

# ONCE AGAIN, THE CITY IN ISAIAH 24-27

by

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The identification of "the city" in the songs of Isaiah 24-27 (24:10-12; 25:1-5; 26:5-6; 27:10-11) has been debated by scholars for decades. Suggested identifications of the city include Jerusalem, Samaria, Tyre, Sidon, Dibon, Nineveh, Susa, Babylon and even Carthage!<sup>1</sup> There are several reasons for this diversity of opinion. (1) The only clear historical reference in the whole of Isaiah 24-27 is to Moab in 25:10b-11, verses that may have been an addition; but the chapters as a whole make little sense when understood as directed against one petty kingdom. Aside from 25:10-11 the chapters and thus the songs are historically ambiguous. Historical criticism, of course, usually works with historical allusions that allow one to determine the time, people, and circumstances giving rise to a passage. No such allusions exist within the songs. (2) The same lack of historical allusions noted for the songs characterizes Isaiah 24-27 as a whole, so the chapters surrounding the songs give no reliable clue as to the identification of the city. (3) The songs were written for some other purpose than their use in their present context. This observation is proved by their lack of any inherent eschatological meaning, in contrast with the wholly eschatological significance they take on in the chapters as they now stand. (4) The songs may not have referred originally to the same city.

In view of considerations like these, March (1966, p. 93) argues that one need seek no definite city behind the first three songs. Rather, he thinks, the songs referred to God's enemies in general, and "the city" was simply a symbol for their power. March is likely correct that no specific city was intended by the original singers, at least for the songs he studies (24:10-12; 25:1-5; 26:5-6). Still, his suggestion does not explain why

1. For a thorough discussion of the problem of dating Isaiah 24-27 and the different suggestions identifying the city, see Redditt (1972, pp. 232-72) and Millar (1976, pp. 15-21).

“the city” would be an appropriate symbol for their power. The question remains open, then, how to understand the term “city.” What would aid understanding is a theory (1) that accounts for the antipathy toward the city in some of the songs and (2) that identifies a group or groups in ancient Israel who might express such antipathy.

Where should one turn to generate such a theory? Historical and form critical studies have not yet solved the issue. Other types of investigations might prove more fruitful. One place to seek new insights is in the work of anthropologists. When an anthropologist looks at the ancient Near East, one thing he sees is a peasant culture. According to Rodden (1975, pp. 89–97), the Near East developed peasant culture well before the rise of Israel, with peasant life moving east to west across the Near East and the Mediterranean by the end of the third millennium B.C. As is generally true with peasants everywhere, the peasant seems to have fared poorly at the hands of the city in ancient Israel, judging by Isaiah’s condemnation of their treatment in 5:8. Thus the relationship between the peasant and the city constitutes one possible source in looking for new views about “the city” in Isaiah 24–27. Yet one other possibility also needs investigation: the four chapters, while not constituting a full blown apocalypse, certainly reveal apocalyptic characteristics. Thus one should investigate whether an apocalyptic group might stand behind one or more of the songs.

This study will explore the question of how to understand the term “city” in the songs of Isaiah 24–27. It will first ask if any of the songs derived from peasant culture or if they express the antipathy that the peasant holds for the city upon which he is dependent. To answer this question, it will be necessary to summarize anthropological research about the nature of peasantry and the relationship of the peasant to the city. Next, the relationship between the peasant and the city in ancient Israel will be sketched. Then the songs will be tested for evidence of a peasant perspective. Only two, 25:1–5 and 26:1–6, betray traces of such a perspective. The fourth song (expanded to include 27:7–11) gives considerable evidence of being revitalistic, reflecting the revitalism of Isaiah 24–27 as a whole. The essay will close with a sociological assessment of the four chapters to help understand the group they addressed.

This study is admittedly speculative. It is not possible to prove conclusively the conclusions drawn here. On the other hand, the results of historical criticism have up until now been quite unsatisfactory. One can hope that this study will open up a more fruitful approach to an old issue.

*The Peasant and the City*

What is a peasant? Simply put, in a preindustrial society peasants constitute the food producers who pay rent or taxes for the right to produce on their land. The basic unit of peasant life is the household, which may exist in two contexts: (1) small landholders or (2) serfs in a feudal society or a bureaucratic empire. In anthropological research this second context has been divided into five categories. (1) Feudal or "bound" peasants are subject to a decentralized body of landowners and inherit the right or obligation to farm their land under specified conditions. (2) Prebendal peasants have a similar relationship to their lords, called prebends, who derive their position not from their families but from meritorious service to the state. (3) State-owned peasants were owned or controlled by the state rather than nobles and were subject to *corvée* labor. This type of peasantry obtained in Mesopotamia and Egypt. (4) Capitalistic peasants and (5) communist peasants constitute the survivals of peasantry in much of the world today.<sup>2</sup> This classification reflects a usage of the word peasant which is so broad that many anthropologists question its validity. Nevertheless, no better term has been proposed. This paper will use the term in the sense of small landholders under capitalism, feudalism, or bureaucratic empires. Peasants are neither tribal horticulturalists nor capitalists who happen to make a living by farming. Still less are they the wage earners hired by such a farmer. Peasantry exists at the level of the household which subsists on its own produce.

In a peasant society land possesses special value. It is received from one's family and should be passed on to one's descendants, generation after generation, to provide for their subsistence. Obviously, it should never be sold to anyone outside the peasant community. When peasant population is relatively sparse, much land will lie fallow and can be divided equally among the children in a household. As the population grows more dense, the division of farms into smaller and smaller units renders them unviable, so pressure increases to adopt a system in which one heir receives the inheritance: primogeniture, ultimogeniture or the personal decision of the household head.<sup>3</sup>

While categorical statements about the peasant mindset are impossible, Foster (1967b, pp. 304–310) has described one concept that char-

2. Harris (1975, pp. 300–305). See also Dalton (1972, pp. 385–416).

3. Worsley (1984, pp. 69–71). In his definition of peasantry and his presentation of the value of land, Worsley follows Wolf, 1966.

acterizes much peasant thought, the perception of the limited good. Peasants see their universe—social, economic and natural—as one in which good things in life come in limited quantities, indeed exist in very short supply. These goods include land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, power and influence, and security and safety. Not only are these goods limited, the peasant sees no way to increase the quantity of these commodities, since he (wrongly) perceives his society to be a closed system. If good is limited and cannot be expanded, one individual can get ahead only at the expense of another.

Rogers and Svenning (1969, pp. 26–38) think this perspective probably accounts for a number of typical personality traits of the peasant: mutual distrust in interpersonal relations, fatalism, limited aspirations, lack of deferred gratification, lack of innovativeness, and low empathy. The peasant personality is not totally negative, however. On the other side are his dedication to his family (Rogers and Svenning, 1969, p. 40) and his reverence for his land.<sup>4</sup>

A peasant belongs to a half culture. He lives within a larger, pre-industrial society, divided into classes and exhibiting a complex economy. Usually trade, commerce and specialization of crafts are well developed. The peasant is the rural half—or, better, majority—of such a society. The first level of social organization beyond the farm is the local village. The village is the level of social cooperation, where the peasant could get and give help for labor-intensive periods (planting, harvesting), acquire a spouse and purchase local goods he could not or did not produce himself. The local village thus amounts to an organization of the peasant's own equals; but at higher levels of organization, specifically in larger towns and cities, control lies firmly in the grasp of merchants, gentry and governmental administrators (Foster, 1967a, pp. 4–5).

The counterpart of the peasant farm and village is the preindustrial city, which, according to Sjoberg (1967, pp. 15–24) typically numbers as inhabitants less than ten per cent of the persons whose economic life is tied up with it. The city is itself divided into quarters, which parallel a rigid social segregation. At the top of the social order, governing the city, is a social and intellectual elite, who are responsible for the official

4. Redfield (1960, p. 64). While the concept of the limited good and these personality traits may be broadly (if not universally) characteristic of peasants, they are not distinctive to peasants. Hence, they will not be employed in the argument later in the paper concerning a peasant origin for one or more songs of the city. This material is presented here to give as broad a picture of peasantry as possible in this limited space.

religion, or the Great Tradition, and who monopolize education for their male family members. There are many lower classes, but no middle class, and only minimal social mobility. Outcast groups like slaves and beggars do work no one else will touch. Women work in the home and are subordinate to men. Prestige is partially associated with age. The city knows little job fragmentation; one craftsman fashions his entire product. There are no managers, nor few middlemen. Guilds control entrance into apprenticeship.

The peasant consumes most of his product. Regardless of whether he owns his land or farms that of someone else, he is typically so far in debt (due either to rent, taxes or price controls) that a third or more of his production, at best barely sufficient, belongs to a lender, usually someone in the city. The city, with its market place, can supply him essential goods, such as foods he cannot grow himself and tools. The peasant's relationship with the city is always one-sided in favor of the city, and is marked by suspicion and distrust. This need/hate relationship is exacerbated by a dependence on and hostility toward governmental authority, also located in the city.

The peasant is a rustic, and he knows it. Urban folks have often been ambivalent toward him, either holding him in contempt or admiring his simple life. The peasant, for his own part, readily admits his inferiority to city dwellers in terms of culture and manners. Conversely, the peasant holds his lifestyle to be virtuous and sees the city dweller as idle, false or extravagant (Redfield, 1960, p. 38). Despite the differences between the peasant and the urban elite, the urbanite depends on the peasant. Only rarely does a peasant rise to the elite class, but his ideas become diffused in the city, and even among the elite. His little traditions feed the Great Tradition, as his grain or livestock feed the bodies of the intellectual, governing elite. The Great Tradition is, in fact, little traditions elaborated by specialists with the leisure to think (Redfield, 1960, p. 50).

### *The Peasant in Ancient Israel*

The relationship between peasants and cities in Israel resembled in many ways the relationship described above.<sup>5</sup> The Israelite peasant seems to have been, for the most part, a small landholder, who received his land as a sacred trust to be passed on rather than sold, even to the king (1 Kgs 21:1-6). Nevertheless, he was subject to taxes, confiscations

5. Lang (1982, pp. 47-63) employs a model of peasantry called rent capitalism. His view is very similar to the one sketched in this section.

and conscription for *corvée* labor for imperial projects, phenomena feared and opposed in the celebrated text 1 Sam 8:10–18. The laws about redeeming land (Lev 25:25–28) clearly reflect the peasant's abhorrence at selling his land, and the laws about the sabbatical year (25:1–7) elaborate the rural custom of leaving land fallow in terms of the Great Tradition. Still, there is little reason to suppose those laws offered any real protection to the peasant. Also, even though Israel had no law of primogeniture, even the patriarchal stories (for example, the Jacob/Esau heritage stories) demonstrate the pressure toward impartible inheritance in the form of the personal decision of the head of the household.

The tribal lists in the book of Joshua and the phrase “a city which is a mother in Israel” (2 Sam 20:19) reveal the clustering of villages around the cities of Israel. The larger the city the less able its own lands were to support it, and the more likely trouble was to erupt between village and city, peasant and urban elite. Furthermore, Alström points out that cities were often established as administrative centers.<sup>6</sup> The use of peasant labor to build cities for administrative purposes must have exacerbated the tension between the groups. On the other hand, Frick has shown that the peasant needed the city, both for goods and for protection. Beyond that, the city also included many farmers as well as other workers within its population.<sup>7</sup>

The peasant had his prophetic defenders. For example, Isa 5:8 pronounces a woe upon the wealthy (no doubt located in Jerusalem or other cities) who confiscate houses (in the cities? villages?) and peasant farms. The city was in a position to make loans for planting and to tax the produce of the peasant. If he repaid the loan in grain after a poor year, his family would starve. If he could not repay his loan or pay his taxes, he lost his property. These conditions existed not only in the eighth century, but lasted for centuries as well (see Neh 5:1–5).

Nor was Isaiah the only prophet to oppose the oppression of the peasants by the urban elite; Micah shared his concerns. The first chapter of Micah is rife with anti-city feelings, but contains no pro-rural theme. In 1:5 Micah calls Samaria and Jerusalem the sin of Israel and Judah. No specific charge is leveled; they are sinful as cities. More to the point is chapter two, which McKeating (1971, p. 162) interprets against the

6. Ahlström (1982, p. 1). He sees (p. 55) the lists in Joshua 21 and 1 Chronicles 6 as lists of cities from which priests and tax collectors were sent out to teach the national religion and collect taxes.

7. Frick (1977, pp. 91–97). See also Andreason (1981, pp. 259–269).

background of the conflict between the city and the peasant condemned in Isa 5:8. "When peasants fell into serious debt they often had no option but to sell, and the laws of redemption were a dead letter. The independent peasant farmers declined in numbers, their holdings were amalgamated into larger estates, and two new classes came into prominence, the wealthy landowners and the insecure landless workers."<sup>8</sup> In 2:1-2 Micah pronounces a woe upon those who lie awake planning such evil deeds as seizing a peasant's house and fields. The peasant knew no recourse (v. 4) against the urban elite, who could take his land (vv. 1-2) and drive his wife and children from the inherited land (v. 9), except God himself (vv. 7-8). In harmony with peasant thinking, Micah condemns the leaders of Israel for abusing the people (3:1-3), for employing *corvée* labor (v. 10) and for taking bribes (v. 11). He condemns the religious elite (or at least some temple prophets) for divining for hire (vv. 5-7).

This reading of Micah resembles somewhat the view of Alt (1959, pp. 373-381) that Micah 2:1-5 intimates so thorough a rift between Judah and Jerusalem that they separated politically. Kallai refuted the article in its extreme stance about a political split,<sup>9</sup> but neither he nor Hillers who follows him (1984, p. 33) has refuted Alt's discovery of friction between Jerusalem and the peasants of Judah. Hillers admits (p. 33), for example, that 2:1-5 envisions a future in which the rich are excluded from the assembly of God. Hillers argues that the verses are not specifically limited to city dwellers, thus allowing for the possibility that local (village) land grabbers were also in Micah's view. While he is correct that the verses are not specifically directed at city dwellers, it is also true that most of the materials in the first three chapters do speak of urban people. Hence, the urban elite is certainly intended, even if village landholders might be also.

More important for this paper is Hillers' concession (pp. 42-43) that the attack upon the heads of the nation (3:11) was cast in peasant terms. Hillers likens Micah's failure to condemn the king to the peasant conviction that the king was unaware of their plight. Hillers also admits that a peasant perspective appears in Mic 4:1-4. The verses read almost identically to Isa 2:2-4, a problem Hillers does not attempt to solve. He does, however, observe that Mic 4:4 is absent from Isa 2:2-4. The verse

8. See also Mays (1976, pp. 61-66).

9. Kallai (1978, p. 251-261). However, Gottwald (1979, p. 519) thinks 2:1-5 and 6:2 both point to a city/peasant tension.

depicts what Hillers calls an “agrarian millennium” (p. 7), in which each person holds his own land and lives off his own vineyard and fig trees. Clearly Micah adopted a peasant ideal over against the city.

Zeph 3:11–13 also adopts a peasant perspective. In those verses the Jerusalem of the future is contrasted with the Jerusalem of the author’s day. Zephaniah, possibly a descendant of King Hezekiah (1:1), charges the political and religious elite with wantonness and violence. In 3:11–13, the people in the city would be no longer haughty, but humble and lowly; no longer deceitful, but truthful; and “they shall all pasture and lie down” (3:17b). The contrast is not merely one of haughtiness versus humility, it is also urban versus rural, official versus rustic. It represents that idealization of peasant life that urban people are apt to make.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear, then, that the Israelite peasant experienced exactly the same tension with the city as his counterparts elsewhere. In addition, the peasant was defended by several prophets, two of whom (Micah and Zephaniah) adopted peasant ideas into their messages. Thus grounds exist for asking whether Isaiah 24–27 might have also employed traditional peasant materials.

### *The Peasant and the Songs of the City*

Wildberger has argued (1978, pp. 953, 980), as others had before him, that the songs of the city found in 25:1–5 and 26:5–6 were not originally eschatological, that they were written for some other purpose than to occupy their current position, and that they acquired their eschatological coloration entirely from their context.<sup>11</sup> The songs display an antipathy toward “the city,” so it is appropriate to ask now if these two songs stemmed originally from the peasantry and if the hostility toward the city is the hostility of the peasant.

Form critically 25:1–5 is an individual song of thanksgiving. Two features in the song impinge on this inquiry: the jubilation over the destruction of the city (unspecified) in 25:2–3 and the protection of the poor and lowly in 25:4. Usually the city is understood to be a foreign city due to the reference to the *armôn zarîm*, normally translated as “the palace of the aliens.” The term *zarîm* is translated the same way in 25:5 in the phrase “the noise of aliens.” In this understanding the word *goyim* in 25:3 would designate “foreign nations.”

10. Some scholars hold 3:11–13 or 3:11–20 secondary, but that decision is largely immaterial in this connection; the passage still manifests an idealization of peasant life, no matter who wrote it.

11. See earlier, for example, Lohmann (1918, pp. 7–22).

This understanding of 25:1–4 is not so iron-clad as it might first appear. For one thing the word *zarîm* might only mean “strangers” and carry no national meaning at all. More importantly, Lohmann (1913, pp. 257–258) has argued that *zarîm* should be emended to read *zēdîm*, a reading supported by two LXX mss (cf. the Stuttgart Bible and Ps 54:5). The phrase would then be translated “the palace of the proud.” If one assumes that 25:2 rails against the inhabitants of the palace because of their pride instead of their foreignness, the mention of the ruthless *goyim* in 25:3 need not refer only to Gentiles. The term *goy* refers to a national entity, with a government, a land, and a sense of consanguinity. The term is often used in conjunction with *mamlākāh*, “kingdom” (see 1 Kgs 18:10; Jer 18:7, 9; 2 Chron 32:15). In short, the term refers to national entities, often Israel<sup>12</sup> (see Exod 19:6; Deut 32:28; Isa 26:2, 15 and numerous other texts). When Isa 25:3 speaks of the cities of ruthless nations, it could easily have in view cities in Israel. Nor ought the modern reader allow the present context to influence his identification of those cities. To be sure, 24:21–23 speaks in global terms, but the song itself does not. The only ruthless city identified in Isaiah 24–27 was located in Moab! While 25:10b–12 (or 25:12) may be secondary, the passage nevertheless gives testimony to how the phrase “cities of the ruthless nations” could be understood. In fact, much post-exilic prophecy condemns places like Moab, Edom, the Philistines, and other nearby, petty kingdoms. One is justified to suggest, in view of all this, that the song originally had in mind such cities, rather than the capital of a world empire.

It is not possible to identify the particular city that was destroyed, but this much seems clear. (1) The city had been ruthless in its exploitation of the poor and lowly. (2) God himself was understood to have avenged them by destroying the city. (3) Its destruction would cause the cities of Israel and other (nearby) nations to fear God. One may conclude that the city had been destroyed as an object lesson to other cities for their exploitation of the poor and lowly. These considerations lead one to think that the song arose, not out of a political context in which God overran a hated, foreign nation, but out of the economic context of the exploitation of the peasant by the city.

Had the target of the song been only the elite, one might argue that 25:1–5 was originally sung by the urban low class. Since the destruction of the whole city is emphasized,<sup>13</sup> it is not likely that some part of the

12. Speiser (1960, pp. 157–163), and Clements (1975, pp. 426–433).

13. Three words designating city appear in 25:2: *‘ir*, *qiryāh* and *armôn*. Ahlström (1982, pp. 16, 20) argues that *‘ir* designates the city as a whole or the city limits, while *qiryāh*

city's populace would sing such a song. Rather, the singer clearly sees himself as part of an oppressed group, whom he designates the poor (*dāf*) and the needy (*ebyôn*). The singer appears, therefore, to be someone outside the city, but victimized by it. It is not difficult to image peasants singing such a song at the fall of a hated city, for it was the peasant who saw himself as the victim of the arrogant, ruthless city.

If the preceding interpretation of 25:1–5 is correct, then 26:5–6 should probably be understood the same way. Once again the verses contrast the haughty inhabitants of the lofty city with the poor (*ʿānî*) and the needy (*dāf*),<sup>14</sup> who gleefully trample the fallen inhabitants. There is no way to tell if this fragment refers to the same city as 25:1–5; certainly there is no claim that the poor overthrew the city, since that was attributed to Yahweh and his human agent was not specified. (Isa 25:12 also speaks of the overthrow of a city, but it is so similar to 26:5–6 that many scholars think it was a secondary composition written after 25:10b–11 and 26:5–6 had taken their present places.) One is probably justified to think, therefore, that 26:5–6 sprang ultimately from a peasant context and subsequently was joined to 26:1–4, which appears to have derived from a procession at a city (?) gate.<sup>15</sup>

The third song of the city, 24:10–12, is quite ambiguous. It is not clear, for example, whether the city has even been destroyed. One may translate the first half of verse 10 as “The city of chaos is broken down,”

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specifies the acropolis or high point of the city, around and below which a city would grow up. The term *armôn* is usually translated as “palace” or “citadel,” and is used in combination with *ʿir* in this verse. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the verse celebrates the destruction of the city in its entirety, including its acropolis and fortified palaces.

14. The two words are, of course, very common in the Old Testament. The only other place they are paired, however, is Zeph 3:12, a passage idealizing peasant life.

15. The style of 25:1–5 and 26:5–6 gives no certain indication concerning a possible peasant origin for these songs. If they displayed fine literary skill, that fact would argue against a peasant origin, unless one supposed a later writer refined the songs. Certainly Isaiah 24–27 as a whole contains exceptional Hebrew poetry, but 25:1–5, especially vv. 3–5, provide difficulties for those who wish to scan it for stanzas or meter. See Box (1908, pp. 563–564); Gray (1911, pp. 119–120); and Lohmann (1913, pp. 257–260). The lines in the last three verses become longer and filled with strained metaphors. Liebmann (1905, p. 166) considerably shortens the end of v. 4 and v. 5 to correct this feature. Millar's scansion (1976, p. 47) of 26:5–6 reveals an abrupt lengthening of lines in comparison with 26:1–4. He even suggests (p. 119) that the references to the city could be later additions, read back into the previous songs from the perspective of 26:11–27:6. There is no way one could remove the references to the city without destroying those songs. Still, Millar's note suggests that he too was troubled by the length of the lines in the two songs. While the style of 25:1–5 and 26:5–6 does not degenerate into prose, neither is it as refined as that, for example, in 24:1–12. Missing is the fine assonance of those verses.

or "The city is shattered into chaos." Kaiser, however, argues (1974, p. 185) that the city had not been destroyed, but became desolate. The song also bemoans the lack of wine, a motif it shares with 24:7-9. Indeed 24:7-12 may have formed one song, which drew on curse language.<sup>16</sup> In that case one might suggest a cultic setting for the song. At any rate the identity of the city is unknown, and the circumstances described are quite general. The song itself has no discernible relationship to peasants; nor does the last, 27:10-11.

### *The Songs of the City and Revitalization Groups*

If 27:10-11 did not arise from the peasantry, what was its natural home? It is not hard to find a place to look. Isaiah 24-27 has been widely called apocalyptic or (better) proto-apocalyptic. Apocalypticism is one form revitalist movements can take. What are revitalist movements? They are attempts to restabilize a society that has undergone significant disorientation. Revitalist groups may come from any social class, but they usually arise among the people who feel oppressed (Worsley, 1968, p. 225). If such people are not under enemy attack or participating in a society that is actually breaking down, their relative deprivation must be of a kind (1) that threatens their internalized system of assumptions, values and commitments, and thus threatens their self-identity, and (2) that challenges their worldview or perceived moral order (Allan, 1974, p. 298). Revitalist thinking is typically expressed through political resistance and/or the rejection of the ideology of the ruling authority.

Worsley (1968, pp. 237-234) describes four circumstances that give rise to revitalist thinking. (1) Such movements often occur among people living in so-called "stateless societies," societies with no central political institutions. (2) Revitalist movements also arise in agrarian or feudal states, in which the peasants and urban poor oppose their nobles, and (3) in politically well-developed societies who have suffered crushing

16. See Fensham, 1963, p. 168, and especially Hillers (1964, p. 57). Both authors mention three themes in curses that appear in Isa 24:7-12: (1) the silencing of joyful sounds, (2) the waning and cessation of the land's fertility, and (3) the ruination of the city of the transgressors. One need only compare 24:7b, 8, 9, and 11 with these examples of curses provided by Hillers. Cf. "Nor may the sound of the lyre be heard in Arpad and among its people" with the last phrase in v. 7 and v. 8. The songs of everyday life would disappear. According to v. 9, the traditional drinking song would cease. Cf. this curse from Ashurnirari: "May his peasant in the field sing no work song." From a treaty of Esarhaddon one reads: "No merry-maker enters its streets; no musician is met there" (cf. v. 11). On ritual cursing see Mowinckel (1962, II, pp. 48-52).

military defeat. Members of the group may wish to carry on a war their leaders say is lost. (4) In contrast with the first three types caused by external forces, revivalist groups may also arise from an internal stimulus. If such groups continue after a secular political organization has assumed power, the cults become passive, project their vision into the more distant future, and emphasize leading quiet, virtuous lives. If a movement simply arises under the poor and neglected of a society, it generally has no program of social reform and takes no part in any political struggle. Instead, the poor usually expect God to reward them after death.

Wallace (1966, pp. 158–163) detects five phases in the life of a revivalist movement. The first is the “steady state,” the period before the rise of circumstances producing the movement. Second, there is a period of increased individual stress. Such forces as climatic change, epidemic disease, war or acculturation cause increasingly larger numbers of individuals to feel intolerable stress. (This is the stage of oppression mentioned by Worley.) The third phase Wallace calls the period of cultural distortion. In this stage early efforts at change are largely ineffective and dysfunctional, perhaps even violent. In the fourth phase, the period of revitalization, the society or group must complete a number of tasks. (1) Someone must formulate a new code, a new image of what the society should look like, and design a program for implementing the code. (2) The formulator(s) of the code must communicate it to the community at large to make converts. (3) As the number of converts increases, the leaders within the movement become a new executive organization, with the responsibility to administer the new code. (4) In the face of the old code with its adherents and inevitable difficulties with the new code, the leaders must modify or adapt the new code. Nevertheless, the code will gradually harden, and the tone of the movement will become increasingly militant, nativistic and hostile toward non-members (5) If the group is successful, it can eventually put its new code into operation. (6) Finally, the new code must be maintained. Maintenance results in the fifth phase, a new steady state.<sup>17</sup>

If the revivalist group is apocalyptic, its program for the future usually contains five elements according to Hillers (1984, pp. 6–7). The first is the removal of foreign cultural elements that cannot be assimilated to the traditional culture. Second, such programs envision a time of trouble during which the group must remain faithful. Third, revivalist groups

17. Burrige (1969, pp. 105–112) outlines a similar progression in three phases.

envison a reversal of social classes, with the result that the group in power (thought to be illegitimate for some reason) will be overthrown. The fourth element is the appearance of a righteous, peaceable ruler. Finally, these blueprints envision triumph over all the nation's enemies, often through supernatural intervention.

With this model of revivalist movements in view, it is time to turn to the fourth song of the city, 27:10–11, which describes a fortified city that has become solitary. The song contains echoes of curse language in its depiction of animals wandering through its forsaken remains.<sup>18</sup> The two verses appear integral to the three verses which precede them. Verse 7 refers to the Exile and God's subsequent punishment of those who carried Israel away. The mention of the solitary city is quite appropriate as a reflection upon the devastation caused by the Babylonians. Further, the song maintains (v. 9) that what Israel yet needs to do to come into God's full graciousness is to reform its cultus, a reformation typified by purging the altars. The particular injunctions of the song were to crush the (hewn) stones of the altars and rid the land of Asherim and incense altars. This verse appears to invoke such legislation as that found in the verses that introduce the Book of the Covenant, particularly Exod 20:25. Further, it appears to object not only to the Asherim, but even to incense altars. Thus, 27:9 may well be an example of nativistic thinking that rejects all foreign influence on the altar in the name of a "purer" form of worship thought to have obtained in an earlier time.

If one tests the whole passage of 27:7–11 against Hillers's list of elements of revivalist programs, one discovers three or even four of the five elements present. Verse 9 requires the removal of foreign elements from the cultus. Verses 8, 10–11 speak of the time of troubles. Verse 7 appears to say the former oppressors have been punished more severely than the people of God, at least intimating a reversal of fortunes. (Verse 6 spells out the future glory of Israel, but probably was not originally a part of the passage.) In any case, the oppressors who carried Israel into Exile have been punished. The only element missing entirely is the rise of a righteous, peaceable ruler, but that motif appears nowhere in Isaiah 24–27. In these chapters God alone is the king, and God alone will reign.

In view of the findings of the last paragraph, namely that three if not four of the elements of a revivalist program for the future appears in only five verses (27:7–11), it seems permissible to conclude that the

18. Pritchard (1969, p. 660). "Arpad shall be a (desolated) mound for . . . [and] gazelles, foxes, hares wild-cats, owls, . . . and magpies." Cf. Fensham (1963), p. 167.

passage came from a revivalist group. As such, the passage would be fully compatible with the writer, redactor or group responsible for the whole of Isaiah 24–27; indeed it could conceivably be the creation of that person or group. With regard to the third song, 24:10–12 (or 7–12), there is nothing to demand that those verses came from a revivalist group, though they describe a time of trouble.

To summarize the results of this study so far, one may say that 25:1–5 reflects the peasant resentment of the city for its pride and ruthlessness. Also 26:5–6 exhibits the same attitude and probably originated in peasant life. The other two songs, 24:10–12 and 27:10–11, exhibit no peasant origins. Both appear integral to their larger contexts. 24:7–12 may be cultic, while 27:7–11 derives from a revivalist group. In no case need the reader assume the city in question is a foreign city. Nor is it possible or necessary to identify any specific city in at least the first three songs. These disparate songs were woven into the eschatological portrait of Isaiah 24–27. In their larger context they take on a cosmic scope.

#### *Implications of this Study for Understanding Isaiah 24–27*

Does the finding that peasant thinking stands behind the songs in 25:1–5 and 26:5–6 suggest that the group behind Isaiah 24–27 was a peasant group? Should one assume a physical continuity between the peasant *Sitz* for the two songs and the revivalist group behind 27:7–11 or even Isaiah 24–27? No, not at all, and for several reasons. The first reason is that Isaiah 24–27 as a whole was so pro-Jerusalem that its whole program for the future revolved around that city, and the second reason is that there is no additional peasant thinking in 27:7–11 or the whole of Isaiah 24–27. The third reason is that much of the poetry of the chapters is too refined to assume it was derived from and written down by rustic peasants. What one can say is that the group to whom and for whom Isaiah 24–27 was written was a revivalist group, and the author or redactor of these chapters employed the peasant songs because they echoed some of his own hostility. It is possible to reconstruct some characteristics of the group behind Isaiah 24–27, which in turn will show why all four songs seemed appropriate.

The author (and presumably the group to whom and/or for whom he spoke) was nationalistic. Too much has been made in modern commentaries about the universalism of Isaiah 24–27. To be sure, the nations were included in the banquet scene of 25:6–8, but only as the foil for the elevation of Israel. Otherwise they appear only to receive punishment from God. The picture of the future included the release of Israel from

subservience (24:21-23) and the return of all exiles (27:12-13), the elevation of Israel and the establishment of Jerusalem as the locus of God's bounty (25:6-10a). The group eschatologized the notion of God as monarch, who would reign from Mt. Zion (24:21-23; 25:6-10a; 26:21; 27:13), and perhaps looked to the elders as the group in Israel to whom political power should belong (24:21-23). Those verses could be interpreted to mean either that the elders were virtuous and deserved to stand before God, or else that they were sinful, like the kings of the earth, and needed to be reformed. Since the elders are in no way punished, the verses overall suggest a positive view toward elders, but do not provide sufficient evidence to suggest that Isaiah 24-27 was composed by a group of elders. Judging from 27:9 the group wanted a purified cultus, but it nowhere else displayed cultic concerns. It does not, therefore, appear to have been a priestly group that had fallen out of power.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the verses draw profusely on other biblical writers, especially prophetic materials.<sup>20</sup> The group appears to have conceived of itself as the righteous (26:1-10, 20-21). It felt betrayed (24:16b) and powerless (26:18).

What perhaps begins to emerge then is the profile of a group, reacting to internal pressure, that objected to the priestly theocracy which had emerged under the supervision of the Persians after the disappearance of Zerubbabel. Given the importance of Jerusalem in Isaiah 24-27, and especially in view of the reference to "this mountain" in 25:6-10a, one should probably conclude that the group centered in Jerusalem. This non-priestly group, having little or no political power, would have felt resentment toward the priests who ruled in collusion with the Persians.

19. Hanson's basic thesis (1975, rev. 1979) is that Isaiah 56-66 and Zechariah 9-14 originated in a group opposed to the priestly leadership in Jerusalem. This group of disciples of Second Isaiah would have included priests outside the Jerusalem priesthood. Hanson suggested (p. 314) that the same group was responsible for Isaiah 24-27. Millar (1976, pp. 117-120) agrees that Isaiah 24-27 was written by a disciples of Second Isaiah, but disagrees that the chapters came as late as Hanson suggests, apparently calling in question as well Hanson's view that the group was opposing the early post-exilic priesthood.

Hanson is on excellent ground in suggesting that Third Isaiah was written by priests because of the presence of texts like 61:6. His attempt to interpret 24:2 the same way was rejected by Millar (1976, p. 117). There is, in fact, no indication within Isaiah 24-27 that the group thought of itself as priestly. The detection of a style similar to Second Isaiah within Isaiah 24-27 does not constitute proof that its author(s) are priestly and identical to the author(s) of Third Isaiah.

20. See the list compiled by Mulder (1954, pp. 74-77).

Having abandoned hopes for a Davidic ruler, they appealed to a supposed primitive kind of Yahwism free of corrupt (or at least improper) worship. They envisioned a society in which God ruled his people directly, or perhaps through his elders. They enjoined the kind of passivity Worsley's typology would lead one to expect from a group reacting to dashed hopes and internal pressure: they preferred to wait for God to act, rather than engage in political struggle (26:20). Self-assured of their own righteousness, they were simultaneously pro-Jerusalem and anti-establishment. The peasant songs attacked the city, the establishment, and constituted useful fodder for the author/redactor of Isaiah 24–27, who could combine that feeling into his vision of a purified, glorious future for Jerusalem.

How did the redactor of Isaiah 24–27 use his material about the city? One should probably see a figurative use of the city in 24:10–12, 25:1–5, and 26:5–6. The first passage continues to describe the immanent inbreak of the end of time announced in 24:1–3. The term “city” in 24:10 would mean “city life,” particularly in the forms of wine drinking and mirth making. In 25:1–5 and 26:5–6 the city functions as a foil to Jerusalem. In the two songs, indeed between 24:21 and 26:6, the subject is the reversal of fortunes. The city of Jerusalem will be elevated at the end of time. The proud city on lofty heights is the opposite of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's elevation must be accompanied by the demotion of “the city,” every opposing city, even in Persia, but not just one city.

The fourth song (27:7–11) may be different. Its opening verses deal with Israel and the Exile, while the subsequent verses (27:12–13) speak of the Diaspora. Verse 9 gives the conditions for God's full pardon of his people. It is most natural to assume then that verses 10–11 deal with Israel too. On those grounds Plöger argued (1968, pp. 71–76) that the city must be Samaria,<sup>21</sup> and that is possible but not likely. There is simply no warrant for introducing any specific city other than Jerusalem. In that case 27:10–11 would be a sad assessment of Jerusalem (following upon verse 9, which rebuked its cultus) in the time of its alleged continuing humiliation. If the composition as a whole dates from the early post-exilic period,<sup>22</sup> the description would be apt. Even if the song arose years after the Exile, however, the population of Jerusalem was so small and the buildings so ordinary that a writer with a cause might call the city solitary. On the other hand, the solitary city may have been a symbol for all the fortified cities of Israel, broken and abandoned in the

21. Plöger (1968, pp. 71–76). Cf. Wildberger (1978, p. 1016).

22. See Henry (1962, pp. 28–31); Cross (1969, pp. 164–165); Hanson (1971, pp. 471–72).

wake of Nebuchadnezzar. Whatever its identity, it was destined not to be rebuilt until its populace discerned the truth of the revivalist group's message.

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