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**Refugees, survivors and a community saved and  
refashioned through judgement:**  
The remnant in Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah

## **Abstract**

The present study consists of four parts. The first three are a canonical analysis of Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah, respectively. These chapters attempt to give an answer to why the community was reduced to a remnant and what characterises them. The final chapter attempts to place the theme of the remnant in biblical theology.

This study rests on two convictions: (1) The interpreter needs to wrestle with the biblical texts in their canonical form because these have been transmitted as works of literature; (2) A canonical method is especially suited for the study of the prophetic literature because of the thematic structure and figurative language of this literary genre.

Through a close reading of these prophets, it is shown, that the remnant theme is used as a bridge or hinge between the themes of judgement and salvation. It provides an explanation and reason for the preservation of a community which has faced judgement. The theme can be used both positively and negatively. The absence of a remnant marks the end of a community. But when it is present there is hope (however small). The theme is often associated with the future promises of restoration which the prophets proclaimed. And as such the remnant will be the future eschatological community, the people of the Messiah.

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# Introduction

## ***Hypothesis***

The theme of the remnant is both common and important in the prophetic literature. It is therefore essential to comprehend how this theme is used in order to understand the theology of the prophets. This will be done by an analysis focusing on three questions: (1) The identity of the remnant. Who are they and what are the characteristics of the people in this group? (2) The cause behind the current situation. Why did they become a remnant? (3) The theme in the wider context. How is the remnant theology integrated into the theology of the prophets?

## ***The scope of this study: why Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah?***

A study of Isaiah and Micah shows that there are similarities between the two books. Therefore it is interesting to compare their uses of the remnant theme. Zephaniah was added to these two because of how the remnant is described. There are significant parallels in the way these three books portray the remnant, especially with regard to the characteristics of the people.

## ***Earlier research***

This is not the proper context to make a full survey of research regarding the remnant theme. Therefore some comments will suffice to place this study in its context. The theme has been discussed in scholarly circles during the past century. The remnant has commonly been connected with eschatology and the group has often been defined as righteous or pious.

Two studies are especially significant for our purposes. Gerhard Hasel's *The Remnant* is the most comprehensive study of the remnant theme. It can be divided into three parts. The first is an investigation of the theme in Near Eastern literature, such as Akkadian and Sumerian sources etc. The second is an investigation of the theme in Genesis, the Elijah cycle and the prophet Amos. The third is devoted to an investigation of Isa 1-39.<sup>1</sup> This is also the most important part for the purpose of this study. Hasel has suggested that the use of the remnant theme can be divided into three categories: (1) A historical remnant is a group of people who have survived a catastrophe; (2) A faithful remnant is a group of people who are loyal to and devoted to Yahweh; (3) An eschatological remnant is a group who will survive future judgement. In this study we can see examples of all these three uses of the remnant theme. And in some cases the term might refer to a group which is both a righteous and eschatological remnant.

The second study was made by Greg King. His dissertation on the theological coherence in Zephaniah includes one chapter on the remnant theme and is therefore of special interest.<sup>2</sup> His study is both well structured and comprehensive.

The book of Micah has been thoroughly discussed in scholarly circles. But no comprehensive study of how the remnant theme is used has been made so far. This will therefore be one of the main contributions of this study.

It is also relevant to add a note about commentaries. Very few writers actually discuss the remnant theme in depth. The oracles against the nations in Isa 13-23 is a case in point. In most commentaries there is no discussion of how the remnant theme is used in these settings. The reason could be space limitations. But it is also possible that most commentators think that the remnant theme is exclusively associated with the covenant community. And therefore ignore these passages. Waltke's commentary on Micah is in some ways an exception. But even his discussion lacks depth

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<sup>1</sup> See Hasel, 1980, 1-44, for a more thorough survey of research until 1980.

<sup>2</sup> King, 1996; see also his article on the remnant in Zephaniah (1994).

sometimes.<sup>3</sup> There is still much useful information to be gained from commentaries however, which is why they will be important throughout this study.

## ***Method***

How will these these texts be studied? This question can be answered on more than one level. The general framework of this study will be canonical. And the text will be studied from three perspectives, literary and structural, echoes and intertextuality, and biblical theology.

### *Canonical*

Canonical criticism has been variously defined. According to Sanders it has two major foci, which he calls “the canonical process” and “canonical hermeneutics.” The first concerns the development of the text within the religious community.<sup>4</sup> He views this as a very important part of this discipline and is therefore critical of Childs who is more focused on “what each book conveys in its fullness.”<sup>5</sup> He does not explain what canonical hermeneutics looks like from a methodological perspective or how it can be utilised. But from his examples it can be inferred that the specific pericopes should not be read in isolation from their wider literary context.<sup>6</sup> This corresponds to the use of canonical criticism in this study. The aim is to understand how the theme of the remnant is used in the final form of Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah.

It is valuable to have the whole canonical framework in the background as the study proceeds. This means that this study will be theological. But the three prophets will still be studied separately. It would be possible to make a synthesis of different aspects related to the remnant theme. But these books were transmitted as separate works of literature within the canonical framework. Therefore it is justifiable to let each book convey its message within this larger framework. This canonical method differentiates this study from some of the previous ones. Individual pericopes will be studied in the order which they occur in Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah because the literary context is important.<sup>7</sup>

One reason for studying the prophetic books from a canonical perspective is the genre of the prophetic literature. These books are often thematically structured and in most cases oracles are not dated. It is hard to determine why this information is absent from most oracles. But it could be an indication that the specific historical setting when an oracle was first delivered was not viewed as important in order for the reader to understand the message.<sup>8</sup> Prophetic texts should not be studied as if they were historical narratives. They clearly belong to a different literary genre, which uses other ways of communication. A narrative is written to recount specific historical events. But in the prophetic literature the focus is on the message of the prophet. In addition the language is mostly poetic. A canonical perspective does not exclude the historical framework from the interpretation of these texts. But it acknowledges that the historical setting is more important for the interpretation of some prophetic texts (cf. Isa 7:3; 36:1-39:9). Letting our interpretation of these texts be informed by historical information is not a violation of the canonical method. For the information contained in

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<sup>3</sup> Waltke, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Sanders, 1984, 21-45.

<sup>5</sup> Sanders, 1984, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Sanders, 1984, 50-57 discuss five observations gained through canonical hermeneutics.

<sup>7</sup> See Hasel, 1980, 216, assigns different pericopes to the respective periods of Isaiah’s work; see also Graham, 1976, who studies these passages in a similar way; He, 1980, 46, also notes that almost all passages which mention the remnant in Isa 1-39 have been considered inauthentic at some point.

<sup>8</sup> Dempster, 2006, 318, who follows Childs, 1987, 46; cf. Smith, 2007, 25, argues that Isaiah can’t be understood apart from its historical context. The question, however, is whether it is important to decide when an oracle was first delivered. Or if it is the general historical context which is important. This question is important but a comprehensive answer can’t be given here.

these texts indicate that it is significant and should be taken into account. This is similar to what Dempster calls a “wholistic canonical approach” where the interpreter doesn’t drive a wedge between a historical and canonical prophet.<sup>9</sup>

### *Literary and structural*

One of the implications of a canonical framework is that the prophetic books should be studied as works of literature. They will not be viewed as collections of oracles that have no connection with each other. For a modern reader it might be tempting to separate different oracles from one another. But the genre of prophetic literature is very different from that of a novel or a textbook of philosophy. There are many similarities in literary style and structure between the prophetic books (e.g. parallelism, inclusio, chiasm). This could be an indication that this genre expresses thoughts and ideas in a different way. Abrupt transitions can be used for rhetorical effect, and doesn’t necessarily indicate that sections are unrelated.

One of the difficult aspects in the study of the prophets is to discern how literary devices are used by the authors or redactors to structure the texts. Motyer observes that our ability to detect structures is very important:

It is taken as axiomatic that in any part of the Bible sound exegesis is imperilled if errors are committed in discerning the structure of the book, passage or verse. On the other hand properly noted structure provides a control, determining to a very large extent the ambience within which exegesis may move.<sup>10</sup>

The last point is especially important. The structure of a text is more than an artistic feature. If it is misunderstood the message of the passage might be distorted. The reader has to ask: Does this oracle have a refrain? Are there special catchwords or logical particles? Does it express the same theme with different words? These and similar questions will be asked in this study.

It is also important to be aware of the larger structures in the literary context. In the following chapters we will see how the theme of the remnant is integrated with the larger themes of judgement and salvation and how it connects these two. Smaller portions of text are framed by the literary context. And it is therefore important to understand this framework if we want a more comprehensive understanding of the texts.

Furthermore, it is possible for a book to have several structures on the same level. A good example of this can be found in Micah. The book begins with the prophet’s name, which means: “Who is like Yahweh?” And in the last section the prophet asks “Who is a god like you?” These phrases form an inclusio indicating that the incomparability of God is a major point in the whole book. At the same time the book can be divided into three cycles, beginning with judgement and ending with salvation. Both these features contribute to the whole message of the book. A structural reading of Micah can take both of these into account.

Finally, we need to include a note about metaphors. This is something which makes the prophetic oracles difficult to interpret. Much of the prophetic literature is written in poetic verse and the remnant theme often occurs together with metaphors (e.g. Mic 5:7-8 [MT 5:6-8]). Sandy writes: “Metaphors begin with something nonfigurative and make it figurative by using it to describe something beyond the scope of its normal meaning.”<sup>11</sup> If we are unfamiliar with the idioms of a language we will naturally read metaphors on a surface level. But if we make such a literalistic

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<sup>9</sup> Dempster, 2006, 324-25.

<sup>10</sup> Motyer, 1993, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Sandy, 2002, 62.

interpretation, we will likely misunderstand the main point of the oracles.<sup>12</sup> Another important aspect is the correspondence between metaphors and reality. Figurative language does not drain a statement of its meaning. Instead: “Applied to words, a figure denotes some form which a word or sentence takes, different from its ordinary and natural form. This is always for the purpose of giving *additional force, more life, intensified feeling, and greater emphasis.*”<sup>13</sup> To understand the prophetic oracles we need to go beyond the surface meaning of figures and metaphors.

### *Echoes and intertextuality*

Another implication of the canonical method is that it is important to observe and explain connections between different texts. This area of study has been referred to as inner-biblical allusions, intertextuality, or verbal parallels.<sup>14</sup> Several of the passages discussed in the following chapters contain inner-biblical allusions (e.g. Mic 7:16-20). It is therefore valuable to mention some guidelines that can be used to evaluate their strength:

- (1) Shared language is the single most important factor in establishing a textual connection.
- (2) Shared language is more important than nonshared language.
- (3) Shared language that is rare or distinctive suggests a stronger connection than does language that is widely used.
- (4) Shared phrases suggest a stronger connection than do individual shared terms.
- (5) The accumulation of shared language suggests a stronger connection than does a single shared term or phrase.
- (6) Shared language in similar contexts suggests a stronger connection than does shared language alone.
- (7) Shared language need not be accompanied by shared ideology to establish a connection.
- (8) Shared language need not be accompanied by shared form to establish a connection.<sup>15</sup>

Leonard’s guidelines focus on shared language because he believes that “verbal parallels provide the most objective verifiable criteria for identifying these allusions.”<sup>16</sup> Beale similarly writes that: “Ultimately, what matters most is uniqueness of a word, word combination, word order or even of theme (if the latter is especially unique). Nevertheless, it needs to be remembered that weighing the evidence for recognizing allusions is not an exact science but is a kind of art.”<sup>17</sup> While this study will mainly focus on verbal parallels, thematic parallels are also significant. These are harder to detect. But if they are combined with verbal parallels they can be more easily recognised.

An important part of the study of inner-biblical allusions is to determine the direction of influence. But these questions will not be discussed thoroughly in this study. Because the answers doesn’t contribute much to our understanding of how the remnant theme is used.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Vanhoozer, 1998, 305-09, for a full discussion of the distinction between literal and literalistic interpretations.

<sup>13</sup> Bullinger, 1898, v-vi, italics mine.

<sup>14</sup> These terms are used by Leonard, 2008; Beale, 2008; Byargeon, 2003; The terminology often varies depending on the preference of the author. Sometimes allusions are distinguished from intertextuality. The latter is used with reference to connections between different texts regardless whether they are intentional or not. Whereas allusions are considered more deliberate.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard, 2008, 245, See 246-57 for a discussion and explanation of these guidelines. It would be possible to add further guidelines or refine these. But for the purpose of this study these are sufficient.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard, 2008, 246-47.

<sup>17</sup> Beale, 2008, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard, 2008, 257-64, has six guidelines to determine the direction of influence; See also Byargeon, 2003, 12-25, who uses a diachronic and a synchronic approach to determine the direction of influence.



## *Biblical theology*

For the purpose of this study it is also valuable to investigate how the remnant theme is developed. Are there similarities or differences between the books? Has some aspects have been removed or new ones added? This area of study is often called biblical theology. Studies within this field can often be divided into two categories. The first includes articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a biblical writer or corpus. The second traces the development of one theme, either across a part of the bible or through all its books.<sup>19</sup> Old Testament and New Testament theologies are often divided into one of these two categories. The individual books are either studied apart from each other or the writer describes how important themes are developed. This study falls into the second category. The purpose is to explain how the theme of the remnant is developed in Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah but also explain how this theme is interwoven with the themes of judgement and salvation. James Hamilton has recently argued that God's glory in salvation through judgement is the central theme of the whole bible. It permeates all the books of the bible regardless of their author or genre. Hamilton is well aware that many biblical scholars dismiss the idea that there is a unifying theme in the bible. Brueggemann writes that there "is no going back to a singular coherent faith articulation in the text (much as canonical approaches might insist on it)."<sup>20</sup> Hamilton agrees with Brueggemann that there is no way to go back. But he also claims that a study of the individual books of the Bible will place a unified message before the reader:

In this study, I will pursue a biblical theology that highlights the central theme of God's glory in salvation through judgement by describing the literary contours of individual books in canonical context with sensitivity to the unfolding metanarrative. In my view this metanarrative presents a unified story with a discernible main point, or center.<sup>21</sup>

In addition Hamilton writes that: "Biblical theology seeks to understand the bible in its own terms, in its own chronology, as reflected in its canonical form. One of the key tasks of biblical theology is to trace the connections between themes and show the relationship between them."<sup>22</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that the remnant theme dominates the bible. But it is still a theme that is present throughout many of the different parts of the bible. We might not realise this because writers use different terminology. As Hamilton writes:

Too much biblical theology has fallen pray to the word-study fallacy and has failed to see that themes can be developed with synonymous terms. Charles Halton has shown that "ancient writers felt no compulsion to provide direct links with their allusions.... Instead, they borrowed imagery and fused it with their own rhetorical purposes."<sup>23</sup>

The theme of the remnant is present already with Adam's lineage through Seth, culminating in Enoch who walked with God (Gen. 5:21-24). It continues through Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and is most clearly expressed in Joseph's words to his brothers: "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.... And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant [רְשִׁיטָה] on earth, and to keep alive for you

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<sup>19</sup> Carson, D.A., "Series Preface" in *Shepherds after my own heart* (NSBT), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann, 1997, xvi.

<sup>21</sup> Hamilton. 2010, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, 2010, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Hamilton, 2010, 77.

many survivors.” (Gen 45:5, 7 ESV)<sup>24</sup> The theme can be traced through the Torah and the former prophets. In these texts the spiritual nature of the remnant is emphasised. Only Joshua and Caleb trust in Yahweh after spying in the land (Num 14:25-13). Boaz is faithful to Yahweh and his statues in a time when many did whatever they wanted (Ruth 2:1, 4-5). Seven thousand have not bowed to Baal in Elijah’s time (1 Kgs 19:18). When the prophets develop this theme they do not begin from scratch. They continue to build on and develop the foundation which is already there (cf. Rom 9-11). One of the valuable contributions of this study is that it places the remnant theme in its biblical theological setting.

### *Further questions and a few objections*

At this point it should be clear that this method will exclude some perspectives that could offer valuable insights. This study will not discuss the composition history or editing of these prophetic books. There are three main reasons behind this choice: (1) This study is limited in its scope. Therefore it is impossible to include all perspectives. It would be acceptable to study Isaiah from a source critical perspective or Micah with the method of redaction criticism. Therefore it should be justifiable to study the remnant theme with the canonical method described above (even if the results will deviate from those of critical orthodoxy). (2) The prophetic literature seems especially suited for a canonical method because of its thematic structure. (3) Many historical reconstructions are based on speculation. That is not to say that they are false. But few theories actually correspond to “any known method of producing an ancient Near Eastern document.”<sup>25</sup>

One of the difficulties with a canonical method is how to determine which canon will be used. Barton notes that the choice of a certain canon can’t be decided by the method itself. Instead the interpreter must use an external criterion to determine which books should be in the canon.<sup>26</sup> This critique should be taken seriously. And it is relevant to be aware of this weakness. But it should also be noted that very few methods (if any) are independent of a worldview or external presuppositions. Even traditional critical scholarship is often influenced by “scientific naturalism.” Therefore this objection is not as strong as it might appear at first glance.

### *Important hebrew roots*

This study of the remnant will focus on the hebrew root שָׂרָה. There are two reasons for this: (1) This is the most common of the roots associated with the remnant theme. It is also present in all of the most significant passages in Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah. (2) The nouns (שָׂרָה, שְׂרָרִית) have the basic meaning “remnant.” The root refers to that which is left over or remains. In many instances “the verb and the substantival derivatives refer to those who physically survive or to the remnant of a group of people.”<sup>27</sup> The nouns generally refer to a group of people who have survived after a disaster, usually caused by famine (Gen 45:5), war (Isa 36-39) or divine judgement (Gen 7-9). Clements argues that the root is theologically neutral in most cases but that it is theologically significant when it refers to Judah or Israel.<sup>28</sup>

The root יָרָה often occurs in the same setting as שָׂרָה and can be used as a synonym (e.g. Isa 4:3 Zeph 2:9). The root basically means to be left or remain.<sup>29</sup> One example is Elijah who complains that he is the only one left after the persecution of Yahweh’s prophets (2 Kgs 19:10).

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<sup>24</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations of the biblical texts are my own. I have often used the English Standard Version as a base text, altering it somewhat, and changing “LORD” to “Yahweh”

<sup>25</sup> Smith, 2007, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Barton, 1996, 94.

<sup>27</sup> Clements, 2004, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Clements, 2004, 274.

<sup>29</sup> Kronholm, 1990, 485-86.

There are two more hebrew roots that are used in connection with the remnant theme, מִלֵּט and פִּלֵּט. These roots have commonly been associated with each other.<sup>30</sup> Williams, however, has shown that they can be distinguished. מִלֵּט focuses on initiation of and departure from danger, while פִּלֵּט focuses on motion towards, point of arrival at, and final state of safety.<sup>31</sup> Hasel writes: “The fundamental motif of the remnant concept is the preservation of life according to God’s plan”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hasel, 2001, 557-58.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, 2002, 439.

<sup>32</sup> Hasel, 2001, 562.

# The remnant in Isaiah: A multifaceted theme

## *Form and structure of Isaiah*

There can be no doubt that Isaiah is a challenging book to study. Otherwise there wouldn't be so many different and oftentimes contradictory interpretations of the book. The goal of this study is to understand how the remnant theme is developed within the book of Isaiah. Therefore the structure of this chapter will be somewhat different from previous books and articles about this theme in Isaiah. Both Hasel and Graham has attempted to study the theme of the remnant chronologically by placing the different oracles in a supposed chronological order.<sup>33</sup> Such investigations could be useful as a way of tracing the historical development of the theme. But there are at least two good reasons for choosing another approach. First, the oracles in Isaiah are very difficult to date. Therefore a chronological study will at best be a very subjective picture of the theme's historical development. Furthermore, an approach that works with the theme within the final form of the text will enable us to see how the theme is developed literary. This in turn will give a more holistic picture. This study will in large part follow the same structure as Gary Smith's two volume commentary.<sup>34</sup>

## *Setting the stage*

The beginning of Isaiah (1:1-31) gives an introduction to the book and introduces some of the main themes that are later developed at greater length. It begins with the superscription that introduces the prophet, Isaiah the son of Amos. The first occurrence of the remnant theme is in 1:9: "If Yahweh of hosts had not left [יִהְיֶה] us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah." This verse gives a framework for the relationship between the remnant and Yahweh. The people are sick internally and their kingdom is in ruins (1:4-8). They reached this point because of their sins. And their end would be just like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, were it not for grace. This oracle gives a fitting introduction to the theme of the remnant in Isaiah.<sup>35</sup> From this ruin Yahweh will preserve a people for himself, a small remnant. Barry Webb writes that Isaiah "is a book about demolition and reconstruction, judgement and salvation. And the order is significant: paradoxically, salvation emerges out of judgement and is possible only because of it."<sup>36</sup> In Isaiah the remnant is at the centre of this message of salvation through judgement already at the outset.

## *A future remnant and their Messianic King*

In this section we will look at several oracles that in different ways contribute to the remnant theme. In general the later oracles continue to build on the former in order to present a more complete picture amidst the difficult times that the people faced.

### *The mountain of Yahweh and the branch*

In the beginning of chapter two there is a very interesting passage. It describes the elevation of the mountain of Yahweh above all other mountains. And people will flow to this mountain desiring to be taught by him. Even though this oracle doesn't mention the remnant it is important for our study for two reasons: (1) There is a similar passage in Mic 4:1-3 with almost the same wording as 2:2-4. The latter is a part of Micah's message about the remnant and it is possible to argue that the

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<sup>33</sup> Hasel, 1980, 216-372; Graham, 1976, 217-28.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, 2007 & 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Graham, 1976, 222, notes that many scholars place this oracle around 701 B.C. cf. Smith, 2007, 104.

<sup>36</sup> Webb, 1997, 31.

passage in Isaiah has a similar function. (2) The time of these events. “It shall come to pass in the latter days.” (2:2 ESV; בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים) The exact date of these events is undefined. According to Motyer the events are neither necessarily far or near in the future.<sup>37</sup> This oracle is connected with another oracle of hope in 4:2-6 which begins with “In that day” (בְּיוֹם הַהוּא) This places these two oracles within the same timeframe. These two oracles are then separated by an oracle of judgement pronouncing the removal of pride, male leadership and proud women (2:5-4:1). This oracle points to the fact that Jerusalem is full with both religious (2:6-21) and social (3:1-4:1) disorder. With this background we can turn to 4:2-6:

In that day the branch of Yahweh shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors [לְבִלְיֻטָּה] of Israel. And he who is left [הַנִּשְׁאָר] in Zion and remains [וְהַנִּבְחָר] in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when Yahweh will have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then Yahweh will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

This is the first oracle that uses the root שָׂר in Isaiah. The participle is used in a parallelism with the related root יָהַר. This explains why a participle is used instead of the more common nouns. (cf. Zeph 2:9). The presence of both these roots as well as the noun פְּלִיטָה emphasise the importance of the remnant theme for this passage.

This oracle follows the same structure as 2:2-4 and 2:5-4:1, by including a vision of Zion’s people as cleansed both personally (v.2-4) and socially (v.5-6).<sup>38</sup> Before we can go on to the remnant it is necessary to determine what “the Branch of Yahweh” [צֶמַח יְהוָה] means. Because of the parallel expression in the second half of the verse some scholars have argued that this simply means that the people will live in a fertile land.<sup>39</sup> The second alternative is to interpret “צֶמַח יְהוָה” as a messianic title: Yahweh will “(a) replace the proud leaders of his people and give them a new leader, the Branch of the Lord, and (b) replace the ruin, devastation and shame of the destroyed land with lush crops that will have great fertility.”<sup>40</sup>

The strength of the first interpretation lies in the parallelism. Other parallelisms in the passage could be used in support of this interpretation. What makes this interpretation difficult is that צֶמַח is used in construct with יְהוָה. Williamson suggests that this formulation indicates that Yahweh “will personally attend to the tangible blessings of the restored remnant.”<sup>41</sup> That is a possible solution but a strong parallelism between branch and fruit would also indicate a parallelism between Yahweh and the land. The connection with Yahweh indicates that the branch is used metaphorically and doesn’t belong to the literal category of trees. Moreover, two similar expressions are used in Isa 11, נִצַּח (shoot) and שֹׁרֵשׁ (root). Both of these are used metaphorically. Later both Jeremiah and

<sup>37</sup> Motyer, 1993, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Motyer, 1993, 64.

<sup>39</sup> Clements, 1980, 54; Hasel, 1980, 263; Nielsen, 1989, 184-87, argues that the parallelism is strong between the two halves of the verse but unlike Clements he believes that they both refer to the Messiah, rather than fertile land. Motyer, 1993, 56, argues similarly that both lines are connected with the Messiah and refer to his dual ancestry, belonging to the family tree of both David and Yahweh.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, 2007, 156; He also adds that other messianic promises follows a similar pattern with both new leadership and new agricultural circumstances (Ez 34:20-31).

<sup>41</sup> Williamson, 2006, 309.

Zechariah uses צמח with messianic connotations (Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12).<sup>42</sup> Smith also notes that צמח combined with either יהוה or צדיק never “refers to the literal growth of plants elsewhere in the Old Testament.”<sup>43</sup> The Messiah will be glorious and beautiful and he will be the pride and honour of the survivors of Israel. The glory of Yahweh caused their destruction before (2:10, 19, 21), now the Messiah will dwell among them with divine glory and they will have their pride in him.

These people are the survivors of Israel. The noun פליטה is often used of people who have escaped a dangerous or life threatening situation like war or famine (Gen 45:7; 2 Chr 30:6). In several places this noun is also used as a synonym of שארית (Gen 45:7; 2 Kgs 19:31; 1 Chr 4:43; Isa 15:9; 37:32; Ezra 9:14). This indicates that the remnant have gone through hardships. They are a community which has survived the judgements described in 2:6-4:1. But why and how? The following verse explains why.

First, the remnant will be called holy. This is a community whose character has been changed so that they are qualified to come before Yahweh (cf. Isa 6:3-5; 62:12).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, they are “recorded for life in Jerusalem.” At some point prior to these events a decision has been made to spare these people. This formulation balances the verse by explaining that the holiness of the community depends on election, not on pious acts.<sup>45</sup> The next verse reinforces this interpretation by explaining how the remnant will become holy. They will be inwardly reformed as the next verse describes. Through the spirit of judgement and the spirit of burning they will be cleansed. And their filth (צאצא) will be washed away. צאצא sometimes means vomit (Isa 28:8).<sup>46</sup> It signifies inner uncleanness, that will be washed away, whereas bloodshed signifies social violence such as oppression. It is significant that Yahweh is the subject of these verbs. Their transformation depends on him.

The oracle continues with a description of the new circumstances in which the remnant will find themselves. Zion will be changed. Yahweh will be present with them. In daytime he will be with them through a cloud and in the night through smoke and the shining of a fire. These pictures echo the exodus where Yahweh lead his people through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire (Ex 13:21-22).<sup>47</sup>

Over all the glory there will be a canopy (הפא). The noun is very rare and is used only three times in the OT (Isa 4:5; Jl 2:16; Ps 19:5). In the other two passages it is connected with a bride or a bridegroom. It is possible that it is used as a metaphor in this oracle. Yahweh will create a הפא over mount Zion to enforce his covenant relationship with the remnant. They are his bride.<sup>48</sup> The description of this new creation concludes by portraying its safety through weather metaphors. The people will be protected from the heat of the day and from storm and rain. Yahweh will provide protection for the remnant in all circumstances.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Contra Blenkinsopp, 2000, 203, who argues that the parallelism weakens this thesis. In support of his argument he also mentions Isa 61:11 where צמח is used with reference to the restored community. But that observation makes it even less plausible that the word refers to a literal plant and not a person or a community; contra Williamson, 2006, 307, who argues that Isa 61:11 refers to vegetation.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 2007, 155; Wildberger, 1991, 165 and Smith, 2007, 156, also notes that the Targum translates צמח יהוה with “the messiah of Yahweh.”

<sup>44</sup> Motyer, 1993, 65; cf. Williamson, 2006, 311-12, who also suggests that this point to the realisation of Ex 19:6.

<sup>45</sup> Motyer, 1993, 65; cf. Wildberger, 1991, 169-70, who reaches the same conclusion by referring to “destiny tablets” mentioned in connection with Babylon; See also Hasel 1980, 269; Williamson, 2006, 311.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, 2007, 158; cf. Williamson, 2006, 313, who argues that this verse portrays a purifying refinement reinterpreted by a post-exilic writer.

<sup>47</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 204, suggests that these evoke “epiphenomena associated with the wilderness sanctuary”. But it is more likely that they point to the presence of Yahweh and possibly a “new exodus.”

<sup>48</sup> Motyer, 1993, 66; Smith 2007, 158 argues that the canopy probably refers to protection.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Williamson, 2006, 314-15.

The remnant that this passage describes is very different from the people in Isaiah's culture. This people will be a refashioned community who live in a refashioned world. Their rise is connected to the Messiah and his reign.<sup>50</sup> In the discussion of Micah these themes will resurface again. The mountain of Yahweh will be connected to the coming ruler of Judah. In that day the remnant will be close to their God and they will be holy like him.

### *The holy seed*

Chapter six of Isaiah has intrigued readers and commentators for centuries and continues to do so today. The chapter can be divided into two parts. The first consists of Isaiah's vision of Yahweh. He sees the majesty of God and hears the Seraphim proclaim his holiness. In this situation he pronounces a seventh woe over himself after the ones directed towards Judah in the preceding chapter (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22): "Woe is me! for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king, Yahweh of hosts." (6:5) As a response to his words one of the Seraphim flies to him and touches his lips with a burning coal. When Isaiah has been cleansed Yahweh asks: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (6:8 ESV) Isaiah responds: "Here I am! Send me." This is then followed by instructions for Isaiah's ministry:

And he said, "Go, and say to this people:  
'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'  
Make the heart of this people dull,  
and their ears heavy,  
and blind their eyes;  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears,  
and understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed."  
Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"  
And he said:  
"Until cities lie waste without inhabitant,  
and houses without people,  
and the land is a desolate waste,  
and Yahweh removes people far away,  
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.  
And though a tenth remain in it,  
it will be burned again,  
like a terebinth or an oak,  
whose stump remains when it is felled."  
The holy seed is its stump. (6:9-13)

Isaiah is not given a very encouraging mission. He will be used as Yahweh's tool in the hardening of his people. They will not understand. Unlike Isaiah they will not say "woe is me." The judgement that Yahweh promises in 6:11-13 seems complete. But the last words balance the message by ending on a possible note of hope: "The holy seed is its stump." Most commentators takes this as a reference to the remnant. Childs writes: "The tree has been felled, but its stump still

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Childs, 2001, who writes that the chapter "contrasts the cleansed, redeemed, and purified community with the haughty, corrupt, and anarchic people of chapters 2 and 3."

stands and in the stump is the holy seed waiting to sprout in God's time."<sup>51</sup> and "At the same time, and interwoven with this unbelief, there appears a testimony to the emergence of a faithful remnant, which springs from the ashes of Israel's destruction, a new creation of God and his Messiah."<sup>52</sup> It is possible that this oracle promises the preservation of a future remnant but it is a very small source of hope. These survivors could be associated with the remnant in 4:3.<sup>53</sup> But Beale has questioned the traditional interpretation. His main thesis is that the people are judged by being made like the idols they have worshiped instead of Yahweh.<sup>54</sup> With regard to 6:13 he makes three observations. (1) Burning trees are pictures of destroyed idols. He admits that there are other passages that uses trees without the context of idolatry:

But the uniqueness of the link between Isaiah 1:29-31 and Isaiah 6:13 lies in three observations: (1) the trees are burning; the word "terebinth" (*'ēlā*) occurs only in Isaiah 1:30 and 6:13, and its etymological synonym "oak" (*'allôn*) occurs only in 6:13 and in 2:13, the latter describing unfaithful Israel in Isaiah 2:7-21, where the proud "loftiness" of unbelieving idolaters is clearly compared to the "lofty" "cedars" and the "oaks," which the Lord will be "against" on the day of judgement, and the implicit judgement is that of being made low. (3) Finally, only in these two passages does Isaiah liken the burning trees to unbelieving Israel (though the reference to idolaters in Isaiah 57:5 is close, where "oak" [*'ayil*; cf. also 1:29] occurs). Thus that Isaiah intends to make a link between these two passages is apparent.<sup>55</sup>

(2) A "stump" is an image of a destroyed idol. He gives three reasons for this connection. First, the word is always used as either a commemorative pillar or a cultic pillar in the OT. All extra-biblical Hebrew, Jewish-Aramaic and Syriac sources of this word stays within these semantic barriers. Therefore it is hard to understand why Isaiah chose this word if he meant "stump?" Secondly, the word also occurs three times in other passages with "oak" (אֵלֶּן or אֵלֶּיךָ) or "tree" (עֵץ) in cultic contexts, two of which includes idolatry (1 Kgs 14:23; Judg 9:6; Josh 24:26). In other contexts it is also associated with "Asherim." Those objects of idolatry make the connection even stronger. Furthermore the idolatrous nuance of the word is tied to the context. Both 6:9-10 and 6:13a refer to idolatry. Therefore this would not be the only reference but rather a continuation of the previous description. This last section seems to develop the thought expressed earlier in 1:29-31, which predicts the destruction of idolatrous trees and their worshipers.<sup>56</sup> From this Beale draws the following conclusion:

The essence of the divine response is that this ironic punishment will last until the land undergoes a severe devastation (vv. 11b-12), and although some will survive, even they will be made like their idolatrous symbols, their destiny resembling the destructive end of their own idols (v. 13). Hence, the divine answer of verses 11b-13 is that the punishment will continue until there is an absolute and exhaustive judgement.<sup>57</sup>

(3) This would mean that the holy seed (זרע קֹדֶשׁ) is an unfaithful remnant rather than a faithful one. The nation that Yahweh intended to be a holy seed is now indistinguishable from the idolatrous

<sup>51</sup> Childs, 2001, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Childs, 2001, 59.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, 2007, 198.

<sup>54</sup> Beale, 2008, 36-70.

<sup>55</sup> Beale, 2008, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Beale, 2008, 57-59.

<sup>57</sup> Beale, 2008, 59.



nations. This conclusion signals the end of Israel's theocratic existence.<sup>58</sup> This interpretation can be supported by Ezra 9:1-2. That is the only other passage in the OT where "holy seed" is used. The community has failed to separate themselves from the people of the land and their abominations. Therefore the identity of the holy seed has been compromised as they mix with the people of the land. It is possible that Ezra is interpreting his situation in light of 6:9-13. In Ezra 9:8, while he is praying, he mentions that God has given the remnant a secure hold that he might brighten their eyes. Ezra could be referring to a reversal of 6:10. This doesn't mean that holy seed is a purely negative expression as Beale writes:

Consequently, "holy seed" still has a strictly positive connotation, but only in the formal sense that *God had chosen the nation to be "his seed" to be set apart from the idolatrous nations*, though despite the holy calling, they had become just like the nations. Although the book of Isaiah later admits of a future, restored Israel subsequent to the coming judgement, this Israel is constituted on a different basis and in a different form from what was previously conceived. Therefore Isaiah uses the remnant idea in both 13a and 13b not positively but negatively in order to emphasize the magnitude and absoluteness of Israel's judgement.<sup>59</sup>

The main strength of Beale's argument is that it is sensitive to the immediate context and the intertextual connections with other passages in both Isaiah and other parts of the OT. But he himself also observes the word holy in its verbal and nominal forms is used with a positive sense in most of Isaiah. There are two times when idol worshipers consider themselves holy (Is 65:2-5; 66:17). This shows that holy could be used with a negative sense in Isaiah. But in these instances it should be remembered that the idolaters consider themselves holy. It is not Yahweh or the prophet who says that they are holy. It is likely that Yahweh and the idol worshipers have different definitions of holiness.

This is clearly a complicated verse. The passage doesn't use any of the standard terminology connected with the remnant and it contributes in a unique way to the theme of the remnant. They were supposed to be a holy seed but they will be an idolatrous pillar. They are not the transformed community envisioned in 4:2-6. Their identity is tied to the idols they worship. Through Yahweh's judgement they have been reduced to a remnant resembling their idols.<sup>60</sup>

### *Shear-jashub, the sign of Immanuel and the child who is born*

In the book of Isaiah the reader is introduced to two of the prophet's sons (7:3; 8:3). They are called Shear-jashub (a remnant will return) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (the spoil speeds, the prey hastens). The names are significant because 8:18 states that the prophet and his sons are "*signs and portents* [לְאִתּוֹת וּלְמוֹפְתֵי־יָמָם] in Israel from Yahweh of hosts." Neither of these words are rare in the OT and they occur together in several books. In 20:3-4 there is a significant parallel text:

Then Yahweh said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years *as a sign and a portent* against Egypt and Cush, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian captives and the Cushite exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt."

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<sup>58</sup> Beale, 2008, 59-60.

<sup>59</sup> Beale, 2008, 60.

<sup>60</sup> Contra Hamilton, 2010, 194, who follows the traditional interpretation of 6:13b and views it as a promise that through the judgement of the exile a faithful remnant will grow.

These verses together with 8:18 are the only two occasions in Isaiah where “sign” and “portent” are used together. The prophet’s behaviour is a sign of what will happen with Egypt and Cush. Because of the parallel it is likely that the names have a similar function, pointing to something that will happen. This can be clearly seen in the introduction of the second son. The prophet is told to write Maher-shalal-hash-baz on a tablet before reliable witnesses (8:1-2). When the son is born Isaiah is further instructed to: “Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the boy knows how to cry ‘My father’ or ‘My mother’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.” (8:3b-4 ESV) There has been no real debate about the meaning of these two signs because the literary contexts provide clear explanations. The situation is different when Isaiah’s first son, Shear-jashub (שְׁאָרְיָשׁוּב), is introduced in 7:3:

In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, “Syria is in league with Ephraim,” the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. And Yahweh said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field. (7:1-3)

The reader is given virtually no information except the name and that Shear-jashub should accompany his father. Therefore Smith has argued that we should be cautious in our interpretation: “Since the story never reveals how Shear-Jashub’s name was employed in this conversation, the most appropriate thing for the interpreter to do is to admit that no one knows how his presence actually assisted in communicating God’s message to Ahaz.”<sup>61</sup>

The name itself is not complicated. It is a verbal sentence consisting of the masculine noun שְׁאָרְיָשׁוּב and the Qal *yiqtol* of the verb שׁוּב.<sup>62</sup> To understand the meaning, there are three basic questions that need to be answered: (1) What kind of return is this? (2) Who is the remnant? And (3) how does the name function as a sign during the meeting?

Interpreters frequently try to solve the problem by studying the historical context. Day argues that the name has to be of some importance for the Syro-Ephraimite war. Otherwise it would be hard to understand why Isaiah should bring his son to the meeting with Ahaz.<sup>63</sup> Following Clements he argues that Shear-jashub relates to the fate of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. If Ahaz trusts Yahweh, the enemy forces will return as a remnant.<sup>64</sup> The name then signifies the triumph of Judah over their enemies. Graham qualifies this view by adding: “The name may have carried the additional threat that only a remnant of Judah would survive, if Ahaz placed his trust in foreign alliances, instead of in God.”<sup>65</sup> The remnant is identified as either the army of the coalition or the army of Judah. And the return is from the fighting of this war. This could be a reference to the prisoners of war that were sent back to Judah after the initial battle (2 Chr 28:5-15). Despite its strengths, this theory has four weaknesses.

First, Shear-jashub was born before the Syro-Ephraimite war which means that the name wasn’t given at this specific occasion. Secondly, the theory doesn’t account for the fact that no explanation of the name is given in the passage. Thirdly, it assumes that the verb שׁוּב refers to a return from one geographical place to another. But the verb is more multifunctional. It can be used in many different

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 2007, 208.

<sup>62</sup> See Hasel, 1971, for a discussion of the name as a verbal sentence; cf. Irvine, 1990, 142-44, who follows Hasel.

<sup>63</sup> Day, 1981, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Day, 1981, 77; Clements, 1980, 83.

<sup>65</sup> Graham, 1976, 219.

contexts to indicate directional change that is unrelated to geography.<sup>66</sup> It is often used of relationships, where two or more people are reconciled or reunited. In some of these instances a change of location could be implied but it is not necessary. Graupner has argued that the basic meaning of the root is to “turn, turn around” rather than “return.”<sup>67</sup> When human beings are the subject of the verb it can be used in basically two ways. In Isaiah 37 it refers to Sennacherib’s return from his campaign in Judah (37:7, 8, 29, 34, 37). Outside this chapter there is only one clear example where people return from a geographical location (35:10). In other verses the verb refers to people who turn to Yahweh (19:22; 31:6) or who turn from transgressions (59:20). In these latter examples it refers to a change of the “spiritual direction” of people’s lives.<sup>68</sup> In these contexts it could be translated “repent.”<sup>69</sup> Unlike 7:3, these examples include information about where/what a person returned from, or where/who he is returning to. Because this information is absent from the narrative the context has to be the determining factor as we try to understand the name.

The fourth and greatest weakness of the interpretation above is that it largely ignores the wider literary context.<sup>70</sup> This is clearly a mistake. For there are several hints in the literary context of how שׁוּב should be interpreted. In the preceding chapter the prophet is commanded to:

Make the heart of this people dull,  
and their ears heavy,  
and blind their eyes;  
otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears,  
and understand with their hearts  
and turn [שׁוּב] and be healed.” (6:10)

Here שׁוּב is used in the description of a process when people hear Yahweh speak. And in response they turn to him from their rebellion. The verb is also used with a similar meaning in 9:13 (cf. Hos 3:5; 6:1-2). This shows that there are examples in the immediate context where the verb is used of people tuning to Yahweh. If שׁוּב had been a rare verb these occurrences would have been decisive. But it is very common in the OT and occurs almost thousand times. Together with the root שׁאַר, however, it occurs in only nine verses. (Ex 14:28; Lev 25:52; Josh 23:12; Judg 7:3; 2 Chr 30:6; Isa 7:3; 10:21, 22; Jl 2:14). Most of these are irrelevant because the words are unrelated. The three verses in Isaiah are the only ones using the noun שׁוּבָה. The importance of this parallel is underscored by the fact that these three verses share the exact same formulation (שׁוּבָה וְשׁוּבָה). The uniqueness of a combination of words are usually seen as the main criteria for detecting allusions or echoes.<sup>71</sup> In addition these three verses belong to the same section within Isaiah. Therefore it seems obvious that the latter are echoes of the name. Many interpreters think that it would be hermeneutically inappropriate to use the meaning found in 10:21-22 as an interpretive key for understanding the

<sup>66</sup> See Holladay, 1958.

<sup>67</sup> Graupner, 2004, 464.

<sup>68</sup> See also, Holladay, 1958, 9, who notes that this root refers to a “religious” return when it is used in compound names in cognate languages; cf. Hasel, 1971, 45, who notes that “in the Amorite and Ugaritic names a divinity is to return to man, while in the name of Isaiah’s son a return on the part of a remnant is envisioned.”

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Dempster, 2006, 299-300, who argues that the call to repentance in the prophetic literature is associated with the root שׁוּב. He also refers to Holladay, 1958, who discuss the use of the root in covenantal contexts.

<sup>70</sup> Contra Irvine, 1990, 146, who writes that the “immediate narrative context should outweigh other factors in explaining the application of the name in 7:3.”

<sup>71</sup> Beale, 2008, 25.

name.<sup>72</sup> In a study of Isaiah as a literary work, however, it is important to take these into account and not dismiss them (even if one thinks that 10:21-22 is a later addition<sup>73</sup>). For it is clearly stated in this context whether the remnant will return to a geographical location or a person:

In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return [שְׂאֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל], the remnant of Jacob, *to the mighty God*. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant will return [שְׂאֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל]. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.” (10:20-22)

We should not take the meaning of these verses and uncritically interpose them on 7:3. But it is important to note that this is another example of how the verb is used of people who repent, and lean on Yahweh. This way of interpreting the name also fits nicely with the historical context. The son is present as a sign and prediction of Ahaz response. The historical records indicate that the king was known for his idolatry (2 Kgs 16:1-4). At the upper pool he is given the opportunity to repent. But instead of turning to Yahweh he sent envoys to Assyria asking for assistance. And when he is offered a sign he shows his unbelief behind a veneer of piety (7:12). He ignores the warning in 7:9: “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.” The Kings behaviour illustrates the fact that only a remnant will return to Yahweh and trust him.<sup>74</sup> The son’s name is a sign of this sad reality, emphasising the negative side of this prediction. But this is probably only part of the names significance. That would explain why the text doesn’t provide an explanation of the phrase at this point. When the reader reach 10:20-23 both sides of this promise are clear as the positive meaning of the name is explained. Many will lean on foreign alliances like Ahaz. But there is still hope, for a remnant will return to Yahweh and truly lean on him.<sup>75</sup> The strength of this interpretation is that it takes into account both the historical and the literary context.

Before we continue with the next passages about the remnant there are some important observations in chapters seven through nine that can contribute to our understanding of the remnant. After or during the meeting with the prophet Yahweh speaks to Ahaz again. The king is offered to ask for a sign as a confirmation of Yahweh’s faithfulness. The prophet gives this reply when Ahaz refuses:

Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the maiden<sup>76</sup> shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. Yahweh will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day Ephraim departed from Judah – the king of Assyria. (7:13-17)

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<sup>72</sup> Smith, 2007, 208n261; Day, 1981, 76, writing about the two occurrences in 10:21-22 states that “both meanings are irrelevant to the Syro-Ephraimite crisis”.

<sup>73</sup> Some interpreters like Day, 1981, 76, justifies the exclusion of 10:21-22 by arguing that these are later additions.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Thompson 1982, 23-28, who similarly argues that the name refers to a spiritual return to Yahweh.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Hasel, 1980, 300-301, who notes that Isaiah, his children and disciples are a pledge that an eschatological remnant will emerge from the future judgement.

<sup>76</sup> עַלְמָנָה has traditionally been translated virgin. A more appropriate translation is maiden or marriageable girl; cf.

Wildberger 1991, 308; Childs, 2001, 66 notes that the phrase doesn’t emphasise virginity but almost all women referred to as עַלְמָנָה appears to be virgins (cf. Gen 24:43; Ex 2:8).

Who is Immanuel? Most commentators argue that he is either Isaiah's second son or a son of Ahaz.<sup>77</sup> The first alternative is strengthened by the fact that the birth of Isaiah's second son is recorded in 8:3. Isaiah is instructed to "call his name" (קָרָא שְׁמוֹ) Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Because this is the only birth mentioned in this context it could be identified with the sign of Immanuel. It is certainly possible for a person to have several symbolic names. The problem with this view is that it doesn't take the whole literary context into account. In the next chapter the phrase Immanuel is used again. Judgement will fall on the land "and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." (8:8 ESV) And the words are repeated again two verses later:

Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armour and be shattered; strap on your armour and be shattered. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us [עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים]. (8:9-10 ESV)

As with Shear-jashub these are the only three occurrences of עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים in the OT. The phrase is used in two different ways. In 8:8 it identifies Immanuel as the owner of the land. And 8:10 functions as a warning directed towards the nations. They will be defeated, whatever they plan or say because God is with his people. These two verses point back towards Immanuel.<sup>78</sup> He is the only hope for the people. If they want to get through Yahweh's judgement (the Assyrians) they have to stand firm in faith. If the land belongs to Immanuel it would be wrong to identify him as Isaiah's son. But could he be Hezekiah or another of the king's sons? Wildberger is probably correct when he identifies the child as a son in the line of David.<sup>79</sup> But Hezekiah might have been nine years old at the time of this oracle. Smith notes this and adds:

If so, this will be a godly king who will bring God's blessing on the nation, so he is primarily a sign of hope to the godly people in Judah. Indirectly, this new king is also a threat to replace the wicked and unbelieving Davidic administration of Ahaz because Ahaz refused to act in faith (7:9).<sup>80</sup>

Having said this it is important to note that "the contextual surrounding of 7:14 does not give very much information that would help the reader understand exactly who this mysterious son will be."<sup>81</sup> One problem with much scholarship is that it often works with the presupposition that all important information can be found through an identification of the historical context. But it seems like this section neither completely identifies Shear-jashub nor Immanuel. Therefore it could be argued that this chapter introduces one character and a sign whose identity and meaning is not fully disclosed when they are first mentioned. Rather it is progressively revealed in the next chapters. Immanuel's identity is clarified in the beginning of chapter nine.

The community will face difficult trials and the faithless will speak contemptuously against Yahweh. The land will be filled with gloom and thick darkness. But in this desperate situation there is still hope:

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<sup>77</sup> Wildberger, 1991, 308-14, includes seven of the most common views in his discussion of Immanuel's identity and argues that the child is Hezekiah.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Childs, 2001, 68.

<sup>79</sup> Wildberger, 1991, 311-12; cf. Collins 2008, 36-37, who argues that the child is Ahaz son but not necessarily Hezekiah.

<sup>80</sup> Smith, 2007, 214; cf. Hasel, 1980, 291, who notes that the child will be God with us rather than God with you; It should be noted that the chronology of Hezekiah's life is somewhat difficult to solve. See Blenkinsopp, 2000, 233-34.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, 2007, 213.

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shined.  
You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.  
For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,<sup>82</sup>  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will do this. (9:1-7 [MT 8:23-9:6])

Who is this child? He will bring peace and stability. He will indeed be powerful, as his names imply.<sup>83</sup> He will sit on David's throne as a king in the davidic line who will establish justice and righteousness. For this study the name אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר is of particular interest. This same formulation is used in 10:21: "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God." These are the only two verses in the OT where these words are combined. This is especially interesting since neither

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Blenkinsopp, 2000, 250 who argues that the word order indicates that this name should be translated "hero warrior." He might be correct but he translates the same phrase as "God of might" in 10:21. One might ask why the phrase is translated differently, especially when the two occurrences belong to the same literary context.

<sup>83</sup> Collins, 2008, 40-41, following Albrecht Alt, argues that these verses represents the enthronement of Hezekiah. If this is correct Isa 38-39 takes on an ironic touch, showing how Hezekiah failed to fulfil these expectations. It is more likely that Isa 38-39 should help the reader to separate Hezekiah and this future davidic king. Collins also mentions that these formulations could be indirectly inspired by egyptian traditions. Childs, 2001, agrees that there are strong parallels with the egyptian coronation liturgy but writes: "To suggest that this oracle is simply hyperbolic, oriental language used to celebrate the accession of a new Israelite king is to historicize the biblical text and to overlook its role within the larger literary context."

word is rare. The use of the name in both of these contexts gives a subtle indication that the remnant will be associated with the coming davidic ruler.

Immanuel's identity was not clear in the previous passage, but here it is revealed.<sup>84</sup> Through the book the reader will be introduced to this character and see him from a variety of perspectives. In a similar fashion the identity of the remnant becomes more and more clear. Their fate is intertwined with the messianic king. He is one of them as Hasel writes: "If the suggestion that Immanuel will rule the future remnant is correct, as seems probable, then it would logically follow that Immanuel himself will be a member of the eschatological remnant."<sup>85</sup>

### *They will lean on Yahweh*

Much of Isaiah goes back and forth between judgement and salvation. After the promise of the future king the setting changes again. The prophet proclaims a judgement oracle against the northern kingdom, which can be divided into four parts ending with the refrain: "For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is still stretched out." (בְּכָל-זֵאת לֹא-שָׁב אִפּוֹ יְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָהּ; 9:12 [11], 17[16], 21[20]; 10:4) All of these oracles proclaim destruction upon Judah and some of them emphasise the people's lack of spiritual discernment.

From this four-part oracle Isaiah turns to the enemies at the gate, the Assyrians. Yahweh will use the Assyrian juggernaut as his rod and staff. In his hand they will bring judgement to a rebellious people (10:5-6). The Assyrian king, however, has other intentions. His spiritual discernment is not better than that of the false prophets. He equates Yahweh with the gods of the nations (10:8-11). Therefore his time as a tool will be limited: "When the Lord has finished all his work on mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes." (10:12 ESV)

Because of this arrogance Yahweh will bring destruction on Assyria. Motyer divides the end of this chapter into four parts with an a<sup>1</sup>b<sup>1</sup>b<sup>2</sup>a<sup>2</sup> structure.<sup>86</sup> The first part focus on the reduction of the Assyrians to a tiny remnant:

Therefore the Lord Yahweh of hosts  
will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors,  
and under his glory a burning will be kindled,  
like the burning of fire.  
The light of Israel will become a fire,  
and his Holy One a flame,  
and it will burn and devour  
his thorns and briars in one day.  
The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land  
Yahweh will destroy, both soul and body,  
and it will be as when a sick man wastes away.  
The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few  
that a child can write them down. (10:16-19)

The remnant theme is not used as a sign of a potential future in this oracle of judgement. What is especially interesting is that the remnant idea is used in relation to the destruction of Assyria. Two observations are important. First, the judgement will be so complete that even a child will be able to

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, 2007, 216.

<sup>85</sup> Hasel, 1980, 298.

<sup>86</sup> Motyer, 1993, 115.

count the trees of the forest. Second, they became a remnant through judgement. The second observation is important for our understanding of how the remnant theme is connected with biblical theology. This oracle is an example of the negative use of the theme in Isaiah where the group left isn't a positive sign. Here this is brought out by the note that even a child will be able to count.

Because of its place in the book of Immanuel, the second part (b<sup>1</sup>) is one of the more important texts on the remnant in Isaiah and the OT:

In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on Yahweh, the holy one of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord Yahweh of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.  
(10:20-23)

This oracle is connected with the previous one through the repetition of the remnant theme. But it is also distinguished by the introductory formula "In that day." (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) This could be an indication that this oracle should be placed in a different timeframe. The destruction of Assyria would occur in the near future (10:25). Smith thinks that this oracle should be linked with the preceding one.<sup>87</sup> There is nothing in the text, however, that requires that interpretation. Different oracles doesn't necessarily have to occur at the same time.

Four observations are especially relevant for this study. First, there will only be a tiny remnant left. That is indicated by the preceding passage. The difference, however, is that there is hope for this group whereas there was only hopelessness for the Assyrians.

Furthermore, the remnant will return to Yahweh. The main characteristic of this group is that they do not lean on Assyria or another foreign power. Yahweh is their stronghold. There is a sharp contrast between this group and the people of Isaiah's own time. 9:13-17 specifically points out that all, even the helpless, were wicked.<sup>88</sup> The portrayal in the beginning of chapter nine emphasised their complete lack of spiritual discernment. This remnant on the other hand trusts Yahweh, they have repented.<sup>89</sup> This contrast shows that they are a refashioned community with real spiritual discernment.

Moreover, this group will only be a part of the "covenant people." The remnant is compared with the multitude of the people. The first line echoes Yahweh's promise to Jacob in Gen 32:12 that his offspring will be like "the sand of the sea." (כְּחֵלֶם הַיָּם) Isaiah declares that even if this is true only a portion of them will actually repent.

Finally, judgement will cause this. That is emphasised in the last phrases. Destruction overflowing with righteousness will at the same time reduce the nation into a remnant and transform them so that they will lean on Yahweh.

### *The stump, the root and the recovery of the remnant*

This section of Isaiah is drawing to a close with two oracles about the righteous reign of a future king. The first is mainly concerned with the king's character and the peace that will characterise his

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<sup>87</sup> Smith, 2007, 262. He, 264, also argues that the remnant is addressed in 10:24 and in a sense merges the categories of a present faithful remnant with an eschatological one. If this oracle address a situation within the lifetime of Isaiah it is likely that it refers to the invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. where much of the population was killed or exiled. But inside Jerusalem Hezekiah turned to Yahweh unlike Ahaz (7.3; 37:3-4).

<sup>88</sup> Smith, 2007, 247-48.

<sup>89</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 257.



reign. The second zooms out and depicts how he will gather peoples and nations along with the remnant of his people:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
And the Spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh.  
And his delight shall be in the fear of Yahweh.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.  
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh  
as the waters cover the sea. (11:1-9)

The first five verses focus on the character of “the shoot from the stump of Jesse.” As Wildberger writes: “What we have here is the prediction about an ideal future ruler, one who is to come from the house of David. Based on content, this comes closest to Mic. 5:1ff.”<sup>90</sup> Suffice it to say that this oracle portrays a reshaped world transformed by the leadership of this heir of David.<sup>91</sup> For this study the second oracle is more important since it puts focus on the remnant:

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples — of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.  
In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.  
He will raise a signal for the nations  
and will assemble the banished of Israel,

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<sup>90</sup> Wildberger, 1991, 463.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Childs, 2001, 104, who writes that this oracle pictures “the restoration of creation by a new act of God through the vehicle of a righteous ruler.”

and gather the dispersed of Judah  
 from the four corners of the earth.  
 The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart,  
 and those who harass Judah shall be cut off;  
 Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah,  
 and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.  
 But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west,  
 and together they shall plunder the people of the east.  
 They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab,  
 and the Ammonites shall obey them.  
 And Yahweh will utterly destroy  
 the tongue of the Sea of Egypt,  
 and will wave his hand over the River  
 with his scorching breath,  
 and strike it into seven channels,  
 and he will lead people across in sandals.  
 And there will be a highway from Assyria  
 for the remnant that remains of his people,  
 as there was for Israel  
 when they came up from the land of Egypt. (11:10-16)

The title has changed but the same ruler is in focus. Primarily he will act as a rallying point where people gather and judge and destroyer of Yahweh's enemies. Several themes from Isa 2:1-11:9 are combined in this oracle.

The salvation oracle in 2:2-3 predicted a day when the nations will come to Jerusalem to receive God's instruction, though a Davidic Messiah is not mentioned. This chapter provides additional information indicating that the "root of Jesse" (from 11:1) plays a central role in the process of gathering people from the nations.<sup>92</sup>

This section can be divided into two parts beginning with *וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא* (11:10, 11). The first verse functions as an introduction and summary of the following verses.<sup>93</sup> This could be taken as an indication that the "root of Jesse" is the remnant. Childs, suggests that the new messianic community owes its life to the new life of the shoot presented in the first half of the chapter.<sup>94</sup>

The remnant theme forms an *inclusio* at the beginning and the end of the second section. Judgement will be reversed. The Messiah will gather the people from the ends of the world,<sup>95</sup> from Egypt to Assyria.<sup>96</sup> The verb *קָנָה* usually carries the meaning to purchase.<sup>97</sup> God will deliver his people from bondage and gather them once again (cf. Ex 15:16). The last clause is significant: "as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt". The tongue of the sea of Egypt will

<sup>92</sup> Smith, 2007, 275.

<sup>93</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 266-67, suggests that these are two appendices to the preceding poem.

<sup>94</sup> Childs, 2001, 105-06.

<sup>95</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 267, notes that many commentators only view Egypt and Assyria as original in this oracle because they are the ones mentioned at the end. This could be correct. But he also adds that these region are aligned topographically. In addition it could be argued that the last formulation of the oracle could be a fixed formula covering the whole region.

<sup>96</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 267, associates this oracle with Shear-jashub. But our discussion above showed that the name refers to repentance rather than gathering from exile.

<sup>97</sup> Smith, 2007, 276.

be defeated so that the remnant will be able walk across in sandals (11:15 cf. Ex 14:22, 29). These references echoes the exodus both directly and indirectly. This gathering of the remnant will be a new exodus, but this time there will be no wandering in the wilderness because of the highway from Assyria. The remnant will no longer be weak. Yahweh will lead them to victory over their enemies. This remnant was created through judgement as they were dispersed to the four corners of the earth. Now their situation will be reversed. They will be vindicated and saved through the judgement of their enemies (11:13-15).

### ***Remnants of destruction***

The second larger section in Isaiah consists of a series of oracles about foreign nations (13:1-23:18). This section can be divided into ten separate oracle that all begin with the noun מִשָּׁפָּט, usually translated oracle or burden. It is interesting that these oracles don't seem to be organised chronologically. Rather they demonstrate that Yahweh is Lord over all the earth. From the east to the west, from south to north. This gives the reader confidence that Yahweh can fulfil what he has promised.<sup>98</sup> These ten oracles can be further divided into two groups of five, each beginning with babylon (13:1; 21:1).<sup>99</sup> The remnant theme is present in five of these oracle through the root שָׂרָה. Some of the oracles also include the remnant thematically. Smith argues that these oracles give us the picture that a remnant from many of these nations will turn from their ways and join with the people of God (14:1-2; 17:7-8; 18:7; 19:18-25; 23:18). It is not clear if this is the case but he seems to think that any group that remains after judgement or destruction will be a remnant. In that sense the texts he refers to includes the remnant theme.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Babylon***

In Isaiah the remnant theme is not used exclusively of the covenant people. The remnants of their enemies are frequently mentioned in these oracles. In the first oracle the prophet visualise the complete destruction of Babylon.<sup>101</sup> Nothing will be left. The land will be desolate and the people gone. This will lead to the restoration of Israel and give them rest from pain and turmoil (14:1-3).<sup>102</sup> Isaiah continues with a song that they will sing as a taunt against the fallen king of Babylon (14:4b-21). Following this taunt Isaiah adds:

“I will rise up against them,” declares Yahweh of hosts, “and I will cut off from Babylon *name and remnant, descendant and posterity*,” declares Yahweh. “And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog, and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,” declares Yahweh of hosts. (14:22-23)

In this oracle the remnant is related to judgement in a slightly different way than in the previous passages. Two observations are relevant: (1) The judgement in these verses will fall on the remnant. (2) The remnant will be cut off. The parallelism of 14:22 puts the remnant in relation to name, descendant and posterity. These four nouns signal that Babylon will be completely destroyed without the hope of recovery.<sup>103</sup> Judgement will be the end. This further indicates that the remnant

<sup>98</sup> Smith, 2007, 292.

<sup>99</sup> Motyer, 1993, 131-32; cf. Smith, 2007, 290.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, 2007, 286.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, 2007, 297, argues that there are several days of Yahweh. It is an expression that refers to the time when a nation will face judgement and destruction.

<sup>102</sup> Smith, 2007, 307, puts this oracle in the same category as the ones in 2:1-5 or 11:10-16. It is one of many passages in Isaiah which uses eschatological language. It will not be treated here because of space limitations.

<sup>103</sup> Hasel, 1980, 363. He also associates this oracle with the arrival of the Babylonian envoys from Merodach-baladan; see also Blenkinsopp, 2000, 286.

theme functions as a bridge between judgement and salvation. For if there is no remnant there can be no salvation. Similarly there will be no remnant without salvation.<sup>104</sup>

### *Philistia*

Chapter fourteen ends with a short judgement oracle against Philistia, with instructions to mourn.<sup>105</sup> “And the firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy lie down in safety; *but I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant I will slay.*” (14:30 ESV) The philistine nation is pictured as a tree. The roots, which figuratively is the nations source of life, will be destroyed. And even the remnant will be annihilated.<sup>106</sup> This oracle has the same emphasis as the previous one. There will be no remnant for Philistia which equals no future hope. Moreover, the oracle points to the importance of trusting in Yahweh and him alone (14:32). Leaning on Yahweh is what characterises the future remnant. If they trust in military power together with Philistia there will be no remnant. And their future hope will vanish.

### *Moab*

The oracle concerning Moab features the remnant theme in two places, 15:9 and 16:14.<sup>107</sup> In the first part the destruction of Moab is envisaged: “For the waters of Dibon are full of blood; for I will bring upon Dibon even more, a lion for those of Moab who escape, for the remnant of the land.” (15:9 ESV) This phrase can be compared with the two previous oracles. There will be some who initially escape the coming judgement. But in the end they will be hunted down as by a lion and the remnant will be devoured. When the remnant idea is developed in the second part of the oracle there are some surprising turns. First the people is instructed to help the moabites and care for them as they flee from the destruction of their land (16:3-5). But because of pride the future of Moab is still dark.

This is the word that Yahweh spoke concerning Moab in the past. But now Yahweh has spoken, saying, “In three years, like the years of a hired worker, the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all his great multitude, and the remnant [רְשָׁרְשָׁר] will be very few and not mighty.” (16:13-14)

Unlike the previous oracles Moab will have a remnant, the possibility of a future existence.<sup>108</sup> But it should be noted that this remnant will be small and without might. The qualifying adjectives cast a shadow over the promised hope of a remnant. Therefore this oracle could be placed in between the previous oracles against the nations and the ones concerning the renewed remnant community. A tiny ray of light is visible on the cloudy sky of judgement.

### *Syria*

The next oracle is directed against Damascus and is the most surprising one in this series of oracles. It contains both judgement and salvation. Because of its importance for this section it deserves to be quoted at length:

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<sup>104</sup> It is interesting that Smith, 2007, 318-19, doesn't mention the remnant theme in his discussion of this oracle.

<sup>105</sup> This oracle is dated to the year when king Ahaz died. Smith, 2007, 323-26, associates this oracle with events around 715 B.C. but he doesn't mention the remnant theme in his discussion of the passage.

<sup>106</sup> Hasel, 1980, 355.

<sup>107</sup> This oracle has been variously dated. Hasel, 1980, 364-65, has argued that the prophet is reusing an earlier poem about Moab. Smith, 2007, 326-27, argues that the oracle should be placed during the reign of Hezekiah.

<sup>108</sup> Hasel, 1980, 372.

An oracle concerning Damascus.  
 Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city  
 and will become a heap of ruins.  
 The cities of Aroer are deserted;  
 they will be for flocks,  
 which will lie down, and none will make them afraid.  
 The fortress will disappear from Ephraim,  
 and the kingdom of Damascus;  
 and the remnant of Syria will be  
 like the glory of the children of Israel,  
 declares Yahweh of hosts.

And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low,  
 and the fat on his flesh will grow lean.  
 And it shall be as when the reaper gathers standing grain  
 and his arm harvests the ears,  
 and as when one gleans the ears of grain  
 in the Valley of Rephaim.  
 Gleanings will be left [רֶשֶׁת] in it,  
 as when an olive tree is beaten –  
 two or three berries  
 in the top of the highest bough,  
 four or five  
 on the branches of a fruit tree,  
 declares the Lord Yahweh of Israel.

In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense. (17:1-8)

This oracle pictures a total destruction of the land. Cities, including Damascus, will be destroyed and fortresses will disappear from the landscape. The remnant of Syria will be destroyed. The two sections are connected by the word “glory.” Normally it would be a positive thing to be compared with “the glory of the children of Israel.” But that isn’t the case here. The second part of the oracle clarifies that the remnant has a gloomy future ahead of them.<sup>109</sup>

But this judgement will not be complete, a remnant will remain. The theme is highlighted by the use of רֶשֶׁת and by the figurative language. The olive trees and the fruit trees will not be completely harvested. A small portion (or a “remnant”) will be left. If the remnant of Syria will be like the glory of the children of Israel, this is the fate that they will meet. The portrayal of harvest explains that they will be reduced to a remnant through judgement.

After the second declarative formula (וְנִשְׁאַף יִשְׂרָאֵל) there is very little hope for the future. The remnant will be tiny (like four berries on a fruit tree). But there is also a ray of hope. The remnant of Syria can be among those who turn to Yahweh.<sup>110</sup> They will abandon their manmade gods. Neither Asherim nor altars will be able to pull them away from the God who created them. “The descriptive terms for God and the contrast with the same gazing at manmade altars strongly implies

<sup>109</sup> Smith, 2007, 343; Hasel, 1980, 349-51, argues that this oracle is purely negative with an ironic flavour to it.

<sup>110</sup> This could be a reference to israelites; the hebrew is אֲדָמָה.

renewed trust in Yahweh.”<sup>111</sup> Like some of the previous passages it points to the change of character within the remnant. They once worshiped man made idols, the work of their hands. Now they turn to the the Holy One of Israel, the God who made them. That this promise occurs together with the remnant of Syria is both stunning and remarkable in light of the Syro-Ephraimite war.<sup>112</sup>

### *Kedar*

In chapter 21 a second cycle of oracles begin with a section about Babylon divided into three oracles. Babylon will be a heap of ruins. This section ends with the following pronouncement:

For thus the Lord said to me, “Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. And the remnant of the archers [וְיִשְׂאֵר מִכְּפָר־קִשְׁתָּי] of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few, for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has spoken.” (21:16-17)

As the oracle concerning Moab this passage portrays a tiny remnant, once strong but destroyed through judgement. It presents a nation that hasn’t been completely exterminated. But the remnant doesn’t provide much reason for hope. This group will be small and therefore unable to reestablish the glory of Kedar.<sup>113</sup> But they will not suffer complete destruction, and the remnant represents the seeds of future existence.<sup>114</sup>

In this passage and in the texts studied above we clearly see that the remnant theme is associated with judgement. It is judgement that reduces a once strong group into a remnant. These remnants are, in other words, created through judgement.

### *Yahweh’s final destruction*

The oracles against the nations are followed by a section with a more universal perspective. Once again this passage emphasise that judgement is an integral part of the remnant theme.

The root שָׂר is used twice (24:6, 12). The first highlights that the coming judgement will be complete: “Behold, Yahweh will empty the earth and make it desolate, he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.” (24:1) And a few verses later: “Therefore a curse devours the earth. and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, a few men are left [וְיִשְׂאֵר].” (24:6 ESV) The reason for the current circumstances is that laws and statutes have been broken and violated along with the everlasting covenant (24:5). This verse provides another example of a remnant created through judgement.

The same verb (שָׂר) is used again in 24:12-13: “Desolation is left in the city; the gates are battered into ruins. For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done.” (cf. 17:6) The remnant idea is not as strong in this example as in the previous because the subject of the verb is desolation rather than a group of men. But it is still interesting to observe the root is used in a context of judgement.

Like several of the texts in the preceding section of Isaiah there seems to be little hope associated with this remnant. But the latter part of the section both includes joy for the fact that God has acted and judged (24:14-16a) and the reality that God will reign (24:18b-23). His reign will mean

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<sup>111</sup> Johnston, 2009, 112.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Hasel, 1980, 349-51, who only discuss 17:1-6. Therefore he concludes that this oracle depicts the destruction of Syria and Ephraim by the Assyrians. If these verses are read separately they give the impression that there is no hope for the remnant of Syria. The interpretation above depends on a reading together with Isa 17:7-8.

<sup>113</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 330, suggests that this oracle could be an interpolation inspired by Nehemiah’s struggle with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem.

<sup>114</sup> Hasel, 1980, 359.

salvation for those who belong to him. Therefore it is likely that many of those who are spared will receive these saving acts.

### ***Yahweh, their crown of glory***

Chapter 28 introduces a new section of the book with a double-oracle of woe and salvation. It is possible that this woe was directed at Samaria after the destruction by the Assyrians in 721.<sup>115</sup> The fading glory of the city is compared with the glory of a flower, which fades away, never to be seen again. That is the fate of Samaria:

Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim  
and the fading flower of its glorious beauty,  
which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!  
Behold, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong;  
like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest,  
like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters,  
he casts down to the earth with his hand.  
The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim  
will be trodden underfoot;  
and the fading flower of its glorious beauty,  
which is on the head of the rich valley,  
will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer:  
when someone sees it, he swallows it as soon as it is in his hand.  
In that day Yahweh of hosts will be a crown of glory,  
a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people,  
and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgement,  
and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. (28:1-6)

This beautiful poem utilises parallelisms as well as creative figurative language. The crown and the flower is used throughout the text. Like a crown gives beauty and glory to its wearer so the flower brings glory and beauty to a field, functioning as its crown. That disappears when the wearer is drunk or the flower fades (28:1). From this introductory phrase the oracle turns to judgement. Like natural forces of hail and flood consume the flower in the field, so Ephraim will be consumed. Its crown will be trampled underfoot and swallowed up like a ripe fig. Judgement is vividly painted. The trampling underfoot echoes the judgement directed at the serpent in Gen 3:15. Samaria will disappear just like a ripe fig from the branch of the tree.<sup>116</sup>

In typical fashion Isaiah turns from this pronouncement of total destruction to a word of hope. Smith notes that:

The mood suddenly and dramatically changes in this salvation oracle about events sometime “in that day,” a temporal marker that refers to the time when prophecies will be fulfilled—often, but not always, with eschatological significance (cf. 2:11, 12, 20; 4:2; 19:19, 23; 24:21; 25:9).<sup>117</sup>

Therefore it is not surprising to find the remnant theme here in this text. The crown that was trampled will be replaced. “Yahweh of hosts will be a crown of glory, a diadem of beauty to the

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<sup>115</sup> Smith, 2007, 475-77; cf. Webb, 1996, 118, who suggests that this oracle is reused in Isaiah for rhetorical purposes as a preface to the oracle against the leaders of Jerusalem (28:14-22).

<sup>116</sup> Childs, 2001, 205.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, 2007, 477; cf. Hasel, 1980, 303.

remnant of his people.” (28:5) It is interesting that the phrase *רוח צדק* is only used in this passage and in 11:11, 16. This is the second construct chain with *רוח* which is used three times in Isaiah.<sup>118</sup> The echo reminds the readers that a great hope awaits the remnant. They will not be annihilated. Instead Yahweh will be their crown and a diadem that cannot perish. Instead of honouring Samaria these people will honour Yahweh. They will look to him and praise his name.<sup>119</sup> He will restore justice in the courtroom and strength on the battlefield. Although these promises of divine empowerment address only two areas of leadership (judicial and military), they illustrate the principle that the transformed remnant will have a new relationship with God that will revitalise many areas of life.<sup>120</sup>

Although some find messianic implications in 28:5-6, drawn from 11:1-4 (the ‘spirit of justice’), the text focuses on what God will do, with no specification that a messianic king will accomplish this.<sup>121</sup> Smith is right when he notes that there is no mention of a messianic ruler in the text. That, however, should not be taken as an indicator that this oracle refers to another restoration than the preceding oracles. The themes of glory and beauty (*כבוד*) along with the phrase “spirit of justice” (*רוח צדק*) echo the salvation oracle in 4:2-6.<sup>122</sup> Both oracles point towards a transformed community. But this oracle also contrasts the present pride of Samaria and the corrupt leadership in Jerusalem (28:7-13) with the remnant as the latter’s glorious future is depicted.<sup>123</sup> They will be a refashioned community in a transformed setting.

### ***Yahweh, the foundation of hope***

Isaiah chapter thirty includes a warning against seeking help from Egypt. People have sought protection from Pharaoh without seeking direction from Yahweh (30:1-2). There will be grave consequences: “A thousand shall flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you shall flee, till you are left [*יִהְיֶה*] like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill.” (30:17; cf. 1:8) Graham concludes that this verse “alludes to the remnant concept.”<sup>124</sup> If they rely on Egypt they will face judgement and become a remnant. This highlights that a remnant is not necessarily a sign of hope. Hope is connected with the protection of Yahweh. Otherwise the presence of a remnant only signals weakness. For this reason the oracle functions as an exhortation. The community has to seek Yahweh in faith.<sup>125</sup>

After a promise of deliverance the next chapter directs another curse against those who trust in Egypt (31:1-3a). Yahweh is portrayed as a strong lion who guards his prey and: “Like birds hovering, so Yahweh of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it; he will spare and rescue it [*מִלֵּט*].” (31:5) The remnant is thematically present. *מִלֵּט* focuses on their escape from danger,<sup>126</sup> which is provided by Yahweh.<sup>127</sup> This underscores what we saw in the previous oracle that protection is needed for the remnant theme to be positive.

<sup>118</sup> Hasel, 1980, 304; *רוח צדק* is also used in Neh 10:28[29].

<sup>119</sup> Webb, 1996, 120.

<sup>120</sup> Hasel, 1980, 304, suggests that this oracle could function as an exhortation for Hezekiah to trust in Yahweh.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, 2007, 478.

<sup>122</sup> Childs, 2001, 205.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, 2007, 478.

<sup>124</sup> Graham, 1976, 224, who suggests that the imagery refers to the Judean army shortly before or during 701 B.C.

<sup>125</sup> Hasel, 1980, 312; cf. Johnston, 2009, 114-15, who points out that the purpose of the section is to make the people trust in Yahweh.

<sup>126</sup> Williams, 2002, 439.

<sup>127</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2000, 427-28, notes the force and poignancy of the imagery.



### *A remnant within the walls*

In the middle of the book of Isaiah there is a prose section describing events at the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. There are some difficulties with the chronology of this passage, especially in relation to 2 Kgs 18-19. For our purposes it is not necessary to solve these issues.<sup>128</sup>

After the Assyrian juggernaut has subdued the countryside of Judah, Sennacherib sends the Radshakeh to Jerusalem. His mission is to scare the people and negotiate them to surrender. His tactic is very simple. First he points out that Egypt has been defeated. They are a broken staff that Hezekiah will be unable to lean on (36:6). Furthermore, the Judean army is so diminished that they would not be able to defeat the Assyrians in battle even if they were equipped by their enemies (36:8). Finally he questions why Yahweh would deliver them out of the hands of Sennacherib since Hezekiah has destroyed the altars of Yahweh (36:7). And if Yahweh wanted to deliver the people would he be able to do that? No other gods could defend their people against the king of Assyria (36:18-20).

This meeting is placed “by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field.” (36:2 ESV) It is the place where Isaiah meet Ahaz with his son Shear-jashub. The king was challenged to trust Yahweh. Now Hezekiah is faced with the same decision. In response the king sends his men to Isaiah with the following words:

This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that Yahweh your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that Yahweh your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer *for the remnant* [שְׁאֵרֵיהֶם] that is left. (37:3-4)

This request is interesting for several reasons. In the context it shows that Hezekiah relied more on Yahweh than weapons and fortifications. Sweeney writes: “Hezekiah obviously is intended to serve as the ideal monarch presented in 9:1-6.”<sup>129</sup> But that interpretation doesn’t take into account the ironic note with which this section ends (38-39). It shows that Hezekiah has grown but he is still far from the king presented in chapter nine.<sup>130</sup>

The passage gives another perspective on the remnant theme. As the Assyrian army invaded Judah refugees gathered in Jerusalem seeking protection behind the walls. Hezekiah then identifies them as a remnant. The text does not give us much information about these people. Unlike some of the previous oracles there is no promise that the community will be transformed. Rather it seems like Hezekiah is using the remnant theme in a broad sense.<sup>131</sup> It refers to a group of people who are left when a larger community has been reduced.<sup>132</sup>

It could be significant that this section never clearly identifies the Assyrian invasion as judgement. But from a structural perspective judgement might be implied, however, since the book of Isaiah usually moves from judgement to salvation. And this section ends with Yahweh’s salvation of Jerusalem. His protection is the only reason why the remnant is preserved.

The exchange continues between the Assyrian headquarter and Jerusalem. Sennacherib sends a letter to Hezekiah. He in turn responds by entering the temple and laying the letter before Yahweh.

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<sup>128</sup> Smith, 2007, 74-77, 581-87, gives a good overview of the different theories. The chronology of this passage gives another indication that the author of Isaiah is not primarily interested in giving a chronological account of historical events. Rather he seems to be structuring his material thematically.

<sup>129</sup> Sweeney, 1996, 458.

<sup>130</sup> Oswalt, 1986, 630 notes that Isa 39 should serve as an antidote against the view Sweeney presents.

<sup>131</sup> See Blenkinsopp, 2000, 474.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Smith, 2007, 611.

“So now, O Yahweh our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are Yahweh.” (37:20) God sends a long reply through Isaiah which ends with the following formulation:

And this shall be the sign for you: this year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that. Then in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will do this. (37:30-32; cf. 2 Kgs 19:29-31)

The sign can be divided into two parts. The first is connected with God’s provision. The people will not be able to sow or plant this season or the coming. But the land will yield what they need. The second part portrays how the remnant within the walls will once again be firmly planted in the land and leave the city in safety. Hasel argues this passage refers to two different remnants, the “historical” and the “eschatological.” The first will again take root in order for the latter to grow out of it in the future.<sup>133</sup> The problem with this interpretation is that there is no separation of the two in the text. Smith on the other hand, argues that the remnant in this passage “describes the survivors who stay in Jerusalem.” He also argues that the theme begun in 4:3; 6:13 and 10:21-22 is picked up here but that it is applied in an entirely new way.<sup>134</sup> What neither of them mentions is that this is a very fitting response to Hezekiah’s prayer. He asked that the remnant would be delivered and Yahweh responds by promising deliverance for these refugees. One thing that differentiates this passage from the eschatological promises is that this remnant will not turn to Yahweh. Perhaps it could be argued that Hezekiah exemplifies this group which would indicate that they are a faithful remnant. But the literary context speaks against that. Yahweh will defend the city for his own sake and because of David (37:35). He will not act because of the remnant’s faithfulness as the king was well aware of (37:20). The description in 2 Kgs 20:12-21:26 indicates that the remnant left in Jerusalem was far from faithful.<sup>135</sup> Therefore it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that the remnant theme is theologically neutral in this passage.

This section ends with Isaiah’s condemnation against Hezekiah for welcoming the Babylonian emissaries: “Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left [יִהְיֶה], says Yahweh.” (39:6) Day notes that “the passage declared that when Babylon conquered Judah, no remnant of the material possessions of the Judean royal family would remain. They would all be taken away by the Babylonian victors.”<sup>136</sup> It is interesting that this verse and the surrounding passages really pictures a real threat. Exile would be bad enough but there would still be a remnant left. But since some of Hezekiah’s descendants will be eunuchs there will be a serious threat against the royal line.<sup>137</sup> The remnant theme is again connected with judgement.

### ***The remnant of a tree and the dreadful reality of idolatry***

The vocabulary used to describe the remnant is not exclusively used in about people. This is the case in an intriguing passage in Isaiah 44. In this chapter the prophet emphasise Yahweh’s greatness. “Thus says Yahweh, the King of Israel and his redeemer, Yahweh of hosts: I am the first and the last; besides me there is no god.” And “Is there a God besides me? There is no rock; I know

<sup>133</sup> Hasel, 1980, 336.

<sup>134</sup> Smith, 2007, 629; cf. Webb, 1996, 153.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Ezra 9:8 which also refers to a remnant which was faithless rather than faithful.

<sup>136</sup> Day, 1981, 225.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, 2007, 658-59.

not any.” (44:7, 8b) The God of Israel is completely unlike the idols of the nations. This theme is picked up again at the end of the chapter. Between these sections a parody about the manufacturing of idols is included. Those who fashion idols will be put to shame because the works of their hands are impotent (44:9-11). This is followed up with a description of the idol-making process (44:12-17). One of the formulations in this section is interesting for our study:

He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part from it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” And the remnant of it [וְשִׁאֲרֵיהֶוּ] he makes into a god, his idol, and fall down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”

They do not know or discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it [וְיִתְקַדֵּוּ] an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has lead him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (44:14b-20)

Idolaters don’t see the stupidity in their own actions because they lack spiritual discernment.<sup>138</sup> They have become like the idols they worship.<sup>139</sup> The use of שִׁאֲרֵיהֶוּ in this context is interesting. These people take the remnant of a tree, after they have cut it in pieces and used some of it for fire to make food and warm themselves. To begin with this clarifies that the word can be used in other contexts. It also emphasises that the word usually refers to something that has been reduced from a more “complete” existence. In addition to these observations there might be a deeper irony to this text than what we first perceive.

In Isaiah, judgement is usually portrayed through pictures of cutting down or by fire. In 9:14[13] Yahweh proclaims that he will cut off (כָּרַת) Israel like a palm branch. כָּרַת is used to picture the judgement of Ephraim and Babylon (11:13; 14:22). In the prophetic literature this is one of the more common verbs used in contexts of judgement (e.g. Ez. 14:13; 21:3; Am. 2:3; Ob. 10; Mic. 5:9-13; Nah 3:15; Zeph 1:3; Zech 13:2). Judgement is also associated with fire in many contexts. One good example is the tongue of fire that will devour the grass in 5:24. In 44:16 an unusual word is used (אָדַר). It occurs only six times in the OT and only once outside Isaiah. It is also used in a song of humiliation directed at Babylon:

Behold, they are like stubble;  
the fire [אֵשׁ] consumes them;  
they cannot deliver themselves  
from the power of the flame.  
No coal for warming oneself is this,  
no fire [אָדַר] to sit before! (47:14)

This is not a pleasant evening before the fireplace. This fire is a picture of judgement. There are more examples in Isaiah where fire is used in this figurative sense (e.g. 10:17; 30:14; 37:19). Because of how these pictures are used it is possible that the idolater is figuratively bringing

<sup>138</sup> Childs, 2001, 344; Goldingay, 2005, 243-44.

<sup>139</sup> So Beale, 2008, 44.

judgement on the cedar that he cuts down and burns in the fire. He brings judgement on the tree in order that he might make an idol out of its remnant. Then he will fall down and cry out: “Deliver me for you are my god!” (44:17) Isaiah continues this section with the following remark: “Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.” (44:21-22) The last phrases echo the oracle of 10:22-23. With this last piece in place we can see the deep irony of this passage. Because of their lack of discernment the idolaters ignores or doesn’t realise that their idols are impotent and that they themselves become like the objects of their worship. The literary context provides a further irony. Yahweh will accomplish what the idolaters have tried in vain to do. He will bring judgement on his proud idolatrous people. He will cut off the unrighteous and devour them through fire. But a remnant will be preserved and from that group he will create a people with ears that hear and eyes that see. They will return to Yahweh and lean on him. For they see that there is no God besides him, no other rock is known to them.

The Idolaters	Yahweh
Idolaters cuts off trees (כרת)	Yahweh cuts off his people (כרת)
The remnant (שארית) of the tree is used to make an idol	The remnant (שארית) of the people is used to make a new people
The idol-maker falls down and cries out to the idol so that it will deliver him	The newly made people falls down before its maker so that he will deliver them.

### ***Turn all the ends of the earth***

The last chapter discussed ended with Cyrus being called Yahweh’s servant. Chapter 45 describes how he will act according to God’s decision because there is no other God (45:5). Yahweh commands: “Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth cause them both to sprout; Yahweh have created it.” (45:8) This statement foreshadows the song of Yahweh’s greatness in the second part of the chapter. The poem is one of the expressions of monotheism in this section of Isaiah. Foreign nations are charged: “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors [פְּלִיטִים] of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.” (45:20 ESV) The word פְּלִיטִים usually describes people who have escaped some kind of disaster or assault. In Jer 44:14, 28 it is used twice with שארית as a synonym. This connection implies that the remnant idea is developed by another phrase. Yahweh will gather a remnant from the foreign nations.<sup>140</sup> The following verses clearly indicates this:

Turn [פְּנֶה]<sup>141</sup> to me and be saved,  
all the ends of the earth!  
For I am God, and there is no other.  
By myself I have sworn;

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Blenkinsopp, 2002, 262-63, who suggests that this section invites gentiles to submit willingly, even if Yahweh’s sovereignty will make them bow their knees in the end. He also adds that this is only one voice in Isaiah which needs to be seen with texts that speak of gentiles being attracted to Judaism or Yahweh blessing foreign nations.

<sup>141</sup> The fact that פְּנֶה is used here could be an argument against the theories that sees these nations as “crypto-Israelites.” The verb might indicate a turning that is made for the first time.

from my mouth has gone out in righteousness  
 a word that shall not return:  
 To me every knee shall bow,  
 every tongue shall swear allegiance.  
 Only in Yahweh, it shall be said of me,  
 are righteousness and strength;  
 to him shall come and be ashamed  
 all who were incensed against him.  
 In Yahweh all the offspring of Israel  
 shall be justified and shall glory. (45:22-25)

There is hope for the nations if they turn to Yahweh. This is one of the characteristics of the eschatological remnant. They have all turned to Yahweh and sought salvation and righteousness in him.<sup>142</sup> The end of this exhortation moves from all nations to the remnant of Israel. The gods of Babylon have been unable to save their worshipers and are carried into exile. Therefore Yahweh speaks to his people:

They stoop; they bow down together;  
 they cannot save [מִלֹּט] the burden,  
 but themselves go into captivity.  
 Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
 all the remnant [שְׁאֵרֵיהֶם] of the house of Israel,  
 who have been borne by me from before your birth,  
 carried from the womb;  
 even to your old age I am he,  
 and to grey hairs I will carry you.  
 I have made, and I will bear;  
 I will carry and will save [מִלֹּט]. (46:2-4)

From the context the remnant seems to refer to a neutral or faithless group.<sup>143</sup> If they had been faithful Yahweh would never have given this exhortation. Despite this the oracle is filled with hope. The remnant is presented with the reality of idolatry. These gods made by human hands are completely different from Yahweh.<sup>144</sup> When the owner cries out in trouble they will only stand there unable to raise a hand to protect or speak a word of consolation (46:5-7). Therefore they are charged: “Remember this and stand firm, recall to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (46:8-10). Because the remnant is asked to remember their transgressions we get the impression that this is not a faithful remnant.<sup>145</sup> That is further emphasised in 46:12: “Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness.” Despite this harsh way of addressing the remnant there is still hope. For the oracle continues on a note of hope:

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<sup>142</sup> Contra Goldingay, 2005, 296, who instead suggests that this section only portrays how foreign nations will recognise that Yahweh controls and works through the events taking place; cf. Smith, 2009, 274, who argues that this oracle refers to a future eschatological remnant.

<sup>143</sup> Goldingay, 2005, 305, suggests that this group are “leftovers from the vicissitudes of history and the chastisement of Yahweh.”

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Blenkinsopp, 2002, 269.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Goldingay, 2005, 306.

“I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.” (46:13) The use of *גִּלְתִּי* in the beginning and the end of this oracle puts emphasis on the contrast between Yahweh and the Babylonian gods.<sup>146</sup> Salvation and righteousness will be given to the remnant and the nations if they turn to Yahweh and stand firm. But the question remains: Are they a remnant that will return or will they fall with their false gods?

### ***They will declare Yahweh’s glory***

The last section of the prophet pictures judgement of the whole earth and the gathering of peoples to worship Yahweh (66:15-24). These verses emphasise the totality and enduring effects of this judgement (66:24). Yahweh is determined to show his glory and will therefore come in all his splendour (66:15-16). Here the remnant theme enters the stage:

Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig’s flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares Yahweh. For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and shall see my glory. I will set a sign among them and from them I will send survivors [פְּלִיטִים] to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations.” (66:17-19)

Yahweh will gather the nations so that they can see his glory and the sign he has raised. The text contains no explanation of what this sign will be. Smith suggests that it could be either a natural or a miraculous sign.<sup>147</sup> Then survivors are sent out. Blenkinsopp connects them with the “survivors of the nations,” and therefore categorises them as proselytes (45:20).<sup>148</sup> Webb suggests that these survivors are the remnant mentioned in 66:12-14. This interpretation depends on the identification of the sign as the birth of a new community in 66:7-9.<sup>149</sup> Schultz similarly argues that these survivors are rebellious Israelites who have been punished.<sup>150</sup> Then 66:18 could be a summary of 66:19-23. It is somewhat difficult to determine the antecedent of the pronoun. If the pronoun refers to “the nations and tongues” the section would portray a gathering of gentiles who are then sent out to the nations.

The focus is not on the remnant and their characteristics. But we can still make two observations: (1) They will be a community devoted to Yahweh. Otherwise they would never obey him and travel to the ends of the earth. (2) Their mission is to declare God’s glory. It is interesting to note that most of the nations mentioned in this list, except Pul,<sup>151</sup> can be found in the “table of the nations” (Gen 10) and Ez 27. These names could suggest that Yahweh will send the remnant so that a new people will emerge in the eschatological age, with members from all the nations.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Because this oracle is so close to Isa 44:8-20 it could include an allusion that oracle, emphasising that Yahweh will deliver his remnant.

<sup>147</sup> Smith, 2009, 749.

<sup>148</sup> Blenkinsopp, 2003, 314; cf Smith, 2009, 749.

<sup>149</sup> Webb, 1996, 250.

<sup>150</sup> Schultz, 2009, 132.

<sup>151</sup> Smith, 2009, 749, mentions that some have emended this to פִּלְזִי, which occurs in Gen 10:6. This is possible since all the other nations can be found in Gen 10. But it could also refer to an unknown nation as Smith suggests.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, 2009, 750; cf. Blenkinsopp, 2003, 313, who associates this section with Isa 11:11-12; 56:18.

## ***Summary***

The remnant theme is important and multifaceted in Isaiah. It is used with reference to both foreign nations and the covenant people. It is used of historical and eschatological communities, of refugees and a transformed people. When Smith summarises the message of Isaiah 1-39 he writes: “They must remove arrogance, trust God for their future, and live with the assurance that their divine, holy King will one day establish his kingdom, send forth the messianic King, and create a time of peace among his holy people.”<sup>153</sup> we could make an addition to the last part: “and create a time of peace among his holy people, the remnant.” For the future eschatological community will be the remnant. They will be a people who heed the challenge of repentance set before them. They will not lean on idols created by humans. Instead they will fall down before their maker. They will be a faithful holy community worthy to come before Yahweh, the holy one of Israel. The second part of Isaiah emphasises his glory (40-66). Ultimately it is this new community, which will be created by Yahweh, and the new creation which will bring him glory.

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<sup>153</sup> Smith, 2007, 77.

# The remnant in Micah: A transformed and forgiven people

## *Form and structure of Micah*

In the introduction we noted that it is important to understand literary structures. This is especially true with regard to the theme of the remnant in Micah. The book consists of many smaller sections of prophetic messages that are put together through catchwords and logical particles.<sup>154</sup>

Before we turn to the specific texts relating to the remnant theme we need to clarify two of the interpretive issues. The first is the overarching structure of the book. Our view of the whole will inevitably effect how we interpret the individual passages. Peacock has argued that the book is chiasmically arranged, with chapters four through five as the central passage of hope.<sup>155</sup> Having done this Peacock further divides Mic 4-5 as a chiasm and also subdivides the middle unit into a chiasm (4:11-5:1 [4:11-14]).<sup>156</sup> If Peacock is right it shows that the book was crafted into a coherent unit. Peacock's division is interesting but not convincing because it oversimplifies some of the passages to fit them into this structure. But he is certainly right that the book of Micah puts emphasis on the incomparability of God.

Traditionally the book has been divided into two or three parts depending on how chapter three is related to the oracles in the preceding and following chapters. Some have argued that it functions as a continuation of the oracles of judgement in the first two chapters. This would result in two or three sections of the book. It is possible to divide it into two cycles of judgement and salvation (1-5, 6-7). Alternatively Mic 1-5 could be divided into two parts (1-3, 4-5, 6-7). The main problem for these two views of the structure is Mic 2:12-13. This oracle of salvation feels misplaced if chapter three is linked to the preceding chapters. Because of this some critics have argued that these verses must be a later addition. Two arguments are used to show this. (1) Micah was a prophet of doom and therefore he could not have pronounced this oracle. Andersen and Freedman, however, are not convinced that this claim could be made about Micah a priori. If Micah's contemporaries could deliver a similar oracle why shouldn't he be able to do the same.<sup>157</sup> (2) These verses are similar in many ways to Mic 4-5. Because these chapters have often been dated to the exile, 2:12-13 has been given a similar date by association. This argument has two weaknesses. First, it could easily be argued that the message fits well with the historical context of 701 B.C. and "there is no specific detail that fits only the Babylonian Exile."<sup>158</sup> Andersen and Freedman does not give a definitive answer to the question of authorship but maintains that these verses are unconnected with Mic 1-3. It is true that there are similarities between 1:2-2:11 and chapter 3. But there are also differences. The three chapters share the common theme of judgement. But pronouncements in the first two chapters are more comprehensive and directed at the whole people. In chapter three on the other hand the oracles are directed at the political and religious leaders of the people (3:1, 9, 11). Therefore it could be argued that these chapters are not as tightly connected as some have assumed.

The book could instead be divided into three cycles of judgement and salvation (1:1-2:13; 3:1-5:15; 6:1-7:20). Each of these sections begins with the imperative of *שמעו* (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). Against

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<sup>154</sup> Waltke, 2007, 14 n34; Willis, 1969, notes that many scholars have argued that Micah is incoherent. Willis himself, views the book as a coherent whole (especially Mic 3-5); Barker & Bailey, 1998, 28-29, mentions six arguments that have been used to argue against the unity of the book. It is not necessary to discuss these here. Suffice it to say that several of these are based on a rejection of supernaturalism.

<sup>155</sup> Peacock, 2003, 29-30.

<sup>156</sup> Peacock, 2003, 38-44.

<sup>157</sup> Andersen & Freedman, 2000, 333; cf. Bryant, 1978, 217.

<sup>158</sup> Andersen & Freedman, 2000, 333; see also Waltke, 2007, 140, who argues that the oracle is intimately connected with the siege of Jerusalem 701 B.C.



this it could be argued that these are not the only uses of the imperative in Micah (3:9; 6:2, 9). And therefore they can't function as division markers. Barker, however, rightly asserts that "there is no literary law that states that a given hebrew verb (in this case an imperative) cannot be used as a major division marker and still perform its usual syntactical function within a division."<sup>159</sup> Each of these sections also end with an oracle of salvation (2:12-13; 4-5; 7:8-20). Furthermore, it should be noted that all these include the shepherd metaphor and the remnant theme. This is also one of the main reasons why Micah is important for the study of the remnant theme. It is not a peripheral theme rather it is placed right at the centre of the book.

The second interpretive issue has to do with a wordplay on the prophet's name. His name is *מִיְיָהוָה* which is the short form of *מִיְיָהוָה*. The name consists of three parts. The interrogative particle *מִי* (who), the preposition *כִּי* (as, like) and *יְהוָה*, the short form of the divine name *יְהוָה*. It means "who is like Yahweh." Towards the end of the book the prophet asks: "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance." (7:18) This question forms an inclusio with the prophets name and challenges the reader to ask whether there is anyone like Yahweh. This rhetorical question emphasise the incomparability of Yahweh who pardons iniquity. And he is doing this for the "remnant of his inheritance." This is yet another indication that the remnant theme is important for the message of the book.

### ***The Remnant will be gathered***

The oracle in Mic 2:12-13 includes the first reference to the remnant and is also one of the shortest oracles in the book:

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob;  
 I will gather the remnant of Israel;  
 I will set them together  
 like sheep in a fold,  
 like a flock in its pasture,  
 a noisy multitude of men.  
 He who opens the breach goes up before them;  
 they break through and pass the gate,  
 going out by it.  
 Their king passes on before them,  
 Yahweh at their head.

There are essentially four ways to interpret this oracle: (1) It is a promise about a return from exile. (2) It refers to a siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent deportation of its inhabitants. (3) It refers to Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem and Yahweh's deliverance of the people within the city walls. (4) It refers to a future eschatological deliverance in the messianic age, which is further developed in Mic 4-5.

Many scholars have argued that the first verse portrays the gathering of exiled and dispersed people like a flock of sheep.<sup>160</sup> The second verse continues by describing how Yahweh frees them and leads them home. According to Mariottini the fold is used to picture a foreign city.<sup>161</sup> The weakness of this interpretation is that folds and pastures usually have positive connotations. They

<sup>159</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 33.

<sup>160</sup> Ben Zvi, 2000, 67; Andersen & Freedman, 2000, 337, notes that Hasel's work has shown that the presence of the remnant theme is not an indication that these verses are a later addition.

<sup>161</sup> Mariottini, 2001, 390; cf. Wagenaar, 2000, argues that *מִיְיָהוָה* refers to the Edomite city with the same name.

are sources of security and food, which can be seen in Jer 23:3: “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold [מִקְוֵה], and they shall be fruitful and multiply.” Even if a different word for “fold” is used in this verse it is clear that the concept has positive connotations. Therefore it is unlikely that the phrases in 2:12 would be used to depict exile. This tension could be solved if the second verse repeats the same thought with different words. This would mean that Yahweh gathers the remnant from exile as he breaks through the gate and leads them home to their pasture and fold.

The first alternative has been questioned by Brin who suggests that this is an oracle of judgement. His argument is based on the use of the verbs אָסַף and קָבַץ. They are often used in contexts of war and siege (e.g. Jer 4:5). The first verse portrays the gathering of refugees behind the walls of a city. The second verse then describes how Yahweh leads his people into exile.<sup>162</sup> The strength of Brin’s interpretation is that he connects the verbs with the context of a siege. But this interpretation also has three weaknesses. (1) If the gathered remnant would be exiled they would share the fate of those who were not gathered. People who didn’t manage to get inside city walls during a foreign invasion would often be exiled. (2) More importantly, the verbs usually have positive connotations when they are used with shepherding language (e.g. Isa 13:14; 40:11; 60:7; Jer 23:3; 31:10). Shepherds gather their sheep to care for them (cf. Ez 34:11-17). (3) Mic 2:13 doesn’t sound like a deportation.<sup>163</sup> Another alternative has to be sought.

Waltke has argued that this oracle refers to the Assyrian invasion in 701 B.C.<sup>164</sup> The refugees are delivered from their temporary fold as the Assyrian army leaves Jerusalem and Yahweh leads them out. Mariottini has given three reasons why he thinks the context of a siege doesn’t correspond to this oracle:

First, people going to Jerusalem to flee from Assyrian danger cannot be considered as analogous to Yahweh gathering his flock. Second, a group of refugees cannot be considered “the remnant of Israel.” Finally, the return of the people to their land could not be considered “going up” (עֲלֶה, v. 13), since an exit from Jerusalem to the villages would be considered a descent.<sup>165</sup>

Neither of these arguments are strong. It is important to keep in mind that this oracle is filled with metaphors. If מִקְוֵה means a fold it would picture a place of safety for the flock. Walls have the same function in the context of a siege. Furthermore, there is nothing in the context that prevents “the remnant of Israel” from being refugees. On the contrary Hasel has shown that the remnant theme was often used with reference to refugees in ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>166</sup> And during Sennacherib’s siege Hezekiah uses שְׂאֲרֵיהֶם with reference to refugees (2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 37:4). Finally, עֲלֶה doesn’t necessarily refer to a process where one person moves from lower to higher ground. It is used figuratively of the exodus from Egypt (e.g. Ex 32:7; Num 21:5; Judg 6:8; 1 Sam 8:8).<sup>167</sup> Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the verb could be used to describe the move from one geographical place to another even if part of the journey was a descent.

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<sup>162</sup> Brin, 1989, 121-24.

<sup>163</sup> This way of interpreting these verses seems like an attempt to harmonise this oracle with the literary context by making it into an oracle of judgement.

<sup>164</sup> Waltke, 2007, 140, gives eight reasons for connecting this oracle with the events surrounding the Assyrian siege; cf. Allen 1976, 302-03.

<sup>165</sup> Mariottini, 2001, 388; cf. Ben zvi, 2000, 69, who writes that there “is no information about the particular setting of the speech in the world of the book, nor is there any sign to the readers to approach the speech from the vantage point of any reconstruction of a particular, historical event in the 8th century BCE”.

<sup>166</sup> Hasel, 1980, 50-134.

<sup>167</sup> Mariottini, 2001, 392, notes the parallel with Egypt but argues that the fold is like a prison the remnant will be rescued from.

If the oracle can be associated with a historical event the Assyrian siege is probably the best alternative. In that case the refugees in Jerusalem are identified as the remnant. The remnant would then be a group of people who are left after a disaster. This would then mean that they are a mixed group of people and not a righteous remnant.

Barker connects this oracle with the eschatological promises in Mic 4-5.<sup>168</sup> The other salvation oracles in Micah contain pastoral imagery and the remnant theme. It could therefore be argued that this refers to the same events. The oracle would then promise care, protection and leadership from Yahweh.

It is difficult to determine whether the third or the fourth alternative is the correct one. The oracle doesn't provide enough clues. For our purposes it is not necessary to determine which of these is the right. These verses focus on Yahweh, who will lead and protect the remnant. From the context we can infer that the remnant was created through judgement. These verses show that the theme of the remnant is used to connect judgement with salvation, whether in Micah's time or in an eschatological future.

### *Events of the messianic age*

The second cycle begins with pronouncements of judgement against the leaders of Judah. These are then followed by two chapters of salvation oracles. The main difference between these oracles and the one in 2:12-13 is that the prophet places these events "in the latter days." Waltke writes that the "syntagma designates a future that is not presently discernible,... and it points to a new epoch, which though it lies in the hidden future, comprehensively alters time and is the goal or outcome towards which an event is striving."<sup>169</sup> If these events had been tied to Micah's lifetime another phrase would probably have been used.

This raises a question about the language that is used in these chapters. Is it to be understood literally or figuratively. In both cases it would refer to something real. The question is whether "prophets represent the future under the imagery and traits of their own historical situation".<sup>170</sup> Waltke notes that the reader needs to be aware that the authors of the prophetic literature used pictures from their own time as well as hyperbolic language in their descriptions.<sup>171</sup>

### *A remnant at mount Zion*

The first oracle we will look at is Mic 4:6-7:<sup>172</sup>

In that day, declares Yahweh,  
I will assemble the lame  
and gather those who have been driven away  
and those whom I have afflicted;  
and the lame I will make the remnant,  
and those who were cast off, a strong nation;  
and Yahweh will reign over them in Mount Zion

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<sup>168</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 69-71.

<sup>169</sup> Waltke, 2007, 193; Barker & Bailey, 1998, 83, argues that the oracle is eschatological because the content points to the messianic age and because of the introductory formula; cf. Kapelrud, 1961, 395-96, who argues that the phrase simply means "in the future" without any eschatological connotations.

<sup>170</sup> Waltke, 2007, 287.

<sup>171</sup> Waltke, 2007, 206-08; cf. Barker & Bailey, 1998, 84, who argues that the restoration should be interpreted as a literal one because there will be a literal destruction.

<sup>172</sup> Kapelrud, 1961, 396-97, mentions that Mowinckel has argued that these verses, along with Mic 2:12-13, are later additions to the text. He adds that "It is inherently unlikely that men who were so loyal to tradition should also have composed new passages and handed them down as words of the prophet."

from this time forth and forevermore.

In order to understand this oracle we need to answer several questions: (1) When will this occur? (2) Who are the lame people and who are the strong nation? (3) What does it mean that Yahweh will reign over them? (4) Are they a faithful remnant? (5) Is there a connection between this oracle and the one in 2:12-13 since the verbs אָסַף and קָבַץ are used in both? The answer to the first question is given in the first phrase, “in that day.” This formulation connects these events with the preceding oracle in 4:1-4:<sup>173</sup>

It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of Yahweh  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;  
and peoples shall flow to it,  
and many nations shall come, and say:  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.”  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall decide for strong nations far away;  
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war anymore;  
but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,  
and no one shall make them afraid,  
for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken. (Mic. 4:1-4)

This is a very interesting oracle. It is both an amazing vision and also includes one of the most difficult intertextual problems in the OT. The phrases are very similar to those found in Isa 2:2-4. The relationship between these two texts will not be discussed in detail here. Because the process of determining whether Isaiah borrowed from Micah or vice versa is complex and the space limitations of this study doesn't permit a detailed discussion. Furthermore, the importance of the oracle for this study lies in its relationship with Mic 4:6-7. Suffice it to say that Byargeon's article outlines the difficulties, while he argues that it is probable that Micah borrowed the phrase from Isaiah.<sup>174</sup>

There is a sharp contrast between this vision and the conclusion of the preceding chapter: “Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.” (3:12) Judgement will not be the end. There will be a reversal of everything Micah has experienced in his lifetime.<sup>175</sup> Zion will be exalted and known globally. People will flow (נִהַר) to the mountain like streams (נְהָרִים) of water. They do not

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<sup>173</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 88.

<sup>174</sup> Byargeon, 2003, 12-26.

<sup>175</sup> Becking, 2002, 4.

come to invade. Rather they come to learn the ways of Yahweh so that they will be able to walk in his paths. This behaviour is explained by the sentence: “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.” People are gathered to Zion to hear the word that has already gone out. The effects of the Law will reach beyond the slopes of mount Zion. Tools of war will be replaced by tools of agriculture. Because the mouth of Yahweh has spoken every man will be able to sit under his own fig tree with no reason to be afraid. This new order can be contrasted with 2:2: “They covet fields and seize them, and houses and takes them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.” (ESV) A man was not secure in Judah because of greed among the powerful. Now the word of Yahweh will create security even beyond the borders of Judah.<sup>176</sup> The oracle in Mic 4:6-7 should be placed within the context of these changes.

Who are the lame? The structure of the verses indicates that they are those who have been driven away (הַנִּדְרָהָה). The verse begins with the declarative formula (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נִאֲמַרְיָהוּ) followed by two pairs of verbs. The first and the last are *yiqtol* first person singular and the second and third are feminine singular participles. This structure and the fact that the roots of the verbs have a similar meaning indicate that the two participles refers to the same group. The addition of “those whom I have afflicted” (וְאֵשֶׁר הִרְעִיתִי) is surprising because of the parallelism in 4:7a. But the phrase helps the reader to identify the lame. They belong to the group that have gone through the judgements described in the previous chapters. This is clarified as the lame are used again in the following verse. This time the verb in the first clause is implied in the second. The structural similarity is clear. The participle is followed by שְׁאֲרֵיהֶם with the preposition לְ. This formulation is followed by another feminine singular participle and לְגוֹי עֲצוּם. The similar structure indicates that the lame and “those who were cast of” are the same group. This places the remnant in a parallelism with “a strong nation.” When this happens the remnant will no longer be a weak group.

Perhaps the most important detail in the oracle is the conclusion which states that “Yahweh will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.” (4:7) There will be a change of leadership in this new age. No corrupt rulers, priests or prophets will reign. Yahweh will replace them and establish a righteous and enduring government.

Barker calls this group a faithful remnant.<sup>177</sup> This is probably an accurate description because they will delight in Yahweh’s teaching and follow his ways like the peoples who stream to Zion. The formulation could suggest that the remnant would be preserved on account of their prior faithfulness. But there is nothing in the text itself that indicates this. On the contrary they were previously afflicted by Yahweh because of their faithlessness. Therefore the potential change of character cannot be attributed to them.

Finally, it should be noted that this oracle echoes the previous one in 2:12-13. This is done by the use of the verbs אָסַף and קָבַץ. The presence of these two verbs together with the root מִלֵּךְ portrays Yahweh as a shepherd-king, and by implication highlights his tenderness.<sup>178</sup> He will not be a harsh ruler. The similarity between these two oracles could be an indication that they refer to the same period. But 4:6-7 is placed “in that day” which clearly place it in the eschatological future. The similarity does suggest, however, that 2:12-13 is an oracle of salvation.

<sup>176</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 86, agrees that the language in 4:4 “are intended to picture proverbially the security, prosperity, and contentment of God’s peaceable kingdom.”

<sup>177</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 89.

<sup>178</sup> Waltke, 2007, 226, see also Laniak, 2006, who discuss the importance of the shepherd metaphor in the ancient world. Even though his monograph doesn’t include a specific chapter about Micah it supplies a framework for these texts.

### *The ruler from Bethlehem and the rest of his brothers*

Mic 4:6-7 is followed by a series of four oracles where the second through fourth begin with the temporal adverb עָתָה (4:9, 11; 5:1). The third is important because it includes one of the roots associated with the remnant theme (יָהֵר) and because of its connection with the restoration of the remnant in the verses that follows:

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops;  
siege is laid against us;  
with a rod they strike the judge of Israel  
on the cheek.  
But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.  
Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has given birth;  
then the rest [יָהֵר] of his brothers shall return  
to the people of Israel.  
And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of Yahweh,  
in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God.  
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.  
And he shall be their peace. (5:1-5a [MT 4:14-5:4a])

Waltke argues that the oracle moves from present distress to future salvation. The judge mentioned in the first verse should not be confused with the ruler because two different terms are used (שֹׁפֵט and מְשִׁיחַ).<sup>179</sup> Much could be said about this ruler from Bethlehem.<sup>180</sup> But for the purpose of this study it is enough to make four observations:

(1) The ruler will be a “new David.” He will be born in the same city and he will have the necessary skills of a shepherd. (2) He will lead in the strength and majesty of Yahweh. (3) He will provide security for his people and be their peace (cf. Isa 9:6).<sup>181</sup> (4) When he is born “the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.”

This ruler has commonly been identified as the messiah. The text doesn’t connect him directly with the remnant. But it is still significant that he is mentioned in this section. This associates him with the future events spoken of earlier in this section. Therefore it is reasonable to view him as a leader of the community. His birth will also inaugurate reunion of people. As Waltke writes:

According to the first of the three oracles, *I AM* would give Zion new birth by redeeming her from Babylon, but more significantly, according to this oracle, her restoration as a strong and unified nation and her triumph over her enemies must await the birth of the Messiah.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Waltke, 2007, 265, 298, identifies the ruler in the first verse as Hezekiah who was beaten on the cheek (figuratively) during Sennacherib’s invasion; cf. Barker & Bailey, 1998, 95-96, who identifies him as Zedekiah.

<sup>180</sup> Both Matt 2:5 and John 7:41-42 and the Targums identify this ruler with the Messiah.

<sup>181</sup> Bryant, 1978, 224-25, argues that this phrase means that this ruler will bring peace and protection.

<sup>182</sup> Waltke, 2007, 279.

The noun יְהִר can be used with the same meaning as שְׂאֲרִיָּה (cf. Zeph 2:9). This is the only example in Micah where the remnant theme occurs with another root than שָׂאֵר. Therefore it is important to ask why this term is used. If it referred to the same group as the remnant it would be natural to use שְׂאֲרִיָּה. Several suggestions have been made regarding the identity of these brothers. They have often been identified as exiles who return from Babylon. Bryant has suggested that they come from the northern kingdom.<sup>183</sup> Some have also connected this group with Isaiah's son Shear-jashub. This could be true if שׁוּב is intentionally ambiguous and emphasise reunion and repentance more than gathering.

Waltke argues that the remnant of Jacob are Micah's contemporaries who survived Sennacherib's invasion (2:12-13), the survivors after the destruction of Jerusalem who were eventually replanted in Palestine. From them the Messiah will come forth. The "rest" on the other hand are the people who didn't return after the diaspora, but who will join with the remnant after the birth of the Messiah. These two communities will be reunited when the Messiah appears.<sup>184</sup> If he is right this would mean that the Messiah would bring peace and security to the remnant and also reunite them with those who are spread out in different nations.

### *Like dew and lion: a strong community depending on Yahweh*

The promise of the messianic king is followed by an oracle about the remnant. Like the oracles in 4:1 and 5:10 it begins with יְהִיָּה. The presence of the *weqatal* indicates that the oracle concerns future events. Because it is placed after the oracle about the Messiah it is likely that these events should be associated with his coming:

Then the remnant of Jacob shall be  
in the midst of many peoples  
like dew from Yahweh,  
like showers on the grass,  
which do not hope in a man  
nor wait for the children of man.  
And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations,  
in the midst of many peoples,  
like a lion among the beasts of the forest,  
like a young lion among the flocks of sheep,  
which, when it goes through, treads down  
and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver.  
Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries,  
and all your enemies shall be cut off (Mic. 5:7-9 [MT 5:6-8])

The oracle can be divided into three parts. The first and second follow the same structure. Both begin with: "יְהִיָּה שְׂאֲרִיָּה יִשְׁקֶב." This is followed by "בְּקֶרֶב עַמִּים רַבִּים" in 5:7 but in 5:8 "בְּגוֹיִם" is added before this phrase.<sup>185</sup> These introductory formulations place the remnant among foreign

<sup>183</sup> Bryant, 1978, 224; Waltke, 2007, 280, also mentions that the group has been identified as the exiled judean authorities or the descendants of David.

<sup>184</sup> Waltke, 2007, 281; cf. Barker & Bailey, 1998, 99, who argues that this refers to a literal gathering of a faithful remnant from exile.

<sup>185</sup> In LXX "ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν" is added after "καὶ ἔσται τὸ ὑπόλειμμα τοῦ Ἰακώβ," which makes the beginning of the two verses identical. Waltke, 2007, 307, argue that this is the correct reading caused by haplography (the omission of two adjacent letters or words; see Tov, 2001, 237 for this phenomenon). Waltke makes a strong case for this reading but it is also possible that בְּגוֹיִם was added to 5:8 at some point to make the verses identical. For our purposes it is not necessary to determine this issue here. The addition of בְּגוֹיִם in 5:8 doesn't alter the meaning of the oracle.

nations. Because of this and the use of יַעֲקֹב Kapelrud has argued that this refers to northern Israel.<sup>186</sup> יַעֲקֹב is associated with the northern kingdom in 1:5. But it is also used with reference to the leadership in Jerusalem (3:1, 8, 9) and to the temple (4:2).<sup>187</sup> Therefore it is not necessary that it should indicate northern Israel in this oracle.

The first portrait presents the remnant “as dew from the Lord” (כִּטְלֵי מִנְאֵת יְהוָה) and “like showers upon the plants” (כְּרִבְיָיִם עַל־עֵשֶׂב). Bryant suggests that the phrase could be understood in five ways:

(1) As dew falls suddenly, so the remnant will fall upon the nations; (2) the remnant will be as innumerable as drops of dew or rain; (3) the remnant will refresh the nations like dew and rain refreshes the grass; (4) as dew and rain are of divine origin, so the remnant will be of divine origin; (5) as dew and rain fall on grass and cause it to grow, Yahweh's favor and might will strengthen the remnant.<sup>188</sup>

In the Pentateuch dew (טל) is a sign of blessing. When Isaac gives his blessing to Jacob he says: “May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine.” (Gen 27:28 ESV) It is a blessing for the land by making it fertile (cf. Deut 33:28). When the people received manna it came together with dew (Ex 16:13, 14; Num 11:9). So even in the desert it was a sign of blessing. In Deut 32:2 it is used figuratively: “May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb.” (ESV) It is clear that dew is viewed as having a positive effect on the land. This latter example is interesting because עַל־עֵשֶׂב כְּרִבְיָיִם is used in both Mic 5:7 and Deut 32:2. Two reasons make this a strong connection. First, the word רִבְיָיִם occurs only six times in the OT and the phrase עַל־עֵשֶׂב only three times. It is therefore no surprise that Mic 5:7 and Deut 32:2 are the only verses with עַל־עֵשֶׂב כְּרִבְיָיִם. Second, these are the only two examples where טל and רִבְיָיִם are used as synonyms in parallel expressions. The relative clause then explains how they will function as a blessing. The verbs קוּה and יִהַל are used in the parallelism. According to Waschke קוּה generally carries the meaning of hope when Yahweh is the object of the verb (directly or indirectly). He views Mic 5:7 as an example that underlines this because it presents hope focused on people as something negative.<sup>189</sup> יִהַל is often used in a similar way.<sup>190</sup> In 7:7 the author writes “I will wait [יִהַל] for the God of my salvation.” When the two verbs are used together they imply an attitude of trust and anticipation (Job 30:23; Ps 130:5; Isa 51:5; Mic 5:6). The remnant will not have this attitude towards human beings. Because they will be like dew from Yahweh it is likely that they will hope in and wait for him.<sup>191</sup> It is this attitude which will make the remnant a blessing among the nations.

In the second part of the oracle the imagery takes a radical turn. Now the remnant is pictured as a lion in the forest and among sheep. They will no longer be weak and prey for their enemies. The

<sup>186</sup> Kapelrud, 1961, 401-02; Bryant, 1978, 225-26, agree that the oracle was pronounced shortly after the fall of Samaria.

<sup>187</sup> This could lead some scholars to assume that the oracle is exilic or post-exilic. This might be correct even though it should be noted that the place among the nations is not necessarily negative. And there is no indication that the remnant will be gathered from this “exile.” Instead the text hints that they will continue to dwell among the nations.

<sup>188</sup> Bryant, 1978, 226, refers to J. M. P. Smith's commentary.

<sup>189</sup> Waschke, 2003, 568-69.

<sup>190</sup> Barth, 1990, 53.

<sup>191</sup> Waltke, 2007, 318.



relative clause emphasise that the nations instead will be their prey.<sup>192</sup> This is further emphasised in the concluding section.<sup>193</sup>

The remnant will be both a blessing and a curse for the nations. They will be refreshing like dew and showers of water for those who stream to Zion. But their enemies will face judgement.

### *No idols allowed*

The section that ends chapter five continues the process of restoration. It begins with “And in that day, declares Yahweh.” The declarative formula place the events in the same timeframe as the previous oracles. This section is also connected with the preceding oracle through the repetition of the verb כרתה.<sup>194</sup>

And in that day, declares Yahweh,  
I will cut off your horses from among you  
and will destroy your chariots;  
and I will cut off the cities of your land  
and throw down all your strongholds;  
and I will cut off sorceries from your hand,  
and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes;  
and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you,  
and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands;  
and I will root out your Asherah images from among you  
and destroy your cities.<sup>195</sup>  
And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance  
on the nations that did not obey. (5:10-15)

The section can be divided into six parts beginning with the declarative formula. There has been some debates about the genre of this oracle. Most scholars agree that it is a salvation oracle, as Barker writes: “God performs radical surgery to rid his people of the things that once caused them to stumble—ultimately a spiritual deliverance.”<sup>196</sup> Wagenaar objects to this theory. He connects the oracle with the “bannformel” found in the Pentateuch regulating the excommunication of people from the community:

The salutary effect of the purification does not, however, imply that the ‘extermination formula’ is an announcement of salvation as such. Both the ‘extermination formula’ in Lev. 26:30; Zech. 9:10; 13:2 and the traditional *Bannformel* unmistakably aim at the purification of the community. But the purifying effect of banishment and destruction does not turn these formulas into Oracles of Salvation.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Bryant, 1978, 224.

<sup>193</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 104; He also argues that this will happen when the Messiah’s kingdom has come in its fulness.

<sup>194</sup> Because of this connection Wagenaar, 2001, 305-06, place 5:9 as the first verse of this oracle. The similarities of these verses makes this alternative possible. But 5:10 begins with *בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא* and the pronouncements declare what Yahweh will do. Therefore it is reasonable to place 5:9 with 5:7-8. Then both oracles end with pronouncements against enemies or nations that were disobedient.

<sup>195</sup> Jeppesen, 1984, 464-65, defends the appropriateness of the parallelism in the verse (cf. Jer 2:28; 11:13) and argue that it could fit into an eight-century context.

<sup>196</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 105-106.

<sup>197</sup> Wagenaar, 2001, 310.

Wagenaar further argues that these oracles should be viewed as pronouncements of judgement. And there can be not doubt that these pronouncements include judgement. But it would perhaps be best to classify them as an oracle of restoration or purification because salvation for God's people often means destruction for their enemies. Purging involves judgement but ultimately it aims at a restored relationship with Yahweh. That is also what these pronouncements point toward. Each part includes two verbs and paint a comprehensive picture of transformation.

The best parallel for understanding Mic 5:10 is Isa 31:1:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult Yahweh! (cf. Isa 2:7-8)

Yahweh will cut off horses and destroy chariots because they have become like idols when people put their trust in them. The same is true with the second part because neither cities nor strongholds are intrinsically bad. In Isa 22:8b-11 the people is criticised because they "broke down the houses to fortify the wall. You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or see him who planned it long ago." Yahweh will cut off and destroy both their offensive weapons and their defences so that his people will not trust in military power.<sup>198</sup>

The third part pictures the removal of sorcerers and fortune tellers. This is not surprising because the law clearly forbids such practices (Deut 18:10-12). One of the reasons why it is viewed as an abomination is because it draws people away from Yahweh. Instead of trusting in his protection and providential care people turn to sorcery or fortune telling to feel secure. In the fourth part Yahweh declares that he will cut off all their carved images. These idols draw people from trust in him to trust in manmade gods, like the things mentioned in the three previous parts.<sup>199</sup> When people turn to these gods they openly reject Yahweh and show that they trust in these pieces of wood, stone or metal.<sup>200</sup> The third and fourth part pictures the removal of people and statues which the israelites have previously trusted in.

To understand the power of this message it is important to see the connection between these four parts. Yahweh will not randomly cut off things from the Land. Instead he will deliberately cut of the things that have become idols. Horses, chariots, cities and strongholds might not be as obvious as carved images because they can be idolised in a more subtle way. In this passage we have a description of how Yahweh will create a people who trust in him instead of created things.<sup>201</sup> To emphasise the thoroughness of the transformation the fifth part summarises and repeats two of the declarations: "and I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities." It would be wrong to make a literalistic interpretation of these pronouncements. They are used figuratively to paint a comprehensive picture. The remnant will be a transformed community consisting of people who are not bound by idolatry. And they have no good reason to turn back because vengeance will be executed on the nations that didn't obey (5:15).

Who are the remnant? Waltke writes that these oracles were addressed to the remnant during the siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. But "this promise by *I AM* himself to excommunicate unbelievers

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<sup>198</sup> Waltke, 2007, 334, suggests that the harsh "political rod" of Assyria could be one of the means which Yahweh used to purge so that they would learn the futility of trusting in weapons and fortifications.

<sup>199</sup> Jeppesen, 1984, 462-63, suggests that this verse could be polemical against the current syncretism between Yahwism and Baalism.

<sup>200</sup> Bryant, 1978, 230, argues that this oracle must have its origin before the exile because idolatry wasn't a problem in postexilic times. He thinks that the oracle could date somewhere between 597 and 587 when the israelites were tempted to trust in Egypt.

<sup>201</sup> Peacock, 2003, 42, makes a similar point.

from their midst entails that the remnant is not yet clean; unbelievers among them must still be sifted out before they become the new Israel of God, destined to extend his kingdom universally.”<sup>202</sup>

Throughout these chapters the oracles point to future events. A time when the remnant will live in different circumstances. They will be transformed through judgement and unified in a wholehearted pursuit of Yahweh under the leadership of the Messiah.

### ***What shall I give for my transgressions***

The third cycle begins with a covenant lawsuit or a “legal procedure.” beginning with a summons and a charge to witnesses (6:1-2).<sup>203</sup> The first section of this cycle is one of the most well known passages in Micah. There are two reasons why this oracle is important for this study. First, it introduces Yahweh’s previous actions for his people in the exodus and the conquest of the land (6:4-5). Furthermore, it introduces the theme of transgressions. While the previous cycles have dealt with outward problems, such as the Assyrian army and corrupt leadership, here the focus shifts to the sinfulness of the community (cf. 6:9).

With what shall I come before Yahweh,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”  
He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does Yahweh require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God? (6:6-8)

A multitude of sacrifices or a flood of oil will not be enough. Not even the life of a firstborn will be enough. Yahweh requires perfect obedience and commitment to the covenant. The reader has to ask if this is possible. They have to walk humbly, perform justice and love kindness (הַסֵּד).<sup>204</sup> After this section another lawsuit follows with additional charges against the people (6:9-16).<sup>205</sup>

The final chapter begins with a lament about the state of the people. “The godly has perished from the earth, there is no one upright among mankind; they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net.” (7:2 ESV) This is far from the requirements of Yahweh. One formulation captures how dire the situation is: “The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge.” (7:4a ESV) The lament, however, ends on a note of hope: “But as for me, I will look to Yahweh; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” (7:7) This verse functions as a hinge linking the first part of the cycle with the oracles of hope. The first of these is a psalm of trust:<sup>206</sup>

Rejoice not over me, O my enemy;

<sup>202</sup> Waltke, 2007, 336.

<sup>203</sup> Barker, 1998b, 441-42, 447.

<sup>204</sup> Waltke, 2007, 392.

<sup>205</sup> This section includes the root עָלָה (6:14). It is used in its general sense of something being preserved.

<sup>206</sup> Barker, 1998b, 447. cf. Waltke, 2007, 432-33, who views the whole of 7:8-20 as a victory song divided into four units.

when I fall, I shall rise;  
when I sit in darkness,  
Yahweh will be a light to me.  
I will bear the indignation of Yahweh  
because I have sinned against him,  
until he pleads my cause and  
executes judgment for me.  
He will bring me out to the light;  
I shall look upon his vindication. (7:8-9)

Mccomsiskey writes: “The attitude of the godly remnant is apparent in Micah's words. They confess their sin and acknowledge that God is just in punishing sin.”<sup>207</sup> This psalm further underlines that everyone deserves punishment for their sins. But there is also a note of hope through these verses as the prophet awaits his vindication. This confession is followed by a salvation oracle promising deliverance (7:11-13). The key verse with regard to the time of these events is 7:12: “It is a day when they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.” (ESV) The formulation echoes 4:1-5.<sup>208</sup> Vindication and judgement will come in the messianic age: “Then the earth will be desolate, because of its inhabitants, as a fruit of their deeds.” (7:13 ESV).

The oracle is the counterpart to the Christian doctrine of the Last Judgement. In traditional language which Israel could understand it expresses the assurance that deficits in the moral balance sheet of the world are eventually to be paid, while the kingdom of God is to be established in triumph.<sup>209</sup>

This oracle of restoration is followed by an interplay between Yahweh and the prophet. This section is important for two reasons. First, it promises that Yahweh will reenact the exodus.<sup>210</sup> Second, it portrays salvation through judgement.

Shepherd your people with your staff,  
the flock of your inheritance,  
who dwell alone in a forest  
in the midst of a garden land;  
let them graze in Bashan and Gilead  
as in the days of old.  
*As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt,*  
*I will show them marvellous things.*  
The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might;  
they shall lay their hands on their mouths;  
their ears shall be deaf;  
they shall lick the dust like a serpent,<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Mccomiskey, 1981, 66.

<sup>208</sup> So Barker & Bailey, 1998, 129; Mccomiskey, 1981, 66 also argues that this oracle pictures the merging of Jewish and gentile communities; Waltke, 2007, 456, on the other hand argues that the oracle contrasts Israel's salvation with the defeat of the nations. He also adds that it portrays a return from exile.

<sup>209</sup> Allen, 1976, 398.

<sup>210</sup> Waltke, 2007, 460.

<sup>211</sup> Hamilton, 2010, 77 views this as a clear allusion to Gen 3:14; cf. Braker, 1998a, 132 who notes this as a possibility.

like the crawling things of the earth;  
they shall come trembling out of their strongholds;  
they shall turn in dread to Yahweh our God,  
and they shall be in fear of you.<sup>212</sup> (7:14-17)

The theme of a new exodus in this oracle forms an *inclusio* with the first covenantal lawsuit of the third cycle.<sup>213</sup> After this confession and prayer the prophet is ready to give another answer to the questions from chapter six:

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in steadfast love [חֶסֶד].  
He will again have compassion on us;  
he will subdue our iniquities.  
You will cast all their<sup>214</sup> sins  
into the depths of the sea.  
You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
and steadfast love to Abraham  
as you have sworn to our fathers  
from the days of old. (7:18-20)

Mccomiskey writes that the “seventh chapter of Micah deals mainly with the societal wrongs of that time. Like a day that begins with a dark, lowering sky and ends in golden sunlight, this chapter begins in an atmosphere of gloom, but it ends with one of the greatest statements of hope to be found in the Prophets.”<sup>215</sup> The subject of this passage is the incomparability of God. He is like no other god because he doesn’t leave his people in their transgressions and sins. It is hard to understate the power of these words against the background of the two preceding chapters. Those descriptions gave no indication that there could be forgiveness. But Yahweh will pardon the “remnant of his inheritance.” The construct chain implies that the remnant is Yahweh’s special possession.<sup>216</sup> The phrase could also indicate that only part of the “inheritance” will receive forgiveness (cf. 7:14).

For our purposes it is sufficient to make four observations: (1) Forgiveness depends only on the character of God. He has good reason to be angry but he delights in steadfast love. חֶסֶד is often associated with God’s covenant love. Together with the adjective יָחַד it shows that Yahweh is moved by his own character to keep the covenant.<sup>217</sup> (2) It is his character that makes Yahweh so different from other gods. That in turn indicates that sins and transgressions are serious matters.

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<sup>212</sup> Achtemeier, 1988, 366, views this verse as an example of universal salvation. Given the allusion to Gen 3:14 it seems more likely that the peoples will turn to Yahweh out of necessity not willingly.

<sup>213</sup> Hillers, 1984, 89, argues that there is no specific link between 7:8-20 and the preceding section. He does admit that this section “resume and bring to resolution a number of the book’s themes”. One of these is the exodus theme which begin in 6:4.

<sup>214</sup> Most of the hebrew manuscripts indicate that this should be “their iniquities.” Some manuscripts along with LXX, Syr and Vg support the reading “our sins.”

<sup>215</sup> Mccomiskey, 1981, 62.

<sup>216</sup> Mccomiskey, 1981, 68.

<sup>217</sup> Waltke, 2007, 464; Barker & Bailey, 1998, 134, notes that the crucial vocabulary in 7:18 is used in Isa 53 of the suffering servant.

Otherwise it is inconceivable why this ability would make Yahweh so different. (3) These verses also indicate that humans are unable “to do justice, and to love kindness [הַסֶּדֶק], and to walk humbly with your God.” (6:8) God will provide something instead of their perfect obedience. (4) The same God who freed them from the power of the Egyptians will now free them from their sins and transgressions. The formulations are significant. The strong expression כָּבַשׁ is used to indicate that iniquity will be subdued.<sup>218</sup> The verb can be used with a positive and negative sense. It depends on the context and the object that will be subdued (cf. Gen 1:28; Num 32:22).<sup>219</sup> For our passage it is relevant that this verb is used in settings referring to the conquest of the land (Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1). The conquest of the land is often associated with the exodus and in 6:5 the community is exhorted to remember what happened “from Shittim to Gilgal.”<sup>220</sup> The second clause in the parallelism promise that sins will be “cast into the depths of the sea.” This formulation echoes Moses song in Ex 15: “Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone.” (Ex 15:4-5 ESV)<sup>221</sup> The frequent references to the exodus in the third cycle strengthens the connection between these verses.<sup>222</sup> In addition there is a parallel in Nehemiah summarising the defeat of Pharaoh with similar formulations (Neh 9:11).<sup>223</sup> Furthermore the introductory question might be an allusion to another phrase in Moses song: “Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh?” (מִי־כַמֶּנְכָה בְּאֱלֹהֵי הַיְהוָה) The last oracle in Micah is filled with language shared with the song of the sea. Together these parallel expressions point toward a “new exodus.” But this time Yahweh will not defeat an army but he will destroy the power of sin over his remnant.

This is the culmination of Micah. They faced many problems, the Assyrian army and corrupt leadership. But the greatest problem they faced was ultimately their own iniquity and sins. From the literary context it seems reasonable to connect this event with the messianic age. The remnant will be a people who are freed from their sins because Yahweh delights in steadfast love and keeps his promises. “But as yet the cloud is still there for the congregation; they look forward to its future removal. Then the way would lie open for unbroken harmony with their covenant God.”<sup>224</sup> They will be saved through judgement of their enemies and the destruction of their sin.

## Summary

From our study of the remnant theme we have seen that it is a multifaceted term. It is used to designate groups of people who have survived destruction. Remnants are created through divine judgement and they function as a source of hope. This theme is a bridge from judgement to salvation.

In the first cycle it could either refer to the historical remnant in Jerusalem during Sennacherib’s siege or the eschatological people of the messianic age. In the second and the third cycles of the book it is used with reference to the messianic community. They will delight in Yahweh’s law and

<sup>218</sup> Gordon, 1978, 355, mentions that this root could be connected with the Akkadian *kaḅāsu* and would mean forgive.

<sup>219</sup> See Collins, 2006, 68-69.

<sup>220</sup> Waltke, 2007, 446, associates both these formulations with the defeat of the Egyptian army. That could be correct but the view presented above should be preferred because כָּבַשׁ is never used with reference to Pharaoh. It should be noted that there is no radical difference between these interpretations and the conquest of the land is often closely connected with the exodus.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Ps 78:53 which also alludes to the drowning of Pharaoh and his army. The difference is that this verse uses the verb כָּסַף, which is used both in Moses song and in the preceding narrative (Ex 14:28; 15:10).

<sup>222</sup> Andersen & Freedman, 2000, 598, also notes the connection with Ex 15; cf. Mays, 1976, 167-68 who writes: “The last two expressions portray forgiveness as a battle and sound like a reminiscence of the victory of the sea (Ex. 15.5); they show that the hymn regards even forgiveness as the work of majestic powers, a ‘miracle’ of the mighty God.”

<sup>223</sup> Andersen & Freedman, 2000, 599, notes that this formulation is dependent on Ex 15 and adapted to standard prose.

<sup>224</sup> Allen, 1976, 403.

be ruled by him. They will follow the Messiah and trust in Yahweh instead of human power or weapons. They will also be a morally reformed and forgiven community. For Yahweh will reenact the exodus and this time release his remnant from the bondage of sin.

# The remnant in Zephaniah: A humble and lowly people

## *Form and structure of Zephaniah*

Zephaniah is a book about the day of Yahweh. Within the book of the twelve it follows after Habakkuk's note about Yahweh's redemption (Hab 3:16-19). But the book of Zephaniah "dispel any possible doubts about the thoroughness of God's judgement."<sup>225</sup> House has suggested that Zephaniah embodies both the climax and the falling action within the twelve.<sup>226</sup> Judgement is not the only theme inherent in the day of Yahweh. In the second chapter the reader can see hints of restoration amidst the coming judgement. King argues that all the major sections in the book should be linked to the day of Yahweh.<sup>227</sup> For that day is central to the whole book as it brings together both judgement and salvation, coming destruction and future hope.

## *Coming judgement and the remnant of Baal*

The first chapter of Zephaniah gives a harsh message. Both man and beast will be touched by the coming judgement:

I will utterly sweep away everything  
from the face of the earth," declares Yahweh  
"I will sweep away man and beast;  
I will sweep away the birds of the heavens  
and the fish of the sea,  
and the rubble with the wicked.  
I will cut off mankind  
from the face of the earth," declares Yahweh.  
"I will stretch out my hand against Judah  
and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;  
and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal [שָׂאֵר הַבַּעַל]  
and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,  
those who bow down on the roofs  
to the host of the heavens,  
those who bow down and swear to Yahweh  
and yet swear by Milcom,  
those who have turned back from following Yahweh,  
who do not seek Yahweh or inquire of him." (1:2-6)

The first two verses of this section point toward a universal judgement. Then the following three verses shifts the focus to Judah and Jerusalem. Here we find the first occurrence of the remnant theme in Zephaniah, "שָׂאֵר הַבַּעַל" (the remnant of Baal).<sup>228</sup> For the purpose of this study two observations are relevant:<sup>229</sup> (1) This passage can be compared with Isa 14:22-23. Both remnants

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<sup>225</sup> House, 1990, 147.

<sup>226</sup> House, 1990, 151.

<sup>227</sup> King, 1995, 17.

<sup>228</sup> King, 1994, 414, does not include this passage in his discussion of the remnant because it refers to another group than the other passages.

<sup>229</sup> The phrase "שָׂאֵר הַבַּעַל" could indicate that these oracles were delivered towards the end of or after Josiah's reform. Before or even at the beginning of the reform it is not likely that the worshipers of Baal would have been called a remnant; Sweeney, 2003, 67, notes that some have argued that this phrase could place the oracle sometime after the reform of Josiah. He suggests that it is a "précis for the following references to the cultic attendants and priests."



will be cut off (כרתה) and their elimination indicate that there is no future hope for these communities.<sup>230</sup> (2) The masculine noun שְׁאֵר is used in this construction. When the remnant theme is used of the covenant people in Zephaniah the feminine noun שְׁאֵרִית is used. It is hard to determine why different nouns were used. But it could be a way of indicating that the two remnants should be clearly distinguished from each other.

The other verses clarify that those who follow other gods than Yahweh or try to combine him with another god will face destruction. This is summarised well in the last phrase. These people “do not seek Yahweh or inquire of him.” These verses emphasise that Judah and Jerusalem will not be spared from the coming judgement. The focus on Judah continues in the following section:

And on the day of Yahweh’s sacrifice—  
“I will punish the officials and the king’s sons  
and all who array themselves in foreign attire.  
On that day I will punish  
everyone who leaps over the threshold,  
and those who fill their master’s house  
with violence and fraud. (1:8-9)

The development of the pronouncements in the first chapter is significant. From these verses onward we can see a clear line. Punishment will fall on those who have sought alliances with foreign powers, who have dealt violently with people or defrauded them. The city is pictured as a mortar where the inhabitants will be crushed or ground to dust. Moreover the prophet adds: “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘Yahweh will not do good, nor will he do ill.’” (1:12) These men exemplify another attitude towards Yahweh. They don’t believe that he is living and active in the world.<sup>231</sup> Therefore they will be judged with the idolaters:

The great day of Yahweh is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of Yahweh is bitter;  
the mighty man cries aloud there.  
A day of wrath is that day,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the lofty battlements.  
I will bring distress on mankind,  
so that they shall walk like the blind,  
because they have sinned against Yahweh;  
their blood shall be poured out like dust,

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<sup>230</sup> See the section “Remnants of destruction” above; Because of this parallel Roberts, 1991, 171, has argued that שְׁאֵר means descendant when it is used in parallelism with שְׁאֵר. Neither “name” nor “remnant” indicate that the group has been reduced. For this reason he also argues that the phrase cannot be used in the dating of the book.

<sup>231</sup> King, 1995, 20, calls these people practical atheists; cf. Achtemeier, 1988, 69, who refers to this verse as the central indictment of the whole book.

and their flesh like dung.  
Neither their silver nor their gold  
shall be able to deliver them  
on the day of the wrath of the Lord.  
In the fire of his jealousy,  
all the earth shall be consumed;  
for a full and sudden end  
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. (1:15-18)

In short there is no hope for mankind. De Roche writes: “Zephaniah is proclaiming man's loss of dominion over the earth, and more importantly, *the reversal of creation*.”<sup>232</sup> King adds: “Though Zephaniah declared that the day of the Lord will bring about destruction on all animate life, he emphasized in several ways its judgment on people, who are the primary recipients of Yahweh's punishment.”<sup>233</sup> This penal aspect of Yahweh's day will continue through the second chapter until 3:8. But hope emerges already in the second chapter with the presence of the remnant.<sup>234</sup>

### ***Seek the Lord***

Most of chapter two contain “oracles against the nations.” But before Zephaniah turn to these, he makes an appeal:

Gather together, yes gather,  
O shameless nation,  
before the decree takes effect  
– before the day passes away like chaff –  
before there comes upon you  
the burning anger of Yahweh,  
before there comes upon you  
the day of the anger of Yahweh.  
Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the land,  
who do his just commands;  
seek righteousness, seek humility;  
perhaps you may be hidden  
on the day of the anger of Yahweh (2:1-3)

This is the first glimpse of hope in the book. The impending judgement seems inevitable. This section is important for three reasons. (1) It signals that salvation or preservation is possible even in these dire circumstances. (2) It identifies some people as humble (עָנִי). These have commonly been identified as a “righteous remnant.” This is an adequate term since they follow Yahweh's commands. But it should also be noted that there is no guarantee that these people will be spared on the day of Yahweh. King is probably right when he suggests that “אִי־לִי” (perhaps) preserves Yahweh's absolute sovereignty and freedom. “Yahweh is not indebted to respond by saving a remnant. On the contrary, He reacts in His sovereignty and freedom, and salvation springs out of His grace and love.”<sup>235</sup> This indicates that the remnant also deserved to be punished even though

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<sup>232</sup> De Roche, 1980, 106.

<sup>233</sup> King, 1995, 23.

<sup>234</sup> cf. King, 1995, 30.

<sup>235</sup> King, 1994, 421; see also King 1996, 143-45.

they were more righteous. Hasel puts it well: “There will be no remnant without God's grace just as little as there will be a remnant without man's return to God.”<sup>236</sup> (3) עָנִי (humble), a synonym of עָנָו, is one of the characteristics of the remnant in 3:12. This connection will be further discussed below.

### ***Restoration of the remnant***

The following verses pronounce Yahweh’s judgement against the surrounding countries. In order to understand this oracle we need to determine why these nations were chosen. The oracles are directed at Philistia (west), Moab/Ammon (east), Cush (south) and Assyria (north).<sup>237</sup> Berlin has suggested that the oracles are directed at the sons of Ham, and displays a conflict between urban and nomadic communities.<sup>238</sup> But it more likely that these oracles together paint a complete picture. All foreign nations will face Yahweh’s wrath on his day. The remnant is mentioned twice. These passages are best studied together because of the similarities they share:

The seacoast shall become the possession  
of the remnant of the house of Judah,<sup>239</sup>  
on which they shall graze,  
and in the houses of Ashkelon  
they shall lie down at evening.  
For Yahweh their God<sup>240</sup> will be mindful of them  
and restore their fortunes. (2:7)

The remnant of my people shall plunder them,  
the survivors of my nation shall possess them.  
This shall be their lot in return for their pride,  
because they taunted and boasted  
against the people of Yahweh of hosts.  
Yahweh will be awesome against them;  
for he will famish all the gods of the earth,  
and to him shall bow down,  
each in its place,  
all the lands of the nations. (2:9b-11)

Three observations can be made regarding the first passage. (1) The remnant will regain territory from their enemies where they can find security.<sup>241</sup> This is suggested by the pastoral imagery. Like sheep they will graze in the land of their enemies.<sup>242</sup> Roberts connects this verse with the preceding one: “And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures, with meadows for shepherds and folds for

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<sup>236</sup> Hasel, 1980, 206; this quote refers to Am 5:14-15 but cf. King, 1994, 422 who also refers to this section.

<sup>237</sup> Kahn, 2009, 450, argues that the “oracles against the Philistia and Ammon-and-Moab can only be explained against the historical reality and conflicts of the 7th century B.C.E. between Judah and her neighbors.”; Berlin 1994, 118-121, argues that these oracles fits the overall historical picture as we know it. Edom is not included in these oracles because there was more hostility in the exilic and post-exilic period.

<sup>238</sup> Berlin, 1994, 122; The main problem with this view is that there are many more sons of Ham and in addition Moab/Ammon are not descendants from Ham.

<sup>239</sup> Sweeney, 2003, 130, notes that “a number of scholars have argued that the presence of the term here indicates post-exilic redactional reworking of this text.” But he thinks that the losses suffered by Judah during the Assyrian occupation could account for this phrase. In addition it could be added that the description of chapter one would by necessity reduce the house of Judah into a remnant.

<sup>240</sup> Roberts, 1991, 199, defends the authenticity of these verses.

<sup>241</sup> cf. Robertson, 1990, 300.

<sup>242</sup> Barker & Bailey, 1998, 457; A collective singular can govern a plural verb, see Waltke & O’Connor,

flocks.” (2:6) Therefore he suggests that it is animals and not the remnant that will graze in the new land.<sup>243</sup> This is a possible interpretation. But pastoral imagery is often used with reference to humans in the prophetic literature (e.g. 3:13; Ez 34; Mic 2:12). (2) Their fortune will be restored because Yahweh has been mindful of them. (3) The remnant is a community which has gone through some kind of destruction. Given the background of chapter one it is likely that they are the ones who were preserved on the day of Yahweh.

The second passage only includes a short note about the remnant. But two more observations can be made: (1) The remnant will not only gain new territory from their enemies.<sup>244</sup> They will also plunder and possess them. (2) The remnant will not be restored because of their own qualities. These nations will be condemned because they have been full of pride against Yahweh’s people.

These oracles gives the community hope for the future. Salvation or restoration will come to the remnant through judgement of their enemies.

### ***From a corrupt to a transformed community***

The preceding chapter treats the judgement of Judah’s enemies while chapter three begins with the judgement of Jerusalem. Once again the prophet turns to the city:

Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,  
the oppressing city!  
She listens to no voice;  
she accepts no correction.  
She does not trust in Yahweh;  
she does not draw near to her God.  
Her officials within her  
are roaring lions;  
her judges are evening wolves  
that leave nothing till the morning.  
Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men;  
her priests profane what is holy;  
they do violence to the law. (3:1-4)

This description explain the need for either repentance or judgement. The leadership of Judah has been infested with corruption. And the priests and prophets who should guide the judges and officials have turned away from Yahweh. Even though they had many opportunities to draw near to God they refused to trust him (cf. Mic 5:7[5:8]): “I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.’ But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt.” (3:7) Despite Yahweh’s discipline the city remained corrupt. That is why the change in 3:9-13 is so remarkable. This section is the most important one for our study of the remnant.

For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples  
to a pure speech,  
that all of them may call upon the name of Yahweh  
and serve him with one accord.  
From beyond the rivers of Cush

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<sup>243</sup> Roberts, 1991, 199.

<sup>244</sup> Roberts, 1991, 200, suggests that the formulation “the remnant of my people” indicates that Yahweh is still laying claim to the whole people and all the territory that was given them.

my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones,  
 shall bring my offering.  
 On that day you shall not be put to shame  
 because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me;  
 for then I will remove from your midst  
 your proudly exultant ones,  
 and you shall no longer be haughty  
 in my holy mountain.  
 But I will leave in your midst [יְהוָה שְׂאֲרָתִי בְקִרְבְּךָ]  
 a people humble and lowly.  
 They shall seek refuge in the name of Yahweh,  
 the remnant of Israel [שְׂאֲרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל];<sup>245</sup>  
 they shall do no injustice  
 and speak no lies,  
 nor shall there be found in their mouth  
 a deceitful tongue.  
 For they shall graze and lie down,  
 and none shall make them afraid.” (3:9-13)

The contrast is extraordinary. These verses begin with a transformation of the nations. They will be changed so that they can come to Yahweh and worship him (cf. Mic 4:1-4). This indicates that the perspective in Zephaniah is universal.<sup>246</sup> After this introductory remark the focus shifts to the covenant people. Worshipers will gather from distant parts of the world.

Several observations can be made about the transformed character of the community: (1) The proud and haughty will be purged from the community (3:11). House aptly writes: “It takes the ravages of the Day of Yahweh to melt away the wicked segment of the chosen people and bring forth the remnant.”<sup>247</sup> (2) The people who are left will be humble (עָנִי) and lowly (לָדָל). Both of these words are often used of people who are in great need and therefore depend on someone else. They will heed Yahweh’s exhortation to seek humility (2:3).<sup>248</sup> This means that they are obedient.<sup>249</sup> (3) These terms further indicate that the remnant will trust in Yahweh, which is also spelled out in the following sentence (3:12).<sup>250</sup> The remnant will be a people who do not rely on themselves, wealth or prestige (cf. 3:2). Because they know that neither of those will be able to deliver them on the day of Yahweh (1:18). (4) The transformation will be most evident in their new behaviour. They will be no source of injustice (לֹא-יִעֲשֶׂוּ עֲוֹנוֹתָם). Injustice is used in different contexts referring to different

<sup>245</sup> Vlaardingerbroek, 1999, 203-04, notes that the remnant of Israel belong to the preceding verse from a “syntactical” perspective.

<sup>246</sup> Berlin, 1994, 134, suggests that the rivers of Cush could be a location in Mesopotamia, even though it is often associated with Ethiopia. Her main point is that the phrase is used to “evoke a far-off place, at the ends of the earth, from which people will bring offerings to the Lord.”; Roberts, 1991, 217-18, notes that the translation of בְּתֵּי-פִּזְוִי as “daughters of my dispersed ones” or the emendation to “in the dispersion” would indicate that the phrase is not referring to foreign peoples but rather exiles from Judah. Therefore he also suggests that it is a later addition to the text.

<sup>247</sup> House, 1990, 209; cf. Roberts, 1991, 218, who writes that the people’s speech was purified “through judgement.”

<sup>248</sup> Roberts, 1991, 218, identifies these people with the people mentioned in 2:3; Berlin, 1994, 136, suggest that these will be spared because they have performed God’s command. But if the remnant was transformed through judgement this behaviour would be the consequence of their transformation rather than the cause of their salvation.

<sup>249</sup> King, 1994, 418.

<sup>250</sup> cf. King 1994, 419, who writes: “In other words these terms are not simply sociological descriptions nor do they merely supply information about the financial status of the remnant. They also tell of the contrite spirit and meek attitude of these people. They are a people whose confidence is not in their own possessions or abilities. Rather, they place their trust in Yahweh alone.”

actions but all these instances “share the common ground of treating others unethically, contrary to Yahweh's stated will. Thus the remnant reject any practice that involves treating others in a way contrary to God's instruction.”<sup>251</sup> More significantly 3:5 states that Yahweh “does no injustice” (עֲוֹן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה). The remnant will share this characteristic with Yahweh. They will behave like him.<sup>252</sup> (5) Yahweh will bring about this change. This section begins with: “For at that time I will change”. Not only the foreign nations will be purged but the covenant community will be transformed as Yahweh carries out his plan of restoration. The new community will be cared for like sheep.

This description differentiates this remnant from the one gathered in Jerusalem during the Assyrian siege.<sup>253</sup> That community remained unchanged. But because of “the fires of judgement, the complacent, adulterous nature of Israel disappears, and a new, holy Israel emerges.... The rebel has been reborn as a righteous follower of Yahweh.”<sup>254</sup>

It is possible that “all the humble of the land” (2:3) will be the foundational community out of which this remnant will grow. But even this community would not remain unchanged. They were challenged to seek deeper humility and more righteousness. These verses describe more than a faithful remnant, they are a transformed people. To underscore how complete this process will be the passage is followed by a section that describes Yahweh as singing over and delighting in his people. This transformed community will not face judgement. They will be secure because Yahweh will be present in their midst (3:15). The remnant will be renowned as their fortunes are restored:

Yahweh clearly relishes His work of salvation. This is apparent when He sings elatedly on restoring His people. This is the only place in the entire Old Testament that refers to a jubilant Yahweh singing over the people He loves. Zephaniah's implication seems to be that Yahweh's ultimate purpose in all the events that will occur on His day is to bring salvation to as many as possible. This is only fitting, for the day of the Lord is a day of salvation.<sup>255</sup>

When will this happen? Are these descriptions of the near or distant future? King argues that the day of Yahweh is both historical and eschatological.<sup>256</sup> VanGemeren writes:

Though the Lord's acts of judgment take place throughout the history of redemption, each act foreshadows the final judgment when all the doers of evil, corruption, and sin will be absolutely and radically judged and removed from the earth (1:3). Each judgment in history is an intrusion of the eschatological judgment, whether on Israel, Judah, or the nations.<sup>257</sup>

For our purposes it is not necessary to determine if these events belong to the near or eschatological future. Suffice it to say that the radical change described indicates that this is a portrait of a new era.

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<sup>251</sup> King, 1994, 420.

<sup>252</sup> King, 1994, 420.

<sup>253</sup> See “A remnant within the walls” above.

<sup>254</sup> House, 1990, 209; He also states that the post-exilic community was the remnant of Zephaniah and Micah. But if that was the case one might ask why they were still struggling to be this “holy remnant.” cf. Floyd, 2000, 235, who writes that the use of Israel indicated that “the new existence of Yahweh's people will not be any mere reconstitution of the state of Judah but rather a re-creation in some new form of the ancient entity that predated the separation of the northern from the southern kingdom.”

<sup>255</sup> King, 1995, 31.

<sup>256</sup> King, 1995, 31-32, cf. Christensen, 1984, 682, who argues that Zephaniah has moved beyond the here and now to eschatology.

<sup>257</sup> VanGemeren, 1990, 175, quoted in King, 1995, 31.

## ***Summary***

“In Zephaniah the prophet is characterized in three ways: interpreter of God’s wrath, proclaimer of worldwide destruction, and herald of coming restoration.”<sup>258</sup> It is a book about God’s judgement and salvation. “Judgment and hope, then, rather than being irreconcilable themes, are two aspects of one divine perspective. Both are designed and intertwined to accomplish God’s purposes.”<sup>259</sup> The remnant theme is located right in the middle of these two great themes. The first chapter proclaims total destruction but there is still a ray of hope. A remnant will be preserved and restored. They will be saved through the judgement of their enemies and the purging of the covenant community. “The book is arranged so that the climax, the concluding note, trumpets the message of salvation. The book builds to a crescendo with the proclamation of salvation in the final verses.”<sup>260</sup> The final section emphasises Yahweh’s delight in the new people he has created, the community he has transformed. The description of judgement in the first chapter described the reversal of creation. At the end of the book Yahweh looks at his new creation and sees that it is indeed very good.

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<sup>258</sup> House, 1990, 198.

<sup>259</sup> Patterson, 2003, 329.

<sup>260</sup> King, 1995, 30.

# Conclusion: the remnant theme in biblical theology

## *Judgement and Salvation*

The theme of the remnant falls between the two theological themes of judgement and salvation. Without either of them there would be no remnant. If the covenant people didn't face judgement they would never be reduced to a remnant. And if God didn't preserve them there would be no one left to constitute a remnant. This is clearly expressed in the beginning of Isaiah: "If Yahweh of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah." (Isa 1:9) The purpose of this section is to show how the remnant theme is interwoven with judgement and salvation.

## *Isaiah*

The first verses of Isaiah present a clear picture. Judgement has been carried out by foreign nations (Isa 1:8). It is the destructive power of that judgement which has reduced the people to a remnant. The first text in Isaiah is connected with salvation (Isa 1:9). The only reason behind their survival as a remnant is Yahweh's preservation. This highlights another theme that is related with the remnant, namely election. They are saved because Yahweh has chosen them to belong to him. That is why they are preserved.

The oracles of judgement continue through the first chapter. The last section of chapter one portrays Zion as a whore that has turned from Yahweh to idols. The consequence of their idolatry is that Yahweh will make them wither and burn like the trees they worshiped. The reader is then faced with an oracle of salvation. The mountain of Yahweh will be restored. Nations will flow to the city in order to hear his word instead of destroying it. This vision of the restored Zion is followed by another section of judgement against Judah, Jerusalem and the nations (Isa 2:6-4:1). This section is in turn followed by yet another oracle of salvation. As we could see in the discussion above Isa 4:2-6 develops the remnant theme. The remnant were created through judgement. The restoration of Zion and the remnant follows in the wake of the judgement portrayed in the previous section. Towards the end of the preceding oracle judgement threatened to swallow everything. But judgement will not be the end. The remnant in Jerusalem will be preserved by Yahweh's grace. He will cleanse them through a spirit of judgement and burning (Isa 4:4). Through a purging (judgement) they will become a transformed community, ready to meet their God.

The same pattern is clearly visible in the next section containing the remnant idea. The complete judgement of 5:8-30 and 6:9-13 will reduce the nation to a tiny remnant. This passage can be differentiated from other passages in Isaiah. The remnant is not a transformed community. They were reduced through judgement but they are still in need of purging.

In the book of Immanuel the remnant plays a vital part. The first occurrence of the theme comes with the introduction of Isaiah's son. He functions as an illustration of Ahaz refusal to trust in Yahweh. A remnant will return to him and be preserved but Ahaz is not part of this remnant. In this section the hope of the remnant is mainly associated with the coming ruler in the line of David. He will replace the line of Ahaz and be a mighty ruler who gives peace to the people. His name "mighty God" connects him with the eschatological remnant (Isa 9:6 [9:7]; 10:21). Assyria will be destroyed and the land of their enemies will be so devastated that even a child can count the remnant of its trees (Isa 10:19). But the eschatological remnant will be preserved. They will be a transformed people who lean on Yahweh their mighty God. The use of this title in this passage indicates that this will happen when the new ruler is born. This remnant will be preserved and avoid the complete judgement which awaits those who do not turn to Yahweh and lean on him (Isa 10:22b-23). They will be saved through a righteous judgement.



In Isa 11:10-16 the remnant theme resurface again. This time the focus is on the gathering of a dispersed people. The dispersion of the remnant presuppose a previous judgement. Through exile they were reduced into a remnant. Now Yahweh will gather them and reunite them (Isa 11:11). And through them Yahweh will bring judgement on their enemies (Isa 11:14-15). The gathering of the remnant is portrayed as a “new exodus” (Isa 11:16). This community will be saved through the judgement of their enemies as the Messiah arrives with a new era.

The next section in Isaiah is the oracles against the nations. When the remnant theme occurs in these it is always connected with judgement. Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria and Kedar will all face judgement. In the first two the theme is used negatively. No remnant will survive, judgement will be complete and therefore there is no hope of salvation. This underscores how the presence of a remnant bridges the themes of judgement and salvation. But the last three oracles contain more hope. A remnant will survive in both Moab and Kedar. But compared with the remnant promised in the salvation oracles above, these remnants are just a shadow unable to give much hope for the future. The remnant of Syria is compared with the olives left on a tree at the end of the harvest. This oracle is more hopeful as it is followed by a promise that there will come a day when mankind will turn from their idols to Yahweh (Isa 17:7-8).

Isa 24 pictures a complete judgement of the earth. Nations will be destroyed and only a remnant will be left. The use of the theme in this section is not as clear as in the previous ones but it shows that the theme is connected with judgement. And perhaps it is also possible to say that it provides some hope for future existence, since the following chapter mentions that Yahweh will make a banquet for all people (Isa 25:6-12). Those who survived the judgement of Isa 24 could be the ones who will take part of this eschatological feast.

The remnant theme appears again in chapter 28. This time the eschatological remnant is contrasted with the fading glory of Ephraim. The northern kingdom was like a flower on a field. But their glory has been destroyed through judgement. But in the future Yahweh will be the glory of the remnant of his people. This oracle looks forward to a time beyond the judgements that the community will face, towards a time when they will be devoted to Yahweh who will reign over them. This remnant will be created through judgement.

In Isa 30:17 and 31:5 the remnant theme is present thematically. Both of these sections emphasise the need for protection. If the people seek help from Egypt or in other foreign alliances they will face destruction. Only a remnant will be left. But if they trust in Yahweh he will provide salvation for them (Isa 31:5).

In Isa 36-39 the remnant theme surface several times. It is primarily used of the refugees who have gathered in Jerusalem. The Assyrian invasion is a judgement from Yahweh on his disobedient people. Through Sennacherib’s invasion he has created a remnant in Jerusalem. Hezekiah prays that Yahweh will save the remnant and Isaiah gives him assurance that the remnant will once again live in the land. This part of Isaiah ends on an ironic note. Hezekiah shows his treasures to Babylonian envoys and is told that these will one day come and plunder Judah. Nothing will be left (יֵתֵר) and the king’s descendants will become eunuchs so that the future of the royal line is endangered.

In Isa 44 the remnant theme is present in a taunt of idol-making. In some ways the making of an idol echoes the previous promises regarding the future remnant. A tree is cut off (like the people), and fashioned into something new (like a new people). The idolater looks to his creation for salvation. But the remnant look to Yahweh their rock and salvation. The deep irony of this passage is that the idolater tries to achieve what God will do through his purging judgement of the people. This passage reminds the reader that the remnant will be saved through a purging judgement.

Yahweh will gather the remnants of foreign nations and exhort them to turn to him so that they will be saved (Isa 45:22-25). Every tongue will swear allegiance to him. They will glory in Yahweh as they are justified. Then the attention is turned on the remnant of the house of Israel (Isa 46:3).

Yahweh is like no other God he will bring salvation to Zion for the remnant of his people (Isa 46:13). They are far from righteousness (Isa 46:12). That is probably why they became a remnant. Salvation is possible because they were preserved. In both these passages judgement and salvation is bridged by the preservation of a remnant.

The end of Isaiah pictures an eschatological judgement. Yahweh will come in glory to judge the whole earth (Isa 66:15-24). At this time he will also take survivors and send them to the far corners of the earth to gather a people for him. Those who survive judgement will worship Yahweh on the new earth (Isa 66:23). This remnant will see his glory and proclaim it.

### *Micah*

Of the three prophets Micah is perhaps the one that most clearly connects the remnant with judgement. This can be clearly seen in the structure of the book. Mic 1:2-2:11 pronounces judgement over the people. This fierce judgement will reduce the nation to a remnant. Therefore the remnant mentioned in the salvation oracle of Mic 2:12-13 have been created through judgement. But Yahweh promises that he will gather the remnant of Israel. Like a good shepherd he will care for them. He will be at their head as they pass through the gate on their way to the pastures (2:12-13). The remnant that was created through judgement will be preserved and saved by their God.

If the second cycle is compared with the first we can notice that the proportions are very different. The oracles of salvation are much longer. But despite this difference it is obvious that judgement is the cause behind the nation's current situation. Zion has been ploughed as a field which leaves a remnant that will be rescued by Yahweh (Mic 4:6-7). This theme of salvation is then developed and expanded in chapters four through five. First the prophet presents a glorious picture of the new and restored Zion. There the remnant will be gathered and Yahweh will reign over them. This first section is filled to bursting with pictures of salvation. There will be no external threats for his people (4:4). The people will be rescued and redeemed from Babylon (4:10). When their enemies gather to destroy the remnant they will be a horn of iron and hoofs of bronze and beat their adversaries to pieces. In all this they will be saved through the judgement of their enemies.

The second part of the salvation oracles (Mic 5:1-15) also contains the remnant. The judgement of chapter three is still implicit in the background. But the second part of this passage also portrays another type of judgement. The remnant will be as lions among other wild animals. They will be Yahweh's tool as he purges the land and execute vengeance on the nations that refused to obey him (Mic 5:8-15). Yahweh will judge his people and make them into a remnant that in turn will be used to judge other nations. The people have suffered under a corrupt leadership. Their hope will be the ruler born in Bethlehem. He will unite the people and shepherd them in the strength of Yahweh and the majesty of his name (Mic 5:3-4). He will bring peace to them and protect them from all their enemies (Mic 5:5-6). He will lead the remnant as they are cleansed and return to Yahweh. Salvation will come to them in two ways. First it will come to them through the judgement of their enemies. But it will also come through the purging of the land (Mic 5:9-15). This process is a judgement that will destroy and remove all the nations idols (horses, chariots, strongholds, sorceries, fortune tellers, carved images or Asherah images). The remnant will be saved through a purging judgement and through the judgement of their enemies.

In the third cycle the theme of judgement returns. It is directed at the wicked. Those who try to deceive their neighbour with false weights or lies (Mic 6:10-13). This cycle presents another picture than the previous two. The remnant that will wait for the God of their salvation. "I will bear the indignation of Yahweh because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgement for me." (Mic 7:9) The prophet is aware that his affliction is deserved. But he also knows that Yahweh will vindicate his faithful people:

The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might;  
they shall lay their hands on their mouths;  
their ears shall be deaf;  
they shall lick the dust like a serpent,  
like the crawling things of the earth;  
they shall come trembling out of their strongholds;  
they shall turn in dread to Yahweh our God,  
and they shall be in fear of you. (Mic 7:16-17)

As Hamilton notes there are several allusions to Genesis 3:14-15 in this section. Yahweh will bring judgement on the peoples and force them to lick the dust. A judgement which echoes the destiny of the serpent.<sup>261</sup> The third cycle emphasise the prophets trust in Yahweh. He will wait for his salvation and vindication. The remnant will once again experience this salvation through judgement in two ways. Their enemies will lick the dust of the ground just like the serpent. Then the prophet reaches the climax of his message. He asks: “who is a God like you” (7:18; מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ cf. מִי־כֶה) The obvious answer is that there is no one. Yahweh pardons the iniquity and passes over the transgressions of his remnant because he delights in steadfast love (7:18). “He will again have compassion on us; he will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” (7:20) Sins, transgressions and all iniquity will be removed. What is interesting with this description is how it is presented. It echoes the judgement which Yahweh brought on the egyptian army at the red sea. The remnant will be saved through the judgement of their enemies and more importantly through the judgement of their sins.

This last section of Micah also highlights the incomparability of God because of his saving actions. Yahweh is glorified as he saves the remnant through judgement. For these actions prove that he is like no other god.

### *Zephaniah*

The difference between Micah and Zephaniah in terms of structure is that the latter only includes one cycle. Both of the books begin with judgement. The first chapter focuses on the coming judgement of Judah and the day of Yahweh. This will not be a minor event. In a way God will de- create what he has made through this judgement (1:2-6).<sup>262</sup> The day of Yahweh is coming. The sound of that day is bitter and it will be a day of wrath, ruin and clouds and it will bring distress on people (1:14-17). This judgement is what paves the way for the creation of the remnant. It is in and through this destruction that a remnant will survive and be forged. Once again we can see how judgement is intimately connected with and is the main cause behind the creation of the remnant. The connection between the remnant and salvation is also present in Zephaniah. Before the specific word is used the prophet proclaims words of hope for the humble of the land who seek Yahweh. From the context it seems reasonable that this group can be identified as a believing remnant. This brings together the themes of judgement and preservation. The nation would not have been reduced to a remnant were it not for judgement. And they would be completely annihilated if God would not preserve them.

In the second chapter judgement surfaces again but in another way. This time Judah is not the target. It will fall on the nation’s enemies. This will result in the rise of the remnant. Through Yahweh’s judgement they will possess the coastlands. When nations are defeated and destroyed the remnant will gather the spoil. If the first judgement functioned as a tool to reduce the people into a

<sup>261</sup> Hamilton, 2010, 250.

<sup>262</sup> Hamilton, 2010, 253.

remnant this second judgement will vindicate them over their enemies. The first oracle in which the remnant is mentioned includes a promise of salvation. They will be restored and Yahweh will shepherd them in the land of their enemies. Salvation will come through the destruction of their enemies. Here the prophet once again point out that salvation will come through judgement of the nations.

The beginning of the third chapter functions as an interlude (3:1-8). The prophet describes the moral decay within the city. And it puts the threatened judgement into perspective. “I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept my correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all I have appointed against you.’ But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt.” (3:8 ESV) The judgement that has been threatened is Yahweh’s correction. But neither Judah nor the nations are willing to fear him. This rebellion will really lead to devastation as 3:8 proclaims the consequences:

“Therefore wait for me,” declares Yahweh, “for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.

All hope is not lost. At this time the remnant will be vindicated and the oppressors will face judgement when Zion is restored (3:19). The last oracle of salvation in Zephaniah develop these thoughts further. When Yahweh acts the world will be turned upside down. He will bring salvation by transforming people from beyond the rivers of Cush. The enemies of the nation will be changed. Their speech will be purified and they will call upon Yahweh, worshiping him (3:9-10). Salvation will then come through transformation of the nations and the remnant. This transformative process includes the removal of the proud and exultant ones. Only the humble and lowly will be part of the remnant. They will receive a total moral makeover that changes their deeds and words (3:11-13). This transformation and purging of the community and the nations will result in salvation. No one will frighten the remnant as they lie down and graze, protected by Yahweh, their shepherd. The last section of Zephaniah urges the people to sing and shout. For “Yahweh has taken away the judgements against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.” (3:15) His presence means all the difference. Reproach and shame will disappear and oppressors will be dealt with (3:18-19). Sorrow will be replaced by joy when Yahweh arrives in the midst of his people transforming and purging them. This section emphasise the centrality of Yahweh. He is “a mighty one who will save” (3:17). We can see how Zephaniah brings together moral transformation of the community and judgement of their enemies as the primary means of salvation. In Zephaniah salvation comes through judgement and transformation. And ultimately this is for the glory of Yahweh as the song of praise indicates.

### *Salvation through judgement: a formulation of a greater theme*

As the above section showed the remnant theme is interwoven with the themes of salvation and judgement. The judgements pronounced in these texts can be divided into two categories. To the first category belong judgements directed towards the covenant people. This type of judgement always decimates the community into a remnant. The second category consists of judgements directed against the enemies of the covenant people. In most cases they are people but in Micah’s last section, sins and transgressions are also judged. This second type of judgement works salvation for the remnant community. Following the judgement of their enemies the remnant is usually restored, both materially, morally and spiritually. In a sense that is really what causes them to remain as a remnant. Yahweh has been merciful and preserved a small group. But if he didn’t restore them they would just walk towards yet another judgement.

The theme of the remnant is placed between these two great themes. In Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah it is clear that Yahweh is glorified as he creates a remnant through judgement of the covenant community and their enemies. Through this process he saves and refashions the remnant into a people who obey him and praises his name.<sup>263</sup>

It is really important to note the structure of the three prophetic books, especially Micah and Zephaniah. Both of these end in a way that points to Yahweh. What Yahweh will do for his people cannot be compared with anything that any pagan god has done. Therefore his actions will ultimately bring him glory. In the last chapter of Isaiah the prophet declares:

For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors [פְּלִיטִים] to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. (Isa 66:18-19 ESV)

It is safe to say that Yahweh's glory is central in the book of Isaiah. More than a fifth of all occurrences of כְּבוֹד in the OT can be found in Isaiah. Through all of Yahweh's actions his glory will be known, including his preservation and restoration of the remnant.

In summary it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that the remnant theme works as a bridge or a hinge to help the prophets to express and clarify the greater theme of God's glory in salvation through judgement. In that sense the remnant theme is not an isolated theme. It stands as a subordinate theme right at the centre of biblical theology.

### ***The remnant as the messianic community of the eschatological age***

We have seen that the remnant terminology can be used of different groups. In several of the passages studied above the remnant can be associated with a messianic king or ruler (Isa 4:2-6; 10:20-23; 11:10-16; Mic 5:7-15). From these pericopes it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that the remnant will be the messianic community. It is interesting to note that Mulzac reached a similar conclusion in his study of the remnant theme in Jeremiah:

Yahweh's regathering is described in terms of a "New Exodus," the scope and magnitude of which points in an eschatological direction. Further, this new Exodus of the remnant places it in connection with the New Covenant. Since the first Exodus was ratified by the covenant at Sinai so too must the new Exodus be ratified by the New Covenant. Therefore, God is establishing a new community comprised of the regathered remnant, placed under new leadership and the principles of the New Covenant.<sup>264</sup>

When the Messiah comes a remnant will grow and they will be ruled by him. It seems like none of these two entities can exist without the other. Without the remnant the Messiah will have no one to rule and without him they will lose their direction. "The remnant, therefore are the recipients of the New Covenant and the new relationship."<sup>265</sup> In short, the remnant theme is used to express the hope of salvation in an eschatological future, under the leadership of the Messiah, after the coming judgement. This is one of the more important uses of the theme in Isaiah and Micah.

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<sup>263</sup> Cf. Mulzac, 1997, 373, who writes that the theme "functions as the bridge between disaster and salvation. It is a constituent element in the emphasis on judgement and salvation. However, because of the attention of the divine initiative in saving the remnant, the focus is placed on salvation and not doom."

<sup>264</sup> Mulzac, 1997, 374; cf. the discussion above regarding Mic 7:18-20 which also pictures a "new exodus."

<sup>265</sup> Mulzac, 1997, 375.

Several of the oracles studied above are connected with a new eschatological age but they lack any reference to the Messiah (Isa 28:1-6; Mic 4:6-7; 7:12-20; Zeph 3:9-13). It could therefore be argued that these oracles should be placed in a different category. But eschatological oracles in the prophetic literature are seldom exhaustive and paint only part of the picture. From a canonical perspective it is reasonable to conclude that they point to the same future but with a slightly different emphasis.

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