

Bartłomiej Sobierajski

Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne
Towarzystwa Chrystusowego w Poznaniu
ks.b.sobierajski@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-3007-787X
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/BPTH.2019.023>

12 (2019) 4: 431–445

ISSN (print) 1689-5150

ISSN (online) 2450-7059

“The Name of YHWH Comes from Afar” (Isa 30:27) in the Light of Rhetorical Analysis of Isa 30:27–33: an Attempt at Identification

Próba identyfikacji „imienia JHWH, które przybywa z daleka” (Iz 30,27), w świetle analizy retorycznej Iz 30,27–33

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest wyjaśnienie znaczenia otwierającej prooroctwo Iz 30,27–33 frazy: הִבֵּה שֵׁם־יְהוָה כִּי אֵל מְרִרָהּ. Trudności interpretacyjne związane są przede wszystkim z występującym tu rzeczownikiem שֵׁם oraz okolicznikiem miejsca מְרִרָהּ. Artykuł przedstawia dotychczasowe próby rozumienia całego wyrażenia, a następnie proponuje jego nowe odczytanie, które jednoznacznie wiąże „imię JHWH” z imperium asyryjskim. Taka identyfikacja wynika zarówno z egzegezy wspomnianego zdania, analizy kontekstu prooroctwa, a także jest poparta przez najnowsze osiągnięcia hebrajskiej retoryki biblijnej. Naświetlone w tym duchu przesłanie prooroctwa odsłania postać Izajasza jako przenikliwego i uważnego obserwatora politycznych wydarzeń, a jednocześnie wysokiej klasy teologa wrażliwego na subtelność Bożego orędzia. Prooroctwo Iz 30,27–33, będące częścią najbardziej dojrzałych wypowiedzi proroka z ostatniego etapu jego działalności (705–701 przed Chr.), wpisuje się zatem w ducha tychże wyroczni, w których niedopowiedzenia i dwuznaczne sformułowania odgrywają rolę zasadniczą.

Abstract: The aim of the article is to clarify the meaning of the opening phrase of the prophecy of Isa 30:27–33: הִבֵּה שֵׁם־יְהוָה כִּי אֵל מְרִרָהּ. Interpretative difficulties arise primarily from the noun שֵׁם and the adverb מְרִרָהּ appearing here. The article presents previous attempts to understand the entire expression, and then proposes a new reading of it, which unambiguously links “the name of YHWH” with the Assyrian empire. Such identification results both from the exegesis and the analysis of the context of the prophecy, and is also supported by the latest achievements of Hebrew biblical rhetoric. The message of the prophecy reveals the person of Isaiah as an attentive observer of political events, and at the same time as a high-class theologian sensitive to the subtlety of God’s message. The prophecy of Isa 30:27–33, which is part of the most mature statements of the prophet from the last stage of his activity (705–701 BC), is thus inscribed

in the idea of those oracles in which understatements and ambiguous phrases play a fundamental role.

Słowa kluczowe: Izajasz; imię JHWH; Asyria; Iz 30,27–33.

Keywords: Isaiah; the name of YHWH; Assyria; Isa 30:27–33.

Introduction

The prophecy of Isa 30:27–33, combining elements of different genres, such as judgment, theophany, promise of salvation and temple songs, seems to be difficult to interpret.¹ It is not surprising then that voices questioning Isaiah's authorship appear.² The arguments provided concern, among others, the opening phrase of the whole prophecy: *שֵׁם־יְהוָה קָם מִמְּרָקֵק*. Analyzing the vocabulary of the historical prophet, the noun *שֵׁם* seems out of place. Some scholars correct it, whereas others treat it as a gloss or redactional addition. A very general expression *מִמְּרָקֵק* also creates similar difficulties. However, a more in-depth analysis demonstrates that they determine the essence of the prophecy, and their proper understanding sheds light on the rest of the pronouncement, solving the problems associated with the accumulation of various seemingly incongruous images. The attempt to find a solution to this problem will be conducted in three steps. In the first stage, the current state of research will be described, namely proposals as to how to understand the opening prophetic phrase “the name of YHWH comes from afar” (30:27). The second step will clarify this expression based on the analysis of the oracle in both the synchronic and historical context. Finally, in the third stage, the highlighted solution to the problem will be verified relying on the results of the analysis of biblical rhetoric, which will offer a coherent vision of the whole prophecy.

¹ Cf. B.S. Childs, *Isaiah*, pp. 227–228; M.K.Y.H. Hom, *The Characterisation of the Assyrians in Isaiah*, p. 123. Some scholars observe in it even elements of the apocalyptic literature cf. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, p. 309.

² The seeming lack of thematic coherence in the analyzed fragment is also for some exegetes an argument against Isaiah's authorship cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, p. 423. Redaction criticism will not be discussed in this article, but we believe that the main core of the prophecy is the historical Isaiah. Premises for this view also result from the specific subtlety of the message of the prophecy, which will be signaled in the course of reflection.

1. Status quo

1.1. Proposals for Understanding “the Name YHWH”

The expression שֵׁם־יְהוָה בָּא is unusual not only for Isaiah but also for the whole of the Holy Scriptures. The idea of the coming of YHWH Himself is considerably more frequent (for example Isa 19:1: וַיָּבֵא מִצְרַיִם קַל וְיָבֵא עַל־עַב קַל וְיָבֵא יְהוָה רֶכֶב עַל־עַב קַל וְיָבֵא יְהוָה רֶכֶב עַל־עַב קַל; cf. 26:21; 40:10; 66:15). Such a description is in line with similar accounts of theophany (for example in Psalms, cf. Ps 50:3; 96:13; 98:9). A certain analogy is offered only by Isa 59:19: “From the west, people will fear the name of YHWH, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come (בְּיַיְבוֹא) like a pent-up flood.” Perhaps relying on this fragment, among others, T. Brzegowy views “the name of YHWH” as His majesty, understood as glory and power after the victorious battle.³

For this reason, some commentators consider the word “name” as an addition (usually Deuteronomistic), the purpose of which would be to transfer the theological burden associated with the destructive activity of YHWH from Him to His name. It is not possible that God – transcendent towards the whole world – could personally engage in His work on earth, hence the redactor added the noun שֵׁם. This procedure makes typically human features, such as anger and outrage, belong to the person of God only indirectly.⁴ The expression “name of YHWH” would thus be a kind of tool to soften the subsequent image of YHWH’s outrage: it is not God Himself who behaves like a warrior displaying His emotions, responding with anger, but only His name. This concept, however, creates some difficulty. Assuming the intervention of the Deuteronomistic redactor in the text, it is difficult to explain the following מִמְּרָחֵק (“from afar”), as “if we have something certain about the theology of the Deuteronomist, it is certainly the fact that the name YHWH only resides in Jerusalem.”⁵

M.J. de Jong views the fragment from Isaiah 30:27–33 as a review of the events of the prophet’s life dated to the second half of the seventh century. He observes that the term “name” in reference to God appears only in the later layers of the book (12:4; 18:7; 24:15; 25:1; 26:8,13; 29:23), while supposing that

³ Cf. T. Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza. Rozdziały 13–39*, pp. 588. J.D. Watts shares the view of Brzegowy recognizing here “glory” (in reference to Ezk 1:28), which ultimately represents YHWH Himself. Cf. J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, p. 474.

⁴ Cf. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, p. 307; W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II. Chapters 28–39*, p. 177. Beuken, however, notes that from the point of view of textual criticism there are no grounds to identify a redactional addition here.

⁵ H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, p. 195.

there are no convincing reasons to treat it as a redactional addition. According to him, the solution is the vocalization as אָפֹּי: “Here comes YHWH from afar.” Thus, the fragment would not focus on the place from which YHWH comes, but on the destination of His intervention, that is, on Zion. From there He shakes the nations (30:28), and it is where He is going to extend His dominion.⁶

L. Alonso Schökel and J.L. Sicre Diaz translate the whole phrase as “YHWH Himself comes from afar,” pointing to the numerous anthropomorphisms that appear later in the text.⁷ However, it is difficult to find other expressions with אָפֹּי having such a meaning to support this translation.

Another suggestion is to identify in the expression “the name of YHWH” the function of revealing Him as ruler and redeemer (cf. Isa 12:4; 29:23; 59:19; Ps 124:8).⁸ God in His name was defamed mainly by political leaders who sought support in Egypt thus depreciating YHWH’s sovereignty (Isa 30:1–3). Now He will display His power and authority (29:23). It is, however, important to observe a different context of invoking the syntagma the “name of YHWH.” In Isa 12:4, it is related to the covenant (although this term does not appear in Isaiah 12) because of the verb אָרָא which appears there. The expression אָרָא + אָפֹּי appears in Isaiah 43:1 and describes the relationship of God with Israel: invoking someone’s name is possible only in a mutual, intimate relationship between the caller and the summoned.⁹ The context of the analyzed fragment clearly deviates from the aforementioned meaning, whereas its relation with Isa 29:23 will be examined in a further part of the paper.

1.2. A Proposal for Understanding the Adverb “From Afar”

When attempting to identify from a geographical perspective the place where the “name of YHWH” comes from, various options are offered. According to Jdg 5:4, God comes from (אָפֹּי) from Seir and Edom, and according to Hb 3:3 He comes (בֹּיָא) from Teman – Mount Paran (identified with Sinai – Dt 33:2). Ezekiel gives the general direction of the north (Ezk 1:4). YHWH frequently comes from Zion (e.g. Ps 50:2; Am 1:5; Mic 1:2–3), which is also characteristic of the Deuteronomist tradition mentioned above, but it is difficult to apply it to Isaiah. In Isaiah 31:4, Lord YHWH of Hosts descends (אָרָא) to fight on Mount

⁶ M.J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, pp. 89, 116–118.

⁷ Cf. L. Alonso Schökel, J.L. Sicre Diaz, *I Profeti*, pp. 259–260.

⁸ Cf. J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, pp. 565–566.

⁹ Cf. W. Pikor, *The Dynamism of Salvation according to Isa 12:1–6*, p. 53.

Zion, hence heaven appears to be the natural habitat for His whereabouts.¹⁰ Indeed, this is the place in the Bible where YHWH comes from most often (Ps 18:10; 144:5; Isa 26:21; 63:19; Jer 25:30).

Other exegetes perceive in this expression a comparison to a storm, the announcement of which can be seen on the horizon from the top of a hill. At the beginning its growth does not seem dangerous, but after a short time it reaches the observer and strikes him with all its force. Such an image fits the following context, which speaks of the wrath of YHWH, which is “like a rushing torrent”, and of His coming in a “cloudburst” and “hail” (30:28,30).¹¹

The expression “from afar” can also denote not so much a specific place in space, but the fact that YHWH refrains from acting in favor of His people. God remained far from Israel, seemingly absent, but at the time of trouble He decided to intervene.¹² Such an understanding would be a kind of polemic with those who claim that a distant God is unable to come with a practical rescue to His people, which would again be consistent with the tendencies described by Isaiah to seek human alliances (e.g. in the context of the Assyrian threat – an alliance with Egypt in Isa 30:2–3).¹³ However, this understanding of the term “from afar” poses some difficulty. The entire pronouncement in vv. 27–28 suggests the punishing intervention of YHWH. While “His lips full of wrath” and “His tongue like a consuming fire” can be interpreted as a demonstration of the strength and power of YHWH, the aim of this coming – “to shake the nations in the sieve of destruction and to place in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray” – bears evidently signs of punishment. Moreover, it is directed not against Israel’s enemy – Assyria (which will resound in vv. 31,33) – but against the peoples of the earth. It is possible to seek other nations which being hostile to Israel would be the subject of this wrath of YHWH; however, it seems quite convoluted.

¹⁰ Cf. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, p. 307. It is significant that the same passage of Isa 31:4 can be translated as YHWH’s fight “against (לְ) Mount Zion,” which absolutely excludes the Deuteronomist tradition.

¹¹ Cf. J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 566; J.A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, p. 252.

¹² Cf. H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, p. 196; T. Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza. Rozdziały 13–39*, p. 588.

¹³ Cf. J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 566.

2. Prophecy in its Context

The analyzed fragment can be found in chapters 28–39, which represent the final stage of Isaiah's prophetic activity. From a historical perspective, this is not only the unsuccessful campaign of King Sennacherib against Jerusalem in 701 BC, but above all the events immediately preceding it – the military campaign of Assyria interpreted in the theological spirit.¹⁴ Such theological motifs are, for example, the reign of YHWH, who, using the Assyrian empire, removes Himself morally corrupt rulers from Judah (cf. 32:1; 33:22),¹⁵ or the motif of the exaltation of YHWH, who shows His majesty to the chosen nation and other nations. (cf. 28:5; 29:6).¹⁶ Finally, this section also resonates with the thought of the salvation of Zion, related to the struggle that God is fighting for His land (cf. 28:16; 33:20).¹⁷ All aforementioned plots are present in the prophecy 30:27–33. For this reason, in the entire expression *שָׁם יִהְיֶה בָּא מִן־הַחֶקֶק*, we propose to see YHWH who comes in the person of the Assyrian king and his army to punish the earth, to display His glory, but ultimately to save Jerusalem. To this end, He uses a hostile empire as a tool.

Such an understanding obviously raises serious doubts whether YHWH can be identified with the Assyrian king/army. At the beginning it should be clearly emphasized that Isaiah does not identify Assyria with YHWH, which is explicitly indicated in section 1–12, which opens the Book of Isaiah. In chapter 5, there is the first announcement in the chronology of the Assyrian invasion in which “the people from afar” (*לְגוֹיִם מֵרְחוֹק*) are called by God (the verb *שָׁרַק* in 5:26). Undoubtedly, Assyria is here subordinate to the will of YHWH.¹⁸ Similarly, in Isa 10, the empire is simply called “the rod of YHWH's anger” (10:5), while the central part of the whole pericope (10:5–34) presenting the pride of Assyria, contains proverbs that unmistakably expose its intentions and reveal the truth about it: it is merely a tool in God's hands that in its pride usurps divine prerogatives (10:15).¹⁹ Nevertheless, there are also passages from the last stage of the prophet's activity (705–701 BC) which confirm the aforementioned possibility of interpreting the “name of YHWH”. The most significant seems to

¹⁴ Cf. R.E. Clements, *Jerusalem and the Nations*, p. 83.

¹⁵ Cf. M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, p. 357.

¹⁶ Cf. G. Stansell, *Isaiah: 28–33: Blest Be the Tie that Binds (Isaiah Together)*, p. 73.

¹⁷ Cf. C.R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, pp. 205–206.

¹⁸ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah 30: A Prophetic Oracle Transmitted in Two Successive Paradigms*, p. 394.

¹⁹ Cf. B. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar prorocत्व o pysze Judy i Asyrii (Iz 1–39)*, pp. 195–200.

be the prophecy about Ariel (Isa 29:1–8). Exegetes unanimously identify it with Jerusalem and it is first presented as a city that was besieged and captured by David (29:1); however, in the course of years, it is God Himself who will beset the city, encircle it with towers and set up siege works against it (29:3). The historical context of statements (as well as most of the prophecies in chapters 28–39), related to Sennacherib’s campaign in 705–701 BC and his failed siege of the capital, suggests that in the event of the encirclement of the empire’s capital the prophet leads us to see YHWH who fights with the holy city.²⁰ Moreover, YHWH emerges victorious from the confrontation against both opponents: the Assyrian army is scattered, while the punishment for Jerusalem is the failure of human attempts to save the capital by seeking military alliances or wisdom among “the prophets and seers” (29:10).²¹ Paradoxically, God’s defeat of Assyria, which did not want to be an instrument in YHWH’s hands, is not an expression of His powerlessness. He brings His plan to an end – although the empire is decimated and the capital saved, the shame of the defenders who sought help in their own wisdom becomes a punishment for them.

A similar idea can also be observed in the prophecy of Isa 31. Although the theme of the miraculous saving of the capital is what mostly resounds in it, the prophet’s intended ambiguity of the expression “YHWH of Hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion/against Mount Zion” once again shows God as the One who fights not only with Assyria, but also with Jerusalem.²²

What are the exegetical arguments for the proposal mentioned above to understand the expression “the name of YHWH comes from afar”? We can demonstrate the following:

- 1) Isaiah speaks not of YHWH who is coming, but of the name of YHWH. This subtle but significant difference sheds light on the understanding of the entire expression. A name frequently carries specific information, and may be related to the function or mission that a person has to fulfill.²³ In the analyzed fragment it is not given what the name is, but there is a task to fulfill: “He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruc-

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 232–233.

²¹ Ibid., p. 244.

²² The aforementioned prophecy was elaborated by the author in his STL thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Alessandro Coniglio *Oracle of Doom or Oracle of Salvation? An Exegetical Study of Isaiah 31*, (January 30, 2018) at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem.

²³ Cf. F.V. Reiterer, H.J. Fabry, H. Ringgren, ׀׀, *TDOT XV*, p. 135. Another function of a name is to declare some truth, to which Isaiah refers by giving a symbolic name to his son (8:1–3), which reveals the plans of YHWH towards Israel.

tion; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray.” (v. 28). In similar words, God’s mission for Assyria was previously expressed (cf. 10:5–7). In addition, a name can also act as an epithet. An example is Psalm 8, in which the expression יהוה אֵלֵינוּ is juxtaposed with מְהִימָתוֹ – the majesty that is attributed to יהוה is the majesty of God Himself. Recognized by man “in all the earth” (Ps 8:3–9), the splendor of His name actually belongs to God Himself. The visible world: flocks and herds, the animals of the wild, birds, fish, finally man himself, as well as the sky, moon, stars – all this is “the name of God” and reveals Him and His majesty.²⁴ Following this line of reasoning and observing the Assyrian army and its characteristics, such as numbers, size, terror, power, one can infer the power of YHWH Himself, who comes with punishing intervention;²⁵

- 2) in Proto-Isaiah, the noun יהוה is usually used in later layers of this book, but “always in the context of recognizing the authority of YHWH.”²⁶ The analyzed fragment fits in with the aforementioned reflection. If we identify Assyria’s punishing invasion of Israel with the arrival of YHWH Himself, the empire must be truly subordinate to God as a tool in His hand, even if it is unaware of it. At the same time, the end of the prophecy, in which the Assyrian king is defeated by the direct intervention of YHWH (30:31–33), confirms the undivided sovereignty of God in world history;
- 3) as was mentioned above, the theology of “the name of YHWH” is not characteristic of Proto-Isaiah. Therefore it is important to look at the immediate context of the analyzed oracle as in the section of chapters

²⁴ Cf. F.V. Reiterer, H.J. Fabry, H. Ringgren, יהוה, *TDOT* XV, p. 136.

²⁵ There is no doubt that the presence of God can be recognized by the human admiration for the world, or by the terror that this world awakens in man through dangerous phenomena of nature (theophanies). For Isaiah, however, it is clear that such a presence of YHWH can and should also be noticed in hostile empires such as Assyria. However, neither the phenomena of nature nor human forces are able to match the power of YHWH – they can only be its reflection – which the prophet unequivocally emphasizes at the very beginning of his book. He announces that YHWH will stand against everything lofty: cedars, oaks, mountains and hills, as well as human works: towers, walls and ships (Isa 2:6–22). “The splendor of His majesty” (מְהִימָתוֹ) and “the fearful presence of YHWH” (פִּיחֵי יהוה) (cf. Isa. 2:10,19,21) are peculiar *mysterium fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum*, which reveal God’s might. Apart from them, the same function can also be performed by the works of man and he himself. Cf. B. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar prorocत्व o pysze Judy i Asyrii (Iz 1–39)*, p. 263.

²⁶ W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II. Chapters 28–39*, p. 178. Cf. M.J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, p. 116.

28–39 the term אֱשׁ appears only in 29:23. The commentators unanimously refer this verse to Isaiah 8:13; both of them contain the call to sanctify (verb שׁדַּךְ in *Hi*) God and to treat Him with fear (verb פָּרַז in *Hi*). H. Wildberger analyzes the “sanctification” of God in the context of Num 20:12. Moses and Aaron did not honor YHWH as holy, but they acted contrary to His commandment, hence “to honor the holiness” of YHWH denotes to obey His commandments. Thus, the expression in Isa 29:23 goes beyond the meaning of “properly cultic behavior”, but implies faith and obedience. This is confirmed by the subsequent explanatory verse 24: $\text{וְיָדְעוּ תַעֲרִירֵיהֶּ בִּינָה}$ (“those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding”). The verb יָדָע used elsewhere refers to drunkards (Isa 28:7), i.e. those who are unable to judge the situation soundly and thus lead the people astray (cf. Isa 3:12; 9:15). Unlike that people, the new Israel will recognize the presence of YHWH, i.e. it will understand His actions in its history.²⁷ Thus the “name of YHWH” שֵׁם־יְהוָה – stands in opposition to the peoples who had the “bit that leads them astray” in their jaws – רֶסֶן מִתְעָה (Isa 30:27,28), who do not recognize God’s salvific presence in history.²⁸ Therefore in the analyzed statement, the prophet clearly suggests to his addressees that they should be able to recognize the Assyrian intervention as a punishing coming of YHWH Himself, who uses foreign nations in the history of the world to implement His plans;

- 4) the expression מִפְּרֹתָיִק appears several times in Proto-Isaiah in the context of the places from which God’s judgment comes (10:3; 13:5), or simply as a description of the farthest corners of the earth (8:9; 17:13).²⁹ It is worth paying attention to the first of these aspects, as it is associated with the arrival of a foreign army of invaders. The fragment from Isa 5:26–30, which is the first direct announcement of the Assyrian invasion, seems significant here.³⁰ It begins with the call of Assyria from “the ends of the earth” ($\text{וַיִּשְׂאֲרִיבֵם לְגוֹיִם מִרְחֹקִיק}$ – 5:26), and its approach is also described

²⁷ Cf. H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, pp. 116–117.

²⁸ This motif is also present in the description of Isaiah’s calling, which is crucial for him: the mission he receives is to “make the heart of this people calloused ... so that it would not understand (יִבְרִיךְ)” (Isa 6:10).

²⁹ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II. Chapters 28–39*, p. 178.

³⁰ Taking into account the entire section of Isa 1–12, the passage 5:26–30 is a prediction of the Assyrian invasion, which is fulfilled in 10:5–34. For a detailed description of the proposed structure of the section Isa 1–12, based on the main theme of a just ruler, see B. Sobierajski, “Antropologiczny wymiar prorocत्व o pysze Judy i Asyrii (Iz 1–39),” pp. 91–94. H. Barth understands the adverb from 30:27 as an immediate reference to 5:26 and 10:3;

by the verb בָּא (וְהָיָה קִמְתָּרָה קֵל יְבוֹא). The grammatical use of different verb forms emphasizes both the connection and the chronology of two prophecies: יְבוֹא (5:26 – *imperfectum*) indicates the inevitable arrival of the enemy (the particle הָיָה shortens the time perspective), but only in the future, while הָיָה בָּא (30:27 – *participium*) confronts the reader with the fact of what is happening here and now. It is also worth noting that the call of Assyria is described not by the verb קָרָא (“summon”), but שָׁרַק (“whistle” – 5:26). The former, in the context of Isa 12:4, where the syntagma $\text{קְרָאיוּ בְּשֵׁמוֹ}$ (“proclaim His name!”) appears, could suggest a connection with covenant theology.³¹ However, the use of a different verb, on the one hand, is a sign of a lack of reference to the concept of the covenant in Isa 30:27. On the other hand, it suggests the understanding of the term שָׁמַע in its immediate context (Isa 29:23), which – as has been mentioned – denotes the revelation of the will of YHWH and the demonstration of His intentions in opposition to those who hide from Him to conceal their thoughts (Isa 29:15).³²

3. Understanding of “the Name YHWH” in the Light of the Composition of Isa 30:27–33

3.1. The Structure of the Oracle

The analyzed fragment consists of four parts: vv. 27–28, 29–30, 31–32, 33. There are not many formal criteria indicating such a division and they are mainly limited to the recognition of the כִּי particle as a term marking the beginning of the third (vv. 31–32) and the fourth (v. 33) part. Due to the lack of a formal division between the first and second part, we have to apply criteria relating to content that quite clearly indicate the caesura after v. 28. Thus, the unity of the first part (vv. 27–28) is demonstrated by two semantic fields related to expressions describing anger and the human face. The former includes such nouns as אֵרָא (“anger” – v. 27), מִשָּׂאָה (“burden”),³³ זַעַם (“agitation”), רֵיחַ (“breath”) together with the verbs בָּעַר (“to burn” or “to glow” also in the metaphorical sense of

however, drawing attention to the inversion of subjects, he clearly distinguishes Assyria from the “name of YHWH,” see H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazzeit*, p. 101.

³¹ Cf. W. Pikor, *The Dynamism of Salvation according to Isa 12:1–6*, p. 53.

³² Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II. Chapters 28–39*, pp. 127–128.

³³ *Hapax legomenon*. It is translated as “rising up” and in the abstract sense “agitation” (also “burden”, “verdict”). Assuming the mistake of a copyist, some see here an image of

anger). The latter group comprises אָר (with its basic meaning denoting “nostrils”), שֶׁפֶּה (“lip”), לְשׁוֹן (“tongue”), צַוְאָר (“neck”), and לֶחַי (“jaw”).³⁴ Characteristically, some words belong to both of these fields (the noun אָר, mentioned here, but also the noun רֶדָּן – “bit” – the basic meaning of which is probably “jaw”³⁵ or רֹיחַ, also associated with the face), which further emphasizes the unity of vv. 27–28.

The unity of the second part (vv. 29–30) is again expressed by two semantic fields whose motifs are, respectively, the sounds associated with celebration and the description of theophany. The first semantic field includes words such as שִׁיר (“song”), חַג (“celebration” or “feast”), שִׂמְחָה (“joy”), חֲלִיל (“flute”), whereas the typical descriptions of theophany are לֶהַב אֵשׁ (“flame of fire”), סְעָר (“storm”), יָרַם (“downpour”), אֶבֶן קָרָד (“hailstone”). As in the previous part, we can also observe here a word that unites both of these fields – it is the noun קוֹל, which, on the one hand, naturally belongs to the first semantic field, but metaphorically it can also denote “thunder” (cf. 1 Sam 12:17) as the voice of God Himself.

The third part (vv. 31–32) is clearly parallel to the second one by taking up the subject of “the voice of YHWH,” but it is separated from the second by the aforementioned causal particle כִּי. The semantic field of sounds is complemented by the names of instruments such as תְּפִימִים (“tambourines”) and בְּנֹרוֹת (“harps”). The second semantic field demonstrating the unity of the fragment are tools related to warfare, such as שֵׁבַע (“staff”), מַטֵּה (“scepter”), מְלֶחֶם מוֹת (“weapon of war”) and the following activities: חָתַת (“frighten”), נָכָה (“strike”), and לָחַם (“wage war”).

The final part (v. 33) also begins with the particle כִּי. The semantic field that we can distinguish here is related to fire – apart from the noun אֵשׁ (“fire”), also present in parts one and two, there are words such as מְדוּרָה (“pyre”), עֵצִים (“wood”), גְּפְרִית (“sulfur”), תּוֹפֶתַה (a proper name Topheth) and the verb קָעַר (“kindle”).

The four parts that make up the analyzed fragment (vv. 27–28, 29–30, 31–32, 33) form the ABB’A’ chiastic structure.

a rising cloud or a pillar of smoke. Cf. D.N. Freedman, B.E. Willoughby, H.J. Fabry et al., אֲשָׁר, TDOT X, p. 28; H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, pp. 186, 197.

³⁴ Similarly W.A.M. Beuken, who divides this prophecy in a different manner (taking into account only the syntactic structures of sentences), clearly indicates this thematic unity. Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah 30: A Prophetic Oracle Transmitted in Two Successive Paradigms*, p. 390.

³⁵ Cf. Job 41:5.

3.2. The Rhetorical Dynamics of the Prophecy

The rhetorical figure presented first displays the dual situation of nations which could seem mutually exclusive (part A and B), but then it justifies both of the aforementioned presentations (part B' and A'). In the light of the earlier remarks, the rhetorical dynamics of Isa 30:27–33 schematically appears as follows:

A (vv. 27–28)	Assyria as a punishing tool in the hands of YHWH
B (vv. 29–30)	A call to joy
B' (vv. 31–32)	Punishing Assyria as a reason for joy
A' (v. 33)	Rejection of Assyria seen as a tool

The first description (A) presents an image of YHWH entering – as had been signaled – as the Assyrian army. The anger of the king of the malevolent empire turns out to be the anger of God Himself, the multitude of the Assyrian army rising up like a wadi stream is the breath of YHWH, which reaches all His opponents. And although the water reaches up to the neck, still leaving hope for survival at this moment, the next verse leaves no doubt that one cannot escape the punishing anger. Thus the reader is faced with the first problem: these peoples are to be shaken in a sieve of “destruction” and nations will be driven by a bit that leads them astray. This first suspense will demand a solution. The sieve should separate the flour from the sand, which is inscribed in the theology of those who were rescued and will represent a new quality of the future reign (cf. Isa. 4:2–3; 6:13; 7:3; 10:20–23). However, there is an image here of sifting everything so that no nation will be saved. The expression “a bit that leads them astray” clarifies the manner of destruction: the deceived peoples will go in the wrong direction. The whole passage creates a contrast with the context of the preceding promise: there “the people dwelled in Zion” (עַם בְּצִיּוֹן יֵשֵׁב – Isa 30:19), here the people have “a bit that leads them astray” (רָסוֹן מִתְעָה עַל לְהִי עַמִּים – Is 30:28), particularly that the stem תעה refers not only to the idea of losing the way, but also to the loss of one’s place of residence (cf. Gen 20:13; 21:14; Jer 50:6).³⁶ Does it imply that nobody will live in Zion?

The second part (B) – the promise of joy that functions in the prophecy as a prediction of rescue – deepens the doubts that arise. The announcement of the song and the joy that man will experience during the celebration does not only not correspond with the previous announcement of punishment but its juxtaposition with the theophany of YHWH carries a completely differ-

³⁶ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II. Chapters 28–39*, p. 180.

ent image of God; earlier He punished nations with the help of Assyria, now He reveals the power of His arm and lets His voice be heard in natural phenomena. So what is the reason for the joy that the prophet predicts? This is the second suspense that the reader expects to find the answer to. The next two parts are intended to provide a solution to the problems posed, as was evidenced by the causal particle וְ at the beginning of each of them.

The third part of the oracle (B') answers the problem posed in the parallel part B. Just as earlier God equipped with the scepter and the rod, which was Assyria, afflicted the chosen nation, so now He Himself will punish Assyria. It is not explicitly stated what the scepter and rod in His hand will be, although we can deduce indirectly their significance from the parallel part B. He will strike the empire with the music of tambourines and harps (v. 32), i.e. instruments used during a celebration. Therefore, it seems natural that Assyria will be struck with the power of natural phenomena – the “sounds” of nature, such as a cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail (v. 30). This can be confirmed by the function of the noun לִּקְוֹ , rhetorically significant in both parts: in v. 30, “the voice of YHWH” appears through phenomena related to the power of nature (fire and water); in v. 31, it is clearly stated that “the voice of YHWH” will shatter Assyria. This part of the prophecy brings one more interesting piece of information. Just as before, the power of the empire was compared to the quickly rising wadi stream that one cannot escape (cf. Isa 28:15), so now YHWH Himself is the storm and downpour that will flood Assyria.³⁷

The reader is left with two more doubts before reading the final part (A'). First of all, why does YHWH, who until now has used Assyria as a tool, reject it at this point, and what is more, directly punish the empire? Secondly – and more importantly – are the plans of YHWH somewhat ineffective, since the intention to punish Judah by Assyria is not finally implemented? The reader will not directly find the answer to the first of the signaled doubts in the analyzed fragment; however, it can be found in earlier prophecies concerning Assyria (cf. 10:5–34). It did not fulfill its task as a tool in the hands of YHWH, in its pride it attributed military successes to its own wisdom and strength, and even began to usurp divine prerogatives, considering itself as the ultimate creator of world history.³⁸ Much more important, however, is the answer given by the

³⁷ There is a motif characteristic of Isaiah of reversing roles or situations, visible among others in Isa 2:6–22; 3:16–24; 5:8–25; 10:5–34; 29:1–8. Cf. B. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar proroctw o pysze Judy i Asyrii (Iz 1–39)*, pp. 256–257.

³⁸ Such divine prerogatives include, for example, the right to set boundaries (cf. Dt 19:14; 27:17; 32:8), which Assyria idolatrously usurps in Isa 10:13. Cf. B. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar proroctw o pysze Judy i Asyrii (Iz 1–39)*, p. 209.

prophet to the second question. It turns out that the ineffectiveness of Assyria as a tool of YHWH and its rebellion against God's intentions regarding itself have been foreseen by Him for a long time and are by no means an expression of YHWH's changed plans or His powerlessness in admonishing His people. God has a plan: "for a long time" (מֵאָתָּה מוֹלָד) Topheth has been made ready for the king of Assyria, which emphasizes his total dependence on God's intended plan, and the *participium* עָרֹךְ and *perfectum* הִרְכֵן, both with a shade of *passivum divinum*, only confirm this. Just as YHWH once showed His anger indirectly – His "name" was Assyria coming from afar like a swollen wadi stream – so now He Himself, with His breath, which is like a stream of sulfur, will set the empire ablaze with His anger. Adverbial expressions constructed on the basis of the preposition מִן constitute a kind of theological inclusion of the entire oracle: the reign of YHWH possesses both a geographical (מִמְצָרְתָּהּ – 30:27) dimension, including the ends of the earth with their empires, and a temporal (מֵאָתָּה מוֹלָד – 30:33) one, which presupposes the perfect wisdom of His eternal plans.

Conclusion

Isaiah – the prophet of the royal city of Judah, an aristocrat and an attentive observer of political events – is widely regarded as a high-class intellectual and theologian.³⁹ The perceptiveness of his observations of God's active presence in the history of his people can be seen primarily in the most mature period of his activities related to the campaign of Sennacherib in 705–701 BC. The miraculous saving of Jerusalem at the end of that campaign could suggest the ineffectiveness of God's intentions and the falseness of the prophet's earlier predictions, in which the Assyrian army was to play a punishing role against the capital of Judah. Prophecies from chapters 28–33, including the analyzed oracle 30:27–33, dispel these doubts. Expressions which are difficult from an exegetic perspective, such as "the name of YHWH comes from afar", do not necessarily indicate the redactional nature of the text. The subtlety of the message that God works through a hostile empire and comes somehow in the person of the king of Assyria and his army means that the essence of the prophecy reaches only the most attentive listeners. The final hostility of YHWH towards the empire is not an expression of the ineffectiveness of His intentions; he has foreseen it "for a long time" and the next stage is His independent, direct action. Hence, not everyone is able to see the "curious" and "mysterious" works of YHWH (Isa 28:21,29; 29:14) towards Israel, Assyria and other nations. The prophecy

³⁹ W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, p. 192.

of Isa 30:27–33 is therefore another passage (apart from e.g. 29:1–8 or 31:1–9) in which understatements or ambiguous phrases play a fundamental role.

Bibliography

- Alonso Schökel L., Sicre Diaz J.L., *I Profeti*, Roma 1996.
- Barth H., *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, Neukirchen 1977.
- Beuken W.A.M., “Isaiah 30: A Prophetic Oracle Transmitted in Two Successive Paradigms,” in: *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, C.C. Broyles, C.A. Evans (eds.), Leiden 1997, pp. 369–397.
- Beuken W.A.M., *Isaiah II. Chapters 28–39*, Leuven 2000.
- Blenkinsopp J., *Isaiah 1–39. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New Haven – London 2000.
- Brzegowy T., *Księga Izajasza. Rozdziały 13–39. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz*, Częstochowa 2014.
- Childs B.S., *Isaiah*, Louisville 2001.
- Clements R.E., *Jerusalem and the Nations. Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, Sheffield 2011.
- de Jong M.J., *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets. A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies*, Leiden 2007.
- Freedman D.N., Willoughby B.E., Fabry H.J. et al., “nāšā”, *TDOT X*, pp. 24–40.
- Hom M.K.Y.H., *The Characterisation of the Assyrians in Isaiah. Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives*, New York – London 2012.
- Kaiser O., *Isaiah 13–39. A Commentary*, Philadelphia 1974.
- Motyer J.A., *Isaiah. An Introduction and Commentary*, Leicester 1999.
- Oswalt J.N., *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1–39*, Grand Rapids 1986.
- Pikor W., “The Dynamism of Salvation according to Isa 12:1–6,” *Biblical Annals* 1 (2011), pp. 39–56.
- Reiterer F.V., Fabry H.J., Ringgren H., “šēm”, *TDOT XV*, pp. 128–176.
- Seitz C.R., *Isaiah 1–39*, Louisville 1993.
- Sobierajski B., *Antropologiczny wymiar prorocत्व o pysze Judy i Asyrii (Iz 1–39). Studium egzegetyczno-teologiczne*, Lublin 2018.
- Stansell G., “Isaiah: 28–33: Blest Be the Tie that Binds (Isaiah Together),” in: *New Visions of Isaiah*, R.F. Melugin, M.A. Sweeney (ed.), Sheffield 1996, pp. 68–103.
- Sweeney M.A., *Isaiah 1–39. With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, Grand Rapids 1996.
- Watts J.D.W., *Isaiah 1–33*, Nashville 2005.
- Wildberger H., *Isaiah 28–39. A Continental Commentary*, Minneapolis 2002.
- Zimmerli W., *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, Edinburgh 1978.