

## **‘AUTO-MALEDICTION’ IN ISAIAH 22:1-14: LESSONS FOR TODAY’S POLITICS**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The more likelihood is to bless oneself and curse one’s enemies; bless one’s nation and curse rivaling polities. But here is a first value puzzle where Prophet Isaiah, a Judean himself, a great benefactor of Judah and a Jerusalem fan also utters oracles of malediction against his land, nay, against himself. This research is an attempt to interpret this unlikely trend of ‘auto malediction’ in Isaiah 22: 1-14, examine its efficacy and implications for Judah and draw possible lessons against today’s presumed inviolability in politics. Employing the methods of Biblical exegesis, this research would progress, through a study of Isaiah 22: 1-14, to identifying the aspect of ‘auto malediction’ in it. Also using the analytical method, a comparative analysis of the plight of Judah with the prevalent situation in today’s politics proposes a good platform for relevant lessons to be drawn and taught. The result promises to be beneficial both to scholarship, religion and politics.*

**KEYWORDS:** MALEDICTION, ISAIAH, JUDAH, POLITICS

### **WORKING OUTLINE**

1. Introduction
2. Explication of Terms
  - 2.1 Auto-Malediction
  - 2.2 Isaiah
  - 2.3 Politics
3. Review of Related Literature
4. Exegesis of Isaiah 22: 1-14
  - 4.1 The Analysis of the Text
  - 4.2 The Interpretation of the Text
  - 4.3 Identifying the Aspects of ‘Auto Malediction’ in the Text
5. ‘Inviolability’ in Today’s Politics
  - 5.1 Presumed Immunity for Politicians
  - 5.2 Presumed Immunity for the Polity
6. Evaluation
  - 6.1 Lessons from Isaiah’s ‘Auto-Malediction’ for Politics Today

## 6.2 Recommendations

### 7. Conclusion

#### INTRODUCTION

Politics, as the affair of the city-state, has always been close to Religion. In most cases, just as Religion is expressed and practiced within a polity, politics itself, and politicians, too, get influenced by the teaching of Religion.<sup>1</sup> The Christian Religion, as a case study, and especially the Old Testament, when properly interpreted, could hold some relevant positions for the benefit of politics today. This has become all the more needful given the trend in today's politics. Among many other 'falsehood' accommodated in modern politics is the presumed inviolability of some polities and politicians. The immunities of the untouchables – politicians and polities – has, to say the least, not only covered up the evil of the favored-inviolable, but it has over exaggerated and has gravely sanctioned the little mistakes of others. The double dealing in today's national and international politics is so pronounced that the people and places represented in Government are presumed 'untouchables.' Today's Politicians would not and cannot indict themselves or their people/community as that would amount to 'auto-indictment.'

But experience has taught, not only that truth is always truth and falsehood is always falsehood no matter who is involved, it has also confirmed that politics would not progress unless everybody – close or far – is confronted with the same language of blame or commendation that characterizes his conduct. Today's politics only 'commends self' and 'blames others.' Even in very glaring situations of misconduct, today's politicians look away from self and tend to indict 'others' only. This attitudinal trend is not only a problem today, it can cause more harm tomorrow if left unchecked.

The search for objectivity in judgment is a necessity. Only such objectivity, which includes indicting one self, supporters and community members when and where necessary, can restore the lost sanity and beauty of politics and command political responsibility again. Interestingly, the Scriptures would always present us with pools of lessons to draw from. One of those passages that sends a strong and objective indication of the folly of inviolability and the meaninglessness of some presumed immunity is Isaiah 22: 1-14 where the Prophet Isaiah utters what could be called 'auto-malediction.'

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on this interconnectedness of politics and religion especially in Isaiah, see: Gerald Emem Umoren, *Political Theology for Theological Politics: A Reflective Inquiry into the Relevance of the "Isaianic Option" for Contemporary Politics*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009

Following the above outline, this research progressed with the assumption that a possible solution to the problem stated above could begin from appreciating this passage.

This research is a response to that need to search for objectivity in religious but more especially in political relations. The initial thing that strikes one in this passage is that Isaiah not only utters oracles of judgment against his own Judah/Jerusalem, he also places such malediction among the terrible oracles he utters against other nations. This research refers to this Isaianic attitude as ‘auto-malediction’ because in cursing his native Judah/Jerusalem, Isaiah was more or less cursing himself. The level of selfishness and self deceit is alarming in today’s politics and, in drawing from Isaianic theology to serve politics, this research is narrowing a big gap in an area with relatively low attention in scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

The main aim of this research, therefore, has been to examine, discover, analyze, appreciate and project the possibility and necessity of ensuring objectivity in religious or political judgment without fear or favor and not minding self-involvement or who is involved.

Following the methods of Biblical exegesis, this research, setting out to understand more of the situation here, has first of all studied the passage noting the aspects of ‘auto-malediction’ prevalent in it. It has also x-rayed the current trend of inviolability and presumed immunity in today’s national and international politics and, employing some analytical method, too, has compared the two situations from Isaiah and from today’s politicians. The findings have been very relevant, meaningful and beneficial.

## EXPLICATION OF TERMS

There are a few terms that need to be explained contextually in this research. They include: Auto-Malediction, Isaiah, and Politics

### **Auto-Malediction**

This is a compound word used in this research to refer to cursing of oneself. It does not mean ‘automatic bad-saying’ as the literal etymology could suggest. It means ‘bad speech about oneself.’ Auto malediction is used in this research broadly to refer to all sayings, prayers, prophecies and actions that constitute anything less than best wishes for oneself

---

<sup>2</sup> A cursory review of relevant literature shows that not much has been done in drawing from the Old Testament to benefit modern politics. This research is a contribution in that regard.

or one's nation and people. In this case, 'auto-malediction' would refer to the oracles of judgment pronounced by Isaiah against himself and his people and land – Judah.

## **Isaiah**

In the context of usage here, Isaiah refers to the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet who preached in Jerusalem touching on relevant themes like Holiness of God, Faith in God and the theology of hope embedded in his remnant theme.<sup>3</sup> The prophet Isaiah, like many other prophets, uttered oracles of judgment and of salvation. There are many oracles of judgment directed to many other pagan nations. But what is of interest to this research is the 'how' and 'why' he also delivered these oracles of judgment against Judah, his people – nay himself. It is in this understanding that this research talks about the auto-malediction

## **Politics**

By politics in this context, this research is referring to a broad understanding of both the art of governance and the people governed within a city-state. It includes all that is necessary to reference a good leadership setting in a city-state.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The topic of "Auto-Malediction in Isaiah 22: 1-14: Lessons for Today's Politics" may be new but the considerations implied in this topic have punctuated scholarship for a long time. There are basically two sections of this research. The first is the consideration of the malediction in Isaiah. This could further be divided into considering 'malediction' itself and also that of Is. 22: 1-14. The second is the needed application of the fact of malediction to benefit today's politics.

There are many works and commentaries on the oracle of Isaiah as recorded in Is. 22: 1-14.<sup>4</sup> Basically every scholar looks at it from the point of view of judgment on Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> See, Donatus Udoette, *Messengers of God*, St. Joseph Publications, Ikot Ekpene: Bricks, 2008, pp. 84-127. For more on the person of Isaiah, also see Gerald Emem Umoren, *Political Theology for Theological Politics: A Reflective Inquiry into the Relevance of the "Isaianic Option" for Contemporary Politics*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009, pp. 17ff.

<sup>4</sup> See works like: Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1998, pp. 16ff; R. E Clements, "The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC., in *Vetus Testamentum* 30(1980) 421-436; Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39, Interpretation*, Louisville: John Knox, 1993, p. 158; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crises*, London: SCM, 1967, p. 27

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. E Clements, "The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC., in *Vetus Testamentum* 30(1980) 421-436.

While their commentaries on this text provides a lot of insight into the understanding of the passage, little or no attention has been paid to the fact that this is an auto-malediction.<sup>6</sup> This is a saying against oneself. Also, the idea of applying auto-malediction to the political situation is a new chapter. These two gaps which are actually very important in the appreciation of this passage today, constitute what this research is pushing to fill. The originality of this point of view – considering the issue of cursing oneself and examining possible lessons for today’s politics, gives real credibility and relevance to our research.

## EXEGESIS OF ISAIAH 22: 1-14

### The Text in Hebrew Transliteration

*1 maś·sā gē hiz·zā·yō·wn; mahlāk 'ê·pō·w, kî'ā·līt kul·lāk lag·gag·gō·wt. 2 tə·šu·'ō·wt mə·lē·'āh, 'ir hō·w·mî·yāh, qir·yāh 'al·lî·zā; hă·lā·la·yik lō ḥal·lē·ḥe·reb, wə·lō mē·tē mil·ḥā·māh. 3 kāl- qə·šî·na·yik nā·də·dū·ya·ḥad miq·qe·šet 'us·sā·rū; kālnim·šā·'a·yik 'us·sə·rū yaḥ·dāw, mē·rā·ḥō·wq bā·rā·ū . 4 'al- kēn 'ā·mar·tî šə·'ū min·nî 'ă·mā·rēr bab·be·kî; 'al- tā·'î·šū lə·na·ḥă·mê·nî, 'al- šōd baṭ'am·mî. 5 kî yō·wm mə·hū·māh ū·mə·bū·sāh ū·mə·bū·kāh, la·dō·nāy Yah·wh sə·bā·'ō·wt bə·gē hiz·zā·yō·wn; mə·qar·qar qir wə·šō·w·a' 'el- hā·hār. 6 wə·'ê·lām nā·sā 'aś·pāh, bə·re·keb 'ā·dām pā·rā·šîm; wə·qîr 'ê·rāh mā·gē·t n. 7 way·hî mib·ḥar'ă·mā·qa·yik mā·lə·'ū rā·keb; wə·hap·pā·rā·šîm, šōt šā·tū haś·šā·' ə·. 8 way·gal 'ēt mā·saḥ yə·hū·dāh; wat·tab·bêt bay·yō·wm ha·hū, 'elne·seq bêt hay·ya. 9 wə·'ēt bə·qî·'ê 'ir- dā·wid rə·'î·tem kî rāb·bū; wat·tə·qab·bə·šū, 'etmē hab·bə·rê·kāh hat·taḥ·tō·w·nāh. 10 wə·'et- bāt·tē yə·rū·šā·lim sə·pār·tem; wat·tiṭṣəw hab·bāt·tîm, lə·ḥaṣ·šēr ha·ḥō·w·māh. 11 ū·mi q·wāh 'ă·sî·tem, bēn ha·ḥō·mō·ta·yim, lə·mē hab·bə·rê·kāh hay·šā·nāh; wə·lō hib·baṭ·t em 'el'ō·še·hā, wə·yō·šə·rāh mē·rā·ḥō·wq lō rə·'î·tem. 12 way·yiq·rā, 'ă·dō·nāy Yah·weh sə·bā·'ō·wt bay·yō·wm ha·hū; lib·kî ū·lə·mis·péd, ū·lə·qā·rə·ḥāh wə·la·ḥă·gōr šā. 13 wə·hin·nēh sā·sō·wn wə·šîm·ḥāh, hā·rōg bā·qār wə·šā·ḥōt šōn, 'ā·kōl bā·sār wə·š ā·tō·wt yā·yin; 'ā·kō·wl wə·šā·tōw, kî mā·ḥār nā·mūt. 14 wə·niḡ·lāh bə·'ā·zə·nāy Yah·weh sə·bā·'ō·wt; 'im- yə·kup·par he·'ā·wōn haz·zeh lā·kem 'ad tə·mu·tūn, 'ā·mar 'ă·dō·nāy Yah·weh sə·bā·'ō·wt. p*

<sup>6</sup> Most of these scholars like Childs, Seitz and Clements as cited above only stopped at interpreting the passage independently of any reference to the nature of the malediction nor to the application of such understanding.

## The Text in Greek Transliteration

1. *to rhēma tēs pharangos Siōn ti egeneto soi nyn hoti anebēte pantes eis dōmata*

2 *mataia eneplēsthē hē polis boōntōn hoi traumatiai sou ou traumatiai machairas oude hoi nekroi sou nekroi polemou*

3 *pantes hoi archontes sou pepheugasin kai hoi halontes sklērōs dedemenoi eisin kai hoi ischyontes en soi porrō pepheugasin*

4 *dia touto eipa aphete me pikrōs klausomai mē katischysēte parakalein me epi to syntrimma tēs thygatros tou genous mou*

5 *hoti hēmera tarachēs kai apōleias kai katapatēmatos kai planēsis para kyriou sabaōth en pharangi Siōn planōntai apo mikrou heōs megalou planōntai epi ta orē*

6 *hoi de Ailamitai elabon pharetras anabatai anthrōpoi eph' hippois kai synagōgē parataxeōs*

7 *kai esontai hai eklektai pharanges sou plēsthēsontai harmatōn hoi de hippeis emphraxousi tas pylas sou*

8 *kai anakalypsousin tas pylas Iouda kai emblepsontai tē hēmera ekeinē eis tous eklektous oikous tēs poleōs*

9 *kai anakalypsousin ta krypta tōn oikōn tēs akras Daud kai eidosan hoti pleious eisin kai hoti apstrepsan to hydōr tēs archaias kolymbēthras eis tēn polin*

10 *kai hoti katheilosan tous oikous Ierousalēm eis ochyrōma tou teichous tē polei*

11 *kai epoiēsate heautois hydōr ana meson tōn dyo teicheōn esōteron tēs kolymbēthras tēs archaias kai ouk eneblepsate eis ton ap' archēs poiēsanta autēn kai ton ktisanta autēn ouk eidete*

12 *kai ekalesen kyrios sabaōth en tē hēmera ekeinē klauthmon kai kopeton kai xyrēsīn kai zōsin sakkōn*

13 *autoi de epoiēsanto euphrosynēn kai agallīama sphazontes moschous kai thyontes probata hōste phagein krea kai piein oinon legontes phagōmen kai piōmen aurion gar apothnēskomen*

*14 kai anakekalymmena tauta estin en tois ōsin kyriou sabaōth hoti ouk aphethēsetai hymin hautē hē hamartia heōs an apothanēte*

### The Text in English (NRS)

*Isaiah 22:1 The oracle concerning the valley of vision. What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops,*

*2 you that are full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town? Your slain are not slain by the sword, nor are they dead in battle.*

*3 Your rulers have all fled together; they were captured without the use of a bow.1 All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away.2*

*4 Therefore I said: Look away from me, let me weep bitter tears; do not try to comfort me for the destruction of my beloved people.*

*5 For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a cry for help to the mountains.*

*6 Elam bore the quiver with chariots and cavalry,1 and Kir uncovered the shield.*

*7 Your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the cavalry took their stand at the gates.*

*8 He has taken away the covering of Judah. On that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest,*

*9 and you saw that there were many breaches in the city of David, and you collected the waters of the lower pool.*

*10 You counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall.*

*11 You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.*

*12 In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and putting on sackcloth;*

*13 but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*

*14 The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord GOD of hosts.*

### **Analysis of the Text**

This is a passage that needs some formal analysis because of the complexity and controversy of its listing, content and context. However, textual criticism reveals that there are no major variants in this passage that could constitute any challenge in interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Historically, the general picture of the passage portrays a familiar leading motif. The remote background of this passage fits into the ‘day of the Lord’ motif. The proximate background is most likely to be the siege of Sennacherib or that of Sargon’s attack on Ashdod. Whichever one, the proximate background has to do with a past event of judgment.<sup>8</sup> Structurally, this passage also portrays a unity. Commonly taken as an oracle against Jerusalem, it is possible appreciate a structure here. Some scholars see some chiasmic structure in the Hebrew but even in the English, one can discern meaningful parts which add up to the overall picture of a judgment against Jerusalem. This research agrees with the following divisions: 1-4; 5-8a; 8b-11; 12-14.<sup>9</sup>

### **Part A (A picture of chaos) vv. 1-4**

*The oracle concerning the valley of vision. What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops, you that are full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town? Your slain are not slain by the sword, nor are they dead in battle. Your rulers have all fled together; they were captured without the use of a bow. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away. Therefore I said: Look away from me, let me weep bitter tears; do not try to comfort me for the destruction of my beloved people.*

---

<sup>7</sup> See commentary on Is 22: 1-14 in *Bible works* 9

<sup>8</sup> Cf. John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 406ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986, p. 407.



**Part B** (The source of the chaos – The Lord God) vv. 5-8

*For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a cry for help to the mountains. Elam bore the quiver with chariots and cavalry, and Kir uncovered the shield. Your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the cavalry took their stand at the gates. He has taken away the covering of Judah.*

**Part C** (The mistaken response of the people to divine judgment) 8b-11

*On that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, and you saw that there were many breaches in the city of David, and you collected the waters of the lower pool. You counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.*

**Part D** (The final indictment by the Lord) Is. 22: 12-14

*In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and putting on sackcloth; but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord GOD of hosts.*

Structurally, the passage forms a block. It progresses from the picture of chaos in vv. 1-4; to the source of the chaos in vv. 5-8a; to the mistaken response of the people to this divine judgment in vv. 8b-11; and, lastly to the final indictment by the Lord in vv. 12-14.

Further analysis would give more insight towards the interpretation of this passage. Semantically and by philology, the form is revealing. For example, scholars are divided as per whether or not this is a reference to a particular event of history. Some are in support of that but there are others who think it was merely a prophecy. The identity of

the event is unclear. The closest determination of this revolves around two possibilities. It is either referring to deliverance from Sennacherib in 701 BC or from Sargon's attack on Ashdod.<sup>10</sup> However plausible they appear, each of them has some situations fighting against its credibility. For example, if we assume that this passage sets into Sennacherib's context, the difficulty would be how to explain the next part of this passage where Shebna is projected as the royal steward.<sup>11</sup> History has it that it was actually Eliakim who was High Priest during Sennacherib's invasion but Shebna was steward during Sargon's attack. Whatever the case the passage is reflective of past events.

Philologically, it is clear that the choice of certain words is a pointer to the fact of judgment for Jerusalem. The reference in verse 1 to the 'valley of vision' is pregnant with meaning. Jerusalem, which is also often referred to as 'Mount Zion' is no longer a mountain but now a 'valley.' The idea of valley points to a change in status - a downgrading. Why is this valley connected with vision? Probably because Jerusalem has been a center of prophecy. Many prophets had seen visions and communicated their visions in this 'mount zion' now turned a 'valley.' Also, in verse 4, the reference to *baṭ'am-mî* 'the daughter of my people' or 'my beloved people' is significant. The idea of 'daughter' informs of the love of a 'mother.' The prophet is here talking about a people that is very close to himself. Infact he is talking about 'mother Jerusalem,' his city. The prophet is not just echoing the fact of election of Israel but he is also confirming that this oracle is about his own beloved community. He was pronouncing an oracle about 'beloved' Jerusalem where he belonged. The idea of malediction is clearly insinuated here in the phrase *'al- šōd baṭ'am-mî* "the destruction of my beloved people." The final indictment is also very significant to the understanding of this passage. God's action was an intervention in warning but the people would not heed. It attracted a stern indictment in verse 14: "*Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die.*" It is interesting to see the double use of the prophetic formula before and after this indictment.

*wə-niḡ-lāh ḥə-'ā-zə-nāy Yah-weh ṣə-ḥā-'ō-wṭ; 'im-  
yə-kup-par he-'ā-wōn haz-zeh lā-ḵem 'ad  
tə-mu-tūn, 'ā-mar 'ā-dō-nāy Yah-weh ṣə-ḥā-'ō-wṭ.*

---

<sup>10</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 407-408.

<sup>11</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 401-407.

It begins by saying that the Lord God has revealed something in his ears and he also ends with the explicit use of the prophetic formula: “thus says the Lord God of Hosts”

*'ā-mar 'ā-dō-nāy Yah-weh šə-bā-'ō-wt.*

This was to show and confirm that the prophet actually pronounced a sentence of divine judgment on Jerusalem, his beloved community.

### **The Interpretation of the Text**

Going by the above analyses, it is possible to arrive at some interpretation of the passage. Both the textual and especially the structural analysis confirm that Is 22: 1-14 is a harmonious bloc. This is definitely an oracle against Jerusalem. The progression of argument as seen in the structural analysis, proves that there was a building up to the point of eventual indictment. Considering also the background of this passage, this research holds that the identity of the event is specifically unidentifiable but that the prophet, occasioned by past experience and prophetic insight was able to interpret the will of God for Jerusalem and communicate same in his oracles. This research believes that there must have been past events of judgment but without total destruction but unfortunately, Israel may not have learnt adequate lessons from that such that instead trusting in God, they sought to trust in their strength and, may be, in their anticipated political alliance. It was against this background that Isaiah foresaw a new and more devastation ahead. Even in the ‘valley of vision,’ the people lacked vision.<sup>12</sup> The entire passage is an indirect judgment against Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> But much more than the above, the reference of the prophet to Jerusalem as ‘valley’ in verse 1; ‘daughter of my people’ in verse 4 and the final indictment of this people in verse 12 all go to confirm that this was a turning of a powerful searchlight unto oneself. Isaiah accused his people of failing to trust in God.<sup>14</sup> This gives this research the opening to view some sort of auto-malediction here. Isaiah as a member of the Jerusalem royal circle, just as he indicted other nations also accused his people of failing to trust in God. He did not mind uttering judgment against his own people of Judah, on account of their lack of faith, which he projected as an inexpiable sin of Jerusalem. The same ‘prophetic hammer’ that fell on other nations – foreign - was used on ‘home Judah.’

---

<sup>12</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986, p. 405.

<sup>13</sup> Tucker, Gene M. “The Book of Isaiah 1-39” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, Edited by Leander E. Keck et al., Nashville: Abingdon, 2001, p. 194.

<sup>14</sup> Tucker, Gene M. “The Book of Isaiah 1-39” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, Edited by Leander E. Keck et al., Nashville: Abingdon, 2001, p. 195.

## Identifying the Aspects of ‘Auto Malediction’ in the Text

At this point, this research is interested in highlighting the aspects of auto-malediction in this passage. As already established, this has to do with those words and situations which point to oneself as judgment. Seeing ‘auto’ as oneself or any body reflecting personal interest, the fact that Isaiah is a prophet of and a prophet in Jerusalem makes Jerusalem his ‘constituency’ and any reference to it, a reference to ‘oneself.’<sup>15</sup> In verse 1, the reference to ‘valley of vision’ is a reference to Jerusalem. Another significant aspect of this malediction is the affectionate reference to his audience as ‘daughter of my people.’ This use of *bat’am-mî* shows the affection, love and closeness of this people to his heart and being and yet he still went ahead to pronounce judgment. This is truly an ‘auto’ (pertaining to oneself) situation. The entire passage but especially verses 4 and 14 are very explicit in pronouncing judgment - “*Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die.*” This is a hard saying of judgment and indictment. It is a ‘malediction.’ The theses of this research is that this passage constitutes an ‘auto-malediction’ since the judgment and indictment (bad-saying)<sup>16</sup> is directed not just to a known body but one which, more or less, constitutes oneself by affinity. Again, this passage comes within the context of oracles of judgment of other nations which perspective constituted lack of trust in God. For Israel or Jerusalem to be enlisted here means that the prophet was turning the sledge hammer on himself and that constitutes ‘auto-malediction.’

## INVIOABILITY IN TODAY’S POLITICS

The disposition of Isaiah to utter malediction against his land does not seem popular in secular politics. The trend of ‘god-fatherism’ has brought so much negative inviolability into politics. Most, if not all politicians today, claim immunity and as long as they are in power, their own, their people, and their land can never be indicted for anything. There is so much protection, cover-up and ‘auto-generated immunity’ that has had serious consequences in the overall working of the polity.

---

<sup>15</sup> Prophet Isaiah is often referred to as ‘Isaiah of Jerusalem.’ Apart from being someone of the Jerusalem cult, he is one who, at a point, personally believed in the inviolability of Jerusalem. That he is from Jerusalem, preaches in Jerusalem; preaches for Jerusalem; and goes ahead to indict them, amounts to ‘auto-malediction.’

<sup>16</sup> Etymologically, malediction is understood from the background of two Latin roots: ‘Mal’ meaning ‘Bad’ and ‘Diction’ meaning ‘saying.’ Malediction therefore means ‘bad-saying.’

## **Presumed Immunity for Politicians**

Experience, in Nigeria and in many other countries in Africa, shows that the rule of law has not been given the pride of place. Some politicians have not only paraded themselves as ‘above the law’ but the system has allowed them to escape with such destructive tendencies. The presumed immunity for politicians has paved way for many of them to escape free of caution, probe or sanction after going against constitutional provisions. The conspiracy of silence experienced in the political arena seems to encourage the presumed immunity of these politicians.<sup>17</sup>

## **Presumed Immunity for the Polity**

The political trend in African countries especially in Nigeria is that of irresponsible god-fatherism. In itself, god-fatherism may be morally indifferent but when it is used as a cover-up mechanism and for the suppression of truth and installation of falsehood, it becomes a problem. Those politicians who presume their immunity are also the ones who try to ensure the presumed immunity of their people and community. There are certain people and community which can never be indicted. Sometimes our leaders pronounce judgment, even over minor mistakes, on all other nations, states, cities and communities as long as they have no personal interest there but they spare their own people and city even ordinary correction or advise on grave breaches of constitutional provisions.<sup>18</sup> This cover-up has caused a lot of setback to the polity of future transformation, growth and sustainable development.

## **EVALUATION**

Malediction is not something that people ordinarily desire. But, as judgment, every one would love to see some degree of objectivity. Having analyzed the passage of study with the clear example of Isaiah’s ‘auto-malediction,’ and, having also studied the opposite tendency in the political terrain where politicians treat their own as ‘sacred cows’ and

---

<sup>17</sup> It is not uncommon, for example in Nigeria, to see a major breach of constitutional provision, overlooked, suppressed, swept under the carpet and dismissed. It is not enough to bring up a case against the politicians but nothing else seems to happen after the initial noise. Their self-acclaimed immunity seems to be upheld by the system and the tendency is to extend such ‘sacred cow’ tendency to.

<sup>18</sup> The current political atmosphere in Nigeria is very tense because of the alleged silence of the Federal government over the killings going on in the country. People ask” ‘is it because people of a certain sect or religion or region are being targeted? Would the Federal Government have kept the same silence if the other religion(s) or regions suffered more of the killing? Could there be any presumed immunity of the political system here?

only indict ‘foreigners,’ the platform is ready to gain from the fruits of true evaluation. This research has not only exposed the double-dealings in today’s politics, it has also discovered and testified to the harm such ‘cover-up’ has already done to responsible politics. This research has found out that there are relevant lessons that can and should be learnt from Isaiah’s ‘auto-malediction.’ Based on these available lessons, a number of recommendations are possible.

### **Lessons from Isaiah’s ‘Auto-Malediction’ for Politics Today**

The following are lessons that could/should be learnt from Isaiah’s ‘auto-malediction’ for politics today:

1. Leadership is a service for all – close and far
2. Judgment is assessed by objectivity
3. God is no respecter of persons
4. Politics is man’s administration of God’s people
5. Malediction is not condemnation but a warning for some desired positive change

Based on the above lessons, the following recommendations can really help shape the orientation of politicians and politics regarding objectivity in judgment.

### **Recommendations**

1. Politicians must see themselves as ‘servants’ of all and not shields for a select few
2. Society must frown more practically at ‘double dealings’
3. The judiciary needs to be allowed more independence
4. The rule of law must be enforced to the end
5. For a start, nobody should be allowed to adjudicate in matters affecting his jurisdiction
6. Moral upbringing should be enforced in schools from the Elementary level in order to ensure that the trait of objectivity in judgment is inculcated from the early stage.

## CONCLUSION

This research, going by the findings, has reasons to conclude that judgment should always be guided by the consideration of common interest/common good over and above individual sentiments. This research professes a clarion call to restore responsibility in religion and politics through objectivity and transparency in judgment. The research has also applied this beautifully, drawing meaningfully relevant lessons for the contemporary era and making useful recommendations that would prove to be very gainful for scholarship, religion and politics at all times.

## Sources

- “Nigeria and the Search for Peace: Reflections on Isaiah 11:1-10” in *Africa Journal of Biblical Research*, Vol. 2, Nos. 1&2 (2015) pp. 112-128.
- Alexander, Nicholas, “Defining Leadership in Today’s World” posted on August 12, 2015 and accessed on line on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018 from [www.nicholasalexander-es.com](http://www.nicholasalexander-es.com)
- BIBLE WORKS* 9, Norfolk, VA: Bibleworks LLC, 2013.
- BIBLE*, Revised Standard Version, 1952
- Brueggemann, Walter, *Isaiah 1-39*, Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1998.
- Childs, Brevard S., *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crises*, London: SCM, 1967.
- Clements, R. E., “The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC., in *Vetus Testamentum* 30(1980) 421-436
- Clements, Ronald E., *Isaiah 1-39*, NCB, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Ehusani, George “Nigeria and the Leadership Challenge” accessed online on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2018 from [www.georgeehusani.org](http://www.georgeehusani.org)
- Henry, Matthew “Commentary on Isaiah 22: 1-14” in *Bibleworks* 9, Norfolk, CA: Bibleworks LLC, 2013, accessed electronically on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2017.
- Jensen, Joseph and Irwin, William H., *Isaiah 1-39* in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* edited by Raymond E. Brown et al, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990, pp. 229-248.
- Light, Gary W., *Isaiah*, Interpretation Bible Studies, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Oswalt, John, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Seitz, Christopher R., *Isaiah 1-39, Interpretation*, Louisville: John Knox, 1993.
- Smythe, H. H., “The Problem of National Leadership in Nigeria” in *Social Research Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1958) Accessed on line on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018 from [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)
- Tucker, Gene M. “The Book of Isaiah 1-39” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, Edited by Leander E. Keck et al., Nashville: Abingdon, 2001, pp. 27-305
- Udoette, Donatus, *Messengers of God*, St. Joseph Publications, Ikot Ekpene: Bricks, 2008.
- Umoren, Gerald Emem, *Political Theology for Theological Politics: A Reflective Inquiry into the Relevance of the “Isaianic Option” for Contemporary Politics*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009