

Isaiah 59

Overview

Following the overall structure of the last nine chapters (Table 1, chart), this chapter covers the second and third elements of the first panel. The Lord indicts the nation for their sin, and introduces the Redeemer, the same character we met as the Servant, but now presented in glory and power rather than humiliation.

False vs. True Worship	58:1-14	66:1-24
Indictment & Confession	59:1-15a	63:7-65:25
The Redeemer	59:15b-21	63:1-7
Zion's Glory (2fs)	60:1-22	62:1-12
The Redeemer	61:1-11	

Table 1: Structure of Isaiah 58-66

59:1-15a Indictment for Sin

Here the people confess their sin, and we read of their judgment.

The section is structured by shifts in pronouns (chart). All could credibly be spoken by Isaiah.

- First, he speaks *to* the people (“you”), describing how their sin is responsible for the alienation they feel from God. We might call this section **Accusation**.
- Next, he speaks *about* their sin, using vivid imagery. This section is a **Description** of their sin.
- Finally, he takes his place *with* the people in **Confession**.

Before we go into the details, note the significance of the overall sequence.

- People cannot confess their sin until they know what it is. Description must come before Confession.
- People will not listen to the description of their sin until they recognize that they are sinners in the first place. Thus evangelism must begin with the unpleasant task of accusation, which is where Isaiah begins this portion of the book:

Isa 58:1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

1-3, **Accusation**

The accusation begins by answering a question that is not expressed in the immediate context: “Why doesn’t God answer our prayers?” This is the question that the people raised early in ch. 58,

Isa 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?

ch. 58 gave a negative answer to their question: your fast is defective. This chapter gives a positive answer: your sin offends God, separating him from you.

59:1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:--The lack of contact with God is not his fault. Isaiah communicates this with two metaphors, the hand and the ear, to express their complaint (Table 2, chart).

- The hand is the organ of action. The Hebrew word “hand” יָד applies to the arm up to the elbow. They feel that God has abandoned them, as though his arm were too short to reach to them.

Action	Speech
Isa 59:1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;	neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:
2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God,	and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.
3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity;	your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

Table 2: Alternation of Action and Speech in 59:1-3

- The ear is the organ of perceiving speech. A heavy ear is one that cannot hear (cf. 6:10), perhaps referring to the feeling of stuffiness that comes from too much ear wax. They feel that God has grown dull of hearing.

Isaiah denies that God is defective in either of these capabilities. The two channels, of action and communication, are broken on their side.

2 But *your* iniquities have separated between *you* and *your* God,--The problem is not that God cannot act, but that their actions keep pushing him away.

and *your* sins have hid *his* face from *you*, that he will not hear.--God rejects their prayer, not because he cannot hear, but because their sins offend him.¹

3 For *your* hands are defiled with blood, and *your* fingers with iniquity; *your* lips have spoken lies, *your* tongue hath muttered perverseness.--For the third time, Isaiah invokes the two channels, one of action and the other of speech.

- God’s hand does not intervene because their hands and fingers are sinful.
- His ear does not hear because what they speak is offensive to him.

Isaiah is expounding Solomon’s analysis of the same problem (Table 3, chart), and v. 3 begins the echo:

Pro 6:16 These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a **lying tongue**, and **hands** that shed innocent **blood**, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness *that speaketh lies*, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Solomon offers a chiasm that emphasizes (from the outside in)

- pride and dissension
- deception
- harmful action
- at the center, the wicked heart

¹ The contrast in the AV between “cannot hear” in v. 1 and “will not hear” in v. 2 captures the distinction nicely, though the two expressions are identical in Hebrew.

Pro 6:16-19		Isa 59	
16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:		1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.	
17 A proud look,	and he that soweth discord among brethren.		8 The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace .
a lying tongue ,	19 A false witness that speaketh lies ,	3b your lips have spoken lies , your tongue hath muttered perverseness.	
and hands that shed innocent blood ,	feet that be swift in running to mischief רעה ,	3a For your hands are defiled with blood , and your fingers with iniquity;	7a Their feet run to evil רע , and they make haste to shed innocent blood : ... wasting and destruction are in their paths.
18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations מחשבות און ,			7b their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity מחשבות און ;

Table 3: Isaiah 59 as Commentary on Pro 6:16-19

These are things that “the Lord hate[s].” They are “an abomination unto him.” So it is not surprising that when he sees these things, he turns away, as vv. 1-2 have already told us.

Thus vv. 1-2 correspond to Prov 6:16, while v. 3 picks up elements from 6:17, 19. Verses 7-8 cover the other elements of this paragraph in Proverbs 6.

4-8, Description

Having captured his hearers’ attention by explaining why God isn’t answering their prayers, Isaiah now gives a more detailed description of their sin, in four parts. The first and last are literal descriptions of their sin, while the middle two are metaphors, or word pictures. Both metaphors emphasize that actions that offend God and try to hurt other people are likely to backfire on the offender.

4a, The Law Courts

4 None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth:--The preposition in both cases is כ "in," and both verbs can be used in a legal sense, “call” referring to summoning to court (cf. Deut 25:8) and “pleadeth” (Nifal of שפט) in the reflexive sense of entering into a court case. The legal system no longer protects the weak from the strong, but has become a tool for oppression and self-advancement, based on trumped-up charges and false claims. Isaiah inveighed against this kind of abuse early in the book (chart):

Isa 10:1 Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness *which*

they have prescribed; 2 To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless!

Just because something is legal doesn't mean it is right.

they trust in vanity, and speak lies;--In conducting their abusive lawsuits, they do not hesitate to twist the truth.

4b, Birth

From a concrete description of a specific sin, he now moves to a metaphor, based on the cycle of life.

they conceive mischief עמל, and bring forth iniquity און.--Acts have consequences, a truth that the Scriptures often depict with the image of conception and birth. Almost the exact saying (changing only the conjugation of the verbs) is spoken by Eliphaz in Job 15:35 (chart).

Job 15:34 For the congregation of hypocrites *shall be* desolate, and fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery. 35 They **conceive** mischief עמל, and **bring forth** vanity און, and their belly prepareth deceit מרמה.

David extends the idiom in describing the wicked in his Psalm against “Cush the Benjamite” (perhaps an oblique reference to Saul).

Psa 7:14 Behold, he **travaileth** with iniquity און, and hath **conceived** mischief עמל, and **brought forth** falsehood שקר.

James adapts the idiom to warn,

Jam 1:15 Then when lust hath **conceived**, it **bringeth forth** sin: and sin, when it is finished, **bringeth forth** death.

Both “mischief” עמל and “iniquity” און emphasize the consequences of sin (trouble, disaster), rather than the offense against God. Note that both Eliphaz and David link this idiom with deception, which was in focus in the first half of the verse. Those who pervert the law to oppress others are setting in motion a chain of events that will result in pain and suffering, for themselves as well as for others.

5-6, Poisonous Animals

Now we turn to another metaphor, based on poisonous animals. There are two images here, the serpent and the spider, introduced in 5a, then developed in an alternation in 5b, and 6 (chart).

5 They hatch cockatrice' eggs,--The English word “cockatrice” describes a mythical creature, a two-legged dragon with a rooster's head. Like references elsewhere to the unicorn, it reflects the beliefs of the translators' day, not a teaching of Scripture. Our version inherits it from both the Geneva Bible and the Bishop's Bible. The Hebrew word simply means a poisonous snake, a viper or adder. Carrying on the birth metaphor from the previous verse, the oppressors are described as encouraging the spread of poisonous snakes.

and weave the spider's web:--The second image is of setting up a trap for the unwary, as a spider does with her web.

Now Isaiah amplifies each of these images.

he that eateth of *their* eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.--

Playing with the eggs of poisonous snakes is dangerous. It is likely to harm the person who does it.

6 *Their* webs shall not become garments, neither shall *they* cover themselves with *their* works:--Returning to the metaphor of the spider's web, what they produce has no practical value.

***their* works are works of iniquity *און*, and the act of violence is in *their* hands.--**What they do produces harm, not benefit.

7-8, The Human Body (Prov 6)

In the last paragraph of the description, Isaiah returns to a more literal description of their sin, once more expounding Prov 6:16-19 (chart).

7 *Their* feet run to evil, and *they* make haste to shed innocent blood:--Isaiah quotes the hands and feet of Prov 6 (showing that he recognizes how the chiasmic structure integrates them). The people he describes not only do evil, but hasten to do evil. The same theme comes up at the end of this verse:

wasting and destruction are in *their* paths.--Their efforts produce only disaster.

***their* thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;--**In between these two (corresponding to the center of Solomon's chiasm), Isaiah directs our attention to their thoughts. "Thoughts of iniquity" מחשבות *און* is the same Hebrew expression that Solomon uses, "wicked imaginations."

In an odd-membered chiasm (with an unpaired center element), the center element receives special emphasis. The centerpiece of all the outward manifestations of wickedness (pride, deception, and violence) is in the heart. Solomon thus anticipates our Lord's teaching (chart),

Mar 7:21 from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

In expounding Solomon's text, Isaiah also bears witness to this fundamental truth.

8 The way of peace *they* know not; ... whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.--The end of this paragraph begins and ends with a declaration that the wicked do not know peace. While there is no verbal correspondence, after seeing so many alignments with Prov 6:16-19, it is tempting to see these statements as alluding to the outermost pair in Prov 6, sowing discord among brethren. Those who allow their hearts to generate wicked imaginations, and who give expression to such thoughts in violent deeds and deceitful words, cannot hope to have peace with their fellows, but are the cause of discord.

The interior of this verse reminds us of the conduct of which we have been reading:

and there is no judgment in *their* goings:--"Judgment" משפט returns to the legal language of v. 4a. They are not subject to God's law.

***they* have made *them* crooked paths:--**Their whole way of life is twisted and perverted.

9-15a, Confession

The shift in pronouns in v. 9 marks an interesting turn. Up to this point, the prophet has been speaking for God, first calling the people's attention to their sin ("you"), then describing their behavior ("they"). Now he turns around, takes his place with the wicked, and leads them in a prayer of confession.

The accusation connected the fact of God's judgment (e.g., v. 1) to the reasons for it (vv. 2-3) with the logical connective "for" (v. 2). The description does not separate these with logical connectives, but emphasizes the unity of cause and effect. Now the connectives return, marking separate and parallel blocks of text (chart). The confession, like the accusation, begins with the consequences, "therefore."

9-13, First Panel

9-11, Effects

First they describe the effects they feel, due to their sin.

9 Therefore is judgment משפט far from us, neither doth justice צדקה overtake us:--These are the two things we were told to pursue in ch. 56,

Isa 56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye **judgment משפט**, and do **justice צדקה**: for my salvation *is* near to come, and my righteousness צדקה to be revealed.

In our study there, we saw that judgment משפט is conformity to God's word, while justice צדקה, often translated "righteousness," is conformity to his will. Ever since the beginning of the book, he has desired these characteristics among his people:

Isa 5:7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for **judgment משפט**, but behold oppression; for **righteousness צדקה**, but behold a cry.

At the beginning of this section, the nation claimed to pursue them:

Isa 58:2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as [if they were] a nation that did **righteousness צדקה**, and forsook not the **ordinance משפט** of their God:

The confession here marks the end of their arrogant self-righteousness. At the start of ch. 58, they think their spiritual condition is fine. Now, they recognize that they have fallen short of God's expectations.

The next three bicola express their frustration using the illustration of blindness. They show an interesting progression (chart).

- First they blame the environment.
- Next they recognize their own inadequacy.
- Finally they recognize that the environment has nothing to do with it, but it is all their fault.

we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.--Their first description of their condition puts the blame completely on their environment. "Behold!

Obscurity.” Nothing is wrong with them. Anyone can see (!) that it’s a dark, foggy night.²

10 We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes:--Next, their attention shifts from the environment to their own lack. Not only are they blind, but they have no eyes at all.

This step is an important one in coming to terms with our sin. We must stop blaming our environment and recognize that the failing is in ourselves. But there is more.

we stumble at noonday as in the night;--In fact, it really is noonday. Those who know the Lord never walk in darkness. All things are light to him, and even if we can’t see, we trust him to guide us. Meanwhile, the unbeliever stumbles around, eyes full shut, in the midst of blazing light.

we are in desolate places among the fat ones as dead men.--The second colon in this pair continues this theme with a different metaphor. The word אֲשֵׁמִיָּה translated “desolate places” appears only here.³ Given the poetic parallelism throughout this section, we expect this colon to balance the paradox of the first. Philologically (see the notes), the word is probably to the root שָׁמֵן “fat,” yielding the sense, “We are as dead people among the fat [prosperous] ones.” We are starving to death in an environment so rich that others are prospering.

11 We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves:--These are two very different reactions to unpleasant situations: roaring with bravado to challenge the situation, and complaining helplessly. Both are presented as characteristics of the sinful nation. Neither bravado nor cowering is appropriate to the child of God. Both are characteristics of those who do not trust in the Lord.

we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.--They return to their recognition of 9a that they have failed to meet God’s standards. But note that “salvation” has replace one of the terms, in this case “justice” (צִדְקָה “righteousness”). Again, 56:1 offers a parallel:

56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye **judgment** מִשְׁפָּט, and do **justice** צִדְקָה: for my salvation is near to come, and my **righteousness** צִדְקָה to be revealed.

Throughout Isaiah, God requires his people to do judgment and justice, but at the same time, he makes it clear that these qualities can come only from him. For example (see notes for others),

9:7 Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with **judgment** מִשְׁפָּט and with **justice** צִדְקָה from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Part of recognizing the consequences of our sinful condition is realizing that the solution lies outside of ourselves. The change here from the boastful claim of 58:2 is remarkable. They no longer think of themselves as “a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God.” Instead, they are aware that they need “salvation,” and that they do not have it.

2 In defense of their self-justification, they might point to verses such as 9:2; 42:16; 58:8, 10b, where Isaiah himself describes the nation as in darkness and waiting for dawn.

3 The AV follows both the Geneva Bible and the Bishops’ Bible, which in turn follow a medieval Jewish interpretation.

12-13, Cause

At v. 12, the repeated conjunction “for” returns us to the cause of the judgment. The repetition of the conjunction leads us to compare and contrast the two halves of v. 12.

12 For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us:--The first half emphasizes what our sin means to God.

The Scriptures repeatedly teach that the offense of our sin is first of all against God (chart).

Joseph, tempted by Potiphar’s wife, wasn’t worried about the offense he would offer to Potiphar. He protested,

Gen 39:9 how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin **against God**?

When David sinned, he murdered Uriah, shamed Bathsheba, and alienated her grandfather Ahitophel⁴, but he confessed to God,

Psa 51:4 **Against thee, thee only**, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight:

The prodigal son surely offended his father and brother, but when he returned, he confessed,

Luk 15:21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

Sin is wrong, not because of any intrinsic characteristics of the actions, but because it denies the authority of our creator. Sin may take place in the sight of other people, but the offense is against God.

for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them;--In keeping with the theme of confession, we must also acknowledge our failing.

To show that they recognize their sin, Isaiah now unpacks it. He starts with the root cause, their attitude toward the Lord.

13 In transgressing and lying against the LORD,--The prepositional phrase “against the Lord” goes with both verbs.⁵ (chart)

To “transgress against” כַּשֵׁחַ is to rebel against one’s ruler. The expression describes the revolt of Israel against Judah,

1Ki 12:19 So Israel **rebelled against** the house of David unto this day.

Or Moab against Israel,

2Ki 1:1 Then Moab **rebelled against** Israel after the death of Ahab.

They first confess that they have rejected God’s claim to rule over them.

To “lie against” כָּחַשׁ is to deny somebody. Bildad uses the expression in describing God’s judgment against a wicked man:

Job 8:18 If he destroy him from his place, then *it* shall **deny him**, *saying*, I have not seen thee.

That is, his native land will completely disown him. Similarly, the nation has denied the Lord and his mighty acts toward them. They have excised him from their national narrative.

4 Compare 2 Sam 23:34 and 11:3

5 The Hebrew accents join the verbs together, with a disjunctive accent on the second.

So the first clause depicts their rejection of the Lord's authority. That rapidly leads to further, systematic degradation (chart).

and departing away from our God,--The Hebrew expression is literally "turn back from after the Lord," that is, from following him. Having denied the Lord's authority in their hearts, their next step is to depart from the way that he has laid down for them in his word.

speaking oppression and revolt,--Much of the law that they have spurned regulates the conduct of people toward one another. Having turned back from following God's way, they now behave inappropriately toward one another. These two terms describe two directions: oppression toward those who have lower status and prestige than we do, and revolt against those who are in authority over us.⁶

conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.--The final and most general manifestation of their apostasy is a general disregard for truth. Note once more the echo of Prov 6, the lying tongue (false witness) driven by a malicious heart. We are reminded again how central truth is to the character of God, and how characteristic deception is of sin.

14-15, Second Panel

14 And judgment משפט is turned away backward, and justice צדקה standeth afar off:--The result of this departure is expressed in the same terms as introduced v. 9.

The second "cause" section in the alternation focuses on the lack of truth that was the bottom step of the downward steps of v. 13.

for truth is fallen in the street,--The verb here is literally "to stagger," like a drunken man (the imagery behind the use of the word in 28:13) or a blind person (v. 10).

Recall that the place of justice was in the street, at the gate of the city. Truth is dysfunctional in the very place where it ought to prevail

and equity נכחה cannot enter.--Straightforwardness ought to be the standard for their commercial and judicial dealings, but it is barred. This is what the people in fact requested:

Isa 30:10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us **right things נכחות**, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:

15 Yea, truth faileth;--That is, it is lacking, or missing. You can't find it anywhere.

and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey:--Once a society abandons the fundamental principle of truthfulness, wickedness triumphs and the righteous are doomed.

Why does Isaiah join the Confession?

The next section turns from Israel's sin to the solution. First, consider a paradox in vv. 9-15.

Sinful people need to acknowledge their sin and turn from it if they expect God to forgive them. Certainly, the citizens of Judah in the seventh century BC, leading up to the Babylonian captivity,

6 The lexicons waffle over whether סרה means "falsehood," "rebellion," or "apostasy." The underlying verbal root סרר is used of the rebellion of a son against a father (Deut 21:18-20). The paired term עשק is most commonly used of an offense against our fellows rather than against God, and it seems most natural in the flow of the passage to understand סרה here in a related sense.

had much to confess. They dallied with false gods, and oppressed their weaker brethren. It makes sense for Isaiah to announce their sin, describe it, and call them to confession.

What is surprising is the way he does this. At v. 9, he could have returned to the second person, urging them, “You need to recognize that you do not keep judgment and justice. You need to tell God that you have sinned against him, and that the ills of your society result from your godlessness.” Instead, he takes his stand with the people and says (v. 12),

our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and **our** sins testify against us

Is this true? Isaiah didn’t visit the high places and offer sacrifices to Baal. He didn’t oppress his neighbor and bring abusive lawsuits. Why does he include himself in the confession?

This is not the only place that a godly person includes himself in a corporate confession of sin. Let’s recognize some other examples, then try to understand what is going on.

Other Examples of Righteous Confessors

Consider other examples of this kind of confession, where a righteous person stands with the sinful people and joins them in confession (chart).

The earliest example I’ve found is Moses, pleading with the Lord after the golden calf:

Exo 34:9 ... let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it *is* a stiffnecked people; and **pardon our iniquity and our sin**, and take us for thine inheritance.

The other examples are (like Isaiah) in the context of the Babylonian captivity.

Jeremiah

Jer 3:25 **we have sinned** against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and **have not obeyed** the voice of the LORD our God.

Jer 14:7 O LORD, though **our iniquities** testify against us, do thou *it* for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; **we have sinned** against thee.

Daniel, after reading Jeremiah’s promise of restoration after 70 years

Dan 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, ... 5 **We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing** from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

Ezra, on discovering the sinful unions among those who had returned

Ezr 9:5 I fell upon my knees, ... 6 And said, O my God, ... **our iniquities** are increased over *our* head, and **our trespass** is grown up unto the heavens.

Nehemiah, on hearing of the destruction of Jerusalem

Neh 1:7 **We have dealt very corruptly** against thee, and **have not kept** the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

An undated example is a general psalm of confession.⁷

Psa 106:6 **We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.**

⁷ Alexander links this to Daniel’s prayer, and thinks it may be by Daniel.

An Explanation

It's tempting to toss these aside with the trite observation that "all have sinned." So confession would not be untrue on the lips of anyone. But the Spirit has preserved examples in which God's people plead their righteousness, and God recognizes them (chart).

David:

Psa 18:20 The LORD rewarded me **according to my righteousness**; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. 21 For **I have kept** the ways of the LORD, and **have not wickedly departed** from my God. 22 For all his judgments *were* before me, and **I did not put away his statutes** from me. 23 **I was also upright** before him, and **I kept myself from mine iniquity**.

Hezekiah:

Isa 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, 3 And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how **I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good in thy sight***. And Hezekiah wept sore.

Surely Moses, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are not less righteous than David and Hezekiah. Yet they join themselves with the people in confession.

We can find a clue to what is going on in several case studies that the Spirit has preserved for us (charts).⁸

Joshua 7, the Sin of Achan

After the great victory at Jericho, one Israelite, Achan, secretly took some of the wealth of Jericho, in violation of the Lord's command to destroy everything.

Jos 7:1 But **the children of Israel committed a trespass** in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and **the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel**.

Note the paradox in 7:1. "Achan ... took," but "the children of Israel committed a trespass." One man sinned, but the Lord was angry with all.

When the nation came to its next military engagement, at Ai, it was roundly defeated.

Jos 7:4 So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. 5 **And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men:**

Thirty-six people died. Achan was not among them. The one who sinned is not the one who suffered.

Joshua came before the Lord to ask, "What happened?" The Lord replied,

Jos 7:11 **Israel hath sinned**, and **they** have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for **they** have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and **they** have put *it* even among their own stuff.

⁸ Another example, not included in the exposition for lack of time, is Deut 21, where the city nearest the body of a murdered man bears iniquity until a sacrifice is made.

God holds the nation accountable for Achan's sin. The thirty-six who died didn't steal anything from Jericho, but they bear the guilt of Achan's sin. Not until Achan was slain did Israel regain God's favor:

Jos 7:25 And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. 26 ... So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger.

2 Samuel 24, David's Census

David offers another example. Trusting in his own military might, he took a census of Israel:

2 Sam 24:2 ... the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which *was* with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people.

He quickly recognized his sin:

2Sa 24:10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. ...

God brings judgment, not on David personally, but on the nation.

15 So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.

We could understand if the Lord smote David, or even Joab and the captains of the host, who carried out the census, but it seems unjust to us that the nation at large should suffer. David felt the same way:

2Sa 24:17 And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.

Not until David confessed his sin and offered a sacrifice did God stop the judgment (v. 25).

25 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

The Bible recognizes our individual responsibility for sin, and our need to respond individually to the Lord in repentance and faith. But it recognizes larger groups as well: the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the local church in the New Testament. Sin contaminates not only the individual, but also the covenant community of which that individual is a part. These groups are responsible for dealing with the individual, by execution or sacrifice, otherwise the guilt remains on them.

The confessions of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Daniel, and Ezra, and Nehemiah, and Ezra recognize this dynamic. Each of these men sees the sin of the covenant community, and also sees that it is not being judged. It is appropriate for them to confess that sin to God, and attempt to lead their fellows to recognize the need to return to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 5 and 11, the Fornicator

This dynamic does not end with the old covenant. Just as one person's sin can contaminate Israel

in the old covenant, an individual's sin can contaminate a local church under the new covenant. The central passage demonstrating this is 1 Cor 5. One person in Corinth is guilty of incest:

1Co 5:1 It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

The church, far from condemning this man's sin, congratulates themselves on their tolerance:

1Co 5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Paul condemns this attitude, and explains that the church is contaminated by the sin of an individual:

1Co 5:6 Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that **a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump**? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.

As in the previous cases, the remedy is to bring discipline on the erring member:

1Co 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 13 ... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Later in the book, when discussing the Lord's Table, he instructs them to examine, first themselves, then one another, when they come together to break bread.

1Co 11:28 But let a man **examine himself**, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not **discerning διακρίνω the Lord's body**.

Failure to maintain purity in the covenant community will lead to God's judgment:

1 Cor 11:30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

The General Principles

Two general principles are at work in these examples.

The first is that God has a process for producing purity in his people. In 1 Cor 11, Paul goes on to give a systematic explanation of the whole process (chart). He distinguishes three levels of judgment. First, the church should judge itself (note the repetition of διακρίνω in v. 31 from v. 29):

1 Cor 11:31 For if we would judge [διακρίνω] ourselves, we should not be judged.

If it fails to do this, God will bring his chastisement to bear.

32a But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord,

His motive is to ensure that they do not suffer the much more severe condemnation that awaits the world of unbelievers.

32b that we should not be condemned with the world.

Our Savior

Tit 2:14 gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

The object of his salvation is not just a single individual, but a people. He desires holiness among his people, and one of the reasons he gathers us into local assemblies is to encourage one another in holiness. It is our responsibility to “reprove, rebuke, exhort” one another (2 Tim 4:2) to that end, and if we do not, the leaven of sin will permeate the entire group.

A second principle is the scope of this responsibility. In both the OT and the NT, it is limited. God dealt more harshly with Israel than he did with the nations around them. Similarly, in 1 Cor 5, Paul makes clear that the disciplinary actions he is prescribing are intended for the church, not society at large.

1Co 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. ...

The pollution extends as far as the authority to deal with it. For Israel, it is the nation, with its authority to enforce the law. For the church, whose highest institutional expression in the NT is the local church, it is the local assembly. We do not break bread with Christendom at large, and the Bible provides us no disciplinary power over them. But among ourselves, we are accountable.

There are two lessons for us to take from these observations.

- Do not think that **your sin** is only between you and God. It also affects your brothers and sisters.
- Do not overlook blatant **sin on the part of other believers**. If that sin is not judged, you will suffer for it.

59:15b-21, The Redeemer Introduced

The next section of these nine chapters (Table 1, chart) is the first of three that describe the Redeemer. This is the same person described earlier in ch. 40-57 as “the Servant of the Lord,” but the emphasis has shifted from his humiliation to his deity and coming conquest.

15b-16a, The Lord sees the problem.

and the LORD saw it--That is, he took note of it. It captured his attention (see Notes). The next three clauses describe his reaction.

and it displeased him that there was no judgment--The overall problem is one that the people themselves have acknowledge in the previous section: the lack of judgment (vv. 9, 11, 14), that is, conduct that is in keeping with God’s word. Once the people lament this, the Lord steps in. Of course he has recognized the lack of judgment all along, but he lets them wallow in their self-righteousness until they see the hopelessness of their situation, and then he takes action.

The main structure of this system is an alternation between two problems that lead to the lack of judgment, and that the Redeemer solves: the opposition of God’s enemies, and the alienation of God’s people from him (Table 4, chart). The problem is introduced in 15b-16a (A-B), then the

solution unfolds in three stages, marked by reversal of the two components (AB, BA, AB). We face an external adversary, Satan and those who serve him, who must be defeated. We also face an internal weakness, the sin of Adam that pervades every human, even God's people, and separates us from God.⁹

A: Defeating the Adversary	B: Restoring Israel
16a he saw that there was no man,	16b and wondered that there was no intercessor:
16c therefore his arm brought salvation unto him;	16d and his righteousness, it sustained him.
17b and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.	17a For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; (cf. Eph 6)
18 According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. 19 So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.	20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. 21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

Table 4: Structure of Isa 59:16-21

16 And he saw that *there was no man*,--First, there is no one to overcome the external adversary.

Of several Hebrew words for man (including אדם and אנוש), this one (איש) is often used to indicate virility and strength (chart):

1Ki 2:2 [David to Solomon] I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a **man**;

Jer 5:1 Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a **man**, if there be *any* that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.

Yiddish uses the German word “*mensch*” “man, person, human being” in a similar sense to designate a person of integrity and honor: “he’s a real *mensch*.”

When God sees the lack of judgment, he can find no one with the strength and ability to deal with those who oppose God's true people.

and wondered that *there was no intercessor*:--Second, because of the sin that separates us from God (59:1-3), there is no one to intervene with God on behalf of his people.

16b-17, His Preparation

God's response to this dilemma reflects the proverb, “If you want something done well, do it yourself.” He seeks a Man and an Intercessor, and he is prepared to undertake both actions himself. He carries out these tasks in the person of his Servant, whom Isaiah now calls “the

⁹ It is remarkable that the section begins (naming the Lord) at the middle of a verse, rather than with a new verse. But this may reflect a Massoretic awareness that 15b (looking back to the preoccupation of the previous section with lack of judgment) is transitional. Only in v. 16 does the alternation between external threat and internal weakness emerge.

Redeemer” (v. 20).

therefore his arm brought salvation unto him;--Is there no strong man to defeat Satan and those who serve him? His own arm will bring salvation. The “arm” is a symbol of strength, and here is most naturally associated with the conquest described in vv. 18-19.

and his righteousness, it sustained him.--A person needs to be righteousness to draw near to God, and Isaiah has already reminded us (vv. 1-3) that nobody meets this requirement. Only God is righteous enough to intercede with God.

17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head;--The theme of righteousness bringing salvation to God’s people continues.

We recall these words from Paul’s picture of the Christian armor in Eph 6 (chart):

Eph 6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Paul has clearly started with Isaiah’s imagery and elaborated it. But think about the implications of what he has done. Isaiah is describing the armor that God dons to come to earth and solve the problem. This is first of all the armor of the messianic Redeemer. It is a fruitful exercise to meditate on how our Lord demonstrated the use of each piece of this armor. Paul now says that we are to wear it.

The relation between the passages is very much the same kind as that in the various Servant passages that Paul appropriates to himself as an apostle (chart). The church is the body of Christ. Our mission is a continuation of his mission. We are the Servant, completing the work of the perfect Servant, and the armor we need in our work is the same that he bore.

and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.--Now we return to the image of conquest, focusing on vengeance and zeal.

Like the breastplate and armor, these are things that one can wear. However, Paul does not include them in his description of the believer’s armor. The current ministry of the church is bringing the message of salvation, not calling down God’s vengeance and wrath.¹⁰

Now that the Lord has prepared himself to deal with the problems that his people cannot handle, he engages them.

18-19, Vengeance on his Enemies

As the perfect Man, he brings judgment on the external enemy, as described in Rev 19.

18 According to ~~their deeds~~ recompenses, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence.--This verse makes two important points: the *principle* that guides the coming judgment, and the *people* who suffer under it.

10 The omission of these elements in Eph 6 is comparable to our Lord’s omission of 61:2b when he presented himself in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19). The third redeemer section, 63:1-7, is entirely about the redeemer’s work of vengeance, and does not appear to be quoted in the NT in describing the present work of the church.

The *principle* is reflected in the three-fold repetition of the root גמל translated “recompense” or “recompenses.” The fundamental idea is bringing something to its appropriate completion, and the nouns used here always appear in contexts of reward or punishment. God’s judgment is never undeserved. All have sinned, and he would be justified in judging all. The marvel is not that he judges, but that some who deserve judgment are spared.

The *people* are described as “his adversaries” and “his enemies.” They are judged because of their deliberate opposition to God. “Adversaries” צרים is used most often (43x) of Israel’s national enemies.¹¹ When the term is applied to adversaries of the Lord, it thus carries the sense we see in Ps 2 (chart),

Psa 2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

The Lord’s enemies have treasonously rejected his legitimate rule. It is just that he should repay them.

19 So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun.--The purpose of God’s judgment is not to satisfy his vindictive urge, but to manifest his glory to the entire world.¹²

When the enemy shall come in like a flood,¹³ the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.--In fact, the vigorous opposition of the enemy (צר, the treasonous adversary from v. 18) is the means by which the Lord gains the reputation and glory promised in 19a. Earlier, Isaiah depicted him waving his banner to draw the nations to attack his sinful people (chart):

Isa 5:26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:

Now he waves that same banner to marshal his heavenly host against his enemies.

20-21, A Covenant with his People

As the Intercessor, he establishes a new relation between himself and his people, dealing with the internal problem of sin that alienates us from God. Historically, this began in the gospels and Acts, but the Jewish aspect will be completed as described in Rev 20.

In our version, we see the expression “saith the LORD” three times in these verses. These words do not reflect the same Hebrew in each case. The first instance is a special expression with distinctive meaning (chart).

20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD יהוה גואל.--The speech formula is the one that marks a summary statement. As we turn from judgment to salvation, the Lord now appears in the character of a Redeemer גואל, a favorite title in Isaiah (see discussion in notes on 54:5). His attention is focused

11 It occurs 14x of the enemies of individuals, but some of these, e.g., Gen 14:10, are nations opposed to the head of the covenant people, and thus also represent geopolitical opposition.

12 The contrast between “west” and “the rising of the sun” is a figure of speech called a “merism,” which lists the parts of a thing to emphasize the whole. Everybody, from east to west (and everywhere in between) will recognize the Lord’s reputation as a result of his judgment.

13 Modern translations take צר as attributive to נהר, describing the redeemer as a rushing (confined) torrent), but this violates both the disjunctive accent and the article on כנהר. See Delitzsch for discussion (though he waves his hands to prefer the modern interpretation).

on those who repent of their sin. Here is the intercessor for whom the Lord sought in v. 16.

The detailed promise that this summary introduces is set off by a repetition of the phrase “saith the LORD,” which is not the special summary marker, but a more ordinary phrase **אמר יהוה** that simply identifies the speaker as the Lord.

21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD **אמר יהוה**;--Isaiah has already promised a covenant to the nation, in the form of the promised servant himself. In both cases “people” is truly singular, pointing to Israel (chart).

Isa 42:6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and **give thee for a covenant of the people**, for a light of the Gentiles; 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Isa 49:8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and **give thee for a covenant of the people**, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; 9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that *are* in darkness, Shew yourselves.

The Servant is the embodiment of God’s promise.¹⁴ But what is the propositional content of that promise? This passage lays down the details. Note the centrality of the Spirit and the Word of God, both of which figure in other OT passages about the New Covenant (chart). The Covenant has five features. No one passage has them all, but all enjoy the support of “two or three witnesses”:

1. The designation of this promise as a covenant (Isa, Jer)
2. The gift of God’s Spirit (Isa, Eze)
3. The centrality of God’s word (all three, the only common element)
4. The eternal, unbreakable nature of the covenant (Isa, Jer)
5. Forgiveness of sin (Jer and Eze)

My spirit that is upon thee,--Who is the “thee” in this passage? The pronoun is 2ms. In previous sections this was the Servant, who can be either the Messiah or his people.

A reference to the personal Messiah would be difficult here:

- the covenant is with “them” (opening of v. 21)
- the reference to “thy seed” fits better with the people, cf. discussion on 53:10.

This clause promises the Spirit, which Ezekiel identifies as a critical component of the New Covenant, and which forms the focus of the fulfillment in Acts 2.

and my words which I have put in thy mouth,--A second common theme, the only one that goes through all three of the New Covenant promises in the major prophets, is that the people will have a new relation to God’s word. No longer will it be an external imposition that they

14 There is no other instance in the OT of a person being called a covenant. These two cases might be understood in three ways: a) The Servant is the messenger of the covenant, cf. Mal 3:1. b) The Servant is the sacrifice that accompanies the covenant; cf. Jer 34:18-20 (taking “calf” as in apposition to “covenant,” and resuming the construction with “give” in v. 20). c) In a more abstract sense, subsuming the other two, the Servant is the embodiment of God’s promises (cf. 2 Cor 1:20).

easily ignore. It becomes integral to them, and they keep it.

shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD אֲמַר יְהוָה, from henceforth and for ever.--A third characteristic is that the relation will never end (also emphasized in Jeremiah).

The promise concerning the “seed” here is similar to the one we saw earlier (chart),

Isa 54:13 And all thy children *shall be* taught of the LORD [the LORD’s disciples]; and great *shall be* the peace of thy children.

The main difference is that in 54:13, the second person singular pronouns are feminine, designating mother Zion. In our passage, they are masculine, representing the people of God as the continuation of the Servant. The promise is not looking back to the barren wife or the bereaved, widowed mother, but forward to “them that turn from transgression in Jacob” (v. 20), who now carry on the work of the Servant.

Notes

ו. 9, 14 מִשְׁפָּט וצְדִיקָה

Isaiah uses this pair more than any other author (13x), though by frequency he is second to the three uses by his contemporary Amos. See notes on Isa 56:1 for discussion of the meaning of the expression; it originates in Gen 18:19, and is used 6x in Psalms and 3x in Prov. Here I organize Isaiah's references by what they say about the pair.

God expects it of his people, but they fail to manifest it

Expectation and failure together:

5:7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for **judgment**, but behold oppression; for **righteousness**, but behold a cry.

Command to do it, along with promise that he will bring it

56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye **judgment**, and do **justice**: for my salvation *is* near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.

The people claim to pursue it

58:2 Yet they seek me daily, 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.

Confession that it is totally missing

59:9 Therefore is **judgment** far from us, neither doth **justice** overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, *but* we walk in darkness.

59:14 And **judgment** is turned away backward, and **justice** standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.

Ultimately, he must give it to his people, in the day of the Lord

1:27 Zion shall be redeemed with **judgment**, and her converts with **righteousness**.

5:16 But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in **judgment**, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in **righteousness**.

9:7 Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with **judgment** and with **justice** from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

28:17 **Judgment** also will I lay to the line, and **righteousness** to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

32:16 Then **judgment** shall dwell in the wilderness, and **righteousness** remain in the fruitful field.

Isa 33:5 The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with **judgment**

and **righteousness**.

Pairing with “Salvation” ישועה

Ps 98 introduces the pairing of “salvation” with “righteousness,” an example that Isaiah mostly follows (and he is the only other author to do so):

Psa 98:2 The LORD hath made known his **salvation**: his **righteousness** hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

Isa 51:6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my **salvation** shall be for ever, and my **righteousness** shall not be abolished.

Isa 51:8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my **righteousness** shall be for ever, and my **salvation** from generation to generation.

Isa 56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my **salvation** is near to come, and my **righteousness** to be revealed.

Isa 59:17 For he put on **righteousness** as a breastplate, and an helmet of **salvation** upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance *for* clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

Our text is the only place where “salvation” is paired with “judgment”:

Isa 59:11 We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for **judgment**, but *there is* none; for **salvation**, *but* it is far off from us.

v. 10 באשמיים

“Desolate places” אשמיים is a *hapax*, and has totally flustered the translators. GNV renders “in solitarie places,” and BSP, “in the falling places,” both following the Jewish sage Joseph Kimchi. Observe:

- the persistent bicola
- the paradoxical meaning of the first half: in spite of our stumbling, it’s really noonday.
- Hebrew’s common use of א as a nominal preformative in forming a noun from a triliteral root (Joüon §88La)

In light of these observations, I prefer to derive the noun from שמן “oil, fatness,” recovering a paradox parallel to that in the first half of v. 10, “we are among the fat or prosperous ones as dead men.”

v. 13, Salvation and (judgment, justice)

Sometimes, one of the key terms in this pair is replaced with “salvation” ישועה.

Replacing משפט:

Psa 98:2 The LORD hath made known his **salvation**: his **righteousness** hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

Isa 51:6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

Isa 51:8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

Isa 56:1 Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation *is* near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.

Isa 59:17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance *for* clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

Replacing צדקה: only one place:

Isa 59:11 We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but *there is* none; for salvation, *but* it is far off from us.

Confessions by Godly Leaders

This is not a universal practice.

Examples of Confession by Leaders

The only pre-captivity example I've found so far is Moses, pleading with the Lord after the episode of the golden calf:

Exo 34:9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it *is* a stiffnecked people; and **pardon our iniquity and our sin**, and take us for thine inheritance.

The other examples that come most readily to mind are among the captives, following the terms that Solomon requested in his dedication of the temple,

1Ki 8:46 If [thy people] sin against thee, (for *there is* no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; 47 *Yet* if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; 48 And *so* return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: 49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

Jeremiah

Jer 3:23 Truly in vain *is* salvation *hoped for* from the hills, and *from* the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God *is* the salvation of Israel. 24 For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. 25 We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have

not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.

Jer 14:7 O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou *it* for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee.

Dan 9, after reading Jeremiah's promise of restoration after 70 years

Dan 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; 5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

Ezra 9:6-15, on discovering the sinful unions among those who had returned

Ezr 9:5 And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, 6 And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over *our* head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

Neh 1:7, on hearing of the destruction of Jerusalem

Neh 1:7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

Neh 9, national confession (follows reading of the law in ch. 8)

Neh 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. 2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

An undated example is a general psalm of confession, which Alexander links to Daniel's prayer and speculates may be by Daniel:

Psa 106:6 We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

Underlying Principle

Josh 7, the sin of Achan, is particularly revealing. Only one person actually sinned, but until the sin was judged by the covenant community, the entire community was held accountable. The 36 men who died in the attack on Ai had not in fact violated the ban, but the consequences of the sin fell on them, as God explained to Joshua:

Jos 7:11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put *it* even among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Same dynamic in 2 Sam 24, the sinful census,

2Sa 24:17 And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people,

and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.

David sinned, but the plague came on the whole nation

In the NT, the church can be contaminated by the sin of an individual:

1Co 5:6 Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that **a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump**? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.

2Ti 2:16 But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. 17 And **their word will eat as doth a canker**: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

The basic principle seems to be that God views his people not only as individuals, but also as collectives (the nation of Israel, a local church). Those collectives are responsible for enforcing his law among themselves:

1Co 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

If they neglect this duty, the guilt falls on the whole company, and even the righteous members (like Isaiah, or Nehemiah, or Daniel) must join in the confession.

Counter-examples

Why does this principle not work in other examples?

Contrast the attitude of earlier Psalms, e.g., David in Ps 18,

Psa 18:20 The LORD rewarded me **according to my righteousness**; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. 21 For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. 22 For all his judgments *were* before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. 23 I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.

Hezekiah's prayer is another example of self-justification:

Isa 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, 3 And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how **I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good in thy sight***. And Hezekiah wept sore.

Answer: In these two cases, the moral state of the rest of the nation is not in view.

Contrast also the intercessions of Abraham (Gen 18). But in a way, this is particularly revealing. The sin of Sodom was so pervasive that God could not find ten righteous people there.

How about Moses (throughout Exod and Num), where the leader is conscious of the sin of the people and (in Moses' case) offers to bear the penalty, but does not assume personal guilt. (But in Exod 34:9, he does include himself.)

Exo 32:30 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. 31 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. 32 Yet now, if thou wilt **forgive their sin--**; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. 33 And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

Num 14:19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

Answer: Moses is correct in describing those who have sinned, and in inviting judgment to fall on his own head, he recognizes the implications of his membership in the collective. God refuses to do so, but note that Moses has already brought judgment on those who worshiped the calf.

Conversely, David does confess his sin (Ps 51), but does not implicate the people.

What does God See (59:15)?

The expression is not a general statement about God's omnipotence, but an indication that he pays attention to something. Compare other instances of רָאָה יְהוָה:

Gen 6:5 **And GOD saw** that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth,

Gen 29:31 And when **the LORD saw** that Leah *was* hated, he opened her womb

Deu 32:18 Of the Rock *that* begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. 19 And when **the LORD saw it**, he abhorred *them*, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters.

2Sa 16:12 It may be that **the LORD will look on** mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day.

2Ki 14:26 For **the LORD saw** the affliction of Israel, *that it was* very bitter: for *there was* not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.

Lam 3:49 Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, 50 Till **the LORD** look down, and **behold** from heaven.