

Isaiah Chapter 22, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
Enigmatic Prophetic Message Concerning Jerusalem Under Siege,
Its Leaders, Shebna and Eliakim and Their Failures
Let Not Jerusalem Think the Road to the Future Will Be Smooth and Easy–
It Will Be Filled With Many Bumps and Bruises!¹

¹**Chapter 22** has one end-note: (1) Citadel / Tower of David / City of David.

Alexander comments that “This **chapter [22]** naturally falls into two parts. The first describes the conduct of the people of Jerusalem during a siege, **verses 1-14**. The second predicts the removal of Shebna from his post as treasurer or steward of the royal household, **verses 15-25**...

“The second part of this chapter is the only example in **Isaiah** of a prophecy against an individual...The ground or occasion of the threatening is not expressed, and it is certainly less probable that the design was meant to be conjectured or inferred from the prophecy itself, than that it is explained in the passage which immediately precedes it...

“The whole may then be described as a prophecy against the people of Jerusalem in general, and against Shebna in particular, considered as their leader and example.” (Pp. 378-79)

Motyer entitles **chapter 22** “The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem): the unforgivable sin.”

He comments that “Again the people of God occupy the fourth place in the cycle of oracles. As Isaiah probes further forward into history, they are still surrounded by the world...

“In the first cycle, the prophet’s spotlight fell on northern Israel (**17:1ff.**), and exposed their abandonment of the way of faith for the way of collective security, the Aramean alliance. Here, Judah is under the spotlight and is found abandoning the way of faith for that of self-reliance. Thus, the people of God surrender to the pressure of the surrounding world...

“Three oracles are brought together in **chapter 22**: Jerusalem (**verses 1-14**); Shebna (**verses 15-19**); and Eliakim (**verses 20-25**). They have a common theme in the condemnation of a this-worldly security. Thus, Jerusalem is found cannibalizing itself to make itself safe, without a thought of looking to the Lord (**verses 8-11**); Shebna is portrayed as the man concerned only for his own worldly glory, before and after death (**verses 16-18**); and Eliakim is at risk of becoming the focal point of the security of others to his own and their downfall (**verses 23-24**). When the city (**verses 1-14**), the

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man (**verses 15-19**) and the family (**verses 20-24**) become self-sufficient they have committed the unpardonable sin.” (Pp. 179-80)

But we ask, where in the text is anything said concerning an “unforgivable” or an “unpardonable” sin?

Slotki states that **verses 1-14** depict “the calamities that are to befall Jerusalem. The prophecy evidently relates to the invasion of Judah in 701 B.C.E. by Sennacherib.” (P. 99)

With regards to **verses 1-14**, Alexander states that “It has been disputed whether the description in the first part of this chapter was intended to apply to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, or by Esarhaddon in the reign of Manasseh, or by Nebuchadnezzar, or by Titus. An obvious objection to the last two is that they leave the prediction against Shebna unconnected with the one before it...

“The objection to Sennacherib’s invasion is that no such extremities were then experienced as the prophet here describes. The objection to Nebuchadnezzar’s is, that **verses 9-11** contain an exact description of the measures taken by Hezekiah, as recorded in **2 Chronicles 32:3-5**. Moved by this consideration, some have assumed a reference to both events, the siege by Sennacherib, and that by Nebuchadnezzar...

“As the measures described in **verses 9-11** were temporary ones which may have been frequently repeated, it is not absolutely necessary to apply that passage to the times of Hezekiah. If the whole must be applied to one specific point of time, it is probably the taking of Jerusalem by the king of Assyria in the days of Manasseh, when the latter was himself carried captive with his chief men, and Shebna possibly among the rest. The choice seems to lie between this hypothesis and that of a generic prediction, a prophetic picture of the conduct of the Jews in a certain conjunction of affairs which happened more than once, particular strokes of the description being drawn from different memorable sieges, and especially from those of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar.” (P. 379)

We agree. The passage is tantalizingly obscure, and has been taken as descriptive of numerous incidents in Judah’s history. Still, commentators have attempted to pin its description down to one historical occurrence.

Gray comments on **verses 1-14** that “Clear and insistent in this section is the contrast between the prophet’s dark vision of destruction and the light-heartedness and recklessness of the people, who give themselves up to revelry, either because they do not perceive the issue of things, and see in a temporary alleviation a permanent relief, or because, feeling the insecurity of the present, they are determined to drown their cares in wine and feasting (**verses 13-14**)...

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“Interpreters have differed as to whether this section is a *prophecy* of the future, or a *narrative* describing the present or the past, or partly the one, partly the other...

“We may briefly then indicate a possible and on the whole most probable, interpretation as follows: in **verses 1-2a** the poet depicts the city of Jerusalem as he sees it actually—noisy, exultant, swarming up to the housetops to watch some spectacle: in **verses 2c-3** he describes (prophetic perfect) his *vision* of the real issue of events to which the city is blind—the city forsaken of its leaders, captured by the enemy, and its citizens ignominiously [causing public disgrace] executed [but what real indication is there that the ‘prophetic perfect’ is being used?]...

“In **verse 4** he rejects the efforts of some of the ‘maffickers’ [people celebrating with extravagant public demonstrations] to cheer him up; he turns from them to bewail the still future, but to him certain, destruction of the people—to him certain, for (**verse 5**) he knows that the Day of Yahweh is at hand and what it means. It is a day of tumult in the valley of vision, of panic in Jerusalem...

“If **verses 6-7** are a real sequence, **verse 6** describes some of the elements (Kir and Elam) in the army which on the day of Yahweh will attack Jerusalem, and **verse 7** reinforces **verse 5c,d**. Again, if **verses 8-11**, apart from the incorporated prose note, are a real sequence, **verses 8b, 9a, 11b.c** (**8a** is altogether obscure) describe the people of Jerusalem, thus attacked, attending to the material defenses of the city, while neglecting Yahweh...

“**Verses 12-14** bring us back to an historical situation similar to that of **verse 1**, and a similar estimate of its outcome: instead of mourning, to which Yahweh has called them, the people are given over to feasting, therefore their fate is irrevocably sealed. They must die.

“The period to which we might most probably assign **verses 1-5, 12-14** is that of Sennacherib. What is described is the revelry to which the city gave itself up when the Assyrian king in 701 B.C.E. raised the siege, or blockade, of Jerusalem. It is doubtful whether **verse 6** fits into the political circumstances of that time.” (Pp. 363-64)

And so, in order to pin the description down to the invasion of Sennacherib, Gray has to eliminate **verse 6**, which names the attackers as Elam and Kir.

Motyer comments on **verses 1-14** that “According to **verses 1-4**, there is a contrast between people and prophet: they rejoice, but he weeps. This is because he sees what they do not see: death, defection and capture (**verses 2b-3**), in fact nothing less than (literally) ‘the destruction of the daughter of my people’ (**verse 4**). **Verse 5**...adds the further explanation that this is a special ‘day of the Lord.’ Are we to believe that such a day had come and gone without the populace noticing it? Is not Isaiah in principle saying, ‘If you could see coming what I see coming, there would be no

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rejoicing'? Such a forward view makes the reference to *Elam* intelligible. Isaiah has long known that Jerusalem will fall to some foe, though not to Assyria. It was revealed to him at the time of the Babylonian visit (**chapter 39**) that Babylon would be the destroyer. This truth is here veiled by referring to Babylon's remoter ally, Elam, and to the unidentifiable Kir in **verse 6**...Consequently the perfect tenses of **verses 3-7** must be prophetic perfects [but the only indication that 'prophetic perfect verbs' are being used is that it is necessary for Motyer's interpretation! And why depict Elam and Kir as the attackers, even if they are conceived as mercenaries of Babylon? Why not say Babylon?].” (P. 181)

Gray comments on **22:1-14** that “Clear and insistent in this section is the contrast between the prophet's dark vision of destruction and the light-heartedness and recklessness of the people, who give themselves up to revelry, either because they do not perceive the issue of things, and see in a temporary alleviation a permanent relief, or because, feeling the insecurity of the present, they are determined to drown their cares in wine and feasting (**verses 13-14**).” (P. 363)

But Gray questions whether or not the section is a unity, and adds that “Interpreters have differed as to whether this section is a *prophecy* of the future, or a *narrative* describing the present or the past, or partly the one, partly the other...

“We may briefly then indicate a possible, and on the whole most probable, interpretation as follows: in **verses 1-2a** the poet depicts the city of Jerusalem as he sees it actually—noisy, exultant, swarming up to the housetops to watch some spectacle. In **verses 2c-3** he describes ([using the] prophetic perfect) his *vision* of the real issue of events to which the city is blind—the city forsaken of its leaders, captured by the enemy, and its citizens ignominiously ‘maffickers’ [noisy celebrants] to cheer him up; he turns from them to bewail the still future, but to him certain, destruction of his people—to him certain, for (**verse 5**) he knows that the Day of Yahweh is at hand and what it means. It is a day of tumult in the valley of vision, of panic in Jerusalem. If **verses 6-7** are a real sequence, **verse 6** describes some of the elements (Kir and Elam) in the army which of the day of Yahweh will attack Jerusalem, and **verse 7** reinforces **verses 5c, d**; again, if **verses 8-11**, apart from the incorporated prose note, are a real sequence, **8b 9a 11b.c** (**8a** is altogether obscure) describe the people of Jerusalem, thus attacked, attending to the material defenses of the city, while neglecting Yahweh. **Verses 12-14** bring us back to an historical situation similar to that of **verse 1**, and a similar estimate of its outcome: instead of mourning, to which Yahweh has called them the people are given over to feasting, therefore their fate is irrevocably sealed. They must die.

“The period to which we might most probably assign **verses 1-5, 12-14** is that of Sennacherib. What is described is the revelry to which the city gave itself up when the Assyrian king in 701 B.C. raised the siege, or blockade, of Jerusalem. It is doubtful whether **verse 6** fits into the political circumstances of that time.” (Pp. 363-64)

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What do you make of this comment? Do you reject it as the comment of an unbeliever, who does not believe the truth of the **Bible**? We say, it is the honest comment of a great biblical scholar, who very much wants to know the truth of Isaiah's message—but who finds in the passage exactly those elements which we say should have been expected in the light of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:7-12**. There is obscurity, and there is a lack of clarity, leading to all sorts of differing interpretations and dating by scholars from widely different backgrounds—the kind of puzzling enigma that those two passages insist are characteristic of the prophetic message.

Oswalt comments on **chapter 22** that it “raises two prominent questions:

- (1) What is an oracle against Jerusalem doing in a collection of oracles against the nations?
- (2) Why is it put here in the collection?”

His response to these questions is: “Surely the reference to ‘vision’ is a sarcastic one, for the people described in this chapter are people whose paramount *lack* is vision. The jubilant people cannot see the inevitable destruction that waits them; the leaders cannot see that God the Sovereign Creator is a better defense than arms and fortifications; Shebna cannot see that courage and responsibility are a better memorial than bricks and mortar. In fact, then, the people of Israel are no better off than the Gentiles around them. Their perspective is the same as the world's and therefore they fall under the same judgment as the world.” (Pp. 405-06)

Do you agree that the title to the oracle, “The Valley of Vision” is meant sarcastically? We say this is possible—but by no means certain. In fact, this is another indication of the “enigmatic” nature of **verses 1-14**. Its depiction is obscure and its application uncertain.

In answer to the second question Oswalt states that “There is [a] two-layered connection of both **21:1-10** and **22:1-14**...Both seem to function on one level for Isaiah's own time, yet point beyond that level to another dealing with later events (the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E.; the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.)...

“All of these factors suggest that Jerusalem is being associated with Babylon here in a conscious way [but Babylon is not mentioned once in the chapter!]. It is not possible to be dogmatic about the purpose of that association, but surely the realization that Babylon was to be Jerusalem's ultimate enemy must have played a part in this association...

“The two sections of the chapter seem to function in a way similar to that of **chapters 19** and **20**, where the second portion (here, **verses 15-25**) form a concrete illustration of what has been talked about in a more general way in the first. Here Shebna, supposedly a man of vision and leadership, is caught up in the building of his

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own tomb while great matters of state are left untended [does the text say anything about great matters of state being left untended? No]. Because he has failed in his stewardship, judgment is hastening down upon him. So it will be for Jerusalem and Judea, which also have failed in their stewardship of God's vision [but not a word is said in the text about 'stewardship of God's vision!'].

"The historical setting of **verses 1-14** has been the cause of a great deal of scholarly interchange. Coupled with this problem is the question of the internal structure of the segment. The variety of opinions still being published is an indication of the complexity of the issue...

"In general terms, the prophet appears to be referring to a past event of judgment where the destruction was not total. Unfortunately the experience did not provoke repentance and trust, but revelry and a blind dependence on armaments. In response to this reaction, Isaiah foresees a new and more devastating judgment ahead. However, the identity of this event is not at all clear.

"The majority of writers take it to be the deliverance from Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. Many of the particulars of that occasion would fit [but others do not fit at all!]. Hezekiah does seem to have prepared his water system for the event (**verses 9, 11**); there was a general destruction of the land (**verses 5-8a**); there seems to have been a flight on the part of mercenary troops [see Sennacherib's annals in Pritchard's **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, p. 288]. Furthermore, if Isaiah had been expecting a general revival after the deliverance from Sennacherib and it did not come, this would account for his extreme bitterness (**verses 4, 14**)...

"However, one or two elements suggest that some other event is in focus. Ultimately, Hezekiah did trust God for deliverance from Sennacherib. It is strange that nearly all commentators assume that Sennacherib's statement concerning why he left Jerusalem is trustworthy and that Isaiah's statement is not. Thus they discount the evidence of Hezekiah's trust in **chapter 37**. There is no indication in this chapter that a siege had been undertaken; the enemy army is not surrounding the city. The reference to flight and captivity in **verses 2b** and **3** actually fits the times of Jehoiachin (**2 Kings 24:10-17**) or Zedekiah (**2 Kings 25:4-7**) better than they do Hezekiah's [both were kings of Judah shortly before or at the time of the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem and Judah]. Finally, Eliakim, not Shebna, was steward in 701 B.C.E. (**2 Kings 18:37**). Thus it may be that the event referred to had occurred during Sargon's attack on Ashdod in 711 B.C.E...

"On balance, this latter position seems more likely. The Assyrian army took Azekah, which certainly must have looked ominous to the Judeans, but then left. What a cause for rejoicing and revelry: 'Isaiah was wrong. Babylon was right. We need not fear Assyria.' Isaiah responds that that kind of blindness will lead to a destruction which would be more complete than anything they could imagine." (Pp. 405-08)

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Oswalt's lengthy comment ending with his decision that the passage depicts Sargon's attack on Ashdod demonstrates how obscure and uncertain the passage is, with so many different possibilities of interpretation. There are elements within it that seem to coincide with Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem followed by his sudden withdrawal and return to Assyria. There are also elements within it that fit much better in the time of Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem and its destruction. But there are also elements that do not fit into either—leading to Oswalt's claim that they fit Sargon's attack on Ashdod.

Watts entitles **22:1-14** "Burden: The Valley of Vision." He comments that "This moving and turbulent episode does not fit normal molds. It contains:

- (1) an accusing question about turbulent behavior (**verses 1-3**);
- (2) a defensive rejoinder (**verse 4**);
- (3) a portrayal of war in Judah as '[the] day of Yahweh' (**verses 5-8**);
- (4) an accusation of government for inadequate preparation, but especially for lack of spiritual sensitivity (**verses 9-11**);
- (5) an accusation of disobedience to Yahweh's instructions (**verses 12-13**); and
- (6) a confession that Yahweh has withheld absolution [forgiveness] (**verse 14**).

"The scene builds the tension steadily with probing, accusing questions (**verse 1**) and observations (**verses 2-3, 5-8, 9-11, 12-13**) before it has the city's leadership confess God's unyielding disapproval. The dismissals that are obviously required will follow [referring to Shebna and Eliakim in the last half of the chapter].

"The entire episode involves Jerusalem, which is addressed directly in **verses 1** and **7-8**. It is Jerusalem's misguided leadership that pleads so plaintively in **verse 4**, receives such a direct rebuke in **verses 9-11**, and confesses to having been discredited in **verse 14**. The leadership is named as Shebna and Eliakim in the next episode.

"The accusers are like the speaker in **chapter 1** and may well be represented as the covenant witnesses, Heavens and Earth." (P. 280)

Kaiser entitles **verses 1-14** "The Unforgivable Guilt of Jerusalem."

He comments that this passage "is a unit in itself, distinguishable by its heading in **verse 1a** and its concluding formula in **verse 14b**, as well as by its content, from what precedes and follows it. In its present form it poses a number of questions concerning its inner coherence, which it is difficult to answer with certainty. In **verses 2-5** and **12-14** it assumes a situation in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem can breathe freely once again after a very recent military defeat. Their enemies are named in **verse 6** as Elam and Kir...

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“In Isaiah’s day the Elamites could have been neither the enemies of the Judean kingdom on their own account nor the allies of the Assyrians, since they did not forfeit their independence until 647 / 46 B.C.E., and in any case were the allies of Merodach-Baladan in his struggle against the Assyrians. If **verse 6** envisages a previous campaign against Judah with Elamites taking part, it would have to be dated in the period of the neo-Babylonian kingdom...

“Assuming the unity of the oracle, the only possible occasion would be Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign against Jerusalem in the year 597 B.C.E., since **verses 1-2** are quite inappropriate to the situation following the fall of the city in 587 B.C.E...

“But there are considerable objections to any connection with the events of 597 B.C.E. After the king and his court had handed themselves over, and even if the deportation of the ruling class had not yet begun, nothing like the sentiments expressed here could have been expected. It seems impossible to adopt the other solution and interpret the whole poem as an eschatological prophecy, since the additions in **verses 9-11a** must be treated as an early testimony to the fact that the oracle goes back to actual events. Thus we must accept that at least the basic substance of the text relates to the only possible remaining situation, that which existed after the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian King Sennacherib in the year 701 B.C.E., and attribute it to Isaiah as its author.” (Pp. 138-39)

Kaiser later adds, “With its intermingling of recollections of the events of 587 B.C.E. and the anticipation of the coming day of Yahweh, this text is further evidence of the way in which, in the post-exilic period, the eschatological expectations of Judaism were created in the process of coming to terms with the catastrophic experience of the fall of Jerusalem.” (P. 147)

In this way Kaiser interprets **verses 1-14** as basically beginning with some historical experience in Jerusalem, but then in **verse 14** becoming a “proto-apocalyptic” prophecy concerning the final “Day of Yahweh,” with the coming of the era of salvation and the destruction of all the nations that fight against Zion.

If he was commenting on **chapters 28** or **29**, or **Zechariah 14**, we would be more inclined to agree with him; but he is commenting on **chapter 22**; and he has to read all of this apocalyptic language into the text, where it is not actually found—including **verse 14**, which says absolutely nothing concerning an apocalyptic future day of Yahweh.

We remember the word of YHWH concerning prophets in **Numbers 12:6-8** concerning the enigmatic, riddle-like nature of prophecy, and the similar words of Paul in **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, concerning prophecy as “seeing through a mirror darkly,” or “in an enigma.” In our opinion, the efforts of commentators to get rid of the enigmatic nature of **chapter 22** are unavailing. The passage leaves no doubt that for the prophet,

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Judah's future lies in the hands of YHWH, and Judah's hope lies in a trusting, obedient relationship with YHWH. And the passage makes it very clear that before Judah and its leaders can arrive at their God-given, promised future, there are going to be terrifying trials to face, with numerous ups and downs, bends in the road.

But to go beyond this, and make the passage more clear and specific than it is, is, we think, an exercise in futility.

²Kaiser entitles **verses 1-4** "The untimely rejoicing of the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

He comments that "The defeat of the great revolt against Assyria, which in the year 703 B.C.E. spread from the south to the southwest of the Assyrian empire, reached a climax in 701 B.C.E. with the capitulation of Hezekiah in Jerusalem, which was besieged by the emperor's troops. We learn of this through **2 Kings 18:3-15**, and especially from the annals of the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib (see Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 287-88)...

"Hezekiah lost a considerable part of his kingdom, which was divided between the kings of Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza. He had to hand over his elite troops and also make large payments of money and goods from the temple treasury and the royal privy purse. Even princesses, women of the court, and male and female singers had to be handed over to Sennacherib and were carried off to Nineveh. But as often happens in history, the city, liberated from the rigors of war and the siege, was seized not by a serious attitude of self-examination and repentance, but by the abandoned delight of those who had once again escaped [this hardly fits the cry at the end of **verse 13**, 'for tomorrow we die']...

"One person stood aside from the universal joy, the prophet Isaiah. In the public hearing he sounded the notes of the lament for the dead, and reproachfully asked Jerusalem, personified as a virgin, the reason for this abandoned joy...

"Anyone who has ever experienced the activity in the evening in the streets of an oriental or Mediterranean city would realize that Isaiah is not exaggerating when in **verse 2a** he describes Jerusalem as a city full of shouting...tumult and exultation...

"The description which follows in **verses 2b-3** is not of a future catastrophe, which is not prophesied until **verse 14**, but looks back upon events during the siege. The mention of the siege is meant to remind Isaiah's hearers how inappropriate their attitude is. Are they rejoicing because of the shameful death of the soldiers and the cowardly flight of their leaders? Anyone who had met his death in the previous weeks of fighting around Jerusalem had not fallen in battle but had been seized while fleeing from the besieged city and executed, to the horror of those who remained, and with the intention of making them realize that surrender was the only way out...No one who tried

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to flee, whether across the Jordan to the Ammonites and Moabites or through the hills of Judah and the Arabah to the Edomites (compare **2 Kings 25:5** [in the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the fall of Jerusalem]; **Jeremiah 40:11-12** [from the same time]), succeeded in escaping: the officers and other dignitaries who tried to flee had to surrender without a struggle. However far anyone had gone, he was taken by his pursuers and brought back in chains, either to die by the executioner's sword or to be deported to Assyria...

“The situation was in fact as Sennacherib describes it, ‘himself (Hezekiah) I shut in like a caged bird in his capital Jerusalem. I threw up entrenchments against him. I made it hard for him to go out of the gate of his city.’ [But this is placing events from the time of Nebuchadnezzar (587 B.C.E.) together with events from the time of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.E.).]” (Pp. 141-42)

Gray entitles **verses 1-5** “The gay city and the prophet’s vision of disaster and death.”

He comments on **verses 1-2b** that they contain “a rhetorical question addressed by the prophet to the merry-making city which has swarmed up to the flat roofs to watch thence (**Judges 16:27** [which states 3,000 people were on the roof of the building which Samson pulled down] the spectacle of Sennacherib’s retreat...or something similarly pleasing...

“The careless merry-makers...think all danger is past; Isaiah thinks otherwise, and sings to them (**verses 2c-3**) a few lines of a dirge [lament for the dead] depicting what he foresees, the slaughter or plight of the city’s defenders, involving, as **verse 4** ...shows, the destruction of the people.” (P. 365)

Slotki comments on **verses 1-4** that “Jerusalem abandons itself to mirth and revelry while the prophet, who knows the future, is plunged in deep sorrow and gloom.” (P. 99)

Oswalt states that “Classically **verses 1-4** have been taken as prophecy (Calvin, Vitranga), and a few modern scholars do also, although most take this passage as reflective of a past event...If the former is correct then Isaiah is looking beyond the present mindless rejoicing to a time when the city will be in ruins...

“If the second position is correct, Isaiah is saying that the people are ignoring present realities. They are dancing and singing when in fact their leaders have deserted them and the land lies in ruin. Isaiah is desolated over the destruction, but even more so over the blindness. Somewhat against this interpretation would be the fact that while this could only apply to 701 B.C.E., that was a time when there was some legitimate cause for rejoicing in their deliverance (**Isaiah 37:22, 23**). This seems to point to a prophetic utterance referring to the destruction in 586 B.C.E. although

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מַה־לְךָ אִפּוֹא כִי־עָלִית כָּל־ךְ לַגְּנוֹת:

Utterance / oracle of (the) Valley of Vision:³

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prompted by the unspecified event in 711 B.C.E. (It is possible that no historical experience was the catalyst for these verses.)” (P. 408)

Yes—for while there are possible references to different events in the history of Judah, no one of those events fits the entire depiction of this chapter. The vision, while rooted in real historical events, cannot be pin-pointed to any one specific event. And, as Oswalt states, the time-reference is unclear. Great biblical scholars differ as to whether it is describing a past event or a future event—it is an “enigmatic” [puzzling, mysterious] passage!

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*The burden of the Valley of Vision. What (is) to thee (what hast thou? Or what aileth thee?) that thou are wholly (literally, the whole of thee) gone up on the house tops?*” (P. 379)

³Slotki comments on the title, מִשְׁאָה גֵּיאַ תְּזִיּוֹן, “*Oracle / Utterance of Valley of Vision*, that Jerusalem is described as a *valley* because it is surrounded by hills, and of *vision* because it was the scene for, or the object of, many of the prophetic visions.” (P. 99)

Alexander states that “By the valley of vision we are not to understand Babylon, nor Judea (Calvin, Lightfoot), but Jerusalem, as being surrounded by hills with valleys between them [but why then the singular ‘valley’? Jerusalem is certainly not one valley!]...

“[Jerusalem is so called, because of its being] the seat of revelation, the abode of the prophets, and the place where God’s presence was manifested [we ask, Where is God’s presence not manifested?].” (P. 380)

Motyer holds that “**Verse 5** shows that *the Valley of Vision* refers to Jerusalem, but Isaiah does not explain why he chose this enigmatic title for the city...It is best to think of *Valley* as metaphorical of life’s darker experiences (compare **Psalm 23:4**). Isaiah endured a ‘dark night of the soul’ as he contemplated the inevitable judgment that would come on his city.” (P. 182)

What do you think? Is the enigmatic title a metaphor for life’s darker experiences, or for Isaiah’s “dark night of the soul”?

Oswalt comments that “Again and again, Jerusalem is referred to as Mount Zion. But here Isaiah says Jerusalem is not a mountain from which a long view is possible, but a valley from which nothing can be seen. (Scott suggests that the reference is to

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What is it to you (singular) then,⁴
that you went up,⁵ all of you (singular) to the roof-tops?⁶

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the Hinnom Valley in which pagan rites were carried on in an attempt to divine the future [**Jeremiah 7:31-34**].” (P. 409)

The Greek translation of the phrase is τὸ ῥήμα τῆς φάραγγος Σιων, “The word of the ravine / valley of Zion.” Watts states that “This interprets the Hebrew to refer to the Hinnom Valley, west of Jerusalem.” (P. 279)

But the Greek translation does not identify the ravine / valley, and it could just as well mean the Kidron ravine or valley to the east of the City of David, or the Tyropean ravine / valley to the west of the City of David.

Here again, we emphasize the enigmatic, puzzling nature of **chapter 22**. Its title is just that—puzzling, and we cannot be sure what it means or why it was given.

⁴Slotki’s translation of this line is “what aileth thee now?” and he comments that “the literal meaning is ‘what, pray, (hath come) to thee?’ or ‘what, pray, meanest thou?’ The prophet, weighed down by forebodings, asks the question ironically of the city’s population who have no cares on their mind [but can this be the case, if the city is under siege, and the people are convinced that ‘tomorrow we die’?].” (P. 99)

Where our Hebrew text reads מַה-לָּךְ, **mah-lak**, “What to you (2nd person feminine singular)?”, 1QIs^a reads מַלְכִי, **malkhi**, “my king.”

⁵Where our Hebrew text reads עָלִית, “you (2nd person feminine singular) went up,” 1QIs^a reads עָלִיתִי, “I went up.” **Rahlfs** translates by ἀνέβητε, “you (2nd person plural) went up.”

⁶Slotki comments on “the housetops,” that “The flat roofs of the houses were vantage ground for watching the joyful demonstrations or holiday processions in the streets below.” (P. 99)

Alexander comments that “The ascent [to the roof-tops] here mentioned has been variously explained, as being designed to gratify curiosity by gazing at the approaching enemy or the crowds of people seeking refuge in Jerusalem, or to assail the invaders, or take measures for resisting them, or to indulge in grief, or to engage in idolatrous worship, or to celebrate a feast. The truth probably is, that the expression is here used as a lively description of an oriental city in commotion, without any intention to intimate as yet the case or the occasion.” (P. 380)

(continued...)

⁶(...continued)

Motyer states that “In **Isaiah 15:3** the *roofs* / ‘housetops’ were the places of communal lament; here they are places of communal joy.” (P. 182)

Oswalt writes, “The prophet cannot understand why the people are thronging to the housetops when they should be in their closets in repentance and prayer.” (P. 409)

⁷Slotki states that **verses 2-3** contain “A vision of the impending calamities.” (P. 99)

Watts comments on **verses 2-3** that “The contrast between consternation at the threat, and jubilation at the ‘macho’ feeling of preparation for heroic struggle surfaces here and in **verses 12-13**. The commentaries generally place parts of this chapter in differing times. When seen as drama [Watts’ overall view], this is unnecessary. The date is 701 B.C.E. The Assyrians [Sennacherib’s army], with an international contingent of mercenaries, occupy Judah and threaten Jerusalem. The government calls for unusual military measures for defense. The inhabitants vacillate between attempting to flee (**verse 3**) and displaying nationalistic fervor (**verses 2, 13**).” (Pp. 280-81)

But Watts’ confident assertion that “the date is 701 B.C.E.” is only a guess; other commentators give different dates, both earlier and later. The fact is that the passage is not clear enough to enable confident dating.

Alexander translates **verse 2**: “Full of stirs, a noisy town, a joyous city, thy slain are not slain with the sword nor dead in battle.”

He comments that “The first clause is commonly explained by the older writers as a description of the commotion and alarm occasioned by the enemy’s approach... Junius makes the prophet ask, How is it that the city is now full of confusion and alarm which was once so joyous? But this distinction of times is altogether arbitrary...The latest writers [in the mid-19th century] are agreed in making it descriptive of the present, not in reference however to alarm and agitation, but to the opposite condition of joyous excitement, frivolous gaiety, and reckless indifference, described in **verse 13**.” (P. 380)

Motyer comments that in **verses 2-3**, “Isaiah is not recording the past but envisaging the future as if it were before his very eyes.” (P. 182)

What do you think? Do you think Isaiah is describing the present, what was happening at the time this message was given? Or is he having a vision of the future that is certainly coming on Jerusalem because of her lack of trust in YHWH?

Motyer holds that Isaiah’s vision is the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.E., as described in **2 Kings 25:4**,

(continued...)

עִיר הַזְּמִיָּה
 קָרְיָה עֲלִיזָה
 חֲלָלִים לֹא חֲלָלִי-חֶרֶב

⁷(...continued)

And the city was broken into;
 And all men of the battle
 (in) the night (fled) by way of (the) gate
 between the two / double walls,
 which was over / above the king's garden.
 And Chaldeans (were) against the city, around (it);
 And he (the king) went (by the) way of the (Jordan) valley.

Oswalt likewise comments on **verses 2-3**, stating that “The noise of the city is a roar as the whole population enters into the proceedings. Again these verses envision the close-packed Near Eastern city where the sound of several thousand inhabitants laughing, talking, and shouting melds into one continuous roar...

“But the prophet see another view of the city, its walls broken down, the streets littered with the bodies of those starved in the siege, *not dead in battle*, its leaders having been captured not in heroic defense of the city but in flight to save themselves...

“This is the city where there is no vision, where the inhabitants cannot see that a selfish, pleasure-seeking society must finally pull its house down around it as it loses its capacity for self-sacrificial service and its capacity for commitment to those values of the spirit without which no human society can long exist.” (P. 409) See:

Isaiah 30:10, where Isaiah charges that Judah is a rebellious people,

who said to the seers, Do not see!
 And to the visionaries, Do not give visions for us!
 Speak straight-forward things to us, smooth things--
 envision deceptions!

Proverbs 29:18,

When there is no vision, a people will be left unrestrained;
 and one who keeps **torah** / teaching / guidance, blessed is he!

Oswalt's interpretation makes for good preaching, but it is being read into the text, on the basis of other passages. **Chapter 22** says nothing about there being no vision in the “valley of vision.” In fact the revelers have a vision of death on the next day!

וְלֹא מֵתֵי מַלְחָמָה:

(You who are) full of noises,

a boistrous city,

a jubilant city (synonym)--

your pierced (are) not pierced (by the) sword;⁸

and (they are) not dead men (from) war!⁹

⁸Watts translates this line by “Your profaned are not those profaned by the sword.” The reason for this is that the root לָלַח , **chalal** has both meanings. He comments: “*Profaned* in the sense that a dead body is thought of as ‘profaned.’ But there are no dead–yet [but why then does the text speak about ‘your dead’?]? Rather, the behavior of the city’s leadership (or army officers...) is contemptible. They are responsible for the policies that brought the Assyrians. Some try to flee but are caught.” (P. 281)

⁹Slotki comments that those who die in Jerusalem “will not die like heroes on the battlefield, but perish from starvation...or lose their lives by ignominious [causing public shame] execution.” (Pp. 99-100) Compare **Lamentations 4:9**,

Better were those pierced / slain (by the) sword
than those pierced / slain by famine;
who wasted away,
pierced by (lack of) fruits of (the) field!

Alexander states that “The expression *thy slain are not slain with the sword* cannot mean that none were slain, but necessarily implies mortality of another kind. The allusion is supposed by some to be to pestilence, by others to famine, such as prevailed in the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and also that by the Romans. As neither is specified, the words may be more generally understood as describing all kinds of mortality incident to sieges, excepting that of actual warfare.” (P. 380)

Gray states that Judah’s dead are depicted as not having died “nobly fighting,” but have been “executed ignominiously [publicly shamed] after the capture of the city, or, perhaps, have died of hunger during the siege.” (P. 365)

These varying views of what is meant by “your dead,” and “your pierced” are another indication of the enigmatic nature of **verses 1-14** as a whole. And whereas Slotki understands the passage as a prediction of the future some two centuries away, these other commentators understand it as a description of what has already occurred.

22:3¹⁰ כָּל-קְצִינֵיךָ נִדְדוּ-יַחַד

מִקֶּשֶׁת אֶסְרוּ

כָּל-נִמְצְאֵיךָ אֶסְרוּ יַחַד

מִרְחוֹק בְּרַחוּ:

All your chiefs / rulers¹¹ fled together

without a bow they were imprisoned.¹²

¹⁰Alexander translates **verse 3**: “All thy chiefs fled together—from the bow—they were bound—all that were found of thee were bound together—from afar they fled.”

He comments that “This verse describes the people, not as crowding from the country into Jerusalem, nor as fleeing from the public places in Jerusalem to hide themselves, but as flying from the enemy and nevertheless being taken.” (P. 380)

We can see how such a description would fit the time of Sennacherib’s forces overwhelming the defensive circle of some 46 towns with their soldiers around Jerusalem, but this also is only a guess.

¹¹Slotki states that this phrase, קְצִינֵיךָ, “your chiefs / rulers,” may mean “your military chieftains.” (P. 100)

¹²Slotki holds that “without the bow...bound” means “having thrown away their bows in their precipitous flight.” But he adds that “Others, with less probability, render ‘they are bound by the archers.’ By bound is meant ‘taken prisoner.’” (P. 100)

Alexander states that “We may either read *they are bound* (i.e. made prisoners) *by the bow* (i.e. the archers, as light-armed troops), or *without the bow* (i.e. not in battle, as the slain were not slain with the sword); or it may mean *without resistance*, without drawing a bow. Some understand it to mean, *they are restrained* (by fear) *from* (using) *the bow*.” (Pp. 380-81)

Gray states that the phrase *without the bow* “has been supposed to mean after the bows had been thrown away, or before there had been time to use the bows; the rendering *because of the bow* is no more satisfactory, and *by the archers...very* questionable.” (P. 365)

Motyer holds that the phrase *Without using the bow* / ‘[away] from the bow’ means without a shot being fired either in defense or by the enemy.” (P. 182)

(continued...)

All your people being found¹³ were imprisoned together.

They fled from afar / far away.¹⁴

¹²(...continued)

Oswalt agrees, noting that “Here the ‘from’ is taken to be privative [an action marked by the absence of some quality or attribute that is normally present], meaning either that they had not fired a shot before being taken captive, or that no shot was fired at them before they surrendered—probably the latter in the light of **verse 2**. Compare **2 Kings 25:1-7** for the story of [King] Zedekiah’s flight.” (P. 403)

The story in **2 Kings 25** tells how the siege which had lasted for two years, became so severe in Jerusalem that there was no food left, and the city was broken into, resulting in King Zedekiah’s flight along with his soldiers from the City of David—and how the troops were scattered, and King Zedekiah was taken captive by the Chaldeans in the plains of Jericho. He was taken to Riblah, where the King of Babylon was, and there, his sons were slaughtered before his eyes, and then his eyes were put out, and he was bound in chains and taken to Babylon.

Where our Hebrew text reads אֲסֻרֵי, “they were taken prisoner / bound,” 1QIs^a reads אֲסֻרָה, “she was taken prisoner / bound.” **Rahlfs** translates by οἱ ἀλόντες, “the ones taken / conquered / caught / convicted.” See the root word ἀλίσκομαι in Liddell & Scott, New Edition Stuart Jones & McKenzie’s **Greek-English Lexicon**.

Again we note the enigmatic nature of **verses 1-14**, with these differing interpretations of the simple phrase “without the bow...bound.”

¹³The Hebrew text for this phrase is כָּל־נִמְצְאוֹתַי, literally “all your (feminine singular) found ones,” which **Rahlfs** translates by οἱ ἰσχύοντες ἐν σοι, “the ones being strong in you (singular).”

¹⁴Slotki explains that “Both they who were found in the city as well as they who fled shared the same fate.” (P. 100)

Oswalt states that in **verse 3** “the chief [problem] seems to be...How can the captives flee after they have been captured?” His solution is to translate by the past perfect, “after they had fled.” (P. 403)

Alexander states that “*All that were found of thee* may be in antithesis to *thy chiefs*; as if he had said, not only thy chiefs, but all the rest. Some understand this as describing the voluntary confinement of the people in Jerusalem during a siege; others apply it to their vain endeavors to escape from its privations and dangers. It is best to give the verse its largest meaning as descriptive of the hardships and concomitant evils, not of one siege merely, but of sieges in general.” (Pp. 380-81)

(continued...)

¹⁴(...continued)

Motyer claims that all of the perfect tenses in **verse 2-3** are “prophetic perfects,” and that “Isaiah is not recording the past but envisaging the future as if it were before his very eyes.” (P. 182)

That is, he thinks **verses 1-14** are in fact a vision of the future. But there is nothing in the text to that effect. Rather, throughout **verses 1-14** the perfect (past) tense is used, and the text appears to be a description of the city at a time in the immediate past that the author has witnessed, and is grieving over. It has been a Divine judgment visited on the City of David—a “day of YHWH,” such as the **Book of Lamentations** depicts so graphically.

Parts of the description so well fit the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C.E., that if we are to understand the description as written by the historical Isaiah, and not the work of a later disciple of Isaiah in the sixth century, we must take the passage as a prophetic picture made almost two centuries before its actual occurrence—as Motyer insists.

But other commentators interpret the passage as better fitted to the surrounding of Jerusalem by the armies of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E, or some other similar occurrence, and do not think the past tense verbs are “prophetic perfects.”

Again, we say, **verses 1-14** are highly enigmatic, defying attempts to date their description.

¹⁵Where our Hebrew text has שָׁעוּ בְּנֵי, literally “Gaze (plural imperative) away from me,” 1QIs^a has שׁוּעוּ בְּנֵי, “cry for help from Me.”

Slotki comments on **verse 4** that “The prophet, overcome by sorrow in view of the approaching disaster, refuses to be comforted.” (P. 100)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: “*Therefore I said (or say), Look away from me; let me be bitter in weeping (or weep bitterly); try not to comfort me for the desolation of the daughter of my people.*”

“These are not the words of Jerusalem in answer to the question in **verse 1**...but those of the prophet expressing his sympathy with sufferings which he foresees and foretells, as in **16:11** and **21:3**.” (P. 381)

Gray comments that “Some of the merry-makers try to cheer up the prophet, who weeps (compare **Isaiah 16:9**; **Lamentations 1:16**) at this sad vision; he refuses to be comforted for the destruction of his people.” (P. 365)

(continued...)

שְׁעוּ מִנִּי
אֲמַרְרָ בְּבִכִי
אֶל-תְּאִיצוּ לְנַחֲמֵנִי
עַל-שָׂר בַּת-עַמִּי:

For this reason I said,

Look away from me!¹⁶

I will be bitter with weeping.

You (plural) shall not hasten to comfort me,
over (the) daughter of my people's¹⁷ destruction!¹⁸

¹⁵(...continued)

Oswalt states, "Isaiah cannot take part in the revelry, which he regards as foolish in the light of what he knows." (P. 410)

Kaiser comments on **verse 4** that "The prophet's demand that they should look away from him...and leave him undisturbed to his bitter sorrow, for which the reasons were deeper than those around him could yet know, and to abandon any attempt to comfort him, is not meant to be realistic but must [?] be understood against the background of the formal language of the funeral lament. It is not a real rejection of people who are trying to comfort the distressed prophet, but a way of emphasizing the vastness of the misfortune, the full extent of which he does not believe the inhabitants of Jerusalem can yet understand. In place of the assurance in a lament that no one is there to comfort the mourner (compare **Lamentations 1:2, 16, 21; 2:9**) we have here the rejection of potential comforters. The attention of the hearers is drawn even more firmly to what Isaiah still has to say about the fate of the people of the southern kingdom." (P. 142) Perhaps...but we are not sure.

¹⁶Slotki states that this line means "Leave me alone."

¹⁷Slotki observes that this phrase, **בַּת-עַמִּי**, *daughter of my people*, common in **Jeremiah** and **Lamentations**, occurs only here in this **Book [of Isaiah]**." (P. 100)

The phrase occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** here, at **Isaiah 22:4**, and in **Jeremiah 4:11; 6:26; 8:11, 19, 21, 22, 23; 9:6; 14:17; Lamentations 2:11; 3:48; 4:3, 6 and 10.**

Alexander comments that it "does not mean the towns dependent on Jerusalem ...nor Jerusalem itself as built by the people...nor the sons of the people...but the

(continued...)

¹⁷(...continued)

people itself, poetically represented as a woman, and affectionately spoken of as a daughter.” (P. 381)

Gray agrees, stating that “The daughter of my people [is] the entire population.” (P. 365)

¹⁸The noun שֹׁדַח, **shodh** is defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as meaning “violence, havoc, devastation, ruin.”

¹⁹Slotki comments on **verses 5-11** that “The prophet’s vision of the future, begun in **verses 2-3**, is resumed.” (P. 100)

Oswalt comments on **verses 5-8a** that “Here the prophet begins to recall the recent situation.” He notes that ‘Normally the day of the Lord was seen as a future event, but here it is a past event from which certain implications ought to be drawn for the future. Compare J. A. Everson, ‘Days of Yahweh,’ **Journal of Biblical Literature** [1974] pp. 329-337.’” (P. 410)

We say, Yes! The “Day of YHWH” is, we think, an eternal day, that comes again and again throughout history, overthrowing oppressors and delivering the oppressed. No society can escape that “day.”

Oswalt also states that **verses 5-8a** “appear to be a general statement that Jerusalem had tottered on the brink of destruction.” (P. 411)

Alexander translates **verse 5**: “*For there is a day of confusion and trampling and perplexity to the Lord Jehovah of hosts, in the valley of vision—breaking the wall and crying to the mountain.*” (P. 381)

Oswalt comments on **verse 5** that “Over against the present tumult within the city, Isaiah recalls another tumult: the uproar which had attended the apparently imminent destruction of Jerusalem. Instead of a quiet reliance upon God (**Isaiah 30:15** [where YHWH says ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’]), there had been a frantic rushing to and fro until the shouts had echoed off the surrounding mountains.” (P. 410)

Kaiser comments on **verse 5** that since it “contains no indication of time, it is possible to understand it in a wholly eschatological sense.” (P. 139)

And again we emphasize the enigmatic, puzzling nature of **verses 1-14**. Indeed, as Kaiser states, there is “no indication of time,” and the passage can be, and has been taken, as describing a number of attacks on Jerusalem in Judah’s past, as a description of something happening in the present as the author writes, and as a prophecy of the

(continued...)

בְּנֵי חַיִּיּוֹן

מִקְרָקֶר קָר וְשׁוּעַ אֶל-הָהָר:

Because a day of tumult, and treading down / subjugation, and confusion²⁰ belongs to my
Lord YHWH of Armies²¹

¹⁹(...continued)

future, either in history, as a depiction of the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 B.C.E., or “in a wholly eschatological sense,” that is, in a “proto-apocalyptic” way, as describing the future era of salvation following the destruction of Israel’s enemies, in the “final” coming of the day of Yahweh. If that’s not “enigmatic,” what else can it be?

And we are reminded of how many conflicting, dogmatic interpretations of Paul’s vision of the future of Israel in **Romans 9-11** have been made, treating those three chapters as a Divinely inspired “road-map to the future” of Israel. We insist that interpreters would be better served by taking Paul’s affirmation in **1 Corinthians 13:9-12** seriously, where he states that when he prophesies, he is seeing enigmatically, not clearly (“through a mirror darkly”), and that what he knows is only partial, not complete.

People of faith, like Isaiah and Paul, can certainly envision the future; they can do all in their power to speak for God—indeed they can, and have. And common to their visions is the conviction that God has a wonderful future in store for His people, indeed for all humanity. But still, their language, and their descriptions, are enigmatic and partial—and should not be taken for more than that. Or, as Paul says, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” (**2 Corinthians 5:7**)

²⁰Slotki’s translation has “trouble...trampling...perplexity.” He comments that “The impressive assonance of the Hebrew, מְהוּמָה וּמְבוֹסָה וּמְבוּכָה, **mehumah umebhusah umebhukah**, cannot be reproduced in translation.” (P. 100)

²¹Gray comments on the phrase “For a day...hath Yahweh of Hosts,” that “the phrase is exactly the same as **Isaiah 2:12**. The ‘day of Yahweh’ is always a future event to Hebrew writers; and it is altogether unsafe to assume...the contrary here.” (Pp. 365-66)

We disagree. The entire **Book of Lamentations**, we believe, is about the Day of YHWH’s wrath that has come on Jerusalem in its past. See **Lamentations 1:22**,

You call my terrors from all around,
like a festival day;
and there was not on a day of YHWH’s anger
an escaped one and a survivor.
(My children) whom I bounced (up and down), and raised,
my enemy finished them off.

(continued...)

in (the) Valley of Vision—
tearing down a wall²² and a cry to²³ the mountain!²⁴

²¹(...continued)

We think **verses 1-14** may well be a depiction of Jerusalem having experienced the coming of that day—as, in Motyer’s words, “Isaiah envisages screams for help resounding to the encircling mountains from the sack of the city.” (P. 183)

Kaiser entitles **verses 5-6** “The coming day of Yahweh.” That is, he interprets the day of Yahweh in this passage as a future, “eschatological” day, certainly not as a day having occurred in the past.

He comments that these verses “are the attempt of a proto-apocalyptic writer to make the ancient prophecy of Isaiah a reality to his own community, by an eschatological interpretation, in spite of the historicizing additions to it which relate it to the events of the year 587 B.C.E. The judgment of Yahweh upon Jerusalem first proclaimed by Isaiah and fulfilled in 587 B.C.E., will not be the last...

“In the final defeat of all the powers on this earth which are hostile to God there will once again be a visitation of Jerusalem, which, in spite of the final liberation which is not mentioned here (compare **Isaiah 29:1-8; 30:27-30**), will be no less terrible than that in the past (compare also **Isaiah 28:14-21** and **Zechariah 14:1-15**). In the expected day of Yahweh, which will decide the fate of Jerusalem and of the nations, the army of the nations will gather before its gates (compare **verse 7**), and by contrast to the present careless rejoicing in the city (compare **verse 2**) there will be a violent tumultuous confusion (compare **Ezekiel 7:7; Isaiah 17:12** and **Psalms 46:7^{Heb} / 6^{Eng}**, consisting of nations which trample everything down...making the inhabitants helpless with dismay...

“The Babylonians who by this time have been destroyed themselves (compare **chapters 13-14** and **Isaiah 21:1-10**) are replaced by the distant Elamites and people of Kir, the former with the quiver in their hands to send a rain of arrows upon everything visible before the city and upon its walls, and the latter advancing to the attack with the protective covers removed from their shields.” (Pp. 146-47)

We say, Yes, there are passages in **Isaiah** and **Zechariah** which depict a future day of Yahweh. But we insist that Kaiser is having to read all these ideas into **verses 1-14**, where the day of YHWH is depicted as having come on Jerusalem in the past.

²²Translation of the phrase **מִקְרָרֵךְ קִיר**, **meqarqar qir**, which we have translated by “tearing down a wall,” is uncertain, due to the fact that the word **meqarqar** occurs nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**. Where our Hebrew text reads **קִיר**, “a wall,” 1QIs^a reads **קִדְשׁוֹ**, “His set-apart place,” probably meaning the temple.

(continued...)

²²(...continued)

Motyer translates the phrase by “battering down walls,” and states that “the [word] **meqarqar** is unknown elsewhere, but a verb **qarqar** occurs in **Numbers 24:17**, parallel to מָחַץ, **machats**, ‘to crush or break in pieces.’ It is likely that Isaiah sought (or coined) an unusual word in order to achieve the assonance with **meqarqar qir**.” (P. 183)

Oswalt translates the phrase by “lifting up the shout,” and states that “the meaning of the verb is speculative since it occurs only here and the parallelism is not good. He refers to scholars who think similar sounding roots in Ugaritic and Arabic which mean “make a sound” yield excellent parallelism. But he concludes that “the meaning is very obscure.” (P. 404)

Yes, “obscure,” and “uncertain”—that’s the reason we say **verses 1-14** are “enigmatic,” “puzzling.”

²³Where our Hebrew text has אֶל, “to,” 1QIs^a has עַל, “against.” However, the later we go in the **Hebrew Bible**, the more prepositions such as these begin to lose their distinctive meaning, and are used somewhat interchangeably.

²⁴Slotki holds that the two Hebrew words קִר וְשׁוֹעַ, **qir weshoa** probably are the names of “tribes participating in the invasion [of Jerusalem]. Others render the second part of the verse: ‘battering down the wall and a cry (of distress ascends) to the mountain.’” (P. 100)

“Probably”—yes, but not for sure, and differing understandings are possible.

Compare **Ezekiel 23:23**, where the phrase וְשׁוֹעַ occurs as the name of one of Judah’s “lovers”:

Sons of Babylon and all Chaldeans—
 Peqodh and Shoa and Qoa,
 all sons of Assyria with them—
 desirable young men, governors and rulers, all of them,
 officers and men of renown,
 riders of horses, all of them!

Oswalt states that “Kir [our Qir] is presumably a far-off land like Elam (**Amos 1:5; 9:7**).” (P. 404)

²⁵Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “And Elam bare a quiver, with chariots, men (i.e. infantry), horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield.”

(continued...)

²⁵(...continued)

He comments that “Elam was a province of Persia, often put for the whole country. Its people were selected archers.” (P. 381)

Gray entitles **verses 6-7** “Elam and Kir,” stating that this is because “soldiers from these two countries or peoples, engage in the attack in Jerusalem.” (P. 367)

He comments on **verse 6** that “The second line in the Hebrew text...is probably both corrupt and intrusive, for it separates two lines which exactly balance one another, term for term The words may be rendered *with chariot(s)* (or, *a riding company...*), *man*, *horseman* (or, *horses*)...

“Throughout the period of Isaiah’s activity ‘Elam is the opponent of Assyria, and its rival for the dominion in Babylon’ [quoting an unnamed author]. Sayce briefly sketches the relations of the two powers thus: Umman-nigas, king of Elam, ‘in 721 B.C.E. assisted Merodach-baladan against Sargon...He died in 718 B.C.E., and was succeeded by his sister’s son Sutruk-Nankhundi, who in 711 B.C.E. again assisted Merodach-baladan, but this time to no purpose. Sargon defeated and captured his general’...

“Thus though certain districts of Elam were captured by Sargon, Elam itself formed no part of the Assyrian empire in the latter half of the 8th century as it did of the empire of Cyrus...

“In the light of these facts other alternatives are:

- (1) to understand Elam as equivalent to such few Elamite mercenaries as might serve in an Assyrian army though Assyria and Elam were opposed to one another...
- (2) to see in the verses the work of a later writer...
- (3) to treat the poem as a celebration of an Elamite attack, directed against the interests of Assyria, on a Babylonian town.” (P. 368)

Motyer states that “Elam lay to the east of Babylon and was throughout Isaiah’s period an independent power allied to Babylon against Assyria.” (P. 183)

He earlier stated that it had been revealed to Isaiah that Jerusalem would fall to Babylon, and “this truth is here veiled by referring to Babylon’s remoter ally, Elam, and to the unidentified Kir in **verse 6**. Consequently, the perfect tenses of **verses 3-7** must be prophetic perfects, the certainty of already-decided acts of God.” (P. 181)

So, in Motyer’s view, “Elam and Qir” are to be understood as a sort of “code-words” standing for Babylon, and the passage is to be understood, in spite of its past tense verbs, as a vision of the future invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of

(continued...)

בְּרֵכַב אֲדָם פְּרָשִׁים
בְּרֵכַב אֲדָם פְּרָשִׁים

וְקִיר עָרָה מִגֵּן:

And Elam bore a quiver,²⁶

²⁵(...continued)

Babylon—which is to be understood as an “interim fulfilment” of YHWH’s long-term purpose in history—none of which is made obvious by the passage itself.

Motyer states that “The Hebrew of **verse 6** is very rhythmical, being three lines of three words each. It has a drum-beat, marching effect, matching its content. Weapons of war—quiver then charioteers and horses (literally ‘chariotry’ / calvary , men, horses’) and shield—are amassed. These are weapons of attack (*quiver*) and of defense (*shield*), and in between are the means of mobile warfare.” (P. 183)

Oswalt comments on **verse 6** that “Although Sennacherib claimed to have defeated the Elamite army on his first campaign against Babylon, it is unlikely, even if the report is accurate, that Elamite troops formed any significant part of the Assyrian army which came against Jerusalem...The prophet is saying that those enemies who will destroy Babylon are the very ones who have threatened Jerusalem. As Babylon goes, so must go those who have trusted in her.” (Pp. 410-11)

But we ask, do you get this from reading the text? We do not, and think that Oswalt is having to read far too much into the text that just isn’t there. It seems to us that the mention of Elam and Qir is another puzzle facing the reader of **verses 1-14**, the solution to which is not obvious.

²⁶For this matter of Elam’s use of bow and arrow, compare **Jeremiah 49:35**,

In this way YHWH of Armies spoke:
Look at Me—breaking Elam’s bow—
beginning of their strength!

Slotki comments that the men of Elam were “expert archers.” (P. 100)

Watts comments that “Elam’s presence before Jerusalem is a surprise. At Babylon (**chapter 21**) it was natural, the only question being ‘On whose side?’ The best explanation seems to be that the entire verse is stressing the international makeup of the attacking troops: bowmen from Elam, chariots with drivers from various nations, and foot-soldiers from Kir.” (P. 281)

With this, Watts suggests that the depiction of an enemy attack is to be understood as an attack on Babylon, not on Jerusalem—which we take as additional evidence that **verses 1-14** are enigmatic, puzzling in nature, concerning which we have no basis for holding to one dogmatic interpretation of its meaning or historic application.

with chariot of a human²⁷ (with) horses,²⁸
and Qir²⁹ lay bare a shield.³⁰

²⁷Oswalt notes that אָדָם, ‘**adham** means “man or mankind.” He comments that “the horses and chariots are the very center of attention in **verse 7**. The intention seems to be something like ‘with chariots manned by riders’ (without regard to nationality).” (P. 279)

Watts states that “*Mankind* may well be intended as a contrast to the ethnic units in Sennacherib’s army: an international troop of chariot drivers representing mankind.” (P. 281)

²⁸Slotki comments that “the phrase may mean ‘men on horseback among the chariots.’” (P. 100) Notice the uncertainty in his “may mean.” The meaning of the phrase is not definite or clear.

Alexander states that “On the whole, the simplest and most natural construction seems to be that which supposes three kinds of troops to be here enumerated: cavalry, infantry, and men in chariots.” (P. 381) And we ask, Is the simplest, most natural construction always the correct construction?

²⁹Slotki states that קִיר, **qir**, “is the place of origin of the Arameans [Syrians].” (P. 101) Compare **Amos 9:7**,

Are you people not like the people of Ethiopia to Me,
O people of Israel?
–It is a saying of YHWH!
Did I not bring up Israel from the Land of Egypt--
and the Philistines from Crete,
and Aram / Syria from Qir?
(See also **Amos 1:5** and **2 Kings 16:9**.)

Alexander states that “Kir is now agreed to be identical with Κυρος, **Kuros**, the name of a river rising in the Caucasus, and emptying into the Caspian sea, from which Georgia (Girgistan) is supposed to derive its name. Kir was subject to Assyria in the time of Isaiah, as appears from the fact that it was one of the regions to which the exiles of the ten tribes were transported.” (P. 382)

See the article on “Kura River” on the Internet, from which we quote:

“The Kura is an east-flowing river south of the Greater Caucasus Mountains which drains the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus east into the Caspian Sea. It also drains the north side of the Lesser Caucasus while its main tributary, the Aras drains the south side of those mountains. Starting in northeastern Turkey, it flows through Turkey to Georgia, then to Azerbaijan, where it receives the Aras as a right

(continued...)

²⁹(...continued)

tributary, and enters the Caspian Sea. The total length of the river is 941 miles.” (10/28/2016)

But Gray states that “No place or people of the name [Kir / Qir] has been discovered in the Assyrian inscriptions.” (P. 368)

And we add that contrary to what Alexander found in the mid-nineteenth century, we have found none of the commentaries we have read making a similar claim concerning Kir / Qir meaning the Kura River.

³⁰Slotki’s translation has “uncovered the shield,” and he comments that shields were uncovered “to enter into battle. Shields were kept in leather coverings when not in use.” (P. 101)

Alexander likewise states that “The uncovering of the shield has reference to the *involucra clypeorum* [envelope of shields] and the *tegimenta scutis detrahenda* [coverings taking shields], of which Cicero and Caesar speak, leathern cases used to protect the shield or keep it bright. The removal of these denotes preparation for battle.” (P. 382)

³¹Slotki’s translation begins **verse 7** with the phrase, “And it came to pass,” and he comments that “With prophetic foresight Isaiah envisages the scene”—a strange way to introduce a statement concerning the future! (P. 101)

Other translations of this phrase are “And your choicest lowlands were filled,” to “Your choicest valleys are full,” to καὶ ἔσονται αἱ ἐκλεκταὶ φάραγγές σου, “and the choice valleys of yours will be...” Slotki’s translation has “And it came to pass when thy choicest valleys were full of chariots.” Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: “*And it came to pass (that) the choice of thy valleys (thy choicest valleys) were full of chariots, and the horsemen drew up (or took up a position) towards the gate.*”

Alexander comments that the opening phrase, “And it came to pass,” “introduces or continues a narrative. It seem here to mark the progress of events. The prophet sees something which he did not see before. He had seen the chariots and horsemen coming; but now he sees the valleys around full of them...”

“The address is to Jerusalem. The valleys are mentioned as the only places where the cavalry or chariots could be useful, or could act at all. As the only level approach to Jerusalem is on the north, that quarter may be specially intended, and the *gate* may be a gate on that side of the city.” (P. 382)

Gray comments on **verse 7** that it depicts “The valleys round Jerusalem...filled with, and the city itself beset by, hostile troops.” (P. 369)

(continued...)

וְהַפְּרָשִׁים שֶׁתִּשְׂתוּ הַשְּׂעָרָה:

And the choice of your³² valleys were full of chariot(s);
and the horsemen stood standing at the gate.³³

22:8³⁴ וַיִּגַּל אֶת מַסְדֵּי יְהוּדָה

³¹(...continued)

Motyer comments on **verse 7** that “The fact that *Your choicest valleys are full of chariots and horsemen are posted at the city gates / And they have carefully positioned horsemen right up to the gate* describes the occupation and spoliation of the countryside and the threat to the security of the city...Notice the movement from preparation for war (**verse 6**) to implementation (**verse 7**) and the impression of the enemy sweeping unopposed through the countryside to the city.” (P. 183)

Watts likewise states that “The status of the invasion is portrayed [in **verse 7**]. The valley-roads approaching Jerusalem are held by chariot-riding brigades. The cavalry has taken up positions opposite the city’s gates...The valleys are the access roads to Jerusalem near Timnah...or those that led from Lachish into the highlands between Hebron and Jerusalem.” (P. 281)

³²The pronominal suffix is feminine singular, referring to Jerusalem.

³³Oswalt states that “The best valleys [we think of the Kidron, the Hinnom, and the Tyropean valleys] were the broadest and...these were naturally the ones which would become the thoroughfares for enemy attack. Here horsemen would be stationed to prevent any sallying out from within and also to press the attack should the gate be breached. So with chariots rumbling up the valleys, with horsemen taking up station at the gates, it had been obvious that Jerusalem was defenseless (**verse 8a**). She was completely exposed and could be picked off at the enemy’s pleasure.” (P. 411)

³⁴Oswalt comments on **verses 8b-14** that “The prophet now moves to his indictment. **Verses 1-4** set the stage, contrasting the blindness of the people with his own prophetic vision [that is Oswalt’s interpretation, but the text does not mention the blindness of the people; it only mentions someone (masculine singular—does this mean the king?) who did not look to God]...

“**Verses 5-8a** recount God’s earlier threat to the city. Now these verses tell of the response to that threat and of the effects of that response. In a word, the effect is disaster, for at the very moment in which a people of vision [the text says nothing of ‘a people of vision’] would be looking at God and their relationship to Him, these people are checking their defenses and preparing ‘Night before Destruction’ parties. If Babylon is broken and can be of no help [but Babylon is not mentioned in the text, and nothing is said about Babylon being broken, or not being of help], then there is nothing to be done except to prepare for the worst...

(continued...)

³⁴(...continued)

“The tragedy was that there was something to be done—commit themselves and their situation to God—but they would not do it...By their refusal to trust God [nothing is said in the text about ‘trusting God’—only an individual’s ‘not looking to God,’ perhaps the king] in preparing for the worst, they have insured that the worst will come, but not through Assyria; in fact, it will be through their would-be-ally, Babylon [but neither Assyria nor Babylon are mentioned in the text].” (Pp. 411-12)

Gray states concerning **verses 8-11** that “The main thought of these verses clearly is that the people of Jerusalem have looked to the seen and not to the unseen [there is not a word in the text concerning ‘the unseen’]. They have attended to the material defenses of the city, [but] they have left out of account the Maker of it all, the Author of the long-formed plan, which works itself out in human history.” (Pp. 369-70)

Motyer entitles **verses 8-11** “Past choices.”

He comments on this section, “Note how cleverly Isaiah underlines the element of reliance on human resource and endeavor by alternating his references to defenses and water supply, giving the impression of a hive of activity as people dart hither and yon, intent on making themselves secure.” (P. 184)

What do you think? Do you see in the text a depiction of people “darting hither and yon”?

Motyer comments on **verse 8** that “The Lord is always the ultimate Agent in His people’s experiences, and it suited His purposes at this juncture to test, by the onset of Sennacherib, whether they, under Hezekiah’s favorable leadership, would walk in the way of faith or the way of the world [such an interpretation may be good from an outside theological understanding of the Lord as ultimate Agent testing His people, but in fact nothing like this is said in the text; not is there any mention of Hezekiah or Sennacherib]...

“Note the sense of immediate reaction in *You looked in that day*. No time was needed for thought; at once self-sufficiency and self-competence took over. Their primary trust was militarism: their stored armaments (**verse 8b**), their material defenses (**verse 9a**) and their supplies (**verse 9b**).” (P. 184)

Alexander translates **verse 8**: “*And he removed the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armor of the house of the forest.*” (P. 382) Alexander correctly uses the second person singular “thou.”

Watts comments that “The enemy (or Yahweh?) has penetrated the line of fortress-towns which protected the city from invasion along the ridge roads in the north or from the valley roads to the west [this is a possible understanding of ‘the cover of Judah, but the text says nothing about Judah’s fortress-towns].” (P. 281)

(continued...)

וּתְבִיט בְּיוֹם הַהוּא
אֶל-נֶשֶׁק בַּיִת הַיְעָר:

³⁴(...continued)

See **2 Kings 18:13**, which is the basis for Watts' comment:

And in year fourteen to the King Hezekiah,
Sennacherib, King of Assyria, went up,
against all Judah's fortified cities,
and he seized them.

Kaiser entitles **verses 7-8 + 11b** "Preoccupation with the present moment."

He comments that in these verses, which he thinks are the work of a post-Isaianic writer, who, "in the spirit of his great predecessor [the historical Isaiah], affirms that the people of Jerusalem, faced with the approaching Babylonians, have not thought of Yahweh and the destruction of the city which Isaiah prophesied, and repented accordingly, but are relying upon its fortifications. After the fall of the city in the midsummer of 587 B.C.E., he hoped to bring the survivors to recognize the hand of Yahweh in the catastrophe that had come upon them.

"By the 'choice, fruitful valleys' he is presumably referring to the eastern end of the valley of Hinnom (compare **Joshua 15:8; 2 Kings 23:10; Nehemiah 11:30**; also **2 Kings 25:4**) and the plains of Rephaim (compare **Joshua 15:8; 2 Samuel 5:18; Isaiah 17:5** [the only passage that mentions fruitfulness is **Isaiah 17:5**; the others only mention the locations by name]. While the chariots and baggage vehicles of the Babylonians were drawing near, the cavalry vanguard was already establishing positions at the gate, in order to make sure that the besiegers could advance unhindered. In the hour of danger the eyes of the people [the text says a male individual, perhaps the king], of Jerusalem turned to the palace, which is called here only the 'House of the Forest of Lebanon.' It covered a greater area than the Temple of Solomon, and seems in fact to have been an audience building for the public activities of the king. [It] ...should not be thought of as originally an arsenal...

"The people of Jerusalem relied upon their king's armaments instead of recognizing the hand of Yahweh behind the encroaching danger. They did not recall that long ago, through Isaiah, He had given a warning of the coming catastrophe which had power to bring it about." (Pp. 144-45)

Kaiser takes **verses 1-14** as referring to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in the past, by a post-exilic author who is looking forward to the soon-coming day of Yahweh, when all of Israel's enemies will be destroyed, and the time of salvation will dawn.

And he uncovered the covering of Judah;³⁵

³⁵Where our Hebrew text has **וַיִּגַל אֶת מַסְךְ יְהוּדָה**, “and he uncovered Judah’s covering,” **Rahlfs** has the future tense: *καὶ ἀνακαλύψουσιν τὰς πύλας Ἰουδα*, “and they will uncover the gates of Judah.”

Slotki’s translation has “And the covering of Judah was laid bare,” and he comments that Jerusalem’s “defenselessness was made evident by the ease with which it was overrun.” (P. 101)

Alexander comments that “The first verb, which some connect with the enemy and others with Jehovah understood, is really indefinite and may be resolved into an English passive, *the covering was removed*. This expression has been variously explained to mean the disclosure of long hidden treasures—the taking of the fortified towns of Judah by Sennacherib—the disclosure of the weak points of the country to the enemy—the opening of the eyes of the Jews themselves to their own condition—the ignominious treatment of the people, represented by the oriental figure of an unveiled virgin.” He concludes that the expression means “the Jews’ own eyes were opened.” (P. 382)

All of these possible varying interpretations point to the enigmatic nature of the passage.

Gray translates by “And the screen of Judah was removed,” and comments that “The verb **גלה** [uncover, remove] appears to be used here...of bringing about exposure by removing a covering. The noun **מסך** (from the verb ‘to cover,’ ‘screen’) is something that screens from view, such as the cloth spread over the well-mouth to hide refugees (**2 Samuel 17:19**), or hangings of the tabernacle such as that which screened the holy of holies from the holy place (**Numbers 4:5**), or the cloud which screened the Hebrews from the Egyptians (**Psalms 105:39**)...

“The sentence may therefore mean Judah, personified as a woman, is disgraced by exposure. Compare **Isaiah 47:2-3**, [where it is said of the daughter of Babylon],

- 2 Take two millstones, and grind flour.
 Take off your veil, strip off your skirt;
 uncover a leg, pass through rivers!
- 3 Your nakedness will be uncovered,
 also your shame / reproach will be seen;
 I will take vengeance!
 And I will not meet a human (with kindness)!

“It is extremely improbable that the clause means that Jerusalem (not mentioned) has been exposed by the capture of the cities of Judah (**2 Kings 18:13**), which formed the screen of the capital; and equally improbable that it means that Judah

(continued...)

and you³⁶ looked on that day³⁷
to (the) weapons of (the) house of the forest.³⁸

³⁵(...continued)
awakes to its true state because the covering over its eyes has been removed.” (Pp. 370-71)

Kaiser comments that “Because the verb [וַיִּגְלֵל], ‘and he uncovered’] is in the singular, the subject is more likely to be Yahweh than the enemy. The covering presumably means the protection which He had previously given to the southern kingdom (compare **Psalm 105:39** [a cloud covered Israel in the exodus from Egypt] and **Isaiah 4:5-6** [a cloud over Mount Zion]) or else the covering of the nakedness of the virgin Judah which has been removed, so that she is now the object of open contempt.” (P. 145)

³⁶Here, the second person masculine singular is used, and we think it most probably refers to the king, or possibly to Shebna.

³⁷Where our Hebrew text has וַתִּבֹט בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, “and you (second person masculine singular) looked on that day, perhaps referring to the king,” **Rahlf's** has καὶ ἐμβλέψονται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, “and they will look on that day,” changing from the Hebrew text’s past tense with a singular subject to the future tense with a plural subject.

³⁸Where our Hebrew text has אֶל-נְשֵׁק בֵּית הַיַּעַר, “to weapon(s) of (the) house of the forest,” **Rahlf's** has εἰς τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς οἴκους τῆς πόλεως, “to the chosen houses of the city.”

Slotki explains that the “house of the forest” means the “house of the forest of Lebanon,” which, “since the days of Solomon (compare **1 Kings 7:2-4** [where Solomon’s building of the ‘house of the forest of Lebanon’ is described; **10:17** [which states that the house of the forest of Lebanon contained 300 shields of beaten gold]) seems to have been used as an arsenal.” (P. 101)

Alexander states that בֵּית הַיַּעַר [“house of the forest”] “is not a proper name, but the designation of a house built by Solomon, and elsewhere called the house of the forest of Lebanon, [not] because erected on that mountain, as some writers think, but according to the common opinion, because built of cedar-wood from Lebanon. This house is commonly supposed to have been either intended for an arsenal by Solomon himself, or converted into one by some of his successors, and to be spoken of in **Nehemiah 3:19** under the name of נְשֵׁק [‘equipment,’ ‘weapons,’ perhaps ‘armory’ or ‘arsenal’; this line includes this same noun: וַתִּבֹט בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶל-נְשֵׁק בֵּית

(continued...)

³⁸(...continued)

הַיַּעַר, 'and you [second person, masculine singular] looked on that day to equipment / weapons / armory / arsenal of (the) house of the forest.']...

“There is no need of supposing that the house contained only the golden shields of Solomon and Rehoboam. The fact that these were deposited there might naturally lead to a more extensive use of the building for the purpose mentioned...

“Looking to this arsenal implies dependence on its stores as the best means of defense against the enemy.” (P. 383)

Instead of בֵּית הַיַּעַר, “house of the forest,” **Rahlf**s has οἴκους τῆς πόλεως “houses of the city.”

Gray states that the noun נֶשֶׁק [weapons], in the phrase אֶל-נֶשֶׁק בֵּית הַיַּעַר “to weapons of (the) house of the forest,” is a general term. Compare:

2 Kings 10:2-3, where Jehu sends a letter to the leaders of Samaria, where Ahab’s sons are living, telling them:

- 2 And now, as this letter comes to you (plural),
and your lord’s (Ahab’s) sons (are) with you;
and with you (are) the chariot(s) and the horses,
and a fortified city [Samaria] and the weapons [וְהַנְּשֵׁק];
- 3 and see / appoint the best one and the right one from your lord’s sons,
and set / place (him) upon his father’s throne;
and fight on behalf of your lord’s household!

Also compare the phrase יוֹם נֶשֶׁק, ‘day of weapons,’ i.e. battle, in **Psalms 140:8**,

YHWH my Lord—strength of my deliverance / salvation!

You covered my head in a day of weapons / battle [בְּיוֹם נֶשֶׁק].”
(P. 371)

Oswalt comments on **verses 8b-11** that “Faced with the threat of imminent attack, the king of Judah, almost certainly Hezekiah [we agree, but the text does not mention Hezekiah], makes a choice as to his first priority. That priority is physical preparation. He looks to his armaments (**verse 8b**), to his walls (**verses 9a, 10** [the verbs in **verses 9-11** are all masculine plural]), and to his water supply (**verses 9b, 11**)...

(continued...)

³⁸(...continued)

“Such preparations were prudent and Isaiah does not condemn them. What he does condemn is the order of priorities [the text says nothing about ‘order of priorities’]...

“If it is true that God is the Sovereign of the universe, then our first task in a moment of crisis is to be sure that all is clear between Him and ourselves. Then other preparations, if necessary, can follow.” (P. 412)

Watts comments that “Having lost a major part of the army by desertion (**verse 3**), and abandoning the hope that the ring of armed towns could protect the city (**verse 8a** [which does not mention ‘the ring of armed towns’]), the citizenry of the city called for arms from the royal armory to protect themselves from the anticipated invaders [but the text says nothing about the citizenry calling for arms].” (Pp. 281-82)

³⁹Motyer comments on **verses 9-11** the “the unforgivable sin is to believe that if one cannot save oneself one cannot be saved [but the text does not mention saving oneself or being saved]...and to act as though this world were all [there is] (**verse 13** [nothing is said concerning ‘the world being all there is’]). The one situation which matches this oracle is that Jerusalem was *en fete* [holding a celebration] to celebrate the inauguration of Hezekiah’s tunnel [but there is nothing in the text concerning Hezekiah’s tunnel or any celebration at its completion!]. This was to them the crowning guarantee of a self-wrought security and to Isaiah, the unforgivable sin.” (P. 181)

He adds that “One of the people’s greatest achievements (the tunnel [of Hezekiah, beneath the City of David, connecting the Gihon spring, outside the walls with the pool of Siloam inside the walls] and some of their most costly sacrifices (the lost [demolished] buildings [demolished in order to use their materials for strengthening and repairing the city walls]) become their unforgivable sin...because they are manifestations of self-sufficiency and human omni-competence.” (Pp. 184-85)

This is a strange comment, reading into it not only theological ideas, but reading into it the whole matter of Hezekiah’s tunnel in the days of Sennacherib. I think back to my youth, when Hitler and Hirohito waged war against Great Britain and the United States—and both the British and the Americans joined together to do all in their power to build naval fleets and airplanes and military equipment to meet their onslaught. My two cousins, who were raised in our family, went to war in the South Pacific, and I joined with other grade-school students in learning to knit and make warm head-gear for our soldiers.

Were those preparations unforgivable sins? Were they manifestations of self-sufficiency and human omni-competence? I say No—we were praying constantly, both privately and in our churches, asking for God’s help and protection—but still doing all in our power to defend ourselves and our countries from those aggressive powers.

(continued...)

³⁹(...continued)

And I am reminded of the many statements in the **Bible** of David the warrior, who makes his arms strong in order to defeat his and Israel's enemies—see especially **2 Samuel 22-23**. I have walked through Hezekiah's tunnel again and again while in Israel—and continue to be impressed with the kind of engineering effort that was made by Israelite workers—with hammers and chisels, carving out that tunnel beneath the hill Ophel and the City of David. I believe it was an act of courageous faith—not an unforgivable sin.

What do you think? Do you think that Hezekiah and the people of Judah quit their praying in order to dig that tunnel, and strengthen the walls of Jerusalem? Read the story in **2 Kings 18-19** with Hezekiah's prayer of faith to Yahweh.

Kaiser entitles **verses 9-11a** "The defense measures taken by the people of Jerusalem," and comments that these verses have a "list of the measures taken to strengthen the defenses as the Babylonian army approached in the year 588 B.C.E. Because of the long siege that was expected, not only had the walls to be firm but a sufficient water supply had to be ensured..."

"As an emergency measure, the houses of Jerusalem were counted, and then, in spite of the expected arrival of refugees from the countryside and the suburbs of Jerusalem that lay outside the walls, all that could be dispensed with were torn down. This was the quickest way to obtain the stones which were then used to repair and strengthen the walls. Considerable remains of the eastern wall of Jerusalem from the days of Zedekiah have recently been discovered." (P. 145)

Alexander translates **verse 9**: "*And the breaches of the city of David ye saw, that they were many, and ye gathered the waters of the lower pool.*"

He comments that "The breaches meant are not those made by the enemy in the siege here described, but those caused by previous neglect and decay. The city of David may be either taken as a poetical name for Jerusalem at large, or in its strict sense as denoting the upper town upon mount Zion, which was surrounded by a wall of its own, and called the city of David because he took it from the Jebusites and afterwards resided there.

Watts comments on **verse 9** that "The government belatedly recognized the many lacks in the city's defenses. Hezekiah's strategy had been to expand his borders and strengthen his perimeter of fortress towns [but there is not a word in the text concerning 'expanding borders' or a 'perimeter of fortress towns']." (P. 282)

See **2 Chronicles 32:26-30**, perhaps Watts' source for his comment:

26 And Hezekiah was humbled in the haughtiness of his heart,
he and Jerusalem's inhabitants;

(continued...)

כִּי־רַבּוּ

וַתִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־מֵי הַבְּרִכָּה הַתַּחְתּוֹנָה:

And you⁴⁰ saw (the) breaches (in the wall) of the City of David,^{41, 1}
that they were many;
and you gathered up water from the lower pool;⁴²

³⁹(...continued)

- and YHWH's wrath did not come upon them in Hezekiah's days.
- 27 And Hezekiah had exceedingly much wealth and abundance,
and he made for himself treasuries for silver and for gold and for precious
stone(s),
and for spices and for shields and for every costly / delightful vessel;
- 28 and storage-places for (the) produce—grain, and new wine and fresh oil;
and stables for every animal and animal;
and flocks for the mangers.
- 29 And he made / built cities for himself [this is hardly “fortress towns”],
gathering(s) of sheep and cattle in abundance.
Because God gave to him exceedingly great property.
- 30 And he—Hezekiah—stopped up the outflow of Gichon's waters—
the upper one.
And he made them (go) straight down to the west,
to David's city.
And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

⁴⁰Here the second person masculine plural is used, and this use continues through **verse 11**.

⁴¹**Rahlf**s translates this line by καὶ ἀνακαλύψουσιν τὰ κρυπτὰ τῶν οἴκων τῆς ἄκρας Δαυιδ, “And they will uncover / reveal the hidden / secret things of the houses of the citadel of David.” This reflects a quite different understanding of what the covering was!

For the “Tower of David,” in contrast to the “City of David,” see our end-note 1, with its **Wikipedia** articles.

⁴²See on the Internet “The Pool of Siloam,” with pictures of a “lower pool” in the Valley of Hinnom. Kaiser states that “The ‘Lower Pool’ is now generally identified with the birket el-chamra about 218 yards below the pool of Siloah.” (P. 146) See on the Internet Shiloah (Siloam) Pool - BibleWalks.com.

Slotki comments that “the lower pool” is identified by some with “the upper pool” (**Isaiah 7:3** [a strange identification!]), “but others suggest that it was situated within the

(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

city walls near the entrance to the Tyropoean Valley. The waters were gathered together as a source of supply during the siege.” (P. 101)

Gray states that “The water was gathered together in the pool by constructing new conduits into it, or opening incoming conduits which had been temporarily stopped...What is referred to here is a provision for a supply of water within the city, not as in **2 Chronicles 32:2-4** to cutting off the supply outside so as *to deprive* the attacking army of water.” (P. 371)

- 2 And Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib (was) coming,
and his faces / front-lines (were) against Jerusalem.
- 3 And he consulted with his officers and mighty men,
to stop up (the) waters of the springs,
which (were) outside the city.
And they helped him.
- 4 And a great (number of) people was gathered together,
and they stopped up all the springs,
and the wadi, the one overflowing in the midst of the land,
saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come,
and find much water?

⁴³Alexander translates / comments on **verse 10**: “*And the houses of Jerusalem ye numbered, and ye pulled down the houses to repair (rebuild or fortify) the wall.*” Notice Alexander’s correct use of the second person plural.

He comments that “The numbering of the houses probably has reference, not to the levying of men or of a tax, but...for the purpose of determining what houses could be spared, and perhaps of estimating the expense. The houses are destroyed, not merely to make room for new erections, but to furnish materials. Ancient Jerusalem, like that of our day [mid-19th century] was built of stone.” (P. 383)

Gray likewise states that “*the houses of Jerusalem are numbered, and the houses selected for demolition are demolished to furnish material wherewith to render the (city) wall (חֹמֶה) inaccessible (בְּצָר), as in Jeremiah 51:53*), by filling up its present breaches, or otherwise strengthening, or repairing, breaches which will be made by the assailants. Compare **Jeremiah 33:4**,

Because in this way YHWH spoke, (the) God of Israel,
concerning houses of this city,
and concerning houses of Judah’s kings--
the ones pulled down to (make a defense) against the (siege-)mounds
and against the sword.

(continued...)

וַתִּחְצוּ הַבָּתִּים לְבַצֵּר הַחֹמָה:

and you counted (the) houses of Jerusalem,⁴⁴

⁴³(...continued)

Ibn Ezra understands the first clause to refer to the numbering of the house(holds) of Jerusalem to discover the number of men available for the war.” (P. 371)

Compare the statement concerning King Hezekiah in **2 Chronicles 32:5**,

And he strengthened himself,
and he (re-)built all the wall that was broken through;
and he raised up above (it) the towers,
and outside the wall, another (wall);
and he strengthened the Millo, City of David.
And he made weapon(s) in abundance, and shields.

Oswalt states that the phrase *you listed the houses* “probably refers to a survey of all the buildings inside the walls, noting which could be demolished to provide rubble for filling the interior of casemate [a small room in the thickness of the wall of a fortress, with embrasures, small openings, from which arrows could be fired] walls and for repairing any broken places...There may also have been some demolition to provide fire breaks and access to the wall for easy movement of troops to any point of emergency.” (P. 413)

Watts comments on **verses 10-11a** as follows: “A survey of Jerusalem’s houses was done both to arrange housing for those villagers who sought safety in the city and to meet needs for defense. Walled cities usually had two walls with a space between, allowing defenders the open space needed to overcome attackers who had penetrated the outer wall. In peace-time that space tended to be built up by squatters with temporary shacks which soon became permanent dwellings. The government apparently took two steps to meet this problem. The houses were demolished to regain the open space between the walls and parts of it were flooded with water from the old pool. This latter created a flooded moat and also ensured water reserves for the besieged city.” (P. 284) Perhaps, but the text is not specific with regard to these matters.

⁴⁴Where our Hebrew text has וַאֲתֵּבְתֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם סִפְרָתֶם, “and the houses of Jerusalem you (2nd person masculine plural) counted,” **Rahlfs** has καὶ ὅτι καθείλοσαν τοὺς οἴκους Ἱερουσαλημ, “and that they demolished the houses of Jerusalem.”

and you pulled down the houses to fortify the wall.⁴⁵

22:11⁴⁶ וּמִקְוֵהוּ עָשִׂיתֶם בֵּין הַחֲמַתַּיִם

לְמֵי הַבְּרֵכָה הַיְשָׁנָה

וְלֹא הִבַּטְתֶּם אֶל-עֹשֶׂיהָ

וַיִּצְרָה מִרְחֹק לֹא רִאִיתֶם:

And you built a reservoir⁴⁷ between the two walls,⁴⁸

for (the) waters of the pool, the old one.⁴⁹

And you did not look to its Maker,

⁴⁵Kaiser notes that the phrase **לְבַצֵּר תְּחַוְּמָה** is literally “to make (the wall) inaccessible.” (P. 138) The root **בצר** means “to cut off / make inaccessible,” especially in the act of “fortifying.”

⁴⁶Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “*And a reservoir ye made between the two walls (or the double wall) for the waters of the old pool, and ye did not look to the maker of it, and the former of it ye did not see.*” (P. 383)

⁴⁷Alexander comments that **מִקְוֵה**, **miqwah**, “according to its etymology [origin and changing meanings] is a place of gathering, and according to usage a place where waters are collected.” (P. 383) The word is commonly used in later Hebrew for the immersion-pools found beneath Jewish homes in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Qumran, as well as elsewhere.

The translation of **מִקְוֵה**, **miqwah** in **Rahlfs** is simply ὕδωρ, “water.”

⁴⁸Alexander states concerning the dual [consisting of two parts] noun **חֲמַתַּיִם**, **chomothayim**, that “as the Hebrew dual is not a mere periphrasis for *two*...[the noun] cannot simply mean *two walls*, but must denote a *double wall* in some situation where but one had been before, or might have been expected. The reference is probably to a wall built out from that of the city and returning to it, so as to enclose the tank or reservoir here mentioned.” (Pp. 383-84)

⁴⁹Slotki comments that the “old pool” is “possibly the pool of Siloam whose surplus water was to be gathered in the reservoir.” (P. 101)

and its Former from afar you did not see.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Watts comments on **verse 11b** that “The government (including the unnamed king) is accused of failure to look to God in its time of peril. It failed to recognize Yahweh’s stake in the city which He had made and formed long before Israel existed. The [**Book of Isaiah’s**] view of Zion emerges here again—a city whose destiny [we would say ‘origin’] is older than Canaan, the promised land, and which will survive the collapse of Israel and Judah (**Isaiah 2:1-4; 65:17-66:24**). The government’s failure to reckon with that destiny, even to endanger that destiny as it pursued adventurous nationalistic and personal ambition, is the thrust of this accusation [but the text makes no mention of ‘Zion’].

“The description of this event in **2 Kings 18:17-19:37 / Isaiah 36-37** contradicts this view. It shows Hezekiah appealing to Isaiah (**2 Kings 19:1-8**). In **2 Kings 19:15-19** Hezekiah prays directly to Yahweh about the second threat to the city. He is supported in each instance by Divine assurances through Isaiah. How are these two views to be reconciled?

“**Chapter 22** appears to be set in a time before the final denouement [climax of a chain of events] pictured in **2 Kings 18-19 / Isaiah 36-37**. A comparison suggests that Hezekiah’s appeal to Isaiah and prayer to Yahweh followed a long period in which no such advice or assurance was sought. The [**Book of Isaiah**] maintains that the policies of Shebna and Eliakim during Hezekiah’s reign ignored prophetic directions to Ahaz (**Isaiah 7**) and warnings to themselves (**Isaiah 20**). There is no hint of a mood to seek the Lord’s direction now—even with Assyria’s cavalry at the gates. Their policy has been one of national independence without regard to God’s strategies for them.” (P. 284)

We say, Perhaps...but this is reading a great deal between the lines, especially with regards to the time intended by the text, which reads to us as being set in the day of or shortly before the city’s destruction—“tomorrow we die!”

The question we raise with regard to the text in **verse 11** is, what does “its” refer to? Does it refer to the pool of Siloam, or to the water? Does it refer to the coming of the siege by the Assyrians, or the killing of Judah’s leaders who attempted to escape? Does it refer to the Divine decree that Judah must be punished for its sins?

Slotki states that it refers to “the evil decree.” (P. 101) And we ask, What evil decree? We suspect he means the Divine decree of Jerusalem’s being attacked.

Alexander comments that the last clause [in **verse 11**] shows that the fault, with which the people of Jerusalem were chargeable, was not that of guarding themselves against attack, but that of relying upon human defenses, without regard to God...They looked to the arsenal but not to God. This seems to put the clause...in antithesis to the whole foregoing context from **verse 8**. If so, the suffixes in עֲשִׂיָהּ וַיִּצְרָהּ, [‘one

(continued...)

⁵⁰(...continued)

making it and one forming it'] cannot refer merely to the pool or reservoir, but must have respect either to the city or to the calamity now coming on it." (P. 384)

Oswalt comments that "*Maker* is another expression of the Isaianic theology of creation...The One Who made all things does have a plan [for His human creatures] and the person who does not take this into account is being very foolish." (P. 413)
Yes, indeed!

He also states that the suffixes on "Maker" and "Former" are 3rd feminine singular suffixes, "referring to the city of Jerusalem. We can focus on human achievement as our ultimate value, or we can focus on the One Who makes human achievement possible." (P. 404)

Here again, in the difference between Alexander's and Oswalt's interpretations, the ambiguity / enigmatic nature of the text becomes obvious.

Oswalt also notes that "In **chapters 43-46** יָצַר, 'to form, make,' occurs 10 times, stressing that the One Who made can redeem." (P. 405)

⁵¹Slotki comments on **verses 12-14** that "Instead of lamentation and penitence the people indulged in merriment. Such complacency cannot be forgiven." (P. 102)

But is it merriment or despair, when the final word is "Tomorrow we die!"?

Gray entitles **verses 12-14** "The unpardonable sin of Judah."

He comments that "Regardless of Yahweh's power to help (**verses 8-11**), the people are regardless also of His call to fasting and lamentation. If the prophet warns them that their state is desperate, they admit it—*tomorrow we may die*, but find therein reason, not for repentance, but merely for revelry and feasting while opportunity offers; hence, as Isaiah has learned by direct revelation, their offence is unpardonable; they must die." (P. 372)

Oswalt comments on **verses 12-14** that "Not only had Judah offended the Sovereign by depending on her defenses instead of on Him (**verses 8b-11**), but she had also responded to His call for repentance with parties whose intended purpose was to put out of mind the terrible events which might soon engulf them. Instead of allowing the situation to prompt them to look at possible causes, they only let the grim effects unhinge their moral restraints. In the Lord's eyes this is the final mark of apostasy." (P. 414)

Slotki comments on **verse 12** that the "call" was Divine, "warning the people by the threatening signs of the times and through His prophets to return unto Him in

(continued...)

⁵¹(...continued)
repentance and humility.” (P. 102)

Alexander translates **verse 12**: “And the Lord Jehovah of hosts called in that day to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding sackcloth.”

He comments that “The meaning is not that He summoned grief to come, but that He called on men to mourn...The providential call to mourning here referred to must be the siege before described.” (P. 384)

Motyer comments on **verse 12** that “The Lord, the Lord Almighty is sovereign in status...How foolish to look to weapons etc. and not to Him!...The way to look to Him was in a true repentance and contrition (**Joel 2:12ff.**) which also touched and changed the outer life.” (P. 185)

Oswalt states that “Obviously, the Isaiah who attacked useless cults in **chapter 1** did not expect that acts of repentance alone would have restored Judah to favor with God. Rather, he is expressing the thought which is found throughout the **Old Testament**: if cult which is not expressive of true change of heart is disgusting, a supposed change of heart which is not expressed in appropriate physical behavior is cheap and superficial (**Psalms 51:17-21^{Heb} / 15-19^{Eng}; Joel 2:12-17; Amos 8:10; Malachi 1:8-11; Isaiah 32:11-13; compare Acts 5:1-11**).” (P. 414)

Watts comments on **verse 12** that “The Lord (and prudence) called for a reversal of policy, abject humiliation before Sennacherib’s authority, penance for their rebellion, promises to rebel no more, payment of tribute due, and penalties for the armies’ trouble. Hezekiah did exactly this during the 712 B.C.E. Ashdod rebellion. The city was spared, but it cost virtually everything in the royal treasury.” (P. 284)

Again the ambiguity / enigmatic nature of **verses 1-14** is obvious, as commentators move from the attack of Sennacherib to that of Nebuchadnezzar to that of Sargon II on Ashdod in explaining the text. In fact, the text is too obscure to be certain of its time of reference, and it seems that perhaps elements of all these different periods may be combined in the text. What do you think?

Kaiser comments on **verses 12-14** that “The real depth of the prophet’s grief was brought about not so much by what had just happened, but by his knowledge of what was irrevocably destined for his people, because they had failed to hear the voice of their almighty God Who had spoken to them in the defeat they had just suffered. By these blows God sought to call them to repentance, but instead they gave themselves up to the joys of the moment...Instead of seeking God’s pardon...they were giving themselves up to abandoned joy, had slaughtered cattle, goats and sheep, and were eating and drinking as at a joyful festival...”

(continued...)

לְבָכִי וְלִמְסַפֵּר
וְלִקְרָחָה וְלַחֲגֹר שֶׁקֶ:

And my Lord YHWH of Armies called on that day,

⁵¹(...continued)

“The words placed in the mouth of the carousers, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,’ which the apostle Paul takes up in **1 Corinthians 15:32**, may be a quotation from a drinking song like those known to us from the Egyptian tombs. Thus one of these harper’s sons reads:

Celebrate a joyful day, noble one!
Forget all evil and think of joy,
Until the day comes [when you disembark
In the country which loves silence.

“The idea of enjoying life to the full because death is coming for certain is common to all mankind. The following verse of Alcaeus [sixth century B.C.E. Greek poet] had been preserved:

It is ill yielding the heart to mischance,
for we shall make no advance if we weary of Thee,
O Bacchus [God of the grape harvest and of wine [also known as Dionysus],
and the best medicine is to call for wine and drink deep.

“But Isaiah is of a different opinion. For him the attitude of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is iniquitous, because it does not take account of God as the Lord of history, Who is seeking to guide [people] by the blows which strike them to repent and to remember Him and His demands [the text says nothing about God as Lord of history, guiding by blows His people suffer]. If they do not remember Him, and fail to hear the call of God which comes to them in the disaster, He will strike them once again for the last time.

“Thus the words of Yahweh, the Lord of reality, ring in Isaiah’s ears (compare **Isaiah 5:9**) and he hears the solemn oath that the wickedness of their unwillingness to repent, and the guilt that results, will only be atoned for by death; that is, it will be objectively wiped out. In other words, for Isaiah the events of the year 701 B.C.E. [but is that the time reference? It is not made obvious by the text] are no more than a preliminary to the final catastrophe which is to fall upon the southern kingdom, because its people have not seized their last chance of turning to Him Who has smitten them.” (Pp. 142-43)

We have no doubt that the text is describing some occasion on which the people of Judah behaved in the manner described by the text. But when commentators specify who the attacker was, and when, they are all going beyond what the text enables the reader to know.

for weeping and for mourning,
and for baldness, and for wearing sack-cloth.⁵²

22:13⁵³ וְהִנֵּה | שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה

⁵²Slotki states that the *weeping* and *sackcloth* (etc.) were “the outward signs of mourning or penitence.” (P. 102) Yes, of course!

⁵³Alexander translates **verse 13**: “*And behold mirth and jollity [celebration], slaying of oxen and killing of sheep, eating of flesh and drinking of wine; eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*” He comments that “The Hebrew verbs are all infinitives.” (P. 384)

Motyer comments on **verse 13**, that “Isaiah returns to the theme of **verse 2**. But now we see why he found their *joy* so offensive: they were contradicting the mind of God (**verse 12**) and applauding human works (**verses 8-11**).” (P. 185)

Oswalt states that “Instead of a deep grief over a long series of offenses against a holy God (such as even Nineveh had been able to produce, **Jonah 3:6-9**), Jerusalem responds with an outburst of hilarity and self-indulgence.” (P. 414)

But is it “hilarity and self-indulgence,” or the last gasps of despair before an inevitable defeat and death?

For the kind of response Isaiah is calling for, see **Lamentations 3:40-42**,

40 Let us search out our ways;
and let us search (synonym),
and let us return to YHWH,
41 lifted up our heart (in our) hands,
to (Supreme God) El in the heavens!
42 We transgressed and rebelled;
You did not forgive.

Oswalt comments that “*killing cattle and slaughtering sheep* probably connotes two things:

“The first is excess. It is likely that the normal diet did not contain a great deal of meat, both because of storage problems and because animals were too valuable for other purposes than food.

“The second is ironic. If there were really going to be a siege, then every food product would be needed. Here the population, perhaps thinking they could not keep the animals alive anyway, is devouring that precious food in a party atmosphere.” (P. 414)

Or is because they thought “Tomorrow we die!”?

(continued...)

הִרְגוּ בְּקָרִי וְשָׁחֲטוּ צֹאן
אָכַל בֶּשֶׂר וְשָׁתוּת יַיִן
אָכְלוּ וְשָׁתוּ
כִּי מָחָר נָמוּת:

And / but look⁵⁴—(there was) rejoicing and gladness,
killing cattle and slaughtering sheep,
eating flesh and drinking wine;
eating and drinking,⁵⁵
because Tomorrow we die!⁵⁶

⁵³(...continued)

Watts comments on **verse 13**: “But this time, a nationalistic celebration raises the city’s feelings to a fever-pitch of bravado—feasting on animals driven into the city, with no thought of needing them to rebuild the country afterward, drinking an excess of wine, with no thought of saving strength and wit to defend the city. So Jerusalem’s rulers had kindled the nationalistic fires in the people’s hearts with celebration and feasting (**verses 13** and **2a**), although they were quite well aware of the city’s vulnerability (**verses 9-11a**).” (P. 285)

But we ask, is this a depiction of “bravado,” or rather a depiction of extreme despair? We think the latter.

⁵⁴Oswalt notes that “The opening וְהִנֵּה, ‘[And /] But behold,’ expresses the prophet’s astonishment and dismay. Compare **Isaiah 5:11-13**.” (P. 405)

⁵⁵Slotki comments that “The Hebrew use of infinitives [אָכְלוּ וְשָׁתוּ] ‘to eat and to drink,’ implies continuous and excessive indulgence in revelries and orgies. The sentence may have been the slogan of the reckless revelers who would enjoy themselves while they could, for life was short and death might come at any moment. It may also be the prophet’s scornful thrust hinting at their impending doom.” (P. 102)

⁵⁶Alexander comments that “The whole foregoing context represents [the celebration] as already past, if not in fact, at least in his perception...It has been disputed whether these last words [to eat and to drink] are expressive of contemptuous incredulity or of a desperate determination to spend the residue of life in pleasure.” (Pp. 384-85)

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

Oswalt states from his Christian perspective that “*For tomorrow we die* expresses the ultimate rationale for a life of acquisition and indulgence. If indeed there is nothing beyond the grave, then self-sacrifice, commitment, and self-denying discipline are foolish (**1 Corinthians 15:32** [‘If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’])...

“On the other hand, if there is life after death, it behooves us to do everything possible to discover the nature and conditions of that life and to be sure that we have met those conditions (**Mark 10:17-22** [‘Go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven’]).” (P. 414)

While we agree that this is true, not one word of this is mentioned in **verses 1-14!**

We are reminded of the **Gilgamesh Epic**, Tablet X, Column ii, where the grieving Gilgamesh, who can find no relief from his grief over the death of Enkidu, his beloved hero-friend, is given the advice:

As for you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full.
 Make merry day and night.
 Of each day make a feast of rejoicing.
 Day and night dance and play!
 Let your garments be sparkling fresh.
 Your head be washed; bathed in water.
 Pay heed to a little one that holds on to your hand.
 Let a spouse delight in your bosom,
 For this is the task of [woman].

(Tigay’s translation, as quoted in John Gardner and John Maier’s **Gilgamesh**, p. 214.)

Motyer comments, like Oswalt from his Christian perspective, that “In the crisis which was upon them their sole determination was to have all that this world could offer them before it was snatched away from them. This ‘mind-set’ denies the spiritual dimension, for their behavior proclaimed that if their own endeavors (their weapons, **verse 8**, costly defenses, **verse 10**, and engineering marvels, **verse 11**) could not save them, nothing could.” (P. 185)

Oswalt notes that “Although the [Hebrew text] has no verb of saying to introduce the quotation in the verse, the [ancient] versions are agreed that one is intended.” (P. 405)

For example, **Rahlfs** translates by λέγοντες φάγωμεν καὶ πίνωμεν αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκουμεν, “saying, Let us eat and let us drink, for tomorrow we are dying (present indicative active)!”

⁵⁷Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: “*And Jehovah of hosts revealed Himself to my ears* (i.e. made a revelation to me saying) *If this iniquity shall be forgiven you* (i.e. it certainly shall not be forgiven you) *until you die...*”

“The conditional form of expression, so far from expressing doubt or contingency, adds to the following declaration the solemnity of an oath.” (P. 385)

Motyer states, “This **verse [14]** begins (literally) ‘and the Lord of hosts has revealed / uncovered Himself in my ears’...The form of words here stresses the objectivity of revelation as something coming to the prophet from outside; its authenticity as a revealing of the Lord Himself; and the genuine reception by a human being of the very word of God (compare **Isaiah 5:9** [YHWH of Armies has sworn in my hearing]; **50:4-5** [YHWH has opened my ear]).” (P. 185)

Motyer here uses this verse as a proof-text for his doctrine of an infallible **Bible**, containing the infallible revelations of God in the ear of His chosen prophets “the very word of God.” Such a comment reflects Christian theological convictions only arising centuries later, and does little to enlighten readers concerning the text, other than involve them in later theological conflicts. There can be no doubt that Isaiah believed he was speaking for God, and that he was hearing God’s word in his ear. But it is a long, long jump from that conviction to the belief in a verbally inspired, infallible **Bible**! We say, leave those convictions aside when commenting on the **Hebrew Bible**—let them arise when in later centuries Christians begin to debate such matters. And when the debate begins, let us not forget the enigmatic, puzzling nature of the text of Isaiah! Is that really what a verbally inspired, infallible **Bible** looks like?

Oswalt states that “This chapter has depicted a people who are the fulfilment of **Isaiah 6:9-10**. In contrast to Isaiah, who had acknowledged his sinful condition and had experienced gracious cleansing, this people has become increasingly blind, deaf, and fat-hearted at every new revelation of God. The result is that their sin cannot, and will not, be covered or atoned for. So then the promise of **Isaiah 6:11-13** can also be expected to be fulfilled.” (Pp. 414-15)

But we say, Be careful when you limit what the gracious love of God can and will do! Does the **Book of Isaiah** teach that Israel’s sin cannot and will not be covered / atoned for? **Isaiah 40:2** proclaims just the opposite, in spite of what this passage says!

Watts comments that “The address in **verses 9-14** has been consistently in second masculine plural. No names are used. The application would fit the entire government or royal house with its appointed officers, which in this case would be identical. This includes Hezekiah and the officials Eliakim, Shebna and Joah (**2 Kings 18:18**)...”

“It is interesting to note that this chapter continues the convention of the [**Book of Isaiah**] and does not mention Hezekiah’s name...The [**Book of Isaiah’s**] negative

(continued...)

⁵⁷(...continued)

attitude toward Hezekiah's era, as seen in **chapter 22**, contrasts with the positive views of **2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles**. Perhaps for this very reason it avoids naming the popular king by name; or, by naming his officials, Shebna and Eliakim, it implies that they must bear responsibility for the policies which they had persuaded the king to follow (compare prophecies in **Isaiah 3:4, 12**).

"In any case the scene does not picture the conclusion of the military confrontation. This was patently known to every Judean who heard (or read) the [**Book of Isaiah**]. Instead, it turns to God's word to Shebna and Eliakim." (P. 285)

Watts explains **verses 1-14** as follows: "The time approaches when the Assyrian armies will be at the gates (compare **Isaiah 36**). Hezekiah's government had been arming to prepare this bid for liberty for some three to four years. But then news came of Babylon's fall in 703 B.C.E. (**Isaiah 21**) and the perceptive in Jerusalem simply 'waited for the other shoe to drop.'

"Now the Assyrians with their polyglot armies of mercenaries and impressed [compelled to serve] troops were in the area. Jerusalem was in an uproar (**verse 2**), but it is difficult to tell whether it was from panic or jubilation. The naive bravado of pumped-up nationalism covered the nervous fears of the city. But the city had no reason to cheer. The first military encounters showed Judean soldiers unwilling to fight (**verse 2b**). They were captured in ignominious flight and made prisoner.

"The Assyrians made a show of force which promptly stripped Jerusalem of its forward defenses in the armed towns and villages near the border. They all surrendered (**verses 5-8a**). This left the city to fend for itself. The intensive military preparations of the past years had prepared for a very different kind of war with the enemy kept at a distance from the city by strong outposts of armed towns. Now, feverish preparations were required for the city to withstand a siege, as Jerusalem looked to its internal armaments (**verse 8b**).

"Whatever the population may have expected, government ministers were well aware of the weaknesses which their foolish bravado had now laid bare. Jerusalem was in no shape to withstand a siege. The population was undoubtedly swollen with refugees from the countryside. The major concern was for water (**verses 9-11a**)...The source for water lay outside the walls, vulnerable to any siege force. So now the government undertook heroic measures to improve the situation. But they showed no sign of understanding how wrong-headed their entire policy had been over some fifteen and more years. They still did not look to God Who made the city and its peoples long before (**verse 11b**).

"God was calling for repentance (**verse 12**) as He had through Isaiah (**chapter 20**) more than a decade before...On such a basis they could sue for peace from Sennacherib, pay tribute, and render faithful vassalage as they had in 712 B.C.E.

(continued...)

אִם-יִכְפַּר הָעֵוֹן הַזֶּה לָכֶם עַד-תָּמֹתוּן

אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת:

And it was uncovered in my ears (an oath by) YHWH of Armies:

This iniquity⁵⁸ will not be covered over⁵⁹ for you until you die!⁶⁰

⁵⁷(...continued)

“But just the opposite occurred. There was a celebration of the temporary liberty –all the more precious because it was unlikely to last (**verse 13**). The drunken show in the streets reflected the irresponsibility of the leaders. They were aware of the precarious nature of their venture. But, once again they had counted on Egypt. A new and nationalistic Pharaoh promised support. But what came was too little and too late.

“For the moment Sennacherib’s forces could concentrate on Jerusalem. Shebna felt an unforgivable guilt because of the matter.” (Pp. 285-86)

But, as we have previously noted, much of Watts’ interpretation is based on other passages—not on this text itself, which does not make matters nearly as specific as Watts does.

⁵⁸Alexander comments that “*this iniquity* of course means the presumptuous contempt of God’s messages and providential warnings with which the people had been charged.” (P. 385)

⁵⁹Alexander comments that “יִכְפַּר” [yekhuppar] strictly means *shall [not] be atoned for or expiated.*” (P. 385)

⁶⁰Slotki comments that this iniquity will not be expiated until death is “God’s message through the prophet...Only death will purge the sins from you. Others explain, ‘the punishment will be nothing less than death.’” (P. 102)

Alexander comments that “This offence is here treated as the sin against the Holy Ghost is in the **New Testament** [see **Mark 3:28-29**, **Matthew 12:31-32** and **Luke 12:10**], and is indeed very much of the same nature.”

He adds that “Some of the Jewish writers understand the words to mean at death but not before, and draw the inference that death does or may atone for sin. But the [Aramaic] Targum has the second death (מוֹתָא תַּיִנָּא), a phrase found also in the Greek of the **New Testament** (ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος [**Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8**]), and constantly employed in modern [mid-19th century] religious phraseology to signify eternal perdition. In this case, however, there is no ground for departing from the simple and ordinary meaning of the words, ‘As long as you live you shall not be forgiven,’ equivalent to saying, ‘you shall never be forgiven.’” (P. 385)

(continued...)

–said my Lord YHWH of Armies.⁶¹

⁶⁰(...continued)

Motyer likewise states that “The sin of unbelief—here expressed in ignoring the Lord (**verse 11b**) and confident self-reliance (**verses 8-11a**)—is the unforgivable sin. The whole passage is a set piece [a thing that has been carefully or elaborately planned or composed] on the contrast between salvation by faith and salvation by works.” (P. 186)

But if the sin of unbelief is “unforgivable,” how can the good news of **Isaiah 40:1-2** be understood?

1 Comfort! Comfort My people,
 says your (plural) God!
2 Speak to Jerusalem’s heart,
 and cry out to her,,
 that her warfare is complete,
 that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,
 that she received from YHWH’s hand double (punishment)
 for all her sins!

Shall we not understand that by YHWH’s grace, the unforgivable not only can be, but is forgiven? And is this not the good news that rings throughout the **New Testament**?

Motyer translates this phrase by “Till your dying day” / “Till you die,” and states that is “uses the oath formula (אִם) requiring ‘Certainly / I swear that...’” (P. 185)

We agree. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** states that the particle conjunction אִם, “if,” is used as “an oath (expressed, or merely implied) אִם (the formula of imprecation being omitted) becomes an emphatic negative, and אִם-לֹא, ‘if not,’ an emphatic affirmative.”

Oswalt states that the phrase *If this iniquity...* expresses the standard oath form of the **Old Testament**. As is typical, only the second half of the oath is preserved (**Isaiah 14:23; Deuteronomy 1:34; Jeremiah 22:7**, etc.).” (P. 415) We agree.

⁶¹Slotki observes that this last line is a “repetition of the first part of the verse for emphasis.” (P. 102)

This last line of **verse 14** in Hebrew, אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת, literally “He said, my Lord YHWH of Armies,” is omitted by **Rahlf**s.

⁶²Slotki comments on **verses 15-25** that they contain “Denunciation of Shebna, a powerful politician in the reign of Hezekiah, and his replacement by a worthier man.”

And while we have insisted that **verses 1-14** are enigmatic and puzzling concerning their time reference, we think it is indisputably clear that the time reference in **verses 15-25** is to the time of Hezekiah—who was king when Sennacherib’s army encircled Jerusalem, thus making it more probable that this may also be the time in which to place the first half of the chapter, and that therefore the “you” (masculine singular) in **verse 8** is referring to King Hezekiah (or possibly to his servant, Shebna).

Slotki comments on **verses 15-19** that they contain “Condemnation, deposition and exile of Shebna who held the influential office of vizier [high official].” (P. 102)

Gray entitles **verses 15-25** “The Disgrace of Shebna and the promotion of Eliakim.”

He comments that “This prophecy, which contains the only piece of personal invective ascribed to Isaiah...is addressed to Shebna (**Isaiah 36:3**), an official of high rank. It predicts his exile and death in a foreign land, **verses 15-18**, and the promotion to his office of Eliakim (**Isaiah 36:3**), of whom it is asserted, under the figure of a peg, firmly fastened, that he will be firmly established in his position, **verses 20-23**. In **verses 24-25** it is further predicted that the firmly secured ‘peg,’ weighted down by his family connections, will ignominiously fall and come to ruin...

“We thus have three stages to the future predicted: the fall of Shebna, the promotion of Eliakim to succeed him, and the fall of Eliakim...It is certainly improbable that a prophet should at the same moment, *in an address to the person to be deposed*, predict both the promotion and disgrace of his successor...Obscure clan struggles, or changing hopes, are elsewhere more or less clearly reflected in the text of the **Old Testament**.” (Pp. 374-75) See **Numbers 16** (Korah’s rebellion).

Gray entitles **verses 15-18** “A prediction of the disgrace, exile, and death of Shebna, the governor of the palace.” (P. 377)

Motyer entitles **verses 15-25** “A study in trust.” He comments that “It may seem a mighty come-down from the high matters of state to the concerns of individuals, but the oracles on Shebna and Eliakim (the only oracles on individuals in **chapters 13-27**) serve two purposes...

First, they show that the choice between faith and works is individual as well as national and that Divine judgment reaches to the individual level; and

Secondly, they provide one of Isaiah’s interim fulfillments. If the two men are those mentioned in **Isaiah 36:3, 11, 22; 37:2**, people had not long to wait before seeing

(continued...)

⁶²(...continued)

the beginning of the demotion of Shebna and the certainty of the word of the Lord.” (P. 186)

But where in Isaiah is this contrast between “faith and works” made explicit? This sounds like the arguments between the Churches of Christ and the Baptist Churches of my youth, or the arguments between Roman Catholics and Lutheran Protestants at the time of Luther—being read back into the **Book of Isaiah**. And where does the **Book of Isaiah** say anything about “interim fulfilments”? We think this is Motyer’s own invention, that Isaiah himself would question or not understand.

Motyer continues: “Shebna found his identity as a person in the ‘this-worldly’ benefits of his office, and he set about securing his ‘place in history’ by his own efforts. He enjoyed a position as the king’s right hand man *in charge of the palace* (**verse 15**). He went in for ostentatious display (splendid chariots; **verse 18**) and he intended to perpetuate his memory in a grandiose tomb (**verse 16**). He was, therefore, individually what the nation was collectively: wedded to present satisfactions and self-confident in the face of the future. Thus Isaiah holds up a mirror to his contemporaries.” (P. 186)

Again we wonder where Motyer got the phrase “this-worldly”? It is not Isaiah’s phrase, and sounds like a Christian theological term being read back into **Isaiah**. What do you think?

Motyer again continues: “Eliakim, in contrast, ran the risk of becoming the one whom others trust...and in this exposes another alternative to the way of true faith. The reliable office-holder attracts to himself the respect and confidence of people, but should this become a reliance on a human person replacing reliance on the Lord, the end is calamity (**verse 25**)—both for the person who is thus foolishly trusted and for those who find their security in him or her. Thus human beings are neither self-sufficient (Shebna) nor sufficient for others (Eliakim). In each case there is a fatal usurpation of the place due only to the Lord. Isaiah reiterates the message of **Isaiah 2:22**, ‘Stop trusting in man.’” (P. 186)

But is this the case? We say, Perhaps...or is Eliakim an example of “nepotism”?

Oswalt comments that “This segment serves to particularize the statements made concerning the nation in **verses 1-14**. Just as the nation had blinded itself in the face of death, choosing revelry instead of repentance, so this individual Judean, a high-office holder, has betrayed his office by attempting to memorialize himself in a lofty tomb. When he should be acting in the interests of his people, formulating far-seeing policies which will take all the factors, including God’s word [through the prophet], into account, he is instead looking to the immediate future and only as it bears on him...

“As a result, says Isaiah with biting words, God will toss him aside like a filthy rag and give his office to another, who will truly act as a father to the people, who will be

(continued...)

⁶²(...continued)

trustworthy and dependable. But even that man will not be able to save the nation single-handedly; ultimately the accumulated weight will pull him down in keeping with **verse 14.**” (P. 416)

Kaiser comments that “This text too faces the reader with a whole series of problems. Should he regard the whole of it, or at least **verses 15-23**, as composed by Isaiah? Or should he accept that it was composed in at least three stages, of which only the first, to be found in **verses 15-18**, goes back to Isaiah, whereas **verses 19-23** and particularly the last two prose **verses, 24-25** are later additions? Does the heading now occurring awkwardly at the end of **verse 15** and giving the impression of being originally a marginal gloss, correctly name the person to whom **verses 15-18** are addressed, or is it the result of a later speculation based on **2 Kings 18:18** and its parallel in **Isaiah 36:3**, either interpreting **verses 19-23** or perhaps even giving rise to them? And why did the prophet so passionately attack the court official? Was it simply his desire for status, expressed in the carving out of a tomb in the rock, and regarded by the prophet as so unseemly, or were there reasons of internal and external politics?” (P. 149)

He adds that in **verses 15-18** “we have a prophecy of warning and judgment, together with a reason, which is extraordinarily dramatic in its language, and directed against a Jerusalem court official who is not named.” (P. 150)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 15**, “*Thus said the Lord Jehovah of hosts, Go, go into this treasurer (or steward, or chamberlain), to Shebna who (is) over the house.*”

Oswalt comments that “Contrary to most commentators, it is plain from the opening that this pronouncement is not to be understood separately from **22:1-14**. It is not a separate oracle but is part of the total content of this chapter...The exact repetition of the description of God from **verse 14** reinforces the connection between the two segments. The Sovereign of the universe, the Master of the hosts of heaven, has something to say to one who styles himself as a somebody in the small circles of Judah.” (Pp. 417-18)

Oswalt observes that “Shebna is given without any father’s name, whereas Eliakim is always named with his father. This, plus the unusual form of the name, has prompted many commentators to conclude that Shebna was a commoner and perhaps a foreigner with no right to such a prominent burial spot...Isaiah is denouncing the tomb-building as a misplaced and self-serving priority.” (Pp. 418-19)

Watts states that **verses 15-18** are “clearly marked out from [their] surroundings and exhibit the characteristics of the ‘speech of a messenger’ (Westerman)...

(continued...)

לְדָבַר אֶל־הַסֵּכֵן הַזֶּה
עַל־שִׁבְנָא אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַבַּיִת:

In this way my Lord⁶³ YHWH of Armies spoke:

Go-come⁶⁴ to this steward / one being of service / benefit--⁶⁵

⁶²(...continued)

“Note that the first line of the speech parallels that in **22:1**...The same shock with which the question is asked in **verse 1** reappears in this question to Shebna. The outline:

- 15a Introductory formula ‘Thus says the Lord’
- 15b A kind of superscription: ‘Against Shebna’
- 15c Instruction to the prophet: ‘Go to,’ like instruction to a messenger
- 16 Accusation: ‘What are you doing here?’
- 17-18 Announcement of Yahweh’s judgment” (P. 289)

He comments on **verse 15** that “This is the first genuinely prophetic word in the chapter...As Elijah was sent to Ahab (**1 Kings 21:17-23**), so now one is sent to Shebna. The messenger (prophet) is unnamed. It may as well be Isaiah as anyone else, but the text does not specify.” (P. 290) Yes.

⁶³The Divine title אֲדֹנָי, ‘**adhonay**, “my Lord,” is omitted by two Hebrew manuscripts, and is also omitted by **Rahlfs**.

⁶⁴Alexander comments on this phrase of two words, לְדָבַר, **lek-bo**, “go... enter or go in, meaning into Shebna’s house, or into the sepulchre which he was preparing.” (P. 386)

See this exact phrase elsewhere at **2 Kings 5:5** and **Ezekiel 3:4**.

Gray comments that “We cannot infer that Isaiah was to seek Shebna in his house, or in the enclosed grave-ground, though **verse 16** would be particularly appropriate if addressed to him in the act of superintending the preparation of his costly tomb.” (P. 377)

⁶⁵Slotki comments on the phrase “this steward,” that “The demonstrative ‘this’ in the context is an expression of scorn.” (P. 102) Oswalt calls it “a contemptuous note.” (P. 418)

Alexander comments that “The word סֵכֵן [which we take to be a qal participle, meaning ‘one being of service, benefit’] has been variously derived and explained to mean a Sochenite (from *Sochen* in Egypt [so, John Gill]), a sojourner or dweller [from

(continued...)

against / to ⁶⁶ Shebna⁶⁷ who is over the house.⁶⁸

⁶⁵(...continued)

שָׁכֵן, ‘settle down,’ ‘dwell’] in the sanctuary, a steward or provider, a treasurer [King James], and a...king’s friend, i.e his confidant and counselor...But Shebna himself is undoubtedly the object of address in the remainder of this chapter. Whatever סֹכֵן may denote, it must be something compatible with the description in the last clause of the verse. Whatever Shebna may have been as סֹכֵן, he was certainly *over the house*.” (P. 386)

Gray states that “In Phoenician the term was used of important officers or deputies of the king...In Hebrew, too, this honorable sense may have attached to the word, and the term, like the English *minister* in its political usage, may have been applied quite respectfully to the highest officers of state.” (P. 377)

Oswalt likewise states that “The exact meaning of ‘steward’ (סֹכֵן, **sokhen**) is not clear since it occurs only here in [the **Hebrew Bible**]. However, the appearance of cognates [related, connected words] in other Semitic languages indicates that this was a very high official in the government, perhaps only second to the king...At any rate, it is clear that the ‘one over the house’ [compare **1 Kings 4:6; 16:9; 18:3; 2 Kings 15:5**] did function as prime minister in Judah, so it seems evident that God is tracing the rot among His people to the very highest levels.” (P. 418)

⁶⁶Watts notes that the preposition עַל, ‘al, which he translates by “against,” “defines the nature of the mission ‘to’ the steward.” (P. 287) Yes...but in the later Hebrew documents prepositions begin to lose their unique meanings, and oftentimes seem to be interchanged with one another.

⁶⁷Gray states that “It is commonly assumed that Shebna was a foreigner, but the assumption is unsafe...That he was a *parvenu* [French--a person from usually a low social position who has recently or suddenly become wealthy, powerful, or successful but who is not accepted by other wealthy people] is a safer inference, for between two other officers whose fathers’ names are given, he stands without his father’s name (**Isaiah 36:3** and elsewhere).” (P. 377)

The name Shebna appears frequently in a longer form שְׁבַנְיָהוּ, **Shebhanyahu** (**1 Chronicles 15:24**); שְׁבַנְיָה, **Shebhanyah** (**Nehemiah 9:4; 10:11, 13**).

Kaiser comments on **verse 15** that “It is clearly important to Isaiah that his readers, like the steward, should be in no doubt that he has come out to meet the powerful official not on his own initiative and because of his own antipathy to him, but because he is carrying out a direct command from God. If...he spoke his words to the

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official in the name of Yahweh Sebaoth, he no doubt intended to remind him that over him who was powerful there was One more powerful still...

“We must assume that Isaiah sought out the official either in his palace or in fact up the hillside in his tomb, where he would have wished to supervise the work.” (Pp. 152-53)

⁶⁸Slotki holds that the phrase “over the house” has reference to “the royal palace.” “A less probable alternative is ‘the temple.’” (P. 102) We think another alternative is “the household.”

Alexander comments that “Some of the ancient versions give to *house* here the sense of *temple* or the house of God, and infer that Shebna, if not High Priest or a Priest at all, was at least the treasurer of the temple. But the phrase here used is nowhere else employed in reference to the temple, whereas it repeatedly occurs as the description of an officer of state or of the royal household, major-domo [chief steward of a large household], chamberlain, or steward...It is not unlikely that the functionary thus described...was in fact prime minister...

“These familiar allusions to things and persons now forgotten, while they add to the obscurity of the passage, furnish an incidental proof of its antiquity and genuineness.” (P. 386)

Gray states that “The palace, not the temple [Latin Vulgate] is meant. Great private persons might appoint persons ‘over their house,’ and the position of such persons was one of great trust and influence (compare **Genesis 39:4; 44:1,4** [Joseph appointed to be ‘over Potiphar’s house’]; persons appointed over the king’s house, governors of the palace, naturally enough ranked as a high, if not the highest, officer of state.” (P. 378)

Watts states that the phrase “who is over the house,” is “the title of a ranking member of government under the king...It is used first in Solomon’s list of officials (**1 Kings 4:6**) where it has an unimportant position. Ahishar [**1 Kings 4:6**, in Solomon’s time] was apparently the *major domo* only...By Hezekiah’s time the position had grown in importance in much the same way that Joseph’s grew under Pharaoh (**Genesis 40-44; 45:8**)...

“Shebna’s position must have been very much like that of a vizier [highest official] in Egypt. ‘All affairs of the land passed through his hands, all important documents received his seal, all the officials were under his orders. He really governed in Pharaoh’s name...’ [quoting Roland de Vaux, **Ancient Israel**, p. 130). ‘He was over the household, governing the people of the land.’ [quoting H. J. Katzenstein and T.N.D. Mettinger].” (P. 290)

(continued...)

⁶⁸(...continued)

He also notes that “Gesenius says two Hebrew manuscripts add the phrase ‘and you shall say to him’...at the end of **verse 15**. **Rahlfs**...has this addition [καὶ εἰπὸν αὐτῷ, ‘and say to him.’” (P. 288)

⁶⁹Alexander translates **verse 16**: “*What hast thou here, and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewn thee here a sepulchre? Hewing on high his sepulchre, graving in the rock a habitation for himself!*”

He comments that “The negation implied in the interrogation is not that he had none to protect and aid him, or that none of his kindred should be buried there because they should be banished with him, but rather that he had none buried there before him; it was not his birth-place, or the home of his fathers. What interest, what part or lot, what personal or hereditary claim hast thou in Judah?...”

“*Here* then refers not to the sepulchre, but to Jerusalem. The foreign form of the name *Shebna*, which occurs only in the history of Hezekiah, and for which no satisfactory Hebrew etymology has been proposed, seems to confirm this explanation of the first clause as representing him as a foreigner, perhaps a heathen...”

“The prophet is directed to upbraid him, not with seeking to be buried in the royal sepulchres although of mean extraction, but with making provision for himself and his posterity in a land to which he was an alien...The prophet, after putting to him the prescribed question, [expressed] his own contemptuous surprise at what he saw.” (Pp. 386-87) Perhaps...But does the text explicitly identify Shebna as “an alien”?

Gray comments that **verse 16** depicts “the intolerable insolence of Shebna. He is preparing a tomb for himself where he has no right, or family claim. Not in a tomb in the height, such as received the bodies of kings...but down in the valley among the graves of the common people...would have been the fitting place for this man, whose father was unknown (**Isaiah 36:3**)...”

“It is the place, perhaps also the fact that Shebna prepares the tomb himself in his lifetime, that rouses ire.” (P. 378)

Oswalt states that “It is likely that the tomb was being built on the hillside across the Kidron east of David’s City where the village of Silwan is now located. A number of fine rock-cut tombs exist there, including the one attributed to Solomon’s wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. In fact, it is possible that Shebna’s particular tomb has been discovered in that area. Clermont-Ganneau gave the first report of the find in 1871, and in 1953 N. Avigad published a translation of the inscription, identifying the tomb as belonging to ‘[.....] yahu, who is over the house.’ (See Avigad, ‘Epitaph of a Royal Steward,’ **Israel Exploration Journal** 3, 1953, 137-152. He argues on the basis of epigraphy for a date about 700 B.C.E. and guardedly favors reading the name as Shebanyahu.) While this suggestion is very tantalizing, it must be borne in mind that

(continued...)

וּמִי לְיָהּ פֶּה
כִּי־חֲצַבְתָּ לְיָהּ פֶּה קֶבֶר

⁶⁹(...continued)

names ending in -yah(u) were exceedingly common in biblical times and that there may have been several stewards who bore this kind of name.” (P. 419)

Wikipedia states, “Another notable tomb, called the Tomb of the Royal Steward, is now incorporated into a modern-period house in the main street of the village of Silwan. At one point plastered for use as a cistern, in 1968 it was in use as a storage room. It was discovered in 1874 by Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau.

“The ancient inscription reads “This is the tomb of [...]yahu who is over the house. No silver or gold is here but (his bones) and the bones of his Amma. Cursed be the man who opens this.” The first part of the Hebrew name is effaced, but it refers to a Judean royal steward or chamberlain. Clermont-Ganneau shipped the tomb inscription to the British Museum, but it was only deciphered in the 1950s by Nahman Avigad.

“Some scholars believe that this is the tomb of the biblical Shebna, the steward and treasurer of King Hezekiah (727-698 B.C.E.). It is thought that at the relevant time the same name could be written with or without the ending -yahu, thus allowing Shebanyahu as a variation of Shebna. According to David Ussishkin, the tomb contained two chambers, the outer chamber with a probable double bench for the occupant and his wife, and an inner chamber with a single burial bench for a relative who may be referred to in the second inscription fragment.” (10/22/2016)

Kaiser, having evaluated such claims, states that “The grave in *silwan*, which was carefully marked out from the surrounding rocks, and consisted of a chamber hewn into the stone and a rectangular doorway, no doubt originally was fitted with a fine stone door, and possessed a false window with a small rectangular hole for light and air, gives us only an impression of how we are to think of the official’s grave.” (P. 152)

Watts comments that “In this episode (a scene which deserves to be remembered beside ‘Nero fiddled while Rome burned’) the prime minister chooses the moment when Jerusalem’s citizens are frantically arming for a last-ditch stand against the invaders [that is, if the last half of the chapter is tied to the first half, which is questionable] to visit the elaborate mausoleum [a large and stately building, housing a tomb] he was preparing for himself in the royal cemetery. The question conveys the horror at his presumption, along with the irony of this action at this time by this official. Such is the character of the chief administrator of Hezekiah’s regime...

“The question remains: What is Shebna, Jerusalem’s ranking official, doing out there at this time? This may compare with the most scandalous revelations of investigative reporting in another age. Why should he be preoccupied with dignity in death, while most people in Jerusalem were still hoping to live? [or, if the two parts of the chapter are intimately connected, ‘expecting to die the next day!’]” (P. 291)

חֲצִבִּי מָרוֹם קְבֻרוֹ
חֲקִי בְּסֵלַע מִשְׁכַּן לִו:

What belongs to you (singular) here?⁷⁰

And who belongs to you here?⁷¹

⁷⁰Where our Hebrew text reads מַה־לְךָ, “What to you / What do you have?”, 1QIs^a combines the two words into one מַה־לְךָ, probably a piel participle meaning “coming (here).”

Slotki comments that this means “What claims or rights have you, a foreign adventurer, here?” He adds that “The form of Shebna’s name seems to indicate that he was an Aramean.” (P. 103) Seems to...but not for sure.

Gray translates by *What hast thou here*, and states that this means, “What right have you to be doing what you are doing here? None. The land is not yours by inheritance.” (P. 378)

Kaiser comments that “We can assume that the prophet carried out the task given to him and met the high official face to face. The word ‘here’ in **verse 16** suggests that the encounter took place outside the city beside the grave, which was perhaps not yet finished, on one of the slopes east of the valley of Kidron.” (P. 150)

⁷¹Slotki states that the question, “Whom has thou here” [means] “You have not even one relative among the nobility or the higher classes of society.” (P. 103)

Motyer comments that “The first interrogative (מַה, mah, what?) questions Shebna’s personal right, the second (מִי, miy, who?) implicitly denies him a position by reason of family name.” (P. 187)

Oswalt states that the two questions “are construed by some as evidence that Isaiah is questioning a commoner’s right to a great tomb among the nobility. On this reading the prophet is asking what ancestors Shebna has there in the necropolis [city of the dead / cemetery]...

“It is also possible that he is merely using a challenging form of address to ask what the prime minister is doing there and who sent him there when he should be tending to the critical condition of the nation (compare **Judges 18:3; 1 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 3:15; 22:1; 52:5** [but these passages are only examples of questioning what someone is doing—and say nothing concerning Shebna’s position or duties]).” (P. 419)

(continued...)

Because you hewed out for yourself here a tomb--⁷²

one hewing out on high his tomb,⁷³

one cutting out a dwelling-place⁷⁴ for himself.⁷⁵

⁷¹(...continued)

And we question whether Shebna (and Eliakim) should be given the title “prime minister,” as Oswalt does. Perhaps so...but the text does not make this explicit.

⁷²Slotki holds that “here” means “among the sepulchres of the aristocracy.” (P. 103)

Motyer holds that the literal translation, “one hewing his grave...!” “has the force in context of ‘that you should arrogate to yourself the right to be one who...’ It is precisely his self-sufficiency and pompous self-importance that integrates this passage topically with **verses 1-15.**” (P. 187) Perhaps...but Motyer is accustomed to reading ideas and thoughts into the text that are not actually found there.

⁷³Slotki comments that “on high” is “perhaps literally, on a hill or mountain. The Hebrew may also signify ‘among the great.’ What Shebna was doing evidenced his presumption and arrogance.” (P. 103)

Alexander comments that מָרוֹם, **marom**, “is properly a noun, and means a high place, but is here and elsewhere used adverbially. The labor and expense bestowed on ancient sepulchres (of far later date however than Isaiah’s time) is still [in the mid-nineteenth century] attested by the tombs remaining at Jerusalem, Petra, and Persepolis, where some are excavated near the tops of lofty rocks in order to be less accessible, to which practice there may be allusion in the מָרוֹם of [this verse].” (P. 387)

⁷⁴Alexander comments that מִשְׁכָּן, **mishkan** “is supposed by some to have allusion to the oriental practice of making tombs in the shape (and frequently in size) like houses, by others more poetically to the idea of the grave, as a long home (בֵּית עוֹלָם [house of long-lasting time].” (P. 387) Compare **Isaiah 14:18**,

All kings of (the) nations, all of them,
lay down in glory,
each one in his house / tomb [בְּבֵיתוֹ].

⁷⁵The change of personal pronouns is notable. Up to the last two lines, the address to Shebna has been in the second person: you...you...you. But now Shebna is referred to in the third person, “hewing out on high his tomb,” instead of “hewing out on high your tomb,” and “cutting out a dwelling-place for himself,” instead of “cutting out a dwelling-place for yourself.” The direct address ends with the first three lines, and the

(continued...)

⁷⁵(...continued)

last two lines are simply an observation of what Shebna is doing, not spoken directly to him.

Rahfs translates this line by καὶ ἔγραψας σεαυτῷ ἐν πέτρᾳ σκηνήν, “and you wrote of / made an inscription for yourself in a stone tent,” keeping up the second person.

Oswalt comments that “*He hews...he cuts* seems to be in the third person for emphasis. These words may have been addressed to a surrounding crowd or simply to the elements, calling on them to look at the outrageous behavior (compare **Isaiah 1:2**). Probably Shebna had come out from the city in a handsomely equipped chariot (**verse 18**) to survey the work on his memorial. He may have been feeling particularly expansive and pleased with himself. If so, these biting words must have been especially humiliating. This kind of experience was typical of the prophets: when they were least wanted, in moments of fear or pride or self-sufficiency, that was the moment they appeared.” (P. 419)

We are reminded of Elijah’s sudden appearance to King Ahab in **1 Kings 18**.

Kaiser comments that “The reproach contained in **verse 16** is not immediately comprehensible to us. Why should a man who possesses the means not prepare a fine grave on the rocky slopes outside the city, and indeed allow himself at the last to be cast into the pit for common people (compare **2 Kings 23:6**)? The prophet’s angry double question challenges the official’s right to such a grave in the rock. The suggestion that the cause lies only in the man’s humble origin, and in his being regarded as a mere *parvenu* [person from low social position who has gained wealth], does not really seem to do justice to the angry tone of the question and the concluding charge that he is shaming his master...

“Perhaps the most likely [interpretation] is that the double question is posed to a foreigner who had no real claim on the people and the country. But it is also necessary to assume that for Isaiah the news of the construction of the grave is only the final act on the part of a man whose attitude and conduct in office he rejected. A word of God came to the prophet, probably like lightning, as far as his subjective experience was concerned, but we must assume that his mind was in some way prepared for it. What was it in the foreigner which had disturbed Isaiah? Was it merely his ostentation [pretentious display], his liking for showing himself to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in a ceremonial chariot, or were there more serious charges in the background?

“According to **verse 17** Isaiah regarded the ‘governor’ [is the one ‘over the house’ the ‘governor’?] as a louse on his people’s skin. Was he then one of those who by ‘iniquitous decrees’ and ‘regulations of suffering’ (compare **Isaiah 10:1** [‘Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression’], perhaps by the introduction of a new land law which was to the disadvantage of the

(continued...)

⁷⁵(...continued)

poor, was dishonestly lining his own pocket?... Isaiah's passionate feeling can be detected, but the reason for it is lost in the mists of time." (Pp. 153-54)

The text does not answer these questions which Kaiser raises.

However, this text should serve, we think, as a starting-point for discussion of our modern funeral industry, with its oftentimes outrageous fees for disposing of human bodies—especially when the body can be donated for medical research, and organs can save the lives of others. What do you think? What are your plans for what will happen to your body when you die?

⁷⁶Oswalt comments on **verses 17-18** that “the language of these two verses is very difficult, but the sense seems clear enough. Instead of being buried in a lovely memorial in Judah, fit for a great man, Shebna will be tossed away like a filthy rag to die unheralded in a foreign land.” (P. 420) Perhaps...but it appears the text is talking about a “ball,” not a “filthy rag.”

Watts states concerning these two verses that “Yahweh’s personal fury exhausts the prophet’s language potential as Isaiah portrays him seizing Shebna and throwing him out, like a ball, into open country (i.e., away from the capital city), to die with his chariot, useless, alone, meaningless without the rank it symbolized—a disgrace to the royal house he served.

“What exactly was Shebna’s crime? Kaiser relates it to Isaiah’s concern for justice and thinks of exploiting the poor...but looks to pride in office beyond that. Clements emphasizes ‘the pretensions of a prominent tomb for himself’...J. M. Ward... stresses Shebna’s identification with anti-Assyrian policies. Wildberger...combines the shock at his pride with recognition of...a political stand of public ruin.’

“The context sets the stage: **verse 4**, the recognition of the result of destructive policies, **verses 9-11**, emphasis on armament and military preparation rather than God’s purposes, **verse 13**, failure to repent and insistence on futile heroics in the face of an overwhelming enemy. These were the faults of the government. Now Shebna’s callous attention to preparation of his elaborate mausoleum adds the last straw.” (P. 291)

Translations of **verse 17** vary greatly, as the speech returns to second person pronouns:

King James, “Behold, the LORD will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee.”

Tanakh, “The LORD is about to shake you Severely, fellow, and then wrap you around Himself.”

(continued...)

⁷⁶(...continued)

New Revised Standard, “The LORD is about to hurl you away violently, my fellow. He will seize firm hold on you”;

New International, “Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, you mighty man.”

New Jerusalem, “But Yahweh will throw you away, strong as you are, will grasp you in his grip”;

Rahfs, ἰδοὺ δὴ κύριος σαβαωθ ἐκβαλεῖ καὶ ἐκτρίψει ἄνδρα καὶ ἀφελεῖ τὴν στολήν σου, “Look now—Lord Sabaoth will throw out, and wipe out a man, and will take away your robe.”

Slotki, “Behold, the Lord will hurl thee up and down with a man’s throw; Yea, He will wind thee round and round.”

Alexander, “Behold, Jehovah is casting thee a cast, O man! and covering thee a covering.”

Kaiser, “Behold, Yahweh will shake you out, as one shakes out a garment, and rids oneself vigorously of lice!”

For similar language, compare **Jeremiah 22:24-26**,

- 24 As I live—a saying of YHWH—
that if Coniah, son of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, should be
a seal / signet-ring upon My right hand—
that from there I will pull you (off)!
- 25 And I will give you into (the) hand of those seeking your life,
and into (the) hand which you were dreading before them,
and into (the) hand of Nebuchadrezzar,
and into (the) hand of the Chaldeans!
- 26 And I will hurl / throw you and your mother who gave you birth,
into the other land,
where you (plural) were not given birth;
and there, you will die!

Kaiser comments on **verse 17** that “Whereas the ‘governor’ feels himself extraordinarily secure in Jerusalem and unassailable in his office, Isaiah regards him as in Yahweh’s eyes no more than a louse, which one tries to shake out of one’s clothes. Yahweh will seize him like a little ball quickly rolled together from scraps of cloth, and hurl him far out of Jerusalem into a ‘doubly wide’ land, that is, a country spreading out in both directions, by which perhaps Assyria may be intended. The official who imagines himself so secure here will one day have to go into exile, to die there far from his honored grave. And the same will be true of the things which he is now so proud. They too will be carried off into the far country as the victor’s booty. What Isaiah thinks of the man who drives about in the ceremonial chariot he tells him once again to his face, directly insulting him: he is in fact a shame upon the house of his master. He does not bring his king honor, as one ought to expect of a reliable minister, but shame.” (P. 154)

(continued...)

וְעִטָּךְ עֵטָה:

Look—YHWH is certainly hurling you away, a (strong) man!⁷⁷

And (He is) certainly taking hold of you!⁷⁸

22:18⁷⁹ צָנֹף יִצְנַףּ יִצְנַףּ צִנְפָה

⁷⁶(...continued)

Kaiser goes on to state that this is an enriching picture of Isaiah the prophet. “The prophet did not appear only before his people as a whole, gathered in the sanctuary, or, as the secondary tradition tells us, before their kings, but also before individuals, in order to hold up to them the mirror of the truth of God, in which man is bound to see himself very poorly reflected.” (P. 155)

⁷⁷Gray translates this phrase by “Yahweh will hurl, will hurl thee, O mighty man.” (P. 379)

Watts states that “*Mighty man* translates גִּבּוֹר, **geber** a man according to his power...But that is nothing when God takes hold of him. **Psalm 52** describes such a hero who is snatched and torn from his tent.” (P. 291)

52:7^{Heb} / 5^{Eng} Also Supreme God / El will pull you down to the perpetuity;
He will snatch you up and He will tear you from a tent,
and He will uproot you from (the) land of (the) living. Selah

⁷⁸Slotki comments that the text can be translated “will fling thee forth violently, O thou man.’ Shebna will be deprived both of position and influence.” (P. 103)

Alexander explains that the infinitives used add emphasis to the “idea that He is *certainly* about to cast and cover thee, or to do it *completely* and with violence...”

“The natural order [is:] First he is thrown upon the ground, then rolled into a ball, and then violently thrown away...The first denotes the imposition of a covering or wrapper, and the second the formation of the whole into a regular and compact shape...the throwing of a man is the very thing here likened to the throwing of a ball.” (Pp. 387-88)

Oswalt notes that “The verbs here are participles, expressing both immediacy and certainty.” (P. 415)

Gray explains that Shebna “had been the *shame* of his *master’s*, the king of Judah’s *house*. But how? By fostering the Egyptian alliance [there is nothing said concerning an Egyptian alliance in this text]? Therefore he is to die far away in the wide plains of Babylon, *the land stretching far in both directions.*” (P. 379)

⁷⁹Translations of **verse 18** vary:

(continued...)

⁷⁹(...continued)

King James, “He will surely violently turn and toss thee *like* a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory *shall be* the shame of thy lord's house.”

Tanakh, “Indeed, He will wind you about Him as a headdress, a turban. Off to a broad land! There shall you die, and there shall be the chariots bearing your body, O shame of your master's house!”

New Revised Standard, “whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die, and there your splendid chariots shall lie, O you disgrace to your master's house!”

New International, “He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there the chariots you were so proud of will become a disgrace to your master's house.”

New Jerusalem, “will screw you up into a ball, a ball thrown into a vast space. There you will die, with your splendid chariots, disgrace to your master's palace!”

Rahfs, καὶ τὸν στέφανόν σου τὸν ἔνδοξον καὶ ρίψει σε εἰς χώραν μεγάλην καὶ ἀμέτρητον καὶ ἐκεῖ ἀποθανῆ καὶ θήσει τὸ ἄρμα σου τὸ καλὸν εἰς ἀτιμίαν καὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ ἄρχοντός σου εἰς καταπάτημα “and the crown of yours, the glorious one, and he will throw you into a great and immeasurable country, and there you will die. And he will place / make the fine chariot of yours into dishonor, and the house of your ruler into a trodden down (place.)”

Slotki, “He will violently roll and toss thee Like a ball into a large country; There shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory.”

Alexander, “Rolling he will roll thee in a roll, like a ball (thrown) into a spacious ground—there shalt thou die—and there the chariots of thy glory—shame of thy master's house.”

Kaiser, “He will roll you up into a little ball, like a ball into a wide and broad land. Die there! Away there with your ceremonial chariots, You shame of your master's house!”

Alexander comments that “The ejection of Shebna from the country is compared to the rolling [?] of a ball into an open space where there is nothing to obstruct its progress. The ideas suggested are those of violence, rapidity, and distance...All the interpreters appear to apply this directly to Shebna, and are thence led to raise the question, what land is meant? Some say Assyria, some Mesopotamia...[others say] the wilderness [or] the open fields outside Jerusalem where lepers were obliged to dwell.” (P. 388)

Oswalt comments on **verse 18** that “Who is a mighty man in comparison to God? All his pomp and glory are nothing but filthy rags.

“*He will surely wind you into a winding* is three words in Hebrew, all three of which have the root **תָּנַף**, **tsnaph**. God will take the rag that is Shebna and twist it up into an insignificant wad...like a ball [there is no verb in the Hebrew text] into a broad land...

(continued...)

כִּדְּוֹר אֶל-אֶרֶץ רַחֲבַת יָדַיִם

שְׂמָה תִּמְוֹת

וְשְׂמָה מִרְכָּבוֹת כְּבוֹדֶךָ

קָלוֹן בֵּית אֲדַנְיָהּ:

Wrapping up He will wrap you up,⁸⁰ a wrapping,

like the ball (thrown) into a land of wide borders.⁸¹

There you shall die,⁸²

⁷⁹(...continued)

“When **verses 17** and **18** are taken together...the sense may be as follows: ‘He will hurl you, having seized you and wadded you up like a ball, into a broad land.’ The broad land (literally ‘broad of two hands’)...would seem to apply most naturally to Assyria with its broad plains.” (P. 420)

⁸⁰Slotki translates by “He will violently roll,” and states that “The verb is found elsewhere only in **Leviticus 16:4**, ‘wind a turban around the head.’ The literal rendering is ‘He will entirely wind thee with a winding.’” (P. 103)

⁸¹The phrase in Hebrew is רַחֲבַת יָדַיִם, literally “(into a land) wide of two hands,” and Watts thinks this means “to the left hand and to the right hand” (p. 288), that is in both directions.

Slotki comments that the “large country” is “probably Assyria, a country of larger size than Judah, with more scope for the exercise of his talents. The language is sarcastic. Shebna will be banished from the land of Judah before he could carry out his dangerous plans.” (P. 103)

Watts states that “A *land wide on both sides* has been taken to refer to Mesopotamia...[and] to the Mediterranean coast. The term is not specific enough for the interpretations laid on it.” (P). 292)

⁸²Oswalt comments on the phrase “There you shall die,” that it means “Not here in dignity and honor, but there in disgrace and ignominy [public shame, disgrace].” (P. 420) Compare **Jeremiah 22:26**, as quoted in footnote 76, where a closely similar statement is made to Coniah.

“Jechoniah was a king of Judah who was dethroned by the King of Babylon in the 6th century B.C.E. and was taken into captivity. He was the son and successor of King Jehoiakim. Most of what is known about Jechoniah is found in the **Hebrew Bible**. Records of Jeconiah's existence have been found in Iraq, such as the ‘Jehoiachin's

(continued...)

and there your chariots of your honor,⁸³

(You) shame (to) your master's house!⁸⁴

22:19⁸⁵ וְהִדְפַתִּיךָ מִמִּצְבֶּיךָ

⁸²(...continued)

Rations Tablets.' These tablets were excavated near the Ishtar Gate in Babylon and have been dated to about 592 B.C.E. Written in cuneiform, they mention Jeconiah and his five sons as recipients of food rations in Babylon. Comparing Babylonian records with date references found in Hebrew biblical texts, the length of Jeconiah's captivity can accurately be determined." (**Wikipedia**, 10/29/2016)

⁸³Oswalt states that the phrase *there your chariots will be* may indicate that Shebna had some special responsibility for the chariotry...But equally likely Isaiah may have been pointing to the matched team and lovely chariot in which the steward had driven out from the city." (Pp. 420-21)

Rahfs translates by the singular, τὸ ἄρμα σου τὸ καλόν, "the chariot of yours, the fair one." Watts notes that "Chariots were used as vehicles for persons of rank." (P. 288)

⁸⁴Slotki states that Shebna's "lord" was Hezekiah, the king of Judah. (P. 103)

Alexander concludes his discussion of this verse by stating, "All that the prophet clearly threatens Shebna with, is the loss of rank and influence in Judah, and a return to his own country." (Pp. 388-89)

But does the text say "in his own country"? And is that all? The verse states that Shebna will die in "a wide land," obviously threatening him with death.

Gray states that "The main point of **verses 16-18**, which clearly is that Shebna is to die, not in honor in Palestine, but in dishonor in Babylon [no—the text does not mention Babylon]; note the repeated *there* in **verse 18**, emphatically pointing the contrast to the repeated *here* of **verse 16**." (P. 380)

⁸⁵Kaiser entitles **verses 19-23** "The servant of Yahweh." He comments that "According to **verse 20b** it refers to the chamberlain, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, whom we know from **2 Kings 18:18 / Isaiah 36:3** and **2 Kings 19:2 / Isaiah 37:2**." (P. 155)

Alexander translates **verse 19**: "And it shall come to pass in that day that I will call for my servant, for Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah." He comments that this means the one calling for Eliakim "will personally designate him."

He adds that "The epithet *my servant* seems to be intended to describe him as a faithful follower of Jehovah, and, as such, to contrast him with Shebna, who may have been a heathen." (P. 389) But notice Alexander's use of the words "seems" and

(continued...)

וּמִמַּעַמְדֶּךָ יִהְיֶה יְהוָה:

And I will thrust you from your office / station,
and from your position you will be pulled down!⁸⁶

22:20⁸⁷ וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַהוּא

⁸⁵(...continued)

“may”—again indications of the enigmatic nature of the text, which leaves many questions unanswered concerning Shebna and Eliakim.

Watts states that “**Verse 19** has the king’s [the king is not mentioned in the text] measured words that demote Shebna. They, like **verse 8a**, are transitional, opening the way for the announcement that comes in **verses 20-24** of Eliakim’s appointment in Shebna’s place.” (P. 289)

Gray sums up **verse 19**: “Shebna will be deposed and his office become vacant for (**verses 20-21**) another to fill...[In the phrase] *And I will thrust* the pronoun must refer to Yahweh.” (P. 380)

Oswalt states, “Whatever the ultimate results of Shebna’s pride might be, the immediate results were clear: he would lose his position ‘over the house,’ a prediction which **Isaiah 36:3, 22** seem to indicate was fulfilled.” (P. 421)

Watts states that “The indirect speech through the prophet changes [in **verse 19**] to the king’s direct speech. In more restrained tones he announces demotion from his high position. A spokesman echoes the decree.” (P. 292)

The text does not identify the speaker, and so commentators choose between the king, and YHWH, and the prophet.

⁸⁶Slotki comments on **verse 19** that “The change of person is rather difficult; an instance of it occurred in **Isaiah 10:12**. The first half of the verse seems to be spoken by God, and *shalt thou be pulled down* is literally ‘he (unspecified subject) will pull thee down.’” (Pp. 103-04)

Oswalt notes that “The shift in pronouns seems to be rather typical of prophetic speech. The prophet varies in the degree of identification that he feels with God.” (P. 416)

⁸⁷Watts comments on **verses 20-24** that “The king’s [?] speech continues, but no longer addresses Shebna directly, as he speaks of his successor, Eliakim. What follows is the fullest description of this position of honor and authority that exists in [the **Bible**].” (P. 289)

Oswalt states that in **verses 20-24** the focus now shifts to Eliakim, Shebna’s successor...Eliakim would be marked by dependability and faithfulness, characteristics

(continued...)

וְקִרְאֹתַי לְעַבְדֵי
לְאֵלִיכִים בְּיַחַד לְקִיָּהוּ:

And it will happen on that day,⁸⁸

⁸⁷(...continued)

conspicuously absent from Shebna's description." (P. 421)

Slotki comments on **verses 20-23** that they depict "The promotion and installation of Eliakim, God's *servant*, as successor to Shebna." (P. 104)

The fact that a political figure such as Eliakim can be designated as YHWH's "servant" is of importance as we come to **chapters 40-55** with their emphasis on the "servant of YHWH," and their identification of Israel as that servant.

YHWH's "servant" is the public official who is the opposite of Shebna, with his self-serving, egotistical attitude.

Oswalt concurs with this judgment, stating that "*My servant* is of course a title of great significance in the **Book of Isaiah** as a whole. It is applied first to Isaiah in **20:3**, then to Israel in **chapters 40-55**, as well as to the unnamed suffering servant, and finally, it is applied again to Israel in **chapters 65** and **66**...

"Although the term obviously involves obligation, even more it expresses privilege. Those who belong to God, who are instruments in His hand, are those who experience the fruits of His love and grace." (Pp. 421-22) None of this is made explicit in the text.

Alexander translates **verse 20**: "*And I will thrust thee from thy post, and from thy station shall he pull thee down.*"

He comments that "The verb in the last clause is indefinite, and really equivalent to a passive (thou shalt be pulled down)." (P. 389)

⁸⁸It is easy for biblical students to take a phrase like this as pointing to the distant future. But notice how the phrase refers to a very short time in the future, when Eliakim takes the place of Shebna.

Kaiser, however, thinks that beginning with **verse 20**, "[using] the favorite formula of introduction for additions with an eschatological content [pointing to the time of the 'end'], a devout writer living well into the post-exilic period, or even in the Hellenistic period [after Alexander the Great], and looking forward to the coming of the Messianic age after the fall of the foreign nations, begins his prophecy of salvation...

(continued...)

and I will call to My servant,⁸⁹
to Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah,⁹⁰

⁸⁸(...continued)

“Because of its content it can best be described as an investiture [a ceremony at which honors or rank are formally conferred on a particular person] or an inauguration oracle...When [Shebna] is driven out of Jerusalem by Yahweh, and the kingdom of peace of the king from the line of David is set up there, like his predecessors in the past and all the great ones of the earth, it will have a court, headed by a deputy or vizier, whose qualities must correspond to those of the coming prince of peace...

“Thus ‘in that day’...after the fall of the governor...Yahweh will Himself call to this office a man submissive and obedient to Him, His servant (compare **Numbers 12:7** [Moses] and **Isaiah 42:1** [YHWH’s servant, who brings forth justice to the nations]).” (Pp. 156-57)

Surely, Kaiser is reading all of this into the text, where not a word to this effect is found!

⁸⁹Slotki insists that Eliakim “was the servant of the Lord (*my* should not be printed *My*); Shebna served his own interests. In **Isaiah 36:3** Eliakim is said to be *over the household* of Hezekiah.” (P. 104) Meaning, we take it, that Eliakim’s “lord” was king Hezekiah, not YHWH. But we think the text attributes these statements to YHWH—perhaps through Isaiah—but not to Hezekiah! See the end of **verse 25**.

⁹⁰Kaiser comments that the name Eliakim, “whose name we find on an impression taken from a seal, seems to have administered the properties of King Jehoiachin even after the latter had been deported [to Babylon].” (P. 155)

For a Christian archaeological denial of this claim, see the article by Steve Rudd, “Misidentified: ‘Belonging to Jotham’ and ‘Belonging to Eliakim servant ...’ on the Internet. Rudd concludes that:

1. The Seal of "Eliakim na-ar Yokan" is found on many jars in many archeological sites and were all produced with the same clay in the same location in 701 BC.
 - a. This is quite an incredible fact and perhaps one day we will have a better understanding as to who, why and where this seal was placed on pottery handles.
 - b. It is still unclear which is the best explanation for all the problems connected with the royal jars, the private stamps, and the Eliakim na-ar Yokan impressions...The Eliakim na'ar Yokan seal impressions are a unique phenomenon, and no satisfactory explanation for them has as yet been proposed. It is quite possible that some adequate explanation of the function of the royal jars and of the title na-ar may yet appear." (The Eliakim Na-ar Yokan Seal Impressions: Sixty Years of Confusion in

(continued...)

⁹⁰(...continued)

Biblical Archaeological Research, Yosef Garfinkel, Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. 53, 1990 AD)

- c. "To summarize, even in 1932, the identification could have been questioned. The biblical evidence did not support the conclusion that the title na'ar always implied the master was a king." (**Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.**, Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, p. 25, 2004 AD)

2. The signet ring "belonging to Yokan" (misidentified as Jotham, King of Judah 750-731 BC) is only a single archeological object found in modern Elat, Israel. Who it belonged to and other details are currently a mystery.
3. These two archeological finds (seal and ring) have been wrongly used by Christians to validate the historical accuracy of the **Bible**.
 - a. There are hundreds and hundreds of others that are valid and Christians are correct in using these to prove the **Bible** [we wonder what Rudd means by 'prove.' We agree, if he means they serve to test whether or not the biblical texts are rooted in history].
 - b. These two finds are not fake, but real archeological objects that were misidentified, which in the case of the seal of "Jehoaichin" caused a 100 year distortion in all the archeology of Israel for decades.
 - c. Whenever a mistake is made in archeology, it is important for Christians to be careful in correcting these mistakes.
 - d. It is in this spirit that this page has been contributed to make sure no Christian ever again uses either the seal or the ring again as evidence except in their correct and truthful context. (10/27/2016)

⁹¹Oswalt comments on **verses 21-22** that "Eliakim will wear the badge of honor and carry out the functions assigned to him..."

Evidently the prime minister [is that what 'over the house' means?] at least, and perhaps other high officials, wore special uniforms. The terms used here for *robe* and *sash* appear elsewhere only for garb worn by the priests (see **Exodus 28:4, 39, 40; 29:5, 8; 39:27-29; 40:14; Leviticus 8:7, 13**). This does not mean necessarily that the court officers had usurped the prerogatives of the priests, but rather that they were standard terms for ceremonial clothing." (P. 422)

Alexander translates **verse 21**: "*And I will clothe him with thy dress, and with thy girdle will I strengthen him, and thy power will I give into his hand, and he shall be for a father (or become a father) to the dweller in Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.*"

He comments that "We may either suppose a reference to an official dress, or a metaphor analogous to that of filling another's shoes in colloquial English." (P. 389)

(continued...)

וְאַבְנֵי־ךָ אֶחְזֶקְנוּ
וּמְמִשְׁלָתְךָ אֶתֶּן בְּיָדוֹ
וְהָיָה לְאָב לְיֹשֵׁב יְרוּשָׁלַם
וּלְבַיִת יְהוּדָה:

and I will dress him (in) your [Shebna's] tunic / robe,
and (with) your belt I will strengthen him;⁹²
and your dominion / authority I will give into his hand.⁹³

⁹¹(...continued)

Gray comments that Eliakim will be clothed with the robes of his office, consisting of a distinctive tunic (כְּתֹנֶת) and sash (אַבְנֵיט)...So also the priests were distinguished by special tunics and sashes, and their accession to office was solemnized by a ceremonial investiture with these and other distinctive articles of clothing...With the insignia, Eliakim will also receive the authority (מְמִשְׁלָה, 'rule,' 'dominion') of the vacant office; but exercising it, unlike Shebna, wisely and well, he will become a father of those whom he governs, the people of Jerusalem and Judah...in caring for their needs...Even in **Genesis 45:8** *father* is no mere title; Joseph had cared for Pharaoh's interests." (P. 380)

Compare **Isaiah 9:5**^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng}, the promised child / son will be named 'Long-lasting Father'; and **Job 29:16** where Job claims that he was "a father to the needy." We understand this to mean that Eliakim will have far more authority than simply controlling who enters and who cannot enter the royal palace. He will play the role of a "ruler," with far more responsibilities than simply a door-keeper.

⁹²Slotki's translation has "robe" and "girdle" for our "tunic / robe" and "belt." He comments that "the king's officers were distinguishing liveries [special uniforms] to mark their respective offices and ranks. The robe (כְּתֹנֶת) is said to have been a long garment made of linen cloth." (P. 104)

⁹³Kaiser comments on **verse 21** that upon this eschatological figure [nothing in the text says anything remotely meaning 'eschatological figure!'], YHWH's servant, YHWH "will bestow...the signs of his dignity: the long tunic with half sleeves and the girdle which gathers it about the waist, a garment similar to that worn by the priests... For him to bind the girdle firmly round the man He has chosen expresses the fact that He is permanently investing him and his descendants with the office. The investiture precedes the formal handing over of the powers of office, which presumably took place by means of a formula of institution (compare **Zechariah 3:7** [concerning Joshua the high priest])." (Pp. 156-57)

And he will be for a father⁹⁴ to (the) dweller (in) Jerusalem,
and to Judah's household!⁹⁵

22:22⁹⁶ וְנָתַתִּי מִפֶּתַח בַּיִת־דָּוִד עַל-שְׂכְמוֹ

⁹⁴Slotki comments that the phrase “a father” means “a counselor, friend and benevolent administrator.” (P. 104)

Alexander states that “*Father* is not a mere oriental synonym of ruler, but an emphatic designation of a wise and benevolent ruler. It seems, therefore, to imply that Shebna's administration was of an opposite character.” (P. 389)

Oswalt states that “*he will become a father* expresses the attitude which a true governor should take toward his people (**Isaiah 9:5**^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng}). This does not mean superiority or paternalism [the attitude or actions of a person who protects people and gives them what they need but does not give them any responsibility or freedom of choice], but genuine care and self-sacrificing love. Thus his people will know that his rule is performed out of genuine care for them and not a self-serving pride.” (P. 422)

Watts states that being a father “for Jerusalemites and Judeans...probably means being available to help in all affairs—a role somewhere between the Saudi monarch's availability to his subjects and a Chicago ward-boss' service to his constituents. He also served as chief of ministers in the royal government. He made decisions which carried royal authority and could not be appealed.” (P. 292)

The text is not by any means this explicit, but we have to agree that the one “over the house” had a great deal of authority.

⁹⁵Alexander states that “The inhabitants of Jerusalem and the family of Judah comprehend the whole nation.” (P. 389)

Motyer comments on **verse 21** that “The Lord's purposes for Eliakim are summed up by the insignia (*robe, sash*) he is given, the *authority* that is handed over to him and the function (to *be a father* is ‘to care for’) with which he is entrusted.” (P. 388)

⁹⁶Motyer comments on **verses 22-23a** that “Eliakim is given the key, i.e. the authority to legislate and make binding decisions.”

We say, No—that is not what a “key” symbolizes. The key enables its holder to open and lock shut the doors—thereby controlling who can and cannot enter. But the key does not symbolize legislating and make binding decisions. Perhaps Eliakim had much more authority than simply controlling entrance to and exclusion from the palace, but that's the symbolism of wearing the “key.”

Kaiser states that “As a sign of his exercise of office, the key of the royal palace in Jerusalem, the house of David...is laid over the shoulder of him whom Yahweh has chosen...”

(continued...)

⁹⁶(...continued)

“To commit to him the exclusive power of opening and closing the palace expresses his control over all the government offices set up there [how so? We say, the office has control of opening and shutting the palace gates, but does not generalize beyond that]. In the **New Testament** the concept of the power of the keys is taken up again in the promise and authority given to Peter (**Matthew 16:18-19**, and also in **Revelation 3:7**, where this passage is directly quoted and presented as uttered by the exalted Lord, Who as the David of the final age opens the way to the heavenly palace to his followers.” (Pp. 157-58)

Alexander translates **verse 22**: “*And I will put the key of the house of David on his shoulder; he shall open, and there shall be no one shutting, he shall shut, and there shall be no one opening.*”

He comments that “In other words, he shall have unlimited control over the royal house and household, which, according to oriental usages, implies a high political authority. Some suppose a reference to the actual bearing of the key by the royal steward or chamberlain...It may be objected, that the phrase house of David seems to imply a metaphorical, rather than a literal palace...”

“The best interpreters [who are they, the ‘best’ interpreters? Are they the ones with whom Alexander agreed?] appear to be agreed that the government of administration is here represented by the figure of a burden, not merely in the general, as in **Isaiah 9:5**, but the specific burden of a key, chosen in order to express the idea of control over the royal house, which was the title of the office in question...”

“The application of the same terms to Peter (**Matthew 16:19**) and to Christ himself (**Revelation 3:7**), does not prove that they here refer to either, or that Eliakim was a type of Christ, but merely that the same words admit of different applications.” (Pp. 389-90)

Matthew 16:19,

I will give to you [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of the heavens,
and whatever you may bind upon the earth
will be having been bound in the heavens;
and whatever you may loose upon the earth
will be having been loosed in the heavens.
(We suspect that this is where Motyer got the idea that the “key” symbolizes
“making binding decisions.”)

Revelation 3:7,

And to the angel / messenger of the church, the one in Philadelphia, write:
These things say the set-apart one, the true one,
the one having the key of David,

(continued...)

וּפְתַח וְאֵין סָגַר

וְסָגַר וְאֵין פְּתַח:

And I will place a key (to) David's household upon his shoulder--

And he will open, and there is no one shutting;
and he will close, and there is no one opening.⁹⁷

22:23⁹⁸ וַתִּקְעֵתִיו יָתֵד בְּמִקְוֹם נְאֻמָּן

⁹⁶(...continued)

the one opening and no one will shut;
and shutting and no one will open.

(Here the “key” has to do with opening and shutting—not with making Divine commandments!)

Gray comments that “Eliakim will also receive the key of the house of David, by which we may again understand a symbol of his office rather than the actual key, with which the palace was locked. Another less probable view is that the whole is figurative, meaning merely, I will lay the burden of administering Judah upon him. In any case, the phraseology reflects the custom of carrying the long and heavy keys commonly used over the shoulder...

“The authority symbolized is extensive, and includes the command of the royal chambers and the right to admit to the royal presence, or to refuse admittance.” (Pp. 380-81)

⁹⁷Slotki comments on **verse 22** that “*the key [was] the recognized symbol of outstanding authority in the royal palace and in the country generally...Upon his shoulder. A key in those days was a long and heavy object which had to be carried on the shoulder. He shall open, etc. He will have supreme power in all State affairs.*” (P. 104)

What do you think? Is Slotki overstating the authority of Shebna and Eliakim? Should we think of them as the Judean King Hezekiah’s “prime ministers”?

⁹⁸Oswalt comments on **verses 23-24** that “Eliakim will be like a peg set firmly in the wall, able to bear a prodigious weight without apparent strain...The usage in **verse 24** defines the one in **verse 23.**” Compare **Ezekiel 15:3**,

Is wood taken from it (the vine) to make (something) for work?
Or will they take from it a peg,
to hang upon it any / every vessel?

(continued...)

וְהָיָה לְכֶסֶף כְּבוֹד לְבַיִת אָבִיו:

And I will thrust / fasten him (as a) peg in a secure place,⁹⁹

⁹⁸(...continued)

Alexander translates **verse 23**: “And I will fasten him a nail in a sure place, and he shall be for a throne of glory to his father’s house.”

He comments that “The figure in the first clause naturally conveys the idea of security and permanence. The reference is not to the stakes or center post of a tent, but to the large pegs, pins, or nails often built into the walls of oriental houses for the purpose of suspending clothes or vessels. The last clause is obscure.” (P. 390)

Motyer takes a different view. He states that “the picture is of a tent peg driven into a firm place, holding the tent secure in the wind. This gives force to the altered meaning in **verse 25** where Eliakim turns into a ‘wall peg,’ a maintenance system for his family.” (P. 188)

Gray comments on **verse 23** that “By means of two figures the security of Eliakim in his office, and the luster which his position will shed on his entire family, are expressed.” (P. 381)

Watts comments on **verse 23** that “The king will establish [Eliakim] in office. The metaphors here appear to be mixed. A peg in a firm place seems to picture a tent peg driven in firm ground, while **verse 24** pictures a fixture to hold pots and pans on a kitchen wall, strong enough to support his broader family (*his father’s house*), including direct descendants (*offspring*) and related members (*offshoot*). Such an appointment provided economic support and safety for the whole family, as it still does in many countries such as India.

“The scene in **2 Kings 18:18 / Isaiah 36:3**, which names both [Eliakim who was ‘over the house’ and Shebna who is described as a ‘secretary’], appears to reflect the situation after these changes have taken place.” (P. 292)

⁹⁹Slotki comments that *a peg in a sure place* is “a simile denoting permanency of office.” (P. 104)

Alexander comments that Eliakim “was to be not only a seat, but a seat of honor, which is nearer to the meaning of the Hebrew phrase than *throne of glory*.” (P. 390)

Where our Hebrew text has יָתֵד, “peg,” or “pin,” Rahlfs translates by ἄρχοντα, “ruler.”

Gray states that “For the figure of the יָתֵד, which commonly denotes the tent-peg, but also a peg on which articles may be hung” see the following passages:

(continued...)

⁹⁹(...continued)

Ezekiel 15:3,

Is wood taken from it (the vine) to make (something) for work?
Or will they take from it a peg,
to hang upon it any / every vessel?

Ezra 9:8,

And now, like a brief moment, favor has come from YHWH our God,
to leave for us an escaped-remnant,
and to give to us a peg in a place of His set-apartness,
and our God to enlighten our eyes,
and to give us a brief reviving / sustenance in our bondage.
[where the Hebrew has “peg,” **Rahifs** has στήριγμα, “support”]

Zechariah 10:4,

From Him (YHWH) a corner / cornerstone;
from Him a peg;
from Him a battle-bow;
from Him will go forth every oppressor, together!

Ben Sirach 14:20-27 (especially **verse 24**), a meditation on seeking wisdom:

- 20 Blessed (is) a man who with wisdom takes care,
and who with his understanding will dispute / reason.
21 The one who considers her (understanding's) ways in his heart,
and on her hidden / secret things he will consider / reflect.
22 Go forth after her like a tracking-hound,
and in her ways, lie in wait!
- 23 The one stooping to look through her windows,
and at her doorways will listen;
24 the one who lodges near her house,
and who will make firm a peg in her walls;
25 he will pitch his tent according to her hands,
and he will lodge in a lodging place of good things;
26 he will place his children in her shelter,
and beneath her branches he will spend the night;
27 he will be sheltered by her from burning heat,
and in her glory he will lodge.

Eliakim is as secure as a peg driven into a place that can be trusted to hold...

(continued...)

and he will be for a throne / seat¹⁰⁰ of glory for his father's house.¹⁰¹

22:24¹⁰² וְתִלְוּ עָלָיו כִּלְוֹ כְּבוֹד בֵּית־אָבִיו

⁹⁹(...continued)

“A glorious throne by no means proves that Eliakim is destined to be king...the throne (כִּסֵּא) was not a seat confined to kings; see especially **2 Kings 4:10**, [where a wealthy woman proposes to her husband:]

Let us build / make now a small walled roof-chamber;
and let us place there for him a bed and a table
and a chair (כִּסֵּא) and a lamp;
and when he comes to us he will turn aside there.” (P. 381)

Oswalt comments that “In the second half of **verse 23**, Isaiah changes the metaphor but keeps the same meaning. Rather than disgracing his lord, as Shebna did, Eliakim will be the vehicle through which his people will be honored, a seat upon which the family will be lifted up.” (Pp. 422-23)

¹⁰⁰Alexander states that כִּסֵּא is the Hebrew name for any seat (answering to stool or chair), and denotes a throne or chair of state only as being a seat par [by] eminence.” (P. 390)

¹⁰¹Motyer comments on **verses 23b-25** that “Rather than find here a prediction of the failure of Eliakim, it is equally idiomatic to introduce a hypothetical sentence: ‘Should he, however, become...and they hang upon him...in that day...the peg will give way...’ In the corrupting tendency of power, the moment will come when Eliakim may yield to the adulation of those who would find their well-being in him and become to them the center of glory, appeal and supply. The point is not just that leadership changes to pride of position, national good is subverted by domestic interest, public good replaced by concern for a proliferating crowd of ‘hangers-on’—true though that is—but that the trust which should be reposed in the Lord is transferred to a human being. Just as an individual is not sufficient for himself (Shebna) neither is he sufficient for others (Eliakim).” (P. 188)

¹⁰²Gray entitles **verses 24-25** “The peg (**verse 23**), being misused, falls to the ground.”

Kaiser entitles **verses 24-25** “The burden of his father's house.”

He comments that “The status of Eliakim, or that of the successors who would be drawn from his family, would not remain unshaken, because it would be eroded by the hereditary oriental evil of nepotism and the abuse of a relation's standing by the members of his clan. Transforming the image of the tent peg hammered into the ground to that of a peg in the wall...he describes in dramatic terms, and with a play

(continued...)

¹⁰²(...continued)

upon the significance of the word **כְּבוֹד**, **kabhodh** which means not only *honor* as in **verse 23**, but according to its derivation can also mean *weight*, how the whole clan will hang like a weight upon the peg represented by their exalted member, just as if one were to hang all the vessels to be found in a house upon a single wooden peg on the wall. There can only be one result; the peg will fall out of the wall and all the pots will shatter...

“One immediately suspects that [the post-exilic author] was holding up the mirror to a hated contemporary, perhaps a Jewish tax official working on behalf of the Ptolemies and responsible for the finances of Judea and the temple, thus seeking to prophesy his fall with impunity [freedom from punishment; but does the text say this?]...

“We may have here simply a straightforward and scholarly historicization by a reader steeped in the teaching of the wisdom schools, who was expressing his conviction that one great man follows another, but that everyone eventually falls if he does not conduct his office incorruptibly and without regard for the interests of his family. One cannot say that his warning and threat is limited in its application to the ancient or the modern East.” (Pp. 158-59)

Slotki comments on **verse 24** that “Eliakim’s entire family, great and small, young and old, will find security and safety in his eminence. Some commentators detect in the verse a subtle satire against nepotism [the practice among those with power or influence of favoring relatives or friends, especially by giving them jobs].” (P. 104)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 24**: “*And they shall hang upon him all the honor of his father’s house—the offspring and the issue—all vessels of small quantity—from vessels of cups even to all vessels of flagons* [large containers in which drink if served]...

“Here the figure of a nail [or peg] is resumed. The dependents of Eliakim are represented as suspended on him as their sole support.” (P. 390)

Gray comments that “the peg here, whatever its meaning in **verse 23**, is a peg driven into a wall. The meaning of the figure is clear; all sorts of cheap articles are hung upon the peg, till, being altogether improperly weighted with this motley assortment of goods, not even the best of holds is of any service, but peg and burden come tumbling down together in undignified and indiscriminate ruin; so a governor [we ask, Is a peg driven into a wall symbolical of a governor? We think not; rather it is symbolical of one who serves in the house of the governor!], a peg of state, if all his relatives insist on his giving free play to nepotism, is brought at last to ruin...

“But is this a a prediction that Eliakim will be a gross nepotist and, in spite of being firmly secured in Shebna’s office, himself come to ruin? That such a prediction

(continued...)

הַצֵּאִים וְהַצְּפוֹת
 כָּל כְּלֵי הַקֶּטָן
 מִכְּלֵי הָאֲנָנוֹת
 וְעַד כָּל-כְּלֵי הַנְּבֵלִים:

And they will hang on him all (the) glory / abundance of his father's household,
 the offspring and the offshoots,¹⁰³
 all (the) vessels, the small (ones),
 from (the) vessels, the bowls,
 even to all (the) vessels, the (wine-) skins.

22:25¹⁰⁴ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

¹⁰²(...continued)

was delivered in the same breath with the prediction of his glory, and in an address to Shebna, seems incredible.” (P. 381)

¹⁰³Slotki's translation of this phrase, וְהַצְּפוֹת is “and the issue,” but Slotki notes that “The Hebrew word צְפִיעָה occurs nowhere else and its sense has to be deduced from the context.” (P. 105)

Motyer translates by “*Offspring and offshoots!* ‘shoots and side-shoots’ is an idiom of totality.” (P. 188)

¹⁰⁴Alexander translates **verse 25**: “In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, shall the nail fastened in a sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall, and the burden which was on it shall be cut off, for Jehovah speaks.”

He comments that “The most natural and obvious application of these words is to Eliakim, who had just been represented as a nail in a sure place. But as this would predict his fall, without the slightest intimation of the reason, and in seeming contradiction to the previous context, most interpreters reject this explanation as untenable...

“Most writers therefore seem to be agreed, that **verse 25** relates to Shebna, and that the prophet, after likening Eliakim to a nail fastened in a sure place, tacitly applies the same comparison to Shebna, and declares that the nail which now seems to be securely fastened shall soon yield to make way for the other. Those who refer the verse to Eliakim suppose his fall to have been occasioned by his nepotism or excessive patronage of his relations, a conjectural inference from **verse 24**...

(continued...)

נָאִם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
תְּמוּשׁ הַיָּתֵד הַתְּקוּעָה בְּמִקּוֹם נְאֻמָּן

¹⁰⁴(...continued)

“The partial fulfillment of this prophecy is commonly supposed to be recorded in **Isaiah 31:3**, where Eliakim actually fills the place here promised to him, and Shebna appears in the inferior character of a scribe or secretary...

“It seems improbable no doubt that Shebna, after such a threatening, should be transferred to another office. But the threatening may not have been public, and the transfer may have been merely the beginning of his degradation...

“In this very case, we are merely told what Isaiah was commanded to say to Shebna, without being told that he obeyed the order. If the execution of this order may be taken for granted, so may the fulfilment of the prophecy. If it had failed, it would not have been recorded or preserved among the prophecies.” (Pp. 390-91)

Motyer comments that “The collapse comes by a combination of internal weakness (*give way*) and external action (*be sheared off*), for no-one is sufficient to be ‘the trusted one’ nor will the Lord allow it.” (P. 188)

Surely this is mistaken. The biblical imperatives call upon all people to become “trusted,” “trustworthy” individuals! Compare **Exodus 18:21**.

Oswalt comments on **verse 25** that “Commentators have had difficulty with this verse because it seems to reverse field so abruptly. How can Eliakim, who has been so roundly praised, be the one who fails and is cut off? For it is surely Eliakim to whom reference is being made...

“However, reflection shows that a word on Eliakim’s fall is not at all unlikely in this setting. Over and over Isaiah had to say that any word of present deliverance was only temporary and that any word of future hope was beyond the fire (see **chapter 5** at the end of **chapters 2-4**; **chapters 11, 12** after **chapter 10**; **chapter 39** after **chapters 36-38**). Thus it is not surprising that the prophet should hasten to add that despite his faithfulness and the lofty things said about him, Eliakim was merely human and that if the nation reposed all its hopes in him, those hopes would certainly be dashed.” (Pp. 423-24)

Watts states that in **verse 25** “a prophetic word in heavy prose style closes the chapter in a dark tone of gloomy judgment. The king’s change of leadership is seen as more cosmetic than real: the policies remain. God’s judgment cuts deeper—Eliakim will also fall.” (P. 289)

He adds that “*In that day* looks beyond the setting of **verses 15-24** dealing with Shebna’s demotion to announce Yahweh’s reversal of the announcement that Eliakim will take Shebna’s place. He is no better and now must be removed.” (P. 292)

וּנְגִיעָה וּנְפִלָה

וּנְכַרְתַּת הַמַּשָּׂא אֲשֶׁר-עָלֶיהָ

כִּי יְהוּה דִּבֶּר:

On that day—

a saying of YHWH of Armies—

the peg, the one thrust / fastened in a secure place,¹⁰⁵ will depart;

and it will be hewn off, and will fall;

and the load which was upon it will be cut off,

because YHWH spoke!¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Slotki comments that “The phraseology (*the peg that was fastened, sure place*) seems to connect this verse with the preceding one, the reference still being to Eliakim. But it is difficult to reconcile this unexpected fall with the greatness and permanency of position foretold in the previous verses...

“Many commentators refer the verse back to Shebna’s dismissal: Eliakim will be a peg in a sure place and remain so and thus be a reliable support for all his relatives and dependants; but Shebna, the peg that was fastened in a sure place, will give way and the entire load of dependants will, like himself, come down with a crash.” (P. 105)

¹⁰⁶Watts sums up **chapter 22**: “The chapter is one woven whole of many colors and styles. It presumes the growing tensions of the Assyrian advance on the city (**verses 6-7** [but there is no mention of Assyria—only Elam and Qir!]) and the political demotion of Shebna, the chief architect of Hezekiah’s policy of national independence and rebellion (**verse 19** [but the text says nothing of his being chief architect of Hezekiah’s policy of national independence and rebellion!]). It sees through the hypocrisy and unrealistic views of the city (**verse 2**), of the government (**verses 9-11** and **12-13**), of the prime-minister (**verse 16**), and of the change of prime-ministers (**verse 25**). Judah’s ruin is manifest: ‘the destruction of the people’ (**verse 4**). Hers is a sin that cannot be atoned for (**verse 14**). She, with the government, will collapse (**verse 25**).

“The chapter avoids Hezekiah’s name, in line with the entire section. But his involvement in every stage is transparent.” (P. 289)

We say No. Hezekiah’s involvement is not transparent—his name is not mentioned, and any reference to him is limited to his possibly being the second person masculine singular subject of the verb in **verse 8a**.

(continued...)

¹⁰⁶(...continued)

Watts explains **verses 15-24**: “The overwhelming accusation of **verses 1-14** has its effect. A prophet who is sent to denounce Shebna in Yahweh’s name (**verse 15**) finds him preparing his own mausoleum (**verse 16**). The prophet passionately announces God’s decree of his downfall (**verses 17-18**). This leads the king to mandate his dismissal (**verse 19**).

“But this is not a real change of direction as the new appointment shows. Eliakim, who has held second position in the government, simply exchanges positions with Shebna (**verse 20**). Eliakim becomes the administrator of the palace, while Shebna is ‘demoted’ to secretary. The game of musical chairs is played out with the pomp and circumstance as the new prime minister is installed with all the formality and confidence that the office deserves (**verses 21-24**).

“But all this has an empty ring. Eliakim’s policies are identical with those of Shebna [nothing is said in the text about Eliakim’s policies; only his being a ‘father’ to the Judeans]. The change will not mislead Sennacherib’s representative [not a word is said in the text concerning Sennacherib or his representative; all this is being read into the text by Watts]. The policies that have long characterized Hezekiah’s Jerusalem will continue. (See **2 Kings 18:19-25 / Isaiah 36:4-10**). Nor has the Rabshakeh missed the rift that exists between the prophets and the court (**2 Kings 18:26 / Isaiah 36:11**).

“It is no wonder that the prophet returns to dissociate Yahweh from promises of permanence for Eliakim that were spoken in the installation ceremony (**verses 23-24**). On the contrary, Yahweh declares that Eliakim must also be removed (**verse 25**) so that no part of that wrong policy and wrong administration may remain.

“The remainder of Hezekiah’s life was apparently a very different one. Manasseh may well have joined him as coregent shortly after this. It was Manasseh’s mark of loyal vassalage, like that of Ahaz his grandfather, that lay over the first half of the following century. That shows the required change of policy and direction which Shebna’s dismissal and Eliakim’s appointment did not demonstrate.” (Pp. 292-93) But none of this is mentioned in **chapter 22!**

1. **Citadel / Tower of David / City of David**

“The Tower of David, also known as the Jerusalem Citadel, is an ancient citadel located near the Jaffa Gate entrance to the western edge of the Old City of Jerusalem. The citadel that stands today dates to the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. It was built on the site of an earlier ancient fortification of the Hasmonean [the kingdom founded by Simon Maccabeus, that lasted until Herod the Great], Herodian-era, Byzantine and Early Muslim periods, after being destroyed repeatedly during the last decades of Crusader presence in the Holy Land by Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers. It contains important archaeological finds dating back over 2,000 years including a quarry dated to the First Temple period, and is today a popular venue for benefit events, craft shows, concerts, and sound-and-light performances.

“Dan Bahat [an Israeli archaeologist who has been involved in numerous archaeological digs in Jerusalem] writes that the original three Hasmonean towers were altered by Herod, and that “The northeastern tower was replaced by a much larger, more massive tower, dubbed the “Tower of David” beginning in the 5th century C.E.,. The name “Tower of David” is due to Byzantine Christians who believed the site to be the palace of King David. They borrowed the name “Tower of David” from the **Song of Songs / Solomon**, attributed to Solomon, King David's son, who wrote: “Thy neck is like the Tower of David built with turrets, whereon there hang a thousand shields, all the armor of the mighty men.” (Song of Songs / Solomon, 4:4)

“As evidenced by the archaeological discovery of the Broad Wall, King Hezekiah was the first to specifically fortify this area. The city's fortifications demonstrate that by the late eighth century B.C.E. the city had expanded to include the hill to the west of the Temple Mount. The motivation for building the walled fortification was the expected invasion of Judea by Sennacherib. The wall might be the one referred to in **Nehemiah 3:8** and **Isaiah 22:9-10**.

“During the 2nd century B.C.E., the Old City of Jerusalem expanded further onto the so-called Western Hill. This 845 yard-high prominence, which comprises the modern Armenian and Jewish Quarters as well as Mount Zion, was bounded by steep valleys on all sides except for the northern one. The first settlement in this area was about 150 B.C.E. around the time of the Hasmonean [the first of whom was Simon Maccabeus, brother of Judas Maccabeue] kings when what Josephus Flavius named the First Wall was constructed.

“Herod the Great, who wrestled the power away from the Hasmonean dynasty, added three massive towers to the fortifications in 37–34 B.C.E. He built these at the vulnerable northwest corner of the Western Hill, where the Citadel is now located. His purpose was not only to defend the city, but to safeguard his own royal palace located nearby on Mount Zion. Herod named the tallest of the towers, 145 feet in height, the Phasael in memory of his brother who had committed suicide while in captivity. Another tower was called the Mariamne, named for his second wife whom he had executed and buried in a cave to the west of the tower. He named the third tower the Hippicus after one of his friends...

“Following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E., the three

towers were preserved as a testimony of the might of the fortifications overcome by the Roman legions, and the site served as barracks for the Roman troops.” (Wikipedia, 10/12/2016)

Today, archaeologists are digging in the area directly to the south of the temple mount, and uncovering what is believed to be the “City of David,” to the southeast from the Tower of David.

“The City of David is the archaeological site of ancient Jerusalem of the pre-Babylonian exile era. It is located underneath the neighborhood of Wadi Hilweh, and extends down from the southern city walls of Jerusalem's Old City. The remains at the site include several water tunnels, one of which was built by King Hezekiah and still carries water, several pools including the Pool of Siloam known from the Old and New Testaments, and here or at the adjacent Ophel scholars expect to find, or claim to have found, the remains of the Acra, a fortress built by Antiochus Epiphanes to subdue those Jerusalemites who were opposed to Hellenization. City of David archaeologist Eilat Mazar believes that a so-called Large Stone Structure she has discovered at the upper area of the site and tentatively dated to the tenth to ninth century B.C.E., may be the palace of King David. Not far from that excavation area a number of bullae (seal impressions) were unearthed, bearing the names of Yehucal son of Shelemiah and Gedaliah son of Pashhur, two officials mentioned in the **Book of Jeremiah**.

“The area is one of the most intensively excavated sites in the Holy Land. The debate within biblical archaeology over the location of the City of David began in the late 19th century with the excavations of Charles Warren and Hermann Guthe on the hill southeast of the Old City. The 1909-11 work of Louis-Hugues Vincent and Montagu Brownlow Parker identified the earliest known settlement traces in the Jerusalem region, suggesting the area was an ancient core of settlement in Jerusalem dating back to the Bronze Age. It is on a narrow ridge running south from the Temple Mount in the predominantly Arab neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem. It is thought to have been a walled city in the Bronze Age which enjoyed the defensive advantages of its position by the Tyropoeon Valley to its west, by the Hinnom Valley to the south, and the Kidron Valley on the east. In the pre-Israelite period, the area is thought to have been separated from the site of the later Temple Mount by the Ophel, an uninhabited area which became the seat of government under Israelite rule. During the reign of Hezekiah, the walls of the city were expanded westward, enclosing a previously unwalled suburb in the area known today as the Western Hill of the Old City, west of the Temple Mount.” (Wikipedia, 10/12/2016)

On the Internet, see Nova, the official web-site of Public Broadcasting System, with its interview of Eilat Mazar, and her discussion of what she believes is the ancient palace of King David.

