Condemnation, Consolation, Coronation: Yahweh's Shifting Estimation of Israel
Wann Fanwar

1. Introduction

Isaianic studies have often fallen into two types, those which posit multiple authorship

theories and those which do not. Both interpretational approaches generally agree that the

book is as complex as any other biblical material, if not more so. The disagreement

invariably has to do with questions of authorship. Inevitably, multiple authorship theories

result in a splintered view of the book, with the dissection of Isaiah into the parts so-called

First/Proto-Isaiah, Second/Deutero-Isaiah, and Third/Trito-Isaiah.[1] The three parts are

generally split into chapters 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66 respectively.[2]

A closer inspection of the two schools of interpretation also reveals that in an effort

to distinguish themselves from each other, they unwittingly succeed in shadowing each

other. A case in point is where even canonical approaches end up dissecting Isaiah along

similar fault lines as multiple authorship theories do which even a cursory survey of

canonical approaches demonstrates. For instance, J Ridderbos maintains that the

superscription of Isaiah "demands as a minimum, . . . that what follows derives in the main

from Isaiah himself"[3] and yet sees two main parts to Isaiah, chapters 1-39 and 40-66, with

the latter being further sub-divided into chapters 40-55 and 56-66. While generally adhering

to the breakdown of materials in the book along a similar pattern, John T Willis emphatically

states, "the present commentary affirms the fundamental Isaianic authorship of the whole

---

[1] See Willis, *Isaiah* (Austin: Sweet Publishing, 1980), 20-31 for a rather comprehensive survey of such views.
[2] In his recent work, Shalom M Paul argues for only Two Isaiahs comprising chapters 1-39 and 40-66 (*Isaiah 40-66* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 1). An unusual position is adopted by Allan A MacRae who considers Isa 40:1-56:8 as a unified whole distinct from previous and subsequent chapters without overtly arguing for multiple authorship (*The Gospel of Isaiah* [Chicago: Moody, 1977], 13). See also Victor H. Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 99, for further discussion.
[3] Ridderbos, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1985), 9.

prophetic book, while acknowledging the possibility of additional words, lines, or verses at a

later time."[4] John N Oswalt also partitions the book into two main parts (chapters 1-39 and

40-66) but clearly asserts, "it is my conviction that the essential content of the book has

come to us through one human author, Isaiah, son of Amoz. It is he who received the

revelations from God and who directed the shaping of the book."[5]

Others have simply attempted to avoid this type of partitioning while maintaining an

essential unity to the book. Herbert M Wolf argues that Isaiah is "the author of the entire

book"[6] but chooses to disregard the three/four part division, replacing it with blocks of

materials instead. Similarly, J Alec Motyer suggests that the simplest explanation to the

question of authorship involving the book of Isaiah is "that the whole literature is the

product of Isaiah of Jerusalem"[7] and proposes a different three-part view comprising "The

book of the King (Isaiah 1-37)," "The book of the Servant (Isaiah 38-55)," and "The book of

the Anointed Conqueror (Isaiah 56-66)." An intriguing alternative is offered by John D W

Watts who views Isaiah from a theatrical perspective and ends up partitioning the book into

12 Acts.[8]

In an earlier work[9] I had also adopted this general consensus and divided Isaiah into

Initial Movement (Isa 1-35), Interlude (Isa 36-39), Crescendo Movement (Isa 40-55), and

Finale Movement (Isa 56-66). However, the more closely I have studied Isaiah since, the

---

[4] Willis, *Isaiah*, 31.

[5] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, NICOT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 25. Oswalt's work for NICOT includes *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). A similar approach is adopted by Gary V Smith in NAC, comprising two volumes, *Isaiah 1-39* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2007) and *Isaiah 40-66* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2009).

[6] Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1985), 37.

[7] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 25.

[8] Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco: Word Books, 1985), li. The 12 Acts are: Isa 1-6; 7-14; 15-22; 23-27; 28-33; 34-39; 40-44:23; 44:24-48:22; 49:1-52:12; 52:13-57:21; 58-62; and 63-66. It should be noted that these Acts are placed in two categories, the former times and the latter times.

[9] Wann Fanwar, *Creation in Isaiah* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008), 42.

more apparent it has become that this segmentation of the book is inadequate and a new approach is called for. What appears needful is an alternate way of looking at the book, especially by those who adopt canonical readings.

It seems that a significant lacuna in Isaianic studies pertains to certain statements which Yahweh makes concerning his people (Israel).[10] Such statements betray Yahweh's true estimations of his people and as such provide theological shifts to the book. Further, the placement of these statements at strategic points in the book also impacts its structural patterns.

Perhaps a clue resides in three statements (in Isa 1:4; 40:1; and 60:1) which together offer a unique view of the book as a whole. This study is an attempt to demonstrate that these three statements play a dominant role in both the theology and structure of the book.[11]

2. Yahweh's Shifting Estimation

I contend that the book of Isaiah portrays a three-shift arrangement which is significant to both its structural unity and theology. This is a view of the book that may enable a better grasp of the riddle of Isaiah and offer greater insight for those who view the book as merely one for scholarly interest. Hopefully this study also provides another platform for Isaianic studies by an intentional refocus of structural elements.

2.1. Condemnation: Yahweh's Initial Assessment

---

[10] I have as yet been unable to locate any work that specifically examines such divine statements though there are references to them in most commentaries. What appears unavailable in extant literature is an approach which studies these statements for their theological and structural effects.

[11] For the purposes of this study, chapters 36-39 are excluded from discussion due to their distinctive form and role in the book. These chapters are mostly narrative historical material and serve as a bridge or interlude between chapters 35 and 40. The dramatic leap of chapter 40 has been well documented as are the linkages between chapters 35 and 40 (see Brevard S Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 299-300; and Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, OTL [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974], 363-364). The historical narrative of chapters 36-39 provide breathing space between the oscillating pattern of Isaiah 1-35 and the ever ascending climax of Isa 40 onwards. Wolf accepts chapters 36-39 as historical interlude but maintains that they are "integral" to the book (*Interpreting Isaiah*, 171).

The first statement revealing Yahweh's estimation of Israel[12] is located in Isa 1:4, "Oh—

sinful nation!" In four quick phrases, Isaiah describes Israel's depravity and with the help of

two couplets, this picture emerges

"a nation of sinning" // "a people heavy with iniquity"

"seed of evildoers" // "children who are corrupt"[13]

Three reasons are supplied to explain this extremely negative assessment: they have

"forsaken" (עזב) or divorced Yahweh; they "have despised" (נאץ) or scorned the Holy One of

Israel; and they "have turned backwards" (implying they had turned their backs on God).[14]

The three verbs imply intentionality on the part of Israel; theirs were not sins of omissions

or accidents. Israel chose to turn away from Yahweh.

What follows in Isa 1:2-15 is a scorching litany of Israel's sins which culminates in

Yahweh's incredible remark that "when you lift up your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look

at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen" (v15). These are not merely

judgment threats, they are expressions of utter disgust and divine rage at the sins of God's

people. Divine repugnance is put out in plain sight for every reader to see. Yahweh asks,

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?" (v11) and "who requires this of you?"

(v12). He instructs them to "stop bringing useless offerings" (lit. "offerings of emptiness")

(v13) and informs them that he "despises" their acts of religiosity (vv13-14) which are an

"abomination" to him.[15] Going a step further, Yahweh says, "I cannot stand iniquity with a

---

[12] The name "Israel" is utilised in this paper for the nation of God even though historically there were at this stage two kingdoms, northern Israel and southern Judah. The book also employs Zion, Judah, and Jerusalem as metonymy for this historical reality (e.g., 1:8; 5:3; etc.).

[13] Cited texts are either from the Holman Christian Standard Bible or personal translation.

[14] The language here is similar to other biblical passages which have to do with serving other gods, such as Deut 30:20; Jdgs 2:12; Jer 2:13; and Ezek 14:5.

[15] There are other practices that God considers "abominations": homosexuality (Lev 18:22-30; 20:13), idolatry (Deut 7:25; 13:15), human sacrifice (Deut 12:31), eating ritually unclean animals (Deut 14:3-8), sacrificing defective animals (Deut 18:9-14), and practicing ritual prostitution (1 Kgs 14:23).

festival" (v13b). Literally, the verse reads, "I cannot [endure] iniquity and assembly" (the two nouns are probably a hendiadys[16]).

The litany of sins makes for morbid reading: depravity and abandoning Yahweh (v14), total and unimpeded sinfulness (vv15-16), resulting devastation of the land (vv7-9), and mindless religiosity mixed with a life of iniquity (vv11-14). Such is the depth to which Israel had sunk that Yahweh likened them to Sodom and Gomorrah (vv9-10).[17] The poignancy of Yahweh's anguish is expressed most painfully in the Song of the Vineyard, "What more could I have done for My vineyard than I did? Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes, did it yield worthless grapes?" (Isa 5:4) Israel's power brokers and populace are referred to by the unflattering appellations of Sodom and Gomorrah and in doing this, the prophet hints at the unlikelihood of their ever heeding the command of God and the potential for divine retribution. Sin is a cul de sac that leads to absolute divine retribution from which no one can escape and no human device or effort can prevent such a calamity.

This preponderance of condemnation extends to other nations as well. In chapters 13-23 we encounter the "Oracles"[18] against the nations which involve Israel and many of the surrounding countries. Chapters 24-27 are often referred to as the Isaiah Apocalypse[19] and

---

[16] The difficulty of translating can be observed in the various renderings of this sentence. "I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly" (ESV). "I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting" (NKJV). "I cannot stand iniquity with a festival" (HCSB). "I cannot bear your evil assemblies" (NIV). "I cannot tolerate sin-stained celebrations" (The NET Bible). "Assemblies with iniquity, I cannot abide" (JPS).

[17] Cf. Gen 19.

[18] The Hebrew *massaʾ* משׂא (Oracle or utterance) is used 11 times in chapters 13-23 (in 13:1; 14:28 [articular]; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1,11,13; 22:1,25 [articular]; 23:1) but only 3 times elsewhere in the book (in 30:6; 46:1,2). Isaiah 13-23 comprises a litany of judgment messages, mostly directed at the nations of the world, though not exclusively so. There are fifteen separate judgment statements which are arranged in two groups (9 oracles + 6 oracles) separated by a narrative interlude pertaining to Isaiah being a sign from God. Ten of the fifteen judgments utilize the word *massaʾ* (משׂא) which is normally translated as "oracle" with the specific connotation of "oracle of judgment" in this segment. Three of the oracles do not employ *massaʾ*, while two of them are introduced by *hoy* (הוי), a particle which expresses surprise or danger and therefore rendered as "Woe!" or "Ah!"

[19] Refer to discussions on the term "Isaiah apocalypse" by Willis (*Isaiah*, 265-267), Smith (*Isaiah 1-39*, 405-412), and Childs (*Isaiah*, 171-174) for helpful overviews of the subject.

depict Yahweh's eschatological judgment. Isaiah 28-33 comprises "Woe"[20] statements

against the nation and others who have been closely associated with Israel. Isaiah 1-35 is

peppered with statements of judgment and this is the dominant motif of these chapters.

Yahweh's judgments are not focused only at the corporate level but are also applied

to individual leaders as signal for systemic failures. The indictment against King Ahaz,

renown for his ungodly ways, is an example of such individual action (Isa 7:10-25).[21]

However, almost unnoticed in the book are Yahweh's indictments against two of Israel's

second-most powerful leaders, Shebna (Isa 22:15-19; cf. 2 Kgs 18:18,26) and Eliakim[22] (Isa

22:20-25). They held the position of *soken*, a Hebrew term which indicates they were

second-in-command in the kingdom.[23] Nevertheless, both leaders were judged as failure by

Yahweh; Shebna for his wanton materialism (Isa 22:16)[24] and Eliakim for his pride.[25]

---

[20] The Hebrew *hoy* הוי (Woe) is employed 22 times in Isaiah but mostly in chapters 1-35 (in 1:4,24; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 10:1,5; 16:4; 17:12; 18:1; 28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1), while it is used only 3 times elsewhere (in 45:9,10; 55:1). The section is riddled by more talk of judgment characterized by the pronouncement of "Woe!" (*Hoy*!) against an assortment of entities. The single appearance of "oracle" (*massa'*) in 30:6 suggests that these prophecies run along the same lines as the oracles of Isaiah 13-23.

[21] Ronald Youngblood highlights "four vivid word-pictures" (flies and bees, forcible shaving of a man's beard, eating curds and honey, and briers and thorns) which Isaiah employs to describe the destruction of Ahaz's kingdom (*The Book of Isaiah: An Introductory Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993], 49).

[22] See Neh 12:41; 2 Kgs 23:34; Matt 1:13 for others with the same name.

[23] "The word *soken* appears in feminine form for 'maidservant' or 'nurse' (1 Kgs 1:2, 4). Inscriptions in several languages support the masculine reading and the term refers to someone who represents the king (Watts, 1985, 290). The title 'who is over the household' indicates a high-ranking government official. It was first used in the list of Solomon's officials (1 Kgs 4:6) and is also mentioned in 1 Kgs 16:9; 18:3; and 2 Kgs 15:5. By the time of Hezekiah, the person with this title appears to be in the same position that Joseph had in Egypt (Gen 40-44; 45:8). In 2 Kgs15:5, Jotham, while serving as co-regent with his father, was accorded this title. Later in Isa 36:3, Eliakim would bear this title (Watts, 1985, 290). At this point in Isaiah, Shebna is the virtual second in command in the court of Judah" (Wann Fanwar, Gerard Bernard, and Soontorn Thanteeraphan, "Shebna and Eliakim: Isaianic Leadership Oracle," *Catalyst* 2014, 9:11-12).

[24] "This attitude is observed in the luxurious burial arrangements he made for himself. An elaborate tomb outside Jerusalem with the inscription 'Tomb of the Royal Steward' may be the tomb of Shebna, but this is far from certain (Smith, 2007)" (Fanwar, Bernard, and Thanteeraphan, "Shebna and Eliakim: Isaianic Leadership Oracle," 9:11-12).

[25] "No reason is spelled out for his fall but three reasons are possible: the glory and burden of government became too heavy, someone destroyed him, or success got to his head and exposed him to divine judgment. The last one is a likely suspect in this particular setting" (Fanwar, Bernard, and Thanteeraphan, "Shebna and Eliakim: Isaianic Leadership Oracle," 9:13). By contrast, Barry Webb suggests that Eliakim was ruined by the striving for power and position of his family (*The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, BST [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996], 102).

When Yahweh uttered, "Oh—sinful nation," he was venting his exasperation over the inability of his people to live in a manner becoming of a special covenant people. However, this is not the only picture emerging from chapters 1-35. This segment of Isaiah exhibits a pendulum movement where condemnation is balanced with hope. As early as Isa 1:16 onwards we read of Yahweh's true salvific desire. The nation that is so satiated with sin is still his (see Isa 5:7) and he is not about to give her up. He calls upon Israel to enter into discussion with him (Isa 1:18), proposes a possible paradigm shift (Isa 1:16-17), and promises restoration (Isa 1:26). This offer of redemptive possibilities is also spelled out in visions of Zion's future glorification (Isa 4:2-6), in messianic intimations of a Prince of Peace (Isa 9:1-7) and a David-like redeemer King (Isa 11:1:9), and in songs of the redeemed (Isa 12:1-6; 26:1-21; 35:1-10).[26]

The entire segment oscillates between these two realities: judgment and hope. This movement is symptomatic of and also provides structural pattern for the segment. The portrayal of an abandoned and adulteress Zion (Isa 1:8,21) receives an entire facelift in the joy of the redeemed returning to Zion (Isa 35:10). Isaiah 1-35 climaxes with a new Zion, a new home for those Yahweh redeems,[27] or as Barry Webbs puts it, "At home, joyful and at rest in the presence of God. It is where we long to be, and the only place where we will ever be totally content to stay."[28] Chapters so filled with condemnation also hold out possibilities for something better.

2.2.   Consolation: Yahweh's Heartfelt Response

As soon as we enter Isaiah 40, we notice a dramatic change in Yahweh's mood. Gone are the negativity and threats of chapters 1-35. Instead a new optimism is depicted with Yahweh

---

[26] Isaiah's use of song is surveyed in Wann Fanwar, "Isaiah's Songs: Liturgical and Missiological Implications," *Catalyst* 2011, 6:30-37.

[27] Refer to Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 580-581.

[28] Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 146.

expressing renewed interest in Israel. Isaiah 40 begins with wonderful words of consolation[29], "Comfort, comfort my people" (v1). This is Yahweh's second estimation of his people and one which governs the interest and structure of the second segment (Isa 40-59).[30] Smith observes, "God's comfort is closely associated with a time of great joy, the restoration of the land, and the redemption of his people."[31] Evidently, a divine shift occurs in Isa 40:1.

There are four pieces of evidence which draw chapters 40-59 into a single reality, providing it with theological and structural unity. The first pertains to the changing attitude of Yahweh. Not only does Yahweh speak with more tender tones (Isa 40:2 says that God will "speak to the *heart* of Jerusalem"), he also chooses to underline the special relationship between himself and Israel. There is a constant use of the name "Holy One of Israel" (11 times in chapters 40-59),[32] which clearly evokes covenantal concerns.[33] This focus on covenant is also expressed in such statements as: "Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen" (Isa 41:8); "I have called you by your name, you are Mine" (Isa 43:1); and "Because you are precious in My sight, and honored, and I love you. Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isa 43:4-5). Furthermore, Yahweh paints a softer image of himself as comforter (Isa 40:1-2; 51:12), as a non-forgetful parent (Isa 49:14-16), and as someone who dwells among his people (Isa 57:15). Yahweh's covenantal love extends to everyone who will come to him (Isa 55:1) and this includes people (foreigners and eunuchs) who had previously been excluded

---

[29] Youngblood labels chapters 40-66 as "The Book of Consolation" (*The Book of Isaiah*, 111). Paul, who maintains that chapters 40-66 is Deutero-Isaiah, also labels the prophet as "Isaiah the comforter" (*Isaiah 40-66*, 128).

[30] Isaiah's second segment, chapters 40-55, has received wide acceptance among scholars of varying persuasions. However, for reasons I am spelling out here, Isaiah's second segment should run until the end of chapter 59.

[31] Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 92. He also provides a detailed analysis of the covenantal implications of "comfort" (Ibid., 92-95).

[32] See Isa 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14,15; etc.. The name is used some 26 times in the book of Isaiah, but elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in 2 Kgs 19:22; Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:19; Jer 50:29; 51:5 (Fanwar, *Creation in Isaiah*, 177-178, n 6).

[33] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 313; Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, 357; Fanwar, *Creation in Isaiah*, 179

from covenant (Isa 56:1-7).[34] This is quantum leap paradigm shift in Yahweh's estimation of Israel.

The second feature is the use of a syntactical element quite distinctive to chapters 40-59, the double imperative[35] from the same root verb with no intervening qualifiers (this occurs in 40:1; 51:9,17; 52:1,11; and 57:14). This feature is found only once elsewhere in Isaiah, in 62:10 where a double double imperative is used.[36] The Hebrew root words employed in this manner are נחם (40:1 "comfort"), עור (51:9,17; 52:1 "wake up"), סור (52:11 "leave"), and סלל (57:14 "build up").[37] While it is customary to treat Isaiah 40-55 as a segment, it seems that this distinctive syntactical feature extends the segment to chapter 59.

The third major feature of this segment concerns the presence of the Servant Poems (42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:1-4-11; 52:13-53:12).[38] The messianic nature of these Poems is widely acclaimed and discussed. Suffice to say that in this context, it is the role of these Poems to this study that are pertinent. Ronald Youngblood speaks of the "significance" of these songs,[39] while Webb refers to them as a "remarkable series."[40] In Isaiah 1-35, Eliakim is the only person Yahweh refers to as "my servant" (Isa 22:20), but he is a tragic figure who, despite being described in almost messianic terms,[41] fails miserably (Isa 22:25). In Isa 40-59, "My Servant" becomes a messianic designation of the true Servant who will not fail Yahweh.

---

[34] See Deut 23:2-9. Paul emphatically asserts that "The prophet thus overturns and abolishes" the "exclusionary policy" of the Torah (*Isaiah 40-66*, 449, 453).

[35] Paul reiterates that this feature is a "recurrent and unique stylistic feature" in Isa 40-55 and appears "more than in any other book of the Bible" (*Isaiah 40-55*, 128).

[36] The double double imperative in Isa 62:10 appears to be a deliberate structural feature.

[37] The last root word serves as an important link to the "way" motif which will be further explored later.

[38] The label "Servant Poems" is preferred here to differentiate them from the other songs in Isaiah. It should be noted that the song term used by Isaiah (רנן, שִׁיר, זמר) do not appear in reference to the Servant Poems (Fanwar, "Isaiah's Song: Liturgical and Misiological Implications," 6:30-37). Webb adds Isa 61:1-3 as a "fifth and final song which brings the whole series to a climax" (*The Message of Isaiah*, 170, n 37).

[39] Youngblood, *The Book of Isaiah*, 147.

[40] Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 170.

[41] Compare Isa 22:20-25 with Rev 1:9-20. The reference to the "key of David" and the authority to open or close with no one able to reverse such action is applied to Eliakim in Isa 22:22 and to Jesus in Rev 3:7.

While there are messianic titles in every segment of Isaiah (1-35; 40-59; and 60-66),

"Servant" is unique to these chapters.[42] Moreover, the incorporation of outcasts (foreigners

and eunuchs) in the covenant fulfills the servanthood expectation of covenant (see Exod

19:4-6) as these new covenant persons become "servants" of Yahweh (Isa 56:6). In this

context, the work of the Servant is to create new "servants" for God.

A fourth feature of Yahweh's new response brings into focus a new covenant reality.

While the phrase "new covenant" is not employed, it is quite evident that Isa 40-59

culminates in new covenantal realities. The Hebrew word ברית (covenant) is used 12 times

in Isaiah[43] with 7 of these in chapters 40-59. In the book, Yahweh speaks of "My covenant"

three times in 56:4,6 and 59:21. In chapter 56, Yahweh states in unequivocal terms that the

outcasts can now become members of his covenant. There is something radically new about

this shift of divine attitude towards those who had been previously excluded from covenant.

Of greater import is the description at the end of chapter 59 where the Redeemer comes to

Zion with these pronouncements: "As for Me, this is My covenant with them.[44] My Spirit

who is on you,[45] and My words that I have put in your mouth,[46] will not depart from your

mouth, or from the mouth of your children, or from the mouth of your children's children,

from now on and forever" (Isa 59:21).[47] God's new covenant, recorded in Isaiah 56-59,

cannot be abrogated or undermined; it will stand the test of time.

---

[42] Wolf maintains that this Servant is a Messianic figure designated to fulfill all the failures of other human servants (*Interpreting Isaiah*, 191). In contrast to this, Paul D Hanson adopts a more nebulous interpretation of the identity of this Servant (*Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation [Louisville: John Knox Press], 43-44).

[43] Isa 24:5; 28:15,18; 33:8; 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 56:4,6; 59:21; 61:8.

[44] This expression is found again only in Ezek 16:8; 37:26.

[45] See Isa 42:1; 61:1.

[46] See Isa 51:16: Deut 18:18.

[47] See Isa 54:10. There is also a resemblance here to the new covenant of Jer 31:31-34.

Isaiah 40-59 culminates in the promise of new covenant realities that may be shared by everyone who comes to Yahweh irrespective of background. The entire segment is predicated on new realities which Yahweh performs through his servant via a new covenant.

2.3.　　　Coronation: Yahweh's Ultimate Shift

The final segment of Isaiah commences with the amazing pronouncement, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh shines over you" (Isa 60:1). The chapter is "one uninterrupted eschatological prophecy delineating a plan for the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and all-pervasive glory of future Jerusalem."[48] This statement presents the ultimate transformation of Israel from the unwanted daughter in chapter 1 to the elevated princess in chapter 60. At first, Yahweh had assessed Israel as "sinful" but then changes his mind to something more comforting. However, he does not stop there as his evaluation of Israel shifts one more time to make her the abode of his glory. This statement speaks of reversed fortunes, the destiny of Israel, and everything in the book crescendos towards the final reversal, new heaven and new earth. Webb calls this new Zion "the kingdom of God come down to earth; the new creation."[49]

Syntactical considerations reveal that double imperative is utilized in Isaiah 60-66, but differently from chapters 40-59. "Arise, shine" (Isa 60:1)[50] are both imperatival forms but come from different root words (קום and אור); this use of double imperative is different from chapters 40-59 and is the only instance where it is used in Isaiah.[51] Isa 62:10 also uses double imperatives with the same root word but the pattern (2+1; 2+1) is different from

---

[48] Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 514.
[49] Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 231.
[50] LXX reads "Shine, shine" which may be an attempt to duplicate the style of Isa 51:9,17; 52:1 (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, 532, n 1).
[51] Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 242.

other passages; it reads "go out, go out . . . prepare . . . build up, build up . . . clear away . . ." These patterns are unique to these chapters.

Another major shift in this final segment of the book has to do with the "servant" motif. In Isaiah 22 a failed "servant" is introduced, while in the Servant Poems the messianic Servant is revealed. In Isa 65:8-16 a new portrait of "servant" emerges. First, the portrait is plural in contrast to the singular portraits of earlier passages. In this passage alone, "servants" is employed 7 times and is paralleled with "chosen ones" twice (Isa 65:9,15). Second, Yahweh speaks of these servants in possessive mode, each time referring to them as "My servants" (Isa 65:8,9,13,14,15). Third, these "servants" are recipients of divine aid, providence, and protection (Isa 65:8-12). They experience great reversals in their lives vis-à-vis their enemies: they eat, drink, rejoice, and shout with joy while the reverse is true for their detractors (Isa 65:13-16); the "contrast between these two destinies is stark, uncompromising, and final."[52] Involved in all this is the transformation of rebels into servants. The book shifts from failed servants to a messianic Servant to servants of Yahweh.

This elevation of Yahweh's people is predicated upon the messianic mission of Isaiah 61. Yahweh's anointed appears to reverse all the conditions resulting from sin: broken hearts are healed, liberty is provided, mourners are comforted, and despair is replaced (Isa 61:1-3). Furthermore, ancient ruins are rebuilt (Isa 61:4) and a new eternal covenant is ushered in (Isa 61:8). Yahweh also tells them that they and their posterity "will be known among the nations" and everyone will recognize them as a people "blessed by Yahweh" (Isa 61:9). God himself is the guarantor of the promises.[53] With all of this transformation, Zion is no longer the abandoned daughter (Isa 1:8) but she is now "Daughter Zion" of Yahweh (Isa 62:11).

---

[52] Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 713.
[53] See Isa 41:13; 42:6-8; 43:3, 15; 44:6, 24-28; 46:8-11; 48:17; 49:26; 51:12-16; 60:16.

The final piece of this incredible shift is Yahweh's proclamation that he "will create a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 65:17).[54] Whatever damage sin had caused is now corrected as Yahweh makes everything new. The intention of this new creation is the eternal survival of Israel, for Yahweh states, "For just as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, will endure before me . . . so will your offspring and your name endure" (Isa 66:22). As a new day dawns, Israel has journeyed from the brink of destruction to the heights of glory.

3. Recurring Motifs

In addition to the preceding discussion, there are other significant structural and conceptual threads which bind together the book and its various components. R E Clements discourses a number of significant inherent connections which stretch across the entire book of Isaiah and link together its various parts.[55] In this study, three separate motifs are presented because they provide additional framework to the proposed view of Isaiah.

3.1.   "New Moon-Sabbath" Motif

A motif that occurs early in Isaiah (Isa 1:13-14) is the "New Moon-Sabbath" motif. The motif reprises in the final chapter of the book (Isa 66:23). These are the only occurrences of the motif in the book and both pertain to Israel's worship experience.[56]

In Isa 1:13-14, Yahweh states, "I despise your incense, New Moons and Sabbaths . . . I hate your New Moons."[57] In this context, New Moon-Sabbath carry very negative

---

[54] Daniel K Bediako has challenged the premise that new heaven and earth here really refers to God's new creation and instead argues for a non-eschatological fulfillment ("Sabbath in the Book of Isaiah," *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry*, 2012, 6:161-175). However, he has not proven definitively that such is not the case. In this study, "new heavens and new earth" refers to the new creation of God.

[55] R E Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 8, 21.

[56] The reversal of symbolisms between chapters 1 and 66 of Isaiah is helpful in articulating the structural parallels between the two chapters. There are clear thematic strands and motifs that bind the two chapters in such a manner that they form an envelope for the book. This structural inclusio frames the material of Isaiah. Some of the pertinent elements in this inclusio are: the motif of desire (1:11 and 66:4); the phrase, "Hear the word of the Lord" (1:10 and 66:5); the reference to new moon and Sabbath (1:13 and 66:23); the reference to sword (1:20 and 66:16); the motifs of shame and gardens (1:29 and 66:5, 17); the reference to human rebellion against God (1:2, 28 and 66:24); and the unquenchable fire motif (1:31 and 66:24). (see Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 610)

connotations; this is what God hates because they are part of Israel's empty religiosity. The motif is found in the midst of Yahweh's litany against the sins of Israel. The motif reappears in Isa 66:23 where Yahweh promises, "All mankind will come to worship Me, from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another." Here the context has to do with the new creation of Yahweh which also serves as the apex of the book. New Moon-Sabbath are now part of the new reality which God creates and serves as symbols of true worship. As Smith puts it, "The point is that these people will continually and repeatedly come before God to worship him with joy. This is why they are in God's kingdom."[58] The motif serves as an inclusio for the entire book of Isaiah,[59] suggesting a literary wholeness of the work.

3.2. "Zion" Motif

Another important thread in the book is the "Zion" motif which appears at the start and end of each segment and also of the book.[60] The motif appears in Isa 1:8 where Zion is mentioned as "daughter abandoned" by Yahweh (cf Isa 1:27), but in Isa 35:10,[61] Zion is the home for the "redeemed" who come to her with song and joy. This pattern is replicated in the other segments of Isaiah. In Isa 40:9, Zion and Jerusalem are presented as "herald of good news" to proclaim the impending arrival of Yahweh who brings his rewards with him. The segment ends in Isa 59:20 with a depiction of Zion as destination for the "Redeemer" and those who follow him. Smith suggests a reversal here where those who were formerly rebellious in Zion have now become God's people.[62] Again, in Isa 60:14, Zion is called the

---

[57] The appearance of these two items in tandem can also be observed in other OT texts, such as, Num 28:9-15; 2 Kgs 4:23; Hos 2:13; Amos 8:5; and Ezek 46:3 (see Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 631).

[58] Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 752.

[59] See Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 610.

[60] The name Zion appears 46 times in Isaiah. Surprising, it is utilised 27 times in chapters 1-35 where the name reflects the pendulum movement of the segment with Zion seen in both negative and positive light.

[61] Isa 35:10 is repeated verbatim in Isa 51:11. The connection between the two readings has raised some redactional concerns. However, neither verse appears to be out of context (see Smith, *Isaiah 1-39,* 581), and the two verses may actually complement the connection between chapters 1-35 and 40-59.

[62] Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 604.

"city of Yahweh, of the Holy One of Israel," while Isa 66:7-13 portrays Zion (twice) and Jerusalem as a "mother" who supplies the needs of and provides comfort to all who come to her. With regards to the final passage, Motyer explains that the "illustration of the birth processes links this vision of the future with the earlier Zion passages (49:21; 54:1) and with the work of the Servant (53:10-11)."[63]

The "Zion" motif serves two functions in the book: (1) It marks the beginning and end of each segment; and (2) It depicts Zion as the final destination of Yahweh's people and does so by repeating the thought at the climax of each segment. Zion is the home of the redeemed, the destination for the Redeemer and his followers, and a redeeming mother caring for her children. The motif offers an important link to the conceptual and structural unity of Isaiah and also to delineate the various parts of the book.

3.3. "Way-Highway" Metaphor

A third principal strand with direct impact upon this study is the "way-highway" metaphor, using two Hebrew root words דרך (d-r-k) and סלל (s-l-l)The words "highway" and "way" [64]. appear at the end of segment 1 (Isaiah 35), at the beginning of segment 2 (Isaiah 40), near the end of segment 2 (Isaiah 57) and close to the start of segment 3 (Isaiah 62).[65]

The song of the redeemed recorded in chapter 35 reaches a climax by introducing an eschatological "highway" (Isa 35:8) on which the redeemed shall travel,[66] while in Isa 40:3

---

[63] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 537.

[64] The root סלל (s-l-l) is the base for *maslul* and *massilah* (both translated as "highway") and the verb "build up" used in Isa 57:14 and 62:10. The paired metaphor "way-highway" also appears in Isa 49:11 with meaning similar to the verses being discussed here. Smith argues that this metaphor is used differently in different context and distinguishes between two highways, one for the God's people, another for the Gentiles. He specifically decouples Isa 40:3 and Isa 62:10 and asserts that the two verses describe two very different events. Further, he attempts a more spiritual and missiological explanation of Isa 62:10 (*Isaiah 40-66*, 653). In contrast, Webb sees Isa 62:10 as a way for both Jews and Gentiles (*The Message of Isaiah*, 239). Whatever position is adopted, the "way-highway" metaphor supplies structural and conceptual links between the various segments of the book and therefore should be interpreted in terms of the whole picture rather than piecemeal.

[65] Wolf also identifies Isa 35:8; 40:3; 57:14; and 62:10-11 as the four passages with the "highway imagery" (*Interpreting Isaiah*, 184) and I concur with his assessment.

[66] Smith suggests that this highway is "reserved for God's redeemed people" (*Isaiah 1-39*, 580).

this is the "highway" for King Yahweh. The road is aptly termed *derek haqqodesh*, the Holy Way, and both the redeemed and their King travel this highway towards Zion. Consequently there are no contaminants or dangers on this way. This interplay connects Isaiah's first and second segments.

A similar linkage is also evident between the second and third segments of the book. Isa 57:14 speaks of the building up of a way called the "way of my people," while Isa 62:10 refers to the "way of the people." The virtual chiasm of these two verses, one near the end of segment two and the other near the start of segment three, indicates a direct connection between the two segments. The use of the "way-highway" metaphor unveils a tapestry of ideas woven together artistically. The interchange between the terms may be presented as follows:

- Isa 35:8 refers to "highway (*maslul*) . . . way (*derek*) . . . way (*derek*) of holiness"
- Isa 40:3 refers to "way (*derek*) . . . highway (*masillah*)"

    o Isa 57:14 refers to (a) "build up, build up (*s-l-l*) . . . way (*derek*) . . . (b) way (*derek*) of my people"
    o Isa 62:10 refers to (b) "way (*derek*) of the people" . . . (a) build up, build up (*s-l-l*) the highway (*masillah*)"

The "way-highway" metaphor portrays Isaiah as a literary whole with interlocking structural and conceptual features.

4. Conclusions

This study has examined significant conceptual and structural strands that bind the book of Isaiah together while also uncovering its various segments. As already noted, the book of Isaiah should be segmented into chapters 1-35, 40-59, and 60-66 (with chapter 36-39 viewed as a historical interlude). Each segment presents a distinct estimation of Yahweh concerning Israel; each segment begins with an unforgettable expression and incorporates distinctive syntactical and literary features. This assessment of God ranges from

condemnation to consolation to eventual coronation. The harsh "Oh—sinful nation" is replaced by the poignant "Comfort, comfort my people" and this in turn gives way to the triumphant "Arise, shine for your light has come."

At the end of each segment there is something new that is unveiled: a new joyful Zion in chapter 35; new covenant realities in chapters 56-59; and new heaven and earth in chapters 65-66. Yahweh's exasperation with Israel is replaced by a desire to uplift his people and then the ultimate elevation of re-creation.

The use of certain motifs provides a unified literary framework for the book. The application of "New Moon-Sabbath" motif, "Zion" motif, and "Way-Highway" metaphor lends weight to the unity of Isaiah and a more refined view of the major divisions or segments within the book.

The conceptual and structural strands examined in this study are highly suggestive of Isaiah's unified wholeness whose arrangement of material has more to do with the shifts in Yahweh's estimation of Israel than some perceived view of literary or theological styling. Moreover, if Isaiah is to be partitioned in any sense at all, this should follow the lines of chapters 1-35, 40-59, and 60-66. Within this framework a clearer view of Yahweh's relationship to Israel is embedded and therefore a more complete understanding of the message of Isaiah becomes feasible.