

WILLIAM D. BARKER

Isaiah's Kingship Polemic

Forschungen
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70

Mohr Siebeck

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70



William D. Barker

Isaiah's Kingship Polemic

An Exegetical Study in Isaiah 24-27

Mohr Siebeck

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Abbreviations

In addition to the standard abbreviations referenced in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, the following abbreviations are used:

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AHw	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> , 3 vols.
AIL	Ancient Israel and its Literature Series
AJBA	<i>Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology</i>
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
ÄZ	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i> , 78 vols.
BA	Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BMDAE	<i>British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt</i>
BZRGG	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte
CAD	<i>Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
COS, vol. 1	<i>The Context of Scripture, Vol. 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World</i>
COS, vol. 2	<i>The Context of Scripture, Vol. 2: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World</i>
COS, vol. 3	<i>The Context of Scripture, Vol. 3: Archival Documents from the Biblical World</i>
CTBTBM	<i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</i> , Parts 1-52
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> (2 nd ed.)
JTS NS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> , New Series
KAI	Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften, 3 vols.
LAdPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LdA	<i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i>
P.Oxy	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
PSJCO	Princeton Symposium on Jewish and Christian Origins
RIME	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RSP	<i>Ras Shamra Parallels</i>
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>

Chapter 1

A Consensus without Sufficient Conclusions: Isaiah 24-27 in Recent Research

It probably remains true that writers on most of the critical questions involved may still be divided into two groups: those who differ from each other and those who hesitate to commit themselves.

G.W. Anderson, "Isaiah XXIV-XXVII Reconsidered"

There continues to be widespread disagreement over such basic matters...Until these and other issues are resolved, not only will the alleged association between Isa. 24-27 and the origin of apocalyptic continue to be purely speculative, but also a significant portion of scripture will remain lost to the church and synagogue...Yet there appears to be a convergence of viewpoints in several crucial areas.

Dan Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*

The grand irony within recent interpretations of Isaiah 24-27 is that the most often repeated epithets for the chapters – i.e. the “Little Apocalypse” or “Isaiah’s Apocalypse” – are also the most misleading characterisations. Occasionally these titles are substituted for one that is slightly more accurate but just as unhelpful, since it is so vacuous: the “so-called Little Apocalypse”. These appellations, or minor variations of them, are employed so frequently to describe Isa. 24-27 that they have become like stock phrases for contemporary commentators: when introducing a discussion of the chapters, or when in doubt about how to refer to them, commentators simply employ one of these titles. Sadly, the epithets have no basis in reality, as Isa. 24-27 is not apocalyptic in form or function. Further, this has been widely recognised for some time.¹

¹ The most common example of this recognition may be seen in the frequent refrain of commentators describing Isaiah 24-27 as “the so-called Little Apocalypse” or “the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse”; for example, see Brian Doyle, *The Apocalypse of Isaiah Metaphorically Speaking: A Study of the Use, Function, and Significance of Metaphors in Isaiah 24-27* (BETL 151; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), p. 2; and H.G.M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah’s Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 156. Further, Gary V. Smith has identified and described four different schools of thought on the genre of Isaiah 24-27; see Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39* (NAC 15A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), pp. 407-408. Finally, some have characterised Isaiah 24-27 as being “(mis-)labeled as the ‘Isaiah Apocalypse’” or noted that “the earlier assignment of Isaiah 24-27 to the Hellenistic genre of apocalyptic has now been widely recognised as faulty”; see J.

The persistence in speaking about these chapters in such delusory ways reflects an important aspect of their history of interpretation. For well over a century there has been extensive disagreement about the nature and meaning of Isa. 24-27. No single interpretation of these chapters has received enough widespread scholarly support to supplant the old conceptions about them. Without a new, prevailing accord about the chapters, it seems we are condemned to repeat the old epithets – inaccurate and misleading at their worst, and vague at their best – time and again.

Johnson has articulated a few points of scholarly agreement about Isa. 24-27.² While it does appear from time to time that a consensus is developing on certain issues (such as those outlined by Johnson), such agreements have still not been met with universal acceptance, and even when they are met with broad approval, they still fail to answer many questions about the chapters. Doyle's assessment appreciates the movement towards consensus, but also notes that a number of weighty issues remain unresolved:

A clear progression can be discerned from viewing Isa 24-27 as a unique, highly fragmentary, haphazardly placed collection to a well-integrated, internally unified, albeit still unique complex. This has been evident in the various studies which approach the history of the redaction of these chapters in one way or another. Recent broad consensus, however, has given rise to a variety of studies which focus on the present structure and structural principles of Isa 24-27...Thus, while we can agree with Johnson [about areas of scholarly agreement on Isa. 24-27]...this study...proposes to seek answers to unsettled questions.³

Indeed there are a number of “unsettled questions” that remain, and there are also a number of questions that Johnson's points of consensus do not mention at all. Thus, if it can be said there is a consensus, it remains a consensus without sufficient conclusions for a complete and cohesive interpretation of Isa. 24-27.

Having noted these difficulties generally, we shall cite some specific areas of scholarly agreement on Isa. 24-27 and also discuss the particular issues that remain unresolved. However, first we shall briefly turn our attention to the fragmented history of interpreting Isa. 24-27. The most significant areas of debate can be classified according to unity, historical background and date of composition, and genre.

Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, “Introduction”, in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27* (AIL 17; eds. J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), pp. 1-6 (1); and Christopher B. Hays, “The Date and Message of Isaiah 24-27 in Light of Hebrew Diachrony”, in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27* (AIL 17; eds. J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), pp. 7-24 (9).

² For example, see Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24-27* (JSOTSup 61; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 16-17.

³ Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, pp. 23, 45.

A. Unity

On the one hand, there is an impetus to assign dates to select verses or passages and classify the various segments within the chapters as independent units that were eventually deposited into the same pseudo-Isaianic receptacle. As a result, adherents of this view claim the section has few, if any, significant interpretive connections between its various internal parts. On the other hand, there is a tendency to understand Isa. 24-27 as a basically unified, literary and theological unit. Within this second group, there is a further subdivision between those who support the view that Isa. 24-27 was composed as a unit and those who advocate the position that the chapters represent layers of redaction and editing, but that their final form is that of a coherent and thoroughly integrated unit.

Two of the most ardent supporters of the “disunity” of Isaiah 24-27 are Wildberger and O. Kaiser.⁴ Both commentators acknowledge their indebtedness to Rudolph and Plöger. Both Kaiser and Wildberger argue that Isa. 24-27 reached its final form after centuries of composition and many layers of redaction.⁵ Wildberger and several others offer a brief history of interpreting the chapters on the basis of disunity, such that we need not recapitulate their efforts here.⁶

More recently, many commentators have begun to regard Isaiah 24-27 as a unified composition. Among those advocating or presupposing interpretations on the basis of unity are Anderson, Watts, Oswalt, Johnson, Seitz and Doyle.⁷ This does not mean that there is a monolithic view on this issue, and, as was noted above, there remain a number of disagreements about authorship, setting and the history of redaction. However, there is a current trajectory of understanding Isa. 24-27 as more of a literary and theological unity, originally com-

⁴ Hans Wildberger, *Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament: Jesaja 13-27* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), pp. 893-905, 910-911 and Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja. Kapitel 13-39* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), pp. 141-145.

⁵ O. Kaiser, *Jesaja 13-39*, pp. 144-145; Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27*, pp. 910-911; see also Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jesaja 24-27* (BWANT 62; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), §64.

⁶ Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27*, pp. 893-905; see also especially Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, pp. 13-24; Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*, pp. 14-15; and Ryo Itoh, *Literary and Linguistic Approach to Isaiah 24-27* (PhD Dissertation, Trinity International University, 1995; Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1996), pp. 4-8, 14-24.

⁷ G.W. Anderson, “Isaiah XXIV-XXVII Reconsidered”, in *Congress Volume, Bonn 1962* (SVT 9; eds. G.W. Anderson, *et al.*; Leiden: Brill, 1963), pp. 118-126 (120, 122-123, 126); John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 311; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 441-443; Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*, pp. 14-15; Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), pp. 172-179; Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, pp. 23, 45; cf. the argument in favour of the unity of Isa. 26:13-27:11 proffered by John Day, “The Dependence of Isaiah 26:13-27:11 on Hosea 13:4-14:10 and its Relevance to Some Theories of the Redaction of the ‘Isaiah Apocalypse’”, in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, 2 vols. (SVT 70; Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 1; eds. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 357-368 (366-368).

posed as such, rather than as a relatively disjointed collocation of hymns and oracles.

B. Historical Background and Date of Composition

The effort to determine the date and historical background of Isaiah 24-27 has been, and continues to be, at the centre of most of the disagreements about the interpretation of the chapters. Certain themes and topics have driven the debates about the historical setting more than others. The most frequently cited include:

1. the perspective of Isa. 24-27 (i.e. whether there is a present or future orientation and whether the judgement is local or universal);
2. the date and the purpose of the explicit reference to Moab in 25:10-12;
3. the date and the purpose of possible references to resurrection in 25:8 and 26:19;
4. the specific identity of the city or cities in chapters 24-26; and,
5. the genre of Isa. 24-27 (i.e. apocalyptic, proto-apocalyptic or other).

Remarkably, one group of scholars or another has supported an historical background for Isaiah 24-27 from every century from the 8th to the 2nd B.C.⁸ As demonstrated by the Table below, scholarship on this issue has long been fractured, and this area of investigation remains particularly divisive among scholars. Even in attempting to chart the various proposals for seven different possible centuries of authorship and historical background, objections may be raised. This is because, undoubtedly, some “supporting commentators” of the various viewpoints would want to nuance their positions in much greater detail. One foresees some of those in support of a date for authorship between the eighth and sixth centuries, (perhaps) wanting to clarify that there were some later editorial influences, while those in all of the remaining camps may (or may not) wish to add their recognition of a genuine, “eighth century B.C.E. Isaiah substratum”.⁹ Such clarifications would only serve to heighten the number of differing viewpoints on this matter.

⁸ See especially the list by Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, pp. 30-37; Anderson, “Isaiah XXIV-XXVII Reconsidered”, pp. 118, *fn.* 3; 119, *fn.* 1-2; 125; F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 345; J. Eaton, “The Origin of the Book of Isaiah”, *VT* 9 (1959), pp. 138-157 (151); Itoh, *Literary and Linguistic*, pp. 4-24; William R. Millar, *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (HSM 11; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 1; John F.A. Sawyer, *Isaiah, Volume 1* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), p. 204; Hays, “The Date and Message of Isaiah 24-27”, pp. 9-11, 23.

⁹ J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (ABC 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 74.

Table 1: Disagreement about the Date and Historical Background of Isa. 24-27

<u>Century Proposed</u>	<u>Some Examples of Supporting Commentators</u>
8 th Century	M.A. Beek; F. Delitzsch; J.H. Hayes; S.A. Irvine; E.J. Kissane; R. Lowth; C.W.E. Nägelsbach; J.N. Oswalt; G.R. Robinson; G.V. Smith; E.J. Young; A.H. van Zyl
7 th Century	F. Bleek; H. Grätz; C. Hays
6 th Century	F.M. Cross; S.R. Driver; W. Gesenius; P. Hanson; F. Hitzig; E. König; W.E. March; W.R. Millar; E.W.E. Reuss; G.A. Smith; W.M.L. de Wette
5 th Century	G.A. Anderson; G. Fohrer; J. Lindbloom; H. Ringgren; J.D.W. Watts
4 th Century	T.K. Cheyne; R. Smend
3 rd Century	O. Plöger; O. Procksch
2 nd Century	B. Duhm; O. Ludwig
Multiple Centuries of Authorship & Redaction	H. Barth; R.E. Clements; W. Holladay; O. Kaiser; J.F.A. Sawyer; M.A. Sweeney; J. Vermelyen; R.N. Whybray; H.G.M. Williamson

However, in spite of all this, it has been increasingly recognised that Isaiah 24-27 has “an earlier rather than a later dating and a future rather than apocalyptic orientation”.¹⁰ The majority of scholars on Isa. 24-27 either support an eighth or sixth century date or they favour multiple centuries of authorship and redaction, including a growing recognition of “early traditions” going back as far as the eighth century.¹¹ Roughly five decades ago, G.W. Anderson was moving in this direction when he argued:

...in these chapters we have a composition which, with all its variety, is essentially a unity, reflecting and addressed to a particular situation, to be assigned to the earlier rather than to the later post-exilic period, a writing which is prophetic rather than apocalyptic in character...¹²

Such an understanding is partially owing to the Qumran discoveries ruling out 2nd century historical settings. It also seems to be a part of recognising the internal unity of the chapters and, as Anderson noted, attempting to more accurately define their genre.

¹⁰ Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, p. 45.

¹¹ In addition to the scholars noted in Table 1 as supporting eighth century authorship, commentators acknowledging at least portions of an eighth century tradition underlying later redaction and editing include Blenkinsopp, Seitz and Williamson among others; see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 74; Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, pp. 1-29, 240-244; and Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 4.

¹² Anderson, “Isaiah XXIV-XXVII Reconsidered”, p. 126.

C. Genre

The first scholar to classify Isaiah 24-27 as “apocalyptic” was Duhm.¹³ Since then, many scholars have assumed that the chapters are apocalyptic without explicitly discussing the issue of genre.¹⁴ Brueggemann and the “Dutch Isaiah Workshop” are currently proponents of this view.¹⁵ However, there has also been significant debate as to whether the genre of Isa. 24-27 is truly apocalyptic, “early apocalyptic” or prophetic in nature. Still others have understood the chapters to be a combination of apocalyptic sections combined with “liturgy”, songs and/or prophecy. Among the most notable adherents of this latter view are O. Proksch, J. Lindblom, O. Kaiser, J. Vermeylen and B.S. Childs.¹⁶ Such analyses and the ensuing discussions are also impacted significantly by the varying ways in which scholars define these terms.

As the debate about the genre of Isaiah 24-27 developed, it became increasingly clear that not everyone defined the “apocalyptic” genre and “apocalypse” in the same way. Consequently, a number of publications, each providing varying definitions of “apocalyptic” and “apocalypse” have been proffered.¹⁷ Klaus Koch deduced six common features of the apocalyptic genre but all of these are not always present in every “apocalypse”.¹⁸ This makes Koch’s analysis useful as a starting point for research, but not as a broadly applicable criteria for identifying a genuine “apocalypse”. John Collins, on the other hand, offers a definition that can be applied to discern every case of an “apocalypse”:

¹³ B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), pp. 172-194.

¹⁴ For example, George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), pp. 397-463.

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 188; Henrik Jan Bosman, et al., *Studies in Isaiah 24-27: The Isaiah Workshop (De Jesaja Werkplaats)* (OTS 43; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹⁶ Itoh, *Literary and Linguistic*, pp. 6-10, 18-19; Kaiser, *Jesaja 13-39*, pp. 141-145; Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 173.

¹⁷ For example, see John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979); Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982); David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983); John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, eds., *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and their Relationships* (JSPSup 46; London: T&T Clark International, 2003).

¹⁸ Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A Polemical Work on a Neglected Area of Biblical Studies and Its Damaging Effects on Theology and Philosophy* (Studies in Biblical Theology 22; London: SCM Press, 1972), pp. 23-28. For a helpful analysis of Koch’s views and their role in the development of definitions for “apocalyptic”, see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 1-9, 12-13, 21-22.

An apocalypse is defined as: “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”¹⁹

Under this rubric, it becomes very difficult (indeed, somewhat impossible) to define Isaiah 24-27 as an “apocalypse”. First, there is no “otherworldly being” (nor is there an assumption of one) communicating the message to a human recipient. Rather, there is a prophetic oracle communicated from the prophet to an ethnic/national group (and, in content of message, to a more universal audience, as well). There is no description of a supernatural, spiritual, or otherwise “otherworldly being” sent to deliver this message to the prophet.

Secondly, Isaiah 24-27 does not include references to “another, supernatural world” in the way that such terminology is usually applied to indicate a more celestial or otherwise spiritualised domain. There are references concerning divine involvement, namely with respect to the temporal aspect of “on that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) and the spatial aspect of YHWH engaged in actions “upon this mountain” (בְּהַר הַזֶּה). However, neither of these are references to “another, supernatural world” as much as references to judgement upon this earth, its peoples, and its nations (e.g. Isa. 24:1, 2-6, 13-20; 25:10-12; 26:21; 27:6-13). In this regard, even the removal of death (Isa. 25:6-8) would have little meaning unless it was an occurrence within this world rather than within a separate, supernatural one. Further, the locus of YHWH’s mountain abode is in the context of involvement within the span of human history – it is defined as a

¹⁹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 4-5. Note that this definition is similar to the one proposed by Paul Hanson insofar as such elements as the “ecstasy” of the “seer”, various mediums of the revelatory vision, and the seer’s “response of awe”; see Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 430. In spite of his own definition of the apocalyptic genre, however, Hanson appears to classify Isa. 24-27 as apocalyptic (or “early apocalyptic”) in genre; see Paul D. Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 93-107; cf. Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, p. 313. Finally, it should be noted that Hanson carefully distinguishes between “the genre *apocalypse*, the perspective of *apocalyptic eschatology*, and the type of religious movement we call *apocalypticism*”; see Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, p. 429. This is a helpful distinction between genre and movement. However, the issue of “perspective” is more difficult because it appears that Hanson considers any non-political or extra-historical prophetic message with a future orientation as coming from an “apocalyptic perspective”; see Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, pp. 11-12. In this regard it may be said that, by Hanson’s definition, Isa. 24-27 is not apocalyptic in genre but it is apocalyptic eschatology in its perspective. Yet this remains somewhat unhelpful in that it merely indicates a non-political/extra-historical prophetic message (or one not delivered to a political or national entity) that has a futuristic orientation. By using the “apocalyptic” terminology for this “perspective” it seems to misleadingly indicate other features beyond the merely non-political or extra-historical; cf. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 9.

future rule from Mt. Zion in Jerusalem (Isa. 24:23) with implications that are both global (e.g. Isa. 24:1-20; 25:6-8) as well as national (e.g. 26:1, 15).

Isaiah 24-27, then, cannot be labelled “apocalyptic” in genre. Isaiah 24-27 represents an oracle about a future divine in-breaking into human history, not a vision of a reality outside of human existence. Themes of universal judgement are present, but those themes alone do not justify an “apocalyptic” label unless one redefines “apocalyptic” as merely or solely meaning “universal judgement” (which we have not done and is surely not the case that scholars are advocating).

Otto Plöger was the first scholar to consider parts of Isaiah 24-27 to be “early apocalyptic”.²⁰ Hanson also categorised the chapters as “early apocalyptic”.²¹ Millar refers to Isa. 24-27 as “proto-apocalyptic”, but without any precision as to how such terminology differs from “early apocalyptic”. In fact, Millar mentions the need for a discussion of the terms “proto-, early- and middle-apocalyptic” but does not define any of these designations before categorising Isa. 24-27.²² F.M. Cross, Doyle and Polaski have each continued to support the notion of “proto-apocalyptic” material in Isa. 24-27.²³

Like the criteria for defining the “apocalyptic” genre, the definition of “early apocalyptic” may vary from scholar to scholar. However, it seems the phrase can best be described as meaning “an eschatological message...advanced even further toward full-blown apocalyptic”.²⁴ Out of such a vague characterisation, one is led to believe that the “early apocalyptic” designation might be termed a mitigated approach to the genre of passages such as Isaiah 24-27. In other words, commentators (such as Plöger and Hanson) have recognised such passages as not being genuinely “apocalyptic” in genre but as hypothetically being representative of “earlier traces of apocalyptic eschatology”.²⁵ Yet, these scholars also seem unwilling to fully define the passages as solely or thoroughly “prophetic” in genre. As a result, the “early apocalyptic” genre emerges as a “middle ground” option, not fully embracing either the apocalyptic or the prophetic genres for passages such as Isa. 24-27. Thus, if what is meant by “early apocalyptic” is a passage with some recognisable though not comprehensive features of other, later genres, then it can be said that “early apocalyptic” is the genre of Isaiah 24-27. However, it must be recognised that such a demarcation is not really describing a “distinguishable type of writing

²⁰ Otto Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology* (tr. S. Rudman; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), pp. 53-78.

²¹ Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, p. 313.

²² Millar, *Isaiah 24-27*, p. 114.

²³ Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, pp. 24-27; Donald C. Polaski, *Authorizing an End: The Isaiah Apocalypse and Intertextuality* (Biblical Interpretation Series 50; Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 62-63.

²⁴ Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, p. 313.

²⁵ Millar, *Isaiah 24-27*, p. 4; Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, p. 313.

or speech...operat[ing] within certain conventions".²⁶ Rather, such delineations are an analysis of the passage's aetiological function in the development of a different genre. This can no more be said to be a legitimate "genre" than perhaps describing other passages as "proto-wisdom literature".²⁷ This does not mean that the recognition of the passage as a precursor to later passages in style and function is inaccurate, it merely indicates that such analyses of the passage's hypothetical use in the development of later genre types are not in and of themselves a "genre" if we understand "genre" in the typical sense of the term.²⁸ Consequently, it seems best to avoid use of the "early apocalyptic" genre (or sub-genre) designation altogether.

Finally, we must turn our attention to the prophetic genre. Gene M. Tucker noted that "the consistent features that define the genre are the presentation of a communication from God announcing future events".²⁹ Although possibly open to the charge that such a definition is too broadly encompassing, this denotation is appropriate because it allows for the recognised variety of forms and literary classifications of "prophecy". To offer a more narrow definition of the "prophetic" genre, such as that of "oracle", would overlook such issues as defining a "vision", and both would ignore tensions in prophecy between narrative and poetry. At the same time, it must be said that the genre of prophecy is in some way meant to be the communication of a divine message with a futuristic orientation. Consequently, Tucker's view of prophecy can be accepted. Within this paradigm, Isaiah 24-27 is prophetic in nature.

In the light of these considerations and Collins' criteria for "apocalyptic", one might say that a nearly "universal" consensus has emerged: Isaiah 24-27 is decidedly *not* apocalyptic, but rather prophetic. Among the adherents of a non-apocalyptic but rather prophetic view of Isa. 24-27 are G. Fohrer, A.A. Anderson, A.S. Herbert, J.F.A. Sawyer, J. Oswalt, J.D.W. Watts, D.G. Johnson, N. Skjoldal, R. Itoh, M.A. Sweeney and J. Blenkinsopp.³⁰

²⁶ On this definition of genre, see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament, Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 16-17.

²⁷ Ironically, here one might think of the proposals of von Rad regarding wisdom literature, rather than prophetic literature, as the source from which the later apocalyptic genre was derived; see G. von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. II* (OTL; tr. D.M.G. Stalker; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1965), pp. 303-308.

²⁸ In other words, this means understanding "genre" as a specific type of literature, having specific characteristics and functions, and conforming to particular conventions.

²⁹ Gene M. Tucker, "Prophecy and the Prophetic Literature", in *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters* (eds. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 325-388 (337).

³⁰ Anderson, "Isaiah XXIV-XXVII Reconsidered", pp. 122-123, 126; A.S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 143-146; Sawyer, *Isaiah*, p. 204; John N. Oswalt, "Recent Studies in Old Testament Eschatology and Apocalyptic", *JETS* 24 (1981), pp. 289-301; idem, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 440-441; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, p. 310; Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*, p. 100; Neil O. Skjoldal, "The

D. A New Consensus for Interpreting Isaiah 24-27

We have referred to certain elements of the study of Isaiah 24-27 about which there are some areas of agreement. Whether or not we can term these the early stages of a “new consensus” about the study of Isa. 24-27 remains to be seen. However, we shall now summarise those areas where there seems to be a growing trajectory of agreement:

1. Isa. 24-27 is a literary and theological unity.
2. The date of composition for Isa. 24-27 is earlier than the late dating (i.e. the “late dating” being near to the time of the composition of Daniel) that was previously proposed.
3. The genre of Isa. 24-27 is not apocalyptic; rather, the genre of Isa. 24-27 is prophetic.
4. Designations such as the “Little Apocalypse” or “Isaiah’s Apocalypse” are misleading and must be abandoned. In lieu of a replacement moniker, there seems to be a general resignation to refer to the chapters, rather vacuously and without much conviction, as “the so-called ‘Little Apocalypse’”.
5. The perspective of Isa. 24-27 is futuristic rather than historical.
6. Isa. 24-27 is integrally more connected to the rest of Isa. 1-39 than was previously thought by the early critics. Therefore, greater efforts must be undertaken to understand its function and its location in Isa. 1-39, and, in turn, its relationship to 40-66.³¹

While we acknowledge these broad areas of agreement, as we noted earlier, there are still many unresolved issues for interpreting these chapters. Most disappointingly, there is not any consensus about a complete and cohesive interpretation of the message and function of Isa. 24-27.

Function of Isaiah 24-27”, *JETS* 36 (1993), pp. 163-172; Itoh, *Literary and Linguistic*, pp. 1-24; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 313-316; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 346.

³¹ For evidence of the first five areas of agreement, see Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*, pp. 16-17; Doyle, *Apocalypse of Isaiah*, p. 45; and Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 346-348. On the sixth point, the impetus for such efforts has been made obvious by the comments of many, such as Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 174; Skjoldal, “The Function of Isaiah 24-27”, pp. 163-172; and Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 320-324. Additionally, Itoh offers a review of various scholars’ work in this area during the past two decades; see Itoh, *Literary and Linguistic*, pp. 1-3, 16-24.

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