

c. Sin exposed and confessed (58:1–59:13)

See the main outline (p. 461), where this section corresponds to A² and C¹, and also the outline on p. 463 and the general remarks in each place.

58:1–14 is a call to the people of God to recognize their sin and rebellion; 59:1–13 shows that there are those who have received and can exercise the divinely created gift of repentance of which 57:18b–19 spoke.

A critique of religion (58:1–14)

The exposing word of God (1) comes to people who are very religious (2) but find no satisfaction in their religion (3). Somehow, God is not responding to them. Put bluntly, however, the religion which is exposed here rests on Canaanite rather than Yahwistic principles. The essence of Canaanite religion was to put the gods under pressure to perform their functions (hence, for example, what we would call orgiastic rites designed to stimulate Baal to acts of fertility). This is the spirit which verse 3 reveals. They act *as if they were a nation that does what is right* (2c), but the motive is to pressure the Lord into response, and hence the dismay (3) that so much afflictive piety has attracted no divine attention! The essence of Israelite religion, however, is response. Not doing things to influence the Lord but doing them to obey him; not works looking for reward but faith acting in obedience. For this reason, Isaiah counterpoises the desperate fasting of verses 2–3 with the joyful keeping of the Sabbath in verses 13–14. For in every sense the Sabbath brings us to the heart of the matter. It is a real test of ‘heart’-religion to give a whole day to God and to do it with delight. The Sabbath is, first, a call to consecrate life’s timetable to God, to adopt a style for six days which allows the seventh day to be a day apart (Ex. 16:22–30; Nu. 15:32–36). But verses 13–14 go beyond getting the timetable right; they are dominated by the word *delight* (13c, 14a). The heart is so captivated by God that the day set apart is a joy. This is the reason for the Sabbath emphasis in chapters 56–66; it is the symbol of a whole life and heart devoted to the Lord.

Theologically and practically, chapter 58 belongs with 1:10–20. The two passages are the same in content, emphasis and movement. In both, it is the unholy alliance between religious punctilio and personal shortcoming that is condemned and, in particular, the assumption that it is possible to be truly religious and socially indifferent. Smart puts it exactly: ‘One of the unique features of the Biblical faith is that there is no genuine relation with God that is not at the same time a relation with the brother.’¹⁷

J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

A¹ The voice of rebuke (1)

B¹ A fast without a blessing: the false exposed, the afflictive emphasis (2–5)

C Contrast: the Lord's chosen fast and its blessings (6–12)

a¹ Social emphases (6–7)

b¹ Personal and spiritual rewards (8–9b)

a² Social emphases (9c–10b)

b² Personal and spiritual rewards (10c–12)

B² A feast with a blessing: the true commended, the joy emphasis (13–14a)

A² The voice of promise (14b–d)

The distribution of words throughout the poem supports this analysis. The contrasting voices (A¹, A²) both refer to 'Jacob', the former exposing the sin of the house of Jacob, the latter promising the inheritance of all that was promised to Jacob. B¹ and B² use the $\sqrt{hāpēš}$ group of words in the same sense as 'self-pleasing' (2af, 3c, 13bf). The contrast between them is supported, on the one hand, by the fasting (3a, 4ac, 5a) and humiliation emphasis (3c, 5b) and, on the other, by the Sabbath (13ac) and delight emphasis (13c, 14a). In the central C section, a¹ and a² both refer to the *yoke* (6ce, 9c), use the verb $\sqrt{\check{s}ālah}$ ('to send'; 6d set; 9d pointing) and refer to feeding the *hungry* (7a, 10a); and both b¹ and b² refer to *light* (8a, 10c) and use the divine name Yahweh (8d, 9a, 11a).

The voice of rebuke (58:1)

The purpose of the poem is to produce a conviction of sin. According to 57:19, repentance is a creative work of the Lord, but the proclamation of his word is the means he uses to create penitents (whom we shall meet in 59:1–13). *Shout it aloud/Cry out/Proclaim with the throat* is a unique expression emphasizing the real and true use of the human voice, just as verse 14d will stress that the resulting proclamation is the *mouth of the LORD*. *The trumpet* ($\check{s}ōpār$) was prominent in the Sinai narrative (Ex. 19:16, 19; 20:18). The prophetic voice here is the voice of the law, purposing to expose *rebellion* (*pešā'*; 53:5, 8) and *sins* (*hattō'ōt*, actual or specific shortcomings; 6:7; 53:12).

A fast without blessing: the false exposed (58:2–5)

By the initial *For* (an explanatory conjunction) we are alerted to the fact that though people's religious practice appears sound (2a–f), there is that about it which, properly

evaluated, is really the rebellion and sin with which verse 1 charges them. Therefore, the renderings *seem eager* (2bf) and *as if* (2c), though not literal, are correct interpretations. What the first stanza (2) thus hints at, the second (3a–4b) develops by exposing the motivation of their fasting (3a–d), the way they use the fast day (3ef) and its outcome (4ab). The final stanza (4c–5) rejects such fasting as spiritually fruitless (4cd) and, because it is only an outward show (5a–d), unacceptable to the Lord (5ef). The three stanzas are, respectively, of six, six and eight lines.

2 Their religious practice seemed praiseworthy. It was assiduous (*day after day*), committed (*seek; cf. 31:1; 55:6; 65:10*) and devoted (*me holds the emphatic position—‘It is me they seek’*). The verb *seem* ($\sqrt{hāpēš}$; cf. the noun *hēpēš* in verses 3e, 13cf) does not itself cast any doubt on their spiritual reality; it simply says that they ‘wish’ or ‘are pleased to’ (cf. 53:10). To all appearance their delight is a model which all true religion should reproduce, for they wish to *know* (2b), to do (2c), to persevere without compromise (2d), to learn (2e) and to practise the presence of God (2f). *Commands/judgments*’ are what the Lord as their king ‘judges’ to be right for them in any given situation. *Just decisions/judgments of righteousness*’ are decisions regarding earthly behaviour which reflect heavenly principles of right. *They seem eager for God to come near to them/delight in the nearness of God*’ refers to the use of the ordinances whereby they ‘come near’ ($\sqrt{qārēb}$; cf. its use in Lv. 1:2) to him, or his resultant nearness to them.

3 What seems to be the product of ‘delight’ (2bf) is actually a calculated policy aimed at producing a heavenly reaction (3a–d). The only fast commanded by law was the Day of Atonement (Lv. 23:26–32), which was a ‘holy convocation’, a time of self-abasement, free of work, a ‘Sabbath of solemn rest’ (*šabbaṭ-šabbāṭōn*). But plainly more is involved in the questions asked here. Doubtless in the formalistic religious atmosphere indicated in 1:10ff. there was much of the Pharisaic spirit of Luke 18:12¹⁸ in which the element of ‘delighting’ in the Lord by responsive obedience changed into the performance of meritorious works. Verses 3e and 4a both commence with *heyn* (‘Look’/‘Behold’), calling

¹⁸ Westermann notes Zc. 7:3 as indicating a post-exilic emphasis on fasting, but the passage has little to do with the problem Isaiah is tackling. The questioners there are asking not what fasts to keep but what fasts may be abandoned. The passages have in common only the thought of fasting in which the Lord finds nothing to approve, but this problem is endemic in all religious practice at any period.

attention respectively to the practical ([3ef](#)) and ‘spiritual’ ([4ab](#)) outworking of their religious day. It does not invalidate a religious act if people find pleasure in what they are doing, but they were using a fast day as if it were a bank holiday—rather as nowadays Sunday has become a second Saturday in each week. What was a day off for the employer was an ‘exploitation’ or ‘oppression’ of his staff. We are not told how this worked out; but in contrast to ‘pleasure’ on the one side, there was exploitation on the other: $\sqrt{nāḡāś}$ is the ‘taskmaster’ verb of [Exodus 3:7](#). *Workers* (*‘aṣṣāb* from $\sqrt{‘aṣab}$ ‘to be in pain’ and thus stressing the toilsomeness of their work) is an otherwise unused noun.¹⁹

4ab ‘Behold’ *your fasting ends in quarrelling* is (lit.) ‘you fast for quarrelling ...’, and only here is the verb ‘to fast’ followed by the preposition ‘for’. The irony is heavy: since their fasts always end in a fight, surely that is what they must be ‘for’! What was intended to influence God obviously brought out the worst in the human spirit, for one can easily imagine the edginess which would result if a basically unspiritual family spent the day together in increasing hunger! The positive side of these charges is that religious exercises prove their validity by being productive of caring ([3f](#)) and personal holiness ([4ab](#)).

4c–5 The final stanza is the Lord’s explicit rejection of their religious exercises. Fasting which is a calculated prompt directed at the Lord ([3a–d](#)), a day of self-pleasing to the disadvantage of others ([3ef](#)) and provocative of the worst elements in the human spirit ([4ab](#)) brings no spiritual result ([4cd](#)) because it does not go beyond the formal act ([5a–d](#)); it has no currency in heaven ([5ef](#)). *And expect your voice to be heard* is (lit.) ‘in order to make your voice heard’. The fast of the Day of Atonement was not explicitly linked with prayer, but fasting and prayer are natural and precious partners, the latter providing the purpose of the former, and the former creating the necessary detachment and concentration of mind for the latter. The words *only ... only* are interpretative additions, but rightly. To *humble* oneself was part of the discipline of the Day of Atonement. [Leviticus 23:27, 29](#) uses the same words as Isaiah (*‘innāḥ nepeš*) but no directions were given explaining this. The people of [Isaiah 58](#) had ritualized the whole exercise into the bowed head, sackcloth and ashes. The phrase *like a reed* exposes the formalism of the whole exercise; it was as automatic and uncomprehending as a reed before a wind. *Sack-*

¹⁹ For ‘*aṣṣābīm* in the sense of ‘taking pains’, work that requires effort.

cloth is mentioned thirty-three times in the Bible as an adjunct to self-abasement before the Lord (e.g. [Ne. 9:1](#)) and understandably so, for we are created as a body-soul unity, and bodily postures and disciplines can indeed enhance reverence and humility of mind and heart. But sackcloth is not commanded in the law and no ‘aid’ is immune from degenerating into a performance.

The Lord’s chosen fast and its blessings (58:6–12)

The message of this central section of the poem is clear from its a-b-a-b formation (see the outline above). The measure of identity of wording between verse [6a](#) and [5a](#) establishes a basis of interpretation. In verse [5a](#) it was not fasting as such that the Lord did not choose but the use made of the time which the fast day created. So in verse [6a](#) the Lord is not rejecting the practice of fasting (*contra* Smart) but is insisting (see Westermann) that a fast day validates itself by being filled with works of social amelioration (*cf.* the link between false religion and social wrong in [Am. 2:8](#)). Hence it is care for the needy ([6–7](#), [9c–10b](#)) which proves itself to have currency in heaven (*cf.* verses [4cd](#), [5ef](#)) by bringing personal blessings ([8–9b](#), [10c–12](#)).

6–7 These verses urge that the objectives of a fast day are the creation of a just society ([6](#)), the meeting of individual needs ([7a–c](#)) and domestic care ([7d](#)).

6 To *loose the chains of injustice*/‘fetters of wickedness’ points to the need to labour for the abolition of every way in which wrong social structures, or wrongdoers in society, destroy or diminish the due liberty of others. To *untie the cords of the yoke* refers to the need to eliminate every way in which people are treated like animals. The *oppressed* are those ‘broken’ by life. It is not enough to work for amelioration; the objective is also to secure the positive values that have been lost. Instead of bondage and brokenness there should be freedom—not only the loosening of the yoke’s harness but also the breaking of the yoke itself, whether of injustice ([6b](#)), inhumanity ([6c](#)) or inequality ([6d](#)).

7 By contrast, this verse reaches out to individual cases. Where the objectives of verse [6](#) are inevitably long-term, there are always things immediately to hand, e.g. providing food, shelter and clothes through direct personal involvement. *Share your food*/‘break your bread for’ suggests actually serving food to the hungry; *provide ... with shelter* is (lit.) ‘bring home’ or ‘bring indoors’ and refers to the opening of the home; *when you see ...* speaks of the immediate responsiveness to need. There is also the very practical observation that there is a whole field of care within the home and family, for it is possi-

ble to be socially sensitive and domestically shortsighted. There is an identical use of *turn away*/‘hide yourself’ ($\sqrt{\text{`ālam}}$) in [Deuteronomy 22:1](#) (‘ignore’).

8–9b This section describes the consequent personal blessings. The complaint of verse [3a–d](#) is cancelled promptly and vigorously: *Then* ([8a](#), [9a](#)) is an emphatic conjunction. To *break forth* ($\sqrt{\text{bāqa'}}$) is to ‘erupt’ like flood-waters (cf. [Gn. 7:11](#)). Four blessings are promised. First, a new beginning to life (*light will break forth like the dawn*); secondly, personal restoration or *healing* ($^a\text{rūkā}$; used in [Je. 30:17](#) of new flesh growing over a wound, and in [Ne. 4:1–2](#) of ‘repair work’); and thirdly, security, with *righteousness* as an advance guard and *glory* as a rear guard. (See [52:12](#) for the picture and [Rom. 13:12](#) and [2 Cor. 6:7](#) for the thought.) The Lord provides righteousness ([53:11](#); [54:17](#)), the believer wears it as armour. *The glory of the LORD* implies the Lord in all his glory, his glorious guardian presence. The fourth blessing is free-flowing fellowship with the Lord ([9ab](#)). The Hebrew has significant emphases: ‘You shall call and the Lord himself will answer; you shall cry for help and at once he will say ...’.²⁰ *Here am I*/‘Behold me’ is the response of a waiting servant (cf. [Gn. 22:1, 11; 1 Sa. 3:4ff.](#)).

9c–10b These verses return to the proper use of the fast day, concentrating now in a more pronounced way on personal behaviour and involvement. The reference to *the yoke* ([9c](#); *of oppression* is an NIV addition) recapitulates verse [6](#) but relates it now, not to the fact that society at large may be structured in unjust, inhuman and unequal ways, but to personal behaviour such as may impose burdens on others. *The pointing finger* is not found elsewhere, but [Proverbs 6:12ff.](#) shows that ‘acting by innuendo’ is what it means—the nod, wink or hint, the unattributable rumour. In a word, it is possible to have a very developed social conscience ([6](#)) but to be personally burdensome and mischief-making. Typically, *malicious talk* is singled out for disapprobation. *If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the oppressed* is ‘If you grant²¹

²⁰ The word order emphasizes ‘the LORD [himself]’. ‘At once’ reflects the fact that the verb is co-ordinate in form, implying that calling and replying are inseparable.

²¹ The qal of $\sqrt{\text{pūq}}$ means ‘to totter’ ([28:7](#)); the hiphil, ‘to totter’ ([Je. 10:4](#)), ‘to meet/get’ ([Pr. 3:13; 8:35](#)) or ‘to let meet, grant’ ([Ps. 140:9; 144:13](#)). The NIV expresses the sense of the Hebrew well. The jussive form here, however, puzzles Driver (155 Obs). [GKC 109h](#) exemplifies jussives in the protasis of a conditional clause ([Pss. 45:12; 104:20](#); [Is. 41:28](#). hence here is is the equivalent to a repeated ‘*im*’ (‘if’)). There is no need to follow [BHS](#) in altering $w^e\text{tāpēq}$ to $w^e\text{tāpīq}$.

your soul to the hungry and satisfy the soul of the downtrodden'. 'Soul' is often metaphorical for 'want, desire', hence 'If you grant to the hungry what you want for yourself and satisfy the wants ...'. The picture is one of a determined and sacrificial commitment, going beyond even the demands of verse 7.

10c–12 This second series of blessings corresponds to verses 8–9b. First, there is clear guidance in life (10c–11a). The imagery of *light* here is not related to 'dawn' (the picture of a new beginning, as in verse 8a) but to *darkness*, and therefore to the perplexities of life, the occasions where we do not know which way to turn. But such darkness will be replaced by constant divine guidance (11a). Secondly, there is the blessing of divine supply in time of need. *Sun-scorched land* (*ṣahṣāḥât*) is found only here but $\sqrt{sāḥāh}$ means 'to be white' (La. 4:7). The cognate adjective means 'shiny, smooth, bare' (Ezk. 24:7) or 'unprotected' (Ne. 4:13 <7>), and there is another noun (*s̄hīḥâ*) meaning 'dry, barren land' (Ps. 68:6 <7>). The thought is not what satisfaction the Lord will give but *where* he will give it—when everything is at its bleakest and least promising. But the divine supply is not only external, it is also an inward strengthening of the *frame*, the gift of durability.²² Thirdly, there are the blessings of fresh resources coming from outside, like water into a *garden*, and from inside, like waters from a *spring*. Fourthly, there are the blessings of restoration and continuance. *Your people* is 'those from you', i.e. those yet to be born. This is a promise of continuance and blessing reaching into coming generations (Ex. 20:6; Pr. 20:7) and extending from recovery of past disaster (*ancient ruins*) to provision for future well-being (*Streets with Dwellings*). Those who wish a post-exilic date for these passages find here a reference to rebuilding after the return from Babylon, but 1:6ff. indicates the relevance to Isaiah's day.

A feast with a blessing: the true commended (58:13–14a)

The Sabbath was not a fast but a feast day. Isaiah counters the negativism of his day (2–5), not only with the positive works and promises of verses 6–12 but by setting the

²² $\sqrt{ḥālaṣ}$ does not appear elsewhere in the causative form found here. Its qal means 'to uncover, draw off, withdraw' (Dt. 25:9; La. 4:3; Ho. 5:6). Its commonest form is the passive participle, 'stripped' (and therefore) 'equipped for war'. If this is the proper background, then the meaning is 'to make ready, equip'. But if it is related to the noun *ḥālāṣayim* ('loins'), then its basic idea is 'strength' and hence 'to make strong'.

feast over against the fast. The Lord is more interested in enjoyment of his blessings through obedience than in self-imposed deprivations. The heart of true religion is to conform to what God has ordained. See p. 479 for the place of these verses in the poem as a whole. Isaiah's prescription for using the Sabbath is surprisingly negative and non-directive as compared with his very positive stance about the proper use of a fast day. The reason is possibly that as distinct from fasts, which individuals might impose on themselves or which might be publicly decreed from time to time, the Sabbath is part of the Decalogue and Isaiah did not wish to go beyond the negatives stated there. It is the nature of a negative command to leave more freedom of movement than a positive command ever can. The emphasis in verse 13a–d is on the recognition of the Sabbath as holy and honourable, and in e–f, on the protection of the Sabbath from improper activities. *Keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath*/‘turn back your foot from the Sabbath’ is equivalent to ‘watch your step on the Sabbath’ (cf. Ec. 5:1). In a word, the Sabbath calls for careful, thoughtful living. It is not a day for *doing as you please*, because it is *my holy day, the LORD’s holy day* and ‘worthy to be honoured’ (*honourable*). Neither, however, is it a burden because, truly understood, it is an ‘exquisite delight’ (as KB translates *delight*, ‘*ōneg*’). It is a day, therefore, for reverential, thoughtful use coupled with sweet joy. The determining factor is whether this or that activity defiles or honours the holiness of the day, whether it is a mere indulgence of a personal pleasure (*doing as you please*) or preference (*going your own way*) or whether it conduces to ‘sweet delight’ in the Lord and his ordinances. *Speaking idle words*/‘speaking a word, talking talk’ is found elsewhere only in Deuteronomy 18:20, where it is used of a word without divine authorization, a mere human word, hence here, ‘chit-chat’.

14a This verse adds yet another blessing with an emphatic *then* (cf. verses 8a, 9a). A true use of the Sabbath brings delight in the Lord himself. *Find your joy* is a reflexive form of the verb which furnished the noun ‘exquisite delight’ in verse 13c. The Lord’s ordinances, truly used, are means of grace, avenues to the Lord himself.

The voice of promise (58:14b–d)

Matching the ‘throat’ of the prophetic herald (1), the *mouth of the LORD* speaks the final word. In contrast to the accusation of rebellion (1), it is a promise of blessing (the ‘and’ in *and I will cause ...* should be treated as explanatory). A twofold blessing is promised: confidence in the face of life (on *ride on the heights of the land* cf. Dt. 32:13; 33:29; Hab.

[3:19](#)) and enjoyment of covenant blessings. *Cause you ... to feast*/‘make you eat’ expresses personal appropriation and satisfaction. *The inheritance of your father Jacob* is all that the Lord promised ancestrally. According to verse [1](#), it was the descendants of *Jacob* who sinned but now it is these sinners who enter into covenant benefit. The initial ‘For’ before *the mouth* should be restored. See [1:20](#), where (as here) the affirmation of the divine word comes in the context of ‘obeying and feeding’. This further cements the link between these chapters which has been evident throughout (see p. [479](#)).

Accused, guilty, penitent, helpless ([59:1–13](#))

The purpose of [58:1–14](#) was to expose rebellion and sin (verse [1](#)). [59:1–13](#) follows in sequence, containing further charges ([1–8](#)) followed by a confession both of guilt and helplessness. In particular, verses [1–2](#) find their background in [58:3–4](#). The people fasted but without succeeding in attracting divine attention or obtaining a hearing. But the problem was neither that the Lord heard but was unable to act ([59:1a](#)), nor that he could not hear ([1b](#)) but that sin had raised a barrier between them and their God ([2ff.](#))

Thus, [59:1–13](#) elaborates and applies chapter [58](#) and does so in a three-part movement. Verses [1–4b](#) are couched in second person plurals, levelling direct accusations; verses [5–7](#) are a third person plural description, and verses [9–12](#) are a first person plural confession. Verses [4cd](#), [8](#), [13](#) are summary statements concluding their respective sections. The whole is written in paired lines, well reflected in the NIV.

Accusation ([59:1–4](#))

The fault to which [58:3–4](#) called attention does not lie in the Lord but in rebellion and sin, which have caused a separation ([2ab](#)) and alienation ([2cd](#)). In particular, there are personal sins of action ([3ab](#)) and speech ([3cd](#)) and sins in the public domain ([4ab](#)). In summary, life lacks a solid foundation (*rely*) and personal integrity (*lies*); its ambitions and motivations (*conceive*) and its effect and outworking (*give birth*) are alike wrong ([4](#)).

[1](#) Surely is ‘Behold’/‘Look’. Arm should be ‘hand’, the symbol of personal action, ability and resource. It is not as if the Lord heard but lacked the strength or sufficiency to respond. Ear denotes both capacity and readiness to pay attention.

[2](#) On *iniquities* (*āwōn*) and *sins* (*hattāt*) see [58:1](#). Sin first opens a gulf (*separated*) and then creates a divine alienation (*hidden his face*). *You from your God*/‘between you and your God’ shows the unnaturalness of the situation; where there should be oneness there is division. The *hidden ... face* is the personal dimension of the situation. The rift is

significant of the offence given to the Lord. The traditional punctuation of *his face from you* is correct as against Watts', who would transfer *from you* to the next line (*i.e.* 'so that he will not hear from you') for which he cites inexact evidence. The Lord is not simply offended by the sin, he is offended at the sinner. *So that he will not hear* is an absolute statement ruling out the possibility of a hearing until the sin barrier has been removed.

3 On hands ... stained with blood cf. 1:15. *Stained*/'defiled' means rendered unfit for God; sin leaves a mark and a pollution. Isaiah pairs 'hands' and 'fingers' in 2:8; 17:8. Here, however, *hands* is not *yād* but *kap̄*, the palm or 'grip' of the hand (if anything, this is a more specific accusation of personal involvement). *Fingers* denotes direct, detailed touch with the minutiae. *Blood* is the damage done to others, *guilt*/'iniquity' the inner corruption and defilement of heart from which specific wrongdoing flows. *Lips* and *tongue* is an example of duplication for emphasis and is meant to cover every aspect of speech. On sins of speech see 53:9. (The only other reference to *lips* in Isaiah is 6:5; on *tongue* cf. 3:8; 32:4; 35:6; 57:14.) *Lies* (*šeqer*) is specific falsehood; *wicked things* ('āwēlā, 'deviancy') is a wider word, denoting general untrustworthiness of speech, both what is not right and what is not seemly.

4 The first two lines of this verse, continuing the catalogue of the sins which have alienated God, may refer to corruption in the legal system, but this is not absolutely certain in 4a. To 'call for justice' is (lit.) 'to proclaim in righteousness' (*qārā' bē*); on this idiom see 41:25. The most likely meaning here is 'to proclaim righteousness', *i.e.* the ordinary person taking a public stand for what is right and for righteous principles. On *pleads his case with integrity* see 5:22; 29:21; Am. 2:7; 5:12. The point here is not, however, corruption on the bench but the misuse of the legal process for illegal ends. The final pair of lines in verse 4 consist of four infinitives absolute, summarizing the people's life-style as 'a trusting in emptiness and a speaking valuelessness, a conceiving mischief and a bringing forth trouble', *i.e.* 'no trust in the Lord, no speaking the truth, pregnant with mischief, producing trouble'. On *tōhū* (*empty arguments*) see 24:10. Isaiah is not reporting what people thought or thought they were doing but is spelling out the implications of any trust other than that of relying on the Lord. They may have come to a thought-out position of trusting the government, trusting the collective security of armed, defensive alliances, trusting the fundamental good sense of all people of goodwill; but the fact is that all trust, except that reposed in the Lord, is trusting that which is without

rhyme, reason or reliability. *tōhû* is a state of flux. *Lies* is not the same word as in verse 3c but the broader *šaw'*, the spirit of unreliability, the whole aura of disregard for the truth. On *trouble* ('āmāl) see 53:11, and on *evil* ('āwen, 'wrong' and the trouble it causes) see 55:7.

Description (59:5–8)

The presentation changes to the third person and is an objective statement of the situation, both figuratively (5a–6b) and in reality (6c–7). The opening lines (5ab) continue from verse 4d and the section is rounded off by a summary statement (8). The opening (*hatch ... hatched*) and closing (*peace ... peace*) verses are palistrophic, providing formal unity to the section.

5a–6b The first pair of lines offers the two illustrations, *eggs* and *web*. The following pairs of lines develop each illustration in turn. Both illustrations are of a 'product', the first harmful to others (5acd) and the second useless to the maker (5b, 6ab). *Hatch* is in the perfect tense denoting fixed character; *spin* is in the imperfect, denoting habitual conduct. There is a constant factor in us as sinners which is a menace to others and which makes us continually ineffective in what we do for ourselves. Sin is a contagion and a frustration. In the terms of the metaphor, *eats* is to share in the fruits of sin and, therefore, to share in its condemnation (*die*). The breaking²³ of the egg may refer to preparation for cooking and eating or it may stand for opposing sinners and their ways. Either way the change from *vipers* (5a) to *adder* (5d) (the translations are somewhat tentative) probably implies that what starts bad always gets worse, whether in the hands of friend (eating) or foe (breaking). *What they make* is (lit.) 'their deeds' (as verse 6c). 'Weaving a web' is a metaphor for making plans (30:1) and inadequate covering (28:20). The sinner's best efforts always leave him or her unsatisfied, unprovided-for.

6c–7 It is typical of Isaiah to explain his illustrations, and the next three pairs of lines are devoted to this. The opening word *Their deeds* forms a 'domino' link (lost in the NIV, see immediately above) with verse 6b. *Evil deeds* ('āwen, 'deeds of trouble-making') is as in verse 4d. The emphasis on the effect of the sinful life continues. The sinner is person-

²³ *hazzûreh* is the passive participle of √ *zûr* ('to press, wring', Jdg. 6:38; 'crush', Jb. 39:15). GKC 74d notes feminine forms 'with weakening of the toneless ā to e' in 1 Ki. 2:36–42; Zc. 5:4. See also GKC 80i and BHS on *zurâ*.

ally involved (*hands, feet, rush, swift, thoughts*) and others are hurt (*violence, innocent blood, ruin and destruction*). *Violence* (*ḥāmāṣ*) is disruptive behaviour (cf. 53:9). *Rush into sin/‘run to evil’* is a general word denoting any sort of wrong. The *innocent* are those who do not deserve this treatment. *Thoughts* is (lit.) ‘appraisal’, thought leading to formulating a plan (cf. 55:8–9). These thoughts are *evil* (*’āwen*; as above): what they plan spells trouble for others. *Ruin* (*šōd*) is a general word for wreaking ‘havoc’; *destruction* (specifically ‘breaking’) leads to the breakdown of society, the breaking up of all that is ordered and settled.

8 Like verse 4cd, this verse looks back over the stanza and passes a general comment. The bracketing idea of *peace* provides the topic. Sinners do not ‘know’ peace (8a) and their life-style (*roads*) cannot lead them to peace (8d). On *peace* see 53:5. *Way*, as it often does, means life-style. *Know* is knowledge as a matter of personal, intimate experience. *Justice* (*mišpāṭ*) is a very versatile word (cf. 42:1); here it probably refers to the ‘rule’ or guidelines by which life is directed. There is no subservience to the ‘judgment’ or mind of God. *They have turned them into crooked roads* is ‘they have twisted their paths for themselves/to their hurt’. Refusing God’s ‘rule of law’, they have made a tangled mess of their lives and the responsibility is wholly theirs. *No-one who walks in them will know peace*, i.e. the future holds no prospect of *peace* (peace with God, harmonious society, personal fulfilment) because the road cannot lead there. *In them/in it* is a particularizing singular, meaning in each and any of the twisted paths.

Confession (59:9–13)

The first person plural indicates that there are those who have come to repentance. The secret work of divine enabling (57:19a) and the effect of the preaching of God’s law (58:1–14) has brought them to the place where they are prepared to confess the *darkness* (9), helplessness (10), bitterness (11ab), hopelessness (11cd) and personal guiltiness (12–13) of sin. In verses 9–11 the stress is on need; in verse 12 on guilt. The distinct grammatical forms (infinitives absolute) of verse 13 (see below) indicate that it is (like verses 4cd and 8) a summary concluding the stanza.

9–11 These verses are marked off by an inclusio *justice is far from us* (9a) and *deliverance ... is far away/‘salvation ... is far from us’* (11d). The balance between *justice* and *righteousness* in verse 9ab and *justice* and *deliverance/‘salvation’* in verse 11cd shows how we are to understand these terms. *Justice* is not ‘the just society’ as such but the rule of

God which will set everything to rights; *righteousness* has the same meaning as in 56:1, the coming act of God in which he will vindicate and display his righteousness and fulfil all his righteous purposes. As Smart says, ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ are ‘synonyms to denote God’s day of redemption’.²⁴

9 The initial *So* (‘al-kēn, ‘therefore’) connects with verse 8. The evidence provided by the present disease and symptoms of sin proves that the longed-for act of God has not yet happened. By the use of the first person plural Isaiah continues to identify himself with his people in their sin, as in 6:5 (*cf.* 1:9; 2:5; 8:10; 9:6 <5> ; 32:15; 33:21–22; 53:6; 63:7; 64:6—7:12). The metaphorical use of *light* and *darkness* is special, though not unique, to Isaiah (*cf.* 2:5; 5:20, 30; 42:6, 16; 45:7; 51:4; 58:8, 10). It is used of the Messiah in 9:2 <1> ; 49:6; 60:1, 3 (*cf.* 10:17; 13:10; 30:26; 60:19–20). The Messianic light is an idea peculiar to Isaiah among the prophets, and in the prophets the Lord as light is elsewhere found only in *Micah* 7:8. In the present passage *darkness* is a reference to the darkness of this world, the setting in which the Lord’s people live. It is unrelieved, so that even *brightness* (a ‘flash’ or ‘gleam’ of light), any small sign of God at work, would be welcome. But they look and find none.

10 The problem, however, is deeper, for the metaphor also describes a condition of human nature, the darkness of *the blind ... without eyes*. Blindness is a misfortune which might be corrected, but to have no eyes is, humanly speaking, an irreversible condition, which can only be mended by an act of new creation. Hence, it matters not what external circumstances are like, *midday* and *twilight* are all one. In *We grope ... feeling our way*/‘we grope ... groping our way’ the same verb occurs twice. We stumble because the defect is in us, not in our circumstances. By comparison, others are *strong* (*ašmannîm*).²⁵ Sin, however, debilitates, and the Lord’s people are pale shadows of what they would like to be (*like the dead*). They are ‘blind’ as to vision and clarity for guiding life, ‘stumbling’ as to constancy and stability of life, ‘dead’ as to vitality and ‘get-up-and-go’.

11 *Growl* (✓ *nāham*, as 5:29–30) is an angry growl, for the believers are angry at the havoc sin makes of God’s world and of their own lives, and frustrated over their help-

²⁴ Smart, p. 254.

²⁵ ‘*ašmannîm* is not found elsewhere, but *KB*’s curt ‘unexplained’ is a surprising lapse. ✓ *šāmēn* means ‘to be fat, healthy’ (*cf.* *mišmannîm*, ‘strong, healthy, vigorous’; 10:16). Hebrew has many nouns formed with prosthetic *aleph* as here, hence ‘the strong, vigorous’.

lessness in the face of sin. The holy groaning of the Lord Jesus ([Mk. 7:34](#); [Jn. 11:38](#)) at the woes of the world is more than we can aspire to, but Paul overheard the groaning of a frustrated creation ([Rom. 8:22](#)), and in this we share ([Rom. 8:23](#)). Isaiah got there ahead of Paul. The expression *moan ... like doves* is used elsewhere of Hezekiah, sick unto death and waiting and hoping for the act of God that brings life and health ([38:14](#)). So believers mourn and sorrow in their sin.

12 A court scene is envisaged with the Lord as judge and sin as the prosecutor. On *offences/‘rebellions’* see [53:5](#); [58:1](#). *Sins* are specific lapses. The plural noun is linked with a singular verb *testify*, with an individualizing effect: ‘our sins—each one testifies ...’. An initial ‘For’ (omitted by the NIV) explains why our sins can testify so effectively: we have no defence to offer because the accusation is true! They are *ever with us* as constant companions, and we can only *acknowledge* that they are ours (lit. ‘and we know our iniquities’); we are personally and intimately united with them. Tellingly, the ‘interior’ word *iniquities* (‘āwô̄n; [53:5](#)), used of the deviant state of the heart, appears here instead of a repetition of ‘sins’ (the outward lapses) parallel to verse [12b](#). We speak from ‘inside information’.

13 Like verse [4](#), this verse uses infinitives absolute to pass a generalizing comment on the stanza, and, like verse [4](#), it stresses sins of speech and uses the metaphor of ‘conception’. The judge before whom we stand ([12a](#)) is the one against whom our *rebellion* and *treachery* have been directed ([13a](#)). *Rebellion* (as in verse [12a](#)) is the wilful refusal of the rule of the Lord; *treachery* is a disavowal of our pledged loyalty to him. *Turning our backs on our God/‘from going after our God’* is the abandonment of his company. As a young bride, Israel was known for ‘your going after me in the wilderness’ ([Je. 2:2](#)) but this has been reversed. The tongue (*fomenting* is lit. ‘speaking’) makes outward what is inwardly true in the heart. Sin infects our whole being. *Oppression* is the social crime of mistreating those over whom we are in a position to exert power, but it is also a sin to be confessed before God. There cannot be a true relationship with the Lord that is not at the same time a genuine relationship with people. Equally, to offend against other people is to sin against God. *Revolt* is arrogant departure from God. *Uttering lies our hearts have conceived* is ‘conceiving and muttering from the heart words of falsehood’. Before the judge we cannot admit that our conduct has been at fault but plead the purity of our hearts, for it is in the heart that the lie came to birth.

B. The coming of the Anointed Conqueror

(59:14–63:6)

The scene is set for the next movement in Isaiah's great presentation by the words, 'The LORD looked ... saw ... was appalled ... put on righteousness ... salvation ... vengeance' (59:15c–17c). The promised coming of 'righteousness' (56:1) is about to take place, but our understanding of what is implied in this has been enriched by chapters 56–59 and their description of the state of the Lord's world-wide people threatened and oppressed by opponents, harassed and defeated by sin. Hence the Lord sets himself to the task of salvation on the one hand and vengeance on the other. The heart of 59:14–63:6 is, however, the emergence of an unexpected individual. In 59:21 a divine covenant with *them* is promised but at once the passage proceeds to address *you* (masculine singular) as endowed with the Spirit and word of the Lord and sharing this endowment with *your* (masculine singular) 'children'/'seed'. Careful exegesis must cater for this remarkable change from plural to singular. But further, an individual speaking in his own person appears at 61:1. He cannot be broadly identified with the Zion people for he comes confessedly to comfort Zion's mourners (61:3). Who is he? And who is the first person singular who speaks in the beautiful poem in 61:10–62:7 and the figure of awesome majesty in 63:1–6? Taking account of all this, the section can be mapped as follows:

59:14–60:22 61:1–9 61:10–62:12 63:1–6

Preface: situation (59:14–15a) and reaction (59:15b–20)

An Anointed One
Covenant-mediator
(59:21)

An Anointed One
Good news at the time of salvation

The work of salvation and righteousness gladly undertaken

The day of vengeance and the year of

	and vengeance (61:1–3)	(61:10–62:7)	salvation (63:1–6)
Glorious Zion	Glorious Zion	Glorious Zion	
The gathering people from all the world, the servant nations (60:1–22)	Resident people: the Lord's priests, the servant nations (61:4–9)	Secure for ever, the peoples gather, the Saviour comes (62:8–12)	

The individual of 61:1, like the Servant, is endowed with the Lord's Spirit (42:1; 59:21; 61:1), and both have a priority ministry of the word (42:1–4; 49:1–2; 59:21; 61:1) and specifically a word of comfort (50:4; 61:2–3). Further points of identity will emerge below. In addition, the four Songs of the Anointed One have the same pattern as the Servant Songs.

- a. In each case the first and fourth Songs are reports, and the second and third are testimonies.
- b. In each case the first Song is about status and task, the second about ministry and objective, the third about personal commitment and the fourth about the completion of the work undertaken.
- c. In each case the anonymity of the individual in the third Song is the same; only in the context of the whole is the place of the third Song fully recognized.
- d. Even the unobtrusiveness of the individual's entrance on the scene in the first Song in each series is the same; we find ourselves suddenly thinking in 'Servant' or 'Anointed One' terms.
- e. Each Servant Song was followed by a 'tailpiece' appropriate to the Song; here, the first three Songs are followed by oracles on the glory of Zion, the particular sort of confirmation of the Anointed One's task and message suited to chapters 56–66, where the wonder of the coming Zion is the 'story-line'. It could even be that 63:7–66:24 is an extended tailpiece to the final Song (63:1–6), bringing, as it does, the 'glorious Zion' theme to a grand climax.

In all, matching the King in chapters 1–37 and the Servant in chapters 38–55, there is the Anointed Conqueror to provide the Messianic focus of the concluding chapters of

Isaiah. A consistent picture emerges. The first two Songs are linked by the theme of Spirit and word; the second, third and fourth by vengeance, salvation and favour, and this in turn integrates them into the total section. In 59:15c–20 the Lord himself dons garments appropriate to the task of salvation and vengeance. Then the Anointed One appears, endowed with Spirit and word (59:21), and his coming dates the advent of the day of favour and vengeance (61:2). It is on him that the Lord puts the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness (61:10) so that he may make righteousness sprout for the nations (61:11) and salvation for Zion (62:1). Finally, the wearer of the robes announces the completion of the work of vengeance and redemption (63:1–6).

a. Situation and reaction: divine commitment to salvation and vengeance (59:14–20)

The four stanzas of this prefatory poem (see the outline above) are of almost equal length: the first two of six lines each, the last two of seven.

A¹ The situation: moral collapse (14–15b)

B¹ Divine reaction: horror and commitment (15c–16)

B² Divine action: righteousness, salvation, vengeance (17–18)

A² The new situation: world-wide, Zion-centred (19–20)

The poem tells a coherent story. The stanzas have a ‘domino’ link: ‘evil’ (15b) and ‘displeased’ (15c) are both from $\sqrt{rā'a}$; ‘righteousness’ joins verses 16d and 17a; and the reference to ‘the islands’ (18e) is amplified by the west-east motif in verse 19ab.

The situation: moral collapse (59:14–15b)

The conjunction *So* introduces a summary of the situation reached at the end of the preceding description and confession. This is how things are: moral absolutes have disappeared (14ab), public morality has collapsed (14cd) and individual moral character is under threat (15ab). *Justice* and *righteousness* is moral practice arising out of moral principle. The initial ‘For’ before *truth*, introducing evidence substantiating the foregoing, should be restored. *Truth/integrity, trust, probity has stumbled in the streets, i.e. has collapsed in public life. Honesty* is straightforwardness, straight dealing. *Truth is nowhere to be found* possibly means ‘integrity/personal probity has gone missing’. There are forces of immorality at work constituting a threat to those who would even as much as stand aloof from what is wrong (cf. Am. 5:13).

Divine reaction: horror and commitment (59:15c–16)

These verses describe the divine reaction from which this whole section (to 63:6) arises. In typical biblical anthropomorphism the Lord is depicted as moving to a decision as if he had been taken by surprise that things had come to this pass and that there was no-one to deal with it. Thus we are enabled to see sin as God sees it and to see ourselves in the helplessness he knows besets us. He was *displeased*/‘it was evil in his eyes/he took it badly’ and *appalled*/‘devastated/felt desolate’. To *intervene*/‘interpose’ means to stand between people and the consequences of their moral collapse (cf. 53:12). His *arm* is the Lord’s personal power and resource (cf. 51:9; 52:10; 53:1). The *righteousness* of the Lord here is his changelessly righteous character whereby he must be true to what he is and faithful to what he has pledged. When his arm works *salvation* it does so because he has promised to save his people and it acts in ways that satisfy the divine righteousness.

Divine action: righteousness, salvation, vengeance (59:17–18)

Clothing is always a metaphor for character, commitment and enduement for the task. *Righteousness*, *salvation*, *vengeance* and *zeal* are all aspects of the divine nature. When the Lord dons this clothing he is publicly revealing what he is. But he is also declaring what he intends to do and that he is able to do it. It is a work which will display and satisfy his righteousness, save his people, repay his foes and be carried through to completion by the driving motivation of divine zeal (*qin'â*; 9:7 ‹6› ; 26:11; 37:32; 42:13; 63:15). The idea of *vengeance*¹ is fundamental to this section of Isaiah. As we noted, it is a main idea left undeveloped in the delineation of the King and the Servant. There must, some day, be a final settlement between the Lord and all who oppose him. It will be done in absolute justice: *According to what they have done*. *Wrath* is the burning hostility of the divine nature to sin; *retribution*, the exactness with which wrath is applied. On *islands*, earth’s remotest bounds, see 11:11; 24:15; 40:15.

18 This is a delightful poem in its own right. One can imagine Isaiah jotting it down because it ‘just came to him’ and then incorporating it wholesale in a more extensive oracle as here. Its inclusio gives a very rounded feel to the stanza:

¹ In verse 17c the MT says ‘he put on garments of vengeance as clothing’. The NIV seems to join those, like BHS, who omit *tilbošet* is not found elsewhere cannot conceal the fact that it is a perfectly understandable and acceptable noun.

According to desert, so he will pay²

Wrath to his adversaries, desert to his enemies

World-wide what they deserve he will pay

The new situation: world-wide, Zion-centred (59:19–20)

In contrast with the arrogant opposition to divine standards evidenced in the opening stanza (14–15b), reverence for the Lord will wrap the whole world, but it will come about through the advent of a *Redeemer* in *Zion*. In other words, the performance of the particular work (redeeming *Zion*) secures a world-wide result. The NIV reflects the currently favoured understanding of verse 19cd, the Lord acting like a pent-up flood suddenly released and whipped to a storm by a driving wind. The picture is attractive and suitable. It involves a tiny change (one vowel point) in the MT, and a question mark must be placed alongside the translation *drives along*. This form of $\sqrt{nûs}$ occurs nowhere else and ‘to cause to hurry’ is a possible meaning. The opening words as they stand, however, more naturally mean, ‘When an adversary comes like a stream ...’. ‘Adversary’ is the same word as in verse 18c and this suggests that it should have the same meaning here. As to the remainder, *nôs^esâ* (*drives along*; see above) could be from $\sqrt{nâsas}$, which is derived from *nêš* (‘a banner’). In Psalm 60:4 <6> and Zechariah 9:16 it means ‘to use or wave as a banner’. A possible translation is, therefore, ‘When an adversary comes streaming in, the Spirit of the Lord lifts a banner against him’. This could be a proverbial saying used discursively here. The ‘adversary’ in question is all the opposition of sin and sinners ranged against the Lord and his people, but the Spirit turns to the attack, reducing the whole world to reverence and bringing redemption to *Zion*. No translation here is free of difficulty; each possibility is apt. On *Redeemer* (*gô’ēl*) see 35:9. *Repent of their sins* is ‘turn from rebellion’ (see 1:27–28; 57:18–19a). The mighty act of redemption works morally through repentance. On ‘rebellion’ (*peša*) see 53:5.

b. The covenant mediator (59:21)

Two items in this verse come without forewarning: the *covenant* which the Lord grants to *them*, and the covenant mediator, the singular *you*, through whom the promised blessings of the divine Spirit and word are secured for endless generations. The situation, however, is parallel to the covenant references, equally unheralded, in 42:6; 49:8;

J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

[54:10](#); [55:3](#). All these are directly related to the Servant and his work. According to [49:8](#) and [54:10](#), it is through the Servant that the people of Jacob/Zion enter into the blessings of restoration and peace; according to [42:6](#) and [55:3](#), blessings are covenanted world-wide through the Servant. The singular *you* thus stands in a Servant position. Divine action has secured a world-wide reverential people and a company of penitents in Jacob, and there is a person whom we may call the Anointed One, for the Lord's Spirit is upon him, through whom their relationship with the Lord is eternally secure. Like the Servant ([53:10](#)), those to whom he secures these covenant blessings are his 'seed'. The emphatic pronoun, *As for me*, underlines divine commitment. The covenant does not rest on human wish or need but on divine determination. *My covenant* is as [54:10](#). It is the Lord's because it is his idea that there should be a covenanted relationship and because it contains nothing, whether promises or stipulations, except what is his. *Them* are the redeemed penitents of [59:20](#) and so, implicitly, the world-wide company of [59:19](#), whom we shall see (in chapter [60](#)) coming to Zion. *Says* is in the perfect tense, 'the Lord has affirmed', denoting a settled matter. *My Spirit* and *my words* are, respectively, the Lord's life and the Lord's truth. The Anointed One partakes of the divine life and lives under the divine truth, and what he enjoys he holds in trust to share with his 'seed'. Though endowed with Spirit and word, the emphasis, as in [61:1–3](#), is on the possession and ministry of the word. This divine word will not depart, *i.e.* it will remain the continuing mark of the Anointed One and of ongoing generations. *Children*/‘your seed’ and *their descendants*/‘your seed’s seed’ link not only with [53:10](#) but reach back to [Genesis 22:18](#) and further back to the ‘seed of the woman’ in [Genesis 3:15](#) (*cf.* Zion’s ‘seed’ in [54:3](#) and the Spirit-endowed ‘seed’ in [44:3](#)). The double affirmation, *says the LORD* (see above), within such a brief space is very emphatic.

c. The coming glory: the Lord’s city, the universal city and the consummation of the Abrahamic blessing ([60:1–22](#))

As so often in Isaiah, the shape of this poem is its message. It consists of ten stanzas (all except one consisting of eight lines), five on each side of the pivotal statement in verse [12](#) that the nation which does not serve Zion will perish.³ This is bracketed by stanzas focusing on the vision of the nations serving ([10–11](#)) and subservient to ([13–14](#)) Zion,

³ See Wade and Cheyne.

building its walls (10a) and bowing low to it (14a). Thus, the poem centres on the Abrahamic theme that those who bless him will be blessed and those who curse him will be cursed (Gn. 12:3; 27:29). The coming glorious Zion is the consummation of the worldwide purposes of God. The remainder of the poem ripples out from this point in concentric circles:

A¹ The Lord, the light of Zion (1–5)

a¹ The city of light, magnet to the world (1–3)

a² Zion's response to the gathering nations (4–5)

B¹ The new status of the nations: materially and spiritually accepted by the Lord (6–7)

C¹ World expectations met in the Lord (8–9)

D¹ The serving nations: the Lord's compassion to Zion (10–11)

E Zion, the key to world destiny (12)

D² The submissive nations: their recognition of Zion (13–14)

C² Zion's needs met by the Lord (15–16)

B² The transformation of Zion, materially and spiritually (17–18b)

A² The Lord, the light of Zion (18c–22)

a² Zion's response to the Lord's blessings (18c–20b)

a¹ The city of light, possessor of the world (20c–22)

Did anything lift Isaiah's heart or excite his literary genius quite as the vision of the coming Zion did? The cadences of chapter 60 recall 2:2–4; 4:2–6; 25:6–10a; 26:1–6; 35:1–10; its view of the incoming world rests on 45:14–25; 49:16–26 and on the climactic passages (19:23–25; 23:18; 27:12–13) within the panorama of chapters 13–27. It is important, too, to recall the 'new Jerusalem' of [Revelation 21](#). In both places there is visionary material of the same order. The gold and silver, along with all the wealth of the nations, is intended to create the right impression of gloriousness. Both Isaiah and John entertain the same hope of the city of God wherein dwells righteousness.

The Lord, the light of Zion (60:1–5)

The first two stanzas (1–3, 4–5) are linked formally by the double imperatives of their opening lines, *Arise, shine* (1a), *Lift up ... and look* (4a). Zion is summoned to enter into the light that is hers and then to observe and react to the nations as they gather to the

same light. In verse 1b *rises* ($\sqrt{zārah}$, ‘to flash/gleam’) forms an inclusio with verse 3b *dawn* (*zeraḥ*), and each stanza ends with a reference to *nations* (3a, 5d).

1 Isaiah is the only prophet who uses the metaphor of ‘light’ to any notable extent.⁴ In Jeremiah it occurs only once (13:16; cf. Ho. 6:5; Am. 5:18, 20; Mi. 7:8–9). When the Redeemer has come to Zion, gathered penitents (59:20) and appointed a covenant mediator to share the Lord’s Spirit with them, it is not just that they are bathed in light but that they are irradiated, inwardly charged with new, outshining life. (On *shine* cf. 1 Sa. 14:27, 29, where Jonathan ate honey and ‘his eyes brightened [“shone”’].) This subjective experience has an objective basis, *for your light has come*.

2 The initial ‘For’ should be restored, as this verse provides an explanatory background. This is not merely a Zion experience, it is aimed at a world need (2ab), which is met by the Lord’s ‘rising’ ($\sqrt{zārah}$; see on verse 1a), the breaking out of the Lord’s light, in Zion. The Lord’s *glory*, i.e. the Lord in all the glory of his person and majesty, will appear and will then magnetize the nations (2:3; 49:7gh; 55:5) out of darkness into *your light ... your dawn/brightness*. Two Old Testament themes meet here. First, regarding salvation, what the Lord does for Zion he does for the world. The particular work is world-wide in significance, the world is saved in the salvation of Zion. Secondly, while missionary outreach is not unknown in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 4:5–8, Joshua 2:10 (Rahab) and 2 Kings 5 (Naaman) speak more typically of the magnetic quality of the Lord and of the people among whom he is found. *Darkness* constitutes both the circumstances of life and the experience of people, but the solution lies in what happens to *you*. The experience of the Lord’s people is prior and privileged but not exclusivist.

3 *Nations* and *kings*, the two aspects of organized life—the ruled and the rulers, signify total response. They also figured in the work of the Servant (49:7; 52:15). Here also is the fulfilment of the universal call issued in 55:1.

4 The start of this verse is identical, word for word, with 49:18a in a parallel context. *All, your sons* and *your daughters* are emphatic—the nations, as well as the children of Zion, join in this great homeward march in which distance is no barrier (*from afar*) and frailty (*carried/nursed*), no hindrance. To confine a prophecy like this to the return from Babylon is to fail to listen to what Isaiah is saying. He looks for a world-wide regathering (involving even sea travel, see verse 9).

⁴ 2:5; 5:20; 9:2¹; 10:17; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4.

5 The sight of the great procession will hearten Zion, who will be radiant ($\sqrt{nāhar}$, ‘to beam’; Ps. 34:5 6). This reaction is explained by her recognition (verse 5c begins with ‘For’) that all is for her enrichment. *The wealth/‘abundance’ on the seas* is possibly an allusion to lands which can be reached only by water. *Sea* can, however, be used metaphorically of all that opposes the Lord’s rule (51:10; Ps. 93) and hence former enemies becoming glad tributaries may be meant here. *Be brought* is ‘turned [over] to’ ($\sqrt{hāpāk}$; as in La. 5:2; Zp. 3:9). Since Isaiah is thinking of the future in city terms, the gathering of the world into the embrace of the people of God is naturally seen in pilgrimage and tribute motifs. The reality is the winning of the nations by the gospel and the gathering of all into the heavenly Zion when the Lord Jesus returns.

The new status of the nations, materially and spiritually accepted by the Lord (60:6–7)

In what terms do the nations gather? On their side they come ‘telling the good news of the Lord’s praises’ (6e); on the Lord’s side, he fully accepts their offerings (7c) and their gifts (7d). *Midian, Ephah, Sheba, Kedar and Nebaioth* are names assembled impressionistically to create the sense of a world-wide surge to Zion. *Midian* is in the far south, *Ephah* to the east of the Persian Gulf, *Sheba* in the deep south, *Kedar* and *Nebaioth* to the east in the northern reaches of the Arabian desert.

6 On *Midian* cf. Judges 6:1, which will have been in Isaiah’s mind. The former dreaded spoiler is now the welcome worshipper. *Proclaiming* is ‘telling the good news’ ($\sqrt{bāśar}$; 40:9). The nations do not come as mere porters of Zion’s children but as converts to the Lord in their own right and as his ‘evangelists’.

7 Likewise, their flocks are *accepted as offerings*, not in the sense of Ezra 6:9–10, where a Gentile ruler provided animals for sacrifice by Israel, but in their own right as partaking of the benefits of the altar. The Lord is ready to take their gifts to *adorn my glorious temple/and the house of my beauty I will beautify*. Two different words are used for the broad idea of ‘glory’ in this chapter. The $\sqrt{kābēd}$ group (1–2, 13), where the idea is ‘weight’ and hence ‘importance’, and the $\sqrt{pā'ēr}$ group (7, 9, 13, 19, 21), where the idea is ‘beauty’. Respectively, they express the glory that impresses and the glory that attracts.

World expectations met in the Lord (60:8–9)

The new stanza brings a fresh thought. The nations who come submissively (4–5), joyously (6) and with acceptance (7) find their natural home (8ab) and the fulfilment of

their longings (9a) in the Lord (9e) and in his beautified city (9fg). We stand, as it were, on a headland to watch the approaching fleet (9b); they come with the speed of flying clouds (8a) and the naturalness of homing pigeons (8b).

9 Surely is ‘For’. On *islands* see 59:18. *Look to me*/‘wait expectantly for me’ ($\sqrt{qāwā}$) has the same thought as the synonymous verb in 42:4c. Consciously or unconsciously, the longings of the nations can find fulfilment only in the God of Israel. They do not come ‘contributing insights’; there is no thought that their religion is good enough for them or that everyone finds in his own gods his own way to heaven. They come rather to the truth about the Lord, *to the honour*/‘for the name’, i.e. to what he has revealed about himself (cf. 2:3). They are ready to submit to the God of another people, *the Holy One of Israel*. This is the meaning of their subservience, the necessary and inevitable submission of the evangelized to the evangelist, his message and his God. They are moved by the attractive *splendour*/‘beauty’ (see verse 7) with which he has endowed his city. If Tarshish (2:16; 23:1) is in Spain, then Isaiah matches this westward look with the eastward look of verses 6–7, but in any case sea travel is added to land travel to complete the picture of a world-wide gathering.

The nations serve Zion (60:10–14)

This is the heart of the poem (see the outline above). The emphasis in verses 10–11 (the serving nations) is on building the city; in verses 13–14 (the subservient nations) it is on beautifying the sanctuary.

10 *Foreigners* is ‘the sons of the foreigner’ (note the inclusio, *the sons of your oppressors*, in verse 14a). The incorporation of ‘the sons of the stranger’ (the same words) was part of the opening vision of this sequence of prophecies (56:3, 6). Having announced the ideal, Isaiah is working his way to its realization. If the words *rebuild* and *serve* suggest menial status, we are missing the point. They are rather evidence of a true zeal to play a citizen’s part now that they are citizens. *Rebuild your walls* is as much a metaphor in connection with Isaiah’s visionary Zion as the gold of Revelation 21:18. It stands for commitment to all that makes the city secure and strong. *Serve* ($\sqrt{\text{šārat}}$)⁵ is the verb of levitical service (56:6; 66:21). *Though*/‘For’ in my anger gives another reason why for-

⁵ The form ‘serve you’ in verses 7 and 10 involves adding the pronominal suffix to a *nun paragogic*. GKC 60e notes twelve passages where this occurs (e.g. Jb. 19:2; Pr. 1:28).

eigners and their kings are found among Zion's citizens. According to verse 3 they came because Zion was alight with the glory of the Lord; according to verse 9e they came 'for the name of the LORD', the revelation of the Lord to be found in Zion. Verse 3 is pictorial, verse 9 is general, verse 10 is specific. This is the light of the Lord, this is the revelation of his name: he was angry but he turned to compassion (lit. 'For in my anger I struck you and in my favour/acceptance I have had compassion on you'). God's anger was real (*I struck you*). *Anger* (*qeṣep̄*) is the explosion of anger (cf. 34:2; 54:8). The nations could look at Zion and judge the nature of its God (Dt. 29:22–27; Je. 22:8–9). But the Lord's passionate love restored them to his favour. 'My' *favour* (*rāšōn*) is translated *accepted* (lit. 'for acceptance') in verse 7. *Compassion* (*✓rāḥam*) is used of the surging, emotion of love (54:7).

11 Constantly *open*⁶ gates are sometimes a picture of total security from threat (Zc. 2:4–5), but the reason here is the ceaseless stream of those bearing gifts. *Their kings led in triumphal procession*/‘and their kings led along’ could mean ‘led as captives’ (cf. 45:14), a vigorous statement of the rightful submission of the incomer. Equally, however, the abbreviated expression could mean ‘with their kings escorted’, coming as being in their own right kings, yet Zion’s willing subjects.

12 This verse is the dark pivot of the whole poem. Zion really is the key to international destiny, the final form of the Abrahamic system (see pp. 493f.). To enter is to be blessed; to stand aloof is to perish—understandably so, for Zion alone is the place where divine wrath has become divine compassion. In *the nation* [*haggôy*] ... *it*/*'the nations'* [*haggôyîm*] *will be utterly ruined*, the word typically describes those outside the pale of the people of God. It is not their alien status, however, which condemns them but their attitude to Zion, *i.e.* whether they are drawn to the Lord’s light (3), his name (9) and his love (10). Both nouns, the singular and the plural, are emphatic, stressing the status from which they may be saved and which, if they hold to it, will be their ruin.

13 The analogy of Solomon’s temple lies behind the picture, recalling how Solomon enrolled the aid of Gentile Sidonians because nothing but the best would do for the Lord’s house (1 Ki. 5:2–9). *Adorn* is ‘beautify’, as in verse 7. *My sanctuary* is not used, as

⁶ *Stand open* is the piel of the verb, and the assumption that a passive form is required makes *BHS* alter to the niphil. The form in the *MT* is supported by *Q^a* and is found in 48:8 and *Song 7:12–13* with a passive meaning.

often now, in the sense of a place of asylum, but is *miqdāš*, a ‘place of holiness’. The *my* signifies that it is holy because of its holy inhabitant ([1 Ki. 8:12–19](#)). *The place of my feet*, i.e. footstool, is where the transcendent and holy God touches earth ([Ps. 99:1; 132:7](#); [Is. 66:1](#); [La. 2:1](#)).

14 The thought of the subservience of the nations has been to the fore since verse [10](#), but here the stress is more on reversal of roles. In order to disabuse our minds of all thoughts of triumphalism on the one side and of enslavement on the other, we need the reminder that in this verse, as in all similar verses, Isaiah is stating the truth within the political terms dictated by the metaphor of the city. Here, very properly, those who seek citizenship must needs come humbly and if, as here, their former behaviour requires it, with extreme submissiveness. The reality this expressed is that of glad submission to the truth and recognition of the place due to those who have been its trustees and ministers. The literary form of the first half of the verse is the same as [41:11–13](#). *Oppressors* is ‘those who humiliated you’; the former ‘top dog’ takes second place. Only a triumph of grace, sketched in verses [3, 9–10](#), could achieve this. For it is not Zion as such that produces this readiness for a changed status and mind; it is the recognition that this is the *City of the LORD ... of the Holy One* (cf. verse [9](#)). It is when the Lord in his holiness is present among his people, and manifestly so, that the world is magnetized.

Zion transformed by the Lord ([60:15–18b](#))

These two stanzas belong together topically, as they both deal with the transformation of Zion and are formally linked in that each begins with *taħat* (*Although you have been/instead of your being* in verse [15](#) and *instead* in verse [17](#)). In verses [15–16](#), Zion is transformed in experience, with three items of rejection (*forsaken, hated, no-one travelling*) followed by three items of transformation (*pride and joy, milk, Saviour*). In verses [17–18b](#) Zion is transformed in material and spiritual circumstances, the base replaced by the best ([17a–d](#)) and society renewed from the leadership down ([17e–18b](#)). Point by point the Lord unravels the dark web of the past and makes all things new.

15 *Everlasting* expresses continuance in time; *all generations*, continuance in experience.

16ab This is a lovely palistrophe: ‘And you will suck the milk of nations; and the breast of kings you will suck’. The leading idea, emphasized by being placed first and last, is the actual enjoyment of the very best of loving, personal care and nourishment.

Milk is fat, rich cream, the best, as in ‘a land flowing with milk ...’. *Breasts* signify intimate, loving maternal care and self-giving. Such a transformation of relationship between Zion and the erstwhile ‘world’ can only be the work of God. *Saviour* (see 56:1) is used here of the saving work of rescue from the disastrous past of verses 14ab and 15ab into the glorious present. On *Redeemer* (*gō’ēl*) see 35:9–10. All is due to the fact that the Lord has identified himself with, and taken as his own, the needs of his people. *Mighty* (‘*‘abîr*’) is a word stressing ‘sheer’ power, here the sheer power of the Redeemer working as Saviour (cf. 1:24). The constant experience of the citizens of Zion is to *know*, to have personal and intimate knowledge of, their God in these terms.

17 Transformation phrases are heaped up to create an impression of superabundant richness and superfine quality, outdoing even the best the old ever knew (1 Ki. 10:21, 27). *I will make peace your governor*/‘your administration, government’ is a good example of Hebrew apposition in which two nouns each retain their own meaning but are totally identified with each other (cf. Jb. 5:24, ‘your tent will be peace’). *Ruler*/‘taskmasters’ is the word of Egyptian slavery (Ex. 3:7). Thus, government as such will be wholly absorbed in the exercises of peace, and where it has deteriorated and become oppressive, even the very worst of the past will be transformed into the best the Lord can give. *Righteousness* is that which matches God’s own righteous character.

18ab By contrast with the establishment of peace and righteousness (17ef), there is the abolition of every force of disorder (cf. 59:6–7). The orientation of these verses is given in Hebrews 12:18–24 and Revelation 21:9–22:5.

The Lord, the light of Zion (60:18c–22)

The final two stanzas return to the theme of the Lord as the light of the city with which the poem opened (1–5). Corresponding to the new attitude on the part of the nations (5), there is, on Zion’s part, the abandonment of all old attitudes of defensiveness, expressed in walls and gates (18cd). Just as she responded to the incoming nations with a trembling and expansive joy of heart (5ab), so she responds (*you will call*) to the acts of God by finding security in his *Salvation* and, where formerly her gates shut out the intruder, now the responsive exercise of *Praise* absorbs all the city. From the Lord to his people flows everything they could need; from them to him flows back an endless paean of praise. The old, physical forms of light (19ab) are replaced by new, spiritual light (19cd), and changes and fluctuations are past (20ab), due to the perpetual divine pres-

ence bringing with it unbroken joy (20cd). There will be full enjoyment of the great salvation God has accomplished (21a; on *righteous* see 53:11; 54:17; 56:1; 59:17), eternal security (21b) because of the divine work of planting (21c–e) and sufficiency for every eventuality (22ab). All this is sure of fulfilment by divine guarantee (22cd).

19–20b In the old order of things, life was ruled by the regularly alternating sun and moon (Gn. 1:16) and was at the mercy of their fitfulness (20a), but in the order of salvation and praise (18cd), the ruling principle is the changeless presence of the Lord. On *glory/‘beauty’* see verse 7. The Lord will not only bathe his people in his light but change them into his likeness.

20c–22 There is an initial ‘For’ which links this final stanza with its partner stanza (see the outline on p. 493) and both explains the unwaning light of the new Zion and moves into the new thought of *light/joy* as the antithesis of *sorrow/darkness*. The background to the removal of sorrow is not only the oppression (14ab) and scorn (15ab) of the past but also its tears of repentance (57:18; 59:11, 20). Thus every external and every internal of sorrow will have been removed. The gathering in of the redeemed of the world will create a fellowship of joy (5, 18cd), and mourning over sin will be succeeded by joy in the Lord (20cd). On possessing *the land for ever* see immediately above (*cf.* 2 Sa. 7:10; contrast Dt. 6:18; 28:63f.). When righteousness is perfected, tenure is secure. Apart from Daniel 11:7, *shoot* (*nēṣer*) is found only at Isaiah 11:1; 14:19. In the new Zion all will be what the Messiah is. *Planted* is ‘of my planting’. They are in the city because the Lord has ‘set’ them there. There has been divine selection and exact placing—like a careful gardener. He has not only put them where they are (*planted*) but has made them what they are (*work of my hands*). The whole new creation, including its people, is entirely his work. *For the display of my splendour* is (lit.) ‘in order to display my beauty’ (the reflexive of $\sqrt{pā'ar}$; see verse 7), the Lord ‘embodied’ and displayed in his people. This had ever been the divine intention (44:23) and hitherto realized only in the Servant (49:3).⁷ The people of the new Zion are strong enough for any foe (Lv. 26:8; Dt. 32:30; Jos. 23:10; *cf.* 30:17). Once more, the description is coloured by the terms of the basic motif of the city (*cf.* verse 14). The new Zion, in its eternal state, will have no foes to contend with, but it will enjoy all the values and attributes of an unassailable com-

⁷ $\sqrt{pā'ar}$ is used only by Isaiah among the prophets (see 10:15; 44:23; 49:3; 55:5; 60:7, 9, 13, 21; 61:3).

munity. An additional background is provided by 51:2. Here is another *least* who becomes *a thousand*; the promise to Abraham is abundantly fulfilled. The motive power guaranteeing the new Zion is the Lord's devotion to its fulfilment (22cd; cf. 9:7hi 6 ; 37:32). In saying *I am the LORD* he stakes his reputation on it happening. *Do this swiftly* is (lit.) 'hasten it', but Watts suggests that $\sqrt{h\ddot{u}s}$ is here the homonymous verb 'to enjoy', found in Ecclesiastes 2:25: 'Not since Eden has Yahweh truly enjoyed his human creation.'⁸ Either thought is contextually true, and since Isaiah would have been fully aware of the double meaning, he must have intended it.

d. Transforming power, present and future (61:1–9)

The Anointed One now appears for the second time. As in the second Servant Song (49:1–6), he speaks in his own person about himself and his God-given ministry. His testimony (1–3) is followed by a tailpiece (4–9). The common theme of both is transformation. The Song is suited to its preceding context. (i) As in 59:21, he is endowed with the Spirit and the word (1). (ii) The proclamation of *favour* and *vengeance* (2) relates to the Lord's own undertaking (59:16–21) to perform acts of vengeance and salvation world-wide. (iii) The Zion-oriented ministry of replacing sorrows with joys etc. (2c–3g, 7) was forecast in 60:17, where also it was a work of the Lord arising out of his covenant blessings mediated through the Anointed One (59:21). This transference of the Lord's work to the Anointed One is important in the light of what is yet to be revealed (10–11). In the same way, what the Lord pledges in the metaphor of 'planting' (60:21) is achieved through the renewing work of the Anointed One (61:3h–j).

The first testimony of the Anointed One: transformed people (61:1–4)

This is the passage the Lord Jesus deliberately sought out as the starting point of his public ministry (Lk. 4:16–22). His action validates authoritatively the understanding we have reached without appeal to the gospels, that Isaiah displays here a Messianic figure. In his reading, the Lord Jesus stopped at the words *the LORD's favour* (2a) and did not proceed to *the day of vengeance*. Thus he expressed his own understanding of his mission at that point, not to condemn but to save the world (Jn. 3:17). He was also aware, however, of a coming day when he would execute the judgment committed to him (Jn. 5:22–29). In other words, what Isaiah sees as a double-faceted ministry the Lord Jesus

⁸ Watts, vol. 2, p. 297.

apportions respectively to his first and second coming, the work of the Servant and of the Anointed Conqueror. The passage is a unity of three movements, opening with the enduement of the Anointed One with the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord (1ab). Next, the purpose of this anointing and its accompanying commission (1d, sent) is elaborated in seven infinitives (1c–3g), and the poem concludes with the result of the work of the Anointed One (3h–4).

1 The Sovereign LORD ('*qdōnāy yahweh*) is the same divine title as in 50:4–5, 7, 9.⁹ It signifies the attribution of sovereignty to Yahweh, the exodus God, who saves his people and avenges himself on his enemies. It is the Spirit of this God—Sovereign, Saviour, Judge—which rests on the Anointed One so that he can work the works of God. Thus his career of salvation and vengeance is signalized. On the enduement of the Lord's Spirit see 42:1. On *preach good news* (*bāśar*) see 40:9. The poor ('*nāwîm*; 11:4; 29:19; 32:7) are the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, those held back from progress and amelioration by people or circumstances. *Bind up*/‘bandage’ (1:6) expresses personal attention, soothing, healing and restoring to wholeness. ‘Heart’ is so versatile a word that *broken-hearted* covers any and every human breakdown, from emotional prostration to conviction of sin (cf. 57:15). *Proclaim freedom* (*dērōr*, ‘manumission’; Lv. 25:10; Je. 34:8) makes a particular link with Leviticus and the great manumission of the Jubilee Year, and the use of *year* (2a) furthers this thought that the Anointed One comes in an appointed time to resettle all things and to release debtors and slaves. *Captives* and *prisoners* denote respectively bondage imposed by people and by place, the contrast implying ‘release of every sort’. *Release from darkness* (*p̄qāh-qôah*) is a reduplicated noun ‘wide-opening’ used only here. $\sqrt{pāqāh}$ ordinarily means the opening of the eyes or ears (42:20), and in 42:7 this is associated with bringing people out of the darkness of prison. Here ‘to proclaim ... wide-opening to the bound’ conflates the two ideas. Thus, in review, the *good news* embraces personal renewal and restoration (*bind up the broken-hearted*), release from restrictions imposed by people (*captives* is a negative description of the creation of a harmonious society) and the rectification of circumstances (*release ... for the prisoners*).

⁹ '*qdōnāy yahweh* is characteristic of Ezekiel (207 times) and Amos (twenty times). It is spread through Isaiah (7:7; 25:8; 28:16; 40:10; 48:16; 49:22; 50:4–5, 7, 9; 52:4; 56:8; 61:1, 11; 65:13, 15). In addition, Isaiah uses the extended title ‘Sovereign Yahweh of hosts’ (3:15; 22:5, 12, 14–15; 28:22). Only Isaiah uses ‘Sovereign Yahweh, Holy One of Israel’ (30:15).

2 The repetition of the verb *to proclaim* signals that what follows recapitulates what has preceded from a new point of view. What is coming is a *year* of favour, a *day* of wrath. In 49:8 the ‘time of favour’ was the preparation and coming of the Servant; in 60:7, 10 the Lord’s favour was extended to the offering brought by Gentiles and expressed in the compassion which he showed Israel and which magnetized the world to Zion. The Anointed One proclaims that this year has now come. In contrast to *year*, *day* expresses the sharp and quickly accomplished work of *vengeance*. Again, what the Lord purposes to do, the Anointed One proclaims (cf. 59:17). *All those who mourn* will be comforted, as the Lord promised in 57:18. (Sorrow in 60:20 belongs to the same word group.) Once more, a divine intention is accomplished by the Anointed One. The thought of vengeance is put to one side and the focus falls on favour. First the removal of every cause of sorrow (2c), and then the positive work of transformation (3a–g). ‘Mourning’ covers all the sadnesses of life (e.g. Gn. 50:10–11), but the contextual link with 57:18 makes mourning over sin the primary thought and the means of entering into the following blessings.

3 *Provide for* is a doubtful rendering in that $\sqrt{s\imath m}$ is not elsewhere used absolutely in this way but always with an object stated or implied. Thus Watts offers ‘to assign rights to’ because he thinks that the mourning in verse 2c was over loss of land rights.¹⁰ While this interpretation is unlikely, it is grammatically on the right lines. Possibly, we should understand a reference to the comfort itself (‘to appoint it for’). Otherwise, since $\sqrt{s\imath m}$ and the next infinitive *to bestow* ($\sqrt{n\dot{a}\dot{t}an}$, ‘to give’) share the meanings of ‘put, place, assign, appoint’, we could make the second resumptive of the first, thus emphasizing the idea, ‘to assign to Zion’s mourners—to assign to them a crown ...’. At all events, penitence brings transformations. First, *a crown of beauty instead of ashes*. The key words involve the same letters: *p^eér* (lit. ‘head-dress’; cf. Ex. 39:28; Is. 3:20; 61:10; Ezk. 24:17, 23)¹¹ instead of *’ēper* (‘ashes’; 2 Sa. 13:19; Is. 58:5). The preposition *instead of* (*tahat*), expressing ‘exact equivalence, substitution’ (e.g. Gn. 22:13), is thus enhanced by the almost identity of the words. The Lord exactly replaces the hurt with the remedy, and, since the ashes of mourning were smeared on the head, he applies his cure pre-

¹⁰ Watts, vol. 2, p. 303.

¹¹ The NIV’s *crown of beauty* presumably arises from the supposition that *p^eér* (‘head-dress’) derives from $\sqrt{pā'ar}$ (‘to be beautiful’).

cisely to the point of need. *Oil* was for times of gladness ([Ps. 23:5](#)) not of sorrow ([2 Sa. 14:2](#)). In [Psalm 45:7](#) <8> ‘oil of gladness’ explains the different sort of life evident in the king. So the Anointed One replaces *mourning* with fresh life. *Garment* is an all-enveloping mantle or ‘wrap’. *Despair* (*kēhā*) refers to what is dull and listless; it is used in [42:3](#) of the ‘dimly burning’ wick. So here, the infusion of new life ([3de](#)) expresses itself in responsive *praise*, replacing depression and low-spiritedness. The motif of clothing signifies the outward expression of an inner reality. The all-covering wrap indicates total personal renewal. With *They will be called*, the construction changes from the infinitives which express the aims of the Anointed One to a statement of what he has achieved. First, there is a new name and status ([3h-j](#)). The passive (lit.) ‘It will be called to them’ stresses the objective reality, the achievement. A new name signifies a new nature with new potentialities ([Gn. 17:5–6](#)). *Oaks* (*cf. 1:29; 57:5*) are not a special variety but ‘large trees’. The other two references in Isaiah associate the ‘large trees’ with false religion. But they have been recovered to the Lord, transplanted and given an established rootage in his garden. *Righteousness* (as in [53:11; 54:17](#)) is the righteousness which gives them status and acceptance before God. Because they are the *planting of the LORD*, their place and character is entirely due to divine action. *For the display of his splendour* is as [60:21e](#).

4 The second achievement of the Anointed One is repossession and restoration. ‘And they will build’ ([4a](#)) matches ‘and they will be called’ ([3h](#)), linking the two results—new people and fresh possession—of the ministry of the Anointed One. As has been the case from [49:1](#) onwards, the picture of the return from Babylon into a desolated country is a motif for a greater recovery, *i.e.* entrance into the true kingdom of God, the land of spiritual inheritance in which every breakdown of the past is mended no matter how long-standing. This involves things that seem to have been ruined ‘for ever’ (*ancient*), things that came as an inheritance from earlier days (*long devastated/‘devastations of former ones [people]’*) and things that the passing *generations* had been unable to mend. Through the Anointed One, all this long-standing and inherited brokenness will be restored.

Confirmation: transformation indeed! ([61:5–9](#))

Like the tailpiece to the second Servant Song ([49:7–13](#)), this tailpiece to the testimony of the Anointed One falls into two parts. The first notes the subservience of the nations

(5–6; cf. 49:7) and the second the covenant of the Lord with his people (7–9; cf. 49:8). Grammatical changes, however, suggest an Isaianic mosaic of originally disparate pieces: verses 5–7a are couched in second person plurals (the NIV alters the MT to third person plural in 7a); verses 7b–f, 9 are in third person plurals, and verse 8 is a first person singular. It may even be that these ‘snippets’ were inserted into an original unity of verses 1–4 and 10–12. But the insertion, like the separation, was done with deliberate intent, so that verses 5–9 could provide a divine confirmation of the work of his Anointed One. Their picture of life and prosperity in the land expands on and confirms verses 3–4.

There are four four-line stanzas ‘pivoting’ on verse 7ef.

A¹ Recognition by the nations, nearness to the Lord (5–6b)

B¹ The fact of recompense: reversal and transformation (6c–7d)

C Possession and joy (7ef)

B² The explanation of recompense: divine justice and covenant (8)

A² Recognition by the nations, blessed by the Lord (9)

The ‘pivot’ (7ef) is linked to the preceding stanza by *double portion* (7be) and to the following one by *everlasting* (7f, 8d). Verses 5–6b and 9 have an identical shape. The first two lines express the relationship of the nations to Zion’s people and the second two the relationship of Zion’s people to the Lord.

5–6b The picture is not of a slave-state or of second-class citizenship but of glad co-operation, of former *aliens* taking their place in the life of the people (as the use of *foreigners*/‘sons of the stranger’ in 60:10 shows). *Will shepherd*/‘will stand and shepherd’ is used of the Messiah in Micah 5:4. ‘Stand’ suggests taking responsibility and exercising oversight as well as continuing in the work.

6 ‘And as for you, you will be called’ *priests* refers to the hitherto unrealized ideal of Exodus 19:6 (cf. the further extension to Gentiles in 66:21; both passages are anticipatory of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ in the New Testament). The parallel thought of recognition among the nations (9ab) requires that those who speak in *you will be called ... named* are the *aliens* and ‘sons of the stranger’. The existing people of God have ministered his truth to these *foreigners*, introduced them to the Lord and brought them into the community of faith. They in turn recognize the special privileged position of those through whom they have been blessed and regard them as *priests* mediating divine

blessings and *ministers* (*m^ešārēt*; the typical verb of levitical service) acting on their behalf in the things of God as true Levites ([Nu. 8:5ff.](#)).

6cd On sharing the *wealth* and *riches* of the *nations* see [60:16](#) (cf. [Rom. 15:27](#)). *In their riches* is ‘in their glory’ (cf. [Gn. 31:1](#); [Rev. 21:26](#)). *You will boast*¹² is probably the most likely meaning of the Hebrew.

7 This verse begins (lit.) ‘Instead of your shame, double; and [instead of] dishonour/disappointment they will sing aloud in their portion.’ The NIV’s *their shame* and the RSV’s ‘your lot’ indicate different ways of making the pronouns of this verse sound harmonious in our ears. It is best to retain the [MT](#) (as above) and so allow verse [7ab](#) to continue from verse [6](#) and, following this, to treat the third person pronoun in [7cd](#) as one of those changes of person frequent in the prophets (cf. [1:29](#); [5:8](#); [42:20](#); [52:14](#); [GKC 144p](#)). On *instead* see verse [3](#). *Shame* is more than embarrassment and includes ‘reaping shame’, being disappointed of hope and exposed as fraudulent. The same applies to *disgrace*. *My people will receive* is an NIV interpretative addition. It would be much better to leave the Hebrew in its abruptness as above. *Inheritance/‘portion, allocation’*¹³ is what the Lord has allocated to his people. The word *double* (*portion* is an interpretative addition) is used in the sense of ‘amply, fully, abundantly’ (cf. [Jb. 42:10](#)).

7ef These lines form the pivot of the poem (see the outline above). They recapitulate the thought of [7a-d](#) and add significantly to it. *Inherit* always emphasizes possession rather than (as with us) the mode by which possession came about. There is thus a progression. In [7ab](#), an ample replacement of *shame* has been made; in [7cd](#), they rejoice within what has been allocated to them; and in [7e](#), this is declared to be their possession. Furthermore, they possess and enjoy it on an *everlasting* basis. Once more, the meaning of *double* (*portion* is an interpretative addition) is ‘amply, fully, abundantly’.

8 The Lord has promised an abundant recompense for his people ([7](#)), but it is not because ‘they have had difficulty enough and it is about time something went right for them’. It arises from the justice to which the Lord is devoted. In bringing this relief, the

¹² *You will boast* translates *titmārā'û* (‘you shall fatten yourselves’).

¹³ The NIV is sometimes not as careful as it might be in selecting English equivalents for Hebrew words, and this is well illustrated in [61:7de](#). *Inheritance* and *inherit* cloud the fact that two different Hebrew words are involved, neither of which is well translated by our notion of ‘inheriting’. In verse [7d](#), *hēleq* is ‘apportionment’ and in verse [7e](#), *yāraš* is ‘to come into possession of’.

year of favour and the day of vengeance (2), the Lord acts with total justice and in the interests of his justice. His salvation is as just as his vengeance. The *For* with which this verse begins is theologically vital. *I hate robbery and iniquity* involves a change in the MT (from *b^eôlâ* ['in burnt offering'] to *b^e'aw^elâ* ('in/with wrong')).¹⁴ This is widely assumed without (apparently) asking what the resultant text would mean, for it would not mean 'robbery and iniquity/wrong' (RSV, NIV) but 'robbery with wrong' or 'robbery in the matter of wrong'. Is there some sort of robbery the Lord does not hate? Is there a robbery without wrong? *Robbery* (*gāzēl*) is always a violent word meaning 'taking by force'. The Hebrew 'robbery in burnt offering' is surprising but makes a point. There is a noticeable parallelism between the expressions 'robbery in burnt offering' (*gāzēl b^eôlâ*) and 'their due in faithfulness' (*p^e'ullātām be'^emet*; 8c). There were no half measures about the burnt offering; it was all or nothing (cf. Gn. 22:2, 12, 16). The Lord required unreserved commitment from his people, and anything less was robbery. He now recalls this in order to illustrate the fact that in his faithfulness he will himself hold nothing back when he recompenses his people. He will live up to his own standards. Hence he says that *in my faithfulness I will reward them*/‘I will give them their *p^e'ullâ*’ (a word which first meant ‘reward for work’, ‘wage’ and then developed the more general meaning of ‘what is due’; cf. 40:10; 49:4). In the end, therefore, the *double* (7be), the faithful gift of what is due (8c), turns out to be *an everlasting covenant*. While 54:10 and 55:3 (where the same words are used) must provide background, the main reference is to 59:21, where the Anointed One is the mediator of the blessings of the divine Spirit and word to the Lord’s penitent people. Obviously, the covenant would also pledge the blessings to the penitent attested by the Anointed One in verses 3–4.

9 On descendants/‘seed’ see 59:21. From one point of view or another, verses 5–9 have focused on transformation. Verse 9 is the capstone—so transformed will the Lord’s people be that world-wide they will be quite distinct (9ab) because of a quality discerned in them (9cd) which can be explained only as an act of divine blessing. To what is Isaiah

¹⁴ Watts accepts the emendation, noting the LXX’s *ex adikias*. He translates it ‘robbery by injustice’, i.e. ‘depriving anyone of his goods or money by unjust judicial action’. This is a contrived meaning for ‘aw^elâ’, which of itself has no juridical overtones and is not so used elsewhere. Indeed, its constant broad use, as deviation in any and every way from the norm, resists this narrowing of reference.

looking forward? Ultimately, it is to the new Zion of chapter 60. But, of course, when that arrives there will be no other *nations* or *peoples*. In other words, Isaiah is once more (*cf.* 60:12) allowing the motif of the rebuilt city and restored people to control his forecast. It is as if he were saying, ‘If you were at that time but one people among many, you would be totally distinct.’ What Isaiah saw as the work of the Anointed One, the people of God have already begun to experience in its first stage (see the introductory note above). In this sense, verses 5–9 have an application to the church between the two cominges of our Lord Jesus, following 61:1–2a and prior to 61:2b. In this light, verse 9 states what should now be true.

e. The commitment of the Anointed One and the oath of the Lord (61:10–62:12)

Like the third Servant Song, the third Song of the Anointed One is a testimony centring on personal commitment, but while 50:4–9 faces the cost of obedience, 61:10–62:7 (a poem in four ten-line stanzas) exults in what will be achieved. This sense of swelling joy continues into the tailpiece (62:8–12), the Lord’s confirmatory oath that Zion will enjoy what is its own and the summons to the world to set out on its grand march to Zion. This delightful section gives us an insight into something of the ‘joy that was set before him’ (Heb. 12:2).

Joy and urgency in the work of salvation (61:10–62:7)

The single voice which speaks in the first, second and fourth stanzas (61:10; 62:1, 6) of this poem is that of the Anointed One.¹⁵ The opinion of Knight and Young that the speaker is Zion overlooks the fact that to be clothed with the garments of salvation (10) would imply, in the case of people, possession and enjoyment of salvation, whereas the remainder of the poem still looks forward to salvation being accomplished and bestowed. The stanzas have both a balanced arrangement and a continuity and unity.

A¹Joy in undertaking the work of salvation (the motifs of bridegroom/bride; the productive earth; the explanatory ‘For’ in lines three and seven) (10–11)

¹⁵ Note how ‘*a*dōnāy yahweh (1, 11) sounds like an inclusio around the poem. If verses 5–9 were not there the resulting formation would read very well as a unit. To divide a poem like this, using the separated pieces cleverly within their new contexts, is exactly what Isaiah did at 5:24ff.

B¹ A single voice praying for Jerusalem (nations and kings to see Zion's salvation/righteousness) (62:1–3)

A² Joy over the transformed Zion (the motifs of bridegroom/bride; the productive earth; the explanatory 'For' in lines three and seven) (4–5)

B² A company called to prayer for Jerusalem (Jerusalem to become a praise in the earth) (6–7)

Within this structure, A¹ and B¹ share the themes of salvation, righteousness and the watching world; B¹ and A² share the 'new name' theme; and A¹ and B² both end on the theme of Jerusalem as a 'praise' universally.

Joy in undertaking the work of salvation (61:10–11)

10 'Clothes' reveal character, guarantee equipment and express commitment. In this sequence of Songs, the promised acts of the Lord progressively become the acts of the Anointed One. In the clothing of the Anointed One a decisive point is reached in this transference of activity. At the start (59:16–17), recognizing that the world could not produce its own salvation, the Lord clothed himself with garments of salvation and righteousness. Now it all passes to the Anointed One (*he has clothed me*; cf. the divine preparation of the Servant in 49:2). *Arrayed* is 'covered/wrapped' (cf. on 'wrap' in verse 3). *Salvation* is directed to us, he will do whatever people need; *righteousness* is God-ward, he will do whatever God's holy nature requires. *Bridegroom* and *bride* may contain a hint at the marriage covenant and, therefore, the involvement of the Anointed One in a covenanting task (verse 8d; cf. the return to the marriage theme in 62:5cd). The main thought, however, is that of the garments which proclaim to the world that this man and woman are bridegroom and bride, that this is their character and commitment. With the same care does the Lord prepare his anointed agent. *Like a priest* is 'dons his priestly head-dress'; the verb is $\sqrt{kāhan}$ ('to act as a priest does'). (On 'head-dress', see verse 3.) This unique expression reflects the Bible's view of the holiness of marriage 'instituted by God in the time of man's innocence'.¹⁶ In the same holy and careful way as a couple dress for their wedding, the Lord has dressed his great agent for the work of salvation.

11 This verse adds a second explanation of the joy in verse 10ab. This task for which he

¹⁶The wording of the introduction to the Wedding Service in the Book of Common Prayer (1662).

is endowed will be fruitful. *Soil* has a spontaneous power of growth; *garden* is cultivated in order to produce. So *righteousness* is the product alike of the spontaneous activity of the divine nature and of the cultivating care of the God who keeps his promises. *Righteousness* is the saving work as it satisfies God and produces the fruit of righteousness in its recipients; *praise* is the saving work as it excites a response.

Zeal for Zion (62:1–3)

The Anointed One expresses his determination that Zion may so come to possess the blessings of righteousness and salvation that it may be plain for all to see; and to possess, too, a new name and royal dignity.

1 *Keep silent* ($\sqrt{hāšâ}$) applies as much to action (Jdg. 18:9; Ps. 107:29) as to words (Pss. 28:1; 39:2 ‘3’; cf. Is. 42:14; 57:11; 62:6; 64:12 ‘11’; 65:6). *Remain quiet* ($\sqrt{\check{s}āqat}$) means ‘to be still, inactive’. The verbs combine to say that the Anointed One will give himself to both ceaseless prayer and ceaseless action. Action, because he is clothed for the task (61:10cd), and prayer, because he recognizes that it is the Lord who must make *righteousness* ... *spring up* (61:11cd). The objective is that Zion may enjoy the fruits of his work. He sets out to achieve *righteousness* (61:10d; cf. 56:1), all that the righteous God requires, and Zion will receive it (53:11; 54:17) in a new status and quality of life. He will accomplish *salvation* (61:10c), and Zion will be saved. The change will be as dramatic as a shining light and a *blazing torch*. *Shines out like the dawn* is ‘goes forth like brightness’ (*nōgah* is never used of ‘dawn’ but always of clear, sharp brightness; 4:5; 50:10; 60:3, 19; Joel 2:10).

2–3 On *nations* and *kings* see 49:7; 52:15; 60:3, 10–11, 16. What the Lord does for Zion attracts the attention of the world, it is a light in their darkness. *You will be called*/‘It will be called to you’ (cf. 61:3h) refers to the objective reality of the bestowal of a new name, i.e. a new nature with new potentialities. Such is the supernatural reality of what the Anointed One does for Zion that only the Lord himself (*mouth*) can *bestow*/‘pick out’ the *name* that expresses it. Thus the work and prayer of the Anointed One brings a three-sided blessing. First, a new status before God (*righteousness*) coupled with *salvation*, rescue from every bondage and threat (1cd); secondly, a visible righteousness of life (2ab); and thirdly, the divine gift of a new nature (2cd). The result is that *you will be a crown*. Zion is not said to wear but, twice over, to be the *crown* or *diadem* in the Lord’s hand. To be in his hand is to be kept, guarded and upheld; to be a crown is to be that

which expresses kingliness—not the exercise of royal power (the wearing of a crown) but the possession of royal worth and dignity. The Lord's people will be the sign that he is King.

Transformation: new names, new status (62:4–5)

Like the first stanza, this third stanza consists of an opening statement (4ab) supported by two explanations (the *But* in 4c should be ‘For’, and the initial ‘For’ in 5a should be restored). The past is gone (4ab) because of the Lord’s delight in Zion, and there is a new, fertile land (4cd), which in turn is explained by illustrations drawn from marriage.

No longer will they call you Deserter, or name your land Desolate is ‘No longer will “Forsaken” be said to you, and to your land no longer will be said “Desolate”.’ The use of the passive of ‘to say’ is characteristic of Isaiah (4:3; 19:18; 32:5; 61:6), whereas it occurs only three times in Jeremiah and once in Hosea and Zephaniah. The past is so completely gone as not to merit a mention. *Hephzibah* (‘my delight is in her’) replaces ‘Forsaken’ and *Beulah* (‘married’) replaces ‘Desolate’. Not only is the person changed but also the environment. The beautiful (in Hebrew) rhyming quatrain¹⁷ of verse 5 explains all. The two halves of the verse are, respectively, the wedding and the honeymoon; the marriage covenant, which includes the bridegroom’s promise to ‘love and to cherish’, and the entry upon the delights of married life in which the bridegroom rejoices in his bride. So Zion will be the object of the cherishing love of her own sons, and the Lord will enjoy honeymoon-delight with those whom the Anointed One has saved and made right with him.

The appointment of praying guardians (62:6–7)

Parallel with the second stanza, in which the Anointed One prays, he now appoints those who will intercede ceaselessly until the full work of salvation and righteousness is accomplished. Before the first coming of the Lord Jesus there were such (Lk. 2:36–38; cf. Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33–37; Lk. 21:36). Smart rightly notes that to interpret the refer-

¹⁷

kî yîb^e al bâhûr b^etûlâ
yîb^{'alûk} bânâyîk
ûm^eśoś hâtân 'al-kallâ
yâśiś 'ālayîk 'elôhâyîk

ence to walls ([6a](#)) as implying that the passage must come from a time after the work of Nehemiah ‘ignores the dramatic and imaginative character of the writing’,¹⁸ which is not descriptive of a situation but impressionistic of watchful urgency. *Watchmen* ($\sqrt{\text{šāmar}}$) is ‘keepers, guardians’. Those who engage in prayer are the true guardians, and true prayer is: (i) ceaseless (lit.) ‘all the day and all the night’; (ii) vocal, verbalizing the need (*never be silent*, $\sqrt{\text{hāšā}}$; cf. verse [1a](#)); (iii) effective Godward (*you who call on the LORD*/‘who put the LORD in remembrance’). We do not conclude that otherwise he would forget, but that our prayers are, by his will, in some way a vital ingredient in the implementing of his promises. Cf. how the promise of [Malachi 4:5](#) came in answer to the prayers of [Luke 1:13](#). Prayer is also: (iv) disciplined (*give yourselves no rest*); (v) urgent and pressing (*give him no rest*; cf. [Lk. 18:1–8](#)); and (vi) sustained (*till he establishes*, i.e. fulfils all that was foretold in chapter [60](#) regarding Zion, the whole work of salvation and righteousness in [61:10–62:1](#)). Jerusalem is made *the praise of the earth*, something the whole world gives praise to the Lord for, because in saving Zion the world has been saved.

The great oath and the great summons ([62:8–12](#))

Where these oracles ([8–9](#), [10–12](#)) may have originated in Isaiah’s ministry is impossible to say, but their Isaianic quality and their appropriateness in their present context is unquestionable. Loss of crops to an invader was a common pre-exilic experience, and it would have spoken deeply to Isaiah’s people about their coming security to be told that this would never happen again. In the preceding Song of the Anointed One, the faithful ‘forces of nature’ were offered as a model of the Lord’s saving exercises ([61:11](#); [62:4–5](#)). Now the people come into assured possession and enjoyment of what was there promised, the establishing of Zion for which the guardian-intercessors were praying ([6–7](#)). The proclamation passage ([10–12](#)) is highly reminiscent of [52:7–12](#), and in this sense it is both a confirmatory tailpiece to the foregoing Song and (like [52:7ff.](#), which is a prelude to the last Servant Song) prepares for the climactic Song of the Anointed One ([63:1–6](#)). According to [61:11](#) and [62:2, 7](#), Zion will be righteousness, glory and praise for all the earth. Now the *people* ([10b](#)) and the ‘peoples’ ([10e](#)) are summoned to a prepared pilgrimage, joining together as *the Redeemed of the LORD* ([12](#)) to come into his city.

¹⁸ Smart, p. 263.

The Lord's oath (62:8–9)

8 If a distinction of symbolism is pressed, *hand* is personal agency, the direct involvement of the person, and *arm* is personal power. Together they point to one who is strong enough for the task and ready to ‘take it in hand’. *Judges 6:1–4* offers a historical example of the situation the oath envisages (*cf. 37:30f.*); *Leviticus 26:16* and *Deuteronomy 28:30–33* offer a conceptual background. Tenure and enjoyment are conditional on obedience within the covenant. Formerly, the people were justly subject to divine acts of punishment and found themselves weak before the enemy. Now the justice of God is satisfied, and there will be no more chastisement or weakness in the face of the enemy. When the covenant is brought to fruition (the marriage motif in the preceding Song; *cf. 54:10; 55:3; 61:8*) and when divine acts of righteousness and salvation excite responses of praise, peace and security ensue.

9 *Praise* speaks of the human heart, sensitive to the fact that every good and perfect gift is from above; *my sanctuary* speaks of the heart of God, willing and satisfied to share feasts of fellowship with his people as in the old days of firstfruits (*Ex. 34:26; Nu. 18:13; Dt. 26:1–11*) and peace offerings (*Lv. 7:11ff.*). Now, however, it is the whole harvest and vintage that is enjoyed in the courts of the Lord. In a word, *the courts of my sanctuary* have ceased to be local and limited and have become a symbol of all life as lived in the presence of the Holy One and of every meal as sacred fellowship. On *sanctuary* see *60:13*.

The great pilgrimage (62:10–12)

10 For doubled imperatives see *51:9, 17; 52:1, 11; 57:14*; for the motif of the prepared way see *40:3ff.; 57:14*; and for pilgrimage to Zion see *24:16; 25:1ff., 6ff.; 27:12–13; 35:1–10*. The picture is of a prepared and welcoming city. The invitation has been issued, the gates are open, the roads have been resurfaced. All that has been said about the gathering of the world pilgrims to Zion (whether carrying Zion’s children or bearing gifts or coming in their own right) is now consummated. Neither obstacle nor uncertainty will mar the journey; the road is smooth, the highway raised up. On it both *the people* and ‘*the peoples*’ (*10e*; not *the nations*) join in pilgrimage; both those whom the Lord will gather out of his then professing people (the penitents of Zion) and those far off to whom he extends his peace (*57:19*). On *banner* see *11:10, 12; 49:22*.

11 There are three ‘beholds’ in this verse: the first (*11a*, omitted by the NIV) is a justification of the foregoing commands to open the gates and prepare the roads: the Lord’s

world-wide proclamation has been issued. The second (11d) reveals the terms of the proclamation. The Lord has announced to Zion that her ‘salvation’ (not *Saviour*) is on its way, and what the Lord does for Zion is done for the whole world. There is no separate salvation for separate groups. Zion’s King is the world’s King (chapters 9, 11); Zion’s salvation (54:1) is the world’s salvation (55:1). Salvation is one element in the Lord’s commitment (59:16), and it has devolved onto the Anointed One (61:10); the moment has come! The third ‘behold’ (11e) calls attention to one whose *reward is with him*. In 40:10 the Lord himself brings the recompense, but now his ‘behold’ points to another who comes bringing reward. The context requires that it should be the Anointed One. When a craftsman commissioned to make a piece of furniture is paid for it, that is his *reward* (*šeker*); the completed article is his *recompense* (*p^eullā*) or ‘fruit of work’. In the case of the Anointed One, his saved people are both what he has earned and what he has accomplished; in terms of 53:12, both his portion and his spoil.

12 *They will be called*/‘they will call them’ sounds as if there were onlookers seeing the pilgrimage arrive and deciding who these incomers are. *They* are the pilgrims, the people and peoples of verse 10, the *reward* and *recompense* of verse 11. *You* is feminine singular and refers to Zion. The titles *Holy People* ... *Redeemed of the LORD*, *Sought After*, *City No Longer Deserted* form an a-b-b-a pattern in which the ‘a’ terms describe what is permanently true and the ‘b’ terms what the Lord has done. *Holy People*/‘a people of holiness’ is more an affirmation than a simple attribution. They are a people with holiness as their dominant characteristic. The *Redeemed of the LORD* are those for whom the Lord has accepted the role of Next-of-kin and paid all their debt (35:9–10). *Sought after* derives from $\sqrt{dāraš}$, which is often used of people coming assiduously to where the Lord may be found (Dt. 12:5), but here it refers to the Lord assiduously finding and gathering his world-wide people (Ezk. 34:11; Jn. 1:43; 9:35). *Deserted* in the MT is a perfect tense, expressing definiteness and certainty: ‘She will certainly never be forsaken’, even ‘cannot be forsaken’.

f. The day of vengeance and the victory of the Anointed Conqueror (63:1–6)

The vocabulary of this awesome passage brings us to familiar ground: garments (1bc, 2ab, 3ef), righteousness (1e), salvation (1f, 5c), redemption (4e), anger and wrath (3cd, 5d, 6ab) and vengeance (4a). In 59:16ff. the Lord donned the garments indicative of his capacity for, and commitment to, salvation and vengeance. In that passage, as here, the

heaping up of anger words indicated where the emphasis lay, but there, as here, ‘his arm brought salvation for him’ ([59:16c](#); [63:5c](#)). The Lord too was appalled that earth’s sinners were without any to come to their aid ([59:16ab](#); [63:5ab](#)). But between these two passages, the beginning and end of the whole sequence, we have learned that the Anointed One comes with a ministry of comfort, vengeance and salvation ([61:2](#)), and that it is on him that the Lord puts the garments of salvation and righteousness ([61:10](#)). The third Song of the Anointed One and its tailpiece focused on salvation ([61:10](#); [62:1, 11](#)), and now it falls to the final Song to unfold the last act of the drama, the day of vengeance. We rightly see the New Testament counterpart of this in the wrath of the Lamb ([Rev. 6:15ff.](#)) and the treading of the winepress of the wrath of God ([Rev. 14:17–20](#); [19:15](#)) and we recoil from it. But sober reflection warns us that our reaction is not to be trusted. We know nothing of the emotions proper to absolute holiness, the just, merited and inevitable final settlement between God and all that defiles and opposes. It is, as Knight says, that ‘God can act only in conformity with himself ... in a passionate and aggressive concern for justice’.¹⁹ Similarly, Smart says, ‘neither for Second Isaiah nor for any other prophet could there be a day of salvation without a day of judgment. God’s mercy and God’s wrath stood not in contradiction but in union.’²⁰

A figure of mystery and his self-identification ([63:1](#))

The word has gone out to Zion that ‘your salvation is coming’ ([62:11](#)), and the watchmen are on the look-out. What they see they do not understand: *Who is this?* The parallel with [52:8](#) is notable. Looking out for their king ([52:7](#)), for the Lord making bare his arm in salvation ([52:10](#)), what they actually see is ‘Behold, my servant ... the arm of the LORD’ ([52:13](#); [53:1](#)). So here, their expectations are baffled by this striking figure who comes alone, approaches from Edom, is vividly and majestically dressed and strides in greatness and strength. On *Edom* and *Bozrah* see the introductory note to [34:1–17](#) and [34:5](#). Country and city are used here in their established sense of the typical eschatological foe, the embodiment of ceaseless animosity against the Lord and his people. But also the area name *Edom* (*'eđôm*) and the reddened (*'āđôm*) garments match each other. It is as if to say, where would one get one’s garments reddened save in the red land itself?

¹⁹ Knight, *Isaiah 56–66*, p. 70.

²⁰ Smart, p. 266.

Likewise, the city name *Bozrah* means ‘vintage’—where else would one tread a wine-press (3)? *Stained crimson* (*hāmēṣ*), used only here, means ‘sharpened’. It does not specify any particular colour but, just as we call some colours ‘sharp’, the watchmen see the distant figure ‘in vivid garments’. As yet they can see only in generalities. *Robed in splendour* is (lit.) ‘outstanding in his clothing’. On $\sqrt{hādar}$ (*splendour*) see 45:2. *Striding forward* ($\sqrt{sā'â}$, ‘to stoop, sway’) is used here of the natural swing of the body when walking energetically. There is no weakness in this figure but rather *greatness/abundance* of *strength*. When he identifies himself, it is as *I, speaking*. The Anointed One was first introduced (59:21) as endued with Spirit and word. He exercised a ministry of the word on the day of vengeance and salvation (61:1) and vowed not to keep silent when he first donned his garments (62:1; cf. Rev. 19:13, 21). Whatever he has been doing, he comes to report it with integrity, as one whose *righteousness* is intact and whose primary consciousness is that he is *mighty to save*. The following verses will major on acts of wrath and vengeance but his foremost awareness is that he has acted in salvation. *Mighty* (*rab*) is the adjective of the noun *greatness/abundance* in line d. Merely ‘great’ strength could rise to an occasion and then, for a while, be spent; ‘abundant’ strength is never spent. And as abundant as his strength is his salvation; it is more than sufficient for every call made upon it.

His clothing described more closely and explained (63:2–3)

The interrogative *Why?* (*maddū'a*) seeks a cause: ‘How do you explain this redness soaked into your garments? Have you been in the winepress? You say you are a speaker but no amount of speaking would account for “the red on your clothes”. This is not their colour; it is a stain!’ The Anointed One does not resist but adopts the motif of the wine-press. *pûrâ* on its only other appearance (Hg. 2:16) is the storage vat, but here it must be the pressing tank. *From the nations/peoples’ no-one was with me*, as we would say ‘no-one in the whole wide world’. *No-one* (*'en 'is*) is as 59:16 (cf. 50:2). From the start of the description of the work of the Anointed One here and then right through verses 4–5 his solitariness is stressed. The whole work of judgment, just as the whole work of salvation (5c), is his alone. If a distinction is intended between *trampled* and *trod*, the second is possibly more vigorous than the first. They are, respectively, $\sqrt{dārak}$ (‘to walk/step on’) and $\sqrt{rāmas}$ (‘to trample’). *Anger* (*'ap*) is the indignation (snort) of anger; and *wrath* (*hēmâ*) is the intensity (heat) of anger. The stress is on anger personally felt. *Blood*

(*nēṣah*) is found only here and in verse 6 and is usually understood of ‘spurting blood’. His clothing was *spattered*²¹ and *stained*.²² The latter ($\sqrt{gā'āl}$) means ‘to stain, pollute’ (59:3; Mal. 1:7). Both meanings are apt here. As to fact, his clothing was stained (was it originally white?), as to effect, this was pollution. The task involved exposure to defilement, which he accepted but which did not defile him, for he returns *in righteousness* (1). All my clothing was what caught the eye (1b, 2a); the overall vividness of blood soaked in. The Anointed One states his wrath but does not explain or justify it. Only the introduction to the Anointed One cycle provides the reason: the subjection of the Lord’s people to oppressive enemies who must be overthrown and the presence of unrepentant sinners world-wide (59:18).

The full story: the occasion, his solitariness and his achievement (63:4–6)

4 There were offences and offenders who aroused *vengeance*. Also, something had to be done for ‘my redeemed ones’ (not *my redemption*, *g^e'ullīm*; cf. 35:9; 51:10; 62:12; Ps. 107:2). The description implies that they already possessed redeemed status and that he acted in this way because they were already his redeemed, not to make them so. This fits in with the progress of Isaiah’s book as we have traced it. The work of redemption was accomplished in chapter 53, but from 56:1 onwards the people were called to wait for the promised salvation. The ensuing chapters reveal the need to be rescued from a stressful and hostile environment and from the plague of sin and failure (57:1ff.; 58:1–59:13). Thus, when the Anointed One acts as *mighty to save* (1) and when the ‘day of

²¹ The verb *w^eyēz* is from $\sqrt{nāzā}$ (‘to spatter’; cf. 2 Ki. 9:33; Is. 52:15). BHS would read a waw consecutive here. The form would logically be *wayyēz*, but it appears in 2 Kings as *wayyiz* (see GKC 76c). Driver (83; cf. GKC 107b²) notes cases like this, where simple waw connects with what has preceded and the imperfect verb contributes its vitality to the scene, and points to 43:28; 51:2; 57:17. In section 174, however, he treats the present form as ‘almost certainly’ a misprint for a waw consecutive formation.

²² ‘Stained’ translates the unusual verbal formation *'eḡ'āltī*. GKC 56p says that the questionable initial aleph stands instead of he, but 56k (noting Je. 25:3) calls it a scribal error. KB treats it as an example of the Aphel formation but suggests we read a niphal (*'eḡgā'ēl*) instead. Q^a has *g'lty*, presumably *ge'altī*. Delitzsch urges that the form is a hiphil with ‘an Aramaean inflexion’ and notes 2 Ch. 20:35; Ps. 76:6<5> (cf. GKC 54a²).

my redeemed' has come, the burden of the activity is the exaction of final vengeance on every foe. 'My redeemed' (*g^e'ullāy*) has the same letters as *stained* ('eḡ'āltī) two lines earlier; their roots ($\sqrt{gā'al}$) have the same spelling. This association must be intended; to him the defilement, to them the redemption.²³ The Anointed One was personally committed to his work; it was in his *heart*, matching the Lord's own 'zeal' in the same cause (59:17).

5 The matter of his aloneness is of such importance that he raises it again. Verse 3 mentions it as a fact, as does verse 4, with its reference to his *heart*, imply 'no other good enough'? This verse adds his personal sense of the tragedy of things as they were: *I was appalled* are the words used of the Lord in 59:16–17. The Anointed One, who came to announce the Lord's day (61:2) and to do the Lord's work (61:10), now speaks with the Lord's voice. *My own arm worked salvation for me* is identical wording to 59:16. Looking forward to the whole enterprise, 59:16 sees it undergirded by the righteousness of God, righteous alike in salvation and vengeance. But here, at the moment of actual execution, *wrath* is spoken of and given the place of emphasis in the sentence. It is as if to imply that many factors might have pressed him to relent, to take a different course, but the intrinsic 'property' of wrath in the divine nature gripped him till the work was done. On *wrath* see verse 3d.

6 For *trampled* ($\sqrt{būs}$) see 14:19, 25; 63:18; Psalm 44:5; Jeremiah 12:10; and for *anger* see verse 3c. The idea of *made them drunk* (*wa'*šakk^erēm; not, as some propose, the colourless *wa'*šabb^erēm, 'and I shattered them') looks back to 51:17, 21–22, where the cup that intoxicates is the cup of the Lord's wrath. There it is taken from the hand of Zion and put into the hand of their foes. The Anointed One again takes over from the Servant, to do the work of wrath where he did the work of salvation. *Their blood* is as in verse 3e. The pouring of the blood on the ground is a vivid way of saying that that particular living entity can never be reconstituted (cf. 2 Sa. 14:14). Thus, like the Servant's work of price-paying and sin-bearing, the Anointed One's work of vengeance is finished work.

²³ The translation *my redemption* (NIV, RSV) supposes a noun (*g^e'ullīm*) found nowhere else and adding nothing to the meaning here. Rather the reverse, for 'my redeemed' contains the right emphasis on people and relationship.

C. Prayer and response: steps to the new heaven and new earth

(63:7–66:24)

See the outline on p. 461. The Isaianic literature is characterized by a wonderful perception of the future, yet every time we are brought to the point where all seems to be fulfilled we meet a ‘not yet’. Chapter 12 sings in joy over the glory of the coming king (chapters 6–11), but chapters 13–27 intervene to remind us of the scale in time and space on which the Lord is working. Again, we trace the work of the Servant to the point where all is done and only the enjoyment of the Messianic banquet remains (chapter 55), and then we discover (56:1) that salvation is still to come. Finally, we reach the sombre but marvellous 63:1–6. Surely now, with the overthrow of every foe, the redeeming work is fully done! But no, the remembrancers take their place on the walls to give the Lord no rest till he fulfils all that is promised. This is the theme of the final section: the praying church (63:7–64:12) and the promising God (65:1–66:24).

1. The prayer of a remembrancer (63:7–64:12)

In 62:6, within the third Song of the Anointed One, part of his zeal for the coming glory of Zion was the posting of watchmen-intercessors to give the Lord no rest till all was fulfilled. They are described as ‘you who call on [remind] the LORD’ (*mazkîrîm*; the hiphil participle of $\sqrt{zākar}$, ‘to remember’: ‘those who cause to remember’). In 63:7 we meet one who says *I will tell/I will cause to remember* (*azkîr*; the hiphil imperfect of $\sqrt{zākar}$). Here there is a watchman-intercessor at his task. As Kidner says, ‘The glories of chapters 60–62 and the vision of the decisive action in 63:1–6 stir the prophet to one of the most eloquent intercessions of the Bible as he surveys the past goodness of God and the present straits of his people.’¹

a. *The foundation of intercession: the mind of God regarding his people* (63:7–14)

¹ Kidner, p. 623.

Typically of biblical prayers, the remembrancer begins by ‘talking to God about God’, especially what he has done in the past for his people, his ways in mercy, forbearance and redemption. Within this section, verse 7 is marked off by an inclusio *kindnesses* ... *kindnesses*. Verses 8–9 belong together thematically, describing the beginning and continuance of the Lord’s relationship with his people. Verses 10–14 consist of two ten-line stanzas (10–11, 12–14), each with its own inclusio: *his Holy Spirit* in verses 10–11 and *glorious arm* ... *glorious name* in verses 12–14.

7 The verse is enclosed between the two references to *kindnesses*. On the plural (*ḥ^asādîm*) see 55:3d. Here it means every possible aspect and display of the Lord’s ‘ever-unfailing-love’, covering first, *the deeds for which he is to be praised*/‘the praises of the LORD’, i.e. those acts of ever-unfailing-love which excite responsive praise. Secondly, it covers *the many good things*/‘the abundant goodness’ which has fully met his people’s needs. *Done* (✓ *gāmal*, ‘to do to’) means ‘to repay, recompense’ (Gn. 50:15) and then (where there is no thought of ‘paying back’) ‘to act fully’, ‘to meet every need’ (Ps. 13:6). His ever-unfailing-love includes also the emotional quality of *compassion* (cf. 54:7), the overflow of love.

8–9 These verses speak of how the Lord’s love began, in election and salvation (8) and how it continued in identification (9a), salvation, redemption and support.²

8 The exodus time is the starting point of the review (Ex. 4:22; 6:7). The Lord expected that his acceptance of them into his fellowship and family would be followed by a commitment of fidelity on their part (*not be false to me*), and *he became their Saviour*. The only place in the exodus sequence where the verb ‘to save’ occurs is Exodus 14:30, a

² Isaiah’s skill in rhyme is well exemplified in verse 9:

- a *b^ekol sāratām*
- b *lō' sār*
- a *ūmal'a^ł pānāw hōši'ām*
- c¹ *b^eah^abat^łô*
- c² *ūb^ehemlat^łô*
- a *hū' g^eālām*
- d¹ *way^enat^łelēm*
- d² *way^enaśś^eēm*
- a *kol y^emē 'ōlām*

comprehensive use indicating that the Red Sea event completed and sealed the whole enterprise as a work of salvation. In this way the Lord not only brought his *people* into the relationship of *sons* to himself but on his side accepted the implications of that relationship by acting in salvation according to their need. Whether they would live within, and live up to, their relationship with him was to be another matter.

9 Here Isaiah explores the relationship further from the Lord's side—*he too was distressed*. This is one of the passages (see 9:3 <4>) where the transition may be either ‘not’ or ‘to him’. Complicating the matter further, *distressed* (*sār*) can also mean ‘adversary’. One possible translation is ‘in all their afflictions, no adversary he!’, *i.e.* he was not the opponent responsible for their adversity, or he did not stand opposed to them in their hour of need, but identified with them. A better possibility, however, is ‘in all their affliction, affliction to him/he had affliction’, *i.e.* he identified with them and shared their tribulation. *The angel of his presence* is ‘the angel of his face’. The face means personal, recognizable presence. This is the angelic being who made the Lord’s presence recognizably real among his people, ‘an *alter ego* of God ... wholly equivalent to the Angel of the Covenant’,³ distinct from God only in so far as God-in-revelation is different from God-in-himself. The noun *love* (*ah^abā*) is used here for the only time in Isaiah (cf. √'ahēb, used of the Lord’s love in 43:4; 48:14; 61:8); it is the love which delights in the companionship of the loved one. This occurrence of *mercy* (*hemlā*), found only in Genesis 19:16, is a perfect illustration of its meaning: ‘the gentle pity that spares’ (cf. the verb in 9:19 <18> ; 30:14). For *redeemed* (*gā'al*) see 35:9, and Genesis 48:16 for the broader significance of a caring and protective identification covering the whole course of life. *Lifted* and *carried* are synonymous, an example of doubling for the sake of emphasis.

10–14 Within the structure of the two ten-line stanzas noted above, the first two lines of the first stanza (10ab) form an introduction. The middle section consists of divine reaction (10cd) and a divine soliloquy (11–14b). In the soliloquy the Lord recalls his dealings with his rebellious people in the aftermath of the exodus, Moses and the Red Sea (11bc, 12ab), the shepherding care he extended to them (11d, 13bc, 14a) and the presence and activity of his Spirit (11ef, 14b). The two final lines (14cd) are addressed to the Lord, describing his continuance with his recalcitrant people and the purpose he had in mind.

³ G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oliver and Boyd, 1953), p 29.

10 The initial emphasis, ‘But they for their part’, picks up the divine expectation in verse **8b** that they, so signally honoured, would not play false. *Rebelled* ($\sqrt{mārā}$; **1:20**, **3:8; 50:5**) denotes provocative rebellion, the idea of rebuff to the approach of a gracious God. On *his Holy Spirit* (*cf.* Ps. **51:11 <13>**) Delitzsch says,

The Spirit of holiness which is distinguished from Him as a personal existence by the fact that he can be grieved (*cf.* Eph. **4:30**) ... Hence Jehovah, and the angel of His face, and the Spirit of His holiness are distinguishable as three persons.⁴

Knight says,

All that is summed up under the word ‘holy’ ... that God is living, transcendent, immanent, righteous and utterly sinless, is applied by **Isaiah 63** and **Psalm 51** to the Spirit of God ... The Spirit thereby receives the personality and the very character of God himself.⁵

So/‘and’ he turned parallels ‘and they rebelled ... and he turned’. *Turned* ($\sqrt{hāpāk}$) means to turn right round. Characteristically it is used of the Lord’s overturning of Sodom. According to Westermann, ‘To grieve God’s goodness is to assail his holiness ... The nerve-centre of all that happens in history consists in the fact that, when God’s holiness has been wounded, things cannot go on as they are.’⁶ **Psalm 78** is an extended treatment of the same theme as these verses. Those who refuse his way become his enemies (**1:24**) and, in the present passage, he theirs. The truth that he hates the sin but loves the sinner needs the balance and corrective of ‘enmity’ passages such as these. In the ultimate, sinner and sin cannot be facilely held apart. The *and* before *he himself* should be omitted to retain the abrupt Hebrew.

11 On *Then his people* see the NIV margin but translate, ‘And he remembered’. The sequence is: ‘And they rebelled (**10a**) ... and he turned (**10c**) ... and he remembered (**11a**).’ In the thick of rebellion and the hostility it provoked, the Lord’s tender mind returned to the beginning of things (*cf.* Je. **2:2–3**). *The days of Moses and his people* masks the abruptness of the Hebrew, which is much more effective. It is as if the Lord were jolted out of his hostile reactions by sudden memories, ‘And he remembered the days of

⁴ Delitzsch, vol. 2, p. 456.

⁵ Knight, *Trinity*, pp. 54–55.

⁶ Westermann, p. 388.

yore—Moses! his people!’. *His people* looks back to *Surely they are my people* in verse 8a. For such dramatic divine ‘remembering’ cf. Exodus 2:24. *Brought them through the sea/‘brought them up out of the sea’ refers to the Red Sea. With the shepherd/‘shepherds’ refers to Moses only or to Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:19–20; Mi. 6:4).* The only references to the Holy Spirit in the exodus narratives are the enduement of Bezalel (Ex. 28:3) and the resting of the Spirit on Moses and subsequently on the elders (Nu. 11:17, 25). But the ‘placing’ of the Holy Spirit ‘in the midst’ of them (cf. Hg. 2:5) suggests the indwelling of the Lord in the tabernacle (Ex. 29:44–46).

12 *Who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses’ right hand* is ‘who made his beautiful arm go at Moses’ right hand’. Unlike the Servant (53:1), Moses was not ‘the arm of the LORD’, but he knew the power of that accompanying arm as he led the people on. *Who divided the waters* is very likely a reference to the pathway through the Jordan at the other end of the journey. At this point reminiscing about historical events gives way to a recollection of the motive which lay behind it all: the Lord’s own repute, *to gain for himself everlasting renown/‘to make for himself an everlasting name’*. In the history of Israel heavenly and divine things were at stake, as indeed Moses knew well (Ex. 32:12; Nu. 14:13–16; cf. Jos. 7:9; Ezk. 20:9, 14, 22).

13 Another thought follows: *led them through the depths*. No barrier was allowed to stand in the way of his people. *Depths* is the plural of *t^ehôm* (see 51:10). From the gods of Egypt to the incantations of Balaam (Nu. 22ff.), no obstacle (natural or supernatural) was allowed to impede his people, unworthy though they were (10ab). The word ‘desert’ is often, as here, used of *open country*; so great was divine care that Israel traversed that great and awful wilderness (Dt. 8:15) as sure-footedly as a *horse* galloping in *open country*.

14ab This verse returns to the story of the journey from Egypt to Canaan, completing it by a third reference to the Holy Spirit: it was he who brought the people into their *rest*. A lovely illustration enhances the thought. Flocks are brought down from the high pastures to feed in lush valleys; even so the Spirit gave them rest in Canaan.

14cd The remembrancer, having brought these thoughts to the divine mind, now addresses him directly in order to draw conclusions. First, he asks God to think of all he did for his people: *This is how you guided*—in all these ways, with all that power, out of all that love, in spite of all that offence. Was it all for nothing? Has God changed?

Secondly, he reminds God that they are still *your people*; the title given in verse 8 has not been withdrawn. They, for their part, have never lived out the implications of their sonship, but where is the Lord of ever-unfailing-love (7)? Does this all-covering love not cover this situation too? Will he also *be false* (8)? Thirdly, what about God's *glorious name*, 'a name of beauty'? The beauty of the Lord (*cf.* 60:7) is everything that attracts about him, the glory of his lovely and winning ways. Will he not still work so that his name may be seen in all its beauty?

b. Confession and intercession (63:15–64:12)

The remembrancer has now established a basis for prayer (63:7–14) by reminding himself and the Lord of the ever-unfailing-love in the divine nature, the special place before God of his people and sons. To such a God prayer can confidently be made for such a people. This prayer is a powerful poem in seven stanzas of which the first (15–16) is slightly longer, and the sixth (8–9) slightly shorter, than the eight-line norm established by the rest.

A¹ The Lord's heavenly house: his compassions restrained (15–16)

B¹ We are your people though it does not seem like it (17–19)

C¹ The nations would tremble before you were you but to show your face (64:1–3)

D The unique Lord: active for those who hope in him, but what of those who ignore his wrath? (4–5)

C² It is we who wilt because of our sin, and you have hidden your face (6–7)

B² We are your people: please consider it! (8–9)

A² The Lord's earthly house in ruins: will he restrain himself? (10–12)

The central D section dares to face the hard question: Can we be saved? This expresses the rigour of a relationship with the one and only God who is also unique in holiness: to know that he holds fellowship with those who walk in his way, that there is such a reality as his wrath—and yet to go on sinning! How can such be saved? The C sections, taken together, are concerned with confession. The hope was for a coming down of their God, bringing the whole world to its knees (C¹), but it is rather 'we' who wilt (C²) because he has turned his face away! The B and A sections find grounds for pleading. In the B sections this is the human ground (we are your people; *cf.* 63:8, 14); in the A sections it is

the divine ground (the heavenly God who is compassionate if only he will release his compassions).

‘Where?’—the problem of love withheld (**63:15–16**)

A plea for divine attention (**15ab**) leads to a question whether God has changed, because formerly he was known for zeal on behalf of his people, compassion and a tender heart (**15cd**). This is a real problem because, come what may, he is still Father and Redeemer (**16**).

15 The Lord is asked to turn his face towards us and take note of what he sees, to give us his full attention. The intercessor consciously adopts the pose called for in Solomon’s prayer (**1 Ki. 8:30**). *Your lofty throne, holy and glorious* is (lit.) ‘the house of your holiness and beauty’. ‘House’ (*z^ebul*) may derive from a verb ‘to honour’ or a verb ‘to rule’. In use it refers to ‘important’ houses (**1 Ki. 8:13; Ps. 49:14 <15>**). On *glorious*/‘beauty’ see **60:7**. The prayer is addressed to the Lord in the fulness of the divine nature, his transcendence (*heaven*), dignity (‘house’), ‘holiness’ and beautiful or winsome glory. *Zeal* (**9:6 <7> ; 59:17**) is the passionate commitment whereby he keeps his promises. *Might* is heroic ability, the strength to tackle a task or a foe. *Tenderness*/‘sounding, turmoil of your inward parts’ is passion as felt, inwardly moving. *Compassion* is overflowing love (**54:7**). In these four ideas the movement is from outside in. The Lord has been known for his zealous commitment to his own cause, the power which enables him, his inward heart and the upsurging of his love for his people. In the Lord’s soliloquy he was overheard saying ‘Where?’ (**63:11**). The interceding remembrancer repeats the question: Where now are the great qualities of the past? (cf. **Jdg. 6:13**). The verb *withheld* is reflexive; the restraint is self-imposed. The use of the verb evidences the believing nature of the question just asked. God has not changed; his zeal etc. is still there. *Withheld* is not ‘destroyed’ or ‘vanished’!

16 The reference to *Abraham* and *Israel* is enclosed in references to the Lord as *Father* and *Redeemer*, and the sense of the verse is that where even the greatest and most honoured members of the family can offer no help, the Fatherhood of the Lord and his Redeemer-kinship is still available and avails. *Know* is from $\sqrt{yādā}$ and *acknowledge* is the hiphil of $\sqrt{nākar}$. Cf. **Deuteronomy 33:9**, where the same verbs are used in the negative ‘to have no regard for’ and ‘not to recognize’, both in the sense of detachment from family relationships and refusal of family obligations. In the present verse there is the

double thought that dead relations cannot, in any case, help and also that, in contrast to 48:11–12, where the people had claimed a relationship to which they no longer had a right, there is now a deep sense of forfeiture. They are alienated from Abraham, the father of the family, and from Israel who gave them the name which should have spelt out their privileges. Into this vacuum comes the Lord as *Father* and with a next-of-kin (*Redeemer*; 35:9) right which has been accepted *from of old*/‘from for-ever’, ‘always’ as part of the revelation of himself, his *name*. The appeal here is to factors within the divine nature, equivalent to his concern for his name in verses 12, 14.

‘Why?’—a plea for an erring people (63:17–19 <17–19a>)

The fundamental problem is within the divine nature, and until the Lord changes (17) nothing can change. Though they are his people (17cd) they will continue in loss of inheritance (18) and as if they did not belong to the Lord at all (19).

17 *Why do you make us wander from your ways?* is not an attempt to lay the blame on the Lord but, in Old Testament thought, a recognition of guilt of such proportions that the Lord could not let it pass but judicially sentenced his people to the consequences of their own choices. *Harden our hearts* ($\sqrt{qāšāh}$) is not used in Exodus of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart,⁷ but the exodus situation is a paradigm. The heart set on disobedience hardens progressively against the way and will of God until the moment, known only to the Lord (and known, indeed, appointed, by him in advance), arrives when the sentence of hardening must be passed. This is the point of no return. Since heart-hardening is humanly irretrievable, only a ‘turning’ on the part of God can help (Ps. 80:14 <15> ; 90:13). Through the work of the Servant, *servants* (cf. 54:17) come into being and into their inheritance. But in the circumstances of this world and the conflict within

⁷ The exodus verbs are $\sqrt{hāzaq}$ (the qal of which means ‘to be/become hard’ [7:13, 22; 8:19<15>; 9:35] and the piel ‘to make hard’, ‘harden’ [4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17]), which is always used of divine action; $\sqrt{kābēd}$ (the qal of which means ‘to be/become heavy/insensitive/unresponsive’ [9:7; cf. the adjective in 7:14] and the hiphil ‘to make unresponsive’ [8:15<11>, 32<28>; 9:34; 10:1]), which is used of both the Lord’s and Pharaoh’s actions; and $\sqrt{qāšā}$ (the hiphil of which means ‘to make harsh/stubbornly antagonistic’ [7:3]), which is used of divine action. The human act of disobedience results in a hardening in the character, a diminishing of the power to respond positively until, in the sovereign management and decree of God, that power is lost totally.

between the old nature and the new, the Lord's servants fall grievously below their grace-based ideal. The contrast between 54:17 and 63:17 is part of the *raison d'être* of chapters 56–66, the expectation of a coming work of God overthrowing every hindrance to the true life of the servants, bringing in the new Jerusalem of holiness. Both *servants* and *inheritance* express a relationship with the Lord. The former carries with it the implication of obedience; the latter, the privilege of enjoyment of what the Lord has given us to 'possess' (the basic idea behind *inheritance*). *The tribes* are the exodus people who enjoyed redemption and were promised inheritance and in the meantime suffered the buffetings of this life and the crass failures of their own hearts.

18–19 It is usual to claim a post-exilic setting for these verses, *i.e.* the return to a devastated *sanctuary*. The whole post-exilic experience is against this view. The mere fact of a return from Babylon was proof that the Lord was ruling his people and was on their side. In such circumstances they could not have said, *Where are your zeal and your might?* (15), nor could they pray, *Return* (17) for it would have been clear that the Lord had indeed 'returned' to them. The verses could, of course, be exilic, looking back to the fall of city and sanctuary in 586 and to what seemed in retrospect the all too short existence of the Davidic empire. But the question has to be asked whether, and to what extent, a prophet is allowed to meditate on what has already been revealed to him of coming events. How would Isaiah, for example, react to his awareness of the coming, undated Babylonian debacle (39:7–8)? In the light of such a certainty how would he pray? If he were imaginatively to put himself into the middle of the disaster he would pray as here. Alternatively, he would pray in perfects of certainty: 'For a little while your people possessed ... our adversaries are to tread down your sanctuary ... we are to become ...!' Either way, Isaiah is casting himself into the role of one longing for a change in the divine heart and for further, rectifying, acts of God. Five privileges are alluded to: election, a chosen *people*; *sanctuary*, the presence of the holy indwelling God; *yours*, family membership by redemption (43:1de); under his kingly care (*ruled*); sharing his *name*, intimately united with him person to person. A more literal translation of verse 19 is, 'For a long time we have been [as] those over whom you did not rule, upon whom your name had not been called.' It is almost as if the clauses had become titles: We have become 'You did not rule over them', 'Your name was not given to them'. *Trampled* is as 63:6: the coming recompense will match the offence.

'If only!'—what might so easily have been (64:1–3 <63:19b–64:2>)

1 The rules governing the particle *lū'*⁸ require a past reference here—not *Oh, that you would ...* but ‘Oh that you had ...’. Isaiah has been reviewing a tragic past (17–19); it could all have been so different! The Lord’s mere presence would have sufficed to change everything! *Come down* provides the inclusio and, therefore, the embracing theme of this stanza (1a, 3b). Isaiah used this verb of the ‘coming down’ of the Lord to deal with the Assyrian threat (31:4). It is part of the stock-in-trade of the theophany, which includes also the trembling earth and the fire (of holiness) (Ps. 18:7ff. <8ff.>; cf. verses 2d, 3b). *Before you* is ‘at/because of your face/presence’; just that, nothing more!

2 This verse has pictures of swift destruction (*fire sets twigs ablaze*) and irresistible change ('fire'—the subject is repeated where the NIV introduces *and—causes water to boil*).⁹ So, if the Lord had only ‘come down’ every foe would have disappeared, all would have been changed (cf. Ps. 46, which might well belong to the Assyrian period of Isaiah’s ministry). God is asked to *make your name known* in all its destructive and transforming power. A theophany is purposeful—that the world might know who and what the God of Israel is.

3 When is better ‘while’, i.e. in the process of the theophany. Awesome is awe-inspiring. Did not expect is a recognition that, for all the well-known motifs of theophany, the coming down of the Lord would always exceed all expectations. This repetition of verse 1ab is discounted widely by commentators as a copyist’s mistake. But the ear attuned to Isaiah’s use of palistrophe will readily hear the heartache and wistfulness with which the stanza returns to its starting point, especially if the words are left as abrupt in English as they are in Hebrew: ‘Had come down; before you mountains trembled!’. If only! We too who are so often baffled by the way the Lord runs the world can identify with the spirit which wonders why he has acted in some other way—why he has not

⁸ The invariable Hebrew rule regarding the meaning of the particle *lū'* ('Oh that!/Would that!') is that the tense of the following verb is determinative. With a following perfect tense it always refers to the past (Would that ... had ...!; e.g. Nu. 14:2; Jos. 7:7); with a present it always refers to the present (Would that ... were <now> ...!; e.g. Nu. 22:29; 2 Sa. 19:7); and with a following imperfect it always refers to the present or future (Oh that ... might ...!; e.g. Gn. 17:18; Jb. 6:2). See Driver, 140; GKC, 151; Davidson, 131.

⁹ 64:2ab<64:1a> is another fine example of Isaiah’s palistrophic technique: *kīqēd*

done something to check evil, change circumstances and people, rescue his own—rather than, as it appears, doing nothing!

'You are angry'—the unique God and the forfeiture of his favour (64:4–5 <3–4>)

In the preceding stanza it all seemed so easy for a God as mighty as the Lord to 'show his face' and put all things to rights. But, asks this central stanza of the poem, why should such a God as he intervene for such people as we? This is the stanza which faces the hard questions. It is embraced by an inclusio lost in the NIV (*ancient times* [4a] and *continued* [5c] are the same Hebrew word, 'olām). Just as God has gone on 'for ever', so has our sin! It is no foregone conclusion that we can be saved. The unique Lord (4a–c) has made known the conditions of blessing (4d, 5ab). Far from meeting these conditions, we have flouted them persistently (5d–f).

4 Neither history (*since ancient times*), nor revelation (*heard ... ear*), nor perception (*eye*) had brought to light any other God; there is no *God besides you*. But what of his character and his ways, this only God? If he is the only one and we expect his aid, we need to know what he is like. First, he *acts on behalf of those who wait for him*. *Wait* ($\sqrt{hākā}$) is synonymous with $\sqrt{qāwā}$ (*expect* in verse 3). At their highest, both mean 'to exercise a patient, confident and expectant faith'. Divine intervention corresponds to the sort of faith the unique God requires as the habitual attitude (*wait* is in the imperfect) of his people.

5 There is, secondly, a moral requirement: *you come to the help of those who gladly do right*. *Come to the help of*/'meet with' is in the perfect tense, signifying a settled characteristic of the Lord. The participles in *those who gladly do right*/'one who is rejoicing and doing righteousness' express an abiding state. The verbs, expressed separately, give weight to each, *i.e.* 'one whose joy it is to continue in righteousness and who, continuing in righteousness, finds joy'. The emotions and moral obedience of the will are both involved. Thirdly, he acts for and helps those who *remember* [you in] *your ways*. Life must be conformed to the pattern of God, yet not be just conformism (as the NIV implies with *remember your ways*) but devotion to the person ('remember you in your ways') so as to pursue the divine likeness. The Hebrew calls for a more literal rendering of the second half of the verse:

'Behold, for your part, you were enraged,

and/because we sinned.

In them a long time—

and shall we be saved?’

The verbs ‘enraged … sinned’ are paired somewhat like ‘rejoicing and doing’ above, but here they are perfect tenses, indicating a settled state: ‘it was your fixed mind to be angry at our inveterate sinning and it was our determination to go on sinning notwithstanding your certain anger.’ Isaiah is not explaining the divine wrath (that would require reversing the order of the verbs—we sinned and so you were angry), rather he is exposing the aggravated offence (that we sinned knowing full well it would enrage you). It was flying in the face of God. ‘In them’ may refer to the plethora of sins we committed or to the two components of anger and sin—over a long period this ‘knowing provocation’ has gone on. Following this the final question has to be faced: can such provocation, such deliberate, persistent offensiveness, meet with salvation?

The hidden face: sin and helplessness (64:6–7 <5–6>)

There is a colossal irony in the balance between this stanza and the matching third stanza (1–3). The expectation was that if the Lord showed his face (1b, 2d, 3b) the world and the nations would tremble. The reality is that it is *we* who are shrivelling (6c) and wasting away (7d) because the Lord has hidden his face (7c). But this comes in the course of a deep acknowledgement of sin as the only response to the previous stanza (4–5). Isaiah gives an analysis of sin.

1. *Unclean* (*tāmē*). This is the leper’s cry (Lv. 13:45) of personal unfitness for the fellowship of God and the worshipping community.

2. *Filthy rags*/‘a garment of menstruation’, i.e. stained by menstrual blood. Bodily discharges that were linked with procreation were considered a defilement because they were so vitally associated with fallen human life. Even what we might consider to be in our favour, *our righteous acts*, flow from a fallen nature and partake of its fallenness.

3. The ‘fading leaf’ image (cf. 1:30; 24:4; 28:1; 34:4; 40:7). This is a picture of decay ending in death. This death is inherent in sin itself, for it is *our sins*/‘iniquities’ (53:5; the interior aspect of sin, sin as the heart of the fallen nature) that *sweep us away* like the wind carries off dead leaves (cf. Ps. 1:4, where the wind is divine judgment).

4. Disinterest in the Lord. Neglect of God both as an object of worship (*calls on your name*; cf. [Gn. 13:4](#)) and as a source of strength ('rouses himself' *to lay hold of you*). The picture behind *strives*/'rouses himself' is that of waking from sleep. So that life without a living relationship with God is not even half-awake. The reflexive verb also makes spiritual life a personal responsibility.

5. Divine alienation (*you have hidden your face*). The consequence of this is that 'you have melted us in the hand of our iniquity'.¹⁰ Figuratively, 'to melt' is to lose energy or 'heart', the dissolution of life. 'In the hand of'/'by the agency of' shows the Lord allowing sin to take its course and to end in death.

'But now'—a plea to the unchanged God ([64:8–9 <7–8>](#))

There is another side to the changelessness of God. On the one hand, he is changeless in his requirements ([4–5](#)), on the other, he is equally changeless in grace and mercy. Once he has constituted himself the *Father* ([63:16](#)) of his *people* that too is unalterable. So the present stanza moves from the grim admissions of verses [6–7](#) to plead *you are our Father* ([8a](#)) and *we are all your people* ([9d](#)), making these the basis of prayer that anger may cease ([9a](#)), iniquity be forgotten ([9b](#)) and favourable attention return ([9c](#)). The matching stanza [63:17–19](#) lamented a 'people' who had never really possessed their possessions ([18a](#)).

8 Yet is 'But now'. The child would not be there but for the father, nor the pot but for the potter, nor the artefact but for the craftsman. It is in this sense that the three figures are used. It is not to blame the father for what his children have done, or the potter for the marred pot etc. but to assert a relationship resting on divine love (*Father*), sovereignty (*potter*) and care (*work of your hand*). This relationship is part of the unchanging reality of God. Therefore the children may return and ask to be taken

¹⁰ √ *mûg* ('to melt') is frequently used figuratively (e.g. [Jos. 2:9](#)). In Hebrew 'many verbs originally intransitive may be used also as transitives' ([GKC, 117u](#)). The probability is that our 'transitive/intransitive' terminology is not wholly appropriate to the Hebrew verb. English requires a transitive verb here. We might even say that Isaiah is not above pushing an intransitive verb into a transitive meaning in order to end this stanza with a fine rhyming effect: *watt^emûgēnû b^eyad-* ^a*wōnēnû*. The alternative is to alter it to *watt^emaggēnēnû* ('and you have handed us over to ...').

home, the pot may look to the potter to remake it. Twice in the last stanza the word *kullānū* (*all of us* [6a]; *we all* [6c, 8c, 9d]) occurred as confession; it occurs twice in this stanza as plea.

9 A comprehensive change in God is desired: to cease both to be *angry* ($\sqrt{qāṣap}$, ‘rage’; a word of general meaning, cf. verse 5c; 47:6; 57:17) and to remember the offences which foster that anger. *Beyond measure* suggests that the divine rage could exceed permissible limits, but the Hebrew is (lit.) ‘unto muchness’, meaning ‘with all its inherent force’, i.e. ‘do not let us feel the full weight of your anger’. They seek instead, a new attitude from God. *Oh, look* is ‘Behold, look’ (*upon us* and *for* should be omitted): ‘Behold, look, we pray! We are your people!’

‘After all this’—can love still be withheld? (64:10–12 <9–11>)

The key verb in this final stanza is *hold yourself back* (12a), matching the same verb in the opening stanza, where tenderness and compassion *are withheld*/‘hold themselves back’ (63:15d). Other links between the two stanzas are the heavenly mansion and the earthly house (11a; 63:15a) and the references to the founding fathers, Abraham and Israel (63:16) and the worshipping fathers of earlier days (11a). The reference to desolate cities and the burnt house have given rise to suggestions of post-exilic dating. It is undeniable that this is what the exiles returned to find, but verse 12 could not have been spoken by them, for their return was evidence that the Lord had not held himself back or been silent. On the contrary, it showed he had ceased to afflict. Their Babylonian experience was over precisely because the Lord had taken action on their behalf. Furthermore, the problem of the immediate post-exilic days was not divine inaction but human failure as the returnees lapsed into carelessness and left the house unbuilt. Consequently, we have the same alternatives as in 63:18–19: either an exilic plea or an Isaianic meditation arising from revelation already vouchsafed to him and voiced imaginatively in this way. As we noted on chapter 39, the Babylonian prediction was undated and a live option within the lifetime of Isaiah. It is inevitable that he would ask himself ‘What would I do when ...?’. It is even more certain that others, once they heard the Babylonian prophecy, would ask him the same question. Such a poem as this (63:15–64:12) is just the *vade-mecum* for the uncharted days ahead. In the light of the balanced pattern of chapters 56–66 (see the outline on p. 461) and the incessant pre-exilic imagery and content, it is not much to ask that the verbs here be taken as perfects

of certainty: ‘Your sacred cities are to become ...’ etc.

10 *Your sacred cities* refers to the whole of the promised land considered as the Lord’s holy portion.

11 *Our holy and glorious temple* is ‘Our house of holiness and beauty’ (for the words *cf. 63:15b*). ‘House’ (rather than *temple*) conveys the proper idea of the Lord’s dwelling place among his people. It was not the fabric and decor which provided beauty but the holiness and attractiveness of the occupant.

12 *After all this/‘over all these things’* does not mean ‘after’ they have happened, but in response to such eventualities. *Hold yourself back* is the reflexive √’āpaq. When this verb was used in **63:15**, those who were at that point praying were themselves the cause of the restraining of divine compassion; but in the course of the poem sin has been exposed, acknowledged and confessed. The Lord has been sought in repentance. Consequently, at the end of the poem divine restraint is not related to people but to the situation as envisaged. The people are now right with God; the wonder of repentance is that it works. Will not the Lord now leap into action to deal with his remaining foes and to create a new situation transcending the ruins of the past?

2. Sure promises: the final reckoning and the new Jerusalem (65:1–66:24)

See the outline on p. [461](#) for the place of these final chapters in the scheme of chapters **56–66**. The prayer of the remembrancer ended, in principle, with the Lord’s penitent people living among ruins, waiting for a remedial act of God. That this is not the Lord’s ultimate intention for his people is the subject of chapters **65–66**. In these chapters there is a closely integrated structure, with balancing themes and a tremendous climax. The overall picture is the same as in **56:1–59:13**. The Lord’s people (his true, believing ones, often in these chapters called his ‘servants’) are set alongside others who are either compromisers or outright pagans. But it will not always be so, for the Lord will bring his servants into a new heaven, a new earth and a new Zion, while a dreadful judgment awaits the rest. Undeniable grimness sits alongside unimaginable glories; both alike are the word of the Lord. We have before us as plain a forecast of the implications of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as chapters **1–37** offered of his birth and chapters **40–55** of his cross. We must not, however, read the Old Testament with hindsight

but let it speak for itself.

A¹ The Lord's call to those who had not previously sought or known him ([65:1](#))

B¹ The Lord's requital on those who have rebelled and followed cults ([2–7](#))

C¹ A preserved remnant, his servants, who will inherit his land ([8–10](#))

D¹ Those who forsake the Lord and follow cults are destined for slaughter because he called and they did not answer but chose what did not please him ([11–12](#))

E Joys for the Lord's servants in the new creation. The new Jerusalem and its people ([13–25](#))

D² Those who have chosen their own way and their improper worship. They are under judgment because the Lord called and they did not answer but chose what did not please him ([66:1–4](#))

C² The glorious future of those who tremble at the Lord's word, the miracle children of Zion, the Lord's servants ([5–14](#))

B² Judgment on those who follow cults ([15–17](#))

A² The Lord's call to those who have not previously heard ([18–21](#))

Conclusion: Jerusalem, pilgrimage centre for the whole world ([22–24](#))

Like all 'archway' patterns, the first purpose of this is to draw attention to the central truth (E), the new creation with its new Zion. The second purpose is to show the steps to the fulfilment of the vision, the conditions upon which it can be enjoyed (A¹-D¹); and the third (D²-A²) is to reiterate and add greater fulness to those same truths. In the present pattern [66:22–24](#) could very well be included in A², for the topic is the same, but the particular emphasis on the Sabbath suggests that these verses were placed at the end to form an inclusio with [56:1–8](#) (with which there are marked similarities) and to conclude what has been a special emphasis throughout.

The Lord's world initiative ([65:1](#))

The Lord has taken the initiative in relation to people who neither asked for him nor sought him, presenting himself to those not previously related to him (the NIV has reversed the order of verse [1cd](#)). Many, if not most, commentators understand this verse as referring to rebel Israelites, apostates who have ceased in any real sense to acknowledge the Lord. However, the most natural understanding of the verbs in the first two

lines is that when the Lord ‘let myself be sought ... let myself be found’ (tolerative niphals) things came to a successful conclusion, *i.e.* those to whom he presented himself responded by seeking and finding. Furthermore, the words *to a nation that did not call on my name* could not at any point be used as a description of Israel, for there were always those who did call. Even if we take the words to mean ‘they called but not sincerely’ the accusation is still too sweeping, and, even if it were not, there is nothing in the Hebrew words or their order to justify inserting the vital thought of sincerity (*cf. 43:22*). In addition, the translation *that did not call* involves an alteration to the **MT**, which reads ‘to a nation not called by my name’ (see the **RV**).¹¹ Plainly, the **MT** excludes a reference to Israel. The only merit, grammatically, in the proposal to understand a reference to apostate Israel is that verse 2 would continue the same subject. This is certainly not decisive and hardly even important. Isaiah did not include headings and divisions in his book. It must, however, be accorded real weight that (as the outlines above show) a reference here to Gentiles fits the pattern of the whole. In this way, once a genuine pattern in a section is discerned, it exercises a proper control on exegesis. **66:18–21** matches the present verse in speaking of ‘nations’ ‘who have not seen my glory’ and ‘have not heard the report of me’. This approach to the nations is all of God, both in its inception (they *did not ask for me*) and in its outcome (‘I let myself be found’). Of course, God cannot be ‘sought’ without a decision and a will to do so. The verse does not overrule this but illuminates its essential background: we can seek only because he has first sought (*cf. 15:16*). The movement to *I said* indicates that the Lord reaches out to people through his word. The heart of the message is his self-revelation: *Here I am, here I am*/‘Behold me, behold me!’ The self-revelation broke new ground geographically but not theologically. Aimed at the hitherto unreached Gentiles, its objective was to bring them within the embrace of his *name*, *i.e.* within the bounds of his redeeming work and the revelation of himself as Redeemer (**Ex. 3:15**). This is what is meant, then, by the Lord lifting a banner to the nations and proclaiming that salvation has come to the daughter of Zion (**60:10f.**).

Pleading, provocation and reaction (**65:2–7**)

¹¹ **BHS** suggests the simple alteration from *qōrā’* (‘was called’) to *qārā’* (‘called’), but to appeal to the **LXX** and other ancient translations on a point like this is extremely unsafe.

This topical outline describes a poem written in six four-line stanzas. In so far as the religious corruption it describes has a background, it is in the pre-exilic Canaanite cults. The most that Foster, for example, can say in favour of his post-exilic setting for this passage is that ‘what we have here, in fact, is a description of the corrupt popular religion that existed in pre-exilic and doubtlessly also in exilic and post-exilic times’.¹² This is to make theory dictate to fact. In so far as evidence extends, the pre-exilic apostasies and syncretisms were burned out by the fires of the exile. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi reveal other lapses in the community but not these. Knight’s contention that the passage belongs to the immediate post-return, ‘a period before sacrificial worship was resumed’,¹³ ignores the evidence of *Ezra 3* that sacrificial worship was the first thing to be resumed. On the other hand, there is abundant reference to the existence of this very kind of corrupt practice before the exile.¹⁴ *1:28ff.* shows that such preaching as this is at home in the mouth of Isaiah and would have been relevant to his situation. In its present context and use its intention is to expose continuing apostasy in the people of God and to threaten the dreadful reality of divine recompense (see also the parallel passages *65:11–12; 66:1–4, 15–17*).

2 The major use of the phrase ‘to spread out [$\sqrt{pārāš}$] the hands’ is to adopt an attitude of prayer (*1:15; 1 Ki. 8:22, 38; Ps. 143:6*). Its use as a general gesture of appeal is limited to *Lamentations 1:17*. What a reversal, then, of the rightful relationship! The Lord with his hands spread out! Such is his longing to move his people to the desired response. *Obstinate* ($\sqrt{sārār}$) means stubbornly rebellious (*cf. 1:23*). Their resistance was proof even against incessant (*all day long*) pleading. And what they were like in their will they followed through in their life-style (*walk in ways not good*), which in turn was rooted in the mind (*their own imaginations/“after their thoughts”, mahšābōt; 55:8–9*).

¹² R. S. Foster, *The Restoration of Israel* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), p. 126. Watts evidences the common determination to date these passages in the post-exile: ‘The presence of the same pagan practices in the Jerusalem of the fifth century which had been condemned in the Jerusalem of the eighth century shows that the exile ... had been no catharsis ...’ (vol. 2, p. 344). Skinner makes the error of appealing to *Ezk. 8:10* as evidence for similar practices, seemingly forgetful that Ezekiel is describing a pre-exilic scene (vol. 2, p. 212).

¹³ Knight, *Isaiah 56–66*, p. 92.

¹⁴ *Is. 1:28–30; Je. 2:20, 27; 3:2, 6, 13; Ezk. 8:1–18; 16:1ff.; Mi. 5:12–14.*

3 To my very face ('al pānāy) is the 'before/besides me' of Exodus 20:3, referring here to the cultivation of alternative objects of worship. Continually corresponds to his pleading all day. The Lord accuses them of disregarding his requirements in the outward forms of religious practice. The garden as a locus of false religion is peculiar to Isaiah (cf. 1:29; 66:17), but 2 Kings 21:18, 26 may indicate a widespread practice. In 1:29 the garden is a place and symbol of fertility. The verb $\sqrt{qātar}$ (*burning incense on altars of brick*/‘burning on bricks’) is not to be restricted to incense-burning (cf. verse 7c) and here is parallel to *offering sacrifices* ($\sqrt{zābah}$). Respectively, the verbs express the ‘slaughter’ and the ‘burning’ aspects of the sacrificial system: ‘they make their sacrifices in gardens and burn them on bricks’. Just as the garden was an unauthorized place for sacrificing, so bricks were an unauthorized material for an altar (Ex. 20:25; Dt. 27:5–6; Jos. 8:31). Isaiah will press his condemnations deeper, but he starts with the simplicities of religious practice, for disobedience often begins at a point where obedience would be easy but we do not think it important.

4 The Lord’s second condemnation concerns the deeper matter of the source of supernatural revelation in which consultation with the dead was foremost (cf. 8:19–20). Deuteronomy 18:9ff. forbade necromancy and fortune-telling and commanded attention to the prophetic word. Keeping secret vigil is (lit.) ‘in guarded places’, i.e. secure against outside interruption. The LXX interprets this as, ‘in the caves they lie for the sake of dreams’. Thirdly, the Lord condemns their application of religion to life in the matter of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ foods. On pigs see Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8. The Massoretes recommend that we read here *mārāq* (*broth*) instead of the reading they preserve in their text, *p̄rāq* (*'bits/fragments'*). Unclean meat (*piggūl*; Lv. 7:18) is the meat of the sacrifices kept beyond the allowable time. In Leviticus 19:7 and Ezekiel 4:14 the same word is used of unclean meat in general. They were unconcerned to bring into their lives the Lord’s standards and disciplines of holiness.

5 In consequence, they developed their own notions of holiness, in particular a holiness of elitism that stood aloof from fellowship and created divisions, a first-class and second-class citizenship of special experiences or claims such as find no place in the Bible.¹⁵ Such pretensions are *smoke in my nostrils* because they reflect a ‘holiness’ which

¹⁵ For the form *q̄dā* (*I am holy you-wise*) cf. 44:21 (*‘you will not be forgotten me-wise’, tinnāšēnî*). Priestly ‘holiness’ inevitably set the priestly order apart from the people (Lv. 21:8), but for his

sits loose to the Lord's directives regarding worship ([3cd](#)), resorts to other sources of revelation than his word ([4ab](#)), neglects the obedience factor in the practicalities of holy living ([4cd](#)) and proves divisive in fellowship ([5ab](#)). *All day* describes the constant irritant of false holiness and forms an inclusio with the *all day* of the divine appeal ([2a](#)), marking off the description of the situation from the following statement of divine intent ([6–7](#)).

6–7 The divine reaction is: (i) certain, for it is *written before me*; (ii) personal, *I will not keep silent/quiet* from word and deed ($\sqrt{hāšā}$; [62:1](#)); (iii) a measured requital, *pay back in full* (the piel of $\sqrt{sālam}$, 'to do something with completeness', hence exactitude of requital; the tense is perfect of certainty); (iv) individual in application, *into their laps/bosom*. The verb *pay it back* is the same as in the previous line and, therefore, 'in full' should be added again; (v) a final settlement ([7ab](#)). Guilt becomes more aggravated as time passes and each generation is more guilty than the last. It is not that each coming generation is doomed beforehand by the actual sins of past generations (in that sense, each generation carries its own load), nor is it that the entail cannot be broken (cf. [Ezk. 18](#)). Rather, from generation to generation there is a heaping up of guilt before God, and failure to break with the past involves accepting the inheritance of the past. This is the price of being human ([Lk. 11:47–51](#)). Note the change of person from *their* ([6c](#)) to *your* ([7a](#)). This should not be altered (as the RSV, [BHS](#)). The same movement is seen in the parallel passage [1:29](#) and is widespread, not least in passages of condemnation, where it is used to bring guilt home to the present hearers. *Because* introduces a final summary of cause ([7cd](#)) and effect ([7ef](#)).

7 *Burned sacrifices/‘they burned’* is the absolute use of $\sqrt{qāṭar}$, as in verse [3d](#). Worshipping on *mountains* is the typical and, as far as is recorded, exclusively pre-exilic aberration.¹⁶ Mountain-tops were chosen as offering more hope of ‘catching Baal’s eye’ and promoting his imitative response. Canaanite religion was a religion of human pressure on the god as compared with a (true) religion of responsive obedience. For *defied/insulted* ($\sqrt{hārap}$) see [37:4, 17, 23–24](#). *Full payment for their former deeds* is one word in Hebrew, *p^eullātām* ('their outcome-of-work'), indicating exactness of retribu-

people, the Lord’s will was the holiness of obedience ([Ex. 19:5–6](#)). Isaiah exposes the nonsense of claiming some sort of priestly holiness while flouting the Lord’s rules for religion ([3](#)).

¹⁶ [1 Ki. 14:23](#); [2 Ki. 7:10](#); [16:4](#); [Je. 2:20](#); [13:27](#); [17:2](#); [Ezk. 20:28](#); [Ho. 4:13](#).

tion, a wage for work done. As the text stands *former* (*ri'sōnā*) must be adverbial (cf. Gn. 33:2; 1 Ki. 18:25), meaning ‘as a first thing’, the first thing the Lord must do, the ‘top’ of his agenda or, possibly, ‘from first [to last]’ (cf. Je. 16:18).¹⁷

A preserved remnant, his servants who will inherit his land (65:8–10)

The idea of a divided community runs throughout chapters 56–66 and is widely understood to reflect post-exilic ‘parties’ at odds with each other. But, in fact, there is nothing in these chapters, or in the contrast here between verses 2–7 and 8–10, that goes beyond, for example, 1:26ff.; 8:11–20; 10:20–23 (cf. 4:3; 6:11–13; Je. 4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11; Ezk. 11:13–20). These passages show how groundless is Whybray’s assertion that the ‘dichotomy which runs through the whole of this chapter ... goes far beyond any concept of a “remnant” in the pre-exilic literature’,¹⁸ or even Skinner’s view that we find here ‘an application to new circumstances of Isaiah’s doctrine of the Remnant’.¹⁹ This is true only if we first invent the new circumstances. There is no reason to deny these words to Isaiah. In those dark days, the hearts of the believing remnant would often have welcomed just such a message of assurance.

8 *Juice* (*tīrōš*) is not unfermented wine but (cf. Ho. 4:11) ‘wine made from the first drippings of the juice before the press was trodden’.²⁰ ‘Finding’ this juice may mean that the grapes were already oozing as they were being picked and thrown into the press and that this spontaneous juice was collected as specially valued. In relation to 63:3, this would be a lovely image of the assurance of salvation: the winepress of wrath discriminates. Was ‘Don’t destroy ...’ a vintage song? (Cf. the vintage shout in 16:10; Je. 25:30. Pss. 57–59, 75 have titles referring to a tune ‘Destroy not.’) *There is yet some good in it/‘for a blessing is in it’, i.e. it is prized for itself.* We may dare to say that the Lord’s people are a blessing to him, and he will carefully guard them from destruction. This remnant is first, according to grace, as the words *I will not destroy them all/‘the whole’* show. All

¹⁷ Otherwise the text must be changed, possibly (with *BHS*) from *r'išōnā* to *b'ērōšām* (‘on their head’). But how odd ‘on their head into their bosom’ would sound! This involves *BHS* in further rewriting of the text.

¹⁸ Whybray, p. 272.

¹⁹ Skinner, vol. 2, p. 213.

²⁰ See the article on ‘Wine’ in *IBD*.

merit the winepress but some are saved from it. Secondly, it is taken from among the professing people, *from Jacob, and from Judah* (9); and thirdly, it is destined for inheritance (9c).

9 *Descendants*/‘seed’ reflects the Abrahamic promise of [Genesis 22:17ff.](#) and reaches even further back to [Genesis 3:15](#). The other side of the Abrahamic promise ([Gn. 15:7ff.](#)) is expressed by *possess ... inherit/possess* (the same verb occurs twice). Cf. the tragically brief ‘possession’ of [63:18](#) with the double use of ‘possess’ here, denoting assured possession. *Chosen* (omit *people* and *servants*) reflects the two sides of the grace-based relationship: the fundamental reality of the Lord’s choice and the responsive reality of the new position and commitment which grace implements ([54:17; 57:18–19](#).) Cf. *my mountains* with the mountains of verse 7. The Lord will bring his people into his chosen place of blessing.

10 Isaiah uses *Sharon* ([1 Ch. 5:16; 27:29](#)) as typical of sad deterioration ([33:9](#)) and of Messianic renewal ([35:2](#)). *Achor* ([Jos. 7:24–26](#)) is a symbol of a bright beginning marred. Here, therefore, the picture is of restoration (Sharon will be what it was meant to be) and transformation (Achor with all threat removed). Nothing will mar this new beginning (cf. [Ho. 2:15](#)). Sharon was to the west and Achor to the east of Palestine, hence, the whole land would be under blessing. *Who seek* is in the perfect tense, meaning ‘have sought’ or ‘are devoted to seeking’ ($\sqrt{dāraš}$, as in verse 1a, is the opening verb of the verse). Is this intended as an inclusio, an indication that verses 1–10 are an original unity? This could well be. In any event it rounds out a sequence. The same characteristic marks those gathered from the world and those taken from the old communities of Jacob: they are diligent to be where they know the Lord is to be found.

The fate of those who forsake the Lord and follow cults ([65:11–12](#))

Those who *forget my holy mountain* contrast with the *chosen people* who *possess my mountains* (9), and their practices identify them with the stubborn rebels of verses 2–7. While Isaiah thus returns to an old topic, there is also progression, for what was in verse 7 a threat of just requital is now (12) *the sword*; but the cause (2, 12) remains the same.

11 Compromise is not possible. To follow the cults is to forsake the Lord; to be busy on those mountains (7) is to *forget his holy mountain*. In action they forsook, in mind they forgot. Religion is no substitute for personal relationship. They found no difficulty being religious (7c), in fact they would climb any mountain except the one where they

might meet the *holy* God. *Spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls ... for Destiny* is an exposure of the silliness of false religion: gods that need to be wined and dined and are yet thought to be the controllers of destiny. *Fortune (gad)* was a Syrian god worshipped widely. Cf. the appearance of the name in places like Baal-gad ([Jos. 11:17](#)) and Migdal-gad ([Jos. 15:37](#)), indicating the pre-exilic setting of this worship. *Destiny (m^enî)* means ‘apportionment’, i.e. of fate. Westermann says that, ‘A charge of open idolatry is surprising in the post-exilic period. It might hint that both the oracle of salvation in verses [9f.](#) and the oracle of judgment in verses [11–12a](#) were simply taken over from tradition.’²¹ But why should they be taken over if they are inappropriate? The setting is plainly pre-exilic.

12 *Destine* (✓*mānâ*) repeats the name of the ‘god’ *Destiny* ([11](#)). They sought ‘apportionment’ and that is what they will get! *Bend down* (✓*kāra'*) has the same consonants, in reverse order, as *spread* (✓*'ārak*; [11c](#)). Punishment matches offence, and false religion brings the opposite of what it seems to promise. Cf. *for I called* with verse [2](#). Their response contradicted the will (*I called*), the mind (*I spoke*), the nature (*evil in my sight*) and the heart (*displeases me/I did not delight in*) of God.

Joys for the Lord’s servants in the new creation: the new Jerusalem and its people ([65:13–25](#))

The three foregoing streams all feed into this great vision of the consummation. These are the world-wide stream (verse [1](#); cf. verse [25](#), recapitulating [11:9](#)), the judgment stream (verses [2–7](#), [11–12](#)), which flows into the contrasts in verses [13–15](#) (cf. verses [20fg](#), [25c](#)), and the remnant stream, which leads to the major content of this passage: the glories awaiting the Lord’s servants. Broadly considered, verses [13–15](#) lead into a recollection of the Abrahamic promise for the earth. A world in which blessing abounds ([16](#)) is explained (verse [17](#) begins with ‘For’) by the Lord’s intention of a new creation, including a new Jerusalem ([17–18](#)). In this new city blessing will abound, sin will be hunted out and the whole earth will be the Lord’s holy mountain ([19–25](#)). Within the editorial inclusio *this is what the Sovereign LORD says* ([13](#)) and *says the LORD* ([25](#)) there are three sections of almost equal length ([13b–16](#), [17–20](#), [21–25](#)), written in a free-verse style. The first and third sections have matching patterns in that each begins with the

²¹ Westermann, p. 405.

sort of life people will enjoy (13–15, 21–24) and moves on to the environment in which they will enjoy it (16, 25). The middle section reverses the order, dealing first with the broad concept of the new creation (17–18b) and then focusing down on the new city (18c–20).

Distinctive people in a world of blessing (65:13–16)

In a series of contrasts we meet people with distinctive experiences (13–14) and a distinctive name (15), with which is associated world-wide blessing (16a–d). The explanation is a new attitude on God's part (16ef).

13–14 *Therefore* refers to the foregoing promises (8–10) and threats (11–12). Note how *my servants* makes a link with verse 9, and the hunger and thirst motif contrasts with the spread table of verse 11. *Eat and drink* is to be understood as in 25:6; 55:1–2, i.e. the contrasting elements necessary to full bodily nourishment used as a picture of the meeting of every need of the person. To this is added the element of (lit.) ‘joy of heart’, internal satisfaction as well as external provision. By contrast, those who forsook the Lord and turned to the cults (2–5, 11–12) will find that they have condemned themselves to total non-fulfilment, to *shame*, i.e. disappointed hopes, *anguish* gripping the whole person at centre (*heart*) and *brokenness of spirit*, the breakdown of every vital energy and purposeful activity.

15–16d In verse 15 the topic of the *name* is singled out and the two verses are linked by a relative pronoun (overlooked in the NIV): ‘... another name, in connection with which whoever ...’. Thus a pattern emerges. The name that leads to *curse* and *death* at the hand of *the Sovereign LORD* (15a–c) and *another name* (not here revealed) which links with blessing and allegiance to *the God of truth* (15d, 16a–d). The ‘name’ signifies all that is essentially true of a person. In retrospect, the *chosen* will see them as exemplary of those upon whom the curse of God justly falls (e.g. Je. 29:22) ending in *death*. Second person plural pronouns (13b–15a) are replaced by a second person singular, *put you to death*, bringing the threat of judgment home to the individual (cf. a similar singular in the judgment passage in Dt. 28:48). The idiom of an ‘individualizing singular’ is widespread. On *his servants* see 54:17. The giving of a new name recalls Genesis 17:5, the foundation of the Lord’s Abrahamic plan. As then so here, the different name ‘means’ becoming a different person with different potentialities and prospects. The verb *invokes a blessing* (the reflexive of $\sqrt{bārak}$) is a further Abrahamic link (Gn. 22:18; 26:4;

cf. the reflexive niphil in [Gn. 12:3; 18:18; 28:14](#)). The thrust of the reflexive verb is, ‘whoever in the world would enter into the blessing designed for him will enter into that blessing in the God of truth’ (the verb is used twice). But such comes to the God of truth ‘in connection with’ the name the Lord has given his servants. Those who link with the name link with the God. Such see in the character or ‘person’ which the name summarizes that which leads them to run to this God to bless themselves, *i.e.* enter into the blessing designed for them. *Land*, in the light of the Abrahamic associations of the passage, should be ‘earth/world’ as above. The title *the God of truth/‘the God of [the] Amen*’, found only here, is recalled in [2 Corinthians 1:20](#), which makes its meaning clear: he is the God who says ‘Amen’ to all his promises, affirming their reality and his trustworthiness in keeping them—the God who promised of old in Abraham that people worldwide would enter into blessing and who has kept his word. This world-wide enjoyment of the faithful God is followed by corresponding world-wide commitment: *takes an oath by/‘swears loyalty to’* (*cf.* [45:23](#)).

16ef *Hidden from my eyes* refers not to what people have forgotten but to what God has forgotten. The ‘For’ which opens the last line makes this clearer: ‘for the past troubles ... forgotten, for they will be hidden ...’. What is no longer valid before God has no ground of being. *Past* is ‘former’, as in verse [17c](#).

New creation, new city ([65:17–20](#))

Two delightful poetic cameos compose this section: the poem of the new creation ([17–18b](#)) and the poem of the city and its people ([18c–20](#)). The former can be divided as follows:

A¹ Divine creative act ([17ab](#))

B¹ The transcending of the past (two verbs) ([17cd](#))

B² The joy of the present (two verbs) ([18a](#))

A² Divine creative act ([18b](#))

17 The initial ‘For’ (omitted by the NIV) should be restored. The purpose of the poem in context is to explain the particular and world-wide blessings of the preceding section. On *create* see [4:5](#). *Heavens* and *earth* represent the totality of things, as [Genesis 1:1](#). *Former things* picks up the reference to ‘former troubles’ in verse [16e](#) but expresses a ‘grander’ conception; not only its sorrows but everything about the old order will be

gone in this total renewal. *Not be remembered* refers to the conscious contents of memory; *come to mind*, to memories suddenly roused. The awareness will be of a total newness without anything even prompting a recollection of what used to be. The divine forgetfulness of verse 16ef will be matched by general amnesia.

18ab *But* is emphatic: ‘But on the contrary’, *i.e.* as compared with the possibility of a past memory surfacing there will be only abounding joy. The doubling of the imperatives is itself a guarantee of total joy, as if saying it two ways encompassed every possible joyful feeling. *For ever* indicates the final difference: the fickleness and uncertainty of ‘earth’s joys’ now will not be so then. On the imperative of certain outcome see 2:9.

18cd The second poem, which begins here, can be divided up as follows:

A¹ The new creation and its intention (18cd)

B¹ Divine experience (19ab)

B² Human experience (19c–20e)

A² The unchanged moral factor (20fg)

For I will create/‘For, behold, I am going to create’ uses the same verb in the same form (a participle expressing the impending future) for the third time (*cf.* verses 17a, 18b), not only forging a link between the two poems but insisting that the Lord pays the same unique, divine creative care to the city and its people as to the total environment. The nouns *delight* and *joy* are in apposition, respectively, to *Jerusalem* and *people*. Hebrew uses apposition when one thing is so identifiable with another that they can be said to be the same, *i.e.* here Jerusalem and delight, its people and joy, are interchangeable (*cf.* 60:18).

19 The new city and its people exactly match the divine design. There is nothing that falls short of his desires (*cf.* Gn. 6:6). Note the change from *its people* to *my people*. By comparison even the ‘very good’ of Genesis 1:31 seems cool! Human experience too matches the new situation: there is nothing to cause sorrow (19cd) nor anything that blights life (20a–e). *Weeping* refers to felt pain; *crying*/‘the sound of a scream’, to inflicted pain. Both the emotion and every cause of it are gone. *No more* corresponds to *for ever* in verse 18a, the matching positive and negative ideas.

20 Throughout this passage Isaiah uses aspects of present life to create impressions of the life that is yet to come. It will be a life totally provided for (13), totally happy (19cd), totally secure (22–23) and totally at peace (24–25). Things we have no real capacity to

understand can be expressed only through things we know and experience. So it is that in this present order of things death cuts life off before it has well begun or before it has fully matured. But it will not be so then. No infant will fail to enjoy life nor an elderly person come short of total fulfilment. Indeed, one would be but a youth were one to die aged a hundred! This does not imply that death will still be present (contradicting 25:7–8) but rather affirms that over the whole of life, as we should now say from infancy to old age, the power of death will be destroyed. *He who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed* is a possible translation, save that it softens the literal ‘will be accursed’. ‘But the sinner, a hundred years old, will be accursed’ is a more likely rendering (see the RV and RSV), not least because it matches and prepares for the reference to the serpent in verse 25c and also because it provides negative strengthening for the assertion of the Lord’s total delight in the new city (19ab). Of course, there will be no sinners in the new Jerusalem (6–7, 12, 15c). Once more metaphor is being used, but the reality is that even if, *per impossible*, a sinner were to escape detection for a century the curse would still search him out and destroy him. Thus verse 20 expresses a double thought: death will have no more power and sin no more presence.

Life in the new city and world (65:21–25)

Three pictures, drawn in the colours of this life, project the perfection of the life to come. There will be security of tenure (21–22b), with an explanation (22c–f); fulfilment (23ab), with an explanation (23cd); and peace with God (24ab) throughout the new creation (25a–c), with the implied explanation that such harmlessness arises from the fact that the whole new creation is *my holy mountain* (25de). The family provides a topical inclusio to the first two related sections (21a, 23cd). This is in line with the Abrahamic covenant (Gn. 17:7), ‘you and your seed’.

21–22 Here we have two positive statements (21) with their negative counterparts (22ab). The thought is not of beginning to build and failing to complete but of building and failing to enjoy because the fruit of labour has been snatched away by an enemy. Such was the fate of the disobedient (Dt. 28:30). Its cancellation speaks of a life that is wholly right with God both in the home (*build houses*) and on the farm (*vineyards*), *i.e.* everywhere. *Vineyards* are the chosen example because they took so long to cultivate and bring into production that they required settled conditions (hence in Zc. 8:12, the vine is called [lit.] ‘the seed of peace’). *For as the days of a tree* is a picture of durability

and longevity, of that which continues long in life and has a secure hold on its place (*cf.* 16:14; 21:16). *Will long enjoy* is (lit.) ‘will wear out’ (the piel of $\sqrt{bālā}$) and therefore, ‘use to the full, live to enjoy full use of’.

23 The thought moves on to the enjoyment of that for which they laboured (23a), without any cloud ever marring their enjoyment (23b). *Doomed to misfortune*/‘for terror’ (*cf.* Lv. 26:16) refers to the insecurity induced by disobedience, with terror lurking round every corner. There is no darker cloud over a parent’s life than to see tragedy touch a beloved child on whom love and hope is set. Such will never be the case in the new Jerusalem, *for* ‘they will be a seed blessed by the Lord’. This blessing comes in accordance with the promise to the ‘seed’ in Genesis 17:7 and, more immediately, because they are the ‘seed’ of the Servant (53:10). *And their descendants*/‘what proceeds out from them’ is a noun in Hebrew, from $\sqrt{yāṣā}$ ‘(to go out)’, therefore, indicating the direct line from parent to child. Here ‘their line’ are with them in enjoying the blessing of the Lord. Not only will they not see their children blighted by tragedy but they will see them one with themselves in the things of God.

24–25 The uniting thought between these two verses is ‘oneness’. First, there is such a oneness with the Lord that he anticipates their needs with his constant provident watchfulness for their good (24a); and secondly, there is such an identity of will that *while they are still speaking* what they say immediately commends itself to him for action. This harmony applies also throughout creation. Eden is restored (25; *cf.* 11:6–9) and old enmities are gone (*wolf*) and fears removed (*lamb*); natures are changed (*the lion will eat straw*), the carnivore will become a herbivore. There is no reference to the great agent of the fall, *the serpent*, in 11:6ff. but it is accurately in position here (*pace BHS*). The only point in the whole of the new creation where there is no change (*cf.* verse 20fg) is in the curse pronounced on sin, which still stands (*cf.* Gn. 3:14).

25d The positive picture of *the wolf* and *the lamb* at one etc. is enhanced by a negative statement ruling out both damage and destruction, what impairs and what annuls. For the whole is *my holy mountain*, the place where the Lord in holiness dwells in the midst of his people, and now, they with him.

Judgment and hope (66:1–24)

Having dwelt on the coming glory, Isaiah begins to retrace his steps (see the outline on p. 522). Broadly, the A-D sequence in 65:1–12 asserted facts: there are those who will

inherit the glory and there are those who might have done but will not. The D-A sequence now commencing is explicit about ‘making your calling and election sure’ ([2 Pet. 1:10](#)). The major topic is stated in verses [2–3, 5b](#), trembling at the word of the Lord. But this stress on making one’s own citizenship of the new Jerusalem a certainty is matched by the responsibility of bringing others in ([A²](#)). Thus the D-A sequence is concerned with entering into possession, fleeing from the wrath to come, a world-wide, gathered people of the Lord.

Those who have chosen their own way and worshipped improperly are under judgment (66:1–4)

The components of these verses are:

1. Verse [1a–c](#), the great God of heaven and earth.
2. Verses [1d–2](#), a unit with two themes: questions regarding where the house is ([1de](#)), prompted by the fact that the Lord made everything ([2a–c](#)), and a reference to the person whom the Lord regards ([2d–f](#)). The assonance of *where ... where* (‘ê-zeh’ê-zeh) with [But] *this is* (*w^eel-zeh*) seems a deliberate junction between the two themes.
3. Verses [3a–h](#), made up of four pairs in which permissible acts of cultic worship are associated with impermissible.
4. Verses [3i–4](#), an accusation of unresponsiveness, parallel with [65:12](#).

Do these four components belong together?²² With regard to the first two ([1a–c](#),

²² Duhm maintains that the ‘house’ was the schismatic Samaritan temple of Mt Gerizim (?fourth century BC). But surely something as outrageous as an alternative temple would call forth a more unmistakable assault than this (cf. Skinner)? Others suggest that more controversy than is reflected in the Old Testament surrounded the building of the Second Temple itself. But as far as our records go there was no controversy at all! Smart (pp. 281–287), however, insists that ‘those who tremble at the Lord’s word’ was a prophetic group hostile to temple building as to all cultic activity. He finds their attitudes stated in [1:10ff](#), which he understands as a total condemnation of the cult. He also sees [44:28](#); [56:1–8](#); [58:13–14](#)—and in general anything at all favourable to religious rules and regulations—as mistaken later insertions. Foster (*Restoration*, e.g. p. 126) thinks that the prophetic group was imbued with what he calls the universalistic ideas of Deutero-Isaiah and that they were horrified at the rebuff to the Samaritans offering to assist the builders. Muilenburg, however, believes that the prophetic group was concerned to make sure that the

[1d–2](#)), Solomon's prayer at the dedication of his temple ([1 Ki. 8:12–29](#)) provides an interpretative background because in it he offers a rationale for the temple. His question in verse [27](#) is crucial: ‘But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens ... cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!’ The question itself seems to be moving towards the answer ‘No’, but the answer necessitated by the whole prayer is ‘Yes’. Solomon began by stating the fact of the house as a divine dwelling (verse [12](#)); next, he affirmed publicly the divine mandate given for the building of such a house (verses [14–21](#)); thirdly, he gave thanks that the promise to David had been kept (verses [22–26](#)). Against this background, the answer to verse [27](#) is never in doubt: in all his greatness the Lord will live in this house because he has promised to do so. This provides perspective for [Isaiah 66:1](#). The Lord is transcendent but, yes, he does come to live among his people. He does not scorn an earthly house. But where did you say it was? It is hard to resist a certain irony in the question! Human beings build towering, obtrusive edifices for God and God professes them hard to find. This is not because he despises them or rejects the motives that prompted them but because it is not where his eye most easily and readily focuses. Thus the *where* ('ê-zeh) of verse [1de](#) takes second place to the ‘But this’ (*we^el-zeh*) of verse [2d](#). The Lord’s priority is the individual who has a trembling reverence for his word.

Turning to the second pair of passages, the first component ([3a–h](#)) touches on the use and abuse of the cultic system, and the second component ([3i–4](#)) describes people who certainly do not tremble at the word. There is, then, an overall shape:

A¹ The house is not the plainest thing to the divine eye ([1–2c](#))

B¹ Where the Lord’s eye falls: reverence for his word ([2d–f](#))

A² The house does not automatically fulfil an acceptable function ([3a–h](#))

B² Rejection of those who refuse the word ([3i–4](#))

It is certainly legitimate to build a house and, great though he is, the Lord will condescend to live there, yet the foremost divine desire is the individual trembling at his word. Cultic practices can become debased and unacceptable, and the Lord will have no truck with those who refuse his word and way.

There is no justification for writing a post-exilic scenario for a passage like this; it is

rebuilt temple subscribed to the proper priorities.

as pre-exilic as Solomon's temple and as Isaianic as 1:10–20. It is understandable that, in the light of his awareness that some day people would return to a devastated city with a mandate to rebuild the house (44:28), Isaiah would wish to ensure proper perspectives for such a task, making use for this purpose of material that originated as part of his polemic against cultic misuse and abuse in his own day.

1 This is the only place where *earth* itself is the divine *footstool*. In 1 Chronicles 28:2 and Psalms 99:5 and 132:7 the house itself, or the ark within the house, is the footstool, and it is a truly biblical and moving thought that the feet of the Holy One rest on the mercy seat. But here, it is not his mercy but his sheer greatness that is the topic, his ‘immensity’ whereby earth itself is no more than his footstool. By adding -*zeh* to the interrogative *where*, it becomes ‘Where-ever?’ (*'ê-zeh*), a question with a degree of puzzlement built in, as if the thing in question could be easily mislaid. Thus the Lord, while not at all repudiating the house, indicates that it is not the sharpest thing in his field of vision. There is nothing novel in this; indeed it is normative biblical thinking. For example, though the Lord graciously confirmed David's wish to build him a house, he started the discussion by asking, ‘Did I ever say ... “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’ (2 Sa. 7:7). Samuel offered the same priority when he said that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sa. 15:22).²³ Isaiah would guard any forthcoming house against a double danger. On the one hand, though the Lord deigns to dwell there, he is not to be thought of in reductionist terms. He is still the transcendent God, filling all heaven, touching earth with his foot. On the other hand, though the house is rightly a centre of sacrifice, the primary call of God to his people is for their obedience to his word. For *my resting place* (*menûhâ*) see Ruth 1:9. In grace the Lord ‘makes his home’ among his people.

2 The doctrine of God is afforded a further safeguard: he not only dominates the whole universe (1), but everything is his workmanship (2a) and owes its being to him (2b). By coming to live in the house he does not become beholden to those who built it,

²³ Similarly, Haggai is misjudged by the common interpretation that he was a temple formalist, teaching that salvation hinges on the temple as such. Rather, his concern was that the people should obey the divine requirements relating to the presence of the Lord among his people. To leave the house unbuilt was equivalent to saying that it was a matter of indifference whether the Lord was among them or not.

for he is himself the maker of all. Just as his transcendent universality is not limited by his condescending to live in one particular place, neither is his sovereign freedom of action limited by accepting a house at the hands of human beings. *Has not my hand made all these things* is more literally a statement rather than a question: ‘All these things my hand has made and into being came all these things!’ *This is the one I esteem* is ‘But to this one will I/do I look ...’; as Birks comments, ‘One object in creation, amid suns and stars, secures the gaze of the great Creator.’ The *humble* (*ānî*) are socially those who are at the bottom of the heap, pushed down by stronger, dominant interests. However, religiously they are those who are ready to take the lowest place before and for God. *Contrite in spirit* is ‘lamed in spirit’ (cf. *nēkēh* used of physical lameness in [2 Sa. 4:4; 9:3](#)). It is only here used with a spiritual reference to express a sense of inability in spiritual matters. This is not the sense of sin but the sense of the damage wrought by sin in the personality and helplessness to please God. *Trembles* (*ḥārēd*; [Ezr. 9:4; 10:3](#)) denotes a sensitive longing to obey.

3a–h See the outline and introductory note above. The words *is like* ([3bdh](#)) and *is like one who presents* ([3f](#)) are interpretative additions committing Isaiah to an outright condemnation of the sacrificial side of religion. We saw in [1:1off.](#) that this is not his position. What he does here is simply to set items side by side. He contrasts the lawful with the sinful (one slaughters a bull: one kills a man); the lawful with the meaningless (one sacrifices a lamb: one strangles a dog); the lawful with the unacceptable (one brings a gift: pig’s blood); and the lawful with the apostate (one makes an incense memorial: one blesses an idol).

According to [Ezekiel 8](#), pre-exilic worship of the Lord went hand in hand with the secret practice of just such deviations. The purpose of Isaiah’s catalogue is to present a call to be clear-cut. The distinction between the two lists is that one expresses a consent to the word of God and the other is deviationist. The building of a house means nothing of itself; the sacrificial cult divorced from ‘trembling at the Lord’s word’ is sinful, meaningless, unacceptable and apostate. When Amos said ‘Go to Bethel and sin’ ([4:4](#)) his meaning was the same—ritual conformity without moral obedience only extends sin into another area of life. It is possible to be religiously meticulous and at worst incur guilt, at best achieve nothing. The word of God is the key to everything.

3i–4 This final section is marked off by an inclusio: *chosen* ([3i](#)) and *chose* ([4f](#)), and

delight (3j) and *displeases*/‘does not delight’ (4f). Within the eight lines of the stanza, the first pair (beginning with *gam-hēmmā*, ‘As for them, then, they ...’) is matched by the second (beginning with *gam-^anî*, ‘As for me, then, I ...’) and the last four lines are an explanation.

3ij Outward life (*ways*), inward emotion (*delight*) and the involvement of the essential person (*souls*) are all included here. Did they say, ‘It is so helpful, it must be right’ or ‘It is so uplifting, it can’t be wrong’? But actually what they chose was *abominations* (*šiqqûṣ*), a very strong word covering all that the Lord detests.²⁴

4 *Harsh treatment for them*/‘their *ta^alûlîm*’ is the same word as in 3:4, contextually translated ‘capriciousness’. √ ‘*ālal* means ‘to act, deal with’ and its common derivative *ma^alālîm* means ‘deeds’. What in 3:4 is the unpredictable acts of a capricious ruler is here the sudden, unexpected onset of judgment. Possibly, therefore, ‘I will choose their summary execution’. *Dread* suggests that they flew to their questionable religious practices as a protective technique. This matches the earlier reference to cultivating the gods Fortune and Destiny (65:11). But far from escaping, divine justice will bring on them what they sought to avoid—as it always does when security is sought other than in the Lord (Gn. 11:4, 8). The root cause is their refusal of the divine word, both actively in what *they did* and mentally in what they *chose*.

Sudden destruction, instantaneous glory (66:5–14)

Two groups are described. On the one hand, those *who tremble at his word* (5b; cf. verse 2e and the introductory note to 66:1–21) and, on the other, those who set themselves against an expectant spirituality and its adherents (5c–f). There is a twofold development from verses 2c–4, where the same groups were differentiated. First, they are now in tension, whereas the earlier description simply set them side by side within the broad parameters of the Lord’s people. The one group hates the other, opposes its membership of the community and scorns its spiritual expectations (5c–e). The heart of the present section (10–11) instructs the ‘word-tremblers’ how to behave in this situation.

²⁴ *šiqqûṣ* is used of idols (2 Ki. 23:24), heathen gods (1 Ki. 11:5), forbidden practices or foods (Zc. 9:7), i.e. all that is contrary to the worship of the Lord (Je. 4:1), and apostate Israel (Ho. 9:10). For √ *šāqas* see Lv. 11:43; Dt. 7:26; Ps. 22:24²⁵. The noun *šeqeṣ* occurs in Lv. 7:21; 11:10, 13, 41; Ezk. 8:10.

Secondly, eschatological issues are made more explicit. For the one group, ‘bringing upon them what they dread’ becomes the wholesale destruction of city and temple (6ab). They are themselves the Lord’s enemies, receiving full, wrathful requital (6cd, 14d). For the other group, metaphors of birth and infancy (7–9, 12–13) are used to indicate the supernatural action which will initiate them into the new Zion and the comforts they will enjoy there. They are dignified by the grand title of the Lord’s *servants* (14c).

A¹ Cynics confounded (5–6)

B¹ Promises illustrated and attested (7–9)

C Joy and mourning in Zion (10–11)

B² Promises stated and attested (12–13)

A² ‘Word-tremblers’ confirmed (14)

The cynical mockery of spiritual expectation, *that we may see* (5f), in A¹ is countered by the affirmation *when you see/and you will see ...*’ (14a) in A². Each A section also refers to *enemies* (6d, 14d). The B sections use the metaphors of birth and infancy: B¹ specifies the birth of a male child (7d) and B² the comfort of a male child (13a, lit, ‘As a man whom his mother comforts’). Each ends by affirming coming divine action (9, 13bc).

5 On *tremble* see verse 2. They are *your brothers* in that they belong formally to the same ‘family’ of the Lord’s people. The thought of tension in the community runs throughout these chapters but, as we have seen, there is no need on that account to subscribe to a supposed post-exilic situation. It is true that in earlier chapters Isaiah does not to the same extent expose the sharpness of feeling that is evident here. This may be due to the fact that his concern then was to address and win back the ‘others’, but here it is to comfort and instruct true believers under pressure. But in any case, we find here the same sort of hostility as in 5:18–19, the same two parties as in 8:11–20, the same contrast between those who seek the cults and those who seek after the Lord and his word, and the same outcome of wrath (8:21–22) and glory (9:2ff. <1ff.>). We might also compare the scorn poured on the prophet himself in 29:9–10. Westermann, who urges that ‘nowhere is the state of affairs between the two parties so clearly brought out’ as here, defines the area of difference thus: ‘they hate ... those who in piety hold to the word of God’.²⁵ But this was precisely the distinction made in the earlier chapters men-

tioned above. They *exclude* because they are persuaded that they themselves are the true members and that the ‘word-tremblers’ have no real claim. *Because of my name* may express the motive behind the would-be excommunication: they really think that the name of the Lord is more truly honoured and the good of his people better served by their compromises and their willingness to accommodate theologies without foundation in the word. On the other hand, *because of my name* may mean ‘because of your steadfast stand for my name’, *i.e.* the truth about God as revealed in his word. The ‘word-tremblers’ subscribe to a joyful expectancy, and their opponents throw this in their faces (*cf. 2 Pet. 3:3f.*). This could have been Isaiah’s experience when he confronted Ahaz with assurances of the dispersal of the northern threat (chapter 7), when he challenged the ecclesiastics and politicians over the Egyptian alliance (chapter 28), or took issue with Hezekiah over Sennacherib (chapters 36–37). The political response that he was a mere babe in a man’s world (28:9f.), that faith had no part to play in the hard game of politics (where only battalions and alliances count), is all exactly as 5:19, and it remains ever the voice of worldly wisdom in response to the voice of faith.²⁶ The Lord holds out to his beleaguered ‘word-tremblers’ the hope of the eschatological reversal. The words *Yet they will be put to shame* are emphatic: ‘But it is they who will reap shame’. The shame they will reap is dramatically presented: city and temple gone and themselves exposed as objects of divine enmity.

6 Hear ... Hear ... the sound is (lit.) ‘A voice ... a voice ... a voice’, with *qôl* in its idiomatic use:²⁷

‘Listen! Uproar from the city!

Listen!—from the people!

Listen! The Lord is repaying ...!’

²⁵ Westermann, pp. 415–416.

²⁶ Westermann differentiates this passage from 5:19 in that there ‘Isaiah’s announcement is one of doom and here it is of salvation’. But in both sections there is the same blending of doom for those who reject the word and salvation for those who turn to it.

²⁷ On the idiom that *qôl* is the equivalent of ‘Listen!’, there is a possible sevenfold example in Ps. 29, but Zc. 11:3 is the only double exclamation outside Isaiah (13:4; 52:8; also 40:3, 6).

Because they did not ‘tremble at his word’ they will certainly tremble before his wrath. *Repaying* ($\sqrt{\text{šālēm}}$) means ‘making a full settlement’.

7–9 These verses show that things that are impossible with people are possible with God (cf. Lk. 18:27).

A¹ A human impossibility (two statements of painless birth; two marvelling questions) (7–8b)

B An even greater marvel (a double question, applying the principle of painless birth to land and nation; the reality of the new Zion) (8c–f)

A² A divine certainty (a double question and double affirmation: the Lord’s infallibility pledged to the task) (9)

7 Painless birth (cf. Gn. 3:16) is a symbol of Eden restored and the curse removed. The picture is of motherhood without labour, *i.e.* the child is really hers but at no cost. *Delivers* (the hiphil of $\sqrt{\text{mālat}}$) is only here used of the ‘delivery’ of a child (cf. 34:15, where it is used of a bird laying eggs).

8 No such thing has entered human experience either by hearsay or experience. It is without human analogy, an act of God. Possibly, the single *thing* refers to the painless birth of the foregoing statements and *things* looks forward to the twofold act of producing country and nation. This would be vivid: ‘Did you ever hear of that? Well, what about these—not a child only but a land and a nation!’ The stress with *day* and *moment* is the same—instantaneousness. When the Lord brings glory to his people, it will be as sudden as the judgment on his enemies (4a) and as complete (6d). The questions are a pointed mockery of the sceptics of verse 5ef. It is as if to say: ‘Do they mock the expectation of the coming glory of the Lord and find it unbelievable? They have not yet faced the central miracle of the whole enterprise: the instantaneous springing into being of a whole new society by supernatural birth.’ For the actuality of it is Zion and her sons. They are her children, but their birth is by the unique, humanly unheard-of processes of verse 7, a work of God (as verse 9 proceeds to ‘explain’).

9 Only here does $\sqrt{\text{šābar}}$ (‘to break’) mean ‘to break out of the womb in birth’. The related noun *mašbēr* has this meaning in 37:3 and 2 Kings 19:3. *Give delivery* and *bring to delivery* are both the hiphil of $\sqrt{\text{yālad}}$. This form of the verb means either ‘to beget’ (of the moment of conception) or ‘to cause to bring forth’ (of the moment of birth). The

translation ‘to bring to delivery’ (the period of gestation) is unexemplified, and we should translate rather, ‘Or do I beget and close the womb?’. *Close up the womb* ($\sqrt{\text{—}}\text{āṣar}$, ‘to restrain’) is used in [Genesis 16:2; 20:18](#) of ‘closing the womb’. The verse, then, expresses two truths. First, the illustration of a process well advanced but not brought to completion ([9ab](#)) shows that the Lord does not proceed so far with his purposes only to abandon them before they are fulfilled. Secondly, the illustration of something begun and frustrated before it can even move towards fulfilment ([9cd](#)) shows that the Lord does not begin what he does not propose to finish. The first illustration bears on the faithfulness of God (‘the love in times past that forbids me to think he’ll leave me at last’);²⁸ the second illustration bears on the sovereignty of God, irresistible in purpose. In each illustration the personal pronoun *I* is emphatic (‘It is I who ... I am the one who ...’). If the divine ‘I’ is in charge what can fail? The illustration of the birth processes links this vision of the future with the earlier Zion passages ([49:21; 54:1](#)) and with the work of the Servant ([53:10–11](#)). The first *says* is imperfect; the second, perfect. The formula with the imperfect is peculiar to Isaiah among the prophets ([1:11, 18; 33:10; 40:1, 25; 41:21](#); cf. [Ps. 12:5 <6>](#)). While the perfect emphasizes the fixity of what is said, the imperfect expresses the persistence of the speaker. ‘The Lord keeps saying’ reminds us that such a one cannot lie; ‘Your God has said’ reminds us that he does not change his mind. As the *LORD (yahweh)* he is by nature the God who brings his people to full salvation and the fulfilment of all his promises ([Jos. 13:14](#)); as *your God* he is the God who has committed himself to his people.

10–11 These verses are the pivot of the whole section (see the outline above). They link the future ([11](#)) with the present ([10](#)) by a conjunction of purpose, ‘in order that’ ([11a](#), *for/so that*; [11c](#), [lit.] ‘so that’ *you will ...*). In the present the call is to identify with Jerusalem: to *rejoice* in her joy, to *love* her for what she is and to *mourn over* her sorrows. In a word, as members of Zion here and now ([Heb. 12:22](#)), we are to be fully involved in, and committed to, the whole life of the earthly church. Zion is looking forward to blessings still in store; to *rejoice with Jerusalem* is to share this forward look. To *love* her is to prize what she stands for: the city where the Lord dwells in holiness, mercy and law. We are to live in the benefit of divine mercy, enjoy the richness of divine fellowship and fashion our lives in obedience to the divine word. To *mourn over her* (cf. [Ezk. 9:4](#)) is to

²⁸ John Newton’s hymn, ‘Begone, unbelief’.

lament the sins of the visible church, its shortcomings, its weakness and ineffectuality in the face of the world and the presence within of compromisers and apostates, but to do so as a fellow-sinner, longing for the blessings and the perfection yet to come (*cf.* 59:9–13). This identification with Jerusalem will issue in participation in the blessings concentrated in her, both present and eschatological. For those who will one day know the full reality of the miracle birth (7–9) are already the children of Zion, her babes at her breast. The baby needs nothing more. *Her comforting breasts*/‘the breasts of her comforts’,²⁹ look forward ultimately to verse 13. *Her overflowing abundance* is (lit.) ‘the nipple of her glory’/‘her glorious bosom’ and indicates that Jerusalem now, but consummately then, is a self-contained system of total supply.

12–13 These verses match the metaphor of birth (7–9; see the outline above) and the allusions to the nursing child and to ‘comfort’ (11). The introductory *For* (12) explains why the promises can be trusted. On *peace ... like a river* cf. 48:18. All that was lost by disobedience will be restored, the whole great story of peace traced to its conclusion (48:22; 52:7; 53:5; 54:10, 13; 55:12; 57:2, 19, 21; 59:8; 60:17). In the future city the intangible blessings of *peace* will be balanced by the outward blessings of *the wealth*/‘glory’ of *the nations* (*cf.* 60:5–7, 11, 16), *i.e.* a pictured city in which every need of every sort is supplied, also a ‘world city’ in which every nation is represented. In 2:2 the nations came ‘streaming’ into Zion; as the book ends, we learn that the initial visions were not illusory. *Flooding* ($\sqrt{\text{šāṭap}}$) is Isaiah’s typical description of the Assyrian ‘inundation’ (8:8; 10:22; 28:2, 15, 17–18; 30:28), but it is also used of the tribulations of those going into captivity (43:2). The measure of judgment is the measure of consolation to the redeemed. The pronoun *her* before *arm* and *knees* is an interpretative addition but probably rightly so. According to 49:23 and 60:4, 16 the nations fostered Zion’s incoming children, but within Zion they pass into proper parental care. Mother Zion is everything to her children: food (*nurse*/‘suck’), caresses (*dangled*, ‘fondled, pampered, cuddled, made much of’; *cf.* Ps. 119:16, 47). The *comfort* offered is threefold: in its quality, which is maternal (13a); in its source and agent, the Lord (13b); and in its location, Jerusalem (13c; *over [b^e]* is better ‘in’). Thus is the proclaimed comfort of 40:1 amply fulfilled. *I will comfort* is divine action; *you will be comforted* is the human experience.

²⁹ $\sqrt{nāḥam}$ (‘comfort’) occurs throughout Isaiah (1:24; 12:1; 22:4; 40:1; 49:13; 51:3, 12, 19; 52:9; 54:11; 57:6; 61:2; 66:13). It is not unusually characteristic, therefore, of chapters 40–55.

14 This verse matches verses [5–6](#). The mockery of those who dismissed the future glory as something they would never see is countered by the affirmative promise, ‘and you will see’ with which this verse opens. *Your heart will rejoice and you will flourish* is (lit.) ‘your bones will flourish’. *Heart* and ‘bones’ comprise the whole person, the psychic and the physical. On *like grass* see [44:3–4](#). *The hand... /And the hand* is an example of the explanatory use of the conjunction: ‘Thus the hand ...’. In the way that this whole section has indicated, the eschatological day will reveal that from first to last all has been of God. *Hand* denotes the Lord acting personally and out of his own resources. On *servants* see [54:17](#). *His fury* is a verb in the MT ($\sqrt{zā'ām}$, ‘but he will be furious with’) and is the only occurrence in Isaiah. The noun occurs in [10:25](#); [13:5](#); [26:20](#); [30:27](#) and is always used of the Lord. ([26:20](#)). It is wholly appropriate to the present context. *Foes* is ‘enemies’, as in verse [6d](#).

Judgment on those who follow cults (66:15–17)

The ‘For’ with which verse [15](#) opens (omitted by the NIV) indicates that the passage is explanatory of what has preceded. See the outline above for the alternating messages of coming judgment and coming glory in this section. Verses [2c–4](#) isolated two groups—the ‘word-tremblers’ and the compromisers/apostates—the latter with particular reference to their unauthorized, abhorrent cultic practices. Verses [5–14](#) did not forget the dark background of judgment ([14d](#)) but concentrated on the glory awaiting the ‘word-tremblers’ ([5, 7–14c](#)). Verses [15–17](#) arise out of verse [14d](#) and focus on coming universal judgment. *Fire* forms an inclusio in verse [15](#), indicating that the judgment is one of holiness. Verse [16a](#) is linked with verse [15](#) by its opening reference to fire and *the LORD* is an inclusio around the verse; it is his holy judgment world-wide. In verse [17](#) *those slain by the LORD* ([16c](#)) are defined as the compromising and apostate cultists of verse [3](#).³⁰ Even if verse [17](#) had a point of origin distinct from verses [15–16](#), it is neatly integrated into its present place both by topical suitability and by the fact that *they will*

³⁰ [66:17](#) exemplifies the versatility of poetic form in the Isaianic literature:

*hammitqadd^ešîm w^ehammiṭah^arîm 'el-hagganôt
'ahar 'ahad^l battâwek^l
'ōk^elê b^eśar haḥ^azîr w^ehaššeqeṣ w^ehā'aḳbâr
yahdāw yāsuḍû*

meet their end ($\sqrt{sūp}$) forms an inclusio with *whirlwind* ($sūpā$) in verse 15b.

15–16 The initial ‘For’ should be restored, making the link with verse 14d (see above). *With fire*, or ‘as fire’ (*beth essentiae, bā’ēs*), has the same construction as Exodus 3:2 (‘in [the character expressed by] a flame ...’), where ‘fire’ is defined as a motif of the unapproachable, deadly holiness of God (cf. Gn. 3:24; Ex. 19). *Chariots*, an earthly manifestation of destructive power, are symbolic of the irresistible power of the holy God acting in judgment. The relation of *whirlwind* ($sūpā$) to *end* ($\sqrt{sūp}$) (17) makes this the wind that leaves nothing behind. *Bring down* is ‘bring back’. Young’s suggestion that ‘to cause his anger to return’ means ‘to appease his anger’³¹ is not borne out by usage,³² which shows that ‘to bring back’ means to make sure that the divine anger meets its target. In verse 15 the emphasis falls on holiness (*fire, flames of fire*) and power (*chariots*); in verse 16 it falls on the justice (*sword, execute judgment*) of holiness (*fire*). On *fire* and *sword* see Genesis 3:24. The whole of human history, from the fall to the last day, is bracketed about by the sword of holiness. *Execute judgment* is the niphal of $\sqrt{\text{šāpāt}}$, meaning ‘to exert one’s judicial rights’. In 59:17 ‘righteousness’ was the first garment the Lord put on; in 61:10 it was among the garments passed on to the Anointed One, who, returning from treading the winepress of wrath, ‘speaks in righteousness’ (63:1). Every act of God is hallmarked with pure justice, whether he saves his people or destroys his foes. *All men* is ‘all flesh’. It is typical of passages such as this that universal judgment is affirmed but not discussed in detail (cf. 3:13–15). The only itemized judgment in chapters 56–66 is that executed on apostate Israel, but references like this to ‘all flesh’ keep the wider dimensions of holy wrath in view.

17 In essence we meet here the people of 65:2–7, 11–12 and 66:3–4: the compromiser and apostates among the Lord’s professing people, those who did not tremble at his word. For when people cease to heed the word of revelation, it is not that they then believe nothing but that they will believe anything—gardens, pigs, and rats included. *Consecrate* ($\sqrt{qādēš}$) concerns the state and nature of the person; *purify* ($\sqrt{ṭāhar}$) relates to his or her fitness to stand before the god. *Gardens* (cf. 1:29; 65:3) were the loci of fertil-

³¹ Young, p. 529.

³² There are nine instances of the hiphil of $\sqrt{\text{šūb}}$ associated with the ‘anger’ vocabulary (e.g. Nu. 25:11; Ps. 106:23). Where the thought of appeasement is contextually required it is stated separately, as in Ps. 78:38.

ity cults purporting to offer the key to fulness of life and prosperity. The nearest Bible parallel to *following the one in the midst* is [Ezekiel 8:7–11](#), where the prophet saw pre-exilic cultists at their worship, seventy elders of Israel with ‘Jaazaniah standing in the midst of them’. The same preposition (*b^etôk*, ‘in the midst’) occurs in both passages. We do not know enough about ancient worship forms to take the matter further. It sounds, on the surface, simply like a congregation taking their lead from a central figure, but it may be a colloquialism by which members of a secret or semi-secret society identified each other (‘Do you follow “the one in the midst”?'). For *meet their end* ($\sqrt{sûp}$, ‘to come to an end') see on *whirlwind* ([15b](#)).

The Lord's world-wide people (66:18–24)

The spotlight swings back to the other group, those whom the Lord will gather into the new Jerusalem. In this passage we come full circle, both to [65:1](#) (see the outline on p. [522](#)) and, on the wider screen, to [56:1–8](#) (see the outline on p. [461](#)). In New Testament perspective, this final section spans the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ: his purpose for the world ([18](#)), his means of carrying it out ([19–21](#)), the *sign* set among the nations, the remnant sent to evangelize them ([19](#)) and the gathering of his people to ‘Jerusalem’ ([20](#)) with Gentiles in full membership ([21](#)). Jerusalem is not the literal city but the city of [Galatians 4:25–26](#); [Hebrews 12:22](#); [Revelation 21](#). Exactly so, but for Isaiah, not privileged as we with hindsight, it was a vision of staggering proportions. Somehow in relation to the Lord’s new-creation purposes for Zion, it would devolve upon those who were already its citizens to gather in from the whole world those who would be co-equal with themselves in citizenship and privilege in the day when Jerusalem would be the pilgrimage centre for all creation and when every opposing factor and person would be a thing of the past.

From the literary point of view these verses are usually printed as prose, but they can be arranged as free verse or rhythmic prose with formations binding the whole together. In verses [18–19](#) the Lord announces that the time has come to set his sign among the nations and to send emissaries to those who have not heard his message or seen his glory. The messengers will declare the glory of the Lord. In verses [20–22](#) the emissaries bring back to Jerusalem those who are called their ‘brothers’, and they will be received by the Lord as full members of the cultic community. In verses [23–24](#) monthly and annual festivals will see ‘all flesh’ gathering in worship, enjoying the privi-

leges into which they have been brought and aware of the fate from which they have been saved.

A¹ A world-wide community envisaged ([18–19](#))

B A community of brothers accepted in Jerusalem ([20–22](#))

A² A world-wide worshipping community in constant session ([23–24](#))

Notwithstanding that the translation of verse [18](#) is an unresolved conundrum, there are clear links between the A sections. ‘Come’ (NIV, *am about to come*) in verse [18](#) matches *all mankind will come* in verse [23](#); *they will come and see* in verse [18](#) matches ‘they will go out and see’ in verse [24](#). There is also the double reference to *nations* in verse [19](#) and the double reference to *all mankind*/‘all flesh’ in verses [23–24](#). The B section has a topical inclusio: *your brothers* at the beginning of verse [20](#) matches *your descendants*/‘seed’ at the end of verse [22](#).

18 The opening ‘sentence’ is so broken that no ingenuity has so far been able to reconstruct it. It consists of three or maybe four words: ‘And I ... their deeds and their thoughts: ... [it] has come ...’. Either linking words have dropped out in transmission, or the whole context has become disorganized leaving these words isolated, or we are dealing with idiomatic Hebrew beyond our ken. An easy solution is to import a verb like ‘know’ (see the RSV) or (as the NIV has done) insert *because of* and adjust the form of the verb ‘come’ to make it refer to the coming of the Lord; this latter has the support of the LXX. But the problem this creates is easy to see. Any coming of the Lord related to *actions and ... imaginations* must be a coming in judgment. Consequently, the *glory* referred to would be that of the Judge. The reference to *glory* in verse [18](#), however, leads to the gathering of the world into Jerusalem as an accepted people. It must be, therefore, that *actions and imaginations* refer to what has preceded; just as *glory* refers to what follows. This is not an attempted solution but simply a way of making the insoluble text palatable in context until the blissful day when we can ask Isaiah himself to explain it: ‘So much for me, their works and their thoughts: it has come. Now to gather all the nations and tongues and they will come and see my glory.’

The Lord has dealt with one side of his promised work of vengeance and salvation ([59:17](#); [61:2](#); [63:4](#)). The day and work of vengeance ‘has come’ ($\sqrt{bô}$ used, as frequently, in the sense ‘to happen’; [Dt. 13:2](#) [<3>](#); [Jos. 23:14](#)). *And gather*/‘Now to gather’ begins the sentence with an infinitive verb (*cf.* [44:14](#)), which is expressive of commitment or even

of obligation: ‘Now I must gather’. Isaiah has used the idea of a banner being lifted up to summons the nations to Jerusalem ([11:12–13](#); [49:22](#); [62:10](#)). He has also seen the Lord himself as the magnet ([2:2–4](#); [60:9](#)). Now the Lord is the missionary, the voice which cries, ‘Peace, Peace’ ([57:19](#)). *See my glory*, i.e. see me in all my glory. The exodus people saw his glory as he cared for them in the wilderness ([Ex. 16:7, 10](#)), the awesome glory on Sinai ([Ex. 24:16–17](#)), the gracious indwelling glory in the tabernacle ([Ex. 29:43](#)) and the glory that coincided with the full operation of the levitical sacrifices ([Lv. 9:6, 23](#)), and they knew the promise that what was first their unique privilege was destined to be the privilege of all the earth ([Nu. 14:21](#)).

19 How is this world-wide privilege to come about? *I will set a sign among them* refers not to a banner raised at a distance to attract (see verse [18](#)) but to a *sign ... among them*, round which they rally where they are. Knowing as we do that this passage refers to the interim between the comings of the Lord Jesus, the ‘sign’ can only be his cross. Isaiah, however, knows and says only that the world finds common cause round a sign the Lord sets among them. *And I will send some* is the clearest Old Testament statement of the theme of missionary outreach. For the most part, the Old Testament thinks of the world as won by attraction; [2:2–4](#) is a paradigm. On the other hand, the New Testament lives under the great commission to go out with the gospel. Together these constitute the missionary obligation of the church: to create a magnetic community and to share a saving message. But here the Lord sends, as once he sent Isaiah himself to his own straying people ([6:8](#)). The missionaries are *those who survive*, the ‘escapees’ ($\sqrt{pālēt}$; cf. [Nu. 21:29](#); [Je. 44:14](#)). In context they are those who have escaped the manifestation of the Lord in fire and sword ([16](#); cf. chapters [24–25](#), where the same idea lies behind the procession of the nations to Zion; they too have escaped world overthrow). In terms of these chapters, they are those for whom the ‘day of vengeance’ was rather ‘the year of my redeemed’ ([63:4](#)), those who heard the Lord’s ‘peace, peace’ and were enabled to exercise the God-created ‘fruit of the lips’ in penitence ([57:19](#)). Some of these are now his emissaries to the world, for such world-wide service is not for all but for those whom *I will send*. The place-names are intended to be impressionistic rather than literal, creating a sense of world outreach (cf. the list at [11:11](#)), and the locations are at the least not certain. Tarshish ([2:16](#); [23:1](#); [60:9](#)) may be Tartessos in Spain. *Lybyans* and *Lydians* are interpretative of (lit.) ‘Pul’ and ‘Lud’. These places are mentioned, along with Cush, in

[Jeremiah 46:9](#) and [Ezekiel 30:5](#), which, according to Young,³³ suggests a southern location, but opinion tends to agree with the NIV.³⁴ *Tubal* ([Ezk. 39:1f.](#)) was in the far north, and the NIV correctly represents ‘Javan’ as *Greece*. *Famous as archers* is ‘who draw the bow’ (cf. [Je. 46:9](#); [Ezk. 27:10](#)). Why is this mentioned? Possibly to indicate that though the list is drawn impressionistically the task of the missionaries is to go into real situations, to face organized, independent peoples and actual dangers. *Islands* (*'îyyîm*; [11:11](#); [40:15](#); [42:4](#); [60:9](#)) represent ‘earth’s remotest bounds’. But whoever and wherever they are, they have this in common, that *they have not heard of my fame*/‘they have not heard a hearing/message/report of me’/‘have heard nothing at all of me’ or *seen my glory* (see verse [18](#)).

20 *Your brothers* are not fellow-Israelites—what an anti-climax that would be! What would be the point of saying that returned Israelites would become priests and Levites ([21](#))? The meaning is exactly as [John 11:52](#). Erstwhile Gentiles are gathered as *brothers* (cf. [19:24–25](#); [45:14–25](#)), and thus the promise of [56:8](#) is fulfilled. *Offering* (*minhâ*) is the most widely used word in the offering vocabulary and has the broad meaning ‘gift’. In respect of the missionaries, their converts are their holy gift to the Lord. If the NIV is correct in thinking that the offering here is the *grain* or cereal offering, then indeed it represents the bringing of the fruit of their labours to the Lord.³⁵ In respect of the converts, they are acceptable to him. The list of transportation is as impressionistic as the list of nations. No distance or difficulty will stand in the way of bringing the brothers home; every transport will be put under contribution. Military transport (*chariots*) will be transformed to works of the gospel of peace; there will be *wagons* where there are roads, *camels* where there are deserts, but, in whatever way, all will come safely to *my holy mountain*. Coming to the holy place they will be as acceptable to the Lord as one of the offerings he himself authorized his own people to bring and which was brought

³³ Young, p. 533.

³⁴ See the relevant articles in the *IBD* and *IDB*.

³⁵ On the *minhâ*, F. D. Kidner writes, ‘The ingredients are those of the kitchen ... These things are made as indispensable in the realm of sacrifice as they are in that of hospitality ... So God requires of his worshippers not only the costly decision of total self-dedication (as pictured in the burnt offering) but with it the offering of the unexciting ingredients of homely, industrious life’ (*Sacrifice in the Old Testament* [Tyndale Press, 1952], pp. 15ff.).

with full attention to the rules of cleanliness. On *clean* (*tāhōr*, from $\sqrt{tāhar}$, what is acceptable to God in purity) see verse 17. The only offering brought in a container was the firstfruits (Dt. 26:2). The converts of the nations come as the firstfruits of the harvest of the world—not a token of what will yet come but as that which is notably holy and peculiarly the Lord's.

21 *Some of them* refers to the world converts. In 61:6, as a result of the work of the Anointed One, Israel became the priestly people, the fulfilment of Exodus 19:6. Now the ideal is extended further. In Isaiah's day only some Israelites were priests or Levites, and he works on this analogy, but by doing so demonstrates that the Gentiles come in on equal terms and into equal privileges.

22 To all this, verse 22 adds a guarantee of perpetuity. *That I make* is a participle of the impending future, 'going to make'. As the outline on p. 523 shows, the new creation and new city is the climax towards which all is moving. It has not happened yet but it has the certainty and perpetuity of something settled *before me* and affirmed by the word of the Lord (on *declares*, *n̄um*, see 1:24). This is the standard and guarantee of permanency pledged to (lit.) 'your seed and your name'. The word 'seed' is virtually a technical term in a context such as this for the single family which is united in the common ancestor Abraham and the common salvation through the Servant (Gn. 22:16–18; Is. 53:10; cf. 59:21; 65:9). The *name* is that which sums up and expresses the inner, 'real' truth about a person (62:2; 65:15–16). The Lord will thus keep his people in secure possession of their new nature as his children, the seed of the Servant. The blessings of salvation cannot be forfeited, because the Lord has promised that their 'name' is as durable as the new creation itself.I

23 Those described as 'your seed', sharing in common *your name*, are now *all mankind*/‘all flesh’. Thus the transition from A¹ to B (see the outline on p. 540), where *the nations* become *your brothers* (19–20), is matched by the transition from B to A², where your 'seed' and *name* is made to apply to 'all flesh', i.e. the redeemed humanity who enjoy the new creation. They are specifically the people of the *New Moon* and the *Sabbath*. Isaiah ends with the perfect keeping of the two feasts whose corruption distressed him in 1:13. They are feasts, not fasts: the days of mourning are over (65:17–19). Also, the emphasis throughout chapters 56–66 on the Sabbath arose from the fact that this is the commandment which more than any other necessitates the submission of the

practical planning of life to the Lord's timetable, a searching test of practical holiness ([58:13–14](#)). The addition of the New Moon, the celebration and hallowing of each month as it comes, increases the pressure to give first place to the Lord in the ordering of life. Only a true commitment of heart and no mere conformist motive can accomplish this. The context requires that the locus of this worship is the new Jerusalem. That 'all flesh' could come to one city shows that Isaiah is running beyond the concept of a single location. This is the world city of the redeemed which we met in chapters [25–26](#) following the fall of the world city of meaninglessness ([24:10](#)). Just as the latter described the whole world organized around humankind and excluding God, so the former, the new Jerusalem, is the new creation organized as the 'city' where the Lord dwells among his people, open and available to them in holy fellowship. The motif of 'pilgrimage' adds the thought of their commitment to come to him, their desire to be where he is.

24 Remarkably, there is a cemetery beside the city. Always as they come to worship, the redeemed deliberately make themselves face (*go out and look*), vividly, horribly, the fate from which they have been spared. Such grimness is not out of place in these final chapters of Isaiah. On the one hand, they have been alight with the glory of the new creation, the new city and its new people. But equally, on the other, they have been solemnized by the note of vengeance ([59:17](#); [61:2](#); [63:4](#)), the winepress of the wrath of God ([63:3](#)), the fiery sword of judgment ([66:16](#)) and the record that *many will be those slain by the LORD* ([66:16](#)). It is consonant with this that the worshippers constantly compel themselves to face the consequences of the last battle as they *look upon the dead bodies*. It is frivolous and wanton to think of the pilgrims 'gloating'.³⁶ In the truest sense of the word, the scene is too awful in its ceaseless corruption (*their worm will not die*) and unending holy wrath (*nor will their fire be quenched*). The cause of it all is that *they rebelled against me* ($\sqrt{pāša'}$, the sin of wilful disobedience); Isaiah ends where he began ([1:2](#); cf. [1:28](#); [53:12](#); [59:13](#)). They did not tremble at the word of the Lord ([66:2](#), 5; cf. [65:12](#); [66:4](#)) and so they came to this endless state. Their continuing corruption reveals the real nature of sin as well as its inevitable outcome. No doubt when they refused to hear they sought to give a good account of their choices, of what they expected to attain and enjoy through following their own way. But the worm was already in the bud, and

³⁶ Smart, p. 292.

in the end the worm was the winner. Is it fanciful to imagine that as they debated their choice they heard a voice which said, ‘Did God really say ...?’ ([Gn. 3:1](#)). The first truth to be set at a discount by the tempter was the doctrine of the wrath of God expressing itself in the sentence of death, but in the end how wrong that voice is proved to be as the two irresistible and inescapable forces of destruction coincide: the working of corruption and the working of wrath. The *worm* and the *fire* bear their own testimony. On the lips of Jesus these verses will become the vehicle of the doctrine of eternal loss ([Mk. 9:43–48](#)). As the references above indicate,³⁷ rebellion has been an Isaianic accusation from first to last. In the present passage its co-relative is *loathsome* (*dērā’ôn*, [lit.] ‘loath-someness’). It occurs elsewhere only in [Dn. 12:2](#), where the context is similar but evidence is lacking to indicate the range of meaning the word may include. For certain, the purpose of visiting the cemetery is not to gloat, not even to pity (though who could restrain pity?) but to be repelled. To see and constantly refresh the memory that these are the consequences of rebellion, and so to turn in revulsion from such a thing and to be newly motivated to obedience by seeing that the wages of sin are indeed death. There is a grandeur about Isaiah not found elsewhere even in the most majestic of the rest of Scripture, a majesty full of glory and of solemnity, plain alike in the revelation vouchsafed to him and the language in which he was inspired to express it. But with the grandeur went a stern resoluteness, that if the glory does not win us to the life of obedience, if visions of the coming King, the sin-bearing Servant and the liberating Anointed Conqueror will not suffice, then maybe the unmistakably horrible rewards of disobedience will drive our wayward hearts to tremble at the word of the Lord.

³⁷ ✓*pāša'* occurs in [1:2](#), [28](#); [43:27](#); [46:8](#); [48:8](#); [53:12](#); [59:13](#); [66:24](#), and the noun *peša'* in [24:20](#); [43:25](#); [44:22](#); [50:1](#); [53:5](#), [8](#); [57:4](#); [58:1](#); [59:12](#), [20](#). This far outruns the use of this vocabulary by any other prophet.