

THE FUNCTION OF ISAIAH 24-27

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The interpretive difficulties posed by Isaiah 24-27 remain intact, even after one hundred years of critical examination. G. W. Anderson's thirty-year-old assessment of the exegetical questions surrounding these chapters is still correct: "It probably remains true that writers on most of the critical questions involved may still be divided into two groups: those who differ from each other and those who hesitate to commit themselves."¹

Such frustration, however, should not lead to despair. Two of the most recent treatments of Isaiah 24-27 have shown that the study of these chapters might indeed be a fruitful field of endeavor when the text is taken as a unit.² My article addresses one of the major questions raised by a study of Isaiah 24-27—that is, identifying its function.

I. ISAIAH 24-27 AND APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The vivid, futuristic language of Isaiah 24-27 inevitably has raised the question of the chapters' relationship to apocalyptic literature. The understanding of this relationship has developed over time and is one of the primary ways in which the function of the chapters has been examined. Others have provided more detailed descriptions of this relationship, but a brief survey is in order here.³

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¹ G. W. Anderson, "Isaiah XXIV-XXVII Reconsidered," VTSup 9 (1963) 118.

² D. G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24-27* (JSOTSup 61; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988); M. Sweeney, "Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27: Toward an Understanding of the Redactional Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 107 (1988) 39-52.

³ It is only with difficulty that the term "apocalyptic" is defined (cf. the title of M. Barker's article: "Slippery Words III: Apocalyptic," *ExpTim* 89 [1977-1978] 325). R. Youngblood notes that most definitions are deficient because they focus primarily on characteristics of apocalyptic: "Definitions of *apocalyptic* tend to be either so general as to be vacuous or so specific as to eliminate from consideration a substantial number of erstwhile apocalypses" ("A Holistic Typology of Prophecy and Apocalyptic," *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* [ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 213). Such definitions are given by J. Lindblom (*Die Jesaja-Apokalypse* [Lund: Gleerup, 1938] 102) and D. S. Russell (*The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* [OTL; London: SCM, 1964] 105). These kinds of definitions are also challenged by P. Hanson: "How, by means of such a list, can one hope to come to an understanding of apocalyptic, or even to be able to identify a composition as apocalyptic?" (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 7). Instead of concentrating on the characteristics of apocalyptic, Youngblood and Hanson emphasize the development of apocalyptic within Israel's prophetic movement (Youngblood, "Holistic" 219; Hanson, *Dawn* 11-12).

1. *Isaiah 24–27 as late apocalyptic.* Perhaps the most important adherent of this view is B. Duhm: "If Isaiah has written these four chapters, he might just as well have written the book of Daniel."⁴ Although his commentary has been widely influential in dividing the passage between the "eschatological prophecies" and the "songs about destruction of a particular city," Duhm's analysis of Isaiah 24–27 as apocalyptic has been reconsidered, no doubt because it is clearly evident that the passage was written well before 150 BC.⁵

Otto Kaiser adopts a somewhat modified view by tracing different strata within Isaiah 24–27 as "advanced apocalyptic speculation" and assigning the dates 167 and 164 BC as the passage's *terminus ad quem*.⁶ Yet apart from an individual resurrection from the dead (if 26:19 is to be so interpreted), most other characteristics of intertestamental apocalyptic are not evident. Other possibilities must be examined in order to determine the relationship between Isaiah 24–27 and apocalyptic literature.

2. *Isaiah 24–27 as proto-apocalyptic or early apocalyptic.* A large part of OT scholarship agrees that Isaiah 24–27 should not be equated with intertestamental apocalypses. But it is still maintained that the chapters reflect an eschatology that is more developed than that of the eighth-century Isaiah. Because this position is based on complex historical and sociological analysis, it has become finely nuanced over the years.

Otto Plöger contends that the rise of apocalyptic is based on a growing dissension within Israel after the exile that marks the roots of apocalyptic literature:

The intensification of the eschatological aspect [of Yahweh's rule and the restoration of Israel] is only intelligible against the background of an intensification of the more or less latent differences within the Jewish community. . . . The result of these conflicts, which gradually increased, and of the conventicle-type breakaways, was the gradual transformation of the restoration eschatology . . . into the dualistic-apocalyptic form of eschatology.⁷

According to Plöger, this ongoing dissension had not reached the boiling point yet in Isaiah 24–27, as "there was still room for the juxtaposition of different types of expectation."⁸

Paul Hanson has expanded Plöger's thinking as he has tried to determine the relationship between "prophetic eschatology" and "apocalyptic eschatology." Like Plöger, he does this on the basis of a struggle between the priests and the idealists of postexilic Israel: "The historical and sociological matrix of apocalyptic is found in an inner-community struggle in the period of the Second Temple between visionary and hierocratic ele-

⁴ Cited in B. Otzen, "Traditions and Structures of Isaiah XXIV–XXVII," *VT* 24 (1974) 196.

⁵ B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1892) 172; cited by Johnson, *Chaos* 14.

⁶ O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster) 178–179.

⁷ O. Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968) 111–112.

⁸ *Ibid.* 112.

ments.⁹ The scope of my article does not allow for a close examination of Hanson's argument. But it is important to notice how his interpretation has affected the understanding of Isaiah 24–27.

From this starting point, Hanson's book (appropriately subtitled *The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*) presents an elaborate thesis: The division between the hierocratic leaders of Israel and the revolutionary idealists, compounded with the bleakness of the postexilic historical situation, led the idealists to a more compatible message, the "gospel of the conflict myth."¹⁰ In Hanson's view Isaiah 24–27 marks an advancement from so-called Second Isaiah toward apocalyptic. He bases his claim on the absence of a specific historical foe and the lack of human instrumentality in the destruction of the world.¹¹ Thus he dates Isaiah 24–27 in the mid- or late-sixth century, ascribes its authorship to a disciple of Second Isaiah, and concludes that the chapters are best "designated as early apocalyptic."¹²

The conclusions of Plöger and Hanson were developed and modified by William Millar. After a detailed examination of the chapters he concludes:

The prosodic style of Isaiah 24–27 and its themes, both separately and in pattern, do establish a literary context for us to understand these chapters. The author emerges as one very much influenced by the work of Second Isaiah. For that reason, we would label the genre of Isaiah 24–27 proto-apocalyptic.¹³

These arguments are intricate but not persuasive. John Oswalt incisively critiques the theory on several counts: (1) an overemphasis upon the latter prophet's use of mythical sources, (2) an unwarranted application of the cosmic-warrior motif, (3) overconfidence in typologies of development, both literary and sociological, (4) rearrangement of the text with little or no consideration of possible alternative arrangements or explanations, and (5) heavy dependence on hypothetical reconstructions of Israel, society, and history.¹⁴

Most notably the theory does not explain the chapters in light of the final form of Isaiah.

Had he [Hanson] considered the canonical shape of Isaiah he might have evaluated these differently, for in the total context of the book they appear in a different light. This failure to address the present structure of Isaiah has another ramification in that it leaves unexplained how it is that the supposed

⁹ Hanson, *Dawn* 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 314. This division, according to Hanson, "is difficult to overemphasize" (p. 210).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 313.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ W. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (Missoula: Scholars, 1976) 114. He divides the chapters into two sections, the first consisting of 24:1–25:9; 26:1–8, the second of 26:11–27:6. In his analysis of the first group he differs from Hanson: "The power of myth to see beyond the limits imposed by historical event was taking hold, but we do not see, as yet, the emerging conflict that Hanson documents through the early post-exilic period" (pp. 118–119).

¹⁴ J. N. Oswalt, "Recent Studies in Old Testament Eschatology and Apocalyptic," *JETS* 24 (1985) 295.

conflict that was so important to the rise of the apocalyptic vision became so completely submerged into the larger syntheses of the present book.¹⁵

Oswalt's discussion casts significant doubt on the conclusions of Plöger, Hanson and Millar. It is apparent that the assumptions these views rest upon cannot sustain the weight put upon them.

3. *Isaiah 24–27 as nonapocalyptic.* In a more recent work Dan Johnson provides a far different perspective on the matter. He contends that Isaiah 24–27 is not apocalyptic in any sense of that word. He argues that the coming judgment (24:1 ff.) is not universal and that the promise of resurrection (26:19) refers only to national restoration from exile. He concludes:

It is inappropriate to refer to this composition as the "little apocalypse" or the "Isaianic apocalypse." It simply does not exhibit the marks of an apocalypse. If we accept the categories proposed by Hanson, namely, "proto-apocalyptic" and "early apocalyptic," along with his criteria for distinguishing between the two, then we must deny his view that Isa. 24–27 is "early apocalyptic." It is not pessimistic about history as the realm of Yahweh's activity; it is prior to the Second Temple era; and it does not reflect an inner-community struggle between visionaries and hierocratic leaders.¹⁶

Johnson's critique of other apocalyptic theories is helpful, and some of his interpretations of Isaiah 24–27 are certainly possible, but ultimately his conclusions are based on the dubious presupposition that any prediction of the distant future (e.g. world judgment, resurrection of the dead) is necessarily late.¹⁷ Such a presupposition produces an exegesis that is at times evasive and seemingly flies in the face of a straightforward reading of the text. For example, in his discussion of Isa 24:1–12 Johnson argues that universal language is used to describe localized judgment. While this phenomenon is not unusual, the thrust of the chapter belies this, especially in light of the parallel usage of *ʔrs* and *tbl* in v. 4. Almost every time this combination occurs in Scripture it refers to the whole world (see 34:1).¹⁸

The general reliability of Johnson's view is questioned by a simple comparison of Isaiah 24–27 with the other prophecies found in Isaiah. Youngblood makes such a comparison and concludes: "[The] major apocalyptic themes [of Isaiah 24–27] are strikingly paralleled elsewhere—not only in

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 299–300.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Chaos* 100.

¹⁷ E. J. Kissane is another interpreter who rejects the title "apocalypse" for these chapters, since he considers the chapters to be apocalyptic "only in a very wide sense" (*The Book of Isaiah, Volume 1 [I–XXXIX]* [rev. ed.; Dublin: Richview, 1960] 259–262). But his reasoning differs from Johnson's. He believes that the nonapocalyptic character of the chapters is proof of Isaianic authorship. Supporting Isaianic authorship should not necessarily entail rejecting the futuristic words of the prophet.

¹⁸ As an example of hyperbolized language Johnson cites Isaiah 34. While it contains hyperbolized language (cf. v. 4), it is clear that the prophet refers to all nations (34:1–2).

apocalyptic sections of other prophetic books but also in nonapocalyptic sections (including all parts of Isaiah itself).¹⁹

In light of this brief survey it seems apparent that Isaiah 24-27 prophesies about the distant future but not in the style of the intertestamental apocalypses. If we understand apocalyptic generally—that is, as predictions about the distant future—then the title “apocalyptic” fits.

In reality Isaiah 24-27 gives little help in deciphering the line of development between Biblical prophecy and the non-Biblical apocalyptic literature.²⁰ Rather, it is more likely that the later noncanonical apocalyptists simply used Isaiah 24-27 as a reference point for their writings, trying to convey the same Scriptural authority as the OT prophet.

II. THE RELATION OF ISAIAH 24-27 TO THE REST OF ISAIAH

After surveying the relation of Isaiah 24-27 to apocalyptic literature, a more fruitful attempt to determine the function of these chapters may be found by comparing Isaiah 24-27 with the remainder of Isaiah. Because we only possess the finished text, the question of function particularly addresses the meaning of the text as it fits within the book.

R. J. Coggins expresses an important point in this regard: “I think we must accept that there is some link between these chapters and the remainder of Isaiah, the nature of which we can attempt to explore more fully, even though objective criteria are very difficult to establish.”²¹ His conclusion is borne out by the vocabulary analysis of W. E. March:

A conservative estimate recognizes that between 65% to 75% of the language found in 24:1-27:1 is found also in the work acknowledged to come from the great prophet of the eighth century whose name has been claimed for the whole of Isaiah 1-66.²²

¹⁹ Youngblood, “Holistic” 218.

²⁰ Oswalt questions the whole notion of apocalyptic literature’s development from eschatology: “If apocalyptic represents a development, one would expect the earlier stage to fall by the wayside. . . . [Instead] the NT, while clearly availing itself of the expanded imagery and thought forms of apocalyptic, equally clearly retains a point of view fully consonant with OT prophecy. . . . [Thus] the [Biblical] apocalyptic view did not replace the prophetic one but rather existed beside it, enriching and expanding it, but never supplanting it” (“Recent” 301). Cf. G. Ladd’s significant contribution to the study of Biblical apocalyptic, “Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?”, *JBL* 76 (1957) 193-200.

²¹ R. J. Coggins, “The Problem of Isaiah 24-27,” *ExpTim* 90 (1979) 329. In a brief review of Johnson’s book Coggins faults Johnson in this matter: “Again, in view of current interest in the structure and formation of the whole book of Isaiah, it is a pity that he has little to say about the significance of these chapters in that process, or about the role of inner-biblical exegesis which they illustrate” (*ExpTim* 100 [1989] 270).

²² W. March, *A Study of Two Prophetic Compositions in Isaiah 24:1-27:1* (dissertation; New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1966) 200. According to March, “this estimate is based on a consideration of every term that is found in 24:1-27:1.” Although March concludes “that there is a sizable number of terms that cannot be directly related to first Isaiah,” it appears that the opposite is true. It seems shortsighted to think that “first” Isaiah exhausted his vocabulary in his previous writings and was incapable of utilizing new words.

Although these scholars feel constrained to reject Isaianic authorship of the chapters, Coggins suggests that "inner-biblical exegesis" reveals a "link" between parts of the book.²³ Marvin Sweeney has taken Coggins' suggestion one step further by analyzing the "textual citations" of Isaiah 24–27.

In an attempt to demonstrate the "redactional unity" of these chapters within the whole book of Isaiah, Sweeney contends that Isaiah 24–27 contains seven textual citations of other portions of Isaiah: 24:13 (17:6); 24:16 (21:2; 33:1); 25:4–5 (4:5b–6; 32:1–2); 25:11b–12 (2:9–17); 26:5 (2:6–21); 26:17–18 (13:8; 66:7–9); and 27:1–13 (5:1–7; 11:10–16).²⁴

Sweeney correctly recognizes the chapters' significance within the book of Isaiah when he states that they constitute "an integral component of the book."²⁵ By recognizing the interrelationship of chaps. 24–27 and the rest of the book he correctly places the emphasis on understanding the text, not on speculative sociological historiography.

Sweeney offers no real evidence, however, to distinguish formal textual citations from mere similarities between passages. From this tenuous starting point he concludes that the so-called citations provide enough evidence to demonstrate that the author universalized the thoughts of "First" Isaiah.²⁶ Although I agree that the focus of chaps. 24–27 is universal, Sweeney's redactional assumptions must remain assumptions because he offers no demonstrable evidence that they are formal citations. Thus while Sweeney provides an important perspective to the study of Isaiah 24–27 by treating it with Isaiah as a whole, it is revealing that he (as most modern scholars) does not conclude that one eighth-century prophet is responsible for the unity of the book.²⁷

Having acknowledged that chaps. 24–27 are a unit within the larger book, the student of Isaiah must question its relationship to the rest of the prophecy. The question can be answered by establishing how the themes of Isaiah 24–27 relate to those of the rest of the book. Are the themes prevalent in chaps. 24–27 (universal judgment, kingdom, feast prepared by the Lord, resurrection of the dead, restoration of Israel) evident elsewhere in Isaiah? While an exhaustive comparison with the remainder of Isaiah is beyond the scope of this article, I shall consider some of the strong links that exist between these chapters and the rest of Isaiah.

²³ In rejecting any possible preexilic date for Isaiah 24–27 Coggins writes: "I should myself incline to rule out the occasional suggestions of pre-exilic dating, on the grounds that proposals of this kind seem to me to stem from other preconceptions about the nature of the material, or about the development of Israel's religion, or whatever the matter at issue may be, rather than an independent assessment of these chapters" ("Problem" 330).

²⁴ Sweeney, "Textual" 42. Sweeney develops the concept of redactional unity in *Isaiah 1–4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW 171; New York: de Gruyter, 1988) 11–25.

²⁵ Sweeney, "Textual" 52 n. 44.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 51.

²⁷ R. E. Clements' comment is typical: "The ascription of it to Isaiah has created a rather dangerous assumption that it is a unity because it derives from a single author" ("Thematic Development in Isaiah," *JSOT* 31 [1985] 98).

Regarding the nature of the chapters, Delitzsch states: "They are related to ch. xiii.-xxiii. as ch. xi., xii. to ch. vii.-x."²⁸ Their relationship, according to Delitzsch, is primarily to chaps. 13-23:

The ch. xxiv.-xxvii. are the finale to ch. xiii.-xxiii., and that in the strictest musical sense. What the finale has to supply in pieces of music, the comprehension in a grand impressive whole of the hitherto scattered motifs, is supplied here by this closing cycle. . . . This whole finale is a great Hallelujah to ch. xiii.-xxiii., hymnic in content, musical in form, and that to such a degree that, as at xxv. 6, the prophecy is, as it were, libretto and score at once.²⁹

Isaiah 13-23 catalogues the burden of the nations, including Israel. Chapters 24-27 bring this section to a climax. They explain how the final, universal judgment will come upon the world. As Sweeney states, they proclaim the coming of the "new world order."³⁰

Chapter 13 contains a declaration of judgment on Babylon. Verse 4 states the Lord's role behind the destruction of Babylon: "The Lord of hosts musters the host of the battle." This judgment is called "the day of the Lord" (13:6), a time of great pain and cruel wrath for nature and mankind (13:7-10). The land will become desolate, and the sun, moon and stars will be darkened. Perhaps the most important element in this description of God's judgment is the utter destruction that will come upon sinners: "He shall destroy sinners out of [the land]" (v. 9).

While judgment is mentioned particularly in the burden of Babylon, Isaiah uses universal terminology (in this case hyperbolic) to describe the judgment: "I will visit upon the world for its evil, and upon the wicked for their iniquity" (13:11). Isaiah elaborates this in chap. 24, where each of the above elements (day of the Lord, destruction of sinners, desolation of the land, dimming of sun, moon and stars) is mentioned. Isaiah's use of Babylon as a stepping-stone for world judgment in chap. 13 is a precursor of the coming world judgment in chaps. 24-27 and probably an underlying factor in John's portrait of Babylon as the place of ultimate wickedness (Revelation 17-18).

Chapter 14 also provides an interesting parallel to Isaiah 24-27. Verse 7 describes the reaction of the earth to Babylon's fall: "The whole earth is at rest and is quiet; they break forth into singing." The joyous reaction at Babylon's defeat is expanded in chaps. 24-27 (esp. 25:1-12; 26:1 ff.), when the people of earth praise the Lord for destroying the ungodly city.³¹

²⁸ F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.) 1.392.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 392-393.

³⁰ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4* 54. The notion that they are climactic necessitates that they be related in some way and that there are recurring themes found in both sections. This is especially evident in chap. 13.

³¹ There are many opinions on the identity of the city: Nineveh, Moab, Jerusalem, Babylon. Each depends on the date assigned to the chapters. This leads some to conclude that the city is generic, a symbol for the whole world. See J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 448-449; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 202; Youngblood, "Holistic" 217. For a recent bibliography on the "city" see P. L. Redditt, "Once Again, The City in Isaiah 24-27," HAR 10 (1987) 317-335.

Thus the themes of judgment and praise in Isaiah 24–27 are already found in chaps. 13–14. While the focus of those chapters is primarily Babylon, *tbl* in 13:11 might hint of a future universal judgment. At least the vivid language and themes of chaps. 24–27 are not without background.³²

As Sweeney observes, however, the function of Isaiah 24–27 should not be limited to their relationship to chaps. 13–23, since chaps. 24–27 contain allusions to the other chapters of Isaiah.³³ For example, there is an obvious connection between the vineyard parable of chap. 5 and chap. 27. In 5:1–7 Isaiah describes God's disappointment in discovering that his hard labor on behalf of his vineyard resulted only in wild grapes. In 27:2–6 the picture is reversed. The Lord enables the vineyard (Israel) to bud and blossom and produce fruit that will fill the entire world. Sweeney concludes:

Thus, chapters 24–27 form a conclusion to both 5–12 and 13–23 since the announcement of the new world order resolves the problems of the punishment of Israel/Judah and the punishment of the nations by demonstrating the end to which the punishment is directed, YHWH's rule of Israel/Jacob and the nations from Zion.³⁴

If we accept Sweeney's suggestion that chaps. 24–27 conclude both chaps. 13–23 and 5–12, we should expect these chapters to share similar themes. One such theme, the vineyard parable, has already been mentioned. It is clearly evident that many other themes presented in chaps. 5–12 are restated in chaps. 24–27.

One prominent theme in chaps. 5–12 is the reign of the Lord. After he heard the seraphim crying "Holy, holy, holy" (6:3), Isaiah exclaimed, "I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5). The picture of the Lord ruling is later seen in 24:23 where the Lord reigns gloriously before the elders.

The rule of the Lord is also depicted in 9:6–7 where the child who is called "the Mighty God" will have the responsibility of government and will establish an everlasting kingdom of justice and righteousness. Chapter 11 further describes the work of the coming King: "He will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked" (v. 4). Chapters 24–27 imply that the coming kingdom will be characterized by justice when they declare that transgressors will be judged (cf. 24:20–22).

Chapter 11 also describes the coming kingdom as a place where the nations gather (vv. 9–10). The same sort of gathering is spoken of in 25:6–7. In both instances the assembly takes place on "the mount," apparently

³² See March's discussion of chaps. 13–14 (*Study* 229–230). He concludes that "if any literary dependence is to claimed [*sic*] at all, it seems most likely that chapter 13 reflects knowledge of 24:1–20 and 24:21–27:1 as a combined work, 24:1–27:1, thus indicating the priority of 24:1–27:1." This argues against Sweeney's theory that chaps. 24–27 are much later than the rest of the book.

³³ Sweeney, "Textual" 41.

³⁴ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4* 62. See Sweeney's detailed exegesis of Isaiah 27, "New Gleanings from an Old Vineyard: Isaiah 27 Reconsidered," *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Honor of William Hugh Brownlee* (ed. C. A. Evans and W. F. Stinespring; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 51–66.

Jerusalem, the center of the kingdom. Chapter 11 concludes with an explanation of the regathering of Israel in a manner similar to 27:11-13. Further, the hymn of praise in chap. 12 parallels the hymns found in 25:1-5 and 26:1-6, where praise follows the declaration of the Lord's work.

Similar themes are not limited to chaps. 5-23. In all of Isaiah perhaps no chapters are closer to Isaiah 24-27 than chaps. 34-35. The thematic similarities between the chapters are striking. Both refer to worldwide judgment (24:1-12; 34:1-3; note especially the parallel uses of "land" and "world" in 24:4; 34:1), speak of the destruction of the elements (24:19-20; 34:4) and of the "host of heaven" (24:21; 34:4), and use a specific, contemporary enemy of Israel to illustrate the principle of judgment.³⁵

On the positive side, both sections refer to a time of fruitfulness, prosperity and peace for God's people (27:6; 35:1-7). Both also refer to the regathering of the people (27:11-13; 35:8-10) and the removal of sorrow (25:8; 35:10). Like chaps. 24-27, chaps. 34-35 stand as a conclusion to a larger section (chaps. 28-33), where the primary message is directed to the blind leaders of Israel and Judah.³⁶ The message of judgment and blessing in these chapters forms a fitting conclusion: Those who disobey God will be judged, and those who trust him will be blessed.

Close parallels are not as apparent in Isaiah 40-66, but similar themes are evident. Sweeney notes the similarity between 26:17-18 and 66:7-9. Later in chap. 66 God's judgment is seen. The Lord will bring fiery judgment upon all people (v. 16), including those who break the covenant (v. 17). God's glory will be declared to and seen by all the nations (v. 18), and people will come to the holy mountain in order to worship the Lord (v. 20). Thus in a universal context both the judgment of the nations and the restoration of Israel are described.

Another theme found in the latter half of Isaiah is the kingship of Yahweh. At least four times the Lord reminds Israel that he is King and that he rules over his creation (41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7). His kingship is seen especially in his dealings with Israel. In 24:21-23 the Lord rules from Jerusalem with universal effect. God as King judges and saves. His kingship, seen throughout Israel's history, will also be displayed in the end times.

Most of the themes in Isaiah 24-27 are found throughout the entire book: the judgment of the nations, the restoration of Israel, the rule of the Lord in Jerusalem. That these eschatological themes are concentrated in Isaiah 24-27 does not provide grounds for dismissing the chapters as late. Instead the congruence of themes argues for the overall unity of the book.

³⁵ Even O. Eissfeldt, who dates chaps. 24-27 as "substantially later" than chaps. 34-35, concedes that the two may be set side by side "in that in both passages a judgment falling upon a particular people in the environment of Judah, in the one case Moab, in the other Edom, is extended into a world disaster, and provides an occasion for the promise of the glory of the kingdom of Yahweh on Zion" (*The Old Testament: An Introduction* [New York: Harper, 1966] 327).

³⁶ Youngblood, "Holistic" 217.

Although many of the themes found in Isaiah 24–27 are found throughout the book, there are some that stand without parallel. It appears that the specific eschatological advancement of Isaiah 24–27 is mostly in the manner in which the blessings of the rule of the Lord are applied—namely, by the resurrection of the dead and the feast for the nations. The absence of these themes in other parts of Isaiah should not be taken to mean that they must be reinterpreted to come up with a more acceptable meaning. Understood properly they mark the particular contribution of the chapters to Isaianic theology and prepare the way for truths found later in the book, such as the “new heavens and the new earth” (66:22).

III. CONCLUSION

Chapters 24–27 of Isaiah do not provide assistance in reconstructing the historical and sociological background of apocalyptic literature. Such reconstructions too often fail to consider the whole of Isaiah, and they place undue weight on questionable presuppositions.

The function of Isaiah 24–27, therefore, should be evaluated from within the unity of the book. While Sweeney’s redactional assumptions must be questioned, it does seem apparent that chaps. 24–27 are a concentration of universal, futuristic themes designed to summarize and conclude chaps. 5–23.

In this light the chapters serve a specific function. The ungodly people of the world, especially the apostate nation of Israel, were put on notice that God is still in complete control over man and the elements. For the godly—that is, those who trusted God and were waiting on him—God provides great encouragement. He has promised that he will conquer all his enemies, including death, and that the sinful nation, after its conversion, will eventually prosper and become the center of universal worship. The “new world order” has been introduced: God is King. He must punish sinners and bless the faithful.