

THE USE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT
IN THE NEW AND
OTHER ESSAYS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF
WILLIAM FRANKLIN STINESPRING

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SPIRITUAL OBDURACY AND PARABLE PURPOSE

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Ancient man was convinced that behind actions and events stood personal cause rather than impersonal or natural sequential occurrence. That this pattern of belief, so characteristic of the ancient Near Eastern man in general, was accepted by the Hebrew is evident throughout his scriptures.

Numerous examples of this personal element pervading the historical process illustrate the point. Our interest here, however, falls not on this personalism in general; rather, we are particularly interested to relate this understanding to a specific concept, spiritual obduracy.

Spiritual obduracy figures as a major theme of Israel's¹ history as depicted by the Old Testament writers and editors. Time and again her stubborn rejection of Yahweh's sovereignty prevented her fulfilling the responsibilities accompanying the covenant relationship. This theme pervaded not only Israel's actions vis-a-vis Yahweh; a like theme was also recognized among certain non-Israelites as a result of Yahweh's influence.

In the former case, examples abound: Israel's refusal to believe that the redeeming, liberating God could lead victoriously into Canaan (Numbers 13-14), or Ahaz' inability to place his reliance solely in the preserving power of Yahweh during the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis (Isa. 7:1-8:15). Among the non-Israelites, the most familiar presentation of spiritual obduracy would be Yahweh's hardening the heart of the Pharaoh (Exod. 4:21; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; etc.).

As our attention focuses on the Christian Scriptures, we recognize that the theme of spiritual obduracy has not been expurgated. Jesus grieved at the hardness of heart of those who witnessed his ministry (Mark 3:5); hardness of heart prevented even the closest followers from understanding the feeding of the five thousand

1. "Israel" is here used as a general designation for the Yahweh worshippers, not as a distinction between Israel and Judah.

(Mark 6:52; note the similar passage in Mark 8:17); the Fourth Evangelist grappled with the problem via the presentation of his sixth sign, Jesus' restoring sight to the man born blind (John 9); Paul wrestled with the problem of the Jewish refusal to hear the message of Jesus, whether proclaimed by Jesus or by a later spokesman such as Paul, concluding that this refusal was understandable only in terms of divinely inflicted and purposeful obduracy (Romans 9-11, especially 11:25).

The conclusion that obduracy was inflicted by Yahweh raises no insurmountable problems as long as the object of the infliction be non-Hebrew. For example, Yahweh's causing the Pharaoh's heart to be hardened presented the interpreter some rather logical hermeneutical maneuvers.² Again, the situation where stubbornness is depicted only as human volition rather than as divine instigation presents no major difficulty, as with the Numbers 13-14 incident. The situation is more difficult when it is his own that Yahweh afflicts, a clear presentation of the problem being found in the commissioning experience of the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-13). Verses 9-13 present major interpretative problems, but in spite of (or because of?) this difficulty the synoptic writers were particularly fond of this passage when attempting to explain the purpose of Jesus' parables. Mark (4:10-12) alluded to this Isaianic passage, while Luke (8:9-10) gave similar treatment; Matt. (13:10-15)³ quoted Isa. 6:9-10, although from the Septuagint rather than from the Masoretic text.⁴

2. See, for example, Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), 1: 262; and Exod. 9:16.

3. Some other synoptic passages which deal with this same theme are Mark 4:21-25, 33-34; Luke 8:16-18, 11:33; and Matt. 5:15, 13:34-35.

4. The Fourth Evangelist (12:36b-50) used the Isaianic reference when summarizing and drawing to a conclusion Jesus' public ministry, attempting to clarify why the Jews were so spiritually blinded to the Truth. Since the Fourth Evangelist did not relate any parables of Jesus (granting the questionable nomenclature to be assigned to passages such as 15:1-11), this usage of the Isaianic commission was quite logical and not really dissimilar to synoptic presentation. The theme of obduracy is also found in Acts 19:9 and 28:23-28, the latter being a Lucan narrative in which Luke placed on the lips of Paul the Isa. 6:9-10 passage as explanation for the Jewish rejection of his message and the resultant mission to the Gentiles, a type of microcosmic view of the Pauline macrocosm as set forth in Rom. 9-11.

It should be indicated that the present writer does not find ultimate answers in linguistic analysis of the differences in perspective according to whether Matthew derived his quotation from the Septuagint or the Masoretic text. At best this serves as means to the end and not as the end *per se*.

Given the importance for the early Christian community of this spiritual obduracy concept, especially as found in this Isaianic commission, we cannot set aside the idea simply as an ancient concept no longer important. Most particularly is understanding consequential as regards the purpose of Jesus' parables, especially since the parable is depicted as Jesus' favorite teaching mechanism.⁵ This investigation, therefore, has two primary foci of attention: (1) to investigate the spiritual obduracy concept via a study of the commission to Isaiah as recorded in Isa. 6:9-13; and (2) to relate where possible this understanding to the problem of parable purpose as recorded in the synoptic Gospels.

ISAIAH'S COMMISSION

The commission to Isaiah appears to be a masterful study in contradiction. By his response, "Here am I! Send me" (6:8), Isaiah opened himself to be the receptive instrument of Yahweh to his people, a function patently absurd if only judgment could result. As J. Philip Hyatt states: "A summons to repentance from sin implies that God will forgive those who do repent."⁶ Edward J. Kissane says: "It is implied that by repentance the people may yet avert the threatened ruin (cf. I. 18 ff.)."⁷

In spite of the absurdity, however, Isa. 6:9-13 apparently does postulate inevitable judgment, indeed a situation where the very word of the Prophet acts as the catalyst to assure Israel's inability to hear Yahweh's word or to recognize his manifestation! Let us note some of the possible hermeneutical approaches to these difficult verses, acknowledging that any interpretation must be judged on the basis of its acceptable approach to the two primary problems raised by the passage: (1) as regards verses 9-10, if the obduracy response of the people be already determined, why should Yahweh compel Isaiah to be his *nabi*? and (2) with respect to verses 11-13, did the Prophet envision total destruction?

5. A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 7, notes "that the parables of Jesus comprise more than one-third of his recorded teaching."

6. J. Philip Hyatt, *Prophetic Religion* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1947), p. 171.

7. Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1941), 1: 75.

It has been suggested often that 6:9-13 reflects a late Isaianic (or possibly even post-Isaianic) understanding colored by years of popular rejection of the Prophet's message. This assumes a post-event and perhaps a post-Prophet writing of the commission, the former almost assuredly true, the latter likely;⁸ furthermore, this interpretation answers the first question raised above by assuming that the rejection response was recognized later rather than at the initiation of the ministry. It is true that in the initial primary political crisis during which Isaiah was Yahweh's spokesman, the Syro-Ephraimitic conflict (see Isa. 7:1-8:15), Isaiah's advice was not heeded, with the result that Judah was reduced to an Assyrian vassal state.⁹ In two other primary political involvements, however, Isaiah's message was acknowledged, and Hezekiah seemingly acted according to the Prophet's directive (see Isaiah 20 and 36-37). Since Isaiah's word was not accepted in every instance, therefore, it seems questionable that the rejection of his message was so thoroughgoing as to influence such a later recording of his commissioning experience.

The issue as regards our second question above becomes: does what we know of the Prophet apart from Isaiah 6 confirm the opinion that a late Isaianic (or possibly post-Isaianic) understanding would have envisioned total destruction? According to von Ewald's judgment, neither Isaiah nor any other prophet would have envisioned final and ultimate devastation, "otherwise the prophets would despair of their own mission."¹⁰ Must we not reckon with the Prophet's attitude toward Judah as seen in the crisis of 735 B.C., which attitude cannot be reconciled with a reading of the commission as prescribing absolute devastation? The Shear-jashub reference of 7:3, numerous other remnant references

8. As an early proponent, see G. H. A. von Ewald, *Prophets of the Old Testament*, trans. J. F. Smith (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876), 2: 62-64. George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903), 1: 57, 78-89, agrees basically with von Ewald. This view is supported by Curt Kuhl, *The Prophets of Israel*, trans. R. J. Ehrlich and J. P. Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), p. 79; and S. H. Blank, *Prophetic Faith in Israel* (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 4.

9. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 259.

10. Von Ewald, p. 69. It is interesting, however, that von Ewald's only support for this conclusion as regards Isaiah's commission was the final phrase of v. 13. We should acknowledge, however, that a passage such as Isa. 5:1-7 cannot be read apart from the Prophet's larger message. See further references in R. B. Y. Scott, "The Book of Isaiah: Exegesis," *IB*, 5: 212.

found in Isa. (1:9; 10:21; 11:11, 16; 16:14; etc.), as well as the persistent hope expressed in chapter 37¹¹ call in question an interpretation which accepts either implicitly or explicitly the radical devastation seemingly indicated by 6:11-13 on the basis that this passage is a record of the later Isaianic (or post-Isaianic) view. This interpretation, therefore, fails to deal adequately with our second question.

George Buchanan Gray maintained that the "doom of the people is inevitably fixed."¹² There is nothing that anyone, Isaiah included, can do by word or deed to avert the inevitable and absolute doom. The people have lived in their insensitivity, now they are left to exult in it. The Prophet's preaching will serve only "to render them blinder, deafer, and more insensitive."¹³ As Elmer A. Leslie expressed this concept: "It will often seem that the more earnestly, intensively, and pertinently the prophet speaks the less attentive or responsive his hearers become."¹⁴ Again, Hyatt states:

It is not necessary to take refuge in the theory that this chapter expresses the prophet's later disillusionment after many unhappy experiences in prophesying. Without taking these words too literally, we may see in them the great depths of Isaiah's conviction and his devotion to his prophetic mission. What he is attempting to say through verses 9-13 is that he is willing to go and preach to his people *even if* they do not pay any attention to him, and *if* the only result of his work is that the land will nevertheless be destroyed.¹⁵

This fixity of judgment finds support when the final phrase of verse 13 according to the Masoretic text is removed. In its context "The holy seed is its stump" (זרע קדש מצבתה) has often been interpreted to imply the hope of continuation, but this phrase is found

11. In terms of the chronological factor in Isaiah's ministry, this hope would be the more significant if associated with a 690 or 688 B.C. invasion by Sennacherib. Regardless, it relates at least to the 701 B.C. incident.

12. G. B. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 vols., The International Critical Commentary, no. 20 (New York: Scribner's, 1912), 1: 109.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Elmer A. Leslie, *Isaiah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), pp. 24-25. Thomas Henshaw, *The Latter Prophets* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 112, also supports this view.

15. Hyatt, p. 34.

neither in the Septuagint nor in the Hebrew manuscript of the book of Isaiah recovered near Qumran.¹⁶ This phrase should be reckoned as a marginal comment added by a post-septuagintal individual who wrestled with this problem even as have we. The issue remains, however, for if the Prophet's proclamation purposefully served only to enforce exultation in insensitivity, why should Yahweh insist on the Prophet's word to his people?

Closely aligned to the idea that the Prophet's word served to enforce insensitivity, Andrew F. Key suggests that Isaiah's message to Judah via his commissioning experience must be understood against a magical background. Recognizing the *דבר* in its ancient context, Key dismisses the possibility that the Prophet's word might be either a judgment derived from past experience or an intuition related to the future; rather, he judges the word of the Prophet to be essentially the word of Yahweh, which articulation once uttered has the inherent ability to effect its realization. Key states:

All this does not mean that prophetic thought gave up the idea that repentance could lead to forgiveness. The prophet is simply saying that the time for repentance is past, the day of judgment has now come, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. The prophet becomes the divinely appointed executioner. . . . The speaking of the prophetic words is not a call for repentance, but a signal for the beginning of God's actions.¹⁷

Thus, this interpretation assumes that the Prophet stands at the conclusion of a long series of Yahweh's actions and Israel's reac-

16. See William H. Brownlee, "The Text of Isaiah VI:13 in the Light of DSIa," *Vetus Testamentum*, 1 (Oct., 1951), 296-98, who admits to the final clause being a late insertion but restructures a portion of the remaining verse so as to relate the verse to the destruction of cult objects. See also Samuel Iwry, "Maṣṣēbāh and Bāmāh in 1Q Isaiah 6 13," *JBL*, 77 (Sept., 1957), 225-37, who likewise attempts to preserve *מַצֵּבָה* by textual reconstruction. To the contrary, Ivan Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah*, Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift 1949:4 (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1949), pp. 5-15, asserts in reference to these final three words that "there is no doubt that the MT represents the authentic and right reading."

17. Andrew F. Key, "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9-13," *JBL*, 86 (June, 1967), 204, but see pp. 198-204. Pagination references found in the next four paragraphs refer to Key's article.

tions; now Yahweh has deemed the time of judgment to be imminent and irreversible. While Key does not use this argument, it might have been an editorial reason for preceding the commission with chapters 1-5, as it recounts the recurring rejections of Yahweh's way by Judah.

While such a view of the Word is commendable in terms of ancient man's thought patterns, it is interpretatively unacceptable to reduce the eighth-century prophets to such an either-doom-or-hope categorization. Even Amos, who is often classified as an exclusive doom spokesman,¹⁸ has certain elements in his message which point to hope.¹⁹ Isaiah, more clearly than Amos, holds to a hope for the future of his people. When it is stated that "the speaking of the prophetic words is not a call for repentance, but a signal for the beginning of God's action," one questions whether the prophetic concern for upholding man's responsibility to respond to his God can and should be relegated to the past tense. If this be so, we are brought back to one of our primary questions: Why should the Prophet speak at all during the three political crises and, furthermore, why should he so constantly refer to the hope of the remnant?

The magical background approach, therefore, gives a reason for the Prophet's speaking, in that by uttering his message the Prophet becomes Yahweh's executioner. The present writer finds this difficult because it removes the responsibility for human response at the moment of hearing insofar as it makes Yahweh's judgmental action contingent on the Prophet's speaking (if he did not speak, the Word would not be uttered and therefore would not occur; see Key, p. 203), and really does not answer why the Prophet should continue to speak once the word of judgment has been set in motion.

In Professor Key's defense, it should be acknowledged that his

18. Julian Morgenstern, *Amos Studies* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1941), 2: 36, portrays the usual doom-oriented picture of Amos.

19. The recurring "yet you did not return to me" (Amos 4:6-11) implies the possibility of forgiveness. The harshness of 3:12 yet upholds the hope of a remnant. Note that the authenticity of a passage such as Amos 5:3-6, 14-15 is supported by J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), p. 316; and Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2: 138, argues for the authenticity of Amos 9:11-15, which passage is judged almost universally to emanate from later redactors.

article deals only with the mode of the Prophet's proclamation, our first question. He clearly states that he was not interested at the time in investigating the "presence or absence of a remnant theory in this passage" (p. 198). The question raised by verses 11-13, therefore, is simply not addressed.

Again, akin to Gray's suggestion is Walther Eichrodt's proposal that continual refusal to heed God's word leads to a moral deadening which makes impossible man's hearing that word. Eichrodt states: "Deliberate disregard of divine truth, habitual failure to listen to God's warning, inevitably lead to that deadness in regard to God's operations which at the decisive moment notices nothing, but in a stupor, asleep, or drunk, lurches irremediably toward the approaching disaster."²⁰ Israel had refused for so long to be attuned to the word of Yahweh that ultimately her "will not" became her "cannot."²¹ This interpretation would suggest that Israel's commissioned proclamation emanated from numerous occasions when Yahweh's people had refused to hear the divine word—the consistent "will not" gradually but assuredly crystallized into a firm "cannot" from which there could be no retreat. This principle holds firmly to an important tenet within Yahwism, namely, man's election by Yahweh does not remove the individual's responsibility for personal response. Human responsibility is more clearly expressed by Eichrodt than by Gray.

Man's refusal has become his inability! We recall that for the theistically-oriented Hebraic mind there was no contradiction sensed in affirming the God of creation to be behind all actions while holding to human responsibility. Given the deity's Lordship over history, it was logical to assume that he used man's actions, whatever they be, in the fulfillment of his purposes. Consequently, it was not the purpose of Isaiah's proclamation to produce obduracy; rather, it was the inevitable result, not just of his preaching, but of prior proclamation as well. From the perspective of our first question, a possible answer emerges, therefore, for in this view the people's choice has determined their inability to respond, whether this proclamation as found in verses 9-10 be preserved as spoken

20. Walther Eichrodt, 2: 432.

21. This is Eichrodt's view as summarized by von Rad, 2: 152.

by the Prophet or as formulated by a later editor who drew on the wisdom of already enacted history.

In his *Theology* Eichrodt does not directly speak to our second question, would there be an absolute devastation of Judah? He does discuss, however, the prophetic attitude which tended to see judgment as corporate rather than individual and resulting in the suffering of both the righteous and the wicked.²² Specifically, as regards the remnant concept in Isaiah, he states that "the fact that the reality of the remnant depends entirely on faith makes its use as a way of escape from the doom of judgment impossible."²³ Might we assume, therefore, that Eichrodt would sense no problem with the general tenor of Isa. 6:11-13? In fairness to Eichrodt, however, we must not ignore the covenantal orientation of his entire *Theology*. The obvious question, therefore, is whether the covenant God would effect so thorough a judgment as is indicated in verses 11-13? We can do no more than speculate on Eichrodt's judgment, however.

As noted above,²⁴ Ivan Engnell, utilizing his characteristic traditio-historical approach, defends the authenticity of the Masoretic text. Summarizing his extensive arguments for the text's authenticity does not concern us, but some of his conclusions are apropos our concern. We have asked of verses 9-10, if the response be already determined, why should the Prophet speak? Engnell judges the *העם הזה*, "this people," of verses 9-10 to refer to both Israel and Judah; but he maintains that "it is also clear that the Northern kingdom is the primary object of the prophet's message. . . ."²⁵ A reason for speaking, therefore, arises out of Isaiah's remnant concept: "It is his mission from the very beginning to foretell doom and misfortune against its apostate people, that is for its future—as far as it got one—wholly dependent on the Judæan remnant, centered around the Davidic Messiah."²⁶ Already Gray, in a slightly different context, has answered this speculation. The

22. Eichrodt, 2: 431-37.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 434.

24. See above, n. 16.

25. Engnell, p. 52. A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 89-90, avoids this problem also by asserting that this passage refers not to Judah but to Israel.

26. Engnell, p. 52.

people of verse 5 must refer to the same people as the reference in verse 9, and "in v. 5 the people must *at least* include Judah."²⁷ We should note further that Engnell does not seek to explain why Isaiah geographically confined his message to Judah. If his message were primarily for Israel, why did he not go, as did Amos, to the North with his proclamation?

Regarding the question of total destruction, Engnell does not state specifically his judgment concerning the North, which in his view will bear the brunt of Yahweh's judgment. As regards the South, his acceptance of the remnant concept would automatically preclude total devastation. In his judgment it is a violation of tradition and text to make Isaiah "a monomaniacal doom-foreteller."²⁸ He states: "*Punishment—a remnant—and a Messianic future*, that is Isaiah's teaching as we know it, and as we must therefore believe it to have been."²⁹ Our second question, therefore, would be resolved by maintaining the preservation of at least Judah's remnant when Yahweh's judgment is delivered.

Gerhard von Rad insists that an understanding of *Heilsgeschichte* elucidates the spiritual obduracy concept. He maintains that it is insufficient to focus on a type of divine *lex talionis*, for Israel's relationship with Yahweh was more personalized than such an automatic reaction concept implies.³⁰ Nor is a psychological or devotional explanation adequate, for such views would focus on the hardening as an end rather than as the means to an end. "Absolutely everything in Isaiah points out into the future—even the saying about the hardening of Israel's heart which is the action of Jahweh himself."³¹ It was Isaiah's conviction, according to von Rad, that in the future "all that had fallen on completely deaf ears in his own day and generation will be fulfilled."³²

Isaiah's hope for his nation's future lends support to interpreting this imposed obduracy in terms of the *Heilsgeschichte*. Isa. 9:2-7, a messianic kingship hymn, anticipates the inauguration of the mes-

27. Gray, p. 110.

28. Engnell, p. 53.

29. *Ibid.*

30. See von Rad, p. 152.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

32. *Ibid.*

sianic king for whose reign there will be no termination, the thoroughgoing establishment of Yahweh's reign.³³ Indeed the remnant concept as expressed in Isa. 7:1-17 assumes that even in the event of the most devastating disaster, Yahweh assures the preservation of his people.³⁴

Von Rad's interpretation deals with both of the questions raised by the commissioning experience of Isaiah.¹ The Prophet recognized the ineffectuality of his message, but this recognition struck no fatalistic overtones. The God of the Covenant was the God of judgment and love—his love (אהבה) had elected Israel as his people, his love (חסד) would also preserve Israel as his people.³⁵ Consistent with Isaiah's perspective was his proceeding with his proclamation in spite of almost assured immediate failure. He was convinced that Yahweh would bring out of his seeming failure a surer awareness of Himself. There is every reason for the Prophet to speak, therefore, for the hope of the future, while secured in Yahweh's unique relationship with his people, is in part predicated upon the Prophet's proclamation.

As regards the question of total destruction, von Rad's assumption that a limitation upon destruction is implied appears sound. Both the general understanding of *Heilsgeschichte*, of which the prophets in general and Isaiah in particular were cognizant, and the remnant concept so clearly maintained by Isaiah suggest that the preservation of at least a part of Judah is a necessity. Yahweh will not abandon his people!

Each of the hermeneutical approaches which has been mentioned has inherent strengths and weaknesses. In general, however, it is not unfair to affirm that failure to evaluate the entire presentation of Isaiah's message has often narrowed the obduracy concept to an incident too minutely defined. We must never lose sight of the

33. This would not be altered if this hymn were originally used in reference to Hezekiah.

34. It should be acknowledged that a comparison of Isa. 7:1-17 with 10:20-23 makes difficult an understanding of the remnant concept. Was it a sign of hope or of judgment? Was it viewed one way at the beginning of the ministry, another at the termination?

35. See especially Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1944), pp. 94-95, but see also fuller treatments of chapters 5 and 6.

fact that Yahweh's people possess more than just a present; they also are a part of their past and because of the covenant-God have an assurance of a future.

It is imperative, therefore, that we interpret Isa. 6:9-13, not as an isolated logion, but rather as a means to an end, i. e. the more complete manifestation of the covenant-God and, concomitantly, as the fulfillment of his covenant purpose. Just as the Pharaoh's heart was hardened "to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Exod. 9:16, RSV), so, we must conclude on the basis of Israel's past history, the covenant concept, and Isaiah's larger message, that Isaiah envisioned his nation's developing a stubbornness and refusal of hearing as a result of his preaching but with the end result that Judah's more complete understanding and acceptance of Yahweh might evolve. Such an evolution would assume action in accord with understanding!

According to Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, Isa. 6:11 is cited as example of a Hebrew grammatical usage expressing "actions or facts, which are meant to be indicated as existing in the future in a completed state. . . ." ³⁶ The completion idea conveyed by this passage implies a time limitation upon the obduracy, with the recognition that Yahweh will utilize impending destruction as the divine revelatory instrument. Isaiah, then, would proclaim a message much like Amos (see Amos 3:9-12; 5:3; 6:9-10). Like Amos, Isaiah recognized imminent but only partially defined danger for the nation; but we acknowledge that Judah's reduction to an Assyrian vassal state in 721 B.C. was only the earnest of his conviction. The full impact of this danger was recognized in 597/587 B.C. ³⁷ when Judah fell to Babylonia. How long will Judah's stubbornness prevail? Until her cities lie waste! There is in this both the recognition of judgment and hope of restoration. This logion stands within the *Heilsgeschichte* tradition.

Thus we would see the most probable solution to the hermeneutical problems raised by Isaiah's commissioning experience to be derived as one relates that commission to both Isaiah's and Israel's total experience. The word of Yahweh must be recognized

36. Emil Friedrich Kautzsch, ed. and enlarger, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed. rev. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 313.

37. And 582 B.C. according to Jer. 52:28-30.

as a two-edged sword, cutting both to preserve and to judge. That sword even in judgment, however, inevitably hopes for preservation. All of the long history of Yahweh's dealing with man supports this *Heilsgeschichte* conclusion.

PARABLE PURPOSE

As suggested by F. W. Beare, "There is hardly an area of New Testament study which has witnessed such far-reaching changes in this century as our understanding of the Parables of Jesus."³⁸ Beginning especially with the publication in 1899 of Adolf Jülicher's *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, the widely accepted allegorical approach to parable interpretation was refuted. C. H. Dodd followed in 1935 with *The Parables of the Kingdom*, in which he emphasized parable interpretation in the context of Jesus' Kingdom proclamation. In the spirit of Dodd's work, in 1947 Joachim Jeremias crystallized further the impact of Dodd's methodology with his *The Parables of Jesus*, while making an important contribution himself by emphasizing that the contextual setting of Jesus' parables had been lost in the process of transmission by the early church.³⁹

We emphasize, therefore, that our efforts to discern Jesus' purpose in his usage of parables is neither predetermined by past critical contributions nor so obvious as to reduce the exercise to one of mental gymnastics. There may indeed be at hand a clue, if we can discern such, to the understanding of Jesus and the early church.

The synoptic witness to parable purpose (Mark 4:10-12;⁴⁰ Luke 8:9-10; Matt. 13:10-15) uniformly suggests by drawing on Isa. 6:9-10⁴¹ (explicitly so in Matthew) that Jesus' purpose in relating parables was to make obscure his message so that those who were enlightened might recognize truth while those not so

38. *The Earliest Records of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 105.

39. See brief but helpful summaries in *ibid.*, pp. 105-8, and Hunter, pp. 35-41.

40. J. Couatts, "Those Outside' (Mark 4, 10-12)," *Studia Evangelica*, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 2: 155-57, dismisses the problem by asserting that 4:10-12 is misplaced in Mark, that the passage should follow 3:20-35.

41. H. D. A. Major, in H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson, and C. J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1938), p. 70, suggests that parable purpose must be understood in relation to the remnant concept of Isa. 6.

gifted might remain in darkness.⁴² Customarily interpreters have affirmed that such a teaching motivation would have been incompatible with the basic nature of a parable, i. e. a simple and easily comprehended narrative drawn from the commonplace elements of existence which attempted to make emphatic one central point.

Since many interpreters have judged the synoptic tradition to be either misleading or misinformed as regards parable purpose, various objections to the apparent intention of the text as presently formulated have been raised: (1) Jesus' parables were intended to make clear rather than to obscure his message to the crowds upon whom he had such manifest compassion;⁴³ (2) the veiled understanding of Jesus' parables exemplifies the imposed "messianic secret" motif found in Mark's Gospel;⁴⁴ (3) the enigmatic parable purpose arose as an explanation on the part of the church to clarify why the Jews accepted neither Jesus nor the church;⁴⁵ and (4) the difficulty arose as a result of the church's clothing Jesus' parables with an esoteric flavor or orienting Jesus as a teacher toward a type of gnostic perspective, i. e. understanding Jesus' message according to the Hellenistic religions of the day.⁴⁶ Numerous other objections to the apparent parables intention as preserved by the synoptic witness have also been stated.⁴⁷

Joachim Jeremias's comment on this difficult logion is char-

42. "The reason which Matthew gives is that the parables hide the message from the unbelievers, but convey it to those who believe." J. C. Fenton, *The Gospel of St Matthew* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 215. Usage of "Matthew" to designate the Gospel, even when used in parallel with Mark and Luke in terms of authorship, is not intended to indicate an acceptance of Matthean authorship.

43. See as example B. Harvie Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark* (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 78.

44. See Frederick C. Grant, "The Gospel According to Mark: Introduction and Exegesis," *IB*, 7: 699-700.

45. Branscomb states: "It is plain that we have to do with a theological explanation which the early Church created" (p. 78). C. H. Dodd, however, states: "But that he desired not to be understood by the people in general, and therefore clothed His teaching in unintelligible forms, cannot be made credible on any reasonable reading of the Gospels." *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1961), p. 4.

46. Note Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1954), pp. 10-11. See also Grant, p. 636.

47. See D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 135-37; also J. Arthur Baird, "A Pragmatic Approach to Parable Exegesis: Some New Evidence on Mark 4:11, 33-34," *JBL*, 76 (Sept., 1957), 201-7. It can be only conjecture, but one wonders if the Fourth Evangelist's avoidance of parables resulted from an erroneous understanding of the parables common in the early church, which understanding coincided not at all with this Evangelist's concept of the clearly revealed Christ. See above n. 4.

acteristic: "The secret of the present Kingdom is disclosed to the disciples, but to the outsiders the words of Jesus remain obscure because they do not recognize his mission nor repent."⁴⁸ This was apparently the synoptic impression: Is this concept totally erroneous or is there historical awareness embedded in this passage? There would appear to be at least three lines of argument which help to clarify the synoptic understanding of parable purpose.

In the first place, the synoptics possibly recorded Jesus' parable purpose from a later perspective of rejection and refusal, creating a situation analogous to that often suggested for Isaiah. It is this point that Branscomb emphasizes when he judges that "we have to do with a theological explanation which the early Church created."⁴⁹

In our earlier discussion of the Isaianic passage, we rejected the idea that the Prophet's commission was anachronistically formulated on the basis of a rejection of the Prophet and his message which pervaded his ministry. For our synoptic passage, however, the same negative argument cannot be used. The Gospel tradition, which is supported by the fact of forcible death, witnesses to Jesus' rejection at least by the religious leadership. Questions of authorship, dating, and provenance are of no import for this issue.⁵⁰ So long as the writer was oriented post-crucifixion,⁵¹ the fact of Jesus' rejection was evident. We acknowledge that early Christian recorders and interpreters of the Gospel could and perhaps did emphasize the fact of rejection (as was the case with Mark) in order to ensure the correlation of their accounts with personal perspectives. This does not preclude our accepting that Jesus was misunderstood and rejected both by the religious leaders and ultimately by the masses. From the perspective of the canonical evangelists' post-crucifixion vantage point, therefore, we can understand why Jesus' purpose in using parables has seemed so enigmatic.

48. Jeremias, p. 15.

49. Branscomb, p. 78.

50. See the still helpful study by Frederick C. Grant, *The Earliest Gospel* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943).

51. We note only that the essential unity of Mark is generally assumed, attempts to prove to the contrary having gained less than scholarly consensus. See, for example, Grant, "Gospel According to Mark," p. 636.

Second, the Marcan concept of imposed spiritual obduracy was not the earliest recorded such usage in the New Testament. Mark's understanding was not unique, therefore; he derived his explanation from a rather well developed ecclesiastical tradition.

The most important witness to this tradition stems from Romans 9-11, where Paul, as one involved existentially (Rom. 11:1), attempted to clarify why the Jews had so manifestly rejected both Jesus and early Christian preaching.⁵² For one who judged preaching to be essential to man's understanding God and Jesus the Christ (Rom. 10:14), the Jewish rejection of the kerygma raised difficult questions.

In Rom. 11:25-32,⁵³ Paul sought to answer the questions raised by the Jewish spiritual obduracy via a threefold formulation: (1) Israel's rejection of the kerygma was both partial and temporary;⁵⁴ (2) Israel's rejection made possible the Gentile entrance into the Kingdom; and (3) Israel will ultimately accept the kerygma and will be reconciled with God through Christ. Experimentally-oriented, Paul expressed the conviction that the Gentile entrance into the Kingdom was a direct result of divinely inflicted and purposeful Jewish spiritual obduracy; but ultimately the obdurate Jews also would accept the kerygma. As expressed by one commentator: "The 'mystery' is that the Gentiles are both the beneficiaries of the Israelites' lapse, and also the means of the salvation of those very Israelites. . . ."⁵⁵

We cannot digress extensively into the divergent reactions to this Pauline affirmation. To indicate the diversity, however, we

52. Beare, p. 111, mentions explicitly the relationship noted here: "Mark has compounded the difficulty by combining with this theory of an esoteric revelation through parables a doctrine of the reprobation of Israel akin to that which is expounded by St. Paul in Romans ix-xi."

53. See the excellent study by Richard Batey, "'So All Israel Will Be Saved,' An Interpretation of Romans 11:25-32," *Interpretation*, 20 (Apr., 1966), 218-28; and the more definitive study by Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel*, trans. Ingeborg Nixon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

54. Paul actually dealt with three distinct categories. On the one hand, there was the Jew like himself who did believe; with this group there was no problem. There was also the Jew, however, who refused to believe; and it was with this group's continued relationship with God that he was so concerned. And finally, there was the Gentile, i. e. the non-Israelite.

55. D. W. B. Robinson, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 9-11," *Reformed Theological Review*, 26 (Sept.-Dec., 1967), 93, but see entire presentation, pp. 81-96. See also W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948), p. 76.

note the following: Was Paul a universalist?⁵⁶ Was he more governed by ideas of predestination?⁵⁷ Was he writing with reference to a future judgment?⁵⁸ Or does this passage exemplify merely national prejudice?⁵⁹

No such theologically- or nationally-oriented reaction alone sufficiently probes the apostle's Israelite historical heritage. We stated initially: "Ancient man was convinced that behind actions and events stood personal cause rather than impersonal or natural sequential occurrence" (p. 87). Specifically, the Hebraic mind affirmed that behind all thought and action stood Yahweh; the דבר of God revealed to man acted as a continually cutting sword which served to divide the faithful from the faithless.⁶⁰ This thought pattern supported or evoked Paul's Romans exposition and the synoptic Evangelists' statements on parable purpose.⁶¹

For understanding parable purpose, a study by J. Arthur Baird⁶² is helpful. Baird accepted as material with which to work sixty-three parables attributed to Jesus. He then sought to analyze each parable according to two criteria: (1) whether the audience to whom Jesus spoke was constituted of disciples or non-disciples; and (2) whether the parable was explained or unexplained. He

56. C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), p. 184. See also Robinson, pp. 81-96; and E. C. Blackman, "Divine Sovereignty and Missionary Strategy in Romans 9-11," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 11 (Apr., 1965), 133, supported by pp. 124-34.

57. John Calvin, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, trans. John Owens (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1947), p. 437.

58. John Knox, "The Epistle to the Romans: Exegesis," *IB*, 9: 576-77.

59. Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 183, states: "We can well understand that his emotional interest in his own people, rather than strict logic, has determined his forecast."

60. See, for one example, Exod. 19:5-6, where it is stated that "if you will obey . . . keep . . . you shall be my own possession. . . ." Note also that the verb "to hear" (שמע) connotes not only "hearing" but also "doing." He who truly "hears" responds with "actions." See Snaith, p. 141.

61. James M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark*, Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 21 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1957), p. 77, asserts that the problem of understanding revolves around "two levels of 'hearing': one is 'hearing but not understanding' (4.12); the other is the 'hearing' for which the chapter repeatedly calls (vv. 3, 9, 23, 24; ch. 7.14)." The existentialist theologians, consequently, recognizing man's basic nature in terms of decision, focus on a central aspect of the Christian message. See, for example, Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), pp. 51-56, especially p. 52. See also Beare, p. 53.

62. The author acknowledges his indebtedness for the content of this paragraph to Baird's article (see n. 47) and pagination references are to same.

concluded that forty-one were explained while twenty-two were left unexplained (p. 206). To the disciples twenty-eight were explained, while thirteen were explained to non-disciples. Only seven were left unexplained to disciples, while fifteen were left unexplained to non-disciples. Graphically this becomes the clearer:

	<i>Disciples</i>	<i>Non-disciples</i>	<i>Totals</i>
<i>Audience</i>	35	28	63
<i>Explanations</i>	28	13	41
<i>Non-explanations</i>	7	15	22

Baird states that "we observe what is perhaps our survey's most striking feature, namely the rough arithmetic ratio of twice the number of parables explained to the disciples . . . as to the non-disciples, and twice the number of parables left unexplained to the non-disciples . . . as to the disciples . . ." (p. 206). It is thus possible for Baird to conclude: "Behind this inner consistency of the Synoptic sources lies not an artificial creation forced in some arbitrary manner upon the recollections of the early Church, but rather the inner consistency of the mind and purpose of Jesus, preserved for us in sufficiently accurate detail to be recognizable" (p. 207). Thus, according to Baird's judgment, the basic principle of Mark 4:11-12 and parallels presents an authentic record of Jesus' parable intention.

Our primary point is simply that Mark was not the first New Testament contributor to utilize the imposed spiritual obduracy concept as explanation for Jewish rejection of Jesus' message. Paul had already expressed similar conviction in a more developed form. Given the traditional association of the Marcan Gospel with Rome, Paul's Roman correspondence looms even larger as a possible influence upon Mark's understanding of Jesus' parable purpose.⁶³ We emphasize, however, that the Pauline viewpoint may recount history per se rather than theologized history. A study such as Baird's raises the possibility that Jesus did indeed give

63. Other places in the Pauline corpus have similar emphasis but without the ample explanation of Rom. 9-11. See, as example, II Cor. 3:12-18.

explanations of the parables to his disciples more readily than to non-disciples.

Third, our earlier Isaianic investigation encourages examination of the synoptic parable purpose in terms of the *Heilsgeschichte* concept. *Heilsgeschichte* assumes the interrelatedness of past, present, and future, with the confident expectation that history will ultimately reveal God's purpose. This expectancy of the consummation of divine purpose permeates the Marcan Gospel, as is true also of Matthew and Luke. Furthermore, for the latter two, the awareness of *Heilsgeschichte* is the more transparent by virtue of the nativity narratives encompassing the genealogical affirmations. As regards Mark, if it be true that this Gospel was an elaboration of the kerygma,⁶⁴ a more *Heilsgeschichte* format would be difficult to envision. What further evidences of *Heilsgeschichte* orientation relative to our investigation do we confront in the synoptics?

We noted earlier that the existentialist theologians⁶⁵ emphasize that Jesus' message forced his hearer to assume his full humanity, to be creature confronted by and participating in the processes of decision making. No aspect of Jesus' message more clearly depicts this than his parables. With whom will you align yourself? For what will you seek? Whenever the individual is confronted by such ultimate decisions, the mode of confrontation is essentially a means of judgment. Each person reacts, and as the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20) illustrates, that reaction is already judgment. This view coalesces with the *Heilsgeschichte* concept in that characteristic of Yahwism-Judaism is the affirmation that the covenant-God perpetually seeks man, thereby forcing the creature ultimately to make the choice so aptly phrased in the Hebrew Scriptures: "Who is on Yahweh's side?" (Exod. 32:26); "Choose this day whom you will serve . . ." (Josh. 24:15). Jesus' parables as preserved characteristically confront man with the ultimate choice in life—reaction to God and the establishment of his Kingdom. Past, present, and future are necessarily bound together in this confrontation and choice.

64. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), pp. 46-52, especially pp. 46-47.

65. See above n. 61.

When investigating Isaiah's commission, we expressed the conviction that it would be sheer folly for Yahweh to compel Isaiah to serve as *nabi* if the Prophet's function were fulfilled in the causing of consternation and confusion. Viewing the history of Yahweh's relationship with men would not permit so negative a conclusion for the Prophet's role; Isaiah's commission must have conveyed the possibility of rectifying the relationship, else the Prophet would have had nothing to proclaim.

For Jesus and his usage of parables, the situation is analogous. If the parables were intended only to confuse and confound, there would have been no need to speak. Rather than being characteristically enigmatic, it would have been easier and more practical to restrict his teaching to the chosen disciples. The fact that Jesus did not choose this alternative indicates that he was interested in and tried to make his message lucid for the masses.⁶⁶

It is possible that Mark made an error in judgment with his usage of this portion of the tradition. Vincent Taylor notes that Jesus would have been cognizant of semitic idiom which often used "a command to express a result. . . ."⁶⁷ Being aware of this, Jesus would have been "impressed by the similarity between the results of His ministry and the experience of Isaiah . . . after the failure of the Mission of the Twelve and his own fruitless activity in Chozrazim, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. . . ."⁶⁸ Jesus' usage of the Isaianic passage, therefore, had a justifiable particular placement in his own ministry, a placement which the synoptics have eradicated completely by associating this logion with parable purpose in general.

As indicated early in this study, we do not wish to become embroiled in semantic and linguistic arguments. It is apropos our investigation, however, to recall that Matthew quoted the Isaianic commission from the Septuagint rather than from the Masoretic text. One could not rely solely on this point since Matthew usually

66. See above, n. 45, for Dodd's comment.

67. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), pp. 254-58. Possibly the problem resulted from difficulties in linguistic transmission, a position advocated early by C. C. Torrey, i. e. a confusion resulting from the koine Greek's usage of *iva* to translate the Aramaic *di*, the latter of which had greater purposive force than the former. See also Grant, "Gospel According to Mark," p. 699.

68. Taylor, p. 258.

quoted from the Septuagint, but the Septuagint in Isaiah 6 differs significantly from the Masoretic text in that the former indicates that the people will not be able to hear because their hearts are hardened, while the latter indicates that God commissioned Isaiah to harden the peoples' hearts. The difference lies in cause (Masoretic text) and effect (Septuagint). Is it possible that Matthew was trying to indicate proper perspective by his usage?⁶⁹ To use Taylor's concluding statement: "This suggestion cannot be proved, but it is in every way superior to the view that iv. 11 f. is a Marcan invention."⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

We conclude that the synoptic writers understood Jesus' purpose in teaching by parables as the historical awareness of Jesus' ministry and their own existential situation dictated, namely, that (1) Jesus' mission and message had indeed been rejected by the Jews (Mark 4:10-12; cf. John 12:36b-50); (2) earlier interpreters such as Paul (Romans 9-11) had discerned properly the reasoning behind such rejection; (3) man's rejection or acceptance of God must be understood in terms of the *Heilsgeschichte* rather than being narrowly confined to man's limited view of history; (4) God's message to man inevitably cuts to redeem and to judge; and (5) the covenant-God must by his very nature be concerned with all men, not a nation or a people in isolation.

We find irresolvable a basic question, i. e. is the parable purpose as recorded by Mark, and especially as elaborated by Matthew, derived from the early church or from Jesus? This uncertainty is the case because logical placement in both Jesus' ministry⁷¹ and that of the early church is discernible.

69. Matthew's Gospel was the only Gospel to incorporate certain sayings attributed to Jesus (10:5-6; 15:24) which apparently supported an exclusively Jewish mission for Jesus and his disciples. If these sayings be authentic, and we would judge this likely (see Beare, p. 81), it is significant that Matthew (28:19-20) has also included uniquely a logion attributed to the resurrected Christ which speaks of universal concern. These passages point to: (1) an ever-present problem for the expanding mission of the church, a problem inherited from Judaism; and (2) an understanding of covenant which is Israelite in its best expression (Exod. 19:5-6; Isa. 42:6).

70. Taylor, p. 258. We note that whether or not the *Heilsgeschichte* view be accepted, a passage such as Mark 4:22 assuredly indicates that Mark did not assume exclusively a negative posture.

71. As long as one assumes that some awareness of the Jesus of history can be garnered from the Gospels, this statement holds. If *Formgeschichte* be pushed to its logical

For Jesus, being a zealous Jew and being prophetically oriented, it was inevitable that his awareness of the past would impress upon him the necessity of man's decision when confronted by God's word. Furthermore, Jesus was aware that the prophets of his people had not been warmly received (Matt. 5:12; Luke 6:23). Their word from God had acted as a word of judgment for many individuals who heard what was expected of them but made no positive response. They "heard" without "hearing"; they "saw" without "seeing." Such was the case when the Prophet from Nazareth spoke. His message fell mainly on unreceptive ears. His contemporaries, like those of the earlier prophets, refused to hear and to do. Thus, it is possible to envision Jesus' having recognized the similarity between his message and the reaction to that message by the hearers when this was compared to the commissioning experience of Isaiah.

There is equally good argument for seeing the application of this logion within the context of the church. There was, on the one hand, the reality of history, a history punctuated by rejection and refusal to hear. This rejection was the dominant characteristic of Israel's reaction to the early church, even during that brief span from the crucifixion until the penning of Mark's Gospel, a more intense rejection than that directed toward Jesus. Johannes Munck states: "There can be no doubt that the early church's discussion of Israel's fate had an influence on the transmission of Jesus' words and deeds and on the final shaping of the tradition as found in our four Gospels."⁷²

Second, we cannot ignore the influence of Pauline understanding on the thought structure of the church in general and on the expanding Gentile mission in particular. This influence is probably most clearly seen in the aforementioned Romans 9-11 passage. Paul's view of Jewish obduracy inevitably would have influenced other early Christians.

Third, the synoptic view of parable purpose accords with the *Heilsgeschichte* concept. Mark's concern for the ultimate clarification

extreme (it is impossible in any sense to move beyond the early church's Christ of faith to the Jesus of history) the statement would be acknowledged inappropriate at that point.

72. P. 20.

of the parables (4:22) agrees with the Matthean conviction that the resurrected Christ expanded the original, more narrowly confined Jewish mission of the historical Jesus. Both the parable purpose concept and the Matthean exclusive passages may be attempts to relate history as observed. It is the conviction of the essential vitality of the word of the resurrected Christ (as Matt. 28:19-20) which has bestowed upon the church a mobility and universality not characteristic of Yahwism-Judaism in the main stream of its expression.

We find, therefore, that an attempt to clarify Isa. 6:9-13 does offer some hermeneutical assistance in interpreting synoptic parable purpose. While one cannot make dogmatic affirmations either about Isaiah's commission or Jesus' parable purpose, certain similar presuppositions may be applied to both passages: (1) the Prophet of Jerusalem and the Prophet of Nazareth were concerned to speak meaningfully to their people; (2) both prophets were convinced of Yahweh's enduring and unalterable concern for his people; (3) both men emerged from a context that took history seriously and recognized man's meaningful place therein, i. e. a *Heilsgeschichte* perspective; (4) both spokesmen understood Yahweh to be the Lord of history, the covenant-God, who would not so thoroughly reject his people as to leave them without the hope of redemption; and (5) both prophets recognized that Yahweh placed upon man the burden of receptive hearing, relegating to man thereby both the bane and blessing of serving as personal judge!