

LINGUISTIC LINKS BETWEEN VERSES 12 AND 13 OF ISAIAH 58

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More than six decades ago, C. C. Torrey made a charge regarding Isa 58:13-14 that has been widely accepted in OT studies: namely, that this passage is "utterly out of keeping with its surroundings," its author being the same person who allegedly inserted another sabbath pericope in 56:2-6.¹ In a similar vein Bernhard Duhm and others have insisted that this passage comes from very late, possibly the time of Nehemiah in the mid-fifth century B.C., for the sabbath was stressed at that time, during a period of Jewish history which was purportedly a time of particularly heavy emphasis upon externals.²

While some commentators, such as George A. F. Knight, merely assume that this passage is an "appendix,"³ or like A. S. Peake simply state that it "bears the marks of a later corollary,"⁴

¹Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 439.

²See Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 3: 425; see also Neh 13:15-22. Reference to Duhm is *Das Buch Jesaia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1968).

³George A. F. Knight, *The New Israel: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 56-66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 29.

⁴Arthur S. Peake, ed., *A Commentary on the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1919), 469.

others, including James D. Smart,⁵ have tried to prove that it is an unwarranted insertion.

In the same vein, Julian Morgenstern states that "even a tyro [i.e., a novice], who knows nothing whatever of the problems and techniques of Biblical science, can hardly escape the feeling that verses 13, 14 seem at the very least like a late and weakening addition to the address proper, and that, too, by another hand."⁶ The reason for this, he believes, is that these verses deal with a theme not touched upon in any way in verses 1-12. Moreover, they enjoin a manner of sabbath observance which is, in its intense ritualism, the complete antithesis—both in spirit and in letter—of all that which the immediately preceding text in verses 1-12 commends and urges.⁷

Morgenstern argues further that if the author of verses 1-12 had added verses 13 and 14 at the time of his address (or even somewhat later) he would have stultified and betrayed himself completely, nullifying whatever effect his earlier words might have had. Thus, Morgenstern concludes: "There can not be the slightest question that verses 13-14 are the work of a different writer and of a somewhat later day."⁸

Statements such as these cause one to wonder whether there is any persuasive proof to support the traditional view of the unity of chapter 58 in Isaiah. Is there any compelling evidence that verses 13-14 are an original part of the chapter, not merely an addition by another author at a later date?

⁵James D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 252, categorically asserts: "It makes nonsense of the prophet's sermon to have him reject a religious observance such as fasting because it has become a substitute for works of love and mercy and then add at the end a note to the effect that if only the members of the nation are scrupulous in the keeping of the Sabbath, God will reward them abundantly. The Sabbath [passage] was the enthusiasm of a later orthodox community, not of Second Isaiah."

⁶Julian Morgenstern, "Two Prophecies from the Fourth Century B.C. and the Evolution of Yom Kippur," *HUCA* 24 (1952-53): 68.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 68-69.

Admittedly, questions of this nature have already been addressed by various scholars.⁹ However, most of these investigations have considered the problem from the perspective of the overall theme and the basic framework and structure of the chapter. In this present short essay I seek to supplement such studies by two other means: (1) a brief linguistic analysis of a crucial concept that occurs in chapter 58, and (2) a comparative word study of two important terms.

1. The "Sabbath"/"Rest" Concept

A literal rendering of the last line of Isa 58:12 and of the first line of verse 13 reads:

Restorer of paths to rest in/
If you turn from the sabbath your foot.¹⁰

A closer look at the original text reveals that the word for "rest" in verse 12 and for "sabbath" in verse 13 are actually based on the same Hebrew root שבת (*šbt*). Stressing the importance of this link between verses 12 and 13, Elizabeth Achtemeier has shown "that the thought of the sabbath rest [in vs. 13] follows naturally on the thought of rest in the land, in verse 12."¹¹ Thus, rest in "space" is followed by rest in "time."

Further examination of the Hebrew text of verses 12 and 13 yields an even more intriguing possible connection between these two verses. In the consonantal Hebrew text the final word of verse 12 is לִשְׁבַת (*lišbet*). The Masoretes pointed it to read: לִשְׁבַתָּ (lāšābet). This is properly translated as "to rest in." However, when the

⁹See, e.g., John T. Willis, *The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Co., 1980), 448-449; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel*, vol. 4, *The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1970), 174; G. Ernest Wright, *The Layman's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *The Book of Isaiah*, ed. Balmer H. Kelly (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 143; Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 60; Claus Westermann, *The Old Testament Library: Isaiah 40-66*, ed. G. Ernest Wright, John Bright, James Barr, and Peter Ackroyd (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 340-341; Rachel Margalioth, *The Indivisible Isaiah: Evidence for the Single Authorship of the Prophetic Book* (New York: Sura Institute for Research, Yeshiva University, 1964), 64, 94, 168.

¹⁰See Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible for a similar rendering.

¹¹Achtemeier, 60.

Masoretes came to the identical word לִשְׁבַּח (*lišbt*) in verse 13, they utilized a different vowel pointing: לְשַׁבָּח (*laššabbāt*). Literally translated, this would be rendered as "to the sabbath." Concerning this matter, R. N. Whybray states: "It may be significant that in the consonantal Hebrew text the final word of verse 12, *lasabet*, to dwell in, could also be read as *laššabbāt* on (or "for") the sabbath."¹²

Even though it is admittedly best to stay with the MT under most circumstances, here it appears that the final word of verse 12 could legitimately be repointed to read the same as in the first line of verse 13—namely, לְשַׁבָּח (*laššabbāt*). In this case the closing line of verse 12 would be translated as "restorer of paths leading to (the observance of) the sabbath."¹³ Verse 13, which deals specifically with the manner of sabbathkeeping, would then be a natural extension and elaboration of the point just made in the previous verse.

In brief, whether one retains the Masoretic pointing and renders the final word of verse 12 as "to rest in" or whether one interprets the consonantal Hebrew text to read "to the sabbath," this concept of "sabbath"/"rest" can be seen to form a close and vital connection between verses 12 and 13, thus linking what is often considered as being the first part of Isa 58 (i.e., vv. 1-12) with the final section of that chapter (vv. 13-14).

2. The "Path"/"Way" Parallelism

An analysis of the use of the noun for "path" (נְתִיבָה = *netibāh*) reveals that it is used a total of 26 times in the Hebrew Bible. Of these, 21 occurrences are in the form of a feminine noun. In the prophetic writings, it is only in its feminine usage that this noun occurs eight times.

¹²R. N. Whybray, *New Century Bible: Isaiah 40-66*, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Oliphants, 1975), 218.

¹³This is the translation of Torrey, 439. Admittedly, Torrey uses this translation in an attempt to prove that the passage was possibly misinterpreted, which might have led to the "addition" of vv. 13-14 to vv. 1-12. While disagreeing with his conclusions, I believe that this so-called misinterpretation in v. 12 could actually represent the correct rendition.

Careful investigation of the usage in these eight occurrences reveals several significant facts. Hosea, an eighth-century contemporary of Isaiah but working and writing in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, whereas Isaiah's ministry was in the Southern Kingdom of Judah uses the term "path" only once, and that is in a synonymous parallel construction with דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*), translated "way" (Hos 2:6). Jeremiah, writing a century or more after Isaiah, but working in the Southern Kingdom where Isaiah had mainly ministered, uses נְתִיבָה (*netibāh*, "path") three times, in every instance as a synonymous parallel with דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*, "way") (Jer 6:16; 18:15; Lam 3:9).

The book of Isaiah itself makes use of נְתִיבָה (*netibāh*) four times (42:16; 43:16; 58:12; 59:8). In chapters 42 and 43 this term is employed in the same parallel form with דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*) as used by Hosea and Jeremiah. However, in chapters 58 and 59 it is utilized differently. Turning to the latter chapter first, we notice that in 59:8 the words "way" and "path" are set forth in a non-synonymous or contrasting manner: "the way of peace" versus "their crooked paths."

When one looks at Isa 58:12 it soon becomes evident that this is the only verse in all the prophetic writings where נְתִיבָה (*netibāh*) stands alone—that is, without the normally comparative or contrasting word *derek*. However, reading on in the chapter we discover that verse 13 contains the "missing" word! It is, of course, a well-known fact that verse (and chapter) divisions in the Bible are not original to the text but were added centuries later. In view of this, we may ask whether it is not possible, or even probable, that the division made between verses 12 and 13 represents simply an unintentional disruption of this passage? In other words, is it not likely that the author intended to use "path" and "way" in a distinct contrasting parallelism, just as he did in the very next poem (chap. 59:8)? In my judgment, this is indeed most probable.¹⁴

Thus, when the arbitrarily inserted verse divisions are removed or ignored, the following picture of the use of נְתִיבָה (*netibāh*) and דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*) emerges: just as in 59:8 the people are

¹⁴It should be noted that in its parallel construction the word "path" appears in the final position in five out of its eight usages in the prophetic writings, with the reverse for the other three. Apparently the order of the words "path" and "way" is not vital to the construction.

depicted as rejecting "the way of peace" (God's way) for "their [own] crooked paths," so here in 58:12-13 they are confronted with the charge of "doing your ways" (i.e., their own ways), rather than being "the restorer of paths" (viz., God's paths). Thus, both passages depict how human beings—in this instance, God's very own people—selfishly choose to go their own perverse way instead of accepting God's promised path of peace and restoration. Therefore, on the basis of the contrasting parallel usage of "path" and "way," there is a clear linkage between verses 12 and 13 in Isa 58.

Up to this point we have considered the parallel use of "path" and "way" only in relationship to the translation of verse 12 as based on the MT: "restorer of paths to rest in." However, if one accepts the equally legitimate translation of the consonantal Hebrew text, "restorer of paths leading to the sabbath," then verse 12 appears to have an even stronger linkage with verse 13. For in this case the passage makes a sharp distinction between those who restore paths leading to the correct observance of the sabbath and those who desecrate God's holy day by going their own ways. Nevertheless, whether one accepts the traditional translation or my suggested one, the contrasting usage of נְתִיבָה (*netibāh*) and דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*) still remains a strong evidence in favor of the integral relationship between verses 12 and 13. Thus it also stands in favor of connecting the first 12 verses and the last two verses of Isa 58, thereby establishing the unity of that chapter.

3. Summary and Conclusions

Over the years many biblical scholars and theologians have questioned the unity of Isa 58. They have suggested that verses 13 and 14 are a later addition, probably by a different author. While other Christian scholars have used the overall theme as well as the framework and structure of the chapter to demonstrate that verses 1-12 are integrally related to verses 13-14, I have sought in this essay to demonstrate the same textual unity by analyzing some significant linguistic links between verses 12 and 13.

As shown above, if one follows the MT there is a close connection between the "rest" in the land and the sabbath "rest" of verses 12 and 13, respectively. This link is seen to be even more compelling if the final word of verse 12 in the consonantal Hebrew

text is legitimately repointed as **נצו** (*laššabbāt*). Based on this repointing, the translation of the closing part of verse 12 would read "restorer of paths leading to (the observance of) the sabbath."¹⁵ Consequently verse 12 would thus be even more naturally and contextually connected with verse 13, wherein the specific details of proper sabbathkeeping are outlined.

A comparative word study of the eight occurrences of the word translated "path" in the prophetic writings is also enlightening. The evidence suggests that the various authors—Hosea and Jeremiah, in addition to Isaiah—consistently used the terms "path" and "way" in parallel constructions. Six times these terms appear in synonymous parallelisms. Once, in Isa 59:8, there is a contrasting parallelism; and the same kind of contrasting parallelism occurs in Isa 58 if verses 12 and 13 of that chapter are considered as a unit. On the basis of the strikingly consistent manner in which the prophetic writers have elsewhere used these terms in parallel, it appears that in Isa 58 the verse division between verses 12 and 13 forms an unnatural break and that the terms are also in parallel here, even though they are located in two different, but adjoining, verses. In the final analysis, then, the foregoing study of "path" and "way" serves to provide one further line of evidence that verses 13 and 14 are an original part of the complete text of Isa 58, a chapter which is a cohesive unit.

¹⁵Again, Torrey's rendition. See n. 13, above.