

Essay 10

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Hebrew language students: discuss an interesting feature of the text.

Isaiah 55-62 includes fragments that deserve careful analysis. Chapter 55 continues the theme of righteousness. It is only possible through God's grace (Oswalt 2003, 606). Chapter 55 is an invitation from God to enjoy His grace. Chapters 56-66 synthesize the themes in chapters 1-39 and 40-55: actual righteous living as a requirement for God's servants and righteousness through His grace (Oswalt 2003, 606). Oswalt considers these chapters are the necessary conclusion and climax of Isaiah's teaching. The reader will find literary figures and central terms that merit further study on Isaiah 55-62.

Some scholars have found a chiasmic structure in Isaiah chapters 56-66. Oswalt points out the following division: A Obedient strangers (56:1-8); B Need for ethical righteousness (56:9-59:15a); C Divine warrior (59:15b-21); D Jerusalem, the light of the world (60:1-62:12); C' Divine warrior (63:1-6); B' Need for ethical righteousness (63:7-66:17); A' Obedient strangers (66:18-24) (Oswalt 2003, 607). Constable agrees with this division. He calls the obedient strangers "foreign worshipers," and the chiasmus center, "the eschatological hope" (Constable 2021). This division highlights the relationship between works and grace. It is a recurring theme throughout Isaiah. It is common to find chiasmic forms in oracles and poetic texts. The study of these structures points to the dynamic between the content of the prophecy and not an explicit compositional format.

Throughout Isaiah, the author applied different idiomatic expressions. In Isaiah 58:13, the prophet mentions: "If you turn back your foot from the sabbath" (אם-תָּשִׁיב מִשְׁבַּת רַגְלְךָ). Scholars interpreted this expression in different ways. Constable notes that it means "to turn away from" (Constable 2021). Others point out that it means "to refrain from traveling anywhere on the Sabbath" or "to keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath." The meaning of this sentence must fit into the overall context of the passage. Isaiah warned the reader to maintain the right attitude toward what God had commanded the Israelites to fulfill. In this context, this idiomatic expression means "not breaking the Sabbath."

A relevant feature in the study of these chapters is the use of verb tenses, binyans, and pronouns. They guide the reader to the central theme. Oswalt points out that Isaiah 55:1-7 has a tone of fervent appeal, as those verses use twelve imperative and jussive verbs (Oswalt 2003, 601). The imperative in Hebrew expresses positive commands and does not state prohibitions. In addition, the jussive expresses the speaker's desire, wish, or orders. Scholars translate these verb forms into English with the modals "may" or "let" (Page 2018, 165). In addition, some Hebrew verbs use different binyan to indicate whether the verb is in passive, active, reflexive, or causative voice. Constable mentions that, in Isaiah 55:6, the verb "while he may be found" is "while he lets himself be found" (Constable 2021). It is because the binyan of this verb is "nif'al" and these verbs indicate tense in the passive voice. Constable points out that understanding suggests a divinely determined day of grace and salvation.

God makes His salvation available. However, it will be available for an appointed time.

Pronouns in a written text help the reader identify to whom the author is addressing his message. Isaiah 57:3-13 uses the personal pronoun "you" (אַתָּם) or the possessives "your and yours" more than twenty-five times to point out Israel's errors. Instead, Isaiah 57:15-19 uses "I" and "my" twelve times to focus attention that God will do it (Oswalt 2003, 619). Something similar occurs in Isaiah 59:2-15a. Oswalt notes that this chapter begins with a condemnation of others in the second-person plural (59:2-3), then moves to the third-person plural (59:4-8), but ends with a confession in the first-person plural (59:9-15a) (Oswalt 2003, 629). The change of pronouns throughout chapter 59 from second to first-person plural implies that the prophet included himself within that condemnation. Like everyone else, he cannot produce in his strength the justice that God demands.

As in the previous chapters, Isaiah uses figures to generate an impact on the reader. Isaiah 61:10 mentions that God will have clothed Israel with garments of salvation and wrapped them in a robe of righteousness. Isaiah compares Israel to a bride adorned for her wedding day (Constable 2021). The figure of the bride (כִּלְה) highlights Israel's joy on that day because of salvation. This figure of the marital relationship also appears in Isaiah 62:4. God will call "his wife" (בְּעוֹלָה) the land of Israel (representing Israel). In addition, the verse notes that Israel will no longer be known as "forsaken." These new terms would reflect God's delight in His people and His work of uniting them with their land (Constable 2021). Israel's figure of marriage (God as husband and Israel as a wife) is also usual in the earlier chapters of Isaiah.

Isaiah 62 employs different titles to refer to Israel. Isaiah 62:4 calls her "my delight is in her" (חֶפְצִי-בָהּ). Isaiah 62: 12 states that the nations will call Israel "the holy people" (עַם-הַקְּדוֹשׁ), "Redeemed of the Lord" (גְּאוּלֵי יְהוָה), "Longed for," (דְּרוֹשָׁה) and "City never forsaken" (עִיר לֹא נִעְזְבָה). These new titles anticipate that God will restore His people's relationship with Himself (Constable 2021). Furthermore, the nations will see this reconciliation and Israel's new status. These names will have their fulfillment in the eschatological times.

A word of frequent occurrence in Isaiah is righteousness (צְדָקָה). Oswalt notices a difference in the meaning of this word between chapters 1-39 and 40-55 (Oswalt 2003, 608). In chapters 1-39, righteousness exclusively delineates behavior that conforms to God's statutes. However, in chapters 40-55, righteousness refers to God's acting to deliver His people, despite their sins. Oswalt points out that if Isaiah were to end in chapter 55, the reader might assume that righteousness is impossible for human beings (Oswalt 2003, 621). Chapters 56-66 add more information about righteousness. Isaiah 62:1 draws a parallel between righteousness and salvation. Oswalt points out that this parallelism has two senses (Oswalt 2003, 631). First, it reminds the reader that Israel's righteousness is only possible because of God's saving activity and not because of Israel's merits. Second, the use of both words makes it clear that the only goal of God's saving activity is a righteous life.

The term "high and exalted" (גֹּדֵד וְנִשְׂאָ) occurs three times in Isaiah (6:1, 52:13, and 57:15). Oswalt considers this to be one of the most beautiful statements in Scripture (Oswalt 2003, 620). This way of referring to God emphasizes two characteristics: He is high, and people should exalt Him. Isaiah 57:15 makes a stunning statement about God: This "high and exalted one" dwells in height and holiness, but He also dwells with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit. This verse points to God's closeness not only to the elite of the world (kings, priests, and prophets) but also to the one who suffers and weeps. Another term of study is the relationship of "light" and "darkness" in Isaiah 60:1-3. Oswalt points out that the emphasis on "light" (אוֹר) shows a contrast with Isaiah 59:9 (Oswalt 2003, 641). Where there was "darkness," there would now be light, like the rising sun. This light will come from God's glory and not from Israel. The term "glory" (כְּבוֹד) also deserves detailed study. This Hebrew word connotes what is weighty, significant, and even real (Oswalt 2003, 646). The glory of God in Christ is the very reality of God. This "glory" leads people only to God. His glory is the demonstration of Himself.

Another frequent term in chapters 56 and 58 is "Sabbath" (שַׁבָּת). The Sabbath appears throughout the Old and New Testaments. God required the Israelites to keep this law faithfully. Furthermore, the Israelites were not to take Sabbath-keeping lightly. The Israelites were to have a proper attitude toward the Sabbath and the whole law (Isaiah 58:13-14). God had promised them that if they kept their part of the covenant, He would bless them, exalt them, and they would enjoy the inheritance promised to their forefather Jacob (Constable 2021). Keeping the Sabbath from the heart was synonymous with surrendering to God and rejecting selfish goals. If they kept their part, they would experience personal and national fulfillment and receive God's rewards. It was a promise that God made with His mouth. That is a true and irrefutable promise.

Bibliography

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