

How Creation and Eschatology Form an Integrated Worldview in Isaiah

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to consider the worldview of Isaiah particularly as it relates to his use of creation and eschatological language. While a full consideration of the worldview of Isaiah is far beyond the scope of this paper, these two facets of Isaiah's message are developed with layered complexity in way that profoundly affects not only his overall message, but at a much deeper level the overall worldview of his audience both then and now. While other themes such as exodus, the nations, wisdom, and suffering can and ought to be developed as they relate to Isaiah's worldview, it is not an overstatement to say that creation and eschatology function as twin pillars supporting much of the larger structure of Isaiah as a whole. **This paper will therefore demonstrate that Isaiah uses both creation and eschatological language to shape the worldview of his audience, and how modern audiences can benefit from these ideas.**

In an excellent article titled *Creation and Eschatology*, Daniel Hardy not only provides helpful definitions for us as we begin, but also seeks to demonstrate how both creation and eschatology are integrated yet distinct aspects of a properly functioning worldview, an idea central to this current effort. He writes that creation "can refer to any factors taken as important to the determinative shape and purpose of the universe (total or visible), the world and human beings, or to their mediation of an ultimate constitutive state or agency in or beyond them."¹ This definition of creation is broader than simply asking 'where did we come from.' Because creation implies meaning and purpose, it considers the responsibility and agency implied. Eschatology, likewise, is more than simply answering the question 'where are we going.' Eschatology is both concerned with the end of the individual as well as the end of the cosmos. As it relates to creation, "eschatology is the outcome of the existence, structure and dynamic of the universe and

¹ Daniel Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology* in *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, Edited by Colin Gunton, First Edition, (Edinburgh, Scotland: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567660718.109>.

world as anticipated in their nature and history.”² For humanity, eschatology is a vision of the “final outcome anticipated in their coming to be as they are, in their creation.”³ This implies that the very fruit of one’s eschatological vision, are found in seed form in one’s creational mythos. Eschatology, therefore, is the “unfolding of what is enfolded in protology, but understood as novum which appears at each point in the unfolding, even at the end.”⁴ As Richard Bauckham states, “God’s eschatological goal... is a perfecting of that original state... It is finally God who gives creation the wholeness it lacks in itself.”⁵ For this very reason, the two are necessarily intertwined with one another.

Initial Definitions & Considerations on Worldview

In order to accomplish our task, we first need to consider the idea of worldview more broadly.

What exactly is a worldview, and how would we discover the particular worldview of any given people, or any given text? The literature on worldview is extensive, and for reason of space I have left many important facets of worldview out, however a short grasp of a few key ideas will help provide a basis for our discovery.

Worldview & Worldvision

J.H. Bavinck in his book *Personality & Worldview*, offers a helpful starting place when he separates a worldvision from a worldview. According to Bavinck, a worldvision is developed by each person at young age. “The human being drinks in the considerations held up before him by his parents and teachers; they melt away into him and help form within him that worldvision that will serve him like a compass in later years.”⁶ These ideas are often received uncritically and unthoughtfully, nevertheless each person begins with a general worldvision. A proper worldview

² Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 110.

³ Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 111.

⁴ Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 115.

⁵ Richard Bauckham, *Eschatology*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*. Edited by J. Webster, K. Tanner, and I. Torrance (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 316.

⁶ J.H. Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview*, Translated & edited by James Eglinton (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023). 33.

however takes additional work to receive. “A worldview is not just a loose, intuitive grasp. Rather, it is supported by arguments, by motives. It clothes itself in the form of reasonableness. It is supported by logical construction.”⁷ A worldview which is ordered, reasoned, developed, and stable “shows you the objective reality and does this with compelling power so that we should form our lives according to it... Every worldview ends up with ‘Repent! In the name of the truth, reform yourself.’”⁸ What Isaiah offers is far more than a loosely organized worldvision, it is a thorough worldview rooted deeply in well constructed arguments and motives.

The Role of Semiotics in Worldview

In David Naugle essay *Philosophical Reflections on “Worldview”* he discusses five key aspects of worldview. While all five aspects play vital roles that will aid us in our journey, it is the first two, semiotics and narrative, which concern us here at our starting point. The role of semiotics is that of considering the signs and symbols that form the often-subliminal sacred architecture of a person’s perspective on reality. These “signs” may take many forms including: thoughts, feelings, symbols, words, expressions, beliefs, and more. “Indeed, a certain string of symbols possesses unique cultural power and determines the meaning of life. Those symbols I would designate a worldview...” These signs are so deeply embedded in the heart and psyche of a person and a community that they ultimately “provide a foundation and interpretation of life.”⁹ In order to understand Isaiah’s worldviews, we must deeply consider the signs he utilizes to assist his readers in interpreting their reality, which as we will see, play a prominent in Isaiah.

The Role of Narrative Mythology in Worldview

Secondly, Naugle helpfully attaches narrative to the formation of one’s worldview. A culture’s shared origin story helps its people make sense of a world that might feel void of sense. More

⁷ Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview*, 34.

⁸ Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview*, 37.

⁹ David Naugle, *Philosophical Reflections*, in David K. Naugle and Arthur F. Holmes, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) Proquest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=7116767>, 4.

than simple stories to entertain, our shared narrative mythology provides the infrastructure within the human heart that all our experiences can be interpreted by. The term ‘mythology’ in this sense does not connote fiction, rather simply refers to the origin narrative itself which is typically filled with layered meaning. Naugle notes that “the narrative stories which are lived out in the world of human experience are a product of bedrock, first-order myths that essentially constitute a worldview.”¹⁰ If the Bible offers the Christian a metanarrative, which it certainly does, then “we should all be able to place our own stories within that grand narrative and find our own perception and experience of the world transformed by that connexion.”¹¹ In the larger Biblical narrative, the stories of creation, fall, and redemption form bedrock aspects of the Israelite worldview that are continually referenced by later Biblical authors. Likewise, in developing his own consistent worldview, Isaiah relies heavily on this shared narrative. Further, “symbolism and myth often work together in the Old Testament,”¹² an idea we will see developed throughout the remainder of this paper.

Creation: Isaiah’s “First-order Myths”

The theme of creation has been noted by scholars of Isaiah as a key theme woven throughout the prophet’s pages. While appearing in various forms throughout Isaiah, this theme is most prominent within, though certainly not limited to, the so called “deutero-Isaiah” chapters, 40-55. It is worth noting as Joy Hooker says, “This is the same point [in Isaiah] where promises of restoration and total transformation of Zion begin to come to the fore.”¹³ In other words, creation language, for Isaiah, begins to take prominent foreground only when speaking about

¹⁰ Naugle, *Philosophical Reflections*, 8

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press; Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Book House Co, 2003), 12.

¹² Joy Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah* in Brett, Mark G., Tim Bulkeley, and Tim Meadowcroft. *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire*. Edited by Andrew T. Abernethy. Illustrated edition (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013) 112.

¹³ Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 115.

eschatological redemption and restoration. Already, according to Joy Hooker, the interweaving of creation and eschatology is discernable.

Creation Language in Chapters 1-39

Our survey of critical creation language begins in the opening verses of Isaiah. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me” (Isaiah 1:2). Isaiah’s condemnation of Israel begins with a calling of all of nature to bear witness against Israel’s sins. Oswalt comments on this verse that, “What God’s people are doing is an offense against nature. Sin, pride, and oppression are contrary to creation as God envisioned it.”¹⁴ Isaiah’s creation imagery continues in the very next verse, “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (Isaiah 1:3). Both the ox and donkey are considered unintelligent animals. Thus, Isaiah begins his book with a stark condemnation of Israel, that their behavior is more unintelligent than that of a beast of burden. Creation in chapter one serves as “a silent witness to the facts of past covenant history, but at this point they were not yet called on to testify in a lawsuit about Israel’s sinfulness.”¹⁵ A very similar use of the creation theme is found in Isaiah 34. “...Let the earth hear, and all that fills it; the world, and all that comes from it. For the LORD is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host;” (Isaiah 34:1-2). Once again, the creation order is bearing witness against sinful behavior, only this time it is not of Israel but of the nations. Creation is thus used by Isaiah to communicate the monotheism of his larger Biblical worldview. God’s creation is not just a Hebraic localized myth, it is a cosmic reality under which all nations find their point of origin. Further, justice is not simply a localized expression, but the entire creation itself bears witness to the fixed standard of God’s justice.

¹⁴ John Oswalt, *John Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 85.

¹⁵ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, Edited by. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 102.

Further, the idea of creation bearing witness against Israel and the nations, implies that creation is endowed with purpose and order. Christoph Schwobel in *The Doctrine of Creation* discusses this with helpful insight. Unlike alternate creation myths of antiquity, Isaiah's God created all that is from nothing other than his own good will. The vital implication of creation ex nihilo is that "everything that is has its being in its relationship to God the Creator."¹⁶ It is for this reason that Isaiah can call creation to bear witness against the iniquities of Israel, for everything that exists is contingent on God for both its existence and purpose. "The world exists... as contingent being; its possibility of existence, its particular constitution and its structures are rooted in its permanent ontological dependence on God the Creator."¹⁷ Creation ex nihilo, therefore gives rise to purpose, an idea that is foundational to discussions on both creation and eschatology. Israel's behavior is therefore out of line with their worldview of a purpose driven creation. Further, as Christopher Watkin so elegantly states, when Isaiah scolds Israel by saying they have "turned aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey" (Isaiah 10:2), he is able to do so precisely for the reason that this kind of behavior is completely antithetical to the gracious behavior of God in creation itself. God's abundance and self-giving in creation "lays the foundation for a caring, compassionate society,"¹⁸ a creational ethic which Israel has fundamentally inverted through their sin.

Creation Language in 40-51

Looking ahead to chapters 4-55, creation language begins to take center stage. There are seven well known creation poems within Isaiah chapter 40-51, including: 40:12-31; 42:5-9; 44:24;

¹⁶ Christoph Schwobel, *The Doctrine of Creation* in Colin Gunton. *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy* (Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 1997) <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567660718>, 163.

¹⁷ Schwobel, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 164.

¹⁸ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 64.

45:7; 45:9-13; 48:12-17; 51:9-16,¹⁹ yet the imagery of creation extends beyond these passages. Kratz, referencing the extent at which Isaiah utilizes creation language in these chapters speaks of the general Hebraic worldview in Isaiah's days, "every child in the ancient Near East could tell you that God is the creator and sustainer of the earth."²⁰ What is emphasized in this section through Isaiah's use of creation language is that "Yhwh is not merely the highest deity, nor even the one God who tolerates no other gods beside him. Rather, he is the only God beside whom there is no other."²¹

We are unable to examine all seven poems in depth, but will pay close attention to a few that will help frame the larger thesis. The first few chapters of "deutero-Isaiah" are largely passages of comfort for God's people. Within the comfort offered by the prophet, is imagery of creation. "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain" (Isaiah 40:4). The comfort God provides Israel is that of creation itself being mended, a theme that will be developed in greater depth in Isaiah 65. We must also simply note here that Isaiah has begun to paint a future eschatological vision that involves a creational reorientation of sorts.

An additional theme evidenced in this passage is the connectedness of God's creation and God's comfort. Isaiah prophecies that God would not only remember his people despite their hardship, but he would soon come and "tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11). This prophecy of tender hope for the future was not to be developed on the strength of man, but was rooted in the cosmic creator-strength of God himself. The reader is invited to

¹⁹ Theodore M. Ludwig, *The Traditions of the Establishing of the Earth in Deutero-Isaiah*. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3. 1973, 345–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3263576>

²⁰ Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel*, Translated by Anselm C Hagedorn and Nathan MacDonald. *Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 2* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 71.

²¹ Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel*, 71.

consider God's power in the creation and sustaining of the world, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?" (Isaiah 40:12). It is the God of Israel, not the idols of the nations who "stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in" (Isaiah 40:22). Again, Isaiah writes, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable" (Isaiah 40:28)." Oswalt comments on this verse, "It is a fundamental truth for Isaiah that since God has the absolutely uncontingent freedom of the Creator, he is free to save his people."²² He who creates by his goodwill and abundance of love, also saves by his goodwill and abundance of love. In terms of worldview, creation serves therefore as an image and anchor of strength and hope for God's people. In a sense, the Hebraic creation story itself is a primary symbol that all is not lost.

Further, Isaiah 40 functions as a fascinating juxtaposition of God's transcendence and immanence. The very God who created the cosmos and numbered the stars, has covenanted himself to Israel and promised to care for them tenderly. The heavens thus serve as a symbol not only of God's might and majesty, but of his transcendence and otherness. As Rudolph Otto might say, the heavens are a sign of the "mysterium tremendum,"²³ the terrifying reality that God is utterly unique and tremendous in power. Yet, as a tender shepherd he is also imminent and involved in his creation. Christopher Watkin quite powerfully draws the importance of God's imminence and transcendence and how these dynamics impact our worldview.

"For the unbiblical view, if God is transcendent, then we cannot say anything about him. For the biblical view, if God is transcendent, then we cannot approach him. For the

²² John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapter 40-66* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 69.

²³ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Translated by John W. Harvey (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010), 13.

unbiblical view, if God is immanent, then we cannot ultimately distinguish him from the stuff of creation. For the biblical view, if God is immanent, then we cannot escape his care and love.”²⁴

Continuing our survey of critical creation passages, we arrive at Isaiah 45 which contains the well-known Cyrus passage. He says to the pagan king Cyrus, “I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things... I the LORD have created it” (Isaiah 45:7-8). The creation language in this passage is used a mechanism to communicate with Cyrus that Yhwh alone is the God of all creation. Alec Motyer comments, “Earthly events have heavenly origins. The initiation, continuation and climax of Cyrus’ career are the Lord’s doing... It is exactly like the way in which the fertilization of earth begins with the rain from heaven.”²⁵ This chapter reveals a fascinating insight of how an Isaiahan worldview understood the authority of a future king like Cyrus. On the one hand, Cyrus is to be viewed as a legitimate ruler with legitimate authority whose existence and decisions are meaningful to God’s people. Yet, God’s people know that Cyrus, like Assyria in Isaiah 10, is ultimately God’s tool. This vision of authority is starkly unique among God’s people, and Isaiah uses creation language to serve this point. Cyrus, as a created being, is ultimately at the whim of the one who stands outside of creation. Like a little boy who might boast of his father’s strength, the Israelites were to walk tall knowing who the omnipotence of their redeemer.

The creation language continues into verses 11-12 of this same passage with an interesting twist. In these verses God is seen as the both “the one who formed” Israel, as well as the one who “made the earth and created man on it.” Within the passage, this interlacing of creation imagery to speak of the origin of Israel and the origin of the earth communicates that the

²⁴ Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 59.

²⁵ J. Alec. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 20. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 324.

God who governs all of creation is “rousing up Cyrus to set Israel free.”²⁶ It is here where the symbol of covenant is seen as binding together much of Isaiah’s creation language. Daniel Hardy connects the idea of covenant and creation when he writes, “The value of human participation in creation-history is deeply dependent, therefore, on the quality of the human response both to creation and to the divine gift... through which humans affect the constitution of creation.”²⁷ For Hardy, it is God’s freely established covenant, which provides the structure for properly living in God’s ordered world. In other words, creation and covenant are intricately woven together for God’s people throughout the pages of Isaiah in a way that shapes Hebraic worldview in order to drive godly behavior. Tim Meadowcroft sees a similar connection of covenant and creation language in Isaiah 55:10-11. Meadowcroft writes, “The metaphors chosen echo a link with creation but also sharpen the focus onto the covenant-making word of God.”²⁸ God’s people will never be fully lost, for they are a covenant people and their God is a covenant-keeping God.

Isaiah 45 continues with further creation language. We read in Isaiah 45:18, “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the LORD, and there is no other.” This passage intertwines God’s creation with God’s purpose for creation. God not only created the heavens and the Earth, but he formed them for a purpose, to be inhabited. This purposeful creation is unique to Yhwh. For Isaiah, creation-faith is “closely interrelated

²⁶ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66 A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969), 168.

²⁷ Daniel Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology in The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, Edited by Colin Gunton. First Edition (Edinburgh, Scotland: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567660718>, 122.

²⁸ Tim Meadowcroft, *Transforming World and Empire*, in Brett, Mark G., Tim Bulkeley, and Tim Meadowcroft. *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire*. Edited by Andrew T. Abernethy. Illustrated edition (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 145.

with the idea of uniqueness of Yahweh.”²⁹ Their God is unique, and has ordered his world in his way according to his good purpose.

Israel’s condemnation in Isaiah 51:12-13 is tied to their knowledge of God as creator and therefore to God as the source of all truth and knowledge. The Israelites are guilty precisely because they have forgotten the LORD their Maker “who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth” (Isaiah 51:12-13). Developing this theme, Murray Rae demonstrates how modern liberal theology, as well as the philosophers of postmodernity, have made this exact error, demonstrating how their epistemology is more akin to Plato’s caves than to a Biblical theology. “Truth, it is thought, belongs to the eternal realm of the divine and is not emenable, therefore, to historical mediation.”³⁰ This skepticism is present in philosophers like Descartes and Spinoza, and has worked its way into the later skepticism of movements like the ‘Jesus Seminar.’ For Rae, the Hebraic understanding of history stands in stark contrast to this skepticism. The Hebraic understanding of history is shaped by two primary conditions. The first is that God created the world *ex nihilo*, and the second is that God has a goal and direction that history is moving towards. Rae writes, “The idea of creation out of nothing means that the world is fully God’s world.”³¹ Truth, objectivity, and interpretation of reality all belong to God. Secondly, Rae notes that the devaluation of creation is at least part of the cause of liberal theology’s descent into skepticism, “The rejection of this historical mediation of truth and salvation has its roots in the devaluation of the realm of space and time in Greek thought, and has been allowed to flourish in the Christian theological tradition because of a neglect of the doctrine of creation.”³² Isaiah does

²⁹ Ph. B. Harner, *Creation Faith in Deutero-Isaiah* (Vetus Testamentum 17, no. 3. 1967. 298–306), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1516847>, 302.

³⁰ Murray Rae, *Creation and Promise: Towards a Theology of History in Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Craig Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, Mary Healy, Murray Rae (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 268.

³¹ Rae, *Creation and Promise*, 285.

³² Rae, *Creation and Promise*, 295.

not permit us to forget our creational origin. Creation is not secondary to Isaiah's worldview, but rather is a primary thread of cohesion running through the entire story of God's people.

Concluding Thoughts on Creation Language in Isaiah

Perhaps Christopher Ansberry summarizes Isaiah's use of creation language well when he writes that creation serves as a "paradigm for the ordering of human life. The cosmic order shapes one's conception of and life within the social order. Put differently, the structure embedded in the cosmos structures one's vision of and vocation within the socio-moral order."³³ This vision of a "socio-moral order" described by Ansberry is akin to what I have been labeling a worldview. Isaiah continually returns to the theme of creation to shape a cogent and cohesive vision of reality for the people of God.

Eschatology

Thus far we have considered the first of two pillars germane to our discovery of Isaiah's worldview, creation. We now turn to consider Isaiah's eschatology. As we saw in our discussion of creation, the term eschatology must be defined. Daniel Hardy writes, "the term is understood at two levels, cosmic and personal, the end of the cosmos (invisible or visible), and the end of the person... and how God provides for these eventualities."³⁴ This is a helpful starting place, but in considering eschatology alongside creation, we must also think of eschatology in terms of purpose as well. If we understand our end, we can truly interpret our purpose in all areas of life. Bauckham summarizes well when he writes, "The coming completion of God's purposes for his creation must set a determinative direction for the understanding of all other topics in theology."³⁵ It is fair to say that one's eschatology will deeply direct their worldview.

³³ Christopher B. Ansberry, *Wisdom and Biblical Theology in Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, Edited by David G. Firth and Lindsay Wilson (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 178.

³⁴ Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 110.

³⁵ Bauckham, *Eschatology*, 308.

Bill Arnold, in his excellent essay *Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism*, provides a helpful starting place for our discussion as he seeks to trace the development of eschatological thought in Israel throughout the centuries. He states that in earlier Biblical literature, such as the Pentateuch, we are presented with a less developed eschatology. “The promises of land and progeny combine older ancestral traditions into a unified national epic and drive the narrative forward.”³⁶ But, after Deuteronomy it might be said that “Israel's covenant traditions required a determinative and ethical self-reflection, a stance that also required a future orientation and expectation of blessing or curse.”³⁷ For this reason the prophets, like Isaiah, had a seemingly much more developed eschatological vision than Moses.

Zion as a Symbol

Joy Hooker, in her essay *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, offers insight for how the symbol of Zion (or Jerusalem) is used dynamically by Isaiah to form worldview. Our considerations in this section are mainly around the eschatological implications of this symbol. However, in order to do so we must trace, in part, its usage throughout Isaiah. In chapters 1-39 Zion is stated as God's dwelling place (Isaiah 8:18) and therefore the place where God's moral standard ought to be clearly executed. In these chapters Zion symbolism is used by Isaiah to state “God's righteous order as the only valid order.”³⁸

Two similar experiences in Zion, one concerning Ahaz and the other concerning Hezekiah draw out some depth for Zion symbolism. In Isaiah chapters 7-8, while King Ahaz of Jerusalem is under siege, Isaiah confronts Ahaz “at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field” (Isaiah 7:3). This location, where water poured into Zion, is filled with

³⁶ Bill Arnold, *Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism* in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*. Edited by J. Webster, K. Tanner, and I. Torrance (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25.

³⁷ Arnold, *Old Testament Eschatology*, 25.

³⁸ Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 116.

deeper imagery of the Garden of Eden. Zion is flowing with steady water, yet because of Ahaz's disobedience, the raging waters of the Euphrates go "over all its banks" (Isaiah 8:8). This story is contrasted in chapters 36-37 when King Hezekiah faces a second crisis in the conduit of the upper pool (Isaiah 36:2). Where Ahaz failed, Hezekiah turned to God. "The Hezekiah narrative demonstrates that God is creator and sovereign ruler. He is the only source of security and refuge."³⁹ All of this narrative is constructed around the powerful Zion symbolism holding the story together.

In later chapters as the nations play a more prominent role, it is Zion that stands at the center of international affairs. "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabians, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours... They will plead with you, saying: 'Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him,'" (Isaiah 45:14). Isaiah is declaring once again that the standard of Zion is the only standard for every nation. "His order is the only valid order. All nations are called to acknowledge this and are therefore summoned to Zion and worship YHWH there (45:14, 49:7, 22-23)."⁴⁰

Yet even beyond nations, empires are called to recognize the standard of Zion as well. "When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes" (Isaiah 10:12). The God of Zion moves empires according to his free will and determination. Even though Zion, the center of God's standard to the world is under the earthly dominion of various empires, Zion itself "is not subject to empire... and is of a whole different nature and quality of space."⁴¹ For this reason, Isaiah's ultimate eschatological vision is of a restored and renewed Zion. "For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (Isaiah

³⁹ Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 118.

⁴⁰ Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 118.

⁴¹ Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 121.

34:8). Zion, the symbol of God's standard will be beautiful and powerful once again. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing" (Isaiah 35:9), "the Lord will "rejoice in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 65:19), and all nations will "come and see [God's] glory" (Isaiah 66:18). This connection to the land, and infusion of purpose to the land itself is baked into the Isaiahanic worldview. "For Isaiah, Zion is the center point for the fulfilment of all God has promised, not just for Judah, but for the whole of creation."⁴² From a macro-worldview perspective, "Isaiah uses Zion as a symbolic tool to call Judah's kings to account, the nations to come and worship, and boldly sets forth an alternative to empire's view of reality."⁴³

The Day of the Lord as Victory Over Israel's Enemies

Central to the discussion on eschatology within the prophets is the phrase 'the day of the Lord.'

This phrase is used throughout Isaiah in a variety of ways. "Generally, the idea refers to a period of time when Yhwh arrives to establish his decisive rule on earth, vindicating the faithful remnant but also punishing the wicked."⁴⁴ The 'day of the Lord' constitutes another symbol deeply embedded in Isaiah's worldview. Herbert Wolf identifies at least nine ways that the idea of the day of the Lord is used by Isaiah: a day of distress (37:3), a day of uproar (5:30), a day of the wrath of the Lord (30:27), a day of vengeance (34:8), judgment by fire (1:31, 66:24), the shaking of heaven and earth (13:10, 34:4), the destruction of Babylon (13:1), the desolation of the earth (24:1), the judgment on the powers of heaven (27:1).⁴⁵ Each of these have particular eschatological nuances which are part of the shaping of Isaiah worldview, all highlighting a time when God will decisively act in human history. That idea, of God's ultimate decisive turning of

⁴² Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 121.

⁴³ Hooker, *Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah*, 121

⁴⁴ Arnold, *Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism*, 27.

⁴⁵ Herbert M Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah, The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 286-291.

history is woven into their entire story as a people. It is a symbol of Israel's overall mytho-heritage.

Often, the idea of the “day of the Lord” is telescoped by Isaiah. As an example, in Isaiah 13, an oracle against Babylon, the phrase is used to not only portray Babylon's ultimate defeat which would occur in a particular moment in world history, but also to refer to something much larger in scale, “a cosmic upheaval that far outstrips the mere destruction of that city.”⁴⁶ Eschatologically, we might say that the “day of the Lord” as it refers to the destruction of Babylon, is a shadow that points to the ultimate substance still to come. “All such “days of the Lord” in the Old Testament find warrant for their portrayal as cosmic upheavals in the fact that they adumbrate a true and coming eschaton in which such an upheaval will take place.”⁴⁷ As a deeply held symbol of Israel, they would have expected a prophet to utilize this language to speak against Israel's enemies, but in Isaiah 2:12 it is used against Israel. This “application of the Day of the Lord theology against his own people was an unusual twist,”⁴⁸ which must have deeply disturbed the true Israelite.

From a mytho-heritage perspective, the Day of the Lord was certainly wrapped up in imagery of the Exodus, a core part of Israel's story, and a core theme utilized by Isaiah. Many of the images associated with that day, are reminiscent of the plagues God sent over Egypt. “They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them... to make the land a desolation... The sun will be dark at its rising... the infants will be dashed in pieces” (Isaiah 13:8-16). In fact, the Exodus serves as a wonderful image to understand how Isaiah uses day of the Lord imagery eschatologically. Goldingjay speaks into this indirectly when he notes that Isaiah “speaks as if

⁴⁶ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants*, New Testament. vol. 3. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 279.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants*, 281.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 140.

the end of the world is imminent; what fulfills such prophecies is not the actual end, but a particular historical expression of God's ultimate purpose receiving a fulfillment in time."⁴⁹

Every smaller day of the Lord, is but a prototype of the ultimate day of the Lord. This shapes not only how Israel ought to live with a purpose in the midst of the rise and fall of various superpowers, but more deeply shapes their worldview of who holds the true power.

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53

Isaiah is perhaps most well-known among Christians for its many passages regarding the servant.

Throughout Isaiah we are continually confronted with Isaiah's eschatological hope firmly wrapped around his vision of the coming servant-messiah. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations... He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:1-4). The most well-known servant passage is Isaiah 53. Darrell Bock describes this chapter as "one of the most significant chapters of the entire Tanakh."⁵⁰ It is here where we most clearly see the rejected suffering servant who would be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Isaiah directly links the future hope of peace and healing with the work of this suffering servant. In other words, "The servant's sufferings were the means of their [Israel's remnant] spiritual restoration."⁵¹

Michael J. Wilkins documents how the symbol of the servant, which occurs thirty-one times in chapters 40-66 was an enigma in Jewish history. Debate existed as to whether the servant was to be taken corporately as a reference to Israel or individually as a reference to a coming savior. This debate existed because the servant had become a symbol that shaped the

⁴⁹ John Goldingjay, *The Theology of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 40.

⁵⁰ Darrell Bock, *Conclusion in The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*. Edited by Darrel L. Bock, and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012), 267

⁵¹ F. Duane Lindsey, *The Servant Songs, A Study in Isaiah* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 122

Hebraic worldview. In some verses, it is clear the servant is a reference Israel as a whole and their purpose among the nations. At other times, the prophet reached far beyond Israel collectively to speak of a particular savior yet to come. “As enigmatic and paradoxical as the varied perspectives may be of the servant in isolation, they will only be understood fully when we see that Jesus Messiah is the fulfillment of the entire portrait found in Isaiah 40-55 as a whole.”⁵² According to the New Testament, Jesus is the proper fulfillment of the servant prophecies, and therefore is the true eschatological linchpin that ushers in a new age of peace and restoration.

John Feinberg, reflecting on Isaiah 53, offers insight into the impact this text might have on the narrative-history that shaped Isaiah’s worldview. Isaiah 53 showcases a God who longs for relationship. “He must be a God who truly cares about us, interacts with us, understands what we experience, and even at times suffers with us. He must be a relational God who is vulnerable to us and our needs.”⁵³ This is the Hebrew God of Abraham and of Moses. While God has always been a relational God towards Israel, the epitome of his relational love is described in the suffering of the servant-messiah. Israel is a nation who is loved with a greater love than any other god or person could ever provide.

The Redemption of the Nations

The future role of the nations in Isaiah is the basis of much academic literature. Understanding Isaiah’s vision for the nations is central to his eschatology, as well as his overall worldview. On the one hand, there is an ultimate submission of the nations to the rule of God. Isaiah writes in chapter 45 that the nations would come in chains and bow down before Israel. Yet, only a few

⁵² Michael J. Wilkins, *Isaiah 53 and the Message of Salvation in the Four Gospels*, in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*. Edited by Darrel L. Bock, and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012), 112.

⁵³ John Feinberg, *Postmodern Themes from Isaiah 53*, in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*. Edited by Darrel L. Bock, and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012), 216.

verses later, Isaiah seems to promote a universal gift of salvation for all the nations. “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:22). Mark Brett sees common imperial language of Isaiah’s day in the seeming contrast. “The submission of the nations therefore comes either by way of violence or by way of assimilation, dual options commonly provided by imperial rule. Oppressors may either be bathed in blood (49:26) or join peacefully in the project of restoring Zion (49:22-23).”⁵⁴ These dueling images for Isaiah are eschatological foundations of an Isaiahan worldview. They begin to answer the question ‘where are we headed?’ For Isaiah, there is a future empire in which God reigns supreme over all nations, and in which his law is the beautiful standard of righteousness for all peoples.

A further question related to the future role of the nations in Isaiah is in regard to their relation to God’s law. On the one hand we read that in the “latter days” (eschatological language), the nations will flow to the mountain of the Lord saying, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). The academic literature refers to this movement of the nations towards Zion in the latter days as “centripetal universalism.”⁵⁵ Other eschatological passages seem to imply that Israel would become missionaries carrying the truth of to the nations, known as “centrifugal universalism.” This is seen in passages such as the servant songs of Isaiah where we read that the “coastlands wait for his law” (Isaiah 42:4), and “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). Grisanti notes that the centripetal nature of the first three servant songs in Isaiah is so strong that Volz, a

⁵⁴ Mark G. Brett, *Imperial Imagination in Isaiah 56-66*, in Brett, Mark G., Tim Bulkeley, and Tim Meadowcroft. *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire*. Edited by Andrew T. Abernethy. Illustrated edition (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 168.

⁵⁵ Michael A. Grisanti, *Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update*. (The Master's Seminary Journal 9. 1998. 36-91), 39.

well-known Isaiah scholar titled “the first three servant songs with the heading “the founder of mission,” and identifies the missionary outreach of Israel as the central concern of these songs.”⁵⁶

While there is tension in regards to which vision Isaiah had of Israel’s future, whether they would be active or passive participants in the redemption of the nations, there are significant worldview implications from the debate. First, God’s original plan for Israel, to be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3) has not failed, and will certainly come to pass. God’s covenant, a theme we have already discussed in our survey of creation, will prove stable in the eschatological final days. Second, despite their just punishment of exile, God’s people were to be shaped by an eschatological hope not only of a restored Zion, but also of a torah loving globe. Ultimately the nations are “destined to turn to the God who lives on Zion and to find their mutual relationships healed there.”⁵⁷

The New Heaven and the New Earth

As we move into the final section of Isaiah a shift is made. Mark Brett says that “the conflict that surfaces within the final eleven chapters of the book of Isaiah seem to belong to a different world.”⁵⁸ This is perhaps most clearly seen in Isaiah 65:17-25 where Isaiah describes the new heavens and the new earth, a picture of God’s final plan of redemption through a new creation. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17). There have been deep hints throughout Isaiah that a final end to all suffering is always on the horizon. We see this in Isaiah 25:7-8 where God promises he will “swallow up death forever.” The clarity of Isaiah 65:17-25 takes this eschatological hope visually to an entire new plane. Oswalt importantly notes the presence of the phrase, “For behold...” that begins this section. This little phrase substantiates everything Isaiah

⁵⁶ Grisanti, *Israel’s Mission to the Nations*, 46.

⁵⁷ Goldingjay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 126.

⁵⁸ Brett, *Imperial Imagination in Isaiah*, 167.

has said from 56:1 onwards. In other words, the vision Isaiah provides in this section gives the very reason why the Israelites ought to live the holy lives he has described previously.

“The people should do righteousness in anticipation of this manifestation of divine power; they should abandon idolatry for this reason; they should believe in God’s revelation of his glory in them because of this; they should listen to the voice of the Servant/Messiah when he says he will open their prison doors because of this.”⁵⁹

We ought to ask ourselves what event Isaiah was considering in his description of a new heaven and a new earth. I believe Francis Turretin accurately summarizes the meaning of this passage when he describes both an immediate and ultimate interpretation of the passage, a telescoping of fulfillment. He writes that the immediate meaning of Isaiah’s prophecy was that God would ultimately bring the Jewish nation back from captivity in Babylon. With prophetic style, Isaiah infers that the return to Israel would be so great that it would “seem as if a new face was to be put upon all things and the heavens and the earth (yea, the whole world) were made new...”⁶⁰ Turretin continues however by stating that the full interpretation should not be restricted simply to Israel’s external restoration, “but should be extended to the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, in whom and by whom the whole world shone as it were with a new face.”⁶¹ Here, Turretin describes the millennial kingdom of Christ’s reign, ushered in at his resurrection and ascension. Yet still, there is a future sense to this passage as well, a sense that picks up on many other promises of final rest made throughout Isaiah, “Wrath and rebellion are gone, a salvation more permanent than even they are has come (51:6), the Savior has done his work, and the Creator’s original purpose in creation may be realized.”⁶² Bauckham summarizes the worldview implications of this passage well when he writes, “What God through new creation takes into

⁵⁹ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, 655.

⁶⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 3 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997), 593.

⁶¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 593.

⁶² Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, 656.

eternity is not simply what creation will be at the end of the temporal process, but all that it has ever been. Nothing of value will be lost.”⁶³ The people of God can live in the reality that the very same God who delivered Israel from the hands of their captors, has also delivered them from the captivity of sin and Satan through the death of Christ, and will ultimately deliver us from every spore of death in this current creation. In agreement with Bauckham we might say the eschatology of Isaiah “lies somewhere between ‘consistent’ and ‘realized’ eschatology, a position sometimes labelled ‘inaugurated’ eschatology.”⁶⁴

Final Thoughts on Eschatology in Isaiah

Daniel Hardy provides very helpful insights as he comments on the response that eschatology ought to form in us. He speaks of the otherness of creation and eschatology being rooted in God, and therefore the need for an “activation of the movement from creation to eschaton... in relation to God.”⁶⁵ This activation occurs in worship, the very place that Isaiah continues to return his audience. God is the “source and end of all being, order and energy in existence.”⁶⁶ Therefore worship is not only the intense celebration of the self-giving God, but it is also “the extensive and encompassing direction of all the universe, the world and human life towards that which has brought them to be and move toward their fulfillment.”⁶⁷ This is the true response of those whose worldview is properly shaped by both creation and eschatology.

Application for Homiletics in Theological and Practical Terms

As part of the aim of this paper is to consider potential homiletical applications for modern preaching as it relates to the worldview of the Isaiah, I offer below a selection of ideas for pastorally applying the findings of this paper faithfully in the pulpit.

We Live in a World of Order and Objective Truth

⁶³ Bauckham, *Eschatology*, 316.

⁶⁴ Bauckham, *Eschatology*, 306

⁶⁵ Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 127

⁶⁶ Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 127.

⁶⁷ Hardy, *Creation and Eschatology*, 128.

First, just as Isaiah pierced through the voices and ideologies of his day, there is a need for pastors to pierce through the mess of postmodernism with the order and objectivity of the God who both created the world with purpose, infused it with certain values and principles, and is leading it towards a God-designed definite end. Francis Schaeffer provides a fitting critique of modern man's worldview in relation to semiotics. He somewhat playfully writes, "To the new theology, the usefulness of a symbol is in direct proportion to its obscurity."⁶⁸ Schaeffer's point is a reference to the postmodern dilemma, what he calls their descent below the "line of despair."⁶⁹ This line of despair is the reality that modern man, in an effort to detach himself from all metanarratives, has removed the very grounds from beneath his feet that had provided objectivity in the first place. Even many self-confessed Christians, unknowingly infused with post-modern thought, believe in the subjectivity of truth, and therefore the lack of any objectivity in reality at all. They have sunk below Schaeffer's "line of despair."

Likewise, postmodernism has accepted a "disbelief in metanarratives and opposition to metanarratives as characteristic of postmodernity."⁷⁰ The detaching of modern man from his mythical history has had drastic effects on his worldview. Leslie Newbigin insightfully suggests that a "strange fissure thus runs right through the consciousness of modern Western man. The ideal that he seeks would eliminate all ideals. With dedicated zeal he purposes to explain the world as something that is without purpose."⁷¹ Christopher Watkin expresses a similar dilemma of modern man when he writes that "to dispense with the idea of God requires a radical overhaul of other concepts that are dependent on God and his character: Ideas like truth, beauty, goodness, justice, meaning, and humanity."⁷² Like Neitzche's madman, postmodern men are destined to

⁶⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 58.

⁶⁹ Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 16.

⁷⁰ Bauckham, *Eschatology*, 307.

⁷¹ Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks, the Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1986), 35.

⁷² Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 153.

walk detached from any basis for objectivity and order. Or as Cornelius Van Til suggests, the nontheistic assumption “denies its creaturehood. It will not be receptive of God’s interpretation; it wants to create its own interpretation without reference to God. It thus tries to do the impossible with the result that self-frustration is written over all its efforts.”⁷³

Isaiah beckons us to cut through Schaeffer’s despair, Neitzche’s madness, and Van Til’s self-frustration with the objectivity of God’s Word. He reminds us that we are not free to interpret reality however we see fit. The signs and the symbols have objective meaning and they are to form an objective basis for living. Our creation heritage is true and cannot be wished away through modern interpretation. Where we came from and where are headed are part of our identity, our very worldview through which we must interpret all of reality.

Living with a Worldview Certainty that Drives Hope

Second, considering how both creation and eschatology feed off of one another in Isaiah, the prophet provides a basis for certainty which ought to drive a hope in the midst of an often seemingly hopeless world. In Augustine’s Confessions, while retelling the story of his conversion, he writes of a moment when the certainty of his faith came to be. “No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”⁷⁴ Alan Lightman, a self-confessed materialist philosopher, comments on Augustine’s certainty, “Certainty, like permanence and immortality, is one of those conditions we long for despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary.”⁷⁵ Lightman goes on to explore, according to his materialistic worldview, the evolutionary reasons for why humans crave certainty. After a few ruminations on

⁷³ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*. Edited by K. Scott Oliphant. Fourth Edition (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2008), 218.

⁷⁴ Augustine Bishop of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. E. B. Pusey (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), section 8.12,

⁷⁵ Alan Lightman, *Searching for Stars on an Island in Maine* (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), 146.

the lack of certainty in an atheistic world Lightman writes, “I will admit that I’m not feeling cheerful after these ruminations.”⁷⁶ Lightman, like Schaeffer described previously, has a worldview devoid of certainty and has therefore sunk beneath the line of despair.

Isaiah calls his audience to live in the reality of certainty. Creation and eschatology function together as the push and pull of our lives guiding us through the turmoil of life in a fallen world. Though Assyria and Babylon may rise, the certainty of God’s omnipotence and sovereignty is to provide the Christian with a steady contentment despite circumstances. When Israel was tempted to lose sight of the certainty of their story in the face of tyrants hostile to them and their God, Isaiah called them to a true anchor of certainty. Every hopeful eschatological passage of Isaiah beckons modern readers to find their certainty in the God who is there.

Living in Babylon while Hoping for Heaven

In an excellent essay titled *The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy*, Moshe Weinfeld demonstrates similarities and differences between the Hebrew prophets understanding of empire and the other ancient near eastern gods. He explains how the Hebrew prophets were the first to envision a “new ideal kingdom built on the ruins of a former ruthless empire.”⁷⁷ They were “the first in world history to raise their voice against imperial tyranny and to depict instead a glorious picture of mankind living in harmony under divine guidance.”⁷⁸ For Isaiah this was applied to Assyria and then to Babylon. For Isaiah’s audience, this eschatological vision permitted them to embrace the tension of their geo-political circumstance. For us, if we are willing, it will do the same.

⁷⁶ Lightman, *Searching for Stars on an Island in Maine*, 156.

⁷⁷ Moshe Weinfeld, *The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy*, in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, edited by S. N. Eisenstadt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 182.

⁷⁸ Weinfeld, *The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy*, 182.

In a chapter titled *Eschatology and Identity*, Christopher Watkin writes that the Christian self is “an eschatological self that exists in the mode of anticipation. It is a self not of static essences but of faith and hope, a self forever displaced and exceeded by its desire for God.”⁷⁹ In the midst of the ever-growing mountain of empires, some political and others simply ideological, that vie for the Christians heart, this eschatological identity points us forward through the fray. While Watkin sees this unique part of our identity as fundamentally rooted in our eschatology, Isaiah might argue that it is both our eschatology and our creation story that function together, to form this stable identity for living in exile.

Further, this creation-eschatological-identity removes the pressures that cause so much of modern man’s identity crises. In a world without God, the modern mantra of ‘you only live once’ puts a frightening perspective on life. We are forced to be and accomplish everything immediately, lest we lose our only chance at happiness and fulfilment. But a worldview anchored in the creational push of God and pulled by the certain telos of God is alleviated of that pressure. “My identity can be messy, confusing, and even frustrating to me in the present in a way that does not signal an ultimate or final denial of who I am.”⁸⁰ The Christian is not crushed by the tyranny of the urgent to accomplish all now in order to prove himself for the day of the Lord is certainly on the horizon. What a distinct and peculiar people we ought to be!

The Simple Humble God-Centered Christian

In the process of writing this paper, there has been one verse within Isaiah that has most personally ministered to me, Isaiah 66:2. After an entire book of themes that involved everything from creation bearing witness to the depravity of Israel, to the rise and fall of empires, to the coming of the savior who would take away the sins of the world, to the incredible eschatological hope of the new heavens and the new Earth, the prophet speaks practically to the simple soul.

⁷⁹ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 577.

⁸⁰ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 578.

“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). I cannot help but wonder if this is the ultimate place the prophet was aiming all along. Having spent some time now mesmerized by the mountain peaks of Isaiah, I have found a rather joyful steadiness in this little verse. Like Samwise Gamgee in *Lord of the Rings*, who having concerned himself with epoch-shaping battles between good and evil, found that the truly good life was back in the humble shire all along. John Watts masterfully summarizes this perspective when he writes that “God’s pleasure is at its peak in the individual tryst with each humble and contrite soul that seeks him out on Jerusalem’s high and holy mountain (or anywhere else). In the simple and lowly attitude of devotion and prayer God’s creation achieves the goal for which it was intended.”⁸¹

The final phrase of Watts, “achieves the goal for which it was intended” perfectly blends together the grand purpose of this paper in the simplest of ways. Our simple lives are not without meaning or purpose, rather they are led by a telos designed by God himself. As we eagerly await the final redemption of all things, it is this humble faithful heart that God is most pleased in. In the midst of the tension of the already-not-yet, the glory of Christ’s resurrection matched by the eager longing for the redemption of all things, the humble simple life of surrender and worship is what pleases our God the most.

⁸¹ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah, World Biblical Themes* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 109.

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