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ABSTRACT

JUSTICE, CULT, AND SALVATION IN ISAIAH 56-59:
A LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Hudyard Y. Muskita

Adviser: Richard M. Davidson

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: JUSTICE, CULT, AND SALVATION IN ISAIAH 56-59: A LITERARY THEOLOGICAL STUDY

Name of researcher: Hudyard Y. Muskita

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Richard M. Davidson, PhD

Date completed: October 2016

The main focus of this dissertation is the interconnection among the themes of justice, cult, and salvation in Isaiah 56-59. The investigation will analyze and explore the theological importance of these themes, which include questions such as, What are the descriptions of these themes in these chapters? How are they related to each other? As divine salvation is portrayed as moving back and forth from immanence to distance several times throughout this particular section of the book of Isaiah, what factors are responsible for this dynamic? What is the role of cult and social justice in this salvation? In what ways does cult affect the prevalence of justice within a community?

This task is accomplished by performing a literary and theological analysis of these particular chapters in the book of Isaiah. Discussion of the literary aspects of the

text employs a microstructural analysis, which starts with a syntactical display of each verse based on its strophic and clausal divisions. The display provides a basis for observation of formal rhetorical devices, especially parallelism, and for highlighting literary patterns, word repetitions, and verbal sequences, with their theological implications. This part of the study is covered in chapters 2 to 5 of the dissertation. Drawing on the findings provided in the previous chapters, chapter 6 presents systematic theological implications of the study.

Thematically, the prophetic discourse in Isa 56-59 narrates God's promise of salvation and its fulfillment. Within this thematic structure, the impossibility for humans to partake of this promised salvation is presented from social, physical, cultic, and moral perspectives. Against this backdrop, assurance of salvation is extended to those who are convinced that they (*viz.*, foreigners and eunuchs) are excluded from it, and this assurance is also extended to God's people, despite their moral failure. In this context, salvation is depicted as being bestowed on those who are undeserving of it; therefore it is unexpected and surprising.

In Isa 56-59 the theme of salvation is presented, first and foremost, as initiated and established by God; it is the work of divine healing and restoration in humans. Yet, at the same time, in order for this process to be effective, a human response is needed. Furthermore, salvation is depicted as a quest for an encounter with the Divine, in which each member of the society may gain a meaningful and constructive experience from it on both personal and communal levels—as a result, it brings justice. It is from this particular perspective of salvation that cult plays a significant thematic role in Isa 56-59. As salvation begins with the right concept about God, in which both the people's theological

and social assumptions and practices can be in harmony with the divine character, the realization of these ideals enables salvation to be a tangible experience. In Isa 56, the description of salvation is saturated with cultic terminology. In Isa 57, the description and critique of social injustice is presented in parallel with a report of the practice of idolatry. In Isa 58, while the audience of the prophet is described as engaging in the “right” form of cultic activity, criticism over social injustice shows that worship and ethics go hand in hand.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Hudyard Y. Muskita

October 2016

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ABD* *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
- ANET* *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. with supplement. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1969.
- AUSS* *Andrews University Seminary Studies*
- BDB* Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Bib* *Biblica*
- BTB* *Biblical Theology Bulletin*
- BZ* *Biblische Zeitschrift*
- CBQ* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- CTJ* *Calvin Theological Journal*
- DCH* Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993.
- GKC* Gesenius, Wilhelm, Emil Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
- HALOT* Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999.
- HAR* *Hebrew Annual Review*
- HTR* *Harvard Theological Review*

<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by George A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962.
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974-.
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody, 1981.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>

<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>Ugaritic Textbook</i> . Edited by Cyrus H. Gordon. 3 vols. Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Preliminary Considerations

This study aims to do a literary-theological study of Isaiah 56-59. The literary approach employed in this endeavor is mainly rhetorical analysis. In older biblical scholarship, the interpretation of biblical texts was characterized by the prevalence of literary or source criticism.¹ Rolf Rendtorf has observed how, in this approach, the reading is basically a search for discovering “on something that lies behind the texts,”² in which a shift of theme or a change of emphasis in a certain passage is considered to be a sign of different authors.³

¹“Literary criticism, or what German biblical scholarship termed *Literarkritik*, has featured prominently in scholarship on the Hebrew Bible since the rise of the historical-critical method in the early nineteenth century. This literary criticism of the Bible had its goal—since it was foundational for *historical-critical* study—the reconstruction of the *history* of the biblical literature. Its method was to analyse the stylistic and (to some extent) the ideological differences among the various writings of the Hebrew Bible . . . in order to separate earlier from later, simpler from more elaborated, elements in the text.” David J. A. Clines and J. Cheryl Exum, “The New Literary Criticism,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Cheryl J. Exum and David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 11, italics by the authors.

²Rolf Rendtorf, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, trans. and ed. Margareth Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 26. He further discusses trends in Old Testament scholarship from the 1940s onward; the major schools that he refers to are the Albright School, the Alt School, the British-Scandinavian Cultic School, the Myth and Ritual School, and the Uppsala School.

³Habel describes several steps of doing literary or source criticism: (1) comparing parallel accounts; (2) distinguishing combined accounts; (3) recognizing literary terminology; (4) discerning literary structures; (5) establishing divergent viewpoints; and (6) tracing normative motifs. On the fifth step, “establishing divergent viewpoints,” he explains, “the presence of a second literary hand is sometimes evident in a distinctive way of thinking or theological stance. Where a definite change in theological

Isaiah 56 to 59 is an example of such a situation, in which a variety of subjects is presented in a compact and concise prophetic discourse. Topics in chapter 56 include, among others, a promise of the imminent realization of the salvation of foreigners and eunuchs among the people of God. In this divine announcement, cultic activities receive a heightened emphasis, especially Sabbath keeping, offering of sacrifice, and prayer at the temple. Chapter 57 deals with the issue of social injustice coupled with idolatry and is followed by a promise of divine healing to those who are “humble.” In chapter 58, one finds an appeal to reconsider the basic nature of one’s religious activity, focusing on fasting and on the Sabbath, in the form of dispute, appeal, and promise. In chapter 59, the barrier to God’s saving act is the lack of justice among the people, but the chapter concludes with a description of divine intervention to bring his salvation to realization.

This multiplicity of themes has been considered an indication of different layers of sources or authors. An overview of both recent and older commentaries illustrates the situation, described so well by George Adam Smith, who made the following comment on the relationship between various themes in Isa 56-57: “this is one of the sections which almost decisively place the unity of ‘Second Isaiah’ past possibility of belief.”⁴ As the focus is directed to the smaller units of the text, Brevard S. Childs noted, concerning Isa 56:1-8, that “there has been much debate regarding the literary coherence of the text. A host of literary-critical analyses have contested the chapter’s essential unity because of

approach is accompanied by other indications of a different literary hand and the likelihood of a second literary source is greatly increased.” Norman C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 15.

⁴George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (New York: Harper and Row, 1928), 437.

the diversity of its components.”⁵ Regarding Isa 56:9-57:21, Edward J. Kissane commented, “modern critics have the most diverse views as regards both the unity of this passage and its date.”⁶ Thematic shifts in the content of Isa 56:9-57:21 led scholars to divide it into two sections: the first part contains criticism against leaders and idolaters (56:9-57:13), while the second part is a salvation speech (57:14-21). Regarding the first section of the passage, Ronald Whybray commented that “there is no agreement among the commentators about either the literary unity or the date(s) of this section,”⁷ while the second part is deemed to be a product of a different author.⁸

With Isaiah 58, the main issue is in the appearance of two different themes, fasting (vv. 1-12) and Sabbath (vv. 13-14), in which the latter is considered to be “a curious appendix, by another hand; utterly unsuited to this place, and yet written to occupy it.”⁹ Finally, Isa 59 is said to have “many obscure passages”¹⁰ and this chapter is considered to be one of the most difficult passages in the latter part of the book of Isaiah, because of its shifts in oral form, literary style, and unexpected alterations of speaker and addressee.¹¹

⁵Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville, KY: Knox, 2001), 454.

⁶Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with a Commentary*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1943), 215.

⁷Ronald Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1975), 199.

⁸*Ibid.*, 208.

⁹Charles C. Torrey, *The Second Isaiah* (New York: Scribner, 1928), 437.

¹⁰Kissane, *Isaiah*, 240.

¹¹Paul Volz, *Jesaja II: Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1932), 230; see also Childs, *Isaiah*, 484.

One of the reasons why scholars have seen such incongruity in these chapters is because the main characteristic of this approach is diachronic, in which attention is given more to determining the authentic words of the original author, reconstructing the historical context, and the meaning of the text is bound to these findings.¹² A different direction, however, has emerged within biblical scholarship in the past few decades, with more attention given to synchronic reading of the biblical text in an effort to balance the past situation. Robert M. Polzin observed: “The Bible’s diachronic dimensions are not in any way to be denied. However, its synchronic dimensions unfortunately have not been sufficiently exploited because of the almost exclusive emphasis on diachrony that characterizes most of modern biblical scholarship.”¹³ In this synchronic approach, attention is directed to the final, canonical form of the biblical text.¹⁴ With regard to the book of

¹²“Because of its concern for the history and prehistory of the text, historical criticism tended (it may be said) to be interested in the ‘original’ meaning of the text, what it had meant to its first readers, and not what it might mean to a modern reader The concern was always to place texts in their historical context, and to argue that we misunderstand them if we take them to mean something they could not have meant for their first readers—indeed, most historical critics regarded this as obvious. The original meaning was the true meaning, and the main task of biblical scholars was to get back to this meaning, and to eliminate the false meanings that unhistorical readers thought they had found in the text.” John Barton, “Historical-critical Approaches,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 10-11.

¹³Robert M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1977), 18.

¹⁴Kessler terms it a “teleological” approach: “There are two possible approaches to the biblical text. The genetic approach deals with the historical questions as to how the text got into its present form. On the one hand the teleological approach studies the meaning of the text as it stands; its analytical concerns propel it into dealing with structural and morphological characteristics.” Martin Kessler, “Rhetorical Criticism in Genesis 7,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1974), 1.

Another terminology for this approach is new literary criticism. Clines and Exum wrote, “In biblical studies the term ‘new criticism’ has been rarely used, but most work that is known as literary—whether it studies structure, themes, character, and the like, or whether it approaches the texts as unified wholes rather than the amalgam of sources, or whether it describes itself as ‘synchronic’ rather than ‘diachronic’, dealing with the text as it stands rather than its prehistory—can properly be regarded as

Isaiah, there is a trend in scholarly discussion for more attention to be given to the message of the final shape of the book.¹⁵

One of the main branches of the synchronic approach is rhetorical criticism,¹⁶ with its emphasis “to define the limits of the literary unit, to recognize precisely where and how it begins and where and how it ends.”¹⁷ This goal is achieved by observing formal rhetorical devices, since biblical texts are considered to be filled with patterns, word repetitions and verbal sequences.¹⁸ As literary (source) criticism has provided data about the hypothetical *Sitz im Leben* of a given biblical text, rhetorical analysis discloses literary devices that show its unity in the final canonical form. Rhetorical criticism, however, while providing insights into literary features of the text, often does not go far enough to

participating in this approach.” Clines and Exum, “New Literary Criticism,” 15-16.

¹⁵Roy F. Melugin, “Introduction,” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 13-31. The concern now is on the relationship between the synchronic and diachronic reading of the book. See Rolf Rendtorff, “The Book of Isaiah: A Complex Unity. Synchronic and Diachronic Reading” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 32-49. An example of this situation can be read in Marvin Sweeney’s review article on Brevard Childs’ commentary on Isaiah. For him, the book “constitutes a landmark in the modern critical interpretation of the book in that it is one of the first major critical commentaries to treat deliberately the book of Isaiah as a coherent, literary whole.” But he noted how, in dealing with the literary structure of the book, Childs’ understanding of the structure of the book “remains firmly rooted in the older Duhmian paradigm that posits First Isaiah in chapters 1-39, Second Isaiah in chapters 40-55, and Third Isaiah in chapters 56-66.” Marvin A. Sweeney, review of Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, *Review of Biblical Literature*, accessed January 5, 2016, http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/1348_2908.pdf. While scholars still struggle with this issue, McKenna is of the opinion that “Appreciation of the grandeur of Isaiah’s message does not depend on an accurate analysis of the book’s origin.” John E. McKenna, *Old Testament Survey, The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, ed. William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederick Wm. Bush, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 289.

¹⁶See Yehoshua Gitay, “Rhetorical Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville, KY: Westminster/Knox, 1993), 136.

¹⁷James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 8-9.

¹⁸Muilenburg, *Ibid.*, 10-17. See also Clines and Exum, “New Literary Criticism,” 17.

explore its theological meaning.¹⁹ Thus, the focus of this study is to do a rhetorical analysis of Isaiah 56-59 and also articulate the theological message of these chapters.

Concerning the rhetorical analysis of Isaiah 56-59, James Muilenburg, in his commentary on Isaiah 40-66, has employed rhetorical criticism in analyzing this section of the book of Isaiah.²⁰ Curtis Fitzgerald studied Isaiah 56-66 with a focus on their continuity and cohesiveness by using rhetorical analysis.²¹ More exclusively on Isaiah 56-59, Gregory Polan has also analyzed these chapters by using rhetorical criticism.²² His argument for the unity of this section of the book of Isaiah is based on uncovering various rhetorical devices found in the text. He proposed the unity of these chapters from both thematic and structural perspectives. Structurally, the declaratory formula in the opening and concluding phrases in Isa 56:1-2 and Isa 59:20-21 functions as an inclusion or “distant parallelism” that envelops these chapters in a literary unit. Thematically, the theme of God’s initiated salvation matches the opening of part of Isa 56 with the concluding part of Isa 59. The promised “salvation” and “deliverance” in 56:1 is brought into realization by the “Redeemer” himself in 59:20. Furthermore, the recipient of this divine intervention is he who restrains himself from doing “evil” (56:2) or turns away

¹⁹This issue has been dealt with by Robbins as he proposes “to reinvent rhetorical criticism as an interpretative analysis.” Vernon K. Robbins, “The Present and Future of Rhetorical Analysis” in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 29.

²⁰James Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66, Introduction and Exegesis*, The Interpreter's Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1956).

²¹Curtis W. Fitzgerald, “A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56-66” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003).

²²Gregory J. Polan, *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation, A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56-59* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986).

from “transgressions” (59:20).²³ For Polan, Isaiah 56-59 consists of four literary units: 56:1-8; 56:9-57:21; 58:1-14; and 59:1-20. The unity of these chapters is observable through repetition of keywords, which, in their root words, appear in at least three of the four literary units given above²⁴ and in the literary structure, especially chiasm. A summary of his study is highlighted here.

Several elements indicate the unity of Isa 56:1-8. First, repetitious usage of the words **שמר**, **עשה**, and **הז** highlights the general movement of the theme of observance in the literary units in the passage.²⁵ Second, the theme of salvation frames the unit in v. 1b and v. 8 by the announcement of its coming and a concluding word about the Lord God's redemptive gathering of many peoples.²⁶ Third, in the opening verse's concerns with the practice of justice and righteousness in the light of the approach of salvation, this twofold development of an exhortation followed by a salvation announcement recurs twice in the admonitions and promises made to the foreigners and eunuchs.²⁷ Fourth, both the strophes in vv. 1-2 and 3-7 are set in chiastic structures, in which “the overlapping chiasm between **שמר** // **עשה** stresses the theme of observance by a movement from a “general”

²³For the full elaboration, see Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 18-22. Polan cautioned that the distant parallelism in Isa 56:1b and Isa 59:20 “is only an initial beginning to the study of 56-59 as a section in the division 56-66.” Ibid., 22.

²⁴Those root words are, **שפט**, **צדק**, **בוא**, **ידע**, **דרך**, **פשע**, **שוב**, and **ראה**. Ibid., 29-34.

²⁵Ibid., 49.

²⁶Ibid., 51.

²⁷Ibid., 88.

to “specific” and back to a “general” admonition.²⁸

Polan perceived Isa 56:9-57:21 as a three-stanza poem, focusing on the themes of judgment and salvation. The first two focus on indictment and punishment of irresponsible leaders and idolatrous people, with the third focusing on the promise of redemptive gifts. Recurrence of some keywords serves as an indication of the unity of this literary unit. The word **יכל**, recurring in the beginning and end of this passage, serves as a device for inclusion.²⁹ The only occurrence of the word **בצע** in the whole book of Isaiah, as it is found in the opening and closing stanzas, reiterates the theme of covetousness that brings about God’s judgment.³⁰ The recurrence of the word **דרך** functions to distinguish the ways of God and humanity.³¹ Finally, Polan listed ten words serving as examples of paronomasia which add to the stylistic devices uniting the stanzas.³²

Regarding Isaiah 58, seven occurrences of **יום**, **צום**, and **יהוה** both demonstrate the key motifs and offer a means of understanding the structure of the literary unit.³³ The interworking of the motifs of fasting and Sabbath also point to the themes of judgment and salvation. The repetition of **צום** serves to show the importance of vv. 13-14 as an

²⁸Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 88.

²⁹Ibid., 94.

³⁰Ibid., 96-97.

³¹Ibid., 97.

³²Those words are **עשה**, **תָּיָה**, **שָׁפַל**, **הָרָה**, **רָחַק**, **נָחַם**, **קָרַב**, **הֵלֵךְ**, **מִשְׁכַּב** and **רוּחַ**. Each of these words occurs in two of the stanzas of the poem of Isa 56:9-57:21. Ibid., 169.

³³Ibid., 181.

integral part of the poem, in which the use of the name Jacob in Isa 58:1b and 14b also serves as a device of inclusion.³⁴ There are examples which show the careful construction of the poem and how it progresses with points of climax. The inclusion in the first strophe (vv. 1a, 4b) begins the unit with the command to lift up the prophet's voice to proclaim to the people their sins and concludes the strophe by telling these same people that their voice is not heard on high. The general movement from protasis to apodosis in vv. 6-14 also signals the conditions which lead to the blessings of salvation and shows the basic rhythm which moves from "conditions" to "results" in each of the three strophes.³⁵

The imagery of the absence of God's saving hand at the beginning of the poem, switching to the portrayal of the coming of the Redeemer to Zion in the concluding part, serves as an inclusion to construct the literary structure of Isaiah 59.³⁶ The description of wicked deeds builds the theme of judgment in vv. 1-8, but the usual pronouncement of judgment is replaced here by a lament and confession in vv. 9-13. At the same time, the vocabulary and imagery continue the emphasis on judgment already begun in vv. 1-8. However, the judgment scene gives way to hope as vv. 15-20 announce the coming of salvation in the image of the Divine Warrior. This movement from judgment to salvation is similar to the basic structure of the two preceding literary units (cf. 56:9-57:13 and

³⁴Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 175.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 241.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 247-248.

57:14-21; 58:1-5 and 58:6-14), and thus shows continuity in the construction of the literary units.³⁷

However, Polan recognized that the schematization he had built is based more on a “broad internal movement,” and explained further that this kind of schematization has its drawbacks when one reads the text following a verse-by-verse analysis.³⁸ In the light of this issue, this study attempts to pursue a verse-by-verse analysis of Isaiah 56-59, observing and giving meaning to how their literary features shape and enrich the overall message of the text.³⁹

More on the theological message of these chapters, the title of Polan’s study, “In the Ways of Justice toward Salvation,” indicates that he has found the importance of the themes of justice and salvation. He saw that the common basis of integration of the whole unit is the theme of salvation⁴⁰ and considered that the major portion of these chapters is an interplay between the themes of judgment and salvation.⁴¹ He also mentioned the

³⁷Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 316.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 327.

³⁹In her comment on Polan’s approach, Franke writes, “While he discussed in some detail the repetition of various key words, patterns of vocabulary, and chiasm achieved by arrangement of certain root words, he did not devote adequate attention to vocabulary. As a result he did not see other devices that were used in the poems and missed nuances in meaning that could perhaps have added to his thesis of the unity of the chapters. Chris A. Franke, *Isaiah 46, 47, and 48: A New Literary-Critical Reading* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 14n54.

⁴⁰Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 327.

⁴¹In the concluding part of his study Polan presents a diagram of thematic structure in Isa 56-59,

- 1) Introduction: Observance → Promise of Salvation
- 2) Judgment → Salvation
 ↙
- 3) Judgment → Salvation
 ↙
- 4) Judgment → Salvation.

importance of the word pair **נִשְׁפָּט** and **צְדָקָה** throughout this section of Isaiah.⁴² Odil Hannes Steck also made a study on Isa 56-59 and perceived that these four chapters stand as two parallel sections: chapters 56-57 and 58-59, in which the focus in 56-57 is on the sin and restoration of the leaders, while in 58-59, it is on the sin and restoration of the common people.⁴³

Others also made a study on Isa 56-59, or on a section of it, from the perspective of the themes of justice, salvation, and cult as a part of their treatment of the larger scope in the book of Isaiah. Kyung-Chul Park addressed the issue of the justification of Israel and the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah through the perspective of interconnections between the themes of worship, temple, eschatology, and justice, in which his discussion covers Isa 56:1-8 and 58:1-14, besides Isa 65:17-66:24, as they are linked to Isaiah 1.⁴⁴ Bohdan Hrobon dealt with the issue of the ethical dimension of cult in the book of Isaiah, in which, among other things, he analyzed Isa 58-59 from that perspective.⁴⁵ Thomas Leclerc analyzed the topic of justice in the whole book of Isaiah, and, in his discussion, he included a brief treatment of Isa 56, 58, and 59.⁴⁶ Mark Gray

In addition, he lists major motifs and themes in Isaiah 56-59: righteousness and justice, the ways of God and of humanity, transgression, knowledge, the Lord who sees, the Lord who comes to redeem, from judgment to salvation. Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 328-339.

⁴²Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 328-330.

⁴³Odil Hannes Steck, "Beobachtungen zu Jesaja 56-59," *BZ* 31 (1987): 228-246. His discussion of these chapters begins with Isa 56:9, because he is of the opinion that Isa 56:1-8 is a continuation of Isa 55.

⁴⁴Kyung-Chul Park, *Die Gerechtigkeit Israels und das Heil der Völker: Kultus, Tempel, Eschatologie und Gerechtigkeit in der Endgestalt des Jesajabuches (Jes 56, 1-8; 58, 1-14; 65, 17-66, 24)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2003).

⁴⁵Bohdan Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension of Cult in the Book of Isaiah* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

⁴⁶Thomas L. Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001).

also dealt with the issue of social justice in the book of Isaiah, with the framework of his study built on the interconnection between Isaiah 1 and 58, especially vv. 6-10.⁴⁷

A cursory reading of Isa 56:1, which serves as the opening presentation for the whole section of Isa 56-59, underscores the themes of justice and salvation: “Thus says the Lord / keep *justice* and do *righteousness* / for my *salvation* is about to come / and my *righteousness* to be revealed.”⁴⁸ However, a further reading of these chapters of the book of Isaiah indicates that the discussion of the themes of justice⁴⁹ and salvation⁵⁰ is

⁴⁷Mark Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

⁴⁸Unless specified otherwise, the English translation of the Hebrew text is my own translation.

⁴⁹In this study, the term “justice,” as a theme, is used to designate social order and social justice in a society. In his study focusing on the topic of justice in the book of Isaiah, Leclerc acknowledged how “justice is a complex topic, and its complexity is evident first in the choice of vocabulary.” He further noted that “both the Hebrew words *משפט* and *צדקה* can, depending on context, be translated by the English word ‘justice.’” Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted*, 7. Therefore, the terms *משפט* and *צדקה*, as they were presented as a pair in Isa 56:1, stand as the most common words to express the concept of social justice in ancient Israel. See Moshe Weinfeld, “‘Justice and Righteousness’—*משפט וצדקה*—the Expression and its Meaning,” in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 228-246; also Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and In the Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995).

With regard to the term *צדקה*, generally translated as “righteousness,” I am in agreement with Skinner who stated, “[T]he idea of righteousness is one of the most complex and difficult of the ruling ideas of OT.” John Skinner, “Righteousness in OT,” *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, John A. Selbie, John C. Lambert, and Shailer Mathews (New York: Scribner, 1909), 4:272. In his study, Yilpet demonstrated that one aspect of righteousness is order. “This order refers to the state or condition of peace, harmony, equity and freedom from oppression and bondage.” Righteousness as order “refers to a condition or situation of life in a community. This situation can be characterized by peace, harmony, and well-being of its members or by disorder and chaos, which is the result of violence, injustice, bloodshed and all forms of oppressive practices in the community/society.” Yoilah K. Yilpet, “A Rhetorical/Intra-textual Study of Isaiah’s Use of ‘sedeq/sedaqa’: ‘Righteousness’ as Order” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1997), 314.

The term *משפט*, generally translated as “justice,” in its most simplified definition, refers to the restoration of a situation or environment which promotes equity and harmony in a community. See Temba L. J. Mafico, “Just, Justice,” *ABD*, 3:1128. However, in demonstrating the complexity of the meaning of *משפט*, Leclerc elaborated, how, “among its nuances, *משפט* may refer to social custom; to specific laws and ordinances; to court cases, types of proceedings, or the verdict; it may mean the principle or virtue of justice or the specific implementation of a social reform. Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted*, 7.

⁵⁰In a more general perception, the term “salvation” designates “a quest for an ideal condition, a ‘better world.’ It presupposes the experience of the contrary, of ‘disaster,’ as with war, imprisonment, sickness, or simply the finitude, the limitedness, of life. One hopes to be freed, rescued, or redeemed, in a

saturated with reference to cultic themes.⁵¹ The presence of cultic themes in this poem is

lasting, or eternal condition delivered from such disaster.” Gabi Brodbeck, “Salvation / Redemption,” *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 4:1671. However, in the Hebrew Bible, “the most fundamental meaning of salvation . . . is God’s deliverance of those in a situation of need from that which impedes their well being, resulting in their restoration to wholeness.” J. Richard Middleton and Michael J. Gorman, “Salvation,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (NIDB)*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006), 5:45. Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible, the nature of salvation includes earthly dimension, spiritual dimension, and future salvation—awaiting new and extraordinary interventions from God. Gerald G. O’Collins, “Salvation,” *ABD*, 5:908-909.

John Sawyer listed the semantics of the word “salvation” in Old Testament Hebrew. They cover the idea of spaciousness, healing, support, leading, lawcourt, knowing, keeping, cleaning, light, lifting, military, refining, and opening. John F. A. Sawyer, *Semantics in Biblical Research; New Methods of Defining Hebrew Words for Salvation* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1972), 37. In his systematic study of the term “justice” in the book of Isaiah, Oswalt pointed out, that beside the parallel of צדק with משפט, other instances have צדק paralleled by the forms of ישע, which shows that righteousness has more to do with salvation or deliverance. John N. Oswalt, “Righteousness in Isaiah: A Study of the Function of Chapters 56-66 in the Present Structure of the Book,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:184-186. With this background, it is quite significant that the first colon of Isa 56:1 has משפט as the parallel of צדקה, and ישוע in the second colon.

⁵¹The term “cult” is derived from the Latin word “cultus,” which, among others, means, “[T]he worship or veneration (of a deity),” P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (2012), s.v. “Cultus.” This understanding of cult as worship is reflected in some Bible Encyclopedias or Dictionaries; for example the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* has the entry on cult as “Cult (Worship).” P. K. Meagher, “Cult (Worship),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: The Catholic University of America, 2003), 4:426; *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* does not have an entry for cult, instead, it refers to “Worship, Early Jewish; Worship, NT Christian; Worship, OT.” Stefan C. Reif, “Worship, Early Jewish,” *NIDB*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006), 5:903-910; Larry W. Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian,” *NIDB*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006), 5:910-923; Richard D. Nelson, “Worship, OT,” *NIDB*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006), 5:923-932.

Since it comes from the Latin word “cultus,” in Old Testament scholarship, cult and cultus are synonymous; they are employed interchangeably. For example, see Angel M. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982) and William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993); compare to Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) and Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

In this study, the term “cult” is employed in its broadest sense. According to Hjelm, “[I]n its widest sense the term ‘cult’ refers to different aspects of worship within a religious tradition. Examples of this include various devotional services, both communal and private.” Titus Hjelm, “Cult,” *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1:473. For Smith, the term “cult,” is used “in its widest sense to include all ways of securing/retaining the god’s favor.” Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament*, 2nd corrected ed. (London: SCM, 1987), 11. Eichrodt, in his discussion of the “cult,” covers the area of sacred sites, sacred objects, sacred seasons, and sacred actions. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 98-177. Wenham perceives that Gen 4-11 reflects a concern with “cultic issues,” which, among others, are the issue of the acceptability of sacrifice in the Cain and Abel story; issues of cult prostitution and sacred marriage rites in Gen 6:1-4; Noah, portrayed as an exemplary keeper of the covenant law, observing the Sabbath, distinguishing between clean and unclean, and offering a sacrifice effective for all

observable, first, in the reference to the Sabbath in Isa 56 and 58.⁵² More obvious indicators are found in God's speech addressed to both the foreigners and eunuchs (56:3-8), the elaboration of idolatry performed by the people (57:5-10), and the religious

mankind; and finally the tower of Babel as a polemic against the religious claims of Babylon. Gordon Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 403. Riley, in his study of the relationship between Israelite kings and cult, includes "to seek the Lord" or "to ask a medium" as in the case of Saul; David's action in transferring the ark to Jerusalem, his blessing on the people after the event, and his preparation for building the temple; Solomon's activities in building the temple and its dedication. William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles*. This kind of understanding held by Riley is comparable to those of Weyde, who wrote regarding cult in the Old Testament: "[It] is a system of ritual acts and words by which the presence of YHWH is mediated, asked for, and praised. William Weyde, "Cult—Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 5:1142. These examples show that the term "cult" covers a wide range of meaning.

⁵²Park understands the presence of cultic themes in Isa 56 and 58 in references to Sabbath observance and the expression of "to minister to him [god]" in Isa 56, and also the practice of fasting and issue of proper Sabbath observance in Isa 58. Park, *Die Gerechtigkeit Israels*, 163-164; 284.

It may be argued that the Sabbath is not necessarily interpreted as cultic in nature, since the Sabbath can stand on its own apart from the cult as a marker of rhythm of time: "rest day—week day—rest day." See Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 135. Also Charles W. Kiker, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament Cult" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1969), 206. Brueggemann is of the opinion that Sabbath as the day of rest does not automatically equate to the day of worship when he reflects, "I am not listing Sabbath as a distinct festival, because it seems likely that Sabbath concerned work stoppage more than worship in early Israel. In any case, the worship of Israel is shot through with 'the sabbatic principle.'" Walter Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 13n3. Based on this assumption, references to the Sabbath in Isa 56:2, 4 and 6 are not necessarily cultic in nature.

However, as Andreasen has observed, "Only a few passages (in the Old Testament) understand the day solely in terms of abstention from work and the ensuing rest (for the laborer) and freedom (for everybody). The great majority of texts are clearly not concerned merely with abstention from work. . . . the Old Testament Sabbath traditions from the earliest to the latest can freely associate the Sabbath both with abstention from work and with festival activities. . . . The Sabbath, we may observe, was never simply a 'free day,' however much the Sabbath literature emphasizes abstention from work." Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-historical Investigation* (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1972), 149.

Furthermore, references to the Sabbath in Isa 56:2 and 6 are in the context of keeping it holy: "keeping the Sabbath from profaning it." The expression "to profane" [חלל] is the antonym of "holy" [קדש]. James Muilenburg, "Holiness" (*IDB*, 2:617). See also Andreasen, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 205n2. Along this line of thought, he explains, "[I]t is generally assumed that the Sabbath is kept holy when Israel refrains from working on it." Andreasen, *Ibid.*, 205. Yet, the holiness of the Sabbath "was expressed through abstention from secular work, through the rest whereby special power from the holy would be made available for the continued life in non-holy time, and probably also through some form of cultic activity." *Ibid.*, 206. From another perspective, Kiker points to the calendar of "holy assemblies" in Leviticus 23, in which the Sabbath has been placed at the head of the list (Lev 23:3), makes it "the Festtag or מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ par excellence." Kiker, *The Sabbath*, 114-115.

activities in Isa 58. These three themes tie various expressions and metaphors in Isaiah 56-59 into one entity.⁵³ Based on this observation, after conducting a rhetorical analysis of the text, the next focus of this study is to examine the interconnection among the themes of justice, salvation, and cult as an implication of the literary features of the text.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed in this study is twofold. First, a study of Isaiah 56-59 with regard to the literary aspects of the final form of the text has been conducted. However, so far, the focus of the study has been more directed toward the distribution of vocabulary as an argument of its unity. Therefore, a study with more focus on the microstructural level of the text and what features in this level bind them into unity is still needed to supplement the existing approaches to see whether or not a verse-by-verse analysis of this section of the book of Isaiah will uphold its unity. Second, numerous references to the themes of justice, cult, and salvation in Isaiah 56-59 suggest that they

⁵³Correspondence among the three themes can be noticeable in the connection between announcement of the nearness of divine salvation with the call to perform justice and observe the Sabbath Isa 56:1-2. In Isa 56:3-8 both the qualification and the promises of salvation for foreigners and eunuchs are saturated with cultic terms. In 56:9-57:13, criticism for the lack of justice is combined with denunciation of idolatry, i.e. false cultic practices, while 57:14-21 contains a salvation speech. In Isa 58, the topic is another issue that deals with religious exercise: fasting and Sabbath-keeping in particular, with a divine admonition on this issue concerned with social justice, and with a promise of salvation. Finally, Isa 59 is concerned with divine salvation in the context of social justice. The complaint about a lack of justice among the people is then followed by a divine initiative to bring about his salvation. So here, in Isaiah 56-59, I tentatively consider the prominent themes to be justice, salvation, and cult.

The use of keywords for thematic intensification in prophetic poetry genre is explained by Alter: "Figurative language plays an important role in this rhetoric. Although it is of course difficult to generalize from one poem to the whole corpus of prophetic poetry, the patterns observable here are fairly typical. One figure, or a cluster of closely related figures, tends to govern a sequence of several lines. *Leitwörter*, keywords, are insisted on as a way of driving home the thematic emphasis of the poem . . . A concentration of almost synonymous words is deployed over a whole passage, with a particularly rich lexicon of designations [i.e.] of sins and its metaphorical equivalent." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 144.

play an important role in the overall theological message of these chapters. Whether there is an interconnection among these themes, in what sense they are interconnected, and how this interconnection shapes the overall theological message of these chapters of Isaiah need to be explored.⁵⁴

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation is to discover more about the literary techniques and devices employed by the prophet in conveying the theological message of Isaiah 56-59: how this passage is unified, and how the individual verses, strophes, and poems both individually and together display integrated and unifying rhetorical structures. In the process, this study aims to clarify the meaning and interconnection of the themes of justice, cult, and salvation in these chapters of the book of Isaiah.

Limits and Scope of the Study

In order to maintain its focus, several delimitations have been imposed on this study. First, the Masoretic text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* is used as the basic text and the reading is derived from it. Reference to other manuscripts and versions is made only insofar as they have significance for the text under consideration. Second, since the discussion will be limited to the final form of the text, it does not attempt to deal with

⁵⁴The investigation will help to analyze and explore the theological importance of these themes and will include questions such as: What are the descriptions of these themes in these chapters? How are they related to each other? As divine salvation is portrayed as moving back and forth from immanence to distance several times throughout the chapters, what factors are responsible for this dynamic? What is the role of cult and social justice in this salvation? In what ways does cult affect the prevalence of justice within the community? What is the function of the universalistic context of these interrelated themes, as alluded to by reference to foreigners and eunuchs?

such issues as the date and authorship of the book of Isaiah.⁵⁵ Third, this study is concerned with the surface structure of the text; thus attention is given more to literary forms than content, with emphasis on the verbal and structural parallels. Fourth, interconnections between the themes of justice, cult, and salvation in these chapters of the book of Isaiah are addressed only as implications of close reading. An exhaustive treatment of these issues can be conducted only in a separate study.

Methodology

Discussion of for the case for of the unity of Isaiah 56-59 is presented through several steps. First, Isaiah 56-59 will be divided into four major poems: Isa 56:1-8; Isa 56:9-57:21; Isa 58:1-14; and Isa 59:1-21, respectively. This division is built upon their common literary features as a dialogue between God/prophet and the people/audience as it will be dealt with in the immediate section below. Second, within these poems, the text will be analyzed on the levels of stanza, strophe, clause, and phrase.⁵⁶

⁵⁵See Franke, *Isaiah*, 34-36. Among those who utilize a similar approach in dealing with different parts of the Hebrew Bible are Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), xii; Francis I. Andersen and David N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation and Commentary*, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 24 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 119-120; 315-316; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation and Commentary*, AB, ed., William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 25A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1994).

⁵⁶For the working tools for the division of the parts of the poem I will employ a modification of Jan Fokkelman's model. Based on his observation of biblical poetry in the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, as a general rule, a poem has 2 to 4 beats/stresses per colon; 2 or 3 cola per verse; 2 or 3 verses per strophe; and 2 or 3 strophes per stanza. Fokkelman explains that his model should not be viewed as a closed system and cannot be taken as an absolute standard, especially when these rules are applied to the poems in the Prophetic books. In this study, the four poems of Isaiah 56-59 are the equivalent of the stanzas in Fokkelman's model, and my analysis will be more on the level of colon and strophe. See Jan P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Knox, 2001), 37.

The stanza is the grouping of verses according to one main thought,⁵⁷ while the strophic division is based on shifts and changes that may occur in tone, verb tense, grammatical person, genre, subject material, or mood within the stanza.⁵⁸ Third, within the strophes, an exploration of literary features of each of the verses will be conducted from the perspective of their syntax, grammar, and semantics.⁵⁹ In an attempt to ascertain a possible meaning of the text,⁶⁰ the reading will give attention to parallelism in which word pair⁶¹ and word play⁶² will be highlighted, based mainly on intertextuality, whether within the immediate context of the book of Isaiah or the broader context of the Hebrew

⁵⁷William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, "Stanza," *A Handbook to Literature*, rev. and enl. by C. Hugh Holman (New York, Odyssey: 1960), 469.

⁵⁸Fokkelman, *Reading*, 87.

⁵⁹See Malcolm E. Elliot-Hogg, "The Poetry of Isaiah 40-45: A Typology of Parallelism" (Ph.D. diss., Dropsie College, 1987), 8.

⁶⁰Gunn states, "Part of the critic's task has little to do with definitive meanings but is concerned rather with prompting discriminatory and imaginative re-evaluation of a piece of literature, by drawing into attention particular (often new) interpretative perspective or possibilities." David M. Gunn, "Deutero-Isaiah and the Flood" *JBL* 94 (1975): 494-495.

⁶¹Berlin pointed out that one of the basic principles of determining parallelism is that the parallelism itself creates a word pair, not vice versa. Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 79; see also Fokkelman, *Reading*, 65.

Clark explains how linguists put emphasis on linguistic competence in the context of word association game. When a player is allowed to take his time, he reacts creatively with rich images, memories, or exotic verbal associations. But when he is urged to respond quickly, his associations become more superficial; these responses are much more predictable, which almost everyone else gives to the same stimulus. Herbert H. Clark, "Word Associations and Linguistics Theory" in *New Horizons in Linguistics*, ed. John Lyons (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1970), 272-273.

⁶²Commenting on the importance of word play in the Hebrew Bible, Noegel writes, "word plays manipulate memory by forcing readers to recall through association and to bring into contrast figures, themes, and events." Scott B. Noegel, "Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats: Jacob and Laban's Double Talk" in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda: CDL, 2000), 163. Blenkinsopp lists twelve words with double meanings in Isa 57:3-13. Despite the fact that he did not make a similar list for other sections of the passages we are concerned with, it serves as a clue as to how the poems in Isaiah 56-59 are saturated with word play. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 162-163.

Bible.⁶³ Fourth, the unifying features between the strophes that contribute to the thematic unity of each poem will be highlighted.⁶⁴ The analysis of each poem will comprise Chapters 2 through 5, which is the main part of this study.

In Chapter 6, the synthesis of the findings of the study will be presented, with focus on the interconnections between the themes of justice, cult, and salvation, and how these themes serve as the unifying logic of Isaiah 56-59, followed by a presentation of summary and conclusion of the findings of the study. Since the concern of the study is

⁶³“The term intertextuality, popularized by especially Julia Kristeva, is used to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text is inseparably inter-involved with other texts, whether by its open or covert citations and allusions, or by its assimilation of the formal and substantive features of an earlier text or texts, or simply by its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistics and literary conventions and procedures that are ‘always ready’ in place and constitute the discourses into which we are born.” Meyer Howard Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1993), 285.

In the same vein, utilizing insights from Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theory, Vines notes, “[T]he resources of language and genre that an author uses to express his intention belong not solely to the author but also to the surrounding culture in which the author is embedded. The use of these common cultural resources engages the author in a kind of dialogue with others who are using the same resources in similar ways. To be properly understood, a literary work should be situated within an ongoing dialogue with other works that share a similar form-shaping ideology or genre.” Michael E. Vines, “The Apocalyptic Chronotope” in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 112.

With regard to of intertextuality in Biblical studies Carroll writes, “[E]very text makes its reader aware of other texts. It insists on intertextual reading. . . it is possible to demonstrate the self-evident nature of the intertextuality of the Bible by referring to what is already known about that collection of many books that we call ‘the Bible.’” Robert P. Carroll, “Intertextuality and the Book of Jeremiah: Animadversions on Text and Theory” in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Cheryl J. Exum and David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 58.

⁶⁴The term “theme” can stand as the general concept. Thus Abrams, *Glossary*, s.v. “Motif and Theme,” or the central idea or thesis of certain literary work. See Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, *Literary Terms: A Dictionary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1960), s.v. “Theme.” Such understanding of “theme” refers to the topic of the work. But this term may also be assigned to ideas that emerge from various aspects of textual elements. Such textual elements are designated by the term “motif”; the idea that emerges from motifs is the theme. While “theme” as topic stands as generalization of the work, “theme” emerging from motifs is ideas with which textual elements are pregnant within their contextual and structural coherence. See Eugene H. Falk, *Types of Thematic Structure: The Nature and Function of Motifs in Gide, Camus, and Sartre* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago, 1967), 2-3.

both literary and theological, the methodology employed here can be termed as a literary-theological analysis.⁶⁵

The Working Procedure

The analysis in Chapters 2 through 5 is carried out with two main purposes. First, a discussion of the literary and theological features of each sub-unit in the text is conducted to uncover its main themes. Second, based on the thematic features of the individual sub-units, the integrating and unifying rhetorical structures and how they contribute to an overall literary unity and depict certain theological message are contemplated.

The plan of the study goes as follows:

(1) In the beginning, a general outline is presented to provide a sense of the structure of the passage. A closer examination of the text of Isa 56-59 is conducted after the order of the given outline.

(2) The analysis of the text is according to the strophes. In the presentation, the strophes are presented first in Hebrew, followed by the English translation, and they will be dissected into smaller syntactic units. The presentation of the text is in the form of

⁶⁵Basically it is an approach employing rhetorical criticism in reading biblical text, with focus on how the text conveys its message; an attempt to understand how form is related to meaning, that content is illuminated through literary features. See Alvin L. Thompson, *Literary Patterns and Theological Themes in the Gospel of Mark* (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 54. Also, among others, Bozak, *Life Anew*, 16; John C. Collins, "What Happened to Adam and Eve? A Literary-theological Approach to Genesis 3" *Presbyterion* 27 (2001): 12-44; Meishi Tsai, "Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision: A Literary and Theological Analysis," *Sino-Christian Studies* 2 (2006): 53-76.

syntactical display.⁶⁶ The main clause starts at the right side of the page for the Hebrew text, while for the English translation, it starts at the left. Subordinate clauses are indented. Second, third, and further levels of subordinate clauses are indented. All elements belonging to the same textual level are lined up directly under one another, with the same degree of indentation.⁶⁷

(3) Next, after the presentation as a strophe, the discussion of the text is based upon each individual clause. Each clause will be presented again both in Hebrew and subsequent discussions will follow to explore the literary and theological elements of the respective clause.

(4) At the end of these chapters a thematic summary will be presented to highlight the unifying features.

In Chapter 6, based on the insights of the reading conducted in Chaps 2-5, Isa 56-59 will be read as a whole. The themes of justice, cult, and salvation will be highlighted, emphasized, and interconnected and their implications will be presented.

Determining the Boundaries of the Passage

There are some indications that a new theme is introduced in Isaiah 56. John Goldingay noted that **נִשְׁפָּט** and **צְדָקָה** are a word pair in the Old Testament and in the book of Isaiah. Their absence in Isaiah 40-55 indicates that Isaiah 56 is the beginning of

⁶⁶Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 99; 166-173; Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1996), 53, 56-57.

⁶⁷Müller, *Microstructural*, 56.

the last parts of the book.⁶⁸ Shalom M. Paul observed that, for the first time in the book of Isaiah, salvation is conditional with the announcement in Isaiah 56. This thematic shift may indicate that a new section in the book of Isaiah begins with Isaiah 56.⁶⁹ It may be noted that the blessings announced in Isa 56:1-7 are conditional. In Isa 59:20, the beneficiaries of the coming of the redeemer are described as “those who turn from transgression in Jacob”—in which the syntax put emphasis on the act of repentance. The poems in Isa 56-59 deal with various aspects of repentance and reformation. This thematic inclusion indicates that these chapters of the book of Isaiah may be read as one unit.

Not all who read Isaiah 56-59 with a synchronic approach consider these chapters as a unit. The problem lies in the position and function of the opening and concluding passages of these chapters. Paul Smith, for example, considered Isa 56:1-8 as an independent unit by itself.⁷⁰ Odil Steck viewed Isa 56:1-8 as a part of the section that begins with Isa 55:5. For him, the content of Isa 56:1-8 is parallel to 55:5-13 and in this regard, they complement each other. First, there is a close relationship between the command to seek the Lord while he is “near” in 55:6 and the command to keep justice and do righteousness as an anticipation of the “nearness” of God’s salvation in 56:1-2.

⁶⁸נשפט and צדקה as word-pair are found in Isa 1:27; 5:7, 16; 9:6; 28:17; 32:16; 58:2 59:9, 14. Both words appear in Isa 54:17, but in separate connections. Therefore, “their absence otherwise in Isaiah 40-55 stands in contrast to their more frequent appearance in the first and last parts of the book. It reflects a difference in emphasis between its different parts”. John Goldingay, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56-66* (London: Bloombury, 2014), 65.

⁶⁹Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 447.

⁷⁰Paul A. Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth, and Authorship of Isaiah 56-66* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1995), 66.

Second, the admonition to forsake the evil ways and return to the Lord, who is merciful, in Isa 55:7 is being developed in 56:3-8, where the most impossible candidates of salvation, the eunuchs and foreigners, are accepted into God's flock. Third, promises to the foreigners and eunuchs in 56:3-8 are considered as a fulfillment of Isa 55:8-11, which states that God's thoughts and ways are far beyond human comprehension. Finally, Steck pointed out a connection between the 'catch-word' ('catch-phrase') "an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed" in 55:13b with the promise of "an everlasting name that will not be cut off" to the eunuchs in 56:5.⁷¹

Christopher Seitz saw a connection among between Isa 54:1-17, 55:1-13, and 56:1-8 as "a roughly continuous section of discourse, with the word "covenant" as the connecting element."⁷² John D. W. Watts was of the opinion that Isa 56:1-8 is an integral part of the section that begins in Isa 54:17c. For him, there were two phrase points that make the theme of this section relevant: the first point is נחלה, "heritage," which refers to the inheritance of the land and participation in Temple service; and second, the phrase עבדי יהוה, "servants of Yahweh." He noticed how, up to Isa 54, the term "servant" has been singular, referring to God's chosen people or God's chosen ruler. From here to the end of the book, only the plural form for "servant" is used.⁷³

Regarding the relationship between the concluding part of Isa 59 and the previous chapters, Alec Motyer, who basically viewed Isa 56-59 as a literary unit, considered the

⁷¹Steck, "Beobachtungen," 228-246.

⁷²Christopher Seitz, "The Book of Isaiah 40-66," *NIB* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 6:465.

⁷³John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 244.

last part of chapter 59, starting from v. 14, as a part of Isa 59:14-60:22.⁷⁴ He perceived how the promise of the coming of “righteousness” in Isa 56:1 is fulfilled by the description of God’s action in Isa 59:15c-17c by these words: “The Lord looked . . . saw . . . was appalled . . . put on righteousness . . . salvation . . . vengeance.”⁷⁵ As this event is about to take place, Isa 56-59 describes what had happened in between.⁷⁶ However, he also considered Isa 59:14-21 as an introduction to a section that continued to 63:6.⁷⁷ Thus, while others looked at Isa 59:14-21 as the conclusion of 56:1-59:21, Motyer saw it as an introduction to the next section, and to highlight his argument, he created a table as displayed in Table 1⁷⁸.

This question, whether Isa 56:1-8 and 59:14-21 belong to the previous section or to the following section, can be explained by saying that these passages functioned as a link between two different sections. They stand as the conclusion of the previous section and at the same time, serve as an introduction to the following section.⁷⁹ This phenomenon may be best described as “interlocking”; a literary device “whereby a

⁷⁴Alec J. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 489ff. See also Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*. Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster), 352, 437; Kang-Ho Kil, “The Light and Darkness Motif in the Book of Isaiah: A Textlinguistic Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005), 240-241.

⁷⁵Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 489.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷*Ibid.* See also Matthew J. Lynch, “Zion’s Warrior and the Nations: Isaiah 59:15b-63:6 in Isaiah’s Zion Traditions,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 244-263.

⁷⁸Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 489.

⁷⁹According to Hanson, “Isaiah 56:1-8 forms a fitting link between Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah.” Paul Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Knox, 1995), 193. As for Isa 59:21, Scullion considers it as a bridge between what precedes and what follows. John J. Scullion, *Isaiah 40-66* (Wilmington: Michael Glazer, 1982), 169.

Table 1. Thematic map of Isa 59:14-63:6

59:14-60:22	61:1-9	61:10-62:12	63:1-6
Preface: situation (59:14-15a) and reaction (15b-20)			
An anointed One Covenant-mediator (59:21)	An anointed One Good news at the time of salvation and vengeance (61:1-3)	The work of salvation and righteousness gladly undertaken (61:10-62:7)	The day of vengeance and the year of salvation (63:1-6)
Glorious Zion The gathering of people from all the world, the servant nations (60:1-22)	Glorious Zion Resident people: the Lord's priests, the servant nations (61:4-9)	Glorious Zion Secure forever, the people gather, the Savior comes (62:8-12)	

segment serves as a literary hinge or transition, serving both as a conclusion to a preceding section and as an introduction to a following section.”⁸⁰

Isaiah 56-59 as a Unit

In his study on Isaiah 56-59, Polan demonstrated the unity of these chapters both thematically and structurally. Structurally, the declaratory formula in the opening and concluding phrases in Isa 56:1-2 and Isa 59:20-21 can be considered as an inclusio or “distant parallelism” that envelops these chapters into a literary unit. He elaborated his

⁸⁰George K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 112; see also Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976), 14-15; Anthony R. Ceresko, “A Poetic Analysis of Ps 105, with Attention to its Use of Irony,” *Bib* 64 (1983): 36; and Paul R. Raabe, “Daniel 7: Its Structure and Role in the Book” *HAR* 9 (1985): 272-273.

point by indicating how the phrase **כִּי־קְרוּבָה יְשׁוּעַתִּי לְבוֹא** [for it is near for my salvation to come] in Isa 56:1b is related to the phrase **וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל** [and come to Zion redeemer /deliverer] in Isa 59:20a. He argued that in both phrases, the root **בוּא** appears and the term **יְשׁוּעָה** [salvation] is synonymous with **גּוֹאֵל** [redeemer].⁸¹ Thematically, the theme of God’s initiated salvation matches the opening part of Isaiah 56 with the concluding part of Isaiah 59. The promised “salvation” and “deliverance” in 56:1 is brought into realization by the “Redeemer” himself in 59:20, and the recipient of this divine intervention is he who restrains himself from doing “evil” (56:2) or turns away from “transgressions” (59:20).⁸² In addition to the arguments above, the unity of Isaiah 56-59 can also be perceived from another perspective, that is, from its discourse and rhetorical patterns.

Arguments from the Rhetorical Pattern

Isa 56-59 begins with a formal prophetic formula—**כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה**, “thus said the Lord”—and this formula of prophetic discourse in its various forms is dispersed throughout these four chapters.

The fact that a divine speech formula is absent in Isaiah 54-55⁸³ and 60-63 may be

⁸¹Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 18-19.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³There is a repeated recurrence of indication of divine speech in Isa 54-55 (54: 6, 8, 10, 17; 55:8), but they consistently stand as an emphatic conclusion of an oracle. Here in Isa 56 onward, the prophetic formula serves as a formal opening of a speech.

Table 2. Prophetic speech formula in Isa 56-59

Text	Prophetic Speech Formula	
56:1	כה אמר יהוה	thus said the Lord
56:4	כי־כה אמר יהוה	because thus said the Lord
56:8	נאם אדני יהוה	declares the Lord God
57:15	כי כה אמר רם ונשא שכן עד וקדוש שמו	because thus said, “the high and the lofty one” “who was established for ever” “and holy is his name”
57:19	אמר יהוה	said the Lord
57:21	אמר אלהי	said my God
58:14	כי פי יהוה דבר	because the mouth of the Lord had spoken
59:20	נאם יהוה	declares the Lord
59:21	אמר יהוה	said the Lord

taken as an indication that there is an intention to have this section to be treated as a single entity.

Isaiah 56-59 can be divided into 4 different poems: Isa 56:1-8; 56:9-57:21; 58, and 59.⁸⁴ There are indications that these poems share some basic rhetorical patterns:

1. They begin with God’s speech (56:1-2; 56:9-11; 58:1-2; and 59:1-2). The speeches consist of a command and are followed by the rationality of that command,

⁸⁴There is a debate regarding the scope of Isa 56:9-57:21. This passage is viewed to be too long to be considered as a unit, therefore it had to be divided into two or even more sections. They considered 57:3-21 as an entity in itself, separated from Isa 56:9-57:3. See for example Elizabeth Achtemeier, review of *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56-59*, by Gregory Polan, in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 512. But the length of the passage does not necessary mean that the passage is not a unit. For example, Seitz, supporting Polan, argues that the passage can be considered as a unit even though it is long. Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” 6:465.

except for Isa 59:1-2, where there is no command, only a rationality of the situation that the audience is experiencing.

2. The speeches are followed by a quotation of the audience's response to God's initial statement (56:3; 57:12; 58:3; and 59:9-15a).

3. The audience's statement receives an answer from God in a more extended speech.

4. These divine speeches are concluded by a kind of "signature" statement. The close reading of these four chapters of the book of Isaiah will follow these rhetorical indicators.

This pattern suggests a kind of "dialogue." Luis Alonso Schökel described this technique as the most frequent cases in prophetic literature in which "the prophet *cites the words* of the hearers or of others *in order to refute them*. . . Sometimes the text will give a signal to identify the citation; on other occasions the reader must understand this on his own initiative."⁸⁵ In the case of Isaiah 56-59, the signal for this style of dialogue is detectable.

⁸⁵Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 174, italics by the author. Bakhtin, analyzing Fyodor Dostoevsky's literary work, he coined the term "polyphonic"—meaning in a single literary work one finds different point of views, consciousness, and voices. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 93. Kang, building on Bakhtin, explains that "Bakhtin believes that dialogism is possible in a formal monologue as long as the monologue contains interaction between independent point of views. Conversely, dialogue between two speaking subjects can be monologic when the dialogue consists of mere repetition of the same viewpoint or the evolution of the same idea. Therefore, from the perspective of Bakhtin's dialogism the oxymoron of "dialogic monologue" or "monologic dialogue" is possible." Eun Hee Kang, "The Dialogic Significance of the Sojourner, the Fatherless, and the Widow in Deuteronomy Through an Analysis of Chronotopes Using Bakhtin's Reading Strategy" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2009), 28. Based on this insight, Isa 56-59 can be categorized as a "dialogic monologue".

CHAPTER 2

ISAIAH 56:1-8: THE UNIVERSAL SCOPE OF SALVATION; SALVATION IS CULTIC IN NATURE

The poem in Isa 56:1-8 is the first set of “dialogues” in Isaiah 56-59. While God is presented as the speaker throughout the poem, in some parts, there are quotations of the speeches of foreigners and eunuchs. In its broadest sense, the outline of this passage is as follows: first, the prologue, announcement, and exhortation in regard to universal salvation (vv. 1-2); second, promises given to extreme prototype-of-salvation recipients: foreigners and eunuchs (vv. 3-7); and finally, the epilogue, the Lord as the gatherer of Israel (v. 8). The structure that the prophetic speech formula uses is to introduce God, who announces the coming of his salvation in v. 1, and concludes with the divine epithet, “the Lord who gathers the dispersed ones of Israel,” in v. 8. This makes this passage a distinct unit bound by a thematic unity.¹

The salvation announced in this speech is characterized by universalism and cultic allusions. The universal character of the salvation is hinted at with reference to אֲנִישׁ /

¹The announcement in Isa 56:1, “keep justice, do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come [בִּיֹא] and my righteousness to be revealed,” is concluded by the signature in v. 8, “says the lord God, the one who gathers [קִבֵּץ] of the dispersed Israel, also I will gather [קִבֵּץ] unto him those who have been gathered.” Polan considers the distribution of the words בִּיֹא / קִבֵּץ in vv. 1 and 8 as a device that unites the poem. He lists the occurrence of the terms as parallel pairs in Isa 43:5; 49:18; 60:4 and 66:18. Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 51n13.

בְּנֵי-אֲדָמָה as the potential beneficiaries of the announced salvation (v. 2), and furthermore, emphasized by reference to the foreigner and eunuchs, as the addressee of God’s speech (v. 3). Finally, it is highlighted in v. 7 by the statement that the house of the Lord will be called “a house of prayer for all people [כָּל-הָעַמִּים].” At the same time, the description of the salvific experience promised in this passage is saturated with cultic imageries and themes in terms of location and activities (vv. 4-7).

Stanza 1: Announcement of Salvation (Isa 56:1-2)

Strophe 1: The Call to Keep Justice and to Practice Righteousness (Isa 56:1)

Isa 56:1 – The Call to Keep Justice and Practice Righteousness

1aA	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
1bA	שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט
1bB	וַעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה
1cA	כִּי־קְרוּבָה יְשׁוּעָתִי לְבוֹא
1cB	וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לְהִגָּלוֹת:
Translation ²	
1aA	Thus said the Lord:
1bA	“keep justice
1bB	and do righteousness,
1cA	for it is near (for) my salvation to come
1cB	and my righteousness to be revealed.

²The translation is provided to help the reader follow the display of the text. The focus here is not to give a polished translation, but more to reflect the structure and syntax of the text, to show various literary devices at work there. Issues regarding various readings and interpretations of a given text are treated in the discussion of the study.

It is noticeable that, in these two strophes, after the prophetic messenger formula in the opening (1aA), the following four sub-units are presented in parallelism: (1) God's announcement/command (1bAB); (2) the rationale of the command (1cAB); (3) the announcement of blessing to those who fulfill the command (2aAB); and (4) the specification of fulfillment of the command (2bAB).

Isa 56:1a – The Prophetic Messenger Formula

56:1aA כה אמר יהוה

This is a prophetic messenger formula that opens not only Isa 56:1-8, but also the whole section of Isaiah 56-59. This formula can be taken as an indication of a new section in the book, inasmuch as the last speech formula before this one is in Isa 52:5.

Isa 56:1b – Command to Keep Justice

56:1bA שמרו משפט

56:1bB ועשו צדקה

Parallelism: שמרו / ועשו and משפט / צדקה. It is a grammatical and semantic parallelism. Both clauses are in the order of verb (imperative) followed by object. Both nouns, משפט and צדקה, are a well-known word pair in the Hebrew Bible and are considered as hendiadys³ that commonly stand as a summary of God's law (Exod 19:5a; Deut 6:5; Mic 6:8).⁴ It is also used to state the ultimate purpose of the election of

³Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 34.

⁴For Whybray "[T]he phraseology perhaps suggests that the author is thinking of obedience to a codified law." *Isaiah 40-66*, 197; see also Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 248. Compared to Isa 58:2, משפט and צדקה

Abraham in Gen 18:19: to create a God-fearing community with its characteristic of doing **צדקה** and **משפט**.⁵

Isa 56:1c – Reason for the Command

56:1cA כִּי־קְרוּבָה יִשׁוּעַתִּי לְבוֹא

56:1cB וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לְהַגְלוֹת

The causal clause **כִּי־קְרוּבָה** governs both cola, and they are in syntactical and semantic parallelism. Syntactically, the order is noun with first person possessive pronoun suffix, followed by verb (infinitive) with preposition particle **לְ**; while the semantic parallelism is **יִשׁוּעַ / צַדִּיק** and **בוֹא / גְלוּ**. The reappearance of the root word **צַדִּיק** functions as a catchword that connect the first and the second parts of the verse.⁶ Furthermore, the pair **יִשׁוּעַ / צַדִּיק** gives a different nuance of meaning to the term **צַדִּיק**: inasmuch as the meaning in v. 1b is in the judicial realm, whereas in v. 1c, it is more in the salvific realm.⁷

are “hendiadys denoting social justice, which is the collective responsibility of the entire nation.” Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 451.

⁵Hamilton notes that the similar phrase **וּמִשְׁפָּט וְצַדִּיקָה** in Gen 18:19 appears much less frequently than **וּמִשְׁפָּט וְצַדִּיקָה**. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 19n3.

According to Westermann, the particular purpose of Abraham’s calling in this passage seems to emphasize him more as “the father of **מִשְׁפָּט** and **צַדִּיקָה**,” not the father of faith as in Gen 15:6. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 288. For Sarna, this inculcation of moral values constitutes the richest and most enduring of legacies. Nahum Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 131. Weinfeld’s observation can be added here, that the prophets of Israel saw the fulfillment of this goal of performing righteousness and justice “as the basis of the nation’s existence.” *Social Justice*, 7. Paul, as he observed concerning the scope covering the terms **אָנוּשׁ** and **בֶּן־אָדָם**, understood that the call to practice justice and righteousness is not limited only to Israel, but extends to all people. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 450.

⁶Westermann points out the uniqueness of this arrangement: “the catchword which makes the connection, ‘do *sedaqa*, for my *sedaqa* comes’, is a strange one, for the same word has a different meaning in the two parts of the sentence.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 309.

⁷For Motyer, the Lord’s righteousness in this particular context is “a work of *salvation*, i.e. rescue

John Oswalt observed this change of tone in the nuance of the meaning of the term צדק in Isa 56-66, inasmuch as the word-pair צדקה and משפט is being used again in Isa 56:1 for the first time since its last appearance in the book of Isaiah in Isa 33:5. In the earlier part of the book, “righteousness” is understood as “morally correct behavior, whether of God or human beings,”⁸ whereas in Isaiah 56-66, the motivation of doing righteousness is not out of fear of impending doom, but more as “the recognition that God is going to mercifully and righteously keep His covenant promises.”⁹

Strophe 2: Promise of Blessing (Isa 56:2)

2aA	אשרי אנוש יעשה-זאת
2aB	ובן-אדם יחזיק בה
2bA	שמר שבת מחללו
2bB	ושמר ידו מעשות כל-רע
Translation	
2aA	Blessed is the man who does it
2aB	the son of man who holds it fast:
2bA	keeping the Sabbath from profaning it
2bB	and keeping his hands from doing all evil.”

and deliverance, for his people.” *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 464, italic by the author. Childs translates the term צדקה here as “deliverance.” *Isaiah*, 455. This understanding of the meaning of the term צדקה is comparable with its usage in Judg 5:11—a hymn praising the Lord for the deliverance he provides for his people through Barak and Deborah. The poem speaks of this salvific act as צדקת-יהוה. Boling understands the term as “Yahweh’s victories;” explaining that literally it means “his righteous acts, by which he vindicates his own saving prerogatives.” Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 6A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 111. Lindars, in the same vein, writes, “the basic idea is vindication rather than justice as moral quality.” Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 247; see also Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 229.

⁸Oswalt, “Righteousness in Isaiah,” 1:184-185.

⁹Ibid., 1:188.

The universal tone of the announcement is reflected in its recipients: **אנוש** and **בן-אדם**.¹⁰ When the two terms are used together, most of the meaning is to signify the common nature of humanity in the sense of their vulnerability;¹¹ however, only in Isa 56:2 are the terms employed in the context of potential access to blessing.

The verbs **שמר** / **עשה** reappear in v. 2 and function, not only as an echo of the announcement in v. 1, but also as an amplification, see Table 3.¹² The fact that in v. 2, the verb **שמר** appears twice in bicolon 2b, while in 2a the parallelism is **עשה** / **חזק**, and the words **שמר**, **עשה** and **חזק** reappear again in vv. 4 and 6 as a description of the

Table 3. Reappearance of the verbs שמר / עשה in Isa 56:1-2

	Text	Keywords
56:1bA	שמרו משפט	שמר
56:1bB	ועשו צדקה	עשה
56:2aA	אשרי אנוש יעשה-זאת	עשה
56:2aB	ובן-אדם יחזיק בה	שמר
56:2bA	שמר שבת מחללו	שמר
56:2bB	ושמר ידו מעשות כל-רע	עשה / שמר

¹⁰See Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 450.

¹¹In Job 25:6 the terms are used in the context of human insignificance, comparable to worm. In Job 36:25, they are in the context of a witness of God's greatness. In Ps 8:4 the meaning of the expression is ambiguous, since v. 3 emphasizes human insignificance in comparison to heavenly bodies, yet v. 5ff elaborates his important position over other creatures. In Ps 90:3 the terms appear in the context of human mortality. The content of Ps 144:3 is comparable to that in Ps 8:4, an expression of human insignificance. In Ps 73:5 the usage of the terms has a neutral connotation, since it merely refers to humanity in general.

¹²Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted*, 134.

characteristics of foreigners and eunuchs, can be taken as an indication of a literary device to unite Isa 56:1-8.¹³

The use of the root עשה in v. 2aA echoes the command to “do righteousness” [עשו צדקה] in v.1, and now it is employed in a blessing pronounced to the one those who “does this” [יעשה־זאת]. In the structure of the verse, the pronouncement of blessing [אשרי] covers both pairs of the bicola. They are a grammatical and semantic parallelism: in the first bicola is between אנוש and בן־אדם, which are synonymous, and in the second bicola between יעשה־זאת and בה יחזיק in which the idea is that by doing “it” [זאת], one is holding on “it” [בה]. The question now is, doing what? Holding on to what?

The function of the demonstrative pronoun “this” (זאת) and the preposition-pronoun combination “in it” (בה) in the phrase “blessed is the man who does *this*, and the son of man who holds *it* fast” (v. 2a) is quite distinct, as can be discerned from the following in Figure 1.

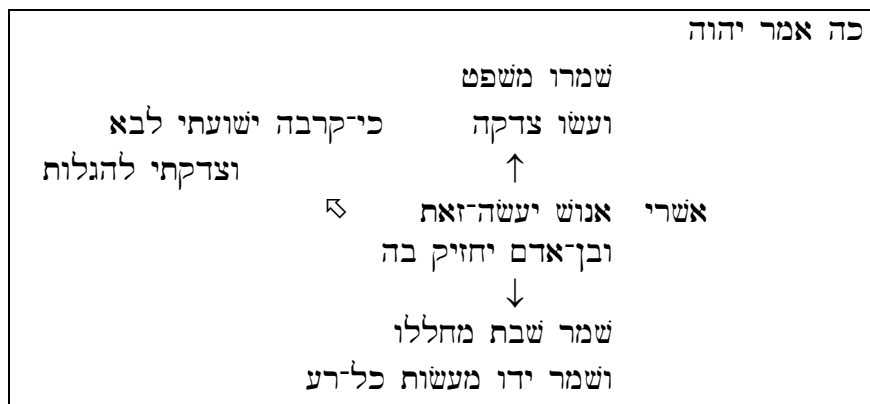


Figure 1. The object of the announcement of blessing in Isa 56:1-2

¹³Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted*, 134.

Scholars differ in their opinions on the object that the text is referring to: (1) Some consider it as referring to the previous colon in v. 1a, the command to keep “justice” and practice “righteousness.”¹⁴ (2) Others look at it as referring to the colon that follows, v. 2b, the keeping of the Sabbath and the refraining from doing evil.¹⁵ (3) Another group of scholars prefers to see it as playing a double function, first referring back to the expression of “justice and righteousness” in v. 1 and, at the same time, pointing to the practice of keeping the Sabbath and refraining from doing evil in v. 2.¹⁶ If we follow the last opinion, the keeping of justice and doing righteousness is being made equivalent to the practice of keeping the Sabbath and keeping one’s hand from doing any evil.¹⁷

In its surface structure, the parallelism *שמר / שומר*; and *מחללו / שבת מעשרת* can be considered as complementary, that keeping the Sabbath holy is to be accompanied by refraining from doing evil. Both cola start with the participial form of *שמר* which is crafted as a contrast to one another. The “keeping” activity has two different directions: in the first colon, as it relates to the Sabbath, it means an active action of

¹⁴Karl Pauritsch, *Die neue Gemeinde: Gott sammelt Ausgestossene und Arme* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971), 34; J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 507; and Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 464.

¹⁵Kissane, *Isaiah*, 209; Volz, *Jesaja II*, 204; Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 62; Leclerc considers it as a rhetorical device of “delayed identification.” *Yahweh is Exalted*, 134.

¹⁶Johann Fischer, *Das Buch Isaias* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1939), 161-171; Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 654; and Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 197.

¹⁷For Blenkinsopp, this prophetic admonition to observe justice and righteousness with further injunction of a specific command (Sabbath observance) and a generic command (avoidance of evil) is given in the context of the imminent parousia. Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Second Isaiah – Prophet of Universalism,” *JSOT* 41 [1988]: 94.

keeping/guarding the Sabbath, to observe it, as if one were portrayed as embracing it.¹⁸ In the second colon, the use of the term expresses just the opposite idea; it means to shun, to hold back from an action, to refrain from doing evil. The fact that the same root in the same grammatical form is employed in both cola may indicate that this colon is to be read as a parallelism, and it is a surprising pair. The keeping of the Sabbath is being paired with keeping one's hand from doing any evil; a specific obedience to a particular commandment is being put at the same level as a broad and overreaching attitude. This lexical design can be considered as an antithesis.¹⁹

As Adele Berlin has noted, a less common pair is actually a product of more careful thought.²⁰ This fact may explain how an “inharmonious” parallelism can be a clue to an important message of the text. In line with this literary consideration, while Whybray called this situation a “strange pairing,”²¹ and Westermann considered it an “awkward parallelism,”²² both of them noticed that this particular parallelism

¹⁸The verb שָׁמַר is a technical term in relation with the weekly Sabbath as well as other yearly Sabbath commandments. Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 77. Goldingay reflected, “Guarding (*samar*) already points to the awareness that the Sabbath needs some protecting; it can be easily profaned. The notion of profanation starts from the fact that there are things that are holy, taken out of ordinary use. In term of time, that applies to the Sabbath.” *Isaiah 56-66*, 70.

¹⁹Pope understands “[T]he antithesis is not in terms of contradiction, thesis and antithesis, but in opposite aspects of the same idea.” Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), LI. See also Joe Krašovec, *Antithetic Structure in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 137.

²⁰Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 69.

²¹Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 197. Gosse notes the significance of the appearance of the word “Sabbath” in this verse, since it contrasts greatly with chaps 1-55 in which the Sabbath only appears in 1:11 and 13-14 as a succession of various celebrations, not a command to observe it. Bernard Gosse, “Sabbath, Identity and Universalism Go Together After the Return from Exile,” *JSOT* 29 (2005): 359.

²²Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 310.

demonstrates the importance of Sabbath-keeping as an indication of one's moral stature.²³

It is probable that the reference to Sabbath observance here is in the context of common human identity, created by God, in which the creation account is climaxed by the account of the seventh-day Sabbath.²⁴ The second admonition, refraining one's hand from doing any/all evil, can also be understood as a universal social gesture among human beings.

The syntax of the announcement in v. 1a indicates that the call to practice justice and righteousness is placed in the foreground with the coming of salvation serving as the background, with the temporal phrase, "for soon," giving a nuance of urgency to this call. In v. 2, this call receives further emphasis with blessing to those who practice them, and a further description of what justice and righteousness implied: keeping the Sabbath and refraining from doing any evil. In this passage, the themes of justice, salvation, and cult—in this case, Sabbath observance—are interwoven.

It is also observable that the repetition of keywords is employed significantly in the presentation of the message. The word צִדְקָה appears twice: first, to describe human practice and second, in reference to God's action. Different words being paired to this word show its rich nuance of meaning. In the initial announcement, the verbs שָׁמַר and

²³“The dissimilarity in kind as between the two halves of the verses discloses the emphasis put upon the particular admonition, the keeping of the Sabbath. In itself, the awkwardness in the drafting of the verse makes one feel that the real point which the admonition wants to make is the only real indication whether a man truly holds to ‘justice and righteousness’, whether he is truly devout, is strict observance of the Sabbath.” Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 310. See also Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 197.

²⁴For Gosse, the cosmic significance of the Sabbath amplified the message of the universality of the salvation. “Sabbath, Identity and Universalism,” 367.

עשה are employed for the command; in the further description, they both re-appear, creating a kind of staircase parallelism:²⁵

keep [שמר] justice
do [עשה] righteousness. . .
blessed is the man who does [עשה] this. . .
keeping [שמר] the Sabbath from profaning it
and keeping [שמר] his hand from doing any evil

That the structure is built to articulate the command, and blessing to those who fulfill it, prompts the reader to read further, to see who is going to fulfill this call and receive the blessing. Furthermore, as the context of the call is the imminent realization of divine salvation, it stimulates a question: How soon it will be realized? If there is a delay, what causes it? The following section of the poem deals with the question of “who” will fulfill the command and receive the blessing, and what the description of the blessing is.

Stanza 2: God’s Speech to the Outsiders (Isa 56:3-7)

This section contains God’s address to the outsiders. These groups of people are traditionally excluded from the worshipping community, the foreigners and eunuchs (Deut 23:1-8).²⁶ Isa 56:3-7 can be divided into strophes:

1. Quotation of the speeches of foreigners and eunuchs (v. 3)

²⁵Staircase parallelism is poetical lines in which the keywords are repeated and the poem proceeds in steps. For discussions on the characteristics of this type of parallelism see Edward L. Greenstein, “One More Step on the Staircase” *UF* 9 (1977): 77; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 150-156.

²⁶Sarna explains that the term “*ben nekhar* is a non-Israelite who resides in the land temporarily, usually for the purpose of commerce. He does not profess the religion of Israel and does not identify with the community’s historical experiences. He is therefore exempted from the religious obligations and restrictions imposed on Israelites.” Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA; New York; Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 63.

2. Speech addressed to eunuchs (vv. 4-5)
3. Speech addressed to foreigners (vv. 6-7).

In its totality, this speech is composed in an ABBA structure:

- A Quotation of foreigner speaks (v. 3a)
- B Quotation of Eunuch (v. 3b)
- B' Speech addressed to eunuchs (vv. 4-5)
- A' Speech addressed to foreigners (vv. 6-7)

Discussion in this section attempts to explore the relationship between the speech to the foreigners and eunuchs with the initial announcement in vv. 1-2: the significance of their inclusion in the coming salvation, the kinds of characteristics that describe their identity, and the descriptions of the salvation promised to them.

Strophe 1: Speeches of Foreigners and Eunuchs (Isa 56:3)

This short strophe contains the speeches of the foreigners and eunuchs as a response to the announcement in the previous verses. The content of the speeches expresses the concerns of foreigners and eunuchs. Both speeches begin with the same **ואל-יאמר** opening formula.

Isa 56:3 – Speeches of Foreigners and Eunuchs

56:3aA		בן-הנכר	ואל-יאמר
56:3aA1		הגלוה אל-יהוה לאמר	
56:3aB	הבדל יבדילני יהוה מעל עמו		
56:3bA		הסרים	ואל-יאמר
56:3bB	הן אני עץ יבש: ס		

Translation

- 56:3aA Let not the foreigner
56:3aA1 who joined himself to the Lord speak, saying:
56:3aB “Surely, the Lord will separate me from his people.”
56:3bA And let not the eunuch say,
56:3bB “I am a dry tree.”

Isa 56:3a – Introduction of the Foreigner

- 56:3aA ואל־יאמר בן־הנכר
56:3aA1 הגלוה אל־יהוה לאמר

This introductory clause of the speech by the foreigner consists of an introductory speech formula and a description about the speaker, presented in a chiastic style, both from the perspective of grammar and word distribution. The structure goes as follows:

- a ואל־יאמר
b הגלוה אל־יהוה / b' בן־הנכר
a' לאמר

Grammatically, it was organized as verb - object - object - verb and the same verb **אמר** serves as an inclusio. Here, the subject **בן־הנכר** receives an amplification as **הגלוה** **אל־יהוה**, a specification that delimits the object of the speech of the Lord: not all foreigners, only those who longed for a specific, intimate relationship with the Lord.²⁷

Isa 56:3aB – Speech of the Foreigner

- 56:3aB הבדל יבדילני יהוה מעל עמו

²⁷Other appearances of this word in plural form are in Isa 56:6 and Esth 9:27. The text in Esther indicates that this term is applied to the proselytes.

This clause expresses the concern of the foreigners: that they will be rejected from becoming a part of the community of God’s people: **הבדל יבדילני יהוה מעל עמו**.²⁸ The wording of this clause is centered on their relationship with the Lord, since it is the Lord himself, they fear, who will reject them, and the purpose of their act of joining is to be *his* people.

Isa 56:3b – Speech of the Eunuchs

56:3bA ואל-יאמר הסרים

56:3bB הן אני עץ יבש: ס

Unlike the foreigners, the eunuchs, here, do not have additional information, probably because they are already God’s people, and the nature of their speech is more a lament about their personal condition: “behold, I am a dry tree.”²⁹

²⁸Reading the text in a post-exilic setting, Tuell considers that Neh 9:2 provides a clue for the situation portrayed here in Isa 56: “and they separated, **ויבדל**, the descendant of Israel, from all foreigner, **בני נכר**, they stand and confess their sins and the transgressions of their ancestors,” and he argues that the term **בני נכר** here is not “foreigner” in generic sense, but refers to an alleged alien living in the land at that particular time. Steven S. Tuell “The Priesthood of the ‘Foreigner’: Evidence of Competing Polities in Ezekiel 44:1-4 and Isaiah 56:1-8,” in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.*, ed. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 201. The emphasis of the report in Nehemiah 9-10, however, is on the separation. There is no report of inclusion of foreigners into the congregation nor that they were assigned priestly functions here in Isaiah 56.

²⁹While this statement is simple and short, **הן אני עץ יבש**, it has a deeper theological implication. Nielsen’s study of the tree metaphor, even though focused on Isa 1-39, is also applicable here: she underlines, “[t]he use of the tree image may vary; but the significant point is always maintained: there is organic correlation in life, nothing happens accidentally.” Kirsten Nielsen, *There is a Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 71. Based on this insight, it seems that the speaker in Isa 56:3, even though he has been faithful to the Lord, as his characteristics given in v. 4 indicate, he is convinced that his condition and status made him naturally to be removed from the reward assigned to the righteous.

In the biblical tradition one of the images for a person is a tree (Jer 11:4; Ezek 17:5ff), and the God-fearing person is likened to a tree planted by the streams of water (Ps 1:3; Jer 8:16). Furthermore, in the book of Isaiah in particular, when God creates “new heavens and a new earth” (65:17), the lifetime of his people is like that of the tree (65:22), which may imply an eternal life. It is interesting that the promise

Strophe 2: God's Speech to the Eunuchs (Isa 56:4-5)

Isa 56:4-5 – God's Speech to Eunuchs

56:4aA	כי־כה אמר יהוה לסריסים
56:4bA	אשר ישמרו את־שבֹּתוֹתַי
56:4bB	ובחרו באשר חפצתי
56:4bC	ומחזיקים בבריתי:
56:5aA	ונתתי להם בביתי
56:5aB	ובחומתי
56:5bA	יד
56:5bB	ושם
56:5cA	טוב מבנים ומבנות
56:5cB	שם עולם את־לֹדֵךָ
56:5cC	אשר לא יכרת: ם
Translation	
56:4aA	“For thus said the Lord to the eunuchs,
56:4bA	who keeps my Sabbaths
56:4bB	chooses what I delight
56:4bC	and holding fast my covenant:
56:5aA	“I will give them within my house
56:5aB	and my walls,
56:5bA	a memorial
56:5bB	and a name;
56:5cA	better than sons and daughters.
56:5cB	An everlasting name I will give him,
56:5cC	which will not be cut off.”

given to the eunuchs in v. 5 is in the context of God's “house” and “walls,” since in Ps 92:13-15 the reward for the righteous is portrayed as being planted in the “house the Lord / in the court of God,” terminology referring to the temple, like the promise in Isa 56:5. For Dahood, the imagery in Ps 92:13-15 carries an eschatological connotation, speaking of immortality, referring to the heavenly palace and courtyard of God. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalm 51-100: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 338. The fact that Ps 92 has a heading as a song for the Sabbath makes it thematically in tune with this promise to the eunuchs, since one of their characteristics is the keeping of the Sabbath (Isa 56:4).

God's response is first addressed to the eunuchs, which covers vv. 4-5 with the outline of the speech addressed to the eunuchs as follows:

- (1) the speech formula (4aA)
- (2) description of the characteristics of the eunuchs (4bABC)
- (3) the gifts given to them (56:5).

Isa 56:4ab – Characteristics of the Eunuchs

56:4aA	כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה לְסָרִיסִים
56:4bA	אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתַי
56:4bB	וּבָחָרוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר חָפְצָתִי
56:4bC	וּמַחְזִיקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:

Isa 56:4 focuses on the characteristics of the eunuchs: keep my Sabbaths, choose what I delight, hold fast to my covenant. This threefold description echoes the announcement of blessing in v. 2, since both verbs שמר and חזק are employed. While the verb שמר has the same object as in v. 2, the Sabbath, in the case of חזק, which in v. 2 does not have a specific object, has a specific object here, the covenant.

The order of the three verbs employed here (שמר, בחר and חזק) expresses a deliberate action of willingness on the part of the eunuch to be with God; it also expresses a development from cognitive to a more affectionate attitude: from keeping and choosing,³⁰ to whole-hearted devotion.³¹ Emphasis on a personal relationship with the

³⁰Motyer noted that the two verbs keeping and choosing are in the form of imperfect of habitual action, which denotes persistence. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 466.

³¹F. Hesse gives one of the meanings of חזק as “whole-hearted devotion.” “חזק,” *TDOT* 4:306.

Lord himself is highlighted by the consistent use of the first person personal pronouns in every object in each colon: *my* Sabbaths; what pleases *me*; *my* covenant.³² From a poetical perspective, the objects of the verbs: Sabbath, חפץ, and covenant may be considered as another example of a combination between a broad expectation from the Lord and his specific requirement, just as in Isa 56:2,³³ with the term חפץ functioning as a link between the Sabbath and the covenant, as an envelope to cover all God's will. This is the first appearance of the word חפץ in Isa 56-59, and it will reappear several more times with its strategic role as a term contrasting the wills of God and the wills of man.

In Isa 56:4 and 6, the foreigners and eunuchs are described, among other things, as “holding fast to My [God's] covenant,” in which there is no elaboration of what the covenant is referring to. A glance at the immediate surrounding context of Isa 56:1-8 shows that the term ברית, “covenant,” appears in Isa 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; and 61:8. Inasmuch as the (re)appearance of the term in 59:21 was considered as one of the keywords that binds Isa 56-59 as a literary unit and at the same time a bridge to the next unit of Isa 60-61,³⁴ it may be suggested that the occurrence of the term “covenant” in Isa

³²John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 458. Westermann notes a shift in religious practice from the level of confessional into a more concrete act of obedience. *Isaiah 40-66*, 313-314.

³³For Halas, the term “Sabbath,” by itself, stands as a figure of speech, a synecdoche—the use of the part for the whole. Roman Halas, “Universalism of Isaias” *CBQ* 12 (1950): 169.

³⁴Polan notes that in the context of Isa 56-66 the word ברית only in Isa 56:4,6; 59:21; and 61:8. He explains how in Isa 56:4,6 and 61:8 the usage of the word highlights the relationship between faithful promise on the part of God on one hand and the importance of fidelity to his message on the other hand. In 59:21 the covenant has to do with bestowal of God's spirit and word to the faithful people. This reference to God's spirit, on the one hand echoes the same theme in Isa 57:15-16 and also anticipates the bestowal of the spirit of God in 61:1. With this background, he concludes that the words “covenant” and “spirit” in Isa 59:21 make this verse function as a hinge verse: it wraps up Isa 56-59 and, at the same time, looks forward to the development of the same theme in the subsequent chapters. *Ways of Justice*, 307-308.

54:10 and 55:3 can be used as a reference for the reading of Isa 56:4, 6. In Isa 54:9-10, the covenant God promised is compared to his covenant with Noah, with whom the concept of the covenant is introduced for the first time in the Bible (Gen 6:18; 9:9-17), and the underlying theme is no more judgment/punishment. In Isa 55:3, the covenant is reemphasized again, now as an “everlasting covenant,” with the perspective of its universality: “nation, גוי, who don’t know, you will call / nation, גוי, you don’t know, will come to you” (v. 5). Reading the theme of the covenant in Isa 56:4, 6 in the context of Isa 54:10 and 55:3ff reinforces the promise of salvation given in vv. 1-2.³⁵

That keeping the Sabbath holy and holding fast to the covenant serve as the condition of the inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs as recipients of the promised salvation given in Isa 56:1-2 may have a deeper literary function. Besides Isa 56:4 and 6, in Exod 31:16, the representation of the Sabbath as an “everlasting covenant” is a part of a command to the Israelites as a whole to keep the Sabbath. In Lev 24:8, it is a part of the priestly instructions regarding the replacement of “the bread of the presence” every Sabbath.

These texts of Exod 31 and Lev 24 are closely interconnected in significant ways and have theological implications. The fact that the replacement of the bread is on a weekly basis instead of daily—like the practice of other ancient Near Eastern cults—among other things, emphasizes a theological connection between the cultic service and

³⁵Some consider that the later part of the book of Isaiah starts with chap. 54 instead of 56. Karl Elliger, *Deuterojesaja in seinem Verhältniss zu Tritojesaja* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), 135-167; Alexander Rofé, “Isaiah 59:19 and Trito-Isaiah’s Vision of Redemption,” in *The Book of Isaiah - Le Livre d’Isaie*, ed. Jacques Vermeylen (Louvain: Leuven University, 1989): 409.

the creation narrative.³⁶ Furthermore, it should be noted that the thoughts and phrases prominent in the “holiness” section of the book of Leviticus saturate this command regarding Sabbath observance in Exod 31:12-17.³⁷ This passage is also a part of the section of the book of Exodus in which its literary connection with the creation story in the book of Genesis is observable.³⁸ Therefore, the interconnection of the two texts highlights the concepts of Covenant, Sabbath, and creation.³⁹

This insight may convey a message that the salvation promised in Isa 56:1-8 is a revitalization of the Creation and Exodus narratives, since the extension of the promise of salvation to בְּנֵי-אָדָם (v. 2), which is creation terminology (Gen 1:26), means that it encompasses all human beings. As the culmination of the creation story is the Sabbath, which was later given to Israel as an “everlasting covenant” during the Exodus, the message of the poem of Isa 56:1-8 indicates that Sabbath observance and holding fast to the covenant are not a unique characteristic only for faithful Israel. They are also characteristics of foreigners and eunuchs who will become partakers of the coming salvation.⁴⁰ Furthermore, their inclusion into the promised salvation includes participation

³⁶Roy E. Gane, “‘Bread of the Presence’ and Creator-in-Residence,” *VT* 42 (1992): 199.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 200.

³⁸*Ibid.*, see also Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy The P Redaction of Ex 25-40,” *ZAW* 89 (1977): 375-86.

³⁹Gane, “Bread of the Presence,” 201.

⁴⁰Bernard Gosse has suggested that Sabbath, identity, and universalism go together. Gosse, “Sabbath, Identity and Universalism,” 359. See also Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 92.

in the temple services (vv. 5 and 7).⁴¹ The promise reaches its climax when “The Lord, the gatherer of the dispersed *Israel*, declares” (v. 8): “My *house*, will be called a house of prayer for *all people*” (v. 7b). Just as in the Exodus, where Israel becomes a kingdom of priests for God (Exod 19:6); in Isa 56, this call becomes universal.⁴²

Isa 56:5 – The Gifts to the Eunuchs

56:5aA	ונתתי להם בביתי
56:5aB	ובחומתי
56:5bA	יד
56:5bB	ושם
56:5cA	טוב מבנים ומבנות
56:5cB	שם עולם אתן-לו
56:5cC	אשר לא יכרתו

Isa 56:5 focuses on the promise given to the eunuchs. As the following diagram shows, the promise given to the eunuchs is specifically in three particular areas:

(1) location of the gift, (2) the gift itself, and (3) a further description of the gift.

Furthermore, they are presented in word pairs:

⁴¹Comparable to the “bread of the presence” which belongs “to the inner, more intimate sphere of the theocentric cult” (Gane, “Bread of the Presence,” 182), here in Isa 56 the “outsiders” are included into inner, more intimate relationship with the God of Israel (Isa 56:8).

⁴²Halas showed that following the message of doom to the nations in Isaiah 34, in the section from Isaiah 35 to 66, there are series of passages dealing with “universal gladness,” by which, in Isa 56:1-8 “the universality of the New Covenant finds expression in more clear terms.” Halas, “Universalism,” 163. However, he was not sure about the function of the theme of Sabbath in this context: “a difficulty here is encountered as to the significance of the ‘sabbath’”. He suggested that the term “sabbath” here is a figure of speech, a synecdoche—the use of the part for the whole. Ibid., 168-169. Based on the insights above, however, it can be argued that reference to the Sabbath, together with the covenant, is an echo of creation and the Exodus, a strategic device to underline this message of the universality of salvation in Isa 56:1-8.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| A. The promise: | I will give them |
| B. Location of the gift: | within my house
and my walls |
| C. The gift: | (a) a memorial
(b) and a name |
| D. Description of the gift: | (a') better than sons and daughters
(b') an everlasting name I will give him
which will not be cut off. |

It is observable that the pairs are supplemental to each other and that they express a sense of comprehensiveness: house / walls; monument / name; sons / daughters; everlasting name / which will not be cut off.⁴³ In this promise, reference to “house” and “walls” addresses the concern of the eunuchs about acceptance into God’s fold; the gifts, a memorial and name, are an answer to the issue raised by the eunuch himself about being a dry tree. From the structure of the text, it seems that reference to the “memorial” receives a qualitative description—“better than sons and daughters”—and the “name” is described in a temporal perspective “everlasting name that will not be cut off.” From a

⁴³While the clause שם עולם את־לֹו אשר לא יכרת seems to be a continuous sentence, in a deeper structure it can be read as a parallelism:

שם עולם את־לֹו
[שם] אשר לא יכרת [את־לֹו]

For explanation on the approach of this reading, see Edward L. Greenstein, “How does Parallelism Mean?” in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 46-52.

stylistic angle, the root נתן in this speech is employed both in the opening and concluding parts: ונתתי להם . . . אתן-לו; both are in the first person with God as the subject. It highlights personal action on the part of God and adds elements of assurance and solemnity to the promise.

With the account of Absalom as a reference, the יד, literally meaning “hand” in v. 5b, refers to a memorial established for one who dies childless.⁴⁴ However, the question is whether this memorial should be understood as literal or figurative.⁴⁵ Franz Delitzsch, referring to Deut 23:13, showed that יד may also mean “a side, and hence a place.”⁴⁶ As the word יד may mean hand, monument, or place; and שם may mean name, testimony, and even a victory stela, Paul suggested that the pair יד ושם “may have been chosen for the multiple meanings of each one of its individual components.”⁴⁷ When the two substantives are joined together, they compose a hendiadys, denoting “a memorial, in this case in lieu of progeny.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴D. W. Van Winkle, “The Meaning of *yād wāšēm* in Isaiah 56:5,” *VT* 47 (1997): 378-385. See also Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 78.

⁴⁵Childs, *Isaiah*, 458. Robert Gordis suggests that יד means offspring. Robert Gordis, “A Note on *yad*,” *JBL* 62 (1943): 341-344.

⁴⁶Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, vol. 2, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 362. See also Childs, *Isaiah*, 458. Among the English Bibles, the New King James version also translates the term as “place.”

⁴⁷Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 454.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 453.

Strophe 3: God's Speech to Foreigners (Isa 56:6-7a)

Isa 56:6-7a – God's Speech to the Foreigners

56:6aA	ובני הנכר
56:6aB	הנלויים על-יהוה
56:6bA	לשרתו
56:6bB	ולאהבה את-שם יהוה
56:6bC	להיות לו לעבדים
56:6cA	כל-שמר שבת מחללו
56:6cA	ומחזיקים בבריתי
56:7aA	והביאותים אל-הר קדשי
56:7aB	ושמחתים בבית תפלתי
56:7aC	עולתיהם וזבחיהם לרצון על-מזבחי

Translation

56:6aA	“And the foreigners,
56:6aB	who join themselves to the Lord
56:6bA	to serve him
56:6bB	to love the name of the Lord
56:6bC	to become to him servants;
56:6cA	All who keep the Sabbath from profaning it
56:6cA	and holding fast to my covenant.”
56:7aA	“And I will cause them to come to my holy mountain,
56:7aB	make them joyful in my house of prayer,
56:7aC	their burnt offerings and their sacrifice will be acceptable in my altar.

After dealing with the eunuchs in Isa 56:6-7, the attention is now turned to the foreigners. While the speech addressed to the eunuchs is characterized by a bicolon, in the address to the foreigners the device is characterized by the use of three prepositional phrases. There are three characteristics of the foreigners, in which their act of joining is described further by three purposes, and the promise given to them is in three components. As the blessing both to all humans and to the eunuchs are in bicolon, the

speech here is in tricolon, indicating a climax.

The pattern of the address to the foreigners is similar to the address to the eunuchs. It starts with a description of their behavioral characteristics, followed by a description of the gifts given to them. Comparable to the speech addressed to the eunuchs, here in the speech to the foreigners, the gifts promised to them also depict God’s personal action, which involves bringing them into a specific location.

Isa 56:6ac – Characteristics of the Foreigners

56:6aA		ובני הנכר
56:6aB	הנלויים עליהוה	

56:6cA	כל-שמר שבת מחללו	
56:6cB	ומחזיקים בבריתי	

The triple characteristics of the foreigners are presented here: (1) joining themselves to the Lord, (2) keeping the Sabbath, and (3) holding fast to God’s covenant. Keeping the Sabbath and holding fast to the covenant echo the call in the announcement in vv. 1-2 and as the characteristics of the eunuch in v. 3. A specific designation that only applied to the foreigners is their act of joining the Lord, and this specification has already been given in v. 3.⁴⁹ Their status as foreigners makes it natural to give emphasis to their decision to “join the Lord.” However, the description of their motivation is significant

⁴⁹Blenkinsopp translates the term הנלויים as the ones “who adhere to [the Lord]” which implies more in the cognitive realm on the foreigners’ attitude toward God. *Isaiah 56-66*, 129. However, to retain the translation as “to join” is more appropriate since it portrays a concrete physical action. Isa 56-59 is quite expressive in portraying concrete actions: keeping one’s hands from doing evil (56:2); putting out one’s tongue (57:4); to quarrel, to fight, and to hit with one’s fist (58:4); satisfy the starving (58:10); hold one’s foot from trampling the Sabbath (58:13); hands defiled with blood, fingers with iniquities, lips spoken lies, tongue mutters wickedness (59:3).

since the wording is flavored with priestly or Levitical terminology.

Isa 56:6b – The Motivations of the Foreigners in Joining the Lord

56:6bA	לשרתו
56:6bB	ולאהבה את־שם יהוה
56:6bC	להיות לו לעבדים

In the clause *לשרתו על־יהוה הנלויים* both verbs, *לשרתו* and *הנלויים* are full of cultic connotations. John L. McKenzie noted that in the word *הנלויים*, its root *לוא* alludes to the name of “Levi,” who among all tribes of Israel has been appointed as the ministering tribe before the Lord in the temple, in which the technical term for their activities is *שרת*, “to minister/serve.”⁵⁰ The use of the term *שרת* with the setting in the temple, like what can be read here in Isa 56:6-7, is the only place where the subject is a non-levitical figure, and even more to the extreme, foreigners.⁵¹

Concerning this situation that foreigners serve as ministers at the temple, Odeberg suggested that there is a connection between Isa 61:6 and Isa 56:2.⁵² The problem with

⁵⁰John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB, ed., William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 20 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 150. That the term *שרת* is attributed to the tribe of Levi, see Deut 10:8; 21:5.

⁵¹Among those who see in the text that foreigners serve the Lord in the capacity of priest and the Levites are Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University, 1985), 118, 128; Blenkinsopp, “Second Isaiah,” 96; and Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 249. However, Olyan is in the opinion that the portrayal of the role of foreigners in this text is just as a regular member of the worshiping community, since all the activities described here are not necessarily restricted to be performed as a cultic functionary. His argument is based on the fact that while the verb *שרת*, “to serve,” “to minister” is used for priestly and Levitical ministry before the Lord, in Ezek 20:32 the term is employed for serving idols made of “wood and stone.” Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Presentation of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000), 92.

⁵²Hugo Odeberg, *Trito-Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66): A Literary and Linguistic Analysis* (Uppsala: Lindequistska Bokhandeln, 1931), 52.

this proposal is that the speech in Isaiah 61 is a blessing promised to the Israelites in particular, in which the foreigners have no participation. They even seem to be excluded in this context (see 61:5). However, Isa 66:21, within the context of the universality of the salvation in vv. 18-21, in which God will take some of the foreigners as priests and Levites, seems to be more relevant as the intertextual explanation for this situation.⁵³

The first characteristic of the foreigner, “the one who joined the Lord,” receives an amplification to describe their motivations further. These clauses deserve further consideration:

56:6bA	לשרתו (a)
56:6bB	ולאהבה את־שם יהוה (b)
56:6bC	להיות לו לעבדים (a')

The structure shows that two different expressions of serving the Lord envelope the idea of loving the name of the Lord: to serve him and to become servants to him. In the expression of ministering to the Lord in a – a', the Lord himself stands as the object: (a) to serve *him* / (a') to become servants to *him*. However, in clause b, in the idea of loving the Lord, the object is indirect, since the object is “the name of the Lord.” The fact that the poetic device here is using “the name of the Lord” instead of his personal pronoun, can be viewed from several angles.

First, the texts emphasize the idea of both the immanence and transcendence of

⁵³For discussions that Isaiah 56 and 66 are closely related and serve as *inclusio* for these chapters, see Karl Elliger, “Der Prophet Tritojesaja,” ZAW 49 (1931): 140; Pauritsch, *Die neue Gemeinde*, 206-209; Childs, *Isaiah*, 542; and Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 79-86.

the Lord: he is close, yet far; he is approachable, yet he is beyond human realm.⁵⁴ Another explanation is that in the cultic context, as in the case of this text, the name of the Lord stands as an alternative term for the divine personality himself. In this sense, to love the name of the Lord is none other than to love the Lord.⁵⁵

Further, the idea of loving the Lord echoes the command in the *shema*: “and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). Some commentators interpreted the command “to love” the Lord here as meaning to serve him in a concrete way, i.e. to obey.⁵⁶ Based on this insight, we can go further to assert that the name of the Lord also stands for his character. Therefore, to love his name is to imitate his character.⁵⁷

It can also be added that there is a possible correlation between this speech and

⁵⁴See Isa 57:15 as the immediate context/reference.

⁵⁵A. S. van der Woude, “שם,” *TLOT*, 3:1362. In the book of Deuteronomy there are two terms for the future place of worship that are used interchangeably: “to place his name” (12:5, 21 and 14:24) and “to make his name dwell” (12:5; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:11). See also Solomon’s prayer in the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:29, 43; 9:3). In Isa 18:7 Mount Zion is called “the place of the Lord’s name.”

⁵⁶Tigay writes, “Nevertheless, love of God in Deuteronomy is not only an emotional attachment to him, but something that expresses itself in action.” Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy; The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, PA, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 77.

⁵⁷To a certain point, the phrase *אהבה יהוה* echoes the command *ואהבה את-שם יהוה* “to love the Lord your God” which appears repeatedly in the books of Deuteronomy (11:13, 22; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20) and Joshua (22:5; 23:11), and it was given in the context of *עבד*, serving the Lord in its most holistic sense. If this connection is intentional, so the idea of serving the Lord in the cultic activities (*שרת*) is to be reflected in one’s whole life and being. Deut 10:12,13 specifies that to love the Lord is related to serving him, by keeping his commands and statutes. For discussions that highlight the imitation of God character as the intention of the Torah, see Bruce B. Birch, “Divine Character and the Formation of Moral Community in the Book of Exodus” in *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. John W. Rogerson, Margareth Davies, Mark Daniel, and Robert Carroll (Sheffield: Sheffield Academics, 1995), 119-135; also Bruce Birch, “Moral Agency, Community, and the Character of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Semeia* 66 (1994): 23-41.

Solomon's prayer during the dedication of the temple.⁵⁸ The fifth petition in the prayer concerns foreigners, הנכרי, who, because of the שם of the Lord, come to the temple or pray toward the temple (1 Kgs 8:41, 42). Ebele Talstra made a contrast between the portrayal of the coming of the foreigners motivated by their love of God's name and the coming of the Gibeonites and Babylonians with deceitful motive (Joshua 9; 2 Kgs 20).⁵⁹ The description of the motive of the foreigner here, "to love the name of the Lord," is in contrast with that of those Gibeonites and Babylonians. The possible connection between Isa 56:6 with Solomon's prayer can be strengthened by referring to the summary of all that God will do for the eunuchs and foreigners, which is summed up in Isa 56:7: "because my house will be called a house of prayer for all people."

Isa 56:7a – The Gifts to the Foreigners

56:7aA	והביאותים אל-הר קדשי
56:7aB	ושמחתים בבית תפלתי
56:7aC	עולתיהם וזבחיהם לרצון על-מזבחי

As the description of the foreigners' motives of joining the Lord are colored with priestly and levitical terms, the promise adds this nuances further. As the location of the promise to eunuchs is specified as "my house" and "my walls," the promise to the foreigners is also specified to take place in three locations: "my holy mountain," "my house of prayer," and "my altar." It is discernable that the description of the locations is

⁵⁸Ebele Talstra, *Solomon's Prayer: Synchrony and Diachrony in the Composition of I Kings 8, 14-61* (Kampen: Pharos, 1993), 122.

⁵⁹Ibid., 183.

moving from broad to specific spheres.⁶⁰ In many occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, the holy mountain is synonymous with the temple, and the altar is the microcosm of its service.

Stanza 3: Concluding Statement (Isa 56:7b-8)

Strophe 1: The “House” as the Locus of Salvation (Isa 56:7b)

56:7bA	כי ביתי
56:7bB	בית-תפלה יקרא לכל-העמים:
Translation	
56:7bA	Because my house,
56:7bB	a house of prayer it will be called, for all people.”

In the context of Isa 56:1-8, the locative climax of the promises in the poem is the “house.” The development of the description of the house in this poem is observable. Starting with v. 5a, the promise to the eunuchs includes a place in God’s house. As to the foreigners, in v. 7a, they will be joyful in “my house of prayer” which is parallel with “my holy mountain,”⁶¹ and finally, this house of prayer will be called “a house of prayer for all nations.” The verb יקרא, “will be called,” in this verse, expresses an activity of naming. It

⁶⁰Motyer sees in this progression of thought a dynamic gesture, how the foreigners were welcomed to the place where the Lord is to be found (my holy mountain), into his presence and his family (my house of prayer), and a guarantee of acceptance and fellowship (my altar). He notes further that the final focus is the altar, a symbol of ultimate encounter with God. In Isa 6:7-8, the prophet Isaiah experiences an encounter with the Lord in the temple in which the altar plays an important role in that event. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 467.

⁶¹Paul sees the connection between “my holy mountain” here with the expression in Isa 27:13, “They shall come and worship the Lord on ‘the holy mountain’, in Jerusalem.” Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 456.

has been observed that in the Hebrew Bible the naming results from events which have occurred.⁶² Thus, the name “a house of prayer for all nations” here in v. 7b anticipates the realization of the event when all nations will worship and pray there.⁶³ This idea is reflected in the syntax of the sentence, in which the phrase “house of prayer” comes before the verb, indicates that the emphasis is on the role of the temple as the house of prayer. Literally, the clause reads, “because my house / a house of prayer / it will be called / for all people.” That the subject of the act of prayer here is “all nations” refers back to the promise of blessing intended for אנוש and בן-אדם in Isa 56:2.⁶⁴

In its own right, the wording in v. 7b functions as a bridge between vv. 1-7 and v. 8. The term “house” in the phrase ביתי, “my house” covers the promise of a place within God’s “house” and “walls” to the eunuchs, and reference to prayer here is more related to the promises to the foreigners. The phrase כל-העמים, “all people” refers back to the terms in v. 2— “human” and “son of man”—and also to eunuchs and foreigners in 3-6; they are all being included in the term “Israel” in v. 8.

⁶²George W. Ramsey, “Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 24-35. That the activity of (re)-naming here reflects a new identity and a new reality for the recipient, i.e. the house, the phenomenon is comparable with Isa 58:12, in which the people will be called (passive mode) “repairer of the breach” and “restorer of paths to dwell in.”

⁶³The clause starts with כִּי which is “a result clause,” it is an expression of God’s intention. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 87.

⁶⁴It is worth noting that while in Isaiah 1 the prayers of the Israelites are unacceptable (vv. 3 and 15), here in Isa 56:7, the prayers are envisioned to be offered by all nations.

Strophe 2: Assurance of Salvation to Israel (Isa 56:8)

56:8aA	נאם אדני יהוה
56:8aB	מקבץ נדחי ישראל
56:8aC	עוד אקבץ עליו לנקבציו:
Translation	
56:8aA	“Says the lord God,
56:8aB	the gatherer of the dispersed Israel:
56:8aC	“also I will gather unto him those who have been gathered.”

Isa 56:8 contains the concluding speech of this unit of Isa 56:1-8, a speech that ends the address to all humans, foreigners, and eunuchs. From a literary perspective, v. 8 builds a connection with the announcement in vv. 1-2: (1) To save / to gather—compare with Ps 147:2, the LORD builds up Jerusalem / He gathers the outcasts of Israel; 1 Chr 16:35; Ps 106:47; Isa 45:20; Zeph 3:19—save / gather. (2) Man / *ben adam*, general / universal human being invited to participate in the coming salvation now being termed as “Israel” from universal to particular. (3) The terminology also serves as an introduction to the following sections of 56:9-59 in which God is at work to win back Israel.

The phrase נאם אדני יהוה is a typical prophetic speech formula and functions as an emphasis either at the end of the divine speech or in the middle of the speech, but never at the beginning as an opening formula.⁶⁵ The name of the Lord receives an

⁶⁵“The normal, most common use of the Yahweh utterance formula [נאם יהוה] is to conclude a rhetorical unit beginning with a *dābār* such as ‘thus says Yahweh’ or ‘the word of Yahweh came.’” H. Eising, “נאם,” *TDOT* 9:110.

The particular prophetic speech formula נאם אדני יהוה appears only in four prophetic books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos. In Isa 3:15 and Isa 56:8, where it functions as a concluding formula; while in Jer 2:19, 22; 49:5; 50:31 and Amos 3:13; 4:5; 8:3, 9, 11, the phrase appears in the middle of divine speech as an emphatic device of its solemnity. Eising explains, as נאם stands at the end of the utterance, it is

extended appellation, in which the root קָבַץ appears three times, indicating that the gathering of the people is emphasized.

The Thematic Structure of Isa 56:1-8

As the analysis above focuses on a verse-by-verse basis of the text, this section attempts to provide an overall thematic structure of the poem of Isa 58:1-8. Several elements contribute to the unity of the passage. The discussion of the unifying elements are divided into three parts: (1) theme, (2) keywords, and (3) thematic reversals.

Thematic Unity

The first strophe opens Isa 56:1-8 with a call to keep justice and do righteousness. This call presents the perspective that God's salvation is about to be revealed. The announcement of the blessing that follows the call specifies the characteristics of those who will enjoy the salvation when it is realized.

Reference to foreigners and eunuchs in the second strophe makes the announced salvation universal in nature. Furthermore, the promises given to them show that the

to emphasize its divine origin and guarantee. Eising, “נִאֲמַר,” 9:110. As for its position in the middle of prophetic speech, he proposes, “in a lengthy discourse the prophet found it appropriate to emphasize that it was ultimately not he who was speaking but God.” Ibid., 9:111.

In Ezekiel, the phrase can appear several times in one chapter; it shows a combination of its appearance in the middle and conclusion of divine speech. In Ezek 11:8 in the middle, but in v. 21 as the conclusion; also in Ezek 14:11, 14, 16, 18, 20, with v. 23 as the conclusion; Ezek 16:8, 14, 19, 23, 30, 43, 48, with v. 63 as the conclusion; 18:3, 9, 23, 30, 32; 20:3, 31, 33, 36, 40, with v. 44 as the conclusion; Ezek 22:12, with v. 31 as the conclusion; Ezek 26:5, with v. 14, and also v. 21 as a conclusion of particular speech; Ezek 32:8, 14, with vv. 16, 31, 32 as a conclusion of particular speech; 36:14, 23, with v. 32 as the conclusion; Ezek 39:5, 8, 10, 13, 20, with v. 29 as the conclusion; and Ezek 43:19, with v. 27 as the conclusion.

In Ezek 5:11; 12:25, 28; 13:8, 16; 17:16; 21:12, 18; 23:34; 29:20; 30:6; 33:11; 34:8, 15, 30; 35:6, 11; 38:18, 21; 44:12, 15, 27; 45:9, 15; and 48:29 the phrase appears in the middle of the speech, while in Ezek 15:8; 24:14; 25:14; 28:10; 31:18; and 47:23 as a concluding speech formula.

themes of salvation and cult are closely connected; they are centered on the temple with cultic functions performed there. Reference to Sabbath observance (vv. 2, 4, 6) strengthens the universality of the salvation announced. The Sabbath is a commemoration of creation, and in this passage its observance is applied to first, אָנוּשׁ, “man,” and בֶּן-אָדָם, “son of man,” and later the eunuch and foreigner. This sets the tone for the vision that the house of the Lord will be called a house of prayer for all people.

Distribution of Keywords

Several words are employed and systematically placed to build the thematic structure of the whole passage. The verb אָמַר, “to say,” is used four times. It appears in vv. 1a, 3a, 3 c, and 4a. The first and the last occurrences are a divine speech formula: כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה. The first is a general announcement intended for all of humanity (see v. 2a), while the last one is specifically addressed to foreigners and eunuchs. The other two occurrences in the middle are the phrase אֶל-יֹאמַר followed by the quotation of the speeches by the foreigner and the eunuch. In a certain sense, this distribution is chiasmic in structure, since the speeches of the Lord envelop the speeches of people who are mainly considered as outsiders.

Another word is שָׁמַר, “to keep / observe.” It occurs in vv. 1b, 2b (2 x), 4b, and 6b. In v. 1b, it is a command to keep מִשְׁפָּט, “justice,” and in v. 2bB it announces blessing upon the person who, with others, keeps his hand from doing any evil. In vv. 2bB, 4b, and 6b, it has the Sabbath as the object. The distribution of this usage of שָׁמַר shows a combination of wide scope of command with the specific one. The consistent appearance

of Sabbath observance assigned to different subjects—all humanity, foreigners, and eunuchs—highlights its importance as the characteristics of the promised salvation. This phenomenon is intelligible in the light of the fact that salvation here is cultic in nature, in which the Sabbath is the climax of the weekly cycle of worship.⁶⁶

Together with *שמר*, the word *חזק*, “to hold fast,” is also distributed evenly among the recipients of the promise of salvation. It appears in vv. 2a, 4b, and 6b. In these occurrences, it is consistently associated with Sabbath observance. In v. 2a the verb *חזק* refers to both the keeping of justice and the practice of righteousness. In vv. 4b and 6b, it has the covenant as the object. At the end of the poem, the verb *קבץ*, “to gather,” appears three times in v. 8 both as a part of divine epithet, “the gatherer of dispersed Israel,” and also to emphasize divine salvific activity; “I will also gather unto him those who had been gathered.”

Reference to the recipient of this coming salvation using different expressions, *אנוש*, “human,” *בן-אדם*, “son of man,” *בן-הנכר*, “foreigner,” *סריס*, “eunuch,” and Israel, shows a tension between universalism and particularism as aspects of the salvation. While it was extended to all humanity, it is in the context of the covenant between God and Israel. All who will enjoy this salvation have to enter into that covenantal relationship and worship God in accordance with what had been revealed to Israel. This last aspect is

⁶⁶In the light of Isaiah 56-66, the emphasis on the importance of the Sabbath observance in Isa 56:1-8 finds its climax in the ending of chap. 66, when the ultimate salvation is realized, in which the description of life in the new heaven and earth is climaxed with reference to Sabbath observance (v. 23).

underlined through different terms to describe the locus of the salvation: *my house, my walls, my holy mountain, my house of prayer and my altar*. Inasmuch as the purpose of this research is to understand the interconnection between the themes of justice, salvation, and cult in Isaiah 56-59, the themes of salvation and cult are noted to stand out in its first poem. The promise of salvation is articulated in cultic terminology.

Thematic Reversals

From a literary perspective, a significant utilization of thematic reversals in Isa 56:1-8 are detectable, and they can contribute as a factor that holds the whole passage together as a unit.⁶⁷ A comparison of the speeches by both the foreigners and eunuchs and those of God shows a reversal. The foreigners, whose characterization is joining themselves to the Lord, indicate that their concern is that the Lord will surely separate them from becoming his people (Isa 56:3a). However, what God will do for the foreigners is bring them to his holy mountain and make them rejoice in his house of prayer (Isa 56:7a). The first reversal in this case is on the level of what the foreigners had done—joined with the Lord, compared to what they think the Lord will do—separate them. What

⁶⁷The use of the term “reversal” here is more in the definition by Holman: “The change in fortune for the protagonist in a dramatic or fictional plot.” C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1986), 412.

Other understandings of the term, for example, offered by Frye, Baker and Perkins, “The thrilling change of luck for the protagonist at the last moment in comedy or tragedy.” Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins, *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 394. However, this kind of understanding is too specific in both the nature (“thrilling change”) and the timing (“at the last moment”); while Catlett’s definition, “Unless the radical reorientation that is observed also employs an element(s) common to the prior and resulting orientation, there is no reversal. The common feature or element may be lexical, structural, grammatical, spatial or temporal,” is too strict. See Michael Catlett, “Reversals in Hosea: A Literary Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1988), 32.

God will do for them is to reverse their fear: instead of separating, he will bring them to his holy mountain, and furthermore, as in a reversal to their concern and fear, he will make them rejoice in his house of prayer.

A similar device is also observable in the speech of the eunuchs and God's response to them. The frustration of the eunuchs is reflected in the exclamatory phrase "behold," and the reference to themselves as a "dried tree" implies no hope for the future, and even a connotation of death (Isa 56:3b).⁶⁸ On the part of God, his speech speaks about giving "an everlasting, עולם, name," a name that will never be "cut off" (Isa 56:5), with an allusion to "eternity."⁶⁹ These occurrences of the device of reversal tied together vv. 3-8 of Isaiah 56.

Another thematic reversal observable in this poem is when the content of the speech in this poem is compared with other parts of the Hebrew Bible. That the promised salvation is extended to the marginalized of society in the context of worship—the foreigners and the eunuchs—reverses the law in Pentateuch. A further reversal is the description of the foreigners, outsiders, who were described as "join[ing] themselves [הנלויים] to the Lord." The participle in this phrase has the root לווה, the same root as the

⁶⁸Beside the meaning "dry," the adjective יבש is frequently used metaphorically in the sense of "decaying." H. D. Preus, "יבש," *TDOT* 5:375. The portrayal of the tree in this phrase is in contrast, for example, with the tree in Ps 1:3, which is transplanted near streams of water, in which some scholars consider this portrayal as "evoking the description of the Garden of Eden," and the description that its leaves never wither is a symbol of immortality. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1-50: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 16 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 4.

⁶⁹Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 459; Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III, Vol. 3: Isaiah 56-66*, Historical Commentary of the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 18-19.

name Levi. As the foreigners draw themselves to the Lord, they are concerned that the Lord will separate them from his people. What happened, however, is just the opposite: in ministering to God, their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable to him—outsiders serving the Lord in the role of a Levite. The consideration from the perspective of theme, the distribution of keywords, and the thematic reversals suggests that there is a certain kind of unity in Isa 56:1-8.

CHAPTER 3

ISAIAH 56:9-57:21: FAILURE ON THE PART OF THE LEADERSHIP, IDOLATRY, AND DIVINE HEALING

Isaiah 56:9-57:21 is the second set of “dialogues” in Isaiah 56-59. The poem opens with God’s invitation to the beasts of the field to come to eat to portray the vulnerable situation of the flocks. The reason for this situation is the lack of interest among the watchers in performing their duties. Despite this, these shepherds encourage each other to eat and drink, and proclaim that tomorrow is going to be better (56:9-12). The poem describes further that failure on the part of leadership resulted in the disappearance of the righteous and the practice of idolatry (57:1-13). Following these presentations of negative situations, the themes switch to promises and acts of healing from God (vv. 14-19). In the ending, there is a contrast between the fates of the wicked and the righteous (vv. 20-21). In older scholarly discussions, this passage was not considered as a single unit. Polan is among the first to have shown its rhetorical unity.¹

¹See Polan for a review of various scholarly positions. *Ways of Justice*, 24-25. As for literary indications of the unity of the passage, see *Ibid.*, 94-101. See also Smith for a review of scholarly treatment of the passage and arguments for its unity. *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 67-71, and Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” 6:489. Among those who criticize Polan’s proposal is Elizabeth Achtemeier, with the main argument that the passage is too long to be considered as a unit. Review of *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56-59*, by Gregory Polan, *CBQ* 50 (1988): 512-513. For support of the notion that prophetic literature is composed of short poems, see Herman Gunkel, “The Prophets as Writers and Poets,” in *Prophecy in Israel*, ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987): 27. This can be disputed by referring to the acrostic poems of Lamentations as an example that a lengthy poem

This poem has two main themes—the sin of the people and God’s healing for them. However, the description of the content can be divided further into four stanzas. The first two stanzas cover the theme of the sin of the people: the absence of salvation and indifference against God. The next two stanzas cover the theme of God’s healing for the people: reconciliation with God and the absence of salvation. The discussion of the texts in this chapter will follow the division of these stanzas.

Connections Between Isa 56:9-57:21 and Isa 56:8

While Isa 56:8 is commonly considered as concluding the speech of the previous section, it can also be read as a transition to the following section. Thematically, there are at least two clues that can be taken into consideration. First, since the portrayal of universal salvation was offered to various recipients such as “human,” “son of man,” “foreigner,” and “eunuch” (Isa 56:2, 3, 4, 6), it was wrapped up with the name “Israel” in v. 8. Furthermore, starting from 56:9 down to the end of chapter 59, the focus of the addresses is shifted to God’s people, “Israel.”² Second, in Isa 56:8, the appellation employed to refer to the Lord is the “gatherer” of the dispersed Israel, with the root קָבַץ repeated three times in this verse. Now, in Isa 56:9, from a thematic perspective, the Lord announces an invitation for the beasts of the field and forest to “gather” to eat, so the idea of “gather” serves as a keyword connection. This observation indicates that Isa 56:1-8 can be considered as a part of the unity of Isaiah 56-59.

can be a poetical unit. See Franke, *Isaiah*, 19.

²The suffix in the phrase “his watchmen” in 56:10 refers to Israel of 56:8. Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:366.

Stanza 1: The Absence of Justice (Isa 56:9-57:2)

As the speeches in Isa 56:2-7 are directed to foreigners and eunuchs, the speech in Isa 56:9-59:20 is addressed to God's people. In this section, in 56:9-57:2, with the focus of the subject changing to the sin of the people, they are addressed in the third person, while in 57:3-13, it is in the second person. The first speech addressed the failure of the watchers to uphold justice (56:9-12), which resulted in the righteous becoming the victims of injustice (57:1-2), and contained a description of the idolatrous activities of the people (57:3-13).

Strophe 1: Failure of the Watchers (Isa 56:9-12)

Isa 56:9-12 – Failure of the Watchers

9aA	כל חיתו שדי
9aB	אתיו
9aC	לאכל
9b	כל-חיתו ביער: ם
10aA	צפו עורים
10aB	כלם לא ידעו
10aC	כלם כלבים אלמים
10aD	לא יוכלו לנבח
10bA	הזים
10bB	שכבים
10bC	אהבי לנום:
10cA	והכלבים עזי-נפש
10cB	לא ידעו שבעה
11aA	והמה רעים
11aB	לא ידעו הבין
11bA	כלם לדרכם פנו
11bB	איש לבצעו מקצהו:

12aA		אתיו אקחה יין
12aB		ונסבאה שכר
12bA		והיה כזה יום מחר
12bB		גדול יתר מאד:
Translation		
9aA	“All the beasts in the field,	
9aB		come,
9aC		to eat!
9b	All the beasts in the forest.”	
10aA	“His watcher is blind,	
10aB		they all do not know,
10aC		they all mute dogs:
10aD		not able to bark,
10bA		dreaming,
10bB		lying down,
10bC		love to sleep.”
10cA	“And the dogs had strong appetite,	
10cB		do not know satiation.
11aA	While they are watchers/shepherds,	
11aB		they don’t have understanding:
11bA		all after their own ways before them
11bB		each, after unjust gain, all of them.”
12aA	“Come, let me take wine,	
12aB	let us drink strong drink,	
12bA	[for] it will be like today, tomorrow!	
12bB	Even much better.”	

Thematically, Isa 59:9-12 is structured in a chiasmic way:

- A invitation (v. 9)
 - B the watchers (v. 10)
 - C the dogs (v. 10b)
 - B1 the shepherds (v. 11)
 - A1 invitation (v. 12)

Both A and A1 are invitations with the summons **אתי**, “to come,” serving as an *inclusio*.³

While in A, the Lord invites the beasts to come to eat the flock as a result of the carelessness on the part of those who are supposed to be their shepherds, in A1, in their carelessness, the shepherds encourage one another to come to enjoy wine. It is followed by a description of the leaders, in which they are referred to as watchmen (B) and shepherds (B1). In the center (C), there is a description of a dog, which is the metaphor for these leaders.

Watchmen, shepherds, and dogs, they all share similar characteristics: **לא ידע**, “they have no knowledge.” The watchmen are designated as **לא ידעו**, “they do not know;” the dogs, as **לא ידעו שבעה**, “they do not know satiation;” whereas the shepherds, as **לא ידעו הבין**, “do not know discernment.”⁴ In the description of the dogs, the first part elaborates the theme of the blindness of the watchmen, and the second part focuses on another aspect of the leaders, their greediness, which is applied directly to the shepherds in v. 11.

Isa 56:9 – Invitation to the Beasts

9aA	כל חיתו שדי
9aB	אתיו
9aC	לאכל
9b	כל-חיתו ביער: ס

³Motyer considers the invitation to eat and drink connects vv. 9 and 12 and makes them a pair. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 468.

⁴The first appearance of **לא ידעו** as it is attributed to the watchmen is ambiguous: it does not have any modifier. Westermann is tempted to add the phrase “of how to take notice” to it, in order to make it parallel with the description of the shepherds in v. 11b. *Isaiah 40-66*, 318.

The invitation to the beasts in v. 9 is arranged where the ending phrase is an echo of the opening, with a variation between field and forest; it has two imperatives in the middle, which is structured as a developed progression from “to come” to the climax, “to eat.”

Reading this invitation against the background of Isa 56:1-8 and the description of what follows in 56:10-12 shows an element of irony. First is the term כל, “all,” in the opening and ending phrases of the verse. The phrases כל חיתו שדי and כל-חיתו ביער in this verse echo the phrase כל-העמים in Isa 56:7. Second, in the light of Joel 2:22, in which the message/promise of salvation is also extended to the beasts of the field, בהמות שדי, that they also will enjoy some kind of blessing, the announcement addressed to כל חיתו שדי makes the reader/audience expect that the speech of blessings in 56:7ff. will be extended to the animal world. Furthermore, eating or feasting has been associated with the coming salvation in Isa 25:6. Thus, this invitation to beasts to come and eat may be considered an echo of that verse. However, what happened, and this is the irony, is that the invitation to the beasts is actually a message of judgment. While the allusion employed in this verse may be considered a continuation of the previous verses, the content of the message is a total break, and even the opposite. As the watchmen are introduced in the beginning of v. 10, further description of their failure to perform their duty is in the portrayal as watchdogs:

Isa 56:10a – The Watchers as Watchdogs

10aA	צפו עורים
10aB	כלם לא ידעו
10aC	כלם כלבים אלמים
10aD	לא יוכלו לנבח

The parallelism in the first bicolon of 10aAB is צפו / כלם and עורים / לא ידעו is synonymous, while the parallelism in the second bicolon of 10aCbA לא / כלבים אלמים is semantic in nature, in which the muteness of the dogs is connected with the inability to bark. The message of this passage is to portray irony, and the themes of “watcher” and “dogs” are interwoven with an emphasis on their impotence.

First, it is ironical to read that the “watchmen” are “blind” since the primary duty of watchmen is to watch; thus, the adjective here stands as a direct contrast to the noun.⁵ While the first clause may be read as referring to physical blindness, the second clause in the bicolon expands the meaning of blindness, since the phrase לא ידעו here does not have any specification. The second bicolon gives another label to the watchmen; they are mute dogs, with the term כלם functioning as the connecting link. The description of dogs echoes that of the shepherds, since both begin with the negative particle לא. Just as the primary duty of watchmen is to watch, one of the expected performances of a dog in the

⁵Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:366. Other occurrences of the term “watchman” in the book of Isaiah also put more weight on the irony, since it is always connected with the activity of seeing: “For thus the Lord said to me: ‘Go, post a *watchman*, let him announce what he *sees*’” (21:6); “voice, your *watchmen* lifted up; voice, together they exalt, because in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion” (52:8).

Other occurrences of the term עור “blind” in the book of Isaiah are always used as a part of the promise of salvation, in which those who are [physically] blind are going to be able to see (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:16). A possible parallel for the context of the blindness here in 56:10 is found in Lam. 4:13, 14, in which the blindness is connected with the act of shedding the blood of the righteous by the prophets and the priests.

context of watching is to bark, but as the watchmen have the physical defect of blindness, the watchdogs are mute.

However, a further depiction of the dogs reveals that their muteness seems to be not because of a physical defect, but because of their laziness, as described by three participial phrases:

Isa 56:10b – Characteristics of the Dogs

10bA	הזים
10bB	שכבים
10bC	אהבי לנזם:
10cA	והכלבים עזי־נפש
10cB	לא ידעו שבעה

The dogs are dreaming, lying down and love to slumber. The ironical element is heightened as the first participle, הזים, “dreaming,” has sounds similar to חזים, “seers.” This is another group in the rank of leaders comparable to watchmen and shepherds, and also stands in direct opposition to blindness.⁶ The next phrase adds further irony: while these dogs are impotent, yet they have great appetites; these weak and lazy dogs eat a lot, as described in v. 10c:

10cA	והכלבים עזי־נפש
10cB	לא ידעו שבעה

The subject הכלבים covers both cola of the parallelism עזי־נפש / לא ידעו שבעה.

The negative expression לא ידעו שבעה here, while it looks like a continuation of the

⁶Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:366. In fact, הזים is a *hapax legomenon*, and indeed some ancient manuscripts have חזים instead of הזים. See McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 154.

incompetence characteristic of these shepherds/dogs, actually means the opposite, since the term here is to portray their dynamic strength: having a “fierce appetite.”⁷

Isa 56:11 – The Watchers as Shepherds

11aA	והמה רעים
11aB	לא ידעו הבין
11bA	כלם לדרכם פנו
11bB	איש לבצעו מקצהו:

After the depiction of watchmen and dogs, a new portrayal is now introduced—a shepherd. The phrase **והמה רעים** seems to function to emphasize the sarcastic element of this section regarding the leaders of the community: “*and* these watch/dogs are *actually* shepherds.”⁸ In the description of the shepherd, the clause **לא ידעו** reappears for the third time in the context of vv. 10-11, and now the object of the clause is **הבין**, “understanding” or “discernment.” “they do not know understanding.”⁹

The result of their lack of discernment is elaborated in v. 11b, which is in parallelism:

⁷The term **עז-נפש** literally means “strong throat,” the only combination of these two words in the Hebrew Bible. Lexically **עז** means strong, mighty, fierce. While **נפש** in this verse is usually translated as “appetite” as one expressive aspect of the “soul,” in a more concrete way it can be translated as “throat.” See Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “A Forgotten Meaning of *nepes* in Isaiah LVIII 10” *VT* 47 (1997): 43.

⁸The particle **ו** here may function as emphatic and explicative.

⁹**הבין** is the term that summarized what the “wise” king Solomon request from the Lord (1 Kings 3:11). The term is also associated with Daniel, who is known as a wise person in the biblical tradition, in his case his wisdom being particularly connected with “vision”: **ודניאל הבין בכל-חזון** (Dan 1:17). From thematic perspective, this comparison with Daniel is of special interest for the reading of Isa 56:11 since one of the descriptions of these shepherds that do not have “understanding” is that they are dogs who love to **הזים**, “dream” (v. 10).

11bA

כלם לדרכם פנו

11bB

איש לבצעו מקצהו:

The parallelism of the words כלם / איש presenting totality paired with singularity, with the term מקצהו again emphasizing the totality;¹⁰ and the parallelism of the phrases פנו לדרכם / לבצעו specifies the term דרך with the phrase בצע. The description here emphasizes that as shepherds, they not only have no clear concept of leadership and responsibility as reflected in the clause “they all just follow their own ways before them,” but they are also selfish: “each after unjust gain, everyone of them.” So far, the description of the fierce appetite attributed to these watchers/dogs/shepherds is with the objective of “unjust gain.”¹¹ However, further description in v. 12 shows that the appetite in this passage also includes physical appetite for strong drink, as recorded in their own speech, which some scholars consider as a drinking song.¹²

¹⁰McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 153. The meaning of קצה, “the end,” here is not in the sense of locative but circumference, that the whole of the shepherds in its totality is after unjust gain. See Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:368.

¹¹The term בצע consistently has a negative connotation in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase בצע בצע is an expression for “greedy of gain,” occurs in Prov 1:19; Jer 8:10; Ezek 22:27; Hab 2:9; and Mal 3:14. The phrase also occurs in Prov 15:27; Jer 6:13 except that it had *long holem* on the participle. In Exod 18:21 and Ezek 22:27, the noun refers to unjust gain, while in Ps 119:36; Prov 1:19; and 28:16, it means covetousness.

¹²Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 663 and Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 201. See also Blenkinsopp, who did not look at it as a drinking song. *Isaiah 56-66*, 148.

Isa 56:12 – Invitation to Drink

12aA	אתיו אקחה־יין
12aB	ונסבאה שכר
12bA	והיה כזה יום מחר
12bB	גדול יתר מאד:

The parallelism in the first bicolon is יין / שכר, while the second bicolon is more a continuous sentence. As the first couplet underlines the strong appetite on the part of these speakers described above, in this case their appetite is for intoxicating drink; the second couplet shows the lack of understanding/wisdom, since they see everything as good and think that the future will be even better. Both attitudes, strong appetite and lack of understanding, are indicated by the catchword לא ידעו:

10a	צפו עורים כלם לא ידעו
10c	והכלבים עזי־נפש
	לא ידעו שבעה
11a	והזמה רעים
	לא ידעו הבין

It is an irony that the shepherds claim that tomorrow will be much greater (v. 12b), because the reality is the opposite: Isa 57:1-2 reports how the righteous are extinguished because there is no one who controls the wicked.¹³ The relationship between the carelessness of the shepherds (Isa 56:9-12) and the death of the righteous (Isa 57:1-2) is explained in the catchword בין, “understanding”/”discernment”:

Isa 56:11a	והזמה רעים לא ידעו הבין
Isa 57:1	ואנשי־חסד נאספים באין מבין

¹³See Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 113.

In Isa 56:11, the shepherds were unable to watch, i.e. they have no בין “understanding”; in Isa 57:1, the righteous perished while no one בין “perceives.”¹⁴ The direct relationship between the behavior of the shepherds and the death of the righteous is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Strophe 2: The Righteous as Victims (Isa 57:1-2)

Isa 57:1 – The Extinction of the Righteous

1aA	הצדיק אבד
1aB	ואין איש שם על-לב
1bA	ואנשי-חסד נאספים
1bB	באין מבין
1cA	כי-מפני הרעה
1cB	נאסף הצדיק:
Translation	
1aA	“The righteous perished
1aB	and no one put it into the heart.
1bA	Devout men were taken away,
1bB	while no one considers.
1cA	It is from the face of evil
1cB	that the righteous is being taken away;

Scholars consider the meaning of the poem in 57:1-2 to be obscure in many

¹⁴McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 153-155 and Oswalt considers Isa 56:9-57:2 as a unit. *Isaiah 40-66*, 467. בין itself is a technical term for understanding. Its definition may be synonymous and overlapping with ידע (for example, in Isa 56:11 the phrase reads לֹא יָדְעוּ הַבַּיִן, “they do not know knowledge”; in Isa 32:3 among the eschatological promises written in the passage, the phrase is יבין לדעת, “the heart of the thoughtless will understand knowledge”). Furthermore, בין has a narrower meaning, emphasizing the insight that comes from knowing. Terence E. Fretheim, “בין,” *NIDOTTE* 1:652. This kind of meaning becomes more explicit as its derivative is בין, “between,” by which it conveys a concept of distinguishing that leads to understanding. Louis Goldberg, “בין,” *TWOT* 1:103.

points, but they agree that it has a discernable structure.¹⁵ Verse 1 has three pairs of cola while v. 2 has three single cola.¹⁶ Both were presented in an a-b-a style, an alteration of the number of persons from singular to plural and back to singular: in v. 1, the objects are “the righteous” (sg), “devout men” (pl), and again “the righteous” (sg). In the same manner, in v. 2, the objects are “he” (sg), “they” (pl), and “the one” (sg).¹⁷

Based on the content, the structure of the pairs in v. 1 is a-b-a1-b1-c-a2, with colon a concerns the righteous while b concerns the unrighteous, with c provides more description of the theme in colon b:

57:1	a	the righteous perished
	b	and no one put it into the heart
	a1	the devout men were taken away
	b1	while no one considers
	c	it is from the evil
	a2	the righteous is taken away

The parallelism is on the semantic level: the righteous perished / men of faithfulness were taken away / the righteous is taken away; the parallel between the second cola is as follows: no one put into the heart / and no one perceived / because of the evil.

As for the nature of the death of the righteous in this section, in v 1a the verb employed is אָבַד. While it is generally translated as “perished,” another nuance of its meaning implies death caused by being lost in the wilderness, and this imagery directly connects the death of the righteous with the failure of the shepherds in taking a good care

¹⁵Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, KY: Knox, 1998), 176.

¹⁶See for example Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 470 and Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 148-149.

¹⁷Motyer considered that the design expresses totality: it points out general truth and applies it to each individual (Ibid.).

of their flocks in v. 11 above.¹⁸ The second vocabulary for death here is **אסף**, in which commentators have translated as “gathered away,” referring to the death as a natural death.¹⁹ Some even go further to point out that it is the will of God for their protection.²⁰ In this line of thought, it also can be taken into consideration that in certain contexts, **אסף** and **קבץ** are synonyms.²¹ If this is the case, there is an implicit connection between the description of the Lord as **מוקבץ** “the gatherer” in Isa 56:8 with the gathering of the righteous in this sub-unit.

However, another possible meaning of **אסף** in this text is death that involves violence. Blenkinsopp translates **אסף** in 57:1 as “swept away,” an indication that the righteous died as a victim.²² The fact that in 57:1a **אסף** is paralleled with **אבר**, “to perish,” is an indication of a death that involved violence.²³ A further consideration can

¹⁸See Jer 50:6; Ezek 34:4. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 42.

¹⁹Besides the main meaning to “gather” and “remove,” **אסף** has a broad semantic range of meaning. In its niph'al form, the expression “to be gathered” can refer to death, with the phrases “to be gathered to one’s people”; “had been gathered to their fathers”; “to be gathered to one’s grave”; or simply “will be gathered.” I. Cornelius, Andres E. Hill, and Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “**אסף**,” *NIDOTTE* 1:470.

²⁰Delitzsch explains that the righteous had an early death to save them from the coming calamity. *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:368; see also Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 664. Oswalt writes, “Here the sense [of the text] would be that the righteous are being taken out of the society by God because of the increasing evil in the society and the evil end to which it is rushing. . . . Evil has become so rampant in the society and its end is so near that God in his mercy is removing the righteous from it.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 470-471. McKenzie does not see the text suggesting that the righteous perish by violence. He notes that because of the incompetency of the leaders in handling religious and administrative affairs, the righteous can find rest only in death. *Second Isaiah*, 155.

²¹John F. A. Sawyer put both words in one entry. “**קבץ**,” *TLOT* 3:1099.

²²Blenkinsopp did not elaborate on the reason why he translates it as such. *Isaiah 56-66*, 148.

²³Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs consider **אסף** in Isa 57:1 as the passive form of *qal*, with the meaning to “be taken away, removed, perish” especially since it is paralleled with **אבר**, *BDB*, 62. See also *HALOT*, 1:74; *DCH*, 1:348.

be added to this interpretation. The phrase **וְאֲנֹשֵׁי־חַסֵּד נֶאֱסָפִים בְּאֵין מִבִּין** in v. 1a has been translated as “the devout men were taken away *while* no one considers.” The preposition **ב** in the word **בְּאֵין** can take the function as causative.²⁴ With this, the reading would be “the devout men were taken away *because* no one considers or because there is no understanding.” This makes a cause-and-effect connection between the fate of the righteous and the behavior of the leaders.

A similar phenomenon can be observed with the phrase **כִּי־מִפְּנֵי הַרְעָה נֶאֱסָף** **הַצְדִּיק** which is mainly translated as “it is *from the face* of the evil that the righteous is gathered away.” The phrase **כִּי־מִפְּנֵי**, in comparison with the usage of **מִפְּנֵי הַרְעָה** in Jer 51:64 and the context of **מִפְּנֵי** in Gen 6:13, can also be read as causal.²⁵ It is possible that in the light of this perspective, the *Tanakh* translates the respective phrase in Isa 57:1b as “that *because* of evil, the righteous was taken away.”²⁶ Based on the above considerations, Isa 57:1 can be structured in the following way, as shown in Figure 2.

This reading will set a direct connection between Isa 56:9-12 and Isa 57:1-2. While the common interpretation of the invitation to the beasts in 56:9 is considered as an invitation of foreign nations to attack Israel (some consider it as a present situation; others consider it in the future), considering the structure of Isa 56:9-57:2 from the perspective

²⁴Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976), 45. From another perspective, McKenzie omits the preposition **ב** to give the text “an easy sense and a parallel to the first line.” *Second Isaiah*, 153.

²⁵See Williams, *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁶*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and The New JPS Translation*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1999). Whybray also gives the alternative reading as such, *Isaiah 40-66*, 201; while Blenkinsopp translates it as “on account of evil” *Isaiah 56-66*, 149.

The righteous	-	the righteous one perished
Community	-	no one put it into the heart
The righteous	-	the devout men were taken away
Community	-	<i>because</i> no one considers
Community	-	<i>it is because</i> of the evil
The righteous	-	the righteous was swept away

Figure 2. The structure of Isa 57:1 based on relationship between the righteous and community

above will give an alternative reading, more as an ironical taunt referring to the situation in which the wicked among the people devour their “righteous” fellows.²⁷ In this case, 57:1-2 is sandwiched between the irresponsible behavior of the rulers (56:9-12)²⁸ and the idolatrous practices of the general community (57:3-13). This situation in Isa 56:9-57:2 can be termed as “passive injustice”: a situation of “civic failure to stop private and public acts of injustice.”²⁹ Public servants—the watchmen and shepherds—are criticized for doing nothing or for not showing an effort to protect the people (56:9-11).³⁰ The community at large is accused of being passive and indifferent as the pious and the

²⁷Thematically, the situation is comparable with the complaint of Habakkuk in Hab 1, especially in vv. 3-4.

²⁸Delitzsch sees the perishing of the righteous in Isa 57:1-2 as a result of the carelessness of the shepherds in Isa 56:10-11. *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:368; see also Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja*, Deel IIIA (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1989), 58. In the line of this argument, it can be added that the word שׁכב functions as a catchword between Isa 56:9-12 and 57:1-2, in which the description of the watchmen/shepherds is lying down, שׁכבִּים (56:10), they are described as resting in their beds, מִשׁכְּבוֹתָם (57:2).

²⁹Judith N. Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1990), 6.

³⁰In the words of Shklar, “(P)ublic servants are even more likely to be passively unjust, being by training unwilling to step outside the rules and routines of their offices and peers, afraid to antagonize their superiors or to make themselves unduly conspicuous.” *Ibid.*

righteous perished, yet “no one takes it to heart.”³¹

Isa 57:2 – The Death of the Righteous

2aA	יבוא שלום
2aB	ינוחו על-משכבותם
2aC	חלך נכחו:
Translation	

2aA	He enters peace,
2aB	they reclined on their bed.
2aC	The one who walks in his uprightness.”

The phrase **יבוא שלום** can be read with “peace” as the subject, as a respond to the chaotic disorder described in the previous strophe.³² However, poetically, reference to “the one who walks in uprightness” in v. 2aC provides an indication that the subject here is a continuation of the one in v. 1, the righteous. In this line of thought, the thematic connection between cola a/c in this verse: **יבוא שלום / חלך נכחו**, may provide an insight about the characteristics of the victim in this strophe. First, that the victim is referred to as **הצדיק**, “the righteous” refers back to the call in Isa 56:1 – “keep justice, practice righteousness” indicates that the righteous here are those respond positively to the divine command. Their identification is elaborated further as **חלך נכחו**, “the one who walks in his uprightness.” The term **חלך נכחו** evokes a more concrete image of being righteous.

³¹Shklar elaborated, “(A)s citizens, we are passively unjust, I shall argue, when we do not report crimes, when we look the other way when we see cheating and minor thefts, when we tolerate political corruption, and when we silently accept laws that we regard as unjust, unwise, or cruel.” *The Faces of Injustice*, 6.

³²See The Vulgate; Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 257.

The word נכח, while it means “upright,” its basic meaning is “opposite.” In this sense, the righteous here are opposing the popular practice of the society, whether it is the leadership, described in the previous strophe, or the general population, described in the following stanza.³³

The phrase על־משכבותם ינוחו, “they reclined on their bed” in v. 2b can be read at least in two different ways and, as can be seen below, the implication of both readings are complementing each other in our attempt to understand the meaning of text. First, in the light the previous strophe, the subject in this sentence is referring to the watchers/shepherds, whose characteristics, among others, they like to שכבים, “lying down.” In this context, v. 2b functions as a further amplification of the irresponsible and irresponsible behavior of the leaders described in v. 1. Furthermore, it also serves as an anticipation for further description of the immoral/idolatrous activities of the people in the following stanza, especially reference to “bed” in v. 8.

An alternative reading is to understand Isa 57:2 as a triple description of the fate of the righteous. That the subject in v. 2a and c are in singular while in v. 2b is in plural can be assume as a parallel or a repetition of the poetic style in v. 1: (a) the righteous (sg) / (b) devout men (pl) / (a) the righteous (sg); while here in v. 2 is (a) he (i.e. the righteous) / (b) they (i.e. devout men) / (a) the one who walks in his uprightness. This kind of reading, which makes a direct connection between the subjects in vv. 1 and 2, conveys a message of hope to the devout person in the perilous time: in the evil environment they might get אבד, “lost,” yet the one who practices righteousness and uprightness may enjoy

³³Koole, *Isaiah III*, 47.

שָׁלוֹם, “peace” and נֹחַח, “rest/consolation.”³⁴

Blenkinsopp, based on his understanding that the term אֲנָשֵׁי-חַסֵּד, “devout men,” in v. 1 is the equivalent of the term חַסִּדִּים, “Hasidim,” he makes a connection between the description in Isa 57:1-2 with Ps 116:15, “Precious in the sight of the Lord the death of his חַסִּדִּים, “devout ones.”³⁵ Reading Isa 57:1-2 in connection with Ps 116:15 provides an insight, despite the unfortunate fate of the righteous in the time of moral decadence, even to a point that they get אָבַד, “perished,” this death is considered as “rest in peace.” In the words of Jan L. Koole, “A different life is matched by a different death.”³⁶

Stanza 2: Indifference against God (Isa 57:3-13)

Starting with Isaiah 57:3, the focus of the poem shifts to the general community³⁷ and the emphasis is their indifference to God, both by attitude and actions. The reading of the structure of Isa 57:3-11 can be different. Based on the description of the actions, one can divide it as an accusation toward revelers and cultic abusers (vv. 3-5) and an accusation toward the adulterous woman (vv. 6-11),³⁸ or the division can be understood as announcement of judgment (vv. 3-4), followed by the description of the behavior of

³⁴Koole, *Isaiah III*, 47.

³⁵Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 151.

³⁶Koole, *Isaiah III*, 47. In the words of Goldingay, it is “a good death,” death with honor and integrity. *Isaiah 56-66*, 113.

³⁷For Blenkinsopp, the woman stands for Jerusalem and the posterity is its inhabitants. He noted a sharp contrast of the portrayal with the presentation of Jerusalem as an abandoned and reunited bride in Isa 49:14-26 and 54:1-17. *Isaiah 56-66*, 156.

³⁸Childs, *Isaiah*, 464.

the audience (5-10) and finally, its consequences (11-13).³⁹ From a locative perspective, the description of the content of the passage moves from an outdoor setting (vv. 5-7), to an indoor setting (v. 8), and then to a journey (vv. 9-10).

Strophe 1: Reproach over God's People (Isa 57:3-4)

Thematically, this strophe is arranged in an A—B—A structure, with (a) a triple description of the identity of the addressee, (b) followed by a triple description of their attitude against God, and (a) concluded with a double description of their identity. In Isa 57:1-4, in the way the object is addressed, there is a change from third person in vv. 1-2 to second person masc. plural in vv. 3-4. This emphasis on the second person forms a bracket in the opening statement of v. 3 and in the conclusion of v. 4b, and both this opening and ending are characterized by extended identity on the parental side, as observable in Figure 3.

Isa 57	
v. 3	ואתם... בני עננה זרע מנאף ותזנה:
v. 4	הלוא אתם ילדי־פשע זרע שקר

Figure 3. Extended parental identity of the audience in Isa 57:1

³⁹Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 475.

**Isa 57:3 – Children of Sorcerers
and Adulterers**

3aA		ואתם קרבו־הנה
3bA		בני עננה
3bB		זרע מנאף
3bC		ותזנה:
Translation		
3aA	“And you, come near!	
3bA	Sons of a sorceress	
3bB	descendants of an adulterer	
3bC	and a harlot!	

Functioning as the opening section of the whole second stanza, Isa 57:3 starts with a call to come near. The term קרב used in this verse echoes the opening statement in Isa 56:1 with the effect of highlighting a contrast. As their salvation is announced as drawing near [קרב], the people are portrayed in this verse as already withdrawing themselves far from the Lord (Isa 56:9-57:2) and now were called to come near [קרב]. The term also portrays a contrast between the foreigners in Isa 56: 3, as they were depicted as those “who joined themselves to the Lord.” Here God’s people are in a distant position from him, so he had to call them to come near [קרב].

The addressee of the speech in this verse is referred to as “children sorceress, offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute.” In the phrase זרע מנאף ותזנה, the term מנאף, which is masculine, refers to the father while תזנה, which is feminine, refers to the mother. Therefore, it expresses overall immorality in both parents. Therefore, it expresses overall immorality in both parents. The description here can be interpreted in at least three different ways. First, it may simply be referring to the immoral behavior of their

ancestor. In this case, the addressee, as children, are not necessarily partaking this sinful lifestyle, therefore, they are innocent.⁴⁰ Second, just as these children are born from a parent with sinful behavior, they also share the same traits of character. The third reading, the expression “son of...” may simply refer to the behavior, attitude and conduct of a person, it is not necessarily a reference to the parent.⁴¹ Based on the elaboration in vv. 4-10, the appellation “sons of a sorceress, descendants of an adulterer and a harlot” is more a description of the behavior of the people, they are practicing sorcery, committing adultery and playing harlot.

In v. 3, the parallelism is on the semantic level between **בני זרע / עננה** and **מנאף / ותזנה**. While **מנאף** and **ותזנה** are synonymous, their parallel with **עננה** is more on the metaphorical sense that the sorcery is religious adultery.⁴² The further description in vv. 5-10 shows how idolatry and sexual misconduct are being blended together.⁴³

Isa 57:4a – Mockery Against God

4aA	על-מי תתענגו
4aB	על-מי תרחיבו פה
4aC	תאריכו לשון

⁴⁰See Ezek 18:2, 14-17.

⁴¹See Koole, who takes the example of Deut 13:14 in which the term **בני-בליעל בני**, children of Belial, “means belonging to a certain dark sphere.” *Isaiah III*, 53.

⁴²**עננה** from the root **עננ**, clouds. In the piel form, it means to bring clouds, in which the subject is usually the Lord himself. When the same activity is performed by humans, usually in poel form, it is an act of sorcery (cf. Isa 2:6; Jer 27:9).

⁴³Davidson notes that this issue is one of major messages in the Latter Prophets. While the practice of idolatry is termed as adultery/harlotry by the prophets, “it was the immoral sexual practices on the cultic level that called forth the most vehement denunciation. . . . [it] struck most directly at the very heart of Israel’s existence as God’s covenant people.” Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 108-109.

Translation

- 4aA At whom do you make jest?
4aB At whom do you open wide your mouth,
4aC sticking out your tongue ?

The censure in v. 4 indicates that reference of parental behavior in v. 3 is more a description of the behavior of the audience. In v. 4a, the question begins with על-מי, repeated twice, and the act of תתענגו is paralleled with תרחיבו פה and תאריכו לשון. The term תתענגו, from the root ענג, which is translated as “making merry over” or “making sport of,”⁴⁴ is a word that usually has a positive connotation.⁴⁵ However, here it conveys a negative meaning, since it is paralleled with the acts of opening the mouth and sticking out the tongue. The question in this verse starts a series of questions from v. 6 to v. 11, and the nature of the questions seems to be rhetorical.

Even though the subject has changed, vv. 3 and 4a use a similar device: a single word in the first colon is paralleled with a double expression in the second colon and repeated in the following verse, as can be read here:

בני עננה
זרע מזנאך

על-מי תתענגו
על-מי תרחיבו פה תאריכו לשון

⁴⁴BDB, 772. However, in HALOT, 2:851, the meaning of the word is “to make fun,” while in DCH, 6:492, it is “to make sport, mock.”

⁴⁵Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 472. In the context of Isa 56-59, later in Isa 58, among the admonitions given there, only if the people call the Sabbath a “delight” [ענג] (v. 13), then they will be able to “take delight” [תתענג] in the Lord (v. 14).

Isa 57:4b – Children of Rebellion and Deceits

4bA	הלוֹא־אַתֶּם ילְדֵי־פֶשַׁע
4bB	זֶרַע שִׁקְרָ:
Translation	
4bA	Aren't you children of rebellion
4bB	descendants of deceit?"

While Isa 57: 4b is also a rhetorical question just like v. 4a, at the same time the content of the question is thematically related, or expansion, of the identification of the audience in v. 3. The parallelism in Isa 57:4b is semantic: זרע / ילד and פשע / שקר. A comparison of the parental identification in vv. 3 and 4a shows that in v. 3, the emphasis is on the practices—cultic and sexual, while in v. 4, it is in the moral realm: transgression and deceit. Later on, in chapters 58 and 59, פשע becomes one of the key terminologies to describe the behavior of the addressee.⁴⁶

Strophe 2: Idolatrous Activities (Isa 57:5-10)

Isa 57:5-10 – Idolatrous Activities

5aA	הנחמים באלים
5aB	תחת כל־עֵץ רענן
5bA	שחטי הילדים בנחלים
5bB	תחת סעפי הפלעים:
6aA	בחלקי־נחל חלקך
6aB	הם הם גורלך

⁴⁶In Isa 58:1 the prophet was commanded to הגד לעמי פשעם “declare to my people their transgression”; see also 59:12,13, 20. The word שקר also reappears in 59:3 and 13. Both פשע and שקר appear together in the same verse, 59:13.

6aC	גם־להם שפכת נסך
6aD	העלית מנחה
6b	העל אלה אנחם:
7aA	על הר־גבה
7aB	ונשא
7bA	שמת משכבך
7bB	גם־שם עלית
7c	לזבח זבח:
8aA	ואחר הדלת
8aB	והמזוזה
8aC	שמת זכרוןך
8bA	כי מאחי
8bB1	גלית
8bB2	ותעלי
8bB3	הרחבת
8bC	משכבך
8cA	ותכרת־לך מהם
8cB	אהבת משכבם
8cC	יד חזית:
9aA	ותשרי למלך בשמן
9aB	ותרבי רקחך
9bA	ותשלחי צרוך עד־מרחק
9bB	ותשפילי עד־שאול:
10aA	ברב דרכך יגעת
10aB	לא אמרת נואש
10b	חית ירך מצאת
10c	על־כן לא חלית:
Translation	
5aA	“The one who inflames himself among the oaks,
5aB	under every green tree;
5bA	Slaughtering the children in the wadis,
5bB	under the cleft of the crags.”

6aA “Among the smooth stones of the wadis is your portion
6aB they, they are your lot.
6aC Also unto them you pour drink offering
6aD you offer grain offering.
6b Upon these things, should I appease myself?”
7aA “Upon a mountain, high
7aB and lofty
7bA you set your bed
7bB and upon it, you climb
7c to sacrifice sacrifice.”
8aA “Behind door
8aB and door post
8aC you set up your remembrances.
8bA Because far from me
8bB1 you uncovered
8bB2 you climb
8bB3 you make wide
8bC your bed.
8cA You make agreement with them for yourself
8cB you loved their bed
8cC you envisioned an ‘arm.’”
9aA “You journey to a king with/for oil,
9aB and your perfumes you make increase.
9bA You sent envoys until far away;
9bB You make them go down even to Sheol.
10aA Because of the length of your road you were tired,
10aB You did not say, ‘it is hopeless.’
10b You found ‘renewed strength,’
10c therefore you did not faint.”

Starting with v. 5 and going through v. 10, the idolatrous activity is described. The

description seems to emphasize its totality, covering both cultic and sexual activities that had been done from the lowest to the highest locations, from public to private activities, from nearby to faraway places, with its climax in *sheol*.⁴⁷ In v. 5, the order of the sentences goes from featuring action to location, while in vv. 6-9 the order is reversed; it starts with the location followed by a description of the actions.

The description in v. 5 of the actions is in participial form, while in reference to the location, the prepositions ב and תחת are used repeatedly as shown in Figure 4.

Action: participial phrase	Location
inflare ⁴⁸ oneself	among (ב) the terebinths under (תחת) every green tree
slaughtering children	in (ב) the valleys among ⁴⁹ (תחת) the clefts of the rocks

Figure 4. Description of actions and locations in Isa 57:5

⁴⁷Middlemas pointed out that descriptions of magical arts and sexual deviance in the context of פשע and שקר reveal that the issue here is apostate worship. Jill Middlemas, “Divine Reversal and the Role of the Temple in Trito-Isaiah,” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 168. Reference to divination and Sheol implies offerings made in connection with seeking help from dead family members. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 116.

⁴⁸Hebrew הנחמים. The LXX translation is derived from the root נחם (οἱ παρακαλοῦντες) instead from הנחם. If this is the case, the action here had a direct connection with the denunciation in the end of v. 6. In fact, as the root נחם opens v. 5, הנחמים . . . it ends v. 6: והעל אלה אנחם; the message is, as they “console” themselves in idolatry practice, the Lord is asking, “should I be ‘consoled’ by this thing?” But the LXX did not see this word play, since אנחם in v. 6 is translated as “angry” (ὀργισθήσομαι). Still, while they come from different roots, the consonantal resemblance indicates that it serves as a kind of catchword for this unit.

⁴⁹For the translation of תחת as “among” instead of “under” in this particular context, see Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Prepositions b Tahat in Jes 57:5” *ZAW* 73 (1961): 226-228.

Isa 57:5 – Fertility Cult and Human Sacrifice

5aA	הנחמים באלים
5aB	תחת כל-עץ רענן
5bA	שחטי הילדים בנחלים
5bB	תחת סעפי הסלעים:

In v. 5aA, the description of the idolatrous activity of the “children” referred to in vv. 3-4 begins with inflaming oneself באלים. There are two possible meaning for this word. In its consonantal text and vowel pointing, the form always refers to “gods.”⁵⁰ The LXX translates this phrase באלים as εἰδωλα, “idols.” However, the parallelism in v. 5a can also lead to an alternative meaning:

5aA	הנחמים באלים
5aB	תחת כל-עץ רענן

The parallel between the term באלים and the phrase “every green tree” suggests that both are modifying the concept of “tree,” and therefore it refers to terebinth tree instead of to the gods.⁵¹ However, it is possible that the author intentionally allowed both meanings to re-inforce each other since these terebinth trees stand as objects of “worshipped.”⁵²

The next parallelism in v. 5b describes the location of the ritual of child sacrifice:

⁵⁰Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 157.

⁵¹Ackerman notes that the Greek translator of the book Isaiah “fails to understand אלים as terebinths.” She refers to Isa 1:29, where the context of the word אלים in this verse can only refer as terebinths, the LXX translates it as εἰδώλους. *Under Every Green Tree*, 102n6.

⁵²Blenkinsopp lists the word באלים among words with double meanings in Isa 57:3-13. For him, the term can refer to deities, spirits of the dead, or sacred trees. *Isaiah 56-66*, 162.

5bA שחטי הילדים בנחלים
 5bB תחת סעפי הפלעים:

In v. 5bA, this activity of child sacrifice⁵³ is said to take place in the wadi [נחל].

However, other biblical references for this form of idolatry specified the location as in the valley [גיא], especially the valley of the sons of Hinom (2 Kgs 23:10; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31; 32:35).⁵⁴ Franz Delitzsch believed that the explanation for this variation is that many things connected with the religious history of Israel cannot be found in its historical books.⁵⁵ From another perspective, it is possible that the author employed this particular term נחל for poetical aesthetics. Considering the relationship between the bicola of v. 5a and 5b, the sound of the word בנחלים in v. 5bA resembles the sound of the word באלים in v. 5aA; therefore, it creates a kind of assonance between them.

The function of this assonance is to strengthen the thematic connection between the cola, since they are a contrast, yet at the same time supplementing each others. The description in v. 5a is about the fertility cult, while in v. 5b, it is about human sacrifice;

⁵³The term שחט employed here may indicate a literal act of child offering, since the word is understood as “the technical term for ritual slaughter. It involves slitting the throat.” Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 54.

⁵⁴The word נחל covers various meanings. While it primarily refers to a wadi, depending on its context, in various versions of the English Bible, the word is also translated as valley, brook, or river, and they may interchange with one another. The phrase נחל מצרים, “the brook of Egypt,” is a technical term for the southern boundary of the promised land. Bar-Deroma argues that the phrase alludes to the Nile river. Haim Bar-Deroma, “River of Egypt [Nachal Mizraim]” *PEQ* 92 (1960): 37-56. Prov 18:4 speaks of a wadi with flowing water that bubbled up. Ezek 47:5 speaks of a wadi with streams that cannot be passed over, deep enough to swim in. Among the blessings envisioned in Joel 3:18, the wadi will have water flowing in it. In Job 6:15-17 we have a quite detailed description of נחל: In winter and early spring, it is filled with muddy ice and melting snow, but in summer it dries up. The activities described in Isa 57:5-6 must take place during the time when the wadis are dry.

⁵⁵Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:372.

while one is reproductive in nature, the other is taking life. This portrayal serves as “summarizing the total range of hateful affronts to the Lord.”⁵⁶ Moreover, the plural form of both locations, as the people inflame themselves among “many” terebinths and they also slaughtered their children in “many” wadis, emphasizes the widespread nature of this idolatrous practice, that they were performed in many places.

Further description in v. 5bB amplifies the location of the child sacrifice practices: **הסלעים תחת סעפי**, “under the cleft of the crags.” Jonas Greenfield considers that the phrase refers to clefts in the rock in which a person can hide to carry out a foul act rather than an overhanging crag.⁵⁷ The “smooth stones” located in the wadies in v. 6 may be pointing to the same reference to the cleft of crags given here.

Going from v. 6 through v. 12, the second person suffixes are feminine, probably because of the heavy allusion to sexual activities and because the metaphor here is for the woman Zion. Verse 6 specifies another description of idolatrous activities with two pairs of parallel cola, again located in the **נחל**, wadi, and closes with a rhetorical question. The emphasis of the first pair is on the issue of “portion,” while the second pair describes the ritual activity being performed.

⁵⁶Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 472.

⁵⁷Greenfield, “The Prepositions,” 228n13.

Isa 57:6 – Worship of the Dead

6aA	בחלקי-נחל חלקך
6aB	הם הם גורלך
6aC	גם-להם שפכת נסך
6aD	העלית מנחה
6b	העל אלה אנחם:

In v. 6aAB, the parallelism between *חלקך / גורלך* is synonymous, and it is a parallel that is consistently used in the book of Isaiah (17:14; 34:17), therefore, it serves as an emphasis. The parallelism in v. 6aCD is between *העלית מנחה / שפכת נסך* which complement each other: the act of pouring drink offerings is paralleled with offering up grain offerings.

This verse also shows a significant word play of paronomasia.⁵⁸ First, the opening phrase of the verse *בחלקי-נחל חלקך* makes an alliterative play between two different meanings of the same consonants *חלק*, “the smooth ‘stone’” and “portion.”⁵⁹ For Motyer,

⁵⁸Paronomasia is “the deliberate choice of two (or more) different words which sound nearly alike.” Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 242.

⁵⁹The word *חלק* used here have a rich nuance of meanings. The lexicons have two basic meanings for *חלק*: (1) “to be smooth,” (2) “to divide,” therefore the text is read “among the smooth *stones* of the wadi is your portion” which refers to the stones worn by water erosion into shapes that were worshiped as a resident “god”. See Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 472.

Irwin adds a third meaning of the root *חלק*, “to die, perish” based on the Ugaritic cognate, where in Rash Shamra texts twice the adjective *hlq* is paralleled with *mt*, “dead.” Based on this, he proposes that the reading of the phrase in 57:6a is “among the perished ones of the wadi is your portion,” by which he proposes that the activity portrayed here is a cult worshipping the dead. William H. Irwin, “The Smooth Stones of the Wady?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967): 31-32; see also Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 148; Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 146-148. Since 2 Kgs 23:6 refers to *נחל קדרון*, the brook of Kidron as a public cemetery, it may support Irwin’s proposal.

Blenkinsopp gives several examples in the Hebrew Bible where *חלק*, “smoothness,” signifies falseness and hypocrisy, and from this perspective it points out the futility of the cultic activity performed by the people. *Isaiah 56-66*, 158. Motyer notes that the “portion” of Israel is supposed to be the Lord (see particularly Ps 119:57 where the word *חלק* is used, and Ps 16:5 where the word is *גורל*, two words that are

this wordplay elaborates the absurdity of the idolatrous practice: “the ‘portion’ of Israel was the Lord (Pss. 16:5; 119:57). What perversion to change the great, divine, *héleq* for a *háláq*, life for a stone, truth for a slippery deceiver!”⁶⁰

In v. 6aBC, there is a play of sounds between the words **הם הם** and **גם-להם**, since it produces a certain rhyme. The fact that the use of the personal pronoun **הם** had to be doubled may indicate an intention on the part of the author to create alliteration.⁶¹ From the perspective of the message in relation to v. 6aA, it serves to emphasize the identification of the **חלקי-נחל**, “the smooth ones/stones of the wadi,” (that is, these idols as the lot and portion of the worshiper).⁶² At the same time, in relation with 6aCD, it stresses the activity performed to these objects: “. . . they, they [**הם הם**] are your lot, even unto them [**גם-להם**] you pour drink offering and offer grain offering.” Furthermore, the phrase **העלית** in v. 6aD is also connected alliteratively with the question **על אלה** in v. 6b, and finally, the word **אנחם** at the end of the verse creates a sound-link with the

precisely presented as a parallel in Isa 57:6), while here the people’s portion is the idol and/or the dead one. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 473.

⁶⁰Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 473.

⁶¹Margalit lists criteria to determine the existence of alliteration in a certain verse, among others, (1) words *hapax legomena*, (2) rare grammatical forms, and (3) by contrasting words and particles and the alliterative consequences of their interchange in specific context. Baruch Margalit, “Alliteration in Ugaritic Poetry: Its Role in Composition and Analysis” in *Ugarit-Forschungen* 11 (1979): 538. The repetition of the third person plural pronouns **הם** occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, therefore it can be considered as a rare grammatical form.

⁶²The word **גורל** refers to a portion that one acquires through casting a lots. The use of the lot is to ascertain the mind and the decision of the Lord regarding the issue involved. One of the most important uses of the lot is the division of the promised land among the tribes of Israel. See Earl S. Kalland, “גורל,” *TWOT* 1:172. Also, on the day of atonement, the destiny of two goats was determined by lot (Lev. 16:8-10). As this background reveals that the term **גורל** expresses God’s intense involvement in the decisive moments in the life of his people, in Isa 57:6, this particular word, together with **חלק**, portrays that the fate of the people is directed by the gods/dead/deceitful ones, in contrast to the living God.

phrases הם הם and גם־להם in the previous cola, thus creating a sense of climax for this verse.

Isa 57:7 – Idolatry on Mountaintop

7aA	על הר־גבה
7aB	ונשא
7bA	שמת משכבך
7bB	גם־שם עלית
7c	לזבח זבח:

An opposite spectrum of locality is being presented here. As the setting of the worship in vv.5- 6 is on the lower ground down at the bottom of a wadi, the setting in v. 7 is shifted to a high and lofty mountain. The description in v. 7a emphasizes the loftiness of the mountain; 7b, the activities of setting up a bed and climbing unto it; and 7c gives the purpose of the activity, “to sacrifice sacrifice” (this expression is as an attempt to retain the assonance in Hebrew, לזבח זבח).

Besides signifying a contrast between low and high, the bottom of the wadi and the peak of the high mountain, the expression הר־גבה ונשא, “high and lofty mountain” also suggests another implication. In the Hebrew Bible, the idiomatic expression for the widespread practice of idolatry is “on every high hill and under every green tree” with its variations.⁶³ In some of their occurrences, this expression constitutes a single phrase in a

⁶³See William L. Holladay, “On Every High Hill and Under Every Green Tree” *VT* 11 (1961): 170-176. In Deut 12:2, the phrase כל־עץ רענן ועל־הגבעות ותחת על־ההרים הרמים appears in the command to destroy idolatry centers. In historical books it appears four times: 1 Kgs 14:23, על כל־גבעה גבהה ותחת כל־עץ רענן describes idolatry under Rehoboam; 2 Kgs 17:10, ותחת כל־עץ רענן על כל־גבעה גבהה is a part of theological reflection as the main reason for the fall of the Northern Kingdom. In two other occurrences the phrase concerns the activities of Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Kgs 16:4 and 2 Chr 28:4 עץ רענן

single verse (Deut 12:2; 1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 16:4; 17:10). In Isa 57, the expression is split into different verses; in v. 5 we have “under every green tree” and in v. 7 “on a high and lofty mountain,” but since both phrases refer to idolatrous activities, they can be considered as standing together as a pair.⁶⁴

Commentators understood the reference to the bed in this verse as being “worship” that is performed here, and involving a sexual orgy.⁶⁵ In the context of the whole book of Isaiah, Brevard Childs points out that the expression “high and lofty mountain” is only found in Isa 2:2 [and Micah 4:1— both verses have same content]: a prophecy that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be “raised above the hills” [נשא מנבות] and all nations will stream to it and from Zion will go forth Torah and the word of the Lord. However, in sharp contrast, the “high and lofty mountain” [הר-גבה] [ונשא] is the location of idolatry against God.⁶⁶ He further notes that in Isaiah 40-55, v. 9 of chap. 40 is the only passage in which Zion is used with a reference to a “high

כל (בבמות ועל-הגבעות וחתת כל). In the context of these two verses there is also a description of this king offering his children as sacrifice (2 Chr 28:3), and making an appeal to the king of Assyria for military help (2 Kgs 16:7; 1 Chr 28:16). Allusions to child sacrifice and a journey to see a certain *mlk* are also found in Isa 57, especially vv. 5 and 9.

⁶⁴Holladay, “On Every High Hill,” 172. Isaiah 57 is the only place where expressions regarding the trees and hills are not in the same verse, but the overall context on idolatry makes it reasonable for the two expressions to be considered as one.

⁶⁵See, among others, Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 324; Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 204; Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 258; Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 478; and Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 473. Albright explains that *bâmôt* “were also unquestionably paganizing rustic sanctuaries, which played a very important role in ‘fertility cult’ . . .” William Foxwell Albright, “The High Place in Ancient Palestine,” in *Volume du Congress: Strasbourg, 1955*, Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 253.

⁶⁶For him, while the description of idolatry practiced in high hills is common in the OT, this specific expression is a “portrayal of Israel’s idolatry against Yahweh is set in direct opposition to the promise of First Isaiah of the true of God on Mount Zion to which the nations will flow to learn torah. In sharp contrast, now the ‘high and lofty mountain’ of Isa 57:7 is used in blatant defilement of God’s holy name.” Childs, *Isaiah*, 467.

mountain” [הַר־גְּבוּהָ]. In this verse, Zion is described as the bearer of good news to announce, “behold your God.” It is ironic that the messenger in Isaiah 40 now makes a mockery of God in in Isaiah 57 (v. 3) through their desecrated worship.⁶⁷

Isa 57:8 – Idolatry Behind Closed Door

8aA		ואחר הדלת
8aB		והמזוזה
8aC		שמת זכרוןך
8bA		כי מאתי
8bB1	גלית	
8bB2	ותעלי	
8bB3	הרחבת	
8bC	משכבך	
8cA	ותכרת־לך מהם	
8cB	אהבת משכבם	
8cC	יד חזית:	

Verse 8 opens with the act of setting a “remembrance” behind the door. It is followed by a description of what the people are doing, since they were far from God. Delitzsch connects the term זכרון, “remembrance,” here with Deut 6:9 and 11:20, in which the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord commanded are to be written down upon the posts and the entrances of their houses as a constant reminder to love the Lord with all their heart, soul and might (Deut 6:1, 6). However, now these remembrances are being put behind the door and post, so the people will not be

⁶⁷Childs, *Isaiah*, 467.

reminded of their unfaithfulness to God.⁶⁸ Others see in this verse a reversal of the symbols mentioned in Deuteronomy and substitute it with pagan signs.⁶⁹

Being far away from God, the activity is presented in a pair of three actions:

Because far from me,
you *uncover*,
you *climb up*,
you *make wide* your bed.
Then you *cut for yourself a covenant* with them,
you *love* their bed,
you *envisioned* an “arm.”

Just as in v. 7 the activity on the bed ended up in offering sacrifice, here in v. 8 the activities lead to the making of a covenant. Thus, these idolatrous activities, while repulsive to God, are characterized by religious/cultic practices.

The word order in the phrase **יֵרֶה חֲזִית** in v. 8cC is noun-verb, which indicates that the noun **יֵרֶה** is being emphasized. This is the second appearance of the word **יֵרֶה** in Isa 56-57.⁷⁰ The verb that governs **יֵרֶה** is **חֲזִית**, which is translated as “to see” in most translations. The fact that this particular verb is being used in this context is significant since the common Hebrew word “to see” is **רָאָה**, and **חֲזָה** is an Aramaic loan-word. In the Hebrew Bible, it appears that **חֲזָה** is used for a certain kind of seeing; it is dealing with the revelation of divine word.⁷¹

In addition to Isa 57:8, the term **חֲזִית**, in its exact form, appears two times in

⁶⁸Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:374.

⁶⁹Childs, *Isaiah*, 467.

⁷⁰The first one is in Isa 56:5.

⁷¹A. Jepsen, “חֲזָה,” *TDOT* 4:284.

Proverbs and several times in the Aramaic section of the book of Daniel (Prov 22:29; 29:20; Dan 2:26, 43, 45; 4:2, 6, 15, 17). In Proverbs, the meaning of the word is within the range of “observing,” while in Daniel, it consistently refers to the dream that King Nebuchadnezzar saw. Based on this background, it seems that the use of the verb חזית in 57:8 implies irony; those who were engaged in activities that are offensive to God, instead of receiving a vision from him, “envisioned” their own dreams.⁷² For the meaning of the word יד, William Albright considers the appropriate meaning is “arm,” since *kaf* is the word for “hand.” He refers to a stele found at Hazor showing two forearms with hands in a protective position.⁷³ Therefore, the יד mentioned here in Isa 57:8 may mean “protection” or it may also refer to “power.”⁷⁴

Another observation for this particular idolatrous activity, with reference to making a covenant and seeing a “hand”/“arm,” יד, can be understood as a portrayal of a contrast between those who are marginal, in this case the eunuchs, and God’s own people. To the eunuchs who are holding fast to the covenant, God will give them, within his house and within the vicinity of its wall—which implies a proximity—a “memorial,” יד, and a “name,” which are better than sons and daughters (Isa 56:4-5). On the other hand, God’s people are behind their own “door,” implying their own “house,” and being remote

⁷²See Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 106.

⁷³Albright, “The High Place,” 251.

⁷⁴Ackerman, *Ibid.*, 107n14.

from the Lord (“far from me,” **מֵאֲחֵרַי**), they make a covenant with the idols and seek a יָד.⁷⁵

While verses 7 and 8 can stand as a unit by themselves, they are poetically and thematically connected. From a stylistic perspective, they have a similar word order:

v. 7 . . . x שמת x ו x הר על
v. 8 . . . x שמת x ו x ואחר

The conjunction here introduces an amplification of the location where the activities take place, and both activities are started by the same verb “to put,” שים.⁷⁶ This device is used to strengthen the portrayal of the wide-sweeping practice of idolatry, from the lowest part of the valley to the top of the mountain, and now, with another spatial element being added in v. 8, the privacy behind one’s door. This element adds another contrast—from open to inner space.⁷⁷

Even though the location is being shifted from the mountaintop to the inner space of a house, the structure of the verse indicates that v. 8 is a development of the theme

⁷⁵For the thematic correlation between Isa 56:5 and 57:8 see Raymond de Hoop, “The Interpretation of Isaiah 56:1-9: Comfort or Criticism?” *JBL* 127 (2008): 687.

⁷⁶The opening phrase of vv. 7 and 8, the words על הר and אחר, they share a similar sound so that they may serve as a certain kind of alliteration:

v. 7a על הר-גבה ונשא שמת. . .
v. 8a ואחר הדלת והמזוזה שמת. . .

The fact that both phrases refer to location, and that both verses are concerned with the same criticism against idolatry and with the same tone of accusation, can be taken into consideration that this “distant assonance” serves as a rhetorical device.

⁷⁷Instead of showing a contrast from open space to inner space, Hanson saw in vv. 7-8 a repetitious parallelism. He emended the word *miškab* into a *miškan*. He argued that a *miškan* has a door and a doorpost. Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979), 199-200. The problem with this emendation is with the following stanza: the actions of “to uncover,” “to climb into,” and “make it wide,” are more applicable to a bed than to a shrine. Therefore, the *miškab* should stand as it is, a bed. Another argument can be added in the comparison with the promise given to the eunuchs: within my house, a *yad*. Just exactly as here, behind the door—i.e. within the house, there is a *zikaron* and a *yad*.

presented in v. 7. There is also an aura of intensification: as the portrayal of the action in v. 7 uses three verbs, in v. 8b, the actions are described in two sets of three consecutive verbs with “bed” as the central focus as seen in Figure 5.

v. 7	v. 8
you put <i>your bed</i>	you uncover
you climb to it ⁷⁸	you climb
to offer sacrifice	you make wide <i>your bed</i>
	you cut (a “covenant”)
	you love <i>their bed</i>
	you envisioned “power”

Figure 5. The “bed” as a focus in Isa 57:7-8

The term “bed” [משכב] seems to be the focus of the descriptions in these verses. It appears once in v. 7 and twice in v. 8, and Brooks Schramm sees a connection between the word “bed” here with 56:10 and 57:2.⁷⁹ One of the characteristics of the leaders / shepherds in 56:10 is that they love to be שכבים, “lying down.” In 57:1, as the righteous are taken away, the unrighteous were reclining on their beds (vv. 7, 8). These considerations of the appearance of the word משכב add another indication of the formal relationship between Isa 56:9-57:3 and the passage that follows it.

One can notice an element of ambiguity here in vv. 7-8 as the element of “bed” is

⁷⁸In the Hebrew text, there is a play of the consonants מ and ש in the terms שמת and שם in the parallel phrases שמת משכבך / גם-שם עליית.

⁷⁹Brooks Schramm, *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 132n1.

introduced, especially in connection with the fact that the people were introduced as the offspring of “adulterers” and “harlots” in v. 3. With this kind of background, a reference to “bed” will lead to a detailed description of sexual activities taking place on this “bed”; however, as one reads on, the action that is being underscored is a kind of worship: offering of sacrifice (v. 7), cutting of “a covenant” (v. 8).⁸⁰

Isa 57:9-10 – Idolatry as Journey

9aA	ותשרי למלך בשמן
9aB	ותרבי רקחך
9bA	ותשלחי צריך עד-מרחק
9bB	ותשפילי עד-שאול:
10aA	ברב דרכך יגעת
10aB	לא אמרת נואש
10b	חית ירך מצאת
10c	על-כן לא חלית:

The description in the text moves from the privacy of the interior of one’s house to a journey. While v. 9 is the description of the action, v. 10 is the reflection on it. The account in v. 9 is structured in an a-b-a-b pattern in which the first colon describes an action and the second colon is an amplification of the first colon:

aA	personal journey: you (yourself) journey to a king with/for oil
aB	amplification of the last word of the first colon, “oil”: you multiply your perfumes
bA	you send your envoys for a journey a far away
bB	amplification of the last word of the third colon, “far-away,” going down to <i>sheol</i> , which can stand for the farthest goal.

⁸⁰For the double meanings of sexual imagery and idolatry activities in this passage, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 155-163.

The journey to a מִלֶּךְ can be read in at least two ways: (1) מִלֶּךְ as a king refers to a political alliance with foreign nations. Understood from this perspective, the journey had a literal meaning.⁸¹ (2) However, if מִלֶּךְ is read in the sense of Molek, the portrayal is an idolatrous activity, and the journey is more in the realm of symbolism.

In v. 10, the expressions use a circular argument. The statement in the first colon is actually a complete sentence: “because of the length of your road you were tired”—you had gone such a great distance that you were actually tired. However, the colon was followed by three sentences that portray a deeper condition:

in your tiredness you did not acknowledge that it is hopeless
in your tiredness you found “renewed strength”
in your tiredness you did not faint.

These arguments are presented to underline the fact that this vigor is not healthy. Instead, this is a vigor of those who are under the delusion of false worship. A comparison of this verse with Isaiah 40, especially vv. 12-31, reveals contrast and irony.⁸²

⁸¹Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 130. Isa 28:14-15 speaks of political alliance with other nations as a covenant with death, a pact with *sheol*. Motyer understands it as a situation in which while the nation thought that they were about to reach peace, actually they had signed the national death-warrant. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 474.

⁸²There are some indications that Isa 57:10 conveys wisdom connotations. Words like מִצָּנָה, דַּרְךְ, חֵיָהּ which appear in this verse are among prominent wisdom words. See Stephen A. Geller, “A Literary Study of Job 28” in *Judaic Perspective on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 169. A closer look at the surrounding context of Isa 57:10 supports the wisdom flavor of this verse. In Isa 57:1, the leaders were depicted as those who are not sensitive and perceptive. The prophet laments that despite terrible things that take place within the community, especially to the righteous, no one בִּין, “understands,” and no one “put it into the heart.” These words belong to wisdom vocabularies. In Isa 55:8 a sharp contrast is given between the Lord’s דַּרְךְ, “way,” which is parallel with his *thoughts*, and the people’s. In chapters 56-59 the occurrence of the word “way” continues this polemical tone between God’s ways compared to the people’s (see Isa 56:11; 57:17; 58:2, 13; 59:8).

Appreciation of these wisdom elements may enable us to compare this verse with Isa 40, especially vv. 12-31. For the wisdom elements in this passage, Melugin asserts from rhetorical points of view that Isaiah 40:12-17 reflects both the form and content of the wisdom genre. “Introduction,” 13-31. Dijkstra considers Isa 40:12-31 as a “specimen of theological wisdom discourse.” Meindert Dijkstra, “Lawsuit,

Isaiah 40 speaks of God in terms of wisdom and creation, followed by an argument of its implication to those who rely on him. In v. 12, two themes are combined: the act of creation is portrayed as a process of balancing and measuring. The focus of vv. 13-14 is on God's wisdom;⁸³ in vv. 15-26, we have a description of God's power over creation. These rich descriptions about God sandwich vv. 18-20 which speak of the impotence of the idols. As vv. 12-26 constitute the argument, vv. 27-31 are the application. The power of the Creator and all-wise God has a direct implication on those who worship him: he gives strength to the weary. In Isa 57:10, what happened is just the opposite; the people who were stirred by impotent idols think and act as those who get renewed strength and vigor.⁸⁴

Strophe 3: The Futility of Idolatry (Isa 57:11-13)

Verses 11-13 are a reflection on the activities described in the verses above, with a sudden change in v. 13b where the message shifts from gloom to hope.

Debate and Wisdom Discourse in Second Isaiah," in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A. M. Beuken*, ed. J. van Ruiten and M. Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University, 1997), 257-265.

⁸³See the words "to direct," "counselor," "understanding," "to teach," and "knowledge."

⁸⁴The text reads: Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way [דרכי] is hidden from the LORD, and from my God my justice is escaped?" Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become *weary* [יערף] nor *tired* [יגע] his understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the *weary* [יערף] and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow *weary* [יערף] and *tired* [יגע] and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get *tired* [יגע] they will walk and not become *weary* [יערף] Isa 40: 27-31 (New American Standard Bible).

Isa 57:11 – Misplaced Reverence

11aA	ואת־מי דאגת
11aB	ותיראי כי תכזבי
11bA	ואותי לא זכרת
11bB	לא־שמת על־לבך
11cA	הלא אני מחשה ומעלם
11cB	ואותי לא תיראי:
Translation	

11aA	“And whom do you dread
11aB	and fear that you tell lies,
11bA	yet me, you do not remember
11bB	nor put in your heart.
11cA	Have I not been silent for long time
11cB	that me, you do not fear.

Isa 57:11 has four cola, structured in a-b-a-b:

A	ואת־מי דאגת
	ותיראי כי תכזבי
B	ואותי לא זכרת
	לא־שמת על־לבך
A'	הלא אני מחשה ומעלם
B'	ואותי לא תיראי:

The parallelism, דאג / ירא; זכר / לא זכר; על־לב / לא־שמת are synonymous in nature. Verse 11 can be divided into four clauses, three starting with the particle of direct object. The object of the verbs in the first colon is “whom” while the remaining three cola refer to the object “me” which is the Lord himself. The fact that the root ירא appears in both the opening and closing of the verse implies that the main issue here is the absence of the sense of the fear of the Lord. Pete Diamond notes that although דאג is a synonym of ירא,

it is never used in connection with the concept of the fear of God.⁸⁵ The parallel between **דאג** and **ירא** indicates that the emphasis here is the feeling of dread.⁸⁶

In the second clause, **ואותי לא זכרת לא-שמת על-לבך** (v. 11b), the phrase **לא-שמת**, “did not put,” from the root **שים** builds a thematic connection with the use of the same word in vv. 7 and 8, and a comparison between them shows contrast or irony. In v. 7, the phrase **שמת** describes putting the bed on the high mountain: **על הר-גבה ונשא שמת** **משכבך**, “upon a high and lofty mountain you put your bed.” In v. 8, the verb refers to putting a remembrance behind the doorpost: **ואחר הדלת והמזוזה שמת זכרוןך**, “and behind door and doorpost you put your remembrance.” The connection between vv. 8 and 11 makes the irony more obvious since both verses contains the root words **זכר** and **שים**. If the clauses from these verses are read in connection with one another, they go as follows:

Upon a mountain high and lofty *you put* [**שמת**] your bed (v. 7)
Behind door and doorpost *you put your remembrance* [**שמת זכרוןך**] (v. 8),
But Me, you do not *remember* [**זכר**] nor *put* [**שים**] in your heart (v. 11).

So here the Lord is asking, “Whom are you supposed to be dreading besides Me?” This question of **את-מי** at the beginning of v. 11 linked the thought with the question **על-מי** in v. 4. As the emphasis in v. 4 is to take someone lightly—God, the One that one should honor—here it is just the opposite: to dread someone who is not God. In the third

⁸⁵A. R. Pete Diamond, “**דאג**” *NIDOTTE* 1:907.

⁸⁶*BDB*, 178; *HALOT*, 1:207; *DCH*, 2:382. Stigers comments on Isa 57:11, “Isaiah asks the harlot, Israel, who it was that brought such fear and worry on her that she turned to idolatry without thinking of the Lord.” Harold Stigers, “**דאג**” *TWOT* 1:177.

clause, God describes himself as being silent, which is the reason that the people take him lightly, do not fear him.

Isa 57:12-13 – The Futility of Idolatry

12aA אני אגיד צדקתך
12aB ואת־מעשיך
12aC ולא יועילוך:
13aA בזעקך יצילך קבוציך
13aB ואת־כלם ישא־רוח
13aC יקח־הבל
13bA והחוסה בי
13bB ינחל־ארץ
13bC יירש הר־קדשי:

Translation

12aA “I will declare your righteousness
12aB and your deeds,
12aC yet they will not profit you.”
13aA “When you cry out, let your collections deliver you.
13aB They all, wind will blew them up,
13aC a breath will take them away.”
13bA “But those who take refuge in me
13bB will inherit the earth,
13bC and will possess my holy mountain.”

The message of v. 12 connotes irony. First, the personal pronoun **אני** in this verse refers to and emphasizes the object that the one they did not fear nor remember in v. 11 is now the one who will pronounce the judgment upon them. Furthermore, all the idolatrous activities reported in the previous verses are wrapped up in this verse as **צדקה**, “righteousness,” and **מעשה**, “deeds.” It is ironical that all these idolatrous practices are

called “righteousness” instead of an “abomination,” which is a standard term for idolatry.

The occurrence of the root words **עשה** and **צדק** in this verse echoes the opening statements of Isa 56:1, 2, in which the command to “practice righteousness” [יעשו צדקה] is accompanied with an announcement of blessing, “blessed are those [אנוש יעשה־זאת] אשרי [אשרי] who do [עשה] these”; and “keep his hand from doing any evil” [שמר ידו מעשות] [כל־רע].

As their “righteous deeds” were put on the scale, they were found wanting: “they will not profit you.” In the book of Isaiah, the phrase **לא יועיל** expresses the idea of the futility of alliance with foreign nations and idols (30:5f; 44:9f; 47:12; 48:17). The occurrence of the negative particle **לא** here culminates in what they had not done in the previous verses:

ואותי לא זכרת	and me you do <i>not</i> remember
לא־שמנת על־לבך	do <i>not</i> put in your heart
הלא אני מחשה ומעלם	am I <i>not</i> silent. . .
ואותי לא תיראי:	and me you do <i>not</i> fear.

Now, as a result, those they depended on, the collection of idols, did not profit them.

Verse 13 describes a contrast between those who rely on the idols and those who take refuge in the Lord, and the sarcasm goes on:

Isa 57:13

13aA	בזעקך
13aB	יצילך קבוציך
13bA	ואת-כלם ישא-רוח
13bBA	יקח-הבל
13cA	והחוסה בי
13cB	ינחל-ארץ
13cC	יירש הר-קדשי:

Verse 13 contrasts two groups among the people in the time of distress.⁸⁷ The first group in v. 13a are those who “cry out” [זעק], in which the infinitive is without a specific object, to whom the cry was directed, and the other group in 13b, those who “take refuge in *Me*,” with God as the specific object. To the first group the Lord said, “Let your ‘collections’ [קבץ] deliver you!” Delitzsch considers קבוציך here to be the various collection of idols. He sees an intentional antithesis to 56:7-8 in the use of this term. In that text, the faithful ones will be accepted in the holy mountain by the Lord who קבץ, “gathers,” them—the word is repeated three times there; in this text, God’s people are looking to the קבץ, “collections,” of their idols as a source of deliverance.⁸⁸

The root נצל, “deliver,” here expresses the idea of snatching prey from an

⁸⁷The verb זעק, “to cry out,” is often found in pair with “wailing” in the context of severe disaster (see Isa 14:31; Jer 25:34; 47:2; 48:20, 31; Ezek 21:12; Hos 7:14).

⁸⁸Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:378, also Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 475. Koenen amended the word קבוציך to בקיך “your end” as a parallel to בזעקך. The reading goes: Nicht werden sie dir nützen bei deinem Schreien, dich retten bei deinem Ende. Klaus Koenen, “Zum Text von Jesaja 57:12-13a,” *VT* 39 (1989): 326-329. Paul compared the verse to the mockery of the futility of idolatry in Jer 2:27 and 11:12. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 472.

animal's mouth, to describe the urgency of the situation.⁸⁹ The idols are found to be impotent; instead of providing the necessary help, these idols were lifted up by the wind and taken away by a breath. The parallelism between יִקַּח־הַבַּל / יִשְׂאֵ־רוּחַ is significant. The parallel between “wind” and “breath” emphasizes that the wind here is a mere breath, the one that comes out from one's nostril. Just a simple breath carries these idols away.⁹⁰ The root נָשָׂא expresses the idea of “being taken up,” (i.e., a vertical movement), while לָקַח, “carried away,” indicates a horizontal movement. The destruction of these idols takes two directions, going level and going up, and resembles the idolatrous activity from the bottom of the valley to the high and lofty mountain (vertical) and from behind a door to a long journey (horizontal) that is portrayed in vv. 5-7. The device of contrasting high and low is carried on in the following verses.

In contrast to those who rely on the קִבְיָן of idols, those who take refuge in the Lord will inherit the land and possess his holy mountain. The theme of inheritance comes into contrast with v. 6, where the idolaters had the “smooth ones” as their portion and lot

⁸⁹*BDB*, 664; compare to *HALOT*, 2:717, “to pull out”; while *DCH*, 5:742, has a more general translation: “to deliver.”

⁹⁰Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 475. In Jeremiah 5, the false prophet, who “have lied about the Lord” (v. 12), are described as follow:

the prophets, they will become a wind [רוּחַ]
the word [הַדְּבַר] is not in them (v. 13).

Commentators had noted a play of word in the word רוּחַ, which can mean either “wind” or the divine “spirit.” John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 40. It is the spirit of the Lord that empower the prophets. However, in this case, these prophets who claim to be filled with the spirit will become nothing but wind. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 187; see also Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 390. This description supplements the portrayal of the futility of idolatry in the pericope above.

while the ones that rely on the Lord will possess the land and inherit his holy mountain.⁹¹ Referral to הַר here alludes to the הַר in v. 7 where idolatry is performed. Furthermore, as the people worship the idol from the valley up to the mountain top, God’s faithful ones inherit the land and the mountain.

In the context of Isa 56-59, the fact that this locative element of the promise of salvation is referred to as “land” [אַרְצֵי] and “my holy mountain” [הַר־קְדוֹשִׁי] hints at a consistent parallel with other promises such as “My holy mountain,” [הַר־קְדוֹשִׁי] the location to which God brings the foreigners in Isa 56:7. Riding upon “the heights of the ‘earth’ [אַרְצֵי]” and “to eat the ‘inheritance’ [נַחֲלָה] of Jacob” in Isa 58:14 are comparable with the phrase “to inherit the earth” [יִנְחַל־אֶרֶץ] here, and the report that God, as Redeemer is coming to “Zion” in Isa 59:20. At the same time, this final note on the fate of the faithful prepares the reader for a transition to the next section, vv. 14-21, which is called an “oracle of salvation.”⁹²

Stanza 3: Reconciled with God (Isa 57:14-21)

Isa 47:14-21 is a unit that focuses on the work of restoration that God will do on behalf of his people. This restoration amplifies the proclamation/promise made in 57:13b: “He who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land and will possess My holy mountain.”⁹³ As the promise is locative in nature—“to inherit the land” [יִנְחַל־אֶרֶץ] and take possession

⁹¹The words “portion” חֶלֶק and “lot” גִּרְלָהּ are closely connected with the idea of land inheritance. See comments on Isa 57:6.

⁹²Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 327.

⁹³Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 485.

of “my holy mountain” [הֵר־קִדְשִׁי]—the emphasis of the promise is on the relational aspect between the Lord and his people: “he who takes refuge in me.” It was followed by the specific natural aspect of the Lord himself, his holiness; that is why the land is called “my holy mountain.” This aspect of holiness will receive more emphasis in the reference to the divine epithet in v. 15.

This locative aspect of the promise is a recurring theme in each section of the “dialogue” between God and his people throughout Isa 56-59:

(1) the eunuchs had been promised an everlasting memorial within God’s “house” and “walls” (56:5) and the foreigners had been promised that God would bring them to “my holy mountain” [וְהֵבִיאֹתִים אֶל־הֵר קִדְשִׁי] (56:7).

(2) In Isa 58, the repentant ones will ride “the heights of the earth” and will be fed with “the heritage of Jacob” [נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב] (v. 14), comparable with the promise “to inherit” [יִנְחַל] the land in v. 14.

(3) in Isa 59, the Lord is portrayed as a redeemer who comes to Zion, which, in biblical tradition, is known as the “holy mountain of God” (Ps 2:6; Isa 2:3; 10:3; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Mic 4:2; Zech 8:3).

Based on its content, Isa 57:14-21 can be divided into several strophes: first, the call/command to build up the way for God’s people (v. 14), with the backlash of the authentication of the command (v. 15); second, reason for the command: God is not angry anymore (v.16), with the backlash about the cause of his anger (v. 17); third, God is going to heal (vv. 18-19), with the turning point in v. 18a (“I saw his ways”); and fourth, the description of those who have no part in the healing process (vv. 20-21).

In v. 14, the call to prepare the way is substantiated by a speech (introduced in

v. 15a) which is a proclamation of salvation, which properly starts in 16 (v. 15b is another introductory speech). It speaks about God's being angry, which comes to a turning point in 18a ("I saw their ways"⁹⁴) and is followed by the theme of healing that goes until v. 19. Verses 20-21 concern the wicked who will not have part in the salvation.

Strophe 1: The Call to Build up the Way (Isa 57:14-15)

Isa 57:14-15 – The Call to Build up the Way

57:14a	ואמר	
57:14bA	סל־סלו	
57:14bB	פנו־דרך	
57:14bC	הרימו מזכשול	
57:14c	מדרך עמי: ס	
15a		כי כה אמר
15bA		רם ונשא
15bB		שכן עד
15bC		וקדוש שמו
15cA		מרומ
15cB		וקדוש אשכון
15dA		ואת־דכא
15dB		ושפל־רוח
15eA	להחיות רוח שפלים	
15eB	ולהחיות לב נדכאים:	

⁹⁴Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 477.

Translation

57:14a	And it was said:
57:14bA	“Build up, build up!
57:14bB	Prepare the way!
57:14bC	Remove obstacle!
57:14c	From the way of my people.”
15a	For thus says
15bA	the high and lofty
15bB	who dwelt forever
15bC	and holy is his name:
15cA	“High
15cB	and holy, I dwell
15dA	yet [I were] with the crushed
15dB	and low in spirit,
15eA	to revive the spirit of the lowly
15eB	and to revive the broken hearted.”

Isa 57:14 – The Command to Restore the Way

57:14a	ואמר
57:14bA	סלל-סלל
57:14bB	פנו-דרך
57:14bC	הרימו מכשול
57:14c	מדרך עמי: ס

The parallelism in this verse is סלל / פנו-דרך / הרימו מכשול, and it is a synonymous parallelism. After an introductory and transitional phrase, “and one said,” there are three consecutive commands in pairs of words with the object “the way of my people.” The first one is the repetition of the verb סלל in its imperative form. This command to build up receives further elaboration to prepare the way and to remove

obstacles. In the general context of the book of Isaiah, the command to build up and prepare the way may be a signal for the coming of salvation.⁹⁵ The introductory formula of the command **וַאֲמַר** can be read both as “and it was said,” as in most English translations of the Bible, or “and I will say.”⁹⁶ The structure of the command is a repetition of two verbs without an object, **סִלְּוּ-סִלְּוּ**, followed by two verbal clauses with an object **הַרְיִנּוּ מִכְשׁוֹל / פְּנִי-דֶרֶךְ** and closes with a phrase, **מִדֶּרֶךְ עַמִּי**; they make a rhythm of 4/4/4 and 5/5 syllables.

To a certain degree, the word **דֶּרֶךְ** functions as one of the key words that holds Isa 56:9-57:21 together. In this particular context, v. 14 plays an important role because in this verse the use of the word marks a turning point: the command to prepare **דֶּרֶךְ** in this text becomes the link between the negative images of the word in its previous appearances and the positive tone afterward. Previously, the word had negative connotations. In Isa 56:11, we find the description “all of them had turned to their own way,” **כֻּלָּם לְדַרְכָּם פָּנוּ**, among the portrayals of the shepherds —the wording is comparable to the command **פְּנִי-דֶרֶךְ** here in Isa 57:14. The activities of the idolaters were summarized as **דֶּרֶךְ** in Isa 57:10.⁹⁷ The people, in their idolatrous activities, were reported as making a journey to a great distance (Isa 57:9). However, now in v. 14, the

⁹⁵Childs, *Isaiah*, 470. The command in Isa 62:10-11 resembles 57:14 in which building up of the way and the removal of the stones implies the coming of salvation. See also Isa 8:23; 40:3; 43:16, 19; 51:10.

⁹⁶Vulgate has the phrase “et dicam. . .”

⁹⁷Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 91-92. The use of the term **דֶּרֶךְ** as the summary for the idolatrous activities of the people appears again in v. 18.

Lord is commanding the road to be built for the sake of his people, toward salvation. From then on, the term has a positive meaning. In 57:17-18, it was revealed that God was angry because of the דרך of his people; as a response, he heals them. It seems that the preparing of the way, the removal of obstacles, in this verse is in the context of the healing process.⁹⁸ Starting with the phrase “I have seen their ways. . .” (18a), everything was changed. The command to prepare the דרך in Isa 57:14 may be an image for repentance.

Klaus Koch points out that in the majority of cases, the word דרך is used figuratively for human activity in general.⁹⁹ In this regard, Eugene Merrill adds that fundamental to the metaphorical meaning of דרך is its covenantal overtone.¹⁰⁰ In addition, Whybray notes, that in the OT, the meaning of the term מוכשול, “stumbling block,” is not literal, but more as a metaphor for sin, especially idolatry, or guilt leading to punishment from God.¹⁰¹ In the light of these comments, it is sensible for some commentators to interpret the command in Isa 57:14 to prepare the way and to remove

⁹⁸Muilenburg sees a direct connection between verses 14 and 18a. *Isaiah 40-66*, 671.

⁹⁹Klaus Koch, “דרך,” *TDOT* 3: 276.

¹⁰⁰Eugene H. Merrill, “דרך,” *NIDOTTE* 1: 989. See also Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 153. The covenantal tone in this particular verse can be seen in the word עמי, “my people.” Later on, in 58:1 עמי is paralleled to בית־יעקב.

¹⁰¹Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 209.

stumbling blocks from the way of God’s people as inward and spiritual preparation for the coming salvation.¹⁰²

Isa 57:15 – Authentication of the Command

15a	כי כה אמר
15bA	רם ונשא
15bB	שכן עד
15bC	וקדוש שמו
15cA	מרום
15cB	וקדוש אשכון
15dA	ואת־דכא
15dB	ושפל־רוח
15eA	להחיות רוח שפלים
15eB	ולהחיות לב נדכאים:

The opening phrase **כי כה אמר** makes a formal connection between v. 15 and the opening phrase of the command in v. 14. It indicates that the announcement in v. 14 is prompted by divine initiative. In v. 15b, the Lord introduces himself in a threefold appellation, and each of them consists of two words which, from a stylistic perspective,

¹⁰²In the words of Hanson, “‘Build up, build up, prepare the way’ has become the call to join in restoring just social structures and forms of worship worthy of God ‘whose name is Holy.’ ‘Remove every obstruction from my people’s way’ has become an admonition to cleanse the land of the apostasy and sin that had led to God’s anger and punishment.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 202. See also Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja: 3 Band Kapitel 40-66*, (Zurich/Stuttgart: Zwingli, 1964), 202; Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 671; Pauritsch, *Die neue Gemeinde*, 72; and Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 91.

From another perspective, observing the prominence of the word “return” in the first chapter of the book of Ruth, Sohn, commenting on Ruth 1:16, writes: “From here we learn that *teshuva*, ‘repentance’ or ‘return’ is not a single event in time but a process. *Teshuva* is a turning toward God that always involves a journey, with many acts of turning on the way.” Ruth H. Sohn, “Verse by Verse: A Modern Commentary” in *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine, 1994), 18.

echo the threefold command in v. 14 in which each of the commands also consists of two-word phrases.

Based on its content, v. 15 can be divided into two sections: v. 15a-b focuses on the One who is the Lord, while v. 15c-e focuses on what he does. In v. 15a, the roots **רם**, **שכן**, and **קדש** are repeated, while in v. 15b, the roots **רכא** and **שפל** are repeated. In their first appearance, the roots **רם**, **שכן**, and **קדש** are part of an *introduction* of who God is—he is the main reason behind the command in v. 14—while in the second appearance, it is an *affirmation* of who he is. Yet at the same time, in the middle of the verse, there is a blending/interconnection between the first group of the roots with the second ones:

מרום
וקדוש אשכון
ואת־דכא
ושפל־רוח

The verb **שכן** holds both sections, tying together opposite, even impossible, realities into one, as if it were accepted as possible.¹⁰³ The term **שכן** here, emphasizing the dwelling of God among the lowly and the broken ones, echoes the dwelling of God among his people as they are just leaving Egyptian bondage.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Flynn notes how the ancient versions, when translating the phrase, had to choose either the transcendent or the immanent nature of the Lord, and they opted for his transcendent nature. He writes, “there is a common trend in the Versions. They seem to ask, how can the Deity dwell with the people and still be transcendent? The translational decisions of the Versions reveal a tendency—possibly with the exception of 1QIsa but this is unclear—to support a transcendent understanding of Divine Presence rather than a more immanent one.” S. W. Flynn, “Where is YHWH in Isaiah 57, 14-15?” *Bib* 87 (2006): 362. But Flynn argues that the either/or approach in understanding this text is unnecessary. Instead, the text should be read as holding two meanings that are complementary. *Ibid.*, 369.

¹⁰⁴Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 476.

The divine epithets presented in v. 15a emphasize that the Lord is not part of this world, either in time (eternally [שכן ער]), spatially (high and aloof [רם ונשא]) or by character (holiness [קדוש שמו]).¹⁰⁵ In its immediate context, these phrases are presented as a polemic against the idolatrous activity described in the previous section: (1) “high and lofty” [רם ונשא] against the “high and lofty mountain” [הר-גבה ונשא] as the location of the idolatrous cult (v. 7)¹⁰⁶; (2) “dwell forever” is in contrast with nature of the idols which were blown away by the wind as chaff (v. 13); and (3) “holiness” is the unique characteristic of the Lord compared to “the sons of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute, children of rebellion, offspring of deceit” (vv. 3-4). Here in v. 15, the Lord’s salvific action is described by expressing the contrast between the highest and lowest, implying a tension between the transcendent and the immanent nature of God, his distance and closeness.

In v. 15b, the words דכא, שפל and רוח serve as the structuring element of the poem in a chiasmic way דכא - שפל - רוח - רוח - דכא - שפל; this structure highlights the relationship between the Lord and the people, especially what he is going to do to/for

¹⁰⁵Oswalt comments that this divine epithet is considered as “one of the finest one-sentence summations of biblical theology in the Bible.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 487. See also Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 671-672. Scholars noticed that this epithet relates the passage to the vision of Isaiah’s call into prophetic office in Isa 6. Childs notes that the phrase *ram wenissa* only occurs in these two passages. *Isaiah*, 471. Blenkinsopp perceives the speaker in Isa 57:15ff as the same as the Enthroned One of Isaiah’s vision in chap. 6, and as here his holiness is self-proclaimed, in chap. 6:3 it was proclaimed by the seraphim. *Isaiah 56-66*, 170.

¹⁰⁶The elements of “high” and “holy” are an important motif in the promises given in other sections in Isa 56-59. In Isa 56:1-8, the eunuchs and foreigners are being assured of a place in God’s “holy mountain” (v. 7); in Isa 58:1-14, one of the promises is that the people will ride on “the heights of the earth” (14); in Isa 59, the Lord will come as redeemer to “Zion” (v. 20), which is referred to as a “holy mountain” in Ps 2:6; Joel 2:1; 3:17; and Zech 8:3.

them. Furthermore, a compact parallelism device is discernable in this verse:

A	ואת־דכא ושפל־רוח
B	להחיות רוח שפלים ולהחיות לב נדכאים:

In A, דכא / שפל־רוח is synonymous parallelism, as are להחיות / להחיות, לב / רוח, and שפל / דכא. The parallel structure which emphasizes one's "spirit" and "heart" and the use of the terms שפל־רוח and שפלים רוח as well as the fact that דכא is used to signify the word לב in the phrase לב נדכאים indicate that referral to the group here is more concerned with the spiritual condition/attitude than the social status of the persons.¹⁰⁷

Thematically, the terminology applied to this particular group to which God is reaching out stands as a contrast to the description of sinners in the previous verses. The terms רוח־שפל and שפלים רוח here are in contrast with the idolaters who "go down" [שפל] to sheol (57:9); as the Lord revives the spirit [רוח] of the humble ones, the "collection" [קבץ] of the idolaters are being carried away by the wind [רוח] (57:13). Furthermore, referral to the term "heart" [לב] creates a connection between different references to the sinful actions of the people, first, to the death of the righteous, which no one has "put in the heart" (57:1); later, it refers to the idolaters who are not putting the Lord in their heart (57:11); finally, the summary of the sin of the people is expressed as "the way of his

¹⁰⁷While in Deut. 23:2 (Heb) the term דכא refers to crushing the testicles, and in Ps 143:3 refers to one's "life" as being crushed, in Ps. 10:7-13; 34:18-22 the term stands as an antithesis for the wicked. Childs notes, "The Holy One of Israel has taken initiative, but a faithful response to this offer is also demanded. The invitation to salvation in God's holy presence calls both for repentance and humility." *Isaiah*, 471. For those who see the terms דכא and שפל as referring to the marginalized social groups in the society, comparable to eunuchs and foreigners in Isa 56, see Flynn, "Where is YHWH," 363.

heart” (57:17). In contrast, here in Isa 57:15b, the faithful have their heart [לב] revived by the Lord.

Strophe 2: Reason for the Command (Isa 57:16-17)

Isa 57:16-17 – Reason for the Command

57:16aA	כי לא לעולם אריב
57:16aB	ולא לנצח אקצוף
57:16bA	כי־רוח מלפני יעטוף
57:16bB	ונשמות אני עשיתי:
57:17a	בעון בצעו
57:17bA	קצפתי ואכהו
57:17bB	הסתר ואקצף
57:17c	וילך שובב בדרך לבו:
Translation	
57:16aA	“Because I will not contend for ever
57:16aB	and will not always angry.
57:16bA	Because a spirit from me will weaken
57:16bB	and the breath of life I have made.”
57:17a	“Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain,
57:17bA	I was angry and struck him.
57:17bB	I hid myself and was angry.
57:17c	Yet he keeps on turning away, after the way of his heart.”

**Isa 57:16 – The Lord will not
Always be Angry**

57:16aA	כי לא לעולם אריב
57:16aB	ולא לנצח אקצוף
57:16bA	כי־רוח מלפני יעטוף
57:16bB	ונשמות אני עשיתי:

The structure of the verse itself is divided into two sections—16A and B—with 16A stating what God will *not* do, and 16B stating what He *will* do. Both bicola begin with the causal preposition כִּי, indicating that the verse is an explanation of the statement given in the previous verses of 14-15.

In v. 16A, the parallelism is לעולם / לנצח and אריב / אקצוף. The first pair is complementary, both are expressions referring to time;¹⁰⁸ while the second pair is synonymous. The parallelism אריב / אקצוף indicates that the term ריב here is more concerned with the emotional level—i.e. disappointment on the part of the Lord rather than a legal lawsuit.¹⁰⁹ It is not enough that God will not contend/be angry forever, but further, He is doing something for the people.

16B is problematic due to the uncertainty of the meaning of the verb עטף. While there is parallelism between רוח / נשמה, which are synonymous,¹¹⁰ the exact meaning of the other pair, עטף / עשה is difficult to construe. The basic meaning of the verb עטף is “to be feeble” or “to faint.”¹¹¹ The translation of the sentence is literally “because a spirit

¹⁰⁸See Ps 9:18; 103:9 for the appearance of the same word-pair; Ps. 103:9 in particular, has identical theme with Isa 57:16A. See José Severino Croatto, *Imaginar el futuro; Estructura retórica y querigma del Tercer Isaias* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 2001), 91; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 171.

¹⁰⁹Comparable to Gen 31:36, “then Jacob became infuriated [חרה] and contended [ריב] with Laban. . .” or with Neh 5:6-7; when Nehemiah learned that certain wealthy Jews were oppressing their poorer brethren, forcing them to sell their children as slaves, he reported, “and I was very angry [חרה] . . . and I contended [ריב] with the nobles and the rulers. . .” Goldingay illustrated, “One could imagine the people are protesting, ‘We are crushed and low in spirit, and Yhwh is too high and lofty to be involved with us. Yhwh has withdrawn from us and hit us and evidently plans to contend angrily with us forever’. ‘On the contrary’, Yhwh says, ‘I do not contend or stay angry. How could that be true? I am the one who created these people.’” *Isaiah 56-66*, 141.

¹¹⁰For other occurrences of parallelism between רוח / נשמה, see Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:14; Isa 42:5.

¹¹¹*BDB*, 742; *HALOT*, 2:814 and *DCH*, 6:350.

from me will weaken / and the breath of life I have made.” It suggests that unless God “weakens” his anger, humanity will be destroyed.¹¹² However, the LXX translates עָטַף as ἐξελεύσεται, “to proceed,” with the translation “for from me proceeds the spirit / and I have made the breath of life.” The implication is that not only will God not be angry with his people any longer, but furthermore, he is going to empower them.¹¹³

Isa 57:17 – Reasons of God’s Anger

57:17a	בעון בצעו
57:17bA	קצפתי ואכהו
57:17bB	הסתר ואקצף
57:17c	וילך שובב בדרך לבו:

As vv. 14-16 already speak about restoration, the content of v. 17 goes back to the cause of the problem, showing how the behavior of the people is a valid reason for the Lord to be angry. While the verse has the Lord as the speaker, the content of the verse focuses on the action of the people at the beginning and at the end of the verse, with the action of God in the center. The description of the action of the people explains what they did before and after punishment from God, and this description reveals how stubborn/insensitive the people were (17c).

The description in the verse begins with the term **בצע**, “unjust greed,” which is

¹¹²See NRSV for such a translation, also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 172 and Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 488-489.

¹¹³See RSV for such a translation. Watts understands the phrase as God’s energizing His people. *Isaiah 34-66*, 263. Childs and Whybray give both options of the translation. *Isaiah*, 468 and *Isaiah 40-66*, 210; while Westermann reads the term רוח as רוּחַם in the phrase כִּי־רוּחַ מִלְּפָנַי יֵעָטֵף meaning, “their spirit proceeds from me,” implying that God is the source of life, therefore He will not be angry forever. *Isaiah 40-66*, 326.

considered as a catchword to summarize the description of the sin in Isa 56:9-57:13.¹¹⁴ As the description of the actions of the people at the beginning uses the word **בצע** and at the end uses the word **דרך**, it echoes the accusation against the leaders of the people in Isa 56:11b, in which **דרך / בצע** is employed as a pair in parallelism:

all of them, to their own way [דרך] they turned
each one to his *unjust gain* [בצע] to the last one.

The term **דרך** in itself is a catchword for the activities of both the leaders and the people.

The leaders had followed their **דרך** for their own gain (56:11), while the people had continued to go their own **דרך** in idolatry (57:10). The description of the action on the part of God in the center of the verse is presented in chiastic structure, with the emphasis on “angry”: **קצף - נכה - סתר - קצף**; the terminology here has the vocabulary of cursing and blessing in the book of Deuteronomy.¹¹⁵

Strophe 3: God Is Going to Heal (Isa 57:18-19)

Isa 57:18-19 – God Is Going to Heal

57:18a	דרכיו ראיתי	
57:18bA	וארפאהו	
57:18bB	ואנחהו	
57:18bC	ואשלם נחמיו לו	
57:18c	ולאבליו:	
57:19a		בורא נוב שפתים
57:19bA		שלום

¹¹⁴Childs, *Isaiah*, 472.

¹¹⁵See Deut 28:22, 27, 35 for **נכה** and Deut 31:17, 18 for **סתר**. For **קצף / סתר** as a word-pair, see Deut 31:17 and Ps 27:9.

57:19bB	שלום לרחוק	
57:19bC	ולקרוב	
57:19cA		אמר יהוה
57:19cB		ורפאתיו:
Translation		
57:18a	“His ways I have seen,	
57:18bA	but I will heal him,	
57:18bB	and I will lead him,	
57:18bC	and I will restore comfort for him	
57:18c		and his mourners.”
57:19a	“Creating fruit of the lips:	
57:19bA	peace,	
57:19bB	peace to the far	
57:19bC	and to the near,”	
57:19cA	says the Lord,	
57:19cB		“and I will heal him.”

Isa 57:18 – God’s Healing Acts

57:18a	דרכיו ראיתי
57:18bA	וארפאהו
57:18bB	ואנחהו
57:18bC	ואשלם נחמים לו
57:18c	ולאבליו:

The term דרך, located in the beginning of the sentence, may be considered as a device to highlight a thematic connection with v. 17. While it is a continuation of the train of thought that has been established there, the content is the opposite. As the ending of v. 17 states that the people “keep backsliding in the way of their heart,” it is these particular ways that the Lord had taken into notice. As a result of what he has seen, there are three actions in response: healing, leading, and restoring. The recipient of God’s

gracious actions here is given in personal expression: “to him and to his mourners.” The explicative phrase וְלֵאבְלָיו can be read as an emphasis of the phrase “to him.” The conjunction ו here is understood as an epexegetical *waw*, with the sense of “that is.”¹¹⁶ This kind of reading will have the object of God’s work of restoration as the same group of v. 15b.

The presentation in vv. 17 and 18, as they are thematically interconnected, both contained an element of surprise—a negative one in v. 17 and a positive one in v. 18. Verse 17, in the mode of the curse and blessing speech in the book of Deuteronomy, after reading the description of how God is angry, striking and hiding, the expectation of the reader is that the people will repent. However, instead of repentance, the text describes how the people keep on going in their wayward ways. The conjunction ו at the beginning of the sentence וַיֵּלֶךְ שׁוֹבֵב בְּדֶרֶךְ לְבוֹ functions as a *waw* adversative, similar to its meaning in the phrase וַאֲרַפְאֵהוּ in v. 18. In v. 18, as God has seen the people’s stubborn ways, it is expected that another set of punishments will be inflicted upon them; however, instead of punishing, God is healing and guiding them. In the words of Motyer, “Suddenly all is different; a new edict goes out from the Lord. Not because man has changed (*his ways* still go on), not because the Lord has decided to overlook sin (*I have seen*), but for a reason undeclared, something that is true in the heart of God and true to the nature of God, ‘smiting’ has turned to ‘healing’.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 490.

¹¹⁷Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 477.

Whybray understands v. 18 as a reinterpretation of v. 14, in which the task of “removing every obstruction” is performed by Yahweh himself out of his love: “he will save *despite* the continued existence of the sin.”¹¹⁸ It can also be said that v. 17 describes the “expected” reaction of God toward the sin of the people, while v. 18 gives his “unexpected” reaction; therefore, this verse serves as a turning point. Polan sees vv. 17 and 18 as complementing each other, in which the acts of punishment in v. 17 are complemented by acts of healing in v. 18:

v. 17	the people goes astray [הלך]	v. 18	God is leading them (back) [נחה]
	they receive striking [נכה]		they receive healing [רפא]
	they receive anger [קצף]		they receive consolation [נחם]. ¹¹⁹

This insight is in harmony with the overall concept of healing in prophetic writings; as Michael Brown observes, it occurs most often in the context of reversal of the effects of divine judgment; the effect of God’s healing could be no less than the effect of God’s smiting.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 210.

¹¹⁹Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 154-155; Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 94-95. Furthermore, while the Lord is not appeased, נחם, concerning their act of idolatry (57:6), he gives them consolation, נחם. Kselman notes that a number of commentators prefers to read the phrase ויאנחהו in v. 18 as “I will give him rest.” However, he argues that the context of vv. 17-18 “moves in a logical progression from God’s wrath at the sin of Israel to his forgiveness and restoration of his people.” Consequently, the reading of “I will lead him” should be retained. John Kselman, “A Note on *w’nhhw* in Isa 57:18,” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 539-542.

¹²⁰See Michael L. Brown, “רפא,” *TDOT* 13:598. In prophetic writings the healing is mainly spiritual in nature, from apostasy (Isa 19:22; Jer 3:22; 8:11; 17:14; 30:17; 33:6; Lam. 2:13; Hos. 5:13; 6:1; 7:1; 14:4; Zech. 11:16). Some of the passages share themes that are comparable to those in Isa 56-57 in a significant way. The message of Jer 3 is a call for repentance. The sin given in this passage is idolatry, especially as performed under the trees (vv. 6, 9), which is specified as harlotry and adultery (v. 9), and which is comparable to the sin described in Isa 57. The Lord promises that He will give shepherds “who will feed you on knowledge and understanding” (v. 15), in contrast with the shepherds in Isa 56 who have no knowledge nor understanding, and furthermore, the Lord will “heal” them from their “faithlessness” just as the people keep on going in their “faithlessness” and yet God will “heal” them.

In Jer 8:10-11 the Lord complains how his people, the whole community, from the least to the greatest, everyone, is “greedy for gain,” בצע בצע, the prophet and the priest, everyone practices deceit, by

Isa 57:19 – The Effects of the Healing

57:19a	בורא נוב שפתים
57:19bA	שלום
57:19bB	שלום לרחוק
57:19bC	ולקרוב
57:19cA	אמר יהוה
57:19cB	ורפאתיו:

Isa 57:18-19 can be read as a unit with the verb רפא as its inclusio. After the text reports that God has seen the ways of his people, several remedial actions by the Lord are given: healing, leading, restoring, creating. As this unit has the Lord speaking in the first

“healing” the brokenness of my people superficially, saying ‘peace, peace’ while there is no peace” (vv. 10-11). In Isa 56 and 57 the main problem of the people is summarized as בצע, but unlike in Jer 8, God will bring a genuine healing and genuine peace to them. In Jer 33, as a part of the promise of healing after punishment, the Lord describes the Babylonian invasion and the exile, as he is angry and “hides his face,” but after that, He will “heal” them, that is, reveal an abundance of “peace” and “truth” (vv. 5-6). In Isa 57, in his anger, God smites his people and hides his face; but he will heal them by bringing “peace.”

That God is the healer of his people is an important concept in the Hebrew Bible. The blessings in the book of Deuteronomy include promises that the Lord will remove all sickness (7:15); just as he is a God who put to death and give life, he also wounded and heal (32:39). In contrast to their surrounding ancient Near East culture, the people of Israel preserved almost no ancient medical literature. This fact may lead to the following observation:

There is no evidence from the OT that ancient Israel had indigenous doctors. If they did, they didn’t talk about them. Ancient Hebrew does not even have a noun for “doctor,” only the participles *rōpē’* and *rōpē’im* (“healer / healers”). When these terms denote human healers in the OT, which is only a very few times other than here (Gen 50:2; 2 Chr 16:12; and Job 13:4), they are always foreigners. In Israel the “healer” is Yahweh (Lundbom, 537).

However, the situation may be viewed differently by pointing to the fact that medical literature in ancient Near East was rarely purely scientific; rather, it is an intertwining of magic, medicine, and religion. Therefore, involvement with physician often implying involvement with pagan deities and practices prohibited by the Torah. Therefore, the context “in which God reveals himself to be Israel’s Healer, must be seen as directed more against rival healing deities than against earthly physician” (Alan Kam-Yau Chan, Thomas B. Song and Michael L. Brown, “רפא,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:1168).

That the Lord is the Healer of Israel does not necessarily mean that the Torah exclude all other medical ways and means. The legislation in Exod 21:18-19 covers a case of injuries caused by a fight. Among the stipulations, the one who struck him shall take care of him until he is completely healed (v. 19b). The phrase רפא ירפא [“completely healed”] is interpreted to mean “to pay the physician’s fee” in the LXX and Targums (Chan *et al*, *Ibid.*; also Brown, “רפא,” 13:600). The cry in Jer 8:22 “Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?” implies the acknowledge usefulness of the physician and of medicine (Brown, *Ibid.*).

person throughout as a mode of emphasis, at the end of the verse, the author inserted the formula of divine speech **אמר יהוה** and repeated the grand plan: “I will heal him.”¹²¹

The theme of healing in v. 18 receives a deeper meaning in v. 19 since it speaks about the act of creation.¹²² Throughout the book of Isaiah, the participle **בורא** is a technical term for the Lord as the creator, but the object here is interesting—the lips.¹²³ As God is doing a life-creating intervention for his people—see the use of the term **להחיות** in v. 15—the term **בורא** here refers to creation applied to the inner self of the re-created person. The point is that God not only heals his people, but he also creates the ability of repentant Israel to praise him with the “fruit of the lips.”¹²⁴ In the context of Isa 57, this concept of praise is in contrast with the attitude of the people toward the Lord in

¹²¹As v. 14 speaks about **דרך**, there is a call to build up the **דרך** of “my people,” and in v. 17, the Lord said that people kept on following the **דרך** of their hearts, but despite this, in v. 18, the Lord had decided to heal, guide and restore his people. Therefore, it can be said that healing and restoration in vv. 18-19 are the realization of the command in of building the **דרך** in v. 14. This conclusion can be strengthened by observing the use of the verb **אמר** as the opening statement of v. 15 and the closing statement in v. 19. Since **אמר** can be considered as the inclusion, therefore it is connected with **ואמר** in the beginning of v. 14, to emphasize the solemnity of the command, plan, and realization of the restoration of the people.

This kind of understanding is also shared by Lim and Koenen. Lim interprets the term “way of the people” in Isa 57:14 “is first and foremost the ‘way of the Lord’ as it primarily refers to Yahweh bringing redemption to his people. Bo H. Lim, “The ‘Way of the Lord’ in the Book of Isaiah” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006), 257. He is quoting Koenen’s comment that states “the demand to clear the way for the people corresponds to the message in v. 15ff. that Yahweh will revive, heal, and lead the suffering.” Ibid., 256. See Klaus Koenen, *Ethik und Eschatologie im Tritojesajabuch: eine Literarkritische und Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 54.

¹²²Koole sees the root **ברא** here in v. 19 as connected with the term **עשה** in v. 16, since they are often presented as a word-pair. *Isaiah III*, 108.

¹²³In the book of Isaiah, the participial form of **ברא** is used as an emphasis of God’s creatorship with such objects as the earth (40:28), the heavens (42:5 and 45:18), new heavens and new earth (65:17), Israel (43:15), and Jerusalem (65:18). The fact that in 57:19 the object of his creative activity is “the word of praise of the lips” makes it an interesting phenomenon.

¹²⁴Childs, *Isaiah*, 472.

the beginning of the chapter, how they “open wide their mouth, sticking out their tongue” against him (v. 4).

The healing also involves the establishment of שלום. The word שלום here functions as an anchor to the whole section of Isa 57:14-21 and it seems to have a double meaning. In relation to the previous context of vv. 14-19 in which the dominant theme is healing, the word is to be understood as “wholeness,” the end product of a healing process. On the other hand, as it introduces the theme in the following verses of 20-21 in which the wicked are portrayed as a raging muddy sea, the word שלום also means “peace,” which has a connotation of tranquility.¹²⁵ In other words, the meaning of the word שלום must be broader than “peace” but covers the whole healing process of the nation: “an enduring state, as wholeness, as salvation.”¹²⁶

Strophe 4: Descriptions of Those Who have No Part in the Healing Process (Isa 57:20-21)

Isa 57:20-21 is a continuation of the theme of peace as stated in v. 19, but the focus now is more on the struggle of the wicked who are not able to experience it. Isaiah 57:19-21 can be read as a unit. It begins and ends with the theme of שלום, strengthened

¹²⁵The nominative שלום, among others, covers the meaning of peace, happiness, well-being, prosperity, health, luck, kindness, and salvation. Philip J. Nel, “שלום,” *NIDOTTE* 4:130. It is also worth noticing that one of God’s promised actions in v. 18 is the verb שלם, to “restore” the comfort of the people, which is the root word for שלום. So the idea of healing toward wholeness is being underlined in this unit.

¹²⁶Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 319-320; also F. J. Stendebach, “שלום,” *TDOT* 15:35. Hasel summarizes the idea of health in שלום as follows: “The themes of healing, forgiveness, and salvation are not (and cannot be) separated in Scripture. Healing involves not merely physical restoration; it includes deeper dimension of forgiveness and restoration into fellowship with God . . . ‘healing’ in the biblical sense, is the experience or process which restores fallen, alienated human beings to intimate fellowship, friendship, and communion with God. It is *šālôm*—‘peace’—in that comprehensive sense of *total* well being.” Gerhard F. Hasel, “Health and Healing in the Old Testament” *AUSS* 21 (1983): 201-202.

with speech formulas **אמר אלהי** and **אמר יהוה**.

Isa 57:19	שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב
	אמר יהוה
Isa 57:21	אין שלום
	אמר אלהי

It is observable that the messages of these parallel phrases are in contrast to each other.

As in v. 19 a promise of peace is extended to those who responded to his gesture of healing, in v. 21 the focus is on the fate of the wicked; how they have no peace. Right in the middle of this theme of “peace” v. 20 provides a metaphorical description of the experience of the wicked. Therefore, thematically, Isa 57:19-21 is structured in A – B – AB: (A) peace – (B) the experience of wicked – (AB) there is no peace for the wicked.

This is the dominant theme of v. 20, which is structured by the terms **גרש - גרש - רשע** - **רשע**.

Isa 57:20ab – Metaphor of the Absence of Peace

19	אמר יהוה...
20aA	והרשעים
20aB	כים נגרש
20bA	כי השקט לא יוכל
20bB	ויגרשו מימיו רפש וטיט:
Translation	
19	Says the Lord...
20aA	“But the wicked
20aB	are like tossed sea;
20bA	For to be quiet, they are not able.
20bB	And the water tossed up mire and dirt.”

In v. 20 the experience of the wicked is described at three different levels: (1)

compared with a tossing sea, (2) this turbulent nature of the water is further described not able to be quiet, and (3) tossing up mire and mud. In v. 21 this kind of situation is summed up as the absence of peace.

In the phrase *כי השקט לא יוכל*, the emphasis is on שקט, “quiet,” and this is, in particular, what the wicked are not able to experience. In Judg 18:7, 27 and Isa 32:17 the idea of שקט is in parallelism with security [בטח]. In contrast with those who take refuge in the Lord so that they are secure, the wicked are not secure and they are restless—in both physical and psychological aspects.

The term רפש for muddy water also appears in Eze 32:2 and 34:18-19. In the first passage, the pharaoh is like a hippopotamus that stirred the water to become muddy; in the latter, the strong animals were criticized for trampling the water with their feet so the weaker ones cannot drink pure water. However, in Isa 57, the wicked did not stir the water for the disadvantage of others like those in the book of Ezekiel; it is more a reflection of their own condition.¹²⁷

The biblical imagery compares the still and chaotic waters with life and death.¹²⁸

Nicholas Tromp sees that the term *mayim rabbim* represents death and the nether world,

¹²⁷Koole, *Isaiah III*, 111.

¹²⁸Rudman explains, “The chaos waters by their very nature are symbolic of the *absence* of order and creation. In the flood narrative, they denote the *reversal* of creation. For the writers of the OT, who saw the formation of individuals as part of God’s ongoing creative activity (Jer 1,5; 49,5; Zach 12,1), and who likewise saw death as a reversal of creation (Gen 2,7; 3,19; Qoh 12,7), the deep would be an appropriate image to denote the cessation of life. To be alive is to be part of the created world; to be dead is to be uncreated. What better way to evoke this latter state than to use an image of the individual being subsumed in the waters of chaos?” Dominic Rudman, “The Use of Water Imagery in Descriptions of Sheol” ZAW 113 (2001): 244.

while simple *mayim* stands for fertility, prosperity, and well-being.¹²⁹ Ps 46 portrays the contrast between the chaotic situation of the world with a still stream of water in the city of God (vv. 1-4).¹³⁰ As the reading goes on, vv. 6 and 8 emphasize that the well-being of the city is because of God's presence there.¹³¹ God's ability to still the roaring sea is often compared with his ability to bring peace to humanity.¹³² In Ps 65:7, the roaring of the seas and its waves is paralleled with the tumult of the people which God calmed. Ps. 89:9 states the following about God: "You rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them."

Robert Luyster observes that in the Hebrew Bible, God's agent in controlling the chaotic waters is his "spirit"—*ruah elohim*—beginning with the creation narrative.¹³³ He explains the meaning of the verb associated with *ruah*. In Gen 1:2, which is *merahepet*, writing, "[T]he verb can best be rendered by a translation in which Yahweh is 'hovering' above as leader, guide, and protector."¹³⁴ This observation is important for understanding

¹²⁹Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, *Biblica et Orientalia* no. 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 64-65.

¹³⁰The theme of a still stream of water characterizing the city of God is also found in Isa 8 and 33 and Ezek 47, which describes the water as bringing healing to both humanity and nature. See Jon Douglas Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (Cambridge: Scholars, 1976), 11-13.

¹³¹Levenson, in his comment on these verses, emphasizes, "The cosmic significance of the Temple, then, is owing to the presence of God within rather than to the Temple as a human artifact to serve as a place of worship." *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³²Luyster writes, "Yahweh's claim to cosmic sovereignty was vindicated, however, by his domination of the waters." Robert Luyster, "Wind and Water: Cosmogonic Symbolism in the Old Testament" *ZAW* 93 (1981): 3.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁴Luyster, "Wind and Water," 8. See also W. H. McClellan, "The Meaning of *Ruah Elohim* in Genesis 1:2" *Biblica* 15 (1934): 526.

Isa 57:20-21, since in the light of v. 16, it was stated that the Spirit of the Lord is the agent in bringing recovery and healing to the people. Thus, the wicked, who are not receptive to the work of the Spirit, are without God’s guidance and protection, and they are compared to chaotic water.¹³⁵

Isa 57:20c-21 – There is No Peace for the Wicked

20c	אין שלום
21aA	אמר אלהי
21cB	לרשעים: ם
Translation	
20c	“There is no peace,”
21aA	says my God,
21cB	“for the wicked.”

This passage is not only thematically a continuation of the previous strophes, it also summarizes the whole poem of Isa 56:9-57:21. In the light of Isa 57:18-19 it means that the wicked fails to receive and experience divine healing and restoration. In larger context, this failure to have peace may cover a situation of the failure on the part of those in the leadership position (Isa 56:9-12); the extinction of the righteous (Isa 57:1-2); indifference against God (57:3-4); and idolatrous behavior (57:5-10). Franz Josef Stendebach translates the phrase *אין שלום לרשעים* in Isa 57:21 as “there is *no salvation* to the wicked,” indicating that the meaning of *שלום* here is broader than “peace” but includes the whole experience of salvation.

¹³⁵Stendebach, “שלום,” 15:35.

The Thematic Structure of Isa 56:9-57:21

The focus of this section is to highlight the thematic structure of the poem of Isa 56:9-57:21. As the address in the first poem (Isa 56:1-8) is mainly directed to foreigners and eunuchs, in this second poem, the focus is on God's people. This transition of the recipient of the message begins with reference to the name "Israel" in 56:8, making this verse serves as a connecting link between Isa 56:1-8 and 56:9-57:21. That God's people are being addressed in this poem is highlighted when, in 57:11, the argument between the speaker and the audience is direct and relational in nature, between "you" and "me," with God as the first person and the people as the second person. The speech concerning God's people can be divided into four distinct topics: the failure of the leaders of the community, the death of the righteous, idolatry practiced by the people and God's healing for their problem. The first two topics belong to the first stanza, while the last two topics constitute the second and third stanza.

Some words serve as a connecting link between different topics of this poem. The criteria for considering these words as a link is their recurrence in different parts of the poem, at least in their root-word form. First is the connection between the first and second strophe in the first stanza. The first stanza in this poem concerns the absence of justice. Because of the lack of a sense of responsibility among the leaders, the righteous are perishing. The connection between these two topics is built through the word **בין**, "understanding." Among the characteristics of the leaders as shepherds, it is said that they "do not know understanding" [**לֹא יָדְעוּ הַבַּיִן**] (Isa 56:11aB), while Isa 57:1 reports that "devout men are taken away because there is no understanding" [**אֲנָשֵׁי־חֶסֶד נֶאֱסָפִים**] **בְּאִין מִבַּיִן**]. Through this link, the theme of a lack of understanding functions as a clue

that there is a direct connection between the irresponsible behavior of the leaders and the violence suffered by the righteous. This kind of connection is ironical in the light of the announcement of the coming salvation in Isa 56:1-2, where a blessing is promised to those who keep justice and practice righteousness [צדקה], but here the righteous [הצדיק] are perishing.

In the first half of the poem, the first stanza focuses on the absence of justice, especially the failure of the leadership, and the second stanza concerns the practice of idolatry by the general population. The leaders are addressed as watchers and shepherds of the people. Their failure to perform their responsibility is comparable to mute, lazy and greedy dogs. The description of the idolatrous activity of the people opened with their being addressed as sons of sorcerers, offspring of adultery and prostitutes, children of rebellion, offspring of deceit. These filial descriptions emphasize their infidelity toward God.

Since these stanzas are discussing totally different topics, the depiction there does not share similar vocabulary. The description of the activity of the two groups leaves an impression that they are not related to each other. The leaders are depicted as dogs that are mute, lazy, and love to slumber: inactivity seems to be their main characteristic (Isa 56:10). The idol worshipers, on the other hand, seem to be vigorous. The locative description of their activity covers a wide range of area, high and low, near and far; they practice idolatry under trees, on the bottom of valley, mountain top, behind closed doors, even to making a far journey. The depiction of their performance includes a wide range of activity, from being “inflamed”—a term that is loaded with illicit sexual connotation (v. 5), slaughtering children, pouring out drink offering, offering grain offering, making wide

beds, offering sacrifice, uncovering oneself, making agreements and sending envoys (Isa 57:5-10).

However, at the same time, the watchers/shepherds/dogs have a strong appetite, do not know satiation (Isa 56:11), and encourage each others to enjoy strong drinks (v. 12). Information of this other side of their behavior indicates that the leaders and the population share the same characteristics: they are both vigorous and lively for what they are interested in doing. The leaders are only slow and lazy in performing their duties. The word חזיה, “to dream” serves as a connecting link between them. As the watchmen are depicted as mute and lazy dogs, “dreamer[s]” [חזיה], who loves to slumber (Isa 56:10), the people, in their worship of the idols, “‘envision’ power or protection” [יד חזית] (Isa 57:8).

The third stanza reports God’s remedy for the sinful behavior of the people. A part of this stanza is in the form of a monologue, in which it gives God’s reflection on what is going on. In the speech, a recurrence of certain vocabulary gives an indication that the audience is addressed as one group. For example, in the report of the death of the righteous, it was commented that “no man *put into the heart*,” [ואין איש שם על-לב] (Isa 57:1a). Later on, because of their idolatrous activities, God asked the people, “At whom are you dread and fear . . . that me, you do not remember, nor *put in your heart*” [על-לבך לא-שמת] (Isa 57:11).

In another example, the leaders are portrayed in their greediness, that “all of them, after their own *ways* [דרך] before them; each, after *unjust gain* [בצע], all of them” (Isa 56:11b). Meanwhile, as God reflects what had happened, he said: “Because of the iniquity

of his *unjust gain* [בצע], I was angry and struck him, I hid myself and was angry. Yet he keeps on turning away, after *the way* [דרך] of his heart” (Isa 57:17). However, in the middle of the poem, in the transition of the part of the sin of the people and the work of healing performed by God, there is an announcement to “build up, prepare *the way* [דרך], remove an obstacle from the way [דרך] of my people (Isa 57:14). Finally, in conclusion, God declares that the wicked are not able to be quiet: “there is no peace [שלום] for the wicked” (Isa 57:21). On the other hand, the portrayal of the death of the righteous, even though he is a victim of injustice, is that “he enters into peace [שלום]” (Isa 57:2).

In the light of the interconnection between the themes of justice, cult, and salvation which is the concern of this study, the poem of Isa 56:9-57:21 gives a description of the absence of justice in relation to idolatrous cult. As these two entities are presented as interconnected to each other, as the thematic structure has revealed, the implication of this portrayal is that false worship degrades the sense of social justice in the community. As for the salvation element, the second half of the poem shows that the answer of this problem is in the hand of God in the terms of the work of removing the stumbling block, the work of restoration and recreation.

CHAPTER 4

ISAIAH 58:1-14: TRUE FASTING, PROPER SABBATH OBSERVANCE, AND SALVATION

Isaiah 58:1-14 is the third “dialogue” between God/prophet and the people in Isaiah 56-59. It opens with God’s speech, which can be divided into two parts: the command to the prophet to declare the rebellion and sin of the people (v. 1), followed by a more detailed description of the sin/problem, which revealed that the problem is religious in nature; the people seem to have a close relationship with God (v. 2). Then the people speak, complaining that the expected result of their religiosity did not become reality; God seems not to take notice of what they have done (3a). God answers the complaint with a long discourse on the meaning of true fasting (vv. 3b-12) and proper Sabbath-keeping (vv. 13-14). The answer that extends from v. 3b to 14 is structured in a repeated series of admonitions and promises.

The poem is divided into three stanzas. The first stanza deals with the wrong practice of fasting (vv. 1-4), the second stanza offers an explanation about right fasting (vv. 5-12); and the third stanza discusses proper Sabbath observance. The discussion of the text of Isa 58:1-14 in this chapter will follow the division of these stanzas.

Stanza 1: Wrong Fasting (Isa 58:1-4)

Strophe 1: Introduction (Isa 58:1-2)

Isa 58:1-2

1aA	קרא בגרון אל־תחשך
1aB	כשופר הרם קולך
1bA	והגד לעמי פשעם
1bB	ולבית יעקב חטאתם:
2aA	ואותי יום יום ידרשון
2aB	ודעת דרכי יחפצון
2bA	כגוי אשר צדקה עשה
2bB	ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב
2cA	ישאלוני משפטי־צדק
2cB	קרבת אלהים יחפצון

Translation

1aA	“Cry out with throat, do not hold!
1aB	like a trumpet, lift up your voice!
1bA	Declare to my people their transgression
1bB	to the house of Jacob their sin!”
2aA	“And me, day by day they seek;
2aB	and knowing my ways, they delight.
2bA	Like a nation that practiced righteousness,
2bB	and the ordinances of their God they never forsake
2cA	They inquire of me righteous-judgment,
2cB	to draw near to God they delight.”

Without any introductory formula, Isaiah 58 begins with a command from the Lord to the prophet to expose the sins of his people; the command is presumably the indication of a new section. Reading this introduction in the light of the announcement of

Isa 56:1 reveals an element of irony.¹ As the admonition in Isa 56:1 is to keep **מִשְׁפָּט** and do **צְדָקָה** in the context of salvation that is at hand, here in 58:1b the prophet is commanded to announce the **פְּשַׁע** and **חַטָּא** of the people—a pair of words that stand as the opposite to each other. If one reads this passage right after Isa 56:9-57:21, especially God’s healing and restoration indicated there for the people, this command in 58:1 indicates that the audience is still not ready for the coming salvation. What makes it more ironical is the fact that in their transgressions and sins, they “looked like” a nation (**גוֹי**, a term that is unusual to be applied to God’s people) that does **צְדָקָה** and never forsakes the **מִשְׁפָּט** of their God, as if the exhortation in Isa 56:1 has been fulfilled.²

Isa 58:1 – Command to the Prophet

1aA	קרא בגרון אל-תחשך
1aB	כשופר הרם קולך
1bA	והגד לעמי פשעם
1bB	ולבית יעקב חטאתם:

In v. 1aAB, parallelism can be seen in the semantic realm, between crying out from the throat / lifting up the voice like a trumpet. In v. 1bAB, parallelism is complementary between **לעמי / יעקב** and between **פשעם / חטאתם**. The key words that connect 1a with 1b are the words **קרא** and **הגד**, “to cry out” and “to declare.”

¹Whybray sees a possible connection between Isa 56:1 with 58:2. *Isaiah 40-66*, 212-213.

²Oswalt underlines the word “like” [כִּי] as the keyword. *Isaiah 40-66*, 496. He also sees a possibility that the term **גוֹי** is employed here as an irony that the nations [גוֹיִם] are more righteous than “My people.” *Ibid.*, 496n19.

As v. 1a constitutes the command to make an announcement with emphasis on how the command should be conducted, v. 1b gives the content of the command. The command section in v. 1a, instead being given in a direct sentence, is phrased in an elaborated poetical form:

a	cry out with throat	
b		do not hold back
a'	like a trumpet	
b'		lift up your voice

In prophetic literature, the sound of a trumpet is used metaphorically to emphasize the task of the messenger in delivering the message, and usually to amplify a message of judgment pertaining to sin.³ At the same time, reference to the sound of trumpet in this particular passage may be an echo of the beginning of the year of Jubilee, implying a

³See Hos 8:1; Jer 4:5; and Ezek 33:6. The prophet Hosea was commanded to blow the שופר to warn against יהוה בית “the house of the Lord” comparable to “the house of Jacob” in Isaiah 58, because the people had broken the covenant and transgressed God’s law. In the prophetic writings, the sound of a trumpet has more emphasis on giving a warning of approaching danger. Isa 58:1 is also comparable to Micah 3:8 in which the prophet is filled with power and the Spirit of the Lord to הגר, declare, to Jacob his פשע and to Israel his הטא. Blenkinsopp even considers that Isa 58:1 is a restatement of Micah’s text. *Isaiah* 56-66, 177. Koole suggests that here the prophet takes over the task neglected by the “watchmen” in Isa 56:9ff. *Isaiah III*, 122.

message of liberty, restoration of equality (Lev 25:9)⁴; and an anticipation to the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:24).⁵

While reference to the sound of a trumpet portrays the prophetic task of delivering the divine message, the context of this chapter suggests that it also a device to evoke another image in the mind of the audience.⁶ The theme of the poem in Isaiah 58 deals

⁴The Jubilee is “a time of release from all social oppression, restoration of all family property, and rest for all the land . . .” From theological perspective this practice concerns ‘the hope of release from debts, slavery, and bondage. Related to this is the idea of justice that safeguarded balance in society.’” Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 457. Lieber, in his reflection on the Sabbatical year and Jubilee, writes, “they represent a unique Israelite attempt to combat the social evils that had infected Israelite society and to return to the idyllic period of the desert union when social equality and fraternal concern had prevailed.” David L. Lieber, “Sabbatical Year and Jubilee” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 14:577.

There is an indication that Jubilee theme is behind the text of Isa 58. The phrase ליהוה יום רצון “an acceptable day to the Lord” in v. 5 is comparable to the phrase ליהוה שנת־רצון “the acceptable year of the Lord” in Isa 61:2, in which the context of vv. 1-2 alludes to the theme of jubilee. It is worthy to mention that in Luke 4:18, 19, in the commencement of Jesus’ public ministry, his reading of Isa 61:1-2 is a selected combination of Isa 61:1-2 and 58:6. Sanders points out how in the LXX the Greek word *aphesis*, meaning release or forgiveness appears both in the phrase “to preach *aphesis* to captives” (Isa 61:1) and “to send the oppressed in *aphesis*” (Isa 58:6). The word *aphesis* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *shemittah* in Deuteronomy 15 and the Hebrew *deror* in Leviticus 25—the two passages in the Old Testament which provide legislation concerning the Jubilee year. He concluded, “Luke’s Jesus, is conjoining the two passages of Isaiah, did so fully in the spirit, and even in letter, of Isaiah 61 which was itself composed out of the Jubilee traditions.” James A. Sanders, “Isaiah in Luke” *Int* 36 (1982): 151.

⁵Lev 23:24 prescribes that the first day of the seventh month is to be a Sabbath, “a commemoration of blasts” [זכרון תרועה], a holy convocation. The Scripture is silent as to why the trumpet is blown on the day of *Rosh Hashanah* and it leaves a wide range of interpretations. However, traditionally it was understood as a call for repentance in anticipation of the Day of Atonement. See The Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashana* 16b, ed. Isidore Epstein and Joseph H. Hertz (London: Soncino, 1935); Louis Jacobs, “Rosh Ha-Shanah,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Judaica; New York: Macmillan, 1972), 14:308). Doukhan refers to the Jewish tradition that “has the judgment of Kippur start from the first day of the month . . . Jews have understood the 10 days preceding Kippur is probationary time during which they prepared for the day of judgment.” Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 128; also Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 79-80.

⁶The voice of the Prophet here is compared to the one of the trumpet [כְּשׁוֹפֵר]. Bruce Waltke and Michael O’Connor explained there are three facets of the basic use of כִּי: the preposition may denote (1) agreement in quantity or measure, (2) agreement in kind, and (3) the logical outcome of the comparisons are correspondence or agreement in kind. “In the case of poetry, however, the point of comparison may be left vague, to allow an analogy to open up, inducing the reader to engage the analogy and find not one but many

with several issues. Among others is, first, fasting—attributed as “to humble one’s soul”—and supposed to be a total rest. Second is the call to implement social justice. Third is an admonition to reach out and to help the marginalized segments of the society, and finally, proper Sabbath observance. With this background, there is a possibility that the metaphor of the sound of the trumpet refers to several cultic themes. They are (1) the anticipation of the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:24), (2) the Day of Atonement itself, and (3) the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:9).⁷ This cultic reference is employed to amplify

contacts between the things compared.” Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 202-203.

This literary technique, in which the use of certain vocabulary is intended to evoke certain imageries, can be considered as *rhetography*. Vernon K. Robbins proposed five different angles to explore multiple textures within a text; (a) inner texture, (b) intertexture, (c) social and cultural texture, (d) ideological texture and (e) sacred texture. Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Text: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 2-4. The first of these, inner texture, explores “features in the language of the text itself.” *Ibid.*, 7. There are six kinds of inner texture: repetitive, progressive, narrational, opening-middle-closing, argumentative and sensory-aesthetic texture. *Ibid.*, 7. The sensory-aesthetic texture deals primarily “in the range of senses the text evokes or embodies (thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, smell) and the manner in which the text evokes or embodies them (reason, intuition, imagination, humor, etc).” *Ibid.*, 29-30. The effort to describe and amplify all these elements of sensory-aesthetic texture is a device termed *rhetography*, which refers to “the graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of the text.” Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text” in *Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy’s Rhetoric of the New Testament*, eds., C. Clifton Black & Duane F. Watson (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2008), 81.

⁷For the list of works that see the link between Isaiah 58 and the Day of Atonement, the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee, see Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 183n160. In Lev 25:8-10 the Day of Atonement and the beginning of the Year of Jubilee fall on the same day. For the discussion about this phenomenon see, among others, Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, no. 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2164-2165. In v. 9, the command literally reads: “and you shall sound the horn of loudness” [וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר חֲרוּעָה]. *Ibid.*, 2163. The fact that reference to the trumpet in Lev 25:9 is שׁוֹפָר חֲרוּעָה while in Isa 58:1 is only שׁוֹפָר does not necessarily mean that they cannot be connected, since חֲרוּעָה “is the term for the sustained blast of the shofar.” Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 171. That reference to the trumpet in Isa 58:1 is thematically connected to the Day of Atonement. Paul commented, “[T]his prophecy was deeply influenced by the injunctions regarding the observation of the Day of Atonement found in Lev 16; 23:24-32; 25:9-10... This image was likely employed because of the ram’s horn that was sounded on the Day of Atonement.” Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 480 and 482.

contradictions between the cultic practice and the spirit behind it. Among others, they are as follows:

(1) The Day of Atonement is the day of purgation regarding sin. The terminology for it includes פֶּשַׁע (Lev 16:21) and חַטָּא (Lev 16:30). In this poem, the command to the prophet is to expose in a loud and clear manner the פֶּשַׁע and חַטָּא of the people (Isa 58:1).

(2) On the Day of Atonement people can show loyalty by obeying God's command to practice self-denial and cessation from work (Lev 16:29, 31). The atonement is only beneficial only to those who are provisionally loyal.⁸ In Isa 58 the prophets' audience, while practicing self-denial, they are forcing their workers to work (v. 3).⁹

(3) Jubilee is the time for liberation, a restoration of equality. It is also a time to rekindle the spirit of brotherhood. In this chapter, the behavior of the people did not reflect those virtues. Therefore, the admonition to them is to show passion and to restore justice. They include to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke. Furthermore, the call is to share bread with the hungry, to bring to the house the poor who are cast out, to cover the naked, and not to hide one's self from his/her fellow (Isa 58:6-7).

⁸Gane, *Cult and Character*, 306.

⁹The term for the Sabbath for this day is שַׁבַּת שְׁבִיחוֹן, which, as Levine explains, "is superlative, literally 'the most restful cessation' from assigned tasks. The Sabbath is to be observed by a greater abstinence from daily tasks than is required on the festivals. On seasonal festivals, one refrains from work primarily to be free to celebrate, whereas on the Sabbath, the very object is rest." Levine, *Leviticus*, 155. He also cited Rashi, who understands this Sabbath rest as *menuhat margo'a*, "a rest of relaxation." Ibid., 110. Lev 16:29 emphasizes that this rest is for all the inhabitants of the land, including the aliens.

Isa 58:1b

1bA והגד לעמי פשעם
1bB ולבית יעקב חטאתם:

Parallelism in this couplet is עמי / יעקב בית and פשע / חטא. In the context of Isa 56-59, this reference to פשע, “rebellion” and חטא, “transgression” is unexpected since they are the opposite of the call to preserve justice and do righteousness. In the more immediate context, in light of the ending of Isaiah 57, which speaks about God’s act of healing on behalf of his people, it seems that the promised salvation, instead of getting closer to its realization, experienced another set back.

The audience is addressed as עמי, “my people;” this is the first time in Isa 56-59 that God’s people are addressed as such. Previous reference to them is indirect. Furthermore, in the book of Isaiah, the term “house of Jacob” appears for the first time in Isa 2:5, and the last time is in 58:1. However, in Isa 2:6, this term “house of Jacob” is parallel to the word “Your people” as reference to God’s people just as in 58:1, and they are the only instances of such word-pairing in the whole book.¹⁰ A comparison between Isa 2:6 and 58:1 signifies the tension that takes place between God and his people. It voices a similar irony that as other nations are becoming God’s people, his own people are indifferent to him.¹¹

¹⁰For Kaiser, the name “house of Jacob” is a reminder of the modest beginning of the people in the twelve sons of the patriarchs, who himself could spend only part of his life in the promised land and have to live out the rest partly in Mesopotamia and partly in Egypt. It was thanks to God’s faithfulness to his promise that God’s people arose from Jacob’s sons. Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1983), 56.

¹¹Isa 2:1-9 can be divided into two parts: vv. 1-5 and vv. 6-9. The first part reports the “streaming” of people to Zion, while in the second part, God’s people do just the opposite. In vv. 2-5 certain keywords

It is also apparent that while the messenger is commanded to lift up his voice in this opening verse, the messenger never speaks all through Isa 58; instead, it is a report of the content of the command; it is the Lord who speaks all through the chapter.

Isa 58:2 – The Seemingly Right Nation

2aA	ואותי יום יום ידרשון
2aB	ודעת דרכי יחפצון
2bA	כגוי אשר צדקה עשה
2bB	ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב
2cA	ישאלוני משפטי־צדק
2cB	קרבת אלהים יחפצון

In the first colon, 2aA, as the syntax indicates, the emphasis is on the Lord. As the object, **אותי**, is put in the beginning of the sentence: “It is *Me*, that day by day they seek,”

are interwoven to create a certain thematic structure of the passage: in v. 2 the prophet speaks with reference to “the *mountain* of the *house* of the Lord” and in v. 3 people talk about going up to the *mountain* of the Lord, to the *house* of the God of *Jacob*; and in v. 5 there is a call to “the *house* of *Jacob*” to walk in the light of the Lord. Verses 6-9 stand as a unit, framed by the word “abandon” in the opening of v. 6 and “do not forgive” in the end of v. 9. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 55. Ortlund, Jr. notices that the word **מלא**, “filled,” which appears in vv. 6-8, as the key word in describing the condition and the behavior of the people. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, in *Preaching the Word*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 52.

Motyer lists what he called “contrasts between the ideal and the actual: (i) the world is drawn to Zion (v. 2); God’s people choose to conform to the world (v. 6); (ii) the world seeks spiritual benefit (v. 3); Zion God’s people heaps up material benefit (v. 7a); (iii) the consequence of coming to Zion is world peace (v. 4); Zion is full of armaments (v. 7b); (iv) the world seeks to know the true God and commits itself before hand to obey him (v. 3); God’s people are busy inventing their own gods (v. 8); (v) the world is received before the Lord’s tribunal (v. 4); God’s people are abandoned and denied forgiveness (vv. 6, 9).” Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 55.

Commenting on Isa 2:6-9, Smith refers to warning of the danger of multiplying horses and accumulating great wealth (Deut 17:16-17) - cf. Ps 33:17; 76:6-7; 140: 10. Isaiah’s counsel to Hezekiah is not to trust in the horses and chariot of Egypt, but to trust in God (Isa 31:1-3). Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 136.

The behavior of God’s own people, in sharp contrast with the attitude of the nations toward God in Isa 2:1-9, is comparable with the portrayal of Isa 56-58: as foreigners and eunuchs joined themselves to the Lord in Isa 56, in Isa 58 there is a tension between the Lord and the house of Jacob.

the effect is emphatic.¹² The parallelism between 2aA and 2aB is complementary: ידרשון / דעת דרכי יחפצון. The sound of the words ידרשון and יחפצון in which both were placed at the end of the cola makes a kind of rhyme; the added *nun* on the third person plural verbs is an archaic touch (cf. Exod 15:14, (ירגזון)).¹³ The parallelism further highlights the purpose of the “seeking,” that is, to know God’s ways, with additional information of the internal/emotional aspect: “delight.” The bicola shows that the act of seeking the Lord is not only ritualistic in nature, but also involves edification.

Isa 58:2b

2bA כגוי אשר צדקה עשה
 2bB ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב

There is a synonymous parallelism between משפט אלהיו / צדקה and עזב / עשה. A concentration of the words צדקה, עשה, and משפט echoes the exhortation in 56:1; it gives the impression that the audience had already achieved the ideal condition for the realization of the promised salvation. An observation of the syntax where the noun precedes the verb indicates emphasis on the acts of righteousness they had performed. The parallel adds more weight to this observation: as the “righteousness” is synonymous with the “Lord’s ordinance,” it means that the righteous deeds here are in accordance with the Lord’s will; the phrase לא עזב signifies faithfulness on the people’s part— as if the rebellious people were such a nation.

¹²For Koole, this emphasis acts as a contrast to how remote the people are from the Lord in Isa 57:3:13. *Isaiah III*, 124.

¹³GKC, 47, *m*.

Despite all of these positive descriptions, the use of the term גוי in referring to God's people is significant, since usually, the term is applied to the foreign/gentile nations. The usual term applied to God's people is עם. It is already an indication that there is something wrong going on with the religiosity of people. The term גוי here strengthens the ironical tone, since the prophet had been commanded to declare the "sins" and "rebellion" of the people despite their apparently religious behavior and moral integrity.

Isa 58:2c

2cA ישאלוני משפטי־צדק
 2cB קרבת אלהים יחפצון

Whereas in 2bA and 2bB, משפט and צדקה are in two cola, in 2cA, these words are combined into one phrase, משפטי־צדק. In 2cA, the clause ישאלוני משפטי־צדק indicates that the people have come to the right source of instruction and are apparently asking for the right instruction. Its parallel with the clause קרבת אלהים יחפצון indicates a positive attitude toward the Lord; they profess to enjoy being with him.¹⁴ The last clause of v. 2 is a repetition of the thought of its opening clause. These clauses are closely related and create a kind of *inclusio*:

2aA ואותי יום יום ידרשון
 2cB קרבת אלהים יחפצון:

As the opening and closing clauses of v. 2 are an *inclusio*, the clauses in between

¹⁴In contrast with the audience in Isa 57:3 who distanced themselves from the Lord, that he had to call them to draw near [קרבו]. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 124.

are the extended description of the professed positive attitude of the people toward God and the whole verse can be read as a chiastic structure:¹⁵

Aa yet (a) *Me* day by day (b) they seek
 b and (c) to know My ways (d) they delight [חפץ]
 Xx As if they were a nation that has (e) practiced (f) צדקה
 x' (f') and the מושפט of their God (e') they have not forsaken
 Aa' (b') they ask (a') of *Me* righteous judgment [מושפטי-צדק]
 b' in the (c') nearness of God (d') they delight [חפץ]

The structure shows how the vocabulary is well chosen and most words are repeated within the unit.

The description of the false religiosity of the people is comparable to the characteristics of the righteous in Ps 1. As the people of Isa 58 seek after the Lord “day by day,” having a deep interest [חפץ] in knowing the ways of the Lord, asking for righteous judgment and delighted [חפץ] in approaching the Lord, in Ps 1:2 the righteous are described as those who delighted [חפץ] in the Torah of the Lord and upon his Torah they meditate [הגה] “day and night.” The idea of חפץ portraying one’s interest or being occupied in certain subjects is apparent in Ps 1:2. In the poetic contrast of the righteous and the wicked, the righteous one is characterized by the following description: “his delight [חפצו] is in the Torah of the Lord / and upon his Torah he meditates [הגה] day and night.” The parallelism of חפץ / הגה adds a nuance to the meaning of חפץ. While the meaning of “to meditate” [הגה] evoked an idea of concentrating one’s mind, further examination of the usage of the term gives a more concrete meaning. In other instances of the root word, reference is made to the sound of a young lion over its prey (Isa 38:14) and

¹⁵Croatto, *Imaginar el Futuro*, 112.

the moaning of a dove (Isa 31:4). Therefore, in the text of the Psalms, the word may mean “to read the Torah to oneself in a low tone.”¹⁶ Charles and Emilie Briggs consider the verb to mean “reading it over and over again in a low tone of one reading to oneself, to impress it upon the mind and commit it to memory.”¹⁷ These insights exemplify how חפץ in the sense of “to be interested” is not merely an expression of a mental state, but this interest is being articulated in a definite action.

Connections between Isaiah 58:1-2 with Isaiah 56, 57, and 59

As for the use of the verb נגד in 58:1 in the command to “declare to my people” and the Lord’s rhetorical challenge, “I, I will declare” in 57:12, the objects of the declaration in these two verses are, at first glance, in contrast with one another. While the announcement “I will declare [נגד] your righteousness” in 57:12 is addressed to an idolatrous audience, the command to “declare [נגד] to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their transgressions” (58:1) is given to an ostensibly religiously faithful audience. However, in the end, it reveals that these people from an opposite spectrum of religious faithfulness belong in the same boat; the futility of their deeds is exposed. The same terms are used in both sections: (1) ואותי in 58:2 / 57:11—they seek / you do not remember, nor put in the heart; (2) דרכי “they delight in knowing my ways” (58:2)—the

¹⁶Arnold A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms, vol. 1: Psalms 1-72*, The New Century Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 60.

¹⁷Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ed. Samuel R. Driver, A. Plummer, and Charles A. Briggs, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951-1952), 1:5.

theme of דרך is prominent in 57; and (3) delight [חפץ] (see 56:4)—one of the characteristics of the eunuchs is choosing what pleases [חפץ] me (the Lord).

The terms עשה; צדקה; משפט; and משפטי־צדק are key words in 56:1-2 which are also used in 58:1-2, as can be read in this comparison as seen in Figure 6.

Isa 56:1	Isa 58:2
כה אמר יהוה	כגוי אשר־צדקה עשה
שמרו מספּט	ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב
ועשו צדקה	ישאלוני משפטי־צדק
כי־קרובה ישועתי לבוא	קרבת אלהים יחפצון:
וצדקתי להגלות:	

Figure 6. A comparison of the use of the words עשה; צדקה; משפט; and משפטי־צדק in Isa 56:1 and Isa 58:2

The vocabulary of 58:2 is usually used to describe the privileged duties of the priests.¹⁸ This fact put the people in Isaiah 58 in a similar role with the foreigners and eunuchs in 56:3-7, in which they also assume a priestly role. They also have the correct object of worship (the Lord himself) as indicated by repeated uses of the first person personal pronouns of the Lord, in contrast with the wrong object of worship depicted in chap 57.¹⁹

A closer reading of the flow of the thought in Isa 58:1-3a shows a disparity between the speech of the Lord and the speech of the people; they do not connect. It

¹⁸Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 177.

¹⁹Koole, *Isaiah III*, 124.

seems that the speech in vv. 1-2 has never been finished. In v.1, the prophet had been commanded to declare the sinful and rebellious deeds of the house of Jacob. What is the rebellion? What are the sins? A further description and elaboration of the sins and rebellion is to be expected. However, the expected elaboration is being withheld, because v. 2 is a kind of introduction to the accusation and its content is entirely positive: they “worship” regularly, and are “seeking” the Lord on a daily basis. Can it be that a further description of sins and rebellion referred to in v. 1 is given in Isaiah 59?

Strophe 2: Wrong Fasting (Isa 58:3-5)

Isa 58:3-4 – Wrong Fasting

3aA	למה צמנו ולא ראית
3aB	ענינו נפשנו ולא תדע
3bA	הן ביום צמכם תמצאו־חפץ
3bB	וכל־עצביכם תנגשו:
4aA	הן לריב
4aB	ומצה תצומו
4aC	ולהכות באגרף רשע
4bA	לא־תצומו כיום
4bB	להשמיע במרום קולכם:

Translation

3aA	“Why did we fast and you did not see?
3aB	we humbled ourselves and you did not acknowledge?”
3bA	“Behold, on the day of your fasting, you find pleasure
3bB	all your toilers you oppressed.”
4aA	“Behold, to quarrel,
4aB	and to fight, you fast,
4aC	and to hit with wicked fist.”
4bA	“You did not fast like this day
4bB	for your voice to be heard on high.”

Isa 58:3a – The Complaint of the People

In v. 3a, the speech regarding the people is abruptly stopped, interrupted by the complaint of the people, i.e. the addressee. As the speaking is being switched to the people, the basis of the complaint is that God did not give heed to the *fasting* they performed, not the seeking, *דרש*, of the Lord, as was presented in v. 2aA. A tone of frustration characterizes their complaint:

Isa 58:3a

3aA למה צמנו ולא ראית

3aB ענינו נפשנו ולא תדע

The parallelism in this verse is *צום / ענה נפש* and *לא ראית / לא תדע*. The synonym between *צום* with *ענה נפש* reveals that the complaint of the audience here is to designate a specific and narrow definition of *ענה נפש*, that is, to “fasting,” especially in light of the technical term of fasting in connection with Yom Kippur (Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Num 29:7). However, the term *ענה נפש* covers a broader activity than just fasting. While the phrase was usually translated as “to humble oneself,” Milgrom offers “to practice self-denial” as a more precise translation.²⁰

The parallel between *צום* and *ענה נפש* indicates that the meaning of *ענה נפש* is focused on the activity of fasting. However, in his response, the Lord defines *ענה נפש* in

²⁰Milgrom explains that *ענה נפש* is not only limited to fasting. In later, post-biblical period, in addition to abstinence from food and drink, it also includes abstinence from bathing, anointing, sexual intercourse, and changing clothes, and may involve sleeping on the ground. *Leviticus 1-16*, 1054; see also Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 246-247.

its broader definition. Moreover, as **ענה נפש** was usually limited to what one did to him—or herself, now it was altered to what one can, or should, do for others. As vv. 6-7 will show, it is not enough to practice self-denial; the call is to relieve those whose rights have been denied, the oppressed ones. As one refrains from eating bread, he should do something to give bread to the hungry. As one sacrifices comfort by sitting in the dust, he should bring the homeless poor into the house. Instead of just wearing sackcloth, he should cover those who are naked. In short, instead of afflicting oneself in **ענה נפש**, the call now is to open oneself to others, the unfortunate ones, who were actually one's own **בשר** (58:7).

The complaint of the people is based on their act of fasting, emphasized as **ענה נפש**, which in the context of v. 2 is an equivalent of seeking and getting closer to the Lord. However, there is no reference to their practicing righteousness nor keeping his statutes—things that also been mentioned in v. 2. It indicates that this fasting is performed as a specific method of seeking the Lord's attention with the hope that He will intervene in their favor. Another possibility is that the fasting they practiced was more an external expression of their worship in contrast with the description in v. 2 where emphasis is more on the internal aspects. It may be that the people are already not confident in the content of their worship, so that they emphasize the form of the ritual, just as James Muilenburg noted that “it [the fasting] had obviously been a purely external form.”²¹

²¹Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 679.

Isa 58:3b-4 – Wrong Fasting

To this short complaint, comes a long answer that will go on until the end of the chapter. The whole discourse is now devoted to the issue of fasting, as a direct response to the complaint of the people. The reader never has a chance, in Isaiah 58, to read more on the “sins” and “rebellion” of the people, nor about the true nature of their “seeking” the Lord and “faithful obedience” to his commandments. In this dialogue between God and his people, the answer is focused on the flaws of the people’s practice of fasting.

Isa 58:3b

3bA הן ביום צמכם תמצאו־חפץ
3bB וכל־עצביכם תננשו:

The parallelism between *תמצאו־חפץ* / *וכל־עצביכם תננשו* reveals the kind of activities that took place on the day of fasting. The strategic use of the root *חפץ* serves as “hook-word,” that connects vv. 2 and 3,²² and this device points to the heart of the problem, the reason why all the positive characteristics given in v. 2 are labeled as sin and rebellion in v. 1.²³

²²For a description of “hook-word” see George Mlakuzhyl, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1987), 106.

²³Childs perceives *חפץ* as a key word in this section: “throughout chapter 58 the author subtly plays with different nuances of the word [חפץ], especially in the contrast between vv. 2 and 3.” *Isaiah*, 477. Muienburg states that in the context of the whole Isa 58 *חפץ* is a strong motif; it compares what pleases God and what pleases men. *Isaiah 40-66*, 679. Williamson notes, “The irony of this comment should not be overlooked. In the previous verse the people are said to ‘delight’ to know God’s ways and to ‘delight’ in drawing near to him, but in a play on words which is not apparent in English translations it is their own ‘delight’ which they are looking for when they fast. This word will recur again twice in the concluding section (verse 13).” H. G. M. Williamson, “Promises, Promises! Some Exegetical Reflections on Isaiah 58,” *WW 19* (1999): 156.

In the phrase **הֲנֵן בְּיוֹם צִמְצִימוֹתֵיכֶם תִּמְצְאוּ חִפְּיָי**, “Behold, in the day of your fast you find חִפְּיָי,” the word חִפְּיָי, which is an abstract noun, appears without any specific or concrete reference. If the immediately previous occurrence of the root in v. 2 in which it had appeared as a verb twice, is used as reference, then this clause has a positive meaning: “they חִפְּיָי in knowing my [God’s] ways / to be near to the Lord they חִפְּיָי.” Logically, the clause “behold on the day of your fasting you find חִפְּיָי” means that on the day of the fasting they gained a better knowledge of God’s ways, or in the day of fasting they have become closer to God.

The verb **מִצָּא** comprises a deeper implication than an idea of simply “to find” as is commonly understood. A comparison with other Semitic languages will illuminate the case. The Aramaic word for “to find” is **שָׁכַח**, quite far from the Hebrew counterpart’s consonantal root. However, the Hebrew word **מִצָּא** may be more related to the Aramaic word **מִטָּא**, “to reach, attain” which had counterparts in the Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic²⁴ and Ugaritic *mtzalmtsa*.²⁵ Thus, the Hebrew word **מִצָּא** encompasses the meaning of “to

²⁴*BDB*, 1100. Rosenthal lists cases in which an Aramaic word with consonant ט is related to a Hebrew word that uses צ:

<u>Aramaic</u>	<u>Hebrew</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
קִיט	קִיץ	summer
חֲטָל	צֶל	shelter
יַעֲטָהּ	יַעֲץ	advice
טוֹר	צוֹר	mountain
נֹטַר	נֹצַר	guard

Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 15.

²⁵*UT* 19, no. 1524.

find,” but also the effort of “seeking.”²⁶

The word חפץ, in one aspect, portrays an emotional gesture of “to incline” toward something or “to strive” for something. Therefore, it may mean “wish,” “desire,” “delight,” and also “precious.” On the other hand, the word also describes a process through which one achieves his wish, desire, delight or what is considered as precious. In such a context, the word can mean “matter,” “business,” or “event.”²⁷ Consequently, the phrase מוצא חפץ, with the meaning of מוצא as “seeking” as discussed above, implies not only the seeking of pleasure, but more a business pursuit, from planning down to implementing it.²⁸

At first glance, here in Isa 58:3, the phrase “Behold, in the day of your fast you חפץ מוצא” suggests a positive connotation, that the people “finds pleasure,” on their fasting day. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that, with the exception of Isa 58:3, 13 and 66:4, the use of the term חפץ in the second half of the book of Isaiah portrays divine approval of a person.²⁹ With this background, it is ironic that the phrase

²⁶מוצא also covers the meanings of (1) “reach”; (2) “overtake”; (3) “to happen/to befall.” See Victor Hamilton, “מוצא,” *TWOT* 1:521; also *HALOT*, 2:619-20.

²⁷That חפץ has two nuances of the meaning, see Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 30. Also Hudyard Muskita, *The Meaning of חפץ in Isa 58:13: A Study of the Concept of Sabbath Observance* (M.Th. thesis, Asia Adventist Theological Seminary, Silang, Philippines, 1995), 14-41.

²⁸That מוצא חפץ means an active effort to realize one’s desire, Koole, using the verbs דרש and לאלא employed in v. 2 as indicators, in which especially דרש is often a complementary term for מוצא, indicates a similar conclusion when he writes, “This ‘finding’ does not therefore mean to chance upon something, but to achieve and take possession of something which one is trying to obtain. . . Somebody finds a booty which he is hunting, Gen 27:20.” *Isaiah III*, 130.

²⁹Isa 42:21; 44:28; 46:10; 48:14; 53:10 (2x); 56:4; 62:4 (2x); 65:12; and 66:4. See José Severino Croatto, “From the Leviticus Jubilee Year to the Prophetic Liberation Time: Exegetical Reflections on Isaiah 61 and 58 in Relation to the Jubilee,” in *God’s Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America*, ed.

“in the day of your fast you **מִצַּא חַפֵּץ**” is a component of divine criticism of the religious pursuit performed by the people.³⁰ Furthermore, it indicates that the fasting does not result in divine’s satisfaction, but more in the satisfaction of the performers. In this sense, they are fasting not with the focus on God, but to serve their own interest.

While fasting without God as the focus is already wrong, the situation is worsened, as the reading continues, with the parallelism **תִּמְצְאוּ חַפֵּץ / וְכָל-עַצְבֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּשׁוּ** leading to further meaning. The conjunction **ו** in the clause **תִּמְצְאוּ חַפֵּץ וְכָל-עַצְבֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּשׁוּ** can be read as explanatory: “you find **חַפֵּץ**, *that is*, all your workers you oppressed.”³¹ The fact that **חַפֵּץ** is being paralleled to the act of oppressing workers is surprising, since suddenly it has a negative connotation, in contrast to its previous appearances in 58:2 and 56:4 in which it always has a positive meaning.³² The situation portrays an irony: the people are complaining that God did not heed and acknowledge their rites of “humbling themselves” [עֲנָה נַפְשׁ] and now, as a response, the Lord shows how, in their practice of humbling themselves, they are, in reality, “further putting down” (oppressed/exploited)

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 101 and 110n33.

³⁰Croatto, “From the Leviticus Jubilee Year,” 101. Clifford, in his review of Polan’s book, pointing out how Polan did not exploit the term **חַפֵּץ** as one of the keywords that unified Isa 58. He explains further that “the word does not here mean simply ‘pleasure’ but divine acceptance; the prophet does not denounce pleasure but the fact that people are designing rites for themselves rather than following God’s mode of worship, which joins worship and mercy to the poor.” Richard J. Clifford, Review of *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56-59*, by Gregory J. Polan, in *JBL* 106 (1987): 707.

³¹The word order in the phrase **כָּל-עַצְבֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּשׁוּ**, where the object is being put first, signifies the flow of the sentence: “all your workers you oppressed,” emphasizing the fact there are people being oppressed, contra Muilenburg who translates, “you oppressed all your occupation, i.e. business affairs.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 679.

³²Muskita, *The Meaning of חַפֵּץ*, 68-69.

those who are “under them” both socially and economically (your toiler).³³ The root of this evil practice lies in the fact that both God and fellow human are being disregarded, for they perform their rites only for their own interest, **הַחֲפִיץ מִצָּא**.³⁴

Further elaboration of this oppression from v. 4 on exposes the real character of the people and may be considered as exposing their “sins” and rebellion.³⁵ The connection between the couplet in v. 3b with v. 4 is evident by the use of the particle **הֵן**. Its reappearance in v. 4 indicates that this verse is a continuation of the argument in v. 3 and brings the argument into a more specific focus.³⁶ The reading of v. 3 through 4a reveals an element of irony. As the people complained and accused the Lord of not taking heed [**לֹא יָדָא** and **לֹא רָאָה**] of their fasting, the Lord responds by using the word

³³Croatto, “From the Leviticus Jubilee Year,” 101. The irony goes deeper when one considers the fact that the root **עֲצַב** which lexically means “toiler” or “heavy worker” already connotes a definite implication of hardship, pain, and distress. See *HALOT* 2:865; Rosenthal, *Grammar*, 15, and *BDB*, 780. The fact that they are being “oppressed” makes their situation much more painful and burdensome.

³⁴In Isa 60:17 the words **חֲפִיץ** and **נִשְׁתָּ** are being paired, in which, among the reversals of fortune that God will perform for his people when he restores Zion, is to turn their “taskmasters” (the participial form of **נִשְׁתָּ**) into “righteousness” [**צְדִיקָה**]:

instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver
and instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron
and I will set your administrators peace
and your overseers righteousness [**וְנִשְׁתֵּיךָ צְדִיקָה**].

In contrast with this promise of salvation, here in Isa 58:3 the people who seem to practice “righteousness” [**צְדִיקָה**] in reality practicing oppression [**נִשְׁתָּ**].

The fact that the participial form of **נִשְׁתָּ** appears repeatedly in the Exodus narrative as a designation for the Egyptian taskmasters who oppressed the children of Israel and contributed directly to the hardship and bitterness of their slavery (Exod 3:7; 5:9, 10, 13) amplifies a further irony that these people, with their pious religious performance, in fact behave just like the legendary oppressors of their sacred history, the Egyptian taskmasters. See Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 176-177. On the other hand, the statement “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you” is attached to diverse social (Deut 15:15; 24:18, 22), religious (13:6, 11) and liturgical (16:3, 12) laws in the book of Deuteronomy. Croatto, *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁵Muilenburg points out that **חֲפִיץ** in v. 3b has no concrete reference, and only with the explanations in v. 4 does it become concrete. *Isaiah 40-66*, 679.

³⁶Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 676.

“behold” [הִן] twice, showing emphatically that he sees what they have done, and furthermore he wants to show how clearly He sees the situation, especially things that the people fail to notice.

Isa 58:4a

4aA	הִן לְרִיב
4aB	וּמִצָּה תְצוּמוֹ
4aC	וּלְהִכּוֹת בְּאֲגָרְף רָשָׁע

The verbs employed in v. 4a, as if signifying a progression of thought, further elaborate the situation that took place during the fasting; there is a progression in the degree of violence involved from רִיב, מִצָּה, to נִכָּה. A comparison with other texts can strengthen this observation. Exod 21:18-19 contains an item of a legal document dealing with cases of bodily injury; the wording in which רִיב, נִכָּה and אֲגָרְף comprise one single clause, shares a parallel with the expression found in Isa 58:4 as seen in Figure 7. Another text is Isa 41:11-12, shown in Figure 8, in which the description of the destructive efforts of Israel’s enemy in some aspects shares similar characteristics with Isa 58:4.

Exod 21:18	Isa 58:4a
When men quarrel [רִיב] and one strikes [נִכָּה] his fellow with stone or with fist [אֲגָרְף] and the man does not die but has to stay in bed. . .	Behold, you fast only to strive [רִיב] and to fight and to hit [נִכָּה] with wicked fist [אֲגָרְף]

Figure 7. Lexical comparison between Exod 21:18 and Isa 58:4a

Isa 41:11-12	Isa 58:4a
Behold [הֵן] will be ashamed and humiliated all who are angry against you will be as nothing and perished people who strive [רִיב] against you you will seek them but not find them people who contend [נִצֵּה] against you will be as nothing and as non-existent people who war [מִלְחָמָה] against you	Behold [הֵן] you fast only to strive [רִיב] and to fight [מִנְצֵה] ³⁷ and to hit [נִכָּה] with wicked fist

Figure 8. Lexical comparison between Isa 41:11-12 and Isa 58:4a

While the flow of the progression of action in Isa 58:4 goes from quarrel and fight to hitting, in Isa 41 it goes from רִיב and נִצֵּה to מִלְחָמָה, “war.” The case of progression and intensification in Isa 58:4a as compared to these other texts indicates that the term חִפְזִין not only portrays an action of compelling others to do heavy work, but there is also a distressing situation of cruel treatment as found in the expressions “quarrel,” “fight,” and “hitting.”³⁸

In the OT, the expression “wicked fist” or “the fist of wickedness,” in which the nouns רָשָׁע and אֲגֵרֶף are paired as one expression, appears here only. An examination of the occurrences of the word רָשָׁע throughout the OT shows that one-third of the citations (8 out of 29) are presented as the antonym of “righteousness.”³⁹ Thus, this unique

³⁷As a noun מִנְצֵה has the root נִצֵּה, just like the verb employed in Isa 41:12.

³⁸Westermann observes, “They pursue their business on a fast day, and make their workers work for them. Indeed, the fast day is an occasion for wrangling and quarelling (this was presumably connected with business affairs). It even comes to deeds of violence.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 336.

³⁹See George V. Wigram, *The Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 1194.

expression of “wicked fist” is intentionally employed to amplify the contrast of the people’s religious performance as compared with its practical result. The people appear to be צדק, “righteous” and שפט, “just,” but their conduct is characterized by acts of רשע, “wickedness,” an antonym for both terms.⁴⁰

Verse 4b serves as a bridge between v. 4a and v. 5. If v. 4a describes the misconduct of the people and v. 5 describes the fasting activity in detail, v. 4b both concludes and introduces the two themes together.

Isa 58:4b

4bA	לא־תצומו כיום
4bB	להשמיע במרום קולכם:

In this verse, cola A and B are more in the form of a continued sentence than two cola of poetry. The fasting as had been described in vv. 3-4a does not make the “voice” of the worshiper to be heard on “high.” The comparison in Figure 9 shows how the prophet presents a different perspective held by different parties about what is going on:

Isa 58:3a	Isa 58:4b
People: why do we “fast” and you did not <i>see</i> ? we “humbled ourselves” and you did not <i>acknowledge</i> ?	God: you did not fast like this day for your “voice” to be <i>heard</i> on high.

Figure 9. Dialogue between people and God in Isa 58:3-4

⁴⁰The Hebrew term רשע may also mean “injustice,” as opposite to שפט. See *BDB*, 957 and *DCH*, 6:526. Later in Isa 59 the theme of the lack of justice and righteousness is also repeated (Isa 59: 9, 11 and 14).

The worshipers expect that their fasting will be “seen” and “acknowledged,” while God said that their fasting is not going to be “heard.” Furthermore, as the people perceive fasting as an enacted activity, i.e. fasting, humble oneself, God considered it as a “voice.”

That this fasting is being referred to as a “voice” to be heard suggests that the role of the purpose of fasting here is to make their prayers and petitions more effective.⁴¹ This insight helps to explain why when they feel that their prayer got no answer as they expected, they complain that their fasting and self-humbling had not been seen and acknowledged. It also reveals how good they are in approaching [קָרַב] God both intellectually (asking for righteous judgment) and religiously (the humbling of selves, prayer and fasting), yet socially, they treat others badly by quarrelling, fighting and hitting and oppressing their workers.

In the context of Isaiah 57 and 58, the expressions in this verse can be compared with those in Isa 57:15, and it helps to amplify the irony of the situation as seen in Table 4.

In Isa 57:15 the Lord declares that even though he is “‘high’ [רַם] and exalted, dwelling in a high [מְרוֹם] and holy place, yet with those who are ‘lowly’ [שָׁפֵל] and contrite. Reading Isa 58:4b in the light of this promise, the fact that the people had fasted and “‘humbled” [עָנָה] themselves, supposedly obtains God’s approval and consequently,

⁴¹Lambert observes, “with the exception of mourning the dead, fasting hardly occurs without prayer. What are we to make of this close connection? The answer is surprisingly straightforward: petitionary prayer in the Hebrew Bible usually arises from a state of affliction or crisis. While prayer constitutes a verbal articulation of the distress, fasting provides an equally expressive—indeed, given the difficulty of rendering pain in words, perhaps an even more expressive—physical manifestation. It therefore shares in the dialogical nature of prayer.” David Lambert, “Fasting as a Penitential Rite: A Biblical Phenomenon?” *HTR* 96 (2003): 479-480.

Table 4. Comparison of the theme “high” and “low” in Isa 57:15 and Isa 58:3-4

Isa 57:15	Isa 58:3-4
Thus says the “high” [רם] and exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is Holy: I dwell on a “high” [מרומ], and holy place, yet with the contrite and “lowly” [שפל] of spirit...	Why do we fast and you did not see? we “humbled” [ענה] ourselves and you did not acknowledge? You did not fast like this day for your voice to be heard on “high” [מרומ]

he will dwell with them.⁴² However, the fact that this act of humbling the self, which is equal with being “contrite and lowly of spirit,” did not make their voice to be heard on “high” [מרומ] indicating that despite their actions and gestures, they are not “humble” spiritually.

Isa 58:5 – The Defect of Outward Fasting

5aA	הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו
5aB	יום ענות אדם נפשו
5bA	הלכף כאגמן ראשו
5bB	ושק
5bC	ואפר יציע
5cA	הלזה תקרא-צום
5cB	ויום רצון ליהוה:

⁴²In Prov 16:19 the term “humble” [שפל] is parallel with “lowly” [ענה]. The verse read, “it is better to be humble [שפל] in spirit, with the lowly [ענה], than to divide the spoil with the proud.”

Translation

5aA	“Is this fasting that I chose
5aB	a day for one to humble himself
5bA	bowing down like a reed, his head
5bB	with sackcloth
5bC	with dust spread out?
5cA	“Is this what you call fasting
5cB	a day, acceptable to the Lord?”

From a structural point of view, v. 5 is the center of the whole chapter of Isaiah 58. Prior to this verse, the discussion deals with the discrepancy between the religious observance of the people and their social reality; and the rest of the chapter deals with the type of religious activities that God expected.⁴³

The bicola of 5a and 5c have parallels, creating an *inclusio* that envelops the whole verse. Both consist of two parallel cola that begin with an interrogative particle, followed by a sentence that shares *צום*, *יום*, and *בחר / רצון*.⁴⁴ This structure of v. 5 can be read as an inverted parallelism with clause 5b as the center, in which the structure strengthens the question regarding fasting.

In the center of the verse, section 5b, the formal posture and gesture of fasting are given: *הִלְכָה כְּאֵנָן רֹאשׁוֹ וְשָׁק וְאִפֶּר יִצִיעַ*, “bowing down, like a reed, his head, with sackcloth and ashes spread out.” The last clause here is comparable to the account in the

⁴³Gray, *Rhetoric*, 120.

⁴⁴The particle for the question in these bicola, *הֲלוֹא* and *הֲלֹא*, is employed to give weight to the rhetorical impact of the question. Brown, Driver, and Briggs explain that the demonstrative pronoun *זֶה* sometimes “is attached enclitically, almost as an adverb, to certain words, especially interrogative pronouns, to impart, in a manner often not reproducible in English idiom, directness and force, bringing the question or statement made into close relation with the speaker.” *BDB*, 261.

book of Esther, when the Jews learn that an edict had been issued to destroy, kill and annihilate all of them, and to seize their possessions as plunder on the thirteenth day of Adar (Est 3:13), “there is a great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing, לרבים יצע ואפר שק (Est 4:3). Literally, the translation of the last phrase here is, “sackcloth, with ashes, was spread out to most of them.”⁴⁵ David Clines interprets the expression as meaning that “most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.”⁴⁶ While the NKJV retains the literal sense in translating Isa 58:5, “to spread out sackcloth and ashes,” some other English versions share the similar understanding of what happens in Isa 58:5 with those in the book of Esther.⁴⁷ For example, the NRSV translates the phrase as “to lie in sackcloth and ashes,” comparable to the NIV and the JPS, “lying on sackcloth and ashes,” or the NASB that goes further with an additional interpretation in its translation: “spreading out sackcloth and ashes *as a bed*.”

Another way of reading ושאק ואפר יציע in Isa 58:5 is to understand that the verb יציע covers only one object, אפר, “ash,” the word that stands immediately before it.

⁴⁵Carey A. Moore, *Esther: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 7B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 47. Paton translates it as “Haircloth and ashes were spread out by most of them.” Lewis Bayles Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (New York: Scribner, 1908), 215.

⁴⁶His literal reading goes, “sackcloth and ashes were strewn [as a bed] for most of them.” See David J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott: 1984), 300.

⁴⁷Baldwin sees the parallel in the gesture between Est 4:3 with Isa 58:5. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 77.

Reading from this perspective, the conjunction ו had the function of accompaniment,⁴⁸ and in this light, the reading will be:

הלכף כאנמן ראשו	bowing down like a reed his head
ושק	<i>with</i> sackcloth
ואפר יציע	<i>with</i> ashes spread out.

This kind of reading elaborates the posture and gesture of the worshipers. A further comparison with other verses about fasting can be added here. In Ps 35:13 fasting is accompanied with being clothed in sackcloth, humbling of self [ענה נפש] and prayer; in 69:10, fasting is characterized by weeping and putting on sackcloth; and Joel 2:12 describes returning to the Lord as fasting, weeping and mourning. From the perspective of form and gesture, a comparison of these texts highlights how earnest and serious is the fasting performed by the worshipers in Isa 58.⁴⁹ As the action of bowing is a sign of

⁴⁸This kind of reading is comparable with the syntax of Dan 9:3, where Daniel’s fasting is described. The text reads, ותחנונים בצום ושק ואפר ואחנה אתפני אל-אדני האלהים לבקש חפלה. A literal, word by word translation of this verse will be: “and I gave [“set,” NKJV] my face unto the lord God, to seek, pray and supplication, by fasting, and sackcloth and ash. One way to understand the expression in this verse is that (1) Daniel set his face unto the Lord (2) with the purpose of seeking him through prayer and supplication (3) in the form of fasting accompanied by wearing a sackcloth and applying ash.

That the third part of the verse, ושק ואפר בצום with the conjunction ו is read in the sense of “accompaniment,” see Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71. For this kind of reading of Dan 9:3, James A. Montgomery writes that Daniel seeks the Lord “*accompanied* with the ancient concomitants of fasting, vesture of sackcloth, and the sprinkling of ashes on the head.” *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950), 360, italics supplied.

⁴⁹Koole sees the reference to sackcloth and ashes in Isa 58:5 as comparable with David’s fasting in his pleading for the life of his and Bathsheba’s son (2 Sam 12:16), how he is lying in sackcloth and ashes “all through the nights.” In his opinion, while Isa 58:4 sketches the fasting takes place on day time (indicated by their actions of engaging in contention, strife, and hitting), this people, like David, may also extend their fasting to the night time as well. *Isaiah III*, 134.

humility,⁵⁰ a reed is a metaphor of lowly insignificance.⁵¹ This imagery and expression strengthens the idea that the posture and attire of the people made them look as if they are really humble.

The impression about how earnest and serious the people are in performing this ritual of fasting is supported by the structure of the outer part of the verse:

5aA	A	הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו
5aB	B	יום ענות אדם נפשו
5b	C	-----
5cA	B'	הלזה תקרא־צום
5cB	A'	ויום רצון ליהוה:

This structure of v. 5 shows how connection between AA' and BB' is in the semantic realm. In AA' the parallelism is between *בחר / רצון* and also between *צום / יום* with the Lord as the subject; they share the idea of the acceptability of the ritual performed by the people. In BB', the parallelism is *צום / נפש / אדם נפש* which makes *נפש* equal to fasting. This idea is comparable with that of Ps 35:13 in which the activity of fasting is described as *עניתי בצום נפשי*, "I humbled, by fasting, my soul."⁵² All these

⁵⁰Micah 6:6 portrays the gesture of bowing in approaching God who is on high [מרום] in which an element of contrast is being made between low and high. This element is also present in Isa 58:4-5 where the humbling of oneself has a purpose of being heard "on high" [במרום].

⁵¹Isa 9:13; 19:15. See *BDB*, 8.

⁵²That *נפש ענה* is an idiomatic expression in the OT for "to humble oneself" see Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Nu 29:7; 30:14; Isa 58:3, 5; and Ps 35:13. E. Gerstenberger, "ענה," *TDOT* 11:238. 230-252. When fasting is being equated to it, it is an expression of contrition, since to humble oneself is "most likely accompanied by prayer and fasting, in preparation for the Day of Atonement." Paul Wegner, "ענה," *NIDOTTE*, 3:450.

description shows how there is nothing wrong with their gesture and posture,⁵³ nor with all of these practices: the call is to go to a deeper meaning.⁵⁴ The point is that outward performance is not enough; it must be a reflection of the inward attitude, something that is listed in detail in v. 6 onward.

The term רצון in the final phrase in v. 5cB, יום רצון ליהוה, “a day acceptable to the Lord,” thematically links the ritual of fasting here with the worship and sacrifice offered by the foreigner in Isa 56:7: “I will bring to My holy mountain, make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt offering and sacrifices will be acceptable, רצון, on My altar.” The fact that the term רצון modifies the term יום indicates that a focus on the practice in itself is not enough but has to do with the general circumstance and mood of the whole day.

The interrogative technique employed in Isa 58:5-7 contains an element of irony and portrays a contrast. As in v. 5, the opening and concluding clauses use positive interrogative particles הלמה and הכמה with a negative implication behind the statement—it is something that you *should not* do, while in vv. 6, 7 the use of the negative interrogative particle הלמה has a positive effect on the statement—things that the people *should* do.

Furthermore, the use of rhetorical questions and re-use of the verb בחר make the

⁵³Commenting on Isa 58:1-9, Lambert writes, “Though couched in the strong language of reproach, the passage never actually attacks the sincerity of Israel’s fasting, but rather argues forcefully for a new requirement for fast days: cessation from the pursuit of one’s own welfare and an active concern to promote the welfare of the afflicted *on that day*.” “Fasting as a Penitential Rite,” 501, italics by the author.

⁵⁴Childs, *Isaiah*, 478.

opening clauses of v. 5 and v. 6 almost a verbatim repetition, creating a formal connection between the two verses:

הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו (5aA)

הלא זה צום אבחרהו (6aA)

As in v. 5, the emphasis is on what is not right with the fasting; vv. 6-7 give the list of what is expected, and surprisingly, the descriptions given in these two verses reveal that this admonition regarding fasting goes far beyond a mere abstinence from food.

While stylistic connections are discernable in vv. 5-7, from v. 6 to v. 14 a certain rhetorical pattern emerges, a series of admonitions in conditional clauses followed by a promised reward as seen in Figure 10.

	Vv.	Themes	Vv.	Themes	Vv.	Themes
“If”	6-7	Admonition	9b-10a	Admonition	13	Admonition
“Then”	8-9a	Reward	10b-12	Reward	14	Reward

Figure 10. Admonitions and rewards in Isa 58:6-14

Stanza 2: Right Fasting (Isa 58:6-12)

In the previous stanza, the people complain that God did not take notice of their fasting and God responds by showing the wrong-doing they have done while they fast. In this stanza, God admonishes the people about true fasting. In v. 5, a series of rhetorical question is presented, giving a list of actions that dealing more with an outward, superficial gesture of fasting. The purpose of those questions is to call for a deeper and more genuine religious practice which is elaborated in vv. 6-12.

Strophe 1: The Right Fasting (Isa 58:6-9a)

Isa 58:6-7 – The Right Fasting

6aA	הלוא זה צום אבחרהו	
6bA	פתח חרצבות רשע	
6bB	התר אנדות מוטה	
6cA	ושלח רצוצים חפשים	
6cB	וכל-מוטה תנתקו:	
7aA	פרס לרעב לחמך	הלוא
7aB	ועניים מרודים תביא בית	
7aC	כי-תראה ערם וכסיתו	
7bA	ומבשרך לא תתעלם:	

Translation

6aA	“Is not this, fasting that I chose
6bA	to loosen the bonds of wickedness
6bB	to undo bands of yoke
6cA	and to send the oppressed to go free
6cB	and all yokes to be broken?
7aA	“Is not, to share to the hungry, your food
7aB	the wandering poor you bring home
7aC	when you see the naked, cover him
7bA	and from your own flesh, not hiding yourself?”

**Isa 58:6 – Admonition: Liberating
the Oppressed**

6aA	הלוא זה צום אבחרהו
6bA	פתח חרצבות רשע
6bB	התר אנדות מוטה
6cA	ושלח רצוצים חפשים
6cB	וכל-מוטה תנתקו:

The admonitions in vv. 6 and 7 have a different emphasis. Motyer notes that v. 6 is concerned with a long-term program while v. 7 is in the realm of practical, immediate action.⁵⁵ In the words of Walter Brueggemann, the mandate in these texts concerns both public policy and “intense face-to-face charity.”⁵⁶

Thematically, the admonitions in v. 5b and v. 7 are compatible. As in v. 5b, the standard practice of fasting is to look inward, to intentionally afflict oneself; in v. 7, the call is to focus outward to those who constantly live in want and affliction, whose heads are “bowed down” by their unfortunate condition as displayed in Figure 11.

58: 5a	58:7
bowing down like a reed his head with sackcloth with ashes spread out?	Is it not to share to the hungry you food and the wandering poor, you bring into the house when you see the naked one, cover him

Figure 11. The contrast of the admonitions in Isa 58:5 and 7; focus on self or society

⁵⁵Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 481. Gray reflects, “whereas 58:6 focuses on the actions that precede and eventuate in liberation (loosening, undoing, letting go, breaking), 58:7 concentrates on what is necessary in order to sustain life for those who have been released (sharing, housing, clothing): liberating the oppressed without also providing resources for life (Ex. 3:21-22) is an incomplete exercise likely to lead to little long-term substantive change in the conditions of the poor.” *Rhetoric*, 128; see also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 179-180.

⁵⁶Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 189. The actions commended in vv. 6-7, in which v. 6 is concerned with the restoration of justice on the level of social structure, while v. 7 deals with direct act of charity on the personal level is in the right order. As Magesa explains, that on the ethical level, justice takes precedence over charity. While charity is an important and necessary human virtue and value, a charity which prevails in a structural injustice situations is antithetical to human dignity, and leaves the unjust structures intact and even perpetuates them. Laurenti Magesa, “The Priority of Justice over Charity,” *African Ecclesiastical Review* 29 no 6 (1987): 351.

As the two verses are being compared this way, the word **בשר** in the concluding clause of v. 7, **וּמִבְשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם**, “and *from your own flesh* do not hide yourself” adds another impact to the message: as conventional fasting is doing something to your own **בשר**, the higher call is to open oneself to others, **לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם**, to realize that they are none other than your own **בשר**.⁵⁷ The term **בשר** frequently appears to signify relationship, especially with responsibility pertaining to it.⁵⁸

The structure of vv. 6-7, in which v. 6 deals with the social system and v. 7 concerns personal compassion, is comparable with the structure of vv. 3-4, as the

⁵⁷Contra Motyer who understands **בשרך** as referring to the closest nucleus of the family, arguing that while taking care of the community, one has to remember his own family. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 481.

It can be proposed here, behind this command in 58:7 especially in the context of the term **בשר**, there is an echo of the command in Deut 10:17-19:

17 Because the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords, great God, mighty and fearsome; do not show partiality, do not take bribe;

18 executes justice to the orphan and widow, loving the sojourner, *ger*, to give him food and mantle;

19 you should love stranger because you are a sojourner in the land of Egypt.

Verse 17 is a statement of who God is, and in the context of Deut 10 it functions as a double entendre, concluding the previous command, yet at the same time also an introduction to the following command. Verse 18 contains an interesting statement; in the beginning, the thought of v. 18a is a continuation of the ending of v. 17 which is concern with the theme of justice, but as the impression about justice in 17 has more emphasis on the judgment (a great, mighty and fearsome God) and the execution of a just judgment (impartial, do not take bribe). However, as the verse goes on, the concrete expression for judgment, executes justice [**עֲשֵׂה נִשְׁפָּט**] has the emphasis on love and caring, since (1) the participial expression **נִשְׁפָּט עֲשֵׂה** has the parallel of **אָהַב**, (2) the objects of the verbs are orphan, widow and sojourner—the marginal people, and (3) what he did in “executing justice” is giving food and clothing. Tigay notes that connection between vv. 17 and 18 led the Talmud to observe that when the Bible mentions God’s power, it immediately mentions his kindness as well. *Deteronomy*, 108. The command in v. 19 has double message, (1) to imitate God, “you should love stranger” [**אֶת־הַגֵּר וְאֶהְבֶּתֶם**] exactly like what God had done in v. 18, and (2) and to remember that they themselves were a sojourner also.

The call to share food and give clothing is repeated in Isa 58:7, with the punch line that the gesture is not to be extended to the sojourners, but to those who are “your own flesh” [**בְּשָׂרְךָ**]. If one fails to show kindness to his own flesh, how much kindness to strangers can be expected from him.

⁵⁸Bratsiotis explains that the term seems “to emphasize an existing blood relationship and to stress the responsibilities that this implies.” N. P. Bratsiotis, “**בשר**,” *TDOT* 2:328.

description of the oppression in v. 3 deals with the system, while the wrong doing portrayed in v. 4 is a personal, direct violence. This comparison, in Figure 12, makes vv. 6-7 and vv. 3-4 echo one another:

Concern	58:3-4	58:6-7
system/indirect	3 Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and oppress all your workers	6 Is not this the fast that I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to send the oppressed free and break every yoke?
personal/direct	4 Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist	7 Is it not to share with the hungry your food; and the wandering poor, you bring into the house; when you see the naked one, cover him; and from your own flesh not hide

Figure 12. Parallel of description of actions in Isa 58:3-4 and 6-7

Polan notes that the series of infinitives in vv. 6-7 stresses a “mode of action, a way of living, to be put into practice, not something done on a single or specific day.”⁵⁹ Therefore, as the people seek the Lord “day by day” (v. 2), now the call is also to practice doing these things on a daily, habitual basis. Commentators noted that to change the social structure of a certain society is not an easy task to do. That is why, as John Oswalt noted, the verbs employed in v. 6 are in the form of forceful language.⁶⁰ This insight is strengthened by the example in Jer 34:8-11 in which the plan to liberate slaves is nullified.

⁵⁹Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 180.

⁶⁰Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 499n26; Gray, *Rhetoric*, 123-125.

The demand for a change in the social structure in v. 6 is expressed in a progression of thought: to loose the bonds, to undo the bands, and to let the oppressed go free, concluded with an appeal “to break every yoke,” with the emphasis on the rescue of the oppressed members of the community from harsh treatment.⁶¹ When the psalmist recounted the experience of Joseph when he was released from the prison and promoted to be ruler of Egypt, he wrote, “The king sent [שָׁלַח] and released [נָתַר] him; the ruler of peoples, and set him free [פָּתַח]” (Ps 105:20); his imprisonment is characterized by fetters on his feet and an iron bar on his neck (v. 18), which is thematically related to the bond, band, and yoke mentioned here. This verse from the Psalm shares the following concentration of verbs with Isa 58:6: “to loose [פָּתַח] the bonds of wickedness; to undo [נָתַר] the bands of the yoke; and to send [שָׁלַח] the oppressed to go free.” In Ps 146:7, the psalmist contrasts the Lord with earthly rulers, and shows that the superiority of the Lord’s government is that He is the One: who executes justice for the oppressed / who gives food to the hungry / The LORD, who sets free [נָתַר] the prisoners. Thematically this verse shares the concern of Isa 58:6-7.

As a concluding statement, the last clause of v. 6 is designed as the climax of the verse,⁶² calling the addressee to ensure that the practice of social oppression will not reemerge, and the term for this degrading system is *מוֹטָה*, “yoke.” As a symbol, *מוֹטָה*

⁶¹Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 337; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 179; Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 215; and Gray, *Rhetoric*, 122.

⁶²It is observable from a syntactic perspective, in which the previous clauses in the verse are arranged in verb-object style, that the last phrase has the object followed by the verb.

usually stands for foreign oppression.⁶³ In Lev 26:13 and Ezek 34:27, the Lord is said to be the one who breaks [שבר] the yoke, i.e. the one who ends Israel's slavery under foreign oppression. The text of Isaiah portrays how the people are called to follow this action of God, to break the yoke; ironically they had imposed it upon their fellow countrymen.⁶⁴

The rhythm of v. 6 in which a rhetorical question is followed by three imperatives and concluded with a summary statement is repeated again in v. 7.

Isa 58:7 – Admonition: Compassion to Those in Need

7aA הָלוֹא פָּרַס לְרַעֲב לַחֲמֹךְ
 7aB וְעֵנִיִּים מֵרֹדִים תְּבִיא בַּיִת
 7aC כִּי־תִרְאֶה עָרִם וְכִסִּיתוּב
 7bA וּמִבְשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם:

The formal structure of this verse is the use of the negative particle לֹא in its opening and ending statements as the keyword. In the opening, this particle functions as a rhetorical question to emphasize the positive nuance and its tone of encouragement, while in the end, it has the function of prohibition. With the understanding that the whole verse conveys a single thought, the word בְּשָׂרְךָ, “your own flesh,” in the clause לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם (7bA) refers to the kind of people previously mentioned within the verse: the hungry, naked and homeless. The word בָּשָׂר is employed to emphasize that these

⁶³See Lev 26:13; Jer 27:2; 28:10, 12; Ezek 30:18; 34:27.

⁶⁴While the verb for “breaking the yoke” in Lev 26:13, Ezek 30:18; 34:27 is שָׁבַר, and in Isa 58:6 is נָתַק, Jer 2:20 shows that these two words are synonymous: “For long ago I broke [שָׁבַר] your yoke and tore off [נָתַק] your bonds.”

unfortunate ones are your own flesh, and the call is to not to hide from them.⁶⁵ The term עלם had nuances of meanings including to conceal an object and to shut (the eyes, ears), but the hithpael form means “to hide oneself,” as to avoid encountering somebody or withdraw oneself from meeting somebody. As in every society, as the general population aspired to improve their standard of living and life condition, the marginal group among them, the poor, hungry, naked, and homeless, may stand as an irritating reminder of where they have been or something that they try to avoid. The temptation is to get rid of them, or at least ignore them. The call in this text is not to show indifference toward those who are still in that kind of condition.⁶⁶ Nakedness means that a certain part of one’s flesh [בשר] that was supposed to be hidden is exposed, and the call in the text is to cover that part of the body; this action is equated with not hiding oneself from his own בשר.

Isa 58:7a concerns three basic needs for human existence, namely, food, housing

⁶⁵As can be observed, in the clause לא תתעלם לך, the syntax puts the emphasis on the word בשרך, “your own flesh.”

⁶⁶Levinas describes the idea of “face-to face encounter” as “an ultimate situation.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 81. Elaborating on Levinas, Beal writes, “(N)aked and hungry. . . the fact solicits a critique of the system from within, ‘a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in the face of the other and under his authority.’ Self-critical becomes accountability, responsibility.” Timothy Beal, “Facing Job,” in *Levinas and Biblical Studies*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Gary A. Phillips, and David Jobling (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 67. The point of the exhortation here is a call to God-like behavior; just as he brings strangers into his house (Isa 56:7), so should his people provide shelter for the homeless. Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 34; Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 179. Furthermore, as an echo of Deut 10:18-19, just as God executes גושפפ, “justice” and shows love to the orphan, the widow and the alien by providing them food and clothing, his people are to do the same to these marginalized persons. See Koole, *Isaiah III*, 140; Hrobon, *Ibid*.

and clothing.⁶⁷ In discussing human rights from a biblical perspective, among other aspects, Sidney Greidanus mentions food and clothing as basic human rights.⁶⁸ Regarding food, he writes, “One of man’s basic necessities, of course, is food. . . . Everyone’s right to food was, therefore, protected by God’s law.”⁶⁹

Jill Jacobs is of the opinion that the laws regarding the festival of Sukkah and instruction to build a roof guardrail or *מעקה* in Deut 22:8 indicate that adequate housing is one of the basic human needs. She believes that these laws teach that “stable and protective housing is a necessary condition for the establishment of a just and permanent society.”⁷⁰ She shows how in the festival of booths, or *Sukkot*, living in the booths should not be a hardship. Furthermore, residents in the booths must have another place to go to when conditions in the booths become unbearable. Based on this, she concludes that

a shelter or transitional housing facility must meet basic needs for a short period of time, but should not be considered a long-term solution to the housing crisis. . . . Therefore, even while we offer emergency controls against homelessness, we cannot consider our work complete until we guarantee permanent housing solutions.⁷¹

She goes on to write that the instruction to build a roof guardrail emphasizes the supreme

⁶⁷That God has concern for these basic needs is discernable in Deut 8. He is taking care of the food and the clothing of the people of Israel throughout the wilderness wandering (vv. 3-4) and He also makes sure that they will have abundance of food and be able to build “good” houses in the promised land (vv. 7-12).

⁶⁸Sidney Greidanus, “Human Rights in Biblical Perspective,” *CTJ* 19 (1984): 18-19.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 18-19. The laws, among others, stated that Israelites had the right to enter any vineyard and grainfield and eat from it (Deut 23:24-25); at harvest farmers were forbidden to take the whole crop for themselves (Lev 19:9-10); any forgotten sheaf in the field and the gleanings of olives from orchards and grapes from vineyards were to be left for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widows (Deut 24:19-22). Moreover, whatever grew in the sabbatical years should not be touched by the owner, they were apportioned for the poor (Exod 23:10-11).

⁷⁰Jill Jacobs, “From Sukkah to Ma’akeh: the Halachah of Housing,” *Tikkun* 15 no. 5 (2000): 54.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 52.

importance of human life: “The commandment of the *ma`akeh* also teaches that the purpose of a permanent house, unlike *sukkah*, is not simply to provide shelter; the house must offer full protection to all who enter it.”⁷²

The importance of clothing as a basic human need is indicated in the laws regarding taking a garment as a pledge (Exod 22:26-27; Deut 24:12-13). It is interesting how the motive clauses accompanying the same law in both texts are complementary. Exod 22:27 warns that the debtor, who has not sufficient clothing against the cold of the night, will cry out [צעק] against the creditor, and the Lord will hear the complaint. In Deut 24:13, on the other hand, if the creditor returns the clothing to the debtor, the latter will bless him, and this act of generosity on the part of the creditor will be a merit [צדקה] before the Lord. Comparing the two texts on the same law, one can notice a correlation between the words צעקה and צדקה. Isa 5:7 employs them as a paronomasia in describing the degrading moral reality of God’s people in the song of the vineyard: וְהִנֵּה צַעֲקָה וְהִנֵּה צַדִּיקָה [the Lord] looked. . . for righteousness, but behold, a cry [of distress].”

The text of Deut 24:13 corresponds further with the message of Isa 58:7-8 in regard to the role of צדקה in relation to one’s conduct. The admonition to give clothes to the poor will result in, among other things, “your righteousness will go before you” [צדקך] יהוה אלהיך ולך תהיה צדקה לפני (v. 8), which is comparable to the phrase

⁷²Jacobs, “From Sukkah to Ma’akeh,” 52.

in Deut 24:13.⁷³ This law regarding garments, which is bound to the idea of צדקה, strengthens the contrast between a genuine and artificial צדקה in Isa 58: as the people appear as a nation that practices צדקה when in reality they do not (v. 2), the call now is to produce some concrete actions, among others, to cover those who are naked, and it will make their צדקה go before them (v. 8).

The call not to hide oneself from those in need is using the word עלם. It is interesting that in the book of Isaiah, this word is employed to describe God's action against his people. Isa 1:15 portrays God as hiding his eyes from the prayers of his people:

When you spread out your hands
I will hide [אעלים] my eyes from you;
even to your multiple prayers
I will not listen,
your hands are covered with blood.

In Isa 57:11, in a series of questions as God confronts his people, he asks:

Whom were you worried and fearful of, that you lied,
and me you do not remember,
do not put in your heart?
am I not silent [חשה] even for a long time [ומעלם]
that you are not afraid of me?

The word ומעלם which is translated in temporal sense “even for a long time” in most English translations, is translated as παρορω in the LXX, and in this line of reading, the

⁷³Commenting on this law regarding a garment as pledge, Tigay writes: “the promise and the warning rest upon the conviction that God is the ultimate patron of the powerless: although they cannot personally reward those who are kind to them or punish those who mistreat them, they have the recourse of God, who will heed their wishes.” *Deuteronomy*, 226. This understanding—that God is involved in human affairs—strengthens the message in Isa 58, that there should not be a discrepancy between one's devotion to God and one's relationship with fellow human beings.

NRSV translates the word as “closed my eyes,” a concept that is similar to Isa 1:15 above. Motyer had noted that out of 16 occurrences of the term חֹשֶׁה, “be silent,” only four refer to silence from speech. The majority implies inactivity.⁷⁴ Using this insight as a direction, the clause הֲלֹא אֲנִי מִחֹשֶׁה וּמְעַלֵּם can be read as “have I kept silent because I have been hiding myself?” The context of Isa 1:15 reveals that the people were labeled as offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly, having abandoned the Lord, despising the Holy One of Israel, turning away from him (v. 4), a description that is comparable with those in Isa 57; as a result, the Lord is עֹלֵם, closing his eyes from all their prayers. It is then followed by a call to cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (v. 17), comparable with the call in Isa 58.

In the laws in Deut 22:1, 3, and 4, the verb עֹלֵם is employed to direct one’s attitude toward a struggling animal:

You shall not, as you see the ox of your brother, or his sheep, straying away, and hide yourselves [וְהִתְעַלַּמְתָּ] from them; you certainly should bring them back to your brother. . .

Thus you should do with his donkey, and thus you should do with his garment, and thus you should do with anything lost by your brother, which he has lost and you have found; you are not allowed to hide yourself [וְהִתְעַלַּמְתָּ].

Do not, as you see the donkey of your brother or his cattle had fallen on the road and hide yourself from them [וְהִתְעַלַּמְתָּ]; you should surely raise it up (Deut 22:1, 3-4).⁷⁵

As the term אָחִיךָ in these verses is translated as “your brother” in some English versions

⁷⁴Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 474.

⁷⁵While in these verses the verb עֹלֵם is employed to express one’s attitude toward animals, in his farewell speech, the prophet-judge Samuel emphasized his integrity by challenging the people whether, in judging them, he ever took a bribe that made him close [עֹלֵם] his eyes in dealing with cases (1 Sam 12:3).

of the Bible,⁷⁶ it is understood as referring to “fellow countrymen”⁷⁷ or “neighbor”⁷⁸ in other versions. This variation of readings shows how these laws emphasize that the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood is to be nurtured among the people. If a sympathetic attitude is to be shown toward animals as an expression of the spirit of brotherhood, in Isa 58 the call is how much more sympathy should be given to a fellow human being, an object that is more dignified than an ox, sheep, donkey or garment of “your brother” [אחיך] but rather, “your [own] flesh” [בשרך]. In the light of the criticism in v. 3, how in their fasting, which is designated as “humbling oneself,” the people in reality are oppressing those who are under them. This kind of gesture can be understood that instead of taking advantage over those who are socially and economically lower than they are, to lift them up by treating them as dignified human beings: “your own flesh.”

Isa 58:8-9a – The Blessings of the Right Fasting

8aA	אז יבקע כשחר אורך
8aB	וארכתך מהרה תצמח
8bA	והלך לפניך צדקך
8bB	כבוד יהוה יאספך:
9aA	אז תקרא ויהוה יענה
9aB	תשוע ויאמר הנני

⁷⁶New King James Version; New International Version; and Jewish Publication Society.

⁷⁷New American Standard Bible.

⁷⁸New Revised Standard Version.

Translation

- 8aA “Then, will break forth like dawn, your light
8aB and your recovery will speedily sprout
8bA and goes before you, your righteousness
8bB the glory of the Lord on your rear.”
9aA “Then, you will call and the Lord will answer
9aB you will cry for help, and he will say, ‘here I am.’”

Following the admonitions, Isa 58:8-9a now gives the promise of good things that the people would enjoy if they changed the attitude of their religious activities. The parallelism can be perceived in these bicola: in 8a, there is a thematic parallelism: the breaking forth of light and recovery from a wound. In 8b, the parallelism is more complementary in nature: **אֶסְרֶיךָ / לְפָנַי**⁷⁹ and **כְּבוֹד יְהוָה / צְדָקָה**, while in 9a, it is **יֵעַן / קְרָא** and **הִנְנִי / שׁוֹעַ**.

In Verse 8a, both clauses had the addressee (second person) as the subject. It concerns recovery in which the imagery of transition from darkness to light is paralleled with a transformation from an open wound to the growth of new covering skin. To Motyer, the expressions in this couplet articulate the idea of a new life. In the context of Isa 58, the recovery of a wound may allude to the fighting and injury referred to in v. 4, and also refer to the social wounds that need to be taken care of, as had been expressed in vv. 6-7. In line with this theme, in Isa 59, as the people bring their confessions, the chaotic situation of their social life is portrayed as someone who is hoping for light, but

⁷⁹“Rear” [אֶסְרֶיךָ] basically means “to gather” and from this, the idea of gathering is moving from behind, and becomes the idea of “rearguard,” so it had a strong idea of protection and security; see Isa 52:12: “for the Lord is walking before you / and in your rear [אֶסְרֶיךָ] the God of Israel.”

instead, experiences darkness; they are looking for brightness but are finding gloom (v. 9).

The promise in v. 8b, “*Your righteousness* will go before you / and the glory of the Lord as rear guard,” has the Exodus-wilderness imagery as its background;⁸⁰ that the pillars of cloud and fire led the people of Israel through their wandering in the wilderness,⁸¹ especially when the pillar of cloud moved from before the people to behind them, to protect them from the pursuing Egyptian army (Exod 14:19).

However, it may also allude to the law regarding garments in Deut. 24:12, 13, how a gracious gesture extended to one’s fellow in the specific context of a garment or clothing will be counted as “righteousness for you *before* the LORD your God.” Following up the line of thought of this law in Deuteronomy, this promise is applicable to the immediate context of Isaiah 58, in which, in v. 2, the Lord criticizes the people, saying that they looked like “a nation that has done righteousness” while in reality they are not, but now, their righteousness is genuine and it goes before the Lord, (i.e. it is acceptable to the Lord). Similarly, as a part of the indictment in Isaiah 57, the Lord says, “I will declare your righteousness and your works, but they will not profit you,” but now their righteousness will be acceptable to the Lord.

In this particular context, the idea of “righteousness” becomes unique, since in one aspect it is what the people will do, but at the same time it is one of the

⁸⁰Julian Morgenstern, “Biblical Theophanies,” ZA 28 (1914): 47-48; Blenskinsopp, 180. Hrobon comments, “the expression יהוה כבוד often stands for God’s presence in the decisive evens of Israel’s *Heilsgeschichte*. See *Ethical Dimension*, 181.

⁸¹See Exod 13:21ff; 14:19, 24; Num 14:14; and Neh 9:12, 19.

blessings/gifts that the Lord bestows upon them.⁸² Oswalt has shown a different usage of the term צדק throughout the book of Isaiah: in the first part, the emphasis is on human behavior; in the second part, it is on God's saving act. Now, in the third section of the book, beginning exactly with 56:1, the demand on the people is used again, but in the context of God's righteousness.⁸³

Verse 9a concludes the promise in this section with a higher level of salvation, as in vv. 8-9a there is a development of ideas from the restoration of one's personal condition: from healing to guidance and protection, to the restoration of one's relationship with God: a direct communication with the Lord.⁸⁴ The vocabulary of v. 9a makes it function as a counterpart of the complaint that the Lord did not take notice of them (v. 3a) and also criticism of the kind of fast that the people had that will "not make their voice heard on high" (v. 4).⁸⁵

Strophe 2: The Right Fasting (Isa 58:9b-10a)

Thematically, the admonition in vv. 9b-10a can be divided into two sections: v. 9b is concerned with what the people should not do, while v. 10a is an encouragement of

⁸²For Oswalt the phrase "your righteousness" combines two ideas: (1) its parallelism with the phrase "the glory of the Lord" indicates that it refers to the Lord, (2) but at the same time, the possessive pronoun makes the phrase refer to the righteousness of the people. *Isaiah 40-66*, 505.

⁸³Oswalt, "Righteousness in Isaiah," 1:188. See also John N. Oswalt, "Isaiah 60-62: the Glory of the Lord" *CTJ* 40/1 (2005): 98.

⁸⁴Quoting Martin Buber, Westermann comments on this verse: "Salvation is not described as a state of bliss, but as the constancy of the dialogical relationship between man and God." *Isaiah 40-66*, 339.

⁸⁵Most commentators have seen this interconnection between these verses, as Brueggemann writes, "Yahweh's presence, attentiveness, and availability are exactly what is hoped for in v. 3." *Isaiah 40-66*, 190.

what they should do. Employing short and precise terms, v. 9b is concerned with (1) the social system (yoke), especially when it is connected with v. 6 above; (2) litigations or legal accusations (pointing fingers); and (3) false accusations or malicious speech (speaking wickedness).⁸⁶ There are three sets of protasis-apodosis in Isaiah 58, in which Isa 58:9b-12 is the second. A consideration of the vocabulary employed in v. 9b indicates that it functions as a bridge between those first and third sets. First, reference to “yoke” [מוטה] and also שלח⁸⁷ already appear in the first admonition (vv. 6-9a), and second, the objection against “speaking” [דבר] in the clause דבר־אין makes a link with vv. 13-14, where among others, the people are discouraged from דבר דבר on the Sabbath.⁸⁸

**Isa 58:9b – Admonition:
Avoid Commotion**

9bA	אִם־תִּסֵּר מִתּוֹכְךָ
9bBa	מוֹטֵה
9bBb	שֶׁלַח אֶצְבֶּע
9bBc	וּדְבַר־אֵין:

⁸⁶Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 217.

⁸⁷The use of the term שלח here is interesting in light of the literary device. As in v. 7 the term has a positive connotation, to “send” the oppressed free, now the term is used with a negative connotation: “pointing” of finger.

⁸⁸The clauses in this verse also make a link with Isaiah 59, especially vv. 3-4; v. 3 refers to “finger” [אֶצְבֶּע] even though in a different context, in the sense of an act of violence, and lips that “speak” [דְּבַר] falsehood, and a tongue that mutters wickedness. Verse 4 gives the context of these actions in the legal setting.

Translation

9bA	“If you remove from your midst
9bB	yoke
9bBb	pointing of finger
9bBc	and mischievous speech ;”

That the prophet discourages the people from דבר־און provides significant insight regarding social tension (contention, strife, and to strike with a wicked fist [v. 4]; pointing of finger [v. 9]) and social injustice (driving all workers hard [v. 3]; bonds of wickedness, bands of yoke, oppression [vv. 6, 9]; Karl Bernhardt explained that in the prophets the term און is used to designate “unlawful legal manipulations and, in general, social injustice;” the deeds and attitudes of און encompass ‘social injustice, cultic wrongs, corrupt politics.’”⁸⁹ Furthermore, Bernhardt observed, the word און is employed to describe “deeds of violence committed brutally and openly, but more or less unobtrusive wickedness, accomplished with cunning and deceit by unjust legal interpretation or deceptive cultic or political propaganda. . . . [I]t is important to observe that the doers of *`aven* use this word mainly as a means of carrying out their plans.”⁹⁰ Based on this description, Bernhardt considered the meaning of the phrase דבר־און in Isa 58:9 as “mischievous speech,” in which “the doers of *`aven* use words to carry out this evil.”⁹¹

⁸⁹Karl Heinz Bernhardt, “און,” *TDOT*, 1:143.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 143-144.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 146. Bernhardt’s assessment is useful, since the English versions of the Hebrew Bible translate the phrase in Isa 58:8 דבר־און as “speaking wickedness” (NASB; NKJV), “speaking of evil” (NRSV), or “speaking if vanity” (Young’s Literal Translation) which suggest that און is merely the direct object of the verb דבר; while the more possible syntactic function of און in this phrase is more specifically about the nature of the activity, as reflected in the phrase “malicious speaking” (NIV).

**Isa 58:10a – Admonition: Open Up
Oneself to the Needy**

10aA ותפק לרעב נפשך

10aB ונפש נענה תשביע

Translation

10aA “If you give, to the hungry, yourself

10aB and the desire of the afflicted one, you satisfied.”

The first clause in Isa 58:10a reads, “if you give, to the hungry, yourself. . .” in which the term פּוֹק, translated as “to give”⁹² above, or “to extend”⁹³ in some English Bibles, basically expresses the idea of “sharing.” However, the term פּוֹק also expresses the idea of “coming out,” “promoting,” and in its *hiphil* form can mean “to cause oneself to come out.” In the light of this later meaning, the reading of Isa 58:10a, ותפק לרעב נפשך ונפש נענה תשביע, can be “*come out* to the hungry yourself, thus the soul of the afflicted one you satisfy.” By reading the verse this way, it posits v. 10a as a direct, specific contrasting link to the term עלם, “to hide” in v. 7, in which the call is פרס לרעב פּרם, “to share to the hungry your bread. . . and from your own flesh *do not hide yourself*.”

The call in v. 10aA is *to come out* [תפק], as an opposite of the act of hiding, עלם], to give your own self [נפשך] to the hungry [לרעב]. This call is stronger than the admonition to share “only” bread in v. 7. Following the direction of v. 7, some Hebrew and Syriac manuscripts read the phrase נפשך, “your self” in v. 10a as לחמך, “your bread”

⁹²New American Standard Bible.

⁹³New King James Version.

and the LXX has both words, “if you give bread to the hungry from yourself.” However, this emendation is not necessary since the point of the call here is for a direct, total, personal care of the needy.⁹⁴ This call of total caring is strengthened further by the next clause, *ונפש נענה תשביע*, “and satisfy the נפש of the afflicted.” Furthermore, in 10aB, as vv. 3-5 portray the people’s fasting as *נפש ענה*, this activity is now being reversed: instead of doing *נפש ענה*, it is better to satisfy those who are in the state of *נפש נענה*.⁹⁵

Strophe 3: The Blessings of the Right Fasting (Isa 58:10b-12)

Isa 58:10b-12 – The Blessings of the Right Fasting

10bA	וזרח בחשך אורך
10bB	ואפלתך כצהרים:
11aA	ונחך יהוה תמיד
11aB	והשביע בצחצחות נפשך
11aC	ועצמתך יחליץ
11bA	והיית כגן רוה
11bB	וכמוצא מים
11bC	אשר לא־יכזבו מימיו
12aA	ובנו ממך חרבות עולם
12aB	מוסדי דור־ודור תקומם
12bA	וקרא לך גדר פרץ
12bB	משבב נתיבות לשבת

⁹⁴See Yilpet, *A Rhetorical/Intra-textual Study*, 267n11. Compare to, among others, Whybray who agreed with the MSS.

⁹⁵Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 112; Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 183.

Translation

- 10bA “And will rise, in the darkness, your light
10bB and your darkness, like noon day.”
11aA “And the Lord, will lead you continually
11aB and he will satisfy, in the scorched places, your desire
11aC and your bones, he will strengthen.”
11bA “And you will be like a watered garden
11bB and like a springs of water
11bC which does not fail its water.”
12aA “And those among you will build ancient ruins
12aB and ages foundations, you will raise up
12bA and you will be called a repairer of the breach
12bB a restorer of the path to dwell.”

Thematically, the reward promised in vv. 10b-12 can be divided into the following sections:

- A The result of what the Lord is doing, with emphasis on the theme of light (10b)
- B What the Lord will do, with emphasis on his presence and guidance in difficult, wilderness-like places (11a)
- A’ The result of what the Lord is doing, with emphasis on the theme of water (11b)
- B’ What the Lord will enable the people to do, with emphasis on rebuilding and restoration of the dwelling place (12)

The thematic movement here has a strong allusion to the Exodus-wilderness-conquest narrative, in which in the last part, instead of building, is rebuilding.⁹⁶ This kind of

⁹⁶For Koole, “this salvation-historical past is paradigmatic for the continuing care with which God leads his people on their path of life and guards them amidst all manner of danger and distress.” *Isaiah III*, 148. See also Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 506. Johnston underlines some New Exodus motifs in Isa 57:14-58:12. However, since his study is more focused on the Markan chapter, these motifs in Isa 57-58 serve more as a background under the broad themes of removal of sin (Isa 57:14-21), fasting (Isa 58:1-12) and the Sabbath (Isa 58:13-14). See James A. Johnston, “Mark 2:1–3:6 and the Sequence of Isaiah's New Exodus in Isaiah 57:14–58:14” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University, 2008).

summarization is comparable to Amos 2:10 in which these themes have been summarized in one verse.⁹⁷

Isa 58:10b – The Promise of Light

10bA וּזְרַח בַּחֹשֶׁךְ אֹרֶךְ
10bB וְאִפְלַתְךָ כַּצְהָרִים:

The parallelism here is synonymous: אֹפֶלֶה / חֹשֶׁךְ; and צְהָר / אֹרֶךְ. This verse is characterized by a thematic progression from dark to light: “and dawning in the dark your light / and your gloom like noonday.” It is noticeable that the second person possessive pronoun is applied to the term “light” in colon a and the term “gloom” in colon b, implying a change of one’s condition. Just as the demand in vv. 9b-10a is a recapitulation of vv. 6-7, the promise in vv. 10b-12 also starts with an elaboration of vv. 8-9a. The theme of light has already been used in v. 8.

In the opening of Moses’ blessing to the Israelites in Deut 33:2, it is the Lord himself who dawns and shines forth, portraying him as light.⁹⁸ This blessing is against the background of the song of Moses in chapter 32 in which the Exodus and wilderness experience are poetically summarized and highlighted, a theme that is also influential in this chapter of the book of Isaiah. With this background, it is quite reasonable to read the theme of light as a repetition/development of the phrase “Your righteousness will go

⁹⁷The text reads: “And I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and I walked you in the wilderness forty years that you might take possession of the land of the Amorite.” For Hubbard this one verse summed up the essential messages of the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua. David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1989), 144.

⁹⁸Birgit Langer, *Gott als “Licht” in Israel und Mesopotamien: Eine Studie zu Jes. 60:1-3, 19f.* (Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989), 129.

before you / and the glory of the Lord as rear guard” in the earlier promise of Isa 58:8b. As in v. 8b the emphasis is on the Lord’s guidance and protection, here in v. 10b, it is more on the theme of light that leads the Israelites through their wilderness experience.

The motif of the Lord as the light of his people is presented in Isa 60:1-2, in a chapter that is located right after Isa 56-59, and the theme of light in Isa 60:1-3 can be read as the result of the coming of the Lord to Zion as the climax of Isa 59. Earlier, Isa 59 describes the absence of justice and righteousness within the society, and this situation is directly connected with the theme of light and darkness:

Justice [משפט] is far from us
righteousness [צדקה] does not overtake us.
We hope for light [אור] but behold, darkness [השך],
for brightness, but we walk in gloom [אפלה].
We grope like blind men along the wall;
like those who have no eyes we grope;
we stumble at midday [צהר] as in the twilight (Isa 59:9-10).

However, God’s intervention and his coming as redeemer to Zion reverse the whole situation (59:15b-21) and as a result, light shines in the place of darkness.⁹⁹ This thematic movement from darkness to light is also present in Isaiah 58. The motif of light here symbolizes the salvation/deliverance God imparted to his people.¹⁰⁰ The vocabulary of Isa 60:2b has affinities with Isa 58:8b and 10b. This can be seen in Figure 13.

⁹⁹Kil, *Light and Darkness*, 257.

¹⁰⁰McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 177; Kil, *Ibid.*

Isaiah 58	Isaiah 60
8b and will go before you, your righteousness	2b and upon you will dawn [זרח]
and the glory [כבוד] of the Lord on your rearward	the Lord, and his glory [כבוד]
10b and will dawn [זרח] in the darkness your light,	upon you will appear
and your gloom like the noonday	

Figure 13. Comparison of the vocabulary in Isa 58:8b, 10b, and Isa 60:2b

From another perspective, Prov 4:18 likened the path of “the righteous” [צדיק] to light that dawns through to the full noonday.¹⁰¹ So in Isaiah 58 this theme of light is a portrayal of a transformation for a nation that earlier looked like a nation that has done righteousness [צדקה] (v. 2) but was, in reality, full of transgressions and sins (v. 1), but now their righteousness [צדקה] goes before them (v. 8) and their light dawns into a full noonday (v. 10).

Isa 58:11a – Assurance of Divine Providence

11aA	ונחך יהוה תמיד
11aB	והשביע בצחצחות נפשך
11aC	ועצמתך יחליץ

The flow of thought in this verse is a thematic progression of what God will do: guide, satisfy and strengthen. In v. 11aA, the term for divine guidance [נחה] is used previously in 57:18, when mysteriously, despite the fact that the people stubbornly

¹⁰¹Prov 4:10-19 is contrasting the paths of the wicked and the righteous. As v. 18 associates the righteous with light, v. 19 portrays the wicked as darkness, so that they “stumble” [כשל] in it. The portrayal of the people stumbling [כשל] in darkness is a major theme in the confession of the people in Isaiah 59 (vv. 10, 14) and also the call as a part of the salvific work of the Lord for his people in Isaiah 57, to remove the כשל from the way of his people (v. 14).

follows “the way of his heart.” God decided to “lead” [נחה] and “heal” them. Both the themes of guidance and healing are also present here in Isa 58:11. The term נחה is used to refer to God’s guidance during the Exodus (Exod 15:13; Deut 32:12), and the use of the personal name YHWH emphasizes the promise of guidance since the name implies his power and faithfulness.¹⁰² The term תמיד highlights his constant presence among the people.¹⁰³ This promise is a strengthening of the promise given in v.9a: you will call, the Lord will answer / you will cry, and he will say, here I am. In v. 11aB, the promise that God will “satisfy [שבע] your desire [נפש]” is an echo of, or in this case, a reward, for the call in v. 9b to satisfy [שבע] the desire [נפש] of the afflicted one.¹⁰⁴

The poetical pair of the theme of God’s continuous guidance in the context of scorched places may look like irony: how can a loving and caring God guide his people to scorched places? But this irony conveys the depth of the poetical twist and the beauty of the promise, since now it receives an elevated tone, that the setting of the promise is in the most impossible location for one to be “satisfied,” that is, in “scorched places.”¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰²Koole, *Isaiah III*, 148.

¹⁰³In his comment on Exod 29:44-46, Gorman underlines that the reason for the Exodus from Egypt is “in order that Yahweh might dwell in the midst of the people.” Frank H. Gorman, “Priestly Rituals of Founding: Time, Space, and Status” in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown and Jeffrey K. Kuan (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 57.

¹⁰⁴Commenting on the interconnection between the exhortation in v. 10a with the promise here in 11a, Koole writes “compassion for each other is crowned by divine compassion.” *Isaiah III*, 149.

¹⁰⁵Isa. 58:11 is unique in its presentation of God’s promise of continual guidance and providence in the “dry scorched places.” For Beuken the setting of this verse is already in the land of Canaan. *Jesaja*, 112-113. However, Koole argues that the promise here is still in the desert setting. *Isaiah III*, 149. Motyer, observing a repeated play of contrast in this verse between darkness and light, wilderness and watered garden, underlines, “the thought is not what satisfaction the Lord will give, but *where* he will give it—when everything is at its bleakest and least promising.” *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 482, emphasis by the author.

From the perspective of rhetography, the expressions in Isa. 58:11 may be compared to the ones in

fact that the object of the verb **שבע** in this verse is **נפש** implies that what is being satisfied is more than physical needs—they are also emotional and intellectual and include the questioning of God’s care and guidance. The same question was asked by the bewildered Israelites during the Exodus (Exod 14:11; Num 20:4; 21:5), but the narrative shows how God’s care for them never failed. This failure to comprehend God’s ways in dealing with his people is echoed in the questions of the people in the opening part of Isa 58 (v. 3).¹⁰⁶

Psalm 23. see also Robert L. Webb, “The Rhetorical Function of Visual Imagery in Jude: A Socio-Rhetorical Experiment in Rhetography” in *Reading Jude with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of Jude*, ed. Robert L. Webb and Peter H. Davids (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 113. As a method, rhetography “predominantly focuses on the manner in which the spatial dimensions of the text contribute to its rhetorical and imaginative effect on the readers and hearers.” Annang Asumang, “The Presence of the Shepherd: A Rhetographic Exegesis of Psalm 23” *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 9 (2010): 3.

In Psalm 23, “[T]he idea of green pastures evoked the image of luxury and extravagant provision, *although such vegetation was rare in many places in the original setting...* For most of the first readers and hearers, “the greenness of the pastures would have conveyed additional notions of newness, productivity, revitalization, and regeneration. . . .” Therefore, “the likely rhetographic effect of reading or hearing about green pastures . . . is *not just the finding of abundant provision in the midst of lack but more so of the experience of revitalization and regeneration which comes with it.* Thus the feeling of contentment which lying down’ evokes blends in with the sense of revitalization and reinvigoration that green pastures suggest. . . . For the believer, the relationship with Yahweh is depicted as a relaxing gentle walk as He feeds and cares for His loved one” (Ibid., 9-11, italics supplied).

Freedman compared sees the relationship between the expression “I lack nothing” (**אחסר לא**) in Psa. 23:1 to the Exodus experience, like in Deut. 2:7 “For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; ‘you have lacked nothing’ (**לא חסרת**)”; also in Neh 9:21, “For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness: ‘they lacked nothing.’” David Noel Freedman, “The Twenty-Third Psalm” in *Michigan Oriental Studies in Honor of George G. Cameron*, ed. Louis L. Orlin, Ernest T. Abdel-Massih, Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz, and Gernot L. Windfuhr (Ann Arbor: Dept. of Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan, 1976), 149.

Both Asumang and Freedman’s understanding that Psalms 23 conveys an image of divine provision, revitalization and regeneration in the midst of lack, provides a comparison with the promise that god will satisfy His people in the scorched places of Isa. 58:11.

¹⁰⁶In these groups of verses (Exod 14:11; Num 20:4; 21:5; Isa 58:3) the interrogative word **למה** functions not only as an introduction to a question, but more as an expression of frustration on the part of the people.

It appears that vv. 10-11a are an elaboration of 8a: then your *light* will break out like the dawn / your *recovery* will speedily spring forth. As v. 10 deals with the theme of light, v. 11aC speaks about the strengthening of the bones, which is connected with the theme of “recovery” in v. 8a, since the term אַרוּכָה also means “healing” and basically refers to new flesh covering a wound.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, the theme of healing is complementary in these two verses, since the term אַרוּכָה in v. 8 implies healing concerns with flesh, while v. 10 is literally concerned with bones.

Isa 58:11b – The Promise of Vigor

11bA	וְהָיִיתָ כְּגֵן רוּחַ
11bB	וְכַמוֹצֵא מַיִם
11bC	אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכְזָבוּ מִיָּמָיו

In v. 11b, another motif emerges—the motif of water. Against the background of v. 11a which speaks of “scorched places” which might refer to the wilderness, it can be said that v. 11 is an echo of God’s providing water in the wilderness. In other parts of the book of Isaiah God’s blessings for his people also have the imagery of water in the wilderness (43:20; 44:3). The difference of Isa 58:11b with those other references is in the fact that instead of transforming the wilderness into a watered garden, the object of the acts of divine transformation is the people, as it was emphasis by repeated use of the second person suffix and personal pronoun: “The Lord will continually guide *you*, satisfy *your* desire, give strength to *your* bones, *you* will be like a watered garden . . .” The emphasis in this verse is that God did not transform the place, but his continual presence

¹⁰⁷See *BDB*, 74; *HALOT*, 1:85.

enabled the people to survive and enjoy his blessings in the most impossible place.¹⁰⁸ In the line of thoughts of the previous verses, this portrayal highlights the blessings of a lively, personal encounter with God.

That the emphasis is more on what God will do to the people than to the place is observable in the poetical strategy of this verse. From one perspective, Isa 58:11 can be divided into two tricola. In the first, the focus is on God's action: he will guide, satisfy, and strengthen them. The second tricola gives the result: they will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, a spring that did not lie. Another way of reading this verse is by dividing it into three bicola:

Isa 58:11Aa and will guide you the Lord continually
Ab and satisfy in the scorched places your soul
Ba and your bones he will make strong
Bb so that you will be like a watered garden
Ca and like a spring of water
Cb whose water does not fail/lie.

It can be seen in v. 11Bab that the idea of being “strong” receives further accentuation with the idea of freshness, with a reference to a “watered garden.” The description goes further in emphasizing how God is transforming the addressee from a passive recipient of his blessings to a channel of blessings.¹⁰⁹ For Jan Koole, the imagery of a spring of water that does not fail in the last bicola (v. 11Cab) is in the context of the call to be attentive to others’ needs in the previous verses. He perceives a cause and effect

¹⁰⁸The term for the scorched place here is נִחְצָחוֹת, and the plural ending here can be interpreted as either quantitative, in the sense of from one to another scorched places or years of drought, following the Targum, or qualitative, to emphasis the extreme droughts. Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:391.

¹⁰⁹In the words of Childs, they will be transformed, renewed, and strengthened. *Isaiah*, 480.

principle at work here: the satisfaction of others is the condition of one's satisfaction, but one is able to refresh others only because one has been refreshed by God.¹¹⁰ As the imagery moves on from wilderness to settlement in v. 12, the theme that the people become the agent of transformation/restoration goes on—they will be called a “restorer.”

Isa 58:12 – The Promise of Restoration

12aA	ובנו ממך חרבות עולם
12aB	מוסדי דור־ודור תקומם
12bA	וקרא לך גדר פרץ
12bB	משבב נתיבות לשבת

The parallelism in v. 12a, both בנה / קום is synonymous while חרבות עולם / דור־ודור מוסדי is complementary, since the term מוסד is parallel with חרב in colon A. Verse 12a is structured in a chiasmic way, with verbal phrases functioning as an inclusio:

A	ובנו ממך
B	חרבות עולם
B'	מוסדי דור־ודור
A'	תקומם

This structuring implies that the emphasis is on the building/rebuilding activity: rebuilding ancient ruins / ages-old foundations re-erected. The flow of thought from vv. 10-11 shows that what God had done for them enabled them to perform these activities. Motyer remarks that the temporal phrases “ancient ruins” and “generation to generation”

¹¹⁰Koole, *Isaiah III*, 150.

foundations lead scholars to conclude that the setting of this verse is postexilic.¹¹¹

However, some commentators explain the situation by pointing out that the subject **מִמֶּנּוּ** of the verb **וּבְנוּ** in the clause **וּבְנוּ מִמֶּנּוּ** refers to future generations, the descendants of the addressee that will return from exile.¹¹² For Oswalt, however, reference to “ancient ruins” does not necessarily refer to a specific time period, since “ancient ruins” are everywhere in Palestine, and in this context, stand for human failure.¹¹³

12bA **וְקָרָא לְךָ גֵּדֵר פֶּרִיץ**

12bB **מִשְׁכַּב נְחִיבוֹת לְשַׁבָּת**

The verbal phrase **וְקָרָא לְךָ** governs both cola A and B in v. 12b. It also functions as a hinge for 12a and 12b, since the new name is the result of the rebuilding activity described in v. 12a. The giving of a new name is one of the salvation characteristics in the latter part of the book of Isaiah; see 60:14 and 62:12, and, in the context of Isa 56-59, is comparable to the promise to the eunuchs: “an everlasting name I will give him . . .” (Isa 56:5).

The parallelism in this couplet is thematically complementary: repairer of the

¹¹¹Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 482-483.

¹¹²Edward, J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:424-425; John T. Willis, *Isaiah* (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1980), 448; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 482; and Yilpet, *A Rhetorical/Intra-textual Study*, 286-287.

¹¹³Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 507. However, texts like 2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chr 32:2-5, 20; and Isa 22:8b-11 record that Hezekiah, in response to the threat of Assyrian invasion, restored the broken walls and channeled the water of the Gihon Spring into the city. These accounts may serve as a clue that the message of this verse is relevant to the original audience of Isaiah. A text like Ezra 9:9, however, records a prayer: “Because we are slaves, yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, and extends to us loving-kindness before the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, and to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem,” indicates that the verse is also relevant for a postexilic setting. For a review of various arguments about the possible historical setting of Isaiah 58 see Muskita, *The Meaning of חֶפְצֵי*, 43-53.

breach [גדר פּרִיץ] / restorer of paths to dwell [מִשְׁבֵּב נְתִיבוֹת לְשִׁבְתָּ] in which the activity of repairing the breaches in the wall is complemented with restoration of the paths. These names are given in connection with what the addressee has done in v. 12a: rebuilding the ruins and setting up the foundations, and now the image is completed with the walls surrounding the city/cities repaired and paths to go there restored,¹¹⁴ implying the idea of prosperous and secure dwelling.¹¹⁵ Hrobon saw the connection between the name “repairer of the breach,” [גדר פּרִיץ] in this verse and the promise in Amos 9:11 when He will raise up the fallen booth of David, “and repair its breaches” [אֶת־פְּרִצֵיהֶן וְגִדְרֹתֶינָא]; “I will also raise up” [אֶקְוֶם] its ruins, “and rebuild it” [וּבְנִיתֶיהָ] as in the days of old.”¹¹⁶ This observation adds another point to the recurring theme in this poem: a call to the people to become divine imitators.

Ron du Preez showed how, in the prophetic writings other than Isa 58:12-13, the term נְתִיב is always in parallel with the term דֶּרֶךְ, and these terms can also refer to a way of life.¹¹⁷ Based on this insight, Yoilah Yilpet considered that the theme of restoration here can refer to both physical and spiritual restoration of the land, especially the lifestyle of the people.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the last word in v. 12, לְשִׁבְתָּ, was considered by Whybray

¹¹⁴The purpose of the restoration of the paths is “to dwell” instead of “to walk;” as Whybray comments, “one does not dwell in streets.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 218.

¹¹⁵Whybray, *Ibid.*, 217.

¹¹⁶Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 187.

¹¹⁷Ron du Preez, “Linguistic Links between Verses 12 and 13 of Isaiah 58,” *AUSS* 30 (1992): 118. See Isa 59:8; Job 24:13 and Jer 6:16, where the terms “ways” and “paths” are referring to the way of life.

¹¹⁸Yilpet, *A Rhetorical/Intra-textual Study*, 287n62.

as a sound play with the term **שבת** in v. 13,¹¹⁹ and therefore it can be interpreted as an introduction to the theme of the Sabbath in the next two verses.

The Connection between Isa 58:13-14 and the Previous Sections of the Chapter

The relationship between Isa 58:13-14 and the earlier verses of the chapter has been questioned.¹²⁰ However, some commentaries appreciate more the unity of the chapter. From a literary perspective, Willem Beuken showed a thematic relationship between the passages through the distribution of keywords: **עשה** (vv. 2, 13); **חפץ** (vv. 2, 3, 13); **יום** (vv. 2-5, 13); **קרא** (vv. 5, 9, 12, 13); **דרכים** (vv. 2, 13); **מצא** (vv. 3, 13); “Jacob” (vv. 1, 14); and the concern about the land in both vv. 11 and 14.¹²¹ Childs considered the spread of these keywords as a “clear indication of careful shaping.”¹²² Klaus Koenen pointed out that the terms **חפץ** and **מצא** are used together only in Isa 58:13a and 3b.¹²³ More on a thematic basis, Koole observed that the Sabbath in v. 13 is presented as a spatial realm—**משבת**, which some commentators emend to **בשבת** (on

¹¹⁹Whybray notes, “It may be significant that in the consonantal Heb. text the final word of verse 12, *lāšābeṭ*, to dwell in, could also be read as *lāššābbāṭ*, ‘on (or “for”) the sabbath.’” *Isaiah 40-66*, 218. To a certain degree, there is a possibility that the translator of the LXX sees this lexical connection between v. 12 and 13, since the word **לִשְׁבֹּת** in v. 12 is translated as *παύσεις*, “to cease” or “to rest” from the root **שבת**. See Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, “*παύσεις*,” *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (Including the Apocryphal Books)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998).

¹²⁰For a summary of the discussion in earlier commentaries see, among others, du Preez, “Linguistic Links,” 115-117, also Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 112n53.

¹²¹Beuken, *Jesaja*, 116; see also Childs, *Isaiah*, 476.

¹²²Childs, *Ibid.*

¹²³Koenen, *Ethik und Eschatologie*, 90; Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 113.

account of the Sabbath)—but the spatial sense with the preposition *מִן* is matched with reference to other spatial objects: dry places, a garden, walls in the previous verses;¹²⁴ this is based on Gnana Robinson’s observation that the Sabbath has a close connection with the covenant; he concludes, “without the Sabbath the possession of the land promised in v. 12 is impossible, Lev 26:34ff, Jer 17:27.”¹²⁵ More from a theological perspective, Paul noted a balance between the earlier part of the chapter with vv. 13-14. In vv. 1-12, the divine blessings are made conditional upon social reform, conduct relative to one’s fellow, while in vv. 13-14, the blessing is conditional upon proper Sabbath observance, which is conduct relative to God.¹²⁶

The basic issue regarding the relationship of this passage with the earlier part of the chapter, however, lies in the fact that, as in the earlier part, the concern is with social justice. The focus is shifted to cult and ritual, just as Smith commented: “if the substance and content of these verses cannot be reconciled with the preceding material, then no amount of rhetorical features can save them from exclusion from the original poem.”¹²⁷

¹²⁴Commenting on the clause *מִן* *מִן* *מִן* *מִן*, Koole wrote, “the expression contains an alliteration, and also puns on the preceding *מִן* . . . *מִן*. This may indicate purely formal key-word association of this stanza with the previous one.” *Isaiah III*, 155.

¹²⁵Koole, *Ibid.* Emphasizing the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant, Robinson wrote, “Sabbath-keeping is now the same as covenant keeping (Is. 56:4, 6). Whoever keeps the covenant keeps the sabbath, and whoever profanes the sabbath breaks the covenant (Lev. 26:42, 45). Thus the sabbath becomes a sign between Yahweh and his people (Ez. 20:12, 20) . . . The covenant which the writer has in mind is the patriarchal covenant . . . the covenant with its promise of the chosen land for Israel. Thus the sabbath becomes the condition for sustained life in the land (Is. 56:5; 58:14; Ez. 20:15-16). When the sabbath is profaned, evil is multiplied in the land, and the land thus becomes polluted (Lev. 19:29-30; 26:1-2, 34-43), an instrument of harlotry (Lev. 19:29) and therefore unsuitable for living. Thus the exile was seen as the result of people’s profanation of the sabbath (Lev. 26:34-35).” Gnana Robinson, *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988), 261-262.

¹²⁶Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 493-494.

¹²⁷Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 113.

This problem can be explained, by noting that the message of earlier verses deals with everyday life, as characterized by the phrase יום יום in v. 2, and reaches its climax with the Sabbath in v. 13, a day which is “‘My holy day’ [יום קדשי] according to the Lord,” something “‘holy unto the Lord’ [קדוש יהוה] in nature.”¹²⁸

While Sabbath keeping, just like fasting here, can be meaningful as long as social justice is being upheld in the society, in the context of Isaiah 58, the question of the connection between the practice of social justice and Sabbath keeping does not necessarily mean that ideal Sabbath keeping is to perform the activities described in vv. 5-12. The main issue in this chapter is described in vv. 2-4 as a broken relationship with the Lord, which is reflected in the treatment of the workers:

in knowing my ways [דרך] they חפץ . . .
the nearness of the Lord they חפץ . . .
behold, in the day of your fasting you find חפץ . . .
that all your workers you oppressed
behold, you fast only to strive, to fight, and to hit with wicked fist

In the admonition to keep the Sabbath, the call is to refrain from doing חפץ, doing “‘your ways’” [דרך] and finding חפץ (v. 13). In the light of this problem, reference to the Sabbath in vv. 13-14 is a reminder that people will not go to the other extreme by being too busy building a better society by practicing social justice to forget the importance of

¹²⁸Koole notes the connection between daily activities to the Sabbath as he wrote, “Besides doing God’s will in everyday life, keeping the Sabbath took a programmatic initial position as the essential characteristic of the true Israel.” *Isaiah III*, 155.

the Sabbath rest,¹²⁹ in the context of proper worship.¹³⁰ Whereas in vv. 5-12 the focus is more horizontal between the people, now with vv. 13-14 it turns to the vertical, between God and the people. In fact, the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue functions as “the bridge from God to neighbor, in that it deals in some sense with relations to God and responsibilities in the human sphere.”¹³¹ Just as the reason for Sabbath keeping is an imitation of God himself,¹³² it serves as a safeguard from exploiting fellow human beings. Thus, Sabbath observance is interconnected with the issue of social justice.¹³³

Stanza 3: Proper Sabbath Observance (Isa 58:13-14)

Basically, this stanza that deals with Sabbath observance is divided into two: v. 13 is a call for an ideal Sabbath observance and v. 14 promises the blessing of it.

¹²⁹The last phrase in the Sabbath commandment in Deut 5:14 reads, “. . . may rest *as you do*.” Commenting on this phenomenon, Tigay noted that in “[T]his one day a week the servant is treated as the master’s equal.” *Deuteronomy*, 69. Wright’s comment on the purpose of Sabbath keeping in general can be added here: “[A]ll of these sabbatical institutions were concerned with the interest of workers, especially those whose only asset is their labor. Neglect of the ‘sabbaths,’ in this sense, corresponds to the accusations of injustice and exploitation of the poor which so common in the prophets. Similarly, economic exploitation is linked to violation of the Sabbath day for greedy motives, by Amos (8:5f.), Isaiah (58:3-14) and Jeremiah (17:19-27; cf. 7:5-11).” Christopher J. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye, The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 79.

¹³⁰In this chapter Oswalt sees a balance between ethical (vv. 6-12) and ceremonial (13-14) aspects of religion. He comments, “Here is the important place where personal religion and ethical religion meet.” Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 508-509.

¹³¹Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville, KY: Knox, 1990) 72. That the Sabbath commandment is the center of the Decalogue see Norbert Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy*, Trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 256 and Andrew D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (London: Oliphants, 1979), 124.

¹³²William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 177.

¹³³For Smith the Sabbath rest is an expression of social justice: “the demand for Sabbath observance may have had a social impetus at its roots, since (according to Deut. 5:12-15) the Sabbath was intended as a day of rest from work. . . Both social justice and Sabbath observance are required for the maintenance of good relations between the people and Yahweh.” *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 113.

The Structure of Isa 58:13-14

From a structural perspective, Isa 58:13-14 can be read from different angles.

First, reading the passage with a focus on several words that are being repeated in a significant way: שבת; קדש; חפץ; עשה; ענג; כבוד; and דבר respectively. The recurrence of these words also makes it possible to read the passage as a staircase parallelism.¹³⁴ Second, the passage can also be summarized by considering the “if” and the “then” structure and places it as a continuation of series of the conditional promise speech already begun in v. 6. Finally, these two verses are to be read as conventional bicola and tricola parallelism.

The Staircase Parallelism in Isa 58:13-14

		Keywords
13aA	אִם-תָּשִׁיב מִשְׁבַּת רִגְלֶךָ	שבת
13aB	עֲשׂוֹת חֲפִצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קִדְשִׁי	חפץ, קדש
13bA	וְקִרְאַת לְשַׁבַּת עֲנֵנִי	ענג, שבת
13bB	לְקָדוֹשׁ יִהְיֶה מִכְבֹּד	קדש, כבוד
13cA	וּכְבֹדְתוּ מַעֲשׂוֹת דַּרְכֶיךָ	כבוד
13cB	מִמִּצְוֹת חֲפִצֶיךָ	חפץ
13cC	וְדַבַּר דְּבַר:	דבר
14aA	אִז תִּתְעַנֵּנִי עַל-יְהוָה	ענג
14aB	וְהִרְכַבְתִּיךָ עַל-בְּמוֹתַי אֲרִץ	
14aC	וְהֵאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיךָ	
14bA	כִּי פִי יִהְיֶה דְבַר:	דבר

¹³⁴For discussions on the characteristics of this type of parallelism see Greenstein, “How does Parallelism Mean?” 41-70 and Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 150-156. Polan termed the structure of Isa 58:13 a “step-wise movement.” *Ways of Justice*, 225.

Based on the distribution of the key words, the thematic development of the passage can be read as follows: the conditional part starts with the Sabbath, with holiness [קדש] as its main characteristic, consequently, one is discouraged from doing חפץ on this day (13a). This Sabbath day is to be considered as a delight [ענג], yet at the same time since it is holy [קדש], it had to be honored [כבוד] (13b). It is to be honored [קדש], among others by not pursuing one's חפץ, and not to “speak word” [דבר דבר] (13c). On the promise part, if one delights [ענג] in the Sabbath, he can delight [ענג] in the Lord (14a). It is the Lord himself who give this promise [דבר] (14b).

The “If . . . Then . . .” Structure

Reading the passage in the formula of the previous verses, that is, as a presentation of conditions followed by a promise, reveals that the term ענג functions as a catchword:

v. 13 . . . קראת לשבת ענג. . .
 v. 14 אז תתענג עליהוה. . .

The issue of ענג can be considered a significant theme in Isaiah 58—how to experience delight in the Lord. In the opening section, the people were portrayed as those who longed for an intimate relationship with the Lord:

v. 2 ואותי יום יום ידרשון
 קרבת אלהים יחפצון

However, they did not experience a fulfilling experience in this encounter; therefore, it ended with a bitter complaint against God (3a). In the promises of restoration, this close, intimate relationship with the Lord is a dominant theme: the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard (v. 8); you will call, and the Lord will answer (v. 9); the Lord will

continually guide you (v. 11).¹³⁵ If the people did not enjoy the presence of the Lord, such promises would just become empty declarations. Sabbath observance, in its proper manner, as the idea of ענג conveys, is a catalyst for an ultimate experience with the Lord.¹³⁶ Furthermore, the *hithpa`el* form of the verb ענג connects Isa 58:14 with God's expression of displeasure in 57:4 in which He challenges על-מי תתענגו, "at whom you make sport?" The same word ענג is in the same grammatical form but is used with an opposite meaning. In Isa 57:4 the word portrays the people's distance and indifference toward God while 58:14 portrays an intimate yet reverent relationship with God. That a word that already had a negative meaning in a particular context is being used again in the same context with an opposite meaning suggests that it may be chosen as a pin-word. This observation is strengthened by the fact that ענג is not a common word with the Sabbath, so the usage of the word further emphasizes a literary strategy.¹³⁷ This connection may imply the call for proper Sabbath keeping in Isaiah 58 as a part of the healing process after a broken relationship between God and his people in Isaiah 57.¹³⁸

¹³⁵In the words of Brueggemann, "Yahweh's presence, attentiveness, and availability are exactly what is hoped for in verse 3 but are not given there. The poem recognizes that the deepest religious need and craving is the reassuring presence of Yahweh, an assurance that in risk and danger we are not alone." *Isaiah 40-66*, 190.

¹³⁶For the connection between the verb תתענג in v. 14 with the noun ענג in v. 13 see August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66*, trans. Erwin E. Kowalke (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 1979), 544.

¹³⁷Later on, after Isaiah, Bloch explains, "the expression Oneg Shabbat, based on Isaiah, has become a household word in many modern Jewish homes and Institutions." Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (New York: KTAV, 1980), 114.

¹³⁸From a certain perspective, the use of the *hithpa`el* form of the word ענג in Isa 57:4 and 58:14 is an inclusio for the problem that the people had with God, described in 57:5ff, and with fellow humans described in 58:1ff.

The Bicola and Tricola Parallelism

Another way to read Isa 58:13-14 is to approach it through conventional bicola and tricola parallelism. The flow of thought in these verses is governed in stages that denote action, acknowledgment, and attitude, as can be seen in the discussion below, which follow the order of the text according to its structure.

Strophe 1: The Call for Proper Sabbath Observance (Isa 58:13)

Isa 58:13 – The Call for Proper Sabbath Observance

13aA	אִם־תָּשִׁיב מִשְׁבַּת רַגְלֶךָ
13aB	עֲשׂוֹת חֲפְצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קִדְשִׁי
13bA	וְקָרָאתָ לַשְּׁבִיט עֲנִי
13bB	לְקָדוֹשׁ יְהוָה מְכַבֵּד
13cA	וְכִבְדָּתוֹ מַעֲשׂוֹת דְּרֹכֶיךָ
13cB	מִמְצוֹא חֲפְצֶיךָ
13cC	וְדַבַּר דְּבַר:

Translation

13aA	“If you turn from the Sabbath your foot
13aB	doing your own interests on my holy day;
13bA	Call the Sabbath a delight,
13bB	the holy one to the Lord honorable;
13cA	Honor him from doing your own ways
13cB	from finding your own interests
13cC	and speaking word;

**Isa 58:13a – To Refrain from Pursuing
One’s Own Interest**

13aA אִם־תָּשִׁיב מִשְׁבַּת רִגְלֶךָ

13aB עֲשׂוֹת חֲפְצֶיךָ בַּיּוֹם קִדְשִׁי

The phrase . . . מִן אִם־תָּשִׁיב מִן governs both the phrase מִשְׁבַּת רִגְלֶךָ and עֲשׂוֹת חֲפְצֶיךָ בַּיּוֹם קִדְשִׁי

קִדְשִׁי.¹³⁹ The wording is structured chiasmically: יוֹם קִדְשִׁי / שְׁבַת is a synonymous

parallelism, while רִגְלֶךָ / חֲפְצֶיךָ עֲשׂוֹת is a thematic parallelism:

רִגְלֶךָ	אִם־תָּשִׁיב	מִשְׁבַּת
	><	
בַּיּוֹם קִדְשִׁי	עֲשׂוֹת	חֲפְצֶיךָ

This structure helps to pinpoint the intended meaning of the phrase. Blenkinsopp comments that this conditional clause is unclear and the translation is uncertain. He understands the command to turn away the foot as a prohibition of travel on Sabbath.¹⁴⁰ The parallelism between מִשְׁבַּת רִגְלֶךָ / חֲפְצֶיךָ עֲשׂוֹת shows that the trampling by the foot on the Sabbath is figurative. The clause מִשְׁבַּת רִגְלֶךָ תָּשִׁיב may be compared with the clause in Prov 4:27 מִרַע רִגְלֶךָ הִסָּר.¹⁴¹ However, the comparison presents a contrast: as the command in Proverbs is a call to turn away from something reprehensible, in Isaiah

¹³⁹GKC, 384 and Pieper, *Isaiah II*, 543.

¹⁴⁰Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 276; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 181.

¹⁴¹Blenkinsopp, *Ibid.*

58 the object of the command is not something negative but on the contrary, positive in nature, the Sabbath.¹⁴²

By nature, the Sabbath is in the realm of time and the act of stepping into or trampling with the foot concerns the realm of space. The call to withhold the foot from the Sabbath connotes a definite action (or a lack of action) rather than an abstract idea. The occurrence of the term רגל in association with the idea of holiness appears several times in the Old Testament. In the theophany experience of Moses and Joshua, both of them were told to remove their sandals from their feet because the place where they were standing was holy ground.¹⁴³ While it is true that they were not told to refrain their foot from stepping unto a certain boundary as in Isa 58:13, the reference to the רגל in Isa 58:13 might be a deliberate allusion to these accounts, to make the holiness aspect of the

¹⁴²See the terms employed to designate the Sabbath in this verse: יום קדש, my [God's] holy day; קדוש יהוה, which can be read both (1) as relational: holy *unto* the Lord, and (2) as a possession: holy (one) *of* the Lord. The emphasis here on the Sabbath is not as a day of rest, but more as a property belonging to the Lord, something that is to be handled with so much reverence. Reverence for both the Sabbath and the holy thing belonging to the Lord is commanded in Lev 19:30 and 26:2 “My Sabbaths you shall keep; and מקדש you shall honor. I am the Lord.” While the word מקדש is commonly understood as referring to the sanctuary, its meaning covers a broader nuance, as Haran states: “The noun מקדש, which the dictionaries usually render as ‘sacred place,’ ‘sanctuary,’ does not necessarily refer to a house of God. In the priestly terminology it indicates any article or object possessing sanctity.” Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 14-15. See also Carol L. Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem,” *ABD*, 6:352; Moshe Weinfeld, “The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel’s Tradition,” in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin R. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 23n62.

¹⁴³Exod 3:5; Josh 5:15; also Eccl 4:17 (5:1 Eng.). Pieper noted, “the Sabbath is pictured as a holy ground which a profane foot must not tread.” *Isaiah II*, 543.

Sabbath become more concrete.¹⁴⁴ Another account worth mentioning is the narrative of the Sinai theophany in Exod 19. Even though there is no explicit reference to רגל, in this passage Moses was commanded to set boundaries around the mountain, and those who stepped inside the boundary or even touched it were to be put to death by stoning (vv. 12-13). The emphasis that these narratives put on the atmosphere of holiness as they encountered the Lord, is now being applied to the Sabbath in Isa 58:13.¹⁴⁵

The parallelism between תשיב רגלך / עשות חפצך, in which definite action (to hold back one's feet) is paired with an abstract word (חפץ), also indicates the nuance of meaning for חפץ intended here, to be portrayed as a definite action. First, it can be observed from the use of the verb connected with חפץ, which is עשה. The audience is discouraged from עשות חפץ on Sabbath. The use of the verb עשה can be traced back to the creation narrative of Gen 1-2 in which God's creative activities were repeatedly described with the term עשה.¹⁴⁶ On the seventh day, however, God was resting from the works He had "done" [עשה]. Another insight from the creation account is the indication

¹⁴⁴Whybray understood the phrase . . . תשיב רגלך מן. . . to mean "be careful not to trespass on the holiness of the sabbath." *Isaiah 40-66*, 218. Milgrom comments on the commands in Lev 19:30 and 26:2 "My Sabbaths you shall keep; and זקדשי you shall honor. I am the Lord," that this additional command of reverence to the sanctuary "adds new aspect to holiness. . . indicating that holiness has both a spatial and temporal dimension." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, ed., William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1699. For Robinson the association of the word קדש with the Sabbath implies that "[T]he Sabbath, by virtue of its association with Yahweh and his Temple, shares his holiness; it becomes a holy day." *The Origin*, 261.

¹⁴⁵That the Sinai theophany serves as a background motif in Isaiah 58 can also be seen in 58:1, the reference to the sound of the trumpet (cf. Exod 19:16) that makes the people tremble.

¹⁴⁶Gen 1:7, 16, 25, 31.

that the term עשה is employed to define a process by which God's word takes shape into a reality.¹⁴⁷

This assumption that חפץ can be understood as a definite action is also observable in cases where the term עשה is paired with חפץ. In 1 Kgs 5:8-9, the word pair describes the implementation process of the negotiation between Hiram and Solomon. In Prov 31:13, it describes the process of creating wool and flax into clothes. In Isa 46:10, the pair describes how God, in his power, accomplishes his plans. Finally, in Isa 48:14, the pair portrays how Cyrus will implement his strategy successfully in conquering Babylon. Based on this observation, the call not to עשות חפץ in Isa 58:13 covers an activity of transforming one's plan into realization, that is, business pursuits, not just "pleasure."¹⁴⁸ In the light of Isa 58:3ff, this kind of pursuit leads to oppression and violence.

Isa 58:13b – To Call the Sabbath a Delight and Honorable

13b וקראת לשבת ענג
לקרוש יהוה מכבד

¹⁴⁷Gen 1:6-7, 16, 24-25, 26, 31; 2:18; 3:1.

¹⁴⁸In his attempt to reconstruct the historical background of Isa 56:1-6, Hammock proposed the issue of Sabbath observance as a political means to unite the people. Based on their background, he divides the community into two groups, the Jews, who are the Exiled, and People of the Land, non-Exiled. The Jews are divided into two groups, the Reproductive and the Eunuch, while the People of the Land are divided into the Convert and the Gentile. For him, the addresses to the Eunuch and "Foreigner"—i.e. Convert in Isaiah 56—is an attempt for a redefinition of the Judean community based on the loyalty of Sabbath observance. However, in the end, Hammock concluded that the attempt is not working. Clinton E. Hammock, "Isaiah 56:1-8 and the Redefining of the Restoration Judean Community" *BTB* 30 (2000): 46-57.

While one does not have to accept his proposal, Hammock makes an important point for an appreciation the message regarding the Sabbath, especially in the context of מצא / עשות חפץ, "finding/doing חפץ, in Isa 58:3,13, that worshipping God with/for political/social/economical motives will lead only to political/social/economical imbalance/unrest.

The verb קרא governs both cola, with parallelism between קדוש יהוה / שבת is synonymous.¹⁴⁹ The parallelism between ענג / מכבד at first glance seems to be contradictory, but in reality, it is complementary, as will be discussed below. The expression . . . ל קרא is an act of naming which involves a change of relationship; a new (better) perspective and renewed appreciation of the object or the event took place.¹⁵⁰ This act of naming, in itself, connects this verse with the criticism in 58:5 in which they consider [קרא] their activities as proper fasting, while in reality they are not. To be able to name an object properly involves a change of appreciation toward it; therefore, the calling of the Sabbath with some “new names” articulates a new experience of Sabbath-keeping. Like this clause, the parallelism between קדוש יהוה / שבת already emphasizes the holiness of the day.¹⁵¹

The parallelism between ענג and מכבד creates tension. The etymology of the word ענג not only covers the idea of enjoyment and relaxation, to loosen oneself,¹⁵² but it is enjoyment in the highest sense, with the connotation of luxury,¹⁵³ while מכבד covers

¹⁴⁹That the Sabbath is specifically associated with the idea of “holy unto the Lord” see Exod 16:23; 31:15; 35:2; Lev 23:3.

¹⁵⁰See for example Hos 2:18; Gen 35:18; 1 Sam 4:21. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and E. M. Kindl observed, in the context of קרא as naming, “the attention shifts from the name giver to the named entity, and the aspect of having a name is specified.” “קרא,” *TDOT*, 13:126.

¹⁵¹Westermann comments, “[T]his makes the holiness attaching to the day all the more strongly emphasized; it is *the* ‘holy day.’” *Isaiah 40-66*, 341, italic by the author.

¹⁵²Tryggve Kroholm, “ענג,” *TDOT*, 11:212.

¹⁵³The word ענג as a noun appears only twice in the Hebrew Bible. In Isa 13:22 it functions as a modifier of royal palaces, that is why Brown, Driver and Briggs, understands its meaning in Isa 58:13 as “exquisite delight.” *BDB*, 772.

the range of meaning of something heavy, burdensome, honorable and something to be taken seriously.¹⁵⁴ Thus, keeping the Sabbath should have the essence of both exquisite delight and reverence. Emphasis on only one of these aspects will diminish the intended blessing of the observance of the day. Only when these two complementary aspects are met will the observance result “תתענג in the Lord.”

However, the text also underlines that it is not enough for one to ענג the Sabbath and then expect immediately to enjoy ענג (*hithpa`el*) in the Lord; there are some other elements that should be added into it. As the verse continues, it is not enough just to “call” the Sabbath honorable [כבד *pu`al* participle]; it should also be displayed through actions. An expansion on the issue of “to honor” [כבד *pi`el*] is given, expressed in discouraging three particular actions: doing your ways, finding your חפץ, and speaking words.

Isa 58:13c – Sabbath Observance as Honoring God

13c וכבודתו מעשות דרכיך
 ממצוא חפצך
 ודבר דבר:

In the light of the thematic structure of Isa 58, this third admonition regarding Sabbath observance, in which the people are discouraged from “doing your ways [דרכך]” and “finding your [own] pleasure / delight / business [חפץ]” echoes one of the criticisms stated in v. 2: “they delight [חפץ] to know my ways [דרכך].” This repetition of vocabulary

¹⁵⁴P. Stenmans, “כבד,” *TDOT*, 7:17-19.

on both ends of the chapter can be read as a reminder for the people not to repeat the previous superficial religious practices if they want to experience the true “delight” [ענין] in the Lord in their Sabbath observance. Furthermore, this device, while structurally holding the opening and the ending of the chapter as a unit, also shows how thematically the introductory part of the chapter is concerned with both the issue of fasting and Sabbath observance. This proposition can be supported further by referring to the preceding clause in v. 2: “They seek me day by day . . .” In the context of vv. 3-12, the act of “seeking” the Lord is accomplished by fasting, as can be compared to the statement “Behold, on the *day* of your fasting” (v. 3). At the same time, in the context of vv. 13-14, it can be assumed that in Hebrew thinking, a “day by day” cycle is culminated with the Sabbath.

The opening phrase וּכְבַדְתוּ, the object of the verb כָּבַד, can be read in two different ways: “and to honor him/it” either referring to the Sabbath or the Lord. The immediate context of v. 13 may lead to a reading as referring to the Sabbath, since the call is to hold one’s feet from trampling on the Sabbath, refraining from doing one’s חֲפִיץ on the Sabbath, to call the Sabbath as delight and consider *it* honorable, as can be read in most English versions of the Bible.

However, reading this verse in the context of Isaiah 58 may also suggest that the suffix refers to the Lord, that the whole chapter provides a larger framework; by observing the Sabbath, one is honoring him. At the beginning of the chapter, the main issue in the complaint of the people is that the Lord did not give attention to their fasting. However, the Lord responded that they fast only to pursue their own interest. The same principle is at work here. The call to a proper keeping of the Sabbath here is with a higher

purpose to restore the broken relationship between God and his people, as reflected in the promises given in v. 14.¹⁵⁵ Reading the phrase this way, the call in v. 13c presents a contrast of “your way” or “the Lord’s way” in honoring (*pi`el*) him with regard to Sabbath observance:

and to honor *him*, from doing *your own* ways
from finding *your own* חפץ
and speaking words.

(1) מעשות דרכיך “From Doing
Your Own Ways”

The phrase עשות דרך may mean to make a journey (Judg 17:8) and it is understood likewise as the meaning of the phrase in Isa 58:13.¹⁵⁶ However, דרך also has the sense of a certain “enterprise” (Deut 28:29; Jer 18:11; 2 Chr 13:22) and that is how some commentaries interpret the meaning here.¹⁵⁷ Koole took these two meanings together and considers “business trip” as the meaning of עשות דרך.¹⁵⁸

In the context of the whole verse of Isa 58:13, the expression עשות דרכיך has a link with the term רגל in the earlier section of the verse as a development of the flow of thought. Moreover, the term דרך also has a connection with v. 2 where it describes how

¹⁵⁵See the NKJ: “. . .and shall honor Him”

¹⁵⁶Paul Auvray and Jean Steinmann, *Le prophète Isaïe*, 2d ed. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1957), 237; Jerusalem Bible.

¹⁵⁷See McKenzie, who translates it as “business.” *Second Isaiah*, 164; see also Pierre E. Bonnard, *Le Second Isaïe, son disciple et leurs éditeurs: Isaïe 40-66* (Paris: Gabalda, 1972), 378. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* considers the term “business” employed here shows that the context of the audience is city dwellers.

¹⁵⁸Koole, *Isaiah III*, 157.

the people, whose חפץ is to know God's דרך, appear like a nation that עשה righteousness, while in reality they just followed their own ways.

In a number of cases in the OT, the term דרך is employed in a figurative sense.¹⁵⁹ In relation to the Lord, obedience to him is portrayed as “to walk in his ways,”¹⁶⁰ while to disobey him is “to turn from his ways,”¹⁶¹ and to repent is “to turn from one’s ways.”¹⁶² The term may also refer to life in general¹⁶³ or to a mode of conduct.¹⁶⁴ In prophetic writings דרך appears as a synonym of נועלל (deed).¹⁶⁵ In historical books, the behavior or administrative style of a king is designated as “to walk in the way of the fathers,” whether it is in a positive¹⁶⁶ or negative sense.¹⁶⁷

In the latter part of the book of Isaiah, the term דרך is often employed figuratively. Anticipating salvation from the Lord is portrayed as preparing the דרך. The coming of salvation is described as God making a דרך in the wilderness and creating rivers in the desert (43:19). Disobedience toward the Lord is an act of not knowing the

¹⁵⁹Herbert Wolf, “Derek,” *TWOT*, 1:197.

¹⁶⁰Gen 18:19; Exod 18:20; Deut 11:22; 19:9; Josh 22:5; 1 Kgs 2:3; 11:38.

¹⁶¹Deut 9:12, 16; 31:29; Judg 2:17; 1 Kgs 13:33.

¹⁶²Jon 3:10.

¹⁶³Josh 1:8; 1 Kgs 8:32, 39; Pss 37:5; 37:7.

¹⁶⁴Jer 26:3; 36:3; Ezek 16:47; 20:43-44.

¹⁶⁵Jer 4:18; 7:5; 42:3; Ezek 14:23; Zech 1:6.

¹⁶⁶2 Kgs 22:2; 2 Chr 20:32; 34:2.

¹⁶⁷1 Kgs 11:33; 15:26, 34; 16:19; 22:43, 52; 2 Kgs 8:18, 27; 2 Chr 21:6; 28:2.

דרך of peace (59:8) or wandering away from God's דרך (63:17).¹⁶⁸ In Isa 65:2, the term דרך is paralleled with מחשבה:

I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people
who walk in a דרך which is not good
following their own מחשבה.

The meaning of the word מחשבה comprises “thought,” “idea,” “intention,” “plan,” “design,” or “invention.”

The examples above indicate that the phrase “to do your own ways” in Isa 58:13 implied opposition to obedience to God. Furthermore, this opposition is portrayed in a dynamic way, since the combination of the words עשה and דרך comprise a thorough process from mental activity to its realization by action to its result.

(2) חפץ ממצוא חפץ “From Finding Your חפץ”

This phrase stands almost as a repetition of the expression in v. 3, הן ביום צמכם. The difference is in the verbal form: the imperfect tense in v. 3 and infinitive תמצאו־חפץ. In v. 13c, the phrase מצאו־חפץ is the main point of the defining answer to the question why the people did not experience God's presence; in v. 13, the phrase is a part of the programmatic condition of enjoying God's presence, so the appearances of the phrase complement each other.

One way to understand the meaning of חפץ in this verse is by considering the

¹⁶⁸See Koch, “דרך,” *TDOT*, 3:289-290. Discussing the phenomenon of the term in the book of Isaiah, he wrote, “because Yahweh brings about a great transformation by his *derek*, the wicked is to forsake his own disastrous *derek* and return (*šub*) to the majestic *derek* of Yahweh which the prophetic word prepares.” *Ibid.*, 290.

concern of the people/audience as reflected throughout the chapter. God’s promises, as presented in vv. 8-12, can be understood as a reflection of the aspiration of the target audience.¹⁶⁹ Some of the promises are presented through figurative expressions like “light,” “healing,” and “the glory of the Lord” (vv. 8, 10); others are more literal in nature, like “to build,” “to restore,” and “to repair” (v. 12). Together, these expressions speak about an endowment of both spiritual and material blessings: prosperity, security and stability. These kinds of aspirations, which are common to every community, can be perceived as a חפץ, which covers the realm of “expectation,” “wish,” and “desire.” All of this dynamic can be summed up as “serving one’s own *interest*,” which covers both “pleasure” and “business pursuit,”¹⁷⁰ since the Hebrew word מוצא encompasses the meaning of “to find” to the effort of “seeking.”¹⁷¹

There is an additional dynamic at work here. The word מוצא in this verse is in a participial form, which portrays a continual and uninterrupted activity.¹⁷² Now that this word functions as a modifier for the word חפץ as the object, the meaning of מוצא חפץ

¹⁶⁹Smart writes, “The promises to the faithful community draws together a variety of images: light in darkness, the guidance of God, good things, strong bones, a watered garden, an unfailing spring, the building of ruins of ancient foundations, the repair of broken walls, the restoration of streets of homes. We may assume that what is promised represents what is lacking in the present reality.” James D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1965), 251.

¹⁷⁰Croatto’s translation of the phrase תמוצא-חפץ in Isaiah 58:3 is influenced by the emphasis on second person personal pronoun of מוצא חפצך in v. 13, and he summarized the meaning of the term חפץ as “interest.” His translation of the verse is as follows: “Look, you serve *your own interest* on your fast day / and oppress all your workers.” Croatto, “From the Leviticus Jubilee Year,” 101, italics added.

¹⁷¹See p. 161-62.

¹⁷²This particular form of action usually indicates “a person or thing conceived as being in the continual uninterrupted exercise or activity,” GKC, 356.

implies business pursuit, from planning down to implementing it.¹⁷³ This kind of meaning is contrary to the spirit of the Sabbath, a day of rest. Therefore, the call here is more in the mental realm: how to mentally rest mentally on the Sabbath. While this exhortation is in the context of honoring God, **וּכְבַדְתוּ . . . מִמְצוֹא הַפֶּנֶךְ**, “honoring him . . . [by not] pursuing your own interest,” it shows that proper Sabbath rest implies faith and trust in God, that He will take care of one’s concerns, provide for the needs, make the dreams and aspirations into reality, *his ways*. On the other hand, as the phrase has similar wording with v. 3 above, the repetition here reminds that the outcome of improper Sabbath observance, i.e. “serving your own interest” [**מִצֵּא הַפֶּנֶךְ**] only ended up in oppression, violence and social injustice.

As has been noted above, the majority of the usage of the term **הַפֶּנֶךְ** in the book of Isaiah is to express divine approval of a person.¹⁷⁴ Beside Isaiah 58, another exception in which **הַפֶּנֶךְ** has negative connotation is in Isa 66:3. As in 58:13c, the term **הַפֶּנֶךְ** in 66:3 is also being paired with the word **דֶּרֶךְ**. A comparison of these two verses may help to illuminate the basic issue being discussed in Figure 14.

¹⁷³Christian understands the phrase **מִצֵּא הַפֶּנֶךְ** means “‘finding business,’ looking for potential customers.” Ed Christian, “Sabbath is a Happy Day! What does Isaiah 58:13-14 Mean?” *JATS* 13 (2002): 88. However, the phrase covers a broader both physical and mental activities of pursuing business.

¹⁷⁴See p. 163n35.

Isa 58:13c	Isa 66:3c
and to honor him, from doing your own ways [דרך] from finding your own interest [הפיץ]	these have chosen their own ways [דרך] their soul delights [הפיץ] in their abominations.

Figure 14. The word הפיץ with negative connotation in Isa 58:13 and 66:3

The part from which Isa 66:3 is quoted above is the conclusion of the verse. The whole verse itself consists of eight pairs of participial phrases, without any connecting particles, making the syntactical relationship between each pair ambiguous:

he who slaughters the ox strikes a man
he who sacrifices the lamb breaks the neck of dog
he who makes grain offering offers swine's blood
he who offers incense blesses an idol.

It is observable that the first part of each pair lists a set of seemingly legitimate cultic activities, while the second part gives a set of different actions.¹⁷⁵ In an effort to understand this passage from ancient manuscripts to English translations, they supply a conjunctive particle between the pairs in a comparative mode.

A quotation of different versions of the Bible here is to provide an example. The RSV translates as follows: “a man who slaughters an ox *is* (i.e. is performing an action in every way comparable to) one who kills a man.”¹⁷⁶ But the JPS Tanakh considers it as a

¹⁷⁵To balance with the cultic activities in the first half, Whybray presumes that man striking and breaking dog's neck referring to sacrifice of human and of dogs. *Isaiah 40-66*, 281. However, the verb נכה, “to strike,” in the first phrase, is never used in a cultic context, it is more forensic in nature; at the same time, the whole predication seems to be in a cultic context. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 297.

¹⁷⁶Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 281. NRSV and NIV had the conjunction *like* between the pairs: “he who slaughters the ox *is like* striking a man; he who sacrifices the lamb *is like* breaking the neck of dog; he who makes grain offering *is like* offering swine's blood; he who offering incense *is like* blesses and idol;” while the KJV, JPS, and NKJV has “as if”: “he who slaughters the ox *as if* striking a man; he who sacrifices

contradiction of behavior, using the word *and*: he who slaughters the ox *and* [is] striking a man; he who sacrifices the lamb *and* [is] breaking the neck of dog; he who makes grain offering *and* [is] offering swine's blood; he who [is] offering incense *and* blesses an idol.¹⁷⁷ The New Jerusalem Bible understands the passage as referring to different actions by various personalities: “*some* slaughter a bull, *some* kill a human being, *some* sacrifice a lamb, *some* strangle a dog, *some* present an offering of pig's blood, *some* burn memorial incense, a revolting blessing.”

Whatever the original intention of the author, the main point of the passage is a discrepancy between a right worship on the one hand and another wrongful practice on the other hand, and all these actions are wrapped up as “to follow one's own ways and to delight [הפִּיץ] in abominations,” the only case beside Isa 58:3 in which הפִּיץ is associated with a negative object. Reading the call in Isa 58:13 to honor the Lord by not doing one's דרך and not pursuing one's own הפִּיץ is a call for total commitment.

(3) ודבר דבר “Speaking Words”

In the third phrase ודבר דבר, the form of the verb is *pi`el* infinitive, and as it is expressed in the cognate accusative, it further strengthens the verbal idea.¹⁷⁸ In their attempt to reflect the tone of the expression, some modern English versions translate the

the lamb *as if* breaking the neck of dog; he who makes grain offering *as if* offering swine's blood; he who offering incense *as if* blesses and idol.”

¹⁷⁷See also Rofé, who reads “the one who slaughters and ox *also* kills a man.” Alexander Rofé, “Isaiah 66:1-4: Judean Sects in the Persian Period as Viewed by Trito-Isaiah” in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, ed. Ann Kort and Scott Morschauer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 208-209; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 297.

¹⁷⁸GKC, 367.

phrase as “talking idly” (RSV) or “excessive talk” (AB).¹⁷⁹ More formal English versions, trying to be faithful to the cognate accusative style of the expression, translate it as “speaking [thine own] words” (KJV), or “speaking [your own] words” (NASB). The phrase “your own” was added following the second-person emphasis of the previous two phrases: דרכיך and הפצך. The expression דבר דבר had been understood as denoting useless words, void of meaning and needless, in which God was forgotten.¹⁸⁰ Based on this understanding, the phrase is translated as “to talk idly.”¹⁸¹ This understanding is reflected in the NIV which renders the phrase as “speaking idle words.”

Smith noted that the use of דבר in the *pi`el* infinitive absolute makes a connection between 58:13 and 58:9; 59:4.¹⁸² In 58:9, the object of the verb is און while in 59:4, it is שוא; both are verbs with negative connotations. In 58:9, the verb is in the context of conditional phrases about negative things that need to be taken care of, comparable to the tone of 58:13. In 59:4, the phrase שוא דבר, “speak falsehood,” is a part of the list of reasons as to why God did not save and answer the prayers of his people (v. 1) and points out how the און and חטא of the people are obstructions of their relationship with the Lord. The further description of these “sins” and “rebellions” include שוא דבר, “speaking lies,” which is in parallel with “trusting in confusion.” As can be observed here, all of these

¹⁷⁹McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 165.

¹⁸⁰Delitzsch, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:366; Young, *Isaiah*, 3:427.

¹⁸¹Delitzsch, *Ibid.*; Young, *Ibid.*; McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 165; Willis, *Isaiah*, 448; and James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1981), 107n21.

¹⁸²Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 113.

three occurrences of the verb דבר shared the theme that it is among the activities that are hindrances to the ideal relationship between God and his people: the fact that דבר consistently appears in the same verbal form in these different occurrences indicates that, in fact, improper דבר is the main obstacle that needs to be removed.

These three consecutive phrases,

וכבודתו מעשות דרכיך
ממצוא הפצך
ודבר דבר

can also be seen as a topical summary of the themes that cause tension between God and his people in Isa 57-58 as a whole. The admonition not to עשות דרך on the Sabbath connects this passage with chapter 57, where the people's דרך is the catchword inasmuch as their relationship with the Lord is so estranged, and it is also exactly what God is going to restore in order that he may bring them back to him (57: 10; 14; 17-18). The discouragement from מצא הפץ links this passage with the broader context of the earlier verses of Isaiah 58. The word הפץ in itself does not necessarily have to be negative in its meaning;¹⁸³ only when this word is read in the context of 58:1-12, especially vv. 3-4, it is understandable why the people are discouraged from doing their הפץ; and the second

¹⁸³See W. E. Staples, "The Meaning of *hepes* in Ecclesiastes," *JNES* 24 (1965): 110-112. The term הפץ had two nuances of meaning: first it means "desire, pleasure" which was considered as the primary meaning, and the second meaning is "affair, matter, or business." See also Whitley, *Koheleth*, 30. However, in the context of Isa 58, it seems that the word covers both meanings. In his comments on Ecclesiastes 3, which he called "A Reflection upon Time and Toil," Murphy underlines the interconnection between time and event: that time is filled by הפץ. Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 23A (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 33. Murphy's comment is significant in the context of Isa 58:13: as a human strives to be productive, to fill time with הפץ, the call now is to refrain from doing הפץ in order that the time may become more meaningful and productive.

person suffix in the word חפצִיךְ connects the usage of this word here in v. 13 with the wrongful deeds described in vv. 3-4.¹⁸⁴ Finally, in the conclusion of Isaiah 57, the restoration and healing that God is working for his people includes “creating the fruit of the lips” (v. 19), which is a response to the wrongdoings described in v. 4: jesting, opening wide the mouth, sticking out the tongue and speaking deceit. This particular process of healing may have to do with the call to refrain from דבר דבר in Isa 58:13. In other words, proper Sabbath-keeping is a part of the remedy for problems pressing the people as they had been portrayed in chapters 57 and 58. This observation can also be supported by the fact that reference to the Sabbath brackets these two chapters (56:2, 4, 6 and 58:13).¹⁸⁵

Strophe 2: The Blessings of a Proper Sabbath
Observance (Isa 58:14)

**Isa 58:14 – The Blessings of a Proper
Sabbath Observance**

14aA	אז תתענג על-יהוה
14aB	והרכבתִיךְ על-במותי ארץ
14aC	והאכלתיךְ נחלת יעקב אביך
14bA	כי פי יהוה דבר:

¹⁸⁴Koole writes, “the suffix in the description of the Sabbath as ‘my [the Lord’s] holy day’ already implies a contrast with ‘your [the audience’s] day of fasting’ in v. 3.” *Isaiah III*, 156.

¹⁸⁵The connection between Isa 56:1-8 and 58:13-14 had been noted by Westermann and Seitz. While Westermann considers it as a product of a later redactor, Seitz looks at the connection as “completely natural.” Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 340 and Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” 6:499-500.

Translation

- 14aA Then you will delight in the Lord,
14aB and he will cause you to ride upon the heights of the earth,
14aC and you will eat the inheritance of Jacob, your father.”
14bA For the mouth of the Lord had spoken.

Isa 58:14a – The Blessings of Proper Sabbath Observance

- 14aA אז תתענג על-יהוה
14aB והרכבתוך על-במותי ארץ
14aC והאכלתוך נחלת יעקב אביך

The promise in 58:14 consists of threefold blessings, expressing a progression from (1) to have delight in the Lord, followed by (2) the Lord will cause them to ride over the heights of the land, and (3) He will cause them to eat the inheritance of Jacob. The structure of the promise is similar to the threefold calls to honor the Sabbath in 58:13c presented above. The promises in this verse are also in the same line with the conditions and promises already mentioned starting in v. 6. One point of the promises is consistently being repeated, that is, a personal encounter with the Lord:

- אז, if (implied). . . (vv. 6-7)
- אז, then. . . you will call and the Lord will answer (vv. 8-9)
- אז, if. . . (v. 10a)
- אז, then. . . the Lord will continually guides you (vv. 10b-12)
- אז, if. . . (v. 13)
- אז, then. . . you will find the Lord a delight (v. 14)

These promises are the answer to what the people are looking for or complaining about (see vv. 2-3). The promise of experiencing delight in the Lord also reverses the situation in 57:4 where the same verb ענג in the same form of *hitpa`el* described the people’s indifference toward the Lord, and now is used to picture a situation of enjoying the Lord.

In this regard, note Whybray who considers “you shall find Yahweh a delight” a better translation of the phrase *אז תתענג על-יהוה*.¹⁸⁶

This promise to experience delight in the Lord is reinforced by the second promise, “I will make you to ride upon the heights of the earth.”¹⁸⁷ In OT literature, the Lord is portrayed as *רכב*, “riding” the clouds, cherub or chariots;¹⁸⁸ and He *דרך* “treads” the high places.¹⁸⁹ Only in Deut 32:13 and Isa 58:14 is the idea of *רכב*, “riding,” combined with *במה*, “high place,” and in both cases, the Lord is the subject who causes his people “to ride upon the high places of the earth.”¹⁹⁰ For some commentators, this promise is a metaphor of living above life’s problems, while others look at it as being more literal, since the idea of *דרך* upon the land has a connotation of ownership of it.¹⁹¹

This understanding that the promise implies the idea of ownership of the land may be

¹⁸⁶Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 219.

¹⁸⁷Oswalt interprets this statement as to “experience the exaltation of being partner with him [the Lord] (he is the Rider in the clouds, and they will ride with him over the high places of the earth).” *Isaiah 40-66*, 509. Koole understands it as an experience of sharing victory with the Lord. *Isaiah III*, 159.

¹⁸⁸See Deut 33:26; 2 Sam 22:11; Pss 18:11; 68:18, 34; 104:3; Isa 19:1; Hab 3:8.

¹⁸⁹Vaughan notes that “*drk* is the verb most frequently associated with *bamot*.” Patrick H. Vaughan, *The Meaning of “bama” in the Old Testament: Textual and Archeological Evidence* (London; New York; Cambridge University, 1974), 59n27. This idea of deity walking upon the high places is also present among other ancient cultures; Laroche points out the rock-reliefs of Yazilikaya, where some gods are represented as walking upon mountains. E. Laroche, “Le Pantheon de Yazilikaya,” *JCS* 6 (1952): 115-123; see also Vaughan, *Ibid.*, 59n28.

¹⁹⁰See Westermann, who understands it as “a metaphor of living high over all depression and obstacles.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 342. For Motyer it is an expression of “confidence in the face of life.” *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 483.

¹⁹¹Tigay understands the high places as “the mountainous heartland of Israel, the hill country of the Amorites.” *Deuteronomy*, 305. For Koole the high places are “a more fertile part of the land, so it is a portrayal of abundance of blessing.” *Isaiah III*, 159. Vaughan notes that “the idea of walking on the land in order to claim ownership of it is prominent in the OT, e.g. Dt xi 24 ‘every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours’ (cf. also Gn xiii 17; Dt i 36, xi 25; Jos xiv 9; Mi v 4-5).” *The Meaning of “bama,”* 59 n.28.

connected with the next phrase of the promise: “I will cause you to eat the inheritance of Jacob, your father,” which means “undisturbed possession of the land,”¹⁹² comparable to the blessings pronounced in Deut 28:1-14.

Structurally, the promise of inheriting the land for a “dwelling place” in vv. 12 and 14 thematically balances the call to bring the homeless poor to the house in v. 7; the reference to “eating” in v. 14 balances the theme of fasting at the beginning of the chapter. Furthermore, as the people are called to satisfy the hungry ones (v. 7), they will be satisfied both in their personal physical needs (v. 11) and with the covenant related with the heritage of their ancestor Jacob (v. 14). This structure indicates a reflection of the interconnection between the inheritance of the land of Canaan, true worship and a proper social life as god’s chosen people in the exodus-settlement narrative.¹⁹³

¹⁹²Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 342. See also Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 114 and James L. Crenshaw, “W^cdōrēk ‘al-bāmōtē ’āreš” *CBQ* 34, no. 1 (1972): 50-51. The idea of inheritance in connection with Jacob in Deut 32:9, which is considered the background for the promise here in Isa 58:14, is given in the context of land possessed by nations as inheritance, נחל, as can be read in Deut 32:8.

¹⁹³In Isa. 58:13-14, the blessing of Sabbath observance is connected with inheritance of the land. In light of the preceding sections of Isa. 58, it indicates a reflection of the interconnection between the inheritance of the land of Canaan, true worship and a proper social life as God’s chosen people in the exodus-settlement narrative. von Rad notes that in the narrative of the process of possessing the land in the book of Joshua, the term “rest” occurs several times (1:13, 15; 11:23; 21:4; 22:4; 23:1). For him this expresses that the granting of the land is “the greatest, the ultimate gift which Jahweh bestowed upon Israel.” Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 304. He elaborates further, “Canaan is Jahweh’s land, ‘Jahweh’s hereditary possession’ (יהוה נחלת) . . . it was a sacral idea, in that Israel exactly equated this land of hers with the area in which Jahweh could be worshipped. Anyone outside its frontiers was ‘far from the face of Jahweh’ (1 Sam. Xxvi. 20). To belong to Jahweh was equivalent to ‘having a portion (חלק) of Jahweh’s land’ (Josh. xxii. 25) . . . [t]he words ‘the land is mine; you are strangers with me and sojourners’ (Lev. xxv. 23) can be described as the theological basis of all legislation concerning the land tenure in ancient Israel.” Ibid., 299-300.

Harrelson, in discussing Karl Barth’s treatment of the Decalogue in the Church Dogmatics, comments how “Israel in the time of the judges was granted several gifts: a land which she had no laboured; a relationship with Yahweh who cared for the oppressed and brooked no opposition from other gods; and a community called into being around God’s love and blessing.” Walter J. Harrelson, “Karl Barth on the Decalogue” in *Studies in Religion* 6 ([1976-1977]: 239). He further explains that each of these gifts constituted a basic responsibility, and a failure to maintain them means destruction. Based on this, he elaborates how this concept is covered in the Decalogue, in which “the relationship with God was especially

However, “riding upon the heights of the earth” in the context of experiencing “delight in the Lord” may indicate that the emphasis is not on the material blessings received, but in the encounter with the Lord himself, as Tryggve Kronholm explains in his discussion on the meaning of עָנַג: “[B]ut delight in the prosperity of the land is linked indissolubly with delight in Yahweh.”¹⁹⁴ Gerhard von Rad’s comment on the concept of land inheritance in the book of Deuteronomy is religious in nature,¹⁹⁵ it seems to support the emphasis on the “delight” in the restored relationship with the Lord.

Gordon McConville, in his study on the connection between law and theology in the book of Deuteronomy, observes that

many of the laws Deuteronomy have something more specific in common, in that they are in some way costly to the one who obeys. . . . But through them all a single, fundamental moral requirement may be discerned—a demand that the Israelite be ready to relinquish something which, for whatever reason, he may feel inclined to take or keep for himself, perhaps even justified in doing so. . . . The principle involved is in fact a paradox. Enjoyment of the land and its benefits depends upon a readiness to relinquish them. . . . it is actually a regular principal that where blessing is promised it is in the context of self-restraint.¹⁹⁶

to be maintained through the first commandments . . .” and “[T]he relationship to Israel’s neighbours is covered in the last six commandments.” Harrelson, “Karl Barth on the Decalogue,” 239. He also points out, “[T]he relationship to the land is not specifically covered, but it is bound up with observance of the Sabbath. One does not possess the gift of the land . . . it remains Yahweh’s land always, and Sabbath rest is a sign that the land, and indeed the entire earth, belongs to Yahweh its creator.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Tryggve Kronholm, “עָנַג,” *TDOT*, 11:213. This observation can be compared with the use of the verb עָנַג in Job 22:26; 27:10; Pss 37:4, 11; Isa 55:2; 58:14.

¹⁹⁵“To this Israel, Yahweh had promised the land of Canaan as a hereditary possession [נַחֲלָה]. Again there is a new linguistic usage. . . . When Deuteronomy spoke of the נַחֲלָה of Israel, the term no longer had a legal, but only a religious, significance.” Gerhard von Rad, “Deuteronomy” in *IDB*, 1:837.

¹⁹⁶Gordon J. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 15-17. In the same vein, Olson writes, “Obedience in the statutes and ordinances of Deuteronomy is often portrayed as letting go or giving away a portion of what God has already given (money, property, crops, power, life, freedom, times, space), all as an acknowledgment of human limits and dependence on God Obedience is learning to let go of the gifts God has given. Such dying to self-interest for the sake of God and others results in a life of true joy for the gifts God has given (Deut. 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14, 15; 26:11; 27:7). Disobedience is grasping and clinging to God’s gifts, making objects or self into idolatrous objects of ultimate concern, desire, and trust.” Dennis T. Olson, “Between Disappointment and Hope at the Boundary:

This concept is important in understanding the underlying principle regarding the connection between the issue of fasting and Sabbath observance in Isaiah 58. In both cases, whether the call is for a sympathetic social gesture like to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of yoke, to let the oppressed go free, dividing bread to the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into the house, covering the naked (vv. 6-7)¹⁹⁷ or to keep the Sabbath holy by restraining from doing one's own interest/pleasure/business, from doing one's own ways (v. 13), the basic principle is that unselfishness is required for true enjoyment in the Lord. This concept can be expanded to cover other sections of Isaiah 56-59, in which the promise given the eunuchs is a “memorial and name” within God's wall, and to the foreigners, their offerings will be acceptable in God's altar—it is something that they offer to the Lord, not what they receive. In contrast, seeking one's own interest is the cause of social injustice—the use of the term **בצע**, “unjust gain,” in Isa 56:11 and 57:17 and the collapse of justice in Isa 59:3-8.

Isa 58:14b – Authentication of the Prophetic Oracle

14bA :כִּי פִי יְהוָה דָּבַר:

“For the mouth of the Lord has spoken” is the concluding formula of prophetic utterance since at the beginning of the chapter, the prophet is commanded to lift up his

Moses' Death at the End of Deuteronomy” in *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville, KY: Knox, 2005), 133.

¹⁹⁷These gestures are summarized in 58:10 as
to give to the hungry your own *nephes*,
and *the nephes* of the afflicted ones you satisfied
this statement can be read as a call to practice self-restraint.

voice presenting the message from the Lord. This clause is also a counterpart with the discouragement from דבר דבר in v. 13; as the people are discouraged from empty, idle talk, here, the word of the Lord is given as a full guarantee.

The Thematic Structure of Isa 58

The focus of this section is to highlight the thematic structure of Isa 58:1-14. The vocabularies in vv. 1-2 set the stage for the entire chapter because they will reappear in different parts of it. Some holidays also serve as the background for the chapter. The reference to *shofar* in v. 1, which, later on, is followed by the reference to fasting (vv. 3, 4 and 5) and the Sabbath in v. 13 casts an imagery of preparation for the Day of Atonement, which was strengthened by the expression of ענה נפש, “to humble one soul,” a term associated with the Day of atonement (Lev 16:29-31) as the description for the fasting (v. 3). That The Day of Atonement serves as the background is strengthened by the command to the prophet to declare the rebellion and transgression of the people, which is being dealt with in the Day of Atonement terminology (Lev 16:16 and 21). Furthermore, as the theme of fasting is developed into the issue of social justice, the theme echoes the jubilee year.

In v. 2, the description of the people as a nation that “practices righteousness” [עשה צדקה] and did not forsake the ordinance (justice) [משפט] of their god was repeated again in the statement that they inquire for “righteous judgments’ [משפטי צדק] from the Lord. In addition to this, the verse employs the word הפיץ both in its opening and ending: “knowing my ways they delight [הפיץ]” (v. 2ab) and “to be near to God they delight [הפיץ].” All of these words echo the vocabulary of the opening of Isa 56 with its call to

preserve justice [משפט] and practice righteousness [עשה צדק] (Isa 56:1), and one of the characteristics of the eunuchs who will take part in the coming salvation is that they choose what pleases [הפיץ] God (Isa 56:4).

The main problem with the audience in these two verses is that in their rebellion and transgression, they look like a nation that practices righteousness and preserves justice, and in addition, they have delight in approaching God, so they fail to see the shallowness of their religious practices and the social problems that it brings. That is why they complain that God did not pay attention to their religious practices (v. 3a).

Developing the claim of the people that they have humbled themselves, the first admonition given to them is that true fasting is to show compassion to the humble ones, first their toil workers, whom they oppressed, including acts of violence (v. 3b-4). The second admonition is that the mere external gesture of fasting is not enough (v. 5).

Starting with v. 6, the admonition is structured in the terms of condition and reward argumentation. In the first pair, the call for true fasting in this passage is to reach out to those who are unfortunate: it is not enough to make oneself hungry by fasting, but to share bread with the hungry. It is not enough to humble oneself by putting on sackcloth and dust, but to reach out, to bring home the homeless and give clothes to the naked ones (vv. 6-7). The blessings following this are in the terms of (1) God's healing with reference to "light" and "healing," (2) God's protection with reference to "your righteousness" and "the glory of God," and (3) God's prompt answer whenever they call (v. 8-9a).

In the promise of God's protection, the description is that "your righteousness" will go before you / "the glory of God" on your rear. The phrase "your righteousness,"

can have reference to God when it is compared to “the glory of God” in the next colon, but it may also reference the righteousness of the people, describing it as an envoy before them. This second meaning is reminiscent of criticism that the people looked like a nation that practice “righteousness” which they do not do in v. 2, but now it speaks about genuine righteousness. The promise of God’s availability whenever they call is an answer to the complaint of the people that God did not take notice of their fasting and humbling of themselves.

Still, in the context of fasting and social justice, the second pair of condition and reward discusses removal of the yoke, pointing the finger and speaking of wickedness. In place of this is a call of the giving of oneself to the hungry and to satisfy the desire of the afflicted ones. Again, the point is to reach out and to help the marginal ones. The blessing that follows is both a repetition and expansion of the blessings promised in vv. 8-9a. First, it speaks about light breaking forth in darkness, which is comparable to the “light” in v. 8a. The promise that “Your righteousness will go before you / the glory of God in your rear” (v. 8b), which echoes the exodus event, now receives emphasis when a promise is given that “the Lord will guide you continually,” and is also expanded when the blessings are specific in the terms of God that will satisfy “your soul” in the scorched place, the imagery of the watered garden and springs of water that did not disappoint (vv. 10-11). All these had strong allusion to the wilderness experience of the Israelites. The promise then moves on using conquest imagery, but now the emphasis is on rebuilding ancient ruins, raising up old foundations, repairing the breach, and restoring the path in which to dwell (v. 12).

The last admonition concerns proper Sabbath observance. In the light of the

themes of the previous parts of the chapter, which is about tension between God and the people followed by counsel regarding social justice as the deeper meaning of fasting, the topic of the Sabbath is appropriate, since the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue concerns both one's relationship with God and fellow humans. As the presentation is still styled in the condition and reward, the conditional part calls for proper Sabbath observance, with specifications of holding the foot from trampling the Sabbath, refraining from doing "your own" **הפץ** and honoring the Sabbath by desisting from doing "your own ways [**דרך**]." The negative admonition regarding **הפץ** and **דרך** is intelligible only in the context of v. 3b, since the reference to **הפץ** is specified as oppressing workers, contention, strife, and hitting. The reward for proper Sabbath observance is in the terms of exquisite delight in the Lord and enjoying the inheritance of the land. This blessing again re-emphasizes restoration of the relationship between God and his people, and in the light of the previous part of the chapter, genuine religious practices will lead to upholding social justice and make living in the promised land become an enjoyable experience.

CHAPTER 5

ISAIAH 59:1-21: INJUSTICE AND DIVINE RESOLUTION

Isaiah 59 is the last set of “dialogues” in Isaiah 56-59. The content of the poem can be divided into mainly three parts: 1-8, God/prophet speaks, the indictment; 9-15a, the people speak, confession; and 15b-21, a report of the acts of God to solve the problem. From the perspective of content, Karl Pauritsch sees a thematic expansion of v. 1 in vv. 9-20. He describes how the argument that the “hand” of the Lord is not too short to “save” [ישע] (1a), is fulfilled as the “arm” of the Lord brings “salvation” [ישע] (15b-20; cf. 16aB); the statement that the Lord’s ear is not too heavy to “hear” (v. 1b) is fulfilled by the fact that He is listening the confession of the community (vv. 9-15a) which resulted in his salvific action.¹ In the first part, vv. 2-3 are a direct expansion of v. 1 and vv. 4-8 are a further indirect expansion of the statements given in vv. 2-3. Other scholars see the distribution of the terms משפט (vv. 8, 9, 11, 14, 15) and צדקה (9,14,16,17) that are presented as a parallel pair in vv. 4, 8, 14 as an indication of the unity of the chapter.²

However, the fact that only a part of the community will be saved (v. 20), while the description of the abuse in part one and the confession in part two covers the whole

¹Pauritsch, *Die neue Gemeinde*, 102.

²Daniel Kendall, “The Use of Mišpat in Isaiah 59” *ZAW* 96 (1984): 391-405ff.

community, makes some question the unity of the chapter.³ However, an observation throughout Isaiah 56-59 shows that the promised salvation is consistently conditional in nature; only a part of the community will enjoy it: in Isa 56:1-8 not all eunuchs and foreigners will enjoy the salvation, only those who meet certain conditions; in the end of Isaiah 57, while peace is extended to those who are far and near (v. 19), the wicked will not experience it (v. 20). The “if . . . then” pattern in Isa 58 gives evidence of the conditionality of salvation offered there. Therefore, in harmony with the tone in the previous chapters, it is expected that not all in the community in Isaiah 59 will enjoy the God-given salvation.

While this chapter has three subdivisions thematically as mentioned above, the discussion of this chapter is divided into four stanzas because the first theme is divided into two stanzas. The first stanza concerns the gap between the people and God (Isa 59:1-4); the second stanza describes the futility of evil deeds (Isa 59:5-8); the third stanza reports the confession of the people regarding their sins (Isa 59:9-15a); and the final stanza highlights God’s saving acts on behalf of his people (Isa 59:15b-21).

Stanza 1: The Gap between People and God (Isa 59:1-4)

This stanza that opens Isaiah 59 starts with an argument from the prophet against an unspoken or unrecorded complaint from the people. Judging by the statement, the complaint shares the similar tone as the one in Isaiah 58. If in the latter the people expressed their question—we have fasting, you did not see; we humble ourselves, you did not acknowledge—here the question seems to be based more on a general situation: why

³Volz, *Jesaja II*, 230-231; Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 220.

God did not hear our prayers and he did not save us. Against this question/accusation, the prophet argues that the problem is not with God but more with them. He builds his case by a description of sin committed by the people.

Strophe 1: The Problem is Not with God (Isa 59:1-2)

Isa 59:1-2 – The Problem is Not with God

1aA	הן	לא־קצרה יד־יהוה מהוֹשִׁיעַ
1aB		ולא־כבדה אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמוּעַ:
2aA	כי	אִם־עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הִיוּ
2aB		מִבְדָּלִים בֵּינְכֶם לְבֵין אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
2bA		וְחָטְאוֹתֵיכֶם
2bB		הִסְתִּירוּ פָנָיִם מִכֶּם מִשְׁמוּעַ:
Translation		
1aA	“Behold, the hand of the Lord to save is not short,	
1aB	and his ear from listening is not heavy.”	
2aA	“On the contrary, it is your iniquities	
2aB	separating between you and your God	
2bA	and your sins	
2bB	caused him to hide his face from you to hear.”	

Isa 59:1 – The Problem is Not with God

1aA	הן	לא־קצרה יד־יהוה מהוֹשִׁיעַ
1aB		ולא־כבדה אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמוּעַ:

The interjection particle הן covers both cola. The syntax of both cola goes as follows: negative particle + verb + subject (part of the body) + preposition *min* + verb. The parallelism in this verse is both syntactic and semantic. The parallelism is קצר / כבד; ישע / שמע; they are complementary to each other. The verbs ישע and שמע as a

word pair also appear in Hab 1:2 and Pss 34:6 and 145:19 with the idea that when the Lord hears, He will save. The pattern in these verses moves from the Lord's hearing the cry of his people and as a response, acting to save them. In Isa 59:1, the movement is reversed; the verb "to save" is followed by "to hear."

The demonstrative adverb הֵן is employed as a counter argument against the preconception of the audience. The frustration on the part of the audience is comparable to that in Isa 58:3, that God is unconcerned with the difficulties and struggles of his people. In Isa 6:10, the phrase "heavy ear" is associated with being insensitive and unable to understand.⁴ However, what happens here in this verse, in the light of v. 3 below, is that actually God does hear his people, and the problem is more with the content of their spoken words, that is, falsehood and wickedness that prevented him from saving after he heard them.

In Hezekiah's prayer of thanksgiving following the deliverance of Jerusalem from Senacherib in Isa 37:27 and 1 Kgs 19:26, the phrase קצר־יָד, "short of hand" is understood as an expression for being powerless. For example, in the New American Standard Bible the phrase is translated as "short of strength." However, the phrase לֹא־קִצְרָה יְדֵיהוָה in 59:1 is not a metaphor of God's being powerless or unable to save; rather, it is a concrete portrayal of the gap that is too wide between the two parties and the fault is on the part of the people, as explained in the following verses. The argument in this verse is also closely associated with the announcement in Isa 56:1 that God's

⁴It is a part of the commission to Isaiah to make the people's heart fat, ears heavy, eyes blind, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts (Isa 6:18).

salvation [ישועה] is about to take place. However, so far, the promise has not been realized, and here the prophet explains that God’s hand is really not too short to save [ישע]; the cause of the delay of salvation is not on the part of God, but instead, it is on the part of the people.

Reference to God’s “hand” as the agent of saving his people is interesting because the “arm” of the Lord is more known as his saving agent. The fact that in this text the hand is being singled out is an anticipation of the description of palms and fingers of the people in v. 3 below. The selection of this particular imagery of hand has several implications: (1) the salvation event is intimate and personal in nature, since the hand of God is being depicted as reaching out to the human/sinner’s hand; (2) that sin is portrayed as a widening of the gap between humanity and God; (3) the description in v. 3 shows that the act of sin makes the people unable to grasp the hand of God extended toward them, since their palms and fingers are stained with iniquity and blood.

**Isa 59:2 – Specification of the Problem:
Iniquity and Sin**

2aA	כי	אס־עונתיכם	היו
2aB	מבדלים	בינכם	לבין
2bA	והטאו	ותיכם	
2bB	הסתירו	פנים	מכם

משמוע:

The particle כי covers both couplets, in the sense of adversative against the logic of the argument in v. 1, with the meaning “on the contrary.” The parallelism is עון / חטא and ברל / פנים. The structure of v. 2 depicts a cause and effect: עון causes separation between God and the people, while חטא causes God to hide his face. Just as

עון is the reason for the gap, as if the separation is so wide that the people are beyond God's reach, חטא is the reason that God hides his face with the result that He is not listening.⁵

The use of the root בדל to describe the separation in this verse is an echo, and at the same time a contrast, of the description in Isa 56. In the poem, the concern of the foreigner is reported that they are convinced that the Lord will prevent them from becoming his people—הבדל יבדילני יהוה מעל עמו (Isa 56:3); while, in reality, God is bringing them to his holy mountain—קדשי אל-הר הביאותים (Isa 56:7). In this chapter, the separation between the Lord and the people is real, and it was caused by their iniquity.

The grammatical form of the word פנים in the phrase וחטאותיכם הסתירו פנים seems to be inconsistent with the syntax, and was considered a corruption of פניו, “his face.”⁶ However, Richard Friedman, in his analysis of the phrase מוסתיר פנים, concludes that the term “was a known and well understood expression, perhaps even a *terminus technicus* for the fact of God's receding immanence. “Its status as a known *terminus technicus* is further indicated by the appearance of poetic forms in which *pānîm*

⁵The parallel of עון / חטא functions as complementary to one another (see Deut 19:15; Isa. 1:4). Referring to the spiritual condition of the people of his time, prophet Jeremiah explains,

“Your iniquities (עון) turned these away,

your sins (חטא) withheld good things from you (Jer 5:25).

Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 484) connects this parallel of עון / חטא in Isa 59:2 with חטא / פשע in Isa 58:1. The structure of the thought in both verses are similar: as in Isa 58:1 the חטא and פשע causes God not to see and heed the people's cultic activities, here in Isa 59 עון and חטא cause God not to hear and hide his face. As “God's face” is sought in the cult and particularly in prayer, it is expected that he will not hide his face but “hear” the prayer for salvation. See Koole, *Isaiah III*, 172. According to H. Simian-Yofre, the majority of the occurrences of the clause *rā'ā ('et'el-) penê yhwh* is a technical term for a cultic encounter with the deity, “פנים,” *TDOT*, 11:604.

⁶Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 220-221.

bears no pronominal suffix.”⁷ Based on this observation, he proposes that the prophet is using the term פָּנִים instead of פָּנָיו in Isa 59:2 because it is “more powerful aesthetically and psychologically,” comparable with the same phenomenon in Job 34:29.⁸

Reference to the “face” of the Lord in the OT has multiple implications. As in the Priestly Blessing (Num 6:24-26), when God shines his face, he expresses blessing and favor⁹ and when he hides his face, the result is the contrary: the absence of his blessing and favor.¹⁰ However, there are times when the hiding of God’s face has a positive implication, like the petition of the psalmist in Ps 51:11 (9, Eng.):

⁷Richard E. Friedman, “The Biblical Expression *mastîr pānîm*” *HAR* 1 (1977): 146.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹The solar imagery applied to the deity is common in the religious traditions of ancient Near Eastern cultures. Michael Fishbane, “Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 115-121. Furthermore, this portrayal of God in solar imagery also emphasizes his role as a source of both light and law/truth. See Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult* (Missoula: Scholars, 1974), 145. This phenomenon is also present in Isa 51:4 “because torah from me will go forth / and my justice for a light for peoples, I will set.”

The association of the sun-god and righteousness and law; light and justice is common in the ancient world. However, as the biblical authors are aware of this way of thinking and employed it in their writing, they transformed the motif and made sure that the sun is not an independent deity but one of God’s creatures under his control, that the sun is not the object of worship. See Nahum M. Sarna, “Psalm XIX and Near Eastern Sun-God Literature,” *Papers, Fourth World Jewish Congress* vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 173, and Nahum M. Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 80.

This association of God with light and justice makes understandable that the hiding of the face of God resulted in the people’s experiencing the absence of justice which is also the light, comparable to those who are groping in the dark, as it was portrayed in Isa 59:9-10:

therefore, *justice* is far from us
and *righteousness* did not overtake us
we hope for *light* but behold, darkness
for *brightness*, but we walk in the gloom
we grope, like *blind men*, along the wall
like those who *have no eyes*, we grope.

¹⁰See for example Deut. 31:17-18; 32:20; and Mic 3:4 where “evil” is the cause God hides his face. The hiding of the divine appearance is associated with negative attitude on the part of the deity against his people; it may understood as “rejection” (Ps 38:4); “forget” (Ps 13:1; 44:24); “anger” (Ps 27:9); or considering one as “enemy” (Job 13:24).

A	הסתר פניך	hide, your face
B	מחטאי	from my sin
B'	וכל-עונתי	and all my iniquities
A'	מחה	wipe out

In this text the reference to God's hiding his face is an act of forgiveness from חטא and עון, but in Isa 59:2, God hides his face because of the חטא and עון. On another occasion, when God "[sets] his face against" somebody (נתן / שים פנו ב. . .), it had a negative implication as an expression for punishment.¹¹ It has been observed that both the expressions נתן פנים and שים פנים had a neutral meaning, simply connoting the subject turning his attention or setting his mind on the object. However, when the two expressions are followed by the preposition ב, the meaning becomes negative. It was termed "*beth* of hostility."¹²

The connection between hiding the face of God and the act of hearing is also found in Psalm 102:3.¹³ However, the theme of Isa 59:2 is more comparable with the situation in Micah 3:1-4 where the people are unjust (vv. 1-3), yet they cry out to the Lord, and He does not answer (v. 4).

For Habakkuk, God is too holy to look on evil; therefore, he cannot tolerate it (1:13). Comparable with this insight, the logic of Isa 59:2 is that God hides his face, not

¹¹See Lev 17:10; 20:3, 5; 26:17; Jer 21:10; 44:11; Ezek 14:8; 15:7.

¹²Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1471.

¹³Psalm 102:3;

אל-תסתר פניך ממני ביום צר לי	do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress
הטה-אלי אזנך ביום אקרא מדהר ענני	incline your ear to me in the day I call, answer me quickly

אז יזעקו אל-יהוה	then they will cry out to the Lord
ולא יענה אותם	but he will not answer them
ויסתר פניו מהם בעת ההיא	and he will hide his face from them at that time
כאשר הרעו מעלליהם	because of the evils they practiced

because he is powerless nor insensitive, but because he is holy.¹⁴

Verses 1 and 2 of Isa 59 are interconnected through thematic and lexical elements.

The reason for the delayed salvation stated in v. 1 is given in v. 2, as can be seen through its thematic connections and word imageries:

- a 1a the hand of the Lord is not *too short*
- b 1b the ears of the Lord are not too heavy to *hear* [שמיע]
- a' 2a but the *עון* causes a *separation* that put them beyond his reaching
- b' 2b and the *חטא* causes God to hide his face from *hearing* [שמיע]¹⁵

As in v. 2, the cause of the problem is given in a general, all-inclusive terminology of *עון* and *חטא*; in v. 3 the explanation becomes more specific and detailed.

Strophe 2: Description of Iniquity and Sin (Isa 59:3-4)

Isa 59:3-4 – Description of Iniquity and Sin

3aA	כי כפיכם נגאלו בדם
3aB	ואצבעותיכם בעון
3bA	שפתותיכם דברו-שקר
3bB	לשונכם עולה תהגה

¹⁴Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 513.

¹⁵Koole sees parallels between the term *שמיע* in Isa 59:1aB-2bB with the parallelism of *עון / כבוד* in 1aB-2ba. *Isaiah III*, 172.

4aA	אין־קרא בצדק
4aB	ואין נשפט באמונה
4bA	בטוח על־תהו
4bB	ודבר־שוא
4cA	הרו עמל
4cB	והוליד און:

Translation

3aA	“Because your hands are defiled with blood
3aB	and your fingers with iniquity
3bA	your lips spoke falsehood
3bB	your tongue muttered wickedness.”
4aA	“No one calls in righteousness
4aB	no one pleads in faithfulness
4bA	relying in nothingness
4bB	and speaks lies
4cA	conceived evil
4cB	gave birth iniquity.”

Isa 59:3 – Reference to Hands and Mouth

3aA	כי כפיכם נגאלו בדם
3aB	ואצבעותיכם בעון
3bA	שפתותיכם דברו־שקר
3bB	לשונכם עולה תהגה

The parallelism here is כף / אצבע / דם, עון / דם in 3aAB and שפת / לשון, דבר / תהגה, הגה, in 3bAB. The particle כי functions as an introduction to the whole verse and it functions as an emphasis to the argument that is about to be presented; at the same time, it reinforces the argument already stated in v. 2. As both verses 2 and 3 started with the

preposition כִּי denoting a causal meaning, so both verses are a supportive argument for the statement given in v. 1.

The verb “defiled” [גָּאֵל] governs both cola of 3aAB: “because your palms are defiled with blood / your fingers [are defiled] with iniquity.” Motyer considers that the reference to כַּף “the palm or grip” of the hand specifies personal involvement in the act of sin and denotes direct, detailed touch with the minutiae.¹⁶ For Eduard König, the preposition ב in the phrase בָּרֵם is an “Artikel der Konnexität;” this blood goes with their action.¹⁷ Blenkinsopp explains that the root גָּאֵל connotes the polluting, miasmatic effect of shedding innocent blood, whether on the hands or on the earth (Isa 1:15; 26:21). He connects it with the case of Abel’s blood, with the result that Cain was hidden from God’s face.¹⁸ Therefore, the accusation in 3aA is intensified in 3aB: not that just their hands, but also their fingers are stained with blood, and because of this God’s outstretched hand in v. 1 finds the fingers are metaphorically too slippery to be grasped; also, God is holy so cannot be defiled in this way, therefore they cannot be saved.

The structure of 59:3b is almost identical except that the verb-object order is reversed, as can be read as follows:

Isa 59:3b			
	C	B	A
3bA	שְׁפֹתֵיכֶם	דִּבְרוֹ־שֶׁקֶר	
	B'	C'	A'
3bB	לְשׁוֹנֵכֶם	עוֹלָה	תְּהַגֵּה

¹⁶Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 484.

¹⁷Eduard König, *Das Buch Jesaja; Eingeleitet, Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1926), 502.

¹⁸Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 188.

Two speaking organs of the body, lips and tongue are mentioned here. For Motyer, the purpose is to cover every aspect of speech.¹⁹ A parallelism between lips and tongue can also be found in Job 27:4; Pss 12:3,4; 34:13; 120:2; Prov 12:19; 17:4; Song 4:11; Isa 28:11; 30:27. It is noticeable that in the book of Isaiah, the occurrence of the word “lips” with reference to human lips is only in Isaiah 59 and in Isaiah 6, the narrative about the call of the prophet. While in chap. 6 the prophet’s lips received purification, in chap. 59, the lips produces falsehood. Other appearances where speaking and muttering form a parallel are found in Job 27:4; Ps 37:30; and Prov 24:2. Job 27:4 stands as an almost identical antithesis of Isa 59:3b:

	F E D C B A
Isa 59:3b	שפתותיכם דברו־שקר לשונכם עולה תהגה your lips spoke falsehood, your tongue muttered wickedness
	G F' D' E' A' B'
Job 27:4	אם־תדברנה שפתי עולה ולשוני אם־יהנה רמיה my lips will not speak unjustly, and my tongue will not utter deceit

A comparison with Job in this context adds a deeper nuance of the argument, since just like Job the people here feel that they suffer innocently and God has treated them unjustly; however, although Job can testify that he does not sin with his lips and tongue, the people are being accused of sinning with their lips and tongue.

Just as the reference to the people’s palm and fingers connects to the “hand of the Lord” in v. 1aA, this reference to lips and tongue connects to the reference of the “hearing” of the Lord given in v. 1aB:²⁰

¹⁹Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 484.

²⁰See Koole, who sees this direction of reading. *Isaiah III*, 170-171.

1aA	הן לא־קצרה יד־יהוה מהושיע	hand
1aB	ולא־כבדה אָזְנוּ משמוע:	ear
3aA	כי כפיכם נגאלו בדם	palms
3aB	ואצבעותיכם בעון	fingers
3bA	שפתותיכם דברו־שקר	lips
3bB	לשונכם עולה תהגה:	tongue

From another perspective, the word עון structurally unites vv. 2 and 3a as a tied unit as

well:

2aA	כי אם־עונתיכם היו	עון
2aB	מבדלים בינכם לבין אלהיכם	
2bA	וחטאותיכם	חטא
2bB	הסתירו פנים מכם משמוע:	
3aA	כי כפיכם נגאלו בדם	דם
3aB	ואצבעותיכם בעון	עון

For the use of חטא and דם as a word pair, see 1 Sam 19:5 and 2 Kgs 21:16. In Lam 4:13-

14a there is a concentration of the terms חטא, עון, and דם as the cause of the fall of the city of Jerusalem into the hands of the Babylonians:

because of the sins [חטא] of her prophets,
the iniquities [עון] of her priests,
who shed in her midst the blood [דם] of the righteous,
they wandered, *blind*, in the streets

In 59:9-10 the people confessed that the absence of justice and righteousness makes them just like a blind person.

Structurally, v. 4 serves as a bridge between vv. 1-4 and 5-8. As the theme of 3b focuses on the speaking organs of the human body, i.e. lips and tongue, v. 4a refers to the act of קרא. At the same time, 4b gives the abstract portrayal of the sinful nature of the people, which is elaborated in a more concrete illustration in vv. 5-8. From a stylistic perspective, as the recipient of the message in vv. 2-3 is singled out in the second person

plural, in v. 4ab the referral becomes impersonal, and from vv. 4c to 8 the personal reference is in the third person plural. Verse 4 seems to be a thematic expansion of v. 3b where the focus is sin caused by lips and tongue; here in v. 4, it receives a further description.

Isa 59:4 – Reference to Injustice in Court Setting

4aA	אין־קרא בצדק
4aB	ואין נשפט באמונה
4bA	בטוח על־תהו
4bB	ודבר־שוא
4cA	הרו עמל
4cB	והוליד און:

The parallelism in v. 4 is קרא / שפט; צדק / אמונה; דבר / בטח; תהו / שוא; הרה / און. The parallelism is semantic in nature in which the word pair expands the meaning of its parallel. The parallel between קרא / שפט gives the nuance of judicial context,²¹ and in normal legal proceedings, this happens according to the proper legal norm [בצדק];²² in Prov 12:17 it was said that “he who speaks truth [אמונה] tells what is right [צדק].” However, here in Isa 59:4, no one sues in צדק and pleads in אמונה. Koole,

²¹Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 49 and 315n136. See also Deut 25:8, where קרא means to summon someone entering a lawsuit.

²²Koole, *Isaiah III*, 174. See Lev 19:15 for the call to judge fairly in righteousness; Pss 9:9; 96:13; and 98:9, for the hope that the Lord will judge the world in righteousness; Ps 72:2, for the wish that the king will judge the people in righteousness; and Isa 11:4, for the assurance that “the branch” will judge the poor in righteousness.

based on Gesenius, reads the *niph`al* form of נִשְׁפָּט in a reciprocal sense, that the people are taking legal action against each other.²³

The absence of righteousness in the legal system is described further in v. 4bc with the pattern of the cola going from inner mental activities to outward expressions of them, from trusting to speaking, and from conceiving to giving birth—all are in infinitive form. In the first bicola (Isa 59:4b), the verbs trusting and speaking had תהו and שוא as the object. The word תהו expresses the idea of “a sphere that stands in opposition to the ordered world”²⁴ and it leads Bovati to understand the word as a situation where there is no distinction between good and evil,²⁵ while שוא means worthless, but also implies

²³Koole, *Isaiah III*, 175 and GKC, 137. From another perspective, the particle אֵין underlines that the total collapse of the justice system, caused by individual behavior. A comparison of this verse with Jer 5:1-2 will add another nuance of the portrayal expressed here:

roam the streets of Jerusalem,
look, know, and search in its open squares,
if you can find a person, if there is one
who is doing justice and seeking truth,
I will pardon her;
although, “as the Lord lives” they said,
it is falsely they swear.

Both Jer 5:1-2 and Isa 59:4 emphasize the absence of righteous action in the community. While Isa 59:4 is a report of such situation, in Jer 5:1 the text is a report of a command given to the prophet. This command, to find even *one* person who does justice, נִשְׁפָּט, and seeking truth, אִמְוִינָה—comparable with the report נִשְׁפָּט אִמְוִינָה וְאֵין בְּצַדִּיק אֵין קִרָּא בְצַדִּיק וְאֵין באמונה אין קרא בצדק ואין, no one calls in righteousness and judges in truth, in Isa 59:4—echoes the bargain between Abraham and God regarding the fate of Sodom in Genesis 18. See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 176-177; Lundbom, 376; and Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Knox, 2008), 73. In the case of Sodom, the Lord assured Abraham that there will be no judgment against it if there are ten righteous people. In the light of this background, the degradation of the situation here is worse than that of Sodom.

²⁴Görg explains that the noun תהו occurs forty times, with eleven in the book of Isaiah alone. In Isaiah the word expresses the idea of desolation, lifelessness, futility, and worthlessness. Manfred Görg, “תהו,” *TDOT*, 15:568-570.

²⁵Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 191n51.

deceit, falseness, and also “futility.”²⁶ In the juridical context, **שוא** involves public falsehood, especially on the part of the witness.²⁷ In Isa 59:3-4, both the nouns **שוא** and **שקר**, falsehood, are objects of the verb **דבר**, an indication that their meanings are closely related, as confirmed by their antithesis of **אמונה** and **צדק**.²⁸ As lifelessness is one of the nuances of the meaning of **תהו**,²⁹ and **שוא** implies futility, these themes of chaos/lifelessness and futility will receive further emphasis in Isa 59:5 with reference to adders and a spider.

The next bicola (59:4c) is both syntactic and semantic parallelism: verb + object, with the parallelism **הרה / הוליד** and **עמל / און**. The verbs for conceiving and giving birth have the objects **עמל** and **און**. Other occurrences of **עמל / און** as a word pair can be found in Num 23:21; Job 4:8; 5:6; 15:35; Ps 7:15; Isa 10:1; 59:4. Job 15:35 also has a parallel of the verbs and objects similar to that in Isa 59:4: Eliphaz, in describing the godless and corrupt person, says, “they conceived mischief and gave birth to iniquity” **הרו עמל והוליד און** [און הרה עמל וילד]

Psalm 7:15 (14, Eng.) has the concentration of similar words in one verse,

Behold,
 he travails [**חבל**] with **און**
 and conceives [**הרה**] **עמל**
 and gave birth [**ילד**] **שקר**

²⁶Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 191n51.

²⁷Friedrich Reiterer, “שוא,” *TDOT*, 14:452.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Görg, “תהו,” 569. See also Tsumura, who understands the meaning of **תהו**, among others, as “waste land” or “land of desolation.” David Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 36.

חבל, הרה, and ילד refer to different phases of giving birth, with the objects און, עמל, and שקר; the first two objects are found in Isa 59:4; and the word שקר already appears in Isa 59:3. Comparing these verses shows that עמל / און as a parallel is not a foreign idea in the Hebrew Bible: as עמל is a trouble done against others,³⁰ it results in און—a trouble / sorrow upon oneself.³¹ This is expressed in Artur Weiser’s comment of Ps 7:14 in which he describes how “the poet emphatically advocates in a series of images the truth that the biter will be bitten.” He explains further, while such understanding is well known in the whole of the Ancient East, that the context of this verse confirms “the mysterious working of God’s righteousness which causes sin to pass judgment on itself.”³²

The principle described by Weiser is also at work here, and it will receive more elaboration in the illustration of vv. 5-6 and confession in vv. 9-15. As the description in v. 4 is more on what the people are doing against each other, the illustration from the animal world in vv. 5-6 focuses more on the effect they bring to themselves. Verse 5a is an illustration about vipers and a spider; v. 5b elaborates on the effect on the people of eating the viper eggs upon the people, followed by what the spider’s web cannot do for them in 6a; 6b is a conclusion of vv. 5-6 and strengthens the argument from the previous verses.³³

³⁰Brown, Driver, and Briggs interpret עמל as “trouble, mischief” done to others. *BDB*, 765.

³¹For such definition of און in Isa 59:4 see *BDB*, 20.

³²Artur Weiser, *The Psalms, A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962), 138-139.

³³Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 221-222. Motyer reads the referral to vipers as what the people did toward others, while referral to spider’s web, as what happened to themselves. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 483.

Stanza 2: Futility of Evil Deeds (Isa 59:5-8)

This stanza focuses on the deeds of the people and shows how futile they are, even how harmful they are. In presenting the point, an illustration from the animal world is employed.

Strophe 1 - Illustration from the Animal World (Isa 59:5-6)

Isa 59:5-6

5aA	ביצי צפעוני בקעו
5aB	וקורי עכביש יארגו
5bA	האכל מביציהם ימות
5bB	והזורה תבקע אפעה:
6aA	קוריהם לא־יהיו לבגד
6aB	ולא יתכסו במעשיהם
6bA	מעשיהם מעשי־און
6bB	ופעל חמס בכפיהם
Translation	

5aA	“Eggs of viper they hatched,
5aB	webs of spider they weaved.
5bA	The one that eat their eggs died,
5bB	and that which is crushed, snakes break forth.”
6aA	“Their webs will not become clothing
6aB	and they will not cover themselves with their works.”
6bA	“Their works are works of iniquity
6bB	and a handiwork of violence is in their hands.”

Isa 59:5 – Viper and Spider

In Isa 59:5a, both cola have identical syntax: noun plural construct–noun–verb:

	c	b	a
5aA	ביצי	צפעוני	בקעו
	c'	b'	a'
5aB	וקורי	עכביש	יארנו

The parallelisms are: ביצי צפעוני / וקורי עכביש; בקעו / יארנו. The fact that the nouns come first in the sentence indicates that they are the focus of emphasis: eggs of vipers and webs of a spider. The parallelism is more on the thematic level; both deal with an image from the animal world to portray the crookedness of society.³⁴ The meaning of this simile will be elaborated in the following cola:

	qal impf - noun - qal ptcp
5bA	האכל מביציהם ימות
	noun - qal impf - qal ptcp
5bB	והזורה חבקע אפעה:

This pair expresses a continual thought, how the effect of one action is followed by another effect, but these cola are structured as parallel: both cola consist of a participle object and imperfect form of the verb; both begin with a participial form. The first colon describes what happens to the one who eats the eggs; while the second colon gives further consequence beside the eating: vipers are breaking forth from the eggs. The calamity brought to oneself also results in trouble for others.

Isa 59:6 – The Futility of the Works of the People

	B	A
6aA	קוריהם לא־יהיו לבגד	
	A' B'	
6aB	ולא יתכסו במעשיהם	

³⁴The expression is a metaphor for conceiving evil plans. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 501.

The parallelisms are: קוריהם / במעשיהם and לא־יהיו לבגד / ולא יתכסו; the bicola is structured as an inverted parallelism, a chiasm. The argument here is to emphasize the futility of their effort.

6bA	מעשיהם מעשי־און
6bB	ופעל חמס בכפיהם

The parallelism מעשי־און / חמס / פעל is synonymous, while the parallel between בכפיהם / מעשיהם is complementary; one explicates what had been done, מעשה, and the instrument of the action, כף.

The Thematic Structure of Isa 59:5-6

In Isa 59:5-6, there is a development in the keywords in which they are woven as a thread. The theme connected with vipers has the catchword of בקע (v. 5aA) and has the thought developed in 5bAB with the occurrence of the term תבקע in 5bB. The theme connected with a spider's web has the catchword of קור (v. 5aB) which is expanded in v. 6aAB with the occurrence of the word קוריהם in 6aA. The parallel word for קוריהם in 6aA is מעשיהם in 6aB; this theme in v. 6a receives further elaboration in v. 6b with the recurrence of the word מעשה in 6bA. This kind of structuring is similar to "staircase parallelism."³⁵ The structuring of the keywords can be highlighted as follows:

5aA	ביצי צפעוני בקעו	בקע
5aB	וקורי עכביש יארגו	קור
5bA	האכל מביציהם ימות	
5bB	והזורה תבקע אפעה:	בקע

³⁵Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 65.

6aA	קוריהם לאיהיו לבגד	קור
6aB	ולא יתכסו במעשיהם	מעשה
6bA	מעשיהם מעשי-און	מעשה
6bB	ופעל חמס בכפיהם	

The distribution of the keywords suggests that the theme of handiwork is central in these two verses, even functioning as an envelope that becomes the *inclusio*: 5a refers to the action of “hatching” eggs and “weaving” a web and in 6b, the focus becomes more specific since it points to מעשה and פעל which are summarized with the phrase “in their hands” [בכפיהם].³⁶ In the center, vv. 5b-6a describes the fatality and futility of what they have done. While the imagery gives an idea of futility, the fact that in 6b the description of the result of what they produce is given in the terms of און and חמס seems to emphasize the acts of crime and bloodshed.³⁷ As a unit, vv. 3-6 portrays a development of activities from what the people had in mind, expressed in what they say and do, in which the context is developed from a dispute in the courtroom to a climax in the act of physical violence.

The imagery using eggs of vipers and a spider’s web reinforces the theme of תהו, worthlessness, in which the deeds of the people seem to bring hope while the result is just

³⁶Both verbs בקע with which in this context both hand and finger play a dominant role, create an image that builds a connection with the previous reference to “hand” כף (vv. 3 and 6) and “finger” in v. 3. For a detailed description of the activity of weaving see Grace M. Crowfoot, “Handicrafts in Palestine [Part 1],” *PEQ* 75 (1943): 75-88.

³⁷Explaining the meaning of חמס, Haag writes, “[O]ften, however, the hand is the agent of *chāmās*. . . this physical violence can go so far as the physical destruction of the enemy so that *chāmās* can take the meaning “bloodshed.” Herbert Haag, “חמס,” *TDOT*, 4:482. Bernhardt discusses the relationship חמס and און, “[T]he use of → חמס *chāmās*, “violence” in parallelism with *ʿaven* (Isa. 59:6; Hab. 1:3; cf. further Ps. 55:10f.[9f.]) brings out the negative aspect of *ʿaven* as an action intended to hurt other person,” “און,” 142.

the opposite. Eggs are a source of life both in the sense of a potential animal contained in it or as a food; however, in this case, these eggs bring death (5bA) and even the potential animal inside it is a harmful one (5bB). The spider web promises something substantial and significant, but merely touching it makes the whole thing collapse.³⁸ Johann Gamberoni explains that in the OT clothing plays an indispensable role in signaling an individual in society,³⁹ just as nakedness symbolizes that something of fundamental importance of one's being has been destroyed.⁴⁰ Based on this insight, the observation that what the people have woven will not become a garment and they cannot cover themselves with what they have made implies an effort to ensure honor and safety within the society but the attempt is in vain,⁴¹ and even ends by bringing fatality upon themselves. Blenkinsopp perceives the reference to the spider-web as clothing as an argument by the prophet of how the moral evils are responsible for the lack of the necessities of life, that is, food and clothing.⁴² In the line of this insight, a connection can be made between this criticism and the reference in Isaiah 58 to neglecting a certain social class who are homeless, naked and hungry.

³⁸See Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 515; Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 221.

³⁹Johann Gamberoni, “לבש,” *TDOT*, 7: 468.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 461.

⁴¹Koole, *Isaiah III*, 179.

⁴²Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 189.

Strophe 2: Application of the Illustration (Isa 59:6b-8)

Isa 59:6b-8 – Application of the Illustration

6bA	מעשיהם מעשי־און
6bB	ופעל חמס בכפיהם
7aA	רגליהם לרע ירצו
7aB	וימהרו לשפך דם נקי
7bA	מחשבותיהם מחשבות און
7bB	שד ושבר במסלוחם
8aA	דרך שלום לא ידעו
8aB	ואין משפט במעגלותם
8bA	נתיבותיהם עקשו להם
8bB	כל דרך בה לא ידע שלום

Translation

6bA	“Their works are works of iniquity
6bB	and a handiwork of violence is in their hands.”
7aA	“Their feet, to evil, run quickly
7aB	they haste in shedding innocent blood.”
7bA	“Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity
7bB	devastation and destruction are in their highways.”
8aA	“They way of peace they do not know
8aB	and there is no justice in their tracks.
8bA	Their paths they made crooked for them
8bB	all who walk(s) in it do(es) not know peace.”

Isa 59:6b – Sin with Hands

6bA	מעשיהם מעשי־און
6bB	ופעל חמס בכפיהם

While the term מעשה makes Isa 59: 6bA a part of the strophe of vv. 5-6, at the

same time, reference to “hand” in v. 6bB makes it a part of vv. 7-8 in which the people are described as committing sin with their hands (v. 6b), feet (v. 7a), and thought (v. 7b); as a result, they do not know peace (v. 8). Reference to both physical and intellectual aspects of a person seems to emphasize the totality of the sinful behavior both in the planning and acting it out.

Isa 59:7a – Sin with Feet

7aA	רגליהם לרע ירצו
7aB	וימהרו לשפך דם נקי

The parallelisms are רגליהם ירצו / וימהרו; רע / נקי / שפך דם נקי. The first pair, וימהרו / רגליהם ירצו is styled in development of thought in which the first element, feet, is a part of totality, while the second element is the totality, the whole person. That the directional object רע in this phrase is put before the verb, indicating an emphasis on the object. The second pair, רע / נקי / שפך דם נקי has רע as a general and abstract noun while שפך is a specific verb describing what רע means in this particularly context.⁴³

Isa 59:7b – Sinful Thinking

7bA	מחשבותיהם מחשבות און
7bB	שד ושבר במסלותם

The parallelism are מחשבותיהם / מחשבות און; שד ושבר / און. Structurally, the distribution of

⁴³It can be noted here that the clause שפך דם נקי, shed innocent blood, appears in Deut 19:10; 21:8; 27:25; 2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4; Ps 106:38; Prov 6:17; Isa 59:7; Jer 26:15, but for King Manasseh, under whose rule the prophet Isaiah lived, this term stands out as a historical paradigm of his government (2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4).

the words in this particular passage is balanced in the sense that one word in one colon is paralleled with two words in the other colon; the word “thoughts,” which is in cognate accusative form, is paired with one word, “highway,” and one word “iniquity” is paired with two words “devastation” and “destruction”:

A	A	B
their thoughts	are thoughts	of iniquity
B'	B'	A'
devastation	and destruction	are in their highways.

The parallelism employed in this bicola makes the word “iniquity” [אִיִּן] which is a general term with a broad range of meaning, have a more specific meaning in this context—devastation and destruction. As the word אִין already appeared in v. 6b which is paired with “violence,” חַמַּס, the reappearance of the word here in v. 7b gives more weight to the meaning of the word in the context of the passage.⁴⁴

In Isa 55:7-8 the term מַחְשְׁבָה, “thought,” has the term דֶּרֶךְ, “way,” as its parallel, and here in Isa 59:7b, the parallel for מַחְשְׁבָה is מַסְלָה, while in Isa 35:8, מַסְלָה is synonymous with דֶּרֶךְ. This pairing of מַחְשְׁבָה with מַסְלָה can be explained with the logic that the use of מַסְלָה instead of דֶּרֶךְ is to support the idea of “running” and “hastening” presented in the preceding bicola of Isa 59:7a, which can be done with more ease on a

⁴⁴Bernhardt commented on this issue: “Because of their variety, parallel ideas which are closely associated with *ʿaven* especially in metrically structured texts help only to a limited extent in obtaining a more precise understanding of the meaning of this word,” “אִין,” 142.

“highway” than on a “way/road.”⁴⁵ Prov 6:16-18 lists six things that the Lord hates / is an abomination to him, and the last on the list is “feet that rapidly run to evil” (v. 18).

Commenting on this clause, Bruce Waltke writes that the emphasis is on “his zeal and zest to follow the inner evil compulsion as soon as possible (cf. 1:16a; Ps 147:15b; Isa 59:7), not swiftness in running.”⁴⁶ This insight from Waltke helps to understand the intention of the word pair מסלה / מחשבה in this parallelism, that there is nothing to stop

⁴⁵The term מסלה usually refers to a well built road connecting regions (Num 20:19; Jdg 21:19; 1 Sam 6:12; 2 Sam 20:12ff; 2 Kgs 18:17; 1 Chr 26:16, 18; Isa 7:3; 36:2); or countries (Isa 11:16; 19:23), as the root סלל, which means “lift up high, pile up” suggests. See Heinz-Josef Fabry, “סלל,” *TDOT*, 10: 266. As an antonym, the phrase סלולה דרך לא refers to an “unmade road.” John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 436. For Robert P. Carroll it is “not the highway.” *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986), 375. William McKane translates the phrase means “unmade road.” *Jeremiah*, 2 vols., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 1:428. For Bright it is an “ungraded road.” *Jeremiah*, 122. See also Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 519.

⁴⁶Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 347. The use of Prov 6 as a reference in explaining Isa 59:8 is justifiable since Whybray has noted that vv. 6-8 “employ the characteristic terminology of the general description of the wicked to be found in Proverbs, the ‘wisdom psalms’, and the book of Job.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 222.

Prov 6:16-19 is particularly relevant to be compared to, since it shares some similar key vocabulary with Isa 59:3-8, as can be observed in the following:

<p>Prov 6:17-19 Seven things that the Lords hates:</p> <p>(1) haughty eyes לשון שקר</p> <p>(2) lying tongue, לשון שקר</p> <p>(3) hands shedding innocent blood, ידים שפכות דם־נקי</p> <p>(4) a heart that devises wicked plans לב חרש מחשבות און</p> <p>(5) feet that rapidly run to evil רגלים ממהרות לרוץ לרעה</p> <p>(6) false witness who utters lies</p> <p>(7) one who spreads strife among brothers</p>	<p>Isa 59 Things that separated people from God</p> <p>3bA your lips spoke falsehood, שקר</p> <p>3bB your tongue, לשון mutters wickedness</p> <p>3aA your hands, כפיכם, are defiled with blood</p> <p>7aB they hasten to shed innocent blood, לשפך דם נקי</p> <p>7bA their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity מחשבותיהם מחשבות און</p> <p>7aA their feet run to evil רגליהם לרע ירצו</p>
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or hinder the people, i.e. their conscience, from accomplishing their evil intentions.

The word *מסלה*, “highway,” functions as a connecting link that holds together the ideas expressed in vv. 7-8: it provides a context for reference to “feet” in 7aA and is connected with the term “thoughts” in 7bB as a wordpair; in v. 8, the word has counterparts through the terms *דרך* (8aA); *מעגל* (8aB); and *נתיבותיה* (8bB).⁴⁷

Isa 59:8 – The Absence of Peace

Isa 59:8 further develops the theme of “feet” in v. 7 by presenting various terms expressing the idea of “way”: *דרך*; *מעגל*; and *נתיבה* which are the locus for the activity of the feet. The root *דרך* and *שלום* ties the verse as unit; in the beginning of the verse, they were presented as the object, which the people failed to know, and in the end of the verse they represent the result: “they do not know the way of peace, and those who walk in it do not know peace. That v. 8 underlines the idea of one’s inability to experience peace as the frame of the verse is elaborated further below⁴⁸:

⁴⁷Delitzsch differentiates the various terms of “way” as follows: *דרך* is a general term, “the way upon which a man goes”; *מסלה* is “a high-road thrown up with an embankment”; *מעגל* is a “carriage road”; and *נתיבה* is “a footpath formed by the constant passing to and fro of travellers.” *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:398. The variety of vocabulary employed in describing the way of the people, *מסלה*, *דרך*, *מעגלה* and *נתיבה*, shows a movement from large to small: highways – road – track – path; from general to specific, portraying the sinful activity from public practices to a more personal level, comparable to the degrading movement of the reference to hand, palm, and finger in vv. 1-2.

⁴⁸The opening and the ending of this verse with the clause “do not know peace” is not just a repetition but a development of the idea. The opening refers to the deeds of the sinful people in which they became the victims of their own scheme, “they twisted for themselves.” The meaning of the clause *ידע שלום לא* *כל דרך בה לא* in 8bB can be multiple: (1) it may refer to those who committed these crimes and are the victims of their own scheme (“they twisted for themselves” 8bA); (2) those who follow the example of these crooked people (“all who walk in it” 8bB); or (3) to innocent victims, who did not involve themselves with all these crimes (cf. the conclusion of the confession in v. 15a “he that turned from evil became a prey”).

Isa 59:8a

8aA דרך שלום לא ידעו
8aB ואין משפט במעגלותם

The parallelism in 8a is chiasmic in structure and synonymous in nature: between מעגלה /

דרך; and the negative phrases אין / לא ידעו / משפט / שלום:

	C	B	A
8aA	דרך	שלום	לא ידעו
	A`	B`	C`
8aB	ואין	משפט	במעגלותם

The parallelism in 8b is more thematic in nature and the cola complement each other's idea: as 8bA presents what the people had done, 8bB gives its result:

Isa 59:8b

8bA נתיבותיהם עקשו להם
8bB כל דרך בה לא ידע שלום:

In the word-pair נתיבה / דרך, the reference to the track is completed with the activity of walking on that track; in עקש / לא ידע שלום, the crookedness of the track resulted in the absence of peace. This reference to peace makes v. 8 a conclusion of 3-8 by making a contrast between all of the unjust practices and *shalom*.⁴⁹ Furthermore, reference to שלום in the context of דרך and מסלה is significant, since throughout the

⁴⁹With reference to Isa 57:21, exegetes interpreted שלום here as "inner peace." For example, Young discusses about the "peace of God" in their hearts. *Isaiah*, 3:433. However, in the context of the description of the wrongdoing given in the previous verses, the theme of peace here has more to do with social conduct. This point illuminates the interconnection between inner peace and social conduct. See Delitzsch, who sees in the verse a portrayal of the people's inability to enjoy "of either inward or outward peace." *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:398.

book of Isaiah, the theme of the highway of the Lord is presented in the context of peace and redemption.⁵⁰

That the term “thoughts” receives a detailed elaboration using various words for “road” implies the usage of the terms “road” here as being both literal and metaphorical, and that there is a close interconnection between what people think and the course of life that they pursue.⁵¹ Another observation can be added here: in Proverbs, “highway” is a metaphor for the conduct of an “upright” person [ישר] (Prov 15:19; 16:17), but here in vv. 7-8, it refers to evil thoughts and practices. Furthermore, in the book of Isaiah, the term “highway” is employed in the context of God’s salvific activities intended for both his people and other nations (Isa 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 62:11), while here, the term is employed in the context of the violent activity of God’s people.⁵²

From stylistic and structural perspectives, some key themes seem to function as a uniting element between vv. 3-6 and 7-8. They are as follows:

(1) References to “hand” and “feet.” As v. 3 portrays, the hands and fingers of the people are defiled with blood and iniquity: כפיכם נגאלו בדם ואצבעותיכם בעון, “your palms are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity,” but here in v. 7, the feet are

⁵⁰Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 516. See Isa 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10.

⁵¹Koch explains that, figuratively, “*derekh* embraces both the course of life (as the ethically neutral unity of the life-story in which one participates passively rather than actively) and also “conduct” (as responsible and ethically accountable actions in specific periods of life).” Klaus Koch, “דרך,” *TDOT* 3:271-272. This background makes the parallelism מושבה / מסלה more understandable.

⁵²In Ps 84:6 מסלה is synonymous with the Lord himself: בך עוזלו אדם עוזלו בך, “Blessed is a man whose strength is in you [the Lord], *mesilloth* are in their heart.” As for the translation of *mesilloth*, some versions of the English Bible have “highways [to Zion]” (NASB; RSV) or “pilgrimage” (NIV; NKJ). Dahood interprets it as “extolments,” referring to the verb *yehalleluka*, “to praise you” in v. 5, arguing that one of the meanings of the root סלל is “to exalt.” *Psalm 50-100*, 281.

responsible for the evil and bloodshed: רגליהם לרע ירצו וימהרו לשפך דם נקי, “their feet run to evil, they hasten to shed innocent blood.” This reference to both hands and feet is intended to express the idea of totality, that the person as a whole is responsible for the evil deeds.⁵³ As the theme of “hand” is connected with the activity of “weaving” (v. 5), the theme of “foot” is connected with the activity of “walking” (vv. 7-8) and both the themes go in the same direction, to עון, “iniquity” and other acts of violence.

(2) There is a movement in the description of what the people think and what they put into action, as can be observed in Figure 15.

	Isa 59:4 הרו עמל they conceived trouble	Isa 59:7 מחשבותיהם מחשבות און their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity
What was in their mind		
What they did	והוליד און they gave birth to iniquity	שד ושבר במסלותם devastation and destruction are in their highways

Figure 15. Descriptions of progression from thought to practice in Isa 59:4 and 7

Another portrayal of the connection between what the people think and what they do can be perceived in the grammatical forms of vv. 6bA and 7bA:

6bA מעשיהם מעשי-און their [handi]works are [handi]works of iniquity
7bA מחשבותיהם מחשבות און their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity

In both cola, the verbs are in the cognate accusative form and they have the same object, און. These styles can be considered a device to emphasize that both the intellectual and

⁵³That reference to “feet” and “hands” as one context expresses the idea of totality see Gen 41:44; Ps 36:1; Ezek 6:11.

physical aspects of the people are responsible for their devastating behavior.

(3) The recurrence of the word און strengthens the continuation and development of ideas already presented in v. 4: דם and און in v. 3, and דם and רע in v. 7, followed by the pair of און and devastation in the following colon.

(4) What they did only bring harm to themselves, as can be presented in Figure 16.

What they did What they suffer	Isa 59:5 they hatch viper's egg those who eat the egg died from the hatched ones come out a viper	Isa 59:8 they make their ways crooked for themselves they did not experience peace
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Figure 16. Descriptions of connection between practice and its consequences in Isa 59:5 and 8

Stanza 3: Confession of the People (Isa 59:9-15a)

Beginning with vv. 9 to 15a, a new section begins, the confession of the people. As reference to the target audience in vv. 1-8 is in the third person, now the reference is in the first person. The introductory phrase . . . על-כן in v. 9 indicates the recipient of the message acknowledging the result of the collapse of justice within society. This affirmation is further signaled by a series using the causal conjunction כי in v. 12. From a thematic perspective, the confession that runs from v. 9 through to v. 15a can be divided into three sections based on their focus: (1) vv. 9-11 give the effect, focusing on what sin brings upon oneself ; (2) vv. 12-13a give the cause, focusing on how sin affects the relationship between the people and God; and (3) vv. 13b-15a go back to giving the effect, but now focusing more on the effect of the sin on the social setting.

Strophe 1: The Absence of Justice and Righteousness (Isa 59:9-11)

**Isa 59:9-11 – The Absence of Justice
and Righteousness**

9aA	על-כן רחק משפט ממונו
9aB	ולא תשיגנו צדקה
9bA	נקוה לאור והנה-חשך
9bB	לננהות באפלות נהלך
10aA	נגששה כעורים קיר
10aB	וכאין עינים נגששה
10bA	כשלנו בצהרים כנשף
10bB	באשמנים כמתים
11aA	נהמה כדבים כלנו
11aB	וכיונים הגה נהגה
11bA	נקוה למשפט ואין
11bB	לישועה רחקה ממונו

Translation

9aA	“Therefore, justice is far from us
9aB	righteousness does not overtake us.
9bA	We hope for light but behold, darkness
9bB	for brightness, but we walk in the gloom.
10aA	We grope like blind men along the wall
10aB	like those who have no eyes we grope.
10bA	We stumble at midday as in the twilight
10bB	among the vigorous like dead men;
11aA	growl like bears all of us
11aB	and like doves we moan.”
11bA	“We hope for justice but there is none
11bB	for salvation, but it is far from us.

Isa 59:9a – The Absence of Justice and Righteousness

9aA על־כן רחק משפט מומנו

9aB ולא תשיגנו צדקה

The adverb על־כן signifies a continuation of the thought of the previous section of vv. 3-8 and it also affirms the indictment presented there. The change of speaker to first person plural marks the beginning of a new section, the confession on the part of the people. This adverb על־כן covers both cola, and the parallelism here is semantic in nature: רחק / תשיגנו; לא / משפט; צדקה / משפט. The term רחק reminds of the announcement in Isa 59:1: that the hand of the Lord is not too short to save, but the deeds of the people had caused משפט to be far away. The word pair משפט / צדקה also reminds one of the command in Isa 56:1 to keep משפט / צדקה, for the Lord's salvation is "near," and in this particular context, the word רחק adds an element of irony, since the call in Isa 56:1 pertains to the "nearness" [קרוב] of salvation, just the opposite of רחק. The fact that the term רחק in Isa 57:9a is being paired with the phrase לא תשיגנו indicates that the ideal state of a society, the realm of משפט / צדקה, is not only far from reality, it is absent. The theme of the absence of justice is described further in the next bicola:

Isa 59:9b-10 – Overpowered by Darkness

Isa 59:9b

9bA נקוה לאור והנה־חשך

9bB לננהות באפלות נהלך

The *pi'el* form of the verbs נקוה and נהלך balances the cola. The parallelism is

synonymous between אור / נגהה and חשך / אפלה. The structure of the bicola is as follows:

	C	B	A
	נקוה לאור והנה-חשך		
A`	C`	B`	
לנגהות באפלות נהלך			

The *pi'el* form of the verbs intensifies the contrast between what had been hoped for with the actual reality of what the people had to go through; the exclamatory term הנה adds a nuance of a disappointed surprise, since what they have is the opposite of what had been expected.

The psychological aspect of what the people feel is portrayed in the movement of the thought, from what they are hoping for (the verb קוה), what they see (the exclamatory הנה), and what they are going through (the verb הלך). As the words חשך and אפלה both refer to the absence of light, אפלה has a connotation of gloominess, calamity, even death, and the plural form of the word intensifies these negative meanings.⁵⁴ The verb הלך in this verse serves as a connecting link between vv. 7-8 and vv. 9-11. The term refers back to variety of synonyms for דרך in vv. 7-8 and prepares for a further description of the “walking” in vv. 10-11.

⁵⁴In Job 10:22; 28:3 term אפלה has a connotation of death; and in Job 30:26 the word is paralleled with רע, “evil.” Amos 5:20 gives the absence of light and brightness as the characteristics of the day of the Lord with connotation of judgment. As in Isa 58:10 the promise there is that the gloom [אפלה] will become as bright as midday; here the people are expecting brightness but the reality is that they walk in the gloom.

Isa 59:10a

10aA נגששה כעורים קיר

10aB וכאין עינים נגששה

The emphasis of this bicola is on blindness: the parallelism is a reversal with

נגששה / נגששה; כעורים / עינים; כאין; the chiasmic structure is as follows:

B A
נגששה כעורים
A` B`
כאין עינים נגששה

The act of groping in the dark indicates a situation of helplessness and being powerless,⁵⁵

and this idea of being powerless is developed further in 10b:

Isa 59:10b

10bA כשלנו בצהרים כנשף

10bB באשמנים כמתים

The parallelism here is more on the thematic level. The comparative preposition כְּ on both cola indicates that the “darkness” experienced here is more internal than external in nature, since they stumbled at midday as if it were in twilight. That the emphasis is more on the internal state of the person is underlined in the next colon: “among the

⁵⁵McAllister states that in the Hebrew Bible blindness is associated with weakness, and he further concludes that “blindness held a special intensity in Israelite thought as a most profound and troubling condition.” Ray W. McAllister, “Theology of Blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2010), 361.

vigorous, we are just like dead ones.” This overall description of blindness and experiencing darkness during the midday, see Figure 17, echoes the blessing and curse in Deut 28, as one of the consequences of unfaithfulness to the covenant (v. 15)⁵⁶:

Deut 28:29	Isa 59:10-11
and you will <i>grobe</i> [משש] at <i>noon</i> [צהר] as the <i>blind</i> [העור] <i>grope</i> [משש] in <i>darkness</i> [אפלה] and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with <i>no one</i> [אין] to <i>save</i> [מושיע] you.	We <i>grobe</i> [משש] like <i>blind</i> men [העור] along the wall, like those who have no eyes we <i>grobe</i> [משש]. We stumble at <i>midday</i> [צהר] as in the twilight... We hope for justice but there is <i>none</i> [אין]; for <i>salvation</i> [ישועה] but it is far from us.

Figure 17. Comparison of the theme of blindness between Deut 28:29 and Isa 59:10-11

The description of walking and stumbling in the dark receives further elaboration, moving from the portrayal of physical movement to the mental state, as it was portrayed that they were sighing.⁵⁷

Isa 59:11a – Illustration from Animal World

11aA	נהמה כדבים כלנו
11aB	וכיונים הגה נהגה

⁵⁶Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 193.

⁵⁷For המה as an expression of inward agitation, groaning, see A. Baumann, “המה,” *TDOT*, 3:415; and for הגה as an utterance of inarticulate sounds see A. Negoitâ, “הגה,” *TDOT*, 3:321.

The parallelism is semantic: הַמִּזְחָה / הַגִּיהָ and דָּב / יוֹנָה. The structure is chiasmatic:

	B	A	
	נָהֲמָה	כְּדַבִּים	כָּלֵנוּ
	A`	B`	
	וּכְיוֹנִים	הַגִּיהָ	נִהְגָה

The noun כָּלֵנוּ indicates totality. Reference to the growling of bears leads some commentators to underline the element of aggressiveness here; however, this understanding does not comply with the tone of impotence in the surrounding context of this colon. Therefore the growling of bears corresponding to the moaning of doves refers to an unclear sound expressing helplessness.⁵⁸

Isa 59:11b – The Absence of Justice and Salvation

The ending of this verse repeats the theme of v. 9a, describing the discrepancy between hope and reality:

Isa 59:11b

11bA	נִקְוָה לְמִשְׁפָּט וְאֵין
11bB	לְיִשׁוּעָה רַחֲקָה מִמֶּנּוּ

The verb קוּה covers both cola, with the preposition לְ to specify the object; the parallelism is מִשְׁפָּט / יִשׁוּעָה; אֵין / רַחֲקָה. The first pair, מִשְׁפָּט / יִשׁוּעָה indicates that the meaning of “justice” expected in this particular verse is more salvific in nature than judicial. As in v. 9a, the pairing for מִשְׁפָּט is with צְדָקָה; the reappearance of the term

⁵⁸Koole, *Isaiah III*, 189.

משפט here serves as an *inclusio* for vv. 9-11, and yet that the word pair here in v. 11 that involves **ישועה** may be considered as a preparation of the thematic shift from self-reflection in vv. 9-11 to the confession of sin as the people see themselves in relation to God in vv. 12-13.

In their own context, vv. 9-11 are structured in a certain way:

9aA	על-כן רחק משפט ממנו
9aB	ולא תשיגנו צדקה
9bA	נקוה לאור והנה-חשך
9bB	לננהות באפלות נהלך
10aA	נגששה כעורים קיר
10aB	וכאין עינים נגששה
10bA	כשלנו בצהרים כנשף
10bB	באשמנים כמתים
11aA	נהמה כדבים כלנו
11aB	וכיונים הגה נהגה
11bA	נקוה למשפט ואין
11bB	לישועה רחקה ממנו

Both the beginning and the ending of this passage are concerned with the absence of **משפט**. That **משפט** is paired with **צדקה** in the beginning and paired with **ישועה** in the ending implies that the concern for “justice” here is on both the horizontal and vertical levels. **משפט** is further likened to “light” and its absence is compared to the experience of walking in darkness, and also like being blind. The walking is further depicted as stumbling and powerless; this state of powerlessness receives a more detailed description in the sighing that they have.

The description of “walking in the dark” in vv. 9-10 complements the portrayal of

the people “running in the highway” in vv. 7-8; they are basically looking at the same event from opposite angles. In terms of sinfulness, these people are running swiftly on a highway to arrive at what they are aiming at (vv. 7-8), but in the case of upholding justice and experiencing salvation, they are very slow, walking—a walk that is characterized by stumbling—in darkness.

Strophe 2: Confession of Transgressions (Isa 59:12-13)

Isa 59:12-13 – Confession of Transgressions

12aA	כִּי־רבו פשעינו נגדך
12aB	והטאותינו ענתה בנו
12bA	כִּי־פשעינו אתנו
12bB	ועונותינו ידענום
13aA	פשע וכחש ביהוה
13aB	ונסוג מאחר אלהינו
13bA	דבר־עשק וסרה
13bB	הרו והגו מלב דברי־שקר
Translation	
12aA	Because our transgressions are great before you
12aB	and our sins testify against us.
12bA	Because our transgressions are against us
12bB	and we acknowledge our iniquities:
13aA	transgressing and denying against the Lord
13aB	and turning away from after our God
13bA	speaking oppression and revolt
13bB	conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.”

The particle כִּי in v. 12 marks a new section. As vv. 9-11 focus on the effect of the absence of justice on the part of the people, vv. 12ff give the “cause” of the problem, with

the key words being **פשע**, **חטא**, and **עון**. The text is presented as a direct confession of the people to God, in which they address him in the second person singular and speak of themselves in the first person plural, showing a collective confession. This confession in vv. 12-13 has a structure of its own:

Against God	12	For our transgressions are multiplied against You
Against self		our sins testify against us
		our transgressions are against us
		we acknowledge our iniquities
Against God	13	transgressing and denying against the Lord
		turning away from our God
		speaking oppression and revolt
		conceiving and uttering from the heart, lying words

Verse 12 opens with the people's acknowledging their transgression against God, followed by self-accusation expressions concerning their sin; v. 13 gives the content of those acknowledged transgressions, with all the verbs in the infinitive form: the first half has a definite object of the action, that is against God, while the second half has no definite object.

Isa 59:12a – Reference to Transgression and Sin

12aA	כי־רבו פשעינו נגדך
12aB	וחטאותינו ענתה בנו

The quantitative expression **רב** covers both cola in order to portray the multitude of the transgressions.⁵⁹ The parallelism here is **פשעינו / חטאותינו**, which is

⁵⁹Kissane read the quantitative expression **רב**, “many” as the verb **ריב**, “to accuse.” *Isaiah*, 248. Thus the emphasis is more on the seriousness of the situation qualitatively than quantitatively. For Koole this kind of reading is a redundancy with the phrase **נגדך** in the end of the colon. *Isaiah III*, 190.

complementary, and נגדך / בנו ענתה, which is at the semantic level, expresses a situation of disadvantage on the part of the speaker. The nature of confession in this sentence is underlined by reference to two different objects of wrongdoing: against *you* in the first colon and against *us* in the second colon. The preposition כּ in the last phrase בנו can be read as adversative, comparable to the particle of the preposition נגד in the first colon.

Isa 59:12b – Reference to Transgression and Iniquity

12bA	כי־פשעינו אתנו
12bB	ועונתינו ידענום

In this bicola, the wrongdoings committed were acknowledged. The parallelism here is semantic in nature—פשעינו / עונתינו and אתנו / ידענום; our transgressions / our iniquities. Ronald J. Williams considered the preposition את in the sense of consciousness, parallel to ידע: and against us / we acknowledge.⁶⁰

Isa 59:13a – Confession of Sin against the Lord

13aA	פשע וכחש ביהוה
13aB	ונסוג מאחר אלהינו

Verse 13 is a continuation of the thought expressed in the last word of v. 12. As the phrase ידענום, “we acknowledge them,” concludes that verse, the next verse provides the content of that acknowledgment. The parallelism here is נסוג מאחר / פשע וכחש: the

⁶⁰Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 59.

verbs “transgressing” and “denying” receive a more concrete action: “turning away” and “from following” in colon B with the object **אלהינו / יהוה**. It is noticeable that the portrayal here has a personal note, as reference to the deity is **אלהינו**, “our God,” noting that a certain relationship exists between the two parties: the transgression is not a general one, it is something committed in the context of the covenant.

Isa 59:13b – Transgression through Speeches

13bA דבר־עשק וסרה
 13bB הרו והגו מלב דברי־שקר

The parallelism **הרו והגו / דבר** is more thematic in nature, while **עשק וסרה / דברי־שקר** is complementary. All the verbs employed here are in *pi’el* form, reflecting the intensity of the activity. In these bicolos, the order is reversed: colon A had one verb followed by two objects, while colon B had two verbs with one object:

Vb	Obj	Obj
speaking	oppression and revolt	
Vb	Vb	Obj
conceiving and uttering	[from the heart]	lying words

As the emphasis of colon A is the product, colon B gives more weight on the source from which the product comes: When the people are speaking of oppression and rebellion, it is because they had conceived and are uttering from their hearts the lying words—and all of these things had been done against God; no wonder the Lord did not hear them (v. 1).⁶¹

⁶¹While not discussing Isa 59 in particular, Jacques Derrida’s insight about the importance of “speaking” illuminates the seriousness of the situation in Isa 59:13 when people did not speak truth to each other:

Strophe 3: The Absence of Justice and
Righteousness (Isa 59:14-15a)

**Isa 59:14-15a – The Absence of Justice
and Righteousness**

14aA	והסג אחור משפט
14aB	וצדקה מרחוק תעמד
14bA	כי־כשלה ברחוב אמת
14bB	ונכחה לא־תוכל לבוא
15aA	ותהי האמת נעדרת
15aB	וסר מרע משתולל

Translation

14aA	“Justice is turned back
14aB	righteousness stands far away
14bA	for truth has stumbled in the street
14bB	and uprightness cannot enter
15aA	the truth is lacking
15aB	and one who turns aside from evil makes himself prey.”

The focus of vv. 14-15a returns to the effect of the absence of justice. The term

משפט appears again in the text.

**Isa 59:14a – Reference to
Justice and Truth**

14aA	והסג אחור משפט
14aB	וצדקה מרחוק תעמד

Each time I open my mouth, I am promising something. When I speak to you, I am telling you that I promise to tell you something, to tell you the truth. Even if I lie, the condition of my lie is that I promise to tell you the truth. So the promise is not just one speech act among others; every speech act is fundamentally a promise. This universal structure of promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice – that is what I call the messianic structure. John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University, 1997), 22-23.

This bicola has a chiastic structure, verb followed by noun in colon A and noun followed by verb in colon B. The parallelism is *סוג אַחור / מרחוק עמד* and *משפט / צדקה*. While *אַחור* is a noun, it is also an adverb,⁶² and, in this context, functions as an adverb with *סוג*.⁶³ The portrayal in this verse is thematically complementary to v. 9a. While there, the people are expecting *משפט*, yet it is “far” from them, and *צדקה* but it does not overtake them, here in v. 14a, *משפט* is portrayed as an object being pushed back and *צדקה*, as standing “far away.”

Isa 59:14b – Reference to Truth and Uprightness

14bA *כי־כשלה ברחוב אמת*

14bB *ונכחה לא־תוכל לבוא*

The verse is in chiastic structure: verb–noun–noun–verb; the parallelism is *כשל / לבוא לא־תוכל* and *נכחה / אמת*. The theme of the absence of justice within the community is being developed to a deeper level. As in 14a, justice exists but vaguely, in the distance; in 14b, it is totally absent.

The relationship between vv. 14a and 14b can be seen from at least two perspectives: (1) the preposition *כי* in 14bA can be read as temporal with the meaning of “when.” Reading thus, the portrayal is that justice turns back and righteousness stands afar (14a) *when* truth had fallen in the public square and integrity was not able to enter

⁶²Ernest Jenni, “אַחור,” *TLOT*, 1:83.

⁶³For the phrase *סוג אַחור* as an idiomatic expression see Pss 35:4; 40:15; 44:19; 70:3; 129:5; Isa 42:17; Jer 38:22; 46:5.

(14b). (2) Another reading is that the preposition כִּי has a causal sense with the meaning of “because,” and with this, justice turns back and righteousness stands afar (14a) *because* truth had fallen in the public square and integrity is not able to enter (14b). Both nuances of meaning can complement each other in the reading of this verse.

The content of v. 14 is not only a description of the direct result of the attitude and conduct depicted in vv. 12-13, but v. 14b is also closely connected with v. 10b. As in v. 10b, the people are confessing that they had “stumbled” and feel so “powerless;” here in v. 14b, it is “truth” that has “stumbled” and uprightness is “not able” to enter. This thematic relationship can be observed in Table 5.

Table 5. The structure of the confession of the people in Isa 59:9-15a

Absence of justice on personal level	Confession of sin	Absence of justice on social level
<p>9 <i>therefore</i> מִשְׁפָּט is far [רחק] from us צָרָה does not overtake us we hope for light but behold, darkness for brightness, but we walk in gloom 10 we grope like blind men along the wall like those who have no eyes we grope we stumble [כשל] at midday as in the twilight among the vigorous like dead men. 11 growl like bears all of us and like doves we moan we hope for מִשְׁפָּט but there is none for יְשׁוּעָה it is far [רחק] from us</p>	<p>12 <i>because</i> our transgressions are many before You and our sins testify against us <i>because</i> our transgressions are against us and we acknowledge our iniquities 13 transgressing and denying against the LORD and turning away from after our God speaking oppression and revolt conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words</p>	<p>14 מִשְׁפָּט is turned back צָרָה stands far away, רַחֵם for truth has stumbled [כשל] in the street and uprightness cannot enter 15 the truth is lacking and he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey</p>

Isa 26:10 described how the wicked, even after being shown a favor, will not learn צדק; he acts wrongfully [עויל] even in the land of uprightness [נכחה]. The term עויל refers to a general negative assessment of a person's behavior and actions as opposed to a specific deed or transgression.⁶⁴ In Amos 3:10, those who do not know how to practice נכחה pile up violence and destruction.⁶⁵ In Job 29:7, the word רחב, “public square,” is paralleled with “gate,” a place where justice is administered (Amos 5:10).⁶⁶ A comparison of Isa 59:14 with these verses may imply that all the evils were are not only being spoken and thought of (59:13), but they had been brought into action, revealing that the judicial system had totally collapsed.

Isa 59:15a – The Pious as Victim

15aA וַחֲדָי הָאֱמֶת נִעְדְּרָתָּ
 15aB וּסְרַ מִרַע מוֹשְׁתוֹלָלָּ

As the reference to “truth” in v. 14 is in a generic sense אמת, in 15a the word is האמת, “the truth.” In 14b אמת is paralleled with נכחה, “integrity,” which hints that the meaning of אמת there is more in the range of “reliability” or “fidelity,” this direction is supported by reference to “deceit” in v. 13 and the absence of משפט and צדקה in 14a.

Now the term האמת in 15a functions as a concluding term to summarize the whole

⁶⁴Josef Schreiner, “עויל,” *TDOT*, 10:524.

⁶⁵For חמס ושד as word-pair see Jer. 6:7; 20:8; Ezek. 45:9; Amos 3:10.

⁶⁶Koole, *Isaiah III*, 195-6; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 209.

phenomenon; that is why it has a definite article.⁶⁷ As a consequence of this total fall of “the truth,” those who turned aside from evil became a prey.⁶⁸ Koole observeds that while abstract nouns in the previous verses are used to portray the situation, the phrase **מִרְעֵ וְסֹר**, “the one who turns aside from evil,” points to a real person; it implies that the intervention by the Lord described in the following verses is intended to be a definite, real event.⁶⁹

While the act of “turning aside” from evil implies a pious intention, it did not convey an effort to stop or oppose evil; one just turned aside. It portrays how grievous is the situation: even those who are quietly turning aside from evil are already being **שָׁלַל**, “plundered,” a term for suffering a defeat in the context of war. This observation can be supported by the fact that v. 16 describes the Lord’s observation that no one has **פָּנַע**, which, while in this verse, is mostly translated as “to intercede,” the meaning of the word

⁶⁷While the connection between Isa 59:9-15 and Zechariah 8 is coincidental, the contrast between these two passages is worth observing: in Zechariah 8, as a result of the Lord’s return and dwelling in it, Jerusalem will be called **עִיר־הָאֱמֻנָה** (v. 3)—while most English translations read the name as “faithful city,” it is more properly translated as “city of truth.” Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 647; and it is a unique designation for Jerusalem. See Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, ed., William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, no. 25B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 413 and Ben C. Ollenburger, “The Book of Zechariah,” *NIB* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 7:795. The passage depicts old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem (v. 4); the street of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing (5); they shall be God’s people and the Lord will be their God “in truth and righteousness” (v. 8). In Isaiah 59, on the other hand, the people are transgressing against, denying against the Lord and turn away from him, with the result that righteousness stands far away and truth has stumbled in the street, and those who turn aside from evil become a prey. As in the description in Zechariah 8, God’s promise for protection from enemies (v. 10), in Isaiah 59 all the chaos that the people suffer comes from among themselves.

⁶⁸In wisdom literature to turn aside from evil indicates that one fears the Lord (Prov 3:7; 16:6; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3).

⁶⁹Koole, *Isaiah III*, 197.

includes to encounter with hostility, to attack, to strike down, even to kill.⁷⁰ So the use of the term here may imply an expectation that somebody will confront this unfavorable social reality.⁷¹ The fact that the verbs **סור**, **שלל**, and **פגע** occur in the same context and all are in the participial form indicates that the actions are connected to each other.⁷² That no one is able to confront this gravity of the evil, that even those who turn aside are already being plundered, compels the Lord to confront the situation himself.

While the style of repetition is employed consistently in the previous verses where the thought or theme of the first colon is being repeated in the second colon, v. 15 is unique in the sense that the logic is more linear in nature, with no repetition:

truth is lacking – he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey
the Lord saw – it is evil in his sight that there is no justice.

Stanza 4: God’s Saving Acts (Isa 59:15b-21)

Isaiah 59 is concluded with a report of God’s intervention on behalf of his people. The description of the action is given in a detailed step by step: it starts with he sees, followed by his assessment of the situation, then a portrayal of his putting on battle equipment, climaxed by his action and its effect. The stanza is closed by God’s reestablishing a covenant with his people.

⁷⁰See *BDB*, 803; *DCH*, 6:648-649 and Paul Maiberger, “פגע,” *TDOT* 11:471 for “killing” as one the nuances of meaning of the word.

⁷¹Maiberger understands the context of the passage suggests that the participial form of **פגע** here refers to “intervention with deeds rather than words.” *Ibid.*, 474. In Delitzsch’s description, it is an action to “form a wall against the coming ruin, and cover the rent with his body.” *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:404.

⁷²Motyer arranges the emphasis of Isa 59:14-15a from the perspective of a moral situation as (1) the disappearing of moral absolutes (v. 14a), (2) the collapse of public morality (v. 14b), and (3) individual moral character is under a threat (v. 15a). *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 491.

Strophe 1: God's Reaction (Isa 59:15b-16a)

Isa 59:15b-16a – God's Reaction

15bA	וירא יהוה
15bB	וירע בעיניו כי־אין משפט:
16aA	וירא כי־אין איש
16aB	וישתומם כי אין מפגיע
Translation	

- 15bA “And the Lord saw,
15bB and it is evil in his eyes that there is no justice.
16aA And he saw that there is no one,
16aB and it amazed him that no one intervenes.

Isa 59:15b – What God Sees

15bA	וירא יהוה
15bB	וירע בעיניו כי־אין משפט:

Verse 15b reports both physical and mental activities: as 15bA has the action of seeing, 15bB gives the conclusion based on what has been seen. While most English versions translate the clause **וירע בעיניו כי־אין משפט** in 15bB as “and it *displeased* him that there is no justice,” the literal expression in Hebrew is stronger: “and it was *evil* in his eyes that there is no justice.” This clause . . . **וירא יהוה וירע**, besides giving an implication of the meaning, also creates a rhyme. Furthermore, the verb **רע** also functions as a thematic link between v. 14 and v. 15 with the structure of **משפט - רע - רע - משפט**; in v. 14aA, the absence of **משפט** introduces the situation, with **רע** functioning as the concluding catchword in 15aB; as the Lord sees, it is **רע** in his eyes that there is no **משפט**, as the structure shows:

14aA	והסג אחור משפט	A
15aB	וסר מרע משתולל	B
15bB	וירע בעיניו	B'
	כי־אין משפט	A'

The report that God “sees” hints that a solution for the problem is dawning on the horizon. In the Flood (Gen 6:5) and Exodus (3:7) narratives, when it is pointed out that God sees, the implication is that he assumes his role as a judge, that he no longer plays the role of an observer or spectator, but he will be directly involved in the event. In the immediate context of Isaiah 59, the fact that God sees is in contrast with the blindness of the people in v. 10.⁷³ In the wider context of Isaiah 56-59, contrast can also be made with the “watchmen” of the people in 56:10 who were blind and impotent, with the result that the righteous perished. The action of God’s seeing is also paralleled with 57:18: “I have seen his ways . . .” which is the turning point of the passage (56:9-57:21), an occasion when God brings healing and comfort to the rebellious people.⁷⁴

Isa 59:16a – Report of God’s Assessment

While v. 16a is almost a repetition of 15b, since both contain a report of the “seeing” activity, it is also an expansion, since there is an expectation from God that someone would come to intervene, but to his astonishment, there is no one:

15bA	וירא יהוה
15bB	וירע בעיניו כי־אין משפט:
16aA	וירא כי־אין איש
16aB	וישתומם כי אין מפגיע

⁷³Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 29n73.

⁷⁴Koole, *Isaiah III*, 198.

The parallelism is ראה / שמם; כִּי־אֵין / כִּי־אֵישׁ; and they are both synonymous and syntactical: a verb with a conjunction followed by the negative particle כִּי־אֵין and reference to a human as object.

There is a transition here from the confession of the people to the action of the Lord, in which the initial action on the part of the Lord is that He “sees.” The seeing on the part of the Lord here is comparable with the one in Isa 57:18; in both texts, his reaction after he sees is unexpected, and it brings salvation. What follows is a report of his response, because what he saw compels him into action, and the imagery of his action is like a warrior going into battle (v. 16) putting on necessary equipment (v. 17), followed by the purpose of the battle (v. 18). The effect of the intervention (v. 19a) and the action itself are described in v. 19b, with the concluding reflection on what has been done in v. 20.

Strophe 2: God’s Putting on Battle Equipment (Isa 59:16b-17)

Isa 59:16b-17 – God’s Putting on Battle Equipment

16bA	ותושע לו זרעו
16bB	וצדקתו היא סמכתהו:
17aA	וילבש צדקה כשרין
17aB	וכובע ישועה בראשו
17bA	בגדי נקם תלבשת
17bB	ויעט כמעיל קנאה:

Translation

16bA	“And his arm saved him
16bB	and his righteousness upheld him.
17aA	And he put on righteousness as breastplate
17aB	and he put on helmet of salvation on his head.
17bA	Garment of vengeance he put on
17bB	and wrapped as [a] cloak, zeal.”

The description in vv. 16b-19 is in the form of a theophany.⁷⁵ The structure of the passage is as follows: vv. 16-17 focus on what the Lord does to himself, beginning with the foundation or legitimacy of his actions in v. 16 and the putting on of the battle wardrobe in v. 17; verse 18 hints at what he will do; and v. 19 describes the effect of what he has done. Verse 16b, which is the beginning of the passage, gives a general portrayal of the whole event.

Isa 59:16b – Reference to Arm

16bA	ותושע לו זרעו
16bB	וצדקתו היא סמכתהו:

From a grammatical perspective, the structure of this bicola is a–b–b–a, since it consists of verb–noun–noun–verb, and based on this structure of pairing the verbs and nouns, the parallelism is “to save / to sustain,” ישע / סמכ; and “his arm / his righteousness,” זרע / צדקה. Usually, “the arm” of the Lord is stretched to save his

⁷⁵Reading the direction of the logic of the text with its movement from problem to solution, the report of that act of *seeing* on God’s part in vv. 15b and 16a can be directly followed with his act of *coming* in v. 20. The purpose of the detailed description of God’s preparing to enter battle and presenting himself as a warrior in vv. 16b-19 has more to do with the theological message of the greater context of Isaiah 56-59, as will be explored below.

people,⁷⁶ and he is also known as the sustainer of the righteous.⁷⁷ However, here in this verse, it is his arm that saves him and his righteousness sustains him.⁷⁸ It is plausible that this description is to underline his self-sufficiency;⁷⁹ as the Lord is about to save and restore righteousness, he is the embodiment of salvation and righteousness. It may also express the certainty of the result of God’s intervention, which is victory and vindication.⁸⁰

⁷⁶It is particularly a technical term for the Exodus event (see Exod 6:6; 15:16; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8); Blenkinsopp notes that the dominant metaphor for divine power is His arm. *Isaiah 56-66*, 198. Ginsberg observes the significance of the usage of expression “arm of YHWH” in the context of divine salvific activities in the later part of the book of Isaiah. He points out how in Isa 51-63 there is “an unusual concentration of locution in which the arm of YHWH figures” (see Isa 51:5a, 5b, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8; 63:5, 12). He further shows, there are only fourteen other appearances of the figure of the arm of YHWH outside Isa 51-63, in which three are in the book of Isaiah (30:30; 33:2; and 40:10) and eight of them in the book of Psalms (Ps 44:4; 71:18; 77:16; 79:11; 89:11, 14, 22; 98:1). In his analysis he comes to a conclusion that “the Psalms passages serve as models, or inspiration, for all of the ‘arm of YHWH’ passages in Deutero-Isaiah.” Harold Louis Ginsberg, “The Arm of YHWH in Isaiah 51-63 and the Text of Isa 53:10-11,” *JBL* 77 (1958): 152-153.

⁷⁷See Pss 54:4; 3:5; 37:17; 71:5; 145:14.

⁷⁸Whybray considers the expression as “strange.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 227. For Croatto this is “interesting.” *Imaginar el Futuro*, 177. It is possible that to make the text more sensible, LXX and the Targum translate the verse as “his arm delivered them” and “his righteousness supported them.” See Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 525.

⁷⁹Westermann notes that “the one thing that v. 16b wants to bring out is that, as he intervenes, God is quite alone.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 350.

⁸⁰Blenkinsopp translates the verse as “his own arm won him victory / his triumphant power sustained him.” *Isaiah 56-66*, 194. For Ginsberg, a comparison can be made between Ps 98:1b-2a with Isa 59:16b since they share common vocabulary and context. “The Arm of YHWH,” 154. Ps 98:1b-2 reads as follow:

הושיעה-לו ימינו וזרוע קדשו	brings him salvation, his right hand and his holy arm
הודיע יהוה ישועתו	the Lord made known his salvation
לעיני הגוים גלה צדקתו:	before the eyes of the nations he revealed his righteousness.

The wording of Ps 98:1b and Isa 59:16bA is almost identical:

Isa 59:16bA	והושע לו זרעו
Ps 98:1b	הושיעה-לו ימינו וזרוע קדשו

The phrase הושיעה-לו in Ps 98:1b is translated as “gained him victory” in several English versions (New American Standard, New King James, New Revised Standard, The Anchor Bible), so the same translation can also be applied to the clause והושע לו זרעו in Isa 59:16b: “gained him victory, his arm.” Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 194. The context of Ps 98 is God’s vindication of Israel before the nations (see v. 3) and

However, from a lexical perspective, the word pairs can also be read as ישע / זרע / סמוך and צדקה.⁸¹ It seems that the use of the terms ישע and צדקה here has a literary purpose, since from a practical perspective, the report of God’s intervention can be just “his arm upholds him.” However, the verse, instead, poetically reads,

- (a) saved him, (b) his arm
- (b’) his righteousness (a’) upheld him.

Structurally, the use of these root words ישע and צדק has a function beyond a poetical purpose. In Isa 56:1 the audience is encouraged to keep משפט and do צדקה in the context that divine ישוע is “about,” literally “near” [קרב] “to come” [בוא] and his צדקה to be revealed. However, the confession of the people about their spiritual and moral failure in Isaiah 59 shows a close connection with this announcement at the beginning of Isaiah 56. In Isa 59:9, they realized how משפט is רחק, “far”—just the opposite of קרב in Isa 56:1—and צדקה did not overtake the society. In Isa 59:11, they are hoping for משפט and there is none, for ישוע, yet it is moving afar [רחק]. In Isa 59:14, משפט is reportedly being turned back, while צדקה, is standing “afar” [רחק]. The repetitive usage of the root רחק with regard to three roots, ישע, צדק and משפט, shows that the purpose of the command in Isa 56:1 is very far off target. The people had failed in the preparation needed for the

God’s rulership over the nations in righteousness (v. 9), and the same thought is also underlined in Isa 59:16-19. Childs sees connection between this verse of Isaiah and Deut 32:35, the Lord will act to vindicate his people, when he sees (ראה) that their hand (יד) (strength) is exhausted and nothing remains. *Isaiah*, 489.

There is also similarity of vocabulary between Isa 59:16b and 63:5. See Wolfgang Lau, *Schriftgelehrte Prophetie in Jes 56-66: eine Untersuchung zu den Literarischen Bezügen in den Letzten elf Kapiteln des Jesajabuches* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 218 and Childs, *Isaiah*, 489. However, the recipient of the actions and the context are considered different from the one in Isaiah 59 since the word in Isa 63:1-6 “can only be used of an intervention against foes from without.” Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 351.

⁸¹The idea that the arm is upholding also appears in Isa 63:5; and righteousness is presented as a word pair with salvation, see among others, Pss 71:15; 98:2; Isa 46:13; 51:5, 6, 8; 61:10; 62:1.

coming of God’s salvation; this plan of salvation is at risk of being jeopardized. With this background, the poetical expression here in 59:16b with reference to ישע and צדקה is an answer to this problem—to emphasize that the plan of salvation will still succeed with God’s intervention. As v.16b is the beginning of the description of God’s intervention characterized by the terms ישע and צדקה, this report will be closed with the term בוא in vv. 19 and 20, making a link with God’s announcement וצדקתי לבוא ישועתי in Isa 56:1b.⁸²

Furthermore, in the context of Isaiah 59, the description of what the Lord is doing in Isa 59:16b also shows connection with Isa 59:1 and therefore can be considered as an answer to the problem presented at the beginning of the chapter as shown in Figure 18.

v. 1	v. 16
behold, the hand [יד] of the Lord is not too short to save [ישע] nor his ears too heavy to listen	and the Lord sees . . . and his arm [זרע] brings him salvation [ישוע]; his righteousness upheld him

Figure 18. Comparison of Isa 59:1 and 16 as a description of the problem of sin and its solution

While there is different vocabulary: יד in v. 1 and זרע in v. 16, some English versions have “arm” for both words; it is possible that they see a connection between the two verses.⁸³ As in v. 1, the prophet is arguing that the hand of the Lord is not too short to

⁸²In Isa 56-59 the root בוא appears only in these three verses. The invitation to “come” in Isa 56:9 and 12 is given by the term אהה, while in 57:3, it is given by קרב.

⁸³See NIV, NJB, JPS, also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 184.

“save” [ישע]; in v. 16 he reports that the arm of the Lord brings him salvation in which the root word ישע is employed.

Isa 59:17a – Reference to Breastplate and Helmet

17aA	וילבש צדקה כשרין
17aB	וכובע ישועה בראשו

As the first half of v. 17 concerns the salvific aspect of divine intervention, the second half focuses more on the punitive aspect. The content makes this verse the connecting link between the previous part of the passage and what follows. The use of the term צדקה in v. 17aA is a continuation of the line of thought of v. 16, while the theme of נקם in v. 17b is expanded in v. 18.

In Isa 59:17a, the verb לבש covers both cola; the pair is צדקה / ישועה; שרין / כובע (breastplate / helmet); the repetition of צדקה and ישועה is similar to the description in v. 16b and also functions as a link between this verse and the opening verses of chap. 59,⁸⁴ even referring back to the opening of Isaiah 56, since there, the Lord announces that “‘my salvation’ [ישועתי] is about to come and ‘my righteousness’ [צדקתי] is about to be revealed,” while here in Isa 59:17, he comes with these attributes being put on as battle

⁸⁴Koole, *Isaiah III*, 199.

clothing.⁸⁵ In v. 11, the people are hoping that salvation and righteousness are to be realized in their society. The problem here is that they would like to achieve them in their own way, not in God's way. Salvation and righteousness are always the attributes of God; although the people are waiting and longing for this, they want it without God.⁸⁶

⁸⁵The opening verse of 56:1 calls for keeping of *משפט* and doing *צדקה* as an anticipation of God's *ישוע* that is about to be revealed. However, in Isaiah 59, the failure to perform this task is repeatedly mentioned. The prophet observes that "nobody 'sues' in *צדק* and *משפט* honestly" (v. 4). The people confess how "*משפט* is far from us, and *צדקה* does not overtake us" (v. 9); "*משפט* is turned back and *צדקה* stands far away" (v. 14). It is significant to note that, against this context, God is portrayed as a warrior preparing to enter into battle with breastplate of *צדקה* and helmet of *ישועה*. As Oswalt has noted, the concentration of the terms of *משפט*, *צדק* and *ישוע* in 56:1 reappear in Isa 59: 4, 9 and 14. "Righteousness in Isaiah," 1:188.

With regard to the connection between righteousness and salvation, Koch explains the issue as follows:

"Righteousness, either divine or human, always implies salvation. This is a very important factor in the OT view of human existence. If we translate *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* with *righteousness*—and there scarcely is another possibility in English, then the translation is rather inadequate. The range of meaning of the two Hebrew nouns is much wider. They not only refer to a moral mind set and moral behavior, but also include a harmony of the person performing it with the surrounding society and nature. Thus *tsedaqah* includes the connotation of health, wealth, reputation, in short every kind of salvation. He who acts righteously will certainly become happy and blessed in the course of time. An evildoer, however, will end in distress and disaster. On both sides there is an invisible as well as inseparable connection between deed and destiny. Whoever performs righteousness will live out of that righteousness, whereas whoever performs iniquity, will die in that iniquity. It belongs to the order of creation that every sinner harms primarily himself and every just person earns happiness. Commonly no divine intervention is necessary for this process. So righteousness and salvation are in the end one and the same thing." Klaus Koch, "Prophetic Metahistory and the Rise of Eschatology in the Book of Isaiah," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 9.

⁸⁶In contrast to what happened here in Isaiah 59, Ps 44:3 (4 Heb.) is worth mentioning. When the psalmist looked back at the nation's history of conquest and occupation of the promised land, the description goes as follow:

for not by their sword did they (the ancestors) possess the land
nor did their arm [זרוע] give them salvation/victory [ישע] to them
but your right hand and your arm [זרוע]
and the light of your face
because you favored them

The unique thing is that the author is creative in his portrayal of what happened, emphasizing exclusively the power and grace of God. For Crow, the psalm does not necessarily follow the account found in the Hexateuch, only preserves the most important element. Loren D. Crow, "The Rhetoric of Psalm 44," *ZAW* 104 (1992): 395. Anderson elaborates it more in his comment: "[I]n retrospect all the heroic exploits of the ancestors were entirely overshadowed by Yahweh's deed of salvation; when a man of God reviews the history of his own people, from the point of view of his faith, then the details of human effort simply merge into the total work of God. Sometimes the relative values must be deliberately over-emphasized to avoid the temptation to become arrogant and proud." *Psalms 1-72*, 338-339.

Standing as a unit in itself, vv. 16b-17a create a chiasmic structure with the root words **ישע** and **צדק** as the structuring element⁸⁷:

16bA	ותושע לו זרעו	A
16bB	וצדקתו היא סמכתהו:	B
17aA	וילבש צדקה כשריין	B'
17aB	וכובע ישועה בראשו	A'

As the whole poetic sequence is approaching its climax with a description of divine salvific intervention and the fact that the divine act is described with repetitive usage of the root words **ישע** and **צדק**, a macro-structuring device of the whole poem can be perceived in Isa 56-59. The usage of these particular words echoes the initial announcement in the opening of the poem “. . . my salvation [**ישע**] is about to come and my righteousness [**צדק**] to be revealed” (56:1b), meaning that this intervention is the realization of the announcement.

Having said that, v. 17 can, at the same time, be considered as a unit in itself, describing the activity of putting on various battle attire, with the repetition of the root verb **לבש** at the beginning of both bicola as the device to strengthening the theme:

17aA	וילבש צדקה כשריין
17aB	וכובע ישועה בראשו
17bA	וילבש בגדי נקם חלבשת
17bB	ויעט כמעיל קנאה:

In this verse, the description is of the Lord as a warrior putting on his battle attire: breastplate, helmet, garment and mantle. The description or symbolism of the attire in 17a

⁸⁷Koole, *Isaiah III*, 201.

is opposite in nature from the one in 17b: righteousness / salvation with vengeance / zeal. This composition implies that instead of differentiating between salvation and judgment, in this verse, the opposite concept is presented as one package.⁸⁸ Basically, the description of the battle attire that God is putting on is the expected result of the battle itself. It is worth noting that there is no reference to any weapon: this portrayal emphasizes the fact that merely his presence brings righteousness and salvation into reality—without any fight.⁸⁹

Isa 59:17b – Reference to Garment

17bA	בגדי נקם תלבשת
17bB	ויעט כמעיל קנאה:

As in 17a, the verb לבש covers both cola; here in v. 17b, the verb לבש is parallel to a different verb—לבש / עטה; בגד / מעיל; נקם / קנאה—and they form a semantic parallelism — putting on / wrapping; garment / mantle; vengeance / zeal. As 17a focuses on the salvific aspect of divine intervention, 17b focuses on the punitive. However, both portrayals stay on the level of dressing up for battle, not the fight of the battle itself.

⁸⁸Motyer notes that “righteousness, salvation, vengeance, and zeal are all aspects of the divine nature. . . . It is a work which will display and satisfy his righteousness, save his people, repay his foes and be carried through to completion by the driving motivation of divine zeal.” *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 491. For Westermann this description of the attributes here is to anticipate the outcome: “an event with two aspects of it, salvation for the devout (v. 17a), and retribution upon the transgressors (foes) (v. 17b). *Isaiah 40-66*, 351.

⁸⁹Compare to Ugaritic Myths of The Baal Cycle, in which Baal’s battle fight involves weapons such as cudgel, clubs, and bludgeon. See Pritchard, *ANET*, 130. Here, in Isaiah, reference to any weapon is absent. Smith’s comment on the comparison between the Baal Text and Psalm 92 may also be applicable to our discussion: while Baal’s victory is won through waging a struggle, Yahweh’s battle is cast in moral terms. Mark Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Introduction With Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU1.1.-1.2*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 337.

Actually, in the whole passage, there is no report of the battle at all. The actual action that the Lord performs is בא, “to come,” in vv 19 and 20. The expansion of the description in 17b is given further in v. 18.

Strophe 3: God’s Actions and Their Effects (Isa 59:18-21)

Isa 59:18-21 – God’s Actions and Their Effects

18aA	כעל גמלות	
18aB	כעל ישלם	
18bA	חמה לצריו	
18bB	גמול לאיביו	
18cA	לאיים גמול ישלם:	
19aA	וייראו ממצערב את־שם יהוה	
19aB	וממזרח־שמש את־כבודו	
19bA	כִּי־יבוא כנהר צר	
19bB	רוח יהוה נססה בו:	
20aA	ובא לציון גואל	
20aB	ולשבי פשע ביעקב	
20bA	נאם יהוה:	
21aA		ואני
21aB		זאת בריתי אותם
21aC	אמר יהוה	
21bA	אשר עליך	
21bB	ודברי אשר־שמתי בפִּיךָ	
21cA	לא־ימושו מפִּיךָ	
21cB	ומפי זרעך	
21cC	ומפי זרע זרעך	
21dA	אמר יהוה	
21dB	מעתה ועד־עולם: ס	

Translation

- 18aA “According to deeds
18aB accordingly he will repay -
18bA wrath to his adversaries
18bB recompense to his enemies.
18cA To the coastlands he will fully repay
19aA so they will fear, from west, the name of the Lord
19aB and from the rising of the sun, his glory.
19bA For he will come like a rushing stream
19bB which the wind of the Lord drives it.”
20aA And come, to Zion, redeemer
20aB to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,”
20bA Says the Lord.
21aA “As for me,
21aB this is My covenant with them.”
21aC says the Lord:
21bA “My Spirit, which is upon you
21bB and My words, which I put on your mouth
21cA will not depart from your mouth
21cB and from the mouth of your descendants
21cC and from the mouth of the descendant of your descendants,”
21dA says the Lord
21dB “from now until forever.”

Isa 59:18 – Repayment to the Enemies

- 18aA כעל גמלות
18aB כעל ישלם
18bA חמה לצריו
18bB גמול לאיביו
18c לאיים גמול ישלם:

Repetition of words: כעל - 2x, גמול - 3x, ישלם - 2x, in a verse consisting of 11

words, the repetition of three words is significantly high. The parallelism is צַר / אֵיב / איים; גְּמוּלָה / גְּמוּלוֹת; חַמָּה / גְּמוּלָה. While the terms גְּמוּלָה and חַמָּה reappear in this verse, the term חַמָּה stands out in a distinct way: recompense and payment are in the form of “wrath.” However, unlike human wrath, the חַמָּה of the Lord is mostly viewed in a positive way in the Hebrew Bible. It is a reaction to human misconduct contrary to his will, an interference with his sovereignty and power.⁹⁰

Reading it literally, the first bicola, v. 18aAB does not have any specific object: “according to deeds / accordingly he will repay.”⁹¹ Whose deeds the text is referring to, is not specified. The next bicola, v. 19bAB, gives further information of the activity of the first bicola: wrath to his adversaries / retribution to his enemies. Based on this structure, the גְּמוּלָה here is in the form of wrath, and the object of this wrath and recompense here is “his enemies.”⁹² The last colon complements the context of the first two bicola in which the adversaries / enemies are paralleled with “distant islands.” This makes some

⁹⁰K. D. Schunk, “חַמָּה,” *TDOT*, 4:464.

⁹¹The expression in this verse contains aspects of *lex talionis* principle (see Exod 21:23-25; Lev 24:19-20; and Deut 19:21).

⁹²Croatto reads v. 18 as a chiasmic structure

A	a	según los <u>actos</u> (<i>gemulôt</i>)	
	b	(tanto) <u>pagará</u> (<i>yešallem</i>)	
X	a	<i>ira</i>	para-sus-opresores
	b	retribución (<i>gemûl</i>)	para-sus-enemigos.
			para las islas
B	a'	el <u>merecido</u> (<i>gemûl</i>)	
	b'	<u>pagará</u> (<i>yešallem</i>)	

For him the X section, which focuses on the enemies, serves as hinge to move on from the oppressors inside the community (topic of the previous strophes) to the external ones, represented in the motif of the islands. *Imaginar el Futuro*, 182-183. Middlemas also understands the identity of the enemy is both foreign nations and Israel. “Divine Reversal,” 166.

commentators consider that the enemy concerned here are the nations outside of Israel.⁹³

The problem with this conclusion is that the context of this act of retribution on the part of God is presented as his response to what happened within the nation, among his people, especially after their confession (vv. 9-15). However, already in Isaiah 56, there is an indication that what God performs for his people has universal implications: the announcement of the coming salvation is directly connected to the eunuchs and foreigners. Thus, it is possible that, here, the judgment upon his people may also have universal effect.⁹⁴

Isa 59:19a – The Effect of God’s Action

19aA וייראו ממוערב את־שם יהוה

19aB ומזרח־שמש את־כבודו

The verb **ירא** governs both cola, and the the parallelism is syntactical: reference to location followed by the attribute of the Lord as the object. The parallelism of **ממוערב** and **מזרח־שמש** is complementary, underlining totality, while **שם יהוה / כבודו** is a synonymous parallelism.

The verb **ירא** that governs the bicola here is mostly translated as “fear” in the English versions of the Bible, which is understandable, since this text suggests the

⁹³For Blenkinsopp, the adversaries are external to Israel because the effect of the divine action is on the east, west, distant areas and beyond. *Isaiah 56-66*, 197. Others who also consider the enemies as external are Fischer, *Isaias*, 170 and Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 695; while those who consider them as the unrepentant members within the community are Kendall, “Mišpat,” 399-400; Sekine, *Sammlung*, 133; Volz, *Jesaja II*, 236; and Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 226.

⁹⁴For Motyer, “the performance of the particular work (redeeming Zion) secures a worldwide result.” *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 492.

context of judgment and punishment.⁹⁵ The meaning of “fear” in this line of thinking is a reaction when one feels insecure, threatened and in danger.⁹⁶ However, there is another nuance of meaning of the term ירא that plays a significant role in this particular context. Whybray explains that the aspects of fear encompassed by ירא includes terror, respect, and worship. Terror and worship are, in a sense, a polar opposite: the former is characteristic of complete anxiety while the latter suggests trust.⁹⁷ The aspect of respect, however, can be a weakened sense of fear or worship. Therefore, the concept of terror can be weakened to express respect, which can once again be intensified to express worship.⁹⁸ Bernard Bamberger summarizes the biblical concept of fear and love of the Lord as follows: “In the OT fear and love of the Deity are not urged as motives for the good life,

⁹⁵Oswalt shows how the precise meaning of the term “fear” here depends on the reading “chosen” for the second bicola of the verse. It can be fearing God in a positive sense or a fear of the terror of retribution. *Isaiah 40-66*, 529-530.

⁹⁶Brueggemann notes that “the actual implementation of Yahweh’s rule is first of all negative—vengeance and fury.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 201. Blenkinsopp writes, “[h]ence, people far beyond the traditional jurisdiction of Israel’s God will fear (not ‘revere’) his name and glory.” *Isaiah 56-66*, 199.

⁹⁷Exod 20 reports, when the Israelites perceive the thunder, lightning flashes, sound of trumpet, and mount Sinai smoking, they trembled (v. 18). Then Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, ירא, for God has come to test you, and in order that the fear, יראה, of him may remain with you. . .” (v. 20).

⁹⁸Miles V. van Pelt and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “ירא” *NIDOTTE*, 2:528. In Deut 10:12 the verb ירא has as its parallel the verbs הלך, “to walk”; אהב, “to love”; and עבד, “to serve/worship”; therefore, as Barré describes, the fear of God “was no mere ‘attitude’ but involved the full range of humanity’s response to the deity.” Michael Barré, “‘Fear of God’ and the World View of Wisdom” *BTB* 11 [(1981): 43. For Otto, instead of conveying the notion of enervating terror, ירא rather produced overpowering awe in the presence of the wholly other. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy; An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (New York: Oxford University, 1958), 13-23. So the connotation of the phrase “to fear the Lord” in Isa 59:19a can be summarized with the words of Kooy: “[T]here is a certain ambiguity in fear. It moves between dread before the deity, which is more than reverence, and a feeling of attraction and gratitude to God that expresses itself in worship and obedience. Thus the concept יראה ארני includes fear but also reverence, faith, and love.” Vernon Kooy, “The Fear and Love of God in Deuteronomy” in *Grace upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Lester J. Kuyper*, ed. James I. Cook (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 113.

but are themselves the good life. They are not means, but ends.”⁹⁹ Commenting on the fear of Israel’s God among the Gentiles, he writes: “[But] more is implied than mere terror. The hope that the Gentiles will fear Jhwh means the hope that that they will recognize his divinity, and acquiring a wholesome respect for his power, will change their attitude toward his chosen people.”¹⁰⁰

From a structural perspective, there is a play of sound between the verbs **רָאָה** and **יָרָא**. As Isa 59:15 reports that the Lord “sees” and, as a response, he takes action to what is happening, here in v. 18 the ends of the earth “fear” what he has done—so they assume the role of witness, because what they see gives further nuance of meaning to the term **יָרָא** here: what they see is “the name of the Lord / his splendor”; the emphasis is more on his character, not on the devastating result of the retribution. That both ends of the earth, west and east, will “fear” the name and glory of the Lord as a result of what he has done, completes the portrayal of retribution to God’s enemies in the distant lands in v. 18. The first half of the verse (to the sun) refers to the nations of the world, not, as enemies, but as seeing God’s action described in verse 18 and so, being constrained to acknowledge this manifestation of his power, an idea frequently found in the latter part of the book of Isaiah.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Bernard J. Bamberger, “Fear and Love of God in the Old Testament,” *HUCA* 6 (1929): 39-40.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰¹Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 227-228.

Isa 59:19b – Portrayal of the Coming of the Lord

19bA כִּי־יָבוֹא כְּנֹהַר צָר
19bB רוּחַ יְהוָה נֹסְסָה בוֹ:

This bicola is more a continuous sentence than a parallelism. Commentators admit that this particular verse is problematic. This results in various readings, and each of the readings is not free from difficulties. The problem lies in determining which word stands as the subject and the identity of this subject. If the subject is in the word יָבוֹא, then the reading will be “for *he will come* like a rushing stream / [which] the wind of the Lord drives.” Here the subject is the Lord himself, a continuation of the theme that began in v. 15b. Reading it this way, the coming of the Lord is compared to natural forces, a storm.¹⁰² However, following Jerome, Daniel Kendall considers that reference to רוּחַ יְהוָה, “spirit of the Lord,” here is more as a purifying power, comparable to Isa 57:13.¹⁰³

Another possibility is to consider the word צָר as the subject of the sentence, with the meaning of “envoy.” With this, the phrase כְּנֹהַר, “like a river/stream,” functions as a metaphor for the envoy, and the reading goes: “for an *envoy* will come as light / the spirit of the Lord waves *him* as a flag.” This envoy is God’s agent as a redeemer against the established order of the community.¹⁰⁴ From another angle, the word צָר can also mean “enemy,” and the text portrays a confrontation: “*when an adversary comes* streaming in /

¹⁰²See among others, Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 228 and Muilenburg, *Isaiah 40-66*, 695. For Westermann the description of the Lord’s advent “as an elemental action that shakes the cosmos.” *Isaiah 40-66*, 351. This kind of reading is reflected in most English versions of the Bible.

¹⁰³Kendall, “Mišpat,” 401.

¹⁰⁴Rofé, “Isaiah 59:19,” 409.

the Spirit of the Lord lifts a banner *against him*.” This reading has the word נססה, which is usually translated as “to drive along,” to be understood as “banner,” derived from נס.¹⁰⁵

The problem with the first reading, portraying the Lord coming like a flooding river, is in the meaning of word צר, that it has to be different from the one in v. 18. Furthermore, it is an incongruity for likening the Lord to a river that his own breath drives along.¹⁰⁶ Against the second reading, with the meaning of צר as “envoy,” the portrayal throughout vv. 15b-19 seems to be that the Lord is acting alone; reference to an envoy will negate this emphasis.¹⁰⁷ With the third reading, צר as “enemy,” the problem lies in the fact that in v. 18b, the enemy is referred to in the plural form, צריי and איביי, since here and in the verses previous to v. 19, a singular form always refers to God.¹⁰⁸ In this regard, Joseph Alexander proposes that God acts both as an enemy and redeemer. He argues that “enemy” is a relative expression and God is always represented as being in opposition to the wicked world. Furthermore, he prefers the reading of the prepositional phrase בו at the end of the verse to be “in it” instead of “against him” when referring to

¹⁰⁵Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 492. This kind of reading can be found in the New King James and the New International’s alternative reading.

¹⁰⁶Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953), 2:376.

¹⁰⁷While reference to an envoy here may stand as a contrast to Isa 57:8-9, in which being so removed from the Lord (v. 8) the people send envoys to distant places looking for help (v. 9), Rofé seems to contradict himself when he explains that “the redemption of Israel as a result of the Lord’s direct intervention into human history. . . How in detail this is going to happen we are nowhere told. Here, perhaps, we have an answer: an envoy of the Lord is about to appear in Jerusalem, to function as a redeemer. . .” “Isaiah 59:19,” 409.

¹⁰⁸Koole, *Isaiah III*, 207.

“the triumphant flag or signal erected in the stream itself and floating on its waves as it is approached.”¹⁰⁹

Isa 59:20 – The Lord as Redeemer

20aA	ובא לציון גואל
20aB	ולשבי פשע ביעקב
20bA	נאם יהוה:

The verb **בוא** covers both indirect objects in this verse: **ציון** and **שבי פשע ביעקב**; both are the recipients of the action of the coming of the Redeemer, and here Zion is being identified with “those who turn from rebellion among Jacob.” Thus, the coming of the Redeemer covers two objects: locative, “Zion” and personnel, “a certain type of people among Jacob.”¹¹⁰ However, the LXX has the phrase **ולשבי פשע ביעקב** in 20aB as $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\epsilon\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\sigma\epsilon\beta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\ \text{I}\alpha\kappa\omega\beta$ in which the word **ולשבי** is emended as $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\epsilon\iota$ [וישב], and the phrase become **וישב פשע ביעקב**, which means “and he shall turn away transgression from Jacob.” This reading is more a description of the purpose of the coming of the Redeemer. While both readings are plausible,¹¹¹ the reading of the MT is preferable in the context of the structure of the passage. At the end of the previous section

¹⁰⁹Alexander, *Isaiah*, 2:376-377. His reading of v. 19 is as follows:
and they shall fear from the west *the name of Jehovah*
and from the rising of the sun *his glory*
for *it* shall come like a straitened stream
the spirit of Jehovah raising a banner in *it*

¹¹⁰Only those who are rightly prepared share in the glorious coming of the redeemer. See Polan, *Ways of Justice*, 302 and Koole, *Isaiah III*, 211.

¹¹¹William L. Holladay, *The Root Subh in the Old Testament; with Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 141.

of vv. 9-15a, reference is made to those who “turn aside” [סור] from evil, and they become a prey (59:15a). Now, at the end of this section, the beneficiaries of the acts of God are those who “turn away” [שוב] from rebellion among Jacob. While the meaning of the term סור is more on the aspect of physical movement and שוב has more a religious aspect, they both refer to an action of turning from/to/for something, and therefore can be an interconnection for both sections: on the one hand they become an object for disaster [שלל] but on the other hand, they become an object of redemption [גואל].

Reference to Zion in v. 20 is the climax in Isaiah 56-59 since it is the first time this proper name appears. Prior to this, reference to location is more by a metaphoric or generic term, but now this particular name, Zion, is used.¹¹² There is a development of the idea from the hill country of Canaan, the mountainous part of the land of Israel, to Zion; that is why, in Isa 58:14, it is the heights of the earth which are being equated to the heritage of Jacob.¹¹³ The fact that the one who comes to Zion is a “Redeemer” in the

¹¹²Studies have been made on the importance of Zion in the book of Isaiah. For Laato this is the theme that unites the whole book of Isaiah: “First and foremost, Zion plays a major role in the theology of said religious group [the group that responsible for the present form of the book of Isaiah]. The book of Isaiah argues in many different ways that both the fate of the people and its future are linked with Zion.” Antti Laato, *“About Zion I will not be silent”: The Book of Isaiah as an Ideological Unity* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998), 209. Other works that discuss the importance of the theme Zion in the book of Isaiah are Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 174; Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion’s Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah—Reassessment of Isaiah 26-39* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991); Ronald E. Clements, “Zion as Symbol and Political Reality: A Central Isaianic Quest” in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, ed. J. Van Ruiten and M. Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University, 1997), 3-17; and H. J. Hermisson, “Die Frau Zion” in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, ed. J. Van Ruiten and M. Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University, 1997), 19-39.

¹¹³Commenting on the phrase “the mount of your heritage” in Exod 15:16, Clifford writes, “The usual interpretation of the “mount of thy heritage” is the mountain of the temple in Jerusalem, and in later times this was indeed how the verse was understood. Yet the poem is too early to have depicted originally Israelite Mount Zion. The ‘mount of heritage’ must have originally meant the hill country of Canaan as Yahweh’s special heritage.” Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972), 139.

clauses in v. 20a is a loaded expression. Koole shows how the term **גואל** is paired with the term “savior” [מושיע] in 60:16; 49:26; 62:11; 63:9. Based on this, he considers that the term **גואל** in v. 20 functions as an *inclusio* to the reference to the verb **ישע** in 59:1.¹¹⁴ For Karl Elliger, the verb **בוא** in this verse functions as an *inclusio* with the same term in Isa 56:1, where God’s salvation is about “to come” [בוא].¹¹⁵ By this, the promise of the Lord’s coming in the opening of Isaiah 56 is fulfilled by his actual coming in the ending of Isaiah 59.¹¹⁶ The formal speech formula **נאם יהוה** at the end of the verse functions to underline (1) the seriousness of the judgment announced, and at the same time, (2) the certainty of the promise of deliverance and (3) the necessity of repentance.¹¹⁷

Isa 59:21 – (Re-)Establishment of the Covenant

21aA		ואני
21aB		זאת בריתי אותם
21aC		אמר יהוה
21bA		אשר עליך
21bB		ודברי אשר-שמתי בפוך

¹¹⁴Koole, *Isaiah III*, 209.

¹¹⁵Elliger, “Tritojesaja,” 122.

¹¹⁶Polan sees the movement of Isaiah 56-59 as when promise becomes reality through the Lord’s action of his coming. *Ways of Justice*, 302.

¹¹⁷Koole, *Ibid.*, 211.

21cA	לא־ימושו מפִּיךָ
21cB	וּמִפִּי זֶרַעךָ
21cC	וּמִפִּי זֶרַע זֶרַעךָ
21dA	אָמַר יְהוָה
21dB	מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם: ס

In its immediate context, the speech in Isa 59:21 is a continuation of the action performed in v. 20. The beneficiaries of the covenant being referred to in the phrase **זאת** **אתם**, “this is my covenant with them,” are those “who have turned aside from transgression in Jacob.”¹¹⁸ As v. 20 portrays the coming of the Redeemer to intervene with the cause/effect of sin, here in v. 21, his activity is more focused on redeeming the people from the power of sin through the endowment of his spirit and his word.

However, in a broader context, the divine speech formula in this last verse of Isaiah 59 balanced the opening of the divine speech at the beginning of Isaiah 56, and both have reference to the covenant [**ברית**], as observed in Table 6.

As in the opening of Isaiah 56, the promise of salvation is connected, among other things, with those who hold to God’s **ברית**; here, at the end of Isaiah 59, the **ברית** is an assurance of the longevity (eternal nature) of the salvific work that God has just done for his people. This assurance can be seen in the word **ואני** which functions as an emphasis.

In v. 21b the promise of the covenant involves two particular things: the bestowment of God’s Spirit and his word. That God’s Spirit is a dominant agent of his salvific work has already been presented in the ending of Isa 57, and this referral to God’s

¹¹⁸Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” 6:502.

Table 6. Interconnection between introduction and conclusion of Isa 56-59 from the perspective of covenant

Isa 56:1a	כה אמר יהוה
4a	כי־כה אמר יהוה לסריסים
4bA	אשר ישמרו את־שבתותי
4bB	ובחרו באשר חפצתי
4bC	ומחזיקים בבריתי:
Isa 59:21aAB	זאת בריתי אותם
21aC	אמר יהוה

Spirit makes the ending of Isaiah 59 comparable with the ending of Isaiah 57.¹¹⁹

Regarding the promise of putting God’s word in the mouth of his people and their descendants, “speaking” plays an important role throughout Isaiah 56-59. In Isa 56:3, the foreigner speaks about alienation and the eunuch speaks expressing hopelessness; in Isa 57:3, “the children of sorcerers and descendants of adulterers” are jesting and opening their mouth against the Lord; in Isa 58:13, “the house of Jacob” are discouraged from “speaking a word” on the Sabbath; and reference is made to lying lips in 59:3. That this promise is given to the recipients and also their descendants, echoes the calling of the addressees as “children” and “posterity” of sorcerers, adulterers and prostitutes in Isa 57:3. The promise that God will put his word on the lips of the people makes Nehama

¹¹⁹This comparison is more sensible as one sees Isaiah 56-59 as parallel passages of Isaiah 56-57 and 58-59. See Steck, “Beobachtungen,” 228-246.

Aschkenasy's observation of the importance of "language" in the Bible worth quoting here:

Language in biblical literature is much more than a medium of communication, or a necessary vehicle of social interaction. It is more than a means for men and women to converse with God and express their spirituality. . .

Countering the notion that language was created by people to facilitate and expand human interaction, the Bible offers the idea of language as preceding human life and utilized by God in the unparalleled and never-to-be-repeated act of creation. Human languages is thus an imitation of the divine word, and as such it is anchored in holiness. Abuse of language is as much as sin as abuse of anything else created by God. For the human tongue to bear false witness, to pronounce God's name in vain, or to utter blasphemy is defiance of God and desecration of His word. The loss of God has been expressed as an inability to hear the word of God. Spiritual alienation is estrangement from language.¹²⁰

The act of God's putting his word in the mouth of the people can be understood in different ways: first, it echoes a kind of prophetic characteristic in Biblical tradition, as can be read in the accounts of Balaam: the narrator reports, "Then the Lord put a *word* in Balaam's *mouth*" (Num 23:5, 16); Balaam is also quoted as saying the same thing: "The *word* that God puts in my *mouth*, thus I shall speak" (Num 22:38); after Elijah revived her dead son, the Zarephath widow declared, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and the *word of God in your mouth* is truth" (1 Kg 17:24). However, from another perspective, it is more probable that this promise from God has more to do with enabling his people to obey faithfully his commands, just as Moses exhorts the sons of Israel "to listen to the voice of the Lord, to keep his commandments and his statutes, to turn to the Lord with all heart and soul" (Deut 30:10); he states that "the '*word*,' [דבר] is very near you, it is in your *mouth* and in your heart, that you may keep it" (Deut 30:14).

¹²⁰Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1998), 118-119.

The Thematic Structure of Isa 59

The focus of this section is to highlight the thematic structure of Isaiah 59. A thematic progression is observable in this chapter of the book of Isaiah. To begin, the theme that was introduced in the opening part of the poem finds its climax in its ending. The opening part speaks about the absence of salvation in terms of a gap between the Lord and the people. The portrayal of this gap uses the imagery of God's hand and ear—that he is accused of not reaching out to nor hearing his people (v. 1). In the ending, the coming of salvation is in terms of God's coming in person as Redeemer of his people (v. 20), with the imagery, among others, of his own arm bringing about salvation to him (v. 16). Beside this thematic progression, throughout the poem, between the introduction and the climax, another thematic dynamic is also at work.

In the first stanza, the false concept that God's hand is too short to save and his ear is too heavy to hear is explained by pointing to the iniquity and sin committed by the people with particular reference to palm of hand, finger, lip and tongue. This reference is a poetical device to match God's hand and ear: that the problem is not with God's hand, but more with the people; nor with his ear but because of their speeches (v. 3). Reference to lip and tongue receives further emphasis with a description of the absence of truthfulness in the court setting (v. 4). This description of what happens in the court uses the terms תהו and שוא, which implies disorder and futility, and this theme is developed further in the second stanza.

The description of the futility of evil deeds in the second stanza is opened with an illustration from the animal world. First, the people are likened to one who hatches viper eggs and/or weaves a spider web. The result is that their weaving cannot be used as

clothing and those who eat the eggs died. Referring to the illustration of weaving a spider web, the phrase to describe the situation is that “they will not be able to cover themselves with their ‘works’ [מעשה].” Building on this illustration is a description of the sinful deeds of the people, being emphasized as “their works [מעשה] is the work [מעשה] of iniquity, and handiwork of violence is in their hands” (v. 6b). The description goes further to highlight how they sin with hand, feet and thoughts. Developing the theme of “feet,” the poem elaborates sin in terms of “ways,” using the terms of “highways,” “road,” and “path.” To emphasize this imagery of “way,” the opening and ending of v. 8 is a play between the words “way,” “peace,” and “do not know”: . . . לא ידעו: . . . כל דרך בה לא ידע on it does not know peace.”

The third stanza contains the confession of the people regarding their sin with its consequences. It opens with an emphatic particle על-כן, “therefore,” justice is far from us, righteousness does not overtake us. The words for “justice” and “righteousness” here are משפט and צדקה, and the fact that they are “far” [רחק] makes this confession a contradictory echo of the call in Isa 56:1, “keep justice [משפט] do righteousness [צדקה]; for it is near [כי-קרובה] for my salvation to come” The next part of the confession describes the consequential effects of sin with the imagery of “darkness.” This description is a contradictory echo of the promises in Isa 58, in which the blessings of God’s presence is in the terms of “light”: “Then your light [אור] will break out like the dawn . . .” (v. 8); “your light [אור] will rise in darkness [השך] and your gloom [אפלות] like midday [צהר]” (v. 10). On the contrary, here in Isa 59, the people acknowledged, “we hope for light

[אור] but behold, darkness [השך] for brightness, but we walk in the gloom [אפלה]” (v. 9); “we stumble at midday [צהר] as in the twilight” (v. 10). The focus of the third part of the confession is an expression of frustration on the part of the confessors, using imagery from the animal world: “all of us growl like bears, moan like doves” (v. 11). Just like the accusation in the second stanza refers to the animal, the same device is used here. As the first three parts of the confession is more a reflection on what had happened, the final part is a direct speech toward God (vv. 12-13).

The fourth stanza reports God’s response to the problem. It opens with God’s assessment of the situation, followed by his response. The description of God’s action is in the terms of bringing about both salvation (vv. 16-17a) and judgment (vv. 17b-18); the scale of its effect is both universal (vv. 18c-19) and particular, with specific reference to Zion and Jacob (v. 20).

In Isaiah 59, the themes of justice and salvation are interconnected primarily through the distribution of the words **שפט**, **צדק** and **ישועה**. First, all stanzas are connected by a repeated recurrence of the words **שפט** and **צדק** as presented in Table 7.

The distribution of **שפט** and **צדק** in this poem seems to have a certain pattern. In stanzas 1, 2 and 4, the root **שפט** is consistently employed in the context of a behavior or performance of a human, while **צדקה**, as it appears in stanza 4, is consistently an action attributed to God. In stanza 3, both terms are employed in the speech of the people, referring to what they are missing. The pattern of the distribution of these keywords reflects the notion in Isa 56:1—that a human is expected to perform justice [to keep

Table 7. Distribution of the words משפט and צדקה in Isaiah 59

Stanza 1 (vv. 1-4)	Stanza 2 (vv. 5-8)	Stanza 3 (vv. 9-15a)	Stanza 4 (vv. 15b-21)
- no one pleads [משפט] in faithfulness (v. 4)	- there is no justice [משפט] in their tracks (v. 8)	- “justice [משפט] is far from us, righteousness [צדקה] does not overtake us” (v. 9) - “we hope for justice [משפט] but there is none” (v. 11) - “justice [משפט] is turned back, righteousness [צדקה] stands far away” (v. 14)	- “the Lord saw, it is evil in his eyes that there is no justice [משפט] (v. 15) - “his righteousness [צדקה] upheld him (v. 16) - “he puts on righteousness [צדקה] as a breastplate” (v. 17)

משפט / do צדקה], as God promises his salvation [my ישועה is about to come / my צדקה is about to be revealed].

At the same time, this theme of justice is intersected with the theme of salvation. The particular term that serves as a connection is צדקה: on the one hand it covers the concept of justice, and on the other hand, salvation. First, the chapter opens with an assurance that God’s hand is not too short to save [ישע]. In the third stanza, as the people reflect on their gloomy situation, they say, “We hope for justice [משפט] but there is none / for salvation, ישועה, it is far from us” (v. 11). Finally, in the fourth stanza, with its focus on God’s salvific intervention for his people, the text reports, “His own arm brought salvation [ישועה] to him / his righteousness [צדקה] upheld him (v. 16). Furthermore, the

text portrays his preparation for the battle: “he put on righteousness [צדקה] like a breastplate / and a helmet of salvation [ישועה] on his head.

In conclusion, as the verse by verse analysis conducted in the earlier part of this chapter focuses on an interconnection between the verses on its micro level, this thematic overview of the chapter indicates a certain thematic structure in this particular chapter of the book of Isaiah and upholds the chapter’s unity.

CHAPTER 6

SYNTHESIS, REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

The task of this study is twofold. The first, is to perform a verse-by-verse reading of Isa 56-59 with the purpose of detecting various literary devices and techniques utilized to integrate and unify this portion of the book of Isaiah. This task has been undertaken in chaps. 2 to 5 of this study. The result of the reading implies that whatever the original provenance of the individual poems or even its segments, there is a possibility to read Isa 56-59 as a cycle of poems constituting a literary unit. The present form of the text indicates some kind of connections, even a continuous line of thought, throughout the four poems.

The second task of the study, which is to be accomplished in this chapter, is to explore the themes of justice, cult, and salvation as they are found in Isa 56-59, and the interconnection among these themes as the focus of the overall theological message of the poems in Isa 56-59. This goal is to be accomplished through several steps: first, by identifying and classifying vocabulary and expressions of justice, cult, and salvation as they are found in each of the poems in Isa 56-59. Second, an analysis of thematic interconnections among four poems in Isa 56-59 will also be conducted. Third, based on these data, the themes of justice, cult, and salvation will be analyzed, described, and specified. Fourth, interconnection among these three central themes in this section of the

book of Isaiah will be specified. Finally, the implications and conclusions of the study will be presented.

Terminology of Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 56-59

The purpose of this section is to highlight the vocabulary employed in Isa 56-59 in connection with the themes of justice, cult, and salvation. The presentation is divided into four parts, according to their poetic divisions: Isa 56:1-8; Isa 56:9-57:21; 58:1-13; and 59:1-21.

Terminology of Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 56:1-8

Terminology of justice, cult, and salvation as they are found in Isa 56:1-8 are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Terminology of justice, cult, and salvation in Isa 56:1-8

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
1	שמרו משפט ועשו צדקה		כי־קרובה ישועתי לבוא צדקתי להגלות
2	שמר ידו מעשות כל־רע		אשרי אנוש יעשה־זאת
3			(1) הבדל יבדילני יהוה מעל עמו (2) הן אני עץ יבש
5		בביתי ובחומתי	ונתתי להם... יד ושם...
6		הנלויים על־יהוה לשרתו להיות לו לעבדים	

Table 8—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
7		(1) שמחתים בבית תפלתי (2) עולתיהם וזבחיהם לרצון על-מזבחי (3) בית-תפלה	והביאותים אל-הר קדשי
8			(1) יהוה מקבץ נדחי ישראל (2) עוד אקבץ עליו לנקבציו

Translation

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
1	(1) keep justice (2) do righteousness		for it is near (for) my salvation to come and my righteousness to be revealed
2	keeping his hand from doing all evil		blessed is the man who does it
3			(1) surely, the Lord will separate me from his people (2) I am a dry tree
5		within my house and my walls	I will give them... a memorial and a name...
6		who join themselves to the Lord to serve him... to become to him servants	

Table 8—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
7		(1) [I will] make them joyful in my house of prayer (2) their burnt offerings and their sacrifice will be acceptable in my altar (3) “a house of prayer”	and I will cause them to come to my holy mountain
8			(1) the Lord God, the gatherer of the dispersed Israel (2) also I will gather unto him those who have been gathered

Terminology of Justice

In the poem of Isa 56:1-8 the terminology of justice is found in the command in the initial part of the poem to keep justice and do righteousness (v. 1), and in the pronouncement of blessing to “a son of man who keeps his hand from doing all evil” (v. 2). In the context of justice, the first reference is a command, while the second is the implementation of it.

Terminology of Cult

Cultic terms in this poem are found in the promise of salvation extended by God. First, they are traceable in the locative description God’s salvific action: for the eunuchs it will be “within my house and my walls” (v. 5), while the foreigners he will bring to “my holy mountain,” which is also “my house of prayer” (v. 7); which will be called “a house

of prayer for all people” (v. 8). In this poem, references to cultic activities are used to describe the motivation for foreigners to join the Lord, which is described as “to serve him” [לשרתו], a technical term for ministry in the tabernacle/temple, and “to become to him servants” (v. 6). The salvation enjoyed by the foreigners portrayed as the Lord will make them “joyful,” and “their offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar” (v. 7).

Terminology of Salvation

In this poem, terminology for salvation is presented to cover several perspectives. The first, is from God’s perspective, in which he announces that his “salvation” is about to come and that his “righteousness” is about to be revealed (v. 1). This announcement is coupled with blessing/happiness [אשרי] extended to all humanity (v. 2).

The second perspective is that of the foreigner and eunuchs, who are quoted as being excluded from the promised salvation. The foreigners’ complaint, that “for sure God will separate me from becoming his people” (v. 3), is an expression of fear of denial to an access to salvation. In the same vein, the eunuchs lament over their condition as a “dry tree” (v. 3), an expression of hopelessness about the future, even an implication of “death.”

In response, God makes a promise specifically directed to these marginal groups within the society. To the eunuchs, the promise is giving a “memorial” and a “name” within “my house and my walls”; to the foreigners, the promise is that he will “bring” them to his mountain (v. 7). Salvific vocabulary is further employed for the description of God’s act of “gathering,” which seems to be directed to his people, “Israel,” as can be

detected in the divine epithet employed as he performs this act: “the gatherer of the dispersed Israel” (v. 8).

Terminology of Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 56:9-57:21

Terminology of justice, cult, and salvation as they are found in Isa 56:9-57:21 are listed in Table 9.

Table 9. Terminology of justice, cult, and salvation in Isa 56:9-57:21

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
56:11	(1) והכלבים עזי-נפש לא ידעו שבעה (2) והמה רעים לא ידעו הבין (3) כלם לדרכם פנו איש לבצעו מקצהו		
57:1	(1) הצדיק אבד ואין איש שם על-לב (2) ואנשי-חסד נאספים באין מבין (3) כי-מפני הרעה נאסף הצדיק		
3		ואתם קרבו-הנה בני עננה זרע מנאף ותזנה	
4		על-מי תתענגו על-מי תרחיבו פה תאריכו לשון הלוא-אתם ילדי-פשע זרע שקר	
5		(1) הנחמים באלים תחת כל-עץ רענן (2) שחטי הילדים בנחלים תחת סעפי הסלעים	

Table 9—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
6		(1) בחלקי-נחל חלקך הם הם גורלך (2) גם-להם שפכת נסך העלית מנחה (3) העל אלה אנחם	
7		על הר-גבה ונשא שמת משכבך גם-שם עלית לזבח זבח	
8		ואחר הדלת והמזוזה שמת זכרוןך כי מאתי גלית ותעלי הרבת משכבך ותכרת-לך מהם אהבת משכבם יד חזית	
12			אני אניד צדקתך ואת-מעשיך ולא יועילוך
13			בזעקך יצילך קבוציך ואת-כלם ישא-רוח יקח- הבלם והחוסה בי ינחל-ארץ ויירש הר-קדשי
14			ואמר סלו-סלו פנו-דרך הרימו מכשול מדרך עמי
15			כי כה אמר רם ונשא שכן עד וקדוש שמו מרום וקדוש אשכון ואת-דכא ושפל-רוח להחיות רוח שפלים ולחיות לב נדכאים
16			כי לא לעולם אריב ולא לנצח אקצוף

Table 9—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
			כי־רוח מלפני יעטוף ונשמות אני עשיתי
17	בעון בצעו קצפתי ואכהו הסתר ואקצף וילך שובב בדרך לבו:		
18			דרכיו ראיתי לו וארפאהו ואנחהו ואשלם נחמים ולאבליו:
19			בורא נוב שפתים שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב אמר יהוה ורפאתיו
20			והרשעים כים נגרש כי השקט לא יוכל ויגרשו מימיו רפש וטיט אין שלום
21			אמר אלהי לרשעים

Translation

Vv.	Justice / No Justice	Cult	Salvation / No Salvation
56:11	(1) and the dogs had great appetite they do not know satiation (2) while they are watchers / shepherds - they do n'ot have understanding (3) all after their own ways before them, each, unjust gain, all of them		

Table 9—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No Justice	Cult	Salvation / No Salvation
57:1	(1) the righteous perished and no one put it into the heart (2) devout men were taken away, while no one considers (3) it is from [because] of the evil that the righteous is being taken away		
3		and you, come near, sons of sorcerers descendants of adulterer and harlot	
4		at whom you make jest? at whom you open wide mouth, sticking out your tongue ? aren't you not children of rebellion, descendants of deceit?	
5		(1) who inflames himself among the oaks under every green tree (2) slaughtering the children in the wadis under the cleft of the crag	
6		(1) among the smooth stones of the wadis is your portion they, they are your lot (2) also unto them you pour drink offering, you offer grain offering. (3) upon these things, should I appease myself?	

Table 9—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No Justice	Cult	Salvation / No Salvation
7		upon a mountain, high and lofty, you set your bed, and upon it, you climb to offer sacrifices	
8		“Behind door and doorpost, you set up your remembrances. Because far from me, you uncovered, you climb, you make wide your bed. You make agreement with them for yourself, you loved their bed, you envisioned an ‘arm.’”	
12			“I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, yet they will not profit you.”
13			“When you cry out, let your collections deliver you...” “But those who take refuge in me will inherit the earth, and will possess my holy mountain.”
14			And it was said: “Build up, build up! Prepare the way! Remove obstacle! From the way of my people.”
15			“High and holy, I dwell yet [I were] with the crushed and low in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the broken hearted.”

Table 9—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No Justice	Cult	Salvation / No Salvation
16			“Because I will not contend for ever and will not always angry. Because a spirit from me will weaken and the breath of life I have made.”
17	“Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid my face and was angry, and he went on turning away, in the way of his heart.”		
18			“His ways I have seen, but I will heal him, and I will lead him, and I will restore comfort for him and his mourners.”
19			“Creating fruit of the lips: peace, peace to the far and to the near...” “and I will heal him.”
20			“But the wicked, are like tossed sea; for to be quiet, they are not able. And the water tossed up mire and dirt.” “There is no peace...”
21			“for the wicked.”

Terminology of Justice

In Isa 56:9-57:21 the vocabulary of justice is employed mainly to describe the absence or lack of that justice. The first reference is for those who are in the position of leadership and are referred to as “shepherds/watchers,” terminology with a connotation of protector and upholder of justice. The poem highlights their failure to perform their expected duty, and portrays them as dogs unable to bark, having a great appetite and not knowing satiation. They were further described as “not having understanding” [לא ידעו] [הבין] all of them just following their own ways, and each of them seeking unjust gain (56: 11).

As a result of this lack of justice, the righteous have perished—and no one cares about it [אין איש שם על-לב]; the pious person has disappeared because of a lack of understanding; it is because of evil that the righteous are wiped away (Isa 57:1). The two verses above, Isa 56:11 and 57:1, describe a cause-and-effect situation in the realm of justice: the lack of interest and capability on the part of the leaders has its effect on the righteous who become the victims of injustice. Finally, as God reflects on what had gone on, the failure on the part of the leadership is summarized as “the iniquity of unjust gain” [בצעו בעון] which underlines the idea of injustice (v. 17).

Terminology of Cult

Cultic terminology is employed in this poem to describe the idolatrous activity of the people. First, these idolaters are identified as the descendant of sorcerers, adulterers and prostitutes (v. 3), which, in the prophetic writings connotes unfaithfulness toward the Lord. Their attitudes are described as sticking out their tongues, and opening wide their

mouths against the Lord, since they are “children of rebellion.” Those gestures are considered as a direct offense against God (v. 4).

The poem goes on to portray the idolatrous activities of the people in connection with cult: inflaming themselves, slaughtering children (v. 5); pouring drink offering, offering grain offering (v. 6); and offering sacrifice (v. 7). The location of these activities is described as among the oaks, in the ravines (v. 5), among the stones of the wadi (v. 6), and also on the “high and lofty mountain” (v. 7).

Terminology of Salvation

With regard to the theme of salvation, the poem speaks of both its absence and its presence. As regards the absence of salvation, in a statement resembling announcement of judgment, God is quoted as saying that he wants to declare the righteousness and deeds of the people, yet those deeds will not benefit them (v. 12). As a criticism, God even tells the people to let their collection of idols deliver them, yet the wind will blow these idols up; while in contrast, those who take refuge in God will inherit the land (v. 13).

Description of God’s salvific works is first described in vv. 14-16. It opens with a command to built up and remove obstacles from the way of “my people” (v. 14). A reversal of the appellative description of the prophet’s audience is a significant sign of a salvific process. As before they were addressed as descendants of sorcerers, adulterers, and prostitutes (v. 3), and as “children of rebellion,” and “offspring of deceit” (v. 4), now they are addressed as “my people” (v. 14). Furthermore, God is portrayed as giving them a word of assurance: just as he is high and exalted, living forever and having a holy name, yet he is with those who are crushed and lowly in spirit, “to revive” the spirit of the lowly

and the crushed heart (v. 15). The expression used for God’s action is literally “to give life” [להחיות] which is also an expression for a resurrection from death (cf. 2 Kg 13:21).

The reason for this salvific act on the part of the Lord is stated: “because I will not contend forever, nor will always be angry” (v. 16). A further description of the saving act on the part of the Lord is given in vv. 18-19, an action characterized as healing, leading, restoring, and even creating [ברא] with the ultimate result of “wholeness” [שלם].

However, despite all of these salvific act by the Lord, the wicked are not able to enjoy it; they are likened to a tossing sea, not able to be quiet; there is no “peace” [שלם] for the wicked (vv. 20-21).

Terminology of Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 58:1-14

Terminology of justice, cult, and salvation as they are found in Isa 58:1-14 are listed in Table 10.

Table 10. Terminology of justice, cult, and salvation in Isa 58:1-14

vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
1		הגד לעמי פשעם ולבית יעקב חטאתם:	
2a		ואותי יום יום ידרשון עשה ודעת דרכי יחפצון	
2b		כגוי אשר צדקה ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב	
2c		ישאלוני משפטי-צדק קרבת אלהים יחפצון	
3a		למה צמנו ולא ראית ענינו נפשנו ולא תדע	

Table 10—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
3b	הן ביום צמכם תמצאו־חפץ וכל־עצביכם תנגשו:		
4a	הן לריב ומצה תצומו ולהכות באגרף רשע		
4b		לא־תצומו כיום להשמיע במרום קולכם:	
5		הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו יום ענות אדם נפשו הלכף כאגמן ראשו ושק ואפר יציע הלזה תקרא־צום ויום רצון ליהוה:	
6a		הלוא זה צום אבחרהו	
6b	פתח חרצבות רשע התר אנרות מוטה ושלח רצוצים חפשים וכל־מוטה תנתקו		
7	הלוא פרס לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית כי־תראה ערם וכסיתו ומבשרך לא תתעלם		
8			אז יבקע כשחר אורך וארכתך מהרה תצמח והלך לפניך צדקך כבוד יהוה יאספך
9a			אז תקרא ויהוה יענה תשוע ויאמר הנני
9b	אם־תסיר מתוכך מוטה שלח אצבע ודבר־און		
10a	ותפק לרעב נפשך ונפש נענה תשביע		
10b			וזרח בחשך אורך ואפלתך כצהרים:

Table 10—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
11			ונחך יהוה תמיד והשביע בצחצחות נפשך ועצמתך יחליץ והיית כגן רוה וכמוצא מים אשר לא־יכזבו מימיו:
13		אִם־תִּשֵׁב מִשַּׁבַּת רִגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפְצֶיךָ בַּיּוֹם קִדְשִׁי וּקְרָאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֲנֵג לְקִדּוֹשׁ יְהוָה מִכְבֵּד וּכְבַדְתָּ מַעֲשׂוֹת דַּרְכֶיךָ מִמְצוֹא חֲפֶצְךָ וּדְבַר דְּבַר:	
14			אִז חֲתַעֲנֵנִי עַל־יְהוָה וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל־בְּמוֹתַי אֶרֶץ וְהֵאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיךָ

Translation

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
1		“Declare to my people their transgression; to the house of Jacob their sin!”	
2a		“And me, day by day they seek; and knowing my ways, they delight.	
2b	Like a nation that practiced righteousness, and the ordinances of their God they never forsake		
2c		They inquire of me righteous-judgment, to draw near to God they delight.”	

Table 10—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
3a	“Behold, on the day of your fasting, you find pleasure all your toilers you oppressed.”		
3b		“Why did we fast and you did not see? We humbled ourselves and you did not acknowledge?”	
4a	“Behold, to quarrel, and to fight, you fast, and to hit with wicked fist.”		
4b		“You did not fast like this day for your voice to be heard on high.”	
5		“Is this fasting that I chose a day for one to humble himself bowing down like a reed, his head with sackcloth with dust spread out? “Is this what you call fasting a day, acceptable to the Lord?” “Is not this, fasting that I chose?”	
6b	To loosen the bonds of wickedness To undo bands of yoke and to send the oppressed to go free And all yokes to be broken?		
7	“Is not, to share to the hungry, your food; The wandering poor you bring home; When you see the naked, cover him;		

Table 10—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
	And from your own flesh, not hiding yourself?"		
8			"Then, will break forth like dawn, your light; and your recovery will speedily sprout; and goes before you, your righteousness; the glory of the Lord on your rear."
9a			"Then, you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, 'here I am.'"
9b	"If you remove from your midst yoke, pointing of finger, and speaking of wickedness;"		
10a	"If you give, to the hungry, yourself ; and the desire of the afflicted one, you satisfied."		
10b			"And will rise, in the darkness, your light and your darkness, like noon day."
11			"And the Lord, will lead you continually; and he will satisfy, in the scorched places, your desire; And your bones, he will strengthen."

Table 10—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Cult	Salvation / No salvation
			And you will be like a watered garden; and like a springs of water, which does not fail its water.”
13		“If you turn from the Sabbath ¹ your foot; from doing your own interests on my holy day; Call the Sabbath a delight, the holy one to the Lord honorable; Honor him from doing your own ways, from finding your own interests and speaking word”	
14			Then you will delight in the Lord; and he will cause you to ride upon the heights of the earth; and you will eat the inheritance of Jacob, your father.”

Terminology of Justice

The vocabulary of justice is employed in Isa 58, first, to describe its absence, and second, to call for its practice and implementation. The opening part of the chapter portrays, in a cynical way, the absence of justice within the society. The people are being

¹This is a cultic Sabbath, the Sabbath of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29, 31; 23:26-32, etc.).

addressed by God as “my people” and referred to as “the house of Jacob.” These positive appellatives are amplified by a further description of how they are likened to a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the commandments of their God. However, as the reading of the text continues, the reality is shown to be just the opposite: while the people perform worship and fasting, at the same time they “oppress” all their laborers (v. 3), and engage in contention, strife, and the striking with “a wicked fist” in dealing with each other (v. 4).

The call to practice justice, described in the context of true fasting, is a call that the audience be more sensitive to the social reality around them. First, they are to improve the social system: to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bonds of yoke, to set the oppressed free and to break all yokes (v. 6). Second, there is a call for direct, personal involvement in taking care of the needy: to share bread with the hungry, to take home the wondering homeless, and to cover the naked ones. In sum, “do not hide yourself from your own flesh” (v. 7). The same call is repeated again in vv. 9-10: to remove from their midst, yoke, pointing fingers and wicked speech. A further call is to share “oneself” with the hungry, and to satisfy the soul of the afflicted ones. In this poem, the theme of personal care of the needy is intensified, as in v. 7 the call is “to break / divide / share your bread with the hungry,” but in v. 10 the audience is exhorted to share one’s own “self” with the hungry instead of just sharing “food.”

Terminology of Cult

The vocabularies of cult in this poem are detected, first, in the reference to trumpet [שופר] as the Lord commands the prophet to declare the “transgression” [פשע]

and “sin” [חטאת] of His people (v. 1). While words like trumpet [שופר], transgression [פשע] and sin [חטאת] are not necessarily cultic terms, in Isa 58 they are employed as an allusion to the cultic themes within the context of the Day of Atonement.² The second reference to cultic practice is references to the activities of drawing near, using the terms “to seek” [דרש], “to ask” [שאל], “to draw near” [קרב], and to inquire an instruction from the Lord—ישאלוני משפטי צדק, דעת דרכי (v. 2a).³ The third reference has to do with the activity of fasting⁴, which is equated with humbling one’s soul (v. 3a); the purpose of this rite is get attention from the deities, to get “your voice to be heard on high” (v. 4b). The fasting is described as being accompanied with the gestures of “bowing down one’s head like reed,” “spreading out sackcloth and ashes,” with the understanding that this approach is acceptable enough (v. 5). The fourth cultic reference is regarding Sabbath observance⁵. In Isa 58 the Sabbath is described as holy unto the Lord, and one is obligated to “call” it a delight, honorable, and כבוד, “honor” the Sabbath by refraining one’s foot from trampling on it, not pursuing one’s own aspirations, not doing one’s own ways, to refrain from pursuing one’s interest, and from “speaking words” (v. 13).

As in Israelite cultic calendar the Day of Atonement is an occasion of abolishment

²See pp. 145-148.

³See Siegfried Wagner, “דרש,” *TDOT*, 3:299 and Hans F. Fuhs, “שאל,” *TDOT*, 14:258-261. Westermann regarded the words דרש and שאל in this verse as equivalent, elaborating that, in the context of Isa 58:2-3a, “the whole of this relates to acts of worship, denoting variety of attempts to hold fast to God. *Isaiah*, 334-335.

⁴That this activity of fasting is associated with the fasting on the Day of Atonement, see p. 172n52.

⁵For the interconnection between the activity of fasting and the Sabbath of complete rest on the Day of Atonement, see p. 147.

of sins, reference to פשע, and חטאת, a reference to both expiable and inexpiable wrong doings⁶ is a device by which the prophet emphasizes the seriousness of the sinful state of the people, and at the same time signaling the flaws in their practice of fasting and Sabbath observance.

Terminology of Salvation

In this poem the vocabulary of salvation is employed to describe a combination of two aspects of salvific experience, first, personal encounter with the Lord, and second, an experience of personal contentment and fulfillment. The emphasis on encounter with the deity on a personal level is reflected in the consistent usage of second person singular to address the addressee, underlining a direct speech. The experience of personal healing and fulfillment is portrayed as “your light will break forth like a dawn, your recovery will speedily sprout out; your righteousness will go before you, the glory of the Lord on your rear” (v. 8). The contrast between the past experience and the present is described thus: “will rise, in the darkness, your light; and your darkness [will become] like a noon day” (v. 10b). Another portrayal of personal contentment is presented as “you will delight in the Lord, he will cause you to ride upon the heights of the earth, and you will eat the inheritance of Jacob, your father” (v. 14).

One strong theme as an aspect of salvation in this chapter is a personal encounter with the divine. This encounter includes several ingredients. The first is divine availability: “then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, ‘here I am’” (v. 9a). The second ingredient is divine providence and guidance:

⁶פשע, “transgression” is rebellious sin, not expiable by sacrifice (Lev 4:2, 22, 27; 5:15, 18).

“the Lord will lead you continually, he will satisfy . . . your desire; he will strengthen your bones, you will become like a watered garden” (v. 11). The third ingredient is joy: “you will delight in the Lord” (v. 14a).

Terminology of Justice and Salvation in Isa 59:1-21

Terminology of justice and salvation as they are found in Isa 58:1-14 are listed in Table 11. In the context of this study, Isa 59 has no reference to cultic theme. Therefore, only the themes of justice and salvation are presented.

Table 11. Terminology of justice and salvation in Isa 59:1-21

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Salvation / No salvation
1		הן לא-קצרה יד-יהוה מהושיע ולא-כבדה אזנו משמוע:
2		כי אם-עונתיכם בינכם לבין אלהיכם וחטאותיכם הסתירו פנים מכם משמוע
3	כי כפיכם נגאלו בדם ואצבעותיכם בעון שפתותיכם דברו-שקר לשונכם עולה תהגה	
4	שוא אין-קרא בצדק ואין נשפט באמונה בטוח על-תהו ודבר הרו עמל והוליד און	
6	מעשיהם מעשי-און ופעל חמס בכפיהם	
7	רגליהם לרע ירצו וימהרו לשפך דם נקי מחשבותיהם מחשבות און שד ושבר במסלותם	

Table 11—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Salvation / No salvation
8	דרך שלום לא ידעו ואין משפט במעגלותם נתיבותיהם עקשו להם כל דרך בה לא ידע שלום	
9a	על-כן רחק משפט ממנו ולא תשיגנו צדקה	
9b		נקוה לאור והנה-חשך לננהות באפלות נהלך
10		נגששה כעורים קיר וכאין עינים נגששה כשלנו בצהרים כנשף באשמנים כמתים
11		נקוה למשפט ואין לישועה רחקה ממנו
12		כי-רבו פשעינו נגדך וחטאותינו ענתה בנו כי-פשעינו אתנו ועונתינו ידענום:
13		פשע וכחש ביהוה ונסוג מאחר אלהינו דבר-עשק וסרה הרו והגו מלב דברי-שקר:
14	והסג אחור משפט וצדקה מרחוק תעמד כי-כשלה ברחוב אמת ונכחה לא-תוכל לבוא	
15	ותהי האמת נעדרת וסר מרע משתולל וירא יהוה וירע בעיניו כי-אין משפט:	
16	וירא כי-אין איש וישתומם כי אין מפגיע	
17		וילבש צדקה כשרין וכובע ישועה בראשו
	וילבש בגדי נקם תלבשת ויעט כמעיל קנאה	

Table 11—Continued.

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Salvation / No salvation
18	כעל גמלות כעל ישלם גמול ישלם: המה לצריו גמול לאיביו לאיים	
19		וייראו ממערב את־שם יהוה וממזרח־שמש את־כבודו כ־יבוא כנהר צר רוח יהוה נססה בו
20		ובא לציון גואל ולשבי פשע ביעקב נאם יהוה:
21		ואני זאת בריתי אותם אמר יהוה רוחי אשר עליך ודברי אשר־שמתי בפיך לא־ימושו מפיך ומפי זרעך ומפי זרע זרעך אמר יהוה מועתה ועד־עולם

Translation

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Salvation / No salvation
1		“Behold, the hand of the Lord to save is not short; and his ear from listening is not heavy.”
2		“On the contrary, it is your iniquities separating between you and your God; and your sins caused him to hide his face from you to hear.
3	“Because your hands are defiled with blood; and your fingers with iniquity; your lips spoke falsehood; your tongue muttered wickedness.”	
4	“No one calls in righteousness; no one pleads in faithfulness; relying in nothingness and speaking lies; conceived evil gave birth iniquity.”	

Table 11—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No Justice	Salvation / No salvation
6	“Their works are works of iniquity; and a handiwork of violence is in their hands.”	
7	“Their feet, to evil, run quickly they haste in shedding innocent blood.” “Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity devastation and destruction are in their highways.”	
8	“Their way of peace they do not know and there is no justice in their tracks. Their paths they made crooked for them; all who walk in it do not know peace.”	
9a	“Therefore, justice is far from us, righteousness does not overtake us.	
9b		We hope for light but behold, darkness, for brightness, but we walk in the gloom.
10		We grope like blind men along the wall; like those who have no eyes we grobe. We stumble at midday as in the twilight among the vigorous like dead men.
11		“We hope for justice but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.
12	Because our transgressions are great before you; and our sins testify against us. Because our transgressions are against us; And we acknowledge our iniquities	
13	Transgressing and denying against the Lord; Turning away from after our God; Speaking oppression and revolt;	

Table 11—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No Justice	Salvation / No salvation
	Conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.”	
14	“Justice is turned back; Righteousness stands far away; Truth has stumbled in the street; Uprightness cannot enter	
15a	Truth is lacking and one who turns aside from evil makes himself prey.”	
15b	“And the Lord saw, and it is evil in his eyes that there is no justice.	
16	And he saw that there is no one; and it amazed him that no one intervenes.	
16b		“And his arm saved him; and his righteousness upheld him.
17a		And he put on righteousness as breastplate; And he put on helmet of salvation on his head.
17b	Garment of vengeance he put on; and wrapped as [a] cloak, zeal.”	
18	“According to deeds, accordingly he will repay; Wrath to his adversaries, Rcompense to his enemies; To the coastlands he will fully repay ”	
19		“so they will fear, from west, the name of the Lord; and from the rising of the sun, his glory. For he will come like a rushing stream which the wind of the Lord drives it”
20		“And come, to Zion, a redeemer, to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” says the Lord.

Table 11—*Continued.*

Vv.	Justice / No justice	Salvation / No salvation
21		<p>“As for me, this is My covenant with them,” Says the Lord. “My Spirit, which is upon you, and My words, which I put on your mouth, will not depart from your mouth and from the mouth of your descendants and from the mouth of the descendant of your descendants,” Says the Lord, “from now until</p>

Terminology of Justice

The vocabulary of justice in Isa 59 is employed to underline the situation of injustice. The absence of justice is presented both in terms of, first, personal and direct involvement, and second, sins committed by the community as a whole. The personal level of injustice is presented as hands stained with blood and fingers, with iniquity, lips that spoke wickedness and tongue that muttered wickedness (v. 3); works of iniquity and handiwork of violence in the hands (v. 6); feet that run quickly toward evil and in shedding innocent blood (v. 7). Their thoughts are described as the thoughts of iniquity, devastation, and destruction (v. 7).

Further criticism of the unjust behavior of the people deals with that fact that no one calls for righteousness, and that no one pleads for truth; instead, they rely upon emptiness, by speaking lies. In summary, the people are described as conceiving evil, with the result of giving birth to iniquity (v. 4). They do not know the way of peace, and there is no justice in their tracks; they made their paths crooked for themselves (v. 8).

On the community level, they made confession, acknowledging to the Lord their transgression, sins, and iniquities (v. 12); “transgressing and denying against the Lord, turning away from following our God” (v. 13a); expressed in “speaking of oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words” (v. 13b). As result of this condition, the confession states that “justice” is turned back and “righteousness” stands far away; “truth” has stumbled on the street and “uprightness” cannot enter (v. 14). Further description presents that, as truth is lacking, anyone who turns away from evil becomes prey (v. 15a). In this context of injustice, the Lord is portrayed as seeing what happened, and it is evil in his eyes that there is no justice (v. 15); he saw that there is no one, and it amazed him that no one intervenes in the situation (v. 16).

The text further described that re-establishment of justice would be accomplished through divine intervention. Portraying him as a warrior who singlehandedly fights the battle against his adversaries, he is wearing a garment of “vengeance” and wrapped with the cloak of “zeal” (v. 17). The divine action is described as “According to ‘deeds’ [גמל] accordingly he will ‘repay’ [שלם]; wrath to his adversaries; ‘recompense’ [גמל] to his enemies; to the coastlands he will ‘fully repay’ [גמל ישלם].” The interplay of the terms שלם and גמל in this verse highlighted the idea of recovering everything back into order, שלם, which also means shalom, and the word גמל conveys the idea of justice, in which one will receive his due according to his deeds.

Terminology of Salvation

The theme of salvation in Isa 59 is presented, first, by the absence of it, and second, as a solution, it comes with divine intervention. This chapter of the book of Isaiah

opens with the prophet's arguing that the hand of the Lord is not too short to "save," and his ears are not "heavy" from listening to his people (v. 1); on the contrary, it is their iniquities and sins that separate them from him (v. 2).

The second part in which the vocabulary of salvation is prominent is found in the confession of the people, reflecting their hopeless situation. Deeply immersed in a sinful condition characterized by injustice, the people are quoted confessing, "therefore, justice is far from us, and righteousness did not overtake us." They described their situation further as hoping for light, but what they have is darkness; expecting brightness, but in reality walking in the gloom (v. 9). The darkness that they are dwelling in made their situation comparable to blind person's groping along the wall. They not only consider themselves as blind, they are also weak: "we stumble at midday as if in the twilight, among the vigorous, we are like dead people (v. 10). The hopelessness of the situation is underlined, with a clear interconnection between the absence of justice and the absence of salvation: "we hope for justice but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us" (v. 11).

The third part of the chapter that deals with the theme of salvation is the portrayal of divine intervention. The text depicts the Lord as a warrior putting on his battle gear and the description of these armaments is loaded with terminology of salvation. God's salvific acts are opened with a description of how his arm saves [ישע] him and his righteousness [צדקה] upheld him (v. 16b). Among the equipment that the Lord puts on is righteousness [צדקה] as a breastplate, and salvation [ישועה] as a helmet (v. 17). The result of this divine action is stated: "they will fear, from the west, the name of the Lord; and from the rising of the sun, his glory." The portrayal of divine intervention on behalf of his people is

summarized as the coming of a “redeemer” to Zion (v. 20). The final act on the part of the Lord is to ascertain the perpetual nature of the salvation by making a covenant that his spirit and his words will not depart from its recipients and their descendants “from now until forever” (v. 21).

Thematic Connections Among the Poems in Isa 56-59

As a poetic cycle, Isa 56-59 is more than an anthology of poetic units. Whatever the original provenance of the individual poems or segments in each poem, the present form of the text exhibits a degree of interconnection between the poems. It is the purpose of this section to highlight the commonality between poems of this particular section of the book of Isaiah. The connection and continuity will be presented, mainly, based on lexical and thematic correspondence, to enhance the points of comparison or contrast in the two comparable poems.

Isa 56:1-8 and 56:9-57:21

The following list of correspondences and antitheses may be drawn up between Isa 56:1-8 and 56:9-57:21:

1. Stylistically, the introduction of the second poem of Isa 56:9-57:21 gives an impression as a continuation of the conclusion of the first poem of Isa 56:1-8. The invitation to the beasts of the field to gather (56:9) echoes the appellative name of the Lord as “the one who gathers the dispersed Israel” and his declaration that he will gather more to those who are already gathered (56:8).

2. The conclusion of the first poem expresses a hope for something better, that the one who gathers the dispersed Israel will gather others to those already gathered (56:8). In

the same vein, the opening part of the second poem shares the same positive expectation in 56:8, as the shepherds are quoted as saying to one another that “tomorrow will be like today, even going to be greater” (56:12).

3. As the reading goes further, however, the description in both poems goes in an opposite direction. In the second poem, either from social or religious perspectives, everything is going downward. As the opening of Isa 56 calls for preservation of justice and practice of righteousness [צדקה] followed by a pronouncement of blessing to one who refrains from doing evil (56:1-2). The poem in Isa 56-57 reports how the righteous [צדק] have perished because of evil, and underlines a situation of the failure of justice within society (57:1).

4. As the opening of the first poem announces that salvation from the Lord is coming near [קרוב] (56:1), the audience of the prophet is compelled to come near [קרוב] as they were addressed as sons of sorcerers, descendants of an adulterer and a harlot, descendants of deceits (57:3), showing what distance God’s people are from their God.

5. The poems portrays a contrast or irony in terms of the people’s relationship to God. The outsiders—foreigners and eunuchs—enjoy a close, intimate encounter with the Lord, while God’s own people are inflamed in idolatrous activity. The foreigners’ burnt offerings and sacrifices are acceptable on the Lord’s altar (56:7), while God’s people pour drink offering, offer grain offering, and even slaughter children as sacrifice to idols (57:5-7).

6. To the eunuch a promise is given as a memorial and name within the Lord’s house (56:5); however, the idolatrous practice is among others, taking place “behind

door,” implying a house (57:8). As foreigners are being brought by God to his holy mountain (56:7), while the idolatry takes place on a high and lofty mountain (57:7).

7. At the conclusion of the description of the idolatrous behavior of the people, the Lord rhetorically says, “I will declare your righteousness [צדקה] and your deeds, but they will not profit you” (57:12). This declaration echoes the call to “keep justice and do righteousness [צדקה] for my salvation is about to come” (56:1) located at the beginning of the whole poetic cycle of Isa 56-59.

8. The theme of restoration in the second poem shares a thematic link with God’s gesture to the foreigner and eunuch, in which, in contrast to hopelessness, promises regarding hope, life, and salvation are offered (see 56:3 for the tone of hopelessness and vv. 5-7 for the promises). In the second poem, assurance is extended to those who take refuge in the Lord, that they will inherit the land and will possess his holy mountain (57:13), just as foreigners are promised that the Lord himself will bring them to his holy mountain (56:7).

9. In the second poem, restoration takes place solely at God’s initiative and mercy: “I have seen his ways, but I will heal him . . . lead him and restore . . . peace to him who is far and to him who is near” (57:18-19). This may be compared to the appellative given to the Lord as “the one who gathers the dispersed Israel . . . and I will gather to them, to those who are already gathered” (56:8).

Isa 56:1-8 and Isa 58:1-14

The following list of correspondences and antitheses may be drawn up between Isa 56:1-8 and 58:1-14:

1. The opening of both poems shows both a common element and a contrast at the same time. The poem in Isa 56 opens with a call to “keep justice” [שמרו משפט] and to “do righteousness” [עשו צדקה] in anticipation that the salvation of God is about (near) [קרוב] to come, with an announcement of blessing to anyone who practices those things and who also keeps his hand from doing any evil (56:1-2). In the opening part of the poem in Isa 58, God’s people are said to be like a nation that “practice righteousness” [עשה צדקה עשה] that did not forsake the ordinances [משפט] of their God, people who like to inquire “just decisions” [משפטי צדק] from God, and delight in the nearness [קרוב] of God (58:2). Yet, despite this seemingly pious behavior on the part of the people, the prophet is commanded to declare the transgressions and the sins of the people (58:1), a situation that is just the opposite of the blessing promised in Isa 56:2, above.

2. On superficial level, an intimate relationship between the people and God is comparable in both poems. In Isa 56, foreigners are referred to as those who “joined themselves to the Lord” (vv. 3 and 6), just as the people in Isa 58 are said to “delight in the nearness of God” (v. 2). However, a contrast between the behaviors of the addressees in the two poems becomes more striking, as the Lord declares that the sacrifices of foreigners will be “acceptable” [רצון] on his altar (56:7); in Isa 58, after describing the kind of fasting that the people are engaged in, the Lord asks rhetorically, “will you call this a fast, a day ‘acceptable’ [רצון] to the Lord?” (v. 5).

3. The theme of “house” plays a significant role as a linkage between the two poems. In Isa 56, God is portrayed as being generous to the marginalized within society. At first, foreigners are concerned that they will be excluded from the salvation

community, and the eunuchs, also, considered themselves as hopeless (v. 3). In his response, God, promises the eunuchs a special gift in his house (v. 5), and he will bring [בוא] the foreigners (literally “will cause them to come”) to his holy mountain and his house (v. 7). As an echo of this generous gesture on the part of God, in the elaboration of the characteristics of true fasting, the audience in Isa 58 are called to reach out to the marginalized within society: to divide their food with the hungry, to bring [בוא]⁷ the homeless poor into the house, to cover the naked, and not to hide themselves from “their own flesh.”

4. As in Isa 56, the eunuchs considered themselves as a “dry tree,” with an implication of death, but God, in his generous act, promises them “an everlasting name,” with an implication of life (vv. 3 and 5); in Isa 58, as a result of the generous gesture on the part of the people toward the marginalized, the Lord promises, among others, that they will be like a “watered garden” (v. 11), an imagery that is an antithesis of a “dry tree” expressed in Isa 56:3.

5. In the first and third poems, one of the prominent aspects of blessing is a close encounter with the Lord, in which Sabbath observance is an integral part. In Isa 56, the relationship between God and the people is depicted as direct and reciprocal in nature. The gesture on the part of foreigners is to join themselves to the Lord, the main characteristics of both the eunuchs and foreigners is holding fast to God’s covenant and keeping the Sabbath (vv. 4 and 6). As a result, portrayal of blessings endowed to them is presented as coming directly from God. To the eunuchs God says, “to them I will give . . .

⁷Both in Isa 56:7 and 58:7 the root בוא are in the *hip’'il* form.

in my house and within my walls . . .” (v. 5); while to foreigners God says, “I will bring them . . . I will make them . . .” (v. 7).

In Isa 58, blessings from the Lord stream from gestures to fellow human beings (vv. 6-7; 9-10a); however, the characteristics of this blessing share similarly in terms of a direct and personal encounter with the Lord, just as in Isa 56:1-8: “the glory of the Lord will be your guard, you will call and he will answer, the Lord will continually guide you, satisfy your desire, give strength to your bones” (58:8-9; 11). In this context of the blessing of a personal encounter with God, proper Sabbath observance is presented as a part and a requisite of that experience (vv. 13-14). This particular thematic link underlines principles that complement one another. While in Isa 56 the experience of salvation is presented as a direct, reciprocal relationship with God, Isa 58 gives a reminder that a blessed communion with God is received as one reaches out and helps out fellow human beings, especially the marginalized.

Isa 56:1-8 and Isa 59:1-21

The following list of correspondences and antitheses may be drawn up between Isa 56:1-8 and 59:1-21:

1. The opening part of the poem in Isa 56 matches the concluding part of the poem in Isa 59, which, thematically, creates an inclusio that places the poems in Isa 56-59 in one unit. As the opening of Isa 56 reports how the Lord announces, “my salvation is about to come and my righteousness to be revealed . . .” (v. 1), and the concluding of Isa 59 reports his coming: “for he will come like a rushing stream . . .” (v. 19); “a redeemer will come to Zion . . .” (v. 20).

2. The promise in the opening of Isa 56 assures that salvation from the Lord is “about to come” or “in the process of coming” [כִּי־קְרוּבָה יְשׁוּעָתִי לְבוֹא] (v. 1). However, as one reads the following chapters, this promise is still not realized. It is the argument in the opening of Isa 59 that provides the answer for this delay of salvation: “behold, the hand of the Lord is not too short that it cannot save, nor is his ear so heavy that it cannot hear: your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, your sins have hidden his face from you . . . (vv. 1-2).

3. The inter-connection between the openings of Isa 56 and Isa 59 can be elaborated further, since they share a high degree of lexical linkage. As the announcement in Isa 56:1 quotes the Lord saying “my ‘salvation’ [יְשׁוּעָה] is about to come,” the counter point in Isa 59:1 explains that “the hand of the Lord is not too short that it cannot ‘save’ [יִשַׁע].” Furthermore, the promise of blessing to the prospective recipients of this salvation is stated, among others, as “blessed is he that keeps his ‘hand’ [יָד] from doing any ‘evil’ (56:2). The counter point in Isa 59 states the reason behind this delay of salvation is that “your ‘iniquities’ have made a separation between you and your God, your ‘sins’ have hidden his face from you, your ‘hands’ [יָד] are defiled with blood, and your fingers with ‘iniquity’” (vv. 2-3).

4. The announcement of the coming of “salvation” [יְשׁוּעָה] contains a command to preserve “justice” [מִשְׁפָּט] and to practice “righteousness” [צְדָקָה] (56:1). The poem in Isa 59 elaborates the failure of fulfilling this divine command. The people are quoted reflecting that “‘justice’ [מִשְׁפָּט] is far from us and ‘righteousness’ [צְדָקָה] does not overtake us (v. 9); “we hope for ‘justice’ [מִשְׁפָּט] but there is none, for ‘salvation’ [יְשׁוּעָה]

it is far from us” (v. 10). Contrary to their expectation, they confess how “‘justice’ [משפט] is turned back, and ‘righteousness’ [צדקה] stands far away (v. 14).

5. A connection between the poem of Isa 56:1-8 with that of Isa 59 is also observable in the description of divine intervention. The Lord who commands preservation of “‘justice’ [משפט] and practice of “‘righteousness’” [צדקה] as his salvation is about to come (56:1) is reported in Isa 59 to have seen that there was no “‘justice,’” [משפט] (v. 15). His response to the situation is described as “‘his own arm brought ‘salvation’ [ישועה] to him, and his ‘righteousness’ [צדקה] upheld him” (v. 16). The text makes a further depiction of how “‘he put on ‘righteousness’ [צדקה] like a breastplate and a helmet of ‘salvation’ [ישועה] on his head” (v. 17).

6. The term “covenant” also serves as a connecting link between the two poems, inasmuch as, throughout Isa 56-59, it was found only in the poems of Isa 56:1-8 and Isa 59. The promise of salvation is extended to foreigners and eunuchs, who are specified, among others, as “‘holding fast to my covenant” (56:4 and 6). The conclusion of Isa 59 reports how, after his salvific intervention, God seals his redemptive act by establishing a covenant with his people (v. 21).

Isa 56:9-57:21 and Isa 58

The following list of correspondences and antitheses may be drawn up between Isa 56:9-57:21 and Isa 58:1-14:

1. The affinity between the two poems is observable through the theme of cult. Both poems describe the vigorous religiosity of the people in a fair amount of detail. In the poem of Isa 56-57, the people are depicted as “on fire” in performing their idolatrous

worship (57:5), where a description of their sacrificial offerings is comprehensive, both in terms of its variety—children who are slaughtered, drink offering, grain offering, “sacrifice” (57:5-7)—and its location—among the oaks, under every green tree, in the wadis, under the cleft of the crags, on a high mountain, behind [a] door, sending envoys to far away places, even going down to Sheol (57:5-9). It is a description that seems to emphasize totality, covering both cultic and sexual activities,⁸ performed in the lowest and the highest locations, from public to private activities, from nearby to faraway places, with its climax in *Sheol*. In Isa 58, a description of rigorous worship is related to God: they seek him day by day, delight in knowing his ways, they inquire for “righteous-judgment,” and delight in his nearness (v. 2). Further description is more in relation to the practice of fasting: humbling themselves, bowing down [the] head—with sackcloth and dust spread (v. 5).

2. The cultic theme is developed further in these poems, in the irony of the worshiper’s activities. Despite the religious activities of the people, at the same time they are also depicted as distant from God, and the situation is presented a contrasting way. In Isa 57, God calls the people to “come near” [קרוב] followed by an elaboration of how indifferent they are toward him: jesting, opening [the] mouth wide, sticking out [the] tongue, rebellious and deceitful (vv. 3-4). On the other hand, in Isa 58, the people are depicted as in close proximity with God, summarized in the phrase, “they delight in the nearness [קרוב] of God” (v. 2). However, despite this seeming intimacy, their behavior in

⁸Blenkinsopp sees the descriptions in Isa 57 as a poetical imagery that has double meanings of idolatry and sexuality. *Isaiah 56-66*, 155-163. See also p. 87n4.

reality is characterized by “transgression and sin” (v. 1).

3. Both poems underline the futility of the cultic activities of the people. Despite the superficially opposite form of worship, one is engaged in idolatry and the other worships the true God, their worship did not bring them the expected result. In Isa 57, after an extensive description of various forms of idolatrous worship, the prophet concludes with a quotation of the word of the Lord: “I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you; when you cry out, let your collection [of idols] deliver you; but the wind will carry them up . . .” (vv. 12-13). In Isa 58, while the people are engaged in a fast to humble themselves before the Lord—i.e. having a correct object of worship—however the prophet, quoting the Lord, concluded, “You do not fast like today to make your voice heard on high . . . Is this a fast that I choose? . . . Will you call this a fast—an acceptable day for the Lord? (vv. 4-5).

4. The issue of injustice is significant in both poems. Isa 56 describes failure and indifference on the part of the leaders/shepherds of the community: they are just concerned with their own personal gain (vv. 10-12). In the same vein, in Isa 58, the people are indicted as only concerned with their own desire, driving their workers, performing acts of oppression and placing bands of yoke (vv. 3, 6).

5. In both poems, divine restoration for his people is depicted as a personal touch of “healing.” However, since the poems had different contexts, the healing process goes differently, and this concept of divine healing complements one another. In Isa 57, to the idolater, the call is to return and to surrender to God. The divine gesture to the people in Isa 57 includes a call to “come near,” and a command to “clear up the way, remove [the] obstacle, from the way of my people” (vv. 3 and 14); what he intended to do for them is

“I will heal [רפא] . . . I will lead . . . restore . . . creating . . . (vv. 18-19).

On the other hand, for the people in Isa 58, who are worshiping the true God, healing takes place as they restore justice and extend kindness to the marginalized. First, they are admonished to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke. Further, they are encouraged to divide bread to the hungry, to bring the homeless poor home, to cover the naked, not to hide oneself from the other in need (vv. 6-7). These admonitions are followed by the promise that “your light will break out like the dawn, your recovery [healing, אריוכה] will spring forth speedily . . . The Lord will give strength to your bones, you will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters do not fail” (vv. 8, 11).

6. In Isa 57, as a part of the process of restoration, the prophetic message calls for building up, preparing the way for God’s people, removal of obstacles (v. 14). In Isa 58, as the people are restored to a right relationship with the Lord and with fellow human beings, they will rebuild ancient ruins, restore the age-old foundation; and they will be called as repairers of the breach, restorers of the streets in which to dwell (v. 12).

Isa 56:9-57:21 and Isa 59

The following list of correspondences and antitheses may be drawn up between 56:9-57:21 and 59:1-21:

1. Both poems employ animal imagery to portray the behavior, characteristics, and activities of the people. In Isa 56, the leaders of the people are likened to an impotent watch dog. While they are supposed to be a watcher, instead they are blind, mute, love to lie down, to slumber and dream; they are greedy and do not know satisfaction (vv. 10-11).

In Isa 59 the sinful behavior of the people is likened to the breeding of a viper and/or the weaving of a spider's web: the results are both futile and deadly (vv. 5-6). At the same time, in their hopelessness and because of their sinful conditions, they growl like bears and moan like doves.

2. In Isa 56, the watchers are ironically described as “blind” (v. 10). In Isa 59, the people acknowledge how the prevalence of injustice is just like experiencing darkness and blindness: “justice is far from us, righteousness did not overtake us; we hope for light, [we get] darkness; for brightness, [we get] gloom. We grope along the wall like blind person, groping like those who have no eyes (vv. 9-10).

3. In Isa 56, the prophet indicated how the leaders are selfish, how “they all have turned to their own ‘way’ [דֶּרֶךְ]” (v. 11) and how, for this wicked people, “there is no ‘peace’ [שְׁלוֹם]” (57:21). In Isa 59, the prophetic accusation includes a description of how the people “do not know ‘the way of peace’ [דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלוֹם]” elaborated as “devastation and destruction are in their highways, there is no justice in their tracks, they have made their paths crooked.” The result is that whoever treads on them “does not know peace” (vv. 7-8).

4. In Isa 57, the Lord confronted the idolatrous behavior of his people, saying, “whom do you mock, opening wide your mouth, sticking out your ‘tongue’ [לְשׁוֹן]? Are you not the children of rebellion, descendants of ‘deceit’ [שִׁקְרָה]? (v. 4). In Isa 59, the sinful behavior of the people is described, among others, as “hands defiled with blood, fingers with iniquity, lips that spoke ‘deceit’ [שִׁקְרָה] and ‘a tongue’ [לְשׁוֹן] that mutters wickedness.

5. In Isa 57, the prophet reports, as a result of injustice, how “the righteous” [הצדק] perishes, the devout men are taken away . . . who walked in his upright [נכוח] way” (vv. 1-2). In Isa 59, the people confess how “justice is turned back, righteousness [צדקה] stands far away, truth stumbled in the street, uprightness [נכוח] cannot enter” (v. 14).

6. The portrayal of the totality of injustice in both poems is described by the phrase “no person” [אין איש]. In Isa 57, it was reported how “the righteous perishes, yet no one [אין איש] takes it into heart, the devout men are taken away, because no one [אין] understands (v. 1). In Isa 59, the prophet reports, as the Lord saw, it was displeasing in his sight there was no [אין] justice. He saw there was no one [אין איש] and was astonished that there was no one [אין] to intercede (vv. 15-16).

7. In Isa 57, the Lord expresses his disappointment of what has happened: “because of the iniquity [עון] of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid [הסתתר] and was angry . . . (v. 17). In the same line of thought, in Isa 59 the prophet explains to the people how “your iniquities [עון] have made a separation between you and your God, your sins have caused him to hide [הסתתר] his face from you... (v. 2).

8. The turning point from negative to positive in both poems involves the act of “seeing” on the part of God. In Isa 57, he says, “I have seen [ראה] his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him... (v. 18). In Isa 59, prior to divine intervention, it was reported: “and the Lord saw [ראה] and it was displeasing in his sight that there is no justice. And he saw [ראה] there was no person, and was astonished that there is no one to intercede... (vv. 15-16).

9. With regard to the locative element of the divine act of salvation, in Isa 57, it was expressed how the one who takes refuge in the Lord will inherit the land and will possess “my holy mountain” (v. 13). The prophetic speech in Isa 59 reported the divine intervention as “a redeemer will come to “Zion” (v. 20). In the prophetic writing, the locative terms Zion and “God’s holy mountain” are interchangeable (see Joel 2:1; 3:17; Zech 8:3).

Isa 58 and Isa 59

The following list of correspondences and antitheses may be drawn up between Isa 58:1-14 and 59:1-21:

1. In Isa 58, the prophet is commanded to declare the transgression [פֶשַׁע] and sins [חַטָּא] of the people (v. 1). In Isa 59, the people confess to the Lord how “our transgressions [פֶשַׁע] are multiplied before you, our sins [חַטָּא] testify against us; for our transgressions [פֶשַׁע] are with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities” (v. 12).

2. The motif of misunderstanding on the part of the people toward God’s dealing with them is detectable in both poems. In Isa 58, the people are asking “why have we fasted and you do not see? We humbled ourselves and you do not take notice?” (v. 3), in which the response to this question is “. . . you do not fast like today to make your voice heard on high” (v. 4). In Isa 59, the fact that the prophet is explaining that “the Lord’s hand is not short that it cannot save; nor his ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you that he does not hear” (vv. 1-2) presupposes the people’s lack of understanding.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that the theme of misunderstanding on the part of the people in these two passages is complementary and portrays an irony. As it is presented in Isa 58:3-4, the misunderstanding has to do with the people's expectation that their fasting—as an expression of humbling oneself, a practice of the day of atonement—will be acceptable to the Lord.⁹ In the light of Leviticus 16, God's approval of the fasting/self denial involves purification of all חטאת, "sin" (Lev 16:30) and purgation of all עון, "iniquity" and פשע, "transgression"(see Lev 16:21, 32-33). Allusion to the Day of Atonement is already presented in Isa 58:1, in which the prophet is commanded to raise his voice like a trumpet,¹⁰ to declare the חטאת, "sin" and פשע, "transgression" of the people. The prophet's explanation to the people in Isa 59:1 is how their עון, "iniquity" and חטאת, "sin" are preventing God from saving and "hearing" them. Furthermore, reference to God's supposed inability to hear in Isa 59:2 is comparable to the prophet's explanation in Isa 58:4 that their violent behavior while practicing the fasting makes it "not heard on high."

3. The prophetic admonition for social reformation in Isa 58 calls, among other things, for a removal of the yoke, pointing of the finger [אצבע] and "mischievous speech" [דבר-און] (v. 9). In Isa 59, the prophet explains the cause of separation between God and the people: "your hands are defiled with blood, 'your fingers with iniquity' [בעון] and [אצבעותיכם], your lips have spoken falsehood, and your tongue mutters wickedness

⁹For the practice of fasting as an expression of humbling oneself in the context of the Day of Atonement see Lev 16:29, 31.

¹⁰See pp. 146-148.

(v. 3). It is observable that both passages refer to fingers and the activity of speaking in a negative way.¹¹

Furthermore, it is significant to notice that in Isa 56-59, the term און is used only in chapters 58 and 59. As in Isa 58, the prophet discourages the people from engaging in דבר-און, “mischievous speech,” (v. 9). In Isa 59, the term און expresses the idea of lies, dishonesty, and the absence of righteousness, which suggests that און conveys the concept of afflictions and calamities on the one hand, and vanity, emptiness, or nothingness of sin on the other hand (v. 4).¹² In Isa 59:6, מועשי-און, “mischievous [handy]works” are associated with an “act of violence” [פעל חמס] while in Isa 59:7 און מחשבות, “mischievous thoughts or intentions,” is depicted as bringing about devastation and destruction.¹³

4. In Isa 58, the divine act of restoration, among others, is described in the term of light breaking in darkness: “your light [אור] will break out like the dawn . . . your light [אור] will rise in darkness [חשך] and your gloom [אפלה] will become like midday (vv. 8, 10). In Isa 59, on the other hand, as the people are separated from the Lord through their behavior, they confess: “justice is far from us, righteousness does not overtake us; we

¹¹See p. 52n49.

¹²See Bernhardt, “און,” 142.

¹³That the term און covers the idea of the act of wickedness accomplished with cunning and deceit by unjust legal interpretation or deceptive cultic or political propaganda in carrying out the plans, see p. 191.

hope for light [אור] but behold, darkness [חשך]; for brightness, but we walk in gloom, [אפלה] (v. 9).

5. The idea of continuity characterized the nature of restoration that God performs for his people. In Isa 58, among the promises given is that “the Lord will continually [תמיד] guide you” (v. 11). In Isa 59, after his act of salvific intervention, the Lord promises that my spirit and my words “shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendant, nor from the mouth of the descendant of your descendant... from now and forever [עַד-עַלְמִים]” (v. 21).¹⁴

Conclusion

It has been briefly referred to in the introductory part of this study that the poems in Isa 56-59 are presented as a kind of dialogue that serves as a rhetorical pattern, which serves as an argument for the unity of this particular section of the book of Isaiah.¹⁵ In this section, additional aspects of unity are presented in the terms of its thematic interconnection and the distribution of keywords that link each of the poems on to the other.

¹⁴See Lev 24:3, 8; Ezek 46:14 how the pairing of the terms תמיד and עלם in parallelism conveys the idea of perpetuity/continuity.

¹⁵See pp. 27-28.

Description of Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 56-59

The Theme of Justice in Isa 56-59

Summary of the Theme of Justice in Isa 56-59

In a nutshell, the theme of justice in Isa 56-59 can be summarized in Table 12.

Table 12. Summary of the theme of justice in Isa 56-59

Isa 56:1-8	Isa 56:9-57:21	Isa 58	Isa 59
A call to do justice (vv. 1, 2)	The absence of justice (56:9-11; 57:1, 17)	(1) The absence of justice (vv. 2, 3, 4) (2) A call to do justice (vv. 6, 7, 9, 10)	(1) The absence of justice (vv. 3, 4, 6-15b) (2) Restoration of justice through divine intervention (vv. 15b-21)

The Thematic Structure of Justice in Isa 56-59

The summary above can be further described further structurally as follows:

- A A Call to Do Justice
 - a “Keep justice, do righteousness...” (56:1a)
 - b “Blessed is the one who . . . keeping his hand rom doing all evil” (56: 2b)
- B The Absence of Justice
 - a Failure of the shepherds/watchers to take care of the flocks (56: 9-11)
 - b The righteous as victim of the situation (57:1)
 - a1 The shepherds/watchers are only after “unjust gain” (57:17)
- B1 The Absence of Justice
 - a The people are “like” a nation that practice righteousness; never forsake the ordinance of their God (58:2b)
 - b Oppression of the toilers as the people are conducting a fast (58:3b)

- c The practice of fasting characterized by quarrel, fighting and striking (58:4a)
- A1 A Call to Do Justice
 - a Social gesture: to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of yoke, to set the oppressed to go free, to break all yokes (58:6b)
 - b Personal attention: to share food to the hungry, to bring home the wandering poor, to cover the naked, not hiding from your own “flesh” (58:7)
 - a1 Social gesture: to remove yoke, pointing finger and speaking wickedness (58:9b)
 - b1 Personal attention: give yourself to the hungry; satisfy the desire of the afflicted one (58:10a)
- B2 The Absence of Justice
 - a The practice of injustice
 - injustice done by hands, fingers, lips, tongue (59:3)
 - injustice done through speaking and thinking (59:4)
 - injustice described as works and handiworks (59:6)
 - injustice performed by feet (59:7-8)
 - B Description of the reality of injustice (Isa 59:9-15b)
- C. The Establishment of Justice
 - a God’s intervention (Isa 59:15b-20)
 - b The covenant to secure the perpetual nature of salvation (Isa 59:21)

Description of Justice in Isa 56-59

In Isa 56-59, the idea of justice, first and foremost, has to do with the idea of what is right. This kind of understanding becomes more perceivable when the term **מִשְׁפָּט**, “justice” is paired with **צְדָקָה**, “righteousness” (56:1; 59:9, 14). Another aspect of justice in Isa 56-59 is that, when put into practice, it requires two directions: vertical, toward God, and horizontal, toward fellow human beings. However, the introduction of Isa 58 portrays the audience of the prophet as a “righteous” nation, which is qualified as people who “practice righteousness” and “not forsaking the ordinance of the Lord” (v. 1). The divine response in the following verses elaborates the act of injustice toward fellow men. This

portrayal underlines the importance of both vertical and horizontal aspects of the practice of justice.

The description of justice, in the light of inter-human relationship, is depicted both on a personal level and on a social level, and they both are presented from positive and negative sides. In its positive sense, the implementation of justice is summarized as “to keep one’s hand from doing all evil” (56:2). The portrayal of justice, in reference to social structure, is depicted as loosening the bond of wickedness, undoing bonds of yoke, and to setting the oppressed free (58:6). Justice also needs to be implemented in a more direct, even a personal way, like sharing food with the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless and covering the naked (58:7, 10).¹⁶

In Isa 56-57, the portrayal of injustice includes failure on the part of those in leadership positions to perform a just government. They were depicted as leaders with no understanding, dogs with great appetite who do not know satiation, because they are after their own ways before them, which is that they are after unjust gain (56:11). With particular reference to unjust gain, the text describes that it upsets the Lord deeply: “[B]ecause of the iniquity of his unjust gain, I was angry and struck him. I hid myself and was angry. Yet he keeps on turning away, after the way of his heart.” (57:17). As a consequence of the failure on the part of the leadership to uphold justice, the righteous,

¹⁶While these actions can be deemed as general social practice, the rhetorical style of the text implies an encouragement for a more direct personal action on the part of the audience:

Is not this, fasting that I chose?
...to divide [פָּרַט] with the hungry *your* food?
...when *you* see the naked, cover him?
...not hiding *yourself* from *your* own flesh?
...to give *yourself* to the hungry
...the desire of the afflicted one, *you* satisfied (Isa 58:6a, 7, 10a).

the devout, are perished, with no one to care about them (57:1).

However, in Isa 58-59, it is the general population that is responsible. The description of justice is, rather, the lack of justice, and the portrayal is saturated with an emphasis on a more personal level. The text describes how the breaching of justice is committed by hand, finger, lips, tongue, feet, and “thoughts” (vv. 3 and 7). The depiction of deeds of injustice covers works, handiworks, ways, tracks, and path (vv. 6 and 8). Furthermore, the sins portrayed here are characterized as pre-meditated: “speaking of oppression and revolt, conceiving, uttering from the heart, lying words” (v. 13b). The whole situation is summarized in the confession of the people: “therefore, justice is far from us, righteousness does not overtake us” (v. 9); “justice turned back, righteousness stands far away. Truth has stumbled on the street, and uprightness cannot enter” (v. 14). This description brings a vivid portrayal of the totality of the wrong-doings committed.

In Isa 56-59, the establishment of justice is presented as an intervention from God. Failure to maintain justice is described as having been rooted, first and foremost, in one’s attitude toward the Lord. In Isa 59, the people confessed that their main issue is “transgressing against and denying the Lord, turning away from following our God” (Isa 59:13a). In the same tone, in the portrayal in Isa 57, despite God’s punishment to bring the people back to their senses, he admitted how his people “keeps on turning away, after the way of his heart” (Isa 57:17). At the same time, restoration of justice is presented as an act of divine grace, despite his people’s failure in practicing justice, the Lord came to bring it: “[H]is ways I have seen, but I will heal him, I will lead him, I will restore . . .” (Isa 57:18). A similar description is given in the concluding part of Isa 59, after the Lord “saw”—a similar expression with the one in Isa 57:18—the Lord decided to act. The

difference is that, Isa 57 speaks about the divine healing, whereas in Isa 59, the portrayal is of the act of judgment (vv. 15bff).

Superficially, there are two incompatible streams of thought regarding justice in Isa 56-59. One line of thought is a consistent call, or even insistence, for the audience to practice and implement justice on both the personal and social level to those in the leadership and general population. A second line of thought is that justice can be realized solely by divine intervention. This apparent incompatibility may lead to a question: if in the end God himself will intervene, why is there such an intensive call for implementation of justice on the part of the people?

An attempt to answer this question can be done by referring to the development of thought in Isa 56-59. The poem starts with a call to do justice, paired with a promise of the soon coming salvation. However, in reference to the theme of justice, the next scene presents a neglect of justice in society (56:9ff). It is followed by an expression of complaint that God is not attentive to all the religious activities performed by the people, the answer to which is that this complaint has its root in the failure of practicing justice (58:3ff). This theme of the absence of justice is developed further in the first half Isa 59. Only then, in the end, does God intervene to restore justice.

However, despite God's intervention, those who rejected him will not be able to experience the restoration of justice: "there is no peace for the wicked" (Isa 57:21). With this kind of background, the call to practice justice and righteousness is given with the purpose that the recipient would be able to enjoy the benefit of God's restoration of justice on their behalf. This line of thinking is the predominant premise in the "if . . . then

. . .” structure of dialog in Isa 58, in which the “if” deals with the call to practice justice, and the “then” is the result or blessing of such a gesture.

On another note, religiosity cannot compensate for injustice; *Rite* is no substitute for *Right*. In Isa 56-57, with the focus on the failure of proper government by the leadership which makes the righteous the victim (56:9-57:2), the portrayal of injustice in the society is presented in the context of idolatry (57:3-11). This kind of emphasis, that idolatry leads to injustice, is quite expected in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷ However, as the description about justice goes on, it turns equally to emphasize that “true” worship directed to a “true God” does not automatically guarantee that justice will be upheld. In Isa 58, the people are depicted as faithfully drawing near and seeking the Lord on a daily basis, having interest in knowing his ways, inquiring for righteous-judgment, and practicing fasting (58:2-3). However, since in their fasting they find “pleasure,” which in this case implies oppressing their workers (58:3b), they quarrel, fight, and hit with wicked fist (58:4a), the prophet warns them that “your voice will not be heard on high” (58:4b) meaning that their devotions are unacceptable to the Lord.

¹⁷If the Decalogue is read as a pair of human’s obligation to God (first to fourth) and to fellow humans (fifth to tenth), the prohibition of idol-making in the second commandment is parallel to the prohibition of murder in the sixth commandment. This parallel implies that a living God should not be reduced into a dead entity like an idol, and at the same time, human beings, which is a reflection of a living God, should not be put to death by killing them. The insistency in the Hebrew Bible that the God of Israel is a living God shows that the basic nature of idolatry is serving or worshiping dead deities. This kind of worship is resulted in a lack of direct accountability to God, and the absence of a consciousness about the living God leads to the abuse of worship, which ended up as ways to avoid accountability through superficial rituals. In the conclusion of the elaborated description of the idolatrous activities of the people, the prophet quoting God asks His people: “of whom were you worried and fearful, when you lied, and did not remember me, nor give me a thought . . . so you do not fear me? (Isa 57:11).

Furthermore, the combination of reference to fasting/self denial¹⁸ and Sabbath observance (58:3,13) therefore identifies that the occasion of the worship as the Day of Atonement has a further implication about social justice. First, it is ironic that as they are practicing humbling of selves/self denial [ענה נפש] at the same time, they are putting down their fellow men through the acts of oppression and violence; and as the Sabbath of the Day of Atonement is the Sabbath of “full stoppage” or “solemn rest” [שבת שבתון] the people are driving/forcing [נגש] their workers [to work] (58:3); an indication of the ridiculousness of outward performance of worship without its true spirit. Second, the purging of sin from the sanctuary and the people on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:17, 30, 33) that resulted in a new/renewed relationship with God (Lev 16:30) is supposed to be reflected in a new/renewed relationship with fellow men. The poems of Isa 58 bring this point into focus, in which vv. 6-7 speak about a renewed relationship with fellow men (see the emphasis on “your own flesh in v. 7); vv. 8-9a speak about a renewed relationship with God; vv. 9b-10a refer again to a renewed relationship with fellow men (see the emphasis on “sharing yourself” [פוק נפשך] in v. 10); and a renewed relationship with with God in vv. 10b-11. The phenomenon underlines the dynamic of interconnection between cult and justice, in which true worship revitalized one’s relationship with God and fellow humans in a positive way and at the same time, the description of cultic activities in connection with injustice reveals how wrong worship¹⁹, whether directed to

¹⁸The parallel between fasting and self denial, the *pi’el* of ענה + נפש (cf. Lev 16:29, 31; 23:26-32; Ps 35:13; Ezra 8:21; Dan 10:2, 12).

¹⁹That worship in Isa 58 is classified as wrong because it is superficial in nature, and was not accompanied by a reflection of the divine character on the part of the worshipers see p. 216n168.

the true God or to idols, has a negative effect on people’s judgment and decision-making, as revealed in their social behavior, resulting in the prevalence of injustice.

The Theme of Cult in Isa 56-59

Summary of the Theme of Cult in Isa 56-59

In a nutshell, the theme of cult in Isa 56-59 can be summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. Summary of the theme of cult in Isa 56-59

Isa 56:1-8	Isa 56:9-57:21	Isa 58:1-14
<p>Portrayal of true, acceptable worship, in the context of salvation offered by God.</p> <p>(1) The locus of salvation referred to by God as “my house,” “my holy mountain,” “my house of prayer” (vv. 5, 7)</p> <p>(2) Reference to cultic activities: offering burnt offerings and sacrifices on the altar (v. 7).</p>	<p>Portrayal of false worship, describing idolatrous activities.</p> <p>(1) Reference to cult: idolatry described as a mocking toward God, performed by “children of sorcerers,” “descendants of an adulterer and a harlot,” “children of rebellion,” “descendants of a harlot” (57:3-4)</p> <p>(2) Description of idolatrous activities (57:5-7).</p>	<p>An ambiguous portrayal of worship, hypocritical worship in nature: with correct forms but lack of corresponding repentance and positive actions in the life.</p> <p>(1) Drawing near to God, learn his ways (v. 2)</p> <p>(2) Fasting as a mean to gain God’s favor (v. 3)</p> <p>(3) Discrepancy between the practice of fasting and social interaction among the people (vv. 4-5)</p> <p>(4) Admonition for an acceptable Sabbath observance (v. 13).</p>

The Thematic Structure of Cult in Isa 56-59

The summary above can be described further structurally as follows:

- A True worship (Isa 56)
 - a Cultic activities, reference to sacrifice and offerings (v. 7)
 - b Characterized as “acceptable” [רצוין] (v. 7)
 - c The locus of worship is referred to as “my house” and “my holy mountain,” “my house of prayer” (vv. 5, 7, 8)
- B False worship (Isa 57-58)
 - 1. Idolatrous worship (Isa 57)
 - a Described as a mocking [ענג] toward the Lord (vv. 3-4)
 - b Cultic activities, child sacrifice, offering sacrifices, and making a covenant implied (vv. 5-8)
 - c The locus of worship is referred to as “oaks and green trees,” “the wadis,” “high and lofty mountain,” and “behind closed door” (vv. 5-8)
 - 2. Unacceptable worship even though directed toward the Lord (Isa 58a)
 - a The act of worship and fasting performed by the people are questionable, whether it is “acceptable” [רצוין] to the Lord (vv. 1-5)
 - b A summons for a proper Sabbath observance, to call it a “delight” [ענג] in order to be able to “delight,” in the Lord, described as riding upon “heights of the earth” (vv. 13-14)

Description of Cult in Isa 56-59

The theme of cult in Isa 56-59 is described in several ways, starting with the concerns of right and false worship. The description covers activities of performance related to worship, it also deals with the issue of attitude toward the Lord, the object of worship, the location of worship, and time of worship.

In Isa 56-59, ritual activities cover both the worship of the true God and the worship of idols. Idolatrous activities are described as high spirited, as the one “who

inflames himself” (57:5), while performing the slaughter²⁰ of children in the wadis (57:5), the pouring of drink offering, the offering of grain to the smooth stones in the wadis (57:6), and the offering of sacrifices on a “high and lofty mountain” (57:7). On the other hand, the worshiper of the Lord is described as serving him, loving his name, becoming servants to him, and offering acceptable burnt offerings and sacrifices on the altar of the temple (56:6-7). Another description of worship is of the activities of seeking the Lord on a daily basis, delighting in knowing his ways, and inquiring righteous judgment from him (58:2). From an experiential perspective, the Lord promises to make those who worship him to be joyful (56:7). Furthermore, there is a reference to Sabbath observance (56:2, 6; 58:13) and fasting, which is equated with humbling oneself (58:3).

With regard to attitude, foreigners are depicted as the ones who join themselves in a close attachment [לִיהָ] to the Lord to serve him and to become his servants (56:6). On the other hand, Judahite idolaters, in contrast to foreigners, were addressed as “sons of sorcerers, descendants of an adulterer and a harlot” (57:3); “children of rebellion descendants of deceit” (57:4). They were summoned to “come near” (57:3), and not only is there a distance between the idolaters and God, their attitude is also one that is negative. That the Lord asked them, “At whom do you make jest? At whom do you open wide the mouth, sticking out your tongue?” (57:4).

In Isa 56-59, validation of the nature of worship cannot be determined by merely considering the object to whom it is dedicated. Isa 56 describes right worship directed toward God, while in Isa 57, wrong worship is directed toward the idols. In Isa 58,

²⁰The term slaughter here may indicate a literal act of child offering see p. 94n53.

however, a correct performance of worship, dedicated to the right deity, does not automatically make it right and acceptable. The worship is invalidated as proper because it is not carried out in the proper covenant context of comprehensive loyalty to God. Furthermore, as it was elaborated in the poem, how people relate to and treat each other also serves as a determining factor in evaluating the validity of the cultic performance and experience. This fact underlines how worship and ethics have to go hand in hand. While the description in Isa 56-57 relates injustice to idolatry, Isa 58 shows how proper worship does not guarantee the prevalence of justice within society when there is a discrepancy between confession, contemplation, and ritual on the one hand, and social behavior on the other.²¹

Another aspect of the nature of true worship is that mood and rigorousness in the performance of the ritual are not the determinant factor in judging its propriety. The poem in Isa 57 characterized the enthusiasm of the worshipers as “hot” or “on fire” [חמים] in their worship of the idols (v. 5). Isa 58, on the other hand, describes how the people are seeking the Lord, the true God, on a daily basis, have delight in knowing his ways, and also delight in the nearness of the Lord (v. 2). All these descriptions are referring to positive emotional aspects of the act of religious activity, but they did not necessarily make the worship performed as true and acceptable.

Several locations are specified as the locus of the cultic activities. A proper worship is described as taking place in the vicinities of the temple. The foreigners will

²¹Paul reflected, “All ritual is secondary and dependent on morality. Moreover, the nation’s ultimate mission and *raison d’être* is based on righteous conduct, i.e., the eradication of injustice and bettering the lot of the indigent.” Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 481.

minister to the Lord in his “house of prayer” (56:7). Other terms that may allude to the temple activity are “house” (56:5, 7), “altar” (56:7), with terms that definitely allude to the temple include “Zion” (59:20) and “mountain” or “holy mountain” (56:7; 57:7, 13). Improper worship takes place, among others, among the oaks and “under every green tree,” in the wadis under the cleft of the crags (57:5), among the smooth stones of the wadis (57:6), and also upon a high and lofty mountain (57:7).

Discussion about cultic themes in Isa 56-59 touches the topic of the Sabbath in the book of Isaiah. The topic of the Sabbath appears four times in the whole book of Isaiah, in the opening and concluding sections of the book, and in Isa 56 and 58. That the theme of the Sabbath is employed to form an inclusio in this book may be regarded as a device to reinforce the message of judgment and salvation in the book, especially in the context of ethics and worship. In both the opening and closing parts of the book, reference to the Sabbath functions as a marker of rhythm of time in connection with worship.

In Isa 1, reference to the Sabbath appears as a part of the message of judgment—a part of criticism discrepancy between worship performed by the people and their behavior. Beside the Sabbath, reference to communal worship activities are “the new moon,” “the calling of assemblies,” “the solemn assembly,” “appointed feasts,” and “prayers” (Isa 1:13-15); God’s objection to the worship offered by the people is designated as their “mischievous behavior” [אָיִן] (v. 13) and that their hands are covered with blood (v. 15).²² So here, in Isa 1, the themes of Sabbath, worship, and the practice of justice are interconnected. In Isa 66, it is a part of the promise of salvation, in the

²²That אָיִן is translated as “mischievous behavior,” see p. 362.

description of the new earth, where the Sabbath occurs as a reference to communal worship performed in the new earth: ““from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,’ says the Lord ” (v. 23).

The occurrence of the theme of the Sabbath in Isa 56 and 58 complements the message conveyed in the opening and closing of the book. In these two chapters, reference to the Sabbath is more concerned with cult, justice, and salvation. In Isa 56, reference to the Sabbath is a part of the portrayal of the universality of salvation offered by God.²³ In this context, keeping the Sabbath holy implies one’s positive response to this salvation promised by the Lord, and at the same time, it serves as an indicator of one’s moral integrity.²⁴ Reference to the Sabbath in Isa 56 also implies the universality of Sabbath observance. As salvation is offered to those who are traditionally an outsiders of the covenant community—foreigners and eunuchs—Sabbath observance, together with a covenantal relationship with the Lord, are the distinguishing marks for these marginalized members of the society as regards qualification for salvation offered by the Lord (vv. 4 and 6). It is observable that description of the Sabbath in Isa 56 is an antithesis of the criticism, in which the Sabbath is referred to in Isa 1. In Isa 58, the topic of the Sabbath occurs as a part of God’s call to his people to experience a deeper and more meaningful communion with him, to go beyond merely superficial and formal religious practice (v. 13). Therefore, the contribution of the poems in Isa 56-59 to the overall theme of the

²³See p. 60-61.

²⁴The connection between Sabbath observance and one’s moral integrity in Isa 56 is indicated by the expressions “blessed . . . who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and keeps his hand from doing any evil” (v. 2); “the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant” (v. 4); and “the foreigners . . . who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant” (v. 6).

Sabbath in the whole book of Isaiah is to invite the reader to contemplate the meaning of Sabbath observance, to go beyond the concern of merely worshiping the Lord on the correct day.

The Theme of Salvation in Isa 56-59

Summary of the Theme of Salvation in Isa 56-59

In a nutshell, the theme of salvation in Isa 56-59 can be summarized in Table 14.

Table 14. Summary of the theme of salvation in Isa 56-59

Isa 56:1-8	Isa 56:9-57:21	Isa 58	Isa 59
(1) Announcement of salvation (vv. 1, 2) (2) Complaint: exclusion from salvation (v. 3) (3) Promise: inclusion to salvation (vv. 4-7a) (4) Assurance of salvation (vv. 7b-8)	(1) Absence of salvation, social realm - failures of the leaders (56:9-57:2) (2) Absence of salvation, cultic realm - indifference to God through idolatry (vv. 3-13a) (3) Salvation: reconciled to God (vv. 13b-19) (4) Absence of salvation - no peace for the wicked (vv. 20-21)	(1) Absence of salvation (vv. 1, 2) - Wrong fasting (3) Promise of salvation (v. 3) (4) Proper fasting (5) Proper Sabbath observance	(1) Absence of salvation (vv. 1, 2) (2) Realization of salvation (v. 3)

The Thematic Structure of Salvation in Isa 56-59

Isaiah 56-59 is both opened and concluded with the theme of salvation. The opening of Isa 56 is an announcement of salvation by God, while in the closing of Isa 59 the salvific acts of God are reported. This movement from the announcement of salvation to its fulfillment can be summarized in the following structure:

Isa 56:1-8

- A Announcement of salvation - universal in scope: אָנוּשׁ and בֶּן־אֲדָמָה (vv.1-2)
- B Complaint: exclusion from salvation
 - a. foreigner (v. 3a)
 - b. eunuchs (v. 3b)
- B' Promise: inclusion to salvation:
 - b. eunuch (vv. 4-5)
 - a. foreigner (vv. 6-7)
- A' Assurance of salvation - universal scope: all people (vv.7b- 8)

Isa 56:9-57:21

- A Absence of salvation
 - a. failure on the part of the leaders (56:9-12)
 - b. the pious as victim - “he goes in peace [שְׁלוֹמִים]” (57:1-2)
- B Indifference to God
 - Idolatry (vv. 3-6)
 - Up and down from mountain down to [שְׂאוּלָה] (vv. 7-9)
 - Going further from God (vv. 10-13a)
- B' Reconciled with God
 - God’s healing (vv. 13b-14)
 - God as the one who is high and exalted yet with those who are low and humble (vv. 15-16)
 - God leads back and restores (vv. 17-19)
- A' Absence of salvation
 - a. failure on the part of the wicked (v. 20)
 - b. “there is no peace, שְׁלוֹמִים, for the wicked” (v. 21)

Isa 58:1-14

- A Absence of salvation (vv. 1-2)
- B Fasting (vv. 3-12)
 - B1 Improper fasting: oppression (vv. 3-5)
 - B2 Proper fasting: liberating the oppressed, reaching out to the marginalized (vv. 6-7)
- A' Promise of salvation (vv. 8-9a)

- B3 Proper fasting (10a)
- A" Promise of salvation (10b-12)
- B' Sabbath observance (v. 13)
 - B'1 Improper Sabbath observance (v. 13a)
 - B'2 Proper Sabbath observance (v. 13b)
- A''' Promise of salvation (v. 14)

Isa 59:1-21

- A Absence of salvation (v. 1)
- B Indictment: what *you / they* have done (vv. 2-8)
- B' Confession:
 - a. What happened *to us* (vv. 9-11)
 - b. What *we* have done *to you* [God] (vv. 10-15a)
- A' Realization of salvation (vv. 15b-21)
 - a. God sees (vv. 15a-16a)
 - b. God responses (vv. 16b-19)
 - c. God comes (v. 20)
 - d. Assurance of salvation (v. 21)

Description of Salvation in Isa 56-59

Even though the beginning of Isaiah 56 states that God gives a promise of salvation and the end of Isaiah 59 describes the fulfilment of that promise, the flow of thought in Isa 56-59 is not a simple linear onward movement from the beginning to the end. As the announcement of salvation creates an anticipation for the plot to move forward, the structure of the poems shows how in the thematic progression there are stagnation, halt, even backward movements (“absence of salvation”), before finally arriving at the ultimate end, the realization of salvation.²⁵

In the first poem (Isa 56:1-8), the announcement of salvation in the beginning is

²⁵Up to a certain degree, this kind of thematic progression/regression can also be detected in other biblical narratives. For example, the exodus - wilderness narrative, the Israelites' entrance to the land of Canaan had gone through some stagnation, halts, even regressions before they finally enter the Promised Land. In the same line, the narrative of David's accession to the throne since his anointment also had to go through stagnation, halts, and even regressions until he finally receives the kingdom. This kind of pattern can be considered as a trajectory of reality of life experience.

reemphasized in the end (A-A'). This salvation is universal in nature, as the recipient of the address are **בְּנֵי-אָדָם / אֲנֹכִי**. Within this context of the universality, two types of unlikely candidates for the salvation are addressed: foreigners and eunuchs. First, an expression of their conviction, that they are excluded, is given, but in response to them, God gives them a specific promise to assure their participation in the coming salvation (B-B'). The description of salvation in this poem focuses on proper worship, both the location and the services performed there, this emphasis goes further to the fact that they are given as the reason for this act of salvation on the part of God, “for my house will be called a house of prayer for all people” (v. 7).

The high note of hope and promise in the ending of the first poem becomes an anticlimax as the reading is continued to the second poem in Isa 56:9-57:21. The invitation to the beast of the forest, while it is echoing God's activity of gathering the dispersed Israel, in reality is a report of the absence of salvation because of the failure of the leaders of the community to perform their duty, with the effect that the righteous become the victim of the situation (A). The poem goes further, describing the people's indifference to God through their idolatrous activity (B). However, despite all the wrong that had happened, God decided to heal, lead and restore them; in this poem; to let God work healing and restoration in a person is the experience of salvation (B'). However, despite this gracious act on the part of God, by their own choice, the wicked do not experience this blessing—for them salvation is still absent (A').

In the third poem in Isa 58, another setback is presented. It opens with the absence of salvation, in which the prophet receives a command to declare the sin and rebellion of the people, while they eagerly and diligently come near, seeking, inquiring and knowing

about God, they find out that their religious endeavors do not lead to the expected divine approval that gets divine approval (A). In this context, two particular cultic activities are addressed, fasting/self denial and Sabbath observance—this combination identifies the occasion as the Day of Atonement.²⁶ Discussion concerning these two topics is open with an exposure of the faultiness of what they have done [or not done] so far, followed by admonitions to a more proper practice (B and C). The poem shows how religious practice based on selfish motivations only brings out the undesirable results. Therefore, in order to become a blessing, it should be expressed in acts of mercy and justice. The catchwords in this proposition are דרך, חפץ and צדק: how the people looked like a nation that performs “righteousness” [צדקה] in which they are not (v. 2); and a change of their attitude and perspective about worship will result in their “righteousness” [צדק] will go before them (v. 8). The contrast between their failed practices and the one that God intended is coined as their “way” [דרך] and “delight” [חפץ] against those which are God’s. The poem goes further in describing that implementing צדקה in both fasting and Sabbath observance brings about harmonious relationship both with fellow human being and with God, and this is the experience of “salvation” (A', A", A''').

The fourth poem, Isa 59:1-21 also opens with the theme of the absence of salvation. It opens with argument from the prophet that God’s hand is not too short that he cannot save nor his ear is too heavy that he did not hear (A). As a proof of this argument, a list of sinful behavior and situation is presented (B). This part of prophetic indictment in Isa 59:2-8 is parallel with criticism toward the leadership in Isa 56:9-57:2,

²⁶The significant of this phenomenon is discussed in p. 370.

descriptions of the people's idolatrous activity in Isa 57:3-13a, and criticism of the people's behavior in Isa 58:3-5. Following this, in the third section of the poem, something unique takes place: the people make confession, which speaks about the unfortunate effect of sin upon them, and all the wrongs they had committed against God (B'). This confession is unique in the context of Isa 56-59, since it shares the similar sense of one's unworthiness for God's salvation expressed by the foreigners and eunuchs in Isa 56:3 and in contrast with the description of the attitude of the people in which they did not remember God nor gave Him a thought in Isa 57:11 and complained about God's dealing with them in Isa 58:3a.

The concluding part of the poem is unique, in the sense that there are no more promises of salvation given as in the previous poems (56:4-8; 57:13b-19; 58:8-9a; 10b-12; 14), instead, here the salvific acts of God are presented (vv. 15-19) with the climax of God's coming in person (20) and concluded with an assurance of endurance of that salvation, from now until forever, *ועד-עולם מעתה* (A'). As to why God can save in spite of the sinful behavior of the people, in Isa 56-59 it remains a mystery; no explanation or justification is given. In Isa 57, after reporting the people's idolatrous activities and assessing its futility, the poem shifts to the theme of God's work of healing and restoration on behalf of the people. In a similar manner, in Isa 59, God's salvific activities are introduced without any explanation of why. One way of understanding this phenomenon is to look at it as an expression of the mystery of divine grace in his dealing with sinful human beings.

First of all, in Isa 56-59 salvation is a divine initiative. This section of the book of Isaiah is opened with an announcement from God that "my salvation is about to come..."

and concluded with a report “and came to Zion redeemer...” (56:1 and 59:20). The narrative plot of the poems in Isa 56-59 is run in, and around, a framework of this theme of salvation, announced by God and realized by his personal arrival as Redeemer. To experience salvation is to respond to this divine gesture: “keep justice, do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come . . . blessed is the man who does this, son of man who holds on it” (56:1a, 2a).

At the same time in Isa 56-59, a contrasting portrayal of human’s attempt to achieve salvation without God and enjoy it outside of him. Throughout the poems, any attempt to achieve and enjoy salvation based on selfish interests only resulted in disarray of social bonding, violence, and injustice. While leaders of the community think they have arrived at an ideal condition of society, “tomorrow will be like today, even more so” (56:12), in reality, people are in a vulnerable situation without protection to a point when “the righteous” [הַצַּדִּיקִים] and “devout man” [אִישׁ יִיחָסֵד] are perishing with no one caring (56:9-57:2). As the people are devoted to their ritual practices for selfish interest, religiosity and violence go hand in hand, even using religious practice as a spiritual and social cover-up. They looked like people who practice righteousness, faithfully keeping the ordinances of the Lord, while at the same time, they oppress their workers, engage in contention, strive, even physical fight (58:2-4); as the poem is saturated with Day of Atonement imagery, the irony of the portrayal gets deeper, since this is the day when their sins are supposed to be purged from the sanctuary, but they are adding more sins. Furthermore, when out of self interest people lay schemes against each other, the result is nothingness (59:6a). After experiencing these failure attempts, they confess how “justice is from us / righteousness does not overtake us / we hope for light, behold, darkness / for

brightness, we walk in gloom . . . we hope for justice but there is none / for salvation, it is far from us” (59:9, 11a).

Furthermore, in line with the fact that salvation is a divine initiative, of Isa 56-59, it is also a divine promise. God promises that his salvation is about to come (56:1)—a promise he offers to eunuchs (56:5), foreigners (56:7), and dispersed Israel (56:8). Because it is a promise, only those who respond positively by believing it will enjoy divine salvation: “blessed is the son of man who takes hold of it” (56:2). In contrast, idolaters do not remember the Lord nor give him a thought, and as a consequence, their righteousness will not profit them. But to the one “who takes refuge in me,” the Lord declares, “he will inherit the land and will possess my holy mountain” (57:11-13).

Another aspect of the concept about salvation presented in Isa 56-59 is that it is transformational in nature. In contrast with the Exodus narrative—commonly considered as a paradigm of divine salvific intervention—God’s salvation means to bring out his people from a certain unfavorable condition and setting to a different one, which is the Promised Land. In Isa 56-59, on the other hand, salvation occurs within the context and condition of where the people are, and it takes place there instead they are being taken out.²⁷ In Exodus paradigm, the people experienced oppression and injustice; thus God removes them from there to the land of Canaan. In Isa 56-59, it is the people who behave unjustly and oppressively towards their fellow brethren. Thus, salvation is a work of

²⁷Sawyer notes, how in prophetic literature this is the underlining conception about salvation. It “denotes bringing something to a person or situation in distress rather than removing him from it. . . . In only 7 cases (out 66) is the verb followed by the prep. מִן, ‘from’.” John F. Sawyer, “ישע,” *TDOT* 6:456. In the context of the covenantal relationship between the Lord and his people, salvation involves staying in the Promised Land rather than being exiled from it (cf. the covenant blessings and curses in Lev 26 and Deut 28).

divine transformation of the people's character and behavior (57:13-19) to help them arrive at a more just, harmonious, and compassionate social system and behavior (58:6-12). So, in this case, salvation is described more in the realm of personal transformation as a result of divine enabling.

As a fulfillment of divine initiative and promise, the description of salvation in Isa 56-59 is presented as divine action. God has the last word in salvation. First, he reaches out to his estranged people: the Lord heals, leads, restores comfort, creating the praise of the lips and giving peace (57:18-19). Following the transformation, there is an on going relationship, since he makes himself available:

you will call, and the Lord will answer
you will cry, and he will say, "here I am"...
the Lord will continually guide you
and satisfy your desire...
you will take delight in the Lord... (Isa 58:9, 11, 14).

Furthermore, he makes sure the perpetual nature of this salvific experience by a bestowment of his spirit upon his people (59:21). Also, as he is "creating the praise of the lips" (57:19), he is putting his words upon their mouth, and makes sure that these words will not depart from them and their offsprings forever (59:21). So, in Isa 56-59, salvation is the result of a process which the Lord performs in and for his people from beginning to the end.

In Isa 56-59, the recipient of divine salvation is universal and covers both Israel and non-Israel. In fact, as the poem begins with divine gesture to the marginalized—foreigners and eunuchs—whose social status and physical condition makes them think they will be prevented from enjoying salvation, it serves as a mirror of the alienated condition of God's people. They are described as descendants of adulterers; being

addressed to as *goy*, “heathen” (57:3; 58:2), makes them comparable to the foreigners in Isa 56. Just as foreigners are afraid that they will be excluded from becoming God’s people, God’s people are called to come near because of they are alienating themselves from him by their idolatrous activities (57:3). From another angle, the people are described as a delight in the nearness of God, and outwardly, their behavior is like a righteous nation (58:2); yet the prophet was commanded to declare their transgressions and sins (58:1), and this sinful behavior makes them out of reach from God who tries to save them (59:1-2).

In his charges against the sinful behavior of the people, the prophet makes a reference to different parts of the body—hands, fingers, lips, tongue, feet, thoughts (59:2-3; 7), which makes them comparable to the eunuchs, whose physical condition makes them unqualified for salvation.²⁸ This elaboration underlines the depth of the work of salvation God performs for humanity, how toward helpless and hopeless sinners he generously performs the work of healing—he sees, heals, leads, restores, creates, and heals to bring about שְׁלוֹם, “wholeness,” for them (57:18-19).

²⁸Motyer points out that the reference to “hands” in Isa 59:3 is כַּף, not יָד, referring to the palm or “grip” of the hand, specifying “a more specific accusation of personal involvement” and reference to fingers denotes a “direct, detailed touch with the minutiae”; for him, reference to different parts of the body means that “the sinner is personally involved” in committing sins. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 486. Blenkinsopp considers the description as a “specific indictment of immoral even criminal, activity. . .” and the fact that the actions of these parts of the body are associated with blood, it “connotes the polluting, miasmatic effect of shedding innocent blood . . . the murder is specifically indicated in Isa 59:3 is suggested by the reference later on (vv. 6-7) to deeds of violence and the shedding of innocent blood.” *Isaiah 56-66*, 188. He also connected the description of shedding the blood with the narrative of the murder of Abel in Genesis 4: “Abel’s blood, which the ground received, cried out for vengeance, with the result that Cain was hidden from God’s face, that is, presence” (Ibid.). Reference about the negative consequence of Cain’s act to his relationship with God is echoed in Isa 58:3, that the people feel that their fasting/self denial did not get the expected response from God, and in 59:1-2, that the anticipated salvation from the Lord was not (yet) realized because their iniquities and sins have “hidden his face” from them.

Isa 56-59 also portrays the absence of salvation from various angles. For eunuchs and foreigners, they consider that their physical and ethnical status is a hindrance to the access to salvation (56:3). Among God's people, the absence of salvation is presented, first, as a situation of "passive injustice" in which both public servants—the watchmen and shepherds—are criticized for doing nothing or not showing an effort to protect the people (56:9-11), and the community at large is accused for being passive and indifferent as the pious and the righteous perished, yet did not "take it to heart."

Second, they thought the issue of idolatry, would help them to achieve the expected salvation (57:5-10), yet, in the conclusion of his indictment, in a sarcastic way the Lord says, "I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you; when you cry out, let your collection [of idols] deliver you" (57:12-13a). The third problem has to do with outward religiosity with the result of a gap between ethics religiosity. While the people are engaged in rituals that make them looked like a righteous nation and give them delight in the "nearness of the Lord" (58:2), they feel that these things are not acceptable to the Lord, since they are complaining that he did not take heed of their fasting. However, on the other hand, the Lord challenges them about whether their practice of fasting can be appropriate as "a day acceptable to the Lord" (58:4-5). Finally, the fourth problem has to do with the people's personal conduct toward each other, characterized by malice and violence (59:3-8).

In light of this perspective, the theme of absence of salvation in Isa 56-59 indicates that despite their status as God's people, by their sinful behavior and condition, the people are alienated from their God, a situation comparable to foreigners and eunuchs. The expression employed to describe this alienation can be detected, as God calls the

people to come near (57:3); they feel that God did not give a proper attention to their fasting (58:3), as if the Lord did not hear and reach out to save them (59:1). Within this context, the divine epithet “the Lord, God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel” (56:8) seems to have a direct application within the immediate situation of the people as was presented in Isa 56-59, and this particular name describes the salvific gesture he extends to them; furthermore, he offers shalom “to him who is near and far,” which can also be understood as referring to those who are “near,” yet they are “far,” by providing healing unto them (57:19).

Interconnection between Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 56-59

On lexical level, salvation, justice, and cult are big words with meanings that expresses human’s aspiration for something good, noble and beautiful. What happen in Isa 56-59, as these words become a theme, they are interconnected to each others, and brings a new dimension of meaning beyond its lexical definition. Salvation is a dream of an ideal reality for humanity with absence of danger and threat, both on a social and personal level, an expression for a safe environment at its best.

The Thematic Structure

An observation of the thematic structure of Isa 56-59 indicates that there is tension between the announcement of salvation in its opening section and its fulfillment in its concluding part. Within this dynamic of salvation promised and its

fulfillment, the themes of justice and cult play an important role, either in a positive or negative way. The interconnection between salvation, justice, and cult can be summarized in Table 15.

Table 15. Interconnection between salvation, justice, and cult in Isa 56-59

Themes	56:1-8	56:9-57:21	58:1-14	59:1-21
Salvation	Promised	From absent to restored	From absent to restored	From absent to restored
Cult	Positive	Negative	Positive and negative	
Justice	Commanded	Negative	Negative then positive	Negative then restored
The nature of reversal /restoration	Cultic	Cultic and justice	Cultic and justice	Justice

In the first poem (Isa 56:1-8), the interconnection between justice, cult, and salvation has more emphasis on the relationship between cult and salvation. The poem opens with the call to keep justice and do righteousness in the light of the coming salvation that is at hand. In its further elaboration, the promise of salvation is expressed in a cultic terminology with an emphasis on the positive aspect of it. To the eunuchs, a promise is given for a place within the house of the Lord, while to the foreigners the promise is that the Lord will bring them to his holy mountain, make them joyful in the house of prayer, and their burnt offering and sacrifices will be accepted on his altar. Access to the temple is extended to a universal audience, since the house of the Lord will be called “a house of prayer for all people.” While this gesture on the part of the Lord is

cultic in nature, the Lord is providing an example of his generosity, and it serves as a model in which in performing justice, people are called to be generous to their fellow men.

In the second poem, Isa 56:9-57:21, the interconnection between justice, cult and salvation has more emphasis on the relationship between the absence of justice to false cultic practices. It begins with description of absence of justice. A list of criticism is addressed to the leaders/shepherds for their failure to perform their duty in taking care of society. As the result of this situation, the righteous become the victims (56:9-57:2). The description of the absence of justice is followed up by an extensive description of idolatrous activities of the people (57:3-13a). This kind of structuring of the poem may imply a cause and effect relationship between idolatrous worship activity and the prevalence of injustice.²⁹ In the midst of these degrading and chaotic religious and social

²⁹This assessment leads to a question – why does idolatrous worship foster or allow for injustice, even though, for example in the prologue of The Code of Hammurabi, the king Hammurabi claimed that he was appointed by deities, among others, “to promote the welfare of the people,” “to cause justice to prevail in the land . . . that the strong might not oppress the weak,” he “established law and justice in the language of the land, thereby promoting the welfare of the people.” Some ancient Near East deities, especially Shamash the sun god, were believed to guard justice. See Pritchard, *ANET*, 164-165.

This question can be addressed by referring to the fact that the book of Isaiah, especially the second part of the book, contains repeated polemics against idolatry. Hendrik Carel Spykerboer perceived that the context of this polemic is

[T]o demonstrate, by way of contrast the incompatibility and uniqueness of Yahweh and serve to undergird DI’s message that Yahweh is a real God and a holy one, who can and will save his despondent and doubtful people. This message is presented in a series of oracles which form a continuous whole from 40:12 till 55:5 and which gradually lead to the climax: the return of the Lord to Zion and the restoration and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.” *The Structure and Composition of Deutero-Isaiah with Special Reference to the Polemics against Idolatry* (Meppel: Krips Repro, 1976), 185.

For Leene, this polemic pointed out that in idolatry, humans “make images, and images demand divinity . . . they lay claim to being greater than images, but history proves the contrary. In the mocking description, the images, in their turn, are reduced to the activity of the men who made them. And so ultimately, before God there are only those makers who in their human acting, as it were, caricature his divine acting.” Henk Leene, “Isaiah 46:8 – Summons to be Human,” *JSOT* 30 (1984): 115. This explanation provides an insight that the basic issue with idolatry is that it is merely a projection of human’s aspiration;

conditions, divine, salvific intervention is described as re-creating, healing, and transforming the person to restore him into “wholeness,” shalom.

In Isa 58, the interconnection between justice, salvation, and cult offers a different perspective that balances the thematic argument presented in Isa 57. In this chapter, the people are presented as engaging in right cultic activities: seeking the Lord on regular basis, delight in knowing his ways, asking for righteous judgment, practicing fasting, and humbling their souls. However, despite what is seemingly ideal behavior, the prophet is commanded to declare their transgressions, פֶּשַׁע, and sins, חַטָּאת. Further description in the text uncovers the fact that their conduct is characterized by the oppression of workers, contention, strife and strike. In this kind of situation, salvation is presented as opening oneself to the other, especially the marginalized, and also a call to engage in a right

and no matter how noble it might be, it is simply a mirror of human limitations—incomparable with the Lord, whose understanding is unsearchable (Isa 40:28). In this polemic, God is presented as the creator of the human, and consequently, to worship Him, in contrast with idolatry, humans are to respond to their creator with the result going way beyond their limited aspirations, that is, to reflect the divine character. In the words of Leene, “to move away from idol-making is to behave as human beings.” Leene, “Isaiah 46:8,” 115.

The explanations above are helpful, since in its present shape, Isa 56-59 is located right after Isa 40-55, and thus provides an insight to understand the correlation between cult and justice in those chapters. With regard to the second poem in Isa 56-57, the message is that the end result of idolatry is injustice because it is merely a reflection of human aspirations, and basically, humans are selfish and their selfishness leads to injustice (see reference to בַּצֵּעַ, “unjust gain” in Isa 56:11; 57:17). On the other hand, the poems in Isa 58 and 59 provide a warning that worship, despite being directed toward the true God, and if conducted in its correct form, if performed with the mentality of idol worship, will not bring the expected result since instead of bringing about a reflection of the divine character upon the worshiper, it is just an accumulation of a flawed human character, characterized by injustice. Milgrom points out that in the theology of the book of Leviticus, with its emphasis on one supreme God, in contrast to pagan religion, the world of demons is abolished. The implication is,

[W]ith the demise of the demons, only one creature remains with “demonic” power—the human being. Endowed with free will, human power is greater than any attributed to humans by pagan society. Not only can one defy God, but in priestly imagery, one can drive God out of his sanctuary. In this respect, humans have replaced demons. . . . Humans can drive God out of the sanctuary by polluting it with their moral and ritual sins.” Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 8-9.

relationship with God, to pursue God's ways and delight, instead of following one's own way and delight.³⁰

The Impossibility of Achieving Justice

In Isa 56-59 the prophet demands a practice of justice (56:1), and he seems to be highly critical toward the social reality around him. Almost every aspect of life is under sharp scrutiny, including government leaders for their failure to watch over the people (Isa 56:9-57:2); the practice of religious syncretism (57:3-8); political alliance with other nations (57:9-10); superficial religious piety (58:2-3a, 5); oppression of workers (58:3b-4, 6); personal sins (59:2-3, 6b-7, 12); corrupt court system/practice (59:4,8); absence of justice in the society (59:9-11, 14-15a); and transgression against the Lord (59:1, 12-13). In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, the prophet's standard is "one octave too high."³¹ He explains, "the prophet is intent on intensifying responsibility, is impatient of excuse, contemptuous of pretense and self-pity. His tone, rarely sweet or caressing . . . his words are often slashing, even horrid—designed to shock rather than to edify."³² Heschel elaborates further, "to us the moral state of society, for all its stains and spots, seems fair and trim; to the prophet it is dreadful. . . . Our standards are modest; our sense of injustice tolerable, timid . . ." ³³ It is because such high expectations make them discontent with

³⁰In the context of the Covenant, people are brothers and sisters under the covenant, which is based on love for God and for fellow humans.

³¹Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets: Two Volumes in One* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 1:9.

³²*Ibid.*, 1:7.

³³*Ibid.*, 1:9.

everything that they see in the society.

As Heschel described how the prophets are too high in their demands for an ideal society, Jacques Derrida thought that justice was impossible.³⁴ In an attempt to explain Derrida, John Caputo pointed out, “The ‘possible’ is a term of art for Derrida, which means the foreseeable and projectable, the plannable and programmable, what he calls the ‘future present,’ the future that can come about with a little luck and a lot of hard work.”³⁵

Derrida makes a distinction between law and justice. While law means “the positive structures that make up judicial systems of one sort or another, that in virtue of which actions are said to be legal, legitimate, or properly authorized,”³⁶ justice, on the other hand, demands more than an application of general or universal law to every case. Among the aspects to be considered, justice “must always be concerned with singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives, the other or myself as other, in a unique situation”³⁷ which means to understand that “each case is another, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation”³⁸ Furthermore, “to address oneself to the other in the language of the other is, it seems, the condition of all possible justice, but apparently, in all rigor, it is . . . impossible.”³⁹

³⁴Caputo, *Deconstruction*, 133.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 130.

³⁷Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed., Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 17.

³⁸Ibid., 23.

³⁹Ibid., 17.

Salvation as a Gift

The description above is helpful in our attempt to understand the core of the message in the poems of Isa 56-59. In this section of the book of Isaiah, the demand of the prophet, in the terms of Heschel and Derrida, is “too high” or even “impossible,” but even higher than that, in these poems, the standard that they apply to all human endeavor is God himself.⁴⁰ The clue for this understanding is found in the opening part of the whole prophetic discourse of Isa 56-59 itself:

Thus said the Lord:
keep justice / do righteousness [צדקה]
for it is near
for my salvation to come / my righteousness [צדקה] to be revealed (56:1).

It has been pointed out that the word צדקה functions as a catchword that connects the first and the second part of the verse, and the double appearance of the term צדקה in this verse has two different meanings, in which the second usage is translated as “deliverance.”⁴¹ However, from rhetorical perspective, the command to the people to practice צדקה in the context that God’s צדקה is near to be revealed, underlines a message that the people are to practice righteousness in the light of the righteousness of God. This fact that the standard for human righteousness is divine righteousness makes the impossibility to achieve it beyond Derrida’s description of ideal justice.

However, in this same sentence, “God’s righteousness” is put in parallelism with

⁴⁰Cf. Lev 11:44-45; Lev 19:2, etc., where God commands the Israelites to be holy as he is holy. This is the basic theme of the so-called “Holiness Code” (Lev 17-26).

⁴¹See pp. 32-33. Furthermore, the word צדקה is used for God’s deliverance because of the Covenant context that he is giving justice to his people, as when they turned to him. This theme is prominent in the book of Judges.

“his salvation,” and it conveys a message of hope despite the impossible demand for human righteousness. As is revealed in Isa 56-59, in the light of the people’s failure to live up to the demand of preserving judgment and practice righteousness—shown by the prophet’s criticism of the social structure and practice of his people, a significant part of the prophecy is devoted to convey either God’s promise or act of intervention on behalf of the people. The poem depicts the Lord extending salvation to eunuchs and foreigners and gathers dispersed Israel (Isa 56); how he heals and restores his people (Isa 57); his availability and abiding presence to make a difference (Isa 58); and finally he comes as Redeemer to establish the promised salvation (Isa 59). In the context of this dynamic tension between the high or even impossible demand, the prophet charges upon his audience to show how the people are inadequate to arrive at the ideal of justice and salvation on the one hand, and the divine promise and gesture of salvation on the other hand, making the beauty and preciousness of the divine gift of salvation become more vivid.

Justice, Cult, and Salvation in Isa 56-59

Within this framework that salvation is a result of divine intervention, the prophet prescribes a mechanism by which the people may enjoy this salvation given by God. Salvation is only possible whenever there is a relationship with God. In this context, the theme of worship plays a central role. Cultic activities, first and foremost, are an encounter with God, and this encounter will inspire divine imitation and thus bring transformation in the person’s experience and behavior. As a result, divine imitation is a catalyst to bring about justice. This concept is perceivable in the interchange of the role of

agents of salvation. In the first, second, and fourth poems, God is the agent of salvation (see Isa 56:5-8; 57:15-19 and 59:16-21), while in the third poem, the people are called to perform this role (Isa 58:6-12). Furthermore, in this line of thought, this call to the people in Isa 58 resembles God's gesture to foreigners and eunuchs in Isa 56; therefore it underlines the concept of *imitatio dei*.

The poems in Isa 56-59 show that while the ideal purpose of the cult is to foster openness to God and offers a personal encounter with God, it is the human tendency to manipulate the cult to serve their own agenda, 'pleasure' [גִּפְּתִים] (see 58:2,3, and 13).⁴² Therefore, just as has been stated in Isa 57:18, that divine encounter brings about "healing and comfort," a manipulation of the cult, whether a worship ascribed and directed to wrong deities (Isa 57) or a worship directed to the Lord, yet merely for personal interests, and therefore the ethical elements are missing (Isa 58) and only prevents the divine transformation in the person; as they lead to manipulation of others, the result is a chaotic social injustice (Isa 56:9-12; 57:1-2; 58:3b-4; and 59:1-16a).

As an illustration of what happened, reference to foreigners and eunuchs in Isa 56 serves as thematic "mirror" to the reality of God's people. Both foreigners and eunuchs are quoted as expressing concerned about being excluded from the announced "salvation." The alienation of foreigners is given to be a social one: "surely the Lord will separate me from his people" (v. 3a), while for the eunuch the reason is physical: "behold, I am a dry tree" (v. 3b). In the following parts of the rest of Isa 56-59, one can perceive how the social behavior and practice of the people had threatened the realization of the

⁴²Muskita, *The Meaning of גִּפְּתִים*, 150-151.

promised salvation, in which reference to sin committed by various physical parts of the body are consistently employed in the context of the practice of injustice. This phenomena make the complaints of the marginal people serves as an irony: while they realized that they have no access to salvation, the people of Yahweh do not realize how they themselves are actually in thea similar condition.

Reflection: Isaiah 56-59 in the Context of the Book of Isaiah

Thematic Connection between the Introduction and Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah

After this exploration on the poems in of Isa 56-59, it can be proposed, from a perspective of thematic structure, that up to a certain degree, the message of these chapters shares the main theological themes of the book of Isaiah, and was structured as a microcosm of this book. When one reads the book of Isaiah as a whole, one of the implications is that Isa 1 and 65-66 form an inclusio, both from both thematic and terminological perspectives.⁴³ The interest of the fate of historical Jerusalem bound up with its role in eschatological hope is considered as the factor that provides a theological cohesion of the whole book.⁴⁴ Both the beginning and ending of the book discuss cultic abuses that lead to breaks between the Lord with his people, with a reference to practices involving sacred gardens (1:29-31; 66:17).⁴⁵ In both sections, normalization of relations

⁴³See David M. Carr, "Reading Isaiah from Beginning (Isaiah 1) to End (Isaiah 65-66): Multiple Modern Possibilities" in *New Visions of Isaiah*, 189. Liebreich a list of terminological parallels between Isa 1 and 65-66. Leon J. Liebreich, "The Compilation of the Book of Isaiah" *JQR* 46 (1955-56): 276-277; 47 (1956-57): 126-127.

⁴⁴William J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah" *TynBul* 36 (1985): 112.

⁴⁵Carr, "Reading Isaiah," 189.

between God and his people involves separation of the righteous from the evildoers, with punishment to the latter.⁴⁶ That is why it can be said that the whole book has two predominant themes, judgment and salvation, and they serve as its thematic frame.⁴⁷

In this context, distribution of words, motifs and names are employed to strengthen this thematic frame. For example, “heaven and earth” in the opening and closing part of the book underlines how while heaven and earth are summoned as witnesses of God’s judgment to his people (Isa 1:2) in the end, the new heaven and earth stand eternally as proof of his work of salvation on behalf of his people (Isa 65:17; 66:12).⁴⁸ The opening part of the book portrays how Zion, under judgment, and that its vulnerability is so vivid (1:8). Yet there is a promise that Zion will be ransomed with justice (1:27), and the end of the book speaks about how the miraculous event of Zion’s restoration is so quick (66:8).⁴⁹ A further observation indicates that these themes of judgment and salvation serves as a means through which “the world sees the glory of God

⁴⁶The evildoers will “be put into shame” (1:29; 66:5) and burned with unquenchable fire (1:31; 66:24). See Liebreich, “The Compilation of the Book of Isaiah,” 277.

⁴⁷Or judgment and forgiveness. See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction*, 327.

⁴⁸Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 677-678.

⁴⁹Clifford discusses how, in the light of reading the book of Isaiah as a whole, three themes in the second part of the book seem to stand outside the main message of the first part of the book, therefore “posing a problem for any theory of redactional unity,” and they are the themes of the exodus-conquest, of creation, and of Cyrus’ as the chosen king, rather than the davidic king. However, he shows how these three themes, “far from being surds in the Isaian system,” reinforce the unity of the book, that “each of the three topics develops something about Zion in its manifold meanings of temple, temple city, or people.” Richard J. Clifford, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 3.

in and through Israel that their salvation will have reached its intended fruition” (2:1-4; 66:18).⁵⁰

Susan Niditch pointed out four main themes in the prophetic criticism in the opening part of the book: (1) the hypocrisy of sacrifice without meaning (Isa 1:10-15), (2) indictment of leaders of the community on ethical grounds (Isa 1:23), (3) images of harlotry (Isa 1:21) and (4) Israel’s state of uncleanness (Isa 1:6).⁵¹ This insight from Niditch shows how thematic interconnection between worship and ethics in the context of salvation plays an important role in the book of Isaiah. In the description of William Dumbrell, “the book of Isaiah moves from the perverse worship offered by physical Jerusalem under judgment arising from neglect of Yahweh’s kingship, to the worship of Yahweh in the New Jerusalem.”⁵² Within this context of worship, the report of the theophany experience of the prophet in Isa 6 plays a significant role in the theology of the whole book, since it narrates how he “realizes that it was the failure of himself and Judah generally to reflect the sovereignty of God, Yahweh’s kingship at the centre of Israel’s covenant life, the cult, which would account for the tremendous movement from prosperity to desolation (v. 12) which Isaiah 6 projects. We clearly see the reasons underlying the sweeping condemnation of worship and sanctuary in Isaiah 1:10-20.”⁵³ In this context, it is the aim of the eschatology of the book of Isaiah to reverse the situation

⁵⁰John N. Oswalt, “God’s Determination to Redeem His People [Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-11; 26:1-9; 35:1-10]” *RevExp* 88 (1991), 153.

⁵¹Susan Niditch, “The Composition of Isaiah 1” *Bib* 61 (1980): 510.

⁵²Dumbrell, “The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah,” 128.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 116.

described in Isa 1, and the material of Isa 2:2-4 is a signal of that hope.⁵⁴

Based on the insight above, we can propose a thematic counter-parallel between the opening and the closing sections of the book, in which the themes discussed above describe that (1) the remnant will “bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord” (Isa 66:20) in contrast to the rejected sacrifice and worship in the opening of the book. (2) portrayal of a peaceful and productive life based on truth (Isa 65:17-25) is in contrast to unjust society under corrupt leadership⁵⁵; (3) reference to punishment upon idolaters (Isa 65:3-7; 11-12; 66:3-4; 15-17), and (4) finally, assurance of salvation to Israel, the “descendants of Jacob” with a special reference to those who sought for the Lord, the “poor,” those “of a contrite spirit,” and the one who “trembles at his word” (Isa 65:9; 66:1-2) in contrast to portrayal of Israel’s stubbornness despite their desperate condition: stricken, sick, full of wounds, bruises, and sores in Isa 1:6.

Brevard Childs explained that in the canonical context of the book, the emphasis in the first part of the book is a message of judgment, while in the later part, it is a promise of salvation. Even when this distinction has been frequently blurred, it is “in order to testify to a theology which was directed to subsequent generations of Israelites. Sinful Israel would always be the object of divine terror; repentant Israel would receive

⁵⁴Dumbrell, “The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah,” 128.

⁵⁵Lack points out that the portrayal of non-violent order of the society, fertility experienced by the people and revelation of God’s glory are elements not found in Isa 1. Rémi Lack, *La Symbolique du Livre d’Isaïe. Essai sur L’image Littéraire comme Élément de sStructuration* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1973), 139-141; see also Carr, “Reading Isaiah,” 189. My explanation is that these themes stand as a contrast to the sinful situation of Judah and Jerusalem in Isa 1.

his promise of forgiveness.”⁵⁶ For Dumbrell, this theme of “judgment” in the sense of absence of salvation (1-39) and “promise of salvation” (40-66) brings a tension between the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the eschatological note of God’s protective role on behalf of Zion.⁵⁷

Based on the comments quoted above, it can be suggested that both the opening and ending of the book of Isaiah are concerned with the issues of worship, salvation, and justice/injustice. Based on this insight, we can compare them to the findings of our study; Isa 56-59 is also concerned with the issues of worship, salvation, and justice/injustice. It is within this kind of theological framework that the message of Isa 56-59 fits in to the theological message of the whole book. The thematic connection between the introduction and conclusion of the book of Isaiah, from the perspective of judgment and salvation in which cult also plays an important role, might be summarized in Table 16.

An observation of the table below indicates that a clear-cut distinction that the book of Isaiah opens with the theme of judgment and concludes with the theme of salvation is a little bit of an overstatement, since both the opening and concluding sections of the book cover both the themes of judgment and salvation. This thematic framework relates to the dynamic of the fulfilment of the promised soon-coming salvation with all its stagnation, halts, even backward movements, before finally arriving to the ultimate end, as it was presented in Isa 56-59 and, to a certain degree, the poems in this section of the book of Isaiah serve as a microcosm of the whole book.

⁵⁶Childs, *Introduction*, 327.

⁵⁷Dumbrell, “Reading Isaiah,” 123.

Table 16. Thematic interconnection between the introduction and the conclusion of the book of Isaiah from the perspective of judgment and salvation

Theme	Negative Description	Positive Description	The book of Isaiah	
Heaven and Earth	- Heaven and earth summoned as witnesses of judgment upon God's people	- Heaven and earth stand as proof of God's work of salvation in behalf of his people	1:2	65:17; 66:1-2, 22
Zion	- Portrayal of Zion's vulnerability in her judgment	- Zion is ransomed by justice, Zion will be the center of worship - Miraculous redemption of Zion	1:8 1:27; 2:3	66:7-13
God's glory		- All nations will come to the mountain of the Lord; he will be the judge; universal peace is achieved - Nations, tongues will see God's glory	2:1-5	66:17-18
Worship	- Rejection of sacrifice offered by the people - Rejection of worship in terms of "the new moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies"	- The children of Israel bring an offering in a clean, טהור , vessel into the house of the Lord	1:10-15 1:13-14	66:20

Table 16—Continued.

Theme	Negative Description	Positive Description	The book of Isaiah	
		- Perpetual worship in the new heavens and new earth in terms of “from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath”		66:22-23
Idolatry	- Judgment and destruction upon idolaters		1:28-31	65:3-7, 11-12; 66:3-4,
The status of Israel before the Lord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A sinful nation, people laden with iniquity; - A people who “have provoked the anger of the holy one of Israel”; - “A people who provoke me to anger continually”; - A “people who chose in which I have no delight” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Salvation is extended to those who are poor and of a contrite spirit, tremble at God’s word 	1:4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65:3 65:12 66:4 66:2
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Condemnation of offering sacrifice and worship without ethical conduct - Rampant injustice is comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah 		1:10-15	1:9-10; 21-23

Table 16—Continued.

Theme	Negative Description	Positive Description	The book of Isaiah	
	- Judgment upon society under corrupt leadership	- A portrayal of peaceful life as God creates a new heaven and a new earth		65:3-7 65:17-24
The Temple	- Criticism of unacceptable worship as “trampling on my [God’s] courts” - Judgment coming from the temple	- The house of the God of Jacob will be the center of universal worship - The “remnant of Israel” [your brethren] and “all flesh” will come to worship to “my holy mountain Jerusalem,” “the house of the Lord”	1:12 2:1-3	66:6 66:19-23

Thematic and Lexical Parallel between the Introduction and Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah with Isa 56-59

After the presentation of thematic connection between the opening and concluding sections of the book, the following section is a presentation of the thematic and lexical parallel between the introduction and conclusion of the book of Isaiah, with the poems in Isa 56-59.

1. The Sinful State of Israel in Terms of Idolatry

The audience of the prophet are addressed in the terms of their status as descendants of sinful ancestors and their insulting attitude against the Lord. In the opening part of the book, they are being referred to as a sinful nation, with the specification of “seed [זרע] of evildoers, children [בנים] who act corruptly . . . abandoned the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, turned away from Him.” (Isa 1:4). In the ending part of the book, the people are described as “rebellious people . . . who provoke me to anger continually to my face” (Isa 65:2-3). In a parallel line of thought in Isa 57, the people addressed as “children [בנים] of a sorcerers, seed [זרע] of an adulterer and prostitute . . . children [ילד] of rebellion, seed [זרע] of deceit” who open wide their mouths and stick out their tongues against the Lord (57:3-4). Furthermore, the act of provoking the anger of the Lord, among others, is described as having to do with a practice of idolatry (Isa 1:29-31; 57:5-13a; 65:3-5, 7), and specific references are given to an oak tree [איל] (Isa 1:29-30; 57:5) and gardens [גנה] (Isa 1:29; 65:3).

The connection based on the lexical distribution between the opening and conclusion of the book of Isaiah and Isa 56-57 on the sinful state of Israel in their rebellion against the Lord can be summarized in Table 17.

Table 17. Lexical connection among the introduction, conclusion of the book of Isaiah, and Isa 56-59 from the perspective of Israel’s sinfulness and rebellion

Theme	Description	The book of Isaiah		
The sinful state of Israel in terms of provocation against the Lord	- “seed [זרע] of evildoers, children [בנים] who act corruptly . . . abandoned the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, turned away from Him.” - “You, children of [בני] a sorceress, seed [זרע] of an adulterer and a prostitute. Against whom do you jest? Against whom do you open wide your mouth and stick out your tongue? Are you not children of [ילדי] rebellion, seed [זרע] of deceit?”	1:4	57:3-4	
Idolatrous activity of the people	- Description of idolatry - Specific reference to oak tree [איל] - Specific reference to garden [גנה]	1:29-31 1:29-30 1:29	57:5-13a 57:5	65:3-5,7 65:3

2. Rejection of Cultic Activities Due to Injustice

Isa 1 reports God’s rejection of Israel’s worship from various perspectives: rejection of sacrifices, appearance in the temple court, the sacred assemblies and festivals, and prayers (vv. 11-15). God has no delight in their sacrifices and burnt offerings, and their sacred meetings are considered more as burdens (vv. 11, 14). The reason for this rejection is given as the practice of injustice (1:15). This kind of argumentation has its lexical and thematic parallels in Isa 58-59.

When the people ask why their fasting did not received divine acknowledgment— i.e. rejection of their worship—it is because of their practice of injustice. While God says

he has no “delight” [גִּפְּתָה] in their sacrifices: blood of bulls, lambs and goats, because their hands “are covered with blood” (1:11, 15), in Isa 58 the reason that God did not take notice of the people’s fasting is because in their fasting they pursue גִּפְּתָה—what is described as driving their workers hard, contention, strife, even to the point of physical violence (v. 3-4). In Isa 65, among others, divine judgment fell upon those whom, God says, “when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear; but did evil before my eyes, choosing things in which I do not ‘delight’ [גִּפְּתָה]” (v. 12; also 66:4). In contrast with the situation in Isa 65 and 66, in Isa 58, as the people put into practice all the suggestions above, the promise is that “you will call, and the Lord will answer, you will cry and he will say, ‘Here I am’” (v. 8).

In Isa 1, the rejection of the people’s prayer is expressed as “when you spread your hands I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood” (v. 15). In Isa 59, the prophet, in explaining the situation between God and the people, said that the hand of the Lord is not so short that it cannot save, nor his ear is so heavy that it cannot hear; but the iniquities of the people have made a separation between them and their sins have hidden his face. The prophet described further the sinful condition of the people as “your hands are defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquity” (vv. 1-3).

In the context of the issue of rejected worship, in Isa 1 the people are called “to cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless” (v. 16-17). In Isa 58, a fasting acceptable to the Lord is depicted as “to loosen the bond of wickedness, to undo the bands of yoke, to let the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke,” with the call going further for them to divide bread with the hungry, bring

the homeless poor into the house, and to cover the naked (vv. 6-7).

The connection based on the lexical distribution between the opening and conclusion of the book of Isaiah and Isa 56-57 on the theme of rejected worship caused by the acts of injustice can be summarized in Table 18.

Table 18. Lexical connection among the introduction, conclusion of the book of Isaiah, and Isa 56-59 from the perspective of rejected worship

Theme	Description	The book of Isaiah		
Rejected worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rejection of sacrifices, appearance in the temple court, the sacred assemblies and festivals, and prayers; God has no delight in their sacrifices and burnt offerings, and their sacred meetings are considered more as burdens. - The people “seek” the Lord day by day, delight to know his ways, asking “just decision,” delight in the nearness of God, yet he did not see nor take notice of their devotion. 	1:11-15;	58:2-3	
<p>עָפַח as keyword for criticism towards the people’s behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God has no “delight” [עָפַח] in the sacrifices: blood of bulls, lambs and goats offered by the people because their hands “are covered with blood.” - God did not take notice of the people’s fasting because in their fasting, they pursued עָפַח - what is described as driving their workers hard, contention, strife, even to the point of physical violence. - The reason for divine punishment upon the people is, among others, that they did evil in His sight and chose that in which He did not delight [עָפַח]. 	1:11,15	58: 3-4	65:12; 66:4

Table 18—Continued.

Theme	Description	The book of Isaiah		
Unheard prayers in connection to the acts of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The prayers of the people are not going to be heard because their hands “are full with blood” - The prophet pointed out that the reason God did not hear is because “your hands are defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquity” (vv. 1-3). 	1:15	59:1,3	
Worship has to be expressed in the practice of justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The people are called “to cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless.” - A fasting acceptable to the Lord is depicted as “to loosen the bond of wickedness, to undo the bands of yoke, to let the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke;” to divide bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into the house, and to cover the naked. 	1:16-17	58: 6-7	

3. Criticism of Unjust Leadership

In Isa 1, the absence of justice is portrayed as a city which used to be full of justice [משפט] and righteousness [צדקה] lodged in it, now occupied by murderers; with the “princess” are rebellious, companion of thieves, everyone of them love bribes, follows after rewards, and did not defend the fatherless and widows (vv. 21 and 23). In comparison with the performance of leadership in Isa 1, in Isa 56 the “shepherds” are criticized in their failure to watch over the flocks, being portrayed as greedy, each one of them are after unjust gain (vv. 9-11), with the result being that the righteous perishes, no one takes it to the heart (Isa 57:1). Furthermore, in comparison to the description of the condition of Jerusalem in Isa 1 as seen above, in Isa 59 the people are confessing how,

because of their behavior, “justice [משפט] is far from us, righteousness [צדקה] does not overtake us . . . we hope for justice [משפט] but there is none, for salvation [ישועה] yet it is far from us” (vv. 9 and 11).

The connection based on the lexical distribution between the opening of the book of Isaiah and Isa 56-57 on the theme of criticism toward the leadership due to their failure to provide, maintain, and execute justice can be summarized in Table 19.

Table 19. Lexical connection between the introduction of the book of Isaiah and Isa 56-59 from the perspective of the absence of justice

Theme	Description	The book of Isaiah		
The absence of justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The city which used to be full of justice [משפט] and righteousness [צדקה] lodged in it, is now occupied by murderers - The people are confessing how, because of their behavior, “justice [משפט] is far from us, righteousness [צדקה] does not overtake us . . . we hope for justice [משפט] but there is none, for salvation [ישועה] yet it is far from us.” - The “princess” are accused as rebellious, a companion of thieves, everyone loves bribes, follows after rewards, did not defend the fatherless and widows. - The “shepherds” are criticized for their failure to watch over the flocks, being portrayed as greedy, each one of them are after unjust gain; with the result being that the righteous perishes, no one takes it to heart. 	1:22	59:9, 11	
		1:23	56:9-11; 57:1	

4. Redemption of Zion

Despite the sharp censure against sinful Jerusalem in Isa 1, the prophecy speaks about the redemption of Zion - “Therefore the Lord says . . . ‘Zion shall be redeemed [פִּדְיוֹן] with justice, her repentant ones [שׂוֹבִי] with righteousness” (vv. 24- 27), comparable to the description of divine intervention in Isa 59: “‘a redeemer [גֹּאֵל] will come to Zion, and to those who turn [שׂוֹבִי] from transgression in Jacob,’ declares the Lord” (v. 20).⁵⁸

It is worth noticing that in both texts above, salvation is extended exclusively to the repentant ones; therefore, it implies that salvation is, at the same time, also judgmental in nature. This kind of understanding is well reflected in the prophecies in Isa 65 and 66. In these two last chapters of the book of Isaiah, presentation of the promises of salvation (65:8-10) is interwoven with/against the message of retributive justice (65:3-7; 11-12), with a contrasting experience between them as described (65:13-14). The opening of Isa 66 states that the lord looks at one who is poor and of a contrite spirit, who trembles at his words (66:2), in opposed to those who practice idolatry (66:3-4); a contrast between the two groups is emphasized (66:5). The restoration of Zion/Jerusalem has a positive effect only on those who “love her, mourn for her” (66:7-10), and they will be satisfied and consoled with her glory (66:11-14a); in contrast, the Lord will punish his enemies, specifically the idolaters (66:14b-17).

In parallel with the description of salvation/judgment in Isa 65-66 as seen above,

⁵⁸For the interconnection between פִּדְיוֹן and גֹּאֵל, see Isa 35:9-10; 51:10-11; and Jer 31:11.

in Isa 56-59 salvation is not for everyone: only certain eunuchs and foreigners, those who keep the Sabbath, choose what the Lord pleases, and hold fast to his covenant will be partakers of the promised salvation (56:4, 6). In the same way, not all Israel will be saved—only those who are contrite and lowly of spirit (57:15); those who extend themselves to reach out to the marginal ones, keep the Sabbath properly (58:6-7, 9b and 13-14), and finally, those who turn from transgression (59:20).

As God comes to restore justice and righteousness, it was depicted as a “repayment” for his adversaries: “according to their deeds, accordingly he will repay” [כעל גמלות כעל ישלם] (Isa 59:18); comparable to the portrayal of divine judgment in Isa 65-66: “for I will repay, repay into their bosom” [כי אם-שלמתי ושלמתי על-חיקם] (Isa 65:6), and “the Lord, who ‘fully repays’ his adversaries” [יהוה משלם גמול לאיביו] (Isa 66:6). The extension of this work of judgment is set even to “coastal lands” [לאיים] and as result, they will see God’s glory [כבוד]” (Isa 59:18-19), comparable to the description how, as a result of divine fury, he will gather all nations and tongues, how they shall come and see his glory [כבוד] and this act is extended to “the coastal lands afar off” [הרחקים האיים] (Isa 66:18-19).

A final note on the theme of the redemption of Zion/Jerusalem looks like this locative identity serves as the embodiment of universal salvation. While in the opening part of the book, heaven and earth are summoned as witnesses to God’s judgment upon his people, the ending part of the book reports realization of the divine salvific act, in which, while the specific locus of the work of salvation is in Zion/Jerusalem, it is in the context of the new heaven and the new earth.

The connection based on the lexical distribution between the opening and conclusion of the book of Isaiah and Isa 56-57 on the theme of the redemption of Zion can be summarized in Table 20.

Table 20. Lexical connection among the introduction, conclusion of the book of Isaiah, and Isa 56-59 from the perspective of redemption of Zion

Theme	Description	The book of Isaiah		
The redemption of Zion	<p>Despite the sharp censure against sinful condition of the people, in the end,</p> <p>- “Zion shall be redeemed [פְּדוּהָ] with justice, her repentant ones [שׁוֹבִים] with righteousness”</p> <p>- ““a redeemer [גּוֹאֵל] will come to Zion, and to those who turn [שׁוֹבִים] from transgression in Jacob,’ declares the Lord”</p> <p>- God will gather all nations and tongues, how they shall come and see his glory [כְּבוֹד] and this act is extended to “the coastal lands afar off” [הָאֲרָצוֹת הַרְחוקִים].</p>	1:27	59:20	66:18-19

5. An Acceptable/Approved Worship, Universal in Nature

The opening scene of the book of Isaiah speaks about rejected worship, but the book is climaxed with a proper worship in its perpetuity (Isa 1:11-15; 66:23). The setting of the worship in the opening part is in the temple court of Jerusalem, and the book ends with the setting of worship in the new heaven and the new earth. This kind of concern in the book of Isaiah, a reversal from the abuse of worship to the proper one, with the climax

is the portrayal of proper worship in the new earth and found its parallel in Isa 56-59.

Chapters 57 and 58 deal with pitfalls in worship. In Isa 57 the people are depicted as rigorous in their worship, although conducted to the wrong deities, with the result in nothingness (v. 13). In Isa 58, worship is dedicated to the right deity, yet the people neglect ethics, and as a consequence, the worship did not bring about the expected blessings. At the same time, in Isa 56-59, salvation is depicted as, and with the goal of, cultic experience (Isa 56:5,7-8), a vigorous encounter with God (Isa 58:13-14) and reestablishment of the everlasting covenant (Isa 59:21). Only Isa 2 speaks about how in “the latter days” all nations will flow to “the mountain of the Lord” to worship, Isa 56 speaks about how foreigners will be brought by the Lord to “my holy mountain” and their worship will be acceptable, because, as the Lord says, “my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (v. 7).

The focus of the discussion in this particular section is to attempt to position the message of Isa 56-59 within the context of the whole book of Isaiah, solely based on the comparison with the opening and concluding sections of the book. A comparison of the message of Isa 56-59 with other parts of the book of Isaiah needs also to be undertaken. Therefore, this topic needs more exploration, and further study in this area is suggested.

General Conclusions

The purpose of the study is first, to attempt to read each poem in Isa 56-59 as a unified literary work, from the perspective of a micro-structural level of poems, and second, to understand the interconnection between the themes of justice, cult, and salvation in this particular section of the book of Isaiah. Reading the poems on their

micro-structural level reveals a certain degree of deliberate structure in them despite their literary complexity. Whatever the original provenance of its individual segments, the present form of the text exhibits a kind of thorough interconnection. It also shows that the colon structure in the poems in Isa 56-59 is designed predominantly as a bicola, with some minor tricola patterns (Isa 58:11 and 13c). The key words and terminology distributed in each colon to build the parallel devices are comparable with other biblical passages, and therefore reading of them as poetic pairs is justifiable.

The book of Isaiah is concerned with judgment and salvation. It is on the part of salvation that Isa 56-59 gives its contribution—what is the meaning of salvation, what are the pitfalls in the attempt to achieve it, what are the hindrances. Within the four poems in these chapters, interconnection between the themes of justice, cult, and salvation are presented. In the first poem, while it is opened with an announcement to practice justice in the context of coming salvation, the predominant motif as the experience of salvation is presented in the cultic terms. In the second poem, while it is opened with a description of a failure on the part of the leadership to provide a proper government for the people, the criticism is followed by a description of idolatry, hinting that the injustice is connected with improper worship practices. In this context of idolatrous worship, God is presented as the source of salvation: he heals, he leads, he restores, he re-creates (Isa 57:18-19).

The third poem provides another angle in the relationship between salvation, cult, and justice. While the cultic activity is addressed to the right deity, the rituals the people are engaged in are the correct ones, yet they feel that all of the cultic activities did not bring the expected outcome, as if they are unheeded and unacceptable (Isa 58:3).

Responding to this concern, points to the problem of their unethical conduct toward their fellow humans. The admonition defines fasting as opening oneself to his/her fellow beings and being sensitive to their needs; then one can experience blessings from it (Isa 58:6-12). At the same time, it is only when one worships God in accordance to his ways and is delighted in him that rituals will bring the expected outcome (Isa 58:13-14). The basic message of this poem is that there are no blessings in worship with the purpose of serving selfish interests.

The fourth poem is concerned with the attempt to achieve salvation without God. This topic is reflected in the announcement in the opening part of the poem, in which God's hand is not too short to save (Isa 59:1). In his oracle, the prophet makes a reference to various efforts on the part of the people: their works—likened to a spider's web—having no substance, their acts, how they run, their thoughts, their tracks, their paths (Isa 59:6-8), with the intended result being to achieve “justice,” “righteousness,” “light,” and “salvation” (Isa 59:9, 11). However, despite all these good intentions, what they have is social disaster and a situation of injustice. The concluding part of the poem reports divine intervention to bring about justice and salvation. The message here is the futility of human efforts to achieve salvation based on its own power.

In conclusion, in the structural frame of Isa 56-59, the theme of salvation is presented as a quest for an encounter with the Divine, in which each member of the society may gain a meaningful and constructive experience from it, on both personal and communal levels. Within this framework, salvation, first and foremost, is described as initiated and established by God; it is the work of divine healing and restoration in humans. Yet, at the same time, in order that this process might be effective, a human

response is needed. The poems in Isa 56-59 presented salvation as having a right relationship with God, and this relationship with the divine will enable one to be an agent of divine blessing to fellow human beings.

Furthermore, as salvation is not found and experienced in a vacuum, but is discovered in one's cultural and communal framework, the message of the prophet covers various aspects of community life, including religion, language, history, and economic activities. As salvation begins with the right concept about God, in which both the people's theological and social assumptions and practices can be in harmony with the divine character, the realization of these ideals enables salvation to be a tangible experience.

The relevance of the message of Isa 56-59 might be set in the larger context of the second half of the book of Isaiah. This part of the book of Isaiah begins with a charge: “[You] comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God” (Isa 40:1). While in the following chapters it was disclosed that the consolation primarily originates with the Lord (Isa 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9), it remains an open question of “who is to carry it out.”⁵⁹ Pondering on this question, Klaus Baltzer elaborated that while the transformation of the people remains a divine wonder, it demands a human response, and only this response permits a new beginning. Within this concept of the necessity of human response, the “consolation of God” makes human consolation meaningful and necessary.⁶⁰ Being put against this

⁵⁹Klaus Baltzer, “Liberation from Debt Slavery after the Exile in Second Isaiah and Nehemiah” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987): 477.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 482.

background, the message of the poems in Isa 56-59 is a response to the call in Isa 40:1, that by responding to God, his people become an agent of divine consolation.

In its more immediate context, Isa 56-59 might be considered as a divine prescription by which the purpose stated in Isa 55, that Israel is to be an agent of salvation for all people (vv. 4-5), can be realized, as well as reassuring in Isa 58:21 the promise of the “everlasting covenant” in Isa 55:3. As an agent of salvation, Israel must first have a right and transforming experience with the Lord in order that their “light” shine, and the glory of the Lord will be upon them (Isa 58:8); then they can “arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord shine upon you” (Isa 60:1).

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