
God's Holiness, Prophetic Commission and Holy Seed: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 6:1-13

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ABSTRACT

Although previous scholarship has engaged with the concept of holiness as it unfolds throughout the text, it is widely acknowledged that Isaiah 6 serves as a pivotal reflection of this theological theme. Nevertheless, there is a conspicuous lack of rigorous rhetorical studies that examine Isaiah 6 through the specific lens of divine holiness. This literary lacuna underscores the need for further scholarly inquiry that critically engages with the rhetorical dimensions of Isaiah 6 and elucidates how the motif of holiness is articulated within it. This article uses the rhetorical method to argue that Isaiah 6 reflects Prophet Isaiah's description of Yahweh's Holiness, which reveals Israel's sinfulness. The author argues that God's holiness serves as a mirror of identity for God's people, rejecting every act of sin and summoning them to daily repentance. The notable reflection of the Prophet depicts that the Holy God hates sin and commissioned Isaiah to warn and persuade Judah about the consequences of sin, leading to the destruction of their land. This paper reveals that both the MT (Masoretic Text) and LXX (the Septuagint) consistently reflect the perpetual perspective throughout the book of Isaiah, portraying the Holy God as one who hates and punishes sin. This theme is central to the chapter because it draws the contrast between God's holiness and Israel's sinfulness. The author's rhetoric connects this theme to the reality of God's hatred for sin and the importance of repentance. By examining Chapter 6 through rhetorical criticism, one gains a deeper understanding of the author's persuasive argument and the significance of God's holiness in the message of Isaiah. Additionally, the rhetorical argument of Isaiah 6 contributes to the breadth and depth of scholarship on the Isaiahic theological framework of divine holiness, man's sinfulness and Yahweh's commissioning.

Keywords: *Prophets, Israel, Holiness, Sin, LXX, MT, Holy Seed*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Given the considerable scholarly arguments in the book of Isaiah, scholars have used several approaches for the interpretation of the book of Isaiah 6 and its relationship with the entire historical breadth and theological depth of the book. It is not surprising that a critical examination of the scholarly sources opens a reader to the understanding that the theology of holiness in Isaiah 6 has become a bridge to cross to every theological theme in the book of Isaiah.

In light of the vast amount of literature, one needs to understand that there is a paucity of literature focusing on the rhetorical study of Isaiah, especially Isaiah 6. Since it is not possible to review all literatures in the book of Isaiah to show the paucity of rhetorical approach to the study of Isaiah 6 and its threefold division, the primary goal here is to help the reader to see the prominent tension in recent scholarship on Isaiah which has always been the issue of interpreters and interpretations that focus on the diversity and unity of the book (Hays 2011, 549; Tiemeyer 2020) and the interpreters have not properly engage the MT and LXX of Isaiah to see the puzzled statements in Isaiah 6 and other parts of Isaiah through careful rhetorical study to evaluate the use of literary devices such as rhyme, repetitions, and language variations that the Prophet employed to persuade the audience (Avioz 2006, 175).

Additionally, the evaluation of Isaiah 6 from different interpreters and interpretations describes Isaiah 6 more on the issue of sin and punishment that will be imposed on the people of Judah (Brueggemann 1988; Childs 2001; Stromberg 2020).

However, the context of sixth chapter of Isaiah is a bridge between Chapters 1-5 and 7, connecting the themes of Judah's wickedness and God's holiness. In *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, John Goldingay reiterates that "one recurring feature in the collages is a description of God as "Israel's Holy One." So one can see the whole book as an outworking of this description of God, and see the collages in two sequences issuing from that fact about God" (Goldingay 2014, 13).

The sixth chapter divulges the abhor nature of the "Holy One" against the

rebelliousness, sinfulness or wickedness of Judah. This means that the focus is on God's holiness from the beginning to the end. Notably, Isaiah reveals a contrast between God's eternal holiness and kingship versus Israel's temporal sinfulness. As a Jerusalemite, Isaiah's focus is on Yahweh's dwelling place in Jerusalem (Zimmerli 2003, 9).

The book of Isaiah uniquely refers to Yahweh as "the Holy One of Israel," a title used more frequently here than in any other Old Testament book. This text reminds Israel of the consequences of living a sinful and idolatrous life in relationship with the "Holy One." YHWH appears to commission Prophet Isaiah for this task, which is rooted in God's holiness and Israel's sinfulness.

For that reason, this present research aims at critically engaging the immediate context of Isaiah 6, rhetorical exegesis of Isaiah 6 and the threefold structural interpretation of Isaiah through the lens of Yahweh's holiness. Furthermore, the rhetorical interpretation of Isaiah 6 with proper engagement of MT and LXX and the unique threefold division of the sixth chapter of Isaiah through the theological theme of God's holiness and holy seed create a gap between this present research and other previous research works on the book of Isaiah.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper uses rhetorical criticism to analyze the persuasive techniques of Isaiah 6 regarding God's holiness, Israel's sinfulness and self-realization of God's Prophet. This method examines the structure and wording of the biblical text, tracing how the author leads the reader through the textual wordings from one point to the next (Carvalho 2009, 43).

Rhetorical criticism requires attention to wording meaning, literary characteristics, grammatical conjunctions and disjunctions, and stylistic matters to achieve a comprehensive understanding (Bryson 1995, 53). The use of a rhetorical method involves engaging stylistic devices like rhyme, repetitions, and language variations to awaken interest and conquer the audience (Avioz 2006, 175).

This paper evaluates how the author achieves a persuasive and informational effect

through the presentation of the viewpoint regarding God's holiness. In articulating, reflecting and interpreting the text of Isaiah, this paper gives close attention to the wording and structure of the text, rooted in the persuasive argument regarding God's holiness that reveals the sinfulness of Yahweh's Prophet and Israel.

The analysis is based on the MT and LXX versions. For using rhetorical method, this present research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the author's persuasive argument in Isaiah 6. This method allows for a thorough inspection of the text's structure and wording, highlighting the author's use of stylistic devices to convey the message. The focus on God's holiness and Israel's sinfulness is central to the paper's analysis. Furthermore, this rhetorical approach enables a nuanced understanding of the author's intent and the impact on the audience. The use of this methodology in this paper establishes its value in recognizing the persuasive approaches employed in Isaiah 6 to summon the repentance of Israel.

3.0 THE TEXT OF ISAIAH 6

Verse	English	Masoretic Text
V.1	In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.	בשנת-מות המלך עזיָהוּ נאָרְאָה אֶת־ אֲדֹנָי יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשְׂאָ וְשׁוֹלְיָו מִלְּאִים אֶת־הַהֵיכָל׃
V.2	Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.	שָׂרְפִים עֹמְדִים / מִמַּעַל לִּי וְשֵׁשׁ כַּנְּפִים שֵׁשׁ כַּנְּפִים לְאִתְּךָ בְּשַׂתַּיִם / יְכַסֶּה כְּפָיו וּבְשַׂתַּיִם יְכַסֶּה רַגְלָיו וּבְשַׂתַּיִם יְעוֹפֶה׃
V.3	And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth	וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ / קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כֹל־ הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ׃

	is full of His glory."	
V.4	And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the house was filling with smoke.	וַיִּנְעֻזוּ אַמּוֹת הַסָּפִים מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרֵא וְהַבַּיִת יִמְלֵא עָשָׁן׃
V.5	Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."	וְאָמַר אֲוִי־לִי כִי־ נִדְמִיתִי כִי אִישׁ טָמֵא־ שִׁפְתַיִם אֲנִי וּבַתּוֹךְ עִם־טָמֵא שִׁפְתַיִם אֲנִי יֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי׃
V.6	Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs	וַיַּעֲף אֶלַי אֶחָד מִן־ הַשָּׂרְפִים וּבִיָּדוֹ רַצְפָּה בְּמִלְּקוֹחִים לָקַח מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ׃
V.7	He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."	וַיַּגַּע עַל־פִּי וַיֵּאמֶר הִנֵּה נִגַּע זֶה עַל־ שִׁפְתֶיךָ וְסָר עֲוֹנְךָ וְנִטְּאֵתָה תְּכַפֵּר׃
V.8	Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"	וַאֲשַׁמְעֵ אֶת־קוֹל אֲדֹנָי אָמַר אֶת־מִי אֲשַׁלֵּחַ וּמִי יֵלֶךְ לִגְוִי וְאָמַר הִנְנִי שְׁלֹחְנִי׃
V.9	He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on	וַיֵּאמֶר לְךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַם הַזֶּה שִׁמְעוּ שְׁמוֹעַ לִמְעַלְמֵיכֶם׃

	listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'	וְאַל-תִּבְיֵנוּ וּרְאוּ רָאוּ וְאַל-תִּקְדְּעוּ:
V.10	"Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."	הַשְׁמֵן לִב־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאַזְנוֹתָיו הַכִּבְדִּי וְעֵינָיו הַשְׁעֵם פְּנֵי-יְהוָה בְּעֵינָיו וּבְאָזְנוֹיו יִשְׁמָע וּלְבָבוֹ יָבִין וְיָשָׁב וְרָפָא לִּי:
V,11	Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate,	וְאָמַר עַד-מָתַי אֶלְדָּג וְאָמַר עַד אֲשֶׁר אֶם- שָׂאוּ עָרִים מְאֵין יוֹשֵׁב וּבְתֵיבִים מְאֵין אֶלֶם וְהִשְׁאֲרָה תִשְׁאֲרָה שְׂמֵמָה:
V.12	"The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.	וְרָתַק יְהוָה אֶת-הָאָדָם וְרָבָה הַעֲזוּבָה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:
v.13	"Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be subject to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump."	וְעוֹד בָּהּ עֵשֶׂר-יָדָה וְיִשְׁבָּה וְהִיְתָה לְבַעַר כְּאֵלֶּה וּכְאֵלֶּיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁלְיָתָהּ מֵאַצְבָּתָהּ כֶּם יִרְעֶה קֹדֶשׁ מִצְבָּתָהּ: פ

4.0 THE NEW PERICOPE AND IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF ISAIAH 6

In *Discovering Isaiah: Content, Interpretation, Reception*, Andrew Abernethy (2021, 75) demonstrates how Isaiah captures the concepts of judgment and salvation through his portrayal of the concept of holiness as the most important attribute of God in the book. This chapter, Isaiah 6, marks a new periscope of Yahweh’s holiness, distinct from the preceding Chapter 5, which ends with a proclamation of judgment (Goldingay 2014, 22).

The vision in Chapter 6 occurs after King Uzziah's death and signifies a shift in Isaiah's message. Chapter 6 is a self-contained periscope, emphasizing the importance of considering the entire chapter in understanding its message. The beginning of Chapter 6 marks a fundamental periscope and revelatory vision of Prophet Isaiah, which happened immediately after the death of King Uzziah (22). The connection between Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 is significant. Chapter 7 begins with an acknowledgement of the ruling king, Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, which parallels the introductory formula in Chapter 6:1, mentioning the death of King Uzziah (Miscall 2006, 45). This parallel highlights the continuity of Isaiah's message and the connection between the two chapters. Chapter 7 introduces the fulfillment of God's word to Isaiah, which is closely tied to the themes presented in Chapter 6. The holy seed of verse 13 in Chapter 6 is also significant, as it is later developed in Chapter 7 (Baer 2006, 36; Routledge 2004, 189).

Furthermore, considering Isaiah Chapter 6 as a complete literary unit provides a deeper understanding of the prophet's message and its connection to the surrounding chapters. The fact that Chapter 6 is a holiness chapter emphasizes the importance of this attribute of God (Goldingay 2014, 22) and its implication to the oracle of judgment against Israel (Baer 2006, 36).

This transition from Chapter 6 to Chapter 7 indicates a shift in the prophet's message, from judgment to the introduction of a new theme. Overall, Isaiah Chapter 6 is a crucial part of the book, highlighting the significance of God's holiness and its connection to judgment

and salvation. This chapter serves as a pivotal point in the book of Isaiah, emphasizing the importance of God's holiness in understanding the prophet's message. In addition, the prophet's portrayal of God as a holy God emphasizes the importance of this attribute in understanding the nature of God. The fact that Chapter 6 is a holiness chapter highlights the significance of this theme in the book of Isaiah (Goldingay 2014, 22).

The chapter 6 intertwined relationship to previous 5 and the beginning of chapter 7 reveal a strong connection in their themes and patterns. These chapters share repeated words, topics, and prophetic oracles that link the themes and patterns. For example in relation to chapter 5: the phrase "land desolate without occupants" in 5:9 is echoed by "land desolate without inhabitants of the cities" in 6:11. The "lack of understanding" in 5:13 is reflected in the people's "hearing without understanding" in 6:10. The idea of "the land that will be destroyed" in 5:8 is mirrored by the "land for destruction" in 6:30. God is directly called the "Holy One of Israel" in 5:19, a title that reappears in 6:16 and 6:19 as "Holy God" and "Holy One of Israel."

The prophetic warning that "cities will be wasted without inhabitants" in 6:11 is also represented by the term "wasteland" in 5:6. Furthermore, the statement "until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged" in 6:11 relates to the promise in 5:5-6: "I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled." Finally, the recurring mention of "land" in 5:8 and 5:30 is paralleled by its repetition in 6:11-12, highlighting the central theme of the land's fate throughout these chapters.

Another important link between chapters 5 and 6 is the contrast between the sinfulness of God's people, described in chapter 5, and the holiness of God, revealed in chapter 6. This is evident in the structure of chapter 5: verses 1-7 present a song about Israel's rebellion, while verses 8-30 list woes pronounced against Israel. The recognition of Israel's sinfulness in these chapters leads directly to Isaiah's vision of God's holiness in

chapter 6. The conflict between YHWH's holiness and Israel's uncleanness is a central theme, as seen in the epithet "the Holy One of Israel," which recurs throughout the book and stands in stark contrast to "the sinful ones of Israel."

Notably, it is only in chapter 6 that Isaiah is officially commissioned and prepared for his prophetic mission, highlighting the necessity of acknowledging the depth of Israel's sin which the chapter 5 ends with predictions of exile (5:24-30) (House 1999, 212) to show intolerant nature of the Holy One towards rebelliousness and wickedness of Judah.

5.0 EXEGETICAL NOTES ON ISAIAH 6:1-14

The sixth chapter of Isaiah opens with an affirmation of the year of the King of Isaiah's death. Scholars have proposed a lot of probabilities about the exact year that King Uzziah died (Brueggemann 1998, 58 and Roberts 2015, 91). The death of Uzziah comes as a fulsome and arrogant attempt to burn incense on the incense altar in the *מִזְבֵּחַ* ("Holy Place") that turned him to unclean leper till he died and of Isaiah with the vision that is all about Holiness (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Meanwhile, as a consequence of his sins for years, the king had lived in total alienation and separation, under divine displeasure and disappointment of his arrogant evil and sins (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:16).

It has been observed that the waw-consecutive imperfect *וַיִּשְׁמַע* marks the first temporal sequence of the pastime narrative in Isaiah 6 to reflect over a sinful king and the holy temple of God. Isaiah in this v. 1 uses the word "hem" which is the Hebrew word *לְשֵׁם* and this word occurs ten times elsewhere in the Old Testament, six of which refer to the hem of the high priest's robe in Exod. 28:33-34 and 39:24-26, the other four the skirt of woman dress (Jer. 13:22, 26; Lam. 1:9; Nah. 3:5)" (Alden 1997, 65). The picture of the hem and the temple here is mostly like a description of a high priest in the holy of holies.

To further portray his temple's picture of this holy of holies that the Lord dwells, in v.2 Isaiah talks about the seraphim and their

positions. The Hebrew word *seraphim* שרפים has been mistranslated here and pictures a petrifying beast (Hendel 1999, 744-745). Some scholars misinterpret *seraphim* here by linking these worshippers with a venomous and flying snake that brought dread to the Israelites when they were in the wilderness after the Exodus and this has often been mistranslated in Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6 to mean the same terrifying serpentine creature (Hendel 1999, 745-748; Brown-Driver-Briggs 2000, 638).

In contrary to those scholarly imaginations, we have to understand that they function as YHWH's servants, called "holy attendants" in the Targum, who minister before his throne in this v.2 (Alden 1997, 66). For the verb שרף means "to burn", but a word of the same spelling is used of "snakes" in 30:6 and the usage in 30:6 misled some to misinterpret the word in this v.2. But we have to note that the word *seraphim* in this v.2 has no definite article: it is a description, not a title and these *seraphim* were "burning ones" who exercised a burning ministry towards the prophet (Motyer 1999, 70).

In verse 3, there is evidence of a climatic exaltation of the Holiness of Yahweh. This Hebrew phrase הִלְלוּ-לֵאלֹהֵי is a demonstrative "reciprocal idea of a mutual action that is expressed with appropriately paired words" (Williams 2007, 55). This communal worship of exaltation is done with holiness formulae which are קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ (holy, holy holy) and might indicate the wholeness (Chisholm Jr 2002, 24-28 and Young 1965, 244) of God's holiness and not really the Trinitarian concept.

The word מִלֵּא is more closely related to the noun "fullness," which refers to the state of being filled, and this concept is connected to Psalm 19, which discusses the creation glorifying God (*The NET Bible*, 2000, 1273). This conveys the idea that the earth reflects the glorious presence of God daily in its beauty. The house in v.4 (בֵּית־יְהוָה) refers to the temple (בְּיַד־יְהוָה) in v. 1 (Williams 2007, 57). And the usage of the smoke here could connote the avoidance of God being seen in essence by a mere human being, and possibly for the good of the prophet Isaiah.

Paul House noted that "smoke covers God in Leviticus 16, so perhaps smoke protects Isaiah from viewing the Lord, which could

cause Isaiah's death. Regardless of the smoke's exact purpose, Isaiah has now seen evidence of Yahweh's greatness, heard the *seraphim*'s comments on God's holiness, and felt the shaking of the building" (House 1999, 218).

This great vision that Isaiah saw, led him to the right comprehension of God, who is too holy to be described or to be associated with man. In the v. 5, Isaiah acknowledges that he is associated with Israel's "woes" when he declared to himself וָאֵי־לִי "woe to me," just like he has proclaimed to the sinful people of Israel in 5:8-23. It is Yahweh who is in the position of pronouncing וָאֵי "woe" on his people, but here his unclean prophet pronounced וָאֵי "woe" on himself because he is a "man with unclean lips". This ought to be noted that before chapter 6, the interjection וָאֵי has its bearing in 3:9 ("וָאֵי", "woe" to the persons who have recompensed themselves with evil") and 3:11 There is an understanding here that must be acknowledged in the sense that וָאֵי, 11; 6:5) lamented by Isaiah to the people and himself, in this way, craftily mirrors the threefold שִׁירֵי־קֹדֶשׁ exaltation by the *seraphim* to YHWH and constitutes a most suitable response when sinful people stand before the judgment throne of the Holy One (Hon 2019, 35).

The translation of a verb שָׁרַף has a Niphal stem that is undisputed, although its diverse translations are: "I am destroyed, ruined, cut off," and another "I am silenced." And these renditions are the possibilities of the verbal root. Smith and Blenkinsopp translate the word as "destroy" or "ruin" from the root שָׂרַף (Smith and Blenkinsopp 2007, 191-192). The LXX rendition is *κατανένυγμα* which means ("I am deeply pained"). On the other hand, Wildberger and Watts renders it "I am silent" from the same root שָׂרַף (Wildberger 1991, 248-249 and Watts 2005, 101-102). However, looking at the context and the words of the prophet Isaiah, the word could be translated as "I am silent" or "I am dumb" for the holiness of God is beyond the expression of the unclean lips of the mere mortals like Isaiah who lives among the people of unclean lips.

The term that Isaiah applies to his lips is *tame* (unclean) which is a direct opposite of holy (Hon, 11). On this note, scholars think that

Isaiah mentioned that his lips are unclean because the Holy praises of the Seraphim cannot be compared with the praises of sinful mortals like him likewise his unfitness to act as God's Prophet (Delitzsch, 1884, 196).

The sinful condition of Isaiah demands the intermediary and immediate action of Yahweh for purification and this leads us to the submission of v. 6. This tells us the response of God to clean a sinner like Isaiah when he confesses his sinfulness in v.5. Yahweh sent an angel to purify Isaiah with a *אֲבָנִים* which could be translated as a "(glowing) stone" for the same word is used in 2 Chron. 7:3, Est. 1:6, Ezek. 40:17, 18, and 42:3 to mean "pavement (made of smooth stone) (Watts 2005, 102).

Although the same similar word *אֲבָנִים* in 1 Kings 19:6 is used to refer to hot stones (or coals) for baking cake, it is a masculine noun, unlike *אֲבָנִים* (pavement) Which is feminine (Wildberger 1991, 250). And this *אֲבָנִים* (pavement) is taken from the Altar. There is no appropriate description of the Altar; whether the *אֲבָנִים* refers to the incense Altar or the Altar of burnt offering (251). The touching of the pavement leads to the total cleansing of the sins of Isaiah.

Therefore, the narrative confirms the eradication of the *אֲבָנִים* of the prophet by Yahweh Himself who does the cleansing through the instrumentality and is representative of seraphim who stands as a priest to Prophet Isaiah. It is very important one translates the verb and conjunction *וַיֵּשָׁב* which is a "Qal stem, with an active voice as "and has departed," instead of a passive rendition (e.g. and "taken away") in most translations (Hon 2019, 17). In the LXX the Hebrew verb *וַיֵּשָׁב* is rendered in the promissory-future tense which is *ἀφελεῖ* (means, this will take away). I prefer the Hebrew rendition of the MT that "has departed" instead of the LXX rendition "will be taken away" because the departure of the sins led to the demand of a service in v.8 which Yahweh, put in the question, whom shall I send? I don't think Yahweh does not know that he is supposed to send the prophet Isaiah.

The Isaiah heard the *קוֹל* "voice" in v.8 with such a question for his response, *מִי אֶשְׁלַח וְיֵלְכֵנִי* "whom shall I send? And who will go

for us?" The questions are contrastively similar. This is in the sense that the first question calls for the screening of Yahweh and the second question calls for a volunteering and available vessel for the demanded task. The *וַיֵּשָׁב* is not a Trinitarian statement, but it is a demand within the YHWH governing body since he is the Lord of hosts (Eldhose 2024, 22-33).

Meanwhile, YHWH is not blind to a purified vessel that has been purified but he needed the vessel to volunteer for the service. And so Isaiah, the new purified vessel exclaimed to be commissioned for the service by YHWH with the Hebrew words *וַיֵּשָׁב וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֵּלְכֵנִי* "and I said, behold, I, send me". The word *וַיֵּשָׁב* which means "behold, I" and other translators may prefer translating *וַיֵּשָׁב* as "here I am".

This Isaiah's commission desires people not to even understand, to even talk of turning from their sins in v.9a because Yahweh made it so open here that no matter how they see they will not know. And v.10a continues with such a strong section with the "Hiphil imperatives *וַיַּשְׁבֵּט* ("make fat"), *וַיַּבְהִיב* ("make heavy"), and *וַיַּשְׁמַח* ("make smeared") compel a concerted effort for one purpose – render the respective organs, heart, ears and eyes, dull and unreceptive, thus making the senses of the people dysfunctional" (Hon, 2020, 18).

And v.10b has a conjunction *וְ*, which is used to begin a negative purpose clause, thereby translated as "lest, or else, beware lest or in order no" (Williams 2007, 163). There is a purposeful chiasm here based on the condition that the people are into, and the chiastic order is "heart/ears/eyes" and then "eyes/ears/heart" in this v. 10c. And after the chiastic order, then the narrator shifted "preceding imperfects to the waw-consecutive perfect in *וַיֵּשָׁב* (and *וַיֵּשָׁב*) that signifies a disjunction for indicating a future outcome, when the abilities of seeing, hearing, and understanding are not obstructed" (Williams 2007, 76).

There is a need for us to note the usage of the LXX in this v.10. The LXX clause reads, *ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου* "for the heart of this people was thickened." Here the subject of the verb "Thickening" is not the Lord, but the "people" that led to the LXX usage of

the particle $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$, and the particle $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ introduces the reason of the previous affirmation regarding the thickening of their heart.

The translator gives the idea that the people hear and not understand and see and not perceive is *because* ($\gamma\alpha\rho$) they have a thickened heart and not because the Lord hardened their hearts (Evans 1989, 63). The difference between LXX and MT is the particle $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$. The LXX writer gives us the picture of God who wants the repentance of the people, but the MT writer pictures a God who does the work of hardening their hearts and seems to desire their destruction instead of repentance.

Furthermore, v. 11 begins with the inquiry of the prophet about the timing of the healing when he categorically asserted $\neg\tau\epsilon\ \gamma\mu\acute{\nu}\delta\iota\ \gamma\lambda\eta\delta\ \gamma\eta\eta$ “Then I said, until when, O Lord”?, which the Lord responded to Isaiah said, $\acute{\epsilon}\psi\iota\chi\ \tau\epsilon\ \lambda\acute{\iota}\psi\text{-}\tau\omega\delta$ which is often translated as “surely until when”, but the phrase can simply be translated as “until”. This “until” of YHWH forms in parallelism of destruction of the cities and houses and between inhabitant and humankind, such repetition is an emphatic repetition in reaffirming YHWH’s answer to Isaiah’s question.

This led to the exploration of YHWH’S reply by the narrator because it seems the speech of Yahweh ended in v.11 with the 1st person reply (Oswalt 1986, 184). Therefore, the narrator describes the activities of the Lord in v.12. The punishable act is that YHWH will banish humankind far away, which results from the destruction described in v.11b.

The shift from the earlier imperfect to the waw-consecutive perfect in $\eta\eta\eta\eta$ (and $\eta\eta\eta\eta$) indicates a future outcome, emphasizing the land’s extensive devastation. This transition marks a disjunction, signifying that this destruction leads to a hopeless situation and determines the fate of humanity Israel. The narrator explains in verse 13, expanding on verse 12, that even if there is a tenth, it is destined for destruction or burning.

The Hebrew verb form $\eta\eta\eta$ (Piel stem) is also used in Isaiah 3:14 and 5:5, where Israel, metaphorically called YHWH’s vineyard (see 5:7), is destroyed by its people as if beasts are grazing over a field or vineyard, similar to

Leviticus 22:4 (Oswalt, 1986, p. 184). The terebinth and oak are mighty trees in Israel. For this understanding, Zohary writes, “The terebinth’s biblical name, *elah*, like that of the oak (*allon*), stems from the Hebrew *el* (god) and is associated with might and sturdiness (Zohary 2022, 109-110). These trees are among the most aged and widespread species, particularly in the Negev, Lower Galilee and the Dan Valley” (110). Isaiah is talking about the temporal felling of these mighty trees to portray the devastating destruction that will overtake God’s people.

And there is a preservation of the Holy seed (Szamocki 2022, 1064). This descriptor “holy seed” is absent in the translation of Septuagint of Isaiah 6:13, but it is reflected in the Qumran manuscript (1Q1Sa) (1055). There is nowhere in the Old Testament that the term “holy seed” is found apart from the post-exilic text of Ezra 9:2. This “holy seed” was used to describe the small community of Judeans who had returned from exile (*golah* community) (1061).

6.0 THE STRUCTURE AND INTERPRETATION OF 6:1-13

Isaiah 6:1-13 has a lot of issues that call for careful structuring and faithful interpretation. Scholars have argued that it is better to structure Chapter 6 into two sections; the vision and the commission. In this sense, the vision of Isaiah (vv.1-7) and the commission of Isaiah (vv. 8-13) (Beuken 2004, 74) and It can also mean the seeing report (vv. 1-7) and the hearing report (vv.8-13). In contrary to the twofold structure, this paper promotes the threefold structure. The threefold structure is captured in this sense: reflection of God’s holiness; reflection of self-sinfulness and reflection of God’s commission. The structurization is followed by the interpretation below:

6.1 Prophet Isaiah’s reflection of God’s Holiness (vv.1-4)

One of the components of the vision begins with the picture of the exalted and high throne of God v.1a. This indicates the contrasting reality of the thrones of men, in the likes of king Uzziah’s throne. In light of that, the Psalmist says, that

God is seated on his holy throne. ... the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted” (Psalm 47:8,9). For there are three times in this context that Isaiah acknowledges Yahweh as a “sovereign Lord.” This acknowledgement portrays the contrast between the limitlessness of Yahweh’s reign and the limitation of the earthly king’s reign (Goldingay 2001, 64).

Therefore, the kingship of Yahweh is not separated from His holiness and glorious presence which Isaiah describes immediately. Isaiah transitions to the vision of Yahweh’s exalted holiness, with verses 1-4 depicting the encounter with divine holiness and glory. Therefore, in picturing of the heavenly being, it is obvious that they are adoring the holiness of God and glorifying God in his holiness contrary to the earthly realm where Israel on the other hand besmirches the glorious presence of God and distorting the holiness of God with their sinfulness.

The encounter of divine holiness always creates soberness and reflection in the hearts of men and this leads us to such a sober and reflective picture of Isaiah’s sinful self in verses 5-8. This holiness of God defines the eternal essence of God and His glorious magnificence which leads the angels to a threefold exclamation to tell us that God’s holiness is indescribable. Furthermore, John Sawyer asserts, “Jewish commentators explain the threefold repetition of the word “holy” as a reference to the manifestation of God’s holiness (1) in heaven, (2) in this world and (3) in the world to come” (Sawyer 1999, 69). On this note, God’s holiness is beyond the grip of the prophet and so can only lead to worship and personal reflection of self-sinfulness.

6.2 Prophet Isaiah’s Purification and commission to the Service of the Holy One (5-8)

The holiness of God, when encountered with humility, prompts self-evaluation and a sense of unworthiness to be acknowledged by such a pure and holy God. Such reflection is not limited to Isaiah because there are people who have such encounters with God and have self-evaluation: Moses in Exodus 3:1-17; Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kings 22: 19-22; Jeremiah in

Jeremiah 1: 4-10; and Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1-3, all of them have self-evaluation in the sense of Isaiah.

Brueggemann, in *Isaiah 1-39*, points out that “the prophet-observer, in the presence of Yahweh’s holiness, has a fresh sense of himself, his inadequacy, and his lack of qualification to be in the holy presence. As the words converge to describe Yahweh’s majesty, they also highlight his inadequacy—terms like ‘woe,’ ‘lost,’ and ‘unclean’ illustrate this” (Brueggemann 1998, 59). However, a critical issue with Brueggemann’s argument is his continued use of the term “prophet-observer” instead of referring directly to the prophet himself.

The experience described is one of self-reflection by Isaiah, rather than an observation made by a third party, as Brueggemann suggests (59). This means that no prophet was qualified for God to use, except the prophet that God Himself qualified. They are too sinful compared to this God who is too holy beyond human imagination. The prophet displayed his humility and self-honesty by identifying with the sinfulness of the people and claiming to be as sinful as the people of Israel, in comparison to the holiness of God that the prophet has encountered in vv.1-4.

On this reality that prophet Isaiah acknowledged in Isaiah 64:4,” We are all like one who is unclean; all our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in your sight...” (NET). And so the faithful repentance of the prophet led to his purification by God through the instrumentality of one of the seraphim v6. This purification is a preparation for the climax of the entire vision and the purpose is to clean him for the use of the Holy God who alone qualifies a sinful man for His holy duties. On this issue, Brueggemann rightly interprets, “The application of live coals to the person of the human speaker is a dangerous, painful and cultic enterprise (cf. Jer. 1:9).

The effect is a complete purgation and rehabilitation, expressed in parallel terms, “guilt departed, sin blotted out” (1998, 59). God qualified Isaiah for his presence and service, just like he qualified all his counterparts in the prophetic assignments. The “send me”

exclamation was made possible because Yahweh has graciously cleaned him (prophet Isaiah) for His commission vv.8-9.

The term used by the prophet has a link with the purification ritual and imagery used in preparing the new king for his coronation and such mouth purification or rituals of cleansing were well-known in Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures (Beuken 2004, 75). For Isaiah to apply such imageries to himself, he is saying that as purified and cleansed by Yahweh, he now stands, on the side of God, the holy and ultimate King who is above all kings. Isaiah is like a vessel king, a true representative of the divine suzerain, having stood in the divine council (Hayes & Irvine 1987, 111).

6.3 Prophet Isaiah's Reflection of God's Preservation of the Holy Seed (9-13)

The prophetic message is that "these people," presumably Judah and Jerusalem, should "not comprehend," "not understand", "not look", "not listen", and "." Yahweh's government decrees that Israel should have all of its senses dulled and numbed beyond notice for them not to possibly repent vv.9-10.

While Brueggemann argues that Yahweh demands that the organs of perception—heart, eyes and ears of his people must fail. And the reason: if they *notice*, they will *turn*. And if they *turn*, they will be *healed*. But the intent of the Government of God is negative: Not to notice and so not to turn; not to turn and so not to be healed (61). He further posits that the verdict of Yahweh intends that the rebellious Judeans should be narcotized so that they will not be healed and so it means that God wills an unhealed people (61).

In the contrary to the submission of Brueggemann, this is not Yahweh and not the thrust of the text because God wills a repentant people. That is why the Greek Septuagint sought to soften the tone of this passage by changing the commands to be descriptive instead not like the Masoretic text that seems to put God's character to questioning about hardened the hearts of His sinful people and desires an unhealed people (Seitz 1993, 55). In his book, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, Brevard Childs struggles to reconcile

the interpretation of MT and LXX when it comes to the hardening of the heart of Israel. Childs argues that the LXX retains the historical context of the MT but it does give us some significant changes in the meaning of the MT (Childs 2004, 6).

Childs portrays his point in the following notable issues: 1. The Isaiah Septuagint translates the strong imperatives of the Hebrew ("keep hearing . . . keep seeing") with future finite verbs: "You will hear... you will see." Accordingly, the prophet is not enjoining the people to become hardened, but predicting that they will remain obdurate. 2. The usage of the passive by the Greek "has grown dull" alters the causative sense of the Hebrew "make fat." It is not the preaching of the prophet that causes the heart to become dull; rather, the prophet preaches because the heart is already fat (Childs 2004, 6).

For Childs, one needs to understand that the LXX toned down the divine initiative to the people of Israel hardening their hearts against the message of YHWH for their repentance (Childs 2004, 6). Therefore, the all-knowing God knows the state of Israel's hearts and seems to confirm that state of their hearts. Craig L. Blomberg rightly reiterates that the context of Isaiah does not necessarily indicate "God's planning in advance to make his people sin" (Blomberg 2007, 47). They are already wallowing in sin beyond human imagination.

The Isaiah text from Qumran caves reads Isaiah 6:9-10 as follows: "Keep on listening, because you may perceive. Make the hearts of these people appalled. Stop its ears and turn away its eyes- lest it see with its eyes and hear with its ears. Let it understand in its heart and return and be healed" (1QIsa) (Blomberg 2007, 47). For this submission, that is why v. 13 indicated that the "tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump"(NKJ) (Blomberg 2007, 47). Although the concept of "holy seed" appears in metaphorical use to designate human descendants and in this context, it is referring to the remnants that will maintain their relationship with God after the

destruction of the land of Israel and geographical exilic displacement.

The “holy seed” indicates the distinct character that is rooted in the Israelite ethos. This expression “holy seed” in this v.13 characterizes and denotes the very God’s people who will survive the destructive punishment of Israel foretold by God to the prophet Isaiah (Szamocki 2022, 1055). The concept of the “holy seed” has lots of connections with some of its prototypes within Isaiah’s corpus; we have references like “the seed blessed by YHWH” in Isaiah 61:8-9 and Isaiah 65:9, 22 (Szamocki 2022, 1063).

This concept of “holy seed” in Isaiah and its connection to Ezra 9:2 leads some scholars to think that the text of Isaiah was edited and compiled during the post-exilic period because in the context of Ezra is talking about the entire community of returnees who returned from the Babylonian captivity who separated themselves from the people of the land (Kaiser 1983, 133; Blenkinsopp 2000, 223; Berges 2012, 80, 87–89).

However, this paper is of the view that the text of Ezra 9:2 is the fulfilment of Isaiah 6:13b. Additionally, this “holy seed” is and remains the YHWH people, who will maintain their holiness, refrain from profaning themselves and desecrating themselves by mixing with the “seed of the Gentiles” and they will not be hardened, blinded and deaf to the words of Yahweh (6:9-10) (Szamocki 2022, 1066).

7.0 CONCLUSION

A rhetorical-exegetical discourse of Isaiah chapter 6, particularly within the immediate literary context of chapters 5 and 7, reveals that the complexities arising from the divergent readings of the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) have not been adequately addressed in relation to the dominant theology of Yahweh’s holiness and its implication to Judah’s iniquities. The interpretive frameworks—whether the conventional twofold division of Isaiah 6 or the threefold structure advanced in this present work—ominously influence the understanding of the text, especially regarding the manifestation of

Yahweh’s holiness, the pervasive sinfulness of Isaiah and Israel, and the prophet’s commissioning to confront the rebellion and iniquity of Judah. This exegetical-rhetorical approach demonstrates that Yahweh’s profound commitment to his own holiness obliges the preservation of a relationship with the remnant, symbolized by the “holy seed” referenced in verse 13, a key motif that finds fulfillment in the post-exilic restoration depicted in Ezra 9. Nevertheless, this thesis acknowledges the ongoing need for scholarly engagement with the interpretive tensions and unresolved questions surrounding the varying representations of Isaiah 6 in the MT and LXX, inviting further critical reflection and dialogue.

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