



# Rebels from Beginning to End

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Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth;  
for the Lord has spoken:  
I reared children and brought them up,  
but they have rebelled against me. (Isa 1:2)

You have never heard, you have never known,  
from of old your ear has not been opened.  
For I knew that you would deal very treacherously,  
and that from birth you were called a rebel. (Isa 48:8)

They shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled  
against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and  
they shall be abhorrence to all flesh. (Isa 66:24)<sup>1</sup>

**R**EBELS FROM BEGINNING TO END. ISAIAH IS NOT A COMFORTABLE BOOK FOR transgressors to read. The discomfort is not limited to the rebellious children of God, as if there were an easily identifiable group of non-rebellious children of God. The sweep is wide, encompassing both those within and without the chosen

<sup>1</sup>All translations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. The citation of texts will follow the NRSV numbering where there are differences from the Hebrew numbering.

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*New interpretive tools produce new readings of familiar texts. Things may be more complex (both more dangerous and more gracious) in Isaiah 65 than we have thought.*

people. The gorgeous charge to the prophetic voice, “Comfort! Comfort my people,” sits within this matrix of rebellion and punishment.

In addition, not just nations and peoples, but *all* nations and *all* peoples are frequently and actively brought into the scope of the ominous pronouncements uttered in the book. Nations and peoples take a pounding at the hands of tyrannical powers like Babylon and Assyria, but they also are depicted as defiantly attacking God’s holy mountain and being wiped out when God strikes out in defense of the sacred precinct. The promise of a world in which all nations stream to the mountain of God and beat their swords into plowshares so that one nation does not lift a sword against another—this promise sits within a narrative matrix of impending judgment and destruction directed against rebellious nations.

The realm of nature, the locus of all life, is also brought into the tension depicted in the book of Isaiah. In chapter one the heavens and the earth are witnesses to God’s case against God’s own children; by the last chapter they are termed the new heavens and the new earth. What happened to the witnessing old heavens and earth? Between the opening and concluding chapters there is much talk of cosmic disruption and upheaval, from terrifying the earth in 2:19 to laying waste to the earth in 24:1 and finally to making a new heaven and earth in 65:17. There are many references to natural rejoicing and renewal in the future of the earth, but these too are embedded in a narrative matrix filled with images of the destructive forces within and against the natural realm. Rebels and nature affect one another.

Nothing is exempted from the upheavals and threats brought about by rebellion. And yet, outside of the Psalms, Isaiah is the most frequently read Old Testament book in Christian worship settings. Why does such an indicting and threatening book have a strong grip on Christian imagination? Among the obvious reasons for the hold are the New Testament’s messianic rereading of many sections, and more ordinary phenomena such as Handel’s use of Isaianic texts in the *Messiah*. An instance from the fall of 1998: In a Twin City congregation an elderly saint, battered by decades of defeat and sorrow in life, choked up as she completed reading the lectionary text from Isaiah 35: “The ransomed of the Lord shall . . . come to Zion with singing . . . and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (10). The pastor should have simply canned the sermon after that. Only a deep cynic would not also be moved to faith and, if not faith, at least to a recognition of the power of Isaiah’s word to shape lives in a hopeful direction despite all the contrary data.

#### I. SHIFTS IN INTERPRETATION

These impacts cannot and should not be jettisoned. There is a need, however, to contextualize the hope, to hear and see it in a fuller matrix than is commonly the case. The needed contextualization does not necessarily have to be historical or socio-political in character. Noting the discomfiting narrative matrix of the comforting words may be sufficient to reintroduce the theological and pastoral tensions that reverberate throughout the book of Isaiah.

Beginning with the narrative context is a rather recent (and in some ways old) methodological move, for the more commonplace approach has been to attribute different themes to authors from different periods or to diverse socio-political groups with competing interests. A brief reference to these alternative approaches is in order to show what questions are not being addressed in this brief essay.

Determining the historical period of composition has been commonplace in biblical studies in the twentieth century. Central questions to be answered included the following: Who is the author, when did he or she write, and what were the circumstances of that writing? For well over a century the answers to such questions for the book of Isaiah have included the assertion that there were several “authors” and “editors.” If the watershed experience of historical criticism for students wasn’t JEDP in the Pentateuch, it was likely to be the fragmentation of the book of Isaiah. College-level introductory textbooks and legions of Bible dictionaries have spoken of a First, Second, and Third Isaiah. This approach is pervasive, so much so that it has become a rather common occurrence when speaking with general church audiences to have someone refer to three Isaiahs.

The most simplified division involves First Isaiah, from the latter decades of the 700s (and a bit beyond) whose work consists of chapter 1-39; Second Isaiah, working around 550 and encompassing chapters 40-55; and Third Isaiah, working after 538 and including chapters 56-66. The division suggests a pithy pattern moving from rejection through redemption to return/restoration. Unfortunately, the simple, pithy division has collapsed in nearly every respect. The first section, for example, has been broken into a minimum of six units (1-12; 13-23; 24-27; 28-33; 34-35; 36-39). Chapters 24-27 are often regarded as among the latest compositions in the book, and chapters 34-35 are occasionally regarded as the displaced work of the author of chapters 40-55. Further subdivisions are often suggested; few critical scholars, for example, regard chapters 1-12 as a unity derived from one authorial hand. Chapters 55-66 were rarely regarded as coming from a single author. In short, the complexity of the reconstruction of the compositional history of the book of Isaiah matches and probably exceeds that of the Pentateuch.

The socio-political reconstructions are no less complex; they are, in addition, subject to much scholarly dispute. How the early chapters connect to the Syro-Ephraimite war, or chapters 28-31 (where do 32-33 fit in?) to various waves of Assyrian incursions is not clear. Reconstructions vary. Does something like the “covenant of death” (28:15, 18) refer to political machinations or to cultic activities? Do chapters 40-55 presume an exilic setting (the majority view) or are there some indications of a Judean perspective? To what, in sociological terms, are the arguments in chapters 56-66 referring? Who, for example, are the servants in 65:13-14, and who are those who are not servants? Returnees from the Babylonian exile? A priestly caste? Apostates? Who is calling whom what? Who is the “Abraham” or the “Israel” who no longer acknowledges the petitioners in 63:16? Who, for that matter, are the petitioners? Does yet another group reject their petition in

65-66? Do the references to the wise and and/or fools and the use of language in common with wisdom literature suggest that Isaiah had connections to royal wisdom circles? Do those in exile come from the former elite social and economic classes? If so, how does that change the reading of 40-55? Reconstructions of the social, political, and economic groups abound.

What has changed in the study Isaiah is a shift toward putting the pieces back together. It is not a matter of rejecting the results of studies along the lines sketched above, confusing and inconclusive as they often are. Rather, there has been a recognition that the book comes to us from antiquity as one book. Why does it come to us as one book? There are, after all, short prophetic books. Why not break Isaiah into several short prophetic books? The effort now is directed to finding what makes the 66 chapters cohere, recognizing that seeking coherence is not the same as arguing for unitary authorship. This new effort can have many similarities to previous work; the interest may still be in the history of composition—when, how, and why were the parts put together. But the shift is still a major one. Who wrote what, when, is a set of questions no longer asked with the same intensity as was the case two decades ago. There is less effort directed to examining individual bricks, so to speak, and more effort directed toward seeing the architecture: How do the bricks made a building and how does the building work as total unit?<sup>2</sup>

This shift creates an opening for experimenting with a less historical mode of reading. The remainder of this essay is a brief attempt at one such experiment. The mention of rebels/rebellion in the three verses cited at the start is just one of many terms or semantic clusters that stretch across the book. In the past, the interpreter would have been obligated to seek the date of composition for each passage and/or determine which social or economic group is referred to and who is doing the referring. Abandoning those questions can lead to ahistorical, spiritualized readings, although they are equally likely to be aesthetic or artistic in character. Even if those pitfalls are avoided, there is no likelihood that a single, definitive reading will be achieved.<sup>3</sup> A reading of a short section (primarily chapter 65) is offered in what follows; the quest is to avoid being frivolous or merely playful, to be instead serious and responsible, as befits any interpretation of scripture.

<sup>2</sup>This sketch is all too brief. To develop a fuller description of this shift and to see some of the results, one can start with Gerald T. Sheppard, "Isaiah 1-39," *Harper's Bible Commentary*, ed. James L. Mays (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 542-570. The shift, without abandoning earlier studies, is clearly in evidence in several recent commentaries. They include Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* and *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: John Knox, 1995); and Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993). For a thorough exposure to detailed work in this new mode (and the debates it has raised), see *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 188-218.

<sup>3</sup>For a robust example of reading in a new way with a clear sense of the pitfalls and complications, see David M. Carr, "Reading Isaiah from Beginning (Isaiah 1) to End (Isaiah 65-66): Multiple Modern Possibilities," *New Visions of Isaiah*, ed. Melugin and Sweeney, 188-218.

## II. A READING OF ISAIAH 65

“I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that did not call on my name” (65:1). How might this text be understood following immediately after the sternly worded complaint addressed to God in 63:7-64:12? The complaint charged God with withholding God’s yearning heart and compassion (63:15), with hardening the petitioners’ hearts (63:17), and with hiding God’s face (64:7). The petitioners requested or, more accurately, demanded that God not be exceedingly angry and not remember iniquity forever (64:9). In the wake of the devastation of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, they asked, “Will you restrain yourself, O Lord? Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?” (64:12). Do the opening words of chapter 65 reject the petitioners’ lament?

Brueggemann, Hanson, and Carr<sup>4</sup> are among the recent interpreters who answer in the affirmative. Brueggemann states:

Israel’s disputatious inclination was prepared to accuse Yahweh of malfeasance when things went wrong. In response, Yahweh is regularly prepared to offer a self-defense, asserting that a breakdown in the relationship is no fault of Yahweh. Inevitably, such a self-defense on the part of Yahweh is regularly turned into a counteraccusation against Israel, providing evidence that the cause of trouble is the unresponsiveness and disobedience of Israel. (239)

Hanson concurs with regard to the present literary arrangement. In his view, chapter 65 was originally an independent unit (a salvation-judgment oracle), but placed next to the lament it becomes “an answer to the questions and complaints of the lament.” The answer: “Not God’s indifference but the people’s rebellion caused the nation to stumble and fall” (241). Blaming God is termed an “evasive tactic.” For Carr, chapters 65-66 answer the lament by “correcting its perspective” (205). The opening verses of chapter 59 lend support to this view:

See, the Lord’s hand is not too short to save,  
nor his ear too dull to hear.  
Rather, your iniquities have been barriers  
between you and your God,  
and your sins have hidden his face from you  
so that he does not hear.

There is, however, room for an alternate reading. First, it can be noted that lament after lament in the book of the Psalms stands starkly before us without an attempt to provide a defense for God. Citations of (or allusions to) laments earlier in Isaiah (40:27 and 49:14) are not followed by renewed charges against the lamenters, but are instead followed by announcements that God is moving beyond judg-

<sup>4</sup>See works cited in notes 2 and 3 above. Despite significant differences, each of these interpreters is attentive to the final literary shape of the building, not simply the bricks.

ment; a new thing, a restoration is under way. Isaiah 63-64 does not dispute the need for exilic punishment; the petitioners and their ancestors have been appropriately punished for their transgressions. The question asked is whether they have been abandoned in their sin and its consequences. The question is not a matter of blame; rather, it is about the presence or absence of God and God's will to redeem God's own fallen and punished community.

Secondly, speakers in 63-64 do not offer anything to God in an attempt to modify God's conduct. In Micah 6, for example, the people wonder what will placate God: "Shall I come before him with burnt offering...thousands of rams...my firstborn?" Or compare Hosea 6, where the speakers have reduced punishment and repentance to a manipulable formula: "Come, let us return to the Lord...he has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will revive us." The petitioners of 63-64 make no such offers, nor do they cite any such formulas. In fact, even ritually correct offerings are rejected (ox, lamb, grain, and memorial offerings in 66:3) and seemingly the reconstruction of the temple is set aside (66:2). The petitioners in 63-64 appeal to none of these as a means to alter God's relationship and conduct toward them.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, there are many charges in 65-66, the specificity of which we cannot recover in every case (some may actually be slurs). There are offerings in gardens and eating swine's flesh (65:3-5; cf. 66:17) and setting a table for "Fortune" (65:11). But the petitioners in the lament made no pretense to be without fault. Their admission of transgression parallels the admission in the midsection of chapter 59: "Therefore justice is far from us...our transgressions indeed are with us" (see 59:9-15). They bring nothing to the relationship except their own transgression. They cite only the relationship that God had previously established, namely, that they are God's children. And to claim to be God's child in the terms of the book of Isaiah is to admit that one is a rebel. Rebel is the label established in the second verse of the book: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." The petitioners of 63-64 do not reject that label, but they do appeal to the second designation in 1:2, namely, children of God. Given both labels, rebel against God and child of God, the appeal can only be made on the basis of mercy and relationship, not privilege and accomplishment.

From this perspective, we can rethink the effect of the opening verses of chapter 65. "I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that did not call on my name." Rather than being an immediate rebuttal of the accusations against God, the words may overlap with those of the petitioners, in effect backing up to reinforce and underscore the petitioners' admissions. Failure to ask for and seek out God, to be a nation calling on God's name—all that is conceded and admitted

<sup>5</sup>Such an appeal is depicted in the quotations attributed to those who do not observe a proper fast/sabbath in Isa 58:3: "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"

in the lament (63:10; 64:10, etc.). 65:2b-5 characterize the sins of God's people, but they do not move us beyond what the petitioners had already declared: "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth" (64:6). Chapter 65 doesn't move us into new territory until verse 6, and there we find a direct response to the closing questions of the lament. The lament ends: "After all this, will you restrain yourself, O Lord? Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?" The answer comes in 65:6: "I will not keep silent, but I will repay." One question was, "Will you keep silent?" and the answer is no. The second question was will you continue to punish, and the answer is yes. This is not an argument about blame; it's about the persistence of punishment. The petitioners pleaded, "Do not remember iniquity forever" (64:9), and the response is, "I will measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds" (65:7 NIV).<sup>6</sup> To whom do the third person pronouns refer in 65:6-7? Are they the "not-servants" and "not-chosen" of verses 8-16? That the answer is not immediately apparent can be seen from observing the inconsistency in the pronouns used in the Hebrew of verses 6-7. On that point, the NIV follows the Hebrew: "I will pay it back into *their* laps—both *your* sins and the sins of *your* father,' says the Lord. 'Because *they* burned sacrifices on the mountains and defied me on the hills, I will measure into *their* laps the full payment for *their* former deeds.'" The shift from "their" to "your" and back to "their" suggests movement between past and present generations, not between a contemporary "us" and "them." It is not surprising then to see a reference to "their former deeds" (not simply "their actions" as in the NRSV). In God's speech, the contemporary addressees (the "your" pronouns) are in continuity with past generations (the "their" pronouns). And should the "their" refer not only to past generations, but also to the contemporary one, it may mean that in the divine speech the directness and intimacy implied by "you/your" is broken; God's own speech creates distance by using third person pronouns to refer to the addressees, who had in the lament claimed God as "*our* father" and repeatedly used the second person pronoun in addressing God. In any case, the opening verses of 65 answer the lament, not correct it, and consequently the lamenters are not automatically and simply the "not-servants" and the "not-chosen" in the next section of the chapter.

Verse 8 begins a second divine speech with a reference to wine found in a cluster subject to destruction. The destruction is put off in order to salvage the wine and, when the metaphor is unpacked, the wine is identified as "my servants" and "my chosen" (65:8-9). Descendants and ample supplies will be provided for "my people who have sought me." (The NIV uses present tense ["who seek me"]; the form is perfect in Hebrew.) In contrast, verses 11-12 refer to those who forsake and forget God (the verbal forms are participles), who, when called and spoken to, did not answer or

<sup>6</sup>The request not to remember *forever* can claim God's own promise not to persist in judgment. See, for example, the "but now" that begins chapters 43 and 44 in contrast to the judgment that is described at the end of each prior chapter. Perhaps more telling is Isa 54:7-8: "For a brief moment I abandoned you...in overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you." The "brief moment" is starting to look rather long.

listen and who “did what was evil in my sight, and chose what I did not delight in.” Those so described are addressed directly; second person forms are used.

The contrast set up between verses 8-10 and 11-12 is extended in a third divine speech by a tightly constructed alteration between the future of “my servants” and the future of the addressee directly addressed as “you” (vv. 13-16). The servants will eat, drink, rejoice, sing, and have a new name. The “not-servants,” the “you” of the text, will be hungry, thirsty, and shamed; they will cry out for pain of heart, wail for anguish of spirit, and have their name used as a curse. The contrasting futures will produce a community that blesses and swears oaths by the God of “faithfulness” (NIV: “truth”). Why will this come about? Because God will forget and hide former troubles. The primary movement from the conclusion of verses 1-7 to the conclusion of verses 8-16 is made by God; God moves from measuring “into their laps the full payment for their *former* deeds” (v. 7 NIV) to declaring that “the *former* things are forgotten and are hidden from my sight” (v. 16 NRSV—the latter two verbs are perfects in Hebrew).

It is helpful at this point to let some of the language of verses 8-16 reverberate with occurrences of the same language in other sections of the book. The echoes are not exact in each case, but they reverberate nonetheless. For example, the terms servant and chosen are plural here in contrast to their usage in chapters 40-55, but that does not preclude some carryover. The servant is in 42:18-19 termed deaf, with open ears but still not hearing. In 65:12 those destined to the sword are accused of not listening when God spoke. What is said of the “not-servants” was earlier said of the servant. The accusations in 42 are followed by descriptions of judgment, but the judgment is brought to an end with the startling disjunctive “but now” that opens chapter 43: “But now...do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” A similar disjuncture takes place between the end of 43 and the beginning of 44. In neither case is there any indication that Jacob/Israel, the chosen servant, has responded to a summons to repentance or met any other condition. The change comes entirely from God; God makes a new commitment and creates a new thing. Has this commitment been broken by God by the time the reader reaches chapter 65?

Numerous other echoes can be heard even though they produce more of a collage than a logical theological line of argument. The condemned addressee will become hungry and thirsty (65:13). Reading elsewhere in Isaiah, we can ask what one is to do with the hungry and the thirsty. Isa 58:7 and 10 assert that sharing bread and offering food to the hungry are among the acts that constitute proper fast/sabbath keeping. Should the servants in 65 share their food with the condemned? Such an act surely has more textual warrant than gloating. An additional reverberation: in 49:8-10 the answered, helped, and kept community of exiles is told that they are a covenant to the people, a people characterized as prisoners. They will not hunger or thirst and springs of water will guide them. Again, the pronouncement is without condition. Has God altered the pledge? Yet one more of



these echoes: Isa 32:1-8 promises a king who will rule in righteousness and with justice, and among the effects of this rule will be the elimination of iniquitous fools who “leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied” and “deprive the thirsty of drink.” Are the servants of 65 now to become the fools? Or even more problematic, will God become both the producer of hungry and thirsty persons and one who ignores them? These echoes (and the questions they raise regarding God) show that the lamenters in 63-64 were not as impertinent as is assumed by interpreters who understand chapter 65 as a correction of the lament.

The above echoes do not exhaust the list. The matter of calling and not answering, of listening when called, reverberates in 65-66 and with the rest of Isaiah. In 65:1 God declares “Here I am, here I am” even though no one is calling (cf. 52:6)—a reason for chastisement, for not to call is not to seek. Seeking is clearly desired, yet later, in 65:25, God is answering before the servants call and hearing before they are done speaking. In 65:17-25 God promises that Jerusalem will be created “as a joy and its people as a delight.” That is the future, but what characterizes them in the present? Seekers of the Lord? Perhaps, but equally, if not more so, they are characterized by the opposite of everything promised in 65:17-25. There is infant mortality (vv. 20 and 23) and lack of longevity (v. 20), homelessness despite building efforts (vv. 21 and 22), hunger despite planting (vv. 21 and 22), and effort that is not enjoyed (v. 23). The promised future is highly disjunctive with the present; the present is remarkably similar to the conditions attributed to the relentless anger and continually outstretched arm of God in chapters 5, 9, and 10.<sup>7</sup> Without the reversal, this community is typified by the marginal survival mentioned in chapter 1, headed toward the material condition of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. 1:9).<sup>8</sup> “When I spoke, you did not listen”—that is the word to the condemned in 65:12, but listening and hearing have been a problem throughout the book. Even the redeemed exiles have difficulty hearing. The rhetoric of chapters 40-55 works as hard at persuading the audience of the new word of comfort as earlier chapters worked to make judgment real, first as a possibility that summoned the community to repentance and later as the irreversible future of exile. In 51:1 those who pursue righteousness and seek God are commanded to listen, for apparently they still do not apprehend the comfort announced already in 40:1. Later, in 51:7, those who know righteousness and who have God’s teaching in their hearts must listen again to the command not to fear, despite the repeated “fear not” of prior chapters. And, of course, hovering over all talk of listening and hearing is God’s commissioning of Isaiah to prevent comprehension, understanding, seeing, and listening

<sup>7</sup>See the verses that precede the recurring refrain in these chapters (“For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still”): 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:14.

<sup>8</sup>An additional similarity between the condition to be reversed (that is, which will no longer exist in the newly created Jerusalem) and that of the condemned is the matter of tormented cries. The terms are not identical but the mood is not all that different. V. 19 states, “No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.” Compare that with the state of the condemned in v. 14: “You shall cry out for pain of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit.”

in order to prevent repentance and the possibility of healing (6:9-10).<sup>9</sup> A final reverberation: “former” is a term making three appearances in the chapter.<sup>10</sup> This word also echoes through Isaiah. Isaiah 9:1 speaks of a former time of contempt to be transformed into a glorified way. “Former things” repeatedly occurs in 40-55, often as something simply to be forgotten because God is doing a new thing. In 65, two of the three references (vv. 16 and 17) cancel the effects and consequences of the former things. Might that even be the case in the long run for the former deeds that are to be paid in full in v. 7? Is it too much for the servants to hope that such a reversal as is extended to them might also be extended to those beyond themselves? The echoes that reverberate within chapter 65 and from there with the rest of Isaiah raise many possibilities beyond a narrow identification of partisan groups and authors. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to say the servants and the “not-servants” have much in common, so much that they may be one and the same. Examining our own lives, such a dual identification of a single group is not impossible. The servants and not-servants share many conditions; those with humble and contrite spirits have already experienced the exiling and estranging wrath of God that stands in the future for the rebels.

The rebels of 1:2 are back at the end in 66:24. Our reading of chapter 65 suggests that we should not be too ready to identify the dead rebels—certainly not to identify them quickly—as not ourselves. The scenes envisioned in 66 are all in the future, a future that is not yet here. Whoever the targeted group or groups were in the past, the text remains open; there are still applicants for the designation, ourselves included. Readers, ancient and contemporary, continue to devise delights of their own making, to devise things that as they become historical deeds (that is, as they become “former things”) are in radical need of being forgotten, hidden, not remembered, and no longer brought to mind. God’s grace stands over against God’s own judgment on our deeds. Rebels from beginning to end. God have mercy on us all.<sup>11</sup> ⊕

<sup>9</sup>“When I spoke, you did not listen” also raises the question of the effectiveness of God’s speech. In 40-55, for example, there is great emphasis on the effectiveness and decisiveness of God’s word, reaching a high point in 55:11: “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Additionally, in 52:6 God’s introduction is claimed to be effective: “In that day they will know that it is I who speak; here I am.” Why is the “here I am” introduction not effective in 65:1? The tension is not simply resolvable by blaming humans. There is a deep theological tension here.

<sup>10</sup>Vv. 7, 16, and 17. In v. 10 the NRSV has only “their actions,” neglecting to reflect the adjective. In v. 16 the NIV loses the echo by translating with “past troubles.” Both the NRSV and the NIV use “former things” in v. 17.

<sup>11</sup>A final hermeneutical comment: In Romans 8 Paul provides a long list of items that currently stand between us and the love of God: hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, and much else in creation. The list remains in force. We trust that it will not always be so, for that is what we have been promised. Perhaps even the corpses outside the city (66:24) can have their fires quenched and worms banished. That would be gracious indeed and consistent with the grace by which all others live. Apart from grace, everyone is ever and only a rebel. It is Christ Jesus who intercedes, the one who was not withheld. Who will separate us from the love of Christ, God’s own Son who was not withheld? The “us” is likely to include far more than we can imagine—and that is an additional good reason to refrain from labeling who the corpses might be.