

## Contents

### Advent 2

*A shoot shall come out  
from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow  
out of his roots.*

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#### • *Lectionary Readings (Year A)*

##### *Revised Common Lectionary*

|                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| First Reading  | <i>Isaiah 11:1-10</i> |
| Second Reading | Romans 15:4-13        |
| Gospel         | Matthew 3:1-12        |
| Psalm          | 72:1-7, 18-19         |

### *Isaiah 11:1-10, [11-16]*

1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his  
2 roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and  
3 understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the  
4 fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

5 He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with  
6 righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the  
7 earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his  
8 lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and  
9 faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard  
10 shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a  
11 little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie  
12 down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play  
13 over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's  
14 den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full  
15 of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

16 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations  
17 shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

18 [On that day the LORD will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the  
19 remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from  
20 Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the  
21 sea. He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of  
22 Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The  
23 jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the hostility of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim  
24 shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim.  
25 But they shall swoop down on the backs of the Philistines in the west, together  
26 they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against  
27 Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. And the LORD will utterly  
28 destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt; and will wave his hand over the River  
29 with his scorching wind; and will split it into seven channels, and make a way to  
30 cross on foot; so there shall be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that is  
31 left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of  
32 Egypt.]

## *Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs*

1. Christopher Seitz suggests a helpful metaphor in approaching the Book of Isaiah. The shaping process of the book can be likened to an orchestral score with quite a few composers. There are key repeating themes such as Zion, the outstretched hand, God's plan of old, and the "thorn and brier" motif. The opening chapter is a kind of overture that points toward the destiny of Zion.

Biblical scholars most often consider the book to be divided into three sections, written by different people across several centuries. Editing and change continue until the Christian era. Most scholars suggest (1) First Isaiah —1-29; (2) Second Isaiah—30-44; (3) Third Isaiah—45-66. A number of subdivisions look at segments like chapters 1-12 that speak of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 following the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721. The text is a combination of judgment and hope in the century between this invasion by Assyrian Sennacherib and the defeat and exile of the people of Israel by the Babylonians in 587. Isaiah 11:1-16 speaks of a new day in which the remnant of the people will be gathered home and the nations experience God's glory.

2. *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.*

One question is about a *shoot*. What is it? Another involves the *stump*. There is much to explore about how a *branch* grows out of the *stump*. But the more elusive question is about Jesse. Who is this Jesse who is the stump and the source of all that the spirit of the Lord is going to bless? Where or what is the origin or genesis of the shoot that is going to make all this difference?

The first reference to Jesse in Hebrew Scripture is at the end of the Book of Ruth. This story tells of a Moabite girl and her Jewish mother-in-law named Naomi. Read about the widow Ruth who marries Boaz and has a son named Obed in the selection from *Peculiar Treasures* by Frederick Buechner found in the Parallel Readings.

*So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to*

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*you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David. [Ruth 4:13-22]*

Buechner also writes below about David who next appears in the Bible as the son of Jesse in 1 Samuel:

*The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."*

*Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is now before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. [1 Samuel 16:1-13]*

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## Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

### Isaiah 11:1-10, [11-16] • December 5, 2010

Look now at the genealogy that opens Matthew's gospel. You might compare it to a somewhat similar one in Luke 3:23-38. Both include Jesse and David. A unique feature in Matthew's genealogy is the inclusion of four women: (1) Tamar who, disguised as a prostitute, seduces her father-in-law Judah and gives birth to Perez and Zerah [Genesis 38]; (2) Rahab the harlot who sheltered Joshua's men when they spied in Canaan and is said by some to have married him, here said to be the father of Boaz [Joshua 2]; (3) Ruth noted above; (4) Bathsheba who is the wife of Uriah and whose second child by David is Solomon [2 Samuel 11-12]; and (5) Mary the unmarried mother and Joseph who are parents of Jesus.

*An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.*

*So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.*  
[Matthew 1:1-17]

3. So the *stump of Jesse* produces David and, Matthew tells us, Jesus. Consider this blood line and lineage. If you were able to decipher genes and track traits in the family what are some of the talents, gifts, leanings, inclinations, and propensities of this family?

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What might encourage or worry you about the shoots or offspring of such a family line? The inheritance from such a family might promise or warn what for the future? Why might David be chosen out of such a heritage? Why such a pedigree for Jesus?

4. Who are some of the famous or infamous figures in your family history? What do you know of your blood line reaching back to the branch of what stump? Looking back at all your “begats,” what can you say about your family talents, gifts, leanings, inclinations, and propensities? What of the skeletons in your closet? What do you know about your pedigree?

How are you both cursed and blessed by your roots? How does your family tree bear delicious as well as poisonous fruit? How would you describe the lineage of characters who are part of the “stump” you are in your day?

How do you measure and evaluate your heritage and worth? How do you imagine God weighs and judges the stump and shoot you are today?

## *Reading Between the Lines*

My sister and I fought all the time when we were growing up—real knock-down drag-outs with plenty of hair-pulling. We fought about any number of things, but most often our altercations were territorial disputes. My growing legs needed room to unfold and—during moments when my sister was fully engrossed in an episode of the *Munsters* or *I Love Lucy*—they slowly and gradually extended onto the West Bank of the sofa, an area that she had long claimed as her own private country. Once my encroachment had become apparent, she threw some or another bomb my direction: a pillow, a book, her heel—whatever was convenient. I countered and, in the space of a minute, a full-fledged war, complete with battle cries, ensued.

We drove my parents bonkers with our squabbling, and they in turn lectured us, screamed and yelled at us, forcibly separated us, banned us from the television. In one particularly memorable reprimand, my father beat the living day-lights out of us with his belt. I was twelve at the time and had never been scared of my father before. But when I saw the fury upon his face as he charged into the room, whipping his righteous belt from around his waist, I learned what it was to fear. Humiliated and subdued for an hour or so, my sister and I retreated to corners as far from one another and from my father as we could get. But the wolf and the lamb did not lie down together that day.

My father didn't understand the depth of our conflict. Even today, over thirty years later, I still do not fully grasp it. My sister and I have each managed to find territories of our own on which to stretch our legs. Occasionally we even find some common ground and celebrate together, but our relationship continues to be marked by periodic conflict. My father didn't fix it with his belt. And so I wonder just how the political powers—the fathers—of today's world can ever hope to end the conflicts and fix the relationships between perpetually warring nations. Belts and bombs will never do the trick. Besides, can a dad ever really tell who started it?

*Kathie Collins*

kcollins@bibleworkbench.org

## Reading Between the Lines

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. . . .*

Let's stop and think a moment about this one. How might we hope for the coming ruler to judge us by what his eyes see? How might we try to refurbish our lives and the way they look so that the judgment of the one who is ultimately important to us will be favorable? What have we done to create a reputation that we hope will make this one judge us favorably on the basis of *what his ears hear*? What would it take for us to become the *poor and the meek of the earth* so as to stand before this judge with any hope at all?

And where might we meet our judge? In the esteem of colleagues? In the eyes of a son or daughter, wife or husband? In the mind-whirling awakening at 3:00 a.m. that takes us to the kitchen for comfort? How might you name your judge?



[cpwohlforth@bibleworkbench.org](mailto:cpwohlforth@bibleworkbench.org)

Shoots, stumps, branches, and roots. Family trees. Curses and blessings.

My daughter Katie and her husband Marc are expecting their second child in November. (By the time you read this, if all goes well, this yet unnamed baby will have arrived.) They are doing what most prospective parents do, going through all the family names and names of friends, trying to decide what this child will be called. In naming this baby, they will also name their associations, their hopes, their aspirations—going back into the past and its stories and going forward into the future.

What is your name? Write out your whole name. Look at it. Is it a family name? A name associated with another person? If you were named for someone, what do you know of them? What role did they play in your life? A “new” name? What was given birth when you were given your name? What else comes with your name? What roles, what dangers? If you could choose your own name, what would it be?

What is your real name, the one no one knows but you?



[bharrison@bibleworkbench.org](mailto:bharrison@bibleworkbench.org)

## Parallel Readings

### From Newsweek

#### *The Language God Talks*

Born in 1915 in the Bronx, the son of Jewish immigrants from Minsk, Wouk grew up loving Mark Twain and chocolate milkshakes, but he was aware that his family's identity extended beyond America. When Wouk was 13, his grandfather, Rabbi Mendel Leib Levine, arrived from Eastern Europe. Levine had never departed from the Halakha, the Way—he had never seen a movie or heard of Socrates; he would not eat a chicken unless he had witnessed its slaughter. One day Levine sat Wouk down in front of a large book filled with columns of an unfamiliar script. It was the Talmud. “*Za rabotu!*” commanded Levine—to work.

Wouk did work at it. But his real initial ambition was to make people laugh. At Columbia, where he studied philosophy and comparative literature, he edited the humor magazine and wrote variety shows. He still studied the Talmud, but for the most part, he recalls thinking, “To hell with that noise. I’m going to be a funnyman.” After graduating, he got a job writing jokes for comedian Fred Allen. It was a nice life; he lived in a penthouse and spent a lot of time chasing girls. But there was something unsatisfying about it, too. After Pearl Harbor, he joined the Navy. He was in training school when he learned that his father had died. Wouk approached his commanding officer and told him that he had to go home to sit *shiva*.

While mourning his father's death, he introduced his grandfather to his mentor and professor from Columbia, and he realized that the two men embodied something true and important: secular, humanist skepticism on the one hand, and the inherited truth of religion on the other. The challenge for him was to respect and understand both those ways of life. His father had done that, he thought—had lived fully in the present, in America, and yet found strength and meaning in tradition. Wouk still wanted to make people laugh, but he wanted to make them think, too.

Louisa Thomas

Louisa Thomas, “The Language God Talks’: Raising Caine,” *Newsweek*, April 9, 2010, pp. 57-58.

### From *Peculiar Treasures*

#### *Ruth*

Ruth was a Moabite girl who married into a family of Israelite transplants living in Moab because there was a famine going on at home. When her young husband died, her mother-in-law, Naomi, decided to pull up stakes and head back for Israel where she belonged. The famine was over by then, and there was no longer anything to hold her where she was, her own husband having died about the same time that Ruth's had. She advised Ruth to stay put right there in Moab and to try to snag herself another man from among her own people.

She was a strong-willed old party, and when Ruth said she wanted to go to Israel with her, she tried to talk her out of it. Even if by some gynecological fluke she managed to produce another son for Ruth to marry, she said, by the time he was old enough, Ruth would be ready for the geriatric ward. But Ruth had a mind of her own too, besides which they'd been through a lot together what with one thing and another, and home to her was wherever Naomi was. "Where you go, I go, and where you live, I live," Ruth told her, "and if your God is Yahweh, then my God is Yahweh too" (*Ruth 2:10-17*). So Naomi gave in, and when the two of them pulled in to Bethlehem, Naomi's home town, there was a brass band to meet them at the station.

Ruth had a spring in her step and a fascinating Moabite accent, and it wasn't long before she caught the eye of a well-heeled farmer named Boaz. He was a little long in the tooth, but he still knew a pretty girl when he saw one, and before long, in a fatherly kind of way, he took her under his wing. He told the hired hands not to give her any trouble. He helped her in the fields. He had her over for a meal. And when she asked him one day in her disarming Moabite way why he was being so nice to her, he said he'd heard of how good she'd been to Naomi, who happened to be a distant cousin of his, and as far as he was concerned, she deserved nothing but the best.

Naomi was nobody's fool and saw which way the wind was blowing long before Ruth did. She was dead-set on Ruth's making a good catch for herself, and since it was obvious she'd already hooked old Boaz whether she realized it or not, all she had to do was find the right way to reel him in. Naomi gave her instructions. As soon as Boaz had a good supper under his belt and had polished off a nightcap or two, he'd go to the barn and hit the sack too. If Boaz's feet just happened to be uncovered somehow, and she just happened to be close enough to keep them warm, that probably wouldn't be the worst thing in the world either (*Ruth 3:1-5*). But she wasn't to go too far. Back in Jericho, Boaz's mother, Rahab (q.v.), had had a rather seamy reputation for going too far professionally,

Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 147-149 and 23-24.

and anything that reminded him of that might scare him off permanently.

Ruth followed her mother-in-law's advice to the letter, and it worked like a charm. Boaz was so overwhelmed that she'd pay attention to an old crock like him when there were so many young bucks running around in tight-fitting jeans that he fell for her hook, line and sinker, and after a few legal matters were taken care of, made her his lawful wedded wife.

They had a son named Obed after a while, and Naomi came to take care of him and stayed on for the rest of her life. Then in time Obed had a son of his own named Jesse, and Jesse in turn had seven sons, the seventh of whom was named David and ended up as the greatest king Israel ever had. With Ruth for his great-grandmother and Naomi as his grandfather's nurse, it was hardly a wonder.

### David

To see what there was about David that made Israel adore him like no other king she ever had, as good a place to look as any is the account of how he captured Jerusalem and moved in the ark.

Jerusalem was a major plum for the new young king, a hill town considered so untakable that the inhabitants had a saying to the effect that a blind man and a cripple could hold it against the U.S. Marines (*II Samuel 5:6*). Just to remind people who it was that had nevertheless finally taken it, David's first move was to change its name to the City of David. His second move was a brilliant maneuver for giving his victory the stamp of divine approval by trotting out that holy box of acacia wood overlaid with gold which was known as the ark and contained who knows what but was as close as Israel ever officially got to a representation in space of their God who dwelled in eternity. David had the ark loaded onto a custom-built cart and made a regular circus parade of it, complete with horns, harps, cymbals, and psalteries, not to mention himself high-stepping out front like the Mayor of Dublin on Saint Patrick's Day. When they finally made it into town, he set up a big tent to keep out the weather, had refreshments passed around on the house, and, just so nobody would forget who was picking up the tab, did the lion's share of praying himself and personally took up the collection afterwards.

So far it was none of it anything a good public relations man couldn't have dreamed up for him, but the next thing was something else again. He stripped down to his skivvies, and then with everybody looking on, including his wife—a high class girl named Michal who gave his administration tone as the late King Saul's daughter—he did a dance. Maybe it started out as just another Madison Avenue ploy, but not for long.

*To see what there was about David that made Israel adore him like no other king she ever had, as good a place to look as any is the account of how he captured Jerusalem and moved in the ark.*

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With trumpets blaring and drums beating, it was Camelot all over again, and for once that royal young red-head didn't have to talk up the bright future and the high hopes because he was himself the future at its brightest, and there were no hopes higher than the ones his people had in him. And for once he didn't have to drag God in for politics' sake either because it was obvious to everybody that this time God was there on his own. How they cut loose together, David and Yahweh, whirling around before the ark in such a passion that they caught fire from each other and blazed up in a single flame of such magnificence that not even the dressing-down David got from Michal afterwards could dim the glory of it.

He had feet of clay like the rest of us if not more so—self-serving and deceitful, lustful and vain—but on the basis of that dance alone, you can see why it was David more than anybody else that Israel lost her heart to and why, when Jesus of Nazareth came riding into Jerusalem on his flea-bitten mule a thousand years later, it was as the Son of David that they hailed him.

Frederick Buechner

## *Critical Background*

### **From Isaiah 1-39**

The material in Isaiah 11 is organized around the theme of Israel's restoration. An opening oracle concerning the royal house (11:1-9) is followed by a brief prose piece where the "root of Jesse" image is extended into a scene of international weal (11:10) and national restoration (11:11). The final poetic oracle extends the image of ensign yet again into a scene of the gathering of the dispersed (11:12) and a description of the peaceful fellowship Israel will again enjoy (11:13). Anticipating the long nations section that follows (chaps. 13-23), the final verses depict a reversal of fortune for Israel, as it now stands strong against its once hostile neighbors Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. True to another theme developed in the nations section, a highway is established by God from Assyria to Israel (19:23). The image also anticipates the charge from the divine council at the opening of Second Isaiah chapters: "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (40:3).

Before turning to the specific exposition of the units in this chapter, two matters need to be addressed in order to understand them properly. One is the meaning and reference of the "shoot...from the stump of Jesse," and the other is the extent to which Isaiah is to be understood as a prophet of salvation. This second matter is of special concern because Israel's prophets are generally conceived of as critical (and for the most part negatively so) appraisers of Israel's destiny, especially when this involves the king. Is Isaiah an exception to this popular conception? How, and if so, why?

### *A Shoot from the Stump of Jesse*

The royal oracle in 11:1-9 is frequently associated with the prior royal oracle in 9:2-7. Even more important in the larger context, however, is the intervening material, that is, the section just discussed in 9:8-10:34 that leads into this description of a new king and a new age. That section was concerned to describe the rise and fall of the Great Forest Assyria. We noted at the outset the controlling image of forest, from "the lofty" (10:33), "Lebanon with its majestic trees" (10:34), "the glory of his forest" (10:18); to "thickets" (9:18) and "briers and thorns" (9:18, 10:17). Assyria was to be an ax in God's hand reducing Israel to "briers and thorns"; the forest was to be burned "through the wrath of the LORD of hosts" (9:19). In the end, it is the Assyrian ax that is broken or, better, returned to

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| Christopher Seitz, <i>Isaiah 1-39</i> , Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 95-98. Reprinted by permission. |
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him who hewed it; the final scene is one of Assyria reduced to “thorns and briars in one day” (10:17), its “thickets” cleared away by the ax of the Lord (10:34).

Some have, quite logically, seen a link between the stump image at 11:1 and the preceding deforestation scene. Yet 10:33-34 does not speak of the deforestation of Israel but of Assyria. The final scene of “the tallest trees...cut down” is the culmination of hopes related to Assyria’s downfall as these found expression in the memoir (8:8-10), but more directly from 10:5 onward. At the same time, 9:8-10:4 does indeed speak of the deforestation of Israel. The turning point comes at 10:5-11, where for reasons of hubris, blasphemy, and loyalty to a surviving remnant, the ax is taken away from Assyria and Yahweh’s anger—not abated—turns against the rod of his fury. Because the remainder of the chapter is occupied with this theme of Israel as remnant (10:20-27*b*), the stump image at 11:1 may seem out of place. Many regard it as a harsh sign that the monarchy has fallen, either into disrepair or altogether.

*A shoot will come forth from this remaining stump. What God did once with Immanuel we will do again.*

Another interpretation can be put forward that finds support in the larger context of Isaiah 5-12. The “stump of Jesse” refers to the reduced kingdom of Jerusalem and those portions of Judah left after the Assyrian assault of 701. The preceding section spoke of the end of Assyrian might, but it also spoke of the gradual desolation of the vineyard, until “overgrown with briars and thorns” (5:6 — see also 9:18). The same image of briars and thorns is extended into the memoir itself (7:23-25), repeated three times for emphasis. The divine commission had closed with reference to a tenth burned again (Judah) and “a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled” (6:13). Though a different word for “stump” appears at 11:1, the controlling image remains the same. Amidst the “briars and thorns” there stands a stump left of a great tree. The Davidic kingdom is nothing but a stump. Was the watchtower that was built “in the midst of” the vineyard pulled down along with its wall? What of the promise of a “young cow and two sheep” (7:21) and of curds and honey for everyone left in the land (7:21)?

Later sections of the Book of Isaiah (chaps. 36-38) verify that one important aspect of the prophet’s proclamation was fulfilled—Assyria was turned back after gradual assaults that reached right up to the neck. Zion was spared by the prayer of the king and the prophetic word. At that same time, the vineyard was all but destroyed. One might imagine a paradoxical sense of thanksgiving. Yet here the prophet gives voice to his hopes for a new day following the defeat of Assyria, the sparing of Zion, and the pious deportment of Hezekiah. A shoot will come forth from this remaining stump. What God did once with Immanuel we will do again. But now the king

will not just stand as a final bulwark against Israel's sins and God's judgment at the hands of Assyria. A new age of royal government and international peace is envisioned.

The important point to make is that the stump image is perfectly at home in the larger context of Isaiah 5-12. There has been a fairly consistent employment of metaphors, even as vineyard and forest are distinctive forms of natural growth, and as Mighty River, Great Forest, and roaring lion (5:29) capture separate aspects of Assyria's role vis-à-vis Israel. A shoot goes forth from the stump, and a branch from the roots of a great tree fallen and burned again. But the stump is also a holy seed (6:13). Here too the separate metaphors do not always come together to form a unitary picture. Is the holy seed a remnant people, the royal seed alone, some other referent now lost to us because of historical factors? This is hard to say. But that the stump image could be restricted to just one period, that is, a period presupposing the fall of the monarchy, cannot be sustained, given the larger context in which metaphors of forest, vineyard, and the great trees are governing ones, deeply rooted (so to speak) in traditions. That a secondary editor would also employ the same images rooted in the traditions before him is not to be doubted. But the stump need not imply that the monarchy has fallen entirely, as was the case in the aftermath of 587 B.C. It is an important concept within Isaiah 6, and its usage there does not imply total destruction (as in 587) but a standing remnant. It is in that same sense that the image is employed in this oracle.

*Here too the separate metaphors do not always come together to form a unitary picture.*

Christopher Seitz

