

When “Hope” is a Verb: A Study of the Communal Hope in Isaiah 59

Peter Tran Xuan Vu, SVD*

Divine Word School of Theology, Tagaytay City, Cavite, Philippines

Abstract: The Book of the Prophet Isaiah does not use the noun “hope” (תִּקְוָה, *tiqwāh*), but rather various verbal roots, such as קוּה (qwh), יחל (yhl), חכה (hkh), to formulate the action “to hope.” Moreover, Isaiah’s vision of hope is expressed with a particular target in a concrete situation-in-life (*Sitz im Leben*). This study explores the centrality of communal hope amid the woundedness in Isaiah 59, arguing that the specific content of hoping action, “We hope for the justice” (נִקְוָה לַמִּשְׁפָּט, *naqaweh lammišpāt*, v. 11), in the Isaian community, emerges from the “postexilic exile” context, in which both the Lord and people felt the absence of justice (אין מִשְׁפָּט, *’ên mišpāt*). The desperate state of justice in the Isaian community is considered the reasonable background of the violent depiction of God and the preferential employment of verbs over nouns to express the communal hope in Isaiah 59. The relevance of Isaiah’s way of describing the communal hope for justice is convincingly presented in the communities and societies where justice is absent due to the wickedness of tyrannical government. The paper appeals to its readers’ sympathy with the victims of injustice brought about by the “Extrajudicial Killings” (EJKs) or “Extralegal Killings” (ELKs). Isaiah 59, indeed, is the prophetic message of hope for justice at the intervention of the Lord.

Keywords: hope, justice, violence, innocent blood, postexilic exile, YHWH

* Peter Tran Xuan Vu, SVD can be contacted at s tranxuanvusvd@gmail.com.

Abbreviations

Most abbreviations in this paper follow the style in Billie Jean J. Collins et al. (ed.), *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*, 2nd ed. (SBL Press, 2014). A few other entries are drawn from Siegfried M. Schwertner, *IATG 3: Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete: Zeitschriften, Serien, Lexika, Quellenwerke mit bibliographischen* (De Gruyter 2014).

1QIsa ^a	Isaiah a
1QIsa ^b	Isaiah b
BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BCE	before the Common Era
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. A Hebrew and English dictionary
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	Gesenius, W., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch and translated by A. E. Cowley. Dover, 2026
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Brill, 1994–1999
HBM	Hebrew Bible monographs
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series Lexicon of the Old Testament
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek OT)
Ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text (of the HB)
NAB	New American Bible
NAS	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary

NET	New English Translation
NIRV	New International Reader’s Version
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the the Traditional Hebrew Text
NRS	New Revised Standard Version Bible (1989)
NRSVCE	New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
pl.	plural
ROT	Reading the Old Testament
SCSt	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
sg.	singular
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
Syr.	Greenberg, Gillian and Donald M. Walter, trans. <i>The Syriac Peshitta Bible with English Translation: Isaiah</i> (Gorgias Press 2012)
Tg. Isa.	Targum Isaiah
TNK	The new translation into contemporary English of the Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text Traditional Hebrew Text
v(v).	verse(s)
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
Vulg.	Vulgate
WeBC	Westminster Bible Companion

Introduction

Hope is one of the main profound theological themes of Isaiah’s vision. It is expressed in different modes: explicit and implicit. It is presented intertwined with oracles of “doom” or judgment. It covers the extended period (8th century BCE – 5th century BCE) in the history of the Israelites. Thus, Isaiah’s vision of hope is expressed from the pre-Assyrian exile through the exilic periods in Assyria and Babylonia up to the post-Babylonian exile.

This paper first presents the explicit expression of hope in the Isaian corpus, focusing on the usage of the Hebrew verbal root for the verb “to hope for, to wait for” [קוה (*qwh*), יחל (*yhl*), חכה (*hkh*)] in a concrete situation in life (*Sitz im Leben*). Then, the particular theme of communal hope amid woundedness in Isaiah 59 is discussed. This study concerns the dominant use of the verbal form to express the communal hope in the Isaian community. It argues that the specific content of the hoping action, “We hope for the justice” (נִקְוָה לַמִּשְׁפָּט, *nəqaweh lammišpāt*) in Isa 59:11, emerges from the “postexilic exile”¹ situation of the Isaian community, in which both the Lord (יהוה, *YHWH*) and people felt the absence of justice (אֵין מִשְׁפָּט, *’ên mišpāt*). The desperate state of the Isaian community is considered the reasonable background of the violent depiction of the Lord and the preference for verbs over nouns to express communal hope. Such an insight is drawn from the “diachronically reflected synchrony”² approach to Isaiah 59.³

The Explicit Expression of Hope in Isaiah’s Vision

In the Hebrew Bible, there are three roots of the verb “to hope for, to wait for”: קוה (*qwh*), יחל (*yhl*), חכה (*hkh*). Among these, קוה (*qwh*) is mostly used (41 times) in the *piel* verbal form to convey hope explicitly. Its majority usage is in wisdom writings, such as Psalms (16 times), Job (5 times), Proverbs (1 time), and Lamentations (2 times). Unlike other prophetic books, Isaiah does not use the noun תקה for “hope”⁴ (תקוה, *tiqwāh*), it, instead, uses the verbal form (15 times). The most

¹ This term was coined by Bradley C. Gregory as a reference to the socio-historical context of the Third Isaiah (56–66), especially Isa 63:1-3. He describes, “A prophet in *postexilic* Palestine is preaching as though he were in exile. In other words, even though the situation he is addressing is after the end of the historical exile, the presupposition of his message is that the exile is in some way continuing.” See Bradley C. Gregory, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah. Isaiah 61:1-3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics,” *JBL* 126/3 (2007): 488. This hermeneutical lens is also shared by modern scholars. For example, Dempsey points out the struggles of the returnees in their homeland after their exilic period in Babylon (roughly 539-400 BCE, specifically around 520 BCE, just before the temple’s rebuilding). See Carol J. Dempsey, OP, “Third Isaiah” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. John J. Collins, et al. (T&T Clark, 2022), 862.

² This approach traces the biblical texts in broad strokes (*in den großen Linien*), i.e., equal consideration of diachrony and synchrony. The exegetical process, therefore, starts with the final text (synchrony), but it also considers the historical development process(es) of the text (diachrony). See Ulrich F. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form*, trans. Millard C. Lind; HBM 46 (Sheffield Phoenix Press 2012), 34. The original name of this approach in the German language, *diachron reflektierte Synchronie*, can be found in Ulrich F. Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt*, Herdes Biblische Studien 16 (Herder, 1998), 10.

³ Chapter 59 should also be read in the literary context of the whole book, as recently proposed by scholars. See Benedetta Rossi, Dominic S. Irudayaraj and Gina Hens-Piazza, eds., *Unity in the Book of Isaiah*, Library of Biblical Studies/Old Testament Studies (T&T Clark, 2024).

⁴ It occurs in Jeremiah (29:11; 31:17), Ezekiel (19:5; 37:11), Hosea (2:17), Zechariah 9:12), Psalms (9:19; 62:6; 71:5), Job (4:6; 5:16; 6:8; 7:6; 8:13; 11:18.20; 14:7.19; 17:15; 19:10; 27:8), Proverbs (10:28; 11:7.23; 19:18; 23:18; 24:14; 26:12; 29:20), Ruth (1:12), and Lamentations (3:29).

frequent occurrence of the verb “to hope” testifies to the significance of the hope motif, among other theological themes, in Isaiah’s vision.

*The Lord’s Hope (Isa 5:1-7)*⁵

It is interesting to note that the first explicit expression of hope in Isaiah’s vision is used for the Lord (יהוה, *YHWH*). The root for the verb “to hope for, to wait for”, קוה (*qwh*), is used 3 times in the parable of the Lord’s Vineyard (vv. 2, 4, 7). This parable is extended to cover the whole social life of the Lord’s people (the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah). Being the owner of the “vineyard,” the Lord hopes for the good grapes (עֲנָבִים, *ʿanāḥîm*); however, it yielded the rotten grapes (בָּצָאִים, *bə ʿušîm*). The implied meaning of “good grapes” is revealed at the end as “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט, *mišpāṭ*) and “righteousness” (צְדָקָה, *ṣedāqāh*).

In contrast, the “rotten grapes” are “bloodshed/oppression/violence/injustice” (מִשְׁפָּח, *mišpāḥ*) and “cry of distress”/ “iniquity” (צָעָקָה, *ṣə ʿāqāh*). Here, Isaiah presents the reality of the divine nurture being turned to rejection. Hence, the Lord’s hope is turned to desperation by his people.

Declaration of One’s Hope for/in the Lord

Isa 8:17 – I will wait for the Lord (וַחֲכִיתִי לַיהוָה, *waḥikīṭī l’ ʿādōnāy*) who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him (וַקְוִיתִי-לוֹ, *waqīwwīṭī-lō*).

Isa 25:9 – Lo, this is our God;
we have waited for him (קָוִינוּ לוֹ, *qīwwīnū lō*)
so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited
(קָוִינוּ לוֹ, *qīwwīnū lō*);
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Isa 26:8 – In the path of your judgments,
O Lord, we wait for you (קָוִינוּךָ, *qīwwīnūkā*)

Isa 33:2 – O Lord, be gracious to us;
we wait for you⁶ (לְךָ קָוִינוּ, *ləkā qīwwīnū*).
Be our arm every morning,
our salvation in the time of trouble.

⁵ All scriptural citations in this paper are from NRSVCE; unless otherwise noted.

⁶ “We hope in you” (NJB).

The Lord's Assurance of Benefit for Those who Hope in Him

Isa 49:23 – Kings shall be your foster fathers,
 and their queens your nursing mothers.
 With their faces to the ground
 they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet.
 Then you will know that I am the Lord;
 those who wait for me shall not be put to shame
 (אָפּער לֹא-יִבְשׁוּ קוֹי, 'āšer lō 'yēḥōšwū qōway).

Isa 51:5 – I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,
 my salvation has gone out
 and my arms will rule the peoples;
 the coastlands wait for me (אֵלַי אַיִים יִקְווּ, 'ēlay 'iyyîm yaqawwû)⁷
 and for my arm they hope. (וְאֶל-זְרֹעִי יִיחָלוּ, wə 'el- zərō 'î yaḡahēlûn)⁸

Isa 60:9 – For the coastlands shall wait for me (לִי אַיִים יִקְווּ, lî 'iyyîm zaqawwû),⁹
 the ships of Tarshish first,
 to bring your children from far away,
 their silver and gold with them,
 for the name of the Lord your God,
 and for the Holy One of Israel,
 because he has glorified you.
 Unexpected Theophany

Isa 64:1-3 – ¹O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
 so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
²as when fire kindles brushwood
 and the fire causes water to boil—
 to make your name known to your adversaries,
 so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
³When you did awesome deeds
 that we did not expect (לֹא יִקְוֶה, lō 'naqawweh),
 you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

Having briefly surveyed the verbal forms associated with “hope” in the Isaian corpus, we now move to examine how the Isaian community’s hope is expressed in

⁷ “The coasts and islands will put their hope in me” (NJB).

⁸ “They shall look to My arm” (TNK).

⁹ “The coasts and islands put their hope in me” (NJB).

Chapter 59. It is essential to note, at this point, that the prophet’s choice of verbal form, rather than a noun, does not merely convey psychological waiting or passive longing; it reveals a relational stance before God shaped by covenant, justice, and salvation. The language of “hope” here becomes theology in motion: the way Israel hopes exposes both the depth of human helplessness and the persistence of trust that reaches beyond immediate historical failure. Thus, the grammar of Isaiah 59 invites us to ask not only “how” hope is expressed, but “in whom” hope is ultimately placed and “what kind of future” God is bringing into being.

The Communal Act of Hoping in Isaiah 59

The hope of the Isaian community in Isaiah 59 is expressed in the context of the absence of justice. The unjust situation manifests in the prophet’s “accusation” against the corrupt people (vv. 1-8). Interestingly, the community’s “confessional lament” includes their act of hoping for light, justice, and salvation (vv. 9-15a). It is important to note that the communal act of hoping *nəqawweh* (נִקְוָה) appears at the center of the pericope (v. 11). The paper now proceeds to examine the situation of the Isaian community in Chapter 59, according to the Masoretic text and its English translation as follows:

Translation	Verse Number	Masoretic Text (BHS)
Behold! The hand of YHWH ¹⁰ is not too short to save, ¹¹ and his ear is not too dull ¹² to hear.	1	הִנֵּן לֹא-קָצְרָה יְד־יְהוָה מִהוֹשִׁיעַ וְלֹא-כְבֵדָה אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמֹעַ:
Instead, your iniquities separate you and your God; and your sins hide his face ¹³ away [so as not] to hear [you].	2	כִּי אִם-עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הִנּוּ מִבְדִּילִים בֵּינֵיכֶם לְבַיִן אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְסָתְאוּתֵיכֶם הַסְתִּירוּ פָּנָיו מִכֶּם מִשְׁמֹעַ:

¹⁰ Instead of translating the tetragrammaton, יהוה, this paper prefers its transliteration, YHWH, which should be pronounced as “Adonai” or “the LORD.”

¹¹ The use of *min* (מִן) with an infinitive, *mēhōšāʿ* (מִהוֹשִׁיעַ, *hifʿil*) and *miššəmədā* (מִשְׁמֹעַ, *qal*), in this verse, most likely expresses the action the subject cannot perform. For similar examples, see Paul Joüon and Takamisu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, SubBi 27 (Gregorian & Biblical Press, 20490), (90).

¹² HALOT, “כבד”, 455. This translation resonates with *eburunen* (ἐβάρυνεν) in LXX, which is from *barunō* (βαρύνω), which means “to make unreceptive, unresponsive”. See also T. Muraoka, “βαρύνω,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Peeters, 2009), 113.

¹³ MT, 1QIsa^a, and 1QIsa^b have *pnym* (פָּנִים). Both pl. forms *pnym* (פָּנִים) and *pnym* (פָּנִים) occur with only sg. meaning (“face”) in the Hebrew Bible. Particularly, in Isaiah, *pnym* (פָּנִים) occurs in 53:3 and *pnym* (פָּנִים) is used in 63:9. So, the context of *pnym* (פָּנִים) 59:2, can allow it to have the meaning as *pānāw* (פָּנָיו, “his face”) as interpreted by the ancient translators (LXX, Vulg., Syr., and Tg. Isa.).

Because your palms have been defiled ¹⁴ with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips spoke deception and your tongue is used to utter ¹⁵ injustice.	3	כִּי כִפִּיכֶם נִגְאַלְוּ בַדָּם וְאֶצְבְּעוֹתֵיכֶם בְּעֵוֹן שִׁפְתוֹתֵיכֶם דִּבְרוּ-שֶׁקֶר לְשׁוֹנֵיכֶם עוֹלָה תִהְיֶה:
There is no one calling with justice and there is no one being judged with fidelity; trusting in confusion and speaking of emptiness, conceiving trouble, and begetting wickedness.	4	אִין-קֹרָא בְצֶדֶק וְאִין נִשְׁפָּט בְּאֱמוּנָה בְּטוֹת עַל-תְּהוֹ וְדִבְר־שָׁוְא הָרָו עֲמָל וְהוֹלִיד אָנוּ:
They hatched viper's eggs, and they wove spider's webs; ¹⁶ he who eats there eggs shall die, from one which is crushed, ¹⁷ a viper is hatched.	5	בִּיצֵי צִפְעוֹנִי בָלְעוּ וְקוֹרֵי עֲכָבִישׁ יֵאָגְדוּ הָאֶחָל מִבִּיצֵיהֶם יָמוּת וְהַזִּוְרָה תִּבָּקַע אֶפְעָה:
Their webs shall not be as a garment, and they shall not cover themselves with their deeds; their works are works of wickedness and a deed of violence is in their palms. ¹⁸	6	קוֹרֵיהֶם לֹא-יִהְיוּ לְבָגָד וְלֹא יִתְכַסּוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם מְצַיִשִׁים אָנוּ וּפְעַל חַמָּס בְּכִפִּיהֶם:

¹⁴ BHS provides two optional readings: *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) or *gō'lu* (גֹּאֲלוּ) without explanation. This suggestion might have been one of the reasons that led Gesenius to suggest, with other scholars, that *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) is a “forma mixta,” that is, the combination of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ, pf. *niph'al*) and *gō'lu* (גֹּאֲלוּ, pf. *pu'al*) and, consequently, disregards the passive sense as the *niph'al* form of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) should convey. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch – trans. A. E. Cowley (Dover Publications, INC., 2006), 138. Unfortunately, Gesenius does not give any alternative sense of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) accordingly. Therefore, this paper maintains that the form of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) is *niph'al* (the passive form of *qal* from גִּאל) for two reasons. First, MT, 1QIsaa, and 1QIsab have the same consonants: נִגְאַלְוּ. This textual evidence can be a strong support for the reading of the *niph'al* of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ). Second, the similar textual situations of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) in our text and Lam 4:14 suggest the same form and meaning. LXX has *emolunthēsan* (ἐμολύνθησαν) in Lam 4:14, and *memolummenai* (μεμολυμμέναι) in Isa 59:3. Both Greek renditions of *niḡ'ālū* (נִגְאַלְוּ) come from *molunō* (μολύνω), “to defile” (see Muraoka, “μολύνω”, 466). Thus, the translation in this paper reflects the meaning of *niph'al*, following the reading of LXX.

¹⁵ The context of *tehgeh* (תִּהְיֶה, *yiqtol*) suggests the habitual or customary action in the past. Similar usages of *yiqtol* are found in Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 339-340.

¹⁶ BHS conjectures *wāqirê* (וָקִירִי) in conferring to Tg. Isa. and *qwy* (קוֹי) is translated as “weaves.” However, *qwy* (קוֹי) is not attested in other texts of the Hebrew Bible. As a noun, *qūrê* (קוֹרֵי) occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible and only in Isaiah 59. Since it is used in the construct chain with *akkābîš* (עֲכָבִישׁ, “spider”), the translation “webs” here is preferable.

¹⁷ Paul notes the vocalization issue of *wāhazzūreh* (וְהַזִּוְרָה). Since *bêšê* (בִּיצֵי) is the governing substantive, *wāhazzūreh* (וְהַזִּוְרָה) should be vocalized with a *qameš* (ָ) under the *resh* (ר). If this reading is correct, *hazzūreh* (הַזִּוְרָה) can be an archaic *qal* passive from the root *zwr* (זֹר), which denotes “trampling, crushing.” Similar use of this verb is in Job 39:14-15. See Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary*, ECC (Eerdmans, 2012), 501.

¹⁸ MT's clause *ûpō'al hāmās bākāpêhem* (וּפְעַל חַמָּס בְּכִפִּיהֶם) corroborates with 1QIsa^a and 1QIsa^b; but note the variant of *ûpō'al* (וּפְעַל) in the last two Mss. LXX lacks this colon, whereas Syr. and Vulg. have it. All English translations follow MT. Whatever the reason for LXX is uncertain. For caution in going the LXX way, see David A. Baer, *When We All Go Home: Translation and Theology in LXX Isaiah 56–66*, JSOTSup 318 (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 277-282.

Their feet run to evil and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways.	7	רָגְלֵיהֶם לָרָע יִרְצוּ וְיִמְהָרוּ לְשַׁפֵּךְ דָּם נִגְי מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם מַחְשְׁבוֹת אֲוֶן שֵׁד וְשֹׁכֵר בַּמִּסְלֹוֹת:
A way of peace they do not know and there is no justice in their entrenchments; their paths twisted for them, everyone walking in it does not know peace.	8	דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלוֹמֹם לֹא יָדְעוּ וְאֵין מִשְׁפָּט בַּמַּעְגְלוֹתָם נְתִיבוֹתֵיהֶם עָקְשׁוּ לָהֶם כָּל דֶּרֶךְ בָּהּ לֹא יָדַע שְׁלוֹמֹם:
Therefore, justice is far from us, ¹⁹ and righteousness does not reach us; we hope for light but behold darkness! For a gleam of light, we walk in gloominess.	9	עַל־כֵּן רָחֹק מִשְׁפָּט מִמָּנֹו וְלֹא תִשְׁיָגֵנוּ צָדִיקָה זָמְנָה לְאוֹר וְהִנֵּה־חֹשֶׁךְ לְגִלְהוֹת בְּאַפְלֹוֹת נְהַלְךְ:
We grope ²⁰ a wall like the blind men, and as without eyes, we grope; we stumble at noon like the twilight, among the sturdy like the dead.	10	נִגְשָׁשָׁה כְּעֹרִים לִיר וּכְאֵין עֵינַיִם נִגְשָׁשָׁה קְשָׁלְנוּ בַצְהָרִים כְּלֵשֶׁף בְּאַשְׁמֹנִים כַּמֶּתִים:
All of us growl like the bears and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, [but] ²¹ it is far from us.	11	נִהָמָה כַּדְּבִים כְּלָנוּ וְכִיוֹנִים נִהָה נְהַגָּה נִקְנָה לְמִשְׁפָּט וְאֵין לִישׁוּעָה רַתְקָה מִמָּנֹו:
Because great are our transgressions before us and our sins testify against us; ²² because our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities.	12	כִּי־רַבּוּ כְּשָׁעֵינוּ נִגְדָּה וְחַטֹּאוֹתֵינוּ עֲנִתָה בָנוּ כִּי־פָשְׁעֵינוּ אֲתָנוּ וְעֹנִיתֵינוּ יָדְעָנוּם:

¹⁹ While some translations keep the literal meaning, “justice is far from us” (NAS, NIV, NRS), others offer interpretative renditions: “We are not being treated fairly” (NIRV), “fair judgment is remote from us” (NJB), “deliverance is far from us” (NET). The present discussion, however, prefers the literal translation.

²⁰ Following *naqawweh* (נִקְנָה) in v. 9, *nəḡaššāh* (נִגְשָׁשָׁה, *pi’el, yiqtol*) is expected here as it is used in 1QIsa^a. However, although *gšš* (גִּשָּׁשׁ) occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, the unexpected form of cohortative is used in many other texts. Grammarians consider it as one of the “pseudo-cohortatives” and in “gnomic situations,” that is, “rendered with an English present tense and with future-time reference.” Bruce K. Waltke – M. P. O’connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), 576-577. In this light, it is possible to accept LXX’s *psēlaphēsousin* (ψηλαφῆσουσιν) (can be a gnomic future, see BDB §349) for *nəḡaššāh* (נִגְשָׁשָׁה) of MT. Similarly, the English present tense here seems proper to the context.

²¹ This insertion follows Syr. and most of the English translations. The omission of adversative *waw* (ו), as in *wā’ayin* (וַאֲיִן) in the first colon, is probably to balance the number of syllables in each colon (9-9). If this conjecture is acceptable, the insertion of “but” can be considered suitable in its context. The same logic is seen in *wāhinnēh* (וְהִנֵּה, but behold!) of v. 9b.a

²² The use of *b + ’nh* (ב + עֲנָה) to express an act of testifying/witnessing against oneself also occurs in Isa 3:9 and other texts of the Hebrew Bible (Gen 30:33; 2 Sam 1:16). LXX and Peshitta share similar interpretations.

Transgressing and deceiving against YHWH and turning away from following our God; speaking oppression and turning aside, conceiving and uttering from heart words of deception.	13	פִשַׁע וְכַחֲשׁ בִיהוָה וְנָסוּג מֵאַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ דְבַר-עֲשָׂק וְסָרָה הָרֹץ וְהָגוּ מִלֵּב דְבַר-יִשְׁקָר:
Justice is driven backward, and righteousness stands at a distance because truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter.	14	וְהַסֵּג אַחֲוָר מִשְׁפָּט וְצָדִיק מִרְחוֹק תַּעֲמֹד כִּי-כִשְׁלָה בְּרָחוּב אֱמֶת וְיִכְלָה לֹא-תִכְבֵּל לָבוֹא:
The truth is lacking, and whoever turns aside from evil ²³ is plundered; and YHWH saw it and it was evil in his eyes ²⁴ that there was no justice.	15	וְתָהִי הָאֱמֶת נֶעְדָּרַת וְסָר מִרָע מִשְׁתַּלָּל יִירָא יְהוָה וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו כִּי-אֵין מִשְׁפָּט:
He saw that there was no one and he was appalled ²⁵ that there was no one who intervened; and his arm brought victory ²⁶ for him and his righteousness was sustaining him.	16	וַיֵּרָא כִּי-אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּוְּמֵם כִּי אֵין מִפְּגִיעַ וַתִּשָּׁע לֹו זְרָעוֹ וַצָּדִיקָתוֹ הִיא סִמְכָתוֹ:
He put on righteousness as the armour and a helmet of salvation on his head; and he put on garments of vengeance [for] clothing, ²⁷ and covered himself in the robe of zeal.	17	וַיִּלְבַּשׁ צָדִיקָה כַּשָּׂרָן וְכוֹבַע יְשׁוּעָה בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּלְבַּשׁ בְּגָדֵי נָקָם תְּלַבֵּשֶׁת וַיַּעַט כַּמְעִיל קִנְיָה:

²³ MT's expression *sār mērā* ' (סָר מֵרָע; סָר as participle of סור) occurs in Job (1:1, 8; 2:3). The use of סור in imperative form (סור) with מֵרָע as an ethical wisdom, command, or formula is also attested in Wisdom literature (Job 28:28; Ps 34:15; 37:27; Prov 3:7; 13:19; 14:16; 16:6, 17). In this context, *rā* ' (רָע) here rightly refers to "human transgressions." C. Dohmen and D. Rick, "רָע," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, vol. 13 (Eerdmans, 2004), 583. The link between Wisdom literature and Isaiah 59 has been more forcefully affirmed in recent Isaiah scholarship. Andrew T. Abernethy asserts the obvious interconnection between Isa 59:7 and Prov 1:16. Moreover, the occurrence of *sār mērā* ' (סָר מֵרָע; Isa 59:15) in Job and Proverbs leads Abernethy to conjecture that "Isa 59:15 is making a point that Israel was so corrupt that someone pursuing wisdom by turning from evil would not be welcome by this community." See Andrew T. Abernethy, "Wisdom in Isaiah," in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, Oxford handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2020), 346.

²⁴ Since this line speaks of a situation as being evil in the Lord's eyes, *yēra' bā' ēnāw* (וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו), this anthropomorphic language seems to emphasize "the eyes function as the locus of personal attitudes and actions." F. J. Stendebach "עֵין," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, vol. 11 (Eerdmans, 2001), 40.

²⁵ Given another use of the same verbal form (*hitpo'el*) from *šmm* (שָׁמַם) in the parallel passage (Isa 63:5), this translation is suitable for wayyistōmēm (וַיִּשְׁתַּוְּמֵם) just as Vulg. also renders it as *aporiatu est* ("he is astonished"). See BDB, "שָׁמַם," 1013; HALOT, "שָׁמַם," 1566. Also, Paul, *Isaiah* 40–66, 508.

²⁶ The use of *hif'il* with *lamed* (ל) here is found similar in 63:5, *tōša' lī* (תִּישָׁע לִי, "[it] brought me victory") and in Ps 98:1, *hōšī' āh-lō* (הוֹשִׁיעָה-לוֹ, "have gotten him victory"). See Paul, *Isaiah* 40–66, 508.

²⁷ LXX and Vulg. Omit *tilbōšet* (תְּלַבֵּשֶׁת, clothing). The reason for this omission could be the

He will repay according to ²⁸ deeds, wrath to his foes, requital ²⁹ to his enemies; ³⁰ to the distant lands, he will repay requital. ³¹	18	פֶּעַל גְּמֻלוֹת פֶּעַל יִשְׁלָם חֲמָה לְצֻרֵי גְּמֹל לְאֹיְבָיו לֹא יִם גְּמֹל יִשְׁלָם:
From west, they will fear ³² the name of YHWH, and from a place of sunrise, his glory; for he will come like the constricted stream, ³³ the wind of YHWH drives on it.	19	וַיִּרְאוּ מִמַּעַרְב אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה וּמִמְּזֻחַ־חַשְׁמֹשׁ אֶת־כְּבוֹדוֹ כִּי־יָבֹא כַּנְהַר צָר רֵיחַ יְהוָה נֹסֵס בּוֹ:
He will come to Zion redeeming, and to those in Jacob who return from transgression; the declaration of YHWH.	20	וְבֹא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל וְלִשְׁבֵּי פִשְׁעַם בְּיַעֲקֹב נֹאֵם יְהוָה

repetition of this word in v. 17ba. However, such a repetition of *lbš* (לִבֵּשׁ, to clothe) could serve a rhetorical purpose in poetry (see Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, SubBi 11 (Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 80. In this view, *tilbōšēl* (תִּלְבֹּשֶׁל) should be preserved.

²⁸ BHS notes that Tg. Isa. reads *gəmul* (גְּמול) for the second *kəa l* (כְּעַל). However, this reading would require many shifts in letters. The retention of *gəmul* (גְּמול) can be argued based on its textual attestation (1QIsa^a) and versions (LXX, Vulg.). For the translation of the pleonastic compound preposition *kəa l* (כְּעַל) in this instance, see BDB §455(a).

²⁹ *BHS* notes that LXX renders *oneidos* (ὀνειδος, “a reproach”) for *gamul* (גָּמוּל, “a requital”) of MT. They further equate LXX’s *ὀνειδος* with the Hebrew *herpāh* (חֶרְפָּה, “a reproach”) and conjecture the possible expression *hārôn-’ap* (חָרוֹן-אֵפ, literally, “a burning nose”) being implied by LXX’s *ὀνειδος*. However, if *BHS* is correct in understanding LXX, *ὀνειδος* should be seen as the rendition for *hmlh* (חַמַּל, literally, “heat, rage”) of the preceding nominative phrase.

³⁰ LXX disregards this nom. phrase because it is probably considered syn. in coordination with the preceding one (see Mirjam van der Vorm-Croughs, *Old Greek of Isaiah: An Analysis of Its Pluses and Minuses*, SCSt 61 (Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 190. However, keeping it as the integral element of the poetic structure is preferable (see Syr. and Vulg.).

³¹ LXX does not have this last clause. This omission can be explained by the fact that this clause parallels the preceding one (see Van der Vorm-Croughs, *Old Greek of Isaiah*, 193). However, disregarding the clause is too much to be justifiable; parallel expression can also be a poetic technique (see Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 57-60). So, the clause should be kept. Moreover, given the theme of universal theophany in v. 19a, the translation “to the distant lands” for לְאֵיִם is preferable (compare NJPS).

³² BHS notes that many Mss *wəyir'û* (וַיִּירָא) from *r'h* (רָאָה, “to see”). Nevertheless, the reading *wəyyr'w* (וַיִּירָאוּ) from *y'r* (יָרָא, “to fear”) is attested in 1 QIsa^a. The same interpretation is also found in LXX, *phobēthēsontai* (φοβηθήσονται, “They shall fear.”), Syr. (ܝܚܠܥܡܢܟܘܢ, “[Those] from the west will fear.”), and Vulg. (*et timebunt*, “And they will fear.”).

³³ For *šār* (צָר), 1QIsa^a has *šwr* (צוּר). This textual variant generates two possible readings. On the one hand, MT reads *šār* (צָר) as an adjective of *nāhār* (נֶהָר). LXX and Vulg. follow this reading. On the other hand, 1QIsa^a proposes a reading of *šwr* (צוּר) as a noun and, therefore, the subject of *yābō'* (יָבוֹא). Syr. has this reading. MT's reading is preferable given the theophany as the main theme of vv. 15b-21. In this view, the LORD is the implied subject of *yābō'* (יָבוֹא) and, in the poet's perspective, the theophany is *kannāhār šār* (כְּנֶהָר צָר, "like a/the constricted stream", see HALOT, "צָר", 1015. צָר in this expression is also compared with the Akkadian etymological and semantic cognate *šarāru* ("to flow"), *mē šarrūti* ("flowing water"). See Paul, *Isaiah* 40–66, 511.

And I, this [is] ³⁴ my covenant with them, ³⁵ says YHWH, my spirit that [is] upon you, and my words that I have placed in your mouth; they shall not depart from your mouth, and from the mouth of your offspring, says YHWH, from now and until eternity.	21	וְאֲנִי זֶאת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּםָם אֲמַר יְהוָה רוּחִי אֲשֶׁר עָלַיָּךְ וּדְבָרִי אֲשֶׁר-שָׂמַתִּי בְּפִיךָ לֹא-יִמָּוֶשׁוּ מִפִּי וְיִמָּפִי וְרַעְדִּי וּמִפִּי זֶרַע וְרַעְדִּי אֲמַר יְהוָה מִעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם: ס
--	----	---

Socio-Historical and Literary Context

Socio-Historical Context

The sequential arrangement of the book of Isaiah in the Masoretic Text probably presupposes that the socio-historical context of Isaiah 59 can be considered according to the historical pointers of the preceding chapters.³⁶ The studies of Deutero-Isaiah have established that Isaiah 49 contains a scenario where the prophet presents the vision of “the awaited return of the exiled and a spectacular reversal of fortunes.”³⁷ The exile in view most probably refers to the Israelites’ captivity in Babylon, and the prophecy of hope for deliverance, as Whybray perceives it, could have been in conjunction with Cyrus’ permission given to the exiles to return to their homeland after the year 539 BCE.³⁸ Such a scenario in some passages of Deutero-Isaiah³⁹ prompts öolars, such as Duhm and Emerson, to confidently assert the

³⁴ Although the information in the square brackets is not present in MT, the copula is usually inserted in English translation in the context of the nominative clause. (See NRS).

³⁵ MT has *’ôlām* (אוֹלָם), whereas 1QIsa^a has אִתְּםָם. BHS notes that LXX and many other MSS and versions expect אִתְּםָם (“with them”). אִתְּםָם occurs in Trito-Isaiah (60:9; 65:23), and *’ôlām* (אוֹלָם), as accusative, is used twice in Isaiah (37:12; 41:16). However, *’ôlām* (אוֹלָם) in the covenant-making context is also found in Ezek 37:26. This similar context supports אִתְּםָם as the prepositional phrase here. It makes our translation, “with them,” possible.

³⁶ However, it is important to note a wide range of theories about the formation of the last 27 chapters of the book of Isaiah. For relevant studies on this issue, see Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*, FRLANT 255 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

³⁷ The vision of hope in Isaiah 49 is figuratively described: mountains turned into a road (v. 11); nature (heavens, earth, and mountains) in exultation because the LORD will have compassion (v. 13); the builders will outdo the destroyers (v. 17); the desolate places will become crowded (v. 19); at the raising of YHWH’s signal, nations will bring back Zion’s children, carrying on their shoulders (v. 22); kings and queens will bow down and lick the dust off their feet (v. 23). See Dominic S. Irudayaraj, *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6: The Trampling One Coming from Edom*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 633 (Bloomsbury, 2017), 67.

³⁸ Roger Norman Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, NCBC (Eerdmans, 1981), 10. Here, Whybray lists the passages that present Isaiah’s prophetic texts concerning Cyrus’ release of the Israelites’ exiles, such as in 41:2-4.25; 44:28; 45:1-6.13; 46:11; 48:14-15.

³⁹ Tiemeyer considers the following passages to convey the notion of the return of the exiles: Isa 43:16-21; 48:20-21; 51:9-11; 52:10-12, and possibly in Isa 43:2. She suggests a metaphorical

“Palestinian background of 56–66.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Gregory argues for the “postexilic exile” in Trito-Isaiah.⁴¹ This claim is significant for interpreting the polemical tone and violent image of YHWH in Isaiah 59.

Isaiah’s scholarship affirms that no clear indicators in Isaiah 59 lead to its dating. However, the prophetic vision of the coming of the Lord in the third section (vv. 15b-21) makes Koole see the implication of a question of Israel’s national restoration. Moreover, he also claims that “the previous chapters suggest that the pre-exilic have mostly continued to exist.”⁴² Furthermore, the “disputatious condition of the postexilic community”⁴³ can be seen in the opening verse of this text. Thus, v. 1a: *hēn lō`-qāṣārā` yaḏ-ādōnāy mēhōšā`* (קָצָרָה יַד־יְהוָה מִהוֹשִׁיעַ הֵן לֹא-), Behold! The hand of the Lord is not too short from saving) appears to be an answer to the question raised earlier by the Lord: *hāqōṣōr qōṣrāh yādī mippəḏūt wə`im-`ēn-bî kōaḥ ləhaṣṣî* (הֲקָצוֹר קָצְרָה יָדִי מִפְּדוּת וְאִם־אֵין־בִּי כֹחַ לְהַצִּיל), “Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem?” Or have I no power to deliver?” in 50:2.⁴⁴ If Isa 50:2 can be understood as an indirect “deep-seated questions of postexilic community as regards the relevance of God.”⁴⁵ It can be interpreted as an apologetic vis-à-vis “the charge brought against God,” and those words “were spoken after the return had taken place.”⁴⁶

Literary Context

Isaiah 59 can be considered a unified textual unit. The unity can be seen in its content, which is expressed through the repeated occurrences of keywords from the beginning to the end of the passage. Thus, the unity of this pericope is built up

interpretation in the cases of Isa 43:2.16-21. For the three other remaining passages (48:20-21; 51:9-11; 52:10-12), she is convinced that they do not constitute an argument for their Babylonian origin, “these passages sought to convince the people of Judah that a return of the exiles from all corners of the world would be advantageous to Judahites since the returning exiles would help restore Jerusalem to her former splendour and rejuvenate her population.” See Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55*, VTSup 139 (Koninklijke Brill, 2011), 202-203.

⁴⁰ See Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), vol. 5 and Grace I. Emmerson, *Isaiah 56–66*, OTG (JSOT, 1992), 81-97.

⁴¹ Gregory, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah,” 488. On the historical context of Trito-Isaiah, see Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66*, IBC (John Knox, 1995), 185-186; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 38-43; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, OTL (SCM, 1969), 295-296.

⁴² Jan Leunis Koole, *Isaiah III*, HCOT (Kok Pharos, 2001), 168.

⁴³ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40 – 66*, WeBC (Westminster John Knox, 1998), 202.

⁴⁴ Gregory, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah,” 488. On the historical context of Trito-Isaiah, see Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66*, 185-186; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 38-43; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 295-296.

⁴⁵ Irudayaraj, *Violence, Otherness, and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6*, 2, n. 6.

⁴⁶ Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 345.

by the repeated use of *yš*ʿ (ישׁע, vv. 1,11,16,17), and *šdq* (צדק, vv. 4,9,14,16,17), and *šp̄t* (שׁפּט, vv. 4,8,9,14,15). The occurrences of YHWH (יהוה, eight times in vv. 1,13,15,19[2],20,21[2]), especially in the prophet's opening declarative statement about YHWH (יהוה, v. 1, and the concluding speech of the Lord (v. 21), can form an *inclusio*⁴⁷ of this textual unit.

The function of Isaiah 59 is recognizable in its immediate and broader literary contexts. It shares considerable thematic similarities with Isaiah 58. Thus, the pair of *peša*ʿ (עֲשָׂא, “transgression, rebellion”) and *ḥaṭṭāʿt* (חַטָּאת, “sin”), previously occurring in 58:1 as part of the prophetic accusation against the house of Jacob, is now presented again in 59:12 with a greater degree of emphasis on confession.⁴⁸ The same observation can be made with the pair of *šdq* (צדק, “righteousness”) and *mišpāṭ* (מִשְׁפָּט, “justice”) in 58:2 and 59:14. Berges further confirms the parallel theme in 58:1b and 59:20 concerning the redemption for the returners from the transgression in the house of Jacob.⁴⁹

In the larger literary context, the opening lines (vv. 1-3) of Isaiah 59 closely parallel the theme of people's sinfulness in Isa 1:15.⁵⁰ Moreover, according to Emmerson's chiastic structure of the Trito-Isaiah, centralizing the “promises of salvation” (60–62), chapter 56 is recognized as parallel to chapter 63 (59:1-15a || 63:7–64:12; 59:15b-20 || 63:1-6).⁵¹ In this context, chapter 59 (esp. vv. 15b-20) can be read as a parallel passage with chapter 63 (esp. vv. 1-6).⁵² As Irudayaraj reasonably points out, “within the five chapters (Isaiah 59–63) thematic focus shifts from ‘doom’ to ‘salvation’ to ‘doom.’”⁵³ In the same vein, Koole interestingly surmises that “the composer of 59:15b–63:6 has deliberately flanked the announcement of Zion's salvation by two words of judgement in which Zion is delivered from enemies who threaten from within and from without.”⁵⁴ However, why does the message of “doom”

⁴⁷ *Inclusio* is a Latin word for “inclusion” in English. It is “a literary device where words or clauses are repeated to bracket off or envelope the marked-off material.” See D. Brend Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Broadman & Holman, 1995), 301; also Jean-Noël Alletti et al., *Vocabulaire Raisonné de L'exégèse Biblique: Les Mots, les Approches, les Auteurs* (Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013), 95.

⁴⁸ J. Goldingay, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66*, ICC (Bloomsbury, 2014), 214.

⁴⁹ Berges, *Book of Isaiah*, 444. Also, Paul Allan Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth, and Authorship of Isaiah 56–66*; VTSup 62 (Brill, 1995), 126-127.

⁵⁰ Childs, *Isaiah*, 487.

⁵¹ Emmerson, *Isaiah 56 – 66*, 20. However, Emmerson does not include v. 21 in the structure, nor does she discuss or explain it.

⁵² Berges, *Book of Isaiah*, 453.

⁵³ Irudayaraj, *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6*, 67.

⁵⁴ Koole, *Isaiah III*, 329.

recur after the promises of salvation? This question leads to the necessary discussion on the genre, structure, and poetic features in Isaiah 59, to which the paper now proceeds.

Genre, Structure, and Rhetoric Features

Genre. The shifts in literary style and the alterations of the speaker and addressee in Isaiah 59 have invited much scholarly effort to identify the genre of this textual unit. Suggestions such as liturgical form, sermon, or apocalyptic genre have been made. Muilenburg classified Isaiah 59 as a “prophetic liturgy.”⁵⁵ However, “liturgy” is “imprecise and speculative”⁵⁶ in this case. Kessler⁵⁷ ascribes the genre of sermon as cited in Westermann. Nevertheless, Westermann is not convinced of either liturgy or sermon genre.⁵⁸ In this regard, Hanson argues for the apocalyptic genre. Notably, he attributes vv. 15b-20 to the theme of God’s judgment through the genre of “a Divine Warrior Hymn.”⁵⁹ However, the suggestion that it is a “prophetic speech” suggested by Petersen⁶⁰ probably grants a suitable form that utilizes rhetorical devices, such as *mišpāṭ* (מִשְׁפָּט, “justice”) shown in its critical positions of the textual unit (vv. 8, 9, 15b), to persuade the audience⁶¹ about the reality of people’s immoral acts and how the Lord’s response would be.

Structure. Generally, most scholars agree on the three-part structure of this pericope: vv. 1-8; 9-15a; 15b-21.⁶² Based on the change of person, speaker, and addressee, Kim names the opening part (vv. 1-8) as an “accusation” against Israel, the

⁵⁵ James Muilenburg, “Isaiah: Chapters 40–66,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible: Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al (Abingdon Press, 1956), vol. 5, 686.

⁵⁶ Childs, *Isaiah*, 484. Unfortunately, Childs does not suggest any specific genre for this pericope.

⁵⁷ W. Kessler, “Studie zur religiösen Situation im ersten nachexilischen Jahrhundert und zur Auslegung von Jesaja 56–66,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* 57/1 (1956): 41–47.

⁵⁸ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, OTL (SCM, 1969), 344.

⁵⁹ Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Fortress Press, 1979), 120.

⁶⁰ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Westminster John Knox, 2002), 28.

⁶¹ This paper defines “rhetorical device” as “the art of persuasion” (French: *l’art de persuader*), following the suggestion of Alletti et al., *Vocabulaire*, 82.

⁶² HyunChul Paul Kim, *Reading Isaiah: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, ROT (Smyth & Helwys, 2016); Childs, *Isaiah*. However, some scholars are also concerned about the placement of v. 21. For the most recent review on this issue, see Gregory Goswell, “Isaiah’s New Covenant (Isaiah 59:21),” *BBR* 32/4 (2022): 384–385. Among scholarly views, the reading of v. 21 in connection with 56:4 – both texts mention בְּרִיתִי (my covenant) – is the most appealing to the canonical function of v. 21 in the larger context (Chapters 56–66) as well as its immediate context (Chapter 59). As Childs observes that the role of v. 21, in relation to the coming of *gō’ēl* (גֹּאֵל, “redeemer”) to Zion (v. 20), is to articulate “God’s purpose in terms of his covenant” (Childs, *Isaiah*, 490).

middle section (vv. 9-15a) as the community's "confessional lament," and the closing subunit (vv. 15b-21) as the Lord's response regarding the redemption for those who have returned from the transgression, *šābê pēša* ' (שָׁבִי פְּשָׁע). Moreover, the literary function of v. 21 is given due significance in the concentric structure (ABCB'A') of this textual unit, presented by Kim, as follows:⁶³

A – vv. 1-3: YHWH, "you" (pl.)

B – vv. 4-8: "they" [v. 8, "There is no justice."]

C – vv. 9-15a: "we" [v. 11, "We hope for justice."]

B' – vv. 15b-20: "they," "he" (YHWH) [v. 15, "There is no justice."]

A' – v. 21: YHWH, "you" (sg.) plus "your offspring"

Kim's proposed structure of Isaiah 59 highlights the desperate situation of justice, which frustrates the Lord's command given earlier in 56:1 (keep justice and do righteousness). Since justice is also the Lord's hope expressed in the vineyard parable 5:1-7, Isaiah's vision of the Lord's violent response to the corrupt people (vv. 15b-20) deems it necessary. This literary structure also reflects the prophet's confidence in the Lord, who will finally judge all things, including wicked thoughts, *maḥšəḇôṭ* 'āwen (מַחְשְׁבוֹת אָוֶן), lying words, *dibrê-šāqer* (דִּבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר), and violent deeds, *pō 'al ḥāmās* (פֹּעַל חָמָס).

Rhetoric Features. Repetition is one of many definitive techniques of rhetoric. Alonso Schökel observes that people "repeat sounds, words, phrases, verses, and strophes in different positions and with various functions."⁶⁴ It is evident in Isaiah 59. The repetition of the name of God, YHWH (יהוה), is evident in vv. 1, 13, 15, 19[2x], 20, 21[2x]. The same rhetorical technique is applied to some verbal roots such as *yāṣ* ' (יָצַע, vv. 1, 11, 16, 17), *šdq* (צִדִּיק, vv. 4, 9, 14, 16, 17), and *šp̄t* (שָׁפַט, vv. 4, 8, 9, 14, 15). As regards the repetition of phrase or clause, the nominal clause, which consists of a particle of negation and a noun – "there is no justice," *'ên mishpāt* (אֵין מִשְׁפָּט) – occurs first in v. 8 after the accusation against the people and recurs in v. 15b as the beginning of the final subunit describing the Lord's response.

⁶³ Kim, *Reading Isaiah*, 272 (with slight modification regarding the content of the chiasmic structure).

⁶⁴ Alonso Schökel, *A Manual*, 76.

Isaiah 59 is also overloaded with numerous metaphors.⁶⁵ The Chapter includes metaphorical images such as conceiving trouble and begetting wickedness [*hārô ‘āmāl wəhōlēḏ ‘āwen* (הָרֹו עָמַל וְהוֹלִיד אָוֶן, v. 4)], spider [*‘akkābīš* (עַכְבַּיִשׁ)] and viper [*‘ep ‘eh* (אֶפְעָה)] in v. 5, paths [*ma ‘gālōt* (מַעְגְּלוֹת, v. 8)], darkness [*hōšek* (חֹשֶׁךְ)] and gloom [*‘āpēlōt* (אֶפְלוֹת) in v. 9], blindness [*‘iwrīm* (עִוְרִים, v. 10)], growling bears [*nehēmeh kadubīm* (נִהְמֶה כְּדָבִים)] and moaning doves [*yōnim hāgōh* (יוֹנִים הָגוֹה) in v. 11], a warrior’s costume [*širyān* (שִׁרְיָן, “breastplate”), *kōba* (כּוֹבַע, “helmet”, *bigdē nāqām* (בְּגָדֵי נָקָם, “garments of vengeance,” *mə ‘ī* (מַעֲיֵל, “robe”, v. 17), and a constricted river [*nāhār šār* (נָהָר צָר, v. 19)].

Having discussed the genre, structure, and rhetorical features of Isaiah 59, the paper now proceeds to examine the situation of justice, *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט), which, as proposed, yields the necessity of the usage of the verbal form, *piel*, to express the communal hope.

The Rhetorical Function of *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט)

A justice-sensitive reading of Isaiah 59 considers *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט, justice) as the keyword of the text.⁶⁶ Before analyzing its rhetorical function, it is important to note the three distinctive rhetorical purposes of *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט) in its literary context. First, by using *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט) with the negative existent particle, *‘en* (אֵין, “there is not”), in v. 8, the prophet recapitulates the immoral acts of the pleading people. Second, by placing *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט) in the confessional statement, *‘al-kēn rāhaq mišpāt mimmenū* (עַל-כֵּן רָחַק מִשְׁפָּט מִמֶּנּוּ, therefore, justice is far from us) at the opening verse (v. 9) of the communal confession (vv. 9-15a), the prophet associates the immoral conduct of the people (the cause of social injustice) with the rebellion against the Lord. Third, with the repetition of *‘en mišpāt* (אֵין מִשְׁפָּט, there is no justice) in the description of the Lord’s perception of the desperation of justice (v. 15b), the prophet thus links the first two parts (vv. 1-8; 9-15a) with the prophetic vision of the Lord’s apparent violent, yet just, response (vv. 15b-21). The following presentation will thus highlight the desperate situation of justice in this Isaian community.

Prophet’s Accusation: “There is no justice in their path” (v. 8)

⁶⁵ Metaphor is understood in this paper as a literary device that invites the reader to perceive the more complex reality, which is implicitly conveyed by the images in Isaiah 59. For the full presentation of the cognitive metaphor theory, see George Lakoff – Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁶⁶ It occurs six times throughout the literary unit (vv. 4,8,9,11,14,15), with one exceptional use of the participle form of *nif‘al*, *nišpāt* (נִשְׁפָּט, “one who is judged”), in v. 4.

In the first section (vv. 1-8) of Isaiah 59, the most impressive statements are the use of *'ên* (אֵין) with *nišpāt* (נִשְׁפָּט, v. 4) and *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט, v. 8). Of these two statements, the first occurrence, *'ên nišpāt* (אֵין נִשְׁפָּט, there is no one calling with justice) in v. 4, concerns the perpetrator⁶⁷ of the judicial system without reliability (*'ēmūnāh*, אֱמוּנָה). In contrast, the second one, *'ên mišpāt* (אֵין מִשְׁפָּט, there is no justice) in v. 8, concludes the accusatory section of the prophetic message.

The prophetic accusation against the pleading people begins with two causative particles *kî* (כִּי, because/for) in the following verses. The first *kî* (כִּי) connected to the preceding negative statement, has a connective function in the verses. Thus, it conveys a contrasting sense, “but rather.”⁶⁸ Logically, as a contrasting statement *vis-à-vis* the preceding verse, v. 2 forcefully asserts the sinful reality of the pleading people. It is evident in the word order of v. 2. Following *kî-’im* (כִּי־אִם, rather), the emphatic position of the subject *’āwōnōtēkem* (עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם, your iniquities) and *ḥaṭṭōt wīṭēkem* (חַטֹּאתַיִךְ, your sins) highlights the moral responsibility of the corrupt people. Moreover, the parallel pattern (aba’b’, in v. 2aα; 2bα) and the chiasmic arrangement cd (2aβ) x d’c’ (2bβ) correspond to the description of the Lord in the preceding verse and thus highlight the people’s culpability. Here, the prophet pronounces that it is not because of “the hand of the Lord” and “his ear” but due to their iniquities and sins.

Following the general assertion of the sinful reality of God’s people, the prophet specifies their sins. Thus, the *kî* (כִּי) in v. 3 points out concrete sinful acts that have become the causes for the absence of the Lord’s deliverance. People’s sinful acts involve their body’s parts, such as the palm, *kap̄* (כַּף), finger, *’ešba* (אֶצְבָּע), lip, *sāpāh* (שִׁפָּה), and tongue *lāšōn* (לָשׁוֹן). Strikingly, these body parts neatly correlate⁶⁹ to the hand of the Lord, *yaq-’ādōnay* (יַד־יְהוָה), and his ear, *’oznō* (אָזְנוֹ), in v. 1. However, they are presented in a contrasting characteristic to those of the Lord. Here, the prophet accuses people of sinfulness being the primary concern. Because of the people’s blood-defiled hands and iniquities-filled fingers, *kappēkem nəgō’ālū ḥaddām wə’ēšbā’ōtēkem be’āwōn* (כַּפֵּיכֶם נִגְעוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּדָמַיִם וְאֶצְבָּעוֹתֵיכֶם בְּעֵוֹן), the Lord’s hand withdraws from saving them; likewise, since “their lips spoke deception and their

⁶⁷ Shalom, *Isaiah 40–66*, 500, renders “to contend, plead” for the *nif’al* form of the verb *špt* (שָׁפַט) and reads it in the light of other examples: Isa 43:26; 66:16; Jer 2:35.

⁶⁸ See GKC, 500 §163b; Muilenburg, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages,” 140. LXX renders *alla* (ἀλλά), also Vulg. has *sed*; likewise, modern English translations, esp. NAB and NRS, maintain such adversative sense.

⁶⁹ However, it is also important to note the difference between the language used for the body parts of human beings and the LORD. While such a language can be applied literally for human beings, its anthropomorphic use for the LORD should be interpreted metaphorically.

tongues uttered wickedness,” *šip̄lôtêkē dibbārû-šeqr lāšônākem ‘awlāh* (הִשְׁפִּילְתֶּם עֲוֹנוֹתְכֶם וְדִבַּרְתֶּם שִׁקְרָא לְשׁוֹנְכֶם עוֹלָה), the Lord’s ears become dull to their pleading.

Human immorality is further elaborated and brought to a deeper level. The prophet, thus, in v. 4a uses the non-existential particle *’ên* (אֵין) two times consecutively to signify the seriousness of human sinfulness. In this context, the two statements, “there is no one calling with righteousness,” *’ên-qōrē’ bəṣēdeq* (אֵין קוֹרֵא בְצֶדֶק), and “there is no one being judged in truth,” *’ên nišpāt be’ēmūnāh* (אֵין נִשְׁפָּט בְּאֱמוּנָה), probably function to summarize the preceding descriptions of the people’s sinfulness and introduces the severe problem, which is presented in the following lines. It is also important to note that the absence of righteousness, *ṣadāqāh* (צֶדֶקָה), and justice, *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט), here is the violation of the Lord’s command given earlier (56:1), the first verse of the Trito-Isaiah. This correlation in the accusatory message is substantiated by the series of infinitives whose direct objects have negative qualities. The text of v. 4b contains four specific immoral acts: trusting upon emptiness, *bātōaḥ ‘al-tōhū* (בָּטוּחַ עַל־תְּהוֹ), speaking of nothingness, *dāber-šāw’* (דִּבֶּר-שָׁוְא), conceiving trouble, *hārô ‘āmāl* (הָרָו עֲמָל), and begetting wickedness, *hōlēd ‘owen* (הוֹלִיד אֲוֵן).

The prophet elaborates on the sinful acts with metaphorical language in v. 5. Two elements deserve our attention. The first element is the shift from direct addressee (second person) to the indirect addressee (third person). The second element is the unusual word order. Firstly, why shift the personal pronouns? Is it significant in the accusatory argument? Goldingay may be reasonable in recognizing the ‘rhetorical effect’ of the use of the third person as “to make the audience (who in reality are still addressed) look at themselves as a third party, as if they are someone else, even though they know that they are not.”⁷⁰ In other words, the audience, in this case, is persuaded to admit their wrongdoings from an objective viewpoint. The following section on the communal confession (vv. 9-15a) is evidence of the success of this strategy.

To further explain the meaning of “begetting wickedness,” *hōlēd ‘owen* (הוֹלִיד אֲוֵן), in v. 4, the prophet presents the immoral actions in an unusual word order in v. 5. By placing the objects, “eggs of a viper,” *bêṣê šip̄ wōnī* (בֵּיצֵי שִׁפְעוֹנִי), and “webs of a spider,” *qûrê ‘akkābîš* (קוֹרֵי עֲכָבִישׁ), before the actions, “they hatched,” *biqqē’û* (בִּקְעוּ), and “they wove,” *ye’ērōgû* (יִאָּרְגוּ), the prophet probably wants to emphasize the danger and uselessness of the wicked people’s works. Its danger is spelt out in the second colon (v. 5ba): the death of the one who eats their eggs, *hā’ōkel mibêṣêhem zāmûl* (הָאֹכֵל מִבֵּיצֵיהֶם יָמוּת), and the emergence of a more dangerous kind

⁷⁰ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 193.

of viper, *’ep’eh* (אֶפְעָה).⁷¹ The uselessness of the wicked people’s works is presented in v. 6a: “their webs are not for them as a garment,” *qûrêhem lō’-yihyû labeḡed* (קוּרֵיהֶם לֹא יִהְיֶה לְבִגְדָה), and “they will not cover themselves with their works,” *lō’ yitkassû bāma’āsêhem* (לֹא יִתְכַסּוּ בַמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם). The following colon (v. 6b) presents the reason for such uselessness in two clauses arranged in a concentric structure (ABBA), which highlights their works of wickedness and deeds of violence.

A – their works (*ma’āsêhem*, מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם)

B – works of wickedness (*ma’āsê-’āwen*, מַעֲשֵׂי־אָוֶן)

B’ – and deed of violence (*ûpō’al hāmās*, וּפְעֹלַת חָמָס)

A’ – in their hands (*bəḡappêhem*, בְּכַפֵּיהֶם)

Human wickedness and violence are seen at their highest point in the shedding of innocent blood. The prophet keenly depicts the movement of the wicked people, which involves the whole body, from their feet, *raglêhem* (רַגְלֵיהֶם), to the head, which generates their thoughts, *maḥšəbôtêhem* (מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם). In addition, the shedding of innocent blood is depicted as a “hastening,” *wimahārû* (וַיִּמְהָרוּ, *pi’el* of מהר), action.⁷² At this point of criticism, the prophet seemingly tries to convince the addressed audience that all the immoral acts described above begin with their “thought of wickedness,” *maḥšəbôt’āwen* (מַחְשְׁבוֹת אָוֶן), which eventually links to “devastation and destruction,” *šōd wāšeber* (שׁוֹד וְשֹׁכֵר)⁷³ in their course, *bimsillôtām* (בְּמִסְלוֹתָם).

The scenario of immoral acts (v. 2-7) leads to the logical conclusion in v. 8. Here, the poetic lines appear to be arranged with a concentric structure. This structure consists of an *inclusio*, which is formed by the lamentation about the people’s ignorance, *lō’ yāqā’û* (לֹא יָדְעוּ) of “peace,” *šālôm* (שָׁלוֹם), and a chiasmic structure at the center, which highlights the paths/roads of injustice/crookedness. The prophet at this moment seems to tell the audience about not only the interconnectedness between

⁷¹ The other occurrence of *’ep’eh* (אֶפְעָה) in Isaiah is 30:6, where the viper is listed among the beasts of the Negeb. In Job 20:16, the viper’s tongue, *lāsôn ’ep’eh* (לִשְׁוֹן אֶפְעָה), kills the wicked one. Both literary contexts, thus, suggest the viper to be a dangerous animal.

⁷² Noting the similarity of this phrase in Isa 59:7 and Prov 1:16, Abernethy, following Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 195, argues for the utility of wisdom traditions in Trito-Isaiah. See Abernethy, “Wisdom in Isaiah,” 346.

⁷³ The repetitive sound of *š* in the two words of “thought,” *maḥšəbāh* (מַחְשְׁבָה), and in the expression “devastation and destruction,” *šōd wāšeber* (שׁוֹד וְשֹׁכֵר), can be considered, from the viewpoint of the “linking sound pattern,” as a device that joins together the wicked thought of the wrongdoers and the “devastation and destruction.” See Thomas P. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10 – 29*, JSOTSup 128 (Academic Press, 1991), 64-65.

peace *šālôm* (שָׁלוֹם) and justice, *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט), but also, and more importantly, the central place of justice in the establishment of peace. The beautiful literary structures of v. 8 can be sketched as follows:

A – the way of peace, they do not know

B – and there is no justice in their paths

B' – their roads are crooked for them

A' – everyone walking in it does not know peace

The illustration above shows that the central section of v. 8 highlights the injustice or crooked paths of the sinful community. In this presentation, the absence of justice, *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט) becomes the primary concern, which, by reechoing the theme of justice in the Lord's commandment (56:1), rhetorically recapitulates all the immoral acts and attacks a group of wicked people.⁷⁴ So, it is now the opportunity for the addressed audience to respond to the accusation.

Communal Confession: “Justice is far from us” (v. 9)

The communal confession is introduced by עַל־כֵּן (“therefore”). Grammatically, the combination of the preposition for causality, עַל (“because”), and the deictic particle, כֵּן (“this”/“that”), can function to link the preceding part (vv. 1-8) with the content that follows.⁷⁵ It correlates the people's confession (vv. 9-15a) to the prophet's accusation (vv. 2-8). Semantically, however, עַל־כֵּן can be a conjunction that indicates the consequence of the preceding acts.⁷⁶ From this perspective, the communal confession (vv. 9-15b) can be read as a consequence of the prophetic accusation in vv. 2-8.

The communal character of this confession is marked by the suffix נו (us/our) and verbal forms in the first-person plural (we). The most striking feature in this section is the repetitive occurrence of מִשְׁפָּט (vv. 9, 11, 14) in a balanced distribution in the poem, just as it is a refrain of a musical arrangement. This extensive use of מִשְׁפָּט undoubtedly shows its central place in this part and conveys the deeper level of transgression than the social injustice. The text indicates that the wicked people

⁷⁴ See Whybray, *Isaiah* 40–66, 221; Goldingay, *Isaiah* 56–66, 197.

⁷⁵ Just as it is also used in Isa 57:10. In other contexts, it can also be used as a consequential connection, such as in Job 42:6. See John Briggs Curtis, “On Job's Response to Yahweh,” *JBL* 98/4 (1979): 497–511.

⁷⁶ In Job 42:6, עַל־כֵּן indicates Job's change of perspective concerning the “dust and ashes” reality of human life as the consequence of the divine speech (40:6–41:34).

do not mention immoral acts against their fellow human beings. In v. 13, the corrupt people confess their acts of “transgressing and deceiving against the Lord” (פָּשַׁע וְכַחַשׁ) (בִּיהוָה) and turning back from behind their God (נָסוּג מֵאַחֲרֵי יְיָ).

Goldingay points out that the root כחש, used in *pi'el* form to describe the deception, connotes the hidden rebellion in contrast to the professed commitment to the Lord. Such a covert act is made explicit by the fact of “turning away” (נָסוּג, *nif'al*) “from following our God,” *mē'ahar ʾēlōhênû* (מֵאַחֲרֵי יְיָ).⁷⁷ From a grammatical viewpoint, it can be said that the *pi'el* form of כחש may imply a greater moral responsibility being charged against the active agent than the *nif'al* of *nāsôg* (נָסוּג) because the latter can be the passive of the former.⁷⁸ Hence, v. 13a probably suggests that the hidden deception against the Lord bears more severe moral responsibility than the explicit act of turning away from him.

The rhetorical function of *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט) in vv. 9-15a seems to be presented in a gradually intensive manner. At the beginning of the communal confession (v. 9), the sinful group admits that justice is far from them, *rāḥaq mišpāt mimmennû* (רָחַק מִשְׁפָּט מִמֶּנּוּ), and this situation is made parallel with their incapability of reaching righteousness, *lō' ʾtasšigēnû šəḏāqāh* (לֹא תַשְׁיִגְנוּ צְדָקָה). Then, at the center of their confession (v. 11b), the people lament that they intensely hope for justice (נִקְוָה לְמִשְׁפָּט). However, there is none, *wā'ayin* (וְאֵין), an affirmation of the accusation against them in v. 8a. Finally, the confession ends with the worst scenario in which justice is turned backward, *ḥussag ʾāḥôr mišpāt* (חָסַג אַחֲוֹר מִשְׁפָּט, v. 14a).

The recurrence of the root סג here is probably a wordplay to present the fact that “justice is turned backward” as a consequence of the people’s turning away, *nāsôg* (נָסוּג), from their God (v. 13a).⁷⁹ These situations of justice, *mišpāt* (מִשְׁפָּט), indicate that the pleading people are not following the Lord’s commandment, in 56:1, that his people should “keep justice,” *šimrû mišpāt* (שִׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט), and “do righteousness,” *ʾásû šəḏāqāh* (עֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה). This desperate context of social and religious injustice can be a justifiable reason for the preference for the verbal form (*pi'el*), rather than the noun, of the root *qwh* (קוה) to express the intensive communal act of hoping for justice at the central place of the pericope.

⁷⁷ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 215. Here, Goldingay sensibly points out that the expression “our God” (ʾēlōhênû, אֱלֹהֵינוּ) is meant to heighten the enormity of these acts.

⁷⁸ Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 40.

⁷⁹ Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 507. In the same vein, Goldingay asserts that the usage of *swg* (סוּג) in this place “already points in another way to the link between the two actions.” See Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 217.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the primary usage of the Hebrew verbal roots *qwh* (קוה), *yhl* (יחל), *hkh* (חכה) for the verb expressions “to hope for, to wait for” in the Isaian prophetic writings. It is proposed that the “postexilic exile” experience of the returnees from the Babylonian exile would have been the reason for the intensive action of hope for “justice.” This study has established that the absence of justice, *’ên mišpāṭ* (אין משפט), in the postexilic community is the reasonable background of the preferential usage of verbal form (*pi’el*) to express the communal hope for justice, which occupies the central place in the pericope (v. 11). The preferential usage of the verb *naqawweh* (נקה) implies the desperate situation-in-life of the Isaian community and the theological vision of this prophetic writing. Isaiah’s theological vision, thus, is suitable for pastoral formation or social-ethical engagement, as outlined below.

The verbal forms of “hope” in Isaiah 59 can be seen as a prophetic diagnosis. First, “hope” exposes the structural sinfulness of God’s people. “Your iniquities separate you and your God; and your sins hide his face away [so as not] to hear [you] (v. 2). The text, thus, links the people’s “broken hope” not to God’s weakness but to their sinful acts, such as bloodshed, false accusations, legal corruption, and violence normalized as policy. Second, the prophetic voice in Isaiah 59 acknowledges a painful reality (vv. 9-10): hope is delayed, justice is systematically absent, and darkness replaces light. Here, the communal hope names the failure of public systems, not merely personal disappointment. Finally, Isaiah 59 envisions “hope” as a theological virtue. The verbal form *naqawweh* (נקה) suggests people’s persistence amidst the moral tension in the community. It also indicates the people’s refusal to accept injustice as normal. Thus, “hope” in Isaiah 59 is not optimism but a communal expectation of God’s just intervention, rooted in covenant faith.

The communal hope for justice in Isaiah 59 is the prophetic vision concerning God’s intervention to restore justice. Here, instead of abstract attributes, God is described with actions. First, God sees the absence of justice (v. 15). This is one of the most powerful lines in the Isaian corpus. It conveys that God is not neutral; God is not distant; God is morally provoked by injustice. This theological vision assures the people of their divine hope in God alone, where human hope has been crushed. Second, God acts when no one intervenes (v. 16). This prophetic vision declares that God becomes the advocate of the voiceless when institutions fail, when courts collapse, and when fear silences witnesses.

Isaiah’s way of expressing the communal hope for justice is relevant in communities and societies where justice is absent due to the wickedness of the

tyrannical government. This prophetic oracle is an appealing voice in the tragic situation of the victims of the “Extrajudicial Killings” (EJKs) or “Extralegal Killings” (ELKs),⁸⁰ which are happening around the world today.⁸¹ These victims experience the total absence of justice in their community, just as the innocent people in Isaiah 59. In such a context, the “Christian hope” includes the following characteristics:

1. Hope begins with truth. Truth-telling is hope’s first act. Isaiah does not spiritualize violence in its context. Likewise, the “Christian hope” today must name EJKs /ELKs as moral evil and acknowledge the dignity of the poor and powerless.
2. Hope as resistance, not compliance. In Isaiah 59, hope refuses to accept lawlessness disguised as order, violence justified as security, and fear imposed as governance. Hope, in contemporary praxis, means resisting narratives that normalize killing, standing with victims’ families, and refusing to let fear dictate moral judgment.
3. Hope as solidarity with victims. The communal expression, “we hope,” in Isaiah 59 invites the Church to grieve publicly, lament liturgically, and accompany those whose loved ones were killed without trial. These communal acts include memorials, prayer vigils, and pastoral presence in communities marked by violence. In such a way, hope takes flesh in compassionate proximity.
4. Hope as moral accountability. Isaiah 59 envisions that injustice separates society from God. Therefore, hope today demands advocacy for due process, defense of human dignity, and formation of consciences (especially among the young, police, and leaders).

The prophetic vision of Isaiah 59 can serve as a compass for the twenty-first-century readers to traverse from “hoping” to “witnessing.” Thus, a theological synthesis of Isaiah 59, in view of the contemporary praxis, could be proposed as follows:

⁸⁰ The United Nations considers these terms synonymous and defines them as “killing committed, e.g., by vigilante groups or secret government agents – outside judicial or legal process – that is, in contravention of, or simply without, due process of law,” accessed 29 June, 2025, https://conferences.unite.un.org/unterm/Display/record/UNHQ/extra-legal_execution/6E3E8435A06FEDE9852569FD00029B39.

⁸¹ For a list of the countries and an update on EJKs/ELKs, accessed 29 June, 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/extrajudicial-killings>.

Isaiah 59	Contemporary Praxis
“Justice is far from us.” (v. 9)	We name systemic failure.
“We hope for justice.” (v. 11)	We refuse to accept injustice as normal.
God “sees” and “acts”	We trust God while acting responsibly.

To conclude, the verbal usage of “hope” in Isaiah 59 implicitly expressed the desperate situation of justice of the Israelites’ community in their homeland after the Babylonian exilic period. It is the prophetic vision about the assuring hope for justice at the intervention of the Lord. In the spirit of the Jubilee Year of Hope (2025), the Christian hope today is not naïve nor passive nor silent. It is rather a moral stance, a communal journey, a faith that believes God still “sees” and “acts.” To hope, in Isaiah’s sense, is to walk with God against the tide of death, until justice and peace embrace (Ps. 85:10; cf. Isa 11:6-9; NJB).**PS**

References

Books and Articles/Journals

Abernethy, Andrew T. “Wisdom in Isaiah.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*. Edited by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer. Oxford handbooks. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Alletti, Jean-Noël, Maurice Gilbert, Jean-Louis Ska, and Silvie de Vulpillères. *Vocabulaire Raisoné de L’exégèse Biblique: Les Mots, les Approches, les Auteurs*. Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013.

Alonso Schökel, Luis. *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*. SubBi 11. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998.

Baer, David A. *When We All Go Home: Translation and Theology in LXX Isaiah 56–66*. JSOTSup 318. Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

Berges, Ulrich F. *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt*. Herdes Biblische Studien 16. Herder, 1998.

Berges, Ulrich F. *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form*. Translated by Millard C. Lind. HBM 46. Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Isaiah 40–66*. WeBC. Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Curtis, John Briggs. “On Job’s Response to Yahweh.” *JBL* 98/4 (1979): 497–511.

- Dempsey, Carol. J., OP. "Third Isaiah." In *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, OP, and Donald Senior, OP. T&T Clark, 2022.
- Dohmen, C. and D. Rick. "רַעַע." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by David E. Green. Vol. 13. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Duhm, Bernhard. *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt*. Vol. 5. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968.
- Emmerson, Grace I. *Isaiah 56–66*. OTG. JSOT, 1992.
- Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch and translated A. E. Cowley. Dover Publications, INC., 2006.
- Goldingay, John E. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66*. ICC. Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Goswell, Gregory. "Isaiah's New Covenant (Isaiah 59:21)." *BBR* 32/4 (2022): 379–93.
- Gregory, Bradley C. "The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah. Isaiah 61:1-3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics." *JBL* 126/3 (2007): 475–96.
- Hanson, Paul D. *Isaiah 40–66*. IBC. John Knox, 1995.
- _____. *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*. Fortress Press, 1979.
- Irudayaraj, Dominic S. *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6: The Trampling One Coming from Edom*. The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 633. Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Joüon, Paul and Takamitsu Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. SubBi 27. Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009.
- Kessler, W. "Studie zur religiösen Situation im ersten nachexilischen Jahrhundert und zur Auslegung von Jesaja 56–66." In *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* 57/1 (1956): 41–47.
- Kim, HyunChul Paul. *Reading Isaiah: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. ROT. Smyth & Helwys, 2016.

- Koole, Jan Leunis. *Isaiah III*. HCOT. Kok Pharos, 2001.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- McCreesh, Thomas P. *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10–29*. JSOTSup 128. Academic Press, 1991.
- Muilenburg, James. “Isaiah: Chapters 40–66.” In *The Interpreter’s Bible: Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah*, edited by George Arthur Buttrick, Walter Russell Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Knox, Samuel Terrien, and Nolan B. Harmon. Abingdon Press, 1956. Vol. 5.
- Muraoka, T. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*. Peeters, 2009.
- Paul, Shalom M. *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary*. ECC. Eerdmans, 2012.
- Petersen, David L. *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*. Westminster John Knox, 2002.
- Rossi, Benedetta, Dominic S. Irudayaraj, and Gina Hens-Piazza, eds. *Unity in the Book of Isaiah*. Library of Biblical Studies/Old Testament Studies. T&T Clark, 2024.
- Sandy, D. Brend and Ronald L. Giese, Jr.. *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament*. Broadman & Holman, 1995.
- Smith, Paul Allan. *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth, and Authorship of Isaiah 56–66*. VTSup 62. Brill, 1995.
- Stendebach, F. J. “עֵי.” In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by David E. Green, vol. 11. Eerdmans, 2001.
- Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia, editor. *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40–66*. FRLANT 255. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.
- _____. *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55*. VTSup 139. Koninklijke Brill, 2011.
- Waltke, Bruce K. and M. P. O’connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*. OTL. SCM, 1969.

Whybray, Roger Norman. *Isaiah 40–66: Based on the Revised Standard Version*. NCBC. Eerdmans, 1981.

Van der Vorm-Crouchs, Mirjam. *Old Greek of Isaiah: An Analysis of Its Pluses and Minuses*. SCSt 61. Society of Biblical Literature, 2014.

Web Page

https://conferences.unite.un.org/unterm/Display/record/UNHQ/extra-legal_execution/6E3E8435A06FEDE9852569FD00029B39.

<https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/extrajudicial-killings>.

