

Isaiah 6, Isaiah's Call

Overview

At first, one finds the location of this chapter surprising. It describes Isaiah's call to his ministry. Why, then, does it not come at the beginning of the book? Compare the historical sequence followed in the gospels, or Paul's account of his call in Gal, or Jeremiah's record of his ministry.

The location actually serves an important rhetorical function. Consider what we have read so far.

- Chapter 1 records God's lawsuit against Israel.
- Chapters 2-4 look forward to the future preeminence of Zion, but in a future day of the Lord, when men will be humbled and the Lord alone exalted.
- Chapter 5 further justifies this coming judgment in the light of the Lord's care for the nation.

All of this material has been presented with reference to the nation as a whole. Now Isaiah engages it personally. He finds himself in the presence of the judge of ch. 1, the exalted one of ch. 2-4, the angry farmer of ch. 5, and recognizes that he, personally, falls under the condemnations that have been uttered. The narrative in this chapter is not just a history of his personal call, but an example of the repentance that his hearers must experience if they are to escape the wrath of God.

The chapter is built around three conversations. The first is among the Seraphim, **praising** the Lord. The second is between Isaiah and one of the Seraphs, concerning his sin and its **pardon**. The third is between Isaiah and the Lord, in which he undertakes the **purpose** of representing the Lord.

1-4a, A Conversation of Praise: The Vision

In the first part of the chapter, Isaiah narrates what he saw and heard, a conversation among the Seraphim concerning the Lord.

1 In the year that king Uzziah died—About 740 BC. Keil and Delitzsch give some indication of the importance of this date¹:

- The longest reign (52 years) up to this time

¹Uzziah reigned fifty-two years (809-758 b.c.). This lengthened period was just the same to the kingdom of Judah as the shorter age of Solomon to that of all Israel, viz., a time of vigorous and prosperous peace, in which the nation was completely overwhelmed with manifestations of divine love. But the riches of divine goodness had no more influence upon it, than the troubles through which it had passed before. And now the eventful change took place in the relation between Israel and Jehovah, of which Isaiah was chosen to be the instrument before and above all other prophets. The year in which all this occurred was the year of Uzziah's death. It was in this year that Israel as a people was given up to hardness of heart, and as a kingdom and country to devastation and annihilation by the imperial power of the world. How significant a fact, as Jerome observes in connection with this passage, that the year of Uzziah's death should be the year in which Romulus was born; and that it was only a short time after the death of Uzziah (viz., 754 b.c. according to Varro's chronology) that Rome itself was founded! The national glory of Israel died out with king Uzziah, and has never revived to this day.

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- “A time of vigorous and prosperous peace”
- Yet Israel persisted in sin,
- and so in this vision the Lord gives them up to blindness.
- It is about this time that Rome is founded, the empire that will have so much to do with Israel, and will dominate world history for the next 2700 years.

I saw also the Lord—Note the lack of capitals. God is identified, not as the covenant God YHWH, but as the sovereign master of the universe.

In this election year we are reminded how much hope people tend to pin on their rulers. When Uzziah is removed, Isaiah's attention is drawn to the true sovereign.

sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,--The setting brings us back to the legal echoes of ch. 1. We are now within the courtroom, before the judge.

the temple.--Isaiah pictures the Lord within the temple, which can only be the Jerusalem sanctuary. The language suggests that Isaiah was in the temple when he saw this vision. Compare Zechariah's vision in Luke 1. This in turn is only possible if Isaiah was a priest. We have no explicit statement of his tribal background, but a priestly lineage is not at all inconsistent with his prophetic role. The other two major prophets, Jeremiah (1:1) and Ezekiel (1:3), were priests, and the prophetic burden is completely consistent with the priests' responsibility to know and teach the Law:

Lev 10:8-11 And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, 9 Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: 10 And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; 11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

Deut 17: 9 And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment:

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Mal 2:7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

It is tempting to imagine that Isaiah, like Zechariah, had this vision while he was ministering in the temple.

Compare David's testimony in Ps 63:2, “To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.” “Sanctuary” there is *שֶׁדֶר*, *qodesh*, which might refer to the tent that he pitched for the Ark in Jerusalem, though usually it refers to the Holy of Holies, from which he would be excluded.

Compare John's experience in Rev 1:10. He was devoting himself to spiritual exercises, and in the midst of this he encountered the Lord.

The Lord can reveal himself to people as they go about their everyday lives (Balaam, Saul on the road to Damascus), but with believers, it is entirely expected that he will reveal himself as they are prepared

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by spiritual activities. Diligence in these activities pays great dividends in our relation with him.

and his train filled the temple.--The “train” is the edge of his garment, the “hem.” In Exod 28:34, it refers to the place on the priestly robes where the bells and pomegranates were attached. Isaiah sees the Lord in the temple, but when he tries to describe him, all he can mention is the bottom edge of his garment. Compare the elders of Israel in Exod 24:

10 And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

All they can bear to observe directly is his lower extremity. His glory is so all-consuming that they cannot look directly on it. So it is with Isaiah. Perhaps he is prostrate, barely able to glimpse the floor beneath the Lord.

2 Above it stood the seraphims:--The word means “the burning ones.” It is applied to the venomous serpents of Num 21:6 because of the pain caused by their bite; here it refers to the shining appearance of the creatures.

each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face,--Even these exalted spirits shrink back from looking directly on the face of the Lord.

and with twain he covered his feet,--When Moses saw God at the burning bush (Exod 3:15), or Joshua encountered the Captain of the Lord's host before Jericho (Josh 5:15), they were told to put off their shoes, which would be defiled by contact with the earth. The burning ones do not wear shoes, and their feet may be defiled by contact with the earth, so they cover them out of respect.

and with twain he did fly.--To do the Lord's bidding.

What are these creatures? Our best clue lies in the vision of the heavenly throne room granted John in Rev 4,

6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

The six wings and the triple declaration of God's holiness seem clearly to indicate that they are the same beings that Isaiah saw. They are also said to be “full of eyes,” an allusion to the vision of the cherubim in Ezek 1:18; 10:12. Those creatures had only four wings (1:6; 10:21), perhaps an accommodation to their role as bearers of the heavenly chariot (since they also have wheels, which the beings here do not).

These beings must have appeared awesome to Isaiah. What they say next is so well known that we run the risk of underestimating its impact, but it is calculated to stimulate terror in Isaiah's heart. Each expression piles threat upon threat, calculated to crush him.

3 And one cried unto another;--We are here privileged to hear how the angels converse among themselves. They are not speaking to Isaiah, much less to the Lord, but they are preoccupied among themselves with the Lord. They do not merely “say” these things to each other, but “cry,” with energy

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and excitement.

It delights God when his creatures are thus preoccupied with him:

Mal 3:16-17 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

The discourse of the Seraphim is an example for us. What characterizes our conversation with one another? Do we spend our hours together sharing gossip, or complaining about the state of the world, or just bantering? Or do we spend reminding one another of our great God?

The Seraphim are speaking “one to another.” Maybe they don't see him yet. But their words strike terror into his heart. Perhaps he can sneak out before they notice him.

and said, Holy, holy, holy,--It is common among Christian commentators to see the trinity reflected here, but that reads both too much and too little into the expression.

It reads **too much** from Christian theology. This is a common Hebrew idiom. Hebrew makes abundant use of repetitions, with a variety of meanings (see notes). The usage here emphasizes the attribute, and corresponds to our adverb “very” or “really.” Compare:

Prov 20:14 It is naught, it is naught רע רע [It's really, really bad], saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.

Isa 21:9 And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen נפלה נפלו [is utterly, completely fallen] and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

Isa 26:3; 57:19 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace שלום שלום, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

In most cases, the idiom only repeats the attribute once, but here it is repeated twice, to make the case even more strongly. Compare (in a verse where no one would think of seeing a trinitarian allusion),

Ezek 21:27 I will overturn, overturn, overturn עוה עוה עוה אשימנה it [I will make it an utter and complete waste]: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.

So we don't need the trinity to explain the expression.

The trinitarian interpretation not only reads too much into the expression, but it also **misses the point**. The sense here is, “The Lord is utterly, completely, absolutely holy.” When we stop to consider what “holy” means (separate, set apart), we realize that their words warn Isaiah that he has intruded where he has no business being. He has somehow stumbled into a place that is unspeakably private, where no sane mortal would ever think of coming.

is the LORD of hosts:--“Hosts” means “armies.” The Lord is described as the ruler over the angels. Thus the Seraphim are acknowledging him as their commander, the one whom they obey. They are his servants, and execute his awesome mission.

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Now Isaiah not only sees himself as an unwelcome intruder into a private, separate realm, but he learns that the one before whom he grovels commands the most powerful army in the universe. There are several of them hovering over him. How can he run fast enough to get away from flying angels? How can he hope to hide in the darkness when their very beings exude light?

the whole earth is full of his glory.--Compare the reflection of this vision in Rev 4:8,

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Here, he fills all space. There, he fills all time.

Now Isaiah learns, not only that a powerful army opposes him, but that there is no place to which he can run. The awesome Presence before whom he is prostrate is in fact everywhere. He is so sinful that he has not recognized It, but the seraphim's third announcement strips away this comfortable ignorance. He realizes how naked he is, and has always been.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried,--This is only an angel speaking, not the Lord, but his voice is so powerful that it rocks the temple.

4b-7, A Conversation of Pardon: Isaiah is Cleansed

This scene has three parts: the pause for Isaiah to respond, his confession, and the act and words of the angel in response..

4b, The Pause

and the house was filled with smoke.--The clause is disjunctive, and we should put the verse division here.

We are probably to see this as a merciful action on the part of the Lord. At the moment when Isaiah's heart is ready to fail him for fear, the smoke cloaks the Lord's glory. The function of the smoke is thus the same as the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, veiling the fire-pillar of the Shekinah, or in the temple when it was dedicated,

1 Kings 8:10 And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

He calls the obscurant "smoke" and not "cloud," which is the usual term for the veil of God's glory. Isa 4:5 shows that this word can still refer to the cloud that veiled the glory of God, but this specific term, together with what follows, suggests that we should see here an allusion to the incense ceremony on the Day of Atonement, Lev 16. Note the sequence of events:

1. *Killing the bullock:* 11 And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:

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2. *Offering incense with coals from the altar:* 12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: 13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:
3. *Offering the blood of the bullock on the mercy seat:* 14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.
4. *Offering the blood of the bullock on the altar:* 18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

The appearance of the smoke (step 2) would mean that the sin offering has already been slain.

He sees the Lord, he hears the terrifying announcement, and then the smoke fills the house, and there is silence. It's his turn now. What will he do?

What would you do? There are really only two options. You can turn and run, if your knees will hold you up—but more likely you would feel as paralyzed as in a nightmare. Or you can surrender. Isaiah chooses this latter option.

5, *Isaiah's Confession*

5 Then said I, Woe is me!--A characterization he has previously applied only to the wicked, 3:9, 11. Now he sees himself among them. The word is “an impassioned expression of grief and despair” (BDB).

He goes on to give three reasons for his dismay, each introduced by the particle ׀ (which the AV translates “for,” “because,” and “for,” respectively). The connection of these three clauses is an important point of interpretation. The AV's change suggests that they want For#2 to modify For#1, while the connection of For#3 is not defined. The identity of the particles suggests that all modify “Woe is me” (Repeated instances of ׀ are usually parallel, as in 40:2 or 54:4; cf. Jer 4:30; 50:11; Jos 2:9. Josh 17:18 shows chaining of the particle, but in a less structured setting).

for I am undone;--A better translation would be, “I am destroyed.” This is his high-level assessment of his destiny. We might say, “I'm toast.” This is the first reason for his despairing cry: he perceives that this unspeakably holy God must destroy him.

because I am a man of unclean lips,²--Compare Moses' self-assessment when he stood before the burning bush (Exod 6:30, cf. 6:12), “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips.” Why does he focus on his lips in the midst of this vision?

James (3:2) reminds us that our speech is the most sensitive indicator of our sinfulness.

2 Ron Nowlin has observed that Isaiah's confession may be stimulated by the circumstances of Uzziah's later years (2 Chr 26:16-21), when he was smitten with leprosy because he intruded inappropriately to the sanctuary. Recall that lepers were required to cover their upper lips and cry, “Unclean, unclean” (Lev 13:45). In the presence of the Lord, Isaiah realizes that he is no more eligible to enter the Lord's presence than Uzziah was. The cry becomes all the more poignant if Isaiah is in fact a priest. In this case, though he satisfies the outward requirements that Uzziah lacked, he realizes that his moral condition makes him no more welcome there than Uzziah was.

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For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

If there is sin anywhere, it will show itself in how we speak. Isaiah's words may reflect his awareness of this principle. This would support the AV's change in the translation of כִּי. I am undone because I am a sinner, as evidenced above all by my unclean lips.

But as we have seen, it would be preferable to interpret the three “for”s as parallel, not sequential. Something else is likely involved. The example of the Seraphim, praising God to one another, awakens within him a sense that this is his duty as well. God has created us for his praise. He has chosen us “that we should be to the praise of his glory,” Eph 1:12. In discussing v. 3, we recalled how the Lord values the conversations of his people about himself (Mal 3:16-17). The NT commands us to speak to one another “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19). If he does not cry out and join their discourse, he is condemned. And yet if he does, he is condemned as well, because his lips, polluted with unworthy speech, are unworthy to bear the praises of the Lord.

This is something worth our meditation. The worst sin Isaiah can imagine, the one with which he is preoccupied when he finds himself in the presence of the divine majesty, is that he has disqualified himself to glorify the Lord. With good reason, the Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches, “A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This is perhaps what Paul means in Rom 3:23 when he defines sin as “com[ing] short of the glory of God.”

We have recently been studying together the various functions of the church, and the meetings through which we pursue them. I have always found the attraction of the breaking of bread meeting in the principle that we are discussing here, the idea that believers should praise God to one another. It's not the only place that we should do this, but it furnishes an ideal setting for us to proclaim to one another the praises of our great God.

The AV's change from “for” to “because” suggests that Isaiah sees his unclean lips as the reason for the destruction he anticipates (“I am destroyed”). That may be, but the parallel in the Hebrew particle suggests that this may be an independent reason for the “woe is me.” He is desolate, not just over the penalty for his sin (the destruction that he deserves), but also that he has disqualified himself from what he now sees as the whole purpose of human existence, to glorify the creator. This is the essence of true repentance: not to regret the penalty of our sin, but to come to hate the sin itself, as God hates it.

and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips:--This failing is not just his own. God says of Israel (Isa 43:21),

This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.

But they are no more worthy to praise God than Isaiah is. He and they alike, formed for the purpose of bearing God's praise as “vessels of honor” (2 Tim 2:21), have polluted their lips. They have made themselves unfit for their exalted calling. How terrible must be the judgment that now awaits them.

This is part of Isaiah's regret (“woe is me ... for ... I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips”). Having heard the worship of the Seraphim, he longs to be part of that activity, but cannot, not only because his lips are unclean, but also because those with whom he should be in spiritual discourse are also unclean.

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This observation should lead us to praise God for giving us to one another; for allowing us as believers not only to be purged ourselves, but also to “dwell in the midst” of others similarly purged, with whom we can worship the Lord.

for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.--The causal conjunction can be understood in three ways.

1. It might explain his frustration at being unqualified to join in worship. In this case, the three conjunctions “for” are chained together. “I’m destroyed because I have unclean lips. I’m concerned about my unclean lips because I’ve seen the Lord and I now realize how far short I fall.”
2. It might go back to “I am destroyed,” recalling the common teaching of the OT that no one can see God and live:
Exo 33:20 And [God] said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.
Jdg 13:22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.
3. But again, the parallel encourages us to see this as yet another reason for his “Woe.” In this case, the point is the contrast between himself and the Lord. “Woe is **me**, for I have seen the **king**.” The vision of God’s majesty emphasizes to him just how puny and insignificant he is.

6-7, The Act and Word of Pardon

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me,--Think of the terror in Isaiah’s heart as he sees this fearsome creature approaching him. He might be tempted to flee, but having confessed his sin, he resolves to accept whatever the sovereign Lord decrees for him.

having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:--If the parallel with the Day of Atonement is correct, the coal originated on the altar of burnt offering, where the bullock of the high priest’s personal sin offering has already been slain, and where its blood will shortly be offered. Those coals in the censer generated the smoke, and now one of them is brought to Isaiah, making him a personal recipient of the sacrifice with which they are associated.

7 And he laid it upon my mouth,--Isaiah was most aware of his sinfulness with respect to his lips. Thus it is to his mouth that the angel applies the token of the sacrifice. We are sinful in every part of our being, but when the Lord makes us aware of our sin, he usually focuses our attention on some specific thing. With Saul of Tarsus, it was covetousness:

Rom 7:7-8 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. 8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

With Isaiah, it was unclean speech, and so the Lord focuses the symbol of cleansing there.

and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips;--The angel brings not only a symbol, but also a word. God’s primary revelation is in human language. People sometimes try to give priority to God’s actions, but the purpose of the actions is to make the words more vivid. God always sends a messenger to explain what his symbols actions mean.

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- The butler and Baker (Gen 40), Pharaoh (Gen (41), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2, 4), and Belshazzar (Dan 5) cannot understand their dreams and visions without Joseph and Daniel.
- Even Daniel, in ch. 7, cannot understand the visions he sees without angelic interpretation.
- The Lord's parables are not intended to be understood without the interpretation, which he gives to his disciples but withholds from those to whom it is not given to understand (Matt 13:10, 11).

It is very important for us to grasp this principle firmly.

1. We must value the word of God above the symbols. The symbols capture our attention, but the word conveys the meaning. The symbols have no efficacy apart from the word. This insight warns against a common misunderstanding of sacraments or other symbols (such as a gold cross on a chain, or a miniature copy of a Bible, which some people carry as good-luck charms).
2. We should be very cautious in expounding symbol-laden portions of Scripture. Where the text provides an explanation of the symbols, that explanation should govern. Where it does not, we should understand that the text accurately records what (say) Daniel or John saw, but be cautious about trying to add the meaning on our own.

The coal is applied to Isaiah's lips. But the angel's words indicate that the cleansing is far broader.

and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.--“Purged” is “atoned,” or “covered.” Isaiah has been made a recipient of forgiveness under the terms of the old covenant.

It's worth reviewing the terms of Isaiah's forgiveness.

1. It is not based on anything that he has done. Even the sacrificial actions are out of his hands. He simply comes to realize his sin, and receives what the Sovereign has for him.
2. The Sovereign deigns to offer him, not death, but forgiveness.
3. That gift is based on sacrifice, the death of an innocent substitute.

8-13, A Conversation of Purpose: The Lord Commissions Isaiah

The conversation has three turns.

1. v. 8, the Lord asks for a volunteer, and Isaiah responds.
2. vv. 9-10, the Lord outlines his mission.
3. vv. 11-13, Isaiah asks how long the condition described in the mission will persist, and the Lord responds.

8, Request for a Volunteer

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord,--Perhaps the emphasis on hearing now reflects the presence of the smoke in the temple.

saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?--The plural “us” recalls Gen 1:26, “let us make man in our image.” The juxtaposition with the singular is quite remarkable, and likely reflects the

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complexity of the Godhead. Non-Christian authors cite the heavenly council in 1 Kings 22 and suppose that “us” refers to the Lord with his heavenly court, but the plural is nowhere used in that text, and it is unlikely that the sovereign Lord would refer to his actions as taken for the sake of others with himself.

Then said I, Here am I; send me.--What a change the coal from the altar has made. He was cowering before the Lord; now he offers himself. Isaiah volunteers without even knowing what the mission is. The natural result of true salvation is a desire to serve the Lord with all of our heart.

9-10, Description of the Mission

The mission that the Lord gives him is quoted six times in the NT, on four different occasions:

- In Matt 13:14, 15, Mark 4:12, and Luke 8:10, the Lord Jesus quotes the passage to explain why he teaches in parables.
- In John 12:40, the evangelist quotes it to explain why people did not believe the Lord, in spite of his miracles.
- In Acts 28:26-27 and Rom 11:8, Paul quotes it to explain why the Jews in Rome did not receive his gospel.

These verses invite a range of tantalizing questions:

- Why would God want to blind people to revelation?
- How does Isaiah in fact carry out these commands in the rest of the book?
- What light (or confusion) do the NT citations lend to the discussion?

I'll begin by explaining the verses as I understand them, then address the NT citations, and finally make a few comments about the general doctrine to which this text contributes.

The Text

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.--“Understand not” and “perceive not” are imperatives, just like “hear ye” and “see ye.” The literal meaning of the text is that Isaiah is to command people to hear, and also to be sure not to understand what they hear, and similarly for what they see.

In fact, Isaiah does often plead with the people to “hear” (about 20x) and “see” (3x), but he never instructs them, “do not understand” or “do not perceive.” He uses the most vivid language, and spells out with absolute clarity the fact and consequences of their sin, and the blessed promise of future restoration.

It seems best to understand the second command of each pair as ironical. The prophets often “command” ungodly actions that people are already doing, to emphasize how God is abandoning them to their sin. Compare:

Isaiah 50:10-11 Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. 11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks:

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walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow. [Clearly, people should *not* walk in the light of their own fire, but trust in the Lord. But those who persist are told, “Go ahead, use your own light. See what it gets you.”]

Ezek 20:39 As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; **Go ye, serve ye every one his idols**, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. [Ezekiel does not really want people to serve idols, but his command reflects the futility of urging them to depart from idols. “Go ahead, I can't stop you.”]

Amos 4:4-5 Come to Bethel, and **transgress**; at Gilgal **multiply transgression**; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: 5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD. [Same attitude as in Ezekiel]

Even our Lord speaks this way to the Jewish leaders of his day:

Mat 23:31-32 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32 **Fill ye up then** the measure of your fathers.

In each case, the command

- reflects the predisposition of the hearers,
- is to be understood as permission to continue their current sin rather than as recommending a new course of action (“Since your heart is set on this course of action, go ahead. I won't stop you.”)
- is associated with a warning of the consequences that will follow.

Thus these commands do not communicate God's will to the people, but are all examples of how God abandons people, or “gives people up,” to their own lusts:

Psa 81:11-12 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. 12 So **I gave them up** unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

Acts 7:42 Then God turned, and **gave them up** to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

Rom 1:22-24 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also **gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, (cf. v. 26).

10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.--Note the chiasm in heart, ears, and eyes. Every channel of perception and understanding is to be sealed off.

The previous commands were to the people. Now the Lord describes Isaiah's duty to be the agent of

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their unbelief. This is a striking mission, and we will take some time to consider it.

Throughout the Bible, the generation of moral blindness is assigned to four distinct agents (see notes): God, his spokesperson (only here), the person who experiences the blindness, and Satan. The classical reformed understanding of the dynamic is that God predisposes the unbeliever to reject the truth, by a direct action on his consciousness, so that the person's self-hardening is a later reflection of this dynamic. Calvin writes that God's purpose is "to control the heart of his adversary, and to harden it into obstinacy."

This text is the only one I can find where the Lord's spokesperson is the agent of the hardening. Because the prophet is the instrument of God, it opens up a new perspective on the nature of the divine hardening. When Isaiah hardens people at God's command, God is hardening them. So how does Isaiah (and God through him) harden people?

Isaiah certainly does not "control the heart of his adversary." Nor does he speak in obscure or dark figures. He prophesies the Lord's judgments with great clarity, and then calls attention to them when they arrive. How can such a ministry be said to "make the heart of this people fat"?

The central text for understanding the hardening of the heart is Exodus 4-14, the record of the plagues and the exodus. That passage repeatedly asserts both that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. We don't have time to study it in detail, but note the following flow:

1. God prophesies (4:21; 7:3,4) that he will harden Pharaoh's heart. Notice in particular two details of the prophecy in 7:3,4:
 - (a) God will harden his heart;
 - (b) Pharaoh will not hearken.
2. Six times, Moses and Aaron present Pharaoh with a clear revelation of God's power, in the form of a miraculous sign, often preceded by an explicit prediction of what will come to pass.
3. Each time, the record describes Pharaoh's response to this revelation by stating either that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, or that he hardened his heart, then that he did not hearken, and then reminding us that this fulfills the Lord's promise in 7:3,4. Note in particular
 - (a) 7:13-14, in response to the rods that become serpents (the AV mistranslates v. 13, which should read, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened," just as in 7:22 and 8:19).
 - (b) 7:22, after the Nile is turned to blood
 - (c) 8:15, frogs (note that here Pharaoh is the agent of the hardening, but it is still said to be a fulfillment of the Lord's promise to harden him)
 - (d) 8:19, lice
4. Only later in the series, after this pattern has been well established, does the Lord state that he has hardened Pharaoh's heart. That statement occupies the same position structurally as the earlier ones, describing Pharaoh's response to yet another miraculous plague (see, for example, 9:12 after the plague of boils).

Thus we have two indications that Pharaoh's self-hardening and the Lord's hardening of him are two

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sides of the same coin.

- Pharaoh's hardening (e.g., 8:15) is described as fulfilling God's promise to harden him.
- The later occurrence of the statement that God did in fact harden him (9:12 and later) occupies the same structural position as the earlier statements that he hardened himself, describing Pharaoh's response to successive plagues.

In Exodus, the mechanism of divine hardening is not some supernatural action on the victim's cognition, but the presentation of clear, forceful revelation that the rebellious sinner cannot bear to acknowledge. Pharaoh had already demonstrated his sinfulness in holding Israel in hard bondage. To accept the obvious evidence of the plagues would be to admit his sin, and this he will not do. He requires no special divine action on his mind to harden him. Each further revelation of the power of God only confirms him in the sinful course that he, as a fallen sinner, is already pursuing. God hardened Pharaoh by giving him revelation of overwhelming clarity, revelation that Pharaoh could not accept without acknowledging his sin in abusing the people of God. God is properly called the agent of this hardening; had he not given this revelation, Pharaoh would have been less hard (though no less sinful). But the revelation hardens him, makes his sin the more apparent, and thus sets him up for the dramatic judgment that God purposes to give him.

Isaiah is to do the same. He will give unmistakably clear prophecies of the fall of the northern kingdom, and the later fall of the south. That evidence will stimulate rebellious hearts to further hardness against the Lord.

To a heart that is in rebellion against the Lord, such clarity and directness is unbearable. It leads to a defensive response on the part of the addressee. Notice these testimonies:

1 Pet 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which **stumble at the word**, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

2 Cor 2:15-16 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: 16 To the one we are **the savour of death unto death**; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

John 3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, **neither cometh to the light**, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

We all have such reactions. The only way that any of us avoids responding in this way to the Word of God is that the Lord intervenes to remove the otherwise universal blindness of sin. Paul summarizes this in 2 Cor 4:3-6,

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to

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shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Why does God tell Isaiah that his ministry will have this effect? For that matter, why does he tell Moses that he will harden Pharaoh's heart? In both cases, the objective is to encourage them in their ministry. God's sovereign purpose is that their message should stimulate rejection rather than repentance. If they did not understand this divine purpose, they might become discouraged. Thus Calvin writes on Exod 4:21,

This, then, is the sum, that [Moses] should not faint nor fail, when he saw the inutility of his first efforts; nor cease to contend boldly till he had fulfilled all the objects of his vocation.

We, no less than Moses and Isaiah, need this encouragement. Though the entrance of God's words gives light (Ps 119:130) to those in whom his Spirit is working, to others those same words bring judicial hardness. Our task is not to preach only to those who will be receptive, but to hold forth God's word to all, trusting in him to use it as he sees fit.

The NT Citations

Our sixth Bible study guideline is, "Find the Bible's comments on itself." These verses are an excellent example for this guideline, because they are so often quoted in the NT. As often, the NT draws on the LXX, so we start by reviewing how it treats these verses. We will see two striking contrasts:

- The difference between God and Pharaoh as the agent of Pharaoh's hardening is reflected in the difference between the Hebrew original and the LXX, and is reflected in Mark-Luke-John-Romans vs. Matt-Acts
- The difference between clear and obscure revelation as the means of hardening is reflected in John-Paul vs. Matt-Mark-Luke.

The LXX Translation (essentially the Matthew column)

The LXX greatly softens both verses.

In v. 9, the LXX translates the second imperative in each case with a future, removing the irony and making it descriptive of what the people will in fact do rather than a "command" to do it.

The LXX also softens v.10, removing Isaiah's agency: "The heart of this people has become heavy, and with their ears they can barely hear, and they have shut their eyes." As the alternation in Exodus between God's agency and Pharaoh's shows, this is a true statement, but much weaker than stating that Isaiah will cause these things to happen.

As we will see in the NT citations, the inspired writers cite both versions. The self-hardening of an unbeliever and the divine hardening are not two different processes. It is misguided to ask, "Which came first? Did God first harden them, and then they hardened their own hearts, or did they first harden their hearts, which God then confirmed?" Rather, the two hardenings are different sides of the same coin. God hardens people by presenting them with irrefutable evidence that they, in their pride and past sin, cannot bear to accept.

John

The evangelist cites the verse to explain why the Jews could ignore the plain evidence of the miracles. He does not soften at all the sense of the Hebrew, but declares that the Jews not only *did* not believe (as Isa 53:1 prophesied), but in fact *could* not believe, because “he hath blinded their eyes.” The pronoun puts the Lord in the place of Isaiah as the one who delivers the message that conveys blinding. As in Isaiah, and in keeping with the principle of John 3:20, it is the very clarity and force of the message (in this case, the miracles) that has this effect on sinful souls.

Paul

Paul twice cites or alludes to these verses.

In Acts 28, he essentially quotes the LXX's softened version to explain the inability of the Jews in Rome to agree on the truth of the gospel he preached to them. Because he is speaking to them, he may have deemed it more tactful simply to state their blindness than to confront them with the notion that God was deliberately hardening them.

But he certainly understands the full import of the original text, as his citation in Rom 11:8 shows, where he emphasizes that God is blinding Israel. There, he is explaining to the believers in Rome the setting aside of Israel to allow the Gentiles access to the kingdom of God.

Explaining the Parables

Matthew, Mark, and Luke quote our Lord's citation of these verses as explaining why he taught in parables. They present a different emphasis that corresponds to the difference between “Pharaoh hardened his heart” and “the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart,” and thus show the essential equivalence of those two dynamics. But the application of the principle is in striking contrast with what we see in Exodus, Isaiah, John, and Paul.

Matthew quotes both verses, largely following the LXX. The Lord explains that he teaches in parables *because* the people have hardened their own hearts. The emphasis here is the same as when Moses declares that Pharaoh hardened his heart.

Luke quotes only v. 9, and **Mark** the same with the addition of the last part of v. 10, but in a paraphrase of Isaiah that makes clear the deliberate hardening of v. 10. The Lord teaches in parables, they report, **in order to** keep people from understanding, just as the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.

There is a remarkable shift here from the approach of Moses and Isaiah, and of the citations in John and Paul. The revelation that blinded unbelievers in all those cases was straightforward. In the synoptics, the Lord is saying that he purposefully engages in misleading, oblique teaching, parables that even his followers cannot understand without the interpretations. This parabolic teaching is the culmination of the judicial blinding to which the OT bears witness. When finally the promised Word of God comes, bringing the greatest possible clarity of revelation, then the judicial blinding becomes absolute and unavoidable, conveyed by a message that even a sympathetic hearer cannot decipher.

We should note that the Lord Jesus did not teach only in parables. He revealed himself to his adversaries in plain, unmistakable language, as in John 5. This clear teaching had the same blinding

effect as that of Moses and Isaiah. The parables were simply the “cherry on the top ” (or the dregs at the very bottom!)

Modes of Teaching

Throughout this discussion, we have seen three modes of teaching:

1. Winsome teaching, like that of the Lord to the woman at the well, tactful, discerning, seeking to accommodate itself to the hearer to win her interest and confidence.
2. Straightforward, “in-your-face” challenges that have the effect of hardening.
3. Deliberately obscure teaching, like the parables, that emphasizes to the hearers that they are being excluded from the truth.

11-13, The Duration of the Judgment

11 Then said I, Lord, how long?--Isaiah recognizes that in giving Israel over to its sin in this way, God is judging them. He inquires as to the duration of this judgment.

And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,--Note the successive stages of destruction that are promised.

- You might destroy a city but still leave a few houses.
- Even if all the houses were gone, the land (the soil, from which the plants grow) might still be lush and productive.

But the Lord promises that all will be left a desolate ruin.

12 And the LORD have removed men far away,--The Hebrew construction is “the man,” a generic use of the article meant to emphasize the class of men. It's not just some men who are removed. Mankind as a class will be forced from the land. The construction **הָאָדָם** is particularly common in Gen 1-3, which provide fully 15% of the 140 biblical instances. **הָאָדָם** is not just any category. It is the category that crowned God's creative work, and the very term would carry echoes of the creation narrative to a Hebrew reader. Every Jewish child would have learned how the Lord once placed **הָאָדָם** in the world. Now the Lord declares that he will remove **הָאָדָם**, undoing his creation in an overwhelming act of judgment. As in Gen 3:22-24, **הָאָדָם** is removed from the favored place and cast out to wander.

and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.--Or, “Great shall be The Forsaking in the midst of the land.” What is “the forsaking?” Isaiah gives us a clue toward the end of his prophecy, when he uses the same term in a conjugal setting:

54:6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman **forsaken** and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

60:15 Whereas thou hast been **forsaken** and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.

62:4 Thou shalt no more be termed **Forsaken**; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in

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thee, and thy land shall be married.

The reference is not to abandoned cities, but to the marital separation of the Lord and Israel, his wife. Isaiah has already looked forward to the day when the marriage canopy will be spread over Mount Zion (4:5), but that culmination is the final remedy for the breach that happens as a result of Israel's sin. Isaiah will later describe that divorce in more detail:

50:1 Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

Here, he describes it as “the great forsaking.”

13 But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return,--The Lord promises that a fraction of the nation will be preserved and brought back into the land, after the time of desolation is over. This promise was fulfilled under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. There is clear archaeological evidence³ that the population after the return was much smaller than before the exile. While the Scriptures do not record exact numbers for us, Neh 11:1,2 suggests that the population was so small that it had to be allocated artificially to cover the territory.

and shall be eaten:--Literally, “It shall be for burning.” Isaiah prophesies a subsequent disaster to befall the restored community, which was fulfilled under Titus in AD 70. Interestingly, Zechariah, writing after the return from Babylon, also recognizes that the nation will yet face another wave of scattering:

1:16-17 Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. 17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through [literally, “from”] prosperity shall yet be spread abroad [elsewhere overwhelmingly “scattered”]; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

Recall that Asaph, in Ps 74, prophesies both the desolation of the temple under Antiochus Epiphanes and its destruction by Titus. The prophets realized that a tumultuous future lay ahead for Israel.

as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves:--The result of this repeated judgment is compared to the state of a tree when its leaves are fallen. It is left a dry, withered trunk, to all appearances dead. Yet there is something that persists in it. AV “substance” appears elsewhere only at 2 Sam 18:18, where it refers to the memorial that Absalom set up for himself. Something remains that can spring to life again. In the final clause of the chapter, the Lord reveals what that persistence is:

so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.--“Holy seed” appears elsewhere only in the chronologically later passage Ezra 9:2, where it describes the Israelite remnant. But Israel is called a “holy nation” in Exod 19:6, a “holy people” in Deut 7:6; 14:2; and a “godly seed” in Mal 2:15, so the

3 David M. Fouts, “The Demographics of Ancient Israel.” Biblical Research Bulletin (Trinity Southwest University), VII (2007):2, <http://www.biblicalresearchbulletin.com/uploads/BRB-2007-2-Fouts-Demographics.pdf>

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reference here seems clear. Through all this judgment, a remnant will persist.

This doctrine of the remnant is prominent in Isaiah:

1:9 Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small **remnant**, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

4:3 And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and **he that remaineth** in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem:

10:20 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the **remnant** of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. 21 The **remnant** shall return, even the **remnant** of Jacob, unto the mighty God. 22 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a **remnant** of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

11:11 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the **remnant** of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

In fact, the noun שֹׁאֵר appears 11 times in Isaiah, out of 42 in the entire OT. This doctrine was so important to Isaiah that he named one of his sons “Shear-Yashub” (7:3), which means “a remnant shall return.”

Paul sees this remnant as evidence that in spite of the general apostasy of the nation, there is a faithful core to demonstrate that God is true to his promises to Abraham.

Rom 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

The parallel teaching for the NT is our Lord's promise in Matt 16:18,

I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

However much the institution may grow corrupted, the Lord will preserve a holy seed, a godly remnant, to fulfill his purposes in the world.

Notes

Uses of Repetition

IBHS 233–34 §12.5a; and GKC 431-32 §133.k.

The only triples are at Isa 6:3, Jer 22:29; Ezek 21:32.

“very”

Need to take into account the different dimensions of “emphasis” developed by Callow and others.

Genesis 7:19 And the waters prevailed exceedingly מַדּוּד מַדּוּד upon the earth; and all the high hills, that

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were under the whole heaven, were covered.

Genesis 14:10 And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits **בארות בארת חמר**; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

Genesis 25:30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage **האדם האדם**; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Proverbs 20:14 It is naught, it is naught **רע רע**, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.

Genesis 30:43 And the man increased exceedingly **מאד מאד**, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

Isaiah 18:2 (cf. v. 7) That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out [or “very strong”] **קו קו** and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!

Isaiah 21:9 (cf. Rev 14:8) And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen **נפלה נפלו**; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

Isaiah 26:3; 57:19 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace **שלום שלום**, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

Isaiah 38:19 The living, the living **חי חי**, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye **נחמו נחמו** my people, saith your God.

Isaiah 43:11, cf. 43:25, 48:15; 51:12 I, even I **אנכי אנכי**, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

Isaiah 48:11 For mine own sake, even for mine own sake **למעני למעני**, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.

Isaiah 57:14 And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people.

Isaiah 62:10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

With verb, triple:

Ezekiel 21:27 I will overturn, overturn, overturn **עוה עוה עוה אשימנה**, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.

Only

Isaiah 43:11, cf. 43:25, 48:15; 51:12 I, even I **אנכי אנכי**, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

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Isaiah 57:6 Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion; they, they הם הם are thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered a meat offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

All, every

Exodus 30:7 And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning בבקר בבקר.: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.

Exodus 36:3 And they received of Moses all the offering, which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free offerings every morning בבקר בבקר.

Exodus 36:4 And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man איש איש from his work which they made;

Vocative

Genesis 22:11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

Genesis 46:2 And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.

Exodus 3:4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

Isaiah 29:1 Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices.

Isaiah 51:9 cf 51:17; 52:1 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?

Isaiah 52:11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.

Isaiah 65:1 I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.

Triple: Jeremiah 22:29 O earth, earth, earth, ארץ ארץ ארץ hear the word of the LORD.

Distributive

Genesis 7:2 Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens שבעה שבעה, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two [שנים, not שנים שנים, but 7:9], the male and his female.

Genesis 7:3 Of fowls also of the air by sevens שבעה שבעה, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 7:9 There went in two and two שנים שנים unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as

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God had commanded Noah.

Genesis 7:15 And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two שנים שנים of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life.

Genesis 32:16 And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove עדר עדר by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove.

Genesis 39:10 And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day יום יום, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

Isaiah 28:19, cf. 50:4 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning בבקר בבקר shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report.

Isaiah 58:2 Yet they seek me daily יום יום, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

Verbal noun + ptc or v.v.

Genesis 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth הרמש הרמש upon the earth.

Genesis 1:29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed עיץ זרע זרע; to you it shall be for meat.

Genesis 7:14 They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth הרמש הרמש upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.

Genesis 7:21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth בכל השרין השרין upon the earth, and every man:

Genesis 8:17 Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth הרמש הרמש upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

Genesis 36:31 And these are the kings that reigned מלך מלך in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born ילד ילד, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 10:16 Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning יקד יקד like the burning of a fire.

Isaiah 25:7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread הלוט הלוט over all nations.

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Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation מוסר מוסר: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Relation to Infinitive Absolute

Does this tendency to use repetition for emphasis perhaps derive from, or help explain, the infinitive absolute construction?

The Agents of Spiritual Blindness

Different passages identify four agents of spiritual blindness: the prophet, Satan, God, and the one blinded. How are these related to one another?

The prophet

Isa 6:10

Satan

2 Cor 4:4, “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

God

See Exodus examples, below

Isa 29:10 For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. Cf. vv. 13, 14, where this judgment results from their rebellion.

Isa 63:17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened (קשה Hifil) our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.

Deut 2:30 But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.

Josh 11:19-20 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. 20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

The sinner

See the refs to Pharaoh in the chart below

1 Sam 6:6 Wherefore then do ye harden כבד your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened כבד their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?--Note use of Piel, where Exodus uses Hifil for כבד (but Piel for חזק)

Ps 95:7

Prov 28:14 Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

The Pharaoh Sequence

The big theological question is the priority of God's hardening and the sinner's. Does God first harden the sinner's heart, leading to the sinner's response? Or is God's hardening a judicial response to the sinner's hard-heartedness? I'm coming to prefer the latter interpretation:

1. There must be a link between God's hardening activity and the activity of the prophet as the agent of God. Compare Exod 4:21, where God's hardening is linked to Moses' presentation to Pharaoh of “all those wonders.”
2. The “gave them up” dynamic emphasizes that God abandons people to their own wickedness, confirming their hardness.

Data

The most extensive hardening episode is that involving Pharaoh. List the instances:

Episode	God hardens Pharaoh's heart 8x חזק 1x קשה 1x כבד	Passive 3x חזק ⁴ 2x כבד	Pharaoh hardens his own heart 3x כבד
	4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden חזק his heart, that he shall not let the people go.		
7:1-2 And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. 2 Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land.			
	7:3-4 And I will harden קשה ⁵ Pharaoh's heart, and multiply ⁶ my signs and my wonders in the		

4 Always with “as the Lord said.”

5 Hifil!

6 Perhaps explanatory clause: “by multiplying...”

Isaiah 6

Episode	God hardens Pharaoh's heart 8x חזק 1x קשה 1x כבד	Passive 3x חזק 2x כבד	Pharaoh hardens his own heart 3x כבד
	land of Egypt. 4 But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you , that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, <i>and</i> my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.		
7:12 For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.			
		7:13 And Pharaoh's heart was hardened חזק , ⁷ that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said .	
		7:14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart <i>is</i> hardened כבד , he refuseth to let the people go .	
7:20-21 And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that <i>were</i> in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that <i>were</i> in the river were turned to blood. 21 And the fish that <i>was</i> in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.			
		7:22 And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened חזק , neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said .	
(Frogs sent and removed)			
			8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that

7 AV makes the Lord the subject, but the verb is Qal.

Isaiah 6

Episode	God hardens Pharaoh's heart 8x חזק 1x קשה 1x כבד	Passive 3x חזק 2x כבד	Pharaoh hardens his own heart 3x כבד
			there was respite , he hardened כבד his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.
(Plague of lice)			
		8:19 Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This <i>is</i> the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened חזק , and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.	
(Flies sent and removed)			
			8:32 And Pharaoh hardened כבד his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.
(Murrain on cattle)			
		9:7 And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened כבד , and he did not let the people go.	
(Plague of boils)			
	9:12 And the LORD hardened חזק the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.		
(Hail sent and removed)			
			9:34 And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased , he sinned yet more, and hardened כבד his heart, he and his servants.
		9:35 And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened חזק , neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses.	

Isaiah 6

Episode	God hardens Pharaoh's heart חזק 8x קשה 1x כבד 1x	Passive חזק 3x כבד 2x	Pharaoh hardens his own heart כבד 3x
	10:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened כבד his heart, ⁸ and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him:		
(Locusts sent and removed)			
	10:20 But the LORD hardened חזק Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.		
(Plague of Darkness)			
	10:27 But the LORD hardened חזק Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.		
(Threat of death of the firstborn)			
	11:10 And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened חזק Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.		
(Passover; Israel led to the Red Sea)			
	14:4 And I will harden חזק Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I <i>am</i> the LORD. And they did so.		
(Pharaoh prepares to pursue Israel)			
	14:8 And the LORD hardened חזק the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.		

8 The only instance where God is said to harden in the Hifil, after Pharaoh is said to do this three times.

Discussion

Observations from the Exodus sequence:

1. The passives emphasize the Lord's prediction (“as the Lord had spoken”), which is probably a reference to 7:3-4. Note the two elements repeated in most cases: the hardening (with agent defocused by the passive), and Pharaoh's refusal to hear.
 - (a) The refusal to hear (from. 7:4) sometimes alternates with not letting the people go (from 4:21).
2. When God is the subject, the most common verb is **הזק** in the Piel. When Pharaoh is the subject, the verb is always **כבד** in the Hifil (but 1 Sam 6:6 uses **כבד** Piel to summarize these statements). Does the “softer causation” of the Piel reflect a permissive aspect to what God does? Waltke-O'Connor follow Jenni's distinction of Piel as a transform of a verbless clause. vs. Hifil as a transform of a verbal clause, and on p. 438 comment on the difference between 1 Sam 6:6 and the Exodus passages in this way: “The *Piel* verbs here direct attention to the results of the situation apart from the event (the hearts' being hardened ...), and the *Hiphils* refers to the process (the making hard of the hearts ...).” This distinction would correspond perfectly with the notion that God is the ultimate cause, but uses intermediate causes. (But note that 7:3 uses Hifil of **קשה**.)
3. Each instance of hardening follows a predicted plague. The hardening is brought about by Pharaoh's refusal to acknowledge the evidence that Moses and Aaron heap upon him in repeated cycles of prophecy, fulfillment, hardening. This is the same process we see in Isaiah, except that there Isaiah is depicted as the agent.

The Inverse Operation

How do the Scriptures describe the inverse operation, where God moves in the hearts of his people?

Incline the Heart* **הטה את לב*

Used of both divine (Ps 119:36; 141:4; Prov 21:1) and human (Prov 2:2) action. This is what Solomon's wives did to him (1 Kings 11:3).

Stir up the Spirit* **העיר את רוח*

This is only divine:

- Nations to war, 1 Chr 5:26; 2 Chr 21:16; Jer 51:1, 11
- Nations to good, 2 Chr 36:22 = Ezr 1:1
- God's people to righteous actions, Ezr 1:5; Hag 1:14