

An Inquiry into חִשְׁבֹּנֹת Against חִשְׁבֹּנֹת:  
A Theological Reflection on Isaiah 6:1-9

By

A. K. Lama

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*Dr. Willem VanGemeren*

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
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## INTRODUCTION

The discussion on the influence of wisdom in Isaiah has gradually begun to resurface in the modern theological research. The scholars have considered the subject from different perspectives. For example, some have looked for the source of wisdom in the writing of Moses<sup>1</sup>, and others in the non-Isarelite ANE sources. A number of scholars proposed the idea of wise men of the royal court and the school of wisdom run by the sages—a class separate from the priest and the prophet, who actively engaged in counseling and training in wisdom. Still other scholars separated the prophets from the wise men in terms of their styles, authority, and the sphere of operation.<sup>2</sup> According to them the wise men were secular, utilitarian, keen on making an advice on how to make life successful, but the prophets were someone who were preoccupied with divine message of predictions and judgment. Some scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph narrative is a "didactic wisdom-story" whose *Sitz im Leben* is suggested to be the period of early monarchy. See in Gerhard. von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom", *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W Truemen Dicken (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966): 292-300.

<sup>2</sup> Compare H. W. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), 241; J. C. Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 23; W. McKane, "Prophets and Wise Men," *SBT* no. 44 (London: SCM Press 1965), 65.

do not accept such proposition.<sup>3</sup> They projected wise men as guardians whose place in Israel was equal in rank with the priests and the prophets. Was Isaiah a prophet turned sage or sage turned prophet? The dialogues on these issues for last forty years have accumulated a rich source of information for consideration. I am grateful to the body of sincere scholars whose work has challenged and inspired me to investigate this subject. In this paper I want to make an inquiry into the nature and source of wisdom in Isaiah by means of a theological study of Isaiah 6:1-9. Before I discuss about my proposal, I will review some of the literatures in following paragraphs to set the rationale for my approach.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Johannes Fichtner is often considered as the one who initiated the recent resurgence of discussions in wisdom and prophecy in Isaiah.<sup>4</sup> He proposed that Isaiah was a sage turned prophet who reflected a great amount of influence of wisdom tradition in his writing. But his proposal had a number of problems. First, his proposal failed to describe the exact

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<sup>3</sup> M. Noth and D. W. Thomas (eds), "Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *VTS* 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955); R. E. Murphy, "Assumption and Problems in Old Testament Research," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 407-18.

<sup>4</sup> J. Fichtner, "Jesaja unter den Weisen," *ThLZ* 74 (1949):75-80.

nature of the influence.<sup>5</sup> Second, the comprehensive explanations for the prophets and traditions were drawn from relatively small number of texts. Third, traditions from varying provenances were squeezed into a single interpretation. Following him, Johannes Lindblom wrote the first comprehensive survey on wisdom and prophets.<sup>6</sup> Others like Samuel Terrien (1962), Hans Walter Wolf (1964), William McKane (1965), J. L. Crenshaw (1967), J. William Whedbee (1971), Joseph Jensen (1973), H. G. M. Williamson (1995) and others have further enlightened the subject with different types of approaches.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand the work so far done on the subject I will discuss Whedbee extensively, and then with the help of Crenshaw, Jensen, and Williamson's critical comments I will propose the rationale for my thesis.

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<sup>5</sup> G. Fohrer, "Some Remarks on Modern Interpretation of the Prophets," *JBL* 80 (1961):309-19.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lindblom, "Wisdom in the Old Testament Prophets," *VTS* 3 (1955):192-204.

<sup>7</sup> S. Terrien, "Amos and Wisdom," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, eds. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962): 108-15; H. W. Wolff, "Amos' geistige Heimat", *WMANT* 18 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964). For a critique of Wolff's thesis, see J. L. Crenshaw, "The influence of the Wise upon Amos," *ZAW* 79 (1967): 42-51; W. McKane, "Prophets and Wise Men", *SBT* 44 (London: SCM Press 1965), 65; J. William. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), Joseph Jensen, *The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah: His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition* (Washington: The Catholic Bible Association of America, 1973), and H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah and the Wise: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton" *Wisdom in Ancient Israel* (Edited by John Day et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

### **J. Williams Whedbee's work**

Whedbee observed a number of weaknesses in Fichtner's thesis.<sup>8</sup> First, the presupposition of Isaiah being wise man prior to his call simply based on his mere use of wisdom genre is flimsy. Second, Fichtner failed to take Isaiah's purpose and motivation into account, but based his conclusion on the traditional sources of the wisdom material. Third, Fichtner did not take full consideration to all the researches done in wisdom tradition to understand the nature of wisdom tradition that was available to Isaiah for adaptation. He also failed to consider some of the recent insights into the relationship between wisdom and law in the prophetic indictment of Isaiah.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Whedbee improvises and refines his work. Despite being aware of the fact that a mere use of certain speech form, such as parables or proverb, is not sufficient to establish wisdom influence on Isaiah, he insists to find a wisdom-like-form in the parabolic passages (Isa. 1:2-3; 5:1-7; 28:23-28), proverbial passages (Isa. 10:15; 29:15-16), and in two of the "summary-appraisal" as identified by Childs (Isa. 14:26, 17:14; and 28:29).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 26.

Whedbee affirms E. Gerstenberger's proposal that the provenance of woe oracles in Isaiah (Isa. 1:4, 24; 3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20,21, 22; 6:5; 10:5; 17:12; 18:1; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1) is wisdom circles.<sup>11</sup> He writes, "my exegesis of selected woe oracles confirmed Gerstenberger's thesis that Isaiah is relying on the rules of the popular ethos in his indictments of social wrongs."<sup>12</sup> Since the content of woe oracles also reveal some sort of relationship between the law and the wisdom, he suggests the need to ascertain if the wisdom in Isaiah appealed the legal standard of Israel, or the popular ethos of his time, which reflected in wisdom of the wise men. Joseph Jensen has followed this approach, which I will review later in this section. Whedbee agrees W. Richter's conclusion on the study of Isa. 10:1-2 that a school of wisdom existed in Jerusalem, which engaged in training the leaders with the popular ethos upheld by both wise men and the law givers.<sup>13</sup> He disagrees with McKane's proposal that wise men were simply disciplined empiricist.<sup>14</sup> Rather he thinks that the wise men in the Jerusalem court already knew in their own tradition about the priority of the divine counsel over human

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<sup>11</sup> E. Gerstenberger, "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," *JBL* 81 (1962): 294-64.

<sup>12</sup> Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 110.

<sup>13</sup> W. Richter, "Recht und Ethos: Versuch einer Ortung des wiesheitlichen Mahnspuches", *SANT* 15 (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1966): 68.

<sup>14</sup> Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 125.

plans or counsels. Isaiah saw the wise men guilty of their own tradition and understanding. Whedbee writes: "The cumulative evidence drawn from the book of Proverbs, the Court History of David, and the Joseph Story seem, in my opinion, to confirm the nature of the wisdom traditions that would be known by Isaiah as he worked within the context of the Jerusalem court."<sup>15</sup> Then, Whedbee moves on to suggest that Isaiah's usage of **יָעַץ** and **עֲצָה** implies a strong influence of the wisdom tradition of Jerusalem court on Isaiah. This influence resulted both negative and positive effect. The negative effect is revealed in the clash between Isaiah and the wise men, while the positive effect is explicit in Isaiah's appropriation of wisdom in Yahweh's activities in the historical situation of his time.<sup>16</sup> It was negative because Yahweh's wisdom and power were seen with doubt by the wise men.<sup>17</sup>

Jensen, who has done a careful investigation on the use of *tôrâ* in wisdom literature, disagrees with Whedbee's conclusion that Yahweh's wisdom was point of contention between Isaiah and the wise men. According to him, God's preeminent wisdom was widely held in the ancient Near East. He writes, "Israel may have been somewhat slow," but they did not

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 134.

contest Yahweh's wisdom.<sup>18</sup> Jensen's investigation on the types of usage of *tôrâ*, based on the etymology and meaning, agrees with B. Lindars' s conclusion: "tôrâ possessed its wisdom connotation of 'instruction' before Josiah's reform and so was an apt word for Dt to use for Israel's aggregate rules of life."<sup>19</sup> According to Jensen, "Isaiah never used *tôrâ* as technical term for a prophetic word; rather all instances are sapiential."<sup>20</sup> Isaiah adopted this and other wisdom words to combat the wise of the court on their own ground.

According to Williamson, all these studies so far have been dependent on the scholarly consensus that prevailed in the middle decades of the century - a consensus that the substantial parts of the book of Proverbs were pre-exilic, that there existed sages of the court who had shared the wisdom of the ancient Near East (such as Egypt), and that they were influenced by available wisdom literature unit such as the Joseph Story (Gen. 37-50) and the Succession Story (2 Sam. 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2). But they are now no longer widely accepted.<sup>21</sup> Whybray suggests the idea of native Israelite

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<sup>18</sup> Jensen, *The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> C. P. Carroll StuhlmueLLer, review of Joseph Jensen, "The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah: His Debate with the wisdom Tradition", *CBQ* 36 (1974), 410-411.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Williamson, "Isaiah and the Wise: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton", 135.

Wisdom known as 'clan wisdom' (or, *Sippenwiesheit*), which had no association with the court and it was broader than the 'royal wisdom' in its social expression.<sup>22</sup> Whybray rejects Fichtner, Whedbee (some parts), and Jensen's work because he does not accept even the existence of a distinct professional class of 'sages' in the pre-exilic period.<sup>23</sup> The current studies in Isaiah shows a tendency on the part of some scholars to deny a large number of passages belonging to 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet,<sup>24</sup> thus making the issue even more contentious and inconclusive. Nevertheless, J. L Crenshaw raises two important questions in his review on Whedbee's approach. First, Whedbee's presupposition and approach requires a consensus on what constitutes wisdom thinking and wisdom literature. Second, the task of determining the source of wisdom influence on Isaiah from any corner is ambiguous because it will require an assumption that the influence of wisdom on a person is a controlled and simple phenomenon. He writes, "Wisdom is not the sole prerogative of the sage; others could be called wise (or foolish)."<sup>25</sup> Crenshaw correctly points out the complexities of influences of wisdom in a person's life.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> J. L. Crenshaw, "Where Shall Wisdom be Found?" *Int* 26 (1972), 74-77.

## **Rationale for my proposal**

Since the book of Isaiah is neither a biography nor a wisdom literature primarily but a book of prophecy, it is difficult to ascertain all sources of wisdom influence on Isaiah as a person. On the other hand, I agree with Whedbee that a wisdom-like-form in the parabolic passages (Isa. 1:2-3; 5:1-7; 28:23-28), proverbial passages (Isa. 10:15; 29:15-16), the two of the "summary-appraisal" as identified by Childs (Isa. 14:26, 17:14; and 28:29),<sup>26</sup> and the woe oracles (Gerstenberger's proposal woe oracles in Isa. 1:4, 24; 3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20,21, 22; 6:5; 10:5; 17:12; 18:1; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1), affirm the influence of the wisdom tradition on Isaiah. But simply an affirmation that there is a wisdom influence in Isaiah does not explain why Isaiah's wisdom stood in opposition to the wisdom of the wise men of his time. Therefore, I will begin with four possible answers to the question why Isaiah's wisdom stood against the wisdom of the wise men of his time: (1) First, the wise men had access to all the wisdom influence that Isaiah had but they knowingly did not apply their wisdom correctly, (2) Second, the wise men did not have all the access to wisdom influence as Isaiah had, (3) Third, the wise men had access to all the wisdom influence that Isaiah had but they did not know how to

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Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 26.

apply their wisdom, (4) Fourth, the wise men were not truly wise. It is difficult to support the last two possibilities, because the wise men are addressed as wise in Isaiah (ch. 29:14) Also, since the personal details of wise men are not available in Isaiah's writing, the first probability can not be discussed from the text. So, we are left with only one probability that the wise men did not have access to all wisdom influences that Isaiah had. Now, is there any passage in Isaiah, which may help us to inquire about the possibilities of Isaiah's privileged condition over other wise men? What event from the writing of Isaiah could possibly enable us to examine for an additional influence on Isaiah? Most scholars would agree that Isa. 6:1-9 is certainly the best possible passage to consider for an additional influence on Isaiah's life.

### **THESIS PROPOSAL**

Since the research so far, as pointed out in my literary review, has already considered most of the possible wisdom influences on Isaiah from horizontal sources without answering the question why Isaiah's wisdom was different than the wisdom of wise-men, I want to probe a vertical dimension of influence on the wisdom of Isaiah. I propose that this vertical dimension of influence, through the personal epiphany of God, was not available to the wise men (as per the writing

of Isaiah), but to Isaiah. Through this influence Isaiah's wisdom was transformed and upgraded to a type of wisdom that stood against the wisdom of the wise men. Acknowledging the complexities of influence that Crenshaw has shown us, I would like to make a theological inquiry on this vertical dimension of influence.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE**

This proposal is significant because an understanding on the nature and the source of wisdom in Isaiah may give us some insight to answer some of the questions raised in the ongoing theological debates on wisdom: What is true wisdom? Are there different types of wisdom? What is the ultimate source of wisdom? In what way wisdom is related to knowing God personally? What is the connection between wisdom and the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, and indwelling of the Holy Spirit? The importance of these questions underlines the significance of this research.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this inquiry the primary text for examination is ch. 6:1-9 and the scope for our theological discussion is chs. 1-39;<sup>27</sup> however, I will briefly discuss its theological

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<sup>27</sup> Due to brevity of this paper, the discussions from the perspective of Isa. 40-55 and Isa. 56-66 will be limited



Isaiah also spoke of such a relationship between wisdom and the fear of God in ch. 11:3. Describing the "stump of Jesse", who will have "the Spirit of wisdom", he wrote, "he will delight in the fear of the Lord." I agree partly with Gerhard von Rad that this fear is not merely an idea of emotion or of psychical form, but "akin to our commitment to knowledge about Yahweh."<sup>28</sup> This fear is surely not caused by a mere cognitive or intellectual knowledge about Yahweh, but a true and personal knowledge of Yahweh. William P. Brown rightly states that this fear in Qoheleth is a reverence for God and not a primitive terror. He writes, "Not only reverence for God correct the rigid logic and extremes of the sapiential enterprise, it constitutes the source from which all virtues and right conduct are to flow."<sup>29</sup> He adds, "To fear God is to surrender the human desire and proclivity to carve out a praise-worthy, lasting existence."<sup>30</sup> If the **יְרֵאָה** (fear) of God is the pre-requisite for the beginning of **חֵכְמָה** (wisdom) in most wisdom literature, then I wonder why the discussion on the

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<sup>28</sup> Gerhard vonRad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972 ), 66.

<sup>29</sup> William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Erdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 146.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

influence of wisdom in Isaiah deals so much on the horizontal aspect while the vertical influence is completely set aside.

### **The significance of vertical influence**

The epiphany of God in ch.6:1-9 not only establishes the prophetic authority of Isaiah but also shows the authenticity and the superiority of his wisdom in line with the wisdom tradition (commonly believed connection between the wisdom and the fear of God as discussed above). Notice that Isaiah encounters God in a unique manner— a unique mode of knowledge that contains the true reverential fear of God. This mode or manner of knowledge in this case can be called as the “revelatory knowledge” as opposed to “cognitive knowledge.” Mark the salient features of Isaiah’s unique personal experience in God:

v.1b	וָאֵרָאָה אֶת־יְהוָה (and I saw the Lord)
v.5a	וְאָמַר אֵי־לִי (Woe to me!)
v.7d	וַחֲטָאתָךְ תִּכְפֹּר (Your sin is atoned)
v.8c	הֲנִי שְׁלַחְנִי (Here am I. Send me!)
v.9a	לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ (Go and tell)

First, Isaiah experiences epiphany of God in such a dynamic manner that he is genuinely convicted of his sin. God being aware of Isaiah’s sincere longing for holiness (woe to me!) grants him atonement. Then, out of the deep gratitude and reverence towards God, Isaiah willfully surrenders himself to the mission and purpose of God. This whole drama of how Isaiah

comes to know God explains the presence of reverence and awe for God. In this encounter, he actually sees the very embodiment of wisdom, God. Later, he describes God as **פְּלֵא יוֹעֵץ**, (Wonderful Counselor in ch. 9:6b), **הַפְּלִיא עֵצָה** (wonderful in counsel in ch. 28:29) and **הַגְּדִיל תּוֹשֵׁבָה** (magnificent in wisdom in ch. 28:29). Notice also the parallelism in ch. 11:2, the relationship between the Spirit of Lord, Spirit of wisdom, and the fear of the Lord:

Ch. 11:2 **וְנָחָה עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה רוּחַ חָכְמָה וּבִינָה רוּחַ עֵצָה וְגִבּוֹרָה רוּחַ דַּעַת וְיִרְאַת יְהוָה:**  
(The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--)

Second, Isaiah is commissioned as a messenger of God. A messenger must remain in direct communication with God in order to deliver His message faithfully. In other words, he has the **יֹעֵץ** and **עֵצָה** of God, the true wisdom not for one time but for the rest of his life. Notice how he views God as the treasure of wisdom:

Ch. 33:6 **וְהָיָה אֱמוּנַת עֲתִיד חֶסֶן יְשׁוּעַת חָכְמַת וְדַעַת יִרְאַת יְהוָה הִיא אוֹצְרוֹ:**  
(He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.)

Mark the adjective **חֶסֶן** (a rich store, treasure, wealth) before salvation, wisdom and knowledge, which implies that in Isaiah's understanding God is not only "a key to the



with God Isaiah knows God's will and plan for Israel. No wonder, he also knows God's will and plan for other nations as well.

Such vertical dimension of wisdom has continuity in the New Testament also. For an example, Luke while describing Jesus' childhood (Luke 2:40), he writes that Jesus was filled with wisdom (πληρούμενον σοφία). The grammatical form of the word plhrou,menon (passive participle) and its parallel use with a phrase καὶ χάρις θεοῦ ἦν ἐπ' αὐτό implies the vertical dimension of influence. No wonder, why Luke described his wisdom as the one greater than that of Solomon's (Luke 11:31). Paul in his first letter to Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:21) explicitly distinguishes the wisdom of the world from the wisdom of God (ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν,). He quotes Isa. 29:14 to prove how Christ was the embodiment of wisdom from God and how the wisdom of the worldly wise is far more inferior to the wisdom of God. Thus, the evidence of vertical influence of wisdom, especially upon God's chosen messenger, can also be supported from the New Testament (Eph 1:8, 17, Col. 1:9, Jam 1:5, 3:17, 2 Pet 3:15).

### **The contents of the vertical influence**

Indeed, Isaiah has the knowledge of God from horizontal sources prior to the epiphany in ch. 6.

Nevertheless, when he sees God in the epiphany, certain knowledge of God forms a deeper meaning than others. It is one thing to know many more attributes of God cognitively, but it is another thing to see them visually. As Isaiah sees God in a dynamic manner he sees specifically some attributes, which not only influences him, but also transforms him. I believe that the motif of Isaiah for recording this epiphany is primarily to convey the dynamic impact of the vertical influence in his life. In ch. 6:1-3, Isaiah describes God as:

v.1b	יָשָׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא (Seated on a throne)
	רָם וְנִשְׂא (High and exalted)
v.3b	קָדוֹשׁ (Holy)
v.3c	מִלֵּא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ (Whole earth is full of his glory)

John N. Oswalt rightly comments: "The vision which 6:1-8 report was clearly fundamental to the entire course of Isaiah's ministry and to the shape of his book. The glory, the majesty, the holiness, and the righteousness of God became the ruling concepts of his ministry. Furthermore, it is this experience which explains Isaiah's contempt for, and horror of any kind of national or individual life which did not pay adequate attention to the one God."<sup>31</sup> Once again, this is not to say that Isaiah's source of wisdom is confined to what he sees of God in his vision. As discussed above, after Isaiah is

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<sup>31</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapter 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 176.

commissioned he is in constant connection with the embodiment of wisdom himself. The point that I want to make here is that this transformative experience of Isaiah is more than an event. It impacted every aspect of Isaiah's life including the framework of his wisdom. In the following paragraph, I want to discuss how the contents of the vertical influence upon Isaiah have vivid connections with Isaiah's message and the framework of his wisdom:

### **1. Isaiah sees God as the King**

Ch. 6:1                    יָשָׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא (Seated on a throne)

v.5                            כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת רָאִו עֵינַי  
(For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty)

In the event of King Uzziah's death the throne becomes empty but Isaiah sees God seated on the throne. Isaiah is assured that even amidst apparent crisis God is in control. The word כִּסֵּא (throne) appears again in chs. 9:6, 16:5 and 66:3 describing the eternal stability of the throne of God. But in ch. 47:1 it is used to describe Babylon's instability. Isaiah also uses the exact word הַמֶּלֶךְ (King) 13 times (chs. 6:1, 5; 14:28; 36:2; 36:4, 8, 13, 14, 16, 36:21; 37:1, 5; 39:3) and its root word 59 times in chs. 1-39. God is designated as king in chs. 6:5; 9:6 and 33:22; but in the remaining verses the term king is used for human beings in contrast to God as king. God is depicted as the king who has power over all the

kings of the earth. This King has a plan for establishing a lasting kingdom.

Ch. 9:6b :וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּלֶא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גְּבוּר אָבִיעַד שֶׁר־שָׁלוֹם:  
(And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.)

Ch. 32:1 :הֵן לְצַדִּיק יִמְלֹךְ־מֶלֶךְ וְלְשָׁרִים לְמִשְׁפָּט יִשְׁרוּ:  
(See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice.)

v.17 :מֶלֶךְ בְּיָפִיּוֹ תִּחְזֶינָה עֵינֵינוּ תִּרְאֶינָה אֶרֶץ מְרֻחָקִים:  
(Our eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar.)

v.22 :כִּי יְהוָה שֹׁפֵטֵנוּ יְהוָה מִחֻקֵּינוּ יְהוָה מִלְּכֵנוּ הוּא יוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ:  
(For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.)

Isaiah's hopes are not anchored in the temporal human kingdom but the eternal kingdom of God – a kingdom that is beyond the political interest of an ethnic nation of Israel. Williamson is right on the target to affirm this: "These editors, tridents, or whatever the influence of the notion that God is King, and that there is no place so far can be seen, for a human, Davidic king."<sup>32</sup> Notice below how Isaiah is pessimistic of human kingdom.

Ch. 14:18 :כָּל־מַלְכֵי גוֹיִם כָּלָם שָׁכְבוּ בְּכַבּוֹד אִישׁ בְּבֵיתוֹ:  
(All the kings of the nations lie in state, each in his own tomb.)

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<sup>32</sup> Williamson, "Isaiah and the Wise: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton", 10

All human kings are mortal and temporal, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. They are unjust, evil, arrogant, and rebellious and therefore subject to the judgment of God. But God alone is the King who is capable of saving and reigning eternally.

Ch. 33:22                      כִּי יְהוָה שֹׁפֵטֵנוּ יְהוָה מִחֻקֵּינוּ יְהוָה מֶלֶכְנוּ הוּא יוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ:  
(For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.)

Since God, as a mighty king, is the almighty warrior, powerful and sovereign, He can remove one nation by another, fulfilling his just plan and cause, directing the history of mankind toward His perfect will and plan. As a judge and as a vindicator, he is able to destroy as well as save.

Ch. 23:9                      יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת יַעֲזֶה לְחַלֵּל גָּאוֹן כָּל-נִכְבְּדֵי-אֲרֶץ:  
(The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth)

For Isaiah appropriation of such knowledge is a true wisdom. A wise person appropriates it by responding in repentance, obedience, and with absolute trust in God. But a failure to understand or respond such wisdom is foolishness.

## **2. Isaiah sees God as high and exalted**

Ch. 6: 1b                      וָאֵרָא אֶת-אֲדֹנָי יֹשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא רָם וְנֹשָׂא  
(I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted)

God alone is high and exalted. Exaltation of anything else was contrary to God's pleasure and plan. The theme **רָם וְנִשְׂאָה** (high and exalted) is repeated in Isaiah's writing to emphasize the supremacy of God against all human wisdom, power and plan:

Ch. 2:11b **וְנִשְׂגַב יְהוָה לְבַדּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:**  
(The LORD alone will be exalted in that day)

Ch. 5:16 **וַיִּנְבֶּה יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**  
(But the LORD Almighty will be exalted)

Ch. 33:5a **נִשְׂגַב יְהוָה כִּי שָׁכַן מְרוֹם**  
(The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high)

Ch. 33:10b **עַתָּה אֲרוּמָם עַתָּה אֲנִישָׂא**  
(Now will I be exalted, now will I be lifted up)

At the same time, things that are associated with God will also be high and lifted up. In ch 2:2, he writes that "the mountain of the Lord's temple to be raised high" (**הַהָרִים וְנִשְׂאָה**). Notice below, how this theme has vivid continuity in the Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah also.

Ch. 52:13 **הִנֵּה יִשְׁכִּיל עַבְדֵי יְרוּם וְנִשְׂאָה וְנִבְּהָ מְאֹד:**  
(See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.)

Ch. 57:15a **כִּי כֹה אָמַר רָם וְנִשְׂאָה**  
(For this is what the high and lofty One says . . .)

On the other hand, God is against those who are lifting and exalting themselves with pride and arrogance in

rebellion against God. They will face the wrath of God (chs. 2:11a, 12,17; 24:4c, 57:7).

Although the phrase **רם ונשא** does not appear as frequently as its concept in several passages in chs. 1-39 (chs.. 2:11, 12, 17; 5:16; 12:4; 24:4; 33:5, 10; etc. either directly or indirectly with synonyms such as **גבה** and **פג** in contrast to the humbling of the arrogant in chs. 2:11, 17; 5:15-16; 10:12; 24:4, 21; 26:5) the epiphany of "God being high and exalted" underlines the message of Isaiah. Williamson writes, "any person or institution demonstrating pride, arrogance or hubris is effectively posing a challenge to God's supreme status, which leads immediately to their categorical condemnation."<sup>33</sup> Isaiah's repeated repudiation of alliance, dependence on human military strength or chariots, his condemnation of the victorious and mighty nations, and the humbling of the haughty imply that the Isaiah's wisdom trait as "God being high and exalted", is at the core his ethics. I agree with Williamson: "Behind all this, it is difficult not to see the reflection of the vision of the Lord, 'high and lifted up', in chapter vi (note especially the repeated use of this description in chapter ii as indicative of all pride which must, therefore, be brought low). It was the reality of

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<sup>33</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 1998), 12.

God's exaltation which gave everything else in society and nature its subordinate but ordered place."<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Isaiah sees God as holy

v. 3a                      קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת  
(Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty)

The word קָדוֹשׁ in its root form occurs 17 times in chs. 1-39 (chs. 1:4; 4:3; 5:16, 19, 24; 6:3; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12; 15; 31:1; 37:23) out of 34 occurrences in all of Isaiah. For Isaiah Yahweh is אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (the Holy one of Israel). This phrase is repeated 14 times (chs. 1:4; 4:3; 5:19, 24; 6:3; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23) in chs. 1-39 out of 23 occurrences in the whole of Isaiah. For Isaiah, the dwelling place of Yahweh is הַר־קָדְשִׁי (the holy mountain) used twice in chs. 1-39 (chs. 11:9 and 27:13), not a single time in Deutero-Isaiah, but reappears five times in Trito-Isaiah (chs. 56:7, 13; 65:11, 25; 66:20).

In Isaiah's understanding, God's holiness is manifested in justice, righteousness, and his judgment over sin.

Ch 5: 16b                      וְהָאֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ נִקְדָּשׁ בְּזָדָקָה  
(The holy God will show himself holy by his

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<sup>34</sup> Williamson, "Isaiah and the Wise: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton", 141.



(nations) occurs 13 verses, and הַגּוֹיִם (the nations) occurs 10 verses in chs. 1-39. Often, these occurrences signify the God's judgments and blessings beyond geographical boundaries of Israel. Notice Isaiah's global perspectives in the following few references:

a. Judgment to the nations

Ch. 2:4a                                    וְשָׁפַט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם  
(He will judge between the nations)

Ch. 14:26a                                זֹאת הָעֵצָה הַיְעוּצָה עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ  
(This is the plan determined for the whole world)

Ch. 34:2a                                כִּי קִצְף לִיהוָה עַל-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם  
(The LORD is angry with all nations)

b. Blessings to the nations

Ch. 2:2e                                    וְנָהְרוּ אֵלָיו כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם:  
(and all nations will stream to it)

Ch. 11:10                                אֵלָיו גּוֹיִם יִדְרְשׁוּ וְהִיְתָה מְנוַחְתּוֹ כְּבוֹד:  
(the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious)

Ch. 26:2                                    פְּתַחוּ שַׁעֲרִים וַיָּבֵא גּוֹי-צְדִיק שֹׁמֵר אֱמֻנִים:  
(Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith)

Ch. 37:16c                                אַתָּה-הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ לְכֹל מַמְלֹכוֹת הָאָרֶץ  
(you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth)

This theme, God's universal domain of operation, has even more clear continuity in Deutero and Trito-Isaiah. In Deutero-Isaiah the word גּוֹיִם occurs in 8 verses, and הַגּוֹיִם occurs in 4 verses. And in Trito-Isaiah also the word גּוֹיִם occurs in 13

verses, and **הַגּוֹיִם** occurs in 4 verses, indicating the global perspective of Isaiah's message and ministry..

The thematic and theological connections between the contents of the vertical influence on Isaiah (such as Isaiah sees God as King, God as high and exalted, God is holy, and God's glory filling the earth in Isa. 6:1-9) with the rest of Isa. 1-39 and Isaiah as a whole book is unequivocal. Although the case for vertical influence as the only reason for the distinctive nature and source of wisdom in Isaiah cannot be fully established, because of the complexities of wisdom influence on a person, it would be reasonable to argue in this paper that the contents of the vertical influence has the thematic and theological connections with the rest of Isaiah's writings and often they are the primary reasons of contentions between Isaiah and the wise men of his time.

## **Conclusions**

Indeed, Isaiah's wisdom is different from the wisdom that is known to his cotemporary. Borrowing from William P. Brown's discussion on St. Thomas Aquinas addition of three theological virtues to "cardinal" virtues of Aristotle and

Plato<sup>35</sup>, I suggest that there are two types of wisdom in Isaiah: Anthropological and Theological wisdom.

Anthropological wisdom is anthropocentric in nature. Its ultimate goal is to make human life better and successful. This wisdom may include prudent wisdom (phronetic), moral wisdom (sapiential) and intellectual wisdom (epistemological). The ultimate source of this wisdom is God's general revelation and the order in creation, natural law, human experience, human intellect, the written law, and the scripture. Since it is anthropocentric in its intent, it may also contain the knowledge and belief in God directed towards its goal but disconnected from the personal knowledge of God and His Spirit.

On the other hand, theological wisdom is a wisdom received in special revelation of God. The ultimate goal of this wisdom is absolute submission to God's will and plan. It contains the knowledge of God, which is transformative, theocentric and directive. It associates the ministry of the Holy Spirit empowering one to orient one's life in accordance with God's character and message. It builds eschatological hope for God's ultimate plan. Theological wisdom may include all the elements of anthropological wisdom

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<sup>35</sup> Brown describes how St. Thomas Aquinas developed a theological context for the highly esteemed "cardinal" virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance distinguished by Plato and Aristotle) to prove the "Charity" as the mother of all virtues. See in William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 12.

available to all; however, it is limited and cannot be gained by human effort alone.

I suggest that Isaiah's wisdom is both theological wisdom and anthropological wisdom, but his contemporary has only anthropological wisdom. Theological wisdom, which begins with a personal transforming experience in God, is sustained and directed by the Holy Spirit. It is not found in virtuous deeds but the virtuous being of a person from where the deeds flow out naturally. Thus, theological wisdom produces character. It is theocentric in its intent—committed to cause and purpose of God. This is the kind of wisdom, which Jesus assures to all his followers when he says, "For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict" (Luke 21:15). He also says, "But when the Spirit of truth comes, . . . he will guide you. . . . He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (Joh. 16:13-14). James describes this wisdom as: "the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (Jam. 3:17) No doubt, Isaiah reflects this wisdom in his writings.

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