

A PHILOLOGICAL AND FORM-CRITICAL REEVALUATION OF ISAIAH 8:16-9:6

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I

Isa 8:16-9:6, especially 8:16-23, is perhaps the most enigmatic passage in the entire book of Isaiah. For well over two thousand years, its messianic allusions have intrigued translators and commentators, but difficulties in establishing the referents of its pronouns, the meaning of its contrasting imagery of light and darkness, and its syntactical structure have continued to confound its interpretation.¹ Although scholars such as Alt (1953), Ginsberg (1958), Driver (1967), and Emerton (1969) have argued correctly that the key to the interpretation of this passage lies in establishing the meaning of the contrasting statements concerning "the former" (*hāri'šōn*) and "the latter" (*hā'ahārōn*) in 8:23,² there remains no general consensus concerning the interpretation of this text. Consequently, a reexamination of the passage is warranted. This paper will demonstrate that a form-critical analysis of the passage, intended to establish its structure and generic character, will provide the basis for a philological reevaluation of the language employed in this text. In addition, it will demonstrate Isaiah's use of word play in the philological reevaluation of this text. It will argue that Isaiah 8:16-9:6 is a prophetic instruction concerning YHWH's signs announced in Isa 7:1-8:15, especially 8:1-15. This identification is based in a disputation in 8:19-9:6 concerning those who rely on mediums and sorcerers and those who understand

1. For discussion of earlier attempts to interpret this text, see Emerton (1969), Whitley (1978), Staub (1979), and Kilian (1983, pp. 5-10).

2. For a recent study of 8:23 that focuses on its antithetical character, see Høgenhaven (1987).

Isaiah's/YHWH's instruction. Those who misunderstand this instruction will see the Assyrian annexation of northern Israel's border territories as a disaster, but those who understand the signs correctly will recognize that the Assyrian defeat of northern Israel presents a new opportunity for the Davidic dynasty to reassert its authority over the northern kingdom. The form of the passage, including its structure and genre, will be considered first together with discussion of the philological problems posed by the text. Afterwards, the intention of the passage will be identified in relation to its formal features.

II

Isa 8:16-9:6 is demarcated by its grammatical and syntactical features as well as by its interest in contrasting the positions of those who rely on YHWH's "Testimony" and "Torah" as opposed to those who rely on mediums and sorcerers. The first person perspective of vv 16-18 and the references to the "Torah" and "Testimony" in v 16 as well as those to Isaiah's children as signs and portents in v 18 indicate that this section forms the conclusion to 8:1-15. Nevertheless, the imperative verbs of v 16 interrupt the narrative perspective of 8:1-15 and indicate the beginning of a new sub-unit within the larger context of this passage. Furthermore, the material in 8:19-9:6 is connected syntactically to 8:16-18 by the introductory *wēkî* 'and if' as well as by the references to "Testimony" and "Torah" that appear in v 20. Although vv 21-22 are frequently separated from the preceding material as the beginning of a new structural unit, the converted perfect verb chain in v 21 and the conjunctive *waw* combined with the imperfect verb *yabbû* 'he shall look' demonstrate that these verses are joined syntactically to the preceding statement in v 20b with its governing imperfect verb *yōmērû* 'they shall say'. Likewise, v 23 is joined to v 22 by the word play involving *mû'ap la'āšer mûšaq lāh* in v 23 and *mē'up šuqā* in v 22. Although many follow Alt's contention that v 23a⁶+b forms the beginning of a new unit that must be grouped with 9:1-6,³ the continued use of contrasting imagery of light and darkness in 9:1 indicates that this material is related to vv 20-22.

The first major sub-unit of this passage is 8:16-17, which announces Isaiah's intention to record his "Torah" and "Testimony" and to wait for YHWH to act.⁴ Although v 18 is commonly included together with vv 16-17,

3. E.g., Wildberger (1972, pp. 365-366). For a recent study that emphasizes the role of 8:23 as a connecting verse, see Thompson (1982, esp. p. 84).

4. The interpretation of *bēlimmudāy* in v 16 is problematic and the subject of much debate

the introductory *hinnēh* 'behold' suggests that v 18 introduces a new section.⁵ This is confirmed by the absence of a syntactical connection between vv 18 and 17 and the presence of the conjunctive *wēkî* 'and if' which connects v 19 to v 18. Verses 16-17 begin with a two-part command as defined by the imperative verbs in v 16, "bind up (*šôr*) the testimony, seal (*hāšôm*) the Torah among my teachings." The two commands apparently form a hendiadys in that both convey the same basic meaning.⁶ Verse 17 is linked to v 16 by its introductory conjunctive *waw* and continues the first person singular speaker's perspective. It explains the reason for Isaiah's commands in that the prophet announces his intention to wait for YHWH.

The second major section of this text appears in 8:18-9:6. These verses are linked together by a combination of factors including syntax and content. They continue the first person singular perspective of vv 16-17 and explain the basis for the preceding announcement by providing instruction concerning the significance of YHWH's signs for Israel and the House of David. The unit begins with Isaiah's assertion in v 18 that he and the children that YHWH has given him are "signs" and "portents" in Israel. Although the balance of the sub-unit in 8:19-9:6 abandons the 1st person form of v 18, it is linked by the introductory *wēkî*. Isa 8:19-9:6 provides instruction concerning the significance of these signs in the form of a disputation speech which asserts their validity over the mutterings and chirpings of the mediums and sorcerers.⁷

(see Irvine, 1990, pp. 207-208, for a summary of the discussion). Although the term is frequently understood as a reference to the prophet's disciples, there is little evidence that Uriah the priest and Zechariah ben Yeberechiah (cf. 8:2) were students of the prophet. The *qittul* noun pattern is derived from the *piel* verb stem and indicates the object of verbal action, in this case, "that which is taught." The term is ambiguous in that it can refer to people who are taught or ideas that are taught. Given the ambiguity of the term and the absence of hard evidence that the term refers to individuals, it seems best to render it as "among my teachings." This would be consistent with Isa 8:1-4 which describes the recording of the Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz sign in written form.

5. On the exclamatory force of *hinnēh*, see Waltke and O'Connor (1990, sec. 40.2.1). Although Labuschagne (1973) points to the potential conjunctive force of *hinnēh*, Isa 8:18 lacks supporting syntactical connectors and a protasis-apodosis form. Rather, the structure and content of the *hinnēh* statement in v 18 indicate its assertive or exclamatory character.

6. N.B., outside of Isa 8:16, 20, where it is parallel with *tôrāh* 'Torah', *tē'ūdāh* 'Testimony' appears only in Ruth 4:17.

7. For basic discussion of the disputation genre, see Graffy (1984). Graffy notes (p. 107) that the genre consists of two principal parts, the quotation of the position to be disputed and the refutation of the position. As noted below, Isa 8:19 contains the quotation and 8:20-9:6 contains the refutation. For a thorough critique of the rigidity of Graffy's position, see Murray (1987). Murray argues for a more varied view of the surface structure of the text in relation to its rhetorical function, but maintains that three essential elements constitute the genre: thesis, counter-

Isa 8:19-9:6 contains two basic sub-units. The first is 8:19, which quotes those who would have the people rely on the mediums and sorcerers. It begins with the statement, "and if they say to you," followed by a quotation of the people's statement concerning the need to inquire from these sources in the balance of the verse. Verse 19b has proved to be quite problematic due to uncertainties regarding its syntax and the meaning of the term *ʔel-ʔēlōhāyw* 'unto its God/gods'.⁸ As the syntactical parallel between *ʔel-ʔēlōhāyw* and *ʔel-hammēiim* 'unto the dead' demonstrates however, *ʔel-ʔēlōhāyw* must be taken as a reference to the spirits of the dead so that the statement reads, "Shall not a people inquire unto its spirits/gods? On behalf of the living unto the dead?"⁹ Consequently, v 19b refers to necromancy as a means for understanding the events of a time of crisis.¹⁰ Its position following v 19a indicates that v 19b is a quotation of the muttering and chirping mediums and wizards who offer their skills in necromancy to the people.

Isa 8:20-9:6 contains the refutation of the position quoted in v 19 and therefore constitutes the second major sub unit of 8:19-9:6. The refutation is based on Isaiah's counter-assertion in v 20a followed by an extended argument or elaboration in 8:20b-9:6 which contrasts the inefficacy of the people's reliance on mediums and sorcerers versus the efficacy of their reliance on YHWH's Torah and Testimony.

The prophet's counter-assertion appears as a basic instruction in v 20a, "To the Torah and to the Testimony." Although this statement lacks an imperative verb, the preposition *lē-* 'to' lends the statement imperative force as a command to rely on the Torah/Testimony.¹¹ As such, it commands reliance on

thesis, and dispute. All three elements appear in Isa 8:19-9:6.

8. For a full discussion of the problems presented by this verse, see Gray (1912, pp. 157-160). For a more recent discussion, see Müller (1975, pp. 65-76), Carroll (1980, pp. 126-134), and Irvine (1990, pp. 179-233).

9. Cf. Lewis (1989, pp. 128-132), who correctly notes Isaiah's attempt to ridicule the people's reliance on necromancy. Note also the use of *ʔēlōhīm* in 1 Sam 28:13 in reference to the conjured spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. The rendering of *ʔel-ʔēlōhāyw* as "unto its spirits/gods" eliminates the difficulties mentioned by Gray (1912, p. 158) in that *bēʔad hahayyim ʔel-hammēiim* 'on behalf of the living, unto the dead' becomes an appositional restatement of the first part of the question in which *hālōʔam... yidrōš* 'shall not a people... inquire' simply carries over into the second part of the verse. Nevertheless, the alternative meaning of *ʔel-ʔēlōhāyw* as "unto its God/gods" will relate to Isaiah's use of word play later in the passage.

10. See Müller (1975, pp. 68-71), who demonstrates that *hāʔōbōt* 'the mediums' and *hayiddēʔōnīm* 'the wizards' refer to necromancers. For a recent survey of material remains and issues related to the cult of the dead in ancient Judah, see Bloch-Smith (1992).

11. On the emphatic function of *lē-* in this verse, see Müller (1975, pp. 67-68).

the signs from YHWH (v 18) which constitute the Torah and Testimony referred to in vv 16-17.

The first element of the elaboration of Isaiah's counter assertion appears in vv 20b-22 which focus on the failure of the people to rely on the Torah/Testimony with a series of statements linked together by conjunctive *waw*'s. It begins with an oath concerning the inefficacy of the people's view. NJV translates this verse, "Surely, for one who speaks thus there shall be no dawn." The Hebrew term *šāhar* is generally translated "dawn" but the root *šhr* on which it is based has a variety of connotations which suggest a wordplay with the verb *diršū* 'inquire' in v 19. The basic root means "to be black" and extends its meaning to "dawn" on the basis of the blackness of night that immediately precedes dawn. The root connotes a sense of efficacy insofar as dawn represents the beginning of a new day and the renewed act of creation associated with the rising of the sun that overcomes the chaos of night.¹² This sense of efficacy appears also in the use of *šahrāh* 'its dawn/enchantment/atonement' in Isa 47:11, "But evil shall come upon you; you will not know its atonement (*šahrāh*). And wickedness shall fall upon you; you will not be able to facilitate its expiation (*kapērāh*)." Here the parallel with *kapērāh* 'its expiation' indicates the use of the term in a context of sorcery (cf. Isa 47:12) in reference to the act of correcting or enchanting away evil.¹³ Likewise, the root frequently means "to look early, seek diligently, search" (cf. Isa 26:9; Ps 63:2) and commonly appears in parallel with the verb *drš* 'to seek/inquire of God' (Hos 5:15; Ps 78:34; Job 8:5; cf. Prov 11:27).¹⁴ In the present context, *drš* describes inquiry from the mediums and sorcerers or from the dead (v 19). When considered in relation to such inquiry, *šāhar* must be understood not only as "dawn," but also in reference to the efficacy of inquiring or searching from the sorcerers and mediums.¹⁵ The prophet's oath in v 20b should

12. Likewise, the use of *šahārūt* 'blackness' in Eccl 11:10 refers to the dawn/prime of life, "for youth and the dawn of life are vanity," and *šēhōrāh* 'black' refers to the woman's beauty in Cant 1:5, "I am dark and comely." In both cases, the root conveys a sense of efficacy or animation.

13. Note the cognate Akkadian terms *saḫāru(m)* 'to be turned to, to bewitch' and *sāḫiru* 'sorcerer' (Müller, 1975, pp. 74-75). Lewis (1989, p. 132, n.13) notes that no satisfactory explanation has been provided for the problem of the sibilant correspondences between Hebrew *šāhar* and Akkadian *saḫāru(m)* and *sāḫiru*. Insofar as Hebrew *šāhar* means "efficacy" and refers to the uselessness of necromancy in the present context (see below), it would appear that Isaiah relies in part on a word play with Hebrew *sāḫār* 'traffic, gain' (cf. Isa 23:3, 18). Certainly, the Sibboleth/Shibboleth incident reported in Judg 12:1-6 indicates that words pronounced with a *samek* in the region of Ephraim might be pronounced with a *shin* elsewhere.

14. The Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic root *šhr* also means, "to break through, dig, search, seek." Cf. Jastrow (1967, p. 1551).

15. Note that Targum Jonathan plays on the parallel meanings of *šhr* and *drš* by translating

therefore be translated, "Surely, if they will say a thing like this which lacks dawn/ inquiry/efficacy," i.e., "Surely if they say a worthless thing like this."¹⁶ Because of its range of meanings, *šāhar* is a key transitional term which links the language of inquiry in vv 19-20 to the imagery of contrasting light and darkness in the following verses.

Verses 21-22 then elaborate on v 20b by describing the consequences of the people's reliance on mediums and sorcerers. Verse 21 contains a number of problems relevant to this function. First, the verbs in this passage are all third person masculine singular forms as opposed to the plural forms of vv 19-20. Although many scholars maintain that the subject for these verbs is an unspecified man,¹⁷ the antecedent subject is *ʿam* 'people' in v 19b, which employs a third person singular verb *yidrōš* 'it shall inquire' in that context as well. The second problem involves the third person feminine pronoun suffix in the phrase *wēʿābar bāh* 'and it shall pass by/through it'. There is no evident feminine singular noun that serves as the antecedent subject for this suffix in the present context. Consequently, scholars have concluded that *ʿeres* 'land' should be understood from the general context so that the verse is translated, "and they shall pass through the land greatly distressed and hungry."¹⁸ The problem is that *ʿeres* only appears in v 22, after this verse and not before it, which indicates that it is not the antecedent. Consequently, *ʿeres* is an unlikely subject for *wēʿābar bāh*. The only feminine singular nouns that appear prior to *wēʿābar bāh* in the present context are *tōrāh* and *tēʿūdāh*, "instruction" and "testimony." As noted above, these nouns form a hendiadys (cf. 8:16, 20); consequently, they not only provide an adequate antecedent for *wēʿābar bāh*, but the only antecedent in the present context. In this respect, the meaning of the verb *ʿābar* as "pass by" or "neglect" results

mikʿan lēt lēh mān dēšāhar wēyibʿōhī, 'now he has no one from whom he will search and inquire'. The Targum translates the Hebrew verbs *diršu* 'inquire' and *yidrōš* '(he) shall inquire' in v 19 as *tēbāʿū* 'inquire' and *tabēʿin* '(they) inquire'. By employing the Aramaic roots *bʿy* in v 20 and *tbʿ* in v 19, both of which translate Hebrew *drš*, Targum Jonathan emphasizes its understanding of Hebrew *šāhar* as "search, inquire." For the text of Targum Jonathan, see Sperber (1962, pp. 17-18).

16. Although *ʿim-lōʿ* frequently functions as an oath formula, such a function appears to play only a secondary role in the present context insofar as it adds emphasis to the prophet's statement in vv 20b-22. It may also be used to express a condition. In the present context, it emphatically identifies v 19b as the condition that will lead to the consequences outlined in vv 21-22. On the syntactical functions of *ʿim-lōʿ*, see Waltke and O'Connor (1990, sec. 38.2d, 40.2.b) and especially Thorion (1984, pp. 56-57). On vv 21-22, see below.

17. E.g., Gray (1912, p. 160).

18. Cf. BHS which suggests emending *bāh* to *bāʿeres*.

in a statement that describes the experience of those who "pass by" or "neglect" YHWH's Torah and Testimony, "and they (the people) shall pass by/neglect it oppressed and hungry."¹⁹ As a result of such hunger and suffering, the people will become incensed and curse its king and its spirits/God.²⁰ The statement, "and it (the people) shall turn its face upward," appears to be derived from a contrast with the following statement that they will look to the earth, but it makes little sense in the context of the people's cursing its king and God. Furthermore, there is no indication that the reference to *ʿeres* in v 22 suggests that the people look downward in contrast to their turning upward in v 21. The word *lēmāʿēlāh* is generally translated "upwards," but the noun *maʿal* can also mean "unfaithful, treacherous act." It is commonly used for treachery against God (Josh 22:22; 1 Chr 9:1; 2 Chr 29:19; 33:19; Ezra 9:2, 4; 10:6) and provides a better conclusion to the statement that "they will curse their king and their God and turn to rebellion." In this case, the *he* accusative added to *maʿal* lends force to the turning *towards* rebellion.²¹

Verse 22 employs the imagery of darkness to describe the despair of the people when it looks at the situation of its land. A chiasmic word arrangement appears in the description of the "distress and darkness" (*sārāh wahāšēkāh*) and "the gloom of anguish" (*mēʿūp sūqāh*) which the people see when they look to their land. Here, *hāšēkāh* 'darkness' and *mēʿūp* 'gloom' both refer to darkness and *sārāh* 'distress' and *sūqāh* 'anguish' both refer to distress. The verse ends with the statement *waʿāpēlāh mēnuddāh* 'and it is thrust into thick darkness' which takes *ʿam* 'people' as the subject of the verb *mēnuddāh* 'thrust out'.

The second element of the elaboration on the prophet's counter-assertion in 8:20a appears in 8:23-9:6 which focuses on the results for those who understand and rely on YHWH's Testimony and Torah. Such persons will understand the situation to mean success for Israel and the House of David.

19. Although the construction *ʿābar bē* generally means "to pass through" in reference to a land, city, or other locality (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 1953, p. 717b, paragraphs 3a, 3b), Ps 103:16 (cf. Deut 2:4) demonstrates that it can also mean "to pass by" in reference to wind (BDB, p. 717b, par. 4b). In the present instance, *wēʿābar bāh* in Isa 8:21 refers to the people's "passing by," i.e., "neglecting," the Torah and Testimony mentioned in vv 16 and 20. See further, n. 23 below.

20. Note the word play on the meaning of the term *ʿēlohāyw*. In the present context, it follows up on the theme of necromancy which is introduced in v 19, but it also plays to the theme of rebellion against king and God (see discussion of *lēmāʿēlāh* below).

21. Normally, a *hātēp patah* appears under the *ʿayin* when *maʿal* 'rebellion' appears with a suffix (e.g., *maʿālō* 'its rebellion'), but see 2 Chr 33:19, *ūmaʿālō* 'and its rebellion'.

This passage is demarcated by the introductory asseverative *ki* 'but' in v 23 and the shift in imagery from gloom and failure to light and success. Verse 23 constitutes a counter-statement to the failure outlined in vv 20b-22. The first part of the verse, v 23a α , constitutes the counter-statement proper. It is commonly translated, "but there will be no gloom (*mū'āp*) for her that was in anguish (*mūsāq lāh*)," but this translation assumes parallel meanings for *mū'āp* 'gloom' and *mē'ūp* 'gloom' in v 22 and *mūsāq* 'anguish' and *sūqāh* 'anguish' in v 22. Although the parallel appears to be correct for *mū'āp* and *mē'ūp*, it is not correct for *mūsāq* and *sūqāh*. Whereas *sūqāh* is a feminine noun derived from the root *swq* 'to be distressed' *mūsāq* is a *hophal* participle derived from the root *ysq* 'to pour, cast, flow'. In its *hophal* form, this verb means "to be firmly established" as indicated by its use in Job 11:15 where it is parallel with *lō' tīrā'*, "you will be secure (*musāq*) and will not fear." A further problem concerns the referent for the third person feminine pronoun of this passage (*lāh*), here rendered simply as "her." As noted above, the similar pronoun in v 21 refers to the hendiadys *tōrah* and *tē'ūdāh* 'Torah' and 'Testimony' which appears in v 20 (cf. v 16). In the present context, "Torah" and "Testimony" provide an adequate antecedent to *mūsāq lāh* in that they provide a basis for the optimism expressed here. Likewise, *mū'āp* in v 23 may well be a *hophal* participial derived from the verb root *y'p*, "to be faint, weary" (cf. Dan 9:21). Such a word play on *mē'ūp* in v 22 would provide a parallel with that between *mūsāq* and *sūqāh* in vv 22-23. In addition, it would provide an appropriate contrast with the oppressed and hungry in vv 21-22. Consequently, v 23a α should be rendered, "but there is no weariness for whomever is firmly established to it," i.e., the Torah and Testimony.²²

22. The prophet's use of a word play involving the term *'eres* in v 22 should be noted here. The term *'eres* commonly means "land" as translated above, but it is also a common reference to the netherworld in ancient Ugaritic and Hebrew literature (see Tromp, 1969, pp. 23-46 for a full discussion). In the present context, the use of the term *'eres* plays upon the reference to necromancy in v 19 and the phrase *wē'ābar bāh* in v 21, which is commonly employed in reference to passing through a land (BDB, p. 717, par. 3a). Furthermore, the references to darkness in vv 22-23 might suggest a reference to the netherworld (cf. Job 10:21-22; contra Tromp, 1969, pp. 41-2), but the appearance of the phrase *mūsāq lāh* reveals the prophet's use of word play as part of his rhetorical strategy to argue on behalf of adherence to YHWH's Torah and Testimony rather than to necromancy. The phrase *mūsāq lāh* can only refer to the hendiadys *tōrah* and *tē'ūdāh* as its antecedent; a reference to *'eres* or an unspecified feminine object (RSV) would make no sense. Nevertheless, the use of *'eres* in association with *wē'ābar bāh* suggests a reference to the netherworld and the disaster that will overtake those who rely on necromancy. But the unusual syntactical relationship between *'eres* and *wē'ābar bāh*, the parallel between the third feminine singular object pronouns (*wē'ābar*) *bāh* and (*mūsāq*) *lāh*, and the exclusive

This is followed by an explanatory statement in v 23a⁶+b that contrasts the experience of those who do not rely on YHWH with the experience of those who do. Verse 23a⁶+b is commonly translated, "In the former time (*kā'ēt hāri'šôn*) he brought into contempt (*hēqal*) the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time (*wēhā'ahārôn*) he will make glorious (*hikbīd*) the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (RSV). Scholars have been correct to see a contrast of images in this verse based on the parallel statements that employ *hēqal* 'to bring into contempt, despise' and *hikbīd* 'to make glorious, honor' as well as *hāri'šôn* 'the former' and *wēhā'ahārôn* 'the latter'. But there are several problems.²³ First, both *hēqal* and *hikbīd* are perfect verbal forms and therefore refer to past events, which undermines the distinction between events pertaining to the past and to the future in the RSV translation. Second, *'ēt* 'time' is a feminine noun but both *hāri'šôn* and *hā'ahārôn* are masculine nouns that cannot serve as adjectives for *'ēt*. Emerton (1969, pp. 158-160) has demonstrated that the term *kā'ēt* must be taken as the equivalent of *kē'attāh*, but in pausal form, and translated "now." This means that "the former" and "the latter" should be understood personally as the subjects of the verbs. According to Emerton (1969, pp. 168-169), "the former" and "the latter" comprise "totality" so that the two terms refer to "everyone, from first to last." Others have understood them as references to two kings of Israel (Ginsberg, 1958)²⁴ or as a reference to Assyria (Driver, 1967). Unfortunately, each of these solutions is inadequate in that they do not account for the larger disputational context of the passage. Rather, the "former" and the "latter" refer to the contrasting positions that have been noted in this context. The "former" designates the position of those who rely on mediums and sorcerers whose views lead to darkness and rebellion against king and God (vv 20b-22). The "latter" refers to those who rely on the Torah and Testimony that explain the meaning of Isaiah's signs (v 23a^α).

It should be noted that Alt (1953) has argued correctly that "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" is equivalent to "the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." The former terms refer to the Israelite names for the northern part of the kingdom of Israel and the latter refer to the three provinces that the Assyrians carved out of this territory when

reference of *mūšāq lāh* to "Torah" and "Testimony" indicates the prophet's intent to advocate adherence to Torah and Testimony throughout the passage.

23. For a full discussion, see Emerton (1969, esp. 158-160).

24. Cf. Eshel (1990) who argues that the verse refers to Ben-Hadad ben Tabrimmon ben Hezion, King of Damascus, as "the former" and Tiglath Pileser III as "the latter."

Tiglath Pileser III annexed it into the Assyrian empire.²⁵ Consequently, the "way of the sea" refers to *Duʾru* (Dor), "Galilee of the nations" refers to *Magidu* (Megiddo), and "the land beyond the Jordan" refers to *Galʾazu* (Gilead). This has important implications when the verse is considered in relation to the following psalm that celebrates YHWH's defeat of enemies and the enthronement of the new Davidic king as well as the larger context of 7:2-9:6 which maintains that the Assyrians were brought by YHWH to remove Pekah and Rezin.²⁶ The "former one" who follows the view of the mediums and sorcerers which leads to darkness will "disparage" (*hēqal*) the Assyrian annexation of this territory as a tragedy and will likely turn against king and God for leading the country into such a disaster. The "latter one" who understands Isaiah's signs properly, however, will "give honor" (*hikbid*) to the annexation or recognize that YHWH has brought the Assyrians to remove the threat posed to the House of David by Rezin and Pekah. Such a person will realize that the defeat of the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition opens the way for the Davidic monarchy to reassert its control over the northern kingdom of Israel and thereby to repair a long-standing breach within the twelve tribes.

The Royal Psalm of Thanksgiving in 9:1-6 builds upon the contrast of light and darkness from the preceding material.²⁷ It begins with an introductory statement in v 1 which employs perfect verbs to describe the people's perception of a great light from the midst of their darkness. The verbs shift to second person perfect forms directed to YHWH in v 2 to introduce a new section in vv 2-5 concerning the joy of the people. Verse 2 addresses YHWH and basically states that God has "increased the joy"²⁸ and made great the celebration." Verses 3-5 then elaborate on the reasons for this celebration in a series of three statements, each of which is introduced by an

25. According to 2 Kings 15:29, the conquered territory included Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor--Gilead, Galilee, the entire region of Naphtali.

26. For a full discussion of the larger context of Isaiah 7:2-9:6, see Sweeney (forthcoming).

27. For the identification of Isa 9:1-6 as a psalm of thanksgiving, see Barth (1977, pp. 148-151), cf. Wildberger (1972, pp. 366-367). Werner (1982, pp. 22-23) correctly challenges the view that Isa 9:1-6 is an individual song of thanksgiving, based on the absence of elements relating to an individual speaker. Because Isa 9:1-6 contains elements of the Individual Song of Thanksgiving, he concludes that it is a mixed form which is based on the Thanksgiving form. The relationship between thanksgiving songs and songs of praise, however, indicates that Isa 9:1-6 is a hymn of praise with thanksgiving elements. On the relationship between the two genres, see Kaiser (1977, pp. 331-332, 336-337), Gerstenberger (1988, pp. 14-16). Although this is not a pure example of the individual thanksgiving form, the presence of the many thanksgiving elements in 9:1-6 and the references to the Davidic monarch indicate that it is a royal psalm of thanksgiving.

28. Read *haggīlāh* 'the joy' for *haggōy lō'* 'the nation not' (cf. BHS).

explanatory *kî* 'because' which explains the basis for the preceding statement. Thus, v 3 addresses YHWH with second person verbs which explain that God has crushed the oppressor of the people. Verse 4 explains v 3 by referring to destruction of military garments as a signal of the end of war. Verse 5 then announces the "birth" or enthronement of a new Davidic king as the reason for the era of peace. Verse 6 differs from the preceding material by employing an imperfect verbal form (*ta'āšeh* 'it shall do, accomplish') to announce YHWH's guarantee that the new monarch's reign will experience "peace without end" and "justice" and "righteousness" forever.

III

The overarching genre of Isa 8:16-9:6 is prophetic instruction concerning YHWH's signs to Israel and the House of David. The primary criterion for identifying the instruction genre in this passage is the content, insofar as the passage is designed to explain the significance of the "signs" (i.e., Isaiah and his children) to an unspecified audience.²⁹ Formal criteria also indicate that this is an example of the instruction genre in that the various sub-genres of this passage are typical elements of instruction speech and facilitate its goals.

The announcement of Isaiah's intention to wait for YHWH in 8:16-17 begins with imperative commands to "bind the Torah/seal the Testimony" in 8:16. These commands are not only typical examples of instructional language, but their concern with Torah, "instruction," and Testimony identifies the basic concern with the signs that YHWH has given to Israel (cf. 8:17). That Torah and Testimony refer to these signs is evident from their present context which refers to the *gillāyôn gādōl* 'large scroll' that Isaiah was commanded to write in 8:1. Insofar as this document contains the record of YHWH's signs to Israel, the command to bind and seal it and the announcement that Isaiah will wait for YHWH indicate the prophet's interest in preserving it until the sign is confirmed.

The basis for the announcement in 8:18-9:6 comprises the essential instructional material of this passage. It begins with an assertion that Isaiah and his children are "signs" and "portents" in Israel (8:18). Not only does this assertion indicate the focus of the passage on explaining the significance of the signs, it also serves a rhetorical function as a proposition whose validity must be confirmed or denied. The following disputation in 8:19-9:6 functions

29. Note Irvine's suggestion that the audience may be the Davidic House (1990, p. 205).

accordingly in that its purpose is to invalidate the competing claim that reliance should be placed in mediums and sorcerers rather than in YHWH and the signs. Consequently, v 19 quotes the people's contention that mediums and sorcerers or necromancers should be consulted in the current situation of crisis.

The balance of the unit in 8:20-9:6 then evaluates the relative merits of the competing claims. It begins in v 20a with Isaiah's counter-assertion in the form of an implicit command to rely on Torah and Testimony, hence, on YHWH's signs. Isa 8:20b-9:6 then elaborates on Isaiah's counter-assertion by challenging the position of those who rely on mediums and sorcerers to understand the meaning of the present situation and by asserting the position of those who rely on YHWH's signs. According to vv 20b-22, those who reject or neglect the Torah/Testimony will see only the negative side of the situation, i.e., the oppression and hunger caused by the invasion of the land, and this will cause them to rebel against their king and God (cf. Exod 22:28). When they gaze at the land, they see darkness, an image used elsewhere to describe the invading Assyrian army (Isa 5:30). Following the evaluation of this popular position, Isa 8:23-9:6 states that there will be no darkness for those who rely on the Torah/Testimony, which indicates that such persons will realize YHWH's beneficial action in bringing about the Assyrian invasion. This becomes clear in v 23a⁶+b where the two positions are contrasted with regard to their evaluation of the Assyrian annexation of northern Israelite territory during the Syro-Ephraimitic War. The former, i.e., those who do not rely on YHWH's signs, will see this action as a disaster insofar as they will despise the annexation of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. The latter, however, will welcome it insofar as they give honor to the Way of the Sea, Trans-Jordan, and Galilee of the Nations, employing Hebrew equivalents for the Assyrian provincial names. The validity of this view is then reinforced by the Royal Psalm of Thanksgiving that concludes the passage in 9:1-6. The psalm celebrates the enthronement of a new Davidic monarch against the background of thanksgiving to YHWH for relieving the country from oppression by its enemies. This indicates the ultimate significance of the sign, especially Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens." Not only will the Assyrian invasion bring hardship to the country, it will also relieve Israel and the Davidic dynasty of the threat posed by the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition. The annexation of the northern districts and the removal of Pekah ben Remaliah from the throne opens the way for the Davidic monarch to reassert authority over the northern kingdom of Israel and finally to bring peace to the land. For Isaiah, a proper understanding of the

recorded signs entails acceptance of the suffering caused by the Assyrian invasion as the price to be paid for the return of the northern kingdom (i.e., Shear Yashub, "a remnant will return") to the Davidic dynasty (i.e., Immanuel, "God is with us").³⁰

STRUCTURE DIAGRAM

Isaiah 8:16-9:6

PROPHETIC INSTRUCTION CONCERNING YHWH'S SIGNS TO ISRAEL, AND THE HOUSE OF DAVID	8:16-9:6
I. Announcement of Intention to wait for YHWH	8:16-17
A. Command to bind/seal Testimony/Torah	8:16
B. Explanation: Wait for YHWH	8:17
II. Basis for Announcement: Instruction concerning the significance of YHWH's signs to Israel and the House of David	8:18-9:6
A. Opening assertion: Isaiah and his children are signs from YHWH	8:18
B. Disputation concerning significance of signs: deliverance for Israel and the House of David	8:19-9:6
1. quotation of the opposing position: reliance on mediums and sorcerers (necromancy)	8:19
2. refutation: inefficacy of reliance on mediums and sorcerers versus efficacy of reliance on YHWH's Testimony/Torah	8:20-9:6
a. basic instruction: to Torah and Testimony	8:20a
b. concerning results of people's failure to rely on Torah and Testimony: failure, rebellion, and darkness	8:20b-22
1) introductory statement: oath/conditional statement concerning failure of people's reliance on mediums and sorcerers	8:20b
2) elaboration concerning failure of people's position	8:21-22
a) they shall neglect it oppressed and hungry	8:21a

30. This is a revised version of papers presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies (Boston, December 16-18, 1990) and the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (Rome, July 14-17, 1991). I would like to express my gratitude to Klaus Baltzer, Moshe Greengerg, Robert Haak, and David Wright for their judicious comments and suggestions. Naturally, they are not to be held accountable for the interpretations offered here.

- b) consequence: rebellion against king and God 8:21b
 - c) consequence: consignment to darkness in the land 8:22
 - c. concerning results for those who rely on YHWH's Testimony and Torah: success for Israel and the House of David 8:23-9:6
 - 1) counterstatement concerning success for those who rely on YHWH's Testimony and Torah 8:23
 - a) counterstatement proper 8:23aα
 - b) explanation concerning contrasting views of Assyria's annexation of northern Israelite territory 8:23aβ+b
 - (1) first case: those who do not rely on YHWH disparage annexation of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali 8:23aβ
 - (2) second case: those who rely on YHWH welcome annexation of Way of the Sea, Trans-Jordan, and Galilee 8:23ay+b
 - 2) Illustration: Royal Psalm of Thanksgiving concerning YHWH's deliverance of Israel and establishment of a Davidic Monarch 9:1-6
 - a) introductory statement: people have seen a great light 9:1
 - b) elaboration concerning joy of people 9:2-5
 - (1) basic statement: YHWH has given joy to the people 9:2-5
 - (2) basis: crushed oppression 9:3
 - (3) basis: cessation of war 9:4
 - (4) basis: enthronement of a Davidic monarch 9:5
 - c) concluding promise: peaceful rule of Davidic monarch guaranteed by YHWH 9:6

TRANSLATION: Isaiah 8:16-9:6

8:16) Bind up the Testimony, seal the Instruction among my teachings 17) and I will wait for YHWH who hides his face from the House of Jacob and I will hope for him.

8:18) Behold/Here am I and the children which YHWH has given to me as signs and portents in Israel from YHWH of Hosts who dwells on Mt. Zion.

8:19) And if they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and sorcerers who chirp and moan, shall a people not inquire unto its spirits/gods? On behalf of the living unto the dead?"

8:20a) To the Torah and to the Testimony!

8:20b) Surely, if they will say a thing like this which lacks dawn/inquiry/efficacy, 21) then it (the people) shall neglect it (Torah/Testimony) oppressed and hungry and it shall be that when it (the people) is hungry, then it shall become incensed and curse its king and its God/spirits and it shall turn to rebellion. 22) And to the land it (the people) shall look and behold/there is distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and it (the people) is thrust into thick darkness.

8:23) But there is no weariness for whomever is firmly established to it (Torah/Testimony). Now the former (he who rejects Torah/Testimony) disparages the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali but the latter (he who understands Torah/Testimony) honors/values the Way of the Sea, Trans-Jordan, Galilee of the Nations.

9:1) The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light, those inhabiting a land of deep darkness, light shines upon them.

9:2) You have increased the rejoicing, you have made great the celebration. They celebrate before you like the celebration at harvest time, as they rejoice when they divide spoil.

9:3) Because the yoke of his burden and the rod of his shoulder, the staff of the one who oppresses him, you have broken as on the Day of Midian.

9:4) Because every boot strapped on in conflict/agitation and garment rolled in blood shall be (consigned to) fire, food (for) flame.

9:5) Because a boy has been born to us, a son has been given to us, and responsibility is upon his shoulder, and his name is called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Ruler of Peace.

9:6) There is no end to the amount of responsibility and peace upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it and to secure it with justice and righteousness, now and forever. The zeal of YHWH of Hosts shall accomplish this.

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