" that punishes the guilty—resulting in Alexander's translation of צִדְקָה by "justice"? Do you agree with Calvin, or with Alexander? We say, genuine righteousness punishes wickedness and injustice.

⁶⁰Motyer states that in **verse 23**, "An initial 'For' [כִּי, our 'Because']...makes this verse explanatory of the consummation / judgment theme. It comes about not by human will (e.g. the imperialist Assyrian Empire) nor by chance or the mechanical operation of historical forces but by Divine decree." (P. 117)

Yes...but right alongside the Divine decree goes the human freedom to make decisions—which are ultimately guided and their outcome determined by YHWH! The nations are not "puppets on strings"!

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 23**: "This verse contains a further explanation of the כְּלִיֹּן חֲרוֹץ [destruction decreed]. *For a consumption even (the one) determined (is) the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, making (or about to make) in the midst of all the earth...*

This verse and the one before it are quoted by Paul (**Romans 9:27-28** [see footnote 49], to show that the Jews, as such, were not the heirs of the promise, which was intended for the remnant, according to the election of grace." (Pp. 238-39)

⁶¹Motyer states that "*Destruction* (כְּלִיֹּן) means 'a coming to an end'...Another form of the same word (כְּלָה) is translated 'destruction' in **verse 23**. In both places it could be translated 'end' or 'consummation'; the Lord will consummate what He has

(continued...)

my Lord YHWH of Armies is making
in (the) midst of all the land / earth.⁶³

10:24⁶⁴ לִכְן כִּהְ-אֵמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת

⁶¹(...continued)

decreed, whether promise or threat, and what He does will be (literally) ‘overflowing in righteousness.’ Overwhelming / ‘overflowing’ (שׁוֹטֵף, from the root שָׁטַף) is used characteristically in **Isaiah** of the Assyrians ‘flooding in’ (compare **Isaiah 8:8; 10:22; 28:2, 15, 17-18; 30:28**)...

“The mercy which safeguards the remnant will be no less abundant! ‘Righteousness’ is the outworking of holiness in the application of righteous principles of world government (compare **Isaiah 5:16**).” (P. 117) Yes...but this is certainly not a full definition of “righteousness”!

⁶²What does נִחְרָצָה mean? The root יָחַרְצַי is a verb, meaning “cut, sharpen, or decide.” In the niphal, as it appears here, it apparently means “strictly determined,” or “Divinely decreed beforehand.”

See the article on this root in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament V**, pp. 216-20. Freedman and Lundbom give the definition of “Divinely decreed ends,” stating that “Certain things are ‘pre-cut’ by Yahweh, i.e., they are determined well in advance of the time when they are to take place...Isaiah tells the people that Jerusalem’s destruction has been determined beforehand (**Isaiah 28:22**), as has the destruction of Assyria (**Isaiah 10:22-23**).” (P. 220)

⁶³Slotki says that this phrase, “in the midst of all the earth,” involves “the Assyrians in particular, but Israel will not be immune from God’s process of extermination.” (P. 53)

Motyer states that “Upon the whole land / in the midst of all the earth / land indicates that the acts of God take place in the actuality of history and in the life of this world. ‘All’ is appropriate, for His acts encompass not only Judah and Israel but, contemporarily, the conglomerate peoples of the Assyrian Empire; all alike are subject to His decrees.” (P. 118)

⁶⁴Watts entitles **10:24-12:6** “Do Not Fear, You Jerusalemites.”

He comments that “The scene is marked by a clear change of subject, picking up the anomalous [abnormal] subject of **10:12** [we understand that subject to be the punishment of Assyria’s arrogance] to become the dominant theme and address...

“The complete mosaic pictures the achievement of God’s and Jerusalem’s goals: stable continuance of the Davidic dynasty, peace with knowledge of Yahweh, leadership over neighboring peoples, return of exiles, and unity in the Kingdom. These

(continued...)

⁶⁴(...continued)

will all be achieved when Yahweh ‘cuts down the trees’ (**10:33-34**), sends His Spirit on the King (**11:2**), judges in righteousness (**11:4-5**), and acts to bring back the exiles (**11:11-12**)...

“Yahweh promises...a successor, (Hezekiah) blessed and successful (**11:1-4**), and of wonderful peace (**11:5-9**) seems within reach...

“It is also reason for a reassessment of the [**Book of Isaiah’s**] view of the reign of Ahaz. For all his timidity in response to a call for bold faith (**7:10-13**), Ahaz did obey the command to be calm and not give in to Rezin (**7:4-6**). He calmly maintained his status as an Assyrian vassal through the following rebellions and invasions. Although his kingdom did not go unscathed, he, his throne, and his kingdom survived. That in itself is the reason for the optimism of this scene. With God being the Activist, Jerusalem’s (and Israel’s) role was a passive one. This Ahaz accepted and he was rewarded.

“A fifth-century reader / hearer could hardly help drawing a parallel to the reign of Manasseh. He also was a loyal Assyrian vassal throughout his reign. His policies also drew the ire of patriots within his realm and among the historians. However, he, too, saved Jerusalem from invasion or plundering. He, too, preserved his kingdom and his throne for his sons and grandsons.” (Pp. 154-56)

Watts, an **Old Testament** professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, here adopts a very “Jewish” interpretation, that is quite different from the views of most Christian interpreters of **Isaiah**, failing to see any “Messianic” predictions in **chapter 11**. He also adopts the view that Ahaz and Manasseh were really good kings, the very opposite of the biblical depiction of these two kings.

Watts entitles **10:24-27c** “Yahweh’s Anger against Assyria,” and comments that “Now he turns directly to the Jerusalemites as they have been reminded that Israel’s fate is sealed and that it involved ‘all the land’—and as they fearfully watch the march of the Assyrian armies along the coastal plain toward Egypt.” (Pp. 158-59)

Slotki states that **verses 24-27** are “a message of comfort and hope, addressed to the faithful remnant.” (P. 54)

Gray comments on these verses that “Zion has nothing to fear from Yahweh’s anger—a point of view radically unlike that commonly taken by Isaiah, but resembling that of e.g., **Isaiah 40:1-2**.” (P. 204)

Oswalt states that “There is no doubt that these verses do not follow **verses 20-23** very closely. They do not pick up the remnant theme at all; instead, they focus very

(continued...)

⁶⁴(...continued)

explicitly upon deliverance from the Assyrians' oppression. At the same time, however, the two passages do not contradict each other but are complementary. The decreed destruction and oppression (**verses 22, 23**) will not be total. A remnant will survive it (**verses 20-22**) as surely as Israel survived earlier oppressions (**verses 24, 26, 27**)...

"If the previous verses were somewhat negative and somewhat positive, these are wholly positive, harking back to great deliverances of the past and asserting that ultimately Zion has nothing to fear from Assyrian power but only from Divine anger, which will be soon gone, redirected against the Assyrians (**verses 25, 26**)." (Pp. 271-72)

Kaiser entitles **verses 24-27** "Do not Fear Assyria."

He comments that "The present text turns to address the people of Jerusalem as the nucleus of the people of God, the part of them which is particularly affected. It tells them to trust in Yahweh's name with tranquility in the face of the unexpected onslaught of the world power and assures them that its days are numbered..."

"Because Assyria and especially its king have vaunted themselves and in so doing invited their destruction...the scribe can comfortably assure the people of Jerusalem, as the nucleus of Judaism threatened by the world power, in the name of the almighty Yahweh Sebaoth ['of hosts'], that they need not fear..."

"The ruler of the world, hostile to God, will not escape the future wrath of God, and his army will perish with him, so that the country will see a repetition of the annihilation of Pharaoh and his army as it once took place at the Sea of Reeds (compare **Exodus 14:27ff.**)" (Pp. 244-45)

Motyer comments that in **verse 24**, "Isaiah turns to the other kingdom of the people of God, Zion. For Judah, hope occupies the foreground as they are certainly smitten but spared destruction. At this juncture it was part of sovereign wisdom to decree that, notwithstanding the decisive unbelief of Ahaz, the kingdom would not be wiped out by Assyria...Isaiah instructs Zion, '*Do not be afraid of the Assyrians.*' He knows that the end will be destruction and deportation (**6:11-12**), but he also knows that the Assyrians will not be the agents in this. They will *beat* [our 'strike'] but not ultimately be a cause for fear." (P. 118)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 24**: "The logical connection of this verse is not with that immediately preceding, but with **verse 19**. Having there declared the fate impending over the Assyrian, the prophet, as it were, turned aside to describe the effect of their destruction on the remnant of Israel, and now, having done so, he resumes the thread of his discourse, as if there had been no interruption. *Therefore*

(continued...)

אֶל-תִּירָא עַמִּי יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן מֵאַשּׁוּר
 בַּשָּׁבֶט יִכָּכֶה וּבַמִּטְהוֹ יִשָּׂא-עֲלֶיךָ
 בַּדֶּרֶךְ מִצְרַיִם:

Therefore, in this way my Lord YHWH of Armies spoke:

You shall not be afraid, My people, dwelling (in) Zion, from / of Assyria!

With the club he will strike you, and his rod will be lifted up against you,

in a way / manner of Egypt.⁶⁵

10:25⁶⁶ כִּי-עוֹד מְעַט מְזַעַר

⁶⁴(...continued)

thus saith the Lord Jehovah of hosts (since this is soon to be the fate of the Assyrians), Be not afraid, O My people inhabiting Zion, of Asshur (or the Assyrian). He shall smite thee (it is true) with the rod, and shall lift up his staff upon (or over) thee in the way of Egypt.

“According to Aben Ezra and Kimchi, Zion is here put simply for Jerusalem, and the address is to the population of that city, whether permanent or temporary, during Sennacherib’s invasion. But as Zion was the seat of the true religion, and the people of God are often said to inhabit Zion, not in a local but a spiritual sense, most interpreters understand the object of address to be Israel in general, while some restrict it to the pious and believing Jews, the remnant of Israel, who were now to be consoled and reassured amidst the judgments which were coming on the nation.” (P. 239)

Oswalt comments on **verse 24** that “Since a remnant will return, [and] since the destruction has been decreed by God, there is reason for hope. If we can believe that the events in our lives are in the hands of and under the guidance of a providential Father, then even punishment may result in hope because His purposes are good and His power is unlimited...”

“The people are reminded of their previous oppression under Egypt and of God’s deliverance. Thus, historical analogy becomes reason for hope...What God has done, He can and will do again.” (P. 272)

⁶⁵Slotki notes that this means their suffering under Assyrian might will be after the manner of “the bondage endured by the early Israelites in Egypt.” (P. 54)

Alexander agrees, stating that the sense is “Assyria shall oppress thee, as Egypt did before.” (P. 240)

⁶⁶Alexander comments on **verse 25**: “This verse assigns a reason for the exhortation not to fear in **verse 24**. *For yet a very little, and wrath is at an end, and My*

(continued...)

וְכִלָּה זַעַם וְאַפִּי עַל-תְּבִלֵּיתָם:

⁶⁶(...continued)

anger (shall go forth, or tend) *to their destruction*, i.e. the destruction of the enemy.

“Interpreters are not agreed upon the question whether the first clause has reference to that destruction also, or to the restoration of God’s people to His favor. [Many interpreters] refer both **זַעַם וְאַפִּי**, [indignation and My anger] to God’s displeasure with Assyria, and this seems to be the sense designed to be conveyed by [King James]. **כִּלָּה** [to finish] will then mean to exhaust or sate itself. But [many other interpreters] refer **זַעַם** [indignation] to God’s anger against Israel, and **אַפִּי** [My anger] to His wrath against Assyria. ‘For yet a very little, and the indignation, which has caused these sufferings to My people, shall be ended, and My wrath shall turn to the destruction of their enemies.’ [This interpretation] makes the connection with the foregoing verse much more natural and easy.” (P. 240)

Translations of **verse 25** vary:

King James, “For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.”

Tanakh, “For very soon My wrath will have spent itself, and My anger that was bent on wasting them.”

New Revised Standard, “For in a very little while my indignation will come to an end, and my anger will be directed to their destruction.”

New International, “Very soon my anger against you will end and my wrath will be directed to their destruction.”

New Jerusalem, “but in a very short time the retribution will come to an end, and my anger will destroy them.”

Rahfs, ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν καὶ παύσεται ἡ ὀργή ὁ δὲ θυμός μου ἐπὶ τὴν βουλήν αὐτῶν, For yet a little, and the wrath / anger will cease. But then the wrath of Mine upon their counsel.” (With no verb in the last clause.)

Gray comments that “There is no need for Yahweh’s people to fear (**verse 24**), for within a very little time (**Isaiah 29:17**) Yahweh’s wrath...against them will be spent (**Daniel 11:36**; compare **Isaiah 26:20**). The last blows which His righteous anger compelled Him to inflict on them with His rod, ‘Assyria’ (**verse 5**), are now falling; He is about to scourge Assyria instead (**verse 26**).” (Pp. 204-05)

Again, **verse 25** is an example of ambiguity in the biblical text, which does not allow for definite and clear interpretation which a simplistic view of the **Bible** assumes. The text allows differing interpretations, and dogmatic conclusions are inappropriate and misleading—not true to the **Bible**.

Because still a little, a trifle,

and My anger's indignation will be finished upon their (Assyria's) destruction.⁶⁷

10:26⁶⁸ וְעֹזֶר עָלָיו יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שׁוֹט

כַּמֶּכֶת מִדִּין בְּצוּר עֹרֵב

וּמִטֵּהוּ עַל-הַיָּם

וְנִשְׂאוֹ בְּדֶרֶךְ מִצְרַיִם:

And YHWH of Armies will raise against him a whip,

like Midian's being struck at Rock Oreb⁶⁹

⁶⁷That is, says Slotki, "the destruction of the Assyrians." (P. 54)

⁶⁸Alexander translates / comments on **verse 26**: "The suddenness and completeness of the ruin threatened are expressed by a comparison with two remarkable events in sacred history, the slaughter of the Midianites by Gideon, and the overthrow of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. *And Jehovah of hosts shall raise up against him (the Assyrian) a scourge (or instrument of vengeance) like the smiting of Midian at the rock Oreb, and His rod (Jehovah's) shall again be over the sea, and He shall lift it up (again) as He did in Egypt (literally, in the way of Egypt, as in verse 24)...*

"The *rock Oreb* is particularly mentioned, because one of the Midianitish princes, who had escaped from the field of battle, was there slain by Gideon; and so Sennacherib, although he should survive the slaughter of his host, was to be slain at home (**Isaiah 37:38**)...

"In the last clause there is a beautiful allusion to **verse 24**. As the Assyrians lifted up the rod over Israel in the manner of Egypt, so God would lift up the rod over them in the manner of Egypt. As they were like the Egyptians in their sin, so should they now be like them in their punishment...They had lifted a *rod* over Israel, but God would raise up a *scourge* against them." (P. 241)

⁶⁹For this matter of Midian's being struck at Rock Oreb, see **Judges 7:24-25**:

- 24 And Gideon sent forth messengers into all of Mount Ephraim, saying:
Come down to meet Midian;
and capture for them the waters as far as House of Barah and the Jordan!
And every man of Ephraim was called out;
and they captured the waters as far as House of Barah and the Jordan!
- 25 And they captured two princes of Midian,
Orebh and Zeebh.
And they killed Orebh in Rock Orebh,

(continued...)

and His rod (will be) over the sea,⁷⁰
and He will lift it in a way of Egypt.⁷¹

⁶⁹(...continued)

and Zeebh they killed at Winepress-Zeebh.
And they pursued Midian.

And (the) head(s) of Orebh and Zeebh they brought to Gideon,
across the Jordan.

What do you think? Do you see this passage saying Midian was struck at Rock Orebh, or only Orebh, a leader of Midian, was killed there, giving his name to the rock?

Motyer comments that “The Assyrians took the whip and perished by the whip!” (P. 118)

⁷⁰Slotki holds that YHWH’s rod being over the sea is referring to “when Israel was delivered and the Egyptians were drowned (**Exodus 14:21ff.**)” (P. 54)

Motyer comments that “*His rod* is another illustration that could hardly be more apt. The Egyptians then (**Exodus 14:15ff.**) and the Assyrians now were so confident of their prey, yet they were foiled, to their own destruction, by a Divine deliverance timed to the second.” (P. 118)

⁷¹The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) of **verse 26** is very different:

καὶ ἐπεγερεῖ ὁ θεὸς ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς
κατὰ τὴν πληγὴν τὴν Μαδιαμ ἐν τόπῳ θλίψεως
καὶ ὁ θυμὸς αὐτοῦ τῇ ὁδῷ τῇ κατὰ θάλασσαν
εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν κατ’ Αἴγυπτον

And the God will stir up (defeat) upon / against them,
like / according to the stroke of the Madiam in a place of affliction.
And His wrath on the road / way, the one toward (the) sea,
into the road / way the one toward Egypt.

And we wonder what these last two lines mean. What wrath of YHWH was seen on the Via Maris, the road to the sea? Could he be thinking of the death of King Josiah of Judah at Megiddo? Watts comments that “It is clear that Tiglath-Pileser and succeeding kings were unable to maintain their presence on the border [that is, the way toward Egypt]. And so they were unable to continue to assess levies or taxes on the caravan trade that passed through.” (P. 159) What do you think the phrase means?

The last line in the Hebrew text is given varying translations:

King James, “so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt.”

Tanakh, “[and will wield His staff] as He did over the Egyptians by the sea.”

New Revised Standard, “and he will lift it [His staff] as he did in Egypt.”

(continued...)

10:27 וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

יִסּוֹר סִבְלוֹ מֵעַל שִׁכְמֶךָ

וְעָלוּ מֵעַל צִוְאַרְךָ

וְחָבַל עַל מִפְנֵי־שֶׁמֶן:

And it will happen on that day,

He will turn aside his burden from upon your shoulder,
and his yoke from upon your neck,
and (the) yoke will be ruined because of fat / oil.⁷²

⁷¹(...continued)

New International, “and he will raise his staff over the waters, as he did in Egypt.”

New Jerusalem, “[will brandish his rod at the Sea] as he raised it on the way from Egypt.”

Darnell, “and He will lift it in a way of Egypt.”

Slotki states that “The ending of this verse is meant to be contrasted with the end of **verse 24**.” (P. 54)

⁷²Watts entitles **10:27d-32** “The March of Conquest.” He comments that these verses “have an unnamed subject approaching Jerusalem from the East and North...A major question turns on the intent of the march. It has usually been understood as malevolent—the approaching ‘destroyer’...But there is evidence to the contrary. The immediate context (**10:24-27** and **11:1ff.**) is positive to Jerusalem. Although there is awesome terror in the villages, appropriate to the approach of the Almighty God, there is nothing in the words that dictate terror for Jerusalem. **Verse 10:24** had commanded the opposite [i.e., not to fear, when the Assyrian lifts the rod against them].” (P. 161)

We think this comment is mistaken, almost silly. The picture is that of an army approaching Jerusalem, having to leave its baggage behind due to a steep climb approaching Michmas. The fear that is expressed is not the awe felt at a Theophany, but fear for the loss of life and property at the hands of the scavenging army passing through. We see no evidence that the passage is a Theophany, in spite of Watts’ and Wildberger’s claims.

We appreciate Delitzsch’s statement that “Seen aesthetically, the description belongs among the most splendidly picturesque that human poetry has ever produced ...Through **verse 32a** the speech moves in quick stormy steps, then it becomes hesitant as if shaking for fear.” (Quoted by Watts, p. 161)

(continued...)

⁷²(...continued)

Perhaps this is overstatement. But I remember translating the passage during my early years of reading Hebrew—and across the years, more than sixty now, the memory of its words has not parted from my mind. Much of the **Book of Isaiah**, I had completely forgotten, and reading and translating it anew for this series of notes, can hardly remember having read it before. But not so with this passage—which made such an indelible impression on me.

Motyer comments on **verses 27-34** that “This may be a description of the Assyrian march, but it is much more likely to be a poetic impression (as in **verse 9**) of an advancing foe. The triumphalist [attitude of superiority] march from conquest to conquest is ‘framed’ with beautiful irony by statements of its ultimate ineffectuality, e.g. the lifting of the yoke (**verse 27a**) and the felling of the tree (**verses 33-34**).” (Pp. 118-19)

Translations of **verse 27** vary:

King James, “And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.”

Tanakh, “And in that day, His burden shall drop from your back, And his yoke from your neck; The yoke shall be destroyed because of fatness.”

New Revised Standard, “On that day his burden will be removed from your shoulder, and his yoke will be destroyed from your neck. He has gone up from Rimmon”;

New International, “In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck; the yoke will be broken because you have grown so fat.”

New Jerusalem, “When that day comes, his burden will fall from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed . . .”

Rahlfs, καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἀφαιρεθήσεται ὁ φόβος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ σοῦ καὶ ὁ ζυγὸς αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὤμου σου καὶ καταφθαρήσεται ὁ ζυγὸς ἀπὸ τῶν ὤμων ὑμῶν, “And it will be in that day, his fear will be taken away from you; and his yoke from your shoulder, and the yoke will be destroyed from your (plural) shoulders.”

Watts, “And it shall be in that day his burden will move from your shoulder and his yoke be broken from your neck. He has ascended from Pene-Yeshemon.”

(This last phrase in Hebrew is מִפְּנֵי־שֶׁמֶן, literally, “from before oil,” an enigmatic phrase—and we see no way to justify Watts’ reconstruction of the text and translation. Other attempts similar to that of Watts include “The Destroyer arises from the North”; “He has come up from Pene Rimmon”; “And be destroyed forever in My wrath.” We say, Why not just admit that the text is puzzling / enigmatic, that we can’t read the text, and don’t know what it means?)

Slotki comments that “As the increasing fatness of an animal would burst the yoke on its neck, so would Israel’s renewed vigor and growing prosperity break down all

(continued...)

⁷²(...continued)
foreign oppression.” (P. 54)

Motyer comments that “The burden (compare **9:4-3**) is the symbol of ‘rendering service,’ the yoke that of being ‘under orders.’ The removal of both speaks of the end of overlordship...

“The second part of the verse is full of difficulty. A literal translation would be ‘and a / the yoke shall be broken because of oil.’ ‘Oil’ symbolizes inherent richness or strength...Was there an inherent richness or strength in Zion making it invincible to Assyria? Is so it was, presumably, the Lord’s Davidic promises...

“But while oil was used in anointing, the word never stands as a figure of anointing. Yet this is probably the nearest to a satisfactory meaning of the text as it stands and matches the rather emphatic who live in Zion of **verse 24**. Poetry is inherently allusive, and the thought here is not unlike that in **2 Samuel 1:21** where David mourns that Saul perished in battle ‘as if not anointed with oil.’” (P. 119)

We say, not only is poetry inherently allusive—so is the prophetic message, as stated in **Numbers 12:6-8**.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 27**: “*And it shall be* (happen, or come to pass) *in that day* (when this prediction is fulfilled) that *his burden* (the burden imposed on him, the heavy load of Assyrian oppression, perhaps with special reference to the tribute imposed upon Hezekiah) *shall depart* (be removed) *from thy shoulder, and his yoke* (a poetical equivalent to *burden*) *from thy neck* (O Israel!), *and the yoke* (itself) *shall be destroyed* (or broken off) *because of* (literally, *from the face of*) *oil* (or *fatness* or *anointing*)...

“The only difficulty lies in the concluding words, which have been variously understood...Some take שָׁמֶן in its usual sense of *oil*, and suppose an allusion to the softening of the yoke with oil, or to its preservation by it...Others take שֶׁמֶן in the sense of fat or fatness, and suppose an allusion to the rejection of the yoke by a fat bullock...or to the bursting of the yoke by the increasing fatness of the bullock’s neck...Others [think of] the excessive wealth and prosperity of the Assyrian empire...or the increasing prosperity of Judah...The general meaning of the verse is plain, as a prediction of deliverance from Assyrian bondage.” (Pp. 241-42)

And we ask, Is this not another example of the prophet’s “enigmatic” statements, as stated in **Numbers 12:6-8**, and as reflected by Paul in **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**?

⁷³Slotki states that **verses 28-32** give “A graphic description of the march of the Assyrian army through various towns on the northern approaches to Jerusalem.” (P. 54)

Gray entitles this same basic passage (which he begins with **verse 27c**) “A Dramatic Idyll [an extremely happy, peaceful scene].” Yes...but the scene opens with the terrifying description of an army marching on Jerusalem. Is that “idyllic”?

Gray continues: “The poet assumes the standpoint of one who is in Jerusalem on the morrow after an invader, marching from the north, has entered Judean territory and encamped within a few miles of the capital, ready to strike at it the next day.

First the invader’s march is described in a succession of short telling clauses, **verses 27-29**: from Pene Rimmon, some ten miles north of Jerusalem, he has advanced through Ai and Migron to Michmas; leaving his heavy baggage there, he has without delay descended into the deep Wady Suwenit below Michmas, crossed its bottom and made the steep ascent to Geba, where at less than six miles from Jerusalem he has encamped for the night...

“This concludes the description of the march, for in **verses 29c-31** the subject of the verb is no longer the invader, and the towns mentioned do not lie on any single route from Geba to Jerusalem. The object of **verses 29c-31** is to indicate, partly by descriptive tenses, partly by imperatives addressed to the terrified towns, the terror of the country between Geba and Jerusalem as news reaches them the same evening of the near presence of the hostile army. The poem closes with the inevitable yet ominous inference: Today the invader will fall on Jerusalem itself!” (P. 207)

Kaiser entitles **verses 28-34** “The Enemy from the North.”

He comments that “In the present context we must see the enemy whose unstoppable advance is depicted in **verses 28-32** as Assyria, the world power which Yahweh has called up against His Own people as a rod of chastisement, yet which is doomed to certain destruction because of its folly...Accordingly the wood cut down by Yahweh seems to refer to the hostile army storming against the city of God, to find an end before the gates of the city [i.e., Sennacherib’s army].”

But for Kaiser, the real meaning of the poem is that it is a description of the eschaton, the “eschatological” final battle between the world powers and the people of God, and cannot be in fact describing the advance of the Assyrians on Jerusalem under Sennacherib.

Alexander comments on **verse 28**: “From the time of the Assyrian’s overthrow the prophet now reverts to that of his invasion, which he describes in the most vivid manner by rapidly enumerating the main points of his march from the frontier of Judah to the gates of Jerusalem. From the geographical minuteness and precision of this

(continued...)

⁷³(...continued)

passage, Eichhorn and Hitzig have inferred that it was written after the event, because Isaiah could not know what route Sennacherib would take...

“The same position is maintained in Robinson’s **Biblical Researches in Palestine** [1838-52; Alexander’s contemporary who lived 1794 to 1863, and is considered by many the founder of biblical archaeology] on the ground that the road here traced could never have been commonly used, because impracticable from the nature of the ground. If passable at all, however, it may well have been adopted in a case of bold invasion, where surprise was the main object. The difficulties of the route in question must be slight compared with those by which Hannibal and Napoleon crossed the Alps...

“We may conceive the prophet standing in vision on the walls of Jerusalem, and looking towards the quarter from which the invasion was to come, enumerating certain intervening points without intending to predict that he would really pass through them. In this case, the more difficult the route described, the better suited would it be to express the idea that the enemy would come in spite of all opposing obstacles...

“J. S. Michaelis supposes the invasion here described to be that of Nebuchadnezzar—partly because that supposition, as he thinks, makes the connection between this and the next chapter clearer and more natural—partly because the

Babylonian army did pursue this course, whereas Sennacherib came against Jerusalem from the south (**Isaiah 36:2**)...

“[However,] the history contains no account of Sennacherib’s own march upon the city, but only of Rabshakeh’s embassy from Lachish, and it is expressly said that when that officer rejoined his master, he had already advanced further to the north. It is easy to imagine, therefore, that he may have chosen a circuitous and difficult approach, in order to take the city by surprise...

“The passage is applied by most interpreters to the Assyrians...The places here enumerated seem to have belonged chiefly or wholly to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah...The language is precisely that of an eye-witness describing at the moment what he actually sees.” (Pp. 242-43)

Oswalt entitles **verses 28-34** “Assyria leashed,” which hardly seems appropriate—as it depicts the Assyrian army marching “unleashed” to the outskirts of Jerusalem! He comments that “Perhaps the major interpretative question in the passage relates to the last two verses. Are they addressed to Assyria as described in the previous verses or are they addressed to Judah as are the following verses beginning with **11:1**? Commentators are divided with good reason. The reference is not at all clear.

“Those who favor making Judah the subject...are impressed by the reference to the shoot coming up from the stump (**11:1**), a point which follows very naturally if Judah

(continued...)

⁷³(...continued)
is the forest being cut down...

“But others...have pointed out that making this passage one of judgment upon Judah does not fit the immediate context, which depicts judgment upon Assyria. In this light, **10:28-34** may be another of Isaiah’s graphic and concrete illustrations of a point. The inevitability of the march is suddenly broken in upon and the oppressor is swept away...[this is where he get the title ‘Assyria leashed’]

“On balance, the argument for relating the passage to its immediate context and making it a parable of Assyria’s destruction seems strongest.” (Pp. 273-74) Yes...but is this passage “a parable”? We doubt that! What do you think?

Oswalt goes on to state that “The discovery of Sennacherib’s annals (as well as the report in **2 Kings 19** and **Isaiah 36:2**) makes it plain that this is neither a prophecy nor a report of Sennacherib’s attack in 701 B.C.E. (contra Calvin). That attack came up from Lachish southwest of Jerusalem [yes--but do we know the exact route of the attack? Do not attacking armies oftentimes take circular routes for offensive purposes?]....

“No literal attack is necessary for this account to serve its purpose in this setting. By means of short, hard-hitting phrases it depicts an army’s relentless progress southward from a point some fifteen miles north of Jerusalem until it finally stands

overlooking the Holy City. That the route taken diverges from the main north / south road at about Bethel and traverses the edge of the Jordan Rift gives authenticity to the story because this way, though more difficult in terrain, would have avoided the potential strong points at Gibeon, Ramah, and Gibeah...

“The net effect is to picture an army, like Assyria’s, which is all but unconquerable...The news that the enemy is lodged in Geba (**verse 29**), with no significant barriers between them and Jerusalem, strikes terror into the hearts of the neighboring villages. Ramah and Gibeah are outflanked. Gallim, Laishah, Anathoth, Madmenah, and Gebim lie directly in the path of the juggernaut as it makes the final march to the outskirts of Jerusalem on the following day...

“In a climactic gesture, the victorious enemy stands astride that high point and hurls taunts at Jerusalem. Obviously, nothing can save the city from such overwhelming force.” (Pp. 274-75)

We say, this reads much more like eye-witness accounts of an attacking army than a parable or made-up story. What do you think?

לְמִכְמָשׁ יִפְקֹד כְּלָיו:

He came upon Aiath;⁷⁴

he passed⁷⁵ through Migron;⁷⁶

⁷⁴Aiath is probably a longer form of the name Ai, which is always written אֵי, **ha(ay)** in Hebrew--"The Ai," which means literally "The Heap," or "The Ruin." It was a small town that lay some 11 miles to the west of Jericho, about 1 and ½ miles to the southeast of Bethel, and about 10 miles directly north of Jerusalem.

According to the story told in the **Book of Joshua** the first attack of the Israelites upon "The Ai" was unsuccessful, because of the wrong-doing of Achan, who had stolen part of the booty from Jericho for his own personal gain. But the second attack, following Achan's being discovered and punished, resulted in the capture and total destruction of Ai. See **Joshua 7:1-8:29**.

Here, according to the word picture drawn by Isaiah, Aiath lay in the path of the conquering army coming against Jerusalem from the north.

Slotki states that Aiath is "assumed to be the ancient town of Ai (**Joshua 7:2**), about two miles northwest from Michmash; probably identical with the modern Tell el-Hajar, nine miles northeast of Jerusalem." (P. 54)

⁷⁵Motyer, commenting on the text as translated in **New International**, states that "*Enter* and *pass* are both perfect tenses and probably should be translated in the past [tense], indicating that the march is already on its way...With *store* the tense changes to imperfect [future tense]. The two perfect tenses represent reports brought back from the front of what has already happened; the imperfect has (so to speak) the sense of alarm as people learn that the key pass of Michmash has fallen. *They store supplies* is possibly more likely, 'he reviews or examines his weapons,' i.e. preparatory to the final assault." (P. 119)

Alexander comments that "The present form, 'he passes,' represents the thing as actually taking place; the preterite, he has passed, implies that he has scarcely reached a place before he leaves it, and is therefore more expressive of his rapid movements." (P. 243)

Rahlf's has the future tense: "For he will come into the city Aggai, and he will pass into Magedo; and in Machmas he will place the goods of his."

Where our Hebrew text spells the name מִכְמָשׁ, **michmas** (with final *sin*), some Hebrew manuscripts spell it מִכְמָס, **michmas** (with final *samekh*).

⁷⁶The only other passage in the **Hebrew Bible** where this town of Migron is

(continued...)

he stores his equipment at Michmas.⁷⁷

⁷⁶(...continued)

mentioned is **1 Samuel 14:2**, where it is located on the outskirts of King Saul's home in Gibeah. It may well be located at the modern Tell Miryam, directly to the north of Michmash.

Slotki states that Migron is "an unidentified place which was probably situated between Michmash and Ai. Some identify it with the modern Makrun, a ruined site north of Michmash." (P. 54)

There can be little doubt that what Isaiah is naming is a group of small villages lying on the route of an enemy force coming from the north towards Jerusalem in the south--and as they come, they sweep both to the west and to the east, threatening the small villages encountered on their way, gathering supplies from the local villagers, and using the villages as stopping-places for storage and spending the night, making sure that the Judeans would be able to get no support from these villages and their inhabitants once they arrived for the battle with Jerusalem.

⁷⁷Michmas is a town of the Tribe of Benjamin, located to the east of Bethel and just a few miles to the southeast from Aiath and Migron.

Gray states that Michmas is seven and a half miles north of Jerusalem. It lies at an elevation of 1990 feet, about two miles distant from Geba, at an elevation of 2200 feet on the top of the opposite slope--separated by the deep Wady es-Suwenit. See on the Internet **BiblePlaces.com** with Bill Schegel's aerial photo from the west of Wadi Suwenit, which gives some idea of the great difficulty confronting the Assyrian army in crossing this deep gorge between Michmas and Geba.

The story is told in **1 Samuel 13:23** of how Jonathan, King Saul's son and dear friend of the future King David, made a successful attack on the Philistines about a mile and a half to the southeast of Michmas, at Geba--and how the Philistines gathered together in Michmas following that attack, resulting in the flight of the Israeli troops. But Jonathan and his armor-bearer descended from Geba and attacked the Philistines in Michmas, causing great confusion in the Philistine camp. Aided by prisoners who had been taken captive by the Philistines, and whom Jonathan freed, they together were successful in putting the Philistines to flight (see **1 Samuel 14:1ff.**).

After the Babylonian exile, returning Jews inhabited Michmas (see **Ezra 2:27** and **Nehemiah 7:31; 11:31**), and Michmas was later to become the home of Judas Maccabeus (see **1 Maccabees 9:73**). It is to be found today with the name Mukhmas--a ruined village on the northern ridge of the Wadi Suweinit, just to the north of Jerusalem.

Slotki states that Michmas "lies less than two miles northeast of Geba (**1 Samuel 13:2ff.**). That the Assyrian troops would "store baggage" at Michmas would be, according to Slotki, due to the fact that they would have to "cross the wadi, the banks of

(continued...)

10:29⁷⁸ עִבְרוּ מֵעֲבָרָה

גִּבְעַת מִלּוֹן לְנוֹ
חֲרָרָה הַרְמָה
גִּבְעַת שְׂאוֹל נִסָּה:

They⁷⁹ have gone through (the) crossing,

⁷⁷(...continued)

which are very steep.” (P. 55) We wonder how Watts can explain this “storing of baggage” in terms of the march being a “Theophany.”

⁷⁸Motyer comments on **verse 29**: “‘They have crossed the pass’ refers to Michmas. The introduction of quasi-direct speech (‘We will camp overnight at Geba’ / ‘Geba our billet [temporary lodging for soldiers]!’) adds vividness and expresses the self-confidence of the foe. Far from delaying at Michmas to establish a supply-base, they have pushed on over the pass, descended 300 feet into the valley and are planning the occupation of Geba, 500 feet up the other side. The enemy has now entered Judah and is six miles from Jerusalem. Ramah and Gibeah were both fortress towns on the direct road to the capital, but far from preparing to halt the enemy, already ‘Ramah has panicked, Gibeah of Saul has been evacuated [has fled].” (P. 119)

Alexander comments on this verse: “*They have passed the pass*, a narrow passage between Michmas and Geba (**1 Samuel 13:3, 5**, etc), a spot no doubt easily maintained against an enemy. Their passing it implies that they have met with no resistance, or had overcome it, and that there was no little or nothing to impede their march...

“Thus far [the author] has described what the Assyrians themselves do—they cross the line at Aiath—pass through Migron—leave their baggage at Michmas—lodge at Geba. Now he describes what the places themselves *do*—*Ramah trembles; Gibeah of Saul flees*...The trembling and flight of these towns are naturally represented as occurring while the enemy was resting at Geba. It may imply either that Ramah was not in the direct line of the march, but within sight and hearing of it, or on the contrary, that it was the next place to be reached, and was trembling in apprehension of it...There is here a rapid but marked climax. While Ramah trembles, Gibeah flees.” (P. 244)

⁷⁹Where our Hebrew text has the plural עִבְרוּ, “they passed over / went through,” 1QIs^a, **Rahlf**s, the Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations, as well as the Aramaic Targum all have a singular verb, “he passed over / went through,” as is true of the preceding verse. But Watts comments that “the change of person makes sense and accords with the dynamic style of the passage.” (P. 160)

[shouting:] Geba--⁸⁰ a lodging-place for us!⁸¹
The (city of) Ramah⁸² became terrified,⁸³

⁸⁰The Hebrew word גִּבְעָה, *geba* means “hill.” It was another town belonging to the Tribe of Benjamin, just a few miles north of Jerusalem, and near Gibeah. The two towns of Geba and Gibeah have sometimes been identified as one town with these two names, but it is most probable that they were two separate towns, with similar names. See **Joshua 18:24, 28**; and here, **Isaiah 10:29**.

Geba was assigned to the Levites; and it was from Geba that Jonathan made his daring descent and attack on the Philistine army encamped at Michmas. In the time of Asa, King of Judah, it was fortified, and became the northernmost limit of the tribal territory of Judah. After the Babylonian exile, it was mentioned in **Nehemiah 11:31** and **12:29**.

The modern town of Jeba occupies the site at the present time. It is some five miles north of Jerusalem.

⁸¹We take the Hebrew phrase, גִּבְעָה מִלּוֹן לָנוּ, “Geba—a lodging place for us!” to be the shout of the army as it crosses the deep ravine between Michmas and Geba.

Watts points out that it is possible to take the last word, לָנוּ as the 3rd person qal plural from the verb לוֹן, “they lodged / spent the night (i.e., in Geba, a lodging place).”

⁸²The Hebrew word הַרְמָה, *haramah* means “the height,” and was the name given to a number of sites in Israel. This Ramah is a town belonging to the Tribe of Benjamin, near Bethel, in the same general area as Gibeon and Beerth (**Joshua 18:25**), and was used as a resting-place on the road connecting central Galilee and Jerusalem.

Judges 19:13 tells how a Levite and his concubine planned to spend the night in Ramah, and **Judges 4:5** tells how Deborah the Prophetess and Judge lived near Ramah. When King Asa of Judah went to war with King Baasha of Israel, Baasha built a fort at Ramah, but when the Syrians attacked Israel, King Asa destroyed the fort and used the materials to build fortresses at Geba and Mizpah (see **1 Kings 15:17, 21-22**; **2 Chronicles 16:1, 5-6**).

Jeremiah tells the story of how King Nebuchadnezzar gathered the exiles after the fall of Jerusalem at Ramah, and how it was there at Ramah that Jeremiah was released by the Babylonian King, and allowed to return to Jerusalem.

(continued...)

Gibeah⁸⁴ of Saul ran away!

10:30⁸⁵ צְהַלֵי קוֹלֶךָ בֵּת-גִּבְעִים

⁸²(...continued)

Ezra 2:26 and **Nehemiah 11:33** tell of the reoccupation of Ramah following the return of the exiles from captivity. It is most probably to be located at the modern Er-Ram, a few miles north of Jerusalem, and within two miles of Geba, or Ramat Rahel [Beth Haccherem], near the traditional tomb of Rachel. See **Jeremiah 31:15; 1 Samuel 10:2** and **Matthew 2:18**.

⁸³Gray entitles the material beginning with this line and continuing through **verse 31**, “The alarm of the country-side.”

⁸⁴The Hebrew word Gibeah means the same thing as Geba--“Hill.” The “Gibeah of Saul” refers to a town in the Tribe of Benjamin, shortly to the north of Jerusalem (according to this passage). As a result of a crime committed by the people living in Gibeah, the town was destroyed in the period of the Judges--see the story as told in **Judges 19-20**, and compare **Hosea 9:9** and **10:9**. It was King Saul’s birthplace (**1 Samuel 10:26**), and served as his place of residence while he served all Israel as King (**1 Samuel 13-15**).

Gibeah of Saul is most probably to be located at the mound of Tell el-Ful, immediately to the north of Jerusalem. This site was excavated by W. F. Albright of the American Schools of Oriental Research in 1922-23, and 1933, and then by P. W. Lapp in 1964. The fact that there was no running water at this site meant that it was not occupied permanently until the Iron Age, when rain-water cisterns came into common use in the hill country. The first small settlement belonged to the 12th century B.C.E., and is most probably the Gibeah destroyed according to the story in **Judges 19-20**. After a time of not being occupied, the town was rebuilt, with a small fortress (about 1025-950 B.C.E., the time of King Saul). Archaeologists have concluded that the fortress was pillaged, and then abandoned for a short while, most probably following the death of Saul. But during the time of Hezekiah, the fortress was rebuilt with a watch-tower, and in later times a much larger village occupied the site during the time of the Maccabees.

⁸⁵Alexander translates and comments on **verse 30**: “To terror and flight [the author] now adds an audible expression of distress, representing one place as crying, another as listening, and according to some writers, a third responding. At the same time he exchanges the language of description for that of direct personal address. *Cry aloud, daughter Gallim* (or daughter of Gallim); *hearken Laishah, ah poor Anathoth!*...

“The site of Gallim is no longer known, but it was no doubt somewhere in the neighborhood of Gibeah.” (Pp. 244-45)

Green comments on **verse 30** that “Three or four towns between Geba and Jerusalem are dramatically invited to participate in the lamentation which the approach

(continued...)

הַקְשִׁיבִי לַיִשָּׁה

עֲנִיָּה עֲנִתּוֹת:

Make your voice shrill,⁸⁶ O daughter of Gallim!⁸⁷

Listen carefully (to them), Layeshah!⁸⁸

Poor Anathoth!⁸⁹

⁸⁵(...continued)

of the invaders occasions.” (P. 209)

⁸⁶Watts states that the Hebrew phrase **צִהֲלִי קוֹלְךָ** means “make your voice shrill.” Others have “Lift up thy voice,” or “Give a shrill cry,” or “Cry aloud,” or “Cry your loudest.” **Rahfs** omits the phrase, translating the verse by taking the last word of **verse 29** as belonging to **verse 30**: **φεύζεται** ³⁰ ἡ θυγάτηρ Γαλλιμ ἐπακούσεται **Λαισα** ἐπακούσεται **Αναθωθ**, “The daughter of Gallim will flee; Laisa will listen; Anathoth will listen.”

⁸⁷“Galliym” (**גַּלִּיִּם** in Hebrew) means “Heaps,” and obviously is being used here to denote a town or village directly to the north of Jerusalem. The only other mention of such a place is found in **1 Samuel 25:44**, but the exact location is unknown.

⁸⁸The Hebrew name **לַיִשָּׁה**, “Layeshah” evidently refers to another small town directly to the north of Jerusalem, but the exact site is unknown. There is a modern Isawiye, a village located two miles to the northeast of Jerusalem.

⁸⁹The phrase **עֲנִיָּה עֲנִתּוֹת**, “poor Anathoth,” located in the Tribe of Benjamin, is much better known than most of these other towns which Isaiah has mentioned as being on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Anathoth was assigned to the Levites (**Joshua 21:18**); it was the home of Abiathar (**1 Kings 2:26**), and also the home of the great writing Prophet, Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 1:1; 11:21**), as well as other famous Israelites such as Abiezer (**2 Samuel 23:27; 1 Chronicles 11:28; 27:12**) and Jehu (**1 Chronicles 12:3**). Conquered by Sennacherib, it was later repopulated following the exile (see **Nehemiah 11:32**).

The modern site is Ras el-Charrubeh; it is located some 3 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem, and lies near the modern town of Anata, which comes from the ancient name.

Gray translates this phrase by “Answer her, Anathoth,” and comments that whichever translation is followed, “there is a paranomasia,” that is ‘play on words,’ or a “pun.” (P. 209)

(continued...)

10:31⁹⁰ נִדְרָה מִדְּמִנָּה

יֹשְׁבֵי הַגִּבִּים הֵעִיזוּ:

Madmenah⁹¹ fled in retreat!

Those who live in the city of Gebim⁹² sought safety!

10:32⁹³ עוֹד הַיּוֹם בְּנוֹב לְעֹמֵד

⁸⁹(...continued)

As Watts notes, others translate by “Anathoth is poor,” while he himself translates by “Answer her, Anathoth.” (P. 160)

⁹⁰Slotki states that “the places mentioned in this **verse [31]** cannot be traced on our maps.” (P. 55)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 31**: “*Madmenah wanders (or removes from her place); the inhabitants of Gebim flee (or cause to flee, i.e. carry off their goods [but how does this mean ‘cause to flee’?])...*”

“In this verse, for the first time, the inhabitants are expressly mentioned and distinguished from the place itself.” (P. 245)

⁹¹This place name, מִדְּמִנָּה, Madmenah, is only mentioned here in **Isaiah’s** description of the advancing army coming against Jerusalem. It has been suggested that Shufat, about 1 ½ miles north of Jerusalem, just to the north of Mount Scopus, is where it was located--but this is uncertain.

⁹²The Hebrew name, הַגִּבִּים, “Hagebhiym” means “The Trenches,” and must refer to some location on the immediate outskirts of ancient Jerusalem, just to the north.

⁹³Alexander translates / comments on **verse 32**: “This verse conducts him [the Assyrian army] to the last stage of his progress, to a point so near the Holy City that he may defy it thence. *Yet to-day in Nob (he is) to stand; (and there) will he shake his hand (a gesture of menace and defiance) against the mountain of the house (or daughter) of Zion (i.e. mount Zion itself) the hill of Jerusalem...*”

“In this verse the [Aramaic] Targum introduces a description of Sennacherib’s army, and a soliloquy of Sennacherib himself, neither of which has the slightest foundation in the original.” (P. 246)

Gray comments on **verse 32** that “Assault on Jerusalem is imminent... *Today* is

(continued...)

יִנְפֹךְ יָדוֹ תֵר (בֵּית־) צִיּוֹן

גְּבַעַת יְרוּשָׁלַם:

Even today⁹⁴ in Nob for a standing place!⁹⁵

He shakes his fist menacingly⁹⁶ at Mount of daughter Zion,⁹⁷

⁹³(...continued)

the morning after the night spent at Geba...Today the foe will take up its position before the walls of Jerusalem.” (P. 209)

⁹⁴Watts translates by “until,” but suggests possibly “again (or still) today.” (P. 160)

⁹⁵A town by the name of Nob is mentioned in three different places in the **Hebrew Bible: 1 Samuel 22:19** (a city of priests, which David visited to obtain bread and weaponry from the High Priest Ahimelech, and which resulted in the death of Ahimelech and the priestly inhabitants. Obviously from this passage in **Isaiah 10:32**, it was a town that lay on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem. We learn from **Nehemiah 11:32** that it was re-inhabited following the Jewish exile in Babylonia.

It has been suggested that the modern site of Ras Umm et-Tala on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus, half-way between Anathoth and Jerusalem, is its location. S. R. Driver, the great English student of the Hebrew **1 Samuel**, thought that perhaps the ridge of a hilly brow from which the traveler from the north first gets sight of Jerusalem is intended (Ras el-Mesharif).

Slotki states that Nob “cannot be identified though it was obviously a place near Jerusalem. It has been suggested that it may have been situated on Mount Scopus to the north of the city on which the Hebrew University now stands.” (P.55)

Watts notes that לִעֲמֹד is an infinitive meaning “to take a stand,” but “has no previous verb to depend upon. The subject has again returned to the approaching one...The infinitive may depend on the previous verbs in **verse 28**, ‘he came up, came, and passed over...to again stand on Nob today.’ This makes it mark the purpose of the march.” (P. 160)

⁹⁶Watts translates the phrase יִנְפֹךְ יָדוֹ by “He waves his hand,” and notes that “The understanding of this context as referring to the Assyrian has caused translators to interpret this as brandishing a fist. But the words simply mean ‘to wave his hand.’” (P. 160)

He adds that “In ancient ritual the gesture of waving the hand may have

(continued...)

⁹⁶(...continued)

indicated his claim to the city. In this setting [a ‘theophany’!] it indicates His pleasure, His decision concerning the city. In **chapter 36** a conquering general stands at another vantage point to negotiate the surrender of the city. But the awesome One here approaching the city does not negotiate. His imperious gesture seals the fate of the city. The gesture is not threatening—on the contrary, the One Who has it in His power to utterly destroy indicates His will for the city to prosper...

“The gesture continues the message of **verses 24-25** [no—it continues **verses 27-32!**] to the city. It need not fear. God will first deal with His enemies and then turn His attention to Zion when His anger is past...The Divine gesture indicates His pleasure that Zion ‘grow large.’” (Pp. 162-63)

That is, Watts takes the waving of His hand to mean a friendly greeting from YHWH to His people in Jerusalem! We think this is a bizarre, highly unlikely meaning for the phrase! See the following passages where the same phrase occurs, only using the hiphil instead of the polel as here in **Isaiah 10:32**:

2 Kings 5:11, which tells of Naaman’s angry refusal of Elijah’s offer of healing by dipping seven times in the Jordan River:

And Naaman was angry, and went (away), and said,
Look—I said, He will come forth to me, coming forth and he would stand,
and he would call out in YHWH his God’s name,
and he would wave his hand to / over the place [of the severely infected
/ leprous skin],
and he would gather / remove the severe infection / leprosy!
(It would be an authoritative, commanding wave of the hand, ordering the
destruction of a disease.)

Isaiah 11:15,

And YHWH will destroy (the) tongue of (the) sea of Egypt;
and He will wave His hand over the River
with the (burning) glow of His breath / wind / Spirit;
and He [YHWH] will strike it into seven wadis / channels,
and He will lead (people) in the sandals [across the River].
(It is an authoritative wave of YHWH’s hand, causing the River to be dried up into
seven small channels, capable of being crossed by people in sandals.)

Isaiah 13:2, where it is the voice of the Divine Warrior, YHWH, commanding His troops to enter Babylon to execute His anger, destroying the city:

Over / on a mountain made bare lift up a signal;
raise up a voice / cry to them,
wave a hand!

(continued...)

⁹⁶(...continued)

And let them enter (the) gates of nobles!

Zechariah 2:13^{Heb} / 2:9^{Eng}, where it is the voice one sent by the Divine Warrior, YHWH, telling what he is going to do to Babylon:

Because look at Me—swinging My hand over them—
and they will be spoil to their slaves.

And you will know that YHWH of Armies sent me!

None of these statements is of the nature of a friendly greeting; rather, they are powerful gestures, accompanying the destruction of a disease, the drying up of a river, and the destruction / overthrow of the City of Babylon! We agree with those interpreters who understand it to mean the “brandishing of a fist,” here, not by YHWH, but by the army of the Assyrians who have arrived at the Jerusalem city-gate!

⁹⁷The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” בֵּית־
צִיּוֹן, “house / temple of Zion,” and the second, the *qere*, “to be read,” בֵּית־צִיּוֹן,
“daughter of Zion.” The resulting translation is either “he shakes his fist menacingly at
Mountain of daughter Zion,” or “he shakes his fist menacingly at Mountain of Zion’s
temple.” Compare **Isaiah 16:1**, where the phrase הַר בֵּית־צִיּוֹן, “mountain of
daughter Zion” occurs again.

⁹⁸**Verses 28-33** together give a unique picture of a powerful conqueror marching against the people of Judah, having come from the north, and making their terrifying, pillaging, victorious way through the small towns and villages immediately to the north of Jerusalem. We take this description to mean an Assyrian force marching south to the heartland of Judea--and here at last coming to Mount Scopus, looking down upon Mount Zion and the Temple of Solomon, standing there, shaking its fist against the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It is a terrifying scene, bringing terror to the hearts of the inhabitants of these small towns, and to Jerusalem as well.

It is a vivid and dramatic picture. In it we see and hear the powerful Assyrian armies marching southward, evidently from Bethel, some eight miles directly north of Jerusalem. Instead of marching directly to the south, the enemy has taken a somewhat circular, wide-sweeping route, in order to avoid Israelite defenses built upon the normal route. They come upon the ancient “Aiath” or “Ai”--the city destroyed by the Israelites in their occupation of Canaan. They pass by Migron, and then store their heavier military supplies and equipment at Michmas. The reason for this is that between Michmas and Geba there is a deep ravine, at the bottom of which is a creek-bed (“wadi”) whose waters empty in the Jordan just to the south of Jericho. It is a “steep crossing,” and as the invading army makes the crossing, their cry goes up, “Geba will be ours tonight!”

(continued...)

⁹⁸(...continued)

Immediately to the west, the inhabitants of HaRamah have become terrified, and the country people who live in small villages run away to escape the danger, with cries of distress--Gallim, and Layeshah, and Anathoth (the home-town of Jeremiah), and Madmenah, and HaGebim. These are tiny towns or villages on the outskirts of ancient Jerusalem, within walking distance of the proud capital city of the Jews. They are filled with terror at the rapidly advancing army. In a few short hours, the poem states, this great opponent will take his stand in Nob--the area known today as Mount Scopus, where the east campus of the Hebrew University stands, overlooking the City of Jerusalem.

There, on that high hill from which the enemy can look down within Jerusalem's walls, the opponent shakes his fist menacingly at Mount Zion's Temple, and at Jerusalem's hill, threatening them with imminent destruction.

Today we have network television, and every night we can watch the stories of war--whether it is the historical memories of the Civil War, or the First World War, or the Second World War, or the undeclared wars in Korea and Viet-Nam, or the Persian Gulf War, or current events taking place all around the world--in Afghanistan, or Syria, or Tibet, or Chile, or North Korea. The television cameras are used with great skill to picture the plans, and the gathering together of the troops, or the staging of the battleships and airplanes, and then give us vivid scenes of their coming into contact with the enemy, and the ensuing battles. During the Persian Gulf War, the cameras took us into the very battle-fields of the "Desert Storm," and we watched with awe as the armies of Saddam Hussein gathered, with their vaunted Republican Guard. We watched the news reports as the Allied Coalition carefully formed their strategy, and then as they unleashed their devastating attack from the rear on the almost totally helpless forces of Iraq.

Without the benefit of television cameras, it is just that same sort of picture that emerges before our eyes in **Isaiah 10:28-33**. It is a picture of an invading army, making its way to its intended enemy stronghold (Jerusalem), to threaten the City with destruction. The terrible horror and fear that cuts into the hearts of innocent civilians as they see the storms of war approaching, becomes very real in this ancient word-picture!

And we wonder, where would Isaiah have obtained such detailed information. Has he just "made up" the account as a vivid parable (as Oswalt views the passage), or has he heard reports from Israelite scouts who have followed the approaching army, bringing back their reports to Jerusalem? We choose the latter.

⁹⁹Slotki comments on **verses 33-34** that they depict "The Assyrian army's destruction at the very moment when it believed itself to be knocking at the gates of victory. The metaphor is that of a forest being cut down by the axe of the woodman." (Pp. 55-6)

(continued...)

⁹⁹(...continued)

Kaiser holds the opposite view: “With fearful violence Yahweh falls upon the city of Jerusalem, as a woodcutter falls upon his trees, to destroy high and low alike (compare **2:12ff.**). Here the undergrowth (compare **9:17**) may have signified for him the common people, and the cedars of Labanon the great men of Zion.” (P. 251)

Gray holds a middle ground, entitling these verses “The Fall of the Forest,” and commenting that “Under the figure of a forest of lofty trees felled by the woodman, this brief fragment describes the approaching destruction of some people [not saying whether this means Assyria or Jerusalem] that have provoked Yahweh’s majesty by their pride...

“The figure of a forest occurs in **verses 17-18a**; but there destruction is by fire; for destruction by felling, compare **Daniel 4:11**^{Aram} /**14**^{Heb} **ff.**; **Zechariah 11:2**, and especially the elaborate description of Assyria under the figure of a cedar in **Ezekiel 31.**” (P. 211)

Motyer agrees with Slotki, stating that “Very probably these verses originated as the opening line of the royal Messianic poem in **11:1-16**...The cutting down of the lofty trees can only refer to the destruction of Assyria. This provides the perfect foil for the

Messianic shoot, but it is extremely dramatic after five verses of Assyrian self-confidence, inexorable progress and effrontery [audacity]!...

“The forest felling matches the forest fire of **verses 16b-17** as the motif of Assyrian destruction...The Assyrians were sovereign until they met the Sovereign—and at the very moment when the threat is at the gates of Zion! The view of history in **verses 5-15** is neither an idle boast nor a splendid illusion. Isaiah will bring the **Book of the King** [Motyer’s title for **Isaiah 1-37**] to its climax with the incident itself (**chapters 36-37**).” (P. 120)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 33**: “To the triumphant march and proud defiance now succeeds abruptly the tremendous downfall of the enemy himself, in describing which the prophet resumes the figure dropped at **verse 19**, and represents the catastrophe as the sudden and violent prostration of a forest. *Behold, the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, (is) lopping (or about to lop) the branch (of this great tree) with terror (or tremendous violence), and the (trees) high of stature (shall be) felled, and the lofty ones brought low...*

“Jerome applies these two last verses to the death of Christ, and the consequent downfall of the Jewish State [!]; Calvin [and others apply them] to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. But these interpretations, although recommended by a seeming coherence with the following **chapter [11]**, are at variance with the foregoing context, where Sennacherib’s invasion is described, and with the scope of the whole passage, which is to console the Jews in view of that event.” (Pp. 246-47)

(continued...)

⁹⁹(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verses 33-34**: “Behold, the Sovereign introduces a sudden and dramatic change. The short, terse [abrupt] phrases describing the army’s progress are abruptly replaced by long, sedate cadences which tell of a great tree’s swift end. In this way the prophet whips away the screen upon which inevitable defeat was painted and shows another factor which lies behind the screen, namely, the sovereign God Who judges all humanity equally. Assyria is not insuperable. She, too, is subject to God and her arrogance will not go unpunished (compare **2:12, 13**). Any calculation which leaves out God is doomed to failure (**8:12-15; 47:8-9**)...

“Although...this passage is not direct prophecy of events in 701 B.C.E., its general truth was surely borne out at that time. The spectacle of the decimated Assyrian camp, so recently so overwhelming, must have brought Isaiah’s words back to the Judeans’ minds with a great deal of satisfaction.” (Pp. 275-76)

In a footnote, Oswalt mentions that “the *peshet* [commentary] on **Isaiah** from Qumran (4Qpls) refers this passage to the march of Gog and Magog against Jerusalem [see **Ezekiel 38-39**].” (*Ibid.*) See Judah M. Rosenthal’s paper on the Internet, “Biblical Exegesis of 4Qpls.”

Marilyn Lundberg states that “A Peshet is a kind of commentary on the **Bible** that was common in the community that wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. This kind of commentary is not an attempt to explain what the **Bible** meant when it was originally written, but rather what it means in the day and age of the commentator, particularly for his own community. In the **Isaiah Peshet**, or **Commentary on the Book of Isaiah**, a verse or verses from **Isaiah** are quoted. Then the commentary begins, often introduced by the word “peshet,” or “the interpretation of the word...” If we were to write a commentary in this way today we might quote a **Bible** verse and then say, “and the meaning of the verse is...” and go on to show the significance of the verse for our own church, synagogue, or society. See “Dead Sea Scrolls, Isaiah Peshet,” on the Internet.

We conclude that Gray is right—the text does not identify who is meant by the forest that is cut down. Whether this means the Assyrian army, or the City of Jerusalem, is a matter of interpretative decision. To understand it as describing the cutting down of the Assyrian army threatening Jerusalem fits in with the preceding context; to understand it as describing the cutting down of Jerusalem, out of which would grow the shoot from the stump of Jesse fits in with the succeeding context.

And again we remark the “enigmatic / puzzling” nature of the prophet’s message!

Watts entitles **verses 33-34** “The Forester before Jerusalem,” and comments that “The verses break the awesome march theophany by identifying the marcher and describing his profession and the result of his mission...הַנִּיבֵה, ‘Behold!’ announces the

identification and sets it off. The full title ‘the Lord Yahweh of Hosts’ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

(continued...)

מִסְעַף פְּאֲרֵה בְּמַעֲרָצָה

וְרַמְיֵי הַקֹּזְמָה גְּרוּעִים

וְהַגְּבוּהִים יִשְׁפְּלוּ:

Look--the Lord, YHWH of Armies

is lopping off / about to lop off a leafy bough with an awful crash!

And his highest limbs are being / about to be cut down,

and the highly exalted ones will fall!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹(...continued)

הָאֲדוֹן [צְבָאוֹת] indicates the importance of the announcement [the exact phrase הָאֲדוֹן צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה occurs at **Isaiah 1:24; 3:1; 10:16, 33** and **19:4; 10:23** and **24** have אֲדֹנֵי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, 'my Lord YHWH of Armies'; **10:26** has יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת 'YHWH of Armies']...

“The presence and the gesture are then interpreted in **10:33-12:6**. ‘Behold’ identifies the gesturing figure as ‘The Lord, Yahweh of Hosts,’ surely a title of considerable significance in view of the Assyrian on the coastal plans opposite. It is Yahweh Who ‘designs a beautiful (thing) with awesome (skill).’ The destructive loss of powerful forces and great nations, like the cutting of trees in the forest to clear the way for one majestic and beautiful one to flourish, opens a door for God’s chosen city and dynasty.” (P. 165)

Perhaps—but we think the basic thrust of this is being read into the text in an attempt to justify its interpretation as a “Theophany.” Nowhere does the text say the marcher is being identified by this phrase.

We understand the verses to be a reaction to the terrifying advance of the Assyrian army on Jerusalem—that’s the “marcher”—and now the text announces the fact that there, at the end of the march, at the gates of Jerusalem, the marcher—the Assyrian army--confronts YHWH, the Lord of Armies, Who will begin lopping off the highest boughs of the forest-tree / army, like a great Forester, cutting off its branches, and rooting out its forest-thickets. It is the beginning of Assyria’s downfall.

¹⁰⁰Watts comments on **verse 33**: “The verse identifies the Lord as the One at work here...It presents that work as מִסְעַף ‘cleaning,’ ‘separating,’ ‘branching’ [Brown-Driver-Briggs has ‘lop off boughs’; Holladay has ‘cut down,’ ‘trim’]...”

(continued...)

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

“He distinguishes between the things to be cut down and those to be pruned and nurtured [we see no indication of ‘pruning and nurturing’ in the text; do you?]....

“The particular work here relates to a פִּאֲרָה ‘a thing of glory and beauty’ like a person’s turban head-dress [the noun is pointed פִּאֲרָה, which is defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as a feminine singular noun meaning collectively “boughs”; likewise **Holladay** defines by ‘collective, branches’; we see no connection with ‘a thing of glory and beauty like a turban headdress’; Watts is reading this into the text]...

“The heart of God’s action is not destruction; it looks beyond that to glorious nourishment of His beautiful thing. The work has a breathtaking, awe-inspiring quality about it (בְּמַעַרְצָה) [defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as ‘with an awful shock, crash’; by **Holladay** as ‘with terrifying power’; this is its only occurrence in the **Hebrew Bible**, but it is related to עֲרִיץ an adjective meaning ‘awe-inspiring,’ ‘terror-striking’]. The three words are infrequently used and have been much misunderstood.” (P. 165)

And so, Watts redefines the three rarely used words, making the work of the great Forester one of trimming and beautifying His beautiful garden—rather than one of cutting down the tops of trees, crashing them to the ground, rooting out the undergrowth.

Watts adds, “The sentence interprets the hand-signal toward Jerusalem in **verse 32**. The [**Book of Isaiah**] has pictured an unflinching and unbending signal in the still outstretched hand of God from **Isaiah 5:25** through **10:4** which signaled His unchanged determination [of destruction] toward the Northern Kingdom. This one foresees the day, very near, when the signal toward Jerusalem will change, calling for growth and nurture of the things of beauty that it is and can be...

“The verse continues in circumstantial clauses to describe the work of destruction against the high and mighty as well as the underbrush. The Divine Forester goes about His work with neither fear nor favor. The רִמֵי הַקִּוְמָה ‘tops of the heights’ [the Hebrew is singular, ‘height’] are the highest parts of tall trees, as are the גְּבוּהִים, ‘exalted ones.’ They are cut and lowered.” (Pp. 165-66)

We appreciate very much the work that Watts has poured into his two-volume commentary on Isaiah’s **Vision**, following the lead of his German teacher, Wildberger. But here, we have to respectfully disagree with his interpretation, which seems to us “far-fetched,” unlikely, unconvincing.

We think the Divine outstretched hand is being waved with threat against the

(continued...)

10:34¹⁰¹ וְנִקְרָא סִבְכֵי הַיַּעַר בְּבַרְזֵל

וְהַלְבָנוֹן בְּאֵדִיר יְפוֹל:

And he will root out the forest-thickets with an iron tool;
and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One!¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

powerful leaders of the Assyrian army, warning of YHWH's soon-coming lopping off of their proud leaders who stand in defiance of YHWH. What do you think?

¹⁰¹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 34**: “*And He (Jehovah) shall cut down (or away) the thickets of the forest (the Assyrian army) with iron, (i.e. with an instrument of iron, as an axe), and this Lebanon (this wooded mountain, this tremendous forest, still referring to the host of the Assyrians) with (or by) a mighty One shall fall...*”

“It is clear that the *iron* of this verse, and the *fire* of **verse 17**, denote one and the same thing, both implying that the forest was to perish, not by slow decay, but by sudden violence...The general figure of a forest is made more specific by referring to Lebanon, a mountain celebrated for its woods.” (P. 247)

Watts comments that “The **סִבְכֵי הַיַּעַר** ‘forest thickets’ refers to thick underbrush that must be cleared to allow the fine trees to grow.” (P. 166)

¹⁰²Yes, that is the word-picture that Isaiah is painting--a terrifying army of foreigners, marching relentlessly towards Jerusalem, shaking its fist in the face of the frightened inhabitants. But Isaiah assures us that there is far more than meets the eye in that picture--if that is all you see. For in fact, YHWH--the God of Armies--is present in their midst, doing His hidden, strange work through and in this very enemy force. Behind all those terrifying external appearances, Isaiah points out, “the Lord, YHWH of Armies, is about to lop off his leafy boughs with an awful crash!” Yes, this fear-inspiring, dreaded enemy, is going to be cut down like a mighty tree in the forest. Isaiah goes on to say, “his highest limbs are about to be cut down, and the highly exalted ones will fall! And he will root out the forest-thickets with an iron tool; and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One!” We say, Lebanon falling is not a picture of Divine pruning and trimming, but rather, a picture of overthrow, destruction!

Here Isaiah has pictured the true and living God--YHWH--Who hiddenly, mysteriously, but powerfully works out His purposes in human history, as a great “Divine Forester,” Who is pruning His trees, cutting down some, lopping off the tops of others. The leafy boughs fall with an awful crash; high limbs are cut off, and fall to the ground. The tallest of cedars come falling down, as the great Lumberjack clears out

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¹⁰²(...continued)

His forest, and roots out the forest-thickets with an iron tool, to make way for new growth. Even the mightiest of forests--Isaiah probably means this symbolically, to stand for mighty nations, here, for Assyria--will fall before his majestic power! In the sweep of world history, both the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, with its capital-city of Jerusalem, will ultimately be cut down, as the Divine Lumberjack does His work in His forest. But so will the powerful world-wide empire of Assyria, and its proud, mighty emperor! YHWH of Armies is in charge--not tiny human beings!

This is the consistent manner in which the picture of YHWH God is painted throughout the **Books** of the **Hebrew Bible**--from **Exodus** through **2 Kings**, and from **Isaiah** through **Malachi**--not that God is literally a "Great Lumberjack in the Skies," but that the true and living God is active in human history--that He has not gone afar off, and left the world to run down on its own, as in "Deism." The God Who created this earth, and the entire human race, is a God Who cares for His creation--like a caring lumberjack cares for the forest--or, to use other similar picture-language that we find in the **Bible**, like a mother-hen who cares for her chicks; or like a shepherd who cares for his sheep, especially for sheep in danger, or the sheep that has gone astray; or like a mother whose love surrounds the child in her womb; or like the father who loves and disciplines his children, always seeking what is best for them, willing to receive the prodigal child back home again whenever that child turns homewards.

We never find in the **Bible** such picture-language as that of a great Inventor, Who builds a huge alarm-clock, winds it up, and then goes away, to watch it run down on its own. No, the **Bible** always uses pictures for this hidden, invisible God, that involve His continual, personal presence, and care, and attention--like that of a great grape-farmer, who cultivates the soil, and plants the vines, and watches over them carefully until the grapes are harvested--who severely prunes his vines and cuts them back, and then treads out the vintage of the grapes, crushing them, and making rich wine from their juice!

We human beings like to think that powerful empires, with their military leaders, hold the "key of history," and that it is their decisions and actions that determine the future of peoples and nations. But Isaiah teaches us to reject that view. It is quite true that such leaders have important, pivotal roles to play in human history--Isaiah will not deny that. But much more important than what those human leaders think and do is the fact that behind the scenes is the true and living God--the **Hebrew Bible** calls Him "YHWH of Armies"--Who in truth holds the key to the future, and Whose mighty acts in fact are determinative of the future of all peoples and all nations. There is a God Who is at work in history, bringing His purposes to pass even in the midst of horribly evil, devastating actions of humans in their God-given freedom. Tiny human emperors like Sennacherib the Assyrian, or two centuries later, Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian, suppose themselves totally in charge, completely free to do whatever they plan and conspire to happen. But their freedom is limited, and they are not truly in charge of the future. Rather, the Creator God of all the universe, the King of the nations, is the One

(continued...)

¹⁰²(...continued)

Who is truly in charge!

Isaiah will not let his readers forget the way in which the great Assyrian conqueror Sennacherib stormed with his troops through central Samaria, and came to the gates of Jerusalem, with his commander shaking his iron fist in the face of Jerusalem and its temple, shutting up Jerusalem “in a cage” as his monuments record—see Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, p. 288. But there, his advance stalled--disturbing news of trouble in Nineveh reached his ears--thousands of his troops perished in a single night--and Sennacherib returned to Assyria without conquering Jerusalem, to be assassinated by two of his sons. The mighty conqueror was himself conquered. He fell like a mighty tree in the forest, lopped off and rooted out, by YHWH of Armies, the “Majestic One”!

Northern Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, were likewise to experience this “lopping off of branches,” and the cutting down of its proud trees by this Great Lumberjack, as Israel fell before Assyria in 721 B.C.E., and then as Judah, two centuries later, fell before Babylon in 587 B.C.E.

We need to hear this ancient message of Isaiah in our own time today. Just as it was for those ancient rulers, so it is tempting for us today to believe that the Creator God Who called the universe into being, is no longer active in its history. We easily assume that God created the earth, and everything upon it, and then went away, to take care of other matters, leaving this world--planet earth--to make it on its own.

It is understandable why we think this way--we recognize the fact that God has given us freedom, and that God expects us to work and provide for ourselves and our families, and that He has given to human beings the responsibility for founding and building nations, and making them strong, and defending themselves from oppressive enemies. But, Isaiah’s message teaches us that just because God has given us human beings freedom and responsibility does not mean that He no longer cares, or no longer takes active, determinative interest in our affairs!

Not at all! What Isaiah (and large parts of the **Hebrew Bible** with him) proclaims as good news is that even in the marching of invading armies, the Lord of History--YHWH of Armies--is present, working out His great eternal purposes! Do we dare to believe that biblical good news? It’s hard to believe at the time when the clouds of war are rising, and the noise of advancing armies is heard, marching through our homeland, such as they were in the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem--but that’s exactly what Isaiah teaches!

There is terrifying destruction in human history, yes. Believers in YHWH, good people, will sometimes be its victims, such as happened to the European Jews in the Nazi holocaust. There are evil oppressors, who take advantage of weaker nations, overwhelming them by their superior power, and destroying the weak and the defenseless--yes.

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1. Allegorical Use of Horses and Chariots for Depicting Human Behavior

Plato, in his dialogue **Phaedrus** (sections 246a–254e), uses the Chariot Allegory to explain his view of the human soul. He does this in the dialogue through the character of Socrates, who uses it in a discussion of the merit of love as ‘Divine madness.’

Plato paints the picture of a charioteer (Greek: ἡνίοχος) driving a chariot pulled by two winged horses: ‘First the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome.’

The charioteer represents intellect, reason, or the part of the soul that must guide the soul to truth; one horse represents rational or moral impulse or the positive part of passionate nature (e.g., righteous indignation); while the other represents the soul’s irrational passions, appetites, or concupiscent [filled with sexual desire] nature. The charioteer directs the entire chariot / soul, trying to stop the horses from going different ways, and to proceed towards enlightenment. (Taken from **Wikipedia**, 6/18/

¹⁰²(...continued)

There are times when, because of our hard-heartedness, and our refusal to listen obediently to the Divine voice, even the people who love and worship God have to undergo destruction and be overthrown, yes. Isaiah well knew that this is true--he himself was witness to this matter as he lived in Jerusalem and shared with Jerusalem’s inhabitants in observing the terrifying might and shaking fist of the Assyrian armies marching through the country-side to the immediate north of the City of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah.

But that’s not the end of Isaiah’s vision. Destruction is not the final word. Rather, the last word of Isaiah’s vision is a word of joyous hope and expectancy. Out of the smoke and destruction and rubble, and the chopping down and rooting out of the forest by the Divine Lumberjack, from a cut-down stump will come new growth, with everlasting hope and joy! That’s how Isaiah’s vision continues. And we today, who share Isaiah’s faith and vision, can likewise look forward with hope, even in the midst of difficult, perilous times!

Do you agree? Do you have such a faith?

16)

In Hinduism, the third Valli of **Katha Upanishad** presents the parable of the chariot, to highlight how Atman, body, mind, senses and empirical reality relate to a human being.

Know that the Atman is the rider in the chariot,
and the body is the chariot,
Know that the Buddhi (intelligence, ability to reason) is the charioteer,
and Manas (mind) is the reins.
The senses are called the horses,
the objects of the senses are their paths,
Formed out of the union of the Atman, the senses and the mind,
him they call the "enjoyer". (**Katha Upanishad**, 1.3.3-1.3.4)

The **Katha Upanishad** asserts that one who does not use his powers of reasoning, whose senses are unruly and mind unbridled, his life drifts in chaos and confusion, his existence entangled in samsara [the cycle of death and rebirth to which life in the material world is bound]. Those who use their intelligence, have their senses calm and under reason, they live a life of bliss and liberation, which is the highest place of Vishnu [One of the most significant Gods in Hinduism]...

This metaphorical parable of the chariot is found in multiple ancient Indian texts, and is called the "Ratha Kalpana." (Taken from **Wikipedia**, 6/18/16)

Neither Plato nor the Hindu text have a place for God in the allegory, as does the biblical text, which depicts YHWH as the ultimate driver of the chariot.

Judaism's two-fold Yetzers / Inclinations (not Horses) in Human Beings: In Judaism, *yetzer hara* (עֲרֵבָה רָעָה) "the evil inclination") refers to the congenital inclination to do evil, by violating the will of God. The term is drawn from the phrase "the imagination of the heart of man [is] evil" which occurs twice in the **Hebrew Bible**, at **Genesis 6:5** and **8:21**. The Sages of the **Talmud (Berakhot 32a)** have spoken about the "evil inclination" in poignant terms, making a comparison to what it is like:

To what is it like, the evil inclination in man? It is like a father who takes his small son, bathes him, douses him with perfume, combs his hair, dresses him up in his finest accoutrements [clothing, outfits], feeds him, gives him drink, places a bag of money around his neck, and then goes off and puts his son at the front door of a brothel. What can the boy do that he not sin?"

The evil inclination in man, or what is often called man's natural inclination, has been the subject of debate since time immemorial. The traditional Jewish view on this complex subject is well-defined in rabbinic literature. The *yetzer hara* is not a demonic force, but rather man's misuse of things the physical body needs to survive. Thus, the need for food becomes gluttony due to the *yetzer hara*. The need for procreation

becomes sexual abuse, and so on. The idea that humans are born with a *yetzer ra* (physical needs that can become "evil"), but that humans don't acquire a *yetzer tov* ("a good inclination") until an age of maturity--12 for girls and 13 for boys—has its source in [Aboth, the last tractate in Seder Nezikin, Volume IV, in the Babylonian Talmud; see Mishnah 21 on Aboth, chapter 5].

The underlying principle in Jewish thought states that every man is born with both a good inclination and an evil inclination. This, in itself, is not bad, nor is it an abnormality. The problem, however, arises when one makes a willful choice to "cross over the line," and seeks to gratify his "evil inclination," based on the prototypical models of right and wrong in the **Hebrew Bible**.

Central to Jewish belief is the idea that every man--Jew and Gentile alike--is born with two opposing inclinations that pull him to act either in a bad way or a good way, but that, in the final analysis, it is man who decides how he is to act. This notion is succinctly worded in the **Babylonian Talmud** (Niddah 16b): "All is given into the hands of heaven, except one's fear of heaven," meaning, everything in man's life is predetermined by God--excepting that man's choice to be either good or bad; righteous or wicked. In this matter alone, man must decide for himself whether he will choose good or bad, or what is often classified as a man's freewill. Traditionally, a person's indulgence of either the good or evil impulse is seen as a matter of free choice.

Most men will, at some time in their lives, succumb to their evil inclination, as it is written: "For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (**Ecclesiastes 7:20**). For this reason, repentance (and in some cases, affliction) is said to atone for most sins, while the preponderance of good works keeps him within the general class of good men. Medieval Rabbi and philosopher, Maimonides, has given instruction on how we ought to view the Evil Inclination:

"Therefore, let a man prepare his own mind and request from God that anything that should ever happen to him in this world, whether of the things that are by God's providence good, or of the things that are by Him evil, that the reason [for their occurrence] is so that he might attain true happiness. Now this was stated with regard to the good Inclination [in man] and with regard to [his] evil Inclination, that is to say, that he might lay to his heart the love of God and his [continued] faith in Him, even at an hour of rebellion or of wrath or of displeasure, seeing that all of this revolves around [man's] evil inclination, just as they have said: 'In all your ways acknowledge Him' (**Proverbs 3:6**), [meaning], even in a matter involving transgression.

Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote in **Derech Hashem** ("The Way of God") that "Man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to God. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will...Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good (Yetzer HaTov) and evil (Yetzer HaRa), and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice and is able to choose either side knowingly and willingly..." (Taken from **Wikipedia**, 6 / 18 / 16)

For a Christian response to this Jewish teaching, see the Apostle Paul's treatment of this Jewish view of the human condition in **Romans 7**, where Paul acknowledges that on his own, he cannot choose the good inclination and avoid the evil inclination, apart from Divine help through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, God becomes the "Driver of the chariot," Who through the gift of His Spirit enables Paul to escape the tragic dilemma in which he finds himself.

2.

Fall of the Assyrian Empire

Ultimately, Assyria conquered Babylonia, Chaldea, Elam, Media, Persia, Urartu (Armenia), Phoenicia, Aramea / Syria, Phrygia, the Neo-Hittite States, the Hurrian lands, Arabia, Gutium, Israel, Judah, Samarra, Moab, Edom, Corduene, Cilicia, Mannea, and Cyprus, and defeated and / or exacted tribute from Scythia, Cimmeria, Lydia, Nubia, Ethiopia and others. At its height, the Empire encompassed the whole of the modern nations of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Palestine and Cyprus, together with large swathes of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Sudan, Libya, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Assyria now appeared stronger than ever. However, the long struggles pacifying the Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arameans and Elamites, the exertions undertaken in keeping the Medes, Scythians, Persians, Urtians and Cimmerians subjugated, and the constant campaigning over three centuries to control and expand its vast empire in all directions, had left Assyria materially, economically and physically exhausted. It had been drained of wealth and manpower; the devastated provinces could yield nothing to supply the needs of the imperial exchequer [royal, national treasure], it was difficult to find sufficient troops to garrison and effectively control the huge empire, and after the death of Ashurbanipal severe civil unrest broke out in Assyria itself, and the empire began to unravel.

Following his death in 627 B.C.E., the nation and its empire descended into a prolonged and brutal series of civil wars involving three rival kings, Ashur-etil-ilani, Sinshumu-lishir and Sin-shar-ishkun. Egypt's 26th Dynasty, which had been installed by the Assyrians as vassals, quietly detached itself from Assyria, although it was careful to retain friendly relations.

The Scythians and Cimmerians took advantage of the bitter fighting among the Assyrians to raid Assyrian colonies, with hordes of horse borne marauders ravaging parts of Asia Minor and the Caucasus, where the vassal kings of Urartu and Lydia begged their Assyrian overlord for help in vain. They also raided the Levant, Israel and Judah (where Ashkelon was sacked by the Scythians) and all the way into Egypt whose coasts were ravaged and looted with impunity.

The Iranic peoples (the Medes, Persians and Parthians), aided by the previous Assyrian destruction of the hitherto dominant Elamites of Ancient Iran, also took advantage of the upheavals in Assyria to coalesce into a powerful Median dominated force which destroyed the pre-Iranic Assyrian vassal kingdom of Mannea and absorbed the remnants of the pre-Iranic Elamites of southern Iran, and the equally pre-Iranic Gutians, Mannans and Kassites of the Zagros Mountains and the Caspian Sea. Cyaxares (technically a vassal of Assyria), in an alliance with the Scythians and Cimmerians, launched a surprise attack on a civil war beleaguered Assyria in 615 BC, sacking Kalhu (the Biblical Calah / Nimrud) and taking Arrapkha (modern Kirkuk) and Gasur. Nabopolassar, still pinned down in southern Mesopotamia by Assyrian forces, was completely uninvolved in this major breakthrough against Assyria.

Despite the sorely depleted state of Assyria, bitter fighting ensued; throughout 614 B.C.E. the alliance of powers continued to gradually make hard fought inroads into Assyria itself. However in 613 B.C.E. the Assyrians somehow rallied against the odds and scored a number of counterattacking victories over the Medes-Persians, Babylonians-Chaldeans and Scythians-Cimmerians. This led to the coalition of forces ranged against it to unite and launch a massive combined attack in 612 BC, finally besieging and entering Nineveh in late 612 BC, with Sin-shar-ishkun being slain in the bitter street by street fighting. Despite the loss of almost all of its major cities, and in the face of overwhelming odds, Assyrian resistance continued under Ashur-uballit II (612-605 B.C.E.), who fought his way out of Nineveh and coalesced Assyrian forces around Harran (in modern south east Turkey), Carchemish (modern Jarablus in north east Syria) and in the vassal kingdom of Urartu (in modern north eastern Turkey). However, the alliance of powers took Harran in 608 B.C.E., and after a failed bid to recapture the city by the Assyrian king the same year, Carchemish too fell in 605 B.C.E.

Sections of the Assyrian army retreated to the western corner of Assyria after the fall of Harran and Carchemish, and a number of Assyrian imperial records survive between 604 BC and 599 BC in and around the Assyrian city of Dur-Katlimmu in what is today north eastern Syria, and so it is possible that remnants of the Assyrian administration and army still continued to hold out in the region for a few years. Certainly by 599 BC at the very latest, Assyria had been destroyed as an independent political entity. (**Wikipedia**, 6/20/16)

