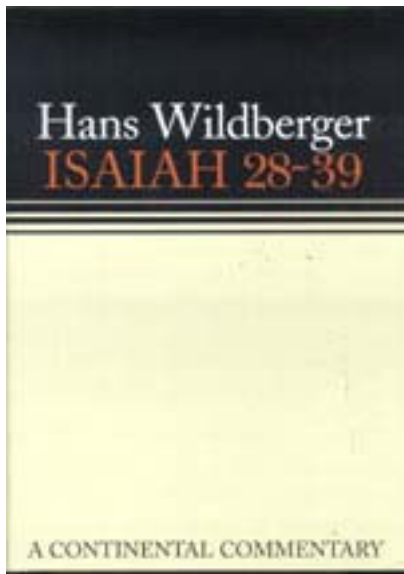


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**Wildberger, Hans**

*Isaiah 28–39*

Translated by Thomas H. Trapp

A Continental Commentary

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John Engle  
Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH 43213

Hans Wildberger's final installment on Isaiah of Jerusalem is here translated by Thomas Trapp. For a strictly English-speaking audience or even for those for whom German is a second language, this book will make a most worthwhile addition to the collection of tools necessary to understand the often arcane book of Isaiah. In addition to a general translation from the German, Trapp has also glossed almost all of the additional foreign-language words and phrases in the book. The translation is careful and flowing even if at times the register seems a little informal for the tone of the book. And Trapp humbly admits that "[o]ne can never be completely sure that one has caught the nuance of a sentence" (xv). Trapp has also updated the bibliography through 2001. But there was also an update done through 1979. These updates occur at the beginnings of each of the pericopes and the larger bibliography at the end. One drawback, however, is the way the updates are successively tacked on to one another. Thus one has three separate blocks of material to work through to look over other scholarship at the head of each pericope and two blocks in the "Selected Recent Literature" in the back. (The update to 1980 had already been incorporated). This makes facile reviewing of the materials very cumbersome and important data easily missed. Another drawback is that each page of the body of the commentary is headed by "Isaiah 29–35." Thus one is forced into the text to ascertain exactly which pericope one is reading about.

As far as the commentary itself is concerned, one will be pleasantly surprised to note that not only does this volume cover Isa 28–39, but it also contains six chapters dealing with various aspects of the life, times, and works of Isaiah of Jerusalem (also known as Isaiah I and Proto-Isaiah). The first chapter deals with “The Book and the Text,” the second with “The Formation of Isaiah I (Isa 1–39), the third with “Isaiah: The Prophet and His Roots in the Religious Traditions of His People,” the fourth with “Isaiah’s Theology,” the fifth with “The Theology of the Post-Isaianic Material,” and the sixth with “Language and Forms of Speech for Isaiah and His ‘Successors.’” These chapters represent the culmination of Wildberger’s thinking on Isaiah and are some of the most fascinating of the book.

In the first chapter, for instance, he notes that in all sixty-six chapters of Isaiah—for a total of 1,290 verses—“304 are either clearly from Isaiah or are most likely from him” (495). This circumstance reflects the interest with which later generations read and commented on his work. The result, of course, is not just “secondary layers” in Proto-Isaiah but also the historical appendix of chapters 36–39 and both Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah (495). These later authors and redactors reflect in their turn “a time when the self-confidence of the prophets weakened” and they became more reticent [*sic*] to speak in their own name and thus connected their own preaching with that of prophetic writings that existed already” (499). Thus, Wildberger maintains that “[t]here is no justifiable reason to speak of an Isaianic school, in any case, certainly not when one considers Isa. 40–66” (500). And yet, as he goes on to note, “Chapters 40–66 cannot be isolated and interpreted independently from the first part of the book without doing violence to the work” (499). This does not imply, however, that Trito-Isaiah is a unity. Indeed, he states that “scholarship has come to recognize that chaps 56–66 cannot be traced back to a single author” (497). Wildberger devotes the rest of this first chapter to a discussion of the text of Isaiah, the versions, and textual criticism. The discussion is pellucid and informative. But I found it strange that he omitted Saadia Gaon’s Judeo-Arabic translation of Isaiah especially when Wilhelm Gesenius utilized Saadia’s work so often and to such benefit in his Isaiah commentary and Wildberger so often quotes Gesenius. Saadia’s work does, however, get a mention in Trapp’s updated bibliography (see 741).

Wildberger’s second chapter deals with the “very complex arrangement we have now” in Isaiah and a thorough discussion of the book’s formation (513). That he uses language such as “complex” and “puzzling” reveals a genuine scholarly humility and search for meaning in Isaiah. And thus Wildberger is often more willing to ask than to explain. And, indeed, it is in figuring out the exact nature of the question that we arrive closer to any answer. He begins his discussion with a review of scholarly contributions to the subject and comes to the conclusion that there are two basic camps in understanding the development of Isa 1–39. The first, as outlined by Bernhard Duhm, finds that “a large

number of . . . collections were assembled together.” The second, as outlined by Sigmund Mowinckel, finds that “there was a basic form of the text . . . to which sections were inserted during various phases” (520). But in spite of this basic disagreement, there is “significant agreement among scholars today that *the expansion of the original material* that formed the genuine words of Isaiah did not take place as the result of a single reworking of the text, no[r] did it reach completion during a single time period; instead, it was the result of a process that unfolded in various phases” (529).

Wildberger then goes on to elaborate his views of the original material and the subsequent expansions. He believes that the reason Isaiah first wrote down his prophetic messages was to preserve them for future generations, since in his own day they were so poorly understood. In the future they would come into their “full power and . . . be recognized as binding.” This, indeed, was “why prophecy in Israel became written prophecy,” “why the canonical prophetic literature took shape in the first place” (532). As far as the Isaianic material itself is concerned, he finds two original complexes, both of which are arranged in a chronological and thematic manner. The first complex is 2:6–11:9, composed of five sections. The second complex is 28–31. It has no detectable further subdivisions and is best seen as a “continuation” of 2:6–11:9. These two complexes comprising six total sections could have been arranged by Isaiah himself or his disciples. Subsequent to Isaiah’s death 1:1–2:5 and 13–23 were added. There were also smaller exilic/early postexilic additions as well. Wildberger finds a “Judgement Recension.” This “redactional activity is found in a series of threats of judgement, which are appended to prophecies of disaster that were already present in the text” (547). There was also a “Salvation Recension,” which aimed at moderating the judgement passages by propounding that “Israel could expect salvation” (549). The final redactions consisted of appending Isa 12; 11:11–16; 33–35; 24–27; and, finally, 36–39.

The remaining four chapters of Wildberger’s findings must be left to the reader’s discovery, since space limitations preclude discussion of them. Suffice it to say that the reader will find in them all the careful and honest scholarship exemplified in the first two. These chapters also give a rare opportunity to non-German reading audiences to encounter a wealth of other German scholarship from all eras. Wildberger is not one of those scholars who ignores good ideas just because they are a couple of hundred years old. And thus a modern English speaking audience can come into contact with a continuum of German scholarship from the 1800s to today. The only weakness that can be noted is the paucity of Israeli scholarship.

As far as the body of the commentary is concerned, Wildberger has arranged his investigation of each pericope with a literature review at the head, which again has been updated by Trapp, followed by the text, textual notes, a discussion of form and setting,

and then commentary. To end he discusses the purpose and thrust of the passage. These sections are carefully written and researched (even if they do occasionally reveal a Protestant Christian point of view) and will prove invaluable to both the specialist who would like to read Trapp's translation of a difficult German turn of phrase and the nonspecialist for whom Trapp has even glossed the Hebrew words in the textual notes. Isaiah 28:10 serves as a fine example of this point. Wildberger translates this verse, "For *sav lasav sav lasav qav laqav qav laqav*, a little here, a little there" (15). And thus he preserves the original intention of connoting gibberish. This notion was sadly lost on the translators of the King James Version, who tried to make sense of the passage (but cf. Luther's translation). Wildberger goes on to devote over a full page to discussing this verse in the section, and in the commentary section he hypothesizes that "this verse would be intended as a way to discredit Isaiah's proclamation" by those who accused him of "vacillating, now speaking commands and reproaches, now uttering promises" (23). These are ideas that are well worth entertaining and are typical of the entire volume. I end by noting a few typographical errors: page 495 (gap in paragraph), page 529 (read "nor" for "not"), page 558 (read "kept" for "keep"), page 634 (insert "as" and a period), and page 669 (read "furnished" for "fur-nished").