

ISAIAH 1:26

A NEGLECTED TEXT ON KINGSHIP

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Summary

In recent studies of the theme of kingship in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 1:26 has been neglected. This article seeks to demonstrate that this text is relevant to the theme. The future of leadership within the city of Jerusalem-Zion as forecast in Isaiah 1:26 is theocratic in shape, with Davidic kingship notably absent. The judges and counsellors spoken of are leaders appointed by YHWH the King and act as judicial officers under him. The setting of Isaiah 1:26 in Isaiah 1, the immediate context of the section 1:21-26, the absence of any mention of kings in Isaiah 2–4, and the portrayal in the first half of Isaiah’s prophecy of Judaeian kingship as a dying institution, all confirm this reading. Isaiah 1:26 is one of a number of texts in the first half of Isaiah that prepare the reader for what would otherwise be a radical shift to an exclusive focus on divine kingship in Isaiah 40–66.

1. Introduction

The current scholarly interest in the unity of the book of Isaiah, a unity variously conceived and explained, is the context within which the present synchronic study is conducted.¹ One aspect of the unity of the

¹ This has been frequently surveyed in recent times, e.g. J. Vermeylen, ‘L’unité du livre d’Isaïe’ in *The Book of Isaiah – Le livre d’Isaïe. Les oracles et leur relectures. Unité et complexité de l’ouvrage*, ed. J. Vermeylen (BETL 81; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1989): 11-27; Rolf Rendtorff, ‘The Book of Isaiah: A Complex Unity. Synchronic and Diachronic Reading’ in *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (JSOTSup 214; Sheffield: SAP, 1996): 32-49; Marvin E. Tate, ‘The Book of Isaiah in Recent Study’ in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House (JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: SAP, 1996): 22-56.

book explored is that of thematic unity,² with many studies highlighting themes that run across the traditional critical boundaries within the book. One such theme is that of kingship. Isaiah 1:26, with its comments on future leadership, comes after an address to rulers ('you rulers of Sodom') in 1:10 and a reference to princes ('your princes') in 1:23. Within a broader indictment of the nation, YHWH takes particular interest in the leadership (vv. 10, 23, 26).³ Verse 26 is followed up by a possible reference to leaders under the figure of 'oaks' (1:29; אֲיָלִים).⁴ This, admittedly, is a minority view among Isaiah commentators. The 'oaks' and 'gardens' are more usually viewed as symbols of an apostate fertility cult, but a reference to deviant cults does not fit the earlier stress on the people's cultic devotion to YHWH (1:10-15). According to Yehoshua Gitay, 'oaks' is a metonymy of trees applied to leaders (both are אֲיָלִים), on whom the people are inclined to rely. The term is applied to 'chief men of the land' in 2 Kings 24:15 and Ezekiel 17:13. On this reading verses 29-31 concentrate on the weakness and collapse of leaders. Leadership among God's people, then, though not actual kingship, is a theme of some prominence in the first chapter of the book of Isaiah, and 1:26 is to be understood in connection with it. It is no doubt due to the fact that 1:26 does not mention kingship as such that it is not usually considered in relation to that theme.⁵ In this article I argue that Isaiah 1:26 is highly

² E.g. H. G. M. Williamson, "'From One Degree of Glory to Another": Themes and Theology in Isaiah' in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, ed. Edward Ball (JSOTSup 300; Sheffield: SAP, 1999): 174-95; Richard J. Clifford, 'The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language', *CBQ* 55 (1993): 1-17; R. E. Clements, 'A Light to the Nations: A Central Theme of the Book of Isaiah' in *Forming Prophetic Literature*, 57-69.

³ Noted also by Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox, 1993): 33.

⁴ See Yehoshua Gitay, *Isaiah and His Audience: The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah 1-12* (SSN 30; Assen/Maastricht: van Gorcum, 1991): 48.

⁵ E.g. J. Coppens, *Le messianisme royal: Ses origines, son développement, son accomplissement* (Lectio Divina 54; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968): ch. 3; Klaus Seybold, *Das davidische Königtum im Zeugnis der Propheten* (FRLANT 107; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972): 66-162; Antti Laato, *Who Is Immanuel? The Rise and the Foundering of Isaiah's Messianic Expectations* (Åbo Akademi Dissertation; Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 1988); H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998); Christopher R. Seitz, 'Royal Promises in the Canonical Books of Isaiah and the Psalms' in *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 150-167; Paul D. Wegner, *An Examination of Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical

relevant to the theme of kingship in the book of Isaiah and that the non-mention of human kingship in Isaiah chapter 1 is a significant silence.

2. The Theme of Kingship in Isaiah

In an article in which P. R. Ackroyd acknowledges the ‘very wide range of themes handled’ in Isaiah,⁶ that of kingship is the first theme dealt with, albeit in brief compass, but the survey is sufficient to reveal a ‘variety of possibilities’ on offer in the book,⁷ making thematic unity difficult. There are in Isaiah texts that look to the future in which an ideal Davidic ruler will exercise authority (9:6-7 [Heb. 5–6]; 11:2-4; 16:5),⁸ but others in which royal realities are to be expressed through the community (55:3). In the second half of the prophecy, the word ‘king’ (מֶלֶךְ) is not applied to an Israelite. The only kings within chapters 40–55 are *foreign* kings (41:2; 45:1; 49:7, 23; 52:15)⁹ or YHWH himself, and there is no reason to think that the chapters look forward to a Davidic revival. An almost exclusive emphasis is placed upon YHWH as king: ‘says the King of Jacob’ (41:21); ‘I am YHWH, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King’ (43:15); ‘the King of Israel’ (44:6); and finally ‘who says to Zion, “Your God reigns”’ (52:7).¹⁰ It appears that the latter chapters of Isaiah have no place for a human (Davidic) king.¹¹ It is not hard, then, to understand why the theme of kingship is not one that comes in for mention when the topic

Press, 1992). Joachim Becker (*Isaiahs – der Prophet und sein Buch* [SBS 30; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968]) pioneered the redaction-criticism of Isaiah as a whole and argued for a theocratic tendency in the redaction. Isaiah 1:26 receives only passing mention by Becker on p. 46. According to Becker, the verse was left unchanged by the redactor, who added vv. 27-28.

⁶ P. R. Ackroyd, ‘Theological Reflections on the Book of Isaiah: Three Interrelated Studies: Theology of a Book’, *King’s Theological Review* 4 (1981): 56.

⁷ Ackroyd, ‘Theology of a Book’, 59.

⁸ In a future article I hope to deal with these three passages, but to anticipate that fuller discussion, there is in each the prediction of a future Davidic ruler, though with clear emphasis on divine initiative and achievement. The Davidic figure is depicted as the chief judicial officer in YHWH’s kingdom.

⁹ Cf. Isa. 60:3, 11, 16; 62:2.

¹⁰ Joachim Becker, *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980; tr. David E. Green): 52: ‘It is impossible to resist the impression that Yahweh is introduced as king of Israel in a way that leaves no room for an earthly monarch, of which in fact there is no mention’.

¹¹ Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*, 10.

is the thematic *unity* of Isaiah. Scholarly studies of kingship in Isaiah to date reveal contrasts more than continuities.

3. Isaiah 1 as an Introduction

The superscription in Isaiah 2:1 is in effect an abbreviation of the one that heads the book at 1:1 and marks an end of Isaiah I, which is to be viewed as an ‘introduction’ to the book as a whole.¹² Isaiah 2:1 introduces the ‘body’ of this prophetic book. This initial chapter extracts themes from Isaiah’s overall message in order to exhort the Judaeans audience to choose righteousness (esp. vv. 18-20). In Isaiah I the entire literary, historical, and theological sweep of the whole book of Isaiah is reviewed.¹³ That does not mean, however, that every Isaianic theme has to feature in the first chapter and we must not impose too rigid a requirement on what form an introduction may take. Maybe ‘prologue’ would be a better description than ‘introduction’, a prologue in which the reader is challenged to respond to the main thrust of the book.¹⁴ It is a call for Zion to become ‘the city of righteousness, the faithful city’ (1:26), in contrast with its present state (v. 21).¹⁵ Jerusalem’s destiny in the plan of God is to become again the city ruled by God. On one level, therefore, the failure to mention kingship in chapter 1 requires no comment, for there are a number of prominent Isaianic themes (e.g. YHWH’s servant, the nations) that find no place in Isaiah 1. On the other hand, seeing that the theme of leadership is clearly present in this initial chapter, the absence of any allusion to kings may be viewed as deliberate and significant.

¹² See G. Fohrer, ‘Jesaja 1 als Zusammenfassung der Verkündigung Jesajas’, *ZAW* 74 (1962): 251-68.

¹³ C. R. Seitz, ‘Isaiah 1-66: Making Sense of the Whole’, in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah*, ed. C. R. Seitz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): 113, 114.

¹⁴ For this suggestion, I depend upon H. G. M. Williamson, ‘Synchronic and Diachronic in Isaian Perspective’ in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (OTS 34; Leiden: Brill, 1995): 211-26.

¹⁵ The repeated terminology (‘faithful/righteousness’) forms an *inclusio* around vv. 21-26 as a unit.

4. Isaiah 1:21-26

The first major unit of Isaiah 1 encompasses verses 2-20.¹⁶ Gitay views these verses as one coordinated address¹⁷ and urges the reader to consider the flow of thought.¹⁸ The oracular formula that closes this unit, ‘for the mouth of the LORD has spoken’ (1:20b) resumes ‘for the LORD has spoken’ in 1:2 and so references to divine speech surround and help to demarcate the unit. Another piece of evidence for the cohesion of verses 2-20 as a unit is that verse 20 returns to the general indictment of rebellion in verses 2-3, after verses 11-17 had given a more specific description of Judah’s apostasy.

The next unit is verses 21-26, one indication being a probable chiasmic structuring of the six verses: verse 24b with verse 23; verse 25 with verse 22; verse 26a with verse 21b; verse 26b with verse 21a.¹⁹ This also suggests a bipartite division of the unit (vv. 21-23, 24-26), and this is confirmed by the divine speech attribution (‘the Lord says’) in verse 24a that acts as a divider. Recently H. G. M. Williamson has argued that verse 26 is an addition by the compiler of the chapter rather than being material that he inherited, so that it is late and redactional. In his view, the *inclusio* of verses 21 and 26 is not as convincing as usually suggested, because there is no echo of verse 21b in verse 26a at all.²⁰ As well, according to Williamson, verse 26a is not concentrically integrated but reverses the whole of the indictment and redactionally brings out the positive implications latent in Isaiah’s own words about the removal of impurities (v. 25). The close relation of verses 25 and 26a is further indicated in that both begin with the identical Hebrew word (ואשיבה), and Williamson views the repetition as characteristic of redactional additions (cf. 5:29, 30). None of this proves, however, that verse 26a is redactional, for it is equally possible that Isaiah

¹⁶ E.g. J. T. Willis, ‘The First Pericope in the Book of Isaiah’, *VT* 34 (1984): 63-77, who says that probably the prophet is the speaker throughout (though he quotes YHWH in vv. 2c-3, 11-17, 18-20).

¹⁷ ‘Reflections on the Study of Prophetic Discourse: The Question of Isaiah I 2-20’, *VT* 33 (1983): 202-221 (216).

¹⁸ Gitay, *Isaiah and His Audience*, 15.

¹⁹ Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991; tr. Thomas H. Trapp): 62; H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (OTS 31; Leiden: Brill, 1995): 109, 110; J. T. Willis, ‘Lament Reversed – Isaiah 1,21ff’, *ZAW* 98 (1986): 236-48 (238, 239).

²⁰ Williamson, *Isaiah 1-27 in Three Volumes, Volume I: Commentary on Isaiah 1-5* (ICC; London: T&T Clark International, 2006): 129-31.

himself has adapted the typical form of a prophetic judgement speech.²¹ If a compiler can adopt and modify the chiasmic structure, so too can an earlier author.

There is a change of thematic focus at verse 21. The focus of verses 2-20 is the people's sins. There is only a passing reference to leaders in 1:10a (parallel 'you people of Gomorrah' [v. 10b]). But in verses 21-26 the people are replaced by the officials as the centre of attention (vv. 23, 26). Verses 21-23 condemn the leaders and officials of Jerusalem, with the clear implication that they are responsible for the degenerate state of the city, and verses 24-26 threaten their removal and replacement. 'Therefore' (v. 24a לכן) introduces the prophetic announcement of judgement after the indictment of verses 21-23, with verses 24-26 containing the prophet's quotation of a speech by YHWH, picking up the smelting imagery of verses 21-23. There is a piling up of (threatening) titles for YHWH in verse 24 in order to strengthen the announcement of judgement, with a use of old titles (e.g. the Mighty One of Israel) to show that it is the God of Israel's ancient traditions who is threatening the wayward nation. The use of archaic divine titles suggests that YHWH's reformation and renewal of Jerusalem will involve a reversion to older patterns of social organisation.

5. Isaiah 1:26

This brings us to the verse of special interest in this study, which I translate as follows:

I will restore judges for you as at first, and counsellors for you as in the beginning; afterwards you will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful town..

In this statement of the anticipated future in the purposes of God for his city, Hans Wildberger notes the reference to an ideal epoch in the past,²² with the text of 1:26 reading 'as at first' and the corresponding

²¹ Claus Westermann classifies 1:25b, 26 as 'expansions' of the 'announcement of judgment' form, but states that such expansions are not necessarily to be viewed as secondary (*Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* [London: Lutterworth, 1967; tr. H. C. White]: 181-82, 187; Claus Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991; tr. K. Crim]: 83).

²² Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 70.

phrase in the second line, ‘as in the beginning’.²³ The future time of salvation (‘afterwards’) is modelled on the past.²⁴ For Isaiah ‘his high point in the past, by means of which the present must be measured, is the history of Jerusalem’ (Wildberger). Otto Kaiser likewise views these time phrases as pointing to Davidic origins or time frame.²⁵ There is, however, doubt that this looks back to the time when David and Solomon were kings, though that is the viewpoint taken by Wildberger and many others.²⁶ The point to be noted, however, is that no explicit Davidic connections are drawn in 1:26. Wildberger says that for Isaiah, Jerusalem is ‘the city where David encamped’ (29:1, *קריית חנה דוד*); cf. the word play on this later in 29:3a, ‘I will camp against you round about’ (*והניתי כדור עליך*). The *BHS* editor (D. Winton Thomas) advises that we read in 29:3a with two Hebrew manuscripts and LXX, *כדור* (‘as David’). The poetic word *קרייה* (‘city, town’) found in 1:21 and 1:26 (in contrast to the more mundane *עיר*) is linked to David in only one reference out of ten occurrences in Isaiah (29:1) and so is not especially associated with David (cf. 22:2; 24:10; 25:2, 3; 26:5; 32:13; 33:20).²⁷ There is in this verse no idealised portrayal of the early royal period. David may have installed judges,²⁸ and the role of the counsellor is one often linked to the royal court,²⁹ but in 1:26 it is anticipated that YHWH will do the installing (‘I will restore’). Wildberger expresses surprise that ‘counsellors’ (*יועיצ*) is the parallel given to ‘judges’, but he again wants to turn it into a larger Davidic establishment.³⁰ The announcement of judgement (vv. 24-25) changes

²³ Both time phrases use double prepositions [כא] (as noted by Joüon and Muraoka §133h) because the preposition and the substantive had already become one word (argues GKC §118sN).

²⁴ Isa. 2:2-4 (2:2a: ‘In the latter days...’) gives another glimpse of that future time.

²⁵ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1972): 20, 21: ‘As in the days of David and Solomon...’; similarly Fohrer (‘Zusammenfassung’, 267), who none the less recognises that the passage does not speak ‘von der Erweckung eines neuen David oder von irgendeiner anderen Herrschererwartung’.

²⁶ See also Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja I. Band Kapitel 1-23* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare; Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1960): 48.

²⁷ Pace Williamson, *Isaiah 1-5*, 134, 136, 145.

²⁸ We know that Jehoshaphat did, cf. 2 Chr. 19:4-11, where Jehoshaphat appoints judges.

²⁹ See 2 Sam. 15:12; 1 Chr. 27:33; 2 Chr. 22:4; 25:16; Isa. 19:11.

³⁰ Ahithophel is identified in 2 Sam 15:12 as David’s ‘counsellor’ (*dwd c(wy)*); cf. in addition, 2 Sam. 15:31; 16:23; 1 Chr. 27:32-33; 2 Chr. 25:16; Ezra 4:5; 7:28; 8:25; see J. Jensen, ‘Weal and Woe in Isaiah: Consistency and Continuity’, *CBQ* 43 (1981): 167-87, for Isaiah’s connection to wisdom thought, perhaps influencing a choice of ‘counsellors’ here.

into a promise of cleansing and rehabilitation in verse 26, since the judgement is a smelting process that causes purifying. R. E. Clements suggests that ‘your judges’ (שפטיך) means judges elected by the people,³¹ but it is better to follow *GKC* §135m that views the possessive pronoun as expressing advantage: ‘and I will restore judges for thee’.³² There is no mention of or place for a messianic ruler, for these are judges and counsellors under God the King.

These officers are given by God to enforce his justice, justice being the main divine concern in the wider context of the chapter (1:16, 17, 21, 23, 27). That is why verse 26b returns to the description of Jerusalem found in verse 21 and repeats the key expressions ‘righteousness’ and ‘faithful town’. In verse 21 they nostalgically describe what Jerusalem was in the ideal past. In verse 26b they are used in reference to what Zion will become again as a result of God’s proposed actions. The term ‘righteousness’ (צדק) has an ancient connection to Jebus (via Melchizedek of Genesis 14).³³ The use of ‘town’ (קרייה) is also archaising (cf. Ps. 48:3: ‘the city [קרייה] of the great king’). The adjectival use of the Niphal participle ‘faithful’ (נאמנה) has the double meaning of faithful/firmly established, the first leading to the second (cf. 7:9; 28:16), and this echoes Isaiah’s favourite preaching topic of faith.³⁴ The terminological links from verse 26b back to verse 21 provide the needed explanation that the righteousness and faithfulness envisaged find expression in just dealings. Though in the Davidic setup, the king was the nation’s chief law officer, in Isaiah 1:26 it is divinely-appointed judges and counsellors who will ensure just dealings in God’s city. As noted by Williamson, the renaming of the city in the new age, such as featured in 1:26b, is a prominent theme in the latter part of the canonical book (cf. 60:14, 18; 62:4, 12),³⁵ and I would see verse 26 as anticipating the (human) king-free theologising of Isaiah 40–66. The failure to mention a king is a significant silence. Not all arguments from silence are weak arguments.

³¹ R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980): 36.

³² The same syntax is found in Isa. 60:17b that mentions ‘your overseers’ and ‘your taskmasters’, that is to say, who are set over the people.

³³ Note also ‘Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem’ (Josh. 10:1) (I owe this reference to the suggestion of the anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this article).

³⁴ Douglas R. Jones, ‘Exposition of Isaiah Chapter One Verses Twenty One to the End’, *SJT* 19 (1966): 319-27 (321).

³⁵ Williamson, *Isaiah 1-5*, 145.

If advisors of the king are meant and a royal position is in view, a better comparison than Davidic bureaucracy is Isaiah 24:23, with its description of YHWH's reign on Mount Zion 'before his elders' (נגד זקניו). The worldwide ruin and chaos described in Isaiah 24 close with the happy ending picturing the final punishment of 'the kings of the earth' (24:21) and their replacement by the kingdom of God (24:23).³⁶ The picture of the reign of God on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem is associated in 24:23 with his divine council,³⁷ referred to as 'his [YHWH's] elders'. J. N. Oswalt understands 'Jerusalem' in 24:23 as its antecedent ('its elders'), given בהר ציון ובירושלם is the immediately preceding phrase,³⁸ but, as noted by Willis,³⁹ we might have expected 'her elders' if the antecedent was the city (עיר is grammatically feminine). With J. D. W. Watts,⁴⁰ Willis argues that these elders are heavenly beings, officials of YHWH's court, noting similarities to the depiction of the 'seraphim' in 6:2. This is one of a number of connections between 24:23 and the heavenly courtroom scene in Isaiah 6 (e.g. the theme of divine glory, cf. 6:3). Franz Delitzsch reflects the view, in part with reference to 1:26 with its '(human) counsellors', that the present text refers to human elders.⁴¹ Willis argues for his alternative view by appeal to use of the term זקנים to denote senior officials in earthly royal courts.⁴² Psalm 105:22 and Isaiah 24:23 are the sole biblical passages in which a group of elders is designated as 'his elders', with the antecedents to 'his' being a king/Pharaoh (Ps. 105:22) and the divine King (Isa. 24:23). The description in Isaiah 24, therefore, features God as King among his

³⁶ Cf. Leon J. Liebreich, 'The Compilation of the Book of Isaiah', *JQR* 46 (1955-56): 259-77 (267).

³⁷ As suggested by T. M. Willis, 'Yahweh's Elders (Isa. 24,23): Senior Officials of the Divine Court', *ZAW* 103 (1991): 375-85.

³⁸ J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986): 440.

³⁹ Willis, 'Yahweh's Elders', 375, 376.

⁴⁰ J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985): 330.

⁴¹ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah. Volume I* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881; tr. J. Martin): 436; Barry Webb ('Zion in Transformation: A Literary Approach to Isaiah' in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. D. J. A. Clines, S. E. Fowl, S. E. Porter (JSOTSup 87; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990): 65-84 [74 n.1]) understands them as 'presumably the leaders of the community which inhabits the new Zion', and contrasts them with the leaders of the old Zion, who are indicted at the outset of the book, referring to 1:23 and 3:14.

⁴² Willis, 'Yahweh's Elders', 376-83.

courtiers (whether human or heavenly), pictured, like Isaiah 6, using earthly royal prototypes.

Furthermore, the picture of the reign of YHWH in Isaiah 2:2-4 supports a comparison of 1:26 with the divine court. This is so, whether 2:1-4 is viewed as part of the book's introduction or juxtaposed to it. The pilgrimage of 'all the nations' to Zion/Jerusalem as the world centre has its origin in Davidic imperialistic claims (cf. Ps. 2:8, 9; 76:3-6),⁴³ yet there is no Davidic king in Isaiah 2, rather YHWH is King. The phrase 'the mountain of YHWH' (2:3) is an abbreviation for 'the mountain of the house of YHWH' (in v. 2 above), as the next verse shows ('to the house of the God of Jacob'). Zion is described as the place of God's 'house' (= palace). The 'God of Jacob' designation points to Psalmic traditions (e.g. Pss. 24, 132), with their strong emphasis upon God's rule from Zion. In the vision of Isaiah, God will teach the nations directly. Certainly no human agent is mentioned. YHWH is described in terms of a wise Solomon-like king who teaches the nations 'his ways' and 'his paths'.⁴⁴ The general sense of 'instruction' (תורה) is used in a non-legal sense of wise counsel (2:3).⁴⁵ Therefore, according to 2:2-4, there is a theocratic shape to the ultimate future. Davidic kingship is missing, even though the picture is modelled on the Davidic empire. Eschatology returns to Kingdom of God theology and all is subordinated to this. This would seem to confirm that in 1:26 YHWH is acting as King and that the judges and counsellors are officers under him.

Oswalt comments concerning verse 26 that the 'absence of a messianic ruler is interesting',⁴⁶ but he draws no inference from this. Christopher Seitz believes it is 'impossible to determine' whether the leadership offices enumerated in 1:26 are intended to be understood as a rejection of kingship and a return to the older offices of judge and counsellor, as in the days of Samuel.⁴⁷ A *rejection* of kingship may be

⁴³ According to J. J. M. Roberts, 'The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition', *JBL* 92 (1973): 229-344.

⁴⁴ Note the use of 'ways/paths' in Wisdom Literature (see Prov. 2:8; Ps. 1:6).

⁴⁵ It picks up verb חָרַץ ('to instruct') used earlier in the same verse.

⁴⁶ Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 107.

⁴⁷ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 35; and again p. 36: 'Chapter 1 cannot be used to argue for a rejection of kingship, as such, in favor of another form of government'. Douglas K. Stuart sees 1:26 as only emphasising the integrity of future judges (in contrast to those who accept bribes in v. 23), so that the 'mode of government...is not strictly in focus' ('The Prophetic Ideal of Government in the Restoration Era' in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* [ed. Avraham Gileadi; Grand

too strong a term, but certainly the return to older theocratic offices is forecast. There is what might be interpreted as an *avoidance* of reference to Davidic kings and the future leadership presaged (judges and counsellors) takes forms that ensure that the only king is YHWH.

6. Leadership in Isaiah 2–4

This conclusion is consistent with and supported by what is found in a survey of Isaiah 2–4. These three chapters have as bookends, the matching sections: 2:1-4 and 4:2-6, which portray YHWH as the king at Zion, with the nations coming to him for instruction as would be expected from a wise king.⁴⁸ His residence in Zion is signalled by theophanic manifestations. These chapters explain the punishment of Jerusalem as a necessary part of YHWH's plan to purify the city in preparation for its role as his capital.⁴⁹ Within the wider section, there is divine judgement with specific reference to the leadership of Jerusalem (Isaiah 3). Isaiah 3:1-3 describes the present (or impending) removal of leaders, and verses 4-7 the disastrous implications of the replacement of leaders by those who are incompetent (RSV, 'boys' and 'babes') and women (see v. 12), with verses 8-15 providing an explanation of this calamity.

The leadership focus of chapter 3 is clear, yet there is no mention of king(s) (cf. 3:2, 3, 4, 12, 14, etc.), nor is loss of kingship referred to as part of the breakdown of social order.⁵⁰ Daniel Schibler notices that

Rapids: Baker, 1988]: 283-92; 288) (suspension points mine). Likewise, Williamson writes: 'No consequences should be drawn from the lack of reference to the king here: the wording is driven by a concern to reverse the previous catalogue of failure than to present a full portrayal of the new age' (*Isaiah 1-5*, 145). This view, however, severely under-reads the text.

⁴⁸ Cf. 1 Kgs 4:34; 10:1-10, 24; William J. Dumbrell, 'Some Observations on the Political Origins of Israel's Eschatology', *RTR* 36 (1977): 33-41; William J. Dumbrell, 'The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah', *TynBul* 36 (1985): 111-28 (117): 'What is affirmed in this passage [Isa. 2:2-4] is international submission to divine kingship' (addition mine).

⁴⁹ J. Jensen (*The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah: His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition* [CBQMS 3; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1973]: 62, 89) says of 2:2-4: 'There is little doubt that in this oracle Yahweh is conceived of as divine king' (89); cf. Ray Carlton Jones Jr., *Yahweh's judgment and kingship in the oracles of Isaiah ben Amoz* (Diss. Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, 1990): 171-75.

⁵⁰ As noted by H. G. M. Williamson, 'The Messianic Texts in Isaiah 1-39' in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: SAP, 1998): 244.

‘other officials and dignitaries are mentioned much more often (than king[s])’.⁵¹ He makes the following listing: 1:10 ‘rulers of Sodom’, 1:23 ‘princes’; 3:2-3 (which ‘contains a whole gamut of dignitaries’, namely, hero [גבור], soldier [איש מלחמה], prophet, judge, elder, counsellor [ירועין], and others); 3:12, 14. There is, it appears, a *studied* ignoring of the figure of the king. ‘All of them (Judah’s leaders) are scolded by the prophet, mostly for social evils and moral decadence, but, interestingly, never the king.’⁵²

Isaiah 3:1-3 describes the removal of social leaders in ‘catalogue fashion’,⁵³ and the catalogue nature of the verses makes the omission of reference to any king all the more obvious, and ‘cannot be accidental, since the passage seems to be an attempt to give a comprehensive listing, not just selected examples’.⁵⁴ It cannot be that the king alone is *above* condemnation, rather the heavy emphasis on divine kingship in the context of 2:2-4 and 4:2-6 leaves no room for the human figure of the king. The vision of the future does not include a human king figure (1:26; 2:2-4; 4:2-6). This provides the best explanation for the ignoring of kingship in chapter 3.⁵⁵ In the first four chapters, though use is made of royal themes and imagery,⁵⁶ especially in 2:2-4, these are used in connection with YHWH as king, and there is no reference to (human) kings except in the superscription at 1:1.

⁵¹ Daniel Schibler, ‘Messianism and Messianic Prophecy in Isaiah 1-12 and 28-33’ in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995): 90 (addition mine).

⁵² Schibler, ‘Messianism’, 90 (addition mine).

⁵³ Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL, XVI; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996): 106.

⁵⁴ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 129. Williamson is another who notes that the loss of kingship is not referred to as part of the breakdown of social order, but offers no explanation (*Variations on a Theme*, 28).

⁵⁵ To J. J. M. Roberts (‘The Divine King and the Human Community in Isaiah’s Vision of the Future’ in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983]: 128), Isaiah seems ‘curiously reticent to attack the Davidic kings’, though the prophet is only too ready to criticise leaders bearing other titles.

⁵⁶ Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995): 26; John Gray, ‘The Kingship of God in the Prophets and Psalms’, *VT* 11 (1961): 14.

7. The Superscription

Isaiah 1:1 is often compared with and related to the superscriptions that front other prophetic books,⁵⁷ but for my purpose I seek to note its intimate relations with the contents of the book it heads, and especially with the theme of kingship. The sequence of four kings is reflected in the rest of the book ('in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah'), and indeed the repeated emphasis in the first half of the book of Isaiah is on the *death* of kings: Uzziah is dead or soon to die (6:1: 'In the year that King Uzziah died'), then Jotham is already dead (7:1: 'In the days of Ahaz *the son of Jotham*, son of Uzziah, king of Judah'), and later Ahaz's death is mentioned (14:28: 'In the year that King Ahaz died came this oracle'). In this way the life-threatening illness of Hezekiah in 38:1, his (temporary) reprieve from death (38:5), and his anticipated demise in 39:8 ('in my days') are prepared for and are part of a sequence. Kingship is viewed as a dying institution in Judah, with notices of the deaths of kings punctuating the first half of the book.⁵⁸ All this suggests that God's long-term plan for his people does not include human kings.

8. Conclusion

The close attention paid to Isaiah 1:26 in this article is an attempt to make up for the neglect of this verse in most treatments of the theme of kingship in Isaiah. The non-mention of kings in 1:26 is highly significant given the context provided by Isaiah 1 with its prominent theme of leadership. The failure to make reference to human kings in chapters 2–4, despite the strong polemic against many other forms of corrupt leadership in Judah, reveals what can only be called a deliberate ignoring of the figure of the king. The vision of a theocratic future in 1:26 is confirmed by the short sections of prophetic hope in 2:2-4 and 4:2-6 that are also thoroughly theocratic in orientation. Such

⁵⁷ G. M. Tucker, 'Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of the Canon' in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. G. W. Coats and B. O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977): 56-70; D. N. Freedman, 'Headings in the Books of the Eighth-Century Prophets', *AUSS* 25 (1987): 9-26.

⁵⁸ Cf. Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991): 119-20, 144, 152; for Conrad this contrasts with 'the reign of the people, who, as a community, will never die' (120), but I would suggest that the contrast is rather with the reign of God (given the juxtapositioning of divine and human kingship in Isaiah 6).

an interpretation of 1:26 fits with the portrayal of Judaeen kingship as a dying institution in Isaiah 1-39. The non-Davidic future for restored Zion that is contemplated in 1:26 is one of a number of factors that makes the shift to divine kingship in Isaiah 40–66 less radical than might otherwise appear.