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STRUCTURE, LITERARY FORM AND POETIC IMAGERY

Haphazard Collection or Sophisticated Arrangement?

AFTER THE POWERFUL CHAPTERS of Second Isaiah with their unified message that Yahweh is not only willing but able to save, chs. 56–66 are likely to seem, at first sight, a bewildering medley of denunciation and promise, warning and hope, lament and confidence. The reader can be forgiven for gaining this impression, for immediately in ch. 56 we are confronted with just such an abrupt transition.

The chapter begins on an optimistic note: the era of salvation is at hand, and this expectation challenges the community to practise justice and engage in righteous action and to eschew evil. Among the general terms used to describe the obligations which God's imminent intervention in salvation demands of his people only one specific requirement is laid down: that of keeping the sabbath (v. 2), a stipulation emphasized twice more in the following verses. Then, as if to underline the newness of the era of salvation, the old restrictive prescription of Deut. 23.1–3 is replaced by a new prophetic *torah* by which both foreigners and eunuchs (the latter concern a hint perhaps of an adjustment to the situation of some who had recently returned home from courtly service in Babylon and Persia) are welcomed into the worshipping community provided that they 'hold fast the covenant' (vv. 4, 6), and in particular its outward and visible expression in observance of the sabbath.

Up to this point in the chapter, then, there is a clear sequence of thought, even though the difference in subject matter between vv. 1-2 and 3-8 suggests that the connection is editorial. The new age of salvation which is at hand is to be marked by the removal of traditional restrictions on access to the temple. Hereafter it will be known as 'a house of prayer for all peoples' (v. 7), for God's concern transcends racial boundaries. Not only will he restore Israel's exiles; he will 'gather yet others to him besides those already gathered' (v. 8). In its present context this is undoubtedly a reference to Gentiles (contrast 11.12). Henceforward, then, membership of the worshipping community is not to be a matter of privilege by virtue of birth and race, but is to be dependent on individual choice—on personal adherence to the covenant, expressed in part by sabbath-keeping. Suddenly, however, the logical sequence is interrupted and the tone changes abruptly to denunciation of the community's leaders (vv. 9-12). The language is searing, and its powerful imagery and moral challenge are in no way inferior to the judgment oracles of pre-exilic prophecy. It is possible to argue that this passage is itself of pre-exilic origin but now applied to new circumstances (so Westermann). Another similarly abrupt transition, this time from denunciation to promise of salvation, occurs in ch. 57, where there seems to be little continuity between the condemnation of idolatry in vv. 3-13 and the assurance offered to the humble and contrite in vv. 14-19.

Yet this first impression that Third Isaiah lacks systematic arrangement is misleading. It is possible to detect, in many instances, the rationale behind the arrangement of the material. As in other prophetic books, there are several examples of the use of catchwords to provide links between originally independent literary units. The following may be given as examples. The similarity of expression between 56.5 ('an everlasting name which shall not be cut off') and 55.13 ('an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off') probably accounts, in part at least, for the placing of what is probably one of the latest parts of Third Isaiah in immediate conjunction with the oracles of Second Isaiah (Jones). Similarly the presence of the catchword *rūaḥ* ('wind' in 59.19, 'spirit' in 59.21) may explain

the present rather awkward position of 59.21, whose prose style and deuteronomistic flavour strongly suggest that it is secondary in this context (though on this see further p. 74). One of the most fascinating examples of the operation of the catchword principle occurs, in all probability, in ch. 58, where it is surprising to find such a radical reinterpretation of what fasting means (vv. 1-12) alongside a thoroughly traditional attitude towards the sabbath (vv. 13-14). Despite Muilenburg's argument that vv. 13-14 are integrally related to their context on the grounds that 'without them the poem remains a torso', the marked difference in the attitudes adopted towards the institutions of fasting and sabbath observance seems compelling evidence that their juxtaposition is due to editorial activity. Moreover, despite certain expressions they have in common ('seeking your pleasure' vv. 3 and 13; 'my ways' v. 2, 'your ways' v. 13), and the general resemblance of the literary form of vv. 13-14 to vv. 9b-11 as a conditional promise of salvation, the exhortation to sabbath-keeping at the end of ch. 58 is closer to 56.1-8, suggesting to Westermann that these two passages may once have formed a framework to chs. 56-58 which at one time existed as a separate and independent unit. It is, therefore, a conjecture worth considering that the key to the present position of 58.13-14 lies in the resemblance, unfortunately not apparent in English translation, between the final word of 58.12, 'to dwell in' (*lašābet*), which in an unvocalized text could be read as 'for the sabbath' (*laššabbat*), and the expression 'from the sabbath' (*miššabbat*) in v. 13 (Whybray).

The editorial arrangement of the material in general, however, is more meaningful than a purely mechanical use of catchwords might suggest. A logical sequence can for the most part be traced in the arrangement of what were originally independent units. To put it briefly, the situation described in 57.1 is to be seen as the consequence of the failure of leadership in 56.10-12 (the verb *bīn* 'to discern' or 'understand' in 56.11 is echoed in 57.1). The theme of wickedness in 57.20-21 continues in 58.1, 4. 59.1 forms an appropriate sequel to the promise of ch. 58, reinforcing its conditionality by affirming that when disaster occurs it is due not to Yahweh's inadequacy but to his

people's sin (here the verb *kbd* is not so much a catchword as a play on two different meanings of the root: 'to honour' in 58.13, 'to be dull, heavy' in 59.1). In 59.14-15 the lament culminates in the assertion that justice, righteousness and truth are lacking in society; in response the divine warrior intervenes precisely because there is no justice (v. 15b). The result of this divine intervention in salvation is the confident summons addressed to Zion to rise from her humiliation, with its attendant promises in 60-62. These in turn are underwritten by the subsequent portrayal of the divine warrior who effects his people's deliverance (63.1-6).

Although at first sight the second portrayal of this warrior figure seems to sit strangely alongside the promises of 60-62, it has important consequences. The vivid description of God's intervention not only reinforces the promises, expanding in dramatic fashion the meaning of the proclamation, 'Behold, your salvation comes' (62.11), but also gives to this impersonal expression a personal content: 'It is I...mighty to save' (63.1). This statement then makes a fitting transition to the praise of Yahweh (63.1-6) which forms the prelude to the lament of 63.7-64.12. Subsequently ch. 65, with its affirmation of Yahweh's patient availability even in the absence of any human response, provides in its present (though not original) context an answer to the final poignant questions with which 64.12 laments the silence of God. Finally, the expression 'my holy mountain' in 65.25, although probably signifying here the land of Israel, is used elsewhere frequently as a designation of Mount Zion, and so provides a link with 66.1 which is concerned with the true nature of God's dwelling-place.

There is yet another feature of these chapters which precludes the view that their present arrangement is the result of anything other than careful and deliberate planning, indeed of artistry, on the part of those responsible for their final form. Far from being a haphazard, unsystematic collection of oracles, these chapters show a remarkable symmetry in their overall structure which cannot be accidental. The pivot is the central section, chs. 60-62, around which the rest of the material is arranged in a series of concentric circles. These three central chapters stand out as distinct from their context

in that they comprise unqualified promises of salvation to the entire community. They contain neither denunciation of Israel's sin nor summons to repentance. It is in these central chapters that we find the closest and most frequent reminiscences of Second Isaiah. Surrounding this nucleus are two 'divine warrior' passages (59.15b-20; 63.1-6). Although they differ significantly from each other in many respects (see p. 31), both describe Yahweh's active intervention on behalf of his people, emphasizing especially his initiative as sole saviour: 'I looked, but there was no one to help...so my own arm brought me victory' (63.5; cf. 59.16). Surrounding these are two long liturgical passages (59.1-15a; 63.7-64.12) in which the worshipping community itself, or an appointed spokesman on its behalf, laments the sins which have led to the community's present pitiful plight, a setting which Westermann regards as not merely editorial but indicative of an intrinsic connection which existed between the prophetic message of hope and the services of lamentation held by the community in exile.

Although the content and language of the two laments differ considerably, the symmetry of arrangement is preserved here also in that the first begins and the second ends on the same note, the silence of God (59.1; 64.12). The first of the two laments, by its affirmation that it is not God's inability to hear and save but his people's sin which has disrupted communication between the human and the divine (59.1-2), balances, and in effect answers, the despairing question with which the second lament concludes (64.12). There is symmetry, too, in the arrangement of chs. 57-58 and 65 which precede and follow the two laments. Both condemn idolatrous practices (57.1-13; 65.1-16), and both serve to reassure the faithful (57.14-19 and 58.8-14; 65.8-25). There is no suggestion here, of course, that they originated in similar circumstances, for there is an evident difference in their historical situations: whereas the tension between two rival religious factions permeates 65.8-15, this dichotomy appears only at the beginning and end of ch. 57, creating the strong impression that this element is not integral to the passage but belongs to a later stage in the process of development. Finally, parallels of a

rather general kind can be detected in chs. 56 and 66: both are concerned, in different ways, with matters relating to the temple and the offering of sacrifice, and both show a remarkably open attitude to the admission into the worshipping community of those normally regarded as outsiders. 66.18–21 in fact goes further in this direction than does 56.3–8 in that it envisages the admission of those not of Israelite stock to be priests and Levites (66.21). The notable correspondence between 56.1–8 and 66.18–24 suggests that they have been deliberately placed in their present position to form a framework for the entire collection of oracles in 56–66, whatever their original provenance may have been. In short, the internal evidence of the chapters themselves suggests that far from their being a haphazard medley of oracles there is a degree of sophistication in the intricate structure of their final form.

The following diagram illustrates the broadly symmetrical structure of chs. 56–66:

- 56.1–8 concerning sabbath-keeping and admission to worship
- 56.9–12 denunciation of leaders who 'turn to their own way'
- 57.1–58.14 denunciation of idolatry; promise to the faithful
- 59.1–15a lament on behalf of the community
- 59.15b–20 the divine warrior intervenes
- 60–62 promises of salvation
- 63.1–6 the divine warrior intervenes
- 63.7–64.12 lament on behalf of the community
- 65.1–25 denunciation of idolatry; promise to the faithful
- 66.3–4 denunciation of those who 'choose their own ways'
- 66.1–24 concerning temple, sacrifice, admission to worship

For discussion of Westermann's detailed analysis, based on this remarkable structural symmetry, of the probable chronological relationship of the various literary units and of the process by which these chapters reached their present form see pp. 63–67.

Literary Forms and Poetic Imagery

One of the particularly interesting features of Third Isaiah is not only that a variety of literary forms appear in these

chapters but also that they provide evidence of how traditional forms were forced into new directions to suit the requirements of a changing historical situation. Some of the oracles in their form and expression resemble the sayings of pre-exilic prophets so closely that it is difficult to judge whether they are pre-exilic in origin and have been reapplied to a later situation, or whether they are postexilic formulations modelled on the sayings of earlier prophets (e.g. 56.9–12). In other instances, however, it is clear that traditional forms have taken a new direction due to the exigencies of the new situation which prevailed after the exile and the changes it brought to the life of the community—in particular, the tensions which threatened to divide it. It is here that these chapters as a whole are most clearly distinguishable from the pre-exilic prophets.

The following is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the literary forms of Isaiah 56–66; rather its aim is to highlight some of the areas in which development can be seen. I begin with a consideration of the judgment oracles, for it is in these that we come closest to the forms of expression in which the prophets of pre-exilic times couched their messages; yet at the same time we can detect a breakdown of traditional forms.

Judgment Oracles

1. *Isaiah 56.9–12*

This passage is a masterly example of a prophetic oracle of judgment, comprising the two traditional elements, pronouncement of judgment and grounds of accusation. In its uncompromising denunciation of ineffectual leadership, and the powerful imagery with which it castigates the betrayal of responsibility by those who seek their own gain rather than the community's well-being, it is a superb example of this literary form. Its figurative language has certain reminiscences of Ezekiel's indictment of Israel's leaders (34.1–10), but its brevity is in marked contrast to Ezekiel's extended metaphor. On the basis of 'form, style and diction' Westermann is convinced that Isaiah 56.9–12 is not only couched in the earlier form but is pre-exilic in origin. It is, however, notoriously difficult to establish priority on literary grounds, and the

possibility of postexilic origin cannot be excluded. Although in general the messages of the postexilic prophets evince a dependence on their predecessors in the great age of prophecy, the possibility of a resurgence for a time of the spirit and power of authentic prophecy cannot be ruled out. Either way, whatever the date of origin, the inclusion here of this judgment oracle gives an insight into the situation in Judah after the return from exile and the deplorable state of some, at any rate, of its leadership. The kaleidoscopic imagery in which the denunciation is couched reflects the multifarious sins of which the leaders are guilty.

What kind of leadership is castigated is not entirely clear: both religious and political leaders may be included. 'Watchman' is a term which generally signifies a prophet (Jer. 6.17; Ezek. 3.17; 33.7) whereas 'shepherd' refers frequently to political leadership (Jer. 23.1-4; Ezek. 34.1-10, especially v. 4). The accusation is comprehensive. At first it is the ignorance of the watchmen, their failure to realize the dangers of the situation and to alert the community to an appropriate response, which is at issue. They are quiet as sleeping dogs murmuring in their dreams (*hōzīm*, a word occurring only here which has the sense 'to talk confusedly'). This is no conventional imagery but comes straight from observation of nature. But then the accusation changes. Dogs, all dogs, have ravenous, insatiable appetites, and so do the shepherds of Israel, intent on their own advantage, with never a thought beyond the pleasure of the present moment as they sing their drinking songs, behaving arrogantly as if the future were at their disposal not the Lord's. The pattern of the metaphors is deliberately chiasmic; the newly coined metaphors of dumb and ravenous dogs, the former useless, the latter dangerous, serve to illuminate the conventional expressions of 'watchmen' and 'shepherds', and to provide the transition between them. These are the depths to which the community's leaders have sunk. In terms reminiscent of a curse formula (cf. Deut. 28.26), wild beasts are summoned to work destruction (see also Jer. 12.9-10 where also the context concerns shepherds who have failed in their trust). This, too, is figurative language, and it is a confusion of the poetic with

prosaic reality to attempt to explain the particular form of this curse in terms of the threat of battle where those slain will be devoured by wild beasts, as does Westermann. It is, however, important to notice the difference in tone here from the way in which Ezekiel, in his condemnation of Israel's shepherds, makes reference to wild beasts (34.5, 8). In Ezekiel the words are descriptive of the fate which has already befallen Israel; in Isa. 56.9 we have the pronouncement, indeed the solemn summons, of future judgment. The impact of the whole is heightened by a play on the word 'come' (*'ētāyū*, an uncommon word) at the beginning and end of the section which binds together the pronouncement of judgment and the accusation: 'All you wild beasts, *come* to eat...' (v. 9); '*come*...let us drink', say the shepherds (v. 12), revelling in sensual pleasure.

2. Isaiah 57.3-13

This second judgment oracle differs from the previous one not only in the subject of its accusation, which this time is not the leaders but apparently the community at large or at any rate a section of society (see below), but also in the nature of the charges brought and in its literary form. The summons to 'draw near hither' (v. 3), together with the formulation as a series of questions (vv. 4-6), distinguish it as a 'trial speech'. Its purpose differs, however, from the trial speeches of Second Isaiah where it is the nations and their gods who are summoned by Yahweh to enter into a lawsuit with him that he may prove his claim to sole sovereignty (cf. 41.1-4; 45.20-21). In some respects Isaiah 57 has a resemblance to Malachi 1 where God's indictment of the nation is set out in a similar series of questions.

The manner in which the cultic irregularities are described as adultery and prostitution (possibly with a literal as well as a figurative sense) resonates with similar pre-exilic utterances (e.g. Hos. 1.2; 2.4; 4.13; Jer. 2.20; Ezek. 16.15-22). The reference to child sacrifice, too, would not be out of place especially in later pre-exilic times (2 Kgs 23.10; Jer. 7.31). There is, however, no consensus as to the origins of this judgment oracle. Westermann unhesitatingly attributes it to the pre-exilic period; Whybray equally confidently maintains that there is

no reason to suppose it is not postexilic. Nevertheless it is clear from its inclusion in this collection of oracles that it had a relevance to the situation in postexilic Judah.

Whereas vv. 3-13a consist entirely of accusation and judgment, it becomes apparent from the framework within which the indictment is set (vv. 1-2, 13b) that there is a division within society between the righteous and the wayward. This framework, as Westermann notes, is decidedly liturgical in tone, both in the lament of v. 1 (cf. Ps. 12.1) and in the assurance of v. 13b. A similar juxtaposition of lament and judgment oracle is to be found in Mic. 7.1-4. It is in this juxtaposition of the liturgical with a prophetic oracle of judgment that we gain an insight into the compilation of the material. As divisions increased within the postexilic community earlier prophetic oracles were reapplied to those who were now regarded as pre-eminently the transgressors.

The question remains: who were regarded as such? Various answers have been given. Some commentators would relate the condemnation to the whole community, others to the semi-pagan, syncretistic worship practised by those who had remained in Palestine amid the Canaanite population during the years of exile, when the exigencies of the time may well have caused them to turn for security to other deities and to illegitimate religious practices including necromancy (v. 9). Others go yet further in this direction, seeing here words of accusation levelled by those who had returned from exile against the other section of the community, and thus evidence of dissension within the community. For the very different view proposed by P.D. Hanson see the discussion on p. 89. In the terminology used there are unmistakable links with earlier chapters of the book of Isaiah: the designation 'sons of the sorceress' (*šn'nāh*, v. 3) is paralleled in Isa. 2.6 (cf. also Mic. 5.11; Jer. 27.9), and the offensive gestures of ridicule are not unlike those condemned in Isa. 37.23. The exact nature both of the judgment and of the specific religious activity condemned in v. 6 is unclear. Whatever its meaning, its impact would undoubtedly have been heightened by the play on the words 'smooth [sc. stones]' (*ḥallēqē*) and 'your portion' (*ḥelqēk*). There is irony, too, both in the scathing accusation

and in the pronouncement of judgment. The 'high and lofty mountain' (*har-gābōah w'nissa'*) which is the scene of Israel's adultery against God recalls the 'high mountain' (*har-gābōah*; 40.9) where the good news of God's saving action was to be proclaimed to, or by, Zion (the Hebrew is ambiguous). Moreover, vv. 12-13 are replete with irony: the God who has held his peace for so long (v. 11) will break the silence to 'tell of your righteousness and your doings, but they will not help you'. Their idols are treated with contempt. They do not merit even a name:

When you cry out, let your collection of idols [lit. collected things] deliver you!
The wind will carry them off,
a breath will take them away.

3. Isaiah 58.1-14

This passage is of particular interest both from the form-critical viewpoint and for the insight it gives into the problems and religious attitudes of the postexilic community in Judah (on which see Chapter 6). In form it is remarkably different from the two previous oracles of judgment discussed above. Yet it seems appropriate to include it here since this passage, and this alone, opens with a categorical summons to the prophet to bring an indictment against the people for their sin in the style of the pre-exilic prophets (cf. Hos. 8.1; Mic. 3.8). This opening summons leads us to expect an oracle of judgment as stern in its denunciation as anything in those earlier prophets. The reality turns out to be otherwise. A surprising change of tone follows. Of the two traditional elements—accusation and pronouncement of judgment—the former appears briefly in vv. 3b-4a; the latter is entirely absent. The rest of the passage consists of a series of exhortations followed by conditional promises of blessing. It is here, in this breakdown of the conventional form of the judgment oracle, that the contrast with earlier prophets is most apparent. Stylistically the closest parallel is to be found in the speeches of Job's friends (Job 11.13-19). The form is highly complex and perhaps best described as 'symptomatic of the coming together of prophetic and liturgical speech' (Westermann).

Following immediately on the divine authorization of the prophet as a messenger of judgment (contrast 61.1 where he is commissioned to proclaim salvation) there is a parenthetical description of the outward piety of the community (vv. 2-3a), a people who lament that their practice of fasting is ineffectual and secures no response from God. It is clear from this, as well as from the language in which the promises of blessing are couched, that the community, or the section of it addressed, is conscious of some kind of distress and lack of well-being, probably attributable to the disappointment of hopes raised by the promises of Second Isaiah. The responsibility is laid firmly at the community's door. Despite their outward religious observances there is only apparent, not actual, commitment to righteous action and to obedience to God's commandments (v. 2). The thought is similar to 59.1-2, 'your iniquities have separated between you and your God'.

A comparison of this passage with ch. 58 is instructive. Whereas 59.1 is followed by powerful denunciation, ch. 58 is, in general, exhortatory in tone. Only in vv. 3b-4 is there anything in the way of direct accusation. The marked difference between this and the exhortatory character of the rest of the chapter is at its clearest in the contrast between vv. 3b and 13 which are alike in using the expression 'to seek your own pleasure' but are remarkably different in tone. The additional fact that the accusation in vv. 3b-4 is concerned with the oppressive treatment of workers and the aggressive pursuit of wealth and not, as in vv. 6-7, with criticism of the traditional observance of fasting, suggests that the chapter is not a unity but has been expanded at a later stage to meet the needs of a fresh situation.

The central section itself (vv. 6-12) falls into two parts. The first (vv. 6-9a) is focused directly on the question of fasting, reinterpreting it radically in terms of positive social action on behalf of the disadvantaged in society; the second (vv. 9b-12) uses similar terms in speaking of social obligation and is identical in form, being a conditional promise of blessing, but has no specific reference to fasting. It should be noted, too, that whereas vv. 1-6 and 13-14 have the form of divine speech, the intervening verses refer to Yahweh in the third person. The

concluding section (vv. 13-14), although consistent with the preceding verses in structure as a conditional promise, in tone as an exhortation, and in subject matter as concerned with a religious institution, in this instance the sabbath, nevertheless differs remarkably in its attitude. There is here no radical attempt to reinterpret traditional forms of sabbath observance but a reaffirmation of customary practice with no apparent acknowledgement of any social dimension. As remarked above (p. 17), Westermann associates this concluding injunction of ch. 58 with the similarly strong emphasis on the sabbath in 56.3-8, and argues that the two form a framework to what originally existed as an independent complex of tradition.

Finally, it should be noted that this chapter shows some signs of the influence of Wisdom circles. Not only are the conditional promises similar in form to the speeches of Job's friends, as noted already, but there is, according to Westermann, a hint of 'the ridicule of the rationalist' in the satirical expression 'to bow down one's head like a rush' (v. 5). Verse 14, too, which unlike v. 13 is couched in traditional language, draws on Job 22.26 together with Deut. 32.13.

Laments

Isaiah 59.1-15a; 63.7-64.12

These two laments, which counterbalance each other so appropriately in the overall symmetry of the structure of Third Isaiah, differ considerably in their literary form. Of the two, that in 63.7-64.12 is the more traditional in structure, and it is generally agreed that it originated in the early exilic period, though Muilenburg notes that it lacks the grim detail of much of the book of Lamentations which belongs to that period, and suggests a time rather later in the exile when bitter memories had begun to fade. Its powerful images and its authentic expression of emotion are so impressive that Westermann describes it as 'probably the most powerful psalm of communal lamentation in the Bible'. It follows the conventional pattern of such laments within the psalter, consisting of the usual elements: recollection of God's past saving

actions (63.7-14) (extended as in Psalm 89 which not only begins similarly but likewise concludes by questioning of God); plea for help, which includes a description of the distress which was the immediate cause of the lament (63.15-64.5a); and confession of sin (64.5b-7). Finally the various elements in the lament are gathered up (64.8-12), culminating in the anguished questioning of God, characteristic of the lament form:

Wilt thou restrain thyself at these things, O Lord?
Wilt thou keep silent, and afflict us sorely?

The lament gives the impression of a deliberate symmetry in its structure characterized by a certain amount of repetition:

63.15	plea for God's intervention	64.1
63.16	claim upon God as father	64.8
63.17	acknowledgement of sin	64.5b-7
63.18-19	reason for the lament	64.11

Finally, the whole is bound together by the corresponding questions concerning the inactivity of God with which the lament begins and ends (63.15 and 64.12). The passage is also of particular interest for its use of the expression 'holy spirit' (vv. 10-11) which occurs only once elsewhere in the Old Testament in Psalm 51.11 (MT 13), a great penitential psalm of the individual.

Unlike 63.7-64.12 which follows the conventional form of a communal lament, ch. 59 is an interesting example of departure from traditional forms. Westermann terms it 'a most curious and odd creation' in that it contains elements not germane to the lament form. In fact, so much does it depart from the conventional lament form that the question has been raised whether it is right to classify it as a lament. Scholars are divided on this form-critical question, some preferring to treat the passage as a liturgy in which a prophetic voice mingles with a communal lament (Haller, Muilenburg), others as a sermon (Kessler), a matter which is discussed below.

The opening words, introduced as they are by the particle 'behold', are to be understood as the prophet's response to an unrecorded lament by the people, perplexed by the failure of

Yahweh to intervene and by his apparent disregard of their prayers. The problem, says the prophet, lies not in any limitation of Yahweh's power. It is the result of sin, their own sins, which have raised a barrier between themselves and God. The accusation in vv. 2-3 is as sharp as anything in the pre-exilic prophets (cf. Isa. 1.15); but, in place of the announcement of punishment which traditionally accompanied the accusation, the direct address to the hearers soon passes over into a description of their sin, its impact heightened by the striking poetic imagery (vv. 5-6). It is this descriptive aspect of the material which gives the passage something of a sermon character since it constitutes an explanation to a despondent people rather than an accusation. The sins referred to here are social injustices not cultic irregularities—the insidious evils by which justice is perverted in the law courts, and the more blatant crimes of violence and murder.

Two strands seem to be intertwined, the community's lament and the prophetic voice—hence the characterization of the passage by some as a prophetic liturgy. The chapter falls into three distinct sections: first, the prophet's response to a communal lament which vindicates Yahweh by way of accusing the people (vv. 1-8); secondly, the ensuing lament, by or on behalf of the people, which includes confession of sin (v. 12; an unusual feature in the traditional form of judgment oracle) and admits the truth of the accusation (vv. 9-15a); thirdly, the assurance of God's intervention to save those who repent (vv. 15b-20; for a similarly abrupt transition to words of assurance compare Joel 2.18). Yahweh is portrayed here as the warrior God who avenges those who 'turn from transgression' (v. 20; cf. 42.13; 52.10). A similar pattern of community lament followed by Yahweh's epiphany is to be found in Psalm 60. The two sections, lament (1-15a) and epiphany (15b-20) are linked together. Yahweh takes action precisely because he sees that there is no justice (v. 15; cf. vv. 9 and 11). The salvation which was far from them (v. 11) is seen to be at hand when he intervenes. Here the divine will is manifested to see right done for the despairing and oppressed. The reference to the coastlands (v. 18) and to the acknowledgement of Yahweh's name from east and west suggests that in origin

this portrayal of the divine warrior was concerned with foreign enemies, as is clearly the case in 63.1-6. However, as ch. 59 now stands, the old antithesis of Israel and her enemies has been translated, in the new situation existing after the exile, into the antithesis of righteous and transgressors within the community itself. In this way traditional language is turned in a new direction to address the circumstances of an increasingly divided community. The concern now is not with external enemies but with destructive forces within the Jewish community.

The debate as to the literary form of the passage is not easily settled. Whybray profoundly disagrees both with those who regard the passage as a prophetic liturgy and with those who classify it as sermonic. He takes issue with the former on two main grounds: first, that the passage is a literary compilation, not an intrinsic unity, for the situation implied in vv. 1-8 and 9-15a, all of which are addressed to the whole community, is not the same as that in vv. 15b-20 where there is clear evidence of internal divisions; and secondly, on the theological grounds that 'it is difficult to conceive of a liturgy in which the simple confession of sin in vv. 12-13 would be regarded as sufficient to cancel the effect of the extremely grave sins condemned in vv. 1-4 and so to open the way for the joyful promise of vv. 15b-20'. He finds serious problems, too, with the view that the passage constitutes a sermon addressed to people perplexed by their pitiable plight, not least because of the long liturgical prayer which is incorporated into it. He regards vv. 5-8 as, in all probability, 'a rhetorical "embellishment" added subsequently to a piece which was originally not primarily a condemnation, whether prophetic or sermonic, but a disputation in which the speaker gave reasons for God's apparent inactivity'. The debate on literary form apart, there can be little disagreement about the power of the poetic imagery, and Muilenburg's comment that 'few chapters in the Bible are so rich and diverse in their vocabulary of sin' is surely appropriate.

Portrayal of the Divine Warrior

Isaiah 59.15b-20; 63.1-6

There are interesting, and significant, contrasts between the portrayal of the divine warrior in these two passages. As was noted above, 59.15b-20 provides an illustration of the way in which traditional motifs have been reinterpreted for new situations. What originally concerned Yahweh's intervention against foreign enemies has now been directed against internal adversaries. In this respect this passage differs from 63.1-6. The chief point of both passages, however, is the fact not only of Yahweh's initiative but of his sole action in the defeat of evil (59.16; 63.5).

In 63.1-6 the prophet makes use of a secular form familiar to his hearers—the customary summons of a watchman to an approaching stranger to identify himself—but the content is based on the motif of the divine warrior. Yahweh is not named, but the identification is clear (cf. Isa. 5.1-7). Fresh from his victory he announces that 'right has won the day' (NEB). Although the specific reference to Edom and Bozrah (v. 1) has sometimes been queried since the passage is concerned with the nations as a whole, its similarity to Isa. 34.6 where Bozrah and Edom are symbolic of hostile nations supports its authenticity here (cf. also Ps. 137.7; Obad. 13-14; Lam. 4.21-22). This is the most extreme statement within Isaiah 56-66 of opposition to the nations in defence of Israel.

Oracles of both Judgment and Salvation

Isaiah 65.8-16

It has been noted above that the judgment oracle in 57.3-13 is now set within a framework consisting of vv. 1-2 and v. 13b, an arrangement which has the effect of transforming it secondarily into an oracle both of judgment and salvation. In contrast, 65.8-16 is intrinsically an oracle both of judgment and of salvation, addressed respectively to two opposing factions within the community. In this dual orientation it differs in a remarkable fashion from the traditional forms of

pre-exilic prophecy in which the nation is treated as a corporate entity whether for judgment or for salvation. In its present form ch. 65 as a whole is symmetrical in structure: vv. 1-7 consist entirely of accusation against idolaters; vv. 8-16a set out the contrasting destiny of two disparate groups within the community, detailing the blessings in store for the one ('my servants' vv. 13-14, 'my chosen' v. 15) and the sorrows which await the other; vv. 16b-25 are purely a description of blessing. These diverse sections are held together by the theme of call and response which is reiterated in vv. 1, 12 and 24. Nevertheless it is difficult to say whether there is an intrinsic connection between vv. 1-16a and 16b-23, for the latter in contrast to the former contains a number of reminiscences of Second Isaiah which link it also with chs. 60-62.

The present position of the chapter suggests that it is intended as God's response to the lament about the silence of God with which ch. 64 ends. Nevertheless it is unlikely that there is an integral connection between the two. The central concern of ch. 65 is with the deep division within the community between those who, from this perspective at any rate, are regarded as faithful worshippers of Yahweh and their opponents who are considered by them to be apostate. It is to this latter group that the oracle is addressed from v. 11 onwards as a pronouncement of judgment. The evils condemned here are cultic irregularities, though they differ in important respects from those to which 57.3-10 refer.

Further Reading

On literary structure and compilation:

Jones, *Isaiah 56-66 and Joel*, p. 33.

Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, pp. 296-308.

The following will also be found helpful:

R. Abramowski, 'Zum literarischen Problem von Jes. 56-66', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 96-97 (1925), pp. 90-143.

H. Odeburg, *Trito-Isaiah (Isaiah lvi-lxvi): A Literary and Linguistic Analysis* (Uppsala, 1931).

R. Rendtorff, 'Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja', *VT* 34 (1984),

pp. 295-320.

On poetic form:

Muilenburg, *Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, pp. 417-18, 652-773.

In addition:

J. Blenkinsopp, 'Second Isaiah—Prophet of Universalism', *JSOT* 41 (1988), pp. 83-103 has a useful discussion of ch. 56 from the standpoint of form criticism.