PART B

ISAIAH
Chapter 6 in the book of Isaiah is the vision of the prophet’s call. Speaking in the first person, the prophet portrays what befell him “in the year that King Uzziah died”, implying that it was committed to writing only after this year and after the events depicted here, probably not before the time of Jotham or Ahaz. Against the background of the sights in the Temple and one of the seraphs touching his lips with a live coal, the prophet hears the Lord’s voice sending him to “this people”: “Hear, indeed, šîm’û šâmô’a, but do not understand, and see, indeed, ūr’û râ’ô, but do not know” (6:9). That is to say, you are neither ready nor capable of understanding what you hear, nor of knowing what you see, and therefore the decree has been issued. The heavenly voice continues: “This people’s heart fattens, and its ears become heavy, and its eyes shut”, because “this people” fears that if it were to see and hear and understand, then it would “turn and be healed”. The three verbs in the hiphʿil conjugation, hašmēn, hakbēd and hāšaʿ, were interpreted and rendered by many scholars as imperatives. In order to explain the wonder that such divine orders are given to a prophet, it was argued that the difficulties “created by this startling, and even harsh, statement…are partly due to the tendency of Scripture writers to refer all things immediately to the will of God”. It is inconceivable, however, that God would command the prophet to “make heavy” the ears of

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1 Skinner, p. 50. Cf. also, e.g., Wildberger, p. 256.