

Isaiah 66, False and True Worship

Overview

As we near the end of Isaiah, it's helpful to recall the overall structure of the book (chart). Isaiah's career spanned two great middle-eastern empires, Assyria and Babylon, and he reveals God's purposes for the nation in its interactions with both of them.

- The first half of the book assures them that Assyria will not conquer them, and urges them to trust in the Lord alone for deliverance.
- The second half prepares them for the coming Babylonian conquest and captivity, delivering three lessons, each ending in a warning to the wicked (chart).
 - Though God will allow Babylon to conquer Judah, he is greater than the gods of Babylon.
 - He will send a special person, his servant, to redeem his people from their sin.
 - This person will restore Jerusalem for the righteous Israelites.

This chapter is a chiasmic review of the four themes presented in ch. 65 (chart), with the addition of a final verse that echoes the doom on the wicked seen already at the end of chs. 48 and 57.

1-2, True Worship

Perhaps the most painful episode in the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem was the destruction of the temple, and the return (Ezra 1) began with Cyrus' decree to rebuild the sanctuary. Isaiah himself (ch. 60) anticipates a day when the temple will be rebuilt.

Following the symmetric pattern that governs this section, the Lord begins by warning the people about the limitations of such a sanctuary. A persistent error throughout Israel's history was trusting in the sanctuary itself, rather than in the Lord whose presence it symbolized.

Recall 1 Samuel 4, when Israel was smitten before the Philistines. Their remedy was to fetch the ark of the covenant to aid them in battle (chart):

1Sa 4:3 the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

God allowed the ark to be captured. It remained in exile seven months (1 Sam 6:1), and then was stored in the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-Jearim for twenty years (1 Sam 7:1-2).

A hundred years later, when the Babylonian threat drew closer, the people again sought confidence in the physical artifacts of religion. Jeremiah rebuked them:

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. ... 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

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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.

Now, anticipating the return, the Lord warns the people that true worship is not defined by architecture but by relationship.

66:1 Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool:--God cannot be contained in a building or a box. Some commentators credit Isaiah and his contemporaries with inventing these insights, but they are not new with the prophets (chart). Before the first temple was built, David realized,

Psa 11:4 The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne *is* in heaven:

1Ch 28:2 Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: *As for me*, I *had* in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building:

Solomon confessed, even as he dedicated the house,

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

where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?--The question “Where is...?” is what you ask when you can’t find something. The picture God is painting is that somewhere in this immense creation, his people are building a house for him, but it is so tiny and insignificant that he can’t find it just at the moment.

2 For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been וַיְהִי כִלְיָאֵלָה --This bicolon echoes the creation story in Genesis 1.¹ The creative command on the first, second, and fourth days of Gen 1 is “let there be” יְהִי, leading to the creation of light, the firmament, and the heavenly bodies. In these cases (vv. 3, 7, 15), as throughout the chapter, marks the fulfillment of this command is marked with the word וַיְהִי, “and there was X” (chart). For example,

v. 3 And God said, Let there be light: and **there was** light.

v. 6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, ... 7 ... and **it was so**.

v. 9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together ... and **it was so**.

v. 11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, ... and **it was so**.

v. 14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven ... 15 ... and **it was so**.

v. 24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, ... and **it was so**.

The plural of “it was” is here translated, “all those things have been,” that is, by divine command.

This observation recalls David’s comment when he dedicated his store of wealth to the building of the temple (chart):

1Ch 29:14 But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

1 Delitzsch: “וַיְהִי has the meaning of the וַיְהִי, which followed on the creative יְהִי.”

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The creature cannot enrich the creator, or do anything to constrain his behavior. He does not need a house from us to shelter him, or offerings to feed him:

Psa 50:9 I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he goats out of thy folds. 10 For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills. 11 I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine. 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof.

Contrast the Babylonian gods, whom the people would come to know during captivity. Babylon had a flood tradition with many points of parallel to Noah's story, and the captives would certainly have learned of it and noted the parallels. But there is an important difference.

In the Babylonian epics, the gods resolve to destroy humanity because the people make too much noise, but when the flood has come and removed the people, the gods realize their error: there is no one to offer them sacrifices. (Atrahasis, Dalley 31-32):

The great gods, the Annuna,
Stayed parched and famished.

After the flood (ANET 95a, Epic of Gilgamesh Tablet XI line 159), when the Babylonian Noah emerges and offers sacrifices,:

The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer

Not so our God. He does not need us to feed him, or house him. On the contrary, the only things we can bring to him are from what he has already given us.

In the first nine chapters of Isaiah 40-66, the Lord shows his superiority over the gods of Babylon by foretelling the future. The emphasis on correct worship in the last nine chapters shows his superiority in his independence of his people. These lessons warn them against syncretism.

saith the LORD:--Not the usual אמר יהוה, but נאם יהוה, marking the preceding statement as particularly prominent. God's creative power is the foundation on which his attitude toward earthly temples rests.

Application: Beware the seductiveness of the artifacts of religion. For many people, a church isn't "a real church" if it doesn't have a building, or an organ, or stained glass windows, or a choir, or ... In their place, all of these things can be useful tools for the gatherings of God's people; but they are not required, and if they become our focus, they can actually be harmful.

but to this man will I look,--Concerning a physical sanctuary, God said, "Where is it? I can't see it." But there is something that does attract his attention, and it is something even a Gentile can show:

even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.--The key to true worship is not a sanctuary, but a right attitude toward God. This verse recalls 57:15,

Isa 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Both verses mention the "contrite spirit," but the terms are different; all together we have five

descriptions of the person who attracts God’s attention.

- “Contrite” in 57:15 is דכא “crushed.” It is used twice in ch. 53 to describe the affliction of our Savior (v. 5 “bruised for our iniquities,” v. 10 “it pleased the Lord to bruise him”). The contrite person is the person who has been crushed under God’s judgment, who realizes his guilt. We are crushed when we recognize that because of our sin, we offend God in the very act of taking up his holy name in prayer.
- “Humble spirit” in 57:15 שפל־רוח is literally “low of spirit,” an expression that appears twice in Proverbs as the opposite of pride (16:19; 29:23). Any attitude of self-worthiness immediately disqualifies us for access to God.
- “Poor” עני refers to a socially disadvantaged person, someone without independent means, a “have not.” Physical poverty does not guarantee godliness, but it puts a person in a position in which they may more readily trust in God because they have no other resources. What is more important is that we recognize our spiritual poverty, our recognition that “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss” (Phil 3:7), and our Lord reflects this characteristic when he proclaims a blessing on “the poor in spirit” Matt 5:3.
- “Contrite spirit” is נכה־רוח . The adjective appears elsewhere only in 2 Sam 4:4; 9:3 where it describes Mephibosheth as נכירגלים, “crippled in his feet.” The one who attracts God’s attention is “crippled in spirit,” without natural spiritual aptitude or qualifications to seek the Lord.
- The final characteristic of one who attracts the Lord’s attention is that he “trembleth at my word.” He does not seek to evade God’s commands or explain them away, but accepts them as the revelation of the all-powerful creator, and responds with the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10).

57:15 reminds us that this attitude is appropriate before the one who is “high and lofty.” The book of Isaiah opens in ch. 2 telling us that

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

Throughout the book we have been looking forward to that promised “day of the Lord.” It is most clearly in focus in ch. 58-66, and now we learn that those who have access to God in that day are just those who recognize their low position before him. When Adam sinned, he tried to hide his sin from God, and as a result was excluded from divine fellowship. Here God promises that he will enter into fellowship with those who recognize their sin and unworthiness.

Application: In modern church talk, “worship” typically means contemporary music, led by an energetic “worship leader” and accompanied by rock instruments, designed to make us feel happy. Given what we have read, it might be well to recall the Hebrew word for worship, which means “to prostrate oneself.” These verses in Isaiah unfold for us the meaning of true worship—not an emotional high fueled by lively music, but a sober recognition of how hopeless we are before the true God, as we cast ourselves entirely on his mercy with a full awareness of our sin and his majesty. May God give us grace not to be led astray by false notions of worship in the modern church, and instead to see ourselves in our true helpless condition.

3-4, False Worship

3 He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.--Leviticus specifies all four of the sacrifices mentioned here (ox, lamb, oblation, incense) as part of the ritual that God *commands* for Israel. But God compares them all with *violations* of his law—the first and last absolutely, the middle two because dogs and swine are unclean animals, ineligible for sacrifice. The form of a ritual in itself does not guarantee acceptability with God. It is possible to go through the right ritual and yet be displeasing to him.

Application: There are certain things we do together: Bible study, fellowship, breaking bread to remember the Lord, collective prayer. We should do these things. But we must never think that these outward activities make us Christians. If we are not believers, they can actually displease God.

The next two bicola bridge the verse division, but are closely aligned (chart). The first describes their action, while the second describes God's corresponding response. The halves of the bicola also align. The first half of each bicolon describes their daily conduct, while the second focuses on their worship.

Yea, they have chosen their own ways,--The people are following their own desires rather than God's. **and their soul delighteth in their abominations.**--"Abomination" שקוץ is a common term for idols and the practices associated with them (chart):

Deu 29:16 For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt; and how we came through the nations which ye passed by; 17 And ye have seen **their abominations, and their idols**, wood and stone, silver and gold, which *were* among them:

Israel delighted to follow after false gods and their worship. Sometimes they even tried to merge these rituals with the temple ceremonies. In 2 Kings 16, Ahaz (743-716 BC), a king to whom Isaiah prophesied in ch. 7, replaced the brazen altar in the temple with one patterned after an altar he had seen in Damascus, while Ezekiel 8 describes abominable imagery and pagan ceremonies in the temple during the 20 years between Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion and the fall of Jerusalem (606-586 BC).

4 I also will choose their delusions [תעלולים capriciousness, childish irresponsibility],--God's choice echoes their choice in v. 3b. The noun translated "delusions" is from a root that refers to childish behavior. They chose to conduct themselves in their own way, rather than following God's law. Such behavior is irresponsible, capricious, child-like, and the Lord abandons them to their capriciousness.

and will bring their fears מגורה upon them;--The two lines are grammatically parallel, and "ways" corresponds with "capriciousness." This suggests that "their fears" is to be understood, not generically, but in a way that relates to their idolatrous "abominations." The OT sometimes uses various words for "fear" as a reference to God:

Gen 31:42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the **fear פחד of Isaac**, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty.

Gen 31:53 And Jacob sware by the **fear פחד of his father Isaac**.

Isa 8:13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and *let him be your fear מורא*, and *let him be your dread ערִיץ*.

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A common motive for pagan worship is to avert the harm that malevolent deities can bring.² Paul teaches us that there is a reality behind idols:

1Co 10:20 the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

Because they were preoccupied with demons and their idolatrous representations, God will deliver them over to the demons. The Revelation promises that unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire, the abode of “the devil and his angels.”

Application: If we are truly God’s people, we will be preoccupied with his ways, not with our own; we will put away the gods of those among whom we live, and serve him alone.

God’s response follows a common pattern in the Scriptures (chart): his judgment often takes the form of giving people what they have desired. We see this pattern throughout Scripture:

In the Wilderness:

Psa 106:13 They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: 14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. 15 And **he gave them their request**; but sent leanness into their soul.

In the Land (a Psalm of Asaph, from the time of David):

Psa 81:1 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. 12 **So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust**: and they walked in their own counsels.

God’s dealings with Gentiles:

Rom 1:21 when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also **gave them up** to uncleanness ... 26 For this cause God **gave them up** unto vile affections ... 28 God **gave them over** to a reprobate mind.

A warning for Believers:

Gal 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for **whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap**. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Application: Whenever we are tempted to depart from the Lord and follow our own way, we should bear in mind that he may just leave us to the consequences of our wilfulness. He will not let us use him

² How does this fear-based worship differ from the biblical fear of God? Our God is greatly to be feared, but this fear is only the beginning of wisdom. It is right that pagans should fear spiritual powers, but that is as far as their religion can take them. The Bible leads us further. Once we recognize our need, it reveals to us God’s eternal love for his elect, and his gracious provision of redemption, by which we can be forgiven and become his children. In our daily *conduct*, we should remember that our God is a consuming fire, and pursue holiness in every action. But our *worship* is very different than that of the pagan. We offer spiritual sacrifices, not to fend off the attacks of an angry God, but to recognize his gracious forgiveness and acknowledge his rule over us.

as “fire insurance,” to pull us out of trouble in case our ideas don’t work. If we insist on doing things our way, he will abandon us to our own devices. He desires that we serve him “with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut 6:5). Nothing less will satisfy him, and ultimately, nothing less will satisfy us.

because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose *that* in which I delighted not.--Note repetition of the four verbs קרא, דבר, שמע, ענה, here and in 65:12, 24. Isaiah is the first writer to bring these together, and the only other cooccurrences are in Jer 7 and 35, echoing the criticism here and in 65:12. He wants us to compare these verses.

Here and in 65:12, God is calling, and the wicked are marked by not responding. What is the opposite of these statements? What characterizes the righteous?

- We might think that the righteous differ from the wicked because they answer when God calls.
- But in fact, the difference is more profound (chart). In 65:24, the whole direction of the conversation changes: it is the righteous who are calling to God, and God who answers.

The hallmark of the righteous is dependence on the Lord. This is not only our privilege, it is our duty. Recall the Lord’s exhortation to his people in Ps 50. He accepts their sacrifices, but explains that he doesn’t really need them. What he wants is their praise ... and their petition:

Psa 50:14 Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: 15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

It is worth considering the other two quadrants generated by caller {God, Man} x response {Yes, No}.

Not everyone who prays to the Lord is answered. Twice already in Isaiah we have read that those in blatant sin have no grounds to ask God for anything:

Isa 1:15 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.

Isa 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that **he will not hear**.

And in the final quadrant, God does call the righteous, and they (unlike the wicked) do hear when he calls (chart). We think of Abraham ...

Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was **called** to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

... or Moses ...

Exo 3:4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God **called** unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I.

... or Samuel ...

1Sa 3:4 the LORD **called** Samuel: and he answered, Here *am* I.

... or Paul ...

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Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and **called me** by his grace, 16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

In fact, Paul uses “called ones” as a generic title for believers:

Rom 1:7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, **called [ones]**, saints:

The righteous do hear God’s call, and they respond to it. Why, then, does the Lord in Isaiah not emphasize their obedience, but rather their dependence?

The answer will come in the next verse, which describes those who claim to be “brethren” but who in fact are not among the Lord’s servants. It is easy to say, “I have received the Lord.” But his true servants live in dependence on him. Our Lord twice taught his disciples,

Mat 20:16 (cf. 22:14) for many be called, but few chosen.

And Peter picks up on this dual nature of God’s saving work when he writes,

2Pe 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

Application: Something more than the call is needed for salvation: one must also be chosen. There are those in every age who make an outward response to the call, but whose conduct shows that they are not chosen. Let us be certain that we have not simply responded to an invitation, but are depending daily on the Lord.

5-6, Contrast

As in 65:8-16, we have a compact contrast between the fate of the servants and the fate of the sinners. There, the passage was addressed to the sinners. Here, the prophet speaks to the servants, and the Lord’s enemies are in the third person.

We really have here a twofold exhortation to hear (chart): the voice of encouragement that the servants hear, and the voice of judgment that falls on the sinners. See notes for a variety of ways to parse the text. It seems best, in keeping with other examples in Isaiah, to understand “voice” קול as an interjection, “Hearken!”

These two statements are closely parallel to the description of false worshippers in the previous chapter, 65:5-6. In both cases, v. 5 focuses on pious opposition from false brethren, while v. 6 speaks of how the Lord will repay them.

5, to the Servants

5 Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word;--The Servants are identified by the final characteristic from v. 2, their immediate and instinctive response to the word of the Lord.

The Lord’s word of encouragement contrasts the expectation of the sinners with the facts of the case.

Your brethren--As in 65:5, the worst opposition comes from those who claim to be believers!

said, “For my name's sake, said;³ Let the LORD be glorified:--The Massoretic pointing (chart) implies that we should make “for my name’s sake” part of what the brethren say, along with “Let the Lord be glorified.” The major objection to doing so is that it’s hard to make sense out of “for my name’s sake let the Lord be glorified” as a single phrase (Delitzsch), but in fact there is no need to join them. Isaiah is drawing a picture of false brethren who are engaged in dropping pious phrases, but doing so carelessly and inconsistently with biblical usage (chart).

- “For the sake of the name” למען שם occurs 16 times in the OT. The most common use is with the second person למען שמך in prayer (4x in Pss, 2x in Jer), as a motive for God to act, just as we pray “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Psalm 25:11 **For thy name's sake**, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it *is* great.

“For my name’s sake” appears only once before our verse, also in Isaiah, explaining God’s longsuffering with Jacob:

Isaiah 48:9 For **my name's sake** will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.

It makes no sense for the false brethren to be throwing the phrase around as it appears here. Are they pretending to be prophets, speaking for God? More likely they are just mimicking a familiar expression, but in a way that shows that they do not understand it.

- “Let the Lord be glorified” is again close to a common form,⁴ but their version differs in two ways. First, they use the *qal* of קבר, while the others are *nifal*. Second, in the others the Lord is speaking of himself in the first person, e.g., at the Red Sea, [one 2ps ref in Isa 26:15]

Exo 14:4 I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host;

Again, they appear to be mimicking biblical language, but without any appreciation of its true meaning.⁵

- The fact that the two statements don’t go together is a third example of the confusion and carelessness in their thought, and their commitment to the form of godliness rather than a true understanding of it.

Application: Carelessness in using God’s word is one warning that somebody may not truly be the Lord’s. His sheep hear his voice, study it attentively, and do not twist it or use it carelessly.

that hated you, that cast you out,--Their actions show their true nature. They do not really love God’s

3 The accentuation appears to favor this association. Everything from the clause-initial אמרו through “cast you out” is terminated by *rebhia*. Then follows “for my name’s sake” with the weaker disjunctive *pashta*, then the content of the statement, “Let the Lord be glorified.”

4 Ex 14: 4,17f; Lv 10:3; Is 26:15; Ezk 28:22; 39:13; Hg 1:8

5 It isn’t necessary to emend our text to the *nifal*; Isaiah may be caricaturing the superficiality of the false brethren and their shallow knowledge of the Scriptures. Compare a similar purposeful error in a quotation in Jeremiah’s vivid description of the mourning women (9:22, MT v. 21), as I discuss in “Some Discourse Functions of Prophetic Quotation Formulas in Jeremiah,” In R. D. Bergen, Editor, *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, pages 489-519. Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas, TX, 1994.

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servants, but hate them, and seek to cast them out of the institutions that they control.

The Scriptures offer numerous examples of such opposition by those who claim to be believers, but are enemies of God's true servants (chart). Our first two examples are from around the Babylonian captivity, and concern people who may have been encouraged by Isaiah's prophecy.

At the time of the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah faced mortal danger from the temple priesthood:

Jer 26:8 Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak unto all the people, that the **priests and the prophets** and all the people took him, saying, **Thou shalt surely die.**

After the restoration, when Zerubbabel returned to rebuild the temple, the adversaries of Judah sought to join in the effort, with the secret objective of frustrating it:

Ezr 4:1 Now when **the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin** heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; 2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, **Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him** since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. 3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. 4 Then the people of the land **weakened the hands** of the people of Judah, and **troubled them** in building,

In the NT, Paul twice mentions ψευδαδελφοι "false brethren," who were a grief to him. In his first letter, Galatians, he writes of

Gal 2:4 false **brethren** unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might **bring us into bondage:**

The context suggests that they were associated with the Jewish arm of the early church, which tried to force Gentiles to convert to Judaism in order to be recognized as Christians.

Later, he lumps them among other serious obstacles that he endured to carry the gospel:

2Co 11:26 *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* **perils** among false **brethren**;

In describing the last judgment, our Savior clearly anticipates that some will even try to fool him with their false credentials:

Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, **Lord, Lord**, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you:** depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.--It may be difficult for us to tell false brethren from true ones. But "the Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim 2:19). He will guide us, and

in the end vindicate his own and punish those who “take his name in vain.”

Application: We should expect opposition, not only from those who outwardly reject the Lord, but also from pious “brethren.” Our Lord warns that many who say “Lord, Lord,” are not truly his servants. We must know God’s word individually and independently, and be prepared to stand before him based on our individual convictions.

6, to the Sinners

Now we turn from the word of encouragement for the Lord’s Servants, to a more ominous sound. Among several ways to parse this verse (see notes), the most likely is that the initial “A voice” should be understood as an exclamation, “Hearken!” Compare (chart)

Isa 13:4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: → “Listen! A multitude in the mountains. Listen! A tumult of the kingdoms of nations ...”

Isa 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD → “Listen! One crying in the wilderness ...”

Then it is parallel to the command in v. 5, “Hear” However, the audience is no longer so specific. The first exhortation was addressed to the Servants, but nobody can escape this sound.

6 A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a the voice of the LORD that rendereth recompence גמול שלם to his enemies.--We should pay attention to the *progression* of what is heard, its *message*, and its *origin*. Then we will consider how this image appears in the NT.

Once we recognize the initial “voice” as an exclamation, we see a progression among the three terms.

1. First, Isaiah hears שאון, an undifferentiated “noise,” a word that refers to a roaring sound, like the waves of the sea (Ps 65:7 MT 8) or a battle (Ps 74:23). Whatever this is, it’s loud.
2. Next, he calls it a קול, the most common word for “voice,” but which includes the more general notion of “sound.”
3. In the third instance he uses קול again, but by attributing it to the Lord, he shows that he refers to a voice, and the construction indicates that it is definite, “the voice.”

The *message* that this voice conveys is not pleasant. When God shouts, somebody is in trouble. In this case, he is focusing his attention on those he calls “his enemies,” and he is “render[ing] recompense,” that is, paying them back for their opposition to him. The expression “render recompense” גמול שלם recalls 65:6 שלם (following on 66:5’s recollection of 65:5) (chart),

Isa 65:5 These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day. 6 Behold, *it is* written before me: I will not keep silence, but will **recompense שלם**, even **recompense שלם** into their bosom, 7 your iniquities ...

It also reminds us of the first description of the Redeemer in ch. 59,

Isa 59:18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly he will **repay שלם**, fury to his adversaries, **recompence גמול** to his enemies; to the islands he will repay **recompence גמול**.

Isaiah 66

This earlier verse identifies the agent of this recompense, the one whose voice is shouting in anger, as the Redeemer who comes to Zion. John brings these images together in the Revelation, when he sees one “who liveth and was dead” (1:18), thus unambiguously the Lord Jesus, but who speaks with a “voice as the sound of many waters” (1:15), and “treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (19:17).

Application: Our Savior declared in John 5 that the Father has committed all judgment unto him. It is a gross distortion of our Lord to view him only as Savior, and not recognize his place as the one who will bring God’s vengeance on a sinful world.

Now we consider the *source* of the voice. Isaiah initially hears it coming from the city, then narrows down the location to the temple. Similarly, “Zion and Jerusalem” (that is, the temple mount and the broader city) is where Amos, Isaiah’s contemporary, situates the cry that he hears:

Amo 1:2 And he said, The LORD will roar **from Zion**, and utter his voice from Jerusalem;

Recall Zion as the center of God’s rule throughout the book:

2:3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and **the word of the LORD from Jerusalem**. 4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall **rebuke** many people:

24:21 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones *that are* on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. ... 23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

David anticipates Zion as the source of God’s severe rule over his adversaries:

Psa 2:5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6 Yet have I set my king **upon my holy hill of Zion**. 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

So when we hear the Lord’s voice coming from Jerusalem, and specifically from the temple, we know that the Messianic King has taken his throne, and from that position now brings judgment on his enemies. But this does not mean that God’s wrath is completely withheld until the Lord’s return and the reestablishment of the temple in Jerusalem. As often, Isaiah cannot completely distinguish in time events that later revelation teases apart. The image of the voice from the temple appears again in the Revelation. Before the bowls are poured out, it is from the heavenly temple that the commandment goes forth both to gather the elect and to harvest the wicked for judgment (chart):

Rev 14:14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came **out of the temple**, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. 17 And

another angel came **out of the temple which is in heaven**, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

When the bowl do come, the command is again from the heavenly temple.

Rev 16:1 And I heard **a great voice out of the temple** saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of **the wrath of God** upon the earth.

Rev 16:17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came **a great voice** out of the **temple of heaven**, from the throne, saying, It is done.

There is a heavenly temple now, as Hebrews 9 clearly teaches. From it the voice of the Lord decrees judgment on those who reject him. We see this judgment now, in the disasters that our world increasingly experiences, and they will increase until the return of our Lord, when he will personally declare God's judgment on sin from the temple in Jerusalem.

7-13, Mother Zion Fulfilled at Last

The emphasis on the city and temple in v. 6 leads naturally to the final instance in Isaiah of a metaphor for Zion that we have seen several times before, as a daughter, wife, and mother (chart).

- Six times, we read of “daughter Zion” (not “daughter of Zion,” as our version has it, but Zion viewed as a tender daughter, at first bereaved and threatened, later redeemed and restored).
- 49:14-50:3 pictured her as a widow bereft of her children and abandoned by her husband. This and the next focus on her disaster, but contain promises of restoration.
- ch. 54 starts with a different sort of wifely disaster, the barren woman, recalling Sarah and Ruth, but then merges this with the abandoned wife.
- ch. 60 tells how the Gentiles will bring their homage to Zion, along with her children. Now the judgment is in the past, and all is hope and light.
- ch. 62 describes the Lord's delight in Zion as a husband's in his wife.

Note the structurally prominent roles of the last two pairs in ch. 49-57 and 58-66, respectively.

This paragraph crowns the metaphor by describing Jerusalem as the mother of her people. It has two halves, corresponding to two facets of the maternal relation (chart): giving birth (vv. 7-9), and sustaining her offspring (vv. 10-13). Each ends (vv. 9, 12-13) with a statement attributed to the Lord.

7-9, Sudden Birth

The first half of the paragraph describes the unprecedented suddenness of the nation's restoration.

7 Before she travailed, she brought forth;

before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.--This couplet is presented almost as a

riddle. Childbirth is often used in Scripture as an image of prolonged labor and pain. Here, the prophet sets before us a mother whose child is born even before she enters labor.

8 Who hath heard such a thing?

who hath seen such things?--In case we miss the unusual nature of this event, he emphasizes that it is unprecedented.

**Shall ~~the earth be made to bring forth~~ a country be born in one day?
or shall a nation be born at once?**

for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.--The subject of the first colon, ארץ, is indefinite, and should probably be understood as “a country,” in parallel with “a nation” in the second colon. “The earth” would require the article (Gen 1:1; 2:1), and is hard to construe with the passive verb “be born,” as the KJV’s tortured “be made to bring forth” suggests.

Here the prophet interprets the metaphor. He is not speaking of the birth of a human child, but the restoration of Zion’s children. The closest parallel is the bereaved widow in 49:14-50:3. There, when the Lord restores Zion’s children, she is amazed:

Isa 49:21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where *had they been?*

In our paragraph, the prophet captures this surprise with his image of an instant, painless birth.

9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith יאמר the LORD:

shall I cause to bring forth, and shut *the womb*? saith אמר thy God.--Now the Lord explains this sudden restoration. It is a sign of his personal involvement and commitment. “I” is the separate pronoun in both cases, thus emphatic, though difficult to translate directly. “I myself, and no other, am the one bringing this child to the birth. How could it be otherwise than successful and glorious?”

v. 8 is sometimes quoted of the events of 1948, the birth of the modern state of Israel. While the establishment of Israel was rapid, it was hardly the work of a day; after the war that broke out with the withdrawal of the British, the first armistice (with Egypt) took over 9 months, the last one over 14 months, and there was no formal peace agreement for decades. The history of the modern state is hardly without travail and without pain. Like all the events of history, the restoration of Israel is the work of the Lord. But it is not the restoration that Isaiah describes here. This restoration awaits the Lord’s return.

10-13, Sustenance

Now the focus of the metaphor shifts to a vivid description of the sustenance that young children draw from a nursing mother.

10 Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her:

rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her:--Note the emphasis on “all” and the nature of the relation. It is not defined by physical descent (that is, Israelites), but includes anyone who loves Jerusalem and has mourned the judgment that has befallen her. This description can include Gentiles who recognize the very special role that Israel has played in God’s plan of salvation. Certainly all of us

who love the Lord thrill with the thought of a city where God's law was the law of the land. We cringe when we read of how her kings abused their position and turned against the Lord. We shudder when we read of the terrible judgments that God brought on her for her apostasy. When she is restored, we will be filled with joy.

Again, we should not confuse this attitude toward Jerusalem with the Zionist agenda that seeks to leverage support for the current Jewish nation. Israel today is about where she was under the kings of Israel, denying the Lord and setting herself up for judgment. Believers still mourn for Jerusalem. The Jerusalem we love is not the capital of an unbelieving Jewish state, but the seat of Messiah's rule. The deliverance we anticipate is not a treaty with the Palestinians, or a diplomatic initiative with the Arab states, but the personal return and intervention of her true king.

11 That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory from her heavy breast.--

This very vivid image depicts restored Jerusalem as a source of nurture and comfort to all those who love her and who have mourned her desolation. Idiomatically, "the breasts of consolations of her" means "her consoling breasts." "Abundance" is a rare word, but cognate words in Ugaritic and Akkadian, as well as the parallelism of this verse, suggest that it is another word for "breast."⁶

The image works in both directions (chart). In ch. 60, Zion is promised,

Isa 60:16 Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

In a moment, we'll see the relation between these two.

12 For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream:--The Lord distinguishes two things.

"Peace" is compared to a river, נהר, a continually flowing source of water, like the Jordan, the Euphrates, or the Nile. In a land of drought, such a constant resource was rare, and precious.

The glory or wealth of the Gentiles is compared to a נהל. This word indicates a gully that is dry most of the year, but fills with water when it rains, and then it is a rushing torrent. When God brings material blessing to Jerusalem (as anticipated in ch. 60), it is like an overflowing flood.

Now, in chiasmatic order (chart), he translates from the metaphor of the river to that of the mother.

then shall ye suck,--The Massoretes put this clause with the previous part of the verse, and not with what follows (chart), and in so doing reconcile v. 11 with 60:16. The comforting abundance of v. 11 results from the wealth of the Gentiles, pouring into Jerusalem like a flood.

ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees.--Just as "ye shall suck" goes with the overflowing wadi of wealth, these promises reflect the constant stream of peace. The Lord paints a peaceful, joyful family scene, with the children and mother playing securely together.

⁶ The word תִּי appears only here and in Ps 50:11; 80:14 of small creatures that ruin the fields, a meaning that doesn't fit here. Cognate evidence (HALOT) suggests two different underlying semitic forms, and there is ample evidence for the meaning "breast" in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Arabic. In some cases, the similarity may be, not etymological (cf. Greek τιθοσ and English "teat"), but onomatopoeic, from baby talk imitating the sucking sound of a nursing child.

13 As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in

Jerusalem.--The Lord emphasizes that this peace comes not from Jerusalem herself, but from the Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem as the channel for his blessing on all the earth.

Application: This paragraph, like the end of v. 6 and the emphasis on Zion as daughter and mother throughout the book, remind us of how precious this city is to God. We ought to obey the Psalmist's call (122:6) to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." Be cautious of any system of doctrine that downplays the importance of this place where God has chosen to set his name, and thank God for the coming day when she will rejoice, because "her warfare is accomplished" and "her iniquity is pardoned" (40:2).

14, Contrast

14 And when ye see *this*, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb:--We don't often speak of bones flourishing like the grass. But Hebrew poetry often associates deep pain or pleasure with the bones (chart):

Pro 17:22 A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Job described his anguish,

Job 30:17 My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest.

When the Lord convicted David of his sin with Bathsheba, David prayed,

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

Afterward, when he gave thanks to God for his restoration, he sang,

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.

So we're not surprised when Jeremiah writes, at the fall of Jerusalem,

Lam 3:4 My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones.

Now, when the Lord restores the city, those who love her feel joy deep in their bones.

and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants,--This is the final instance of this name for the Lord's people in Isaiah. It is well to recall how he has used this important term (charts).

- Before Isaiah, it is applied to notable people: Abraham, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, David.
- In the second half of Isaiah, the singular term is used in two ways:
 - Of the nation as a whole
 - Of one distinguished individual who will bear the sin of the people. The last and greatest of these references is Isa 53, is a promise of the redeeming Messiah.
- The NT uses many of these texts to describe the work of the early believers in carrying the gospel, as though the hourglass were widening back out. This idea aligns with Paul's description of the church as "the body of Christ," representing him and carrying out his work.

- Support for this NT application of these texts comes in the third part of Isaiah 40-66, where we encounter the plural term as a description of the righteous.

and his indignation toward his enemies.--Here is the contrast we expect in this verse. God will faithfully care for his servants, but he will bring fiery wrath upon those who oppose him. This warning is amplified in the next paragraph, which focuses on the false worshippers.

15-17, False Worship

We read first of the judgment, then of the conduct that calls forth that judgment.

15 For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. 16 For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.--It is sobering to read of the Lord's wrath against his enemies. Some think that this is characteristic of the God of the Old Testament, and pretend that the Lord in the NT is of a very different character. The data do not bear this out. Consider four testimonies: from the Lord, Paul, Hebrews, and John in the Revelation (chart).

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, **into everlasting fire**, prepared for the devil and his angels:

2Th 1:6 *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; 7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 **In flaming fire taking vengeance** on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, ...

Heb 10:27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and **fiery indignation**, which shall devour the adversaries.

Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 **His eyes were as a flame of fire**, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And **out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword**, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The OT and the NT agree that "*It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

What kind of behavior leads to such violent punishment? The next verse describes it as hypocrisy that pretends to obey God in worship but is defective in its place, its center, and its shallowness.

17 They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves—These are perfectly respectable activities. In fact, they are commanded in the law.

Isaiah 66

“Sanctify yourselves” appears in Lev 11:44 and 20:7 as motivation for keeping the dietary laws and abstaining from pagan worship, respectively. It is one expression of the repeated theme throughout Leviticus, “ye shall be holy; for I *am* holy” (11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; cf. 21:8).

“Purify themselves” refers to the ceremonies they were to undertake when in spite of their efforts to sanctify themselves, they became impure. Twelve of the 20 instances of this form (*hithpael* of טהר) are in Leviticus, all in ch. 14, describing the purification of the leper.

To look at these people, you would think they were the most observant of Jews. Similarly, in v. 3 they offer the various sacrifices commanded in the law (chart). But we saw here that their devotion to “their own ways” made these sacrifices abominable to the Lord. Here too, conformity to outward ceremonies incurs the Lord’s wrath when it is inappropriately motivated.

The Lord calls out three shortcomings.

in the gardens—The first problem is the place of their worship. At the beginning of Isaiah, we read an ominous warning about “the gardens” (chart):

Isa 1:28 they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. 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.

The historical books often describe the “groves” that were central to Canaanite religion, and for that reason forbidden to Israel. The English word “grove” represents the Hebrew אֲשֵׁרָה, which strictly speaking is a sacred pole, but Deut 16:21 shows that these were established by planting trees (the “oaks” of Isa 1:28), and perhaps then later cutting off the branches to leave the bare pole standing.

Deu 16:21 Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees [any tree as an Asherah] near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee.

So in fact “grove” describes what we would see if we were to approach such a sanctuary—a park dominated by sacred pillars. These gardens are the outdoor “high places” against which the prophets inveighed. We saw them in the corresponding paragraph in ch. 65,

Isa 65:2 I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way *that was* not good, after their own thoughts; 3 A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in **gardens**, and burneth incense upon altars of brick;

Application: God loves gardens. He originally planted one as a place for him to enjoy fellowship with Adam. But we have been cast out of the garden, and for us to attempt to set up a garden of our own to replace it is blasphemy. The places that God has ordained for worship always center around sacrifice that acknowledges our sin and God’s provision for it, not an attempt to regain Eden on our own.

behind one tree in the midst,--The second shortcoming is their focal point. There are two ways to read this verse, and both of them give us an interesting insight into how our worship can fall short.

The word “one” in this verse is an instance of a phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible called “*Kethiv-Qere*,” meaning “Write-Say.” The Hebrew scribes carried the Scriptures in their memory as well as on the written page. Sometimes these two disagreed. The manuscript a scribe was copying might have one form, while the scribe had been taught to say something else. In such a case, they would mark the new manuscript with a special instruction: “Write this [because that’s what I found written in the source] but

Say this [because that's what I've been taught to say].”

The difference in this case is whether the word “one” is the masculine אֶחָד (the Kethiv, to be written) or feminine אֶחָדָה (the Qere, to be said) (chart).

Our version follows the feminine Qere in this place (though not always), which also happens to be the reading in the oldest mss we have, 1QIsa^a and 1QIsa^b. In this case, the feminine probably refers to the Asherah pole at the center of the pagan sanctuary. Their worship is centered around an idol, not the Lord. Clearly such behavior is unacceptable.

The masculine also makes good sense. In this case, the reference would be to a person, a priest or other functionary. The people worship as they do because they are following a human leader. This error is somewhat more subtle. In fact, many churches have a designated though unbiblical role of “worship leader.” But our worship to the Lord is to come from our devotion to him, not from following a designated human leader.

Our Lord promised a blessing on those who gather “unto his name” (Matt 18:20, Greek).

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

This invitation is why it is so important for us to remember our Lord each week as he commanded.

Application: Clearly, putting some other god at the center is wrong. Just as importantly, putting a human other than Jesus of Nazareth at the center is also wrong. All the sanctification and purification in the world will do us no good if the focus of our worship is on the wrong god, or if it is motivated by the charisma of a human leader and not by the person of the Lord himself.

eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse,--The third shortcoming is the shallowness of their religion. It does not permeate their daily lives. The word “abomination” שֶׁקֶץ appears 18x in the OT, 11 of these in Lev 11 in describing unclean animals. So he names the general category of unclean foods along with two specifics. For all their worship, when they sit down to eat they neglect God's dietary laws, and eat the things that God forbids.

Application: We should never think that our pious acts at worship somehow blind God to our disobedience in daily life. Man looks on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

shall be consumed together, saith אֲנִי the LORD.--These hypocritical worshippers will receive the judgment outlined in vv. 15-16.⁷

18-22, True Worship from the Gentiles

18 For I know their works and their thoughts:--Most commentators assume that these “works” and “thoughts” reflect the sin of the false worshippers, like the emphasis on “their own way” in v. 3 and “their delusions” in v. 4. (NET translates the missing verb, “I hate their deeds and their thoughts.”) Yet what follows appears to describe blessing, not cursing.

Isaiah is intimately acquainted with his Bible, the Scriptures written before him. That literature would

⁷ The citation formula is the special one with אֲנִי that marks a summary.

have included the Pentateuch and the wisdom books (except for some of the later psalms), as well as some early portions of the historical books (perhaps Judges and Samuel). In all this literature (in fact, in all the OT), only two other places use these two terms together (chart):

Psa 92:5 O LORD, how great are thy works! *and* thy thoughts are very deep.

Pro 16:3 Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.

The Psalmist uses the words of the Lord's thoughts and works, which he adores. Solomon is talking, not about the sinful works and rebellious thoughts of the wicked, but about the mind and actions of someone who is following the Lord. If Isaiah has this verse in mind when he mentions "their works and their thoughts," then he has moved from the wicked to the righteous. Just as God knows the wickedness of those who follow their own desires, he also watches over those who are committed to him, and the following verses describe the favor he shows them.

it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory.--

This appears to be an introductory summary to what follows (chart). Both mention the many nations, their coming, and the Lord's glory.

vv. 19-21 outline a series of four events around the theme of the true worship that the Lord desires. The first two of these have already happened. The other two are yet to come.

19 And I will set a sign among them,--The first event is a sign. Isaiah speaks--much of signs (chart):

- The virgin birth to Ahaz (7:11, 14)
- The children of God given to Messiah (8:18)
- The promised Egyptian sanctuary in the coming kingdom (19:20)
- Isaiah's unusual attire (20:3)
- Promise of crops after Assyrian invasion (37:30)
- Reversal of the shadow on Hezekiah's sundial (38:7, 8)
- Replacement of thorns and briars with firs and myrtles in the kingdom (55:13)

In this verse, the Lord doesn't tell us what that sign is, but it motivates "those that escape" to go to the ends of the world to declare God's "glory among the Gentiles." The Jewish remnant, most notably Paul but other apostles as well, did declare God's glory among the Gentiles, and the NT uses "sign" to describe the event at the center of their message: the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (chart).

Mat 12:38-40 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a **sign** from thee. 39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and **there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:** 40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; **so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**

Mat 16:1-4 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a **sign** from heaven. 2 He answered and said unto them, ... 4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

In both cases, the Lord insists that this is the *only* sign that will be given to the Jews. John also records the Lord's teaching about his passion as a sign, though in a different context:

Isaiah 66

Joh 2:18-19 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What **sign** shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? 19 Jesus answered and said unto them, **Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**

and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.--The second event is that as a result of this sign, somebody goes somewhere to declare God's glory. Several questions suggest themselves.

Who are "those that escape"? Because they preach to the Gentiles, they are apparently distinct from the Gentiles, which means that they are Jews. Yet the Lord does not promise that all Jews will do this, but only "those that escape." The reference is probably to the terrible judgments upon the hypocrites that we have read in vv. 15-17. Those judgments had not fallen in their full form in the first century, but the Lord and his apostles warned the Jews of the coming judgment, and those who turned to him were fleeing that judgment, the first part of which fell in AD 70 (chart).

Luk 21:36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to **escape** all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Act 2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, **Save yourselves** from this untoward [crooked, perverse] generation.

So it is reasonable to see in "those that escape" a reference to the Jewish remnant, those who recognize their Messiah and so avoid the terrible judgments that have fallen on apostate Judaism, and the judgments that yet remain.

Where do they go? We can't recognize all of the names in the list, but we can recognize some (chart).

- Tarshish (LXX θαρσις, not to be confused with Saul's Tarsus ταρσευς), usually identified with Tartessus on the southern coast of Spain just west of Gibraltar. The name is also associated with Sardinia, and with the south-eastern coast of modern Turkey (Cilicia)
- Tubal and Lud are associated with Asia minor, modern Turkey
- Javan points to the islands of Greece.

When does this happen? It is notable that Paul, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," ministered extensively in Asia Minor and Greece, and intended to carry the gospel to Spain as well:

Rom 15:24 Whensoever I take my journey into **Spain**, I will come to you: ... 28 ... I will come by you into **Spain**.

We don't know whether he ever realized this ambition. Acts ends with his first imprisonment in Rome, and there is reason to think that he was released and had a subsequent time of ministry from which no epistles remain. But it is tantalizing to think that he may have been motivated by this text in planning his outreach.

The job was not finished in the first century. The destinations include "the isles [regions] afar off." Our Savior sent his disciples into "all the world," a work that continues to this day.

20 And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy

mountain Jerusalem, saith אָמַר the LORD,--The third event is that the Gentiles who learn of the Lord's glory now bring "your brethren," the dispersed of Israel, back to the land, by every possible conveyance. This event has been prominent throughout Isaiah (chart):

Isa 11:11 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to **recover the remnant of his people**, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

[to servant Jacob:] Isa 43:5 Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6 I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: **bring** my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;

[in comforting Mother Zion:] Isa 49:22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the **Gentiles**, and set up my standard to the **peoples**: and **they shall bring** thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

Isa 60:9 Surely the **isles** shall wait for me, and the ships of **Tarshish** first, **to bring thy sons** from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee.

Spiritually, some Jews have turned to the Lord as a result of Gentile testimony. But the gathering described here is physical, and envisions a reversal of the worldwide dispersion that has resulted from Israel's captivities. The fulfillment of this promise awaits the coming kingdom.

as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.--The bringing of the Jews by the Gentiles is an act of offering by the Gentiles, comparable to what Israel has long done in bringing their offerings to the Lord. Those offerings had to be brought "in a clean vessel," and the Gentiles, now cleansed, are just such a vessel to convey Israel back to the land.

21 And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith אָמַר the LORD.--The fourth event is that the Gentiles are not merely present as worshippers, but take their place in the ranks of those who officiate before him in the millennial temple.

22 For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith אָמַר the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.--In the opening summary of this passage (v. 18b), the Lord looked forward to the turning of the Gentiles. Now he promises that Israel's position as his chosen people will persist into the New Heavens and the New Earth that he will establish after the present order is destroyed.

This verse guards against any notion that the work of physical Israel ends with Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Though the Gentiles lead the return and even participate in the temple ministry, Israel's seed will continue before the Lord.

23-24, No Peace to the Wicked

Isaiah 40-66 falls into three parts, each with its own internal symmetry. The first two end with a reference to God's judgment on the wicked: "*There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.*"

Isaiah 66

(48:22; 57:21). The third ends on the same theme, but expressed in more detail. Structurally, this statement is part of the “true worship” paragraph, or at least closely joined to it by v. 23. The description of the regular worship of the Lord passes directly into a reminder of those who choose not to serve him.

23 And it shall come to pass, *that* from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith אֲמַר the LORD.--The gathering of God’s people to worship him is a common priority in Scripture. We should note **who** comes, **when** they come, and **where** they worship.

Who: The involvement of “all flesh” is something that the prophets have long anticipated:

Isaiah draws his expression that “all flesh shall come” from David:⁸

Psa 65:1-2 Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.
2 O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee **shall all flesh come**.

David also promises,

Psa 86:9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

Zechariah, writing after the return from Babylon:

Zec 8:20 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: 21 And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. 22 Yea, **many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem**, and to pray before the LORD. 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that God is* with you.

When: How often does everybody come to Jerusalem? Isaiah says, “from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another.” Contrast Zechariah:

Zec 14:16 And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem **shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles**. 17 And it shall be, *that* whoso will not come up of *all* the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. 18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that *have no rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Zech 14 emphasizes that this will be an annual event, aligned with the feast of Tabernacles. This is less frequent than the three-times-a-year gatherings commanded under the law (Deut 16:16): Tabernacles, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost. But Isaiah anticipates more frequent gatherings, weekly and monthly. I don’t understand the reason for the difference, or how it would be practical for “all flesh” to

⁸ This is the only earlier text that uses this clause, “all flesh shall come.”

Isaiah 66

convene weekly. (Oswalt II.692 calls the idea of a physical weekly gathering “ludicrous.”) But I’m sure we’ll receive more detailed instructions when the time comes.

Some find the notion of sabbath worship inconsistent with the NT, notably

Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*:

As we have noted before, setting the calendar is a civil function, and having a central sanctuary to which to gather requires a civil manifestation of the people of God. Since the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and until the Lord’s return to set up his earthly kingdom, God has delegated civil functions to unsaved Gentiles. Paul’s instruction is for this period. But Isaiah clearly teaches that in the coming kingdom, the Sabbath (and temple worship) will be restored.

Where: In addition to this centralized worship, the worship of God will be distributed throughout the earth. Isaiah himself prophesies,

Isa 19:19 In that day shall there be **an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt**, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. 20 And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. 21 And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform *it*.

Malachi, a post-exilic prophet like Zechariah, rebukes the priests in the restored temple for the shallowness and hypocrisy of their worship, but promises,

Mal 1:11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and **in every place** incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

So the overall pattern that we anticipate is worship distributed throughout the Gentile world, “in every place,” with periodic returns to the sanctuary in Jerusalem, notably at the Feast of Tabernacles. Truly, in that day,

Isa 11:9 the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Application: In this present age, the temple in Jerusalem has not yet been restored, and we cannot perform the pilgrimages. But we can gather, as Malachi promises, “in every place,” to offer “incense and a pure offering” to the Lord.

24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.--At first glance, this seems a strange note on which to end such a triumphant prophecy. What place does contemplating the damned have in our worship of the Lord?

As often, Isaiah may simply be reminding us of teachings in the Psalms. David wrote,

Psa 58:10 The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. 11 So that a man shall say, Verily *there is* a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

For David, seeing the judgment of the wicked is essential to vindicating the righteousness of God. If his laws are to have any meaning, they must be enforced, and the destruction of the wicked brings him glory just as does the salvation of those who repent.

Similarly, David's seer Asaph recorded,

Psa 73:3 For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ... 13 Verily I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocency. ... 16 When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me; 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end. 18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. 19 How are they *brought* into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when *one* awaketh; *so*, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

It is when Asaph goes "into the sanctuary" that he understands the destiny of the wicked. We cannot fully appreciate our salvation, and God's grace to us, unless we understand his burning wrath against the wicked. The full realization of his kingdom requires not only our Savior's glorious rule from Zion, but also broad recognition of his fury against the wicked.

Notes

Uses of למען שם

למען שמך

Describing the motive of somebody coming to Israel:

- 1 Kings 8:41 Moreover concerning a stranger, that *is* not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country **for thy name's sake**;
- 2 Chronicles 6:32 Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country **for thy great name's sake**, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house;

With imperative, as motive for request:

- Psalm 25:11 **For thy name's sake**, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it *is* great.
- Psalm 79:9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, **for thy name's sake**.
- Psalm 109:21 But do thou for me, O GOD the Lord, **for thy name's sake**: because thy mercy *is* good, deliver thou me.
- Psalm 143:11 Quicken me, O LORD, **for thy name's sake**: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.
- Jeremiah 14:7 O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou *it* **for thy name's**

sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee.

- Jeremiah 14:21 Do not abhor *us*, **for thy name's sake**, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us.

למען שמו

Acknowledgment of God's gracious acts

- Psalm 23:3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness **for his name's sake**.
- Psalm 106:8 Nevertheless he saved them **for his name's sake**, that he might make his mighty power to be known.

למען שמי

Other than 66:5, God's explanation of his own actions; notably Ezek 20.

- Isaiah 48:9 For **my name's sake** will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.
- Isaiah 66:5 Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out said, **for my name's sake**, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.
- Ezekiel 20:9 But I wrought **for my name's sake**, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they *were*, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt.
- Ezekiel 20:14 But I wrought **for my name's sake**, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out.
- Ezekiel 20:22 Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought **for my name's sake**, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth.
- Ezekiel 20:44 And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have wrought with you **for my name's sake**, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

Things that come מציין

Lord's Voice, Wrath, Law

Joel 3:16 The LORD also shall roar **out of Zion**, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD *will be* the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

Isaiah 66

Psalm 110:2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength **out of Zion**: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

Amo 1:2 And he said, The LORD will roar **from Zion**, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

Isa 2:1 = Mic 4:2 for **out of Zion** shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Lord's Salvation, Glory

Psalm 14:7 Oh that the salvation of Israel *were come* **out of Zion!** when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, *and* Israel shall be glad.

Psalm 50:2 **Out of Zion**, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.

Psalm 53:6 Oh that the salvation of Israel *were come* **out of Zion!** When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, *and* Israel shall be glad.

Psalm 128:5 The LORD shall bless thee **out of Zion**: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.

Psalm 134:3 The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee **out of Zion**.

God's People bless him

Psalm 135:21 Blessed be the LORD **out of Zion**, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

Wailing in Time of Judgment

Jeremiah 9:19 For a voice of wailing is heard **out of Zion**, How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast *us* out.

The Call of God

The contrast in the use of verbs of speaking and responding in the case of the wicked (65:12, 66:3) vs. the righteous (65:24) is striking. The wicked do not hear when God calls; the mark of the righteous is not that they do hear when God calls, but that they call upon the Lord.

In fact, the rest of Scripture bears witness that the righteous *do* in fact hear when the Lord calls.

Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Gen 22:11-12 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here *am* I. 12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him:

Gen 22:15-17 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, 16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*: 17 That in blessing I will bless thee,

Isaiah 66

Exo 3:4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I.

Exo 19:20 And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses *up* to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.

1Sa 3:4 the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am* I. ... 6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. ... 8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me.

Believers are “called ones”:

Rom 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called, an apostle, ... 7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called, saints:

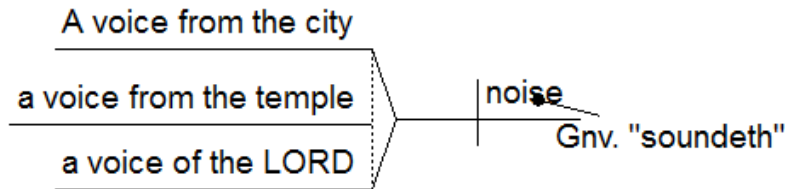
Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace, 16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

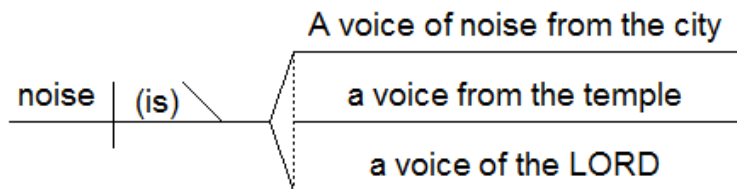
Grammar of vv. 5-6

The grammar of v. 6 is anomalous. There are four possibilities, diagrammed below..

The Geneva Bible seems to take שאון as a verb: “A voyce **soundeth** from the citie.” But the form is not a verb.

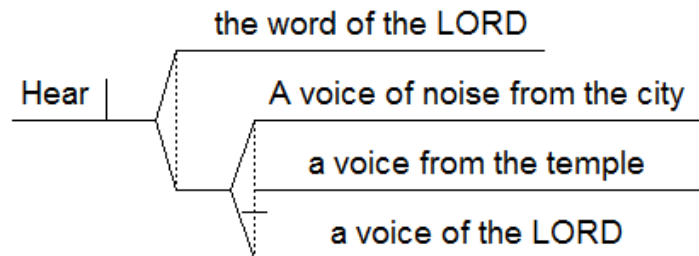


We might take קול שאון as a classifying verbless clause (following the usual order P-S) that successively refines the definition of the noise: “The noise is a sound from the city, a sound from the temple, the very voice of the Lord.”

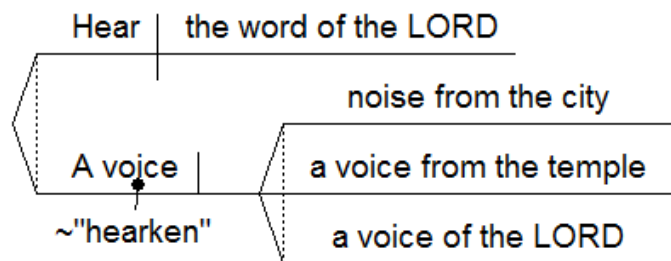


Isaiah 66

We may be intended to carry over the imperative “hear” from v. 5. Then the addressees are the same in both clauses. The servants are invited to listen first to the word of encouragement in v. 5, then to the word of sound of judgment in v. 6. This reading integrates the passage very closely, but it seems to stretch Hebrew sentence structure to have the domain of a verb extend this far. Are there other examples? One would rather expect a repetition of “hear” at the start of v. 6.



In some cases, the word “voice” קוֹל serves as an interjection, “Hearken!” or “I hear.” We see this elsewhere in Isaiah (13:4; 40:3), and throughout the OT (see Joüon 162.e), and this seems the best way to understand the construction here. This reading is grammatically smoother than breaking and resuming the clause in 5a. In this case the hearers are not specified; the prophet calls everybody, servant and sinner alike, to pay attention.



Zion in Isaiah

Throughout, when she is addressed, it is with 2fs pronouns.

Daughter Zion

Six references. Note from 10:32 and 52:2 that the term is identified with Jerusalem.

Bereaved and threatened:

1:8 And **daughter Zion** is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

10:32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand *against* the mount of **daughter Zion**, the hill of Jerusalem.

Restored

Isaiah 66

16:1 Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of **daughter Zion**.

37:22 This *is* the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, **daughter Zion**, hath despised thee, *and* laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.

52:2 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, *and* sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive **daughter Zion**.

62:11 Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to **daughter Zion**, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him.

The Bereaved Widow, 49:14-50:3

Zion divorced by the Lord, her children gone; the Lord promises to restore them, and she marvels where they all came from. Gentiles bringing them back. cf. 11:10-12

Isa 11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The Barren Wife, ch. 54

Barrenness like Sarah; combined with the bereavement of ch. 49 in vv. 4, 6

Isa 54:4 for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

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.

ch. 60

Gentiles bring tribute; Zion sucks the breast of the Gentiles, v. 16! (contrast 66:11, where Zion is the nurse)

ch. 62

cf. vv. 4-5, combining the two tragedies of ch. 49 and ch. 54.

Toward the end, the civil restoration anticipated in ch. 60 also becomes prominent.

Other isolated passages

Commonly, the city is personified as a woman.

In Isa 3, the focus is on the daughterS (plural) of Zion, but the city itself comes into focus at the end of the chapter:

Isa 3:26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she *being* desolate shall sit upon the ground. *Compare the command for her to arise at 52:2.*

Isa 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

Gentiles bringing the Jews back to Zion

Isa 11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up **an ensign for the nations**, and shall **assemble the outcasts of Israel**, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Isa 43:5 Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6 I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: **bring my sons from far**, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;

Isa 49:22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and **they shall bring thy sons in their arms**, and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders. 23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with *their* face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Isa 60:9 Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, **to bring thy sons from far**, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee.

Isa 62:10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people [singular; Israel]; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the peoples [plural; Gentiles].

Isa 66:19 And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, *to* Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, *to* Tubal, and Javan, *to* the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. 20 **And they shall bring all your brethren** *for* an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.

The Lord's Banner in Isaiah

Drawing the nations to judge:

(against Israel) 5:26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:

(against Babylon) 13:2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.

(all nations) 18:3 All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye.

(against Assyria) 31:9 And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire *is* in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.

Drawing the nations to bring Israel back:

11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

11:12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

49:22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in *their* arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders.

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

Other:

30:17 One thousand *shall flee* at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill. *General symbol of something isolated*

33:23 Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey. *symbol of weakness*

מדי...ב...

The combination is unusual. מדי by itself (with a verb) means “as often as.” “From X to X” is usually “X *be*-X,” cf. 1 Sam 1:7,

1Sa 1:7 And *as* he did so year by year שנה בשנה, when מדי עלוטה she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her;

But we do have our expression elsewhere in this sense:

1Sa 7:16 And he went **from year to year** in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

Isaiah 66

2Ch 24:5 And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God **from year to year**,

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