

Contemporary events: Assyria no threat (30:27–33) – Motyer pp 251-253

This second movement in the section on the faithfulness of the Lord turns from eschatology to imminent history. The parallel ‘woe’ (chapter 28) ended by leaving the future of Jerusalem an open question as the careful farmer harvests each crop according to its individual requirements. Though Judah’s dallying with Egypt (30:1–7) is deeply offensive to the Lord and useless in respect of the Assyrian threat, yet Jerusalem will not fall to Assyria. Rather, the Assyrian king, thundering towards Zion, is in fact climbing his own funeral pyre! The poem is in three seven-line stanzas:

A¹ Divine action: the shaking of the nations (27–28)

B The song and the shout: Judah’s festivity and the Lord’s rage (29–30)

A² Divine action: the overthrow of Asshur and its king (31–33)

Verse 27a, *the name of the LORD* (*šēm yahweh*) and verse 33e, *the breath of the LORD* (*nišmat̄ yahweh*), the first and last lines in the Hebrew, form an inclusio. Anthropomorphisms abound. In the first stanza, the Lord’s *Name*, *anger*, *lips*, *tongue* and *spirit* (NIV, *breath*) are mentioned; in the second, his *voice*, *arm* and *anger*; and in the third, his *voice* and *breath*. There is also a sharing of words. Stanzas one and two both have *consuming fire* and stanzas one and three share *burning*. *Sieve* (28) and *blows of his arms/‘shaking’* (32) are the same root, and *torrent* (28) and *stream* (33) are the same word. Stanzas two and three both have references to musical instruments: *flutes*, *tambourines*, *harps*. Note also how stanza one ends with the Lord as master of history on a universal scale (*nations*, *peoples*) and stanza three with the Lord as master of history on an age-long scale (*long been prepared*). The structure of the poem puts the Lord’s people at the centre of his sovereign rule, the glad recipients of his victory.

Divine action: the shaking of the nations (30:27–28)

This opening stanza makes the fullest use of the sort of anthropomorphic language which marks the whole poem. Its intention is to show the Lord wholly involved in action and reaction in world history and the inevitability of a final moral settlement because of what he is and can do. His *Name* is the summary of his revealed character (Ex. 3:15). He comes as the God who judges his foes and redeems his people. *From afar* is firstly part of the storm motif of the passage (the approaching storm heralds its coming by far-off signals; cf. Ezk. 1:4), but also it suits the note of the long preparation of historical events on which the poem ends (33). *Smoke* and *fire* were exodus symbols of divine presence (Ex. 13:21) and holiness (Ex. 19:18). The Lord acts not arbitrarily but in accordance with what he has said and by his authoritative word. *Breath/‘spirit’* (*rûah*) accords with the storm metaphor and also indicates the mode of divine personal action. *Rushing* is the word translated ‘overwhelming’ in 28:15, 18. 8:8 uses the same symbolic wording, *to the neck*, in connection with the Assyrian invasion. The *sieve of destruction* (*šāw’*, ‘falsehood/worthlessness’; 1:13; 5:18), in which the Lord *shakes/‘sieves’ the nations* is designed to sieve out and expose the false and worthless. The mixture of metaphors—the sieve to discriminate (cf. Am. 9:9) and the bridle to control and direct (cf. 37:29)—is truly Isaianic.

The song and the shout: Judah's festivity and the Lord's rage (30:29–30)

The motif of song typifies, as always, glad entrance into a freely provided deliverance. Here, in the central stanza, the Lord's people rejoice (29) while all the victorious action (30) is his. The prime night festival was Passover, which suits this context with its exodus symbolism of fire and cloud (27) and the reference to the Lord as *the Rock* (Ex. 17:1–7; see on Is. 17:10). The reference to song looks back to Exodus 15:21. *Your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes*/'You will have a song as on the night ... and joy of heart as when ...' refers to no formal religious procession with time-honoured ritual formally observed but to a response of heart, expressing itself in song and music. The Psalms evidence abundant music in the festivals of Israel even though we do not know the shape the ceremonies took. His *majestic voice*/'voice of his majesty' is a voice appropriate to one as majestic as he. *Arm* is the organ of personal strength in action and is an exodus symbol (Ex. 6:6). *Raging* (*za'aḇ*, 'rage of') is from a verb meaning 'to be enraged with or feel bitter against' (2 Ch. 26:19; Pr. 19:3), and hence is expressive of personal animosity. *Anger* (*'aḇ*) is the snorting or outbursting of anger. On *consuming fire*/'flame of consuming fire' cf. Exodus 3:2 where, however, the word is different. For the motif of storm see 28:2, 17. There the hail was punitive of Israel/Judah through an outside foe (the 'strange' use of the divine arsenal; 28:21), here (as in 10:12) the rage turns against the foe as the Lord refuses finally to destroy his people. The strange mixture of lightning ('fire', RV) and hail is found in Exodus 9:23.

Divine action: the overthrow of Asshur and its king (30:31–33)

Verse 31 begins (lit.) 'For by the voice of the Lord Assyria will be shattered'. The concluding stanza explains and applies the poem to the immediate situation. The second line may have the Lord as its subject (as the NIV; so Delitzsch), but Buber is more correct in suggesting a description of Assyria, 'with whom as rod he smote' or, more idiomatically, 'who, as [the Lord's] rod, was smiting'. The vocabulary here is as in 10:5. *His punishing rod* is 'the rod of foundation', i.e. founded for the purpose, a predetermined or predestined rod. The balance between *tambourines and harps* and (lit.) 'battles of shaking or sieving' takes up the balance in verses 29–30 between the song and shout. 'Shaking' makes the Lord's action against Assyria typical of his final settlement with all nations (28).

Verse 33 begins with 'For' as a further explanation, namely, that what is about to happen has long been determined upon. The name *Topheth* (cf. 2 Ki. 23:10; Je. 7:31–32; 19:6, 11, 14) possibly arose from giving the noun *tēḇat* ('fire-place') the vowels of *bōšet* ('shame, disgrace'), resulting in the 'disgraceful burning-place'. Here the Hebrew has the unique form *toḇteh*, which may be an alternative designation. Little did the Assyrians know that their imperial progress to Zion (10:8–11) was their funeral procession with the pyre long since laid! The simple use of the definite article indicates that *the king* refers to the king of Assyria (36:14). For all that he may think of himself as 'the' king, he now meets a greater King than himself, the one whose predetermination built the pyre and whose *breath* will ignite it. *Its fire pit has been made* is 'he [the Lord] has made its fire pit'.¹

¹ J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 251–253.

1. Find the inclusio phrases

Inclusio is a literary device that repeats words or themes at the beginning and end of a section. The repetition brackets the section.

2. Find the Anthropomorphisms

Anthropomorphism refers to descriptions of God's being, actions and emotions in human terms.

3. Discuss different metaphors seen in the verses

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable

4. Highlight the phrases of overwhelming power

5. Highlight elements associated with time

6. Highlight elements associated with music

7. Review verse 33 and discuss the symbolism and graphic nature of the verse...

27 Behold, the name of the Lord comes from a remote place;

Burning is His anger and dense is His smoke;

His lips are filled with indignation

And His tongue is like a consuming fire;

28 His breath is like an overflowing torrent,

Which reaches to the neck,

To shake the nations back and forth in a sieve,

And to put in the jaws of the peoples the bridle which leads to ruin.

29 You will have songs as in the night when you keep the festival,

And gladness of heart as when one marches to the sound of the flute,

To go to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel.

30 And the Lord will cause His voice of authority to be heard,

And the descending of His arm to be seen in fierce anger,

And in the flame of a consuming fire

In cloudburst, downpour and hailstones.

31 For at the voice of the Lord Assyria will be terrified,

When He strikes with the rod.

32 And every blow of the rod of punishment,

Which the Lord will lay on him,

Will be with the music of tambourines and lyres;

And in battles, brandishing weapons, He will fight them.

33 For Topheth has long been ready,

Indeed, it has been prepared for the king.

He has made it deep and large,

A pyre of fire with plenty of wood;

The breath of the Lord, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire.