

Isaiah 55-57

This concluding element of ch. 49-57, like 50:10-51:8 (its correspondent in the first panel), is structured around repeated invitation (charts). The first series of invitations graciously invite those who will accept the Lord's grace. The second series is a solemn summons to his judgment. A recurring feature in both sets of paragraphs is the shift from the initial invitation (always plural) to a singular reference in the body of the paragraph. The final paragraph offers both forgiveness to the humble and judgment to the recalcitrant.

55:1-56:8, Invitation to the Receptive

55:1-5, *Promise of the Davidic leader to those who hunger and thirst*

This invitation begins in highly figurative form that recalls several themes from earlier Scripture, then gives a literal interpretation of the figure.

1-2, The Figure: Free Food and Drink

55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat;--The invitation in vv. 1-2 recalls a vignette that Solomon portrays in the early chapters of Proverbs. He describes two women who invite the foolish to a feast (chart):

Pro 9:1-5 Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: 2 She hath killed **her** beasts; she hath mingled **her** wine; she hath also furnished her table. 3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, 4 Whoso *is* simple, let him turn in hither: *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 5 Come, eat of **my** bread, and drink of the wine *which* I have mingled.

Pro 9:13-17 A foolish woman *is* clamorous: *she is* simple, and knoweth nothing. 14 For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, 15 To call passengers who go right on their ways: 16 Whoso *is* simple, let him turn in hither: and *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 17 **Stolen** waters are sweet, and bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant.

We have just finished Isa 54, in which the nation is presented under the image of a woman, once foolish but now restored to the Lord. She is exhorted to “sing, ... break forth into singing, ... and cry aloud” (54:1). So it is natural to think of the contrast in Prov 9, and hear echoes of that invitation here.

If Zion is issuing the invitation, the Gentiles are the guests. v. 4 offers the Messiah, not to the “people” singular, but to the peoples, an expression that Isaiah uniformly applies to the Gentiles. The nation, now restored, turns her message toward the Gentiles.

55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, ... he that hath no money;--The invitation is addressed to people who meet two conditions: they are thirsty and they are poor.

- I am thirsty when I recognize my need.

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- I am poor when I recognize that I am unable to meet my need with my own resources.

All would be straightforward, except that the caller says, “Buy and eat.” How can those with “no money” “buy”?

yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.--He repeats the former paradox, “buy ... without money,” and adds another. The verb “buy” שָׁבַר is uniformly applied elsewhere in Scripture, most notably in the Joseph story, to the purchase of grain or other solid food. The expression in the previous line is consistent: “buy and eat.” But nowhere else is one ever said to buy a beverage; contrast the Lord’s instruction to Israel during the Exodus about their journey through the land of Esau (chart),

Deu 2:6 Ye shall buy שָׁבַר meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy כָּרָה [a different verb] water of them for money, that ye may drink.

Similarly, Moses said to Sihon king of Og,

Deu 2:28 Thou shalt sell שָׁבַר me meat for money, that I may eat; and give נָתַן me water for money, that I may drink:

This emphasizes that the language is to be understood figuratively. The restored Wife of Jehovah is not offering physical food and drink, but spiritual refreshment.

There is another allusion. Fourteen of the seventeen uses of this verb that appear before Isaiah, are in the Joseph story. It would seem that Isaiah wants us to recall this story. Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt, has become ruler of the land by interpreting Pharaoh’s dream about seven years of plenty and seven subsequent years of famine. Under the wise leadership of Joseph, Egypt has stored up food during the years of abundance. Then comes the famine (chart).

Gen 41:56-42:3 And the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. 57 And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy *corn*; because that the famine was *so* sore in all lands. 42:1 Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, ... 2 ... Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die. 3 And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

The story of Joseph reminds us of a time when the Gentiles provided physical food to Israel and his family. Now Isaiah anticipates a time when Mother Zion, restored from her folly, offers spiritual food to the Gentiles.

There is more. Recall the details of the story. The brothers take money to buy grain, but when Joseph’s servants load the grain onto the brothers’ donkeys, they put the money in the sacks.

Gen 42:25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and **to restore every man's money into his sack**, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them. ... 35 And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, **every man's bundle of money was in his sack**:

Eventually the brothers have to return for more grain. Jacob instructs them to take the original payment, plus additional money for the new grain:

Gen 43:12 And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry *it* again in your hand; peradventure it *was* an oversight:

The first thing they do when they reach Egypt is to attempt to return the money.

Gen 43:19-23 And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door of the house, 20 And said, O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food: 21 And it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, *every* man's money *was* in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand. 22 And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks. 23 And he said, Peace *be* to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: **I had your money.**

When Joseph loads their sacks on the second trip, again he returns the silver they have brought:

Gen 44:1-2 And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks *with* food, as much as they can carry, and **put every man's money in his sack's mouth.** 2 And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, **and his corn money.**

Israel was hungry for physical food. They sought to buy food from the Gentiles, but in fact, they received it “without money and without price.” Try as they might, they couldn’t pay for it. Now Isaiah anticipates a day when the tables are turned, and Israel invites the Gentiles to come and buy food without payment.

2 Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is not bread?* and your labour for *that which satisfieth not?*--We do not expect to eat for free. Zion reminds her hearers that they willingly spend money and labor every day, for what they think will satisfy their hunger. Yet it does not really satisfy. As the Lord said to the woman at the well in John 4,

Joh 4:13-14 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: 14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Think of the most expensive meal you have ever eaten. Unless it was this morning, a day later you were hungry again. Zion urges her Gentile hearers, “Come to me for the true food and drink. It is what you have been seeking all along. You would gladly give all your wealth for it. Yet, when you come, ready to buy, with your money in your hand, you will find that payment has already been made. As Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: **I had your money.**’”

hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is good,* and let your soul delight itself in *fatness.*--She urges her hearers not to be misled by second-rate fare. Do not follow the invitation of Dame Folly. Eat what is truly good. Delight in what is truly rich food.

3-5, The Interpretation: A covenant with Israel’s God, through the Messiah

So far, Zion’s invitation is a double paradox. She calls the hungry to buy refreshment, but without money. And she insists that the true food is very different from what they so eagerly pursue. This is picture language, designed to stimulate their curiosity. What is the reality that lies behind this picture?

3, Offer of a Covenant

3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear,--“Hear” שמע is the same verb as “hearken” in v. 2, and links the figure to the interpretation. The invitation to hearken and enjoy rich, free food is explained as an invitation to hearken and enjoy life through the Messiah.

and your soul shall live;--What is at stake is more than a satisfying, inexpensive meal. This is a matter of life and death.

and I will make an everlasting covenant with you,--Most commentators see the Lord as offering the covenant. But recall Israel’s foreign policy (Deut 20), to march against the nations and offer them a choice between submission to the Lord, and death (chart).

Deu 20:10-17 When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. 11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, *that* all the people *that is* found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. 12 And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: ... 15 Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities *which are* very far off from thee, which *are* not of the cities of these nations. 16 But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee *for* an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: 17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them;

That chapter does not mention covenants, but it is clear from other passages that Israel could enter into covenants with other nations. In Exodus, God warned them not to make such a covenant with the nearby nations:

Exo 23:31-32 for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. 32 Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.

But they could offer peace to the far-away nations. The Gibeonites, who actually lived in the land of promise, somehow learned of this policy. They presented themselves to Joshua, saying,

Jos 9:9 From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, ... 11 Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and... go to meet them, and say unto them, *We are* your servants: therefore now make ye a league [a covenant] with us.

Israel was fooled, and the Scripture records,

Jos 9:15 And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league [covenant] with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

It is Israel’s mission to “make a covenant” with the nations of the world, and here she offers it. What is that covenant?

an everlasting עולם covenant ברית ... even the sure נאמנים mercies חסדים of David.--There is only one other place in the OT that describes God’s “mercies” חסדים toward David as faithful אמן, Psalm 89, written by Ethan, David’s singer. These two words sound the theme in the opening verses, and are picked up later in the Psalm to describe the promise of David’s everlasting Seed. The Psalm also speaks of covenant and eternity (chart).

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Psa 89:1-4, 28-37 I will sing of the **mercies** **חסד** of the LORD **for ever** **עולם**: with my mouth will I make known thy **faithfulness** **אמן** to all generations. 2 For I have said, **Mercy** **חסד** shall be built up **for ever** **עולם**: thy **faithfulness** **אמן** shalt thou establish in the very heavens. 3 I have made a **covenant** **ברית** with my chosen, I have sworn unto **David** my servant, 4 Thy seed will I establish **for ever** **עולם**, and build up thy throne to all generations. ... 28 My **mercy** **חסד** will I keep for him for evermore, and my **covenant** **ברית** shall **stand fast** **אמן** with him. 29 His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. ... 33 Nevertheless my **lovingkindness** **חסד** will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my **faithfulness** **אמן** to fail. ... 35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto **David**. 36 His seed shall endure **for ever** **עולם**, and his throne as the sun before me. 37 It shall be established **for ever** **עולם** as the moon, and *as a faithful* **אמן** witness in heaven.

God's covenant promise to Israel is of an everlasting seed, who would rule on David's throne.

Paul quotes our verse, with its reference to Ps 89, as a prediction of the resurrection of our Lord, in his sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (chart):

Act 13:34-35 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, **I will give you the sure mercies of David**. 35 Wherefore he saith also in another [place] [Ps 16:10], Thou shalt not suffer **thine Holy One** to see corruption.

Both Ps 16:10 and Isa 55:3 use the root **חסד** a "covenant faithfulness," translated in the LXX (and quoted by Paul) in both places as **σσιος** "holy." Paul pivots on this shared vocabulary:

- The faithful promise to David in Ps 89:36 is the everlasting seed that "shall endure forever"
- That seed cannot see corruption (Ps 16)

Who is the everlasting seed? It cannot be Solomon, or any of the kings that succeeded him. Dead men do not "endure forever." The death of Jesus would have disqualified him as well, except that God "raised him from the dead." Without the resurrection, God's mercies to David cannot be sure, which is why Paul's gospel always includes the resurrection.

1Co 15:17 if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins.

Conversely, the promise of an eternal seed as God's sure mercies to David guarantees that the cycle of death will be broken, and David will have a descendant who will live forever.

Ps 89 describes this promised seed as "a faithful witness in heaven." Zion goes on in v. 4 to recall that promise, quoting God (chart). Here's a paraphrase:

I [Zion] offer to you Gentiles an everlasting covenant, the same one that God promised to David in Ps 89. Here is God's promise: "Behold, I have given him, the Davidic king, for a witness to the peoples, by which I mean a leader and commander to the peoples."

We will study this promise in more detail, but we should pause to grasp the flow of the thought. The literal food and drink that Zion offers her guests is the Messiah. God's covenant promise to her through David is not for her to hoard selfishly. As Gentile Egypt once fed Israel with physical food, she is now to feed the Gentiles with spiritual food, the promised Messiah. As Egypt's corn was purchased by others and provided free to Israel, so the spiritual sustenance that the Gentiles crave is available to them

“without money and without price,” because another has purchased it at great price.

4, *Titles of the Covenant Witness*

The heart of the covenant is a Person, who is described in the next verse. This notion of covenant-as-person recalls the Lord’s words to his servant in 49:8,

Isa 49:8 I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people.

There, though, “people” was singular. Here, that covenant, once appropriated by Israel, is now offered more broadly.

In presenting the Lord’s offer, Zion describes the promised Seed first with the word “witness” from Psa 89:37, then with two others (“leader,” “commander”). Twice he is said to be given “to the peoples” (plural, not singular as in AV, thus a contrast with 49:8). Let’s start by considering the beneficiaries, then turn to the titles.

“The Peoples”

4 Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples,--In this verse, Zion quotes the Lord’s offer of the eternal seed. It’s easy to see the first clause, “I have given him for a witness,” as a quotation of Ps 89:37, the Lord’s promise of “a faithful witness in heaven.” “A leader and commander” can be understood as an explanation of the work of the “witness.” But how about the claim that the covenant gives this witness “to the peoples”? If Zion is indeed quoting the Lord, where does that come from?

Note first that the Hebrew term לאומים is plural, not singular as in AV, and thus indicates the Gentiles.

This is strengthened by the term itself. This is the rarest of the three words for “people” or “nation” that we find in the OT (chart).

- גוי “nation” appears 560 times, 432 in the plural. So it usually designates the gentiles, and in later Hebrew became the standard term for a non-Israelite, but in the OT it is sometimes applied to the nation. It emphasizes territory and foreign relations
- עם “people” appears 1868 times, 230 in the plural. Thus it is most common of Israel. It emphasizes commonality and cohesiveness of a society, and is used in describing Israel’s relation to the Lord (they are called עם יהוה, but never גוי יהוה).
- Our term, לאום “people,” is the least common one. It appears 31 times, 26 in the plural. Thus, like גוי, it is used mostly of Gentiles. In fact, Israel is included only twice: Gen 25:23 (where the descendants of Esau and Jacob are contrasted as two לאומים), and Isa 51:4 (where it applies to a single people composed of Jew and Gentile alike).

Fourteen uses of לאום precede Isaiah historically, and ten of these are in the Psalms, always describing the nations as the objects of God’s conquest and rule. It is particularly common in descriptions of the coming Messianic age. Here are some prominent examples (chart):

Ps 2 is the first Messianic Psalm, and one of the most explicit. It uses the term to identify the nations who rage against the Lord and over whom he gives his king dominion.

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Psa 2:1 Why do the heathen גוים rage, and the **peoples** imagine a vain thing? ... 8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen גוים *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.

Ps 9 describes the Lord's rule over those designated by this term:

Psa 9:7-9 But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. 8 And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the **peoples** in uprightness. 9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

All of Ps 67 concerns God's rule over all nations, and v. 4 uses our term twice (as well as the other terms, גוים "nations" and עמים "peoples," all plural).

Psa 67:1-7 God be merciful unto us, and bless us; *and* cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. 2 That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations גוים . Let the peoples עמים praise thee, O God; let all the peoples עמים praise thee. 4 O let the **nations** לאומים be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the peoples עמים righteously, and govern the **nations** לאומים upon earth. Selah. 5 Let the peoples עמים praise thee, O God; let all the peoples עמים praise thee. 6 *Then* shall the earth yield her increase; *and* God, *even* our own God, shall bless us. 7 God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

So Zion's paraphrase of the Lord's covenant gift, both the notion of the Messianic witness and his mission to all nations, is indeed drawn from the Psalms.

Now let's meditate on each of these titles that the Lord gives David's descendant.

Witness

Witness עד--The word "witness" was prominent in our discussion of the contest between the Lord and the idols in ch. 40-48. The false gods are commanded to bring forth their witnesses (charts):

43:9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their **witnesses**, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, *It is* truth.

44:9 They that make a graven image *are* all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they *are* their own **witnesses**; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

Then Israel is introduced as the Lord's witness, in her capacity as the Servant of the Lord:

43:10 Ye *are* my **witnesses**, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

43:12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when *there was* no strange *god* among you: therefore ye *are* my **witnesses**, saith the LORD, that I *am* God.

44:8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it?* ye *are* even my **witnesses**. Is there a God beside me? yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any*.

She has this responsibility, even though she is deaf and blind:

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Isa 42:19 Who *is* blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger *that* I sent? who *is* blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant?

But Israel the failed servant will be redeemed by the perfect Servant, who comes into full focus in ch. 53. He can carry out this role of attesting to God's uniqueness before the peoples and their false gods.

Ps 89 says that the witness is "in heaven," not the usual word שמים, but השחק, "the dust, the cloud." The plural of this form is often used as a poetic term for heaven, but the singular only appears twice in this sense, once here, and once in v. 6 (MT 7) of this same Psalm (chart),

Psa 89:6 For who in **the heaven** can be compared unto the LORD? *who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?

The language here describes the heavenly court, where the Lord presides over all the angelic hosts. We see it most clearly in Job 1,

Job 1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

and 1 Kings 22:19,

1Ki 22:19 I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

All the angels, both good and evil, are convened by the Lord and under his control. Some of these powers present themselves as deities to the nations. Ezekiel (28:12, cf. v. 2) and Daniel (10:13, 20, 21) show this relation between angels and individual nations, which Isaiah also recognizes (chart):

24:21 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth.

The contest between the Lord and the gods of the nations that we saw in ch. 40-48 naturally takes place in this heavenly council. It is there that the angelic host are summoned, even those who oppose the Lord (like Satan in Job), and there that he calls them to defend their claims to deity. The primary role of the servant of the Lord ("my servant Job") is to bear witness against them. Israel failed, instead worshipping them, but the Messiah will be that faithful witness in the heavenly court, overturning the claims of the rebellious angels, and setting free the nations who have been under their dominion.

In the NT our Lord's work in the heavenly council is viewed as part of his priestly ministry (Heb 7:24-26). Note the illustration of that intercessory work in Zech 3.

Leader

Leader נגיד --The word literally means "the one who is in front," so "leader" is an excellent translation. We'll consider this term from three perspectives.

1. In biblical texts written before the time of Isaiah, it has a very specific meaning that is particularly appropriate to the Davidic seed.
2. Its usage contrasts with the much more common word מלך "king." It is instructive to consider why the OT uses this special word rather than the more common term.

3. The LXX regularly renders this term by ἡγεμοῖα, which is used of church leaders in the NT. So this word will help us understand God's pattern for leadership in the church.

Leader in Israel's History

This term's earlier uses in the Hebrew Bible all refer to Israel's kings, notably David (chart). The people, and even the biblical narrator, sometimes calls them "kings," but when God speaks directly about the ruler, almost always he uses מֶלֶךְ.¹

After the people ask for a *king* in 1 Sam 8, God tells Samuel,

1Sa 9:16 To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him *to be captain* over my people Israel,

When Samuel meets Saul,

1Sa 10:1 Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured *it* upon his head, and kissed him, and said, *Is it* not because the LORD hath anointed thee *to be captain* over his inheritance?

And when the Lord deposes Saul, Samuel tells him of David:

1Sa 13:14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be captain* over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.

Abigail says to David,

1Sa 25:30 the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee **ruler** over Israel;

When the tribes come to crown David, the people recall,

2Sa 5:2 Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a **captain** over Israel.

David defends his dancing before the ark to Michal,

2Sa 6:21 And David said unto Michal, *It was* before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me **ruler** over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD.

The Lord sends Nathan to tell David of the covenant that God is making with him with the message,

2Sa 7:8 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be **ruler** over my people, over Israel:

So this term recalls the rulers whom God appointed over Israel, and in particular David.² The witness that God promises in Ps 89:37 continues this role, not only to Israel, but to all the peoples.

1 The only exception I can find is 1Sa 16:1 "I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons." But it is intriguing to contemplate the potential messianic scope of this statement.

2 The term is also applied to Hezekiah (2 Ki 20:5), and to two of the kings of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam (1 Ki 14:7) and Baasha (1 Ki 16:2).

Leader vs. King

The much more common term “king=” מלך is the usual term for a head of state in the ancient Near East (chart).³ Of the 7681 Hebrew words in the OT from most common to least common, this is #21, and the fifth most common noun. It regularly describes Gentile kings. The densest OT book is Esther (>4% of the words). The densest chapter (37 instances in 24 vv, 10.5% of words) is in Joshua 12, the summary of the kings whom Israel defeated. The first occurrence of the term, and its densest concentration in the Pentateuch (27 instances in 24 vv, 5.9%), describes the battle of the kings in Gen 14.

Moses recognizes that the time would come when Israel would desire a king, and acknowledges its worldly inspiration.⁴

Deu 17:14 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, **like as all the nations that are about me;**

The idea of a human king is a pagan idea, and attractive to the heart that wants to conform to the world. Why does God prefer to use “leader” נגיד instead of “king” מלך to refer to Israel’s heads of state?

The Pentateuch repeatedly emphasizes that God is Israel’s king (chart). Moses concludes his song celebrating the victory at the Red Sea with the phrase,

Exo 15:18 The LORD shall **reign** for ever and ever.

(“Reign” is from the same root as “king.”) The declaration that the Lord reigns echoes throughout the Psalms: Pss 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1. When the Lord compelled Balaam to bless Israel, he declared,

Num 23:21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God *is* with him, and the shout of a king *is* among them.

The parallelism shows that the king is the Lord.

When Moses blessed the people, he declared,

Deu 33:2, 5 The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; ... And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people *and* the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

Late in the NT, Paul considers the title “king” to belong to God:

1Ti 1:17 Now unto the **King** eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The linkage between kingship and deity is not restricted to Israel. Throughout the ancient Near East, kings were often regarded as quasi-divine, very different from those whom they rule.⁵ We see this in the

3 It’s so common that it was a key to the decipherment of the Ugaritic tablets in 1930. Both the writing system and the language were unknown, but the frequent repetition of a three-letter sequence led to the hypothesis that those letters were MLK.

4 This is probably the point of the promise to Abraham (Gen 17:6) and Jacob (Gen 35:11) that their descendants would include kings.

5 A recent survey of this theme, with citations of the copious earlier literature, is Nicole Brisch, ed., *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*. Oriental Institute Seminars 4. Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2008. Available online at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/pdf/ois4.pdf>.

monarch of Tyre:

Eze 28:1-2 The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart *is* lifted up, and thou hast said, I *am* a God, I sit *in* the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou *art* a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God:

This is not Satan, who is described in vv. 12-19 as an anointed cherub. Ezek 28:1-2 is an earthly monarch who claims divine status.

These two ideas—the Gentile nature of kingship, and the divine claims inherent in the role—both show up when the people ask Samuel for a king. Their request is motivated by worldliness:

1Sa 8:4-5 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, 5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now **make us a king to judge us like all the nations.**

And the Lord's response shows that this desire for a king compromised their devotion to him:

1Sa 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for **they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**

Samuel reported this to the people:

1Sa 12:12 And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, **Nay; but a king shall reign over us:** when **the LORD your God was your king.**

In the days of Hosea, contemporary to Isaiah, the Lord recalls these events:

Hos 13:10-11 **I will be thy king:** where *is any other* that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? 11 I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took *him* away in my wrath.

When Moses gave instructions for the king that he knew would come, he stipulated (chart),

Deut 17:15 Thou shalt in any wise set *him* king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: **one from among thy brethren** shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother. ... 18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites: 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: 20 **That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren,**

This requirement is remarkable. Throughout the ANE, kings were viewed as quasi-deities, far superior to the people they ruled. Not so with Israel. The king must be one of them, and like them, must be subject to the law of God.

Against this background, it's not surprising that the OT prefers a different word for Israel's leaders (chart). The term גָּיַר is related to the common preposition נָגַד, which means "facing, corresponding to." The first use of this preposition is in Gen 2:18, 20, which describes Eve's relation to Adam as כַּנְגֵדוֹ .

“corresponding to him, his opposite.” The נגיד is out in front of the people, prominent among them, but not essentially different from them.

Recall Deut 17:20, “That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren.” The one who leads God’s people is not over them, but beside them, subject to the same law that they are. People need leadership, as the book of Judges teaches when it diagnoses Israel’s disastrous condition four times⁶ with the statement, “There was no king in Israel.” But the Scriptural solution to that problem is not to turn a man into a monarch. It is to recognize the Lord’s kingship, and those whom the Lord has appointed as leaders under him. The best example of this was David, as Asaph commemorates him in Ps 78,

Psa 78:70-72 He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: 71 From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. 72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

David was Israel’s נגיד, not a tyrant to dominate them and usurp God’s place as king, but a shepherd to feed and care for them. The one promised in Isa 55:4 will exercise this function toward all nations.

Isa 55:4 calls the coming Messiah a נגיד rather than a king, building on Ps 89 (e.g., v. 4), which presents him as the seed of David. Of course, the Scriptures also present the Messiah as a king (chart). In Psalm 2, the Lord introduces the Messiah to the rebellious nations:

Psa 2:5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6 Yet have I set my **king** upon my holy hill of Zion.

But the use of this title for our Lord Jesus is a reminder of his deity, which Ps 2 emphasizes with the decree, “Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee” (2:7).

As Son of Man, our Lord is our brother and our נגיד. As Son of God, he will rule as king.⁷

NT Parallels

This contrast carries into the NT. The LXX (chart) regularly renders נגיד by ηγεσθαι, which is the term used of elders in Heb 13:7, 17, 24 and translated in our version “them that have the rule over you.” Our Lord also anticipated that there would be some in the church to whom this title applies (Lk 22:26), and it designates two of the prominent brothers in the Jerusalem church, Judas and Silas (Acts 15:22).

6 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

7 How about us? Are we kings? Once in the NT we are called “kings” (1:6 in MT is “kingdom,” not “kings”):

Rev 5:10 And hast made us unto our God **kings** and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

This title is so remarkable that other mss changed it into “a kingdom and priests” to match Exod 19:6.

Exo 19:6 ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

Peter echoes this of NT saints, quoting the LXX phrase exactly:

1Pe 2:9 But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

The reference in Rev 5:10 probably anticipates our role during the Millennium:

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and **shall reign with him** a thousand years.

But even there we are not called kings. The reference is altogether remarkable, and possible only because of our incorporation into our Lord, whom God has anointed as prophet, priest, and king.

Like the law of the king in Deut 17, the NT emphasizes the difference between Gentile authority and leadership among God's people (chart). Peter writes,

1Pe 5:1-3 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords κατακυριεω over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

He is echoing our Lord's teaching, which (like Deut 17) combines rejection of the world's patterns with condemnation of haughtiness:

Mat 20:25-28 But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion κατακυριεω over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief [πρωτος, but Luke has ηγουμενος] among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

In the OT and NT alike, the people of God are neither a leaderless popular democracy nor an authoritative hierarchy. God is their only king, and he appoints servants, shepherds, leaders, to feed and serve his people and be their example. The promised Messiah is the prototype of this role, the one whom Peter calls "the chief shepherd" under whom all other shepherds serve.

Commander

Commander מצוה.⁸--The *Piel* ptc מצוה appears 45 times in the OT. Two are in Isaiah's contemporary Amos, and one in Jeremiah; the others are all in the Pentateuch, and 38 of those are in Deut, all in the stereotyped phrase "I command you," spoken by Moses (chart). The overwhelming echo of this term is that of the Mosaic teacher, and interestingly, the Bishop's Bible translated it "teacher." The emphasis here is that the promised Davidic seed will not only rule his people as leader, but also instruct them as Moses did. Thus this grammatical form links us to Moses, and that reference in turn reminds us of Moses' promise in Deut 18,

Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

The Messiah, the anointed one, is called this because he fills three roles whose OT incumbents were anointed: the prophet, the priest, and the king (chart). As "commander," the Lord offers him as prophet. We observed that his witness in the heavenly council involves his role as our priest, and as "leader," the Lord offers him as the successor to and fulfillment of David, the anointed נגיד. Thus this verse concisely brings together all three Messianic offices.

⁸ Elsewhere, צוה appears with נגיד only with verbal meaning "appoint": 1 Sam. 13:14; 25:30; 2 Sam. 6:21 (all three, the Lord appointing David); 1 Ki. 1:35 (David appoints Solomon). The נגיד must be authorized by someone else. So Isaiah might be emphasizing that here, the leader is also the commander. But the participial form is nowhere used in these appointing passages, and its use with Moses is overwhelming, making that the more likely parallel here.

5, Promise to the Covenant Leader

5 Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee--The one being addressed is the Servant. This is suggested by the 2ms pronouns, which overwhelmingly indicate the servant in the second half of Isaiah up to this point. It's also reflected in the parallel with 49:7,

Isa 49:7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, *and* his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of לַמֶּלֶךְ [for the sake of] the LORD that is faithful, *and* the Holy One of Israel, and he ~~shall choose~~ has chosen thee.

Both verses teach that the nations will submit themselves to the Servant, and both explain (using the preposition לַמֶּלֶךְ “for the sake of,” translated “because,” the purpose that draws them, the glorification of the Lord God.

Following the parallel of 49:7, the speaker is apparently the Lord, as in v. 4. So the flow of thought is:

- v. 3, Zion invites the Gentiles to the everlasting covenant described in Ps 89.
- v. 4, paraphrasing and extending Ps 89:37, Zion quotes the Lord's promise to provide the seed of David as a witness to God's uniqueness and a leader and teacher, all for the benefit of the gentile peoples.
- v. 5, the voice of the Lord continues, addressing the person introduced in v. 4.

The first half-verse recalls David's observation at the end of Ps 18 = 2 Sam 22, the great summary psalm of thanksgiving that stands as an epilog to the history of his life. This passage also refers both to those whom the leader has not known and to those who have not known him (chart):

Psa 18:43-44 Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; *and* thou hast made me the head of the heathen: **a people whom I have not known shall serve me.** 44 **As soon as they hear of me,** they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me.

David's wars of conquest extended Israel's authority far beyond the boundaries of Israel. Immediately after reporting God's covenant with David in 2 Sam 7, the historian records the extent of his conquests (chart):

2Sa 8:1-14 And after this it came to pass, that David smote the **Philistines**, and subdued them: ...

2 And he smote **Moab**, ... And *so* the Moabites became David's servants, *and* brought gifts.

3 David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of **Zobah**, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates.

5 And when the Syrians of Damascus came to succour Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the **Syrians** two and twenty thousand men. 6 Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, *and* brought gifts. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

9 When Toi king of **Hamath** heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer, 10 Then

Isaiah 55-57

Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer, and smitten him: for Hadadezer had wars with Toi.

And *Joram* brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass: 11 Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued; 12 Of **Syria**, and of **Moab**, and of the children of **Ammon**, and of the **Philistines**, and of **Amalek**, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of **Zobah**.

14 And he put garrisons in **Edom**; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

David thus furnishes an illustration of what this verse promises, but he has been dead for three centuries by the time that Isaiah writes, and the promise must be understood of his descendant the Messiah. Yet at first glance that seems difficult. David can speak of “a people whom I have not known,” but how can that be true of Messiah?

One might invoke other examples of our Lord's limited knowledge, such as the time of his coming (chart):

Mar 13:32 But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

But the promise to Messiah throughout the OT is that he will rule over all nations. So it's difficult to understand the denial of knowledge as simple ignorance.

Something deeper is going on. In the Bible, the verb “to know” can refer, not just to cognitive awareness, but to a relationship. It is used thus to speak of the relation of a man to a woman, as in Gen 4:1,

Gen 4:1 And Adam **knew** Eve his wife

Even God is said to know or not to know people, based on his relation with them. An early and classical example is his relation to Abraham:

Gen 18:19 For **I know him**, [in order] that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; [in order] that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

God is not speaking of his awareness of Abraham's faithfulness, but of a relation that leads to the promised benefits.

A remarkable example is Amos 3:2

Amo 3:1-2 Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, **2 You only have I known** of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

God does not mean that he only knows about Israel. He names Egypt in the previous verse, and in ch. 9, he shows that he knows about other nations as well,

Amo 9:7 Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the

Isaiah 55-57

LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?

The point of Amos 3:2 is not that God is ignorant of the other nations, but that he has only entered into covenant relation⁹ with Israel. So the promise to Messiah is that nations that were not formerly in covenant relation with him will submit themselves to him. At his first advent, he declared to the Syro-Phoenician woman (chart),

Mat 15:24 I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

But the promise in Isa 55:5 is that other nations who once were in rebellion against him will submit themselves to him.

because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.--The particle “because of” למען always has a sense of purpose or reference (chart). As a preposition it is most often (61x out of 71) translated “for the sake of,” and there is no reason not to translate it that way here. The promise is not just that God will bring the nations to Messiah, but that they will come for the sake of the Lord. God’s purpose in the world is to manifest himself and proclaim his glory. He sends the Messiah, not first of all to bless the nations, but to exalt himself, by drawing rebellious sinners into submission. Compare Paul’s summary of the Savior’s work in 1 Cor 15,

1Co 15:24 Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. ... 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

The NT Echo in John

In Isa 55, the bride of the Lord, corresponding to Dame Wisdom in Prov 9:1-5, offers free food and drink, then interprets that gift as the promise of an everlasting covenant under the protection of the Messianic witness, leader, and teacher. It is not surprising that the NT applies this imagery to our Lord. In John’s gospel in particular, our Lord three times uses the offer of food and drink as an image for his salvation.

John 4:10

To the woman drawing water at the well in Samaria, the Lord said,

Joh 4:10, 14 If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. ... 14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Note that our Lord calls this living water “the gift of God.” Just as in Isa 55, those who partake of it do

⁹ See Huffimon’s articles in BASOR volumes 181 (1966) 31-37 “The Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA” and 184 (1966) 36-38 “A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA” for parallels from Hittite, Akkadian, and Ugaritic texts.

so “without money and without price.”

John 6

In John 6, the Lord feeds the 5000 with physical food. Money is not sufficient to satisfy their need:

Joh 6:5-7 When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? 6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

In the end, the Lord feeds them for free. Then he instructs them about provision that is far more important, but still free.

Joh 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

Joh 6:54-56 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

In explaining this provision, the theme of a free gift once again comes to the fore. Nothing that we can do can earn this food.

Joh 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 7:37-39

Perhaps the most direct allusion is in John 7, at the conclusion of the feast of tabernacles.

Joh 7:37-38 In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and let him drink, 38 he that believeth on me, as saith the Scripture.

The parallel is particularly strong if we repunctuate John 7:37-38, following the NET Bible and many Western church fathers (chart). Then both passages have two parallel invitations: the first for the thirsty to come, and the second to drink. (Isa 55:1 MT invites people to eat אכל, but the LXX, instead of the expected εσθιω, translates πινω “drink,” directly anticipating our Lord’s second invitation.) This parallel in turn explains the following statement, “as saith the Scripture,” which in John can either precede (6:31; 12:14) or follow (1:23) the reference.

Under this punctuation, our Lord uses “he that believeth” to reflect Isaiah’s idea of buying without money and without price. This parallel directly supports Paul’s observation in Rom 4,

Rom 4:4-5 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Recall that Isaiah has already equated laboring with payment:

Isaiah 55-57

Isa 55:2 Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not?

The following verse explains in more detail the meaning of the promised water (chart).

out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

The closest antecedent to “his” is “he that believeth on me.” So this statement is a parallel promise to 4:14,

the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

And what is that water?

39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

The consistent testimony of the OT is that the new covenant is marked by the giving of the Spirit, more than once described as water:

Isa 32:15 **Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high**, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Isa 44:3 For **I will pour water** upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: **I will pour my spirit upon thy seed**, and my blessing upon thine offspring:

Isa 59:21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; **My spirit that is upon thee**, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

Joe 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that **I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh**; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

Eze 36:25-27 Then will I sprinkle clean **water** upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And **I will put my spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.

Through Isaiah, God promised the free water that can alone quench a sinner's thirst, and our Lord repeatedly presents himself as the fulfillment of that promise.

55:6-13, Promise of forgiveness and restoration to the repentant

The **invitation** to forgiveness (stating *what* the Lord is doing; from Isaiah or Zion) is followed by a series of **explanations** about *how* it is done, each introduced by ׀ (spoken by the Lord), and concluded by a final statement of the **motivation** (*why* the Lord does it) from Isaiah (13b) (chart).

6-7, Invitation (What the Lord is doing)

The invitation names the Lord in the third person, and we are probably to understand it as being spoken either by Zion (following the invitation in v. 1) or Isaiah.

The invitation has three parts, emphasizing the opportunity (6), the requirement (7a), and the promise (7b)

6, *The Opportunity: Promised but Limited*

6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:--The first part of the invitation emphasizes two characteristics of the opportunity that is available to the sinner. It is promised in advance (thus they ought to know of it), but it is also limited (if they do not take it, they may lose the chance). Both of these characteristics are grounded in earlier Scripture.

A Promised Opportunity

The two invitations (seek ... call) are echoes of Moses' farewell to Israel in Deut 4 (chart). At the beginning of the chapter, he recalls,

Deu 4:7 For what nation *is there so great*, who *hath* God so **nigh** unto them, as the LORD our God *is* in all *things that we call upon him for*?

Then he goes on to warn them against idolatry, and the judgment that they will experience if they turn from the Lord. If they choose other gods, they will get other gods:

Deu 4:27-28 the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. 28 And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

This is what happened to the northern kingdom under Sennacherib, and later to Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. But Moses immediately adds,

Deu 4:29 But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt **find him**, if thou **seek** him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

Now Isaiah, writing for the captives in Babylon, recalls this promise. "Remember Moses' promise," he says. "The Lord promised to be accessible to you in captivity, if you would seek him."

A Limited Opportunity

The second link to earlier revelation is the idea that the door of invitation may not remain open indefinitely. There is a period during which God may be found, but if we are stubborn, he may withdraw (chart).

David, declaring the blessedness of forgiveness in Ps 32, says,

Psa 32:6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee **in a time when thou mayest be found**: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

David is an example of someone who repented the minute he was reminded of the need. Another Psalm

reminds us of the consequences of refusing the opportunities that God gives us.

Psa 95:8-11 Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, *and as in* the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. 10 Forty years long was I grieved with *this* generation, and said, *It is* a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: 11 Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

When the Israelites refused to go up and take the land, God closed the door to them, and in spite of later entreaties, they could not go up. The Scriptures are full of warnings against the “hard heart” that refuses to heed God’s invitation. He will not be mocked. We should be careful to stay tender and attentive toward the Lord. The danger is not that he will refuse the truly penitent, but that we will be so hardened against him that we can no longer truly repent.

7a, The Requirement: Repentance

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts:--Next, Isaiah summarizes the **requirement**, the manner in which we are to seek the Lord. Both our thoughts and our conduct must be on the table. Isaiah echoes this principle from the Psalmist’s requirement for the one who would ascend into God’s holy hill (chart):

Psa 24:4 He that hath **clean hands**, and a **pure heart**; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

We heard this same double exhortation in James:

Jam 4:8 **Cleanse your hands**, ye sinners; and **purify your hearts**, ye double minded.

Isaiah is working toward the promise in 7b of forgiveness of sin, but first he requires a turning from sin. This same requirement persists in the NT. In every age, repentance must precede remission of sins:

Luk 24:46-47 Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that **repentance** and **remission** of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the **remission** of sins,

7b, The Promise: Forgiveness

and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy רחם upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.--Finally, if we take the opportunity and satisfy the requirement, God promises mercy and forgiveness. This is a theme with which God comforted his people in the previous chapter (chart):

Isa 54:7-8 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great **mercies רחמים** will I gather thee. 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting **kindness חסד** will I have **mercy רחם** on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

The word used here and twice in the previous chapter refers to God’s tender compassion toward his

people, like that of a mother toward her child. The additional word **חסד** in 54:8, often translated “tender mercies” or “lovingkindness,” refers to his covenant faithfulness. The combination of the two in relation to forgiveness is powerful. God forgives not only because of his compassion (**רחם**), but also because of the covenant obligation he has taken upon himself (**חסד**). In the first invitation of this section (v. 3), Zion has invited us to God’s everlasting covenant, which is centered in the promised Witness, Leader, and Commander (v. 4), the Messiah. His sacrifice provides the covenant foundation that allows God to be both just, and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

This picture of a merciful God is not an innovation of the NT. It runs throughout Scripture. Its roots are deep in the law itself, when God proclaimed his character to Moses. There, he joins to these two words for mercy, a third that reflects the kindness of a superior to an inferior:

Exo 34:6-7 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful** **חנון** and **gracious** **רחום**, longsuffering, and abundant in **goodness** **חסד** and truth, 7 Keeping **mercy** **חסד** for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.

v. 7 links God’s mercy to forgiveness, as we have here and in Isa 54. But it also reminds us that he judges the guilty.¹⁰ Forgiveness is not automatic and universal. It is selective. In the previous chapter in Exodus, God tells Moses,

Exo 33:19 I ... will **be gracious** **חנון** to whom I will be gracious, and will **shew mercy** **רחם** on whom I will shew mercy.

All of us are sinners. Some of us experience God’s forgiveness, and others his judgment. Fundamentally, the difference is due to God’s choice. But the invitation of Isa 55:6-7 is open to all. Anyone who meets the condition of being “wicked” and an “unrighteous man” is invited to lay hold of God’s mercy, and claim his forgiveness.

8-13a, Explanations (How the Lord forgives sin)

Now the speaker changes. The Lord himself explains the reasons for the invitation, using a series of clauses introduced by **כי** (chart).

The idea that a holy God could forgive his rebellious people is remarkable. The fundamental ethical problem in the Bible is how a sinful people can live in fellowship with a holy God. That is why the confession of Exod 34:6 is so important, and why it is quoted so often throughout the OT.¹¹ Zion has invited the people to come and drink freely, though they cannot merit the refreshment that they crave. Isaiah has invited them to seek the Lord, even though they are wicked and unrighteous. A thoughtful

¹⁰ The two outcomes in v. 7 are probably not to be understood as alternatives, but as concurrent, both experienced by the redeemed. The first describes the forgiveness of the *guilt* of sin, while the second focuses on its *consequences* in our lives. Ezek 18:20 invites us to limit our understanding of the second half of the verse: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” Thus we distinguish the *visitation* of sin, which can cross generations, from *bearing* sin, which affects only the sinner. Gal 6:7 describes positively the visitation of sin, as opposed to bearing of sin: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

¹¹ Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 51:1; 86:15; 89:1,2; 103:8; 145:8; Nah 1:2,3; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2

reader will ask, “How can this be? How can the truth of my wickedness and God’s mercy meet together? How can God’s righteousness and my peace kiss each other? (Ps 85:10)?”

People do not behave this way. They do not give away food and drink for nothing. If they are wronged, they demand retribution. I recall a comment on our Lord’s teaching to turn the other cheek that was made by a Muslim critic: “This is completely unnatural, and contrary to human nature.” He was right. We do not naturally forgive. If we envision God in our own image, he must be only wrath and vengeance, and we have no hope. Anticipating such objections, the Lord interjects himself into the discussion with this central idea:

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,--God is not simply an oversized man. We cannot understand him if we start with our own thoughts and inclinations. This is why his Word is so important. Only if he tells us what he is like, can we know him. And when we study his revelation, we find that he is qualitatively different than we are.

saith the LORD **נאם יהוה**--Several times we have noted this expression in Isaiah. It comes at the middle or end of a verse, and differs from the more common expression that often begins a verse, “thus saith the Lord” **כה אמר יהוה**. The latter expression simply identifies what follows as the word of the Lord. This expression communicates this as well, but in addition it indicates that the text that it follows is a summary statement, a synopsis of a longer discussion that either precedes or follows.

In this case, the summary comes first, and the rest of the paragraph works out in detail what it means for God’s thoughts and ways to be different from ours. Each section, introduced by **כי**, highlights a different distinctive. God’s thoughts are superior, active, and beneficent. In each case, we should consider how the characteristic under consideration relates to the theme of this paragraph, which is forgiveness.

9, God’s Thoughts are Superior to ours

God amplifies v. 8 with an allusion to Exod 34:6.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.--The second part of the verse is an amplification of v. 8. The first part characterizes the difference in terms of the difference between the heavens and the earth.

Only one other place in the OT compares divine and human characteristics using the comparison of heaven and earth (chart):

Ps 103:11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his **mercy** **חסד** toward them that fear him.

We might think the comparison casual, but consider the context. David begins by recalling Exod 34:6,

Psa 103:8 The LORD *is* merciful **רחום** and gracious **חנון**, slow to anger, and plenteous in **mercy** **חסד**.

He doesn’t quote Ex 34:7, but he does recall the theme of forgiveness, and then relates it to God’s mercy.

Ps 103:9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. 10 He hath not dealt

with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his **mercy** toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

In fact, he goes on to meditate on the other characteristics of Ex 34:6: God’s רחם in v. 13, our weakness that motivates his חן in 14-16, and his חסד again in v. 17. So the chain of thought is quite clear:

- God offers the possibility of forgiveness through Moses in Exod 34.
- David meditates on it in Ps 103.
- Isaiah picks up the theme, and specifically links to the exposition in Ps 103.

God’s thoughts are not just higher than ours in general, but with specific reference to the problem of sin. We seek for justice and vengeance; he offers mercy and grace.

Note the repetition from v. 7 (chart):

Let the wicked forsake his way ,	so are my ways higher than your ways,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts	and my thoughts than your thoughts

We repent, not because our way and thoughts are intrinsically wrong, but because we find something better. From one perspective, sin is “com[ing] short of the glory of God,” Rom 3:23. We were created to be his image, and to be in his likeness (Gen 1:26). Our sin mars that image, and we are to forsake it so that he can restore his glory in us.

The superiority of God’s thoughts to ours thus has two implications for the forgiveness of sin.

1. It establishes the fact of sin, because it sets a standard compared to which we fall short.
2. It opens the possibility of forgiveness, because God’s ways and thoughts, unlike ours, are characterized by mercy.

10-11, God’s Thoughts are Active

God’s thoughts are not only greater than ours, but they are active. They can actually do things. It was great news recently¹² when researchers demonstrated that a paralyzed woman could control an external robot arm just by thinking about it, using signals from a chip implanted in her brain. We ordinarily need our bodies to mediate between our thoughts and the external world. But God’s thoughts directly change the world, the moment they are expressed as his word. He expresses this using a simile.

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:--

The effect of rain in an arid climate is striking. The brown hills turn green overnight, as the fresh grass springs up in response to the moisture.

¹² “Reach and grasp by people with tetraplegia using a neurally controlled robotic arm.” By Leigh R. Hochberg, Daniel Bacher, Beata Jarosiewicz, Nicolas Y. Masse, John D. Simeral, Joern Vogel, Sami Haddadin, Jie Liu, Sydney S. Cash, Patrick van der Smagt & John P. Donoghue. *Nature*, Vol. 485, No. 7398, 17 May 2012. Reported in *Wired*, <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2012/05/thoughts-control-robotic-arm/>

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:--God's word has the same causal power as the rain.

it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.--This principle is clear from the very first chapter of the Bible, where God speaks the world into being (chart). Reality is subject to his word, and when he speaks, the world changes.

The particular simile that God uses is particularly appropriate in discussing salvation. In ourselves, we are like the barren hills at the end of a scorching summer, consumed by our own lust and pride, rebellious against God and under sentence of death. It is the word of God falling upon us that brings life, replacing the works of the flesh (the dry, brown grass that is no value to anybody) with the fruit of the Spirit (fresh, green grass that provides food for man and beast).

The NT picks up this imagery in describing the role of the Scriptures in bringing life.

Joh 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

Jam 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

1Pe 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God,

The most fundamental principle of evangelism is to expose people to the Word of God. Apologetic arguments play to the adversary's strength, but the Word of God is living and active. We must learn to turn it loose and let it work.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The activity of God's thoughts plays an important role in forgiveness. Though his superior thoughts condemn us, our sin is so great that it blinds us to this difference. The word of God, the expression of his thought, makes clear to us our sin and brings us to repentance.

12-13a, God's thoughts are thoughts of Blessing

These exalted thoughts of mercy, that find expression in powerful words, are thoughts of good and blessing toward God's people. Jeremiah will later pick up this theme (chart):

Jer 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace:--In the immediate context, the focus is on the coming deliverance from Babylon. We have already heard God's commands to the people to leave their captivity and return home:

Isa 48:20 **Go ye forth of Babylon**, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.

Isaiah 55-57

Isa 52:11 **Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence**, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.

Some did not, as the book of Esther makes clear. But God commands them to leave when the city is destroyed by Cyrus, and promises that their return will be with joy and peace.

That historical deliverance is only a figure of the much greater deliverance that God is preparing for his people. Rev 17 presents Babylon as a figure of all that is opposed to God, the great harlot that drinks the blood of the martyrs. Her fall in Rev 18 is the first step introducing the Lord's final conquest over the earth in ch. 19. In 18, believers are exhorted,

Rev 18:2, 4 **Babylon the great** is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. ... **Come out of her, my people**, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

Paul uses this same imagery to emphasize the need for separation from the world in our day:

2Co 6:17 Wherefore **come out** from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,

God has, in the words of v. 12, led us forth with joy and peace.

the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree:--One evidence that Isaiah is looking beyond the fall of physical Babylon in 538 BC is the physical transformation that Isaiah repeatedly promises (chart). The effects of the curse are reversed. This transformation has not yet occurred.

These promises were particularly prominent in the first half of the book (chart):

Isa 29:17 Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?

Isa 32:15 Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Isa 35:1,2, 6, 7 The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. 2 It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God. ... 6 for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. 7 And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, *shall be* grass with reeds and rushes.

Isa 41:18-19 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. 19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, *and* the pine, and the box tree together:

God's superior thoughts condemn us, and his active thoughts make us aware of our sin, but his beneficent thoughts ensure that the outcome is forgiveness, not condemnation.

13b, Motive (Why the Lord forgives sin)

At this point Isaiah's voice returns, marked by the third person reference to the Lord. This shows that this final clause is not a part of 12-13a, but a separate paragraph, and in fact it gives the significance of God's work of forgiveness. Vv. 8-13a tell us *that* God's thoughts are different from ours, but *why* should they be different? The answer lies in God's overall purpose to exalt himself (chart).

and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.--This final clause is critical. Why does God think thoughts of good toward his people? It is not first of all for their sake, but for his own, to make himself a reputation before the watching universe. This is the same motive we saw at the end of the first invitation, in v. 5. God promises to make many nations subject to the covenant witness-leader-teacher, not for their sake, or even for his, but "for the sake of the Lord thy God." Forgiveness is God's great self-glorification before the universe, manifesting at once his authority as the law-giver, his power as judge, and his mercy and grace as the one who provides a way of forgiveness.

56:1-8, Promise of Inclusion

The increment that this invitation adds to those that have gone before concerns two categories of people who were excluded under the old covenant: the son of the stranger, and the eunuch. The Lord begins by stating the two-fold commitment that he expects from his people, then illustrates it in the case of the two excluded categories of people: the "son of the stranger," and the eunuch (chart).

1, The Expected Commitment

56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment משפט, and do justice צדקה--Hebrew poetry frequently places nouns in parallel with one another. They are usually semantically related, but often include subtle distinctions that reward attention. What is the relation between "judgment" and "justice"? (chart)

The two nouns first occur together in God's statement about Abraham:

Gen 18:19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, **to do justice צדקה and judgment משפט**; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

They form a basic claim to godly conduct that is frequent throughout the OT (see notes).

- The first word, "judgment" משפט, is a name for law, and emphasizes what is according to God's legislation.
- The second word, "justice" צדקה, is literally "righteousness," and indicates what is according to God's character.

Perhaps the best translation of the two is the AV's in Ezek 18 and 33 (repeatedly), "lawful and right." Here, "Obey the law, and do what is right." The association of the two recognizes that simply doing what the law says is not enough. It is possible to be obedient outwardly and yet harbor inward rebellion against the Lord. Our Lord frequently emphasized this principle in his dealings with the Pharisees.

Isaiah 55-57

Luk 11:39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter (judgment); but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness (no righteousness).¹³

Compare also his criticism of the Pharisees' interpretation of the law in Matt 5:17-48 (chart), where he directs their attention beyond the outward behavior that the law enjoins to the underlying character of the heart.¹⁴

God requires both outward obedience to his word and inward conformity to his character.

These terms occur together in a remarkable passage in Ps 36:5-6 (chart):

Psa 36:5-6 Thy **mercy**, O LORD, *is* in the heavens; *and* thy **faithfulness** *reacheth* unto the clouds. 6 Thy **righteousness** [= justice] *is* like the great mountains; thy **judgments** *are* a great deep:

The first two terms, those that are situated above the earth, are two of the attributes of God from Exod 34:6. The two terms that are placed on the earth describe what he expects of us. Note that justice (righteousness) is higher than judgments; it is the characteristic that we can aspire to share with him, as seen also in the next part of our verse, where it is repeated as an aspect of his self-revelation in the last days:

for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness צדקה to be revealed.--There are three things to note here.

First, "righteousness" is repeated (chart). It is required of us in the first half of the verse, and attributed to God in the second. We are to be righteous as he is righteous; cf.

Lev 11:44 For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Lev 19:2 Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

1Pe 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

As God's image, his statue in the midst of his creation, we are to reflect his character.

Second, note the direction of causality. The call to obedience does not bring salvation and righteousness, but is motivated by the promise of God's salvation and righteousness.

Third, this relation between exhortation and motive is consistent throughout the Bible. Isaiah's invitation is the counterpart of the NT message of John the Baptist and our Lord (chart),

Mat 3:1-2 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

¹³ Luke 11:42 makes clear that even their judgment was incomplete.

¹⁴ This is not the only error of theirs that he corrects in this passage; they add "hate your enemy" to the command to love one's neighbor, and their presentation of divorce is completely contrary to the OT teaching.

Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And this same motive continues throughout the NT:

Luk 12:35-37 Let your loins be girded about, and *your* lights burning; 36 And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. 37 Blessed *are* those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching:

Tit 2:12-13 denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

1Jo 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

1Jo 3:2-3 but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

2Pe 3:14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

Those who truly expect the Lord's return, will conduct themselves in preparation for his coming, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1).

2-8, Illustrated

God illustrates this principle, the need for both outward obedience and inward conformity, in a surprising way, by describing the inclusion of two classes of people who were excluded under the law of Moses. Remarkably, he is calling for obedience, but in the process overruling some precepts that are actually in the law. We might not be surprised to find this in Paul, but it is fascinating that Isaiah anticipates some of the changes that come with the new covenant.

The heart of the section is a chiasm describing the two categories of people involved, first under the law of Moses, and then in the era that the text anticipates, which we understand to be the new covenant. This core is preceded and followed by summaries of its main points (chart).

- v. 2 anticipates the need to lay hold of the covenant and keep the Sabbath.
- vv. 7b-8 promise access to God's house for all people, even those previously excluded.

2, Opening Summary

This verse anticipates the language that describes the inclusion of the two classes of people in vv. 4-7a.

2 Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it;--We need to be careful about the antecedents of the pronouns. "This" makes sense as referring to the instruction of v. 1, "keep judgment and do justice." But what about "it," which is feminine?

The verb "lay hold" **החזיק** appears only eleven times in all of Isaiah, but three of them are in this

paragraph. The latter two are in vv. 4, 6, in the phrase “take hold of my covenant.” “Covenant” happens to be a feminine noun. So it makes sense to understand this expression, “that layeth hold on it,” as anticipating this later statement.

that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.--Again, this summary verse looks forward to vv. 4, 6, both of which talk about the need to keep the Sabbath *and* do something along with that observance.

It’s remarkable that Isaiah promotes the Sabbath here, when he wrote earlier (chart),

Isa 1:13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

The problem there was that their outward conformity to the law was marred by inward disobedience:

Isa 1:16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

What he asks here is not simply keeping the Sabbath, but keeping the Sabbath while avoiding any evil. This pairing is an example of the relation between judgment and justice in v. 1. The first is a ritual, outward, conformity to the law, while the second is a deeper conformity to the law of God.

3-7a, Two excluded categories restored

When judgment and justice, law and righteousness, are observed together, divisions based on external characteristics will fade away. Isaiah brings up two of these that were imposed under the Old Covenant: the “son of the stranger,” and the eunuch. He considers them in chiasmic order:

- 2b son of the stranger
- 3 eunuch
- 4-5 eunuchs
- 6-7a sons of the stranger

The first two references (with singular, generic nouns) remind us that, as classes, they were excluded under Moses’ law. The last two (with plural nouns) tell how they will be included as a multitude of individuals, recalling the opening summary in 2a.

3, The Categories Excluded

It will help if we consider these in reverse order.

3b neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.--The law of Moses excluded eunuchs from being members of the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:1).¹⁵ This exclusion may seem harsh, but recall the centrality of the seed to God’s promise with Abraham and the fathers. The nation was to be a people, an ethnic and racial unity, in a special relation with God. Someone who could not have children could not participate fully in the ongoing history of the nation.

¹⁵ Deu 23:1 He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD.

It is striking to realize the constraint this put on the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:27ff. So great was his love for the Lord of Israel that he had come to Jerusalem to worship, even though he could never become a convert to Judaism, but must watch from afar.

3a Neither let the son of the stranger בן הנכר, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people:--The first category, the “son of the stranger,” is a little more difficult to understand.

The idiom is most often translated simply “stranger” in the OT, and is a standard phrase for non-Israelites, who would be called “Gentiles” in modern parlance. They are indeed excluded from the covenant, as Moses makes clear at the founding of the nation (chart):

Exo 12:43 And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover:
There shall no stranger בן נכר eat thereof :

Even an Israelite could not offer a sacrifice that was raised by the son of a stranger:

Lev 22:25 Neither from a **(son of a) stranger's** hand יד בן נכר shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.¹⁶

However, even under the old covenant, a foreigner could gain access to the covenant. Following the prohibition in Ex 12:43, we read,

Exo 12:48 And when a **stranger גר** shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, **let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it;** and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

The “son of the stranger” could become an Israelite by receiving circumcision. Why then does Isaiah treat the admission of this category of person, like that of the eunuch, as something new?

Note the parallel between Exod 12:43 and 12:48.

Exo 12:43 There shall no **stranger בן נכר** eat thereof :

Exo 12:48 no **uncircumcised person** shall eat thereof.

The parallel shows that the “son of a stranger” is simply an “uncircumcised person.” By receiving circumcision, a foreigner ceases to be the “son of a stranger.” But in this case, Isaiah is proposing something very radical: there will be a day when the Lord will receive the “son of the stranger” *without* the need for circumcision, in his condition as a foreigner.

Like the eunuch, the son of the stranger also has an echo in Acts: the case of Cornelius the Centurion in ch. 10. Recall the opprobrium that met Peter after he visited Cornelius:

¹⁶ 1/13/13: This reading of Lev 22:25 depends on the antecedent of “their” in “their corruption” and “their blemishes” referring to the uncircumcised person, while “they” must go back to the animals of the previous verses. On reflection, it is more likely that this verse is saying that blemished animals are not acceptable, even if bought from a foreigner. It was permissible for the “stranger among you” (called a גר, not a בן נכר) to offer sacrifices: see Num 15:14-16. However, the גר was probably circumcised, since he is permitted to partake of the passover (Num 9:14, cf. Exod 12:48), something forbidden to the בן נכר in Ex 12:43. In Num 9:14, the גר is distinguished from the אֹרֶץ הָאָרֶץ, the one who “springs up from the land,” that is, the native-born. So somebody like Ruth or Uriah the Hittite would be a גר, but not בן נכר.

Act 11:3 Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Perhaps Luke had Isa 56 in mind in selecting the prominent conversions that he presents to show the impact of the coming of the Spirit.

Isaiah brings together the requirement for circumcision and the exclusion of the eunuch. Ethnic continuity is at the heart of Israel's identity in the OT. They are carrying the promised seed of Abraham that will one day yield the Messiah. Circumcision reminds them of their role in passing on and extending the nation. Only those who are able to procreate, and who are marked in a way that reminds them of their procreative responsibility, can fully participate in the community.

In our passage, the Lord reveals that the day will come when this physical, ethnic character of the people of God will come to an end. No longer will the eunuch and the uncircumcised be excluded from the house of the Lord.

4-7a, The Categories Restored

Now, in chiasmatic order, he describes positively the blessings that will come on these previously excluded groups, using the terms of the general statement from v. 2.

4 For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose *the things that please me*,--Keeping the sabbaths by itself is not enough, any more than it was in ch. 1. What God desires is judgment *and* justice, outward obedience *and* inward delight. The standard is not just what is written, but "the things that please me." The question is not whether we have checked the box, but whether God is delighted at our service.

and take hold of my covenant;--What covenant is in view? It can't be the covenant of Sinai, which excluded the eunuch. The repetition of the phrase in v. 6 shows that it also can't be the covenant with Abraham, which excludes the uncircumcised. While Isaiah does not use the term "new covenant" that Jeremiah does (31:31), it's hard to escape the conclusion that the Lord is here promising a covenant that goes beyond anything that Israel has known up to this time.

Both keeping the sabbaths and taking hold of the covenant remind us of the opening summary in v. 2.

5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters:--The tragedy of the eunuch is that he cannot have offspring to carry on his name. The Lord promises that he will be memorialized in God's house, in a way far superior to physical seed.

I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.--Even a physical descent can die off, but God gives his people an everlasting name.

6 Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant;--Note again the indications of a relation that goes beyond the explicit stipulations of the law:

- "join themselves to the Lord," choosing to associate with him rather than with the world
- "serve him," seeking to accomplish his purposes rather than our own

- “love the name of the Lord,” seeking to see him honored

7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer:--

Under the old covenant, the uncircumcised were not welcome in the temple. Paul was nearly killed by a Jewish mob who thought that he

Act 21:28 brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

In fact, he had not, but the day will come when the uncircumcised will be welcome.

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar;--This promise has reference to the prohibition we saw before in Lev 22:25,

Lev 22:25 Neither from a (son of a) stranger's hand יד בן נכר shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.¹⁷

Under the old covenant, offerings from the uncircumcised were rejected, but now God promises that they will be accepted.

7b-8, Closing Summary

Adjusting the English punctuation allows the the classical summary formula נאם יהוה to be in its distinctive non-initial position,¹⁸ and yields a nice chiasmic summary of the two groups who have now been given access to the house of God.

for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people, 8 saith נאם The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel.--The two descriptions that come before and after the summary formula נאם יהוה recall the two categories of people who have been the subject of the preceding detailed discussion:

- “all people” recalls “the sons of the stranger”
- “the outcasts of Israel” recalls “the eunuchs”

The final clause extends this summary yet further.

Yet will I gather others to him/it [the house],--The focus in vv. 4-7 has been on access to the house of the Lord, which is thus the most likely antecedent for the pronoun.

beside those that are gathered unto him.--In a nutshell, here is the theme of the entire paragraph. God will greatly enlarge the population of those whom he draws to his house of prayer.

Note that the Lord is doing the gathering. We do not come to God's fellowship of our own initiative. He must draw us. The same verb συναγω that the LXX uses here appears in our Lord's promise,

Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

¹⁷ 1/13/13: See footnote on 3a. I now think it more likely that this verse prohibits blemished animals even from an uncircumcised person, than an uncircumcised person *per se*, but the uncircumcised would certainly have been excluded from the altar in general, as from the passover.

¹⁸ The formula is usually clause-final, but clause-medial instances are not unprecedented; cf. Jer 1:19.

In Matt 18, the verb is passive. Isa 56:8 tells us who is doing the gathering.

Sabbath and the New Covenant

One puzzle remains. The inclusion of the uncircumcised and eunuchs, in contrast to the Mosaic ordinance, indicates pretty clearly that we are on new covenant ground here. However, the one example of obedience that he continues to require of these newly included people is respect for the Sabbath, something that Paul treats as no longer binding under the new covenant:

Rom 14:5-6 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. 6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*.

Col 2:16-17 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

It's worth noting that the promises to the two excluded groups of people include access to "my holy mountain" and "my house of prayer." Isaiah has repeatedly promised that the Day of the Lord will include the exaltation of God's temple on Mount Zion:

Isa 2:2-4 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, ... 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; ... 4 ... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

(v. 4 certainly has not been fulfilled in our age.)

Isa 4:6 And there [Mt. Zion, v. 5] shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.

Isa 24:23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

This invitation is looking past this present evil age to the Millennium. During that period, God will restore Sabbath-keeping, along with many other aspects of Israel's cultus. Later in Isaiah, we read,

Isa 66:23 And it shall come to pass, *that* from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD.

And after his description of the Lord's return to Mt. Zion, Zechariah reports,

Zec 14:16 And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up... to keep the feast of tabernacles.

56:9-57:13, Summons to the Wicked

The previous invitations have been to those who would embrace God's salvation. The next two invitations describe the judgment that will come on those who reject that invitation. Yet each of these

paragraphs ends with a reminder of the Lord's protection for the righteous (chart).

These two commands work together. The first one summons the wild beasts to devour, while the second summons those who will become their prey.

56:9-57:2, Wild beasts called to devour the complacent

56:9-12, Summons to the Beasts

The imagery of this section draws on the common image of Israel as God's flock:

Psa 78:52 [He] made **his own people** to go forth **like sheep**, and guided them in the wilderness **like a flock**.

Psa 79:13 So we **thy people and sheep of thy pasture** will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.

Psa 95:7 For he is our God; and **we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand**. To day if ye will hear his voice,

Psa 100:3 **we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture**.

This metaphor of the flock has several components (chart).

- Of course, we need the sheep.
- Where there are sheep, there must also be a shepherd to protect them.
- The shepherd often had dogs to help them in their work, as Job mentions in 30:1, "the dogs of my flock"
- That protection is necessary because there are wild beasts in the field and forest who would devour them.

Isaiah highlights each of these elements, emphasizing the shortcomings of the nation and its leaders. As we consider the imagery in its relation to Israel, let's also think about the lessons it carries for the church.

First, we see the wild animals who threaten the flock.

9 All ye the beasts of the field, come to devour all ye the beasts in the forest.

A flock is constantly at risk because of wild animals who would prey on the sheep. David described the risk to Saul, from his experience as a shepherd (chart):

1Sa 17:34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

Here, Isaiah is summoning the pagan nations to ravage God's flock. The message is similar to the one conveyed under the image of a vineyard in Isa 5,

Isa 5:5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:

Isaiah 55-57

The wild beasts who devour are pagan armies. God defended his flock from the beasts of Assyria under Hezekiah, but the time will come when, because of their sin, he will abandon them to the beasts of Babylon.

The NT uses similar imagery with respect to the church (chart). Our Lord warned the disciples,

Mat 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening **wolves**.

Mat 10:16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of **wolves**:

Paul tells the elders of the church at Ephesus,

Act 20:28-30 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

A wolf is someone from outside the flock who comes into it for the sake of personal advancement. We want to think that everybody who visits our gathering has good intentions, but the Scriptures warn us that some will come to destroy. If we are following the Lord with all our hearts, he will protect us, but if a group departs from the Lord's way, as Israel did, we should not be surprised if the Lord summons the wild beasts of the field to take its candlestick out of its place.

The metaphor may seem obscure because we don't see any reference to the sheep, the central element of a flock. Has Isaiah left them entirely in the background? Perhaps not.

All English versions render this verse to contain two descriptions of the wild beasts that threaten the flock (chart). God summons the beasts of the field and the beasts of the forest to come to devour his people. The words allow this sense, but the Heb accentuation suggests a more radical understanding, in which "all ye beasts in the forest" is the object of "devour." Jeremiah picks up this verse in his prophecy a century later, and his citation suggests he follows this latter understanding. In 12:7-9 (chart), God describes the people of God as a beast of the forest in v. 8, devoured by the beast of the field in v. 9.

Jer 12:7-9 I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. 8 Mine heritage is unto me as **a lion in the forest**; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it. 9 Mine heritage *is* unto me *as* a speckled bird, the birds round about *are* against her; come ye, assemble **all the beasts of the field**, come to devour.

On this reading, "the beasts in the forest" are the second element of the metaphor (chart). The wayward flock is no longer in the field, but has wandered off into the forest, where it has no business being. The nation that should have been God's flock has instead become a pack of wild animals, and God summons other wild animals to devour it. The loss of the flock is not solely the fault of the shepherds. Some of the responsibility rests on the flock.

The situation is similar to Ezekiel's criticism in ch. 34. After condemning the shepherds for abusing the flock, he turns to the flock itself (chart):

Isaiah 55-57

Eze 34:17-22 And *as for* you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. 18 *Seemeth it* a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? 19 And *as for* my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet. 20 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, *even I*, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. 21 Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; 22 Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle.

Again, we should consider the application to the churches. Consider Paul's exhortations to the Thessalonians. They fall into two groups: the duty of the sheep toward the shepherds, and of the shepherds toward the sheep. Both warnings recognize the danger of unruliness among the sheep.

1Th 5:12-14 And we beseech you, brethren [the sheep], to know them [shepherds] which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. **And be at peace among yourselves.**

1Th 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren [shepherds], warn them that are **unruly**, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*.

Consider how often the NT warns against strife among brethren:

Jam 4:11 **Speak not evil one of another**, brethren.

1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* **among you envying**, and **strife**, and **divisions**, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Eph 4:31-32 Let all **bitterness**, and **wrath**, and **anger**, and **clamour**, and **evil speaking**, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind **one to another**, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

What does a shepherd want the flock to do? Eat, drink, produce lots of wool and milk, and multiply. Shepherds among God's people want the flock to be well fed, to grow spiritually, and to reproduce spiritually. When the flock is unruly, not only do they fail to achieve these ends, but they become prey for the wild beasts of whom the Lord warned.

The third element of the picture that Isaiah sketches are the "watchers," who should be watching out to guard against the threat. After a summary description, we read of two watchers, sheepdogs and shepherds. A common construction throughout the paragraph is a description followed by a negative statement about what they can do (chart).

10 His watchmen are blind.-- This summary statement concerns, literally, "those who are watching." s Isaiah describes them with an oxymoron: the watchers are blind. They are incapable of seeing what is going on.

they are all ignorant [they do not know],--This clause gives the consequence of their blindness: literally, "they do not know" what is going on around them.

they are all dumb dogs,--Now we turn to one form of watcher, dogs. We know from Job 30:1 that

shepherds kept dogs to help them tend the flock.

The criticism of the dogs progresses through three stages. First, we learn of their unfortunate infirmity that makes them insensitive to the threat. Then we are told of their laziness, and finally of their self-serving attitude.

“Dumb” here is a physical defect, not a cognitive one. They are unable to speak.

they cannot bark;--Because they cannot speak, they couldn't give the warning, even if they could recognize the problem.

So far, one can hardly blame the dogs. Dumbness, like blindness, is an unfortunate circumstance. It makes a dog unfit to be a sheepdog, but through no fault of its own. But the next set of characteristics, presented as staccato participles, makes them blameable.

sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.--They are lazy. Even if they could see and bark, they wouldn't take the time to.

The third criticism is even more accusatory:

11 Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough,--They do not desire to please their master, but live only to satisfy themselves.

The fourth element of the metaphor consists of the shepherds. The construction “and they are” refers back to the watchers. The shepherds share two of the defects of the dogs.

and they are shepherds that cannot understand:--A good watchdog can see something out of the ordinary and sound the alarm, but one expects the shepherd to understand the nature of the threat. The dumbness of the dogs goes along with the lack of understanding of the shepherds, who do not recognize the dangers that confront the flock.

they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.--Like the dogs, the shepherds are motivated by greed. They only care about feeding themselves. One is reminded of our Lord's criticism of hireling shepherds in John 10:12-13 (chart),

Joh 10:11-14 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an **hireling**, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The **hireling** fleeth, because he is an **hireling**, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine.

12 Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.¹⁹--Their selfishness shows itself in debauchery and drunkenness. We saw this same error among the leaders of Ephraim in ch. 28 (chart).

Isa 28:1 Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower, which *are* on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!

Isa 28:7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are

¹⁹ Rick Gross suggests that these words may be addressed to the flock, not just the other shepherds. Not only are they blind to the coming judgment, but they actually reassure the people falsely (Jer 6:14).

out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

Note a symmetry in the description of the dogs and the shepherds (chart). Each has two main failings. The first failing is in their lack of attentiveness to the dangers confronting the flock. The second is in their selfish focus on their own appetites.

I don't know of any NT application of the imagery of the sheepdog to the church. But it does say quite a bit to the shepherds, and the sheepdogs and the shepherds have similar responsibilities with respect to recognizing imminent danger (chart).

1Th 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*.

Act 20:28-31 **Take heed** therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore **watch**, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Israel suffered when her watchers were blind (failing to see problems coming), dumb (failing to sound the alarm), and unable to understand. Elders put the flock at risk when they are not alert to Satan's attacks, and when they do not warn the flock.

Both Israel's watchdogs and her shepherds were self-serving. We have already read our Lord's condemnation of self-serving shepherds, and the NT continues this theme in warning against those who would serve for pay (chart).

Act 20:33-35 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that **so labouring** ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

1Pe 5:1-3 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; **not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind**; 3 Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

57:1-2, Consolation to the Righteous

The verse division is misleading. We have a bicolon describing the overlooked death of the righteous, then a tricolon explaining the blessing behind their passing (chart).

57:1 The righteous perisheth,
and no man layeth it to heart:
and merciful men are taken away,
none considering

that **the righteous**
is **taken away from the evil to come.**
2 He shall enter into peace:
they shall rest in their beds,
each one walking in his uprightness.

Let's consider the related terms together.

First, we are considering a group of people called “**the righteous**,” “**merciful men**,” and those who “**walk in uprightness**.”

- “Righteous” צדיק describes one who conforms to what is pleasing to God, who “does justice.”
- “Merciful men” אנשי חסד are those who manifest covenant faithfulness in their dealings.
- One who walks in uprightness הלך נכח literally “walks straight ahead.” He is not devious or deceitful.

This is a stark contrast with the behaviors that we have seen in the previous verses. These are not lazy, greedy watchers, but sheep who conduct themselves as they ought.

Second, what is the perishing that is in view here? The whole paragraph invites the beasts of the field to come and ravish the flock, but that event appears to be “the evil” mentioned in 1b, from which the righteous are delivered. Rather, we see here, as in Ezek 34, the result of most of the flock behaving like “beasts of the forest.” In their selfish and unruly behavior, they trample on the righteous sheep.

Third, nobody gives any thought to this anomaly, that the righteous perish, and in fact perish at the hands of their fellows. The suffering of the righteous is a major theological dilemma, one that motivates large portions of Scripture. But the corrupt flock is so blind that they don't give it a moment's attention.

Fourth, even though the beasts of the forest don't care why God allows the righteous to perish, Isaiah does, and he explains it. When the beasts of the field arrive to devour the beasts of the forest, the righteous will not be there. Their early death delivers them from the terrible judgment that is to come.

57:3-13, Judgment on the whore and her children

Having summoned the wild beasts of the field to devour the corrupt and careless flock, the Lord now summons his people to tell them of the coming judgment.

57:3-13a, Lawsuit Against the Defendants

The 2fs references in vv. 6-13a appear to refer to the “sorceress” and “whore” of v. 3, which brings us back to the feminine language of ch. 49b-50a and ch. 54 (chart). We have seen Judah, the wife of the Lord, depicted first as a barren widow, and then as a redeemed wife. Now she appears again, condemned as a sorceress and a harlot. We will see her again, in ch. 60 and 62, fully restored and glorified.²⁰ But first, we must learn of her sordid past.

²⁰ See Notes for more details. The image is also used of Damascus (ch. 17) and Babylon (ch. 47).

The first (ch. 49-50) and third (ch. 57) addresses to the woman also include her children. The first one comforted her, and criticized her children, but the apple never falls far from the tree, and the present address, though starting with the children, devotes most of its attention to condemning the mother as well.

This section is an instance of the covenant lawsuit form, or ריב, which we considered earlier in ch. 1.²¹ This form has a standard format, much as a letter does with its outside and inside address, salutation, body, and signature (chart). In the case of the ריב, these include (chart)

- a summons to the trial (v. 3),
- an interrogative accusation (vv. 4-5),
- a detailed account of the defendant's rebellion against the sovereign (vv. 6-11),
- and the threat of judgment (vv. 12-13a).

This form is common in the prophets, and also known from secular literature (the Mari archives, dating to 1800 BC; the epic of Tukulti-Ninurta from about 1200, and several Hittite examples from the mid-second millennium).²² So by the time of Isaiah, it was an established, if somewhat archaic, formula of judicial accusation. Recognizing this form allows us to have a better feel for the overtones that the Lord's language would bring to his hearers.

v.3, Summons

The first element of the covenant lawsuit is a summons, convening the court.

3 But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore.--The ones summoned are characterized by their parentage. We can anticipate their character by that of their parents. The titles given the parents indicate that the parents will not get off without blame, as Mother Zion did in ch. 49.

The Lord gives two titles for the mother, both recalling the sins of the nation as outlined earlier in the book. The first focuses on her compromise with the earlier inhabitants of the land of Canaan; the second on her desire for external alliances.

Sorceress reflects her adoption of the practices of the inhabitants of the land. Compare the only other use of עוֹנֵן in the book,

Isa 2:6 Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and *are soothsayers like the Philistines*, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

Moses warned against this:

Deu 18:10-12 There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an **observer of times**, or an enchanter, or a witch, 11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. 12

²¹ The form has also been detected in 42:18-25 and 48:12-16a, where I did not emphasize it in this exposition.

²² Julien Harvey, *Le Plaidoyer Prophétique* Studia 22. Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967.

For all that do these things *are* an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

Whore marks her association with the (masculine) adulterer, her unlawful partner. In the following verses, this adulterer is the foreign nations with whom she sought alliances. Again, this title is applied to Judah only once, earlier in the book:

Isa 1:21 How is the faithful city become an **harlot!** it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

The declaration of rebellion has two panels, and it is likely that each panel corresponds to one of these titles, “sorceress” and “whore.”

vv. 4-5, Interrogative Accusation

The next element is the accusation, framed as a question.

4 Against whom do ye sport yourselves?--The uniform usage of this construction (Hithpael of נגַן with לָ) in earlier passages is positive, referring to delighting oneself in the Lord or in his blessings (chart):

Psa 37:4 **Delight thyself** also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Psa 37:11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall **delight themselves** in the abundance of peace.

So we should not understand the question as suggesting a negative answer. We might better translate, “In whom is your delight?”²³

The Lord Jesus taught,

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The true sign of our relation to God is not how we behave, or what we believe, but what brings us pleasure. The true believer will delight in the Lord, in his Word, and in time with his people. If we find these things a burden and unpleasant duty, that’s a danger sign that they are not our true treasure, and some idol has crept in.

That’s what has happened to those whom the Lord accuses here. They do not delight in the Lord, or in his people. Quite the contrary, they mock the truly righteous, and go after false gods.

against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?--These are gestures of pride and mockery (chart).

Hannah was on the giving end of this mockery:

1Sa 2:1 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: **my mouth is enlarged** over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

More often, we read of God’s people on the receiving end:

²³ All modern translations take the question negatively, but the Bishop’s Bible is much more nuanced and closer to the established usage of the expression: “Wherin take ye your pleasure?”

Job 16:10 They have **gaped upon me with their mouth**; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me.

Psa 22:13 They **gaped upon me with their mouths**, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

Psa 35:21 Yea, they **opened their mouth wide** against me

Lam 2:16 All thine enemies have **opened their mouth against thee**: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.

Earlier (57:9), we learned that some in the flock had in fact become wild beasts of the forest, and the previous invitation closed with a look at the righteous, who are taken away in death before God's judgment falls (57:1). These expressions suggest that God is now speaking to their oppressors, those by whose hands they were in fact taken away.

“Where is your delight? You do not truly delight in me. Rather than occupying yourselves in worshipping me, you mock those who truly do serve me.”

Now the accusation goes deeper. The reason they mock the righteous is that their own conduct is so reprehensible (compare the dynamic in Rom 1:32):

are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood,--They are characterized by rebellion and deception. Note the “child of,” “seed of” idiom for assigning a characteristic to somebody.

5 Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree,--Instead of following the Lord, they participated in the Canaanite religion. These rites were fertility rituals that included ritual prostitution in sacred groves.

slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks?--The offspring of these orgiastic ceremonies were offered in sacrifice.

Here is their true delight—not in the Lord, as David exhorted in Ps 37, but in rejecting his righteous servants, and giving themselves over to the carnal rituals of idolatrous worship.

6-11, Declaration of Rebellion

Following the stereotyped structure of the covenant lawsuit, the Lord now turns from interrogation to statement (chart). In addition, he turns from the children to their mother, addressed with feminine pronouns. This movement is in the opposite direction to that in ch. 49-50, where he started with the mother and ended up condemning the children. It also differs from that passage in criticizing the mother as well as the children.

This section has two panels, each beginning with a statement and ending with a threatening question. Each panel can be aligned with one of the titles given the woman in v. 3.

6, Condemnation of the Sorceress

As we understand the summons, the sin of the sorceress is in following the false religious practices of the Canaanites, the original inhabitants of the land of promise. The full effect of the statement and the

following question relies on puns that escape the English reader (chart).

6 Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion; they, they are thy lot:--The reference is unclear, but all the possible interpretations condemn them.

The “smooth things” may be stones (as our version has it) that served as idols. Then the Lord is saying, “You have chosen them as your gods. Enjoy them.”

But a stronger interpretation is possible,²⁴ perhaps in the form of a pun. The root translated “smooth” קלל is used in Ugaritic, a West Semitic language dating to the time of Moses, to describe dead people, and graves were often dug in the walls of the wadis (2 Kings 23:6). One function of those who deal in black arts is to call up the dead, as Saul asked the witch of Endor to do for him with respect to Samuel (1 Sam 28:8). In violation of Deut 18:10-11, they have engaged in these forbidden practices. Now God says: “You want to consult the dead? You may go join them.”

even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered a meat offering.--They have participated in the rituals associated with these satanic practices.

Should I receive comfort in these?--The verb is נחם, which here has the meaning “calm myself, retract punishment.” God is making a pun with the word “enflaming yourselves” in v. 5, which sounds similar in Hebrew (הַנְחַמְתֶּם from נחם vs. אֶנְחַם from נחם). “Should I soothe my wrath while you are enflaming yourselves in lust?” The question is rhetorical. It would be completely irrational for them to expect God to stand by while they rebel against him.

The lesson for us to learn from the condemnation of the sorceress is that we must not allow the world to lure us into its godless practices. Just because everybody around us is doing something doesn’t make it right. What matters is God’s opinion.

7-11, Condemnation of the whore

Having condemned Judah as a sorceress, polluted with the false religion of the Canaanites, he now condemns her as a whore, who has violated her duty her divine husband and formed foreign alliances. This paragraph has two parts. The first develops the metaphor of harlotry, while the second appears to present the literal truth behind it.

7-8, The Metaphor

7 Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.--The place of the harlotry is “a lofty and high mountain,” and the action itself is identified as offering sacrifice, presumably to false gods. The Lord is Israel’s husband, and worship of any other god constitutes unfaithfulness to him.

The OT frequently mentions the “high places” of idolatrous worship. However, up until the time of Solomon, the term does not have a negative association. Even Samuel offered at a high place (1 Sam 9:12-14, 19, 25), and the Tabernacle was at a high place during the reign of David (1 Kings 3:4). The

24 Discussed in H.V.D. Parunak. A Semantic Survey of NHM. *Biblica* 56 512-532, 1975, following W. H. Irwin, "The Smooth Stones of the Wady"? Isaiah 57,6, *CBQ* 29 (1967) 31-40.

term takes on a negative association only after Solomon set up an idolatrous high place (chart):²⁵

1Ki 11:1-8 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites; 2 Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: *for* surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father. 7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, **in the hill that is before Jerusalem**, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

His motive was to please his foreign wives, whom he took as diplomatic gestures, to build relations with the nations round about. He turned his trust from the Lord to the pagan nations around him, and the hilltop sanctuary he built for his wives was the first “high place” that the OT condemns (charts for topography).

This notion of misguided international relations appears to be the original point of the metaphor of spiritual fornication. Isaiah condemns Tyre in these terms:

Isa 23:17 And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth.

Similarly, when Ezekiel develops this image of spiritual harlotry (16:19ff, ch. 23) eighty years later, his focus is not on the idols, but on the nations whose gods they were:

Eze 16:26 Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger.

Eze 16:28 Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied.

Eze 23:22-23 Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side; 23 The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, *and* all the Assyrians with them:

Israel was to spread the knowledge of the true God to all the other nations, subduing them in holy war (Deut 20). Instead, she sought their support, engaged their commerce, and worshiped their gods. In God’s eyes, this was infidelity to him.

²⁵ There are a few negative references earlier than this. Lev 26:30 is a prediction of the judgment that came in the time of the prophets, and thus can be understood as prophetic of the time after Solomon. Num 33:52 acknowledges that the indigenous people had high places, and commands Israel to destroy them, but we hear little about them in the narrative.

There is a warning here for us. We are to be “pilgrims and strangers” on the earth. Our citizenship is in heaven. Earthly nations are the enemies of God, and we must not seek security or deliverance from them.

8 Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance:--God commanded Israel to mark the doorposts of their houses with the nation’s fundamental confession of love for the Lord (chart):

Deu 6:4-9 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. 9 **And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.**

Such a marker would not only remind them of their allegiance, but advertise it to all who visited them. But they have moved this remembrance behind the doors, like an adulterer who hides his wedding ring in the midst of unfaithfulness.

for thou hast discovered thyself to another than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it.--They have abandoned themselves to sensual pleasures with other lovers, trusting in the foreign nations, and worshiping their gods.

9-10, The Reality

9 And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off,--The reference to “the king” and “messengers” (ambassadors) shows that the paragraph is moving from figure to reality. The Lord reminds them of their diplomatic misdirection. We can recall two examples from the time of Isaiah.

The first isn’t recorded directly in Isaiah, but it lies in the background of Isaiah’s interactions with Ahaz in ch. 7, about 735 BC. The nation was threatened by a confederation of Syria and the northern Kingdom, and sought help from Assyria. The history is in 2 Kings:

2Ki 16:7-8 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I *am* thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. 8 And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent *it for* a present to the king of Assyria.

The second example, 20 years later, came when Assyria was threatening Judah. Recall Isaiah’s own accusation of the nation in the time of Hezekiah, when Judah sought help from Egypt against Assyria:

Isa 30:1-7 Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: 2 That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! 3 Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your

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shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt *your* confusion. 4 For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes. 5 They were all ashamed of a people *that* could not profit them, nor be an help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach. 6 The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence *come* the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people *that* shall not profit *them*. 7 For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength *is* to sit still.

These pagan kings are examples of the “adulterer” in v. 3. The word is masculine, and is best understood to refer to the partner of the whore, not to the whore herself.

This dynamic has not diminished over the centuries. Consider the relation between Israel and the US. Israel doesn’t trust in the Lord today any more than she did 2700 years ago. She assiduously cultivates political alliances with powerful partners, in the hope that they can protect her. It didn’t work then, and it won’t work now. Zechariah 14 predicts (chart),

Zec 14:1-2 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, ...

Meanwhile, consider the position in which this places the US: not as a righteous protector of God’s chosen people, but as an adulterer facilitating the apostate nation’s lack of faith.

We have a counterexample that shows the correct attitude, in the book of Ezra, as he prepared to return to Jerusalem to teach the people (chart).

Ezr 8:21-23 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God *is* upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath *is* against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

and didst debase *thyself* even unto hell.--The diplomatic missions to Egypt were described as “going down to Egypt” (chart):

Isa 30:1-2 Woe to the rebellious children, ... 2 That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!

Isa 31:1 Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; ...

In fact, they might as well go all the way down to Sheol.

The next verse is an alternation, ABAB. The A sections show the effect that their adulterous efforts have on them, while the B sections show their emotional response.

10 Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way;--It was a long, hard journey, to seek out diplomatic support from other lands. She spared no effort; the way she pursued is characterized as “great,” that is,

long and arduous. The expression is used in Jos 9:13 by the Gibeonite ambassadors to describe the journey that they claimed to have pursued to make an alliance with Joshua and the Israelites.

yet saidst thou not, There is no hope:--Here is the first statement of their emotional response. It's amazing how persistently people will seek help from powerless worldly resources, while giving up on God if he does not immediately do what they please.

thou hast found the life of thine hand;--The idiom is unparalleled in biblical Hebrew, but we can guess at its meaning. The "hand" is the organ with which we do things, and is often a image of strength, sometimes even translated "power" in the KJV (e.g., "power of the tongue," Prov 18:21; "power of the dog," Ps 22:20; "force of the sword," Jer 18:21). Though they are wearied, yet they reach deep within themselves to find more life for their hand, that is, to redouble their strength for the effort.

therefore thou wast not grieved.--Like the first A, this clause reports their emotional response. In spite of the burden, the nation was persistent in pursuing this false source of strength.

So, putting the A's and B's together, we understand the verse to say, "You have grown weary through your efforts, but managed to pull yourselves together and keep on trying. In all your efforts, you have not lost hope or grieved." All the emphasis is on their self-sufficiency.

11, The Question

11 And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared,--Like the condemnation of the sorceress, the condemnation of the whore ends with a question. Like the first question, this one is rhetorical. It actually makes a statement: in seeking foreign alliances, they have feared men rather than God. Ahaz feared Pekah and Rezin and sought refuge in Assyria (ch. 7); Hezekiah feared Assyria and sought refuge in Egypt (ch. 30).

Note the rhetorical pairing with the interrogative accusation in v. 4, "In whom do you delight?" (chart) We usually think of delight and fear as applying to different objects: we flee what we fear and approach what we delight. Israel's sin consists of fearing her foes and delighting in her allies. But these verses insist that she should both delight in, and fear, the Lord.

It is a wonderful paradox that the One who invites our deepest delight also demands our most trembling fear.

Deu 6:5, 13 And thou shalt **love** the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ... 13 Thou shalt **fear** the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

Deu 10:12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to **fear** the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to **love** him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

It must be so when the sinful creature is invited into the presence of the holy Creator. We are called to "dwell with the devouring fire," Isa 33:14. All of our deepest longings can be satisfied only in him, and yet the closer we come to him, the more clearly we perceive his purity, and the more we are drawn with Isaiah to cry out, "Woe is me" (6:5). We are like moths drawn to the flame, irresistibly attracted to that which must destroy us. The difference between our situation and that of the moth is that the divine

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Flame, of his own grace, and through the incredible sacrifice of his own Son, allows us to survive, even flourish, in the presence of his all-consuming holiness.

that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me,--The point of these two clauses is that they have departed from the Lord's covenant. Compare the priestly plea in Ps 44 (chart).²⁶

Psa 44:17 All this is come upon us; yet have we not **forgotten** thee, neither have we **dealt falsely** in thy covenant.

Let's reflect on the meaning of each of these accusations, and how it relates to their fear.

thou hast lied--The lying reflects their repeated broken promises to obey and trust the Lord. (chart)

The first was at Sinai. God offered the people a covenant:

Exo 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:

This promise should make them proof against fear. If they are his peculiar treasure, and if he controls all the earth, no one can touch them.

Exo 19:7-8 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together, and said, **All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.**

The people accept the offer. They place themselves under the Lord's promised protection, and declare their fealty to him. Yet they broke this promise. They lied.

The OT contains several "roller coasters," historical records of how the people repeatedly forsake the Lord, suffer his punishment, call on him, and are delivered. Three prominent examples are the book of Judges, Ps 78, and Ps 106. Each time they call on the Lord, they are renewing their covenant commitment; each time they fall into sin, they show the falsehood of these declarations. In Ps 78, Asaph, one of David's musicians, describes this recurrent faithlessness as lying:

Psa 78:36-37 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and **they lied unto him** with their tongues. 37 For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

Is there a parallel here with us? When we receive the Lord Jesus, we declare our faith, our trust in him. When we face difficulty, do we rest in him and obey his word? Or do we seek other sources of support, and compromise our obedience to him? When we fear others, we are declaring that our statement of faith was a lie.

Thou ... hast not remembered me--(chart) As a mark of their devotion to the Lord, they were to place the marker on their doorpost that we discussed in v. 8, the "remembrance." But now the nation has hidden the remembrance and broken their covenant promise to be a nation set apart to him, by placing their trust in other nations and their gods.

Ps 78 rebukes the nation not only for lying in their covenant professions, but also for not remembering

²⁶ This Psalm appears (Hengstenberg) to have been written during the time of David, when the Edomites took advantage of his absence from Jerusalem to launch a raid against the nation (1 Kings 11:14-15)

the Lord's might acts toward them:

Psa 78:42-43 **They remembered not his hand**, *nor* the day when he delivered them from the enemy. 43 How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan:

Like Israel, we are at risk of not remembering the Lord's goodness toward us. If we would only remember what he has done in the past, we would realize how ill-founded our fears for the future are. When we are afraid of others, we show that we have not remembered him.

nor laid it to thy heart?--To "lay something on one's heart" שים על לב is a Hebrew idiom, a favorite of Isaiah,²⁷ that means "pay attention." They have not paid attention to what they are doing when they seek foreign help. They have not stopped to contemplate the real implications of their action. They have not considered the implications of their covenant relation with God for every decision that they make.

May the Lord enable us to "lay to heart" our professed relation with the Lord, keeping it foremost in every decision that we make.

This entire verse recalls the woes of the first part of the book. In particular, ch. 29-30 (chart) anticipate the themes of this chapter. First, God accuses them of a lack of proper fear:

Isa 29:13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and **their fear toward me** is taught by the precept of men:

Then he mentions the same sin we have here, of seeking help from other nations:

Isa 30:1-2 Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: 2 **That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth**; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!

Finally, he accuses them of lying:

Isa 30:9 this *is* a rebellious people, **lying children**, children *that* will not hear the law of the LORD:

have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?--They have tragically misunderstood God's patience and forbearance as implying that he would not punish them for their disobedience.

vv. 12-13a, Threats

The fourth section of the covenant lawsuit is the threat of coming judgment (chart).

12 I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works;--The "I" is emphatic. Each of us delights to set forth his own righteousness: (chart)

Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

²⁷ 42:24-25; 47:5-7; 57:1.

But the judge here says, “I’m not interested in what you have to say about your works. I am the one who will evaluate them.” And we have already seen what he thinks about them. Perhaps we should understand the imperfect verb in a present rather than a future sense: “In what I am saying to you, I am declaring your supposed righteous works. You think you are pious; I see idolatry and murder. You think you are promoting international relations; I see you forsaking your covenant with me.”

for and they shall not profit thee.--The conjunction is the simple ׀, not the usual reflex of “for” (כי). This clause does not explain why he declares their righteousness and works, but rather, the result of his examination of the evidence. He reviews them, and discards them as worthless.

13 When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee;-- “Companies” קבוצה appears only here. It means “gathering, collection,” and probably refers to all the alternative gods and allies that the nation had heaped to itself.

A major challenge in missions work in pagan cultures is that people are often quite happy to add Jesus to their god-shelf, but not to reject the false gods. But our Lord insists on exclusivity. We are to have no other gods before him, and if we trust in all the things we have gathered together, he will abandon us.

This warning is appropriate to us as well. Our devotion to the Lord must be complete, absolute, and uncompromising. If we trust in the Lord plus something else, he will abandon us to the something else. This principle does not mean that we become hermits under a vow of poverty, but it does warn us about the attitude we are to have to this world’s resources (chart).

1Ti 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

We are not to trust in this world’s riches, whether material goods, or an education, or doctors, or influential friends. At the same time, God delights to bless those who truly trust in him, and often provides them with great blessings of these sorts.

but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity [a breath] shall take them:--All false objects of hope will be dispelled with the slightest breath.

57:13b, Consolation to the Righteous

Like the invitation to the wild beasts, the summons to the wicked concludes with a promise to the righteous (chart).

but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess נהל the land, and shall inherit ירש my holy mountain;--We have often noted the parallels between the promised return from Babylon and the Exodus. The idea of inheriting the land of promise is one such common theme. These two verbs are especially prominent in the accounts of the Exodus and the Conquest (chart).

What is remarkable is the application of this language to God’s holy mountain. Earlier references to this mountain are all in the Psalms, another instance of Isaiah’s deep knowledge of the Bible he already had. In the Psalms, this mountain has two main characteristics (chart).

First, it is the place where the Lord rules, hears requests, and receives worship, the place of his palace.

Psalm 2:6 (unsigned) Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

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Psalm 3:4 (David) I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.

Psalm 48:1 <A Song *and* Psalm for the sons of Korah.> Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* the mountain of his holiness.

Psalm 99:9 (unsigned) Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is* holy.

Second, it is the place where the saints desire to abide

Psalm 15:1 <A Psalm of David.> LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall **dwell in thy holy hill**?

Psalm 43:3 (with 42, sons of Korah) O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them **bring me unto thy holy hill**, and to thy tabernacles.

The two go together. The believer delights in the Lord (v. 4) and longs to be with him and with his people. So wherever God is, is the believer's fondest destination.

This promise is the culmination of the age long process by which God draws his people to himself (chart).

At the first Exodus, and indeed the return from Babylon, the people came to the land, but the whole architecture of the tabernacle and temple was designed to emphasize the inaccessibility of God. The court was open to Israelites, the holy place only to priests, and the holy of holies only to the high priest, only once a year.

Today, the veil has been torn apart, and we have access to God, but the land he has chosen is no longer the center of our worship.

The day is coming when God receives his redeemed children into his home, and we will possess the sanctuary. As Isaiah envisioned at the start of his prophecy,

Isa 2:2-3 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

57:14-21, Final Summary

14 And shall say He said, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people.--This is the start of a new section, rather than the end of v. 13. That in turn means that the *waw* should be understood as the ordinary *waw*, not *waw* relative, and the verb translated as past rather than as future (continuing the imperfects of 13b). There are three reasons for this (chart):

The first reason is technical. The two verbs in the previous verse are both imperfects, and there is no reason for the writer to switch to sequential forms here.

Second, the antecedent of the pronoun in “my people” in Isaiah is most commonly the Lord, not the righteous.²⁸ Even the exceptions are Isaiah delivering the word of the Lord. The title is never placed on the lips of a third party. Thus we should understand that the speaker changes.

Third, each of the three sections of ch. 40-66 contains such a command to prepare the way:²⁹

Isa 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isa 62:10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

In both other places, it is paragraph initial. So it probably is here.

Comparison of this command with 40:3 suggests an important contrast (chart). There, the command was to prepare “the way of the Lord,” the way for the Lord to come to his people. Here, we read of “the way of my people,” the path that they will follow to come to God. The rest of this section (which also ends ch. 49-57) is an alternation ABAB of Promise and Warning. It summarizes the choice that faced Israel, and that faces every person. Thus it lays out very clearly the path that they must follow.

- On one hand, we can receive the three gracious invitations and enjoy the Lord’s fellowship.
- On the other, we can rebel against him and suffer his judgment.

15-16, Promise to the Contrite

The first promise presents a contrast between God’s eternity and holiness, and the humility he requires of those whom he favors.

He begins with three characteristics of God: his exaltation, his eternity, and his holiness (chart). They are detailed in the quotation formula, then repeated in the first clause of the quotation itself.

15 For thus saith the high and lofty One.--God’s first characteristic is that he is exalted above everything else (chart), and will judge all those who oppose him. This description recalls the early chapters of the book. Three times in ch. 2 we are told that other things that are “high and lofty” רום ונשא will be brought low:

Isa 2:12 For the day of the LORD of hosts *shall be* upon every *one that is* proud and lofty רום, and upon every *one that is* lifted up נשא; and he shall be brought low:

Isa 2:13 And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up רום ונשא, and upon all the oaks of Bashan,

Isa 2:14 And upon all the high רום mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up נשא,

Then, in ch. 6, Isaiah sees the Lord:

Isa 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up רום ונשא, and his train filled the temple.

28 26 instances in all. Exceptions: 5:13; 22:4; 26:20; 53:8. NB: “Thy people” 61:21 = Israel.

29 Delitzsch

In his temple, the Lord is constantly “high and exalted,” and when his people are threatened, he shows himself thus on earth. When the Assyrian was threatening Judah, the Lord declared,

Isa 33:10 Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted **רום**; now will I lift up **נשא** myself.

The first characteristic of the Lord is that he is above all, and he will put down anyone who challenges his place. In the 1956 film “The King and I,” we laugh at the provincial arrogance of the King of Siam, who insists, “When I sit, you sit. When I kneel, you kneel. Head must not be higher than mine!” We condemn a man with this kind of pride and self-centeredness. But when the Lord describes himself this way, it is the truth. He is exalted above all, and everything that is higher than he will be brought low.

that inhabiteth eternity,--The second characteristic that the Lord emphasizes is that he is eternally immanent (chart). There is an interesting tension between the two words in this clause.

The word “eternity” **עד** is most commonly used as an adverbial accusative, thus, “the one who dwells eternally.” Thus it emphasizes something that never changes.

The verb pulls in another direction.³⁰ Two verbs are used to describe God’s dwelling. One, **ישב**, is used almost always of his heavenly dwelling. In fact, Solomon insists,

1Ki 8:27 But will God indeed dwell **ישב** on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?

God is omnipresent. He cannot be contained in any fixed location.

The verb **ישב** does not appear in this verse. Our verb, **שכן**, is much less common overall, but in fact is the most common verb used of God’s dwelling, and it always refers to places on earth that he condescends to inhabit, places through which he makes himself accessible. It is used frequently in Deut³¹ to describe the place of God’s sanctuary. For example,

Deu 12:11 Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell **שכן** there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:

This verb is also the root of the word for a tent or tabernacle, **משכן**, which was the form of sanctuary that God preferred. Thus the verb emphasizes the transience of God’s dwelling with his creatures.

The combination of the verb with the noun gives us pause. God cannot be contained in a sanctuary. He condescends to make himself available to his people—but this availability is eternal. It will never be withdrawn. This promise is a blessing for the believers, but a terror to those who reject him. He is not an absentee landlord, but is engaged with his creatures, both for blessing and for judgment.

whose name is Holy;--The third characteristic that the Lord emphasizes about himself is that he is holy, separate, set apart (chart). This was the great characteristic that impressed Isaiah in his inaugural vision in ch. 6.

There are two ways to understand this clause in English.

³⁰ See notes for further detail.

³¹ Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2

1. It might mean that the word “Holy” is one of God’s names or titles, along with YHWH, Lord of Hosts, etc.
2. Or it might mean that his name has the characteristic of being holy.

Hebrew distinguishes these two cases with different word order, and in this case, the word order (with predicate before subject) favors the second option.³² God’s holiness pervades everything associated with him: his mountain is holy (57:13b), his temple is holy (Ps 5:7), the angels that surround him are holy (Matt 25:31), and the name by which he is called is holy.

Holiness implies exclusion. Because God’s mountain is holy, only the righteous can ascend to it (Ps 15). Because his house is holy, only the priests, specially sanctified, have access. Because his name is holy, not everyone can invoke it. If we are unworthy, we cannot pray to him or even praise him. That would violate the third commandment, not to take his name carelessly or casually (Exod 20:7). It’s bad enough that sinful people cannot come into his presence, but a holy name means that we cannot even call upon him. Note the Psalmist’s constraint:

Psa 145:18 The LORD *is* nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him **in truth**.

If we are not righteous, our worship is an abomination to him, as we read in the very first chapter of Isaiah.

I dwell in the high and holy place,--This statement combines the previous three (chart):

- “dwell” שכן is the verb for his availability at the sanctuary
- “high” recalls the first statement, “the high and lofty one”
- “holy” reminds us of the third.

Because of the verb, it is very unlikely that God is speaking here of heaven. That would be indicated by ישב. More likely, he is declaring his perpetual and exalted availability on Zion, the place where he has chosen for his name to dwell. David knew this:

Psa 68:15-16 The hill of God *is as* the hill of Bashan; an high hill *as* the hill of Bashan. 16 Why leap ye, ye high hills? *this is* the hill *which* God desireth to dwell in; yea, **the LORD will dwell שכן in it for ever**.

The sons of Korah rejoiced,

Psa 87:1-2 His foundation *is* in the holy mountains. 2 **The LORD loveth the gates of Zion** more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

As the pilgrims made their ascent to Jerusalem for the feasts, they sang,

Psa 132:13-14 For the LORD hath chosen **Zion**; he hath desired *it* for his habitation. 14 **This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell³³; for I have desired it**.

³² See notes for extensive discussion.

³³ ישב, not שכן, but the unmarked nature of the more common root means it can be used either of heaven or of the earthly sanctuary; it’s שכן that has the special focus on the sanctuary.

Isaiah, inspired by this teaching, repeatedly emphasizes the promise of God's residence on Zion:

Isa 2:2-3 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that the mountain of the LORD'S house* shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isa 12:6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of **Zion**: for great is **the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee**.

Isa 24:23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when **the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion**, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

Let's pause to consider the the paradox in this clause. The verb indicates that we are speaking of Zion, not heaven. Yet God's high, eternal, holy status is not diminished. He has made himself accessible, yet is surrounded with such glory that we naturally shrink from approaching him. His next words reassure us that his chosen presence on earth is not to mock us.

with him also that is of a contrite and of a humble spirit,--Two characteristics are required of those who would draw near to this high, eternal, holy God. They must be contrite, and humble in spirit (chart).³⁴

"Contrite" is literally "crushed." It is used twice in ch. 53 to describe the affliction of our Savior:

Isa 53:5 *he was bruised* for our iniquities

Isa 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to **bruise** him

The contrite person is the person who has been crushed under God's judgment, who realizes his guilt. We are crushed when we recognize that because of our sin, we offend God in the very act of taking up his holy name in prayer. We are absolutely without hope.

"Humble spirit" is literally "low of spirit," an expression that appears twice in Proverbs as the opposite of pride:

Pro 16:19 Better *it is to be* of an **humble spirit** with the lowly [the poor], than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Pro 29:23 A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the **humble in spirit**.

As in the NT, so for Isaiah, access to God begins with repentance. Any attempt to assert our own worthiness immediately disqualifies us from access to the high, holy, eternal sanctuary of God. He receives only those who have been crushed by his law and are of a humble spirit.

to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.--Yet he does not receive them to gloat over them. His objective is to revive them, "make them alive."

16 For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth:--"Contend" אָרִיב is the verb describing the action of bringing a lawsuit for breach of covenant, the specific action we saw described

³⁴ "Contrite" bears the disjunctive *Pashta* accent, and is probably not in construct with "spirit."

in vv. 3-13a. The context of this verse is God's dealings with his people, those with whom he had a covenant, and who are "contrite and of a humble spirit." It is not a universal statement of limitation on God's anger. God's purpose is not to remain perpetually in an adversarial posture toward his people. But he is clear elsewhere that those who reject him will suffer forever (chart):

Isa 34:6-10 The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, ... 8 For *it is* the day of the LORD'S vengeance, *and* the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. 9 ... and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. 10 It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up **for ever**: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it **for ever and ever**.

Isa 66:24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for **their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched**; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.--If God were to pursue his wrath as far as justice permits, they would be destroyed. Yet he himself is the one who has made them: "I" is emphatic, "I myself."

17, Warning to the Wicked

Who is described in this verse? The only candidate in the immediate context is "him that is contrite and of a humble spirit." The Lord is looking back to the sinner's condition before he turned to the Lord, to his rebellion and the Lord's response.

The condemnation is a chiasm, but also shows a linear development (chart).

The chiasm is ABC CBA, where

- A = description of wickedness
- B = God's wrath, expressed with the verb קצף
- C = God's punitive action

There also appears to be a progression from evident chastisement to abandonment.

17 For the iniquity of his covetousness.--The initial description of wickedness is very specific: the impulse to enrich oneself at the expense of others. This was a common problem in the society of Isaiah's day (chart).³⁵

Isa 3:14-15 The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the **spoil of the poor** *is* in your houses. 15 What mean ye *that* ye beat my people to pieces, and **grind the faces of the poor**? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

was I wroth, and smote him:--God's initial response to sin is chastisement, like the Assyrian invasion and the Babylonian captivity. God smote the nation to show his wrath and call them to repentance.

³⁵ See also Amos 2:6-7; 4:1; Amos was Isaiah's contemporary.

I hid me, and was wroth,--Better, "hiding myself, I continued³⁶ being wroth." If the sinner resists, God abandons him to his evil ways, as we see in Rom 1 (chart). As a result of his wrath (1:18), "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28) to the natural consequences of their own sin. Just because he is no longer chastising them, they ought not to think that there is no more wrath. In fact, divine neglect is the most severe result of wrath.

and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.--Now the sin is more general. "Froward" means "perverse, twisted, contrary."³⁷ The wicked has ignored God's correction. Now he follows the wicked inclinations of his own heart as he moves farther and farther from the Lord.

18-19, Promise to the Contrite

How does a person get from the condition of v. 17 to the contrite and humble attitude of v. 15? As far as his own works are concerned, God has abandoned him to his own lusts. But now God intervenes, and outlines a series of steps that he will take to restore the wayward one.

18 I have seen his ways,--God has hidden his face from the sinner, so that the sinner cannot see him, but this does not mean that God no longer sees the sinner. He continues to watch him.

and will heal him:--Completely apart from any merit in the rebel, God resolves to restore him. The theme of sin as sickness that needs healing goes all the way back to chapter 1:³⁸

Isa 1:4-6 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. 5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is **sick**, and the whole heart **faint**. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is no soundness* in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been **closed**, neither **bound up**, neither **mollified** with ointment.

Isa 53:5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and **with his stripes we are healed**.

I will lead him also,--His care goes beyond dealing with past sin, to guiding the repentant person in the future. Hebrew has several verbs for leading; this is the one used in Ps 23:3, "he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."

and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.--The conjunction is to be understood epexegetically, defining more closely who it is that receives comforts: "him, that is those among him who mourn." We have come full circle to "him that is contrite and of a humble spirit" from v. 15. As our Savior promised,

Mat 5:4,6 Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

36 The verb is a simple imperfect with *waw*, not with *waw* relative, and it seems well to retain the imperfect sense, in contrast to the perfect קצפת earlier in the verse.

37 Modern English preserves "fro" only in the expression "to and fro," meaning "back and forth." Just as "toward" is the direction by which you approach someone, "froward" is the direction away from someone, in this case, the Lord.

38 Cf. also 6:10; 30:26

19 I create the fruit of the lips;--The verb is a participle, “creating.” It modifies the previous verse, but there are two possible connections, which show the value of thinking about the grammatical structure of the text (chart). It might express the *result* of the restoration, or it might describe the *means* by which God does the restoration.

Modern translation (NIV, NET Bible, ESV, NASB) understand the clause to express the *result* (chart). They would note a similar expression used by Isaiah’s contemporary Hosea,

Hos 14:2 Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the **calves of our lips**.

When the LXX (about 500 years after Isaiah) translated Hosea, it used the expression καρπον χειλεων “fruit of the lips,”³⁹ which is picked up by the writer to the Hebrews,

Heb 13:15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

In both cases, the praise and thanksgiving of the redeemed is a sacrifice to God. The meaning would be that by restoring the sinner, God creates the words of praise that the sinner utters in thanksgiving.

This is a beautiful reading of the text, and expresses a true dynamic. But it has two problems.

1. It leaves 19b dangling.
2. The clause “creating the fruit of the lips” is much more closely connected with v. 18 than with v. 19, and we should have expected the Massoretes to put it there (as RSV does).⁴⁰

(Two technical notes:

1. The Massoretes were Jewish scribes between the 7th and 10th centuries AD who committed to writing the vowels and accents of the Hebrew Bible. Up to that time, this information had been preserved orally.
2. Verse divisions in the OT are part of the accentual system, and are as much part of the ancient tradition as are the vowels. The situation is different in the NT, where verses weren’t added until 1551 by Stephanus, who published Erasmus’ NT text. The NT divisions do not reflect any ancient tradition, and can often be improved upon.)

The Massorete’s decision to group it with v. 19 urges us to look for a closer connection with the rest of the verse. They see the rest of the clause as expressing the “fruit of the lips” that God causes to be uttered (chart). The means by which God does the promised healing (v. 17) is by sending messengers with the offer of healing expressed in the rest of the verse:

Peace, peace to *him that is far off*, and to *him that is near*, saith the LORD;--These words then describe “the fruit of the lips” that God creates to bring about the restoration. Instead of looking to Hos 14:2 and Heb 13:5 for the meaning of the idiom, we might consider Solomon’s words,

Pro 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

39 The difference between “calves” פרים and “fruit” פרי is only one letter.

40 On this reading, 19b is a summary of 15-19a, and would be appropriately marked with יהוה נאם. However, our text does not use this formula, but אמר יהוה, which does not mark a summary. On my parsing, it is an embedded quotation.

Isaiah 55-57

Our Lord's message of God's grace to helpless sinners was just such a harvest of the "fruit of the lips." This is how the NT understands the verse, twice (chart). Peter introduces his sermon to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, thus:

Act 10:36 The word which **God sent** unto the children of Israel, **preaching peace by Jesus Christ**: (he is Lord of all:)

He describes our Lord as sent by the Father with a message of peace for his hearers. The Father has created the fruit of our Lord's lips, bearing his offer of peace. The allusion is particularly appropriate in Peter's context, the first proclamation of the gospel to a Gentile, for the Lord promised in Isaiah that this message would be offered "to him that is far off" as well as "to him that is near."

Later, Paul writes to the Ephesians, describing how they as Gentiles have been incorporated into the people of God. Note how he plays with the word "peace" that Isaiah emphasizes through repetition.

Eph 2:11-18 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were **far off** are made **nigh** by the blood of Christ. 14 For **he is our peace**, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, **so making peace**; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached "**peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.**" 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

We need to put the last part of v. 17 in quotation marks. Paul is quoting Isa 57:18 as the message that our Lord came to proclaim. Like Peter, he understands it as a direct teaching of the salvation of the Gentiles along with the Jews.

God claims to "create the fruit of the lips." Our Lord often taught that the "fruit of his lips" came by the express enabling of the Father (chart):

Joh 7:16 Jesus answered them, and said, **My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.**

Joh 8:28 Then said Jesus unto them, ... **as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.**

Joh 12:49 For I have not spoken of myself; but **the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.**

Joh 14:10 the words that I speak unto you **I speak not of myself**: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

Joh 17:8 For **I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me**; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that **thou didst send me.**

How thankful we should be that God did "create the fruit of" our Savior's "lips," offering peace to both

Jew and Gentile, and thus healing us of our sin-sickness.

and I will heal him.--The verb “heal” is a different tense than “I will heal him” in v. 18. That form anticipated a future action. This one looks back on the healing as complete. When God declares peace to a troubled soul, the work is accomplished, as surely as light appeared when God declared, “Let there be light.” The messenger carries two statements from God (chart):

- Peace is available to everybody, Jew and Gentile.
- God has healed them.

They are presented as parallel, but the second really gives the reason for the first. The reason that Jew and Gentile can have peace is because God has healed them. We learned the mechanism of that healing in 53:5, “with his stripes we are healed.”

20-21, Warning to the Wicked

God offers peace to the contrite and humble of spirit. But not all people are willing to recognize their miserable condition, and God describes them with a vivid picture.

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.--Throughout the Bible, the sea is a place of trouble and death. The Israelites were not a sea-faring people. Their perennial enemies, the Philistines, were sailors, and it was an act of desperation for Jonah to enter a boat to flee from the Lord. Before God finished his creation, it was all water; the first creation separated the sea from the dry land, and in the new heavens and the new earth, there is “no more sea,” Rev 21:1. For Isaiah, the stormy sea is the very image of the troubled soul of a sinner going on “frowardly in the way of his heart.”

21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.--We have seen these words before, at the end of the first section, 48:22, and the third section will end with an expanded description of the lack of peace of the wicked. This is the great burden of the the second half of Isaiah. The wicked are in torment. To those who are willing to recognize their condition, God offers comfort through the promised Servant.

Notes

לאומים in v. 4

Unlike עַם or גּוֹי, which are commonly either of Israel or of the nations, this term almost always describes the Gentiles (shown by the prevalent use of the plural, 26/31 = 84% times; גּוֹי is 432/560 = 77%, עַם is 230/1867 = 12%; the only places where it is applied to Israel are Gen 25:23, in contrast with Esau, and Isa 51:4, where it describes the new people made up of both Jew and Gentile). The plural appears 14 times before Isaiah: two in Genesis, two in Proverbs, and the rest in Psalms. There, it views the nations as objects of God's conquest and judgment, over whom he will rule.

At the time of the conquest

Psa 44:1-2 We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what* work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. 2 *How* thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; *how* thou didst afflict the **people**, and cast them out.

Psa 105:43-44 And he brought forth his people with joy, *and* his chosen with gladness: 44 And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the **people**;

Coming Messianic rule

Psa 2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the **people** imagine a vain thing? ... 8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.

Psa 7:6-8 Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me *to* the judgment *that* thou hast commanded. 7 So shall the congregation of the **people** compass thee about: for their sakes therefore return thou on high. 8 The LORD shall judge the **peoples**: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity *that is* in me.

Psa 9:7-9 But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. 8 And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the **people** in uprightness. 9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

Psa 47:1-9 O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. 2 For the LORD most high *is* terrible; *he is* a great King over all the earth. 3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the **nations** under our feet. 4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah. 5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God *is* the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. 8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. 9 The princes of the people are gathered together, *even* the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth *belong* unto God: he is greatly exalted.

Psa 65:5-8 *By* terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; *who art* the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off *upon* the sea: 6 Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; *being* girded with power: 7 Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the **people**. 8 They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.

Psa 67:1-7 God be merciful unto us, and bless us; *and* cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. 2 That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. 3 Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. 4 O let the **nations** be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the **nations** upon earth. Selah. 5 Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. 6 *Then* shall the earth yield her increase; *and* God, *even* our own God, shall bless us. 7 God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

Psa 148:7-11 Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: ... 11 Kings of the earth, and all **people**; princes, and all judges of the earth:

נגיד vs. מלך in the OT

God's chosen term for the rulers of Israel is נגיד rather than מלך, which is properly his own title with respect to the nation.

Throughout the Pentateuch, מלך refers most commonly to the other nations. The first occurrence of the term, and its densest concentration in the Pentateuch (27 instances in 24 vv) is in describing the battle of the kings in Gen 14. The densest concentration overall (37 instances in 24 vv) is in Joshua 12, the summary of the kings of the land whom Israel defeated.

God as Israel's King

Exo 15:18 The LORD shall **reign** for ever and ever.

Compare the common proclamation, "The Lord reigns," Pss 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1

Num 23:21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God *is* with him, and the shout of a king *is* among them.

Deu 33:5 And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people *and* the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

This is the theme of Samuel's complaint when the people asked for a king:

1Sa 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for **they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**

1Sa 12:12 And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, **Nay; but a king shall reign over us:** when **the LORD your God was your king.**

Hos 13:10-11 **I will be thy king**: where *is any other* that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? 11 I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took *him* away in my wrath.

God does refer to Israel's rulers as kings:

In his promise to Abraham

Gen 17:6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and **kings** shall come out of thee.

And Jacob

Gen 35:11 And God said unto him, I *am* God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and **kings** shall come out of thy loins;

David:

1Sa 16:1 I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a **king** among his sons.

The verdict at the end of Judges is that Israel needs a king

Jdg 17:6 In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes.

Jdg 18:1 In those days *there was* no king in Israel:

Jdg 19:1 And it came to pass in those days, when *there was* no king in Israel,

Jdg 21:25 In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes.

Israel's kings as imitation of the Gentiles

Deu 17:14-15 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a **king** over me, **like as all the nations** that *are* about me; 15 Thou shalt in any wise set *him* king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose:

But that king is subject to severe constraints: he is to meditate in the law of God and be subject to it,

Deu 17:20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren

1Sa 8:4-7 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, 5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now **make us a king to judge us like all the nations**. 6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. 7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for **they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them**.

Parallels with Isa 49

Isa 49	Isa 55
8 I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people (DU singular)	3-4 3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, <i>even</i> the sure mercies of David. 4 Behold, I have given him <i>for</i> a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples.
7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, for the sake of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he hath chosen thee.	5 Behold, thou shalt call a nation <i>that</i> thou knowest not, and nations <i>that</i> knew not thee shall run unto thee for the sake of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

God’s Thoughts

Contrast our thoughts with God’s counsels:

Pro 19:21 *There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

References to God’s thoughts:

David: Psa 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Psa 92:5 O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

David: Psa 139:17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!

Psa 139:18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.

Translated “purpose”:

Jer 51:29 And the land shall tremble and sorrow: for every purpose of the LORD shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant.

Mic 4:12 But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.

Joh 15:15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

56:1Keep judgment, do justice

This combination elsewhere only:

Psa 106:3 Blessed *are* they that keep judgment, *and* he that doeth righteousness at all times.

But Hengstenberg (see Alexander) takes Ps 104-106 as a Babylonian supplement to the Davidic 101-103, which would mean that Ps 106 is drawing on Isa rather than v.v. Note also that Isa uses plural for both verbs, while the Ps moves from pl to s. So 106:3 may be a reference to

Psa 103:6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

The first pairing usually indicates keeping specific ordinances:

Psa 119:106 I have sworn, and I will perform *it*, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

But with the singular, it seems more to have the notion of keeping what is just, preserving justice in our dealings. Cf. Hosea:

Hos 12:6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

Mic 6:8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Motyer: keeping justice means conformity with God's law; doing righteousness means conformity with his character, 51:1. Compare also AV translation repeatedly in Ezek 18, "do [that which is] lawful משפט and right צדקה"

Do Judgment and Justice

The expression is applied in three ways that may inform one another.

The first instance describes the general conduct of a righteous person:

Gen 18:19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice צדקה and judgment משפט; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Pro 21:3 To do justice and judgment *is* more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Eze 18:5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful משפט and right צדקה,

Eze 18:19 Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, *and* hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.

Eze 18:21 But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Eze 18:27 Again, when the wicked *man* turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

Eze 33:14 Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;

Eze 33:16 None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

Isaiah 55-57

Eze 33:19 But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.

The term is used of God's rule over his creation:

Psa 99:4 (God as king) The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.

Psa 103:6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

Jer 9:24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.

It also describes the principles by which a king or magistrate is to rule:

Deu 33:21 (Gad) And he provided the first part for himself, because there, *in* a portion of the lawgiver, *was he* seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.

2Sa 8:15 = 1 Chr 18:14 And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment משפט and justice צדקה unto all his people.

1Ki 10:9 = 2 Chr 9:8 (Queen of Sheba, of Solomon) Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

Jer 22:15 (of Josiah) Shalt thou reign, because thou closest *thyself* in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, *and* then *it was* well with him?

Jer 22:3 (Davidic king) Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Jer 23:5 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

Jer 33:15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

Eze 45:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD.

Who is the “son of the stranger” בן הנכר in 56:3, 6?

Option 1: A foreigner

“Son of a stranger” בן נכר is most often translated simply “stranger” in the OT, and is a standard phrase for non-Israelites, who would be called “Gentiles” in modern parlance. These people are excluded from

the covenant:

Exo 12:43 And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover:

There shall no stranger בן נכר eat thereof :

Even animals bred by foreigners were not accepted for sacrifice:

Lev 22:25 Neither from a stranger's hand יד בן נכר shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.

The covenant of Sinai was restricted to Israelites, and foreigners had no part in it.

However, even under the old covenant, a foreigner could gain access to the covenant, via circumcision. Following the prohibition in Ex 12:43, we read,

Exo 12:48-49 And when a stranger גר shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for **no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof**. 49 One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.

The construction in v. 48 with “uncircumcised person” ערל is precisely the same as that with “son of a stranger” בן נכר in v. 43. Already under the Old Covenant, this situation obstacle could be removed. So what is new here?

Ezek 44:7, 9 defines the בן נכר as “uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh.” Isaiah might be anticipating the waiver of the requirement of physical circumcision, but certainly he does not mean that one uncircumcised in heart could have access?

Option 2: Specifically Ammon and/or Moab

Ammon and Moab were excluded through the tenth generation (which Neh 13:1 interprets as meaning “forever”), and Edomites and Egyptians until the third, Deut 23:3-8. The key reference for the eunuch, Deut 23:1, is also the passage that records the limitation on Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Egypt. Perhaps Isaiah is thinking of these restrictions, and promising a time when even members of those nations will have access to the Lord. But in that case we should have a provision for bastards, too.

Actually, perhaps Isaiah is referring to the “bastard,” our version’s translation of ממזר. Our translation agrees with the LXX’s rendering εκ πορνειας, and would refer to any child born out of wedlock. If this is indeed what Deut 23:2 means, it would exclude Boaz, the sixth generation from Perez (Ruth 4:12, 18-21), who was the son of Tamar by harlotry with Judah (Gen 38:29).

What does ממזר mean? It is a very rare word, appearing only two times in the OT. We have two clues.

Nehemiah 13 has Deut 23 in view in v. 1, when it refers to the exclusion of the Moabites and Ammonites from the congregation:

Isaiah 55-57

Neh 13:1, 3 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; ... 3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

This problem of intermarriage was a persistent one. Ezra had to address it when he returned to the land (Ezra 9-10), and he terminated the unions. Neh 13:1-3 records that it returned, and at the end of that chapter we see it once again:

Neh 13:23-25 In those days also saw I Jews *that* had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, *and* of Moab: ... 25 And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

This suggests that our word may refer to offspring of a mixed union, the kind of union against which Ezra and Nehemiah struggled. This would be consistent with the only other use of the word in the OT, Zech 9:6, which describes God's judgment on the land of the Philistines:

Zec 9:6 And a **bastard** מִמְזֵר shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

The notion that the Philistines would not be able to maintain their ethnic control of one of their key cities seems more to the point than concerns about legitimacy or illegitimacy.

What about Ruth? Isn't she an example of what Deut forbade, and Nehemiah condemned (cf. Neh 13:23). Yet her descendants (notably David) were accepted into the congregation. Observations:

- Some take Deut 23:3 to exclude only males, though Nehemiah clearly applies it to women as well. Is this a historical step in the transition from patriarchal to matriarchal definition of ethnic membership?
- Strictly, the prohibition against intermarrying in Deut 7:1-3 applies only to the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land of promise. Deut 21:10-13 does seem to allow marriage to a captive woman from another nation. However, Nehemiah applies Deut 7 more broadly, appearing to cite it in 13:25.
- If מִמְזֵר excludes people of mixed parentage, it might be restricted those with foreign fathers. Again, Deut 21:10-13 wouldn't make much sense if the children of foreign wives were excluded.

Parsing 56:9

Collect all multiple subjects from AF that have predicator (less commonly, an adjunct to the predicator) intervening, and note accent on predicator. There are 19, and in every case the intervening element ends with a disjunctive accent before continuing with the second subject.

Ref	Text	Predicator type	Accent
Isa 56:9	All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, <i>yea</i> , all ye beasts in the forest.	Qal imperative	Merekha (conj)

Isaiah 55-57

Gen 24:25	She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.	Prep phrase	Athnax
2 Sam 23:24	Asahel the brother of Joab <i>was</i> one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, ²⁵ Shammah the Harodite,	Prep phrase	Athnax
Isa 14:8	Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, <i>and</i> the cedars of Lebanon,	Qal pf + indirect object	Tipxa on pp
Isa 16:8	For the fields of Heshbon languish, <i>and</i> the vine of Sibmah	Pual	Geresh
Isa 30:6	the land of trouble and anguish, from whence <i>come</i> the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent,	Prep phrase	Rebia
Isa 35:2	the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon	Niphal pf + pp	Zaqeph on pp
Isa 49:7	Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship	Qal impf + Qal WR (waw relative)	Zaqeph
Jer 6:11	the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with <i>him that is</i> full of days.	Niphal impf	Zaqeph
Jer 6:12	And their houses shall be turned unto others, <i>with their</i> fields and wives together	Niphal pf WR + subj1 + pp + subj2	Zaqeph on pp
Jer 48:7	Chemosh shall go forth into captivity <i>with</i> his priests and his princes together	Qal pf WR + subj1 + pp + subj2	Zaqeph on pp
Jer 49:3	their king shall go into captivity, <i>and</i> his priests and his princes together.	Pp + Qal impf	Zaqeph
Nah 2:12	where the lion, <i>even</i> the old lion, walked, <i>and</i> the lion's whelp	Qal + subj1 + adv + subj2	Tebhir on adverb
Job 9:4-11	(complex)		Sof pasuq at end of 4!
Prov 8:18	Riches and honour <i>are</i> with me; <i>yea</i> , durable riches and righteousness.	Pp	Athnax
Prov 30:30-31	(complex)		Sof pasuq
Est 8:17	the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day	Pp	Zaqeph
Ezr 3:9	Then stood Jeshua <i>with</i> his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, <i>with</i> their sons and their brethren	Qal impf WR + subj1 + adv + purpose clause + subj2	Athnax

	the Levites.		
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On the other hand, a predicator is regularly joined to following DO with conjunctive, such as Munax (Gen 3:19 “eat bread”) or Merekha ! (Exod 12:8 eat flesh)

2fs Sections

Eight places in Isaiah are marked by heavy concentration of 2fs forms. The counts are of the 2fs suffix pronoun, 2fs pf and impf forms, and 2sf independent pronouns. BW search:

`/*@nc??c+S2fs* *@pi2fs* *@v?p2fs* *@v?i2fs*`

Two of the concentrations describe Gentile nations:

- 17:10-11 (25 hits), Damascus
- 47 (63), the humiliation of Babylonian

The others describe Zion:

- 49 (22), Mother Zion bereaved
- 51-52 (21), mixed, the arm of the Lord and Jerusalem, in the “Awake, awake” triplet
- 54 (42), barren Sarah redeemed
- 57 (72), condemnation of the sorceress and the whore
- 60 (28), Israel’s future glory
- 62 (17), Israel’s future glory

Reward of the Faithful in 57:13b

but **he** that putteth his trust in me shall possess **נחל** the land, and shall inherit **ירש** my holy mountain

The usual expression is **ירש את-הארץ**. The verb **נחל** is usually reserved for descriptions of the apportioning of the land among the tribes. The verb **ירש** appears 158x in Gen-Judg; **נחל** as a verb appears only 35x. TWOT notes that **נחל** usually emphasizes possession by gift, as in our sense of “inherit,” while **ירש** is more generic, and that would conform to the statistics. It would suggest that we reverse the translations of the two terms in this verse, and in fact, both the Bishop’s Bible and the Geneva Bible use “inherit” for **נחל** and “possess” or “possession” for **ירש**. The general tendency throughout the AV is the same (according to eSword’s KJV, **ירש** Strong’s 3423 occurs 232 times and is translated 126x by English words involving “possess” but only 36x with “inherit” words, while **נחל** Strong’s 5157 occurs 60 times, translated 50x by “inherit” words but only 5x by “possess” words. I’d love to know why the AV translators reversed both of these in this passage. In addition, in parallel verses, the more general term usually comes first, then the rarer one; this verse reverses this tendency.

Inheriting the mountain is a very rare concept. Judah did it:

Isaiah 55-57

Jud 1:19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out *the inhabitants of* the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

But this is not God’s mountain; that construct appears only in 57:13 and in 65:9,

Isa 65:9 And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.

Even in 65:9, the reference is to plural mountains, not singular as in 57:13.

The expression **הר-קדש** plus a singular suffix appears before Isaiah only in Psalms, and always of Mount Zion. The pronoun always refers to the Lord. The instances can be grouped by the function that the Lord’s mountain serves:

- Place where the Lord rules, hears request, and receives worship
 Psalm 2:6 (unsigned) Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.
 Psalm 3:4 (David) I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.
 Psalm 48:1 <A Song *and* Psalm for the sons of Korah.> Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* the mountain of his holiness.
 Psalm 99:9 (unsigned) Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is* holy.
- Place where the saints desire to abide
 Psalm 15:1 <A Psalm of David.> LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?
 Psalm 43:3 (with 42, sons of Korah) O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

שכן, ישב, גור

	שכן	ישב	גור
Total instances	130	1087	99
God as subject	AF search yields only Num 35:34; Deut 33:12; Joel 4:21; Ps 68:17, but it doesn’t code semantics for antecedents of pronouns. HALOT lists 26 instances, but TWOT says 43x! Clines on ש is not yet available.	AF yields only 2 Sam 7:2; Ps 47:9! One would expect far more. Clines lists 42, fewer than TWOT’s citation for שכן .	AF yields none (Logos doesn’t even recognize גור as a verb). Clines doesn’t give any instances.

Observations:

1. By frequency, יָשַׁב is the unmarked form, with more generic meaning.
2. גָּר clearly emphasizes transience, but is never used of God. The corresponding noun is used once of God, in Jer 14:8 (TDOT), but to deny that this status is appropriate to him. The גָּר is a client, without rights, dependent on the good-will of the legitimate inhabitants (and thus the object of charitable care, along with the fatherless and the widow.
3. By contrast, שָׁכַן is used much more of God than one would expect (43/130, compared with 42/1087 for the unmarked verb). TDOT suggests that יָשַׁב is more appropriate to a settled abode, a fixed location; note the use of שָׁכַן as the basis for מִשְׁכָּן "tabernacle, tent-dwelling."
4. These observations suggest that שָׁכַן emphasizes that the omnipresent God cannot be tied down to any fixed location. TWOT notes that יָשַׁב is seldom used of God's dwelling on earth; in fact, 1 Kings 8:27 denies that this is possible, and any instances of such a predication (Ps 9:12, ET 11) should be assigned to the unmarked use of the term. His proper and permanent seat is Heaven, Ps 2:4. Yet on earth, he is not a גָּר, a dependent client. He created it, and has title to it. The verb is noteworthy in Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2; cf. 12:5 as describing God's choice of a particular location for his sanctuary.
5. In the light of these observations, Isa 57:15 is promising that though God stands above his creation and cannot be contained in it, he condescends to dwell there with his people forever. It probably does not refer to heaven; we would expect יָשַׁב. More likely, the expression מְרוֹם וְקְדוּשׁ אֲשַׁכֵּן refers to Zion:
 - (a) This fits the Deuteronomic use of שָׁכַן as designating the place of the sanctuary.
 - (b) מְרוֹם apparently refers to Zion in 33:5 (contrary to HALOT), cf. 33:16), cf. Ezek 17:23; 20:40; 34:14.
 - (c) The following words about the inclusion of the humble and contrite believer recall the promise at the end of 57:13.

Verbless Clauses with subject שֵׁם

Objective: determine whether קְדוּשׁ שְׁמוֹ in 57:15 is a clause of identification (adding קְדוּשׁ to other names such as אֱלֹהִים and יְהוָה) or classification (describing his name itself as sacred and set apart). Based on word order (P-S), we would expect a clause of classification, but what is the usage in clauses with שֵׁם as subject?

According to Andersen-Forbes, there are 42⁴¹ such clauses with word order PS and 122⁴² with order SP.

41 Leaving out Ps 118:26; Prov 22:1, these Instances requiring further study: 1 Kings 8:15-16; Ps 92:2-4, and instances with a finite verb: 2 Chr 6:4-5

42 Instances requiring further study: Num 3:17, 43; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 4:28. Pr 21:24 looks like PS.

Divine names: 2 Sam 6:2 (finite verb); Jer 16:21; Zech 14:9 (שְׁמוֹ אֶחָד sounds like classification, but there is a finite verb), Ps 83:19; 113:2 (finite verb).

SP Order

The SP clauses are all identification, mostly giving the names of family members (notably royal mothers). Only a few of these (Jer 16:21; Ps 83:19) refer to the Lord's name.

PS Order

References to the Lord's name is much more common in PS clauses.

Interrogation

The interrogation מה שמך or מי שמך obviously comes in this order (4x + 1x).

Chiastic renaming sentences

The order is appears in renaming contexts, usually as a chiastic sentence:

Gen 17:15 שְׂרֵי אֲשֶׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שְׂרֵי כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ : Chiastic sentence? Compare the renaming of Abraham earlier in the chapter, with an explicit verb:

Gen 17:5 וְלֹא־יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָהָם

Gen 28:19 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמֵי־הַמְּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית־אֵל וְאוֹלָם לֹו שְׁם־הָעִיר לְרֵאשִׁנָּה

Jdg 18:29 וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁם־הָעִיר דָּן בְּשֵׁם דָּן אֲבִיהֶם אֲשֶׁר יוֹלֵד לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאוֹלָם לִישׁ שְׁם־הָעִיר לְרֵאשִׁנָּה

Relative Clauses

With names of God

Names of God: Most of these are as relative clauses, often terminating a string of participles. The construction appears many times in Isa, and the name in question is usually יהוה צבאות.

Exo 34:14 כִּי יְהוָה קַנָּא שְׁמוֹ אֵל קַנָּא הוּא "For the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God"

cf. Zec 14:9 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי יְהוָה אֶחָד וְשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד

Isa 47:4 גֹּאֲלֵנוּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל "Our redeemer, whose name is the Lord of Hosts, is the Holy One of Israel"

Isa 48:2 וְעַל־אֲלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִסְמְכוּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ "They rest upon the God of Israel, whose name is

AF counts 130, but these include 8 with explicit verb: Gen 17:5; 1 Sam 8:2; 2 Sam 6:2; Ezek 20:29, 2 Ki 17:34; Ps 113:2; Dan 10:1; Zech 14:9

the Lord of Hosts”

Isa 51:15 וְאֶנְכִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ רִגַע הַיָּם וַיִּהְיֶמוּ גַלְיֹוֹ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ "I am the Lord thy God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar, whose name is the Lord of Hosts"; Jer 31:35 quotes this

Isa 54:5 כִּי בַעֲלִיךָ עֲשִׂיךָ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ "For thy husband is thy maker, whose name is the Lord of Hosts”

Jer 32:18 הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ "The great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of Hosts”

Jer 33:2 כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה יְהוָה יוֹצֵר אוֹתָהּ לַהֲכִינָהּ יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ

Jer 46:18 = 48:15 = 51:57 נְאֻם־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ

Jer 50:34 גְּאֻלָּם | חֲזֹק יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ

Jer 51:19 כִּי־יוֹצֵר הַכֹּל הוּא וְשָׁבַט נַחֲלָתוֹ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ

Amo 4:13 כִּי הִנֵּה יוֹצֵר הָרִים וּבִרְאָ רִיחַ וּמִגִּיד לְאָדָם מִה־שָׁחַז עֲשֵׂה שְׁחַר עֵיפָה וְדָרַךְ עַל־בְּמֹתַי אֲרָץ "For Behold: The Former of Mountains and Creator of Wind, ... whose name is ..." cf. 5:8-9; 9:5-6

Amo 5:27 אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ

Zec 6:12 הִנֵּה־אִישׁ צֶמַח שְׁמוֹ

With human

The same usage is found with a human:

1Ki 13:2 וְנֹלַד לְבֵית־דָּוִד יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ שְׁמוֹ relative clause, “whose name ...”?

Job 1:1 אִישׁ הָיָה בְּאֲרָץ־עֹזַן אִיּוֹב שְׁמוֹ

2Ch 28:9 וְשֵׁם הָלֵה נְבִיא לַיהוָה עֲדָד שְׁמוֹ

Is this verse an inverted version?

Pro 21:24 וְדַ יְהִיר לֶץ שְׁמוֹ עוֹשֶׂה בְּעִבְרַת דָּוִן:

Expected classification instances:

Mal 1:11 (2x) גְּדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם

Psa 8:2 = 10 יְהוָה אֲדַנְיָנוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ

Psa 72:19 וּבְרֹדֶף | שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם

Psa 75:2 וְקִרְוֵב שְׁמֶךָ

Psa 76:2 נֹדַע בְּיְהוּדָה אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל גְּדוֹל שְׁמוֹ:

Psa 111:9 פְּדוּת | שְׁלַח לְעַמּוֹ צְוֵה־לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ קְדוֹשׁ וְנוֹרָא שְׁמוֹ

Psa 113:3 מִמְזֶרֶח־שֶׁשֶׁשׁ עַד־מְבֹאֵא מְהִלָּל שֵׁם יְהוָה

Pro 18:10 מְגִדֵּל־עֵז שֵׁם יְהוָה בּוֹ־יִרְוֶן צְדִיק וְנִשְׁגָּב

Of a human name: Sol 1:3 שְׁמֵן תּוֹרֵק שְׁמֶךָ

Discussion of 57:15

The relative clause construction does not fit: our clause (unlike any of the previous ones) is introduced with a *waw*:

Isa 57:15 כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְיָ וְנִשְׂא רַם וְנִשְׂא שְׁכֵן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ

There is ample precedent for associating attributes with the objectified Name of God (largely in the Pss, which Isaiah quotes frequently). Note in particular Ps111:9, and compare the adjectival use:

Psa 99:3 יוֹדוּ שְׁמֶךָ גְּדוֹל וְנוֹרָא קְדוֹשׁ הוּא

cf. 99:5, 9, “for he is holy”

So the identification/classification distinction is applicable here.

57:16, God’s Temporary Wrath

57:16 is one of numerous verses in the OT that describe God’s wrath as temporary. Yet others (e.g., Isa 34:10; 66:24) describe never-ending judgment, something we see in the NT as well. This note reviews some of the verses describing temporary wrath. In each case, the context is not a general statement about God’s government of the world, but rather his dealings with his covenant people, or with a specific believer under chastisement.

Psa 30:5 For his anger *endureth* but a moment; in his favour *is* life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning.

David is commemorating the Lord’s deliverance of him from a difficult situation:

Psa 30:1-3 I will extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to

rejoice over me. 2 O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. 3 O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

God's deliverance was the result of David's supplication to him:

Psa 30:8 I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication.

Now he invites the saints (not all people) to rejoice in this attribute of God:

Psa 30:4 Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

Psa 103:9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

This verse is the beginning of David's exposition of Exod 34:6:

Psa 103:7-8 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. 8 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

This is , God's description of himself to Moses on the occasion of reissuing the tables of the covenant. In the previous chapter, God has already indicated the limited nature of this covenant:

Exo 33:19 And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

The following verses repeated remind us that his mercy is not general, but focused on a specific group:

Psa 103:11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy **toward them that fear him.**

Psa 103:13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth **them that fear him.**

Psa 103:17-18 But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting **upon them that fear him**, and his righteousness unto children's children; 18 To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Isa 26:20 Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

Consider the following verse:

Isa 26:21 For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

A particular cataclysm (the Assyrian invasion) is in view, and God's people are promised protection through it, demonstrating the principle of 2 Pet 2:4-9

Isa 54:7-10 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. 9 For this *is as* the waters of Noah unto me: for *as* I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. 10 For the mountains shall depart, and the

hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.

God is addressing the daughter of Zion, with whom he has a special relationship, which he states in the previous verse:

Isa 54:5 For thy Maker *is* thine husband; the LORD of hosts *is* his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Isa 57:16 For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

“Contend” is אָרִיב, the special verb describing a covenant lawsuit, which is invoked repeatedly throughout Isaiah against Israel. Note also the qualifications for those whom he is willing to receive, in the previous verse:

Isa 57:15 I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit,

The focus is on God’s relation with his people.

Syntax of Infinitive Absolute in 57:17

This is the only place in the OT where an infinitive absolute immediately precedes an imperfect with *waw*. Inf absolute can immediately follow (Ezek 25:12) or precede (commonly, e.g., מות ימות, its verb, but not with a conjunction intervening. So on the basis of word order alone, one would associate הסתר with ואכהו. However, the accents clearly associate it with the following ואקצף.

The sequence does occur with *waw* consecutive:

1Sa 19:23 הָלוֹךְ וַיִּתְנַבֵּא

2Sa 16:13 הָלוֹךְ וַיִּקְלֵל

Examples with the perfect:

2Sa 13:19 הָלוֹךְ וַיַּעֲקֶה

Isa 31:5 גָּנוּז וְהֶצִיל פָּסַח וְהִמְלִיט: