

The Lady known to Isaiah.  
Temple Studies Group  
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Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries. They both gave their prophecies in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, but Isaiah was the older of the two since he also prophesied in the reign of king Uzziah who died in 742 BCE.

Both knew that there was a Lady in Zion who was the Mother of the king.

Isaiah's words are better known than Micah's: 'Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel.' (Isa.7.14). These words were spoken to king Ahaz as he prepared Jerusalem for an attack by a coalition of enemies from the north. The kings of Syria and Israel were trying to force him to join their rebellion against Assyria. Both the city and the Davidic dynasty were in danger, and so Isaiah gave king Ahaz the assurance that there would be another king in the house of David. A boy would be born who would have the royal title 'God with us', Immanuel.

The next king was Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, who came to the throne in about 715 BCE. Hezekiah, *hizqiyahû*, means 'the LORD strengthens'. Micah's words became another familiar Christmas prophecy - at least, some of them did. We are interested today in the words that are less well known.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, who are little among the clans of Judah,  
From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
Whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.  
*Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
When she who is in travail has brought forth;  
Then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel.  
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD [Hezekiah],  
In the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.  
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great  
To the ends of the earth* (Mic.5.2-4).

An unnamed Lady would give birth to one named Hezekiah - maybe that is why the royal child was given the name. Isaiah called him Immanuel, God with us; Micah says he would rule with the majesty of the Name of the LORD his God. This was the ancient royal ideology, in which the king was the presence of the LORD with his people. He was the shepherd who fed his flock. He was the strength of the LORD with his people. He was God with us.

But who was his mother? One of the most startling variants in the great Isaiah scroll found at Qumran occurs in this passage about the Lady and her child. In the Masoretic text, the LORD through Isaiah tells king Ahaz to ask for a sign: 'Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven' (Isa.7.11). The Qumran form of the text, however, differs by one letter. Instead of 'Ask a sign from the LORD your God' it reads: 'Ask a sign from *the Mother* of the LORD your God.' By changing an *aleph* into an *ayin* [or vice versa,

depending on which way you think the change was made] the Mother of the LORD either appears or disappears.

Micah implies that the Lady had been driven from her city but would return:

And you, O tower of the flock,  
Hill of the daughter of Zion,  
To you it shall come,  
The former kingdom shall come,  
The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem (Mic.4.8).

Here is another of the Lady's titles: she was the Daughter [of] Zion, and her former power would return to the temple. Micah here speaks to the temple itself: it was the tower of the flock, the Ophel of the Lady. Translating literally, the words of Micah are:

To you she shall come,  
and the former/supreme royal power shall come to you,  
the sovereignty of the Daughter [of] Zion.

'Royal power' and 'sovereignty' are both feminine nouns in Hebrew, and both the verbs in the verse are feminine forms. The meaning could be simply that royal power would return to Jerusalem. But the rest of the passage implies that a female figure has left the city. In other words, Micah says that a female figure with her royal power would return to the city.

The tower was also Enoch's name for the temple; the high and lofty tower for the Lord of the sheep (1 En.98.50). Josephus knew why it had been called the tower. He said the temple had been built on the summit of a steep hill, and that additional land had to be built up with a retaining wall and infill. The retaining wall rose up some 300 cubits from the floor of the Kidron valley and so from the east, the temple looked like a great tower (*War* 5.183) .

This was the tower of the flock, the Ophel [hill] of the Daughter of Zion.

It is usually assumed that 'the hill of the daughter of Zion' was just a poetic way of describing the city - no female deity was involved. But it is also assumed that 'the hill of the LORD' (e.g. Ps.24.3) means the hill that was holy to the LORD, the name for the deity who was worshipped there. The hill of the Daughter of Zion must have meant what it says: that it was sacred to a female figure. She and her royal power would return.

But how had she been driven from her city?

The Lady was crying out like a woman giving birth. Perhaps, says Micah, there is no king in the city, no counsellor to protect her.

Pain has taken you like a woman giving birth, *yoledet*.  
Writhe and give birth, daughter of Zion, like the woman who gives birth, *yoledet*.  
For now you go forth from the city  
And you dwell in the field (Mic.4.10).  
Many *peoples* have gathered against you,  
And they say: let her be polluted/ violated,  
And our eye shall gaze [as in vision] upon Zion (Mic.4.11).

The word *yoledet* was also used by Isaiah to describe the Lady who conceives and *bears* a son. Maybe this too was a title. The word 'people', *gôyîm*, usually means foreign nations,

but it was used by Jeremiah to describe the unfaithful people of Judah (Jer.5.9), and so the picture here is of the Lady going from her city, violated and a sight for lewd eyes. There is temple style wordplay here, since the word for gaze is also used for visions. It implies that the Lady had once been the object of vision, but now of crude exposure.

The Lady, however, would punish her violators.

But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD,

They do not discern his *plan*,

That he has gathered them like sheaves to a threshing floor (Mic.4.12).

There is more possible wordplay here, because the word for 'plan' is the feminine form of the word for a 'tree', 'ēṣā. One of the Lady's symbols was a tree, and one of her names was Wisdom, as in 'Wisdom is the tree of life for those who lay hold of her...' (Prov.3.18).

She was also described as the mother cow who bore the royal bull calf. Some sketches found on a huge pot at Kuntillet Ajrud in the Judean desert have been dated to the time of Isaiah and Micah. They show the LORD and the Lady as humanoid figures with bovine heads and feet, and such imagery was as common for them the image of the Lamb of God is for Christians. There is an image of the Lady of Ugarit – a neighbouring culture to the north of Israel and Judah - that shows her as a horned Lady, suckling the crown princes, and even the writer of 1 Kings - who was very careful indeed not to say anything about the Lady who was by his time abandoned - even the writer of 1 Kings revealed that Solomon's great ivory throne, overlaid with gold, was surmounted by the head of a calf (1 Kgs 10.19). King David had a wife named Eglah, the heifer (1 Chron.3.3), and a potsherd written in the time of Isaiah and Micah has the name Egeliyah which means 'Yahweh is the calf'. Micah knew this image of the Lady, and so he predicted how the Lady would punish her enemies:

Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion,

For I will make your horn iron and your hooves bronze;

You shall beat in pieces many people... (Mic.4.13).

This, then, is the Lady as Micah knew her: the Mother of the great shepherd of Israel who bore the Name of the LORD and was the strength of the LORD with his people; she ruled in a tower in Jerusalem - the temple - and she had been driven out. Micah prophesied that she would return to her tower and to her position as ruler. She was symbolised by a tree that was used in wordplay with the word for wise counsel, and she was represented sometimes by a mother cow whose son was the calf-king. In the Akathist Hymn, Orthodox Christians still address Mary with titles that had been images of the Lady in the eighth century BCE: she is the Tree with glorious fruit, the Mother of the Shepherd, the unshakeable Tower, and in the Canon of the Akathist, Mary is addressed as the Heifer who bears the unblemished calf for the faithful.

We now turn to Isaiah, Micah's older contemporary, to see how he reacted to the events that prompted the oracles of Micah.

First, there had been a devastating earthquake. Amos, who prophesied during the reigns of king Uzziah in Judah and king Jereboam II in Israel, delivered his message during the two

years before the earthquake (Amos 1.1). Since both Uzziah and Jereboam II reigned for forty years, this is not a precise date, but the words of Amos are the oldest written prophecies that survive, and doubtless the earthquake reinforced his message that punishment would follow the selfish lifestyle of the people of Israel. Archaeologists incline to put the earthquake about 760 BCE, but there is nothing definite about that date.

Three things are recorded about king Uzziah (2 Chron.26):

- he was the great builder, fortifying the walls of Jerusalem with towers, building towers in the desert and making water cisterns. He built up his army and was doubtless preparing to resist the growing power of Assyria.
- he was caught up in a power struggle with the priests of the family of Aaron, since he went into the temple to burn incense and was violently ejected by them.
- he became a leper, which his enemies said was a punishment for his blasphemy, and his son Jotham was regent until Uzziah died.

Josephus shows how the story was told in at the very end of the second temple period. The earthquake had been caused by Uzziah's blasphemy, and the sun's rays coming through a great crack in the temple caused his leprosy (*Antiquities* 9.10.4). The great earthquake caused a huge landslip that blocked the southern part of the valley east of Jerusalem, which was remembered for centuries. Late prophecies appended to Zechariah include: 'The valley between the hills will be blocked as far as Jasol. It will be filled in as it was by the earthquake in the days of Uzziah the king' (Zech.14.5, Jerusalem Bible).

In the year that king Uzziah died, Isaiah had his great vision of the LORD enthroned, and was called to prophesy to a people of unclean lips, people who had adopted false teaching (Isa.6.5).

One of the problems in the Book of Isaiah is why his 'call' vision happens in chapter 6.

Chapter 1 is a preface to the completed scroll, which summarises the themes:

How the faithful city as become a harlot, she that was was full of justice.

Zadok/ righteous abode there, but now murderers (Isa.1.21).

This is a book about a city/woman who had justice and Zadok/righteousness but has become a city/harlot who has murderers. The original Lady had been ousted by another.

Chapter 2 reads like the beginning of a collection of prophecies: 'The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem...' Why, then, should his 'call' occur in chapter 6? It seems that there were several phases in his ministry, and the first concerned the fallen angels who were ruling the land at that time. It was their influence, he said, that had caused the earthquake and brought judgement upon the land (Isa.2.6-8; 3.16-17). The LORD's vineyard – the city and the temple – had produced not justice and righteousness, as it had when the city was faithful, but bloodshed and cries of despair, the result of the murderers who accompanied the harlot (Isa.5.1-7). Isaiah described the earthquake as the day of the LORD's judgement. Everything would be brought down: the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks

of Bashan; the high mountains and the lofty hills; the high tower and the fortified wall; the ships of Tarshish and the beautiful craft; and the haughtiness and pride of men (Isa.2.12-22).

Isaiah does not call them fallen angels, but he describes their sins: they used diviners and soothsayers, they had vast wealth, they were dealing in horses and chariots - the arms trade of that time – and the women of Jerusalem were proud and wanton. This was his reaction to the prosperity in the reign of Uzziah. But the sins he condemns are not those of the ten commandments; they are sins that the Enoch tradition ascribes to the teachings of the fallen angels. They taught how to work metal into weapons; how to make cosmetics and fine jewellery; how to cast spells and make drugs; how to predict the future (*1 Enoch* 8). The result was fornication and godlessness, and the cries of men went up to heaven.

There had been more than a physical earthquake when Isaiah was a young man. There had been a cultural revolution of some sort: the people had rejected the law of the LORD of Hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel; traditional values had been overturned, and for this an enemy would come from afar, roaring like lions to carry off prey (Isa.5.25-30).

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.  
Who put darkness for light and light for darkness  
Who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter  
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes  
And understanding in their own sight (Isa.5.20-21).

The revolutionaries were claiming to be the new wise men.

The *Book of Enoch* has preserved another view of this period, enigmatically recorded in a history that divides time into periods called ‘weeks’. The sixth week is the two centuries or so from the reign of Uzziah to the destruction of the first temple.

In the sixth week, all who live [in the house of glory and dominion, i.e the temple] shall lose their sight,  
And the hearts [that is the minds] of all of them shall godlessly forsake Wisdom.  
In that week a man shall ascend;  
And at its close the house of dominion shall be burned with fire,  
And the whole race of the chosen root shall be scattered. (*1 Enoch* 93.8).

The man ascending is Isaiah who had a vision of the throne, and we shall come to this in a moment. What is interesting here is that Enoch says that the priests - those who lived in the temple - godlessly forsook Wisdom just before Isaiah experienced his ascent. This corresponds to Isaiah’s condemnation:

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes  
And understanding in their own sight.

The Enoch text also shows that the abandoned Lady was called Wisdom.

It also explains Uzziah’s conflict with the priests in the temple; he had resisted those who were abandoning Wisdom, and his leprosy was seen [by them] as proof that he had done wrong. He had challenged the rights of the Aaronite priests in the temple, and he had lost. The right to burn incense was the sign of priesthood, and the Aaronite priests denied this to king Uzziah. As a Davidic king, he would have been a Melchizedek priest, a sacral king.

Each king was a Zadok and a Zaddik, titles that mean ‘the one who had been made righteous’ and in turn ‘makes righteous’. It seems that Uzziah was the last of the MelchiZedek priests who represented the LORD with his people. Hence the line in the preface to Isaiah’s prophecies: ‘Zadok abode there, but now murderers.’

When the Pentateuch was compiled by the spiritual heirs of those priests who had rejected Uzziah, many stories from their own history were written into the ancient material. This was in effect rewritten to explain and thus justify the new situation. In Numbers 12, for example, Miriam [whom we know as Mary] and Aaron spoke against Moses because he had married a Cushite woman and also claimed to be the only one who spoke words from the LORD. Miriam was smitten with leprosy for her presumption to challenge Moses, but Aaron her younger brother who was the high priest pleaded that this should not be a permanent affliction. Miriam was healed after seven days, but had no more part in the story. Old conflicts cast long shadows, and this rejection of Wisdom was remembered for centuries, despite the account in the Pentateuch. The great Jewish commentary on Exodus, known in its present form in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE but preserving much older material, said that Aaron was the high priest, Moses was the king and Miriam, their *older* sister, was Wisdom from whom descended Bezalel who built the tabernacle and later, King David (*Exodus Rabbah* XLVIII.4). Miriam/Wisdom was thus the mother of the Davidic kings.

While Miriam was banished, but before she died, there was another rebellion against Moses. A Levite named Korah and some others challenged Aaron’s exclusive right to burn incense. Moses was angry with them, and the earth split asunder and swallowed them. In other words, they were punished by an earthquake. The Aaronite priests took the bronze censers from the rebel priests and made them into a covering for the bronze altar: ‘to be a reminder to the people of Israel so that no one who is not a priest, who is not of the house of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense to the LORD’ (Num.16.40). A short while after that, Miriam died ‘and there was no more water for Israel’ (Num.20.1-2).

These stories look suspiciously like the events in the reign of Uzziah, when the Aaronite priests gained supremacy in the temple because the Moses traditions were gaining supremacy over the royal traditions in Jerusalem. The ill-fated Uzziah became a leper and was banned from burning incense. The manifesto of the pro-Moses group that was gaining power and eventually achieved complete supremacy in the temple in the time of king Josiah includes this interesting declaration: ‘Keep [the Law of Moses] for that will be your Wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all peoples...’ (Deut.4.6). These are almost exactly the words that Isaiah used to condemn the new wise men responsible for the cultural revolution in his time: ‘Woe to those who are *wise* in their own eyes, And *understanding* in their own sight.’

These fragments from various places – Micah, *1 Enoch*, the Pentateuch - suggest that the Lady was removed from the temple in the time of Isaiah. Using the wordplay that characterises temple tradition, Isaiah says what Micah said: the Daughter of Zion was the Mother of the king who was the presence of the LORD; that she was taken from her city out

into a field; that she was exposed and violated; and that she would return. But this is not obvious in the way the texts are now translated.

Immediately before Isaiah's condemnation of the new wise men, we read this:

Woe to those who drag iniquity with cords of falsehood,  
Who draw sin as with cart ropes... (Isa.5.18).

Isaiah had seen something dragged with ropes, and he saw this as the sin of the new wise men.

- Drag is *mašak*, Anoint is *mašaḥ*
- Iniquity is, literally, distortion.
- Cords is [*ḥebel*], *ḥablê*, labour pains is [*ḥēbel*], *ḥēblê* ..
- Falsehood is *šāw'*, devastation, ruin is *šo'â*.
- Cart "*gālâ*, cart, is the same word as '*eglâ*, a heifer.
- Sin, *ḥatt'â*, means failure to understand, miss the mark, as in Proverbs 8.36, where Wisdom says: 'He who sins against me/ misses me, harms himself.'
- Cords '*abôt*, is also interwoven foliage, garlands, as in Ps.118.27: 'Bind the sacrifice with leafy garlands.'

Just beneath the surface of this text is a temple scene of anointing, birth, a heifer and leafy garlands. Here, the prophet is describing something being dragged out on a cart. The symbol of the Lady, perhaps?

There are frequent references in the Hebrew Scriptures to removing 'the Asherah' from the temple, cutting it down and burning it. It was remembered as a tree, and even at the end of the second temple period, people were still making trees into asherahs and so there were law against the practice (Mishnah *Aboda Zara* 3.7-10). There is no reference to removing the Asherah in the time of Uzziah, but his great grandson Hezekiah cut down the Asherah (2 Kgs 18.4), so it must have been in the temple some thirty years after the death of Uzziah. But the Asherah had been removed and restored several times: king Asa, the great grandson of Solomon, had removed the Asherah and burned it by the Kidron brook in about 900 BCE (1 Kgs 15.13); king Josiah removed the Asherah and burned it by the Kidron brook in about 623 BCE (2 Kgs 23.6). Burning it by the Kidron suggests that this place was sacred to her, and that this was the ultimate desecration.<sup>1</sup> There are several references to the Asherah being removed, but none to its being restored.

There was an ongoing struggle for several centuries, described by one side as purification of the temple by removing Asherah and by the other as abandoning Wisdom. The name Asherah was itself a part of the purge. All the examples of the name that have been found in inscriptions are the form *Ashratah*, which is linked to the word for happiness or right living. The form Asherah, with its Canaanite associations, was a way for later scribes to denigrate the Lady of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> I developed this idea of chapter 5 describing the removal of the Lady's tree from D J Butler, *The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon's Visionary Men*, self-published, printed by CreateSpace, Charleston, 2012, pp.144-145.

The new wise men in the time of Isaiah say, as they drag out the symbol of the Lady from her hidden place in the holy of holies:

Let him make haste,  
Let him speed his work that we may see it;  
Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel draw near  
And let it come, that we may know it (Isa.5.19).

Again, there is word play. The 'plan' of the Holy One is the same as the word for 'tree', as in the words of Micah:

But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD  
They do not discern his *plan*,

This taunt – 'Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel draw near, let it come, that we may know it' - could also be: 'Let the tree of the Holy One [ that is, the Lady] draw near, let her come that we may know her', where 'know' has the sexual meaning. The first part of the taunt - 'Let him make haste, Let him speed his work that we may see it' would mean 'Let us see the hidden Lady'. Why this name? Because the title 'The Virgin', *lmh*, means literally 'The Hidden One' or 'The One who Conceals'.

The new wise men not only dragged the symbol of the Lady from the temple; they changed the priesthood. The usual translation is:

They acquit the guilty for a bribe  
And deprive the innocent of his right. (Isa.5.23).

But translated literally, the lines are:

They are the ones who for a bribe consider a wicked man righteous,  
and turn aside the legal right of the Righteous One, the Zaddik.

This alludes to Uzziah, the MelchiZedek high priest, being replaced by another who did not represent the LORD with his people. Isaiah made another condemnation of those who ill treated the Zaddik, the Righteous One: 'They bind the Zaddik even though he is good; they shall eat the fruit of their deeds (Isa.3.10, translating literally). The Hebrew text is not clear, but LXX translated the first part: 'Let us bind the Righteous One, for he is no use to us.'

What is clear is that something unpleasant happened to the Zaddik, but this is no longer clear in the present form of the Hebrew text.

And then Isaiah had his call vision 'in the year that king Uzziah died'. Isaiah saw the LORD of Hosts as the king, enthroned in the temple. His reaction was that he was part of a people with unclean lips - people who had adopted false teaching. His initial exclamation is usually translated:

Woe is me! For I am lost; I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king, the LORD of Hosts! (Isa.6.5).

One old Greek translation [Symmachus, *esiōpēsa*] and the Latin [Vulgate *tacui*] both read the 'I am lost' as 'I kept silent'. The Hebrew verbs for 'be silent', *dmm*, and 'be destroyed', *dmh*, are similar in some forms. Isaiah had kept silent when all these changes were happening, and he realised that he had been wrong.



He was then called as a prophet to speak against the people of unclean lips. The words that follow describe the punishment for the people of unclean lips. This is the situation where Enoch said they had forsaken wisdom and lost their sight.

Go, and say to this people:  
'Hear and hear but do not understand;  
See and see but do not perceive.'  
Make the heart of this people fat  
and their ears heavy  
and shut their eyes;  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears,  
and understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed (Isa.6.9-10).

The prophet had to warn them that if they had rejected Wisdom, their punishment would be to live with what they had chosen. They would no longer have the Lady's gifts of understanding and perception. They would no longer 'see'.

This loss of understanding, spiritual blindness, became an important theme in the New Testament. Jesus quoted these words of Isaiah when he explained to his disciples why some people did not understand what he was saying:

This is why I speak to them in parables. Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah...' (Matt.13.13-14).

What these people did not understand was the secret of the kingdom of God (Mark 4.11-12, Luke 8.10). John concluded the first section of his Gospel with a reflection on these words. The Jews could not believe, he concluded, and then paraphrased Isaiah's words: 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them' (John 12.40). Paul, when he was under house arrest in Rome, reflected on why he had had so little success with the Jews there. He too quoted these words of Isaiah (Acts 28.26-27).

Isaiah then asked the LORD how long this punishment would last, and was told:

Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitant,  
and houses without people, and the land is ruined and desolate,  
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land (Isa.6.11-12).

It is a picture of total desolation. The last line, however, can be read in a very different way:

*Until the Forsaken One is great again in the midst of the land.*

Another oracle in Isaiah, given by one of his disciples some two centuries later, took up these words about the Lady and her land and assured her that her time of humiliation was over:

You shall no longer be termed 'Forsaken',  
And your land shall no more be termed 'Desolate',  
But you shall be called 'My delight is in her' [Hephzibah],  
And your land 'Married';  
For as a young man marries a virgin,  
So shall your sons marry you,

And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
So shall your God rejoice over you. (Isa.62.4-5).

Isaiah's warning to the people was that their land would be desolate and empty until the Lady was restored and made great again. She must have been restored after the time of Isaiah, because king Josiah removed her again and burned her tree symbol a century later, and shortly after that, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and the people were scattered.

Some of them fled to Egypt, where they complained to the prophet Jeremiah that the disaster had been caused by abandoning the Lady. They called her the Queen of heaven.

We will do everything that we have vowed, burn incense to the Queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and prospered and saw no evil. But since we left off burning incense to the Queen of heaven, and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and been consumed by the sword and by famine (Jer.44.17-18).

They also made small loaves 'to represent her', and here there is more wordplay: 'represent' is 'āṣab, 'forsake' is 'āzab. The one whom they had represented with the holy bread they had now abandoned.

The land would be desolate, said Isaiah, until the Forsaken One was great again in the midst.

The lines that follow, Isaiah 6.13, are almost unreadable, a sign that censors have been at work. The italics represent a likely reconstruction of the original. The underlined words look like the name Ashratak.

And though a tenth remain in it [<sup>a</sup>širiyyâ]  
*And Asherah will again be in it [the land]*

It will be burned again  
*She shall return and be eaten*

Like a terebinth or an oak

Whose stump remains standing [<sup>a</sup>šer] when it is felled  
*Asherah sends forth her branches, standing alone*

The holy seed is in its stump  
*The holy seed is in her trunk.*

Isaiah described the great tree and her fruit restored to the land, and the faithful eating from her. On his heavenly journey, Enoch saw a fragrant tree, and the archangel who was guiding him explained to him:

No mortal is permitted to touch this fragrant tree until the great judgement... Then it shall be given to the righteous and the holy. Its fruit shall be food for the chosen ones, and it shall be transplanted to the holy place, to the temple of the Lord, the eternal king' (*1 Enoch* 24.4-5).

In the Book of Revelation, John described the Woman clothed with the sun and crowned with stars – the Queen of heaven - giving birth to her royal son; and he also described the tree of

life restored to the holy of holies, bearing fruit all through the year, and with leaves for healing the nations (Rev.12, 1-6; 22.2). In the Akathist hymn, Mary is acclaimed as

Tree of glorious fruit from which believers are nourished  
Wood with shady leaves under which many shelter.

In the reign of Ahaz, Uzziah's grandson, Jerusalem was threatened by a coalition of Israel and Syria. The Lady was needed to protect her city, and so Isaiah met the king and gave him the oracle of the Virgin about to give birth to the next Davidic king. She was the Mother of the LORD, and the Davidic king sat on the throne of the LORD (1 Chron.29.23) .

But the people had refused the waters that were the sign of her presence, and it may even be that the great earthquake had affected the flow of the Gihon spring. The withdrawal of the Lady's gift of water underlies another of Isaiah's oracles:

Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently...  
therefore behold the LORD is bringing against them the waters of the River, the king of Assyria  
and all his glory...' (Isa.8.6-7).

King Asa had burned the symbol of Ashrathah near the Kidron, by the Gihon spring that was sacred to the Lady, and King Josiah would do the same. Here, Isaiah describes the rejection of the Lady as the rejection of her waters. Jesus told the blind man to wash his eyes in the waters of Siloam [the later name for Shiloah], and he would be able to see again (John 9.11). The Lady who gave sight was not forgotten; and those who rejected her lost their sight.

Isaiah gave an oracle about the future king who would grow from the stump of the house of Jesse. He would be anointed with the Spirit that made him the LORD, and this would be conveyed by the sacrament of the Lady's holy oil.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
And a branch, *nešer*, shall grow out of his roots.  
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him  
The spirit of Wisdom and understanding  
The spirit of counsel and might,  
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

And his *delight* shall be in the fear of the LORD (Isa.11.1-3).

Branch, *nešer*, is a likely basis for Matthew's prophecy 'He shall be called a Nazarene' (2.23) as there is no prophecy that corresponds exactly to Matthew's words.

The new shoot from the stump would receive the sevenfold Spirit to transform his mind, and his 'perfume' would be the fear of the LORD. There is wordplay here: *rûah* is Spirit, but *rêah* is perfume. The word translated 'delight' actually means 'perfume', with 'delight' being recognised as only a metaphorical use of the word. When he had been anointed with the sevenfold Spirit, the Anointed One would have the fragrance of the oil, what Paul would later call 'the fragrance of Christ' (1 Cor.2.14-15). This was the perfumed anointing oil, which Jewish tradition said had been hidden away in the time of King Josiah (Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a). Ben Sira, writing in Jerusalem about 200 BCE, recorded a poem about Wisdom who described herself as the temple perfumes:

Like cassia and camel's thorn I gave forth the aroma of spices,  
And like choice myrrh I spread a pleasant odour,  
Like galbanum, onycha and stacte,  
And like the fragrance of frankincense in the tabernacle (Ben Sira 24.15).

An early Christian text knew that the perfumed oil in the temple was prepared as an imitation of the true oil which came from the fragrant tree of life. This is Peter explaining to Clement, who at the end of the first century would become bishop of Rome:

The Son of God, the beginning of all things, became Man. God first anointed him with oil which was taken from the wood of the tree of life...

Peter then explained that when the Anointed One came, he would anoint all the pious when they entered his kingdom.

In the present life, Aaron the first high priest was anointed with a compound chrism, which was made after the pattern of the spiritual oil... If then this temporal grace, compounded by men, was so powerful, consider how potent was that oil taken by God from a branch of the tree of life...' (*Clementine Recognitions* 1.45-46).

This text is often dismissed as late and suspect, but John knew that when Christians were anointed they were given knowledge:

But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you know all things... His anointing teaches you about everything (1 John 2.20, 27).

The association of the perfumed oil and the gift of knowledge - Wisdom - was known to Isaiah.

Further, king Solomon was anointed by the Gihon Spring, which was later known as the Virgin's spring, and there is good reason, as we have seen, to think it was sacred to the Lady (1Kgs 2.38-39).

When he had received the perfumed oil that gave him the Spirit, Isaiah knew that the gifts of the Lady transformed his perception:

He shall not judge by what his eyes see  
Or decide by what his ears hear... (Isa.11.3).

The result of his transformed perception would be peace and harmony in the creation – 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb'.

Isaiah gave several oracles about the future king:

The Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel.

The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and might  
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD...

And one we have not yet considered:

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...  
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa.9.6-7).

The four throne names in this oracle were translated into Greek as just one name: ‘The Angel of Great Counsel.’ This shows that the Jews in Egypt, descended from the refugees who had protested that they should never have abandoned the Queen of heaven, remembered that the Davidic king was Wisdom’s envoy.

Isaiah looked to the future and predicted that the land and its rulers would be transformed when the Lady returned and poured out her Spirit:

Behold a king will reign in righteousness,  
And princes will rule in justice...  
Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,  
And the ears of those who hear will hearken.  
The mind of the rash will have good judgement...  
The fool will no more be called noble...(Isa.32.1, 3, 4, 5).

Until that time, there would be desolation.

For the palace will be forsaken,  
The populous city deserted;  
The hill and the watchtower  
Will become dens for ever,  
A joy of wild asses,  
A pasture of flocks;  
Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,  
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.  
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,  
And righteousness abide in the fruitful field.  
And the effect of righteousness will be peace,  
And the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.  
My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,  
In secure dwellings and in quiet resting places. (Isa.32.32.14-18).

Towards the end of his time as a prophet, Jerusalem was again threatened by enemies. This time it was the Assyrians who were extending their power westwards and, in 701 BCE, were about to attack Jerusalem. King Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, was in panic because he had been destroying the old religion, and, as the Assyrian envoys taunted him, he could not expect help from the LORD whose rural holy places he had destroyed (2 Kgs 18.22). The king went to the temple to pray, and Isaiah gave him the answer to his prayer. The Lady was still protecting her city..

She despises you, she scorns you - the virgin daughter of Zion;  
She wags her head behind you – the daughter of Jerusalem.  
Whom have you mocked and reviled?  
Against whom have you raised your voice  
And haughtily lifted up your eyes?  
Against the Holy One of Israel! (Isa.37.22-23).

It would be interesting to know if Isaiah’s ‘Holy One of Israel’ was another of his titles for the Lady. There was a female deity in neighbouring countries whose name was ‘the Holy

One', *Qudshu*, and there are places where she seems to have been hidden by the censoring scribes. In the time of Solomon's son Rehoboam we read that there was 'a male prostitute' in the land (1 Kgs 14.24). Change the present vowels that make the word mean 'male prostitute', and the Lady Qudhsu, the Holy One, emerges from the text. 'Qudshu was in the land at that time.' The mother of Rehoboam's son and heir, and the mother of his grandson, was a woman who venerated Ashratah, and king Asa, the grandson, banished both his mother and her abominable image. The Lady had probably been known as 'the Holy One' for a very long time.

It is interesting and perhaps significant that when John described the anointing which the Christians had received, and from which they took their name, he said they had been anointed by the *Holy One*, and so had received all knowledge (1 John 2.20).

Who was this Lady whom Isaiah undoubtedly knew in Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE? She was the Mother of the LORD, the king, and she was remembered as Miriam/Mary, the older sister of both Moses and Aaron. She protected Jerusalem. She was represented by bread and by the tree of life, which, you will recall, Adam and Eve rejected in favour of a forbidden tree. Part of their punishment would be to get their bread only by hard toil (Gen.3.19). The Lady, her priests and their oil, were driven many times from the temple, and finally she was removed from the Scriptures by the second temple scribes. A special group was established to remove all blasphemies from the ancient texts, and by blasphenies, they meant ideas that were no longer acceptable. These 'corrections of the scribes', *tiqqune sopherim*, are a recognised phase in the history of the text of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> What is not agreed, however, is the extent of these changes, but it is clear that many concerned the Lady whom Isaiah knew. What is also clear is the Christians knew about the Lady who has now almost disappeared from the Hebrew Scriptures, and the question is: how did they know the Lady whom Isaiah knew?

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, S Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950, pp.28-37.