

The Nations in Isaiah: Friend or Foe; Servant or Partner

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The book of Isaiah contains a more comprehensive treatment of the rest of the nations of the world than do most of the other biblical prophetic books. It addresses the nations in a variety of ways, but when this variety is looked at in the light of the present structure of the book, it may be argued that Israel's relationship to the nations becomes the skeleton around which the book's theology is structured. This article seeks to explore how that structuring takes place and how it affects both the purpose and the message of the book in its present form.

Key Words: Isaiah, nations, restoration, worship, glory of God

Like many of the so-called “writing prophets,” the book of Isaiah views the momentous political and military events of the ninth through the fifth centuries B.C.E. through the lens of the sole lordship of Yahweh in the world.¹ In this respect it is no different from Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or for that matter, Habbakuk. Each of these books represents all the nations as existing under the direction of Israel's God and acting according to his purposes.

Yet, it can be argued that Isaiah's view of the nations is much more comprehensive and nuanced than the other prophetic books' views of the nations. Isaiah in its present form is not content merely to insist that the nations move at Yahweh's behest or that the activities of the nations are directed to achieve Yahweh's purposes on behalf of his people. It also argues that Israel has a mission to the nations and that the nations will eventually join Israel in Jerusalem, where they will not only serve Israel but also share with Israel in the worship of God. This complex understanding has sometimes been seen as a result of the book's recensional complexity.² Thus, differing editorial viewpoints contributed to different views concerning the nations. In this article, I will seek to examine how the present shaping of the book conditions our reading of the relationship of the nations to Israel.

The total picture presented may be stated in the following way:

1. G. E. Wright, “The Nations in Hebrew Prophecy,” *Encounter* 26 (1965): 225–37.

2. So, for instance, W. L. Holladay, *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 20. See also M. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 46–47.

1. Israel should not be seduced by the glory of the nations into trusting them.
2. If Israel trusts the nations instead of Yahweh, these very nations will turn on Israel and destroy it.
3. When Israel has been destroyed, God will call the destroying nations to account.
4. God will deliver Israel from the nations.
5. This deliverance will be an expression of the glory of God.
6. Israel will declare the glory of God to the nations.
7. Israel will be the means whereby God's rule of justice will come to the nations.
8. The nations will come to Jerusalem bringing gifts to offer to God and by extension to God's people.
9. The nations will either serve Zion or be destroyed.
10. The nations will join Zion in worshiping Yahweh.³

When these concepts are studied in the light of the present ordering of the materials in the book, it may be asserted that the relationship of Jerusalem/Zion to the nations forms the central core of what the book is saying.⁴

The two extreme poles of this relationship appear in chs. 1 and 2. In the first chapter the point is made that because of Israel's disobedience "strangers" are devouring the land (1:7). Then the option is put to Israel: obey and eat the best of the land, or rebel and be eaten by the sword (1:9). In neither of these cases does one of the common words for "nations" appear, yet the nations are clearly in view. If Israel is disobedient to God, the nations will be his tool of punishment. This is made explicit in ch. 5, where a signal flag is raised to call the nations to destroy Zion.

But the first five verses of ch. 2, the segment shared with Micah (4:1–6), present a radically different picture. Instead of the nations' being a tool of God's judgment, they are supplicants coming to Jerusalem to learn the Torah of Jerusalem's God. Here, in the very opening words of the book, we are presented with two apparently contradictory pictures. Will the nations come to Israel to destroy, or will they come to worship? Thus, the reader is invited to ask how this opposition can be worked out, and the rest of book as it now stands is organized in such a way as to answer this ques-

3. The Hebrew words that may be translated "nations," chiefly גוֹיִם, עַמִּים, עַמְמִים, and אֲמִם, occur more than 85 times in the book.

4. Roy Melugin ("The Book of Isaiah and the Construction of Meaning," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah* [ed. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 1:39–56) argues that the variety of structures that have been proposed for the book argue that meaning is the province of the reader. I continue to believe that it is possible to discover what the originator(s) of a piece of communication intended. On Isaiah's comprehensive view of the nations, see H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (trans. T. Trapp; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 94–96. On the unity of message in the book, and the relationship of the nations to this message, see R. E. Clements, "A Light to the Nations," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (ed. James W. Watts and P. R. House; JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 60.

tion. This is confirmed by the closing segment of the book, 66:18–24, where all flesh comes to worship God in Zion.

The question begins to be addressed at once in 2:6–22. If Zion is to be the means of declaring God's glory to the earth in his Torah, then clearly it is God's glory that must fill Israel. But instead, it is the glory of the nations that fills Israel. They have made alliances with "foreigners" (2:6b) and are filled with their wisdom (6a), wealth (7a), weaponry (7b), and idolatry (8). They are enamored with all the great things of the earth (12–17), especially those that promote human pride, and the result is that all pride in human achievement, especially making divinity in human form, will be humiliated. It will be humiliated by a revelation of the "terror of the Lord, and . . . the glory of his majesty" (10, 19, 21). This idea emerges again in ch. 6, where the declaration of God's unique holiness is accompanied by the statement that it is his glory that fills the earth. It is not the glory of humanity, as epitomized by the nations, that fills the earth but God's, and Zion must somehow learn that.

In whose glory then will Judah/Jerusalem trust? This becomes the central issue around which chs. 7–39 are organized. Will they trust God and become the means of declaring his glory to the nations? Or will they trust the nations, having been seduced by the nations' glory, and be destroyed by them? Chapters 7–12 lay out the whole sequence of events that refusal to trust God will set in motion. Then chs. 13–35 demonstrate the folly of trusting the nations, and chs. 36–39 show another Judean king, Ahaz's son Hezekiah, also being given the test of trust.

The sequence of events in chs. 7–12 is initiated by Ahaz's refusal to trust God for deliverance from Syria and Israel. He does so because he has already made a defensive alliance with his greater enemy, Assyria. In response, Isaiah informs him that Assyria will shortly overflow the land (8:7–8).⁵ Because Ahaz has trusted the nations and their glory instead of God and his glory, he will soon find himself being destroyed by the very repository of his trust.

But, somewhat surprisingly, the story does not end there. God does not intend to allow the nations to decimate his people. So in a dramatic contrast to the oppressive might of Assyria, God offers the kingdom of the child (9:1–6[2–7]). Through the repeated use of children in this segment, the writer is asserting that God's weakness is stronger than the might of the nations.⁶ Thus, in spite of their strength, the nations must ultimately confront the One whose purpose they are fulfilling (10:5–19, 27–34), with the result that their illusion of being self-directing and self-perpetuating will be shattered. But as with Israel, God does not intend that the nations will be exterminated. They are drawn to this king, who will be like a signal

5. Interestingly, the land is not described as Ahaz's land, but Immanuel's.

6. See Shearjashub 7:3; Immanuel 7:14; 8:8, 10; Maher-shalal-hash-baz 8:1, 3; Isaiah's children 8:18; the Prince of Peace 9:1–6; the child who counts the trees 10:19; and children playing with deadly animals and reptiles 11:6–8.

flag for all to see (11:10).⁷ They will come to worship him, returning the captive Israelites to their Lord (11:12). As a result the Israelites will no longer rely on their oppressors but on their Lord (10:20).

Chapter 12 represents the final outcome of this sequence of events. Because of God's deliverance, Zion will trust the Lord and not be afraid of the nations (12:2). The inhabitants of Zion will declare to the nations the glorious work that God has done in delivering them (12:3–6).

There is a sense in which chs. 7–12 provide us with a summary of the rest of the book. Chapters 13–39 explore in greater detail the question of whether God is greater than the nations. Is he their ruler, and is their destiny in his hands? Can he really be trusted in view of Judah's smallness and the nations' greatness? Then chs. 40–55 consider the question whether Judah, having experienced the predicted result of trusting the nations, really can be delivered from them. The answer is, as it was in chs. 10–11, a resounding "yes." Not only that, but Judah will be the means both of demonstrating to the nations the unique deity of Yahweh and of establishing his rule of justice among them. Thus, chs. 56–66, presupposing at least a partial restoration, ask how this rule of justice will be established and how the mission to the nations will be carried out.

Chapters 13–39 address the question of trusting the nations through the juxtaposition of five blocks of material: 13–23, 24–27, 28–33, 34–35, and 36–39.⁸ Without arguing that the structure is entirely intentional, it still may be noted that there is an interesting interchange of focus in these five blocks: they move back and forth from specific to general. Chapters 13–23 address specific nations; chs. 24–27 speak of the world in general; chs. 28–33 return to a specific focus on Judah and the temptation to trust Egypt during the last two decades of the eighth century; chs. 34 and 35 then sum up the alternatives in general terms: trust the nations and join them in a barren desert (34), or trust God and find the desert turned into a garden (35). Finally, chs. 36–39 offer two specific test cases in trust.

The oracles against the nations in chs. 13–23 detail God's charges against each of the nations, including Judah itself (ch. 22).⁹ There is a sense of worldwide coverage, beginning with Babylon on the east and concluding with Tyre on the west. Between these two, almost every nation that

7. Ten of the 20 occurrences of *nēs* are found in Isaiah (5:26; 11:10; 11:12; 13:2; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 33:23; 49:22; 62:10). Of these, 8 have to do with calling the nations to serve God's purposes. The 2 that do not are 30:17 and 33:23.

8. Some writers have proposed including chs. 34–35 and 36–39 in a subsequent division of the book. For a recent example of this approach, see Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*. I believe that the continued prominence of the question of trust in chs. 36–39 argues conclusively for their inclusion with the earlier chapters.

9. For a study of the genre of national judgment oracles, see Duane Christensen, *Prophecy and War in Ancient Israel: Studies in the Oracles against the Nations in Old Testament Prophecy* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1989); see also Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series 2; Jackson, MS: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988).

had any bearing upon Judah is included.¹⁰ The function of Babylon at the beginning of the list is significant, because it is plain from the sweeping language used in both chs. 13 and 14 that Babylon is being treated as a representative of the glory of all nations and their rulers. At the other end of the collection of oracles, Tyre also seems somewhat representative. This is confirmed by the way in which the book of Revelation uses Isaiah's language for Tyre to describe Babylon. By placing this very wide-ranging collection of oracles at this point, the author or the editors seem clearly to be saying that it is foolish to put one's trust in the glorious nations of earth when they will all be brought down to destruction by Judah's God.

The generalizations found in chs. 24–27 both confirm and expand on this conclusion. Chapter 24 sums up the particular judgments announced in chs. 13–23 in general statements relating to the whole world. The chapter concludes with a vision of God reigning in glory on Mt. Zion, not merely over the nations, but over the entire cosmos.¹¹ As in ch. 12, the consequences of Yahweh's destruction of his people's enemies are songs of praise to him (25:1–5) and expressions of trust in him (26:3–4). These are intimately related to the divine promises of restoration from among the nations. So 27:12–13, which promises that God is going to thresh the fields of Assyria and Egypt and bring the good grain home, has a very similar tone to 11:15–16, where the author speaks of drying up the waters of Egypt and Assyria in order to make a highway to bring his people home.¹²

But there is one feature in this section for which the reader is perhaps not prepared. This is the assertion that one of the key events of the feast in ch. 25 is the removal of the shroud of death that is cast over all nations (vv. 7–8). The rejoicing in God's glory is not only for Zion but also for the whole world. This was intimated in 11:9–10 but is made explicit here. As with Israel, so with the nations: God's purpose in judgment is not extermination but restoration.

The particular point at issue in chs. 28–33 is whether Judah will put its faith in Egypt, following the advice of the national leaders, who are described as blind and drunken. There are six repetitions of "oi," or "woe" found in the unit (28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1). The first five of these serve to focus the issue of trust ever more sharply. They move from general statements about the foolishness and cravenness of the leaders (28:1; 29:1) to an explicit statement of woe on those who trust Egypt instead of God (31:1).

10. Only Ammon and Edom are missing, and Edom comes in for special attention in ch. 34.

11. Interestingly, the picture of world destruction is interrupted by the sound of nations from all over the world singing praise to God (24:14–16a), but the prophet still seems unwilling to hear these songs from Israel's former enemies. He cannot forget the treacheries that will still occur (v. 16b).

12. Hugh Williamson notes this similarity but does not believe it indicates the same hand at work (in his case, the hand of Deutero-Isaiah), *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 178–79.

Rather like what appeared in ch. 7, the real folly of trusting in one nation for deliverance from the threats of another nation is that God has already settled the fate of the threatening nation. So it is said several times throughout the unit that God will fight against the Assyrians and that their end is certain (29:5–8, 17–24; 30:19–33; 31:8–9). This is made clear in the final woe (33:1) which, true to form, is addressed to the oppressing nation. The true king has appeared (32:1), and the oppressor cannot stand against that kingdom. Again, as above, the result of Yahweh's deliverance is an expression of trust (33:2). The people who would not wait for God but rushed off to make alliances with Egypt now express their willingness to wait on him.

Chapters 34 and 35, as stated above, serve as a general conclusion to what has been said in chs. 13–33. They sum up the consequences of trusting the nations or of trusting God. Interestingly, the two chapters presuppose the recurrent situation described above. The people will not trust God from the outset and thus avoid the desert of human pride.¹³ Rather, they will trust the nations first and will end up in the desert. But God's true trustworthiness will be shown by his willingness and ability to make a garden bloom in that desert (35:1–2) and to make the place where the jackals lie become a water meadow (35:7).

In the light of this understanding of the materials from chs. 7 to 35—trust the nations or trust God—it can be seen that chs. 36–39, far from being a historical appendix, as some older commentaries called them,¹⁴ are an integral part of the argument of the book.¹⁵ Isaiah had confronted Ahaz on the highway to the fuller's field and challenged him to trust God in the face of the threat from Syria and Israel. Ahaz refused to do so, and Isaiah told him that Assyria would soon threaten the very life of the nation. Now this prediction has come true: the Rabshakeh stands on the highway to the fuller's field and dares Hezekiah (whom he does not deign to call king) to trust in God. No less than six times the Assyrian officer lays out the issue: in whom do you trust? He quickly dismisses the thought of trusting in

13. The fact that Edom is mentioned in ch. 34 has caused some commentators to overlook the generalization that characterizes the chapter. However, this use of graphic examples to underscore a general point is a characteristic feature of the present book. Two occurrences of this feature are found in 3:16–4:1 and 25:10–12. In the former a beautiful, finely-dressed, elegantly-coiffed woman is used to illustrate Jerusalem's pride, which will be humiliated. In the latter, Moab is used to illustrate the proud city of earth that refuses God's grace.

14. J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (New York: Scribner, 1846); C. von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (trans. J. S. Banks; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889); J. Skinner, *Isaiah, Chapters I–XXIX* (The Cambridge Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930). See also O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

15. For one expression of this understanding, see C. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991). For a counterargument, see Williamson (*The Book Called Isaiah*, 189–211), who concludes that the material was first composed by those familiar with Isaiah's writings, then incorporated into the Deuteronomic History, and then incorporated into the book of Isaiah. I do not believe he solves the problem created by the reversed chronology of the materials.

Egypt and puts the point very simply: there is no point in trusting God; he is just one more of a string of national deities that the Assyrian king (not the Assyrian gods!) has destroyed. On the other hand, he says to the people, if you will put your trust in the Assyrian king, he will treat you very favorably. Clearly, the reason for the inclusion of these materials at this point in the book is to present them as a test case of all that has been said in chs. 13–35. If God is trusted instead of the nations, he can and will deliver from the nations.

On the other hand, if God is not trusted, he will not deliver. This is the point of the second test case, chs. 38–39. Here, in an incident that almost certainly occurred ten years or more before Sennacherib's attack, Hezekiah had an opportunity to declare the glory of God to Babylon and failed to do so, choosing rather to attempt to impress the Babylonian envoys with his strength and his wealth. The result was predicted destruction by Babylon. We do not have space here to discuss all the hermeneutical issues that this structuring of the materials raises. But with regard to the theme of the nations, the basic point seems clear. In fact, Judah would not follow the later example of Hezekiah but the earlier one. They would not turn to God in the face of the Babylonian threat and as a result would not experience the kind of deliverance that Hezekiah experienced from Assyria. The unit serves then to conclude the lessons on the trustworthiness of God with two graphic illustrations. But it also serves to introduce another phase in the discussion of Zion and the nations. What happens if God does not deliver from the nations? Does this not mean that God has been defeated by them? Chapters 36–39 prepare us to hear that the answer is "no."

Because the folly of trusting the nations and the theme of the complete trustworthiness of God were vindicated in chs. 7–39, it is not surprising that they are not major points in what follows. Here, particularly in chs. 40–55, the issue is: can Yahweh do what he promised in chs. 10, 11, 14, 19, 27, 29, 30, 33, and 35? That is, can he restore a remnant of his people from among the nations, and can he do it in such a way that it will make his glory manifest to the nations? The answer is a resounding yes, from both the point of view of God's willingness to do so and his ability to do so. The lawsuit against the idols in chs. 40–48 is really a lawsuit against the nations. Sennacherib had said that God could not compare with him, the representative of all human glory. Now God says that the nations cannot compare with him; they are a drop in a bucket, dust on a scales, grasshoppers on the earth, in fact, less than nothing (40:15–17, 22–23). Given the exilic audience of these statements, they are truly stunning ones. Is the mighty Babylon who holds Judah in its hand really nothing? The answer is "yes," and thus it is not surprising that Babylon becomes the graphic example of this point in ch. 47.¹⁶ Babylon has said of itself what only God can say: "I am, and there is none besides me" (47:8, 10; cf. 43:11; 44:6–8; 45:14, 18, 21–22; 46:5; 9). As a result God will use another of the nations to bring

16. For this feature of graphic summarization in the book, see n. 13 above.

Babylon down into the dust. Cyrus exists to carry out the prior plans of God. Just as God could use an Assyria or a Babylon to carry out his plans for Israel, so he can use the Medes and the Persians to carry out his plans for Babylon.

But as it emerged earlier in the book, in chs. 11 and 25 God's purposes for the nations are not merely to punish them for their pride and their unwarranted cruelty. He wishes to establish his *mišpaṭ*, his rule of justice, among them. He is not the God of Israel alone but the God of the whole earth.¹⁷ While this thought is first introduced in ch. 42, it is more prominent in chs. 49–55. Again, how astonishing this sounds against the backdrop of the exile. Of all times when one would think that it would be unlikely for an oppressed nation to believe that God could rule benevolently over all nations, this would be it. But the fact remains that this is the context in which these pronouncements are to be heard. God intends to bring justice to all the nations. Specifically, he intends to do this through his servant (42:1, 6–7; 49:6). Obviously, this is not the place to go into the vexed question of the identity of the servant.¹⁸ Nor is it necessary for the purposes of this study to make that identification. The point is that God is not content merely to restore his Israelite servants from captivity. This is only the beginning of his purposes for the nations. He expects that his salvation will reach to the ends of the earth (49:6; 52:10). Is this just so that the ends of the earth may see the salvation that God is giving to Judah? While 52:10 may be construed this way, 49:6 can hardly be done so. Furthermore, 2:1–5 at the beginning of the book and 66:23 at the end tell us that the nations are to be participants, not merely spectators, in the worship of God. As argued above, the strategic placement of these statements supplies the context in which the final redactors intend for us to read the book.¹⁹

My point here is that, even in chs. 49–55, where the focus is specifically on God's desire and ability to solve the alienation that has arisen between him and his bride, the nations are not forgotten. God's restoration of his people to fellowship with himself will be the paradigm for the restoration of the nations to himself. The servant, whoever we may conclude that to be, has a work that is not only for Zion but for the entire world (49:6). Zion's task is to be a witness to the antiquity of God's good promises for them and to his incomparable ability to carry out those purposes against all the odds (55:5). Not only does fallen Zion look to the mighty arm of the Lord for deliverance, so do all the ends of the earth (51:4). The apparent

17. D. Hollenburg ("Nationalism and the Nations in Isaiah XL–LV," VT 19 [1969], 23–26) argued that the universalism here is only an extension of nationalism. D. Christensen ("A New Israel: The Righteousness from among the Nations," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* [ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], 251–59) has presented evidence showing that this need not be the case.

18. For a discussion of the options, see my *Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 49–52, 58–59. A select bibliography appears in the companion volume, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 113–15.

19. Clements, "A Light to the Nations," 68–69.

weakness of that arm when it appears will be shocking to all, including the nations and their kings (52:14), but this is consistent with what was said in chs. 7–12: God demonstrates his power through weakness.²⁰

Chapters 56–66 explore how it will be possible for Zion to play its part in the achievement of God's plans for the nations. By what means will Zion declare God's glory to the nations? The change in atmosphere from chs. 40–55 is apparent. There, offers of God's unfailing, undeserved love are repeated in lyrical tones. Here we see something more like chs. 7–39, with their demands for obedience. I have proposed elsewhere that the function of this section as it now stands in the book is to synthesize the two views of righteousness that appear in 1–39 and 40–55. In 1–39 righteousness is something you do, whereas in 40–55 it is something you receive. Chapters 56–66 show that the obedience called for in the earlier chapters is possible precisely through the undeserved favor displayed in the later chapters.²¹

How do the nations figure in all of this? If God's *mišpaṭ* is to come to the nations through Zion, then Zion must somehow be able to do justice. But this is just the problem. Zion seems unable to do this. The placement of the nations in this discussion is very significant. They appear prominently in three places: at the beginning (56:1–7), in the middle (chs. 60–62), and at the end (66:18–24). These observations seem to support the proposal of Charpentier that the contents of these chapters are arranged chiastically.²² While it is possible to push proposed details of this structure too far, it does seem that the facts support the general hypothesis. The Messiah stands at the apex in 61:1–4 (E). On either side are descriptions of the glory of redeemed Israel in the sight of the nations (D, 60:1–22; 61:5–62:12). On either side of those is the Divine Warrior, who does for Zion what it cannot do for itself (C, 59:15b–21; 63:1–6). On either side of those are blocks of material describing restored Zion's inability to do righteousness (B, 56:9–59:15a; 63:7–66:17). And on either side of those, at the beginning and end of the division are paragraphs describing the worship of foreigners (A, 56:1–8; 66:18–24).

I propose that, by placing the worshiping nations at the beginning and end of the section, the author or editor is signaling to us the readers the significance of this idea for understanding the section. When the nations are again given prominence in the center segments, we are prepared to

20. R. Melugin ("Israel and the Nations in Isaiah 40–55," in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* [ed. H. Sun and K. Eades; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 249–64) comments that chs. 40–55 do not adequately address the issues of justice (p. 261). He points especially to the statements about the nations' submitting to Zion in 45:14–17 and 49:22–26. Two questions should be asked: May this not be a defect of reading chs. 40–55 independently of the rest of the book? And should we not consider the surprising degree to which justice is promised to those outside Israel, *given the historical backdrop of the exile?*

21. J. Oswalt, "Righteousness in Isaiah: A Study of the Function of Chapters 56–66 in the Present Structure of the Book," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:177–91.

22. E. Charpentier, *How to Read the Bible* (trans. J. Bowden; New York: Gramercy, 1991), 77; G. Polan, "Salvation in the Midst of Struggle," *TBT* 23 (1985): 90–97.

recognize this prominence and to read it appropriately. The opening and closing sections confirm to us that God's salvation described in 40–55 is indeed not for Israel alone. To be sure, this salvation is always in conjunction with Israel's, as 66:18–24 makes clear. Nevertheless, it is in full partnership with Zion, as 56:1–8 shows. In fact, this opening segment also introduces the key theme of the second levels (56:9–59:15a and 63:7–66:17): the apparent inability of Zion to live out the kind of obedience the foreigners and eunuchs are offering. The point seems to be that the evidence of being a member of the covenant people is not first of all birth but behavior. God's salvation is for the ends of the earth, and any, whether they be foreigners or eunuchs, may participate in it if they will live God's life. The temple is to be a house of prayer for all nations (56:7–8). The reminiscences of ch. 2 are unmistakable.

Zion, expected to be the means by which God's rule of justice comes to the earth (see above on chs. 49–55), is unable to produce justice. So say the "B" sections.²³ Therefore, the divine warrior must do this by himself (59:15b–21 and 63:1–6).²⁴ As a result, God's light will shine out of Zion to all the nations (60:1–22 and 61:5–62:12). In response to the dawning of this light, the nations will stream to Zion. Specifically, it is said they will do three things. They will bring Israel's children back (60:4, 9; see also 49:22). Along with the children, they will bring their wealth as a gift to proclaim God's praise and to honor the name of the Holy One of Israel (60:6, 9; 61:11; 62:7). And finally they will serve the people of Zion. Kings are led in triumphal procession, and the nations that will not serve Israel will be destroyed (60:11a–12; see also 49:23). Foreigners will take the menial tasks so that the inhabitants of Jerusalem can perform the role of priests (61:5–6).

How are we to read these last passages? Should we see them as an alternative view that has not been synthesized adequately? Does one group of returnees want the nations to participate in worship with them, while another group insists that the nations may only serve the returnees? And has the evidence of this struggle not been adequately synthesized in the final form of chs. 56–66?²⁵ Whatever we may think about the recensional history of the components of 56–66, it is clear from the way in which the material is presently structured that we are not intended to see these statements as ultimately contradictory. By making 56:1–7 and 66:18–24 the base upon which the triangle rests, it is clear that we are to understand the statements about submission of the nations to Zion (not only in chs. 60–62 but also in 45:14–17 and 49:22–26) as partial and not final. God wants the

23. While both of these sections speak of Zion's inability to do righteousness, they do not do so in an identical fashion. The B' section (63:7–66:17) makes more of a contrast between those who do righteousness in response to God's empowerment and those who refuse to do so, depending on their own efforts.

24. If we ask the identity of this Warrior, it is surely the Spirit-anointed one described in the apex section (61:1–4).

25. So, for example, Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 388–89.

nations to come into his house (56:7) to worship him (66:23) and, while the antecedent is not entirely clear in 66:21, there is a strong likelihood that the “them” from whom priests and Levites are drawn in 66:21 are the nations who are bringing the family of Zion back from captivity.

If this is the book’s intended final statement about the nations, why are the statements about servitude here? I think there may be two reasons for their retention. The clue to the first is to be found in ch. 12. That brief hymn says two things about the nations, just as chs. 60–62 seem to say two things. Zion will declare the glory of God to the nations (12:3–6) because it trusts God and no longer fears the nations (12:1–2). Now, how might this thought that Zion need fear the nations no more be most forcefully expressed in the style that characterizes this book? Not merely by saying it, but much more powerfully, by picturing it graphically. By picturing the nations as servant, the author or editors are saying that redeemed Zion need not fear the nations in any way. Instead, Zion may trust the Warrior who is Spirit-anointed to deliver it from every captivity to the nations, including the seduction of their glory. And being thus delivered, Zion is free to represent the glory of Yahweh in such a way that the nations who are willing cannot help but be drawn to him, as the opening and closing segments of chs. 56–66 indicate.

The final verse of the book (66:24) suggests another point. Even in a setting where “all flesh” is said to join together in worshiping God, there are rebels whose ultimate fate is destruction. Thus, we may imagine that those responsible for the final form of the book are envisioning two responses among the nations: all of them submit to Zion’s God, but some do so willingly, recognizing God’s glory in Zion, while others submit by force and become servants of redeemed Zion. They are forced to bow the knee to God and his people, whether they like it or not. This twofold thought is stated explicitly in Jer 12:14–17, where God promises to restore all nations who will learn the ways of his people and swear by his name. But the nations who will not listen will be uprooted and destroyed.

In its present form the book of Isaiah presents a fully developed discussion of the relationship between Zion and the nations, one that is unparalleled in its completeness elsewhere in the Bible. It takes us from Judah/Jerusalem’s being devoured by the nations to Zion’s being a beckoning light to them; from the nations as destroyers to the nations as fellow-worshippers. The way in which this theme is developed through the present arrangement of the materials in the book bears witness to the intentionality of this arrangement.