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stroy his people, it would fail of its purpose. The issue of the wrath of Yahweh must be not destruction but healing. The purpose of the acts of Yahweh must ultimately be "peace," that state of security and well-being, both outward and inward, which was the ideal of the ancient Israelite. This prophet, however, does not look simply to the community as a whole. There is a hope of peace for the righteous, even if the wicked destroy their own opportunities for peace. The prophets of post-exilic Israel do not envisage a situation where the corruption of the major portion of the community will bring the entire community to ruin. The refrain of vs. 21 appears in xlviii 22, where it is out of place; see NOTE *ad loc.* and COMMENT (SEC. 24). Here it follows naturally on the preceding line, which speaks of peace as the work of the healing of Yahweh. This peace cannot reach others than the righteous.

From:

Anchor Bible Commentary: Second Isaiah
J. L. McKenzie

37. TRUE FASTING

(lviii 1-14)

LVIII

- 1 "Speak out with full voice, do not hold back; lift up your voice like a horn;
Declare to my people their guilt, to the house of Israel their sins.
- 2 Day by day they seek me; they delight to know my ways,
Like a nation that does righteousness, and has not abandoned the law of its God.
They inquire of me for just judgments; they are happy that God is near."
- 3 "Why do we fast, and you do not see it? Why do we afflict ourselves, and you do not know it?"
"Look, on your fast day you pursue your own profit, and you drive all your workers hard.
- 4 Look, you fast amid strife and contention, while you strike the poor^a with the fist;
You do not fast today so as to make your voice heard on high.
- 5 Is this the fast which I will accept? When a man afflicts himself,
And bows down his head like a rush, and spreads sackcloth and dust for his couch?
Do you call this a fast, a day which pleases Yahweh?
- 6 Is not this the fast which I will accept?
To loose the fetters of injustice, to remove the bands of the yoke;

^aReading with the versions; Heb. "the guilty."

- To set free the oppressed, to break every yoke?
 7 Is it not to share your food with the starving, to admit to your house the homeless poor?
 To clothe the naked when you see him, and not to withdraw yourself from your own kind?
 8 Then your light will burst out like the dawn, and your healing will be quick;
 Your righteousness will march before you, and the glory of Yahweh will march behind you.
 9 Then you will cry out, and Yahweh will answer you; you will call for help, and he will say, 'Here I am.'
 If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, and malicious speech,
 10 If you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desires of the afflicted,
 Your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom will become like noonday.
 11 Yahweh will guide you always; he will sate you in the desert;
 He will renew^b your strength, and you will be like a well-watered garden,
 Like a flowing spring whose waters are never exhausted.
 12 They will build on your ancient ruins; you will raise up your age-old foundations;
 You will be called the repairer of breaches, the restorer of ruined dwellings."^c
 13 "If you restrain your foot on^d the Sabbath from doing^e your business on my holy day,
 If you call the Sabbath delightful, and Yahweh's holy day honorable,
 If you honor it by refraining from business, from pursuing gain and from excessive talk,

^b Conjectural emendation suggested by the sense; Heb. "he will strip off."

^c Conjectural emendation suggested by the sense; Heb. "paths."

^d The translation supposes no emendation; the prepositions *beish* and *min* frequently coincide in meaning, especially in poetry (D. N. Freedman).

^e Conjectural emendation; Heb. "to do."

- 14 Then you will delight in Yahweh, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
 And I will feed you from the inheritance of Jacob your father—for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken."

NOTES

lviii 1. *horn*. The ram's horn used in ancient Israel as a summons to war and to cultic assembly. Verse 1b imitates Mic iii 8.

2. *Inquire*. A formal ritual petition.

3. In the OT, fasting is mentioned only as a sign of sorrow, as in the ritual of mourning, and not as an ascetic practice. In Israelite cultic law no fast is prescribed except the fast of the Day of Atonement (Lev xvi 29-31, xxiii 27-32; Num xxix 7).

5. The wearing of *sackcloth* and the smearing of one's self with *dust* and ashes were also parts of the ritual of mourning.

8. See lii 12.

9. *pointing of the finger*. Insulting gesture.

13. The *Sabbath* seems an afterthought, and these lines may be a secondary addition to the original poem. The ideal of Sabbath observance proposed here is found in no other passage of the OT. In the post-exilic period, the Sabbath became a day of genuine religious joy. It is mentioned in rabbinical literature. The Sabbath observance was not a burden: it liberated man for a meeting with God.

excessive talk. Renders Heb. *dabbār dābār*. D. N. Freedman points out that talking was not prohibited on the Sabbath, and suggests that the phrase should be understood of legal processes. This meaning of the phrase is without example. The phrase is difficult; and if the translation is retained, there is probably an implication of idle talk.

14. *the heights of the earth*. Elsewhere—Deut xxxii 13; Amos iv 13; Mic i 3—heights upon which Yahweh treads or upon which he makes others tread. They are the mythological mountains upon which the gods dwell. The ambiguity of the speaker becomes acute in this verse, as the use of Yahweh and the first person shows. This ambiguity is noticed elsewhere in Third Isaiah. IQIs^a reads the third person, but the ambiguity is not thereby removed. One may suppose a double recension, which has been conflated (D. N. Freedman); but at the root of the problem there seems to be a stylistic trait of some of the writers whom we group as Third Isaiah.

COMMENT

This poem is constructed as a dialogue between Yahweh and the Israelites. The opening line is addressed to the prophet, but he does not speak in his own name in the course of the poem. The reproach is directed to the attitude which conceives the service of Yahweh as fulfilled by cultic observances; see SEC. 15 (xlili 22-28) and COMMENT. The Israelites "seek" (vs. 2) Yahweh by the cult of the temple; the "ways" they delight to know are not the "ways" of covenant law but the procedures of ritual cult. These stand in antithesis to "righteousness" and "law" (literally "judgment"). The "just judgments" they seek are the vindication of Israel, its prosperity and protection from harm. These are sought by the ritual of mourning, which is also the ritual of repentance; but in spite of the ritual of repentance, the community still suffers poverty and insecurity.

The prophet attacks the community in the tone of the pre-exilic prophets, and for one of the glaring faults so often mentioned by these prophets: the oppression of the poor and helpless by the rich. Even though the post-exilic community as a whole was a poor and struggling group, differences had arisen between the few who had most of the wealth and the mass of the population; see COMMENT on SEC. 34 (lvi 9; lvii 2). The prophet caricatures the ritual of the fast, which is carried on without interruption in the pursuit of gain. The prophet presents a brief ideal picture of a community in which common needs are supplied by common assistance; the passage could well serve as the original sketch from which Matt xxv 31-46 was composed. Should the community act in this way, the salvation which has been delayed will come quickly; the prophet describes its coming in terms drawn from Second Isaiah (see the NOTE on vs. 8). These allusions suggest that the prophet and others, reflecting on the poems of Second Isaiah and contrasting them with the miserable conditions of restored Jerusalem and Judah, explained the contrast by appealing to the failure of the community to exhibit the moral regeneration for which Second Isaiah called. The community seemed to have learned nothing from the preaching of the pre-exilic prophets, nor from the judgment which had fallen on Israel for its failure to create a true community. The restoration was not the fulfillment of

the great saving act promised by Second Isaiah, nor could that saving act occur as long as Israel remained what it was. This theme occurs in other poems of Third Isaiah; it is his restatement of the preaching of Second Isaiah, applied to the resurgent people of Israel. Verse 12 suggests that the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah had not advanced very far at the time the prophet spoke—a constant visible sign that the salvation had not arrived. Muilenburg notices no mention of temple or sacrifice.

The lines on the Sabbath are probably a secondary expansion; see NOTE on vs. 13.

shrine and appointed his son to be priest at the shrine (Judg. 18:5); but soon thereafter he replaced his son with a Levitical priest (Judg. 18:7-13).

Then during David's kingship a priest named Zadok emerges (2 Sam. 15:24-37), who became chief priest at the Jerusalem sanctuary after David's death (1 Kings 2:35). Zadok's ancestry is unclear, although at a later period he was assumed to be a Levite.⁸ It is clear, however, that by the time of the Babylonian exile only the Zadokite priests had a claim to be the legitimate priests for the Jerusalem temple, and that they attempted to demote the Levites into a subordinate role (like Christian deacons rather than priests, let us say). This is the program for the future which the prophet Ezekiel set forth (Ezek. 40:46, 48:11). The author of 1 and 2 Chronicles, writing in the fifth century B.C., also reflected this changed situation in his own description of the early days of David. Look at the subsidiary tasks given the Levites according to 1 Chronicles 23:2-5, and notice the fact that the priests are distinguished from Levites in vs. 2 there.⁹

Now when the Jews returned from Babylon it was evidently the Zadokites who laid claim to the administration of the temple area; it was they who insisted they were the legitimate spokesmen for Israel, the inheritors of Abraham and Jacob (= Israel).

But the Levites were a repository of some of the most sensitive spirits in Israel. For example, it is likely that they were the ones who had preserved the traditions that gave rise to the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁰ No doubt some Levites had remained in Palestine during the time of the Babylonian exile, for one notes that there were attempts to continue offering sacrifices in Jerusalem even after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar (compare Jer. 41:5). Also, there surely must have been Levites among those who returned from Babylon (compare Ezra 1:5).

A scenario then that would fit the evidence of conflict in 63:7-64:12 is this. The Zadokite priests got hold of the administration of the temple and claimed authority and exclusive rights, as those in religious power are wont to do.

They claimed, "We have Abraham, we have Israel for our father" to those who were excluded from power, to those specifically outside the power structure who nevertheless claimed to be spokesmen for God (including Levites, and including our Third Isaiah). Third Isaiah affirms that those who boast of "Abraham" and "Israel" do not know "us" (63:16), and he makes the counterclaim that it is God who is our father (63:16, 64:8). He further makes elaborate mention of Moses and what God did through Moses (63:11, 12)—but Moses was a *Levite* (Exod. 2:1), indeed the Levite through whom God brought the people into existence. Third Isaiah is fighting here against the exclusiveness of a priestly party that had reserved to itself the rights and privileges of a religious aristocracy. God's heritage, he affirms, is wider than the confines of some priestly in-group: it consists of his "servant," the "tribes" (plural) of his heritage (63:17). Now we can begin to comprehend some of the emotion behind the affirmation that even foreigners and eunuchs (who could never qualify to be priests—we recall Lev. 21:17-23 once more) are welcome in God's temple. We can imagine how the priestly party would react to that.

This is an example of a common phenomenon, namely, that when a group is systematically excluded from power and responsibility, the out-group compensates for its powerlessness by affirming that "they may have the power, but we have God on our side." Sometimes, of course, this makes religious sense. Since power corrupts, God is more likely to be on the side of the powerless. But sometimes one suspects the claim to be purely a defense mechanism. I recall once seeing a crudely lettered sign on a small frame church in the midst of the great farms in the San Joaquin Valley in California: "Jesus' Only True Church." The claim was theoretically possible, but did seem to me unlikely.

In any event, this is the process evidently at work in Third Isaiah. The priests may hold the temple area, but God speaks through his excluded prophets, who insist that there is more to God's work with his people than the power group would allow.

Chapters 58 and 59 also betray tension between these

factions in the community. In 58:1-12 we find the controversy circling around the question of fasting. It is fascinating how the questions of the religious life in this period began to center on matters of cultic obligation—who should enter the temple, how one should observe the sabbath, how one should fast.

Who are "they" in vs. 2, which reads, "They seek me daily"? The Hebrew verb "seek" here is a frequent technical term for getting a yes-or-no answer from God through cultic means (compare the first Isaiah in 31:1: "But [they] do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult [the same verb] the Lord"). In the same way here the Hebrew says, "And me day by day they consult," and the next line mimics it: "and knowledge of my ways they delight in." The rest of the verse describes people who claim to speak for God, who follow meticulously the Standard Operating Procedure. In short, the verse describes the priestly party once more.

The first half of vs. 3 is the prophet's quotation of the priests' perplexity: they cannot figure out why their routine doesn't pay off. The prophet's answer begins in the last half of vs. 3 and continues through the first half of vs. 9. Soon it appears that the prophet's answer is really God's answer (vss. 5, 6, "I choose"), and God's answer is that though you thought your delight was in God's ways (vs. 2), you are really only pursuing your own gratification (vs. 3b). Fasting that means something will mean sharing your food, your shelter, your clothing with the destitute who need it (vs. 7). Then the light you look for will dawn (vs. 8)—words that echo Second Isaiah, "For a law will go forth from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples" (51:4). Then the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard (58:8)—again echoing Second Isaiah, "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (40:5), "the God of Israel will be your rear guard" (52:12). The rest of the passage, vss. 9b-12, summarizes most movingly what we have already heard: take away the yoke (of oppression to your fellows in the community), take away the pointing of the finger (of scorn—compare Prov. 6:13), take away the speaking of wickedness (of slander), and then your light will rise in the darkness (vss. 9-10).

This passage suggests how the themes of Second Isaiah were being grappled with in the give and take of the restored community. God's glowing promises announced by Second Isaiah are true if (and it is a big "if") you who lead the community only manifest the compassion of heart which God expects.

Chapter 59 begins with a declaration based on a rhetorical question of Second Isaiah, who had announced God's asking, "Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem?" (50:2). Third Isaiah, still evidently addressing the careless leadership of the community, affirms the negative: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (59:1-2). That is, don't keep wondering when God is going to manifest himself: you have only yourselves to blame. This sort of message—that God has not helped the people because they are wicked—is the same kind of message we heard Haggai making to explain the poverty of the community. Haggai had said: you are poor because you have not pressed to rebuild the temple (Hag. 1:2-11—we discussed this material earlier in the chapter). It is an understandable religious response, and there is no doubt an element of truth in it; but one does miss the spacious sense of God's grace and the thankful response of the community in faith which one gains from the first Isaiah and from Second Isaiah.

What an accusation it is which the prophet levels! "Your hands are defiled with blood . . . your lips have spoken lies" (vs. 3). And his accusation continues with "they"—he is not even speaking to them directly any more: "they conceive mischief" (vs. 4), "they hatch adders' eggs" (vs. 5). No question about it, in vss. 4-8 the prophet finds vivid language to express his bitter contempt for those leaders. Notice, at the same time, how carefully he shapes his poetic lines: vs. 5a mentions both adders' eggs and the spider's web, vs. 5b elaborates on the adders' eggs (they are no good for food, and snakes come forth from them), and vs. 6a elaborates on the spider's web (it is no good for clothing). It is striking that the indictment in vss. 1-8 is not fol-

lowed by any announcement of God's judgment in vss. 9 and following, as we might expect (look back at 5:8-30 and see how closely the announcement of God's judgment follows the "woes"). By this period of time the prophetic word came in a different mood, a mood of realism shaped by the difficulties of the religious life. Our leaders have misled us: this is why justice is far from us (vs. 9). We looked for that light (vs. 9) for which Second Isaiah had prepared us (51:4 once more), but find nothing but darkness; we grope for the wall like the blind (vs. 10), we moan and moan like doves (vs. 11). The community finds itself slipping farther and farther from the shining promises of Second Isaiah.

The announcement of God's judgment which we did not get in vss. 9-15a does come, after all, in vss. 15b-20. God is "astonished" or "appalled" (vs. 16—not "he wondered," as the *Revised Standard Version* has it) that there was no human agency to intervene. We cannot help wondering whether Third Isaiah was wishing for another Cyrus to deliver them as the historical Cyrus had delivered the community from oppression a generation before. So God himself must intervene personally, God himself must be the warrior. The image of God as the divine warrior was of course an old theme in Israel; the first Isaiah and Second Isaiah both drew on it (see 31:4-5 and 42:13), but Third Isaiah goes at it much more elaborately than his predecessors in the Isaianic tradition did. His words recall the elaborateness of the early hymns from Israel's tradition (see, for a good example, Exod. 15:1-18). Third Isaiah mentions God's arm that brings victory (59:16) as the Exodus poem did (Exod. 15:16). But there is this great difference: Third Isaiah uses symbolic and almost mythical language to describe the activities of the warrior (metaphors for his breastplate, his helmet, his clothing, his mantle, vs. 17), while the old poem in Exodus gives the specifics of history (Pharaoh's chariots in the sea, Exod. 15:4; the dismay of the chiefs of Moab, Exod. 15:15, and all the rest). Third Isaiah is attempting to give stability to his faith by reference to the ancient images for God among his people, but he is losing his grip on the specificities of God's dealings with real people

(the reference to "enemies" and "coastlands" in vs. 18 seems only an echo of Second Isaiah).

There is one more passage of conflict literature which we must touch on now, and that is 66:1-6. This passage is scathing in its denunciation of the whole apparatus of temple and sacrifice. "What is this house which you would build for me?" (vs. 1). Why a temple at all? "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool." The idea of trying to centralize me in Jerusalem is ridiculous. And as for sacrifice, one who offers an ox is no better than a murderer; one who offers a lamb is no better than someone who gets rid of a stray dog; one who makes a cereal offering is no better than someone who messes around with pig's blood; one who offers incense at the altar is no better than an idolater (vs. 3). We have already met words that try to put the sacrificial system into perspective (we recall our discussion of 1:12-15 in Chapter III), but there is no parallel to this blast of Third Isaiah's anywhere else in the Old Testament. If we take this word seriously, then what becomes of the careful directions in Leviticus (Lev. 1-7), what becomes of the great dreams of Ezekiel to restore the temple system (Ezek. 43:18-27)? They are dismissed by Third Isaiah with a contemptuous wave of the hand. Those of us who see no place in the religious life ourselves for sacrifice will no doubt applaud him, but we must see how unprecedented his words were in his day—only so can we grasp how bitter must have been the split between the priestly party and the prophetic party in his community. The last part of vss. 3b-4 turn on the word "choose": if they for their part chose what made them happy, then I for my part choose to afflict them, because they chose what does not make me happy at all.

Conflict we find within the lines of Third Isaiah, but not all of his chapters are so. If there was misery for those who returned from Babylon, there was also grandeur, and chapters 60-62 sing with some of the old excitement of Second Isaiah. Of all the material of Third Isaiah, it is these chapters that are most familiar to us. The words "Arise, shine, for your light has come" (60:1) echo in our minds from Handel's *Messiah* or from the readings in Christian

the years immediately following the return, the community probably did not face blatant economic disparity among its members; everyone shared the very real poverty and economic struggles in this "day of small things" (Zech 4:10).

Furthermore, our ability to "read" the justice concerns of the prophets is, in a sense, dependent upon the particular form which their words took. In the oracles of judgement of the pre-exilic prophets, the very form of speech called for a detailed exposition of the reasons for the divine word of judgement. Literally dozens of oracles attest to a standard format: summons to the addressee; enumeration of the specific reasons for judgement; the announcement of judgement ("therefore" . . .). The very shape of the oracle provides the space to outline, as it were, the economic abuses and oppressions, often at considerable length and in graphic detail. But, at the time of Exile, as the standard forms of prophetic speech changed, we find new genres: promises of salvation, proclamations of salvation, disputations, visions. The standard format of the promise of salvation, for instance, includes address, assurance of salvation, basis of salvation, consequence of God's action—but there is no place structurally to discuss justice concerns per se. In point of fact, however, many of the oracles of salvation do portray a vision of justice, plenty and prosperity for all. Note, for example, Joel 3:18:

And in that day, the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water,
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord.

The salvation promised includes an abundance of food and water for all—this is the reality of *shalom*, a reversal of poverty and want. The justice concern is not so explicit nor readily

apparent to us today because of our tendency to read the salvation oracles in a very spiritualized sense.

I have indicated that the issue of social justice is not the *only* concern of the later prophets, and that their "value" (to put that word into quotation marks) as prophets is not to be judged solely in terms of explicit attention to this particular theme. Still, as the following examples will illustrate, in a new political and economic situation, when the very forms of prophetic speech had changed radically and when prophecy itself was becoming more priestly and more apocalyptic, the later prophets did continue to uphold justice as an integral and essential element in what is meant for the community to know its God.

Isaiah 58:1-14: "Is Not This The Fast?"

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
(58:6-7)

Let us begin with the combination of the themes of justice and fasting in Isaiah 58, a lengthy text with hints of complex development. Clearly the issue of fasting was of particular concern for the post-exilic community (we shall see this again

in our discussion of Zech 7-8, pp. 134-136). In the pre-exilic period, fasting had been primarily an expression of mourning (1 Sam 31:13, 2 Sam 1:12, 3:35), or a response to a crisis (Josh 7:6, Judg 20:26, 1 Sam 7:6). By weeping, the tearing of one's clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and other ritual activities, the person fasting sought to arouse the pity and compassion of God. At the time of the destruction in 587 BC, we know that a series of public communal fasts were initiated to mourn the events connected with the catastrophe (a fast in the fifth month to commemorate the burning of the city, in the seventh month for the murder of Gedaliah, in the fourth and the tenth months commemorating the initial breach in the walls and the beginning of exile; see Zech 7:3, 8:19).

Our passage begins with the summons, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins" (58:1). In the style typical of the later prophets, Third Isaiah draws upon earlier standard prophetic language (e.g. Hos 8:1, "Set the trumpet to your lips"; Mic 3:8, "to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin). The people ask "Why have we fasted and you do not see us?" (58:3). The Lord replies with words of indictment: they pursue their own business on a fast day; they oppress their workers; they quarrel and fight. They are meticulous about the external observances, the bowing down and the sackcloth and ashes, but these alone will not attract divine attention; the mere observance of rituals of fasting is not an automatic guarantee that God will respond. In the key verses quoted above (58:6-7), the Lord goes on to spell out the nature of a true fast: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to free the oppressed, to break every yoke, to share bread with the hungry, to house the homeless, and cover the naked. For a

people who had themselves recently experienced delivery from slavery and exile, the language is especially poignant, "to loose . . . to undo . . . to let the oppressed go free . . . to break the yoke." The true fast is not a negative doing without, but a positive doing for: to share bread with the hungry, bring the homeless into your own houses, clothe the naked. Only when this is being done, can there be the expectation of salvation, "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up speedily" (58:8).

The prophet acknowledges that the magnificent salvation promised by Second Isaiah is not yet a reality in the struggling community. His message is fundamentally the same as the eighth century prophets: the problem lies not in the realm of cultic observance, but in the realm of relationships between people. Without a just society, one in which the poor are fed, the naked clothed, the homeless housed, salvation cannot come to pass. The eighth century prophets had pointed out the danger of cult becoming a false idol—something which promises a salvation which it cannot give. Now when fasting had acquired a central place in the worship life of the post-exilic community, the voice of prophecy tackles this new form of cultic observance which likewise has the potential for becoming a substitute for real acts of justice.

Zechariah 5: A Scroll And An Ephah

For a further examination of how the post-exilic prophets dealt with justice concerns, let us turn next to Zechariah 5, a chapter which is likely to be much less familiar to most of us. Zechariah is not a prophet whom one readily connects with this issue at all! He was probably a priest himself and identified

11/14

Near at hand is my sure purpose,
My salvation has gone forth,

and through the later Isaiah now again he says:

Near at hand is my salvation,
My sure purpose all but evident.

It would surely have pleased the Second Isaiah to know that his words had really lived. Seemingly lost in outer space they had yet lodged somewhere nearer home, and for a subsequent generation they held reality. The rejected promise of the one century became the dogma of the next.⁴

This last-cited passage does not have the tone of a polemic. It seems to anticipate agreement. The author of this utterance was not alone in believing that salvation was thus near at hand. Unlike the Second Isaiah, this Isaiah was speaking to a people who also believed. He urged them, only to make the little extra human effort which might alone be needed to convert the emergent promise into splendid fact. This is the meaning of the plea:

Preserve justice and do the right,

which accompanies the repeated promise:

For near at hand is my salvation. . . .

Trito-Isaiah assumed that the people expected what he expected and that they asked only: When? and: Why the delay? and: What can we do?

That he was not alone in his expectation the following verses also suggest. In them two types of persons among the Jewish population, the castrates and the proselytes, express their concern lest they be excluded from salvation. They did not doubt, they expected the fulfillment of God's sure purpose; they were worried only that they might be left out. The prophet reassured them. Just do God's will, he said. Isa. 56:1-8 is a comprehensive invitation: Partake!

The comprehensive character of the invitation is, incidentally, another sign of the influence of the Second Isaiah. If the dimension of God's purpose was world-wide for the author of Isa. 56 it had

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Buddon Blank
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also been so for the Second Isaiah, according to whom God was resolved:

Every knee shall do me reverence,
Every tongue confess me,

and generously offered:

Turn to me and be saved
All you ends of the earth.

Through Trito-Isaiah God only confirmed his earlier resolve, when, as the climax of this utterance in chapter 56, he said

For my house shall be called
A house of prayer for all peoples

and repeated the invitation: Partake!

Preserve justice and do the right,
For, near at hand is my salvation,
My sure purpose all but evident.

The first of the utterances known as Trito-Isaiah clearly reveals the source of the expectation that salvation is at hand: directly or indirectly the Second Isaiah was responsible for the terms as well as for the spirit of the passage. And this same utterance is clear evidence of the widespread air of expectancy at the time of Trito-Isaiah. The new day was dawning in all its splendor before the eyes of men.⁵

Not to be overlooked is the demand with which the passage opens: "Preserve justice, and do the right," and its implication that men can nudge history, so to speak, and by acceptable conduct hasten, or, at any rate, not hinder, the dawning of the desired day. The implication of a second passage in Trito-Isaiah is the same and it is very specific. The passage is Isa. 58:1 to 12. There the answer to the question: What can we do? is as follows:

Is not this the fast which I prefer:
To loose the fetters of wickedness,
To cut the bonds of the yoke,
To free the enslaved,

And that you break every yoke?
Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry,
And that you open your home to the homeless poor,
And cover the naked when you see him
And do not hide from your own flesh? . . .

If you remove from your midst the yoke,
The pointing of the finger and speaking evil,
And give of yourself for the hungry
And satisfy the want of the afflicted. . . .

This in chapter 58 is the equivalent of the formula "Preserve justice and do the right" in chapter 56. And both statements appear to be the answer to the questions: Why does the dawn delay? What can we do? That this is so in chapter 58 is suggested by the immediate continuation of the foregoing passages: If you do these things, then

Light shall break forth for you like the dawn
And healing for you shall spring forth speedily,
And your triumph shall go before
And the glory of God after you. . . .
Light shall rise for you in the darkness,
As the noonday shall be your deep darkness.

These and like symbols in chapter 58 stand for "salvation" and "sure purpose" of God in chapter 56. Again the expectation, here as there. It is merely a matter of: Why not yet?

This is what they ask, aggrieved, earlier in this 58th chapter:

Why do we fast and you not see?
Why do you not heed when we afflict ourselves? *

People and prophet in this situation were differently oriented. What, unlike the prophet, the people thought should be effective is ritual in nature: fasting and self-mortification. But only their prescription differed—that is all; like his, it had the purpose of inviting salvation.

The words of Trito-Isaiah in this chapter and his formula in chapter 56, his broad statement: "justice," "the right," as well as his particulars: "set free the enslaved . . . divide your bread with the hungry . . . open your home to the homeless poor . . . cover

the naked . . . satisfy the want of the afflicted," both agree notably with the staccato imperatives of the first Isaiah:

Wash, be clean.
Remove from my sight
The evil of your deeds.
Cease doing wrong.
Learn to do good.
Seek justice.
Correct oppression.
Secure the orphan's right.
Take up the widow's cause.*

The demand was the same, but the motivation was different; and this difference is an essential difference between the first Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah. The one expected disaster, the other expected salvation. The one spoke of national calamity, the fruit of man's corruption, the other of triumph, the gift of a resolute God. The first Isaiah prescribed the works of righteousness as a means to *avert catastrophe*; Trito-Isaiah prescribed the works of righteousness as a means to earn salvation, to *invite redemption*. And of course the difference is understandable. Between the time of the one Isaiah and of the other catastrophe had fallen, an Ezekiel and a Second Isaiah had appeared with God's promise of glory, partial fulfillment had pricked the appetite, and all were expectant. Expectancy is the new note, the mood of the times of Trito-Isaiah.

To be sure, the mood of the eleven chapters is not uniform. All too frequently it seems to be one of bitter disappointment. But even the presence of disappointment testifies to the mood of expectancy. For, disappointment is inconceivable without an antecedent hope. Much of what appears in Trito-Isaiah can be understood only as the prophetic reaction to popular dismay over the nonfulfillment of cherished expectations.

Why the vision faded we cannot certainly know, but something surely happened to dash all hopes. Perhaps that fifth century about which too little is clearly known, was in fact the dreary converse of all earlier promises. At a distance we telescope history. The moments of triumph, from Jehoiachin's release to the restoration of Jeru-

saalem's walls, span at least a century—no single lifetime; and for most men, for the most part no doubt, the triumphs were rare and life was drab and unprofitable. There were without doubt serious depressions and reverses. The edict of Cyrus and the return of some exiles would have been forgotten amid such hard times as Haggai described: "sowing much, harvesting little. . . ." The sack of Jerusalem some decades later, if the evidence is correctly interpreted, was a staggering blow.

There is more history than is on record. No available source tells of a devastating attack upon Judah between 516, when the temple was rededicated, and the middle of the fifth century, when Nehemiah heard with dismay of the desolate state of the capital city, but it can only be because the records are fragmentary. An abundance of indirect evidence converges upon the conclusion that Jerusalem suffered a grim experience then.¹⁰ The temptation was doubtless great to abandon all hope and it became the prophet's new responsibility to cup his hand about his own still dimly burning hope and to keep alight as well what little faith yet burned in others, threatened as it was by the wind of harsh realities.

If the devastation which the following passage describes was not the result of the assumed assault upon Jerusalem early in the fifth century, it was the result of a similar calamity unrecorded and unguessed. The vividness of the language points in this context to an event much more recent than the destruction of the first Temple in 586:

Your holy cities are a wilderness,
Zion is a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
Our sanctuary, our pride,
Where our fathers praised you,
Is burned.
All our pleasant place is a ruin.¹¹

This is not conventional language reminiscent of battles long ago. It is, in its context, a witness' awed description of a major catastrophe within the fifth or a later century, one which dashed hope to the ground and raised all manner of doubts in the minds of the sur-

vivors as to God's benign purposes and his power to effect them. The author of Isa. 63:7 to 64:11 (if it is one piece) was swept along in the flood of despair which followed in the wake of the catastrophe. He was sharp and impatient with his God, but he had nothing to say to restore the spirits of his fellow sufferers.¹²

We do not know how many such major calamities and minor reverses conspired to produce the mood of disappointment, but the mood is unquestionably present and, if not the author of this lamentation, others in other chapters of Trito-Isaiah did have words to say to counter a newborn despair.

First there is the author of 57:14 to 19. In v. 14 God speaks not to his people but about them. Those whom he addresses appear to be God's spokesmen, his prophets. He gives them a charge concerning his people:

Cast up, cast up, prepare the way.
Remove the obstacle from the way of my people.

Here it is the task and mission of a prophet to clear a way, to remove an obstacle. And what is this obstacle? In the figurative language of this passage, "obstacle" appears to symbolize bewilderment and despair. At any rate, it is to the task of removing such an obstacle in the way of his people that the author of the passage as if in obedience to the divine charge immediately turns. As against the people's bewilderment he denies that God is either remote or indifferent to their misery.

I dwell [God says] on high in holiness,
But [also] with the crushed and lowly
To revive the spirit of the lowly,
To revive the courage of the crushed.

And as antidote to their despair the prophet brings God's assurance:

I will not contend forever . . . ;
I will heal him . . . ,

and again:

I will heal him.

He knows himself called to keep the failing hope alive.

ture, the potential for individual and communal spiritual growth that it holds is inexhaustible.

Isaiah 58:1-14

Your Own Interests, or the Interests of God?

Chapter 58 is a classic example of prophetic tradition in the Bible. Here the fidelity of the Third Isaiah circle to the central themes of justice and proper worship developed by Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah comes to clear expression.

Once again those themes are shaped in relation to the specific issues of the early restoration period. The polemic is directed against a group described as self-righteous and meticulous in religious observances. Its members engage in theological study, seek out divine oracles, engage in cultic rites, and fast. But, according to the prophetic voice in this passage, it is all a sham, mere external motions, hypocritical acts that fail to meet the test of genuine religion. Their faith is faith in the subjunctive mood,

as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God.
(Isa. 58:2b)

Earlier (see Overview) we observed the central importance of the concept of *mišpāt* (above translated "ordinance") in the thought of Second Isaiah, as the order of compassionate justice God has created and upon which the wholeness of the universe depends. The problem is not that the people are unreligious. That would be easy to condemn. No, they are hyper correct in their religious observances and delighted to exhibit their piety, but in their very exercise of religion they miss the essential point, God's order of compassionate justice. They are thus indicted in the prophetic word for "their rebellion" and "their sins." How can that be?

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.

(Isa. 58:3)

These religionists have memorized all the conventional forms of religion such as "to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes" (58:5). God remains unimpressed: "Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?" What is a true fast? It is "a day acceptable to the LORD." What such a day entails is clear. It is described in 61:1-3, a passage repeated in Jesus' reading from the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21). It is the Jubilee, the time in which God's *mišpāt*, or order of compassionate justice, is restored. It is the time of healing, of remission of debts, of release from slavery, of return to one's confiscated property. This passage thus locates God's central concern in the exercise of justice and the practice of compassion. Without these, all the pious motions of religion are mere "as ifs."

The severity of the prophetic attack on self-serving, dehumanizing religion is matched by the grandeur of the description of the fast that is pleasing to God. The fact that it takes the form of a series of rhetorical questions spoken in the divine first person adds to the beauty of the passage:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
(Isa. 58:6-7)

In a community where those who regarded themselves as the most religious had converted religion into private acts of study and ritual, thereby leaving the entire realm of social relations and commerce under the dominion of ruthless, self-serving exploitation, the prophet reaffirms the classical understanding of Yahwism that grew out of the experience of God's liberating slaves from their bondage, feeding them in the wilderness, and giving them a homeland of their own. It is a rigorously moral understanding that places the one who would be true to God on the side of the same ones whom God reached out to help and empower, those suffering injustice at the hands of authorities, those imprisoned for acts of conscience, those denied their fair share of the land's produce, those denied housing and proper

clothing, those turned away even by their own relatives. The appeal is an impassioned one to the heart of the community. It is a plea to reclaim authentic humanity by replacing cold, calculating self-interest with acts of loving-kindness that restore genuine communal solidarity.

The community-building effects of such a return to true personhood are stated in terms beloved by the entire Isaiah tradition, namely, light, healing, and restoration (vv. 8, 10-11). What is more, persons who have thus experienced the restoration of human community find that they have simultaneously become reconciled with God. Healing encompasses all aspects of their existence. The barriers that their cold-heartedness toward their fellow human beings had constructed have dissolved. In contrast to those who complained bitterly, amidst their fasting, that God did not hear them, those who have directed their attention to the needs of their neighbors in need find that God is present with them (v. 9).

This leads to the final motif of the chapter, namely, proper religious observance. The prophet has not attacked the practices of the self-righteous in order to dismiss religious rites categorically. Much to the contrary, the prophet has sought to purge false religion from the land in order to restore true religion. Acts of loving kindness toward the neighbor do not exhaust the life of faith. They culminate in worship. The life of compassionate justice comes to its most sublime expression by taking delight in the Lord (v. 14). This completes the all-encompassing harmony characterized by God's order of justice and mercy. Even as they live true to the image of God in their day-to-day life by imitating God's acts of loving-kindness and giving expression to authentic community through mutual caring, God's people celebrate the origin of all life in life's source through worship, by honoring God in a special way on the Sabbath (cf. 56:6-7). The inseparability of worship from the life of justice and compassion thus is reaffirmed and held up as the only reliable foundation for a people trying to rebuild a nation after a period of calamity. Reconciled with God and embodying God's shalom, the nation would find its ability restored to go about the specific tasks confronting it in the 530s and 520s B.C.E.:

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Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

(Isa. 58:12)

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The integration of the prophet's spirituality and social consciousness thus takes shape in relation to the specific circumstances of his time. A nation must be rebuilt upon a foundation that is both consistently moral and deeply spiritual if the calamities of the past are not to be repeated. No aspect of the nation's life therefore escapes prophetic scrutiny. For every aspect of life is within the domain of God's concern.

Few passages in Third Isaiah reach across the centuries with as much power as this chapter. It requires no fancy interpretive ploys. Its message addresses the heart as passionately today as it did in the sixth century B.C.E. One cannot read these fourteen verses without the sense of having been addressed by God, without having heard a divine word that is at once severe in its attack on the perversity of self-preoccupation and assuring in its invitation to return to authentic personhood. Like Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 23:31-46, Isaiah 58 states God's will with a clarity that wins the assent of all that is true within us and then goes on to evoke our deepest sense of joy with the invitation to delight in the Lord through worship purified by loving-kindness.

Isaiah 59:1-21

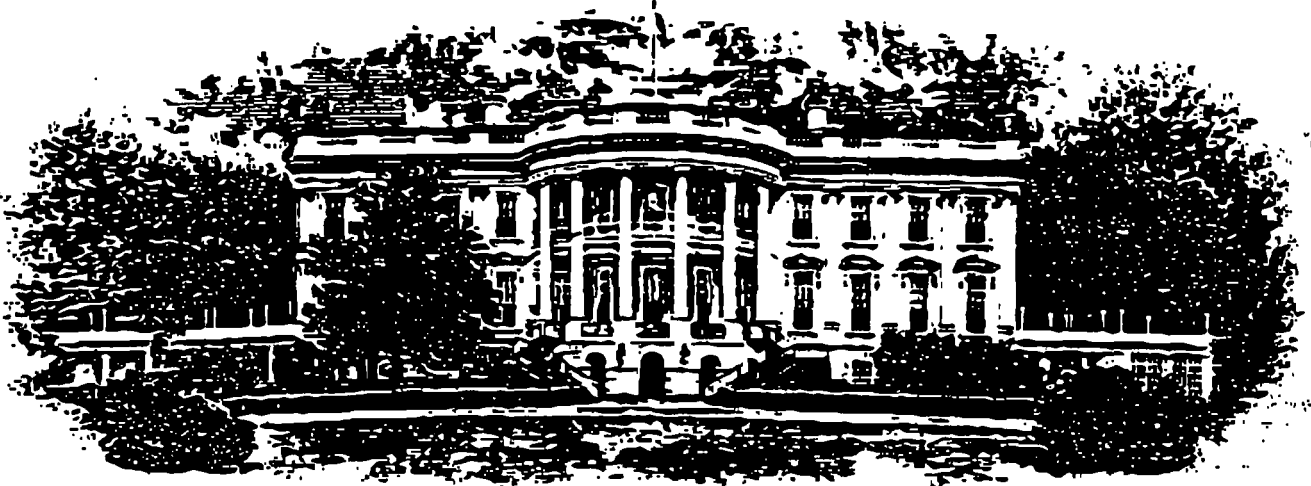
Mercy That Requires Repentance

Songs of lamentation are well attested in the Hebrew Bible, especially from the decades following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. The frankness with which the people of Israel addressed their God in times of adversity bespeaks their understanding of the divine-human relationship as authentic and open to unadorned honesty. Out of the ruins of national calamity the faithful raised their complaint to God:

Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
(Lam. 5:20)

The lament could take on a scolding tone, casting blame and even accusing God of ignoring their entreaties:

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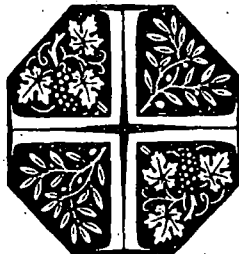
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Warnings to keep the moral law

ISAIAH 57, 58

Worn out by your unending
excesses,
even so you never said, 'I am past
hope.'
You earned a livelihood
and so you had no anxiety.
Whom do you fear so much, that
you should be false,
that you never remembered me or
gave me a thought?
Did I not hold my peace and seem
not to see
while you showed no fear of me?
Now I will denounce your conduct
that you think so righteous.
These idols of yours shall not help
when you cry;
no idol shall save you.
The wind shall carry them off, one
and all,
a puff of air shall blow them away;
but he who makes me his refuge
shall possess the earth
and inherit my holy hill.

Then a voice shall be heard:
Build up a highway, build it and
clear the track,
sweep away all that blocks my
people's path.
Thus speaks the high and exalted
one,
whose name is holy, who lives forever:
I dwell in a high and holy place
with him who is broken and
humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
to revive the courage of the
broken.
I will not be always accusing,
I will not continually nurse my
wrath.
For a breath of life passed out from
me,
and by my own act I created living
creatures.

For a time I was angry at the guilt 17
of Israel;
I smote him in my anger and
withdrew my favour.
But he ran wild and went his wilful
way.
Then I considered his ways, 18
I cured him and gave him relief,
and I brought him comfort in full
measure,
brought peace to those who 19
mourned for him,
by the words that issue from my lips,
peace for all men, both near and far,
and so I cured him, says the LORD.
But the wicked are like a troubled 20
sea,
a sea that cannot rest,
whose troubled waters cast up mud
and filth.

There is no peace for the wicked, 21
says the LORD.

Shout aloud without restraint; 58
lift up your voice like a trumpet.
Call my people to account for their
transgression
and the house of Jacob for their
sins,
although they ask counsel of me 2
day by day
and say they delight in knowing
my ways,
although, like nations which have
acted rightly
and not forsaken the just laws of
their gods,
they ask me for righteous laws
and say they delight in
approaching God.

Why do we fast, if thou dost not 3
see it?
Why mortify ourselves, if thou
payest no heed?

trance of a house as an invitation to wanton pleasure seekers. 13: *Holy hill*: Zion, Jerusalem; see 56.7 n.; 65.10.

57.14-21: Consolation to the humble. God addresses the *broken and humble in spirit* (v. 15) to assure them that they will be healed. 15: *Name is holy*: see 40.25-26 n. 18: Those who mourned for Israel are either the repentant Israelites or peoples sympathetic to Israel's tragedy, like the Persians. 19: *Men . . . near*: proselytes.

58.1-12: The true fasts, a prophetic Torah. This is a postexilic oracle (v. 12). Its insistence on justice along with outward religious acts is in the tradition of the great prophets (Jer.7.21-28). 1: A *voice like a trumpet* is that of the prophet to warn people of danger; see Ezek.33.3-4. 3: A *fast* was prescribed by the Law only on the Day of Atonement (Lev.23.26-32). Later other fasts were added to commemorate public calamities (e.g. destruction of the Temple in the fifth month; Zech.8.18-19) or to beg God's mercy when disaster threatened (Joel 2.1-15). There

- Since you serve your own interest
only on your fast-day
and make all your men work the
harder,
- 4 since your fasting leads only to
wrangling and strife
and dealing vicious blows with the
fist,
on such a day you are keeping no fast
that will carry your cry to heaven.
- 5 Is it a fast like this that I require,
a day of mortification such as this,
that a man should bow his head
like a bulrush
and make his bed on sackcloth and
ashes?
- Is this what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?
- 6 Is not this what I require of you
as a fast:
to loose the fetters of injustice,
to untie the knots of the yoke,
to snap every yoke
and set free those who have been
crushed?
- 7 Is it not sharing your food with the
hungry,
taking the homeless poor into your
house,
clothing the naked when you meet
them
and never evading a duty to your
kinsfolk?
- 8 Then shall your light break forth like
the dawn
and soon you will grow healthy like
a wound newly healed;
your own righteousness shall be
your vanguard
and the glory of the LORD your
rearguard.
- 9 Then, if you call, the LORD will
answer;
if you cry to him, he will say,
'Here I am.'
- If you cease to pervert justice,
to point the accusing finger and lay
false charges,
- 10 if you feed the hungry from your
own plenty
- and satisfy the needs of the
wretched,
then your light will rise like dawn
out of darkness
and your dusk be like noonday;
the LORD will be your guide
continually
and will satisfy your needs in the
shimmering heat;
he will give you strength of limb;
you will be like a well-watered
garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
The ancient ruins will be restored
by your own kindred
and you will build once more on
ancestral foundations;
you shall be called Rebuilder of
broken walls,
Restorer of houses in ruins.
- If you cease to tread the sabbath
underfoot,
and keep my holy day free from
your own affairs,
if you call the sabbath a day of joy
and the LORD's holy day a day to
be honoured,
if you honour it by not plying
your trade,
not seeking your own interest
or attending to your own affairs,
then you shall find your joy in the
LORD,
and I will set you riding on the
heights of the earth,
and your father Jacob's patrimony
shall be yours to enjoy;
the LORD himself has spoken it.
- The LORD's arm is not so short that
he cannot save
nor his ear too dull to hear;
it is your iniquities that raise a
barrier
between you and your God,
because of your sins he has hidden
his face
so that he does not hear you.
Your hands are stained with blood

were also fasts out of private devotion; see Mt. 6.16; Lk. 18.12. 5: *Bow his head*: sign of sadness;
sackcloth and ashes: sign of mortification and mourning.

58.13-14: The rewards of observing the Sabbath. See Exod. 20.8-11; Deut. 5.12-15.

59.1-21: A liturgy of repentance. The parts which comprise this unit may have once existed
separately, but together they are the words of a liturgical act of confession and forgiveness.
1-9: *It is your iniquities*: the prophet begins the service by indicting Israel for her sins.

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Spontaneously he resolves to heal them; he will lead them along the right path to where their ritual mourning, "the fruit of their lips," will find acceptance. In 57:19-21, God unambiguously declares his will to save the repentant in Zion and in far-off lands and to punish the wicked. As in Psalm 1, where the wind blows the wicked like chaff, the wicked here are uprooted; ceaselessly churned by the sea. Israel far and near is to turn to God who dwells with the lowly.

58:1-14

The Fast That Yahweh Wants

Though some scholars believe that chap. 58 is a composite (vv. 1-3a plus 5-9 making up the original kernel), the passage develops a single idea coherently: liturgical fasts win Yahweh's favor only when people act justly by caring for the poor. Verses 13-14 include sabbath observances among the required acts of justice, as does 56:1-8; Israel did not reduce obedience to social justice alone.

58:1-3b, The Prophet Is Instructed. Verse 1 instructs the prophet to speak like a trumpet (cf. Hos. 8:1) and gives a reason for the ensuing judgment: the people seek oracles from priests and prophets but do not "do righteousness" (the same phrase expressing total fidelity, as in 56:1). Popular frustration at God's silence is felt particularly at the fasts (Isa. 58:3a), which had been observed on the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months since the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. (Zech. 7:1-7; 8:19).

58:3c-5, The Prophet Denounces the Fasts. Though the people approach God as if they were a righteous nation (v. 2cd), they oppress their neighbor. Their self-abasing gestures are not accepted (v. 5).

58:6-14, Proper Repentance and Its Fruits. In v. 6 begins the first of three long conditional sentences; the others begin at vv. 9c and 13. What Yahweh requires in the first sentence is that they liberate and care for the poor, the needy who are victimized by the wicked (→ Poor). For their fasting to be accepted, they must reverse the behavior described in vv. 3b-4. Verses 8-9b depict what the divine response will be to such conversion: their light and healing will shine forth; God will lead them and will answer their prayer.

In the second conditional sentence, if you free the poor (vv. 9b-10) then your light will shine, and Yahweh will lead you (vv. 10b-11 = v. 8). Verses 11d-12 show the happy effects of God's favor: the people will have water in abundance, and their city will be rebuilt, the goal of the fasts.

In the third and climactic "if . . . then" series, righteousness is interpreted as keeping Yahweh's Sabbath, a day for joy and for casting off willful conduct (v. 13). As in 56:7-14 and 57:13, Yahweh's protection is described in terms of exodus-conquest. Isa. 58:14 cites the great poem of Israel's origins: "He will put them on the high places of the earth, he will let them eat the produce of the field" (Deut. 32:13). There is a progression in the fruits of repentance in the three sections; culminating in the third: secure possession of the land.

59:1-21

Those Who Repent in Zion Will Be Saved

Most scholars believe that chap. 59 is a redactional unit, i.e., its unity is the work of an editor rather than the prophet. The prophet rebukes a complaint, typical of community laments, that Yahweh is silent (v. 1ab), vigorously showing that the people, not Yahweh, are responsible for their plight (vv. 2-8). A traditional lament follows in vv. 9-15b. Verses 15c-20 are the divine response to the lament: judgment in favor of the righteous. Verse 21 is generally seen as an addition.

59:1-8, Prophetic Rebuke of a Lament Complaint. In communal laments such as Pss. 44:9-25 (esp. vv. 23-24); 74; 77 (esp. vv. 7-10); 89:38-51; and Lamentations, the people complain of God's indifference at his people's suffering in order to rouse him to action, e.g., "Why do you hold back your hand?" (Ps. 74:11a). Isa. 59:1 alludes to such a complaint about Yahweh's power. Such near blasphemy deserves the prophetic rebuke of vv. 1-8. The first part of the rebuke, vv. 2-4, vigorously directs the blame away from Yahweh and onto the people, declaring that "your" sins are the reason for God's absence; the Hebrew suffix "your" is repeated nine times in eight verses. The description of "your" sins (vv. 1-4) resembles other cultic rebukes (e.g., Ps. 50:16-21; Isa. 1:14-15). Isa. 59:4 mentions legal abuses (Job 5:1; 9:16; 13:22 show the legal context). The word "no one" in Isa. 59:4a, like "no one" in Pss. 12:1-2; 14:1, 3 (= Ps. 53), provides part of a conventional description of corrupt society. Isa. 59:5-8 includes traditional language for deep-rooted perversity (cf. Ps. 58:3-5): evil conduct ends in frustration (the vain weaving in Isa. 59:6) and death (the poison of v. 5). Human life is a path (a metaphor repeated six times). As is common in Third Isaiah, words from the one section recur, often without development, in another: "hand," "blood," "no one," "justice," which appear in vv. 1-4, reappear in vv. 5-8.

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Isaiah 58 (English-NASB)

See also: [Previous chapter](#), [This chapter](#), [Next chapter](#), [NIV](#), [RSV](#), [KJV](#), [Darby](#), [YLT](#)

-
- 1 «CRY loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their *transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins.
- 2 «Yet they *seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done *righteousness And *has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight *in the nearness of God.
- 3 "Why have we *fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not [1]notice?" Behold, on the *day of your fast you find your desire, And drive hard all your workers.
- 4 «Behold, you fast for contention and *strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to *make your voice heard on high.
- 5 «Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing [2]one's head like a reed And for spreading out *sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an *acceptable day to the LORD?
- 6 «Is this not the fast which I choose, To *loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to *let the oppressed go free And *break every yoke?
- 7 «Is it not to *divide your bread [3]with the hungry And *bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the *naked, to cover him; And not to *hide yourself from your own flesh?
- 8 «Then your *light will break out like the dawn, And your *recovery will speedily spring forth; And your *righteousness will go before you; The glory of the *LORD will be your rear guard.
- 9 «Then you will *call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you *remove the yoke from your midst, The [4]*pointing of the finger and *speaking wickedness,
- 10 And if you [5]*give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the [6]desire of the afflicted, Then your *light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday.
- 11 «And the *LORD will continually guide you, And *satisfy your [7]desire in scorched places, And *give strength to your bones; And you will be like a *watered garden, And like a *spring of water whose waters do not [8]fail.
- 12 «Those from among you will *rebuild the ancient ruins; You will *raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the *breach, The restorer of the [9]streets in which to dwell.
- 13 «If because of the sabbath, you *turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a *delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your *own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And *speaking your own word,
- 14 Then you will take *delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride *on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the *mouth of the LORD has spoken.»
-

[1]Lit *know*

[2]Lit *his*

[3]Lit *for*

[4]Lit *sending out*

[5]Lit *furnish*

[6]Or *soul*

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Isaiah 58 (English-KJV)

See also: [Previous chapter](#), [This chapter](#), [Next chapter](#), [NIV](#), [NASB](#), [RSV](#), [Darby](#), [YLT](#)

- 1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.
 - 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.
 - 3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.
 - 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.
 - 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?
 - 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?
 - 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
 - 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.
 - 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;
 - 10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:
 - 11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.
 - 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.
 - 13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:
 - 14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.
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See also: [Previous chapter](#), [This chapter](#), [Next chapter](#)

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Isaiah 58 (English-Darby)

See also: [Previous chapter](#), [This chapter](#), [Next chapter](#), [NIV](#), [NASB](#), [RSV](#), [KJV](#), [YLT](#)

- 1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins.
 - 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that doeth righteousness, and hath not forsaken the ordinance of their God; they ask of me the ordinances of righteousness, they take delight in approaching to God:
 - 3 -- Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not; have afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find what pleaseth [you], and exact all your labours.
 - 4 Behold, ye have fasted for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness; ye do not at present fast, to cause your voice to be heard on high.
 - 5 Is such the fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul, -- that he should bow down his head as a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes [under him]? Wilt thou call this a fast, and a day acceptable to Jehovah?
 - 6 Is not this the fast which I have chosen: to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, and to send forth free the crushed, and that ye break every yoke?
 - 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring to thy house the needy wanderers; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
 - 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the dawn, and thy health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of Jehovah shall be thy rearguard.
 - 9 Then shalt thou call, and Jehovah will answer; thou shalt cry, and he will say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger and the unjust speech,
 - 10 and thou proffer thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then shall thy light rise in the darkness, and thine obscurity be as midday;
 - 11 and Jehovah will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and strengthen thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a water-spring, whose waters deceive not.
 - 12 And they [that come] of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations [that have remained] from generation to generation; and thou shalt be called, Repairer of the breaches, restorer of frequented paths.
 - 13 If thou turn back thy foot from the sabbath, [from] doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy [day] of Jehovah, honourable; and thou honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking [idle] words;
 - 14 then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah, and I will cause thee to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken.
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Isaiah 58 (English-NIV)

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- 1 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.
- 2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.
- 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.
- 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.
- 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?
- 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
- 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
- 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness [1] will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
- 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
- 10 "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.
- 11 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.
- 12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.
- 13 "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
- 14 then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.
-

1. 8 Or *your righteous One*

See also: [Previous chapter](#), [This chapter](#), [Next chapter](#)

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Isaiah 58 (English-YLT)

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- 1 Call with the throat, restrain not, As a trumpet lift up thy voice, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins;
 - 2 Seeing -- Me day by day they seek, And the knowledge of My ways they desire, As a nation that righteousness hath done, And the judgment of its God hath not forsaken, They ask of me judgments of righteousness, The drawing near of God they desire:
 - 3 'Why have we fasted, and Thou hast not seen? We have afflicted our soul, and Thou knowest not.' Lo, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, And all your labours ye exact.
 - 4 Lo, for strife and debate ye fast, And to smite with the fist of wickedness, Ye fast not as [to]-day, To sound in the high place your voice.
 - 5 Like this is the fast that I choose? The day of a man's afflicting his soul? To bow as a reed his head, And sackcloth and ashes spread out? This dost thou call a fast, And a desirable day -- to Jehovah?
 - 6 Is not this the fast that I chose -- To loose the bands of wickedness, To shake off the burdens of the yoke, And to send out the oppressed free, And every yoke ye draw off?
 - 7 Is it not to deal to the hungry thy bread, And the mourning poor bring home, That thou seest the naked and cover him, And from thine own flesh hide not thyself?
 - 8 Then broken up as the dawn is thy light, And thy health in haste springeth up, Gone before thee hath thy righteousness, The honour of Jehovah doth gather thee.
 - 9 Then thou callest, and Jehovah answereth, Thou criest, and He saith, 'Behold Me.' If thou turn aside from thy midst the yoke, The sending forth of the finger, And the speaking of vanity,
 - 10 And dost bring out to the hungry thy soul, And the afflicted soul dost satisfy, Then risen in the darkness hath thy light, And thy thick darkness [is] as noon.
 - 11 And Jehovah doth lead thee continually, And hath satisfied in drought thy soul, And thy bones He armeth, And thou hast been as a watered garden, And as an outlet of waters, whose waters lie not.
 - 12 And they have built out of thee the wastes of old, The foundations of many generations thou raisest up, And one calleth thee, 'Repairer of the breach, Restorer of paths to rest in.'
 - 13 If thou dost turn from the sabbath thy foot, Doing thine own pleasure on My holy day, And hast cried to the sabbath, 'A delight,' To the holy of Jehovah, 'Honoured,' And hast honoured it, without doing thine own ways, Without finding thine own pleasure, And speaking a word.
 - 14 Then dost thou delight thyself on Jehovah, And I have caused thee to ride on high places of earth, And have caused thee to eat the inheritance of Jacob thy father, For the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken!
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Isaiah 58 (English-RSV)

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- 1 "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.
- 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.
- 3 'Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.
- 4 Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.
- 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?
- 6 "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
- 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
- 8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
- 9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. "If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.
- 10 And the LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.
- 11 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.
- 12 "If you turn back your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
- 14 then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
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דבר אלחינו יקום לעולם

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58:9

THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE

9 Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;

you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am.

"If you take away from the midst of you the yoke,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

we have a literary device here (König, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik*, p. 171). This phenomenon, of which König gives numerous examples, is called palindrome (see his *Das Buch Jesaja*, p. 500; cf. also 52:6; 65:1).

4. FOURTH STROPHE: GLOWING PROMISES (58:9c-12)

In the previous strophe the introductory questions occupy the greater part of the prophet's thought, but here the conditions for the divine favor are briefer, while the expanded conclusion (vs. 10c-12) is of much greater length. The prophet is inspiring his people with the promise of a glorious future and holding before them the hope of a radical change. Much of the strophe is repetition, but the promises are greatly deepened.

9c. The pointing of the finger: A gesture of contempt and scorn (cf. Prov. 6:13). Among the Arabs this sign was a means of bringing misfortune upon people, and it is possible that some such association is present here (Ignacz Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1896-99], I, 56; cited by König, *Jesaja*, loc. cit.). Speaking wickedness: König thinks false prophecy is meant; Feldmann, quarreling and contention (vs. 4); Volz, slander. Volz's suggestion fits the context best.

10. The LXX reads, "And if you give bread to the hungry from your soul"; the Peshitta also has "bread." The primary meaning of the verbal root here is "to bring out," "to furnish," "to produce" (cf. Ps. 144:19). The word yourself (lit., soul or "life") may be a slip (the same word follows in Hebrew). In this case read, "furnish bread to the

prayer is answered. The answer to prayer is significant:

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am.

God is himself the essential response to prayer. The accounts of a saying of Christ's concerning prayer differ in Matthew and Luke. In Matt. 7:11 God gives "good things" to those who pray; in Luke 11:13 he gives "the Holy Spirit." The Spirit is God himself in intimate and empowering fellowship. The specific requests which men make may or may not be granted. God always answers with his presence, his own thought and love. A parent's refusal or assent to a child's request contains his affection and judgment for the child, a refusal as truly as an assent. Whatever we pray for, the unfailing response is God—Here I am. God may always be "had for the asking." Other results of prayer are by-products of this invariable reply.

9c-12. *What Is an Acceptable Fast?*—The pointing of the finger, i.e., in contempt. The religious attitude toward fellow men is reverence for them as children of God (cf. I Pet. 2:17, "Honor all men"). Speaking wickedness: Torrey translates "slander" (see Exeg.). It may mean "idle words," "chatter," as in vs. 18 (cf. Matt. 12:36). A fast turned into a holiday for the well to do might easily breed gossip, a deadly antisocial sin. "Gossip is a beast of prey that does not wait for the death of the victim it devours." Such "vain speaking" is a temptation of the leisure classes whom the prophet has in mind. John Galsworthy pictures Forsyte 'Change, the home of Uncle Timothy and the aunts: "The homes of neutral persons of the secure classes, who are out of the battle themselves, and must find their reason for existing, in the battles of others." If you pour out

¹ *The Forsyte Saga* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 125.

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ISAIAH

58:11

11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

11 And the LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things,^a and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

^a The meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain

hungry." Satisfy the desire [*néphesh*]: The noun might also be rendered "appetite." Then shall your light: Cf. vs. 8a. Here the contrast is clearly stated.

11. Vss. 11-12 bring the prophetic oracle to a climax. God will no longer seem remote and unresponsive (see vs. 3ab), but his righteous judgments and nearness (vs. 2sf) will be a living and continuing reality: And the LORD will guide [or "lead"] you continually. So they will know his ways and walk by them. When they pray, he will answer. Observe how the line connects with vs. 10ab. It is not likely that the prophet is thinking of the new exodus (40:11; 42:16; 52:12). Rather, we have a characteristic transformation of one of the major ideas of Second Isaiah (cf. also 57:18). And satisfy your desire with good things: The closing phrase is usually rendered "in desert places." König reads "in sunburnt regions" (cf. KJV in drought). The RSV follows Torrey in deriving this word נַחֲמָה (only here in the O.T.) from an Arabic root *ṣah*, "good," "sound," "healthful." The LXX seems to paraphrase this idea, "according as your soul desires"; Vulg., *splendoribus*; Targ. and Syriac, "delicacies." This suits the context. Make your bones strong: The primary meaning of the root is one of strength and vigor, therefore "invigorate." The bones represented the basic stability of the self. Psychological disturbances such as despair or distress, etc., caused the bones to dry up, decay, or shake, while good news, etc., gave strength to the bones, another vivid illustration of the Hebrew view of man as a psycho-physical organism (cf. Aubrey Johnson, *Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, especially pp. 69-71; Eichrodt, *Theologie des A.T.*, II, 74; see Pss. 6:2 [Hebrew 6:3]; 31:10 [Hebrew 31:11]; 32:3; 38:3; 51:8; 102:3, 5 [Hebrew 102:4, 6]; see also Isa. 66:14; Prov. 15:30; Job 21:24). The promise answers the depressed and confused state of the community. The second tristich seizes upon the favorite Oriental allusion to water, expressing life and joy and abundant blessing. As the result of Yahweh's guidance, the life of the community will be like a watered garden (cf. Jer. 31:12), like a spring of water (lit., "gushing forth of water"), whose waters do not fail (lit., "do not deceive"; cf. Jer. 15:18; Mic. 1:14). Kittel suggests, in view of the shortness of the line, that a word has fallen out, perhaps "of life." The addition is not necessary. Cheyne *et al.* render "channel of water" and adduce Assyrian parallels. The last clause is a splendid figure for the vitality of the community's continuing life under the guidance of God (vs. 11a).

yourself for the hungry—"The gift without the giver is bare."⁹

The consequences first repeat vs. 8 and then amplify. The prophet has in mind national recovery and health. Isaiah's blessings, as Delitach points out, are both receptive, a watered garden, and inherent, a spring of water, whose waters fail not. This is the prosperity of

a nation

Made free by love, a mighty brotherhood
Linked by a jealous interchange of good.⁹

⁹ James Russell Lowell, *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, Part II, st. viii.

⁹ Shelley, *Revolts of Islam*, Canto V, st. xiv.

Vs. 12 reveals the major concern of these returned exiles in their devastated homeland. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt. Foundations of many generations suggests buildings of which the basement walls alone are standing. The restoration of walls and streets renders a city or countryside habitable. Streets implies populous places now deserted. This is a text which readily applies to the untouched or less touched lands in a postwar world. Such more prosperous nations will not assume the role of repairer and restorer unless ruled by the spirit which the prophet is inculcating. A people must pour out itself for the hungry, must reverence

58:12

THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE

12 And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

13 ¶ If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own words*:

12 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

13 "If you turn back your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure⁴ on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure,⁵ or talking idly;

⁴ Or business

⁵ Or pursuing your own business

12. This verse is a valuable clue to the conditions prevailing in Jerusalem and Judah. It certainly does not suggest that the temple had been rebuilt. The land will be restored. The ruins caused by the Babylonian invasion will be rebuilt (44:26, 28, "she shall be built"; 45:13; 54:11; 61:4; cf. also 49:8). Skinner's comment that this verse shows that the prophet is thinking chiefly of physical and political prosperity is contradicted by the preceding verses and the general context of the poem. The idea of physical restoration is clearly in the writer's mind, but spiritual regeneration significantly precedes it (vss. 8-9b, 10c-11). And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt: The Hebrew seems awkward (see KJV). The second word (lit., "from you") has been emended in various ways, e.g., Cheyne, "thy children" (or "sons"); Duhm, "thy people." Torrey argues for the present text on the basis of the Arabic. The RSV follows him here. The verb, however, should be read in the Niphal (יבנו) with König, Elliger, and Volz. The new situation will be recognized in the new name, Repairer of the breach (cf. 60:14; 61:3, 6; 62:2, 4, 12). The restorer of streets to dwell in: The word for streets (*nethibhōth*) should probably be emended to ruins (*nethibhōth*; so Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica*, 3rd ed.; ad. loc.; Johannes Hempel, *Hebräisches Wörterbuch zu Jesaja* [Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1924]; Torrey, et al.; cf. König, *Jesaja*, p. 501). G. R. Driver sees the difficulty in the infinitive to dwell and derives it from an Akkadian root *sabatu*, "to clear ground"—"who restores paths by clearing them" ("Linguistic and Textual Problems," p. 405).

5. FIFTH STROPHE: KEEP THE SABBATH (58:13-14)

The sabbath was an ancient Israelite institution founded by Moses himself (Exod. 20:8; 23:12; 31:15; 34:21; see also Isa. 58:2). Volz calls it the grandest institution of O.T. religion. It was celebrated in pre-exilic times (1:13; Amos 8:5; cf. Hos. 2:11 [Hebrew 2:13]). The Deuteronomic decalogue (Deut. 5:15) associates it with Israel's bondage in

the nations it is called to serve, and must avoid thoughtless speech which might wound their sensibilities.

13-14. *The Sabbath and Fasting*.—The emphasis upon the holy day of the LORD is a product of the Exile. Ezekiel in his desire to stress the separateness of Israel had said much of sabbaths, "I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them" (Ezek. 20:12; etc.).

Ezekiel does not stress the humanitarian benefits of a labor-free day. Its humane aspect drops out in his emphasis upon its holiness, a symbol of national dedication to God. This is not the more attractive aspect of the sabbath. But here, where the prophet places it side by side with his moving appeal for social kindness, it seems to recapture the more generous purpose of its institution.

14 Then shalt thou say, Lord; and I will be in the high place with the herit of the mouth of t

Egypt, and th the priestly ac prominence b was for Israel her covenant. cessation of al für die Alttes the synagogue between vss. 1 of the God o place the who

13. The s and a holy ti worship of th should read, for the glory: should be ren the holy day phrase, empha Or talking ic from your m probably a w:

14. This obviously clin in the LORD: Cf. Deut. 32:

Not a few c on the sabbat and delete th which followe was essential t Israel; the sabl In the Maccab fused backgrou lowed themsel engage in batt (I Macc. 2:36 good uncouth, temporaries b This was one churchmen to which martyrs later became: Son of God. T of the most sa The plea h sabbath as the wish that the j

ISAIAH

58:14

14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

14 then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Egypt, and the original Elohist decalogue (Exod. 20:11) is expanded in the light of the priestly account of the Creation (Gen. 2:1-4a). During the Exile it achieved great prominence because it was an institution that could be celebrated on foreign soil. It was for Israel a confession of her faith and a witness to the nations of Israel's loyalty to her covenant Lord. The Babylonians also celebrated the seventh day which involved a cessation of all ordinary activities (W. W. Cannon, "The Weekly Sabbath," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XLIX [1931], 325). Volz finds the origins of the synagogue in its celebration, and this is indeed possible. There is no contradiction between vs. 1-12 and vs. 13-14 of our poem. The sabbath here is tantamount to worship of the God of Israel (cf. Gen. 2:1-4a). The special value of these verses is that they place the whole poem in a profoundly theocentric context.

13. The sabbath is holy ground (cf. Exod. 3:5). As the Lord's day, it is a holy time, and a holy time must be observed by cessation of all secular preoccupations and by worship of the holy God. From doing your pleasure: Cf. vs. 2b, 2e, 3c. Perhaps we should read, "from carrying on your business" (cf. vs. 3d). Not for man's profit but for the glory and praise of God the sabbath was instituted. Cf. vs. 13e, where the phrase should be rendered as in vs. 3c, 13b. The repetitions in this strophe are notable. And the holy day of the LORD: The Hebrew has the holy of the LORD, a most interesting phrase, emphasizing the unique place of the sabbath as holy. Honorable: Vulg., *gloriosum*. Or talking idly: Lit., "speaking a word." The LXX, "Not speaking a word in anger from your mouth," is perhaps a paraphrase of the supposed meaning. The words are probably a warning against idle talk that might desecrate the holiness of the day.

14. This concluding verse is the apodosis of vs. 13. The lines are impressive and obviously climactic, and the last line crowns the entire poem. Then you shall take delight in the LORD: Cf. vs. 2b, 2e. And I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth: Cf. Deut. 32:18; 33:29; Ps. 18:33; Hab. 3:19. The heritage of Jacob your father: Cf.

Not a few commentators regard these verses on the sabbath as irrelevant in this chapter, and delete them. But in the confused days which followed the return from the Exile it was essential to restore fidelity to the God of Israel; the sabbath was a symbol of such loyalty. In the Maccabean period, with a similarly confused background, a thousand loyal Jews allowed themselves to be slaughtered rather than engage in battle in self-defense on the sabbath (1 Macc. 2:36-38). But "Time makes ancient good uncouth," and Jesus scandalized his contemporaries by his treatment of the sabbath. This was one of the reasons which led devout churchmen to demand his execution. That which martyrs died for in 168 B.C. two centuries later became a chief cause of the death of the Son of God. Thus does time alter the relevance of the most sacred institutions.

The plea here is for the recognition of the sabbath as the holy day of the LORD. One could wish that the prophet had been as specific in his

teaching on how the day is to be honored as he was in his teaching of the right observance of a fast. During the Exile the synagogue and its services had sprung up, and these were brought back to the homeland. Corporate worship of God and instruction in his word are unquestionably included in honoring the sabbath. The emphasis throughout this chapter is upon delight in the LORD. This is the mood of many of the psalms (cf. Ps. 37; 42; 119). To "enjoy God" is considered "man's chief end." Much current religion stops short of this. Augustine Birrell has spoken of Charlotte Brontë's religion as "robust Church of Englandism, made up of cleanliness, good works and hatred of humbug—all admirable things certainly, but not specially religious." Of the three brilliant daughters in the Yorkshire rectory, he says that "alone amongst the sisters Anne had enough religion to give her pleasure."¹ The elderly Franz Josef

¹ *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: W. Scott, 1887), pp. 59, 65.

THE INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE

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Researches into the Life and Faith of Ancient Times

IN FOUR VOLUMES

כלאח הארץ דעה את־יהוה

The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord—ISAIAH 11:9c

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who had tyrannized over them will in their panic consume one another in internecine war.

Chs. 50-54 contain two songs of the Servant of the Lord: 50:4-9(11); 52:13-53:12. For the rest the chapters are mainly concerned with the rehabilitation of Zion-Jerusalem. In 50:1-3; 52:1-2; 54 the city is pictured as the "wife" of Yahweh. This figure is not uncommon in the OT (cf. Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16; Hos. 2) and is continued in the NT in the conception of the church (Eph. 5:25-27) or the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2, 9) as the bride of Christ. After all they had endured of separation from their homeland, Yahweh's people might conclude that he had formally divorced their mother (cf. Deut. 24:1) or sold them (her children) to some creditor (cf. Exod. 21:7; II Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:3, 8; Matt. 18:25). The meaning of 50:1, which is correctly translated in the RSV (contrast KJV), is that Yahweh has not given Zion any bill of divorce, and to think of him as having any creditors is preposterous. On the contrary, the Exile was consequent to his people's sins (vs. 2).

In the well-known final chapter (55) the gifts of God are as *ex gratia* and as universal as anywhere in the Bible. Vss. 3-4 are sometimes interpreted as an assurance that the Davidic monarchy will be restored. Another and more probable interpretation is that the covenant with David will now be remade with the people as a whole (the pronouns "you" and "your" in vs. 3 are plural in the Hebrew). At the same time it is urged that delay in accepting the proffered grace may be fatal (vss. 6-7). Yahweh's "thoughts" and "ways" are not as the thoughts and ways of men (vss. 8-9). His "word" and purpose will as assuredly be fulfilled as that rain and snow fructify the earth (vss. 10-11). The prophecy concludes on the same note as that with which it began. We should judge that the liberation edict of Cyrus (cf. Ezra 1:1-4) had not yet been published. The closing sentence may be rendered: "It shall be to Yahweh for a memorial, an everlasting inscription which shall never be effaced," as though the way back through the desert is to be kept in perpetuity as a commemorative park.

f. Interpretation. The conclusion of the preceding paragraph raises the question whether the exuberant language of the prophet is to be taken literally, or whether it is only so much poetic hyperbole. Did he expect the journey back to Palestine to be effected in the wonderful way he describes? And, if he did, must we set him down as a deluded enthusiast? Was he, in fact, a poet-prophet of the sixth century? Or was he a poet of ca. 400 whose imagery need not be taken literally? If he was the former, it may be argued that if events did not happen as he expected, his "theology" has no firm foundation.

It is hardly necessary to say that there was no "return" from exile on the scale and in the miraculous way Deutero-Isaiah expected. Indeed, there does not appear to have been any considerable return until the time of Ezra (ca. 400 B.C.). The evidence of Haggai and Isa. 56-66 is that conditions in Jerusalem were depressing until Nehemiah rebuilt the walls (444 B.C.). The "glory of the LORD" was not revealed with the immediacy and fulness the prophet seems to have expected.

This, however, is not to discredit Deutero-Isaiah.

The matter may be expressed in this way: Deutero-Isaiah is the last of the great prophets, and in his message we see the culmination of revelation which may be said to have begun through Moses and was intensified in the prophets, particularly Isaiah, of the eighth century. It is as if the Prophet of the Exile reached the crest of a range looking out over a wide prospect to the coming of Christ (*see SERVANT OF THE LORD*). The NT gospels take their cue from the "evangelist of the OT" (Mark 1:1-3 and parallels), and Christ, as it has been said, "served himself heir" to the mission of the Servant. But the vision of any great prophet is "foreshortened." He sees the distant as near and depicts it in outlines of amazing clarity. And a prophet, like any artist, must depict what he sees in a medium (in this case poetry) suitable to his theme and in the idiom of his time. Deutero-Isaiah was steeped in the traditions of his people, and his descriptions of salvation were inspired by the epic of the Exodus, which in the course of the centuries had come to have all the radiance of "salvation history." Had there been no NT sequel, we might have had to say that the prophet's theology had little foundation to sustain it. As it is, in the context of Scripture as a whole, it is right to say that his message has been "transfigured" and that its basic conceptions are authenticated.

g. Theology. It is permissible to speak of the "theology" of Deutero-Isaiah, notwithstanding that it is not systematically formulated. All his thinking is determined by his conception of Yahweh as the sole Creator of the universe, Lord of history, Savior of Israel his chosen people and, indeed, of all mankind. His whole outlook is theocentric. Yet there is no trace in it of pantheistic monism. Yahweh is represented as saying: "I am He [than whom there is none other]." This is in marked contrast with the Vedantic philosophy, which says to man: "That art thou [than which there is nought else]." Yet Yahweh's care and concern for the world did not cease when he had created it. There is, of course, no hint of the modern concept of "continuous creation," but Yahweh is said to have "created" Israel (43:1, 7, 15), and the word is used even of contemporary happenings (41:20). This is as far removed from a stark or abstract theism as it is from pantheism: in the "berserker rage" passage (42:13-14) something like anguish is attributed to Yahweh. Whoever the perfect Servant of the Lord may have been, suffering is the means by which he fulfils his mission. The range of verbs and nouns which the prophet uses to describe Yahweh's relation to the Israel he "loves" (43:4) is very wide: he is Savior, Redeemer, King, Shepherd; he calls, chooses, strengthens, and takes by the hand. The most obvious link with proto-Isaiah is the conception of Yahweh as the "Holy One of Israel" (thirteen times in Proto-, eleven in Deutero-Isaiah). The expression is infrequent outside the book of Isaiah, and Isaiah was the first to use it. But there is a difference in emphasis between the two prophets: in Proto-Isaiah the major emphasis is upon Yahweh as judge (1:4; 5:19, 24; etc.); in Deutero-Isaiah it is always upon his saving power and protection.

3. Chs. 56-66. This section of Isaiah presents problems of which there is so far no agreed solution.

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The divergencies of view may be briefly indicated. A small minority of scholars believe that chs. 40-66, together with, perhaps, chs. 34-35, are from one author. Others think that chs. 56-66 are not from Deutero-Isaiah. Of them, some think they are a unity, by a disciple of Deutero-Isaiah; others, the majority, that they are from several authors, most of whom were disciples of Deutero-Isaiah. In either case, "Trito-Isaiah" is a convenient designation.

a. *Authorship and date.* The general background is Palestinian, and it is arguable that some parts at least could be pre-exilic (e.g., 57:1-13 is very much in the vein of Ezek. 16: 23). On the other hand, passages like chs. 60-62 are so like Deutero-Isaiah that if they had been included in chs. 40-55, there would be little disposition to doubt that they are his. It has often been argued that the references to the temple (58:5, 7; 60:7) and the walls of Jerusalem (60:10) are proof that the temple had been rebuilt but that the walls had not. This would indicate a date between 516 and 444. But what is said about the temple may be in expectation of the future rather than description of the present, very much as 62:6 must be anticipation of the rebuilding of the walls, if the chapters are a unity and the walls had not yet been built. In 63:7-64:11 the temple is in ruins, from which we must suppose that the passage dates from shortly after 586, unless—which is questionable—disaster had befallen the 516 temple.

On the whole, chs. 56-66 are not so clearly a unity as are chs. 40-55. Even in chs. 60-62, which are so like Deutero-Isaiah, there are significant differences of emphasis: e.g., in 62:11 there is obvious literary affinity to 40:10, but instead of "Behold, the Lord Yahweh comes," we have: "Behold, your salvation comes," as if studiously to avoid the idea, so prominent in chs. 40-55, of Yahweh's triumphal march in person; similarly, "Prepare the way of Yahweh" (40:3) becomes: "Prepare the way for the people" (62:10).

The broad difference of emphasis between chs. 56-66 and chs. 40-55 is this: in chs. 40-55 Yahweh is coming to the immediate help of his people, and it is they who need to be roused from their hopelessness and despondency; in chs. 56-66 it is Yahweh who seems reluctant, while the people clamor for his coming; passages like

O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down
(64:1);

We look for justice, but there is none,
for salvation, but it is far from us
(59:11);

Give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
(62:7)

would sound out of place in chs. 40-55.

The probable solution of the problem of chs. 56-66 is that which is most widely favored—namely, that "Trito-Isaiah" is from a number of authors who were in the tradition of Deutero-Isaiah. In that case the several pieces may date from various times between 538 and 444 or even later. 63:7-64:12 is similar in tone to Lamentations and may date from early in the Exile. For the rest, it is difficult to assert with

confidence dates before or after the period 520 (Haggai-Zechariah) to 516 (dedication of the second temple). Earlier "Trito-Isaiah" critics were inclined to a date not long before Nehemiah (444) and interpreted passages like 65:1-7; 66:1-4 as polemic against the Samaritans; but little is known in detail about the Samaritan Schism. More recently the tendency has been to favor dates ca. 516. This would account better for the close similarities between Trito- and Deutero-Isaiah. It must be admitted that the history of the Jewish community in the first half of the fifth century is very obscure.

Trito-Isaiah shares with Deutero- and Proto-Isaiah the emphasis upon Yahweh as the "Holy One of Israel" (60:9, 14; cf. 57:15). We are to think of the eighth-century Isaiah as having created a tradition which continued to be a living and potent force for some three centuries.

b. *Contents.* The emphasis upon the ordinances of religion in 56:1-8 is almost wholly foreign to the chapters preceding. There is no mention of the sabbath in Deutero-Isaiah. Here, to keep the sabbath and to refrain from doing evil are in parallel clauses. Justice (צדק) and righteousness (יִשְׁרָאֵל) have many nuances in Deutero-Isaiah; in this context they have a cultic-legal flavor. The passage is an assurance to foreign proselytes and (Jewish) eunuchs that if they hold fast by Yahweh's covenant, they shall have equal access to Yahweh in his temple with born and unmutated Jews. In this there is something of the catholicity of Deutero-Isaiah, and the verses appear to be a protest against an exclusiveness which became all too common in postexilic times.

56:9-57:13 is a scathing invective against corrupt religious leaders (56:9-57:2) and licentious nature-worship (57:3-13). It could well be pre-exilic, but there is insufficient reason to suppose that the practices condemned did not persist after the Exile. The remaining verses of ch. 57 are entirely in the spirit of Deutero-Isaiah. The transcendent God dwells with the man "who is of a contrite and humble spirit." This paradox is expressed with a simplicity that makes it sound entirely natural. It is not said that God *in spite of* his holiness dwells with the lowly and meek, but that he "dwells" (so the Hebrew) in eternity and with the lowly and meek.

There is evidence that during the Exile regular fasts were observed (Zech. 7:1-7; 8:18-19). There is always danger that statutory religious observances can come to lack sincerity. From Isa. 58:1-12 it appears that fasting made people quarrelsome and that on fast days they engaged in business (vs. 3 RSV mg.) and bullied their workers. The prophet is bidden to ask them whether they can properly call this fasting. This denunciation of social unrighteousness is entirely in the spirit of the pre-exilic prophets. In 58:13-14 the sabbath is to be treated as holy ground, a day when business is to be put aside (vs. 13 RSV mg.). The passage is brief but has the same moral fervor as the preceding.

The theme of ch. 59 is that Yahweh's delay in coming to the help of his people is not due to inability on his part but to their sins. A vivid description of these is followed by a community lament and confession. Finally, Yahweh himself takes the initiative and intervenes, coming in judgment like a pent-

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up stream (vs. 19 ERV mg.). He will come as Redeemer (so RSV rightly, as against KJV). There is no thought of incarnation, but in the light of the NT sequel the interpretation of the KJV has a certain justification and even inevitability.

The general similarity of chs. 60-62 to Deutero-Isaiah has already been noted. The section can be divided into three parts according to the present chapter divisions. Ch. 60 opens with a magnificent description of the sunrise glory of Yahweh upon Jerusalem while the rest of the world still lies in darkness. The nations are attracted to the brightness and themselves bring back the exiles. The Holy City shall be mistress of the nations; foreigners will rebuild her walls, and their kings be her servants. The material and moral prosperity of Zion will be without precedent. There will be no more need of sun and moon, because Yahweh will be her everlasting light (cf. Rev. 21:23).

The opening verses of ch. 61 were read by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:16-20), with the significant omission of the words "and the day of vengeance of our God." They have sometimes been taken as a Servant Song, but it is more probable that the speaker is the prophet. The rest of the chapter is very similar to the chapter preceding. A glorious future awaits the Jews, who are collectively to exercise the same priestly functions in the world-wide community of the people of God as the priests exercise toward lay Israelites.

62:1-5 reverts to the theme of Zion as the bride of Yahweh (cf. 50:1-2; 54; see BEULAH). For the meaningless "your sons" (vs. 5) read, with only a vowel change, "your bulder" — i.e., Yahweh. Yahweh will station watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem to remind him continually of his promise to make the city a "praise in the earth" (vs. 7).

The dramatic poem 63:1-6 has literary affinities with 59:15-20; 61:2, and recalls the figure of the berserk warrior of 42:13. Antiphonal voices are heard. The first must be that of the prophet; the second is the voice of Yahweh, solitary, and mighty in power and salvation. The words: "I have trodden the wine press alone" (vs. 3) have sometimes in the language of devotion been interpreted of Christ's agony on the Cross. This was not the intention of the writer. Nevertheless, in the light of the sequel, it has a measure of justification (see on 42:13).

63:7-64:12 is one of the most moving passages in the OT. It is a community lament, in which appeal is made to Yahweh's steadfast love manifested in the past history of his people. The words "in all their affliction" should be joined to the end of 63:8, and vs. 9 should be translated: "It was neither envoy nor messenger, but his own presence [lit., 'face'] that saved them" (cf. Exod. 33:14). This is supported by the parallelism and by the LXX, and is even closer to the MT. "In all their affliction he was afflicted" is hardly normal OT doctrine, though there are approximations to it in passages like Isa. 42:13-14. The whole is an impassioned appeal to Yahweh to come to the deliverance of his people. The passage is significant in that twice in it the spirit of Yahweh is called "his holy Spirit" (elsewhere in the OT only Ps. 51:11—H 51:19), and it is often noted that there

is a measure of hypostatization in the conception of the Spirit (cf. "They . . . grieved his holy Spirit"; one cannot "grieve" an abstract quality).

The difference between the RSV and KJV translations of 65:1 should be noted. The former is correct: "I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me." God is ready to be found, but he is not found by those who will not trouble to seek him. This is appropriately followed by a denunciation of ghoulish worship. Yet God will not destroy the whole people (vs. 8-10), though destruction awaits those who deliver themselves over to gods like Gad ("luck") and Meni ("fate"; vs. 11-12). The chapter concludes with descriptions of a new creation and the long life of those who shall live in the redeemed community.

The concluding chapter (66) moves between the two poles of judgment and salvation. The most natural interpretation of the first paragraph is that it dates from ca. 520 and is a protest against temple and sacrifice as such. However this may be, the verses are the clearest foreshadowing in the OT of the dominical word: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

In conclusion, although on a first reading chs. 56-66 seem uneven in quality and hardly on the same level of inspiration as Deutero-Isaiah, the oftener they are read the more are they seen to contain some of the unforgettable passages in the OT.

4. Text. The text of Isaiah has, on the whole, been well preserved; indeed, a glance at the footnotes to Kittel's *Biblica Hebraica* is sufficient to indicate that it presents fewer problems than do the majority of the other prophetic writings. Even before the discovery of the DEAD SEA SCROLLS, the attitude of scholars toward the text was already becoming markedly more conservative than it had been at the beginning of the present century (see TEXT, OT). If a passage appears to be seriously corrupt and the versions provide no solution, it is now widely agreed that purely conjectural emendation is of little value. There is always the possibility that a passage which has defied interpretation may become clear as knowledge of the languages cognate with Hebrew increases (e.g., the word עשיר, "rich," in 53:9 has long been a puzzle, and it has been usual to emend it to עשירי, "evil doers"; but it now appears that it is cognate with Arabic *guthr*, "rabble" or "dregs" [of humanity], of which it is a sound philological equivalent). There are two Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah. One (1QIs^a) is complete, and the other (1QIs^b) fragmentary. MS *b* is almost word for word the same as the MT. MS *a* has many readings different from those of the MT, and although some few of them may be superior, the majority are only differences of orthography. The two Dead Sea MSS go to show that the MT was substantially fixed by the beginning of the Christian era—a conclusion which few would have dared assert with confidence before the discovery of the scrolls.

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