

Isaiah 9:7-10:4, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

Yes, YHWH Is With Us--

But Here, In Visitation of Divine Judgment on Northern Israel and Ephraim Because of Social Injustice and Moral Iniquity¹

¹Gray entitles **9:7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}-10:4** “The Doom of Ephraim,” and adds **Isaiah 5:26-29** to the end of this passage, as do others such as Wildberger.

Gray comments that “The five strophes of the following poem...are of very nearly equal length. In the original poem each strophe probably contained exactly 14 lines.” In his translation, he retains the prophetic past tenses, but insists that “the whole poem is a forecast of the future, not a survey of the actual past...”

“Two different views have been widely held with regard to the purpose and general character of the poem. According to one, the entire poem is prophetic, predicting a succession of calamities that are to fall on Israel; according to the other, it is for the most part an historical survey of past calamities (**9:9-20**), closing (**5:26-29**) with the prediction of a yet more complete calamity which is still to come.” (Pp. 177, 180)

Oswalt entitles **9:7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}-10:4** “Measured by God’s Standards,” and comments that “The segment...answers a theological question posed by the previous one. On what basis will Ephraim’s designs against Judah come to nought [nothing]? Is it not in fact because of Ahaz’s alliance with Assyria and because of Assyria’s superior might? Isaiah’s answer is No. It is not Assyria with whom Ephraim, and later Judah, must come to terms; it is God...”

“The God Who delivered His people into Assyria’s hand can deliver them from that hand. In fact, He will do so, by the power of that messianic figure already introduced in **8:23-9:6^{Heb} / 9:1-7^{Eng}**.” (Pp. 249-50)

Motyer entitles **9:7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}-10:4** “The moment of decision,” and states that “This four-stanza poem is a classic of biblical social analysis...”

1. National disaster (**verses 7-11^{Heb} / 8-12^{Eng}**)
2. Political collapse (**verses 12-16^{Heb} / 13-17^{Eng}**)
3. Social anarchy (**verses 17-20^{Heb} / 18-21^{Eng}**)
4. Moral perversion (**10:1-4**) (P. 106)

Watts comments on this passage that “Repetition of the refrain, ‘In all this His anger has not turned, His hand is still outstretched’ in **9:11b^{Heb} / 12b^{Eng}, 16d^{Heb} / 17d^{Eng}, 20b^{Heb} / 21b^{Eng}, 10:4b** demonstrates the unity of the passage as well as the strophes of the poetic unit...”

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“The entire scene is formed about the word which the Lord has spoken. Israel’s response (or lack of response to it) is reflected in the first two strophes. The last two record no such response. Israel is too far gone. In the last strophe the funeral tone of the lament takes charge. Israel is presumed dead...

“The entire scene resumes the viewpoint of **chapters 1-5**...The positive and hopeful notes of **8:23-9:6^{Heb} / 9:1-7^{Eng}** and of **10:5-19** change nothing in the necessity for God to respond to Israel’s flagrant sins.” (Pp. 142-43)

Slotki states that **verses 7-20^{Heb} / 8-21^{Eng}** contain “An oracle on the Northern Kingdom arranged in three regular strophes, each ending with ‘For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.’ This section is regarded as the most artistically arranged of all the writings of Isaiah.” (P. 45)

Gray entitles **verses 7-20^{Heb} / 8-21^{Eng}** “Ephraim’s pride to be humbled by the Philistines and Syrians.”

He comments that “The opening lines announce that Yahweh has determined the doom of the Northern kingdom...In **verses 10-11b** the first stage of the coming judgment is then described. It will consist of devastating attacks by external foes, the Syrians and the Philistines being definitely named.” (P. 182)

Kaiser entitles **verses 7-11^{Heb} / 8-12^{Eng}** “The word of Yahweh and the visitation by neighbors.”

Oswalt comments on **verses 7-11^{Heb} / 8-12^{Eng}**, that “the sin for Isaiah, the source of all other sin, is the pride which exalts humanity above God, which makes God but a tool for the achievement of our plans and dreams. So it is this for which Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria are called to account...They are about to run headlong into the God they have ignored as He musters their ancient enemies against them.” (P. 251)

Slotki adds that **verses 7-9^{Heb} / 8-10^{Eng}** are the “introduction,” which states that “the arrogant inhabitants of Ephraim, and particularly those of Samaria, are the subject of this oracle.” (P. 45)

Alexander comments on **verse 7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}**: “Having repeatedly interchanged the three great subjects of this prophecy—the deliverance of Judah from the power of Syria and Israel—its subsequent punishment by means of the Assyrians—and the reign of the Messiah, for whose sake the kingdom was to be preserved—the prophet passes here abruptly from the last to the first, and again predicts the punishment of Ephraim. He reverts to this event, which had already been repeatedly foretold, for the purpose of declaring that the blows would be repeated as often and as long as might be needed for the absolute fulfilment of God’s threatenings.” (P. 209)

דְּבַר שְׁלַח אֲדֹנָי בִּיעָקֹב

וּנְפַל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

My Lord² sent forth a word³ against Jacob,
and it fell on Israel.⁴

²Where our Hebrew text has אֲדֹנָי, “my Lord,” 1QIs^a has יְהוָה, YHWH.

³Where our Hebrew text has דְּבַר שְׁלַח אֲדֹנָי, literally “A word He sent forth, my Lord,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has θάνατον ἀπέστειλεν κύριος, literally, “death He sent forth, Lord.” Gray suggests that an unpointed Hebrew text can be read as דְּבַר, “pestilence,” and this may be the case here.

Gray states that “The *word* of God once *sent forth* (**Psalms 107:20; 147:15, 18**), whether its purpose be the destruction or the well-being of men, cannot return to God till it has wrought His purpose (**Isaiah 55:10-11**; compare לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ, [I will not cause it to return] **Amos 1:3** etc.).” (Pp. 182-83)

Watts states that “A *word* is used here in the sense of ‘a message.’ But it is also much more, like a verdict from a court, a decision by a business on a contract. It reports a decision and determines a future. This *word* involved Jacob / Israel, the elect people, the two hundred-year-old nation that laid claim to that promise with its capital in Samaria, the rival and sometime enemy of Judah / Jerusalem...

“Yahweh’s complaint in **1:2-3** was about Israel. The announcement in **2:6-8** was about Israel. The song of the vineyard applied to Israel (**5:7**). The ‘woes’ of **chapter 5** applied to Israel. Isaiah’s vision and ‘this people’ in God’s words were about Israel (**6:9-10**). Isaiah’s word to Ahaz was about Israel (**7:7-9**). His prophecy of ‘Maher-Shalal-Chash-Baz’ (**8:1-3**) was about Israel. Indeed, a *word* had gone out from Yahweh against Jacob.” (P. 143)

⁴Gray comments that “This destructive word dispatched by Yahweh will find its mark: it will *fall into Israel*. *Israel* and *Jacob* are synonymous, and here mean specifically the Northern kingdom. For a third synonym is (in **verse 8**) *all the people*; and this phrase in turn is unmistakably explained in the parallel line as *Ephraim*, the leading tribe, and *the inhabitants of Samaria*, the capital of the Northern kingdom.” (P. 183)

Slotki holds that the “word” mentioned in this verse is “the oracle that follows.” He adds that “Jacob” and “Israel” are “synonymous with the Northern Kingdom as opposed to the Kingdom of Judah in the south.” (P. 45)

(continued...)

וידעוֹ הָעַם כָּלֹו

אֶפְרַיִם וְיוֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמֶרֹן

בְּנֵאֻמָּה וּבְגִדְלֵי לֵבָב לֵאמֹר:

And the people will know—all of it--⁵

Ephraim, and inhabitant(s) of Samaria,⁶

⁴(...continued)

Alexander holds that “The true sense is that of a dictum or authoritative declaration, not that which follows, nor that which goes before, but the whole series of threatenings and warnings which God has sent by all the prophets and by all the seers (**2 Kings 17:13**), perhaps with special reference to that respecting Pekah in the **seventh chapter**.” (P. 209)

Slotki states that the perfect tense of the verb וּנְפַל, understanding the waw as not conversive / consecutive, is an example of the “prophetic perfect,” meaning that the passage speaks of the action as having been completed, when in reality it is still in the future—that is, “it is soon to be realized.” (P. 45)

⁵Slotki says that they will know, “by the immediate fulfilment of the prophet’s prediction.” (P. 45)

Motyer states that “There is no escape from the word, ‘All the people, every one of them’ will know it...The word spoken and refused (compare **28:10-13**) becomes the same message turned to chastisement.” (P. 107)

Gray comments that “The people will learn by actual experience of its effects how overwhelming the coming calamity is to be...A day of Yahweh is coming that will abase pride (**Isaiah 2:22ff.**), and prove the insecurity of all confidence which, instead of resting on Yahweh (**Isaiah 7:9**), rests on self (compare **Amos 6:13**), or any other human power (**Isaiah 30:1-5; 31:1-3**).” (P. 183)

Watts states that “There is no way for the people to ignore the obvious disaster. Yet they choose not to recognize its deeper meaning. *Arrogance and a stout heart* are those nemeses of mankind that invite God’s retribution.” (P. 143)

⁶Oswalt comments that “In a phrase which duplicates his favorite ‘Judah and Jerusalem,’ the prophet refers to *Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria*.” (P. 252)

with pride and greatness of heart saying,⁷

9.9^{Heb} / 9:10^{Eng}⁸

⁷Alexander comments on **verse 8^{Heb} / 9^{Eng}**: “The word which God had sent had reached the people; they had heard and understood it, but continued to indulge their pride and self-security. *And they know* (the Divine threatening), *the people, all of them*, (literally *all of it*; the noun being singular but used collectively), *Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria* (a limitation of the general terms preceding, so as to prevent their application to Judah), *in pride and in greatness of heart* (an equivalent expression), *saying* (the words recorded in the next verse.)” (P. 210)

⁸Slotki comments on **verse 9^{Heb} / 10^{Eng}** that “The prophet makes his point the more forcefully by means of a metaphor. In their conceited self-confidence they claim to be able to make good any loss they might sustain, and even to improve upon their lost possessions. They would replace cheap *bricks* by costly *hewn stones* and the common *sycamores* by precious *cedars*.” (P. 46)

Gray states that “These words, perhaps a popular proverb, reveal the self-reliant, God-forgetful temper that makes the coming doom inevitable: the people are confident that they can themselves much more than make good the losses they have suffered...

“The entire situation suggested in this verse closely resembles that described by Hosea (**7:9-10**). Hosea and Isaiah alike see the gravity of what the people treat so lightly.” (P. 183)

Alexander comments on **verse 9^{Heb} / 10^{Eng}**: “The very words of the self-confident Ephraimites are now recorded. Instead of being warned and instructed by what they had already suffered, they presumptuously look for greater prosperity than ever. Bricks are fallen, and hewn stone will we build; sycamores are felled, and cedars will we substitute. The oriental bricks are unburnt, so that most of their brick structures are as little durable as mud walls. The sycamore is durable, but too light and spongy to be used in solid building. The latter is accordingly contrasted with the cedar, and the former with hewn stone, the two most highly valued building materials...

“By some interpreters these words are literally understood...[but many others understand them figuratively. Still] others more correctly understand both clauses as a metaphorical description of a change from worse to better, by a substitution of the precious for the vile, without specific reference to the literal rebuilding of towns or houses. Bricks and sycamores are then mere proverbial expressions for that which is inferior, and cedars and hewn stones for that which is superior...It really relates to what the ten tribes had themselves endured, and expresses their belief that those reverses would be followed by a better state of things than they had ever known.” (Pp. 211-12)

Oswalt states that “this quotation says a great deal in a short span about Ephraim’s attitudes. Breezy and blase [unimpressed or indifferent to something because one has experienced or seen it so often before], they refused to admit that they were limited. If someone knocked down the mud-brick wall, they would not merely

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לְבִנְיִם נִפְלוּ

וְגִזִּית נִבְנָה

שְׁקִמִּים גִּדְעוּ

וְאַרְזִים נִחְלִיף:

Bricks fell,

and (with) hewn stone we will build;

sycamore trees were cut down,

and cedar trees we will exchange (for them).⁹

9.10^{Heb} / 9:11^{Eng}¹⁰

⁸(...continued)

rebuild it, they would rebuild it with finely dressed stone. If an invading army cut down the common sycamore trees, as invading armies were wont to do, then the Israelites would plant the much more valuable cedars in their place. In short, Israel could, by her own resilience and resourcefulness, turn disaster into accomplishment.” (P. 252)

Motyer comments that “The *bricks* falling down could refer to the earthquake (**Amos 1:1; 4:11**) which took place in the reign of Jeroboam II (about 786-746 B.C.E.). It was the voice of God, but they took it as a challenge to rise to the occasion: they were equal to it!” (P. 107)

Watts states that “The determination to ‘tough it out’ is bravado [a show of boldness intended to impress]. In some times and against some adversaries it would have been admirable. Against Assyria’s determination to root out potential rebellion and re-structure the government of the entire region, it was fool-hardy. In face of God’s announcement that covenant would not be renewed, it was spiritually reprobate.” (P. 143)

⁹The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) adds at the end of **verse 10^{Heb} / 11^{Eng}**, καὶ οἰκοδομήσωμεν ἑαυτοῖς πύργον, “and we will build for ourselves a tower.”

¹⁰Slotki entitles **verses 10-11^{Heb} / 11-12^{Eng}** “The first calamity.” He comments that it consists of “invasion and plunder from the north, east and west. The attacks are not to be understood as taking place simultaneously, the prophet having in mind a long stretch of the history of the Northern Kingdom.” (P. 46)

Oswalt states that these two verses depict how “on every hand adversaries will arise, not in spite of the Lord, but at His bidding. From east and west they will come,

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וַיִּשְׁגַּב יְהוָה אֶת־צָרֵי רֶזִין עָלָיו
וְאֶת־אֹיְבָיו יִסְכֶּסֶד׃

And YHWH will set Rezin's foes¹¹ high over him,

¹⁰(...continued)

before and behind, their mouths open to devour this hapless [unfortunate] people which had been so confident in itself. Having taken themselves out from under the hand outstretched for blessing, they discover that the hand is still outstretched, but now lightnings flash from fingers which would have caressed them, and, indeed, would still if they would but return.” (P. 253)

Alexander comments on **verse 10^{Heb} / 11^{Eng}**: “Here begins a second stage in the progress of God’s judgments. He had sent a warning prophecy before (**verse 7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}**), and they had been taught its meaning by experience (**verse 8^{Heb} / 9^{Eng}**), but without effect upon their proud self-confidence. *And (now) Jehovah raises up above him (i.e., Ephraim) the (victorious) enemies of Rezin (his late ally), and (besides these) he will instigate his own (accustomed) enemies (to wit, those mentioned in the next verse)...*

“The suffix in עָלָיו [‘above him’], refers, not to Rezin, but to Jacob , Israel, Ephraim, the inhabitant of Samaria, mentioned in **verses 8^{Heb}, 9^{Eng}**. They who were to conquer Israel are called the enemies of Rezin, to remind the Israelites of their alliance with him, and to intimate that they who had so lately conquered Syria were soon to conquer Israel.” (P. 212)

Motyer states that “the tenses in this verse are difficult but it is best to understand a general reference to the past. The reign of Jeroboam brought prosperity and national self-confidence (see, e.g. **Amos 6:13**). He restored the kingdom to Solomonic boundaries—but what went up like a rocket came down like a stick, and in no time Israel was reeling under blow after blow.” (P. 107)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) of **verse 10** is quite different from the Hebrew:

καὶ ῥάξει ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ἐπανιστανομένους
ἐπ’ ὄρος Σιων ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς
καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν διασκεδάσει
And the God will break apart those rising up,
upon Mount Zion, against them;
and their enemies He will scatter.

¹¹Slotki notes that Rezin’s [the king of Syria’s] foes were “the Assyrians from the north, who were also the adversaries of Ephraim, Rezin’s ally.” (P. 46)

and his enemies¹² He will spur on.¹³

9.11^{Heb} / 9:12^{Eng14}

אַרַם מִקֶּדֶם וּפְלִשְׁתִּים מֵאַחֲזֵר
וַיֹּאכְלוּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־פֶּה
בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב אָפּוֹ
וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נִטְוִיָּה:

Aram at (the) front, and Philistines at the back;¹⁵

¹²Gray comments that “The general terms adversaries [our ‘foes’], enemies are explained in **verse 11** to be the Philistines and Syria.” (P. 184)

¹³Motyer states, “Instead of bowing to the word of the Lord they chose to be like any other ‘power’ in the world and they found the price of this was that they became what they chose, a nation among nations, caught up in the world’s power struggle.”

¹⁴Alexander comments on **verse 11**^{Heb} / **12**^{Eng}: “This verse contains a more particular description of Ephraim’s *own enemies* who were to be stirred up against him, with a declaration that this was not to be the end of the infliction [the action of inflicting something unpleasant or painful on someone or something]. *Aram* (or Syria in the widest sense) *before*, and *Philistia* (or *the Philistines*) *behind*, and they devour Israel with open mouth (i.e. ravenously). For all this (or notwithstanding all this) His wrath does not turn back (from the pursuit or the attack), and still His hand is stretched out...” (P. 213)

Motyer states that “The Arameans were ancestral foes of Israel...the enmity would have continued unabated had not the Assyrian threat thrown them into each other’s arms...Israel doubtless saw itself as securing an ally; Isaiah saw that it was being swallowed up.” (Pp. 107-08)

¹⁵Alexander notes that the Hebrew phrase מִקֶּדֶם...מֵאַחֲזֵר [our ‘at the front...at the back’] “before and behind may simply mean on opposite sides, or more specifically to the east and west, which are often thus described in Hebrew.” (P. 213)

Watts explains that “קֶדֶם means ‘in front,’ and אַחֲזֵר means ‘behind.’ Because one cites direction as though facing the sunrise, קֶדֶם becomes ‘east,’ אַחֲזֵר ‘west.’ This fits Israel’s position with Aram to the east and Philistia to the west.” (P. 141)

and they will devour Israel with every mouth!¹⁶

With all this, His anger has not turned back,

and His hand is still stretched out!¹⁷

9.12^{Heb} / 9:13^{Eng}^{18, 19}

¹⁶The phrase בְּכָל־פֶּה, “with every mouth,” is given varying translations, from “with open mouth,” to “with greedy mouths,” to “with gaping jaws.”

Alexander states that the phrase does not mean “*in every place* (Targum), or *on all sides* (Lowth)—nor does it mean *with all their mouths* (Syriac Peshitto), i.e. the mouths of all their enemies—but *with the whole mouth*, with the mouth wide open (Luther, Calvin and most modern writers [in the 19th century].” (P. 213)

Motyer says the phrase means “greedily and at will.” (P. 108)

¹⁷Slotki says that “stretched out still” means “to mete out more drastic punishment.” (P. 46)

¹⁸Slotki entitles verses **12-16**^{Heb} / **13-17**^{Eng} the “Second strophe.” He comments that “The people still disregarding the prophet’s warning and, despite the calamities enumerated, continuing in their wickedness and corruption are struck again. Their rulers and leaders are taken away, joy is withdrawn from their young men, and even their orphans and widows are deprived of the protection of God’s mercy.” (P. 46)

Kaiser entitles verses **12-16**^{Heb} / **13-17**^{Eng} “The annihilating blow.”

Gray entitles these verses “A day of overwhelming disaster,” and comments that “The first judgment leads to no greater regard for Yahweh (**verse 12**), complete depravity continues (**verses 16c,d**). Consequently Yahweh will bring about a single day of overwhelming disaster when high and low will perish (**verse 13**). The flower of Israel’s youth, its widows and orphans, no longer enjoy Yahweh’s care (**verse 16**)...

“The vagueness of the description points to the strophe being prophetic, not historical.” (P. 185)

Oswalt entitles **verses 9:12-16**^{Heb} / **13-17**^{Eng} “Leaders Who Mislead.”

He comments, “That pride and arrogance which exalts humanity issues in an adulation of the ‘great’ men of a society. But that very adulation renders them less and less able to lead their people. For just leadership can only come from persons who know their own weaknesses and corruptibility...The person who believes, consciously or otherwise, that humanity is ultimate can all too easily accept the glowing things that people say about him or her (meaning it about themselves), and the only goal is to keep them saying those things. ‘Government’ disappears as the leaders pander more and more to the ever-changing whims of a fickle people. This is the situation Isaiah

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describes in **3:1-12** and again in **28:1-29** (there too of Ephraim). Those upon whom the nation ought to be able to depend to set its course and to lift up the standards by which it can measure itself are actually looking to the people to find out what course and standards will be most popular. The result can only be progressive contamination of all goals and values by the rot of self-service and self-adulation.” (P. 254)

Motyer states concerning these same verses that “The bricks have fallen (**verse 10**), now the leaders fall. Inexorably the consequences of rejecting the Lord’s word unfold. Refusing revealed truth, and therefore relying on unaided human wisdom, they find that it is not enough. Their leaders become mis-leaders and everyone comes off the worse; from the *young men* in their prime, who might be thought able to look after themselves, to the defenseless *fatherless and widows*, who are in any case without resource. Even the virtues which the Lord loves (**verse 17**; compare **Psalm 10:14**; **Hosea 14:3**) cannot be had without commitment to the Lord. When the word is rejected every grace is subject to erosion.” (P. 108)

Does this mean that the young men, and the widows and orphans as well, have joined in rejecting the word of YHWH?

¹⁹Oswalt comments on **verses 12-13^{Heb} / 13-14^{Eng}** that “a people who will not respond to the initial judgment which falls upon them (compare **Isaiah 1:5**; **Hosea 6:5**; **Amos 4:6-11**) and seek from God both the diagnosis and the cure (compare **Isaiah 8:19**; **Hosea 5:15-6:3**) will shortly find their foolish rulers leading them into a situation where they will have no leadership at all.” (P. 254)

Alexander comments on **verse 12^{Heb} / 13^{Eng}**: “These continued and repeated strokes are still without effect in bringing the people to repentance. And the people has not turned to Him that smote them, and Jehovah of hosts they have not sought. Sin is described in Scripture as departing from God. Repentance, therefore, is returning to Him...God went on punishing, and the people went on sinning...

“God is thus described, as Aben Ezra has observed, in order to intimate that He was the inflicter of their punishment—the Assyrian being merely the rod of His anger (**Isaiah 10:5**)—and also that His stroke sought to lead them to repentance.” (P. 213)

Motyer comments that “The people (הָעָם) which is emphatic in Hebrew [we see no indication of emphasis], is almost a title for Judah and Israel, ‘the people *par excellence*.’ They who alone ought to have seen Whose hand it was that *struck them* failed to read the lessons of their experience and to ‘return,’ i.e. repent (compare **Amos 4:6ff.**). The only way to flee from God is to flee to Him, *to turn to Him*. Before repentance wrath melts and mercy triumphs...Returning would have brought them redemption and liberation, for *the Lord* (Yahweh) is the God Who redeems His people and overthrows His and their foes; it would have linked them to omnipotence, to the Almighty.” (P. 108)

וְאֶת־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לֹא דָרְשׁוּ׃

And the people did not return to the One striking them;
and to YHWH of Armies²⁰ they did not seek!

9.13^{Heb} / 9:14^{Eng} 21

וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

רֹאשׁ וְזָנָב כַּפֵּה וְאַנְמוֹן

יּוֹם אֶחָד׃

And YHWH will cause to be cut off from Israel,
head and tail, branch and reed—²²

²⁰The phrase “YHWH of Armies” is changed in the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) to τὸν κύριον, “the Lord.”

²¹Watts comments on **verses 13-16**^{Heb} / **14-17**^{Eng} that “The second round of encounter has Yahweh remove effective leadership from Israel. A second action has the remaining leaders confuse their followers. God cannot bless this situation.” (P. 143)

Motyer comments on this verse that “One fatal day brings ruin throughout the nation. The metaphor of **verse 13**^{Heb} / **14**^{Eng} is spelled out in a balanced scheme in the following verses. **Verse 14**^{Heb} / **15**^{Eng} describes the downfall of leadership and **verse 15**^{Heb} / **16**^{Eng} the reason for it; **verse 16**^{Heb} / **17**^{Eng} describes the ruin of the people and the reason for it.” (P. 108)

Alexander comments on **verse 13**^{Heb} / **14**^{Eng}: “The next stroke mentioned is a sudden destruction among all ranks of the people, the extremes being designated by two figures drawn from the animal and vegetable world. And Jehovah has cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day.” (Pp. 213-14)

²²Slotki states that “head and tail” means “leader and follower,” and that “branch and reed,” which his translation has as “palm-branch and reed,” means “the tallest and shortest of plants, symbolizing the upper and lower classes.” (P. 46)

Oswalt explains the phrase *head and tail, palm branch and bulrush*: “By means of [these phrases] the prophet includes in the coming destruction the totality of leadership, from the most honored, the waving palm, to the most humble, the bowing rush (**Isaiah 58:5**). **Isaiah 19:15** uses the same language for the foolish leadership of Egypt.” (P. 255)

(continued...)

(in) one day.²³

²²(...continued)

Alexander comments that “כַּפֵּרֶה” does not mean a root (Aben Ezra) nor a branch in general (Kimchi), but a branch of the palm-tree...or the tree itself...This tree, though now rare in the Holy Land, abounded there of old, especially in the southern part, where several places were named after it (**Deuteronomy 34:3**; **2 Chronicles 20:2** [Jericho, עִיר הַתְּמָרִים, ‘City of the Palms,’ and Engedi, חֲצֵצוֹן תְּמָר, ‘Gravel-stones of a Palm’])...It appears on Roman coins as as the symbol of Judea.” (P. 214)

See the Internet article “Ancient Jewish Coins: Coins from Judaea Capta,” which states “Soon after the Temple at Jerusalem was razed by the victorious troops led by Titus in 70 C.E., his father--Emperor Vespasian--launched an extensive issue of coins commemorating the hard fought Roman victory over the tiny Jewish nation. The Judaea Capta series lasted for 25 years under Vespasian and his two sons who succeeded him as Emperor--Titus and Domitian. These commemoratives were issued in bronze, silver and gold by mints in Rome, the Roman Empire, and Judaea.

“The basic design elements of the coins struck in Rome or in its Empire are a palm tree and a seated figure of a female (allegorical representative of Judaea) in an attitude of mourning. The depiction on these coins may reflect the prophesy of Isaiah (c. 700 B.C.E.): “For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen...Thy men shall fall by the sword and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn, and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground (**Isaiah 3:8, 25-26**). Other Judaea Capta varieties include the standing figure of the victorious emperor, a male captive, the goddess Victory, and Roman symbols of war.

“The most common Judaea Capta coin is the silver denarius issued by Vespasian, picturing Judaea weeping beneath a Roman trophy, and the inscription IVDAEA [Judaea]. Other denarii of Vespasian show Judaea seated next to a palm tree, Judaea standing next to a palm tree with her hands bound, inscribed IVDAEA DEVICTA [Judaea Conquered], a tiny Jewish captive next to Victory, Judaea seated beneath a palm tree with a Roman soldier standing alongside, etc. Some of these designs also appeared on gold coins.” (6/9/2016)

Alexander states that the palm tree, or one of its branches, contrasted with the אֲנָמוֹן, not a smaller branch or twig (Jarchi), but a rush or reed...[denotes] more generally that which is superior and inferior, including every class in the community. The figures are resolved by the **Septuagint [Rahlfs]** (μέγαν καὶ μικρὸν [great and small].” (P. 214)

²³Oswalt comments that the phrase “in one day” means ‘Abruptly, suddenly, the judgment will fall, without time for preparation or amelioration [improvement]... Fortunately for humanity, the God Who can destroy in a day is also the God Who can and does redeem in a day (**Zechariah 3:9**).” (P. 255)

(continued...)

זָקֵן וְנִשְׂוֵא־פָנִים

הוּא הָרֵאשׁ

וְנָבִיא מוֹרֵה־שֶׁקֶר

הוּא הַזָּנָב:

Elderly man and honored person—

²³(...continued)

Because look—the stone which I placed before Joshua—
upon one stone (there are) seven eyes.

Look at Me—(I am) engraving its engraving / inscription—
(it is) a saying of YHWH of Armies—
and I will remove (the) iniquity of this the land / earth in one day!

²⁴Alexander comments on **verse 14^{Heb} / 15^{Eng}**: “To the descriptive figures of the preceding verse, the prophet now adds a specific application of the first [descriptive figure]. Jehovah had cut off from Israel, not only in a general sense, the upper and lower classes of society, but in a more restricted sense, the wicked rulers, who were the corrupt head of the body politic, and the false prophets who, as their abject adherents, and on account of their hypocrisy and false pretensions to Divine authority, might be regarded as its tail, because contemptible and odious, even in comparison with other wicked men, who laid no claim to a religious character. *The elder and the favorite* (or honorable person), *he is the head and the prophet teaching falsehood, he is the tail.*” (P. 214)

Oswalt states that “Here the writer interprets the figure, and with wry humor defines his competitors, the false prophets, as the tail. Delitzsch suggested that this image was intended to compare these prophets’ fawning flattery to a dog’s wagging tail. Equally likely it merely conveys Isaiah’s contempt for those who sold their integrity to the service of the rulers (**1 Kings 22:5-28; Jeremiah 28:1-17**)...

“Because of this self-serving attitude on the part of the leaders of the nation the people can receive no truly objective guidance. The leadership says and does only what is most likely to maintain itself in power.” (P. 255)

Gray describes this verse as “An annotation, interpreting ‘the head’ and ‘the tail’ of **verse 13**. Note the characteristic הוּא [‘it’], used alike by Jewish and Arabic annotators.” (P. 186)

he (is) the head;²⁵
and a prophet, a teacher of falsehood–
he (is) the tail!²⁶

9.15^{Heb} / 9:16^{Eng} 27

וְיִהְיוּ מְאֻשְׂרֵי הָעַם־הַזֶּה

מִתְעִים

וּמְאֻשְׂרָיו

מִבְּלָעִים:

And those pronouncing this people blessed will be
leading astray;
and those pronounced blessed
(will be) swallowed up!

²⁵Motyer comments that “The prominent men / ‘uplifted of face’ are those ‘important’ people who add weight to the community though not holding official position. As in **Isaiah 3:1-4**, inadequate leadership is one of the signs of Divine judgment at work.” (P. 108)

²⁶Slotki explains that “The false prophet is in reality no leader but a follower. In his prophecy he merely says what the ruling classes (*the elder and the man of rank*) wish him to say.” (P. 46)

²⁷Alexander comments on **verse 15^{Heb} / 16^{Eng}**: “This verse gives a reason, not why all classes were to be destroyed, but why the rulers and false prophets had been specially mentioned...The truth expressed and implied is that the leaders of the people had destroyed them, and should perish with them. *The leaders of this people have been seducers, and the led* (such of the people as are thus misled) *of them* (are) *swallowed up* (or ruined).” (P. 214)

Motyer states that “Those who guided the people will be led astray / ‘swallowed up,’ i.e. they will disappear without trace; a vivid portrayal of the outcome of being directed on the wrong road.” (Pp. 108-09)

עַל־כֵּן עַל־בְּחֹרָיו
 לֹא־יִשְׂמַח אֱלֹהֵי
 וְאֶת־יְתֻמָּיו וְאֶת־אֲלֻמְנָתָיו
 לֹא יִרְחַם
 כִּי כָלֹ חַנְּף וּמִרְעַ
 וְכָל־פֶּה דֹבֵר נִבְלָה
 בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב אָפוּ
 וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נִטּוּיָהּ:

Therefore, over His / his chosen young men

²⁸Alexander comments on **verse 16^{Heb} / 17^{Eng}**: “*Therefore* (because the people are thus incorrigibly impenitent) *the Lord will not rejoice over their young men* (literally *chosen ones*, i.e. for military service, the word being used in the general sense of *youths*, but seldom without reference to war), *and on their orphans and their widows* (elsewhere represented as peculiarly the objects of God’s care) *He will not have mercy* (expressing in the strongest form the extent and severity of the threatened judgments) *for every one of them* (literally *of it*, referring to the singular noun *people*) *is profane* (or *impious*) *and an evil doer*, *and every mouth is speaking folly* (in the strong Hebrew sense of wickedness). *For all this His wrath is not turned back, and still is His hand outstretched.*” (P. 216)

Motyer states that “*Therefore* indicates that the situation of both leaders and led is culpable. The former need not have misled, for the Divine word was available; the latter need not have followed, for God’s truth had been openly preached to them...

“*The fatherless and widows were the prime objects of Divine concern (Psalm 68:5)*. When His compassion is withdrawn from such the nation is rejected indeed. The reference is probably to the military overthrow in which the nation ended, with young men losing their lives, children being orphaned and women widowed.” (P. 109)

my Lord²⁹ will not rejoice;
and to His / his orphans and His / his widows
He will not show compassion,³⁰
because all of it (is) godless and an evil-doer,
and every mouth is speaking senselessness.
With all this, His anger is not turned back;
and still His hand is stretched out!

9.17^{Heb} / 9:18^{Eng}³¹

²⁹Where our Hebrew text reads אֲדֹנָי, “my Lord,” some eighteen Hebrew manuscripts read יְהוָה, YHWH.

³⁰Slotki comments that “Even widows and orphans must suffer in the midst of such godlessness and corruption.” (P. 47)

Oswalt states, “As a result of its foolish leadership the nation has come to the point of complete corruption so that God’s aid is denied to both the strong, the choice young warrior, and to the weak, the orphans and widows. He does not take joy from the young men’s prowess in battle, so they are defeated and there is no help for the defenseless at home. The reason for this situation is plain enough, for like rotten fruit, the decay has reached every level of society...

“The evidence of this decay is seen in the expression of their values: they speak foolishness...This is not harmless triviality but rather that perversion of truth which makes good evil and evil good (**Isaiah 5:20; Psalm 14:1**). To speak or act in error is one thing, but to speak or act foolishly represents a conscious denial of reality...Such an attitude is far from constituting a return to the Lord and His values. So the out-stretched hand is still one of judgment.” (P. 255)

Oswalt refers to a number of other passages, but they do not say what he is saying here—another example of his sometimes piling up “proof-texts” that don’t prove what he claims they do. Nonetheless, we think his comment is appropriate and true.

³¹Slotki entitles **verses 17-20^{Heb} / 18-21^{Eng}** the “Third strophe,” and comments that they depict “Utter confusion and dejection, widespread anarchy and fratricidal [characterized by the murder of brothers] war.” (P. 47)

Oswalt entitles these verses “Loss of Brotherhood.” He comments that “The initial spark of pride issued in a misplaced adulation of human leadership. Such leaders must inevitably lead their people astray and fail. When that happens the result is anarchy. It is the old cry of ‘Every man for himself.’ With the restraints removed, all the ugliness of self-serving appears. Usually blood relations may be depended upon, but

(continued...)

כִּי־בַעֲרָה כְּאֵשׁ רְשָׁעָה

שָׁמִיר וְשִׁית תֹּאכֹל

וְתִצַּת בְּסִבְכֵי הַיַּעַר

³¹(...continued)

not so when 'self' becomes all important. Wickedness knows no bounds once it is unleashed...

“Nor is this solely an ancient phenomenon. Some of the scenes reported in [Nazi] Germany’s last hours before the end of World War II are strongly reminiscent of Isaiah’s pictures.” (P. 256)

Motyer comments on **verses 17-20^{Heb} / 18-21^{Eng}** that “Under deficient leadership (**verses 12-16^{Heb} / 13-17^{Eng}**) the door is opened to unchecked self-seeking. This stanza exposes the betrayal of brotherliness (**verse 18^{Heb} / 19^{Eng}**), the essential barrenness of the acquisitive life (**verse 19^{Heb} / 20^{Eng}**) and the breakdown of social cohesiveness (**verse 20^{Heb} / 21^{Eng}**).” (P. 109)

Gray entitles these same verses “Civil War.”

He comments that “Civil war is the fresh element in this third picture of coming judgment. Israelite relentlessly pursues Israelite, tribe is ranged against tribe.” (P. 186)

Alexander comments on **verse 17^{Heb} / 18^{Eng}**: “This verse assigns a reason why God’s hand is still stretched out for the destruction of His people, by describing that destruction as the natural effect of their own wickedness, here likened to a fire beginning near the ground among the thorns and briars, then extending to the undergrowth or brushwood of the forest, which, as it consumes away, ascends in a volume of smoke. *For wickedness burneth as the fire, thorns and briars it consumes, then kindles in the thickets of the forest, and they roll themselves upwards, a column (literally, an ascent) of smoke...*

“Most of the older writers translate all the verbs as futures, thus converting the whole verse into a threatening. But the interchange of preterite and future forms, as well as the connection, seems to show that they should be explained as presents, and as expressing the natural effects of wickedness...

“Thorns and briars are often used as emblems of the wicked (**Micah 7:4; Nehemiah 1:10; 2 Samuel 23:6**), and their burning as a figure for the punishment of sinners (**Isaiah 33:12; Psalm 118:12; 2 Samuel 23:7**).” (P. 216)

Motyer comments on **verse 17^{Heb} / 18^{Eng}** that “the picture changes from *briars* to *forest thickets*, and where it enters it destroys. The end is total destruction as all is carried away in a *column of smoke*.” (P. 109)

וַיִּתְאַבְּכוּ גְאוֹת עֵשׂוֹן:

Because wickedness burned like the fire;

it will consume briars and thorns.

And it set on fire in thickets of the forest;³²

and it rolled up (?)³³ a majesty of smoke.

9.18^{Heb} / 19^{Eng}³⁴

³²Slotki states that the “briars and thorns” represent “the common people, who are the first to suffer in the national demoralization,” and that the “thickets in the forest” represent “the elders and rulers” who “will not escape the effects of their corruption.” (P. 47)

Oswalt states that “Of course, as Mauchline and Delitzsch correctly point out, there are two fires described here, but they are intimately related. One is the consuming fire of sin. The other is the fire of God’s wrath. But the two are aspects of one another. Because sin is contrary to God’s purposes it has the seeds of its own destruction within it...In this sense, its own results are the judgment of God. So as sin both fuels a lust for greater lawlessness and, at the same time, devours its perpetrators, the last scraps of filial attachment are stripped away, leaving brother against brother.” (Pp. 256-57) What do you think? Are these two fires, or one fire?

³³The phrase וַיִּתְאַבְּכוּ, *wayyith)abbekhu*, is found nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**, and as a result, its meaning is uncertain.

³⁴Watts states that in **verse 18^{Heb} / 19^{Eng}** “The third round of the encounter speaks of God’s judgment as a counter-fire that singes the land and turns the people into highly combustible material. The figure changes, becomes more personal. The extreme situation leaves no room for compassion and mutual aid.” (P. 143)

Alexander comments on **verse 18^{Heb} / 19^{Eng}**: “The figure of a general conflagration is continued in this verse, and then exchanged for a literal description of the miseries produced by civil war. *In the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, the land is darkened (with the smoke—or heated by the flame) and the people is like food (or fuel) of fire—one another (literally, man his brother) they do not spare...*

He states that “The word brother may have merely its idiomatic meaning of another person, or be treated as emphatic, and as meaning that the nearest ties of blood were disregarded (Calvin).” (Pp. 217-18)

Motyer states that “Wickedness is inherently self-destructive as the simile of verse **17^{Heb} / 18^{Eng}** shows, but it is so by the will of God...Wrath (עֵבֶרָה) probably denotes the out-bursting of wrath which sweeps all before it...See **2 Kings 15:8ff.** for

(continued...)

בְּעִבְרַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת נִעְתָּם אֶרֶץ

וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמֵאֲכֹלֶת אֵשׁ

אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו לֹא יִחְמְלוּ:

By YHWH of Armies' fury (the) land / earth was scorched;

and the people became like fuel (for) a fire.

No one will spare his brother.³⁵

³⁴(...continued)

the civil wars which followed the death of Jeroboam II. Six kings reigned before Samaria fell in 722 B.C.E., five came to the throne by assassination and only one passed the throne to his son. This, at the top, was symptomatic of a grab-all society in which *people* are just so much *fuel*, i.e. an expendable commodity." (Pp. 109-11)

³⁵Slotki comments that this verse (18^{Heb} / 19^{Eng}) "describes a grim state of famine culminating in insanity." (P. 47)

Alexander comments that "The horrors of civil war are now presented under the fearful image of insatiable hunger, leading men to devour their own flesh. *And he tears on the right hand, and is hungry still, and devours to the left, and still they are not satisfied; each the flesh of his own arm they devour...*The prophet sees one assailing the other on the right, and the other in turn attacking him upon the left, and this double subject, corresponding to *a man* and *his brother*, may have given rise to...the plural verbs referring to the people collectively, the singular nouns to the component individuals. The Targum explains *right* and *left* as meaning *south* and *north*; but they simply denote that the devouring should be mutual, and extend in all directions...The additional idea, that the fighting is between near kinsmen, is expressed by the strong figure of devouring one's own flesh, while the special mention of the arm may imply...that the mutual destroyers ought to have been mutual protectors." (P. 218)

Oswalt comments that "The particularly devouring power of sin is seen in its capacity to destroy human relations. These connections, upon which humanity is most deeply dependent, cannot survive the fire of self-serving...That has been the history of Israel up to and including Isaiah's own day. In the north, one bloody coup after another followed upon Jeroboam II's death in 752 B.C.E. until the final Assyrian victory thirty years later. The south had been spared a good deal of that kind of dynastic bloodshed because of the strength of the Davidic heritage, but the inter-tribal hostilities, which had begun even in the wilderness and had continued into the present with Ephraim's most recent attacks, were very real to them. It is this history which probably prompted Isaiah's reference to Ephraim and Manasseh and then Judah." (P. 257)

וַיִּגְזַר עַל־יְמִינָו וַרְעֵב

וַיֹּאכַל עַל־שְׂמְאוֹל וְלֹא שָׂבְעוּ

אִישׁ בְּשַׂר־זַרְעוֹ יֹאכְלוּ:

And he cut on (the) right, and he was (still) hungry;
and he ate on (the) left, and they were not satisfied.³⁷

Each one eats his arm's flesh.³⁸

³⁶Watts comments on **verses 19-20^{Heb} / 20-21^{Eng}** that “The people turn on each other in an orgy of self-destruction. The proud boast of self-reliant rebuilding (**verse 9**) forgotten, the inner fabric of social and political relationship succumbs to chaotic violence. (P. 143)

Motyer comments on **verse 19^{Heb} / 20^{Eng}**: “But for all this acquisitive activity no personal satisfaction or fulfilment ensues...The metaphor of greedily carving food now in this direction (on the right) now in that (on the left), which, nonetheless, fails to satisfy hunger...

“In this senseless mutual exploitation, each was in fact eroding what would be for his own strength in the time of trial.”

³⁷Gray comments that “The inappeasable hostility of the people is compared to a hunger which is constantly and largely fed but never satisfied.” (P. 187)

³⁸Alexander comments on that “The application of the figures in **verse 18^{Heb} / 19^{Eng}** is now made plain by the prophet himself, who has been drawing no imaginary scene. It is Israel, the chosen race, that feeds on its own flesh. *They devour each the flesh of his own arm—Manasseh (devours) Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh--and together they (are) against Judah. For all this His wrath is not turned back, and still His hand (is) stretched out...*

“The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were more nearly related to each other than to any of the rest, and therefore their hostility afforded the most striking illustration of the mutual rancor which the prophet has described as prevalent...The mutual enmity of these two kindred tribes could only be exceeded by their common hatred to their common relative, the tribe of Judah...No sooner did one party gain the upper hand in the kingdom of the ten tribes, than it seems to have addressed itself to the favorite work of harassing or conquering Judah, as in the case of Pekah , who invaded it almost as soon as he had waded to the throne through the blood of Pekahiah. The repetition in

(continued...)

מִנְשֵׁה אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם וְאֶפְרַיִם אֶת־מִנְשֵׁה

יַחֲדוּ הֵמָּה עַל־יְהוּדָה

בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב אָפוּ

וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה:

Menasseh (eats) Ephraim, and Ephraim (eats) Menasseh;
together they (are) against Judah.

With all this, His anger did not turn back;
and still His hand (is) stretched out!

10:1⁴⁰ הוּי הַחֲקָקִים חֲקָקֵי־אֵין

³⁸(...continued)

the last clause intimates that even these extreme evils should be followed by still worse; that these were but the beginning of sorrows; that the end was not yet.” (Pp. 218-19)

Watts states that “the Hebrew text’s ‘the flesh of his own arm’ does not make good sense. The Alexandrian group of the **Septuagint** [Greek translation of the **Hebrew Bible**] adds τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, “of the brother.”

³⁹Motyer comments on **verse 20**^{Heb} / **21**^{Eng}: “The scale of the mutual destruction was nationwide...It is the final condemnation of this society that with all the bonds of family relationship, shared experiences and Divine blessing commonly enjoyed, the only thing which in the end united them was a common enmity. Even in those anarchic, perilous times, energy and resources were found to go to war with Judah (e.g. **2 Kings 15:37**).” (P. 110)

Gray comments that “In **verses 16-20a** Isaiah certainly is describing, whether historically or (as is more probable) prophetically, a state of affairs similar to what he actually witnessed in the Northern kingdom.” (P. 187)

⁴⁰Kaiser entitles **verses 1-4** “Woe to the lawbreakers!”

Oswalt entitles these verses “Oppression of the Helpless,” and comments that “The first manifestation of human pride is in oppression (see also **Malachi 3:5**,

And I will draw near to you (plural) for the judgment;
and I will be Witness, hurrying (My judgment) against the magicians,
and against the adulterers,

(continued...)

⁴⁰(...continued)

and against the ones swearing to the falsehood;
and against those oppressing (the) wage of a hired person,
a widow, and an orphan,
and turning away a temporary resident / immigrant;
and they did not fear / reverence Me, said YHWH of Armies!).

It is one thing when competition or rank and favor pits brother against brother and region against region. It is another when persons begin consciously to deprive the helpless of their rights in order to oppress them. At this point, the lowest limits of cynicism and self-serving have been reached. The brutal nature of warfare and conquest can at least be masked with the trappings of destiny and courage. Oppression of the helpless has no such coverings. Its essential ugliness cannot be hidden.” (Pp. 258-59)

Slotki comments on **verses 1-4** that they constitute “a strophe ending with the same refrain as the three strophes in the preceding chapters. It may be regarded as the last of a poem of four strophes and as referring still to the Northern Kingdom; or it may be viewed as being connected with the following oracle and like it referring to the Kingdom of Judah.” (P. 48)

Watts comments on **verses 1-4** that “Mourners take the hint and pick up a lament. The helplessness of ineffective crisis government is pictured. The ‘misleaders’ (9:15) show of decrees and executive orders only increases injustice but brings no order to these chaotic times. The state is dead, the mourners chant, and the leaders have no option but to share in its fate. The final comment notes that *God’s anger has not changed*. Israel’s fate, as a nation, is sealed...

“[These verses] respond to the dark picture of Israel’s condition, lamenting the bad leadership which had precipitated its current state. Oppressive laws against the weak and helpless for the hope of ill-gotten gain have weakened the fabric of society. It cannot withstand the external pressures. The exploiters will suffer like all others. Thus they experience God’s anger which was aroused by their deeds.” (P. 144)

Alexander comments on **verses 1-4** that “The prophet first completes his description of the prevalent iniquity, with special reference to injustice and oppression, as a punishment [for] which he threatens death and deportation by the hands of the Assyrians...

“In these verses, as in the different divisions of the **ninth chapter**, there is an accusation followed by a threatening of punishment. The sin denounced in the first two verses is that of oppression and injustice. The punishment threatened is desolation by a foreign foe, and its effect, captivity and death. *Woe unto them that decree decrees of injustice, and that write oppression which they have prescribed*. Many interpreters suppose two different kinds of public functionaries to be here described, viz., judges or

(continued...)

⁴⁰(...continued)

magistrates, and their clerks or scribes...or evil counselors and sovereigns...or civil rulers and prophets.” (P. 220)

Motyer states that “This fourth—and as the poem stands, final—stanza returns to the topic of leadership but not in the same way as verses **9:12-16**^{Heb} / **13-17**^{Eng}. There the charge was general—inept, misleading leaders. Here the charge is of blatant misrule, the wilful making of decrees in the interest of class-division and personal advantage. In the end, social unruliness (**9:12-20**^{Heb} / **13-21**^{Eng}) resolves itself into the dominance of an unscrupulous clique who write laws for their own ends.” (P. 110)

Gray entitles **verses 1-4** “The Doom of unjust Judges,” and comments that “This strophe is curiously unlike those that precede: in each of those, judgment is categorically announced, and the cause for it directly stated. Here the coming of a ‘day of visitation’ is *assumed* in a question put to those whom it will overtake, and the ground of judgment is *implied* in the description of those to whom the opening interjection of calamity refers. The subject of the first three strophes is an entire people or country, which is throughout referred to in the third person. The subject of this strophe is a particular class—the judges that take bribes and wrong the poorer litigants; and these people are here addressed in the second person...

“Charges against the rulers of greed and unrighteousness do indeed ‘run like a red thread through Isaiah’s speeches against Judah’ (**Isaiah 3:14-15; 5:7-8, 23; 1:17, 26**); but the same disorder prevailed in the Northern kingdom (compare e.g. **Amos 5:12**).” (P. 189)

But we ask, where does this passage mention “judges” or “litigants”? In fact, the text does not specify who it is other than they are those making wicked decrees and writing legislation that causes trouble. Surely this is a description of those who hold power, and have the authority to make decrees and write statutes that are binding upon others, especially the poor people. Judges could certainly be included in their number, but so also could be priests, especially high priests, who were in charge of the temple and its sacrificial worship; it could include prophets, especially those who served in the royal court and in the temple; and most of all, it would include kings and the high officials serving in their courts.

Gray comments on **verses 1-2**, that “One class of persons, not two...are here denounced...The persons referred to are not the makers of laws...for new laws, whether good or bad, were not an annual production as in modern states—but the administrators of the laws, the judges or arbitrators; these, being bribed, assigned property in dispute, or determined penalties without regard to the rights of the question, but merely according to the price paid for their decision, so that the poor lost their cases, or the substance of widows and orphans was wasted in trying to pay a high enough price for what was theirs by right. Thus the decrees, or decisions, of these judges are mischievous, or hurtful to, and entail suffering on, the weaker parties...

(continued...)

וּמִכְתָּבִים עֲמַל כָּתְבוּ:

Alas / Woe to those making statutes--⁴¹

statutes of wickedness!

And those writing--

they wrote trouble--⁴²

⁴⁰(...continued)

“When the judges are said to inscribe and write the decrees, it is not, of course, meant that they necessarily did the actual writing, but that they were the authors of the decisions and had them written down...

“A very large number of the written records of decisions of the Assyrian and Babylonian law-courts have been preserved; these deal with a great variety of disputes touching inheritance, deposits, partnerships, lands, houses, and other property...

“The decision was written down and the notary of the court gave a copy to the plaintiff, if not also to the defendant, and kept one copy for the archives...Similar Jewish documents of the fifth century B.C.E. have been found...In **Jeremiah 32:6-13** we have a precise account of the writing of a deed of sale.” (Pp. 190-91)

Motyer comments on **verse 1**: *Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees!* ‘Woe to those who enact mischievous statutes, and the writers who write trouble.’ The former are the law-makers...and the latter are the promulgators and administrators, drafting laws for publication and application.” (P. 110)

⁴¹Where our Hebrew text has the definite article, הַחֲקִיקִים, “the ones decreeing,” 1QIs^a omits the definite article, and reads “ones decreeing.”

⁴²Translations of **verse 1** vary:

King James, “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness *which* they have prescribed”;

Tanakh, “Ha! Those who write out evil writs And compose iniquitous documents”;

New Revised Standard, “Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes”;

New International, “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees”;

New Jerusalem, “Woe to those who enact unjust decrees, who compose oppressive legislation”;

Rahlf, οὐαὶ τοῖς γράφουσιν πονηρίαν γράφοντες γὰρ πονηρίαν γράφουσιν, “Woe to the ones who are writing evil—for writing evil they are writing!”

(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

What do you think? Who is Isaiah talking about? Could these be writings that have been included in the **Hebrew Bible**? Could Isaiah mean statutes such as those which demand capital punishment for rebellious children, or homosexuals, etc.? Will those who quote **2 Timothy 3:16**, “All writing / every writing is God-breathed...” include these writings as coming from God? Is not the student of the **Bible** warned that not all written statutes and decrees are good and profitable?

Slotki comments that “Both the judges and the scribes are employed in framing legislation which enables them to exploit the poor and the helpless under the mask of legality.” (P. 48)

Yes, but we ask, Why name only judges and scribes? Why not name royal officials like Ahab and Jezebel, or prophets serving in the royal court, such as opposed Jeremiah, or high priests like Amaziah who opposed Amos, or Haman, the high Persian official in the **Book of Esther**, an early Hitler, who authored legislation demanding the murder of all Jews?

Gray states that “The persons referred to are not the makers of laws...for new laws, whether good or bad, were not an annual production as in modern states.” (P. 190) We wonder where Gray got this idea. Does he assume that all the laws contained in the **Five Books of Moses** came directly from Moses at one time?

We say, Moses probably gave the Ten Commandments, and the Covenant Code; but Moses had numerous judges and priests serving under him, who were deciding cases, and who were daily issuing both judicial and priestly decisions in Moses’ name, decisions which would become part of the lengthy legislation found in **Exodus, Leviticus** [with its numerous priestly sacrificial laws], **Numbers** and **Deuteronomy**. After Moses’ death, came Joshua, who also gave **Torah** (see **Joshua 24:25-26**), and Joshua was followed by other leaders in Israel like the Judges—such as Deborah and Samuel—and then the kings, especially David and Solomon, who likewise issued decrees and laws to guide the people as new situations and problems arose.

Jesus, in **Matthew 23:2**, is quoted as saying the scribes and the Pharisees “sit on Moses’ seat,” meaning they gave legislation and wrote decrees that were binding on the people just as was the original Mosaic legislation. And there both were and still are law-makers and writers of legislation who are selfish and self-serving, whose laws and decrees are given to enhance their own gain, certainly not the welfare of the poor who are subject to their laws and decrees. Such legislation is wicked—not good; it doesn’t help—it causes “trouble.”

Can you think of modern legislation that does the same thing? What about in the history of America, where legislation was enacted to prevent women from voting, or that deprived African-Americans of their civil rights? Has not such written legislation caused immense trouble in our history?

(continued...)

10:2 לְהַטּוֹת מִדִּין דְּלִים

וּלְגַזֵּל מִשֹּׁפֵט עֲנִי עַמִּי

לְהִיּוֹת אֶלְמָנוֹת שְׁלָלָם

וְאֶת־תּוֹמִים יִבְזוּ:

to turn aside poor people from judgment,
and to rob justice of afflicted ones of My people;⁴³

⁴²(...continued)

We say, Just because something is written law / legislation, even in the **Bible**, or in national constitutions, does not make it automatically right or just! All legislation, whether secular or religious, whether non-biblical or biblical, must be constantly scrutinized and either upheld or abandoned on the basis of genuine justice and what its effect is on the poor among us, i.e., widows and orphans and immigrants—those with little or no legal power!

Gray comments that “Charges against the rulers of greed and unrighteousness do indeed ‘run like a red thread through Isaiah’s speeches against Judah’ (**Isaiah 3:14-15; 5:7-8, 23; 1:17, 26**); but the same disorder prevailed in the northern kingdom (compare, for example, **Amos 5:12**)...

He adds that “A very large number of the written records of decisions of the Assyrian and Babylonian law-courts have been preserved; these deal with a great variety of disputes touching inheritance, deposits, partnerships, lands, houses, and other property...The decisions were written down and the notary of the court gave a copy to the plaintiff, if not also to the defendant, and kept one copy for the archives... Similar Jewish documents of the 5th century B.C.E. have been found...In **Jeremiah 32:6-13** we have a precise account of the writing of a deed of sale.” (P. 191)

Oswalt comments on **verses 1-2** that “Those responsible for maintaining the laws of the country are doing so in such a way as to enrich themselves at the expense of the helpless...Such partiality was a particular affront to God, Who is in Himself just but Who also is concerned for those who lack the normal ‘leverage’ to ensure that justice is done them.” (P. 259)

⁴³Slotki states that **verse 2** “describes the aim and the result of the legislation spoken of in the preceding verse.” (P. 48)

Kaiser comments that “Underlying [this “alas” or “woe” of **verses 1-2**] is the conviction that the Deity is the Advocate of all those who cannot plead their own cause and carry it through...

(continued...)

for widows to become their prey,
and orphans they plunder. ⁴⁴

⁴³(...continued)

“Happy the people among whom belief in the working of Divine righteousness has not yet died out, and among whom the powerful know that One even more powerful is over them. Happy, too, a people among whom the more insignificant do not allow themselves to be blinded by jealousy, recognize the success and achievement of others, and understand that a tyranny from below can have as corrupting an effect on the community as a tyranny from above.” (P. 104)

Of course this last sentence of Kaiser is his addition to the text, which says nothing concerning a “tyranny from below,” but is a political comment critical of the poor when they finally come to power. The fact is that the poor rarely come to power; but when they do, they can be just as unjust as their wealthy predecessors!

Motyer states that “The purpose of the legislation is now stated: the denial of justice (**verse 2a**) and the manipulation of justice for gain (**verse 2b**). Possibly the rulers concerned would have denied such an uncaring purpose, but the **Old Testament** insists that everything foreseeably resulting from any action (the remote intention) is part of the purpose of that action (the immediate intention). Both עָנִי (poor) and עֲבָרָה (oppressed) have the same general ambience, ‘poor’ as contrasted with ‘rich,’ and ‘weak’ as contrasted with ‘influential.’” (Pp. 110-11)

Alexander comments that “This form of expression frequently occurs in the sense of perverting justice or doing injustice.” (P. 221) See:

Exodus 23:6,

You shall not turn aside justice of your poor person in his disputed case!

Deuteronomy 24:17,

You shall not thrust aside a judicial decision of a temporary resident (or) an orphan;
and you shall not take a widow’s garment as a pledge!

Deuteronomy 27:19,

Cursed (is) one who thrusts aside a legal decision
(on behalf of) a temporary resident, an orphan and a widow!
And all the people will say, Amen!

⁴⁴Included among the poor people who are targets of unjust legislation are the two most vulnerable groups—widows and orphans, who are oftentimes mentioned in

(continued...)

⁴⁴(...continued)

biblical statements as those to whom special care and protection must be given. See:

Exodus

22:22, do not abuse widows or orphans!;

Deuteronomy

10:18, YHWH executes justice for the widow and orphan;

14:29, the Levite who has no inheritance, the temporary resident (immigrant), orphan and widow;

16:11, identical listing;

16:14, same listing, but including male and female slaves / servants;

24:17, 19, 20, 21, temporary resident (immigrant), orphan, widow;

26:12-13, same listing as **14:29** and **16:11**;

27:19, anyone who perverts justice to temporary residents (immigrants), orphans and widows;

Job

22:9, Eliphaz accuses Job of having abused widows and orphans;

24:3, Job agrees that widows and orphans must be cared for, but Shaddai doesn't judge violaters;

29:13, Job claims he has made the widow's heart sing for joy;

Psalms

68:5, God is the Father of the fatherless and Protector of widows;

Proverb

15:25, YHWH maintains the widow's boundaries;

Isaiah

1:17, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause!

1:23, faithless leaders do not bring justice to orphans, nor defend the widow's cause;

9:17, YHWH will not have compassion on the orphan and widow, because of the sinfulness of their nation;

10:2 (here), woe to those who rob widows and orphans!;

Jeremiah

7:6, YHWH will let Judah dwell in her land if, among other things, they will not oppress the temporary resident (immigrant), widow and orphan;

22:3, "Do justice and righteousness; deliver the robbed from the oppressor; do no wrong to the temporary resident (immigrant), orphan or widow, and shed no innocent blood";

49:11, YHWH tells Edom He will keep their orphans alive, and their widows can trust in Him;

Ezekiel

22:7, the judgment of bloody Jerusalem is: "Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the temporary resident (immigrant) suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you!";

Zechariah

(continued...)

10:3⁴⁵ וּמַה־תַּעֲשׂוּ לַיּוֹם פְּקֻדָּה

וּלְשׂוֹאָה מִמֶּרְחֵק תָּבוֹא

עַל־מִי תִּנּוּסוּ לְעִזְרָה

וְאַנְהָ תַעֲזְבוּ כְּבוֹדְכֶם:

And what will they do for / at a day of (YHWH's) visitation (to punish)?,⁴⁶

⁴⁴(...continued)

7:10, “Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the temporary resident (immigrant), or the poor, and let none of you devise evil in your heart against another!;

Malachi

3:5, YHWH will judge sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, oppressors of hired workers, the fatherless and widows, those who thrust aside temporary residents (immigrants), and do not fear Him!;

Mark

12:40, Jesus observes and applauds a poor widow’s offering;

Luke

20:47, Jesus warns against those who devour widows’ houses, while praying long prayers!;

Acts

6:1, a complaint in the early church about widows being neglected in the daily distribution of aid;

9:39-41, mention of widows in Christian movement in Joppa;

1 Timothy

5:3-16, Paul gives instructions concerning genuine widows;

Jacob (“James”)

1:27, pure religion visits orphans and widows in their affliction.

⁴⁵Alexander comments on **verse 3** that “The wicked rulers are themselves addressed, and warned of an approaching crisis, when they must be deprived of all that they now glory in. *And* (though you are now powerful and rich) *what will you do in the day of visitation, and in the ruin* (which) *shall come from far* (though all may appear safe at home)? *To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory* [our ‘wealth’] (for safe keeping)? The questions imply negation, as if he had said, You can do nothing to protect yourselves, there is no place of concealment for your glory [wealth].” (Pp. 221-22)

⁴⁶Oswalt notes that the root פְּקֻדָּה “has a broad range of meanings, but all can be grouped together under the idea of inspection by the commander. The results of such an inspection may be positive or negative depending solely on the condition of the

(continued...)

and for a destruction⁴⁷ (that) will come from afar?⁴⁸
To⁴⁹ whom will you (plural) flee for help?

⁴⁶(...continued)

situation.” (P. 258) The noun פְּקֻדָּה has various meanings, from “oversight,” to “mustered,” to “visitation,” to “store.” Here, it means “visitation for punishment.”

Oswalt states on **verses 3-4** that “the Master has only entrusted His servants with their positions and will shortly come to survey (פְּקַד) their stewardship (compare **Matthew 24:45-51**). What will they do then?...

“For these people, *the day of visitation* will be a day of disaster with neither help nor hiding place, for the only Refuge is the very One Who brings the disaster...All the illgotten wealth will be lost as devastation sweeps in from far away (the coming from a great distance may refer to Assyria or it may also be a way of expressing God’s sovereignty: He is not merely a local God.) The position and power which enabled them to walk on the backs of the poor will be meaningless before God’s judgment.” (Pp. 259-60)

Gray states that “here the day of visitation of Yahweh is thought of as a desolating storm already brewing in the distance...but Yahweh, the true refuge...is Himself the cause of this storm, and consequently for the unjust judges here addressed there will be no refuge to flee to.” (P. 192)

⁴⁷Alexander states that the Hebrew word שׁוּאָה originally signifies a noise or tumult, and is therefore peculiarly appropriate to the ruin caused by foreign invasions, such as those of the Assyrians and Babylonians, which appear to be alluded to.” (P. 222)

Oswalt translates by “devastation,” and states that it is “parallel to ‘cloud’ in **Ezekiel 38:9**, suggesting some such meaning as ‘storm.’” (P. 258)

⁴⁸We take the question in this verse to mean What will you do when YHWH’s visitation to punish comes from afar, that is, from the far off eastern nation of Assyria? Motyer agrees, stating that “*From afar* is a concealed reference to Assyria.” (P. 111) But see footnote 6.

Alexander states that “According to the usage of the **Old Testament**, *the day of visitation* is a time when God manifests His presence specially, whether in mercy or in wrath, but most frequently the latter.” (P. 222)

⁴⁹Here the preposition עַל, which normally means “on,” or “over” or “upon” or “against,” obviously means the same thing as the preposition אֶל, “to.” We have

(continued...)

And where will you leave your wealth / abundance?⁵⁰

10:4⁵¹ בְּלִתֵּי כָרַע תַּחַת אֲסִיר
וְתַחַת הַרְוּגִים יִפְלוּ
בְּכָל-זֹאת לֹא-שָׁב אָפוּ
וְעוֹד יָדוּ נְטוּיָה:

Except—he bowed down beneath a prisoner,⁵²

⁴⁹(...continued)

oftentimes observed that especially in the later writings of the **Hebrew Bible**, prepositions lose their former, more precise meanings, and are used rather interchangeably, as is the case here.

Alexander states that “עַל, as Kimchi observes, is in this connection simply equivalent to אֵל.” (P. 222)

⁵⁰Slotki comments that “the Hebrew word כְּבוֹד [normally translated ‘glory’] may also be rendered ‘wealth,’ as in **Genesis 31:1** and elsewhere.” (P. 48) Oftentimes it means “abundance,” and we think that translation would be fitting here in **Isaiah 10:3**, or as Alexander states, it means “whatever they now boasted of and trusted in.” (P. 222) Oswalt states that the word “conveys something of the same idea as ‘treasure’ in English; not merely ‘money’ but the glitter, the desirability, the significance, and the power of wealth,” (p. 258), but translates by “abundance.”

⁵¹Gray notes that “There appears to be a rapid transition from the picture of the storm to that of a battle, in which many fall prisoners to Yahweh and the rest are slain.” (P. 192)

⁵²The first two lines of **verse 4** are given varying translations:

King James, “Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain.”

Tanakh, “From collapsing under *fellow* prisoners, From falling beneath the slain?”

New Revised Standard, “so as not to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain?”

New International, “Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.”

New Jerusalem, “to avoid squatting among the captives or falling among the slain?”

Rahlfs, τοῦ μὴ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς ἐπαγωγὴν, “so as not to fall into captivity / distress?”

(continued...)

and beneath those murdered they⁵³ will fall!⁵⁴

⁵²(...continued)

Gray notes that this line, בְּלִתֵּי כְרַעַ תַּחַת אֲסִיר, “is impossible. Most attempted translations assume for בְּלִתֵּי a meaning, or usage, which cannot be justified.”

What do you think this first line of **verse 4** means? Does it mean that when the day of visitation comes upon these unjust legislators / writers, they will have no place to hide except beneath / among the prisoners or the murdered, seeking to become anonymous, mixing in with the crowds of slain or captured? **Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests the translation “and where will you leave your glory? *save that* they bow down under the prisoners, and fall under the slain! i.e. (ironically) their only refuge will be among the corpses of a battle-field [or losing their identity among those taken prisoner].”

Oswalt notes that the literal meaning of תַּחַת is “‘under,’ so some commentators believe the prophet is saying that these formerly high and mighty persons will be under the captives and the slain. It is hard to make any sense of that interpretation, except as a figurative one. A more normal sense would be ‘in the same place as,’ compare **Exodus 16:29; Leviticus 13:23; Joshua 5:8**, etc.” (P. 258)

The first word in this first line is the preposition בְּלִתֵּי, which apparently is a particle of negation which means “not” or “except.” Alexander and the **King James** translation understand בְּלִתֵּי to mean “without Me,” i.e., without YHWH, Whom they have forsaken, or Who has forsaken them. But Alexander notes that both **Rahlf's** and the Latin Vulgate take בְּלִתֵּי “in the sense of *lest* or *that not*.” (P. 222)

Oswalt comments on **verse 4** that “The exact meaning of the verse is open to dispute because of uncertainties over the meaning of the first word בְּלִתֵּי. However, the general sense is plain enough. These great men (and women) who have enriched themselves at the expense of the helpless will suffer the same fate as everyone else: huddling among the captives, lying in the heaps of the slain. Before the wrath of God, status, power, and wealth mean nothing.

“So for all these offenses against God—pride, false leadership, devouring one’s brothers, oppression of the poor—the Divine hand is outstretched. It is not Assyria’s overwhelming power which dictates the future of Ephraim and Judah; it is their failure to submit to God and to live in accordance with His principles.” (P. 260)

⁵³The first line of **verse 4** has the 3rd person singular “he,” while the second line has the 3rd person plural, “they.” Motyer comments that “The singular particularizes, the

(continued...)

With all this, His anger did not turn back,
and still His hand was out-stretched!⁵⁵

⁵³(...continued)
fate of each; the plural generalizes, the fate of all.” (P. 111) Do you agree?

⁵⁴Alexander concludes that “On the whole, the most natural interpretation of this difficult and much disputed verse is that which explains it as a solemn declaration that their glory and especially their noble chiefs must either go into captivity or fall in battle.” (P. 223)

⁵⁵Slotki comments that “There will be no escape for them [meaning those who exploit the poor under the mask of legality] from the Divine wrath.” (P. 49)

Watts explains the section **9:7-10:4** by stating: “The scene acts to stem the tide of patriotic euphoria that had broken out in Jerusalem in the previous scene. The optimism that saw only opportunity, glory, and light beyond the crisis tended to be blind to the dire implications inherent in the approach of the Assyrian. They, and the audience, are called ack to the grim implications of God’s decision to end the covenant relation with Israel (which was something of a farce anyway on the part of the Northern Kingdom).

“But the issue of Israel–election and God’s intentions for His people–will be back. It cannot so easily be disposed of.

“**10:1-4** responds to the dark picture of Israel’s condition, lamenting the bad leadership which had precipitated its current state. Oppressive laws against the weak and helpless for the hope of ill-gotten gain have weakened the fabric of society. It cannot withstand the external pressures. The exploiters will suffer like all others. Thus they experience God’s anger which was aroused by their deeds.” (P. 144)