

Isaiah 11.1-5

The following commentary encompasses notes on the Hebrew grammar and syntax along with notes from an Ancient Near Eastern perspective. It includes notes on the importance of trees in Scripture as well as notes in the use of word play in poetry, and concludes with my final thoughts on the passage. A bibliography is attached. It is not exhaustive by any definition of the word and would be more complete to include verses 6-9 (which was considered), but I decided to briefly address and include those verses in my final thoughts, The In-Between Spaces. ~ Elizabeth

A shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse
and a sprout from his roots will bear fruit.

The Spirit of Adonai will rest upon Him
The spirit of wisdom and discernment
The spirit of counsel and strength
The spirit of knowledge and fear of Adonai

He will delight in the fear of Adonai
For not with regard to the seeing of His eyes will He judge
Nor with regard to the hearing of His ears will He decide

And He will judge with righteousness the poor
And He will decide with uprightness for the meek of the earth
And the earth will be smitten with the rod of His mouth
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked

And righteousness will be the belt around His loins
And His faithfulness will be the belt around His waist

וַיֵּצֵא חֹטֵר מִגֵּזַע יֵשׁוּעַ וְנֹצֵר מִשְׁרָשָׁיו
יִפְרֶה:

וְנָחָה עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה רוּחַ חֵכְמָה וּבִינָה
רוּחַ עֲצָה וּגְבוּרָה רוּחַ דַּעַת וַיְרֵאת
יְהוָה:

וְהָרִיחוּ בִּירְאֵת יְהוָה וְלֹא לְמַרְאֵה עֵינָיו
יִשְׁפּוּט וְלֹא לְמִשְׁמַע אָזְנוֹ יוֹכִיחַ:

וְשָׁפֵט בְּצֶדֶק דְּלִים וְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמִישׁוֹר
לְעִנְיֵי אָרֶץ וְהִכָּה אָרֶץ בְּשֵׁבֶט פִּי וּבְרוּחַ
שְׁפָתָיו יָמִית רָשָׁע:

וְהָיָה צְדָק אַזּוֹר מִתַּנְיֹו וְהָאֱמוּנָה אַזּוֹר

Isaiah 11.1

וַיֵּצֵא חֹטֶר מִגֵּזַע יֵשׁוּב וְנֹצֵר מִשְׂרָשֵׁיו יִפְרֹחַ:

A shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse
and a sprout from his roots will bear fruit.

וַיֵּצֵא

This verse begins with a vav consecutive; it continues the narrative and ties together the previous verses in chapter 10. As the chapter closes, Isaiah describes Assyria’s swift and utter destruction as Adonai lops off boughs with a terrible crash, with the tall in stature cut down, the lofty abased, and the Mighty One using an iron axe to lay waste to the thickets of the forest. Barnes, in his commentary says this ... “Between the Assyrian, therefore, and the person who is the subject of this chapter, there is a most striking and beautiful contrast. The one was at first magnificent—like a vast spreading forest—yet should soon fall and decay; the other was the little sprout of a decayed tree, which should yet rise, expand and flourish.”

חֹטֶר shoot גֵּזַע stump נֹצֵר sprout שְׂרָשֵׁי root

While Assyria falls never to rise again, for Israel there lies hope in the promised Messiah that would come after the exile of Judah when the Davidic rule had ceased. Ariel Berkowitz in his commentary on Isaiah notes the parallelism between חֹטֶר shoot / גֵּזַע stump and נֹצֵר sprout / שְׂרָשֵׁי root. While cedar trees will not sprout once cut down, the olive tree produces sprouts from the stump. Even if an olive tree dies, the shoots will still grow so that one generation replaces the next. “They are the same DNA of the tree, resurrected and restored.”

נֹצֵר sprout

Nazareth comes from the same root

It is most likely that it is the common theme of “humble beginnings” attached to the idea of a “sprout” or “twig” that combine the town of Yeshua with the Isaiah 11 prophecy in Matthew 2.23. (Tim Hegg, Messiah in the Tanach, p106)

חֹטֶר is only found in two verses, here in the present verse paired with נֹצֵר (sprout) rendering a best translation of *shoot*, and in Proverbs 14.3 where it is translated as *rod*.

From an ANE perspective...

“Texts from both Egypt and Mesopotamia predict kings coming to power who will be successful in bringing peace, justice and prosperity, though these are usually written after the king is on the throne as a means of legitimating his rule.” (John Walton, IVP Background Commentary on the OT) Consider the following oracles:

Ashurbanipal would be responsible for “the hungry being fed, the naked being clothed and prisoners being set free.”

Tiglath-Pileser III is the shoot or scion of the city of Baltil (Assur) bringing justice to his people.

Marduk Prophecy (from about 1100 B.C.) a king whose reign is distinguished by acts of reform bringing about stability and prosperity. He will be favored by the deity resulting in the gate of heaven being opened for eternity. Peace and justice are the fruits of the deity ruling through this ideal king. Walton comments, “Though the Marduk Prophecy may well have been written as propaganda for the king, who desired it to be understood as applying to himself, it demonstrates that the rhetoric used in Isaiah would have been familiar as a way to describe a future ideal kingdom.”

Some Notes on Trees

In Scripture, other than God and humans, trees are the most mentioned living creation. They make their appearance at pivotal times in Biblical history. From the beginning moments of creation trees are intertwined with God and man. Both are brought forth by Adonai from the dust of the earth having the ability to bear fruit. Trees are present at man’s fall into sin, when Adonai speaks to Moses from a burning bush, and visits Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre. In Isaiah, enemy armies are depicted as forests that Adonai swiftly destroys. There is no shortage of the mention of trees in the Apostolic Writings and often times Yeshua seems to be near a tree (Mark 11.12-25), describing a Heaven as a tree (Matthew 13.31-32), seen from a tree (Luke 19.1-4), gathered with His disciples near trees (Mark 13.3), prayed in a garden of trees (Matthew 26.36-42), and his death was on a tree (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19).

Oaks and Cedars in the ancient world were highly valuable for their size, fortitude, and strength as well as their beauty. They were used in the construction of palaces which became a source of pride and a place of trust for those who built them. Consider how the Psalmist describes a man who delights in the Torah of Adonai and who meditates on His word day and night as a firmly planted tree by streams of water with qualities of stability, strength, life, and fruitfulness.

Isaiah 11.2

וְנָחָה עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה רוּחַ חָכְמָה וּבִינָה רוּחַ עֲצָה וּגְבוּרָה רוּחַ דַּעַת וְיִרְאַת יְהוָה:

The Spirit of Adonai will rest upon Him
 The spirit of wisdom and discernment
 The spirit of counsel and strength
 The spirit of knowledge and fear of Adonai

וְנָחָה עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה

“The **רוּחַ** is clearly the Ruach of ADONAI, as directly stated, and thus the “branch” is endowed with the characteristics named, through the work of the Ruach. This heightens the picture and mystery of the incarnation.” (Tim Hegg, Syntax Notes on Isaiah 11.1-5). And Barnes states, “His human nature was kept pure; his mind was made eminently wise; his heart always retained the fear and love of God, and there is no absurdity in supposing that these extraordinary endowments were to be traced to God.”

Isaiah 11 is the continuation of prophesying Yeshua’s appearance, His identity, and the effects of His rule and reign. In 7.14, we have learned Immanuel, *God with us*, will come as a baby to grow and dwell among us. He adds to the prophecy in chapter 9 with verses 6-7 mirroring ever so closely with verses 2-3 of our current passage. (Translations NASB)

Isaiah 7.14

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9.6-7

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
 And the government will rest on His shoulders;
 And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
 On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
 From then on and forevermore.
 The zeal of Adonai of hosts will accomplish this.

From an ANE perspective...

Kings were said to be endowed with a divine spirit referred to as the *melammu* which is a visible representation of the gods, and for comparison in Scripture would be similar in reference to the **כְּבוֹד** “glory” of Adonai. Baker states,

Sennacherib credits to it his ability to subdue Hezekiah: “As for Hezekiah, the fear of the awe-inspiring radiance of my lordship overwhelmed him.” Some reliefs from Syria and Mesopotamia show various symbols above both gods and kings, indicating some continuum between the two, not in identity but in power and enablement.

Isaiah 11.3

וְהִרְיָחוּ בְּרִצְאֵת יְהוָה וְלֹא לְמַרְאֵה עֵינָיו יִשְׁפּוֹט וְלֹא לְמִשְׁמַע אָזְנוֹ יוֹכִיחַ:

He will delight in the fear of Adonai
For not with regard to the seeing of His eyes will He judge
Nor with regard to the hearing of His ears will He decide

וְהִרְיָחוּ בְּרִצְאֵת יְהוָה

וְהִרְיָחוּ hifil inf. construct הִרְיָח to smell (Genesis 8.21) From Tim Hegg’s syntax notes and commentary:

1QIsa contains the line, which gives ancient, pre-Masoretic witness to the line itself. The best understanding of the line is that it describes that which pleases Him, even as a fragrant aroma, as well as a statement of his infallible discernment. “He shall take delight in goodness, and be able to distinguish it without fail from its counterfeits.” [Joseph Alexander, Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah (Zondervan, 1976), p. 251.]

Oswalt seems to be hesitant to offer a definitive opinion on this line of verse 3 and giving a wide berth to doubters of its authenticity (which the writer of this commentary is not to be counted). However, part of his comment is worth noting and is in italics below with my notes in brackets. He says,

Considerable controversy surrounds the first phrase of v.3. If the text is correct{and I believe it is}, *the sense is that Messiah will “smell” with delight the attitude of reverent concern for God’s ways just as God delights in the smell of incense.* However, the passage is strange enough to merit considerable caution over its authenticity. (p.280)

Buksbazen offers a worthy note on this verse:

Endowed with the fullness of the Spirit of the LORD, the Messiah “delights” to see others fear the Lord. The Hebrew word for “delights” is “*haricho*.” Literally it means “to inhale with delight,” like the fragrance of a sweet smelling offering (Lev. 3.5,16).

Thus filled with the Holy Spirit, the Messiah will not depend upon fallible human senses such as sight or hearing to render righteous judgement and decisions, but will have perfect knowledge from within His inner self. John said of Christ: He “needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man” (John 2.25) (p.181)

Grogan’s comments on righteous judgement is worth considering:

The act of pronouncing judgement in the court is often reared in the OT as the acid test of a wise and incorruptible use of authority (cf., e.g. 5.21-23; Ps 72.1-4). Verse 3b does not mean that right judgment ignores evidence available to the senses but rather that it requires inner qualities of character (cf. Jn 2.25; 7.24). The word “judgement” has an ominous ring to us; but when used of the poor it is almost a synonym for salvation (Ps 72.2; 82.2-4). Where there is corruption in the law courts, it is the poor who long for a righteous judge. (p 544-545)

From an ANE perspective...

“The foremost responsibility of a king in the ancient world was to establish justice, and therefore the rhetoric of kings throughout the inscriptional material proclaims their success in that endeavor. The wisdom of a king was assessed by the brilliance of his insight into complex cases, and his suitability for the throne was evaluated by his commitment to provide for the vulnerable classes of society. The ability to resolve difficult cases was believed to be divinely endowed (compare Solomon; see comments on 1 Kings 3:16–28 and 2 Chron 1:12) and therefore was not dependent solely on the evidence that could be presented in court (see Prov 16:10).” (Walton, IVP Background Commentary on the OT)

Isaiah 11.4

וּשְׁפַט בְּצַדֵּק דְּלִים וְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמִישׁוֹר לְעִנְיֵי־אָרֶץ וְהִכָּה־אָרֶץ בְּשִׁבְט פִּי וּבְרוּחַ שְׁפָתָיו יִמִּית רָשָׁע:

And He will judge with righteousness the poor
 And He will decide with uprightness for the meek of the earth
 And the earth will be smitten with the rod of His mouth
 And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked

וּשְׁפַט / בְּשִׁבְט / שְׁפָתָיו

Here Isaiah uses assonance (word play) to link the couplet together.

וּבְרוּחַ שְׁפָתָיו יִמִּית רָשָׁע

Barnes explains “*The breath of his lips* means that which goes forth from his lips—his doctrines, his commands, his decisions.”

שִׁבְט

from HALOT...a rod as an instrument of punishment; the Messiah shall strike the earth with פִּי שִׁבְט the rod of his mouth (NRSV; REB: “his verdict like a rod”) while in the following verse (v.5) it is used in the sense of “the cane of God’s discipline.”

From an ANE perspective...

“Discerning judgement is important for God’s ruler, and similar attributes were valued elsewhere as well.” (Walton IVP OT) Consider:

Babylonian ruler Der... “just judge, not harming any man, one who secures justice for male and female victims of wrong,”

Pharaoh be greeted by a Ugaritic king as “great king, king of Egypt, gracious king, just king, king of kings.” which emphasized the significance of justice and equity in their relationship.

The Functions of Word Play in Poetry

a summary of Wilfred G. E. Watson pages 245-250

“Word play is largely a feature of oral poetry, since it depends on how the words sound.”

to amuse and sustain interest

The use of ambiguous or archaic words would keep the audience listening with intent augmenting interest.

to assist composition

Poets often used word plays in a series as well as in sequences of proper names, places, and ancient itineraries to frame their poems.

to lend authenticity

Word play is evidence of a poet’s mastery of language; for the prophet, it increased the authenticity of their message.

to link a poem or its parts

It is useful in binding couplets together as evidenced here in Isaiah 11.4 (other examples can be found in Psalm 148.3-5 and Habakkuk 6.16)

to denote reversal

Reversals of fortune are often expressed by way of wordplay and can be confirmed by ABA Chiastic structure which “denotes inversion of an existing state.”

to show appearance can be deceptive

Word play, being ambiguous in character, is a poet’s master choice to illustrate deception of appearance.

to equate two things

Using similar names can equate things of disparate nature.

other functions

Two other functions worth noting: the frequent use of word play in laments; and the helpfulness in assisting the memory of the poet and his audience while being instructive.

Isaiah 11.5

וְהָיָה צְדָק אֲזוּר מִתְּנִיּוֹ וְהָאֱמוּנָה אֲזוּר חֻלְצֵיוֹ:

And righteousness will be the belt around His loins
And His faithfulness will be the belt around His waist

וְהָאֱמוּנָה

Articular is translated as a possessive... *And His faithfulness*. See Williams §86.

צְדָק and אֱמוּנָה

Adonai's righteousness is the truth and standard by which all things are measured; Adonai's faithfulness is the rock where the covenants and promises are anchored. Grogan comments,

In the divine economy, the word is active and powerful (cf. Ge 1.3; Isa 55.10-11), and the Messiah's word of judgement will be utterly effective (cf. Jn 12.48). He judges as "the Word of God" (Rev 19.13-15). This testifies to his great power (cf. v2), for unlike many a monarch he is well able to execute the judgements he pronounces. In him word and consequent action are virtually one. (p.545)

מִתְּנִיּוֹ ("loins") and חֻלְצֵיוֹ ("waist") are used here as parallel pairs in the same verse. Both are used metaphorically of "Strength" or "Power." For מִתְּנִיּוֹ, cf. 1Ki 2:5; 12:10; Is 45:1. For חֻלְצֵיוֹ, e.g., Job 38:3; 40:7. (Tim Hegg, Syntax Notes on Isaiah 11.1-5).

From an ANE perspective...

אֲזוּר

belt/sash.

"The same word is used in both lines of this verse, but one item is a wrap around the thighs, while the other winds between the thighs. These are the most basic articles of clothing, and without them an individual would be naked." (Walton, IVP OT)

In the Near Eastern dress styles, the belt or sash (v.5) was the garment that gave stability to the whole ensemble; and to "gird the loins" (KJV; 1Ki 18.46; 2Ki 4.29; 1Pe 1.13) was to prepare for work. The Messiah would be prepared in character for his work of judgement. (Grogan, p. 545)

Final Thoughts

The In-Between Spaces

Peace will be established only by the reign of the Prince of Peace.
Charles Spurgeon

We exist in a world that is saturated with lies cloaked as truth, evil deemed as good, darkness perpetuated as light, humans believing themselves to be gods capable of saving the world and each other. The leaders in our own governments promise a counterfeit justice that claims to favor the disadvantaged but instead favors the elite among us. We are assaulted daily with arrogant opinions devoid of truth and divisive rhetoric meant to distract and influence. Too often it succeeds.

The world spinning out of control, even though I know Adonai is in control, leaves a surreal feeling, an unsettled feeling that skulks about causing distraction throughout the day. Void of fear, this unwelcome curiosity of *what ifs* and *what's next* makes me weary. I know I do not have to fear because knowing His truth is easy. I know His righteousness is unflawed. I know His faithfulness is unfailing. Trusting His word is the easiest thing I do. It is the waiting that is hard; it is the waiting that trips me up. In the waiting for justice, in the waiting for peace, in the waiting on Him, I find myself wavering between two wants whispered as prayers...Yeshua don't tarry and Yeshua wait a little longer.

There is a part of me that knows that no matter how much I long to meet Him, I am not ready. I am an imperfect and impatient creature plagued by a perfectionist's demands. I want to be ready, but deep down in my striving soul, I know I never will be. It is the only thing that truly fills my heart with fear because I know there will be wrong choices that turn into sin and undisciplined moments that turn into laziness, a temper that flares and a tongue that wounds, mistakes and misunderstandings that are difficult to rectify, and oh the impatience that dwells within me, not only with myself, but with everyone else too! And I am greedy; I want more time and extra chances to fix my messes before He returns and finds me sorely lacking. So I find myself waiting in these in-between spaces, the spaces between the wanting and the ultimately receiving. But there is another space called hope and if I am not careful, it gets lost.

Alec Motyer says in his beginning comments on Isaiah 11, "Undated hope is a living, ever-present assurance for God's people, and it is at this point that the passage speaks as much to the church today as in Isaiah's time." And he is not wrong. How many times have I read Isaiah's penned words grasping onto hope in the midst of the world's chaos and anarchy?

*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
The Spirit of Adonai will rest on Him,*

*The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 The spirit of counsel and strength,
 The spirit of knowledge and the fear of Adonai.
 And He will delight in the fear of Adonai,
 And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
 Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;
 But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
 And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
 And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
 And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,
 And faithfulness the belt about His waist.*

*And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
 And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
 And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
 And a little boy will lead them.
 Also the cow and the bear will graze,
 Their young will lie down together,
 And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
 And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.
 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
 For the earth will be full of the knowledge of Adonai
 As the waters cover the sea.*

The hope in this passage grounds me. I read these words and it does not matter that I do not know when, it settles me that I know it is truth. His truth. The only truth. Adonai's righteousness is the standard by which all things are measured; Adonai's faithfulness is the rock where the covenants and promises are anchored. His gift of my faith undergirds my hope and the conviction and belief that one day the remaining words of this prophecy will come to pass and the world can not stop it. It will all happen within Adonai's perfect timing and within His perfect will. My impatience will not nudge is closer and my sin will not delay it. Evil will never triumph, injustice and chaos will never reign. There is only one King and His name is Yeshua.

As I was reading through Messiah in The Tanach, I found this quote,

There is a period of time from His appearance to His rule and reign over Israel, and the victory He gains for her. But when He does eventually come to power, He ushers in a peace for Israel, and a drawing of the nations to Torah, and He does so in an unending manner. His victory is an eternal one, and the peace He brings is never overcome. As Prince of Peace, He establishes an eternal rest for His people. In this regard, then, the prophecy

envisions both the first and second advent of Messiah Yeshua, who came as a baby at a time when the Davidic dynasty had been cut off, and He will return a second time as the ruling and reigning King. (Hegg, Messiah in the Tanach, p107)

As I read it, it occurred to me that Yeshua is waiting too. And it is not the first time. He waited upon the earth just as we do now. He waits now for His time to return. But He does not wait idly or impatiently. It is in this new realization that, here in the world in the space between the increase of evil and the longing for justice and peace, I find encouragement to wait too. Not in an idle way or an impatient way, but a determined way. Paul reminds me that hope that is seen is not hope and asks, "who hopes for what he already sees?" I can not see the future, but I know the One who can. And because of Isaiah's faithful service to Adonai, I can meditate on the words he penned, close my eyes, imagine it all. I can not change the world, but I can do my best to bear the image of the One who will as He rules and reigns. And in the space between this moment and Yeshua's return, I will wait for justice and peace with hope.

Bibliography

Baker, David W. "Isaiah" in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 4*, edited by John H. Walton, 2-227. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009

Bartelt, Andrew H. *The Book Around Immanuel: Style and Structure in Isaiah 2-12*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996

Berkowitz, Ariel. *Studies in Isaiah (702BibTk Part 1 Spring Quarter 2021)*. Israel: TorahResource Institute

Berkowitz, Ariel. *Studies in Isaiah (703BibTk Part 2 Fall Quarter 2021)*. Israel: TorahResource Institute

Buksbazen, Victor. *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*. Bellmawr: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 2008

Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc, 2006

Grogan, Geoffrey W. "Isaiah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, 433-863. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008.

Hegg, Tim. *The Messiah in the Tanach*. Tacoma: TorahResource, 2003.

Hegg, Tim. *Syntax Notes - Isaiah 11:1-5 (602Heb - Hebrew Syntax II Winter Quarter 2021-2022)*. Tacoma: TorahResource Institute

Kugel, James L. *The Great Poems of the Bible: A Reader's Companion with New Translations*. New York: The Free Press, 1999

Motyer, J. Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993

Oswalt, John. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986.

Oswalt, John. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

Walton, John H. , Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000

Watson, Wilfred G. E. *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Williams, Ronald J. *William's Hebrew Syntax*. Third Edition Edited by John C. Beckman. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2007.

Additional Reference Works in Accordance

HALOT

Barnes Notes on the OT

Bibles

BHS

NASB 1995

LXX - Breton

in Accordance

MT-ETCBC

NASB (1995) with Strong's

LXX Rahlfs Tagged.