

Essay 11

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

Isaiah 63-66 emphasizes the future eschatological glory (Constable 2021). In chapters 63 and 64, Isaiah asked God whether He would not act in the face of Israel's rebellious behavior. Chapters 65 and 66 offer an answer from God's perspective. He would deliver them from their afflictions, but He also expects His people to demonstrate the covenant He has established in their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Oswalt 2003, 703). God longs for humanity to fulfill the goal of life: to enjoy God's glory residing in men and women. Throughout this message to God's people, Isaiah uses literary figures and terms that require conscientious study.

Figures of speech are the most common tools used in prophetic books. Similar to other chapters, Isaiah captured the book's message using them. A metaphor is a figure of speech widely used in this book. It expresses a reality or concept using another that bears a relationship of similarity. Isaiah 63:3 uses the metaphor of the vintage to illustrate the blood of the enemies of the warrior (the Servant of God). He alone had trodden them without anyone's help (Constable 2021). The relationship between the grapes (through the winepress פּוֹרֵה) and the blood is in the vivid image of the color. The grapes will stain the warrior's clothes with blood color. Another frequent metaphor is the woman, as a reference to Israel. Isaiah 66:7-9 describes Zion as a woman giving birth to a son (וְהִמְלִיטָהּ). The image of this fertile woman brings to mind the barrenness and childlessness mentioned in earlier chapters of Isaiah (Oswalt 2003, 695). Isaiah warns that God freely gives real life (fruitfulness) due to humankind's obedience. Isaiah 66:11 exploits this image of a fruitful woman by referring to suckling breasts. A baby does nothing to satisfy its own needs. Likewise, believers must only recognize their dependence and receive what God can provide them (Oswalt 2003, 695).

Another frequent literary figure in Isaiah (and in other books of the Bible) is the synecdoche. This figure uses a part of a group to refer to the whole group or vice versa. Isaiah 63:1 refers to a Warrior who came from Edom (אֲדוֹמִים) victoriously. Edom was Israel's perennial enemy, but here represent all of Israel's enemies (Constable 2021). This form is not unusual in Isaiah since Edom and Moab are taken as synonyms for Israel's enemies in the early part of Isaiah. It is a common synecdoche. Isaiah 66:14 refers to the hand of the Lord (יְדֵי-יְהוָה) as a sign of deliverance, redemption, and power on behalf of His people. The hand of the Lord does not refer that God would use only His hand to help His people but is a way of expressing God's working. Generally, this expression is associated with punishment for evil. In Isaiah 66:14, God would defend His people but show His wrath to their enemies (Oswalt 2003, 696). The use of pronouns to highlight the differences between the audiences Isaiah refers to is frequent in this book. Isaiah 65:13-16 specifies two different groups using the pronoun "you people" (אַתֶּם) and "my servants" (עַבְדַּי). "You" points to those people who want to manipulate God for blessings, while "my servants" refers to those people who seek God for themselves with changed lives (Oswalt

2003, 682). Thus, this pronoun highlights the existence of two groups within Israel. Some people seek Him honestly, and some only expect to receive blessings by living rebellious lives.

Isaiah is the second most referenced book in the New Testament. Just Psalms has more references than Isaiah. However, there are also parallels between Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets. Constable points out that there is a close affinity between Isaiah 66:18-24 and Zechariah 12-14 (Constable 20021). Some scholars consider the Zechariah passage as an extension of these verses in Isaiah. Joel is another prophet that quotes or has references from other minor and major prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Obadiah, and Ezekiel). It is because the prophetic messages have only one Communicator who has sought to make His message known to the world. There is a unique expression in the Old Testament in Isaiah 63:9. The angel of His presence (מַלְאָךְ פְּנִיּוֹ) is the messenger who came from God to deliver His people (Constable 2021). It is the only place in the Bible where this title appears. Constable points out that it may refer to an angel but probably refers to the second person of the Trinity, the principal agent of salvation according to the New Testament (Constable 2021).

Some expressions in Isaiah require a more detailed analysis to understand their meaning. Isaiah 64:7 mentions that no one calls on the name of God or "lay hold of Him" (לְהִחְזֹק בְּיָהוָה). Oswalt points out that to "lay hold of God" means to be in a vital relationship of dependence and self-renunciation (Oswalt 2003, 672). Another relevant expression appears in Isaiah 63:10. Isaiah refers to those who were rebellious and who "grieved his holy Spirit" (וַעֲצִבוּ אֶת־רוּחַ קֹדֶשׁוֹ). This verse helps the reader understand that "grieving the Holy Spirit" is synonymous with rebelling against God (Constable 2021). In addition, only Isaiah 63:10 and Psalms 51:11 mention that God's Spirit is "holy" (קֹדֶשׁ). God's holiness is incompatible with rebellion. A person who displays disobedient behavior cannot walk in God's will nor show His holiness throughout his life.

On the other hand, Isaiah 65:4 uses another expression that requires further analysis. This verse narrates behaviors contrary to God's law (such as eating pork). In addition, it mentions "sitting in the graves" (הִי־שֹׁבִים בְּקִבְרֵי־יָם). Constable points out that sitting in the tombs and lodging among the rocks seem to be rituals of the cult of the dead (necromancy). In this way, someone can contact the spirits of the dead by spending the night in cemeteries (Constable 2021). The Old Testament considers these practices an abomination (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). The idolatrous behavior of the people also led them to worship other deities. Isaiah 65:11 mentions that some of the people had forsaken God and had set the table for Fortune (דָּג) and offered libations to Destiny (מְנִי). Constable notes that Fortune was an Aramaic god, and Destiny would be related to the goddess "Manat" of Arabic mythology (Constable 2021). Some have pointed out that these gods would be known in the Greek world as Jupiter and Venus. Israel was not only a people versed in necromancy but also idolatry.

Isaiah 65:2 aptly portrays the human condition without God. They are stubborn people (סוֹרְרִים), walking in evil ways (הֵהָלְכִים הַדֶּרֶךְ לֹא־טוֹב) and after their own thoughts (אַחַר מַחְשַׁבְתֵיהֶם). These three ideas describe in a brief compendium

what the human problem is (Oswalt 2003, 680). Instead of humanity being obedient to the Creator, it has rebelled and devised other forms of life that are not good. Any human behavior that attempts to replace God's model is "not good" and leads further down the path of rebellion and self-sufficiency. Isaiah will continue to focus on this "rebellious" character of Israel. Isaiah 65:3 mentions that Israelites provoked God by offering sacrifices to Him in gardens (גִּנֵּה) and on bricks (לִבְנֵה). Gardens were unauthorized places to offer sacrifices. Bricks were unauthorized materials for an altar (Constable 2021). However, God's rebellious people wanted to do things their way. This way of acting contrary to God showed an open denial of His laws and will.

Isaiah 66 describes the future in terms of "new heavens and a new earth" (הַשָּׁמַיִם הַחֲדָשִׁים וְהָאָרֶץ הַחֲדָשָׁה). In this new condition, death will have no power. Furthermore, God promises to bring forth the nation of Israel (Isaiah 66:9). This new Israel is not a political one, as many people have thought, but a "new Israel" that will be born one day when they believe in Jesus Christ (Constable 2021). Also, there will be a sign amid His people. With this sign, the survivors (of His people) will go to other nations to publish God's glory among them. Some biblical scholars have identified these nations with Spain, Libya, Turkey, Russia, and Greece. However, the point is that this message will reach the ends of the earth (Constable 2021). Although not entirely, God's message is getting various nations today. It is a reminder that God's words will be fulfilled in His time and ways.

Bibliography

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Oswalt, John N. *Isaiah. The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003.