

‘TRUST IN THE LORD’:
HEZEKIAH, KINGS AND ISAIAH

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Summary

The Hezekiah narrative (2 Kings 18-20 // Isaiah 36-39) is unique in the Former Prophets in its repeated use of בָּטַח ‘trust, rely on’. An exploration of the context and content of בָּטַח in the narrative and elsewhere in Isaiah, Psalms, Proverbs and other prophetic literature points to a consistent pattern of true and false grounds for ‘trust’. In particular there is no basis in the ‘inviolability of Zion’. The drama of the narrative is sharper in the context of Isaiah and may have been shaped soon after Sennacherib’s death, with possible wisdom influence. At the same time, the redactor of Kings has seen ‘trust’ as a key feature in Hezekiah’s reign. The relevance of the narrative to readers of the canonical Kings and Isaiah is also considered. There is significance for all in the worship of YHWH alone together with humble obedience. It is his honour that is affirmed among the nations.

I. The Hezekiah narratives and ‘trust’

The Hezekiah-Isaiah narratives have long attracted both historical and literary investigations. It is the only narrative in Kings involving a prophet whose messages are included in the Latter Prophets and that alone would arouse interest. To this is added the existence of parallel accounts in 2 Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39, a sizeable block, with all manner of literary and theological questions, and the parallel with Sennacherib’s own account which raises historical questions. With this can be combined the later forms of the tradition as used in Chronicles and textual traditions represented by the LXX, Qumran and Josephus.¹

¹ A. Konkel, ‘The sources of the story of Hezekiah in the book of Isaiah’, *VT* 43 (1993), 462-82, is a recent close textual analysis of the various text traditions of both Isaiah 36-39 and 2 Kings.

For much of this century attention has focused on the Kings narrative, generally with a primarily historical interest.² It has been common since Gesenius³ to see the Isaiah setting as secondary, the material being borrowed from Kings, either as an addition to First Isaiah on analogy with the addition of Jeremiah 52 to that book⁴ or more commonly as a bridge when First and Second Isaiah were joined.⁵

Interest has begun to shift to Isaiah 36-39 in its own right within the book of Isaiah, asking questions concerning literary and theological relationships to the rest of the book. Important studies providing an impetus have been those of Ackroyd,⁶ Clements,⁷ Smelik,⁸ Conrad,⁹ Sweeney,¹⁰ and the ongoing work of Seitz.¹¹

² A significant investigation by B.S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM, 1967), concluded: 'In terms of the specific historical problem of 701, it seems unlikely that a satisfactory historical solution will be forthcoming without fresh extra-biblical evidence' (p. 120). He also began to grapple with the theological significance of the differing responses to the Assyrian crisis, investigating form-critically other passages in Isaiah and the Chronicler's version.

³ W. Gesenius, *Der Prophet Jesaja* II, 2 (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1821), 932-36. See also B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (HKAT 3.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

⁴ A recent exponent is A. Rofé, *Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 39.

⁵ E.g., argued consistently by Clements (see note 7).

⁶ P.R. Ackroyd, 'An interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A study of II Kings 20, Isaiah 38-39', *SJT* 27 (1974), 329-52; 'Isaiah i-xii: Presentation of a prophet', *Congress Volume 1977* (VTS 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 16-48; and 'Isaiah 36-39: Structure and function', in W.C. Delsman *et al.* (ed.), *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg* (AOAT 211; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), 3-21. The three articles are reprinted in Ackroyd, *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1987), 79-120, 152-71 (notes on 266-78, 282-85).

⁷ R.E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament* (JSOTS 13; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980); *Isaiah 1-39* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); 'Unity of the book of Isaiah', *Interpretation* 36 (1982), 117-29 [reprinted in J.L. Mays and P.J. Achtemeier (ed.), *Interpreting the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 50-61] and 'The prophecies of Isaiah to Hezekiah concerning Sennacherib: 2 Kings 19:21-34 // Isaiah 37:22-35', in *Prophezie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im Alten Israel: Festschrift S. Hermann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. R. Liwak and S. Wanger (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991), 65-78 ('Unity' and 'The prophecies' reprinted in R.E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 35-48, 93-104).

⁸ K.A.D. Smelik, 'Distortion of Old Testament prophecy: The purpose of Isaiah xxxvi and xxxvii', in A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *Crises and Perspectives: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature: Papers read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference held at Cambridge, U.K. 1985* (OTS 24; Leiden: Brill,

Groves turns to the theological significance in his work on 'actualization',¹² while Williamson, as part of his investigation of material used by Second Isaiah, reviews the changing attitudes to the relationships of Isaiah 36-39 to the rest of the book.¹³

Much discussion has centred on the question of a theology of the 'inviolability of Zion' and its relationship to the events of 701. Associated has been royal ideology. Clements in particular has argued that any idea of inviolability is a result of Jerusalem escaping destruction in 701 and the later end of the Assyrian empire. It became 'part of a more comprehensive ideology which found its focal point in the Davidic dynasty', being a development of the Josianic period.¹⁴

Since Ackroyd's 1982 work it has been common to draw attention to the contrasts between Ahaz (Is. 7) and Hezekiah, with Hezekiah's role in the narrative as a possible model for future behaviour.¹⁵ Seitz

1986), 70-93; revised and updated in K.A.D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (OTS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 93-128.

⁹ E.W. Conrad, 'The royal narratives and the structure of the book of Isaiah', *JSOT* 41 (1988), 67-81; and *Reading Isaiah* (Overtures in Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), esp. 34-51.

¹⁰ M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW 171; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988); and *Isaiah 1-39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 454-511.

¹¹ C.R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); 'Isaiah, Book of' (sections on 'First Isaiah' and 'Third Isaiah') in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997 [CD], 1992): III. 472-88, 501-507; *Isaiah 1-39* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1993); and 'On the question of divisions internal to the book of Isaiah', *SBL 1993 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 260-66.

¹² J.W. Groves, *Actualization and Interpretation in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 86; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 191-201.

¹³ H.G.M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

¹⁴ Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 84-86. Clements carries further the proposal of H. Barth (*Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit* [WMANT 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1977]) of a Josianic period redaction for chapters 1-35.

¹⁵ Smelik ('Distortion', 82, 86; *Converting*, 117-18, 126-28) is radically different. He notes in passing the contrast between Ahaz and Hezekiah, but makes more of the contrast with Zedekiah in Jeremiah 38, using the 1984 work of S. de Jong ['Hizkia en Zedekia: Over de verhouding van 2 Kon. 18:17-19:37/Jes. 36-37 tot Jer. 37:1-10', *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese/Bijbelse Theologie* 5 (1984), 135-46]. For Smelik and de Jong the Hezekiah narrative is exilic or from the Persian period, framed in the light of Zedekiah's failure to listen to the prophet Jeremiah. This however uses a more remote literary parallel rather than the one to hand in Isaiah.

speaks of ‘interest in proper trust’,¹⁶ while Clements comments that the relationship of the message of Isaiah to the events of 701 ‘raises some very searching questions about the nature of faith itself’, observing that ‘several commentators have branded the particular act of religious faith demanded by Isaiah as a kind of irrational “Utopianism”’.¹⁷

My own interest is in a reading of the texts in their Kings and Isaiah contexts, focusing on the question of ‘trust’. Exploration of the unusual intensity of use of the root and the contexts of its usage elsewhere will provide pointers to the basis and content of the ‘trust’ that is called for and how this relates to Zion and Davidic theology.

In commenting on the passages (whether in Kings, Isaiah or Chronicles) many have made proposals concerning what ‘trust’ was being commended in the narratives and its theological basis. Some have drawn particular attention to the unusual concentration of **אָטַח**.¹⁸ It is my contention that attention to the *language* and its use and contexts both within and outside the Hezekiah narrative opens some new perspectives.

II. **אָטַח** ‘Trust’: Its context and content

1. ‘Trust’ in the Kings narrative

The Hezekiah narrative in 2 Kings is unusual in the number of instances of **אָטַח** (variously rendered in English versions, ‘have confidence in, trust, depend on, rely on’ and cognate nouns). There are ten instances in chapters 18-19,¹⁹ but only three with this nominal or verbal usage elsewhere in all the narrative of Genesis-Kings.²⁰ Of

¹⁶ *Isaiah 1-39*, 220.

¹⁷ *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 24-25.

¹⁸ Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 85, Groves, *Actualization*, 197, Smelik, ‘Distortion’, 78, *Converting*, 110, and G. Knoppers, “‘There was none like him’: Incomparability in the books of Kings”, *CBQ* 54 (1992), 411-31, esp. 419. R. Deutsch, *Die Hiskiaerzählungen: Eine formgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Texte Js 36-39 und 2R 18-20* (Basel diss.; Basel: Basileia, 1969), has a detailed excursus on the root, including examination of contexts of its use and its synonyms and antonyms (pp. 64-72).

¹⁹ 18:5, 19 (twice), 20, 21 (twice), 22, 24, 30; 19:10.

²⁰ Dt. 28:52; Judg. 9:26; 20:36. The root is used another 13 times in the adverbial sense, ‘securely, in safety, unawares’. A. Jepsen, **אָטַח**, *TDOT* II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. ed., 1977), 88-94, helpfully distinguishes the interrelated meanings: “‘to feel secure, be unconcerned,’” or, specifying the reason for the security, “‘to

the ten instances, nine are placed on the lips of the Rabshakeh or Sennacherib's messengers and are identical in the Isaiah parallels.²¹

The other instance, not paralleled in Isaiah, is in the editorial introduction (2 Ki. 18:5): 'He trusted in YHWH the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him.' In all Old Testament narrative only of Hezekiah is it said explicitly that he 'trusted in YHWH'.

The peculiarity is striking. What does it mean that the usage, so strong in this narrative and in the editorial introduction, is almost absent elsewhere in Genesis-Kings?

Two further observations are made before exploring that question:

(1) The three other instances in Genesis-Kings have similarities to the Hezekiah context. Deuteronomy 28:52 is in the context of the covenant curses and speaks of the futility of 'trust in high and fortified walls' when there is not covenantal obedience, while Judges 9:26 and 20:36 refer respectively to 'trusting' in some other help during a rebellion (Shechemites against Abimelech) and in military strategy (Israelites relying on the ambush set against the Benjamites).

(2) The editorial introduction in 2 Kings continues: 'For he held fast (דָּבַק) to YHWH; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that YHWH commanded Moses' (2 Ki. 18:6). The phrase 'holding fast to YHWH' is peculiarly Deuteronomic: Deuteronomy 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20, with the similar occurrences in Joshua 22:5; 23:8; Jeremiah 13:11. The phrase occurs elsewhere in the OT only once, in Psalm 63:8. This is in contradistinction to אָחַז which is not Deuteronomic²² but is, as I will discuss below, common in Psalms. Certainly the argument of Groves, following Childs, is fallacious, that 'trust plays a more important role in the Deuteronomistic corpus than it does in Isaiah, and therefore is primarily an example of the Deuteronomistic hand at work in the formation of these stories'.²³

rely on something or someone" (p. 89), while Deutsch, *Die Hiskiaerzählungen*, 70-71, provides tables. Knoppers, "There was none like him", 419, erroneously refers to the root appearing 'nine times in 2 Kings 18-19' and 'only twice in the rest of the deuteronomistic history (Deut 28:52, 1 Kgs 5:5)'. 1 Ki. 5:5 is an adverbial use, while the overlooked Judges instances parallel usage in the Hezekiah narrative.

²¹ Is. 36:4 (twice), 5, 6 (twice), 7, 9, 15; 37:10.

²² Significantly M. Weinfeld's *magnum opus*, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), nowhere refers to אָחַז.

²³ *Actualization*, 197, n. 197. See Childs, *Isaiah*, 85.

The contents of the Rabshakeh's words are obviously of interest, especially in Isaiah, linking with oracles earlier in the book.²⁴ Irrespective of questions of literary history, these oracles provide a context for the readers of Isaiah: it could be said that the Rabshakeh has divine authority for some of his words: it *is* folly to trust in Egypt and Assyria *has* been called to the attack by YHWH. This heightening is however not present in 2 Kings. Still, what is crucial in both settings is that he goes further and says that it is useless to 'rely on YHWH' (2 Ki. 18:22, 30; 19:10 // Is. 36:7, 15; 37:10), for it will not happen that 'YHWH will deliver' (2 Ki. 18:30, 32, 35; 19:11-12 // Is. 36:15, 18, 20; 37:11-12).²⁵

Clearly 'relying on YHWH' in some way is linked with deliverance,²⁶ but what does it mean to 'rely on YHWH' and what is its theological foundation?

Clues as to the answer are given as one reads sequentially the Kings narrative (paralleled in Isaiah):

(1) The first 'false' confidence cited by the Rabshakeh is in 18:20:

אֲדַבְרֵי־בְרִשְׁתִּים עֲצָה וּגְבוּרָה לְמַלְחָמָה

This is generally interpreted as referring to an alliance with Egypt, whether actual or contemplated. The NRSV's 'Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war?' conveys this sense. It certainly fits the following statements, 'upon whom are you relying...? You are relying on Egypt...' The NIV's 'You say you have strategy and military strength' may be influenced by seeing allusion to military preparations in Jerusalem itself (as in Is. 22:8b-11).

(2) The second 'false' confidence (18:22) is an allusion to active centralisation of worship by Hezekiah, seen ironically by the Rabshakeh as a move YHWH would not like. Centralisation is not explicit outside the speech, but merely hinted at in one short editorial summary verse in Kings, referring simply to the 'removal of high places, smashing of sacred stones, and cutting down of Asherah poles', and the breaking of the bronze serpent (2 Ki. 18:4). There is no hint of these actions in Isaiah, while Chronicles describes them as the

²⁴ E.g. Conrad, *Reading*, 42-43; Groves, *Actualization*, 197-98. An earlier exposition of this feature is in J. Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 143-61.

²⁵ This feature is the basis of Smelik's conclusion that the Rabshakeh is 'a pupil of the Israelite prophets..., a literary figure who plays the opposite to Isaiah and has to speak in a similar way' ('Distortion', 86, *Converting*, 125).

²⁶ The root נָצַל occurs ten times, matching the occurrences of בָּטַח.

initiative of the people after the purification of temple worship and the Passover celebration (2 Ch. 31.1).²⁷

While centralisation is significant elsewhere to the Deuteronomist, neither Kings nor Isaiah in fact sees centralisation itself (as distinct from worship of YHWH alone) as conveying 'merit' that warrants security.

(3) The third is a 'reliance on horses', whether in Hezekiah's own army, or reinforced by Egypt (18:23-24).

(4) The fourth focuses on the role of Hezekiah himself encouraging the people to 'rely on YHWH' (18:30).

(5) The final reference to a 'false' confidence dwells at length on the power of 'the god you rely on' as being no more than that of the gods of other nations defeated by 'the kings of Assyria' (19:10-11).²⁸ It is this accusation alone that provides the basis for Hezekiah's prayer and confidence.

(6) Hezekiah's prayer (19:15-19) is based solely on the kingship of YHWH, maker of heaven and earth, the living God, over all heaven and earth, over all 'kingdoms of the earth'. The motive of the petition is that 'all kingdoms on earth may know that you, YHWH, are God alone'. There is no reference to the city or temple (other than YHWH being 'enthroned on the cherubim') or to Davidic kingship.

(7) The first reference in the whole narrative to Davidic kingship is in the final verse of the collection of oracles brought by Isaiah. In 19:34 YHWH says:

'I will defend this city to save it,
for my sake and for the sake of David my servant'.

The statement is repeated in the following chapter, in Isaiah's words to the ill Hezekiah (20:6; with introductory reference to 'the God of your father David' in 20:5).

All of these features are identical in the Isaiah narrative, except that the phrase 'for my sake and for the sake of David my servant' is not

²⁷ Smelik comments: 'The description of the reforms (by the Rabshakeh) differs from the account in 2 Kings xviii 4—another indication that the narrative was not original to the book of Kings' ('Distortion', 78; similar in *Converting*, 110-11).

²⁸ Far from being simply a repetition of the boast of 18:33-35 which is that of a single 'king', 'me' (Sennacherib), there is here expansion to include the whole history of Assyrian militarism. The same expansion is in the words of Hezekiah, 19:16, 17.

repeated (it is only in Is. 37:35, not in 38:6). In both books priority is given to ‘for my sake’.²⁹

The question to be pursued is whether there are similarities with other ‘trust’ passages. The concern is not primarily with literary or tradition history but rather with contexts and content of ‘trust’. At the same time the data will be shown to have relevance for questions of historical development.

2. ‘Trust’ in Isaiah

In listing links between Isaiah 36-39 and preceding chapters, Groves observes that ‘the element of trust (בטח) which is central to the Rabshakeh’s speech also plays an important role in Isa 30:15’.³⁰

For thus said the Lord YHWH, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in *trust* shall be your strength.
But you refused.

Seitz makes the link pointedly: ‘Shall we trust the “Thus says the LORD” of Isaiah or the “Thus says the great king” of the Rabshakeh?’.³¹ Williamson’s reaction is that ‘the occurrence of a relatively common word like *bth* cannot take us very far’,³² but that neglects the distribution features already noted.

In contrast to the scarcity in Genesis-Kings, there are in Isaiah 17 instances of בטח outside of chapters 36-39.³³ These can be put into broad categories:

(1) Criticism of ‘relying on’ military strength (‘horses, chariots’), linked with alliance with Egypt as seen in 31:1 and in the literary context of 30:15.

²⁹ It may be significant that the phrase ‘for my own sake’ occurs outside the Hezekiah narrative only in Isaiah 43:25 and 48:11 (twice). Emphasis is upon the integrity of God’s honour. The phrase ‘for the sake of David (my/his servant)’ is a feature of 1 and 2 Kings, occurring in 1 Ki. 11:12, 13, 32, 34; 15:4; 2 Ki. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6 (cf. 1 Ki. 8:24, 25, 26, 66).

³⁰ *Actualization*, 197, following Childs, *Isaiah*, 85.

³¹ *Isaiah 1-39*, 246.

³² *The Book Called Isaiah*, 193.

³³ Statistics of the verb and derivatives for various books are listed in E. Gerstenberger, ‘בטח *bth* to trust’, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 227 [ET of בטח; *bth* *vertrauen*], *THAT* (München: Chr Kaiser; and Zürich: Theologisches Verlag, 1971), col. 301, with corrigenda]. D.J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. II, ב-ו (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 140-41, provides details of syntactical associations. See also the tables in Deutsch, *Die Hiskiaerzählungen*, 70-72.

The associated behaviour is significant. The immediate literary context of 31:1 speaks of 'not gazing on (שָׁעָה) the Holy One of Israel and seeking (דָּרַשׁ) YHWH'. It refers to people as 'evildoers' and 'workers of iniquity' (31:3) and uses the language of 'deep apostasy', namely the worship of 'idols' (31:6-7).

30:15 likewise is in a context of the folly of trusting in Egypt when people are not willing to hear YHWH's 'instruction' (30:9) but 'rely on [again חָטְאָ] oppression and deceit' (30:12). The meaning of the last phrase is debated, with some seeing a reference to social injustice as being out of place and so emending.³⁴ Retaining MT leads to a comment such as Clements': 'The specific condemnation appears to relate to general corruption and violence on the part of the citizens of Judah, rather than to the act of rebellion against Assyria. Perhaps the prophet saw the two as linked. Moral perversity has led to political folly.'³⁵

(2) There is a threefold description in 32:9-11 of women, probably of the leading classes, as 'complacent' (so NRSV). The sense is that they are 'confident' everything is fine. Nevertheless, there is to be a reversal, a purging renewal.³⁶ Again there are contrasting uses of חָטְאָ. 'Confidence' that their present lifestyle will continue is set against the enduring 'trust, confidence' that flows from rulers who do what is just and right:

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and *trust* forever. (32:16-17; cf. 32:1)

There is no basis for 'trust' without justice. 'Complacency', with its negative connotation, is an appropriate English word for a 'trust' that has a faulty basis.

(3) The remaining three instances in chapters 1-35 are all in songs of deliverance, affirming 'trust' in YHWH for peace.

In 12:2 the affirmation 'I will trust and not be afraid' is followed by the liturgical formula seen in Exodus 15:2 and Psalm 118:14, 'Yah is my strength and song/might, he has become my salvation.'

³⁴ See discussion in J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 553.

³⁵ R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 247.

³⁶ Compare the similar, more vivid description of 3:16-4:1.

Similarly, the instances in Isaiah 26:3, 4 are ‘trust’ for the ‘peace’ that comes to a ‘righteous nation keeping faith’, to a ‘city’ that is not ‘lofty’. Such a people can ‘trust in YHWH forever’, since he is an ‘everlasting rock’ (a common image of security and protection). In these two passages there is only one reference to ‘Zion’ (12:6), and that is in the context of YHWH’s name being made known in all the earth. In chapter 26 it is ‘our strong city’ that is contrasted with the ‘lofty city’. The focus is on YHWH’s name and right living rather than on Zion *per se*.

(4) There are five instances in chapters 40-66 that mirror the contexts already noted in chapters 1-35.

42:17 makes the general statement that those who ‘trust in carved images’ will be put to shame.

In 47:8, 10 the focus is on ‘daughter Babylon’ who sits ‘securely’ in her arrogance, ‘trusting’ that no-one sees her ‘wickedness’, and saying arrogantly, ‘I am, and there is none besides me’, a deliberate contextual contrast to the similar statements made by YHWH.³⁷ Babylon matches the arrogance of Sennacherib in chapters 36-37.

50:10 encourages the person who ‘fears YHWH and obeys the word of his servant’ to ‘trust in the name of YHWH’, while in contrast, in 59:4 one characteristic of the group that is persisting in injustice and violence is said to be conducting legal disputes in a way that ‘relies on empty arguments’.

There is no question that Zion is a major concern of the book of Isaiah. It is a key feature binding the book together in the movement from what Zion is to what she is to become.³⁸ Yet, when one looks at the ‘trust’ passages in Isaiah and asks what it means to ‘trust YHWH’ or to enjoy living in a situation of ‘trust and confidence’, attention is overwhelmingly on the worship of YHWH alone, with a humility that recognises dependence on him and that is linked with a life of doing what is right and just.

It would appear that the words against ‘trusting’ in horses and Egypt are not because horses and Egypt are *per se* wrong. Rather such ‘trust’ has become a substitute for moral obedience and sole worship

³⁷ E.g. 43:10-11; 44:8; 45:5, 6, 18, 22.

³⁸ In addition to Seitz, *Zion’s Final Destiny*, see B.G. Webb, ‘Zion in transformation: A literary approach to Isaiah’, in D.J.A. Clines, S.E. Fowl, and S.E. Porter (ed.), *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (JSOTS 87; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 65-84; and W.J. Dumbrell, ‘The purpose of the book of Isaiah’, *TynB* 36 (1985), 111-28.

of YHWH. It is the honour of YHWH amongst the nations that is at stake in the deliverance of the city.

From the limited data in Isaiah there has been little evidence to link 'trust in YHWH' with the common understanding of an 'inviolability of Zion theology' and the association with the Davidic line. There are however several instances of בָּטַח in the book of Psalms and so we now consider the contexts and content of 'trust' there.

3. 'Trust' in Psalms

(1) *The object of 'trust' and its corollaries.* There are 52 instances of בָּטַח in Psalms (30% of all instances in MT). Again a few categories come to the fore regarding the object and basis of 'trust' and the behaviour that is appropriate for one who 'trusts in YHWH'.

(a) The folly of 'trust' in human resources is common, whether this be: (i) 'mortals/princes' (alliances?): 118:8, 9, in a psalm celebrating victory; and 146:3, celebrating the God who 'executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry...but brings the way of the wicked to ruin'; (ii) 'weapons': 44:7, in a plea to 'my King and my God' to deliver from enemies as in the past;³⁹ or (iii) 'wealth': 49:7, in a wisdom psalm where the 'wealth' is linked with oppression; 52:9, 10, where the contrast is 'trust in God's kindness'; and 62:9, 11, in a context of violence and extortion.

(b) 'Trust' in YHWH is put over against the worship of other gods: 31:7, 15 (in a cry for deliverance from accusing attackers); 115:8, 9, 10, 11 (with God as universal, 'maker of heaven and earth') and 135:18 (in a psalm which brings together God as creator, the exodus tradition with defeat of other nations, and YHWH's dwelling in Zion).

(c) As well as in some of the psalms already cited, elsewhere 'trust in YHWH' is contrasted generally with the life and ways of the 'wicked' and is linked with walking in God's ways, following his commands, etc. Ten instances are in psalms generally designated as 'wisdom'.⁴⁰ Nine instances are in laments or complaints, where the psalmist affirms 'trust' as raising a problem—why is God not acting?—or calls others to 'trust' despite difficulties or makes a joyful affirmation of 'trust'.⁴¹ In some cases there are affirmations of not

³⁹ Later in the psalm is the affirmation that 'we' have not worshipped 'a strange god' (v. 21).

⁴⁰ 9:11; 25:2; 33:21; 37:3, 5; 49:7; 78:22, 53; 112:7; 119:42.

⁴¹ Personal trust: 13:6; 22:5, 6 (his ancestors); call to others: 4:6; affirmation: 28:7; 55:24; 56:4, 5, 12.

living like evildoers,⁴² or ‘trust in YHWH’ is expressed in confessing one’s sins and so being forgiven and delivered (e.g. 32:10). In a song of thanksgiving comes an affirmation that because of the psalmist’s deliverance and praise others will also ‘fear and trust YHWH’ (40:3). Even one’s ‘trusted’ close friends may prove unreliable, but one’s cry can always go out to YHWH (41:10).

The cry of Psalm 86 brings together a personal lament of a ‘poor and needy’ person who is ‘your servant who trusts in you’ (v. 2), an affirmation that there is no god who can compare with YHWH, a concern that all the nations come to worship (vv. 8-10), a personal desire to learn God’s way (v. 11), and a plea for deliverance so that the enemies come to see they were wrong.⁴³ Psalm 143 shares some of these components.

It must be asked whether and how ‘trust’ features in specifically Zion or Davidic contexts. The following observations are pertinent.

(2) *‘Trust’ and the Davidic king.* Gerstenberger warns that ‘one should be cautious in defining specific royal prayers or psalms’ as they fit into other categories.⁴⁴ In those which he then describes as royal,⁴⁵ only in 21:8 does פָּטַח occur: the king is blessed because he ‘trusts in YHWH’. There is no indication as to what this ‘trust’ involves.

Of course, this category is expanded considerably if the view is adopted that most, if not all, of the lament and complaint psalms are regarded as being spoken by the king.

(3) *‘Trust’ in the context of YHWH’s kingship over all the earth.* פָּטַח is not used in any of the commonly designated Yahweh-Kingship psalms.⁴⁶ However, it does occur in other psalms which refer to God as ‘king’ (44:7 [see above]; 84:4 [see below]) and where there is concern that all the nations know YHWH to be the only God (86:2 [see above]).

(4) *‘Trust’ and Zion, in the commonly designated ‘Zion hymns’.*⁴⁷ Only in Psalm 84, a psalm of the joy of worship in the temple, is פָּטַח used (v. 13). This is also a psalm in which YHWH is addressed as

⁴² 26:1; 28:7; 55:24.

⁴³ For this sense of being ‘ashamed’, see J.W. Olley, ‘A forensic connotation of *b5j*’, *VT* 26 (1976), 230-34.

⁴⁴ E.S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 256.

⁴⁵ Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 110 and 144, along with the YHWH-kingship psalms and Zion hymns which are listed in the following two footnotes.

⁴⁶ Psalms 47, 93, 96-99.

⁴⁷ Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, 132 and 137.

'YHWH of hosts, my king and my God' (v. 4). Apart from the delight in being in 'the house of my God', the psalmist contrasts his 'walking in integrity' with those who 'dwell in tents of wickedness' (vv. 11-12).

Outside of this category, in a lament, Psalm 27:3 affirms 'trust' linked with the desire to 'seek YHWH in his temple' (vv. 4-6). While reading Psalm 91:2 in isolation may allow reference to the temple ('shelter of the Most High', 'make the Most High your dwelling') its canonical context following Psalms 89 and 90 points to a situation where the temple has been destroyed and the Davidic kingship is in question or the worshipper is in exile.⁴⁸ Similarly, 125:1 states that 'Those who trust in YHWH are *like* Mount Zion', being protected, along with encouragement to persist in being righteous, because eventually the 'wicked' will no longer rule.

(5) *Summary*. There is nothing in the contexts of אֱמֶנֶת that links it with either the Davidic covenant or a 'protection of Zion' theology. Overwhelmingly it is associated with the following components: (a) worship of one God alone, who is incomparable and who is to be recognised as God by all nations; and (b) a life of integrity, characterised by the desire to walk in God's ways and not follow the ways of the 'wicked'.

Over against this, 'trust' in human resources and power (including wealth) is invariably linked with self-centred oppressive use of power and status, worship of other gods and failure to be concerned for God's glory.

A link with the temple, Zion and the Davidic covenant is secondary. It is YHWH who is 'King'.

4. 'Trust' in Proverbs

אֱמֶנֶת occurs in significant numbers (18 instances) in Proverbs. The contrasts observable are of 'trusting in YHWH' over against 'relying on one's own insight' (3:5; 28:26) or 'relying on riches' (11:28; 28:25). There is 'security' in following the path of wisdom and being righteous (1:33; 10:9; 28:1; 29:25). These can be compared with the similar use in wisdom psalms noted previously.

⁴⁸ For discussion of the canonical shape of the Psalter and specifically the placing of 89 and 90, see most recently J.C. McCann, Jr., 'The book of Psalms', in *The New Interpreter's Bible* 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 662; also J.C. McCann, Jr. (ed.), *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTS 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

5. 'Trust' in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve

The root is also common in Jeremiah (23 times) and Ezekiel (14 times). The contexts point to not relying on:

(1) fortifications, people or wealth (Je. 5:17; 9:3; 17:5; 46:25 [Egypt]; 48:7; 49:4; Ezk. 16:15; 30:9; 39:6);

(2) 'the temple of YHWH' (Je. 7:4, 8, 14), linked with unjust and immoral behaviour and the worship of Baal;

(3) a relationship with YHWH not linked with right behaviour (Ezk. 33:13⁴⁹); and

(4) 'lies' (Je. 13:25, Baal,⁵⁰ 28:15 and 29:31, prophecy).

Rather people are to 'trust YHWH' (Je. 17:7 [contrast v. 5]; 39:18; 49:11). In the restored relationship in the land people will live 'securely', without need for protection other than YHWH (Ezk. 34:25, 27, 28; 38:8, 11, 14).

Nowhere is there a link with the Davidic covenant and only in Jeremiah 7 is there any link with the temple—and that is strongly linked with behaviour.

In the book of the Twelve there are only 9 instances. Hosea 10:13, in a context of 'wickedness', refers to 'trust' in warriors; Amos 6:1 is judgment on those who 'are secure on Mount Samaria' while practising injustice; Habakkuk 2:18 speaks of the folly of 'trusting in idols made by people'; Zephaniah 2:15 is judgment upon Assyria in her arrogance in saying, 'I am, and there is none besides me' (similar to words used by Babylon in Is. 47); while in Zephaniah 3:2 it is Jerusalem who is full of oppression and rebellion, with priests profaning the sanctuary—'she does not trust in YHWH'.

Zechariah 14:11 is the only verse specifically referring to 'security' for Jerusalem when 'YHWH will be king over the whole earth (and there will be one YHWH and his name the only name' (v. 9).⁵¹

6. 'Trust': A summary

As well as the ten instances in 2 Kings (matched by the parallel nine in Isaiah and one in 2 Chronicles), I have commented on all the other

⁴⁹ The use of *אֲבָרָה* in this verse is difficult to put into clear English. L.C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990), 140, lucidly translates the verse: 'When I promise the virtuous person that he will win life and then, relying on his earlier virtue, he does wrong, none of his virtuous actions will be remembered'.

⁵⁰ 'You trusted in the falsehood' is here explicitly linked with 'you have forgotten me (YHWH)'.

⁵¹ The other instances in the Twelve are Mi. 2:8 of robbery of people who pass by 'trustingly', and Mi. 7:5 of the breakdown of human society where one cannot even 'trust' a neighbour.

relevant instances in MT: only three in Genesis-Kings; the other 17 in Isaiah, 52 in Psalms, 18 in Proverbs, 23 in Jeremiah, 13 in Ezekiel and 9 in the Twelve.⁵² The uneven distribution is obvious.

In all of the varied books there is a commonality of context and content:

(1) 'Trust in YHWH' is evidenced by the worship of one God and a life of doing what is just and right, following his ways. When these are present there is protection and security for city and people.

(2) It is pointless to 'trust' instead in military might or wealth or status or anything else which seems to give protection and security. The use of 'instead' is deliberate, for in each instance where such 'trust' is condemned there is concurrently worship of other gods and/or practice of injustice and oppression.

(3) YHWH acts when the honour of his name is at stake, when an opposing power arrogantly claims self-sufficiency and/or belittles YHWH.

(4) There is no basis in the Davidic covenant *per se* for 'trust'. Rather it is the king, with people, who is called to 'trust' according to the content in (1).

(5) There is no basis for 'trust' in the presence of the temple or in a special status for Zion.

(6) Rather, in some contexts there is explicit affirmation of YHWH as 'King' of all the earth, over all nations [linked with (3)].

Significantly, these are the features that are evident in the Hezekiah narrative. Apposite is the observation of Seitz: 'Especially in view of the treatment of Judah and of neighboring nations, the failure of Sennacherib to take Jerusalem was a matter of no small theological significance. But the biblical sources do not relate the Assyrian "defeat" to some iron-clad commitment on God's part to Zion.'⁵³ To this we now add that the integral place of **צְדָקָה** in the narrative points to the absence of an 'inviolability of Zion' theology as crucial to the narrative from the beginning. The key is 'trust' in YHWH.⁵⁴

⁵² There remain only the 10 instances in Job which are not relevant.

⁵³ 'Isaiah (Book of)', 484. This negates an argument of Smelik for Persian dating of the narrative, that 'confidence in Jerusalem's inviolability was not restored before the Persian period' (*Converting*, 123, n. 106). Similarly it undermines Clements' argument for a 'Davidic-Zion orientation' as the 'original nucleus' of the narrative 'modified and reminted in the light of the tragic events of 587 B.C.E. to incorporate a new doctrine of the remnant' (*Old Testament Prophecy*, 47).

⁵⁴ In his detailed discussion of 'Zion as a symbol of security and refuge', B.C. Ollenburger, *Zion the City of the Great King* (JSOTS 41; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 66-80, repeatedly states that security comes as a result of trust alone in Yahweh and that "'pride" is considered the fundamental sin' (p. 70).

III. Literary and theological observations

The investigation thus far has ignored literary-historical issues and has simply read the texts as they are, looking for both commonalities and differences. Further, it has not sought to examine the semantic field of the idea of ‘trust’. For this reason the evident contrast in the book of Isaiah between Ahaz and Hezekiah has not been considered as the Ahaz narrative does not use אָמַן but includes a play on the root אָמַן (Is. 7:9). Moberly rightly comments, after observing the lack of use of the root in narratives relating to Abraham, Moses and David, that ‘it would be foolish solely to focus attention on specific occurrences of a certain Heb. root (valuable though that can be), and...one must consider the concept of a certain type of relationship with God that is represented by the specific word’.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the window that has been opened through focusing on the usage of one root throws light on a number of areas of modern debate.⁵⁶

The rarity of instances in Genesis-Kings outside of 2 Kings 18-19 suggests strongly that the narrative may not be original to 2 Kings. Recently Smelik and Seitz have argued in detail for the primacy of the Isaiah setting. This is supported by the instances of the word elsewhere in Isaiah in similar contexts. While Clements sees a Josianic redaction for the material, Seitz has argued cogently for the material dating some time soon after the death of Hezekiah. *Inter alia* he notes the attention given to the names and roles of the officials, Eliakim, Shebna and Joah (36:3, 11, 22; 37:2; with the first two also mentioned in 22:25, 20). They, or their circle, were admirably placed to ‘recall and preserve the original 701 traditions, ultimately shaping them into their present, carefully structured form’.⁵⁷

The usage of אָמַן in the narrative may well have wisdom associations, due to its prominence in Proverbs and wisdom psalms. Jepsen, indeed, ‘emphasize[s] that the root *bth* is intimately connected with Wisdom Literature’.⁵⁸ Is there relevance in the notation in Proverbs 25:1 about collections by ‘Hezekiah’s men’? There is no question that the Hezekiah narrative would be relevant to wisdom concerns and in turn that wisdom was an interest of the court, and so

⁵⁵ R.W.L. Moberly, אָמַן in W.A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 648.

⁵⁶ See further below (n. 62). It may well be significant that chapters 7-8, which have more interest in the Davidic line, do *not* use אָמַן.

⁵⁷ Seitz, *Zion’s Final Destiny*, 108-116; quotation from p. 115.

⁵⁸ Jepsen, אָמַן, 94.

the usage is consistent with the conclusions of Seitz.⁵⁹ In this way the narrative had significance soon after Sennacherib's death in 681.

At the same time one notes the careful analysis leading to Konkel's conclusion on the textual character of the two forms (Isaiah and Kings), that it is most likely that each has been based on an earlier textual form.⁶⁰ It is possible that the incorporation of the narrative in the canonical book of Isaiah provides the memory of the historical context of the incident in the wider ministry of Isaiah of Jerusalem. The words of the Rabshakeh have added dramatic effect in the Isaiah context in comparison with Kings.

The narrative is now in two larger canonical works, the book of Isaiah, and the book of Kings (or Genesis-Kings), and so has significance for later audiences beyond the early seventh century.

The Kings editorial introduction to the Hezekiah narrative is significant. It uniquely affirms that Hezekiah 'trusted in YHWH, the God of Israel', with emphasis being given through word order to the object of the trust: 'it was on YHWH that Hezekiah relied' (18:5). The content of such 'trust' that I have isolated as common to wide-ranging material (Psalms, mostly pre-exilic, and Proverbs), while not Deuteronomic, is still consistent with emphases of the Deuteronomistic History. While in Samuel and Kings there is affirmation of the place of the Davidic covenant and of the temple, the Deuteronomistic History itself consistently makes these secondary to the wider issues of the covenantal relationship with YHWH as 'king' (e.g. 1 Sa. 8, 12) and the presence and power of YHWH as not linked with the temple (e.g. 2 Sa. 7:5-7; and Solomon's prayer in 1 Ki. 8:23-53). Can one also say that the Hezekiah narrative downplays the significance of centralisation (as distinct from worship of YHWH alone)? As was noted earlier, Hezekiah's religious reforms are described only in one editorial verse (18:4) and one statement by the Rabshakeh (18:22), not taken up any further. It is his later arrogant scorn of YHWH's power and glory that becomes the precipitating rationale for appeal to YHWH. Thus the model of Hezekiah in 'trusting' becomes pertinent to the exilic community, who have lost king and temple and know Babylon's scorn (portrayed in Isaiah 47). Gerstenberger comments that both the Hezekiah narrative and

⁵⁹ J.J. Schmitt, *Isaiah and His Interpreters* (New York: Paulist, 1986), 49-60 summarises a number of proposals of other links between Isaiah and wisdom.

⁶⁰ See note 1.

Jeremiah's temple sermon (Jeremiah 7) 'are examples of exilic (Dtr) concerns for a new relationship with Yahweh'.⁶¹

Likewise, the story of Hezekiah has relevance for the whole book of Isaiah, and hence for the post-exilic community.⁶² This is borne out by features of the canonical arrangement proposed recently by two writers. Conrad has argued for a reading of the book that links the royal narratives of Ahaz and Hezekiah with what follows: in both, a 'fear not' oracle addressed to the king (7:4-9 and 37:6-7) is followed by one addressed to the people (10:24-27; several in chapters 41, 43, 44).⁶³ Over against the scholarly consensus that divides the book as 1-35(39), 40-66, Seitz has proposed that in 'the final presentation of the book' the division is 1-33 and 34-66. In this way 36-39 is 'a concrete example of God's care at one moment in Zion's history' framed by 34-35 affirming 'Zion's final triumph' and 40-66 with 'the same line of interest'.⁶⁴ This matches the structure of 1-33, with general word of judgment on 'Judah and Jerusalem', followed by a concrete example of the reason for judgment, and then further general development of the theme.

The other instances of 'trust' in the book of Isaiah and their import support the linking of the Hezekiah narrative with the rest of the book, both before and after. Thus contexts before the narrative focus more on the empty 'trust' of Judah, while those later turn to the uniqueness

⁶¹ Gerstenberger, פתח, 229.

⁶² It is of note that, while Isaiah 7-9 gives much attention to the Davidic line (7:2, 13: messages to 'house of David'; 9:7: 'David's throne and his kingdom'), the Hezekiah narrative has less emphasis, and in fact the arrangement of material in Isaiah 38 seems to make Hezekiah's illness and temporary respite much more a pattern for the city/people.

⁶³ *Reading*, 34-51.

⁶⁴ 'On the question of divisions', 264-65, which includes quotations from his *Isaiah 1-39*, 240-42. Taking the cue from a clear break in 1QIsa^a, a similar division is proposed by W.H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumrân Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: OUP, 1964), 247-59, and developed by C.A. Evans, 'On the unity and parallel structure of Isaiah', *VT* 38 (1988), 129-47. Strangely Seitz does not refer to 1QIsa^a, but rather to 'a striking fact' that the mid-point in verses as marked by the Masoretes comes at 33:20, 'practically where chapter 34 picks up with its vision of the new vineyard's protection' (*Isaiah 1-39*, 241). The Masoretic notation however is irrelevant. Texts in the MT tradition give no evidence of a major break, with variety in paragraphing at the start of chapter 34. For instance, the Leningrad Codex has no break between 33:24 and 34:1, the Aleppo Codex a closed paragraph and Codex Babylonius Petropolitanus an open paragraph. See J.M. Oesch, *Petucha und Setuma* (OBO 27; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979) T16+, and I. Maori, 'The tradition of *Pisqafot* in Ancient Hebrew Mss: The Isaiah texts and commentaries from Qumran', *Textus* 10 (1982) [1]-[50] (in Hebrew), see p. [31].

of YHWH over against idols and the downfall of the nations. The narrative is more than a historical bridge.

Also relevant is the link in usage and imagery with Psalms. We have noted that some of the 'trust' contexts are affirmations of God as 'King'. Significantly this is a feature of Isaiah. While מֶלֶךְ is not common as a title of God it is used 5 times in Isaiah: 6:1; 33:22 (both significant locations); 41:21; 43:15; and 44:6. In the context of the book as a whole the theological thrust is similar to that of the canonical structure of the book of Psalms, with a shift of focus from Davidic kingship to God as king.⁶⁵

It appears relevant that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are similarly concerned with right 'trust'. They share with the book of Isaiah, Psalms and the Deuteronomistic Historian the view that 'trust' can only be placed in YHWH, and must be linked with consistent behaviour, namely, worship of YHWH alone and following his ways of justice.

The Hezekiah narrative probably has its literary origin in wisdom circles soon after Sennacherib's death, and has meaning then; but in its canonical contexts it speaks to exilic and post-exilic audiences. It fits most happily in the book of Isaiah but it also accords with the theology of the Deuteronomist. There can be no 'inviolability of Zion', nor 'trust' in the Davidic kingship. God responds as people 'trust' *him*, by worshipping him alone and following his ways in doing what is just and right. That is the only way to lasting security. Appeal to God is made on the basis of the honour of his name amongst the nations: one can 'rely' on him.

⁶⁵ See discussions in J.L. Mays, 'Isaiah's royal theology and the Messiah', in C.R. Seitz (ed.), *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 39-52; R. Schultz, 'The King in the book of Isaiah', in P.E. Satterthwaite, R.S. Hess and G.J. Wenham (ed.), *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 141-65; and C.R. Seitz, 'Royal promises in the canonical books of Isaiah and the Psalms', in his *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 150-67.