

Isaiah 63-65, Indictment and Confession

Overview

As we emerge from the chiasm that organizes ch. 58-66, we come once again to the Lord's indictment of the nation and their confession in the first person (chart). This section corresponds to 59:1-15a (chart), with its extensive third-person accusation and the peoples' confession in the first person.

Our present section also deals with these themes, but its organization is more complex, and is marked by several textual contrasts (chart).

- Change in speaker distinguishes 63b-64 (Isaiah) from 65 (the Lord)
- Change in reference to the Lord distinguishes 63:7-14 (third person references, talking about the Lord) from 63:15-64:12 (second person references, talking to the Lord)
- As in ch. 59, the people are referred to variously as "they," "you," and "us." In both cases "Us" marks confession, while "You" marks accusation. "They" includes both indictment for sin and a new feature not present in ch. 59, promises to the righteous.
- 65 has five sections, alternating between judgment on the wicked and blessing on God's servants

63:7-14, Historical Summary

In these eight verses (chart) Isaiah presents a summary history of Israel, recalling four distinct phases:

- God's grace to his people
- their rebellion
- his judgment
- their awakening as they recognize what they have forsaken.

Note the repeated references to Israel as the Lord's people (vv. 8, 11, 14). The idea that God has a chosen people for whom he cares in a special way becomes particularly important when the Lord speaks in ch. 65, and contrasts his people, who will come through judgment to glory, with another class of people who will be doomed.

v. 14b is a summary of this whole process, God's leadership of his people in a way that glorifies himself. The shift in the references to the Lord from "he" to "thou" forms a transition to the confession starting in 63:15, where Isaiah continues to address the Lord as "thou."

The four steps that Isaiah outlines (God's care, the nation's rebellion, chastisement, and turning back to the Lord) happened repeatedly in Israel's history, and this pattern is important enough that the Spirit has recorded it multiple times. Let's review these before studying our passage in more detail.

Literary Background

Ps 78 explains the establishment of the Davidic dynasty by pointing out how sinful the people were up

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to that point, with special emphasis on Ephraim (chart).

Ps 106 is probably from the time of the captivity, which it explains as the culmination of God's judgment on Israel, closing with a prayer that God would deliver his people (chart).

Both of these are long on rebellion and chastisement, and short on repentance. The most regular example of the pattern is the book of Judges (chart), which summarizes it in ch. 2, then gives examples of it in six separate judgements, in addition to seven minor ones that aren't presented in full detail.

Application: The Spirit's concern to record this pattern repeatedly in Scripture tells us to pay special attention to it. This cycle is a recurring process in God's dealings with his people. It shows us what to expect if we would "walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps 116:9). We should recognize the tendency of the flesh to overlook the Lord's goodness and rebel against him, his constancy in chastising us for our sin, and his willingness to receive us back if we repent.

7, Prolog

7 I will mention—The verb here is הזכיר, the work of the מכירים of 62:7. It may be that Isaiah is here picking up the heavenly message and relaying it to God's people. Note the array of words that he uses to communicate the Lord's grace toward his people.

the lovingkindnesses of the LORD,--This word stands as a summary for all the others. It represents God's faithful, covenant love in the light of his promises to the fathers. He goes on to amplify these lovingkindnesses in two ways.

Both of these amplifications involve the verb גמל, which our version translates "bestowed." This term marks the discharge of an obligation. It's sometimes translated "recompense," but that is too narrow, since there need not be reciprocity. The obligation may be undertaken unilaterally; cf. the use of the term for weaning a child. The Lord's praiseworthy acts are not the result of anything we have done. They discharge an obligation that he has taken on himself, by bringing us into covenant with him.

Isaiah further defines the Lord's lovingkindnesses with two words: his praises, and his great goodness.

And—Note the italics. "Praises" and "goodness" are in apposition to "lovingkindnesses" (chart).

the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us,

It seems at first strange to us to describe "praises" as an objective quality of the Lord, in parallel with "goodness," rather than something that we bring, but the plural of תהלה is rare (6 out of 59 occurrences of the noun), and except for 22:4, appears to refer to his "praiseworthy deeds," in parallel with other objective attributes. For example (chart),

Psa 78:4 We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the **praises** of the LORD, and his **strength**, and his wonderful **works** that he hath done.

Exo 15:11 Who *is* like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who *is* like thee, glorious in **holiness**, fearful *in* **praises**, doing **wonders**?

It is interesting that the Lord's mighty acts are described in terms of the response that observers make to them. God is in the business of showing himself off, and for us to worship and praise him is to fulfill

the purpose for which he created us.

Isa 43:21 This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.

and the great goodness toward the house of Israel,--Just as “praises” describes God’s deeds in terms of what they mean to him, “goodness” describes them in terms of what they mean to us: blessing, happiness, and care. Even when they may for the moment be unpleasant, we need to remember that “all things work together for **good** to them that love God,” Rom 8:28.

which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.--The motive for his goodness is traced to two of God’s characteristics for which we should ever be thankful.

His **mercies** רַחֲמִים are his compassion, his feelings of pity and sympathy for us in our miserable condition. He is not untouched by our pains. Isaiah will amplify this characteristic in v. 9, “in all their affliction he was afflicted.”

His **lovingkindnesses** חַסְדִּים again remind us of his faithfulness to his covenant. He is not only compassionate, but also honest, carrying out the obligations that he has assumed toward us.

Application: The two terms in apposition to “lovingkindnesses,” “praises” and “goodness,” teach us how we should view the Lord’s actions toward us. They should always bring forth our praise, and we should always view them as beneficent, “good” things intended for our blessing. They show us God’s greatness and his love, and should stimulate our worship and our thanksgiving.

8-9, God’s Gracious Care

Now we turn to the first of the four steps in Isaiah’s summary history of Israel, recalling God’s gracious care. While the principles apply throughout Israel’s history, there seems to be a special recollection of the Exodus (chart), which would be consistent with Isaiah’s emphasis on this event elsewhere.

In our version, v. 8 sounds like hopeful but deluded thinking on the part of God. “Surely they are my people. Why wouldn’t they be? So they will certainly behave themselves, and on that assumption I’ll deliver them from their afflictions.” But the next few verses, not to mention the rest of the Bible, show that they *were* unfaithful. If the conventional reading is correct, God was badly deceived!

Each of these three clauses allows a different interpretation, which yields a rather different meaning.

8 For he said, Surely¹—In English, “surely” can express hopeful observation. “I thought he was my friend. Surely he wouldn’t say bad things about me.” In Hebrew, it can have a much stronger force, of a solemn declaration. We see this sense elsewhere in Isaiah (chart):

Isa 45:14 Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make

¹ Alexander wants to take נָא as restrictive in this verse, and elsewhere in Isaiah. It certainly can have a restrictive sense, but it’s hard to insist on this uniformly in Isaiah. It seems to me that a distinction between passive assertion (“Oh, look, what do you know about that!”) and active, decreative assertion better fits the parallels. When God asserts something, he is decreeing it.

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supplication unto thee, *saying*, **Surely** God *is* in thee; and *there is* none else, *there is* no God.

This is the solemn confession of those who have submitted to Israel. They're not saying, "Well, it looks like God is on your side." They are with all their heart acknowledging his rule. Again:

Isa 45:23-25 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me **every** knee shall bow, **every** tongue shall swear. 24 **Surely**, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. 25 In the LORD shall **all** the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

v. 24 is a quotation of what is meant by v. 23, "every tongue shall swear." "Surely" is here a word of solemn commitment, an oath.

they are my people,--This title recurs in the history in vv. 11 and 14, and will be important in understanding the distinction between his Servants and the wicked in ch. 65. Out of all humanity, God has a specific group that he is pleased to own as his peculiar people.

So the first sentence is not an optimistic hope on God's part, but an authoritative declaration: I have decreed that they are my people. God is not saying this because he observes it to be true. It is true because he says it. The statement comes before the fact, and makes it true.

children that will not lie:--The deception in question is with regard to their covenant obligation. At Sinai, they made a promise:

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.

Our verse concerns this promise. As a prophecy, it is just plain false. They did break their promise, as v. 10 shows. But again, there is another way to read it.

The future in Hebrew can be used to convey obligation. It's used that way in the ten commandments. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" is simply the future statement, "Thou wilt not make unto thee any graven image." As a statement of fact, it (and all the other commandments) are false, but they are presented as duty and objective, not as prediction. We should understand this clause in the same way. Having chosen his people, God resolves that they *shall* be faithful to their covenant obligations...and he will do whatever is necessary to bring that about. Following the example of the Ten Commandments, we might translate, "children that shall not be unfaithful." That is the standard for which God has chosen them and to which he will hold them.

Paul echoes this same principle in the NT:

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Application: It seems that in every chapter, Isaiah reminds us of this central principle. Our salvation is not only *from* death and damnation. It is also *to* godliness. God purposes that we *shall* not lie, and by the work of his Spirit, he will achieve that in our lives. Rather than fight against it, we should understand that holiness is his purpose for us, and pursue it eagerly.

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so he was their Saviour.--Our version suggests that he became their Savior because of his expectation that they would follow him, but the Hebrew grammar carries no such implication. The clause is a simple continuation: he chose them as his people, and in doing so, he became their Savior.

So v. 8 takes us back to God's election of Israel, to bring them out of Egypt. He actually entered into covenant with them at Sinai, but his decree to make them his people would antedate that, and in fact Isaiah mentions it even before the sufferings in Egypt, which come next.

9 In all their affliction he was afflicted,²--It is a precious truth that God feels the pains of his people. We have already seen this in v. 7, where his goodness toward us is motivated by his mercies, his tender compassion. Compare also the testimony of other Scriptures (chart),

Jdg 10:16 And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Zec 2:8 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

His intervention at the time of the Exodus began with his statement,

Exo 3:7 And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction³ of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

When God's chosen people are suffering, it gets his attention.

Application: We should never be discouraged that God doesn't understand our problems. One of his characteristics is "tender mercies," deep empathy with our condition. If anything, he feels our pain even more deeply than we do, because he fully understands the spiritual nature of the conflict that leads to it.

and the angel of his presence saved them:--This remarkable expression reflects God's promise to Moses concerning the Exodus. His presence was mediated by an angel, in whom his very name, that is, his person and character, dwelt (chart):

Exo 23:20 Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name *is* in him.

And his "presence," literally "face," is the agent of their deliverance:

Exo 33:14 And [God] said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest. 15 And [Moses] said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.

Deu 4:37 And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight [בפניו "with his presence"] with his mighty power out of Egypt;

Throughout the OT we read of "the angel of the Lord," a character who is identified with the Lord himself. For example (chart), he appears

2 Following the *Qere* לו instead of the *Ketiv* לא. The same alternation appears in 9:2, where AV chooses לא, but there also I prefer the *Qere*. 1QIsa follows the *Ketiv*. For a vigorous defense of the *Ketiv*, see Alexander, but he appears to be motivated mostly by a desire to preserve impassibility.

3 The sense aligns well with Isaiah, though the Hebrew term in Exodus, עני, differs from Isaiah's צרה.

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- To Hagar:

Gen 16:7 And **the angel of the LORD** found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. . . . 13 And she called the name of **the LORD** that spake unto her, Thou God seest me:

- To Moses:

Exo 3:2 And **the angel of the LORD** appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. 3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. 4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, **God called unto him** out of the midst of the bush,

- Manoah:

Jdg 13:21 But **the angel of the LORD** did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he *was* an angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because **we have seen God**.

When Micah anticipates the coming of the Messiah, he says of him,

Mic 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting**.

One form in which he “went forth from of old” was in the form of “the angel of the Lord,” and in one of those excursions, as “the angel of the presence,” he brought Israel out of Egypt.

in his love and in his pity⁴ he redeemed them;--The Exodus is often described as God’s redemption of Israel out of bondage (chart): God promised Moses,

Exo 6:6 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I *am* the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will **redeem** you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:

And after the victory at the Red Sea, Moses recalls,

Exo 15:13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people *which* thou hast **redeemed**: thou hast guided *them* in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

and he bare them, and carried them—Recall Moses’ description of how the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, like an eagle carrying her chicks:

Deu 32:11 As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: 12 *So* the LORD alone did lead him, and *there was* no strange god with him.

all the days of old.--The phrase only appears elsewhere two verses later, where it refers to the times of Moses and the Exodus.

4 This particular noun *חַמְלָה* appears elsewhere before Isaiah only in Gen 19:16, of God’s grace to Lot in bringing him out of Sodom.

10a, Their Rebellion

10 But they rebelled מרה, and vexed עצב his holy Spirit:--The cooccurrence of these two roots takes us back to the Exodus, and in fact to Ps 78,

Psa 78:40 How oft did they provoke מרה C him in the wilderness, and grieve עצב C him in the desert!

The idea that we could “vex” or “grieve” God is at odds with the classical notion that God is “without body, parts, or **passions**” (Westminster Confession of Faith 2.1).⁵ The observation about “passions” is at odds with the common and consistent representation of God’s wrath, rejoicing, repentance, or (as here) pain. It comes more from Aristotle’s view of God as the “unmoved mover” than from the Bible. We read in the last verse that he feels their afflictions when others abuse them. Now we learn that he is grieved by their sin..

The concurrence of “vex” and “Spirit” recalls the image of the forsaken widow,

Isa 54:6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.⁶

To be “vexed in spirit” is to feel the way a wife does when her husband forsakes her. Now the Lord claims to feel the same way when his people forsake him.

The NT also teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the one who most particularly is offended by our sin.

Eph 4:29-30 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30 And **grieve** not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Paul is concerned here with corrupt speech, and in fact this was the means by which Israel in the desert most often offended the Lord.

Application: We should guard against a view of sin that is too mechanical. It is true that our sin breaks God’s law, but it is far more than a technical or legal offense. It is a personal offense that causes God pain. A sign of true love for somebody is a desire to please that individual, and knowledge that they are hurt by our actions should be strong motive to change our behavior.

10b, God Chastises Israel

therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.--The outcome of this divine anguish is his opposition, the practical manifestation of his displeasure.

This verse is reminds us of Moses’ recollection of God’s chastisement in the wilderness (chart).

Deu 32:15 But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered *with fatness*; then he forsook God *which* made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock

⁵ The only proof-text offered for the “impassibility of God” in the Westminster Confession is Acts 14:15, where Barnabas and Paul tell the men of Lystra that they are not God, but “men of like passions with you.” They are not denying that God has passions, only that his passions are like ours.

⁶ Recall that we interpreted this verse as a summary that integrates the forsaken wife of ch. 49 with the barren young woman with which 54 opens.

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of his salvation. 16 **They provoked him to jealousy** with strange *gods*, with abominations **provoked they him to anger**. 17 They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new *gods that* came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. 18 Of the Rock *that* begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. 19 And when the LORD saw *it*, **he abhorred them**, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. 20 And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end *shall be*: for they *are* a very froward generation, children in whom *is* no faith. 21 They have moved me to jealousy with *that which is* not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with *those which are* not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. 22 For **a fire is kindled in mine anger**, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. 23 I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. 24 *They shall be* burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. 25 The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling *also* with the man of gray hairs.

11-14a, Israel's Remembrance

11 Then he [Israel] remembered זָכַר the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying--The subject is a bit confusing (chart). The 3ms in the previous verse is the Lord, but the questions that follow make sense only on the lips of Israel, so many commentators (e.g., NET Bible) violate the Massoretic accents to make "his people" the subject. This is not necessary, if we remember the consistent use of the 3ms for the Servant of the Lord, encompassing not only the Messiah, but also the nation viewed in its legitimate role as the Lord's people. Note also later in this verse, "put his Holy Spirit within him." Those who respond to the chastisement are indeed the Lord's Servant, liable to sin but finally faithful to him. This body recalls God's faithfulness in times past, not just as individuals, but as a body, coming together for the Lord's service.

The recollection surveys the history of the exodus. He highlights **three great gifts** that he gave them during that period.

Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?--The **first gift** is human shepherds. The noun is plural, as our version notes in the margin, referring to Moses and Aaron. At the start of their journey from Egypt, God brought them out of the Red Sea.

where is he that put his holy Spirit within him [his people]?--The singular pronoun here is probably why our version emends "shepherds" רָעִי to the homophone "shepherd" רֹעֵה, but it no doubt refers collectively to the people, just as does the opening verb. The reference is to the equipping of the seventy elders of Israel, when Moses felt overwhelmed by the burden of judging the people. The Lord's solution was to equip the elders with his Spirit, which is his **second gift**.

Num 11:25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto [Moses], and took of the **spirit** that *was* upon him, and gave *it* unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, *that*, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

Years later, the eight Levites who led the people in in national confession would recall,

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Neh 9:19 Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. 20 **Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them**, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.

Human shepherds do not serve in their own wisdom, but enjoy the direction of God's Spirit.

12 That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm,--The idiom is even starker than our version makes it: "who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses." Everywhere Moses went, the Lord's powerful arm was beside him, overthrowing their adversaries and providing for their needs. This was God's **third gift**: his own powerful intervention.

dividing the water before them,--At the other end of the journey, he divided the waters of Jordan **to make himself an everlasting name?**--Here was God's purpose in his mercy to Israel, and his purpose in all of his dealings with us: to magnify his own name. God is in the business of showing himself off. Our greatest joy is to bring him glory.

13 That led them through the deep—"The deep" תהום often has an ominous sense in the OT. It first appears as the unformed chaos in Gen 1. Throughout the OT it is an alien place, one with which the Israelites were never totally comfortable, and one characteristic of John's vision of the new heavens and the new earth is that "there was no more sea," Rev 21:1. Here, this statement serves as a summary of the Lord's guidance and protection for the nation throughout the exodus.

The Massoretic accents place the major break in the verse after "deep." We should read the second half of the verse as a separate sentence. Isaiah began this account by recalling the shepherds God gave to his people. Now he expands this metaphor by two comparison of the people with domestic animals. The verbs in these two comparisons are all imperfects, stating ongoing habitual facts about God's provision for his people.

as an horse in the wilderness, that they should do not stumble.--The "wilderness" מדבר is open land, grazing land, where a horse can move swiftly and without encumbrance. Whatever God's people encounter, he leads them smoothly through.

14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD causes him to rest:--The valley is where one finds springs and streams, where tired animals can refresh themselves. The Lord knows when we are exhausted, and provides refreshment. Perhaps he has in mind Ps 23,

Psa 23:2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

The recollection of God's past blessings by those currently suffering is a common theme in Scripture, and one that invites our imitation (chart).

Psa 22:4 Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. 5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. 6 But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

Psa 44:1 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. 3 For they got not the land

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in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. . . . 9 But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. 10 Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves. . . . 23 Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast *us* not off for ever.

Paul tells the Romans,

Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

One reason to become familiar with God's mighty works in the past is to gain hope and strength for our own times of trial.

Application: Our circumstances may change, but God never changes. Develop the habit of matching your present trials against those of God's people in the past, observing how the Lord delivered them, and taking courage for your own pilgrimage.

14b, Transitional Summary

so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.--Now Isaiah turns to the Lord and addresses him directly, as a transition leading to the next section. As at the end of v. 12, he reminds us that God's purpose in all these gracious acts is to glorify his own name.

63:15-64:12, Petition and Confession

The references to the people shift from third person to first person, and those to God shift from third person to second person. Instead of talking about the history of God and his people, Isaiah now stands with the people and speaks directly to God.

This section contains several references in the past tense to the wasting of the land in war and the destruction of the temple:

64:10 Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

63:18 our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary

These references have been urged as evidence of an exilic or even post-exilic date for this portion of Isaiah, but we must remember that Isaiah writes for the people in exile. He places himself in their position and frames a prayer that they can utter when that time comes.

The section is organized chiastically,⁷ ABC-D-CBA, centered on 64:4-5a (chart).

⁷ Following Motyer

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God's habitation : Why doesn't God respond to our need? His earthly habitation is destroyed, but he still lives in heaven.	63:15	64:10-12
God's people : he created them. Why does he allow them to wander from him?	63:16-19	64:8-9
God's wrath : it should deal with the pagan nations, but Israel is equally liable to it because of their sin.	64:1-3	64:5b-7
God's expectations : that his people will wait for him, rejoice, work righteousness, and remember him.	64:4-5a	

We will consider the corresponding pairs of verses together, since they greatly illuminate each other.

63:15; 64:10-12, God's Habitation

The confession begins and ends with God. The first and last paragraphs focus on God's habitation—his heavenly house in 63:15a, and the earthly temple, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, in 64:11. The thought of both houses leads Isaiah to ask, on behalf of the people, why God isn't intervening.

To understand his logic, we have to go back to the prayer that Solomon offered in 1 Kings 8 when he dedicated the temple. This prayer has a very regular structure, repeated seven times (chart):

- If something happens that requires divine aid
- And people bring that matter to the temple,
- Then God should hear in heaven.

In other words, the temple is seen as a portal to heaven, an earthly place through which an earthly people can access a heavenly God.

One paragraph of that prayer in particular requires our attention (chart):

1Ki 8:46 If they sin against thee, (for *there is* no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; 47 *Yet* if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; 48 And *so* return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and **the house which I have built** for thy name: 49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication **in heaven thy dwelling place**, and maintain their cause,

This portion of Isaiah is written for the people that will find themselves in the situation that Solomon anticipated, in captivity in a foreign land. But there is a problem. Solomon assumed that the temple would still be there so that they could direct their prayer to God through it. In fact, the temple will be destroyed. The final paragraph captures this dilemma:

64:10 Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy

and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. 12 Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?--Now that the temple is gone, is their access to God cut off? Will God now “refrain himself” from acting on behalf of his people “for these things”? “These things” are the destruction of the temple, which Solomon dedicated to give them this access. Because it is gone, will God no longer hear them?

It is interesting to compare Isaiah’s prayer here with Jeremiah 7 and 26 (chart). During the Babylonian threat, before the city fell, the priestly class encouraged the people that the temple would protect them against the enemy. Jeremiah warned them against this illusion:

Jer 7:4 Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, *are* these. ... 8 Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. 9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; 10 And come and stand before me in **this house**, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? 11 Is **this house**, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen *it*, saith the LORD. 12 But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. 13 And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, ... 14 Therefore will I do unto **this house**, which is called by my name, **wherein ye trust**, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

Their trust was in the house, and to this day many people focus their attention on the physical trappings of religion instead of on the Lord. In rejecting the people’s trust in the Temple, Jeremiah is simply following Isaiah’s insight, expressed in this prayer.

This misplaced trust was already evident in Isaiah’s day (chart).

Isa 1:11 To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? 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. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

From the perspective of the exiles for whom Isaiah writes, the temple is gone, but Solomon acknowledged in each stanza of his prayer that God’s true habitation is in heaven. So in the first paragraph of our section, Isaiah leads the people in turning directly to God in heaven and seeking his intervention.

63:15 Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory:-- Isaiah boldly suggests that as long as God is in heaven, he is still accessible. They can call directly on him, even in the absence of the temple.

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Note the contrast with ch. 1, which condemns temple ceremonies conducted in hypocrisy. The temple was *neither necessary nor sufficient* to give Israel access to God. Chapter 1 shows that it was not *sufficient*. The people had to have the right attitude of heart. This section shows that it was not *necessary*. Even after it is destroyed, they can still come to God.

where is thy zeal קנאה and thy strength גבורה, the sounding of thy bowels מעה המון and of thy mercies רחם toward me? are they restrained?--The reason is that the true motives for his intervention are not some house that Solomon built, but his own intrinsic character. Isaiah leads the people to recall four aspects.

- God's **zeal**, or **jealousy**, is his possessive attitude toward his people. They are his peculiar possession, and he protects them eagerly.
- One need not fear a jealous man who is weak, but the Lord combines zeal for his people with unmatched **strength**, the ability to take action without resistance.
- In unusually graphic language, Isaiah depicts the emotional turmoil that God feels at the abuse of his people in terms of internal discomfort so great that it causes the **bowels to rumble**. Compare an earlier verse,

Isa 16:11 Wherefore my **bowels shall sound** like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kirharesh.

- A more conventional reference to God's emotions points to his **mercies**, literally his inward parts.

If God is to be true to these attributes, so often attested throughout the Scriptures, he must take action.

Application: It is a great temptation for us to place our trust in things that we can see and feel. The desire for a physical sanctuary is deep-rooted even in pagan cultures. Many people feel that worship is invalid unless it takes place in a proper sanctuary. By taking away Israel's physical temple, God shows them (and us) that it is a mistake to focus on it. Our trust must be in God, and his compassion toward us, even though things seem missing.

63:16-19; 64:8-9, God's People

Now Isaiah leads the people from the nature of God to his relation with them. These two paragraphs are marked (chart) by

- the confession that God is their father, their redeemer and creator,
- a petition for his mercy,
- and their description as his servants, his inheritance, his possession, his people.

Consider each of these themes in turn.

63:16-17a; 64:8, God is their Father

At the start of each paragraph, they acknowledge God as their true father.

16 Doubtless for thou art our father, though for Abraham he is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledges us not: thou, O LORD, art our father,--Isaiah leads the people to make a distinction between their physical descent from Abraham and Israel, and their spiritual relation to God. He does not deny that they are the seed of Abraham. In fact, earlier the Lord has insisted on it (chart):

Isa 51:2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah *that* bare you:

That command required that the believer recall the life of Abraham and Sarah, something that is possible because it is required in Scripture. But the other direction does not work. Abraham and Israel are not aware of the believer (the statement is indicative, not concessive; see notes). The reason is that Abraham and Israel are dead. Neither they nor other dead saints can help us.

The notion of God as our Father is much more common in the NT than in the OT, but it is not unknown there. Isaiah has already used this idea at the opening of his book (chart):

Isa 1:2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

As we have seen so often, ch. 58-66 are unwinding the sins of the opening chapters. At the outset, Israel did not behave appropriately as God's children, but now Isaiah leads them to confess to God that they are indeed his offspring, and to call on that relation in their time of need.

Isaiah almost certainly has in mind Moses' use of this image in his great valedictory poem:

Deu 32:6 Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? *is* not he thy father *that* hath bought קנה thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

Of the three clauses that define God's fatherhood in this verse, the second and third clearly refer to his role as progenitor or creator. The first is an interesting verb, and appears in two senses. The most common sense, followed by our translators, is "buy, purchase, acquire." But the verb also is used to describe the action of creation, as in the title assigned to God by Melchizedek in Gen 14:19 and echoed by Abraham in 14:22, קונה שמים וארץ, which our version renders "possessor of heaven and earth," but more likely to be understood as "creator of heaven and earth" (see notes on Genesis). In the two halves of the chiasm, Isaiah appears to be playing with both meanings.

"our redeemer גואל from everlasting" is thy name.--According to the Massorettes, the main break in the verse comes after "father," not "redeemer," as in the AV. "Redeemer" is not an additional title alongside "father," but the distinctive name that marks him as their father. The "redeemer" גואל is the kinsman-redeemer, as in Ruth, a deliverer who must be related to the one in need. Because God is their Father, he has always had the standing to deliver them from oppression.

In coupling this statement with the claim that God is their Father, Isaiah may be drawing on the semantic ambiguity of the first verb describing God's fatherhood in Deut 32:6, קנה "purchase/create." By taking the verb in the sense that our translators do, he associates fatherhood with redemption.

The reference to God as their Father in the second half also appears to draw on Deut 32:6, this time with reference to God's creative work.

64:8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.--Isaiah loves the metaphor of the potter יוצר and the clay (29:16; 41:25; 45:9), inspired no doubt by the record of Gen 2:7 that "the Lord God formed יצר man of the dust of the

ground.”

But God’s relation to them as creator poses a dilemma. The very fact that he is the potter and they are only clay leads them to wonder why he has allowed them to fall into sin. Let’s return to the first paragraph of the pair (chart).

63:17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?--Isaiah’s statement is very strong. Taken by itself, it might suggest that he is blaming God for their sin. But in the context, where they are confessing God as their Father, and drawing on his creative power from Deut 32:6, the words have more the sense of confusion than of accusation. “You created us. Why did you arrange things so that we would fall into sin?” Isaiah is not angry with God, or rejecting responsibility for the nation’s sin, as becomes clear in 64:5-7. But he recognizes that God could have prevented it all, and this leads him to recognize that God can now bring it to an end if he chooses.

Application: True repentance must start with a recognition of the absolute distinction between the creature and the creator. This distinction lies at the root of God’s authority to command us, and our accountability to him. It does lead to some intellectual dilemmas, such as the problem of evil, but it also allows us to leave those problems, along with all of our other cares, at the Lord’s feet, and trust him completely.

63:17b; 64:9a, They Ask God to Intervene

After recognizing God as their Father, they ask him to deliver them. On the first side of the chiasm, their request takes the form of a single word:

63:17b Return ...--He has turned his back on them, as they have moved away from him. They call on him to turn back to them.

In the second half, their petition is more detailed.

64:9a Be not wrath very sore, O LORD,--They recognize the legitimacy of his wrath against them, but ask that he would moderate it.

neither remember iniquity for ever:--They also recognize that they have sinned, but pray that he would not remember it for ever. The grounds on which he can justly overlook sin are not discussed here, but Isaiah has already described them in ch. 53.

63:17c-19; 64:9b, They Remind God that they are His

In the third part of each paragraph dealing with their relation to God, they remind him of the relation that they have with him.

In the first paragraph, notice the progression of titles by which they claim relation to him.

63:17c for thy servants' sake,--Throughout Isaiah 40-66, we have encountered the notion of “the servant of the Lord” (chart). The title initially indicates the nation as a whole, then narrows down to the perfect Israelite, the Messiah who gives his life to redeem his people. In the last nine chapters (58-66), we read no more of the singular “servant” (chart). The Messiah is still there, as the divine redeemer, but

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now God's restored people are called his "servants," bringing us to the final portion of the hourglass.

Application: We were surprised in our study of the Servant passages to find the NT writers quoting them to describe the church. But here we see that Isaiah has anticipated this usage. Those who follow the Servant of the Lord themselves become the Servants of the Lord, redeemed by his passion, empowered by his Spirit, and pursuing his work.

the tribes of thine inheritance.--They claim to be God's "inheritance," his peculiar possession.

vv. 18, 19 introduces a contrast between them and those who will conquer them and destroy the temple.

18 The people of thy holiness [thy holy people]--In the light of all their sin, how can they call themselves "thy holy people"? The answer lies in the central meaning of "holy," which is "set apart, distinct." Because God has chosen them as his "inheritance," they are different from all other nations. This distinction forms the heart of their appeal.

have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.--They call on God to fix their problem. He put them in the land, but now someone has taken it from them, and destroyed the sanctuary where he caused his name to dwell.

19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.--God's honor has been challenged. His property has been damaged. The appeal is not that he would deliver them, but that he would vindicate his name and the people who bear it.

In the second half of the chiasm, his reference to them as God's people is more concise, but just as much to the subject.

64:9b behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.

Application: God's purpose in redemption is first of all not our comfort, but his own glory, to make himself an everlasting (v. 12) and glorious (v. 14) name. The blessing that comes to us is the result, not of anything in ourselves, but of the fact that he has chosen us as his own people, setting us apart from all others. Our happiness will increase in the degree that we learn to rejoice, not in our comfort and the satisfaction of our desires, but in our relation to him. "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps 37:4).

64:1-3, 5b-7, God's Wrath

From their special relation with God, the people turn to God's wrath (chart). The links between these two paragraphs are not as clear as those in the previous two, at least in English

- Both paragraphs talk about God's face. In the first paragraph, the word "face" is part of the expression "at thy presence," literally "from thy face" מפניך.
- Both describe his wrath using idioms of heat and flowing. In the first, the mountains flow, the fire melts, the waters boil. In the second, "consumed" מוג is literally "melted."

In the first paragraph of this level, they ask that God would *unveil his face* to the nations to destroy them. But in the second, they recognize that they have also become his adversaries by sinning against him, and it is the *hiding of his face* of care and blessing that is the source of their distress.

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This dual function of God's face reminds us seems strange at first, but is a deep principle within the Scriptures. The fact that both joy and sorrow, blessing and cursing, come from the Lord, is the result of his sovereign nature over all things:

Isa 45:6-7 I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. 7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*.

Job 2:10 shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

Application: One of the most serious distortions of the modern humanistic view is that God wants to bless us and suffering must come from somewhere else. The same God brings both blessing and judgment. There is no other entity in the universe powerful enough to protect those who spurn God's law, or to take away the security and happiness of those whom he purposes to bless. The believer should see God's hand behind every blessing and every disaster alike.

64:1-3, God's Wrath on the Nations

64:1 Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence,--Having acknowledged God's heavenly abode, and their special relation to him, they now pray that he would come down from heaven and bring judgment against their adversaries.

2 As when the melting fire burneth [fire kindleth brushwood], the fire causeth the waters to boil,--The first clause has a word in it that appears nowhere else in the OT, המסים (chart). Our version derives it from a word מסמ meaning "to melt," but the morphology is obscure (what happens to the second o?). The parallel with the second clause is better if we take it from a root attested in Arabic, سمه, referring to brushwood, the small sticks that one gathers to kindle a fire.

The metaphor presents God's wrath as expected and unexceptional. It is as straightforward to him, as ordinary and common a process, as the kindling of a cooking fire and the boiling of water, something that happened thousands of times every day among the tents of Israel. "Lord, it is nothing to you to intervene. It's no harder than making tea in the morning."

to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!--The motive they offer to induce God to take this action is not their deliverance, but his own glory, just as in Isaiah's narrative of God's past kindness in 63:12 (chart) "to make himself an everlasting name," 63:14 "to make thyself a glorious name." Recall also Moses' intercession with God after the people refuse to enter the land:

Num 14:15-16 Now *if* thou shalt kill *all* this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, 16 Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

Application: It is a mark of true faith to seek God's glory, not our own comfort. The people, in their confession, show the work of God in their hearts by their concern for his reputation.

3 When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.--They know that he is able to manifest himself in this way because he

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has done it before. The expression recalls the song of Deborah (chart),

Jdg 5:4-5 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. 5 **The mountains melted** from before the LORD, *even* that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

The actual event is described in Exod 19:

Exo 19:18 And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Isaiah may intend us to recall not only the dramatic fire and smoke of Sinai, but also the fearsomeness of God's law, which he there gave to his people. In this case, the judgment that he is calling down on the enemy is not just for Israel's deliverance, but for God's vindication of his rule over the earth.

64:5b-7, God's Wrath on His People

In the second half of the chiasm, the focus continues on God's wrath, but now the target has shifted. The people are led to acknowledge that the Gentiles are not the only ones who are worthy of God's judgment.

This paragraph is itself a chiasm (chart):

- 5b, 7b, God's wrath because of their sin
- 5c, 7a, their obliviousness both to their sin (in the first panel) and the remedy (in the second)
- 6, four characterizations of their sin.

5b behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned:--The cause of God's wrath on the Gentiles is not that they aren't Israelites. It's that they have sinned against God. Sin brings God's wrath on any sinner, including Israelite sinners.

in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.--"In those" expresses a neutral collective idea (Delitzsch), as in Ezek 33:18, and refers to their sins. The last clause should be understood interrogatively. "We have been going on like this for a long time; is salvation possible for us?"

In the center, the people invoke vivid images to describe the effect of their sin. The first two come from the ceremonial law of defilement.

6 But we are all as an unclean thing,--Literally, "the unclean thing," which is a generic description throughout the law for anyone who is defiled. Its densest use (chart, 3x in one chapter) is in Num 19, the law of the red heifer, describing the cleaning ritual.

and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;--According to the law of Lev 15, bodily emissions made a person, whether male or female, unclean. This clause certainly refers to the state of the woman under this law, and the previous clause may recall the parallel constraints on the man.

Such a person could not approach the tabernacle without undergoing a ritual of cleansing (chart):

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Lev 15:31 Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that *is* among them.

In normal life, such ceremonial defilements were unavoidable but occasional. But Israel now recognizes that her sin places her in a continual state of uncleanness, and thus of separation from God.

The next two images shift from defilement to the change of the seasons.

and we all do fade as a leaf;--In Israel, the rainy season is over our winter, from October to March. At the end of this time comes the *khamsin*, the wind from the desert, which dries out all the grass and turns the hillsides brown. Isaiah uses this natural phenomenon to describe the fading of people's self-sufficiency. Earlier, the prophet develops the metaphor more fully (chart).

Isa 40:6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass. 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

The spirit of God is like the hot wind from the desert, withering all human sufficiency.

At first, this seems to be an unusual notion. We usually think of the Spirit as bringing life:

Eze 37:9 Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind רוח, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. ... 13 And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, 14 And **shall put my spirit in you**, and ye shall live,

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*.

Joh 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is **born of the Spirit**.

At the outset of our study of this section, we remarked that God's face (or presence) could be responsible for both blessing and cursing. In a striking but related way, the Spirit of God, usually associated with life and creation, can also bring death and destruction.

Perhaps the two are not so different. The first step in salvation must be repentance. We must know that we are hopeless sinners before we will ever listen to the gospel. The voice that we hear in this chapter is the voice of the remnant, those with whom the Spirit is working. He is working to bring them life, but the first step in that process must be to wither them to the point that they recognize their need.

Application: In our own lives, and in dealing with unbelievers, we should recognize the need for the Spirit's work of withering as a necessary prerequisite to his work of salvation. We should not despair over this necessary preparation, but welcome it as a step toward great blessing.

and our iniquities, like the wind/Spirit רוח, have taken us away.--Like dead leaves, they are swept away, under the effect of their sin.

7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee:--The corresponding member emphasized their positive persistence in sin. This member is the negative counterpart: they make no effort to turn to the Lord and seek his forgiveness.

for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed מנינו us, because of our iniquities.--As in 5b, God's opposition is explained by their sin.

64:4-5a, God's Expectations

The AV margin of v. 4 varies in two ways from the main text (chart).

1. In the main text, the people address God, and tell him about somebody else has made preparation for those who wait for that other person. This kind of shift in pronoun might be a reference to the Redeemer, an ambiguity we have seen elsewhere in Isaiah.⁸ But here this explanation doesn't make sense. The margin is more straightforward, taking "God" as what men have not heard or perceived, and the rest of the verse as a description of him.
2. In both versions, people are unable to conceive of something. In the main text, they cannot imagine God's blessing. In the margin, it is God himself that they could never conceive on their own. Both statements are supported by other Scriptures, but they are different, and we pay attention to what the Spirit has recorded in this context.

Interestingly, the main text deviates from both the Geneva Bible and the Bishop's Bible, even though the KJV was motivated by the tension between the advocates of the two versions, and the first principle for the translators was, "The ordinary Bible, read in the church, commonly called the Bishop's Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit." Perhaps the translators are seeking to conform more closely to Paul's paraphrase in 1 Cor 2:9 (chart), but that varies widely from Isaiah (both MT and LXX), and so should not be taken as a normative translation. We'll talk about his use of the text later, but we'll follow the marginal rendering in the KJV for our exposition.

Exposition of the Text

vv. 4-5a are chiasmic (chart). They begin and end with a description of human awareness: there is something that people cannot anticipate in advance, but once they have experienced it, they will always remember it. In the center, we have a description of this great mystery.

4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, Θ a God beside thee,--God is beyond what men can discover on their own. He is distinguished by his behavior, at the center of the chiasm: the way in which he relates to his people. Isaiah makes two apparently contradictory statements.

which doeth so ~~what he hath prepared~~ for him that waiteth for him.--First he offers a stark contrast between God's responsibility and ours.

⁸ See supplementary note on "Big Ideas in Isaiah"

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- God “doeth” עָשָׂה. This verb, which appears 2640 times in the OT, is the most generic, vanilla term for action in Hebrew, very much like “do” or “make” in English, without the notion of purpose included in “prepared.” God is characterized by action, by doing.
- Our job is to “wait for him.” He is active; we are passive. We naturally try to fix things ourselves. But the Lord insists that he is to do, and we are to wait.

So Moses exhorts the people at the shore of the Red Sea (chart),

Exo 14:13 Fear ye not, **stand still**, and see the salvation of the LORD

Or Jehoshaphat to the nation, faced with invasion by a powerful alliance:

2Ch 20:17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, **stand ye still**, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem:

Or the Lord, encouraging Ahaz not to go to Egypt for help:

Isa 30:15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; **In returning and rest** shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

David bore witness,

Psa 40:1 **I waited patiently** for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

And Isaiah summarizes his introduction to this whole section with the promise,

Isa 40:31 But **they that wait upon the LORD** shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

Other gods place impossible demands on their worshippers. The God of Israel does for those who wait.

5 Thou meetest hast met him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, --Note the contrast with v. 4. There, God does, and man waits. But now God’s people are described in terms of two things that *they* do. In fact, the verb עָשָׂה in “worketh[doeth] righteousness” is the same one used in v. 4 of God’s work, in contrast with man’s patient waiting.

The meaning may be clearer if we render the tense of the verb “meetest” more precisely. It is the perfect, which is the usual way to describe a past action. We could render the verse, “Thou hast met him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.” Hebrew participles are tenseless, and Hebrew grammar does not constrain the order in which the main verb and the participles are executed. If the rejoicing and righteous deeds are *conditions* for God’s meeting them, that contradicts the previous verse. But if the meeting comes first, then the actions of this verse *grow out of* the relationship that God has initiated with his people, and that initiation is grounded only in his grace.

The grammar allows either order.⁹ But the context urges us to understand that the meeting comes first, and the righteous acts follow it. Once we recognize this pattern, we see a parallel with important NT texts (chart).

- The idea that God does and we wait recalls Eph 2:8,9 and Titus 3:5-7, “not of works.”
- Our understanding of v. 5a anticipates Eph 2:10 and Titus 3:8, which urge good works.

⁹ See the Notes for examples of the perfect governing participles as direct objects that clearly go in both directions.

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These NT verses insist that the *root* of salvation is God's free grace, but its *fruit* is godliness. Isa 64:4-5a makes this same point. God works for those who wait for him, but when he encounters them, they respond to this unearned privilege with eager, devoted service.

What are the signs of one whom God has graciously met? (Chart)

First, he "rejoiceth." Joy is the result, not the cause, of his blessing. A familiar example is David. His sin with Bathsheba led him to deep spiritual agony:

Psa 32:3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.

But as he confessed his sin, he asked for God's joy:

Psa 51:8 Make me to hear **joy and gladness**; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice.

The theme is common in Isaiah, in describing the effect when God restores Zion:

Isa 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain **joy and gladness**, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Application: There are two deep lessons here.

1. In spite of the Satan's lies, sin does not bring pleasure. On the contrary, it brings sadness. True happiness comes in serving the Lord, not in rebelling against him.
2. We should rejoice in the Lord. His blessings lie thick around us, giving us ample reason for rejoicing. When we allow ourselves to be discouraged, we are letting Satan pull us back into his realm and persuade us that God is out of control. We should obey the command of Scripture,
Phi 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice.

There is a second sign of one whom the Lord has met: he "worketh righteousness." That was certainly the order with Abraham:

Gen 17:1 the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

The Lord met him, and challenged him to righteousness. In fact, as we have often observed, the righteousness of our good deeds lies not in any intrinsic characteristic of those deeds, but in the fact that in doing them we are recognizing the Lord's authority over us.

Under the New Covenant, our relation with the Lord gives us a new resource to obey him, the Holy Spirit:

Eze 36:27 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*.

But it has always been the case that God must meet us before we can obey him.

~~those that~~ they will remember thee in thy ways:--We should probably understand this as a distinct clause, returning us chiasmically to the theme with which v. 4 opened. Both elements talk about our knowledge of God.

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- The first one told us that men cannot conceive of such a God on their own, a God who works on behalf of his people out of grace and not because they have earned his favor.
- This one tells us that after he has revealed himself to us, our thoughts are preoccupied with him.

Use of this Text in 1 Cor 2:9

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul teaches that the knowledge of God comes not by human wisdom, but by God's Spirit. In support of his claim, he writes,

1Co 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

His citation clearly echoes Isa 64:4. Both passages make the point that certain things are inaccessible to man's reason. But the object of man's ignorance in the two passages is different. In Isaiah, people are ignorant of a *God* who deals with his people out of grace and not in reward for their works. Paul teaches that people are ignorant of the *blessings* that this God gives to his people.

It's important to consider how the NT writers use the OT, because their use suggests how we should use it. Do they quote verses out of context, distorting their original meaning? Or do they respect the original meaning? Note several things:

1. His claim "as it is written" is still true. His message that God's blessings are unanticipated is grounded in the OT. In describing the Servant's work, Isaiah writes of the "many nations,"
Isa 52:15 for *that* which had not been told them shall they see;
and *that* which they had not heard shall they consider.
We will see that he may have other passages in mind as well.
2. Paul is not simply quoting Isa 64:4 (chart). He makes a number of changes that agree neither with the Hebrew nor with the LXX.
 - (a) He omits "since the beginning of the world"
 - (b) Instead of the order "ear ... eye," he has "eye ... ear"
 - (c) He inserts "neither have entered into the heart of man"
 - (d) He omits the second person pronoun referring to God
 - (e) Instead of the generic verb "doeth," he uses "prepared" ετοιμαζω, a much more specific verb. Out of the 2640 instances of עָשָׂה in the OT, in only three places is it translated "prepared," in Esther, describing the gallows that Haman "made" for Mordecai. The overwhelming Greek equivalent of Isaiah's verb, and the one used by the LXX in our verse, is ποιᾶω (2288 times); the expected Hebrew reflex of ετοιμαζω is the Hebrew כָּוַן, usually translated in English as "establish."
 - (f) Instead of describing God's people as waiting, Paul describes them as "loving" him.

In the light of these differences, it would be a mistake to think that Paul simply intends to quote Isa 64:4. Something else is going on.

3. Many of these differences can be traced to other passages of Scripture that suggest themselves

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to Paul. He is bringing together several passages, each of which reflects on a different theme:

- (a) Isa 64:4 reminds him that God is not accessible to unaided human experience, either first hand (the eye) or tradition (the ear).
- (b) Isa 65:16 reminds him of another channel of human consciousness, the imagination, beyond which God's actions go.
- (c) We know from the four-stage history of ch. 63 that he has been thinking about Ps 78, and one phrase in that Psalm suggests his focus on God's blessings: the people in the wilderness could not conceive that God could feed them.
- (d) The description of God's people as a plurality who love him, rather than a single person who waits for him, is from Exod 20, recalling God's covenant with his people.

Paul is presenting is a rich tapestry of OT allusions around several themes. He cites Isa 64:4 because of its emphasis on the limits of the eye and ear, but draws the object of that limitation from Ps 78. What he presents "is" indeed "written," not in any single Scripture, but throughout the OT.

Application: This kind of statement can only come from somebody who is immersed in the Scriptures. He knows them so thoroughly that they weave themselves together in his mind. This kind of intimate knowledge of the Word of God should be our objective. Are our thoughts so saturated with the Word of God that all of our expressions are examples of "as it is written"?

Now the people have finished their confession, and the Lord responds.

65:1-25, Divine Indictment and Blessing

The division between this section and the last is marked by a change in the speaker, from the people in confession to the Lord's response. Let's anticipate how this section is related to the one that follows.

Our initial survey of ch. 58-66 distinguished the outer two members of the chiasm as "false vs. true worship" and "indictment and confession" (chart). When we surveyed 63-65, our initial analysis of 65 clearly showed the shift of speakers and the different pronouns for the Lord, but otherwise seemed a bit chaotic (chart).

In studying ch. 65-66 more closely, it is clear that Isaiah has tied them together. He unites God's response to the people's confession in 63-64 (corresponding to 59:1-15) and the theme of true and false worship (corresponding to ch. 58), through symmetric repetition of four common themes:

- The Lord describes true worship, in terms that make clear the inclusion of the Gentiles.
- He condemns the false worship that characterized Israel.
- He generalizes the criticism of their worship into a distinction between those he calls his "servants," and the wicked, and describes the destiny of each of them.
- He anticipates the blessings that will come on Jerusalem.

The structure is a folding (chart): the four themes are linear in ch. 65, but chiastic in ch. 66. The final

element of each structure introduces the promise of new heavens and a new earth. The overall effect is that the accusation section moves from the second element of the nine-chapter chiasm on the way in, to the last on the way out (chart). This is not a defect in the structure; on the contrary, it is an example of a family of transitional techniques that modulate the symmetric patterns we have been observing, and keep them from being completely mechanical.¹⁰

1, True Worship from the Gentiles

We learned in 64:4 that God does for those who wait. Now he gives us a striking example of this (chart). His first response to the people's prayer is that he will make himself accessible even to those who do not seek him as Isaiah does in his prayer.

65:1 I am sought דרש of them that asked שאל not for me; I am found מנא of them that sought בקש me not:--The expression is somewhat paradoxical. How can you seek without asking or seeking?

The trick is that the passive form of the verb in Hebrew (the Nifal stem) can be used to express permission. In the case of דרש, an excellent example (chart) is

Eze 20:3 Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye come to enquire דרש G of me? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired דרש N of by you.

They come to inquire (Qal). By our western sense of the passive, if they inquire, then the Lord has been inquired of by them. But the Lord denies this. They come to inquire, but he does not receive their inquiry. The passive in this case expresses what he permits to happen.

So in our present text, the Lord is expressing his receptiveness to those who would never think of seeking him in the first place. We might render more idiomatically,

I let myself be sought by them that asked not for me;
I let myself be found by them that sought me not

In ch. 64, Israel has been seeking the Lord in confession (chart). His first response is to remind them that their restoration is not under their control. He determines whom he will allow to find him, even to the point of making himself available to those who do not seek him.

I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation גוי that was not called by my name.--Here God makes the point even more strongly. Israel bore the name of God, and they plead this relation in their confession:

Isa 63:19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

The Lord reminds them that he will make himself available to those who do not enjoy this position. Whatever he chooses to do with them, they must recognize that their acceptance with him rests entirely on his gracious acceptance, not on any qualifications that they can claim.

In Romans (chart), Paul cites this verse and the next to anticipate what he was observing in his ministry, that the Jews rejected the Messiah God offered them, while the Gentiles, who never had any

¹⁰ H. V. D. Parunak. Transitional Techniques in the Bible. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 102:525-548, 1983.

history of seeking God, were receiving the gospel.

Rom 10:20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. 21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

He uses the distinction to urge the importance of preaching, which is necessary just because Gentiles do not have the traditional knowledge of God that the Jews did, and so do not ask of him or seek him:

Rom 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

His quotation is consistent with our understanding of the passage, as one of Isaiah's many prophecies of the salvation of Gentiles. This meaning is also consistent with the symmetrical paragraphs in ch. 66.

2-7, False Worship

As the Lord turns from the Gentiles to the Jews, he responds to a different facet of their prayer. They accuse him of being remote and unmoved (63:15). He responds to them that he has never been inaccessible to them; the separation has been on their part, because of their willful worship.

2 I have spread out my hands all the day—In contrast to the Gentiles, Israel has been the object of his patient care, and how have they responded?

The description of those to whom he appealed in vain is in two parts, each beginning by calling them a people אָמֵץ, then continuing with articular participles. If we diagram the passage (chart), we notice right away that the second instance of "people" has far more relative clauses describing it than the first. We further notice that these descriptions in the second branch are of specific offenses, while the first one is generic. The first round is a summary, while the second unfolds the details.

unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts;--

The summary description of Israel includes three characterizations. Unlike the details in vv. 3-5, these are all very generic.

- They are rebellious סָרָר "stubborn," resistant to being led, as Hosea describes a young cow in 4:16.
- Their way is "not good." It will not profit them in the long run, and it does not agree with God's standards.
- They are walking "after their own thoughts." Here is the root of the problem, people who follow their own ideas instead of seeking to know God's thoughts and submitting their minds and wills to those thoughts. Contrast those praised in 66:2, 5, who "tremble at his word."

Application: If we would know the good way, we must know and submit to God's Word. What we get out of our own minds will lead us only into rebelliousness, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Jer 17:9

3 A people—Now he amplifies some of the specific ways in which this stubborn people follows its

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own thoughts in ways that are not good.

The main contents of the list is a series of offenses, but it begins with, and is followed by, a reference by the impact their conduct has on God. The inclusio formed by these references is skewed with respect to the grammar (chart). We've already seen another instance of structural skewing: from the division of ch. 58 from ch. 59, we expected a strong break between ch. 65 and ch. 66, but in fact they are closely linked. These features are not rigidly mechanical, but artistic and rhetorical moves that the author can modulate with discretion.

that provoketh me to anger continually to my face;--If this book teaches us anything, it teaches us to beware the wrath of God. A reasonable person recognizes dangerous animals or hostile people and tries to avoid upsetting them. Israel is clearly not reasonable.

- Faced with the most wrathful, violent entity in the universe, Israel deliberately “provoketh me to anger.”
- They do so, not obliquely or trying to hide their sin, but “to my face.”
- This offense is not temporary or occasional, but “continual.”

The list of offenses that follows recalls numerous instructions that God had previously given the people concerning their worship. If the people pray such a prayer as Isaiah has given them, and yet conduct themselves this way, their prayer will not be acceptable.

The specific area of conduct that he is criticizing is their worship. Certainly, it is bad enough to behave rebelliously and follow our thoughts instead of God's word in any area, but it is particularly offensive in worship (chart).

- Nadab and Abihu offered unholy fire before the Lord, “which he commanded them not, and there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev 10:1-2).
- Saul offered a sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel the priest, and as a result, Samuel told him, “now thy kingdom shall not continue” (1 Sam 13:9-14).
- Uzziah insisted on offering incense before the Lord, and became “a leper unto the day of his death” (2 Chr 26:16-21).

With good reason, the Westminster divines advised their flock,

WCF 21:1 the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.

Application: Our worship is to be shaped, not by our creativity, or by what attracts the most people, or by what most pleases us, but by the standards of Scripture. This passage warns us that anything else is worse than ineffective; it is positively an insult to God, and will call forth his wrath.

that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick;--In English, this looks like a

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separate relative clause, but in Hebrew it is subordinate to “provoketh.”¹¹ Right away the Lord emphasizes that the offense is in the worship that the people offer. (chart)

The “gardens” are the groves and sacred trees that were central to Canaanite worship. Isaiah recalls this failing at the start of the book:

Isa 1:29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

A garden is a great place to worship God. God put our first parents in a garden. But because of their sin, he excluded them, and any effort to construct such a garden in our own strength is an assertion that we can regain paradise by our own efforts.

“Altars of brick” similarly emphasize human efforts to worship God based on our own worthiness. The Law authorized two kinds of altars, apart from those in the Tabernacle: a pile of earth, and uncut stones.

Exo 20:24 An altar of **earth** thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of **stone**, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

The restriction on the stone altar emphasizes the need to use materials in their natural state, as God gave them. Brick altars are not authorized, and involve human effort inappropriate to a sinful person approaching a holy God. Brick was widely used in Babylon, and the reference may be to those in captivity who would adopt elements of Babylonian religion.

4 Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments,--The reference to graves may be a reference to necromancy (calling up the dead, like the witch of Endor whom Saul consulted), which the law forbids:

Deu 18:10-11 There shall not be found among you ... a necromancer.

Such worship is not only forbidden by the law, but it renders the participant ineligible to conduct true worship. In 64:6, “the unclean thing” takes us back to the ritual of the red heifer in Num 19, whose main purpose was to cleanse people from the defilement associated by contact with a dead body. This defilement required a person to be excluded from the sanctuary until purification could be made.

Num 19:11 He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. ... 13 Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel:

Someone who “remains” among the graves and “lodges” in the monuments remains perpetually unclean, cut off from the worship that God ordains. Yet these people offer their sacrifices in spite of their pollution.

which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels;--The Lord devoted an entire chapter (Leviticus 11) to dietary restrictions. Like contact with a dead body, violation of these rules would make a person unclean, and ineligible for worship. Yet those who claim to be his people

¹¹ The second instance of “people” is definite, linking it with the definite participles “that provoketh,” “that remain” “that eateth,” and “that say.” “Sacrificeth” lacks the article.

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systematically reject these instructions.

Application: Why should we obey God? The strongest reason is so that we can have fellowship with him. The badness of sin is not in its pleasure (as though God didn't want us to have fun), nor even first of all in the severity of the punishment that it brings on those who do it. The badness of sin is that it cuts us off from fellowship with God. The ceremonial laws of purity were meant to convey that the privilege of fellowship with God is for those who follow his laws, no matter how superficial they may seem.

5 Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.--Remarkably, so far from acknowledging their sin, these people claim that it is the new normal, and condemn anybody who does not approve their pollutions! Isaiah anticipated such a reversal early in the book:

Isa 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

This particular offense is common in our day. The only sin that modern Americans recognize is a lack of tolerance for their own rebellion against God's word. (Lack of tolerance against believers has become acceptable.) Those who uphold God's standards are accused of "hate crimes," and we can expect to see them prosecuted legally (as they already are in other countries) for civil rights violations.

Application: When everyone around us is calling black white and white black, our own moral judgment can become confused. This testimony reminds us that truth and morality are not democratic. Something is true because God says so, not because everybody thinks so. Something is right because it accords with God's commands, regardless of what people think. The only remedy is for us to know God's word thoroughly. We cannot trust others to know it for us, for the academy is full of people who twist it. We must know it for ourselves. "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isa 8:20.

These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.--Once more the Lord reports how this kind of behavior affects him. Anyone who has tried to cook with a wood fire knows how acrid and offensive the smoke is, and how difficult it is to keep the smoke from blowing into your face. Many people pretend to worship God while trusting in their own works, violating his law, and condemning those who seek to remain true to the standards of his word. They will get no credit for effort or good intentions. The Lord warns them that even if they pray Isaiah's prayer, their rebellious, sinful worship will render it an offense, and not a means of blessing.

So far, this section describes the false worship to which Israel was often tempted. The next section (vv. 8-16) will talk about the judgments that God will bring on them for this sin. Vv. 6-7 are a transitional device called a hinge, containing key elements of the sections on either side. In this case, it is chiasmic (chart). In the center we have a summary of the false worship from vv. 2-7, while the outer members anticipate the judgment of vv. 8-16.

6 Behold, it is written before me:--God emphasizes the certainty of this warning of judgment by describing it as written down. Often the Scriptures speak of God's books to remind us that he will not forget something:

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Exo 17:14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this *for* a memorial in a book, and rehearse *it* in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

Psa 56:8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: *are they* not in thy book?

Mal 3:16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

The expression has its origin in the custom of human monarchs of recording important events. Recall in Esther how Mordecai's deliverance of the king, written in the official chronicles (2:21-23), became the basis for Haman's ultimate undoing (6:1-2).

So God promises not to forget the people's sin.

Application: Beware the modern view of God as a kindly grandfather who overlooks sin. The Lord not only does not overlook it, but emphasizes that he keeps careful records so that he can punish it appropriately.

I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom,--The image recalls how Boaz gifted Ruth. She lifted up her outer garment to form a container into which he poured grain, which she carried, close to her heart, back to Naomi. Just as close as Ruth held Boaz's blessing, so close will the wicked be forced to embrace God's judgment.

7 Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith יְהוָה the LORD,--Note the introduction of the second person, preparing for the continued description of judgment in vv. 8-16. Up to this point the description of the apostates has been in the third person, which continues with "your fathers" and "have burned incense." The point is not that the sons will be guilty suffer for the sins of the fathers; Ezekiel makes clear that this is not God's practice.

Eze 18:20 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.

Rather, the sons have sinned in the same way that the fathers have, and so it is appropriate for them to receive the same judgment due to the fathers.

which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed me upon the hills:--The center of the hinge recalls the false worship described in vv. 2-5.

therefore will I measure their former work into their bosom.--The hinge closes by recalling once more the promise of judgment.

8-16, The Fate of the Servants and the Wicked

As anticipated in vv. 6-7, the next section talks about the fate that awaits those who have rejected the Lord. The structure of the section is governed by two contrasts (chart): the speaker (the Lord vs. Isaiah), and those being described (the righteous, described in the third person, and the unrighteous, in the second person). Twice the Lord speaks, each time contrasting the fate of the righteous and the

wicked. The first time, he devotes a paragraph to each, but the second time he mingles them together (chart). Then Isaiah concludes.

8-12, The Lord's First Statement

8 Thus saith the LORD,--The first time the Lord speaks, he separates his discussion of his servants and the wicked.

8-10, *The Lord Blesses the Elect Servants*

The last paragraph (the hinge) anticipates judgment on the false worshippers. vv. 8-16 will amplify this judgment, but the Lord's first statement qualifies it.

As the new wine is found in the cluster, and *one* saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it:--Repeatedly in Isaiah, the vineyard has been an image of God's judgment (chart).

- In 5:1-7, the heavenly vintner finds no good grapes in the vineyard, but only wild, sour ones, so he abandons it to the wild beasts.
- In 63:1-6, the redeemer is portrayed as having crushed his adversaries as one who treads down grapes.

Yet we have also heard of his mercy toward his vineyard:

Isa 27:2-4 In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. 3 I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest *any* hurt it, I will keep it night and day. 4 Fury *is* not in me: who would set the briers *and* thorns against me in battle?

Here he reconciles these two images. Imagine that in the vineyard of ch. 5, destined for destruction, one should find a few good grapes (chart). The farmer might decide to spare the vine for the sake of the good grapes,

- just as the Lord promised Abraham that he would spare Sodom for ten righteous people,
- and as the Lord Jesus taught that the tares would be allowed to grow along with the wheat to avoid destroying the good harvest.

so will I do for *my servants'* sakes, that I may not destroy them all.--As the analogy suggests, God promises that the coming judgment will not destroy the "good grapes," whom he calls "my servants."

The "servant" of the Lord (singular) throughout ch. 49-57 was singled out for suffering, being rejected by the people (chart):

Isa 50:6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

Isa 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:

and the object of God's wrath:

Isa 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief:

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Now the “servants” are singled out for blessing.

9 And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob,--The verb נָסַח C is the same one that describes how the angels delivered Lot from Sodom:

Gen 19:16 they **brought him forth**, and set him without the city.

Peter expresses the underlying principle this way:

2Pe 2:9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

Application: We live in a day when the Lord’s judgments against sinful people are beginning to unfold all around us. Sometimes we may be tempted to fear in the face of such adversity, but throughout the Bible, God cares for his servants. He may allow us to suffer at the hands of ungodly men, in order to glorify him, but we will never share the wrath of God that will fall upon them, and he will deliver us.

and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains:--Note the possessive (as in 14:25; 49:11; no earlier uses). The Lord here emphasizes his particular relation with the land of promise. All the earth’s mountains belong to him by right of creation, but the mountains of Israel are his particular possession, the place he has chosen for his capital, and the chosen remnant, preserved from the coming judgment, will be allowed to inherit it.

Throughout Isaiah, we have seen this geographical emphasis as part of the promise of the redemption of Israel. Such promises are very difficult to reconcile with a covenant view that spiritualizes Israel into the church, unless one turns “my mountains” into something like the seven hills of Rome.

and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.--This pairing of titles seems designed to emphasize to us the relation between the singular and the plural servants. The paired singulars appear only three times before this (chart): once of David, the prototype of the Messiah

Psa 89:3 I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant,
and twice in Isaiah, of Jacob:

Isa 45:4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

and of the suffering Servant:

Isa 42:1 Behold **my servant**, whom I uphold; **mine elect**, *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

10 And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks,--The plain of Sharon (chart) is an alluvial plain stretching from the Yarqon (which empties at Joppa, modern Jaffa, just north of Tel Aviv) to the Crocodile River (draining the western slopes of Carmel between the Yoqneam and Megiddo passes). It is the natural route for armies to follow moving north and south, and Isaiah describes it as desolate under the Lord’s judgment:

Isa 33:9 The earth mourneth *and* languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed *and* hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off *their fruits*.

When the time of restoration comes, once again flocks will graze on the grassy dunes, unmolested by

foreign armies.

and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in,--We don't know the exact location of this valley (chart); it is on the north-eastern border of Judah (Josh 15:7), somewhere between Jericho and Jerusalem. But the location isn't as important as the name, which means "trouble." It received this name because it was the place where Joshua caused Achan to be stoned for his violation of the ban on Jericho:

Jos 7:25-26 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled עכר us? the LORD shall trouble עכר thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. 26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor עכור, unto this day.

As with Sharon, the point is that a place previously marked by judgment will now become a peaceful, pastoral scene.

for my people that have sought me.--The expression takes us back to v. 1, where God allows some to seek him. They are the ones who qualify as "my people."

Application: vv. 8-9 told us that God's judgments are focused, and he promises to spare his people from the wrath that will fall on the ungodly. Now we read that they are also reversible. He can take away the consequences of military abuse of the Sharon, and remove the stigma of the place of Achan's judgment.

11-12, Judgment on the Wicked

Now, with the safety of God's servants guaranteed, the Lord turns to the wicked with a chiasmic description of judgment (chart): their sin on the outside and the judgment in the center (the inverse of the hinge in vv. 6-7).

The first description of their sin focuses on their false worship, in four clauses.

11 But ye are they that forsake the LORD,--The predicate is a participial phrase, "the forsakers of the Lord" עזבי יהוה, and occurs only twice in the OT: here, and in 1:28,

Isa 1:28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and **they that forsake the LORD** shall be consumed.

The verbal form is a bit more common, and is central to the condemnation of the people at the opening of the book:

Isa 1:4 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.

The next clause gives the major symptom of how they forsake the Lord. As throughout this chapter, the focus is on defective worship.

that forget my holy mountain,--They abandon the temple worship, and go after other gods.

that prepare a table for that troop-- “Gad,” which means “good fortune,” and her probably refers to a god of destiny. Delitzsch notes the pre-Islamic Arabic worship of Jupiter and Venus as deities of fortune, and suggests that those are the deities in view here as well.

and that furnish the drink offering unto that number--Or “Meni,” another pagan deity, perhaps Venus.

12 Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter--At the center, we have a description of the coming judgment, as they fall before the invaders. “Number to” implies careful accounting:

Ezr 1:7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;
8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and **numbered them** unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

This language recalls the “measuring” of judgment in v. 7. Not one person will evade the coming judgment. God will hand them out one by one to the attackers.

because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear--The fault for this coming judgment lies squarely on them. God made himself known to them, but they did not heed him.

but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not--Instead, they deliberately rebelled against him.

These four clauses are repeated nearly verbatim in 66:4, at the end of the “false worship” section, by way of transition to the consequences.

Application: God’s purpose is to present people with his call to repent, and hold them accountable. Israel’s mission (Deut 20) was to carry the claims of God to all the earth. Under the New Covenant, the Lord, in the great commission, charges his church to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Not all will respond, but all will be subject to the statements “I called” and “I allowed myself to be sought.”

13-15a, The Lord’s Second Statement

The second statement by the Lord integrates the references to the servants and the wicked much more closely, alternating AB AB AB AB BA. The reversal of the final member is a conventional way to mark the end of a sequence (chart); compare

Psa 115:5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.

Now he uses this device to integrate the Lord’s care for his servants with judgment on the wicked:

13 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry--In contrast to the famine of the siege that led to cannibalism, they will have ample food.

behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty--When crossing the wilderness on their

return, they will have ample drink.

behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed:--Their internal mental state will be at peace, rejoicing in the Lord's goodness.

14 Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit.--This internal joy will show itself outwardly.

15 And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen:--The final, reversed member reflects the custom of using somebody who has suffered as a means of cursing others, saying, "may the Lord make you suffer the same way X did."¹² The misfortunes of the wicked become the standard by which all suffering is described.

Application: We should never be jealous of the apparent prosperity of the wicked. Any disadvantage we experience is temporary, and God will greatly bless us while leaving them to a dreadful destiny.

15b-16, Isaiah's Summary

The third person references to the Lord show that now Isaiah is speaking.

for the Lord GOD shall slay thee,--The reason their name will become a curse is the Lord's wrath.

and call his servants by another name:--We've read this promise before, in 62:2. There, we saw that the Lord gives someone a name to demonstrate his authority over them, just as Adam named the animals to reflect his dominion over the earth.

Because we are his servants, under his dominion, he defines our lives. The next two clauses remind us how our speech should reflect this.¹³

16 That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth;--To "bless oneself" is to recognize the source of one's blessing. God's servants trace all their blessings to the Lord. The wicked ascribe their success to false gods, such as "Fate" and "Destiny" (v. 11). We should look for opportunities to acknowledge God's hand in what we do. I try to substitute the word "blessed" wherever I'm tempted to say "lucky," to remind myself and others that I live under the hand of God.

and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth;--The form of a biblical oath is, "May the deity do something bad to me if I do not do XYZ" (chart). Ruth's promise to stay with Naomi shows her adherence to Naomi's god:

Rut 1:1 the **LORD** do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me.

We're not surprised that pagan Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre, swears by a pantheon:

1Ki 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let **the gods** do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

Swearing in the name of a deity is recognizing that deity's power, and so the OT commands believers to swear only in the name of the Lord, and not of other gods:

¹² Num 5:21 shows the antiquity of the custom, and Jer 29:22, later than Isaiah, is a concrete example.

¹³ In both expressions, note the asymmetry with 15a. The new form of cursing comes from the name of the wicked, but the new form of blessing does not come from the name of the servants. God himself is the focus.

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Deu 6:13-14 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.
14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which *are* round about you;

Swearing in the name of a god is in a class with worshipping that God:

Jos 23:7 That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear *by them*, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them:

Application: Just as blessing oneself in the name of the Lord means that we trace all our blessings to him, so swearing in his name recognizes his power to harm us (chart). We are under his authority. He names us, and he is now the one from whom all our weal and woe come. We should consciously reflect on this in times of blessing and in times of sorrow, that all our ways are in his hands alone.

the God of truth—The name is remarkable: אלוהי אמן, cf. Rev 3:14, where our Lord is called “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” Both his blessings and his judgments are based upon his faithful word. He is *arbitrary*, in the sense that he does what pleases him. But he is *not capricious*, acting inconsistently with himself. He reveals his will, and then acts in accordance with that revelation.

because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine¹⁴ eyes.--Even after disappointments are past, we sometimes cling to them, nurturing bitterness over things that are long gone. Though the Lord sometimes leads his people through deep waters, the coming blessing will free them from lingering regrets. The glory that he has prepared for us is so great that we will give no thought to what we suffered before.

17-25, Blessing on Jerusalem

The initial clause of this section is quoted twice in the NT, in ways that invite us to consider once more how biblical prophecy works, before delving into the details of this paragraph.

17a and Manifold Fulfillment

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth:--This expression, which recurs in 66:22, is quoted twice in the NT: in 2 Pet 3:13, and Rev 21:1. But the new world that Peter and John envision differs from some of the details that follow in Isaiah. To see this, let's consider the NT's overall revelation about last times, and then see how Isaiah fits in (chart).

Paul gives a very useful summary in his discussion of resurrection in 1 Cor 15. He distinguishes

- v. 23, the resurrection of believers at Christ's return to set up his kingdom
- vv. 25-26, the destruction of death at the end of his reign (which implies the resurrection of unbelievers)
- vv. 24, 28, the end of the Son's distinctive reign as he delivers up the kingdom to the Father.

Note the distinction between vv. 25-26 and v. 28. The Son has a period of reign over the earth that is distinctively his own, and that ends with the defeat of all his enemies. At that point, he delivers the

¹⁴ Isaiah is speaking; throughout the book, it is the people who are to forget their former troubles. Cf. 35:10; 54:4; 65:19

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kingdom to the Father.

The Revelation fills out this outline with great detail, using Isaiah's expression to mark one of the periods. We recognize

- ch. 19, the return of Christ, accompanied by the believers
- 20:1-6, his earthly rule (v. 4 "reigned with Christ") with resurrected believers (vv. 5-6)
- 20:7-15, Satan's final rebellion and ultimate defeat; the great white throne judgment at which all the dead are raised, and thus death itself is defeated and is cast into the lake of fire
- ch. 21-22, detailed description of the New Heaven and the New Earth (quoting our verse), with explicit note that the first heaven and first earth are passed away. This appears to be the period when the Son has delivered the kingdom to the Father. They both rule (22:13 "the throne of God and of the Lamb"), but it is no longer the distinctive rule of Christ as envisioned in 20:4.

2 Pet 3 also cites Isaiah. His emphasis is on the destruction of the first heaven and first earth, in agreement with Revelation.

Isaiah names the new heavens and new earth, and tells us that weeping and crying are banished, which corresponds with Rev 21-22. But the NT plan shows differences from Isaiah.

1. Isaiah anticipates, not the destruction of the heavens and earth¹⁵, but their transformation.
2. Isaiah anticipates death (v. 20), something that ends in Rev 20, before the NH/NE.
3. He also describes the taming of the wild beasts (v. 25). In 11:7-8 we are told that this condition is characteristic of the period when the rod of Jesse rules over the earth in righteousness, "slay[ing] the wicked" "with the breath of his lips" (11:4). This description is more appropriate to the Millennium than to the deathless New Heavens and New Earth of Rev 21-22.

This is another instance of the principle of manifold fulfillment that we saw in Isa 60 (notes on vv. 5,6): an initial prophecy is repeated down through history, sometimes in words and sometimes in events that foreshadow or partially realize the promise, until the time of the actual fulfillment. Just as distant mountain ranges collapse into a single horizon, distinct but similar events seem to collapse when viewed from the distant past. Our study of Isa 60 showed the same foreshortening of the Millennium and the New Heavens and New Earth that we see here. The same phenomenon also happens in Isaiah with regard to the first and second comings of the Messiah,¹⁶ or the restoration of Jerusalem.¹⁷

Application: Why should we spend so much attention on these prophecies? God delights to reveal his purposes to his servants, giving them glimpses of what he has in store (Amos 3:7). He is like an architect who shows a customer a beautiful drawing of the house that is about to be built. When the customer visits the work site, all they see is a pile of dirt and a muddy hole. But keeping their eye on the drawings helps them wait patiently through the events that lead to the promised outcome.

¹⁵ He does recognize coming physical changes: "the desert shall blossom as the rose," 35:1; "there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters," 30:25.

¹⁶ 9:6 anticipates a child who will rule, but the child and the dominion are separated by over 2000 years.

¹⁷ Isaiah promises this restoration in terms of the return from Babylon (48:20; 52:9-12, with which compare the vessels in Ez 1:7-8). Nothing in Isaiah distinguishes this return from the restoration of Jerusalem anticipated in ch. 60. Yet she was never independent of her Gentile patrons, and was scattered again under Rome, as Zechariah anticipated (1:16).

17b-25 Exposition

With this background in mind, we can consider the details promised in this paragraph.

and the former [things] shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.--“The former things” might be a reference to the former heaven and earth, a tempting option in view of the insistence of Peter and John that the old heaven and old earth will be done away. But the the expression is a favorite of Isaiah, who accounts for 5/6 of its instances in the Bible, and in all the others (41:22; 42:9; 48:3; 65:16), it refers to past events. The point is not that the old heavens and old earth are not remembered, but that the former chastisements fade away in the glory of the new order.

Now he presents a series of vignettes that characterize the new order. To understand the significance of these vignettes, we need to remember that when God made the covenant with Israel, he accompanied it with blessings for obedience (Lev 26:3-13; Deut 28:1-14), but also with curses for disobedience (Lev 26:14-39; Deut 28:15-68) (chart). These promises revoke specific curses from those passages.

18-19, Joy

God warned Israel that if she betrayed his covenant, she would be greatly depressed (chart):

Lev 26:16 I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart.¹⁸

The captives mourned their fate:

Psa 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

The first contrast is that God will replace sorrow with joy.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create:--Here is a central pattern in God’s dealings with us. He creates, and our job is to be glad and rejoice in what he has created. We are not the doers. We are the observers, enjoyers, and praisers.

- This was the standard in Eden. God planted a beautiful garden, and placed man in it to enjoy it.
- A prominent theme in the OT is praising God for his power in creation, and for his delivery from trouble. What is such praise, but rejoicing in what God has done?
- In the NT, we are told that the material things God creates are for our enjoyment,

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;

Conversely, the central sin for which unbelievers are condemned is lack of thankfulness, failing to rejoice in the Lord:

Rom 1:20 they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful;

In the NH/NE, there is a centerpiece to the new creation that stimulates our joy:

¹⁸ Compare also Deut 28:66; Lev 26:36.

for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.--The construction with two objects means to turn the first object (the material) into the second (the product) (see notes for discussion). In this case, the Lord turns Jerusalem into an object of joy (Young), that which stimulates people to rejoice. 18a tells us that the people respond to her in this way, while 19 tells us that the Lord also rejoices.

This state of affairs has not always been so. Zechariah, writing after the return from Babylon, records the Lord's resolve at that time,

Zec 12:2 Behold, I will make Jerusalem **a cup of trembling** unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah *and* against Jerusalem. 3 And in that day will I make Jerusalem **a burdensome stone** for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people:--Not only will people rejoice in Jerusalem's restoration, but the Lord will take pleasure in her.

and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.--Again, Zechariah recognizes that this promise has not yet been fulfilled:

Zec 14:2 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, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

20, Longevity

God warned his people that breaking the covenant would lead to premature death in many forms: war, famine, wild beasts (chart).

Lev 26:17 ye shall be slain before your enemies:

Lev 26:22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children

Lev 26:29 And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat.¹⁹

The second contrast is the weakening of the power of death.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days:--That is, premature death will no longer be experienced. But it is important to note that at this point, there still is death:

for the child shall die an hundred years old;--Somebody who is 100 will be considered young, just a lad גֶּעֵר.

but the sinner *being* an hundred years old shall be accursed.--So if someone dies at 100, it will be considered a curse for their sin.

Clearly the period in view is neither our present age nor the ultimate state. The extension of life reminds us of the time before the deluge, when people routinely lived for hundreds of years. At the same time, there is still sin, and still death, something that Isaiah elsewhere acknowledges will

¹⁹ Cf. Deut 28:53.

ultimately be destroyed:

Isa 25:7-8 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken *it*.

21-22, Recompense

The curse warned that others would enjoy the fruit of their labors (chart):

Deu 28:30 thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof.²⁰

This element echoes the experience of the Amorites at the time of the conquest:

Deu 6:10 the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, 11 And houses full of all good *things*, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; ...

The third contrast is in the ability of people to enjoy the fruits of their own labor.

21 And they shall build houses, and inhabit *them*; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. 22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat:--The results of their labor will not be taken from them to enrich a conqueror.

In the light of modern ideas of justice, it is remarkable that the Lord defines the ideal state in a way that condemns redistribution. God does command us to be sensitive to the needs of the poor and care for them, as a matter of individual discretion and obedience. But for a higher power to take the fruit of one person's labor and give it to another is not justice. It is a curse, imposed on people for some moral fault, such as the Amorite culture when their iniquity was full (Gen 15:16). When the Day of the Lord arrives, such redistribution will end.

for as the days of a tree *are* the days of **my people, and **mine elect** shall long enjoy the work of their hands.**--This verse combines the last two promises, long life and enjoyment of one's own labor. Trees live for centuries, producing fruit that is a blessing to all.

23, Hope for Children

The curse warned that their children would be taken from them (chart):

Deu 28:32 Thy sons and thy daughters *shall be* given unto another people,

Deu 28:41 Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity.

Recall, for instance, the case of Daniel and his friends. God was faithful to them, but have you ever thought of how their parents must have felt when their sons were taken away?

²⁰ Cf. Lev 26:16

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The fourth blessing is that parents will bring children into a world that offers blessing and not disaster.

23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble;--“Bring forth” refers specifically to the birth of children, and the parallelism suggests that we should understand “labor,” a general verb for suffering pain, in the sense of labor pains. It is a discouragement when the world into which parents bring children has only trouble and sorrow to offer. Compare Job’s curse on the day of his birth, because it brought him into a world of suffering:

Job 3:3 Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night *in which* it was said, There is a man child conceived. ... 10 Because it shut not up the doors of my *mother's* womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes.

That will not be the case here.

for they *are* the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.--Successive generations will enjoy the blessing of the Lord on their parents.

24, Divine Access

The curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 came upon the people because of their disobedience to the Lord. Isaiah has already warned them (chart) that

Isa 59:1 the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.

The fifth blessing is that access to God will be restored.

24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.--Their relation with him will be so close and so intimate that he will grant their request even before they can frame it. Paul describes God as

Eph 3:20 able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

25, Dominion over Nature

Another feature of the curse was proliferation of wild animals:

Lev 26:22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your *high* ways shall be desolate.

The sixth blessing is that this threat will go away.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all *my* holy mountain, saith **יְהוָה the LORD.**--The earth returns to the condition of Eden, where there is no death or hostility.

These verses are a summary of 11:6-9, a passage that clearly describes the earthly reign of the “rod out of the stem of Jesse”:

Isa 11:4 with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the

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earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

Man's original task was to

Gen 1:28 Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

History will not be complete until Adam's son completes this task, and Isaiah promises a day in which the Servant of the Lord, accompanied by the Servants of the Lord whom he has redeemed, fulfills this ancient destiny.

Notes

Provoking and Grieving God

OT References

Isa 63:10 But they rebelled מרה G, and vexed עצב D his holy Spirit:

Num 14:11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke נאץ D me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

Psa 78:17 And they sinned חתא G yet more against him by provoking מרה C the most High in the wilderness.

Psa 78:40 How oft did they provoke מרה C him in the wilderness, and grieve עצב C him in the desert!

Psa 78:56 Yet they tempted נסה D and provoked מרה C the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:

Psa 95:9 When your fathers tempted נסה D me, proved בהן G me, and saw my work.

Psa 95:8 Harden not your heart, as in the provocation מריבה, and as in the day of temptation מסה in the wilderness:

Psa 106:14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted נסה D God in the desert.

Psa 106:43 Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked מרה C *him* with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.

	נאץ	חתא	מרה	עצב	נסה	בהן	ריב
Num 14:11	x						
Psa 78:17		x	x				
Psa 78:40			x	x			
Psa 78:56			x		x		

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Psa 95:8					x		x
Psa 95:9					x	x	
Psa 106:14					x		
Psa 106:43			x				

NT References

Eph 4:29-30 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30 And **grieve** not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

1Th 5:19-21 **Quench** not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesyings. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always **resist** the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye.

63:16, Abraham and Isaac

I have found four different interpretations, two of which require that the particle ׀ be understood as concessive “though” (as in all translations except the Bishop’s Bible), and two based on understanding it as causal.

Concessive ׀

Two interpretations read ׀ as concessive, reflected by the English “though” and the use of the subjunctive mood, which emphasizes the irreality of what is stated: “even though (which is not the case) ...”

For Calvin, the irreality is in the disappearance of all natural affection.

The natural and true meaning is, “O Lord, that thou art our Father will be so sure and so firmly established, that even though all parentage and all relationship should cease among men, yet thou wilt not fail to be our Father. Sooner shall the rights of nature perish than thou shalt not act toward us as a Father, or the sacred adoption shall be infringed, which was founded on thy unchangeable decree, and ratified by the death of thine only-begotten Son.”

Others (cited by Alexander as including Piscator, and mentioned also by Gill) understand the irreality to consist in the sudden reappearance of the patriarchs. If they were, contrary to expectation, to arise immediately from the dead, they would be disgusted at the sinfulness of the people. Thus understood, the words combine a confession of sin (“Abraham and Israel would not acknowledge us because of our sin”) with a confidence in God’s faithfulness to them.

Causal כִּי

There are also two interpretations that read כִּי as causal or explanatory, leading to an indicative sense of the words, which would be better translated as in the Bishop's Bible, "for Abraham knoweth us not, neither is Israel acquainted with us."

Alexander takes the words as indicating that Isaiah speaks for the full church of both Jew and Gentile. Even those who are not Jews, whom Abraham and Israel do not recognize, claim God as their father.

The true sense of the verse, as it appears to me, is that the Church or chosen people, although once, for temporary reasons, co-extensive and coincident with a single race, is not essentially a national organization but a spiritual body. Its father is not Abraham or Israel, but Jehovah

Gill and Delitzsch understand the clauses as a frank admission that the dead are not involved with the affairs of those still on the earth:

Gill: those, who were their ancestors, were both dead; and the dead know not any thing of their posterity, and of their case and circumstances in this world, temporal or spiritual; nor are capable of giving them any help or aid in time of distress; and perhaps the prophet, in the name of the church, purposely

Delitzsch: Abraham and Jacob-Israel have been taken away from this world, and are unable of themselves to intervene in the history of their people.

Interpretation

The concessive sense is much less common than the indicative. Note especially Joüon-Muraoka p. 602 note 1, "Aejmelaeus (1986: 205-7) rightly stresses that the concessive force is unlikely where the כִּי clause follows the main clause." [Aejmelaeus, A. 1986. "Function and interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew," *JBL* 105.193-209]. All but one of the examples that Joüon cites have the concessive clause first; the exception is Pr 6:35. Aejmelaeus argues persuasively that concessive כִּי clauses must precede the main clause. So we should choose the causal reading in this case.

Of the causal interpretations, Alexander's is clearly motivated by his persistent efforts to avoid restrictions of Isaiah's language to a remnant of physical Israel, and see Israel as the church. It is true that *some* in the church could make the statement about Abraham and Israel. However, some in the church *are* physical Israelites, and could not make such a statement.

It seems that the reading of Gill and Delitzsch is the most cogent, and I have followed it in my notes.

63:17

The discussion uncovered three possible explanations of this verse, summarized by Rick Gross as confusion, petulance, and desperation.

The explanation in the text above is confusion, which Rick summarizes as "If You are indeed our Father, why have You given us the latitude to depart from obeying You? Why have You allowed us to have so little fear of You that we'd even consider disobedience? It would seem to us that You'd want to have had tighter control of us, Your children."

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Petulance protests, “How can You hold us accountable when You, Who are sovereign over all things, ordained that we sin? Our disobedience is therefore ultimately Your fault.”

Desperation laments, “Please help! We don't want to end up cast off from You like the others with hardened hearts who've forsaken Your ways.”

In support of petulance, one may note

Rom 9:20-21 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? 21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Here Paul brings together the protest of 63:17 and the corresponding reference to the potter from 64:8. This might suggest that the first half of the chiasm is an initial response by the people, corrected in the second half, and that works with the elements concerning their relation to God and God's wrath, but not so well with the reference to his habitation.

63:18 עם קדשך

The construction <noun> + קדשך appears 20x in the OT.

The noun refers:

- 3x to God's name, 1 Chr 16:35 = Ps 106:47; 1 Chr 29:16
- 1x to the Sabbath, Neh 9:14
- 1x to the Spirit, Ps 51:11
- 1x to God's people (here)

The other 14x all refer to places: mostly the sanctuary (as in Isa 63:15), then God's hill, his city Jerusalem, or his cities. But the expression עם קדש (without the genitive pronoun) appears also in Isa 62:12 and Dan 12:7.

The use of the noun קדש(ו) of a person is extremely rare in the Bible. It occurs of Judah in Ps 114:2, unusually understood metaphorically of God's sanctuary (following the general tendency of the term), and possibly of Aaron in 1 Chr 23:13, where he may be called “the holy of holies.” But it is very common in the Qumran sectarian documents to describe the community and their leader.

Compare the expression to the adjectival expression עם קדוש (ליהוה), which occurs 9x in Deut (7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9), and with plural genitive in Dan 8:24. The adjective is widely used both of people and of holy places.

There may be a difference. The adjectival expression, as used in Deut, emphasizes their separation *from* the other nations. The expression with the noun emphasizes our union *unto* God. The first is true at our salvation. The second is the result of his chastening work during our life with him:

Heb 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness.

קוה vs. חכה

The most common LXX translation for both is υπομενω; a close second for חכה is μενω.

Hebrew	Total instances	υπομενω	μενω	*μενω	*ελπίζω	Negated
חכה	14	6 (43%)	4 (29%)	10 (71%)		2 ²¹
קוה	49	26 (53%)	3 (6%)	29 (59%)	2 (4%)	2 ²²
יחל	43	6 (14%)			21 (49%)	3 ²³

חכה, as the less common word, is more likely to be marked in some way. Can we distinguish it?

Parallel verses:

	קוה	יחל
חכה	Isa 8:17 And I will wait upon חכה the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look קוה for him.	None
קוה		Job 30:26 When I looked קוה for good, then evil came <i>unto me</i> : and when I waited יחל for light, there came darkness. Psa 130:5 I wait קוה for the LORD, my soul doth wait קוה, and in his word do I hope יחל. Isa 51:5 the isles shall wait קוה upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust יחל. Mic 5:6 (ET 7) as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth קוה not for man, nor waiteth יחל for the sons of men

The distribution of parallels and the possibility of translation by (επ)ελπίζω show that קוה and יחל are closer to each other semantically than either is to חכה. Every instance of חכה is either clearly temporal, or open to a temporal interpretation:

Clearly temporal:

2 Kings 7:9 Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day *is* a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we **tarry חכה** till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

2 Kings 9:3 Then take the box of oil, and pour *it* on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and **tarry חכה** not.

Job 32:4 Now Elihu had **waited חכה** till Job had spoken, because they *were* elder than he.

Psalms 106:13 They soon forgot his works; they **waited חכה** not for his counsel: *contrast with soon מחר*

Daniel 12:12 Blessed *is* he that **waiteth חכה**, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five

²¹ Both instances (2 Ki 9:3; Ps 106:13) are purely temporal

²² Isa 64:2 has clear sense of expectation, but Mic 5:6 is only temporal delay

²³ Mic 5:6 and 2 Sam 18:14 temporal; Job 13:15 Ketiv is expectation.

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and thirty days. *Reference to days emphasizes time*

Hosea 6:9 And as troops of robbers **wait** **הכה** for a man, *so* the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness.

Habakkuk 2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not **tarry** **הכה**.

Possible ascensive construction: wait, and then hope for or pursue.

Job 3:21 Which **long** **הכה** for death, but it *cometh* not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures;

Isaiah 8:17 And I will **wait** **הכה** upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look **קוה** for him.

Ambiguous, could be taken either way

Psalms 33:20 Our soul **waiteth** **הכה** for the LORD: he *is* our help and our shield.

Isaiah 30:18 And therefore will the LORD **wait** **הכה**, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD *is* a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that **wait** for him **הכה**. *The first sense is clearly temporal; the second one is easily understood as urging us to patience, recognizing that God is not in any rush.*

Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world *men* have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside thee, who does for him that **waiteth** **הכה** for him. *If we were to take the verse in the sense of 1 Cor 2:9, the case for temporal would be even stronger: we cannot hope for what we cannot conceive.*

Zephaniah 3:8 Therefore **wait** **הכה** ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination *is* to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, *even* all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. *Reference to the day suggests temporal emphasis.*

Conclusion: **הכה** specializes for the temporal meaning of “patience” that is included within the broader semantic field of **קוה** and **יהל**. The distinction between the latter two merits investigation, but is not pursued here.

Temporal order of Perfect and Participle in 64:5

What is the temporal order of the “meeting” and the three actions performed by those whom God meets? The use of the perfect for **פגוע** suggests that it might be antecedent to those actions: “You have already met those who rejoice and do righteousness.”

Illustration 1 is a Logos syntactical search on the Andersen-Forbes DB of perfect verbs governing participles as direct objects. It returns 95 hits (including Isa 64:5). NB: in many cases the participle is subordinate to the object, and not itself the object, e.g., Deut 31:21; 1 Sam 2:22.

Some perfects, by their semantics, must follow the achievement of the participles in time. This is the

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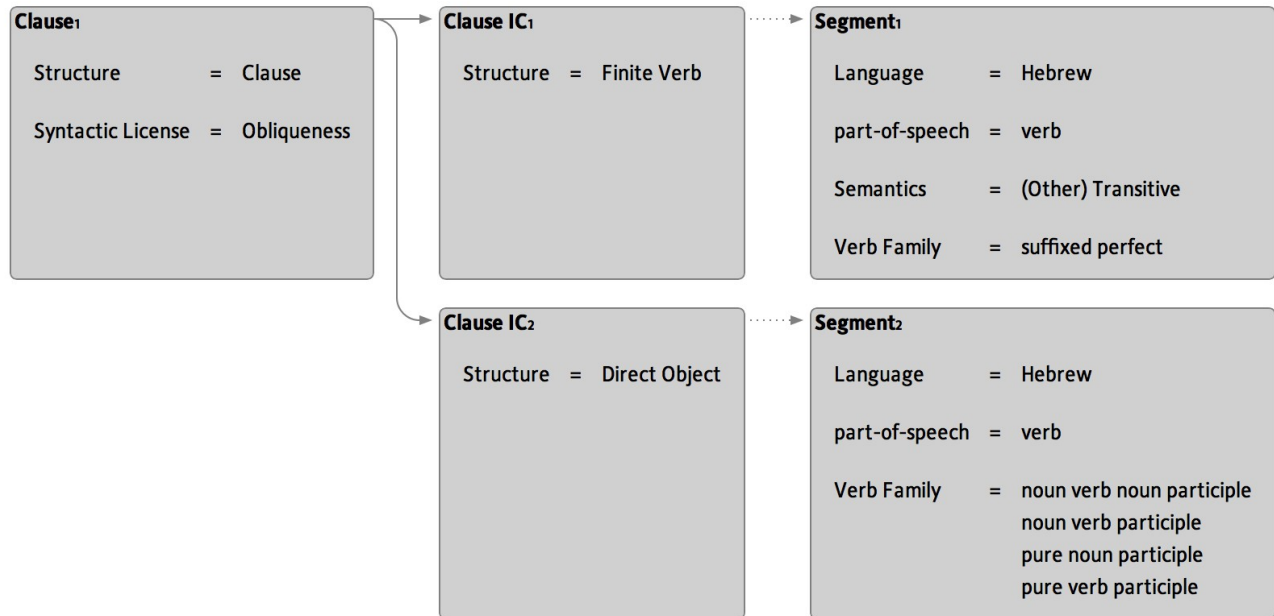


Illustration 1: Perfect verb governing participle as direct object

case for verbs of sensing such as ראה and שמע, as in Gen 31:12 “I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee,” Exod 3:9, 16; 6:5; or קבר, Num 11:34 “there they buried those who lusted”; or “kill” or “drive out” the “inhabiters” יושבים.

In other cases, semantics equally requires that the perfect come first, as with ילד: Gen 4:22 “Zillah bare Tubal-Cain, an instructor ...”

So perhaps we need to explore the semantics of פגע further. But only twice (here and in Isa 47:3) is God the subject of the G stem.

Maybe Zeph 1:7, “he hath bid his invited ones”? They were not invited until the bidding took place.

The best solution appears to recognize that there is no predetermined temporal relation between a main clause suffix verb and participles as direct objects. The situation is different in Greek, where participles carry tense information, relative to the time of the main verb. Here, one must determine from context.

Hebrew Verbs for Asking and Seeking

65:1 encourages us explore the differences among בקש, שאל, דרש.

Syntax of ברא in 65:18b

We have two clauses, each with a verb that governs two nouns:

I create Jerusalem a rejoicing,
and [I create] her people a joy

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All interpretations take the first noun in each clause as the direct object of the verb: God promises to bring Jerusalem and her people into being in a new way. What is the relation of the second noun in each case (rejoicing, joy) to these original clauses?

I can see two alternatives: accusative of product, and adverbial accusative. Delitzsch seems to waffle on this.

Accusative of Product, Waltke 10.2.3

Verbs of making can take a double accusative, in which the second describes the product produced from the first. Examples:

Isa 42:16 I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.

Isa 45:18 he created it not in vain לא תהו בראה

Isa 44:15 he maketh it a graven image עשהו פסל

Deu 27:6 Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones

1Sa 28:24 did bake unleavened bread thereof ותפהו מצות

With this reading, the Lord is saying that he will turn Jerusalem into rejoicing, which might mean metaphorically that all the people rejoice. The emphasis then is on their joy. The first part of the verse does describe the people's joy,

Isa 65:18 be ye glad and rejoice for ever *in that* which I create

But this seems to describe the readers' joy over seeing what the Lord has done, rather than joy as the product of his work.

Jouön §125^{ua} asserts that this is very rare with the Qal, preferring to see it only in the Hiphil transform of a transitive verb, where the first object is the transformed subject of the original verb. But §125^v discusses verbs of making as a transform of the verbless clause, and §125^w of clauses with הִיָּה. In these cases the first object is usually the material and the second object the product.

Delitzsch's discussion of the verse seems to favor this: "Jehovah creates Jerusalem an exultation and her people a rejoicing by making joy her uniform, constant state, the characteristic of her inner and outer life."

Young is a bit different: "To *create Jerusalem a joy* is to create her into that which is an object of joy." This reading aligns well with the previous clause, as well as with the following one.

Adverbial Accusative, Waltke 10.2.2

A very common construction uses a second accusative adverbially, of time, place, manner, etc. In this reading, the Lord might mean that he is creating Jerusalem *joyfully*. The emphasis would then be on his joy, which he states explicitly in the next clause:

Isa 65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people

This seems to be Delitzsch's point in his translation (as opposed to his comment):

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I create Jerusalem anew in exultation. and her people in joyfulness.

I wonder whether the adverbial accusative can ever indicate purpose? Then the Lord could be saying that he creates Jerusalem *for joy*, to bring joy both to himself and to those who witness the process.

Perhaps it is best to go with accusative of product, in Young's sense, and see the clauses before and after as identifying the two groups who respond to Jerusalem as an object of joy.

Delitzsch on Millennium vs. NH/NE

“... the O.T. prophet is still unable to keep apart what the Apocalyptist divides into distinct periods. The O.T. teaches nothing of a blessed hereafter. Beyond the grave lies Hades. Of a heaven with happy human beings the O.T. knows nothing. Round God's throne in heaven are only angels, not human beings. And before the Risen One ascended to heaven, heaven was really not open to men ; there was therefore no heavenly Jerusalem, whose descent to earth could be the object of hope. For this reason in O.T. prophecy the eschatological idea of the new cosmos certainly coalesces with the millennium. It is exactly so in lxvi 23 f. In both cases what is described lies beyond the new creation of heaven and earth. And in both cases the prophet does not depict the future state in colours taken from this one, but for him the final renewal of the world coalesces with its prelude here.”